The Mosaics of the Qubba al-Zahiriyya in Damascus:  
A Classical Syrian Medium Acquires a Mamluk Signature.

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Glass mosaic was a luxurious medium of decoration around the Mediterranean in regions that either belonged to or were influenced by Byzantine artistic traditions. It also played a major role in the ornamentation of Umayyad architecture of the seventh and eighth century. It was profusely applied on the walls of commemorative monuments in all major urban centers and many palatial retreats in the countryside. After the fall of the Umayyads in 750, mosaics seem to have been slowly abandoned in favor of other decorative techniques, save for a few consciously historicizing examples, such as those of the Cordoba Mosque in Umayyad Spain (ca. 961), and the routine repairs of the remaining Umayyad monuments in Syria and Palestine. Then, sometime during the thirteenth century, the medium made a forceful reappearance in Mamluk architecture before it totally disappeared for unknown reasons by the middle of the fourteenth century. During that short period, at least seventeen buildings have been recorded that had been adorned with mosaic in Cairo (8), Damascus (3), Jerusalem (3), Hebron (1), and Tripoli (2).

The Umayyad mosaics of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the Great Mosque of Damascus have generated numerous interpretations, and, something rare in the study of Islamic art, provoked scholarly debate about their artistic origin, the identity of their makers, and their intended meanings. But unlike their Umayyad predecessors, Mamluk mosaics have never been analyzed nor interpreted, perhaps because most of them consist of simple vegetal and floriated motifs set in conchas and spandrels of arched windows.¹ One exception, which is probably the earliest, is the Mausoleum of al-Zahir Baybars (the Qubba al-Zahiriyya) in Damascus. Its mosaic panels are distinguished both by the relatively large surface area they occupy and by their themes, which include architectural representations that are similar, but not identical, to those in the nearby Umayyad Mosque. These architectural representations were seen as either an aberration or a single attempt to adopt the old Umayyad scenes outside of their own context, which was deemed a failure by the patrons. But, in 1985, a Mamluk qa‘a was discovered at the Citadel of Cairo with fragments of mosaic displaying architectural representations. This new find clearly demonstrates that the Qubba al-Zahiriyya's scenes were not an isolated experiment and
provides new clues to the uses and range of themes of mosaic decoration under the Mamluks.²

In this paper I will analyze the architectural scenes in the Qubba al-Zahiriyya in Damascus and the qa’a at the Cairo Citadel. My argument is that these scenes are not mere copies or alterations from admired models in the Umayyad mosaics or from some other source, but rather variations on available representational themes that were used to convey ideological messages which stem from the context of the early Mamluk period.

The Mosaics of the Qubba al-Zahiriyya

Al-Zahir Baybars died in Damascus in 1276, and was buried there in a mausoleum (qubba) hastily built in the outer room of a house bought by order of his son and successor Baraka Khan in 1277, although he had prepared a mausoleum for himself in Cairo.³ The qubba was apparently not completed until 1281, after the death of Baraka Khan and his entombment with his father by order of Qalawun, the new sultan who usurped the throne form the descendants of Baybars.⁴ The qubba is a square room covered with a dome on a high, octagonal drum supported on four simple squinches. Its four walls are profusely decorated to a height of about fifteen feet with a marble and marble-mosaic dado, followed by a narrow band of intricately carved stucco scroll, intersected in certain places by a narrower band of elaborate marble mosaic, and topped by a frieze of glass mosaic – recently renovated – that runs around the four walls, and in the tympanums and soffits of the windows. Three of the frieze's four sides depict architectural representations. The fourth side, the four corners, and the tympanums and soffits of the six windows consist of natural and stylized vegetal motifs coming out of vases, trees, cornucopia, and leafy scrolls reminiscent of the more sophisticated Umayyad examples.⁵

The three architectural ensembles depicted in the Qubba al-Zahiriyya are symmetrically arranged around the centres of their walls. The most elaborate scene is set on the south wall, or the Qibla wall, facing the entrance to the dome (Fig. 1). Its central field is occupied by two superimposed compositions. The lower one consists of a four-column arcade followed by five free-standing columns crowned with natural leaves instead of the usual Corinthian capitols.⁶ The upper group consists of two identical, long structures flanking a central tower with a spire. The two buildings seem to be depicted in perspective as their side walls run at an angle with the middle tower. Their fronts are made of colonnades surmounted by galleries, which are in turn roofed with conical
gables. Both buildings are topped by what looks like central domes over high drums with pointed profiles rising behind the gabled roofs. The space between the two buildings and the central tower is occupied by wavy lines of white and dark blue tesserae, possibly suggesting water, and probably borrowed from the famous "Barada" scene of the Umayyad Mosque. The scene is flanked by naturalistic representation and surrounded by a guilloche frame.

