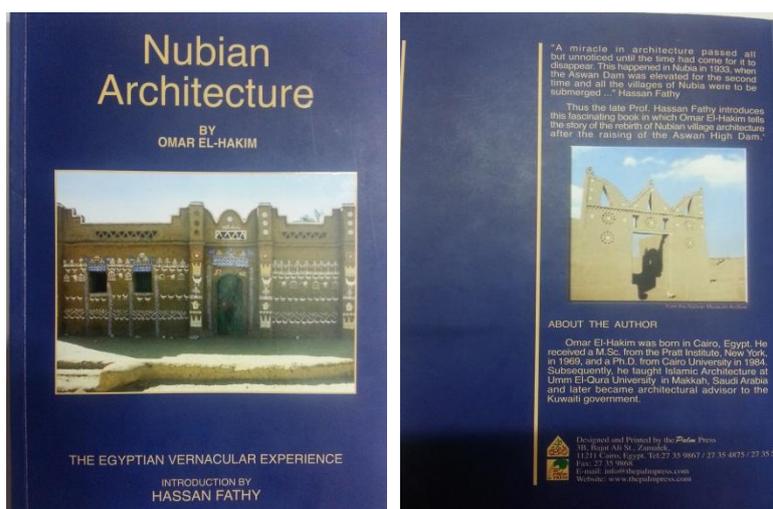


Book Review
Nubian Architecture:
The Egyptian Vernacular Experience

Edited by Omar El-Hakim
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Reviewer
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There has been substantial interest recently in developing the environment of Nubia; in other words what the High Dam left of Nubia, through the dynamic contributions of the governmental agencies and international funding programs. Hence, the vernacular architectural traditions observed in old Nubia prior to the construction of the Aswan High Dam gave Omar El Hakim gives a strong impulse to highlight the unique architectural heritage of Nubia. The purpose of this book has been to indicate what may be learned from the Egyptian Nubian relocation and to demonstrate the importance of vernacular architecture to rural redevelopment and settlement procedures.

This monograph is a great source of information for those who are concerned with future resettlement projects. The introduction has been brilliantly written by Prof. Hassan Fathy. It highlights the unfortunate incident of the submerged villages of Nubia while pointing out the strong determination of the Nubians and their great mastery in designing their houses through their artistic and architectural capabilities.

The author has arranged the contents of the book carefully in an organized sequence. The monograph in chapter one gives important geographical and historical background to the

area of Nubia. It has also included some useful information about the Nubians social traditions, customs, religion and economy. This is an extremely informative summary of the region. Omar has given an elaborate explanation about the three distinct ethnic groups of Nubia; the Kanzis, Arabs and the Mahas. Since the passing strangers were welcomed in Nubia, they were provided with shelter at guesthouses. The author has attached at the end of this chapter, some plans and elevations of these guesthouses with different types of roofing.

These drawings however would have been better placed in the following chapter which is dedicated to describe the style and the different designs of the Nubian houses.

Chapter two firstly discusses the layout of the Nubian villages where the houses are either settled along the Nile or extended inland following the natural contours. Secondly, it explains the general features of the Nubian way of life which contribute to the design of the Nubian house. The author has been keen to mark the major differences between the architectural styles of the different regions. He has succeeded in distinguishing the differences that exist in many aspects such as the style of the roof, doors, windows and external plastering. The main difference is in the methods and techniques used in roofs and wall construction which change apparently according to the area. This chapter is rich with its drawings and illustrations in order to support the script. However, these architectural drawings are not always arranged to facilitate comprehension. It was hard to correlate the illustrations with their description. Moreover, the chapter gives a very interesting case of the Nubian community which is located at Abu El-Riche. It is fascinating because the community was created by the Nubians who moved from the Kanzi area in 1933. The author has written a good description associated with attractive pencil sketches and photographs. Finally, the chapter ends with illustrations of the Nubians technique of catenary vaulting.

The immensity of chapter three has come from the records of the Central Committee immensity for the Relocation of Nubian Population (CCRNP). It attempts to show the differences between the fruitful move of the Nubian population to Abu El-Riche in 1933 and the unsuccessful move to komombo in 1964 when the Aswan High Dam was elevated. Firstly, the author has given the programme which the committee has decided to follow at their first meeting. Then he discusses the conclusions of the survey which the Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs has done. The committee has decided to establish the new villages at *komombo* in an arrangement as close as possible to that in old Nubia. They were given the same names and their new locations were parallel to the old villages. However, there are many differences which the author was eager to present clearly in the following chapter. He has described the layout of the villages and the houses in *Komombo* and *Esna*, Nevertheless, a bit more explanation would have served the readers better.

The Nubians tried hard to adopt their new reality but it was a very hard challenge. That is what appears in chapter four which has been dedicated to look at the architecture and arrangements of the new settlements at Komombo. The purpose of this chapter is to study the social and cultural effects of these new settlements on the Nubians. Added to that, it examines the architectural adaptations made by the Nubians to their new environment. The writer has presented many innovations made by the Nubians in order to impose themselves on the physical strictness of their new communities. Though there are many disadvantages of

these new townships, I believe that there are some benefits that the author should have taken into account. He has attacked the government architects who had paid nearly no attention to the merits of the materials and the techniques of the Nubian vernacular tradition while constructing the new community. They have even removed Prof. Hassan Fathy from the relocation committee because of the threat his proposals set to other members who stood to achieve economic and political advantages from the relocation.

After nine years deportation from Nubia, Nubians banded themselves into a cooperative and decided to return. Chapter five deals with the Nubians at komombo attempt to move to their former homeland. The chapter looks in detail at their migration to Qastol and Adindan townships which were the first to return to Old Nubia in 1977. At that time, Omar El-Hakim and his brother were settlement planners and they submitted a report to Oxfam agency in order to develop the community at Qastol and Adindan. The chapter first gives a brief summary of Qastol and Adindan region. However, some maps and aerial photographs of the region were required. Then, the author has provided the readers with a wide description of the new settlements and building practices in Qastol and Adindan. At the end of this chapter, it has mentioned some important cooperatives which have been created such as *High Dam Lake Authority, El- Takamul Co-operative, Fishing Cooperative* and *Wadi Komombo Company for Land Reclamation*.

Chapter six focuses on the recent activities and participations done by independent and government agencies in order to develop the area along the shores of what the High Dam left of Nubia. It mentions some remarkable projects and settlements which had been created in this area. One example was a shelter programme for the fishermen started by a non- profit aid organization. This shelter contained some medical and agricultural facilities. These projects were very functional and were considering the materials and the techniques used usually by the Nubians. The end of the chapter is rich with photographs and architectural drawings which exposes the new settlement designs and the region layout. The bibliography given at the end of this book is tremendously useful for anyone interested in learning more about this subject. Moreover, the footnotes attached are providing some important information and clarify some points made in the text.

In conclusion, this monograph has achieved its purpose well. Though the plans and elevations provided unfortunately lack scales and there were some spelling mistakes through the text, this book forms a cherished contribution to the subject. It takes the readers through a wonderful Egyptian experience.