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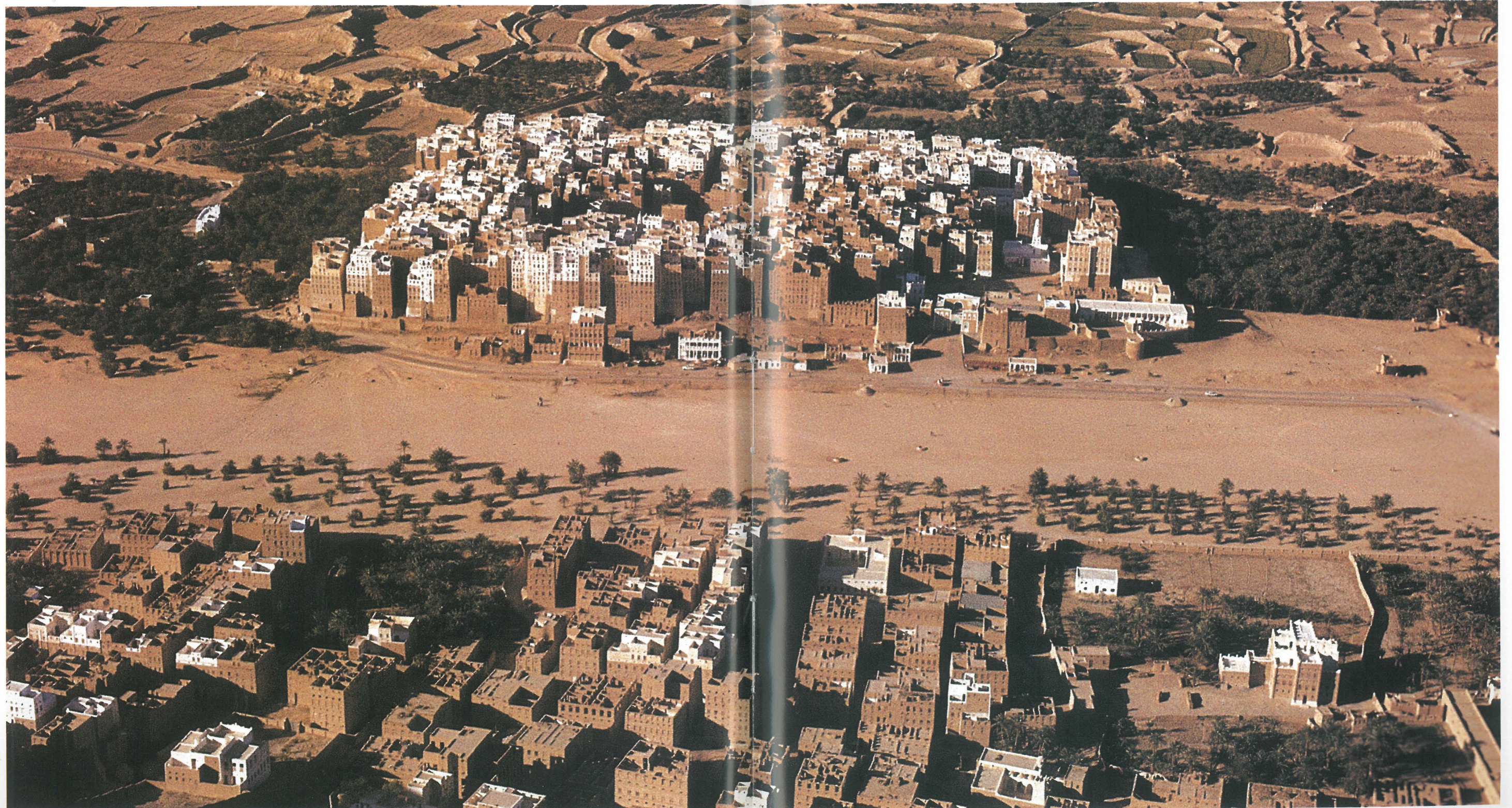
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SHIBAM AND THE WADI HADRAMAUT

