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The Cult of `Alid Saints in the Fatimid Monuments of Cairo
Part I: The Mosque of al-Aqmar

Some recent contributions to the study of Islamic architecture indicate that a monument’s iconography and the reading of its inscriptions can provide new perspectives for social or political history as well as for the art historian. A case in point are the monuments of the Fatimid period (358–567/969–1171) in Cairo, a period Gaston Wiet characterized as "une des plus passionantes de l’histoire de l’Egypte musulmane," and one whose architectural legacy includes considerably more than merely its documentary sources. Among the twenty-seven monuments listed for this period are a pair of doors, a qa’a, and a minaret, five military gates or walls, five mosques, and fourteen shrines or mausoleums. Of the shrines and mosques, ten have epigraphic or textual citations linking them to the `Alid saints. The tombs and shrines all date from the last quarter of Fatimid rule: six of them to between 514 and 524 (1120–30) and six to between 525 and 546 (1130–50), two periods in which the turmoil and confusion that beset the Fatimid caliphate as a result of the first and second succession crises were most apparent. They represent the earliest and largest related group of funerary monuments surviving from the first six centuries of Islam. My contention here will be that they appeared as an architectural expression of an officially sponsored cult of `Alid martyrs and saints that was being used to generate support for the government of an Isma`ili imamate-caliphate which was being spiritually and politically discounted by historical events.

Isma`iliism, a sect of the Shi’i and the state religion of the Fatimid dynasty, holds as its central tenet the conviction that after the Prophet’s death the only rightful heads of the Islamic community, and hence the only authoritative religious teachers, the imams, were `Ali (the Prophet’s son-in-law), his sons al-Hasan and al-Ḥusayn, and the descendants of al-Ḥusayn through his son `Ali Zayn al-`Ābidīn, the solitary survivor of the tragedy of Karbala. The Shi’i communities maintain that the naṣṣ (that is, the explicit statement) by which Muḥammad nominated `Ali to succeed him as imam of the Muslims occurred at Ghadir Khumm, where the Prophet is said to have received a revelation upon returning from the Farewell Pilgrimage on 18 Dhul-Hijja 10/16 March 632. In the presence of the Companions, taking `Ali’s hand in his own, he pronounced, “If I am anyone’s mawla, then `Ali is his mawla.” Then Muḥammad announced his own impending death and enjoined all believers to remain loyal to his family and to the book of God.

In 148/765, with the death of Ja`far al-Ṣādiq, the sixth imam after `Ali, the Imāmī-Shi’i community split. Ismā’il, Ja`far’s eldest son and heir, had died before his father. A part of the Shi’i recognized Ismā’il’s younger brother Mūsā al-Kāšīm as the seventh imam, and his line continued until the twelfth imam, who disappeared in about 260/873 and is still the “awaited imam” or Mahdi of the great majority of the Shi’a, the iḥtima` `askari or Twelver Shi’a, today. Another part of the Shi’i community recognized Ismā’il’s son Muḥammad as the imam, and as followers of the line of Ismā’il they became known as the Ismā’ili or Severen Shi’a.

The Fatimid imamate professed to represent the true Islam transmitted through a line of seven imams and their successors, who alone understood the interior (bātini) meaning of the religion proclaimed by the Prophet. Central to the Ismā’ili system, therefore, is the imam — the heir of the Prophet, the Chosen of God, and the sole rightful leader of mankind. The imams, as descendants of
'Ali and Fātima through Ismā'il, were divinely inspired and infallible, were even hypostases of the universal divine spirit. As such the Imam of the Age was the fountainhead of knowledge and authority, sole interpreter of the esoteric truths that were hidden from the unlearned, and source of commands that required total and unquestioning obedience. In the Ismā'ili belief, guidance and salvation could be achieved only through the imam, the mediator between God and mankind. Except by the imam’s intercession and through his guidance by interpretation of scripture, it was impossible for men to avoid the punishment of God; to die without following the Imam of the Age was to die, in the words of well-known Shi'i hadiths, “as ignorant carrion,” or “the death of the Jāhiliyya.”

Along with the idea that the imams were the intercessors for mankind, however, there developed a corollary reliance on the intercession of saints and martyrs from among the Prophet’s family, and, to a lesser degree, among their faithful followers and associates. This belief began to manifest itself after the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn at Karbala in 61/680 on ‘Āshūrā (the tenth of Muḥarram), the old Muslim Day of Atonement, when he, along with some seventy kinsmen of the Prophet and their supporters, was ruthlessly put to death by an Umayyad force. Out of this massacre grew the themes of self-sacrifice, atonement, and redemption that became such powerful forces in Shi‘i belief. Al-Ḥusayn was held to have given his life “to revive the religion of his grandfather Muḥammad,” “to redeem it,” and “save it from the destruction into which it had been thrown by the behavior of al-Yazīd [the Umayyad caliph].”

Belief in the efficacy of the intercession of saints and martyrs developed from the belief that Muḥammad, and after him his family, could mediate for true believers.

The passion motif in the Shi‘i system—that the death of al-Ḥusayn helped pave the way to paradise — was also associated with the manifestation of the divine among men: “I believe that the imam, especially chosen by God as the bearer of a part of the divine being, is the leader to Salvation.” Within the holy family this divine element is transmitted to the next imam, who is made known by the particular designation, or naṣṣ of the ruling imam.

The tragedy of Karbala also probably accounts for the special role the Shi‘a give to martyrdom. Al-Ḥusayn, in his deliberate self-sacrifice and as heir and transmitter of the divine light in the family of the Prophet, is the king of martyrs, the shahīd par excellence. The use of shahīd to mean “martyr,” in the sense of one who dies for the faith, is not found in the Qur’an, where it is only used in the ordinary sense of “witness,” as in the phrase, “that you should be witnesses to mankind, and the Prophet a witness to you” (2:143). Using shahīd to mean “martyr” may have reflected Christian influence, especially in the ninth century, when the hadith literature written down at that time told of the great privileges waiting in heaven for the shahīd who witnessed to his faith with death. This is of course perfectly in line with qur‘anic teaching, but the Qur’an does not use the word shahīd for those who die “in God’s way.” In subsequent centuries the concept of the shahīd underwent further modification until finally almost anyone who had died a violent death and aroused pity, including even a victim of bubonic plague, was considered to be a shahīd and a friend of God.

As the martyr’s death of one ‘Alid succeeded that of another, the emphasis on martyrdom so thoroughly permeated the Shi‘i tradition that legend made even the lives of ‘Alids who otherwise never attained prominence end in martyrdom. The tomb of the shahīd was called a mashhad and enjoyed the reverence of the pious. The role of the imam, the passion of al-Ḥusayn, and the importance of martyrdom are thus intricately related, and they form the theological context in which to consider the ‘Alid cult of saints which developed in the late Fatimid period.

