CAIRO

Information supplement From:
Institue Francais D'Architecture

Cairo is certainly not a city that offers itself up easily to the appreciation of tourists who are generally passing through on their way to the spectacular archaeological sites which begin at the very gates of the city and can be seen rising at the end of unencumbered avenues. Moreover, the old city is not adapted to the requirements of groups of tourists. Apart from the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities (which no one can deny is one of the richest in the world), it is only sites such as al-Azhar and its nearby bazaar, the Caietel and the recent Mohammad Ali mosque that appear the more on the programmes of the rapid visitor. More so than any other city perhaps, this one needs to be revealed by a series of itineraries which would, nevertheless, only begin to touch upon the riches of its streets, its network of tiny alleys, the variety of its squares, gates, monuments, palaces, and passageways; the same applies to the diversity of Cairo's urban patterns, which reflect successive cities that have transformed a site bordered by the desert, hills, cities of the Dead and the Nile, natural sources of richness for Egypt. A recent edition of the Cahier de la Recherche Architectural already invited us to discover the city of Cairo, however partially.

This guide offers us further encouragement for discovery, although it is clearly too brief for a city of 12 million inhabitants. It has been meticulously put together, with sound historical documenting, by Sewane Noweir, architect, historian and researcher at the I.F.A and A.D.R.O.S., and who is also involved in a Cairo "Workshop" with Jean-Charles De- paule, Philippe Panerai and Mona Zaka- rya. Ms. Noweir was assisted for those parts dealing with 19th century transformations of Cairo, by Mercedes Volait, who is also an architect and researcher at A.D.R.O.S. and at the CEDEJ. (A recent article by Ms. Volait appeared in Mi- MAR 13) - Pierre Clement, Institut francois d'Architecture, Paris.

This bulletin has been made possible by the support and participation of The Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

The seventh century: Fustat

The Arabs arrived in Egypt in 640 A.D. and founded their capital, some 20 kilometers south of the tip of the delta, on a site where the Muqattam Mountains came closest to the Nile. 'Amr Ibn-Al-As, the commander-in-chief of the Caliph Omar's army, chose the site of the town on the banks of the Nile, and in close proximity to the Byzantine fortress of Babylon. The town was built around a central core, the Amr Mosque (built in 641-62 A.D.) around which the conquerors settled. Then, ethnic settle-

ments, each with their own sanctuaries, were formed on the periphery. The first Arab town took the form of a military camp, though lacking in fortifications (hence the name Fustat (a camp). It consisted of three gates, situated in the north, the east and the south, market places and a mosque, which primarily served as a place of worship but was at the same time used as a watch-tower, a meeting hall and a court of justice. Fustat very rapidly developed into the administrative capital of the region and engulfed the ancient City of Bab- ylon within its urban confines.

Though Fustat was the first Arab town in the region, it was however not the first to occupy that site. Due to its strategic position, its geographic characteristics and its proximity to the Nile, the site had long before been considered an important one. This thoroughfare of all Asian invasions gave the towns in this region their own military characteristics. In the south, on the site of a fortress in Ancient Egypt, Roman Emperor Trajan had between 98-117 A.D. built fortifications and the Fort of Babylon, which the Arabs called 'Dar al Shami'; it was thus through the mispronunciation of the older name 'Pi-Hapi-an-er', that the name Babylon came to be used. Situated directly on the banks of the River Nile, this important town of the Greek and Roman era, boasted a port, two kilometres of dockland and was joined to the Red Sea by a canal, which had previously existed in Ancient Egypt. Further south, about twenty kilometres from Babylon on the west bank of the Nile, stood Memphis; Memphis had been the capital of the old empire and was one of the oldest and the most important towns of Egypt; it contained the Temple of the God Ptah, a royal palace and impressive fortifications. It was also the seat of government. Though Memphis did not always retain its status as a capital, it nevertheless remained an important town, which was partly due to its strategic location between Lower and Upper Egypt. Within this same region and during the same era, there was also Helio- polis - or 'Ain Shams - the holy city of An- cient Egypt. As the capital city of one of the regions in Lower Egypt, Helio- polis had, for a very long time, played an unde- niable important role. Its temple (of which there only remains an obelisk) had been the oldest and the most important temple devoted to the worship of the Sun.

The two cities of Memphis and Heliopolis had, from the times of the Pharaohs, been linked by a route that was bordered with Sphinx. This road passed close to the for- tress and the site that was later to become Babylon. This historic path played a very
The eighth century: Al-Askar

In 750 the political situation changed; the Umayyads were overthrown by the Abbasids. When the Abbasid army reached Egypt, they abandoned Fustat and founded Al-Askar (the cantonment) in an area called Al-Hunra al-Kuswa in the north of Fustat.

A new cluster of settlements was formed around the Dar al-Irmar (the governor's palace) and around the mosque (which was built in 785 and of which there is no trace today). The military town of al-Askar spread out around this core composed of large buildings, numerous market places and houses built in regular patterns. The new city expanded, and like Fustat acquired the character of a big town, maintaining at the same time two distinct centres - the seat of power at al-Askar, and the centre for social activities at Fustat.

