CHAPTER SIX

ARCHITECTURE OF THE AYYUBID PERIOD

THE CITADEL (1183-84)

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (1171-93), an Orthodox Sunni Muslim from Syria sent to rescue the Fatimids from the Crusaders, contributed to the development of Cairo on several levels. After repulsing the Crusaders and seizing power from the Fatimid ruler, he expanded the capital city to include all elements of the native and ruling population (al-Fuṣṭāṭ and al-Qāhirah), and dealt also with subversive Shi'a movements. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn is a hero in the Muslim world because of his victories against the Crusaders and the liberation of Jerusalem.

In Egypt, he unified the two capitals into one large complex that was to be encompassed by an enormous set of walls, thus abolishing the exclusive nature of Fatimid al-Qāhirah. To meet the Crusader threat, he added to the city's fortifications, founding the Citadel on the Muqâṭṭam hill to serve both as a fortress and residence of rulers and their garrisons.

The foundation of the Citadel, like all major architectural works, is associated with a popular story Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, having ordered that several pieces of meat be hung in various places in the Egyptian capital, found that the meat hung on the Muqâṭṭam hill remained fresh much longer than the rest, and this prompted him to choose this site as having the healthiest air. This is, of course, an anecdote, and later interpretation. The Citadel was built on top of a hill because Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn came via Syria, and it was traditional in Syria at the time to build hill fortifications. The Muqâṭṭam hill was also Cairo's only natural site for the fortifications required in medieval warfare.

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn assigned his vizier Badr al-Dīn Qarâqûsh to begin the works in 1183-84, according to an inscription slab over the main entrance, Bāb al-Mudarraj, but he did not live long enough to occupy the residence. A successor, al-Malik al-Kâmil, was the first to use the Citadel as a royal residence, in 1207-8, and from then until the nineteenth century, the Citadel was the residence of the rulers of Egypt.

The main function of the Citadel was of course to connect and fortify the city's walls, which Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn had ordered built to encompass all parts of the capital. Situated between al-Qāhirah and al-Fustâṭ, the Citadel formed a sort of joint between the northern and southern part of the walls. The Citadel was never besieged. It did, however, fulfill its residential role by housing the royal palace and its dependencies, just as the Fatimid's walled al-Qāhirah was exclusively the residence of the Caliph and his entourage.

The Citadel of Cairo is a gigantic complex of walls and towers to which all periods of Cairo's history have contributed. Its present configuration is in two parts, the earlier northern enclosure, and the southern part constructed primarily by the Mamluks.

THE NORTHERN ENCLOSURE

The northern part, an independent enclosure, was begun by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and completed by his Ayyubid successors, though later periods of history have also left their traces on its walls. This enclosure is an irregular polygon, whose walls and towers measure some 1,700 meters. Some towers are circular, built of dressed stone, others are rectangular and built of embossed stone. The differences of shape and type of stone cutting are Creswell's argument for attributing the round towers to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and the rectangular ones to his successor, al-Malik al-'Ādil. To build the Citadel, several small pyramids at Giza were demolished, and Crusader prisoners put to work on the construction.

Like the walls of Badr al-Jamâl, the walls and towers are built on three levels. The lower parts are buried today, and excavations are currently underway to expose them. Each tower is composed of several impressive halls large enough for several hundred soldiers. The function of each rectangular tower was to allow for the separate defense of each section of the fortress.

Originally, the northern enclosure had two main entrances. The one facing the city, Bāb al-Mudarraj, is today incorporated in the walls and gates of Muhammad 'Ali and is accessible only from within the enclosure, though the original ramp, cut in rock, still
leads up to the gate. The gate has its original foundation inscription naming Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn and his vizier Qarāqūsh. The vestibule of this gate has a painted blazon added later by Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad which is the earliest surviving painted blazon. Other late Mamluk inscriptions can also be seen there, commemorating later restoration works. The second gate, Bāb al-Jabal, also called Bāb al-Qarāfī because it overlooks the cemetery, is located on the same axis as Bāb al-Mudarraj, on the southeast side of the enclosure.

The architects of the Citadel produced some innovations. Unlike the earlier Fatimid walls of Badr al-Jamālī, the Citadel had bent entrances for better defense, and the arrow slits reached to the floor, giving archers more flexibility. There are also machicoulis, projecting structures in the walls above the entrance from which hot liquids could be poured on invaders. Military improvements in the architecture were the result of long campaigns against the Crusaders.
The Double Headed Eagle

On top of one of the walls of the Citadel facing west barely visible from below is an eagle carved in stone, which is popularly attributed to Salāḥ al-Dīn. This now headless bird, reported by travelers to have once had a double head, must originally have been located elsewhere, for its present location is atop a wall that was rebuilt several times. Casanova, the primary historian of the Citadel, notes that al-Malik al-Kāmil had a coin struck in his name with a double-headed eagle on one side, which might have been the sultan’s emblem, though Creswell believed, without indicating his reasons, that the eagle was of later date. The double-headed eagle is a common motif in Islamic art.

