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THE MAUSOLEUM OF IMAM AL-SHAFI‘I

This blessed cenotaph was made for the Imam (al-Shafi‘i)...by ‘Ubayd the carpenter, known as Ibn Ma‘ali, in the months of the year five hundred seventy-four. May God have mercy on him; may he [also] have mercy on those who are merciful toward him, those who call for mercy upon him, and upon all who worked with him—the woodworkers and carvers—and all the believers.

—Inscription on the teak cenotaph
at the grave of Imam al-Shafi‘i

For at least ten centuries, in a city replete with holy sites, the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi‘i (d. AD 820) has been perhaps the most beloved and popular of Cairene shrines. Like the humble woodworker Ibn Ma‘ali, whose entreaty for himself and his fellow carpenters has sealed the scholar’s grave since the end of the twelfth century, pious visitors have continuously gathered at this site to pray and petition the saint’s intervention. Crowds of supplicants still press against its iron grille each Friday to deposit small tokens, requests, and letters; to sit and read in the cool darkness of the tomb under its high dome; and to visit with friends and family, pray, and receive the saint’s *baraka* (blessing). The mausoleum is a solemn and moving space, sobering in its hushed vastness, a beloved center for the popular religious life of the city.

Two buildings have stood at this site, located in the Qarafa al-Sughra cemetery south of Cairo (fig. 1). The first was built by the Ayyubid Sultan Salah al-Din (known in the West as Saladin) in 1180. The second—the extant building—was endowed by his successor, al-Malik al-Kamil, in 1211 (figs. 2 and 3). Only three physical elements remain from Saladin’s construction: a marble column at the head of the grave,¹ the teak cenotaph mentioned above, and the foundation inscription, now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo.² Although the original construction is gone, the mausoleum, expanded by al-Malik al-Kamil, remains the largest freestanding mortuary chamber in Egypt, its dome only slightly smaller than that of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.³

Despite the limited physical evidence for Saladin’s building, medieval travelers’ accounts, topographical works, and chronicles provide considerable primary evidence about its foundation, constitution, and structure. We know, for example, that it was the first building Saladin completed after the fall of the Fatimids in Cairo.⁴ We also know that adjacent to the mausoleum Saladin built a massive complex that included a magnificent madrasa for the study of Islamic sciences. Based on these facts, it is often assumed that this building embodied the Ayyubid ambition of *ihyā’ al-sunna*, the reinvigoration of Sunni orthodoxy, following two centuries of Shiite Fatimid rule, and that al-Shafi‘i’s mausoleum thus played an important symbolic role in the revival of Sunnism in Egypt. But the story of how and why this pious complex was created and the possible reasons for its expansion just thirty years later under al-Malik al-Kamil are complicated and intriguing. Although the restoration of Sunnism could have been part of what motivated the construction of a madrasa at the grave of this important Sunni jurist, a statement against Shiism does not seem to have been the primary incentive for either Saladin’s building or that of al-Malik al-Kamil. Indeed, a close examination of the history, inscriptions, and decorative programs of these buildings suggests no direct evidence that the mausoleum at the grave of Imam al-Shafi‘i was part of an effort to combat Shiism. Rather, if we can discern any ideological focus to the construction of the mausoleum, it appears instead to have been a bitter intra-Sunni conflict, one between Shafi‘i Asharites and their rivals, the Hanbalis.

In addition to its ideological significance, there are at least two reasons the Shafi‘i complex is important for our broader understanding of the architecture of medieval popular piety: First, its initial construction by Saladin instigated the creation of a new ritual center by sparking a general shift northward in cemetery construction. Thus this complex alone transformed the urban landscape of the city of Cairo in a

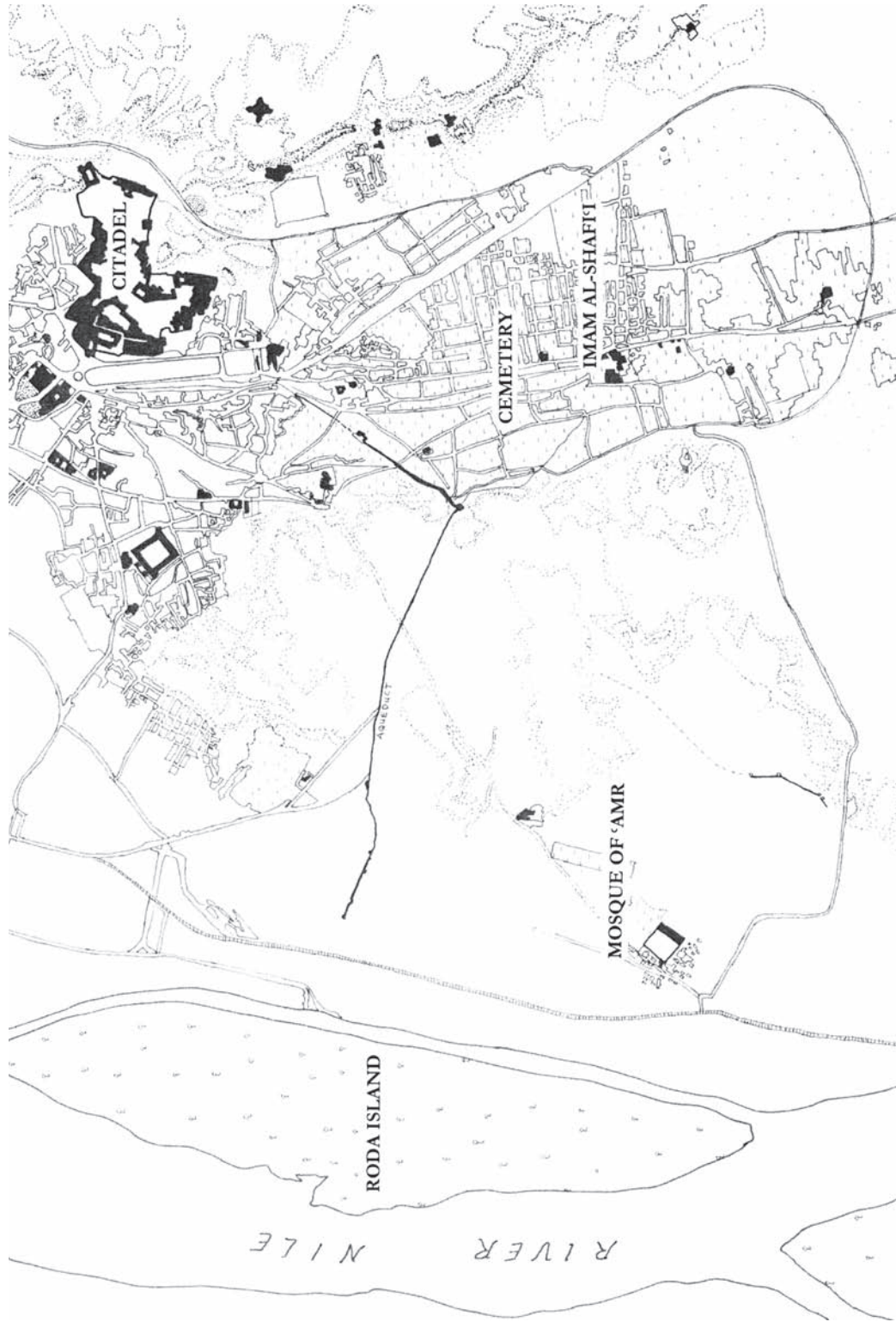


Fig. 1. Map of southern Cairo, showing the location of the Citadel, the Qarafa al-Sughra (Lesser Cemetery), and the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i. (After Egypt, Mašlahat al-Misāha (Survey of Egypt), *General Map of Cairo* [Cairo, 1920])

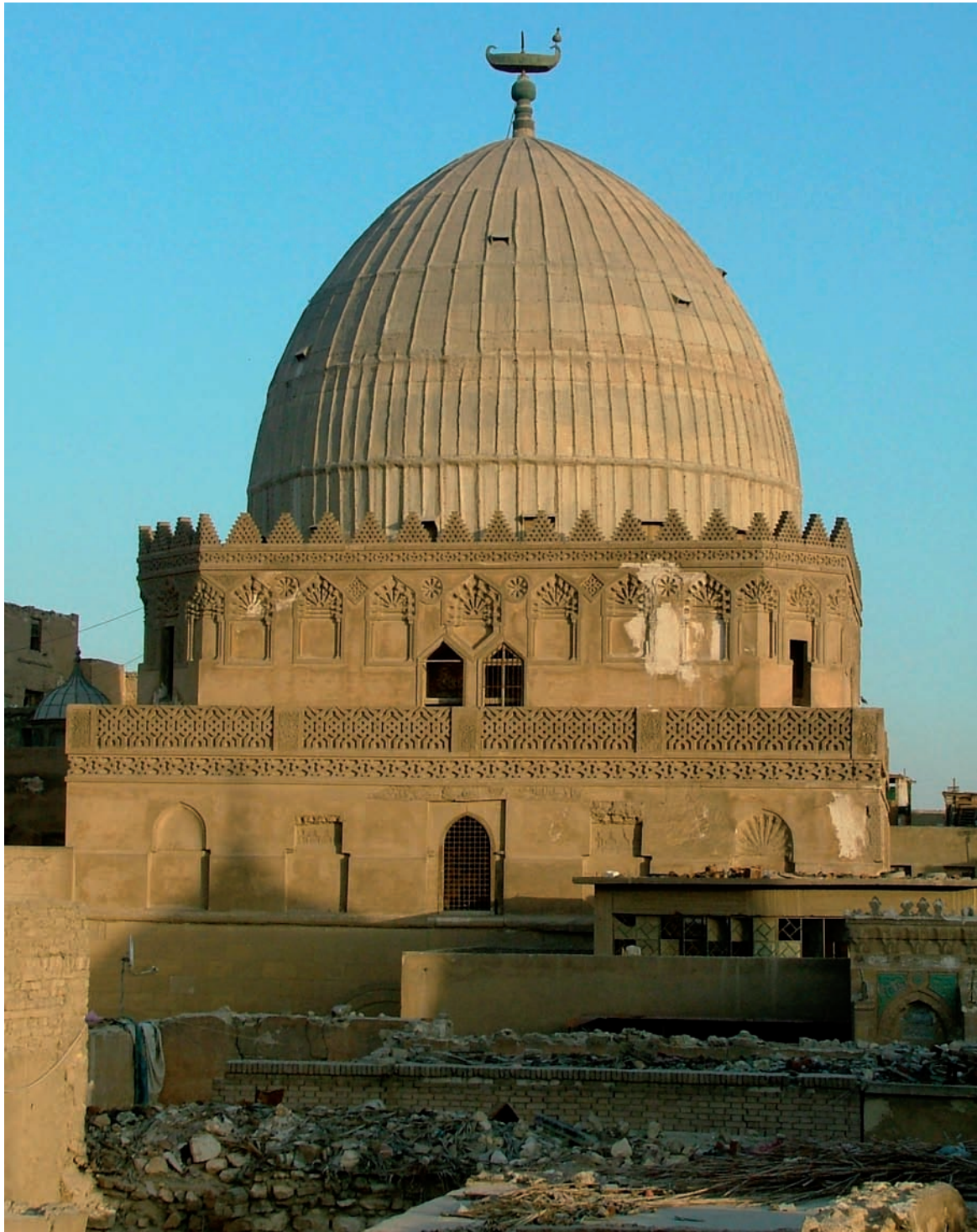


Fig. 2. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i, 1211. (Author's photograph)

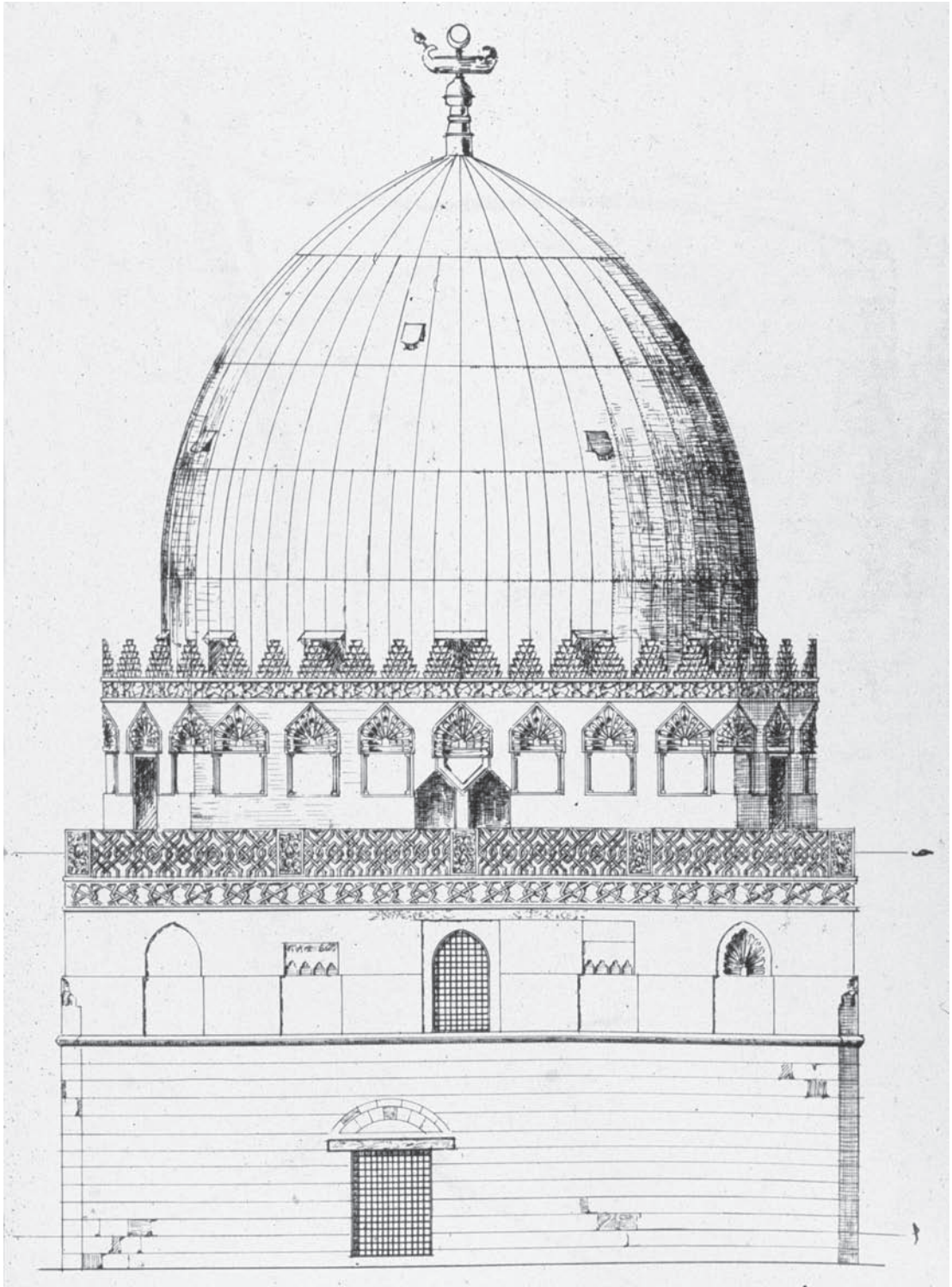


Fig. 3. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i, elevation. (After K. A. C. Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, vol. 2, fig. 31)

