

marble and stone. In particular, banks built in the 1950s were clad in natural and artificial materials: Rafidain Bank, Bank of Baghdad (1957, J. A. Ritchie and Jibreel Khamu), the Ottoman Bank (1956, Philip Hirst and G. B. Cooper). Central heating and cooling were used for the first time and became an integral part of buildings. Elevators were also used for the first time and became widespread, particularly among important buildings such as banks.

New construction methods and technological advances in engineering that allowed for long spans became common and influenced building layouts, which became more compact and dependent on mechanical services rather than responding to natural conditions. Curtain walls and louvers became widespread. Many architects were enthusiastic about these new building elements, which were not only rationally employed in line with climatic conditions in Iraq, but also in order to achieve aesthetic effects, at times involving color. The work of Abdallah Ihsan Kamil, Rifat Chadirji, and Philip Hirst shows an enthusiasm in using these systems for different purposes.

The 1950s yielded notable works of architecture that left a mark on architectural production in Iraq. The finest example of placing architectural practices into a new perspective is the Red Crescent Workhouse in al-Alwiya, designed in 1948 by Ellen Jawdat al-Ayoubi. In addition, the work of Abdallah Ihsan Kamil and Jafar Allawi hold a significant place in the repertoire of the 1950s. Allawi designed several buildings including al-Hariri High School in al-Adhamiya (1953), the Jaafari School (1946), the Sami Saadeddine Building in Rusafa Square (1949), and the Mirjan Building in Bab al-Sharqi (1953–54), an exemplary work of the decade. Midhat Ali Madhlom was a prolific architect. He designed al-Amana beach resort (1947), al-Ardhrumli Cinema (1946–47), the Iraqi Society for Palm Dates Building in al-Salhiya in the early 1950s, the School of Economics and Politics (1956), and the July 14 Casino (1958–59), near al-Muthanna Airport, in collaboration with Hisham Munir. Young Iraqi architects who studied abroad and worked in Iraq complete the picture of architecture in the 1950s. They were mostly involved in designing private residences in the modern style.

The State Development Board (*Majlis al-I'mar*) commissioned renowned international architects to design various large-scale projects. Some remain unbuilt: designs by Frank Lloyd Wright including an opera house in Um al-Khanazeer Island and a Post and Telegraph Office within the Baghdad master plan designed by the firm Minoprio-Spencely-MacFarlane; the Police and the Ministry of Defense buildings designed by Willem Marinus Dudok, including the Palace of Justice and the Land Registry and Settlement Building within the Civic Center; and the Fine Arts Museum and the Central Post and Telegraph Building by Alvar Aalto. Some commissions were brought to fruition and the buildings are still standing: the vast Baghdad University Campus, by Walter Gropius and TAC, was partially implemented in the mid-1980s; Le Corbusier's Gymnasium, initially designed on the site of the present Conference Palace, was finally built in 1980 on the other bank of the Tigris. Several important official buildings were built in the Karradat Maryam neighborhood, which is now known as the Green or International Zone: the Ministry and Council of Construction (now the Ministry of Planning) by Gio Ponti in 1962, the Presidential Palace and the National Council Building by G.B. Cooper in 1953, and the American Embassy by Jose-Luis Sert shortly after. Lastly, Constantin Doxiadis was commissioned for a master plan and housing scheme for Baghdad. As a result of the flow of new architectural ideas, experimentations, successes, and failures, the 1950s established a solid foundation for modern architecture and later architectural practices in Iraq.

Architecture in the 1960s and 1970s:
building Iraqi modernity

The Iraqi National Revolution (July 14th, 1958) became the trigger of a complex identity: on the one hand, it has often been expressed as a break with the Western world but on the other hand, it created the opportunity for incorporating the legacies of international modernism. Among the major trends of this new Iraqi expression in art and architecture, we can find, for instance, the neo-Islamic Classicism of Mohamed Makiya, or the International Regionalism conceptualised by Rifat Chadirji. The main figures of this generation are: Hisham Munir, Qahtan Madfai, Qahtan Awni, Hazim al-Tek, the Central Consultation Office (Mehdi al-Hasani), Said Madhlom, Iraq Consult (Rifat Chadirji, Abdallah Ihsan Kamil and Ihsan Shirzad), and Maath Alousi, among others.

