# THE INFLUENCE OF TRADITIONAL MUSLIM BELIEFS ON MEDIEVAL RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

## A STUDY OF THE BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK PERIOD

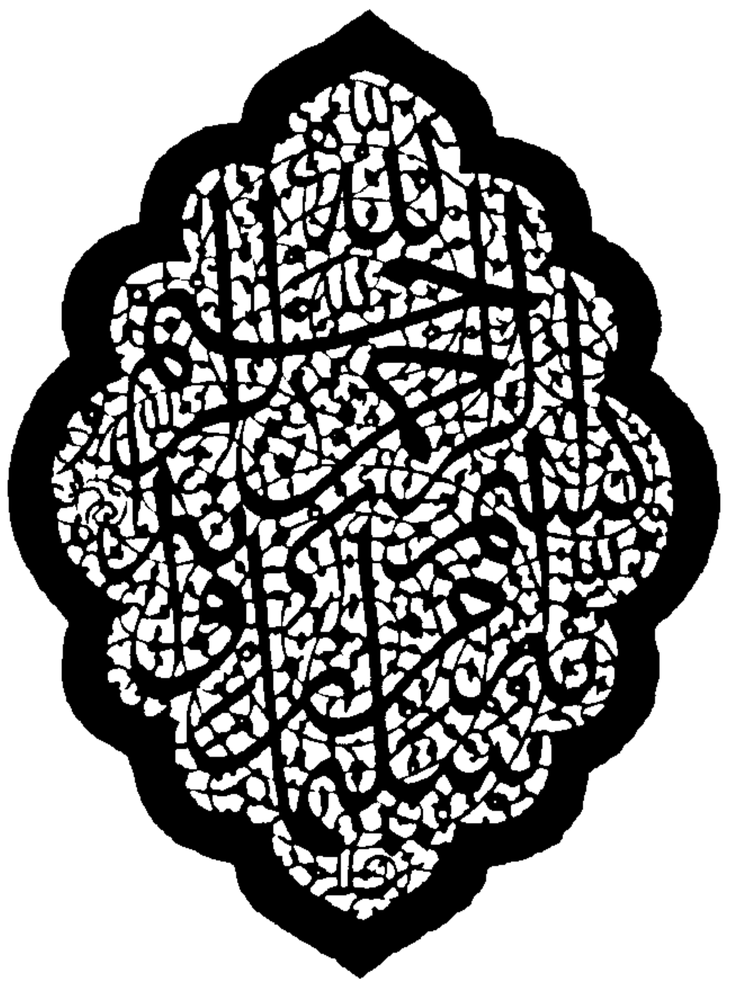
**Aly Hatem Gabr**

Ph.D Thesis

Department of Architecture
University of Edinburgh

1992

EX LIBRIS UNIV. EDINBURGH.



**IN THE NAME OF GOD THE MOST MERCIFUL**

**AND COMPASSIONATE**

***"He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward; and He is the Knower of all things."***

Qur'ān: (57/3).

## DECLARATION

This thesis has been composed by myself and is my original work.

Aly Hatem Gabr

Part of Chapter Ten has been published in: Emily Lyle (ed.), ***Sacred Architecture in the Tradition of China, India, Judaism, and Islam***, Cosmos 8, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1992. The paper is entitled: "The Madrasa of Sulṭān Ḥassan, Cairo: A Cosmological Interpretation".

# ABSTRACT

Mamlūk medieval religious architecture was designed and built through a process which involved a deep knowledge of Śūfism, the inner dimension of Islam. Through the symbolism implicit in this process, the external, limited, and sensible forms of these buildings carried within themselves inner transcendental qualities. This thesis adopts the traditionalist approach which has its foundation in objective truth based on Islamic metaphysical interpretations. This approach is applied to reach the symbolism of medieval religious buildings, focusing specifically on the Baḥri Mamlūk period in Cairo as a case study. The need for such a study is twofold: firstly, to know the truth about the intent and design process of the medieval Mamlūk tradition; and secondly, to see if it is possible to formulate new guidelines for contemporary architects to use in today's mosque designs.

Medieval historical sources emphasize that the Mamlūk society had its roots in Śūfī thought. Sultāns, *emīrs*, scientists, intellectuals, the common people, and even some of the *'ulamā'*, respected and participated in Śūfī rites. The hypothesis behind this study is that the Śūfī thought which pervaded Mamlūk society at large must have influenced the craftsmen who produced artifacts, particularly the sacred ones.

A purely historical approach is used to introduce the buildings of the case study. This immediately raises several queries that have either been answered inadequately, or remain unanswered within a stylistic and historical approach; this shows the limitations of its scope of interpretation. By adopting the traditionalist approach it is possible to re-create the traditional Mamlūk context applying both exoteric and esoteric dimensions of interpretation to these buildings. The context consists of both the setting and the design and building processes involved in creating a traditional product, as well as the traditional view of the relationship between the Śūfī masters, the Śūfī craftsmen, and the general craftsmen who were not necessarily Śūfīs. It is here that the relation between the symbol and the act of "creation" of traditional forms is revealed from a Śūfī point of view to imitate the process of Divine Creation. This line of argument is adopted and applied to the different notions of architectural form which are in turn analyzed from a traditional viewpoint.

Subsequently, specific architectural analyses reveal several layers of understanding in the symbolism of traditional religious buildings: the level of the elements, the level of the relationships which incorporates several elements visually and results in a second layer of symbolism, the temporal level through the sequence of spaces of a building which gives yet a further dimension to this wholistic system of symbolism. Baḥri Mamlūk cases are analyzed at these three levels, and the results confirm the value of the methodology adopted in this thesis. The findings bring about a more vivid picture of how and why a traditional member of the society designed and used these buildings down to their constituents. It is at this level where architect, craftsman, and user are unified in their relations to the traditional artefact that the symbol of unity is found to be operative.

The thesis ends in a general review of how a traditional prototype would have been created in the Baḥri Mamlūk period. The benefits of adopting the traditionalist approach in order to re-create a lost tradition are then discussed. This is followed by a review of the basic differences between the modern and traditional processes, which sheds light on the extent of our contemporary displacement from our traditional past. The question of the relevance of this study to the contemporary situation is raised. It is here that it becomes evident that there can be no return to traditional principles while living in a modernistic society governed by modern values. The suggestion that is set forth is that there must neither be a faked tradition nor a faked modernity. If the contemporary architect is to make use of such traditional findings and symbolisms, he must first adapt his method of form-creation by learning from the principles of the traditional process so as to be able to reuse them to fit the society's contemporary needs and using the means of today.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, praise and thanks be to God the Almighty that the achievement of this study has been made possible.

The basic theme of this thesis originated in October 1985 during the preliminary course work for my Masters degree with the stimulating discussions I had with my adviser and friend, Dr. Abdelhalim Ibrahim in Cairo University about the importance of understanding the truth about traditional Muslim architecture. That same year, I chose the Mamlūk *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan as a case-study to demonstrate our traditional heritage. After several visits to this complex, I realized that the beauty of this building stemmed from its sheer simplicity which struck me whole-heartedly. It was with these overwhelming feelings that I knew that I should spend several months studying the architecture of this period. Today, six years later, I realize that what I have found and written in this thesis is merely the *debut* of what will be a lifetime's work.

Throughout the period of this research, I have been helped by many people who have presented invaluable assistance through one way or another. There is firstly Professor C.B. Wilson who supervised this thesis with a great interest and enthusiasm to say but the least. His criticisms and remarks have been very educational, and have enabled me to strengthen my argument. I would like to thank him for the books and papers that he has provided me with throughout the course of the research. It was through his sincerity that I managed to keep the on-going momentum of the work. I wish to take this opportunity to extend the deepest and warmest of my regards and appreciation to him.

I also wish to extend my thanks to Dr. Deborah Howard for her co-supervision during 1990 and 1991 and for the valuable advice she gave me. It has been a distinct privilege to work with the guidance of both supervisors. I would also like to add that I have enjoyed and greatly profited from my association with other members of staff of the Department of Architecture of Edinburgh University such as Martin Birkhans, Dr. Ian Boyd Whyte, and Fiona and Ewen McLachlan. It is at this University and in this department to be precise that my ideas found a home.

During the field-work and survey of the mosques in Cairo, I was assisted by a number of colleagues, friends, and members of staff in the Islamic department in the American University in Cairo. Most special thanks however are due to my friend Amr el-Meliegy and my colleague Hussein Asaad for their help in surveying, and to Dr. Laila Ali Ibrahim and Dr. Chahinda Karim for the material they provided me with.

It would not be just to end this acknowledgment without making grateful appreciation to those who have financially supported my stay: in Edinburgh having been assisted by an O.R.S. award and a studentship for three consecutive years without which I would not have been able to complete my work; in Cairo having been granted a leave-of-absence for almost four years from the department of Architecture, Cairo University.

I extend my deep gratitude to Mrs Margaret Irwin and Mrs Roberts for the help they gave me throughout my stay in Edinburgh in the Department of Architecture. I would also like to thank Jill Evans and other members of the inter-library loan staff of Edinburgh University for the material they provided in relation to my research. Special thanks also go to the librarians of the Creswell Collection in the American University in Cairo. I would also wish to thank all those who helped me in the special collection and manuscript section of the Asad National Library in Damascus who allowed me to have access to rare and unpublished documents. Thanks are also due to Dr Qasim Towayr deputy of the Antiquity and Tourism Department in Damascus, for the material he provided from his private collection.

I would like to thank all the friends and colleagues who, over the past four years have given me advice and assistance: in particular Sameer Zahr al-Layaly who discussed with me sections of the thesis and framework and gave very insightful remarks. I am also deeply indebted to my friends and colleagues in the Department of Architecture.

Though last not least, to my family in Egypt, I lovingly dedicate this work; I am eternally grateful to them for their encouragement and patience throughout this period and I sincerely hope to find other ways than mere words to show them my gratitude.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS


**ABSTRACT** v
**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** vii
**TABLE OF CONTENTS** ix

INTRODUCTION: xiv
**0.1** Roots of the Problem. xv
**0.2** Aim of the Study. xxiii
**0.3** Organization of the Thesis. xxiv

CHAPTER ONE: **METHODOLOGY: THE HISTORICAL AND TRADITIONALIST APPROACHES** 1
**1.1** Tradition and Traditional Architecture. 1
**1.2** Tradition, Change, and Technology. 7
**1.3** Approaches of Dealing with the Past. 10

CHAPTER TWO: **SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSMITTED TO THE TRADITIONAL BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK SOCIETY** 15
**2.1** The Mamlūk Educational System. 17
**2.2** The Islamic Rational Sciences (*al-'Ulūm al-'Aqliyyah*). 30
**2.3** *Shari'a* Based Sources of Religious Knowledge. 40
**2.4** Ṣūfī Based sources of Religious Knowledge. 52

CHAPTER THREE: **THE BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK SETTING** 80
**3.1** The Establishment of the Mamlūk Regime. 80
**3.2** The End of the Baḥrī Mamlūks (784 A.H., 1381 A.D.). 83
**3.3** The Mamlūk State. 84
**3.4** The Mamlūk Traditional Social Order. 85
**3.5** The Political and Economic Conditions Under the Baḥrī Mamlūks. 89
**3.6** Baḥrī Mamlūk Religious Life. 94
**3.7** The Impact of Mamlūk Religious Belief on the Sacredness of the Mamlūk City. 100

CHAPTER FOUR: **ISLAM, PRAYER, AND THE MOSQUE** 109
**4.1** Islam and Traditional Muslim Man. 109
**4.2** God-Man Relationship in the *Shari'a*. 113
**4.3** Prayer (*Ṣalāh*) in Islam. 116
**4.4** The Ṣūfī Understanding of Prayer. 123
**4.5** The Mosque in the *Sunna*. 127
**4.6** The Mosque of the Prophet in Madina: the Prototype. 132
**4.7** The Mamlūk *Madrasa* and *Khanqah*. 137

CHAPTER FIVE: BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE AND PROBLEMS OF ITS INTERPRETATION 143
5.1 Historical Description of Baḥrī Mamlūk Religious Architecture. 144
5.1.1 The Congregational Mosque Type. 145
5.1.2 The *Madrasa* and Mosque/*Madrasa* Type. 169
5.1.3 The *Khanqah*, *Khanqah/Madrasa*, and *Khanqah*/Mosque Type. 218
5.2 Observations on Religious Baḥrī Mamlūk Architecture and on Limitations of the Historical Approach. 240

CHAPTER SIX: THE EXAMINATION OF THE TRADITIONAL MAMLŪK PROCESSES OF THE PRODUCTION OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE 249
6.1 The Relationship Between Ṣūfism and the Mamlūk "Guilds". 251
6.2 Design and Building Process in the Mamlūk Period. 261
6.2.1 Building regulations. 262
6.2.2 Architectural books and manuals. 264
6.2.2 The architectural design process. 266
6.2.4 The building and construction process. 273
6.3 The Traditional Ṣūfī Craftsman's Understanding of Art. 279

CHAPTER SEVEN:THE REFLECTION OF ṢŪFI BELIEF ON THE TRADITIONAL PROCESS OF "FORM-GIVING" 285
7.1 Sign, Symbol, and the "Creation" of Traditional Forms. 286
7.2 The Centre, Vertical Axis, and Horizontal Orientation. 295
7.2.1 The Centre (The Ka'ba). 295
7.2.2 The Vertical Axis (Cosmic Axis). 301
7.2.3 Horizontal Orientation (The *Qibla*). 306
7.3 Notions of Space, Shape, Surface, and Colour. 308
7.3.1 The Notion of Space. 308
7.3.2 The Notion of Shape. 315
7.3.3 The Notion of Surface. 327
7.3.4 The Notion of Colour. 334

CHAPTER EIGHT: ELEMENTS OF MEDIEVAL TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE 340
8.1 The Portal (*Bāb* or *Bawwābah*). 341
8.2 The Entrance Hall and Offset Corridors (*Majāz*). 345

CHAPTER NINE: THE ANALYSIS OF BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS IN TERMS OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THEIR ELEMENTS
9.1 Baḥrī Mamlūk Cases. 387
9.1.1 Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdarī. 387
9.1.2 Complex of Qalāwūn. 392
9.1.3 *Khanqah* of Baybars al-Jāshankīr. 397
9.1.4 Mosque of al-Naṣir Muḥammad. 402
9.1.5 Mosque of Altinbugha al-Māridānī. 408
9.1.6 Mosque of Aṣlam al-Bahā'i al-Silaḥdār. 413
9.1.7 Mosque of Sheykhū. 417
9.1.8 *Khanqah* of Sheykhū. 421
9.1.9 *Madrasa* of Ṣarghatmish. 426
9.1.10 *Madrasa* of Tatar al-Hijāziyyah. 432
9.1.11 *Madrasa* of Umm al-Sultān Sha'bān. 437
9.1.12 *Madrasa* of Emir Mithqāl. 441
9.2 Relations Between The Elements Of Baḥrī Mamlūk Religious Architecture. 445
9.2.1 The Entrance Relation. 445
9.2.2 The Courtyard Relation. 448
9.2.3 The Prayer Hall Relation. 452
9.2.4 The Mausoleum Relation. 456

CHAPTER TEN: SYNTHESIS: A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF MAMLŪK RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS. A Case Study of the *Madrasa* of Sultān Ḥassan 460
10.1 Introduction. 460
10.2 A Traditionalist Interpretation of the *Madrasa* of Sultān Ḥassan. 462
10.3 Conclusion. 489

CHAPTER ELEVEN: CONCLUSION AND PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH 492
11.1 Problems Faced While Reconstructing the Mamlūk Tradition. 492
11.2 The Process of Creation of a Traditional Sacred Model. 494
11.3 Benefits of the Traditionalist Approach Vs. the Purely Historical. 503
11.4 Relevance to Contemporary Mosque Architecture. 504
11.5 Suggestions for Further Work. 508

BIBLIOGRAPHY 510

# SYSTEM OF TRANSLITERATION

| Arabic letters | Transliteration |
|---|---|
| ء | ’ |
| ب | b |
| ت | t |
| ث | th |
| ج | j |
| ح | ḥ |
| خ | kh |
| د | d |
| ذ | dh |
| ر | r |
| ز | z |
| س | s |
| ش | sh |
| ص | ṡ |
| ض | ḍ |
| ط | ṭ |
| ظ | ḍh |
| ع | ‘ |
| غ | gh |
| ف | f |
| ق | q |
| ك | k |
| ل | l |
| م | m |
| ن | n |
| ه | h |
| و | w |
| ي | y |

| Short Vowels | |
|---|---|
| ـَ | a |
| ـُ | u |
| ـِ | i |

| Long vowels | |
|---|---|
| ا/ى | ā |
| و | ū |
| ي | ī |

| Diphthongs | |
|---|---|
| ـَـ و | aw |
| ـَـ ي | ay |
| ـِـ | iyy |
| و | uww |

## QUR'ĀNIC CITATIONS

All verses quoted from the Holy Qur'ān in the thesis are from the translation by A. Yusuf Ali - unless stated otherwise in a footnote. For the Qur'ānic citations, the *sūra* number is given first, followed by a stroke and the verse number(s).

For example, Qur'ān: 23/34-36 means that these Qur'ānic verses are the translation of A. Yusuf Ali from *sūra* 23, and the verses are 34 to 36.

## DATING

The method of dating followed in this thesis incorporates the *Hijrī* date A.H. followed by the Roman Calender date A.D. between brackets. In some cases, only one of the two dates is used; this is due to the absence of information on the lunar month, which if approximated in the *Hijrī* calender, may result in misleading conversions.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

All photographs and illustrations incorporated in the text of this thesis are the author's, except when stated otherwise. Where plans have been redrawn, corrected, or edited, the word *After* followed by the name of the author or source (in cases Department of Antiquities or other organizations) is added between brackets after the caption.

## REFERENCES

The full reference is written only the first time it appears in each chapter, this is followed by the standard *ibid.* and *op cit.* system of referencing.

Int. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

# INTRODUCTION

In our time, traditional architecture is constantly undervalued, not least by architects themselves. It is enough to pass through the streets of Cairo today to see that there is an architectural identity crisis. My argument is that this is a threatening and damaging tendency which must be reversed: it is threatening in the sense that the society is getting used to architectural forms that have nothing to do with their tradition, and dangerous to the urban profile as a whole. Architectural critics of today[1], have in their own individual ways, warned against the total freedom of modernism in architectural thought. They have emphasized the fact that modernistic theories should not be means of experimentation on the society to reach solutions to present day architectural problems. Evidence of this architectural crisis may be found in Egyptian architecture produced in the last two centuries, where impersonal and alien examples are common-place. Casual observation demonstrates that a break from the tradition has led to the loss of local architectural character.

For nearly a century, there has been a growing feeling in the Egyptian society of the need of something besides what our own period can provide us with. Throughout this period, some architects have looked at the possibility of a return to tradition - in some form or other - as the only available means of escaping from the present crisis. This has been manifested in external copying from past examples rather than understanding the processes through which such a tradition has produced such buildings. At present, this outlook of difference in interpretation and approach is far from being understood by either the designers or the general public.

In this thesis, the term "tradition" or "traditional" will be used to denote a society that is dependant on religion and revelation in its way of life, in the sense that it is imbued with a sacred dimension. This sacredness and the centrality of religion to such a traditional society gives it its cohesiveness and homogeneity, as well as its laws and values. Because it is not dependent on rational quantitative logic alone, it carries within it a non-physical dimension

---

[1] Such critics in the Middle-East are: the late Ḥassan Fatḥī, Dr. 'Abdel-Ḥalīm Ibrāhīm, Dr. 'Abdel-Bāqī Ibrāhīm, Dr. Al-Rimālī, Rāsim Badrān, and 'Abdel-Wāḥid al-Wakīl; in the West such as Brent C. Brolin, Suzi Gablik, and P. Blake.

which will be termed either spiritual or psycho-spiritual. On the other hand, the term "modern" or "modernistic" will be used to denote the breaking away from traditional continuity; it has its origin in the Renaissance period. Modernism as referred to here, is dependent on rational, empirically determined science as opposed to traditional science which is based on both qualitative as well as quantitative dimensions. Religion does not form the core in modern society. In the Egyptian case, we have been cut off from our tradition beginning from the eighteenth-century A.D. accompanying the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt in 1798. Although the French occupation of Egypt lasted only three years, it marked a turning point in the history of the country and its effects were enduring. The most important of these effects was the introduction of traditional Egypt to modernism.

## 0.1 ROOTS OF THE PROBLEM

In the past two centuries, the Egyptians' trend of copying from western culture has demonstrably failed to be the key to solving our present cultural crisis; more so, when this copying has extended to religious buildings which share nothing with that western culture. Evidence shows that wherever modernistic architectural and planning ideals have been introduced, a disintegration of the traditional socio-cultural, and symbolic values has taken place. Western architectural principles have taken over the traditional ones partly because modern architects have imposed their values on the public, and partly because the society desires to express the surface glitter and technical progress of this age - for its own sake or for other matters such as status. The proposals of such an architecture, which has impregnated our culture as a language of form, assume it to be the outcome of a rational approach to design with new materials and techniques. The user is told that these new forms, devoid of tradition and heritage, are "functional" or "economical" or determined by new materials and techniques, and from that viewpoint it is "inevitable" to use them.

The introduction of such ideas into the traditional profile of cities, has resulted in the disintegration of the value system which holds the culture together. The rejection of traditional behaviour patterns and beliefs were implicit in the modern designers' rejection of traditional architecture forms. This is obviously due to the fact that traditional and modern values are opposed. The spiritual loss that has resulted from the onset of modernity is real, and our society has sensed it. Evidence of this is seen in many projects designed in the traditional "style" in the last two decades by clients who have the luxury of choice.

The problem is compounded by the conviction held by the modern architect that the general public's opinion is in accordance with his individual taste. But then we know that there are significant differences between the ways different individuals use and perceive the buildings they encounter. In traditional societies, these differences of perception were accommodated because taste was not individualistic but shared by the whole society as it was based on the value system of the tradition itself. By denying socio-cultural, traditional and spiritual continuity, the architect has failed to recognize and accommodate these differences in perception. Thus, contemporary architects have usually placed the blame for lack of popular acceptance of their modernistic styles on public ignorance of beauty and functional requirements of the up-to-date "spirit of the times" (what modernists call in Arabic *rūḥ al-'aṣr*). It is interesting to note that this "spirit of the times" is a subjective man-decided "spirit" as opposed to the traditional understanding of "Spirit" which is essentially Divine. Modern architects do not see that it is a matter of their own failure to recognize that their ideals have seldom coincided with the accepted symbols and values of the public - assuming they will catch up eventually.[1]

By comparing traditional and modern forms of art, one can easily arrive to the specific phenomenological differences between the two. While traditional art is subtle, mostly produced by an anonymous artist, modern art is flamboyant, and fame-seeking. Traditional art is part of the whole process of life and daily experience of the society, while most modern art is an asset that only some privileged few can experience - made for the elite rather than the entire public. The a-historicity of the traditional process of art gives it the quality of continuity and stability rather than the innovative pluralism of modernism which seems to reflect the sign of today and the future. Traditional art aims at reflecting authenticity, and leads into integration - to the Truth - which is considered "good" art, while on the other hand the pluralistic tendencies of the modern is considered "bad" from the traditional viewpoint as it can encourage neurosis as a means to achieve novelty, power, impact, ... etc.[2] From this brief comparison, it is evident that traditional art can have a therapeutic and spiritual role, contrary to modern art which cannot because it does not have the means to provide for that role.

---

[1] This exactly corresponds to all contemporary *avant garde* "artists" who see themselves as the leaders of "taste".

[2] Such qualities are much easier to achieve with disintegrative art.

Following the well-known saying: "as within so without", the imbalanced state of our contemporary art and architecture reflects the very nature of the problem: that modern man is mostly in a general state of imbalance. Gulzar Haidar, René Guénon, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, who share traditionalist views, point out the ailments of the modern Muslim architect[1] - he is considered here as a representative of the Muslim society. By pointing them out, we can understand why the modern Muslim architect is unable to bring a therapeutic and spiritual dimension of function to his architecture.

The first ailment is the breakdown of wholeness and unity; in our modern empirical habit of "scientific" analysis we tend to partition a whole into its primary constituents and rarely look back to synthesize what we have partitioned, and so forget what our cause for analysis is. This general loss of the sense of unity and integration of life has directly affected contemporary Muslim architecture. But looking at Islam itself, we find it to be based upon Unity (*Tawḥīd*) which is the means by which the integration of all aspects of human life is fulfilled; and since there is no distinction in Islam between "sacred" and "profane", this unity pervaded the quality of traditional architecture of the medieval city relating all types of architecture to that of the mosque - the Islamic building *par excellence*.

The second ailment is modern man's reduced recognition of the Divine value system. We live today in a world of secular democracy, secular utilitarianism, secular humanism and numerous other secular "isms". By denying a Divine schema within which humanity may find its fulfilment, modern man has left himself to be taken over by the growing spiritual "greyness" that is characterized by our spiritual emptiness. As far as secularization is concerned, the effect of modernism has been to reduce the traditional Islamic conception of *'ilm*, according to which all knowledge, including mathematics is considered sacred, to the conception of science as a purely profane form of knowledge[2]. The traditional architect, who is entitled *mi'mār* (he who builds) or *muhandis* (he who is a geometer, according to the traditional conception of geometry similar to that found in the Pythagorean tradition),

---

[1] For more details, see argument in Gulzar Haider, "Habitat and Values in Islam: A Conceptual Formulation of an Islamic City", in The Touch of Midas, ed. by Ziauddin Sardar, Manchester University Press, London, 1984, Pp.172-173. Also see René Guénon, The Crisis of the Modern World, Luzac and Co., London, 1942. Complementary ideas have been discussed extensively in Chapters One and Two by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1968; and in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islam and the Plight of Modern Man, Longman, London, 1975. Also see Nasr, Traditional Islam in the Modern World, KPI Ltd., London, 1987, Pp.239-250.

[2] See op cit. Guénon, 1942, Pp.61-67. These ideas will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two in this thesis.

becomes transformed into the modern architect, a person who now deals with profane mathematics and engineering techniques divorced from both *ḥikmah* (wisdom in the original traditional sense) and *ḥirfah* (craftsmanship).[1]

A nearly identical process of desacralization has occurred resulting in the limitation of the traditional understanding of "imagination". The imagination of the traditional Muslim was determined by forms and symbols drawn mostly from the Qur'ān; these imbued his soul. Traditionally, the world of imagination was considered to have a cosmic dimension which lay between the material and purely spiritual worlds. It consequently had a reality that served to give human imagination a function above and beyond profane imagination as understood in the modern world.[2] The imagination of the traditional Muslim artist was constantly nourished by the Islamicized cosmic sector of this world, and of course more directly by the Qur'ān. The modern Muslim has been deprived of this celestial sustenance, so that even where there is a degree of creativity on the part of some modernized Muslim architects, the fruit of this creativity has hardly anything to do with Islamic art or architecture.[3] There are of course exceptions, but I speak of the majority and not of isolated cases.

The third ailment, is the narrowing of the Islamic tradition to include only the principles of human action as embodied in the *Sharī'a* (Islamic Divine Law), not the principles of wisdom (*ḥikmah*).[4] It is not possible to deal here with the how and why of the spread of the puritanical, rationalistic movements[5], and the reason for their indifference to Islamic art and architecture. What is important for the present discussion is that these movements, in their attempt to revive the *Sharī'a* and the practices associated with daily life, have for the most part ignored the arts and the metaphysical and philosophical principles underlying them. At best, God is remembered as Truth - at least on a certain level - but He

---

[1] op cit. Nasr, 1987, p.229.

[2] Ibn 'Arabī the medieval Ṣūfī refers in his work to this imagination speaking of its creative power. It is translated as *mundas imaginalis* to prevent the confusion with the modern term "imagination". See Henry Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi, trans. from the French by Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series XCI, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1969.

[3] op cit. Nasr, 1987. p.230. We will see in Chapters Seven and Eight that symbolism in Mamlūk architecture was basically reliant on its cosmology as interpreted through Ṣūfism.

[4] ibid., Pp. 228-229.

[5] Sometimes called "reformist movements" and are associated with groups like the *Wahhābiyyah* in Saudi Arabia, and the *Ikhwān al-Muslimīn* in Egypt. See Morroe Berger, Islam in Egypt Today: Social and Political Aspects of Popular Religion, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970.

is forgotten as Presence. Thus, beauty becomes incidental and the Islamic character of architecture is of total inconsequence. What matters to the Muslim architect is that the new city development has a mosque or two somewhere. It matters little if they look like sports-centres or conference halls. These factors alienate the Muslim from those aspects of the Islamic tradition which bear most directly upon art and architecture; that is, the wisdom always associated with Islamic esotericism (*bāṭiniyyah*) and the cosmology which issues from it, and the principles governing Islamic art and architecture.

In traditional Muslim art, beauty is symbolically considered to be a reflection of the Divine Beauty: as the famous Prophetic *ḥadīth* asserts, "*God is Beautiful and He loves beauty.*"[1] Moreover, beauty is an intrinsic dimension of the Truth and its manifestations, and it is therefore a necessary component of every legitimate artistic creation. Islam never separates beauty from utility, or art from the process of making. The change of sensibility due to modernization has caused many Muslims to lose their inner sense of beauty, dignity, harmony and nobility, which characterizes Islamic art as indeed it does all authentic manifestations of the spirit. Accordingly, the Islamic traditional society viewed the role of the arts to be a tool to help the human being master his inner confusions by enriching his cognitive imaginative experience, and consequently, architecture as the most public and indeed inescapable of the arts, was seen to have a high psycho-spiritual and therapeutic potential.

Today, the absence of a well-developed contemporary language of architecture form, understood both by architect and user and capable of reconciling the high technical demands of the building program is unlikely to contain these dimensions at all. Looking at contemporary mosques - and I refer to religious buildings as being the most obvious to include the need of traditionally inherited values, symbols, universal canons of aesthetics and spatial order - we find that such a language can hardly be said to exist. It might have evolved naturally, in step with the technical developments of the last hundred years, but this possibility was excluded by modernism's rejection of historical stereotypes which left a void which has hardly begun to fill. One of the dangers of this time is that under the pressure of the need for more building, the void will be filled not by a language in the full sense constantly developing and adapting to fine shades of outer and inner modes of expression, but by a *code*, a limited, and external sign system. (Figs. 0.1 & 0.2) By its nature, such a code

---

[1] "*Inna Allāha Jamīlun yuḥibbu al-jāmāl.*" These ideas will be discussed in Chapter Six.

is individualistic and is ill-adapted to the responsibility of communicating a widespread societal vision and thus, of discharging the therapeutic and spiritual function of art and architecture.

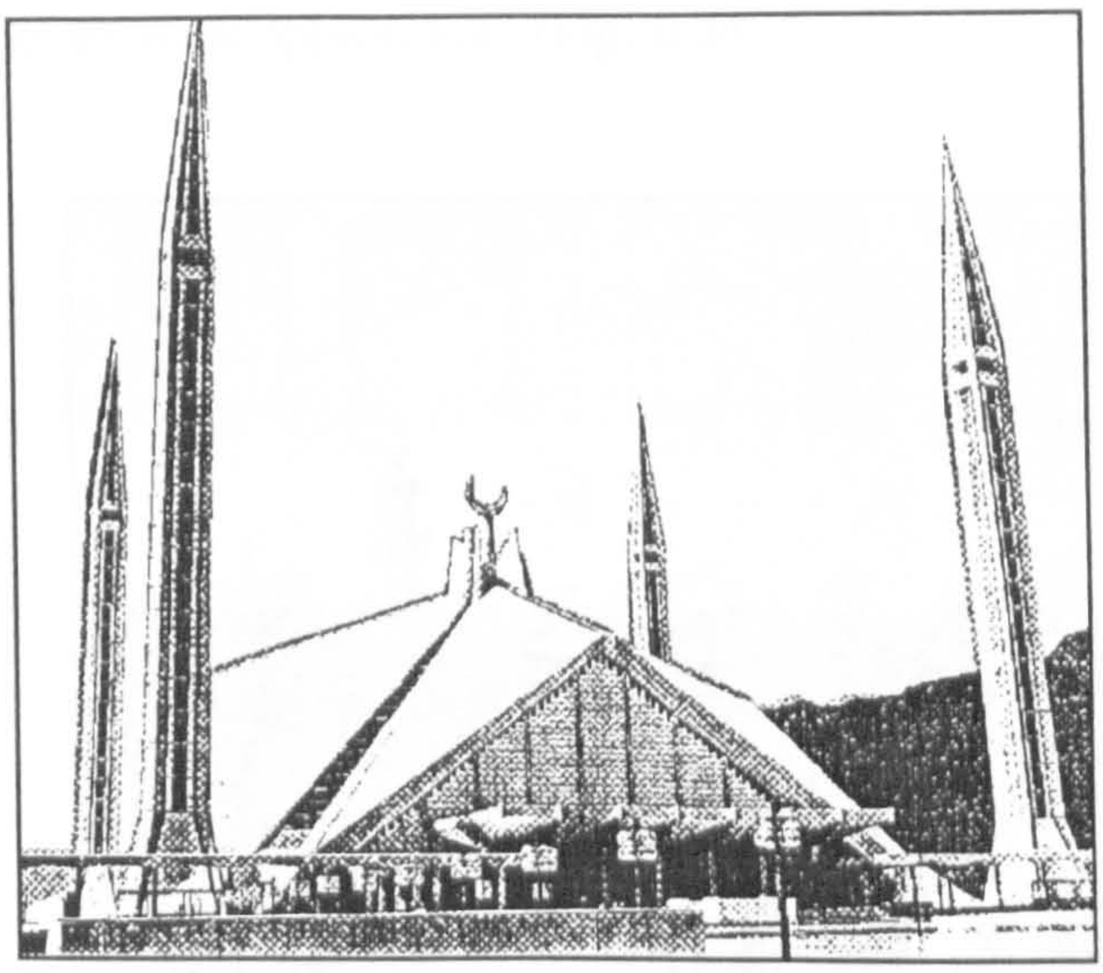


**Figure 0.1** The Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, Pakistan is considered from the modern point of view one of the "best" examples of contemporary mosque architecture.

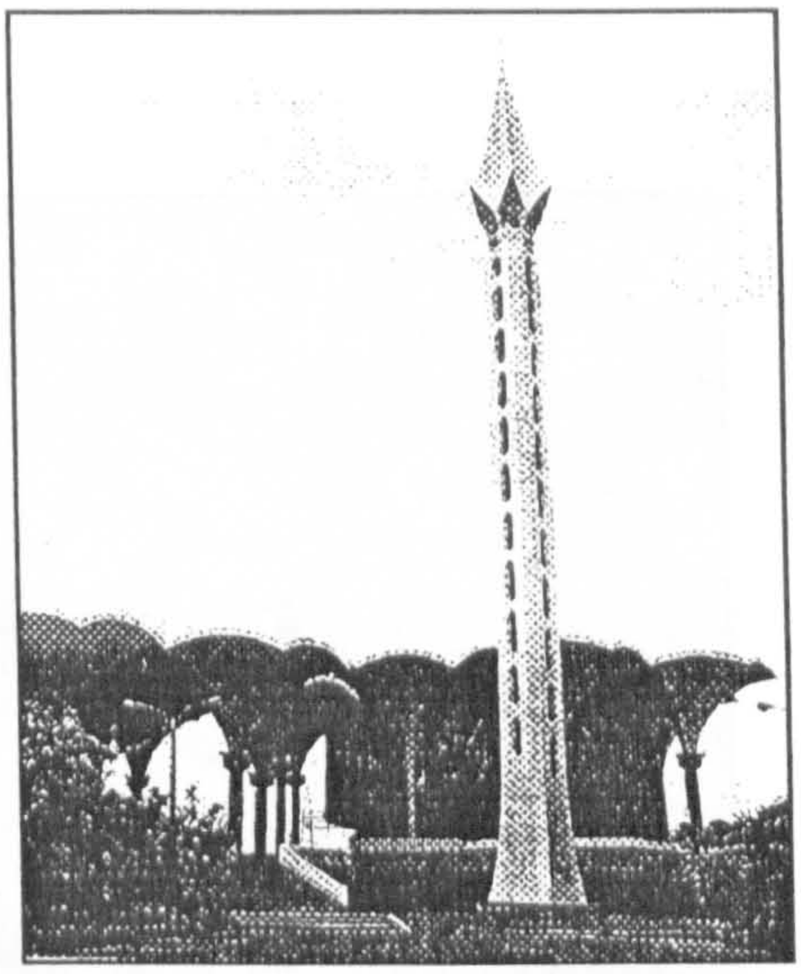


**Figure 0.2** The Central Mosque of Bangkok, Thailand is another example of a contemporary mosque inspired by the modern movement.

These arguments appear to be leading to a discouraging and unwelcome conclusion: if we are about to experience a deeply disturbing metamorphosis; and if survival in the crudest literal sense is to depend on our ability to adapt to it; and if that ability depends on the liveliness of our cognitive and imaginative abilities; and if it is the function of the arts to keep these abilities alive and at full stretch; and if we cannot count on architecture - architecture as a social act is the most public and accessible of the arts - to carry out this function; then the outlook is very grave.

In the face of this gap in the continuity of the Egyptian tradition, all sorts of "remedies" have been proposed. In the turn of the century, there was a statesmanlike attempt to restore the identity of Egyptian architecture - at least in governmental projects - during the time that ʻOthmān Muḥarram Pasha was the Minister of Public Works, who suggested that the architectural character of Egypt should be divided into two: Upper Egypt should bear and develop the traditional Pharaonic style, while Lower Egypt should adopt the Islamic style. Mosques were to obviously follow the Islamic style[1] (the medieval Mamlūk style was mostly chosen for its rich vocabulary and superior craftsmanship).

---

[1] Even this obvious choice is ignored today in favour of modern and post-modern mosques.

The result of this endeavour was the application of Mamlūk "styled" Islamic façades to the designed buildings - which did not follow the Mamlūk "style" in their interiors. An example of this is the Mosque of al-Rifā'ī built in 1906 A.D. by an Italian architect. Its sight, immediately opposite the famous Mamlūk *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan furthermore validated its external appearance. (Fig. 0.3)

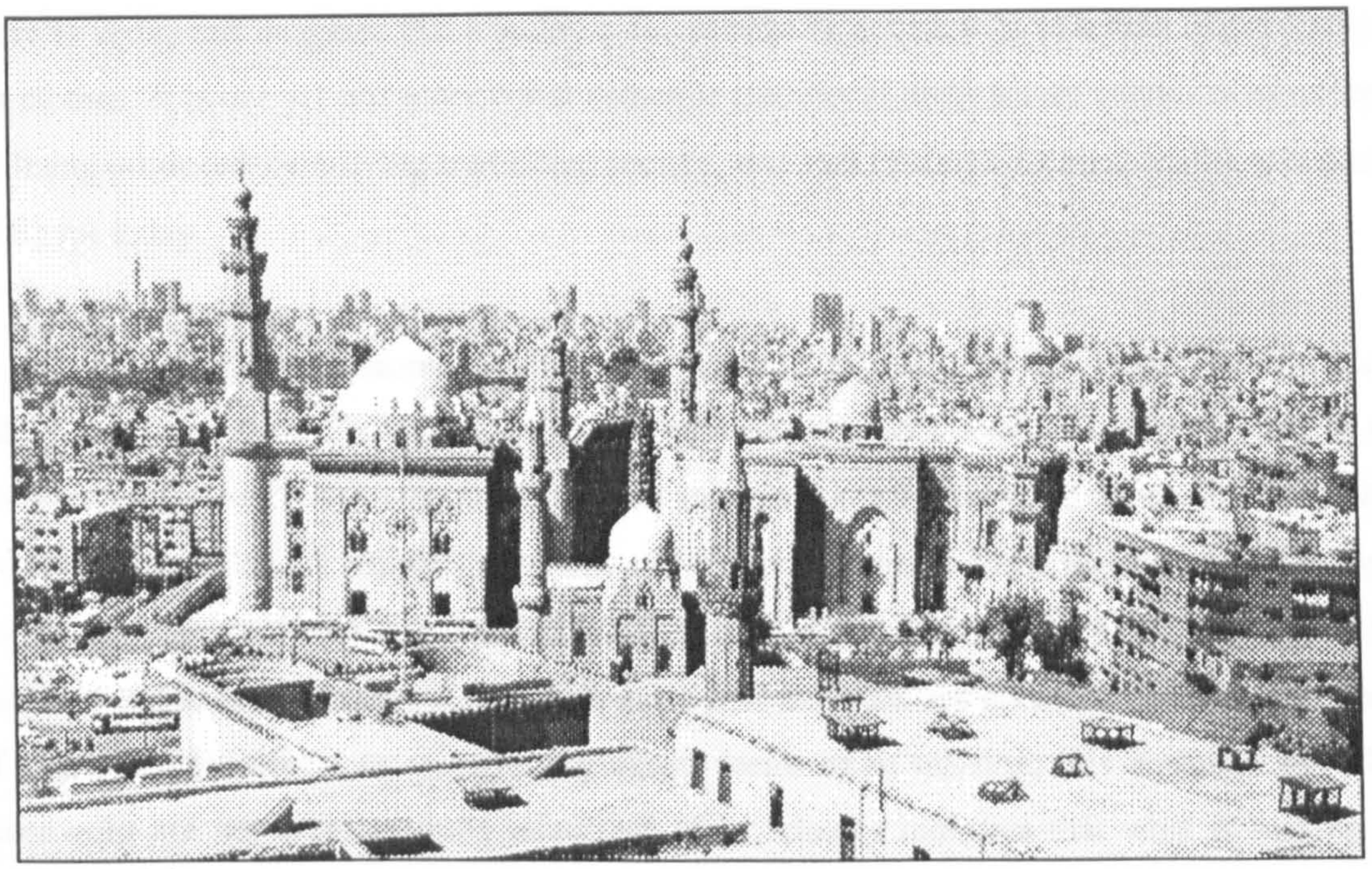


**Figure 0.3** Al-Rifā'i Mosque 1906 A.D. (right) shows a consciousness of external copying. It faces the Mamlūk *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan 1356 A.D. (left).

In the past decade, nearly a century later, with the overgrowing concern with the problem of identity, some contemporary architects in Egypt[1] have taken action by putting their thoughts to the test and applying them to several projects - mostly mosques. Due to their eagerness to arrive to immediate solutions, and more importantly, due to their background in architectural education, they resorted once more to stylistic copying of historical medieval prototypes.

This goes on to show two things: one is the encouraging fact that the Egyptian society throughout the last century has been aware of, and is eager to, remedy the cultural confusion reflected in architecture; the other - not so encouraging - is that this confusion is identified as a problem of *style*, and style is looked upon as some sort of external cosmetic that can be applied to any building and changed if necessary. The modern educated architect believes that

[1] It should not be misunderstood that these problems hold true for Egypt alone; the identity crisis can be sensed all over the Muslim world.

Ancient Egyptian architecture is represented by the temple with its pylons and cavetto cornice, and Muslim architecture by pointed domes and clustered stalactites - i.e., an architecture of appearances and not of content. Our architectural schools, dominated by the historical approach, explain architectural matters of form related to past periods by classifying them in terms of "accidents" of style[1] - the obvious features of which are such as the pylon and stalactites. Thus, the graduate architect who goes to practice *believes* that there is nothing more to style, and imagines that a building can change its appearance as a man might change his clothes. It is not yet understood that authentic traditional architecture cannot exist except by being produced by a living traditional society, and that this architectural tradition is dead in Egypt today.

Examining the outcome of this stylistic external copying, we find these contemporary mosques to be partial images of the past executed in a poor craftsmanship. If one is to compare one's feeling in a traditional mosque and in a contemporary one which is supposedly a copy, we find that the authentic one will still stir in us stronger inner feelings. Even though we do not understand the intent and symbolism of traditional architecture, we respond to its qualities and seek it. Somehow, although these new mosques are meant to be representations of traditional buildings, an essential ingredient seems to be missing; this is sensed even by those who are not architecturally educated[2] which clearly indicates that what is lacking is sensed through intuition and must lie in the domain of the Universal. We will see in Chapters Eight, Nine, and Ten that this missing ingredient is nothing other than spirituality: that which was never included in modern architecture.

It appears evident that by simply understanding traditional Mamlūk religious architecture through a stylistic approach, we can only achieve its partial understanding (its external dimension so to speak) that is neither fulfilling to the user, nor reflecting the truth of that which is copied. My hypothesis is that we should look for that which goes beyond the physical form of traditional religious architecture; that is to say, the inherent symbolic meaning resulting from the traditional process of creation which echoes the Truth by reflecting the Universal archetypes.

---

[1] This point will be further pursued in Chapter Six, when comparing architectural perception of traditional and modern architecture.

[2] This point deserves attention, because the way we are educated and "taught" to visualize and criticize can have a bias effect on our judgements.

## 0.2 AIM OF THE STUDY

The main goal of this thesis is to reach a broad understanding of the truth in the symbolism of traditional religious buildings in the medieval period in Egypt - rather than the stylistic influences that led to them. The study will be carried out specifically on the Baḥri Mamlūk period in Cairo (648-784 A.H., 1250-1383 A.D.) and will be primarily concerned with Śūfi influences connected to it. This symbolism can be referred to as the inner spiritual meaning and expressive intention beyond the external physical forms of this architecture. In the traditional sense, a true understanding can only be reached when we arrive to the external (utilitarian) and internal (spiritual) dimensions of function. The forthcoming objectives of this research are the main steps to achieve the final goal:

- To propose an appropriate approach to examine these traditional buildings and to test its validity.
- To understand the traditional Islamic sciences and other sources of knowledge from a traditional point of view rather than through modern empirical eyes.
- To find the relationship between the traditional Mamlūk system of apprenticeship (whether formal or informal), and the Śūfi orders, and their involvement with the Mamlūk traditional educational system.
- To identify some of the problems of interpretation when following a purely historical approach.
- To re-create the traditional design and building processes to enable us to reach a deeper understanding of the centrality of Unity (*Tawḥīd*) in regard to religious architecture.
- To find the general symbolic framework behind the creation of traditional forms - i.e. elements and relations incorporated in Mamlūk religious buildings.

Such findings are vital to overcome limitations of interpretation resulting from the purely historical and stylistic approach and will reveal the symbolic and spiritual dimensions inherent in the traditional forms. Accordingly, when such findings become understood by both user and designer, then the traditional creative process can be evaluated to see the possibility of their usage in contemporary mosque designs - or at least to produce evidence to the contemporary architect in the Muslim world of the extent of his displacement from his own traditional cultural heritage.

## 0.3 ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

In order to achieve the aims of the study, the thesis is organized in eleven chapters: Chapter One deals with the meaning of tradition and traditional architecture as well as the methodology of the historical and traditionalist approaches. In Chapter Two the question of Islamic sources of knowledge that were transmitted to the Mamlūk society is considered. The traditional Mamlūk educational system is first described; followed by a brief discussion dealing with the nature of these sources of knowledge which are divided into scientific and religious categories. This discussion leads to the basic differences in the understanding of the sciences in traditional times to engulf both qualitative as well as quantitative dimensions. It is also here that Ṡūfism, the esoteric dimension of Islam, is revealed to have been prevalent in Egyptian medieval times, and inter-connected to the life of the society.

Chapter Three introduces the Mamlūk setting. Aspects of the Mamlūk context are discussed in a broad sense from the political, economical, and religious points of view. The religious life described here shows how the *'ulamā'* and the Ṡūfi *shaykhs* had come to accept and respect one another in the Mamlūk period. This chapter ends with a view of the Mamlūk city with special emphasis on the role of the mosque in relation to the urban setting of medieval Cairo. The next Chapter deals with prayer and the mosque in Islam. Both the outer and inner meaning of prayer in Islam is discussed here, ending with what the *Sharī'a* has to say in relation to mosque design. This section argues how sacred objects and buildings are simple in both use and form at the beginning of any tradition and why they acquire a certain elaboration and complexity with time. The chapter ends with examples of the *madrasa*, and *khanqah* types prevalent in the Mamlūk period which illustrate the elaboration of uses and forms of the mosque in time.

Chapter Five presents the Baḥri Mamlūk religious buildings from the historical point of view. The typology of these buildings is introduced categorizing them into three groups: mosques, *madrasas*, and *khanqahs*. This provides an exoteric view of the interpretations of such buildings and leads to speculations regarding the intent of some of the architectural elements. Such observations suggest the extent of the limitations of such a purely historical approach. Chapter Six then investigates the traditional processes of design and building, taking the vital role of Ṡūfism in the formation of the Mamlūk guilds into consideration. The nature of the Ṡūfi craftsman as well as the relation between art and craftsmanship is then discussed.

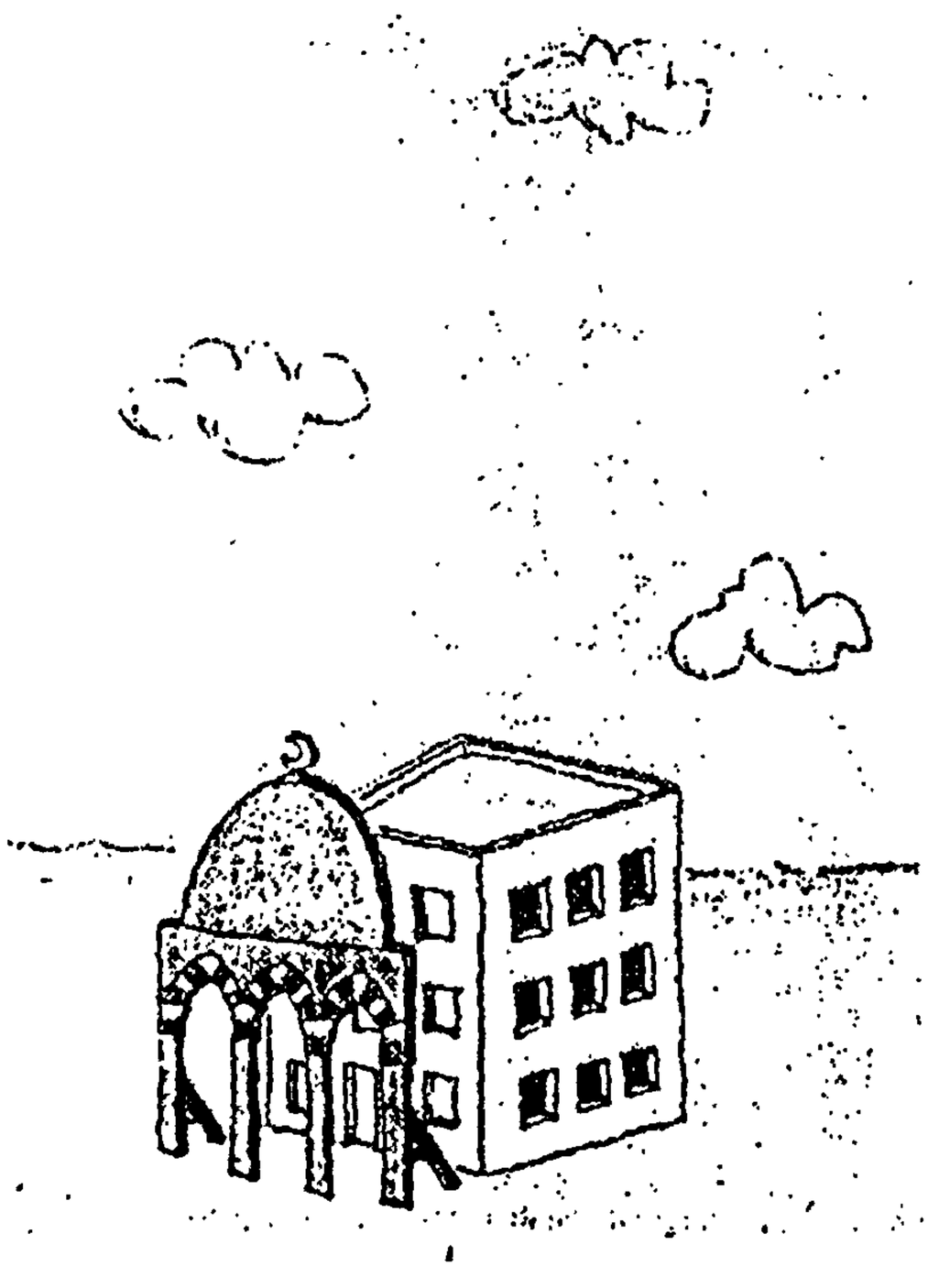
Chapter Seven, forms the theoretical foundation upon which Chapters Eight and Nine are based. It shows how Ṡūfī belief in both inner and outer dimensions were reflected in the medieval process of creating a traditional form. The relationship between a sign, a symbol and the process of traditional creation is argued leading to the three notions of space that are central to the understanding of the Islamic tradition: the centre, horizontal and vertical axis. The traditional notions of space, shape, surface and colour which make up the form of an object are discussed from both their internal qualitative, and external quantitative dimensions.

Based on such understanding, an analysis of the traditional symbolism of the elements incorporated in medieval religious buildings is carried out in Chapter Eight. The findings of this chapter reveal several facets of the symbolism beyond the traditional buildings but fail to explain the whole truth. This is because the analysis of an element in isolation is unrealistic. From this viewpoint, Chapter Nine is introduced: firstly, to apply this symbolism on twelve Baḥri Mamlūk cases thus showing the validity of the approach and confirming the symbolism; and secondly, to formulate four main relationships found in Mamlūk religious buildings. The analysis and understanding of such repetitious relationships which are observed in the Mamlūk religious buildings reveal yet a further dimension of the truth.

Chapter Ten, synthesizes the whole architectural findings of the thesis in terms of a more detailed personal visit to the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan. The visit shows how the parts of the traditional building and the whole are one unity. It also reveals another dimension of the truth: that of the temporal aspect experienced by a visitor through the sequence of spaces of a building rather than by looking at the building statically in plan, section, and elevation.

Chapter Eleven concludes the thesis by answering the questions that were raised earlier in connection to the benefits of the traditionalist approach, and the traditional process of creating a prototype. Furthermore, it sheds light on the relevance of this research to today's contemporary mosque architecture showing how it could aid the designer to produce an architectural vocabulary and language based on the understanding of the past but at the same time being independent from such matters related to materials, technology and know-how. Finally, suggestions for future work are outlined in relation to both traditional as well as contemporary architecture.

Int. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11



# "ISLAMIC" ARCHITECTURE???

# CHAPTER ONE

# METHODOLOGY: THE HISTORICAL AND TRADITIONALIST APPROACHES

## 1.1 TRADITION AND TRADITIONAL ARCHITECTURE

In English the dictionary meaning of tradition is the process of handing down or handing over, derived from the Latin "*tradit*" which is the past participle of "*tradere*": to hand over or to deliver. As such it refers to the action of transmitting or handing down statements, beliefs, rules, motifs, customs, techniques or the like, from one to another, or from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice rather than by writing. Less specifically, it indicates a long-established and generally accepted custom or method of procedure having almost the force of law.[1]

In Arabic there are a number of roots which are understood to convey a similar meaning: *naql* which has a primary meaning of transferral and relocation; *rawy* which has the primary meaning of transmitting and relating; *qald*, in its form of *taqlīd* which conveys the meaning of copying, imitating, and adopting ideas. The root, however, which best renders what concerns us is *ḥaddatha*, in its meaning: to tell, relate, and report by word of mouth. This word is familiar to all Muslims in its form *ḥadīth*, where it refers specifically to sayings and actions of the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) which were handed down from transmittery (*rāwiya*) to transmitter (*muḥaddith*) until finally they were put down in writing.

> ***To speak of tradition is to speak of constant unchanging principles of heavenly origin and of their application to different moments of time and space. It is also to speak of the continuity of certain doctrines and of the***

---

[1] Abdullah Nuridin Durkee, "Tradition and Technology", in Muslim Education Quarterly, vol.4, No.3, Spring Issue, The Islamic Academy, Cambridge, 1987. p.13. For a full definition of the term "tradition" also see Edward Shils, Tradition, Faber and Faber, London, 1981. Pp.12-13.

> ***sacred forms which are the means whereby these doctrines are conveyed to men and whereby the teachings of the tradition are actualized within men.***[1]

Tradition and traditionalism as understood and used by Seyyed Hossein Nasr has been established and shared by a school of writers who include Ananda Coomaraswamy, René Guénon, Henry Corbin, Titus Burckhardt, Frithjof Schuon, and Martin Lings.[2] According to their approach, tradition is not custom or habit; nor is it the temporary style of a passing age; it is continuous and all-embracing and its most essential element is religion. It continues as long as it lives and is lived. C.B. Wilson who has frequently compared traditional and modern societies in order to bring out their differences, explains that the members of a traditional society are implicitly and unconsciously referred to the unifying core that bonds all aspects of that tradition - a value system which governs their lives[3]. This return to the source, is the very essence of each tradition as it leads to integration and unity[4]. What characterizes all traditional societies is a living wide-spread internal sense of the sacred; and even if it ceases to exist outwardly, it does not die completely.

George M. Foster[5] discusses the different aspects of tradition in relation to the society and behavioural matters; he states that "*tradition is learned*" because the behaviour patterns that constitute a specific tradition are not genetically or biologically determined. Every infant has the potential to learn any tradition. Through the process of socialization or acculturation, the child acquires the prevailing beliefs and attitudes appropriate to the social roles he occupies, and the patterns and values of the society into which he is born. But

---

[1] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in Nader Ardalan & Laleh Bakhtiar, The Sense of Unity, The University of Chicago press, London, 1973. p.xi.

[2] For a definition of the traditionalist position and a representative bibliography of those writers, see C.B. Wilson, "On Modernist Reactions to Traditionalist Interpretations of the Art and Architecture of Traditional Societies - Part I", in Edinburgh Architecture Research, vol.17, 1990, Pp. 124-126. In this paper, he discusses the traditionalist approach both in general and in application to a variety of topics.

[3] A more detailed discussion of the value system in traditions will follow below. Also see C.B. Wilson, "The Centre of the World and the Interpretation of Architecture", Edinburgh Architecture Research, vol.11, 1984, Pp.50-59; and by the same author, "Architect and Community: Traditional Processes and Modern Products", 3rd Asian Congress of Architects, Seoul, 1988; published in Bulletin of the Institute of Industrial Science, Keimyung University, Korea, vol.11, 1989, Pp. 227-238.

[4] Unlike modernity which is disintegrative due to its reliance on "originality" in a subjective sense; i.e., personal innovation rather than the traditional meaning which is authenticity.

[5] George M. Foster is specifically interested in the impact of technology on traditions. For more information see Chapters One, Two, and Three in, Traditional Cultures: and the Impact of Technological Change, Harper and Row, New York, 1965.

because the life experiences of no two people are absolutely identical, traditional society produces *similar* traditional products which are not absolutely *uniform*.

Any tradition is a logically integrated, functional, sense-making whole. It is not an accidental collection of customs and habits thrown together by chance. A tradition may be compared to a living organism, in that each of its parts is related in some way to all other parts. Each fulfils a definite function in relation to the others and is essential to the normal functioning of the organism as a whole. Each part, in turn, draws upon all the other parts in some way for its own continued existence, and its growth and development are dependent upon corresponding growth and development in the tradition as a whole. To put the matter another way, each religion (or revelation) on which the tradition is based upon, reflects the dominant values of the total tradition, and the beliefs and activities that constitute religion articulate with other aspects of tradition at numerous points. For instance, social, economic, and juridical phases of a tradition cannot be fully understood without an understanding of religious forms which, in turn, are expressed through physical and spiritual dimensions.

To say that a tradition is a logically integrated functional entity, does not imply that its parts interact in perfect harmony, without stress or strain. In an absolutely static community this might be true. But traditions change, and the parts of a tradition change at different speeds; consequently, perfect integration and perfect fit are impossible. Every tradition, therefore, represents something of a compromise: to attempt striking a balance between the stresses resulting from unequal rates of change, and the forces which work toward continuity and consistency.[1] The importance of an understanding of tradition as a utilitarianly and spiritually functional sense-making whole should be apparent; also, that change in any social phase of a tradition cannot occur without accommodation in those phases that have an impact upon it.

All traditions are constantly changing; no culture is completely static. Although every culture produces inventors and discoverers, who are the ultimate sources of change, no group would progress rapidly if change could come about only through the ingenuity of its own members. As far as a particular society is concerned, its proneness to advancement is the

---

[1] Unlike transformation which is fatal to any tradition. For example, the shift from the Egyptian Pharaonic tradition to the Christian one, occurred after Constantine professed Christianity and Egypt became a Christian province; it was then that the Pharaonic religion which held the core of the tradition came to a complete halt.

result of its members' exposure to the tools, techniques, and ideas of other groups, their readiness to adopt and adapt these new ways and forms according to the rules dictated by their tradition.

It was mentioned earlier in this chapter that every tradition has an inherent value system within it that has its basis in religion. Members of a traditional society, to a greater or lesser extent, react emotionally to their tradition. They are not neutral in their attitude toward most of its elements. They classify the phenomena of their daily life into good and bad, desirable and undesirable, right and wrong categories. The particular way in which they - as individuals - classify, reflects the traditional orientation of the group in which they have been socialized. Toward some things they react strongly, with approval or dissatisfaction. It justifies them in their actions or thoughts and reassures them that they are behaving as their traditional society expects. This value system gives stability to tradition. It can be thought of as a vertical axis leading to the Ultimate Truth; everything must first go back to the Origin in order to "seek approval" and thus, be absorbed in the tradition: this is the process of traditionalization. (Fig. 1.1)

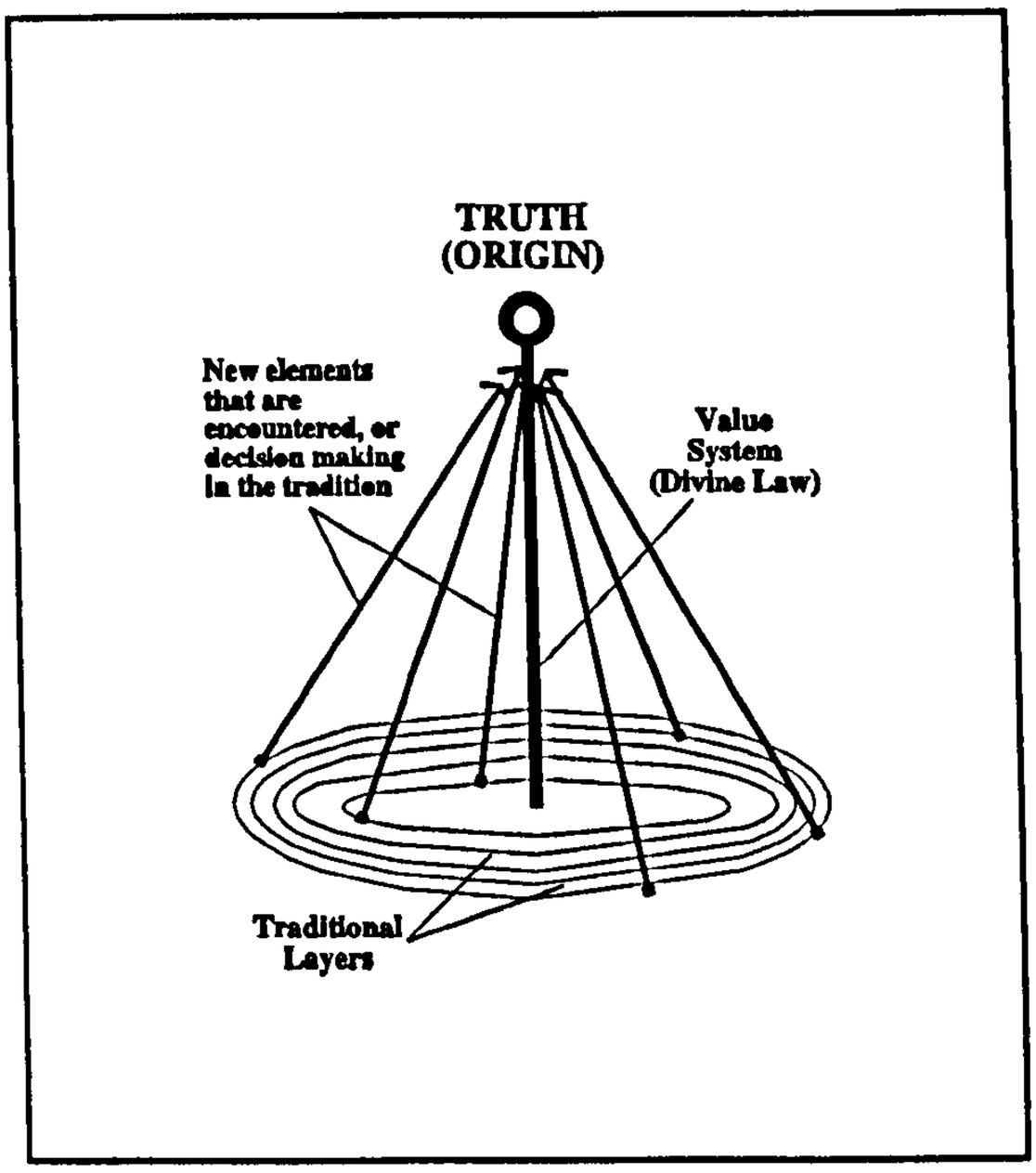



**Figure 1.1** The process of traditionalization: conforming to the Origin through the value system.

The rightness of the traditional way of life is thereby validated. Most individuals find security in conforming to the standards of their tradition's value system. In an analytical sense a value system plays an important role in preserving the society. Values seem to change more slowly than other aspects of tradition. Although this reluctance to change in the face of rapid technological advances often induces serious stresses, this essential conservatism of values serves as a brake on uncontrolled change, usually slowing the process to the point where a society can absorb new elements without threatening its basic structure and unifying core.

Tradition makes possible the largely instinctive interaction between individuals that is a prerequisite to social life. Through language and other symbols, it provides for the communication and understanding that is essential to the ongoing activities of daily living. Tradition may be thought of as a "memory bank" where knowledge is stored, available immediately without conscious effort, to guide the members of the traditional society in the situations in which they routinely find themselves.[1] Tradition also supplies them with the cues that enable them to understand and anticipate the behaviour of other people and to know how to respond to it. Tradition can be likened to a map: if the map is accurate and one can read it, one won't get lost; if one knows a tradition, one will know ones way around in the life of that traditional society.

Tradition as thus understood, is the "guiding idea" of a society and is its inspiring principle. Throughout most of history, tradition has governed every aspect of human life, not least man's artifacts, and has been directly related to the tradition's spiritual principles. Art and architecture are among the most important and direct indications of the principles of the tradition, for man lives in buildings and, in order to be drawn toward the core of the tradition (the transcendent vertical axis, see Fig. 1.1) they must be surrounded by forms that suggest this way of life and the beliefs that govern it.[2] The medieval Muslim tradition represents a good example of a society wherein one can detect the presence of certain unchangeable principles that have dominated the whole civilization in both time and space.

In such a tradition, one of the roles of the "creator"[3] of forms was to keep the tradition going, with his own insight, to give it that catalytic momentum that would save it from coming to a standstill. The traditional architect or craftsman would naturally be relieved of many decisions (by the value system implicit in the tradition), but on the other hand, he would be obliged to make others equally demanding to stop the tradition from dying. In fact, the further a tradition has developed towards its stage of maturity, the more effort the artisan must make to reach a step forward.

---

[1] We will see in Chapter Six that this is what accounts for the mutual understanding between architect, patron and craftsman in a traditional society.

[2] This point will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

[3] We should not confuse between the term "Creator" which lies in the domain of the Divine, and "creator" which is of human capacity (i.e., architect, or craftsman). This point will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Six and Seven.

The important characteristic of Muslim traditional art and architecture is its continuity, variety, and unity based on the accumulation of layers of understanding, one on top of the other, to form a wealthy and endless source of knowledge. This traditional knowledge is formed and matures along the ages[1], and thus, remains the backbone to the process of "creation" of traditional form. Although these patterns are diverse, they are always related to their source and essence - the Truth[2]. The revitalization of any lost tradition is possible through the unfolding and understanding of these successive layers - not through modern eyes but from a traditional viewpoint.