Al-Malik al-Kāmil was the first to dwell in the Citadel, and its first residential structures are therefore attributed to him, but very little is known of them and nothing has survived. He is reported to have built the royal stables, which of course were an important and integral part of the Citadel complex, due to the importance of cavalry in both Ayyubid and Mamluk armies. He also most likely introduced the homing pigeon post, in the tower called Burj al-Maṭār.

Fig. 18 The Citadel in the Mamluk period (after Casanova)
WATER SUPPLY

Elevated and remote from the Nile, the Citadel required special arrangements for the provision of water. Šālah al-Dīn built an aqueduct to raise water with the help of waterwheels from the Nile to the hill. The one we see today was built later and further north by Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and restored by Sultan al-Ghūrī. The large hexagonal building on the Nile cornice at Fum al-Khaliṣ once had on its top the waterwheels operated by oxen. The water went by slightly sloping channels to the next set of waterwheels and finally to the numerous cisterns of the Citadel, a total waterlift of more than one hundred meters. Šalāḥ al-Dīn also carved the famous ninety-meter deep well called Būr Yūṣuf (his full name was Šalāḥ al-Dīn Yūṣuf), an impressive achievement that always has astonished visitors. It was built in two levels, with waterwheels and a cistern midway and more waterwheels at the top. Baby oxen were taken down to work the waterwheels, remaining there until they died. The Citadel had a number of such wells, but this surviving one is most famous. There are remains of two other waterwheel complexes attached to the Citadel, one on the northeast side and the other on the southeast side with the name of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad carved on it.

THE SOUTHERN ENCLOSURE

The northern enclosure, built into solid rock, was the military section of the Citadel, where troops were garrisoned. The southern enclosure was partly erected upon landfills to give the royal inhabitants of the palace complex a view over the whole capital and beyond to the surrounding villages. Its architecture is usually described as extroverted, luxurious buildings overlooking the city, in contrast to the introverted nature of the military fortress.

The two enclosures were connected by a gate called Bāb al-Qulla, or Gate of the Tower, built by Sultan al-Zāhir Baybars. The site of this gate is the same as that where Muḥammad ʿAlī rebuilt it in the nineteenth century. Coming from the northern enclosure through this gate, we face the mosque of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, probably erected on the site of an older mosque. One can assume that the Citadel had a mosque dating to its earliest foundations. The mosque stands on an esplanade, to the south of which is now the mosque of Muḥammad ʿAlī, itself erected on the site of the former Great Hall, or al-Iwān al-Kabīr.

The Mamluk palaces within the Citadel did not survive, but we know they were located on the south and west sides, overlooking the horse market. This, along with the royal hippodrome for equestrian sports, parades and ceremonies such as prayers on feast days performed by the Sultan and his court, were all strategically located beneath the Citadel from its earliest days. No spoils from ancient pyramids were used in the southern buildings; stone was cut on the site and the depression that resulted had to be filled in with earth and was then turned into a green park, al-Hawsh, for royal entertainments. The Mamluk sultans contributed regularly to the buildings, embellishing and refining the palatial complex of the Citadel.

SHAJARAT AL-DURR (1250)

Shajarat al-Durr, the widow of the last Ayyubid sultan, al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb, was the first sultan of the Bahri Mamluk dynasty. Her first husband, al-Ṣāliḥ, did not stay long at the Citadel, but constructed a new citadel for himself and his troops on the Nile island of Rawda. The Nile was popularly called al-bahr; hence the name Bahri Mamluks. He did, however, add a hall at the Citadel which before it burned in 1285 was used as the sultan’s residence. Shajarat al-Durr built a hall at the Citadel called the “Hall of the Columns,” in the residential compound near the privat apartments. It was the harem’s main hall and remained for several centuries.
The sultana, a quite remarkable if briefly reigning queen, introduced a new musical ceremony at the Citadel. Flute players and drummers were conducted by an amir in ceremonial garb, holding a golden rod and performing acrobatic movements by torchlight to the rhythm of the music. Shajarat al-Durr was fond of ceremonies. The historic funerary procession carrying al-Ṣāliḥ’s body from his residence at Rawda to the mausoleum she built for him has been carefully recorded by historians.

Sultan al-Zahir Baybars (1260-77)

Al-Zahir Baybars reconstructed some of the walls of the Citadel and added new towers, among others the one at Bāb al-Qulla. He also erected a new palace overlooking the horse market, further evidence of the importance of the cavalry in Mamluk armies. A Palace of Justice, Dār al-Ṣadl, was built outside the Citadel on its northwest side, where he held audience and performed his judicial functions. A tower with carved lions, Baybars’ emblem, has recently been excavated at the Citadel.