Text and photographs by Jean-François Breton
Drawings by Christian Darles

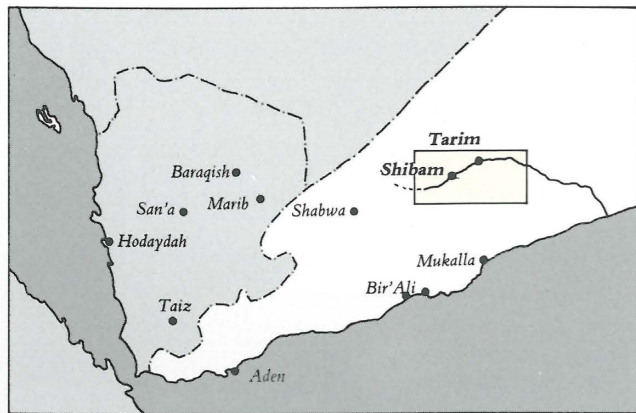
General view of Shibam. The city occupies a trapezoidal plan. Palm groves and irrigated fields surround it. On the southern bank of the Hadramaut is the suburb of al-Sahil. At the lower right is a former summer abode of a wealthy Shibam family.



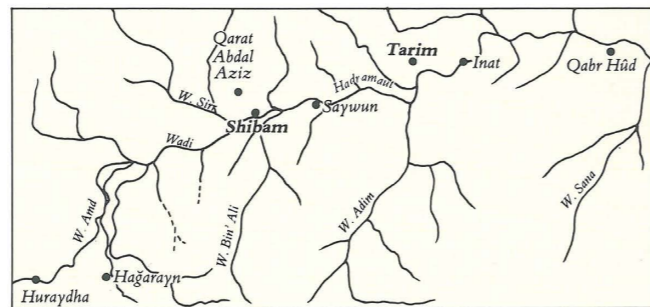
The city of Shibam stands on a rock promontory that surges out of the bed of the Wadi Hadramaut. Its daring mudbrick architecture symbolises the traditions of the Southern Yemeni people. Ramparts enclose a trapezoidal shaped area measuring some 250 metres from north to south and 380 metres from east to west. The tall facades of adjacent houses rise 20 to 25 metres high above the ramparts. It is the only city in Yemen fortified in this particular way, and its origins as a defence system go back to the pre-Islamic kingdoms (5th century B.C. to 5th century A.D.). The ancient city of Najran was still protected by its attached wooden houses resting on high stone basements.

Intersections of the major streets determine the location of the city's most important places: squares, mosques (of which there are now seven), and public institutions. The mosques generally correspond with the different quarters of Shibam.

Within the walls one finds a unique concentration of 500 tall dwellings that house 8,000 inhabitants. The tallest has eight storeys and measures about 30 metres, while many others have five or six storeys on the average. Houses belonging to the wealthiest citizens are located in the western district, on ground that is 10 metres higher than the gates of the city itself; those of the poorest classes are found in *sūq* around the Haroun al-Rashid mosque. At the lowest point of the city,



Map of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) with the Wadi Hadramaut valley (inset at right).



Site plan of the city of Shibam, South Yemen. Indicated on the plan are institutional buildings, commerce, mosques and residences.

Below: Shibam from the southwest. The location of Shibam in the middle of the Wadi Hadramaut bed (foreground), i.e. in an area of periodic flooding, was originally done by placing it on a natural hill protected from rising water. Then, a series of superposed buildings in the course of milleni heightened the city's ground level, mainly on the northwestern side.

Bottom, left: Shibam from the northwest side. This is the highest district of Shibam, about 10 metres higher than the city gate, and 20 metres higher than the Wadi level. The wealthiest houses of Shibam, built between 1880 and 1920, are located here.

Bottom, right: Eastern side of Shibam. The contiguous high dwellings form a complete defence system several metres behind the city wall. In this district, houses are about 15 to 20 metres high, instead of the 25 to 30 metres on the southern side.



close to the gate, stands the old Sultan's palace, the new market and school.

The reasons why houses of Shibam rise so high are complex. The city is situated along a border between two Sultanates, Quayti and Qathiri, which were often at war in the past. Dwellers of Shibam had to seek refuge and protection in the height of their houses. The same reflex seems to have already occurred in the pre-Islamic times. In the city of Shabwa, the former capital of the Hadramaut, the tall houses assumed partly a defensive role. The houses of Shibam look like towers (*husn*): their ground floor has no windows but they have occasional loopholes. This building upwards is a tradition that