Two events in the second half of the Fatimid period shed special light on the decoration of the mosque of al-Aqmar. They are the vizierate of Badr al-Jamālī (467-87/1074-94) and the succession crisis of 487/1094.

The long reign of al-Mustanṣir (428-87/1036-94) had seen a turning point in the fortunes of the Fatimid dynasty. In Egypt a series of social, political, and military crises in the middle of his reign had brought the country to near anarchy and forced him to call for help. He turned to the Armenian general, Badr al-Jamālī, a former governor of Damascus and commander-in-chief at Acre, to restore order and stability.

Badr al-Jamālī ruthlessly carried out al-Mustanṣir’s request. As “Commander of the Armies,” “Sword of Islam,” and “Helper of the Imam,” he pacified the capital, subdued the Delta, and quelled rebel refugees, quarreling Arab tribes, and Nubian troublemakers in Upper Egypt. The restoration of order brought not only a reestablishment of the imam’s worldly political power,
but also a reaffirmation of his spiritual authority. In his capacity as "Surety of the Judges of the Muslims" and "Guide of the Propagandists of the Believers," Badr al-Jamālī restored and rebuilt mosques "destroyed by heretics" or "ruined by rebels." As in the time of al-Ḥākim, the imam is once again referred to as wāli ("intimate") after 'Alī, who is called in the Shi'i creed the wāli of God. The earliest extant instance of the Shi'i creed appearing on a Fatimid monument dates to this period. It occupies a prominent position over the lintel of the Bāb al-Nāṣr, the Gate of Victory, built in 480/1087 as part of the new city fortifications which Badr built to defend Cairo against an anticipated attack from the Sunni Seljugs: "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, There is no god but God Alone, no Associate has He; Muhammad is the Messenger of God and 'Alī is the intimate [wāli] of God."17

Badr al-Jamālī had not only saved Egypt from disaster but had ushered in a new era of splendor. Between 466 and 487 (1074–94) he established a dictatorial regime in which all effective political, judicial, and civil initiative was transferred from the Fatimid imam-caliph to the vizier. The historical and epigraphic evidence pertaining to his career indicates that he served his master and himself with loyalty and zeal.18 The broad outlines of his policies can be seen in the inscriptions of the mashhad which he ordered built on the Muqtaṭṭam Hills, in his restorations in association with his son al-Afḍal to the mashhad of Sayyida Nafisa, and in the minbar he ordered for the mashhad of al-Ḥusayn at Ascalon.

Over the entrance to the mashhad of Badr al-Jamālī is the panel containing the foundation inscription. It begins with two verses from the Qur'an, 72:18 ("The places of worship belong to God; so call not, along with God, upon anyone") and 9:108 ("A masjid that was founded upon God-fearing from the first day is worthier for thee to stand in; therein are men who love to cleanse themselves; and God loves those who cleanse themselves"). The inscription then continues:

Believers by the length of his stay, and make his power lasting and make his word prevail and deceive his enemies and those envious of him as he seeks the good pleasure of God—in the month of Muharram 478 [1085].19

The interior plan of the sanctuary is quite simple: a triple arcade leads to three vaulted chambers, behind which is a domed central bay with narrow, vaulted rooms to either side. The main decoration of the interior is concentrated on a splendid stucco mihrab which dominates the sanctuary and consists primarily of bands of qur'ānic inscriptions (plate 1). These frame the recessed niche and the rectangular panel in which it stands. A raised boss at the apex of the arch was once embellished by a carved design of names. It is now illegible, but it may have been composed of the intertwined words Muḥammad and 'Alī.

On the exterior frieze of the mihrab is 24:11: "Those who come with the slander are a band of you; do not reckon it evil for you; rather it is good for you. Every man of them shall have the sin that he has earned charged to him; and whosoever of them took upon himself the greater part of it, him there awaits a mighty chastisement." This is followed by 24:36 and the beginning of 24:37, which starts across the top of the rectangular panel: “In

tions in the historic inscription above the door ("May God deceive his enemies and those envious of him as he seeks the good pleasure of God"), the purpose of the building is not. It is first of all on an unusual site. A single monument crowning a spur of the Muqṭṭam, it commands an excellent view of the city below and is itself readily visible; but, although the Qur'anic inscriptions over the entrance allude to it as a masjid—a place of prayer—it is so isolated that not many people would have been likely to respond to a call to prayer from its minaret. Its founding inscription refers to it as a masjid, but nobody is known to be buried there, although a small room projecting from the sanctuary on the northeast side of the building is suitable for a tomb. It certainly could not hold the grave of its namesake, for Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Maqrīzī, the only author to identify Badr's final resting place, states that he was interred outside the Bāb al-Naṣr. The site is also far away from the then existing Muslim cemeteries of Fustat.

Several explanations for its presence there have been put forth, but perhaps the most compelling, based on the epigraphic evidence, is that of Oleg Grabar. He suggests that the building's purpose "on a cliff overlooking the whole city was to symbolize the victories achieved only a few years earlier by Badr al-Jamāl in the name of the Caliph al-Mustansir over the rebellions and disorders which for a long time plagued the Fatimid Empire." That the building commemorated the martyrs who had died for the restoration of legitimacy, peace, and order is given further support by the inscriptions noting the restorations to the masjid of Sayyida Nafisa and to the masjid at Ascalon.

The first "official" restoration made by the Fatimid government to an ʿAlī's tomb in the Qarafa, the great southern cemetery where the populations of Fustat, al-ʿAskar, and al-Qata'i buried their dead, was undertaken at the masjid of Sayyida Nafisa (d. 209/824), a prominent and pious ʿAlī saint whom Imam Shafiʿi, the great Sunni legislist, used to visit to exchange hadiths, for despite differences in their religious opinions, they remained on cordial terms. In its inscription, al-Afdal, Badr's son and heir, is eulogized as co-initiator and perpetuator of his father's religious concerns. Since the majority of the population of Cairo and Lower Egypt were followers of the Sunni-shafiʿi, and Badr al-Jamāl needed their support to consolidate Fatimid rule in Egypt, the Shrine of the Lady Nafisa, located near the main road between the royal quarter of al-Qāhirah and the metropolis of Fustat, could have been used
to symbolize the cordial relations between Shi’a and Sunni that would obtain under his rule. The inscription reads:

[Bismillah.] Victory from God and imminent conquest for the slave of God, his intimate [wall], Ma’add Abū Tamīm the Imam al-Mustanṣir billah, Commander of the Believers, God’s blessings be upon him and upon his forefathers the pure, and on his descendants most magnanimous. The construction of this gate [bab] was ordered by the most illustrious lord commander of the armies, sword of Islam, helper of the imam, surety of the judges of the Muslims, and guide of the propagandists of the true believers — may God strengthen the religion through him and give pleasure to the Commander of the Believers by the length of his stay, make lasting his power and elevate his word and strengthen his support through al-Afḍal, his most illustrious offspring, sword of the imam, glory of Islam, nobility of humankind, helper of the religion, intimate of the Commander of the Believers, God elevate him yet higher and rejoice the Commander of the Believers in the length of his stay, in the month of Rabī’ II of the year 482 [June 1091].27

In 484/1091, Badr al-Jamālī “discovered” the head of al-Husayn at Ascalon, the frontline city retained by the Fatimids along with a few other coastal cities after they had lost Syria and Palestine to the Sunni Seljuqs. The story of this discovery is detailed in a long Kufic inscription that adorns the beautiful minbar which embalmed the mashhad in Ascalon.28

The Twelver Shi’a believed that al-Husayn’s body was laid to rest in Kurbala, but that his head was sent to the Umayyad caliph Yazid in Syria and then disappeared. In the tenth century Muslim writers claimed variously that it was in Damascus, Baalbek, Homs, Aleppo, Raqqah, Medina, and even Marv.29 This simultaneous appearance of al-Husayn’s head in various parts of the Islamic world was probably owing to preexisting, local head cults for which that of al-Husayn was substituted.30 Ascalon, the last Fatimid stronghold in Palestine, was one of these. Its sanctuary was dedicated to three Egyptian Christian martyrs31 decapitated in a.d. 308 during the persecutions of Diocletian. Arab historians mention a mashhad to al-Husayn at Ascalon, but not before the date of the minbar (484/1091).

By the end of the eleventh century the Fatimids, though once more securely established in Egypt, had suffered severe losses to their empire. In the West, Sicily had been lost since 445/1053, and the Zirids in North Africa had broken with their Fatimid suzerains. To the east, in Syria, Damascus had fallen to the Seljuqs, stern enemies of the Isma’īlis, in 469/1076, while most of the other Fatimid possessions had been conquered or usurped by minor Muslim principalities. In the holy cities of the Hijaz, from 481/1088, allegiance to the Fatimid imams had been denied and the khutba was said in the name of the ‘Abbasid caliph.

Badr al-Jamālī himself led the armies of the Fatimid caliph to regain lost territory, but an expedition against the Artuqids in Jerusalem was not successful, nor were repeated attempts to regain Damascus and Syria in 471/1078–79, 478/1085–86, and 482/1089–90. These failures made Ascalon, with its Christian head cult, a propitious site for the discovery of a relic that would turn it into a rallying point for the Fatimid cause.32 The miraculous manifestation and triumphal exaltation of the head and its installation in a splendid place of worship are recorded in a Kufic inscription over the door of the minbar donated to the new mashhad. The inscription reads as follows:

[Praise be to God alone, no associate has He.] Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, ‘Ali is the intimate [wall] of God — may the blessings of God be upon them both and upon their pure descendants. Praise be He who established for our two lords the imams their genealogy in glory and raised a banner and manifested a miracle in every moment and a sign revealing mighty in nobility and solicitude. One of His miracles, exalted be He, was the revealing of the head of our lord the martyr-imam Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Husayn b. ‘Ali b. Abi Ṭalib — God’s benediction be upon him and upon his grandfather and upon his father and upon the People of their House [ahl bayyīt-hum] — at a site in Ascalon in which the oppressors — may God curse them — had hidden it to put out the light which God Most High had promised as a sign of his appearing. May the curse of God be upon the oppressors, and may God enlighten [?] His attraction by it, from the abodes of the oppressors, and its appearance now as exaltation to His friends of His right hand, rejoicing the breasts of His party [Shī’a], the believers, the purity of whose inmost thoughts He knows in their relationship [that is, with the imams] and in religion; in fulfillment of the proof unto the worlds. God has nurtured the servant of our lord and master Ma’add Abū Tamīm the Imam Mustanṣir billah, Commander of the Believers — the blessing of God be upon him and upon his pure forefathers — the illustrious lord commander of the armies, the sword of Islam and helper of the imam, surety of the judges of the Muslims and guide of the propagandists of the believers Abū al-Najm Badr al-Mustanṣir, causing [the head] to appear in his day, bringing it forth from its hiding place, distinguishing him in veneration of it and in prizing its resting place. He has come forward with the foundation of this minbar for the adornment of the exalted martyrdom [mashḥad] which he constructed, wherein he deposited this head in its most exalted place as a qibla for the amir and for the prayers of those accepted by God and an intercessor for those who seek intercession and for visitants. He has built it from its
foundations and purchased properties for it, making their revenues an endowment for its maintenance, its keepers, and its beautification for this day and all that follow it until God shall inherit the world and those upon it—best of inheritors is He! — and he has spent upon all this from the surplus of what God has given him in lawful property, pure funds from what he possessed, seeking God's face and looking for the merit He accords, earnestly endeavoring for His good pleasure and as a manifestation of honor for this imam, and a display for his standards according to God's Word, may he be exalted: "Only he shall inhabit God's mosques who has believed in God and in the last day, performed the prayer and paid alms and feared none save God alone; it may be that such will be of those who are guided aright" [Qur'an 9:18]. And the Prophet, may God's benediction and peace be upon him, said: "I leave among you two precious things: the Book of God and my descendents, the People of My House; these two shall never be separated any more than these two [fingers], until they arrive at the Basin." It is incumbent on him who believes in God and the last day to magnify it [the shrine] and hold it high and see to its interests, to maintain what it requires in construction and purification. The founding of this minbar took place in the year 484 [1091].

Badr al-Jamālī was the first Fatimid vizier to single out an 'Alid saint for special prominence when, in the frontier town (thaghir) of Ascalon, the head of al-Ḥusayn — "the light promised as a sign of God's appearance" — was revealed to him. Desecrated by the impious, it was reinterred in a special sanctuary by Badr al-Jamālī at his own initiative and expense "as a qibla for the amir and an intercessor for those who seek intercession." His justification, as stated on the minbar, was given in the words, "I leave to you two precious legacies, the Book of God and my posterity, the members of my family," which the Prophet had uttered at Ghadir Khumm after he had designated 'Ali as his successor and the next imam of the Muslims.