profound and lasting way. Second, following al-Malik al-Kamil’s intervention in 1211, al-Shafi‘i’s mausoleum was crowned by one of the largest domes in the Islamic world, an issue that is perhaps also connected with the movement of the cemetery northward. Why was there a need to build such a large dome? What was it about the city of Cairo, or the grave of this scholar, that required monumentalization to such a degree? Was it merely the prestige of al-Shafi‘i, or was this building meant to make a statement with more complex associations? The evidence suggests that al-Kamil’s monumental reconstruction was principally intended to provide a dynastic mausoleum for himself and his family. If so, it was probably concerned only secondarily, if at all, with doctrinal matters. Indeed, its architecture and decoration seem to express little in the way of universal ideology, for as we shall see, al-Kamil’s building is first and foremost a testimony to the strength and tenacity of local style in Ayyubid Cairo. Given the reputation of the mausoleum as a symbol of Sunni revival in Egypt, however, the presence or absence of any sectarian semiotic charge is significant for our understanding of the building itself, its history, and its historiography, and also for our knowledge of sectarian and interconfessional conflict in this period.

ARGUMENTS FOR A SEMIOTICS OF ISLAMIC ORNAMENT

In the past two decades, the field of Islamic art history has seen the publication of several studies presenting semiotic interpretations of architectural forms. These studies argue for political or ideological interpretations of the meaning of Islamic sacred space and its ornament, and are focused primarily on Syria and Egypt from the tenth through the twelfth century—a pivotal period during which the Islamic world was divided politically between two competing caliphates, the Fatimid Isma‘ili Shiites in Egypt and the Sunni Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad. The Abbasid cause was subsequently strengthened under the Seljuqs, Zangids, and Ayyubids.

This political division was also an ideological one, and the period is often described as one in which Sunnism, threatened by the appearance of a powerful Shi‘i dynasty on its western front, formulated a clearly defined, state-sponsored program of doctrinal counterpropaganda, with the aim of strengthening Sunni

orthodoxy.⁵ For the arts, the implications of this program may have been far-reaching: one recent author asserts that it was “the primary motivating force behind many of the cultural and artistic changes of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.”⁶

According to this argument, the main tool of this anti-Shiite program, usually termed the “Sunni revival,” was the sponsorship of the madrasa for the teaching of Sunni legal theory. Building on this claim, recent research argues that certain forms, such as cursive writing, muqarnas (stalactite vaulting), and some types of vegetal or geometric decoration may have been consciously exploited by eleventh- and twelfth-century Sunni partisans as potent carriers of symbolic—specifically Sunni—meaning.⁷ Other research suggests that the appearance and spread of these forms, which particularly proliferated in areas ruled by Sunni dynasties acknowledging the suzerainty of the Abbasid caliphs, may be interpreted as visual expressions of allegiance to the Abbasid capital at Baghdad.⁸ Some have further interpreted this phenomenon as an organized response to an even more overtly propagandistic visual agenda formulated by the Fatimids, who, it is proposed, had exploited symbols of Isma‘ili esoteric doctrine and the Shi‘i practice of the visitation of tombs to publicly proclaim the dynasty’s Shiite allegiance.⁹ Politically speaking, the ultimate victors in this struggle were the Sunnis, and the sweetest moment of that victory is traditionally reserved for Saladin, who defeated the Fatimids in 1171. As noted above, following this success, the first architectural project that Saladin completed was the mausoleum and madrasa at the grave of al-Shafi‘i.

In view of the assumptions that have been made about this building and its meaning, it is notable that, subsequent to K. A. C. Creswell’s architectural survey of some forty years ago, there has never been a careful study of the building itself.¹⁰ Considering the importance of its interpretation in the historiography of Ayyubid architecture, and its centrality in the world of medieval popular piety—for, as noted above, it was and remains among the most beloved of Cairene shrines—such a study seems overdue.¹¹ As we shall see, the Shafi‘i complex provides an opportunity to investigate the evolution of popular practice in Egypt and to explore many of the recent semiotic arguments about the political and ideological use of the sacred.

THE SALAHIYYA MADRASA AT THE GRAVE OF
AL-SHAFI'Ī

In the year 1178, the carpenter 'Ubayd b. Ma'ali completed work on his extraordinary teak cenotaph.¹² Commissioned by Saladin, it is still considered a masterpiece of medieval woodcarving, an exquisite and fitting tribute to adorn the mausoleum of the revered Sunni jurist.¹³ In its original form, however, al-Shafi'ī's mausoleum was only one part of a larger complex focused on a madrasa and attendant structures. This college, known as the Salahiyya Madrasa, became the most prestigious in Egypt during the Ayyubid period.¹⁴ In addition to its size, two features assured that prestige: its location at the grave of al-Shafi'ī, and the extraordinary salary that was endowed for its rather singular professor, a pious and ascetic sheik named Najm al-Din al-Khabushani.¹⁵

But al-Shafi'ī's grave was a potent holy site long before the arrival of the Ayyubids. Indeed, it had even been an object of pilgrimage for some Shiites.¹⁶ Though we know little about the appearance of previous structures on the site, by the time Saladin constructed the Salahiyya complex there, the grave of al-Shafi'ī was already established within the sacred landscape of the cemetery as an important locus of blessed emanations, or *baraka*. Numerous stories are told of the people's love for the grave. In the eleventh century, when building the Nizamiyya madrasa in Baghdad, the Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk had wanted to transfer al-Shafi'ī's bones to Baghdad to be reinterred as the centerpiece of his new school. He wrote to the Fatimid vizier Badr al-Jamali, who was willing to grant his request. When the vizier went to the grave to begin the exhumation, however, there was an immediate demonstration of protest from the population of Cairo, which got a bit out of hand and culminated in the assembled crowd throwing rocks at the vizier. The uprising was brought under control, and the vizier proceeded to exhume the bones, but as soon as the workmen began to remove the bricks (*libn*) around the grave, there arose an intoxicating perfume that immediately drove everyone mad. This seems to have been quite enough for the workmen, who refused to continue, citing the perils of flouting divine intervention. The Imam's bones stayed put. Nizam al-Mulk, for his part, far from being displeased that his wishes had not been fulfilled, was so astonished by the miracle that he decreed an official account of it be read in all the mosques of the Seljuq lands. The event undoubt-

edly increased the prestige of al-Shafi'ī's grave.¹⁷

According to Ibn al-Zayyat, when al-Shafi'ī died and was buried in 820, the area was the family plot of the historian Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam. Thus the construction of the Salahiyya complex there at the end of the twelfth century involved the relocation of many tombs. Their occupants' bones were reinterred in the Maqbarat al-'Ayna' when Saladin built the madrasa.¹⁸ Ibn Taghribirdi provides contrary evidence, and writes that the area was an open courtyard before Saladin began construction.¹⁹ In either case, the building of the mausoleum and madrasa was an impressive undertaking, begun around 1176–77.²⁰ Given the Ayyubids' tendency to favor the Shafi'ī school, and considering the affection of the people of Cairo for the grave of the Imam, Saladin's decision to build the Madrasa al-Salahiyya there seems an obvious choice.

The earliest Arabic source to describe the madrasa complex was the Spanish pilgrim Ibn Jubayr, who visited it in 1182–83, shortly after its dedication. He writes:

The *mashhad* (shrine) of Imam al-Shafi'ī—may God be pleased with him—is among the most magnificent, celebrated, and expansive that there is. Facing it (*bi-izā'ihī*) was built a madrasa the like of which has never been constructed in this country, there being nothing more spacious or more lavishly built. He who walks around it will believe that it is a separate town (*annuhā baladun mustaqillun bi-dhātihī*). Facing it (*bi-izā'ihā*) are a bath and other fine public facilities. Construction continues to this very hour, and the expenditure on it is measureless. The shaykh, imam, ascetic, and man of learning called Najm al-Din al-Khabushani is personally responsible for it. The sultan of these lands, Salah al-Din, generously pays for all of this, saying: "Increase in splendor and elegance; we shall provide for all." Glory to Him who made him "*ṣalāh dīnīhī*," like his name."²¹

From this text, we learn several things about the physical constitution of the buildings. First, the madrasa complex was of extremely large size. Ibn Jubayr's assertion that it resembled a separate town, though likely an exaggeration, still leaves little doubt about the foundation's impression on its contemporaries. It seems that Saladin spared no expense in ensuring that his madrasa would be among the finest Egypt had ever seen. Furthermore, the use of prepositions such as *izā'a* indicate that the tomb and the madrasa were very close or even attached to each other, and there could well have been direct communication

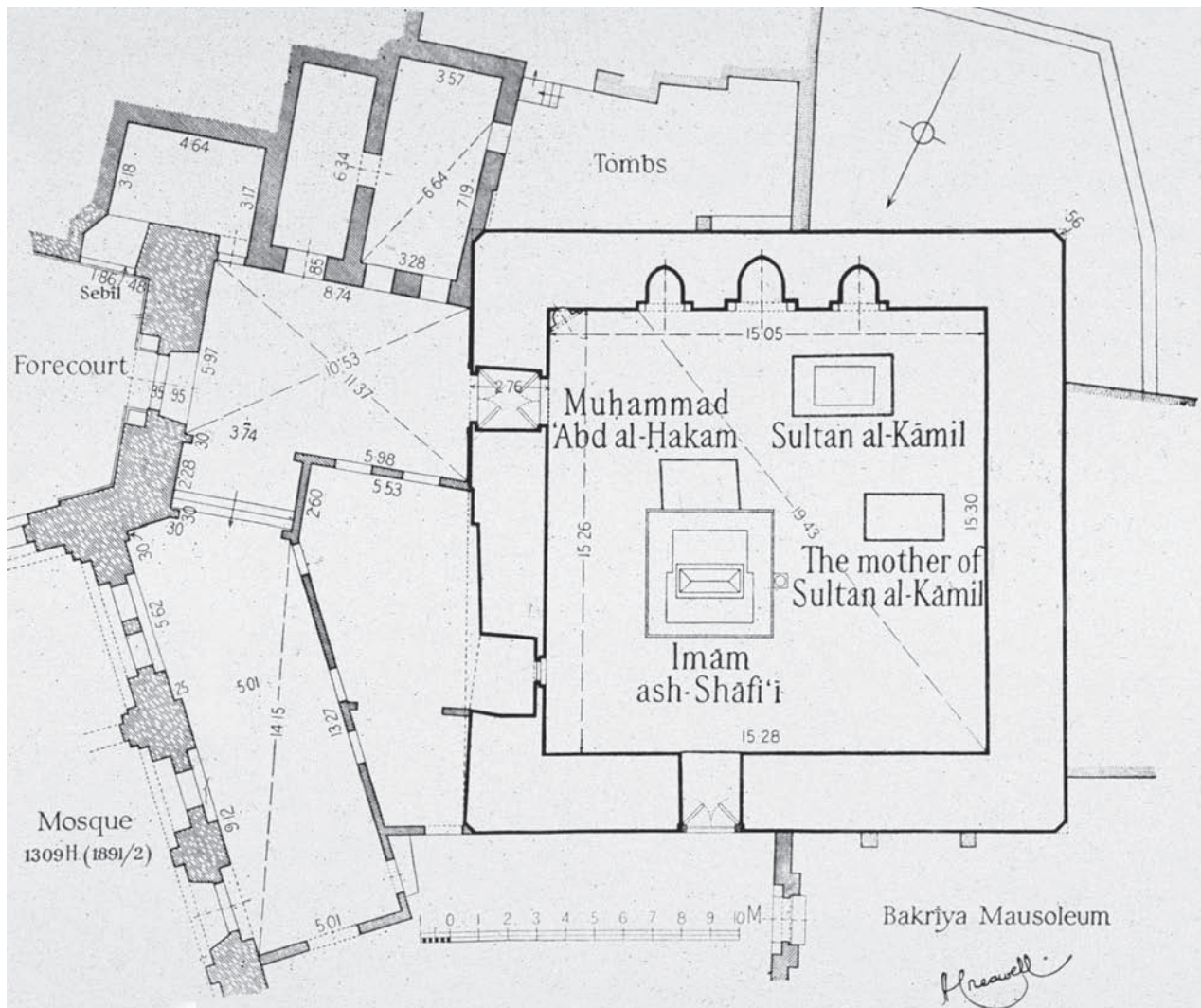


Fig. 4. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i, plan. (After K. A. C. Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, vol. 2, fig. 30)

between them. This supposition is strengthened by the fact that the original entrance to the mausoleum on the northwestern side (today a window) is on an axis that does not correspond to that of the central mihrab (fig. 4).²² Rather, the entrance is somewhat unusually situated to the left of center, such that it corresponds directly with al-Shafi'i's cenotaph. It is a modest entrance for such an imposing structure, a small door with a wooden lintel bearing an inscription so worn it is now unreadable. Such an entrance makes sense if al-Kamil, in the process of expanding the mausoleum, were attaching it to the already

extant madrasa of Saladin. It thus seems likely that the college was originally on the northwestern side, in direct communication with the tomb. If so, the Imam's cenotaph would have been visible to one facing the qibla wall of the adjoining madrasa.