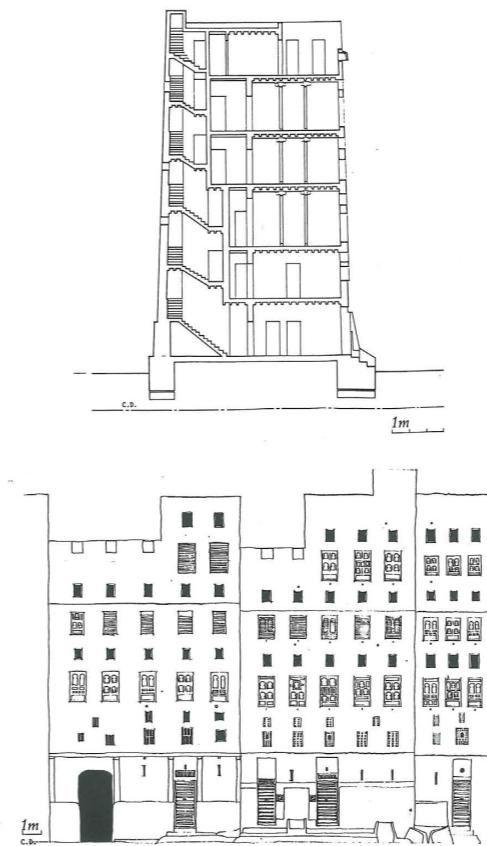
also occurs in the Hadramaut countryside. Rising towards the sky, these houses also seem like striking symbols of economic prestige. One quarter of Shibam's population travelled abroad after the mid-seventeenth century, and these Yemeni settled in Singapore, Malaysia, Java, Batavia and Southern India. The greatest amount of wealth from these overseas Hadramis came back between 1820 and 1870. All of the money earned abroad was invested in costly buildings. In Shibam, the prestige of these trader families is reflected in building tall structures. In Tarim, some 50 kilometres east of Shibam, they built large two- or three-storeyed houses, decorated in an Indonesian fashion.

Below: Western side of Shibam. In the palm groves, rises the small al-Qabub mosque, probably built in the 18th century.

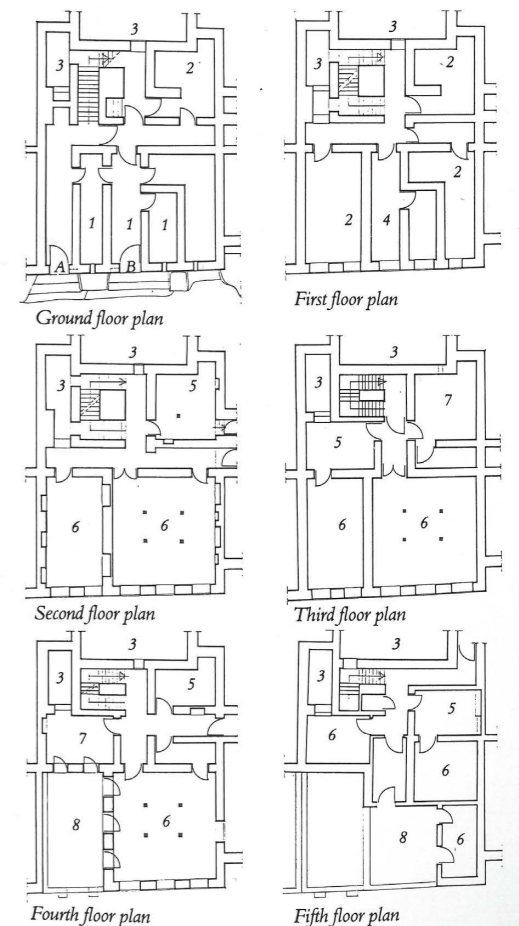
Right: A five-storeyed house on Shibam's southern perimeter. The facade of the house is turned towards the inside of the city, as the rear dominates the city wall. Its ground floor has small openings, its upper storeys have two rows of openings.



Section, elevation and floor plans of typical houses in Shibam.



- A. dwellings
 - B. shops
 - 1. store, shop, warehouse*
 - 2. reserve (of provisions), stone*
 - 3. lightwell
 - 4. animals
 - 5. baths, bathroom
 - 6. residence, house, dwelling*
 - 7. kitchen
 - 8. terraces
- *depending on the building's location and context.