This inscription registered Badr al-Jamālī's intention to turn Ascalon into a popular religious center, a rallying place at a threatened point in the Fatimid empire. The burgeoning official reliance on the cult of the saints, coinciding as it did with Fatimid imperial losses, was in the next generation given further impetus by the succession crisis that followed Badr al-Jamālī's death in 487/1094, a few months before that of Imam al-Mustansir. Badr was succeeded by his son al-Afḍal, who since 482/1089 had been associated with his father in the affairs of the state. At the death of al-Mustansir the young and ambitious vizier bypassed Nizār, the caliph's eldest son and — it was asserted — heir (that is, he had already received the naṣṭ), to enthrone al-Mustalī, a younger and more tractable prince. The dispossessed heir fled to Alexandria to raise an army, but was captured, imprisoned, and later murdered. Among the people who believed that the progeny of Nizār were the true imams was Hasan-i Ṣabbāh, an Isma'īlī missionary from Persia. He recognized Nizār as the rightful imam and founded a sect called by his name.37

Because the Fatimid rulers were the religious heads of the Isma'īlī sect of Shi'i Islam, their succession was part of the dogma and therefore of grave religious as well as political importance. The sect had in the first place been founded by the followers of Ismā'īl, the eldest son of Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. These followers had refused to recognize the legality of a "second" naṣṭ to Mūsā al-Kāẓim and had stood firmly for the transfer of the rights of the imamate to Ismā'īl's son Muḥammad. After al-Mustansir's death, al-Mustalī's claim gained considerable support in Egypt and the Yemen, but elsewhere a large proportion of the followers of the Fatimid imam, especially in Syria and Iran, remained faithful to Nizār and, after his death, to his descendants.38

At al-Mustalī's death in 495/1101, his son al-Āmir, a child of five, was proclaimed caliph by al-Afḍal. Al-Āmir was, of course, rejected by the Nizāris, and during his reign the Nizāri schism caused the Fatimids to lose the support of the greater part of the Isma'īlī diaspora and threatened support in Egypt.39 When the dictatorial al-Afḍal was assassinated by Nizāri emissaries in 515/1121, both the Nizāris and the rulers in Cairo rejoiced. It seemed an auspicious time for a rapprochement between those who had gained through the vizier's death. A great public assembly in Cairo in 516/1122 proclaimed the legitimacy of the Mustalī line, and a document, the epistle of al-Āmir, was drawn up for the occasion, addressed chiefly to the separated Nizāri brethren and proclaimed throughout Egypt.40 Letters were also sent to the castles of the Nizāris in Persia and Syria to defend al-Āmir's title to the imamate.41

In 516/1122 the vizier in Cairo, Ma'mūn al-Baṭa'ībī, allegedly discovered a plot directed and financed by Nizāri supporters in Syria to assassinate both Caliph al-Āmir and himself. He used it as an occasion to institute elaborate security precautions at the frontiers and in Cairo to prevent the infiltration of Nizāri agents. "Orders came from al-Ma'mūn to the governor of old and new Cairo to register the names of all the inhabitants, street by street and quarter by quarter, and not to permit anyone to move from one house to another without his express authorization. . . . Inquiries were pursued about the affairs
of the Isma'īlis so that nothing concerning the affairs of anyone in old or new Cairo was hidden from him.”

Concerns over the Nizārī controversy and over the role of the reigning Fatimids as the true imams show themselves in the mosque of al-Aqmar (519/1125), the major architectural monument of the period. Not only for the art historian, but also for the social and political historian, the elements of the façade and their interrelationships reveal contents unusual for a mosque and raise significant questions about the building's purpose.

Most of the ornamentation is concentrated between two bands of carved, floriated Kufic script running across the entire width of the façade, whose principal sections are a projecting entrance and a left wing (plate 2). The right wing of the façade was totally destroyed when a group of later buildings was constructed, but emerging from the house which now stands next to the mosque, just before the reentrant angle of the main salient, are several letters that once belonged to its lower inscription. They are not all legible, but they do support the claim that a right wing once existed to balance the left one.

The main foundation inscription lies directly under the cornice of the building. Its opening words disappeared with the right wing, but the standard pattern of Fatimid inscriptions suggests the following: “[Bismillah.] Its construction was ordered by the servant of our lord and master Imam al-Āmir bi-ḥkam Allāh, son of Imam al-Musta’li.” It then goes on:

... billāh, Commander of the Believers — may the blessings of God be upon them both and upon their pure ancestors and on their most magnanimous descendants seeking to be near to God the excellent King. Oh God, give the victory to the armies of Imam al-Āmir bi-ḥkam Allāh, Commander of the Believers, over all infidels [two meters missing] the most illustrious lord al-Ma’mūn, commander of the armies, sword of Islam, helper of the imam, surety of the judges of the Muslims, and guide of the propagandists of the believers Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muhammad, servant of al-Āmir — may God strengthen through him the religion and give pleasure to the Commander of the Believers by the length of his stay, make his power lasting and make his word prevail, in the year 519 [1125].

This is the only surviving foundation inscription from the Fatimid period that mentions a reigning caliph's father; the intention was presumably to stress al-Āmir's succession through his father al-Musta'li. The wish that God should give the caliph “victory over all infidels” could be construed as a reference to his struggles against the Crusaders, who had established themselves in Syria in 492–93/1099, but it could equally obviously refer to all rebels against the authority of the imam, among whom the recalcitrant Nizārīs would have been prominent. Finally, the titles given the vizier al-Ma'mūn indicate that he had

been endowed with the same responsibilities and all-encompassing powers as Badr al-Jamālī before him.

A second foundation inscription bisects the façade at midpoint, and its contents are similar. Of the qur'anic citations the most significant occupies the place of honor in the large medallion of the main hood. It is 33:33: "O People of the House [ahl al-bayt] God only desires to put away from you abomination and with cleansing to cleanse you." Shi'i exegesis regards this verse as evidence for the Shi'i claims to the imamate of 'Ali and his descendants, that is, that the 'Alid family lost the visible caliphate to win the invisible one. According to a hadith, Muḥammad went out one morning wearing a cloak (kisā') under which he took, first, Fāṭima, then 'Ali, and then al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn; he hugged them and quoted 33:33. For many of the Shi'a the ahl al-bayt is limited to the ahl al-kisā' (the People of the Cloak) and their descendants, and devotion to them is an essential and even principal part of their religion.