Thus, the meaning of the term "traditional Muslim architecture" becomes evident as the buildings produced by Muslim traditional society. It was learnt and was passed on from one generation to the other through participation and experience. Although the major outline of the rules *implicit* in this tradition were shared by its society, it is not possible to say that all these rules were applicable at all times. It should be noted that reference to *implicit* rather than *explicit* rules differentiates "traditional Islamic architecture" from "historical Islamic architecture"[3] - hence, traditional continuity as opposed to stylistic fashion.

Traditional Islamic architecture is a logically integrated, functional, sense-making whole and not the outcome of a collection of haphazard patterns of building vocabulary that do not relate to an overall scheme. It is functional, not only in the literal sense of utility but involves wholistic functions - such as utilitarian, climatic, social, aesthetic, symbolic, spiritual, cosmological, ...etc. There are no separate and distinct levels of function in it[4], nothing can be separated out to be labelled specifically as "material", or "spiritual". Because traditional Muslim architecture emerged from its essence (the Ultimate Truth), its forms were continuously renewed from within. It was this interiority of the traditional process that linked it to the inner spiritual needs of the medieval Muslims.

---

[1] This could be said too of modern science, but that operates on a totally different level. The principle characteristic of traditional knowledge is that its essence - its source - remains unchanged; modern science on the other hand, lives by a process of throwing out the old source and replacing it by the more "up-to-date".

[2] op cit. Wilson, 1990, Pp. 125, 132.

[3] An externalized architecture as we discussed in the Introductory Chapter; relying on copying elements rather than understanding processes and relationships.

[4] Everything is part of everything else in traditional architecture.

## 1.2 TRADITION, CHANGE AND TECHNOLOGY

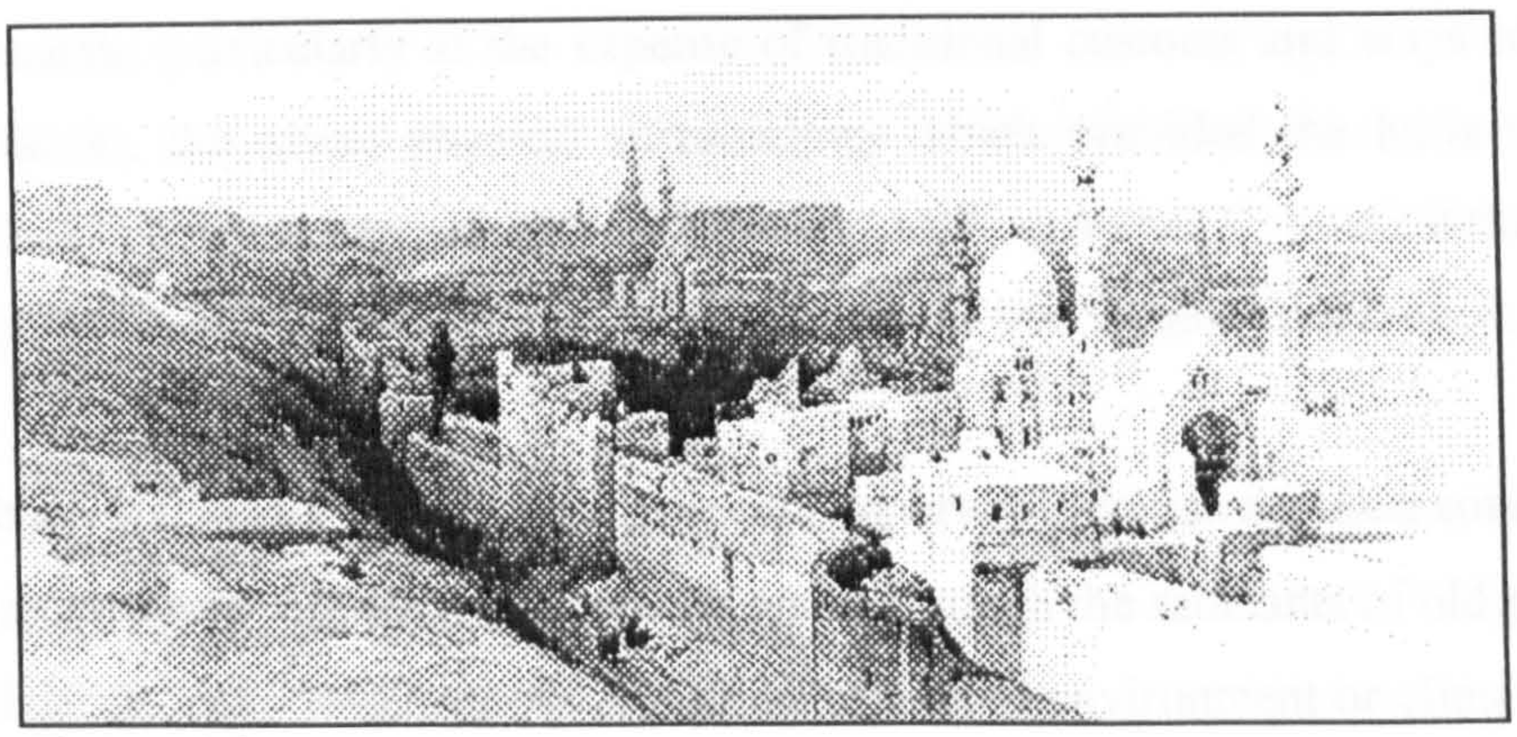


**Figure 1.2** "BEFORE": a view of traditional Cairo looking West as depicted by David Roberts.

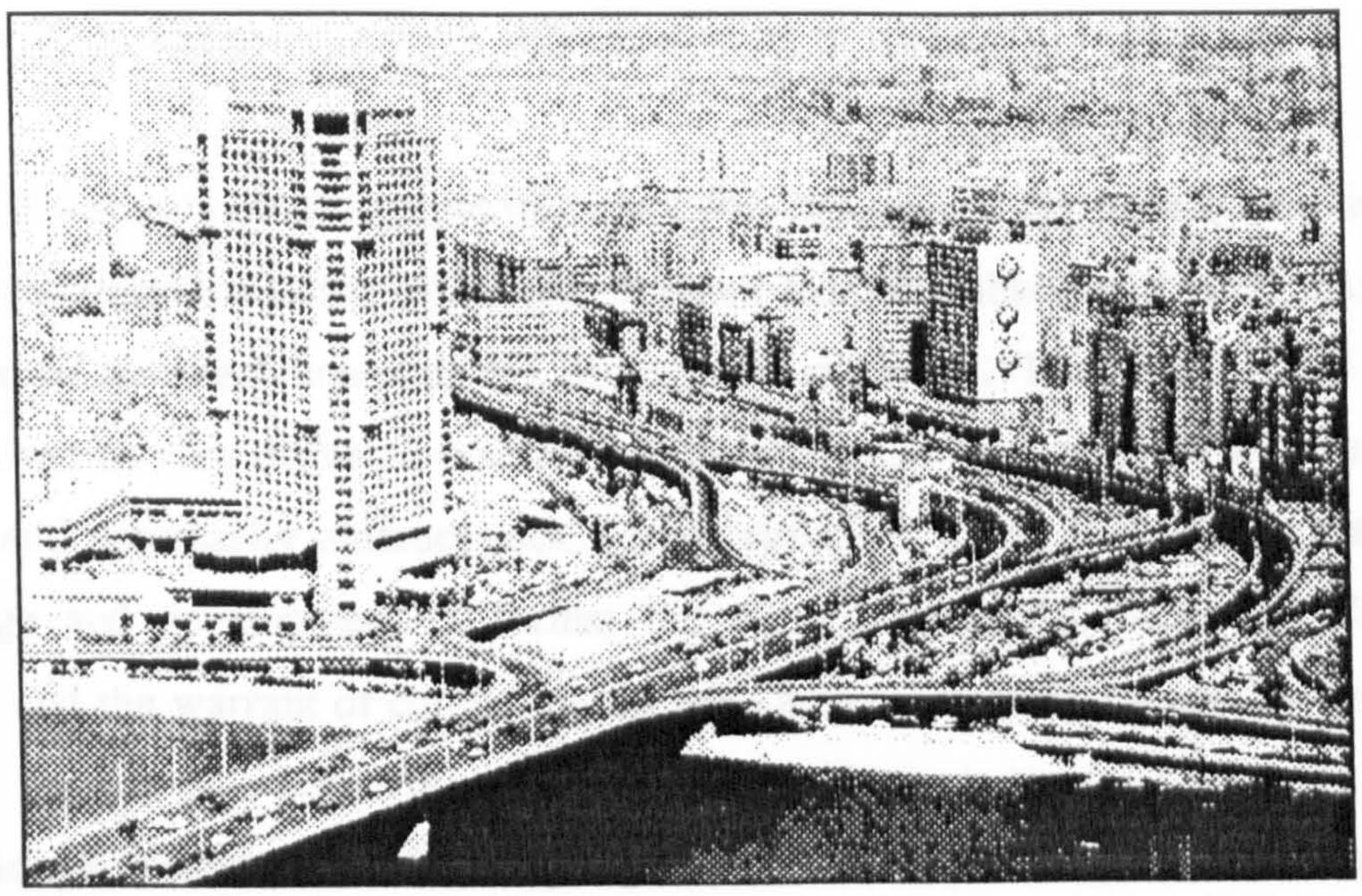


**Figure 1.3** "AFTER": a view of Cairo as seen today showing the loss of our traditional identity.

It is since Napoleon entered Egypt a little over two centuries ago that the wave of modern industrial technology, has engulfed Egypt[1]. We have discussed in the Introduction that the spread of that process has seriously effected our Muslim tradition. The Egyptian society, weak and insecure, willingly began adopting the methods of its conquerors, until it is today hard to tell Cairo from other modernized cities in the Middle-East. As the Egyptians began adopting these methods and new values, they cut themselves off from the remaining links of their tradition that they had heretofore historically maintained. (Figs. 1.2 & 1.3)

---

[1] For a more elaborate discussion on the architectural transformation of Egypt see Abdelhalim I. Abdelhalim, "Transformations in Architecture and Urbanism: Public Projects and Private Initiatives", in Designing in Islamic Cultures 4, "Continuity and Change: Design Strategies for Large-Scale Urban Development", M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, 1984, Pp.43-48.

The Egyptian architectural and human crisis has come about from a transformation of a medieval traditional type of society to an industrial-age society.[1] This change has been abrupt and harsh, particularly at the expense of traditional customs and ways of life. The traditional fabric, the actual physical surroundings which provided the basis of life and livelihood have altered beyond any previously held conceptual possibilities and, in consequence, most of the strongly held traditional ideals and values have eroded.

'Abdel-Wāḥid al-Wakīl[2], a practising contemporary Egyptian architect concerned with traditional architecture, argues that when one walks through the remnants of old parts of any traditional Islamic city - whatever the difference of natural environment or climate - what is immediately apparent is its Islamic identity. He goes on to say that this tangible identity depends not upon uniformity of design or materials but upon the fundamental unity of the traditional society that lived in these cities according to traditional principles.[3]

Al-Wakīl goes on to say that this unity does not depend upon the imposition of some kind of "artistic totalitarianism"; nor does it result from the absence of such changes as the introduction of new techniques or the use of new materials. The long history of Islamic civilization and its very diffusion over different regions and its acceptance by many different peoples would necessarily obstruct such a static situation. There is no doubt that there has been change and development of forms; but more importantly, there has always been continuity, and the warrant of continuity has been adverse to tradition and its disciplines.

> ***Change is intrinsic to all living organisms and institutions; but the anchor of change is continuity safeguarded by tradition. Without this safeguard, change becomes not part of a cyclic progression, but a kind of centrifugal violence that disrupts and fragments the arts, and none more than architecture.***[4]

---

[1] Gülgönen calls it a "morphological crisis". See Ahmet Gülgönen, "A Typo-Morphological Approach to Design Thinking", in a Symposium held by the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies, Cambridge, 1988, p.115.

[2] He is considered to be an "apprentice" of Ḥassan Fatḥī.

[3] 'Abdel-Wāḥid al-Wakīl., "Identity, Tradition and Architecture", in Arab Architecture Past and Present, Arab British Chamber of Commerce, London, 1984, p.26.

[4] ibid., p.26.

Change, sanctioned and protected by tradition, is no more than a gradual movement necessary to sustain vitality; without this movement there is death. But where there is vitality, there is also variety and creativity, not necessarily all at the same level; for even within the scope of tradition there is always a likelihood of "good" and "bad" periods. These rises and falls are also as intrinsic to organisms and institutions as change itself: they are the "signs" of life.

What needs pointing out, is that change is not synonymous with what is today called "progress and technology." Change, sanctioned by tradition, has never destroyed the unity of the Islamic tradition; but the notion of "progress" has destroyed the unity and integrity of Muslim architecture, and has also implied a fake substitute: namely, *uniformity*. This has come about because today, progress and technology are believed to bring about a better way of life as time moves on[1] - implying a progress as uniform as time's passing.[2]

If it was the role of the Muslim tradition to safeguard Islamic art and architecture, then it follows that the role of art and above all architecture, was to safeguard the environment in which the tradition could survive. Once this relationship has been negated by novelty, or by simple subjectivity on the part of contemporary artists and architects, then a vicious circle follows; what was mutually supportive gives way to what is now mutually destructive[3].

These remarks apply wherever a secular viewpoint has prevailed in practice over a traditional one (based on the spirit). All spiritual perspectives, and the creative traditions they foster, although truly related to their contemporary times, have about them an element of the timeless and universal, while the secular "modernistic" viewpoint stresses the fleeting and the subjective: "*it is always itching to overthrow the present and dash to some, to any, novelty*

---

[1] Mirrit Boutros Ghali discusses this issue in Chapter Eight in, Tradition for the Future: Human Values and Social Purpose, The Alden Press, Oxford, 1972. She states that: "*change in itself, the bare fact of change is now taken as an improvement, irrespective of what is changing and of the direction in which it is changing*".

[2] This has resulted in the almost uniform adoption by everyone of the modern "International Style" which adopted the principle of form following utilitarian function. Consequently the modern movement resulted in a "global monotony" and has been followed by the post-modern which from the traditional viewpoint is none other than the modern style to which are applied varying degrees of remedy "cosmetics".

[3] op cit. al-Wakīl, 1984, p.26. Also see G.W. Locher, Transformation and Tradition and Other Essays, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1978, Pp.170-171.

*tomorrow*"[1].[2] The pursuit of the new, unguided by traditional principles, makes for subjectivity and the loss of identity - naturally so, because tradition is always greater than the practitioner and his true identity is in fact the tradition.

To abandon tradition, to disregard the achievements and models of the past and to be caught up in the trauma of change means to be incapable of handling the new. What seems a basic appeal is for us to distinguish between natural and "good" change from the otherwise unnatural and "bad"[3]. The problem today, does not lie in whether we are willing to learn from and adhere to traditional precedents and principles or not, but lies in *how* to learn from the Muslim tradition.

## 1.3 APPROACHES OF DEALING WITH THE PAST

> ***The tide can only be stemmed by taking heart and attempting to act upon the words of the Prophet who said that when you see the end of the world coming, plant a tree. Because salvation, in the Latin sense of "to make things whole", never comes by reaction but only by action. It is only by returning to the correct actions through inner realization of the Truth that this wholeness can come, whether for an individual or for the ummah. God says: "Verily Allah will never change the condition of a people until they change themselves."[4] What is needed is for the Muslims to change themselves through returning and understanding their true tradition.[5]***

'Abdel-Ḥalīm Ibrāhīm, an Egyptian contemporary scholar largely interested in traditional Muslim architecture as a means of re-creating the Egyptians' lost identity, explains that there is a layer between the world as it exists and the world as it is shaped by man: this

---

[1] Brother Aiden, "Icons - mysticism versus mistiness in art", Modern Painters, vol.4, 1991, p.179.

[2] See full argument in C.B. Wilson, "On Modernist Reactions to Traditionalist Interpretation of the Art and Architecture of Traditional Societies - Part 2", Edinburgh Architecture Research, vol.19, 1992, Pp. 58-79.

[3] This echoes the notions of "good" integrative and unitarian art as opposed to the "bad" disintegrative mentioned in the Introduction.

[4] Qur'ān: 13/11.

[5] op cit. Durkee, 1987, p.23.

is the layer of creation. He argues that this layer is coded historically through what he calls the "creative process of the traditional community", and that each community has its own way and process of its coding and decoding.[1] Of practical importance to this thesis, he says that although the Islamic tradition is mostly dead in Egypt, the buildings produced by that society (in which were encoded the inner meanings) still survive, and it is beyond their external forms that lie their qualitative functions which need unveiling.

It follows that the first step towards the re-creation of the Egyptians' lost tradition can only be achieved by means of a correct evaluation and understanding of the intention behind historical forms; i.e., the decoding process suggested by Ibrāhīm. This must be undertaken not in such a way as to produce a dead record of past events, but on the contrary, in order to see them as a vital and perceptive reflection, through changing physical forms reflecting unchanging spiritual patterns which have their origins in the Universal. The revival of the Islamic traditional arts and sciences and the re-discovery of their spiritual and metaphysical principles are thus first required.

To achieve this in the wake of the disappearance of the guilds and craftsmen[2] requires: digging into the leftover literature and the sciences, including sacred and spiritual knowledge, to analyze and understand what was the basic framework of knowledge with which the tradition derived its wisdom (*ḥikmah*); and more importantly by examining the buildings that constitute this tradition.

S. Gulzar Haider affirms that medieval traditional architecture, "*which by its very nature mediates between earth and heaven*", was the means by which belief was reflected and expressed according to the wishes and ideals of both patrons and builders - architects and craftsmen[3]. Haider classifies the literature in the field of Islamic art and architecture into three kinds (accordingly, implying three approaches) towards dealing with Islamic art and architecture:

---

[1] 'Abdel-Ḥalīm Ibrāhīm, "On Creativity, Imagination, And The Design Process", ed. Ismail Serageldin, Space for Freedom, Aga Khan Award for Architecture, New York, 1989, p.236.

[2] The knowledge that was held by the guilds was orally transmitted, that is why it is lost to us.

[3] Many of whom were trained in the master-disciple system of the Sufi orders in the Mamluk period to be studied. See S. Gulzar Haider, "Islam, Cosmology, and Architecture", in a symposium held by the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture: Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies, Cambridge, 1988, p.73.

*The first are the historical studies; they focus on problems of dating, precedence, influence, style, technique, and texts that relate the architectural work to its sociopolitical context. The methodology of research and writing is scientific and objective in that nothing is acceptable until it is corroborated by the sources. The authors themselves are often agnostic, if not openly atheistic.*

*The second kind of literature is inspired by a spiritual world-view and a gnostic frame of mind. Authors of this variety quote from the sacred and philosophical texts to construct decoding and evaluative instruments for the Islamic arts. Buildings to them are symbolic texts that are catalytic to states of mind. They find the particularities of history a bit distracting in their pursuit of the trans-historical meaning and message of Islamic architecture. They are most open and perhaps most daring in constructing cosmological explanations for buildings.*

*Finally their are the authors who try to establish a direct correspondence between Islamic jurisprudence and urban patterns and architectural forms. They too uphold the belief and the practice of Islam, but are in general very suspicious of the gnostic and esoteric dimensions of Islamic thought. They are eager to accept climatic causalities and social correlations to establish their thesis that the sharia is the prime form-giver of the Islamic environment. They are equally quick to reject or pronounce as religiously unacceptable any attempt to construct an architectural theory that explains the mausolea[1] of Islamic history.*

*It is understandable that authors holding these three very different points of view have great difficulty understanding one another's work. Very often the positions are frozen, and lines so firmly drawn that one group can no longer face the other.[2]*

---

[1] From the point of view of the *Sharī'a*, the building of mausolea is strictly prohibited. The veneration of the dead whether for stately reasons - sulṭāns or *emīrs* - or others pertaining to belief of holiness attributed to the deceased - saints, *imāms* or *awliyā'* - is forbidden; likewise, the celebration of the birth of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) or the designation of certain feasts relating to holy men *mawālid*. All these traditions or customs have no origins in the *Sharī'a*, and yet are practised in the popular living tradition. Most of these practices stem from remnants of *Shī'i* and Ṣūfi beliefs that have precipitated in the Egyptian society.

[2] ibid., Pp.77-78. The problem of intolerance of each of these groups is accountable on the grounds that all of the three viewpoints are totally opposed not only as approaches but in their own world views.

Although Muslim architecture has been extensively researched from a historical, descriptive point of view, looking at it in terms of style, such studies have overlooked the most essential ingredient in this architecture: the "framework" of the traditional process of creation. This framework is undoubtedly the unifying vertical axis which holds the tradition together. The administration of such an essential ingredient to the purely historical, descriptive approach, instantly transforms the view of the architecture in question to one based on traditional knowledge (religion, sciences, customs, social habits, ...etc.); the external, transitory, stylistic historicity becomes an inner, lasting, continuous traditional process[1].

I believe that it is possible to make use of the findings of these three approaches to help understand and reveal the true intentions of the medieval Muslim tradition. Explanations arising from the application of the first approach (the historical) can be enhanced with the help of the third approach (the *Sharī'a*) which helps in decoding some aspects that the purely historical cannot answer adequately. On the other hand, the second approach (the esoteric) can forward our understanding by introducing a symbolic layer of findings which must have been vital in the design process - the other two approaches do not consider this esoteric dimension. This can be achieved by finding the symbolic meanings which were based on orally transmitted knowledge, and were circulated informally in the society on a popular level. In this thesis, this resulting bridge of approaches will be referred to as the "traditionalist approach", it will rely primarily on Ṡūfī thought and method of interpretation (*ta'wīl*), while at the same time taking into consideration the laws that are applicable from the *Sharī'a* as well as historical facts from the original medieval sources to form an overall view that can be termed "nearest to the truth".

One last point remains to be discussed concerning the choice of period and of building type to which the traditionalist approach will be applied - and tested for its validity. The medieval Baḥrī Mamlūk period has been chosen based on the following criteria:

- It is the most glorious of Cairene Islamic art and architecture. This is historically accountable by the fact that craftsmen and builders from Syria, Iraq and Persia came to Egypt to benefit from Cairo's artistic activity.

[1] Meaning it is not attributed to a certain date but rather to a series of layers through time.

- It is one of the few periods where change related to art and architecture was minimal; this indicates that the tradition had reached the stage of its maturity.
- A wholistic unity is sensed in Mamlūk buildings more than in those of earlier periods in Cairo.
- Contemporary "Islamic" architecture in Egypt involves stylistic copying from the Mamlūk period - indicating an affinity to this particular tradition.
- A more practical reason but of considerable consequence, is that the Mamlūk period is well documented. This has allowed for immediate analysis.

On the other hand, religious buildings: mosques, *madrasas*, and *khanqahs*, have been chosen for their direct religious function. They have also been chosen because they are the basis for the understanding of all Mamlūk traditional Islamic architecture in Egypt as their influence extended its principles of the spiritual and the sacred to practically every other architectural unit and finally to town and city planning. Most importantly, the medieval mosque in its wholistic function, is also the "House of God" (*Bayt Allāh*), it is the building inside which man must "feel"[1] the Divine as *Presence*.

[1] In Ṣūfī terms.

Int.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

# CHAPTER TWO

## SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE TRANSMITTED TO THE TRADITIONAL BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK SOCIETY

Traditional Muslim civilization grew up gradually in the first few centuries after the expansion of the Arabs, and it was the result of close intermingling and collaboration between many different peoples, both Arab and non-Arab. Many elements in this traditional civilization were adopted from older civilizations, but everything was influenced to a greater degree by the Islamic tradition based on the religion of Islam[1]. Traditional Muslim civilization was thus a synthesis of many different cultural elements under the spirit of the Islamic tradition. This synthesis was a novel one in at least three respects: first of all, it bore the stamp of Islam; secondly, owing to the wide extent of the Arab conquests, it brought together cultural ingredients that had never been assembled before on such a large scale; and thirdly, due to the creative efforts of its participants, it brought about fresh cultural achievements. This last point bears special emphasis: a true synthesis is not merely a juxtaposition of pre-existing elements; it is a creative event whereby the old is woven together to produce the new. Thus, a vital aspect that this chapter will discuss is how knowledge passed over from generation to generation, through a process which involved much more than a custodianship of the ancient sciences but included a great many achievements of its own.

We shall first have to discuss the educational system in medieval Mamlūk times; meaning the process of teaching as well as the subject matter that was taught. We shall concentrate on certain elements within the large body of Muslim medieval knowledge that are relevant to both religious architecture and to the chosen period - that of the Baḥrī Mamlūks. One of the difficulties is to understand these traditional sources of knowledge through medieval eyes and not to distort them by understanding them through modern concepts.

Another problem to be faced when examining the sources of traditional knowledge is that Mamlūk historians and writers in general deal with what is now often called "high culture". High culture - which does not represent all the knowledge available to the Mamlūk

---

[1] See the process of traditionalization discussed in Chapter One.

society - as contrasted to folk or popular culture, has a very strong literary basis, and is cultivated primarily by persons who belong to the upper strata of society. Unfortunately, as is the case with all historical periods of the past, the researcher is always faced with an abundance of material on high cultures and scarcely nothing on folk culture. The concept of high culture is not as comprehensive as that of traditional civilization. The latter includes orally transmitted knowledge, beliefs, and methods of behaviour that are transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth - which explains why there are only fragments of written evidence of traditional information.

In this chapter, we shall examine several aspects of traditional Islamic knowledge available during the Mamlūk period. We shall investigate the overall objective of Islamic traditional knowledge in the two main educational institutions - namely, the *madrasa* (college administered by the *'ulamā'*) and the *khanqah* (house of the Ṡūfīs administered by Ṡūfī *shaykhs*). We will see that both these institutions taught the same sciences, and that the difference was the emphasis of some over the others. The traditional knowledge that will be dealt with in this chapter will follow the categorization found in the sources: *Sharī'a*-based sciences, Islamic rational sciences, and Ṡūfī esoteric sources.

To arrive at an adequate understanding of Ṡūfism within the scope of this thesis is a very difficult task, especially since there are only some aspects of it that are relevant to the understanding of Mamlūk art and architecture - mainly its symbolic aspects. Yet, it can be misleading to deal with some of the beliefs related to it while omitting the rest, as the resulting view will be fragmented.

Ṡūfism forms the theoretical framework from which we will be able to understand three fundamental points necessary to this research. First, to know the nature of Ṡūfism, its history and place in Islam; as well as its socio-religious structure and the life of the Ṡūfī in Mamlūk society. Secondly, to identify Ṡūfī practices and beliefs of relevance to the Mamlūk *khanqah*; and thirdly, to arrive at the metaphysical basis of Ṡūfī beliefs and practices, especially in so far as this relates to the symbolism and other important characteristics of relevance to the Mamlūk mosque, *madrasa*, and *khanqah*.

## 2.1 THE MAMLŪK EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

***The best worship is the pursuit of knowledge.***[1]

***Search for knowledge ('ilm) even unto China, because it is an obligatory duty of every Muslim.***[2]

***The men of learning are the trustees of my community (umma).***[3]

***Pursuit of knowledge is superior to prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and jihād (struggle for the sake of God) if and when it is for the sake of God alone.***[4]

As seen in these four authentic Prophetic *ḥadīths*, to ask for knowledge (*ṭalab al-'ilm*) in Islam is highly esteemed and classed at a superior level above all types of worship (*'ibādah*); it is for this reason that so many patrons have sponsored educational institutions[5] throughout the different periods of Islamic civilization.

It is evident in the sources that large numbers of students applied to ask for knowledge in Mamlūk *madrasas* and *khanqahs*.[6] To the twentieth-century reader, it might be thought that asking for knowledge (*ṭalab al-'ilm*) might be directly related to seeking teaching jobs (*mu'allim* or *ustādh*), but al-Idfawī[7] (a contemporary Mamlūk historian) tells us that there was a great unemployment amongst teachers (*mu'allimīn*), and that educational institutions were over-staffed. This clearly rules out the possibility that material benefit was the incentive behind asking for knowledge, and indicates that people must have learnt for the

---

[1] Prophetic *ḥadīth* quoted by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi' Bayān al-'Ilm*, Cairo, 1968, vol.X, p.90.

[2] ibid., vol.X, p.79.

[3] ibid., vol.X, p.77.

[4] ibid., vol.X, p.75.

[5] Up to the Ayyūbid period, the sole educational institution was the mosque. When the Ayyūbid Sulṭān Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī conquered Egypt, he brought with him a new type of educational institution that had originated in the Seljūk period, this was the *madrasa*. By the time of the Mamlūks, the *madrasa* had proven to be a successful way to fulfill both the educational as well as the religious requirements, so that it slowly took over the position of the mosque. Due to the massive spread of Ṣūfism in Egypt since the Ayyūbid and through the Mamlūk period, the *khanqah*, a new educational institution was introduced to house Ṣūfī disciples.

[6] In the Ayyūbid period only foreigners were admitted in *khanqahs* which gave it an exclusive character. But by the time of the Mamlūks, it had been launched into the Egyptian society and played a big role in influencing the society.

[7] See Kamāl al-Dīn Ja'far Ibn Tha'lab al-Idfawī (13th C.), *al-Ṭāli' al-Sa'īd al-Jāmi' Asmā' Nojabā' al-Ṣa'īd*, al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah lil-Ta'līf wal-Tarjamah, Cairo, reprint 1966, Pp. 477-479.

sake of acquiring spiritual benefits and for the religious knowledge implicit in the sciences - since asking for knowledge (*talab al-'ilm*) is equivalent to worship (*'ibādah*).

Traditional medieval society was rooted in, and governed by Islam as understood by the medieval society - this involved both an outward and an inward dimension. Accordingly, the method of asking for knowledge (*talab al-'ilm*) was an outcome of this framework. *'Ilm* (external knowledge) was primarily considered to be of the *Shari'a*[1] (Divine Law) in its various fields leading to the Muslim's knowledge of God and His Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his responsibility towards himself and the *ummah* (Muslim community). While on the other hand, the inner dimension of *'ilm* was gnosis (*ma'rifah*) and could only be achieved through a spiritual transcendence. Both the outer and inner dimensions of knowledge were aimed at knowing God. Ḥajī Khalīfah in "*Kashf al-Ḍhunūn*" says: "*what is meant by knowledge ('ilm) and teaching (ta'līm) is the knowledge of God Almighty which is the epitome of all desires and the ultimate of all happiness.*"[2]

Traditionally, a mandatory prerequisite to ask for knowledge (*talab al-'ilm*) was that the intent behind it (*niyyah*) should be purely for the sake of God (*khālisah li-Wajh Allah*). Al-Zarnūbajī (d. 591 A.H.) says on this matter of intent: "*intent is vital in a time of learning as it is the prerequisite for anything and everything in Islam.*"[3] Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā'a, a fourteenth-century Mamlūk contemporary, mentions that the benefits of knowledge (*'ilm*) do not apply to those who ask for knowledge for any secular reason (*naf' al-dunyā*) "*or for bad intentions, or for money, or self glory, or for the sake of attracting more students and followers.*"[4]

---

[1] The *Shari'a* is an expression of Allah's will and the basis of man's relationship with Him. Only by obeying Allah's commands can man discover the good life. To disobey is to invite ruin, both in this life and in the hereafter. The *Shari'a* spells out all of man's duties. These duties embrace not only man's social behavior but also the details of worship. It prescribes both a right way to live and a right way to pray. Allah's relationship to man is spelt out in the *Shari'a* as that of a Lord (*Rabb*) to his servant (*'abd*).

[2] Haji Khalīfah, sometimes known as Mustafa Ibn 'Abd Allah (9th C.), *Kashf al-Ḍhunūn 'an Asāmī al-Kutub wal-Funūn*, al-Mathnī Bookshop, Baghdad, offset reprint, n.d., vol.1, p.52.

[3] Borhām al-Islām al-Zarnūbajī (12th C.), *Ta'līm al-Mota'allim Ṭarīq al-Ta'allum*, Dar Ihyā' al-Kutb al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo, n.d., p.10. It should be born in mind that *niyyah* is just one of the many aspects that are ignored in our modern process of learning. This is an example of how different interpretations can be by looking through modern eyes.

[4] Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā'a (13th C.), *Tadhkirat al-Sāmi' wal-Motakallim fī Adab al-'Ālim wal-Mota'allim*, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, n.d., (copy of the Hayderabad edition, India 1353 A.H.), p.13.

Al-Suyūṭī, the Mamlūk historian and compiler of *ḥadīths* says in "*Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍarah*":

> ***... know that since Egypt has become the seat of the Caliphate (i.e., the Mamlūk), it has become great, and Islamic practices have increased in it and that the Sunnah has returned to it and innovation (bid'ah) has disappeared and it has become the abode of the 'ulamā' and scientists.***[1]

It seems that the other parts of the Muslim world, faced with the dangers of the Tartar and Mongol invasions - as for example Iraq, and the Fertile Crescent (*Bilād al-Shām*) - encouraged the migration of scientists and *'ulamā'* into Egypt. Furthermore the establishment of the 'Abbasid Caliphate in Egypt on the hands of the Mamlūk sulṭāns, made Cairo the sole heir to Baghdad as the centre of Islamic religious and scientific activity in the Muslim world.[2] Ibn Baṭṭūṭah, the medieval traveller (d. 779 A.H., 1377 A.D.) accordingly wrote that the *madrasas* of Cairo could not be counted because they were so numerous.[3]

By examining the process and method of teaching in the Mamlūk educational institutions, we find that according to Ibn Jamā'a, there were study circles (*ḥalaqah* or *dars*) in both mosques and *madrasas*. He describes these, saying that the *mu'allim* or *shaykh* would sit facing the *qibla* (the direction of prayer), and would read a part or more from the Qur'ān, then he would start his lesson. After finishing, he would ask a few of his students to repeat what they had heard to make sure that what he had said was understood. In the case that they had misunderstood, the *mu'īd* (literally "he who repeats") who was an assistant teacher, would repeat the lesson again.[4] On the other hand, al-Suyūṭī[5] (d. 911 A.H., 1505 A.D.) the famous Mamlūk historian and compiler of traditions, says that there was another method of teaching by means of dictation, but that it was not a popular method of teaching and hence was carried out once a week by a few selected teachers (termed *ustādh*, pl. *asātidhah*).

---

[1] Al-Suyūṭī, *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍarah fī Tārīkh Miṣr wal-Qāhirah*, Cairo, Dar Iḥyā' al-Kitāb, 1968, vol.2, p.96.

[2] Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Āshūr, *Miṣr fī Dawlat al-Mamālīk al-Baḥariyyah*, Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo, 1959, p.189.

[3] Ibn Baṭṭūṭah (14th C.), *Tuḥfat al-Nuḍhḍhār fī Gharā'ib al-Amṣār wa 'Ajā'ib al-Asfār*, Paris, 1880, vol.1, p.70.

[4] ibid., Pp. 38-45.

[5] See op cit. al-Suyūṭī (15th C.), 1968, vol.1, p.360.

Several Mamlūk *waqfiyyas*[1] (endowment deeds, sing. *waqf*) show that the patron of the educational foundation interfered in both the teaching method and to the content of what was being taught, to the extent that he would leave explicit instructions to be followed by the *ustādh* or *shaykh*, and *mu'īd*. For example, the *waqfiyyah* of Sulṫān Barqūq in the second Mamlūk period[2], goes as far as to state how the students should seat themselves around their tutor. Likewise, that of the Baḥrī Mamlūk Kāfūr al-Ṡarghaṫmishī states that:

> ***The students and the mu'īd should sit around their tutor in the south īwān (vaulted space in a madrasa) and read a preliminary part of the Qur'ān, then make a prayer on the endower and his family and all Muslims. The mu'īd should then read out three lessons of fiqh (jurisprudence) according to the Ḥanafī madhhab (a school of jurisprudence)....***[3]

The final achievement that every student aspired to was an *ijāzah* (literally meaning "permission"; i.e., a permission to transmit the knowledge he has learnt. The term came to denote a parchment of accomplishment). There were several types of *ijāzas* in the Mamlūk period, the first and more esteemed was one granted to a student to enable him to teach; the second type was more inferior, and basically gave a licence to its holder to read out certain books or manuscripts to students - not all books, but only those he had showed a comprehensive understanding of. This insured that whatever knowledge was being transmitted was correctly understood.[4]

Mamlūk sources refer in more than one case to the relationship between a student and his teacher; it is described as one of deep respect which continues even after the death of the teacher. Ibn Jamā'a says that "*a student would visit the grave of his teacher, ask for his forgiveness, and would give money to the poor in his name (ṣadaqah), and take care of his*

---

[1] The patron and founder of any religious foundation used to endow it with a *waqf* which would involve a considerable piece of land. The revenues coming from that *waqf* would go to the maintenance and upkeep of the building as well as to pay salaries of teachers, student stipends, ...etc.

[2] According to 'Abd al-Ghanī 'Abd al-'Āṫī, *al-Ta'līm fī Miṡr Zaman al-Ayyūbiyyūn wal-Mamālīk*, M.A. thesis, unpublished, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, 1975, referring to Manuscript 51, Folio 9, in Dār al-Wathā'iq al-Miṡriyyah.

[3] Extract from the endowment deed of Kāfūr al-Ṡarghaṫmishī, Dār al-Wathā'iq al-Miṡriyyah, Manuscript 76, Folio 12.

[4] See two *ijazah* documents in the Asad National Library: The *ijāzah* of al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥīm 'Awaḍ, Manuscript 10775, 6 pages, and the *ijāzah* of No'mān al-Allūsī, Manuscript 11325, 3 pages.

*children and relatives for him.*"[1] In spite of this deep respect for their teachers, students could decide who they saw as fit or unfit to teach. An example of this is given in Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's account in the thirteenth-century of the objection made by the students of the *Madrasa* al-Manṣūriyyah after *Shaykh* Aḥmed Ibn Moḥammad al-'Asjadī (d. 749 A.H.) was appointed as their teacher. They complained to the principal in charge of the endowment deed (*nāḍhir al-waqf*) and said: "*you have imposed on us he who is unfit (to teach), and we do not want any person who will not help us to augment our knowledge.*"[2]

More importantly, apart from the more orthodox teaching of the *'ulamā'*, a number of Ṣūfī *shaykhs* emerged in the ninth-century A.D. who attracted large followings. Through them Ṣūfism[3] achieved great popularity among the masses. In contrast to the somewhat rigid legalism of the *'ulamā'*, Ṣūfism, which focuses on inner spiritual dimensions, appealed to the needs of the people.[4] In the eleventh century A.D., many *'ulamā'* began to see that there was much good in Ṣūfism and themselves began to cultivate the esoteric experience (*bāṭiniyyah*) - such as the famous Ṣūfī jurist al-Ghazzalī[5] (d. 1111 A.D.). To these *'ulamā'*, Ṣūfism represented the real heart of religion, since it dealt with the inner dimension of Islam, that is to say it involved both physical and metaphysical dimensions[6], whereas the *Shar'a*, as such, could deal only with outward behaviour (*ḍhāhir*).

---

[1] op cit. Ibn Jamā'a (13th C.), n.d., p.90.

[2] Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (13th C.), *al-Dorar al-Kāminah fī A'yān al-Mā'ah al-Thāminah*, Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, Cairo, 2nd edition, 1966, vol.1, p.286.

[3] Ṣūfism is a type of religious experience in which the focus is on a heightened sense of the reality of God. Ṣūfism takes its clue from the monotheistic affirmation, which it interprets as meaning that Allah is the Sole Ultimate Reality and everything other than He is but an appearance. The Ṣūfī (as the follower of Muslim spiritual practices aimed at direct experience of Unity is called) seeks through various spiritual exercises to become so wholly preoccupied with Allah that he becomes thoughtless even of his own selfhood. This state is known in Arabic as *fanā'* (disappearance of self), and is accompanied normally by strong feelings of ecstasy. Ṣūfism will be discussed in section 2.4 in this chapter.

[4] See op cit. 'Āshūr, 1959, p.186., and see Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), The *Muqaddimah*: An Introduction to History, second edition, trans. Franz Rosenthal, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1967, p.68. Also see Bernard G. Weiss and Arnold H. Green, A Survey of Arab History, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 1985, p.165.

[5] "*Al-Ghazzali's ideas dominated Islamic educational thought for centuries after his death.*" See A.L. Tibawi, in Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National Systems, Luzac and company Ltd., London, 1972.

[6] According to Humayun Kabir, the contemporary Muslim scholar, the realization of an external and internal dimension in everything led to the fact that the Islamic sciences grew. For the full argument see Humayun Kabir, Science Democracy and Islam and Other Essays, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1955, Pp. 7-10.

Śūfīs taught in two distinct types of Mamlūk buildings, the *khanqah* and the *zāwiya*. The *zāwiya* (which will not be dealt with in this thesis) involved extremist forms of Śūfism and was mainly located in rural areas where the influence of the *'ulamā'* was minimal. These, the *'ulamā'* continued to condemn. But a large segment of the Śūfī movement preferred to operate in conformity with the religious law. In Cairo for example, where Śūfīs had to operate in proximity to the *'ulamā'*, the *khanqah* became an official institution which was kept under the control of the state.[1] Śūfism became so integrated into Mamlūk urban life that the Śūfī began to follow the *madrasa* regime, acquiring in the process a worldly education besides his spiritual training which enabled him to participate in all levels of the community. At the same time the *madrasa* students gained exposure to the Śūfī approach to religion. Thus, a wedding of sorts took place between the Śūfī movement and the official religious establishment to produce a "Sunnī Śūfism", and thereafter legal studies and spiritual exercises were carried on side by side by the same persons - many *'ulamā'* were also Śūfī *shaykhs* and vice versa. As a result Śūfism became practised not only in the *khanqah* but in the Mamlūk mosque and *madrasa* as well. We will see in Chapter Four that even the *waqf* endowment documents sometimes used the words "mosque", "*madrasa*", or "*khanqah*" simultaneously or alternatively to describe the same building. This indicates that in Mamlūk perception, the difference between these three types of buildings were reduced to a great extent.

The interrelation between the mosque, *madrasa*, and *khanqah* during the Mamlūk period was so strong that Ibn al-Ḥajj, the Mamlūk contemporary writer said that it was common for Śūfī practice - including the strongly prohibited dance and music - to be held at mosques as well as *madrasas*[2]. In general, the *madrasa/khanqah* system was conceived of more as a *madrasa* with Śūfī services available as an added program. As in the case of the *madrasa* student, the final aim for the Śūfī disciple studying in the *khanqah* was to obtain an *ijāzah* to transmit Śūfī oriented acquired knowledge.

This liaison between Śūfism and the *'ulamā'* was probably what prompted Ibn Khaldūn to write the following passage in his "*Muqaddimah*" in the fourteenth-century Mamlūk period:

---

[1] There is a big difference between the education of Śūfīs in a *khanqah*, and that of Śūfīs in a *zāwiya*. See Leonor Fernandes, The Evolution of the Khānqāh Institution in Mamluk Egypt, Ph D Thesis, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1980, p.90.

[2] Moḥammad al-'Abdarī Ibn al-Ḥājj (14th C.), *Madkhal al-Shar' al-Sharīf 'Ala al-Madhāhib*, al-Maiba'ah al-Miśriyyah, Cairo, 1929, vol.3, p.99.

> ***When the sciences were written down systematically and when the jurists wrote works on jurisprudence and the principles of jurisprudence, on speculative theology, Qur'ān interpretation, and other subjects; the Ṡūfīs, too, wrote on their subject. Some Ṡūfīs wrote on the laws governing asceticism and self-scrutiny, how to act and not act in imitation of (saints). Al-Ghazzālī, in his "Kitāb al-Iḥyā'", dealt systematically with the laws governing asceticism and the imitation of models. Then he explained the behaviour and customs of the Ṡūfīs and commented on their technical vocabulary. The science of Ṡūfism became a systematically treated discipline in Islam. Before that, esotericism had merely consisted of Divine worship, and its laws had existed in the breasts of men. The same had been the case with all other disciplines, such as Qur'ān interpretation, the science of ḥadūth, jurisprudence, and the principles of jurisprudence.[1]***

From this passage, we find a parallelism between the *Sharī'a*-based sciences and the Ṡūfī-oriented sciences which naturally paved the way to the liaison mentioned above. The involvement of the *'ulamā'* - who taught in the *madrasas* - in the teaching of Ṡūfīs in the *khanqahs* testifies to the harmony in attitude between the orthodox and Ṡūfism[2].

It was mentioned above that the relationship between the student and the teacher in the *madrasa* was strong and based on mutual respect. In the case of the *khanqah*, Mamlūk sources indicate that the relation between the Ṡūfī master and his disciples was much stronger. Al-Sayyid Ibrahīm al-Dusūqī, one of the Ṡūfī *shaykhs* in the Mamlūk period, described this relationship: "*The best student with his shaykh is analogical to a rag in the hands of a washerman, he should not move nor talk without permission, nor should he marry, travel, go out or in, mix or work, study religion or science or any such thing except by consent*"[3]. It was through such submissiveness and obedience that the meaning of the teachings administered by the spiritual master were absorbed by his disciples. It is thus evident that the relation between Ṡūfī disciples and their master was closer than that of the teacher to his students in the *madrasa* as it extended to influence his entire life.

---

[1] op cit. Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), 1967. p.360.

[2] This was far from applicable on the Ṡūfīs who behaved reprehensibly in the *zāwiyas*.

[3] Ibrahīm al-Dusūqī quoted in 'Alī Sālim al-Nabbahīn, *Nidhām al-Tarbiyyah al-Islāmiyyah fī 'Asr Dawlat al-Mamālīk fī Miṡr*, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, Cairo, 1981, p.78.

We can conclude from this brief examination of the teaching methods in both the Mamlūk *madrasa* and *khanqah*, that the educational system depended on a system of apprenticeship, and that its final aim was to produce scholars who were able to faithfully transmit the knowledge they had learnt. It also shows that this traditional system of oral transmission could be traced back to the earliest centuries of Islam. This can be seen in the well-known tradition narrated by Abū al-Dardā', one of the Companions (*Ṣaḥābah*) of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) who said: "*a man cannot be a scholar ('ālim) until he becomes an apprentice, and he cannot be a scholar until he practices what he learns.*"[1]

It should not be thought that the role of teaching in the Mamlūk *madrasa* and *khanqah* was limited to teaching students only, because it extended in fact to teaching the general populace as well. This is confirmed by al-Maqrīzī (the most famous Mamlūk historian d. 845 A.H., 1442 A.D.) who wrote in his "*Khiṭaṭ*" that the *madrasa* and *khanqah* are: "*mosques where lessons - termed "al-mt'ād" - were taught to the society by the respected 'ulamā' and shaykhs.*"[2] It must be pointed out that there are two major points of difference between traditional and modern meanings of the terms "religious lessons (*mt'ād*)" and "religious sciences (*'ulūm dīniyyah*)": in traditional times, religion (*dīn*) did not concern the hereafter alone but covered all aspects of worldly matters - unlike today where religion is divorced from secular matters. The fundamental objective of traditional teaching in Mamlūk times was to emphasize the importance of knowledge (*'ilm*) for the sake of the Muslim, in the sense that although the topics that were discussed were primarily to do with life and worldly matters, they were ultimately spiritual in order to aid people to the higher objectives - to "know" and "see" the Truth in everything[3]. The term "man of religion" (*rajol dīn*) was in-existent, instead, there was the term *'ālim* (pl. *'ulamā'*) or *shaykh* (pl. *shuyūkh*) to denote a man of knowledge of both religious and worldly matters.

To elaborate on this point, al-Suyūṭī[4] gives some examples such as that of Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 687 A.H., 1288 A.D.) who was called the *shaykh* of medicine during the Baḥrī

---

[1] Abū al-Dardā' (d. 32 A.H. / 652 A.D.) quoted by Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, Beirut, reprint in 1957, vol.2, p.357.

[2] Taqiyy al-Dīn Aḥmed Ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī (late 14th C.), *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Dowal al-Mulūk*, Maṭba'at Lajnat al-Ta'līf wal-Tarjamah wal-Nashr, Cairo, vol.1, 1956, 2nd edition of the reprint, appendix no.17, p.1045.

[3] This point will be discussed in detail below.

[4] op cit. al-Suyūṭī (late 14th C.), 1968, vol.1, p.542.

Mamlūk period in Egypt. Al-Suyūṭī tells us that he was also the author of numerous books on medicine, *fiqh* (theology), *ḥadīth* (Prophetic traditions), Arabic, and logic. Al-Sakhāwī (d. 902 A.H., 1496-97 A.D.), another medieval Mamlūk historian, tells us of another example of a *qāḍī* (judge) who lived during the last decades of the Mamlūk period in Egypt called Zayn al-Dīn al-Anṡārī. He was called the "*encyclopedic man (al-rajol al-mawsū'ī) because he studied fiqh, Arabic, cosmology ('ilm al-hay'ah), geometry, arithmetic, algebra, medicine, and other sciences.*"[1]

This is not surprising when one learns that Baḥrī Mamlūk *madrasas* taught several of the Islamic sciences besides the religious ones[2]. According to Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī[3] and to Ḥajjī Khalīfah[4], two Mamlūk writers, the sciences were divided into three main branches: First, *Shari'a* oriented subjects (*al-'ulūm al-Shar'iyyah*) and these were usually subdivided into *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *uṡūl al-fiqh* (sources of jurisprudence), *tafsīr* (Qur'ānic interpretation), *'ilm al-ḥadīth* (Prophetic traditions), and *'ilm al-qirā'āt* (the science of Qur'ānic recitation). Second, Arabic language oriented subjects (*'ulūm al-lughat al-'Arabiyyah*) such as *naḥw* (grammar), and *ṡarf* and *bayān* (conjugation). Third, the rational sciences (*al-'ulūm al-'aqliyyah*): *ṭibb* (medicine), *'ilm al-'adad* (arithmetic), *'ilm al-jabr* (algebra), *'ilm al-handasah* (geometry), *'ilm al-hay'ah* (cosmology), *'ilm al-mīqāt* (temporal sciences), *ṭabī'ah* (physics - literally "nature"), and *al-kīmyā* (alchemy). On the other hand, al-Subkī says that there were some subjects that were not taught in the Mamlūk *madrasa* but could be learnt privately through tutors, such as philosophy, logic, and geography and history. In addition to these subjects which were taught in the *madrasa*, *ta'wīl* (Ṡūfī interpretation of the religious sources) was added in the case of the *khanqah*. Likewise, apart from the daily prayers carried in the *madrasa*, the Ṡūfīs were expected to attend a session of *ḥudūr* (literally "presence"; at the end of such sessions the *Ḥadrah Ilāhiyyah*, Divine Presence, is reached) and to perform *dhikr* (remembrance) individually in Ṡūfī cells (*khulwāt*).

---

[1] See Moḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (15th C.), *al-Dhayl 'ala Raf' al-Aṡr aw Baghyat al-'ulamā' wal-Rowāh*, al-Dar al-Miṡriyyah lil-Ta'līf wal-Tarjamah wal-Nashr, Cairo, n.d., Pp.140-143.

[2] For a brief view of the development of the Islamic sciences from the 'Abbasid Caliphate till the beginning of the eleventh-century A.D., and the shift from the reliance on the Islamic revelation for their source of knowledge to a much wider range of sources, see S.H. Nasr, An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological doctrines, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1964, Pp.12-13.

[3] See Taj al-Dīn 'Abd al-Wahāb al-Subkī (14th C.), *Mu'īd al-Ni'am wa Mobīd al-Niqam*, Maktabat al-Khangi bi-Miṡr bil-Ishtirāk ma' Maktabat al-Mathnā bi-Baghdād, Cairo, reprint 1948, p.78.

[4] Also see op cit. Ḥajjī Khalīfah, n.d., vol.1, p.52.

It is thus evident, that the body of knowledge that was available and transmitted in the Mamlūk *madrasa* and *khanqah* was quite considerable. Ibn Khaldūn, in an explanatory passage in his "*Muqaddimah*" discusses the reasons behind the growth of traditional Islamic sciences in the Mamlūk period saying:

> ***The sciences are numerous only where civilization is large and sedentary culture highly developed; the reason for this is that the crafts are numerous only in cities. The quality and number of the crafts depend on the greater or lesser extent of civilization in the cities and on the sedentary culture and luxury they enjoy, because (highly developed crafts) are something additional to just making a living. When civilized people have more labour available than they need for mere subsistence, such (surplus) labour is used for activities over and above making a living. These activities are man's prerogative; they are the sciences and the crafts ... We at this time (fourteenth-century A.D.), notice that science and scientific instruction thrive in Cairo, because the civilization is greatly developed and its sedentary culture has been well established for thousands of years. Therefore, the crafts are firmly established there and exist in many varieties. One of them is scientific instruction.***[1]

Ibn Khaldūn, here points out several important points that need to be clarified. First, he gives the reason why the Mamlūk period specifically thrived within the Muslim tradition, by attributing it to the crafts that prospered during that period - which was at a time of high development in the sedentary culture of Cairo. Second, and more important, he gives us a connection between scientific instruction as being related to the crafts[2]. Ibn Khaldūn in another passage of the "*Muqaddimah*" explicitly states: "*the sciences and the crafts are treated as one*"[3]. This last point is vitally important, as it implies that the sciences that were taught in Mamlūk *madrasas* and *khanqahs* were connected to the sources of knowledge (*'ilm*) that were passed on in the course of instruction in the crafts - amongst which is architecture.

---

[1] op cit., Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), 1967, p.343.

[2] "*Scientific instruction is a craft*". ibid., p.340.

[3] ibid., p.42.

M.S. 'Āshūr, the contemporary historian who has written a great deal on the Mamlūk period, confirms that the crafts in the Mamlūk period were acquired through a system of apprenticeship that resembled to a great extent the acquiring of knowledge in *madrasas* and *khanqahs*. He says: "*Guilds*[1] *(niqābāt) in the Mamlūk period were based on apprenticeship.*"[2] According to Bayard Dodge, the master would get his apprentices who graduated from primary schools (*kuttāb*) and would teach them his craft.[3] This is affirmed by al-Maqrīzī's (d. 845 A.H., 1442 A.D) account of when he passed through the market of paper (*sūq al-warrāqīn*): "*under the hands of each master (mu'allim) several young boys were working under his instructions*", he further elaborates saying: "*every craft in Egypt had a 'arīf, one who would help the master in supervising the apprentices of his craft.*"[4] This account has a lot in common with the educational system mentioned above and to a great extent parallels the role of the *ustādh*, the *mu'īd*, and the students - or Ṣūfī *shaykh* and disciples in the case of the *khanqah*. This confirms Ibn Khaldūn's point of view concerning the crafts and sciences being treated as one - i.e., following the same system of indoctrination.

Although the full argument of the connection between Ṣūfī *shaykhs*, master craftsmen, and the system of apprenticeship in relation to Mamlūk architecture will be discussed in detail in Chapter Six, it is necessary here to indicate that Islamic guilds were linked to Ṣūfism. Louis Massignon, who has spent many years researching Islamic guilds writes in "Les Corps de Metiers et la Cité Islamique" that: "*a new fervour of religious and even secret society (referring to the Ṣūfī brotherhoods) was introduced by the Isma'īlī Fatimids in Egypt*"[5]. He goes on to say that this created a new type of cohesion to the Muslim community due to the fact that the Ṣūfī brotherhoods became integrated with the professional, craft, and commercial corporations. Massignon says that this traditional system was later inherited by the Ayyubids

---

[1] He does not mean formal guilds, but rather informal groups of people sharing the same craft. These "guilds" were to a very large extent similar to those seen in the Ottoman empire which were sponsored by the state. Since no historical sources mention such guilds in the Mamlūk period, it can be concluded that they must have been informally organized. A more detailed discussion of such issues will be carried out in Chapter Six.

[2] See op cit. 'Āshūr, 1959, p.207.

[3] See Bayard Dodge, Muslim Education in Medieval Times, the Middle East Institute, Washington, 1962, p.5.

[4] See al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *al-Mawā'iḍh wal-I'tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wal-'Āthār*, Cairo, reprint 1207 A.H., vol.2, p.452.

[5] See Louis Massignon, whose position can be found in "Les Corps de Metiers et la Cité Islamique", Revue Internationale de Sociologie, 1920, vol.28, Pp. 473-89, and in "Islamic Guilds", Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, 1932, vol.7, Pp. 214-216.

and the Mamlūks and that they were "*essentially adopted by them*"[1]. Bernard Lewis, another contemporary historian who has followed the footsteps of Massignon agrees with what he said, but says that the guilds were informal and not appointed by the state.[2] In any case, what is important to us is that the Ṡūfī brotherhoods were connected to the crafts.

Al-Sakhāwī (d. 902 A.H., 1496-7 A.D.) and Ibn Taghrī Birdī (d. 874 A.H., 1470 A.D.) two other famous medieval Mamlūk sources, bring out most clearly the fact that traditional knowledge (*'ilm*), the scholars (*'ulamā'*), and the Ṡūfī *shaykhs* together played a vital role in the instruction of those who would become master craftsmen (*mu'allimīn*). Al-Sakhāwī gives an examples of the Ṡūfī *shaykh* Aḥmed Ibn Aḥmed al-Suyūṭī who worked as a judge (*qāḍī*), as a teacher in several *madrasas*, and learned the craft of glass-making until he had reached a mastery of the profession "*and became a master himself*"[3]. While Ibn Taghrī Birdī in "*al-Manhal al-Ṡāfī*" gives another example of a certain Borhan al-Dīn Ibn Zaqā'ah al-Ghazzī (d. 816 A.H., 1413 A.D.) "*who started his life as a tailor then became an imām (leader of prayer) who could give opinions on the different sciences ('ulūm), especially Ṡūfī interpretations, plants and herbs - in relation to their benefits - and mathematics.*"[4]

These two cases quoted by al-Sakhāwī and Ibn Taghrībirdī of master craftsmen who were Ṡūfīs, knowledgeable of *Shari'a*-based sciences, as well as rational sciences confirms Massignon's argument that Ṡūfism was integrated in the society as a whole through the impregnation of the brotherhoods in the fields of professional, craft, and commercial corporations. It follows that according to Ibn Khaldūn - who said that the crafts and the sciences shared the same indoctrination - the system of apprenticeship in the guild would follow the same method of instruction in the *madrasa* and the *khanqah*.

Considering that in the medieval guild those responsible for building construction consisted of master builders (*mu'allimīn*), architects (*muhandisīn*), builders (*bannāyīn*), and craftsmen (*ḥirafiyyīn*), it would not be presumptious to assume that at least the level of master builders would have had their instruction in one of these two institutions. I say "at least"

---

[1] op cit. Massignon, 1920, p.473.

[2] See Bernard Lewis, "The Islamic Guilds", The Economic History Review, VIII Nov. 1937, Pp. 20-37.

[3] op cit. al-Sakhāwī (15th C.), n.d., p.65.

[4] Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Maḥāsin Ibn Taghrī Birdī (late 14th C.), *al-Manhal al-Ṡāfī wal-Mostawfī ba'd al-Wāfī*, Dār al-Kotob al-Miṡriyyah Press, Cairo, reprint 1956, vol.1, p.152.

because it is more probable that the level of the architects (*muhandisīn*) were instructed as well because they needed a firm knowledge of geometry, mathematics, astronomy, and physics.

Since both the *madrasa* and the *khanqah* taught the same sciences and shared Ṡūfī beliefs and practices - in different degrees according to the intensity in Ṡūfī instruction - then, all those involved in the craft of building must have been exposed to Ṡūfīsm to a greater or lesser degree, if not directly, then indirectly by its oral transmission through the system of apprenticeship adopted by the guild. Of course those who would have had direct contact with Ṡūfī *shaykhs* by having learnt and practised Ṡūfism in a *khanqah* would be more knowledgeable of esoteric aspects than those who had been educated in a *madrasa*. But in the very least, they would have been exposed to the three above mentioned types of traditional knowledge available at the time of the Mamlūks. Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, who dealt with traditional medieval Persian architecture discussed the "creative traditional Muslim", i.e., the traditional medieval builders. They sum up the traditional education system saying it produces different men for different functions through a common set of principles:

> ***..., and those who want to become masters study with master craftsmen and also with Sufi masters, to whom the order of the guilds has always been related. The whole educational system, commencing with the foundation of society as embodied in the craft guilds, moving up to the madrasa, and culminating in the khanqah, or centre for spiritual training, is directly interwoven with the entire Islamic tradition, especially the esoteric dimension contained within Sufism.***[1]

But in fact, it is not only the members of the guilds who were influenced by Ṡūfī thought; we will see in a section below and in Chapter Three that Mamlūk sulṭāns, and *emīrs* who sponsored the building of the religious monuments, as well as the society were strongly influenced by Ṡūfism in the Mamlūk period. The very fact that Mamlūk sources stress that Ṡūfism was thoroughly "in the air" - and was shared by both Mamlūk patrons as well as the populace - by itself created an indirect Ṡūfī influence on the members of the Mamlūk community as a whole - not only the builders. This indicates that in the Mamlūk period, the

---

[1] Nader Ardalan, and Laleh Bakhtiar, The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1973, p.9. Ardalan and Bakhtiar refer this quote to Hamilton Gibb and Bowen, Islamic Society and the West, Oxford University Press, London, 1967, part 1.

designer, client, and users shared the same understanding and background. That is why in a traditional society, whatever symbols are incorporated in the design process they are always understood by all, because they are used and lived by all. It follows that in their "creations", the Mamlūk designers would have derived from the traditional available knowledge a system of symbolism based on the physical and metaphysical dimensions - we will see in the following chapters that this system of symbolism is inherent in the sciences which are related to the Ṡūfī doctrine.

Thus, it is clear that there is a necessity to examine the rational traditional sciences, and the religious sciences as manifested in the *Sharī'a* by the *'ulamā'* and in Ṡufism by the Ṡūfī *shaykhs* to be able to re-create the body of knowledge that was transmitted through traditional methods of instruction and teaching in the Mamlūk *madrasa* and *khanqah*.

## 2.2 THE ISLAMIC RATIONAL SCIENCES (*AL-'ŪLŪM AL-'AQLIYYAH*)

When we look at the Islamic rational sciences (*'ulūm 'aqliyyah*), we might expect to see the impact of Islam suddenly diminish. Is not science a 'secular' endeavour, we may ask, which seems nothing more than to gain an understanding of the physical world and to apply the knowledge thus gained to the problems of daily life? What part can religion possibly play in the study of physical processes? And is not the same true of mathematics, the handmaiden of science? What is religious about the science of numbers?

It is because we have today secularized science that we must, in dealing with traditional Islamic science, first realize that it was inseparable from a religious view of the world. We are conditioned by modern science to think of the physical world as a self-contained entity which is to be studied and understood without reference to anything else. By contrast, the Muslim scientist could only see the physical world as the manifestation of the Divine in everything; he was incapable of seeing it in any other way. This perspective is rooted in the Qur'ān, which views common physical events such as the falling of rain and the growth of vegetation as Divinely wrought miracles (*mo'jizāt*) and signs (*ayāt*). As we saw earlier, most Mamlūk scientists were exposed to Ṡūfism in varying degrees, and were also well versed in the rational sciences, thus, they brought to their work a strong sensitivity to the Presence of Allah. This enabled them to affirm the unity and harmony of the universe. The physical world was for them an organic whole, consisting of closely interrelated parts

held together in perfect harmony; as such it reflected the orderliness and wisdom of the Divine Being Himself.

Let us first examine the sources from which the body of Islamic knowledge was formed. According to Dr. 'Abd al-Laṭīf Ḥamzah, the contemporary scholar who has studied the intellectual movement in the Ayyubid and Baḥrī Mamlūk periods in Egypt, the sources of knowledge in the medieval period are threefold: The first influence and source, was from the East, meaning Iraq. Iraq was influenced by Persia which was more inclined to philosophical approaches. That is why we find that the translations (*tarājim*) that came from the East were philosophically oriented. Evidence of this can be found in quotes in introductory chapters where authors for instance, start their argument by saying: "... *and I read the rationalizations (ma'qūlāt) in the land of 'Ajam (Persia)*"[1]. The second, he says, is from the West, meaning from Morocco and Andalusia. From there, Ṣūfī ideas, literature (*al-riwāyah*), and traditional transmission (*naql*) were carried to Egypt. The third, he goes on to say, stems from the very nature of the Egyptian homeland and this is the inherited Coptic[2] knowledge which was later to be reformulated into traditional Islamic Medieval science.

These sources necessarily involved Greek and Neo-Platonist influences on the Islamic sciences[3]. This is accountable in the sources contemporary to the Mamlūk society. According to Ḥamzah who quotes Ibn al-Nadīm, a medieval historian, as saying that Khālid Ibn Yazīd Ibn Mu'āwiyah ordered Greek philosophers who knew Arabic to be brought to him, and commissioned them to translate the Greek and Coptic books into the Arabic.[4] This was the first instance where Greek sciences became available to the Muslims of Egypt. This is further confirmed by Ibn Khaldūn who wrote in the "*Muqaddimah*": "*The sciences of only one nation, the Greeks, have come down to us (in completeness), because they were translated through al-Ma'mūn's efforts.*"[5] On the other hand the Neo-Platonic influences are seen in the

---

[1] See full argument in Dr. 'Abd al-Laṭīf Ḥamzah, *al-Ḥarakah al-Fikriyyah fī Miṣr fī al-'Aṣrayn al-Ayyūbī wal-Mamlūkī al-Awwal*, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, Cairo, 1947, p.23.

[2] The original inhabitants of Egypt were called Copts; today, the term Coptic refers to the local Egyptian Christians who are a sect of the Greek Orthodox church.

[3] On Greek and Neo-Platonic roots of, and influences on, the Islamic sciences see C.A. Qadir, Philosophy and Science in the Islamic World, Routledge, London, 1988, Pp. 110-112. Also see S.H. Nasr, Islamic sciences: An Illustrated Study, World of islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd, Kent, 1976, Pp.9-11.

[4] op cit., Ḥamzah, 1947, p.213.

[5] op cit., Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), 1967, p.39.

writings of the Iraqī Brethren of Purity[1] (Ikhwān al-Ṡafā) who are famous for their "Epistles" (*Rasā'il* tenth-century A.D.) which were "... *widely read by most learned men of later periods including Ibn Sīna and al-Ghazzalī* [2]."[3] The most important characteristic of the Ikhwān's metaphysical writings, is that they could address themselves to some particular phase of a subject without forgetting the whole which is an excellent demonstration of the traditional attitude towards science in Islam. The *Rasā'il* contain many profound metaphysical and cosmological ideas, mostly stated in Neo-Platonic, Neo-Pythagorean, and Hermetic symbols.[4] Although the Ikhwān seem to show a deeper interest in issues related to Christianity than Islam, their ideas found a great willingness for adoption amongst Ṡūfīs such as Ibn 'Arabī and Ibn al-Fāriḍ and Ibn Sīna who all had an impact on Mamlūk education.

It is perhaps in science that the synthesizing character of traditional Islamic civilization is most pronounced, since Islamic science represents the fusion of a particularly wide variety of earlier traditions. Seyyed Hossein Nasr expresses the impact of the inheritance of the Islamic tradition of several other traditions saying:

> ***Islamic science came into being from a wedding between the spirit that issued from the Qur'ānic revelation and the existing sciences of various civilizations which Islam inherited and which it transmuted through its spiritual power into a new substance, at once different from and continuous with what had existed before it. The international and cosmopolitan nature***

---

[1] On the identity and influences of the Ikhwān al-Ṡafā see Ian Richard Netton, Muslim Neo-Platonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1982.

