

EDITORIAL: SPECIAL ISSUE ON TRADITIONAL PUBLIC BATHS-HAMMĀMS- IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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This special issue on hammāms in the Mediterranean addresses a research subject that has been far too long neglected. Commonly known as “Turkish baths”, hammāms, or public bathhouses, were important facilities in Islamic cities. Although the institution flourished and spread over a large geographic area under the Ottoman Empire, the Islamic bath is not of Turkish origin. The hammām as a building evolved from the Roman and Byzantine public bath houses and has been adapted to suit the washing requirements of Islam. Located near mosques, souks and residential centres, hammāms played a key role not only in providing a washing facility for the conduct of major ablutions necessary before praying but also a venue for social interaction and rituals, marking religious celebrations and major events in the life of women.

The hammām, in the European imagination, remains a utopian space as depicted in Orientalists' paintings. A large central pool is a recurrent feature in paintings such as “After the bath” by Rudolf Ernest, “Bathing in the Serglio” by Theodor Chasseriau, “Steam Bath”, the “Great Bath” and “Nargileh Lighter” by

Jean Leon Gerome. Yet large pools are a rare feature in hammāms and, when available, they are much smaller and do not occupy a central position in the spaces. Indeed, the transition from the roman bath to the Islamic one meant that large cold water pools disappeared completely. Small hot water plunge pools are consistently found in the historic hammāms of Cairo because of their role in heating the spaces. This is because the under-floor heating system (the hypocaust system of the Roman baths) was abandoned in the hammams of Egypt. Small plunge pools were also found in the hammāms of Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. In all these cases, each plunge pool is located in a secondary room and not in the main space.

In Ingres's famous painting the “Turkish Bath” (1862, Musee du Louvre, Paris), erotic images of naked women in the hammāms are depicted. It is interesting to note that Ingres never travelled to the East. While preparing this picture, the artist read and copied out the French translation of Lady Mary Monttagu's account of her visit to a hammām in the early eighteenth century. Although she emphasised the fact that there was no impropriety amongst the large crowd

of bathers, Ingress seems to have ignored this comment in spite of the fact that, for centuries, hammām etiquette requires women and men to remain partially clothed.



Hammām Tayruzi, Damascus, Syria (Source: M. Sibley).

The institution of public baths has seen a rapid decline in the late 19th and the 20th centuries, particularly in the Middle East. The introduction of modern bathroom facilities accelerated the disappearance of many historic structures. This has been further aggravated by the introduction of new roads across the fabric of many historic urban centres, resulting in the demolition of a

significant number of public baths throughout the historic Mediterranean cities.

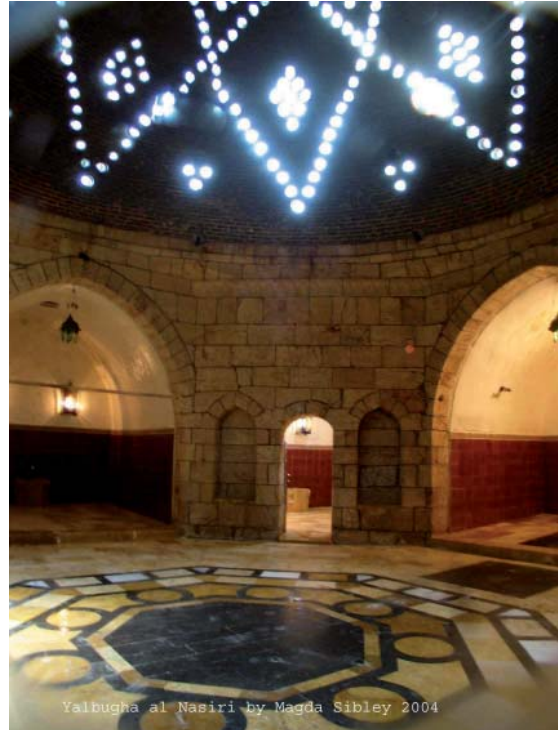
Memories of long happy hours spent with my late grandmother in a hammām in Algiers were one of the reasons behind my interest in this building type. This led me, since the 1990's, to apply for and receive various research grants from the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK with the aim of cataloguing the surviving hammāms throughout the Mediterranean countries and understanding the way in which they are still functioning, used and perceived today by contemporary society. This interest gained an international dimension with my participation in the EU funded FP6 "HAMMAM – Hammam, Aspects and Multidisciplinary Methods of Analysis for the Mediterranean Region" project during which I led two key work packages dealing with architectural typologies and restoration technologies of hammām buildings in the Mediterranean region.

