

The Resurrection of the Ḥijāz Railroad Line

Introduction

Trans-Jordan has always been an important connection between Syria and al-Ḥijāz. Prior to Islam, trade caravans used to travel back and forth between the Arabian Peninsula and the Eastern Mediterranean. After Islam millions of pilgrims to Makka embarked on the same journey and re-confirmed the existence of the Royal Sacred Path through their sacred mission to the holy land of al-Ḥijāz.

The character of this sacred path was shaped by religious, political and architectural events, the most recent of which was the construction of the Ḥijāz railroad line at the turn of the century. It was a continuation of other railroad lines that commenced from Istanbul and connected Damascus with al-Madina and Makka. Beside its political and religious importance, the Ḥijāz railroad line represented the beginnings of the modern history of Jordan, when Trans-Jordan underwent dramatic changes that introduced it to the world as a defined region with a unique architectural heritage.

In Jordan, only sites dating earlier than the year AD 1700 are protected by the Antiquities Law. This has led, unintentionally, to the neglect of the modern architectural heritage that flourished during the last one hundred and fifty years or so. Even though part of that heritage might not be considered historic according to government laws, the preservation and rehabilitation of such a heritage is important for the future generations in Jordan. These monuments and sites, if preserved, will stand as a living proof to Jordan's existence and way of life during that critical period.

The Ḥijāz railroad line stands out starkly against the desert landscapes of Syria and Jordan as a reminder of the Muslim Ottoman period. The construction of the railroad was a symbol of resistance to European control and was one of the most complex administrative and engineering tasks undertaken by a non-Western government — the Ottoman Empire — in the 19th century. The stations of the line show that regional traditional architecture does not take the form of domestic architecture

only, but that the public sector of Jordanian regional architecture is just as significant, and deserves the attention of concerned parties. This paper will shed some light on the historic, religious and political aspects of the Ḥijāz railroad line, among which are the notion of the sacred path, and the notion of the line as a cultural conveyer of ideas, tradition and architecture. It will also demonstrate how one of these stations — the Ḥijāz railroad station at al-Maḥaṭṭa in 'Ammān — could be adapted and brought back to life through a comprehensive rehabilitation scheme and advocacy plan. The adaptive-reuse of the station at 'Ammān will be approached as an issue of contemporary intervention in a built-up environment, in order to achieve continuity in time and preserve the existing context.

The issue of reviving the Ḥijāz railroad line and stations, not only for the transportation of pilgrims but also for economic and commercial purposes, is a vital and crucial solution to a more progressive and upgraded region. Responsibility for such revival does not lie only with architects, historians and conservators. It is a responsibility shared by all citizens and agencies in all domains of life.

The Ottoman Empire in the 19th Century

The deterioration of the Islamic Ottoman Empire started a long time before its formal collapse after World War I. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Ottomans could not keep up with a booming and progressive Europe after the Industrial Revolution. This led to the colonisation of Islamic territories by Britain, France and Russia. The Ottomans saw Germany as the best ally to get rid of the British and the French, so they sided with Germany in World War I. After the War Britain and France took over the East Mediterranean region — Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan — and they occupied Istanbul.

During that period of rapid change and catastrophes, lived a prominent figure to whom history has not done justice — the Ottoman Sultan, Abdulhamid II, who ruled between 1876 and 1909. He tried to stop the deteriora-

tion of the Empire, but unfortunately he failed, especially after the revolution of 1908 and the coming to power of the Committee of Union and Progress (C.U.P). The Committee's main aim was to destroy both the Islamic Empire and Abdulhamid II, claiming that progress could be achieved by separating religion from state. Another figure who came on the political scene later was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who was supported by France, Britain, Russia and several other European nations. In 1919, he announced the independence of the modern state of Turkey. In 1922 Atatürk declared the end of the Islamic caliphate and established the secular state that advocated a complete separation between religion and state affairs.

Sultan Abdulhamid saw in the erection of the Hıjāz Railroad, which he incorporated in 1900, a way of upgrading the Eastern Mediterranean. He considered it a Muslim project, not only transporting pilgrims from the northern parts of the Islamic World to the holy land, but also reinforcing Muslim unity and economic growth by connecting all the regions. The French and the British opposed the construction of the railroad line and did their best to stop it.

Throughout the 19th century, the territory east of the Jordan river and south of the Hauran was sparsely populated, inhabited chiefly by semi-sedentary and nomadic Bedouins. They were dependent for their income upon irregular agriculture, animal husbandry and the pilgrimage. Ottoman authority among them was purely nominal. After the Russo-Ottoman war of 1876, refugees from the Circassians founded a number of villages and the town of Amman, which was to become later on the capital of Jordan (Ochsenwald 1980: 23).

