

# Sana'a, the Old Walled City (Yemen): The Cultural Heritage and Conservation

El-Sayed M. El-Banna\*

## [Abstract]

- It is an old city in the Republic of Yemen, It was established in the second half of the first century A.D.
- During the Islamic period, the city had the Islamic features in all types of architectural building and its layout.
- Because of political circumstances, the old city still has its original features till the end of the twentieth century.
- For its fame in the monumental buildings and magnificent houses some western scientists called or named it; The Eastern Old Walled City.
- As all old cities, Sana'a was not far from the modernization effects.
- The programmer of conservation had begun directly after the revolution in 1962: establishing an executive office for conserving processes, enacting laws, and putting regulation- demanding the help from UNESCO and also from many countries to:
  1. Restore many building epically many monumental buildings.
  2. Improvement in infrastructure: pavement, water pipes and sewerage works.
  3. Help the inhabitants to restore their houses.

## 1 Introduction

The restoration and conservation of monuments, one may think, are dealing with the movable monuments, cleaning, completion, strengthening, and then putting it in the museum, which it is very easy to make an appropriate surrounding environment to protect the monuments from any future deterioration factors. On the other hand, in the case of the old city, it is in a different situation. It has the meaning of conservation in its large space either in solving the problems which threaten the city, or in the kind of conservation processes. It has various problems and subsequently it must have various solutions, such as for examples:

- The problems of overpopulation.
- The problems of modernization.
- The problems of traffic.
- The problems of infrastructure.
- The problems of finance.
- And maybe political problems like Jerusalem city in Palestine and the Islamic republic countries in the previous Soviet Union.

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\* Cairo University, Faculty of Archaeology.

Beside these problems there is the problem of each monumental building according to the investigation and analytical studies on restoration processes which may be dealing with all of its building materials, and maybe there is a problem concerning its foundation and underground water.

It is wide cycle in the meaning of restoration and conservation:

- How can we respond to the modern requirement of the inhabitants?
- How can we execute the infrastructures?
- How can we solve the problems of underground water?
- How can we put the styles in rebuilding the house inside the city?
- How can we reuse the building which lost its original function?
- How can we put the city in the map of tourism?
- How can we up-grade the city as a whole?

However in the same time, we must preserve and maintain the traditional features. And also it is important here to mention that as a base of historic cities any plan for conservation of a city cannot be applied on another city, because every city has its unique problems, and its authentic features which we most define before making any conservation process.

As for the value, a movable monument can be considered as an alphabet of a word from a page for the history of any nation, but the historic city with its various features can be considered as a page from the history of this nation.

Again, as for Sana'a, the eastern old walled city in the Republic of Yemen, it is a rare city if we compare it with the other Islamic historic cities, because it may be the only historic city which has its original and traditional features till now without tangible disfiguration. This case is perhaps due to a special circumstance after the Ottomans (Turkish) departure from Yemen in 1918 A.D., i.e. the style of the rule as a monarchical rule depending on the tribe and religious meanings, because the Yemeni people believed deeply in the leader (الإمام) who did not make any connection with the outer world fearing for any revolution against him.

## 2 The History of Sana'a

It is a Sabaeen city. It was established in the second half of the first century A.D. In 628 A.D., the city became one of the Islamic cities and had the features of the Islamic civilization gradually. The most of the monumental buildings in the city related to the Ottoman (Turkish) rule: 1538-1635 A.D., then from 1872-1918 A.D.

The main point in the history of the city is the type of the rule within the first of the twentieth century. During this period, there were no relation with the outer world, and subsequently, neglect in education and culture, and no connection with the contemporary civilization had happened.

This political circumstances originating from religious rule kept the old city far from the effects of modernization, and the city still has its completion until the revolution in 1962. The old walled city of Sana'a has nearly the all types of Islamic buildings which date to different periods: before Islam, during Islamic periods, and in Ottoman (Turkish) rule.