Sultan Qalāwūn (1279-90)

Qalāwūn restored the Great Hall (al-Īwān al-Kabīr), whose founder is not identified, though it might have been al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ, in the southern enclosure. He also enlarged its functions to include those of al-Zahir’s Palace of Justice outside the walls, which was then abandoned. He is credited with the building of a large dome standing on columns of marble with gilded capitals. On the walls was a figurative map of the Mamluk empire with the names of its cities, forts, rivers, seas, and mountains. A dome at Bāb al-Qulla replaced the tower of al-Zahir Baybars between the two enclosures. Qalāwūn also added various palaces and living quarters for his officers and mamluks.

Al-Ashraf Khalīl (1299-93)

Al-Ashraf, son of Qalāwūn, built an elevated pavilion with a view of the city, Giza and the pyramids. Curiously, this pavilion had wall paintings of various amirs and their private guards, and a richly decorated dome on columns.

Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (1293-1294, 1298-1308, 1309-1341)

Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was the most prolific builder (also a great rebuilders) in Cairo’s history, and his contributions to the residential architecture of the Citadel were by far the most important. He was not only fond of architectural projects, but ruled long enough to realize many of his ambitions, practically rebuilding the entire southern enclosure.

He built a new royal mosque near the Iwān al-Kabīr, the ceremonial center of the residential complex. Al-Nāṣir often destroyed buildings and built his own on their sites, thus glorifying his own name and eclipsing those of his predecessors. His new palace survived until the beginning of the nineteenth century and was depicted by the French Expedition in the Description de l’Égypte. Although by that time abandoned and decayed, its remains still were evidence of its unparalleled grandeur. For the construction of the palace huge pharaonic granite columns were brought from Upper Egypt to support the dome—over forty red granite columns, according to the French consul in 1696. His mosque at the Citadel has such columns. A scholar of the Description found al-Nāṣir’s palace more impressive than both the mosques of Ibn Tūlūn and Sultan Hasan.

An esplanade, where the senior amirs sat before going on duty, separated the Great Hall from the other great palace nearby on the south, the Qaṣr al-Ablaq, named for its striped light-and-dark stone courses.

This palace was less ceremonial, and composed of two halls facing each other, the qa‘a plan that was used.

Pl 60 The Great Iwān of Sultan al-Nāṣir at the Citadel (Robert Hay)
in Mamluk and Ottoman residential palaces of Cairo. Between a huge dome covered with green tiles and supported by a number of columns, the larger northern iwān was oriented to the northwest breezes, facing the smaller southern iwān. Both had large windows with iron grills, overlooking the cemetery to the south and the whole city and its environs to the west and north. This palace has been recently excavated, together with some of the famous granite columns.

Al-Qāṣr al-Ablaq communicated with three other palaces, two built higher than the rest and reached by stairs. The palaces all had facades of striped yellow and black stone, and interior communications between the private apartments of the sultan and the harem. Inside, the palaces had marble dadoes of various colors while the floor was paved with imported white marble. Glass mosaics with mother of pearl and painting decorated the upper walls, as well as large gilded inscriptions. Some remains of these can be seen in the excavated parts. The gilded iron window grills were surmounted by other windows decorated with colored Cypriot glass. Foreign travelers mentioned wall paintings representing houses and trees, and private apartments roofed by domes. Today, a close look at the remains at Sultan Qalāwūn’s mausoleum gives us a taste of this vanished architectural fantasy.

All that has survived of the Mamluk palaces are a series of vast vaulted halls built on piers, in proportions recalling the pharaohs. The enormous projecting corbels facing the Citadel’s square make us wonder what great structures they supported.

The park in the private part of the complex called al-Hawsh was green with grass and trees. Horses, sheep, cattle, ducks and chickens were kept for the use of the harem. Each of the official wives of the sultan had her own apartment. A staircase led from the private apartments to the stables, and the sultan also had a passage from al-Qaṣr al-Ablaq, where he held audiences twice a week, to the Great Īwān.

Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad died before the completion of the palace called Duhaysha overlooking the park. It was completed by his son, al-Ṣāliḥ Iṣmā‘īl.

Sultan Hasan (1347-51; 1354-61)

Sultan Hasan, son of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, built the gigantic mosque facing the Citadel, to flatter royal eyes with its imposing dome and double minarets. He also built a domed palace called Baysarriyya, attached to the private apartments. Its walls were gilded and its height was eighty-eight cubits, or over fifty meters. It had a tower with a private apartment for the sultan, decorated with ivory and ebony, and its windows opened onto a garden.

