

Vernacular Architecture

Second Semester

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Traditional Courtyard House Layouts in Erbil City

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House Layouts from (1900-1930):

Traditional Courtyard House Layouts in Erbil City

- **Society in Iraq in general and Erbil city in particular during the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century was living in isolation from the great cultural developments in various aspects of economic, political, social and technical and so on, that were taking place in the western world.**
- **Whereas the people were satisfied with those means of the primitive civilization that they got, they gradually developed through experience and overlapped by the perceived need; alterations or changes have been rare and done only in case of urgent need.**

House Layouts from (1900-1930): Traditional Courtyard House Layouts in Erbil City.....cont.

- ❑ So, the additions are not sudden, there is enough time to adjust and adapt the elements of a previous civilization.**
- ❑ Thus, by the accumulation and experience gained through the use, every aspect of society was a reflection of the values and ideas of that civilization (architecture in general and house layout design, in particular, is one of those aspects).**
- ❑ Consequently, the traditional house layouts in Erbil city reflected the values of the community and its social privacy.**

The effect of the social aspect on the configuration of vernacular architecture in Erbil city at the level of planning

- On the social level, it is noted that the veil of women (Hijab) was a general and absolute condition, which in turn led to the city closing in on itself at the planning level (Alizadeh, 2007), (Fig. 1).
- This concept has also been confirmed at the level of neighborhoods and alleyways through the relationship joints between inside and outside.

Alizadeh, H. (2007). Changes conceptions of women's public space in the Kurdish city. *Cities*, 24, (6), 410-421.



Figure 1: The old part of Erbil: compact urban fabric reflecting socio-cultural situation

The effect of the social aspect on the configuration of vernacular architecture in Erbil city at the level of house layouts

As for the level of a house layout, this principle had been confirmed by the openness of the house on central interior space (courtyard) in accordance to socio-cultural motivations (Figure 2a-b).

The traditional form of house layouts are totally veiled from the outside, giving complete privacy to its components and spaces, as well as providing safety and protection to its inhabitants against outsiders.