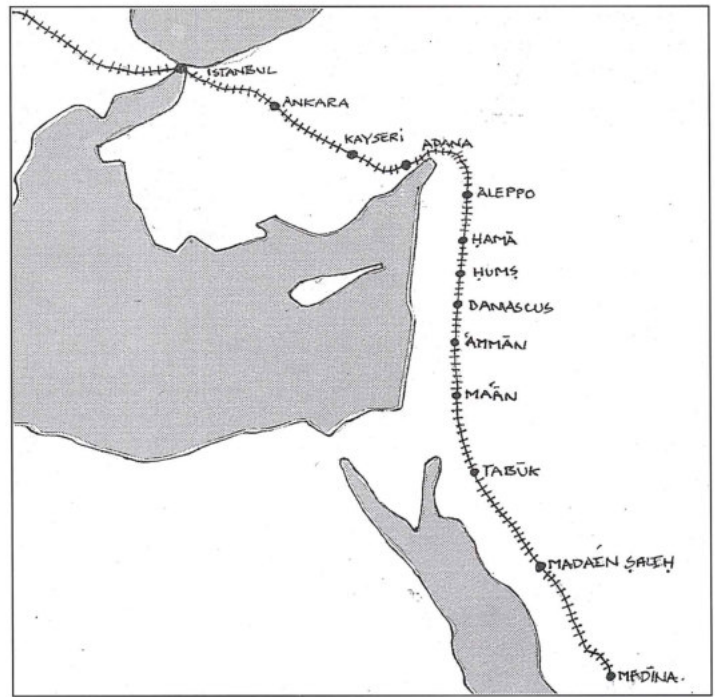
Research concerning the Hıjāz Railroad, as with other aspects of late Ottoman history, is faced with numerous difficulties, mainly because written documentation concerning the Hıjāz Railroad have been less lasting than its rails, freight cars and stations. In general the sources for Ottoman and Arab institutional history are less abundant and more difficult to find than those dealing with more dramatic military history.

The Sacred Path: From Istanbul to Makka

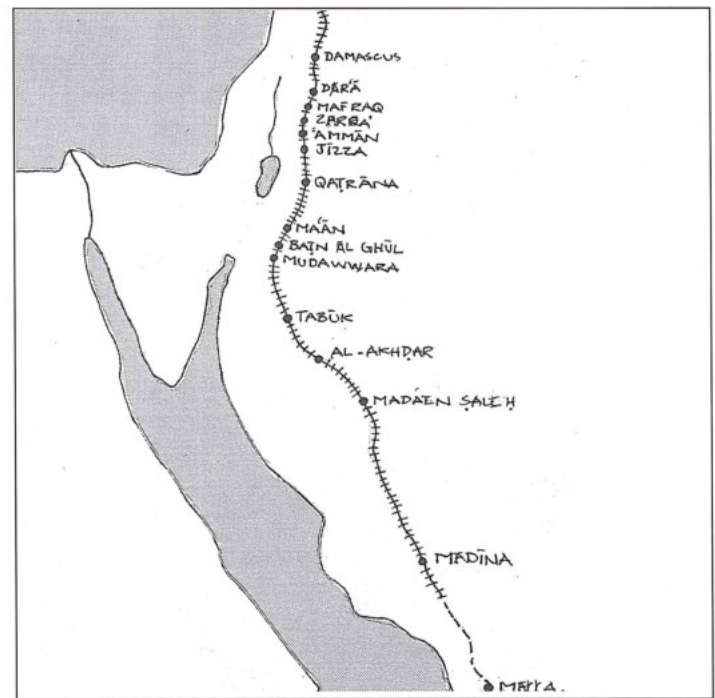
The concept of the Sacred Path connecting or leading to various religious magnets is an ancient one. The Sacred Path has always had an impact on architecture, urbanization and techniques of transportation.

From Istanbul to Damascus

The route of the railroad line from Istanbul to Makka was divided into two main parts. The first part, called the Taurus Express, connects Istanbul with Damascus via Ankara, Kayseri, Adana, Aleppo, Ḥamā and Ḥumş (FIG. 1). The second part, the Hıjāz Railroad line, connects Da-



1. The Sacred Path from Istanbul to Makka.



2. The Hıjāz Railroad Line, from Damascus to al-Madina.

mascus with al-Madina (FIG. 2), and will be discussed in length below.

