MOHAMMAD AL-ASAD

THE MOSQUE OF MUHAMMAD ʻALI IN CAIRO

Among the extraordinary number of mosques in Cairo, the earliest of which date as far back as the seventh century, the most visible to tourists and inhabitants of the city is the mosque of Muhammad ʻAli. With its dominating position on the edge of the Citadel and its unusual silhouette, it has a visual prominence unmatched by Cairo’s numerous masterpieces of Islamic religious architecture, including the mosques of Ibn Tulun and Sultan Hasan. This is surprising, especially since the structure does not belong to that great period of Cairo’s history from the tenth to the fifteenth century when the city was a major world capital. Instead, the mosque was constructed at a time when Cairo was just emerging from the position of relative provincialism to which it had been relegated since the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517.1

Many considerations, among them its chronological position, its location in the Citadel, and its association with an important patron, make the mosque of Muhammad ʻAli a significant structure which can be thoroughly understood in reference to a variety of external elements ranging from the city’s topography, to the architecture of the Ottoman world, to the political aspirations of Muhammad ʻAli himself. Before proceeding to this relatively complex level of investigation, however, we must begin with a basic formal analysis, that is, a description of the monument independent of those personal, cultural, and functional considerations that will modify, but at the same time complete, our initial understanding of it.

The mosque, which is located on the western edge of the Citadel overlooking the city, appears to the viewer in stages. In the city below, the structure appears to be a cubic mass topped by a central dome, surrounded by a cascading set of four half-domes and four corner domes, and framed by two slender minarets (fig. 1). Entering the citadel from its western New Gate, one first sees the structure’s northern façade (fig. 2), and then other elements come into the viewer’s range, most notably, a courtyard bordering the structure from the west. Around its other side, its eastern façade has a sizable rectangular projection (fig. 3). The northern and southern façades have porticoes extending along their lower parts. The upper sections center on a central dome resting on an octagonal drum supported by a square base. A series of windows accentuate both the main dome and the surrounding domes and half-domes. Two tall minarets flank the western façade; two small towers flank the eastern façade, and another four surround the central dome.

As one approaches still closer, the structure is no longer seen as a three-dimensional formal composition, but as a series of decorated surfaces not visible from a distance. The lower part of the structure can now be seen as sheathed in marble (fig. 4),2 and the variety of capitals, pedestals, and bases of the columns and pilasters come into focus. Also visible at this distance are decorative motifs such as the inscription bands, a good portion of which are placed within a colored frieze located above the capitals, and the domed square units dividing the porticoes. In the final result, a monumental structure of tall minarets and large domes is transformed into richly ornamented surfaces.

The mosque’s courtyard is entered from either of two gates, one located in its northeastern, the other in the southeastern corner, where the courtyard and the sanctuary meet (fig. 5). The courtyard has porticoes on four sides consisting of equally sized bays. Three of the portico bays — those containing the two aforementioned entry gates and a third gate leading into the interior of the mosque — project higher than the rest. The courtyard has a centrally located kiosk composed of an octagonally arranged arcade of columns supporting a lead covered wooden dome and containing a large ablution tank (fig. 6). The whole is richly decorated with colored geometric and vegetal patterns and inscriptions. A clock tower stands in the middle of the courtyard’s western portico, rising about twice the height of the surrounding porticoes. It occupies two portico bays which are treated as a blind arcade. Marble covers the inner, just as the outer, courtyard walls. Surface articulation is provided by engaged pilasters, friezes, and vegetal and geometric patterns. A colored frieze of inscriptions above the pilaster capitals runs around the interior walls of the courtyard. Windows pierce the courtyard walls in the center of each of the portico bays. Along with the entry gates, they pro-
vide the only connection between the courtyard and outside. Otherwise, the courtyard is an isolated space, open only to the sky.

The portal in the middle of the eastern courtyard portico leads into the sanctuary; two other entrances to the sanctuary are located at the center of its northern and southern façades. The interior reflects the exterior forms (fig. 7). It is a squarish area, defined from above by the central dome, supporting domes, and half-domes. From the east, it extends into a sizable rectangular projection. The space of the sanctuary is interrupted by the four large piers supporting the domes and by a gallery area located above its western entrance. The interior is decorated with vegetal and geometric motifs and inscriptions.

