

Weisa Wasef's Museum, Harania

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
 الحمد لله رب العالمين
 والصلاة والسلام على
 سيدنا محمد وآله
 وصحبه أجمعين
 أما بعد
 فقد أتممت هذا العمل
 بفضل الله تعالى
 وبمساعدة
 من أحبهم
 وبمناحة
 من عاونهم
 وبإذن
 من هدانا
 لهذا
 بل قد علمنا
 أن الله
 هو
 العزيز
 الحكيم

Located along the road to Sak-kareh, some 15 kilometers from Cairo, this museum was begun in the 1960's. It is part of a group of buildings initiated by the architect during the previous decade, which includes a weaving school with workshops, pottery workshops, a hall for rug exhibitions, as well as dwellings for the craftsmen and their families.

Designed to house sculptures by children, the museum was built of material available and processed on the site, namely, adobe bricks. A group of masons was trained by the architect himself during construction. The choice and utilisation solely of natural materials for the museum (nothing other than earth is present) creates a remarkable unity, in terms of colour, of the physical characteristics of the surroundings, and the objects that are exhibited — which are themselves of earth.

The museum is conceived in such a way that the rooms are arranged around open spaces (passageways or courtyards), which are a fundamental aspect of traditional architecture in the country. The two entries open onto two courts (*haiouch*), one of which leads to the caretaker's two-room dwelling, and the other leads to the exhibition rooms via open galleries. These galleries give access to an office and to the main courtyard planted with palm trees, which permit natural lighting for the rooms and is itself an exhibition space.

A covered passageway connects this courtyard with a large exhibition hall covered with a vault. Small openings, located high along the walls, allow direct natural light into niches containing sculptures. There are two other rooms, each covered with a cupola, one of which also has

windows. The first room is arranged with *mastabas* and niches that receive daylight; the other one has alcoves in which the exhibited objects are indirectly lit.

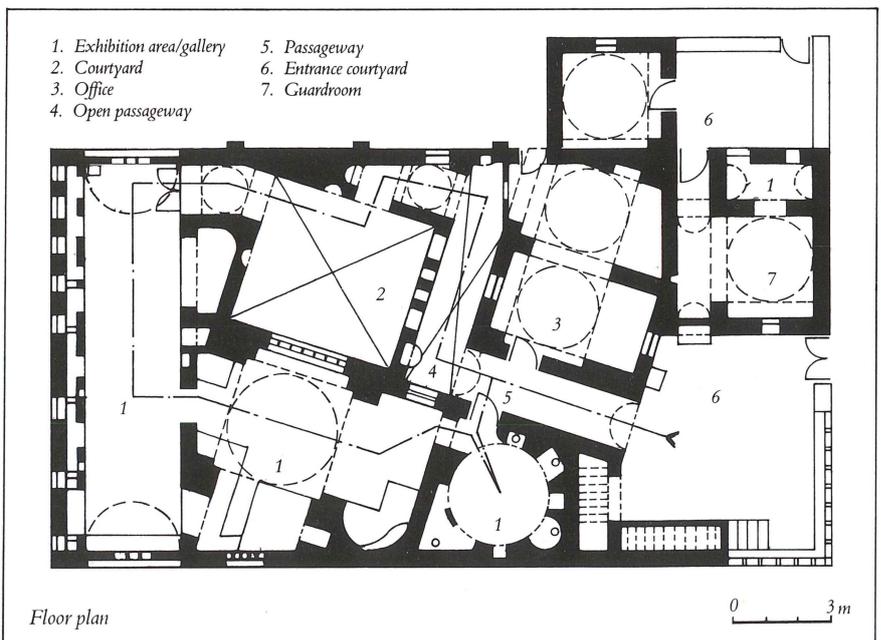
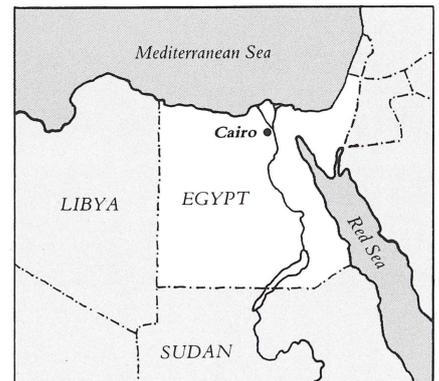
The arrangement of exhibition areas allows for a progressive change from zones of strong light (open galleries and courtyards) to zones where the light is reduced, modulated and controlled — whether by way of the intensity of illumination, or the size of area which is lit. This has been accomplished through the size and location of apertures, as well as a careful diversity in heights of the rooms. Thus, sculptures of the same material as that used for building the museum (even to the extent that everything was created on site) are displayed with sufficient natural light, in terms of intensity and of quality, to emphasise their intrinsic character.

