THE LYRICAL FAÇADES OF SAN'â'

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The Lyrical Façades of Ṣan'â'
by
Saba Taher Al-Suleihi
Submitted to the Department of Architecture on May 8, 1992
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This study investigates aspects of the interrelationship between poetry and architecture as two modes of cultural expression. It postulates that the critical aesthetic values of a culture surface in its various products which may interchange influences and roles.

As an example of a rich indigenous Yemeni and Islamic culture, the old city of Ṣan'â' provides a good case for the exploration of the nature of the contemplated interchange. The study considers some fundamental patterns in both the façades of Ṣan'â' and its lyrical poetry.

The parallels drawn are used to construct hypotheses for the investigation of the patterns of the façades using techniques parallel to those used in studying the metric patterns of Arabic poetry. The proposed model shows promising potential as a tool to reveal the ordering principles underlying architectural composition.

Thesis Supervisor: Ronald Lewcock
Title: Visiting Professor of Architecture

To Lamis, who shares this song with me.

To my father, who would have appreciated our song.

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FOREWORD

The general subject of this thesis has long been one that has interested me. Linguistic patterns in their various forms I have always found a source of unlimited fascination. With my eyes opening on such patterns in my native culture, architecture seemed but another linguistic pattern. It reflected the differences between communities, as did dialects.

The linguistic analogy embraces the differences in form between the patterns of one language or dialect and another. If one pattern was prose, the other might be poetry. Sanʿâʾ seemed to belong to the poetic type.

In its early stages, the development of an idea for the topic benefited from brainstorming discussions with Professor Ronald Lewcock, who continued to watch over the process in all stages, and with fellow students Kevin Low and Hatice Yazar. The topic was crystallized and inspired by the work of Steven Caton, the author of *Peaks of Yemen I Summon*, which deepened my feeling of the dimensions of the role that poetry plays in the tribal communities of Yemen. It was also helped by the advice of Professors William Porter, Nasser Rabbat and Masood Khan as well as Professor Julian Beinart.

One of the difficulties that I had to cope with in this study was the lack of a particular example with a systematic methodology to follow. It was a source of

challenge at some points and dismay at others, to say the least. The relatively short time given to complete the study was hardly enough to begin it.

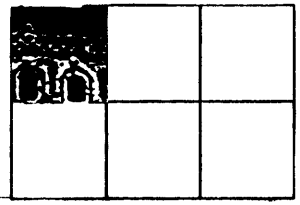
Other difficulties were related to the specific examples from architecture and poetry that were not always at reach when needed. This, however, was not a major problem concerning the visual material since the available bits and pieces proved sufficient for the purpose. For the poems, with the absolute shortage of any written reference at the beginning, I had to rely on memory until I received the necessary books.

This study is an attempt to appreciate a product of a particular culture using that culture's own values. By applying the critical values of poetry in evaluating façades, we give the culture a chance to explain itself, and enable ourselves to appreciate it as insiders.

I see some previous master theses at MIT as other examples of this approach—namely, that by Hatice Yazar, *Architecture in Miniature: Representation of Space and Form Illustrations and Buildings in Timurid Central Asia*, 1991; and that by Howyda Al-Harithy, *Architecture Form and Meaning in Light of Al-Jurjani's Literary Theories*, 1987.

1

INTRODUCTION



About The Study

The deep impression that the architecture of the old city of Ṣan'â' leaves on visitors is without doubt due to the overwhelming character of its façades. Those façades together create a powerful visual image: the after effect in the memory may be compared to the level to which a culture could be reduced by the passage of time. This suggests that the character of the façades is essential to the definition of the architecture of Ṣan'â'.

Architecture, besides being a tangible indication of cultural differences, provides the physical envelope for inter-cultural interaction. In this sense, the architecture of Ṣan'â', particularly its façades, becomes the threshold to understanding Ṣan'ânî culture. This, as a principle, may be true of many other cases: the specific relations between the different facets of a culture often reflect the peculiarities of the culture.

This study draws connections between two important products of the Arabic and Islamic cultures—these are the two arts of architecture and poetry. For its rich architectural and poetic heritage, Ṣan'â' is taken as a milieu to study the culture.

Coming, as I do, from the same background, I find it helpful to take Ṣan'â' as an example to explore those cultural peculiarities.

This study first establishes a cultural background about the affinities that take place between the different products of the culture of Ṣan'â' and Yemen as part of Arabian and Islamic cultures.

It then presents in three chapters some of the principles that underlay the design of façades in Ṣan'â', followed by the principles of Arabic poetry, and attempts to draw parallels between the two.

Visual exploration of the façades is done using photographs and drawings as sources of information and as media of communication. For poetry, the definition of basic principles and characteristics is presented, and parts of poems are used as illustrations. One chapter is given to develop a hypothetical model for the establishing parallels between the metric principles of poetry and the organizing principles of the façades.

This discussion limits itself to Ṣan'â' as the milieu in which the affinity between architecture and poetry is studied. Although it is possible that similar parallels may be drawn in other places, consideration of these is beyond the scope of this research.

SAN'Â'—ARCHITECTURE AND SOCIETY

In his book, *The Aesthetics of Architecture,* Roger Scruton recognizes architecture's character as a public object as its "distinguishing feature." It differs from other arts such as music and literature in the fact that it takes away the "free choice" of the members of the public in determining their involvement as whether "to observe or ignore."[1] This statement is specially true for the role architecture plays in San'ânî culture. The architectural tradition is deeply embedded in the people's imagination as their way of reflecting both their inner *selves* and their individuality.

The tall towers that compete to reach higher in the sky allude to the ideal model of the legendary Qasr Ghumdân, the palace of the kings of Saba'. The tower houses of San'â' belong to the same tradition as the legendary palace: tall multi-story buildings, each with a characteristic reception room (*mafraj*) at the top. The exterior decoration with white plaster accompanied with the alabaster windows, Ameen Rihani thinks, is a simulation of the marble used to decorate the exterior of Ghumdân.[2] The description and stories attached to its construction and destruction are part of a folk culture and not limited to the educated elite.

The tall towers of San'â'
Maréchaux

[1]Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Architecture,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 13.
[2]Ameen Rihani (1876-1940), *Arabian Peak and Desert,* Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1983, p.177.

Sabaean inscription (*Musnad*)
Maréchaux

The Noble Origin:

The city of San'â' is nick-named *Madînat Sâm* (the city of Shem), attributing its foundation to the legendary Shem son of Noah, the oldest reference in time that the esoteric collective memory of the nations in the area could suggest. Having a clear and honorabledescent (*nasab*), is one component of tribal identity. As Steven Caton points out, being descendants of the ancient Himyarites and Sabaeans is an important aspect of tribal ideology and definition of a tribesman in Yemen.[3] According to this ideology and as related by traditional genealogists, the Yemenis are descendants of Qahtân (Yoqtan), a descendant of Shem. They believe in the nobility of this origin deeply rooted in antiquity and in its being the honored origin for the whole Arabic race. Authenticity is, therefore, established by this direct connection with the legendary past and by the belief that they carry the pure ancient South Arabian blood in their veins. This concept is consistent through the genealogical subdivision of the tribes and their descent from a shared ancestry. Each tribe takes pride also in its direct ancestors as representatives and carriers of nobility and honor.

Sharing this origin with the rest of the country and also belonging to their own tribes, the population of San'â' are, one can safely say, tribal settlers of the city. Al-Hamdânî in *Sifat jazîrat al-'arab* mentions that San'â' was divided into quarters according to the tribal divisions of the population.[4] This seems to have changed at a later period since it is not true for the modern period; however, almost each family in the city is related to some tribe and often maintains this relation.

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[3]Steven Caton, *Peaks of Yemen I Summon*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, pp.33-34.

[4]Franck Mermier, "De l'Usage d'un Concept: La Citadinité à Sanaa," in Yemen Sanaa *Peuples Méditerranéens*, No. 46, janv.-mars 1989, pp. 31-48. p. 39.

In this frame of reference, Sanʻâʼ did not exist as one entity united by belonging to one father, like a tribe, and one *ʻasabîyah* (kinship) or tribal solidarity using Ibn Khaldûn's term. As Ibn Khaldûn explains, *ʻasabîyah* is stronger among tribal communities but is eventually "destroyed" after they settle in cities.[5] Therefore, the need for a unifying character to substitute the divided *ʻasabîyah* of the members of the community was probably the unconscious motive, since it was not possible to overlook this tribal division even of the *urban* population, and obviously with the lack of one immediate shared ancestry, another identity of the city emerged—an identity more integrated with its definition as an urban existence.

The fact that legend in this culture connected Sanʻâʼ with the venerated ancestor of the country, with emphasis on the place rather than the race, suggests a physical dimension of nobility; it is the very spot where Shem chose to build his lofty Ghumdân, the romantic ideal for all the houses in the city. As the Yemeni people see in the tribal values the continuation of an honorable system deep-rooted in antiquity, and in themselves a representation of their ancestors' ideal, their architecture is the continuation of an architectural heritage idealized in the *ancestor* of Yemeni tower houses, Qasr Ghumdân.

In this sense, Sanʻâʼ becomes an architectural manifestation of the *genealogy* of Yemeni tribes gaining, therefore, distinction by the merge of legend and political power as the seat of the central state.

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[5]Fuad Baali, *Society, State, and Urbanism: Ibn Khaldun's Sociological Thought*, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1988, p. 97.

ARCHITECTURE, ARTS AND CRAFTS—AFFINITIES

Poetry and Architecture:

When al-Khalîl ibn 'Ahmad, the eighth century philologist of Arabic, developed his theory of meter, he derived his terminology largely from the structure of tents. So, the basic unit in the poem is the *bayt* (house), and the two basic metric measures are the *watid* (peg), and the *sabab* (cord). In other words, the poem was perceived to possess structural and spatial qualities analogous to those of architecture. Therefore, its architecture came similar to the generic type in the environment where poetry was produced. This terminology works in that context as a strong metaphor based on the organic relationship between the poet and the environment.

This metaphor seems consistent in al-Khalîl's perception of poetry. A spatial image of poetry is also expressed in a rhyme attributed to him, where figuratively, "the ladder of poetry is long and hard to climb for those who do not know it."[6] The emphasis on architectural qualities of poetry must have been a result of al-Khalîl's observation of the context in which poetry was produced.

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[6]*ash-shi'ru sa'bun wa-tawîlun sullamuh*
'idhâ-rtaqâ fî-hi-lladhî lâ ya'lamuh
zallat bi-hi 'ilâ-l-hadîdi qadamuh
yurîdu 'an yu'ribahu fa-yu'jimuh

In their artistic vision of the Yemeni context, Maria and Pascal Maréchaux, through juxtaposing images of people, buildings and objects, imply the oneness of the source of artistic creation in the society, and the persistence of aesthetic values,[7] where artistic expression becomes a manifestation of the value system.

Within a similar perspective of the onness of a culture, the poet was seen as a *builder* of meaning, and his construction had to share some of the properties of the architectural types known to him. The fact that this property was shared with many crafts enabled this analogy to extended to other crafts such as textiles.

Poetry and Textiles:

In its development from the original genres, poetry was presented as a piece of decorated textile. The terms *tasmît* , *tawshîh* and *tatrîz*,[8] which are used in Arabic poetry, are taken directly from textiles. One of the important books written in the thirteenth century on the art of strophic poetry writing was titled *Dâr ut-tirâz* (*The House of Textiles,*)[9] a term used to designate the workshops for the production of textiles.

The analogy goes further to the nature of the development that took place in the tradition. The new patterns that developed in the form of the Arabic poem employed mechanisms of elaboration and articulation of the poem's *surface* similar to

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[7]See Maria and Pascal Maréchaux with Dominique Champault, *Arabian Moons: Passages in Time Through Yemen,* Singapore: Concept Media, 1987.

[8]These refer to techniques of elaboration in Arabic poetry, by which hemistichs usually with different rhyme or meter are added in different positions in the poem .

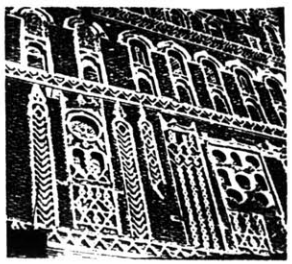
[9]By Hibatullâh ibn Ja'far ibn Sanâ' al-Mulk (1155-1211), *Dâr ut-tirâz fî 'amal il-muwashshahât,* ed. Jawdat ar-Rikâbî, Damascus: Dâr al-Fikr, 1st ed. 1949, 2nd ed. 1977.

those that were developed in textiles. Creating flat surfaces and enhancing them with texture and vibrancy seems to have been a prominent tendency expressed in Islamic arts, from which poetry was not an exception. Articulation has always been a characteristic of Islamic arts, and textiles were perhaps the rich source of inspiration that led the arts in their development.

As a symbolic tool, textiles presented a noble agent to express the values of a culture. They were used metaphorically in many contexts as we are told by traditions. When the Prophet was pleased by Ka'b ibn Zuhayr's poem, the Prophet's own cloak (*burd*) was given to the poet to honor him. This act gave the poem its name as *al-Burdah*. It was, however, a tradition to honor poets by giving them cloth.

Architecture and Textiles:

The analogy between architecture and textiles has always been drawn on the basis of a strong visual resemblance. Cloth seems to have played a major role in the architecture of ancient times. In Mughal architecture, screens were used extensively to cover openings and divide spaces in addition to treating building surfaces with motifs and patterns that call textiles to the mind. It is possible that these patterns were appreciated first in textiles then transferred to stone and bricks where their techniques were applied in the same way wood construction and articulation techniques had been applied to stone in Greek and Hindu architecture. This is evident in the surface treatment of Moorish, Timurid, Seljuk and Mughal architecture.