A good portion of the inscriptions are from the Qur’an, the hadith, and popular prayers and sayings. The most conspicuous inscriptions are placed in the shields painted on the surfaces of the pendentives and the half-dome above the mihrab (fig. 8). They follow the Ottoman formula in which each of the shields contains the name “Allah,” or “Muhammad,” or of one of the Prophet’s four successors. Of the remaining inscriptions, in both Arabic and Turkish, one mentions the name of the Ottoman Sultan 5Abd al-Majid (r. 1839–61); it is dated 1262 (1845–46) and is part of a frieze located above the entrance of the eastern courtyard portico. Also included in the epigraphic program is a poem by Muhammad Shihab al-Din, a nineteenth-century Egyptian poet. It is dated 1261 (1844–45) in the inscription, and is a eulogy for the patron and his mosque. Its verses are divided up among the marble frames of the windows surrounding the mosque and its courtyard. In it, the mosque is compared to other architectural wonders, some of which are difficult to identify, but all of which have clear royal associations. They include the “palace of Ghamdan,” “the pyramids of Hormos,” “the iwan of Khusrav,” “the throne of the Queen of Sheba,” and the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus (umawiyy al-Sham).

The plan of the mosque of Muhammad 5Ali shows a
of 21 m., almost half the width of the structure itself (fig. 10). The dome is supported by pendentives, which in turn rest on four large piers.

Written accounts of the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli include the publications of the author Hassan ʿAbd al-Wahhab, which comes closest to those anticipated by twentieth-century architectural history. He provides thorough descriptions of the monument and an account of its history to the mid twentieth century. Gaston Wiet's *Muhammed Ali et les Beaux-Arts* collects a substantial number of comments and descriptions relating to the monument and mainly supplied by Western observers. These are often misinformed. One of them attributes the mosque to Muhammad ʿAli's French architect Pascal Coste, for example. In fact, Coste was initially considered, but was not chosen for the task. Other accounts describe this clearly Ottoman mosque as “Arab” or “Egyptian.”

One important account of the monument is provided by ʿAli Mubarak in his monumental *al-Khitan al-Tawfiqyya al-Jadida li-Misr al-Qahira*, a multi-volume work published in 1888, more than half a century after construction on the mosque had begun. In format, this publication is based on the fifteenth-century *Khitan* of al-Maqrizi, leading to an arrangement unusual for the modern reader. Instead of seeing a monument in its totality, it is described as a collection of details. As a result, Mubarak provides information pertaining to a variety of elements, including the number of columns and windows in the monument, and even the number of steps found in each of its minarets, but no overall view of it. His apparent obsession with details may have been inspired by his training as an engineer, but it also reflected the attitude of his contemporaries and earlier observers that a structure was composed of a juxtapositioning of independent elements and details, rather than a syntactic arrangement of them.

Mubarak also provides a meticulous account of the mosque’s epigraphic program, both the location of the structure’s inscriptions and their contents. This is important because many of them cannot be seen from ground level. Mubarak also gives the contents of the waqfs provided for the monument by two of Muhammad ʿAli’s successors, ʿAbbas and Muhammad ʿSaʿid. The amounts yielded by the waqfs and the manner in which they were to be spent are stipulated.

The mosque of Muhammad ʿAli was begun in late 1828, and much of it was finished by the time of its patron’s death in 1849, though work on it continued — first to complete it and later to restore and repair it —
until well into the present century. The mosque's positions in time and space establish the context to which it belongs. Concerning its geographic location, the city of Cairo had been the center for a number of major dynasties beginning with the Tulunids down to the Fatimids, Ayyubids, and, most important, the Mamluks, who rose to power during the second half of the thirteenth century. Even though Mamluk rule formally came to an end with the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517, the Mamluk infrastructure was not destroyed. In practice, Mamluk princes continued to govern the country under the nominal suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan and his appointed governor. It was not until Muhammad 'Ali firmly established himself in power that Mamluk rule was brought to an end once and for all. To this political process of development is a corresponding architectural one. A unique architectural tradition had developed during the Mamluk era. Even after the Ottoman conquest of Egypt, the Mamluk architectural vocabulary continued to prevail and was modified only partly through the introduction of Ottoman models.

The continuity between the architectural production of Mamluk and Ottoman Egypt is evident even in structures showing strong Ottoman influences such as the mosques of Suleyman Pasha (1528) and Malika Safiya (1610). Although both express a clear reliance on Ottoman prototypes as evident in their plan configurations and shape of minarets, they remain strongly connected.

