

Manifestations of Islamic Urban Jurisprudence in the Architecture of Oasis Palaces.

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Abstract

The art of architecture is a true mirror that reflects various aspects of people's civilizations and cultures that have emerged throughout the ages. Within the context of this research paper, the main focus revolves around the characteristics of palace structures, highlighting the most significant features of desert architecture in accordance with Islamic urban jurisprudence. The choice of this architectural style, construction methods, and the geometric composition, along with all the structures and facilities, are all closely related to the intellectual and cultural life of the inhabitants. Their abilities to envision and simulate a model that meets their social, economic, and defensive needs they aspire to achieve. The palace design, its architectural engineering, boundaries, and features are set in a way that does not deviate from the organization of the Islamic city and its urban character. The past connects with the present through their presence, and the character of cities is defined by the architectural features they encompass.

Keywords:

Desert palaces, Islamic urban jurisprudence, desert architecture, city.

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The research:

Covers the following issues:

- 1- What's the main focus revolves around the characteristics of palace structures, highlighting the most significant features of desert architecture in accordance with Islamic urban jurisprudence .
- 2- Methodology employed, Descriptive analytical approach

Concept of Palaces in Desert Architecture:

The term "palace" is linguistically defined as confinement or imprisonment, as mentioned in the statement of AsmabintYazid al-Ansariyah: "Indeed, women are confined (muḥṣurat), locked up"¹ Additionally, "qasarat" means being unable to reach or communicate with something. In the context of construction, a palace is a well-known term referring to a house, and it is said that every house made of stone is called a palace because it restricts the sacred area (haram) within it. This is evident in the verse of Surah Ar-Rahman: "Fair ones reserved in pavilions" (referring to palaces)². Furthermore, the term "qasr" is also used to describe the roots of trees and date palm trees.³ This comparison is drawn because the roofs of palaces are supported by the roots of palm trees and other trees. Notably, these linguistic definitions of the term "palace" (confinement or restriction) align with the

architectural characteristics of palaces. This concept closely resembles the common and widespread understanding found in

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historical sources. In the Islamic city, a palace refers to the residence of the caliph, his family, and his entourage. During the Islamic era,⁴ caliphs and sultans competed in constructing palaces, which symbolized their power and wealth. They built towering structures with grand doors and exquisite decorations.

These architecture and splendid palaces⁵. Algeria was not far from this urban movement, as it witnessed the construction of numerous palaces and fortresses. It is well known that the urban fabric of any country is shaped palaces were strategically located both within and outside the cities (oasis)⁶. Muslim artists excelled in constructing and adorning these palaces, turning them into architectural masterpieces that testified to the greatness of their builders. Poets were so captivated by their beauty that their verses became architectural records. One example is Al-Khuzaymi's description of Baghdad and its magnificent according to prevailing cultural traditions, which are the result of various interactions. The most important factors include shared social life and compliance with the civilizational conditions of that society. Religion and customs play a dominant role in these conditions .

In Oasis architecture, a palace is considered a form of human settlement and represents a dynamic model of prevailing traditions among the inhabitants of these regions. It is characterized by architectural richness, forming a harmonious architectural fabric.

It serves as a residential unit encompassing multiple houses and families that share similar living patterns. Additionally, it reflects certain social relationships rooted in various tribal origins inherited from specific political circumstances.

The factors that contribute to the formation of desert palaces can be considered common conditions for building cities in general. In this context, we will focus on the most important conditions necessary for their formation:

1- **Availability of suitable water:** There is a similarity between cities and palaces in that both rely on significant underground water reservoirs that have been replenished over hundreds of years, considering the low rainfall levels in those areas.

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- 1- **Fortification:** It is essential for desert palaces to have defensive measures, including walls, trenches, and towers. Additionally, naturally fortified locations were chosen for these palaces.
- 2- **Air quality:** Elevated location, water, and greenery are fundamental factors for ensuring air and body safety. This is measured by the oxygen and moisture provided by the greenery in the atmosphere. Therefore, people in these regions sought to have orchards adjacent to the palaces. Furthermore, the use of environmentally friendly materials in construction contributes to the moderation and safety of the air. These buildings serve as a true model of natural architecture, promoting physical well-being and mental clarity⁷.

