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Iraq has a very old and rich cultural history. Due to the wars in the region, much of this history has been lost. This applies particularly to the citadel in the city of Erbil, protected as one of world’s oldest, permanently inhabited urban settlements. Over more than 6,000 years this UNESCO World Heritage Site has been, without interruption, a military, religious and cultural stronghold in the Kurdish steppe of northern Iraq. The fortress is situated on top of an artificial, elliptical archaeological mound, 32 meters above the flat city and its surroundings. Its dense urban fabric consists mainly of brick houses with traditional courtyards. Scattered among the town’s complex fabric are a prison, seven historic graves, a Koran school, three gates and several squares. They are revealed as you stroll through the narrow streets, evidence of the citadel as a self-sustaining system with a military, political, legal, economic and housing infrastructure. The narrow streets of this age-old labyrinth provide continuous shade, induce pleasant breezes during the hot summers and give shelter during cold, hard winters. In the center of the citadel was a public bath, a Hammam, built next to one of the city’s three mosques. Founded in 1775 by Qassim Agha Abdullah, who was inspired by traditional Islamic principles, this public bath was traditionally constructed with close links to its urban context and in accordance with socio-cultural norms of the society within which it operated (A. Al-Haidari, 2014). The well, a basic component, is still present today but no longer in use. It provided water for drinking, cleaning and bathing in a common facility of purity, the Hammam. Recently, an ambitious project has commenced to conserve and revitalize Erbil Citadel. This project has two main objectives. The first...
comprises physical conservation procedures to preserve and improve the architectural, physical and structural quality of the citadel buildings. The second entails adaptive reuse procedures to deal with the preserved buildings. With the aim of bringing the citadel back to life as a centre for culture, recreation and tourism, adaptive reuse has been adopted as the core strategy for a culture-driven revitalization. Within this context, this paper intends to contribute to the revitalization of the citadel by focusing on an important element of its urban fabric, the public bath (Hamman). In accordance with the guidelines of the Burra Charter, our project aims to protect a significant and valuable part of this cultural world heritage site (Burra Charter, (1999)) through our design of the Hamman as a renovated bathhouse instead of as a museum as previously proposed (Al Yaqoobi, (2014)). Once again water will connect the citizens of Erbil and its visitors as modern techniques and designs are combined with ancient traditions and architecture. This proposed adaptive reuse process not only represents a source of inspiration for revitalizing the entire citadel, but through water it also constitutes a catalyst for its redevelopment (Naraly,B. (2001)).

The significance of the Citadel Hammam has its origin in the various functions and purposes, which are accommodated historically on its grounds. As a place of entertainment, this bathhouse, just like the fountains in the courtyards of the townhouses, acted as a source of cooling and relaxation (Al Yaqoobi, (2012)). In addition, the hammam complex was a place of hygiene as it was built originally to support the Citadel’s citizens physically as well as spiritually. The Hammam’s spatial organization incorporated a purifying religious force for both mind and body. As one of its many functions, the Hammam stimulated the senses. The further one entered the successive areas, the more the world quieted. One can spend time in the hottest space of the facility, with the部件 reflecting filtered light is reflected, complex scents of herbs and soap are identified, hot air envelopes the visitor, and sins are washed away. The purifying effect of the hammam was not only physical but also held a deeper and religious significance: a cleansing of the mind by scrubbing the sins of the body. (A.Al-Haddari, 2014)

From its inception, the hammam was also a place of social significance. The water brought together citizens without distinction, even the most isolated women. Public bathing and traditional massage formed an important weekly or even daily ritual. As such this facility had a strong social function. Waiting times for bathing created social opportunities. The hammam became a meeting place for both men and women. Visitors exchanged news items; dissatisfaction and political unrest in the city are discussed among all sections of the population. The bathhouse was even the only social gathering place for isolated Muslim women, who lived permanently in the seclusion of their houses. It was the single place where they could come into contact with other women outside their immediate family circle. Islamic bathhouses often function as a public forum. Hammams were used for all kinds of ceremonies of great significance in the lives of ordinary Muslims. People usually gathered here during the day, but they also organized events or even prayer services in this public space next to the mosque. The hammam was the location to assess the physical qualities of a prospective bride by her new female relatives. When a potential daughter-in-law had been selected, she was invited to visit the hammam with her family-to-be. This ‘test’ was critical for the marriage to be concluded. This was followed later by an inspection of men in the bathhouse in preparation for their wedding. (Derbard, N.A., (2008))

One of the most important ceremonies at the hammam took place when a baby was 40 days old. The child was brought to the bathhouse to undergo a traditional washing ritual in order to become a member of society. Different festivals took place with music, drinks and food, such as henna, farewell and birthday parties and so on. People who converted to Islam were taken to the bathhouse. And finally, residents came to bathe when they experienced difficult or decisive moments in their lives. When war or disease hit the country, people tried to find peace in the comfortable hot steam of the hammam.