Fig. 3. Mosque of Muhammad 'Ali. View from the southeast. (Photo: Ministry of Waqfs, The Mosques of Egypt)
to Mamluk architectural practices as reflected in their methods of construction and decorative programs.13 With the accession of Muhammad ʿAli to the governorship of Egypt in 1805, the country entered a new phase of its development. Muhammad ʿAli was an Albanian who joined the Ottoman army as a junior officer in an Albanian detachment. In 1801, he was among the troops sent by the Ottomans, with British aid, to expel the French from Egypt. Muhammad ʿAli took advantage of the power vacuum resulting from the defeat of the Mamluks and the consequent ouster of the French. Through a combination of military and political shrewdness, he secured the support of the Albanian detachment and the local ulama, and managed to become the most powerful man in Egypt. His accomplishment was recognized by the Ottoman sultan’s appointing him as governor of Egypt in 1805. His descendants governed the country, though often only nominally, until 1953. Once Muhammad ʿAli secured the governorship of Egypt he set about achieving independence from the Ottoman Porte, a task which he accomplished with considerable, if not total, success. Still, he remained a member and product of the Ottoman world. While he may have confronted Istanbul militarily and politically, he maintained a cultural allegiance to the Ottomans, and Turkish was the language he used. He just happened to rule a province called Egypt.14 When we examine this mosque, Muhammad ʿAli’s paradoxical relationship to the Ottoman world is relevant. Usually the formal composition of a building tells about it positions in time and place. An early-nineteenth-century Cairene building, for example, would be expected to have a predominantly Mamluk vocabulary modified with limited Ottoman features. However, Cairo’s Mamluk heritage is here ignored, and instead the city is presented with a predominantly Ottoman structure. By the 1820’s, when Muhammad ʿAli had firmly established his rule, Egypt had been under Ottoman suzerainty for over three centuries. Ironically, it was the governor who most aggressively sought Egypt’s independence from Istanbul who also provided Cairo with its most Ottomanized structure. In appearance, the mosque borrows a formula from a number of Istanbuli imperial Ottoman mosques whose origins can be traced back to the Byzantine church of Hagia Sophia (532–37), and whose earliest Ottoman example is the mosque of Bayazid II (1501–6). This family of mosques includes well-known and important monuments such as the Süleymaniye (1550–57) and the mosque of Sultan Ahmet (1609–17). Both incorporate a large central dome supported by two or four half-domes, with minarets, ranging in number from two to six, flanking the whole composition. All those components, clearly hallmarks of the “Ottomanness” of a monument, are to be found in the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli. They also do not just allude to a generic imperial Ottoman mosque, they make specific and accurate references to a set of historical examples found in Istanbul and conceived between 1543 and 1617, a period of architectural and cultural brilliance in Ottoman history. The idea of a squarish sanctuary area covered by a central dome which in turn is flanked by four half-domes is found in Sinan’s complex of Sehzade Mehmet (1543–48), the Yeni Valide mosque (begun 1597), and the mosque of Sultan Ahmet. This singling out of a subgroup of imperial Ottoman mosques is most probably the result of formal choices. From the compositional point of view, these structures with their multiplicity of
domes and half-domes are the most elaborate of the Ottoman imperial mosques. For someone attempting to establish links with the Ottoman heritage, such grandiose structures would be the most suitable for imitation. Of equal importance is that all three mosques belong to a period of Ottoman supremacy and splendor.

The mosque of Muhammad ʿAli is not, however, the first example of a classical Ottoman revival. An earlier one is the new Fatih mosque in Istanbul as it was rebuilt in 1766 soon after an earthquake destroyed the original structure; it too follows the formula of a central dome surrounded by four half-domes, and has been described by Godfrey Goodwin as a “conscious piece of revivalism in the grand manner.” It provides another example of the emulation of a specific set of monuments belonging to the classical Ottoman period and may well have been one of the structures examined by those responsible for the conception of the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli. If it was, we are provided with a revival based on a previous revival.\(^{15}\)

The mosque of Muhammad ʿAli not only sets out to establish visual and formal links to the great imperial mosques of the classical Ottoman period, but it also utilizes dimensions expressing an equivalent level of monumentality. If one considers this structure’s general area, the size of its courtyard, the diameter and height of its central dome, and the height of its minarets, it becomes obvious that this is a structure which, in size at least, rivals the largest Ottoman mosques. It is also the largest mosque to be built in the first half of the nineteenth century. Its monumentality is apparent when one compares its dimensions to those of three of the most celebrated

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Fig. 5. Mosque of Muhammad ʿAli. Southeastern entrance of courtyard. (Photo: Visual Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University)
mosques of the Ottoman architectural heritage, the Süleymaniye, the Selimiye in Edirne (1569–75), and the mosque of Sultan Ahmet. The area of its prayer hall is comparable to that of the mosque of Sultan Ahmet, though smaller than the Süleymaniye. Its courtyard is larger in area than those in both the Süleymaniye and Sultan Ahmet. The diameter of the dome is smaller than its Ottoman counterparts, but its height is comparable to those of the Süleymaniye, and higher than those of the Selimiye and Sultan Ahmet. Most impressive of all are its 84-meter minarets, which are not only higher than their Ottoman counterparts, but are among the tallest anywhere.15