The old city had its fame not only for its monumental buildings, but also for its magnificent houses. Any house inside the old city can be considered as artistic masterpiece. Maybe its fame came from the completeness of the city because of delaying the modernization invasion till about 1970, and the quick high interest from the local authorities. Therefore, the city had been put into the world heritage list in 1983.

### 3 Sana'a as One of the Best Cities all over the Islamic World

The old walled city of Sana'a can be considered as one of the best cities all over the Islamic world. The city still has its completion or its original features without much modernization effects (Fig. 1. and Fig. 2).

All types of Islamic buildings are preserved well. Mosques are seen from nearly all periods of its history. And Samsarh (old hotels), public bathes, wells and its requirements, and madrasa (schools) etc. are also named. The distinguishable pattern of houses is typical in this area. The wall remains still extend around nearly the most of the city.

The city still has the character (marks) of historic cities: the wall around the city (Fig. 3), streets and lanes, the souq (markets) in the city center, the all types of monumental buildings, the traditional crafts, and the adaptation between the old city and its extensions outside the wall.

A characteristic feature in the old city is shown in a garden (Fig. 6). This garden is located behind a group of houses and is cultivated by many sorts of vegetables and fruits by using the drainage water from these houses.

El-Bakeria mosque (Fig. 7) is a good and complete example of Turkish mosques in building, and the Yemeni ornaments. The Saila (Fig. 8) is a low road going across the city. Its purpose is in gathering the rain water and then the water accumulates in a specific site in order to preserve it for people's needs.

A special type of buildings (distinguished style) in Sana'a is the Ramp (mirnaa)(Fig. 9 and 10). It is for pulling the water container from the bottom of the well by camels or other suitable animals and collecting the water in a pool which has channels leading to the nearest mosque, bathhouse (public bath) (Fig. 11), meqshama, and some houses.

As all Islamic cities, or old cities, in general, the old walled city of Sana'a is not far from the problems which threaten it. Some example for the new rebuilding of houses inside the old city should be mentioned. Fig. 12 and 13 show the same in building materials, but not have the harmony with the surroundings. This is one of disfiguring patterns.

Modernization aspects inside the old city make disfiguring and pollutions. As for modern requirements, the inhabitants use it in disfiguring styles. They often have the desire to use modern building materials. And using car in narrow streets causes vibration and pollution. (Fig. 14)

On the contrary to the most Islamic old cities, the inhabitants in the old city of Sana'a always have the desire to live in the new extensions, and renting their old houses inside the old city. This situation makes a careless condition for the houses. The wall of Sana'a is also deteriorated much in some places. (Fig. 15)

In general, we can say that the problems which threaten the old walled city of Sana'a cannot be considered as difficult in comparison with the other old cities in many countries.

#### 4 The Programs of Conservation

After the revolution of 1962, the Yamani authorities realized the fame and importance of the city, and immediately enacted several rules and regulations to protect its monuments: establishing of an executive office for the conservation of the city. It was enacting and implementing several laws that regulated and controlled activities within the old city especially about the usage of modern building materials and about the height of rebuilt houses.

In collaboration and help from the UNESCO many other progressions were done. To launch an international campaign to rehabilitate the old city and to revitalize its socio-economy, the sum of \$10 Million US was reinvested in the city's infrastructure. Restoration works have been completed or undergoing. The infrastructure work included extensive pavement work, fresh and sewage water pipe, and the upgrading of Wadi Saliah. Restoration efforts included the city's wall and its individual buildings.

The financing of the restoration and new constructions has been done with the assistance of many countries like France, Germany, Italy, Japan, The Republic of Korea, The Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, and Yemen, plus international organizations such as the UNDP and the UNESCO.