Ibn Jubayr's description is augmented by a later one from al-Maqrizi, who adds that in addition to the baths, the complex was provided with an oven opposite the madrasa that produced sixty *ratls* of bread a day—enough, according to one estimate,²³ to feed at least a hundred students—and a large number of shops attached to the building. Income was provided

from the shops and from the cultivation of an island in the Nile. Al-Maqrizi also tells us that in addition to the professor, the endowment provided for the support of ten *mu'īds*, or teaching assistants.²⁴ It seems a reasonable guess that this madrasa was large enough to accommodate between 100 and 150 residents.

Furthermore, the location of Saladin's project would only have accentuated its already considerable size, for in the late twelfth century this area of the cemetery was relatively empty—not yet the “great medium of divine blessing,” in the words of Ibn Battuta,²⁵ a veritable city of the dead that to this day plays a rich role in the lives of the inhabitants of Cairo. Although the Fatimids had built extensively in the Qarafa al-Kubra to the south, when the Shafi'i complex was built, that cemetery, as well as much of Fustat, still lay in ruins after being intentionally burned by the Fatimids in 1168.²⁶ Thus, the domes of Saladin's foundation would have been the most visible markers on Cairo's southern horizon; indeed they are likely to have been the only ones.

This supposition is bolstered by the fact that the construction soon attracted other buildings, instigating a northern shift in the development of the cemetery, away from the older Qarafa al-Kubra and toward what now became known as the Qarafa al-Sughra. This movement echoed the migration of the general population from Fustat to Cairo proper.²⁷ This shift in construction indicates that the focus of building activity was, at least for a time, not on the repair and restoration of ruined buildings in the old cemetery but rather on new construction in the northerly area. Indeed, al-Maqrizi confirms that the development of the new quarter proceeded in tandem with the decline of the older cemetery area.²⁸

Al-Maqrizi further records that the area between the tomb of Imam al-Shafi'i and the Bab al-Qarafa below the Citadel was, at the time of the building of Saladin's complex, the location of a spacious *maydān*, or hippodrome. This open area existed well into the fourteenth century when, during the third reign of al-Nasir Muhammad b. Qalawun (r. 1309–40), it was extensively built up, apparently for the first time.²⁹ Thus, when the Shafi'i complex was built, the view of the mausoleum and madrasa from the city of Cairo would have been wholly unimpeded by other construction, and its situation would have remained so for at least the first 125 years of its existence.

This careful attention to the siting and location of the madrasa, and later to the mausoleum of al-Kamil,

is significant for our understanding of the visual effect intended by the patrons of these buildings. Most particularly, they may have considered the view from the Citadel; perhaps, on a clear day, Saladin could have seen the crowds of legal students and pious supplicants from its walls. Furthermore, unlike his predecessor Saladin, al-Kamil actually took up residence in the Citadel in 1207. Four years later, in 1211, he decided to expand the mausoleum.³⁰ When it was completed, with nothing but a wide *maydān* between the Citadel and the madrasa complex, the image of the soaring dome on the horizon must indeed have been inspiring (fig. 5).

THE SHEIKH AL-KHABUSHANI AND INTRA-SUNNI COMPETITION IN MEDIEVAL CAIRO

There is evidence to suggest, however, that Saladin was not the primary force behind the remarkable nature of the appearance, size, and location of the madrasa. Returning to Ibn Jubayr's account, we find that his description of the madrasa is followed by mention of the executor of the funds of the foundation, the ascetic shaykh Najm al-Din al-Khabushani. It is also here, in the biography of this shaykh, that we may first begin to discern a possible ideological motivation behind the building of the expansive madrasa.

Al-Khabushani, who according to Ibn al-Zayyat was buried “under the feet of Imam al-Shafi'i,”³¹ was a well-known scourge of religious innovation, and he particularly targeted the Hanbalis. Ibn Jubayr certainly knew who al-Khabushani was and eagerly called on him after visiting the new madrasa, “to be blessed by his prayers, for we had heard of him in Andalusia. We found him at his mosque in Cairo, in the closet in which he lives...and what a narrow closet it is! He prayed for us and we departed. Of all the men in Egypt, we saw no one else like him.”³²

Indeed, Ibn Jubayr probably hadn't seen the likes of him anywhere, for the shaykh was apparently a singular character, with a reputation as an arrogant, stubborn, and pugnacious enforcer of piety. It seems likely that the instigation for the building of the complex was al-Khabushani's own, and that Saladin merely provided the funds.³³ The strongest evidence for this assertion is in the foundation inscription for the madrasa itself.

It reads:

This madrasa was built at the urging (*bi-istidā'*) of the shaykh, jurist, imam... [and] ascetic Najm al-Din,



Fig. 5. View of the cemetery from the citadel, with the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi‘i visible at center. (Author’s photo)

the pillar of Islam, exemplar of mankind, the mufti of the sects, Abu ‘l-Ba[rakat b.] al-Muwaffaq al-Khabushani—may God perpetuate his success—for the jurists who are disciples of al-Sha[fi‘i]—may God have favor on them—[who are] characterized by their firm, unified, Ash‘ari doctrinal foundation [against] vain reasoners (*al-ḥashwiyya*) and other innovators.”³⁴

A remarkable aspect of this inscription is that there is no mention of Saladin as the true patron of the building. This is in vivid contrast to virtually every other foundation inscription by Saladin, and indeed completely goes against what was by then the well-established Zangid and Ayyubid practice of emblazoning founders’ names, and their seemingly ever more elaborate titles, on the exteriors of buildings.

Here, the only person ostensibly to be credited for building the madrasa and mausoleum is the shaykh al-Khabushani, and we are specifically informed that it was built at his urging (*bi-istīdā‘ al-shaykh*), presumably meaning his urging of Saladin. This vague implication is the closest one may come to understanding that someone besides al-Khabushani himself was behind the creation of the complex, and indeed, if not for the textual sources, we would likely have no clue as to the identity of its actual patron.

Other sources confirm that it was certainly within the power of the shaykh to instigate such a project. Not only had he pressed Saladin to build the madrasa next to the grave of al-Shafi‘i, but he had also issued a legal opinion sanctioning the execution of the last

Fatimid caliph (who passed away before such action became necessary) and the pronouncement the *khutba*, the Friday sermon, in the name of the Abbasid caliph.³⁵ Saladin apparently hesitated in enforcing this, and according to some sources al-Khabushani of his own volition ascended the minbar and, threatening the preacher with his cane, ordered him to pronounce the sanctioned *khutba*.³⁶

Al-Khabushani was a bold and colorful figure who seems to have had a strong influence over the sultan. Many anecdotes told about the shaykh illustrate the respect Saladin had for him, and the extraordinary license he was allowed. One day, when Saladin was preparing for battle, al-Khabushani went out to wish him off and used the opportunity to ask the sultan to abolish some taxes he felt were unjust. When Saladin refused, the shaykh became enraged and, disregarding all propriety, began to beat the illustrious sultan violently on the head, shouting, “May God not grant you victory!” and causing his headgear (*qalansuwa*) to fall to the ground. Shocked and speechless, Saladin left for the battle, in which he was defeated. Upon his return, he rushed straightaway to al-Khabushani and kissed his hand, begging for forgiveness, for “he knew it had been because of [al-Khabushani’s] curse” that he had lost.³⁷

Who was this powerful shaykh, who clearly had both the ear and the purse strings of the sultan? We will focus here on one aspect of his biography, his strict devotion to Shafi‘i Asharite theology and his consequent blind hatred of the Hanbalis. The main aspects of the debate between the Sunni legal schools revolved around a number of key doctrinal questions, including the createdness of the Qur’an and the nature of divinity. The traditionalist Hanbalis advocated a strictly literal reading of the Qur’an; to use the most famous example, they held such Qur’anic imagery as the “Throne of God” to entail that because God could sit on a throne He must therefore have corporeal form. For the Asharites, this literalism was the basest of heresy. Asharism—integrated with the Shafi‘i school by al-Ghazali in the eleventh century—represented the compromise between the traditionalist view on one hand and the radically rationalizing tendencies of groups such as the Mu‘tazila on the other. For the Shafi‘i Asharites, the overly literal readings of many traditionalist Hanbalis could only lead to *bid‘a*, or innovation, particularly the *bid‘a* of giving God attributes, which was to their way of thinking tantamount to anthropomorphism (*tashbih*). Asharism

proposed a middle ground, adopting some aspects of Mu‘tazilite rationalism, particularly the use of *kalām*, or rational argument, but also introducing the concept that some theological points could not be fully understood by humans and must be accepted *bi-lā kayf*, without speculation.³⁸ Thus, because of the Hanbali insistence on only the most literal readings, the Asharites branded them the worst sort of innovators: “anthropomorphists.”

These debates were not merely academic, for there exists more than one report about bloody riots in the streets of Cairo over theological issues.³⁹ These were so disruptive that Saladin’s successor, al-‘Aziz, went so far as to try to have the small but troublesome Hanbali community of Cairo expelled.⁴⁰ The roots and organization of such factional discord, sometimes called *‘asabiyya*⁴¹ or simply *fitna* in the Arabic sources, are not clearly understood. For Baghdad we have a fairly complex picture, but for other cities the phenomenon is only beginning to be explored.⁴² We do know that such conflict was limited temporally and spatially: it appeared sometime toward the end of the tenth century in the eastern Islamic lands and never seems to have spread beyond Egypt into North Africa. By the Ottoman period, it had all but died out.⁴³

Within these four to five hundred years, however, intra-Sunni confessional discord was a profound force shaping Islamic society and urban life—a force at least as powerful and perhaps even more immediately disruptive than the schism between Sunnism and Shiism; given the weakness of the later Fatimids, the Sunni-Shi‘i conflict had perhaps ceased to be a true threat even before Saladin quietly put the Shi‘ite dynasty to rest at the end of the twelfth century. Indeed, most cities accommodated at least two warring Sunni factions.⁴⁴ As Richard Bulliet has demonstrated for Nishapur, such violent differences had the potential to rend the fabric of society, at times devolving into outright intra-urban war. In Nishapur, this strife escalated throughout the eleventh century, ultimately leading to the destruction and abandonment of the city.⁴⁵ Similarly, when a large population fleeing the Crusaders and Mongols entered Damascus in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, a series of *fitnas* erupted between these mostly Hanbali refugees and resident Shafi‘i elites over theological issues.⁴⁶ The schism could also take a more subtle but no less pointed form: in thirteenth-century Damascus, for example, a Shafi‘i founded a madrasa with a waqf that specified that “no Jew, Christian, Magian, or Hanbali” could enter, a juxtaposition implying an

animosity so great that the Shafi‘is hardly considered the Hanbalis to be Muslim.⁴⁷

Further, this internal Sunni conflict was an essential feature not only of medieval urban life but also of the Sunni revival, which was concerned as much with eliminating erroneous Sunni confessional adherences as with responding to the threat posed by the Shi‘i Fatimids. Thus Makdisi repeatedly insists that the Sunni revival was “not merely a Sunni revival, but a Traditionalist Sunni Revival...a religious revival in which the forces of Traditionalism fought against the forces of Rationalism of all shades,” including Ash‘arism. Indeed, the most famed document of the Sunni revival, the *risāla al-qādirīyya*, or Qadiri Creed, was not directed against the Shi‘a alone but was “anti-Shi‘i, anti-Mu‘tazili, and anti-Ash‘ari.”⁴⁸ Issued in 1018 by the Abbasid caliph al-Qadir bi’llah (r. 991–1031), the creed was a profession of faith that defined official Abbasid doctrine. Inspired by Hanbali ideas, it condemned all forms of Shiism but also, as noted above, took aim at Mu‘tazilism and Ash‘arism, doctrines that had been embraced by certain Sunnis and that were now unambiguously placed outside the realm of “official” Sunnism. The Qadiri Creed, Makdisi writes, “was a Sunni creed, because it opposed Shi‘i doctrines; but it also opposed rationalist Mu‘tazili and Ash‘ari doctrines; and for this it may rightly be called a Traditionalist creed, and the religious triumph it symbolized, a Traditionalist triumph.”⁴⁹ Thus we see that from its inception, the revival was concerned with the reformation of Sunnism as much as the condemnation of Shiism.⁵⁰ This official stance undoubtedly encouraged intra-Sunni competition, and as it evolved, the revival indeed became a complex and much-contested phenomenon.

The Asharite shaykh al-Khabushani certainly did his part in opposing the “anthropomorphist” Hanbali traditionalists. One of his exploits took place before the building of the Salahīyya complex. A few years before al-Khabushani’s arrival in Cairo, a certain Ibn al-Kizani, a scholar infamous among the Ash‘arites for his alleged anthropomorphism, died and was buried next to al-Shafi‘i. When al-Khabushani arrived and heard of this, he was enraged. Unable to contain himself, he went to the grave, dug up the unfortunate Ibn al-Kizani, and, while flinging his bones in all directions, shouted, “a *ṣiddīq* [righteous man] and a *zindīq* [heretic] should not be [buried] in the same place!” The Hanbalis immediately “attacked [al-Khabushani] and rallied against him, and there occurred between

them warlike attacks and riots,”⁵¹ i.e., they promulgated a *fitna*. Clearly, al-Khabushani had a close relationship to Saladin not only as a legal and doctrinal advisor but also as a scholar with a very particular anti-Hanbali ideological agenda, which he wasted no opportunity to demonstrate. Thus it would seem that these preferences put him at the center of the intra-confessional conflict that plagued Cairo in the late twelfth century.