The patterns of desert palaces:

The opinions of scholars have varied in identifying the patterns of desert palaces, based on certain architectural elements or external forms. This has resulted in multiple patterns, each of which includes a group of palaces sharing some architectural characteristics. One pattern encompasses a group of palaces that are situated on rocky hills and constructed using a combination of small and large stones. An example of this pattern is the Al-Muniea Palace⁸. Another pattern is attributed to all palaces built after the 7th century CE, including the palaces of Zanati and Arab tribes⁹. Abdul Rahman Ayyub, on the other hand, relies on the external form in categorizing the palaces. This includes a

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rectangular pattern, which consists of a series of adjacent rooms in a rectangular shape, built at ground level or below the rocks. Another pattern bears resemblance to Roman and Coptic fortresses in Egypt, as well as the ribat structures that were widespread in the Islamic world. There is also a circular pattern, which is considered one of the most advanced patterns due to the distribution of internal spaces. Its origins can be traced back to the late 5th century AH (11th century CE)¹⁰.

Urban and Architectural Configuration of the Palace:

The urban fabric of the palace follows architectural traditions rooted in the Islamic religion and social values that have become deeply entrenched in these regions. These traditions emphasize

social solidarity and ensuring sanctity. The local architecture, guided by these principles, aimed to give the palace an architectural form that respects the personal freedoms of the family and preserves the spirit of the neighborhood¹¹, as expressed in the Quran and emphasized by the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, in his saying, "A believer to another believer is like a building, each part supporting the other"¹². The Islamic perception of society encompasses the framework of primary relationships (kinship), which impose themselves as necessary structures that help individuals define their existence. From this perspective, the architectural elements of the palace in these areas serve the philosophy of social interaction as defined by Islam¹³. By architectural configurations of the palace, we mean the main buildings and essential spaces that constitute the overall physical structure of the palace:

1. The Mosque (al Masjid): It forms the foundation of the structures in the Islamic city. It serves as the starting point for the alleys and pathways that branch out throughout the palace.

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Although it may not occupy a central location from an architectural standpoint, it remains spiritually central due to its role as a focal point, unifying the palace's components. In this regard, the congregational prayer (Salat al-Jama'ah) gains importance as a religious practice that unifies the community through the functions performed by the mosque, such as worship, social gatherings, communication, and information dissemination. Within the same religious context of the palace buildings, we find shrines and funeral prayer spaces, primarily associated with the beliefs of the palace residents, often located on the periphery of the palaces.

2. Pathways and Roads: This is another key element in shaping the palace's structure, serving as the arteries that connect its center (the mosque) with the rest of its facilities. These pathways are divided into two sections:

a) Main Streets: They connect the palace to neighboring areas. In terms of their nature, they are communal property, regulated in terms of usage, maintenance, and supervision by the community, in adherence to Islamic legislation. This is in line with the saying of the Prophet, peace be upon him, as narrated by Abu Hurairah, "If you differ in the pathways, then make them seven cubits wide"¹⁴.

b) Alleys and Pathways: They represent the arteries that branch within the palace to connect its roads to residential neighborhoods. They are designed based on ethical considerations of modesty and sanctity, specifically catering to the movement of women within the palace and between houses without discomfort. These alleys are often covered, winding, and narrow, leading to the entrance of dwellings.

3. Walls and Moats: Fortresses, walls, and moats constitute defensive structures. The Prophet, peace be upon him, ordered the digging of a trench on the northern side of the city, which was exposed to political conflicts. He also commanded the fortification

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of houses near the trench. Thus, the features of defensive architecture emerged as essential elements of urban planning,

forming a protective enclosure around the city. It was said that the Islamic city is wrapped or protected but not closed¹⁵.

4. Entrances: Openings in the wall, often fortified with two protruding pillars from the outside, provide access to the palace's entrance through a wooden bridge. They are usually surrounded by a moat, and their doors are made of palm wood.

5. Towers: Towers are elements of defensive architecture that allow for observation inside and outside the palace. Their shapes vary, and the tower is often located at the corner of the wall. The palace may have two or four towers.

