

Documentation of the Tarimi Mansions 2003-04: Dar al-Salam

Pamela Jerome, James Conlon and Selma Al-Radi

Introduction

An American team of conservators and architects, and employees of Yemen's General Organization of Antiquities and Museums (GOAM) worked from December 27, 2003 through January 15, 2004 documenting Dar al-Salam, one of the Tarimi mudbrick mansions. Dar al-Salam is an Art Deco mansion dating to the 1930s and was designed by Sayid Alawi Abu Bakr al-Kaf.

Co-directors of the Tarimi mansions documentation project are Pamela Jerome (Adjunct Associate Professor, Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation; Director of Preservation and Senior Associate, Wank Adams Slavin Associates LLP) and Dr. Selma Al-Radi (Research Fellow, New York University's Institute of Fine Arts; Co-Director, the 'Amiriya Restoration Project, Rada', Yemen). James Conlon (Director of Interdisciplinary Projects, Columbia University's Visual Media Center) was a collaborator for a second season. In addition, the Columbia team consisted of Rene Fan (architectural conservator), Nadia Yousef (architect), Nuha Ansari (intern), Debora Rodrigues (architectural conservator), and Michele Lamprakos (architect). GOAM colleagues included Abd al-Rahman al-Saqqaf (Director of the Seyoun Museum), Abdallah al-Saqqaf (architect), and Muhammad al-Qadi (archaeologist).

The work of the previous year was to document Qasr al-'Ishshah.¹ The 'Ishshah was the seat of the al-Kaf family patriarch, 'Umar bin Sheikh al-Kaf. The al-Kafs were a prominent family of merchants who made their fortune in Singapore. The documentation work led to emergency stabilization funding provided by Yemen's Social Fund for Development (SFD) for the reconstruction of the collapsed portion of the west elevation (Fig. 1). This work was completed in 2004 by master mason Karami Faraj al-Tamur, who subsequently passed away. In addition, funding was provided by the Ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation for the reconstruction of the collapsed northwest kitchen wing, and the collapsed northwest and northeast wings of Dar Dawil, the oldest building in the 'Ishshah complex. This work will be executed by master mason Awad Ramadan Ba Mumin.

¹ James Conlon, Pamela Jerome and Selma Al-Radi, "Documentation of the Tarimi palaces, 2002-2003: Qasr al-'Ishshah," *Yemen Update. Bulletin of the American Institute for Yemeni Studies*, No. 45, 2003, pp 9-22.

Background

In 2004, an updated feasibility study for the preservation of the Tarimi mudbrick mansions was completed at the request of UNESCO.² The study revealed that of the fifty mansions identified, forty were built for various members of the al-Kaf family. The remaining mansions were constructed for the al-Juneid, bil-Faqih, al-Hadi, al-Haddad and bin Yahyah families.

Twelve of the Tarimi mansions were expropriated in the early 1970s by the Marxist government of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. With the unification of the two Yemens in the early 1990s, the houses were returned to their rightful owners, but due to lack of maintenance, most were in poor condition. As a result, two are beyond repair (al-Mudarrabah and Bir Yimani). One, which was identified as beyond repair in the preliminary feasibility study of 2000,³ has since been demolished (Lubnan). One is in good condition because it continues to be used as a school (Aydid), and another was recently restored (Asmarah) and has become a center for religious studies. The rest are abandoned with the exception of the 'Ishshah which is under long-term lease to the Tarim branch of the Yemeni Society for History and Heritage Protection and is displayed to the public as a house museum. An additional nine mansions are essentially abandoned, one of which is a ruin (Ba Hussain) and another, which suffered an area of collapse, has been partially demolished (al-Majaff). For this reason, the Tarimi mansions were placed on the World Monuments Fund 100 Most Endangered Sites list for two consecutive two-year cycles from 2000 through 2004.

Related Events

Initially, the plan was to document the Hamtut, a Mughal-style mansion dating to the 1880s located adjacent to Dar al-Salam in the core of the "historic district" of Tarim. The Hamtut's condition is more precarious than that of Dar al-Salam. It is one of the expropriated palaces and has never been reoccupied. Dar al-Salam, on the other hand, although also expropriated, was used as a grade school under the Marxist regime. It is in relatively good condition. For various reasons, it was not possible to secure the keys to the Hamtut in a timely fashion. In addition, Dar al-Salam was to be the site of the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Günter Grass event held on the afternoon of 11 January 2004. Therefore, a decision was made to document Dar al-Salam instead.