[2] Al-Ghazzalī shows the effect of Neo-Platonism when he says that there is a spiritual dimension to the process of learning: "*knowledge exists potentially in the human soul like a seed in the soil; by learning the potential becomes actual.*" He goes on to say that there are two distinct channels in his system through which learning is acquired: actual application and Divine inspiration, the efforts of the mind and body on the one hand and a "light from God" on the other. Here the Neo-Platonic in al-Ghazzalī asserts the firm belief in a Divine illumination as being more efficacious than simple human reason. al-Ghazzalī quoted by A.L. Tibāwī, 1972, Pp.40-41. On al-Ghazzalī's attitude to the sciences, see Michael E. Marmura, "Ghazzalī's Attitude to the Secular Sciences and Logic", in ed. George F. Hourani, Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1975, Pp. 100-109. Also see W. Montgomery Watt, Islamic Philosophy and Theology, Edinburgh University press, Edinburgh, 1962, Pp. 114-122.

[3] Muḥammad Taqī Danishpazhūh, "*Ikhwān-i Ṡafā*", Mihr, #8, Tehran, 1952, p.610. Also for a detailed discussion of the influence of the Ikhwān, see A.L. Tībāwī, "*Jamā'ah Ikhwān aṡ-Ṡafā*", Journal of the American University of Beirut, 1930-1931, Pp.1-80.For the effect of the Neo-Platonic effect on medieval society, see Edward J. Jurji, "The Course of Arab Scientific Thought", in ed. Nabīh Amīn Fāris, The Arab Heritage, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1946, p.223.

[4] See op cit. Nasr, 1964, p.21.

*of Islamic civilization derived from the universal character of the Islamic revelation and reflected in the geographical spread of the Islamic world, enabled it to create the first science of a truly international nature in human history. Islam became heir to the intellectual heritage of all the major civilizations before it save that of the Far-East, and it became a haven within which various intellectual traditions found a new lease upon life, albeit transformed within a new spiritual universe.*[1]

Let us then examine a few of these traditional rational Islamic sciences available to the Mamlūks. We will not examine these sciences from their quantitative achievements but as sciences occupied within the Islamic tradition as a kind of contemplation of the universe unrestricted to mere empirical investigation. Although the quantitative achievements of Islamic science are considerable, it is a distortion to ignore their qualitative dimension.

Islamic cosmology (*'ilm al-hay'ah*) relates to the principles of Islam and to the metaphysics which arises from Ṡūfī esoterism. It aims to understand as well as visualize the higher states of existence through the contemplation of the cosmos. According to Islamic sources, these states of being (*maqāmāt*; sing. *maqām*)[2] lie below the Divine Presence of Allah, above the Throne (*'Arsh*) and Seat of the Throne (*al-Kursī*), followed by the eight angels connected to the Divine Throne, and followed by the seven heavens and ending with the four pillars which carry the celestial spheres connecting them to the physical worlds.[3]

In the Mamlūk period, manuscripts on cosmology had to rely on *ḥadīth* sources such as the fifteenth-century Mamlūk compilation by al-Suyūṫī "*al-Hay'ah al-Saniyyah fil-Hay'ah al-Sunniyyah*"[4]. Although there are many interpretations of these *ḥadīths* from the symbolic point of view, their cosmological significance is the same. The task in Mamlūk traditional cosmology was to transform the cosmos into a sort of image which could be contemplated in order to lead to the unity that is within the multiplicity of creation. It relies on both the descriptions that the Prophet Moḥammed (peace and blessings be upon him) gave after his

---

[1] op cit. Nasr, 1976, P.9.

[2] As we will see in section 2.4, the *maqām* is also a fundamental notion in Ṡūfī belief.

[3] These points will be discussed in detail in the following chapters as the need for clarification arises.

[4] Al-Suyūṫī (115th C.), trans. by Anton Heinen, Islamic Cosmology, In Kommission Bei Franz Steiner Verlag. Weisbaden, Beirut, 1982.

nocturnal ascent[1] (*al-mi'rāj*) to the Divine Presence - especially the version of this *ḥadīth* transmitted by Ibn 'Abbās - and on the theosophical and philosophical descriptions of the cosmos found in the Qur'ān. In general, it also relies on notions and symbols drawn from the doctrinal formulations of Ṣūfism as well as numerical symbolism and traditional astronomy. It seems that the Mamlūk view of cosmology was not very different from the general traditional theme of cosmology throughout the different periods of Islam. This is made clear by Nasr who describes the general theme of Islamic cosmology and its connection to Ṣūfism as follows:

> ***Islamic cosmology, therefore, displays many facets and forms but all leading to a single inner content. The meaning of all the cosmological schemes in Islam has remained the same, namely the relating of multiplicity to Unity, of existence to Being, of each creature on a particular level of existence to the higher levels and finally to the Divine Names and Qualities in which are to be found the principle and the 'end' of all cosmic manifestation.***[2]

Cosmology was related to mathematics (*'ilm al-riyāḍiyyāt*) which held a highly privileged place amongst all of the traditional Islamic sciences. The role of this knowledge fed back into all other forms of science and the arts including of course, architecture - we will see in Chapters Eight and Nine, numerous applications of it on Mamlūk religious architecture. Apart from its quantitative dimension, traditional mathematical science had a specific qualitative dimension, thus uniting the physical to the metaphysical.

This love for mathematics, especially geometry (*'ilm al-handasah*) and number (*'ilm al-a'dād*), is directly connected to the Islamic message, which is primarily connected to Unity or *Tawḥīd*.[3] Allah is One, thus the number one represents the symbol of the Source of everything and the series of numbers themselves represent the means through which

---

[1] The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was accompanied by the Archangel Gabriel from Makkah to Jerusalem and then vertically through all the States of being to the Divine Throne (*al-'Arsh*) itself, this event is mentioned in the Holy Qur'ān and described by Prophetic *ḥadīths*.

[2] op cit. Nasr, 1976, p.31.

[3] On traditional Islamic Mathematics, see op cit. Qadir, 1988, p.115.

multiplicity returns to the One.[1] That is why we find that treatises on mathematics sometimes involve introductions of a spiritual nature referring to Divine Creation and its harmonious order which relates directly to the domain of mathematics when understood from a traditional perspective. The introduction of the early seventeenth-century Ottoman treatise on traditional art and architecture "*Risāle-ī Mi'māriyye*"[2] involves passages describing the heavens and the earths connected vertically to the Throne of God (*'Arsh*) and the Seat (*Kursī*) as well as number symbolism. Although it dates from the seventeenth-century A.D. and does not apply directly on the Mamlūk period, it shows the traditional viewpoint of the connection between Ṣūfism, the crafts, mathematics, cosmology, astronomy, astrology, and the *awliyā'* (saints) by the use of both poetry[3] and prose.

The major sources for Islamic mathematics were Greek, Mesopotamian, Ancient Egyptian, Persian and Indian.[4] Of this vast inheritance the Muslim made the basis for the development of Islamic mathematics. On number theory, the Muslims distinguished between *'ilm al-a'dād* (science of numbers) and *'ilm al-ḥisāb* (science of computation including algebra).[5] Upon looking over medieval Muslim works in number theory and computation we observe several important achievements. The most important of these is the development of the philosophy of numbers and of mathematics in general, which unveils a qualitative dimension of mathematics which is very different from the prevalent empirical one that we know today.[6]

Nasr says that in the field of geometry, an important work is the eleventh century

---

[1] Ideas from op cit. Nasr, 1976, p.75.

[2] See the Risāle-ī Mi'māriyye: An Early Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Treatise on Architecture, trans. Howard Crane, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1987. Pp. 26, 27, 49-52.

[3] Poetry has always been a tool used by the Ṣūfīs to show their esoteric ideas. Ibn al-Fārid (13th C.) the Mamlūk Ṣūfī poet and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (13th C.), the Turkish Ṣūfī poet are a wonderful example of this.

[4] As for the Greek sources, they include most of the major works of Greek mathematics such as the Elements and Data of Euclid; the Conics, The Section of the Ratio, and the Determinate Section of Apollonius Pergaeus and the all important Introduction to Arithmetic of Nichomachus. Archimedes' works were also translated into Arabic and made use of.

[5] A series of important figures appear to have contributed to this field, foremost among them was Abul-'Abbas Ibn Bannā' al-Marrākūshī who lived in the thirteenth-century A.D. Mamlūk period and produced "*Talkhīṣ A'māl al-Ḥisāb*" (Summary of Arithmetic Operations). Abul-'Abbās Ibn al-Hā'im al-Miṣrī, who lived in the fourteenth century, wrote on both arithmetic and algebra.

[6] op cit. Nasr, 1976, p. 81.

"*Fīmā Yaḥtāj al-Ṣāni' min A'māl al-Handasah*" (What the Artisan Needs of Geometric Operations) of Abul Wafā' al-Buzjānī in which the various applications of geometry are thoroughly discussed.[1] He goes on to say that in the domain of geometry, both plane and solid, Muslims followed the path laid out by the Greek mathematicians, solving many of the problems which had been posed but remained unsolved by their predecessors. They also related geometry to algebra (*al-jabr*) which was established in the ninth century A.D. by Moḥammed Ibn Mūsa al-Khawārizmī; he firmly established the relation between this branch of mathematics and certain metaphysical principles central to Islamic doctrines. Finally, they devoted special attention to the symbolic aspects of geometry and its role in non-representational art (arabesques), keeping always the qualitative geometry in view which reflects the wisdom of the *Musawwir* (one of the names of God is the Designer or Fashioner) of the Universe.[2]

It should be remembered that the term "architect" in Arabic is "*muhandis*" (he who is a geometer) or "*mu'allim*" (teacher or master of craft). Accordingly, shapes created in the process of producing traditional Islamic art and architecture are inseparable from the traditional concept of mathematics, particularly geometry and the science of geometric forms, where each number and figure, when seen in its symbolic sense, is an echo of Unity and a reflection of a quality contained in principle within that Unity, which transcends all differentiation and all qualities and yet contains them in a principle manner[3]. Through mathematics, a harmonious balance and constant awareness of the flow of multiplicity from Unity and the return of all multiplicity to Unity - reflecting the Presence of the One in the many - was achieved. This is what characterizes Islamic traditional spirituality and is manifested in a direct manner in Islamic art and architecture.

But in traditional Islamic sciences, mathematics was not only related to cosmology,

---

[1] This reference is mentioned in Nasr 1976, unfortunately I have not been able to get hold of a copy of this manuscript.

[2] ibid., Pp. 82-85.

[3] We will see in Chapters Seven, and Eight that the square repeated in the courtyards of buildings was not just seen geometrically as a square, it was perceived as the symbol of stability and completion and a reflection of the quadrangularity of the four pillars carrying the celestial sphere bridging the earth to the heavens. The octagonal form encountered in so many mosques is not just a structural device to enable the architect to place the dome upon a square base, but a reflection of the Divine Throne (*'Arsh*), which according to Islamic *ḥadīth* is supported by eight angels. The dome is not just a way to cover the walls, it is the image of the vault of heaven and beyond it of the infinite and illimitable world of the Spirit of which the sphere or circle is the most direct geometrical symbol.

it was closely related to astronomy[1] as well, which of all the Islamic sciences produced the most prolific literature. Nasr says that "*Astronomy in its traditional Islamic setting is referred to either as 'ilm al-nujūm (science of the stars) or 'ilm al-falak (science of the celestial bodies).*"[2] Both the Qur'ān, with its frequent reference to the heavens (*samāwāt*), and the requirements of Islamic rituals induced Muslims to study the stars. Man has been ordered to look at the heavens and the earth to see the signs (*āyāt*) of Allah's Sovereignty - the Qur'ān often speaks of the signs of Allah found in the natural order especially the heavens. From the practical point of view, astronomical calculations had to be relied on in medieval times to determine the prayer times (*mawāqīt*) and the direction of the *qibla* (Makkah, the Ka'ba to be precise) which were essential in relation to any religious building. Observatories of unprecedented excellence were constructed in a number of places, and the astrolabe, that all important instrument of medieval astronomical calculation was greatly improved in Mamlūk times.[3] Mamlūk Cairo was a major centre of astronomical activity in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth-century. It was in Cairo that Ibn Yūnis wrote his masterpiece on observational astronomy. His contemporary Ibn al-Haytham - although known as a physicist - is also important in this domain for his study of the nature of the heavens.[4]

Astronomy in turn was related to astrology. The systemization of astrology as an art, and its cosmological symbolism, returns back to Ptolemaic Egypt. It was in fact this deep symbolism that made its integration into Islamic civilization and into esotericism possible. Throughout Islamic history, theologians (*'ulamā'*) and jurisprudents (*fuqahā'*) have repeatedly condemned astrology and with the same persistence it has continually been cultivated on the popular level. All the same, in the traditional universe of Islam it was not contradictory to find such a person as al-Birūnī - a mathematician - writing treatises on astrology. Nasr comments on this saying that: "*the world in which the traditional Muslim found himself was vast enough to enable both the mathematical aspects of astronomy and the symbolic aspects*

---

[1] On Astronomy, see op cit. Qadir, 1988, p.116.

[2] op cit. Nasr, 1976, p.95.

[3] The use of such facilities, together with the application of the newly developed trigonometry enabled Muslim astronomers to discover data that raised serious questions about the Ptolemaic theory of planetary movements. Although the Muslims continued to adhere to the geocentric conception of the universe, their criticisms of Ptolemaic theory became known to Copernicus and paved the way for the adoption of the heliocentric theory.

[4] ibid., p. 101.

*of astrology to survive together, often in the mind of a single astronomer or philosopher."*[1]

A number of Muslim thinkers were only concerned with astrology as linked to cosmological symbolism. This is seen in the astronomers who were inclined to astrology but ignored its superstitious and predictive aspects. On the whole, at one end astrological symbolism and the study of aspects of cosmic reality as the determinants of terrestrial events became an aspect of Islamic cosmology and metaphysics - such as in the works of Ibn Sīnā (d. 1036 A.D.) - at the other end, predictive popular astrology was the means by which people lifted the burden of what the future had in store for them. In this manner, popular astrology was divided into three branches: questions concerning the life of an absent person; choosing the right moment to take a crucial act; and foretelling the future.[2] These three branches were and are condemned by Sunnī Islam.

Apart from those mentioned above, the traditional rational sciences included another set of hidden sciences - hidden because they were neither taught nor practised publicly as their misuse could lead to unpredictable consequences. These sciences were related to numerous symbols that were understood in their time which dealt with hidden forces within the cosmos and the means of dealing with these forces. Thus the hidden Islamic traditional sciences are nothing but applications of cosmological sciences which cannot be understood without having the doctrines to decipher their symbolism. On the exoteric level, the *'ulamā'* prohibited and discouraged strongly the cultivation of such practices while on the esoteric level they were a means to achieve the Truth and the ultimate direct Knowledge - Gnosis.

Alchemy[3] is considered to be the major of these sciences, and those who practised it considered it to be a science of both the cosmos as well as of the soul. The alchemical point of view is based on the principle that all things are found in all other things, thus, transmutation from one thing to another is possible. To do this they believed there had to be a "catalyst", a spiritual agent symbolized by the philosophers' stone. Ibn Khaldūn in his "*Muqaddimah*" showed disfavour to alchemy and defined it as "*a sort of sorcery, because the transformation of specific bodies (substances) from one form into another is affected by*

---

[1] ibid., p.126.

[2] See op cit. 'Ashūr, 1959, Chapter Six. We will see how such facets of popular belief had consequences on the Sulṭān Ḥassan's life for instance when a minaret toppled during the course of the construction of his *madrasa*.

[3] On Alchemy and Chemistry, see op cit. Qadir, 1988. Pp.119-121.

*psychic powers, and not by practical technique,*"[1] at the same time he says that "... *among the inhabitants of cities such as Cairo ... Egyptians show a great eagerness for the practice of alchemy.*"

Alchemy is concerned with the soul but uses the material world, especially minerals and metals, as a source of symbols[2]. Its ideal is to change or rather deliver gold from nature. Alchemy reached its peak during the time of Jābir Ibn Ḥayyān[3] in Mamlūk times who took it as a total philosophy of nature, his doctrines were concerned with the mineral kingdom and the transmutation of metals into gold. The basis of this natural philosophy is the four elements and the four natures. According to Jābir, all metals were a product of the combination of sulphur and mercury in different proportions - in this case his reference was to an alchemical masculine sulphur and a feminine mercury. It should be emphasized that alchemy made use of the cosmic forces themselves in order to transcend the cosmos. The alchemists believed it was the unification of male and female principles that produced a new perfected form; and that while applicable to metals, this could be applied to the soul of man each on its individual plane. Jābir also believed that the key to understand the structure of any substance was the *mīzān* (balance) through these polarizations of male and female, hot and cold, ...etc. Here the balance is concerned with inner (*bāṭin*) and outer (*ḍhāhir*) qualities and with numeral symbolism which ties to the notions of Ṣūfism - especially related to Ibn 'Arabī's *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* (Unity of Being).

The relation between alchemy and Ṣūfism is profound. The reason is that Ṣūfism is a way of realization, which constitutes a doctrine, a method and a sort of alchemy through which the soul of man is transformed. In other words, Ṣūfism found in alchemy the example through which it could describe its teachings. As an analogy, the Ṣūfī master worked upon the base metal of the soul of the disciple and with the help of the spiritual methods of Ṣūfism transformed this base metal into gold. Alchemy is hence considered by the Ṣūfīs to be its supporting branch.

---

[1] op cit. Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), 1967, p.391.

[2] See the introduction of Titus Burckhardt, Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos Science of the Soul, trans. by William Stoddart, Element Books Ltd, Dorset, 1967.

[3] Ibn Khaldūn again attacking alchemy introduced Jābir Ibn Ḥayyān as "*the chief sorcerer of Islam... discovered the craft of sorcery and alchemy.*" op cit. Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), 1967, p.391.

The possibility of transmutation from base metal to gold has been debated throughout Islamic history by scientists, philosophers and theologians. Most philosophers and scientists accepted the alchemical point of view, even if they did not believe in transmutation. The Shī'ite theologians favoured alchemy tremendously (mostly in Persia and Iraq and in the earlier Fatimid period in Egypt) yet the *Sunnī* theologians rejected its application. In Mamlūk times, after seeing how many rich people had become impoverished by it[1], the *'ulamā'* prohibited and condemned it. Al-Gūbarī called the alchemists "... *they are the greatest group amongst groups that are dedicated to 'eat' peoples money unjustly*".[2] Nevertheless, we will see in Chapter Seven the role of alchemy in relation to the ennoblement of materials as perceived by traditional medieval craftsmen.

## 2.3 *SHARĪ'A*-BASED SOURCES OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

Since Islam was the primary integrative factor in traditional Mamlūk times, the *Shari'a* based sciences (*al-'ulūm al-Shar'iyyah*) occupied a central place within the subject matter taught in the Mamlūk *madrasa* and *khanqah*. By *Shari'a*-based sources of knowledge, we mean those disciplines and skills that were directly related to the sources of the Islamic faith, especially the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* literature. The term therefore does not in this usage, include religious thought as represented by philosophy, or Ṣūfism. The primary aims of the *Shari'a* based sciences were the preservation and correct understanding of the sources of the faith.

The greater emphasis was, understandably, devoted to the Qur'ān. Within Qur'ānic sciences the most important subjects were the recitation of the Qur'ān (*'ilm al-qirā'āt*) and the explication of the Qur'ān (*'ilm al-tafsīr*). The correct recitation of the Qur'ān is a matter of utmost importance to Muslim religious scholars. In order to appreciate why this is so, we must realize that the Qur'ān represents to the Muslim the very Speech of Allah (*Kalām*

---

[1] S. 'Āshūr, *Al-Mojtama' al-Miṣrī fī 'Aṣr al-Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk*, Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo, 1962, p. 243.

[2] Al-Gūbarī ('Abd al-Raḥīm al-Shahīr bi 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Abī Bakr), *Al-Mokhtār fī Kashf al-Asrār*, Damascus, 1884, p.61.

*Allah*).[1] Since the very words of the Qur'ān are from Allah, they have in the minds of the Muslims a sacred character. It is through these Divine Words that Allah establishes contact with man and communicates His will to man. This being the case, it is imperative that the words of the Qur'ān be transmitted with the utmost care from generation to generation.

Oral rhythmic recitation was for medieval Muslims the only proper mode of the Qur'ān's transmission. A specialist in Qur'ānic recitation (*muqri'*) taught correct recitation to a group of disciples, who in their turn became specialists and taught recitation to others. In this manner Qur'ānic recitation was passed on from generation to generation. Not only were the words of the Qur'ān thus transmitted, so also was a particular style of recitation, called in Arabic *tajwīd*[2]. Alongside this oral tradition, a written text of the Qur'ān was also preserved from generation to generation, the agents of transmission in this case being scribes who produced a continuing supply of copies of the text. This gave rise to the arts of calligraphy of Arabic scripture, which came to be one of the basic elements of decoration in Islamic architecture especially in religious buildings.

Next to the rhythmic recitation and transmission of the Qur'ān, the most important Qur'ānic discipline was that of *tafsīr* (interpretation or explication). Within this discipline a large literature of commentary on the Qur'ānic text arose. Qur'ānic interpretation (*tafsīr*), passed through two phases during the history of Islam: the first was "transmittive", and the second was "rational". This second phase, was the one that was more influential in Mamlūk times and was started by al-Ghazzalī (d. 1111 A.D.). He said that mere transmission was not enough to know the Book of God and that it was possible for each person to deduce things from the Qur'ān according to one's capability. According to his Ṡūfī beliefs he also added that the Qur'ān had both a *ḍhāhir* (external) and a *bāṫin* (internal) dimension, and that one could not understand the Word of God without understanding the two. He gives an example of the Qur'ānic words related to the literal order given to Moses to "remove his shoes (*fakhla' na'layka*)", that the word "*na'layk*" in the world of matter means "shoes", while in the world

---

[1] Many writers on Islam describe the Qur'ān as the Word of Allah. This choice of wording, though certainly appropriate, is somewhat vague, since it is essentially metaphorical and may be used for any divine revelation, whether verbal or not. In the Bible for instance, the phrase is sometimes applied to moral principles or imperatives which prophets or apostolic writers convey to their contemporaries in their own words. In such cases the Word of God is contained in the words of men. The Islamic tradition on the other hand, affirms that the Qur'ān consists of words which are themselves from Allah. The Prophet Moḥammed (peace and blessings be upon him) is in no sense the author of the Qur'ān. Both the ideas found in it and the words through which these ideas are expressed have a Divine Origin.

[2] *Tajwīd* is a melodious type of recitation; the Islamic tradition carefully distinguishes it from singing as such.

of the spirit it meant "*the world and the hereafter*"[1]. He further attributed the difference views in interpretation to the attainment of True Knowledge - involving wisdom (*ḥikmah*) only revealed to Prophets and the special *awliyā'* (friends of God; i.e., Ṣūfī saints). This perspective opened the way to a new future for *tafsīr*.[2] As a result, three branches arose from *tafsīr*: the first was the science of debate (*'ilm al-jadal*) which yielded interpretations such as those of the Mo'tazalites[3]; the second was esoteric Shī'ite interpretation (*ta'wīl bāṭinī Shī'ī*) yielding Shī'ite interpretation[4]; and the third was esoteric Ṣūfī interpretation (*ta'wīl Ṣūfī bāṭinī*) which yielded such interpretations as Ibn 'Arabī's Qur'ānic interpretation - unfortunately this work was never completed[5].

On the other hand, the explication of, and commentary on, the second great source of Islamic faith, the *ḥadīth* literature (*'ilm al-ḥadīth*), did not present so a difficult task as that of the Qur'ān. The biggest concern of the scholars was to determine the authenticity of each *ḥadīth* by determining "chains of authorities" (*silsilat asānīd*, singular: *isnād*) which were attached to the *ḥadīth* narratives.[6]

Since the *Sharī'a* to which the community of Muslims was subject is considered to be from Allah, jurisprudence (*fiqh* the study of this Law) is closely related to the religious studies mentioned above. It is needless to say that the norms laid down by the *Sharī'a* were indistinguishable from moral or ethical norms in traditional times: the medieval Mamlūk Muslim did not separate Law from morality. Because it is the expression of Allah's will, the *Sharī'a* necessarily has a moral character; what it declares right or wrong is *Really* right or wrong. Furthermore, the norms contained in the *Sharī'a* constitute absolute norms.

---

[1] See full argument in al-Ghazzalī (12th C.), Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn, trans. by Maulana Fazlul Karim, Taj Company, Delhi, 1982, vol.1. Pp. 33, 88.

[2] The following examples of *ta'wīl* are mentioned in op cit. Ḥamzah, 1947, p.186.

[3] On the Mo'tazalites see op cit. Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), 1967, p.72.

[4] To illustrate this, when God says in the Qur'ān "and slaughter the cow," the Shī'ite *ta'wīl* of the "cow" is "'Ā'ishah" the wife of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

[5] Up to the *sūra* (chapter) of *al-Kahf* (the Cave). See al-Suyūṭī (15th C.), Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn, al-Nuskhah al-Ūrobbiyyah, Cairo, n.d., p.188.

[6] Perhaps the most typical representative of this type of specialized religious scholars of the Mamlūk period was Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (15th C.). Al-Suyūṭī is said to have produced 561 distinct works, of which 450 have survived. Al-Suyūṭī's writings covered the whole field of contemporary literary and scientific studies. This thesis will rely on numerous *ḥadīths* that have been compiled by him especially ones related to traditional cosmology.

In medieval times, Muslim jurisprudence embraced two primary components: the science of *fiqh* and the science of *usūl al-fiqh*. The former sought to work out the actual details of the *Sharī'a*; the latter sought to determine the methodological principles which were to guide this effort. These two undertakings presupposed that the *Sharī'a* had not been given to man in the form of a ready-made system of law, one which covered all situations of life; such a system had, therefore, to be constructed by human scholars, the *'ulamā'* who are also called *fuqahā'* (from the term "*fiqh*"), on the basis of careful study of the revelation which had come through Moḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The chief repository of revelation was the Qur'ān, while the recorded deeds of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) which were found in the *ḥadīth* literature, were also vehicles of revealed Truth and therefore constituted a second valid source for the understanding of the *Sharī'a*. These sayings and deeds were regarded as a sacred tradition (*Sunnah*[1]), which every Muslim must follow to the best of his ability.

But many cases which called for consideration in this working out of the *Sharī'a* were not explicitly covered in the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*, and therefore some further principles had to be developed whereby the *Sharī'a* could be correctly elaborated. One such principle was the principle of consensus (*ijmā'*). According to this principle, whatever regulation the Muslim community unanimously agreed upon was a true representation of the *Sharī'a* and was therefore binding upon all Muslims. The consensus of the community was, like the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), a vehicle of Divine Truth; whatever the community agreed upon was considered to be a valid expression of the Divine Will. Another principle adopted by the *'ulamā'* was that of the validity of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*). According to this principle, whenever a scholar could find no guidance in the Qur'ān, *Sunnah*, or consensus on a particular matter, he was under obligation to draw analogies, or parallels, between cases dealt with in these sources and the case at hand.[2]

The *fiqh* books evaluated individual human acts on the basis of five categories. A particular act might be (1) obligatory (2) commendable (3) permitted (4) reprehensible or,

---

[1] From which the term Sunnī is derived.

[2] Thus, if he were asked to render a judgment concerning the taking of drugs - not specifically mentioned in the sources - he might build an argument against taking drugs by drawing an analogy between it and intoxicating drinks (*khamr*), which the Qur'ān specifically condemns. Secondly, he could draw from the famous Prophetic *ḥadīth* which renounces anything that harms the "self" or the "others" (*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*).

(5) forbidden.[1] Medieval Muslim jurists operated on the assumption that all human acts could be evaluated in terms of these five basic categories. However, the evaluation of a particular act was not a human decision but a deduction from the recognized sources of Law, especially the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth*. It was not man, but Allah who evaluated or judged human acts - this is one of the primary notions in the Islamic tradition. But deduction from the sources required that the sources be interpreted correctly. The sources did not as a rule say "this is forbidden", or "this is reprehensible". Generally, the sources contained commands or prohibitions, or statements implying commands or prohibitions, from which the precise evaluation of an act had to be derived.

The work of deriving evaluations of acts from the sources (an endeavour which is called *ijtihād*) requires that basic methodological principles be clearly set forth. These principles constitute the second primary concern of Islamic jurisprudence, and since early Islam, a distinct category of scholarly literature was devoted to it. Thus, alongside the books of *fiqh* there emerged books of legal theory (*usūl al-fiqh*). The study of the methodological principles of legal inquiry became one of the most important of all scholarly disciplines within medieval Islam.[2] In theological terms, it represented nothing less than a process of discovering the Will of Allah.

In the realm of *fiqh*, the most famous *faqīh* in the times of the Mamlūks was 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn 'Abd al-Salām (d. 660 A.H.) who came from Damascus and lived in Cairo for more than twenty years, where numerous *'ulamā'* left their positions for him[3]. He became a Ṡūfī under al-Shihāb al-Suhrawardī[4] and was apprenticed under the *Shaykh* Abī al-Ḥassan al-Shādhilī one of the well known Ṡūfī leaders. His great influence was political, social, and spiritual to the extent that when this *faqīh* died, Baybars the First said: "*Today my throne has been secured, because if this shaykh had told the people to throw me out, they would have*

---

[1] The second and fourth of these categories have no parallel in modern positive law. Most modern legal systems are content to state what is obligatory and what is forbidden and to lay down the penalties or punishments for omitting the former and committing the latter; by implication, acts which are not strictly defined as obligatory or forbidden are permitted. The rewards envisioned in Islamic thinking are granted primarily in the life to come, just as punishments are to a large extent meted out in the life to come (notwithstanding the stipulation of a limited number of temporal punishments).

[2] op cit Weiss & Green, 1985, p. 177.

[3] *Shaykh* Zakī al-Dīn Ibn 'Abd al-'Aḍhīm al-Mondhirī stopped *iftā'* (extracting laws from the Sharī'a) after he had heard him.

[4] One of the most famous *Sunnī* Ṡūfī *shaykhs* (d.1234) who influenced the Mamlūk period.

*removed me from the throne."*[1] 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn 'Abd al-Salām was not only just and firm with the society and the sulṫāns, but also upon himself. It was said that he had made a *fatwā* (decreed some law from the *Sharī'a*) and then it appeared to him that it was incorrect. His response was that he proclaimed in Cairo and Fustāṫ that: "*whoever has heard a fatwā from Ibn 'Abd al-Salām of this, he should not follow it as it is wrong.*"[2]

On the other hand, Islam contains many ideas which speculative minds were able to adopt to construct integrated systems of thought. Islamic speculative thought is concerned with ultimate things: God, spirit, the nature of things, the purpose of life...etc. It may be divided into three primary fields: theology, philosophy and Ṡūfī thought. As we saw in the sciences that mathematics was closely related to astronomy and astrology, and that astrology was in turn related to alchemy, and alchemy to Ṡūfism, we find that these three fields of Islamic speculative thought were also closely interrelated in Mamlūk times and were traditionally interwoven.

Theology as such is the systemization of religious beliefs; it transforms a set of beliefs into a system of thought which is rationally coherent. In doing so, it provides a justification for religious beliefs whereby those beliefs can be defended against critics or urged upon non-believers. This latter function of theology is usually called apologetics. In medieval Islamic theology, this apologetical function was highly manifested. This is suggested by the Arabic term by which Islamic theology is generally known, namely *kalām*. Although *kalām* normally means simply "speech", it can as a designation for theology, be best translated as "dialectic".[3]

As we mentioned above, the expansion of the Arabs in the seventh and eighth-centuries was a great stimulus to dialectical theology. It brought Muslims into close contact

---

[1] See quote in op cit. Ḥamzah, 1947, p.207.

[2] ibid., p.207.

[3] This translation is not intended to explain the origin of the term "*kalām*" as a designation for theology, since this has not yet been determined with full certainty. Some scholars think that theology was called *kalām* because the *Kalām Allah* was one of its main subjects. In Islamic theology dialectic was a type of discussion in which the supporter of the given doctrine built up a case or rationale for his doctrine by answering particular questions or criticisms raised by his fellow discussants. This is opposed to the deductive method. In the latter, one works out a system of thought in isolation from others by deducing from certain basic tenets, taken to be unattackable, further tenets that are implied in the basic tenets. The deductive method raises neither critique nor cases, instead it uses "cold logic" and hence is not necessarily accepted. Thus, it is clearly the dialectical method which is the more suitable instrument of apologetical theology.

with a variety of non-Muslim religious and intellectual traditions, such as Greek and Indian philosophy, and Christian and Jewish theology, all of which contained within themselves considerable variation. As a result of these contacts, Muslims were faced with many challenges to their own religious faith. They had to decide whether to respond to these challenges, and thus engage in dialectic with disputants who did not share their religious faith, or simply to ignore the challenges.[1] But these challenges did not originate only from non-Muslims, many of them arose from within the Muslim community itself.[2]

Despite its vigour, dialectical theology was not universally accepted among medieval Muslims. The more conservative Muslims looked upon it as an intrusion of human reason into the domain of religion. In their view, revelation as contained in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* literature, was completely sufficient as a source of religious Truth and there was no need to add to it the findings of the dialecticians. If the revelation was silent on certain matters, it was best to leave these matters to Allah and concentrate on those things concerning which the revelation was absolutely clear. In the final analysis, what mattered most was obedience to the commands laid down in the revelation, not the satisfaction of human curiosity concerning things not touched on in the revelation. The exponents of this point of view frequently called themselves the *ahl al-ḥadīth*, or "people of the tradition", meaning that beyond the Qur'ān itself, they accepted only the *ḥadīth* literature as a source of the Truth, thus repudiating human reason as a means for discovering the Truth. A number of books were written condemning dialectic.[3]

Due to the hostility of most of *ahl al-ḥadīth* to dialectic, the theologians (*mutakallimūn*) had to take extreme pains to defend their use of dialectic in the realm of religion and to show that it was fully compatible with the *Sharī'a*. One of the first to do so was Abul Ḥassan al-Ash'arī, who wrote a book entitled "Highlights of the Polemic Against

---

[1] op cit. Weiss & Green, 1985, p. 180.

[2] When such issues arose within the community of Muslims, the various contending groups could, if they chose, employ dialectic in advancing their position. Thus, dialectic came to be a tool not only for apologetics vis-a-vis non-Muslims but also for sectarian developments within Islam. It was, in fact, by means of dialectic that an orthodox *Sunnī* theology was ultimately constructed - which has remained basically unaltered until today.

[3] One of the most famous of these was a book by Ibn Qudāmā entitled The Censure of Speculative Theory, which maintained that dialectic in matters of religious faith was contrary to the *Sharī'a* and therefore illegal (*ḥarām*). ibid., p.181.

Deviators and Innovators"[1], in which he claimed that revelation not only permitted the use of reason but actually encouraged it. As an instrument of apologetics whereby the faith of the community could be safeguarded and strengthened, dialectic was thus for al-Ash'arī and his followers, a duty which the faithful could not evade.[2] Such ideas were influential in the mamlūk period.

One of the most significant features of the *kalām* theology was its cosmology, or theory of the physical world. In order to preserve the exclusive power of Allah, the theologians denied that the physical world can exist from one moment to the next by virtue of any power or momentum of its own. The notion of a universe endowed by its Creator with an independent continuing existence, and made to operate in accordance with certain mechanical laws, was alien to the thinking of the medieval Muslim theologians. Such a universe, in their way of thinking, would have imposed a limitation on the Absolute Power of Allah. Accordingly, they assumed that the physical world is continuously created by Allah from moment to moment. Each moment was viewed as an atomic unit of time having no duration. The rapid succession of Divine creations gave an impression of duration, but this impression of duration in no sense pertained to the physical world itself. Continuity and movement, as we perceive them in the physical world, were illusions resembling the illusion of continuity and movement created by the cinematic projector. This cosmology, needless to say, ruled out the possibility of real causality. The relationship between a cause and its apparent effect is imaginary; there is no intrinsic connection between them.[3] The *kalām* theologians insisted that Allah created the world in the manner of an artisan, that He made it out of nothing, and that he sustains it moment by moment by a process of continuous creation[4].

---

[1] Al-Ghazzalī was in accordance with most of his writings who in turn influenced the eleventh-century Ayyubid and the later Mamlūk period with his ideas. On the Ash'arites, see op cit. Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), 1967, p.72.

[2] This same conviction inspired the later Ṣūfī theologian, al-Faḍalī, to write about the question of how much theology the common people (i.e. non-theologians) must know in order to fulfill their duty as Muslims. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) maintained that every Muslim must be able to provide a rationale for his faith and provided some arguments, starting with arguments for Allah's existence, which would enable him to do this.

[3] We will see the consequence of this theory on the design of water streams *salsabīl* used in mosques in Chapter Eight.

[4] In Chapter seven, the traditional design process will be seen to parallel to a great extent the process of Divine Creation.

Broadly speaking, traditional Islamic philosophy was closely akin to theology[1], since it deals with religious themes such as Allah, creation, salvation, and prophecy. However among historians of Islam it has become customary to restrict the term theology to the dialectical or *kalām* movement and to apply the term philosophy to the movement under consideration in this section. This accords with medieval Muslim practice, which distinguishes *kalām* from *falsafa*[2], the latter term being of the same Greek origin as the English term "philosophy".

*Kalām* theology acquired some of its elements from Greek and Hellenistic philosophy; the dialectical method itself was well-known to the Greeks, not to mention certain substantive ideas, such as that of the atomic composition of the physical world. But Islamic philosophy was to a greater extent a carry-over of Hellenism into the Islamic world, even allowing for the many original contributions of the Islamic philosophers. *Kalām* theology arose at a time when Greek and Hellenistic ideas were just beginning to percolate into the Islamic world, whereas *falsafa* was the direct outcome of the massive translation of Greek philosophical books into Arabic which took place in the ninth-century A.D. *Kalām* theology was in large part a product of developments in early Islam; *falsafa* was more a continuation on Islamic soil of an ancient tradition going back to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

It is somewhat more difficult to speak in general terms about *falsafa* than about *kalām* theology, since the latter, despite certain variations, was on the whole a more integrated movement. The philosophers did not operate within the framework of an orthodoxy and were able therefore to develop their thinking much more freely along individual lines than were the theologians. It seems that philosophy in the later thirteenth-century in the Sunnī world was unpopular amongst the *'ulamā'* due to the fear that it might lead to excessive interest for its own sake over the *Sharī'a* oriented sciences. Al-Subkī says:

> ***It is forbidden (ḥarām) to study philosophy to those who have not digested the basics of the Sharī'a in his heart and who have not been filled with the majesty of the Prophet, and who has not learnt the Book by heart as well***

---

[1] For the differences in the attitudes of looking at traditional Islamic philosophy and Modern philosophy, see S.H. Nasr, "The Teaching of Philosophy", in ed. S.H. Nasr, Philosophy, Literature, and Fine Arts, Hodder and Stroughton, King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, 1982, Pp.3-21.

[2] On Sunnite theology from 1100 to 1250 A.D., see op cit. Watt, 1962, Pp. 125-130.

*as a great deal of the hadīth literature ... and he who has arrived to all these requirements may then study philosophy in order to answer back at those who have written it, but even then under two conditions: the first, that he be confident of himself and unmoved by what its agnostic claims (mulāḥadah), and second, not to mix the words of the philosophers with those of the 'ulamā'.*[1]

The great philosophers began with al-Kindī (d. 866 A.D.), who was followed by al-Farābī (d. 950 A.D.), and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037 A.D.). The best way to illustrate al-Kindī's work is to look at the first few pages of his "Book of the First Philosophy". The first chapter of this work contains some ideas fitted together according to two principles: the first states that no man can alone attain the whole of Truth; it is attained gradually and has a historical dimension (a past). The second principle states that, the components of Truth are in no way opposed to religion, for philosophy contains in essence knowledge of Divine Sovereignty and Divine Unity, as well as understanding of the virtues to be followed and the evil to be avoided. This meant that there was a basic agreement between the teachings of the prophets and the content of books of philosophy.[2] Al-Kindī deals with Allah, who is One, the cause of the unity of created things and hence of their existence, since all existence is one or unified; being the cause of the unity of created things, He is therefore the Creator in the strict sense of the word.[3]

The second principle is the ascent of the soul, through the acquisition of virtues (*iḥsān*), from the tangible world to the world of the Intellect, beyond the spheres of the planets and stars to the world where it merges into the Light of the Creator. The third topic is the way heaven obeys Allah: this is dealt with through a commentary on a verse of the Qur'ān that speaks of the stars bowing down before Allah. The question is what this "bowing down" consists of. Al-Kindī applies *ta'wīl* and says that it means the stars' obedience to Allah: after all, the heavens are governed by Allah, and the whole world has been made what

---

[1] See al-Subkī (14th C.) in op cit. Ḥamzah, 1947, p.78.

[2] Ideas from a paper by Jean Jolivet in Islam Philosophy And Science, Four Public Lectures Organized by the Unesco, The Unesco Press, Vendome, June 1980. Pp. 43-4.

[3] On al-Kindī's Aristotelian, Mu'tazalite, and Neo-Platonic views of God see Ian Richard Netton, Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology, Routledge, London, 1989, Pp.51-65. Also see Alfred L. Ivry, "Al-Kindī's *On First Philosophy* in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*" in ed. George F. Hourani, Essays on Islamic philosophy and Science, State University of new York press, Albany, 1975, Pp.15-25.

it is by Allah. So here we see a commentary on the Qur'ān being helped by Ṡūfī methods of interpretation or by Greek cosmology. To stay faithful to his religion, al-Kindī occasionally allowed himself to diverge from his Greek masters. Aristotle teaches that the world is eternal, whereas al-Kindī devotes some pages to demonstrate the opposite; that the world is not infinite or eternal but had a beginning and an end. Thus the parts of the philosophical legacy that denied revealed information was rejected.[1]

Al-Farābī (d. 950 A.D.) is famed both for his extensive commentaries on the works of Aristotle and for original philosophical works of his own. His commentaries helped to make the ideas of Aristotle more understandable to Muslim readers, who found Aristotle's own works (in Arabic translation) obscure and difficult to grasp. Al-Farābī is responsible for the fact that Greek philosophy became firmly rooted among Muslim intellectuals. For this reason, al-Farābī was to become known as "the second master" (Aristotle being the first). Among his own original works, the most famous is "*al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*" (The Virtuous City), which presents a view of an ideal political community which resembles in many ways that found in Plato's "Republic". In this work, al-Farābī develops a metaphysics of emanation, about the way the universe as a whole stems from the first being.[2] While al-Kindī refers to Allah calling him the 'One-True'; al-Farābī calls him the 'First'. These are philosophical terms, but they are also Divine Names found in the Qur'ān, which shows that although the philosophers were attacked by medieval *'ulamā'* because they did not stick to the explicit teachings of the *Sharī'a*, they relied on the Qur'ān and on general Islamic themes.

Al-Farābī - like al-Kindī - tells us that religion and philosophy have a single source, i.e. an Intellectual indirect Light from Allah, and that they therefore have the same content. In his book entitled "Book of Religion", he tells us that the speculative and practical parts of religion are consecutive to the theoretical and practical parts of philosophy. Moreover, since not everyone is fitted for philosophical speculation, those incapable of it need pictorial representations of the truth: and these pictorial representations differ according to the prophets and the cities in which they are spread. This implies a Unity of Religion and at the same time explains the reason for the diversity of religions. This last point, and especially the distinction between those who are capable of philosophizing and those who are not (for whom religions

---

[1] We will see in the next section that these ideas obviously tie to Ṡūfī belief.

[2] op cit., Jolivet, 1980, Pp. 49-50. Also see op cit, Netton, 1989, Pp. 109-114.

exist), echoes the ideas mentioned above by al-Ghazzalī in relation to *tafsīr* ( Qur'ānic interpretation).[1]

Ibn Sīna (d. 1037 A.D.) carried on the tradition of original composition and became the most influential of all the Muslim philosophers, he was the one who was the most influential during the Ayyubid and Mamlūk periods. Although Ibn Sīna was strongly attacked by al-Ghazzāli for supporting doctrines incompatible with religion on such fundamental points as God's Knowledge of particular things and the resurrection of bodies and was also attacked by Ibn Khaldūn in the "*Muqaddimah*"[2].Ibn Sīna wrote prolifically and at the same time involved himself actively in political life, even serving on several occasions as prime minister to ruling *emīrs*. As all traditional men of sciences, Ibn Sīna's expertise extended beyond the bounds of philosophy to Ṡūfism[3], into the domain of the rational sciences to include medicine.

Ibn Sīna's work was based entirely on a neo-Platonist theory: it is a typical feature of Ṡūfism that it never refrained from adopting ideas from Neo-Platonism. He thought that knowledge consists in uniting oneself with the Source of knowledge, by this way, one is able to convey the Truth of material forms to the soul. He says that this process involves a progression which leads to a plane which is of Divine Intellect - similar to Ṡūfī belief in states (*maqāmāt*). In this case, Ibn Sīna's Ṡūfī ideas are echoed in his philosophy. He argues that this ascending to the Divine holds good for the prophets and also with modifications for the Ṡūfī *awliyā'* (saints or friends of God); but he completes that what the prophets have in addition to the Ṡūfīs is a powerful Imagination - a transcendent one - and an ability to command the obedience of external matter.[4]

Although we mentioned that there were basic differences between the philosophers

---

[1] That each individual understands the Qur'ān according to his capabilities; this is the attitude which opened the door to *ta'wīl*.

[2] See Ibn Khaldūn's point of view on Ibn Sīnā in op cit. Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), 1967, p.357.

[3] There is a lot of controversy on whether Ibn Ṡīna was a Ṡūfī himself or not. This controversy lies in that in some of his work he refutes Ṡūfism as such, while in others he takes Ṡūfism as his theme to discuss the subject matter he deals with. See Julian Baldick, Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, London, 1989, p.61.

[4] Ibn Sīna says that prophets can unite not only with heavenly intelligence and souls, but also with heavenly bodies, through which they can bring about changes on earth. These points are discussed in op cit. Jolivet, 1980, Pp. 54-5. Also see op cit. Netton, 1989, Pp. 174-178.

and the *kalām* theologians, philosophy influenced the *kalām* movement. It was prior to the Mamlūk period, from the late eleventh-century A.D. onwards, that *kalām* theologians began to use the deductive method of investigation along with the traditional dialectic, and somewhat later they began to employ certain philosophical themes.[1] However, the *kalām* theologians never adopted *falsafa* in full but rather continued to adhere to fundamental orthodox tenets.

The *kalām* theologians and the philosophers were not the only ones in the Mamlūk period to construct a system of thought. A third category of speculative thinkers the theosophists, or Ṡūfīs did so too. Islamic theosophy is the speculative side of Ṡūfism and is a system of thought based on the principle that the knowledge of Allah and of ultimate things is derived from intuition or esoteric insight. Such intuition or insight is called in Arabic *ma'rifa*. The Ṡūfī way (*ṭarīqah*) is the practical side of Ṡūfism as opposed to theosophy.

## 2.3 ṠŪFĪ BASED SOURCES OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, Mamlūk society was deeply rooted in Ṡūfism. The ideal way to approach the study of Ṡūfism as practised by the Mamlūks would be to re-create the footsteps of a medieval Ṡūfī disciple affiliated to a Way (*ṭarīqah*). But this is impossible to achieve - due to the fact that the very nature of Ṡūfism is orally transmitted, both as a knowledge and as a practice. The best way to evade this problem is to examine the few fragments of Ṡūfī manuals which survive along with the historical hints that are to be found in Mamlūk sources. This creates an incomplete skeleton of medieval Mamlūk Ṡūfism and necessarily implies the need to rely on Ṡūfī sources from other periods including present-day ones to provide its missing parts - bearing in mind that the essence of Ṡūfism has not changed since the beginning of Islam. The study of Ṡūfism from purely Ṡūfī sources, however assumes a thorough acquaintance with the Islamic religion in general and also preferably a grasp of one of its native languages. Ibn Khaldūn in Mamlūk times says in his book "*Shifā' al-Sā'il*" that one cannot express what Ṡūfism is, unless one participates in its feeling and "tasting".[2]

---

[1] ibid Weiss, p.185. If we turn to the great theological compendium of 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (14th C.), *al-Insān al-Kāmil* Universal Man, trans. by Titus Burckhardt, Beshara Publications, Sherborne, 1983, we find that a large part of it is devoted to philosophical matters.

[2] Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), *Shifā' al-Sā'il li-Tahdhīb al-Masā'il*, The Catholic Press, Beirut, 1959, Pp. 96-97.

The sources that will be used to fill the missing gaps will mainly be those of contemporary writers who are either Ṡūfīs themselves or have attained sufficient knowledge of it such as Martin Lings, Titus Burckhardt, Annemarie Schimmel, Shaykh Fadhlallah Haeri, K.S.K Khan, William Stoddart, A.J. Arberry, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, and Julian Baldick. Other contemporary sources will be used by writers such as Frithjof Schuon and Henry Corbin who adopt what is termed the universalist approach, which regards Islam and Ṡūfism as a particular manifestation of universal human aspirations towards the supernatural and spiritual. While perceiving the spiritual essentials common to all the great religious traditions, this approach does not make the mistake - so often made today - of belittling the significance and importance of a definite and unequivocal commitment to one particular tradition, nor do they forget the reality that the individual is moulded by a religious tradition and not vice versa.

To understand what Ṡūfism is, we must first reach out for the meaning of the term itself, when and under what circumstances it originated and what was the need for the emergence of Ṡūfī thought. One cannot move beyond these steps without first examining what the Mamlūk Ṡūfī view of the *Sharī'a* was - which the Ṡūfīs call the "outer Law" - and thus establish their standing from this Law. From there it will be possible to understand the basic Ṡūfī beliefs which involve different aspects in their doctrine. The "way" (*ṭarīqah*) or the Ṡūfī path, which is the practical aspect of Ṡūfism, can then be investigated, leading to the symbolic interpretations of the Ṡūfīs - the key point to symbolism in art and architecture in the Mamlūk period.

.....

***The Ṡūfī training is a religious one. It is free from any such reprehensible intentions (sorcery). The Ṡūfīs aspire to total concentration upon God and upon the approach to Him (al-taqarrob ila Allah), in order to obtain the mystical experiences of Gnosis and Divine Oneness. In addition to their training in concentration and hunger, the Ṡūfīs feed on exercises by which their devotion to that training can fully materialize. When the soul is reared on such exercises, it comes closer to the Gnosis of God, whereas, without it, it comes to be a Satanic one. Whatever kashf or mukāshafah (supernatural knowledge or activity) is achieved by the Ṡūfīs is accidental, and was not originally intended. Had it been intentional, the devotion of the Ṡufīs would have been directed toward something other than God, namely,***

*toward supernatural activity and vision. What a losing business that would have been; in reality it would have been polytheism. Through their devotion, (Ṡūfīs) intend (to come near) the Master, and nothing else. If, meanwhile, some (supernatural perception) is obtained, it is accidental and unintentional. Many (Ṡūfīs) shun (supernatural perception) when it accidentally happens to them, and pay no attention to it. They want God only for the sake of His Essence, and nothing else. It is well known that (supernatural perception) occurs among the (Ṡūfis). They call their supernatural experiences and mind-reading 'physiognomy' and 'uncovering'. Their experiences of supernatural activity they call 'acts of Divine Grace'. None of these things is unworthy of them.*[1]

This revealing passage from the "*Muqaddimah*" of Ibn Khaldūn writing in the Mamlūk context, is important in several ways: firstly, it shows that Ibn Khaldūn saw that there was an unjust conflict between the Ṡūfīs and the *'ulamā'* and that he - although not a Ṡūfī - himself found a need to clarify the Ṡūfī standpoint. Secondly, it gives us hints about the intentions and practices of the Ṡūfīs in Mamlūk times which are similar to Ṡūfī practices and beliefs present today - which at least does not contradict our reliance on contemporary Ṡūfī sources to fill any missing gaps in Mamlūk Ṡūfī literature. Ḥamzah says that Ṡūfism appeared in Egypt in the end of the eighth-century A.D. Al-Kindī the tenth-century Ṡūfī philosopher and historian says in his Book "*Ṭabaqāt al-Wolāh*": "*in Alexandria, there appeared a group (ṭā'ifah) called Ṡūfīs preaching people to do good and disagreeing the sulṭān in a lot of what he was doing ...etc.*"[2] In the ninth-century A.D., Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṡrī[3] (d. 245 A.H.), is the first famous Egyptian Ṡūfī to be mentioned by historians[4], followed by Ibn al-Kīzānī in the *Shī'ite* Fatimid period, and the famous Ṡūfī poet 'Omar Ibn

---

[1] op cit., Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), 1967, Pp.85-86, and p.395.

[2] al-Kindī (10th C.), *Ṭabaqāt al-Wulāh wal-Quḍāh*, Maiba'at al-Ābā' al-Yasū'iyyūn, Beirut, 1908, p.162.

[3] For more about Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṡrī (9th C.), see Farid al-Din Attar, Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the *Tadhkirat al-Auliya'*, trans. by A.J. Arberry, Arkana, 1990 Pp.87-100.

[4] Al-Suyūṭī (15th C.) in his "*Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍarah*" recalls the famous Ṡūfīs of Egypt: he starts with Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṡrī upon whom the Egyptians revolted, claiming that he had innovated in the words of the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). He was reported to the Caliph and was accused of blasphemy (*zandaqah*). When he was brought to the Caliph, he preached to him and as a result the Caliph cried, this resulted in that Dhū al-Nūn was returned to Cairo in all pride. See al-Suyūṭī quoted in Ḥamzah, 1947, p.120. Dhū al-Nūn was the first to differentiate between *ma'rifah* (gnosis) and *'ilm* (knowledge). He shows influences of Neo-Platonism in his writings. See Annemarie Schimmel, Mystical Dimension of Islam, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1975, Pp. 42-46.

al-Fāriḍ[1] in the Ayyubid and Baḥrī Mamlūk periods. Ḥamzah goes on to say that it is evident from Mamlūk medieval sources that the Egyptians responded greatly to Ṣūfism to the extent that he says: *"if we look at Ṣūfism as something un-Islamic, then the Egyptians responded to Ṣūfism more than Islam!"*[2]

On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyya[3], the thirteenth century jurisprudent, attributes its origination to the year 199 A.H. and relates it to a mystical *Shi'ite* school whose leader was al-Jāḥedh in Kūfa.[4] Ibn Taymiyya also attributes the first use of the term Ṣūfī to the Mamlūk contemporary alchemist Jābir Ibn Ḥayyān.

Looking at the root of the term Ṣūfism, we find that it originates from three Arabic letters *ṣa*, *wa* and *fa*. According to the famous tenth-century Ṣūfī al-Kalābādhī, the word is derived from *ṣafa* which means purified[5]. He goes on to say that there is another opinion, that it is derived from the Arabic word *ṣafwah* which means those who are selected, and that others think that the word is derived from the word *ṣaff* which means line or row, implying those early Muslims who stood in the first row in prayer or supplication or *jihād* (fight for the sake of God). Another view that he refers to is derived from the word *ṣuffa* which was a low veranda made of clay, slightly elevated off the ground, in the Mosque of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in Madīnah. He also says that some assume that the origin of the word Ṣūfism is from *ṣūf* (wool), because the people who were interested in inner

---

[1] On Ibn al-Fāriḍ see op cit. Baldick, 1989, Pp.81-82. Also see op cit. Schimmel, 1975, Pp. 274-279. Schimmel writes that: *"it has become customary to mention the name of Ibn 'Arabī along with that of his contemporary Ibn al-Fāriḍ"* as much as they are different.

[2] op cit, Ḥamzah, 1947, p.27.

[3] Taqiyy al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya was a reformer in the Mamlūk period. Ibn Taymiyya took a dim view of his times. Even though he lived at a time when the Mamlūk state was at the peak of its power and prosperity, he saw the social and religious life around him defective and in decline. In particular, he singled out the Ṣūfī orders as a target of criticism, attacking especially the cult of the *awliyā'* (saints) and practices related to it, which he considered to be an intrusion into the religion of Islam (*bid'ah*). He called for a purification of Islam from everything which was incompatible with the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* and for a return to the pristine simplicity of original Islam. He also took to task the legal conservatism of the *'ulamā'*, counselling them to seek fresh insight from the Qur'ān and *Sunnah* rather than relying on the statements of later authorities. He even spoke out against certain practices of the Mamlūk state. These criticisms of practices and attitudes that were firmly entrenched among his contemporaries brought Ibn Taymiyya into conflict with the state and the *'ulamā'*, resulting in his frequent imprisonment. Although Ibn Taymiyya's ideas had little impact on his times, they came to constitute an important reformist legacy that was to be preserved in his writings and to bear fruit in later (modern) times.

[4] Ibn Taymiyya (13th C.), *"al-Ṣūfiyyah wal-Fuqarā'"* in Majmū' Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām, Cairo, 1348 A.H., p.7.

[5] Abū Bakr Moḥammad Al-Kalābādhī (10th C.), "al-Ta'āruf Li-Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf", Cairo, 1960, Pp.21-26.

knowledge cared less about their outer appearances and often took to wearing one simple garment all the year round which was made of wool.[1]

Ibn al-Jawzī (d 597 A.H., 1200 A.D.) in his famous book "*Talbīs Iblīs*", recounts that Ṡūfism started in the form of *zuhd* (retreat from the materialistic; having its origins in the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*) and piety in order to perform a sort of *jihād al-nafs* (the inner fight of the soul against the spirit which promotes evil) towards the straight path.[2] Thus, the term Ṡūfism came to mean those who were interested in obtaining inner awakening and enlightenment (*ishrāq*). They were following the path of self-purification, that of the "heart", and the improvement of the quality of their character and behaviour to reach the stage where they could achieve direct worship of God as if they could see Him - knowing that although they do not see Him, He sees them.[3] Schimmel writes that: "*Sufism meant, in the formative period, mainly an interiorization of Islam, a personal experience of the central mystery of Islam, that of Tauḥīd, 'to declare that God is One'.*"[4]

By the beginning of the Mamlūk period, Ṡūfism was understood as a type of spiritual and intellectual asceticism which stood above the divisions of religion - i.e., the unity of religions because God is one for all. This understanding was shared by the different schools of Ṡūfī theosophy. These can be divided into three schools as follows: the first, believed in Gnosis (*ma'rifah* sometimes referred to as *ghunūṡiyyah*), and Unity (*Ittiḥād*) or in the Unity of Being (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*) - which is slightly different in its terminology[5]. In this doctrine, their is no multiplicity in creation as there is no Creator and created, nor worshipper and Worshipped, but only One Truth, that there is One Being which is God.[6] Accordingly, all the multiplicities of creation are just appearances of sensible forms which reflect the Divine

---

[1] For the roots of Ṡūfism see op cit. Ḥāmzah, 1947, Pp. 96-103; also see Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri, The Elements of Sufism, Element Books Limited, Dorset, 1990. p.1. Also see op cit. Fernandes, 1980, Pp. 26-27.

[2] 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn 'Alī Ibn al-Jawzī (12th C.), "*Talbīs Iblīs*", Cairo, 1340 A.H., p.158.

[3] For an account of the rise and development of Ṡūfism, see op cit. Schimmel, 1975, Chapter 2. Also see A.J. Arberry, An Introduction to the History of Sufism, London, 1942.

[4] op cit. Schimmel, 1975, p.17.

[5] As far as this research is concerned we will treat *Ittiḥād* and *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* as one.

[6] See Dr. 'Alī al-Ṡāfī Ḥusayn, *al-Adab al-Ṡūfī fī Miṡr fī al-Qarn al-Ṡābi' al-Hijrī* Dār al-Ma'ārif bi-Miṡr, Cairo, 1964, p.37. Also see op cit., Ḥāmzah, 1947, p.95.

Truth and Oneness of the Necessary Being[1]. The main figures in this school were Abū al-Ḥassan al-Śabbāgh, 'Omar Ibn al-Fāriḍ, and 'Afīf al-Tilmisānī.

The second school, based its belief on the Moḥammadan Truth (*al-Ḥaqīqah al-Muḥammadiyyah*) - sometimes called the theory of the transfer of Moḥammadan Light (*nadhariyyat tanaqqul al-Nūr al-Moḥammadī*) which is very similar to Isma'īlī *Shī'ite* ideologies - especially in relation to the transfer of wisdom and gnosis among the *quṭb* (literally pole; meaning the head of the *ṭarīqah*) which corresponds to that of the *imām's*. The only significant person mentioned in the sources to have followed this doctrine was Ibrāhīm al-Dusūqī. The sources say that his influence was mostly outside Cairo.[2]

The third school was a more conservative one, called the Shādhiliyyah after its founder Abū al-Ḥassan al-Shādhilī - he was followed by Abū al-'Abbas al-Mursī - and were more inclined to follow the teachings of *ahl al-Jamā'ah wal-Sunnah* (i.e., the *'ulamā'*) and not to defy the *Shari'a* although they applied *ta'wīl* which to a great extent conflicted with exoteric Law and its interpretation (*tafsīr*).[3] Although al-Shādhilī believed in "Creator" and "created" as two distinct entities - opposed to the Unity of Being - he dealt with issues related to the Divine Presence (*al-Ḥaḍrah al-Ilāhiyyah*) and its relation to Intuition (*al-Futūḥ al-Rabbanī*), and the experience of Divine Light or Illumination (*Ishrāq*) and in a Spiritual world (*Malakūt*) transcending our earthly world.[4] The question is why did such beliefs arise in a religion like Islam that has an explicit Law as the *Śhari'a*?

I believe that the requirements of traditional Muslim life were to recognize all the aspects of creation within traditional man himself, as manifested in the world accessible to the outer senses, and to be in spontaneous awareness of the unitive nature of reality at all times. That explains the interest in the code of conduct prescribed by the Śūfīs.[5] Sa'īd

---

[1] This ties with the philosophical ideas of Ibn Sīna who insisted on the concept of Necessary Being when discussing God.

[2] See op cit, Ḥusayn, 1964, p.35. This research will not deal with Ibrāhīm al-Dusūqī's ideas as they are highly unlikely to have reached a degree of influence on the Cairene society, and consequently do not bare any significant impact on their mentality.

[3] ibid., p.36.

[4] op cit. Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), *Shifā' al-Sā'il*, 1959, p.47.

[5] The Śūfī way is a great challenge to modern man. While the materialistic seeks, loves, and worships *power*, the Śūfī seeks, loves, and worships the *Source of Power*.

'Āshūr, the contemporary historian who has specialized in the Mamlūk period says that throughout the history of Islam, we find that whenever the outer aspect - the physical and material, in this case the *Sharī'a* - has been developed and stabilized, traditional man's attention has been drawn more towards the inner aspect of life - in this case Ṡūfism. Also, when the outer circumstances of a society become intolerable, and its people are in confusion and suffering privation, and are in dire need of understanding the purpose of life, then again, we find man's attention turning towards knowledge and the search for a way out of such an intolerable situation. He concludes that this situation is exactly what gave rise to the emergence of the Ṡūfīs as a powerful influence in Mamlūk society.[1]

Hints of the extent of such influences on the Mamlūks can be found in profusion in the sources. For example, on the level of the Egyptian society at large, al-Maqrīzī recounts how people used to wait on Fridays outside the *khanqahs* of Cairo to watch the procession of the Ṡūfīs; he says in his "*Khiṫaṫ*":

> ***Shaykh Aḥmed 'Alī al-Qaṡṡār saw the people on Fridays coming from Fusṫāṫ to Cairo to watch the Ṡūfīs of the Khanqah of Sa'īd al-Su'adā' (the first khanqah to be built in Egypt) leaving it to go to pray the congregational prayer in the Mosque of al-Ḥākim. The Shaykh of the khanqah followed by the other Ṡūfīs would then walk in a procession in silence to the door of the mosque near the minbar (pulpit).***[2]

By doing so, they believed they would receive *baraka* (blessings) by having seen the devoted friends of God. On the level of the Mamlūk sulṫāns and *emīrs*, a Mamlūk manuscript tells us that al-Malik al-Ashraf Mūsā, one of the sons of al-Malik al-Kāmil, wrote in his will that he wanted to be shrouded after his death in a garment worn by one of the *fuqarā'* (Ṡūfīs) - obviously to obtain his *baraka*.[3] It should be born in mind that the idea of *baraka* did not stop at the living but extended even after the death of these Ṡūfī *awliyā'*. The Ṡūfīs interpreted

---

[1] See op cit. 'Āshūr, 1962, Pp.162-163. It is in these situations that the Ṡūfī centres and Ṡūfī masters emerge. When excessive materialism, and decadence reach their zenith, then the situation demands the need to balance itself by turning towards establishing spiritual awareness and awakening, which is when Ṡūfism begins to rise. Thus it is often the particular quality of life and its specific demands which determine the appropriate counter-balance needed to restore equilibrium.

[2] op cit. al Maqrīzī (14th C.), Khiṫaṫ, 1270 A.H., vol.4, p.274.

[3] Author unknown, Shifā' al-Qulūb, Manuscript 51 (*Taṡawwuf*), Dār al-Kutub al-Miṡriyyah, p.25.

the Qur'ānic verse: "*do not consider those who have died for the sake of God as dead, as they are alive and prosperous in the eyes of God,*" in which case they consider the saint to have died for the sake of God in their attempt to fight against their spirit (*nafs*).[1]

We have discussed, aspects related to the *Sharī'a* in the previous section: let us now discuss the dividing line and differences between the outer law (*Sharī'a*) and the inner Truth or Reality (*Ḥaqīqah*). Al-Suyūtī tells us in his book "*Ta'yīd al-Ḥaqīqah al-'Aliyyah*" (Support of the Transcendent Truth) that there are two *ḥadīths* upon which the Ṣūfīs base their belief in *Ḥaqīqah* as completing the *Sharī'a*:

> ***The first is narrated by al-Gharībanī in his tafsīr on al-Ḥassan who said: "the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: 'Each verse has a ḍhahr (back) and a baṅn (front)' He then says: Ibn al-Naqīb in his tafsīr says on this (the ḍhahr of the verse means what appears of its meaning to those who believe in the external (li-ahl al-'ilm bil-ḍhāhir), and its baṅn is what constitutes of secrets which God reveals to those who believe in the Truth (arbāb al-Ḥaqā'iq).***"[2]

The second ḥadīth mentioned by al-Suyūtī in the above mentioned book is the one which was corrected by Abū Na'īm. He says: Abū Na'īm narrated that Ibn Mas'ūd said: "*The Qur'ān descended on seven letters, each one of them has an external (ḍhahr) and internal (baṅn).*"[3]

K.S.K Khan, the twentieth-century Ṣūfī, draws the following analogy to explain this difference between the external Law and internal Truth. He says that when one embarks on the *Sharī'a*, it is like putting a canoe into a river in order to reach the ocean. If the traveller has a unific vision, if he is a "man of unity", then he will recognize that although it is a river, it has a direction which will lead to its original nature and reality, which is that of the ocean. The ocean is the inner reality and the river is the outer road. The river would have no

---

[1] This has a direct implication on the popular belief in mausoleums in the Ayyubid and Mamlūk periods in which Ṣūfism was widely practised. This point will be dealt with in Chapter Three.

[2] Al-Suyūtī (15th C.), Ta'yīd al-Ḥaqīqah al-'Aliyyah wa Tashyīd al-Ṭarīqah al-Shādhiliyyah, Manuscript 3014 (*Taṣawwuf*), Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo, p.7.

[3] ibid., p.8.

purpose or meaning if it was not to end at the ocean, and yet its origin is from the ocean![1] William Stoddart on the other hand, gives another analogy of the two domains - the outward and the inward - and says that they remain more or less distinct, though bearing a very definite relationship to one another.

> ***This relationship can perhaps best be described as follows: the outward religion, or 'exotericism',... may be likened to the circumference of a circle. The inner Truth, or 'esotericism', that lies at the heart of the religion, ... may be likened to the centre of the circle. The radius proceeding from circumference to the centre represents the mystical or 'initiatic' path (tariqah) that leads from outward observance to inner conviction, from belief to vision, from potency to act.***[2]

Therefore we can conclude that from the Śūfī viewpoint, the outer Islamic Law is seen as the complete and final Law of God revealed to Moḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). It is based on the laws of conduct that were revealed directly in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. These laws make it possible for every member of the society to govern all external codes of conduct. Although the ultimate aim of the *Sharī'a* aims at the spiritual refinement of the soul of man - through worship - it does not tell him explicitly how to achieve it.