Right: Covered gallery, with relief sculptures set into the walls. Niche for sculpture at far end.

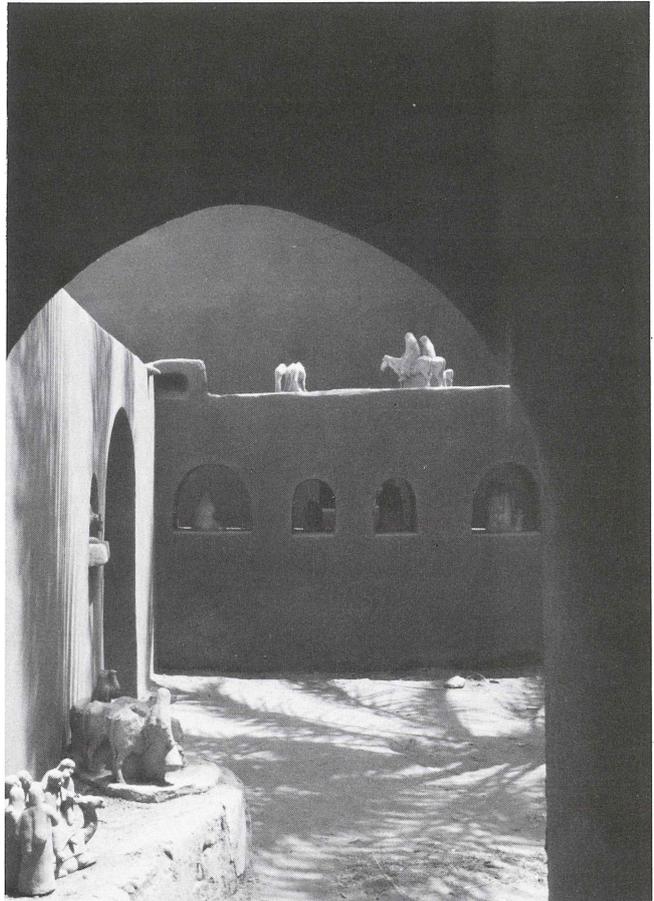
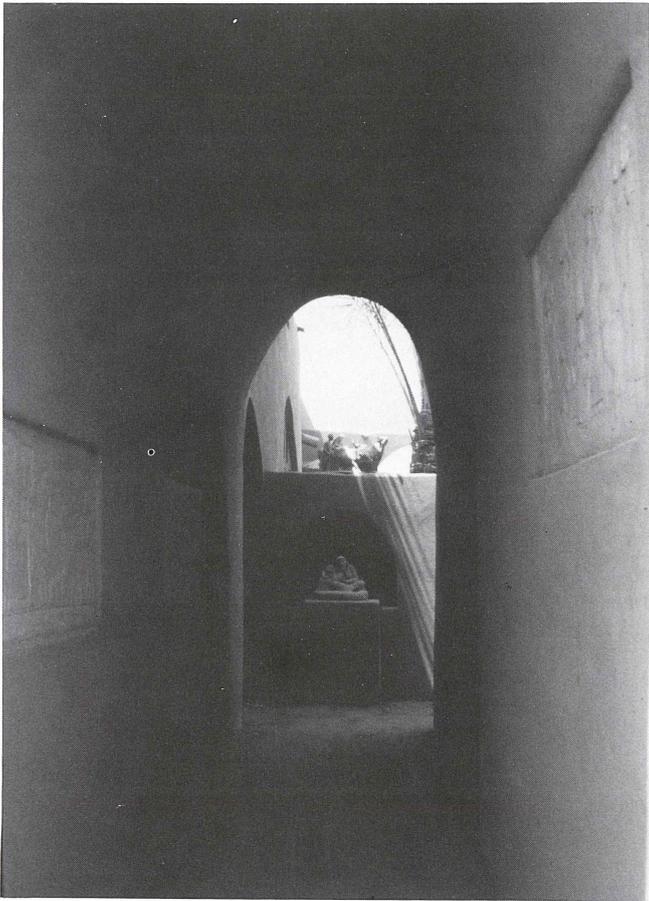
Far right: View into courtyard with windows for sculptures.