The western wall has two groups of structures which are similar in composition to the ones in the south wall but are typologically different from them (Fig. 2). The frontal, three-column arcade is stocky and short. Its light brown arches are covered with curving vegetal motifs, as if they were trellises carrying plants. Their spans are closed with curtains tied near their lower end and wavering in the wind, in a manner reminiscent of the curtains in the representation of the Palace of Theodoric in St-Appolinaire-Nuevo at Ravenna, or even closer to the few representations of curtains at the Umayyad Mosque, of which one is attributed to the renovations ordered by Baybars himself. The rear group is symmetrically organized around a central spired tower. The two side structures, represented at an angle, are long and gabled, each with two round finials at the two extremities of their gables. The two side corners of the composition are occupied by two domed towers, frontally represented and divided as if to mark two storied structures. The architectural scene is flanked by two huge bowls with simplistic arrangements reminiscent of the Dome of the Rock's vases, but rougher in execution. The two ends of the field above the curves of the windows' arches are taken up with two more architectural groups which are mirror reflections of one another. Each is made of two long, gabled structures and a domed tower behind the front building.

The third architectural scene appears on the northern wall above the entrance (Fig. 3). Its center is taken up by a huge tree whose branches and foliage are executed in the same method of gradual shading found in the Umayyad representations of trees. Two identical groups of buildings, both oriented toward the east so as not to give the impression of being reflections of one another, flank the tree. Both groups are displayed atop what appears to be a crude rendition of a green hill, lush with plants and trees. The architectural compositions use the same formal basic elements used in the other two groups. A huge, domed tower occupies the center, surrounded by two long, gabled buildings, behind each of which stands another tower similar to the central one but smaller. A strange, flat and slanted element appears midway along the height of the central tower. If this does not
represent some unknown convention of roof, it may be depicting the slanted roof of a wind-catcher \textit{(badhahanj)}, which was a familiar element in the Mamluk city's skyline.

Two remarks may be drawn from this brief description. First, clearly the Mamluk mosaicists have not preserved the technical tradition that was initially passed on from Byzantine Syrian masters to early Islamic ones when the Umayyad mosaics were executed. Their trees and vegetal motifs rely on thick outlines and large-size elements to fill their fields. Their columns are distorted and confused reproductions of ancient types which might have become obscure to them, but still carried the allure of antiquity and the weight of convention.

Second, the Mamluk mosaicists apparently derived some of their architectural compositions from real examples, probably to lend their scenes an air of authenticity and contemporaneity, but also because those were the only ones they understood enough to be able to render them in mosaic. First among these elements are the domes and domed towers, which appear here in prominent places as opposed to their secondary role in the Umayyad panels. They might refer to minarets or to fortified towers and \textit{qubbas}, or domed palatial and commemorative structures, which dotted the Mamluk cities. Second is the \textit{badhahanj}, which has been previously used to identify a Mamluk city's skyline. Third, the Mamluk mosaic scenes manage to create the effect of varied architectural compositions with a restricted repertoire. This is a characteristic of Mamluk architecture itself, which manipulated a small number of elements to produce variations suitable for multiple functions. It is possible that the Mamluk mosaicists were expressing this feature of the architecture they were depicting by restricting their own repertoire of basic forms.

This concordance between the architectural representation in mosaics, within the limits of the medium and its conventions, and the actual Mamluk architecture appears to have been further developed in the scenes of the qa‘a in the Cairo Citadel, to which I shall now turn briefly.