In addition to its reliance on classical Ottoman prototypes, the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli also shows elements of European origin, though here, the incorporation of European models often reached Cairo via Istanbul, where motifs of European provenance had achieved popularity since the early part of the eighteenth century. In Istanbul, the “Tulip period” of the 1720’s had shown a particular fondness for European products. In architecture, this was evidenced by a variety of features ranging from French formal garden styles in Ottoman landscape designs to the introduction of European furniture in the palaces of the Ottoman sultans and their high-ranking officials. In spite of this popularity of imported items, however, the integrity of Ottoman systems of architectural expression was maintained and there were no discontinuities with the Ottoman heritage. From the architectural point of view, the Tulip period was restricted to the introduction of some decorative modifications.17
By the mid eighteenth century, the architecture of the Tulip period had culminated into the phase known as the "Ottoman Baroque," a vocabulary characterized by an increasing use of decorative details from the West and by an expansion of the borrowing process to include certain planning features. One early structure which clearly expresses the qualities of this era is the Nurosmaniye mosque in Istanbul (ca. 1755; fig. 11), with its modified classical order (and Islamized capitals), curving façades and eaves, and horseshoe-shaped courtyard in place of the traditional rectangular one. Both Mubarak and Julius Franz, a German architect practicing in Cairo, regarded the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli as having been modeled after the Nurosmaniye mosque. Although the two mosques differ in their overall architectural compositions, they are linked through a number of formal similarities derived from Western architectural and decorative elements, including the use of natural looking floral motifs, curved surfaces, and modified classical details. In the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli, the process of Westernization was carried a step further through the introduction of the clock tower, one of the earliest to be included in a mosque.

Although on a stylistic level Ottoman influence is dominant, an overview of the artists, craftsmen, and technicians responsible for the structure reveals considerable diversity. Hassan ʿAbd al-Wahhab identified a number of those involved in the realization of the monument through an examination of government documents. The craftsmen responsible for the lead covering

Fig. 7. Mosque of Muhammad ʿAli. Prayer hall. (Photo: Ministry of Waqfs, *The Mosques of Egypt*)
of the domes and minaret caps were brought from Istanbul. The assistant engineer, draftsmen, stone masons, and marble workers were all Egyptians. European craftsmen was called upon to provide technical drawings for the windows and to execute contracts relating to the marble and copper works. Pietro Avoscani, an Italian artist living in Egypt, was charged with the task of obtaining marble for the mosque from European quarries.

Although the prototypes for this mosque are clearly Ottoman, it is nonetheless a structure that would seem out of place in Istanbul. Most Ottoman mosques can be entered from a courtyard gate at the end of a central axis that runs along the length of the mosque and links that gate to the mihrab. In contrast, the western façade of the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli faces a sudden topographic drop, and instead of an entrance, its center has a clock tower. As a result, the mosque complex can be entered only from the sides. Another non-Ottoman feature is the shape of the domes which are slightly pointed and are of a higher profile than their Ottoman counterparts; they rest on octagonal drums providing an arrangement that also does not feature prominently in Ottoman architecture. Aesthetically, the formal composition is not a great success. Ottoman continuity, in which the mass comprised of the central dome and its supporting domes and half-domes are united into a triangular outline, is lacking for the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli.

Another deviation from Ottoman prototypes is in the treatment of the façades. In Ottoman imperial examples, the openings of each façade are placed within a large blind arch. With the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli, there is no such attempt to unite the arrangement of
windows. A final, and visually minor, variation is the shape of the column capitals (fig. 4). Capitals of ancient Egyptian inspiration are used instead of ones expressing Islamic or classical influences. These lotus capitals provide the only direct allusion to the architectural heritage of Egypt to be found in this building.

These deviations differentiating the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli from the imperial Ottoman mosques of Istanbul can partly be attributed to the physical distance separating Cairo from Istanbul, and thus can be viewed as local modifications of Ottoman practices. However, they more probably are the result of direct or indirect European influence. Even the use of the lotus capital should not be construed as an indigenous revival of elements belonging to Egypt’s ancient architectural heritage. Interest among the Muslims of Egypt in that distant period was surprisingly limited. The lotus capital probably reached the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli via Europe, where ancient Egyptian civilization had been admired since the time of the ancient Greeks. Following Napoleon’s expedition to the country in 1798 and the subsequent publication of the Description de l’Égypte pharaonic Egypt was systematically studied. It was not until the mid nineteenth century that Egyptology would become a topic of interest among Egyptians.