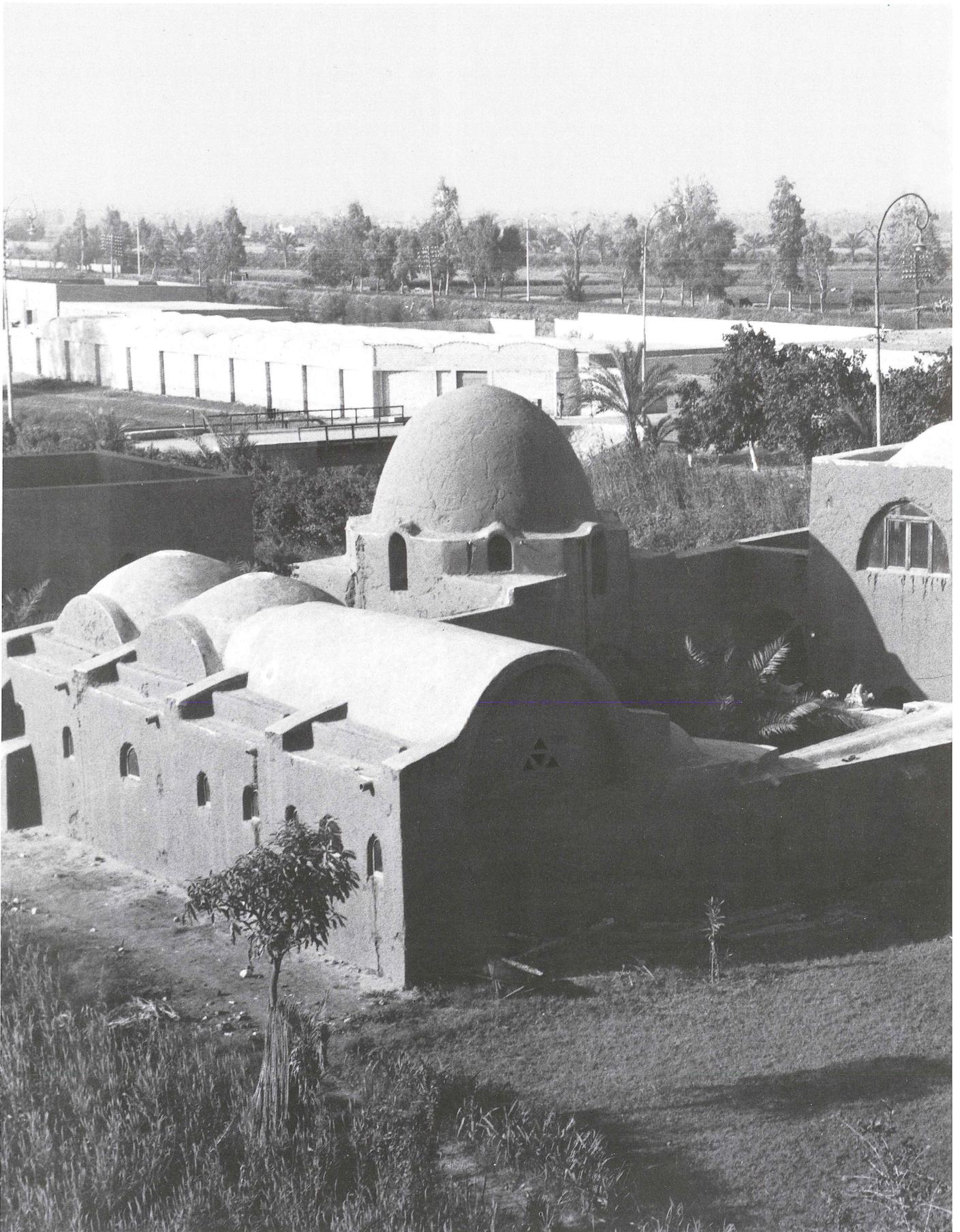
Right, below: Courtyard with palm tree and sculptures along upper wall (in foreground).

