INTERPRETING THE PAST
volume IV

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WHO OWNS THE PAST?
Heritage Rights and Responsibilities in a Multicultural World

Proceedings of the Second Annual Ename International Colloquium

Provincial Capitol, Ghent, Belgium
22-25 March 2006

Flemish Heritage Institute
Province of East-Flanders
Ename Center for Public Archaeology and Heritage Presentation

2007 Brussels, Belgium

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CAIRO'S ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE: HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF A MEGACITY

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IN the late nineteenth century, a new quarter in European style was added to Egypt's capital. A variety of architectural styles can still be seen there, such as Art Deco, Jugendstil, Roccoco and Baroque. In contrast to many cities in the Middle East, Cairo's European quarter was built largely on virgin soil. Whereas in many cities the process of "Hausmannization" took place by demolishing large parts of earlier, medieval quarters, in Cairo the medieval quarter was mainly left intact and the new quarter was laid out from scratch at another location. During the Revolution of 1952, many of its buildings were burnt to the ground and even though the surviving architecture has suffered continuous deterioration over the past five decades, it still offers many interesting aspects.

This built heritage of the relatively recent past is slowly being recognized as important heritage in its own right. National and international heritage professionals are not only focusing on managing Cairo's medieval built heritage, but gradually widening their view. This paper will examine the possibilities for the formulation of an integrated management strategy for this type of heritage in a megacity.

The research area

The research area for this study is located in Downtown Cairo, *Bwist el-balad* in Arabic, and encompasses the triangle between the squares Ramsis, Gumhuriyya and Tahrir. Obviously, this is not the only location where built architectural heritage from the turn of the last century can be found. However, the current research is mainly restricted to this area for two main reasons. First, this is the heart of the modern city as envisaged by its instigator and patron, Khedive Ismail. Second, the area is particularly illustrative of the problems encountered in a megacity. Traffic is dense, air pollution high, and the streets are crowded with people with varying relationships to this part of town.

Historic overview

During the 19th century, Egypt became more and more oriented towards Europe. This culminated in the construction of a completely new quarter in European style by Khedive Ismail. It was called Ismailia, after its founder. The recurring story that this quarter was built especially for the opening of the Suez Canal is partly a myth. Khedive Ismail's father, Ibrahim Pasha, had already begun an ambitious project to turn the then-swampy area into solid building ground by diverting the course of the Nile through means of various canals. After visiting the World Fair in Paris in 1867, Ismail wished to model his new city after the examples he had seen in Europe. The Suez Canal ceremony would be a perfect showcase for Egypt's new, "modern"attitude, and the construction of an entire new quarter was carried out under heavy time pressure.

Figure 1. Looking up the center of Cairo

When the Suez Canal opening ceremonies were finally held in November 1869, Cairo boasted an elegant new quarter in which its guests would feel at home. The quarter was laid out according to contemporary European urban planning. Broad

avenues intersected at spacious star-shaped squares or *etoiles* and series of riverside palaces provided fitting accommodation for the most distinguished guests. In the years that followed, more and more buildings were added, lending Cairo a unique skyline composed of a wide variety of architectural styles. Foreign entrepreneurs and their businesses settled in Cairo, causing it to be a truly cosmopolitan city.

Western Architecture in an Islamic city: a Clash of Cultures and Values

All of this could not be farther from the traditional Middle-Eastern city that Cairo hitherto had been. In constructing a completely European-style quarter, not only did new architectural styles find their way to the city, but western values clashed with those of the Middle East. This was literally demonstrated in the demolition of parts of Cairo's medieval quarters in order to link the Citadel to the new quarter by means of wide avenues. The layout of the new quarter was completely alien to the traditional city, not only in shape, but also in its very nature. The balance between public space and private domain was radically shifted. In the Muslim community of Cairo, the need for public space was limited, whereas the private domain was the most important part of the fabric of society. The doors in narrow, winding streets led to the spacious courtyards of the private houses, where guests would be received and the family lived. In Ismailia, large squares were incorporated in which people could meet in public, while the size of a private house was now adapted to family life only.

Ismailia also created the invisible boundaries present within any city, causing the spatial distribution of people. This typical urban phenomenon is not static, but shifts according to changes in preferences and fashion. What is known as a less desirable quarter in one period can be the place to be in another. Sometimes, this shift in spatial distribution is stimulated by the construction of a new part of town, but equally often it occurs simply because certain groups of people slowly relocate themselves, leaving urban fabric to follow in the footsteps of demographical change. In Cairo, the existence of Ismailia led to a strong gentrification since Ismailia was rooted in western values and customs and associated with British rule. It stood in sharp contrast to the traditional city.

Alongside gentrification issues, economic developments led to a spiral of events that finally resulted in the Revolution. The construction of the new quarter – along with other modernizing measures and investments – eventually led to Egypt's bankruptcy. Egypt was forced to sell its majority shares in the Suez Canal

Company to the British, and in doing so the British gained effective control over Egypt. It was only decades later, on January 26th 1952, that Egypt took matters in its own hands again.

