Bayt Farhi and the Sephardic Palaces of Ottoman Damascus in the Late 18th and 19th Centuries

by Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis

DESCRIPTION:

One of the largest and most important palatial houses of late 18th- and early 19th-century Damascus belonged to the Farhi family, who served as financial administrators to successive Ottoman governors in Damascus and Acre. The conversion of Bayt Farhi to a hotel provided a unique opportunity to make a detailed examination of its architecture, which is comparable to those of affluent Christians and Muslims, and decorated with high quality materials in the latest styles.

Bayt Farhi's outstanding architecture and decoration is documented and presented in this first comprehensive analysis of it and Damascus's other prominent Sephardic mansions Matkab 'Anbar, Bayt Dahdah, Bayt Stambouli, and Bayt Lisbona. The Hebrew poetic inscriptions in these residences reveal how the Farhis and other leading Sephardic families perceived themselves and how they presented themselves to their own community and other Damascenes. A history of the Farhis and the Jews of Damascus provides the context for these houses, along with the architectural development of the monumental Damascene courtyard house.

Lavishly illustrated with extensive color photographs, plans, and reconstruction drawings the book brings to life the home environment of the lost elite Sephardic community of Ottoman Damascus. It will be an essential resource for those studying the architecture, history, and culture of Syria and the Ottoman Empire. Co-published with Manar al-Athar, University of Oxford.

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