Two patterns woven in wool and in bricks.
Varanda

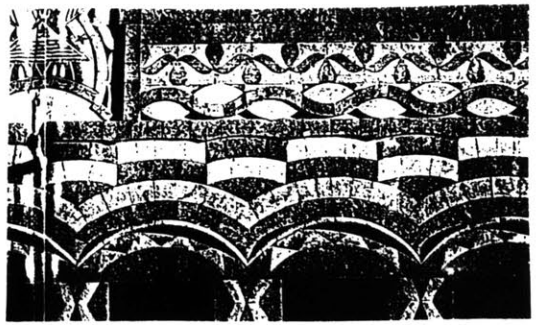
Lisa Golombek lays out this affinity suggesting that it is related to the techniques that the architects used in construction. The grid that regulated buildings

in plan is also the basis for designing the façade and its decoration. This imaginary grid on the façade, like the grid of the loom, led the architect to treat the building surfaces as fabric panels.[10]

This theory seems to possess a great potential since the idea of using cloth is originally rooted in the nomadic tent, where the fabric is the architecture itself, or complementary to architecture, as decoration for the interior.[11] Based on this, a number of observations, concerning the relation between architecture and fabrics, are laid out in the following discussion.

Textile Façades:

The legendary Qasr Ghumdân of San'â' is reported to have had four façades of stone, each of a different color: red, green, black and white.[12] This description seems more applicable to a textile scheme. The four sides could have been a development of four carpets or hanging curtains. Covering buildings with cloth might be an ancient tradition that was represented later using more durable materials with techniques and motifs taken from textiles. Fernando Varanda recognizes this resemblance in technique and appearance between the two arts implying that crafts are manifestations of one logic, "Affinities between decorative patterns in architecture and various crafts are evident. Patterns are 'woven' into brick and stone walls, as they are woven in basketry and rugs; motifs are 'carved' into plaster and



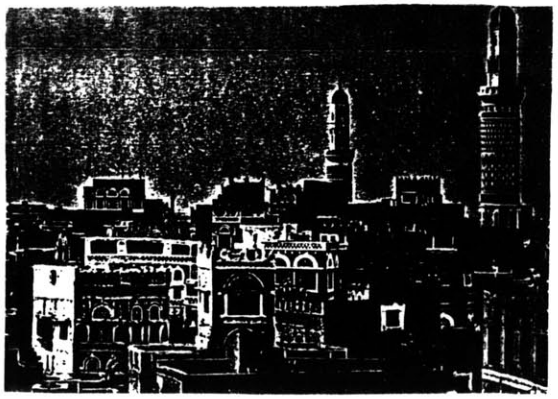
Textile techniques in stone façades
Bonnenfant, *Maisons*.

[10]See, for example, Lisa Golombek, "The Function of Decoration in Islamic Architecture," in Margaret Sevcenko ed., *Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1988, pp. 35-45 [44].

[11]We know that the tradition of hanging decorated rugs and carpets on the interior walls to decorate them is still practiced today in many Islamic countries.

[12]ar-Râzî, *tarîkh.u madînat.i san'â'*, p. 21.

wood as they are carved in jewelry; wall painting, too, are reminiscent of painted ceramics."[13]



A view of the city of San'â' with the minarets
Serjeant and Lewcock

The Minarets Of San'â':

The tradition of covering the Ka'bah with cloth (*kiswah,*) a practice preserved until today, may be a surviving trace of an ancient tradition.[14] In the Islamic context also, tombs of saints (*walîs*) and important persons are honored by covering them with decorated fabric.

This was also the case with the Dome of the Rock, which, as reported by al-Wâsitî, used to be dressed in the winter by two covers (*jilâlân*), one of woolen fabric (*labûd*)and another of leather (*'adam,*)and that the space used to be closed by silk curtains (*sutûr dîbâj*), between the columns, which were then visible to the outside.[15]

Some scholars argue that the minarets of San'â' are the carriers of the first influence of the present form of traditional decoration of buildings in San'â'.[16] This

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[13]Fernando Varanda, *Art of Building in Yemen,* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1982, p. 111.

[14]According to traditional sources, some legendary Himyarite rulers used to cover the Ka'bah with Yemeni textiles. And as reported by Ibn Battûtah, that was still practiced in the thirteenth century during the reign of the Rasûlid sultan al-Malik al-Muzaffar Yûsuf (1250-1295). [Werner Daum, "From the Queen of Saba' to a Modern State: 3000 Years of Civilisation in Southern Arabia," in Werner Daum, pp. 9-31. p. 21.]

[15]'Abu Bakr al-Wasitî (1019), *Fadâ'il al-bayt al-muqaddas,* Isaac Hasson ed., Jerusalem: The Magnes Press-The Hebrew University, 1979, p. 82.

[16]According to Ronald Lewcock, the oldest datable patterned brick minaret in San'â' is that of al-Madrasah 1519/1520. These minarets seem to be of a Central Asian or Persian origin [Ronald Lewcock, "The Medieval Architecture of Yemen," in Werner Daum ed., *Yemen—3000 Years of Art and Civilisation in Arabia Felix,* Innsbruck: Penguin-Verlag, 1987, pp. 204-211. p. 211]. Also, Lewcock, *The Old Walled City of San'â',* Paris: UNESCO, 1986. p. 90.

theory is supported by the fact that the vertical patterns on the façades are found in the seemingly older houses, which indicates that these vertical patterns were perhaps derived from those used on minarets.

As symbols for the religion, the minarets were celebrated by covering them with decorative patterns, a tradition that may have come in the fifteenth century from Persia, where it was practiced in earlier periods.[17] The patterned brick minaret of al-Muẓaffar Mosque at al-Mahjam[18] may be an indication of an earlier influence.[19] It is possible that these symbolic structures might otherwise have been covered with cloth, as exemplified in the ultimate sacred symbol of Islam, the Ka'bah.

Architecture, Music and Poetry:

In Ṣan'â', the excellent artistic expressions of the society are predominantly presented by the two arts of architecture and music. The special and very distinctive character of the architecture of Ṣan'â' is not present anywhere else in the whole country. Although some characteristics are shared by the architecture of the highlands in terms of plan organization and other functional aspects, the special expression of the façade is exclusively a Ṣan'ânî characteristic.

Music is another specialty of the city of Ṣan'â'. The highly appreciated Ṣan'ânî genre has been the subject of entertainment in almost all Yemen, and has always been called by this name. It flourished especially in social gatherings such as the *qât*

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[17]Lewcock, Medieval, p. 211.
[18]A medieval city in the Tihâmah of Yemen, the strip of coast on the Red Sea.
[19]This mosque was built by the Rasûlid sultan al-Muẓaffar in the thirteenth century [Barbara Finster, "The Architecture of the Rasûlids," in Werner Daum ed., pp. 254-64, p. 255 and 262.

chewing sessions, where its audience belonged to all the social categories of the society. The name *San'ânî* does not only mean that it came from San'â'—although it has been produced, modified or developed in other cities—it also indicates its association in the minds of the people of Yemen with that city, and suggests its leading role over the others. In one of his poems, al-Qûmandân[20] says:

> Sing, O Hâdî, the song of our homeland
> To the tune of cheering (*dân*)
> Forget about the music of San'â' of the Yemen
> [It is] "A branch of agates."[21]

This verse reacts against practicing San'ânî music, implying that it was a sort of cultural dependence, depreciating the local identity. This means that the term is not merely used for classifying this type, but is also a realization of the San'ânî ingredients it incorporates, qualifying it as representative of the San'ânî identity.

The word *music* in the Yemeni context implies poetry by definition, since music there does not stand by itself as an independent or abstract art, but includes the sung

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[20]Al-Qûmandân (d. 1943) is the name by which the prince poet 'Ahmad Fadl al-'Abdalî, who was also a musician, was known. He was the brother of the former sultan of Lahj in the South.

[21]Muhammad 'Abduh Ghânim, *Shi'r al-ghinâ' as-san'ânî*, Bayrût: Dâr al-kâtib al-'arabî, 198..?. p. 29.

"ghanni yâ hâdî nashîd ahl al-watan ghanni sawt (sôt) i-d-dân
mâ 'alaynâ ('alênâ) min ghunâ san'â-l-yaman ghusn.i min 'iqyân."

The last hemistich quotes the beginning of a famous San'ânî song written by 'Ahmad ibn 'Abd ar-Rahmân al-'Ânisî (d. 1825):

"ghusn.i min 'iqyân.i 'athmar bi-l-qamar qadd al-habîb."

words or lyrics as an integrated and essential part,[22] an aspect that will be explained in the course of this discussion.

Throughout its development in history, as it gained the traditional status as the seat of government, the city of Ṣan'â' has acquired a reputation as a center of arts and crafts in the country. Its people developed a high level of appreciation for the arts, which conditioned their social expression to suit the more tranquil urban life they led, as opposed to the rough life of the tribal communities in the country, where poetry occupied a more important status as a medium of expression. Having its roots in tribal societies, it is probable that this urban community initially employed the same forms of expression as those practiced by its ancestral tribal community. The poem, because of the now-more-art-oriented milieu, was *crafted* into a musical genre, thus assuming a new form, more fitting to its new environment. The urban society, becoming more receptive to sensory experiences, emphasized in the process the production of social expressions such as music.

Based on this understanding, it becomes clear why the sung words are inseparable from the music; they are the essence of the song, and music is only a celebration of the lyrics, a form of presentation. The Ṣan'ânî song is the urban version or reincarnation of the tribal poem, which has lost its significance to the ritualistic performance of music.

Given their knowledge of and sensitivity towards the visual context, the urban population, as excellent masters of crafts, found in architecture even a better medium

[22]This is a property that is also shared with the classical Arabic music.

to express the city's uniqueness, which was conceived as a reinterpretative manifestation of the inherited arts of the spoken word. In creating the unique character of the city, architecture has played the same role that the poem played in gaining honor and distinction for the tribe. The distinction that the city was after through an emphasis on its urban character was brought to existence as an overwhelming poem of nobility and honor, expressed in its lofty mansions with their decorated façades, a collective performance of a song of wealth, power and glory.

Seen as such, the decorated façades of San'â', the most spectacular of Yemeni visual arts, exhibit a unique character that has no equivalent in the whole country. It was conceived as an incomparable piece of rhetoric, that has retained its affinities with its poetic ancestry and, nonetheless, preserved its fundamental characteristics.

Replacing the all-conceptual world of values expressed through poetry in the tribe, these two arts—i.e., music and architecture—presented the more tangible values of urban life. As architecture, arts and crafts assumed in the urban context the symbolic role that poetry played in tribal communities, they acquired the properties of that original medium, retaining some of its characteristics and developing others. The San'ânî song was the form that the poem developed into when it settled in the city.

THE IMAGE OF SAN'Â'

San'â' of the Yemen—Connotations:

The term, *san'â' al-yaman* (San'â' of the Yemen), which is used where the name San'â' alone would suffice, indicates its singularity among the cities of the country. Although other cities are given different names of affection, only San'â' is named with connection with the country, thus, suggesting its leading position. It is not unusual in the names of towns in Yemen to refer to the area in which a town is located especially if more than one town have the same name.[23] There is, however, only one San'â', which means that the name is given to signify this aspect of uniqeness. The term, therefore, becomes equivalent to *the city of Yemen*, or *the capital of Yemen*, even when San'â' is not the political capital of the country.

In traditional poetry, San'â' has been praised for its unique status and apparently for its physical qualities as suggested by the proverbial verse traditionally attributed to 'Alî ibn Zâyid:[24]

None is like San'â' a city;
Nor like Tihâmah a country.

or as praised by 'Ahmad ibn Husayn al-Muftî (d. 1877):

San'â'—may God bless her with rain—

---

[23]There are, for example, three Shibâms in Yemen. To distinguish between them, each is mentioned with its region—i.e., Shibâm Hadramaut, Shibâm Kaukabân and Shibâm al-Ghirâs.

[24]*mâ fî-l-mudun mithl san'â*
wa la-l-bawâdî tihâmah

Is a home for all beauties
There is none like Ṣan'â' of the Yemen
Nor like her people
Ṣan'â' has won all merits
Happy is he who lives there
Fulfilling all yearning
Three [virtues] in that plain—
Water; and the green hills surpassing in beauty
And every beautiful gesture.[25]

Architecture has always characterized the city of Ṣan'â' in the consciousness of the people of Yemen. This unique character is attributed to the city's decorated façades, which exists nowhere in the country. The city was, therefore, distinguished and its architecture became the associated with the political status that the city occupied.

In a traditional nuptial song named after the town of 'Udayn,[26] the young bride is praised by mentioning that her family's house is built of bricks (*yâjûr*),

Your father's house is built of bricks
Doves orbit around it.[27]

---

[25]'Aḥmad ibn Ḥusayn al-Muftî (d. 1877), *Ṣan'â ḥawat kull fann (diwân)*, Muḥammad 'Abduh Ghânim ed., Ṣan'â': ad-Dâr al-Yamanîyah, 2nd ed. 1987, p. 27.
li-'anna ṣan'â saqâha-llâh.u fayḍ al-ghamâmah manzil ḥawâ kull.i fann
mâ mithl.i ṣan'a-l-yaman kallâ wa-lâ 'ahlahâ
ṣan'â ḥawat kull.i fann yâ su'd.i man ḥallahâ
tinfî jamî' ash-shajan thalâth.i fî safḥahâ
al-mâ wa-khuḍrat rubâha-l-fâyiqah bi-l-wasâmah wa-kull.i ma'na.n ḥasan
[26]A little town in the region of Ibb in the midlands, about 160 km. south of Ṣan'â'.
[27]*bayt abîk ma'mûr bi-yâjûr wa-l-ḥamâm fawquh tadûr*

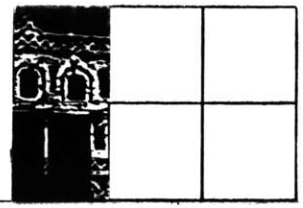
Since the predominant building material in that area is stone, bricks would definitely distinguish a building. However, the subtle gesture in the song is, perhaps, not as much for the material as for the style. Many of the governors and high-rank state officials came from Ṣan'â', and some of them—although rare—built their houses in the *Ṣan'ânî* style, which became then a sign of prestige and high status.

Especially in al-Muftî's excerpt, the celebration of the merits of a place is clearly not restricted to the psychological aspect of relating to a place. The image is drawn by weaving the physical qualities of the city with spiritual shades.

This indicates that part of the memory and prestige of Ṣan'â' was associated with it as a visual existence. As a center for crafts, the city was actually full of visual references and experiences that the poets and the common people associated with its memory.