The functions of Hamman previously mentioned are supported and, in fact, accomplished overall by its spatial organization: the Camekan, the Westani, and the Harriet. A normal bathhouse consists of three major components that are interconnected. The first room, a bather passes is the ‘Alberani’, which is the cool or lukewarm space combined with the ‘Camekari’ or the entrance area. This area serves as a social meeting point and dressing area where a visitor dons a postural or a traditional flat-woven Turkish towel around the waist over a cloth of silk or cotton. The next space, which is called the ‘Westari’ or ‘the middle’, is a warmer room. The middle room may not be of high importance to visitors, but, in fact, it is most essential to the hamman. Without the Westari the hammam misses a certain rhythm necessary for its proper functioning. The human body can cope with very high and low temperatures as long it has the time to adapt or to recover. When going from a dark to a light place or the other way round, one’s eyes need time to acclimate. The long corridor of this middle room serves as a place for adjusting to the differences in both temperature and lighting. For this reason, the Westari is replaceable in the hammam’s process. After having adjusted gently to the heat and light in the lukewarm middle room on one of the massage beds, one can spend time in the hottest space of the facility, the ‘Harriet’. This space is permanently filled with steam, the place where people wash and cleanse themselves, not only physically but also mentally. In the ceiling of this room there usually is a dome with small windows to let in filtered natural light into an otherwise dark space below. In the middle of this space there is a platform with a marble surface, referred to as the belly or sweat stone used for the traditional rough massages. In the corners of this space are water fountains or showers for washing and rinsing of the body and hair. Large hammams have two of these areas, one for men and one for women, whereas the smaller hammams use a strict separate time schedule for each sex. (E.Resul, (2015))

After the thorough treatment, a bather walks slowly back to the Alberan, where one can dry while drinking a cup of tea or milk.

In order to be an integral part of the Erbil Citadel Revitalization Project, our project, in conformity with the Burra Charter guidelines, proposes a policy for the Hamman that identifies a use or combination of uses to retain the cultural significance of the place and specifically its social significance. The basic idea of the design is to reshape the building and to make it operational as a hammam once more. As a principal criterion for achieving this objective, the proposed interventions on any level and any scale should be minimal. A restored use of the place, with minimal changes to the principal physical structure and uses, should respect associations and meanings and, where appropriate, should provide for the continuation of practices which contribute to the local culture. As respect for culture and existing valuable elements must be the most natural approach in this process (Flivos, B., & Van Cleempoel, K. (2012)). It is crucial to use material from the area itself. Such an approach keeps the design close to the identity of the place.
to the culture of the place and preserves the identity of the historical city and hammam as a typical Islamic construction. The bathhouse functioning once again as a real hammam instead of the proposed new use of museum enables a first-hand experience of the cultural past. At the original open courtyard of this public space, we placed traditional trees, benches and a small water source to invite people to come and gather as they used to. Through maintaining the existing conditions and spaces, the infrastructure will welcome the visitor through a confluence of past, present and future.

The exterior of the hammam will maintain its current and traditional appearance through restoration, whereas the inside will be almost entirely recoated, using typical Iraqi and Kurdish materials and modern techniques. The new design maintains the apertures and skylights that allow natural lighting from above. Spatial interventions into the interior include the introduction of new seating in the changing room, lockers, a footbath, a division of the harret to create two contemporary saunas, updated toilets and a small shop. Interventions are also made to update the water heating system. Historically, heat was produced by burning manure and waste, which was subsequently transported under the building through tunnels based on the system of the Roman thermal baths. The biggest fire burned under the hot belly stone or the center of the traditional bath-house. Instead, we introduce environmentally respectful methods for heating the water through the use of the sun and the wind, combined with a minimum of electricity and gas. The tunnels remain the same although they now contain a modern ventilation system. The thickness of brick walls and other passive cooling techniques, such as semi-basements like the tunnels and small windows, offer added advantages. The old and the new strengthen each other.

A proper system (like the hammam of Erbil) does not require essential changes in order to revive on an architectural and social level. Its manual is easy to read when one feels the original atmosphere of the various rooms. In the restored monument, the historical operation remains identifiable to the local residents to whom the site has special associations and meanings. Like the Burra Charter predetermines, the people of Erbil are invited to assume the essential social, spiritual or other cultural responsibilities of the place by integrating it back into their lives. However, the minimal changes provide the opportunity for visitors of this heritage to experience foreign cultural values in a climate of co-existence without the loss of the original, social and spiritual characteristics.