\textbf{The Mosaics of the Cairo Citadel's Qa‘a}

Unfortunately, two fragments are all that remains from the large mosaic frieze which once run around the inner walls of the excavated qa‘a above a high marble dado and another continuous frieze of small trilobed niches. The first is so effaced that no description of its composition is possible, although it undoubtedly shows a structure on its left corner. The second displays a building flanked by trees almost in a conventional façade way with no
attempt to create a sense of depth (Fig. 4). The workmanship is different from that of the Qubba al-Zahiryya, and the size of the tesserae is much larger, but the representation is nonetheless expressive.

The structure in the middle appears to be a light, tripartite, and domed garden pavilion with wide openings. Its first level consists of an arcaded porch, made of what appears to be a double-arched opening in the middle, flanked by closed bays, and another set of arched openings on the sides. The center of the second level is occupied by a two-storied structure surmounted by a pear-shaped lantern whose base is embellished by round tesserae of mother-of-pearl. It is flanked by two light structures whose tops are unfortunately deleted. But they must have been domed lanterns, because the ubiquitous pointed representations of drums, suggestive of a dome on top, are still intact. Trees with unnatural, large leaves appear from behind these two structures as if to suggest a sense of depth in what is otherwise a totally flat architectural representation.

Like the scenes of the Qubba al-Zahiryya, the architectural scene in the qa’a seems to have been related to contemporary Mamluk architecture. It recalls in its general character the type of structures named manzara in contemporary sources. A manzara was primarily a light pavilion in a pleasance garden with numerous openings. The etymology of the word alludes to the structure's basic function as the place whence one looks out, perhaps the equivalent of a belvedere. But, unfortunately, we do not have any contemporary description of the actual layout and form of a manzara.

**The Iconography of the Mosaic Architectural Scenes**

At this point, I will consider the mosaics of both examples in their artistic and iconographic contexts. The first point to elucidate is the reason behind the revival of glass mosaic after it had been confined to respected Umayyad monuments for at least five centuries. The sources do not offer any clue, but the simplest answer is to surmise that the rarity and opulence of the medium as it appears at the Umayyad Mosque and the Dome of the Rock have prompted this revival. This proposition, however, depends on the presence of interested patrons, who must have desired the reintroduction of mosaic, and who decided at a certain moment to ask the mosaicists that were usually called in only to repair some damaged scenes in some Umayyad monument to apply their medium in new structures. Michael Meinecke postulates such a moment. He argues that the revival of mosaic techniques was the result of an effort by Baybars who sponsored an atelier, formed most
probably of Damascene craftsmen, to restore the mosaics of the Umayyad monuments in Damascus and Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{11} This is indirectly revealed by Ibn Fadl-Allah al-‘Umari who says that new mosaic tesserae were being made for the repair works of the Umayyad Mosque in his time, and that tesserae from the same stock had been used in the mosque of the governor of Damascus, Tankiz (built in 1317), whose building he witnessed.\textsuperscript{12}

The second point to delineate is the relationship between the mosaics of the Qubba al-Zahiriyya and those of the Citadel's qa‘a. Given the fact that the former precedes the latter by at least twenty years, and maybe forty years, depending on the correct dates of both structures, the two examples may be seen as two stages, derived from different pictorial sources, in the adaptation of the mosaic medium to representational purposes in the Mamluk period. From the previous analysis of the motifs and details of both examples, it becomes clear that there was an interest to represent recognizable and existent architecture in these scenes. In the Qubba the craftsmen were still confined to the Umayyad models, although they were seemingly trying their best to infuse the new scenes with some degree of contextuality. By the time the qa‘a in the Cairo Citadel was decorated, it seems that the mosaicists, or perhaps their patrons who should have been the ones most concerned about the intelligibility of the scenes, had already realized that a new mode of representation was needed. The source of infusion appears to have been sought in another artistic medium, miniature painting, which was similarly concerned with developing pictorial conventions. It is very difficult to substantiate this interpretation, but the striking resemblance between the scene at the Citadel's qa‘a and several, almost-contemporaneous Mamluk and Mesopotamian manuscripts where a whole range of analogous tripartite, light, and domed structures with arched openings rendered in façade form supports it.\textsuperscript{13} The closest of these examples, a miniature in a manuscript of the book *Kashf al-Asrar*, is in fact Mamluk from either Syria or Egypt and is dated to the mid fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{14} It is composed of a central structure flanked by two smaller rooms topped with ribbed, slightly bulbous domes and is open to the outside through numerous grilled, large windows.

