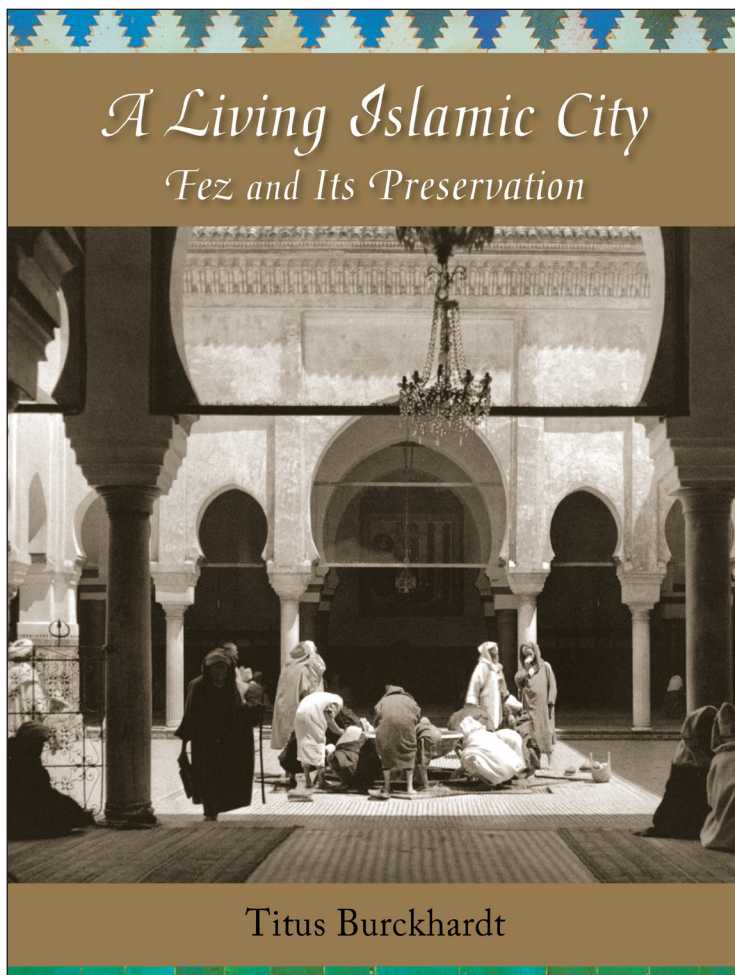


A Living Islamic City *Fez and Its Preservation*

by Titus Burckhardt
edited by Jean-Louis Michon
& Joseph A. Fitzgerald



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The Moroccan city of Fez, founded in the ninth century CE, is one of the most precious urban jewels of Islamic civilization. For more than 40 years Titus Burckhardt worked to document and preserve the artistic and architectural heritage of Fez in particular and Morocco in general. These newly translated lectures, delivered while Burckhardt was living and working in Fez, explore how the historic city can be preserved without turning it from a living organism into a dead museum-city, and how it can be adapted and updated using the values that gave birth to the city and its way of life. Aided by photographs and sketches made during the course of his lifetime, Burckhardt conveys what it means to be a living Islamic city.



Selections from the Book

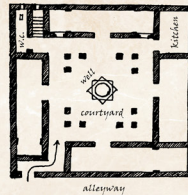


Above left and right: Views of the courtyard and hall of al-Qrawiyin University-Mosque; Below right: Outer wall of the Moulay Idris II Mausoleum-Mosque, with beggars seated

Islamic learning given publicly in the Qrawiyin Mosque. The practice of placing the main marketplace close to a sanctuary and, in a way, beneath its protection goes back to the

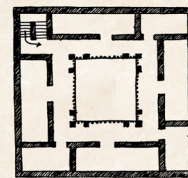
Seen from the height of one of the surrounding hills, the city of Fez displays a marvelous homogeneity of forms, reminding one of a geode of crystals; it is only with difficulty that one can discern the contours of single houses. Its fundamental unity is the *huyut*, a long and rectangularly-shaped habitable room, whose average size is fairly constant. Several *huyut*

(plural of *huyut*), grouped around a central courtyard, make up the house, which can always be enlarged by adding new *huyut* or by juxtaposing several inner courtyards. There is the simple house, whose courtyard is generally surrounded by four *huyut*, and there is the *riyadh*, the enclosed garden that can be made of two *huyut* connected to each other by perimeter



walls. Around a large courtyard, the *huyut* will be relatively larger but their proportions will remain approximately the same.

Arabo-Islamic architecture always develops starting from a basic habitable unit or *corps de logis*, which is repeated at various scales of size depending upon the circumstances. Even palaces are made up of a more or less complex grouping of units and have often been expanded depending on successive landlords, each one adding several new rooms. With the exception of fortifications, this architecture never proceeds from great masses of structures, and nothing is more foreign to its genius than the European concept of buildings built in blocks and subdivided into multiple apartments. Herein lies the difference between a collectivism determining individual existences based on a preconceived whole, and a "personalism" operating in the framework of an adaptable collectivity.