With this in mind, we return to the building’s foundation inscription, the text of which, as mentioned above, credits only al-Khabushani for the construction. There is another notable aspect of this inscription: it makes no mention of the relation between Sunnism and Shiism, and in fact its only reference to doctrinal orientation is a clear declaration of allegiance to Asharite theology. But a closer reading reveals its message to have been even more pointed, for the word used to describe the group to which the Asharites were opposed, *al-ḥashwīyya*, translated literally above as “vain reasoners,” actually had a deeper meaning. *Al-ḥashwīyya* was an insult with specific connotations; it was commonly used by medieval polemicists as a nasty epithet for the Hanbalis. As stated in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* entry on the term, it was “used by some Sunnis of extremist traditionalists...[and] in a narrower sense, of the *Ashāb al-Ḥadīth* who, uncritically and even prompted by prejudice, recognize as genuine and interpret literally the crudely anthropomorphic traditions.”⁵² Given that the Isma‘ili Fatimids were about as removed as a theological school could be from the literal interpretation of God’s word, it is impossible that the term referred to them. Here, in this most important of documents from the original building, is strong evidence that if Saladin’s foundation had a doctrinal component, it had little to do with any statement against Shiism, and was instead apparently focused on the intra-Sunni conflict between the Hanbalis and the Asharites.⁵³

The specificity of the message in the foundation inscription of the madrasa can be appreciated more fully when it is compared with Saladin’s inscription on the western portal of the Citadel, under construction at precisely the same time as the Salahīyya complex. This reads:

The foundation of this brilliant citadel, next to the well-guarded city of Cairo, was ordained in accordance with the resolution that unites utility with beauty and [as] the space for protection for [those] who would take refuge in the shadow of his kingdom, by our lord al-Malik al-

Nasir Salah al-Dunya wa-l-Din...Yusuf Ibn Ayyub, the reviver of the empire of the Commander of the Faithful (*muh̄yī dawlat amīr al-mūʾminīn*), under the direction of his brother and heir apparent al-Malik al-ʿAdil...⁵⁴

This is the sort of foundation inscription one might expect to find on the exterior of a madrasa designed to proclaim Sunni identity in the face of Shiism. It names the founder Saladin as the reviver of the sphere of Sunni authority by making explicit reference to the “Commander of the Faithful,” the Caliph in Baghdad. Furthermore, as Nasser Rabbat has argued, its use of the title *muh̄yī dawlat amīr al-mūʾminīn* had no precedents, although it would appear as a feature of many of Saladin’s later inscriptions.⁵⁵ The deliberate use of the word *muh̄yī* is perhaps significant, considering Saladin’s reputation as a leader particularly committed to the *ihyāʾ*, or revival, of the faith. The Citadel inscription is a proclamation of the triumph of Saladin as a Sunni ruler, emphasizing reunification and revitalization of Sunni political authority after a prolonged period of Fatimid rule. Clearly, had it been Saladin’s intention to promulgate such a message through the foundation of the madrasa at the grave of al-Shafiʿi, the means and ideological language were available. The issue then becomes why he did not do so.

MADRASAS IN EGYPT DURING THE FATIMID PERIOD

So far we have seen that the evidence of the foundation inscription for the Salahiyya Madrasa, against the backdrop of conflict between various Sunni groups in medieval cities throughout the Islamic lands, complicates the assumption that the complex was conceived primarily as an ideological instrument against Shiism. But to what degree may we say that the particularities of this building are representative of a wider phenomenon? George Makdisi argued almost forty years ago that the madrasa in general was not to be seen primarily as a tool of Sunni revival.⁵⁶ In the 1970s one of Makdisi’s students, Gary Leiser, surveyed the first 150 years of madrasa construction in Egypt, finding that the first madrasa in Cairo was built in 1096–97, long before Saladin arrived there in the late twelfth century.⁵⁷ Leiser concluded that the foundation of religious institutions such as the madrasa had more to do with the consolidation of Sunnism than the elimination of Shiism. His conclusions have been reiterated

recently in the new *Cambridge History of Egypt*, where Michael Chamberlain argues,

The Ayyubids were undoubtedly attached to Sunni Islam and exerted themselves to see it flourish. However, the relationship between this general commitment and their patronage of religious institutions is more intricate than the notion of Sunni revival can account for...insofar as we can discern an ideological objective in Ayyubid religious policy, it seems to have been directed at Sunnis as much as Shiʿis...There is little evidence that the foundation of madrasas was an anti-Fatimid policy, or that Sunnism, the religious affiliation of the majority of the Muslim population, required new institutions to flourish on the levels of belief or communal identity. Madrasas existed in Egypt well before Salah al-Din, some sponsored by Fatimid wazirs.⁵⁸

Indeed, it seems that the first madrasa in Egypt was founded sometime around 1096 by an Andalusian immigrant, a Maliki *faqīh* (jurisprudent) named Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Turtushi.⁵⁹ This scholar traveled extensively after leaving his native country in 1083, eventually making his way to Baghdad, where he came within the orbit of the great Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk. He was greatly impressed with the educational and religious facilities the vizier had constructed in Baghdad, reserving special admiration for the Nizamiyya. After spending some years studying in the city, al-Turtushi traveled to Syria, from which he set sail for Alexandria, arriving around 1096. The people of the city were greatly taken with him and encouraged him to settle in Alexandria permanently. He acquiesced, and shortly thereafter met a pious and affluent woman whom he married. He converted her large, two-story house into the first recorded madrasa in Egypt, using the upstairs as the living quarters and the lower floor with its large reception hall (*qāʿa*) to teach *fiqh* and Hadith.⁶⁰

At least some students were lodged there, and the income from al-Turtushi’s wife provided for the maintenance of the building. The number of students may have been rather large; one account says that when al-Turtushi went for walks, during which he often discoursed on legal matters, he was sometimes accompanied by hundreds of students.⁶¹ His fame and stature grew, and during his nearly thirty years there, many luminaries studied with him. Al-Turtushi’s foundation, though not purpose-built, meets the basic requirements for a madrasa: an independent Sunni residential college supported by private funds, with a live-in professor of *fiqh*. It seems likely

that many early madrasas were of this somewhat informal character.

Following this precedent, and perhaps in reaction to the adherents that this Spaniard—with whom he had a longstanding quarrel—had attracted in his city, the Maliki qadi of Alexandria, Ahmad b. 'Abd al-Majid b. Hadid, erected the first purpose-built madrasa, also at the end of the eleventh century. It was still in existence in the thirteenth century, and is therefore likely to have been endowed.⁶² Ibn Hadid's title, *Makīn al-Dawla*, granted to him by the Fatimid caliph, gave the madrasa its name, the Makiniyya. At about the same time, a third madrasa, cited by al-Safadi in his biography of a student who studied there, was founded by Abu 'l-Husayn Yahya b. al-Mufarrij al-Maqdisi, the Shafi'ī qadi in Alexandria. As his name implies, al-Maqdisi was an immigrant from Jerusalem, and he established a college for the Shafi'īs that seems to have been transitory but probably helped to prepare the way for future Shafi'ī madrasas in Egypt.⁶³ There is little information about the physical form of these two schools, but their founders' stature as judges appointed by the Fatimid caliph suggests they may have been reasonably significant architecturally.

The fourth madrasa, however, had inarguable presence. It was founded in Alexandria in 1137–38 by a Sunni Fatimid vizier, Ridwan b. al-Walakhshi, who expended considerable energy in strengthening his ties to the Sunni community; this may have been his motivation for constructing a madrasa. The first, though not the last, Fatimid vizier to establish a madrasa, al-Walakhshi was by then the de facto leader of the country, given the limitations of the later Fatimid rulers.⁶⁴ The foundation document still exists and, in perhaps the strangest turn of events in the history of the institution of the madrasa, is written in the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Hafiz. Although this is likely to have been a mere formality, the document goes so far as to state that the caliph, rather than the vizier, decided to construct the madrasa⁶⁵ and even gives its name as al-Hafiziyya. It seems likely that Ridwan had hoped to gain support from the Sunnis of Alexandria, and that al-Hafiz would also have found this politically expedient.⁶⁶ This madrasa became the most famous in Egypt until the construction of the one at the grave of al-Shafi'ī, in no small part due to the fame of its *mudarris* (professor), the imam Sadr al-Din Abu Tahir Isma'il b. 'Awf, a student of the above-mentioned al-Turtushi. In the end, the madrasa came to be named after Ibn 'Awf, who, after al-Turtushi's

death, became the best-known Maliki in twelfth-century Egypt. He taught for fifty years and had hundreds of students, the most famous of whom were Saladin and his sons al-'Aziz, al-Zahir, and al-Afdal. Although a great deal is known about the teachers and students at this madrasa, there is again little information about its constitution or physical appearance. It was, however, a fully endowed residential college sponsored in part by the Fatimid caliph, and its longevity—it lasted for well over a hundred years before being eclipsed by grander institutions—indicates that it was a school of considerable consequence.⁶⁷

A fifth school was founded in 1151 for the Shafi'īs, by yet another Sunni vizier for the Fatimids, Ibn Sallar. It was called the 'Adiliyya after Ibn Sallar's title "al-Malik al-'Adil" but was soon nicknamed "al-Silafi" after its *mudarris*, Abu Tahir al-Silafi. He too was a famous and well-respected teacher, who taught in Egypt for sixty years. In 1177, Saladin and his sons paid him a visit in his madrasa, where they studied Hadith.⁶⁸ Once again, we know little of the physical structure of the madrasa, but from its staff we may speculate that it was a substantial foundation: it had a muezzin and two or three *mu'īds*, one of whom was in charge of forty young men.⁶⁹ Al-Silafi also kept his large library there.

All told, at least eight madrasas are known to have been established in Egypt in the Fatimid period, and there may have been more. Most of these were in the Sunni stronghold of Alexandria, but one was also established in Fustat.⁷⁰ Thus Saladin did not introduce the institution of the madrasa to Egypt; rather than being forcibly implanted by a single ruler, this institution seems to have followed a natural model of dispersion, spread by scholars who had studied or taught in the East as they made their way west. Thus we see that the Nizamiyya in Baghdad was built in 1067 and the first madrasa in Damascus in 1097–98. If the first Sunni legal school was indeed the one built in Alexandria by al-Turtushi shortly after his arrival in Egypt in 1096, then the madrasa arrived in Egypt at about the same time it arrived in Syria: nearly eighty years before the advent of Saladin. While Saladin's foundations were undoubtedly more sumptuous and architecturally significant than preceding ones, the introduction of the institution itself cannot be credited to him. Rather, he seems to have been astutely capitalizing on popular support for an already existing institution. Still, the paradigm of Sunni revival and its Egyptian genesis in Saladin's foundation at the grave of

al-Shafi‘i has a long genealogy and has played an important role in scholarship on the Ayyubid period.⁷¹ Given the above discussion, one may well ask how the idea of the madrasa in Egypt as an Ayyubid import has become so important historiographically?

Modern authors are not solely responsible for linking this building with the Sunni revival. Given Saladin’s subsequent fame and numerous achievements, medieval writers tended to credit him retroactively with the introduction of the madrasa into Egypt. Leiser, too, was puzzled by this phenomenon and offered the following explanation for it:

After all, he became the great Sunni hero of his time and the madrasa was a Sunni creation. In this respect, some authors even contradicted themselves in an attempt to add more glory to the Saladin legend. For instance, in his biography of al-Silafi Ibn Khallikan clearly states that Ibn al-Sallar built a madrasa...in 1151–52, some twenty years before Saladin became vizier.... In spite of this, when he comes to the life of Saladin, he feels compelled to declare that there were no madrasas in Egypt when Saladin took over the country. Al-Maqrizi does the same thing...[reporting that Ridwan built a madrasa in 1137–38]. But then for the year 1170–71, in the same work, he mentions Saladin’s first madrasas and states that until they were built, there was not one madrasa in all of Egypt....Modern writers also frequently attribute the madrasa to Saladin. This is because they usually rely, indirectly or directly, on Ibn Khallikan’s life of Saladin or the *Khīṭat* [of al-Maqrizi].⁷²

Thus, because Saladin was the great reviver of Sunnism in Egypt and the idea of building madrasas is historiographically associated with Sunni revival, seeing Saladin’s foundation of the Salahiyya as the first Egyptian example of the type seems to have its own internal logic and momentum. This conventional misapprehension of course does not rule out the possibility that a madrasa built by Saladin after his conquest of Egypt was part of a Sunni program to combat Fatimid influence, or that such concerns were part of the implicit mandate for its foundation. We may at least be certain, however, that there is no specific information in the history of the Shafi‘i complex or its foundation inscription to support the proposition that these concerns were foremost in the minds of its founders.

SEMIOTIC INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS AND THE MAUSOLEUM OF AL-MALIK AL-KAMIL

The building that now stands on the site of Saladin’s original foundation dates to 1211 and, as mentioned above, was built by Saladin’s eventual successor al-Malik al-Kamil, who was buried there along with his mother (figs. 2 and 3). It is remarkable to note that the foundation of al-Kamil—though constructed at what is often regarded as the high point of Sunni revival in Egypt—does not bear signs of an overtly Sunnite orientation. This fact is significant in light of the research by art historians on the semiotic dimensions of the architectural programs of both the Fatimids and the Ayyubids. We will now look more closely at these arguments and their implications for the Shafi‘i mausoleum, for this subject has by now generated considerable literature.