The HAMMAM project was led and administered by Dr Heidi Dumreicher and her team at OIKODROM (The Vienna Institute of Urban Sustainability) who brought together an impressive multidisciplinary consortium of researchers and practitioners from both Europe (United Kingdom, France and Austria), and Middle Eastern and North African countries (Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco). This three year research programme was carried out between 2005 and 2008 during which on-site, in-depth, multi-disciplinary investigations of case study hammām buildings and their neighbourhood were carried out in the cities of Ankara (hamāmm Sengul), Damascus (hammām Ammuna) Cairo (hammāms Al-Tanbali and Bab al Bahr), Constantine (hammām Suq El Ghzel) and Fez (hammām

Seffarine). Unfortunately field work could not be completed on hammām Al Samarra, the case study in Gaza, due to the difficult political situation. Field work involved research teams from Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries working intensively together for a period of two weeks in the location of each of the case study hammāms around the Mediterranean. Experts from different disciplines and backgrounds such as architecture, building conservation, urban planning, sociology, history, economy, water engineering, environmentalist, artists and film makers (from Europe, North Africa and the Middle East) worked closely together and with the inhabitants of the neighbourhood where the case study hammāms are located. The work was aimed at forming scenarios for the sustainability of the hammām and its neighbourhood by developing a deep multidisciplinary understanding of both the tangible and intangible dimensions of this heritage building and the contemporary transformations taking place within it and its neighbourhood.

It is interesting to note that as a result of the work of the HAMMAM consortium, local and international awareness for the safeguard of hammām buildings has been raised. Some winning stories include the case study hammām Ammuna, a small neighbourhood hammām in Damascus away from the tourist area. This building has been saved from closure and decay as it has been purchased by a local private investor who restored the building and re-opened it as a working hammam for women with the introduction of contemporary facilities and services. This hammām has become a focal point for the local community. Its restoration and re-opening, have brought new hopes for this otherwise neglected neighbourhood. It has also triggered new local initiatives for improving the

urban environment of the extra-muros historic neighbourhood of Al Uqaiba.



Yalbugha Al Nasiri Hammām, Aleppo, Syria. (Source: M. Sibley).

Another winning story is that of the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Cairo who has accepted for the first time the concept of restoring hammām al Tanbali and re-opening it as a functioning hammām, reversing the current tendency of restoring hammāms as buildings to visit and look at rather than use. It is therefore with great pleasure and pride that I have been

given the opportunity to edit this special issue of IJAR. My thanks go to Dr. Ashraf Salama for giving me the opportunity to present this work. Special thanks are also due to Dr Fodil Fadli, my research associate for his invaluable contribution to this issue and continuous support. Many of the papers presented in this issue would not have been possible if it were not for the financial support of the EU for the HAMMAM project and the efforts of all the members of the HAMMAM consortium for their invaluable contribution to this issue.

This issue brings together some of the results of the HAMMAM project through a selection of papers written by authors who are members of the consortium. It also includes papers by

researchers outside the HAMMAM consortium, completing the picture of the hammāms in countries not covered by the HAMMAM project such as Tunisia and Libya. Three other papers by members outside the consortium will be published in the next IJAR issue.

The papers in this issue have been organised according to three broad themes reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of the work. These themes are: social and cultural aspects, conservation and heritage protection, urban and architectural analyses, environmental evaluations and future scenarios of sustainability. The papers cover case studies in the whole area of North Africa from Morocco to Egypt as well as others in Syria and Turkey.



Hammām Al Malek Al Zaher, Damascus, Syria,
(Source: Ahmet Igdirligil).

This special issue starts with the paper of Kolb and Dumreicher which argues that the hammām is a rich tangible and intangible Mediterranean heritage. It is a living cultural heritage with specific social and cultural practices and rituals that are still alive across the wide geographic area around the Mediterranean. This is followed by El Kerdany's paper which discusses the current threats to the survival of hammāms pointing to "Modernization" and "Islamic Fundamentalism". Both tangible and non-tangible dimensions of heritage are examined, based on recent field studies that recorded changes in the function of two currently operating historic hammāms in Cairo.

The issue of legal protection of hammāms as heritage buildings is then discussed in al-Habashi's paper which compares the various protection frameworks in the five Mediterranean countries where the case study hammāms are located. The paper explores the types of legal protection that prevail and their impact on the current status of the buildings. A number of recommendations are made to establish a coherent legal protection system that respects ethics of heritage conservation and emphasizes the revitalization of the hammāms' social, financial and health roles in the society.

