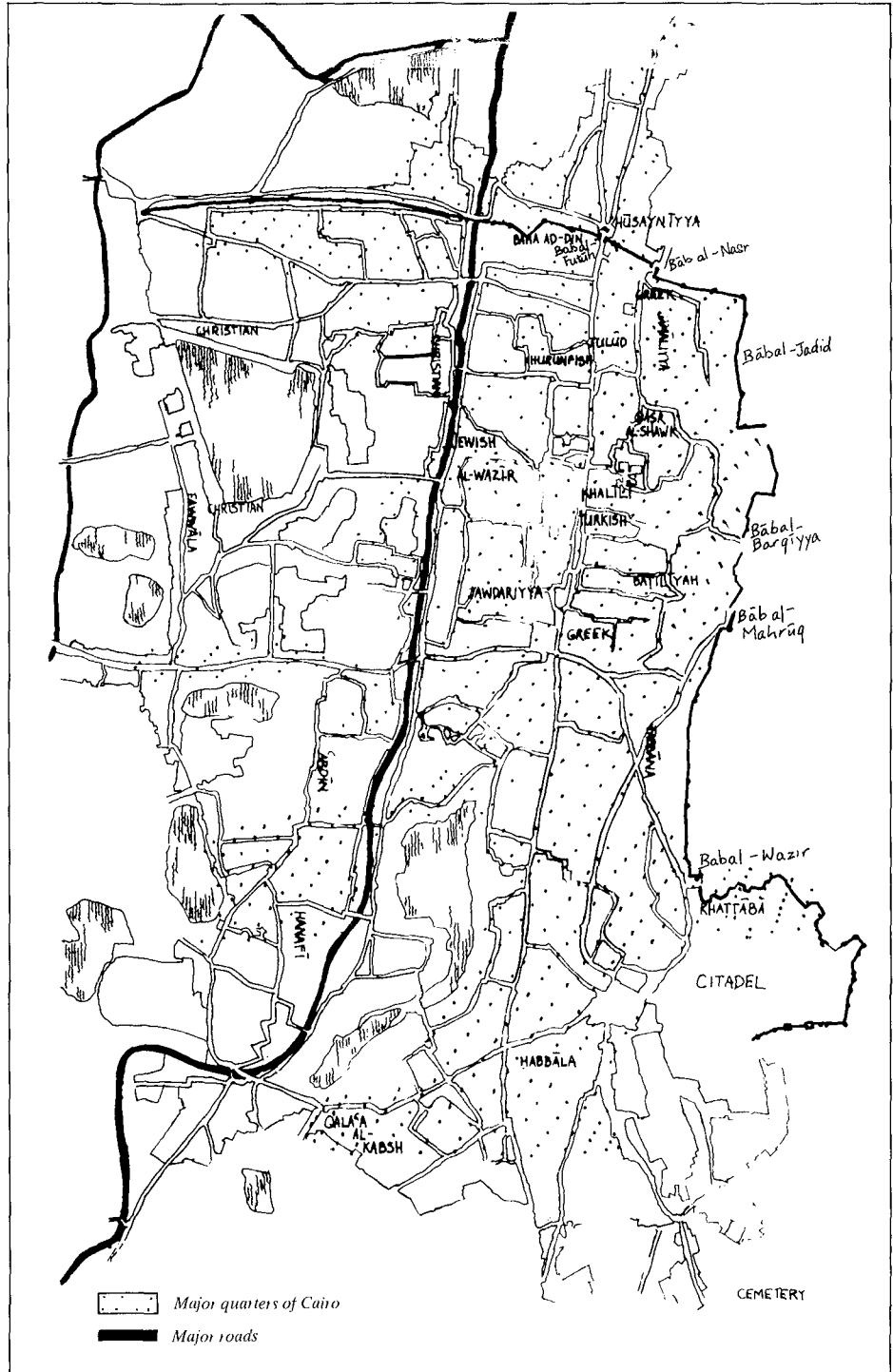
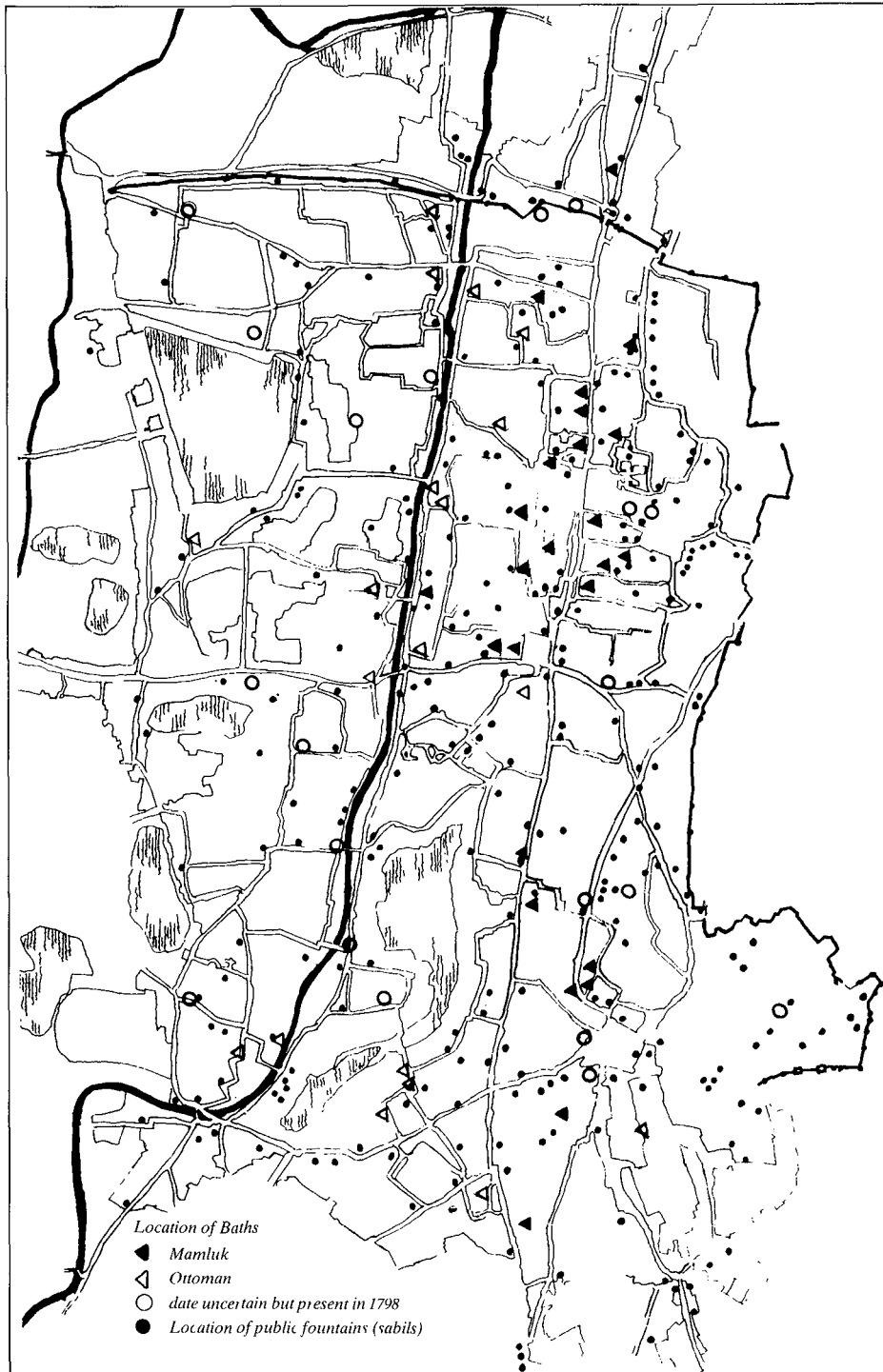


Northern expansion of the city
 Courtesy of the author

that Damascus, Tripoli and Aleppo show some of the same characteristics as Cairo (the cases of Jerusalem and Mekka being different because of the specific requirements imposed by their holiness), but these were all cities heavily influenced in their social and visual structure by Egypt. Fez, Marrakesh, Tunis, Tlemcen, Mosul, Baghdad, Konya, Bursa, Isfahan or Yazd all exhibit a different relationship between urban fabric and architectural monument. Every one of these cities contains any number of major buildings, some even striking masterpieces of Islamic architecture. What none of them possesses is, on the one hand, the continuity of major building activities over several centuries (as Cairo has from roughly 1000 until 1800) and, on the other, the consistent exhibitionism of these buildings, whose domes and minarets define Cairo's horizon line and whose gates and inscribed walls shape the configuration of the living city, for instance in the de-