2

THE FAÇADES OF SAN'Â'



There are many ways that can be used as methods to analyze the San'ânî façades. As Suzanne and Max Hirschi suggest, a façade of a building in San'â', and actually any façade, can be read as a combination of parts or as a whole, horizontally or vertically.[28] However, it should always be borne in mind that the San'ânî façade is not an isolated entity in the urban context. Although it exists sometimes as an individual piece, it cannot be isolated from its background or context.

"Les façade yéménites sont toujours partie intégrante d'un tout."[29]

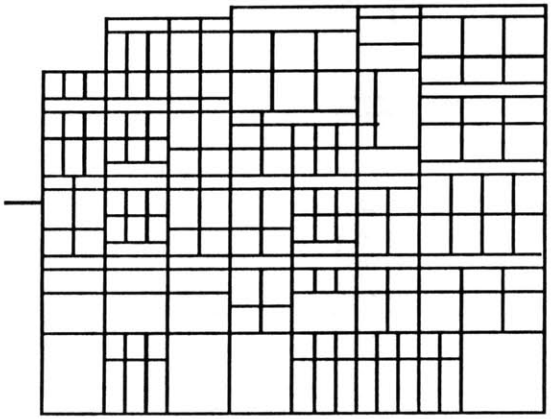
It always operates within groups and ensembles. The impression given by one building is never complete unless perceived as a part of one whole, a euphoria of clustering forms and undulating planes—that is the city.

When seen as individual compositions, the excessiveness of decoration strikes as obsessive. But, as Dominque Champault notes, "when the gaudy façades are viewed as an ensemble, aligned behind front yards, their ornament is miraculously

Reading the San'ânî façade
Herschi

[28] Suzanne et Max Hirschi, *L'Architecture au Yemen du Nord*,, Paris: Berger-Levraut, 1983. pp. 231. The terms *"lecture particulier"* and *"lecture globale."* were used.
[29] Ibid. p. 285.

An ensemble of four houses at al-Qâsimî



A conceptual layout of the four façades at al-Qâsimî

toned down. One quickly forgets to criticize excess, given the harmonious majesty of Sana'a homes, side by side, alike yet different."[30]

However, for the purpose of analyzing the façades and making the comparison with poetry, we will have to isolate not only individual façades but also elements and sequences.

The diagram of the façade on this page is based on the dimensions within which elements geometrically belong to a whole. These can be compared to the metric measures in the poem which give it its dimension in time. In other words, this is the dimension that describes *quantity* versus others describing *quality*.

This composite façade is highly ordered in terms of its overall structure, with a great deal of freedom in the manipulation of elements within the composition. The deceptive chaotic effect of the whole, characteristic of the San'ânî façade, is achieved by means of repetition, alternation and manipulation of very few elements or shapes. In the mean time, the scheme has a clear and legible order that deviates a little from perfect symmetry and is, however, based on it.

The elements constituting the San'ânî façade relate to each other through a number of mechanisms following the principles of perception,[31] putting the different

[30]Dominique Champault, "The Centuries," in Maréchaux, *Arabian Moons*.
[31]These principles are discussed in, for example, Frederick Jules, *Form/Space and the Language of Architecture.*, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Center for Architecture and Urban Planning Research, 1974.

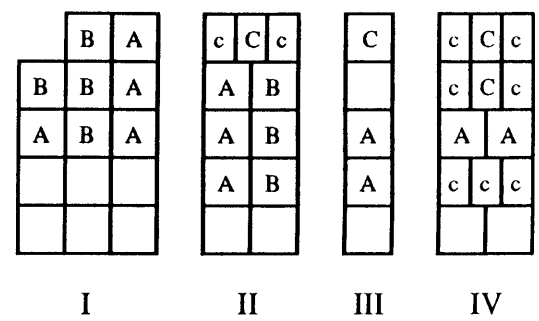
parts in one legible whole. These mechanisms are summarized in the following analysis.

Façade Layout

In the façades of the buildings at al-Qâsimî, each element appears more than once in the whole ensemble. Distributed over four divisions according to the four houses behind the façade, the different window groups can be categorized according to their shape, size and position. The general layout of the façades will be discussed before discussing the details of each composition.

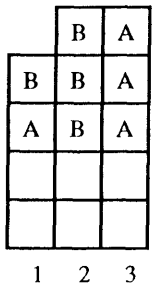
Symmetry:

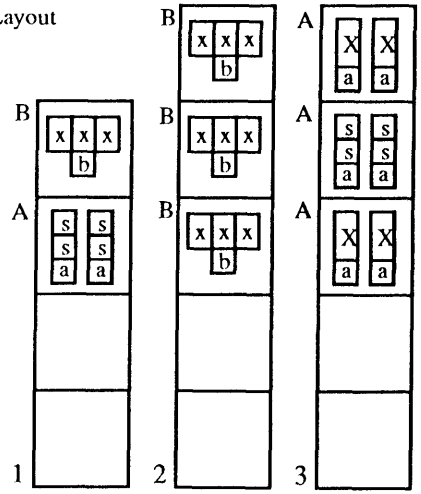
Although the overall scheme is not symmetrical,[32] it becomes more so as its parts are considered. The basic configuration of the parts clearly exhibits regularity and a tendency towards order. Façade I of the ensemble is made of three vertical strips dominated by *A*-and-*B*-type window groups; purely *A* for the right hand strip, *B* for the middle and both *A* and *B* for the left. Part II is strictly *A* and *B*, divided in two columns with each type in one column, topped by one row of type *C* and *c*. Part III is a single vertical strip with type *A* elements at the lower levels and *C* at the top. Part IV is made of two rows of *C*-and-*c* type at the top, one of *c* at the bottom, and one of type *A* in the middle.



[32]It should be borne in mind that this façade is actually four functionally independent façades that were built in different times, responding to different needs, which brings it close to impossibility to be symmetrical as a whole.

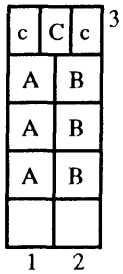
Façade I: General Layout

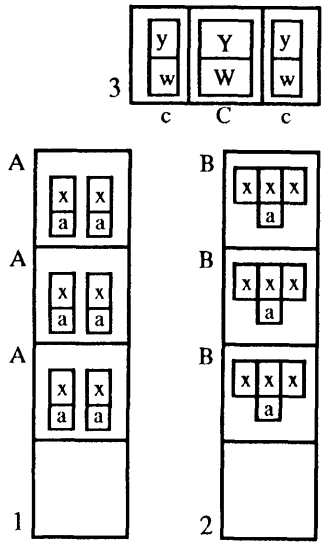




Façade I:
Enlarged diagram showing vertical strips separately

Façade II:
General Layout





Façade II:
Enlarged diagram of parts

At this level of the analysis, symmetry is already evident in part III and part IV, while the other two are considerably regular. However, at a lower level of analysis, all the parts conform to symmetry without exception. The following analyses of the individual façades show this property to be consistent and absolute.

Façade I:

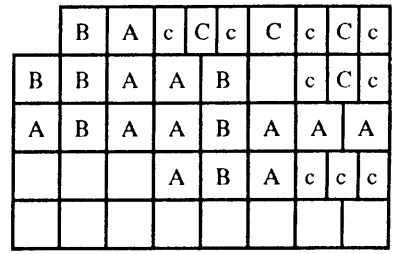
Each one of the three strips making the façade is divided symmetrically by a vertical axis. This principle applies to the individual elements, as well as to the details.

Façade II:

Façade II also follows the same pattern, where the two columns of windows and the upper story joining them are internally organized around vertical axes.

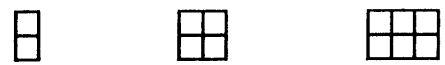
Repetition:

In addition to symmetry, the diagrams presented above show the repetition of elements as another clear characteristic. Throughout the whole scheme, as illustrated in the diagram below, the *A*-type window group was repeated eleven times, the *B*-type seven times and the *C*-or-*c* -type thirteen times. Through this simple tool, the basis for the rhythmic pattern of the façades is established then enhanced by means of grouping of elements employing and complementing the principle of symmetry.

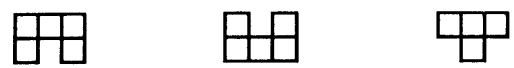


Basic and Composite Elements
Regeneration of Forms

The basic elements at play here are essentially the openings; each of which in almost all cases takes the form of a window surmounted by a fan-light window. The quantitative measure is set to the whole façade by the closely conforming dimensions of these elements. Generating other composite elements made of groups of two or more of these, this basic element establishes the rhythms of the façade. The diagrams to the right show these elements expressed as matrices describing their quantitative value.

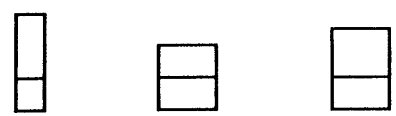


basic element | element of two units | elements of three units



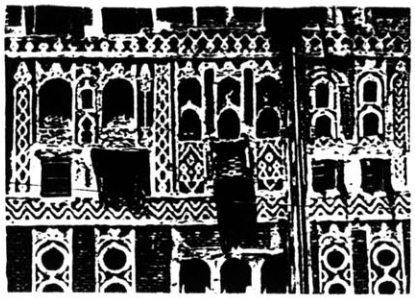
variations of three-unit element with missing segments
They have the same quantitative value as the complete

There are also other variations of the basic elements where the upper compartment is doubled in height, or where both are doubled in width only as illustrated in the diagrams next to this.



variations of the basic element

Regeneration of forms



Regeneration of forms
Bonnenfant, *Maisons.*

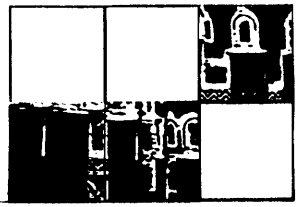
Compositions are then created using those elements with varying rhythms and pace of reccurrence. Therefore, it is usually the case that the many different forms constituting one façade are generated from what is essentially one basic element or two. This economy in elements or variables is also a characteristic of the metric patterns governing poetry. In one poem, there is usually one metric measure or two, in which case they are related one way or another.

The impression that Yemeni architecture induces is, without doubt—as Suzanne and Max Hirschi put it, attributed to the qualities of the façades.[33]

[33]Hirschi, p. 285.

3

THE LYRICS OF SAN'Â'



THE FORM OF ARABIC POETRY
THE METRIC SYSTEM

Al-Khalîl ibn 'Ahmad:

Possibly the oldest living art of Arabic, poetry had already become a well developed tradition as early as the fifth century A.D. prior to the appearance of Islam in Arabia. Al-Khalîl ibn 'Ahmad (d. 743 A.D.), an Arab philologist, was the first to develop a highly sophisticated system regarding the phonetic properties of Arabic poetry.

Al-Khalîl gathered the pre-Islamic poems and categorized them according to their phonetic structures. Based on a binary scheme, he developed a system of metrics[34] describing the rhythmic structure of the verse. This metric model of al-Khalîl's was the one that regulated and conditioned Arabic classical poetry in general

[34]For a comprehensive layout of al-Khalîl's theory of meter, see Gotthold Weil, art. "'arûd I," in *Encyclopaedea of Islam*, vol. I, pp. 667-677.

until our own day. Three elementary components can be identified in this system. These are the syllable,[35] the foot and the hemistich.

The Syllable:

According to the Arabic theory of meter, words are made by two conditions of the consonant—moving (*mutaharrik*), and unmoving (*sâkin*).[36] The *mutaharrik* is a consonant with a short vowel such as *la, li* and *lu,* expressed graphically by the symbol (o). The *sâkin* is either a single consonant such as the consonant sounds *b* and *d,* or a long vowel such as *â, î* and *û,* graphically expressed by the symbol (|).

The *mutaharrik* could be equated to what is meant by the term *short syllable.* Therefore, the symbol (o) stands for a short syllable as well.

The *long syllable* is made by adding a *sâkin* (|) after a *mutaharrik* (o), resulting in (o |)—e.g., *lam, lil, mâ* and *fî.*

TABLE: SYLLABIFICATION OF EXAMPLE
"qifâ nabki" (Let's stand to weep!)

Syllable Number	1	2	3	4
Syllable Division	*qi*	*fâ*	*nab*	*ki*
Al-Khalîl's Notation	o	o |	o |	o
Syllabic Notation	Cv	CV	CvC	Cv

C = consonant
v = short vowel
V = long vowel
o = short syllable
o | = long syllable

The Foot:

Of the different possibilities of combining the syllables described above, only eight combinations are used in Arabic metrics as basic feet (*'ajzâ'*, sg. *juz'*/part). Each metric pattern comes into being by repeating one or two of these eight feet according to a prescribed formula.

[35]According to Gotthold Weil, Al-Khalîl did not know the terms *syllable* and *stress,* "yet his ear surely perceived what we call syllables and stresses, for his graphic paraphrase...does give us a clear picture of the rhythm in ancient Arabic verse." ['Arûḏ I, p. 669]
[36]Note that the terms *sâkin* and *mutaharrik* are different from consonant and vowel.

Following a tradition of Arabic grammarians, al-Khalîl represented the eight rhythmic feet by eight "mnemonic words"—namely, *fa'ûlun, fâ'ilun, mafâ'îlun, mustaf'ilun, fâ'ilâtun, mufâ'alatun, mutafâ'ilun* and *maf'ûlâtu.*[37] Certain variations are allowed, however, in each one of these standard measures.

