

THE ISLAMIC METROPOLIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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The standpoints of my contribution to Islamic metropolises will be highly limited even in two respects. The first limitation emerges from the fact that I approach to the problematique of these metropolises only from outside, from the point of view of the European culture complex and this is mitigated only slightly by the experiences concerning the Byzantine character recognized in the nature of some Eastern-Middle European metropolises and my own personal experiences gained in Ankara and Baghdad⁺. The other limitation derives from the fact that the Islamic metropolises situated on a many-ten-thousand-kilometre-long belt extending from Morocco to Indonesia have so different social, ethnic and geographical backgrounds which are equalized, to some extent, just only by the Islam. This is why this broad domain should be narrowed down. In fact, almost exclusively the Islamic character is common in Djakarta, Casablanca, Karachi, the Algiers Tunis¹ or Teheran; consequently, by the second limitation I mean that this time I am not going to speak about them but only the large cities of the Middle East that, in addition to Ankara and Baghdad, I have had the opportunity to get to know.

Our fancy was hit not only by the physical appearance of these cities but by their image as well/and here we think of Lefebvre's term "urbain"^{1/} beside the "image"^{2/} concept of Kevin Lynch/. And these two having been integrated into a unified experience became part of the observing participant's intellect as well as his emotional and sensitive world at the same time.

Among the metropolises of the Middle East proper Istanbul and
⁺ Between 1965 and 1968 the author was professor of urban and regional planning at the Middle East Technical University, Ankara /Turkey/; between 1974 and 1976, he was UN Co-Director of the Center of Urban and Regional Planning.

Ankara in Turkey, Damascus in Syria, Beirut in Lebanon, Amman in Jordan, Baghdad in Iraq , Kuwait, which can be regarded as a polis, Tehrān in Iran and finally, Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt may be classed. Although this enumeration embraces only a narrower region of the Islamic world, the differences between the countries and cities are still considerable. While, on the one pole, there is Turkey, which, since Kemal Atatürk's time has been a "lay-state", although its cities have preserved their Islamic character; on the other pole, there are the Shiite Iran and the Sunni Saud Arabia, with their strong enforcement of Islamic law and jurisdiction, where the rules of Koran are sought to be put into force not only in smaller settlements but in various spheres of the lives of large cities.

Relying, primarily, on my experiences in Ankara and Baghdad my remarks concerning the metropolises of this geographical region are rather impressionistic, and here I cannot undertake the task of making a deeper comparative analysis because of the lack of quantitative data which, otherwise, are rapidly changing in space and time in this region.

However, before identifying the more or less homogeneous characteristics, let us have a quick glance at these cities one after the other and some individual features of theirs. With her unique topographic potentialities Istanbul, the historical Byzantium and, later, Constantinople, situated along the Bosphorus and the Golden Horn as well as at the boundaries of Europe and Asia, is one of the most attractive cities of the world. Ankara located on the barren Anatolian plateau, which was the one-time Galatia of the Celts and the Ancyra of the Romans, relapsed

into an unimportant small town from her glorious past, and only in the twenties of our century Kemal Atatürk made her the new capital of Turkey. The small town with some tens of thousands of inhabitants became one of the early prototypes of planned cities. While the plan made by the German Janssen reckoned only with a maximum of 200,000 people, nowadays Ankara's population is about 2 million, taking a distinguished place even among the metropolises of developing countries with her pace of growth. Damascus is one of the most ancient places where -- according to records, too, -- for at least three thousand years, there has been a continuous urban life. She is, indeed, a green oasis full of historic remains in the Syrian desert and her today's metropolitan form seems to be established by French urbanistics just like that of Beirut the historic remains of which are less significant than her Phoenician and Levant traditions. In Beirut's modern architecture French cultural influences can be traced, too. Baghdad, the former seat of caliphs, is^a largely spreading metropolis on either side of the Tigris; although her today's appearance does not show, she is also an ancient city. The English influence exerted on her vast spaces, the leading of her roads, her large-scale roundabouts and traffic network is the most accentuated here. Only few people know that Amman, too, had had a long prehistory before she became totally deserted in the Middle Ages. She was already mentioned as a seat of the Ammonites in the Old Testament; and the presence of the Romans is witnessed by the well preserved amphitheatre. Her new metropolitan growth is mostly the product of the 20th century, last but not least, the consequence of Israeli and Palestinian confrontations. In the past decades Kuwait has been turned into a one-million metro-

economy has created a unique socio-economic as well as architectonic and urbanistic situation, the foreseeable development of which is tied to forces and factors external to the region, probably, to a greater extent, than that of the other metropolises mentioned, owing partly to oil's "monoculture", and partly, the political instability of this region. In my enumeration I have not included Cairo and Teheran, /further on, Alexandria, /that are geographically peripheral but regarding their political and economic aspects as well as their role played in Islam they are the two most significant metropolises in the region. Although a considerable part of my statements refers to them as well, they represent not only a larger metropolitan dimension but are so unique that they would be worthy of a special study.

Thus, what are the individually important features typical of the metropolises of the Middle East which are similar to each other and join them with the metropolises of developed countries, or even, with those of Eastern-Middle Europe?² And what are the features which differ from these to a greater or smaller extent? Let's have a look at some of them:

- As opposed to the large transitory urbanizational zones embracing the European and North American metropolises these cannot or, just in some traces, can be found in the Middle East. Cities are growing though but, in most cases, there are no transitions; frequently, the desert or bare mountains surround the recently built 8-10-storey houses.

