

Rethinking Cultural Heritage: Lessons from Sana'a, Yemen

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The unique architecture of Sana'a has been the focus of international conservation efforts, which have stimulated local interest and contributed to the formation of a local discourse. Because conservation followed so quickly on the heels of modernization, Sana'a provides an opportunity to study the interplay of these two global ideologies in the context of a strong local tradition of building. After a brief discussion of the history of conservation in Sana'a, this article will discuss how conservation discourse and practice have been appropriated and transformed by residents, builders, and conservation professionals. It suggests that a unique approach is developing on the ground, which can contribute to the critical reevaluation of conservation on the global "periphery."

Modernism and conservation are usually seen as contradictory approaches to the built environment: the former, at least in its early formulation, saw the city as a *tabula rasa*, while the latter aims to protect historic buildings and urban fabrics. Yet both these ideologies emerged within the intellectual and historical framework of modernity. Indeed, some authors see conservation as the child of modernity, its ideological "other" which has allowed modern society to develop according to the inexorable laws of progress. This is underlined by the similarity of architectural and conservation discourses in the early twentieth century: both saw the old and the new as antithetical, but also as complementary and dependent on each other.¹ While all cultures and eras have selectively maintained and preserved elements of the past, the modern era is distinguished by an ideology of conservation constructed in opposition to the ideology of progress. The contest between the two has played out in the physical and social fabric of cities: while grand schemes and urban renewal have destroyed historic districts, conservation policy has reified them; both strategies isolated and circumscribed the traditional within the modern.

If conservation is to realize its potentially pivotal role in the creation of a sustainable environment, the old and the new must be treated as part of a single continuum. Such a

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The paper on which this article is based was chosen as co-recipient of IASTE's 2004 Jeffrey Cook Award.

shift requires a reassessment of the critical framework of conservation, and a reevaluation of the conceptual and disciplinary boundaries that reinforce the divisions between the new and the old.² A critical reevaluation of the history and theory of conservation is all the more urgent as international agencies promote an approach of “cultural relativism” in the conservation of heritage in various parts of the world. The dissemination of theory and methods is not new, since the conservation of antiquities was established in many European colonies; most native practitioners were trained in “international” standards that are based on European theory. But now research institutes and agencies are assisting certain countries in the development of culture-specific conservation standards, based on “indigenous” principles and values.³ While this approach attempts to counter charges of cultural imperialism, it is questionable whether conservation can operate outside the system of values and assumptions within which it was conceived. “Cultural relativism” is perhaps most useful in underlining the relativism of the established discourse.



FIGURE 1. A woman in Sana'a furious at inspectors who are requiring her to dismantle a wall built in nonconforming materials.

Recent studies in so-called developing countries have presented forceful critiques of conservation policies and practices. They cite the bureaucratic imposition of policies that have little meaning for local residents; the adoption of conservation standards that are incompatible with local social and economic goals; the gentrification of historic districts, the displacement of local residents, and the creation of “stage sets” for the tourist trade (FIG. 1).⁴ While much of this critique is valid and important, it is problematic in several respects. Most of the critics are not trained in architecture or conservation and have little experience in the field. Their studies tend to see conservation as a hegemonic discourse, rather than as a discourse that is appropriated and transformed. Most importantly, they look at conservation in isolation from modernist planning, which imposes its own values and regulations. As such, they often implicitly privilege modernist ideology and its ethic of progress — in effect promoting not only modern design and methods, but the material, human and capital basis of the modern construction sector. Investment in this sector may promote dependence on foreign products, technologies and expertise at the expense of local materials and labor resources. It is in this area that conservation, if carried out within a progressive political framework, can function as a form of resistance, promoting local knowledge and practices as alternative models for modernity.⁵

In this article I propose to reframe conservation within the wider discourse of modernity — recognizing that both are imported ideologies, and are transformed and used by different actors for various purposes. Sana'a, the capital of the Yemen Arab Republic, provides an ideal case study for several reasons (FIG. 2). First, it was the site of a major conservation project conducted under the auspices of UNESCO and the government of North Yemen — one of the first projects to focus on upgrading urban infrastructure, incorporating strategies of modernization and conservation. Second, the distinctive architecture of Sana'a was largely insulated



FIGURE 2. View of the old city of Sana'a in 1995. Photo by Monica Fritz, 1995, courtesy of the Aga Khan Visual Archive, MIT.

from development pressures until the 1960s. The rapid succession of modernization and conservation resulted in a paradox: unlike many other countries in the Middle East that had abandoned traditional construction practices in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in Yemen these practices had not died out. Yemenis were not separated from their “heritage” by an historical divide: rather, living traditions were to be “conserved.”

Yemen is uniquely positioned to contribute to the reevaluation of conservation theory and practice that is occurring on the global “periphery.”⁶ It is home to remarkable and varied architecture, builders who continue to practice traditional techniques, and two decades of experience in conservation. Drawing on one year of fieldwork in Sana'a, I will attempt to describe a unique approach that is developing on the ground in the practices of conservation professionals, builders and residents. This experience should, I believe, provide the basis for conservation plans and legislation which may challenge, rather than conform to, existing international charters.

THE CAMPAIGN TO SAVE THE OLD CITY OF SANA'A

The mythic origins and noble history of Sana'a have been related by historians since medieval times, and are often evoked in conservation literature.⁷ Located at a strategic point in the Yemeni highlands, Sana'a has always been an important political center. One of two capitals of the ancient Sabaean Empire, it was the governor's seat under the early

Islamic caliphs, an important administrative center during the later medieval and Ottoman periods, and from the eighteenth century, the capital of the Zaydi imams.⁸ Thanks to certain historical and geographical factors, Yemen has been able to maintain a degree of autonomy throughout most of its history.⁹ These factors, along with the isolationist policies of the imams in the twentieth century, contributed to the relative continuity of social and built form in Sana'a and in the highlands generally.

Sana'a is known especially for a variation of the tower house, a type that can be found throughout Yemen. In Sana'a these houses, which can reach eight stories in height, are built of stone and fired brick with distinctive, plaster-decorated openings. They were originally designed for extended patrilineal families: as sons married, additional stories were added or new structures were built on adjacent land. The basic social and administrative unit of the city is the quarter (*hara*), which has at its heart an endowed complex of mosque, bathhouse (*hammam*), and agricultural garden (*maqshama*) (FIG. 3). Human waste from houses, disposed through long-drop chutes, dried quickly in the mountain air and was collected for use as fuel for the bathhouse. The ashes were used as fertilizer for the garden, which was irrigated by gray water from the ablutions pool at the mosque. Thus each quarter comprised a kind of ecosystem, which would today be seen as a model of sustainability.

The old city of Sana'a is bisected by a dry river bed (*wadi*) that floods in the rainy season; it has recently been paved as part of the conservation effort. To the east of the *wadi* is the



FIGURE 3. *Maqshamat al-Hurqan*, one of the many agricultural gardens in the old city of Sana'a.

Great Mosque, one of the oldest in the Islamic world, and the central market (FIGS. 4, 5). The buildings of the market are largely one-story, interspersed with large caravansarays (*samasir*) that served the wholesale trade; the oldest probably date to the seventeenth century when the coffee trade was at its height. The old urban core, along with several suburbs that date from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, were surrounded by a series of walls pierced by seven gates, including the monumental Bab al-Yaman at the southern entrance to the city (FIG. 6). Tribal as well as endowed agricultural land extended up to the walls, limiting expansion of the city.¹⁰

The decline of the old city was closely linked to the rapid changes following the 1962 revolution and the opening of North Yemen to the global market.¹¹ The new government initiated a process of modernization which aimed in part to erase the history of the ousted imamate. The foundations of a modern capital city were laid: Tahrir Square was created on the grounds of the former imam's palace, and building projects were undertaken to the north and west of the old city to house new government infrastructure. As part of this process, several city gates and portions of the walls that surrounded the city and its old suburbs were demolished.¹² The destruction was encouraged by Egyptian engineers and advisors who were working in the various ministries, on behalf of what was a de facto occupation authority. As agents of Nasserist modernism, they influenced the design of numerous structures, especially along Abd al-Mughni Street which runs along the line of the old western wall (FIG. 7).



FIGURE 4. (ABOVE) View of the suq looking east toward Jabal Nuqum.

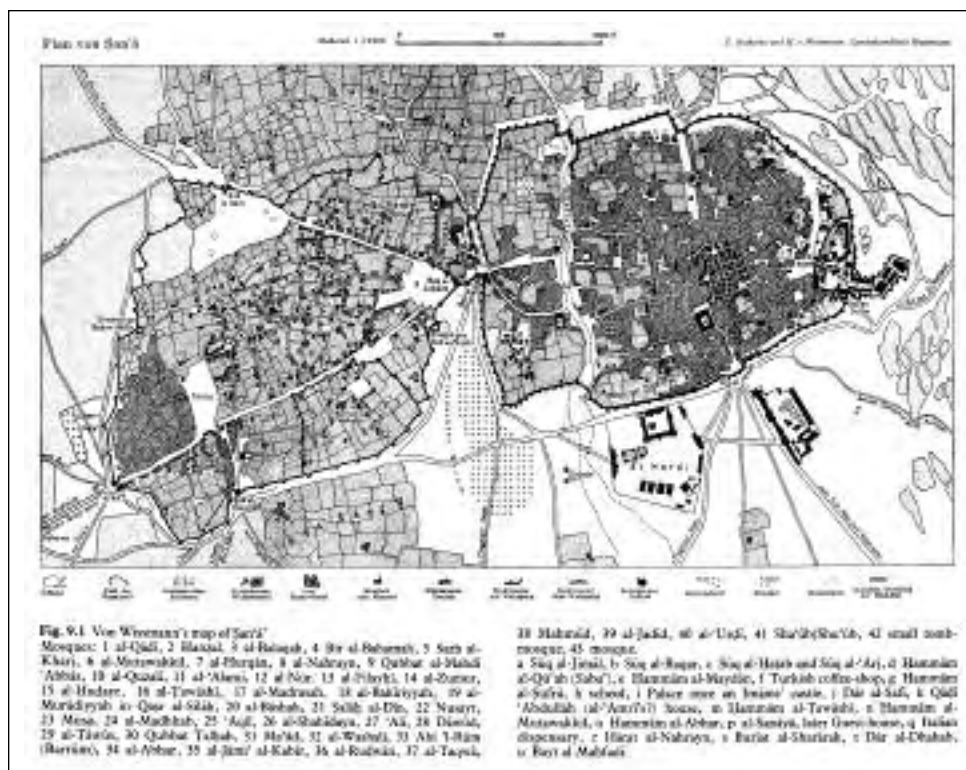


FIGURE 5. (LEFT) Von Wissman's map of Sana'a, 1929, showing the walled city with the wadi running north to south. To the west of the city are several walled suburbs, including the seventeenth-century Jewish quarter. Source: R. Lewcock and R.B. Serjeant, Sana'a, An Arabian-Islamic City, 1983. Reprinted by permission of author.