The exegesis of 33:33 can be traced back to the account of the first major crisis of Islam; the death of the Prophet. Ya'qūb b. Ja'far (d. 293/905-06), one of the earliest and most important Shi'i historians, relates that when the Prophet died his body was bathed by 'Ali b. Abī Ṭālib and other kinsmen. "While they were in the room they heard a voice but did not see any person who spoke. The voice said, 'Peace, and God's mercy and blessing be upon you, O People of the House. Verily He is to be praised and glorified [11:73] for God only desires to put away from you abomination, and with cleansing to cleanse you.' [33:33] . . . Ja'far b. Muḥammad was asked, 'Who do you think that is?' and he answered, 'Gabriel.' At that very moment, while 'Ali was performing the last ablutions for the dead Prophet, Abū Bakr was being elected Muḥammad's successor. The relevance of the warning in 33:33 is to the years of strife and tribulation that would befall the house of the Prophet. The verse suggests that God has done something to the ahl al-bayt which, while perhaps not readily understood, was nevertheless part of the divine plan. The appearance of the passage on the façade of al-Aqmar was also an appropriate reminder for those who defended the Mūsā'ī claims to the imamate and clearly relates to the political dissension and controversy of those years. This is the earliest occurrence of this verse on any surviving monument of the Fatimid period.

Flush with the top of the main door and confined to the entrance salient (plate 3) is an inscription of which enough survives to identify it as 24:36-37: "In temples [bu'yār] God has al-

Batā‘ibi) is the only extant Egyptian prototype for the ribbed arch over the main entrance at al-Aqmar (plate 4). Assuming that both the decoration and the disposition of the right wing of the façade were similar to those of the existing left wing, the total effect would have been that of three mihrabs (plate 5). This triple-arched disposition at al-Aqmar is given added significance by Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s description of the covering of the Ka’ba at the time of his pilgrimage to Mecca in 442/1050; this, like all kiswas from an early date, had been woven in Egypt: “On the four faces of the veil one saw mihrabs woven in colored silk, and patterns in gold thread. There are three embroidered mihrabs on each face, the central one is largest, and those on each side smaller.”

Still other features suggesting mihrabs appear on the wing of the façade, such as the rectangular panel near the upper left corner and the flat, S-shaped pattern under the main boss of the niche. In the panel, side colonnettes with foliate capitals and bases support an arch, from the center of which hangs a mosque lamp (plate 6). Two little roundels fill the spandrels above the arch: the one on the left contains the name Muḥammad, the one on the right the words and ‘Alī. Filling the whole space between the colonnettes, and underneath the mosque lamp, is an open grille design which radiates from a central, six-pointed s’ ʿ r. This is a clear evocation of 24:35: “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp (the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star).” It is also an evocation of the popular Shi‘i tradition, coupled as it is with the words Muḥammad and and ‘Alī: “The stars are a pledge to the world that it will not be drowned, and my family are a pledge the community that it will not go astray.”

This panel is similar to one of the flat mihrabs in the mosque of Ibn Tūlūn, dated to the ninth-century foundation of the mosque. Unfortunately, much of the design of this flat mihrab has been lost, but still very visible is the mosque lamp in the shape of an eight-pointed star that hangs down from its center.

Related to the panel on the façade of al-Aqmar is a small wooden panel in the shape of a keel-arched mihrab which is now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. The names of Muḥammad, ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥusayn alternate to frame a niche. At the apex of the arch is an eight-pointed star. Inside the arch is a roundel under which the words Muḥammad on one side and and ‘Alī on
the other. There are other examples of these wooden-panel mihrabs.\textsuperscript{51} Because they have nail holes they are thought once to have been mihrab plaques for house prayer. They date from the eleventh century and are known to have come from Shi'i tombs, where they were placed under the heads of the dead.\textsuperscript{52}

The other feature of the left wing of the façade, the curious curving outline below the flat hood, is also related to another mihrab on one of the piers of the mosque of Ibn Tulun, also datable to the ninth century,\textsuperscript{53} although its central panel was probably added in early Fatimid times. There is a definite similarity in the curving outlines on the two panels.

Prominent in the decoration of the façade is the name ‘Ali, which appears in three central areas: in the middle of the medallion of the main hood, where it shares a place with the name of Muhammad; in the center of the arch dominating the left half of the façade, this time encircled by five linked \textit{Mu\'aammad}s; and on the side of the corbel on the corner. ‘Ali’s name is included in the decoration of the mihrab of the mausoleum of Umm Kulthum (516/1122); it also appears on the mihrab donated by the vizier al-Afdal b. Badr al-Jamali to the mosque of Ibn Tulun in 487/1094\textsuperscript{54} and possibly on the mihrab of the mashhada of Badr al-Jamali. Here it survives on a mosque façade.

Rashid al-Din b. Shahrashub, presumably a Twelver Shi'i writer (d. 588/1192), includes Isma'ili material in his book, \textit{On the Virtues of the Family of Abi Talib}.\textsuperscript{55} The information he provides allows us to guess at some of the esoteric significance of the mosque’s plan of decoration and at the same time suggests how handicapped we are in the study of the Fatimid monuments by the wholesale loss and destruction of Isma'ili texts. Among the litany of epithets for al-Husayn he gives the following: “the lamp of those who trust in God”; “the lamp of the lofty family ties”; “the shining full moon”; “light of the Fatimid family”; and “a part of the light.”\textsuperscript{56}

In a poem put in the mouth of al-Husayn on the day of his martyrdom, the martyr says, “My father is a sun, my mother a moon [\textit{qamar}] and I am the star, the son of two moons; my grandfather was the lamp of guidance.”\textsuperscript{57} A star (“a part of the light”) and a lamp are shown on the façade of the mosque, itself called al-Aqmar, the moon white or moonlit. In the same poem ‘Ali is called “the oratory of two qiblas” (that is, al-Hasan and al-Husayn) and “the seventh perfect one after the Prophet — and there is no oratory without a religion.”\textsuperscript{58} This last phrase makes it fairly certain that the poem ascribed to al-Husayn is of Isma'ili origin. The beliefs that in the house of ‘Ali would come the “Seventh Day” and that the Light of God in ‘Ali was transmitted to his descendants are basic Isma'ili tenets. The poem then says that the Quraysh with their two idols, al-Lat and al-Uzza, prefigure the truth of ‘Ali with his \textit{hasanayn} (“two fine beings”). It goes on:

I am the son of ‘Ali, best of the house of Hashim;  
That suffices as boast, if I choose to boast;  
And son of God’s Messenger, the noblest of His creation,  
And we are the Lamp of God shining on earth,  
With Fatima my mother, the child of Ahmad.\textsuperscript{59}

Ibn Shahrashub quotes a well-known tradition retold by Abu Nu’aym al-Isfahani from Ibn ‘Umar, who said: “I heard the Prophet say: al-Hasan and al-Husayn are my two sweet-smelling herbs in the world,”\textsuperscript{60} a figure of speech that at least suggests an explanation for the decoration showing a plant growing out of a pot on the left side of the façade. The central portion of the roundel in the upper register of the façade’s left wing just above this pot is missing, but may have been connected with al-Hasan or al-Husayn. ‘Ali
is mentioned in the medallion of the central niche; al-Hasan and al-Husayn could well have been mentioned in the upper roundels of each side wing. This would also give us a reason for the effacing of the roundel on the surviving wing when Egypt was under Sunni authority — ‘Ali is acceptable to Sunnis, but al-Hasan and al-Husayn are less so. Another pot of “sweet-smelling herbs” was presumably on the missing right side.