As nothing of these residential structures has survived, an important, if not major, part of the Mamluks’ architectural achievements is difficult for us to imagine. Two interesting points come from these accounts: paintings and portraits decorated the walls, and private apartments had domes. Nothing similar in Cairo architecture has survived.

During the Mamluk period, the northern enclosure continued its important function, as the officers’ and armies’ quarters, and important officials and amirs had their residences in the Citadel. A prison set up in a cave was later abandoned because of the bad smells, and because al-Nāṣir Muḥammad preferred to keep the prisoners in the towers.

Beneath the Citadel, on the site of Baybars’ palace of Justice, al-Nāṣir established the ṭablakhāna, a place where the royal ceremonial orchestra performed at intervals throughout the day.

The Citadel is often described as a city in itself, lodging tens of thousands of people, with quarters and streets. It even had a Tatar quarter with a church until 1321. Several mosques and madrasas were located in the northern and southern enclosures, and there was also a great library. It burned in 1296. Remains of the original mint where coins were struck are still visible in the southern enclosure.

Sultan Qāytbāy (1468-96)

Sultan Qāytbāy, was as fond of construction as al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. He enjoyed a fairly long reign, during which he restored the Great Palace and other structures at the Hawsh Van Ghislée, visitor to the court of Sultan Qāytbāy in 1482/3, describes what he found at the Citadel:

Arriving at the palace, they were led through nine or ten galleries and halls, until they reached a lovely summer residence, built with beautifully cut stone and decorated with paintings in gold and blue and other rich colors. The residence looked from two sides through handsome grilled and gilded windows upon courtyards, gardens and orchards with all kinds of plants and fragrant fruit trees. There were many fountains, not natural ones, but artificial ones to water all the gardens. Finally, in the residence, they found the most sumptuous thing that can be imagined. The walls, like the floors, were covered with polished stones such as black, white and pink marble,
serpentine, porphyry, and other precious stones. The walls and hallways were decorated with moldings, knots, geometric shapes, and arabesques, as well as with mosaics and other things difficult to explain. In the middle of the residence is a rectangular basin knee-deep and three or four steps wide with fresh water and small fishes. The sultan can cool his hands and feet there whenever he likes! The floors of this place were covered with rich carpets and cushions, some covered with linen, others with silks and velvets, and others with golden draperies, or Indian leather of nice color and good smell. The sultan sat in this place on a cushion, his legs folded like a tailor, playing chess with one of his courtiers.

Another visitor, von Harff, described Sultan Qâytbây in the same year:

There sits the Sultan at a man’s height from the ground beneath a tent with exquisite hangings, on fine carpets, his feet tucked under him as tailors in our country sit working at their table.

Sultan al-Ghûrî (1501-16)

Qâytbây was not the last Mamluk sultan to embellish the Citadel Al-Ghûrî loved luxury, jewelry, rich clothes and good food. He ordered the renovation of the Royal Kitchen, the Harem, the Qaṣr and the Hippodrome in the last of which where he spent the major part of his time. There, belvederes and loggias surrounded a pool forty cubits long, which on occasions such as receptions of embassies or the Prophet’s Birthday was filled with roses. The pool received its water from an aqueduct repaired by the sultan, and its water flowed down to irrigate the hippodrome gardens. Trees with fragrant fruits, carrying cages of exotic singing birds as well as kiosks and sumptuous tents pitched within the gardens, provided shade. There was also a Hall of Justice which al-Ghûrî did not much use. A tower connected al-Ghûrî’s pleasance quarters with the Citadel through an elevated passage. The sultan would give banquets, with food served on Chinese porcelain, enjoying his last days, while Sultan Selim marched toward Syria and Egypt. The next sultan Ẓûmânîbây, threatened by the advancing Ottomans, fortified the walls of the Citadel — in vain!

The Ottoman Period (1517-1805)

Sultan Selim, despite the great receptions that honored his ambassadors at the Hippodrome of al-Ghûrî, conquered Egypt in 1517. From that date until modern times, Egypt was reduced to the status of a province paying tribute to the Ottoman Empire. It was no longer ruled by sultans, but by governors who changed every two years or so, sometimes more frequently. The Citadel of course lost its imperial splendor. Sultan Selim, conqueror of Egypt, took most of the Citadel’s marble to Istanbul, and adopted the whole system of ceremonies, including the running of the kitchens, to those of the Ottoman court, on the scuffle of a governorate.

