

## Architecture in Iraq from 1914 to 2014: from pre-modernity to uncertain challenges

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At the beginning of World War One and of the British Mandate era, and apart from a few modernizations that occurred within the Tanzimat (reforms) period, most Iraqi cities closely resembled the traditional *madina* of the Arab-Muslim world. Some, such as Baghdad, Mosul, and Kirkuk were home to a cosmopolitan population. The successive phases of architectural and urban development in Iraq, predominantly consisting of brickwork, remain legible today. Indeed, until at least the 1980s, most of these cities evolved following the principle of extension rather than that of destruction or densification.

### Architecture in the 1920s and 1930s: from neo-traditionalism to modern eclecticism

Major shifts in the built environment during the British occupation (1917–1921) and after the establishment of a modern state and a monarchy in August 1921, caused the emergence of modern architecture in Iraq. New situational requirements, the country's need for diverse building types, the emergence of new construction technology, and the establishment of governmental departments concerned with architectural and construction issues, have all contributed to the establishment of modern architecture and hastened its arrival. The built works of this period not only deserve appreciation, but also require preservation as they constitute a part of the rich cultural heritage of the Iraqi people.

The most important buildings designed and built in Iraq at this time were initiated by the newly created Department of Public Works under British administration. The production of this department, which established the main architectural features and processes of development in Iraq, influenced the practice of related departments such as the Endowments (*Awqaf*) Department, the Architecture Department in the Ministry of Education, and the Baghdad Mayorality (*Amanat Baghdad*). It also introduced the new title of Government Architect, assigned to design diverse buildings that meet the needs of the young state. Multiple architects and engineers bore the title during the British occupation and after the establishment of the state: H. C. Mason, G. B. Cooper, Jackson and his assistant Baxter, and Ahmad Mukhtar Ibrahim, the first Iraqi to hold the title in 1936. Unfortunately, the title was canceled in 1940.

In Baghdad, Al al-Bayt University complex, an ambitious large-scale project, influenced modern Iraqi architecture due to the fact it was the first public building without the traditional central courtyard. While the architectural practices of the 1920s developed from the intersection of modern and traditional approaches, modern eclecticism characterized the architecture of the 1930s that witnessed political, economic, and social events resulting in a fertile environment for major architectural changes. Iraq acquired a notable political status regionally and internationally as an independent state after joining the League of Nations in 1932, which affected its architectural development.

The establishment of organizations specialized in coordinating and improving the quality of architectural production set influential trends in the built environment. These organizations not only supervised construction, but also provided recommendations that resulted in legislation that helped create and organize the new built environment, such as the Law of Municipalities, passed in 1931, and the Law of Roads and Buildings in 1935, which shaped the urban and architectural morphology of cities in Iraq until the 1980s.

The 1930s is unique in terms of its design production that resulted from a close collaboration between architects, designers, builders, and craftsmen (both local and foreign), who constituted the design task force that created the architectural panorama of the decade. The period brought about new and unusual trends in design styles, due to the use of catalogues published in Europe, mainly in France, England, and Italy. Offices that specialized in architectural designs started to publish in catalogues, and their work became popular. Clients were left to freely select the design that suited them, while a local office was in charge of execution. These eclectic designs

employed an excessive amount of ornamental elements and foreign architectural vocabulary. Lastly, the 1930s saw the emergence of the first academically qualified Iraqi architect, Ahmad Mukhtar Ibrahim, who was succeeded by many others, such as Hazem Nameq, Jafar Allawi, Abdallah Ihsan Kamil, Midhat Ali Madhlom, and Sami Qerdar. Their leading designs had a strong influence on the Iraqi architecture of the 1930s and beyond.

Changes in architectural language and in planning mainly in residential and public buildings were equally important. Many important facilities became the new landmarks of the growing capital: the School of Medicine (1930), the Muthanna Airport (1931), the Awqaf Library in Bab al-Muaddham (1931, recently demolished), the Industrial / Agricultural Exhibition Center in Bab al-Muaddham (1932, previously the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the Royal Palace (1933), the Royal Hospital (1934), the Royal Mausoleum in al-Adhamiya (1934–1936), the School of Engineering (1936), the School of Fine Arts in al-Kasra (1936), the Ministry of Defense Headquarters in al-Qalaa (1936), the Primary School Teachers' Training College (1936), and the Olympic Club in al-Adhamiya (1938–39).

As for the aesthetics of the residential buildings, the 1930s were characterized by an eclectic style that blended various references, including European neo-classicism along with Mesopotamian remnants and Islamic details. It resulted in a specific combination due to the interweaving of local traditional brickwork know-how, and a new decorative vocabulary. This coincides more or less with the persistence of symmetrical designs and the recourse to central inner spaces.

### From World War Two to the Iraqi Revolution: the rise of an international modernism

Architecture after World War Two shows a clear break with the former period, in nature, scale, and the widespread use of new construction methods and materials, in addition to the integration of complex electromechanical systems. The 1940s witnessed a trend of abstract geometry, and of rational, functional, Bauhaus-inspired aesthetics, where plastered concrete began to overtake brickwork, in regards to structure as well as ornamental motifs.

With the advent of the 1950s, there was a fertile environment, ready for architectural development. The local culture was changing rapidly, and radically new ideas had a notable impact on other creative fields, such as painting, poetry, and literature. The number of architects and structural engineers educated abroad, or at the School of Engineering in Baghdad (inaugurated in 1937), was increasing. A variety of new materials became available. The economy boomed due to the vertical growth of oil production, creating large revenues that propelled construction and development, as the local bourgeoisie gathered more capital than before.

Multi-story buildings began to emerge on Baghdad's skyline. This is an important architectural event; until then, the skyline was limited to minarets and domes of mosques, amidst clusters of single-story buildings. The construction of the Sofer Building in al-Rashid Street designed by Midhat Ali Madhlom in 1946 was a shock. It was four stories high, enough to mark a new period in Iraqi architecture. The Damirji Building (1948) designed by Niazi Fetto had, by the standards of the time, an incredible height of six stories. Although later surpassed by high-rise buildings such as the fourteen-floor Daftar Dar Building (1953) designed by the German firm Intercontinental and Abdallah Ihsan Kamil, and the fifteen-floor Rafidain Bank designed by Philip Hirst, the Damirji Building remains memorable to Baghdadis.

In addition, façade treatment changed, as plastering façades with a mixture of sand combined with limestone or cement, an innovation credited to a Hungarian architect, became popular. The meticulous attention required in building brick courses became obsolete, and craftsmanship in building construction declined. However, new finishing techniques adorning buildings emerged, such as cladding with