Canals, major roads and quarters of Cairo.
 Courtesy of the author



The supply of water in Cairo. location of public fountains and baths, 1798

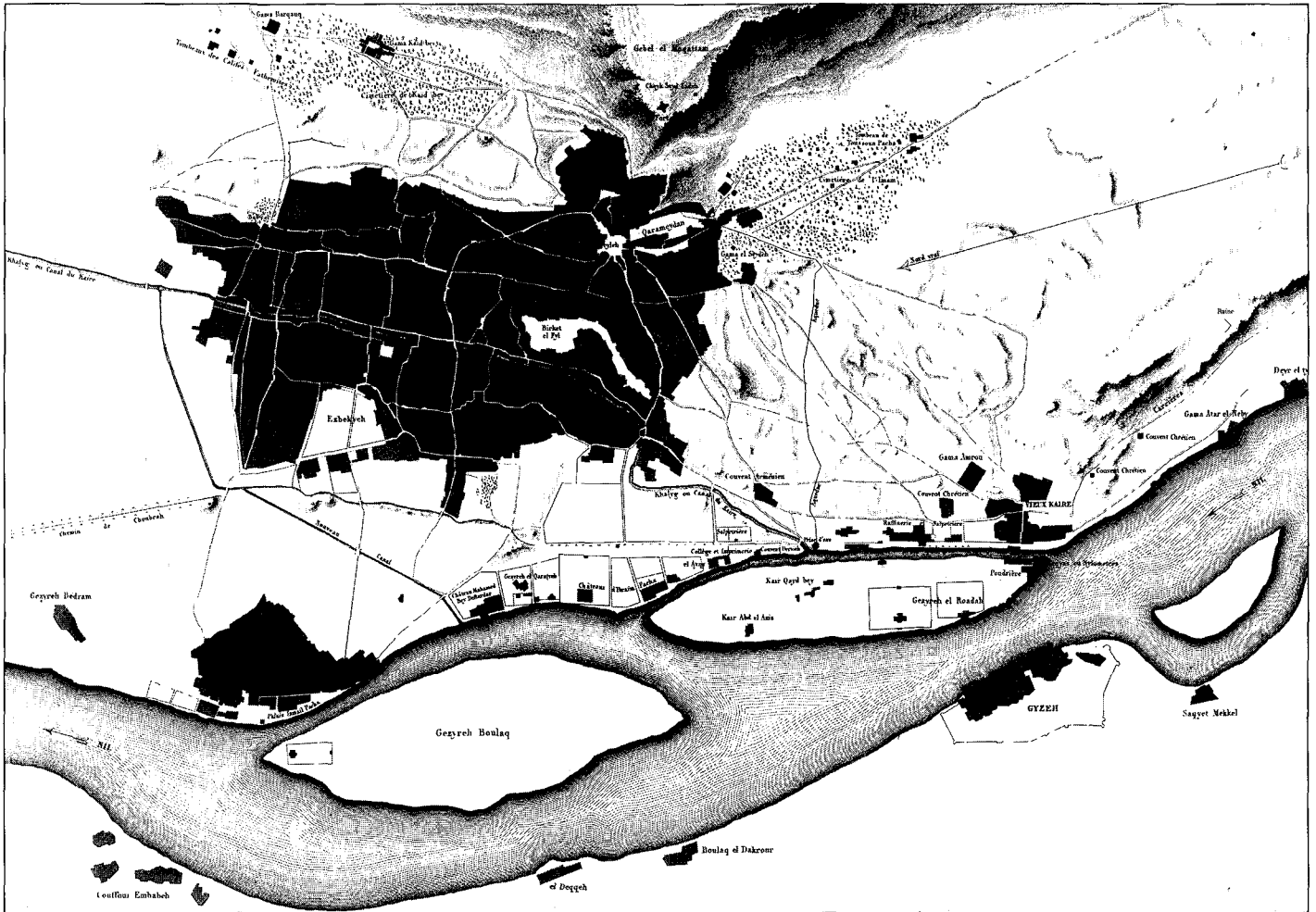
Courtesy of the author

lineation of its streets and passageways as well as of the eternal city of the dead, for the vast cemeteries of Cairo were an integral part of the metropolis.

The purpose of this essay is to raise a few questions about the significance of this Cairene peculiarity and to provoke a discussion on how to interpret it at two different levels. One is the level of perceiving, or reading, the city's static monuments as an integral component of the living fabric of the city. The second level is more of a query: assuming that a reasonable interpretation has been proposed for the monuments and therefore an adequate definition exists of the city's formal character, can and should this awareness be extended to the judgement of the modern city and become part of any planning of the future city?

One last preliminary note is necessary. Constraints of time for an introductory presentation and the limitations of my knowledge and of whatever detailed research I have done on Cairene monuments compel me to restrict my remarks on the city before 1520. This is, I believe, legitimate to the extent that the main forms and characteristics of the city were determined by the extraordinary intertwining of a Fatimid urban order of the eleventh century, of Ayyubid ideology of the late twelfth, and of an often studied Mamluk system from the thirteenth to the early sixteenth. The ways in which this was all done still await its historian.

The first historical question posed by Cairo is why it became so uniquely different. There is no clear answer to this question, but, for the purposes of the discussion, I should like to propose the following explanation. Alone among the major urban centres of the mediaeval Muslim world, Cairo was provided with a combination of incentives for investment and expression in large scale architecture. Some of these were built within its ecological setting, others were accidents of history. The main ones are: continuous sources of wealth through trade for nearly half a millenium, whatever vagaries existed in commercial



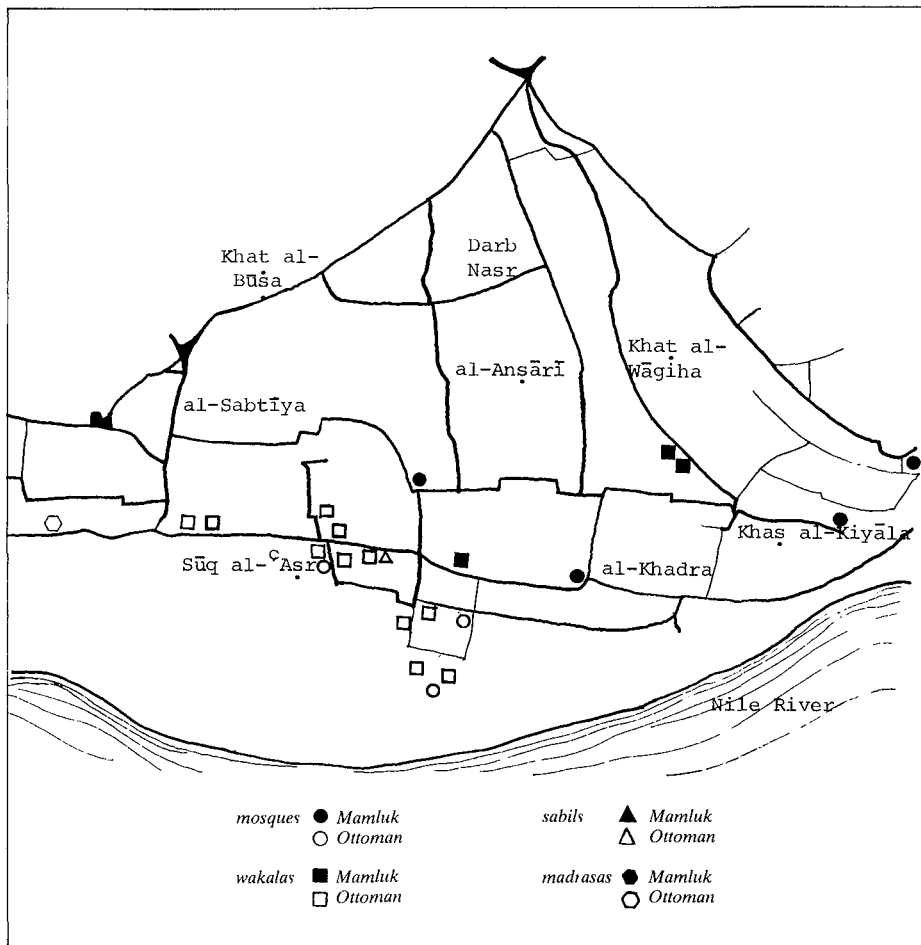
Cairo and its environs before 1825

Source: Coste, Pl. LXVI

activities; absence of destructive invasions which had plagued most of western Asia until the sixteenth century; at time shaky, but usually successfully operational, indigenous mix of religious and ethnic communities; consistent magnet of intellectual, social, and money-making institutions and activities which brought people from all over the Muslim world and, in a more controlled way, from the non-Muslim world as well (until the growth of an imperial Istanbul, the image of the Turk, the Saracen,

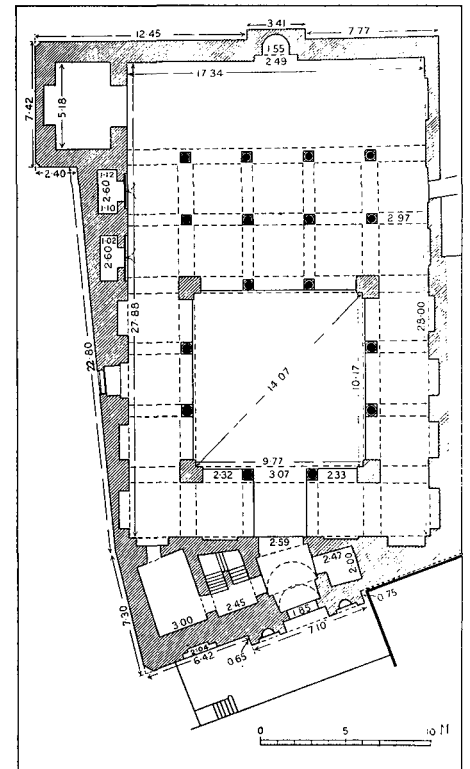
etc. in the West was an Egyptian one); availability of easily visible major monuments from older civilisations, classical ones and especially ancient Egyptian ones, which entered the realm of myths as well as served as quarries; in Mamluk times, original presence of a class of patrons issued from the military "slaves" associated to the local bourgeoisie and ulama through the complex web of a legal system; in older times, a less well studied (except in so far as it is known through the Geniza docu-

ments) but not less original patronage of striking variety. No other Muslim centre was provided with that many operative factors creating in Cairo both a consistent patronage and the means to invest in building. But the possibility of architectural investment does not compel its actuality. Something else triggered building as the major form of expression, as opposed to the manufacturing or collecting of objects, for instance (although both of these activities did take place). A partial answer to this



Bulaq location of monuments

Source: Hanna, fig 3



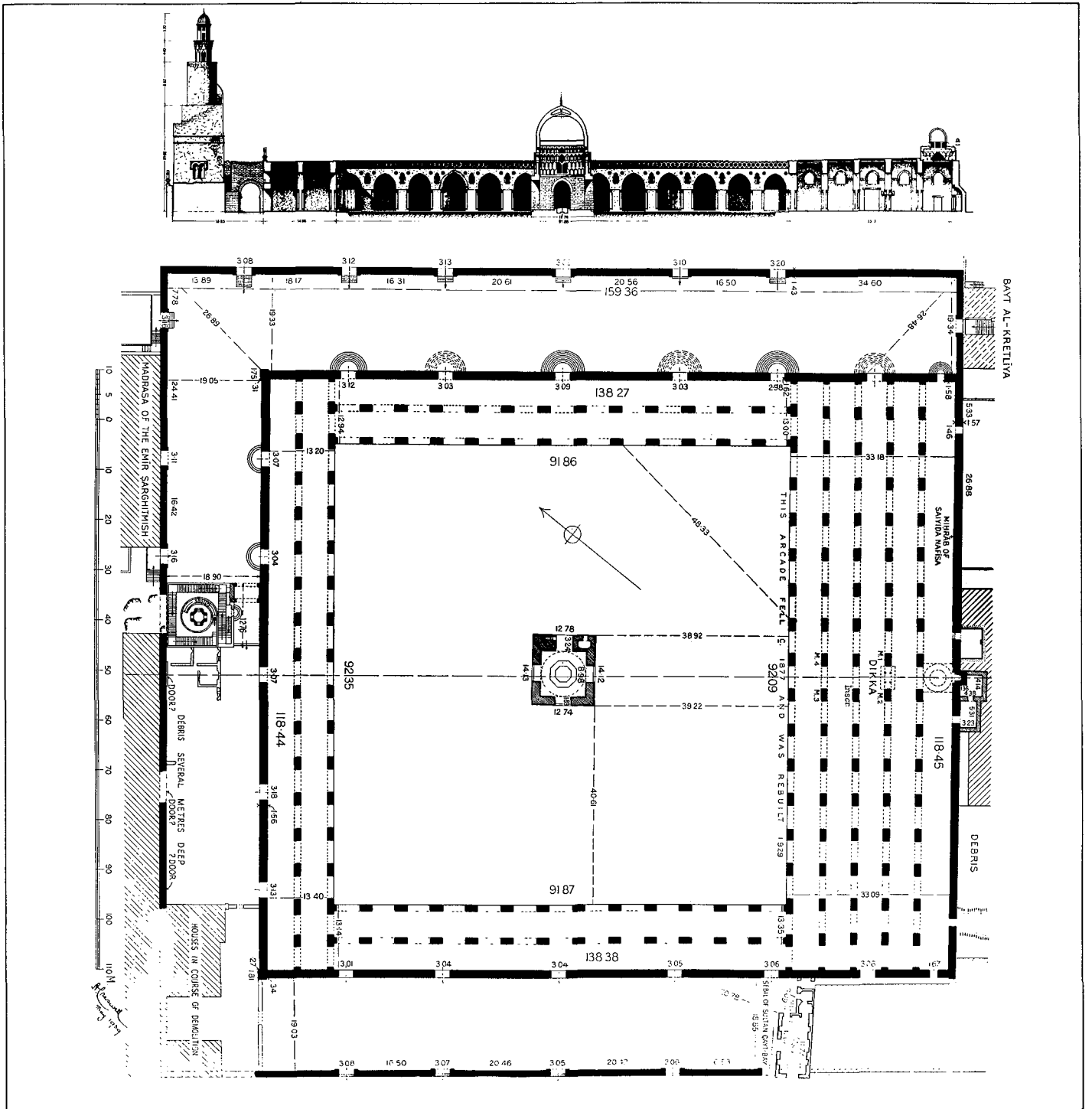
Mosque of al-Aqmar, A H 519/1125 A D , plan
Source Creswell, MAE, vol 1, fig 141