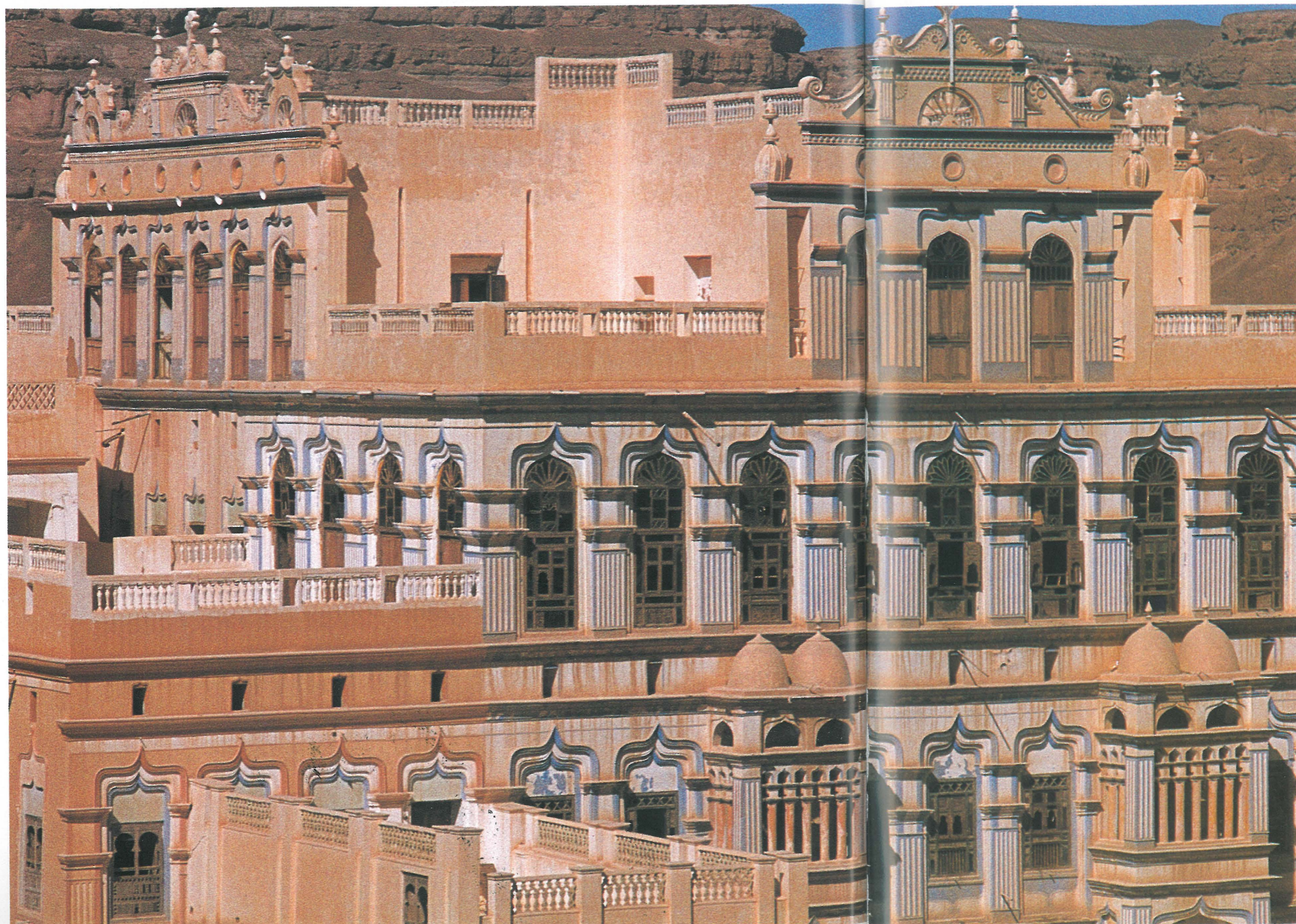


awqaf houses, are partly destroyed. Long stretches of the city-wall have collapsed. Causes of deterioration are essentially the poor maintenance of external surfaces, and the failure to seal off the sewerage system. The present system of open drains connected to an inadequate network of underground pipes is another cause of deterioration of the houses' foundations. Moreover, extensive damage followed the destruction of the Muza dam, some 7 kilometres to the west, in 1982.