Günter Grass, the Nobel Prize-winning author, donated part of his prize towards the establishment of the Association of Mud Masons. Dar al-Salam has been proposed as its future headquarters. The German Embassy's cultural attaché department along with Dr. Abd al-Karim al-Iryani, advisor to Yemen's president, organized the 11 January

² Pamela Jerome, Updated Feasibility Study: Preservation of the Mudbrick Mansions of Tarim, Yemen, unpublished report submitted to UNESCO, Unit of Arab Countries, Division of Cultural Heritage, Paris, France, issued 15 March 2004.

³ Pamela Jerome and Selma Al-Radi, Feasibility Study for the Mudbrick Palaces of Tarim, Yemen, unpublished report submitted to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York, NY, 5 April 2001.

2004 event. Dar al-Salam was cleaned, some electricity and plumbing installed, carpentry work was carried out on the front entrance door, and repairs were made to one of the roofs where a hole had developed in the mud substrate. This work was carried out under the supervision of the Sana'ani architect, Abdallah Hadrami, and al-Radi with funding from the SFD.

Subsequent to the ribbon-cutting ceremony and tours of the house, the event moved to the front yard of the Hamtut. This area had been prepared by removal of rubbish and leveling of the ground with a bulldozer. In addition, a deeply undermined area of the front entrance's foundation was filled and stabilized, and carpentry repairs were made to the front door. Some cleaning was carried out in order to permit guests to visit Hamtut's central corridor, which wraps around a small interior swimming pool. The rest of the house was considered too precarious and was kept off limits.

The Günter Grass event resulted in major media coverage. On the morning of 11 January 2004, an additional event brought more publicity to the plight of the Tarimi mansions.⁴ An award ceremony was held in the recently restored west section of the 'Ishshah. Dr. Gaetano Palumbo of the World Monuments Fund presented the Tarimi mansions preservation project partners with Certificates of Outstanding Accomplishment, signifying the removal of the Tarimi mansions from the 100 Most Endangered Sites list.

Staging these events has a value extending beyond good public relations. These cultural activities have proved to be an effective tool in the first stages of reinvigorating the heritage core of Tarim, similar to our initial public event in November of 1999, the premiere of the documentary film, "The Architecture of Mud."⁵ As the efforts of our partners in the Tarim branch of the Yemeni Society for History and Heritage Protection have shown, there is local interest in Tarim's cultural heritage. While many of the villas stand abandoned, the resurgence of activities in several key buildings gradually establishes new life in the center of the historic city. Associating national and international events with the city's heritage sites further invigorates these local interests while also associating local efforts with what were once private places. These cultural events then represent our shared efforts with the community to define and establish significant heritage places.

Team member participation in professional conferences and other activities has resulted in building interest in the project and establishing new partnerships. In early December of 2003, Jerome and Conlon presented the Tarimi mansions preservation project at Terra 2003, the 9th International Conference on the Study and Conservation of Earthen

⁴ "Preserving the mud brick palaces of Tarim," *Yemen Observer*, January 10, 2004, p 20.

⁵ Caterina Borelli and Pamela Jerome, "The Architecture of Mud," Anonymous Productions, 1999.

Architecture which was held in Yazd, Iran.⁶ As a result, Jerome was approached by Dr. Anna Paolini of UNESCO's Unit of Arab Countries, Department of Cultural Heritage to provide an updated feasibility study, Power Point presentation and a proposal for the restoration and adaptive reuse of one of the Tarimi mansions. For the latter, al-Fijr, the unfinished house of the architect, Sayid Alawi Abu Bakr al-Kaf, was selected. Al-Fijr is being proposed for adaptive reuse to house the important collection of al-Awqaf Manuscript Library. The collection currently resides in a concrete-frame building without benefit of climate control. Al-Fijr's adjacency to the 'Ishshah and proximity to al-Mihdhar Mosque, as well as its generous room sizes and layout, make it ideal for this use.

Community Partners

This season brought to a successful conclusion our two-year cooperative agreement with GOAM. The Tarimi mansions documentation project will continue under the auspices of the SFD, which is also supporting emergency stabilization work. The SFD is being approached for funds to stabilize the roofs of al-Ryad, the Hamtut and the 'Ishshah, the shoring of a termite-infested beam in al-Fijr, and the rebuilding of the camel ramp and supporting pier in the Dar Dawil section of the 'Ishshah complex.

Dr. al-Iryani's personal interest in the fate of the Tarimi mansions has been a major motivator for focusing the attention of the Yemeni government on Tarim. This season, Ahmad Juneid al-Juneid, the vice governor of the Hadhramaut region, is negotiating the purchase of five of the mansions on behalf of the government which is creating an NGO to assume ownership. There also has been more discussion about the establishment of legislation to protect Tarim and regulate the aesthetics of new concrete construction.