second question emerges when we recall the remarkable conservatism of Cairene architectural forms. Whereas Iran and the Turkish beyliks, not to speak of Italy, embarked, from the thirteenth century on, on major experiments with novel and sometimes striking ideas, Cairene architecture exploited and honed, lovingly and imaginatively, very traditional forms of spatial composition and surface decoration: courts, porticoes, domes, iwans, Muqarnas, geometric interlaces, large bands of writing, and so on. The Mamluk monuments of Cairo tell and tell again the same

story in a by-then well established language, because the need had not arisen to seek a new idiom or to say something new. A culture at apparent peace with itself saw in the proclamations of buildings the best and most expressive way of reminding itself of its own accepted values and, as its monuments copy each other, compete with each other, at times but rarely replace each other, always enter into a dialogue with whatever preceded them. They recall, it seems to me, the way in which the late nineteenth-century mercantile civilisation of the West built, wherever it reached (in-

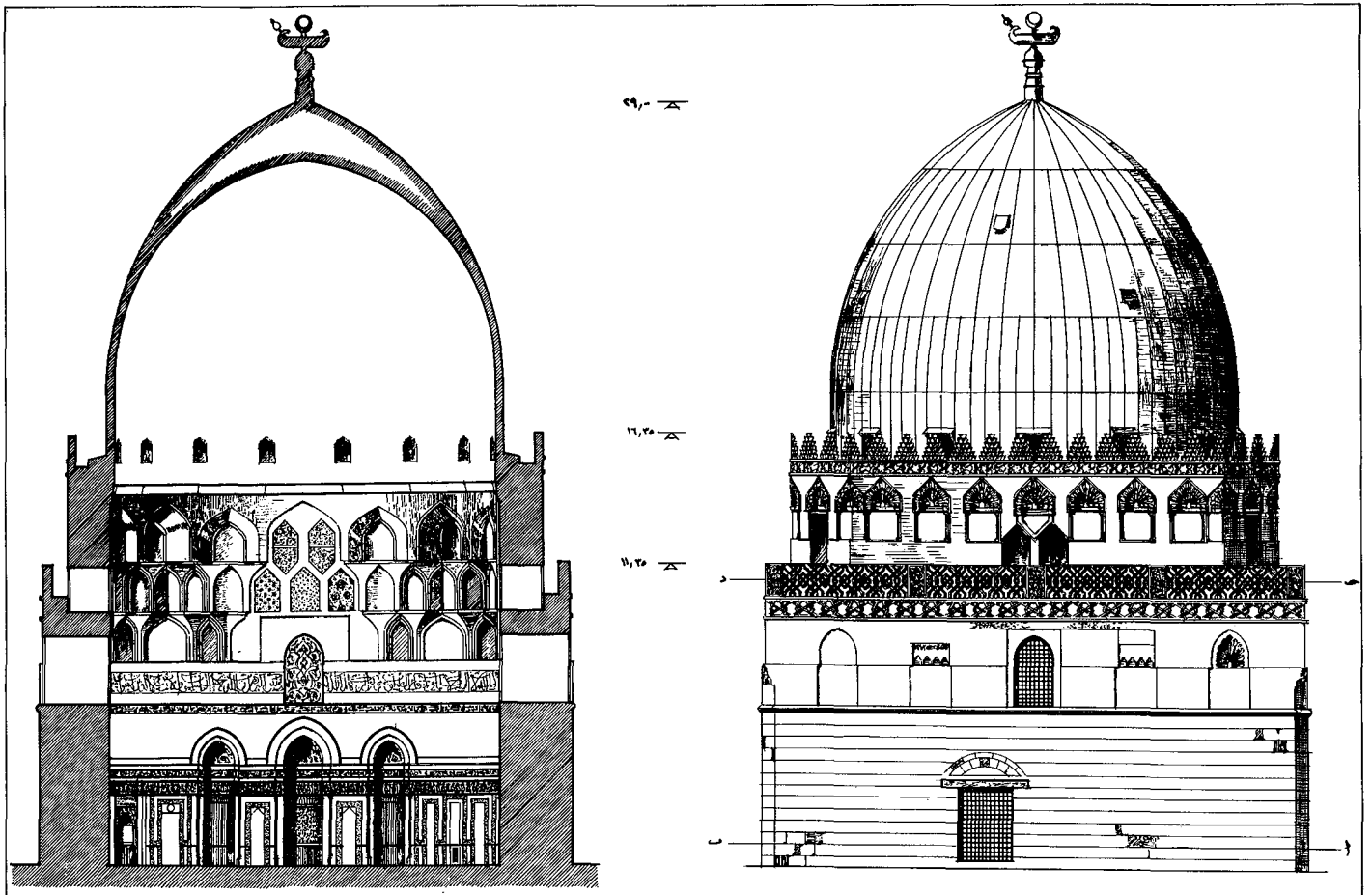
cluding Cairo and Istanbul), its banks, insurance companies, museums and often universities in modified neo-classical style. I am arguing, in other words, that, beyond the existence of resources and of a patronage, there was in Cairo, especially in Mamluk times, a cultural self-assuredness and an unquestioning agreement on which forms are needed and why. It is this agreement which was necessary for the expression of resources and patronage in architecture and for the conservatism of that expression.

Historians may well refine these generalities, point out certain exceptions to them like the madrasa of Sultan Hassan, identify many additional motivations and explanations for the buildings of Cairo between 1000 and 1500, and in general pursue the



Mosque of Ahmad Ibn Tulun, A H 265/877 A D , elevation and plan

Source: Creswell, EMA, vol. 2, figs 246, 247.



Shrine and Mausoleum of Imam Shafi'i, A H. 608/1211 A D , elevation

Source: Creswell, MAE, vol. 2 fig. 31

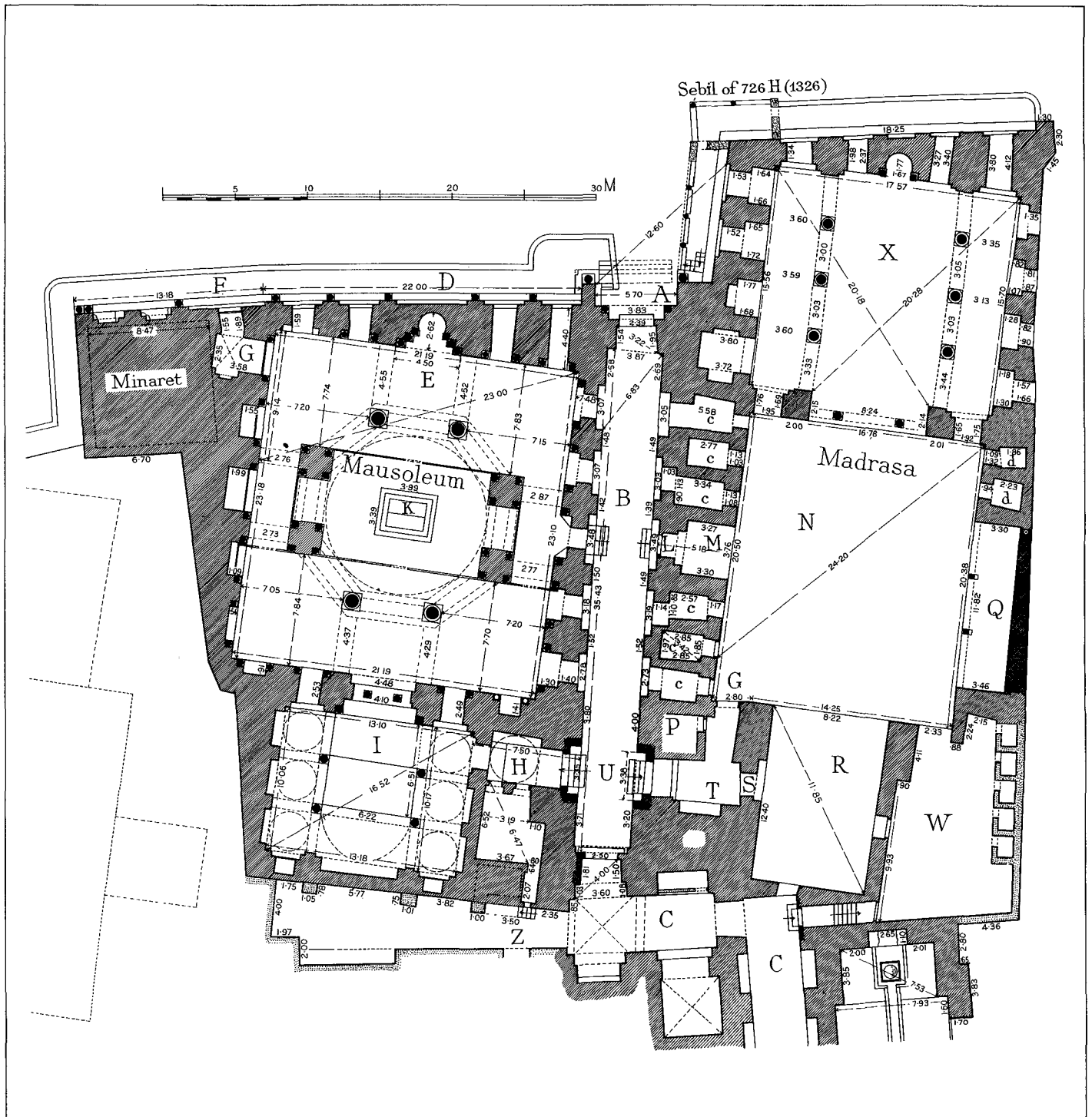
multitude of descriptive, technical, archaeological, textual, formal and comparative analyses which are the requisites of a synchronic understanding of the monuments, that is to say of their meaning within their time, ideally coming as close as possible to the moment of their creation. However fascinating and important this knowledge may be for a proper awareness of the past, its pertinence for the contemporary world and especially for contemporary building is more difficult to ascertain. Only too often, as with the monument to Rifat Pasha, the direct mirroring of the past, even when well-done, gives a feeling

of imitative emptiness, because it lacks the nexus of motivations, purposes, and ideological, functional or pious meanings which gave genuineness to the past. But, even if one is critical of the values of what has been called the neo-Mamluk style, it remains true that the genuine Mamluk style is an inescapable part of Cairo, deeply anchored in its very being, and therefore, that the contemporary city must come to grips with it without slavishly copying it.