Most of the line between Istanbul and Damascus was already laid out by foreign railroads with the collaboration of the Ottoman Empire. By 1900, a number of lines had been built or planned by Germany and France. In the north, the German-dominated Baghdad railroad connected Berlin with

Baghdad via Istanbul, Aleppo and Mossoul. That was an appropriate step to foster the alliance between Germany and the Ottoman Empire. The central area of Syria was served by a French-owned company, the Damas, Hama et Prolongements (D.H.P), which reached Damascus and had a connection with Beirut. (Ochsenwald 1980: 45).

From Damascus to al-Madīna and Makka: The HĪjāz Railroad Line

The Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II did his best to bring the HĪjāz Railroad into existence, taking into consideration the millions of pilgrims going to Makka every year. He was aware of the project's religious and political impact at the same time. Work started from Damascus in September, 1900. The line reached Dar'ā and then 'Ammān in 1903. From 'Ammān, construction continued south, reaching Ma'ān in September, 1904. The line reached al-Mudawwara in 1906. The first train to reach al-Madīna was on 22 August, 1908 (TABLE 1).

Table 1. Stages of construction of the HĪjāz Railroad Line.

Date	Place	Distance in kilometres
1/10/1901	Muzayrib to Dar'ā	14
1/10/1902	Dar'ā to az-Zarqā'	80
1/10/1903	Damascus to Dar'ā	123
1/10/1903	az-Zarqā' to 'Ammān and al-Qaṭrāna	124
14/10/1904	Ḥayfā to Baysān	59
27/5/1904	Baysān to Jordan Bridge	17
1/10/1904	al-Qaṭrāna to Ma'ān	132
1/10/1904	Ma'ān to al-Mudawwara	113
15/11/1904	Jordan Bridge to Muzayrib	73
1/10/1906	al-Mudawwara to Tabūk	120
1/10/1907	Tabūk to al-'Ulā	287
22/8/1908	al-'Ulā to al-Madīna	323
Total:		1465

The distance from Damascus to al-Madīna was about 1320 km. The HĪjāz Railroad Line never reached Makka as intended, even though all survey work was already done for that task. There were several reasons why: 1) the revolution in 1908 in Istanbul that led to the overthrow of Abdulhamid II; 2) the opposition of the Bedouins to the line because they used to live off guiding the caravans going to Makka; and 3) the aggressive attitude of Great Britain. The British saw in the railroad line a threat to their interests in the region. They bombed parts of the railroad with the help of Lawrence of Arabia, who collaborated with the Bedouins and made numerous raids on construction camps and different train stations. TABLE 2 shows the principal stations of the HĪjāz Railroad in

1914.

The major problems for workers resulted from the weather and absence from families. Health problems developed from the extreme variations between heat and cold, lack of water and especially recurring attacks of communicable diseases. Attacks of scurvy and dysentery were followed by typhoid and in 1902-3 by a devastating attack of cholera. Between Dera and Amman, at least four hundred workers died from cholera; many fled the area. Health conditions for workers were improved only in 1907, when doctors and pharmacists were sent from the Fifth army and several hospitals were opened. Separation from wives and families involved all but a few engineers and administrators who were able to afford housing accommodation near the railroad. (Karpāt 1985: 17).

Some other problems involved raids on the railroad by the Bedouin tribes, but Circassians and Ḥawrānī Arabs in maintenance crews along with the troops doing

Table 2. Principle stations of the Hijaz Railroad in 1914.

Name of station	Distance from Damascus (km)
Damascus	0
Kiswah	21
Dayr 'Ali	31
Masjid	50
Jibāb	63
Khabab	69
Muḥajjah	78
Shaḡra	85
Izra'	91
Dar'ā	123
Naṣīb	136
al-Mafraq	162
as-Samra	185
az-Zarqā'	203
'Ammān	222
al-Jiza	260
al-Qaṭrāna	326
Ma'ān	459
Ghadīr al-Ḥajj	475
Baṭn al-Ghūl	520
al-Mudawwara	572
Tabūk	692
al-Akhḡar	760
al-Mu'azzam	822
ad-Dār al-Ḥamrā	880
Madā'in Ṣāliḡ	955
al-'Ulā	980
Hadiyya	1133
al-Madīna	1302

construction work, provided security against raids. Topography presented fewer problems than did the climate. Most of the track was built on flat or slightly rolling terrain. The tracks covered 210 kilometres of plains, 54 of steep hills, and 1164 of slightly hilly areas.

After World War II, efforts were made to re-open the Hijāz Railroad Line. In 1947, 1953, 1954, 1955 and 1981, several meetings were held between the governments of Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Unfortunately none of these meetings resulted in a firm decision to use the line again. Since then, there has been many demands asking for the resurrection of the line, to be used on both national and regional levels.