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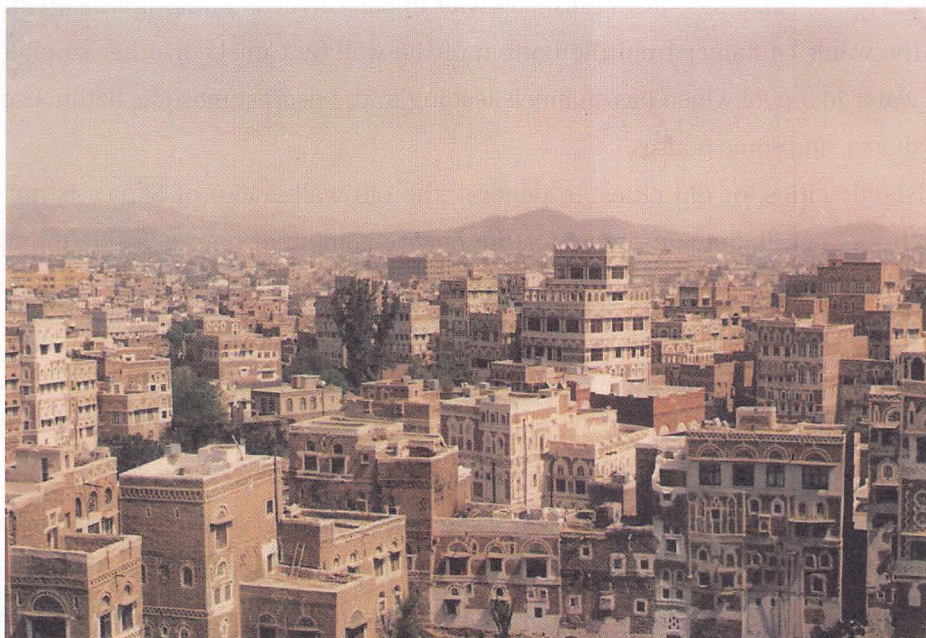