The meaning or purpose of the panel just under the main foundation-inscription band on the same level with that containing the mosque lamp also now becomes more understandable. It can only be described as resembling the doors of the period, and could be a representation of the closet door in the mosque where the Qur’an, the other legacy which Muhammad left to his community of believers, was kept.

Again assuming what was on the right wing, the niches on the façade can be grouped to form various significant and mystical numerical combinations. The whole façade consisted of three flat-arched areas (the main entrance, plus one in each wing) symbolizing perhaps ‘Ali, the “oratory of the two qiblas,” with al-Hasan and al-Husayn. This disposition of three is repeated in the main-entrance salient in the form of the main hood plus the two lower niches. The main-entrance salient itself contains five niches (two on each side of the entrance, separated by a register of stalactites), the number of the Holy Family or “People of the Cloak”: Muhammad, Fātima, ‘Ali, al-Hasan, and al-Husayn. Finally, the five niches of the entrance salient plus those of each side wing form a total of seven, the favored mystical number of the Isma’ili Seveners.

Of the decoration on the qibla wall nothing survives from 519/1125, but it is very likely, based on epigraphic remains, that the outer and inner decorations of the mosque were related. What the relationship was is suggested by what remains of the Qur’anic citations which outline the keel-shaped arches of the sahn. One is 4:166, “But God bears witness to that He has sent down to thee; He has sent it down with His knowledge; and the angels also bear witness; and God suffices for a witness,” a verse that can be taken as a confirmation of the message of 33:33, wherein God’s mysterious ways nevertheless proceed from divine logic. The other is 24:35, which precedes verse 24:37, found over the entrance: “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp (the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star) kindled from a Blessed Tree, an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West whose oil well-nigh would shine, even if no fire touched it.” This verse — “Light upon Light; God guides to His Light whom He wills” — has also been taken by the Shi’a as evidence for the naṣṣ, the divine light transmitted to the successive ‘Alid imams.

The general decorative scheme of the façade in its various elements thus suggests a deliberate and evocative choice of inscriptions and ornament: the emphasis in the main inscription on the legitimacy of the incumbent imam; the Qur’anic verses which allude to political and spiritual strife and schism; the relationship between the Qur’anic verses and the decoration in such specifics as “light,” “lamp,” “star,” and “mihrib”; the association of the ornament and its disposition with mihrabs of the period; the prominence of ‘Ali’s name and also the implied presence of the ahl al-kisā’; and finally the façade’s probable relation to the interior through the pierced medallion of the main hood and the continuation of the Qur’anic inscriptions around the sahn. This raises an important question: What exactly was the total arrangement intended to convey? The actual designation of the building was destroyed with the right façade. Because of the building’s plan (that of a small, central courtyard bordered by colonnades), it has been commonly referred to as a mosque. As in the case of the masjid of Badr al-Jamāḥī, however, even when a designation is made the exact purpose of the building can still be in doubt.

Unfortunately, the monuments of primary interest to this study are not emphasized by the historical sources. The most important single source for the study of Fatimid monuments is the Khitaṭ of al-Maqrīzī. It was probably written in 819–28/1416–24; it is valuable because al-Maqrīzī seems to have had access to all the authorities of consequence who preceded him, and more than three-fourths of their works have since been lost. One source al-Maqrīzī uses which still survives is the Akhbār Miṣr by Ibn Muyassar (d. 677/1278), a history of the Fatimid caliphs (363–553/973–1159). The surviving version, however, is missing the sections dealing with the years 387–439/997–1048 and 503–15/1109–21, the very years in the reign of al-Āmir that would have provided a context for the mosque of al-Aqmar.

After the time of Badr al-Jamāḥī, al-Qāhirah was no longer solely a royal and fortress city. When Badr arrived, famine, chaos, and disorder had rendered the city “wasted, desolate, and deserted,” and al-Maqrīzī reports that Badr “gave permission to his soldiers, to those who ate his salt [al-malhīyya], and to the Armenians, and to those whose rank allowed them, to build in
al-Qāhirah what they wished with materials to be found from the dwellings in Fustat whose owners were dead. Then people took what was there from ruined mansions, built houses in al-Qāhirah and lived there.⁶⁶ By the early twelfth century, it had been opened to the army and the notables, the bureaucrats, the wealthy merchants, and many others from among the elite and had become the city of the Fatimid establishment.

When it was built, al-Aqmar was situated next to the Eastern Palace of the caliphs, perhaps as a small place of worship for members of the royal household and the neighboring elite, and perhaps as a small teaching mosque for the dissemination of pro-Mustaʿfī doctrine as well. The two little rooms inside the main door and others to the rear would have served as lodgings, libraries, store-rooms, and lecture areas for the teachers and staff (fig. 1), since al-Maqrīzī asserts that “there were studies in it from its earliest times.”⁶⁸ A small room that projects from the qibla wall on the northeastern side may have been intended for a tomb (plate 7). In contrast to the limestone blocks used for the rest of the building (aside from the façade, which is of gray stone), this room is made from courses of rubble and brick.

In his section on the changes made to the sanctuary by Amir Yilughah al-Sālimi in 801/1398 al-Maqrīzī does not mention this addition,⁶⁹ nor does it seem likely that it was built on after al-Maqrīzī’s time; the entrance from the qibla riwaq, a large keel-arched opening, is obviously part of the original Fatimid construction (plate 8). The small room opening off the northeast side of the sanctuary of the mashhad of Badr al-Jamāli provides a precedent both for the existence and for the lateral positioning of this room.

We know from Muhammad b. ‘Alī b. Muyassar that in the year 516/1122 the vizier al-Ma’āmun ordered the “restoration”⁷⁰ of seven mashhads, “the first of which was that of Sayyida Zaynab and the last of which was the mashhad of Umm Kulthum.”⁷¹ This is the first time that the texts specifically date work on Fatimid mausoleums, and 516/1122 — a year when the paramount concern of the Fatimid government was to vindicate the claims of the ruling imam against the powerful Nizārī schismaticus, who had assassinated the vizier al-Afdal⁷² — is certainly a likely one for this architectural activity.