This inner refinement of the soul and its development is the aim of Śūfism; man needs to embrace and submit to both the outer Law and the inner Reality, because he encompasses both. The human being is an interspace, between the two. He is involved in the outer law, or code of behaviour, in the sense that he is a physical, material entity, and he is involved in the inner reality in the sense that there is something within him which is immaterial, beyond time and space.[3] Ibn Khaldūn writes: "*Whoever has the outer law without the inner reality has left the right way; whoever has the inner reality without the outer law is a heretic; whoever unites the two of them has realization.*"[4]

---

[1] Khan Sahib Khaja Khan, Studies in Tasawwuf, Idara-i Arabiyat-i, Delhi, 1923, p.47.

[2] William Stoddart, Sufism: the Mystical Doctrines and Methods of Islam, Taj Company, Delhi, 1983, p.20.

[3] See Chapter Four for a description of the traditional medieval Muslim.

[4] For a complete view of the origins and ideology of Śufīs, and for the differences in Mamlūk perception between *'ulama'* and Śūfīs see op cit. Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), 1967, Pp. 358-367.

Since Sufism represents the esoteric aspects of Islam, its doctrine is in essence an esoteric commentary of the Qur'ān. Chains of intermediaries have passed on the keys of all Qur'ānic exegesis according to the teaching of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). The Ṡūfīs believe that some of these *ḥadīths* are important for them, and these are the ones that he enunciated as a "contemplative saint" rather than "Law-giver". They also believe strongly in the *ḥadīth qudsī*[1] and say that such traditions set forth truths that only the contemplatives can fully understand.[2]

Based on the concept that the Qur'ān has an outer and inner meaning, the Ṡūfīs founded the tool of *ta'wīl* (interpretations of inner meaning) basing it on the symbolical nature and multiple meanings of the words. Titus Burckhardt elaborates on this point giving the following summary:

> ***It might be said that the ordinary exegesis of the Qur'ān takes the expressions in their immediate meanings whereas the Ṡūfī exegesis uncovers their transposed meanings, or, again, that while exotericism understands them conventionally, the Ṡūfī interpretation conceives their direct, original and spiritually necessary character.***[3]

The esoteric *ta'wīl* of a certain verse does not contradict the exoteric interpretation, but simply adds a further layer of understanding to it. Yet, at times the Ṡūfī exegesis reverses the exoteric meaning. Ṡūfīs account for this by explaining that an individual point of view and that of transcendence may contradict one another by the very fact of their opposition. Imam al-Ghazzalī who widely influenced the Mamlūk period, designated a section in the first volume of "*Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*" regarding *ta'wīl*.[4] Strangely, he starts by refuting *ta'wīl* altogether - and proves it to be opposing to the *Sharī'a* - then ends the section by applying *ta'wīl* himself. As we mentioned in an earlier section of this chapter, there were two types of *ta'wīl* in medieval times, one was a *Shī'ite* esoteric *ta'wīl* such as that adopted in Fatimid Cairo, and the other was a *Sunnī* Ṡūfī *ta'wīl* adopted since Salāḥ al-Dīn set to wipe away the

---

[1] God speaking in the first person by the mouth of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

[2] Titus Burckhardt, An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine, trans. by D.M. Matheson, Thorsons Publishers Ltd., Northamptonshire, 1976 (b), p.41.

[3] ibid., p.42.

[4] op cit. Al-Ghazzalī (12th C.), 1982, vol.1, Pp. 257-259.

*Shī'ite* Fatimid beliefs in the Ayyubid period. This latter type of *ta'wīl* was inherited by the Mamlūks. No doubt al-Ghazzalī must have been referring to the *Shī'ite* esoterism in the first instance and was referring to the second *Sunnī* esoterism in his application.

To summarize the contents of this section on *ta'wīl*, we may refer to al-Ghazzalī who strongly adheres to the *ḥadith* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) which says: *"He who interprets the Qur'ān according to his own opinion should seek his abode in Hell."* Thus he prohibits individual interpretation according to this opinion. The main idea in the *Sharī'a*, he says, is to abide to *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* (interpretation) so as not to discover new meanings. Al-Ghazzalī adopts the following argument to prohibit individual interpretations: he starts by saying that every person has his own perceptions and hence tends to incline towards his own opinions, accordingly, a person interprets the Qur'ān according to his own desire to serve his ends. For this reason the interpreter thinks that his interpretation is correct and law abiding. Al-Ghazzalī explains that this is interpretation according to ones own misguided opinion. He gives an example of misguided *ta'wīl* saying: *"The Qur'ān says: 'Go to Pharaoh as he has transgressed the limit.' They (who apply ta'wīl incorrectly) interpret the word 'Pharaoh' as 'heart'."*[1] Secondly, al-Ghazzalī says that he who attempts to understand the meaning of verses that have no explication and who are not expert in *Sharī'a* make many mistakes. He says that without first being expert in knowledge of external meaning there will be no advancement of knowledge to reach meanings coming out of the Intellect.

> ***He who claims to have internal meanings of the Qur'ān without at first being expert in its external meanings is like a man who claims to have reached the interior of a house without first approaching its door...***[2]

Al-Ghazzalī then explains that their are esoteric meanings found in *tafsīr*. He gives the example of a verse from the Qur'ān where God says, *"It has become heavy in the heavens and the earth,"* in other words, it has been made secret to the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth. He gives other examples such as the use of the word companion (*qarīn*) where it means angel in the verse: *"His companion (qarīn) said, He who is near me is a rebel."* While on another occasion it means the devil as in the verse: *"His companion (qarīn) said, O our Lord, I have not misguided him."*

---

[1] ibid., p.257.

[2] ibid., p.257-8.

He sums up explaining that there are two types of Qur'ānic verses: the first are self explanatory through *tafsīr*, while the second need *ta'wīl* to be understood. As to the second type, he gives the example of the Qur'ānic verses: "*You have not shot arrows when you shot arrows, but it is God Who shot the arrows.*" The external meaning of the verses is clear, but the internal meaning is unrevealed in the meaning of both "throwing arrows" and "not throwing arrows" which are contradictory to each other. Al-Ghazzalī then says that one has to know the reason for this throwing. This reason comes in the following verse, "*Fight with them. God will punish them through your hands.*" He comments that the internal meaning lies in the deep ocean of spiritual knowledge and shows man that his action is tied up with his strength and that strength is tied with the power of God. Al-Ghazzalī concludes this section by saying that every verse of the Qur'ān similarly has a secret inner meaning, and that it becomes clear only to those whose hearts are clear of impurities. It follows that to al-Ghazzalī, external *tafsīr* is insufficient for the full understanding of the meaning of the Qur'ān.

Going back to esotericism (*batiniyyah*) in the Mamlūk period we have to stop at Abū al-Ḥassan al-Shādhilī and 'Omar Ibn 'Abd al-Fārid as representatives of the two schools of Ṣūfī thought popular in Cairo in the thirteenth and fourteenth-centuries. Al-Shādhilī's[1] writings show that he was an Ash'arite[2] and belonged at the same time to *ahl al-Sunnah wal-jamā'ah* (following the *Sunnī 'ulamā'*) - adopting to a great extent a lot of al-Ghazzalī's ideas. According to his beliefs, God is One and is a Necessary Being[3], He is Eternal, and acknowledges to Him all the Divine Names and Qualities. Al-Shādhilī believed that there could be no Truth without the *Shari'a*. He was accused of heresy and blasphemy after he claimed that God had talked to him questioning him on what he had benefitted from his obedience and disobedience.[4] Of course this displeased the *'ulamā'* who believe that God only speaks to the prophets and that there is no revelation (*waḥy*) after the Seal of the Prophets Moḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). But in fact, it was not al-Shādhilī, the person, that had spoken to God, but al-Shādhilī the *qutb* (pole or link with the Vertical Source) that had done so. Another cause for his disfavour from the part of the *'ulamā'* was his saying that

---

[1] Originally a Moroccan immigrant to Egypt.

[2] See the beliefs of the Ash'arites in section 2.3 above.

[3] Following Ibn Sīna's methodology.

[4] 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Manāwī, *al-Kawākib al-Dorriyyah*, Manuscript 260, 259 (*Tārikh*), Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, p.347.

: *"Whoever does not love disobeying God in His Kingdom has loved that his mercy and compassion remains unrevealed."*[1] Which means that when God loves somebody he shows cruelty and harshness on him which is far from any ideas found in the Islamic Law.[2] But again, it was the Ṡūfī in al-Shādhilī who had said that statement, referring to the fact that when God loves somebody he tests his patience and strength of belief by subjecting him to difficult tests.

On the other hand, Ibn al-Fārid̈ (who was mentioned earlier to have been amongst the famous Ṡūfīs who lived through the Ayyubid period (d. 632 A.H.), had a strong social and spiritual impact on the society. He contacted many of the famous Ṡūfīs of his period, the most famous of whom are Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī of Baghdad (d. 632 A.H.), and Mohyi-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī of Andalusia (d. 638 A.H.). Al-Suhrawardī's inclination was more towards a *Sunnī* Ṡūfism while Ibn 'Arabī was more inclined to a theosophical Ṡūfism.[3] This shows that both *Sunnī* Ṡūfism as well as Ibn 'Arabī's ideas were influential in Mamlūk Egypt, and that Ṡūfīs did not necessarily contact those who shared their own inclinations but that they also exchanged ideas with other Ṡūfīs.

Ibn al-Fārid̈'s beliefs were based on Divine Love, to the extent that historians have mentioned that he spent his life entranced with love of the Sacred Essence (*Dhāt al-Qudus*). The goal of the lover is to see his Beloved and this shows clearly in his poetry and can be seen in the verse where he says: *"And if I ask You to see You Truthfully, comply, and do not answer 'you will not see' (lan Tarā)"*[4]. As was mentioned earlier, Ibn al-Fārid̈ was originally unitarian (*ittiḥādī*, a side-track from *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* i.e., inclined to the belief in the doctrine of Unity of Being) in his Ṡūfī beliefs. 'Abd al-Laṫīf Ḥamzah, analyses the sources and influences on Ibn al-Fārid̈'s beliefs saying:

---

[1] ibid., p. 348.

[2] op cit. Husayn, 1964, Pp. 70-71.

[3] op cit. Ḥamzah, 1947, p.127. The greatest and by far the most influential of all the Ṡūfī theosophists in the Mamlūk period was Muḥyi'l-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī. His two chief works are entitled *"al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah"* (Meccan Revelations) and *"Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam"* (Bezels of Wisdom). Ibn 'Arabī's influence can be seen in much of the theosophical writing of later generations and had quite a noticeable influence on the Mamlūk society especially since he visited Egypt on his way to Makkah prior to his pilgrimage. Later, when he settled in Damascus his influence remained to be considerable as *'ulamā'* from Cairo and Damascus were on continuous dialogue.

[4] See op cit., Ḥusayn, 1964, p.95.

*There are three sources of Ṡūfism that influenced Ibn al-Fāriḍ: these are Ibn 'Arabī, al-Ḥallāj, and Neo-Platonism. From the first he adopted the doctrine of Unity of Being (Waḥdat al-Wujūd), because in his state of "being" he saw himself and the Divine Essence (al-dhāt al-Ilāhiyyah) as one. When Ibn al-Fāriḍ asked Ibn 'Arabī to explain to him an aspect of Ṡūfism, he was referred by Ibn 'Arabī to the "Mekkan Revelations" (al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyayh) saying that no better explanation of it would be found elsewhere. Accordingly, Ibn al-Fāriḍ was said to be a pupil of Ibn 'Arabī. From the second, (al-Ḥallāj) he was influenced with al-Ḥulūl (the nearest translation is disintegration) because in the last stage of his state of being, he used to refer to the same terminology used by al-Ḥallāj.[1] From Neo-Platonism he was mainly influenced by al-Fayḍ al-Ilāhī (the Overwhelm of the Divine) and the Ḥaqīqah Muḥammadiyyah (Moḥammadan Truth), which is the origin of all creations from the Ṡūfī point of view ... he was in accordance with the Sunnah, he loved beauty - this beauty was not a limited beauty in the created beings around him, but a universal ultimate Beauty which went far beyond these forms...*[2]

These three sources moulded together, influenced Ibn al-Fāriḍ but one cannot say that he belonged to any of these three ideologies on its own. Ḥamzah explains this last point by saying that he could not have held to a belief in "Unity of Being" because he achieved Unity with God through his heart and not his Intellect which contradicts Ibn 'Arabī's ideas. At the same time his belief in Unity with God was in itself opposed to the Ṡūfism of *ahl al-Sunnah* (Sunnī Ṡūfism) which explains why Ibn al-Fāriḍ used the term "Unity of Witnesses" (*Waḥdat al-Shuhūd*) instead of "Unity of Being" (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*).[3] At the same time, it is clear from the sources that the doctrine of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* was one of the central doctrines of Ṡūfism that affected not only Ibn al-Fāriḍ but Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ṡabbagh, and 'Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilmisānī as well as many other Mamlūk contemporary Ṡūfīs - whether in its pure form as Ibn 'Arabī explains it or whether in its slightly modified terminology under the name "Unity", or "Unity of Witnesses" - as used by Ibn al-Fāriḍ.

---

[1] Ḥamzah assures the readers that this second influence was only in terminology but not in meaning as the meanings referred to by Ibn al-Fāriḍ were very far removed from al-Ḥallāj.

[2] op cit. Ḥamzah, 1947, Pp.129-131.

[3] We will deal below with this last point in more detail.

Originally, Ibn 'Arabī says that the term *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* is derived directly from the profession of faith (*shahādah*), which is understood not only as "there is no god except (*illa*) God, and Moḥammad is the Messenger of God," but also as "there is no reality except Reality"[1]. One of the many names of God, indeed is *Al-Ḥaqq*, which means "Reality" or "Truth". The Ṣūfīs who hold to a belief in the Unity of Being teach that the relative has no reality other than in the Absolute, and the finite has no reality other than in the Infinite. In Islam, man has access to the Absolute and the Infinite through the Qur'ān, which is revelation of God to the world, and also through the Prophet who, within the world itself, is God's very reflection. In the two clauses of the *shahādah*, man has access, on the one hand, to the Divine Immutability and on the other, to the Prophetic norm.

Another fundamental concept in the Ṣūfism of the Unity of Being is derived from the second testimony of Islam, "Moḥammad is the Prophet of God". The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) serves as the spiritual model and as the place of gathering of all those universal and particular forms and meanings which are displayed throughout the universe. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is an individual who, in form, manifests all the possibilities of humanity. By marrying and having children, he expresses his human nature. Through his receiving the revelation while in an unlettered state, he is a receptacle of the Divine Word. To the Ṣūfīs, the Prophet is the Universal Prototype who unites the inward, eternal aspect of reality with the outward, phenomenal aspect.

According to the doctrine of the Unity of Being, at one and the same time, the Ṣūfī realizes an outer state of knowledge beyond the Divine Law and seeks union with the inner Truth through meditation and invocation (*dhikr*) of the Divine Names. The one who attains this union is the one who knows *through* God, after travelling *to* God, *in* God. The goal of Ṣūfism is to gather all multiplicity into unity, with the totality of one's being, in direct contemplation of spiritual realities; to come to know the qualitative unity which transcends the existence it unifies, at the same time as one integrates all aspects of self into a centre. The journey begins with withdrawal from the material world in which one is drowned. To go from multiplicity-in-unity to unity-in-multiplicity, one must first die to self: not a biological death but a spiritual one, where the soul dies, and by dying is transformed, and then returns to this material world. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī (d. 1131 A.D.) elaborates on this:

---

[1] Ibn 'Arabī's ideas in op cit. Burckhardt, 1976 (b), p.70. The Ṣūfī doctrine of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* is, in fact, accurately translated as non-duality.

*He who is not twice born will not ascend to the kingdom of Heaven. He who is born from the womb sees only this world, only he who is born out of himself (meaning from within) sees the other world. O friend, he who knows the form of things has behind him only the resurrection from the grave of the womb through natural birth, he is a child. He who knows the natures of things has developed his normal thinking, is an adult.*[1]

Accordingly Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (d. 1273 A.D.) says that the first twenty years of man's life are the time in which the body matures and he acquires the knowledge of the *external*. The second twenty years of his life are the time in which his spirit matures and he then acquires the *inner* knowledge, "*he who sees only the outward is also a mineral and has no access to the spirit. He is a child and immature, even though he may outwardly be an old man and a hundred years old.*"[2]

When this spiritual death occurs, the multiplicity of the soul disappears, and the vision of Unity fills the emptied soul. This is when one sees God in Oneness. Then, when one returns to consciousness of multiplicity, the Spirit returns to all things. It is here that the ultimate meaning of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* is revealed: to see things as they "Really" are, to see the Truth. It is the dissolution of the profane consciousness of man who sees all things as independent of God: to realize that one was never separate from God; that God in His Oneness is both immanent and transcendent. The question that is brought forth is: how does the Ṡūfī achieve this stage of inner maturity?

Spiritually oriented people need periods of meditation, prayer and seclusion. No prophet has ever attained prophethood without months or years of seclusion - often in caves. In the same way, the Ṡūfīs have followed in the footsteps of the prophets. They need periods of seclusion - usually forty days - to reduce the impact of the outer world on them in order to develop the inner.[3]

As was pointed out earlier, the *khanqah* in the Mamlūk period was to provide Ṡūfīs

---

[1] 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī, *Tamhīdat*, no 1, Basel University Library, MS.MIII (45), 6a, Pp. 13-5.

[2] Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī, *Fīhī mā Fīhi*, (trans. by Arberry and Schimmel), Azamgarh, 1929, Pp. 11-12.

[3] op cit. Haeri, 1990. p.27.

with the opportunity to devote all their efforts and time to their spiritual ascent for the sake of reaching a union with the Divine. From the Ṡūfī point of view, the basic acts of worship which are defined by the *Sharī'a*, such as the ritual prayer (*ṡalāh*), fasting (*ṡiyām*), almsgiving (*zakāh*), the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) and so on, although necessary, are considered to be insufficient to reach inner maturity. Accordingly, we saw earlier in this chapter that a set of spiritual exercises were imposed by the endower (*wāqif*) and partly by the *shaykh* or Ṡūfī master[1]. These spiritual exercises either involved *dhikr* (remembrance or invocation) which was performed by every individual disciple in a cell (*khilwah* pl. *khilwāt*[2]) or in groups to perform what was termed *ḥudūr* (literally meaning presence due to the Presence of Allah "*Ḥadrah Ilāhiyyah*" that is unveiled at its end).

All repeated recitation of sacred parts of the text or the Divine Names - whether aloud or inward - is considered to be *dhikr*. Much evidence is found in the verses of the Qur'ān on the merit of *dhikr*; for example: "*Invoke (idhkur) the Name of thy Lord and devote thyself to Him with utter devotion,*"[3] "*Remember (idhkurū) God with much remembrance,*"[4] "*Verily in the remembrance (dhikr) of God do hearts find rest,*"[5] "*Remember Me (idhkurūnī) and I shall remember you,*"[6] and "*Recite what is sent in the Book by inspiration to thee, and establish regular prayer: for prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds; and remembrance (dhikr) of God is the greatest (thing in life) without doubt. And God knows the (deeds) that you do.*"[7] Burckhardt explains that in the case of repeating the Divine Name implies a Divine Presence (*Ḥaḍrah Ilāhiyyah*) which dominates the mind of the person who invokes it. He argues that man finds it very difficult to concentrate on the Infinite, but, by being able to concentrate on

---

[1] An important condition in a *shaykh* (Ṡūfī master) being a "true" teacher is that he must have achieved real enlightenment by arriving at complete knowledge of the "self". The spiritual master must know the extraordinary vast horizon of the self. As the Ṡūfī tradition goes, "*Whoever knows his self, truly knows the Lord,*" (which ties to the Ṡūfī interpretation that man was created in the image of God). The ultimate aim of the Ṡūfī master is to assist his follower to discover Truth within the self and to be enlightened about reality.

[2] The *khilwāt* are usually small dark windowless vaulted rooms located on the sides of the courtyards of Baḥrī Mamlūk *madrasas* and *khanqahs*, in some cases (as we will see in Chapter Five, they were located in blocks outside the *khanqah* proper).

[3] Qur'ān: 73/8.

[4] Qur'ān: 22/41.

[5] Qur'ān: 13/28.

[6] Qur'ān: 2/152.

[7] Qur'ān: 29/45.

a symbol of the Infinite attains to the Infinite itself. He concludes that "*Union with the Divine Name becomes Union (al-waṣl) with God Himself.*"[1]

Along with the above mentioned verses from the Qur'ān are the *ḥadīths* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) who also showed merit of invocation:

> ***Never do men gather together to invoke (or to remember) God without their being surrounded by angels, and without the Divine Favour covering them, and without Peace (al-Sakīnah) descending on them and without God remembering them with those who surround Him.***

> ***A man said: O Prophet of God, truly the laws of Islam are many. Tell me a thing by which I can obtain the rewards. The Prophet answered: Let your tongue be ever moist with mentioning God.***

Ibn al-Ḥājj (d. 1336 A.D.) in "*Madkhal*" describes the different activities that were performed by Mamlūk Ṣūfī disciples in their cells, and says that the primary activity was that of *dhikr*. A Ṣūfī disciple would also read certain texts prescribed by the master[2], would meditate, and in some cases would interpret his own dreams.[3] On the other hand, the endowment of Baybars al-Jāshanqīr indicates that in the *khanqah*, Ṣūfīs had to meet after every prayer to read the *āyat al-Kursī* (the Throne verse), perform *dhikr* through the repetition of certain formulas thirty-three times each, and then make a prayer (*du'ā'*) on the two *imāms* of the *khanqah* (that of the Shāfi'ī and Ḥanafī schools).[4]

*Ḥudūr* on the other hand, was described by the famous medieval traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa who visited Cairo in 1325 A.D. during the Mamlūk period and said that every Ṣūfī

---

[1] op cit. Burckhardt, 1976 (b), p.101.

[2] As far as original Ṣūfī works are concerned, they were written in order to help those who were already following the Ṣūfī path. The Ṣūfī writings are helpful to the practitioners of the Ṣūfī path, but the written word is secondary experience compared to the direct benefits and transmission of knowledge which occur when the seeker keeps the actual company of a spiritual master. Writing is only useful as an aid, a memoir or a reminder for the practitioner. When such writings are discovered and taken and studied out of context, then confusion arises.

[3] op cit. Ibn al-Ḥajj (14th C.), 1929, vol.3, Pp. 130-158.

[4] See the *Ḥujjat Waqf Baybars al-Jāshanqīr*, Manuscript 22, Folio 4, in op cit. Fernandes, 1980, Pp.126-127.

sat on a rug that was reserved for him. After performing prayers, parts of the Qur'ān called (*ajzā'*[1]) were distributed and each Ṡūfī read a part in his turn. He goes on to say: "*they end the reading of the Qur'ān and have a dhikr session.*"[2]

Leonor Fernandes mentions three or four similar accounts of *ḥuḍūr* described by people from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries.[3] This similarity indicates that although every Ṡūfi is different from other Ṡūfīs, he is not different in that, like the others, he is seeking the Truth (*Ḥaqīqah*) and is striving towards total awareness of Reality. He longs to know the Absolute and he yearns for eternal love. He wants to know the unchanging state within himself by not being distracted or obsessed by the constantly changing situation outside. To be in such a state he needs a helping hand, a "physician of the soul". The greatest "physician" for him is the Universal Prototype, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) whom he takes as a model in his awareness, he then tries to find a living person who embodies the prophetic wisdom, both outwardly and inwardly, and who has more experience than himself of the Ṡūfī path, to guide him.

To understand and learn all about doctrinal truths does not bring about the transformation of the soul. That is why, the Ṡūfī doctrine and practice consist of a spiritual alchemy. We mentioned earlier that the symbolism of alchemy was used to describe practice of the *dhikr* through which the soul in its chaotic, degenerate state is "lead" was transmuted by means of the philosopher's stone (the Divine Name invoked in *dhikr*) into "gold", which is its true nature. This true nature which has been lost, is recovered by the practice of *dhikr*. The "alchemical work" thus symbolizes the "work of spiritual realization". This essential alchemical operation is thus a "transmutation" of that which is "base" into that which is "noble". Practically speaking, the soul of the Ṡūfī must first become "poor" in relation to God so that the Ṡūfī can feel a directly operative concentration. In Islam, the highest form of worship is spiritual virtue (*al-iḥsān*) and the Ṡūfīs believe that it is best attained as the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) explained it: by the adoration of God as if one saw Him. To the Ṡūfīs all virtues are contained in spiritual poverty (*faqr*).

---

[1] There are thirty parts (*juz'*) in the Qur'ān.

[2] See op cit., Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (14th C.), Riḥla, Pp.27-28.

[3] op cit. Fernandes, 1980, Pp. 126-136.

In Ṡūfism, poverty is emptiness in order to be the receptacle of God. Virtue (*al-iḥsān*) is the indirect basis for spiritual concentration, and contemplative virtue cannot be completed without the aid of a sort of "alchemy" to transmute the natural powers of the soul, but it is through its revealed symbol that the Ṡūfī can achieve concentration - which leads the way to the Divine Grace which transforms the soul. The word alchemy is most suitable to be used to describe the process of concentration. The soul can be seen as a form of matter which is to be transmuted from lead to gold. Likewise, the soul in a state of hardness must first be "liquified" and then "re-solidified" to get rid of its impurities.[1] During invocation (*dhikr*) of the Name of God, the three constituents of the Ṡūfī way, that is the doctrinal truth, virtue, and spiritual alchemy are performed in one act.

There are two main domains in Ṡūfī doctrine, the first is that of Universal Truths (*al-Ḥaqā'iq*) and a science of the soul (*al-ḍaqā'iq*). Burckhardt goes on to explain that apart from these two domains, there are three other distinguishable domains of the Ṡūfī doctrine, and these are metaphysics, cosmology and spiritual psychology. It thus follows that cosmology can be understood by applying metaphysics to the cosmos which is similar to creating analogies between the human soul and the cosmos[2]. That explains why Ṡūfī psychology repeatedly relies on the analogy of the human being (microcosm) and the cosmos (macrocosm). It is by this way and by this order of ideas that we can deduce how the Ṡūfī masters derived symbolism from the Islamic traditional sciences of Astronomy, Astrology, cosmology, and alchemy.

We mentioned earlier that in Ṡūfism, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is the Universal Prototype who unites the inward, eternal aspect of reality with the outward, phenomenal aspect. Each Ṡūfī seeks to become the Universal Prototype. Hence, in the context of traditional art and architecture, the Ṡūfī inspired artisan or architect who becomes the Prototype is the means through which he comes to display the splendour of creation. The method of becoming the Universal Prototype is *dhikr*, its repetition must continue until one can be described by the *ḥadīth qudsī* (sacred tradition) in which God says: "*My servant never ceases drawing nigh unto Me, and when my servant does so, I become the Hearing by which he hears, the Seeing by which he sees, the Hand by which he seizes and the Foot by which he walks.*" The Ṡūfī "witnesses" (*yashhad*) when in full consciousness of the Divine Presence

---

[1] See op cit. Burckhardt, 1976 (b), Chapters 14 & 15.

[2] For more information on these analogies see ibid., Chapter 5.

- which explains Ibn al-Fārid̀'s preference to call this doctrine *Wahdat al-Shuhūd* (Unity of Witnesses). To do so is to "*worship God as if you do not see Him (know intuitively), He sees you*". It is to know that God is always in the direction towards which one prays and invokes.[1]

The Śūfīs believe that from the Divine "point of view", creation is a single act and summed up in one prototype in which all the Divine Essences are reflected. But as we mentioned earlier, from the point of view of *Wahdat al-Wujūd*, the Universe can only be a multiplicity since oneness applies to God alone. Thus, in that doctrine the unique prototype is a series of polarizations such as man and woman, macrocosm and microcosm, male and female[2], ...etc. each of which is perfect in itself.[3] Each term of these polarizations of the unique prototype contains, either implicitly or explicitly, its own complementary term. For example it would follow that man has in him the nature of woman and this is so from the origin of being. The Qur'ān attests this fact in: "*Mankind, heed your Lord Who has created you from a single soul, and created its mate from it, and propagated so many men and women from both of them...*"[4]

In the same way the world or the macrocosm "contains" man who is an integral part of it. From the Śūfī viewpoint, the place of man has a relatively comprehensive vision of the universe as opposed to all other organic beings - which have only partial vision of the world. Man can conceive both spiritual essences and forms. This argument leads to the assumption that man (microcosm) and the universe (macrocosm) reflect one another as mirrors. It follows that man's intellectual essence can contain all the possibilities which are revealed in this world. The *ta'wīl* of the Qur'ān: "*And He (God) taught Adam all the names,*"[5] is interpreted esoterically as God having taught Adam all the essences of beings and of things.

Light and darkness are another polarization. For the Śūfīs, existence is light. When the Absolute appears to the consciousness of the enlightened Śūfī, it appears as

---

[1] Laleh Bakhtiar, Sufi: Expression of the Mystic Quest, Thames and Hudson, Singapore, 1976, p.11.

[2] This explains the alchemists - such as Jābir Ibn Ḥayyān - concern with attributing masculine and feminine qualities to metals in the process of achieving transmutation.

[3] These polarizations tie up with the ideas mentioned earlier when dealing with alchemy and the possibility of transmutation by means of achieving a balance (*mīzān*).

[4] Qur'ān: 4/1.

[5] Qur'ān: 2/31.

uncontaminated unity, as light. All multiplicity disappears into darkness. Thus when light makes its full appearance, Unity appears.[1]

In Ṡūfism, *dhikr* relates to that which is in one's innate nature (*fitrah*). It is the remembrance of the Essence of God the Almighty, of the Source of all manifestations and attributes. That Source is within everybody. On the Ṡūfī path, one is required to forget everything else that is discernible, everything that is other than God, in order to return to the original remembrance. It follows that the original innate remembrance of God is already in every heart, whether one is aware of it or not.[2] Through the guidance of a spiritual master, the seeker is led beyond, to a level where there is no remembrance of anything that is mentionable. Then, that which has always been there, encompassing everything, is evidently experienced and witnessed. The purpose of Ṡūfī practices is to be spontaneously aware of the absolute or central reality as well as remaining aware of the physical and material limitations of the phenomenal world which surrounds us. One is an inner awareness which is based on the senses, and the other is an outer awareness which is based on the senses. So the aim of a Ṡūfī teacher is to give the appropriate practices to his close follower and to watch over the results.

Physical consciousness relates to matter and mass, and is low on the scale of consciousness because it is farthest from the spiritual. Higher on the scale is consciousness of the mind, such as feelings and emotions. Higher still is the intellectual consciousness of moral values, a sense of justice and equality, and so on. The aim of the Ṡūfī is to go even higher to attain the Intellectual Knowledge.

Following this ascending order, in the state of meditation there is first the consciousness of the physical body; then the body is forgotten, but there is still the consciousness of ideas and thoughts. Through the technique of single-pointed meditation, all the ideas and thoughts are sublimated. Beyond that is the state of pure or highest consciousness where there is no consciousness of any discernible thing. It is an indescribable simple awareness. Now this is not the end of the meditation exercise. Actually, it signifies a new beginning, the end of all thoughts is the beginning of another dimension. The doctrine of the *dhikr* is that the Divine Name Allah directly vehicles the soul, and when the believer

---

[1] The concept of *ishrāq* or Illumination.

[2] op cit. Haeri, 1990. p.60.

unites himself with the Divine Name in fervent invocation, he inwardly frees himself from the material world. Virtual at first, this liberation becomes effective through perseverance and the Grace of God. Without this Grace, the *dhikr* can be a mortal danger. Hence the prohibition to attempt to practice it methodically without initiation and the guidance of a Ṣūfī master. This explains why Ibn Khaldūn in Mamlūk times - quoted earlier on Ṣūfī practices - wrote that Ṣūfism could be Satanic had it not been directed towards God.

In the tradition of Ṣūfī seclusion practices, we often find a time of retreat being prescribed by the spiritual master for the close follower, usually for a period of forty days, or ten days, or seven or three days, and so on. The Ṣūfī master places a seeker in retreat when he is fully prepared for it in body, mind and heart. Once in spiritual retreat, the purpose is, by means of *dhikr*, to leave all thoughts behind and through single-pointedness experience pure consciousness. During a close follower's retreat, his intake of food must be carefully regulated by the spiritual master. Equally, his mental, emotional and spiritual state is watched. Spiritual retreat and remembrance of God are of no use unless the seeker is ready to leave all aspects of creation behind him.[1]

Particular importance is attached to special places by spiritual masters for meditation, supplication and other spiritual practices. Obviously, every place has a certain degree of spirituality attached to it. There are certain places on this earth which are given more emphasis than others such as Makkah, Madinah, and al-Quds (Jerusalem), but in addition to those places, the Ṣūfīs add the shrines of the earlier prophets and the saints (*awliyā'*) believing that there can be a continuous never-ending flow of *baraka* from them, whether dead or alive.[2] Actually, when one visits these places, one feels that a great event once took place there, and this feeling is often helpful in healing the heart and raising one's spiritual level, thus explaining the *baraka* attached to them. These places help a great deal if a person is guided and prepared to uplift his state. In such places of superior sacredness, the enlightened master reaches a state (*maqām*) where he sees the entire cosmos in his heart. He regards his heart as the sacred house of worship of God as the centre of the cosmos. He sees God's trace at all times everywhere. However, for a layman in spiritual matters, it appears as if God is more present at certain times and in certain places than at other times and places.

---

[1] ibid. p.62.

[2] For more details, see Chapter Three.

But even *dhikr* and meditation, carried out in a special place bearing a higher degree of sanctity is insufficient to transform the soul of a Ṡūfī from the state of impurity to one of purity. It is through symbols, that he will move closer to this transformation. One of the most profound symbolic expressions used by Ṡūfīs to "visualize" transformation is found in the Qur'ānic verse: "*He is the First, and the Last, the Evident and the Immanent, and He has full knowledge of all things*".[1]

Laleh Bakhtiar explains that the First is the origin of all things. It is the birth, the beginning, the centre and the point. The First is the knowledge of man in his primordial state *Fiṫrah*; (that is symbolized in Adam who was taught the Names and Essences of everything). It is at the centre, from which the First began, and that the Last is found. The Last is death and reintegration with the Divine. The Last is the One to whom all return. The Path begins at the centre, manifested in man by his heart which is veiled - due to its material impurities. It is only by rending this veil by purifying oneself that the Ṡūfī is able to find Self, which can only be reached through insight, invocation and contemplative meditation. The Last is a temporal externalization: it is death and reintegration with the Divine. All this process is symbolized by the night journey (*mi'rāj*) of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) which the Ṡūfī emulates.[2] She goes on to say:

> ***It is through symbols that one is awakened; it is through symbols that one is transformed; and it is through symbols that one expresses. Symbols are realities contained within the nature of things. The entire journey in God (Ṡūfī ascent) is a journey in symbols, in which one is constantly aware of the higher reality within things. Symbols reflect both Divine immanence; they refer to both the universal aspect of creation and the particular aspect of tradition.***[3]

Symbolism is perhaps the most sacred of Ṡūfī sciences, for it is through seeing symbols that he continues to remember, to invoke. Each time he forgets, and is pulled back into the forces of the material world, he must struggle again to remember; and it is only

---

[1]Qur'ān: 57/3.

[2] op cit. Bakhtiar, 1987, p.84.

[3] ibid., p.25.

through an understanding of the symbols that he can do so. Symbols are thus seen as vehicles of transmission of Divine realities, which transform the Ṡūfī by carrying him to the higher states of being from which they originate. Known as a world unto themselves (*'ālam al-mithāl*), they are the place of encounter between the world of Heavenly Prototypes - such as the heavenly and earthly Ka'bas described in the *ḥadīth* literature - and the sensible phenomenal world. The world of symbols is a reflection of the world of the Heavenly Prototypes. The further a thing moves away from the Heavenly domain of Illuminated Knowledge, and the closer to the sensible world of phenomena, the more the external qualities it exhibits and vice versa.

In Ṡūfism, everything in creation is a symbol: for everything perceived by the *outer* senses may be conceived through the *inner* senses as a sign of a higher state of reality. However, this symbolic vision takes place for the Ṡūfī, only when the symbol is seen. The Ṡūfī cannot see except when he acquires knowledge of illumination, which arises after he has passed through the Divine Law, gained the knowledge of the doctrines of Ṡūfism, seen through the inner meaning of practices and rites, and achieved union with God and ultimately gained wisdom through direct knowledge from the Source. Here he reaches the Centre to gain the Truth. This knowledge of illumination allowing him to reach the Truth is not seen; it is that which makes him see as it makes itself seen in the form through which it shines.

After this spiritual awakening, the Ṡūfī returns back to his physical consciousness. After this process, he rebuilds himself through rites and practices particular to the tradition to which he has been awakened. He is inspired by universal forms, but this inspiration finds expression only in his particular tradition.

The tradition is a Divine norm which maintains the permanence and continuity of the particular people who hold it. It relates the whole of life to certain principles which transcend the human plane. It repeats, recalls, and recollects the Divine Ideas or Heavenly Prototypes. It is religion in its most universal aspect. In its aspect of continuity or permanence, it continues a chain of oral transmission which relates it through the Vertical axis to the Source from which all things emanate. Continuity is not simply a horizontal line of human history. Continuity pierces the horizontal line with the vertical axis of revelation, and thereby relates the tradition to a trans-historical time[1]. It is tradition, sanctified by revelation, which creates

[1] See discussion and diagram 1.1 in Chapter one.

and preserves the universe of forms, ideas and institutions. The forms appear in art and in the crafts; the ideas are reflected, expressed and recalled in the intellectual development of each tradition; and its institutions retain the forms and ideas for future generations. However a symbol has only been expressed, the Śūfī knows that man cannot create symbols: he is transformed by them.

To conclude, Śūfism based on wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and the love of God, finds its expression not only in the mental forms of metaphysics in the sciences, but also in poetry - as seen in the case of Ibn al-Fāriḍ - and in art and architecture through its connection to the guilds. Its essence is communicated most directly in symbols and analogies. Because it ultimately deals with the spiritual, it can speak without hindrance not only to the traditional learned believer, but also to the layman.

It follows that a traditional artefact created by a member of the community would release its beauty not only in its physical shape, but also in what that shape symbolizes. The degree of beauty would naturally correspond to the level of comprehension which has been experienced by both the artisan - or his master who instructed him - and of the user. This traditional view of art allows the user to achieve a higher status of his soul ( a sort of *mi'rāj* or ascent) by being reminded of God's Presence in everything. He would thus be helped by virtue of the clarity and lucidity of what the artefact created to achieve transcendence. The traditional architect as influenced by the medieval sciences would obviously be seeking to build universal models through his art and architecture. Having their source of inspiration in the tradition itself would ultimately mean that they would reflect its essence: equilibrium, beauty, serenity, and Oneness. In doing so, it would naturally exclude all secular conflicts between heaven and earth since traditionally speaking, the term "secular" did not exist.

**SUMMARY**

After having dealt with the Mamlūk educational system, and the sources of knowledge that were transmitted to the Mamlūk students in both the *madrasa* and the *khanqah*, we find several observations that are important to emphasize:

First, the process of teaching was a system of apprenticeship in both the Mamlūk *madrasa* and the *khanqah*. Because of the great influence of Śūfism on the Mamlūk society

in Egypt, knowledge (*'ilm*) that was transmitted was shared in both institutions - especially after the *'ulamā'* accepted Ṡūfism, to the extent that some became Ṡūfīs themselves. In all cases we have seen that *'ulamā'* taught the *Sharī'a* sciences in the *khanqah* and that Ṡūfī practises were carried out in the mosque and *madrasa*. We can say that a considerable marriage of sorts occurred between external and internal dimensions of knowledge during the Mamlūk period.

Second, it appears that al-Ghazzalī's ideas, which were adopted by Abū al-Ḥassan al-Shādhilī, and Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine, which affected Ibn al-Fāriḍ, were the most popular Ṡūfī beliefs amongst the Mamlūk Egyptian society. Both these figures, taken as representatives, were attacked at times by the *'ulamā'* yet their influence was extremely strong. The influence of Ṡūfism that permeated the political and social levels of the society was even more consolidated when Ṡūfī brotherhoods infiltrated the craft guilds. This naturally effected those who were involved in the traditional building process, either directly or indirectly.

Third, that the traditional Mamlūk crafts and the Islamic sciences (*'ilm*), in their different forms of rational and religious sciences, in both the *Sharī'a*-based and the Ṡūfī-based, were all interconnected. This means that a Ṡūfī *shaykh* could be a *faqīh* (one who deals with jurisprudence), a mathematician, a cosmologist, a writer of books on medicine, and a master (*mu'allim*) of a certain craft, all at the same time. That is because in the Islamic tradition, knowledge is wholistic and unfragmented, every part is shared by all other parts, and the ultimate goal of all these sciences is to *be* Muslim; that is to promote good and fight evil by elevating the status of the soul (*nafs*) by curbing the spirit (*rūḥ*).

Fourth, that there is a huge difference between *'ilm* (knowledge as known by the *'ulamā'*) and *ma'rifah* (gnosis as known by the Ṡūfīs), and that the aim of the Ṡūfīs in the Mamlūk period were to reach a balance of both. The external knowledge of *'ilm* was the *Sharī'a* which could be reached by learning it, while the internal *ma'rifah* which leads to the Truth cannot be reached except by following the Ṡūfī way (*ṭarīqah*). This path would enable the Ṡūfī to reach the stage of enlightenment, a point of purity in the soul by the aid of a Master. At this stage, he would receive Direct Knowledge from the Source (i.e., God). This Direct Knowledge enables its recipient to see the Truth in everything; i.e., to see the qualitative inner dimension hidden in the quantitative external appearance of things.

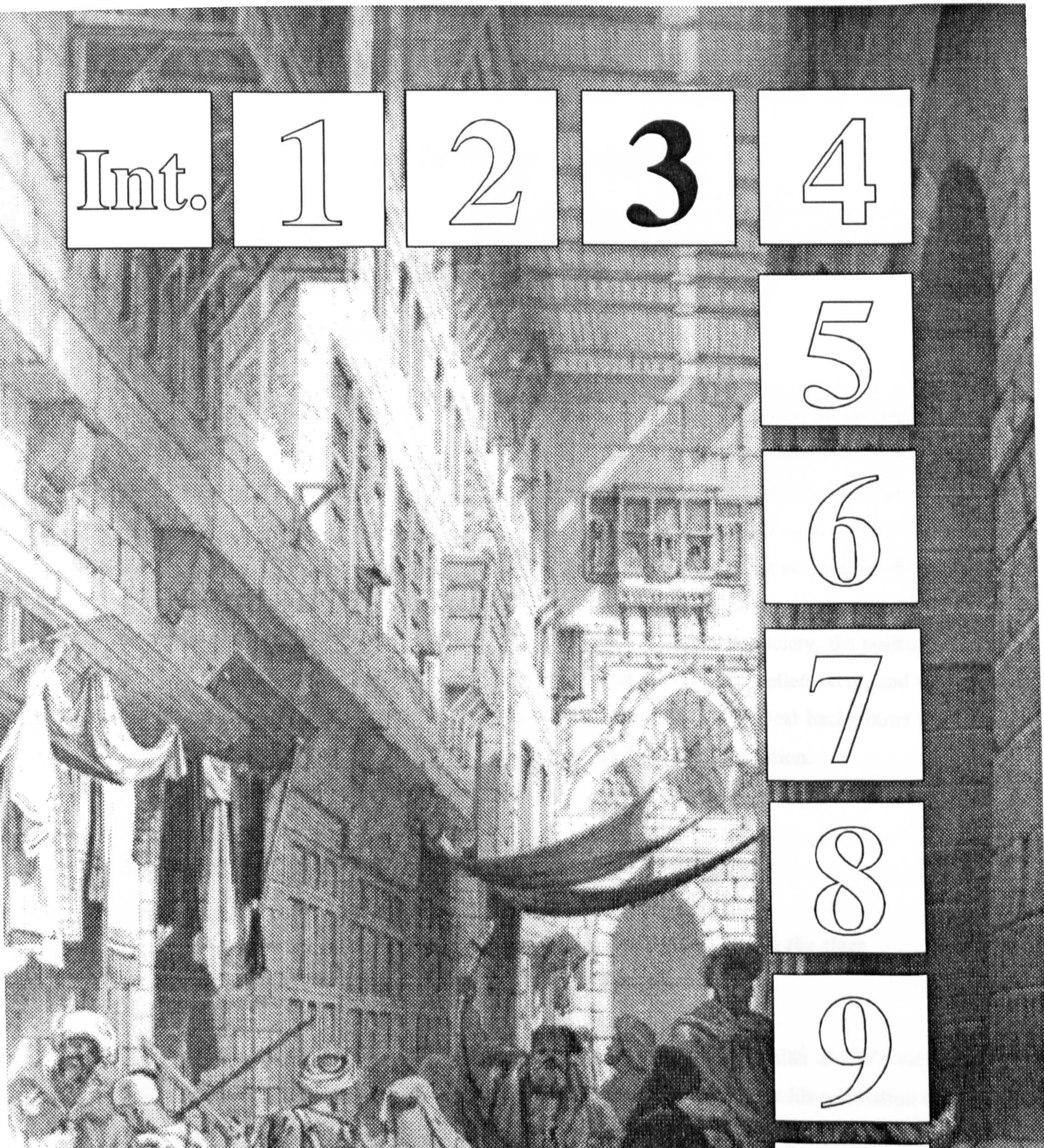
Fifth, that symbols play a major role in traditional science. This symbolism had its roots in pre-Islamic as well as Islamic traditions. Although certain philosophical ideas did not find a willing audience amongst the Egyptians of the Mamlūk period, they were indirectly and implicitly operative on all the levels of the society. For example the gnostic elements found in Neo-Platonism, Hermeticism, and Neo-Pythagoreanism were not an everyday topic of discussion but they were operative in the sense that they were fully absorbed in Ṡūfism which was *lived* in varying degree by the majority of the society.

What is most important in the findings of this chapter, is its implications on the examination and analysis of the religious buildings of the Mamlūk period. That is so because architecture is a social act which "*cannot be divorced from a culture's view of the grand scheme within which it exists.*"[1] Therefore, the relationship between the sciences, the crafts, the guilds and the Ṡūfī brotherhoods is vital to enable us to approach the Mamlūk buildings using the traditionalist argument that was established in Chapter One. This approach is valid on the basis of the fundamentality of the gnostic and esoteric aspect implicit in traditional civilizations such as that of Islam as lived in Mamlūk medieval times, and as shared by the designer, client, and user. There are brief periods in history when it is both fashionable and safe to present visual symbols publicly, without risking the wrath of the *'ulamā'*. It is these brief periods that are usually the golden age of a craft or art. In the Mamlūk case, it was sulṫāns and *emīrs* who fostered and encouraged Ṡūfī thinkers, who in turn influenced artists, craftsmen and architects of that age. We will see in the following chapters how they took full advantage of this patronage to express Ṡūfī ideas with a freedom that had previously been diminished to a great extent.

By alternatively following a strict, purely historical approach one could easily be misled to focus on aspects related only to high culture, or on those related to empirical and external knowledge. This would consequently lead to a superficial, quantitatively assessed understanding of that historical period. It is thus evident that by following the traditionalist approach, one can arrive to a more truthful understanding of the Mamlūk tradition by taking into consideration the esoteric aspects of knowledge transmitted to the Mamlūk society.

---

[1] Gulzar Haider, "The City Never Lies", in Inquiry 2, 6th June 1985, Pp.38-44.


Int.
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11

# CHAPTER THIREE

# THE BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK SETTING

## (648-784 A.H. / 1250-1381 A.D.)

As mentioned in the Introductory Chapter, this research is focused on the Baḥrī Mamlūk period. This, the most prosperous epoch within the Egyptian medieval Islamic tradition, was characterized by continuity and stability. In order to study the Cairene religious buildings of the Baḥrī Mamlūk period, one has to imagine how Cairo as a whole was organized. We will deal with the medieval traditional city of Cairo to reach an understanding of the urban contextual environment in which the Mamlūk religious buildings formed points of focus. The traditional context ultimately has to do with the Mamlūk society, the political and economical conditions, how the state functioned, what the religious beliefs were, and so on.[1] The information that is produced in this chapter will form a historical background to help in the process of re-creating the traditional Mamlūk Egyptian perception.

## 3.1 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MAMLŪK REGIME

> ***Ever since Egypt succeeded in turning the Crusaders away, it took the place of Baghdad and became the centre of the Islamic world.***[2]

From the perspective of Islamic History, the Ayyubid Sulṭān Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn's most important achievement was not his victory over the Crusaders[3], but rather his restoration of Egypt as the centre of the Muslim empire and his revivification and strengthening of *Sunnī* Islam as the dominant faith in the lands formerly ruled by the *Shī'ite* Fatimids. Under Ṣalāḥ

---

[1] In traditions such as the one we are dealing with, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between specific domains, (i.e., there is no way to classify what is solely religious or political or economic...etc. all domains are inter-related). For our purposes, the classifications that have been made under those specific domains should not be taken rigidly, they have been placed thus, for the convenience of the research.

[2] Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), The *Muqaddimah*: An Introduction to History, trans. by Franz Rosenthal, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1967, p.25.

[3] See P.M. Holt, The Age of the Crusades: The Near East from the Eleventh Century to 1517, Longman, London, 1986, Pp. 82-83.

al-Dīn, the *madrasa* - a legacy from Seljūk times which had already been implanted in Syria - was further expanded and carried into Egypt. It became a principle means whereby orthodox *Sunnī* Islam supplanted Isma'īlism, the *Shī'ite* sect dominant in the times of the Fatimids[1]. Even the Azhar[2], which had previously been the centre of Isma'īlī education, was transformed under the Ayyubids into a bastion of *Sunnī* orthodoxy.

The rise to power of the Mamlūk regime[3] in Egypt was the result of a chain of events set in motion by the death of the Ayyubid Sulṭān al-Malik al-Ṣālih in 1249 A.D. Al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ had created a corps of Turkish Mamlūk soldiers, the largest in Egypt's history up to his time, and had made this corps the mainstay of his army. These Mamlūks were stationed in barracks on an island in the Nile near Cairo called al-Rawḍah, and accordingly became known collectively as the Baḥrīs (from *baḥr*, literally meaning "sea" but the common colloquial Arabic term in Egypt for the Nile). The Baḥrīs had already demonstrated their military expertise by inflicting a defeat on the Crusader army of Louis IX, which had invaded Egypt just before al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ's death.[4]

A preliminary indoctrination of foreign soldiers was necessary so that they would understand what was required of them. For the Mamlūks to accept these duties, conversion to the faith of their subjects and instruction in Islam was essential. In a tradition which drew little distinction between religious conviction and social behaviour, conversion to Islam was a way of introducing foreigners to the habits and expectations of the people over whom they ruled, a way of fostering conformity to the ways of Islamic societies[5]. 'Alī Sālim al-Nabbāhīn, the twentieth-century scholar who has researched the educational system during the time of the Mamlūks, says that their education in Islam served as an initiation into the

---

[1] Although the great majority of the population living within the Fatimid Empire were *Sunnī* Muslims, the Fatimids themselves remained faithful to the principles of Isma'īlī *Shī'ism* and to the objectives of the revolutionary movement which had brought them to power. The ultimate objective was to overthrow the 'Abbassid Caliphate - which was essentially *Sunnī* - and to establish the supremacy of the 'Alawī line throughout the world of Islam. The Fatimids sought to accomplish this objective through three closely related means: military expansion, commercial expansion and subversive propaganda in lands not under their rule. See Bernard A. Weiss and Arnold H. Green, A Survey of Arab History, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 1985, p. 113.

[2] The oldest university in the Muslim world (around 1010 years old) located in Cairo and still functioning till the present day.

[3] Sometimes referred to as the slave dynasty because the word Mamlūk literally means slave. See Sir William Muir, The Mamluke or Slave Dynasty of Egypt: 1260-1517 A.D.), Smith Elder and Co, London, 1896.

[4] op cit. Weiss & Green, 1985, p. 198.

[5] See the meaning of a traditional society in Chapter One.

roles of local notables in carrying on public affairs for which no regular governmental provision had been made.[1]

The Mamlūks adopted the system, that the rule belonged to the most powerful; the one powerful enough to seize the throne and eliminate all rivals.[2] It reflected the circumstances that had given rise to the Mamlūk take-over and the cancellation of Ayyubid legitimacy. Although the method of succession was a variable of Mamlūk politics, certain basic features of the Mamlūk system remained constant throughout the two and a half centuries of Mamlūk rule. The most striking of these features was the essentially foreign character of the military class. The Mamlūk system seems to have been deliberately designed to keep the military aloof from the indigenous population.[3] Persons born within Mamlūk territories, including sons of Mamlūk soldiers and officers, were barred from serving in the regular armed forces. Only an auxiliary and inferior force called the *ḥalqa* was open to natives, but service in the *ḥalqa* offered little opportunity for personal advancement.[4]

The ranks of the regular forces were supplied exclusively from slave markets. It was believed that only youths, "freshly" bought, possessed the toughness and spirit required for excellence in the military arts. Only they, by virtue of their slave origins, could be counted upon to be absolutely loyal to their superiors and unreservedly devoted to the military way of life.[5] The Egyptian native population, softened by a sedentary life - so often mentioned in Ibn Khaldūn's "*Muqaddimah*" - was believed to be incapable of cultivating the qualities and physical skills required of the true warrior. Thus, the sons of the Mamlūks (*awlād al-nās*[6]), who were excluded from the non-hereditary ruling caste to which their fathers belonged, were obliged to enter civilian careers, unless they chose to serve in the "inferior" *ḥalqa* corps.

---

[1] For the education of the Mamlūk elite see 'Alī Sālim al-Nabbahīn, *Niḍhām al-Tarbiyyah al-Islāmiyyah fī 'Aṣr Dawlat al-Mamālīk fī Miṣr*, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, Cairo, 1981, Pp. 156-158.

[2] See Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattaḥ 'Āshūr, *Miṣr fī 'Aṣr Dawlat al-Mamālīk al-Baḥariyyah*, Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo, 1959, Pp.9-12.

[3] See op cit. al-Nabbāhīn, 1981, p. 127.

[4] ibid., p. 199.

[5] See Robert Irwin, The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250-1382, Croom Helm, London, 1986, p.8.

[6] This term is still used till the present day to denote a distinguished social background.

## 3.2 THE END OF THE BAḤRĪ MAMLŪKS (784 A.H., 1381 A.D):

In 1381 A.D. the last of Qalawūn's[1] descendants to rule as sulṭān was overthrown by an able Mamlūk commander named Barqūq, who belonged to a corps of Mamlūks known as the Burjīs - so named because they were stationed in the main Citadel (*Qal'ah*) of Cairo, sometimes called *burj* (tower). The Burjī corps had originally been founded by Qalāwūn himself nearly a century earlier. Barqūq's coming to power marked the end of the Baḥrī rule. The series of sulṭāns who ruled the Mamlūk empire thereafter were sometimes called Burjīs, after the corps which brought them to power, and sometimes Circassians, since all but two of them were of that ethnic origin.

The transition from Baḥrī to Burjī rule corresponded to a number of important political and economic changes. Under the Burjīs, the dynastic principle was abandoned altogether and once more the "survival of the fittest" system of succession became the norm. Although this system had the advantage of producing many strong and capable rulers, it made for general instability in political life (mainly division in the troops). Conversely, al-Maqrīzī, in an observation more critical than he himself may have realized, ascribed the chaos of the early fifteenth century (the fall of the Mamlūks) not just to division among the troops, but to failure to educate the new soldiers in the tradition of Islam. "*When they failed to be imbued with respect for the elders of the community and with desire for the approval of the religious authorities, the cause of the community was ill-served.*"[2]

Whereas under the Baḥrīs Egypt and the Fertile Crescent (*Bilād al-Shām*) had enjoyed economic prosperity, under the new line of rulers the economy of these countries went downhill. The economy was at a loss; any surpluses available for investment in urban structures and the patronage of the arts and crafts were dissipated. This was immediately reflected in the declining number of *waqf* (endowment deeds) and of the construction of religious public works. Urban manufacturers suffered equally from the regression of the

---

[1] ibid, Pp.62-82. The Qalawūn Family or 'dynasty' is considered to be the unique case of the adoption of the hereditary rule in the time of the Mamlūks for a period of over a century (1279-1382 A.D.). This period represents the pinnacle of the Mamlūk period, as all of its characteristics appeared in it and took its final form. Al-Ḍhāhir Baybars is considered to be the founder or sower of the Mamlūk seed, while the Qalawūn family the harvesters. To contemporary historians the word Qalawūn is synonymous to power, grandeur, internal stability, and external safety. Also see op cit. Holt, 1986, Pp. 99-106.

[2] Al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *al-Mawā'iḍh wal-I'tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭat wal-Āthār*, Cairo, Bulaq reprint, vol.1, 1270 A.H., p. 104.

Mamlūk economy. So large was the part of the Mamlūk garrisons in the consumption of craft output and the employment of urban workers that the decline of their incomes had widespread repercussions. Luxury craft work collapsed from lack of patronage. Other factors help to account for the decline of the luxury crafts, but do not so fully explain it as the failure of patronage. The depression of building activity must have had considerable impact on associated crafts.

> ***In the turbulent fifteenth century, public works and endowments of religious institutions did not come to a halt, but they nonetheless slowed considerably. In principle, however, performance of services for the community remained a way of winning its approval, support, and co-operation. To build great public edifices - symbols of grandeur - and to do charitable works served to expiate the inevitable sins of public life, win the accolades of men, and ensure prayers of the pious after one's death.***[1]

## 3.3 THE MAMLŪK STATE

One of the principal characteristics of the Islamic social order was the presence of an Islamic state, of Islamic rule. The Arab conquests had given rise to a highly elaborate state structure, one having a vast territorial domain extending from China to Spain. What emerged thereafter was a network of smaller state formations most of which came to form an international *Sunnī* political order. Each ruler within this network looked to the Caliph, who continued to reside in Baghdad, as the theoretical bearer of ultimate political authority and was careful to secure official recognition from him. Thus the Caliph, who could now no longer be considered a head of state, had become a legitimizing agent within a network of states whose unity under the aegis of *Sunnī* Islam he symbolized. Some of the states within this network were able to achieve sway over considerable territory - for example, the territory of Egypt, Syria, and Palestine established by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī.

After the destruction of the 'Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad in 1258 A.D., the Mamlūks wanting to prop up their image as legitimate rulers of the Muslim *umma*,

---

[1] Ira M. Lapidus, Muslim Cities In The Later Middle Ages, Student Edition, Cambridge University Press, London, 1967, p. 69.

maintained under their patronage a remnant line of 'Abbasid Caliphs. This line was inaugurated by Bāybars al-Bunduqdārī in 1261 A.D.[1], when a refugee of the 'Abbasid House was proclaimed caliph in Cairo. The Mamlūk-sponsored caliphate was obviously meant to be a puppet institution and as a result, did not enjoy universal recognition among *Sunnīs*.

The role of the puppet caliph was to invest each new sulṫān - for the sulṫān was, in theory, a delegate of the caliph. In fact, however, the caliph had no real power to appoint sulṫāns. In the political theory of Ibn Jamā'a (the Mamlūk historian) and like-minded persons, whenever a military commander seized power by defeating or slaying his rivals (who might include the previous sulṫān), he had a legitimate claim to rule and the caliph was obliged to invest him with the office of sulṫān.

Eventually, the need arose for a new conception of legitimacy which did not entail the official sanction of a caliph. This need was met with a doctrine known in Arabic as *al-siyāsah al-Shar'iyyah*, according to which the Islamic state existed wherever the ruler was a professing Muslim and used his power to preserve the public peace in collaboration with the *'ulamā'*, to uphold the Divine Law (*Shari'a*). Under this new conception, the Islamic state, although able to exist without a caliphate, still continued to carry on the essential functions of the caliphate. Islamic rule *per se* remained a reality.[2] Two primary functions defined almost universally the role of the Islamic state: the first, was the maintenance of internal peace, security, and decency of the Islamic social order; and the second, was the maintenance - and, where possible, the advancement - of the frontiers separating the Islamic domain from the realms beyond. Both these functions of the Muslim state were fulfilled in the Baḥrī Mamlūk period.

## 3.4 THE MAMLŪK TRADITIONAL SOCIAL ORDER

The Mamlūk Islamic social order was that pattern of social relationships among individuals, classes, and groups of the Muslim Mamlūk *umma* (community). These included the Mamlūks who were the state military elite, the *'ulamā'* and Ṡūfī *shaykhs*, the craftsmen and merchants, and the organized bodies of commoners. The reason that they were considered

---

[1] For a more detailed historical background, see op cit. Holt, 1986, Pp. 90-98.

[2] op cit. Weiss & Green, 1985, Pp. 149-50

classes of their own is because the Mamlūks regarded them as the basis of their power and prosperity. S.A. 'Āshūr, the contemporary historian who has specialized in the Mamlūk period writes that the Mamlūk elite respected the *'ulamā'* and Ṣūfī *shaykhs* because: "*it was through them that they had known Islam, and in its blessing (baraka) they were living.*"[1] As for the craftsmen and merchants, they were the ones who helped the Mamlūk state financially in times of need due to their great wealth. But it is an equilibrium or self-balancing pattern of traditional ordered relationships between the classes which appears to be the key to understanding how the Muslim society functioned.

The term "traditional Muslim social order" is not meant to suggest that the social order to be examined in this section was identical to the ideal Islamic order. The latter was considered to be manifest in the *umma* under the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the first Caliphs and in the *Sharī'a* as worked out by the *'ulamā'*. The actual *traditional* social order within which Muslims lived during the Mamlūk period was viewed by the more devout Muslims as somewhat removed from Islamic ideals, even though it was shaped to a large extent by them.[2] The reason was the depth of the influence of Ṣūfism on the Egyptian medieval society[3]. But before discussing the social role of Ṣūfism on the society, we must first examine the traditional meaning of the term "society".

The notion of society as the total aggregate of people living together in a certain territory and conforming to certain common patterns of social behaviour, admittedly, did not have a prominent place in the thinking of medieval Muslims. There is in classical Arabic - as distinct from modern Arabic - no precise equivalent of the English word "society". Within Mamlūk society there were solidarities which were stronger than that of society as a whole and which had the effect of overshadowing the notion of society as such. Chief among these solidarities was that of the religious community. Religion was thus the primary basis of social cohesion. Secular conceptions of community (such as that embodied in the modern concept of a nation) were virtually unknown. The only solidarity which compared in strength with the religious community was that of the extended family; whereas the individual belonged to the former by virtue of religious affiliation, he was bound to the latter by the ties of kinship.

---

[1] Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Āshūr, *al-Mujtama' al-Miṣrī fī 'Aṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk*, Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo, 1962, p.29.

[2] op cit., Weiss & Green, 1985, p. 145.

[3] See Chapter Two.

To some degree other solidarities existed, for example, that of towns or quarters, that of regions, that of particular trades and professions, but these were always overshadowed by the religious community. Among Muslims the most serious threat to the overriding solidarity of the *umma* was posed by sectarian differences, which were in principle religious in nature - even if there were concealed social or economic factors behind them in given instances. However, this threat must not be unduly exaggerated. Ultimately the sects were able to establish a satisfactory mode of life, in spite of occasional outbreaks of violence.[1] In any case, the vast majority of Muslims were *Sunnīs*, and it is among them that the solidarity of the *umma* was achieved on the largest scale, despite some variations in law and theology (*madhāhib*). Among *Sunnīs* the view came to prevail that certain differences in regard to law and theology were inevitable[2] and that the unity of the *umma* was not to be compromised by these differences.

The Muslim *umma* was of course vast. This vastness, which might have militated against its solidarity, was partially offset by two things: the mosque and the pilgrimage. The mosque provided a setting in which the solidarity of the *umma* could be expressed locally or internally. One of the two Arabic terms for mosque, namely *jāmi'*, means "gathering place" (the other is *masjid*, the place of prostration). The mosque is the place where Muslims in a particular locality gather together for worship and social intercourse. It thus engenders a local congregation which epitomizes the Islamic *umma*. Muslims who worship together in a given mosque acquire a feeling of congregational unity while retaining a sense of belonging to the universal *umma*. On the other hand, the universal *umma* is epitomized in an even more dramatic way in the great Pilgrimage (*Ḥajj*) to Makkah. It is in *Ḥajj* that local ties disappear as pilgrims from all parts of the Islamic world gather for common religious observances. Though they constitute a small segment of the *umma*, their varied origins make them a living embodiment of the universality of the *umma*, and each pilgrim returns to his home with tales of the great event that foster the universalist spirit in others.[3]

It is obvious, therefore, that despite the vastness of the Muslim *umma* in Mamlūk

---

[1] The most serious sectarian division was that between *Sunnīs* and *Shī'īs*, but even between these a large measure of peaceful coexistence was achieved.

[2] Because a *ḥadīth* attributed to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in fact stated that the *umma* would be divided into seventy-three sects. In another *ḥadīth*, he said that differences in opinions regarding the Divine Law were a mercy (*raḥmah*) as it widened the scope of interpretation.

[3] ibid., p. 146.

times, one cannot equate it with society as such. It was rather a part of society, as were also the other religious communities which were accorded legitimacy under the *Sharī'a*. The larger notion of society as a whole may have played a somewhat secondary role in Mamlūk thinking, but this is not to say that the concept did not exist at all. While there is no precise equivalent in classical Arabic to the English term "society", taken in the broad sense which the term has in modern social science usage, there is a term in whose meaning the concept of society was very strongly implied. This is the term *dār al-Islām* (literally, "abode of Islam"). Strictly speaking, this term has more a territorial than a social connotation. It refers to that part of the physical world in which Islam is secure by virtue of the presence of an Islamic state and where the *Sharī'a* is honoured. But the people who inhabit *dār al-Islām* clearly constitute an Islamic society, whether all be Muslims or not. Non-Muslims who adhere to "legitimate" revealed religions[1] are as much a part of Islamic society as the Muslims. Although they are not subject to all parts of the *Sharī'a*, they are subject to those parts that govern inter-communal relations, and if they are *ahl al-dhimmah* - sometimes referred to as *ahl al-Kitāb* (people of the book); i.e., Jews and Christians - they have a distinctly Islamic status. In this respect, the system of mutually tolerant theocracies established by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the first Caliphs persisted. Non-Muslims enjoyed religious freedom provided they observed those inter-communal regulations laid down in the *Sharī'a* and fulfilled their obligations to the Islamic state.[2]

In Chapter Two, we saw that Śūfism emphasized group experience due to the fundamentality of *ḥuḍūr* (group *dhikr* sessions) in the *khanqah* in the Mamlūk period. This was the way that it drew the community of Śūfīs together. This communal lifestyle in the Mamlūk *khanqah* had taken the form of life in brotherhoods rather than as individuals living in solitude in cells or caves - as Śūfism had started during the first centuries of Islam. This could be said also of the Mamlūk mosque and *madrasa* which during that period adopted a lot of Śūfī practises, even the greatly prohibited dance and music incorporated in *dhikr*. This communal lifestyle as lived by the students of both the *madrasa* as well as the *khanqah* had

---

[1] Legitimate in the Islamic tradition involves the two other Abrahamic religions: Judaism, and Christianity (referred to as *ahl al-dhimmah*). Hinduism and Buddhism for example, are considered forms of *wathaniyyah* (paganism). This does not mean that Muslims cannot live with them, it simply means that they have less privileges than those of *ahl al-dhimmah*. For example, Muslims are obliged by the *Śharī'a* to protect Christians and Jews during war provided they are paying the *jizyah* (a sort of poll tax), while they are not obliged to protect any people who believe in other religions.