During the second half of the 20th century, the Middle East went through many political and geographical changes that resulted in several Western-dependent societies. Currently, beside the desperate need for political stability in the region, there is a growing need for the re-evaluation of the economic infrastructure, with the hope of more cooperation between different poles. The revival of the Hijāz Railroad Line could be a perfect example of organizational cooperation in the Middle East. The project's contribution to regional economic growth in transportation, trade, accessibility and political unity is of great and sensitive value. It could set the first step to a more upgraded region.

Typology of Train Stations along the Hijāz Railroad Line

The term "Islamic Architecture" is often misused, because of its broad and general meanings. Islamic culture and architectural style had remarkable impacts on the Islamic World. At times these impacts were genuine in their form and meaning. There were times when these impacts blended and interacted with what was already there, to produce ultimately a "regional architecture" with Islamic influences.

The architectural style in the Eastern Mediterranean went through many periods of change: ancient, classical Greek and Roman, Byzantine and Islamic. The final product that we see in the 20th century is the result of all these periods. It is noticeable that for the last two centuries, Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon were influenced by Ottoman Architecture. This style was disseminated gradually from north to south. The following study of train stations in Asia Minor, Syria and Jordan shows how this dissemination was carried through. Geographic proximity, strong social relations and similar climatic conditions were the foundations for such a dissemination.

Alongside the Hijāz Railroad Line, stations can be categorized into two main types. The first "terminus" type is found in major urban centres, such as Istanbul and Damascus (FIG. 3) where the tracks enter the city

and end at the station itself, giving a sensation of terminating a journey and arriving at one's destination. The terminus stations tend to be very grand and represent the architectural style that was popular at the time.

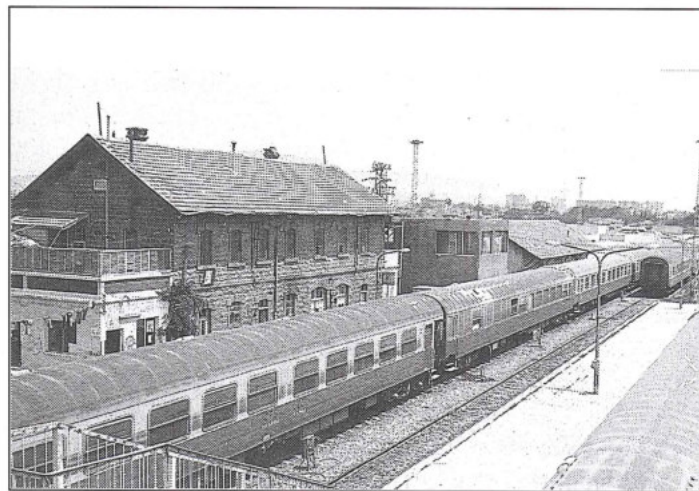
The second "rural" type is found in towns and villages. From visits to different locations, it can be noticed that in the case of the rural type, the tracks tend to run parallel to the stations with platforms that run also parallel to the configuration of different buildings forming the station. The station is a stop along the way and the town is usually not a major destination. This type is found in places like Aleppo, Qadam (FIG. 4), Dar'ā, az-Zarqā', 'Ammān (FIG. 5), al-Qaṭrāna (FIG. 6), Ma'an and many other places.

The "Terminus" Type

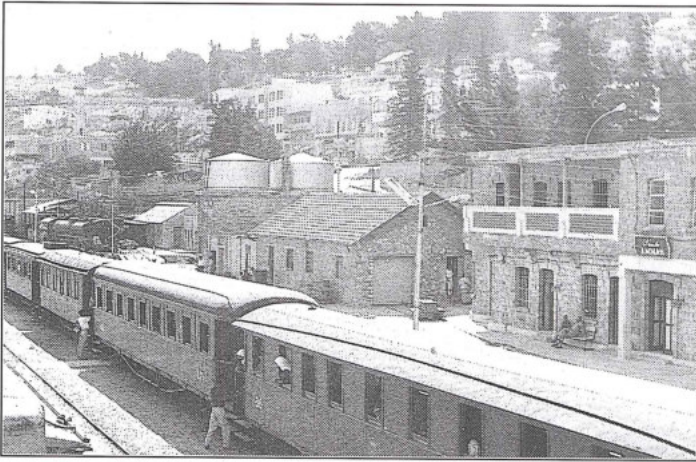
One of the few examples that fully represents this type on the Hijāz Railroad Line is the Hijāz Railroad station in the centre of downtown Damascus. This station was built after the Qadam station in the outskirts of Damascus. The reason for building this station in the middle of the downtown area was to attract and encourage local trade