In view of the architectural precedents established by Badr al-Jamālī, the restoration of saints’ tombs immediately before the building of al-Aqmar, the religious schism of the period, and the deliberately evocative nature of the ornamentation of the façade, the suggestion can be made that the mosque of al-Aqmar was supposed to include a tomb, most probably for an ‘Alid saint. The analogy of the name al-Aqmar with al-Azhar (from al-Zahrā’, “the Shining One,” or Fātima) is obvious, and it is tempting to suggest that the qamar (“moon”) originally meant to be honored here was no less than al-Ḥusayn himself — or at least his head.

It would have been eminently logical for Ma’mūn al-Batā‘iḥī to build a shrine in Cairo for the presumed head of al-Ḥusayn, which Badr al-Jamālī had found, at a time when the first succession crisis threatened the domestic stability of the regime, and when the Crusaders, encamped in Syria and Palestine, threatened Ascalon. What al-Ḥusayn meant to the Shi‘a is indicated in a poem by Ibn Ḥammād:

This is the Imam, the son of the Imam,  
For we have in every age an imam;  
This is he whose grave visitor is just like him  
Who makes his pilgrimage to the Ka‘ba every year.\(^{73}\)

If this had been al-Ma’mūn’s intention, however, it came to nothing. In 519/1125, a few months after al-Aqmar was completed, al-Ma’mūn was arrested, along with five of his brothers and all his family, when the caliph accused him of plotting to replace him on the throne with a self-proclaimed son of Nizār, then residing in Yemen, and of coining money in Nizār’s name.\(^{74}\) In 519/1125, when al-Ma’mūn’s duplicity in the pro-Nizārī plot was suspected, al-Amīr presented a portable wooden mihrab to the mosque of al-Azhar, to which a wooden panel in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo obviously once belonged.\(^{75}\) In the context of the time in which it was given — the pro-Nizārī plot in which al-Ma’mūn’s duplicity was suspected — the inscription opens with two well-chosen passages from the Qur’an. They are 2:239, “And if you are in fear, then afoot or mounted: but when you are secure, then remember God, as He taught you the things that you knew not,” and 4:104, “Relent not in the pursuit of the enemy; if you are suffering, they are also suffering as you are suffering, and you are hoping from God for that for which they cannot hope; God is All-knowing, All-wise.” The inscription continues:

This blessed mihrab was ordered to embellish the noble mosque of al-Azhar in Mu‘izzī Cairo by our lord and master al Manṣūr Abū ‘Ali the Imam al-Āmir bi-ābkam Allāh, Commander of the Believers — may the blessings of God be upon him, and upon his ancestors most pure and upon his descendants most magnanimous — the son of Imām al-Musta‘īl billāh, Commander of the Believers, the son of Imam al-Mustaṣīr billāh, Commander of the Believers — may the blessings of God be upon them all and upon their ancestors the imams most pure, the sons of the rightly directed guides [bānī al-ḥudūt al-rāshīdin] and peace until the Day of Judgment in the months of the year 519 [1125].\(^{76}\)

Two years later the Nizārī vizier al-Ma’mūn was put to death. This event, too, is commemorated by al-Amīr in the inscription chosen for the mosque at Damietta. After the bismillah and 9:18, “Only he shall inhabit God’s places of worship who believes in God and the Last Day, and who performs the prayer, and pays the alms, and fears none but God alone; it may be that those will be among the guided,” it continues:

This blessed mosque was ordered restored by the Imam of the Period and the Age [al-‘agr wa‘l-zamān] — may peace be upon the mentioning of him — our lord and master al-Manṣūr Abū ‘Ali Imām al-Āmir bi-ābkam Allāh, Commander of the Believers — may the blessings of God be upon him and upon his ancestors most pure
and rightly guided and upon his descendants most magnanimous — eternal blessings until the Day of Judgment in the month of Rajab 521 [July–August 1127].

In these inscriptions al-Ámir’s name appears alone, unsupported by that of an all-powerful vizier. His claim to the imamate-caliaphate is traced back through his father al-Musta‘li and his grandfather al-Mustansir to his ancestors, the “rightly guided” ones. The caliph al-Ámir was determined to be again an imam who ruled and who was the central object of Isma’il devotion. For him, the cult of saints fostered by his vizier as a focus of popular piety must have seemed to represent competition. For twenty-four years he had been ruled by overbearing viziers — first al-Afdal and then al-Ma‘mún. Now it was his turn to rule, and to rule alone: “He returned the ceremonies to their former flourishing condition after al-Afdal had discontinued all that.” He had built up Damietta and Tinnis as Mediterranean ports, and Damietta seems deliberately to have been chosen for this proclamation of legitimacy — the Imam of the Period and the Age, whom all believers must acknowledge — because it was a maritime city open to all external influences, and it was turned toward Syria, where a Fatimid revolt was already brewing. These two inscriptions, with their references to al-Ámir’s ancestors as “the rightly guided” and to himself as their lineal descendant, the first reflecting a time of schism and doubt, the second a vigorous affirmation of his position as the Imam of the Period and the Age, reveal how political and religious conditions can be very much reflected in epigraphy.

In 525/1130, Caliph al-Ámir was assassinated by agents of the Nizâris, and the Fatimid state was confronted by a new succession crisis. Al-Ámir left no heir, although at his death one of his wives was pregnant. The army leaders called in the caliph’s cousin, ‘Abd al-Majíd, and he assumed power as regent. From the sources it is not clear whether the child turned out to be a girl or a boy, or whether it died naturally or was murdered, but it was believed by many that al-Ámir’s rightful heir was an infant son named Abû al-Qâsim al-Tayyib, and today the Musta‘li Isma’ilis still claim the imamate of al-Tayyib’s descendants. Many months of complicated coups and counter-coups were staged for and against ‘Abd al-Majíd by various army leaders. Among the latter was the son of al-Afdal, Abû ‘Ali Ahmad, known as Kutayfâ, a Twelver Shi‘a who reigned for a year. He declared the Fatimid dynasty deposed and placed the empire under the sovereignty of the expected imam, the Mahdi of the Twelver Shi‘a.