This hypothesis leads to the question of the reason behind the usage of mosaics with architectural representations in the first place. The answer, it seems to me, has to do with the referential dimension of these scenes rather than with their artistic value or their elaborate execution. In other words, the architectural scenes were used because the patrons grasped the expressive potential of their architectural iconography. Mamluk
sultans such as Baybars and Qalawun seem to have had ample opportunities to admire the mosaic scenes in the Umayyad monuments and to notice their anagogic effects as illustrated by the traditions that were current among the Damascenes. They also realized through the repair works they have ordered in the same monuments that an acceptable degree of expertise to use the same techniques in new structures was available. The sultans, however, were interested in another kind of messages related to their own status. When they considered the mosaic decoration with architectural scenes, the range of possible meanings they could read in them was clearly delimited by the subjects depicted: buildings and their natural surroundings, and settlements, large and small.

But what was the meaning, or meanings, which were read into the mosaic architectural representations and which went above and beyond their architectural iconography?

It was, I believe, pride in the territorial conquests of the early Mamluk sultans and the extent of their dominion. Al-Zahir Baybars (1260-76), al-Mansur Qalawun (1280-90), and al-Ashraf Khalil (1290-93) had distinguished themselves in fighting the Crusaders and the Mongols and had managed to recover the whole of natural Syria from them and secure it for the Mamluk sultanate. They naturally would have wanted to celebrate these conquests, and through them to assert their sovereignty and to exalt their own persons, in clear and lasting ways. Thus, probably, the idea of reading into the stylized architectural representations on the walls messages about the geographic extent of the sultan's dominion was developed. Moreover, simplifying the architectural imagery was not only the result of the mosaicists' limited capacity to invent new compositions. It may have also been intentional to a certain degree and aimed at making the message clearer and more intelligible to contemporary viewers so that the sultans can boast visually of their conquests and domains in one space of representation.

This interpretation is very hard to substantiate in the written sources. The available texts are in fact silent in relation to the scenes of the Damascene mausoleum and the Cairene qa’a. They even do not report their existence in the first place. But a single reference furnishes an explicit indication of the type of messages assigned to architectural representations in a contemporary palatial structure. Ibn ‘Abd al-Zahir, who was a semiofficial court historian for both Baybars and Qalawun, relates in the events of the year 1284 that when Qalawun built a new throne hall (called qubba as well) in the court of the Citadel, he ordered depicted on the walls of its riwaqs the likeness (sifat) of each of his
castles (*husun*, pl. of *husn*) and citadels (*qila’,* pl. of *qal’a*) surrounded by mountains, valleys, rivers, and seas.\(^{18}\)

Clearly, what Ibn ‘Abd al-Zahir is expressing in this sentence is the official reading of the scenes. The verisimilitude, as we understand it today, between the architectural representations and Qalawun's actual castles was of secondary importance, if at all, to the plausibility of their identification as such. What counted was that these scenes provided probable and variegated images that could be read as representing the real castles and fortresses. Slight differences in compositions, similar to the ones encountered between the scenes in the Qubba al-Zahiriyya, would have been sufficient to justify their interpretation as different localities by contemporary viewers. The patron need only supply the intended messages and the pictorial vehicle that broadly corresponds to them to be accepted by his audience.\(^{19}\) At the Citadel, Qalawun's major objective was most probably to exploit these identifications to boast of his own military achievements and the extent of his dominion in a single, prominent space: his own throne hall.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Zahir does not tell us in what medium the castles were rendered, but their themes and compositions recall the scenes in the Qubba al-Zahiriyya and the qa’a at the Citadel of Cairo. Since these scenes were executed in mosaic, and since we do not know of any other medium that was used at that time for architectural scenes on walls, it is plausible that those in Qalawun's hall too were done in mosaic as well. Michael Meinecke has shown that Qalawun was responsible for the completion of the Qubba al-Zahiriyya in Damascus. He may also have brought Syrian craftsmen to Cairo to execute the decoration in his *bimaristan* complex, which was built shortly afterward (1284), and which has a mosaic conch in its madrasa's mihrab.\(^{20}\) The same Syrian mosaicists who did the scenes at the Qubba al-Zahiriyya in Damascus may then have done the representations of castles and fortresses in Qalawun's new audience hall at the Citadel of Cairo.