Fig. 91. Von Wissman's map of Sana'a
 1 al-Qadi, 2 al-Balad, 3 al-Rabwah, 4 Bir al-Bahar, 5 Sana al-Kharr, 6 al-Musawakil, 7 al-Furqan, 8 al-Nahayn, 9 Qubbah al-Balad 'Abbas, 10 al-Qasbi, 11 al-'Ahsa, 12 al-Nar, 13 al-Shaykh, 14 al-Zumar, 15 al-Hadram, 16 al-Tawikh, 17 al-Madrash, 18 al-Bakriyyah, 19 al-Muridiyyah al-Qasr al-Salib, 20 al-Balad, 21 Salib al-Din, 22 Naury, 23 Masa, 24 al-Madrash, 25 'Ajl, 26 al-Shahidiya, 27 'Ala, 28 Dima, 29 al-Talib, 30 Qubbah Yaqub, 31 al-Kabir, 32 al-Wasbi, 33 Abi 'I-Ban (Barriq), 34 al-'Ahsa, 35 al-Jam' al-Kabir, 36 al-Rafida, 37 al-Taqi,

38 al-Balad, 39 al-Jahid, 40 al-'Ust, 41 Sha'ib al-Sayid, 42 small north-mosque, 43 mosque, 44 Suq al-Jawid, 45 Suq al-Baqer, 46 Suq al-Hadram and Suq al-'Ar, 47 Hammam al-Qasbi (Sab'), 48 Hammam al-Madrash, 49 Turkish coffee-shop, 50 Hammam al-Sayid, 51 school, 52 Palace over an 'Imam's' vault, 53 Dar al-Safi, 54 Qadl 'Abdullah (al-'Ahsa's) house, 55 Hammam al-Tawikh, 56 Hammam al-Madrash, 57 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 58 al-Sayid, 59 Qasr al-'Ahsa, 60 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 61 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 62 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 63 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 64 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 65 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 66 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 67 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 68 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 69 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 70 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 71 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 72 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 73 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 74 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 75 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 76 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 77 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 78 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 79 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 80 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 81 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 82 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 83 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 84 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 85 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 86 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 87 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 88 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 89 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 90 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 91 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 92 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 93 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 94 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 95 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 96 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 97 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 98 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 99 Hammam al-'Ahsa, 100 Hammam al-'Ahsa.

response to new demographic and technological factors. The majority of Yemenis who migrated to the Gulf worked in construction¹⁵: there they had become familiar with new house types built of concrete and concrete block derived from Western and Egyptian suburban models. Upon their return to Sana'a they introduced these new types, laying them out in orthogonal blocks and domesticating them with such features as multi-lite windows and plaster decoration. Many families began to leave the old city for the new districts which provided certain amenities, including the possibility of owning a car and independence from extended families. At the same time, conditions in the old city were deteriorating: unpaved streets, poor drainage, the absence of a modern water and sewerage system, and litter (resulting from the increased use of manufactured products) all served to accelerate outmigration. Conditions reached a crisis in the late 1970s after piped water had been brought into the old city without any means to carry it off site. The dramatic increase in groundwater destabilized foundations and led to the collapse of numerous houses.¹⁶

Around this time the idea of the “international safeguarding campaign” had emerged at UNESCO: initially aimed

at saving archeological sites, the strategy was applied to the historic cities of Fez and Cairo in the late 1970s. At the 1978 session of the General Assembly of UNESCO, the governments of North and South Yemen called for safeguarding campaigns for the cities of Sana'a and Shibam-Hadhramaut, respectively; these were formally launched in 1984. The Campaign to Save Old Sana'a, like that for Shibam, was in many ways a landmark project: challenging prevailing conservation practice, its authors insisted that not only individual monuments, but the entire historic core, was a testimony to collective genius and thus worthy of conservation.¹⁷ In order to accomplish this, the city must be kept alive by improving conditions and checking the flight of residents to the new districts. The first phase of the Sana'a Campaign thus focused on infrastructure: the water system was replaced and upgraded, and a sewer system installed; streets were paved, and building foundations were stabilized. A second phase, to be launched after infrastructure was in place, would restore and rehabilitate key buildings in the city. These high-profile projects would be funded by donor nations whose embassies were eager to participate but were not generally interested in sponsoring infrastructure (FIGS. 9, 10).¹⁸



FIGURE 9. (LEFT) Street paving in the quarter of al-Abhar, the first area to be paved under the Campaign to Save Old Sana'a.

FIGURE 10. (RIGHT) Interior of Samsarat an-Nahhas, a caravanseray restored by the governments of Norway and North Yemen to serve as the National Center for the Revival of Yemeni Handicrafts.

The innovative strategy of the Campaign was only adopted after a conflict within a UNESCO mission that was sent to evaluate conditions in Sana'a. The two architects on the team, who had recently worked on conservation plans for the old cities of Cairo and Tunis, advocated the conservation and upgrading of the entire historic core of Sana'a. The other members of the team — who were conservators, not architects — objected to this strategy: invoking the Venice Charter, they argued that it went against the prevailing practice of the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), whose mandate was the careful conservation of historic monuments.¹⁹ The “whole city” approach, however, had the support of certain key individuals at UNESCO, as well as several prominent Yemenis; it seemed to respond to the desire of local reformers, who wanted to introduce modern amenities in the old city while preserving its special qualities.²⁰ Today, largely as a result of the Campaign, conservation-based development has been adopted as a strategy by local and donor agencies in various cities and towns throughout the country.²¹

Because of the two-phase approach, different observers have different conceptions of the Campaign. Residents of the old city greatly appreciate the street paving, water, and sewer works, which have made the old city one of the best-served sectors of Sana'a. For them, conservation is not simply an aesthetic exercise but a process that has improved their lives and validated their environment. Others, including some individuals involved in the Campaign, see it primarily in terms of the restoration and reuse projects which, they feel, were driven largely by the interests of donor nations and agencies rather than by local needs.²² The Campaign unleashed a conflict between two competing notions of conservation, rooted in different histories: the “traditional” approach of monument restoration, and an urbanistic approach that attempts to reconcile modernization and the form of preindustrial urban fabrics. The latter approach emerged at the end of the nineteenth century in the context of urban planning, as city administrators and architects struggled to deal with the effects of modernization.²³ After World War II this process was naturalized as “development.” Modernist planning solutions were proposed for newly independent nations with little concern for local models and conditions — which were in any case seen to be incompatible with modernization. By the 1970s, however, development discourse had taken on a new tone, validating traditional practices and promoting the informal sector. Planners began to call for the conservation of historic urban fabric and architecture, alongside modernization and industrialization.²⁴ It was the fate — and many would say, good fortune — of Sana'a to be drawn into the web of development assistance at this juncture.

The second phase of the Campaign ended in the early 1990s. Around the same time, a number of factors combined to slow or halt conservation activities, especially the economic crisis that followed the first Gulf War. The crisis was largely provoked by newly unified Yemen's opposition to the war, the expulsion of Yemeni workers from the Gulf, and the with-

drawal of donor aid.²⁵ As part of the restructuring of government after unification (1990), the special body that had been created for the conservation of the old city of Sana'a was recast as a national authority, responsible for all historic cities of Yemen (the General Office for the Preservation of Historic Cities of Yemen, or GOPHCY). This new institution, with an expanded mandate and dramatically reduced resources, was also deprived of the donor funding that had helped overcome internal obstacles to conservation.²⁶ In the late 1990s a major World Bank initiative for three cities — Sana'a, Shibam-Hadhramaut, and Zabid — was abandoned after consultants expressed doubts regarding the institutional capacity of concerned agencies. The World Bank has subsequently sponsored conservation-based development through the Social Fund for Development, a semi-autonomous government agency which the Bank helped to create. The SFD has funded most public conservation projects in recent years directly or indirectly, and has been able to attract many veterans of the UNESCO Campaign. It retains close ties with GOPHCY: the two offices jointly initiate projects and some GOPHCY employees work as consultants to the SFD. But the efficiency of GOPHCY continues to be hampered by certain structural problems, to the frustration of all levels of administration.

Today, after two decades of experience in conservation and media efforts to increase public awareness, conservation is now a shared language in Sana'a. While this language is drawn from international practice, it is often used to express local values and concepts that differ from international models. Conservation in Sana'a is at an important juncture: a conservation plan for the old city, supported by a GIS system, is being prepared with the assistance of an Italian team; draft legislation currently under consideration will, if approved, be the first binding conservation law in the country. The state of the old city, which has generally been well preserved, suggests that conservation resonates with the feelings and values of many. Rather than imposing ideas that may be seen as alien, policymakers can build on these feelings by developing plans and legislation that have local meaning and relevance. As a lawyer with long experience in conservation has noted, a law must reflect the feelings and needs of society if it is to be effectively applied.²⁷

I will now discuss some local views of and approaches to conservation, which I have gleaned from interviews with residents, builders, and conservation professionals.

RESIDENTS

Most residents with whom I spoke have a generally favorable view of conservation, and like living in the old city. For many, conservation appears to have validated a “traditional” way of life: the close relations within the quarter (*hara*), a greater degree of piety, and in some cases, religious and political conservatism. On occasion the language of conservation — the injunction against modernization (*istihdath*)

— is used to validate these social forms and norms in the face of rapid change. Some individuals — particularly the younger generation and those without ties to the old city — feel that the benefits of modernity are happening elsewhere, and seek to leave.²⁸ In a few cases, members of families who left the old city have returned or are thinking of returning. Their reasons range from the qualities and “spirit” of the old houses, to the urban life and sociability they feel is missing in the new districts.