The Hemistich:

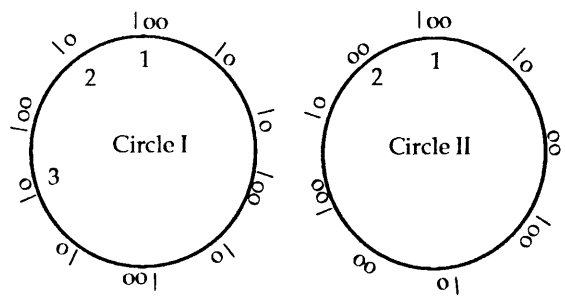
The foot, as mentioned before, is the basis for the metric patterns, which are actually determined by the hemistich (*shaṯr*). The hemistich is the smallest recognizable structural unit, of which a poem is a direct repetition. Each line—i.e., distich (*bayt*)—in a poem is made by two metrically identical hemistichs that differ only in details. The quantity described in the first hemistich in a poem sets a rigid pattern for the rest of it. All ancient Arabic poetry was found by al-Khalîl to conform to sixteen such patterns. Using the eight feet discussed above, he represented them in sixteen standard formulae, which he called *buḫûr* (sg. *baḫr*/river or sea). The following is an example of such formulae for the hemistichs:

fa'ûlun	*mafâ'îlun*	*fa'ûlun*	*mafâ'îlun*
oolol	oololol	oolol	oololol

TABLE: THE EIGHT METRIC FEET

FOOT	NOTATION	SYLLABLES
fa'ûlun	o o l o l	Cv CV CvC
fâ'ilun	o l o o l	CV Cv CvC
mafâ'îlun	o o l o l o l	Cv CV CV CvC
mustaf'ilun	o l o l o o l	CvC CvC Cv CvC
fâ'ilâtun	o l o o l o l	CV Cv CV CvC
mufâ'alatun	o o l o o o l	Cv CV Cv Cv CvC
mutafâ'ilun	o o o l o o l	Cv Cv CV Cv CvC
maf'ûlâtu	o l o l o l o	CvC CV CV Cv

[37]See Weil, p. 669.



Two of Al-Khalîl's five circles. There are three patterns in Circle I and two in Circle II. The following is a linear layout of each pattern read anti-clockwise.

Circle I:

1 oo l o l oo l o l o l oo l o l oo l o l o l
2 o l oo l o l o l oo l o l oo l o l o l oo l
3 oo l o l o l oo l o l oo l o l o l oo l o l

Circle II:

1 oo l oo o l oo l oo o l oo l oo o l
2 oo o l oo l oo o l oo l oo o l oo l

The Metric Circles:

Some of the sixteen different patterns were found to coincide with some others in the sequences of short and long syllables. Since the basic eight feet making the metric patterns are related in that respect, this relation was also evident in the final patterns. For example, the three feet *mafâ'îlun* (oo l o l o l), *mustaf'ilun* (o l o l oo l) and *fâ'ilâtun* (o l oo l o l) are all the possible combinations of three instances, one (oo l) and two (o l). The mathematical relationship between the three feet is better discerned when written as follows:

mafâ'îlun oo l o l o l
mustaf'ilun o l o l oo l
fâ'ilâtun o l oo l o l

So the coincidence in the division of these three feet is transferred to the three patterns made by the repetition of each one of them, resulting in circular patterns that lead to each other. The only difference between the three of them is the starting point of each on the circular pattern

oo l o l o l oo l o l o l oo l o l o l
o l o l oo l o l o l oo l o l o l oo l
o l oo l o l o l oo l o l o l oo l o l

Realizing this property, al-Khalîl developed five circles for the sixteen metric patterns. The circular theme is especially appropriate to reflect the nature of the metric structure of the poem, in which the meter of the first line recurs in a circular manner.

Structure of the Poem

The Classical Model:

In the old tradition, each line in a poem was divided into two equivalent hemistichs. According to a strict system of rhyme, all the second hemistichs in a poem, and usually the very first one, had to end with the same sound.

The classical poem assumes a symmetric vertical structure with the distich (*bayt*) as its basic constituting element. Each *bayt* stands as a separate entity in terms of contents, grammatically independent from what is before or after it. The diagram on this page describes the basic structure of the classical poem.

_____x	_____x
_____a	_____x
_____b	_____x
_____c	_____x

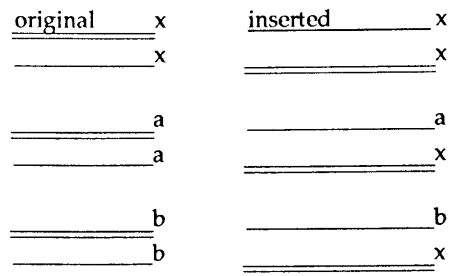
Basic structure of the poem

Each line represents the *bayt* unit broken into two hemistichs, where *x* indicates the rhyme system of the poem, *a, b, c* and *d* the endings of the first hemistichs.

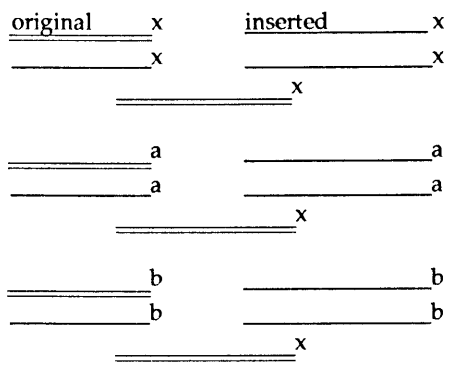
Development of the Model:

There are certain qualities that are appreciated in classical Arabic composition especially in poetry. Such qualities as rhyme, alliteration, contrast and balance happened spontaneously and less frequently in pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry but started to be more elaborate and deliberate towards the end of the 'Abbâsid period, as poets became more *professional*, and poetry itself became more of a mechanical application. That may be attributed to the continuous efforts of scholars to determine the characteristics of *good poetry* and rhetoric in general. The following

is a hypothetical construct of the development of other genres, especially those known in Ṣan'â', from the classical form.[38]



Tarbî' (making four)



Takhmîs (making five)

Making Four and Making Five:

As a result of this tendency toward articulation, some new versions of the form described above came to existence. Some practices like *tarbî'* (literally making four), and *takhmîs* (making five) became a trend to make some celebrated or admired poems more elaborate and more appealing to the taste of those days.

These practices resulted in new forms slightly different from the original model. *Making four* means making the two hemistichs in a line four hemistichs by simply inserting two new ones between the original two, resulting in four.

Similarly, *making five* implies inserting three hemistichs between the original two, resulting in five. Since the inserted hemistichs had the same metric value as the original, the new poem did not change in that respect; it only became longer. However, the main change occurred in the rhyme system of the poem. The inserted hemistichs took the rhyme of the first hemistich in each line, which resulted in new cycles of rhyme.

Another important change was the configuration of the *bayt*, which grew bigger acquiring a new anatomy. In the example of *takhmîs*, each five hemistichs described one entity, related in their content and grammar. The last hemistich

[38]Ghânim presents a different construct that is not different from this in essence. See Ghânim, *ghinâ'*, pp. 120-29.

became the closing (*taqfîl*) of the new unit. Because it provided a better musical variation, this pattern was followed in original poems meant to be sung.

The idea of *bayt* and its *closing* was extended even more. The *closing* became longer containing two hemistichs, and many variations were developed.

```
_____a    _____a
_____a    _____a
      _____x
      _____x
```

A mixture of this extended form of the *bayt* with that of *making four* resulted in another pattern with a three-hemistich *closing*, one attached to the *bayt* and two detached. The two parts were separated by inserting a number of hemistichs with a different rhyme and usually a different meter. This practice was called *tawshîh* (embellishment), taking its name from embroidery and textiles. A typical example of this scheme is illustrated in the following diagram:

```
bayt      _____x    _____x
          _____x    _____x
tawshîh         .........y
                .........y      } different meter
                .........y
taqfîl    _____x    _____x

          _____a    _____a
          _____a    _____x
                .........y
                .........y
                .........y
          _____x    _____x
```

Juxtaposing the pattern:

```
_____a    _____a
_____a    _____x
```

on the pattern:

```
_____a    _____a
_____a    _____a
      _____x
      _____x
```

produces the pattern:

```
_____a    _____a
_____a    _____x
      _____x
      _____x
```

Humaynî Mubayyat and Muwashshah:

The etymology of the word *Humaynî* is ambiguous. However, as a term, it is designated in Yemen to the type of poetry that uses local dialects and colloquial expressions without conforming to the grammatical rules of the classical Arabic language, although lexical words and expressions are sometimes used.

Among the many forms that fall under the general definition of the *Humaynî* poetry are three forms that make the largest part of the lyrical poetry of San'â'. These are the simple poem, the *Mubayyat* and the *Muwashshah*.

The Simple Poem:

The simple poem is similar to the classical poem usually with two an internal and a final rhyme. The metric patterns employed may differ from those of the classical poem.

Mubayyat:

The *Mubayyat* consists of cycles; each is usually eight or four hemistichs. Each cycle has its own single or dual rhyme in addition to another shared with the other cycles. All cycles have the same metric pattern.

Muwashshah:

The *Muwashshah* consists of cycles; each of which is usually composed of three distinguished parts:

bayt, made of four or eight hemistichs;

tawshîh, made of three or six hemistichs;

taqfil, made of two or four hemistichs.

As a general rule, there are two patterns concerning the number of hemistichs in a *muwashshah* cycle. The first follows the larger number in the three parts—i.e., eight, six and four respectively. The second follows the smaller number—i.e., four, three and two respectively.

bayt

_____ c	_____ c
_____ c	_____ c
_____ c	_____ c
_____ a	_____ b

tawshîh

_____ d	_____ d
_____ d	_____ d
_____ d	_____ d

taqfil

_____ a	_____ b
_____ a	_____ b

Layout of Examples

The purpose of this layout is to illustrate some of the physical characteristics of the *Humaynî* poem. The discussion will be mainly on the metric pattern as well as other phonetic and abstract compositional properties as distinguished from those related to meaning or content per se. Selected excerpts from various poems will be used as examples to illustrate common qualities shared by poems of the genre.

In his analysis of the tribal Yemeni dialect, Steven Caton identified six syllable types:

1.	Cv	*bi-* (with), *li-* (to)
2.	CV	*fî* (in), *mâ* (no)
3.	CvC	*qad* (already)
4.	CVC	*qâl* (he said)
5.	CvCC	*tamm* (completed)
6.	CVCC	*ḫâjj* (pilgrim)

According to his analysis, only the first one, Cv, is a light syllable in meter while the rest are heavy. Light is indicated by the symbol (∪), and heavy by the symbol (–). For clarity, the system of metric notation suggested by Caton will be used here.[39]

symmetry	_____a	_____b
equal hemistichs	_____a	_____b
one final rhyme	_____a	_____b
one internal rhyme	_____a	_____b
	_____a	_____b
	_____a	_____b
	_____a	_____b
	_____a	_____b

Simple Structure:

While similar to the classical type in its simple symmetrical structure and the division of each line into two equivalent hemistichs, the following example is different in other regards. Besides the grammatical aspects, it differs in the schemes of meter and rhyme it follows.

[39]A layout of the system is in Caton, pp. 274-85.

– ∪ – | ∪ ∪ – | ∪ –	∪ ∪ – | – ∪ – | ∪ –
jalla man nafas as-sabâh	*wa-basat zillah.u-l-madîd*
– ∪ – | – ∪ – | ∪ –	– ∪ ∪ | – ∪ – | ∪ –
wa-lham al-qumriy an-niyâh	*yishjiy an-nâzih al-ba'îd*[40]

Although derived from the classical patterns, the particular metric scheme for this poem did not exist in any previous classical example, thus rendering it characteristic of the *Humaynî* type. The types of feet making the pattern for this example are (– ∪ –), (∪ ∪ –), (– ∪ ∪) and (∪ –). As suggested by John Lotz, the first three are actually variants of the first one, (– ∪ –).[41] Only the middle position in this foot is fixed as (∪), while the other two can change. Therefore, a common metric scheme for all the hemistichs in this poem is (– ∪ – | – ∪ – | ∪ –).

Another characteristic is the common practice of following two rhymes in the poem.[42], This seems to be consistent in all the examples of the simple type. All the first hemistichs end with the sound *âh* and the second ones with the sound *îd*, thus emphasizing the poem's symmetrical theme.

جَلَّ مَنْ نَفَّسَ الصَّبَاحْ
وَبَسَطْ ظِلَّهُ المَدِيدْ
وَأَلْهَمَ القُمْرِيَّ النِّيَاحْ
يَشْجِي النَّازِحَ البَعِيدْ

Great is He Who created the morning
Spread its extended shadows
And inspired the doves to coo
Stirring memories for the passing stranger.

[40] 'Ahmad ibn 'Abd ur-Rahmân al-'Ânisî (d. 1825), *Zamân as-sibâ* (dîwân), Muhammad 'Abduh Ghânim ed., San'â': Markiz ad-Dirâsât, 1981. p. 113.

[41] According to his theory of fixed and free syllabic positions which will be referred to later. See, Caton, pp. 278-80.

[42] This practice is dominant in many traditional Arabic locales such as the tribal poetry known in other parts of Arabia as Nabatî.

Symmetry	_____a	_____a
Cyclic structure	_____a	_____a
Internal rhyme		
Final rhyme	_____b	_____b
	_____b	_____a
	_____c	_____c
	_____c	_____a

فويتنه في خدّهـــا وردهـــا سويحره هاروت من جندّهـــا
في مزحهـــا لاقت وفي جِـدها افدي بروحي جِدّها والمزاح

A little beauty, roses blossom on her cheeks—
A young charmer, Hârût is but a follower of hers—
Fascinating, in play and when serious:
How heartily I love her play and her seriousness.

Simple cyclic structure	_____a	_____a
Asymmetrical meter	_____a	_____a
Varying hemistich length		
Final and internal rhyme	_____b	_____a
	_____b	_____b
	_____c	_____c
	_____c	_____a

***Mubayyat*:**

Another category that shares this simplicity of structure is the *Mubayyat* type, in which the *bayt* is extended to four or eight hemistichs instead of two. For clarity, the term *cycle* will be used here to mean the extended *bayt*.

Each cycle has its own rhyme at the end of each hemistich. A cycle may sometimes have two rhymes alternating between the hemistichs. However, the final rhyme in each cycle is that of the first cycle in the poem.

The following example of the shorter *mubayyat* type shows some of the properties introduced above:

∪ – ∪ – | – – ∪ – | – ∪ –	∪ – ∪ – | – – ∪ – | – ∪ –
fuwaytinah fî khaddahâ wardahâ	*suwayhirah hârût.i min jundahâ*
– ∪ ∪ – | – – ∪ – | – ∪ –	– – ∪ – | – – ∪ – | – ∪ –
fî mazhahâ lâqat wa-fî jiddahâ	*'afdî bi-rûhî jiddahâ wa-l-mizâh*[43]

The rhyme shared by the hemistichs of this cycle is the sound *dahâ*, while the final rhyme *âh* in the last hemistich is taken from the first cycle in the poem and shared with every final hemistich in this poem.

