

Analysis of the Architectural heritage of El-Mansoura city, Egypt towards urban conservation approach

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Abstract: *Mansoura city is one of the Egyptian intermediate cities in the Nile delta, The city center heritage mostly are in the European Mediterranean style because of the presence of the foreigner communities in the city during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As many other Egyptian intermediate cities, the city heritage suffers from lack of maintenance and absence of organized conservation programs. El-Mansoura architectural heritage are divided into main five zones around the city center, The “private palaces and villas zone” it was the residence of the aristocratic Egyptians, The “Northern city center” it was the administration zone near the port, The “Commercial center” with high concentration of commercial activities, “El-Mokhtalat neighborhood” it was the residence of the foreigners and elite Egyptians, “Torel neighborhood” it was a combination of private villas. Their are some trials to preserve and restore the city heritage but normally they are individual trails, now there is some projects to make urban development of the valuable zones and that will lead to effective conservation projects in the future.*

El-Mansoura: is an intermediate city in Egypt, Coordinates: 31°03'N 31°23'E with a Population (2008) of 1,045,000. It is the capital of the Dakahlia Governorate. Mansoura means “The Victorious (city)”. The city is named after the Egyptian victory in the battle of Mansoura over Louis IX of France during the Seventh Crusade "Al-Makrisi [¹]". Mansoura lies on the east bank of the Damietta branch of the Nile, in the Delta region. Mansoura is about 120 km northeast of Cairo. Across from the city, on the opposite bank of the Nile, is the town of Talkha. Mansoura and Talkha together form ametropolitan city. Mansoura was established in 1219 by Saladin's brother, “Abu-Bakr Malik Al-Adil I” of the Ayyubid dynasty. After the Egyptians defeated the Crusaders during the Seventh Crusade, it was named Mansoura. The city is famous for its architectural style that is mainly in the European Mediterranean style. Like Cairo and Alexandria, Mansoura was home to a flourishing Greek community until the Nasserite era, when many were forced to leave. Many of the older and best established shops and businesses around the city still bear their original Greek names. The first English school in the city was established on the site of the old Greek school in the Torel area "[²]".

El-Mansoura architectural heritage

The development of the city fabric: the city of Mansoura started on the river Nile from a point where the river is in its minimum width and this point is now the bridge that connects El-Mansoura and Talkha city, as shown in fig.1 from that point the city expanded east, west and south.



Fig.1. El-Mansoura and its expansion directions.

¹ Makrisi, “*Essulouk li Mariset il Muluk [The Road to Knowledge of the Return of Kings]*”, in *Chronicles of the Crusades*, AMS Press, New York, 1969, pp. 535-556.

² http://www.egypttravelsearch.com/Cities/El_Mansoura.html

The architectural heritage of Mansoura historical center has gained its value due to its particular characters that represent all the cultures that passed over the city, and reproduce its ethical values in local style. That is because of the national culture of the aristocratic and intermediate class "El-Kerdany [³]"'. And emphasize this meaning the words of some historian who said that "Alexandria and Port-saed [⁴] are European sites where Egyptian live in, but El-Mansoura is Egyptian city with European live in" " Al-Morsy [⁵]"'.

1. Valuable heritage regions of El-Mansoura:

The architecture heritage of El-Mansoura consists of main five zones fig.2, Each one of these zones has it's own characters that define it's value as followed.



Fig.2.Map of El-Mansoura and it's historic center highlighting the main valuable culture regions.

(1).private palaces and villas, (2).Northern city center, (3). Commercial center, (4).El-Mokhtalat St., (5).Torel.



Fig.3. Private palaces and villas zone, (1). El-Shenawy Palace, (2). Dr. Mahmoud Samy Palace, (3). Villa Gheath, (4). Private villa.

³ El-Kerdany, Dalela "Global architectural heritage of the city of Mansoura: fact or fantasy, towards Management of the city modern heritage", The international conference: management of the common heritage of the Mediterranean countries , Alexandria, Egypt, 29-31 march 2005.

⁴ Two cities at the Egyptian north coast most of their building in the European style.