After the Revolution, Soviet-inspired concrete building blocks were erected, palaces destroyed, villas reassigned to overcrowded schools, and poorly-maintained apartment buildings were left to buckle under the consequences of rent control, an instrument that prohibited owners from increasing the rent and discouraged them from investing in even basic maintenance. As a result of decades of neglect, these buildings have become a hazard for the population. The buildings one encounters today are far removed from their original beauty and elegance. In fact, the research area of this study has often been referred to by Cairoplanners as the "Terrible Triangle." Ramsis and Tahrir squares are former etoiles gone supernova; the streets are congested with traffic and the remaining buildings are sorely neglected. In the urban context of Cairo, this heritage poses some interesting challenges.

Heritage Challenges

Within just a few years, it is estimated that the main part of the world population will live in cities. A relatively low percentage of those urban areas are so-called megacities: cities with over 10 million inhabitants. In Africa, urban growth is the most rapid with an average of 5% per year. In 1937, Cairo was inhabited by a little over 1 million people. Today, Cairo, with an estimate of 18 million inhabitants, is the largest city on the continent and in the Middle East. This shift in population from rural areas to the city and the expanding of existing cities has serious implications for the urban relation to its surroundings. The megacity needs immense resources of food and water, and on a more structural level, concrete for building and economic possibilities for its inhabitants. The steadily increasing population density requires different approaches to, for example, water and waste management, traffic flow, housing, education and employment. This increasing pressure on the city has its effects on architecture as well. The architecture of a city forms its visible backbone; all of the above factors either affect it or take place in and between it. Architectural heritage management in a megacity needs therefore to be studied in relation to other factors and can simply not be seen as an individual activity. The heritage challenge in Cairo consists of two main subjects: urban challenges and socio-historical challenges. These will be addressed below.

Urban challenges. One of the factors bearing a strong relation to the condition of architectural heritage in Cairo is the city's infrastructure. Four main categories are dependent upon that infrastructure: water supply, sewage disposal, waste management and traffic flow. The first three affect the architecture from the inside out; the fourth affects it from the outside in. Leaking pipelines allow water to seep in the walls and foundations of buildings, undermining their structural integrity. The water is polluted, either with waste residue or chemicals. To what extent this slow and silent process has affected the architecture needs to be investigated. Solid waste is often piled up in the interior courtyard of square building blocks. Garbage bags are simply thrown out of the kitchen window and left to rot, meanwhile attracting rats and other pests. Cairo does have an inventive recycling system for its solid waste. Waste is collected daily, sorted and if possible reused by as many as 40,000 people and approximately 200 small factories. This microsystem functions remarkably well and reduces the existence of large garbage dumps outside the city. However, the garbage collectors cannot collect all the solid waste the city produces, especially not when it is carelessly thrown away beyond their reach.

From the outside, the edifices are being threatened by air pollution. The air pollution in Cairo reaches levels 10 to 100 times higher than the World Health Organization's standards. The pollution consists mainly of lead, sulfur dioxide, carbon dioxide and nitrogen dioxide, caused by emissions of vehicles, industry and

Figure 2. Architectural elements suffer the consequences of pollution

trash burning. The deposition of acids on the architectural heritage has a dramatic effect on the condition of the buildings. The traffic density in the research area is very high. Roadway fly-overs have been constructed to alleviate traffic pressure on the main arteries, but have resulted only in two levels of heavy traffic with unregulated exhausts just a few metres away from the facades of buildings. The urban problems caused by Cairo's infrastructure do not only pose a serious health risk, but are also instrumental in the decay of the city's architectural heritage.

Socio-historical challenges. Cairo's recent architectural heritage is closely related to Egypt's relation with the West. It was erected in an era when "western" was synonymous with "modern," destroyed in a time when Egypt reclaimed its own identity, and is now in need of care at a time when the balance between the West and the Middle East is topic of discussion. Egypt as a nation does not need to be reminded of its colonial past, yet these edifices are larger-than-life reminders of that era. What are the consequences for this heritage? In this particular case, heritage management and politics are closely interwoven.

The research area played an important part in the gentrification process during the British occupation. From the moment it was laid out on the drawing board, it provided a tear in the social fabric of Cairo. The new, western quarter helped create new, invisible borders in the city. During the presentation of this case-study at the colloquium, it was stressed that possible gentrification in an attempt to restore this area needs to be closely monitored. Another interesting, related factor at work is the ongoing fragmentation of society itself. As a result of globalization, current developments and politics in the region, the population is splitting apart into smaller groups that identify themselves with, for example, various religious beliefs. Heritage can play a crucial role in that social process. Is heritage viewed as a binding factor, or does it enhance the ongoing fragmentation? The points of view of the various stakeholders need to be analyzed in detail.