Composite Structure

I. *Mubayyat:*

The character of a poem is determined largely by the degree of elaboration of the different structural determinants—i.e., the meter, the rhyme and the hemistich

[43]Muhammad ibn Sharaf ad-Dîn (d. 1607), from Ghânim, *Ghinâ'*, p. 223.

division. Their significance as determinants of the structure varies according to the proportions of the role each one of them plays in different cases.

In the following example, emphasis is given to the variation in the length of the hemistich, and the asymmetrical metric theme within a simple cyclic structure. The poem follows the general form of the *mubayyat* type with cycles of four hemistichs. The rhyme system is elaborate within the cycle but kept the same in all the cycles of the poem.

– – ∪ – |– ∪ – –
da' mâ siwa llâh.i w as'al

– –∪ –|– ∪ –| – – ∪ – | –∪ – –
mawlâk.a 'inn alladhî 'anshâk.a mâ radd.a sâ'il

∪ – ∪ – | – – ∪ –| –∪ – –
'a-mâ lahu t-tadbîr.u mâ shâ'a yaf'al

∪ – ∪ –|– ∪ –| – –∪ –| – ∪ –
balâ qadîrun 'alâ mâ shâ'a hû dhu l-jalâl[44]

Leave all but God—and ask your Lord!
He Who created you rejects no prayer
Have not all plans belonged to Him?
Verily omnipotent is He, the All Glorious.

دع مـا سوى الله واسأل مولاك إنّ الـــذي أنشاك مـا ردّ سائـل
أما لَهُ التدبير ما شاء يفعل بلى قديرٌ عـلى ما شاء هُو ذو الجـلال

The four hemistichs end with the sounds *al, il, al* and *âl* respectively. Although derived from the same sound, these are practically three different rhymes. The other cycles in this poem employ the same rhyme scheme.

_____al _____il
_____al _____âl

_____al _____il
_____al _____âl

_____al _____il
_____al _____âl

Symmetry is broken in the metric system by varying the hemistich length. The first hemistich in each line is always shorter than the second one. This variation is further emphasized by adding an extra foot in the third hemistich, which offsets the regularity of the order by shifting it one foot.

[44]Jâbir Rizq (d. 1902), from Ghânim, *ghinâ'*, p. 315.

The meter for this cycle—and, therefore, the whole poem—consists of three types of feet, *a* (– – ∪ –)[45], *b* (– ∪ – –), and *c* (– ∪ –) arranged in the following sequence: *a b—a c a b—a a b—a c a c.* The extra *a* in the third division plays an important role in changing the face of this pattern. Without it, the patterns stands as: *a b—a c a b—a b—a c a c,* which is far more regular than the actual pattern.

II. *Muwashshah*

The following example is the first cycle of a poem of the *muwashshah* type. The cycle consists of three parts—the *bayt,* the *tawshîh,* and the *taqfîl.* The first and the third parts are similar in meter and rhyme. Each line in these two parts consists of two hemistichs; the first one of which is much longer than the second. These two parts, however, differ in the number of hemistichs in each. There are eight hemistichs in the first and only four in the third. The middle part, which is the *tawshîh,* consists of six hemistichs similar in meter to the shorter hemistichs in the two other parts but different in rhyme.

Cycles:	_____c	_____d
bayt	_____c	_____d
tawshîh	_____c	_____d
taqfîl	_____a	_____b
Metric variation	_____e	
Hemistich division	_____e	
Symmetric/asymmetric	_____e	
Variation of rhyme	_____a	_____b
rhymes: internal/final	_____a	_____b

Bayt:

∪ – ∪ – |– ∪ – |– – ∪ – | – ∪ – –
yiqarrib allâh.a lî bi-l-'âfiyah wa-s-salâmah

– – ∪ –|– ∪ –
wasl al-habîb al-'aghann

man hâz.a kull al-mahâsin wa-l-halâ wa-l-wasâmah

wa-kull.i ma'nâ hasan

wa-nis'al allâh ta'âlâ 'awdanâ min tihâmah

lâ safh.i san'a-l-yaman

li-'anna san'â saqâha-llâh.u fayd al-ghamâmah

manzil hawâ kull-i fann

May God, with good health and safety,
reunite me with [my] sweet-voiced beloved
Who has won all charm and beauty
and all virtue
And may God return us from Tihâmah
to the meadows of San'â' of the Yemen
For San'â'—may God bless her with rain—
is a home for all beauties

يقرّب الله لي بالعافيهْ والسلامه وصل الحبيب الأغن
من حاز كلّ المحاسنْ والحلا والوسامه وكلّ معنى حسن
ونسأل الله تعالى عودنا من تهامه لا سفح صنعا اليمن
لانّ صنعا سقاها الله فيض الغمامه منزلْ حوى كلّ فن

[45](∪ – ∪ –) being a variant of (– – ∪ –).

Tawshîh:

– – ∪ –| – ∪ –
mâ mithl.i san'a-l-yaman
san'â hawat kull.i fann
yinfî jamî' ash-shajan

– –∪ –|– ∪–
kallâ wa-lâ 'ahlahâ
yâ su'd.i man hallahâ
thalâth.i fî safhahâ

توشيـح

ما مثل صنعا اليمن كلّا ولا أهلها
صنعا حوت كلّ فن يا سعد من حلّها
تنفي جميع الشجن ثلاث فى سفحها

There is none like San'â' of the Yemen
Nor like her people
San'â' has won all merits
Happy is he who lives there
Fulfilling all yearning
Three [virtues] in that plain

Taqfîl:

– – ∪ – |– ∪ –| – –∪ –| – ∪ – –
al-mâ wa-khudrat rubâha-l-fâyiqah bi-l-wasâmah
∪ – ∪ – |– ∪ –
wa-kull.i ma'nâ hasan

kam yidhak az-zahr.u fîhâ min bukâ' al-ghamâmah
fa-yâ saqâhâ watan[46]

تقفيـل

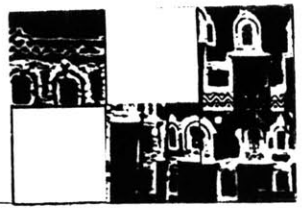
الما وخضرةْ رباها الفايقةْ بالوسامه وكلّ معنى حسن
كم يضحك الزهر فيها من بكاء الغمامه فيا سقاها وطن

Water, and the green hills surpassing in beauty
And every beautiful gesture
How long have flowers laughed there at a weeping cloud
—A blessed home.

[46]al-Muftî, p. 27.

4

COMPARISON



PRINCIPLES OF ARTISTIC CREATION IN SAN'Â'
POEMS AND FAÇADES—SHARED CHARACTERISTICS

In social occasions such as marriage or the celebration of a new birth, the façade of the family house is white washed or redecorated to express the happiness of the occasion. Architecture is thus involved as a medium of direct expression, closely tied to the temporal aspect of the culture. In this way and due to family changes not unrelated to these events, the city is seen in a continuous metamorphosis in a response tuned to the social expression of its inhabitants, recording the individual and the communities' collective memories. As a temporal gauge, the façade appears to play a role beyond its functional limits. It must, therefore, express more precisely the joy and cheerfulness of those occasions as a song or a poem would.

Bonnenfant, *Maisons* Serjeant and Lewcock
The playfulness of the façade—a reflection of happiness and well being

One aspect of similarity between the façades of San'â' and poetry is that no two façades in the city are to be found identical. Although it belongs to a tradition, each

façade stands as an individual piece of work,[47] like a single poem in a poetic tradition.

The shared characteristics and principles of composition between poetry and façade design will be discussed here in reference to the principles presented in the previous chapters. The principles that were suggested for the façade will be used here as an outline to examine the poetry.

Symmetry:

Among the first recognized principles of artistic composition in Sanʿâʾ is symmetry. In architecture, the desire to have a symmetrical façade, according to Lewcock, sometimes produced a symmetrical plan.[48] Whereas symmetry has persisted in poetry as an essential characteristic evidently since pre-Islamic times, which indicates its importance as an aesthetic value in this culture.

Symmetry of parts
Bonnenfant, *Maisons*

A typological analysis of the different configurations a façade could take, done by Suzanne and Max Hirschi, shows clearly that the façade systems are created actually by systematically manipulating a few variables to produce a variety of combinations covering almost all the probabilities.[49] This fact of conforming to a mathematical or geometric rule illustrates the tendency towards order and consistency, of which symmetry only becomes a complimentary rule or a symptom.

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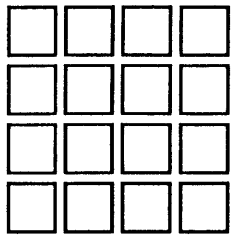
[47]Hirschi, p. 323.
[48]Lewcock, *Walled City*, p. 78.
[49]Hirschi, p. 327.

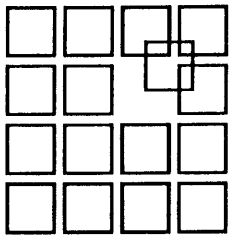
However, a composition does not seem to be forced toward perfect symmetry. In most cases, a façade is balanced around a vertical axis, while its parts are divided symmetrically by other parallel axes. In other cases, it is divided by a central axis but hardly achieving perfect symmetry.

Contrary to this understanding, it could be argued that, as most examples attest, there is a tendency to break the overall symmetrical scheme by introducing variation or the offsetting of some minor or key elements. This last point raises the question whether symmetry or asymmetry is the rule.

Bayt an-Nimaymî:
Balancing elements around a vertical axis
Serjeant and Lewcock

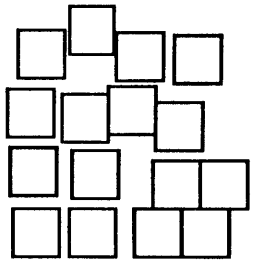


I: Perfect Symmetry



II: Point of Interest

III: Asymmetry



SYMMETRY AND VARIATION: CONCEPTUAL DIAGRAMS

The three diagrams in this page represent three types of organization: absolute order, order with the introduction of interest, and irregularity. It is suggested that Diagram I must be the origin of all three since it has, according to the Gestalt law of simplicity or "good configuration,"[50] the simplest form easiest to perceive.

Symmetry, Variation and Asymmetrical Balance:

In Diagram III, where perfect order is not at all alluded to, symmetry is less of a criterion in appreciating or evaluating the composition—i.e., it is not suggested by the form in any way. Irregularity, for that matter, is less accentuated as a positive value. While Diagram II, by contrast, is clearly based on symmetry or strict order, drawing attention to the curiously displaced element as a strong focal point or center of interest.

The ambiguity illustrated in this diagram lies in whether it represents order or disorder. Practically, both interpretations are equally possible. Disorder or variation, however, seems to be emphasized, and order appears to work as a good background to make it stand out. In other words, because of the more ordered background, the irregularity, as it is clear in Diagram II, appears to dominate its character, which makes it more illustrative of this quality than Diagram III although less physically so.

[50]Jules, pp. 22-24. This law describes the way in which the environment is perceived. Forms are reduced to simpler wholes.

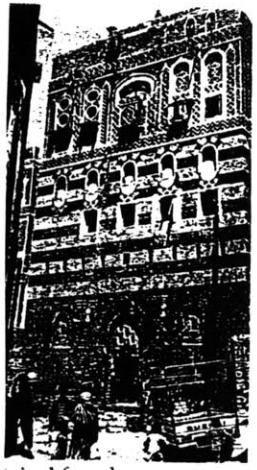
Asymmetrical balance is also expressed in the traditional Yemeni male dress, where symmetry is broken particularly by the special shape and placement of the dagger (*janbiyah*) on the waist belt.

As is the case with architecture, the poetic genres practiced in Yemen include, in addition to the original classical type characterized by symmetry, other types that have developed from and are based on that symmetrical type. They are considered symmetrical in terms of meter, rhyme and structure. Divided vertically into two identical halves, the classical poem follows one meter that takes its complete form in the first distich (*bayt*). As introduced in the previous chapter, the metric formula regulating the distichs made of a number of standardized units called *taf'îlât* (sing. *taf'îlah* /foot).[51] Of the sixteen patterns described by al-Khalîl's theory, there are some made by repeating one foot and others by alternating different ones. The former type is called pure (*ṣâfî*), and the latter mixed (*mamzûj*). These two types are applications of the two principles of *repetition* and *alternation*.

Repetition—*Pure* Metric Patterns:

In classical as well as in vernacular Yemeni poetry, *pure* metric patterns are made by repeating a single foot. An example of this type from classical poetry is

Variation and balance
Serjeant and Lewcock



Bayt al-Mahdî:
an example of symmetrical façades
Bonnenfant, *Maisons*.

[51]Originally termed (*'ajzâ'*/parts, sg. *juz'*).

لا بدّ من صنعاء وإن طال السفر
وإن تحنّى كل عودٍ وانعقر

Sanʿâʾ be it must, however long the journey,
Though the hardy camel droop
leg-worn on the way.[52]

– – ∪ – |– – ∪ – |– – ∪ –
lâ budda min sanʿâ wa-ʾin tâl.a s-safar

∪ – ∪ – |– –∪ –|– – ∪ –
wa-ʾin tahannâ kullu ʿûdin wa-nʿaqar

The metric pattern of this verse is made by repeating the foot – – ∪ –, with the exception of the first foot in the second hemistich. This foot differs from the rest in the first position, where it starts with a light syllable (∪) instead of a heavy one (–). According to al-Khalîl's theory, the two feet have the same metric value and are, therefore, interchangeable.

As suggested by John Lotz, reports Caton, variation in the foot follows the concept of position within the foot. Certain syllabic positions in the foot are fixed where only one *base* is allowed, while other positions allow either of the two *base classes*. Moreover, "No syllabic-prosodic systems exist in which all positions are fixed."[53] In this case the first position allows either the light or the heavy syllable to occur. The foot, therefore, may take the form – – ∪ – or the form ∪ – ∪ – without causing a faulty meter.