The Municipality of Tarim, with Muhammad al-Sha'iri as director, and the Tarim branch of the Yemeni Society for History and Heritage Protection are both major stakeholders in this collaborative effort. In the upcoming season, we hope to hold a series of community workshops to design a preservation master plan for the city of Tarim. This would enable community participation in adaptive reuse decisions while fostering the understanding of preservation as a tool for economic development. The goal of the project is to manage change in a sustainable way and mentor the revitalization of the community through historic preservation. Simultaneously, we will continue to document abandoned mansions, thereby focusing the community's awareness on the significance of these structures.

Eventually, we would like to involve architecture and/or engineering students from the universities of Sana'a and Mukalla, respectively, in the documentation training program. In the upcoming season, we hope to have Columbia University preservation graduate students participate as well.

⁶ Pamela Jerome, James Conlon and Selma al-Radi, "Preservation of the mudbrick palaces of Tarim, Yemen," Terra 2003. 9th International Conference on the Study and Conservation of Earthen Architecture, Tehran: Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization, 2003, pp 319-328.

Documentation of Dar al-Salam

Dar al-Salam is an imposing three-story structure with its main (south) façade characterized by its rounded balconies (Fig. 2 and refer to elevation). Exterior decorations are restrained and executed in monochrome (Fig. 3). Originally the home of Muhammad Hussain al-Kaf, its current caretaker is his son, Salih Muhammad al-Kaf. The building is for sale for 2,500,000 Saudi Ryals (approximately \$665,000) and is under negotiation for purchase by the Yemeni government.

The plan of the building is developed symmetrically around a central courtyard (refer to plans), with a two-story U-shaped kitchen addition around a second courtyard attached to the rear (north) elevation (Fig. 4). A single-story addition erected to the west incorporates garages on the ground floor, the roof of which is a large terrace accessed from the central corridor of the 1st floor. A secondary entrance, probably for women, household workers, and visitors of lower status, is attached to the garages and rises to the rear (north) of the terrace, culminating in a large water tank (Fig. 5). This house shows a maturity of design that the 'Ishshah, built as a series of additions, lacks. (The main structure of the 'Ishshah and its later additions were designed by the same architect, Sayid Alawi Abu Bakr al-Kaf.)

Gently curving steps lead up to the front entrance door, recessed under a balcony. To either side of the main door are a series of doors opening up into storerooms. The exterior steps were repaired in preparation for the Günter Grass event under the direction of master mason Ghamadan Karama Ba Haji (Fig. 6).

A monumental sweeping stair (Fig. 7) leads from the ground floor entry hall to the 1st floor level and the corridor that encircles the courtyard. Directly opposite the top of the stair, Art Deco stained glass double doors with a stained glass transom above (Fig. 8) lead to a balcony overlooking the courtyard (Fig. 9).

Subtle painted decorations characterize the rooms (Fig. 10). Decorative niches vary from space to space (Fig. 11). Columns are constructed of stone drums covered in plaster. Column capitals are similar in all of the spaces, although the paint schemes differ (Fig. 12). Rooms tend to be generously sized and most of them have attached balconies. Bathrooms have separate elegant sink rooms adjacent to WC/shower rooms (Fig. 13). A traditional kitchen survives intact on the 1st floor (Fig. 14).

The house is being proposed as the future headquarters for the Association of Mud Masons. It lends itself to classroom and office use and has ample space to incorporate representatives of other traditional construction guilds, such as lime craftsmen and carpenters. The German-sponsored technical aid program to Shibam, GTZ (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*), is working at a grass roots level to organize the mud masons into a guild which can compete with the valley's concrete

contractors for government bids. Courses in estimating and construction document reading are envisioned, as well as the apprenticeship of younger craftsmen.

As with the previous season, documentation was accomplished through a combination of low- and high-tech methods. These efforts were led by the three team leaders, with Jerome responsible for the technical aspects, al-Radi acting as a liaison to the Yemeni government, and Conlon responsible for the digital component. As in the previous year, the building was measured using conventional tape measures and a laser measurer. We worked off of existing plans published by Salma Samar Damluji.⁷ The plans proved to be inconsistent and, in many cases, inaccurate, particularly for the ground floor level. This may have been a result of not having access to all spaces; however, we were given permission to remove and replace all padlocks, thereby gaining access to all spaces.

Unlike the previous year, this season's CAD drawings were partially produced as the plans were being measured. The software used was Vector Works. Rene Fan and Michele Lamprakos drafted the CAD drawings. Neither draftsman was familiar with the software, the industry standard being AutoCad; however, the latter is not Macintosh compatible. The drawings were not finished before we left Yemen and Fan completed the drawings in New York upon our return. For the sake of efficiency, this was accomplished by converting the drawings into AutoCad files.