The family home is a fundamental institution in the south of the Arabian Peninsula, representing the unity and permanence of a lineage.²⁹ Many residents of the old city of Sana’a have a deep emotional attachment to their houses, particularly when the house has been held by a family for generations. Conservation has touched these emotions, and at the same time has begun to transform them. As a result of conservation and media coverage, residents have become increasingly aware of their houses, as well as aspects of their everyday life, as heritage (*turath*). “Now everyone is conscious of *turath*,” a builder’s wife told me. “Before, it was something they just did.” The term *turath* derives from the verb *w-r-th*, “to inherit”; it associates the idea of *wirth*, or family inheritance — property, values, and traditions — with the collective inheritance of society.³⁰ Many residents have begun to internalize this association, although in some cases it conflicts with deeply held values of private property. The idea that their houses are recognized not only as heritage, but as world heritage (*turath alami*), has reinforced a sense of pride. At the same time, they are becoming aware of their monetary value, which has skyrocketed since the UNESCO Campaign: they can now envision the opportunity — which so far arises only rarely — to transform the family home into capital.

Residents are aware of regulations that prohibit them from making changes to facades and require them to use traditional materials in any renovation or new construction. Most individuals with whom I spoke approve of these regulations — often citing the need to maintain *turath*, which is the work of their forefathers (*ajdadna*) and testimony to their genius. During the recent reconstruction of the well enclosure (*marna*) of Talha mosque, a young man from the neighborhood came up to the builder with an old photograph of the site. He congratulated the builder, noting that the new enclosure looked exactly like it did in the photograph. When I asked him how he felt about this kind of work, he replied, “All of the old city should be rebuilt exactly as it was.” Yet with regard to houses, residents generally have a more fluid interpretation of *turath* than the one articulated in the official guidelines. They see certain changes — for example, adding additional floors or annexes to house married sons — as compatible with *turath*; indeed, this is what they have always done. Planners point out, however, that the traditional mechanisms of adaptation no longer work. The birth rate has increased dramatically: as sons marry, houses will not be able to expand to accommodate their families. Although addi-

tions have been permitted in the past, they are now restricted pending the implementation of a conservation plan.

Conservation professionals speak of preserving the “character” of the city, but this often translates into practical planning concerns: for example, the need to maintain a balance between built and open space, which has decreased dramatically in recent decades. In other cases the criteria are aesthetic — for example, the effect of vertical additions on the skyline. Yet such judgments are, in fact, not so different from traditional practice: a good builder, I have been told, assesses the surrounding context — literally, the “air” (*jaw*) around the house — and builds what is appropriate to it.

The case for safeguarding the old city’s special qualities and pleasant living environment is easily accepted by residents. But they see the enforcement of regulations as uneven and even arbitrary, depending on the degree of influence wielded by a particular property owner. Probably the greatest source of conflict between residents and inspectors is the opening of shops in the ground floor of houses. Traditionally used for animals and the storage of foodstuffs, the now-unused ground floor has taken on added value since the conservation effort, and there is increasing pressure to put it to productive use. I will discuss this in more detail below.

Most residents recognize the value of traditional materials and techniques and would like to continue to use them. Some are aware of the value of local architecture as a system — its strength, its environmental properties, and its artistic qualities. But traditional materials and techniques are in short supply and are significantly more expensive than new materials like concrete block, which is produced locally. Residents often opt for hybrid solutions, applying decorative brickwork and stone cladding as veneers on what is essentially a new constructive system (FIG. 11).³¹ Such solutions are usually approved by inspectors who, following local and international guidelines, are primarily concerned with the exterior of buildings. Yet the reduction of “tradition” to veneer — a process that occurred in the nineteenth century in Europe and the United States as part of the industrialization of building — ultimately undermines the critical potential of the architecture as a constructive and environmental system rooted in local knowledge and practice. By focusing on image rather than substance, conservation guidelines often contribute to the demise of the essence of the heritage they purport to preserve.

The cost of maintaining the massive tower houses is beyond the means or priorities of most families. Most well-to-do residents moved to villas in the new districts, often leaving the old houses to less prosperous relatives. The division of property may remain unresolved after the owner’s death — one of the main reasons for the neglect of houses. It is here that the expanded definition of heritage runs into problems, especially in the context of a poor country. If historic cities are the property of the collective — even the world — should individual homeowners be made to bear the cost of their



FIGURE 11. Brick arches and detailing applied as veneer on a concrete block wall.

maintenance?³² “At least a city like Venice derives some benefit from its status as a World Heritage City,” said one resident. “They have lots of tourists, but what benefits have we seen?”

The expanded definition of heritage requires changes to the legal framework of conservation, in particular the relation between public and private entities. Many national conservation laws require the state to purchase historic properties if they are not maintained by their owners. In light of the limited finances of the Yemeni state and potential conflicts with aspects of Islamic law, authors of the draft conservation legislation devised various strategies to assist homeowners. These include the creation of small loan funds, the repeal of a rule that makes traditional work ineligible for construction loans, exemption from permit fees and eventual taxes, and the provision of free technical assistance and supervision by GOPHCY staff. At the same time, the institutional capacity of GOPHCY would be strengthened by making salaries comparable to those at government research institutes.³³ To date, however, the law has not been passed, and programs to assist homeowners have been tried on only a limited basis.³⁴ The designation of *all* houses as historic also raises the question of conservation standards and methods: it suggests that “conservation” of historic cities should perhaps be reconceived as

maintenance, which was traditionally carried out by residents and builders, rather than experts.³⁵ “Residents had a spiritual tie to their houses,” said a professional who now lives in the old city. “This tie translated into practices (*suluk*), like watering down the earth in front of one’s house, and renewing plaster (*nura*).” This is perhaps why residents and builders have so easily embraced the idea of conservation, which seems to validate familiar practices.

BUILDERS

As noted earlier, building practice in Yemen changed dramatically after the revolution, particularly in Sana’a, the capital city. New materials and technologies — in particular, reinforced concrete — were initially brought north by Adani contractors after the revolution and diffused via a rapidly expanding road network. By the 1970s these techniques were in general use, not only for new commercial and institutional typologies but also for houses.³⁶ While they incorporated certain local materials and elements, these were increasingly reduced to cladding. The master mason (*usta*) initially benefited from the construction boom and experimented with the new technologies. Increasingly, however, projects came to be directed by new professionals — engineers, architects, and construction managers — who had skills that were not part of the *usta*’s training. Some *ustas* acquired these skills and became prosperous contractors. But in many cases highly trained *ustas* ended up working in concrete construction for contracting companies, typically owned by men who had had experience with new construction technologies in the Gulf. No longer the head of a prestigious profession, the *usta* was now subordinated to a building process that valued different skills.³⁷

The building arts have traditionally been highly valued in Yemen, as can be seen by the remarkable variety and quality of so-called “vernacular” architecture; even in Sana’a, many excellent examples are of fairly recent origin (FIG. 12). Building skills were typically passed from father to son, and many families acquired reputations as great *ustas*. Arguably, it has been the social status of builders, rather than their knowledge base, that has suffered most as a result of changing building practice. This has encouraged the tendency for builders’ sons to seek careers in various new professions that carry greater prestige and monetary rewards.

Conservation has had a perceptible effect on architectural taste, and has to some extent renewed the prestige of *ustas* trained in traditional techniques. They have benefited from increased patronage in old-style work in the old city and suburbs, as well as neotraditional architecture throughout the city — what one builder describes as “the revival of heritage” (*tajdid at-turath*).³⁸ For many builders now in their forties and fifties, who began their apprenticeships after the revolution, conservation has validated the work of their fathers and



FIGURE 12. The upper floors of this house were built by the *usta* who served as consultant to the UNESCO Campaign.

grandfathers: they see the old buildings as a training ground for them, challenging them to perfect their own skills.³⁹ Although they continue to work in concrete construction — their bread and butter — they are advocates of traditional methods and materials, which they believe produce better and more durable architecture.

It is often said that builders are fundamental to conservation because they possess the skills needed to restore and maintain old buildings. The *ustas* themselves are very conscious of this fact: they are now caretakers not only of local, but world heritage. Yet they are rarely, if ever, consulted in discussions of what conservation is, or should be, in Yemen. Rather, they serve a system whose goals appear to be defined in the boardrooms of local and foreign agencies.⁴⁰ While they speak fondly of certain conservation professionals who respect their skills, they wonder why their status is not valued and rewarded — especially in public conservation projects that rely on general contractors. Noting the damage that is done to old buildings by materials like cement, one *usta* said:

Do you water a tree with petrol or water? If you keep watering it with petrol, it will dry up and burn. The ustas are the ones who know how to water. We know how to maintain the old city, just like our fathers did, yet we get no benefit from it. The benefit goes to the contractors, who have money but no experience.

Local building processes cannot be conserved through training courses, as has been suggested by some experts. An anthropologist and architect who apprenticed with an *usta* in Sana'a has noted that the building process has many aspects: it includes the social roles and status of builders; their technical knowledge as embodied in practice and performance; the transmission of expert knowledge, normally through an apprenticeship system; and their social and economic relations with suppliers and clients.⁴¹ Unfortunately, these aspects of building process are rarely considered in conservation projects. Public projects, and especially those that receive funds from donor agencies like the World Bank, are expected to use general contractors who are qualified by their administrative abilities and financial resources rather than by their skill in building. *Ustas* generally cannot qualify as general contractors because they may not have bank accounts or money to put up as security. They also have difficulty with, or resist, competitive tendering, which involves certain procedures that are alien to traditional practice. For example, *ustas* are often unable to read drawings and specifications, which are the basis of quantity estimating; they are also accustomed to charging by the day, rather than by the square meter. As the employee of a general contractor, the *usta* suffers not only financially, but in terms of creative autonomy and social prestige. Architects and managers are aware of this. One architect at GOPHCY has proposed that public projects contract directly with specialized building trades: “that way we will preserve the *usta*,” he notes, “not only the product of his work.”