Fig. 1 General view of Sana'a

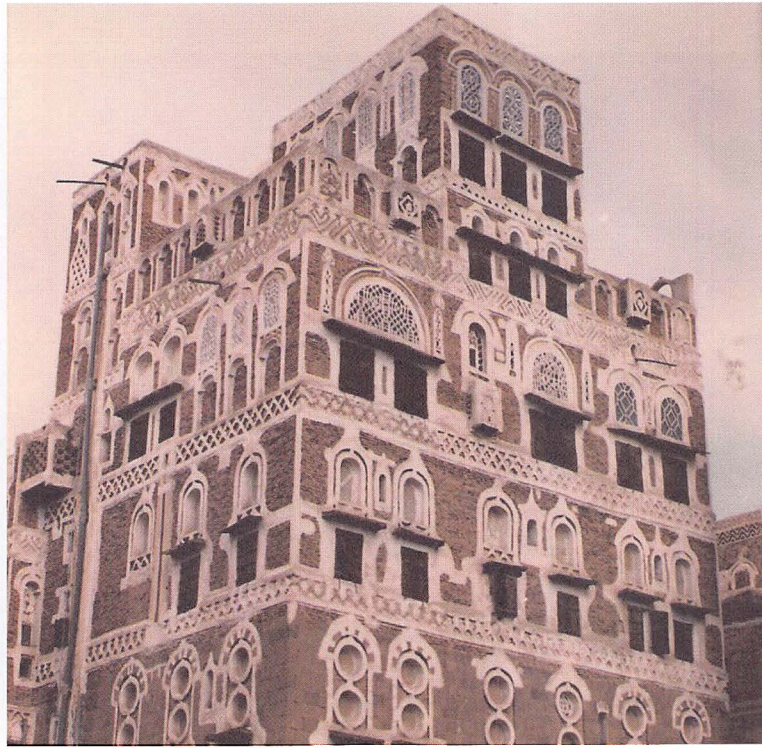


Fig. 2 One of the houses in style of Sana'a



Fig. 3 The wall surrounding Sana'a

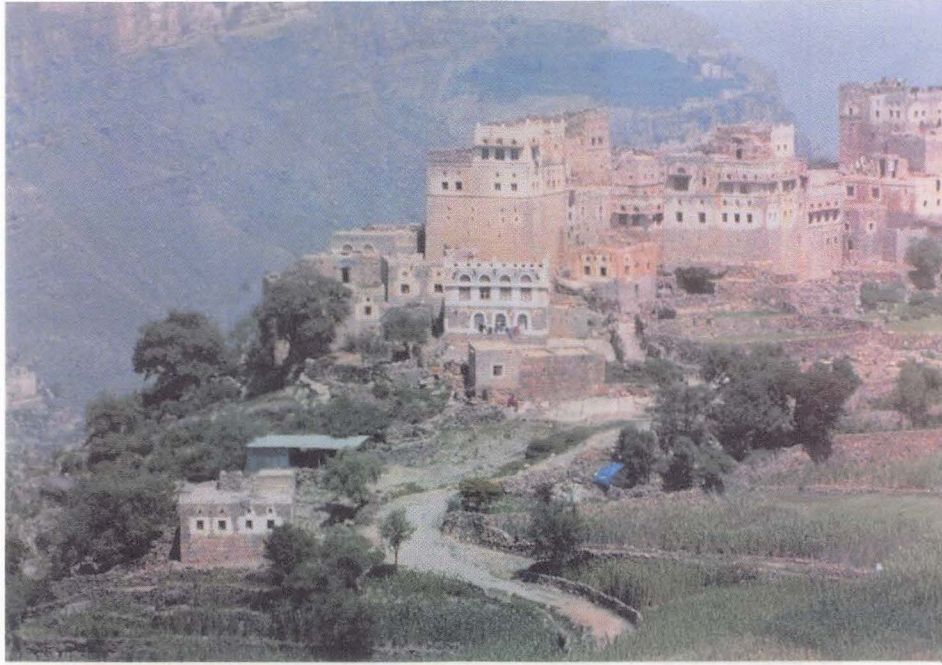


Fig. 4 The same style in another city in Yemen (Kahlan)



Fig. 5 The same style in another city in Yemen



Fig. 6 Meqshama (garden)



Fig. 7 El-Bakeria mosque in Sana'a



Fig. 8 Sailsa Street (a low road across the city)

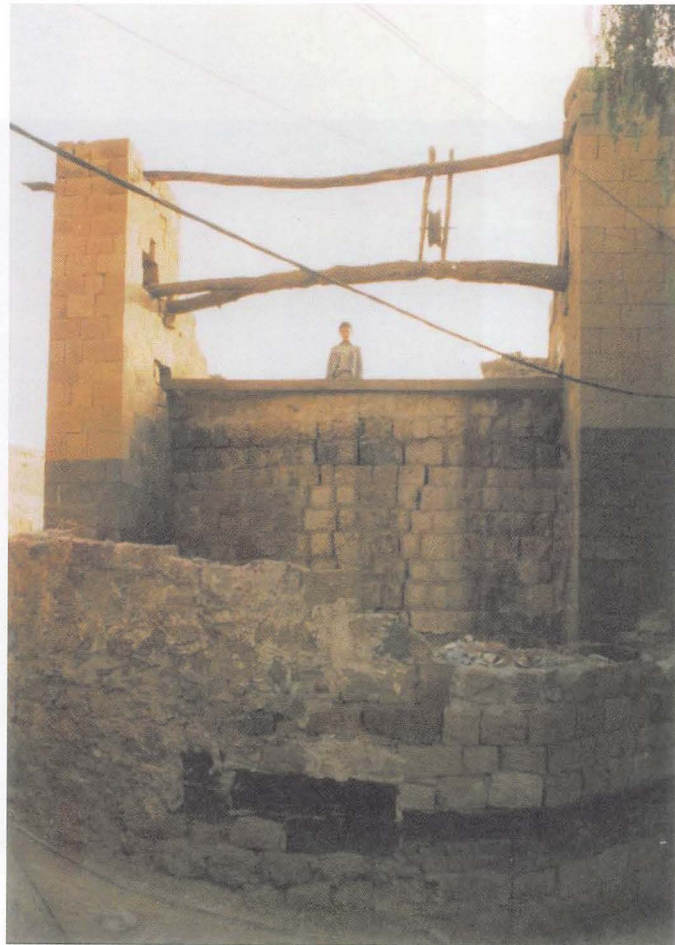


Fig. 9 Mirnaa for pulling the water container from the bottom of the well





Fig. 10 Mirnaa for pulling water (the ramp)

