



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Narratives in Mamluk architecture: Spatial and perceptual analyses of the madrassas and their mausoleums



Shatha Malhis*

Faculty of Architecture and Design, Petra University, Al-Bunayyat 961343, Jordan

Received 16 July 2015; received in revised form 9 November 2015; accepted 11 November 2015

KEYWORDS

Madrassa;
Mausoleum;
Perceived relationships;
Spatial relationships;
Axial analysis;
Isovists

Abstract

Mamluk sultans were known for their patronage of the arts and architecture. Their educational institutions were among the wide array of architectural projects that linked them as ruling elites to the religious scholars of their times. Their tombs were placed in a mausoleum attached to their educational-religious complexes to attest to their legacy. The evolution of their buildings such that both educational and memorial functions are integrated with the dense surroundings is scrutinized through chronological-spatial analysis. The configuration of the built form, the disposition of its boundaries, its patterns of accessibility, and its visual properties are the features that present the buildings to one's experience and bring certain perceptions into play. In this study, various spatial descriptor tools of space syntax are employed to analyze the data of 14 Mamluk examples (1260–1517A.D.) and capture the differences in the experience where the expression is preserved. Analyses of the configurational characteristics, axial attributes, visibility structures, and isovists highlight how the spatial and formal properties of the layouts were used to express certain representational relationships. The advantages of combining different spatial investigations allows for understanding historical design principles and how the geometry of forms could hide in its abstract rules, conceptual and perceptual qualities.

© 2015 The Author. Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

In this study, the dynamics of the spatial experience of a *Mamluk madrassa* and its *mausoleum* are investigated, and the nature of the configuration rules underlying their annexation over time is examined. Furthermore, answering

*Tel.: +962 65603894.

E-mail address: shathamalhis@gmail.com

Peer review under responsibility of Southeast University.

the questions of whether the madrasa and the mausoleum remain as two independent functions within one context or their adjacency developed into one homogeneous functional whole is attempted. This paper provides a look into their spatial physical attributes and attempts to capture the narrative behind their formations. The investigation focuses on extracting the meaning of the architecture and learning how architecture becomes meaningful as a functional and perceptual space. Analyzing Mamluk forms produced through time is the key to understanding the spatial-perceptual phenomena and the mechanisms through which such phenomena unfold. To this end, this paper starts with a historical review of the Mamluk period with emphasis on the two architectural types under investigation. It then provides an exposition of the spatial investigations, showing their tools, theoretical conceptions, analysis, findings, and interpretations.

The Mamluk sultanate (1250-1517) emerged during the decline of the *Ayyubid* realm when Turkic Mamluks (originally slave-mercenary soldiers in the Ayyubid military organization) eventually overthrew the last Ayyubid sultan in Cairo and established their own rule. Mamluk history is divided into two periods based on the origins of their different dynastic lines: the Bahri Mamluks (1250-1382) of Turkic origin from Russia, and Burji Mamluks (1382-1517) of Caucasian Circassian origin. In the context by which they ascended to the throne, Mamluks used architecture among their tools to reestablish their authority as sultans. Their choices as to what status to cultivate were affected by their need to reaffirm their legitimacy and power. They exploited every avenue to associate themselves with the actions of the distinguished past rulers and worked “to create the trappings of an empire” (Newhall, 1987). Although the range of their work was outpouring at every social, geographic, and topological scale, the most eternal testimony to the Mamluk reign remains to be its architecture. Their buildings exemplify one of the most distinguished medieval architectural civilizations and their spectacular manifestations are keys to the political and social history of the epoch.

1.1. Madrasa

As an institution, the madrasa is centuries old, first built in the eleventh century in Baghdad and spread later to varied locations. *Madrasas* attracted the patronage of rulers throughout the Mamluk history, and are to this day a mosaic of parts dating back to different periods and building campaigns. Mamluk sultans showed great interest in improving education, concentrating on religious, theological, and practical aspects, such as the Quran, Sharia, and prayers (Brentjes, 1997; Makdisi, 1981). Although a full picture of life within the Madrasa’s religious institution is unavailable, this life is illustrated by several accounts clarifying that there “was not a madrasa where students did not focus on their studies day and night” (Tamari, 2001). Ulema played a vital role in the political and social life of the era; they were “employed as teachers of religion, and were seen as religious elites” (Lev, 2009). The rule system, which madrasa division encapsulates, suggests three categories of users: passer-by visitors (strangers), long-term users (students), and caretakers including sheikh and live-in students (inhabitants).

A madrasa usually has a cruciform arrangement with four iwans where the four Sunni rites were usually taught (Fig. 1). On the main axis of the *Qibla-iwan* lies the mosque. The court is an integral part of the four-iwan formation (Creswell, 1922); its creation employed distinguished decorative capacities and revealed the sophistication in the use of geometric patterns and motifs (Al-Harithy, 2007). In addition to these major components, a madrasa included cells for the students, quarters for the sheikh, and sometimes a free water fountain (Parker, 1985; Rabbat, 2010). In the last quarter of the fourteenth century, Khutbah and prayers were allowed on Fridays; thus, minbars and minarets were added in some institutions (Behrens-Abouseif, 2011; Mahamid, 2013).

1.2. Mausoleum

A typical Muslim grave usually consists of a simple tomb and a headstone occasionally decorated with inscriptions of the

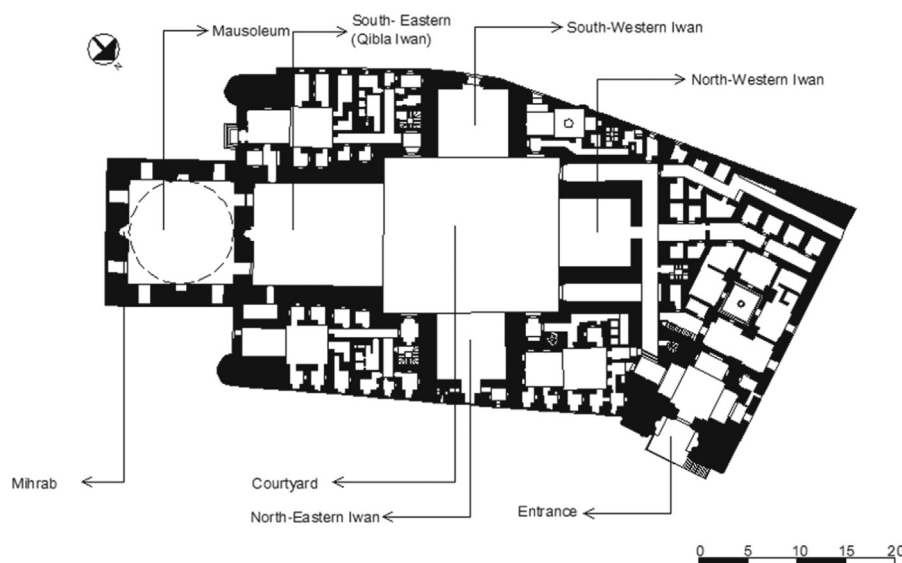


Fig. 1 Sultan Hassan’s madrasa complex plan—C7—with its spatial categories.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/270688>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/270688>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)