The Social Fund for Development has begun to address these and related issues on an experimental basis.⁴² As cultural heritage began to take on increasing importance as a program area, SFD managers realized that although *ustas* were best qualified to work on historic buildings, they were disqualified by certain procedures and guidelines required by donor agencies. SFD managers have quietly begun to develop ways to facilitate the participation of *ustas* and to strengthen their autonomy. In villages and small towns, a system called “community contracting” is used: local committees act as general contractor and employ *ustas* directly; progress of work and contract payments are overseen by SFD supervisors. In urban areas, however, procedures are complicated by bureaucratic structures that make disbursement of funds more cumbersome. Most SFD projects in Sana'a — for example, the restoration and upgrading of urban gardens, or *maqashim* — are awarded to general contractors, who are required to employ qualified *ustas*. But in a recent project that restored a series of house facades on the *wadi*, the SFD helped one *usta*

qualify as a contractor by simplifying certain procedures and waiving the requirements of a security bond and guarantees.⁴³

Architects and managers also realize the problems inherent in the use of construction drawings. Not only is the *usta* often unable to read them, but they can restrict his creativity, which derives from the engagement of the body and the material.⁴⁴ SFD project drawings are thus often left intentionally schematic, allowing the *usta* to execute details which, as one manager notes, “he can do better anyway.” A project in Shibam-Hadhramaut funded by the SFD and the German development agency GTZ has demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the role of the *usta* and the transfer of expert knowledge. Experienced *ustas* are hired as consultants, who supervise the work of other builders and sometimes help them secure contracts. By supporting the tradition of apprenticeship, the project recognizes that building skills are intimately related to the methods by which they are transmitted.⁴⁵ It should be noted that a similar provision was included in the draft conservation law: older masters of building and manual trades were to be hired by the government as consultants, for the purpose of training new practitioners. Unfortunately, the provision was struck from the law because it conflicted with an age limitation for government employment.⁴⁶

The role of the builder has been undervalued in conservation practice, perhaps because of the perceived rupture between traditional and modern building practices in Europe. In the early twentieth century Alois Riegl, one of the seminal thinkers of conservation theory, argued that the primary value of the monument in the modern era is “age value.” This leads to a new conception of the monument, which Riegl defined as *any* building old enough to be seen through the lens of historical distance.⁴⁷ The primary goal of conservation is thus the indefinite preservation of original material and traces of age, which are the source of the monument’s authenticity. This task is to be entrusted not to builders, but to new kinds of experts:

The care of monuments, until now entrusted essentially to creative artists, who have had to reestablish the originality and lost stylistic unity of monuments, in the future will be provided by historians, who will have to judge and evaluate their historical value as well as their traces of age, and the technicians, who will have to determine and implement the appropriate measures for the conservation of the monument and the traces of the old that are existing in it. There is a place for the artist as such only if he is at the same time an historian and a technician. . . . [S]uch a change in the organization of the care of monuments will not dispossess the artist, as might be superficially thought, but rather will liberate and greatly enlarge the field of his activity.⁴⁸

Modern conservation is conceived not as a creative art, but rather as a science of the past: as an historical document, a building must be restored according to concrete evidence

rather than conjecture or interpretation. Modern interventions and rebuilding are thus strongly discouraged; where new work is required, it must be clearly distinguished from the old.⁴⁹

Along with *turath*, the term “historic” (*ta’rikhi*) can be heard frequently in Sana’a. One builder described his restoration work as an “historical treatment” or “cure” (*‘ilaj ta’rikhi*). Yet in the language of builders, such terms indicate a process that is more fluid and interpretive, rather than documentary. For example, there seems to be no prejudice at all against rebuilding: it must seem natural to builders, since they continue to practice the old techniques. Moreover, there is little attempt to distinguish new work from the old. A noted historian and conservator argues that the continuity of building techniques makes it difficult, if not impossible, to date Sana’ani houses by means of style and details.⁵⁰ This continuity has carried into the “modern” practice of conservation: indeed, builders pride themselves in the fact that their often substantial interventions cannot be distinguished from the original building fabric.

For builders, it appears that the past is not embodied in historical documents or perfectly preserved buildings, but rather in practices that they have inherited and continue to perform in the present.⁵¹ On one occasion, a builder proudly showed me photographs of a facade that he had rebuilt “exactly as it was,” reusing the original materials. Yet upon further discussion, it became clear that he had in fact made significant changes to the building:

The lower level was too short — like an old man hunched over — so I made it taller. The window sills also needed to be slightly higher, because the facade is qibli (north-facing); when the sill is higher, a child sleeping next to it will stay warm.

In building practice in Yemen, as in other art forms, the past is validated by its continuing relevance in the present.⁵² The term tradition — *taqlidi* — derives from the root *q-l-d*, “to imitate.” Builders may describe their work as imitating the past, but in fact it is creative and interpretive — in effect, improving on the past.

This ideological evocation of the past is not so different from modern conservation, which insists on faithfulness to an original model. The language of conservation is thus familiar to builders, and easily adopted to express their own attitudes toward the past. Like tradition, conservation involves change, but achieves its force through the rhetoric of the unchanging.⁵³

CONSERVATION PROFESSIONALS

Even among conservation professionals — some of whom have formal training in conservation and are charged with the execution of official discourse — there seems to be little prejudice against rebuilding. They use documentary

tools like photographs and measured drawings in ways that both conform to and diverge from international practice. Inspectors, for example, may authorize demolition and rebuilding when the existing structure is no longer sound, but also when the proposed use cannot be accommodated within the building fabric. They stipulate, however, that the building must be rebuilt “exactly as it was.” This was apparently standard practice in Sana’a, until it came to be abused by property owners who built new structures that were seen to be incompatible with the surrounding context.⁵⁴ Like builders, conservation professionals make little attempt to distinguish new work from old; in some cases, they build entirely new structures using traditional materials and methods to accommodate new uses. The well enclosure at Talha mosque, which a neighbor said was rebuilt “exactly as it

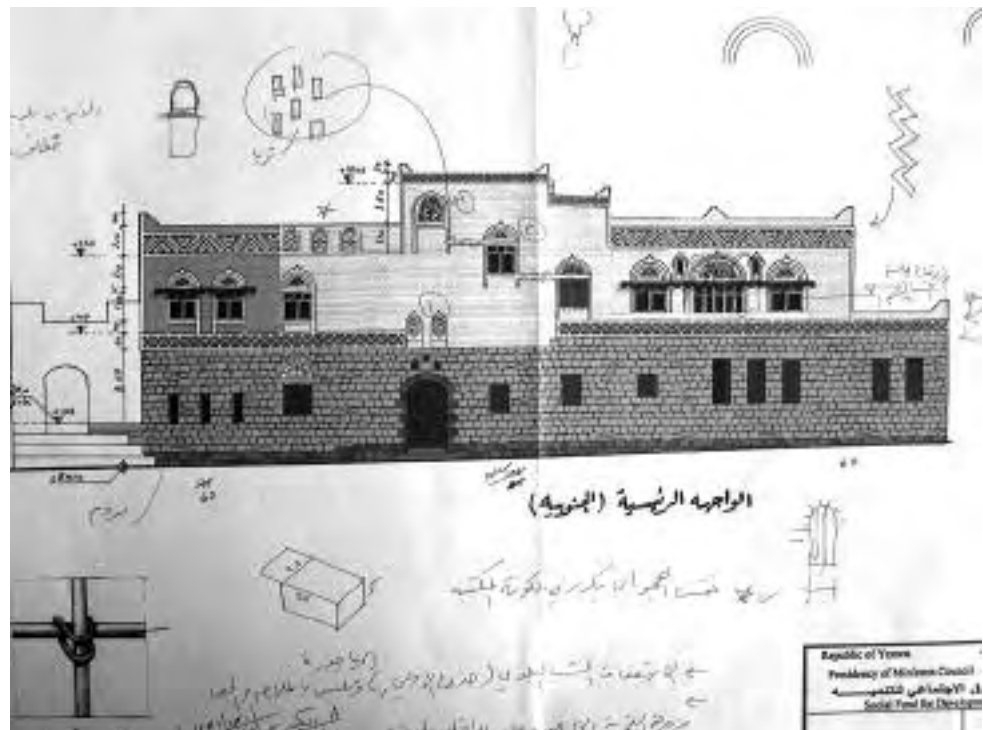
was,” was in fact substantially reconfigured to house a women’s embroidery center. Project documents clearly indicate that the architects were not trying to adhere to the original form of the building; rather, they were striving to reconcile the requirements of the new program with the building’s historic context (FIGS. 13, 14). The new elements, built of traditional materials under the supervision of an *usta*, might easily be mistaken for original parts of the complex. In such cases, the architect and the builder collaborate to create new typologies, demonstrating the adaptability of the historic fabric and the materials and methods that created it.⁵⁵

Following international practice, conservation guidelines in Sana’a are largely proscriptive, focusing on what should *not* be done. But in practice, conservation officials and builders continue to fabricate the “traditional,” which evolves



FIGURE 13. (ABOVE) Street elevation of the marna’ (well enclosure) of Talha mosque, ca. 1980. The dashed section lines show the ramp for the animals that operated the pulley, with the well at right. The rooms above housed a Qur’anic school and living quarters for the instructor. Source: R. Lewcock and R.B. Serjeant, *Sana’a, An Arabian-Islamic City*, 1983. Reprinted by permission of author.

FIGURE 14. (RIGHT) The same elevation, in a second phase of design for the adaptive reuse of the marna’. Redlines and notes indicate changes architects felt would be more consistent with the local style and surrounding context. Courtesy of the Social Fund for Development.



in response to changing needs. Such experiments, I would argue, are more interesting than official buildings in the old city that attempt to reinterpret old types, limiting traditional materials and techniques to veneer. Buildings like the women's center allow builders to work in the old methods from the ground up — a rare occurrence within the old city and elsewhere in Sana'a. But how else are traditional techniques to be preserved, if they are restricted to the indefinite preservation of "original" material?

Because of their training and their mandate, local conservation professionals are on the "front lines" in the negotiation of international and local practice and are thus, in some sense, the most conflicted group. In most cases they are the first generation of professionals trained in conservation programs in Europe and in local workshops run by foreign experts. They interface with international agencies like UNESCO which, despite their stated interest in sustainability, continue to be largely concerned with aesthetic criteria.⁵⁶ Yet these professionals are aware of the unique circumstances in which conservation has been introduced into Yemen — particularly its association with development which, for some, changes the nature of conservation. "Cultural heritage is a Western term," said a local engineer with long involvement in the Campaign. "It has limited application in a place where the built environment continues to fill the need for shelter and social and spiritual sustenance."