6- Al-Rahabat and al-Miyadain: These refer to the unbuilt spaces, often named "Rahba" in desert palaces. They are usually located opposite the congregational mosques and serve multiple functions depending on seasons, times, and occasions. Architecturally, they contribute to the harmony between the built masses and open spaces, while functionally, they facilitate social practices as important areas for gatherings and information exchange.

7- Al-Maskan (the House): This refers to the basic elements of the residential unit, which are generally similar in desert palaces, following the general plan of the house.

–The number of entrances can reach up to two, with one directly opening into it and the other leading to the guesthouse.

- **Al-Saqifa:** The main entrance opens onto it, characterized by its indentation as it does not directly open onto the courtyard. It contains the entrance that leads to the guesthouse.

- **Al-Sahhn (Al-Hawsh):** The central movement area, open to allow light into the rooms and air circulation. It serves as a courtyard for children to play and a place to rest under the sunlight during winter.

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- **Al-Sabat:** It is a covered open space directly connected to the courtyard. Its significant importance lies in being a gathering area for the family, especially during hot days when staying inside the rooms or in the middle of the courtyard is not feasible.

- **Reception room:** Sometimes it opens directly onto the corridor, and there is an entrance from the courtyard to facilitate its organization and cleaning by the residents.

- **Private room:** Usually used for sleeping.

- **The kitchen:** Used for storing food and cooking. A corner of it is allocated for the fireplace, commonly used in winter, equipped with a chimney to exhaust the smoke.

- **The staircase:** Connects the ground floor to the upper floor.

- **Bathroom.**

- **The stable:** Almost every house has this element due to its frequent use, reflecting the residents' interest in animal husbandry¹⁶.

The impact of the jurisprudence of urban planning on the design of the desert palace:

The architects and builders of these palaces relied on fundamental principles that are rooted in both Islamic values and social norms. They adapted to the natural environment on which these palaces were constructed, and these principles became applicable laws for all inhabitants. This is known as "Urf al-'Imaran" (the customary practices of urban planning). This customary practice is based on a set of fundamental principles in the Islamic religion, including:

Preservation of the faith: This principle is manifested in the structure of the palace and the significant importance given to religious architectural elements in the overall design of the palace. It also entails upholding the teachings of the religion in terms of social interactions, respecting the principle of neighborliness and coexistence.



Figure 1: A topographic section illustrating the process of selecting palace construction sites - by the researcher.

Preservation of Life: Ensuring appropriate site selection for palace construction and the necessity of meeting the previously mentioned conditions, while adapting to the natural conditions that characterize desert regions in general.

Preservation of Privacy: By creating specific areas, such as what is known in the palace domain as limited passages, which are only used by the residents of the houses located in that passage and who share a close family relationship.

Preservation of Resources: It is reflected in the avoidance of excess in construction and limiting it to what is necessary, hence the clear absence of ornamental features as seen in urban architecture¹⁷.

1-The general physical structure of the palace: The design of the physical structure of the palace takes into consideration the general privacy of the religious and social values of its inhabitants. On the other hand, it distinguishes between the residents of the palace and the visitors, whose movements are very limited. This is reflected in the layout that highlights the limited mobility within the palace domain. The movement within the palace can be clarified and defined according to the subsequent plan. Foreign visitors initiate their movement from the palace entrance, passing through the public square via a main street, usually heading to the mosque or the market, and then leaving directly after completing their purpose.