The governors, or pashas, appointed from Istanbul did not use the Great Iwân of the Mamluks, and it was abandoned. They stayed in the private quarters of the palace and established the offices of notables and officers there. Al-Qaṣr al-Abîaq was used as a factory for weaving the cloth to cover the Ka‘ba in Mecca. The northern enclosure was used by the Janissary corps, and the western dependencies by the ʿAzab corps. Sulaymân Pasha built an elegant mosque, totally Turkish in style, in the northern part in 1528, and Amir Ahmad Kaṭkhûdâ built a mosque for the ʿAzab corps in 1697 on the site of a Mamluk mosque. A double circular gate, Bâb al-ʿAzab, facing the mosque of Sultan ʿHasan and imitating the architecture of Bâb al-Futûh, was built in 1754.

In the northeastern enclosure, the arsenal and ammunition stores were kept as well as workshops of carriage makers and other shops. There was also a large bath.

The large circular tower near the mosque of al-Nâṣîr Muḥammad was built by ʿIbrâhîm Pasha in 1520. He also built other towers and restored the city walls near the Citadel. The towers he built were crowned with domes covered with lead. During the Ottoman period, some additions were made in the southern enclosure, where the pashas resided. A Turkish visitor to Egypt, Evliyâ ʿCebî, who worked at the Citadel for several years, writes that from the towers the pasha could be kept under control in case he made any attempt to declare his independence.

Muḥammad ʿAlî (1805-1848)

Muḥammad ʿAlî rebuilt major parts of the western walls of the Citadel, including the gates on the city side. The original gate of ʿAbît al-Dîn was incorporated in a new gate and in the process became invisible from the outside. Several structures were added in both enclosures, including the Jawhara Palace, a Palace of Justice, and a new mint which can still be seen today. In fact, most of the secular buildings inside the Citadel today are the works of Muḥammad ʿAlî Muḥammad...
‘Ali himself did not reside at the Citadel, having built other palaces in the city, but the Citadel continued under his rule to be a center of government.

To many Egyptians, and visitors, the Qal’ā, or Citadel is associated with the imposing building with large domes flanked by a pair of very slender minarets, the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli. This purely Turkish building became a landmark of Cairo after Muhammad ʿAli pulled down the remains of the Great Iwān. That act and his massacre of the Mamluks inside the Citadel ended an important phase of Egyptian history and culture. Muhammad ʿAli’s mosque and other structures all belong to an alien style, inspired from Turkey and Europe. The art and architecture of the Mamluks that had prevailed until his reign began in 1805 had become a thing of the past.

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**THE MAUSOLEUM OF IMĀM SHĀFI‘Ī (1211)**

We have noted before that the Fatimids erected a number of memorial buildings to celebrate saints of the Prophet’s family from whom the Fatimid Caliphs claimed descent. The Ayyubid rulers, who worked systematically to abolish all traces of Shi‘ism in Egypt, destroyed the palaces of the Fatimid Caliphs, but they could not destroy the shrines, for they were sacred to all Muslims. They used the madrasas to consolidate Sunnism, and built in turn their shrine for Imām Shāfi‘ī, founder of one of the four rites of Islamic law. This mausoleum was larger than any earlier shrines, and it can be considered as symbolic of the reinstatement of Sunni Islam in Egypt.

Ṣalāh al-Dīn built a madrasa for the Shāfi‘ī rite in the cemetery near the tomb of Imām Shāfi‘ī, and also sponsored a magnificent wooden cenotaph, one of the great masterpieces of medieval Cairo woodwork. Al-Malik al-Kāmil, a later Ayyubid ruler, erected the dome over the grave of Imām Shāfi‘ī in 1211, at the southern extremity of the cemetery of al-Fuṣṭāṭ.

**THE EXTERIOR**

The mausoleum of Imām Shāfi‘ī has a square base whose inner width measures about fifteen meters. Though the base consists of massive stone walls, it supports only a wooden dome covered with a shell of lead. The exterior of the structure has retained much of its original appearance, though the shrine has been embellished and restored several times.

In addition to its great size, the building differs from Fatimid shrines in the profile of its dome, which curves immediately above the transitional zone. Fatimid domes begin with parallel walls and start to curve nearer the top. The transitional zone, instead of being octagonal and visible between the rectangular base and the dome, is hidden behind a second rectangular, receding story with cut-off corners. Thus from the outside, the building looks as if it were built on two levels; inside there is no such division. The upper level is decorated with keel-arched niches with fluted hoods, and includes elements of Andalusian-style stucco decoration in the treatment of the carved colonnettes and of the spaces between the niches. The upper part of the lower story is decorated with a band of interlaced geometric patterns similar to those used above Fatimid prayer niches, and to the one on the southwest minaret of the mosque of al-Hākim.