Trained in a variety of fields, including architecture, design, engineering, history, archeology and law, these local professionals generally work to restrict changes in the old city, though some question the regulations in private. As might be expected, the most ardent advocates of international practice are architects and graduates of technical or fine arts programs: they have a deep knowledge of and appreciation for the special qualities (*khussusiyyat*) of local architecture and want to conserve them. The old city is all they have left: "[it] is like a sword that my father gives me," said one architect. "It will not be repeated." A noted restoration architect explained his approach:

The architectural style of Sana'a cannot be changed. Sometimes if an owner wants something new, I will do it very carefully. But most do not know the style, and end up ruining the facades.

These feelings appear to be shared by builders: they work to perpetuate a culturally and historically conceived notion of tradition, which provides the framework and limits for their creativity.⁵⁷ I pointed out to one builder that the architecture of Sana'a was not static, but rather had changed over time; should it not continue to evolve? "Change can be allowed," he replied, "but it must be within the framework (*nitaq*) of the Sanaani style."

The past — usually defined as "before the revolution" — is strangely near in Yemen. The so-called "old city" of Sana'a

and its walled suburbs *were* the city as late as 1970; they now comprise only a fraction of the urbanized area, most of which contrasts dramatically with the older districts in terms of architectural and urban forms. Rapid modernization — what many have described to me as a "cultural shock" — appears to confirm the idea of historical rupture embedded in conservation discourse. This rupture seems to be felt more strongly by the educated, who see themselves on the other side of an historical divide. "Change has happened so quickly," said a professional at GOPHCY. "Everything is so new, that we now long for everything old." The "old city" represents not only the collective past, but the personal memories of individuals and families. For conservation professionals, conserving the old city is perhaps a means to conserve a part of their own identity. They thus embraced the strategy of the UNESCO Campaign, which aimed to conserve not only the physical fabric, but a traditional way of life.⁵⁸

Despite the changes of the last twenty years — especially demographic changes — most people who live inside and outside the walls believe that the old city retains a premodern social cohesion. The idea of old Sana'a as unchanging is probably due to be challenged by historical case studies, as has been done for premodern cities in Europe and other parts of the Middle East.⁵⁹ The idea has nevertheless been reinforced by conservation. Much as a World Heritage City is seen to represent the culture that produced it, the inhabitants, too, take on this representative function, "distanced" from their contemporaries along an historical time line.⁶⁰ This perhaps explains the frequent references in the official press to the old city as a museum of a bygone era. "Even the people," said one prominent official, "are antiquities [*athar*]." Residents themselves sometimes use the term "museum" in protest, when they feel their lives are being artificially circumscribed.

While conservation professionals want to conserve the urban fabric and the way of life it represents, they acknowledge that the old city is changing — in part due to the success of the conservation effort itself. The Campaign aimed to revitalize the central market, Suq al-Milh, which now enjoys increased prestige as the best place to buy certain traditional products. Infrastructure and booming commerce led to a dramatic increase in land prices, and commercial activities have spread to areas that had been largely residential. Planners worry that this process — which they call "suqification" — threatens the traditional life of the quarter.⁶¹ Large merchants are most problematic: they buy up houses — sometimes entire blocks — and demolish them or use them for storage. On a smaller scale, homeowners often try to take advantage of increased property values by opening shops in the ground floors of their houses (FIG. 15). While this is prohibited by current guidelines, conservation professionals note that it is an attempt to deal with changing patterns of use. Few families now keep animals, or stock up on grains from the countryside, notes one architect:



FIGURE 15. Shops installed in the ground floor of houses.

In all the conferences and symposia on the old city, no one has ever mentioned the obsolescence of the ground floor. They only talk about how its form is essential to the historic character of the city. But it is impossible for us to leave it without a function. . . . If the idea of conservation had developed here, rather than abroad, it would be completely different.

The key, many believe, is to give people alternatives. “Instead of prohibiting residents from making openings in the ground floor,” said a senior architect at GOPHCY, “perhaps we should help them design these openings, so that they are aesthetically acceptable and structurally sound.” Such an approach would add a prescriptive element to the largely proscriptive guidelines — acknowledging the implications of development, which is required for cities to remain alive. It might be instructive to cite a similar process that happened long ago in what is now a famous World Heritage City. In Venice, shops and workshops spread into residential districts during the late medieval and early modern periods:

central Venice was, in effect, “suqified.”⁶² Those changes — part of the city’s growth and development — are now part of the historic fabric that is protected by law. How, then, can we exclude such changes in Sana’a in the interest of conserving its “historic character”?

TWO ATTITUDES TOWARD THE PAST

While the term “living historic city” is now commonly used in conservation, standards and methods for the conservation of such cities have not been clearly articulated. The term “living” implies that a city must adapt and change in order to remain alive. The term “historic” is more problematic — especially when it is applied not only to monumental structures, but to the everyday fabric of the city. Certain key concepts in the international charters — concepts like heritage, authenticity, and significance — discourage change and evolution. These concepts derive from various intellectual currents in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe — historicism, romanticism, and theories about culture that were developing in the emerging social sciences. Both historicism and romanticism posited a radical break between past and present, and the “irreversibility of the historical time line.” Applied in conservation, these ideas mean that an object or monument is to be valued primarily as a record of the past: its material authenticity is thus its primary source of value, and must be preserved indefinitely.⁶³ In the early twentieth century, the idea of authenticity was approached from another direction: “culture” came to be conceived as an area of inquiry, largely through experience in the European colonies. Culture was understood as a discrete, bounded entity that contained a genuine, unspoiled essence — an essence that could be discerned from the study of material artifacts and settlement patterns.⁶⁴ These ideas about culture confirm certain premises of conservation — for example, the notion that a material artifact *represents* the culture that created it, providing evidence of the culture’s authenticity. The overlap of historicist and culturalist ideas in the fields of conservation and urban planning has yet to be explored.⁶⁵

The modern practice of conservation — what I will call the “historicist approach” — has produced various tools for the documentation and classification of “heritage.” Like other bureaucratic tools, they are used to translate local, context-based knowledge into theoretical knowledge that is used to order complex social and material phenomena.⁶⁶ Inventories, drawings, maps, texts and photographs are used to document historic buildings and cities, organizing them along an historical timeline that excludes the present. Disseminated via print and virtual media, these representations document an ostensibly “objective” view of the past. Because of the “irreversibility of the historical timeline,” cultural heritage resources are considered “non-renewable.”⁶⁷ But this borrowing from the environmental movement is misleading, particu-

larly in areas of the world where traditional techniques persist: it sees cultural heritage as a product that cannot be rebuilt, rather than as a *process* that is self-renewing.

I would argue that it is the historicist approach to conservation, rather than conservation per se, that is new to Yemen.⁶⁸ By positing a divide between past and present, the historicist approach has the effect of making the past alien. Yet as many observers have noted, the past continues to be a meaningful part of the present in Yemen. This past is not the past of historians, but rather a past that is continually performed and validated in the present, in response to changing conditions. In contrast to textual representations that codify the past, performance involves improvisation within culturally accepted frameworks of practice and aesthetics.⁶⁹ Performance of the past can be understood as “tradition”: not the mechanical reproduction of forms, but rather “an interpretive process that embodies both continuity and discontinuity. . . . [It is] a process of thought — an ongoing interpretation of the past.”⁷⁰ It is this kind of interpretive process that shaped the old city of Sana'a, and is still alive today.

It is tempting to suggest that the text-based, historicist approach to conservation be discarded in favor of a practice-based, performative approach. But conditions have changed in the context of capitalist modernity: change is often no longer a matter of assimilating new concepts and practices within an existing framework, but rather of embracing new systems that undermine the framework itself. One anthropologist has noted that tribal poetry may die out in Yemen because of competing values transmitted via the educational system — for example, the privileging of text over spoken language, and standard Arabic over dialect.⁷¹ In much the same way, local construction practices may die out as new values are embraced — for example, the privileging of abstract representations (drawings, specifications and estimates) over embodied practice. The “rationalization” of construction is naturalized in both architectural and economic discourses, but it is largely driven by ideology: cost and efficiency take precedence over social and environmental concerns, the building of local economies, and the creative role of labor. Like modern construction, the historicist approach to conservation tends to privilege abstract representations over practice. It would appear, then, that local building practice is threatened on two fronts: on the one hand, by new constructive systems that ultimately undermine its conceptual, social, and aesthetic framework; and on the other by conservation, which tends to reify it.

What is the future of traditional building practice in this context? I would like to suggest that a new and critical kind of conservation is already emerging in Yemen from the synthesis of historicist and performative approaches to the past.

In many areas of the world that experienced modernization, historicism tended to replace traditional building practices as the latter were subsumed within modern constructive systems. Due to the rapid pace of change in Yemen, the situation is different: traditional builders continue to practice, and have found validation for their work in historicism. They use not only the language of historicism but its tools: for example, an exceptional documentary work on Sana'ani building practice is used by at least one builder as a reference manual and in training (FIGS.16,17).