A different kind of analysis of the classical, especially Mamluk, monuments of Cairo makes it possible to suggest a number of

subtler and more profound ways in which the historical monuments of Cairo have in fact affected the physical fabric of the city and have created a specifically Cairene aesthetic, which may or may not be transferable into contemporary terms for new parts of the city, but which ought to be considered whenever the fate of the historic city is being debated. I shall limit myself to two points and develop some of their consequences.

The first point is that nearly all buildings of classical times are independent constructions and not major modifications of or



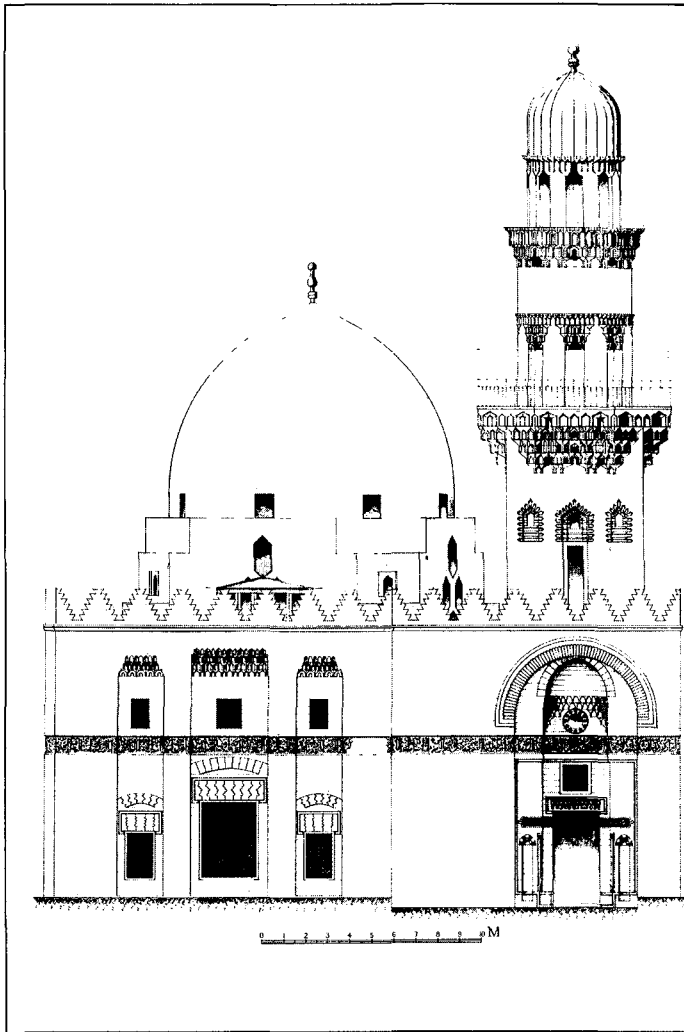
Madrasa and Mausoleum of Sultan Qala'un, plan.

Source: Creswell, MAE, vol 2, fig. 108



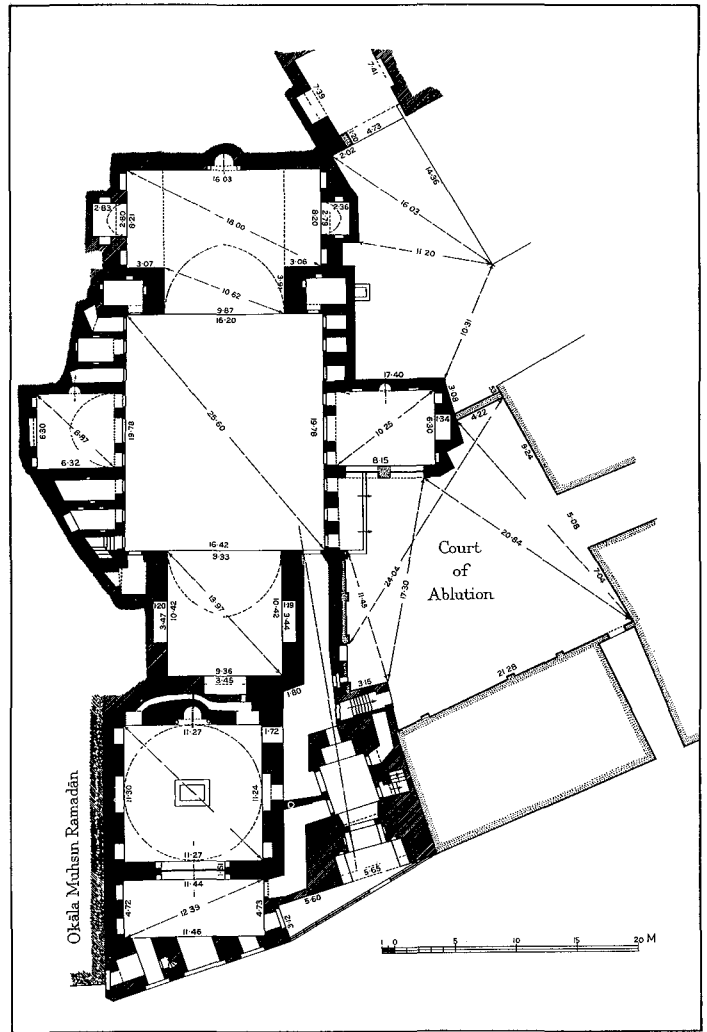
Madrasa and Mausoleum of Sultan Qala'un, A H 684/1285 A.D

Source: Coste, Pl XX



Khanqah and Mausoleum of Sultan Baybars Jashankir, A.H. 706-9/1306-10 A D , elevation

Source: Coste, Pl. XXIII.



Khanqah and Mausoleum of Sultan Baybars Jashankir, plan.

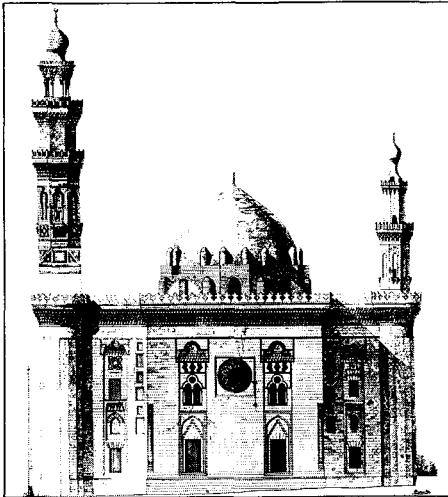
Source: Creswell, MAE, vol. 2, fig. 142

additions to older buildings. There are exceptions, no doubt, as with the Mamluk additions to the mosque, and especially the Azhar complex. The latter is important, because it is the one example of a monument with a complex and idiosyncratic history which required constant modifications — as it is still modified today — because its living force and purpose overshadow its formal character and make its succession of

synchronic meanings irrelevant as new ones come to the fore. Other exceptions are usually repairs or secondary reflections of a new taste, although further studies on individual monuments may modify this conclusion. Assuming, however, that it is valid, what are its implications for the history of Cairo, especially if one recalls that relatively few monuments (except for private dwellings or secular buildings) were

systematically or willfully destroyed in order to be replaced by new ones?

Two implications strike me as particularly important. One is that the integrity of the monument was protected by much more than the legal deeds which assured, for a while at least, its proper utilisation. It was protected because, even when its initial functions had lessened in importance or



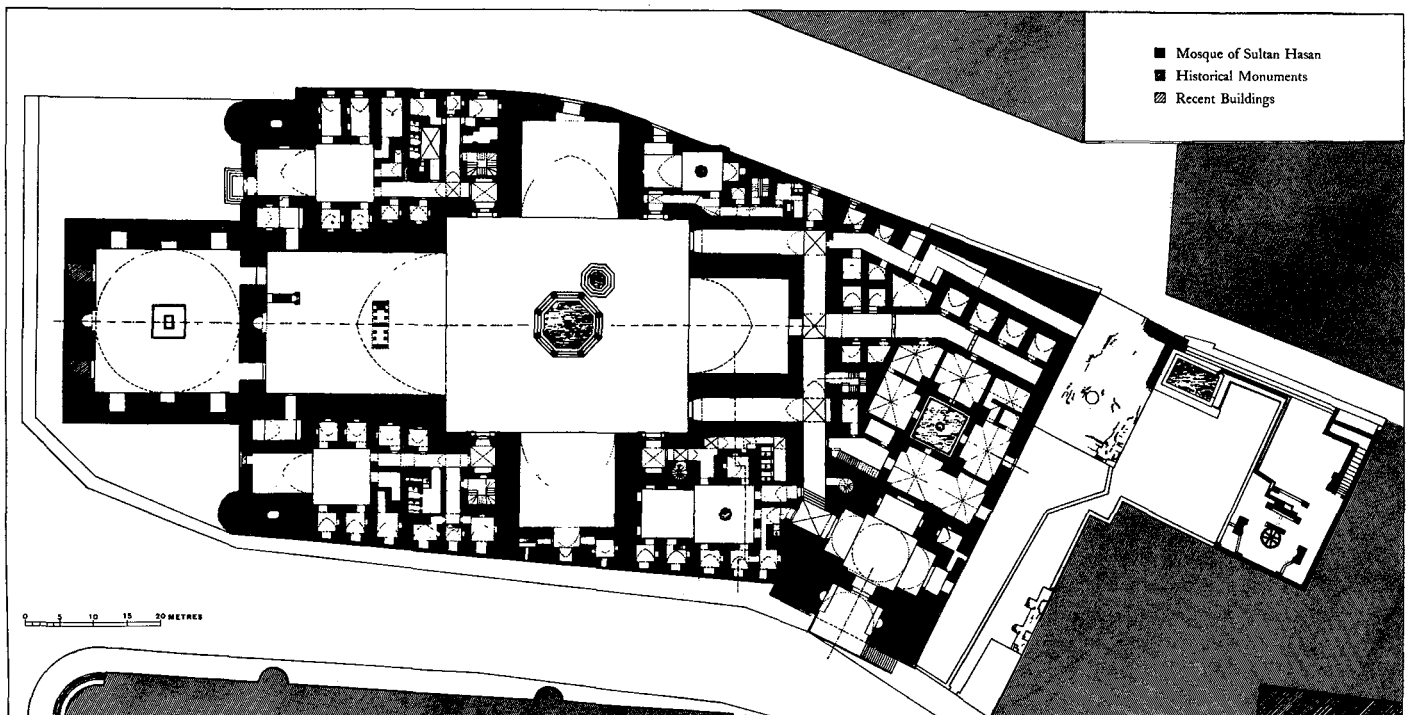
Mosque and Madrasa of Sultan Hasan,
A H 757-64/1356-62 A D., elevation