Caroline Williams and Irene Bierman (for the Fatimids) and Yasser Tabbaa (for the Ayyubids) have presented evidence for the symbolic function of certain building types, decorative elements, writing styles, and architectonic forms. These, they have argued, were deployed on the facades and interiors of buildings in programs of ideological propaganda for the strengthening of their respective doctrinal orientations and the consolidation of political hegemony. According to Williams, the Fatimids’ patronage of a “cult of ‘Alid saints” was a key “adjunct of state policy.”⁷³ This cult was promulgated through a campaign of constructing tombs for Shiite martyrs and saints, with the intent of generating support and loyalty for the Imam Caliph.⁷⁴ Williams was the first to elaborate the idea that the Fatimids, following a series of crises in the latter half of their rule, had consciously appropriated the Cairene cult of saints in an orchestrated effort to appeal to local groups and interact with their largely Sunni population. In two studies, one focused on the iconography of the mosque of al-Aqmar and the other on a series of tombs constructed in this period, she argues that the Fatimids were trying to reach out to their subject population through the use of architectural forms and symbols with Isma‘ili meanings.⁷⁵ Following Williams, Doris Behrens-Abouseif has proposed that Fatimid ritual was the impetus for the placement and iconography of Fatimid buildings. In an article on the Aqmar Mosque, she demonstrates that the buildings in the Bayn al-Qasrayn, the main street between the Fatimid palaces in Cairo, were conceived almost as elaborate stage sets for ritual and procession.⁷⁶

Bierman has subsequently argued that the Fatimids made use of a variety of artistic media to promulgate their message of Shi‘i identity, particularly that of “writing signs”—propagandistic messages on coins, *ṭirāz* fabric, and architecture. The Fatimids’ ability to communicate these messages was dependent on a central aspect of Isma‘ili doctrine: *ta‘wīl*, or interpretation. This system was used to manifest the esoteric meaning of phenomena hidden within certain external symbolic forms. The most common of these symbolic forms consisted of concentric circles, symbolizing Fatimid cosmological understanding, that were displayed on coins and architecture.⁷⁷ Writing style is another key element of Bierman’s argument: the Fatimids, like almost all other architectural patrons before the eleventh century, wrote their public inscriptions in Kufic script, and particularly in floriated Kufic, a difficult-to-read style that would have obscured the overt meaning of messages—a kind of deliberate ambiguity particularly resonant with Fatimid esoteric doctrine.⁷⁸

Tabbaa argues for a similar kind of symbolic meaning for certain types of ornamental, formal, and stereotomic innovations of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries in Syria and Egypt. He builds on the work of Gülru Necipoğlu, who, in *The Topkapı Scroll*, assembles an eloquent case for the semiotic content of Timurid and Turkoman architectural ornament, particularly the two-dimensional *girih*, or “knot” mode, subsequently defined by Tabbaa as interlacing vegetal forms and interlocking geometric shapes,⁷⁹ and its three-dimensional counterpart, the muqarnas. Unlike Necipoğlu, who argues for the general unifying role of the Abbasid capital for succeeding Sunni dynasties, rather than proposing a direct correlation between the geometric mode and a specific school of Sunni theology, Tabbaa suggests that these forms, like their Fatimid counterparts, may have been the bearers of specific sectarian meaning—in this case Ash‘ari Sunnism as expounded by Nur al-Din’s chief apologist, al-Baqillani. This theologian generated an atomistic theory of the universe and argued for an all-powerful, all-knowing God who controls everything, in opposition to the Mu‘tazili theological rationalism favored by the Isma‘ili Fatimids, which, though accepting God’s absolute sovereignty, nonetheless validated the autonomy of independent causes and the free will of human beings.⁸⁰

This program, Tabbaa argues, also included the adoption of *nashkī* (cursive) script, the elaboration and transformation of vegetal arabesque and the *girih*

mode, and the use of muqarnas vaulting. These signs proclaimed the Sunni orientation of the Zangids and Ayyubids in much the same way that Fatimid forms had expressed hidden aspects of Isma‘ili doctrine.⁸¹ The change in writing style is perhaps the most important of these symbolic markers: Bierman is in accord with Tabbaa when she maintains that “the style of writing, a cursive script, visually signaled the contrast with earlier practice.”⁸²

However, Williams, when describing the mausoleum of Shafi‘i, writes that the Ayyubids “did not efface the cult places of the ‘Alid dead. Instead, the Ayyubids themselves, in a triumphant assertion of their own orthodox rule, built in the midst of the ‘Alid tombs the largest single-domed mausoleum in the Qarafa... which was architecturally, decoratively, and functionally a successor to the Fatimid mausolea.”⁸³ This introduces a paradox, for if we accept Tabbaa’s argument that certain forms had come to be associated with Sunni revival in Syria, it seems contradictory that the Ayyubids in Egypt would pronounce orthodoxy using the same visual signals that, according to Williams, Behrens-Abouseif, and Bierman, had recently been associated with heterodoxy. Nevertheless this borrowing of Fatimid forms is among the most pronounced features of Egyptian Ayyubid architecture generally. Why, if the Ayyubids were invested in asserting ideological difference from their Fatimid predecessors by symbolic means, would they choose to build in Egypt in a style that was in almost every regard derived from Fatimid buildings?

Indeed, a careful look at the mausoleum built by al-Kamil shows that this building has more in common with the Fatimid mosques and mausolea that preceded it than with any Sunni Ayyubid architecture in Syria. The one way it seems to have diverged from its Fatimid predecessors was in sheer size: even today, its brooding presence towers over the tombs that surround it. It has the largest freestanding dome in Egypt; at 29 m in height and more than 15 m in diameter, it is, as mentioned above, only slightly smaller than that of the Dome of the Rock.⁸⁴ In plan, the building is a square with sides measuring over 15 m internally and 20.5 m externally, its stone walls almost 3 m thick (fig. 4).⁸⁵ Just off center, marking the grave of the Imam, and on a direct axis with the original entrance to the north, is the extraordinary wooden cenotaph commissioned by Saladin, made of teak imported from India.⁸⁶ Also buried within the tomb, near the grave of al-Shafi‘i, are the patron, Sultan al-Kamil, and his



Fig. 6. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i, interior. Original carved wooden brackets supporting wooden octagon for suspension of lamps. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 1037)

mother.⁸⁷ To the side of the Imam's grave facing the mihrab is the tomb of 'Abd al-Hakam, the historian in whose graveyard al-Shafi'i was interred in the ninth century.

Though the interior has been renovated repeatedly, one feature is original to the construction of al-Kamil: carved wooden brackets that support a wooden octa-

gon for the hanging of lamps and that bear, on fields of scrolling vegetation, inscriptions in an archaizing form of floriated Kufic (fig. 6),⁸⁸ a style that would be perfectly at home in a Fatimid building.

The exterior elevation of the mausoleum (fig. 3) consists of two stories, the first approximately 10 m high and surmounted by a parapet 1 m in height.



Fig. 7. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'ī, post on the parapet with Kufic calligraphy. (Author's photo)

Below the parapet, from the springing of the decorative blind arches downward, the building is constructed of large ashlar blocks. This lower story is divided in two by a torus molding that runs around the building at a height of 6.03 m. The beveled corners of the lower story taper to a point above the torus molding, and the niches formed under these chamfered corners are decorated with muqarnas. On each side, four blind arches rest on the molding, arranged in pairs around a single window at the center. From the springing of the blind arches upward, the building material is brick.

Above them begins the parapet, which is surmounted

by the second story, 6.16 m in height.⁸⁹ The parapet rests on a band of simple interlaced geometric ornament and consists of four rectangular brick panels on each side, also decorated with geometric interlacing executed in stucco. Interspersed irregularly between these panels are five brick piers or posts (fig. 2). Each of these is decorated with one of two types of stucco frieze, the end and center piers bearing Kufic calligraphic ornament on an arabesque field (fig. 7), and the intervening two featuring vegetal arabesque contained within a frame (fig. 8). On the second level, above the parapet, the decoration consists of a series of keel-arched blind niches with

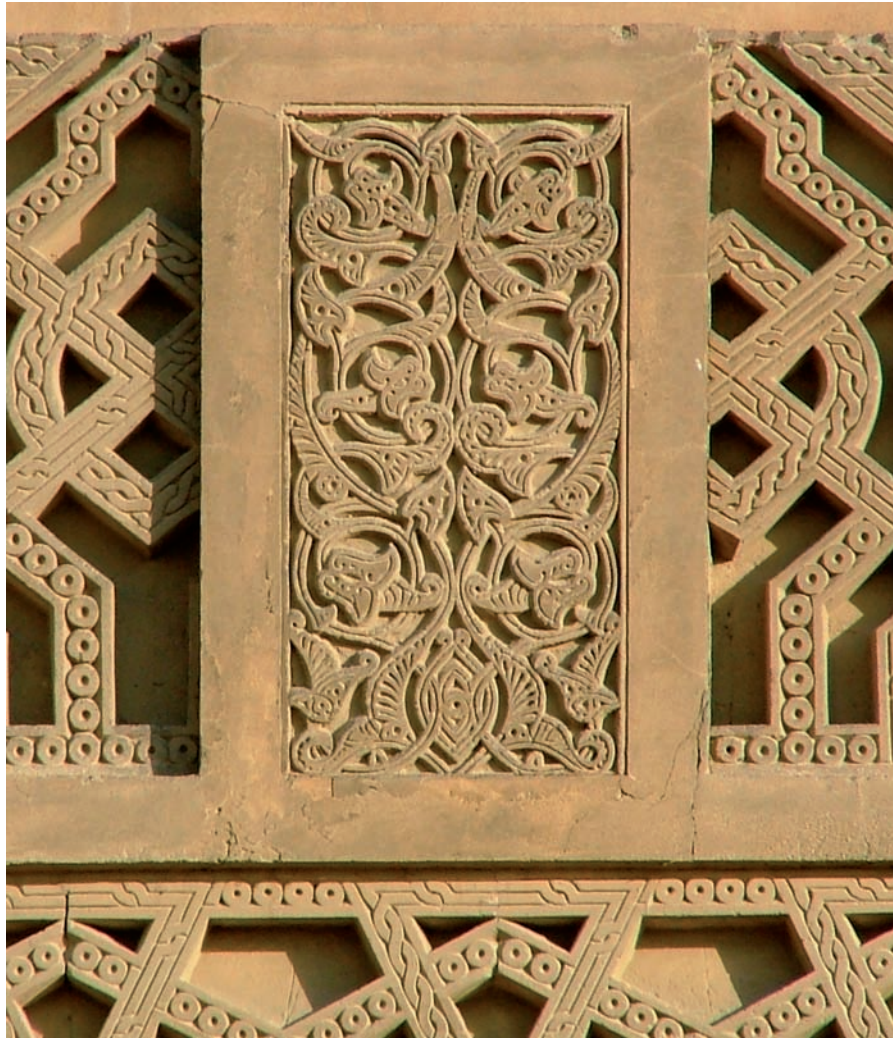


Fig. 8. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i, post on the parapet with arabesque ornament. (Author's photo)

ribbed hoods. Between these niches are rosettes or lozenges (fig. 2).

Virtually every element of the exterior decorative scheme is derived from earlier Fatimid constructions; a systematic comparison of the most important elements demonstrates the imitative nature of this ornamental program and its strong perpetuation of local style.

Proceeding from the bottom of the elevation, the tripartite, keel-arch-shaped muqarnas crowning the chamfered corner above the torus molding (visible in fig. 3), has its closest parallel in the mosque of al-Aqmar of 1125 (fig. 9), where we find precisely the same feature, although with its muqarnas decoration

in better repair. Similarly, the flat and pointed blind arches on the first story of the mausoleum, resting directly on the torus molding, are reminiscent of those on the al-Aqmar facade (fig. 10), and one of the pointed arches, on the far right in Creswell's drawing (fig. 3), retains its ribbed hood after the manner of the arches there. Further, the two flat arches on either side of the central window of the mausoleum (fig. 3) are each decorated with a miniature arcade of trilobed arches. This is another typical Fatimid form, to be seen, for example, in a window from the mausoleum of Sayyida 'Atika of 1120 (fig. 11).

The interlacing stucco parapet crowning the first



Fig. 9. Mosque of al-Aqmar, 1125, facade. Chamfered corner crowned with keel-arched muqarnas. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3890)

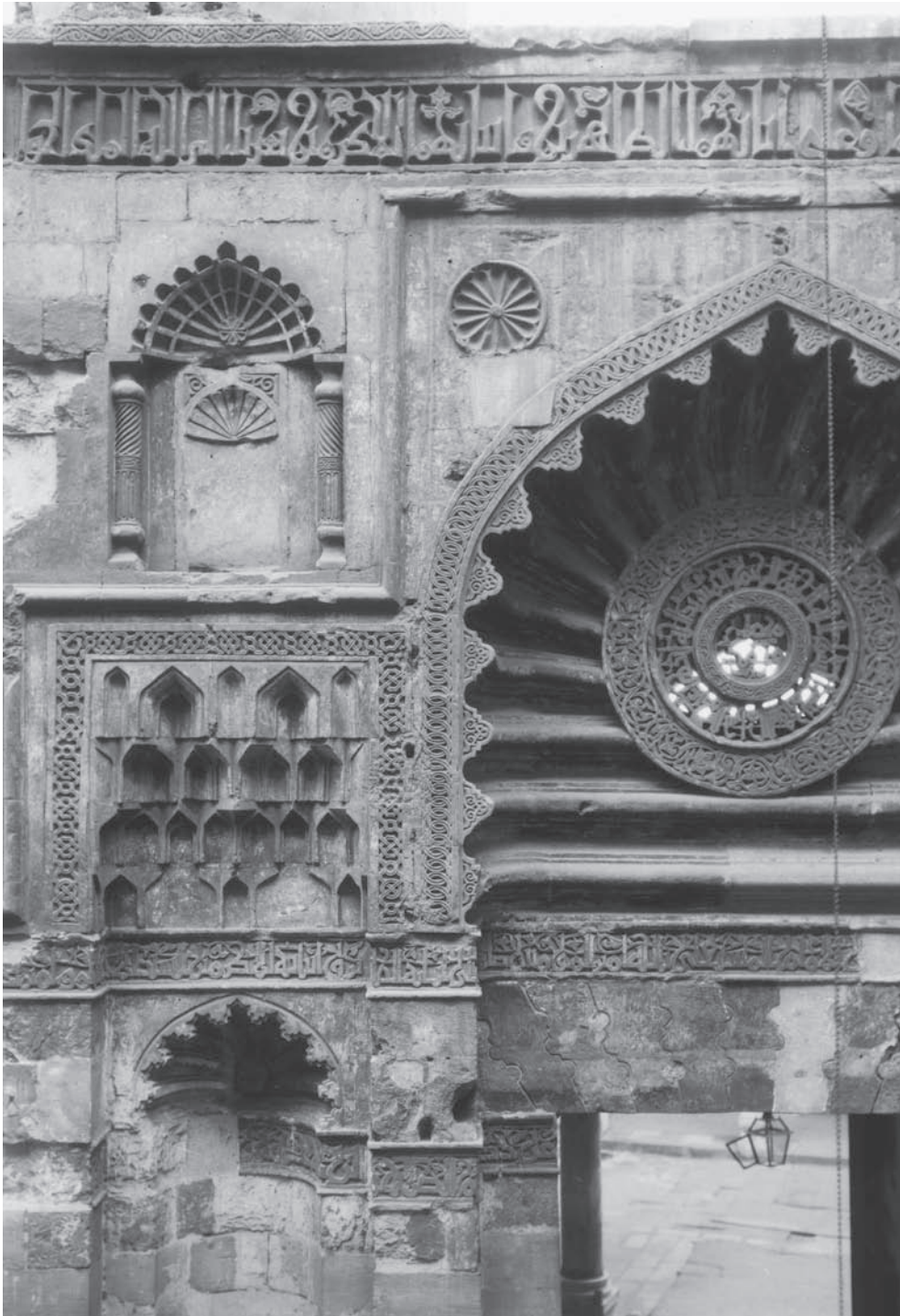


Fig. 10. Mosque of al-Aqmar, facade. Detail of ornament near the entrance. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3885)