On account of this, South Yemeni authorities carried out long preliminary studies. Missions and experts were sent out from 1980 to 1984.¹ In December 1982 a UNESCO Committee included Shibam and the Wadi Hadramaut in the World Heritage List. At the end of 1984, the Director-General of the

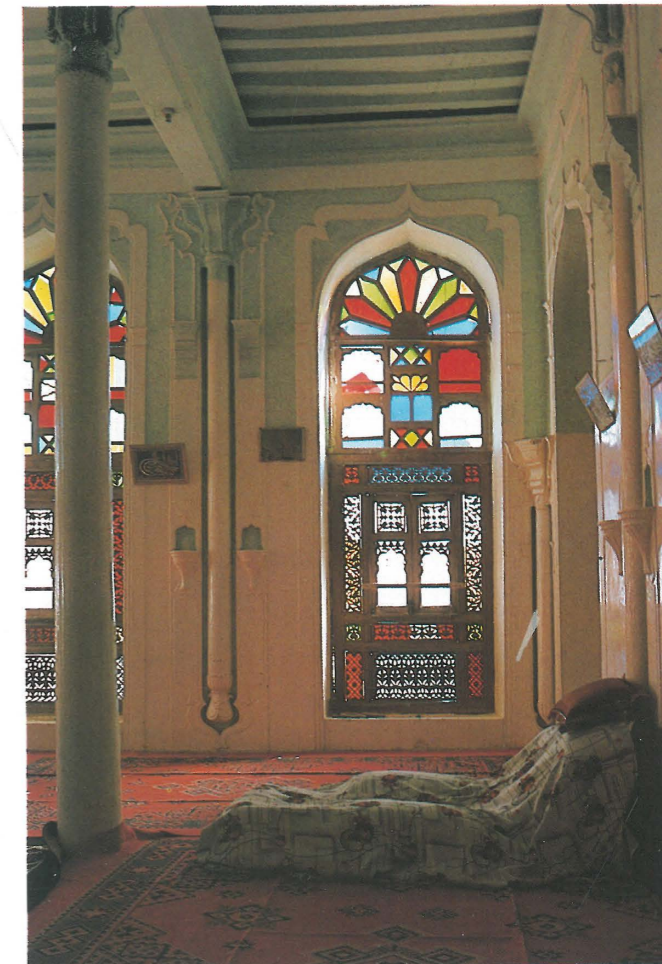
UNESCO made an appeal on behalf of the preservation of Shibam and the Hadramaut cities. The project will focus first on emergency works: rebuilding the Muza dam and its embankments, introducing a complete drainage system in Shibam, and improving the water supply. Studies have already been carried out in order to rebuild the Muza dam.

¹ The results of a preliminary study have been published by Jean-François Breton and Christian Darles in *Storia della Città*, n° 14, 1980. During his missions between 1980 and 1983, Dr. R.B. Lewcock collected considerable material which will be published by UNESCO. In 1985 measurements of the buildings were completed in order to construct a model of Shibam (scale: 1/300th) for the Yemeni Center for Culture. A photogrammetry programme may well set up within two years.



Below, left: One of the al-Qaf's family palaces in Tarim, some 30 miles east of Shibam. The great houses of Tarim are massive, square buildings, with rows of tall windows and few extensions on the roof. Signs of strong contacts with Southeast Asia in the 19th century are to be observed both on the exteriors and on the interiors of these palaces.

Below: Interior of a great house in Tarim. Ceilings, pillars and beams are covered with a plaster of mud and then painted with soft colours or then covered again with bright lime. Pillars are made either of stone or palm trunks. Doors were often sent ready-made from Singapore or Java as the supply of wood in Hadramaut is scarce.



The Hadramaut authorities have partly rebuilt the city wall. A longer term programme consists of installing a sewerage disposal system for each house.

It is an essential aspect of policy that the original techniques of construction shall be used as much as possible in the Hadramaut (for instance, the mud-brick Saywun Airport), but this means high costs for labour. So a useful experiment may be the importing of mechanical devices to provide cheaper costs of mixing and pounding the material (like the *ramad*).