[2] See 'Āshūr who relies on original sources for this viewpoint in op cit. 'Āshūr, 1962, Pp. 55-56. For an opposing point of view, see Donald P. Little, "Coptic Conversion to Islam under the Baḥrī Mamlūks, 692-755/1293-1354", in History and Historiography of the Mamlūks, Variorum Reprints, London, 1986, Pp.552-568.

a social impact on the solidarities within the traditional Mamlūk society. Not only had the Ṡūfīs come to mix together, they had established a very influential role within the community of the *'ulamā'*, in public life, and particularly in relation to the Mamlūk military elite.

> ***In Egypt an official called the shaykh al-shuyūkh (chief shaykh), was responsible for the over-all administration and discipline of the Ṡūfīs and for their liaison with the sulṫān. Such closely knit bodies were important foci of communal aggregation,...***[1]

It has been discussed in Chapter Two that Ṡūfism impregnated public life through its influence on the crafts and commercial corporations. This was due to the close bond between the guilds and the Ṡūfī brotherhoods. We have seen Massignon, Lewis, 'Āshūr, and Dodge's points of view on the guilds in medieval Islamic times which indicate that they were connected to Ṡūfī brotherhoods - described as "*a new fervour of religious and secret society.*"

On another level of the society, the Ṡūfīs were respected and feared by the sulṫāns who encouraged the Ṡūfīs to become more integrated with the more orthodox *Sunnī* religious current. This is the very reason why the *khanqah* was "officialized" and thus, received the consent of the *'ulamā'*, as a result, many *'ulamā'* had come to tolerate Ṡūfism and some of them became Ṡūfīs themselves. On the other hand, we also saw Ṡūfīs in the Mamlūk period, such as al-Shādhilī and Ibn al-Fāriḋ, who took a part in the social and political life, sharing in official receptions, marching under the banners of their *ṫarīqas* to express political preferences, as well as defending the rights of the Egyptian populace in times of tyranny.[2]

## 3.5 THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS UNDER THE BAḤRĪ MAMLŪKS

The most characteristic feature of the Mamlūk period is the huge building activity that took place in it, particularly in the domain of religious buildings. But this was not all, as Egypt before the Mamlūks had not known such a flowering of the arts, literature, public works, as well as an array of other cultural activities. It seems at first ironic that this selected

---

[1] op cit. Lapidus, 1967, Pp. 105-6.

[2] Ḥayāt Nāṡir Hajjī, *Aḥwāl al-'Āmmah fī Ḥokm al-Mamālīk*, Sharikat Kāḋhimah, Kuweit, 1984, p.227.

military elite, without roots in Egypt, were patrons of such magnificent mosques, *madrasas* and *khanqahs*, and were lavish in their endowment of religious foundations and delighted to witness the refinement of the crafts. In fact, there are several explanations for this: these huge monuments flanking the narrow roads of Cairo were visible symbols of power and success. They dominated the everyday environment spatially as well as visually. Furthermore, although the military elite was known for its life of luxury and sometimes for its looseness[1], there were among the Mamlūk sulṭāns and their *emirs* men who were truly devout. Sulṭān Ḥassan ( ruled in 755 A.H., 1354 A.D.) for example, under whom some of the greatest excesses occurred, was personally a simple and unpretentious man, scrupulous in the observance of the rules of his religion, spending little on himself, but generously endowing the buildings he had erected.[2] To the founder, a pious endowment appeared to be an investment in the afterlife.[3]

But the Mamluks did not build monuments only for self-glorification and piety. There was also a strong social and economic motive inherent in the nature of Mamlūk society. We have seen that the Mamlūk elite was a one-generation nobility only; young children were brought as slaves from non-Muslim areas into Egypt, educated, trained and set free. Nevertheless, Mamlūk *emirs* married and acquired dependents for whom future provision had to be made. The fiefs which maintained the sultan or the emirs were not hereditary, but belonged to the "state treasury" (*bayt al-māl*) to be re-apportioned when he died or fell into disgrace[4]. However, in building a charitable establishment dedicated to God, the Mamlūk could endow it with some of his property with the income to be used for its upkeep and monthly expenses. For this purpose a *waqf* deed was drawn up stipulating how and for what purposes and salaries the income was to be used. The more religious purposes the endowment fulfilled, the more income it received and the more personnel it retained. Most commonly, these personnel were members of the Mamlūk's own families. Thus the religious foundations became a way of providing for dependents, and a way of safeguarding revenues otherwise subject to expropriation. This *waqf* income, in theory blocked in perpetuity and irrevocable, served to maintain the religious building and encouraged everybody who could to build. The

---

[1] Such notorious cases as *Emir* Ulmās al-Ḥājib who publicly announced his homosexuality.

[2] We will see in Chapter Ten, a case-study of the most magnificent of all Baḥrī Mamlūk *madrasas*, that of the Sulṭān Ḥassan.

[3] Caroline Williams, "The City of Cairo: The Mamluks", Cairo Today, April 1983, p.61.

[4] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khitat*, n.d., vol.I, Pp.401-2.

*waqf* system furthermore explains why it is that so many religious endowments, as opposed to less-sacred[1] constructions have survived so well.[2]

Politically speaking, the Egyptian society was governed by three distinct bodies: the first was administrative - the military class, the Mamlūk sułtāns and *emīrs*; the second was judicial - *qaḍī* (judge), and the *muḥtasib* (supervisor of the market); the third was spiritual and religious - the *'ulamā'* and the Ṣūfī *shaykhs*. While the political influence of the first group is obvious due to the legislative power that the sułtāns and the *emīrs* possessed, the other two need explanation.

The *qāḍī* (judge) was to apply the *Sharī'a* to cases brought before him. In principle, therefore, the *qāḍī* should himself be one who deals with the *Sharī'a* (i.e., a *'ālim*, singular for *'ulamā'*), since only the well versed in the *Sharī'a* should be in position to apply it to specific cases. Since the *Sharī'a* defined not only what was obligatory and forbidden but also what was merely advisable or inadvisable, much of it lay beyond the scope of positive law (that is, judicially applicable and enforceable)[3]. On the other hand, the *muhtasib* or the inspector of the market had the duty of seeing that public morality was properly maintained in the *sūq* (market) including the observance of general standards of decency and propriety on the part of the public. Through him the communal duty of promoting good and preventing evil (*al-amr bil-ma'rūf wal-nahy 'an al-munkar*) was discharged.[4] The *muhtasib* also exercised authority over the various trades and crafts.

The fact that Egyptians responded to the third group is explainable when one reads of the numerous accounts where the *'ulamā'* and the Ṣūfī *shaykhs* stood by the Egyptians to show them what their rights were and to help them achieve the minimum social respect that

---

[1] In Islam there is no secular as opposed to sacred; we will deal with this point below.

[2] op cit. Williams, April 1983, p.62.

[3] The primary means whereby the Islamic state transforms the *Sharī'a* into positive law is a judicial system called in Arabic *qaḍā'*. This system centred upon a court over which a judge bearing the title of *qāḍī* presided. In applying the *Sharī'a* to particular cases and in relying upon sanctions provided by the state to undergird his decisions, as an agent of the state the *qāḍī* helped to bring about the realization of an Islamic positive law. op cit. Weiss & Green, 1985, Pp. 151-2.

[4] ibid., p. 159. Also in Janet L. Abu-Lughod, Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971, p.24.

each member of the community aspired.[1] One of the many factors that led to the superior respect of the *'ulamā'* and the Ṡufīs was that they regarded themselves responsible for the reform of rulers.

The dominant position of the military, which was a prime feature of political life under the Mamlūks, extended to economic life as well. The military class disposed of great amounts of wealth. Land was, as everywhere, the primary source of wealth. Egyptian agricultural land was divided into 24 carats of which the sulṭān owned four, the *emīrs* ten, and the rest was owned by the military.[2] The *iqṭā'* system made the military the prime landowners.[3] The revenue which the Mamlūks drew from the *iqṭā'* holdings was, on the whole, considerably greater than that of the military in previous periods of Egypt's history. Because of this wealth, the military became principle participants in economic life. In addition to being the leading consumers, the Mamlūks also invested in economic ventures and were able to use their power to discourage competition from the civilian population.

The ever increasing involvement of the Mamlūk military class and the state in economic activity was accompanied by a further decline of the bourgeoisie. Urban administration was taken over almost completely by the Mamlūks themselves. Every town had its Mamlūk governor and garrison, which exercised absolute authority. The bourgeoisie dwindled in importance and became economically dependent upon the military. Agricultural production passed almost entirely into the hands of the Mamlūks, and they monopolized the selling of food, the construction of markets (*sūqs*) and the leasing of shops.[4]

These developments notwithstanding, the first century of Mamlūk rule (1250-1350 A.D.), during which the Baḥrīs were in power, proved to be a surprisingly prosperous period economically and resulted in the production of many buildings - especially mosques, *madrasas*, and *khanqahs*. This prosperity came from the government of the Baḥrī Mamlūks which afforded peace and security within the Mamlūk territories at a time when turmoil

---

[1] See Dr. 'Abd al-Laṭīf Ḥamzah, *al-Ḥarakah al-Fikriyyah fī Miṣr fī al-'Aṣrayn al-Ayyūbī wal-Mamlūkī al-Awwal*, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, Cairo, 1947, p.67.

[2] Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Āshūr, Al-Ayyūbiyyūn wal-Mamālīk fi Miṣr wal-Shām, Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo, n.d., p.343.

[3] *Iqṭā'* is a system of land holdings wherein a considerable size of land was owned by an individual. See Tsugitaka Satō, "*Iqṭā'* Policy of Sultan Baybars I", Orient, Tokyo, vol. XXII, 1986.

[4] op cit. Weiss & Green, 1985, p. 202.

prevailed in many other areas. Furthermore, the Mamlūk state itself, continuing in the tradition of its predecessors, encouraged and to a large extent sponsored international trade, granting residential privileges to foreign merchants and maintaining careful control over vital sea routes, especially the all-important Red Sea route.

Also, judging from the absence of evidence to the contrary in Mamlūk sources, public health during the first century of Baḥrī rule seems to have been good. The chronicles of the period mention very few epidemics or severe famines. This resulted in a growth of the population and consequently, of the labour force. Growth of population was also stimulated by the influx of large numbers of people from the land to the east, especially Iraq, as a result of the Mongol threats. Among these immigrants were many *'ulamā'*, Ṣūfī *shaykhs*, artisans, builders, bureaucrats and soldiers, all of whom were capable of being absorbed by the Mamlūk tradition in a productive manner. Leonor Fernandes says that:

> ***...by attracting foreigners, namely scholars, to their capital, the Mamluks were making sure that Cairo would remain as has been described by Ibn Khaldun, the centre of the Muslim world, and its sultan would then rightfully bear his title of Sultan al-Islam wa'l-Muslimin (the Sultan of Islam and the Muslims).***[1]

But because the main source of Egyptian economy, as had always been the case, was agriculture, this was reflected in the social structure. All cultural activity and institutional development ultimately depended upon it. Ibn Khaldūn, the fourteenth-century historian, tells us that the civilized arts and sciences were made possible by the existence of a privileged wealthy class who lived off a surplus of agricultural products and who dwelled in cities, which arose by virtue of this surplus. Thus, he says, cultural life is dependent on the vicissitudes of agriculture. In so far as the surplus is reduced in difficult times, cultural life is restricted, and the level of complexity and sophistication of the society's institutions lowered; in so far as the surplus increases and is well managed, city life and culture are able to flourish. In such cases, he continues, change is uncommon, and when it does occur it is slow. As a result, the prevailing mentality and social attitudes, were conservative.[2] This

---

[1] Leonor Fernandes, The Evolution of the Khanqah Institution in Egypt, PhD Thesis, Princeton University, 1980, p.98.

[2] See Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.) opinion quoted in Chapter Two.

description and analysis of Ibn Khaldūn's views of change within a tradition corresponds to the definition that was adopted in Chapter One, that the value system which is the backbone of the tradition is its origin as well - Islam in both its inner and outer dimensions.[1]

## 3.6 BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK RELIGIOUS LIFE

Because the Baḥrī Mamlūk śulṭāns deliberately cultivated the image of pious defenders of *Sunnī* Islam, Cairo became a bulwark of orthodoxy against the pagan and heretical influences which flourished to the East - such as the infidel Mongols. We mentioned above that in 1261 A.D. Baybars al-Bunduqdārī[2] installed an Abbasid survivor of the Mongol invasion as Caliph in Cairo. Although the 'Abbasid Caliphate had exercised little effective power in its last century, it still remained in *Sunnī* eyes a powerful symbol of Muslim unity and legitimacy. Now the time-honoured institution was restored under Baḥrī Mamlūk patronage.

The religious prestige which this action brought to the sultanate was further enhanced by a more active policy with respect to the Ḥijāz. Bāybars al-Bunduqdārī used diplomacy to win the allegiance of the Sharīf of Makkah (the guardians of the Holy cities), who had been embarking on an independent policy, and in a short time the Ḥijāz became a dependency of the Mamlūk state.[3] To emphasize his patronage over the three holy cities - Makkah, al-Madinah, and Jerusalem - Bāybars adopted the title "servant of the holy places", which was subsequently borne by his Baḥrī Mamlūk successors.

One piece of evidence which reflects the wide scope of religious activity in the Mamlūk period is the abundance of religious monuments that were erected in their time. 'Āshūr, while discussing the building activity in the Baḥrī Mamlūk period quotes Khalīl Ibn Shahīn, a Mamlūk contemporary writer, and the author of "*Kashf al-Mamālik*", as estimating

---

[1] We will see in Chapter Six, that resistance to change stems from the fact that any traditional act has to be "original" in the sense of authenticity; such a traditional understanding of originality is by its nature opposed to innovation and hence, explains the slowness of change.

[2] Bāybars al-Bunduqdārī is regarded to be the real founder of the Baḥrī Mamlūks. His rule is considered to be amongst the most prosperous in all aspects.

[3] See op cit., Little, "Religion Under the Mamluks", 1986, p.170. The patronage of the holy places in Islam is considered to be the ultimate role and symbol of leadership.

the number of mosques in Cairo at the time of the Mamlūks to be more than one thousand, of which, al-Maqrīzī said, one hundred and thirty had a *khuṭbah* (i.e., performed the Friday congregational prayer). 'Āshūr goes on to say that it is recorded that al-Nāṣir Moḥammed and his *emīrs* alone erected twenty-eight mosques.[1]

It should be understood that by the rise of the Baḥrī period, the mosque (*jāmi'*) and school (*madrasa*) came to perform the same functions, meaning that both were used for prayer and teaching - to the extent that a large number of *madrasas* had a *khuṭbah*. Some medieval writers such as Ibn al-Ḥājj argued that teaching in the mosque was to be preferred over the *madrasa* because part of the benefit of teaching is to "*show (or put forward) the Sunnas and to fade away the bid'as (alien novelties)*"[2], and that since the mosque is a place of assembly, this benefit would be greatest there. But apparently, Ibn al-Ḥājj's opinion had little effect on the Mamlūk elite, who persistently sponsored the construction of *madrasas*, and *khanqahs* - primarily educational institutions which carried out the role of the mosque.

On the other hand, the *khanqah* in the Baḥrī Mamlūk period remained as a place for *Sunnī* Ṣūfī teaching and training, along with the collaboration of the *'ulamā'* from the *madrasas* who instructed the Ṣūfī disciples in the outer Law, the *Sharī'a*. As the case of the *madrasa*, daily prayers were held in the *khanqah*, but it was in the later Circassian Mamlūk period that the Friday *khuṭbah* was introduced to it thus bringing out its full independent existence within the Mamlūk code of Muslim life.

Ibn Khaldūn in his "*Muqaddimah*" tells us of another type of Ṣūfīs in the Mamlūk period called *majādhīb* (literally "pulled" by Allah; sing. *majdhūb*) who belonged to the low life of the Mamlūk society, and inspired divergent and un-*Sunnī* religious views among the common people.[3] Some of them were affiliated to Ṣūfī *ṭarīqas* based in the *zāwiyah* - another Ṣūfī institution unsupervised by the Mamlūk state and unaccepted by the *'ulamā'* - representing the intoxicated and more passionate strand of Ṣūfism.[4]

---

[1] In extremely rare cases do we encounter a Mamlūk sulṭān who did not inaugurate at least one mosque. op cit. 'Āshūr, n.d., p.353.

[2] Ibn al-Ḥājj, (14th C.), *Madkhal al-Shar' al-Sharīf 'Ala al-Madhāhib*, al-Maṭba'ah al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo, 1929, vol.2, p.121.

[3] op cit., Ibn Khaldūn (14th C.), 1967, Pp.140-141.

[4] op cit. Lapidus, 1967, p. 106. On the differences between the Mamlūk *zāwiyah* and *khanqah* see op cit. Fernandes, 1980, Pp. 44-46.

We discussed in Chapter Two how while the Mamlūk tradition largely emphasized both religious and cultural life, many discoveries were made and new departures attempted by religious scholars and men of letters who sought to hold on to the achievements of their predecessors and to carry them further. In so far as they had anything of their own to contribute, it was by way of elaborating upon what their predecessors had done or continuing (and perhaps completing) what the predecessors had begun. Understanding this traditional balance between conservatism and searching for the better is vital in relation to the Mamlūk period and may be historically explained in terms of at least three factors. First, the Mongol threats and invasions of the mid-thirteenth century which caused many Muslims to look to the Mamlūk state as the last remaining bulwark of Islam against paganism.[1] The belief that the Mongols were determined to destroy Islam created in the Mamlūk territories an atmosphere of retrenchment and a pre-occupation with the task of preserving the Islamic heritage.[2] Second, as a result of the enmity between the Mamlūks and the Mongol state , Egypt and Syria became relatively cut off from other Islamic centres.[3] This cultural isolation produced an attitude of self-sufficiency. In the absence of challenges or cross-currents emanating from rival centres of civilization, the cultural and religious climate under the Mamlūks became static and somewhat ingrown. Consequently, old ideas and traditions seemed unassailable, and the primary task of learned and cultured men seemed to be that of transmitting faithfully what had been received.

To these factors must be added the third and perhaps most important factor: the coming to fruition under the Mamlūks of the Seljūk legacy.[4] It will be recalled that the Seljūks had inaugurated a revived *Sunnī* socio-political order based on conformity to *Sunnī* religious teachings, which had taken on the character of an orthodoxy. The primary instrument for the inculcation of this orthodoxy were the *madrasa* and the *khanqah* which

---

[1] This was especially true after the Mamlūks had proven their superiority over the Mongol armies at the battle of *'Ayn Jālūt* in 1261 A.D.

[2] op cit., Weiss & Green, 1985, p. 204.

[3] The eastern centres of Islamic civilization, where a distinctly Iranian central-Asian tradition was in the making. In the Islamic lands to the North (Turkish Anatolia) and West (the Maghrib) there existed no centres of civilization capable of influencing to a significant degree developments within Mamlūk territories. The Turkish communities of Anatolia were still in the process of building up a civilization of their own, and Maghribī civilization was more influenced by the lands ruled by the Mamlūks than vice versa and was, in any case, located behind an ever-increasing barrier of nomadism. As for cultural contacts with the Byzantine empire and with Western Europe, these were minimal, despite diplomatic and commercial connections.

[4] For more detail on the relationship between the Mamlūk state and religion under the Seljūk model, see Ira Lapidus, A History of Islamic Societies, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, p.353.

were sponsored also by the state to establish a *Sunnī* Ṣūfism, intended to produce not only *'ulamā'* and Ṣūfī *shaykhs*, but civil servants, scientists, teachers, and master craftsmen as well[1]. As we saw above, this revived *Sunnī* order was upheld by the military class and economically maintained through *iqtā'*.

This Seljūk legacy had been zealously embraced by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī who had carried it into Egypt, where it became an instrument for revivifying Egyptian society and for "cleansing" it from the effects of the *Shī'ite* Fatimid rule.[2] By the time the Mamlūks came to power, the Seljūk legacy had been operative in Egypt for three-quarters of a century. The Mamlūks further strengthened it by giving it a solid and stable military basis surpassing that of any of their predecessors. By the time Baybars took power, the prohibition of any jurisprudence other than the four Sunnī schools (*madhāhib*) extended to the fact that unless complying to these, a person would be denied such jobs as *qāḍī* (judge), teaching, preaching...etc.[3] As we saw in Chapter Two, al-Suyūṭī, the fifteenth century Mamlūk historian and compiler of traditions had emphasized this point by saying that, the *Sunna* was elevated and esteemed, while *bid'a* (alien novelties) decreased during the Mamlūk period. This does not mean that *Shī'ism* was extinct but denotes that it decreased considerably.[4] An indirect way that *Shī'ism* came to settle in the society was in Ṣūfism. It was firmly stated by Ibn Khaldūn in his "*Muqaddimah*"[5] (fourteenth-century A.D.) that the Ṣūfī orders had their origins from *Shī'ism* - which is of course untrue.

*Sunnī* orthodoxy, as promulgated under the Seljūks and later under the Mamlūks, was by its very nature conservative.[6] Not only did it regard the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as embodying the final revelation of Allah to man, more significantly, it regarded the Law which had been built up by the jurists and the system

---

[1] See Chapter Two, section 2.1.

[2] See op cit. 'Āshūr, 1959, p.184-185.

[3] op cit. Al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, n.d., vol.4, p.161.

[4] This can be accounted for by Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (15th C.), *Al-Ḍorar al-Kāminah fī A'yān al-Mi'at al-Thāminah*, Cairo, 1966, vol.2, p.46, that when someone wanted to get rid of an enemy all he had to do was to say he was *Shī'ī*. Also see op cit. 'Āshūr, 1962, p.153.

[5] Ibn Khaldūn referred to in Zakī Mūbārak, Al-Taṣawuf al-Islāmī fī al-Adab wal Akhlāq, Cairo, 1938, vol.2, p.339.

[6] Indeed, orthodoxy and conservatism, though not synonymous terms, represent closely related ideas.

of beliefs worked out by the *kalām* theologians as the best possible formulation of received religion and as sufficient for all time. More importantly, *Sunnī* orthodoxy came to regard *Sunnī* Ṣūfism in its more moderate form as an essential part of Islam - i.e., they acknowledged that there was an inner as well as an outer aspect to Islam. That is why we found that in the beginning of the Mamlūk period, two types of religious authorities were spiritually, socially, and politically influential: the *'ulamā'* mainly dealing with exoteric teachings of the *Sharī'a* according to the four schools of jurisprudence, and on the other hand, the Ṣūfī *shaykhs* dealing with esoteric aspects related to the Truth (*Ḥaqīqah*) through the Way (*ṭarīqah*) By the time the Mamlūk tradition had matured, a liaison between the outer and inner dimensions of Islam was achieved.

We saw in Chapter Two that the training which the *'ulamā'* received in the Baḥrī Mamlūk *madrasa* embraced all of the religious sciences as well as the rational sciences. The chief sciences were those related to the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, the two fundamental sources of law. These studies of course required a thorough knowledge of the Arabic language, its vocabulary and grammar, and for this reason the linguistic sciences became an important adjunct to the religious sciences in the curriculum of study of the *'ulamā'*. Finally the Islamic rational sciences were taught in direct connection with the traditional understanding of the Islamic faith. We also saw that in the *khanqah*, in addition to these subjects, *ta'wīl* (esoteric interpretation) as well as Ṣūfī sessions of *ḥuḍūr* or *dhikr* were performed.

The training of the *'ulamā'* and the Ṣūfīs was highly personal. The worth of one's training depended, not upon what *madrasa* or *khanqah* one studied at, but which teacher one studied under. Despite the institutionalization of learning, religious instruction continued to revolve around the personal connection between teacher and student. One did not upon completion of his studies receive a degree from an institution, but rather a certificate of approval called *ijāza* from a teacher or master. This certificate amounted to a permit to teach to others the material learned from the teacher. Learning was thus transmitted orally from generation to generation. Not the library but the teaching place was the primary centre of learning (notwithstanding the many splendid libraries which the Islamic world produced). In principle, education was open to all, regardless of background. The sole requirement was an aptitude of learning.

It was indeed the centrality of the Muslim tradition as manifested in the medieval period that had carried the Muslims to tremendous achievements by directing their energies

toward a consciousness of religious thought as the only means to understanding the nature of God's creation and, thus, of His will. No demand had been made of them to believe in dogmas difficult or even impossible of intellectual comprehension; and thus, the thirst after knowledge had not been forced to assert itself in a painful struggle against the traditional faith. On the contrary, it had stemmed exclusively from that faith. Moḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) declared that "*Striving after knowledge is a most sacred duty for every muslim man and woman*", and his followers were led to understand that only by acquiring knowledge could they fully worship the Lord. When they pondered the Prophet's saying, "*God created no disease without creating a cure for it as well*", they realized that by searching for unknown cures they would contribute to a fulfilment of God's will on earth: and so medical research became invested with the holiness of a religious duty. They read the Qur'ānic verse: "*We create every living thing out of the water*" - and in their endeavour to penetrate organisms and the laws of their development: and thus they established the science of biology. The Qur'ān pointed to the harmony of the stars and their movements as witnesses of their Creator's glory: and thereupon the sciences of astronomy and mathematics were taken up by medieval Muslims. And in the same way they took to all the other sciences in which the Muslim genius was to find its most lasting monument. In building that monument they did no more than follow the admonition of their Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) that "*if anybody proceeds on his way in search of knowledge, God will make easy for him the way in Paradise*"; that "*the scientist walks in the path of God*"; that "*the superiority of the learned over the mere pious is like the superiority of the moon when it is full over all the other stars*"; and that "*the ink of scholars is more precious than the blood of martyrs.*"

Another facet of Mamlūk religious life was Śūfism's high regard for men of outstanding spiritual achievement in the veneration of saints (*awliyā'*: more correctly translated as "friends of God"). This originated from the *Shī'ites* - particularly after the martyrdom of Ḥussayn Ibn 'Ali - who elevated the descendants of 'Ali to a position of special sanctity, and in particular the *Imāms*. They were believed to be infallible and their words were taken and equated to those of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). In the case of *Sunnīs*, reverence is reserved to all the prophets and messengers of God (peace be upon them), the *Ṣaḥāba* (Companions) and the founders of the four law schools: *Sunnī* Śūfīs add to these a galaxy of others and transform reverence into outright veneration (investing the person with a sacred character beyond simple reverence). The reason for this, is that Śūfī doctrine maintains that the earthly structure of the order has its counterpart in the invisible spiritual universe, which is believed to revolve around a central vertical axis, an unidentifiable

cosmic *shaykh* called the *quṭb* (pole), whom the Ṡūfī Leader *shaykh al-shuyūkh* typified.[1] The awe which Mamlūk Ṡūfīs felt for their Ṡūfī Leader, linked as he was to the cosmic *quṭb*, was a new ingredient in popular religion unknown in the early days of Islam; it was matched only by the attitudes of the more extreme *Shī'ites* toward their *Imāms* - the reason why Ibn Khaldūn attributes Ṡūfism to *Shī'ism*.[2]

## 3.7 THE IMPACT OF MAMLŪK RELIGIOUS BELIEF ON THE SACREDNESS OF THE MAMLŪK CITY

Von Grunebaum, in discussing the Muslim city structure, points out that one of the most striking features of the Mamlūk Islamic tradition is its predominant manifestation in cities as opposed to rural settlements. He says that it was in the city that the influence of the *'ulamā'* in the *madrasa*, the approved Ṡūfī *shaykhs* in the *khanqah*, and the state was greatest. The whole civilization was found in the city; it was only there that administration, law, religion and culture had their power.[3] Islam from the time of its adoption, had a very strong urban underpinning, and as it spread it fostered a development of urban life. Its spread was, in fact, largely from city to city. Islamic Law was developed within the context of the city, and many of the regulations pertaining to worship presuppose an urban setting. The mosque itself, although possible in the smallest village, was not its true self except in the city. It was indeed in many respects a pillar of urban life. This is why Von Grunebaum concludes that: *"To the medieval Muslim, a town is a settlement in which his religious duties and his social ideals could be completely fulfilled."*[4]

Even though the typical medieval Muslim city might appear to the modern viewer to be lacking in organization, it was not without an overall plan. For instance, during the two Mamlūk periods (thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth-centuries), the city of Cairo expanded

---

[1] op cit. Fernandes, 1980, p.121. The *shaykh al-shuyūkh* was considered to have been chosen by God and not by the Ṡūfīs. Prior to the death of a Ṡūfī Leader *shaykh al-shuyūkh* the appointment of a *khalīfah* to succeed him was established to ensure spiritual continuity from one generation to the other.

[2] As we will see in a following section, many Ṡūfīs of great renown were endowed by later generations of followers with *baraka*, or blessing coming from supernatural power - sometimes evidenced in the working of miracles. Their tombs became virtual centres of worship, to which people came to seek answers to prayers.

[3] Gustave E. von Grunebaum, "Structure of the Muslim Town", in ed. Dunning S. Wilson, Islam and Medieval Hellenism: Social and Cultural Perspectives, Variorum Reprints, London, 1976, p.143.

[4] ibid., p.142.

to almost five times the size of its original walled nucleus. Furthermore, and perhaps of more importance, the area it encompassed by the end of the fifteenth century remained almost constant until the latter half of the nineteenth century. This much-expanded city, however, was shaped in great part by the physical and social characteristics of its forerunner, the Fatimid city. The physical pattern of the city, (relation between mosque, market, residential...etc.) shows elements that cannot be understood today without an examination of their tenth and eleventh-century roots. Thus, the city of the Fatimids with its social and physical structure influenced the form that the Mamlūk city of Cairo was to take.[1]

The basic elements in its layout were: the main mosque, the commercial area or *sūq*, the official quarter (where public buildings were located), and the residential areas or districts called *ḥāras*, or *khuṭaṭ*. Mamlūk Cairo had thirty-seven *ḥāras*. Many of the quarters, though not every one need have been a solidarity, were closely knit and homogeneous communities. The tendency of different groups to seek the comfort and protection of their own members was very strong in a world where no man was truly safe except among his kin. The solidarity of some districts was based on religious identity, on different ethnic or racial groups, on sectarian religious affiliations[2], and on a common craft. Examples of solidarities based on a common craft can be seen in some medieval quarters which have survived till the present day, such as those of *al-Naḥḥāsīn* quarters (coppersmiths), *al-Khayyamiyya* quarters (tent quilters), and *al-Warrāqīn* quarters (paper manufacturers). Another basis for solidarity existed in the attachment of workers to particular mosques. The hundreds of small places of worship scattered throughout the quarters and markets made them vital centres of worldly and spiritual life. Many of the smaller mosques bore the name of the trade of their market. Some were even endowed by artisans.

This is not surprising since we saw that religion in the Mamlūk period, in both its outer and inner dimensions was the heart of the tradition. It was related to the *'ulamā'* as well as the Sūfīs, and these two were related to the crafts. This leads to the suggestion that as the life in the *madrasa* and the *khanqah* was closely knit inside these institutions, it was likewise in the city quarters (*ḥāras*) because the society that lived outside the Mamlūk educational buildings shared the same beliefs as the students and disciples. The difference between the

---

[1] op cit., Abu-Lughod, 1971, p.23.

[2] See Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Locations of Non-Muslim Quarters in Medieval Cairo", Annales Islamologiques, vol.XXII, Cairo, 1986. Also see, op. cit. Lapidus, 1967, Pp. 85-6.

two was not a difference of kind of knowledge as much as that of degree. Certainly such associations within Śūfī brotherhoods among artisans and craftsmen increased solidarity in the Mamlūk period. As a result of the more popular affinity to Śūfism, the Śūfī ideas connected to historical, eschatological, and religious views of the masses were absorbed by them.

Originally, the first mosque in any newly Islamicized city was built by the caliph to hold all the worshippers of his capital for the Friday prayers - from where the term *masjid jāmi'* came, that is, the congregational mosque. Examples of such are the Mosque of 'Amr in Fusṭāṭ, the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn in Qaṭā'i', the Mosque of al-Azhar in Fatimid Cairo, and the Mosque of al-Ḍhāhir Bāybars in Mamlūk Cairo.

The formal arrangement of the elements constituting the medieval Islamic city was preferably concentric (allowing of course, for some variation from city to city). The heart of the city was the main mosque whose central position was indicative of the primary importance of religion in urban life. In the immediate vicinity of the main mosque was the *sūq* (market), which had an internal organization of its own based on the segregation of the various trades and crafts. Proximity to the mosque was reserved for the luxury and more noble trades, such as those of perfume and incense, while the crude activities, for example tanning, were situated further from the mosque. Such organizational rules could not be applied to a city such as Cairo because of the complexity of the stages that were involved in its growth.[1] By the beginning of the Baḥrī Mamlūk period, prompted by the diminished availability of open space within the city, massive monumental buildings had started to give way to structures which were both smaller in scale and more complex in plan. The pressure of space inside the city meant that new buildings with their various components had to be squeezed into irregular spaces confined between existing structures and streets. Size and shape were reduced, functions were modified, internal disposition became increasingly ingenious and skilful.[2]

The unity of the city depended entirely on activities in the public section of the city. The Friday mosques and *madrasa* mosques gathered people from all quarters for worship; they also gathered them for public purposes, such as to listen to an address by the ruler. The

---

[1] op cit. Abu-Lughod, 1971, Pp. 56-67.

[2] op cit. Williams, April 1983, Pp.59-60.

*sūq* also brought people together in very active exchange, both commercial and social.[1] Thus, traditional Mamlūk cities were built around a system of political, religious, and communal organization which had been in the making for centuries.[2] This system was traditionally passed from generation to the next. Ira Lapidus says:

> ***The "institutional" history of Middle Eastern and Islamic urban societies is not to be understood in terms of formal political, legal, and social structures, but rather in terms of informal relations among individuals, classes and groups.***[3]

This "informal" relationship, the tradition, was what bound individuals, classes, and groups into a whole process of life in the Mamlūk city. The point that needs to be argued at this stage, is what the Mamlūk tradition, which moulded the mentality of the Egyptian society, contributed to their conception of a city such as Cairo. Before dealing with this, we should first explain what has been referred to more than once in this chapter as "less sacred" as opposed to "secular". In traditional Islam, the notion of "sacred" as opposed to "secular" was not known. It is true that there are certain elements within the tradition of Islam that seem to be more inclined to the secular, nevertheless, they are never devoid of a sacred dimension. As mentioned in Chapter One, the traditional process cannot function without returning the object in question to the Source or Centre upon which the whole tradition is based. This core is the religion of Islam as understood in medieval times - i.e., based on outer and inner dimensions. The returning of every object to the religion means to reflect its sacred character in both its external as well as internal form. Some objects will reflect more sacredness externally, while others will implicitly do so internally. Thus, the degree of sacredness connected to any traditional object should thus not be confused with that of kind.

The assessment of the degree of sacredness of a city like that of Mamlūk Cairo would be based on the conceptions of the community who lived in it. It would increase in sacredness if it was a stronghold of Islamic life, a focus of missionary (or military) expansion, a centre of learning, and according to the number of outstanding theologians and Ṣūfīs, living or dead

---

[1] op cit. Weiss & Green, 1985, p.157.

[2] op. cit. Lapidus, 1967, p. xiv.

[3] ibid., p. xiv.

which would tend to give it an aura of Islamization. When we go back to the Seljūk sultāns in Asia Minor, we find that they followed a system of Islamization in the parts they conquered. They would immediately proceed to the naming of judges (*qāḍīs*), *'ulamā'*, *imāms*, preachers, and *mu'adhdhins*; as a next step towards securing the Islamisation of the area, mosques, and *madrasas* would be founded. Once safely and solidly Muslim, the inhabitants of a city might wish to find a truly Islamic genealogy, so to speak, for their city to convince themselves that its origins had been connected with some figure of Muslim mythology - preferably one of the prophets whom Moḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) had acknowledged as a predecessor. The Mamlūks did the same as the Seljūks with the difference that they added the appointment of Ṣūfī *shaykhs* and founded *khanqahs* as well.

With reference to the Islamic genealogy of Cairo (*Miṣr*), it was found to have been the birth place of the Prophet Moses during the time of the Pharaohs. He was later followed by the Prophet Yūsuf (Joseph) who also lived in Egypt. Jesus and Mary (peace be upon them) escaped the persecution in Jerusalem by fleeing to Egypt and staying in Old Cairo. From the point of view of tombs of Ṣūfī saints[1] and members of the house (*ahl al-bayt*) of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), Cairo was found to be very fortunate. By the time of the Fatimids, Cairo had become a city noted for its tombs and mausoleums belonging to the daughters of the Prophet, such as Al-Sayyida Nafīsah, Al-Sayyida Zaynab, and his nephew Al-Ḥusayn. That is not counting the tombs of the *awliyā'* friends of God be they *'ulamā'* such as that of the famous jurist Al-Shāfi'ī or Ṣūfī saints which count by the hundreds. Edward William Lane, who lived in early nineteenth-century Cairo wrote in 1871:

> ***If the deceased is one of the 'ulamā', his corpse is usually taken to the great mosque of al-Azhar. The people of the southern parts of the metropolis generally carry their dead to the mosque of the Seyyidah Zaynab, or to that of any other celebrated saint. The reason for choosing such mosques in preference to others, is the belief that the prayers offered up at the tombs of very holy persons are especially successful.***[2]

---

[1] The blessing of an important saint's or prophet's tomb would make for a certain sacralization of the town that was privileged to refuge the remains of the religious hero.

[2] Edward William Lane, An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, John Murray, London, 1836, fifth ed., vol.2, pp.262-63.

Reflections of this order suggest that sanctity of a locality in traditional times was believed to stem from the *baraka*, or blessing of a prophetic tomb or the sanctuary of a Ṡūfī saint (*walī*), present in the city. The sacredness of a traditional city was directly correlated to the number of descendants of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) or of other personage of a high religious rank, such as the Companions (*Ṡaḥabah*) who were buried there. Otherwise, sanctity could grow from the spiritual effect of accumulated religious learning. Such sanctity may be overlaid, as we will see in Chapter Seven, by sanctity due to the part in which the locality is called upon to play in salvation; and on an even higher level of religious meaning, by sanctity due to the role assigned to the locality in cosmology.[1]

According to the Ṡūfīs, the *baraka*, or spiritual blessing related to a tomb of a *walī* remains active and is in a way linked with the relation to the remains of a man who was in life a recipient of the Divine Presence.[2] Upon their death their supernatural force would cling to their grave[3] and the realisation of this *baraka* by their disciples and the local population gave rise to a cult, generally well organised under the direction of their natural or spiritual descendants. Ībn Sīnā (d.1037 A.D.) argued the oneness of the chain of beings for the transmissibility of spiritual force, as well as the effect of the souls of the saints visited on the devout. The concept that the souls of the purified saints may have a direct effect on bodies not their own is set forth by Ibn Sīnā with a view to explaining their miracles.[4]

Moreover, as we discussed in Chapter Two, Ṡūfīs believe that a *walī* is not thought of as being dead, but as mysteriously alive. They derive this from the following passage from the Qur'ān: "*And say not of those who were slain in the way of God: 'They are dead.' Nay, they are living, though ye perceive (it) not.*"[5] This verse exoterically refers in its immediate sense to those who fall in the *jihād* (holy war), and many of the tombs venerated are in fact *mashāhid*, burial places of those who fought against the enemies of Islam. But since the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) described the struggle against the passions of the

---

[1] See Ṫāha Ḥusain, "The Sacred Character of Islamic Cities", in op cit. ed. Dunning S. Wilson, 1976, p.27.

[2] Titus Burckhardt, Art of Islam: Language and Meaning, World of Islam Festival Publishing Co., Kent, 1976 (a), p.93.

[3] Avicenna, *Fī Bayān al-Mu'jizāt wal-Karāmāt*, quoted by Taha Husain, op cit. ed. Dunning S. Wilson, 1976, p.27.

[4] ibid., Pp.27-28.

[5] Qur'ān: 2/154.

soul as "the greatest holy war" (*al-jihād al-akbar*), the Ṡūfīs applied *ta'wīl* to that verse applies a priori to all those who have spent their lives in direct experience of knowing God.

Burckhardt discusses the paradox of the numerous mausoleums which are found in Islamic lands, saying that the glorification of the dead is foreign to the spirit of Islam. "*The most beautiful tomb*", said the Prophet, "*is one that vanishes from the face of the earth*", and the Qur'ān says, "*All that is on the earth will perish: But will abide (forever) the Face of thy Lord, Full of Majesty, Bounty and Honour.*"[1] Burckhardt accounts for this paradox by two factors that are in a way inescapable, the first of which is the ambition of sulṫāns for personal glory. This ambition is perhaps not altogether Islamic but it is, after all, fairly natural and it is made legitimate by the hope that the soul of the deceased shall benefit from the prayers offered up for it by the visitors to the tomb. The second factor is a corollary of the first, and consists in the wish of the community of believers to honour the saints, whom they see as the true kings of the earth as much as, or more than the Mamlūk military elite represented by sulṫāns and *emīrs*.[2]

In the Mamlūk period, the general veneration of saints, among both people and sovereigns, reached its definitive form with the organization of Ṡūfism into orders or brotherhoods, each with its chain of founding or renovating masters. Popular piety came to be centred increasingly on the local saint and his sanctuary; not infrequently the sanctity of the place was seen as due to the remains of one of the countless prophetic forerunners of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) having found their last resting-place in that particular spot. That is why we notice that there are hardly any Mamlūk religious buildings that do not have a mausoleum as part of the building complex. Pilgrimages and festivals *mawālid* at the sanctuaries also became the vogue in the Mamlūk period[3]. The well known *ḥadīth* which permits pilgrimages apart from *Ḥajj* (and *'umrah*) to Makkah only to the

---

[1] Qur'ān: 55/26-7.

[2] It should be noted that in Mamlūk times, whereas the mausoleums of *emīrs* and sulṫāns were usually built by the persons who expected to repose in them, those of saints were the gift either of their disciples or of sovereigns. op cit. Burckhardt, 1976 (a), p.93. Also see John Alden Williams, "Urbanization and Monument Construction in Mamluk Cairo", in Muqarnas: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture, ed. Oleg Grabar, vol.2, Yale university Press, New Haven, 1984, Pp.34-35.

[3] The common people reached the extent of giving so much importance to the visiting of graves of *shaykhs* that they said, "*The pilgrims who arrived to Sīdī Aḥmed al-Badawī from the Fertile Crescent, Aleppo and Makkah this year are greater than the pilgrims who have gone to the two holy places (meaning Makkah and Madina)*". See Ibn Iyās (15th C.), *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr fī Waqā'i' al-Duhūr*, reprint of the Franz Steiner edition, by Maktabat 'Īssā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, Cairo, 1963, vol.2, p.221.

mosques of Madina and Jerusalem reflects the earlier battle, long since abandoned, which the theologians fought against the cult of those minor sanctuaries. For them the doctrinal problems connected with sainthood had been more or less settled; they confined themselves to warning against objectionable practices that were apt to become connected with the cult.

The Mamlūk Ṡūfī *faqīh*, Ibn al-Ḥājj (d.1336 A.D.) discusses the visiting of the *awliyā'* in his "*al-Madkhal*":

> ***It is needful for him (for the believer) not to be remiss in visiting the saints and the pious elect (al-awliyā' wal-ṣāliḥīn), by whose sight Allah revives the dead hearts even as he revives the earth through the heavy rain. Through (the saints) hardened hearts come to be at ease and difficult matters become simple. For (the saints) are standing at the door of the Generous Benefactor (Al-Karīm Al-Mannān). So no one who seeks them out will be rejected and no one who keeps their company (majālisuhum), or seeks their acquaintance (mu'ārafatāhum), or who loves them, will be disappointed... They are the gateway to God that stands open to His servants. And he that is of this kind would go forth to see them and obtain their blessing. For by seeing some of them he will acquire such understanding, watchfulness and other (spiritual gifts) as no one will be able to describe...***[1]

These benefits are successful provided that the suppliant follows the *Sunna* in every regard. Ibn al-Ḥājj goes on to warn his contemporary readers of false saints, particularly the *majādhīb* - the unaccepted intoxicated Ṡūfī strand as practised in the Mamlūk period in the *zāwiya*:

> ***And let him beware lest he visit an innovator or one whose sole concern with religion is (to use it for) imposture (tamwīh)... On occasion you will find one who lays claim to religious knowledge ('ilm), and sit before one who lays claim poverty (faqr) and closeness to God; yet (this latter person) allows the time for prayer to pass without praying; and (his adherents) will excuse him by (asserting) that he is (so deeply) involved in his "self" (that he is unable to attend to the formal obligations of the faith). I have seen***

[1] op cit. Ibn al-Ḥājj (14th C.), 1929, vol. 3, p.139.

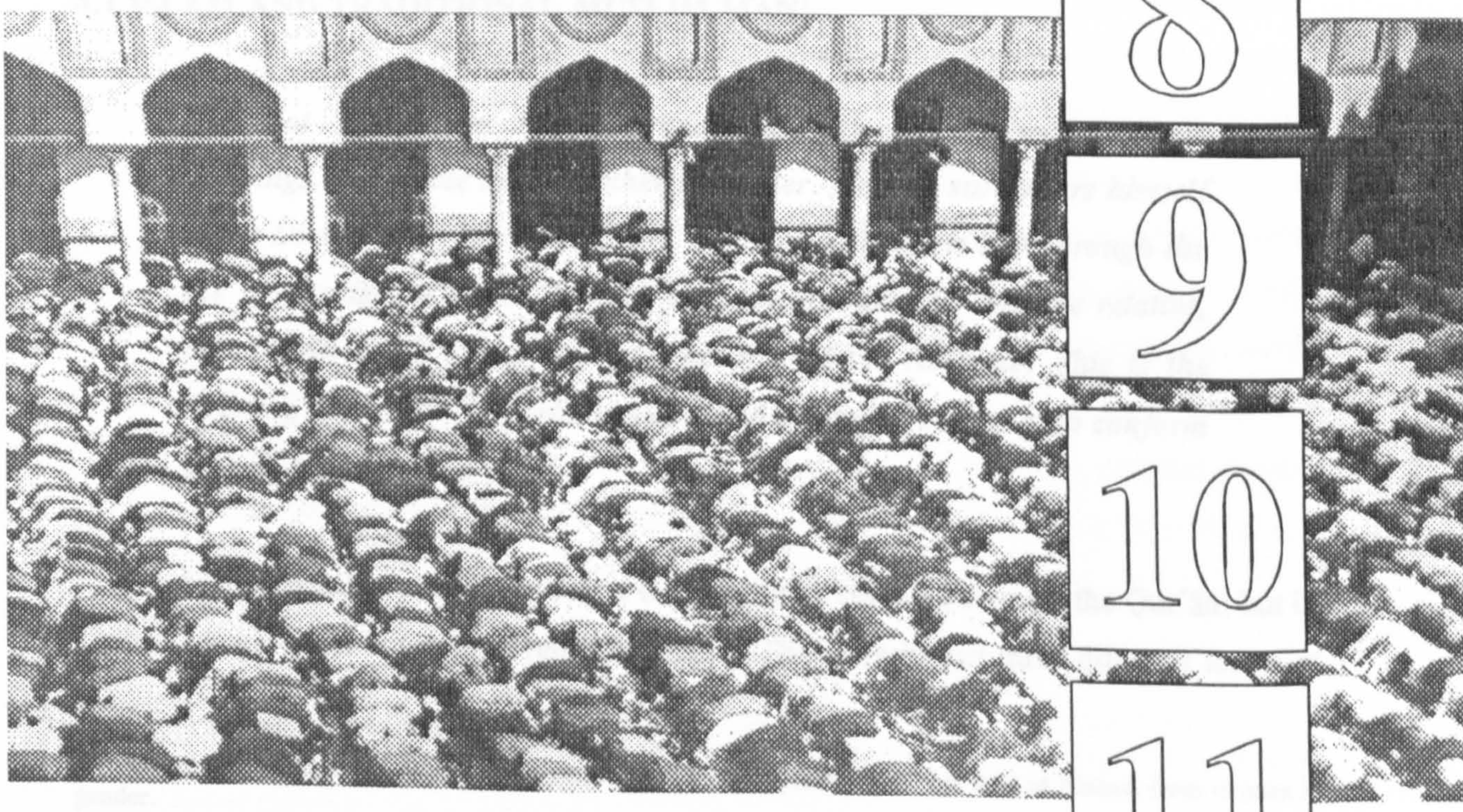
*one of the pious poor travel for three or four days to visit a personage of this kind. Then when he met up with him (that personage) was in rags, even showing his private parts. This is a shameful matter with regard to religion bespeaking little modesty on terms of the perpetuation of sins and of counteracting the Sunna and neglecting the obligatory duties (farā'iḍ); and also since the uncovering of private parts is forbidden as it is to look upon them; so is also by general consent the displacement of prayer from its appointed time.*[1]

## SUMMARY

From this brief examination of the history of the Baḥrī Mamlūk period, it is possible to create an image of the contextual setting within which the Mamlūk religious buildings that are to be studied were built. It is obvious that the traditional influence dominated Mamlūk life in the sense that religious influences pervaded Mamlūk politics, the economy, the state, and the city as a whole. The building industry thrived especially in the domain of religious architecture - due to the eagerness of the Mamlūk military elite to prove their piety as well a their eagerness to benefit from the *baraka* of building monuments where the Name of Allah would be raised under the restored *Sunnī* faith. The Mamlūk elite possessed the legislative power as well as the financial means to build and maintain their monuments. Apart from the dual function of prayer and education introduced in the *madrasa* and *khanqah* that were discussed in Chapter Two, this chapter reveals a third layer of function connected to Mamlūk religious buildings: the mausoleum. The mausoleum was perceived as another source of *baraka* which could be obtained by the patron buried in it. The *baraka* in this case had another dimension related to the sanctity of the city, which increased by the increase in the number of mausoleums in it. This last point indicates the extent of Ṣūfī influence in the domain of Mamlūk religious architecture.

[1] ibid., p.140.

Int. 1 2 3 **4** 5 6 7 8 9 10 11



# CHAPTER FOUR

# ISLAM, PRAYER, AND THE MOSQUE

In this chapter, we will deal with three fundamental and interrelated points: Islam, prayer, and the mosque. Before discussing these matters in relation to this thesis, we will attempt to establish an understanding of some primary Islamic views which will help the non-Muslim reader to understand the God-man relationship in Islam. This will be followed by a description of prayer in Islam and its interpretation from both the *Sharī'a* as well as the Ṣūfī points of view which will naturally lead to the mosque which is both the building of prayer and the Islamic building *par excellence*. The mosque will be examined from several angles: the first deals with the mosque from the viewpoint of the *Sunna*, the second is concerned with its function, and the third looks at the development of its form according to the change in function and understanding of Islamic belief in traditional Mamlūk times. This last point is given specific emphasis as it explains the notion of change within the tradition, and illustrates how beliefs are in principle reflected in architecture.

## 4.1 ISLAM AND TRADITIONAL MUSLIM MAN[1]

> ***The root 'salama' in Arabic, from which Islam is derived, has two meanings, one peace and the other surrender. He who surrenders himself to the Divine Will gains peace. The very idea of Islam is that through the use of intelligence which discerns between the Absolute and the relative, one should come to surrender to the Will of the Absolute. This is the meaning of Muslim: one who has accepted through free choice to conform his will to the Divine Will.[2]***

In a particular sense, Islam refers to the religion revealed through the Qur'ān; but in a more general sense it refers to religion as such. There are in fact three different levels of

---

[1] Throughout this thesis, by the term "man" we will mean mankind and not man as distinct from woman in gender.

[2] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London, 1975, p.27.

meaning in the word "Muslim". Firstly, anyone who through his intelligence and by his free will accepts a Divine revelation is a "Muslim" in its most universal sense. Secondly, Muslim refers to all creatures of the universe who accept Divine Law in the sense that they conform to the unbreakable laws - which are called "laws of nature" in the modern world. The Qur'ān frequently refers to the regularity of natural phenomena such as night and day, the sun and the moon, ...etc., as signs (*'āyāt*) of His existence. The fact that the sun rises regularly every morning and one observes no break in the regularity of the natural order proves in Muslim eyes the Presence of the Divine Will to which all creatures are subservient and which, in fact, they have no choice but to follow. It is only man who, because of the free choice given to him as a trust to bear, can refuse to submit to the Will of Allah. God says in the Qur'ān: "*We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it being afraid thereof: but man undertook it; he was indeed unjust and foolish.*"[1] It is only man who can stop being a Muslim in this second meaning of this term, whereas all other beings are Muslim because they cannot be otherwise. Finally, there is the highest meaning of Muslim which applies to a person who is living every moment of his life in conformity with the Divine Will as nature does.

Islam is a Universal Reality that comprehends man and the universe based on what is in the nature of things, concentrating particularly on the Divine nature itself. For this reason Islam is based from beginning to end on the idea of Unity (*Tawḥīd*), for God is One.[2] Unity represents the constancy of Islam. It is, in fact emphasized so much that for a non-Muslim it seems to be a redundant expression, a kind of excessive reiteration of something which is obvious. But to the Muslim the idea of Unity does not just mean the assertion that there is only one God in the Heavens instead of two or three. Unity is - in addition to being a metaphysical assertion about the nature of the Absolute - a method of integration[3], a means of becoming whole and realizing the profound Oneness of all existence. Islam seeks to realize this integration first of all in the human being in his inner and outward life. This means that man should not be divided either in his thoughts or actions. Every action, even the manner of walking and eating should, manifest a spiritual norm which exists in his mind and heart.

---

[1] Qur'ān: 33/72.

[2] "*God is the Creator of all things: He is the One, The Supreme and Irresistible.*" Qur'ān: 13/16. "*Truly am I a Warner: no god is there but the One God...*". Qur'ān: 37/65. "*Say :He is God the One and Only; God the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him.*" Qur'ān: 112/1-4.

[3] See Chapter One for the integrative attributes of traditions and traditional societies as opposed to modernity and modern society.

But if we read what God says in the Qur'ān concerning the purpose of His creation of man, we find: "*I have only created jinn and men so that they worship Me (illa liya'budūn).*"[1] We should not be immediately misled by our modern understanding of "worship" because in the teachings of Islam the word "*'ibādah*" encompasses a much larger scope. The role of the Muslim in Islam is to recognize Allah in every step and action of his life. This recognition is manifested in the way Muslims live, in such a manner that "God is seen everywhere" and "in everything".

On this basis we can say that Islamic worship can mainly be divided into two categories: the first is direct worship, meaning the worship of God through the five pillars of Islam - prayer being the most important of the five after *Tawḥīd* (Unity of God) - carried out in a set canonical ritual. As we shall see, prayer is highly recommended to be performed in congregation in a mosque[2] although the whole earth that we know is a potential place for the performance of that daily activity[3]. The second, is indirect worship and encompasses the rest of daily conduct. Having established this, we can understand the world views adopted by a traditional Muslim.

The traditional Muslim looked at the world from a material and spiritual perspective - as opposed to just a material one as modern man does today - meaning that he believed in his spiritual existence and dealt with it accordingly. He saw himself as a tripartite being composed of a mortal body (*jism*), soul (*nafs*), and immortal spirit (*rūḥ*). Without the union of these three parts he believed he would be demeaned in his existence and would be unbalanced. To him, earth alone was meaningless, as he saw himself on the first earth that lay between the seven Heavens and the seven earths in the cosmos all connected together vertically by an axis that ran through these seven Heavens and earths[4]. Thus, we can say that

---

[1] Qur'ān: 51/56.

[2] Al-Bukhārī and Muslim affirm the authenticity of the following *ḥadīth*: "*The merit of congregational prayer surpasses that of the individual prayer by twenty seven degrees.*"

[3] According to a *ḥadīth*, the whole earth is purified for the Muslims and is thus a potential place for prayer and a mosque - except for tombs and places of disposal of waste such as toilets ... etc.

[4] Ibn Rahuya in *Musnad*, Abu al-Shaykh and al-Bazzār, on the basis of a sound chain of transmission that goes back to Abū Darr, report that God's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) presented the following teaching: "*The interval between Heaven and earth is the distance of 500 years. The diameter of every Heaven is also as much 500 years. And the interval between this Heaven and the one after it is also as big as 500 years. Thus up to the seventh Heaven; and with the earths it is similar. And the distance between the seventh Heaven and the Throne corresponds to all that.*" We will see in Chapter Seven, the implications of such cosmological facts on religious Mamlūk architecture.

the traditional conception of man was one of Unity based on attributes of both the physical and the metaphysical - *ḍhāhir* and *bāṭin* to use Ṡūfī terms[1].

If man is indeed an integral unity of body and soul - as Islam insists he is - no aspect of his life could be too trivial to come within the purview of religion. The Qur'ān never lets Muslims forget that the life of this world is only one stage of the way to a higher existence, and that the ultimate goal is of a spiritual nature. Material prosperity, Islam says, is desirable but not an end in itself: and therefore man's appetites, though justified in themselves, must be controlled by moral consciousness. This consciousness ought to relate not merely to man's relation with God but also to his relations with his fellow men and women; not only to the spiritual perfection of the individual but also to the creation of social conditions that are conducive to the spiritual development of all, so that all might live in fullness.

On the social plane, as we saw in Chapter Three, in traditional Mamlūk times Unity expressed itself in the integration of the Muslim community (*umma*) - i.e., in one Muslim people no matter how scattered and far removed its members may be[2]. Unity also manifested itself in the realm of the arts and sciences, in which Islam cannot remain neutral vis-a-vis any form of knowledge. Islam has always sought to unify all domains of knowledge and that is why, as we saw in Chapter Two, the inter-relations between the rational sciences, as well as the *Sharī'a*-based and Ṡūfī-based religious sciences in Mamlūk times. The function of Islamic Unity (*Tawḥīd*) was to *integrate*. Mamlūk history has demonstrated this aspect of the tradition of Islam in both domains of the sciences - rational and religious - as well as in the crafts[3], in which forms were elucidated and elaborated to display Unity and in which no distinction has ever been made between the sacred and the profane[4]. The very fact that the word secular does not exist in Arabic is sufficient proof that secularism has not existed in Islam.[5] Thus, we find that Islam envisages man in his totality with all his strengths and weaknesses, his material physical needs as well as his spiritual needs.

---

[1] See argument in Chapter Two.

[2] The concept of the Islamic nation was an unbreakable bond between heaven and earth; from which the Muslim derived in abundance all that he needed to light his path through life. That is the political ideal that is based on the central idea of Unity.

[3] See Chapter Two for the relationship between Ṡūfism, the sciences, and the crafts including architecture.

[4] See argument in Chapter Three.

[5] op cit. Nasr, 1975, p.30.

## 4.2 GOD-MAN RELATIONSHIP IN THE *SHARĪ'A*

A fundamental point in Islam is to understand how it envisages the relation between man and God. It is of course God who is the Master (*Rabb*) and man the servant or slave (*'abd*), and it is for man to come to realize this Truth, to know that only Allah is God, only He is the Absolute, and that man is a relative being who stands before Him given the free choice of either accepting or rejecting the Truth. This relation between man and God is central in Islam.

In the confrontation of the issue of man and God, Islam considers man as he is in his primordial nature (*fitrah*) and God as He is in his Absolute Reality (*Ḥaqīqah Muṭlaqah*).[1] Islam emphasizes over and over again not how God has manifested Himself, but what His nature is - nature in the common meaning of the word not in the philosophical sense, for philosophically speaking Allah has no nature. As for man, Islam legislates for man according to his real nature as he is with all the possibilities inherent in the human state as such. Seen in his ordinary condition man is a weak and negligent being. He is usually obedient to his surroundings and a prisoner of his *nafs* (soul) which taunts him towards evil. It is only by overpowering the *nafs* that he can become better and achieve the ennoblement of his spirit (*rūḥ*). Man does not live to the full potentialities of his human condition. Were it to be otherwise he would need no religion and revelation to guide him. Bearing all this in mind, Islam without overlooking the limited and weak aspect of human nature, does not consider man in his aspect as a perverted will but essentially as a vicegerent of God on earth *khalīfah*[2]. He is a vicegerent because he is the only creation of God which accepted the Trust.

The Islamic revelation conceives of man first as a theomorphic being and then addresses itself to that something in man which is in the form of the Divine.[3] That something is first of all an intelligence that can discern between the true and the false and naturally,

---

[1] It might of course be said that not only Islam but every religion is based on God and man's relation to Him. But there are certain religions which emphasize a particular incarnation of the Divinity or various manifestations of the Absolute. op cit. Nasr, 1975, p.17.

[2] This belief is not in any way anthropomorphic, for the Divine Essence remains absolutely transcendent and no religion has emphasized the transcendent aspect of God more than Islam. See C.A.O. Van Nieuwenhuijze, The Lifestyles of Islam: Recourse to Classicism Need of Realism, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1985, Pp.55-56.

[3] Of course the Qur'ān also addresses man in his human form as well wherein he is capable of sinning.

leads to Unity (*Tawhīd*). Secondly, it is a will to choose freely between the true and the false; and thirdly, it is the power of speech, of the word to be able to express the relationship between God and man.[1]

Intelligence, will and speech are all essentially Divine Qualities. It is God who has as one of His Qualities "Knowledge" which is connected to the Divine Intellect. One of the Divine Names of God is "*Al-'Alīm*" (He who Knows everything); God also possesses Absolute Will. God mentions in the Qur'ān that if He orders something to "Be", then "it is". Also the "Word" belongs to God; it comes from Him, belongs to Him and returns to Him. Hence, the qualities of intelligence, will and speech are Divine Qualities which God has given in trust to man, and through them leads man back to Himself. Islam takes these three elements, and makes them the basis of the religion. The real nature of intelligence is ultimately to come to realize that there is no god but Allah: that is, to come to know that in the end there is only One Absolute Reality. Intelligence (*al-'aql*) in Arabic which more oftenly means reason but sometimes includes intellect, is also what binds us to God - in fact one of the meanings of the root "*'aql*" is to tie or bind. The Qur'ān addresses those who have gone astray from religion as those "who cannot understand" (*lā ya'qilūn*), or those who cannot use their intelligence correctly. It is very significant that the loss of the Islamic Faith is not equated in Qur'ānic language with the corruption of the will but with the improper functioning of intelligence[2].

Islam emphasizes that man should have complete confidence in God, reliance on His Will and on the realization that only God has Absolute Will. But man by virtue of his theomorphic nature shares in this freedom of the will; and as Muslims share in it therefore, they must bear fully the responsibility of having to choose. Were this responsibility not to be obligatory upon us there would be no real meaning to religious faith.

As for speech, it is the most direct manifestation of what we are, of our innermost being. Islam, therefore makes it central in its rites which revolve most of all around prayer. The central rite of Islam which has been called the pillar of the religion (*rukn al-dīn*) is the daily prayers. Calling upon God in prayer is to be able to remember Him by invoking His

---

[1] ibid. p.18.

[2] God says: "*O ye who believe! Approach not prayers with a mind befogged, until ye can understand all that ye say...*" (Qur'ān: 4/43).

Name at all times and more directly, to use the power of speech as the means of prayer - not forgetting that the Qur'ān which is recited during prayer is the "Word" of God.

It might now be asked why then does man have need of revelation if he is a theomorphic being endowed with an intelligence which can lead him to a knowledge of God and affirmation of Unity (*Tawḥīd*).[1] Although Islam is based on the primordial nature of man and his intelligence rather than will which has become warped after the Fall, it nevertheless believes that revelation is absolutely necessary. Without the aid of God, man cannot discover by himself the way of salvation, the "Straight Path"[2]. Man - as mentioned previously - is by nature imperfect and forgetful as a result of the Fall. Therefore he needs to be reminded. Without religion and without the revelation, man would have been only accidentally human. It is only through participation in a tradition, that is, a divinely revealed way of living, thinking and being, that man really becomes man and is able to find meaning in life. It is only tradition in this sense that gives meaning to human existence. Many thinkers of the age of rationalism who theorized against religion did not realize the profound need of man for religion or for spiritual meaning in an ultimate sense, and could not foresee that once deprived of a Divinely revealed religion, psycho-spiritual ailments would appear[3]. This is precisely the reason why contemporary Muslims feel that they are suffering from a spiritual loss in the built environment as a whole; but when this spiritual deprivation reached the mosque - which even by modern standards should convey a feeling of the sacred - then the repercussion was drastic and the implications dangerous.

The privilege of participating in the human state, in a state which contains the opportunity and possibility of transcending the world of nature, and of possessing an immortal soul beyond the physical world, carries with it also a grave responsibility. This responsibility is the Trust of having the freedom to accept or reject the Faith. Man by taking the Trust was given the choice to change his status in the universe by either accepting or rejecting the Will of God - i.e., either achieving a stage of spiritual transcendence, or remaining in a low physical and animal-like status. Muslims believe that Islam as a Divine revelation was placed

---

[1] For a more detailed argument of *Tawḥīd* and free will as related to God-man relationship see op cit. Neiuwenhuijze, 1985, Pp. 67-68.

[2] The Straight Path (*al-Ṣirāt al-Mustaqīm*) appears in the Qur'ān in several verses indicating the way to Heaven.

[3] This is very important as to the therapeutic role of religion and religious art and architecture to the society.

as a seed in the heart of man who is regarded in his *fiṭrah* (primordial nature) as the receptacle of this Divine message. Man can be analogically likened to a container, he cannot break it; he can only purify it and empty it of any impurities that fill it so that it can become ennobled to be worthy of receiving Islam. The best way to achieve this purity is through the practice of the basic pillar of Islam: prayer.

## 4.3 PRAYER (*ṢALĀH*) IN ISLAM

> ***The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) says: "Prayer is the pillar of religion; to neglect it is to prepare the downfall of religion."***[1]

In Islam, prayer is the mainstay of conviction, the chief of good works and the best act of obedience. If we consider the five pillars of Islam - profession of Faith, prayer, fasting, alms-giving and pilgrimage - we find that the profession of Faith is necessary to become a Muslim (i.e., without it one cannot be considered Muslim). Fasting the month of Ramaḍān is compulsory yet can be substituted by other means for those who have lawful excuses (i.e., sick, travelling, pregnant, ...etc.). Alms-giving is only compulsory to those who are financially capable; likewise, pilgrimage is to be performed once in a lifetime for those who are physically and financially capable. It is only prayer that is the universal, non-exemptible pillar of the Islamic religion which sets Islam distinctively from all other religions.[2]

Analogically speaking, prayer can be seen as a symbolic act of all of the five pillars of Islam; for in it the profession of Faith (*Shahādah*) is recited, the Muslim fasts from all earthly acts (speech, food, drink,...etc.), he leaves whatever work he is doing to perform the prayer (an act of alms-giving), and faces the Ka'ba in Makkah (a symbol of pilgrimage). Thus, prayer in Islam is performed five times a day as a constant reminder of the five pillars of the religion. Accordingly, prayer is emphasized in Islam.

> ***Of all a man's actions, the first to be examined in the Day of Resurrection will be the prayer. If it is found to be complete it will be accepted of him***

---

[1] Authenticated in al-Bayhaqī.

[2] The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) says: "*Between us (Muslims) and them (all other religions) is prayer.*"

***along with the rest of his work, but if it is found wanting it will be rejected along with the rest of his deeds.***[1]

Prayers have to be performed at their set times (*al-ṣalāh fī mīqātihā*). God says in the Qur'ān: "*Prayers have been prescribed for the believers at set times*".[2] The merit of the prescribed prayers at their set times is elaborated in a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) who was talking to his Companions and said: "*The five set prayers may be compared to a stream of fresh water, flowing in front of your house, into which you plunge five times each day. Do you think that would leave any dirt on your body?*" When they replied: "*None at all!*" The Prophet said: "*Indeed, the five prayers remove sins, just as water removes dirt*".[3] The benefit and logic behind the frequency of prayer in Islam and their distribution along the times of the day is to remind the Muslim of God Almighty at all times. This constant remembrance promotes good deeds and prevents the occurrence of evil.[4] Al-Bazzār quotes a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) saying: "*Anyone who deliberately misses a prayer has forsaken his Faith.*"[5] That is to say, he has virtually been stripped of his Faith, since its knot has been untied and its pillar has fallen.