The hammāms of Fez (Morocco), Constantine (Algeria), Tunis (Tunisia), Tripoli (Libya) and Damascus (Syria) are then presented in a series of papers discussing their urban and architectural characteristics and providing a clear picture of the common features that span time and geography as well as the specific characteristics linked to their geographical location. The Raftani and Radoine paper focuses on the hammāms of the world heritage city of Fez and highlights their characteristics

which are reminiscent of the small Roman baths or balnea found in Volubilis.

The paper of Debbach presents the Ottoman bath of Suq el Ghezal in Constantine- Algeria, and discusses the contemporary challenges for its survival as an operating bath house due not only to the changing social and economic context but also to contemporary fundamentalist religious interpretations which make the hammām a forbidden space for women.

Bouraoui's paper presents an overview of the hammāms of Tunis highlighting their morphological characteristics. It identifies recurring systems of spatial organisation based on systematic classifications and analyses of the hammāms' spatial components and their relationship to each other.

Sibley and Fadli's paper presents an analysis of the two remaining working historic hammāms of the medina of Tripoli and the way they are used and perceived today by the locals and North African migrants living inside and outside the old city.

Aboukhater's paper provides an analysis of the morphological characteristics of the internal layouts of several hammāms. Examples are chosen mainly Damascus and Fez. Using basic concepts of Space Syntax the paper highlights how the layout of the hammāms responds to implicit social rules of privacy, segregation, control, movement and social interaction.

The internal environmental conditions of the five traditional hammām buildings investigated in the HAMMAM project are investigated in two papers, one by Bouillot, the other one by Mahdavi and



Hammām Fethi Domes, Damascus, Syria, (Source: M. Sibley).

Orehounig. The passive environmental strategies are explained in Bouillot's paper. Data on indoor environmental (thermal) conditions and outdoor microclimatic conditions in the immediate vicinity of five traditional hammams located in Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Syria, and Algeria was collected by Mahdavi and Orehounig who present an objective assessment of the actual

performance of these buildings and evaluation of their strengths and weaknesses.

A contemporary hammām recently completed in Brodrum (Turkey) as part of a wellness complex is presented by Ğdirilgil, the architect of the project. The paper highlights the approach towards integrating into a contemporary

project some of the lessons learned from the vernacular architecture of the hammāms in Turkey. However, the author argues that newly designed hammām facilities will inevitably differ from the traditional ones. The differences will find expression in the architectural solutions chosen to accommodate the addition of new activities to the core hammām function.

Last but not least the paper of Levine et al ends this special issue with a broader spectrum of considerations related to the relationship between the hammām and the question of sustainability. Levine et al argue that the outcome of corporate capitalism has not been what was initially expected – a greater wealth for the few and greater poverty for the masses is evident in many developing economies. It is also argued that the North African Medinas still have existing life patterns that are remnants of a proto-sustainable past. The question that is raised is how can we develop scenarios that propose a sustainable future for these hammāms while being respectful and supportive of the historic local culture yet also create a viable strategy for developing a sustainable mode of contemporary life?

It is hoped that this first issue on hammāms is the beginning of further research and publications in the field. The University of Liverpool's School of Architecture has a research group researching hammāms in North Africa and the Middle East and building a database on hammāms in the Mediterranean countries.

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Dr Sibley is a senior lecturer in Architecture at the University of Liverpool school of Architecture. Her research examines world heritage Islamic cities in North Africa and the Middle East with particular emphasis on the transformations of the residential quarters. Two building types have been the focus of her research: the courtyard house and the public bath or hammam. She has been awarded various research grants from the Arts and Humanities Research Council in the UK (AHRC) and the EU to carry out field work on the public baths in the Mediterranean world heritage cities. This work recently gained an international dimension with her partnership in the European consortium for the HAMMAM project, funded under the 6th Framework Programme - Specific Targeted Research Projects (STREP) (see <http://www.hammams.org>). She has also been successful in securing a large AHRC research grant in June 2006 to document the historic public baths of North Africa. This project is funded for a period of three years. She has also established a research group on hammams at the Liverpool School of Architecture (see <http://www.hammams.info/>). As well as her hammam work, she is also involved in a four year EPSRC funded research project led by Salford University, SURegen - Integrated Decision Support System for Sustainable Urban Regeneration, where she is investigating heritage-led urban regeneration. She is currently supervising PhD research projects on heritage-led sustainable urban regeneration, eco-tourism, low- energy courtyard housing and sustainability assessment methods. She is fluent in French, Arabic and English and can be contacted at this email address: msibley@liv.ac.uk