The question remains of how, if at all, could a medieval viewer identify specific sites in the mosaic scenes we see today as generic and idealized. To try and answer this question we will have to turn to the Umayyad mosque in Damascus which has achieved such a hallowed position in the imagination of medieval Muslims that many considered it among the wonders of the world. Consequently, its mosaics elicited a series of descriptions from the 10th century to the present that allow us to check if their meaning changed over time. On the surface, this does not seem to have been the case. In fact, the descriptions seem to copy one another and to repeat the same motifs. But a careful reading
hints at a perceptual development in the descriptions that occurred in the 13th century, that is when the mosaic medium was readopted in contemporary Mamluk structures.

The earliest report we have comes from the geographer al-Muqaddasi (fl. 966-1000), who tells us in passing that the mosaics depict cities and villages, but does not identify any of them. Ibn ‘Asakir (1105-76), the foremost medieval historian of Damascus, collects together all the previous reports on the acquisition and cost of the mosaics in his comprehensive compendium, Tarikh Madinat Dimashq. He also copies a poem composed after a fire in 1069 devastated the mosque in which the variety and enchanted nature of the trees represented are extolled, but the architectural scenes are not once mentioned. The encyclopedic geographer, Yaqut al-Hamawi (1179-1229), reports that the porticoes of the mosque contain representations of every city and every kind of tree in the world. He attributes this report to the famous essayist al-Jahiz (d. 869), but when he himself describes the mosaics he only praises the intricate depictions of plants and trees. The famous cosmographer of the thirteenth century, Zakariyya al-Qazwini (1203-83), repeats the words of al-Muqaddasi almost verbatim. Another famous cosmographer, Sheikh al-Rabwa al-Dimashqi (1256-1327), who was Damascene by birth, widens the scope of the scenes by adding castles and seas to Muqaddasi’s list and gives them an Islamic stamp of approval by remarking that they contain no representation of forbidden subjects (i.e., human figures). Reports from the second half of the fourteenth century begin to mention the architectural scenes with a new emphasis on their possible worldly models. The first to do so is the Damascene biographer Ibn Shakir al-Kutubi (d. 1362) who states that the mosaics "depict the Ka‘ba's likeness (sifat), set above the mihrab, and the images of cities and villages, each represented with all that it produced of trees remarkable for their fruits or their flowers or other objects." His text was reused in several later Damascene sources such as al-‘Ulmawi in his description of Damascus (written 1566) and al-Busrawi in his Tuhfat al-Anam fi Fada‘il al-Sham (ca. 1595).

Al-Kutubi’s description differs from those of his predecessors in two critical respects. He is the first to specify that the central part of the scenery depicts the holiest Islamic center, the Ka‘ba, which spatially and ritually represented to the Muslims the center of the world. He also indicates a certain pictorial differentiation between the illustrations of cities based on what he terms their distinct products of fruits, flowers, or other objects, which indeed are elaborately diverse in the mosaic compositions. A little-known Egyptian
chronicler, Abu al-Baqa’ al-Badari, writing in 1494, develops this idea further by claiming that the cities and villages are each represented with the wonders (‘aja’ib) that distinguish it. He thus relegates all the unexplainable architectural details and mysterious landscapes and fantastic plants with jewel-like fruits we see today in these scenes, and which we cannot comprehend, to the category of ‘aja’ib and reads them as characterizations of their locales. For him, the accuracy of representation does not seem to have been important as long as the scenes suggested different cities, which could be distinguished by legible marvellous attributes, and which are arranged in a certain order around the Ka’ba. Thus, it seems that Ibn Shakir and his successors saw in the mosaics an iconographic, global depiction of the countries of Islam, probably disposed in some hierarchical order on the two sides of the Ka’ba's scene along the porticoes of the mosque. This interpretation is new and it brings the scenery down from an eschatological realm to a political one.