Atop the dome of Imām Shāfi‘ī is a copper boat which is said to have been filled in the past with grain for birds. The minaret of Ibn Ṭūlūn had a similar finial that has not survived. There is an Egyptian tradition of putting small models of boats in shrines, the most prominent example being the boat at the shrine of Abū-l-Hajjāj in Luxor which is taken in the annual procession on the saint’s birthday. This is obviously a pre-Islamic tradition that survived in Egyptian Islamic
Pl 61 The mausoleum of Imām Shāfi'ī
The shrine of Sidi Sāryā at the Citadel had a small boat until the mosque in which it is located was recently restored.

The Interior

The interior is more complex than the exterior, with various styles represented. The lower part of the walls with colored marble panels and the prayer niche at the corner correcting the improper orientation of the three original prayer niches must be attributed to Sultan Qāytbāy’s late-fifteenth-century restorations. The painting of the dome and its transitional zone was accomplished under Amir ʿAlī Bey al-Kabīr in the second half of the eighteenth century. Original decoration survives in the wooden frieze running along the walls, as well as the wooden beams from which the lamps once hung.

The transitional zone of the dome reveals the restorations made, as the arrangement of windows alternating with squinches of similar profile has been disturbed by the addition on each side of a large window with a pointed-arch profile. This also must be part of Qāytbāy’s restorations. Creswell attributes the whole transitional zone to Qāytbāy because of the sophisticated form of its multiple-tiered squinches. For the period of Qāytbāy, however, this type of transition was already archaic and no longer in use. Moreover, the profile of the dome resembles that of al-Ṣāliḥ, also Ayyubid, and has no parallel in the late Mamluk period. For the Ayyubid period, this squinch style, although it may look more elaborate than was common at that time, might well be justified by the extraordinary size of the dome that made a new transitional device necessary. In the Fatimid period, with increasing dome height, the squinches had already developed from a plain to a composite shape.

Sultan al-Ghūrī is mentioned in an inscription as having restored the dome; he may have covered it with the green tiles found by Creswell under a lead sheet. This sultan’s own mausoleum dome was once covered with green tiles (in 1503/4), and tiles of the same type found at Imām Shāfiʿī were used at the mosque of Sulaymān Pasha at the Citadel (1528), the minaret of Shāhīn al-Khalwātī (1538), and the zāwiya of Shaykh Saʿūd (1539), all built in the first half of the sixteenth century.

The arrangement of the three prayer niches had been adopted in earlier Fatimid architecture, in the mausoleums of Akhawāt Yūsuf, Sayyida Ruqayya, and Yahyā al-Shabīh. The present entrance, according to Creswell, is not the original one. It must have been on the axis of the prayer niches, where a recess used today as a window shows the earliest existing example in Cairo of a wooden coffered ceiling.

The cenotaph sponsored by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn is one of the great masterpieces of medieval woodwork in Cairo. It has geometric designs with bands of inscriptions in both Kufic and naskhī script. The cenotaph carries the signature of the carpenter-artist who made it, ʿUbayd al-Najjār Ibn Maʿālī, and is dated 574 Hijra (1178/9). The marble column with Imām Shāfiʿī’s name and date of death, topped with a turban-like structure, is original. When the mausoleum was built, the text carved on it was copied in naskhī on the back.

A second wooden cenotaph for the mother of Sultan al-Kāmil, builder of the mausoleum, is less well preserved. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s wife and son are buried in the mausoleum though the exact location is not marked by a cenotaph. He himself is buried in a mausoleum in Damascus.

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THE MADRASA OF SULTAN AL-ṢĀLIḤ NAJM AL-DĪN AYYŪB (1243)

During the Ayyubid period several madrasas were erected in al-Qāhirah and al-Fuṣṭāt, many of them within the premises of houses and palaces. The only one of these surviving in a condition allowing us reliably to describe its design is that of al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb, the last Ayyubid sultan.

Other madrasas built during this period were dedicated either to the Mālikī or Shāfiʿī rite, but al-Ṣāliḥ’s madrasa taught all four rites of Islamic law, Shāfiʿī, Ḥanafī, Mālikī and Ḥanbalī, the first madrasa to do so in Egypt. In this it followed the example of the Madrasa Mustanṣiriyya in Baghdad (1233). In 1330, under the Mamluks, the Friday sermon was introduced to the madrasa of al-Ṣāliḥ.

The Exterior

The madrasa of al-Ṣāliḥ was built on part of the site once occupied by the Great Fatimid Palace, that is,
Pl 62 The madrasa and mausoleum of Sultan al-Šāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb.
within the heart of the Fatimid city. To the passerby today, only a minaret standing above a passage with an exquisitely decorated entrance is visible, the rest of the facade beneath the minaret is behind a row of shops.

The minaret is the only minaret of the Ayyubid period to have survived intact. It is a brick construction of the mabkhara style. It is supported by the roof of the passage and has a rectangular shaft and a second, receding story of octagonal section. It is topped by a ribbed helmet resting on stalactites.