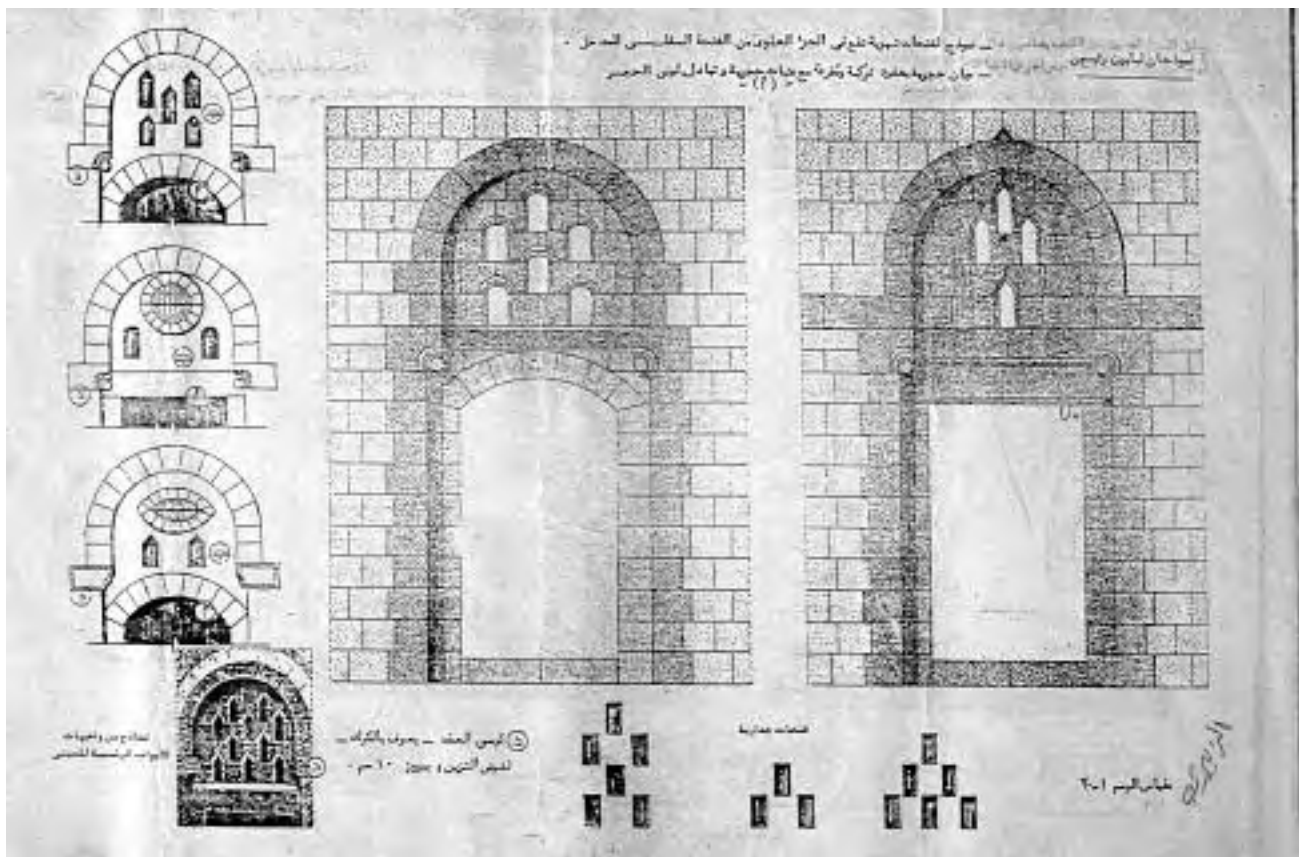
Historicist tools and concepts have to some extent been absorbed in the performance of “tradition” — not only by builders but to some extent, by residents who would like to see the old city rebuilt “exactly as it was.” This is consistent with the definition of tradition, which has always absorbed concepts and tools and has in turn been transformed by them. At the same time, the “past as performance” appears to check the historicist tendency to reduce traditional building to representation. International strictures against rebuilding seem to be generally ignored in favor of performative re-creations that make little attempt to distinguish old from new. Like builders, architects freely “perform” the past, making use of builders’ skills and creative abilities, and often inventing new *turath* to accommodate changing needs. Significantly, architects and builders seem to agree on a culturally constructed framework of tradition; for both groups, historicist documentation helps to establish the parameters of that framework. This framework can also check the tendency of state and corporate actors to co-opt and homogenize “tradition” in their pursuit of political or commercial goals.⁷²

The synthesis of performative and historicist approaches, then, may allow a city to be both “living” and “historic,” accommodating change within the context of an accepted aesthetic. This synthesis can be crafted into a concerted policy for conservation at the national, regional and local levels. Such a policy would be prescriptive as well as proscriptive, conceiving of conservation as a fundamentally creative process rather than as a means to preserve products. It would recognize and promote builders as independent agents and full partners in conservation. At the same time, historicism would help to establish the framework for change — not by reifying forms, but by demonstrating their relevance and adaptability to present conditions. Such an approach to conservation is fundamentally *critical*, in that it interrogates received notions of modernity and identity that are embedded in both modernization and conservation discourses. As such, it shifts attention from historical images to evolving images.⁷³ Such a critical approach to conservation may help to sustain the special qualities of Sana'ani and other local architectures in the face of two global ideologies.



FIGURE 16 (RIGHT). A new door opening in a recent restoration, designed after the middle drawing in Figure 17 (the builder is the son of the usta whose work is shown in Figure 12).

FIGURE 17. (BELOW) Page from a documentary work on Yemeni building crafts. S. Sallam, "Al-hiraf at-taqlidiyya al-islamiyya fi al-'amara al-yamaniyya" ("Traditional Islamic Crafts in Yemeni Architecture"), unpublished Masters thesis, Department of Fine Arts, University of Cairo, 1988. Reprinted by permission of author.



NOTES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The research and fieldwork on which this paper is based were supported by grants from Fulbright-Hays, the Social Science Research Council, and the American Institute for Yemeni Studies.

1. "The main point about modernism," writes historian and critic Alan Colquhoun, ". . . was that it stood for a change in the relationship between the present and the past. . . ." For Alois Riegl, one of the seminal thinkers of modern conservation theory, the "age value" of monuments was meaningful because of its *contrast* to the new. This "corresponds closely to the ideas of the Modern Movement, in which the preservation of historical monuments sometimes went hand in hand with the destruction and rebuilding of the city. . . . Historical works have here lost their meaning as part of the fabric of time and space and are preserved as emblems of a generalized and superseded past" ("Newness and Age Value in Alois Riegl," *Modernity and the Classical Tradition: Architectural Essays, 1980–1957* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), p.220.

The relationship between conservation and modernity has been discussed by F. Choay, *Invention of the Historic Monument*, L.M. O'Connell, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); D. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and P. Haughey, "Oppression and Resistance: Historic Preservation in the Politics of Modernity," unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Architecture, University of Washington, 2001.

2. F. Matero and J.M. Teutonico, "Managing Change: Sustainable Approaches to the Conservation of the Built Environment," paper delivered at the Fourth US/ICOMOS International Symposium, Philadelphia, April 6–8, 2001; and M.A. Hewitt, "Architecture for a Contingent Environment," *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol.47 No.4 (May 1994).

3. The development of conservation standards relevant to different cultures and regions has been the focus of various charters as well as expert missions. The Getty Conservation

Institute and the Australian Heritage Commission, for example, are currently working with the Chinese government to develop the so-called "China Principles" for the conservation of Chinese cultural heritage (J.M. Teutonico, personal communication). The approach of "cultural relativism" in conservation developed from experience at Native American sites (F. Matero, personal conversation). See articles in *CRM/Conservation Resource Management*, a publication of the U.S. Department of the Interior/National Park Service: D. Cushman, "When Worlds Collide: Indians, Archaeologists, and the Preservation of Traditional Cultural Properties," *CRM* 16 (1996), pp.49–54; S.T. Greiser and T.W. Greiser, "Two Views of the World," *CRM* 16 (1996), pp.9–11; and D. Hems, "Abandoning the Cult of the Artifact," *CRM* 4 (1997), pp.14–16.

4. See, for example, various case studies in N. ALSayyad, ed., *Consuming Tradition, Manufacturing Heritage: Global Norms and Urban Forms in the Age of Tourism* (London: Routledge, 2001).

5. One author describes conservation that serves local and community needs as "criticism in action" (S.S. Townshend, "Architectural Conservation in the Dawning Second Republic," *Architecture SA*, May/June 1993). Such criticism takes on special relevance in a globalized world. Scholars in various disciplines have recently begun to consider the role of local knowledge and methods in constructing "alternative modernities," or more radically, "alternatives to modernity." The latter approach, in particular, goes beyond the mere domestication of Western knowledge and practices, arguing instead for their radical reformulation according to local epistemological systems. See W. Mignolo, *Local Histories, Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); and A. Escobar, "Culture Sits in Places," *Political Geography*, Vol.20 No.2, pp.139–74.

6. See, for example, G.A. Krishna Menon, "Conservation in India: A Search for Direction," *Architecture + Design* (1989), pp.22–27; and "Rethinking the Venice

Charter: The Indian Experience," *International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments Working Paper Series*, Vol.40 (1992).

7. According to medieval historians, the city was founded by Shem (Sam), the son of the Prophet Nuh (Noah). For a discussion of the city's founding myths and their modern uses, see F. Mermier, "Les Fondations Mythiques de Sanaa et d'Aden," *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Mediterranee*, Vol.67 (special issue, "Le Yemen, Présent et Passé") (1994), pp.131–39.

The most comprehensive source for the history and architecture of Sana'a before the 1962 revolution is still R.B. Serjeant and R. Lewcock, eds., *Sana'a: An Arabian-Islamic City* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1983). See also R. Lewcock, *The Old Walled City of Sana'a* (Paris: UNESCO, 1986); and H. Kopp and E. Wirth, *Sana'a: Développement et Organisation de l'Espace d'une Ville Arabe*, Cahiers de l'Institut de Recherches et d'Etudes sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman (IREMAM), CNRS-Universités d'Aix Marseilles, 1994. The latter work includes a discussion of the history of Sana'a after the 1962 revolution; for this period see also G. Grandguillaume et al., eds., *Sanaa hors les Murs: Une Ville Arabe Contemporaine*, Collection Villes du Monde Arabe, Vol.1, (Tours: URBAMA, 1995); and F. Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen," unpublished diss., Department of Geography, University of Durham, U.K., 1994. Paul Bonenfant has produced a number of important works on Sana'a, especially the edited volume *Sanaa: Architecture Domestique et Societe* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1995).

8. The Zaydi dynasty was established in the tenth century and lasted until the mid-twentieth century, although the extent of its rule varied considerably. It is associated with a restrained form of Shi'ism which, for example, disapproves of the veneration of saints. The highland tribes have historically been Zaydis, and have dominated the Sunnis with or without the encouragement of the imams. See P. Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen* (New York: Oxford Press, 1989), p.11.

9. Two Ottoman occupations (1538–1635 and 1872–1918) did not bring the kind of cultural domination that accompanied European colonization elsewhere in the region; nor did Yemen's modest petroleum reserves attract the kind of foreign intervention that occurred in neighboring states. Even the British occupation of Aden (1839–1967) at the southern tip of the peninsula did not radically transform the tribal structure, but allowed for the emergence of a modernizing elite (G. Grandguillaume, "Sanaa, Ville d'Arabie," in Grandguillaume et al., eds., *Sanaa Hors les Murs*, pp.4–6).

10. Tribal custom prevented the sale of land to individuals outside the tribe. When a capitalist land market emerged after the end of the civil conflict (1970), this custom began to lose its force, and tribesmen began to engage in speculation (Kopp and Wirth, *Sana'a*, pp.43–44, 52–55). Kopp and Wirth do not mention endowed agricultural land outside the walls, but I have heard this from various informants. Much of the endowed land was confiscated or illegally purchased after the revolution — since in principle endowed property (*waqf*) property cannot be sold.