A monument’s primary form of affiliation often is with a place, as with the Great Mosques of Córdoba, Qairawan, and Samarra. In other cases it is with a patron, as with the mosques of Ibn Tulun, Baybars, and al-Ghuri. The third form of association is more prominent in the Western world, from the Renaissance onwards, and consists of coupling a structure with its architect. Examples belonging to this category include monuments ranging from Bramante’s Tempietto to Frank Lloyd Wright’s various residential structures. As with much of the Islamic world’s pre-modern architectural production, this third form of association is weak for the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli, and is overwhelmed by the other two. Consequently, it cannot be studied as the architectural expression of an individual artist. We are told that the architect was a certain Yusuf Boshnak (Bushnaq), but evidence used to support this identification is inconclusive and unconvincing. Hasan ʿAbd al-Wahhab’s perusal of governmental archives allowed him to find references to many of the artisans participating in the mosque’s building, but not the architect. ʿAli Mubarak, while identify-

Fig. 9. Mosque of Muhammad ʿAli. Plan. (From: Ministry of Waqfs, The Mosques of Egypt)
ing a number of the calligraphers who worked on the mosque, makes no mention of the architect.\textsuperscript{39} The first attribution to Yusuf Boshnak is an undocumented citation provided in a 1908 Baedeker, where he is identified as Yusuf Boshna (not Boshnak). Hassan ʿAbd al-Wahhab later suggested that “Boshna” might be a misspelling of the more common name “Boshnak.” Since then, “Yusuf Boshnak” has been identified as the architect of this mosque.\textsuperscript{39}

Further archival research might eventually provide a definitive identification of this mosque’s architect, but for the moment, the available information allows certain conclusions. For one thing, the architect was knowledgeable about both Ottoman and contemporary European architectural practices, but he was not an exclusive product of either tradition. Consequently, it is probable that he was not an Egyptian, but either an Ottoman who had strong contacts with Europe, or a European who was well acquainted with the architectural heritage of Ottoman Istanbul and who even may have resided in that city. The lack of references dealing with this architect makes it safe to assume that he was a master builder or even a chief contractor, but not an acclaimed designer.

The essential purpose of a mosque is to provide an enclosure for the performance of prayers. These prayers may range from individual ones to the congregational Friday and ʿIbd prayers. According to Mubarak, the mosque was built for “the benefit of those working in the departments and palaces to enable them to perform the Islamic prayers and rituals, since all these departments
and most of the administrative agencies during... [Muhammad 'Ali's] reign were in the citadel." To accept Mubarak's explanation as the sole reason for the structure's existence would be naive. A mosque of this size, capable of accommodating over 6,500 worshipers, would exceed the needs of any administrative staff working in the Citadel. Besides, it is adjacent to yet another mosque, that of al-Nasir Muhammad built in 1318–35, now deserted, but still impressive. As Mubarak mentions, this was the mosque in which a number of Mamluk sultans performed the prayers and from which their chief judges delivered the Friday sermon. Therefore, if the sole purpose of constructing the mosque was to provide the administrative staff of the Citadel with a place to pray, then the neighboring mosque of al-Nasir with its capacity of about 5,000 worshipers would certainly have sufficed.

The other function attributed to this mosque is that of a mausoleum: it was to shelter the remains of its patron Muhammad 'Ali. Although Muhammad 'Ali seems to have intended to use the mosque as his final resting place, it is probable that the idea was an afterthought, since around 1820, he had constructed a royal cemetery to house his remains as well as those of his offspring. Three of his sons and a number of their children were actually buried there. Muhammad 'Ali's cenotaph is in the southwestern corner of his mosque, not in an area specifically designed to house a tomb, in contrast to the situation encountered in most Ottoman imperial mosques where a türbe for the sultan is built next to his

Fig. 11. Istanbul, Nurosmaniye Mosque. (Photo: Visual Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard University)
mosque, or in Egypt where, as in the case of the earlier mosque of Sultan Hasan or the later al-Rifa'i, certain parts of the structure are designated, and architecturally differentiated, to express that purpose. For that reason, the possibility that Muhammad 5Ali decided to use this mosque as his mausoleum only after its construction had begun should not be excluded.