On the other hand, the merit of congregational prayer (*ṣalāt al-jamā'ah*) is strongly emphasized in Islam. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "*The merit of congregational prayer surpasses that of individual prayer by twenty-seven times.*"[6] The fact of having the intention of prayer in a mosque is particularly encouraged as seen in the following *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah who said:

***"If someone makes his ablution and does it well, then set out with the intention of performing the prayer, he is already in the state of prayer while***

---

[1] Authenticated in al-Ḥākim.

[2] Qur'ān: 4/103. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "*There are five prayers which God has prescribed for His servants. For those who perform them properly without disrespectful omissions, there is a guarantee that God will admit them to paradise....*" Authenticated in Abū Dāwūd, Al- Nisā'ī and Ibn Mājah.

[3] Authenticated in Muslim. Other sayings of the Prophet are: "*The five set prayers are an expiation, for there is something amongst them by which major sins are repelled*," also authenticated in Muslim.

[4] As mentioned earlier, the God-man relation is based on the fact that man is weak, negligent and persuadable to sin.

[5] Authenticated in al-Bazzār.

[6] Authenticated in Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

*on his way to it. With each two steps he takes, a good deed is added to his record and a bad deed is erased from it. So do not linger when you hear the signal that the prayer is beginning, for the one who is furthest from home will get the greatest reward." They asked: "Why is that ?" And he said: "Because of all the steps he had to take."*[1]

There is also a quantitative different virtue for the different prayers of the day. According to 'Othmān, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "*To perform the late evening prayer ('Ishā'), in congregation is equivalent to spending half the night in vigil, while to perform the dawn prayer (Fajr), in congregation is like keeping vigil throughout the night.*"[2]

Besides establishing the merit of congregational prayer, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) stressed that congregational prayer should be performed in a mosque: "*He who lives near the mosque may not pray outside of the mosque.*"[3] By this *ḥadīth*, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) clearly enforced Muslims to pray in the mosque in preference to any other place.

When we come to examine the form of prayer, we find that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) says: "*Adore Allah as though thou didst see Him, and if thou dost not see Him, He nonetheless seeth thee.*"[4] Although this *ḥadīth* tells us how we should conduct our prayers internally, it does not tell us how to perform it. It is in other explicit Prophetic *ḥadīths* that the external form of prayer is explained. A *ḥadīth* that is authenticated in al-Ṭabarānī states that prayer in Islam has been attributed to the form of prayer performed by the Angels to God in the Heavens:

*After the affirmation of His Unity, no duty has been imposed on God's creatures that is dearer to Him than ritual prayer. Had anything been dearer to Him, it would have become a form of worship for His angels. As*

---

[1] Authenticated in al-Bukhārī.

[2] Authenticated in Muslim.

[3] Authenticated in al-Dāraquṭnī.

[4] *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) translated in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Living Sufism, Unwin Paperbacks, London, 1980, p.vi.

*it is (each of them performs part of the prayer), some bowing, some prostrating themselves, some standing upright, and some sitting.*[1]

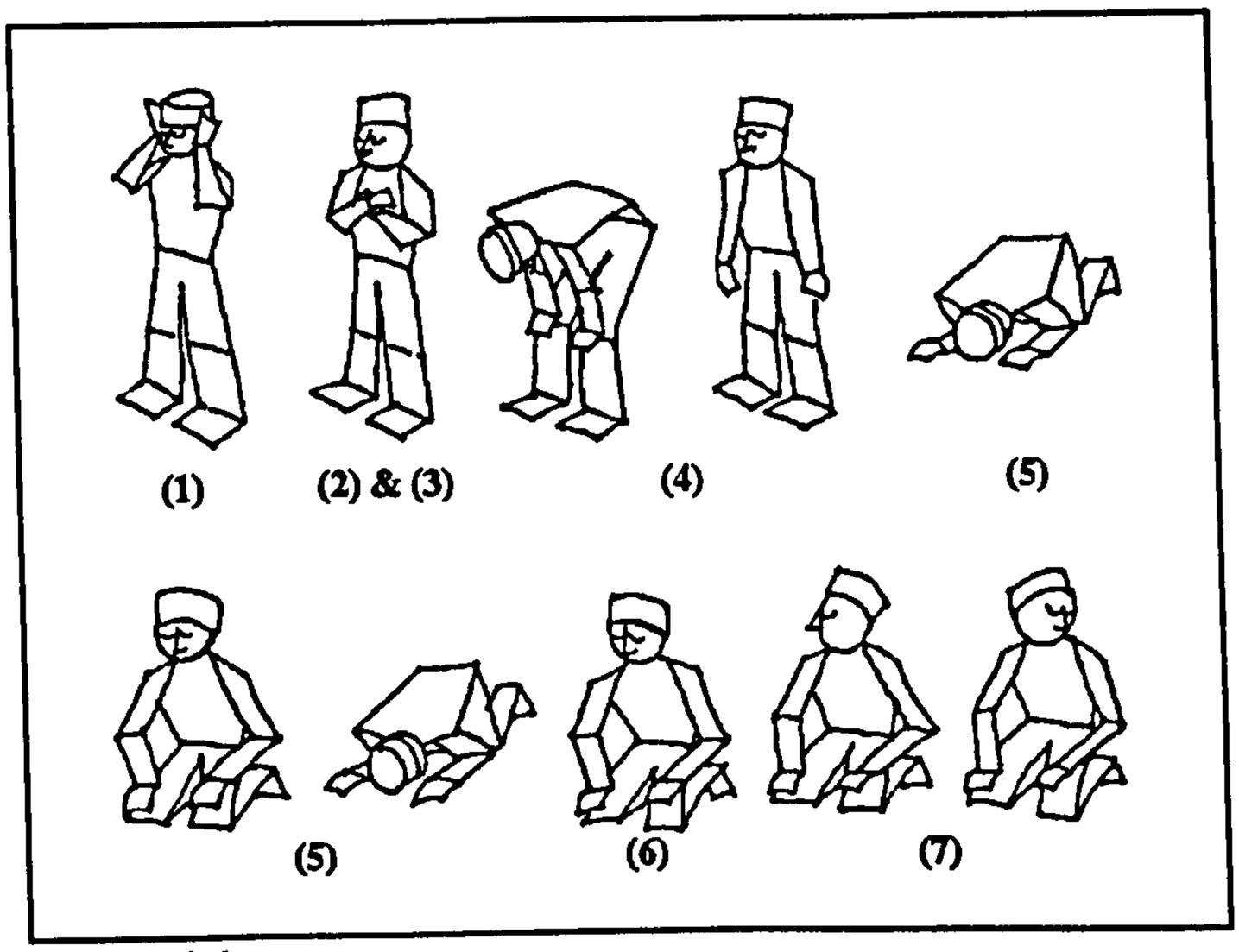



**Figure 4.1** The seven stages of prayer in Islam which compose a *rak'a*.

There are seven stages - in addition to a preliminary stage - that have to be followed in Islamic prayer to complete what is called a cycle (*rak'ah*)[2]. (Fig.4.1) Before starting prayer, and upon hearing the *'ādhān* (call to prayer) by the *mu'adhdhin* (he who calls the prayer), the Muslim starts by reviewing his own heart to free it from worldly matters. Having performed the necessary ablutions[3] as an act of purification - both physically and mentally - he is ready to pray individually or in congregation, at home or in a mosque depending on the case. Muslims who are quick to answer this call are the ones who find in it their joy and happiness, that is why the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to say: "*Comfort us with it, Bilal!*"[4]

---

[1] Authenticated in Al-Ṭabarānī.

[2] There are several cycles in each one of the five daily prayers. These have been prescribed in the *Sunna*. For detailed accounts of prayer, see 'Abdallah M. Sheḥātah, *Arkān al-Islām*, al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-'Āmmah lil-Kitāb, Cairo, 1974, Pp. 53-60; al-Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh al-Sunnah*, Maṭābi' al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah, Madina, 1988, vol.1, Pp.121-152; al-Ghazzalī, Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship, translated from the *Iḥyā'* by Muhtar Holland, The Islamic Foundation, London, 1983, Pp.44-48; Moḥammad al-Albānī, *Ṣifat Ṣalāt al-Nabiyy min al-Takbīr ila al-Taslīm Ka'annaka Tarāhā*, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut, 1983.

[3] Ablution is an act of purification that every Muslim has to complete prior to any prayer. It involves the washing of hands face arms and legs in a certain manner. Ablution can either be performed at home or in the mosque.

[4] Bilāl was the *mu'adhdhin* in the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

The first actual stage in prayer is to face the direction of the Ka'ba (*istiqbāl al-qibla*); in doing so, one turns his face *away* from all other directions and looks toward the Ka'ba (which is called "the House of God" *Bayt Allah*): he turns his heart *away* from everything other than prayer itself, directing it towards God. The second stage is to stand upright and have the intention (*niyyah*) to pray. Holding oneself erect in body and spirit, the Muslim who is about to pray forms his intention to perform prayer in obedience to God's command. This is followed by *takbīr* in which one says "Allah is Great". The third stage is to recite from the Qur'ān (*qirā'ah*). In this act one should be aware of everything one is saying and the tongue should merely act as an instrument of interpretation for the inner feelings.

The fourth stage is to bow down (*rukū'*). God says: "*Who sees you when you stand up to pray and your movements among those who prostrate themselves.*"[1] Bowing (*rukū'*) and prostration (*sujūd*) are accompanied by a renewed affirmation of the supreme greatness of God. The fifth stage is to prostrate (*sujūd*). This is the highest level of submission, for it brings down the most precious part of the body - namely the face - to meet the most lowly of things: the dust of the earth. This act might be considered as a reminder of restoring the "branch" to its "root", for of dust were we created and to dust we shall return. This act of prostration is repeated twice in every cycle of prayer so as to reinforce the fact of ones submissiveness. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "*The servant has no better means of approaching God than prostration in private.*"[2] And Anas Ibn Mālik said:

> ***If a man remembers God on any plot of ground, be it by way of prayer or other form of remembrance, that plot will boast about it to all the surrounding plots. It will rejoice in the remembrance of God to the utmost extent of the seven earths. No man gets up to pray without the earth being embellished for him.***

The sixth stage is to sit and testify (*tashahhud*). This is when the Muslim makes the testimony where the profession of Faith (*Shahādah*) is made. Thus the testification to the Unity of God and the mission of Moḥammed (peace and blessings be upon him) as Messenger is reaffirmed in each and every prayer. The seventh and final stage is to perform the salutation (*taslīm*) which is done on either side - the right and the left. The salutation is the

---

[1] Qur'ān: 26/218-9.

[2] Authenticated in Ibn al-Mubārak.

intention to conclude the act of prayer, and the Muslim supposes that he is saying his last prayer and that he may not live to see another.

However, al-Ghazzalī in his *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*[1], says that apart from the basic requirements of the seven stages of each cycle, special qualitative merits have been accorded to those who perform prayers and reach a status of humble adoration (*khushū'*) and inner serenity (*ṭuma'nīnah*). These are necessary to achieve the elevated spiritual status of prayer as described by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in the *ḥadīth*: "*Prayer is ascent (mi'rāj) for the faithful (mu'min)*".[2]

Humble adoration (*khushū'*), he says, is essential for the correct performance of prayer. God says in the Qur'ān: "*And perform the prayer in remembrance of Me.*"[3] But one cannot be in a state of humble adoration without fully comprehending what he is saying in prayer; the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "*While in prayer, you are only awarded for what you have comprehended and reasoned.*"[4] A considerable essence to prayer is the process of understanding and the state of the mind *'aql*. This point has been further explained and emphasized by Ibn 'Abbās, one of the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), who once said that a person who had performed a short prayer in full awareness is much better than a whole night's vigil when the heart is inattentive.[5] This indicates that there is a need for inner serenity in prayer and that there is a quantitative as well as a qualitative dimension to prayer.

On the other hand, the Muslim believer must magnify God, in fear and in hope and in humble awareness of one's shortcomings. There can be no relaxation in any of this once Faith has been achieved, although his intensity will depend upon the strength of his conviction. Al-Ghazzalī says that any slackness in prayer is surely caused by mental distraction, divided attention, failure to be whole-hearted in communion and a heedless

---

[1] See full argument in al-Ghazzalī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, transl. by Maulana Fazlul Karīm, Taj Company, Delhi, 1982, vol.1, Pp. 158-160.

[2] Authentic *ḥadīth* quoted in op cit. ed. S.H. Nasr, 1975, p.114.

[3] Qur'ān: 20/14.

[4] Authenticated in al-Bukhārī.

[5] Authenticated in Muslim.

attitude to worship. He says that random mental activity is the thing that distracts from prayer; it must therefore be dispelled so that a feeling of serenity can be acquired. Stray thoughts may be prompted by either external causes or may rise from within. To remove the symptom, the Muslim must treat the cause.

As for external causes, the worshipper's attention is caught by anything that happens to engage his senses. He begins to take an interest in it, seeing gives rise to thinking, then one thought leads to another and the process goes on. Sensory impressions do not divert those whose intention (*niyyah*) is strong and whose aspiration is lofty, but they inevitably distract the weak. The remedy lies in cutting off these causes by lowering the eyes, leaving no distracting objects in front of the worshipper, or reducing his range of vision by praying close to a wall. That is why the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) used to tell the Muslims to pray while gazing at the place of prostration. The devout would consider their prayer to be perfect when they were unaware of the people to their right and left. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) once prayed while wearing a cloak with an ornamented border, a gift from Abū Jahm. He removed it when he had finished his prayers, saying: "*Take it back to Abū Jahm, for it distracted me from prayer...*"[1]. This explains why ornamentation, use of over-bright colours, excessive grandeur, and over-elaboration of mosques are likewise, categorized as hateful deeds. It is the external distraction that they cause to those who pray that contradicts the proper manners of performing the ritual prayer in order to achieve humble adoration (*khushū'*) and inner serenity (*ṭuma'nīnah*).

Al-Ghazzalī says that internal causes are mainly instigated by worldly concerns in such a manner that the mind does not dwell on a single subject but keeps flying from one direction to another. To lower the eyes is then of no avail, for plenty of distractions have already got inside. That is why, before consecration for prayer (*takbīr*), the Muslim should empty the heart of all cares and worldly material concerns, leaving him free of potential distractions.

It is obvious from the above described seven stages of a cycle (*rak'ah*), and from al-Ghazzalī's recommendations for inner serenity, that prayer in Islam involves both physical as well as inner acts of worship. The question that is a cliché in Islam is if God really expects the Muslims to show Him their respect by repeated bowing and kneeling and prostration; in

[1] Authenticated in al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

other words, would it not have been better only to look into oneself and to pray to Him in the stillness of one's heart? The answer to this lies in the understanding of what a Muslim human being is. We saw that the Muslim perceives himself as a tripartite being created of a physical part, the *body* and an immaterial part, the *soul* and *spirit*. Because he consists of an external part (*ḍhāhir*) and an internal part (*bāṭin*), he is considered to be balanced. Thus when the Muslim prays with his body as well as with his soul and spirit, he is worshipping God in his totality.[1] (Fig. 4.2)

**Figure 4.2** Prostration in prayer, represents the humbling of the body to bring about the *mi'rāj* of the soul.

## 4.4 THE ṠŪFĪ UNDERSTANDING OF PRAYER

In the last section, we dealt with several Prophetic *ḥadīths* that define the nature of prayer in Islam. We have also seen that there is a physical as well as a spiritual dimension to prayer which is related to quantitative as well as qualitative merits. Ṡūfīs emphasize some of the *ḥadīths* and esoterically base their understanding of prayer on the following one: "*In truth God is present in the qibla of every one of you.*"[2]

---

[1] Similar ideas in Titus Burckhardt, Art of Islam: Language and Meaning, The world of Islam Festival Publishing company, Kent, 1976 (a), p.85.

[2] A Ṡūfī *ḥadīth* not authenticated. See Syed Ali Ashraf, "The Inner meaning of the Islamic Rites: Prayer, Pilgrimage, Fasting, Jihād", in Islamic Spirituality Foundations, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, SCM Press Ltd, New York, 1985, p.115. This *ḥadīth* is used by Ibn 'Arabī in a quotation below.

We saw in Chapter Two that Ibn 'Arabī was influential in the Mamlūk period, particularly on Mamlūk contemporary Ṡūfīs such as Ibn al-Fāriḍ. In his *Fuṡūṡ al-Ḥikam* Ibn 'Arabī defines prayer as "*... a cult, the sense of which is shared between God and His servant ('abd), and so is related on the one hand to God and on the other to the individual*"[1]. He goes on to explain that God divides prayer between Him and His servant into two halves, one being due to God, and the other to His servant, and accordingly the servant receives from God whatever he asks for. Ṡūfīs accordingly consider prayer to be an individual act based on direct communication between God and man, a shared act of worship wherein God has His own role in the prayer as man does. Thus, Ibn 'Arabī says that, "*it is He who glorifies me at the moment when I glorify Him. It is He who worships me at the moment when I worship Him.*"[2] He goes on to say that prayer is a "dialogue" between man and God, a "*secret call exchanged at the moment of prayer.*" To achieve this, Ibn 'Arabī suggests three spiritual stages for the individual who wants to pray:

> ***First the faithful must place himself in the company of his God and "converse" with Him. In an intermediate moment the faithful in prayer, must imagine (yatakhayyal) his God as present in his qibla, that is facing him. Finally in the third moment, the faithful must attain to intuitive vision (shuhūd) or visualization (ru'yā), contemplating his God in the subtle centre which is the heart, and simultaneously hear the Divine Voice vibrating in all manifest things, so much that he hears nothing else.***[3]

So, it is through abstract visualization that Ibn 'Arabī suggests we should contact the Absolute. He says that contrary to the Christian use of the icon (a physical image) as a visualization, in Islam it is an imagined form, "*Adore Allah as though didst see Him.*" Thus, Henry Corbin says that to the Ṡūfīs, prayer is the "*highest form, the supreme act of the creative imagination.*"[4] To achieve such a level of concentration to visualize God, we have

---

[1] Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṡūṡ al-Ḥikam*, translated by Angela Culme-Seymour from Titus Burckhardt, Beshara Publications, Gloucestershire, 1975, vol.1, p.22.

[2] ibid., vol.1, p.83. This is extremely un-Islamic and even blasphemous, because in numerous verses of the Qur'ān God tells us how He does not need man's prayers or supplications, He is above all that, which makes it rather obvious that God does not worship anybody for He is *the* Worshipped!

[3] ibid., vol.2, p.341.

[4] Henry Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī, translated from the French by Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series XCI, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1969, p.248.

seen that al-Ghazzalī advised he who prays to restrict his vision to a spot, that to which he prostrates and joins the earth, he should help achieve this concentration also by invocation *dhikr*. Here the auditory requirement - speech - is introduced as a cornerstone to the understanding of the Śūfī views on prayer. Ibn 'Arabī says that to "*invoke god (lidhikr Allah)*" is to put oneself "*in the presence of God (taḍa' nafsak fī al-Ḥaḍrah al-Ilāhiyyah).*" He goes on to say that if one is not present in front of God and does not "hear" God, and does not "see" God, then he cannot be in a "state of prayer."[1]

It follows that in Śufism, prayer does not depend on the sense of seeing as much as it does on hearing the *dhikr* itself. When the Śūfīs say that God is in the *qibla* of every person, it is the auditory presence that is so - which is not fixed in a certain location but rather diffused around us in a place that has no boundaries: "*Wherever ye turn, there is the Face of God.*"[2] That is why the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) while showing how he was privileged by God over the other prophets that preceded him affirms: "*God has blessed my community (umma) by giving them the face of the whole earth as a purified mosque (sanctuary).*"[3]

The seven stages of prayer are also dealt with by Ibn 'Arabī in his *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah* where he says that these stages have both spatial and temporal references. He uses the qualitative attributes of the symbolism of numbers and says that spatially they can be seen to correspond to the seven Heavens and the seven earths; and temporally, they can be seen to refer to the seven days of the week in which God completed the creation of the world. He adds that they also correspond to the number of circumambulations of the Ka'ba in the pilgrimage. Ibn 'Arabī says that these seven circumambulations are "... *equivalent to the seven spheres, which are the seven heavens, because they are circular in shape and so is the sphere.*" He goes on to explain that when one is circumambulating the Ka'ba, one "*is actually producing seven spheres.*" In the same passage from his *Futūḥat*, Ibn 'Arabī sets out to sum up these relations as follows:

---

[1] op cit. Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 1975, vol.1, p.233.

[2] Qur'ān: 2/115.

[3] All the *ḥadīths* on mosques are listed alphabetically in Arabic, in Hussein Mo'nis, *al-Masājid*, al-Majlis al-Waṭanī lil-Thaqāfah wal-Funūn, Kuweit, 1981, p.25. Mo'nis quotes his *ḥadīths* from al-Zarkashī, *I'lām al-Masājid*, Pp. 420-427.

*God made for every circuiting movement of this week (i.e., the seven circuits of the circumambulation) a trace in the prayer so that every trace can be known that is generated from one circuit. Thus the prayer manifests seven bodily traces and seven spiritual traces, one trace from the movement of every circuit of the week of the circumambulation... the seven bodily traces that exist in the structure of the prayer are: the first standing, the bowing, the second standing, which is the raising up from the bowing, the first prostration, the sitting between the two prostrations, the second prostration and the sitting for testimony. And the invocations associated with these seven bodily movements are (also) seven: they are the spirits.*[1]

Accordingly, Ibn 'Arabī correlates the postures of prayer with their tendencies to the tripartite being of man. He says that prostrating is the tendency by which man seeks his bodily origin (*jism*), that is water and earth[2]; through the standing posture, the ascending tendency man seeks his spirit (*rūh*) that is God in him; and through bowing, the horizontal tendency, he seeks the origin of his mental faculties in his soul (*nafs*).[3]

It is of vital importance to discuss here the displacement of Ṣūfī belief from the *Sharī'a*, bearing in mind that prayer is amongst the most explicitly described rituals in the Islamic Divine Law. The difference in interpretations is not the important issue as much as the extent of departure of the medieval eleventh, and twelfth-centuries from the orthodox - as practised in the first few centuries after the death of the Prophet. This drastic difference is a clear indication of a willingness adopted by traditional people to adopt and develop new ideas - although branded as innovative (*bid'a*) and condemned by the *Sharī'a*. Their intentions were surely not to contradict the teachings of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) but to form supports or channels to sustain the continuity of the tradition. It was then that the possibility arose of "over-compensation", such as the above mentioned case of the interpretation of prayer by Ibn 'Arabī in both his *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* and *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*. This can be said of religious architecture as well which we will find to have started simple according to the *Sharī'a* but soon departed into over-elaborations and monumentality coupled

---

[1] Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, Cairo, 1911, vol.1, p.704. (My translation).

[2] According to the Qur'ān man is created from clay (water and earth) as well as of the Breath of God.

[3] ibid., vol.1, p.426.

with highly complex system of symbolism inherent in the forms that were produced. The over-eagerness and enthusiasm that was instigated by the traditional people to create material supports to the tradition came out of their concern to promote the continuity of the Islamic tradition.

In the following section we will examine the laws governing the design of mosques as described in the *Sunna*. This will be followed by the description of the mosque of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). When compared to Mamlūk models of religious buildings, we will find how nearly all the basic requirements of the mosque - as stated in the *Sunnah* - were ignored seven centuries after the death of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). This will explain the "over-compensation" mentioned above in Mamlūk Ṡūfī interpretation and will show that it was not restricted to ideas and beliefs, but was equally apparent in Mamlūk art and architecture - traditional architecture is a reflection of the beliefs of the traditional society.

## 4.5 THE MOSQUE IN THE *SUNNA*

> ***The mosques of God, shall be built and maintained in fitting dignity, by such as believe in God, and the Last Day, who establish regular prayers, and practice regular charity, and fear none (at all) except God. It is they who are expected to be on true guidance.***[1]

The Arabic word *masjid* (mosque) linguistically means a place for prostration where forehead and nose touch the ground[2] as a symbol of submission and as a means of releasing any haughtiness and conceit from the heart. The importance of prostration was elaborated by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) who stated that the Muslim was nearest to God while prostrating to Him and that he should increase his invocation and summons then[3]. And

---

[1] Qur'ān: 9/18. From this verse it is evident that it takes special supreme qualities in a Muslim to build and maintain a mosque; so that the architecture of the mosque will be a true reflection of the essence of Unity in Islam.

[2] We have discussed that this is a behavioral pattern considered to be the utmost symbol of showing reverence and solemnity. It is an act of humbling oneself.

[3] Authenticated by Muslim and Abū Dāwūd who quote the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as saying: "*A believer is closest to God during prostration...*"

since prostration is a symbol of submission to God[1], then the act of prayer performed by all Muslims alike is an act of physical and spiritual integration. Thus the mosque became a symbol of Unity for Muslims. God also says: "*And the places of worship are for God (alone): so invoke not any one along with God,*"[2] this emphasizes that the act of Unity performed by Muslims concerns God, the One, the Creator.

The mosque is the symbol of Islam. It is the most beloved place to Allah[3], it is the fortress of faith and goodness. It is also the house of the believers[4]. The reason why the mosque has a very high esteem in Islam is because prayer forms the backbone of the religion. Mosques are also God's earthly abodes and those who build them are God's servants, set apart by Him for this great honour, that in them they might carry out His Word. Ever since this verse quoted at the head of this section was revealed to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) the mosque has had an exalted status, which explains the prominent role it plays in the life of Muslims.

In past generations the mosque was the centre of social life: it functioned as the place of worship and devotion as well as being a school and a university where small groups studied in various fields of knowledge.[5] Mosques were beacons of guidance, exhortation and counselling amongst the Muslims, as well as being assemblies - where the administration of the *Shari'a* was carried out and the business of the state was transacted. Men of influence used to gather in the mosque to attend to the interests and affairs of the nation and to organize groups of Muslims ready for them to be despatched to spread the word of God.

In addition to that, associated with the mosque was a host of other activities. In it the Muslim found consolation; condolences were given to fellow brothers in the mosque in the

---

[1] The meaning of the word "Islam" is submission and surrender. While Islam as a religion is man's total submission to the Will of God.

[2] Qur'ān: 72/18. No place of worship whatever should be used for the worship of any other but the true God. Worship should not be mixed up with vain objects, but should be reserved for the sincere service of God. All our gifts are for God's service, which includes the service of His creatures, and not for our vain glory

[3] Muslim recounts that Abū Hurayra said: Prophet Mohammed (peace and blessings be upon him) said "*The most beloved places to God are its mosques...*".

[4] The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said that God guarantees safety to those who took the mosques as their homes.

[5] See discussion in Chapter Two.

case of misfortune[1]. Originally, the wounded and sick were nursed in it[2], on its premises judging took place[3], marriage was announced in it[4], and dates were hung in it for the hungry[5]. In other words it was the Muslims' meeting place for religious as well as less sacred matters.

> ***The mosque is the temple of Islam, it is the parliament, school,meeting place and court. It is the place where muslims leave behind their earthly matters at the door; and enter with open hearts to faith, embellished with humbleness then make straight lines where old and young, prince and commoner, rich and poor are equated; their feet aligned and their shoulders crowded and their foreheads all on the ground in prostration. All are equally honoured in worship. It is also the parliament where all the people meet on the congregational Friday prayer to discuss their matters. In it the ruler is elected and in it laws are discussed with reference to the Sharī'a. It is the meeting place where every stranger heads for upon his arrival to introduce himself to the natives. It is also the school where the first principles of Islamic culture were initiated. The mosque is also the court (tribunal) where judging took place to resolve all problems arising between the people.[6]***

This is how the mosque functioned in the early days of Islam. Today, we see that it is the state, with all its institutions and organizations, that has assumed the task of organizing those specialist functions that impinge on every aspect of life in every sphere: in government, in the judicial system, in schools, universities, research and scientific institutions, ministries and all the various authorities - in all these the state has taken over the role of the mosque.

---

[1] It is mandatory that the person in distress should not be their for the sole purpose of receiving condolences.

[2] Authenticated in al-Bukhārī, 'Ā'isha recounts that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) put up a tent in the mosque to tend to the wounded.

[3] After the law cases increased in number the necessity to establish courts in other places was necessary because of the sanctity of the mosque and to avoid the disturbance of those who are praying.

[4] From a *ḥadīth* recited by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) asking people to announce marriage in the mosques.

[5] Authenticated in al-Bukhārī.

[6] Muḥammad al-Dāwūdī, *al-Masjid fi al-Kitāb wal-Sunnah wa Aqwāl al-'Ulamā'*, Dār al-Wafā' lil-Ṭibā'ah wal-Nashr, al-Manṣūrah, 1986, Pp. 88-89.

Yet, the mission of the mosque still remains, for it is the impregnable stronghold from which Muslims can combat those deviant ideas and undercurrents that assail Islamic societies. The mosque fulfils this role through the congregational prayer which is the very reason behind its existence. It is through the Friday congregational prayer - which is a reminder of the traditional Islamic culture - that must be held in a mosque to hear how wrong doctrines are to be corrected. The community as a whole can be directed towards sound beliefs within the context of the eternal teachings of Islam and keep the social culture of Islamic society intact.

Muslims have been ordered and encouraged to build mosques in both the Qur'ān and the *Sunna*. In fact, mosques are the only earthly buildings that Muslims were specifically ordered to erect on the face of the "transitory" perishable earth.[1] Allah says that what is best for the righteous is in the Hereafter and asks, "... *will ye not understand?*"[2]. God knows that man looks for the temporal goods of this world and reminds us that "... *He looketh to the Hereafter: and God is Exalted in might, Wise.*"[3]. Yet in spite of all the emphasis on the discouragement of worldly matters and the focus on the Hereafter, a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) encourages the building of mosques. A *ḥadīth* states that all worldly matters will perish on the Day of Judgement save the mosques[4]. Another *ḥadīth* indicates that whoever builds a mosque for God's sake alone[5] - however small it is - will have an eternal abode in heaven[6]. Also amongst the most potent *ḥadīths* which encourage the building of mosques is the one which tells of the reward granted to those who use mosques frequently; it is narrated by Abū Hurayrah who reported God's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) as saying:

> ***"There are seven whom God will cover with His Shade on the day when there will be no shade but His (i.e., on the Day of Judgement),"*** **amongst**

---

[1] op cit. Mo'nis, 1981, p.26.

[2] Qur'ān: 7/169.

[3] Qur'ān: 8/67. Here wisdom has been connected to the fact that what we should be striving to fulfill is the world of the Hereafter rather than the earthly perishable world that we live in.

[4] This further indicates that the erection of mosques is an eternal act.

[5] There have been instances where mosques have been built for other reasons, such as that built by some hypocrites during the life of the Prophet. In such a case the building of the mosque was to create division between Muslims into sub-groups and preach false doctrine rather than following God's teachings.

[6] op cit. Mo'nis, 1981, p.27. Furthermore the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said that those who frequent the use of the mosque will be given an eternal resting place in Heaven.

those seven mentioned in the *ḥadīth* is, "*... a man whose heart is attached to the mosque from the time he leaves it till he returns to it (for the next daily prayer) ...*".[1]

That is why the first thing that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) set to do upon his arrival to Madina was to order the building of a mosque. While he was helping in its erection he said, "*O God, their is no good other than the good of the Hereafter, forgive us all*"; once again this indicates that the act of building a mosque was in the domain of the eternal.

There are a number of Prophetic *ḥadīths* dealing with the code of ethics concerning the mosque. Some of these have to do with manners and behaviour inside the mosque[2], while others have to do with the features that should and should not be found in it. Some of these are general such as the following: 'Ā'isha and 'Abd-Allah Ibn 'Abbās narrated: "*The Prophet talked of the curse of God to those who build places of worship at the graves of the Prophets.*"[3] Anas reported God's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) as saying: "*One of the signs of the Last Hour[4] will be that people will boast and vie with one another about mosques.*"[5] Ibn 'Abbās reported God's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) as saying: "*I was not commanded to build elaborate mosques,*" he went on to say: "*You will certainly ornament them as the Jews and Christians did.*"[6] Ibn Mājah recounts that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "*Manners that should not be taken in a mosque are: it should not be taken as a shortcut between two distances or a passage way, .... and it should not be taken as a market.*"[7]

---

[1] Authenticated in al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

[2] The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) says: "*Do not take your youth and your mentally disturbed to the mosques.*" (For fear of any disturbance they might cause). In another *ḥadīth* the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was seen to order some Muslims to move away from the mosque upon seeing them sleeping in it.( It was not seen proper to take the mosque for a resting place). Also, no weapons of any kind or raw meat is to be taken into it.

[3] Authenticated in al-Bukhārī.

[4] That is to say, the Day of Judgement.

[5] Authenticated in al-Bukhārī.

[6] Authenticated in al-Bukhārī.

[7] op cit. Mo'nis, 1981, p.27.

There are also several *ḥadīths* which condemn those who introduce novelties and innovations *bid'a* that contradict the spirit of the mosque - such as its simplicity - or that which might distract the people from their prayer: "*Whoever innovates in mosques, is cursed by Allah, the Angels, and mankind*"[1]. Although up until this point all the *ḥadīths* that we have quoted call for the simplicity that complies to the teachings of the spirit of Islam, there comes another strong statement from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him): "*Provide adequately for mosques ( i'tū al-masājid ḥaqqahā) - i.e., build them adequately.*"[2]. We will see in the following section that the definition of the term "adequacy" (*ḥaqqahā*) proved to be highly flexible as the Islamic tradition developed in the first seven centuries.

In the time of the Caliphs Abū Bakr and 'Omar, when the Islamic armies were sent out to convert the people of neighbouring lands, the mosque passed through a new phase of diversification which had not been evident before then. The reason for the need of diversity can obviously be attributed to the different environments, sites, people, climate, available building materials, in addition to the cultural and traditional values of each locale. For this reason, we find that the first mosques were designed to follow the model of the mosque of the Prophet (peace be upon him), but in time, each locale took over its own character following its local tradition. The diversification of mosque forms since the emergence of Islam, was the result of a perpetual eager attempt to "embody" and physically recreate a representation of traditional Islamic belief. This embodiment of belief was through the more sacred traditional artifacts, specifically the mosque.

## 4.6 THE MOSQUE OF THE PROPHET IN MADINA: THE PROTOTYPE

This prototype of all mosques has its origins in the *Sunna* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). In its primitive form, this mosque was a square enclosure 100x100 cubits open to the sky with three entrances, one on each side saving the *qibla* wall, which was empty. Adjoining the *qibla* wall a roof made of mud and palm fronds seven cubits high, and supported on eight palm trunks served to protect the worshippers against the sun.

---

[1] ibid. p.29. In the later years during the Caliphate of 'Omar, the mosque of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was re-erected. 'Omar ordered the craftsmen involved to "*shelter the people from the rain*" and forbade them to use over-bright colours lest it distract the people. Authenticated in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. ibid., p.28.

[2] ibid., p.25.

By the erection of this mosque at Madina, the first built mosque was created. It showed startling simplicity and the utmost accord with the environment. It also symbolized and represented a visual expression of the essence of the values in Islam and the integration between its design and the doctrine. The building materials which were directly found in the environment were used. As for the design itself, this mosque had no *miḥrāb* (praying niche) and no *mi'dhana* (minaret). The main constituents were a *ṣaḥn* (open court) and a covered part called the *riwāq* and another covered part called the *miḍhallah*. The first sheltered the people during prayer and faced the *qibla*, while the other faced the north and was used to discuss the matters that concerned the *umma*. The *riwāq* was rectangular - the length being the *qibla* providing laterality - to give as much room for people to stand in the first rows. Light was admitted in the prayer area by its reflection from the courtyard. (Fig.4.3)

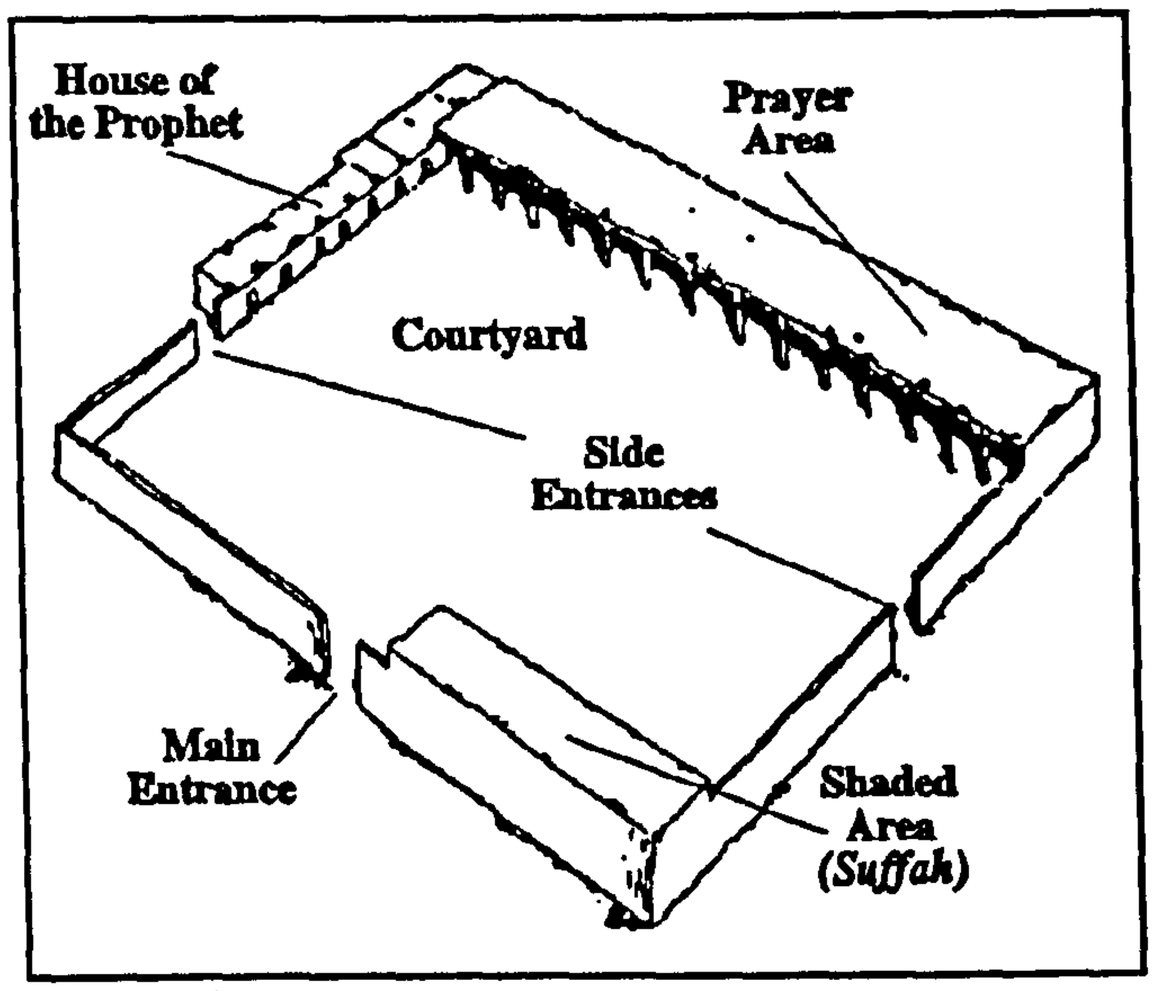



**Figure 4.3** A reconstruction of the Mosque of the Prophet in Madina. (*al-Bināʾ*, vol.1, Feb-Mar 1979)

When we look at the fundamentals of mosque design following the *Sunna* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), we find that the Mosque at Madina established principles that were used for future mosque designs. These are: first, the division of the mosque into *riwāq* (prayer hall) and *ṣaḥn*; second, the construction of the prayer area in the form of a pillared hall with its length parallel to the *qibla* wall to accommodate longer rows; lastly, the principal of axial planning as seen in the three-door arrangement. Furthermore, the architecture of this mosque can be said to be based on principles that are egalitarian, iconoclastic and introvert. Also when one speaks of a mosque (or a place for prayer) in general, it is evident that it has to be Makkah-oriented, facing the Ka'ba. This prerequisite, accompanied by the purification (*ṭahārah*) of the place for prayer and availability of a water source for ablutions[1] are the two essential mandatory requirements for worship mentioned in the *Sunna*.

---

[1] Ablutions demanded a water fountain *mayḍa'ah* which took several forms. Sometimes they comprise a domed or open fountain within the mosque, intended for washing only. Alternatively, ritual ablution could be carried out near the mosque.

Another essential demand of a mosque is to provide straight lines for the worshippers in the easiest and most practical way. Here we find that the use of columns and beams coincides structurally with this religious demand. This is because the praying area is divided accordingly into equal parts expressing the equality of Muslims, that is to say that there is no place wherein the believer would be closer to God than another inside a mosque. This equal repetition developed later on to form the arcade which was to form a very popular design tool in medieval Islamic architecture.

Although the dome in itself has been used frequently in mosque designs - taken as a practical method to roof a building while relying on the least number of supports and enhancing the feeling of space inside an interior - yet, what it fails to do is to convey the democratic equi-divided prayer units of space and thus, does not emphasize the concept of equality which is central in Islam. Moreover, it does not help in the order of the prayer lines.

Entrances are never located to lead the people entering a mosque to the *riwāq* (prayer hall) directly. On the contrary, entrances are usually located in a position to lead the people inside the mosque through a shaded entrance followed by the open court and finally to the *riwāq*. There are two reasons for this: the first is spiritually functional to provide for enough transition between the outside world and the world within the mosque wherein the person would be worshipping God. The second is utilitarian so as to avoid passing in front of any people during the performance of prayer - for example a late-comer arriving to the mosque after the congregational prayer has started[1].

The presence of windows in a mosque has always been a matter of controversy: the Mosque of Madina had none. The debate has ended in the conclusion that windows can be placed in walls other than that of the *qibla*. The reason is to avoid glare while facing the *qibla* and more importantly to avoid the distraction and disturbance caused by passers-by outside the mosque to those who are focusing on prayer or meditation. Even in cases where windows are located in the other walls of the prayer hall, they should be placed above the eye-level of a standing person.

---

[1] There is a Prophetic *ḥadīth* which prohibits people passing over peoples necks while they are praying which confirms that if the entrance was through the prayer hall, it was inevitably going to involve this prohibited act. It should be noted that usually there are no aisles especially designated as a passageway in the mosque and that the *riwāq* is always packed with people praying very close to one another - their feet and shoulders touching one another.

The sacredness of the parts of the mosque are not equal, that is to say, for instance, that the *riwāq* (prayer place), is more sacred than the *ṣaḥn* courtyard. This has its roots from the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) when discussions of the affairs of the *umma* were carried in the less sacred court while prayer was carried out in the more sacred shaded area. This might explain why we find that the newly innovated elements of a mosque (few as they may be) that came to attach themselves to mosque design are found in the *riwāq*. These elements are: the *miḥrāb*, and the dome above the *miḥrāb* (*maqṣūra* or royal box). Although these elements were not found in the first mosques of Islam they have become part of the traditional requirements of the mosque.

The *miḥrāb* was not an absolute requirement of any functioning mosque. According to al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Duqmāq, the *miḥrāb* was first introduced in the Mosque of the Prophet by a group of Coptic craftsmen from Egypt during the time of 'Omar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz during the reign of al-Walīd Ibn 'Abd al-Malik (705 A.D.). This element which was obviously an innovation (*bid'a*) became a successful symbol of the mosque and soon became a fundamental element to be incorporated in all religious buildings. Although art-historians have debated the origins of the *miḥrāb*, they have all accepted that there is no obligation for it to be present in a mosque. Robert Hillenbrand, the Islamic art-historian, is inclined to believe that it remained as a "vestigial memory" of its earlier predecessors - meaning the Greco-Roman and Christian counterparts representing its origin - in that the leader of prayers who was himself the caliph stood in the *miḥrāb* while leading the congregational prayers. In this way, the caliph would be seen as a point of focus for all the people to see him.[1] But in fact, the entire *qibla* wall facing Makkah serves as a directional indicator. We have seen that Muslims pray while standing in rows parallel to that wall and looking at the point at which their head will meet the ground during prostration[2], there is no focal point in the centre of the *qibla* wall. It thereby makes the *miḥrāb* from the utilitarian point of view needless even though he who leads the congregational prayer is at the centre. Yet, the fact that the *miḥrāb* was a successful symbol and took its place in the tradition strongly indicates that its symbolic function - i.e., the non-utilitarian part of function - must have had a more vital role to the medieval traditional Muslims.[3]

---

[1] See Robert Hillenbrand, "The Mosque in the Medieval Islamic World", in Architecture in Continuity: Building in the Islamic World Today, ed. Sherban Cantacuzino, Aperture, New York, 1985, Pp. 36-37.

[2] See section on prayer above.

[3] We will see the traditional interpretation of the *miḥrāb* in Chapters Seven, and Eight.

On the other hand, within the mosque, the obvious place for the dome would have been in the geometrical centre of the prayer area. But in fact, throughout the medieval Muslim tradition, the location of the dome was chosen above the *miḥrāb* - opposing all rules of symmetry and balance in classical architecture. Hillenbrand interprets this as the obvious intention to agglomerate all the important elements in the most sacred of areas within the mosque. The utilitarian function that he attributes to it is that the *miḥrāb*, although visible from the inside, is not identifiable from the outside - as it is sometimes taken in the thickness of the wall and not projecting outwards - accordingly, the Muslim architect, wanting to indicate this important part of the mosque, introduced the dome as an external visible sign of that spot. From the aesthetic point of view, he adds that the dome punctuates the regular beat of the mass of the mosque.[1] These two points are hardly compatible to the function of the mosque, as there is no utilitarian importance attributed to the ability to identify the direction of the *qibla* while outside the mosque. As for the aesthetic attribute, a dome placed anywhere near the external wall of the façade would have equally punctuated the regularity of the external mass and should not necessarily be located above the *miḥrāb*. This argument strongly indicates that there must have been other reasons for the introduction of the dome above the *miḥrāb* to medieval mosques.[2]

The *maqṣūra* is a separate, usually square enclosure within the mosque. In most cases it coincides with the dome above the *miḥrāb* mentioned above. Its walls are usually partitions of wooden latticework. It is associated to mosques in which the ruler attended prayers. This seclusion within the mosque defies the principles of egalitarianism that the mosque should provide. Robert Hillenbrand accounts for its presence for one of two reasons: the first being an influence from the Byzantine practice of housing the emperor in a royal box, the second being that two of the Caliphs of the Prophet ('Omar and 'Ali) were murdered in the mosque. Hillenbrand concludes that whatever the reason, it remains that the *maqṣūra* was a means by which the ruler got an exalted space in the mosque which denotes the secularism that seeped through into the designs of religious buildings.[3] This purely rational historical reasoning might be comprehendible from the utilitarian point of view, but it obviously defies the traditional notion of sacred and secular in Islam. It indicates that there must have been another

---

[1] op cit. Hillenbrand, 1985, p.39.

[2] We will see the traditional interpretation of this element in Chapters Seven, and Eight.

[3] ibid., Pp.38-39.

functional dimension to its introduction. This observation is even more emphasized when the *maqṣūra* is examined in relation to the dome above the *miḥrāb*.[1]

From this brief review of departures from the simple design of the Mosque of the Prophet at Madina, we find that many elements became attached to the mosque even though they had no origin in the *Sunna* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). The historical explanation of the origin of these elements might be acceptable to "modernistic" rational minds, but they jar with traditional medieval Islamic beliefs.

## 4.7 THE MAMLŪK *MADRASA* AND *KHANQAH*

We saw in Chapters Two and Three that the *khanqah* and *madrasa* are two types of religious institutions which, unlike the mosque, were not originally planned for the use of the general public. Rather, they were restricted for the use of a certain community attached to and appointed by the founder to these institutions[2]. Because the students lived and prayed, as well as studied inside these buildings, the *khanqah* and *madrasa* tended to combine the features of both domestic and religious architecture. Accordingly they had to be Makkah oriented in their interior and later, when they held Friday congregational prayers, were built with minarets. As domestic architecture, they had living units and kitchens[3]. In addition to these elements, the *khanqah* provided cells (*khalwāt*) for the Ṡūfīs to perform their spiritual exercises.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, shortly before the fall of the Fatimids and the establishment of the *Sunnī* Ayyubid rule in Egypt, Ṡalāḥ al-Dīn was working on bringing the country back into the mainstream of *Sunnī* Islam - ultimately proclaiming its allegiance to the 'Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad[4]. Even before he had seized total control of the country, it was clear from the policy of the future ruler that he was determined to use all means at his

---

[1] We will see the symbolism of the *maqṣūra* in Chapters Seven and Eight.

[2] Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Change in Function and Form of Mamluk Religious Institutions", Annales Islamologique, Tome XXI, Institut Francais D'Archeologie Orientale Du Caire, 1985 (b), p.73.

[3] Some *khanqahs* even incorporate *ḥammāms* (baths) or apartments for the founder and his family.

[4] Ira M. Lapidus, "Ayyubid Religious Policy and Development of the Schools of Law in Cairo", Colloque International Sur l'Histoire du Caire (1969), Cairo, 1972. Pp. 279-286.

disposal - primarily religion as the core of the traditional society - to reach his goal. Once he had secured the rule for himself, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn moved to consolidate this rule by winning the support of the *'ulamā'* and Ṣūfī *shaykhs*. As a result, he initiated a policy whereby religious foundations were officially put to the service of the state. Among such foundations was the *madrasa* and the *khanqah* which "dispensed" religious education. We saw that the main reason for the focus on religious education was to erase the previous Shī'ite legacy by reintroducing the *Sunnī* schools of law and jurisprudence. As a result, the Mamlūk rulers who followed, embarked on a campaign aiming at building a number of *madrasas* in Cairo and in the short period of forty years, about twenty *madrasas* were built in Cairo alone.[1]

We also saw that the mere existence of these academic institutions is an indication that the Mamlūks were determined first to change the structure of the civilian elite, and secondly to attract as many prominent scholars from other Muslim countries to their capital, Cairo. The reason for the establishment of the *khanqah* was to provide Ṣūfīs with a home, a place of worship and their essential needs, it would permit them to fully dedicate themselves to their Ṣūfī way of life. Despite similarities, in the early phase of their history both the *madrasa* and the *khanqah* incorporated features reflecting the distinctiveness of purpose in the lives of their communities.[2] Unlike the Ṣūfīs, who dwelt in a *khanqah* on a fairly permanent basis, *madrasa* students were mobile. We saw that in the beginning, Ṣūfīs were mostly Persians or foreigners (*'Ajam wa awlād al-ghurabā'*). This soon changed and the *khanqah* became open to all members of the society. According to Ibn al-Ḥajj, who wrote in the fourteenth-century, a *'ālim* (scholar) had to be available to common people in order to spread knowledge among them, accordingly he said, the doors of a *madrasa* and *khanqah* should remain open to everyone[3]. We also saw in Chapter Two that there are signs which indicate an integration of Ṣūfism into urban life: the Ṣūfī began to follow the *madrasa* regime, acquiring in the process a worldly education which enabled him to advance his career. At the same time the *madrasa* students gained exposure to the Ṣūfī approach to religion.

It seems that with education provided in the Mamlūk *khanqah* and Ṣūfism as practised

---

[1] Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iḍh wal-I'tibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wal-'Āthār*, Cairo, reprint 1270 A.H., vol. 2, Pp. 363-368.

[2] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1985 (b), p.74.

[3] Ibn al-Ḥajj, *Madkhal al-Shar'*, Cairo, 1981, vol. 2, p.104. A scholar was linked to his completion of courses in specific subjects with specialized instructors who were entitled to issue the *ijāzah* or academic license for each topic.

in *madrasas* and mosques of the same period, a Ṡūfī sponsored by such organizations could gain access to any public or official position. This primarily affected the master craftsmen who in turn transmitted the knowledge to the members of their guilds through the system of apprenticeship. Ṡūfism was so much in the air that it would not be incorrect to say that in Mamlūk traditional times, the Ṡūfī who was sponsored by such institutions as the *madrasa* and the *khanqah* could be anybody from any origin or profession. It can be concluded that no doubt the fusion of the *madrasa* and *khanqah* led to the assimilation of Ṡūfīsm into practical life. With these developments, the Cairene mosque returned full circle to its original pluralistic function - but with a difference in its activities - where prayer, teaching and Ṡūfī rituals took place to be accessible to the society.

Although Chapter Five is dedicated to the description of Mamlūk religious architecture, here we will quickly look at the architectural development that took place in the *khanqah* and *madrasa* due to the change in the function of the mosque. We find that: firstly, the need to accommodate space for the four schools of law (*madhāhib*) as the cornerstone of the foundation resulted in the introduction of four *iwāns* (usually pointed vaults) connected to the rectangular courtyard. The larger *qibla* oriented *iwān* was reserved for daily congregational prayers performed by the students. With the rise of the typical four-*iwān* *madrasa* plan as opposed to the pillared hall mosque, both the laterality of the praying hall which provided longer rows, and the egalitarian quality arising from the post and lintel system of dividing the space were rejected.

Due to the need for living quarters for the students, several floors were designed to accommodate their rooms, along with a kitchen (*maṭbakh*). This verticality inevitably gave rise to monumentality and grandeur, which are prohibited by the *Sunna*. Apart from that, rows of Ṡūfī cells were accommodated on the left-over spaces of the internal façades of the courtyard or alternatively in annexed wings accessible from either the courtyard or from the entrance hall.

But the most important characteristic of Mamlūk buildings is in fact the mausoleum which is persistently emphasized. In all cases, it takes the most prominent position of the building on the main façade. These mausoleums were used as burying places for the patron or founder of the religious institution or for an important *'ālim* or Ṡūfī saint (*walī*). This again is a direct violation to the teachings of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) who prohibited the construction of mosques on tombs, and prohibited prayer in front of graves or

in graveyards. This in fact makes *all* Mamlūk *madrasas* and *khanqahs* contradicting the *Sunna* of the Prophet.

Another general feature of Mamlūk buildings is that they are decorated externally by means of *ablaq* masonry. *Ablaq* is the alternating contrasting coloured stones forming horizontal lines usually in red and white or red and yellow. This conflicts with the teachings of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) who warned against using over-bright colours - the *ḥadīth* of 'Omar, the second Caliph explicitly orders the Muslims not to use red and yellow "*lā tuḥammar wa lā tuṣaffar*" in mosques. While internally, the *qibla* wall as well as the courtyard floors were given particular attention and are richly ornamented in coloured marble cladding.

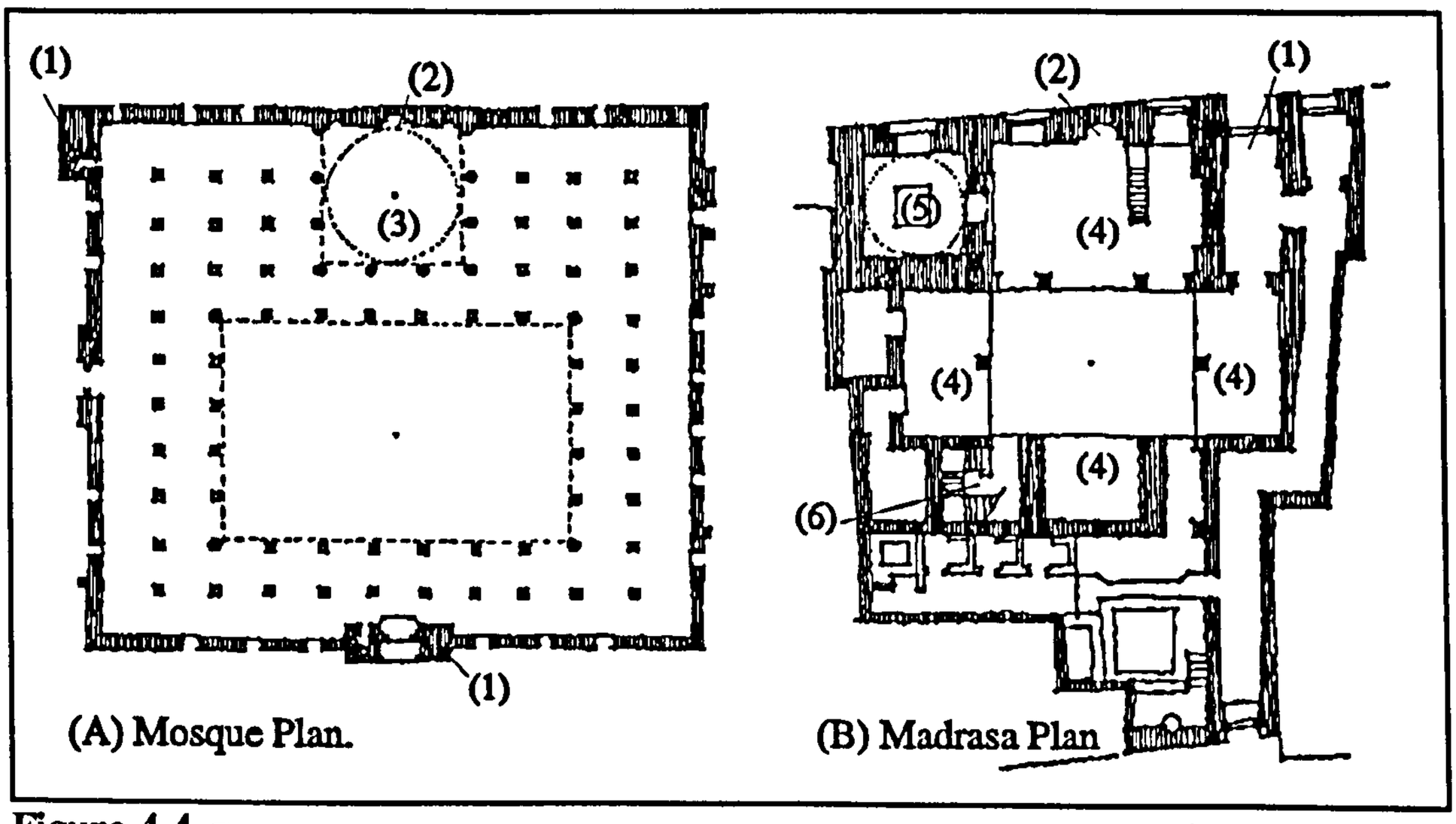



**Figure 4.4** The elements that depart from the prototype of the Mosque at Madina. (1)Minaret (2)*Miḥrāb* (3)*Maqṣūra* (4)*Iwān* (5)Mausoleum (6) Living quarters.

Thus, it is obvious that the criteria that was followed in the design of Mamlūk religious buildings was very far from the teachings of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). This and the elements that came to be attached to the mosque after the first century of Islam indicate that traditional popular beliefs practised by the Muslims after the death of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) took over the orthodox original teachings of the *Sunna* which condemned innovation in religious practices (*bid'a*). this departure from the *Sunna* must have been the overwhelming factor which was to be reflected on the inherited and developing building tradition in medieval times.

## SUMMARY

This chapter has revealed several vital points that are fundamental in the search for the meaning of traditional Mamlūk religious architecture. Firstly, it paves the way for the non-Muslim to understand some fundamental Islamic principles which are otherwise taken for granted by a Muslim reader. Secondly, it introduces the basis of prayer and mosque design in the *Sunna* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), not because this has direct relevance to Mamlūk mosque design as such, but because it shows the extent of the latter's departure from the original prototype of a mosque.

It is because Ṡūfism was introduced to bring back Egypt to the mainstream of *Sunnī* Islam, through both its doctrine and method, that its popularity and assimilative characteristic permeated the society in all its facets. The impregnation of Ṡūfism in the Mamlūk society shows on the other hand how even prayer - which is amongst the most explicitly discussed issues in the religion of Islam - did not escape Ṡūfī *ta'wīl* as illustrated by the interpretations of Ibn 'Arabī that have been discussed.

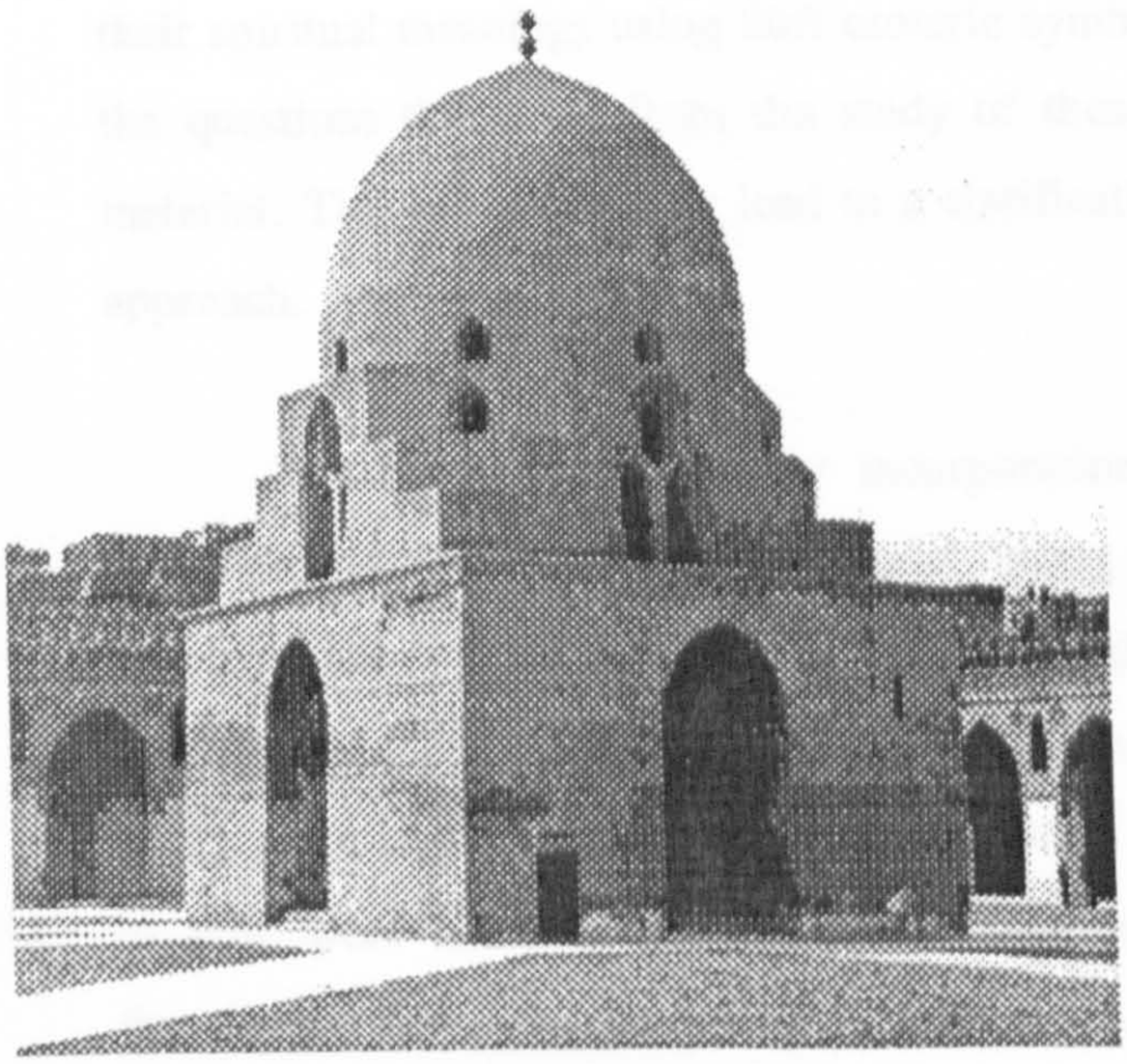
Such general observations indeed reveal the extent to which change in medieval religious beliefs affected the changes in function of religious buildings which were in turn reflected in architectural forms. There is no doubt that alongside this change of architectural form there was change in the meaning of what these new forms represented. We saw in Chapter Two that Ṡūfism showed a strong affinity with symbolism, whether as an aid to achieve the spiritual ascent of its disciples - such as alchemical symbols - or as a method of interpretation of all creations and phenomena, natural or man-made. It thus follows that most of the Mamlūk architects (*mu'allimīn*) or master craftsmen, the builders, and all those involved in the craft of building who were exposed to Ṡūfism either directly, by having learnt and practised Ṡūfism in a Mamlūk educational institution, or indirectly by being part of the traditional Mamlūk society must have reflected their Ṡūfī learning in their "creations" through that system of symbolism inherent in the Ṡūfī doctrine.

By adopting this hypothesis - even before testing its validity - we can clearly explain why we feel a sense of totality in traditional buildings as opposed to modern ones, and also explain the lack of a psycho-spiritual dimension in modern mosques. Modern religious architecture might be interesting to the viewer because it is innovative, but this interest is transitory because it does not carry out the continued level of fulfilment that is attainable in

its traditional counterpart. It is only through such traditional models that are built according to the dual understanding of function, the utilitarian and psycho-spiritual, that the spiritually therapeutic function of religious architecture can be released.

One last point remains to be discussed regarding the object of innovation. We have seen that the Mosque of the Prophet at Madina shares very few architectural features with the types of religious Mamlūk buildings. In particular, a cornerstone in the design of Mamlūk buildings was the mausoleum. This innovation (*bid'a*) in the *Sunna* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) recalls the argument of "over-compensation" in belief that was mentioned in section 4.4, where we mentioned that in the course of time, after the first few centuries of any religion, people living according to a religious tradition need to develop material forms which act as symbols and supports to the revelation. These supports are produced to act as props to the tradition in order to safeguard its continuity. Because they are created by the traditional people they both reflect and protect that tradition. It is then that the traditional society tends to overlook these deviations from the orthodox in order to maintain the continuity of the tradition. It is only by examining Mamlūk traditional religious buildings from this viewpoint that one can arrive at a *full* understanding of their traditional meaning.

Int. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11



# CHAPTER FIVE

## BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE AND PROBLEMS OF ITS INTERPRETATION

The first objective of this chapter is to introduce a catalogue of Baḥrī Mamlūk religious architecture from the historical point of view. This is divided according to the three types of buildings dealt with in the thesis: mosques, *madrasas*, and *khanqahs*. The literature that has been relied on in this section is mainly original sources such as al-Maqrīzī's "*Khiṭaṭ*" and twentieth-century accounts by historians and art-historians such as K.A.C. Creswell, Gaston Wiet, Max van Berchem, Su'ād Māhir, Doris Behrens-Abouseif, Robert Hillenbrand, Chahinda Karīm, Leonor Fernandes, Laila 'Alī Ibrāhīm, Caroline Williams, Jonathan Bloom, and others. This historical review is a necessary step to arriving at a physical description of the buildings as well as facts such as dating, choice of site, use of materials, and foreign influences, ... etc. This provides the background which will enable us to analyze the Mamlūk buildings in the later chapters of this thesis in an attempt to derive their spiritual meanings using Ṣūfī esoteric symbolism. The second objective, is to identify the questions that arise from the study of these buildings in light only of the historical material. This will ultimately lead to a clarification of the limitations of a purely historical approach.

The buildings chosen for incorporation in this chapter are not all the Mamlūk religious buildings which were executed during the Baḥrī Mamlūk period. Those buildings that have not survived, or have been partially destroyed and later rebuilt - without having been documented or reconstructed to their original state - have been omitted. Halls of palaces which were in the Mamlūk period used as halls of prayer and/or *madrasas* are also omitted as they were not originally designed for these functions. Complexes that have several functions - for example having a mosque, *madrasa*, *khanqah*, hospital (*māristan*), and mausoleum (*qubbah* or *ḍarīḥ*) - are dealt with as a whole so as not to fragment their unity.