We have seen that the minaret of the Abū 'l-Ghadanfar in the late Fatimid period marks the beginning of this mabkhara shape in minaret architecture.

The decoration of the rectangular shaft has disappeared on the street side, though on the back it appears as keel-arched panels with fluted hoods of carved stucco. On the upper level, the octagonal section is decorated with lobed openings and stalactites. This is the earliest example of stalactites on the helmet of a minaret, a feature that later forms an integral part of mabkhara minaret decoration.

The minaret stands above a public passage separating the two wings of the complex. A few wooden beams indicate that the passage was originally covered. The entrance is crowned with a handsome keel-arched niche of carved stone with a foundation inscription in naskhī script in its center. From this center radiate flutes to form a large frame of stalactites on the borders of the niche. The niche is flanked with smaller carved niches on both sides, also with fluted hoods, underneath rectangular recesses with stalactite cresting. Though not an exact copy, the facade treatment follows the pattern established at the nearby Aqmar mosque.

The facade of the madrasa now hidden by shops is paneled over its entire width, with keel-arched central panels at the entrance and rectangular panels over the rest. Each panel is recessed and includes a window, a device that appeared for the first time at the mosque of

Pl 63 Niche above the entrance at the madrasa of al-Šāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb.
al-Ṣāliḥ Ṭalā'ī. The lintels of the windows are carved in stone

**THE INTERIOR**

The plan of the madrasa was reconstructed by Creswell, who found that it duplicated the plan he identified of the earlier madrasa which is today in ruins, of al-Malik al-Kāmil on the opposite side of the street. The madrasa of al-Kāmil had only one courtyard with two ʿiwān. The madrasa of al-Ṣāliḥ had two wings separated by a public passage, each wing composed of a courtyard with two vaulted ʿiwān facing each other across the courtyard, one of them with its back to the street, the other and larger one Mecca-oriented. The lateral sides were occupied by two stories of living units for the students. Today only the northwestern ʿiwān, has survived; the rest of the madrasa has nearly disappeared.

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**THE MAUSOLEUM OF SULTAN AL-ṢĀLIḤ NAJM AL-DĪN BUILT BY SHĀJARAT AL-DURR (1250)**

Al-Ṣāliḥ died while his troops were engaged in a battle against Louis XI and his French Crusaders, who had invaded the city of Mansura. His widow Shajarat al-Durr was clever enough to keep the sultan's death secret until the campaign ended with a Mamluk triumph and the capture of the French king, and thereby prevent the troops' morale from flagging. In the meantime al-Ṣāliḥ's body was kept at his citadel and residence on the island of Rawda. Since Al-Ṣāliḥ had left no heir, his mamluks decided to nominate his

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*Fig 19 Plan of the madrasa of al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb (Creswell)*
Turkish widow and former slave Shajarat al-Durr as his successor to the throne. She was the only woman in Muslim history ever to acquire the rank of a sultan, though only for a few months. Then she married al-Mu'izz Aybak, the first Mamluk sultan. She managed for a while to hold a powerful position, being the de facto ruler until she was killed.

Between al-Ṣāliḥ’s death and his official burial, while Mamluk troops were occupying in fighting the Crusaders, Shajarat al-Durr built the mausoleum for her husband, which was to be attached to his madrasa. Once the building was completed, the body was transferred with great pomp and ceremony from Rawḍa to the tomb. By that time Shajarat al-Durr had abdicated in favor of Aybak, who consequently led the procession. He was followed by the amirs and dignitaries, all dressed in white, their hair cut in sign of mourning. They carried the banners, clothes and weapons of the dead sultan and deposited them in his tomb.

Until Sultan Qalāwūn built his own madrasa-mausoleum, the mausoleum of al-Ṣāliḥ was the place where the ceremony following the nomination of a new amir for Syria was celebrated.

In the history of Cairo’s architecture, Shajarat al-Durr played an important role because she was the first to introduce the tradition of attaching funerary structures for the rulers to their religious foundations. She also built a mausoleum for herself near her own madrasa. Throughout the Mamluk period sultans and amirs followed this practice.

The Entrance

The entrance, which lacks all architectural enhancement, leads to a passage parallel to the mausoleum. It is surmounted by a slab which bears an inscription indicating the date of al-Ṣāliḥ’s death (1249).

The Interior

The fact that the depth of the window recesses gradually decreases from north to south is an indication that the Mecca-oriented dome is set askew to adjust it to the street alignment.

The large iron-grilled windows were intended to give the passerby visual access to the Sultan’s tomb, as well as a share in the blessing of Quran recitations performed at the windows for this very purpose.