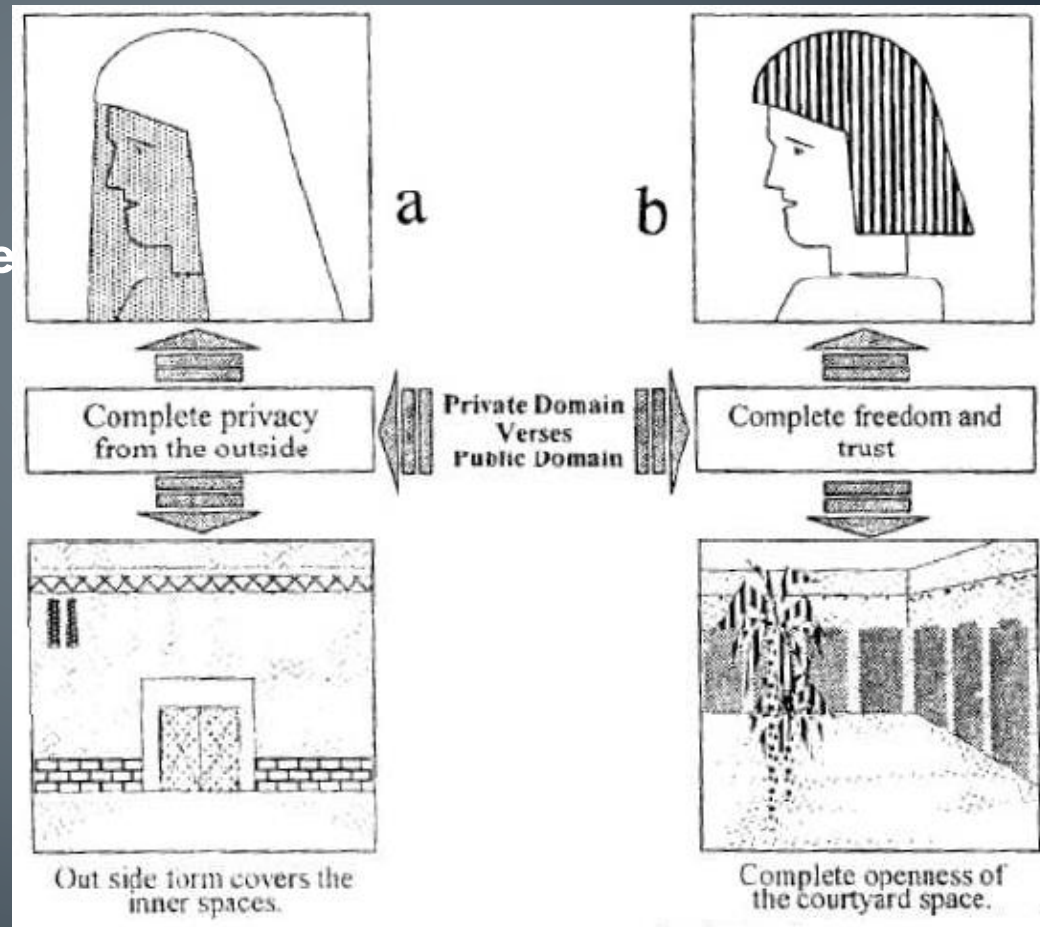


Figure 2a-b: Inner courtyard provides privacy, protection and safety to inhabitants

Design Characteristics of House Layout (Courtyard House Layout) in Erbil city during the period 1900-1930

By observing the models of house layouts in this period (1900 -1930), through the identification of different key spaces, nature and uses of the main activities, zoning of spaces, and house links with the alleyway (outside), we can say that the courtyard house layout is mainly based on emphasizing four basic concepts as follows:

- 1. Function.**
- 2. Social privacy.**
- 3. Safety and protection.**
- 4. Respond to environmental requirements**

Design Characteristics of House Layout (Courtyard House Layout) in Erbil city during the period 1900-1930

Emphasis on these concepts is clearly reflected in the design of traditional house layouts in Erbil through dividing the house into different zones and spaces, according to the function and social situation, as follows:

- 1. Public-private spaces:** including spaces such as reception room (guest room).

Design Characteristics of House Layout (Courtyard House Layout) in Erbil city during the period 1900-1930

- 2. Private spaces:** including various family spaces, such as closed spaces, semi-closed spaces, and open spaces. The private spaces can be classified as follows: The main courtyard, the Dolan (the entrance vestibule in the large houses), the Mejaz (the entrance passageway), Tarma (the balcony that overlooks the courtyard), Iwan and Talar (open rooms which widen the balcony into a usable space), and so on.
- 3. Private-private spaces:** such as bedrooms.

Design Characteristics of House Layout (Courtyard House Layout) in Erbil city during the period 1900-1930

Between these three types above, there is another type of space called transitional spaces (circulation spaces), which link and collect them. Locations, importance, forms, areas, and details of these spaces can be ranged depending on the quality of the linked spaces.

With regard to locating the house mass within the plot area, the external walls of a traditional house are boundaries of the plot area, so there are no exterior spaces, only the inner courtyard (Figure 3).

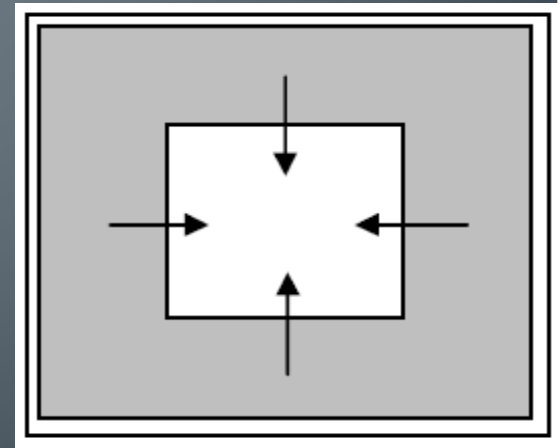


Figure 3: External walls in traditional houses represent boundaries of the house

Inner courtyard as a main feature in Erbil traditional house layouts

The inner courtyard is a dominant component in the traditional house (Figure 4), where most of the family activities take place in. It provides them with privacy and safety, in addition to being an effective source for receiving sunlight and fresh air.

