

Conservation Project

The principal investigators will be art historian/archaeologist Dr. Selma Al-Radi, co-director of the 'Amiriya Restoration Project in Rada', Yemen, and architect/architectural conservator Pamela Jerome, an adjunct associate professor at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) and a senior associate with Wank Adams Slavin Associates, a New York architecture and engineering firm. The trainees will be students from the historic preservation program of the GSAPP, along with Museum of the Hadhramaut personnel, and architecture students from the University of Mukallah.

The significance of the Tarimi palaces and the fact that most of them are undocumented led us to propose their listing on the World Monuments Fund 100 Most Endangered Sites list for 2000-01. We have just received word that the site has been selected for re-listing on the 100 Most Endangered Sites list for 2002-03.

Proposed Method of Documentation

Over the long term, the project is intended to revitalize the historic center of Tarim. Conceived as a dual project involving both documentation and restoration, we believe that the conservation and subsequent adaptive reuse of three to four of the palaces will rally the community into a new respect for their cultural heritage, while simultaneously training future local architects in the efficacy of the traditional construction materials, the art history of the hybrid styles, and the economic viability of historic preservation. We produced a feasibility study, issued April 5, 2001, which elaborated on how this could be done while making a preliminary assessment of the existing condition of 27 of the palaces.

The co-directors will work with a local architect, Abdullah al-Saqqaf. Project space will be provided by the Museum of the Hadhramaut in Seyoun. Under the guidance of the co-directors and local architects, students will measure and draw floor plans of the Ishshah and al-Munaysurah palaces using hand-held drafting boards. Students will also use both digital and conventional photography to document the elevations and details. The digital photographs will be downloaded into a laptop and printed using a color printer. The color prints will be inserted into clear sleeves and conditions will be graphically recorded directly onto the sleeves using a predesignated crosshatching system.

At Columbia University's Media Center for Art History, Archaeology and Historic Preservation (MCAH) the marked-up conditions assessment sheets will be scanned into the computer. The photographs, drawings and assessments will be

used to develop a website to disseminate the information and exhibit the students' work. As the project progresses over the next few years, we plan to exhibit at the Sana'a, Mukallah and Hadhramaut museums as well.

Long-term Documentation and Conservation

Hands-on conservation work and a focus on the social context of the project will come together through a broad understanding of heritage planning and documentation. We believe that documentation in the widest sense will enable us not only to save individual buildings, but also to give a voice to the community of Hadhrami craftsmen. We will disseminate the work of all our participants through digital resources—QuickTime Virtual Reality, three-dimensional modeling, digital video, and high-resolution digital imagery—that will be at the disposal of all parties involved. We will also reapply these materials to future on-site interpretation, museum presentation, and classroom use. In parts of the Hadhramaut the bandwidth to receive web-delivered presentation techniques are not available. In this case, we will use digital resources based a local drive until the digital infrastructure is in place.

The Media Center for Art History, Archaeology and Historic Preservation will develop the online pedagogical resources to complement the project and connect it to courses taught on this and other campuses. The challenge is to bring the onsite experiences and narratives of individual artisans to students and the public in general. Through critical inquiry and a variety of techniques teachers, students and the local community will develop a narrative of the Hadhrami tradition of earthen architecture and its place in the world today. Rather than creating a linear sequence of question and answer, we will provide users access to a mass of raw material inviting visitors to engage the Hadhrami tradition of earthen construction through its craftsmen and their master works. By this, we mean an active desire to engage with the creativity of the community and its history; to explore the urban and social framework of Tarim and thr Hadhramaut Valley in its entirety; and to discover the multiple levels of meaning of place. Putting our work online will also make it available to a wider audience, and it will serve as digital archive for coming generations. Most important, we will be training Yemeni architects in the latest documentation techniques, computer software and visual interpretation theory. These are skills that may be reapplied to future work within the field as well as projects outside of the discipline of heritage conservation.