The tall prayer niche preserves almost nothing of its original decoration, except a pair of marble columns with carved bell-shaped capitals and remnants of carved marble panels. Traces of glass mosaics in the conch, which could be seen until some years ago, indicated that the prayer niche was once decorated in the same manner as Shajarat al-Durr’s own mausoleum.

The transitional zone of the dome consists of wooden trilobed squinches set within rows of stalactite niches. The windows set in the transitional zone are adapted to the profile of the squinches, each composed of three hexagonal lights, with stucco arabesque grills that include colored-glass bits.

The wooden cenotaph with geometrical inlay, together with some remnants of wooden shutters and doors, are original.

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The Mausoleum of Shajarat al-Durr (1250)

The mausoleum of Shajarat al-Durr at the cemetery of Sayyida Nafla is the only surviving structure of a complex she built there that included a madrasa. It is directly opposite the mausoleum of Sayyida Ruqayya and near the shrine of other female saints such as Sayyida Sukayna, Sayyida ‘Atika, and Sayyida Nafisa in al-Fuṣṭāt’s cemetery.
No Mamluk sultan’s death is as famous as the death of the Sultana Shajarat al-Durr. She continued to wield power during al-Mu‘izz Aybak’s reign, but soon lost power over her husband, who began to court the daughter of a ruler in Iraq. She killed him, whereupon his followers beat her to death and threw her body half naked from the Citadel, where it remained a few days until she was buried in her mausoleum. In time, her mausoleum, located in an area full of shrines, came to be venerated by the people living in the quarter. Today, the whole area is in rather dilapidated condition.

**The Exterior**

The most interesting feature of the mausoleum’s dome is its profile, which like that of the mausoleum of the Abbasid Caliphs has a keel-arch curve, thus differing from that of al-Ṣāliḥ’s mausoleum. It also has a different facade treatment. The dome, with an entrance on every side except the qibla wall, makes an angle with the street alignment to which it is not adjusted. The building itself, with its three openings, must have been within an enclosure. The qibla wall with the prayer niche protruding outside and the southwest wall still have remains of ornaments: lozenges and medallions carved with flutes and keel-arched niches with fluted hoods.

**The Interior**

Inside the mausoleum of Shajarat al-Durr the three sides around the qibla are decorated with a stucco keel-arch niche set above each entrance. The qibla side is decorated with a keel-arched prayer niche. The keel-arched niches above the three entrances are shallow, fluted, with the flutes carved and radiating from a central panel. The frames of the niches are composed of stalactites, or two rows of carved small niches, and the spandrels of the niches are finely carved with floral motifs, appearing so lacy that the details are hardly recognizable. The whole is framed by an inscription band of naskhi script on an ornate background.

The transitional zone of the dome is reduced, compared to that of al-Ṣāliḥ, since the dome itself is smaller. Painting decorates the stucco squinches.

The prayer niche is concave; its conch starts above a wooden frieze that runs around the whole chamber above the three entrances. A stalactite triple frame borders the prayer niche, which is decorated inside with glass mosaics forming a tree with mother-of-pearl pieces set in the foliage, an allusion, perhaps, to the sultana’s name, “Tree of Pearl.” The wooden frieze running along the walls with carved inscriptions and arabesques is Fatimid in style and must have belonged to an earlier building. The upper inscription band underneath the transitional zone was once covered with a thick coat of black paint, no doubt by enemies of Shajarat al-Durr. It was later repainted in white, and carries her name and titles.

**Pl. 64 The mausoleum of Shajarat al-Durr**

**Pl. 65 The prayer niche at the mausoleum of Shajarat al-Durr**
SHAJARAT AL-DURR'S AND AL-ŠALIH'S MAUSOLEUMS COMPARED

The mausoleum of Shajarat al-Durr is attributed to the year 1250, the year she ruled, following the death of al-Šalih, whose mausoleum she also built in the same year. It is thus interesting to compare the two structures.

The mausoleum of al-Šalih was built near his madrasa, in the very heart of the city. Its architecture, as a structure added to the madrasa and also aligned with the street, and its facade whose keel-arch panels and carved lintels are similar to those of the madrasa emphasize its urban character. The mausoleum overlooks the street with large iron-grilled windows placed at a level that allows the passersby to look inside.

The mausoleum of Shajarat al-Durr was also part of a complex that included a madrasa and other structures, but it was built in a cemetery. The facade of the dome is not adjusted to the street, or lane, and the chamber was not directly accessible from the road but from another structure to which it was attached, as is suggested by the three entrances as well as the prolongation of the southwestern wall beyond the dome. The mausoleum chamber had three entrances and needed no windows.

In its urban context, the dome of al-Šalih is thus an expression of the Sultan’s royal status, while the mausoleum of Shajarat al-Durr, located in a venerated area of the cemetery, has more religious connotations.

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