⁵ Al-Morsy, Ibrahed, "Foreign communities in the Directorate of Dakahlia in the second half of the nineteenth century", unpublished PhD, Ain shams university, Egypt,1990.

1.1. private palaces and villas:

That zone was the private residence of the elite and aristocratic Egyptians families because it's view on the river Nile and it is quite distance from the crowded city center, and the main remaining building in this zone is "El-Shenawy Palace" that was chosen to be the national museum, "Dr. Mahmoud Samy Palace" used as Mansoura university administration, "Villa Gheath" and other private villa and they are private residence fig.3.

1.1.1. El-Shenawy Palace:

This palace was built between 1339 and 1344 between the Nile and El-Gomhoria St. (Foad the first St.), It was build for "Mohamed Bek El-Shenawy" -one of the aristocratic family in El-Mansoura and member of Wafd party⁶- it was built on the Italian style by Italian architect and Italian handcrafts This palace was awarded from "Mussolini" on 1350 as the best building in the middle east that was built on the Italian style outside Italy fig.4. The building with the garden is about 4164 m² and the built area is 441 m² (20.5m*22m), the skeleton of the building made of stones covered with bricks. The palace are surrounded with gardens from the four sides and its facades designed on the Baroque and Rococo style and they are in good conditions fig.5,6.



Fig.4 Certificate from "Mussolini" on 1350 as the best Italian building outside Italy.



Fig.5 Front façade and Entrance of El-Shenawy palace.



Fig.6 Northern façade.



Fig.7 details of the façades.



Fig.8 details of the decorations and the main staircase.

The facades are decorated with bricks and the details made of lime stone, the columns are made of white marble fig.7. The interior decoration are in the Italian renaissance and many of the materials and furniture were brought from Italy specially the main wooden stairs that was exported completely from Italy fig.8. The building has some problems due to the groundwater and in some parts of the ground floor, and some degradations in the side

6 The Wafd party was an Egyptian nationalistic movement that came into existence in the aftermath of World War I.

façade due to problems in the water supply system fig.9. At 2005 the Egyptian ministry of culture had bought the palace to convert it into museum of El-Mansoura heritage and now it is under restoration.



Fig.9 deteriorated parts due to the moisture and atmospheric effect.

1.2. Northern city center:

This zone is the commercial and service center of the city, where still exist some of the best administration commercial buildings, some of them were restored and reused during the last decades. Such as “Bank of Alexandria” that was restored after many years of abandon, “El-Shawa Commercial center” that was transferred from hotel to commercial center, “The City Hall” that include also branch of “The Egyptian united bank” fig.10.



Fig.10. Northern city center zone, (1). Alexandria Bank, (2). Commercial center and hotel, (3). Residential and administration for Misr insurance , (4). Egyptian united bank and the city hall.

1.2.1. Bank of Alexandria:

This building that was built in 1902,It was designed by the Italian architect “Luigi del Coure”. The first use of this building was “The Anglo-British Bank”, “the Italian Bank” from 1921 till 1931, “Barclays Bank” from 1931 till 1960, and after that it was bought by “Bank of Alexandria” and used as the main branch of the bank, and the second floor was residence of the bank manager.



Fig.11. Bank of Alexandria before restoration.

Until the eighteenth of the nineteenth century it was closed after moving the bank to new building in the main offices zone fig.11. It was abandoned till the restoration and rehabilitation project in 2004 fig.12. In this project they restore the exterior of the building and make some changes in the interior such as adding the second floor to the bank and remove some walls to expand the main hall. "El-Eashy [7]".



Fig.12. Façades and details of “Bank of Alexandria” after restoration.

1.3. El-Seka El-Gededa “The commercial city center”:

This is the origin of the city and it is main commercial path, starts from “El-Abasy St.” to The “train station square” passing throw “El-Maleka” and “El-Hosenia” squares. This zone contains many historic building with commercial and private offices use fig.13.



Fig.13. El-Seka El-Gededa “The commercial city center”. (1).Glouria Hotel,(2). Building in the Islamic style,(3)abandon buildings with commercial activities, (4),(5),(6),(7) commercial and office buildings.