Muhammad 5Ali's successors introduced a number of new uses for the structure, some of which became institutionalized. Muhammad Sa'id (r. 1854–63) established the tradition of holding yearly religious ceremonies in the mosque on five specified nights, the first two commemorating Muhammad 5Ali's death and burial on the thirteenth and fourteenth of Ramadan; the remaining three celebrated Laylat al-Qadr (the night during which the Qur'an was revealed), Laylat al-Mi'raj (the night of the Prophet's Ascension to the heavens), and the night marking the middle of the month of Sha'ban. These events were preceded by elaborate banquets in one of the royal palaces and were attended by the ruler as well as important state dignitaries. They were continued until the 1950's when the rule of Muhammad 5Ali's dynasty was brought to an end. Another important, but unique, event to take place in the mosque was the Ottoman sultan 5Abd al-Aziz's performing the Friday prayers during his visit to Egypt in 1863. The prayers were preceded by a grand procession that brought the Ottoman sultan from the palace of Muhammad 5Ali in the Citadel, where he was staying, to the mosque itself. A maqsura was built specially for this occasion. Two others were built in the mosques of al-Husayn and Sayyida Zaynab where the sultan was also expected to perform the prayers, though he never did.

Beyond these special occasions, the mosque's connection to the ruling powers is expressed in other ways. It is a mosque that from the beginning was associated with the Egyptian royal family from Muhammad 5Ali, through his successors, down to Faruq, its last important ruler. Every one of Muhammad 5Ali's heirs was careful to leave his stamp on the structure, either by completing parts of it or by additions or renovations. On a different level, the mosque's importance was expressed in two other ways, both pertaining to its location in the Citadel. The Citadel is Cairo's most prominent landmark, and the center of power from which Muhammad 5Ali's empire was governed. More specifically, the monument was built over the Mamluk hall of justice and thus literally as well as metaphorically replaced the old seat of power. Its location opposite the earlier royal mosque of al-Nasir Muhammad, which had been the center of Cairo's official religious ceremonies for centuries, eclipsed that structure, not only functionally (the mosque of al-Nasir Muhammad was used to store food), but, as a result of its height, also visually. As a mosque, this symbol of an older regime could not be destroyed, but at least it was neutralized and rendered ineffective.

Also significant is the mosque's architectural vocabulary. The mosque totally turns its back on the Mamluk architectural heritage of Cairo, and instead faithfully emulates Ottoman, and more specifically imperial Ottoman, examples. The reliance on Ottoman prototypes also reflects a sense of belonging to, as well as competition with, the Porte in Istanbul. The Ottoman Empire still provided Muhammad 5Ali with his main source of political legitimacy even as he defied it. In fact, his allegiance to the Ottoman political system is found in an inscription located above the western entrance of the mosque which mentions the name of the then reigning Ottoman Sultan 5Abd al-Majid. The composition of the mosque itself also directly and indirectly both acknowledges a degree of Ottoman supremacy and expresses defiance of it. The imperial Ottoman mosque, the prototype for the mosque of Muhammad 5Ali, was a building type reserved for use by the Ottoman sultan. The presence of two or more minarets in an Ottoman mosque marked imperial patronage and thus remained the exclusive prerogative of the Ottoman sovereign or those of royal blood, such as the sultan's mother or son. By constructing a mosque with two minarets, Muhammad 5Ali expressed his equality with his overlord in an unambiguous way. In other words, this monument is something of an architectural act of rebellion.

These various characteristics add up to a set of messages communicated by the structure, but one prerequisite for their understanding was a knowledge of the architectural conventions of the Ottoman world. The group of perceivers to whom the vocabulary of this mosque was comprehensible would have been a small one. For the architecturally uninitiated, who constituted the majority of viewers, a structure carries out its communicative tasks through the intermediacy of other elements such as its utilitarian function, size, location, the use of materials, and decoration, or what also can be referred to as elaborateness. While alien to the architectural heritage of Egypt, this structure can still be clearly and readily identified as a mosque. Its importance is asserted through its location on the Citadel, its imposing size, the use of expensive materials, and the elaborateness of its decorative scheme. To the majority of viewers, it is on this more basic, but more universal, level that
such a structure is comprehended. More than a shelter for prayers and a burial place for the patron, this mosque is an architectural representative and symbol of Muhammad ʿAli’s dynasty and an assertion of its power and authority. The importance of the mosque to Muhammad ʿAli’s successors is evident. They all built additions and renovations, or donated waqfs to it.

Oddly, although Muhammad ʿAli is buried there and the contributions made to this mosque by his successors are clearly documented, little is known concerning the interaction between mosque and patron during his lifetime. One explanation is that the mosque had not been finished by the time he died in 1849. Another reason might be that the use of the architectural object as a political and propaganda tool in the Islamic world is often overlooked by historians. Even to Mubarak, the mosque was merely a utilitarian structure. Neither Henry Dodwell nor Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, each of whom devoted a monograph to the study of Muhammad ʿAli, make any mention of his major architectural achievement. Often, it is on a subconscious level that a work of architecture communicates with its perceivers.