This adaptive reuse proposal of minimal intervention reveals a central thread, which can be translated to similar heritage sites. Muslim communities from North Africa, the Middle East to Central Asia share the same architectural principles. Their constructions all try to secure functional necessities through standards and systems at home, at work and in public spaces. In spite of these similarities, local surroundings, culture and art have a physical impact on all constructions. Typical materials, space formations, architectural elements, decorations and inscriptions create clear distinctions. Furthermore, public and religious sites, including hammams, received additional attention during their building process because they visualised the nature and spirit of its users. The bathhouses combined daily and sacred life by providing water to support body and soul. Therefore, remaining hammams should be regarded as gems of cultural heritage that reconnect people to their past but also to their future. The cultural and artistic elements have a better chance of being maintained for following generations if they remain in use. The water in the hammam becomes a catalyst for rebuilding both the heritage and the community in the citadel of Erbil without any loss of identity. A judicious, adaptive reuse is the only method for maintaining specific, vulnerable sites within society in order to preserve contemporary rituals.

ENDNOTES:
1 From an interview with Mr. Al Yaqoobi Dara (Head of High Commission for Erbil Citadel Revitalization) in 4/17/2014.
Ahmed Abbas holds a Bachelor Degree in Architecture from the Technical University of Aarhus and a Master in Interior Architecture from Hasselt University in Belgium. He has six years of experience as an architect in leading his own company. He has been a lecturer at the University of Newroz (University of Arts) where he teaches Modern Design and Preservation from Columbia University in 2016. Ford currently works for Daniel Libeskind in New York. His architectural work has been published internationally.

Brian Ambroziak is an Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. His publications include Michael Graves: Images of a Grand Tour (2005) and Infinities of Place: Two Thousand Years of Three Dimensional Mapping (1999) with Princeton Architectural Press. In 2009, Brian Ambroziak founded time|space|lab with Andrew McLellan and Katherine Ambroziak.

Katherine Bambrick Ambroziak is an Associate Professor of Architecture at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her publications include DeadSpace Arlington, Material Sandra: Memoirs of the Collective Individual, Surrogates Stones, Odd Fellows: Constructing the Positive Self, and Goodfit of Ritual in Design. Since 2009, she has served as the primary designer and coordinator of the Odd Fellows Cemetery Reclamation Project, a conservation and rehabilitation initiative that aims to educate and support the minority communities of East Knoxville through the design and implementation of a responsive memorial landscape.

Michael Leighton Beaman is the founding principal of Beta-fluid, a design/research office run with Landscape Architect and educator Zaneta Hong. Michael is also a co-founding member of the design nonprofit GA Collaborative. Michael currently teaches at the University of Virginia where he is an Associate Professor in Architecture and at the Rhode Island School of Design, where he is critic in the Architecture Foundation. In addition to teaching and practice, Michael is a critic for Architectural Record focusing on design technologies and techno-centric design practices.

Inge Donné completed her bachelor’s degree in Interior Architecture at Luca School of Arts, Brussels, and her master’s degree on the topic of adaptive reuse at Hasselt University, Belgium. After completing her MRes in Heritage, Science and Lenses architecture, she researched the reuse of water towers and created a masterproject for the water tower of Hoeilaart (BE) as co-working space.

Dr Graeme Evans is a Professor of Urban Design at Maastricht University, Department of Design and Director of the Art & Design Research Institute. He has been leading a research project in the Lee Valley as part of a 3 year Arts & Humanities Research Council-funded project: Towards hydrobioclunx, examining interactions between urban ecosystems and urban water landscapes, and the legacy of waterside architecture and heritage. In June 2015 he curated the Hackney Wick Fish & Island Connecting Communities Festival which resulted in a series of local-based design interventions including BA Interior Architecture student work, as part of the London Festival of Architecture. Graeme is also Professor of Culture & Urban Development at Maastricht University, The Netherlands where he has been working on several industrial heritage re-use schemes.

Alexander Ford earned a B.S. in Architecture from the University of Michigan in 2010, and an M.S. in Landscape Architecture and Preservation from Columbia University in 2016. Ford currently works for Daniel Libeskind in New York. His architectural work has been published internationally.

Francesco Garofalo founded Openfabric in 2011, an office specialising in landscape architecture and urban planning based in the Netherlands. Francesco Garofalo studied Landscape Architecture in Van Hall Larenstein Arnhem, the Netherlands and in Genoa University. Through Openfabric he has led various awarded competition and commissions, including: a proposal for New Tianzhai square in Cairo, Egypt; an AIDS memorial park, New York, USA; renewal of the main boulevard in Genoa — Via XX Settembre, Italy (‘First prize’) an urban square, realised in The Hague, The Netherlands (‘First prize’). Francesco currently teaches at the Amsterdam Academy.

Nicholas Gervasi earned a B.Arch and M.Arch from Tulane University in 2012, and an M.S. in Historic Preservation from Columbia University in 2016. Gervasi currently works for AVON Studio Architecture and Preservation in New York.