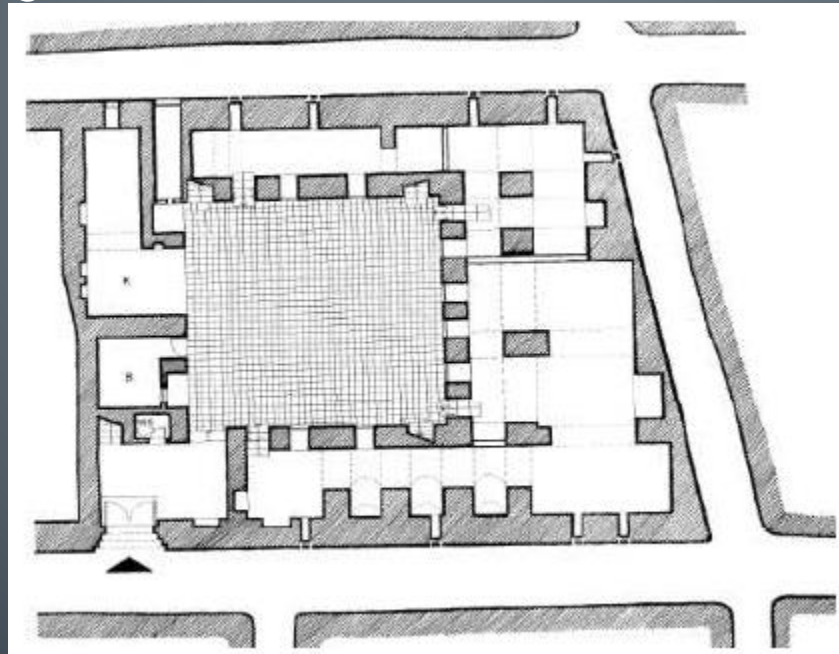


Figure 4: Layout plan of traditional courtyard house in Erbil city

Spatial – Functional Relationships of House Layouts

- **The nature of relations between spaces in house layouts of this period reflects the nature of social relationships between family members, and members of the community as a whole.**
- **The cohesive relationships of family and the sense of security are reflected through the visual supervision of spaces one on the other to emphasize the unity, the cohesion of the parts, and an absolute desire to regulate public and private spaces.**

Spatial – Functional Relationships of House Layouts

With regard to the visual relationship between inside and outside, this relation is almost non-existent at the level of the **ground floor**.

- While there is a relationship in one direction (from inside to outside only) in the **first floor** through a visual link in closed spaces (such as bedroom) that overlooking the alleyway and the other semi – closed spaces, to affirm the principle of social privacy and to visually isolate the interior from the outside (Figure 5).



Fig. 5: Visual relationship between inside and outside in traditional courtyard houses in Erbil city

Spatial – Functional Relationships of House Layouts

Moreover, the hierarchy nature of the social relations (private and public) begins from the alley (public) and passes through the entrance passageway (*Al-mejaz*).

This element was designed to confirm the principle of privacy. It links the outside indirectly with the inner courtyard (private-public) which can be considered the key node of circulation in the house.

Access to closed spaces, semi closed spaces and service spaces in the ground floor can be achieved through this node (Figure 6).



Fig. 6: Sequential relationship between courtyard (private space) and the alleyways (public space)

Spatial – Functional Relationships of House Layouts

- Spaces on the ground floor in the traditional house layouts are linked with the first floor through the courtyard by elements of vertical movement (stairs), which work as links or joints between public and private spaces.
- It is noted that most of the ground floor spaces (closed and semi-closed), are spaces for general domestic use.

Spatial – Functional Relationships of House Layouts

- The courtyard is considered as a public space at the level of family used as an axis for circulation, and various activities such as sitting, dining, cooking, and playing area for children.
- The spaces in the upper floor are mostly private ones such as bedrooms of the family members, and sometimes there is a room for storage...