The mosque of Muhammad ʿAli obviously is important in its own right: its patron, location, and relation to its setting all contribute to its significance. This structure also marks a shift in the evolution of modern architecture in the Islamic world. In fact, if a structure representing the Islamic world’s architectural entry into the modern period needs to be chosen, the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli qualifies as a serious candidate. The early nineteenth century is the period during which the first experiments of modernization in the Islamic world had taken place. It was in the Egypt of Muhammad ʿAli that such experiments were carried out most aggressively, and where existing political, cultural, and economic systems came into conflict with newer ones brought in from Europe. The result was the interaction of two sets of values which continues well into our own day.

As with most monuments built in a transitional phase, the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli has features of both newer and older periods. On the one hand, it continues a centuries-old Islamic architectural tradition, both in elements that are part of its formal composition and its location in the Citadel, since concentrating authority in a citadel was a characteristic of the traditional Islamic city. Not until the second half of the nineteenth century were the citadels in numerous cities of the Islamic world replaced by palaces and administrative buildings located inside the cities. In Cairo, this happened in 1874 when the new royal palace of ʿAbdin was completed, and the Citadel was displaced as Egypt’s administrative center. But when the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli was built, the Citadel still retained its political importance, and was also the site of the construction and renovation projects carried out by Muhammad ʿAli. Placing the mosque on its western edge overlooking the city was in itself an acknowledgment of the Citadel’s continuing significance.

The mosque has two levels of affiliation. The first is a pan-Islamic one. Through the utilization of an Ottoman prototype, a reference is made to the supreme symbol of Sunni Islamic unity. The second is a personal one, in which a reference is made to the ruler himself. The monument was in effect his personal property. He was its patron; it was named after him; it held his remains; and his successors inherited it. In both cases of affiliation, however, there is no reference to Egypt as a nation, it is simply another region of the Ottoman world, a province that happened to fall by chance under the control of a particular governor. This missing nationhood, a sense so strongly connected to any people’s entry into the modern period, is yet another aspect of the mosque’s pre-modern or late-medieval character.

In spite of the comfortable position this mosque holds in the pre-modern tradition of Islamic architecture, it introduces a number of features anticipating new systems of architectural expression. In the Islamic world, one of the signs of the advent of the modern era was a powerful break with what had been until then an evolutionary and continuous past. Such ruptures also affected architecture. Pre-modern Islamic Egypt is characterized by a continuous architectural tradition dating back to the Islamic conquest and extending into the Ottoman period. Even after the Ottoman conquest, Mamluk architectural traditions remained dominant, and Ottoman influences only produced modifying, instead of overwhelming, effects. Muhammad ʿAli’s building of this mosque changed that by rejecting the prevailing Mamluk vocabulary in favor of an Ottoman one. With this, an architectural break with the past was achieved.

A contrast to this development can be found in the Nusretiye mosque in Istanbul, a near contemporary of the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli (1822–26; fig. 12). It shows a heavy reliance on the Baroque and early-nineteenth-century Classical Revival prototypes as evidenced in a variety of elements, including the shapes of the bases and the balconies of its minarets, the placement of a sizable arcaded royal pavilion in front of the sanctuary, and the clock tower. In spite of this dependence on Western models, it remains a square-domed mosque flanked by
two minarets, one which, according to Godfrey Goodwin, "Sinan would be able to recognize ... as within his concept of the Ottoman tradition." Such continuity with existing local architectural traditions is lacking for the mosque of Muhammad 'Ali, and is replaced by a disregard, if not rejection, of them.

Whenever an architectural tradition is initiated, a process of replacement has to follow through the development of new systems of architectural expression. The mosque of Muhammad 'Ali conforms to this model. An existing tradition was rejected, and a new vocabulary was imported. The resulting composition concentrates on two traditions: sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century imperial Ottoman architecture and early-nineteenth-century European architectural practices introduced to Cairo through Istanbul.

The accuracy with which information was transmitted from Istanbul to Cairo is another manifestation of this mosque's position as an initiator of new architectural developments. This mosque goes beyond being an example of local architectural practices modified by imported ones, for instead of modifying styles, it replaces them. For the first time in Egypt, an imported vocabulary is transplanted comprehensively and accurately. The distance separating the originating region from the receiving one did not compromise the coherence of the imported model. This accuracy in the transfer of information is not unrelated to more general developments.
characterizing a culture's entry into the modern era.