## 5.1 HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION OF BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the re-establishment of Sunnism to Egypt with the advent of the Ayyubid period necessitated the adoption of new types of religious educational foundation: the *madrasa* and the *khanqah*. These were inherited by the Baḥrī Mamlūks, and the patronage of religious art and architecture was strongly encouraged by the sulṭāns and *emīrs* who were members of the ruling elite. We saw in Chapters Two, and Three, how the Mamlūk mosque, *madrasa* and *khanqah* came to carry out the three functions of: prayer, teaching, and Ṣūfī practices simultaneously. The difference was the degree of functional emphasis in each type of building. As Doris Behrens-Abouseif says:

> ***At the same time, mosques and madrasas were also opening their doors to Ṣūfī practices. During the 14th century many religious foundations combined the functions of both khanqah and madrasa. Maqrīzī's list of religious buildings in Cairo names several foundations under both labels.[1] Sanjar al-Jawli's construction (703 A.H., 1303 A.D.) for example, is designated as madrasa and khanqah. ... Its plan with a single iwān courtyard surrounded on the other sides by cells, suggests that it may have been a khanqah to which classes in law and theology were introduced. The same was probably true of the khanqah of Mughulṭāy al-Jamālī (730 A.H., 1329 A.D.). The Aqbugha foundation (740 A.H., 1340 A.D.), on the other hand, was originally a madrasa to which the Ṣūfī exercise of ḥudūr was introduced, as also happened at the mosque of Sheykhū[2].***[3]

This explains the difficulty of classifying the buildings by means of the terms used to "label" them. Accordingly, the typology followed in this section uses divisions of form as well as function. For example, if the sources "label" a particular building as a mosque, but

---

[1] Further steps were taken towards the integration of the terms used for religious foundations; *waqfs* (endowment deeds) have been seen to use the term *madrasa* the term *jāmi'*, while the building's own inscriptions might use the term *madrasa*. Similar cases are seen with the terms *khanqah* and *madrasa*.

[2] Taqiyy al-Dīn Al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Al-Mawā'iḍh wal-I'tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wal-Āthār*, Bulāq reprint 1270 A.H., vol.2, Pp. 313, 382, 426.

[3] Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Change in Function and Form of Mamlūk Religious Institutions", Annales Islamologiques, Tome XXI, Institut Français D'Arcchéologie Orientale du Caire, Cairo, 1985 (b), p.81.

the building has the typical four-*iwān* arrangement with a central courtyard, then it will be put under the category of *madrasa*, or *khanqah* depending on the function that was more emphasized - Ṡūfī teaching or Divine Law. Within each classification, the buildings are arranged chronologically.

### 5.1.1 THE CONGREGATIONAL MOSQUE TYPE

There are several Baḥrī Mamlūk mosques that follow the evolution of form of the Mosque of the Prophet in Madina, and are usually termed as hypostyle mosques.[1] These are: the Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī who was better known as al-Ḍhāhir Baybars (or Baybars the First), the Mosque of Ulmās al-Ḥājib, the Mosque of al-Nāṡir Moḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn, the Mosque of Alṭinbughā al-Māridānī, and the Mosque of Āqsunqur. Although the four-*iwān* plan eventually became the more commonly used in the laying out of Cairene Baḥrī Mamlūk *madrasas* and *khanqahs*, it never found favour in the planning of congregational mosques.

Mosque of Sulṭān Baybars al-Bunduqdārī (al-Ḍhāhir Baybars): (Monument no.1 in Antiquities department survey plan[2] - in the following examples we will refer to this reference by a number, followed by the phrase "on plan" between brackets).

Baybars was a pious *Sunnī* Muslim; the sources indicate that he was a Ḥanafī - which is confirmed by the fact that this mosque was built for the Ḥanafīs. The sources also affirm that Baybars was a Ṡūfī; he is said to have had a Ṡūfī spiritual adviser (*shaykh ṭarīqa*) called *al-Shaykh* Khiḍr[3].[4] While examining the different Mamlūk buildings in this chapter, we will find that a lot of *emīrs* and sulṭāns were in fact, strongly influenced by Ṡūfism which will be seen to be reflected in the choice of epigraphy on the external and internal façades of the religious buildings.

---

[1] Because they are roofed by means of columns and beams - or arches - creating a hypostyle hall effect.

[2] See *Fihris al-'Āthār al-Islāmiyyah bi-Madīnat al-Qāhirah*, issued by Maṡlaḥat al-Misāḥah, 1951.

[3] See op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, p.312. Also see J. Spencer Trimingham, The Sufi Orders in Islām, Oxford, 1973, p.170.

[4] For a general description of Baybars and his religious firmness see Jonathan Bloom, 1982, Pp. 74-76.

This mosque is located today in al-Ḍāhir Square. According to al-Maqrīzī[1], it was in (665 A.H., 1266 A.D.) that the sulṭān decreed the construction of this mosque.[2] Al-Maqrīzī goes on to describe how Baybars went out with his ministers and *muhandisīn* (literally geometricians, meaning architects in modern terminology) to find a suitable site for this building. They finally agreed to use the sulṭān's favourite polo site in al-Ḥusayniyyah, north of the Fatimid walls of Cairo.

After measuring the site, the sulṭān talked about the building and the process of its construction and he decided that the rest of the square should be as a *waqf* (endowment) for the mosque. He also had the *hay'ah* (image) of the mosque drawn in his presence. He suggested that the door should be like that of the *Madrasa* al-Ḍhāhiriyya, and that a *qubba* (dome) should be built over its *miḥrāb* (prayer niche) of the same size as the dome of the famous jurist al-Shāfi'ī. He wrote letters at the same time to different places requiring marble columns to be sent from every place, also that camels, buffaloes, kine and other beasts of burden should be sent from every province. He wrote likewise for iron appliances and good timber for the doors and ceilings. He also appointed officers to supervise the building of the mosque. Al-Maqrīzī goes on to say that the sulṭān left after that to visit the *madrasa* of Cairo where he sat and talked to the *imāms* appointed to it, and stated that he had laid the foundation of a mosque for Allah's sake and that he had put a *waqf* to serve it for His sake as well, and that when he died he would not want to be buried there. He also specified that he would not like the features of the place to be changed after his death, because he had done what he had done for the sake of Allah Transcendent.[3]

The building was begun in the middle of Jumada II, 665 A.H. and on the following year, the sulṭān left Egypt for Syria and took possession of Jaffa. He took a quantity of wood found in the Citadel of Jaffa and slabs of marble, and put them in one of his ships and sent it to Cairo. He ordered the timber to be used in a screened enclosure in the mosque (*maqṣūra* or royal box[4]) and to use the marble for the *miḥrāb*. An inscription on a great slab of limestone over the *miḥrāb* gives 666 A.H. as the date of the dome, which has not survived.

---

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 2, p.299.

[2] This is confirmed by an inscription on a slab over the doorway within the north entrance porch. The date 666 occurs also on a slab over the west entrance.

[3] ibid., vol.2, Pp. 299-300.

[4] See Chapter Four.

Al-Maqrīzī goes on to say that on the first of Muḥarram 667 A.H., Baybars visited the mosque on horseback to view it, and found it as beautiful as could be and was pleased with its being finished in so short a time and with so much care. He gave robes of honour to those who carried out the work - a typical Mamlūk way of rewarding the master builders and architects. It is said that these robes were very elaborate and worth a large sum of money. Al-Maqrīzī gives the names of the two persons who took the task of building the monument: al-Ṣaḥib Bahā' al-Dīn Ibn Ḥanna and the *Emīr* 'Alam al-Dīn Sanjar al-Surūrī (who was the governor of Cairo at the time). The mosque was finished and inaugurated by the sulṭān in (Shawwāl 667 A.H., June 1269 A.D.) and a Ḥanafī *khaṭīb* (he who gives the Friday speech) was appointed to the mosque.[1]

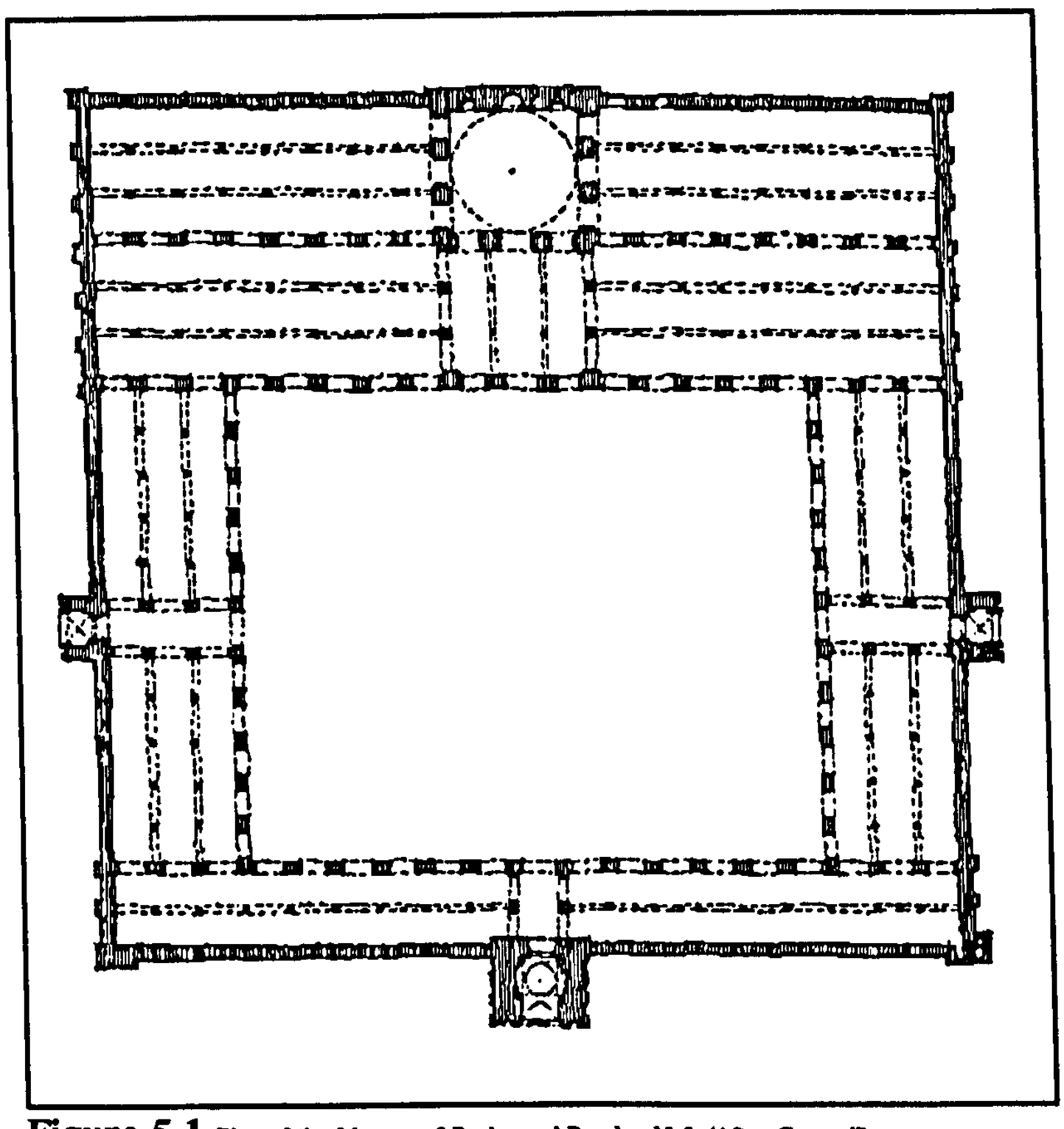


**Figure 5.1** Plan of the Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī. (After Creswell)

This building is the first Mamlūk Friday congregational mosque which according to K.A.C Creswell, who adopts a historical formalist theory of evolution to explain Islamic architecture, resembles to a great extent that of the Fatimid Mosque of al-Ḥākim - which in turn relied mostly on the dimensions of the Mosque of 'Amr Ibn al-'Āṣ as far as its size and

[1] ibid., vol.2, Pp. 299-300.

organization is concerned which followed itself the model of the Mosque of the Prophet in Madina. Creswell explains a lot of the features of the Mosque of Baybars as foreign influences from Syria and Mesopotamia.[1] (Fig.5.1)

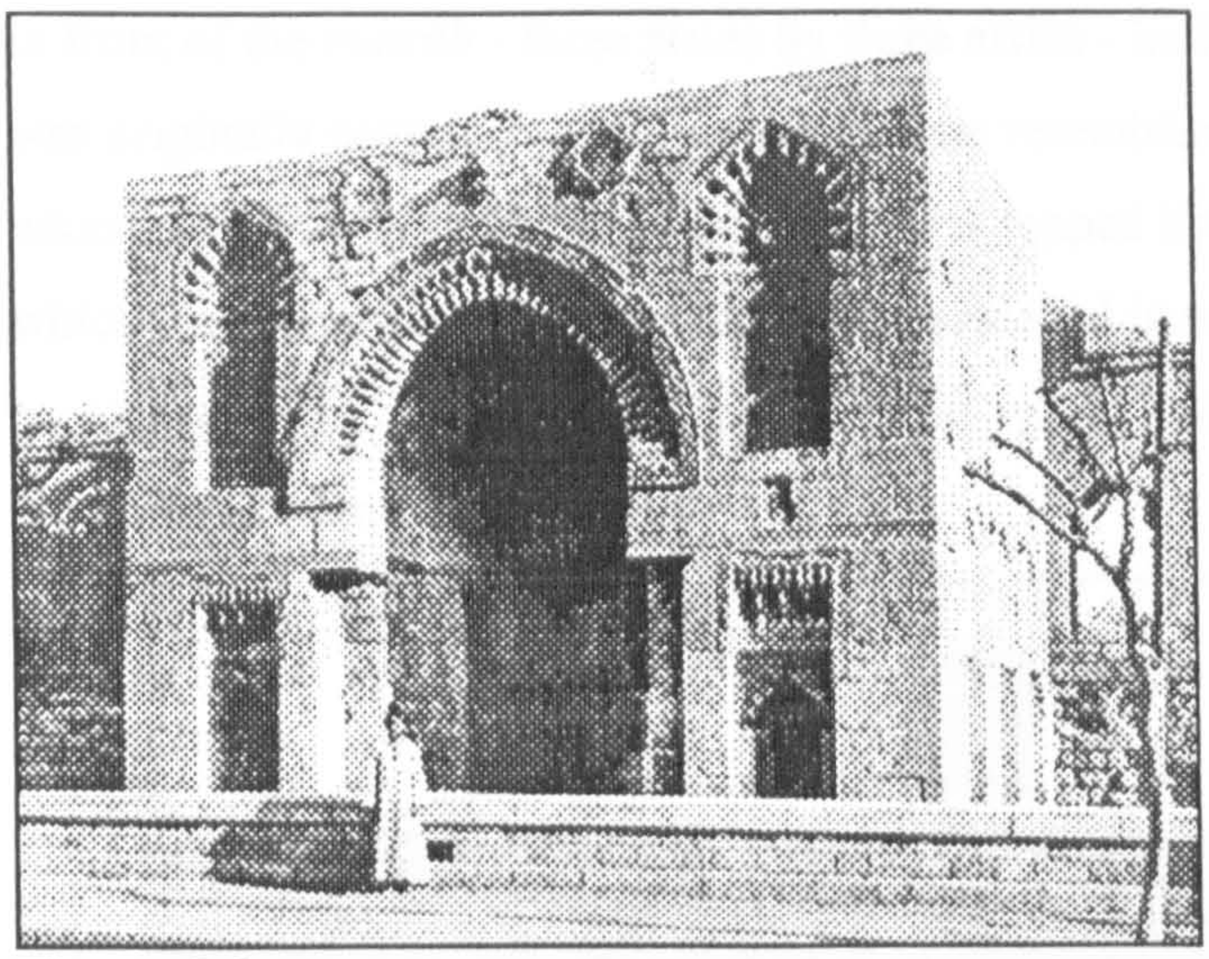


**Figure 5.2** The main portal of the Mosque of Baybars is pointed and recessed, in a projecting tower-like structure. (Creswell)

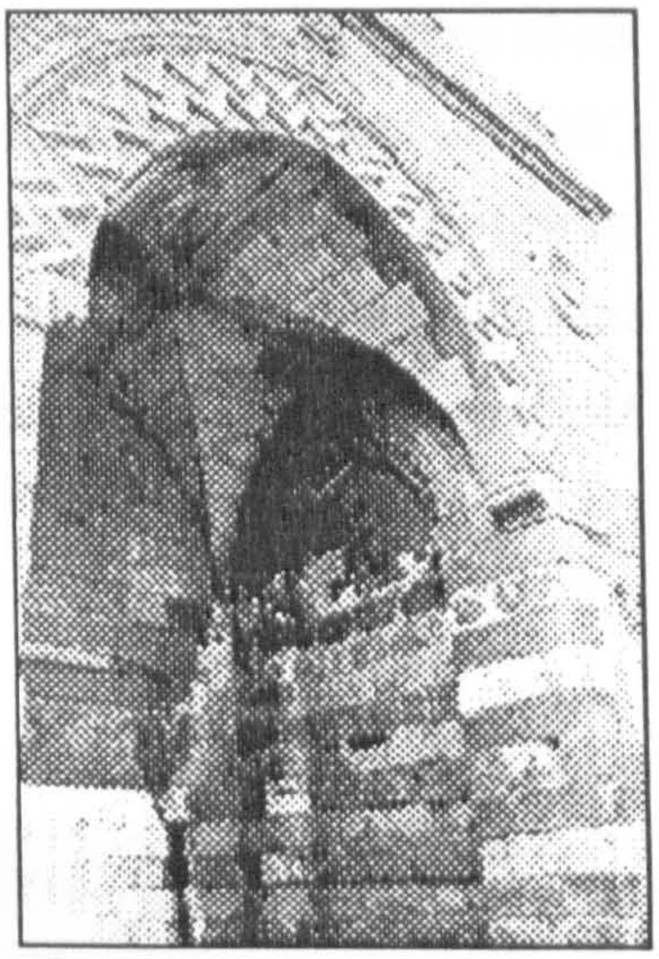


**Figure 5.3** Intersected vault roofing the secondary entrance halls.

The plan of the mosque is a square, 100x100m and the height of its external wall is topped by a row of crestings (*sharāfāt* colloquially known as *'arāyis al-samā'* or "brides of the heavens") in the shape of triangular geometrical crenellations. The four corners of the external wall are visually emphasized by four square towers.[2] Three projecting portals give access to the entrance halls, and into the *ṣaḥn* (courtyard). The main portal is a pointed arch which leads to an entrance hall roofed by a slightly pointed compound dome. (Fig. 5.2) The secondary portals are also pointed, but lead to intersected vaulted entrance halls. (Fig.5.3) The intersecting visual lines from these three points of access, correspond to the exact centre of the *ṣaḥn* which in turn, is axial to the *maqṣūra*, the dome above the *miḥrāb*, and the *miḥrāb* itself. The significance of this arrangement has not been discussed by historians and art-historians. One cannot be sure whether there was a central water fountain (*fawwārah*) overlaid on the centre of the courtyard or not. Having suffered a good deal of misuse in the past - in Napoleon's time it was used as a fort - and part of the *qibla* arcade having been closed off and set aside for use as a mosque in modern times, it is hard to visualize the complete plan the way it was built.

---

[1] K.A.C. Creswell, Muslim Architecture of Egypt, Oxford, 1937, vol.2, p.172

[2] For a full description and the measurements of this mosque see Su'ād Māhir, *Masājid Miṣr wa Awliyā'uhā al-Ṣāliḥān*, Ministry of *Awqāf*, Cairo, n.d., vol.3, Pp.34-37.

According to Creswell's reconstruction of the plan, the axial doorways lead to the courtyard (*ṣaḥn*). The *ṣaḥn* is surrounded by *riwāqs* (arcaded aisles), the largest being that of the *qibla*. In its centre is a *miḥrāb* ending in a pointed semi-dome. The large clear space in front of the *miḥrāb* - three aisles by three aisles - indicates the place of the *maqṣūra* which was originally covered by an enormous dome resembling that of the mausoleum of al-Shāfi'ī which would indicate that its square base was topped by *muqarnasāt* (stalactites, a system by which transition from square to circle was achieved in medieval times). By also following the prototype of the mausoleum of al-Shāfi'ī, it would follow that the dome above the *mihrāb* would have been pointed.

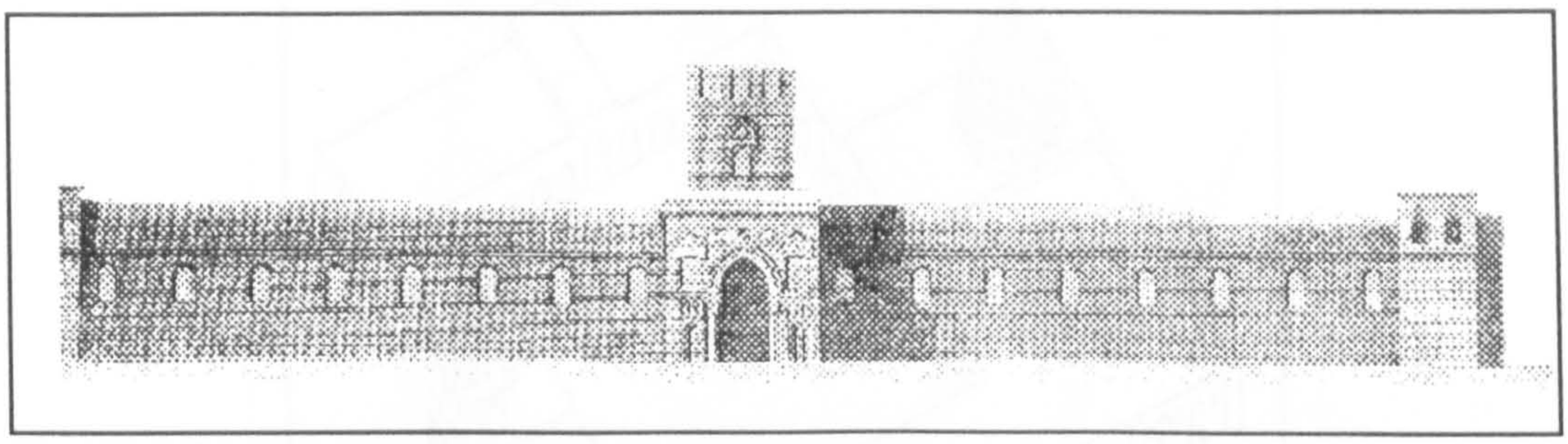


**Figure 5.4** **The main façade of the Mosque of Baybars as illustrated in the "*Description de l'Egypte*", showing the surviving square base of the minaret above the portal.**

In the Napoleonic "Description de L'Egypte", a lithographic print of the main façade of the mosque shows the square base of what was a minaret above the main entrance gateway (Fig. 5.4) - axial to the *miḥrāb*, and *maqṣūra*. This minaret has been theoretically reconstructed by Jonathan Bloom who has done extensive research on this mosque and has speculated that it probably looked like the one placed above the entrance of the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ṣāliḥ which had a square base followed by an octagonal storey and ended in a *mabkhara* (literally incense burner) ribbed pointed top.[1]

Bloom, after his theoretical reconstruction of this mosque, says that the fact that the combination of portal and minaret was ignored by Creswell weakens the latter's formalist argument on the origins of this mosque[2]. (Fig.5.5) He says that this is what prompted other historians such as R. Stephen Humphreys, to explain the form of this mosque in terms of its visual attributes. Humphreys accordingly says that this mosque resembles fortress architecture

---

[1] See the full argument in Jonathan M. Bloom, "The Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī in Cairo", Annales Islamologiques, Tome XVIII, 1982, Pp.50-51.

[2] See Creswell's architectural evolution theory of this mosque in op cit. Creswell, 1937, Pp. 161-172.

rather than reflecting religious character.[1] He adds that because the Mamlūks derived their power from their military supremacy, this mosque was intended to leave no doubt about the political and religious legitimization of the new ruling class, a visual message of a fortress of *Sunnī* Islam - because it followed to a great extent the Mosque of the Prophet - fortified under the power of the Mamlūks.

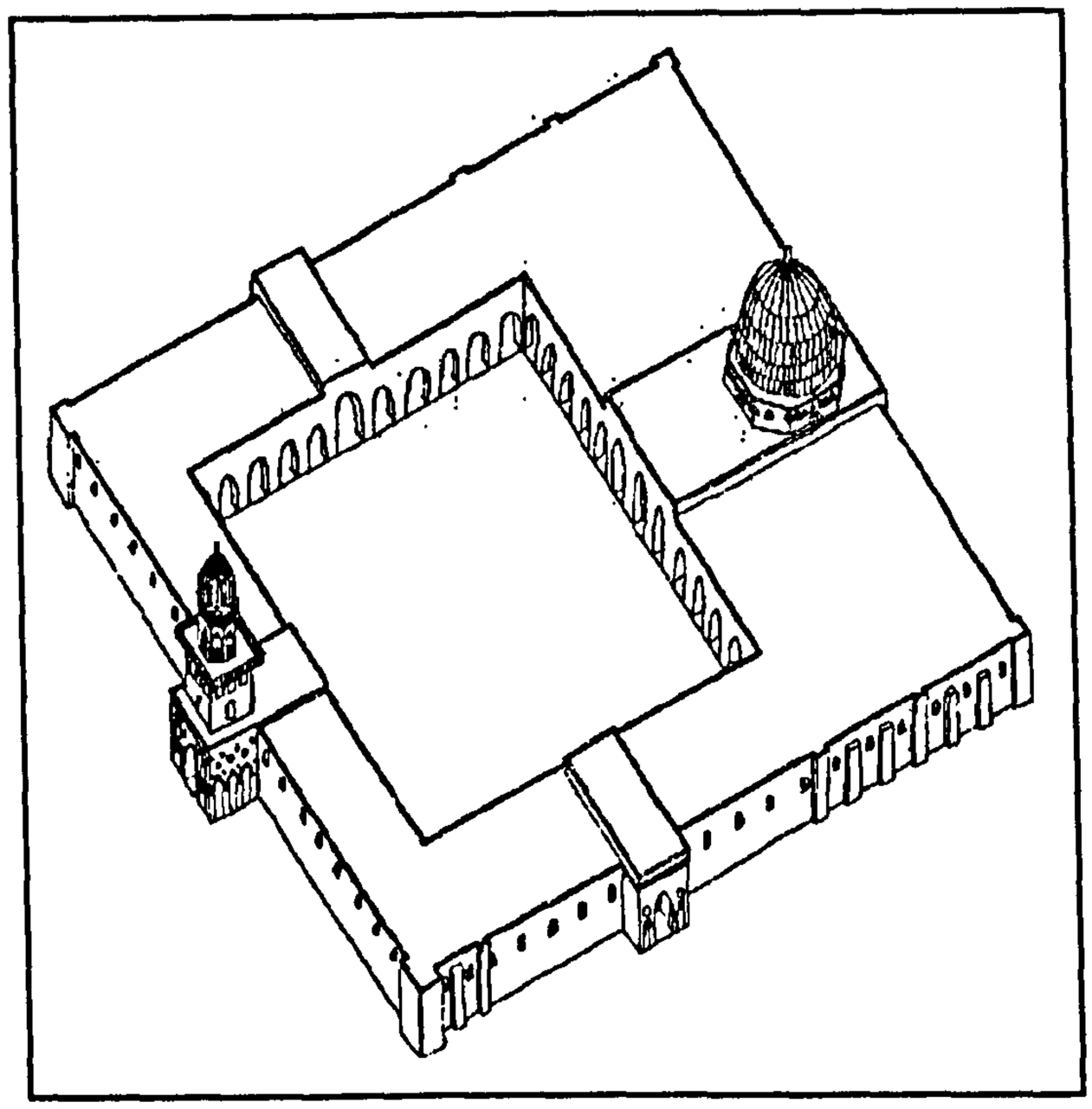


**Figure 5.5** Reconstructed axonometric of the Mosque of Baybars according to Jonathan Bloom.

Mosque of the *Emīr* Ulmās al-Ḥājib: (No.130 on plan)

*Emīr* Seyf al-Dīn Ulmās was one of the Mamlūks of Sulṭān al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn. He was promoted several times and became influential to the degree that he assumed the role of "vice-sulṭān" - he was not titled as such. According to al-Maqrīzī, he fell into disgrace for two reasons: first for having spoken ill of the sulṭān during his absence to the Ḥijāz; and second for his appalling personal conduct[2]. His belongings

[1] See Stephen R. Humphreys, "The Expressive Intent of the Mamluk Architecture of Cairo: A Preliminary Essay", in Studia Islamica, 35, 1972, Pp. 69-119.

[2] He used to raise pigs in his stables and sell them to the foreigners - prohibited in Islam. He was also infamously known for his homosexuality. See Chahinda Karīm, *Masājid Umarā' al-Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Ibn Qalāwūn*, PhD thesis, Cairo University, 1979, p.33.

consisting of a large amount of gold and silver which was confiscated by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad along with "*huge amounts of extremely fine marble*". He was hanged in 734 A.H.[1]

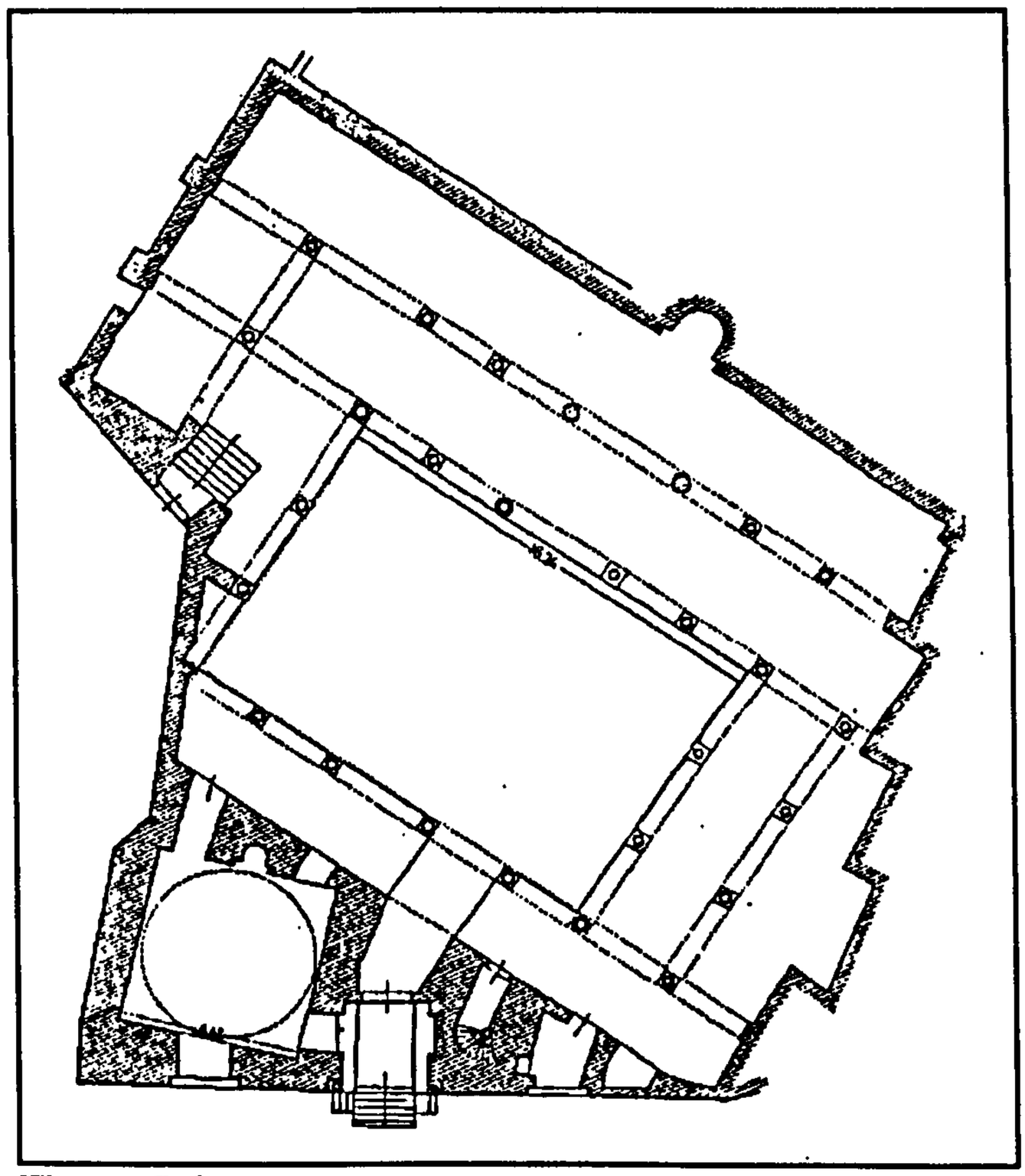


**Figure 5.6** Plan of the Mosque of *Emīr* Ulmās al-Ḥājib. (After Kessler)

According to al-Maqrīzī[2], this mosque was built in (730 A.H., 1329-30 A.D.) during the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn. (Fig. 5.6) This period is renowned for the building activity that was encouraged by the sulṭān himself and his *emīrs*. The mosque is located on the intersection of al-Ḥilmiyyah Street and al-Qal'ah Street. The main façade has a central portal flanked by two niched windows. High above the windows is a band of epigraphy carrying the following *du'ā'* (prayer):

> ***In the name of God the merciful the compassionate, O God, You who will bring people together on the Day of Judgement, bring us together with sincerity, loyalty, humility, God-fear, self scrutiny (murāqabah), light, certitude, knowledge ('ilm), gnosis (ma'rifah), ... , and the real***

---

[1] See op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.174.

[2] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), Khiṭaṭ, vol.2, p. 307.

***understanding of the Qur'ān, make us enter in the entrance of Truth (adkhilnā madkhal Ṡidq), and reinforce us with Love (al-Maḣabbah).***

These lines are located on the right hand side of the door, the epigraphy continues on the left hand side as follows:

***and make us leave from an exit of Truth (akhrijnā makhraj Ṡidq), and give us victory through Your Power, you are the Transcendent, the Glorified, the All-Hearing, the All-Victorious, Unique, Able, Alive, Alert, Merciful, Compassionate, He who has a kingdom is (missing word) I ask by the name of thy Glory that has filled the corners of your Throne (arkān 'Arshak) and with thy Ability that has created your Creations and with thy Mercy that is All-Encompassing and with thy Knowledge that encompasses all things.***[1]

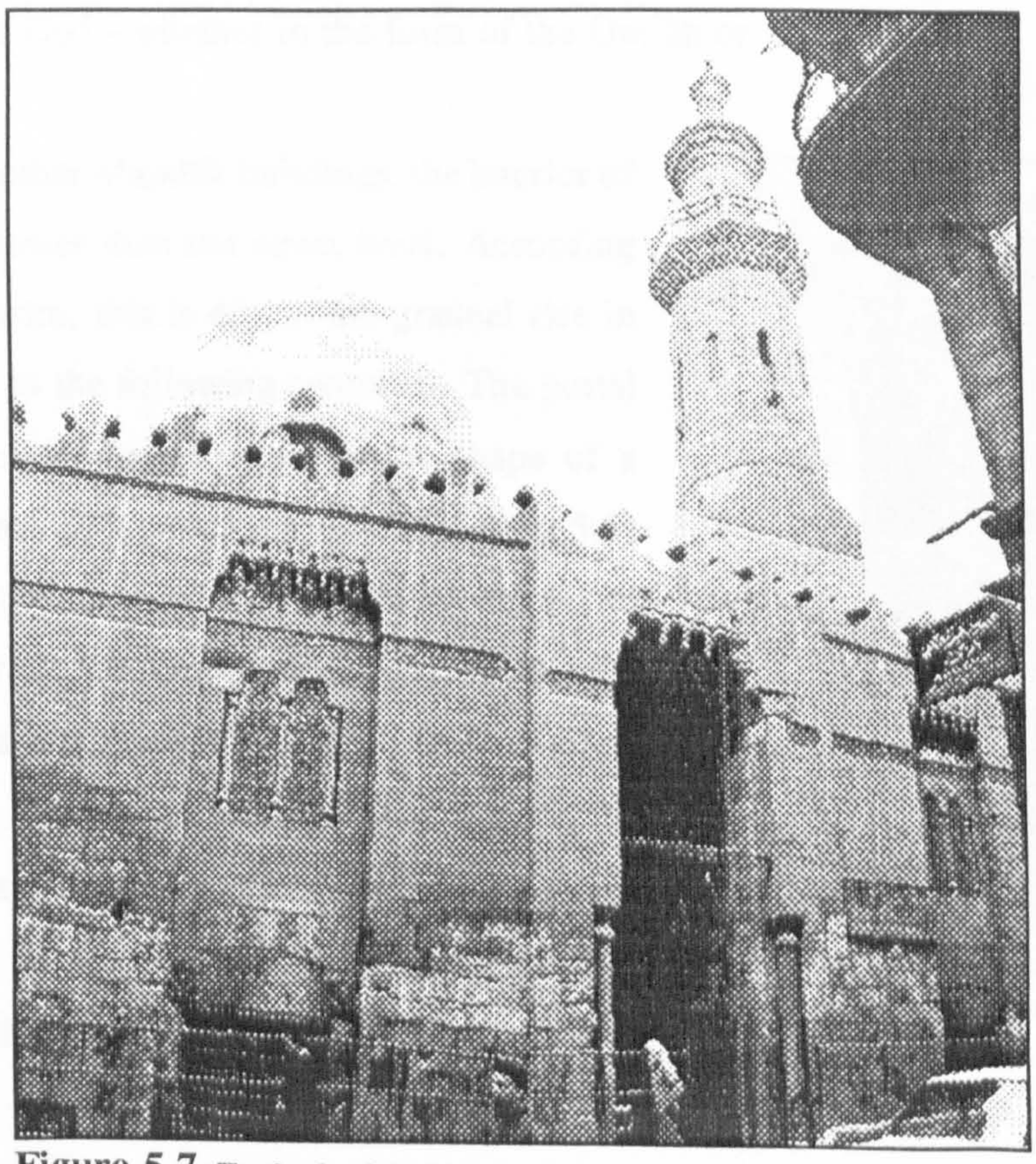


**Figure 5.7** The façade of the Mosque of Ulmās showing the portal, minaret, dome, windows and band of epigraphy running across its length.

[1] op cit. Chahinda Karīm, 1979, Pp. 41-42. (My translation).

This *du'ā'* obviously indicates Ṡūfī influences: first in the differentiation between knowledge and gnosis; their the reference to the *real* understanding of the Qur'ān (by *ta'wīl*) and in the repetitive mentioning of the Divine Names; in mentioning the entrance and exit of Truth which is a reference to a bodily life in Truth and a spiritual resurrection to Truth; and finally in the mention of the Throne of God which as we will see in Chapter Seven plays a central role in the cosmological symbolism of Ṡūfism. This Ṡūfī influence is furthermore emphasized in another band of epigraphy on the window located above the portal where Ulmās refers to himself as *al-faqīr ila Allah* (the poor to God)[1] which is a typical term used by Ṡūfīs when referring to themselves.

Also worth mentioning here is the fact that most of the epigraphy used in Mamlūk religious architecture is located at a height on the façades that does not allow it to be legible. This suggests that Mamlūk epigraphy was not really meant to be read and that its significance must have been other than that. We will see that traditionally speaking, Islamic calligraphy is considered to have a sacredness which it implicitly embodies by the fact that it depicts the Actual Word of God - whether in the form of the Qur'ān or in *du'ā'*.

Unlike other Mamlūk buildings, the interior of the mosque is lower than the street level. According to Chahinda Karīm, this is due to the gradual rise in the street level in the following centuries. The portal is also different in that it is not in the shape of a pointed arch; instead it is flat and recessed. (Fig. 5.8) Grouped stalactites descend from the top of the portal recalling stellar shapes (*aṭbāq najmiyyah*) which have at their centre a star shape which is in Arabic termed *tirs* (a pivot) - because from it, the rest of the geometrical shapes emerge.[2] The significance of such a composition is not interpreted in any historical handbook of Islamic art.

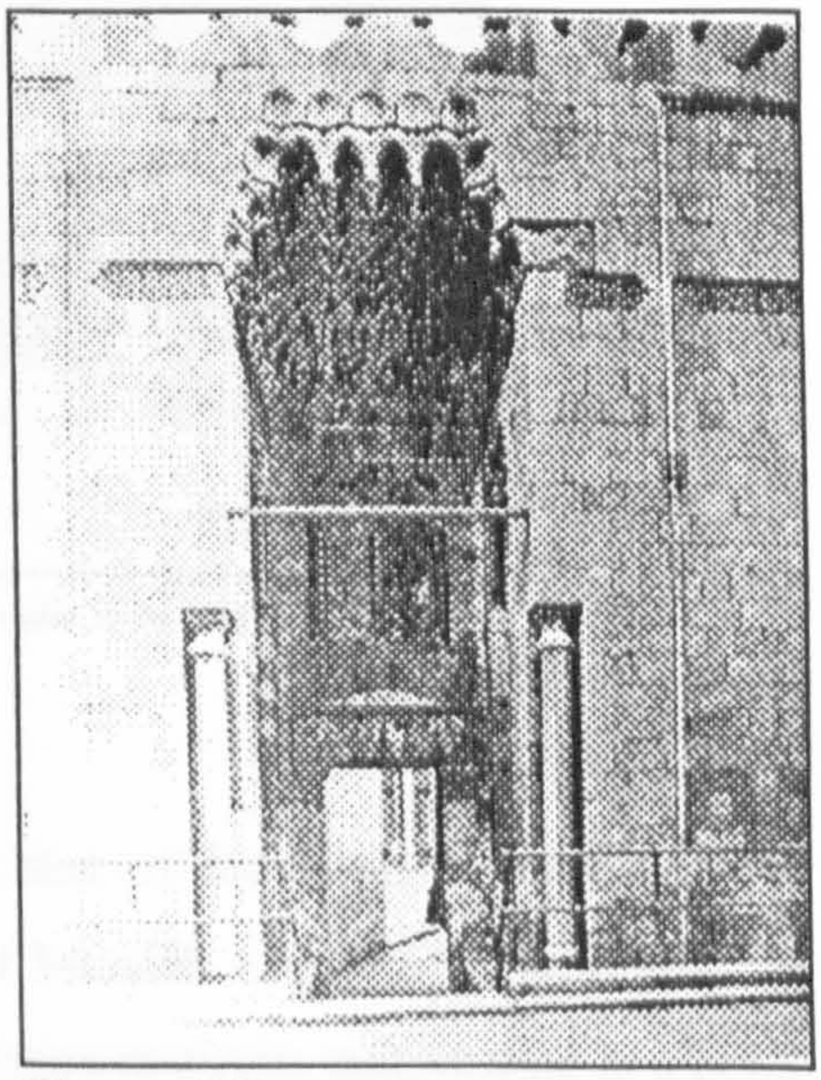


**Figure 5.8** The stalactite portal of Ulmās.

[1] See op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.176.

[2] op cit. Chahinda Karīm, 1979, p.49. We will see in Chapter Six, that this is a typical manifestation of Unity in multiplicity and multiplicity from Unity.

The interior of this hypostyle mosque is angled so that the correct orientation toward Makkah is established; that is to say that it is not on an axis with the line of the main façade, which is aligned with the street. Al-Maqrīzī says that most of the marble in this mosque was transported from "the islands of the sea" (*juzur al-biḥār* probably Greek islands), and from Syria and Turkey.[1] Because the column capitals and bases are diverse, it seems that they have been reused from old buildings. The arches used in the arcade are pointed and vary in size. Due to the small area of the mosque, the *riwāq* of prayer is equal in depth to two others (the northern and southern roofed arcades) and is not the largest of the four *riwāqs*; it houses a deep set *miḥrāb*. Chahinda Karīm mentions that an old photograph of the Mosque of Ulmās was found in the year 1902 A.D. which shows that the courtyard had a fountain which has been removed during one of the many restorations that have been made to this mosque.[2] She does not say what was the form of the fountain. (Fig. 5.9)

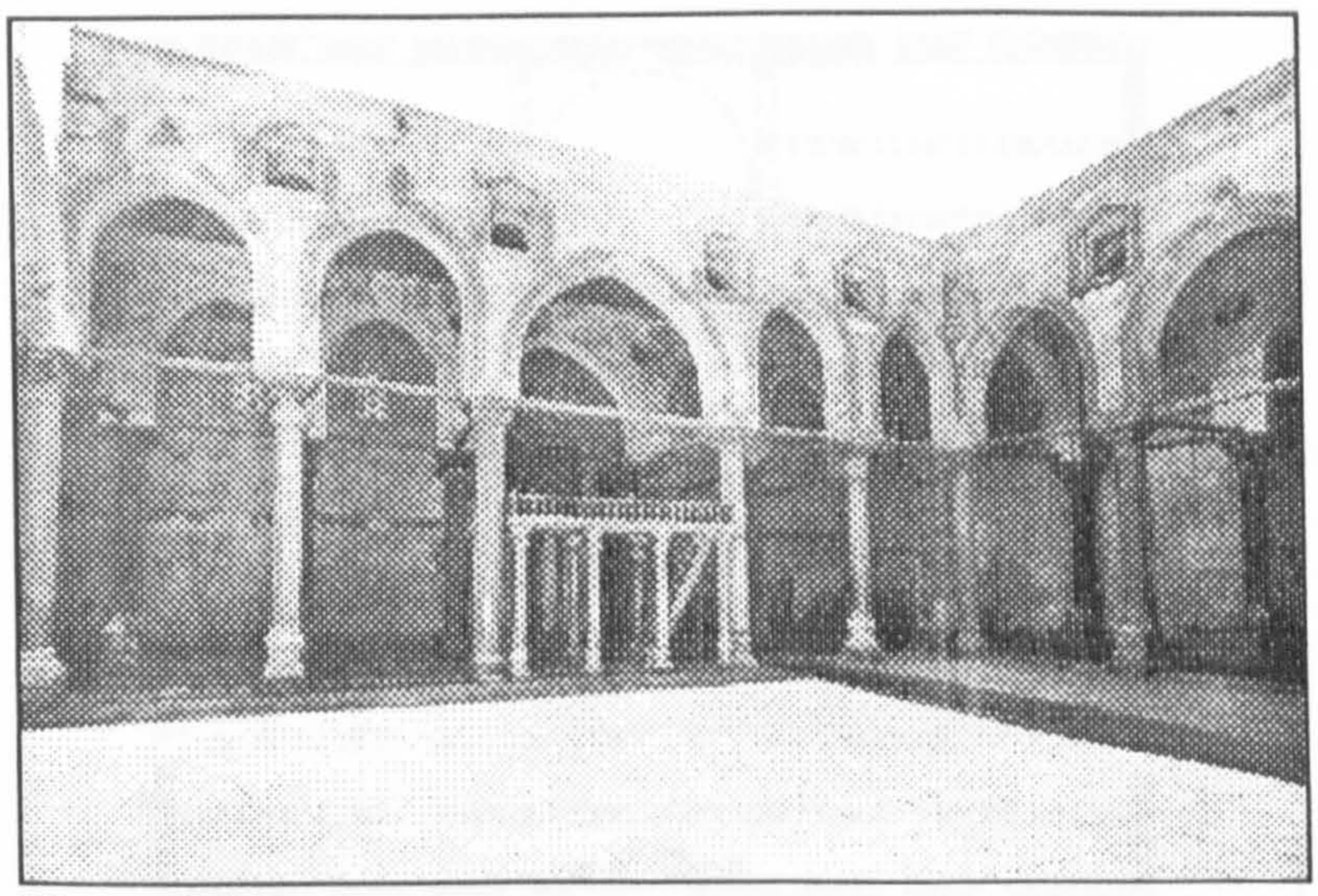


**Figure 5.9** The interior of the Mosque of Ulmās facing the *qibla riwāq*. Note the larger central colonnade leading to the *miḥrāb*. (Hautcoeur & Wiet)

The most prominent position in the mosque, that of the street intersection, was reserved for the mausoleum which is a characteristic of Mamlūk architecture. It follows the typical traditional change of sections from square to octagon to circle, culminating in a point. Internally the zone of transition from the square to the circle is by means of five rows of stalactites. Eight windows pierce the octagonal drum and eight others the dome itself. A second marble *miḥrāb* is located in the mausoleum which deviates from the *miḥrāb* in the

---

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiiat*, vol.2, p.307.

[2] op cit. Chahinda Karīm, 1979, p.40.

prayer area by thirty-three degrees[1]. The body of *Emīr* Seyf al-Dīn Ulmās is buried in a basement vault underneath this chamber.

As for the minaret, this lies on the main façade flanking the right side of the portal. The base is a square which is transformed into an octagon by means of four inverted triangles and is followed by a cylindrical third storey ending in a pointed domical top. According to Su'ād Māhir, this last section was restored by the Ottomans.[2] Neither she nor other historians suggest any interpretations to this transition of form commonly used in Mamlūk minarets.

Mosque of Sulṭān al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad at the Citadel: (No.143 on plan)

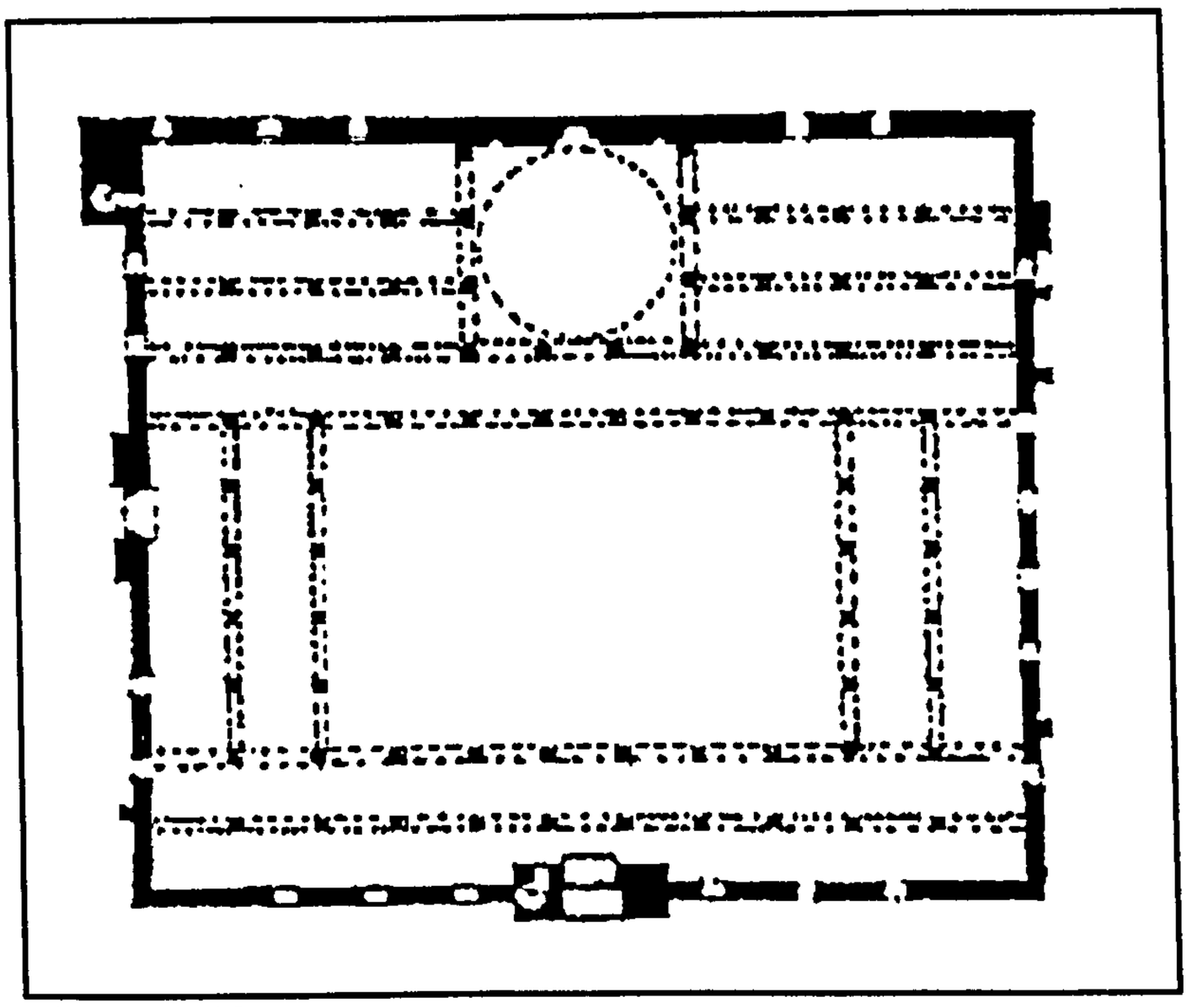


**Figure 5.10** Plan of the Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad at the Citadel. (Dept. of Antiquities)

The Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was one of Qalawūn's five sons. He ruled for a total of forty two years in three different stretches from 1293 to 1340 A.D. Being a man of courage and intellect, his reign marked the climax of Mamlūk culture and Islamic civilization in Egypt. Al-Nāṣir was an active builder, who also encouraged his *emīrs* to build and his reign is credited with over thirty mosques, *madrasas*, and *khanqahs*. He concentrated state power in the Citadel, making it the political, military, and administrative centre of the

---

[1] ibid., p.83.

[2] op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.179.

Mamlūk regime; however, this mosque is all that is left of his vast building program at the Citadel. The mosque which is large enough to hold 5000 worshippers, was the principal mosque of the Citadel. (Fig. 5.10)

There are three inscriptions in the Mosque of al-Nāṣir: one over the north entrance, one over the west entrance, and one composed of wooden letters nailed to planks of wood, the latter runs round the square base of the dome above the *miḥrāb*. These inscriptions have suffered in the lapse of the centuries, and the only surviving one is that of the west entrance and bears the date 718 A.H. Al-Maqrīzī[1] states that this mosque was built by Sulṭān Muḥammad in 718 A.H., but he adds that it was destroyed and rebuilt in 735 A.H. Traces of the original masonry of the mosque (fragments of the old crestings in the form of geometrical crenellations for example), show that during the second stage of construction the existing walls were heightened. According to Hautecoeur and Gaston Wiet, the semi-circular crestings that now exist are also not original and were added for defense purposes during British colonial times[2]. Al-Maqrīzī also says that the sulṭān increased the area of the building when he rebuilt it. But Creswell assumes that this destruction cannot have been complete because of the inscription which still exists over the west entrance.[3] (Fig. 5.11)

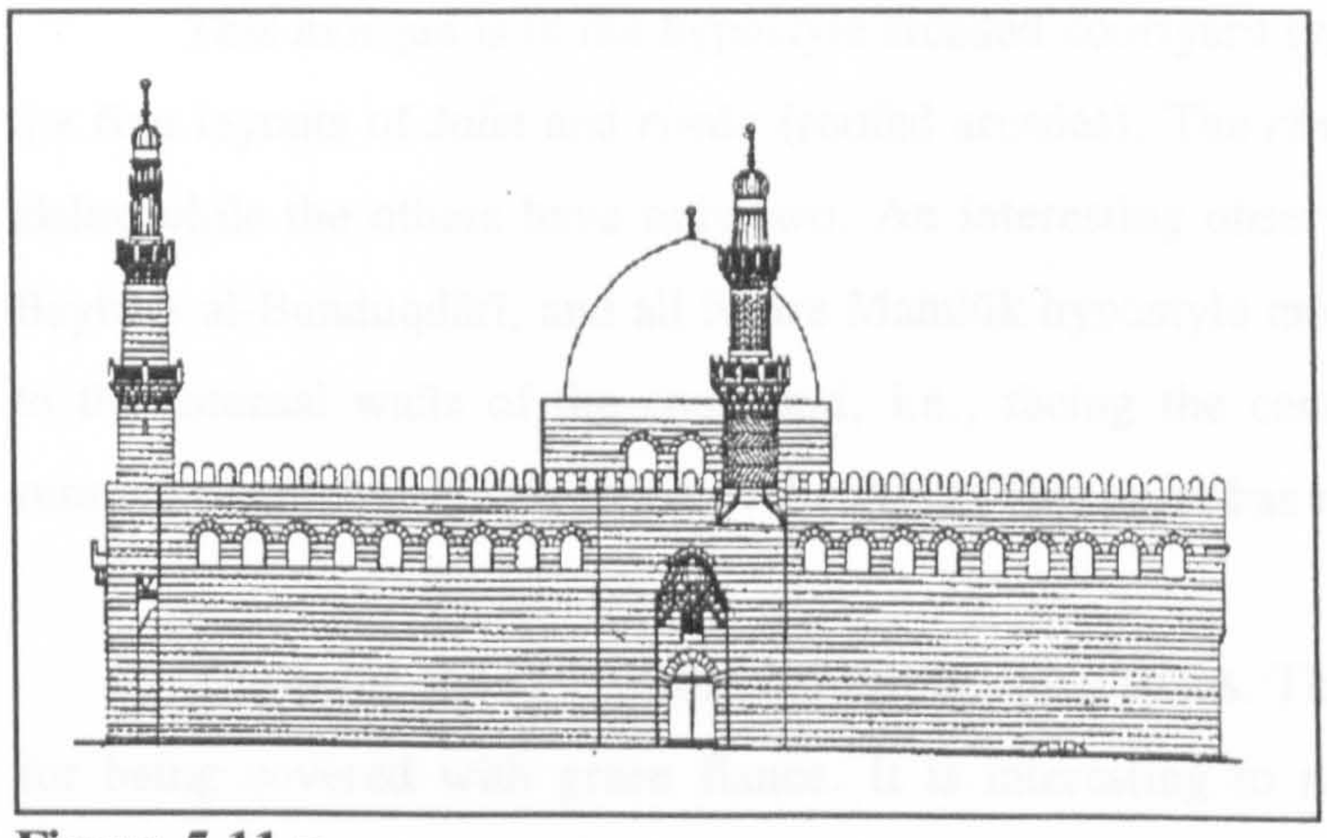


**Figure 5.11** The main façade of the Mosque of al-Nāṣir as it exists today after its walls were heightened. (Islamic Cities Organization)

**Figure 5.12** The stalactite main portal of the Mosque.

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, Pp. 212, 325.

[2] Hautecoeur & Gaston Wiet, *Les Mosquées du Caire*, Paris, 1932, vol.1, p.287.

[3] See K.A.C. Creswell, "A Brief Chronology of the Muhammadan Monuments of Egypt", Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archeologie Orientale, 1919, p.93.

There are two entrances to this mosque: the main entrance is a pointed recess outlined by a trefoil arch with stalactites and flanked on its right jamb by the main minaret. The western door is a smaller entrance and Su'ād Māhir suggests that it was probably used in the time of al-Nāśir to allow him to his *maqṣūra*[1]. (Fig. 5.13)

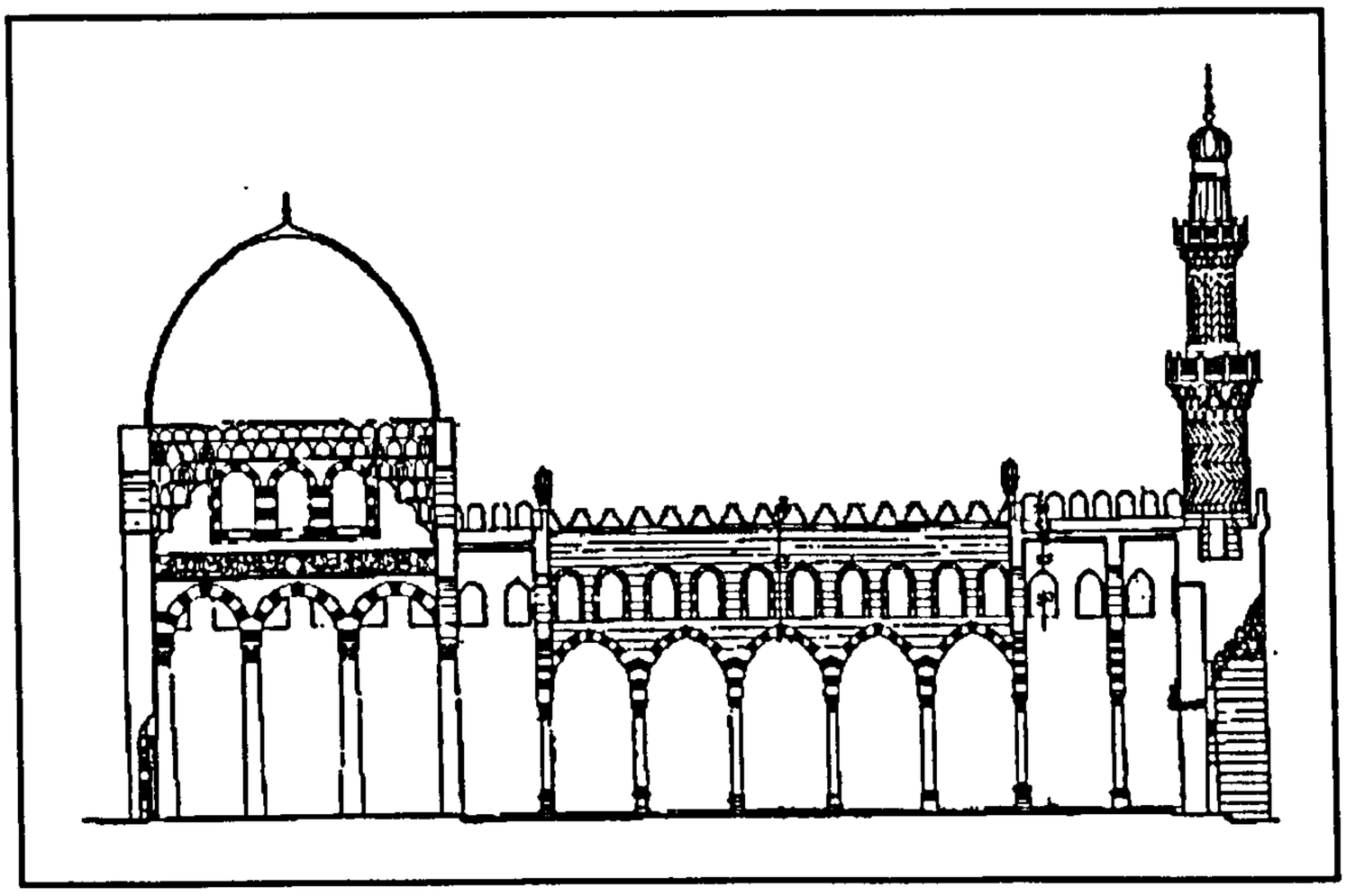


**Figure 5.13** Section of the Mosque of al-Nāśir showing the arcades facing the centre of the courtyard rather than the *qibla*. (Islamic Capitals Organization)

This mosque is in the hypostyle arcaded courtyard type, and considered to be among the first layouts of *ṣaḥn* and *riwāq* (roofed arcades). The *riwāq* of the *qibla* consists of four aisles while the others have only two. An interesting observation is that in the Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī, and all future Mamlūk hypostyle mosques, these *riwāqs* run parallel to the internal walls of the courtyard, i.e., facing the centre of the building, rather than running parallel to the direction of the *qibla*. This point has not been discussed by historians.

The dome above the *miḥrāb* occupies three spans. The exterior of the dome is famous for being covered with green fiance. It is interesting to note that a dome was known in Mamlūk times as a *qubba khaḍrā*[2] (literally a "green dome", but we will see in Chapter Eight that in the traditional sense it denoted the "dome of the heavens"). The dome itself is pointed and carried on five rows of stalactites that transform the square base of the dome to an octagon. A band of epigraphy beneath the springing point of the stalactites bears Qur'ānic verses that relate to prayer and to the virtue of those who build mosques. (Fig. 5.14)

---

[1] op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.136.

[2] ibid., vol.3, p.138.

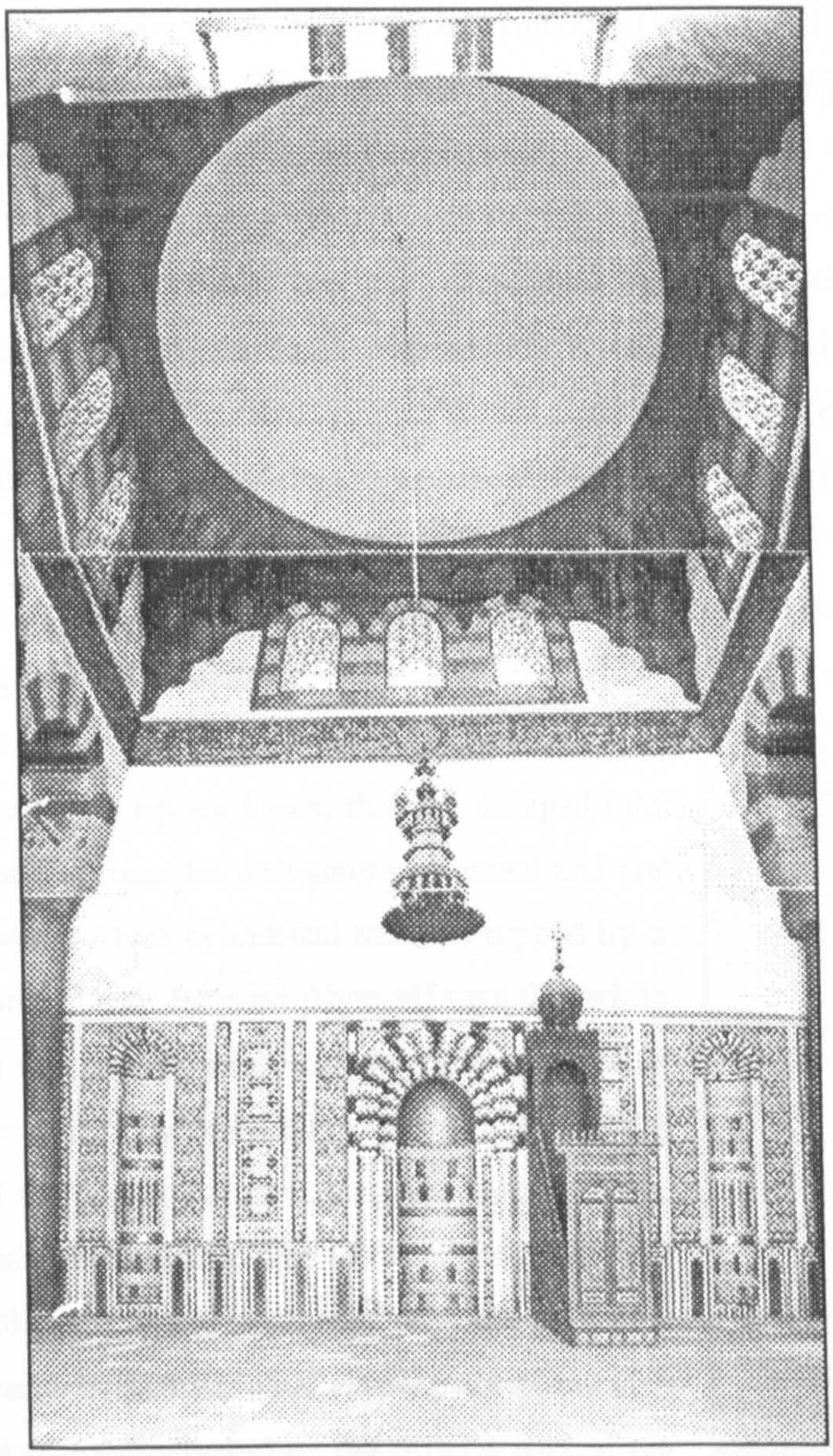


**Figure 5.14** The internal organization and zone of transition of the dome above the *miḥrāb* in the Mosque of al-Nāṣir.

The *miḥrāb* itself was restored several times, firstly by the Ṣulṭān Qaytbāy and secondly by the Ministry of Antiquities, so that one cannot know for sure if the surviving *miḥrāb* has any of the original's form or decoration. The pulpit (*minbar*) is a modern addition made by Lajnat Ḥifḍh al-'Āthār in 1949. On the whole, the interior of the mosque as it is today, appears to be unusually austere and plain; this is because the Ottoman Sulṭān Selīm (known as "The Grim") carried off to Istanbūl all of its marble panelling.