Al-Kutubi’s account, though based on the older historians, undoubtedly reflects current Mamluk interpretations of this type of scenes. Such a logical, mundane, and down-to-earth interpretation may have originated in the Mamluk period after the methods of representation and themes of the Umayyad mosque's mosaics were taken over by the Mamluk sultans and applied in their structures to convey another kind of message. This message was in turn reapplied by al-Kutubi and his contemporaries and successors to the Umayyad Mosque's scenes, which therefore acquired a new Mamluk meaning. This reciprocity of form and meaning was possible only because by the thirteenth century the Umayyad imagery had become cryptic and was thus reopen to interpretation, and because by the same time the new Mamluk scenes have been composed and have been put to service in the expressive vocabulary of Mamluk art, thus introducing a novel dimension of significance to the mosaic architectural scenes, both new and old.

Meinecke's article discusses those of the Zahiriyya, and a few articles on the mosaics of the Umayyad Mosque mention them in passing. For the three examples in Jerusalem see, Miriam Rosen-Ayalon, "A Neglected Group of Mihrabs in Palestine," In: M. Sharon, Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honor of Professor David Ayalon, (Jerusalem, 1986) 553-63. For Tripoli see Hayat Salam-Leibish, The Architecture of the Mamluk City of Tripoli (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 49-50.


4 Michael Meinecke, "Das Mausoleum des Qala‘un in Kairo," 64.

5 A complete description of the Qubba al-Zahiriyya's non-architectural representations is in Michael Meinecke, "Das Mausoleum des Qala‘un in Kairo," 65-66.

6 This group appears as a residue of the depictions of exedrae and porticoes found in the Umayyad Mosque's mosaics such as the one discussed by Barbara Finster, "Die Mosaiken der Umayyadenmoschee von Damaskus," Kunst des Orients 7, 2 (1972): 83-136, esp. 93-97. If this interpretation of the Mamluk scene is correct, it will explain the existence of the mysterious green dots between the rear columns which may be the remainder of the windows found in the back wall of the exedra's representation, such as the one published in Eustache De Lorey, "Les mosaïques de la mosquée des omayyades à Damas," Syria 12 (1931), pt. 10.

7 See Finster, "Mosaiken," figs. 33 and 35. The closer example attributed to Baybars is reproduced in De Lorey, "mosaïques," fig. 12.

8 These two bowls greatly resemble another Damascene example closer to them in date: the stylized vase found under the Nur al-Din inscription panel on the eastern portico of the Umayyad Mosque uncovered in 1953, which may be dated to 1159. See Nikita Élisséeff, "Les monuments de Nur al-Din," Bulletin d' Études Orientales, 13 (1949-51): 5-43; the panel is reproduced in ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Rihawi, "Fusayfusa‘ al-Jami‘ al-Amwi," Les annales archéologiques arabes syriennes 10 (1960), fig. 6.

9 Marguerite van Berchem, "The Mosaics of the Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem and of the Great Mosque in Damascus," in K.A.C. Creswell, Early Muslim Architecture (E.M.A.) (Oxford, 1932) vol.1, 150-252, 247. She identifies a whole group of architectural elements in the mosaics of the transept of the Umayyad Mosque that may have been derived from the medieval Islamic repertoire.
This feature was similarly used by Sauvaget in his attempt to prove that an Italian painting from the late Renaissance effectively represented Mamluk Damascus, see, Jean Sauvaget, "Une ancienne représentation de Damas au Musée du Louvre," Bulletin d'Études Orientales, vol. 11 (1945-46): 5-12.

Michael Meinecke, 'Das Mausoleum des Qala'un in Kairo,"63-9. He had to adjust the chronology of mosaic appearance to preserve the precedence of the Qubba al-Zahiriyya's mosaics in Damascus, for two of the Cairene structures decorated with mosaic were constructed before it: the mausolea of al-Salih (1250) and Shajar al-Durr (1256). This, he achieved on stylistic grounds by contending that the mosaic representation in the mihrab of Shajar al-Durr's mausoleum – that of al-Salih's had disappeared some years ago – is subsequent to Qalawun's madrasa's mosaics, which he argued was decorated by Syrian craftsmen who were brought to Cairo after they finished the Qubba al-Zahiriyya. Baybars in fact effectuated mosaic repairs both at the Dome of the Rock and the Umayyad Mosque, see, Mujir al-Din al-'Ulaymi, al-Uns al-Jalil bi Tariikh al-Quds wa-l-Khalil, M. Bahr al-‘Ulum, ed. (Najaf, Iraq, 1968) vol. 2, 87-8; ‘Izz al-Din Muhammad ibn-Shaddad, Tariikh al-Malik al-Zahir, A. Hutait, ed. (Wiesbaden, 1983) 355.