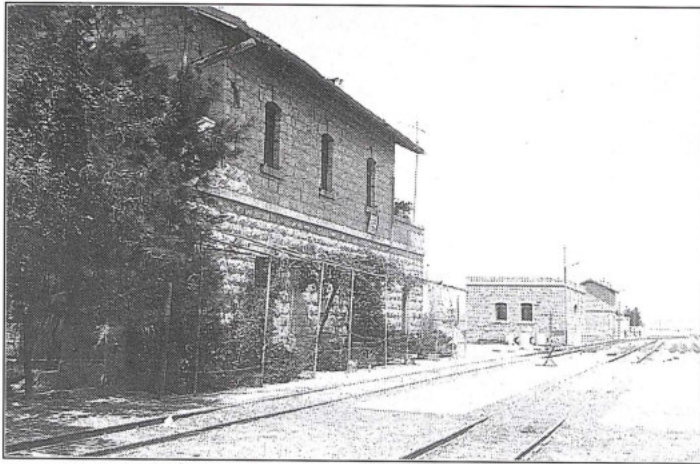
3. Al-Hijaz station, Damascus, 1990.



4. Qadam station, suburb of Damascus, 1990.



5. 'Ammān station, 1990.



6. Al-Qatrāna station, 1990.

to use the train and make it as accessible as possible. The station is famous for its interior wood work, proof of skilled Syrian craftsmanship.

The "Rural" Type

The other type of train station exists in small towns and villages, and rural areas. There are dozens of rural stations between Istanbul and Makka. The stations are usually built parallel to the tracks, with simple cubic forms, and either flat or pitched roofs — an influence from Ottoman Turkish architecture. Most of these stations are identical or very similar to each other, the same design was used more than once as a prototype in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Qadam and 'Ammān stations are examples of rural stations.

Qadam Station (FIG. 4): The station is located outside Damascus, on a historical and religious site. The Prophet Muḥammad used to head the caravans going north from Makka, and the place called Qadam — meaning the foot — is thought to have been where the Prophet dismounted from his camel. It is the furthest point north from Makka

that the Prophet visited during his life. The Qadam station, rather than the HĪjāz station in the centre of Damascus, is the one currently in use for passenger service into Damascus, serving the lines coming from Aleppo and 'Ammān.

'Ammān Station (FIG. 5): The HĪjāz Railroad Line reached 'Ammān in 1903. At that time when the station was built, 'Ammān was a small town serving a modest population, and the station was built with such a capacity in mind. The main station building was built parallel to the tracks, and several houses were also erected to house the people who worked at the station.

The Preservation and the Rehabilitation of the HĪjāz Train Station at 'Ammān

The HĪjāz Railroad station in 'Ammān occupies an important part of the city, which was a very busy centre in the early 1920s up to the 1930s. The station is also close to the old airport. Three major factors contributed to the deterioration of that part of 'Ammān in general and that specific site in particular: 1) the shift of the city's urban centre to the new downtown area and then to suburbs away from the old part; 2) the construction of the new Queen Alia International Airport 40km south of 'Ammān; and 3) the unpopularity of the train as a medium of transportation, now replaced by cars and buses. Besides, the line does not connect as many countries as it used to in the past. The station at 'Ammān still functions for commercial goods and weekly trips to Damascus and other touristic areas.