Pure metric patterns were employed also in the lyrical poetry of Yemen, using exactly the same patterns as those used in classical poetry. The difference lay in not conforming to grammatical rules and in employing local dialects and olloquial

[52]Translation after R.B Serjeant and Ronald Lewcock, *Sanʿâʾ—An Arabian Islamic City*, London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1983. p. 6. "Traditional, cited by al-Hamdânî and others."
[53]Caton, pp. 278-80. According to al-Khalîl's theory of meter, this foot follows the form *mutafʿilun* oo|oo|, a variation of *mustafʿilun* o|o|oo|, which is followed in the rest. They also differ in the first position

expressions as mentioned earlier. The following example is the first line of a poem employing the same metric unit as the one used in the classical verse above:

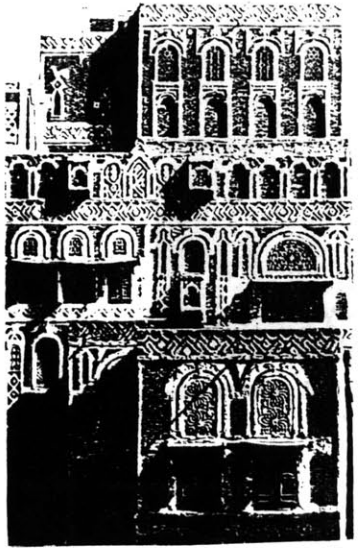
– – ∪ – | – – ∪ –	– –∪ – | – – ∪ –
ashraf 'alayyâ ka-l-qamar	*min tâqat al-qasr al-mashîd*[54]

اشرفْ عليّا كالقمر من طاقة القصر المشيد

Shone on me like the Moon
From the window of the lofty mansion.

The foot in meter, being a temporal module in poetry which gives measurable *dimensions* to the auditory structure of the poem, corresponds in visual terms to the spatial module in a rhythmic design. Basing a pattern on one module may be compared to using only one type of feet in a poem with the *pure* metric pattern.

The classification into two categories of *pure* and *mixed* orders seems to be applicable as one component in a system of analysis of the traditional San'ânî façades.



The cyclic structure of the façade—
alternation of windows, fanlights and friezes
Bonnenfant, *Maisons*.

The Cyclic Structure:

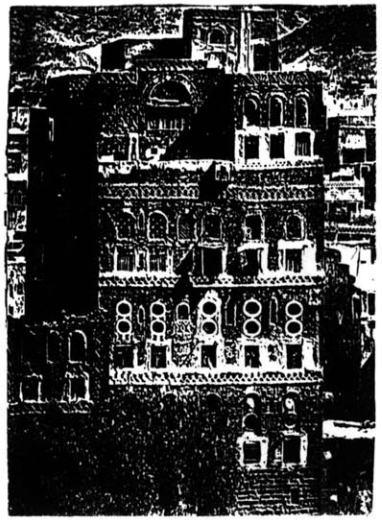
One aspect of similarity between the architecture and poetry of San'â' is the strong cyclic structure of the whole. Within the two types of metric patterns discussed above, further divisions can be recognized in terms of structure. The *bayt* is the smallest complete unit that constitutes the poem.

In its basic configuration, the composite *bayt* (the cycle) comprises three parts: the *bayt*, *tawshîh* and *taqfîl*. The *bayt* consists of four or eight hemistichs; the *tawshîh* of three, four or eight; the *taqfîl* of two or four hemistichs. It is, however, rare to find it

[54] al-Muftî, p. 75.

in this form. More common than not is the omission of the *tawshîh* or the *taqfîl* part, or both. The *bayt*, in that case, becomes eight hemistichs.

By reviewing the repertoire of the *Humaynî* poetry, two characteristics related to the cyclic structure of the poem stand out. The first is that most of the poems employ the mixed type metric patterns. The second is that they follow a modified composite structure of the cycle where it consists of only an eight-hemistich *bayt* and no *tawshîh* or *taqfîl*.



Bayt al-Blaylî at Mûsâ, west façade.
Bonnenfant, *Maisons*, p. 54.

Succession:

In façade compositions, elements are related horizontally by means of similarity in form. In one floor, windows may share some characteristics—e.g., general shape, specific configuration, and closely conforming dimensions—emphasizing the different musical rhythm of each group. Justified by the presence of the decorative friezes between the floors, each floor reads as one unit that may employ a different layout from those used in the other floors. However, the different themes in the floors of one façade are usually related.

In the west façade of Bayt al-Blaylî, the four floors above the ground floor are characterized by the different appearance of windows in each one of them. The first, second and third floors above ground are moduled by a line of five windows in each. These windows are almost equal in size but obviously unequal in their contribution to the overall composition.

Accumulative Structure:

The façade in San'â' follows a clear accumulative pattern. Like a poem, it builds vertically in layers, repeating the same sequential structure in each layer of the composition. Like the typical sequence of a *muwashshah* poem—i.e., *bayt*, *tawshîh*, and *taqfil*—a typical sequence in the façade is windows, fanlights and decorative friezes. These three elements seem to be essential to the façade which, as a result, appears to be a mere product of this accumulation. In principle, the height of a façade and the length of a poem can extend to any dimension by adding more layers to the top of the former and cycles to the end of the latter.

***Mixed* Metric Patterns—Alternation:**

The mixed patterns are made by alternating two feet or more. An example of this type from the classical genre is

– –∪ –| – –∪ –|– –∪
san'â'.u dhât.u-d-dûr.i wa-l-'âtâm.i

– ∪∪ – |–∪∪ –|– –∪
wa-l-qidam.i-l-'aqdam.idhî-lquddâm.i

صَنْعَاءُ ذاتُ الدُّور والآطـــــــام والقِـدَم الأقـدم ذى القُـــــدَّام

San'â' of the mansions and towers tall,
High in antiquity, from time afore.[55]

The pattern comprises of the two feet – – ∪ – and – – ∪, where in the second hemistich, the foot – ∪ ∪ – is a variation of the first one. In this case, the second position is the *free* position in the foot.

[55]Translation after Serjeant and Lewcock, p. 6. "'Ahmad 'Îsâ al-Radâ'î, late 3rd/9th century (?)"

A branch of agates, flowering with the moon
my slender beloved
Surpassing gazelles and all maidens
Outdoing all branches, when sways
Overwhelming my eyes
with the [beautiful] neck
I said when I saw the beautiful mouth
adorned with pearls
And the roses on the cheeks
"Why do you abandon me? It is not right to do so.
And ask our fellows, my dear!"

غصن من عقيانْ أثمرْ بالقمرْ قدّ الحبيبْ فايق الغزلانْ والغيدْ
مخجل الاغصانْ قامةْ إن خطرْ وأرى القضيبْ(١٠٠٨) وسمى الاعيانْ بالجيدْ
قلت لما بانْ من بين الدررْ صافي الشنيبْ وعلى الأوجانْ نورِدْ
ما لذا من شانْ هجرك من هجرْ ما هُوْ مصيبْ واسال الاخوانْ يا سيّدْ

Manipulation of Elements:

Meter, being the most fundamental musical characteristic in the poetry, conditions the form and structure of the poem.

– ∪ – –|–∪	– –|– ∪ –	–|– ∪ –	
ghusn.i min 'iqyân.i	*'athmar bi-l-qamar*	*qadd al-habîb*	
		–∪ – –|–∪	– –
		fâyiq al-ghuzlân.i	*wa-l-ghîd*
mukhjil al-'aghsân.i	*qâmah 'in khatar*	*wa-zrâ-l-qadîb*	
		wa-sabâ-l-'a'yân.i	*bi-l-jîd*
qult.i lammâ bân.i	*min bayn ad-durar*	*sâfi-sh-shanîb*	
		wa-'alâ-l-'awjân.i	*tawrîd*
mâ lidhâ min shân.i	*hajrak man hajar*	*mâ hû musîb*	
		wa-s'al al-'ikhwân.i	*yâ sîd*

The example above is the first cycle of a three-cycle poem. This cycle consists of four lines. Each line is divided into two composite hemistichs, the first of which is much longer than the second and is divided into three sections with three rhymes. The shorter hemistich is divided into two sections with two rhymes.

The metric pattern for the first hemistich is made of three successive feet of the type (– ∪ – –),[56] and one end foot of the type (– ∪ –). The second hemistich is made of two feet of the type (– ∪ – –). The foot division of the line does not coincide geometrically with the hemistich's rhyme subdivision—i.e., the rhymes are not placed at the ends of the feet.

[56]A variation of this foot is ∪ ∪ – –; the first position allows either a light or a heavy syllable to occur.

Rhyme	_____ ân_____ ar	_____ îb	_____ ân	__îd
Meter	– ∪ – –	– – ∪ – –	– ∪ –	– – ∪ –	– ∪ –	–	– ∪ –	– – ∪	– –

Layering and Virtual Symmetry:

The structure and division of the metric pattern here present an overlooked potential for symmetry violated by a superimposed layer of rhymes; a layer made itself of several cycles and layers. This overlapping is a freedom that was restricted to a great degree in the classical poem. The purpose is, however, to establish a solid ground of order, done in this case by the *virtual* symmetry, and then to enrich it by introducing variation of elements and overlapping of patterns.

Using various layers to emphasize variation within order is also a common characteristic of the San'ânî façade, as introduced earlier. Symmetry is first established as an underlying ordering system, then broken in such a way that keeps the essence of symmetry or balance, which the façade maintains. The concept of virtual symmetry in asymmetric compositions seems to be a dominant concept.

_____ân_____	ar	____îb	_____ân	___îd
_____ân_____	ar	____îb	_____ân	___îd
_____ân_____	ar	____îb	_____ân	___îd
_____ân_____	ar	____îb	_____ân	___îd
_____bak____	mak____	âl	_____âr	___lâh
_____bak____	mak____	âl	_____âr	___îâh
_____bak____	mak____	âl	_____âr	___îâh
_____ân_____	**ar**	**____îb**	**_____ân**	**___îd**
_____nî_____	ûl	____tak	_____âs	___âs
_____nî_____	ûl	____tak	_____âs	___âs
_____nî_____	ûl	____tak	_____âs	___âs
_____ân_____	**ar**	**____îb**	**_____ân**	**___îd**

Diagram for rhyme sequences of Poem *Ghusn min 'iqyân.*

TABLE: SUMMARY COMPARISON

PRINCIPLES	ARCHITECTURE	POETRY
SYMMETRY BALANCE	an organizing principle for many exemplar façade; generally characteristic Window groups are based on symmetry, which also regulates other principal elements. The most generic and basic of façades in Ṣan'â' is a symmetrical one.	The generic type, from which all the types are derived, is symmetrical. The classical poem is symmetrical, and the variations introduced in the other genres follow symmetrical orders.
SIMILARITY	Similar elements are given equal treatment or positioning.	In addition to the metric system, the patterns in a poem are given by the systems of rhyme, similarity of the sounds ending hemistichs and distichs, as well as words.
REPETITION	One element, group or sequence is repeated composition and singular elements are rare.	A poem is created as an auditory system by repeating metric units—i.e., syllables, feet and hemistichs—cycles and sounds.
ALTERNATION	Elements and sequences are alternated within cycles in compositions—e.g., window, vent, window, or small, large, small, etc.	Metric patterns are essentially alternations of metric units. Genres like *muwashshaḥ* and *mubayyat* are based on alternating rhymes and metric patterns.
RHYTHM	grouping and alternation of elements; sequences created by different components; vibrating patterns of the decorative bands	reoccurrence of metric units at calculated distances; repetition of sounds, words; creating pairs or groups of sounds and words, by means of contrast or similarity
VARIATION	Elements that qualify in a façade as similar or equal usually display a great deal of variation in detail, dimensions and configuration. It adds to the richness and	For one basic metric unit, as prescribed by the classical theory of meter, there exists a number of variations that have the same quantitative value as the original.
CONTRAST	Elements are contrasted to each other in terms of their weight, size and shape. They differ in qualities like elaborate and bare, full and empty, big and small, round and square, etc. The contrast in color between the gypsum plaster and the bricks is an important characterizing feature of the Ṣan'ânî façades.	The meter is based essentially on binary systems of contrasting units: vowel and consonant, light and heavy. Soft and hard sounds are used in rhyme. Antonyms are used to ornament the poem.
SIMPLICITY	simple and clear structure of parts an whole; complexity is achieved by multiplication and juxtaposition of parts.	simple structure; whole is made by repetition of parts
CYCLIC ORDER	The façade is composed of cycles of windows, stained-glass windows, horizontal decorative bands, etc.	cycles of the metric and rhyme systems; *bayt; dawr* / cycle: *bayt, tawshîḥ* / margin, *taqfîl* / closing
PROGRESSION	As a general rule, decoration of the façade gets more elaborate and complex at the upper levels than at the lower ones. There is a gradual movement towards a climax, that occurs, in most cases, at the upper most level.	A poem has a beginning and an end, and there is usually a theme around which it is structured.
CONVENTIONAL MEASURES	The whole façade can be divided into a set squares, and there are proportional measures according to which aesthetic qualities of a building are judged; conventions such as those ruling the height of a room—and accordingly of a floor—compared to its width; the number and types of windows in one room—e.g., a central large window flanked by two smaller ones.	metric quantity and metric formula; foot, hemistich, distich; cycle; rules of rhyme, etc.
CLICHÉS AND THE SENSE OF TRADITION	elements like entrance gates; mafraj window-unit; decorated bands; prescribed format	expressions, social and pious; formal beginning and end ending; prescribed format
ORNAMENT	important; tends towards excess	important; tends towards excess
GENRES	varies from the simple and clear to the sophisticated, the symmetrical and highly ordered to the asymmetrically balanced and deliberately	from monotonous classical *qaṣîdah*, other genres and varieties are created
STATUS	more important in urban context, giving identity and distinction to the city; par excellence, a medium of individual expression of wealth and social status	more important in tribal context, a medium of expression and honor gaining for individuals and groups; in urban context it is integrated with music which is also another distinguishing art of Ṣan'â'
PRODUCTION	individual—i.e., practically produced by individuals: builders / patrons	individuals: poets
PRACTICE AND PERFORMANCE	collective	collective

5

THE LYRICAL FAÇADES OF SAN'Â'

READING THE SAN'ÂNÎ FAÇADE

Analogy:

Experiencing the San'ânî façade follows as a process two patterns. The first is at street level while walking in the narrow streets of the ancient city. Images pass in front of the beholding eyes in sequences of visions, ever-changing in a very slow motion, where the individual takes part in a performance with no distinction between the *audience* and the *stage*, the beholder and the scene. The second takes place in the reception room (*mafraj*) at the top of the house during *qât* [57]chewing sessions. Through the windows of the room, the beholder absorbs the view with the nectar of the tender leaves. The view is incredibly static and unchanging, yet full of

Panoramic view of the old city of San'â'.
Serjeant and Lewcock, p. 195.