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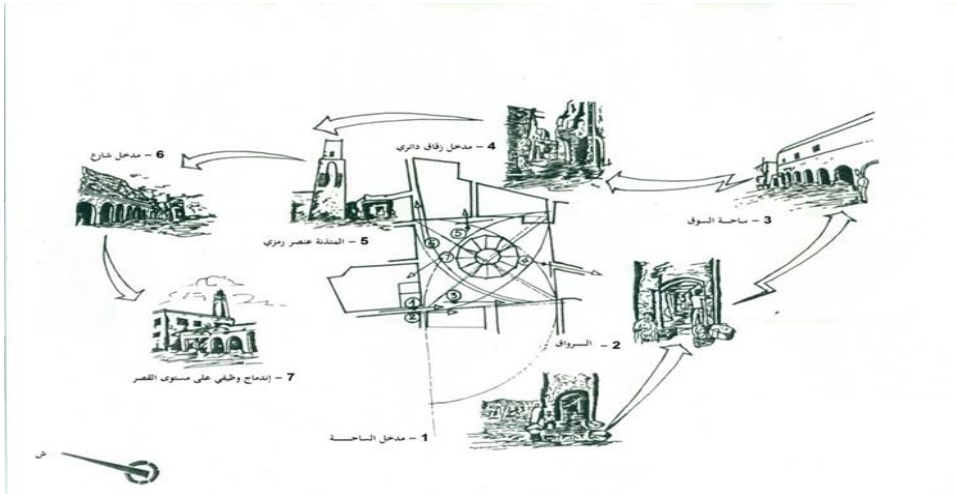


Figure 2: A diagram illustrating the movement of permanent foreigners within the desert palace domain - by the researcher

On one hand, it shows the interaction between the palace residents while respecting the principle of neighborliness through the design of dwellings, main streets, alleys, and limited passages. There is always a focus on creating breaks in the urban space, whether through the design of circular alleys or the inclusion of courtyards (sahn) in the house design, as highlighted in the subsequent plan.

Religious Architecture: The early mosques of Islam were simple spaces of varying sizes, where the direction of the qibla was determined and they were cleaned. Sometimes, they were enclosed or had a minaret. This is because the nature of mosques contradicts grandiosity and excessive ornamentation. A mosque

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should be simple, reflecting the simplicity and purity of Islam¹⁸. Desert architecture has maintained this approach, unlike the religious architecture found in urban areas, where, even if there are mosques and congregational buildings within desert palace areas, there may be some instances of excessive ornamentation. However, these remain very exceptional cases. The accompanying image demonstrates the extreme simplicity in the construction of mosques, despite their importance in palace design.



Image 1: Illustrates the simplicity of mosque and congregational building construction - by the researcher.

Civil Architecture: It is directly linked to the prevailing social character within the overall structure of the palace. Its architectural elements may vary depending on their location within the neighborhood, but they share common features. Comparing most residential units, we can conclude that their organization is primarily based on the courtyard, which is considered the central hub of activity in the house. The palace

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houses are typically limited to two floors, with the ground floor containing the majority of the architectural elements. The upper floor usually includes one or two multi-purpose rooms. The palace residences are closely clustered around the minaret of the mosque, ensuring their protection and defense. It becomes difficult to distinguish the beginning and end of one dwelling from another, as there are rarely clear separations between them¹⁹.

As for the layout, it makes use of the available land. Unexpected corners may suddenly appear²⁰, while in other instances, the rooftop room, known as the "sufra"²¹, is situated above the passage, reflecting the traditional spatial organization that suits the particular human relationships. If the courtyard is the primary element of life within the palace, the room inside the house represents the highest degree of human privacy. The dwelling exhibits the desert-inspired characteristics, featuring an internal courtyard and a rooftop. Various forms of houses exist, evolving within the palace and governed by a single principle, which is the maximum utilization of urban space.

The functions of the essential components of the house adhere to a specific lifestyle, economic production methods, and unique social relationships²².

Similar to other architectural elements in the palace, which hold significant importance in desert architecture, their construction also follows customary practices, manifesting through various manifestations, including:

The restriction on the height of the dwelling: Providing housing is an urgent need required by Islamic law, as it is a place of comfort and privacy. Therefore, customary practices in the field of urban jurisprudence dictate that this privacy should be respected by not exceeding the height of the dwelling's walls, in order to maintain the compactness of the overall physical structure of the

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palace. No one, regardless of their social status, is allowed to violate this customary practice, in compliance with the Prophetic principle of "no harm should be inflicted or reciprocated." Thus, the purpose of implementing this custom is achieved by preventing neighbors from overlooking each other, blocking sunlight, or encroaching on spaces that do not belong to them.

Facade: The facades of palace dwellings are simple and devoid of decorative elements, in order to avoid differentiation among residents and eliminate any display of extravagance or pride. If any ornamentation exists, it is usually confined to the interior of the dwelling. The facade is typically painted in a uniform color that blends with the surrounding environment²³.