‘Abd al-Majíd was reinstated as regent at the end of the year 525/1131, but since he could not now claim to be regent for an heir, ‘Abd al-Majíd assumed the title of imam himself. Until then the Fatimid imamate had been transmitted from father to son. A sijil, or decree, was now published in ‘Abd al-Majíd’s name and using the title of al-Hâfiz li-dîn Allâh, claiming that his cousin al-Ámir had nominated him as his successor, just as the Prophet who had died without a male heir had nominated his cousin ‘Ali as his successor. Al-Hâfiz claimed that the imamate had come to him in a straightforward way without complications and continued as imam until his death in 544/1149, but his reign was marred by internal upheavals and by the intrigues of his viziers, one of whom, Bahirâm, was a Christian Armenian, and another, Riðwân, a Sunni.

It was after these two periods of political assassination, in 515/1121 and 525/1130, that the Cairo mausoleums as they survive today were built or restored. The monuments and their inscriptions constitute documents of the first order of importance. It was also during those two periods that a new impetus was given to the burgeoning cult of ‘Alid saints in Cairo (an account of which will appear in a forthcoming study).

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NOTES


4. Ya‘qûb b. Ja‘far b. Wâbih b. Wâdîh, Al-kâtib al-ya‘qubi al-‘abbâsî tarîh (Beirut, 1960), 2:111–12. The word mawâl, “lord” or “friend,” is ambiguous. In commenting on this hadith, the Shi‘a have taken the first meaning; the Sunnis have taken the second.


6. Al-rawd al-nâdir (Cairo, 1928–30), 5:6; and


9. Ibid.


11. As, for example, in Qur‘an 4:79; 6:19; 41:53. A possible exception is 4:72, where the dilaratory are quoted as thanking God they did not have to “witness” an affliction with the believers.


13. Ibid., s.v. “Shī‘a.”


17. A fourth line continues underneath the bottom frame: “May the blessings of God be upon them and upon all the imams who are their descendants.” This line, though in the same style of Kufic, is curiously placed, for it appears below the panel’s bottom frame, runs into a small boss over the arcuated lintel, and ends beyond the panel’s left frame.

18. “Thanks to his firm and orderly government and that of his son al–Aḍḍāl Shahanshah after him, the Fatimid caliphate endured for another century. His achievement was even more remarkable, indeed, for the general principles on which he reorganized the administration were so soundly conceived that they remained operative for centuries…” Gibb, “Caliphate and Arab States,” p. 94.


20. Sakina, probably cognate with the Hebrew term *sechina*, meaning “holiness of God.”


23. *MAE*, 1:157, argues that the room was added at a later date, but F. Shāfī‘ī suggests that it was part of the original building (“The Mashhad of al–Juyushi,” *Studies in Islamic Art and Architecture in Honor of Professor K. A. C. Creswell* [Cairo, 1965], pp. 237–52).


25. For example, Shāfī‘ī, in “Mashhad of al–Juyushi,” has argued that this monument was a mosque disguised as a watchtower to alert the Cairo residents against an attack from the Sunni Seljuqs who were threatening Egypt.


30. Ibid., p. 305. Van Berchem argues that the belief that al–Huṣayn’s head was in Damascus stemmed from a transformation of an early Christian supposition that the head of Saint John the Baptist was buried there.

31. Vincent et al., *Hébron*, p. 239.

32. Ibid., p. 240.


34. There exists in Aswan in Upper Egypt a large necropolis of graves and mausoleums (cubes covered with squinch-supported domes) dating for the most part from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Aswan was on the pilgrimage route from North Africa to Mecca and was also the last major Muslim city before Nubia, where devotees and warriors gathered to guard the frontiers of Islam. In the necropolis are buried, along with traders and inhabitants of the area, the *shuhadda*, the martyrs who had died “in God’s way,” testifying to their faith either in holy battle or while performing the pilgrimage. See *MAE*, 1:131–45. Badr al–Jamilī campaigned in Upper Egypt in the years 469–73/1077–81, and built monuments commemorating his victories (*MAE*, 1:146–55). He must have been aware of this necropolis and even influenced by it in the building of his Maqṣātam mashhad. See also Ugo Monneret de Villard, *La necropoli musulmana di Aswan* (Cairo, 1930).
35. See above, n. 27.
36. Al-Musta’il was declared heir by al-Mustansir at the time of the boy’s wedding to al-Afdal’s daughter (A. A. A. Fyzee, Al-hidayatu’l amiriya [Oxford, 1938], p. 11).
37. These adherents are also known as the Hashishiyas, or the Assassins.
38. Nizâr Isma’ilism has continued to recognize a line of imams of which the present one is the Aga Khan.
41. Lewis, Assassins, pp. 59–60.
43. MCLA Egypte, 2:171; RCEA, 8:146–47; see also MAE, 1:241–45, plan on p. 242, pls. 82c, 83, 84, 85a.
44. EI, 1st ed., s.v. “Shî’a.”
45. Ibid., 2d ed., s.v. “Ahl al-Kisa.”
52. U.A.R. Ministry of Culture, Catalogue, p. 221.
53. EMA, 2:349.
54. MAE, vol. 1, pls. 77, 116b.
56. Ibid., p. 232.
57. Ibid., p. 233.
58. Ibid., pp. 232–34.
59. Ibid., p. 233.
60. Ibid., p. 230. There may well be another reason for juxtaposing al-Hasan and al-Husayn. Many Isma’ilis believe that al-Hasan had been imâm mustawwad’, or acting imam, for his younger brother al-Husayn, who was the imâm mustaqlar, or imam in the permanent line of succession. Was there perhaps an intended analogy in the case of Nizâr, the elder son, with Hasan? Al-Musta’il would then remain the imam of the true succession, and the separated Nizâris could be appealed to to “come home.” For a discussion of this, see Mekarem, Political Doctrine, p. 86, n. 134.
61. MAE, vol. 1, pls. 83b (door panel) and 84f (closet door).
62. For example, the Isma’ilis believe that there are seven pillars of Islam. To the five regular pillars (prayer, alms-giving, the fast of Ramadan, pilgrimage, and unitarianism), they add purification and allegiance (waâya), which to them is the most important pillar (Makarem, Political Doctrine, p. 52, n. 3).
63. Only the inscriptions on the northeast side of the courtyard remain.
64. These inscriptions were read by the late Mrs. Wafya ’Ezzi.
67. Ibid., p. 49.
68. Ibid., 3:187.
69. Ibid., p. 186.
70. “Restoration” of mashhads, by analogy with other sites in Cairo, seems to mean building a shrine over an existing grave.
73. Ibn Shahhrâshûb, Manâqib, p. 231.
74. MCLA Egypte, 1:712.
76. RCEA, 8:149–50; MAE, vol. 1, p. 118c.
77. MCLA Egypte, 1:709–15; RCEA, 8:158.
78. Al-Maqrizi, Khitat, 3:188.
79. MCLA Egypte, 1:712.
83. Ibid., pp. 208–9.