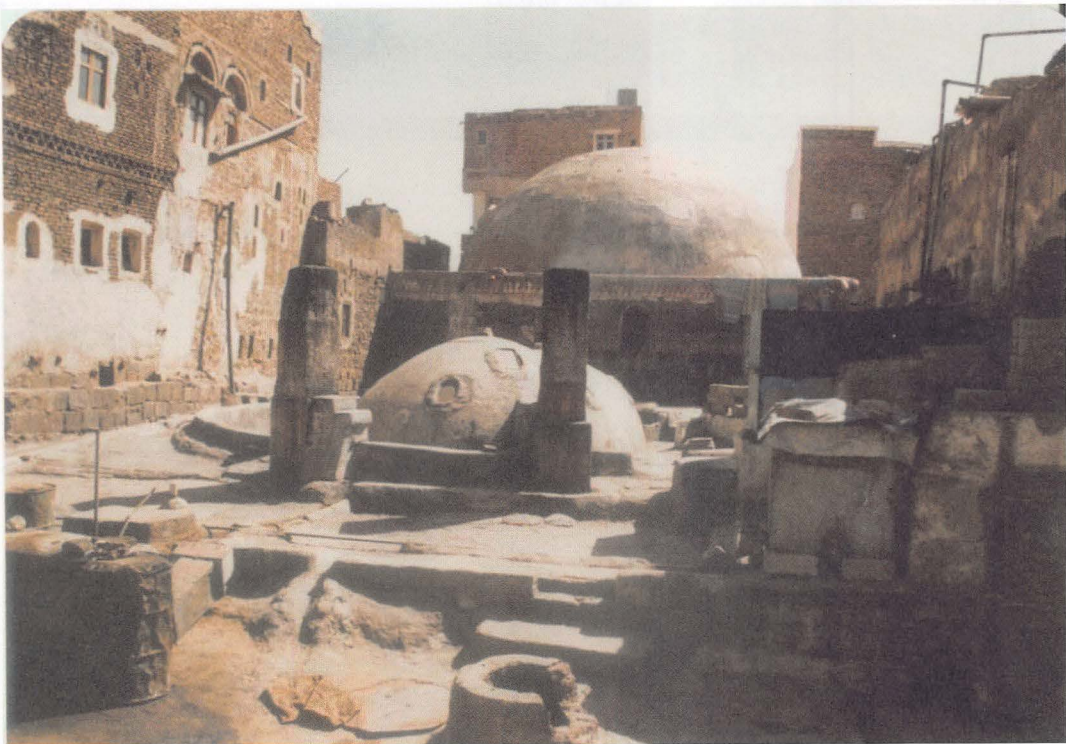


Fig. 11 Hammam El-Midan

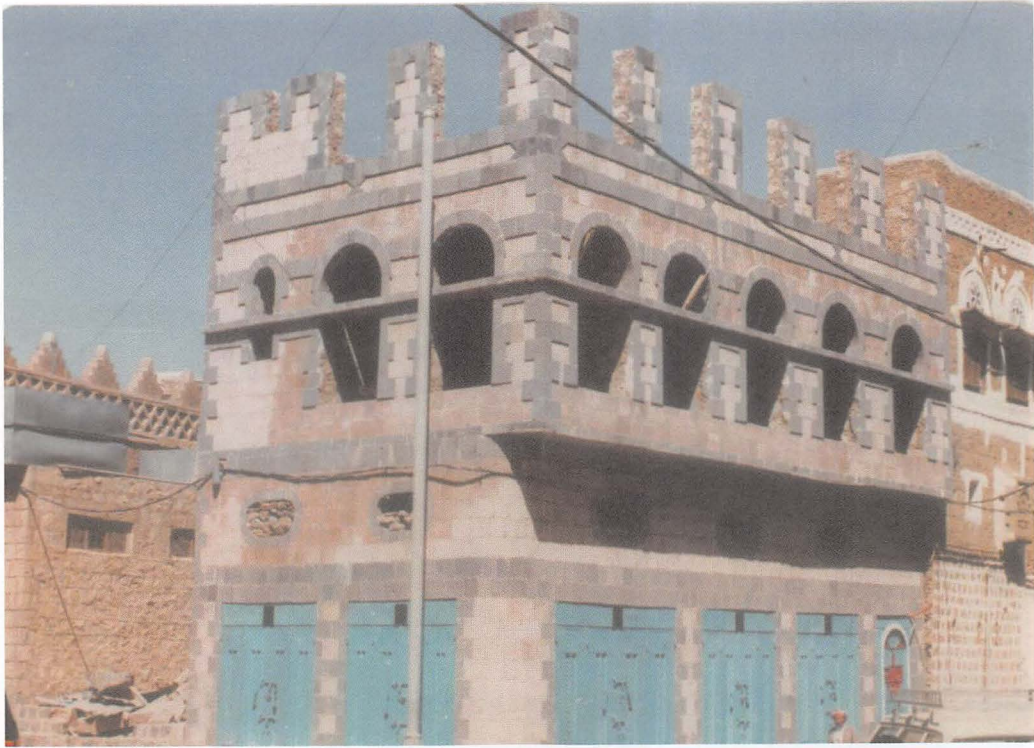


Fig. 12 Rebuilding in a nearly traditional style inside the old city