Ibn Fadl-Allah al-'Umari, Masalik al-Absar fi-Mamalik al-Amsar, (reproduced from MS. 2797/1, Ahmet III Collection, Topkapi Sarayi Library, Istanbul) Fuat Sezgin ed. (Frankfurt, 1988) vol. 1, 144. Tankiz must have used the same atelier in the decoration of his two madrasas in Palestine, at Jerusalem and Hebron (both built in the late 1320s), for it is very difficult to posit the presence of qualified mosaicists in the area then, see, Michael Burgoyne, Mamluk Jerusalem: An Architectural Study, (London, 1987) 236, and note 70.

There is another possible and curious parallel between the Mamluk mosaics and the branch of manuscript illustrations in which there was a high degree of realism in architectural representations, namely the miniatures of Maqamat al-Hariri, and that is that they were synchronous: they flourished together and went out of fashion almost at the same time. See, Oleg Grabar, "The Illustrated Maqamat of the Thirteenth Century: The Bourgeoisie and the Arts," in A.H. Hourani and S.M. Stern eds. The Islamic City: A Colloquium (Oxford, 1970) 208-10. The implications of this similarity are beyond the scope of this study, but they surely would elucidate wider aspects of the social and cultural history of the period. Several of the manuscripts of the Maqamat al-Hariri contain such depictions, such as the Leningrad MS. S 23, Forty-Second Maqama, dated to 1230; also Rasa’il Ikwan al-Safa, MS. Essad Effendi 3638, Topkapi Saray, dated to 1287. Both manuscripts are attributed to the Baghdad school.

15 Both Baybars and Qalawun spent long stretches of time in Damascus and both effectuated repair works and additions in the Umayyad Mosque and the other charitable institutions around it, such as the bimaristan of Nur al-Din, which was renovated by Qalawun in 1281.

16 The representation of conquered cities as a means of asserting the power of rulers in either painting or low relief on the walls of palaces is known from the earliest periods of Egyptian and Mesopotamian kingdoms. Maps were not a familiar means of visual communication in the fourteenth century, nor were models and mock-ups. The only other way that was conceivable, and which was used, was writing, and it was exhibited in the addition of new attributes in the titulatures of rulers. See the analysis of Nur al-Din's titulature development in Yasser Tabbaa, "Monuments with a Message: Propagation of Jihad under Nur A-Din (1146-1174)," The Meeting of Two Worlds: Cultural Exchange between East and West during the Period of the Crusades, V. P. Goss & C. V. Bornstein eds. (Kalamazoo, Mi, 1986) 223-40, esp. 226.

17 The inferior quality of imitation in the repaired scenes at the Umayyad Mosque and in new Mamluk structures, noticed even by the contemporary historian ‘Umari, vol. 1, 193, suggests that the craftsmen did not master the medium well enough to break with the old conventions and venture into new compositions.

18 Ibn-‘Abd al-Zahir, Tashrif al-Ayyam wa-l-‘Usur fi-Sirat al-Malik al-Mansur, Murad Kamil ed. (Cairo, 1961) 139. Ibn al-Furat, Tarikh, K. Zurayk, ed. (Beirut, 1942) vol. 8, 38, and Maqrizi, Khitat (Bulaq, 1854) vol. 2, 212, give similar reports but do not mention the images.


20 Meinecke, "Das Mausoleum des Qala'un in Kairo," 64.


22 Ibn-‘Asakir, Tarikh Madinat Dimashq wa Zikr Fadlaha wa-Tasmiyat man Hallaha min-al-Amathil aw Itiza bi-Nawahiha min Waridiha wa-Ahlaha, 19 vols. (reproduced from MS in al-Zahiriyya in Damascus), ed. M. al-Tarhuni (Damascus,