Fig. 11. Mausoleum of Sayyida ‘Atika, 1120, window. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3848)

story of the mausoleum is also a common feature of Fatimid buildings. Perhaps the most obvious parallel, though simpler in design, is the star-interlace pattern of the parapet of the mosque of al-Hakim (990–1018) (fig. 12). Furthermore, the friezes on the posts of the al-Shafi‘i parapet (figs. 7 and 8), as Creswell remarked,⁹⁰ are most closely related to a number of late Fatimid mihrabs, including those of the mausolea of Sayyida ‘Atika (fig. 13) and Ikhwat Yusuf (1125) (fig. 14), and the *mashhad* of Sayyida Ruqayya (1133) (fig. 15).⁹¹ The strongest correspondence here is in the pattern of scrolling palmettes and half palmettes contained within a frame, powerfully reminiscent of the stucco decoration from the mihrab of Sayyida ‘Atika.⁹² Furthermore, in the stucco decoration surrounding a window at the northeast end of the sanctuary in the ca. 972 mosque of al-Azhar (fig. 16), palmettes scroll in compact circles, growing out

of a central “vases,” themselves fashioned of leaves, in composition nearly identical to the friezes on the posts of the al-Shafi‘i parapet.⁹³

To the upper story, with its sequence of fluted, keel-arched niches resting on engaged colonnettes, interspersed with circular saucer and lozenge forms (fig. 2), the courtyard of the mosque of al-Azhar also offers a direct comparison. The primary features of the decoration along the internal facade of the mosque courtyard, which belongs to the 1138 renovation by Caliph al-Hafiz, are virtually identical to the exterior decoration of the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi‘i, producing a strong visual parallel between the mausoleum and the most prestigious of Fatimid buildings. Furthermore, in the mausoleum, just as in the courtyard of the mosque, this sequence of motifs is crowned by step crenellation on the cornice. Another instance of blind arches combined with fluted saucer forms is to

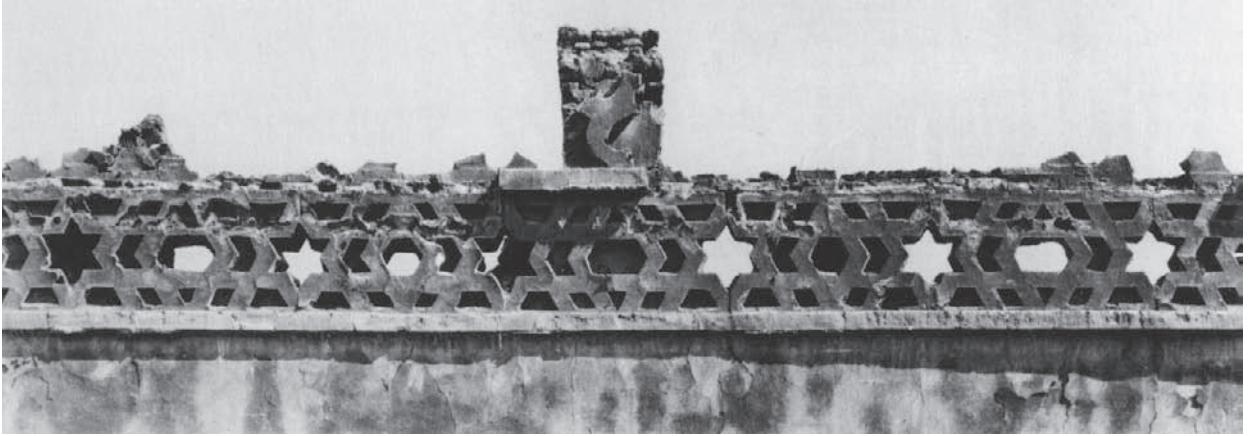


Fig. 12. Mosque of al-Hakim, 990–1018, parapet. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford)



Fig. 13. Mausoleum of Sayyida 'Atika, mihrab. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3849)



Fig. 14. Mausoleum of Ikhwat Yusuf, 1125, detail of mihrab. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3863)



Fig. 15. *Mashhad* of Sayyida Ruqayya, 1133, detail of mihrab. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3904)

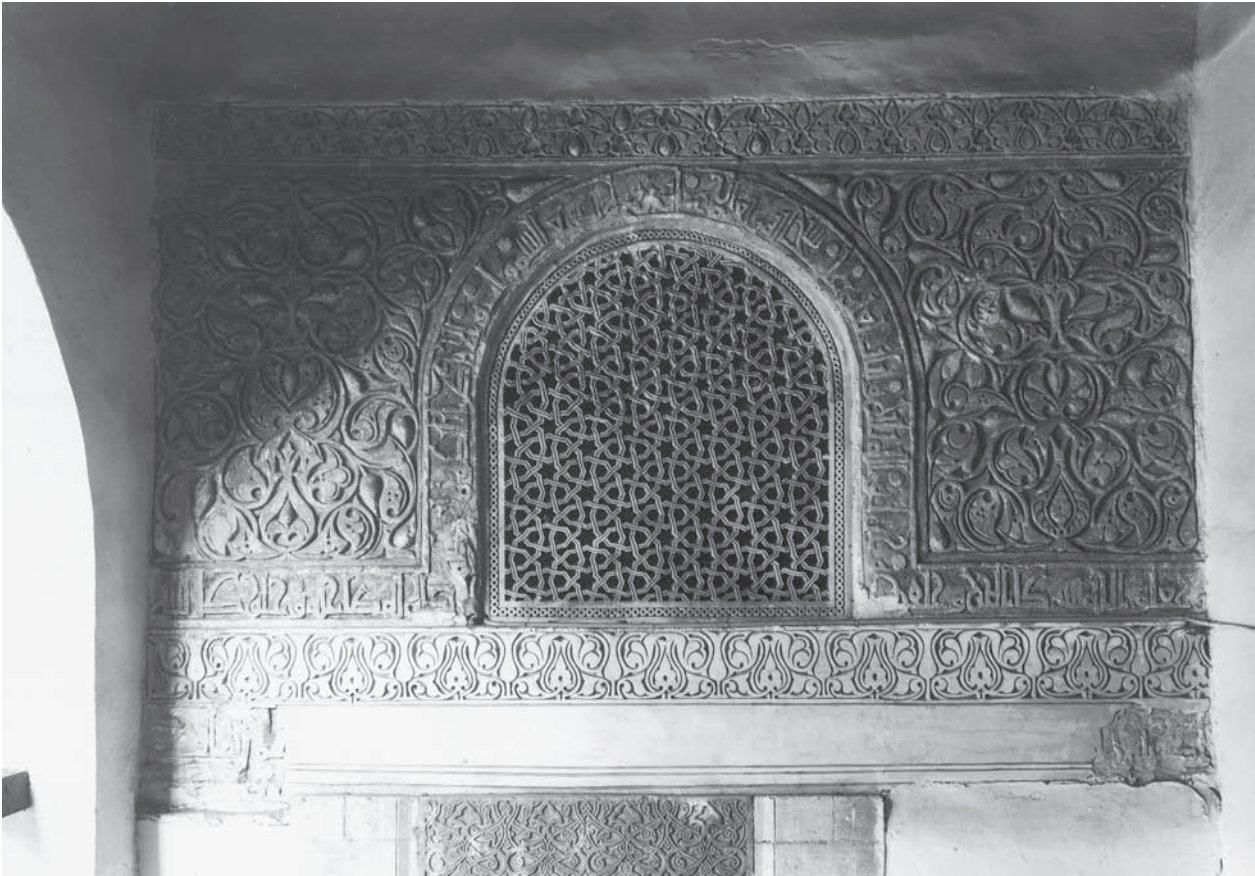


Fig. 16. Mosque of al-Azhar, ca. 972, stucco decoration surrounding window at the northeast end of the sanctuary. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 3064)

be found in the courtyard of the mosque of al-Salih Tala'ī, built in 1160 (fig. 17).

More interesting still, in light of the semiotic arguments previously cited, is the fact that the ribs of the blind arches in the Shafi'ī mausoleum emanate from a central motif strongly reminiscent of what Bierman has suggested was the essential Isma'ili motif of concentric circles, such as are found in the mihrab of Sayyida Ruqayya and on the facade of the al-Aqmar mosque.⁹⁴ Although the concentric circles have been replaced by vegetal ornament,⁹⁵ from afar—the only way these motifs, located very high on the elevation, could have been viewed—this small distinction was probably not clearly apparent. The overall visual effect is that encircling the facade of this Ayyubid building are what appear to be Fatimid mihrabs, bearing whatever associations they may have had for twelfth- and

thirteenth-century Cairene visitors.

Such a program calls into question the degree to which this decorative language was associated with Fatimid esoteric doctrine, at least by the early thirteenth century. Certainly if it were, al-Malik al-Kamil would not have used it to adorn the grave of the founder of one of the most prominent Sunni law schools. At the same time, if there were an Ayyubid architectural language fully developed in Syria that was clearly associated with the Sunni revival, why wouldn't elements of that architectural style have been employed here? In the end, two conclusions suggest themselves: either that language was not seen as necessary, at least by the early thirteenth century, for the expression of Sunnism outside Syria, or this building was not the monument to Isma'ili defeat it is often argued to be. From the comparisons noted above, it is at least



Fig. 17. Mosque of al-Salih Tala'i, 1160, courtyard facade. (Photo: K. A. C. Creswell, © Creswell Archive, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, neg. no. C. 228)

clear that the iconography of this building is a demonstration of the primacy of local style over universal ideology in Ayyubid Cairo.

So what, if anything, is original in this building? Is there any trace of a political or ideological message in its iconography? As mentioned previously, its one remarkable innovation was its extraordinary size. Perhaps for this reason alone it was, in its day, the “most famous *mashhad* built on the cubical domed plan.”⁹⁶ With the exception of the Dome of the Rock, at the time of the building of the al-Shafi'i mausoleum there was simply no other dome of comparable scale anywhere in the region;⁹⁷ no surviving Fatimid building comes close to attaining its span or height.⁹⁸ It inspired imitations: al-Maqrizi relates that in 1269, when the

Mamluk Sultan Baybars al-Bunduqdari built his congregational mosque north of the city of Cairo, he specified that the dome was to be “the same size as the dome of al-Shafi'i.”⁹⁹ Indeed, the al-Shafi'i mausoleum might have been the largest freestanding domed structure that had ever been seen in Cairo. Is it possible that this extraordinary dome was itself the message?

Although we lack enough evidence regarding al-Kamil's specific motivations to draw clear conclusions, two points about the al-Shafi'i dome are suggestive. One is its resemblance to that of the Dome of the Rock, whose scale it approaches, and whose construction technique—two wooden shells, covered on the exterior with lead—it moreover imitates quite directly. Although the current al-Shafi'i dome dates to

a restoration begun in 1480 by the Mamluk sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay, its resemblance to the pointed profile of the Ayyubid dome of the mausoleum of al-Salih, of 1250, suggests that the fifteenth-century restoration followed Ayyubid precedent.

This parallel is notable considering that, along with the elimination of the Fatimids, Saladin's other great victory was the eviction of the Crusaders from Jerusalem in 1187. Al-Kamil's father, al-^ʿAdil Abu Bakr b. Ayyub (r. 1200–18), repulsed another German incursion in 1198.¹⁰⁰ The particulars of the scale and construction of the Shafi'ī dome, given the recent capture of Jerusalem, suggest a dialogic relationship of this building to the third-most holy of Islamic sites, now once again restored to Muslim hands. If so, it would not be the last time a Cairene building made reference to Jerusalem: just over sixty years later, the octagonal plan of the complex of Sultan Qala'un (1284–85) would consciously echo that of the Dome of the Rock. Is it possible that the Dome of al-Kamil was to be seen, not as a victory monument to the eviction of the Shiite Fatimids from Cairo, but rather to the eviction of the Christian Crusaders from Jerusalem? The evidence at this point is only suggestive.

The second possibility, however, is easily confirmed by the textual sources, as well as by evidence from the building itself. It is immediately apparent that al-Kamil's building was intended to function not only as a *mashhad* for al-Shafi'ī but also as a dynastic mausoleum for al-Kamil, his mother, and perhaps others of his family. The one unambiguous indication of al-Kamil's intentions comes from al-Maqrizi, who tells us that "...when al-Malik al-Kamil...buried his son [*sic*] in the year 608 [1211] next to the grave of the Imam... [he] built the great *qubba* over the grave of al-Shafi'ī and brought water to it from the Birkat al-Habash by means of an aqueduct leading to it."¹⁰¹ As both Creswell and Wiet have observed, the word "son" (*ibnahu*), "for it was al-Kamil's mother (the Princess 'Adiliya) who died on 25 Safar of this year (8th August 1211), and it is her cenotaph which is the second most important in the shrine."¹⁰²

The fact that al-Kamil's mausoleum was built the year of his mother's death suggests that the sultan's motivation for the expansion of the mausoleum was a desire to commemorate his mother and provide a dynastic mausoleum for his family at the grave of a saintly figure. In that sense, it is a building that fits directly into the Cairene practice of burial close to a

holy person's tomb.¹⁰³ The steady stream of supplicants to al-Shafi'ī's grave and the proximity of the adjoining madrasa would assure perpetuity of memory for the sultan and his mother. Indeed, al-Kamil's mausoleum foreshadows the intensely competitive late-Ayyubid practice of private foundations by individuals.¹⁰⁴ The building is thus among the first examples of the architecturally dazzling monumental dynastic mausolea favored by members of the ruling house in the later Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.

