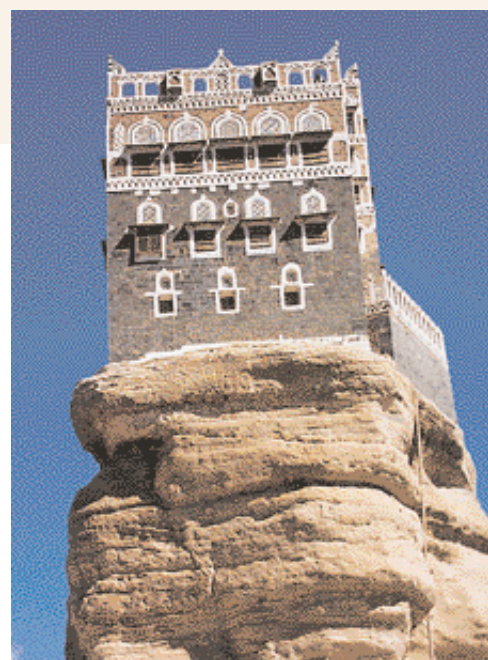


Dar El Hajar:

A Bewitching Building

"Dar El Hajar" is a historic building standing proud in the heart of Wadi Dhahr, some 14 km (half an hour's drive) from the capital Sana'a. If one looks from Sana'a towards the north-west, one is required to contemplate each corner of this "house" with so many exotic and astonishing features.

> By: Sana'a- Khalid Adhababi



The fortress stands in the Rocky Mountains and, throughout history, played an important role in the politics of the country. Its location on a rock face shows the ingenuity of Yemeni architecture which is admired all over the world.

Its name, "Dhar" or fortress, was derived from the granite rock on which it was built. While no one disagrees with this there are many versions of the history of the fortress. Some claim that its construction dates back to the pre-Islamic period. Others believe it was founded during the reign of the Turks in Yemen. Its construction is also dated from the 11th century Hegira.

It is more plausible that it was founded at the end of the 12th century Hegira, by Ali Ben Salah El Omary, a knowledgeable man of science and letters with multiple gifts. He was distinguished by his knowledge of architecture

and Imam El Mansour put him in charge of his buildings and the construction of many houses. But Dar El Hajar was his greatest achievement.

Contents of the palace

There are three main stages in the construction of the palace. It was almost totally destroyed by the rain and Imam Abdullah El Mansour rebuilt it with black stones which can still be seen today. El Mansour lived in the palace until he died.

Imam Al Nasser, subsequently took up residence in the Dhar and made considerable improvements. Other improvements included the hall added by Imam Yahya Ben Mohamed Ben Hammoud-eddine. On the northern side of the palace, there is a circular basin like the ones found in old Sana'a.

Dar El Hajar has only one entry by the north

side with long stone staircases. It includes 35 rooms: offices and warehouses for clothing, cereals and other products. In the middle of this palace, one finds a staircase with beautiful architecture, rising towards the terrace.

There is also a well, currently closed, and a typical Yemeni kitchen. The southern side of the palace includes a balcony and many corridors with splendid columns and arcades.

In front of the palace, one finds, a true architectural jewel – a geometrically designed basin. If one visits this palace on Thursdays and Fridays one will see traditional Yemeni weddings. This area is also known for its fruit-bearing products, in particular grapes, apricots, quinces and pears.

Dar El Hajar has become a unique and significant tourist destination because of its skilful construction and magnificent natural surroundings. ■