Mizab (Rainwater Spout): Mizab is one of the important elements in desert palace architecture due to its vital function of draining rainwater from the roofs of dwellings. Palace residents are allowed to construct Mizabs on main, secondary, or limited streets, following customary regulations to prevent harm and preserve personal and religious interests. Some of these regulations include pouring the Mizab against the neighbor's wall, having it facing another Mizab, having more than one Mizab on the facade of one's house, adjusting its height or length, and using it to drain water other than rainwater²⁴, such as wastewater from washing.

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Image number 2: Examples of facades and Mizabs of palace dwellings - by the Archive

Entrance of the dwelling: Typically, we find multiple entrances in a palace dwelling. There is a main entrance that directly leads to the courtyard (sahn) of the house, and another entrance that leads to the guest house or the upper floor (a private wing for receiving guests, separate from the main dwelling) via an independent staircase. This arrangement is intended to preserve the privacy and sanctity of the residents. Each entrance is designed in a way that forms a broken or obscured view from the inside, which is architecturally known as "saqifah."



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Image 3: Illustrates a model of the entrances to the palace houses - from the archive.

The threshold plays an important role in the life of the desert palace community, meeting the harsh conditions of nature and adhering to the custom of preserving life²⁵. It achieves the following:

- Protects the house from the entry of blowing sand during sandstorms.
- Prevents the leakage of rainwater and air.
- Prevents the entry of insects and reptiles.

- Defines the boundaries of the dwelling, so the entrance cannot be changed under any circumstances, even if the dwelling is rebuilt after being demolished²⁶.

Openings and windows: In order to preserve the sanctity of the residents and respect the right of the neighboring houses, a new opening or window can only be created after consultation with the adjacent or opposite neighbor and obtaining their approval. It is also necessary to determine the location of the opening, provided that the following conditions are met:

- It should not encroach on the property of others.
- It should not directly overlook the neighbor's dwelling.
- It should not face the neighbor's window or opening.
- It should be created at the top of the wall.
- It should not be created in the external wall of the palace²⁷.

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Image 3: A model showcasing the placement of windows in palace residences - by the researcher

Wall between neighbors: Due to the general physical structure of desert palaces, which is based on the compact construction style to meet the values of Islamic religion, it has become a symbol of social connections. This is in line with the Prophet's saying about Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari: "A believer to another believer is like a solid structure, each part supporting the other." Considering this great importance, it is prohibited for neighbors to make any changes to the wall, whether by increasing or decreasing it, except by mutual agreement and witnessing. It is also forbidden to install pillars or construct a staircase on the wall, either from one side or both. In case of cracks or tilting, both neighbors share the responsibility of repairing it.

Allocation of the dwelling for other activities: It is prohibited by customary law to allocate the dwelling for purposes other than residential use, such as opening a shop, a bathhouse, or holding gatherings in front of it.

CONCLUSION

The contemplation of this architecture also reveals an aspect that is equally important to materials and construction techniques, which is the relational aspect represented in providing tranquility, psychological comfort, and social harmony prevalent in palace communities. This is achieved through simplicity and asceticism in accordance with the religious values associated with the jurisprudence of architecture. The palace construction concept relied on the resources available in the region, and the builders were keen to create structures that align with simplicity while incorporating aesthetic elements that mimic the natural beauty surrounding them from all sides. They demonstrated meticulousness and dedication, considering it a reflective mirror of their multiple values. The observer of the construction methods in desert palaces immediately notices the prevailing relations among members of their communities, through their confined and limited movements, which do not allow crossing social boundaries. There is a clear architectural progression from the outsider to the resident within the palace. The planning of these palaces was not arbitrary but rather based on analysis and study of

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the climate and the suitability of materials and construction techniques available in the same region. It also took into account the design of residential units that adhere to values and principles. The harmonization between these aspects requires creative construction that proves the ability to build desert palaces and accomplish them accordingly. As a result, the principles of architectural jurisprudence reflected in the design of urban fabric were achieved, especially in residential units, which are the fundamental unit and the essence of desert palace structures, to prevent harm in line with the legal foundations that prevent the destruction of oneself.

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