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Urbanization in Developing Countries

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Preface

In his book *The Road to Oxiana* Robert Byron notes as his first impression of Damascus: 'Here is the East in its pristine confusion.' Anyone looking at the field of urbanization in the Middle East might well say the same. There are a number of excellent studies on the Middle Eastern city, mostly collections of scholarly essays but none, I think, attempts to provide a study of the subject from one viewpoint. This I have tried to do in the present work, writing primarily for undergraduates studying social change. In so wide ranging a topic, however, there are inevitable problems of organization, selection and definition.

Foremost among the problems of definition are the terms 'Middle East' and 'urbanization'. The territories grouped here under the title 'Middle East' include Libya, Egypt, the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, Israel, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey and Iran. The grouping dates only from the Second World War when a single military province stretched from Iran to Tripolitania. As with most regional definitions it is easy to agree on the core area – the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant and Mesopotamia – but it is open to dispute which of the peripheral countries of the region should be included and which excluded. I have included Turkey, Iran, Egypt and Libya because of their intimate geographical links with the core area but I have excluded the rest of North Africa. A distinction between the Middle East and North Africa is increasingly hard to justify, since they have so much in common, but limitations of space preclude consideration of North Africa here; similarly Sudan, which is likely to be treated in a separate volume in the present series. The term 'urbanization' has been used in several ways: urbanization has been described by some authors as an increase in the proportion of a nation's population in urban areas, while an increase in the population of towns, whether faster or slower than the countryside, is called urban growth; others have described the process of an increase in the size of urban settlements as 'urbanization'. In the present work neither of these two definitions will be adopted, since the concern here is both with the demographic event of where people live, and with the social processes involved whereby people acquire material and non-material elements of culture, behaviour patterns and ideas that originate from or are distinctive of the city. To avoid ambiguity, the term 'physical urbanization' will be used to discuss where people live, and 'social urbanization' when questions of social process are involved. I take an 'urban area' to be a settlement with more than 5 000 inhabitants, following the United Nations definition. As we shall see, one of the characteristic features of the Middle East is that there are strong traditions of urbanism, that is traditions

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of living in towns, as opposed to social urbanization. The social and environmental background to urbanism will therefore be discussed in the first chapter.

To cover so complex a field presents also problems of selection and interpretation. Statistical material on the region is far from comprehensive even now; it is often unreliable and may lack comparability over time and between countries. Published information is available from an extraordinary variety of sources, drawing on work in numerous disciplines, ranging from, say, applied micro-meteorology to social history, each with its own methods, its own assumptions, its own view of the questions one should ask.

What this volume does is to describe how the life of the traditional Middle Eastern city has been transformed by modern physical and social urbanization; in doing so it examines whether the urban ethos developing there is something peculiar to the region, and if that is the case, of what social values, traditional and modern, it is composed. I took as my starting point the idea that urban development is growing from common origins throughout the region towards essentially similar ends, but that one should not lose sight of differences in the social structure of contrasting cities. Accordingly, I included numerous case studies as examples of variations on the general process. But in the course of writing it became apparent that for all the present similarities from one country to another, future, planned urban development may be moving on divergent rather than parallel lines. Added to this familiar difficulty of avoiding on one side too much generality, while on the other the temptation to dwell on the particular, there is a problem in discussing certain social institutions, notably the family and voluntary associations, when there is little material published on them. This, I must confess, may be the result of too heavy a reliance on works published in English. Of these and other shortcomings I am aware, and I trust I will be told of more.

If these were some of the difficulties the task of writing the book was made a great deal easier by generous assistance and helpful comment from many quarters; without them the book could not have been finished. I wish to acknowledge my debt to Kenneth Little, the editor, for a great deal of help given on the broad scope of the book as well as in many painstaking details. Gerald Blake and Brian Beeley read and commented on parts of the manuscript; B.T. Costello read the whole text. Since my days as an undergraduate I have benefited from the fund of knowledge and interest in the Middle East at the University of Durham Department of Geography, and the University of Durham Institute of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies. I owe much also to my wife Margaret for her forbearance while the book was a-writing.

The book is dedicated, in gratitude, to my parents.

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