The project also includes sites in the Hadramaut valley. It will focus on the restoration of important works in Tarim (the city walls), Sayûn (The Friday Mosque), al-Mashad (the tombs) and Bôr (Abd Allah Mosque). Designed as an exten-

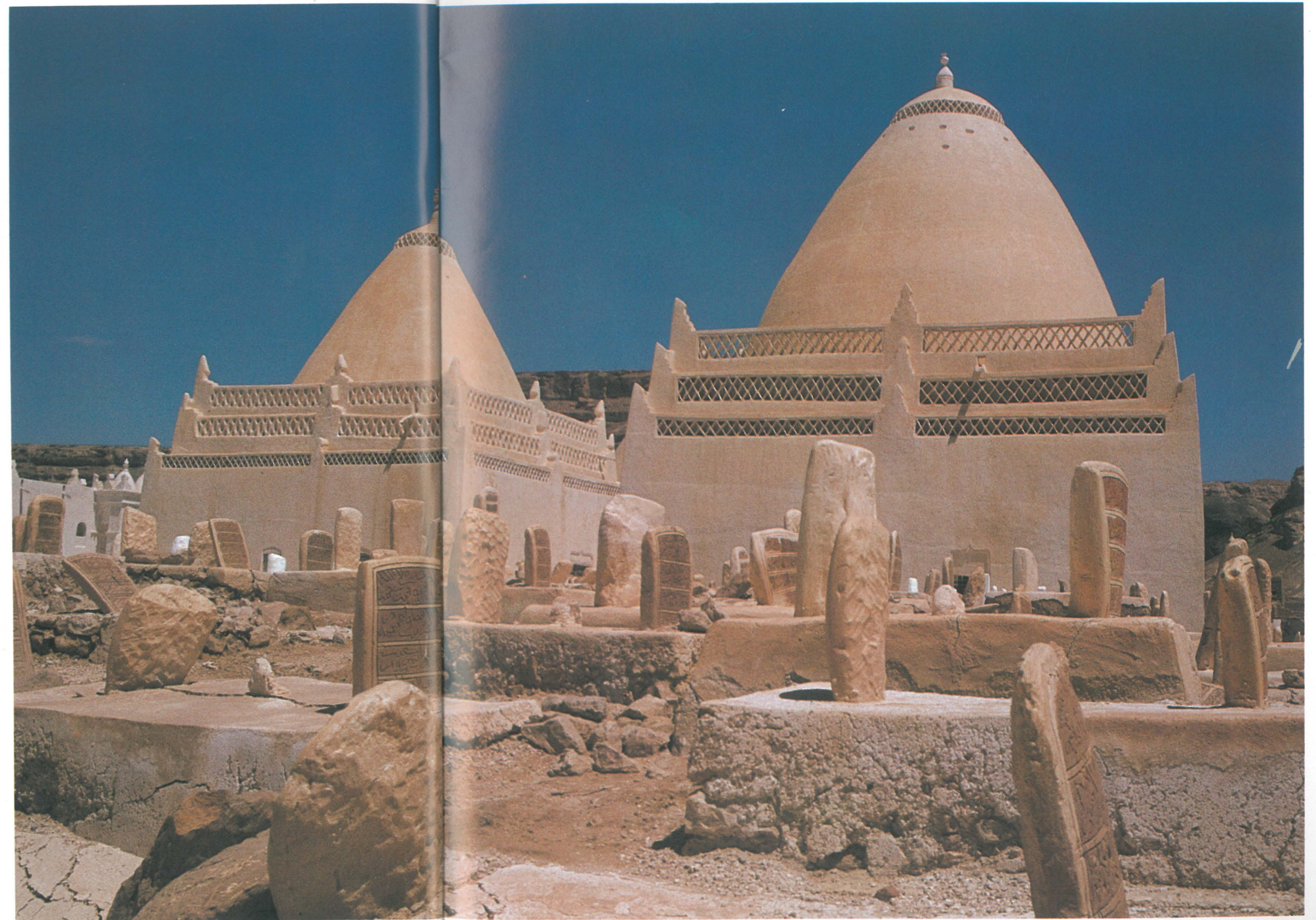


Above: The minaret of the principal mosque in al-Huraydah made out of mud, some 40 miles southwest of Shibam. This mosque is reputed to have been built by an Indian architect at the end of the 19th century. It is connected to the tomb of the donor and to a former Koranic school.

Right: Inat, east of Tarim, was one of the famous towns of the Hadramaut. The great qubba of Sheikh Abu Bakr, as well as the tombs of six other holy men, attracted many pilgrims. The white cupolas are of a pure Hadrami architectural type.

sive programme of integrated regional development, it will seek to give a new lease on life to the Hadrami cities through coordinated actions in various fields of cultural activity.