[57]A stimulant shrub that is consumed in Yemen usually in social gatherings taking place every afternoon. The uppermost room in the traditional San'ânî house is reserved for intertaining guests in such gatherings.

illusions and uncertainties of depth. The magical effect is enhanced by the surreal dialogue of planes, lines and shapes, as a reflection of an inner dialogue.

Seen as poetic practices, the two experiences belong to different types of experiences. The first is pulsing with movement and bodily involvement analogous to an active collective performance, where poetry is recited or produced animated with dance and music, to celebrate an occasion. While the second is more of a mental exercise, where one *reads* deeper and deeper into the picture in a meditative manner, revealing layers of illusion, as it changes with the changing light in the outside. Like reading or reciting poetry, this experience becomes an entrance for the mind to worlds of magic and soaring fantasies.

Perception:

An elementary point to start the reading with is the way in which the façade is perceived in Ṣan'â'—that is the mechanism or the path that the eye follows reading it. Statistically, the possibilities are uncountable, but only a few are helpful for our purpose.

Two of these mechanisms are suggested by the peculiar verticality of the façades. The first is from the top down; the second is from the bottom up. Horizontal reading is guided by the horizontal lines of the decorative bands separating the floors, which extend sometimes over a number of buildings, binding them together. Although it is difficult to judge which one is closer to reality, the following discussion will evaluate their appropriateness for the purpose.

Vertical Reading:

When seen from a distance, the tops of the buildings are more likely to draw attention first. The eye may descend then to the bottom of the buildings, passing over the elements in-between and lingering on the important details. However, the façades of Ṣan'â' are more often experienced from within its narrow and winding streets. The short distance separating the beholder from the building ensures that contact with the entrance and lower floors takes place first. The eye then moves up towards the top of the building.

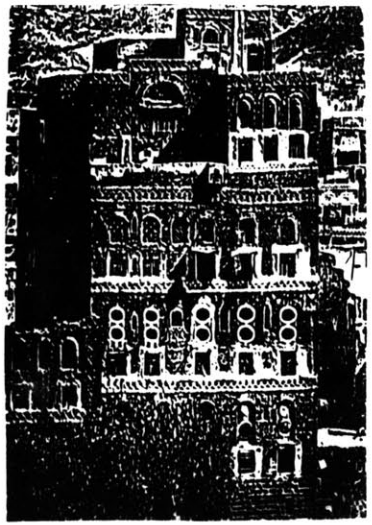
The entrance, which is the only decorated element on the plain ground floor, plays its full role in the composition because of the reduced effect of the labored decoration of the upper floors from a close point of view. The perceived image is affected by foreshortening as a result of the great variation in the distance between each point on the façade and the picture plane.

The possibility of reading a façade of a building in Ṣan'â' from the top down is more probable looking from the top of another building, which may normally take place while sitting in the reception room (*mafraj*) , for the afternoon entertainment session, which is a limited experience. In any case, that reading is partial since only the tops of the other buildings are visible.

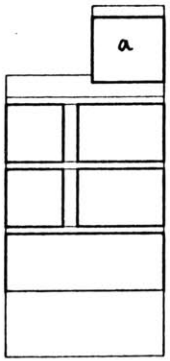
Horizontal Reading:

The left-to-right reading of the façade, and vice versa, seem to be equally possible, assuming that a cultural preference diminishes here to a minimum since the process is conditioned by external factors such as the approach and the design of the façade itself. The horizontal decorative bands play an instrumental role suggesting

the horizontal reading. By providing coherent horizontal zoning of the vertical expanse of the façade, these bands help build up gradually to a vivacious crescendo at the top.



Bayt al-Blaylî, west façade.
Bonnenfant, *Maisons*, p. 54.



Metric Pattern of Façade—Synthesis

The three windows of Group *a* in the west façade of Bayt al-Blaylî have the same quantity in terms of dimensions and shape. However, they are not equal in contributing to the façade. Because of their almost equal size,[58] it would appear that none of them stands out as distinguished from the others. But, on reflection, the central one, due to its special positioning, attains a visual quality distinguishing it from the other two; it is symmetrically flanked by windows and is centrally positioned.

The Binary System

Experiment I:

When this façade is read using a binary system similar to that used in poetry—assume that the two variables are the solid and void—the process produces two classes of instances rendering all unequal elements, openings for example, as equal. If *solid* is represented by the symbol (–), and *void* by the symbol (∩), the formula for the window group in question will be represented by the pattern – ∩ – ∩ – ∩ –,

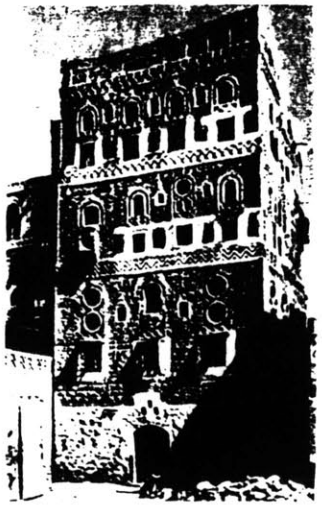
[58]When we talk about size or dimension in Yemeni architecture we mean the approximate or rough size or dimension. So, the expression: "elements with the same dimensions" means elements that fall within one range of dimensions and are perceived as equals. This also applies to the terms *square, circle,* etc.

where the middle and end windows are the same. As already explained, the middle window is expected to have a different notation.

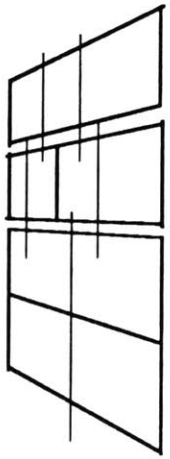
Similarly, in the façade of Bayt an-Nimaymî, the pattern of the second floor will be – ∩ – ∩ – ∩ – ∩ –, which does not recognize the difference between the two window-groups either. It is obvious that the window to the left forms a group by itself while the other three form another group balanced around the central one.

To be meaningful, the pattern – ∩ – ∩ – ∩ – ∩ – produced above has to be read as – ∩ – ∩ – ∩ – ∩ –, where the two groups are visually separated. We realize that another (–) should be added to read the three-window group as centralized, resulting in the pattern – ∩ – [–] ∩ – ∩ – ∩ –. Having done that, the smaller group reads very clearly while our judgement is still needed to recognize the centrality of the middle element in the larger group. The pattern may be further clarified by putting it as – ∩ – – ∩ – ∩ – ∩ –, which brings it closer to describing the subject. However, this final pattern relies on the particular visual layout on paper. The distance between the symbols is part of the convention.

Signifying the *solid* and *void* in our system to differentiate between the elements constituting the façade seems to need other components to qualify it for our purpose. The *solid-and-void* method belongs to a tradition of *visual* analysis where dimensions and proportions are other major components of the system. Without those components, the system, although will still communicate correct information, will not describe some aspects that we recognize essential to the comparison between the composition of the façade and that of poetry.



Bayt an-Nimaymî at at-Tawâshî.
Serjeant and Lewcock, p. 447.



Window groups and centers

A basic difference between the conventional system used to codify syllabic weight and that used in classical visual analysis lies in their relation to the object they represent. The latter is an abstraction of the actual dimensions and geometric relations of the object, that depends necessarily on how exactly it is represented on paper. The result does always resemble the original image and actually reproduces it.

The former, on the contrary, uses symbols that bear no resemblance in form to the original. The symbols themselves, like the letters of an alphabet, can take any form but still reproduce the original in all cases. The reader's knowledge of the convention is essential in this case. In this respect, the visual system is more intuitive.

Realizing that the system we are after here, should denote, as in poetry, quantity rather than quality—i.e., it should distinguish between big and small, long and short, rather than just solid and void—we should change or modify our criteria. In other words, the three windows in the group should be given different quantity. The middle window should have a different value from that given to the two on the sides. The binary system will distinguish two types of elements (windows in this case).

Center and End:

What is the difference between the two positions; the middle window and the end one? The contribution of an element in a façade is very much conditioned by its relation to the elements around it. Group *a* in Bayt al-Blaylî, for example, forms a centralized arrangement due to three identifiable reasons:

- the proximity of its elements to each other;
- their similarity in form;
- and their being odd in number.

The middle element then becomes special among the three because it conforms best to these properties. Being in the middle, it is equidistant from both of the other elements. The second rule applies equally to each one of them, but allows the middle one to be different without upsetting the group configuration, which again distinguishes the middle element. The third property gives obvious distinction to the middle one since it leaves no other choice but the one geometric center of an odd number.

Experiment II:

These three principles do not necessarily apply to all the examples in Ṣan'â', but they will, nonetheless, help in identifying the criteria for our binary system. The system depends on two elementary notes, signifying two characteristic categories, according to which elements can be classified.

Let us now modify the assumption. Instead of *solid* and *void*, which, as discussed above, do not stand alone as a variables for our system, assume that the two variables distinguish between an element in the middle and another at the end. Let us name the first *center* and the second *end*.

From Experiment I, the final modified pattern for the window groups of Bayt an-Nimaymî (p. 69) was – ∩ – – ∩ – ∩ – ∩ –, where a *center* element was signified

as (– ∩ –), and an *end* element as (– ∩) or (∩ –). These symbols can be simplified in order to clarify the system.

Since the *solid* on the façade always defines the limits of the *void*, and tends to recede to the background, the two symbols of the system can be given to the two conditions of the *void*. Therefore, the center instance (– ∩ –) becomes (∩), and the two end instances (– ∩) and (∩ –) become (–).

(∩) *center*

(–) *end*

Definitions:

The *center* is any element with two equal elements on its sides, like the element *X* in the pattern *a X a*.

The *end* is any element with unequal elements on both its sides, like *X* in the pattern *a X b*, or *a X*, or *X X a*.

Therefore, based on this definition of elements, the pattern for Group *a* of Bayt al-Blaylî will be denoted as – ∩ –, and the pattern for the windows in the second floor of Bayt an-Nimaymî as ∩ – ∩ –, thus supporting our perception of these sequences. In the first, there is only one group with the middle element as special. In the second, there are two distinguishable groups, ∩ | – ∩ –; one with a single element balanced in a background; another with three elements balanced around the middle one.

APPLICATION OF THE SYSTEM—METER

Bayt al-Blaylî:

The pattern below describes the west façade of Bayt al-Blaylî, being read from the bottom up, and from left to right.

First	– ∩∩∩–
Second	– –∩ – ∩–
Third	– –∩ –∩–
Fourth	∩ –∩–

Bayt al-Blaylî at Mûsâ, west façade
Bonnenfant, *Maisons*, p. 54.

The proposed system produced a pattern reasonably descriptive of this façade. It renders the second and third floors as equals but different from the first. They both have the pattern – – ∩ | – ∩ –, divided into two groups. Comparing these three floors to each other, we find the following:

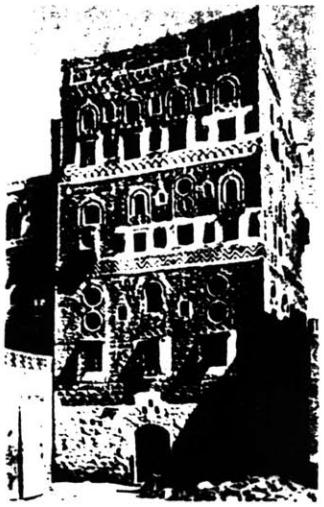
SUMMARY TABLE:

FLOOR	WINDOWS	GROUPS	FEATURES	OTHER
First	five	one	double-circle	
Second	five	two (2+3)	double-circle	extra fanlight
Third	five	two (2+3)	arch	extra fanlight
Fourth	four	two (1+3)	arch	plus one shubbâk

- they all have five windows in each;
- the windows of the first floor are members of one group;
- the first and second floors have double-circle fanlights;

- the windows of the second and third floors are divided in each floor into two groups of two and three windows;
- there is an inserted fanlight window between each two window groups in both the second and third floors.

Although the first and second floors share the same feature in the upper windows, the double-circle fanlight, they are different in their structure. While the windows in the first are equally spaced, they are divided into two groups in the second, which is also the case with the third floor. This division is more important, in terms of quantitative structure, than the resemblance in shape, which remains effective in issues parallel in poetry to the rhyming sounds of words, for example, rather than to their syllabic or metric values.



Bayt an-Nimaymî at at-Tawâshî
Serjeant and Lewcock

Bayt an-Nimaymî:

Applying the system to the façade of Bayt an-Nimaymî produces the following pattern:

First	– ∩ –
Second	∩ – ∩ –
Third	– ∩ ∩ –

Hemistich Division

As a general characteristic, the façades of San'â' are usually divided into areas. Despite the very strong horizontal subdivision of the façade by the horizontal

decorative bands, those areas are perceived to form vertical sequences. In that respect, this vertical relation between elements in the façade is analogous to that relating the hemistichs in a poem.

Hemistichs are given in poetic construction by grouping words in a poem on the basis of meter. They relate to each other within quantitative metric patterns often with rhyme as another indication of their interrelation. Although the distich (*bayt*), the basic unit in the poem, is horizontal in structure, the poem is perceived as a vertical construction.

This effect is simulated in the architecture of Ṣan'â' by the grouping of the elements of the façade, especially by using the two principles of similarity and proximity.[59] The groups are usually different in length and quantity and are clearly divided by a space or a different element. Sometimes, this break is done by the change of plane. A few examples are considered in the following to illustrate this point.