The dynamic growth and progress of Iraq in the following two decades resulted in both the proliferation and maturation of creative work. Thus, new architectural forms emerged along with new names on the professional scene, as architectural production sought to meet the demands of growth, progress, and prosperity.

Several factors fostered creative production in this period: the boom of the Iraqi economy, particularly resulting from oil production and sale, the steady increase of the number of Iraqi architects, especially graduates of the three Iraqi architecture schools, the availability of engineers with different specialities, in addition to the immediate and positive influence of international architectural achievements on

the practice of local architects. The latter built upon the foundational period by carefully studying the particularities and elements of the local built environment, shaped by local climate, building materials, and construction methods, and by consciously incorporating them into new architectural and aesthetic configurations. It is natural that the work of Iraqi architects of this period acquired more maturity and depth. They worked ardently with expert foreign architects from professional and academic governmental organizations, as well as reputable foreign firms, such as Polservice and TAC, which worked on Gropius' design for Baghdad University in collaboration with Hisham Munir and partners. As the period presented the protagonists with numerous opportunities and challenges, the intellectual rigor, cultural readiness and openness of the architects allowed them to acquire valuable professional experience. Moreover, famous international architects were not commissioned as frequently as before. Government and private organizations employed foreign architects (mostly from Eastern Europe) for specific consultations and projects.

In the mid-1970s and later, the excessive formal usage of elements from the Arab and Islamic architectural heritage began. This phenomenon was paralleled by simplistic interpretations of the issue of heritage and contemporaneity in architecture and other fields. The wave of postmodern architecture, which brought some confusion as to architectural goals and processes, paved the way for this shift in direction. Postmodernism influenced Iraqi architects, especially in relation to historical symbolism and its incorporation into contemporary forms.

Architecture in the 1980s and beyond:
a major break

In the 1980s, the launching of major public works transformed the capital into an enormous construction site. Foreign and Iraqi architects were given the mission of translating national ambitions into monumental architecture. However, the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the First Gulf War, and the long lasting sanctions that ensued (1991–2003) changed the situation. Early on, the Conference Palace was built (1978–1982, Heikki Siren), al-Karkh and Haifa Street were reconstructed, and an ambitious project to rebuild the Bab al-Sheikh area was launched. The Abi Nawas Development was implemented in the mid-1980s (Abbad Al Radi/Planar and Skarup & Jespersen): this housing complex in brick is remarkable both for its low-rise silhouette offering a perspective espousing the curve of the Tigris, and for its solar energy panels on flat roofs, the first of their kind in Iraq. In addition, the international competition for the Great State Mosque was initiated in 1982. Local and international firms participated, such as Mohamed Makiya and Partners, Dar al-Amara (Qahtan Madfai), the Technical Studies Bureau (Maath Alousi), in addition to Robert Venturi, Ricardo Bofill, and Minoru Takeyama. However, architectural achievements discontinued after the escalation of the war with Iran which began in 1980. The 1990s saw major events that changed the course of architectural production in Iraq, to the point that it virtually ceased during the years of the sanctions, except for the work of the Architecture Department of the Presidential Office. However, this work utilized a poor architectural language and approach, replete with ornamentation.

Current Challenges

A new war and military occupation took place in 2003, rendering it nearly impossible to produce decent architecture, as architectural creation understandably declined. The country is currently undergoing political and societal redefinition, amidst a context of terrorist violence which renders possible urban renewal secondary to urgent security issues. Nevertheless, individual projects are envisioned in Baghdad, such as the winning competition entry for the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers in the Baghdad Green Zone by Manhal al-Habbobi and CAP Consultants (2011), in addition to several projects by Zaha Hadid Architects: the new Parliament Building in Mansour (2011), the Central Bank in Jadriya, and the Opera House in Salhiya.

As for the general urban landscape across the country, numerous buildings are disfigured by heterogeneous ornamentation consisting of marble, stone, and aluminum paneling. In such an unstable situation, one can only witness a degradation—hopefully temporary—of building, aesthetic, and urban qualities. Nevertheless, excellent restoration works have been recently done on two major Modern icons of Baghdad, which had been bombed and looted in 2003: the Ministry of Planning by Gio Ponti (1962) on the west bank of the Tigris, and the Central Post and Telegraph Building by Rifat Chadirji (1972) on the east bank—both positive signs in an otherwise gloomy context.

Translated from Arabic by Lotfi al-Salah