

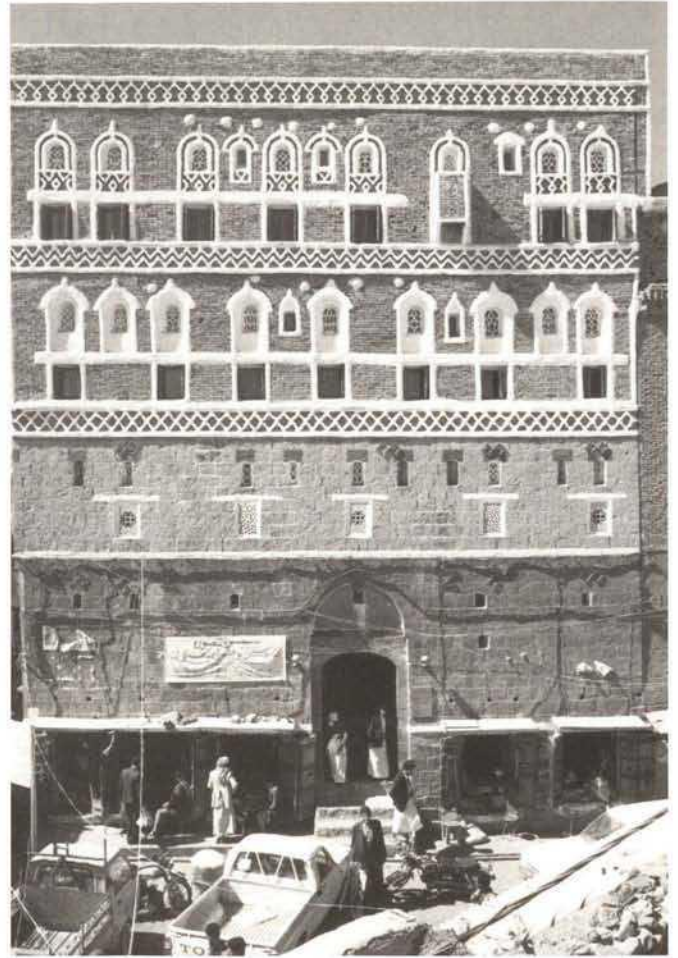
YEMEN – HERITAGE @ RISK!

Suq of Sana'a with the Samsarat al-Mansurah viewed from the east

Not only the cities of Sana'a, Shibam and Zibad, registered in the UNESCO World Heritage List, belong to the cultural heritage of this country, which has been able to preserve many of its traditions, but also a lot of other historic cities and villages as well as cultural landscapes and archaeological sites. There is no ICOMOS Committee in Yemen yet. The General Organisation for the Preservation of the Historic Cities of Yemen (GOPHCY) is the state authority for all questions on conservation and urban maintenance.

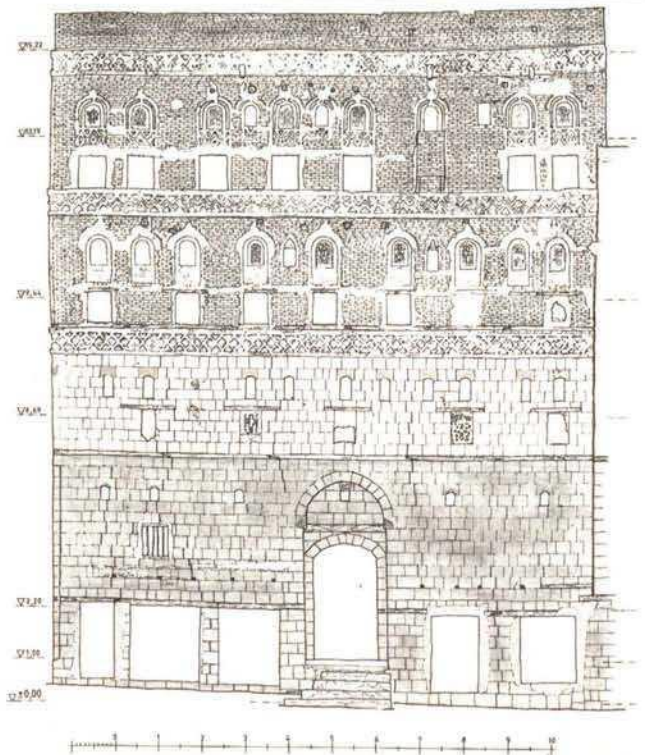
Sana'a with its architecture of stone and earth and its richly decorated façades, its traditional urban structure of residential quarters, suqs, mosques, public baths, gardens, narrow streets and squares is in some parts still threatened by deterioration under the pressure of modern social and economic processes of change. But in the past years, under the auspices of a UNESCO campaign to save Sana'a, several countries sponsored projects not only in order to stop the decay of the historic city, but also to improve the quality of life by an amelioration of the infrastructure. One of the most successful pilot projects was the repair and restoration of the caravanserai of Samsarat al-Mansurah, using only traditional materials and the skills of local craftsmen, and repairing without cement and reinforced concrete.