The ninth century: Al-Qata'i

The year 868 announced a new era and more changes. The new settlement of Al-Qata'i was established around a colossal mosque in the North East, on the Yuchkar heights between al-Askar and the existing citadel.

The town took its name from the fact that the land in the area had been distributed in the form of allotments amongst the troops and palace officials. Though al-Qata'i was not fortified, its mosque with its high walls and its circular porthole as a fortress, gave it a military character.

A large castle was built on the heights of Muquattam, at the foot of which stood a large Maydan (a square or a race course), with a big boulevard linking the two to the mosque of Ibn Tulun. The town then, had an area of nearly 1 sq. mile. The northern extension of the town and the construction of the castle were signs that the town was expanding in that direction, and very soon al-Qata'i and al-Askar, that had previously been but sectors of Fustat, merged into one single town.

From the time that Fustat was founded through to 960 when the Fatimids arrived and al-Qahira was founded, the towns expanded northwards along the historical axis. Most often this expansion came about when the principal core and the centre of power i.e.: the mosque, the governor's residence and the homes of the elites changed place. These then went on to form the next clusters of settlement. This process was however equally influenced by the geographical configuration of the region and the role played by the Nile. After the Arab conquest, the Nile river bed changed its course a number of times each time directly affecting the town. In the seventh century it came as far as Qasr al-Sham flooding the Amr Mosque. The town had two bridges, one in the north at Al-Maqsa (directly on the banks of the Nile where Bab al-Hadid stood), and the second at Mird to the north of Babylon. There was only one island (Rawdah) which was linked to Mird by a bridge.

About ten years after the Arab conquest, the Nile shifted towards the west leaving open land around the fortresses, on which new constructions rose. The Nile then ran much further to the east than today, and the present Ibn Tulun area lay submerged under water, which is what gave it its wealthy suburban features. This area today stands at about one kilometre of the Nile. The dried and filled up marshlands that existed in the fourteenth century bear witness to the constant erosions of the river bed.

During the eighth century, the Nile changed its course once more, this time pulling further to the west. At this time there were four islands: the isle of Tawdah which faced Fustat, the isle of Jazirah which faced the Nile, the isle of Jazirah in the north east (which later became part of the mainland), and finally the isle of al-Fil. The reclaimed land was put to use stage by stage. First it stood as islands in the middle of the river. Later the waterways separating them from the mainland got out off from the principal river bed causing them to dry up and become part of the mainland. This was the start of a long period, which culminated in the construction of the Fatimid capital and was the axis along which the towns expanded. By the seventh century, the town expanded. By the seventh century, the Nile course once more. This time it stood as islands in the middle of the river. Later the waterways separating them from the mainland got out of the river bed. The Nile then ran much further to the east than today, and the present Ibn Tulun area lay submerged under water, which is what gave it its wealthy suburban features. This area today stands at about one kilometre of the Nile. The dried and filled up marshlands that existed in the fourteenth century bear witness to the constant erosions of the river bed.

The tenth century: Al-Qahira (Cairo)

In 969, al-Mu'izz arrived in Egypt with the Fatimid army coming from Tunisia. He settled in the north of the three towns that had previously been built by the Arabs. This was the start of a long period, culminating in the construction of a town of imperial proportions. Djawhar, the Fatimid Vizir, was given the task of creating this new town. This new city was to be named Misr al-Qahira (the triumphant). The city was built on the mainland - only when the river swelled did this area go under water. They therefore came to be known as Birka (marshes or marshland). Large country houses were built around these marshes and this was to be the start of urbanisation. Then the swamp was dried or filled up and they became gardens and orchards, and in the process they were further split up by the canals and the irrigation systems. Pits of land were left as islands. These then went on to form the next clusters of settlement. This process was however equally influenced by the geographical configuration of the region and the role played by the Nile. After the Arab conquest, the Nile river bed changed its course a number of times each time directly affecting the town. In the seventh century it came as far as Qasr al-Sham flooding the Amr Mosque. The town had two bridges, one in the north at Al-Maqsa (directly on the banks of the Nile where Bab al-Hadid stood), and the second at Mird to the north of Babylon. There was only one island (Rawdah) which was linked to Mird by a bridge.

About ten years after the Arab conquest, the Nile shifted towards the west leaving open land around the fortresses, on which new constructions rose. The Nile then ran much further to the east than today, and the present Ibn Tulun area lay submerged under water, which is what gave it its wealthy suburban features. This area today stands at about one kilometre of the Nile. The dried and filled up marshlands that existed in the fourteenth century bear witness to the constant erosions of the river bed.