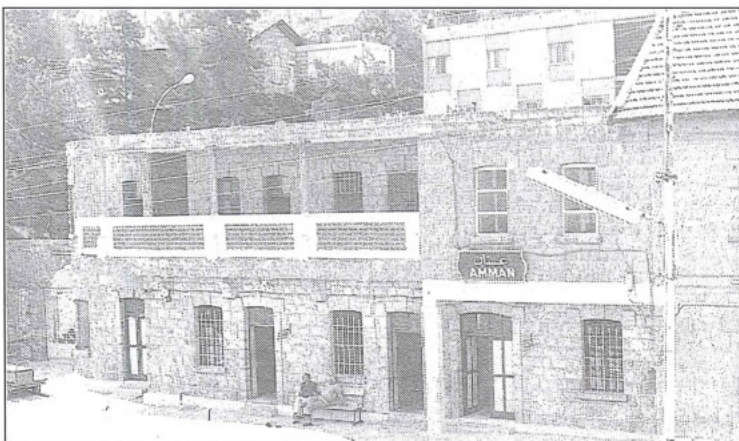
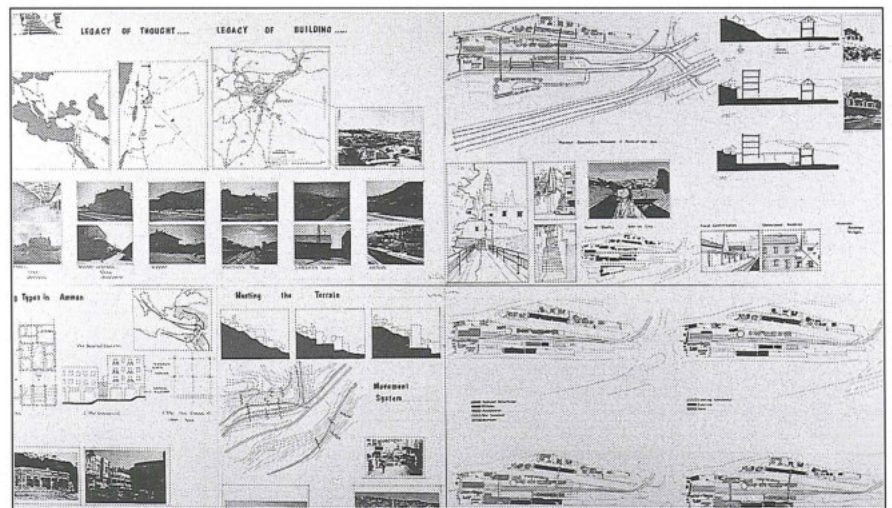
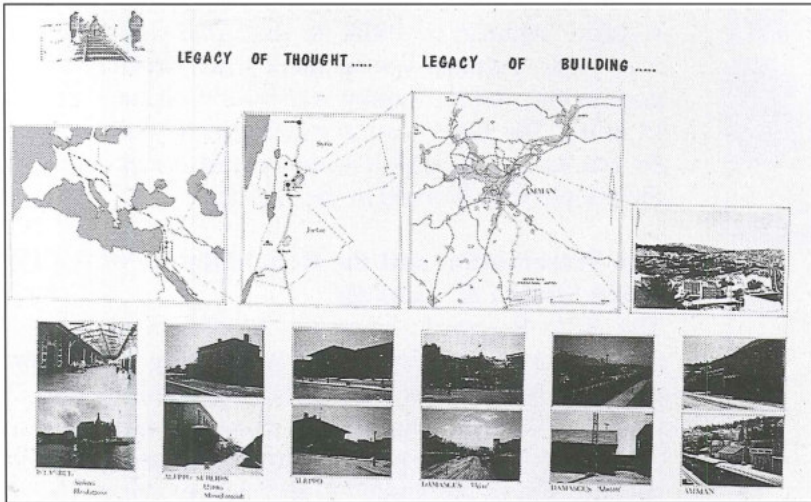
The resurrection of the HĪjāz Railroad Line in general and the preservation and rehabilitation of the station at 'Ammān in particular are the foundations for broader political and architectural objectives. Two main objectives can be easily identified: 1) on a political level, salvaging the concept of a unified Muslim nation, through an architectural proposal that advocates the revival of the HĪjāz Railroad Line and corresponding stations; and 2) on an architectural level, preserving and rehabilitating one of these train stations at 'Ammān within its existing context and surroundings. Discussing the architectural objects in depth leads to several essential points that the design project took into consideration:

- 1) The issue of contemporary intervention in a built-up environment.
- 2) The meanings and messages of place, formed by the character of a local region or a particular location.
- 3) Implementation of the movement system by erecting physical connections between the different parts of the site, and establishing other kinds of physical connections with the surrounding neighbourhoods, thus attracting people either to or through the site even if they do not want to use the train station.