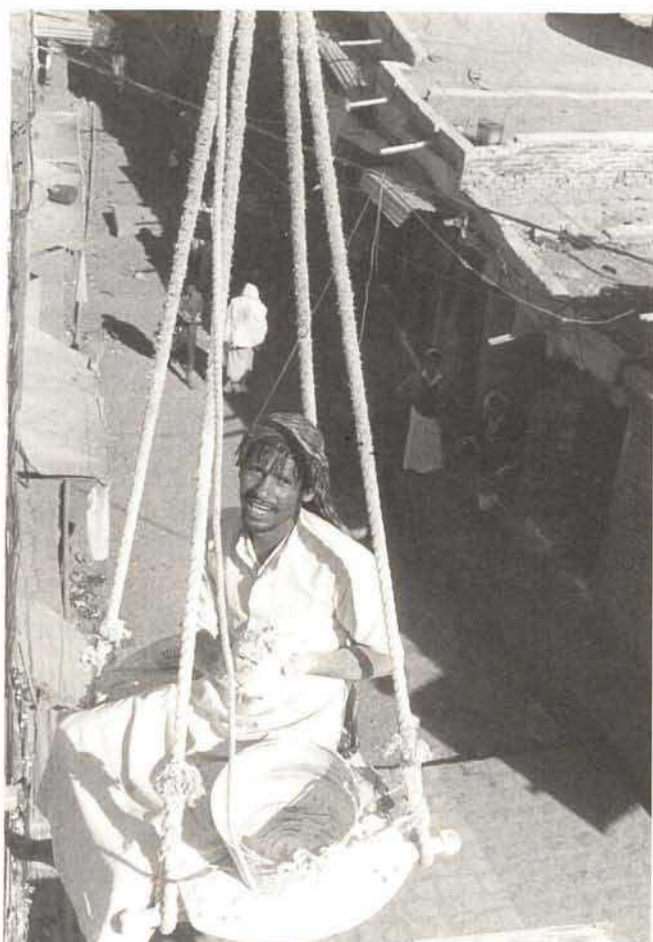
Suq with the Samsarat al-Mansurah



Samsarat al-Mansurah after restoration

Samsarat al-Mansurah, documentation of the damage before restoration





Gypsum work on the windows



Stone houses in Thula



Installation of the brushwood layer for the ceiling

Pounding of a quadath layer



Earthen buildings in Sadah



In other cities of Yemen as well as in still completely unspoiled sites like the stone constructions in Thula and the earthen constructions in Sadah, one becomes aware of the importance of repairing and restoring with traditional techniques and authentic materials. To make sure that these traditions are not lost and that a certain continuity is preserved is a question of survival, not only for the monuments in Yemen. Another seriously endangered site is the city of Shibam, the “Chicago of the de-

sert”, in the Wadi Hadramant, constructed of mud brick, many buildings reaching a height of more than 12 storeys. 10% of more than 550 buildings in Shibam are in a very bad condition and some houses have already collapsed.

(From: Michael Petzet/Wolf Koenigs (editors), Sana'a, ICOMOS Journals of the German National Committee, vol. XV, 1995.)

Shibam, city of tower houses in southern Yemen