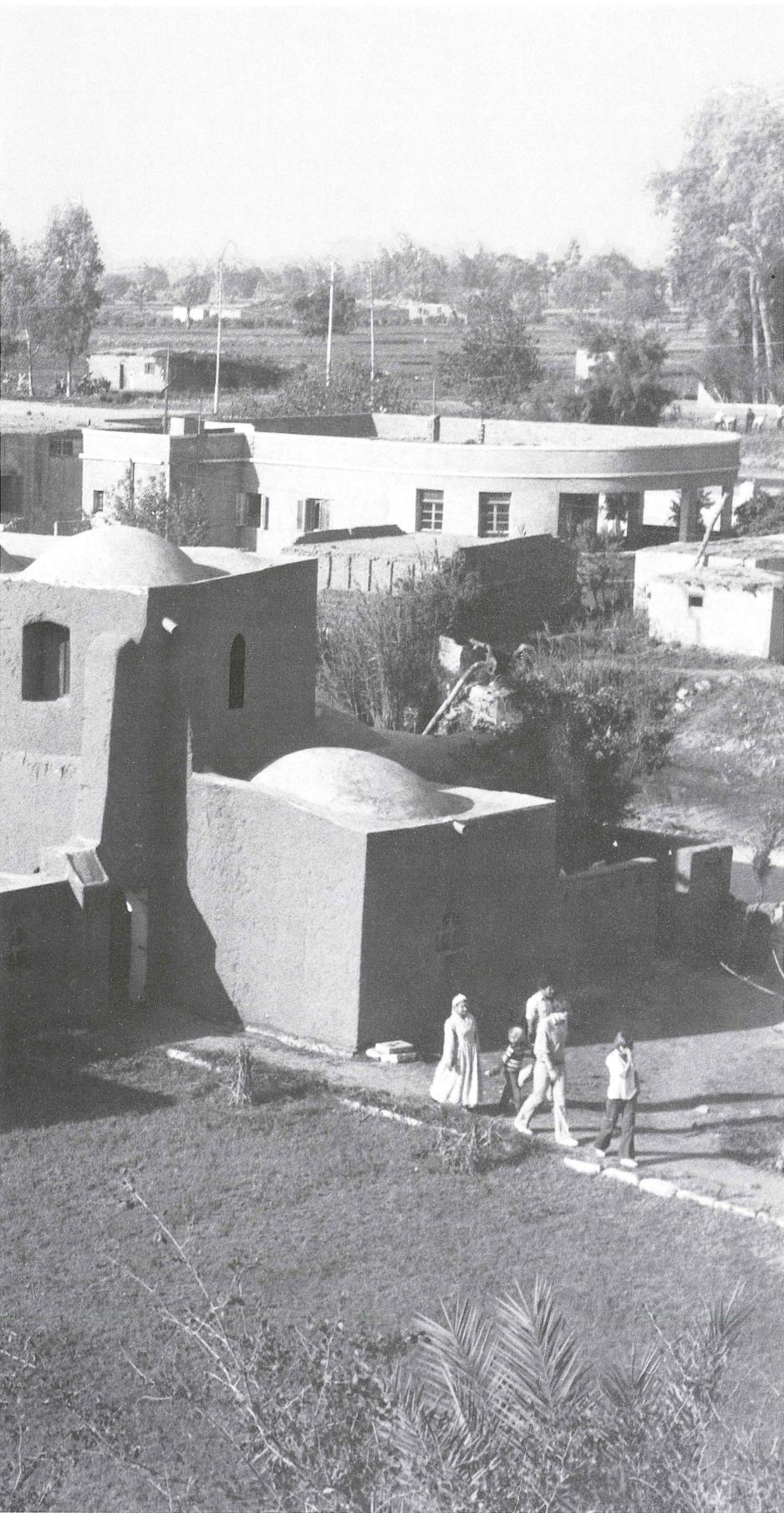
Overleaf: Exterior view of museum.



Article and photographs by Sawsan Noweir, an Egyptian architect currently involved in research on Arab housing.







The Egyptian architect, Ramses Weisa Wasef (1911-1974) began his long career with work on "A Potter's House in Old Cairo" (1935), an architectural diploma project at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, for which he received a prize. He began building at the age of twenty-five, upon his return to Egypt, with construction of his project for the French Lycée in Heliopolis. This was the start of his intense professional activity devoted to teaching as well as to building. When Wasef initiated the complex of buildings in Harania in 1952, he had already completed a school in Old Cairo, a kindergarten for the French Lycée at Bab Al-Louk, the Moukhtar Museum in Gujirieh, two churches, in Zamalek and in Heliopolis, and numerous private houses.

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