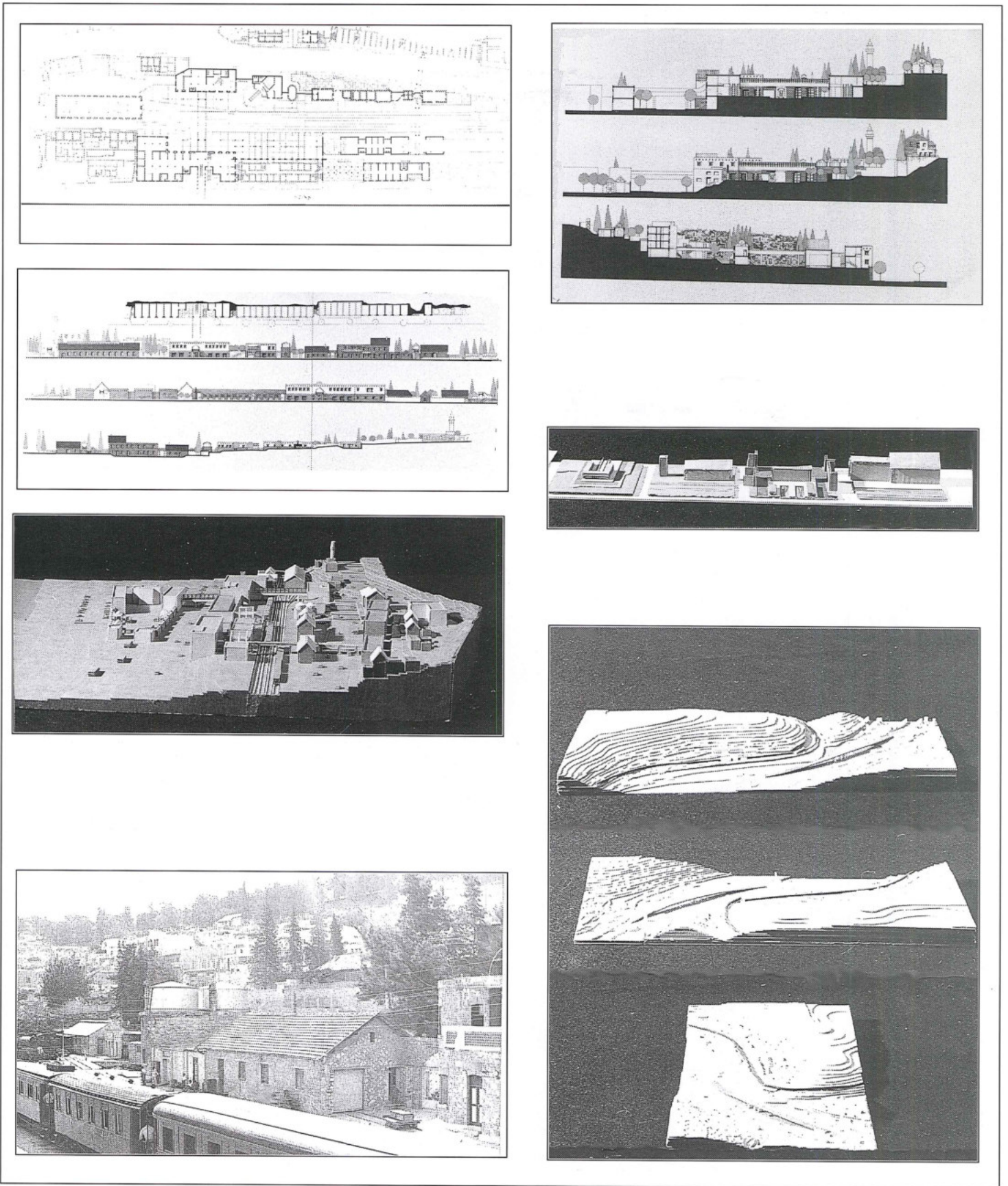
For more details, refer to FIGS. 7, 8, and 9 that il-

illustrate the architectural drawings and the proposed scheme for the rehabilitation of the station and its immediate surroundings. In brief, the proposal advocates the reuse of the old station to serve as a railroad-archive museum, and the construction of a new terminal and ad-