11. North Yemen was the unofficial name of the Yemen Arab Republic. South Yemen, or the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), was created in 1967; it consisted of the southern and eastern portions of contemporary Yemen, with Aden as its capital. The two Yemens were united in 1990.

12. P. Costa, "Sana'a," in R.B. Serjeant, ed., *The Islamic City* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980); and M. Murayt, formerly of the Ministry of Public Works, interview.

13. Abd al-Karim al-Iryani, former Prime Minister, interview.

14. M. Murayt and R. Lewcock, interviews; P. Costa, "Sana'a."

15. Kopp and Wirth, *Sana'a*, p.11.

16. A water supply system for Sana'a was installed in several phases between 1975 and 1982, beginning with the old city. In addition to the absence of sewerage and drainage, faulty pipes and workmanship caused extensive leaking which was exacerbated as water pressure within the system improved. Cisterns overflowed almost immediately, and water soaked into the ground, trapped above a perched water table. This led to disastrous consequences for the

tower houses: by 1982, thirty houses had collapsed (Ron Lewcock, interview; and P.I. Helmore, "Water Supply, Sewerage, and Drainage," consultant report for UNESCO/Campaign to Save Old Sana'a, 1982). The situation has been partially remediated by the installation of a sewerage system and the upgrading of the water supply system; in some areas, the latter is still in process. But according to builders, groundwater continues to be the source of 90 percent of structural problems in houses. 17. The concept of the international safeguarding campaign grew out of UNESCO's rescue of the temples of Nubia, which would have been inundated with the building of Lake Nasser. The success of this project led to the World Heritage Convention of 1972 and the formalization of the safeguarding campaign as a strategy. A list of prospective "World Heritage Sites" was compiled in the mid-1970s, and the idea of the safeguarding campaign was promoted to nations where these sites were located. The strategy was first applied to the cities of Cairo and Fez, which were listed in 1979 and 1981 respectively — although the World Heritage Convention itself was oriented to the safeguarding of ruins and archeological sites (Hadi Saliba, UNDP-Sana'a, and Selma ar-Radi, archeologist and conservator, interviews).

The initial impetus for the safeguarding of Sana'a may have been Pasolini's film "Le Mura di Sana'a" (1971), which appealed to UNESCO to save the city. This was followed by the Cambridge University expedition to Yemen (1972) and exhibit (1973); and in 1976, by the heavily attended international exhibition "Nomad and City," held at the British Museum as part of the World of Islam Festival. The long-awaited study of the Cambridge expedition, edited by Lewcock and Serjeant (*Sana'a, An Arabian-Islamic City*), was finally published in 1983, although parts of it had been available earlier.

Although the Sana'a Campaign was not officially launched until 1984 and the city was not listed as a World Heritage site until 1986, actual work began earlier. Several UNESCO missions to Sana'a in the late 1970s and early 1980s laid groundwork on site. Important contributions were also made from 1981 by the partnership of Quaroni and Bonifica, sponsored by the

Department of Antiquities and financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Two young Yemenis — Ahmad al-Ibbi, an architect, and Ali Oshaish, an engineer — were instrumental in securing the support of government officials; when the Ministry of Works agreed to fund them for the purpose of developing a strategy, the campaign became a practical reality. Ronald Lewcock, who had carried out UNESCO missions to Sana'a and Shibam, served as UNESCO's coordinator for the campaigns in both cities. Conservation efforts in Fez, Cairo and Tunis were among the models consulted in the preparation of the strategy for Sana'a (Ron Lewcock and Ali Oshaish, interviews).

18. G. Boccardi and R. Lewcock, personal conversations. There were a few exceptions, notably Dutch and German contributions for street paving. Some twenty countries contributed funds for the restoration of individual monuments. For the campaign philosophy and a list of projects — only some of which have been realized — see B. Lane, "San'a: Pilot Restoration Projects for the International Campaign to Safeguard the Old City of San'a," General Organization for the Protection of the Historic Cities of Yemen (GOPHCY), UNDP-UNESCO Report YEM/88/06 (1988).

19. The architects argued that the problem of groundwater, in particular, must be resolved before any building restorations were undertaken. Why restore buildings if they would soon collapse? (R. Lewcock, interview).

20. Qadi Ali Abu Rijal and Abd al-Karim al-Iryani, interviews.

21. See M. Yoshida, "Conservation-Based Development of Historic Cities: the Case of the Old City of San'a in Yemen," *Regional Development Studies*, Vol.1 (winter 1994/5), pp.143–70.

22. "The minimal coordination that takes place between the donor nations and GOPHCY is not inscribed in a comprehensive plan based on urbanistic, social, and economic criteria. . . . Only an external vision, marked by an often reductive aestheticism, seems to prevail notably among the foreign experts, usually architects, involved in these projects. The perception of the old city is sustained by the nostalgia for a golden age, a lost harmony, coupled with the specter of an urban

archipelago isolated from the rest of the city. This ideology of heritage, that conceives the *intramuros* area as an open-air museum and its inhabitants as the last representatives of an endangered species, has colored the elaboration of most of the projects undertaken until now" (F. Mermier, "Sana'a, Metaphore de l'Etat Yemenite," in Grandguillaume, ed., *Sana'a Hors les Murs*, p.50, translation mine).

23. Urban conservation developed alongside the new field of urban planning in the last decades of the nineteenth century, but this has not been adequately considered in the histories of either discipline.

24. In the early 1970s modernist plans for Sana'a, promoted by Egyptian and Saudi consultants, were criticized by U.N. experts who advocated local models and the protection of the old city. In 1978 L. Berger Kampsak's Master Plan for Sana'a and four other cities called for the conservation of the old city of Sana'a (Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen," pp.135,226–27).

25. As a result of the government's opposition to the war, 800,000 to 1,000,000 Yemeni workers were deported by the Gulf states. Their sudden return led to the crash of an artificially inflated economy: they required housing and services and flooded the labor market. The value of the Yemeni riyal began a sharp decline, resulting in a dramatic decrease in income and prices.

26. Mermier, "Sana'a, Metaphore de l'Etat Yemenite," p.52.

27. Tariq al-Hamadi, Director of Legal Affairs, GOPHCY, personal conversation.

28. J. Lambert, "Comsommation de Masse et Tradition a Sana'a: Vers une Culture Urbaine," in Grandguillaume, ed., *Sana'a Hors les Murs*, p.92. Similar sentiments were voiced by several informants.

29. The term *bayt* is used to signify the house and the family that resides in it. It also refers to a form of ownership — the family endowment — that aims to maintain the indivision of property, and thus reinforces the tie between the family line and the house (P. Bonnenfant, "Maisons. Voisins, et Exterieur," in Bonnenfant, ed., *Sana'a: Architecture Domestique et Societe*, pp.65–66).

30. The Arabic terminology follows and essentially translates the French term *patri-moine*, which was also used to evoke a new,

collective concept of inheritance (A. al-Habashi, personal conversation).

31. Walls are typically built of concrete block instead of stone and fired brick (*yajur*). Where stone is used, it is often machine-cut (*manshur*) rather than hand-finished (*muwaqqis*), although machine-finishing is technically prohibited in the old city. Ceiling/floor systems use imported milled woods of standard sections instead of what builders call *baladi* ("domestic," typically *'ilb* for beams). Floor surfaces above are cement on plywood. Interiors are often finished in traditional plasterwork.

The use of structural concrete, hidden from view or disguised by brick veneer, has been much debated among conservation professionals. Some see it as a natural evolution of building practice, while others feel it changes the character and qualities of the architecture.

32. Abdullah ad-Dailami, Director, Cultural Heritage Unit, Social Fund for Development (interview, November 2003).

33. "Draft Law for the Conservation of Historic Cities, Areas, and Monuments, 2004."

34. Funds budgeted for homeowner compensation — for example, in cases of damage from street paving or burst pipes — are diverted to provide small loans for house repair. But the number and amounts of these loans is insufficient; moreover, the use of compensation funds for this purpose has been challenged on legal grounds by the Ministry of Finance. A "heritage fund" was established several years ago by ministerial decree, funded by taxes on several high-volume consumer products. To date, however, these funds have not been requested for projects (Tariq al-Hamadi, personal conversation).

A recent project, funded by the Social Fund for Development, was conceived as part of improvements for Sana'a's turn as Cultural Capital of the Arab World in 2004. Intended as a pilot project, it restored five adjacent house facades and repaired interior structure and spaces that affected the facades. In contrast to a similar project in Shibam-Hadhramaut, which requires residents to request improvements and to pay 70 percent of the costs, in Sana'a participants were selected because of the architec-

tural quality of their houses and their prominent location on the east bank of the *wadi*. They were required to pay only 30 percent of the costs, but to date none have paid; builders are hoping for compensation from the Mayor's office.

35. The restoration of two exemplary tower houses according to "scientific" conservation standards in the early 1990s is now seen by most local and foreign professionals as misguided. One of the projects, financed by Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and executed by Italian firms, made extensive use of techniques like concrete injections. These methods are now seen as expensive and unnecessary, especially when local builders could have stabilized the building using traditional techniques. "The Italian attitude was, 'Let's save these stones,'" said an Italian architect who assisted on the project. "An *usta* [local builder] would have said, 'Let's rebuild.'" Despite thoughtful interior planning and details, the project did not produce a replicable model, as the architect had hoped. This project, as well as another house restored by a Swiss-Yemeni team, also ran into legal problems. While GOPHCY claims that the owners had agreed to sell the houses to the state after restoration, the owners disputed the claim and have refused to sell. The Swiss project was the focus of a controversy that reveals much about how such conservation efforts were perceived (see Mermier, "Sana'a, Metaphore de l'Etat Yemenite," pp.50–52).

36. By the mid-1970s, 20 percent of houses in Sana'a were being built in concrete (Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen," p.158).

37. Varanda, "Tradition and Change in the Built Space of Yemen," pp.156–58.

38. In several important and insightful works on building practice in Sana'a (see below), Trevor Marchand notes that conservation has led to increased patronage for builders trained in traditional methods; he attributes this to the rise in cost of imported materials during the economic crisis of the early 1990s. However, I have found no evidence to support this. Builders and architects have told me that *all* materials became more expensive as a result of the economic crisis. The prices of traditional materials — especially structural wood and the particular

type of brick used in old work — have continued to increase due to their scarcity.