In this context, its Fatimid-inspired decorative vocabulary was perhaps meaningful simply as an expression of pious princely opulence, utilizing the already extant and highly developed local stylistic idiom. Here, however, the Fatimid idiom is reconfigured and reinvented to serve new and individual functions. Carved stucco adorning the interior of the prayer hall of the mosque of al-Azhar is now enclosed in small panels high on the exterior of the imposing al-Shafi'ī facade, as if they were tiny mnemonic devices—decorative quotes—eliciting memory of the tradition as whole. The keel-arch and saucer decoration of the interior courtyards of public, congregational mosques such as al-Azhar or al-Salih Tala'i' becomes the exterior surface treatment of a building devoted to the memory, glorification, and sanctification of a few individuals. All of these elements were positioned on the surface of a building of enormous scale. Though the mausoleum of al-Shafi'ī may have been among the first to employ such a method, this process of borrowing, reconfiguring, and investing with new meaning was to be a hallmark of architectural style in Cairo throughout the Ayyubid period.¹⁰⁵ It is remarkable that al-Kamil built this building before he became sultan, while he was viceroy under his father, al-Malik al-^ʿAdil. The year of his formal investiture as viceroy, 1207, is the year he moved into his new residence in the Citadel.¹⁰⁶ Four years later, the expansion of the mausoleum was completed. From his residence in the citadel, across the wide *maydān*, al-Kamil's view of his mother's lofty resting place at the grave of al-Shafi'ī would have endured until he too was laid to rest there.

The evidence presented here—including the backdrop of intra-Sunni competition in Cairo; the details of the shaykh al-Khabushani's biography and particularly his doctrinal conflict with the Hanbalis; the close reading of the foundation inscription for the madrasa, with its unambiguous condemnation of Hanbali theology and lack of anti-Shi'ī polemic; the presence of the institution of the madrasa before the arrival of

Saladin; and finally the Ayyubid borrowing of Fatimid style in al-Kamil's mausoleum—suggests that, rather than being a statement against the vanquished Isma'ili Fatimids, Saladin's intent in his foundation of the madrasa and mausoleum at al-Shafi'i's grave had to do with gaining the control and allegiance of particular group of Shafi'i Sunnis in the context of a highly competitive medieval polemical environment.

It is unclear whether he pursued this goal for purely ideological reasons, as did the shaykh al-Khabushani, or for more earthly ones: the Shafi'is were more numerous, and he must have seen them as more easily controlled than the troublesome Hanbalis, who always remained a tiny though vocal minority. Perhaps, as Chamberlain has suggested, the "overall pattern of relations between ruling households and the warriors and shaykhs upon whom they depended was more significant than the direct importation of institutions [such as the madrasa]."107

What is clear is that there is little in the remaining evidence from Saladin's complex, or in the architecture or decoration of al-Malik al-Kamil's mausoleum, to argue for the symbolic role of this building in a campaign of Sunni revival against the Isma'ili Fatimids. These conclusions do not, of course, necessarily mean that such forms, in other times or more distant lands, were not evocative of the associations attributed to them by the semiotic arguments cited above. Nor does it mean that the al-Shafi'i mausoleum itself was devoid of symbolic associations: as has been shown above, it simultaneously communicated a polyvalent network of such associations, ranging from the proclamation of intra-Sunni polemic to the visual expression of pious princely opulence. In fact, the virtue of semiotic theory is its very flexibility as an interpretive framework, and the borrowing, reconfiguring, and investing with new meaning of Fatimid forms in this building illustrates nothing less than such a semiotic process at work. The al-Shafi'i mausoleum is a product of a distinct moment and location in Islamic history: an early-thirteenth-century building in Cairo. As such, it cannot prove or disprove semiotic theories about buildings more distant in time or space. The evidence here suggests, however, that such symbolic associations were limited both temporally and spatially—mutable, fluctuating, and subject to change and intervention over time.

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NOTES

1. Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe* (hereafter *RCEA*), 18 vols. (Cairo, 1931–), vol. 9, no. 3333. 91–92. This marble column bears a straightforward funerary inscription giving al-Shafi'i's name, titles, and birth and death dates, as well as blessings. It is possibly an Ayyubid re-inscription after the original, which was noted by several medieval observers: see K. A. C. Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt* (hereafter *MAE*), 2 vols. (Oxford, 1952–59), vol. 2, 64, n. 2.
2. G. Wiet, *Catalogue général du Musée de l'art islamique du Caire: Inscriptions historiques sur pierre* (Cairo, 1971) no. 64, 49–50. This is no. 118 in the museum inventory. See also Wiet, "Les inscriptions du mausolée de Shāfi'i," *Bulletin de l'institut d'Égypte* 15 (1932–33): 170; and *RCEA*, vol. 9, no. 3339, 95–96.
3. Creswell, *MAE*, vol. 2, 65; Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture* (New York, 1994), 319; Caroline Williams, *Islamic Monuments in Cairo* (Cairo, 1993), 137.
4. The construction of the citadel was undertaken two years previously but not completed until 1207. See Nasser Rabbat, *The Citadel of Cairo* (Leiden, 1995), 73–75.
5. For a clear and insightful summary of the "Sunni revival," see Yasser Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art During the Sunni Revival* (Seattle, 2001), chap. 1. Its elements are familiar to most students of Islamic history; for two examples that deal with the revival in Cairo, see Ira Lapidus, "Ayyubid Religious Policy and the Development of the Schools of Law in Cairo," in *Colloque international sur l'histoire du Caire* (Cairo, 1972), 279–86, and André Raymond, *Le Caire* (Paris, 1993), 106–12.
6. Tabbaa, *Transformation*, 8.
7. Tabbaa, *Transformation*.
8. Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture: Topkapı Palace Museum Library MS H. 1956* (Santa Monica, 1995).
9. Irene Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Berkeley, 1998); Caroline Williams, "The Cult of 'Alid Saints in the Fatimid Monuments of Cairo, Part I: The Mosque of al-Aqmar," *Muqarnas* 1 (1983): 37–52, and "The Cult of 'Alid Saints in the Fatimid Monuments of Cairo, Part II: The Mausolea," *Muqarnas* 3 (1985): 39–60.
10. Aside from Creswell's work, there have been only two studies relating to this building: one on the inscriptions (Wiet, "Inscriptions") and the other about the small boat atop the shrine: J. M. F. van Reeth, "La barque de l'Imām aš-Šāfi'i," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk Eras: Proceedings of the 4th and 5th International Colloquium Organized at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in May 1995 and 1996* (Leuven, 1998), 249–64. Van Reeth gives a survey of the history of the building and some of the inscriptions.
11. A Cairene friend once confided that he thought of al-Shafi'i

- as a kind of “patron saint” for the city. Perhaps the best index of Egyptian devotion to the Imam is to be found in the thousands of letters that are continually deposited in the grille around his cenotaph and even mailed through the regular post, often simply addressed to “Imam al-Shafi’i, Cairo.” In the 1970s these letters were the subject of a sociological study: see Sayyid ‘Uways, *Rasā’il ilā al-Imām al-Shāfi’ī: Zāhirat irsāl al-rasā’il ilā darīh al-Imām al-Shāfi’ī* (Cairo, 1978).
12. *RCÉA*, vol. 9, no. 3331, 89–90.
 13. Saladin brought this woodworker from Syria, most likely from Aleppo, where his family was already renowned for their skill. His father was probably Ma’ali b. Salim, who in 1165 carved the now-lost mihrab of the Maqam Ibrahim in the citadel of Aleppo. ‘Ubayd was thus likely the brother of Salman b. Ma’ali, the woodworker who made one of the most extraordinary examples of this technique of mortice-and-tenon construction: the minbar of the mosque of Jerusalem, finished in 1168–69. See Wiet, “Inscriptions,” 172–73.
 14. Saladin’s college was also called the Madrasa al-Nasiriyya.
 15. According to al-Maqrizi, the sultan “paid [the professor] every month a salary of forty dinars for *tadrīs* (instruction)”: al-Maqrizi, *Mawā’iz wa ‘l-‘tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa ‘l-āthār*, 2 vols. (Bulaq, 1270 [1853]), vol. 2, 400. This was a remarkable sum, nearly four times that paid to the *mudarris* of the Suyufiyya Madrasa, founded by Saladin in the same year; the latter professor received only eleven dinars per month. See Gary Leiser, “The Restoration of Sunnism in Egypt: Madrasas and *Mudarrisūn*, 495–647/1101–1249” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1976), 213.
 16. According to the medieval pilgrimage guide written by ‘Ali al-Harawi (d. 1215), who in the opinion of Sourdel-Thomine was probably a Shiite: Janine Sourdel-Thomine, *Guide des lieux de pèlerinage* (Damascus, 1957), xx–xxii. Many pilgrimage places—though in theory belonging to one sect or another—were visited by Muslims from across the religious spectrum. Shiite visitation of nominally Sunni shrines, and vice-versa, should probably be interpreted in the context of the essentially ecumenical character of popular religious devotional practices, a subject that deserves further exploration. For examples of how Muslims and Jews shared popular pilgrimage sites in the medieval period, see Joseph Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford, 2002).
 17. al-Maqrizi, *Khiṭat*, vol. 2, 462.
 18. Ibn al-Zayyāt, *Kawākib al-sayyāra fī tartīb al-ziyāra fī al-qawāfatayn al-kubrā wa ‘l-ṣughrā* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthanna, 1968?), 214–15.
 19. Ibn Taghribirdī, *Nujūm al-zāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa ‘l-Qāhira*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1855), vol. 1, 588.
 20. Creswell, *MAE*, vol. 2, 64.
 21. Ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr* (Beirut, 1981), 21; idem, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst (London, 1952), 40.
 22. This is assuming that al-Kamil’s mausoleum preserved a plan resembling Saladin’s original. In any case, Saladin’s madrasa was still in existence when al-Kamil enlarged the mausoleum, and the irregular orientation of the door must indicate that there was some preexisting building on this side of the tomb.
 23. al-Maqrizi, *Khiṭat*, vol. 2, 400. For the estimate, see Leiser, “Restoration,” 228–29: “The *raṭl* was almost the same as today’s American pound.”
 24. al-Maqrizi, *Khiṭat*, vol. 2, 400.
 25. C. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous* (Leiden, 1999), 21.
 26. The fire was set in a futile attempt to deter the imminent Crusader attack by Amalric, Crusader king of Jerusalem.
 27. Taylor, *Vicinity*, 18–20.
 28. al-Maqrizi, *Khiṭat*, vol. 2, 444.
 29. *Ibid.*; Taylor, *Vicinity*, 20.
 30. H. Gottschalk, *Al-Malik al-Kāmil von Egypten und seine Zeit* (Wiesbaden, 1958), 26.
 31. Ibn al-Zayyāt, *Kawākib*, 209.
 32. Ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat*, 21; idem, *Travels*, 41.
 33. This has also been suggested recently by D. S. Richards, s.v. “Ṣalāh al-Dīn,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed. (henceforth *EI2*), (Leiden, 1960–2004).
 34. *RCÉA*, vol. 10, no. 3682, 60. Also see Wiet, “Inscriptions,” 179.
 35. Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a’yān wa-anbā’ abnā’ al-zamān*, 8 vols. (Beirut, 1968–73), vol. 3, 111; al-Ṣafadi, *al-Wāfi bi ‘l-wafayāt*, (Wiesbaden, 1962–) vol. 5 (1970), 100–101; al-Maqrizi, *Iti’āz al-ḥunafā’ bi-akhbār al-a’imma al-Fāṭimiyyīn al-khulafā’*, 3 vols. (Cairo, 1973), vol. 3, 329–30.
 36. al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi’iyya al-kubrā*, 10 vols. (Cairo: 1964–76), vol. 7, 15. G. Wiet suggests that it was al-Khabushani himself who pronounced the *khuṭba* in the name of the Abbasid caliph a few days prior to the Fatimid caliph al-‘Adid’s death: *EI2*, s.v. “al-‘Ādid li-Dīn Allāh.”
 37. al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 7, 16.
 38. For a more detailed explication of these debates, see Necipoğlu, *Topkapı Scroll*, 96–97.
 39. G. Leiser, “Hanbalism in Egypt before the Mamlūks,” *Studia Islamica* 54 (1981): 166.
 40. Michael Chamberlain, “The Crusader Era and the Ayyūbid Dynasty,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, England, 1998), vol. 1, ed. Carl Petry, 232.
 41. As Bulliet has demonstrated, the term *‘asabiyya* had two meanings: a positive one denoting a fundamental bond of social solidarity (as such, the word was made famous by Ibn Khaldun’s usage), and a negative one implying factional strife or fanaticism. A person called *muta’asib* was a fanatical devotee of a particular group, in this period usually a legal school, or *madhhab*. See R. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishapur* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 31–32.
 42. George Makdisi, *Ibn ‘Aqil et la résurgence de l’Islam traditionaliste au XIe siècle* (Damascus, 1963), 69–164, elucidates how this factionalism was manipulated by the eleventh-century caliphate in Baghdad, which managed to skillfully mobilize the Hanbalis in support of its cause.
 43. Bulliet, *Patricians*, 28.
 44. C. Cahen, “Mouvements populaires et autonomisme urbain dans l’Asie musulmane du moyen âge, II,” *Arabica* 6 (1959): 3–56.
 45. Bulliet, *Patricians*, 32.
 46. L. Pouzet, *Damas au VIIIe/XIIIe siècle: Vie et structures religieuses d’une métropole islamique* (Beirut, 1988), 80–90.
 47. Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190–1350* (Cambridge, England, 1994), 169, and see 167–74 for an insightful analysis of the role of *fitna* in