Source: Herz, Pl IV

dwindled to nothing, something else in it had become part of the fabric of its urban setting. On a pious and emotional level, it could be that so many of these monuments contained burial places and thus the fascinatingly complex relationship of the traditional Muslim ethos to the presence of the dead developed, nearly automatically, a web of constant associations with any monuments containing a mausoleum. I shall return shortly to a possible formal level of associations in a different context, but a second implication of this social protection of so many monuments may well be that, regardless of the formal differences which exist between them, they were always part of the visual code expected within traditional society. There would have been what may be called a semiotic contract between patrons, builders and the population which required less certain

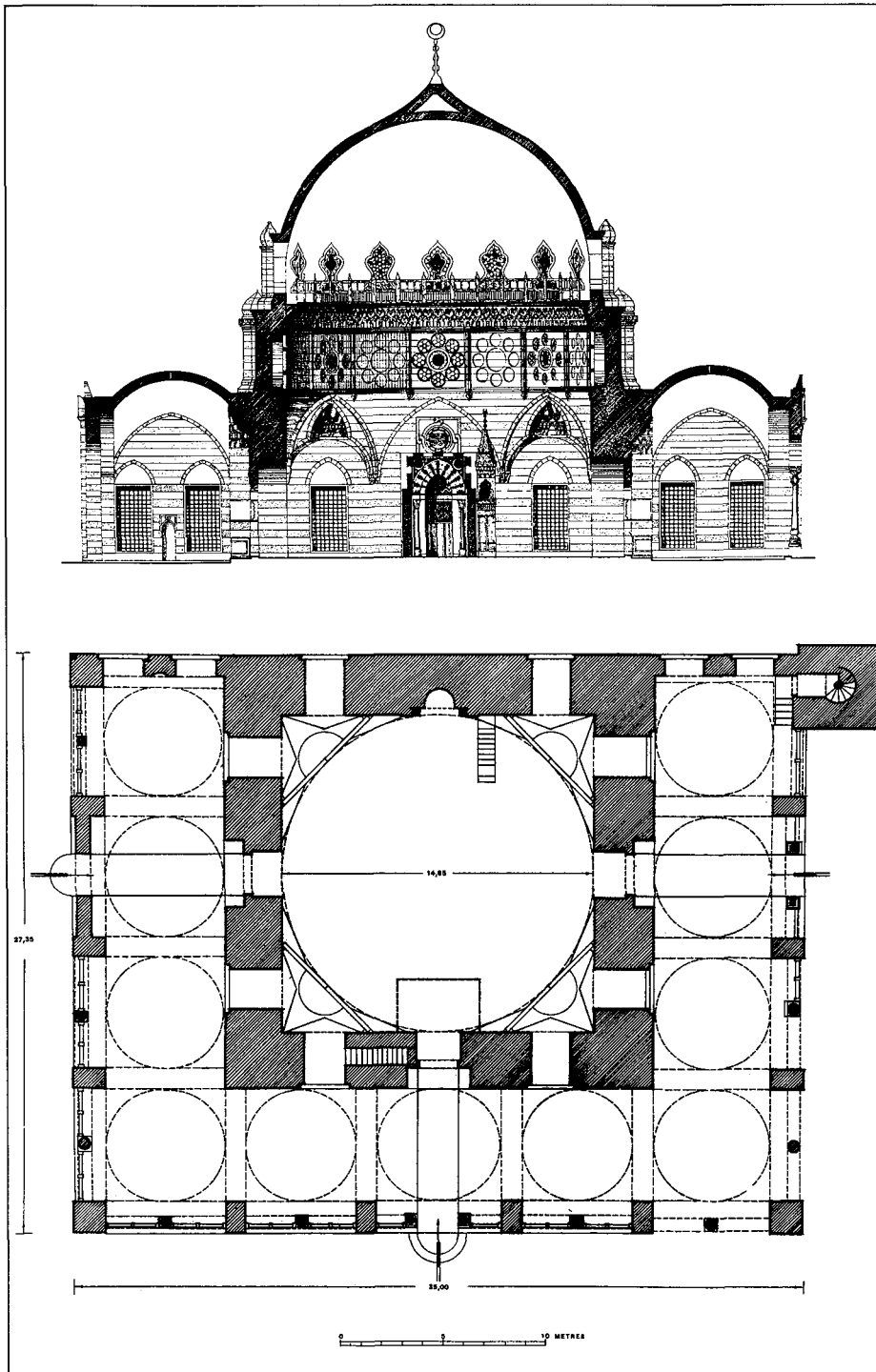
functions to be performed than certain forms to be available regardless of the functions to which they were applied (Was there really a need for all the madrasas which existed in Cairo?).

It is much more difficult to identify the operation of a visual code in the past than to understand practical function, but (and this is my second major point about the historic city of Cairo) the large number of monuments preserved as well as the literary and epigraphic sources available for them lead to a general hypothesis for discussion. It has often been noted that the specific function of many Mamluk buildings — *madrasa*, *khanqah*, *ribat*, *masjid*, *jami*, even at times hospital or warehouse — is difficult to identify by visual observation alone, by the simple perceptions of its gate or facade. Most of those buildings use



Mosque and Madrasa of Sultan Hasan, plan

Source: Creswell, ME, vol 1, fig 66.



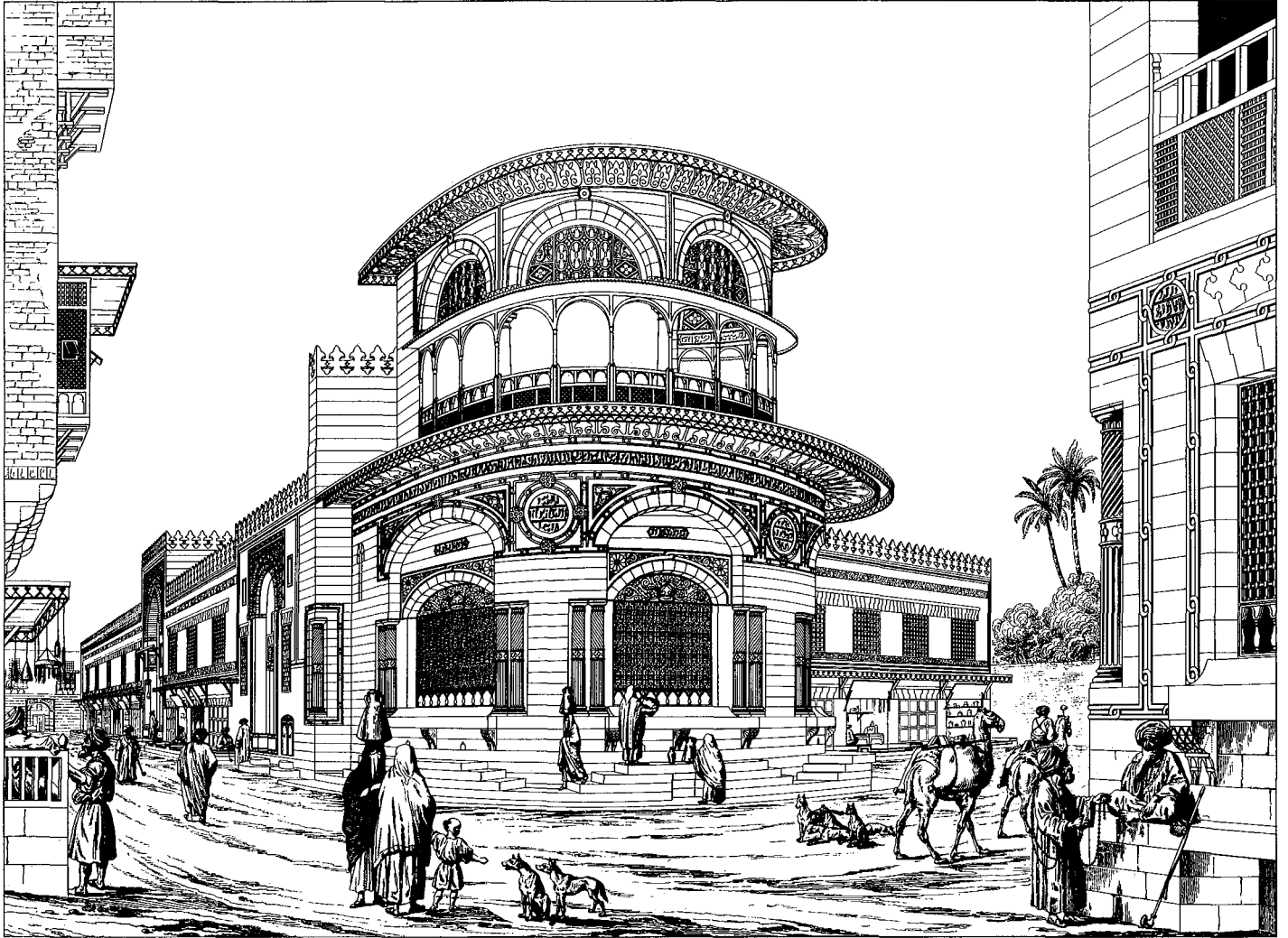
Mosque of Sinan Pasha, A H 979/1571 A D , elevation and plan

Source Creswell, ME, vol 2, fig 109, 110

a small number of architectural themes which are the ones dominating the city's landscape, most particularly minarets, domes and gates. They are the real, continuous, architecture of Cairo much more than the functions they house. The historian of society and of culture forgets the forms and discusses purposes, investments, economic and ideological contexts. The historian of art looks at them and determines stylistic evolution, technical quality and expressive power or else he points out that these and other similar features are related to each other in the sense that the mosque of Baybars recalls that of Al-Hakim, that Qaytbay's madrasa bears a relationship to Qala' un's or to al-Nasir's. These relations can be explained in terms of certain ideological or emotional objectives from the times of Baybars, Qala' un or Qaytbay, but these explanations do not operate for later times, when the contingencies of the thirteenth, fourteenth or fifteenth centuries are not meaningful. What still operates today is what I would like to call the rhythmic power of the monuments, whereby minarets (more accurately called towers) serve as a visual relay leading from one place, and elaborate gates request of the passerby that he stop and enter, or at least look. To the judgement of the historian of society or of art may be added the judgement of the Cairene urbanologist who seeks meanings from the point of view of the visual perception of the city.