Naomi House is a Designer, Editor and Writer with an approach to the Interior that is framed through forensic investigations. A Senior Lecturer in Interior Architecture at Midlands Metropolitan University she is also a Tutor in Critical and Historical Studies at the Royal College of Art. Naomi is a founding member of Ritual in Design, exploring the changing relationships between people, the environment, identity and adaptive reuse. A widely published design scholar and researcher, Naomi has served as an editor and associate editor of several international peer-reviewed publications, and as co-founder of the International Journal of Interior Architecture & Design. Her most recent publications include Journal of Interior Architecture Education, Journal of Interior Design, AD Journal, Design Reuses, International Journal of Architectural Heritage, International Journal of Adaptive Reuse, and various publications of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture.

Bia Merveito studied Interior Architecture at the Polytechnic of Lisbon (EAP) and Conservation of Monuments and Sites at the Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation in Leuven (BE). In 2014, she obtained a PhD in architecture at Hasselt University; her thesis was entitled ‘re-use: an interior view on adaptive reuse of buildings’; her current research focuses on the theory of adaptive reuse, and preservation of spirit of place. She teaches courses on adaptive reuse at Hasselt University in the specialized master programme in Interiors ‘Adaptive Reuse’ exploring spatial potentials and the poetics of the existing.

Catherine R. Joseph is an architect based in New York City. She earned a Master of Architecture from Cornell University and a Bachelor of Science in Structural Engineering from Duke University.

Paula La Scala PLS, architect, is Doctor Europaeus in Museography (Palermo). In 2013 attended, as a guest PhD student, the School of Museum Studies at University of Leicester (UK). Since 2013 she has been taking an active part in L@bCity Architecture, a research group headed by Prof. Renzo Lecardane and Superintendent of C.L.O. – the Council of Inordinate Design.

Karen Lenn holds a Master in Architecture and Architecture Sciences from Sint-Lucas and KU Leuven, both in Belgium. She worked for 10 years as an architect specializing in adaptive reuse, energy efficiency and design for all. In 2012, Karen started a PhD on the reinterpretation of underserved monastic sites in Limburg (Belgium) and Western Europe at Hasselt University. She is also engaged in several design studios concerning adaptive reuse and collective dwelling at the same university.

Kees Lekman is an Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of British Columbia. He holds degrees in planning, urban design and landscape architecture. Current research focusing on the intersection of landscape, infrastructure and ecology has been published in the Journal of Architectural Education, Topos, Landscape Paysages and New Geographies. Kees is also founder of Paralisa Landscape, a collaborative and interdisciplinary design and research platform. k.ekman@ualcub.ca www.paralisalandscape.com

Lucas Lennstra is a landscape architect and urban designer based in Amsterdam. Lucas held a Masters of Design in Adaptive Reuse, from the Rhode Island School of Design. Some of her built work includes the US Embassy Compound in Jakarta, Indonesia, Vicont Solar’s headquarter in Luhu, China, and Lytham Dental in Tempe, Arizona.

Ernesto Aparicio is a Senior Critic in the Department of Graphic Design at RISD. Aparicio earned his BA at the Escuela de Bellas Artes, La Plata, Buenos Aires and completed his Post Graduate Studies at the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. Prior to moving to the US, he was an Art Director for Editions du Seuil in Paris, while maintaining his own graphic design practices. Aparicio Design Inc. Best known for his work in the world of publishing, Aparicio has worked on corporate identities, publications, and way-finding for corporations and institutions in France, Japan, and the US. Recently, Aparicio was named Creative Director for the New York firm DFA.

Markus Berger is Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director in the Department of Interior Architecture at RISD. Berger holds a Diplomingenieur für Architektur from the Technische Universität Wien, Austria and a regional architect (SBA) in the Netherlands. Prior to coming to the US, Berger practiced and taught in the Netherlands, Austria, India, and Pakistan, and currently heads his own art and design studio in Providence. His work, research, writing, and teaching focus on art and design interventions in the built environment, including issues of historic preservation, sensory experience and interaction. He is a co-founder and co-editor of the InAR Journal.

Liliane Wong is Professor and Head of the Department of Interior Architecture at RISD. Wong received her Masters of Architecture from Harvard University Graduate School of Design and a Bachelor of Art in Mathematics from Vassar College. She is a registered Architect in Massachusetts and has practiced in the Boston area, including in her firm, MWA. She is the author of Adaptive Reuse: Extending the Lives of Buildings, co-author of Libraries: A Design Manual, and contributing author of Designing Interior Architecture and Flexible Composite Materials in Architecture, Construction and Interiors. A long time volunteer at soup kitchens, she emphasizes the importance of public engagement in architecture and design in her teaching. Wong is a co-founder and co-editor of the InAR Journal.