The appearance of this mosque on the Cairo skyline was a clear indication of the end of an era. Still, while this structure showed signs of modernization, it showed limited signs of Westernization. The incorporation of modified classical orders, a clock tower, and the use of European craftsmen indicate increasing contact with the Western world, but these various influences were subordinated to an overall organizational formal system which was still clearly Islamic. The Western avalanche that was to overtake the Islamic world in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had not yet arrived, and perhaps had not been allowed to do so. What is notable about this mosque, and the period of Muhammad ʿAli in general, is the unique phenomenon of modernization carried out independently of Westernization, a situation that would not last for long.

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NOTES


2. According to ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, the original intention was to cover the façades fully with marble; see ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Masjid, p. 381.

3. Ibid., p. 385.

4. For a wording of the poem, see Mubārak, Khīṭāt, 5: 80–81.

5. The dimensions of the monument are provided in Mubārak, Khīṭāt, 5: 78.

6. A review of the sources dealing with the monument are found in note 1 above.


8. Ibid., pp. 266 and 272.

9. The only exception to Mubārak’s methodology of describing the architectural monument is his likening of the mosque of Muḥammad ʿAlī to the Sidi Sariyya (or Sulaymaṇ Pasha) mosque (1528), located nearby in the citadel, and the Nuriyya mosque in Istanbul (ca. 1755); see Khīṭāt, 5: 78.

10. While Mubārak’s Khīṭāt remains one of the more important works describing Cairo’s evolution during the nineteenth century, it still contains its share of inaccuracies. For an overall assessment of al-Khīṭāt, see Jack A. Grabbs, Jr., The Writing of History in Nineteenth-Century Egypt: A Study in National Transformation (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), pp. 115–18.


12. For a history of the mosque after Muḥammad ʿAlī’s death, see Mubārak, Khīṭāt, 5: 82–87, and ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Masjid, pp. 381–83.


15. A more detailed account of the Fateh mosque and its reconstruction in the mid-eighteenth century is provided in Godfrey Goodwin, Ottoman Architecture, pp. 394–96.

16. The dimensions of these Ottoman mosques are available in Goodwin, Ottoman Architecture, pp. 225, 226, 231, 261, and 483 n. 62. Concerning the dimensions of the mosque of Muḥammad ʿAlī, see ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Masjadi, pp. 384–85; and Mubārak, Khīṭāt, 5: 78–79.


18. A more detailed account of the Nusretiye mosque is found in Goodwin, Ottoman Architecture, pp. 380–427.


20. The clock was a gift presented to Muḥammad ʿAlī in 1845 by the French King Louis-Philippe. See ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Masjīd, p. 386. An earlier example of the inclusion of a clock tower in an Islamic religious structure is the Nusretiye mosque in Istanbul, completed in 1826. Additional information on this mosque is found in Goodwin, Ottoman Architecture, pp. 417–19.

21. The national identities of the technical staff involved in the


24. The Egyptian author and educator, Rifa‘a al-Tahtawi was among the first Egyptians to become interested in Egyptology. See Crabs, *Writing of History*, p. 70. A revealing example of the gradually changing manner in which Egyptians began to view their ancient heritage during the course of the nineteenth century is found in the changing of the logo of *al-Waqā‘i‘ al-Miṣrīyya*, the official Egyptian journal founded by Muhammad ʿAli in 1828. Originally, the logo consisted of a classical-looking urn; starting with the eighteenth issue (1829), it was replaced by a pyramid, indicating a new interest among Egyptians in their pharaonic past. See Ibrāhīm ʿAbdul, *Ṭārīkh al-Waqā‘i‘ al-Miṣrīyya*, 1828–1942 (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a‘ al-Amirīyya, 1942), pp. 35–36.


26. The identity of the architect is discussed in ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, *Masājid*, p. 378; and Wiet, *Mohammed Ali*, p. 285. The British traveler Robert Curzon (in Wiet’s translation in his *Muhammad Ali et les Beaux-Arts*, p. 266) attributes the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli to an anonymous Armenian architect. The attribution is the result of mistranslating "Armenian architecture" into "architecte arménien." In describing the hall of justice which was replaced by the mosque of Muhammad ʿAli, Curzon writes: "The hall, which was a very fine room, divided into aisles by magnificent antique columns of red granite, has unfortunately been pulled down by Mohammed Ali. He did this to make way for the mosque which he has built of Egyptian alabaster, a splendid material, but its barbarous Armenian architecture [italics mine] offers a sad contrast to the stately edifice which has been so ruthlessly destroyed." See Robert Curzon, *Visits to Monasteries in the Levant* (London: John Murray, 1851), p. 41.


28. Ibid., p. 77.

29. Ibid., p. 79.


38. Ibid., p. 90.