1.4. El-Mokhtalat “Mixed neighborhood”:

After the construction of “Mohamed Ali palace” in 1866 El-Mokhtalat “Mixed” zone was the residence of the foreigners and elite "Salem [8]”, Most of the building were built on the European style and many of them are still exist, that makes this zone one of the most important parts of the city, It contains three main parts; the main street “Fareda Hassan street” connecting between the “Happy-land” square and the “Government square”, Northern elevation on the Nile, The eastern elevation on El-Geash Street fig.14.



Fig.14. El-Mokhtalat St. “Mixed neighborhood”, consists of three parts (A). Fareda Hassan St, (B). Northern part on the Nile , (C). El-Geash St.

7 El-Eashy, Alaa, “Aesthetical values of architectural heritage in Egypt”, unpublished PhD, Mansoura university, Egypt,2006, P170.

8 Salem, Hany S., “Monitoring and analysis of historic valuable buildings in Mansoura City and it’s surrounds”, unpublished Master thesis, El-Azhar university, Egypt,2001.

1.4.1. Fareda Hassan street:

It is the main street in the neighborhood, starts from the Happy-land square at the west to the surveying building in front of the Government building in the east. The most important building in this street is the palace of “Mohamed Ali” [9], some schools and some private residential buildings. Recently most of the ground floors are converted into restaurants, bazaars and commercial facilities fig.15.



Fig.15. Fareda Hassan St. the buildings (1),(2),(3),(4),(6),(7),(9) are private residential, (5).Mansoura Court previously “Mohamed Ali Palace” , (8). Mansoura secondary school for girls.



Fig.16. Northern part of El-Mokhtalat on the Nile. (1).private residential buildings, (2).Expansion of Mansoura Court , (3).National party, (4).El-Mehalawy Villa.

9 The palace was built in (1863-66) for “Mohamed Ali” the governor of Egypt, and then it was transformed into the “Mixed Court” (1878) now it is El-Mansoura court.

1.4.2. Northern Elevation on the Nile:

The northern Building represents a combination between the local style and the European Mediterranean styles, most of the buildings are residential except the expansion of the court that was built in the garden of “Mohamed Ali” palace, and the national party that was the Nile marine of the palace fig.16.

1.4.3. El-Geash Street& Om-Kouthom square:

This is the commercial and administration zone in the city because of the presence of the government building, most of the historical buildings was removed and replaced with modern building but still exist some building such as the palace that is now the Police headquarter and some residential buildings fig.17.



Fig.17. El-Geash Street& Om-Kouthom square. (1),(2),(3).private residential and office buildings, (4). palace now the Police headquarter, (5).residential building in ruins.

1.5. Torel Neighborhood:

This neighborhood was built at 1920 “Eelie Torel” French businessman, It was planed by the Italian architect “Luigi del Coure” as a group of private villas with gardens located on a perpendicular grid of streets. Many of these villas was replaced with modern building but the neighborhood still has its original characters because of it’s urban pattern and some remaining villas fig.18.



Fig.18. Torel Neighborhood. Some remaining villas.

Problems that faces the architecture heritage of El-Mansoura city:

Mansoura city –as most of the intermediate cities in Egypt- has its own unique heritage that define the image the city. Most of the city heritage are private properties and normally haven't any economic income that make it very difficult to restore or maintain those buildings. Recently there was some trials to preserve and reuse heritage buildings some of these trials were succeeded and others were just deformation of the original buildings, some other building were removed and replaces with modern building duo to economical reasons, other building are in ruins because the Egyptian law prevent the elimination of valuable buildings. That leads to the lose of important part of the city heritage because there isn't a general plan to manage the city heritage fig.19.



Fig.19. Some building are abandon others are in ruins and some were eliminated.

Currently there are some projects to make urban development of the city heritage zones, in collaboration between “El-Dakahlia’ governorate and “Mansoura university, Department of architectural engineering” and that may gives a good opportunity to preserve the city heritage in the future fig.20.



Fig.20. Some recent project of the city urban development designed by a team of the “Mansoure university architectural department staff”.