During the eighth century, the Nile changed its course once more, this time pulling further to the west. At this time there were four islands: the isle of Tawdah which faced Fustat, the isle of Jazirah which faced the Nile, the isle of Jazirah in the north east (which later became part of the mainland), and finally the isle of al-Fil. The reclaimed land was put to use stage by stage. First it stood as islands in the middle of the river. Later the waterways separating them from the mainland got out of the river bed. The Nile then ran much further to the east than today, and the present Ibn Tulun area lay submerged under water, which is what gave it its wealthy suburban features. This area today stands at about one kilometre of the Nile. The dried and filled up marshlands that existed in the fourteenth century bear witness to the constant erosions of the river bed.

The tenth century: Al-Qahira (Cairo)

In 969, al-Mu'izz arrived in Egypt with the Fatimid army coming from Tunisia. He settled in the north of the three towns that had previously been built by the Arabs. This was the start of a long period, culminating in the construction of a town of imperial proportions. Djawhar, the Fatimid Vizir, was given the task of creating this new town. This new city was to be named Misr al-Qahira (the triumphant). The site chosen by the Fatimids stood mid-way between Fustat and Ain Shams. This new city was to be named Misr al-Qahira (the triumphant).

The new city expanded, and like Fustat acquired the character of a big town, maintaining at the same time two distinct centres - the seat of power at al-Askar, and the centre for social activities at Fustat. The city then went on to form the next clusters of settlement. This process was however equally influenced by the geographical configuration of the region and the role played by the Nile. After the Arab conquest, the Nile river bed changed its course a number of times each time directly affecting the town. In the seventh century it came as far as Qasr al-Sham flooding the Amr Mosque. The town had two bridges, one in the north at Al-Maqsa (directly on the banks of the Nile where Bab al-Hadid stood), and the second at Mird to the north of Babylon. There was only one island (Rawdah) which was linked to Mird by a bridge.

About ten years after the Arab conquest, the Nile shifted towards the west leaving open land around the fortresses, on which new constructions rose. The Nile then ran much further to the east than today, and the present Ibn Tulun area lay submerged under water, which is what gave it its wealthy suburban features. This area today stands at about one kilometre of the Nile. The dried and filled up marshlands that existed in the fourteenth century bear witness to the constant erosions of the river bed.
The new town was built on a practically square-shaped plot of land about a mile away from the river. The town's boundaries were defined by natural landmarks: on the east rose the Muqattam heights, on the west the canal (the Khalij had originally served as a ditch). The name of the street running between the two palaces was 'Bien al-Sourien' (road between two walls), which has survived to this day, and so wanted to impose great changes. The project consists of: - a commercial building on an area of 10,000 m² - a casino building which comprises a ground floor as a dining hall for employees and 2nd & 2nd floor for the casino halls - restaurants and playgrounds in two floors - administrative offices and a power station - a swimming pool, a jacuzzi & an anchorage - an accommodation for 240 employees in 120 rooms with private bathrooms - sanitary drainage treatment unit. (P. 30)

- Mummification Museum - Luxor
Arch. Gamal Balfour
Mummification art is considered the top secret of the Pharaohic civilization which couldn't be discovered by modern science despite all attempts; hence it has to keep the depths of this amazing secret. The remarkable thing about the matter is that Egypt, the country of mummification, had no museum for this art, so it was natural to think of establishing such a museum trying to bring this art close to people and visitors. Therefore, the Ministry of Culture had received the opposite building to Luxor Temple to change it for cultural purposes, it had been decided to transform one of its halls to be the Mummification Museum. (P. 24)

- Atatürk Cultural Center
Arch. Erol Kiliç
The project consists of: - a commercial building - a commercial building - the biggest of all in its kind in Egypt - with a garden for reading, a cinema, an important reading hall, cafeteria, a symposium hall, administration, stores for artistic works with an open court, besides a group of other facilities. (P. 12)

- Istanbul Hilton Development & Expansion Project
Arch. Dr. Zakaria El-Dary
This building was constructed in the twenties of this century where it was designed by Mustafa Pasha Falih. It was among the buildings of the International Fair Land in Gezira, then it was changed in the sixties to a showroom for Performing Arts according to its design, it wasn't efficient enough for this function. When the earthquake of October 1992 occurred, there were collapses and cracks which were the National Center for Performing Arts taking the chance to re-design the building to suit its function. The project consists of many elements including showrooms for Performers and a cultural library - the biggest of all in its kind in Egypt - with a garden for reading, a cinema, an important reading hall, cafeteria, a symposium hall, administration, stores for artistic works with an open court, besides a group of other facilities. (P. 12)

- Istanbul Hilton Development & Expansion Project
Arch. Dr. Zakaria El-Dary
This building was constructed in the twenties of this century where it was designed by Mustafa Pasha Falih. It was among the buildings of the International Fair Land in Gezira, then it was changed in the sixties to a showroom for Performing Arts according to its design, it wasn't efficient enough for this function. When the earthquake of October 1992 occurred, there were collapses and cracks which were the National Center for Performing Arts taking the chance to re-design the building to suit its function. The project consists of many elements including showrooms for Performers and a cultural library - the biggest of all in its kind in Egypt - with a garden for reading, a cinema, an important reading hall, cafeteria, a symposium hall, administration, stores for artistic works with an open court, besides a group of other facilities. (P. 12)