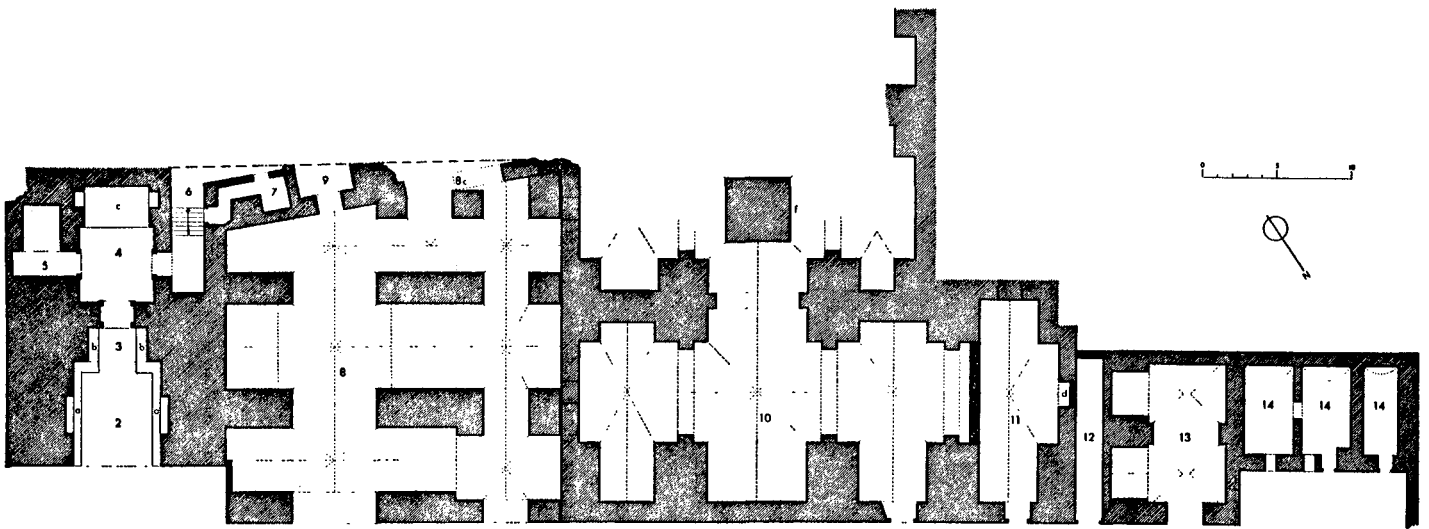
What has been provided in the city of Cairo is a network of visual signs which orders movement within the city and which makes it physically usable and understandable, whenever one tries to use and understand it. There is the movement from the Hakim mosque to the southern cemetery, the side trip to the citadel through Darb al-Ahmar, and any number of other vectors which articulate the city. These directions are given by permanent forms epistemologically independent of the functions to which they are attached.

Among the Islamic cities known to me, only Istanbul has a relatable rhythmic order, but it lacks the density of signs provided by Cairo and it is on a totally differ-



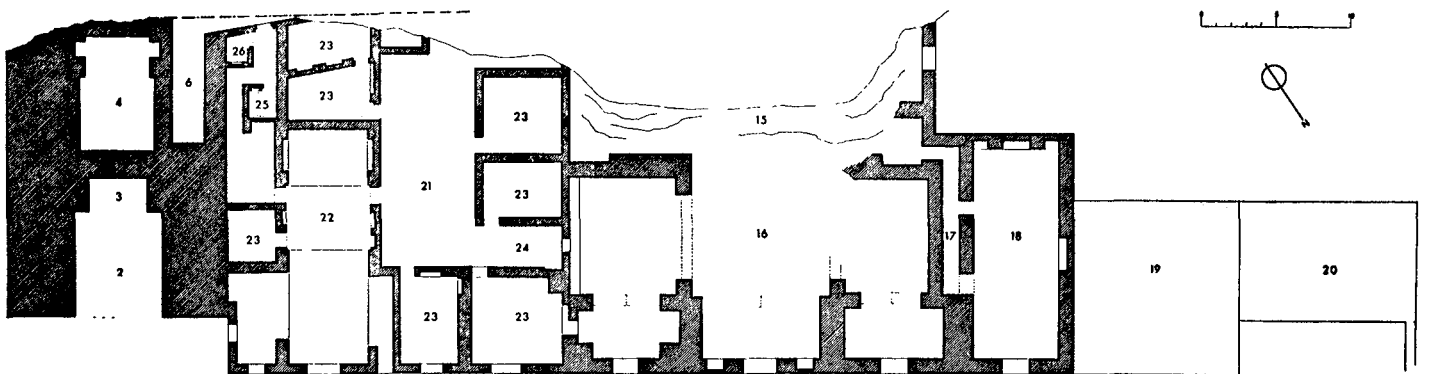
Two Sabils. centre, Ottoman, 18th century, right, Mamluk, 15th century

Source: Coste, Pl XLI



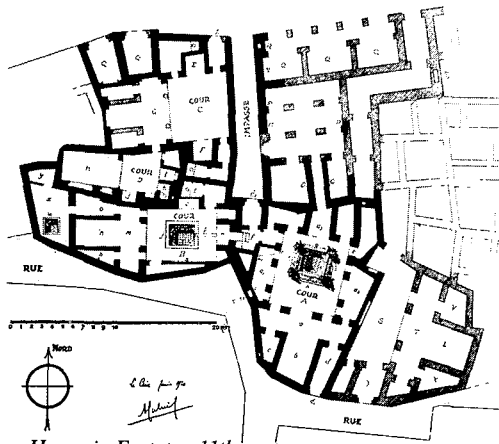
Place of Yashbak/Qusun, 14th-15th century, plan, first floor.

Source: Revault, Maury, vol. 2, fig. 11



Palace of Yashbak/Qusun, second floor.