- the social and religious life of medieval Damascus. Like the Hanbalis, Christians and Magians were also often accused in medieval polemic of anthropomorphism or even polytheism (*shirk*). Perhaps this explains their being grouped together by the building's patron, although it is not then clear why Jews should be placed on this list of forbidden entrants.
48. George Makdisi, "The Sunnī Revival," in D. S. Richards, ed., *Islamic Civilization 950–1150* (Oxford, 1973), 155–57. Most legal scholars identified not solely with their *madhhab* but also with diverse theological schools, for example, Rafidi, Mu'tazili, or Ash'ari; see Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqil*, 294–97. For a discussion of the complicated and shifting relationships between the various Sunni creeds, see Y. Ibish, *The Political Doctrine of al-Bāqillānī* (Beirut, 1966), 54–83. The seeming inconsistencies generated by these allegiances often seem bewildering; for example, the theologian al-Baqillani (d. 1013), who was the chief Maliki qadi in Baghdad, is nevertheless buried at the grave of Ibn Hanbal. An ardent defender of Sunnism against Shiism and the Mu'tazila, he would therefore have been in agreement with the anti-Shi'i provisions of the Qadiri creed, but at the same time he is Ash'ari and wrote the famous Ash'ari treatise on the imamate entitled *al-Tamhīd*.
 49. Makdisi, "Sunnī Revival," 168.
 50. The Sunni revival seems to have been an extremely complex and shifting phenomenon, and its means and ends as initially formulated under the Abbasids in Baghdad developed considerably—sometimes in very different directions—over time and distance. Thus, although the revival began under a traditionalist caliph, later—perhaps as a result of al-Ghazali's synthesis of opposing doctrines—it was carried on in twelfth-century Syria and Egypt under the banner of the largely Shafi'i-Ash'ari Ayyubids, whose tolerance for traditionalist Hanbali troublemaking in Cairo or elsewhere was rather limited.
 51. Leiser, "Hanbalism," 166.
 52. *EI2*, s.v. "Hashwiyya"; see also "Nābita" and "Sunna."
 53. This, of course, does not prove that a desire to eliminate remaining traces of Shiism was not also part of the intention behind the founding of the madrasa. Certainly the intransigent shaykh al-Khabushani would have been no more tolerant of Shiism than of what he perceived as deviant forms of Sunnism. But this seems not to have been his most pressing concern when building the madrasa. Because the remaining elements of Saladin's original construction are so few, the evidence of his intent is partial, but fortunately the foundation inscription, perhaps the most important indicator of the patron's intentions, is among the surviving evidence. Its statement against the Hanbalis cannot, of course, confirm the absence elsewhere in the building of contemporary anti-Shi'i polemic, but the failure to mention or even allude to Shiism in the foundation text is striking, and, I would argue, constitutes strong evidence that the expression of such sentiments was not the founder's immediate priority.
 54. *RCEA*, no. 3380; Tabbaa, *Transformation*, p. 68 invokes this cursive (*nashkī*) inscription and those on the wooden cenotaph in the tomb of al-Shafi'i as further evidence of Saladin's propagandistic intentions in his foundations in Cairo (see n. 80, below). He also remarks on the naive quality of the cur-
 - sive of the Citadel inscription, arguing that it is suggestive of the "inexperience of local calligraphers in the new calligraphic style." None of these inscriptions, however, seems visually prominent enough to have been intended as a true counterweight to the bold inscriptional programs on Fatimid buildings. In fact, the only visible inscriptions on the exterior of the al-Shafi'i mausoleum are Kufic. We will return to this point below.
 55. Rabbat, *Citadel*, 71.
 56. George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West* (Edinburgh, 1981), 300.
 57. Leiser, "Restoration," 118.
 58. Chamberlain, "Crusader Era," 232.
 59. The history of the madrasa in Egypt has been meticulously documented by Leiser ("Restoration"), but since his dissertation is unpublished some of his findings are summarized here. The following section is based on his work.
 60. Leiser, "Restoration," 115.
 61. *Ibid.*, 119.
 62. *Ibid.*, 129.
 63. *Ibid.*, 131.
 64. As did Jews and Christians, Sunnis functioned in important roles in the Fatimid administration, several as Fatimid viziers. Always the majority in Egypt, the Sunnis, in the later years of weakened Fatimid rule, had a great deal of freedom. This is why when Saladin arrived there may have been little need to actively stamp out Shiism, which had long before ceased to be a real political or ideological threat. See above, Chamberlain, "Crusader Era," 232.
 65. Leiser, "Restoration," 133.
 66. *Ibid.*, 135.
 67. *Ibid.*, 150.
 68. *Ibid.*, 159.
 69. *Ibid.*, 175.
 70. A chronological list of pre-Mamluk madrasas can be found in Leiser, "Restoration," appendix 5, 471.
 71. The monument is nearly always discussed in terms of its role in instigating, representing, or embodying the Sunni revival in Egypt. For example, Gaston Wiet, in his description of the Shafi'i complex, wrote that Saladin introduced the madrasa into Egypt, reasoning that it was the logical outgrowth of his "Sunnite reaction"; see Wiet, *Cairo, City of Art and Commerce* (Norman, OK, 1964), 53–54. According to Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic Architecture in Cairo* (Cairo, 1989), 85, Saladin's complex "can be considered as symbolic of the reinstatement of Sunni Islam in Egypt." Williams, *Islamic Monuments*, 137, states, "it was here that Salah al-Din founded the first madrasa in Egypt as part of his effort to combat the Fatimid Shi'a." This reading of the building and its meaning is so well established that it has become a commonplace when discussing Ayyubid architecture.
 72. Leiser, "Restoration," 113–14.
 73. Williams, "Cult, Part II: The Mausolea," 39.
 74. *Ibid.*, 57.
 75. *Ibid.*, 57, and Williams, "Cult, Part I: The Mosque of al-Aqmar," 37–52.
 76. Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "The Façade of the Aqmar Mosque in the Context of Fatimid Ceremonial," *Muqarnas* 9 (1992): 29–38. For an elaboration of similar themes with respect to Fatimid ritual, see Paula Sanders, "From Court Ceremony to

- Urban Language,” in *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times*, ed. C. E. Bosworth (Princeton, 1989), 311–21; and idem, *Ritual, Politics and the City in Fatimid Cairo* (Albany, 1994) chaps. 2 and 3.
77. Bierman, *Writing Signs*, 60–61.
78. Ibid., 60–90. See also Tabbaa, *Transformation*, 56–57.
79. This is Tabbaa’s gloss (*Transformation*, 8) on Necipoğlu’s more technical definition, for which see *Topkapı Scroll*, 9. Tabbaa has proposed that the *giriḥ* (“knot”) style of decoration was “at least partly introduced” to Egypt in the early Ayyubid period, citing al-Shafi’i’s cenotaph as an example (*Transformation*, 96). He also suggests that Saladin may have been intentionally importing the *giriḥ* mode to Cairo because it was already associated with Sunnism in Syria. As he himself notes (81–82), however, prior Egyptian examples exist in the wooden mihrab of the Fatimid shrine to Sayyida Nafisa and the minbars of Qus and Hebron—this last commissioned by Badr al-Jamali for the shine of the head of al-Husayn—which date from the mid-to-late twelfth century. Both Necipoğlu and Tabbaa dismiss these as less developed, rare, and/or intrusive examples, but it is possible that they are no more rare than the few surviving eleventh-century examples of such ornament in the Eastern provinces of the Abbasid empire, which both Tabbaa and Necipoğlu (*Topkapı Scroll*, 99–100) have convincingly argued are our only remaining record for the early development of the form in Sunni realms. Though these forms are not identical to contemporaneous forms further north and east, they are still, it seems to me, attempting to evoke a similar decorative idiom—a combination of vegetal arabesque with increasingly sophisticated geometric strapwork—that may perhaps have been a universal courtly style of the period with associations of luxury and refinement. If so, it undoubtedly was not yet developed as fully in Cairo, which, as the Shafi’i mausoleum and other Ayyubid examples demonstrate, remained conservative stylistically well into the thirteenth century, even long after the Sunni Ayyubid takeover. A similar conclusion might be drawn from Saladin’s patronage of the woodworker Ibn Ma’ali to carve the cenotaph for the Shiite *mashhad* of Imam al-Husayn, at or about the same time as he was working on al-Shafi’i’s cenotaph. Saladin’s commissioning a single artisan who employed a nearly identical decorative vocabulary for a nominally Sunni shrine and a nominally Shiite one could indicate that Saladin’s intent may have been sectarian conciliation or appropriation rather than the expression of ideological supremacy through decorative form. Caroline Williams, “Quranic Inscriptions on the Tabut al-Husayn in Cairo” *Islamic Art* 2 (1989): 3–14, argues for the Shiite character of the inscriptions of the Husayn cenotaph.
80. M. Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1983), 33.
81. Tabbaa, *Transformation*, 8–9. Tabbaa also notes that the al-Shafi’i cenotaph and the foundation inscription from the madrasa are the earliest instances of *nashkḥī* writing in Egypt (*Transformation*, 68). Though this is certainly the case, the most notable feature of the cenotaph is the fact that it bears historical inscriptions in both Kufic and *nashkḥī*; see Wiet, “Inscriptions,” 172.
82. Irene Bierman, “Art and Architecture in the Medieval Period,” in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, England, 1998), vol. 1, ed. Carl Petry, 372.
83. Ibid., 372.
84. The Dome of the Rock is approximately 30 m. in height and 20 m. in diameter.
85. Creswell, *MAE*, vol. 2, 65, points out that this is quite sufficient to support a dome of brick or stone and adds that it is thus surprising that the dome is built of wood. This raises the possibility that the original was indeed built of more durable material. The present wooden dome dates to a restoration by Sultan Qaytbay, begun in 1480: idem, *MAE*, vol. 2, 73. It seems originally to have been covered with green tiles, some of which Creswell saw when the lead coating was removed briefly during repairs in 1951: *MAE*, vol. 2, 71.
86. Williams, *Islamic Monuments*, 123.
87. However, al-Kamil is also said to have been buried in the Citadel; see *EI2*, s.v. “al-Kāmil.”
88. Creswell, *MAE*, vol. 2, 68–69. As far as I am aware, these inscriptions have not been published.
89. Ibid., 65–66.
90. Ibid., 66.
91. Ibid.
92. The combination of Kufic with interlacing uprights on a field of vegetal arabesque, visible on the al-Shafi’i post in fig. 7, appears in the mosque of al-Hakim, on a small window to the left of the mihrab. Creswell argues that this window grille shows Maghribi influence, which made itself felt in Cairo around the middle of the thirteenth century; he therefore concludes that the window of the mosque of al-Hakim dates to a thirteenth-century restoration: *MAE*, vol. 1, 82, n. 2. The presence of the same motif at the mausoleum of al-Shafi’i, however, suggests a slightly earlier date for the appearance of this style in Egypt. It is perhaps the sole element of the mausoleum façade that is not directly derived from Fatimid precedents, although it is nevertheless notable that the inscription is in Kufic and not *nashkḥī*.
93. Tabbaa proposes that this style of scrolling vegetal ornament declined in popularity in Syria under the Ayyubids in favor of a more highly rationalized vegetal arabesque that, he suggests, was more expressive of Sunni revival: Tabbaa, *Transformation*, 80–81. Another example of decorative continuity can be found on the walls of the citadel, near Saladin’s *nashkḥī* inscription discussed above. Despite the presence of this inscription, the decorative ornament, like that of the mausoleum, is again essentially Fatimid. This is particularly true on the Burj al-Zafar, which, according to Lorenz Korn, “seems to indicate the survival of Fatimid decorative traditions under the reign of Saladin.” For this and further elaboration of the long survival of Fatimid motifs in Ayyubid architecture, see Korn, “The Façade of aṣ-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb’s Madrasa and the Style of Ayyubid Architecture in Cairo,” in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras III: Proceedings of the 6th, 7th, and 8th International Colloquium Organized at the Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven* (Leuven, 2001), 101–21, esp. 107. For the images from the Citadel, see Creswell, *MAE*, vol. 2, pls. 18 and 19.
94. Bierman, *Writing Signs*, 62–70, 110–112.
95. The same is true of several Fatimid buildings, for example the mihrab of Sayyida Ruqayya, which has at the center of its ribbed hood a six-pointed star on a field of vegetal arabesque (fig. 15).

96. Taylor, *Vicinity*, 27.
97. To my knowledge, the only other domed mausoleum anywhere that exceeded it in dimension at that date was that of Sultan Sanjar at Merv, built in the 1140s. Another possibility is the *qubba* at Bab Ibrahim in Mecca (destroyed), built in the tenth century and also praised for its extraordinary height. It was said by Ibn Jubayr to be “almost as high as the adjacent minaret”; see Jonathan Bloom, “The Introduction of the Muqarnas into Egypt,” *Muqarnas* 5 (1988): 27.
98. The one Fatimid possibility, which although destroyed by the Ayyubids would certainly have been alive in memory, was the famous tomb of the Fatimid caliphs, the *turbat al-zaʿfarān*, which had been built in the Western Palace around 973. Though we do not know its exact dimensions, the building was extolled for its height. However, the *turbat al-zaʿfarān* was not a freestanding mausoleum, since it consisted of a separate room incorporated within the fabric of the palatial complex; see *EI2*, s.v. “Turba,” 674.
99. Maqrīzī, *Khīṭat*, vol. 2, 299–300. Creswell has translated this passage in full; see *MAE*, vol. 2, 155. See also Jonathan Bloom “The Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī in Cairo,” *Annales Islamologiques* 18 (1982): 54, 64. Bloom has shown that like the al-Shafīʿī mausoleum the mosque of Baybars was the focus of an intra-Sunni dispute. According to Shafīʿī law, only one congregational mosque could be used for the Friday *khutba*, and the Ayyubids had designated the mosque of al-Hakim for that function. During the reign of Baybars, however, an attempt was made to reinstate the *khutba* in the Mosque of al-Azhar. The Shafīʿī qadi reacted strongly in opposition. Bloom argues that the building of the mosque of Baybars was an attempt to placate Shafīʿī opposition to the pronouncement of the *khutba* in al-Azhar by providing a new congregational mosque for those adherents of other legal schools who were not bound by the Shafīʿī restriction, and who therefore wished to give the *khutba* elsewhere. Baybars’s well-known decision, in 1264, to elevate the qadi from each of the four schools of law to the rank of *qāḍī al-quḍāt*, a position held since Ayyubid times only by the Shafīʿīs, was also the cause of conflict; see Bloom, “Mosque of Baybars,” 62–64.
100. R. Steven Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols: The Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193–1260* (Albany, 1997), 105–108.
101. al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭat*, vol. 2, 444.
102. Creswell, *MAE*, vol. 2, 64, n. 8.
103. This is a phenomenon eloquently explored by Taylor, *Vicinity*.
104. On which, see R. Steven Humphreys, “Women as Patrons of Religious Architecture in Ayyubid Damascus,” *Muqarnas* 11 (1994): 35–54.
105. Korn, “Façade,” 101–21.
106. Gottschalk, *Al-Malik al-Kāmil*, 26. Al-Kamil had personally supervised the completion of work on the Citadel begun by Saladin; see Rabbat, *Citadel*, 75; Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols*, 145.
107. Chamberlain, “Crusader Era,” 232.