- Every metropolis, be it anywhere in the world, -- just due to its order of magnitude -- covers a very wide socio-

this spectrum shows greater extremes than that in Europe or North America but smaller than in the poorest region of the world /,e.g. in India or in some countries of Africa or South America/. If only the developing world is seen, not regarding such extreme cases,e.g. as Kuwait, the metropolises of the Middle East take a so called middle position.

-- However, the contrasts refer not only to the socio-economic sphere but the physical appearance of the great majority of cities mentioned,too. E.g. in Ankara, which is one of the first cities in the Middle East having modern plan of urban development, more than half of the inhabitants live in the so called "geçekondu", settlements built "overnight"+, in slums erected without permission, and infrastructure at all, whose proliferation the authorities have not managed to stop either by long-term planning or short-term governmental measures so far. Even if not in such degree, the huge differences in the way of life of the individual strata of the population and in the appearance of their homes as well are typical of all cities.

-- Thus, the montage character -- in its broadest sense -- of the metropolises in the Middle East is not only more varied and colourful but rougher,too. And I hardly say

+ According to the old Turkish common law whoever builds a house on anybody's site overnight can keep it; nobody can take it from him Naturally, nowadays nobody can -- nor, perhaps wants to -- control whether the home built without permission has been erected overnight since, frequently, policemen, the officials obliged to conduct the inquiry, moreover, some judges as well live here. The fact is that the existence and growth of geçekondu and slums like that make a great problem for

new when I underline the vividness of the cities of the Middle East, the bustle of their streets, the street life of their inhabitants continuing until late hours, owing to meteorological factors and the far more informal attitudes of the people than those in Europe and America. The montage is the montage of sensations as well, which is filled up by challenges to the other senses in addition to sight.

- The particularly transitory character of the orientation order of the Middle Eastern Islamic metropolises can also be mentioned here. While -- if using Kevin Lynch's terms;^{3/} i.e. paths, edges, districts, nodes, landmarks -- the linear orientation along paths and edges and that according to ordinal range of buildings are typical of western city dwellers, Eastern orientations are, primarily, based on landmarks. Although in the metropolises of the Middle East the street number system adopted from the West can also be found, the real spatial informedness relies considerably, on a landmark /a mosque or an other important public building, market, shops or, perhaps, a formation of nature, e.g. a group of trees or cliffs/.
- Concomitant with this are the characteristics of traffic seemingly chaotic at the first glance. Here the formal and declared traffic rules are taken into consideration, to a far lesser degree, than those in the West. It is worth stopping at this point since the traffic structure and signs of some cities are, to some extent, also symbols of more hidden social conventions, moreover, sometimes

acteristics. E.g. Germany is overdecorated with traffic signs -- as was pointed out in a comparison with France by a traffic journal --; the demand of the Germans towards a formal order, compared with that of the French, manifests itself even in this field. In the Middle East there are relatively few road-signs; and even these are neglected. In fact, conventions based on strength, size, speed and skill -- not declared in decrees -- dominate. Although even the use of traffic indicator is rare, everybody pays attention to everybody and everything; and the number of accidents is not higher than in the metropolises of Europe and North America.

-- The vitality of cities in the Middle East is motivated by the leisureliness of their inhabitants and a considerably stronger inclination to improvisation as opposed to the purposeful and "planned" movements of the Western man. Cityscapes and atmosphere are much more characterized by the hustle and bustle of idle men -- and due to the demographic explosion -- the comings and goings of a great number of young men.

-- As far as the programmes of the future of Middle-Eastern Islamic metropolises are concerned, for the time being, their sources of error are considerable. The preliminary and overall complex studies needed so much are either very fragmentary or, insomuch as they are made by foreigners for the lack of native experts, problems arise after their application. Master plans relying on inadequate analyses

immediately after their preparation, giving way to both confused and spontaneous proliferation and voluntarist central conceptions. The conceptual changes brought about by the high-level and interdisciplinary training and further training of local experts, the participation in administration of specialists having practice in urban and regional planning and/or the increased consideration of their ideas may result in a remarkable improvement compared to the practice of our days.

However, it should be noted that today's practice -- and here not only the practice of city planning but the fuller lives of the Middle Eastern metropolises are meant, too -- is not at all pejorative. Let's cite the book of Eric Fromm published 20 years ago and entitled "To Have or To Be"^{4/}, in which he compared the preferences of the western world in connection with "to have" with the emphasis on "to be" of oriental cultures. Naturally, here Fromm had, principally, the cultures of the Far East in mind but in relation to those living in the Islamic metropolises of the Middle East we can state that it is just the Islamic character which denotes a kind of particular transition where the increased demands on the possession of material and technical goods, dependently on local specifics, are mixed, in a unique way, with the ancestral capability of the man of the East closely related to Fromm's term "to be" which makes them capable of the more frequent experiencing of the "timeless presence".

And it is this "component" of the mix to which, I think, the man of the West should pay special attention. While the basic

should point at guaranteeing a better infrastructure and higher level technology within the framework of planned "to have"-s parallel to the experiences of "to be" but without sacrificing it, we must recognize the values that are not provided by the exclusively technological society, and in this respect we have something to learn from the Eastern city dwellers who are much poorer than we are in material goods.

References.

1. Lefebvre, Henri: Le droit a la ville. Paris, 1972
2. Lynch, Kevin: The Image of the City. Boston, 1960
3. Op. cit. /2/
4. Fromm, Eric: To Have or To Be. London, 1966