Source: Revault, Maury, vol. 2, fig. 12

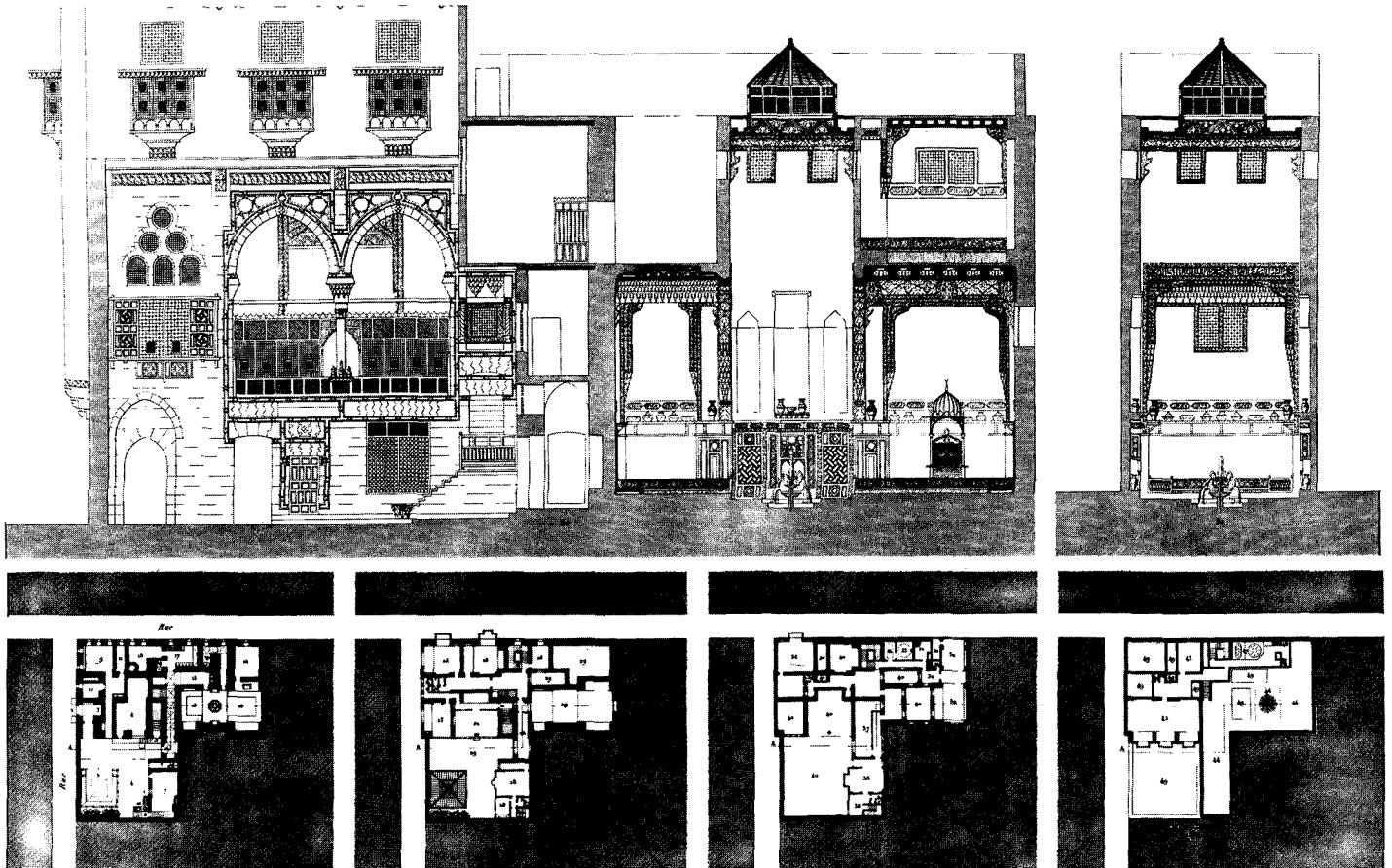


House in Fustat, c 11th century,
Source: MAE, vol 1, fig 56

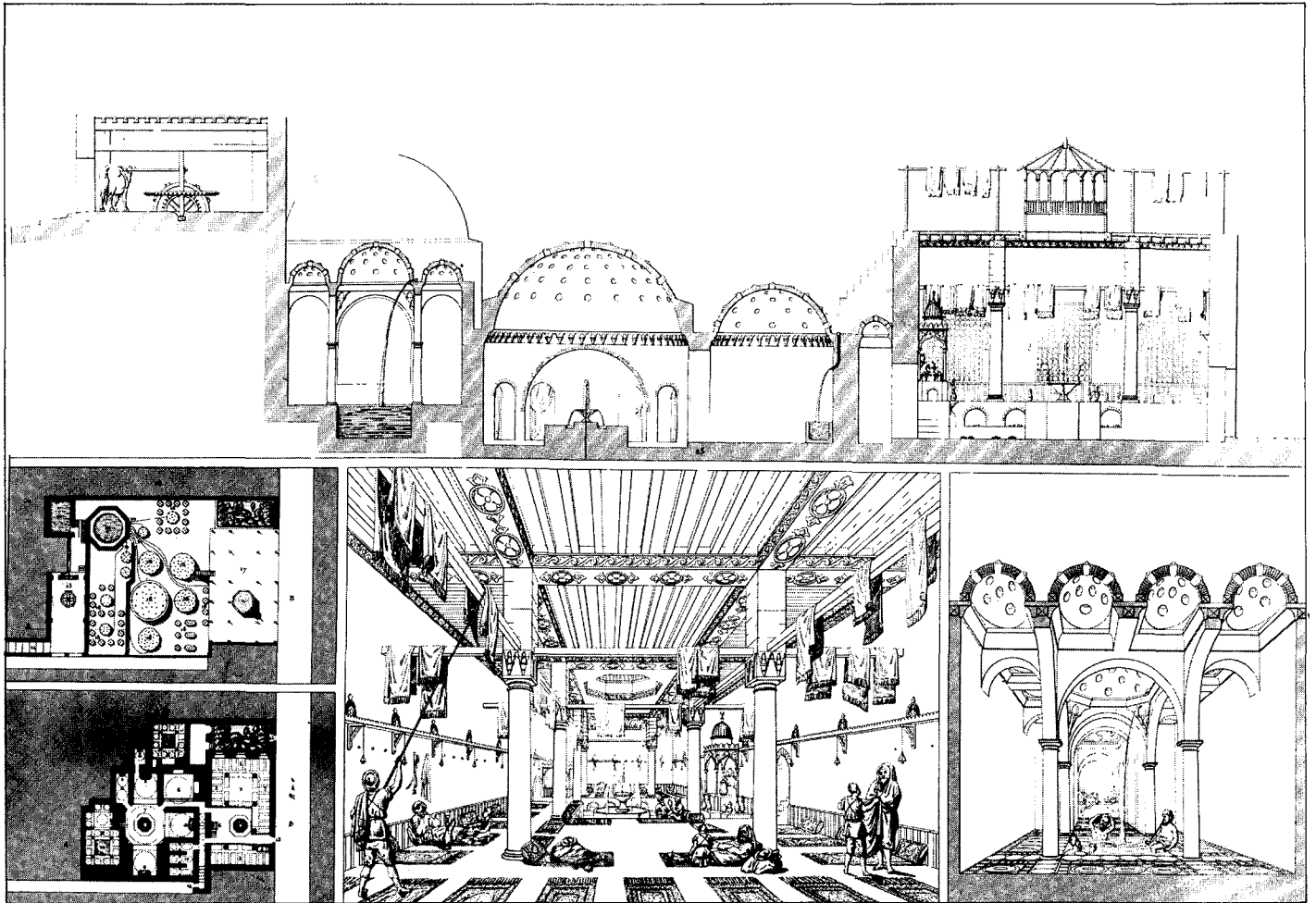
ent scale. It no longer matters, at this level, what specific historical contingencies, needs, functions or investments were needed for the creation of this visual network. What does matter is that a character has been given to a city in the latter part of the Middle Ages which has remained in function until today, but which has not been extended to the new areas of the city, where traffic circles and neon ads have replaced minarets as beacons, tall buildings took over from domes, and gateways have given way to window displays. This is perhaps indeed the language of the end of the twentieth century, but it may just be

possible that a fuller understanding of what made Cairo unique in the past may help in keeping it unique in the future.

But the argument of this short essay in interpreting a city seeks to go beyond the specifics of the city of Cairo. Using a city unusually rich in mediaeval monuments, it suggests that, when a city has acquired the monumental density of Cairo, monuments escape the exclusive scrutiny of the historian; they become continuous factors in the formal life of the urban system because their real meaning is determined less by what happened in them than by how they act upon the total urban fabric.



House, 18th century.
Source: Coste, Pl XLVII



Bath, 18th century

Source Coste, Pl XLVII.



Caravansarai of Zulfikar, 18th century

Source: Coste, Pl. XLIII



Caravansarai of Sultan Qaytbay, A H 885/1480-81

Source Coste, Pl XLII

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Events important to the history of Cairo**A H /A.D**

11/632	Death of the Prophet Mohammed in Medina
18-20/639-41	Conquest of Egypt by General 'Amr ibn al-Aas under the Caliph 'Umar
20/641	Capture of the Old Roman Fortress of Babylon (Qasr al-Sham) in Old Cairo
20/641	Egypt, a province under the Caliphs in Medina.
20/641-2	Mosque of 'Amr built Foundation of Al-Fustat as a city and as the capital.
41-132/661-750	Umayyad Dynasty
132-650/750-1258	Abbasid Dynasty
133/751	Governor of Egypt moves his residence to the new quarter of Al-Askar
254/868	Ahmad ibn-Tulun becomes governor of Egypt
254-92/868-905	Tulunid Dynasty
256/870	Ibn-Tulun moves residence to al-Qatai
265/877	Mosque of ibn-Tulun completed
297-567/909-1169	Fatimid Dynasty
358/969	Fatimid armies from North Africa take Fustat Foundation of the walled city Al-Qahira (Cairo)
361/972	Al-Azhar mosque dedicated
403/1012	Al-Hakim mosque completed
458-69/1066-72	Ruination by drought and pestilence Fatimid treasuries dispersed
480-84/1087-91	New walls and gates (Futuh, Nasr, Zuwayla) built. Threat of invasion by Seljuk Turks
490/1096	First Crusade begins
492/1099	Jerusalem falls to the Franks
558-63/1163-68	Syrians and Franks battle for control of Egypt
563/1168	Fustat burned to prevent it falling to the Franks

564/1169	Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi takes control of Egypt.
564-650/1169-1252	Ayyubid Dynasty
566-72/1170-76	Walls of Cairo extended; the citadel first built
c.571/c 1175	Madrasa system of education introduced into Cairo
c 638/c 1240	Elite corps of Turkish Mamluks (slaves) formed by Sultan Malik as-Salih
667/1249	First conspicuous funerary foundation with tomb and madrasa built for Malik as-Salih
668/1250	Bahri Mamluk dynasty begins
657/1258	Mongols take Baghdad and murder the Abbasid Caliph.
660/1261	Sultan Baybars sets up an Abbasid survivor as Caliph in Cairo.
664/1265	Baybars becomes overlord of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina
676/1277	Baybars defeats the Mongols in North Syria
692/1292	Last Frankish enclaves captured
709-740/1309-40	Reign of An-Nasir Muhammed ibn Qala'un, greatest Mamluk builder and patron.
782/1382	Circassian Mamluk dynasty begins.
872-901/1468-96	Reign of Al-Ashraf Qaytbay, apogee of Circassian Mamluk period
906-21/1501-16	Reign of Qansuh al-Ghuri
923/1517	Selim I, Ottoman Sultan of Turkey conquers Egypt, which becomes a province of the Ottoman Empire
945/1538	Last Cairene Abbasid Caliph dies and bequeaths the title of Caliph to the Ottoman Sultan of Turkey.
1182/1768	Sheikh Ali Bey revolts against the Ottomans, takes part of Arabia and tries to annex Syria
1182/1772	Revolt put down
1213/1798	Napoleon defeats the Egyptian forces at the Battle of the Pyramids
1216/1801	The French evacuate Egypt Control restored to Ottomans
1220/1805	Mohammed Ali expels the Ottoman governor and massacres leading officials

Grabar

The primary concern of my essay and of the following remarks is not to describe or interpret the monuments of Cairo in their historical context but rather, taking the specific instance of Cairo, to meditate on the role of the historian and of history in assisting planners, architects, designers, political leaders and practical administrators for mapping out the future, meeting the emergencies of today, or making decisions which irreversibly affect the future. Some argue that the historian is but the chronicler of what happened or of what is happening, and that his judgement is of no greater value than that of any contemporary citizen or critic except in so far as he can articulate his views more easily or with more learning than most. Others claim that he has the responsibility of defining how any one decision fits or does not fit with a presumably agreed upon (whether officially or subconsciously) relationship of the present to the past. Others yet maintain that it is arrogant to assume that a historian has a sort of monopoly on critical judgement, but also that his role is more than that of a chronicler, for he speaks in the name of a curiously ill-defined constituency in the process of building the future: the constituency of the dead, of the ancestors, of the spaces and forms they have left functioning or to be replaced by new spaces and new forms. But does the historian simply report, as best he can, what seem to him or to the consensus of his profession to be the voices of the past? Or does he transmit to the past questions formulated today and seek in the past answers and directions for the future? I have no answer to these questions which are but a particular case of the broader issue of outside consultants in the making of today's world, but it is a long-standing worry about them which determined the character of my presentation.

The essay contains two kinds of information and a set of questions.

There is first a list of dates, events and successive rulers which served to emphasise the wealth and the complexities of

Cairo's history. This list suggests that there are many, perhaps a dozen moments in time at which it is possible to develop a profile of what Cairo was like and to buttress a physical and visual description with the social, political and cultural practices and attitudes which prevailed at the time. Such horizontal cuts through the city of Cairo have never yet been done, except partially, and while fascinating to the historian, their actual usefulness to the contemporary practitioner is perhaps secondary, except in raising one issue. When the historian talks of Cairo's past through its monuments, he is talking of many pasts, not of one, and his role is to distinguish one past from another, to sharpen the contrasts between them; and yet the reality of the city itself mingled the pasts, mixed them in a symbiosis across historical periods. At what point is it legitimate to decide that the city had reached a coherent equilibrium which could and should be preserved instead of being allowed to live on?

Second, the essay contains a selection of Cairene forms for major functions, which became monuments. Although there are many unexplored aspects of this area, information regarding monuments is, on the whole, fairly easily available, and especially the procedure for the establishment of factual data is fairly clear. It is simply a question of more scholars and architects (and therefore more funds) for the correct recording and interpretation of standing monuments, of archaeologically retrievable ones and of textual information about them. The problems which exist at this level are of two kinds. One is that of control over accuracy and completeness of information, as *these* are the monuments on which history is based, and especially the ones which may be destroyed, modified, adapted to new uses or restored. Absence of control can lead to disastrous effects, while informed control has achieved notable successes in Cairo or elsewhere. The second kind of problem lies in the political-cultural realm: what and how does one preserve? Much has been written on that subject, but, more important than what and how is the question of *why* does one pre-

serve: to show respect for the past or to satisfy the needs of today?

Finally, the essay sought to move a step beyond the simple acknowledgement of Cairo's unique wealth in Islamic monuments by implying three more speculative questions: What was it in the history of Cairo that allowed for its uniqueness? What are the forms taken by that uniqueness? What, if anything, does that uniqueness mean today or for the future? These questions deserve some further elaboration.