Above, above left, and below: Drawing and plan of the ground and upper floors of a typical house in Fez



Much has been said about the egalitarian character of Muslim society, but it is too often forgotten that its apparent leveling hides the utmost internal differentiation. On the one hand, all men are equal before God, for all are but weak creatures or servants (*ibad*, plural of *ibid*), and in this sense the individual effaces himself in the collectivity; indeed, just as he effaces himself in the mass of those who pray, in the anonymity of the crafts, and in the uniformity of traditional dress, so too the individuality of each house or dwelling hides itself in the compact mass of city buildings. On the other hand, each man, by the fact that he is a responsible creature before God, is unique in his inner nature, and it is in this transcendent uniqueness that his liberty and dignity reside. In the same way each Muslim dwelling opens onto the sky, in its solitude.

values which are independent of whether rammed earth or concrete is used and which, in their essential motivation, are independent of "era" since they are enshrined in a spiritual perspective.

And let us not forget that there still exists in Fez what we would call a *genius loci*, or, more adequately, a *barakah* that will have the last word.



Above and opposite: Streets in the old city of Fez

Fez is not a museum-city: it is an intensely living organism, well fitted to the measure of man, but the shock of too abrupt a confrontation with the modern European world has disrupted it greatly. What is imperative now is to preserve the city's irreplaceable monuments and essential characteristics at the same time as realizing a measure of adaptation to present exigencies. Such adaptation necessarily involves modernization but, at the same time, it must be inspired not by European models but by what we might describe as the urbanism inherent in the ancient structure of the city. To attain this end, there will be many obstacles to overcome, not the least of which is the prejudice in certain circles against what is regarded as a "return to the Middle Ages."

Before "modernizing" the old Arab city by "Europeanizing" it at the same time, let us consider the human order its structure expressed. It may well be that this order bears values unknown to modern town-planning,



Praise for Burckhardt and His Previous Works

“[A] remarkable and striking profile of one of Islam’s sacred cities captured in lively prose and enchanting pictures in both color and black and white.”

—*Review of Middle East Studies*

“Titus Burckhardt makes the world view of a traditional Islamic society concretely apparent. One of the most profound depictions of lived Islam.”

—**Navid Kermani**, author of *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran*

“[Burckhardt] expounded with unsurpassed lucidity the principles of Islamic art and architecture. . . . [His] works on Morocco . . . are not only masterly expositions of the art of the country he loved so much, but also a study of the intellectual, religious, and social structures of the traditional Islamic world as they relate to art and architecture.”

—**Seyyed Hossein Nasr**, Professor Emeritus of Islamic Studies, George Washington University, author of *Islamic Art and Spirituality* and *Knowledge and the Sacred*

“Titus Burckhardt’s dedication of nearly six years of his life to the cause of Fez was in response to a debt of gratitude he felt to a country and a city which, during the decades of [the nineteen-] thirties and forties, had so amply nourished his spiritual development. . . . [His] works are distinguished by their quest for timeless values and . . . have themselves acquired a timeless quality.”

—**Stefano Bianca**, Director of the Historic Cities Support Program, and author of *Urban Form in the Arab World*

“[T]he sense of beauty . . . is indeed the ‘sixth sense’ which first attracted him to Morocco and later, in the last part of his life, brought him as a physician called in for consultation, to the country and the city which has become as dear to him as his own country.”

—**Jean-Louis Michon**, former Chief Technical Advisor to the Moroccan government on UNESCO/UNDP projects, author of *Introduction to Traditional Islam*

“No one since the legendary A.K. Coomaraswamy has been able to demonstrate how entire civilizations define themselves through their art with the precision of Titus Burckhardt.”

—**Huston Smith**, Professor Emeritus, Syracuse University, author of *The World’s Religions* and *Why Religion Matters*

“Burckhardt has done more than any other single author in the past 50, if not 100, years to recover the essential principles of the purpose of the arts. His breadth and depth of scholarship is awe-inspiring. He will emerge in due time as one of the most important writers on the recovery of the true value of art in the twentieth century and even in the twenty-first century.”

—**Keith Critchlow**, Professor Emeritus at The Prince’s School of Traditional Arts, London, and author of *Order in Space* and *Islamic Patterns*

“Titus Burckhardt is an authority whose works are a constant source of inspiration.”

—**Martin Lings**, former Keeper of Oriental manuscripts at the British Library, and author of *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* and *Splendours of Qur’an Calligraphy and Illumination*



About the Author

Titus Burckhardt (1908-1984) was a leading member of the “Traditionalist” school of comparative religious thought and an expert on Islam, Islamic arts and crafts, and its spiritual dimension, Sufism. The great-nephew of the famous art-historian Jacob Burckhardt, he lived for many years in Fez, Morocco and was an integral part of the Moroccan government’s successful preservation of the ancient medina of Fez as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1981. In 1999 the Moroccan government sponsored an international symposium in Marrakesh in honor of Burckhardt’s distinguished work. His writings include *Fez: City of Islam* and *Art of Islam*.

About the Editors

Jean-Louis Michon (1924-2013) was a “Traditionalist” writer, editor, translator, Arabist, and artistic consultant who specialized in Islam in North Africa, Islamic art, and Sufism. From 1972-1980 Michon was Chief Technical Adviser to a series of joint programs by UNESCO, the UN Development Program, and the Moroccan government aimed at the preservation of traditional arts and crafts. He is the author of *Autobiography (Fahrasa) of a Moroccan Sufi* and *Introduction to Traditional Islam, Illustrated*.

Joseph A. Fitzgerald studied Comparative Religion at Indiana University, where he also earned a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree. He is an award-winning editor whose previous publications include *The Essential Sri Anandamayi Ma* and *Spirit of the Indian Warrior*. He lives in Bloomington, Indiana.