Three aspects of this preservation campaign have to be considered. First, the cost of providing new facilities in Shibam and of returning the city to a decent state of repair; secondly, the cost of maintaining the old city in this condition for the foreseeable future; thirdly, the cost of repairing the main buildings of other cities. The first step is estimated at 60 million US dollars, the second at 10 million dollars (every 50 years), and the third at 30 million dollars. The appeal to various contributors is amply justified by the significance of this architecture to Arab culture that is seriously endangered.





The town of Qabr Hūd is 70 miles east of Shibam in the Hadramaut valley. The town, built around the shrine of Nabi Allah Hūd, is inhabited only three days in the year during the Pilgrimage. The market-place with its white-washed fountain is to be seen here. Photograph: M. de Cardenal.

Jean-François Breton is a French archaeologist who has worked in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen for many years. He is a member of the international board directing the campaign to preserve Shibam.

Christian Darles is a French architect who has participated on missions to South Yemen and has assembled important graphic documentation on the architecture of the region.

Doha: Results of Mosque Competition

The Jury to decide the winning entry to the competition for the Ali bin Abu Talib Mosque in Doha, Qatar met in the early summer and selected the project by Rasem Badran of Jordan for first prize. A.W. El-Wakil of Egypt received second prize, while Jafar Tukan of Jordan and K. Banany of Morocco were awarded third and fourth prizes respectively.

Lyon: Earth Institute Founded

It was announced recently in France that an international Institute for Construction with Earth is being founded near the city of Lyon, at l'Isle D'Abeau New Town. The event coincides with the inauguration of 65 dwellings in the same New Town zone employing the most common and perfected techniques for construction with earth. At the same time, this endeavour marks the fifth anniversary of the now famous centre Pompidou exhibition. "Des Architectures de Terre", whose curator Jean Dethier is one of the prime movers in the association "Batir en Terre" (Build with Earth) which plans to have the new institute functioning by 1987. Patrice Doat, president of the organisation "Craterre" and professor at the School of Architecture in Grenoble also figures among the sponsors of the new institute.

Located 29 kilometres from Lyon, the institute will engage in a variety of efforts to promote earth as a viable material in contemporary building: "dissemination of operational techniques in this field through training programmes and other means of technology transfer; research thanks to cooperation among numerous regional, national and Third World scientific organisations (universities, laborator-

ies, etc.); coordination of endeavours between local authorities interested in the utilisation of earth for public construction and various industrial or commercial enterprises capable of achieving these; information made available to the general public concerning the advantages — especially economic ones — of earth as a building material".

For further information contact: "Batir en Terre S.A.N., l'Isle D'Abeau, France or Jean Dethier, 43 rue Beaubourg, 75003 Paris, France.

Paris: Architecture Exhibit: India Year in France

The Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts in Paris is hosting a large architectural exhibition until January 19th, 1986 as part of a vast series of shows and events organised by the two countries in order to inform the public on traditional culture and contemporary realities in modern India. Architect Jean-Louis Veret, curator of the exhibit and former associate of Le Corbusier for many constructions in Ahmedabad, collaborated with Indian architect Raj Rewal and a working group to produce a remarkable panorama of architecture old and new.

Three principal themes were selected around which the material presented has been organised: Traditional Indian Architecture, Contemporary Indian Architecture, and Le Corbusier in India. Within the first themes eight examples provide the focus, having been chosen for their representativity of a geographical area, period in history, religious significance amid the many religions present in India, etc.; these are: Srinagar (Kashmir), Fatehpur Sikri, Jaisalmer, Padmanabhapuram, Orchha and Datia, Mandu, the observatory of Jaipur and the reservoirs of Adalaj and Modhera. Presented primarily through photographs, these are

nevertheless also supplemented by original works of art.

Contemporary Architecture in India, the second theme, takes as its starting point, the independence from British rule in 1947. Building types ranging from low-cost housing to monumental structures are exhibited by photographs, models and slide shows, illustrating the works of major Indian architects. However, the third section will emphasise the achievements of Le Corbusier, invited by Prime Minister Nehru in 1951 to design the city of Chandigarh, and subsequently several private and institutional buildings in Gujarat state. These have been considered around various sub-themes, such as "architecture and light", "architecture and water" and "architecture and the sun". A special section is also devoted to Pierre Jeanneret, cousin and long-time partner of Le Corbusier who lived and worked for many years in India.

A catalogue in both French and English languages accompanies the show. The rich and diverse experiences portrayed in this Franco-Indian cultural endeavour are indeed of interest to many other Third World countries.