What allowed for the uniqueness of Cairo? Let me give one example. There is hardly a more extraordinary place in Cairo than Bab Zuwayla, where the Fatimid wall of 1092 supports the mosque of Al-Muayyad of 1405-20, where the very peculiar mosque of Salih Tala'i is off every axis of the area, and where vistas open up toward every part of the traditional city. From an aesthetically logical point of view, it is an absurd place, as different styles of construction and repetitive functions abut against each other and for every style represented here an example of greater quality exists elsewhere. But none of this matters, for all these disparate elements have been united by the life of the city, by its endless activities, and the monuments are simply the almost accidental associates of continuous life. The rebuilding of the walls of the Fatimid city by Badr al-Jamali, the power of a Fatimid notable with a new taste for externalisation of forms and certainly with commercial instincts, and of a Mamluk sultan are not in themselves significant to what happened to them over time. The clash of styles and the apparent lack of order were unimportant, because none of these buildings were really "monuments". They were answers to local or governmental needs in their time. To what these may have been I shall return in a moment, but what matters is that they could all be accepted, even when, as in the mosque of Salih Tala'i, very alien forms are used, because their patronage, their use, and their forms were part of what I called a semiotic contract, that is to say, an agreed upon relationship between

people and forms. Any such contract builds on what was there before and a military tower can become the base of a minaret or a place for a merchant of today to hang his wares, because it is there and belongs to whoever operates there. The point is that what preserved and nurtured the “monuments” of Bab Zuwayla is not an aesthetic concern for architecture, nor a concrete knowledge of history, nor even legal restrictions, but an acceptance of a formal language as the language of Cairo.

What are the terms of this language? I have in the essay stressed minarets as signs for movement and direction, as vectors; domes as fixed places of importance, sacred or otherwise; gates as stop signs in one’s perception and use of the city. All three of these forms lead to what is perhaps the most important component of Cairo, perhaps of any traditional city, which is the street, or more correctly, the means of communication not between monuments (as today’s guide-books put it correctly for our time of tourism), but between types of activities: home living, social relations, piety, working, washing, eating, and so forth. It is this network of movement whose historical dimensions have to my knowledge never been studied in the traditional Islamic city, which is then articulated and perhaps formalised by monuments.

What does it mean today? At the risk of overstating a case, I would say first of all that the city which existed until the early nineteenth century had developed a system of forms which probably met its needs; but this system was one of *signs* rather than of *styles*, for what remains in common between the Fatimid, Ayyubid, early Mamluk, late Mamluk and Ottoman periods is not a treatment of forms which changed as taste changed, but the *typology of forms* which always contained the same skeleton. The question is whether the nineteenth and early twentieth century city did not already replace that system and that typology with new ones. One can advocate a deliberate return to an earlier system, but, I feel, only with the full awareness of the implications, cultural and social if not political, of what

one is doing. In other words, for the purposes of our discussions, I would like to raise the question whether the visual system of the Ottoman and earlier city is not already a language of the past which has been replaced in Cairo (but not, for instance, in Fez or Aleppo) by another system. Yet, and this is my second question, even if the concrete forms of the past — and perhaps some of the functions — are no longer pertinent to meet the needs of today, could one argue that the *types* of needs and the *types* of responses found in the past are still those of today? We are still talking of networks of communication between living, working, keeping healthy, educating children, praying, dealing with social and family relations. Have we found the signs which make these activities operate? Do we know what are the processes today of recognising vectors, places of importance, and acts of stopping? Do we know the physical shape expected by contemporary society and social groups? And, finally, the past, the glorious physical past of Cairo, so threatened by contemporary developments may well have become the symbol of Cairene identity, that which differentiates Cairo from dozens of other metropolises. The historian’s task may well be for the contemporary world one of fashioning symbols, of providing themes of self-identity at a totally different level from one of *explaining* the past, at the level of making the past a sign for today such as those on banknotes or postage stamps. Whether this is an ethically justifiable activity is something which does concern us yet takes us far away from one primary purpose, that is to understand how the city of Cairo can face the future. Yet, at some point, the ethics of our work must be faced as well as its techniques.

To sum up, I am bringing up to the attention of the colloquium the following main questions and issues:

1) Cairo has many pasts which the historian learns to distinguish; for the contemporary planner, builder or decision-maker, are these refinements in knowledge of any real importance or do they not contain

dangers of ideological connotations if used outside of the past’s own realm?

2) Up to the middle of the nineteenth century, the several pasts of Cairo shared a language and a typology of forms: has that language been replaced by the new language of the second half of the nineteenth century, which is strikingly represented in Cairo? And therefore, are we justified in giving so much importance to the earlier language in thinking of the architecture of today and the future?

3) The problem of dealing with history is different from the problem of dealing with quarters containing historical documents.

4) There may in fact be a way to define an urban architecture of Cairo with its own unique characteristics, in which the initial impulse may well have been provided by the Fatimid city of the tenth century, but in which the constants are the relationship between forms or the activities around them and not the *visible* forms.

Lamei-Mostafa

With regard to the rich architectural heritage of Cairo dating from the period of various Muslim dynasties since 640 A.D. and particularly with regard to your reference to the “continuity of major building activities” between 1000 and 1800 A.D., let me point out that destructive invasions were not totally absent in Egypt’s history. The Mongols, after they took Baghdad, were defeated in Northern Syria by the Mamluk Sultan Baybars, but earlier, during the Ayyubid period, Egypt was twice invaded by the Crusaders. The first occurred in 1219 and the Crusaders remained in the Nile delta for two years. For the second time, in 1249, the Crusaders also invaded the Damietta area where they remained for a year.

In addition to such destructive invasions, draught and pestilence also caused devastation. There was a seven-year draught between 1066 and 1073 during the Fatimid period. There were six more recorded be-

fore the one that devastated Egypt between 1404 and 1406 mentioned by Al-Maqrizi.

I wish to point out that Cairo is not unique because of an absence of interruption and devastations in its history or because its sources of wealth remained un plundered, but because of another factor which I call Egyptian authenticity. Throughout history, before and after Islam, foreign influences alien to Egyptian culture were not easily accepted and had negligible impact on Egypt. In some cases, foreign influences were absorbed and adapted in such a way as they became incompatible with Egyptian life and identity. Foreign civilisations that came into contact with Egypt, on the other hand, were affected to a greater degree by the Egyptian civilisation as can be observed in the heritage of the Persian, Greek and Roman periods.

It is not necessary to look for a new architectural vocabulary in order to understand the uniqueness of Cairo: despite the variations over time the heritage we observe reflects a distinct Egyptian-Islamic personality. Architecture changed slightly and became diversified in each successive era, yet it was integrated and harmonised with precedents.

So it is with the present: historic buildings must not impede development and progress, but the new has to be made a continuation of the past so as to give personality to the contemporary city and to create an integrated and harmonious environment. I am not saying that old forms and elements should be repeated as was the case in the nineteenth-century Europe, but principles derived from the old must be integrated into a new architectural vocabulary. Meanwhile, people can be made to appreciate the importance of the heritage by means of rehabilitation and proper re-use of old buildings in an integrated urban fabric.

As for the difficulty of identifying the functions of buildings from their appearance, this problem is not unique in the case of Cairo but is a common one with regard to many mediaeval cities in the east and west.

For example, the facade of the hospital by Filippo Brunelleschi (1445) in no way reflects the function of the building. Conversely, in Cairo different parts of a building meant for different functions (such as mosque, madrasa, cells for madrasa students, library etc.) can be identified by looking at the building materials and construction systems used and at the sizes and types of openings.

What has taken place in Cairo in this century is, in fact, the breaking of a link that had continued for about ten centuries. The city has been overwhelmed by a drastic change in its physical environment: aesthetic values have been discarded, and a gulf has been created between the human being and the social environment with a sudden turn to European civilisation in the name of progress. We cannot adopt European theories. Every country has its own personality, way of life as well as its own social, political and economic system.

I hope, therefore, that this seminar will draw up resolutions and recommendations to save Cairo as one of the major urban centres of the Muslim world and to protect those values which have made it the leading city in art and architecture in this region.

Grabar

A very short comment. Mr Mostafa may be right about the fact that a link was broken. What I'm wondering is how the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fit in the social history of Cairo so as to know whether a link was broken or something new has happened. I don't know the answer to this yet.

Abu Seif

Professor Grabar has raised a number of questions that could challenge a whole generation of scholars. I would like to refer to

two points: the uniqueness of Cairo and its colourful character. With regard to the uniqueness of Cairo, Professor Grabar has pointed out its architecture and the density of its monuments, mentioning the continuity of major building activity over several centuries that has no parallel in any other Islamic city.

Unlike any other Islamic city, Cairo has retained indisputably and uninterruptedly its status as capital for fourteen centuries. At times it was only a provincial capital; under the Fatimids and the Mamluks, however, it was for centuries an imperial capital. For Egypt it was always the capital, considering that Fustat and Al-Qahira were located close enough to each other to be incorporated into one larger agglomeration. Most of the other Islamic countries have had at sometime during their history more than one capital with other cities competing for supremacy in some regard. Unlike Syria, Andalusia, Morocco, Iran, etc., where more than one city had some urban or architectural grandeur to display, in Egypt, Cairo has always been the centre of everything, all arts and activities. New urban foundations by amirs, sultans or khedives always took place within the area of Cairo. Even Mohammed Ali who did not hesitate to break with local traditions and the rules of aesthetics did not think of founding a new capital. He preferred to transform Cairo, as did his successors.

Professor Grabar questioned the fact whether the tradition of being aware only of Cairo's mediaeval monuments is sufficient in planning the city's future. He pointed out that Cairo had several pasts; and that we should not, for example, forget the experiences of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which were not unsuccessful. Quarters like Isma'il's city centre, Sayyeda Zainab, Shubra and Heliopolis are all part of traditional Cairo. Today Cairo includes about 25 per cent of Egypt's total population most of whom are not even aware of a mediaeval Cairo with all its monuments. This can be said about the millions of inhabitants in Shubra as well as about the millions of migrants from the

countryside to the capital. To either group a Mamluk monument or a *mushrabiya* window is something they are not familiar with.

One of Cairo's traditional features is its cosmopolitan character which was always pointed out by travellers of the mediaeval and post-mediaeval periods. Indeed, people from all over the world have been attracted to Cairo and its activities. These people, together with their ideas and fashions, were assimilated into Cairene society thus making Cairo one of the earliest Islamic cities to meet with modernism. Cairo's past is therefore not only a mediaeval one, but a past which has also known aspects of modernity. All future planning should be based on an awareness of the various stages of history, all of which form our tradition. An awareness of this pluralism (including rural and urban elements) is to be taken into account if slavish imitation of architectural style and urban design alien to its surroundings is to be avoided.