Mechanisms of Division:

The division of parts followed in the façade of Bayt al-Jirâfî (p. 77) is an example of the *hemistich division* parallel in façade composition. It employs two of the mechanisms of separation introduced above—these are the separation on a single plane (i.e., the *grouping of elements*) and the separation on different planes (i.e., the *recessed planes*).

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[59]According to Gestalt principles, similar elements tend to form one group. Groups are also formed following the pattern of spacing between them; closer elements tend to form one group. [Jules, p 24.]

Grouping of Elements:

The façade is divided into areas perceived as distinguishable parts of a whole. Each part comes to being as a geometric unit incompassing affiliated elements. These elements are related by their similar forms, sizes or the dimensions separating them. The different areas on the façade created as a result of this relation play the role of hemistichs in poems as explained above.

The role of meter in poetry is given here to dimensions, proportions and geometry, while the role of rhyme is played by similarity and repetition of forms.

Vertical Strips:

The vertical zoning of the façade is another form of the grouping mechanism. It is a successful instrument to strengthen the analogy to the poem. Relating elements vertically in the façade by means of coinciding the structural division of each floor, the vertical strips resemble the hemistichs of a poem—the horizontal division of the line results in the accumulation of the coinciding hemistichs in the poem.

Recessed Planes:

The two mechanisms introduced above deal with division on a single plane on the façade. The third form deals with division on different planes. Planes are recessed beyond one another to form autonomous parts within one whole. These planes emphasize the surface quality of the building rather than tits mass. They present the façade as layers of surfaces that project into a single surface—that is the the main plane of the façade.

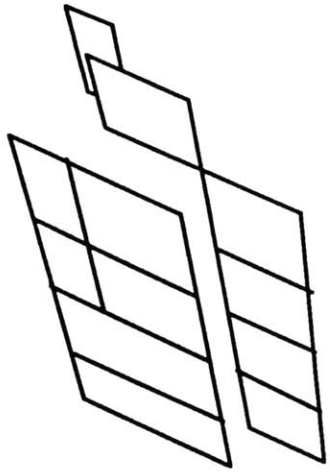


Diagram showing recessed planes in perspective, top view

Application of the Hemistich Division

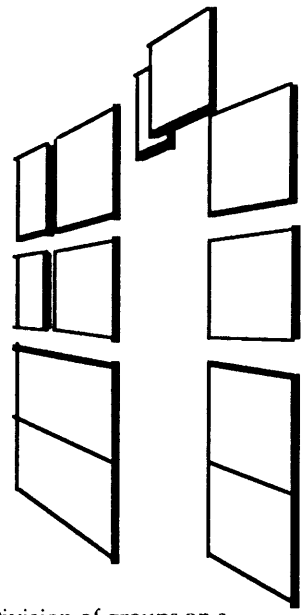
Bayt al-Jirâfî:

The façade of Bayt al-Jirâfî is divided on three main planes. Two of them are recessed behind the third, which is the fundamental plane. On this main part of the façade, the elements are divided into groups on the same plane.

Grouping:

At the level of the first floor, the windows form a single group of four. The second and third floors are divided into two parts by means of two types of window groups. The first, to the right, is a large window flanked by two smaller windows. The second, to the left, is made by a large window accentuated by two small vents (*shawâqîs*,,sg., *shâqûs*), on both sides. This produced an asymmetric pattern of *hemistich division*. The two groups in each floor share the same surface.

Bayt al-Jirâfî at al-Kharrâz
Composed from photos by Bonnenfant, *Maisons*, and Lewcock, *Walled City*



Division of groups on a single plane develops into division of planes

Recessed Planes:

At the top floor, this line of separation between the two groups continues as a break between two surfaces. This change in the nature of division is actually consistent with the rule of progression followed in the façade. It graduates in three stages from one extreme to another. It starts from non-existence at the first floor, to separation between groups on one surface at the second and third floors, to a split of the surface at the top floor by setting back one of the window-groups beyond the other. This recess is augmented by another recess of both surfaces beyond the surface of the building, thus creating three planes for the façade.

This progression is complemented by the progression of the patterns of the decorative friezes. They start with simple designs at the lower floors and gradually get more elaborate at the higher levels. Similarly, the proportion of the opening to the solid increases gradually as from the bottom to the top of the building.

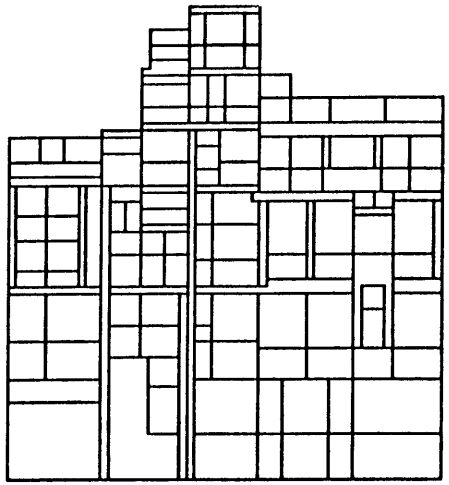
Bayt Mutahhar:

Vertical Strips:

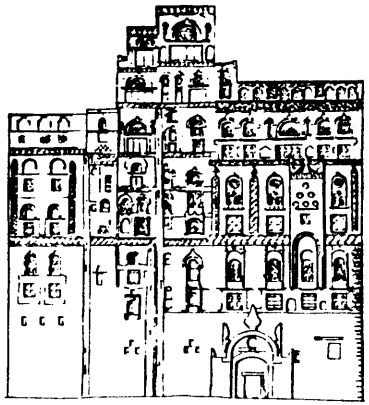
It is a large house with a composite façade that can be seen as divided into three vertical strips. Since the elements in each one of these three parts share certain characteristics that unite them together, the vertical reading of these relations is emphasized over the horizontal. It is still possible to see how the three parts relate horizontally, if we think of the whole façade as poem with three hemistichs in each line. The a poem will form three columns following the hemistich division especially if the three hemistichs in one line are different in meter, length, or rhyme.

This façade will be presented in the way described above as a three-partite poem, which will still enable a horizontal as well as a vertical reading.

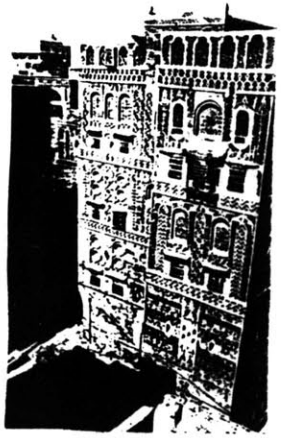
– –	– –	– ∩	– – ∩ –
– – –	– – –	– –	– ∩ – – ∩ – –
– – – –	– –	– –	
– ∩ –	∩ ∩	– –	– – ∩ – –
	∩ – –	– –	– ∩ – ∩ –



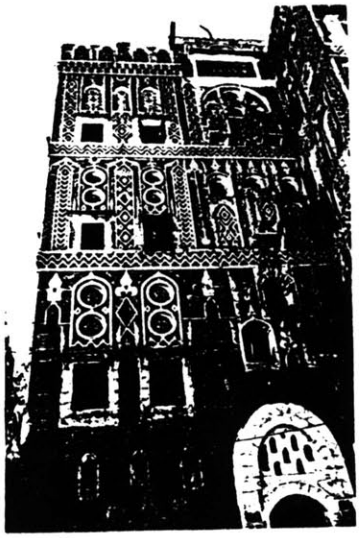
Bayt Mutahhar at al-Flayhî: Quantitative subdivision of the façade according to the area givin to each element.
Based on drawing in Serjeant and Lewcock



Bayt Mutahhar
Drawing by Lewcock in Serjeant and Lewcock.



Bayt Sarî' at M'âd, main façade.
Lewcock, *Old Walled City*, p. 69.



Bayt Sarî' at M'âd, façade with entrance.
Serjeant and Lewcock, p. 494.

Bayt Sarî':

This house is characterized by its elaborate and relatively precise façade decoration. The south façade of Bayt Sarî' comprises four floors and is divided into two surfaces one is advanced before the other. This advancement of surface could be seen as a strong break such as that dividing two columns of hemistichs in a poem. The metric pattern of this façade is interpreted as follows:

First		– – – – – ∩ –
Second	– ∩∩∩ –	– ∩ – – ∩∩∩ –
Third	– – ∩ – –	– – ∩ – – ∩ –
Fourth	– – ∩ – –	∩ – ∩∩ –

HEMISTICH	FIRST HEMISTICH						SECOND			THIRD				
POSITION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1		–		–			–		–		–	∩	–	
2	–	∩	∩	∩		–	–	∩	–	–	∩	∩	∩	–
3	–	–	∩	–	–	–	–	∩	–		–	∩	–	
4	–	–	∩	–	–			∩		–	∩		∩	–

Symmetry and Asymmetry—The Derivation of Genres:

The potential of the technique suggested here can be further tested by using it in the comparison between façades. The façade of Bayt al-Mahdî and that of Bayt Sarî' will be discussed for the purpose.

The façade of Bayt al-Mahdî is characterized by the absolute symmetry with emphasis on a vertical axis dividing it into two identical halves. With this strict formality, it can only be compared to the classical poem with its uniform metric system and symmetrical division of hemistichs.

The façade of Bayt Sarî', on the other hand, is divided asymmetrically into two vertical planes. The narrower plane is advanced in front of the other. In the wider plane, the entrance is located asymmetrically on one side. Two vertical strips almost equal in width can be recognized on this plane.

Using the hemistich analogy, the second façade can be seen as a two partite poem with one short and another long hemistichs. The major division between the hemistichs is done by the advancement of the smaller plane. The long hemistich is further divided into two sections.

The manipulation of metric quantity by manipulating the hemistich division was, in addition to other things, a tool to break the rigidity of the classical form. The asymmetrical genres were, as we have seen earlier, derived directly from the symmetrical prototype.

Bayt al-Jirâfî at al-Kharrâz
Lewcock, *Walled City*, p. 51.
Bonnenfant, *Maisons*, p. 22.

Bayt al-Mahdî
Bonnenfant, *Maisons*

Similarly, the second façade as a type seems to be a result of manipulating the first as a type. By projecting the advanced surface in the façade of Bayt Sarî' back to the plane of the recessed one, the pattern will change into three vertical strips with the entrance in the center of the middle one and equally divided elements in the other two. Furthermore, featuristic elements are located on the axis passing through the center line of the entrance—a perfect example of the symmetrical type. By carefully considering the façade of Bayt al-Mahdî and the resulting pattern, strong resemblance between the two becomes clear.

In this way the process of derivation of the architectural genres could possibly be suggested to have followed the same patterns of development as those of the poetic genres and employed the same mechanisms of transformation.

6

CONCLUSION

Through the course of this study, I have attempted to show the interrelation of two important aspects of the cultural heritage of the old city of Ṣan'â'. Attention should be drawn to the possibility that the case of Ṣan'â' could find parallels in the wide range of not only the Islamic cities but possibly other similar indigenous cultures.

I should remark that the identity of a certain culture is definitely a reflection of its preferences. The type of parallels drawn in this study could be plausible only if such cultural preferences are taken in consideration. By this I mean the appropriateness of the approach and the method to the particular culture.

The Arabic language was the preferred medium of artistic expression for the Islamic culture. So its capacity for reflection of imagination and for metaphor must have influenced the development of Islamic arts. The dominance of the literary heritage in Islamic cultures extends to almost all forms of art production. The sacredness of the *word* as the representation of the will of God revealed in the Qur'ân, the role that language plays as a noble medium of expression, and the strong presence of the written form of the language in the arts are a few indications of the special status that language occupies in Islamic culture Language and its underlying

structure hints at its perception of the world. Utilizing its own linguistic patterns as tools to understand its other patterns may provide us with better understanding of its various aspects.

The Islamic cultures have always been evaluated through methods that were originally created to fit a different intellectual construct. The understanding of Islamic culture through these methods—"whether any culture can be meaningfully understood through the application of techniques developed outside it"[60]—can only be limited.

The dialogue between the different aspects of a culture provides an alternative for analyzing and evaluating cultural production from within the culture itself rather than from without. The Islamic culture that grew over a vast expanse of space and time, and developed original forms of expressing its aesthetic values on the spiritual and physical levels, has definitely the power to explain itself from within—revealing subtleties that can be seen only through its own channels.

This should not be understood to mean that this study provides a substitute for the other methods of inquiry used by scholars of Islamic architecture now. Nonetheless, it supports an alternative discourse between different aspects of the culture. If this suggests anything, it is the possibility and potential that such discourse presents as a way of analysis closer to the mentality of the makers of the art.

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[60]Oleg Grabar, "Reflections on the Study of Islamic Art," in *Muqarnas: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture*, vol. I, 1983, pp. 1-14, [p. 2].

Another related point that this study sets forth is its penetration into a specialized body of knowledge to make use of the highly developed methodology there, which has worked for centuries within the culture, and apply it instead to its architecture. That is to take advantage of the method of analysis used in recognizing the patterns of poetry to recognize the patterns of architectural composition.

A counter argument that might be made is that this attitude is not actually consistent with the way the culture presented itself; while it developed this method for poetry, it did not consciously apply it to architecture. The answer is that the development of the theory of meter was not actually contemporary with the creation of the poetic patterns. Al-Khalîl analyzed a mature tradition that was considered by the standards of those days, and by many in our day, as unsurpassable. The creators of that tradition were hardly aware of the technicalities and rules which al-Khalîl introduced; they were concerned with the production of poetry as part of their daily reality. Similarly, architecture developed as a practice as part of the lived reality in those societies, where the concern was its production and refinement as a craft.

Besides, the necessity that was felt to discover the rules for poetic composition was in its great part an act of preservation, when the art of poetry, which was a dominant mode of expression, was endangered by the dramatic changes that the Arabic culture was then undergoing. Under the same circumstances and for the same reasons, the rules of Arabic grammar were derived and written at that time. Similar concerns with identity and cultural expression arise today, when not only is intuition less reliable, but the definition of what belongs and what does not is ambiguous.

It is my hope that this exploration may heighten appreciation of Sanʻânî architecture, and encourage others to experiment with similar techniques of analysis.

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