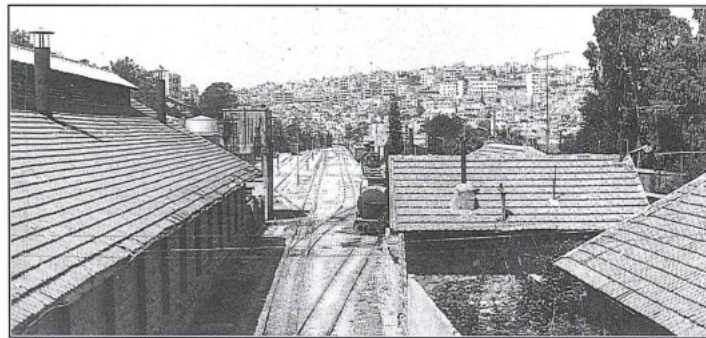
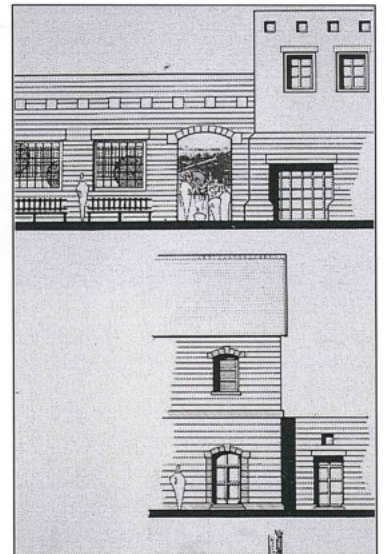
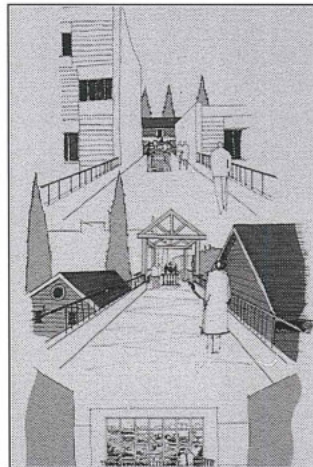
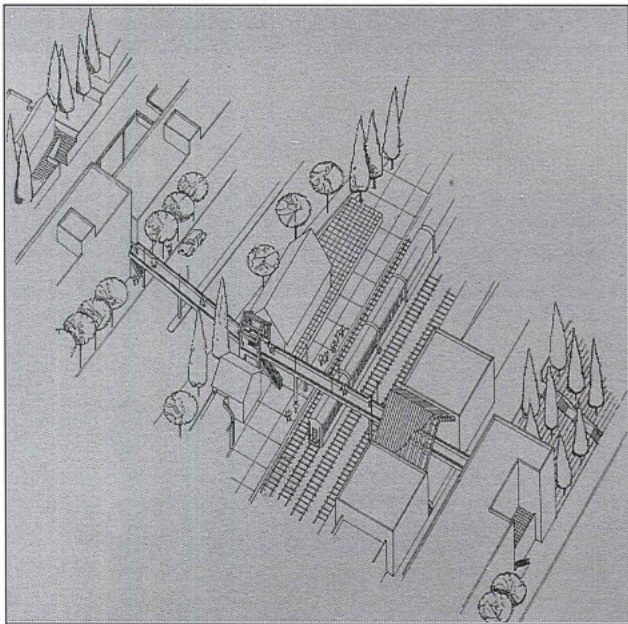
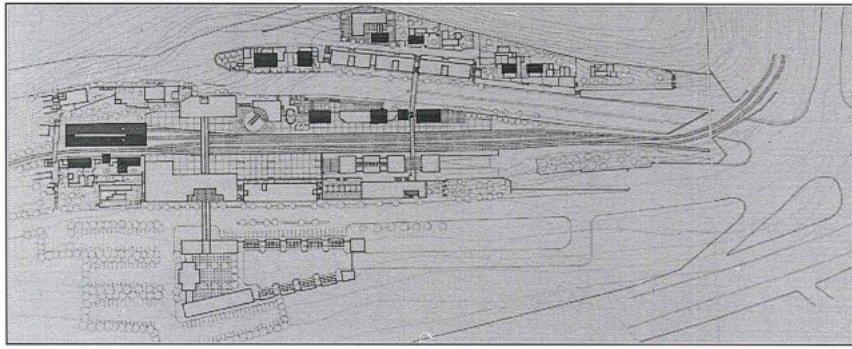
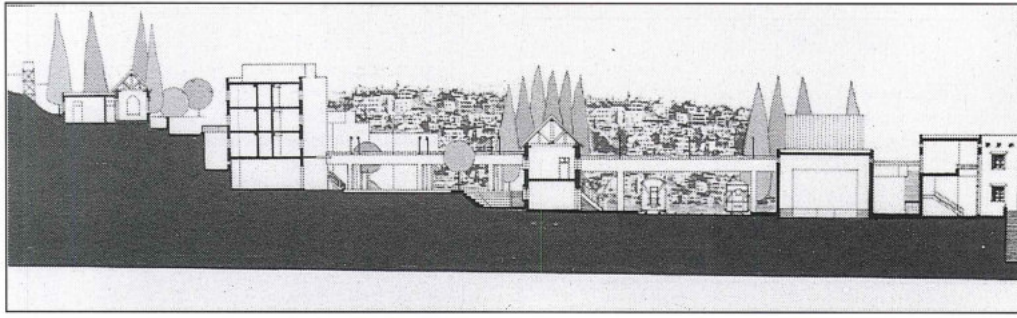
ditional freight service facilities. The adaptive-reuse of the station at 'Ammān is approached as an issue of contemporary intervention in a built-up environment, in order to achieve a continuity in time and preserve the existing context.



7. Rehabilitation Project, 'Ammān station. Journey and site analysis.



8. Rehabilitation project, 'Ammān station. Plan, elevations and model.



9. Rehabilitation project, 'Ammān station. Sections and details.

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