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The Islamic Garden

A digression , taken from the article, "City and leisure parks"
(Richard Bodeker and Mohamed Scharabi, Garten und Landschaft, 8/1976)

Few Central Europeans and even few Arabs are aware that the roots of Western culture, not least in garden art and landscape design are essentially of Arabic origin. In the Orient the arts had time to put down deep roots. They were built on the inheritance from many cultured peoples: the Persians, Nabateans, Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines. All the customs of settled life took such root in the Orient that ineradicable traces are left behind. Among all these arts, garden design is, next to architecture, without a doubt one of the most important. Fountains and small bodies of water are conspicuous in many Islamic park areas. Water symbolises purity in Islamic teaching, and this virtue has great importance. In addition the water stands as a connecting element between architecture and vegetation. The constant flow of the water not only provides movement, but a cool atmosphere, which is desirable in the entire Near East region. Vine leaves often shaded entire courts and small gardens. Trees were set out in pots or planted at intervals. Flower beds, ponds, and canals were narrowly bordered. Next to the paths were pleasant flowers and plants and shrubbery. To create order in the multicoloured and multiform park, palms and other trees were regularly planted. They also formed a shaded area, which made possible a pleasant visit in the hot seasons. Visual prospects such as those in the garden park of the Alhambra were not a rarity. Balconies and terraces were built on natural or artificial hills viewing towers. From the descriptions of Islamic parks, we know the love of the Arabs for the unusual. To the traditional gardens belonged indigenous and foreign animals. These made a sort of zoo. In the ponds coloured fish were bred. Greenhouses, labyrinths, and sundials were built in the gardens. The greenhouses sometimes served as reception rooms in winter. Not only Arabic, but also European travellers described and admired the Islamic garden art. Chardin among others pictured the Tchegar-Bagh and Tschihil-Sutun in Isfahan. They were characterised by the complete subordination of architecture to the landscape formation. The parks were inseparable elements of the city ground plan and city life in general.

WATER GARDENS ENJOYED BY THE
PUBLIC ON THE SITE OF THE
DIPLOMATIC QUARTER, SAUDI ARABIA



THE DESIGN OF THE DIPLOMATIC
QUARTER RESPONDS TO BOTH
THE FREEDOM OF THE DESERT
LANDSCAPE AND THE FORMALITY
OF THE ISLAMIC GARDEN.

Riyadh Diplomatic Quarter

In 1977, members of the diplomatic missions in Jeddah were promised that when they moved to Riyadh six years later, they would enjoy a considerably higher quality of life than was normally the case for the capital city. Given the fact that the 900-hectare site for the proposed new Diplomatic Quarter resembled a moonscape, this promise was met with some scepticism.

Two or three Bedouin camps, with their herds of sheep, goats, and camels had ensured that, apart from a few meagre grasses, the site