Aims of the Current Project

Who determines what of this heritage is important and what is not, in light of other choices that inevitably have to be made? How can politics, heritage, and present city needs be integrated into a functional and acceptable heritage policy? These are a few of the questions the project will address.

The first stage of the project is comprised of a research stakeholder analysis. What research has already been carried out in the field of both architectural heritage management and urban improvement, in both Egypt, the Middle East and the rest of the world? In urban improvement projects, heritage management can play an important role if integrated in an early stage of such a project. Heritage can be of outstanding use in urban improvement, not only as a tool to visually enhance its surroundings, but as a structural contribution as well. In the research stakeholder analysis will be investigated if, how and when heritage management has been in integrated in urban development projects, and if not, how it should or could have added to the results.

The next stage will be an extensive stakeholder analysis, encompassing the views of inhabitants, visitors, decision-makers on the heritage, as well as their views of themselves, each other and the various parts they play in the usage of this heritage. It will be of great importance to examine the opinions and sentiments of the various stakeholders towards this heritage and this quarter of town. On a wider level, it will be necessary to include viewpoints on Cairo and Egypt as well in order to place this heritage and its stakeholders in a larger perspective.

Furthermore, research into the degradation processes that affect the architecture will be carried out along with an inventory of its current condition.

Figure 3. Architectural heritage is squeezed between infrastructural needs and population density

Historical research will be carried out to gain insight on the former uses and appearance of these edifices.

The results of these research-projects will be combined into a sustainable management strategy that is interlinked with urban improvement and other urban planning projects. It is pivotal that this management strategy is formulated in close co-operation with the various stakeholders and especially the Egyptian authorities. The main focus will be to ensure a sustainable, functional form of heritage management. In the context of a city as large as Cairo, it is not possible or even justifiable to single out just one aspect. Heritage management in a megacity does by the very nature of its context include making choices. It can not take the form of creating an open air museum without regard for the living city's needs. The challenge is to integrate the past and the present in order to build a better future. For example, the insights gained by the stakeholder analysis can inspire possibilities for adaptive re-use of buildings, which in turn can be enclosed in urban improvement projects or even instigate them.

Towards an Integrated Management Strategy

In the early years of its existence, the town built on virgin soil next to the old city quarters of Cairo had a name and a clear identity. Nowadays however, this part of town is simply called *Bwist el balad* in Arabic, or "Downtown." Heritage management of this quarter needs to include a sense of identity. This identity is much interwoven with political views and socio-historical problems. We have seen that the heritage challenges faced in Cairo are enormous and have much in common with constraints inherent to any megacity in the world. Various aspects still remain to be investigated, but it may be argued that the physical appearance and the conservation of the buildings is a relatively small part of the problem. In heritage management as presented in this colloquium much attention has been paid to the different values of heritage sites, and especially here the viewpoint of each stakeholder involved needs to be addressed. Turning a part of town associated with a colonialist past into a newly respected city quarter will require addressing the values of stakeholders with the utmost attention. It will require a thorough approach and the raising of awareness of many parties. It will require an integrated approach in which ancillary consultants like architects and engineers will play an important role, but, most of all, one in which the stakeholders have to be heard. The way in which East met West, the way in which Cairo integrated the Western styles is what truly makes this quarter of the largest city of the Middle East unique.

OWNING THE ORDINARY: ON PREVENTIVE ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE CUSTODIANSHIP OF THE PAST

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QUESTIONS surrounding the ownership of cultural property – and more specifically that of archaeological remains – have been at the forefront of discussions on the "socio-politics of the past" for some two or three decades now. As attested by the abundant literature generated, issues of ownership primarily concern moral rights and legal prerogatives, including the symbolic and economic values that can be identified in, attached to, or even extracted from the archaeological remains in question. By and large, it is taken for granted that these vestiges display some unique or exceptional features that make their ownership desirable, and manifestly so. It is upon this premise of desirability that various claims and counter-claims are advanced by the protagonists concerned, and that archaeological science and historical knowledge come to be mobilised, as the evidence allows and the occasion demands, to legitimate or to contest this yearned belonging.

But are there no other issues surrounding the ownership of the past? Cannot this ownership become topical without being coveted? What happens for example when the archaeological remains in question are not considered to be outstanding or emblematic in any way, but, on the contrary, some sort of "negative" assets, impediments or liabilities that one could well do without? Far from being hypothetical or spurious, "burdensome possessions" of this kind are actually infinitely more common than one might imagine. Indeed, this category includes the numerous vestiges of the past unearthed in the course of infrastructure and development works, and subsequently dealt with through a specific form of practice variously known as "salvage", "rescue", "developer-led," "developer-funded," or, better still, "preventive" archaeology. Brought to light when car parks, roads and terminals are being planned or even already under construction, or again when quarries are opened up and golf courses laid out, these remains often stand literally in the way of the bulldozers – and by extension, as regrettably some would see it, in the way of socio-economic progress. The reaction raised by these threatened archaeological remains does not seem to be "who