Exterior elevation CAD drawings were generated by manipulating digital photographs using Photoshop to produce rectified images. Measurements taken of window openings were used to scale the images, which were then converted into measured CAD drawings. Documentation using QuickTime Virtual Reality was accomplished for several of the rooms. Approximately 3,000 digital photographs and 250 35-mm color slides were produced. Samples were taken of mud substrate, mud plaster and lime plaster for analysis. Our work is disseminated on the website www.learn.columbia.edu/tarim.

In addition, on the last two days of our stay in Tarim, the 'Ishshah was resurveyed to correct inaccuracies in the plans. The draftsman who produced the drawings, post-graduate student Olsen Jean Julien, did so after our return from Yemen in 2003 and without the benefit of ever having seen the building. Thus, invariably, there were mistakes in the plans, which we took the opportunity to correct.

Dar al-Salam Estimated Budget

With the help of Abdallah Hadrami, the following estimated budget for restoration costs was compiled.

⁷ Salma Samar Damluji, *The Valley of Mud Brick Architecture*. Shibam, Tarim and the Wadi Hadramaut, Reading: Garnet Publishing Ltd., 1992.

Restoration Budget:

Masonry repairs	\$15,000
Waterproofing of roofs	\$15,000
Exterior and interior lime plaster repairs	\$20,000
Carpentry	\$25,000
Electrical installation	\$20,000
Plumbing installation	\$20,000
Wrought ironwork	\$2,000
Landscaping	<u>\$7,000</u>

Dar al-Salam Restoration Budget Subtotal ***\$124,000***

20% Contingency

\$24,800

10% Consultant's fees

\$14,880

Dar al-Salam Restoration Budget Total ***\$164,000***

Future Work and Funding

Next season, we intend to survey the Hamtut and al-Fijr. The Hamtut is being proposed for adaptive reuse as the Center for Visiting Scholars and is under negotiation for purchase by the Yemeni government. We envision the restoration of the Hamtut and Dar al-Salam occurring simultaneously. We hope to begin occupying the Hamtut by the 2005-06 season.

Funding for the restoration program could come from several sources, as discussed with the American Embassy at the end of the season. Our long-term program requires approximately \$500,000 per year over a ten-year period. We are in the process of applying for 416(b) grants from USAID. Program development for the Hamtut is being sought from a MEPI (Middle East Partnership Initiative) grant. The German cultural attaché department has expressed interest in developing al-Ryad into a Museum of the Environment of the Wadi. We have applied to UNESCO to fund the restoration of al-Fijr and to sponsor the community workshops. The Samuel H. Kress Foundation of New York has committed to providing some funds to cover Columbia University graduate students' participation. The American Institute for Yemeni Studies continues to provide us with fellowships to execute the documentation training program.



Fig. 1: The collapsed area of the west elevation of the 'Ishshah was reconstructed in 2003 under the supervision of master mason Karami Faraj al-Tamur with funds from the Social Fund for Development.



Fig. 2: Dar al-Salam is a mudbrick Art Deco masterpiece designed by Sayid Alawi Abu Bakr in the 1930s. It is being proposed for adaptive reuse as the future headquarters of the Association for Mud Masons.

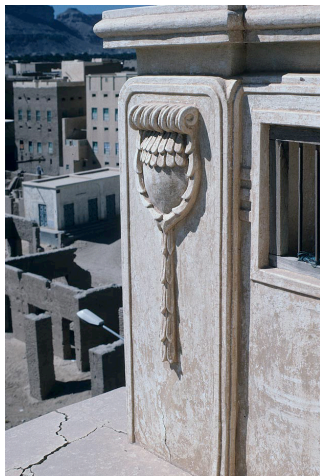


Fig. 3: Dar al-Salam's exterior details are simple but elegant, monochrome three-dimensional decorations.



Fig. 4: The two-story kitchen addition was planned around a secondary courtyard.



Fig. 5: The secondary entrance culminates in a water tower and exits onto the terrace formed by the roof of the garage addition.



Fig. 6: The exterior steps to the main entrance of Dar al-Salam were repaired in preparation for the Günter Grass event with funding from the Social Fund for Development.



Fig. 7: A monumental stair leads from the ground floor entrance to the 1st floor.



Fig. 8: Art Deco details include the stained glass balcony doors with transom above, here depicted before the removal of a Marxist-era partition.



Fig. 9: The 1st floor balcony overlooks the main courtyard.



Fig. 10: Room 133 is typical of the subtle interior décor.



Fig. 11: The design of decorative niches differs for each room.



Fig. 12: Column capitals are similar although the paint schemes vary.



Fig. 13: The WC doubles as a shower room.



Fig. 14: The traditional kitchen survives in the Dar al-Salam.