39. “When I first built next to my father’s work, I felt ashamed,” said one builder who specializes in traditional construction. “But gradually I learned from his work, and came to feel proud.”

40. Krishna Menon has noted a similar phenomenon in India, where builders work within a system that is alien in conception, and whose goals they are not asked to help define (“Rethinking the Venice Charter,” pp.51–52).

41. T. Marchand, “Process over Product: Case Studies of Traditional Building Practices in Djenné, Mali and Sana’a, Yemen,” *Managing Change: Sustainable Approaches to the Built Environment*, Proceedings of the 4th Annual US/ICOMOS International Symposium, Philadelphia, April 2001 (Los Angeles: the Getty Conservation Institute, 2003), p.139.

42. These attempts to adapt procedures to the special requirements of cultural heritage projects have been described to me by Abdullah ad-Dailami, Director of the Cultural Heritage Unit; Nabil al-Maqalih, Project Officer; and other project managers at the SFD.

43. See note 34 above.

44. T. Marchand, *Minaret Building and Apprenticeship in Yemen* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), pp.176–79.

45. Omar Abd al-Aziz Hallaj, project manager for GTZ. The SFD/GTZ project recognizes the need to maintain and upgrade houses in Shibam using traditional methods; it thus incorporates a loan program which, in contrast to the pilot project in Sana’a (see note 35), requires owners to pay 70 percent of costs. The project also includes an infrastructure component: a sewer and drainage system will be installed through community-based contracting — that is, without general contractors (Abdullah ad-Dailami, SFD, personal conversation).

46. This objection can and should easily be overcome, especially since laws at the same level are allowed to conflict as long as they do not conflict with the constitution (T. al-Hamadi, personal conversation).

47. In the draft law that accompanied his famous essay “The Modern Cult of Monuments,” Riegl suggested that the period of time required for a monument to acquire

“age value” was sixty years; roughly this same period of time is used in most conservation legislation. See “Progetto di un’organizzazione legislativa della tutela dei monumenti in Austria,” in S. Scarrocchia, ed., *Alois Riegl: Teoria e Prassi della Conservazione dei Monumenti: Antologia di Scritti, Discorsi, Rapporti 1898–1905, con una Scelta di Saggi Critici* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1995), pp.212–21. For the concept of “age value,” see “The Modern Cult of Monuments,” K. Foster and D. Ghirardo, trans., *Oppositions*, Vol.25 (Fall 1982), pp.21–51. This essay is usually presented and analyzed in isolation from the larger legislative project which it was intended to introduce.

48. A. Riegl, “Progetto,” in Scarrocchia, ed., *Alois Riegl*, p.212 (translation mine).

49. These principles are contained in articles nine and twelve of the Venice Charter (1964), and are elaborated in B. Feilden and J. Jokilehto, *Management Guidelines for World Heritage Cultural Sites* (Rome: ICCROM, 1993).

50. R. Lewcock, personal conversation.

51. In the restoration of the Amiriyya *madrassa* (religious school) in Rada, for example, the chief *usta* continually tried to improvise, adding or changing details that he felt would improve the building. He had to be persuaded that as an historic monument, the restoration had to be faithful to the original (Selma ar-Radi, personal conversation).

52. Steven Caton has made a similar argument for tribal poetry (“*Peaks of Yemen I Summon*”: *Poetry as Cultural Practice in a North Yemeni Tribe*) Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, pp.35–36).

53. Theorists and practitioners concerned with the conservation of artifacts, architecture and cities have acknowledged that preservation involves change, material as well as social. But procedures and policies are generally aimed at masking or minimizing the apparent effects of change. While the discourse is internally consistent, it is not that different from the use of the term “tradition” in other societies and eras. Indeed, the ideological usefulness of the term “tradition” appears to lie in its ability to mask change.

54. Nabil al-Maqalih, Project Officer, SFD, personal conversation.

55. Builders differ in their opinions of such “innovation” within the historic fabric. The builder in charge of the restoration, while admitting the usefulness of the women’s center, said that it was a mistake to build a new building within the *marna* enclosure; it should be kept “as it was.” Another builder said it didn’t matter, since the enclosure still looks the same on the outside. The latter statement echoes international practice which tends to be concerned with the exterior of buildings: facades constitute public space, and thus “historic character.” Several Yemenis objected to this idea when it was presented in an Italian-led workshop in the early 1990s: “If the house is a whole that reflects the life of a society,” asked one architect, “why should different standards be applied to inside and outside?”

56. See, for example, the report on the Old City of Sana’a in the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, Report of the Rapporteur, December 7–8, 2001, twenty-fifth session of the World Heritage Committee, Helsinki (<http://whc.unesco.org/archive/repburexto1.pdf>).

57. Marchand, *Minaret Building in Yemen*, pp.235–36.

58. “The goals [of the campaign] are to convey [the] unique character of the [old medieval city] along with its sense of age and history, and to ensure the preservation and protection of [its] way of life as much as possible for those who desire it.

Underlying these aims, however, is a recognition of the importance of carrying the burden of history without stifling urban life so that the population is encouraged to change and upgrade its way of life while still retaining the best of the past” (M.B. Lane, “The Campaign Plan of Action,” *San’a: Pilot Restoration Projects*, p.15).

59. Steven Caton, personal conversation.

60. A city can be listed as a World Heritage site if it is “an outstanding example of traditional human settlement or land use which is representative of a culture (or cultures) especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change” (Feilden and Jokilehto, *Management Guidelines for World Heritage Cultural Sites*, p.6.) As Samia Rab’ notes, it is the “repre-

sentative rather than [the] associative nature [of cultural resources] that renders them worth conserving" ("Authenticity in Cultural Heritage Management: Reassessing the International Charters of Restoration & Conservation," unpublished paper, March 2004, p.4).

61. The term *sugisation* was coined by architect Jacques Feiner and sociologist Hadi Eckert, who were involved in various conservation projects and studies in Sana'a and elsewhere in Yemen. In his dissertation ("La Vielle Ville de Sana'a: Analyse Morphologique comme Fondement de la Sauvegarde Patrimoniale," doctoral thesis no. 1652, Department of Architecture, Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne, 1997), Feiner argued that installing shops on the ground floor of houses led families to vacate because the privacy of women was compromised. These families would then leave their houses, renting out the upper floors or leaving them vacant. These floors would be neglected and fall into disrepair, and ultimately the house would collapse. Feiner's theory has been embraced by many conservation planners in Sana'a. But it appears that many homeowners continue to inhabit houses with shops on the ground floor, some of which have existed for many years. Some residents have told me that the shops in residential areas do not compromise privacy; on the contrary, they make life more convenient. Others, however, have said that "no one would agree to live in a house with a shop on the ground floor." These contradictory reports may be explained by the disjuncture between the image and the reality of the old city. Values and customs are changing, in part as a result of the market economy — for example, increasing numbers of homeowners are renting floors to unrelated families, a change that would for many have been unthinkable some decades earlier. The old values and ways continue to be confirmed verbally, though they are often contradicted by practice.

62. See, for example, E. Concina, *Venezia nell'età moderna* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1989), maps II–IV.

63. Despite attempts of the last decade to broaden the definition of authenticity, it continues to be understood primarily in

material terms. See Feilden and Jokilehto, *Management Guidelines*, pp.16–17.

64. R. Handler, "Authenticity," *Anthropology Today*, Vol.2 No.1 (1988); and G. Wright, *The Politics of French Design in French Colonial Urbanism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), chapter 2.

65. Gwendolyn Wright discusses links between the new disciplines of urban planning and the social sciences in French colonies in North Africa and Asia (see footnote above), while S. Hamadeh looks at the idea of the "traditional city" in urban historiography and its influence on colonial conservation policies in Algiers and Tunis. S. Hamadeh, "Creating the Traditional City: A French Project," in N. AlSayyad, ed., *Forms of Dominance: On the Architecture and Urbanism of the Colonial Experience* (Aldershot: Avebury Press, 1992), pp.241–59.

66. See J.C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

67. Feilden and Jokilehto, *Management Guidelines*, p.16.

68. One conservation professional noted that conservation and sustainability (*istidama*) are old concepts, embodied in practices like maintenance, reuse, and the recycling of water and solid wastes. "Why do we always have to look to Europe for concepts that we already have?" he asked.

Alaa el-Habashi has argued that the *waqf* system encompassed a "traditional" approach to conservation: endowment deeds provided for maintenance and restoration, based on social utility rather than aesthetic criteria. This approach was supplanted by a new type of conservation brought to Cairo by the French in the nineteenth century. Although the new approach was alien, El-Habashi concedes that it saved much of the historic area of Cairo in the drive to modernize. See "Athar to Monuments: The Intervention of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe," Department of Art History, University of Pennsylvania, 2001.

69. S. Caton, "Peaks of Yemen I Summon"; and personal conversation. Paul Dresch discusses the interweaving of past and pre-

sent in tribal histories and in the construction of the Yemeni state. (*Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen* (New York: Oxford Press, 1989, pp.30–31.)

70. R. Handler and J. Linnekin, "Tradition, Genuine or Spurious?" *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol.97 (1984), pp.273–74.

71. S. Caton, personal conversation.

72. An interesting case in point is the mass plastering of house facades in Sana'a to mark the city's turn as Cultural Capital of the Arab World (2004). This YR 65,000,000 (U.S. \$350,000) project was initiated in December 2003 by the Ministry of Culture, apparently without the consultation of local experts. The conception and execution of the project have been criticized by local and foreign architects and conservators, as well as by *ustas* and workers who were hired to carry out the work.

Representatives of the Ministry have defended the project by invoking "tradition," that is, the periodic replacement of plaster on house facades. But the techniques used do not follow traditional practice: plaster was applied thickly and using trowels, rather than by hand; worse, old plaster was scraped off, damaging the surface of the brick and in some cases destroying historic decoration, as on the minaret of al-Abhar mosque. No documentation or technical studies were carried out on monumental structures before the work was carried out. As a member of the World Heritage Committee noted, the use of a single method for monumental structures and houses has tended to homogenize the varied character of the architecture. Although the project could not be stopped — in part because of apparent support from the community — the intervention of the World Heritage Committee persuaded the Ministry to modify its techniques. In this case, local practice was defended by an international agency, which was able to wield more influence than local professionals and *ustas*.

73. Krishna Menon, "Conservation in India: A Search for Direction," pp.25–27.

All photos are by the author unless otherwise noted.

