

Architectural Science Review

Volume 43, Nr. 4, 2000

Cairo Architecture

4137

Kairo - Die Entwicklung des modernen Stadtzentrums im 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert (Cairo - The Development of the modern city centre in the 19th and early 20th century), by Ihab Morgan. Peter Lang, Postfach 227, CH-3000 Bern 15, 1999. 334pp., ill. pbk. Swiss Fr. 78.00.

The author was born in Cairo, and he studied architecture there and in Zurich. His book starts with Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, during which the French spent 3 years in Cairo. Napoleon brought not merely an army, but 167 archeologists, architects and engineers, and the architectural knowledge of the West. Their effect on the architecture of Cairo was almost instant.

All the French professionals were under the terms of the armistice with Nelson repatriated with the French expeditionary force; but some of the architects soon returned at the invitation of Egyptian clients, and despite the British occupation the French influence is marked in the Cairo buildings of the 19th century.

This book describes all the major public and commercial buildings in detail, and where there were public competitions Morgan cites not merely the winner but also the short-listed architects and the essence of their entry. There are more than two hundred photographs and about one hundred maps, so that even a reader with only a slight familiarity with Cairo should be able to follow the description of the buildings and of the intervening streets and squares.

Cairo has had a technical university since 1820 and an architecture school since 1866, which compares quite favourably with many European countries (and with Australia). However, most of the major 19th-century buildings were designed by European architects.

This book has copious footnotes, which contain interesting information, such as the history of the Egyptian and foreign postal services and biographies of architects (and their clients) who have played a prominent part in the development of the cityscape.

Two short concluding chapters deal with the recent history and the present time. In the second half of the 20th century Cairo grew into a megacity. It now has a population of 13 million, the biggest in Africa and the Middle East. The infrastructure, which was of European standard in the early 20th century, could not cope with this huge influx.