Fig. 13 Rebuilding in nearly traditional style inside the old city



Fig. 14 Modernization features

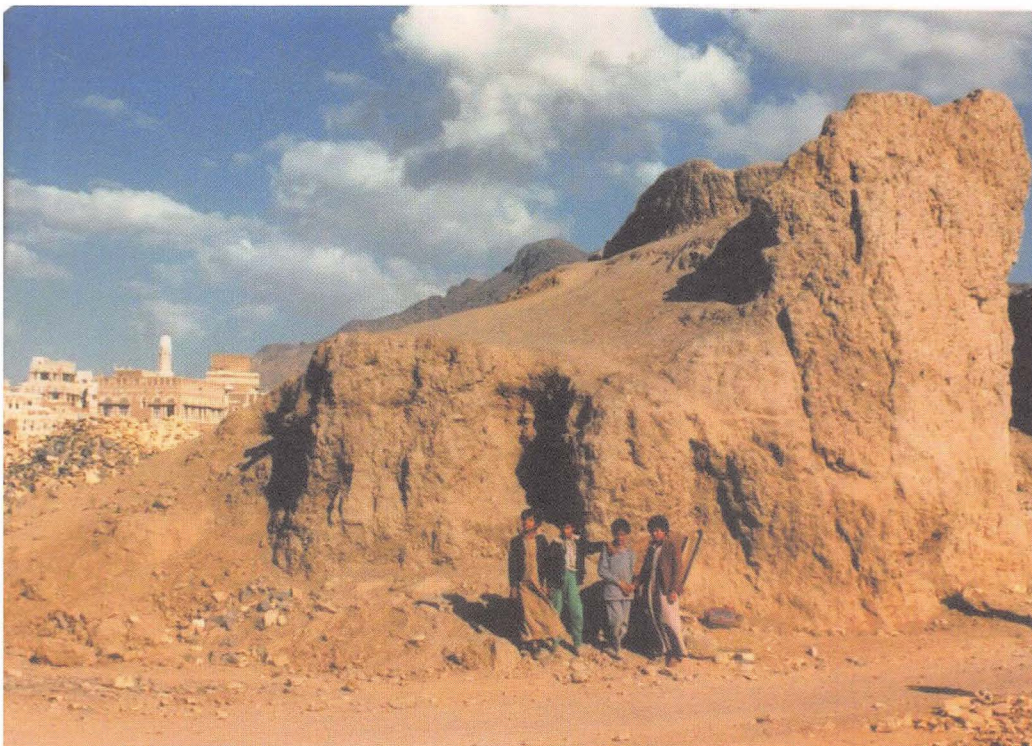


Fig. 15 Deterioration of the wall