The arches that are used in this mosque are pointed and slightly horse-shoe shaped. The columns of the *maqṣūra* have been reused from ancient Egyptian temples as indicated by their capitals and bases. Su'ād Māhir quotes Ibn al-Dāwadārī in "*Kanz al-Durar*" that the

sulṭān had ordered these columns to be removed from the temples and to be transported during the flood of the Nile up to Cairo. He mentions that thousands of people had to pull them until they were brought to their final destination.[1]

The ceiling of this mosque has been described by several historians as being extremely ornate, covered with gold leaf[2]. Major C.M. Watson described the ceiling of this mosque as especially worthy of notice, saying: "*It was painted in bright colours, with much gilding, and ostrich eggs are fixed in the spaces between the corners of the hexagonal panels.*"[3] this is a departure from the *Sunna* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) - which was discussed in Chapter Four - who distinctly ordered Muslims not to ornament their mosques excessively.

The minarets have square bases, that are changed into an octagon by means of triangles obliquely positioned and are immediately followed by two cylindrical sections topped by a bulbous pointed finial. Doris Behrens-Abouseif says that while the location of the western minaret, near the main entrance of the mosque, is normal, the location of the other minaret on the northern corner of the prayer hall needs explanation. She says that the Citadel had been the residence of the sulṭāns since the end of the Ayyubid period and contained not only this new mosque with the barracks of the Mamlūks to the north, but also various residential structures including the official part of the royal complexes to the south. The western entrance of the mosque was the ceremonial one used by the sulṭān coming from his apartments, while the northern one faced the dwellings of the Mamlūks and served as a public entrance. The western minaret addressed the prayer call to the inhabitants of the royal apartments, from which it was quite visible, while the northern

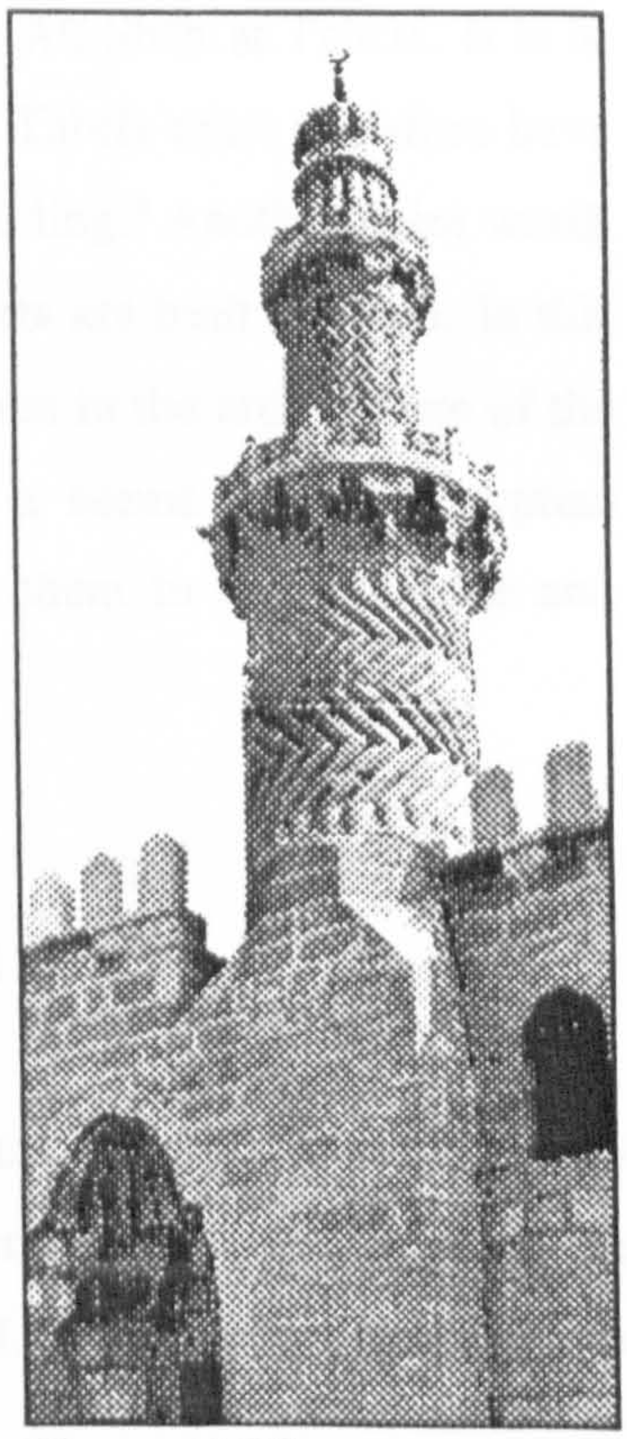


**Figure 5.15** The minaret placed to the right of the main portal entrance.

---

[1] ibid., vol.3, p.132, quoting al-Dāwadārī, *Kanz al-Durar*, vol.9, p.383.

[2] See Abul 'Abbās Aḥmad al-Qalqashandī (14th C.), *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā fī Ṣinā'at al-Inshā*, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, n.d., reprinted in Cairo, 1918, vol.3, p.375.

[3] See Major C.M. Watson, The Mosque of Sultan Nasir Mohammad Ebn Kalaoun In the Citadel of Cairo, Cairo, 1931, p.6.

minaret was close to the ears of the more public quarters. The northern minaret in addition to being higher than the western one, has a feature that allows its blue faience decoration to shine against the sky and be seen from the royal apartments, despite the distance and angle of vision.[1] This might suggest that the minaret acted as an external landmark to the mosque.

These two minarets, differ from others of this period in two ways: contrary to all Mamlūk examples, their bases are below the present roof level of the mosque. This is because they were built in the 718 A.H. stage of construction - before the walls were made higher. (See Fig. 5.15) Second, they have fluted bulbous ends and glazed faience decoration on their sides. This was a time of friendly relations between the Mongols of Persia and the Mamluks[2]; one result of this was that the ambassador to the court of Abu Sa'īd returned to Egypt, brought with him a craftsman who is said to have built two minarets for the mosque of *Emīr* Qūṣūn on the pattern of the minarets of the Mosque of 'Alī Shāh at Tabrīz. It is in the opinion of Doris Behrens-Abouseif that this craftsman from Tabrīz must therefore have been given the opportunity to apply his talents to the sulṭān's building.[3] Another point worth mentioning is that, unlike the Iranian minarets, al-Nasir's minarets are built in stone. In this context one should ask how far involved the Tabrīzi craftsman was in the architecture of the two minarets, apart from designing their faience decoration. It seems that the Egyptian masons had the ability to adopt new patterns while executing them in the technique and materials they were familiar with.

Mosque of Alṭinbugha al-Māridānī: (No.120 on plan)

Alṭinbugha al-Māridānī started his career as a cup-bearer (*sāqī*) and ended as the governor of Aleppo. Judging by his name he must have been originally owned by a person who came from Mardīn in Turkey - hence his name al-Māridānī. This *emīr* also married the daughter of Ṣulṭān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.[4]

---

[1] Doris Behrens-Abouseif, The Minarets of Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 1985 (a), p.80.

[2] Richard B. Parker et al., Islamic Monuments in Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 1985, Pp. 240-241. Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad had established diplomatic relations with the Mongol court of Iran and was married to a Mongol princess.

[3] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1985(a), p.78.

[4] op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.233.

The mosque is located in al-Tibbānah Street in al-Ḍarb al-Aḥmar. The plan resembles to a large degree that of the mosque built by Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad at the Citadel. We mentioned earlier in this section that ample documentation attests to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's great interest in building, not only his own foundations, but also to his frequent encouragement of his *emīrs* to build for themselves. He sent them official contributions of various kinds: marble, wood, workmen, builders or architects. This is particularly true in the case of this mosque, for not only was marble and wood provided out of the private allowance of the sulṭān, but as a special mark of favour the chief architect of the court *mu'allim* Ibn al-Suyūfī, was sent to lay out the mosque and to build the minaret.[1] (Fig. 5.16)

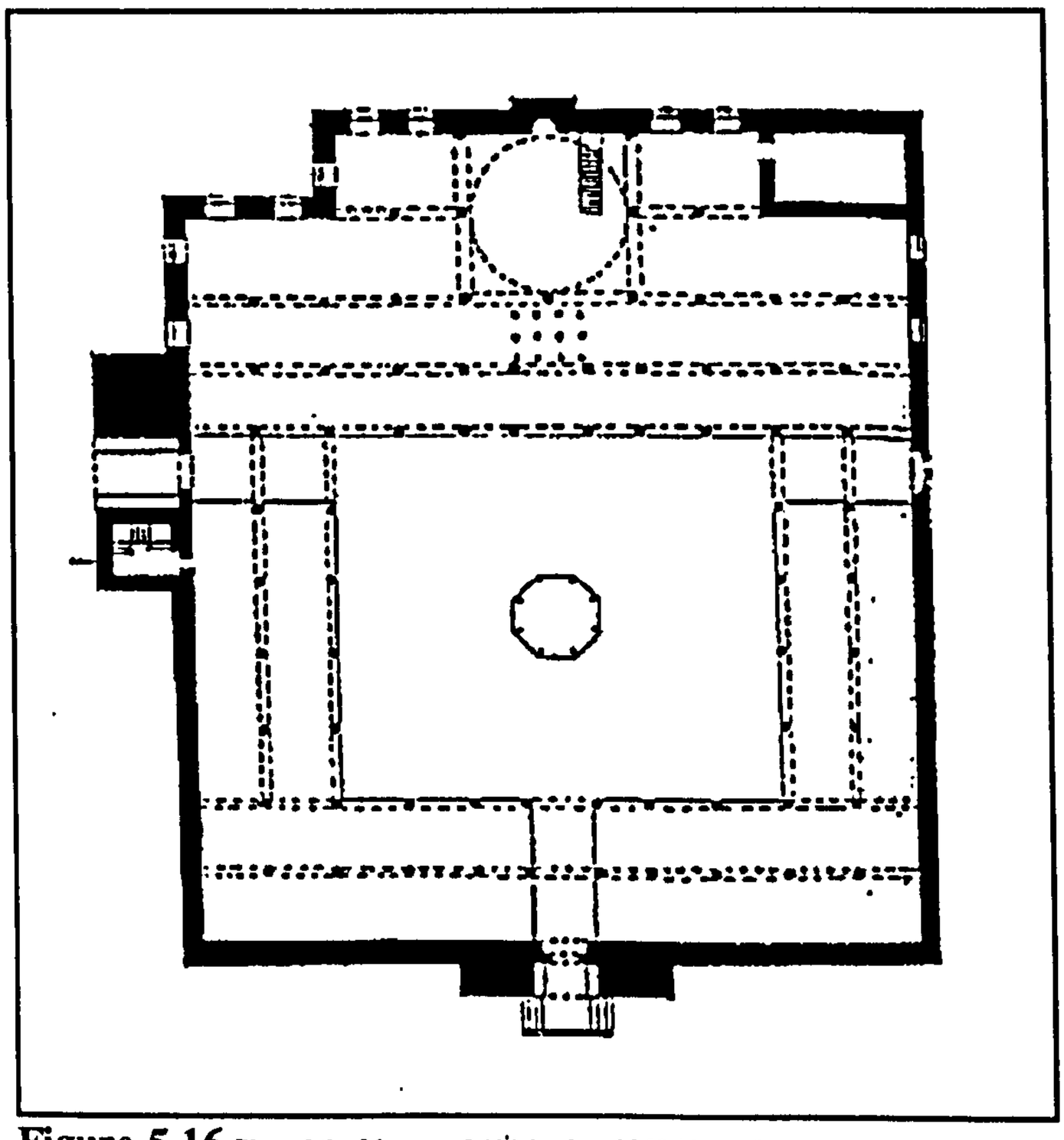


**Figure 5.16** Plan of the Mosque of Aṭ̈inbugha al-Māridānī. (Dept. of Antiquities)

An inscription in the bay of the west entrance, over the door, states that it was founded in (739 A.H., 1339 A.D.). Another inscription above the window over the door, states that it was finished in (740 A.H., 1340 A.D.). According to al-Maqrīzī, it was inaugurated on Friday the 24th in the month of Ramaḍān that year.[2]

---

[1] op cit. Parker et al., 1985, Pp. 110-111.

[2] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 2, p.308.

**Figure 5.17** The pointed vaulted main portal of the Mosque of al-Māridānī.

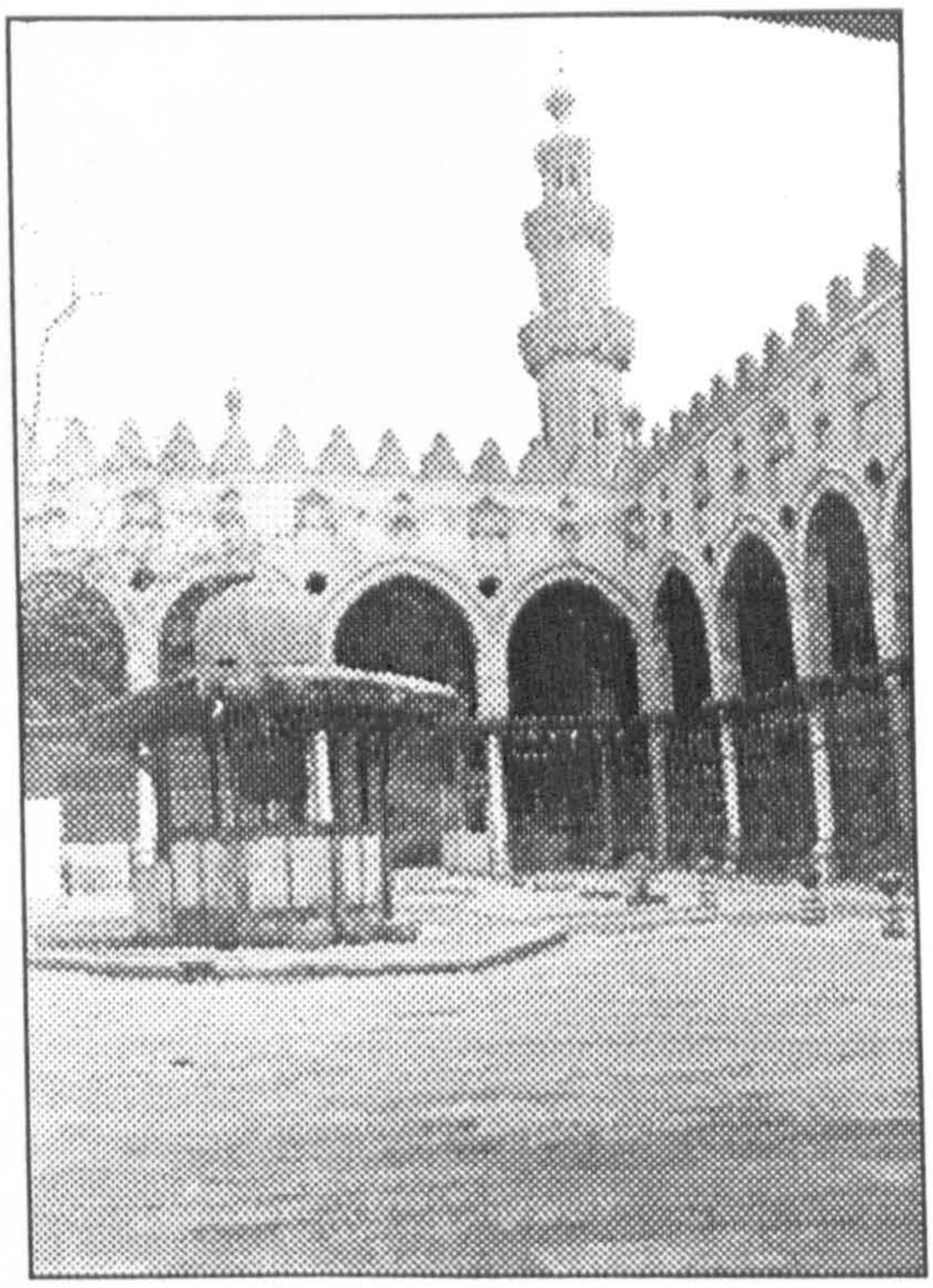


**Figure 5.18** The eight-columned domed pavilion located at the centre of the courtyard.

The Mosque of al-Māridānī is considered to be one of Cairo's most spectacular hypostyle mosques. Three entrances lead to the central courtyard. The main portal is a pointed vault. (Fig. 5.17) The centre of the courtyard has an octagonal water fountain roofed by a dome carried on eight columns. (Fig. 5.18) According to Doris Behrens-Abouseif this fountain was not part of the original design, but a later addition - she does not tell when it was constructed.[1] The rectangular *ṣaḥn* is surrounded by four *riwāqs*, the largest of which being that of the *qibla* (four bays while the other three consist of two bays). The *qibla riwāq* is separated from the rest of the mosque by a *mashrabiyya*[2] screen. Because fine quality wood was scarce in Cairo and therefore prized, it was used primarily for decoration. (Fig. 5.19) This screen belongs to the earliest period of *mashrabiyya* work; Behrens-Abouseif says that it resembles to a great extent that of the earlier mausoleum *mashrabiyya* work in the complex of Qalāwūn[3] - which will be examined in section 5.1.2.

---

[1] Doris Behrens-Abouseif, Islamic Architecture in Cairo: An Introduction, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1989, p.115.

[2] *Mashrabiyya* work is an Islamic craft which was stimulated in Egypt by the shortage of fine wood for panelling. The basic principle is straightforward: a lattice is constructed of turned oval shapes joined together by short turned and ribbed links. The different types of *mashrabiyya* depends upon the size of the wood that is turned.

[3] ibid., p.114.

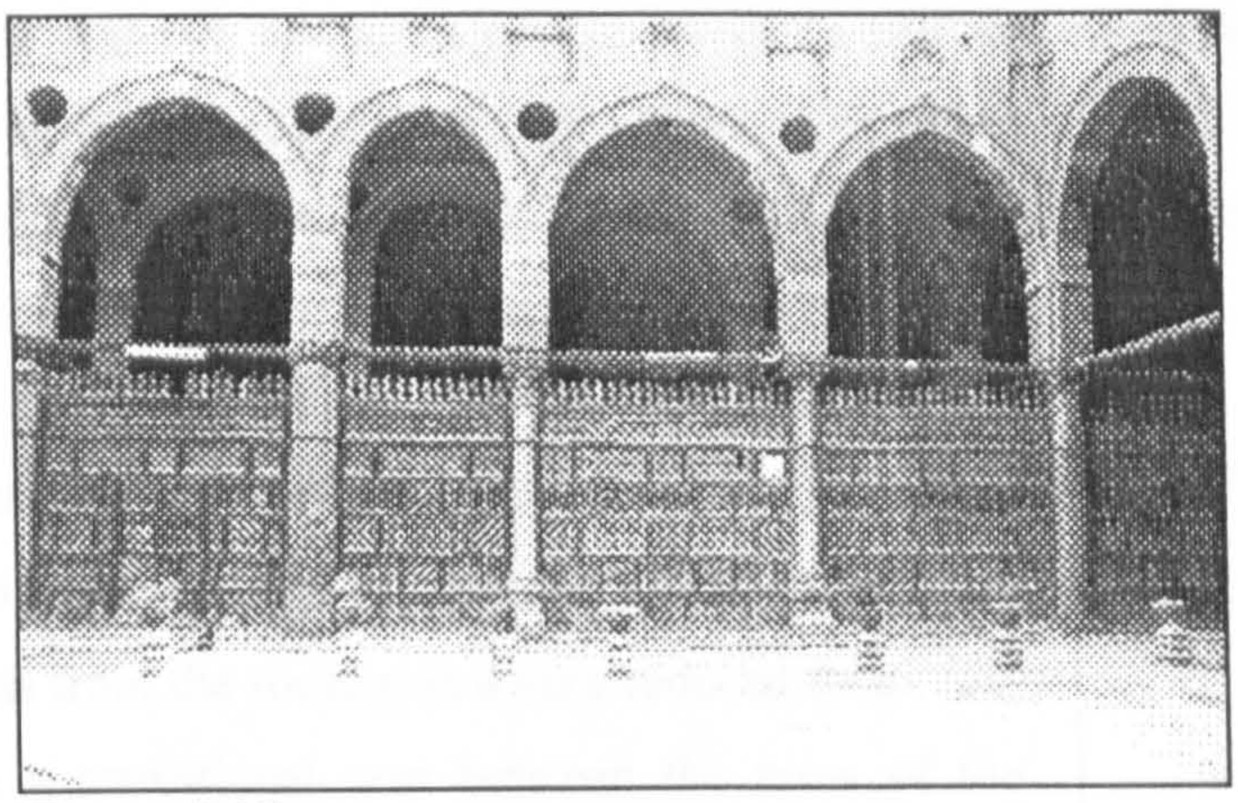


**Figure 5.19** The *mashrabiyya* screen separating the *qibla riwāq* from the court.

In front of the *miḥrāb* there is a *maqṣūra* domed area consisting three bays by three bays. Its arches are supported by eight red granite Pharaonic columns, and resembles to a great extent that of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's Mosque at the Citadel. The *miḥrāb* has a pointed semi-dome top decorated by radiating patterns of marble. (Fig. 5.20) The pendentives of the dome as well as the inscriptions in the interior are all made of painted and gilded wood[1]. Al-Maqrīzī notes that the columns that were used in this mosque were originally used in the Mosque of Rashīd (Rosetta)[2]. This indicates that the reuse of materials did not discriminate between Islamic and other sources.

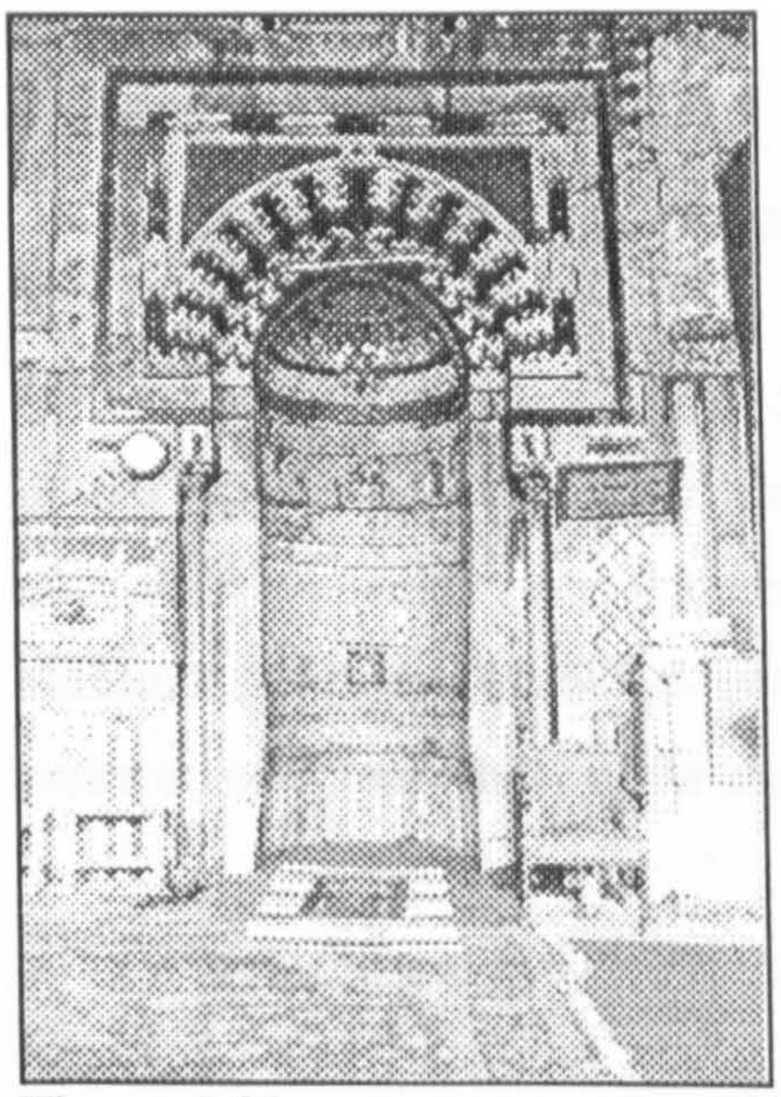


**Figure 5.20** The *miḥrāb* of the Mosque of al-Māridānī.

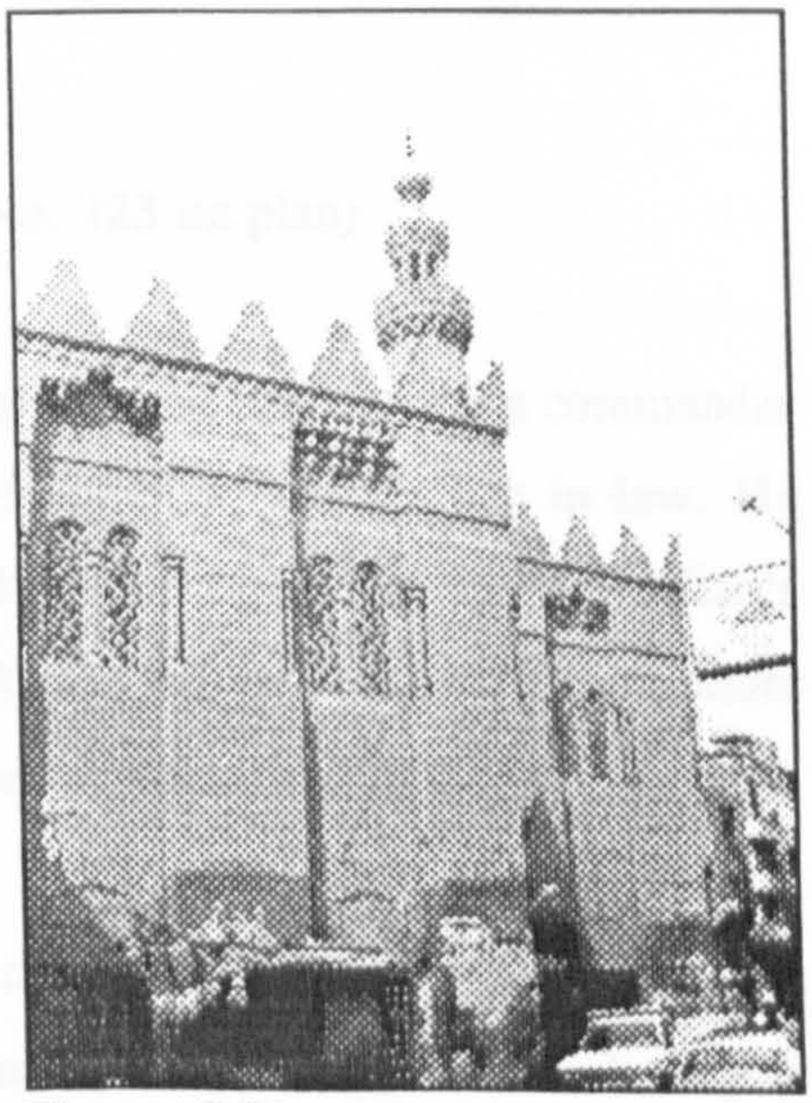


**Figure 5.21** External recessed window panels with stalactite formations.

---

[1] ibid., p.114.

[2] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 2, p.308.

The façade follows the curve of the street so that the discrepancy between the orientation towards Makkah and the street alignment is taken care of by the "stepped" arrangement of the exterior. The façade is divided into shallow panels with stalactite hoods, with two windows in each panelled recess. (Fig. 5.21)

The minaret, next to the entrance, shows new elements that set the model for the design of future minarets. The square shaft stage projects from the rooftop in a very reduced form, and is no more than a transitional area between the mass of the mosque and the minaret - whereas the octagonal section was the one that was reduced in the Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. Two octagonal sections follow that. The *mabkhara* end (literally "incense burner" because it resembles its shape) is eliminated, and is replaced by a small dome supported on eight slender columns - sometimes referred to as a pavilion, serving as the final stage. It is the first instance of this type of minaret top which became the distinguishing mark of Mamlūk minarets in the following period.[1] (Fig. 5.22)

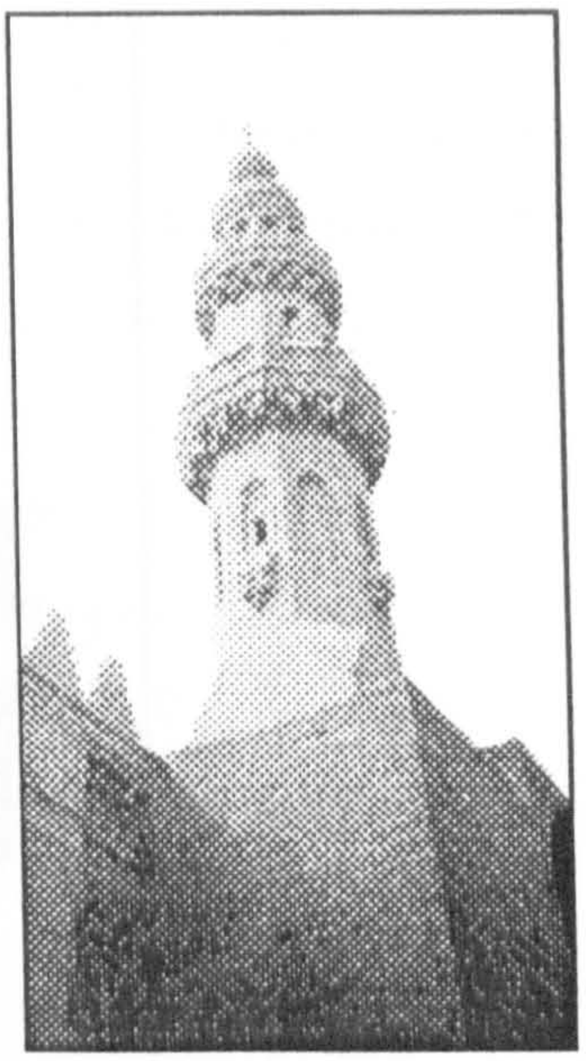


**Figure 5.22** The minaret of al-Māridānī.

**Mosque of *Emīr* Āqsunqur (Blue Mosque):** (No. 123 on plan)

Shams al-Dīn Āqsunqur al-Nāṣirī, an *emīr* of one hundred soldiers and a commander of one thousand, was al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's master of the hunt, and his son in law. He changed his position several times until he became the one responsible for the sulṭān's construction projects (*shādd al-'amā'ir al-sulṭāniyyiyyah*). He was one of the most important *emīrs* at court, especially under the ephemeral successors of Sulṭān al-Nāṣir.[2]

According to two inscriptions, this mosque was commenced on the (16th of Ramaḍān 747 A.H., 31st December 1346 A.D.), and worship was first celebrated there on Friday (3 Rabī' I 748 A.H., 13th June 1347 A.D.). The mosque was restored and largely rebuilt in the interior by Ibrāhīm Agha Mostaḥfaḍhān in (1062 A.H., 1652 A.D.) who added the blue tiles -

---

[1] op.cit. Parker et.al., 1985, p.108.

[2] For a more detailed history of *Emīr* Āqsunqur, see op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol. 3, p.235.

which were either imported from Istanbūl or from Damascus and gave the mosque its third name, *al-Jāmi' al-Azraq* (the Blue Mosque). (Fig. 5.23)

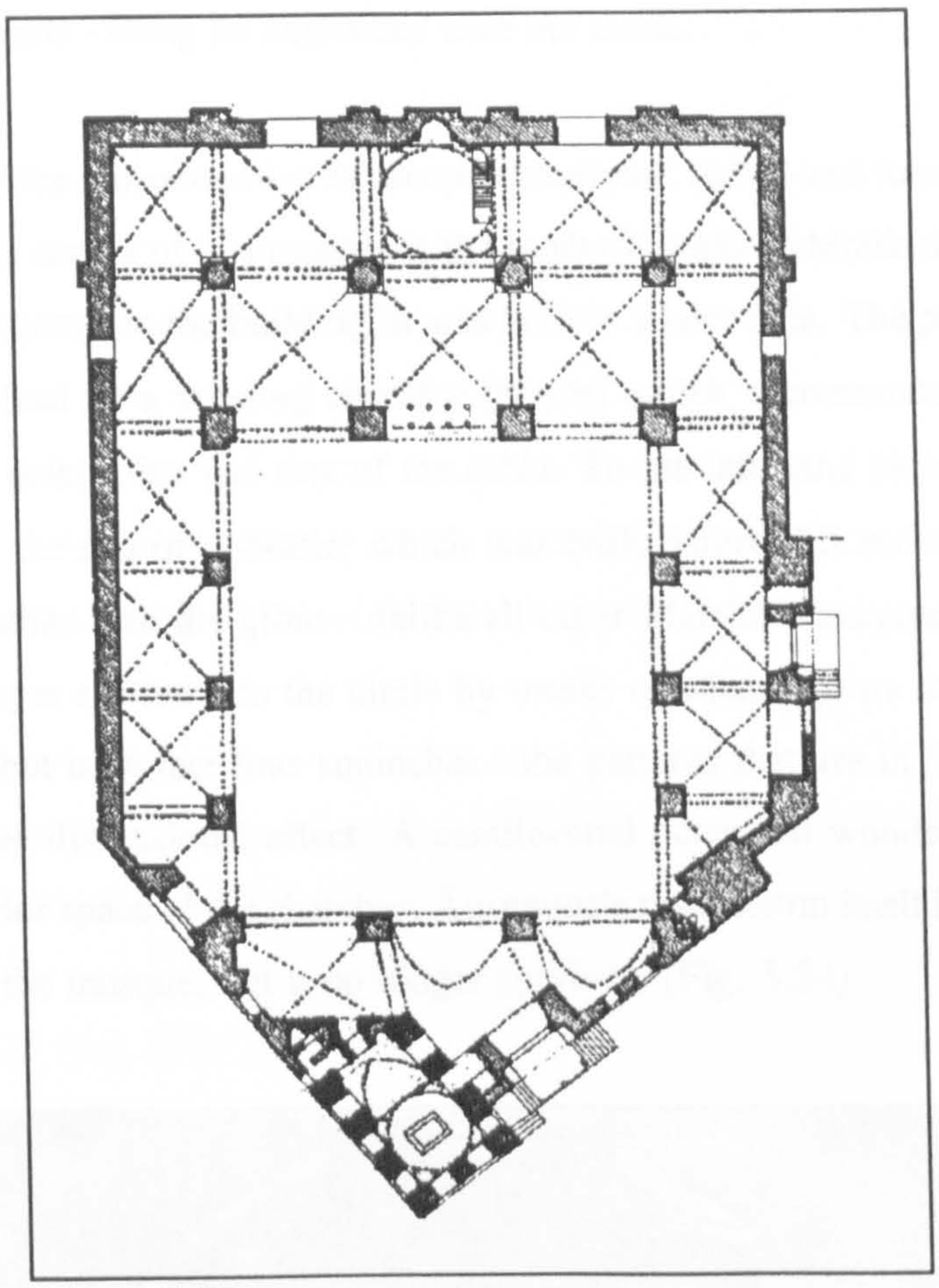


**Figure 5.23** Plan of the Mosque of Āqsunqur. (After Meinecke)

Creswell's opinion[1] is that the external walls are original save the east wall which is attributed to the Ottoman period. Furthermore, he adds that the interior appears to have been slightly changed and hypothesizes a reconstructed interior space. Al-Maqrīzī confirms that the interior was vaulted by saying: "... *this building was constructed by the Emīr Aqsunqur al-Nāṣirī from stone and made his roofing in the form of stone vaults*"[2]. Ibrahim Agha apparently, when reconstructing this mosque, did not follow the original divisions and spacings between the columns so as to provide for space for his mausoleum, yet, the dome over the *miḥrāb* seems to be original as it is similar to others of the same period.[3]

---

[1] op cit. Creswell, 1919, p.103.

[2] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, p.309.

[3] The Mosque of *Emīr* Tankīzbugha, (764 A.H., 1362 A.D.) and the two mausolea of Sulṭān Sha'ban's *Madrasa*, (770 A.H., 1368-9 A.D.).

Al-Maqrīzī adds that *Emīr* Āqsunqur, the original founder, was very concerned with the construction of this mosque to the extent that he participated in its construction himself as an act of piety: "*...he even used to carry the soil with the builders with his hands and used to be late for his lunch - being so engrossed with the work...*"[1].

The plan of the mosque is that of an open courtyard (*ṣaḥn*) and four *riwāqs*. Attached to the north-western corner of this mosque is the tomb of Sulṭān al Malik al-Ashraf; although seemingly well integrated to the building, it was built in a later date. The pointed vault portal and entrance hall lead to a winding corridor (*majāz*) which accommodates the difference between the street orientation and that of the *qibla*. To the left hand side of the entrance is the mausoleum of the son of al-Nāṣir, which was built before this mosque, it follows the street alignment rather than the *qibla* - unlike all other Mamlūk mosques.[2] The mausoleum is square and changes section into the circle by means of what appears at first sight to be a row of stalactites but is in fact four squinches - the patterns that are in high relief give the sensation of a three dimensional effect. A cantilevered octagonal wooden frame is seen to project in the interior space of the chamber. Āqsunqur's mausoleum itself is said to have been in the precinct of the mosque, but it no longer survives. (Fig. 5.24)

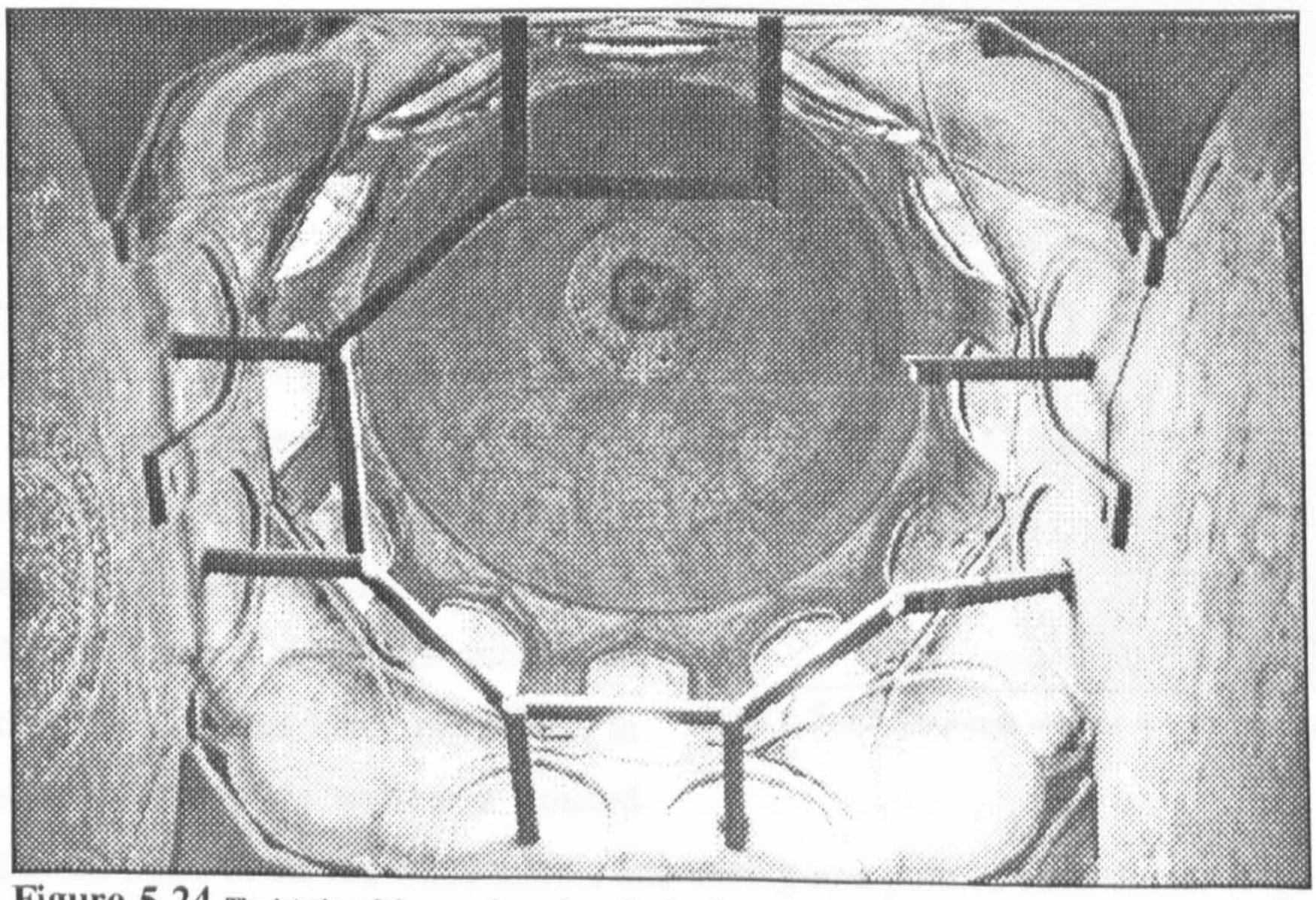


**Figure 5.24** The interior of the mausoleum dome showing the octagonal wooden frame.

---

[1] ibid., vol.2, p.309.

[2] op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.237. There is no explanation for this.

Al-Maqrīzī tells us that in (815 A.H., 1412-3 A.D.) the *Emīr* Tūghān al-Dawādār constructed an octagonal water fountain in the centre of the courtyard roofed by a dome on pillars - this fountain also no longer survives. He says: "*in its centre, emīr Tūghān al-Dawādār, constructed a water pond (birkat mā') and roofed it and put marble columns to it which he acquired from the Mosque of al-Khandaq.*"[1] Su'ād Māhir, a contemporary Islamic art-historian, writes that *Emīr* Tūghān, "*had constructed a water fountain for ablutions (fasqiyyah lil-wuḍū').*" This is a typical misinterpretation, casually made by historians based on preconceived utilitarian ideas related to elements in Islamic buildings. Al-Maqrīzī's description does not say that the fountain was to be used for ablutions, it simply describes the construction of a fountain and the marble columns that were acquired to roof it. We will see in Chapter Eight that the symbolism of the water fountain in Mamlūk times had a spiritual function, based on a cosmological model that was derived from Qur'ānic verses and from Ṡūfī *ḥadīth* literature.

The *riwāq* of the *qibla* is not roofed as all other Mamlūk buildings are by wooden beams, instead, it is cross vaulted. Michael Meinecke tells us[2] that this is a typical Syrian influence that Āqsunqur had picked while he was appointed governor of Tripoli. The piers are also of a unique form never to be repeated again in Egypt: they are octagonal and are transformed by means of triangular transitions to a square at the point where they meet the ground. A dome above the *miḥrāb* bay is also atypical as the square base is transformed to an octagon and then to a circle by means of squinches rather than stalactites. On the other hand, the *miḥrāb* in the centre of the *qibla* wall is a pointed arched niche made of carved white marble and ending in a pointed semi-dome. (Fig. 5.25)

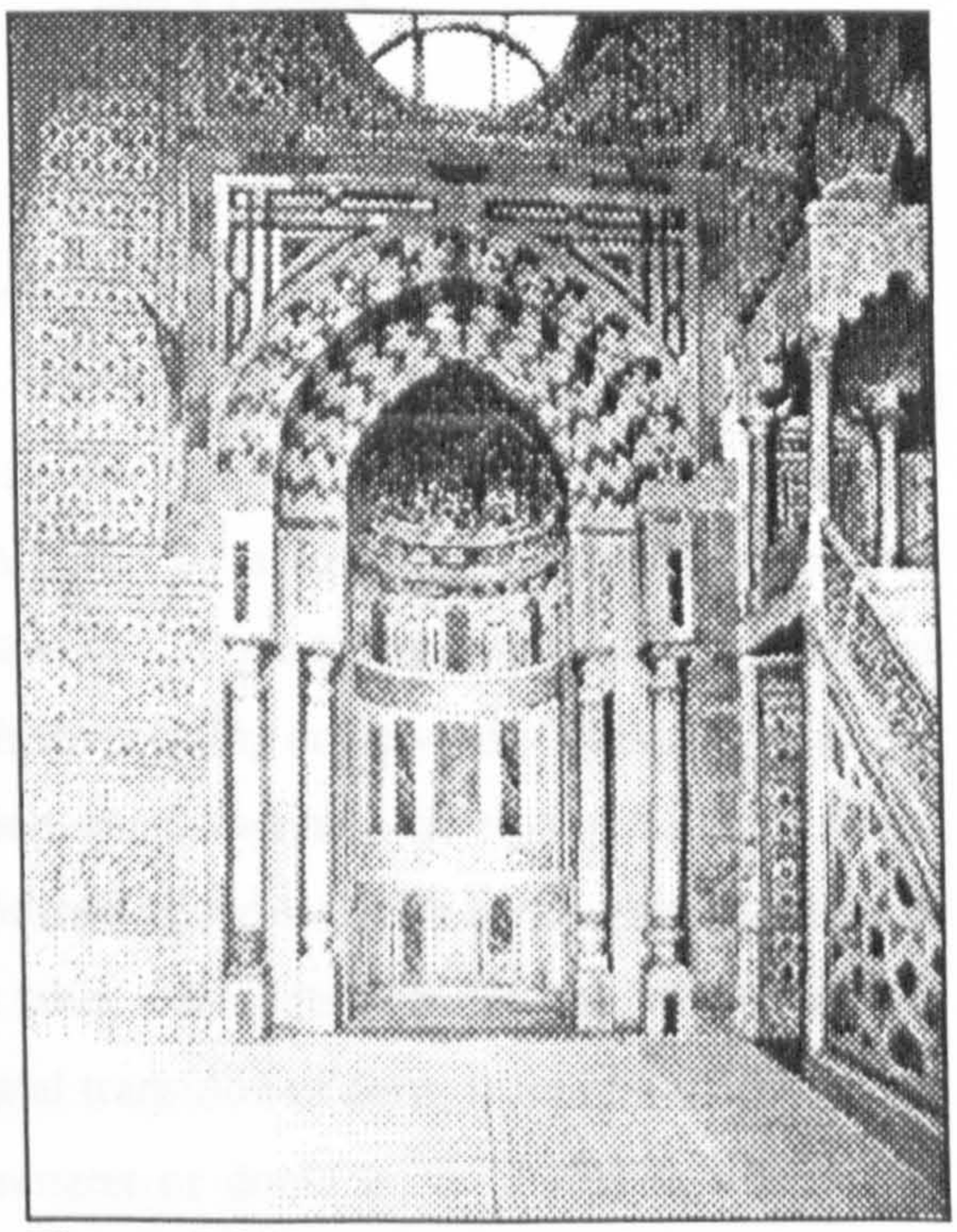


**Figure 5.25** The pointed *miḥrāb* at the centre of the *qibla* wall.

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khitat*, vol.2, p.310.

[2] See Michael Meinecke, "Die Moschee des Amirs Āqsunqur an-Nāṡirī in Kairo", Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo, Band 29, 1, Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, Mainz, 1973, Pp. 9-10.

The minaret of the Mosque of Āqsunqur is one of the most impressive Cairene minarets in shape, proportions and placement. It is not located at the portal, but at a more strategic location, the southern corner, projecting into the street and thus dominating the southern part of the building, and acting as a landmark. (Fig. 5.26) By examining drawings made by prominent nineteenth-century illustrators of Cairo, such as David Roberts, and Pascale Coste, we find that this minaret consists of four stories instead of the existing three[1]. Doris Behrens-Abouseif says: "*the first story is circular and plain, the second circular and ribbed, the third was octagonal, and the fourth is composed of the usual pavilion of eight columns supporting a bulb...*"[2].

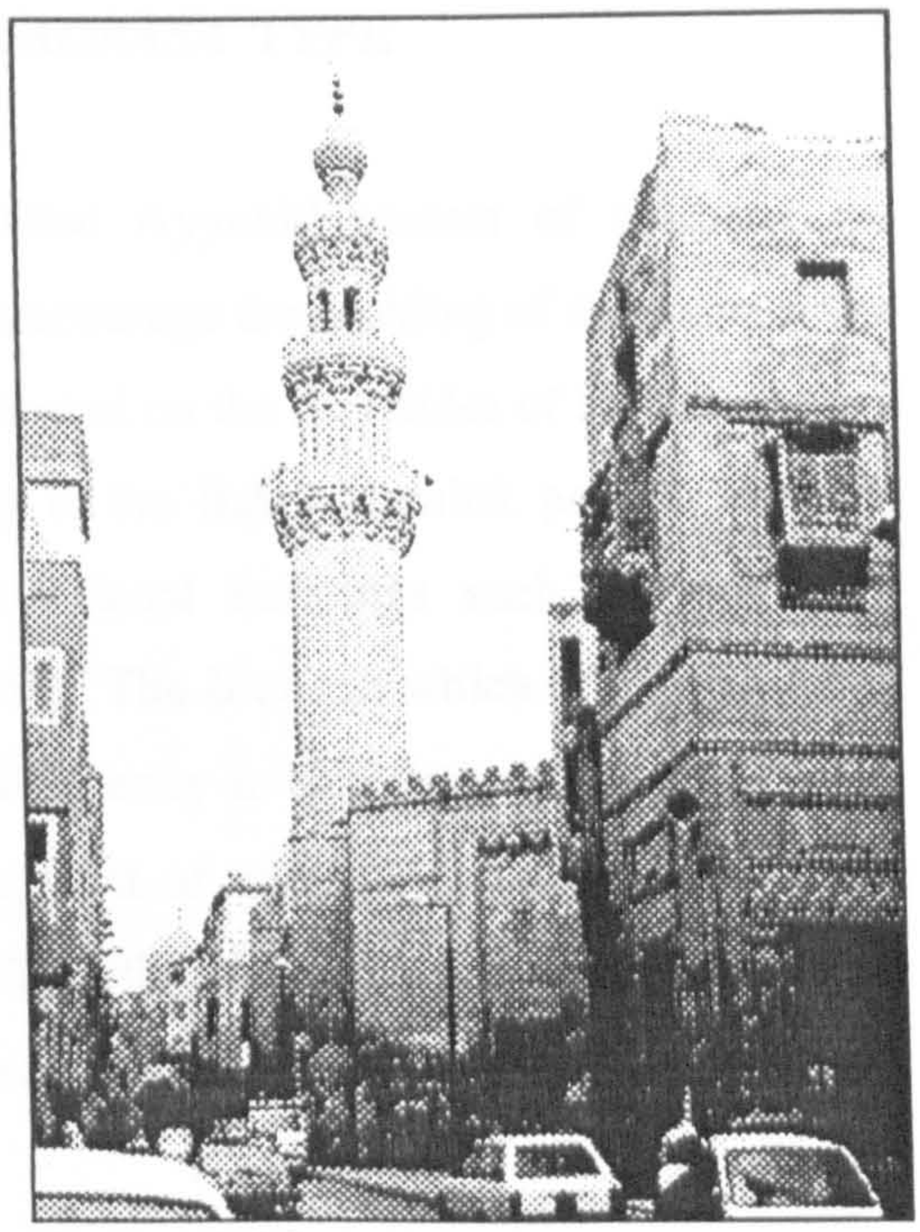


**Figure 5.26** The minaret of the Mosque of Āqsunqur acting as a landmark.

This description would make this minaret a unique case in that it has no square base, and that in this case the usual transition from square to octagon to circle followed by the Mamlūks was not respected. But in fact, on close observation, it is evident that there are two reduced sections at the base of the minaret that start by a square, followed by a reduced section of an octagon - the transition is by means of oblique triangles placed at the corners of the square with their base at the top and their tip pointing downwards. These two reduced sections are then followed by the circular section, the octagonal, the eight pillared pavilion, and finally by the bulbous top that Behrens-Abouseif describes. The notion that a section of a minaret is considered to be one only when it takes a considerable elongation is misleading and gives a distorted description of the sequential transition of form from one section to the other. No matter how small a section of a minaret or dome is, it is vital to take it into consideration. In the coming chapters - Seven, Eight, Nine, and Ten - we will be analysing the qualitative aspects of form and geometry as well as the symbolisms of each of the elements that constitute a Mamlūk religious building.

---

[1] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1985(a), p.88.

[2] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.115.

### 5.1.2 THE *MADRASA* AND MOSQUE/*MADRASA* TYPE

The Mamlūk period, following the inherited Ayyubid system of ensuring the continuity of *Sunnī* practice in Egypt, continued to encourage the building of *madrasas*. The typical arrangement was that of four *iwāns* axially located on the four sides of a quadrangular central courtyard. There were numerous *madrasas* in the Baḥrī Mamlūk period, some of which were complexes which included other functional buildings such as a hospital (*māristān*), a fountain (*sabīl*), or a mausoleum (*ḍarīḥ*). The *khanqah* which to a great extent resembles the *madrasa* in its form is categorized differently in this chapter according to its emphasized Ṣūfī function. Furthermore, from the point of view of form, the *khanqah* is different from the *madrasa* in its incorporation of Ṣūfī cells (*khalwāt*), as well as a *qā'a* (hall) for *ḥuḍūr* - both related to Ṣūfī practises as discussed in Chapter Two.

<u>Complex of Sulṭān Qalāwūn:</u> (No.43 on plan)

The Sultan Qalāwūn was a Tartar from the Qipchaq region of the lower Volga. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī was the first importer of slaves from this region and Qalāwūn was one of his Mamlūks who became sulṭān in 1279 A.D. and founded a dynasty that ruled for almost a century.[1]

This complex located in al-Mu'izz Lidīn-Illah Street (in *al-Naḥḥāsīn* or Coppersmiths quarter) provides the earliest monumental examples of the new styles and techniques brought to Egypt from Syria, and dramatically illustrates what was to become the "hallmark" of Mamlūk architecture: imposing scale and profusion of ornament.[2] The complex consists of a hospital (*māristān*), mausoleum (*ḍarīḥ*), and *madrasa* all attributed to Qalāwūn with the date (683-4 A.H., 1284-5 A.D.). The whole complex, with its three components, was built in thirteen months; al-Maqrīzī's comments on this saying that: "*when a spectator contemplates this huge monument and hears it was built in such a short space of time he often will not believe it.*"[3]

---

[1] op cit. Parker et al., 1985, p.196.

[2] See Gaston Wiet, <u>Les Mosquées du Caire</u>, Les Livres de France/Hachette, Poitiers, 1966, p.17.

[3] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), translated in Parker et al., 1985, p.199.

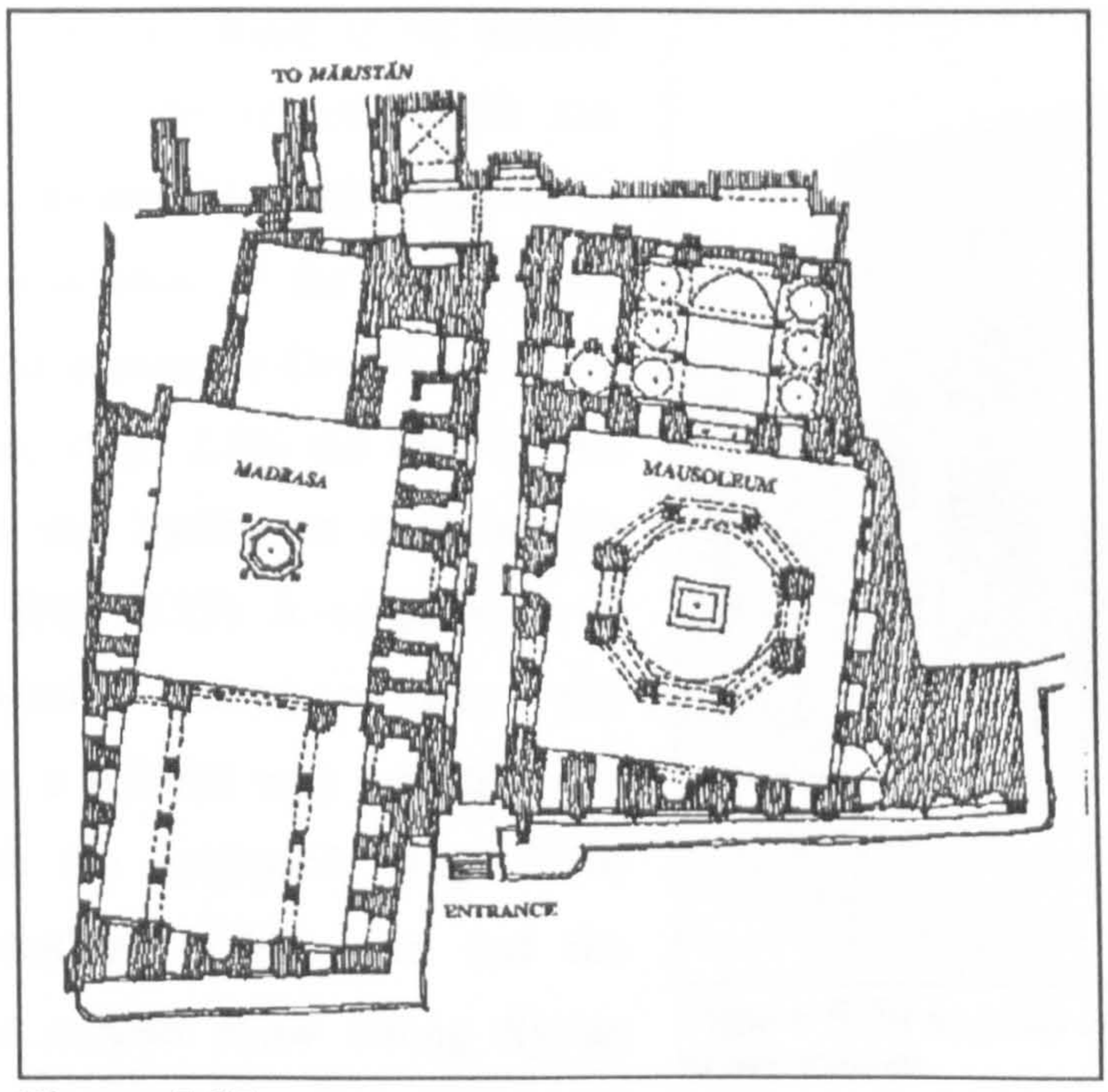



**Figure 5.27** Plan of the Complex of Sulṭān Qalāwūn. (After Creswell)

According to al-Maqrīzī[1], the *Madrasa* al-Manṡūriyya was commenced in Ṡafar 684 A.H. and finished in Jumāda I of the same year. The plan of the *madrasa* is that of a *ṡaḥn* and four *iwāns*. The portal of the complex is a horse-shoe arch with a pointed arched doorway. The door itself is covered with bronze polygons and star-shaped patterns. This leads to a corridor which in turn leads to the *madrasa* entrance on the left, and the mausoleum on the right - and originally led at the end of this corridor to the *māristān*. (Fig. 5.27)

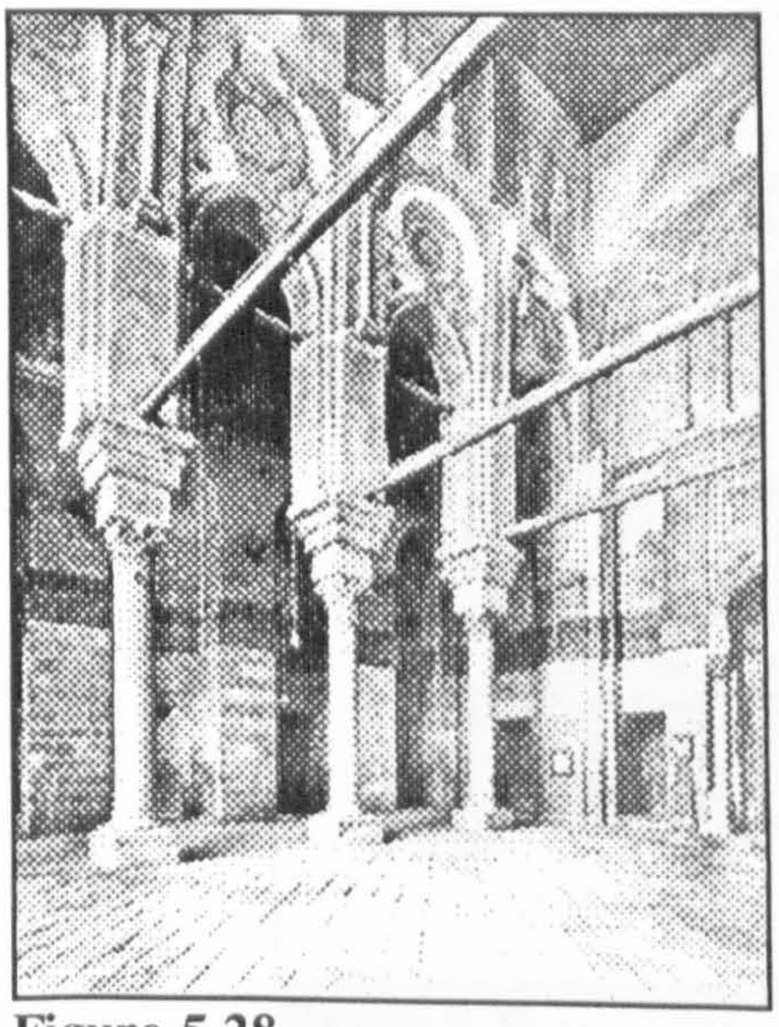


**Figure 5.28** View of the *qibla iwān*. (Creswell)

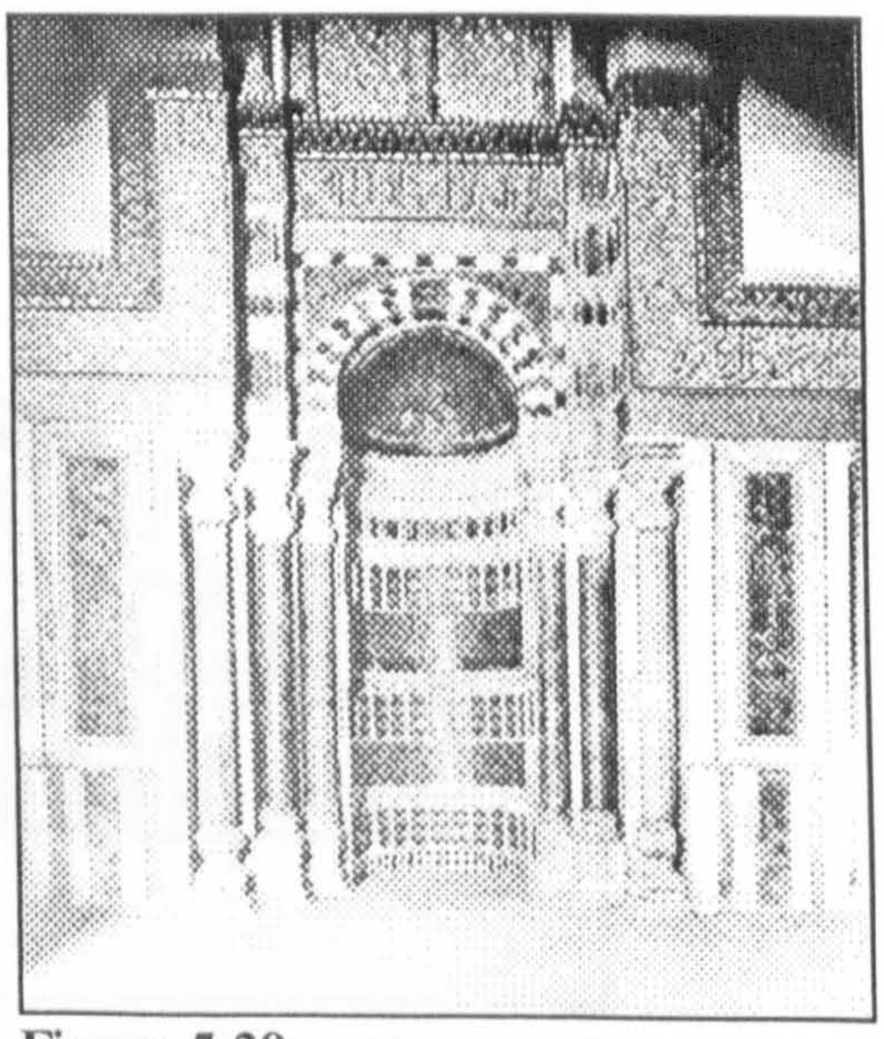


**Figure 5.29** The prayer *iwān miḥrāb*.

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, p. 406.

The *madrasa* was meant to be entered through a winding corridor (*majāz*) which lies back in relation to the entrance used today, which was originally the window of the north *iwān*.[1] The *qibla iwan* (the eastern) is divided into three aisles by columns, (Fig. 5.28) the central part being the widest and leading to a horse-shoe shaped *miḥrāb*. (Fig. 5.29) A screen-wall of grouped semi-circular arched openings and circumscribed by a pointed arch separates the *qibla iwān* from the courtyard. (Fig. 5.30) Creswell says that this *qibla iwān* and the treatment of the *miḥrāb* show strong Syrian influence. Very little remains of the octagonal water fountain located in the centre of the courtyard. It is difficult to reconstruct its form, as the original sources do not describe it. But if we were to speculate, it would probably be the usual octagonal domed pavilion frequently used in Baḥrī Mamlūk religious architecture.

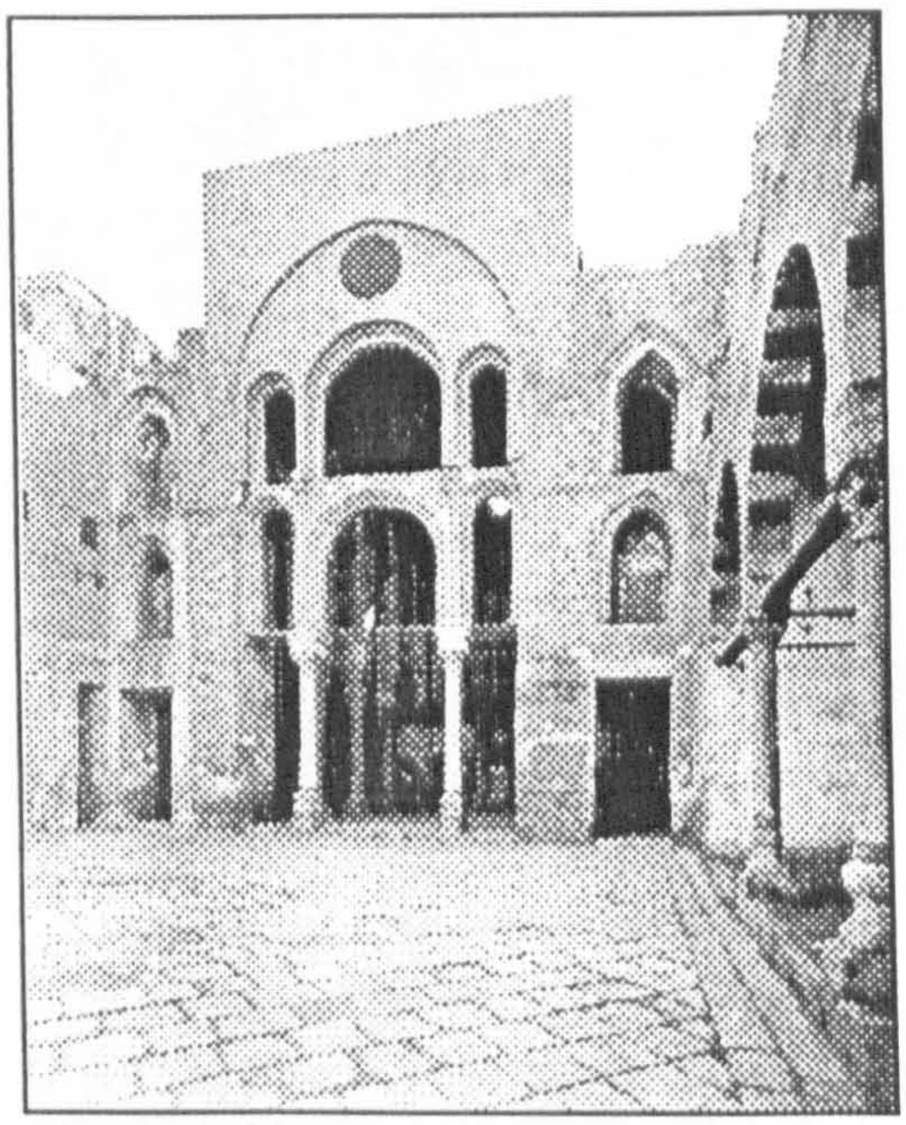


**Figure 5.30** Screen-wall separating the *qibla iwān* from the *ṣaḥn*. (Creswell)

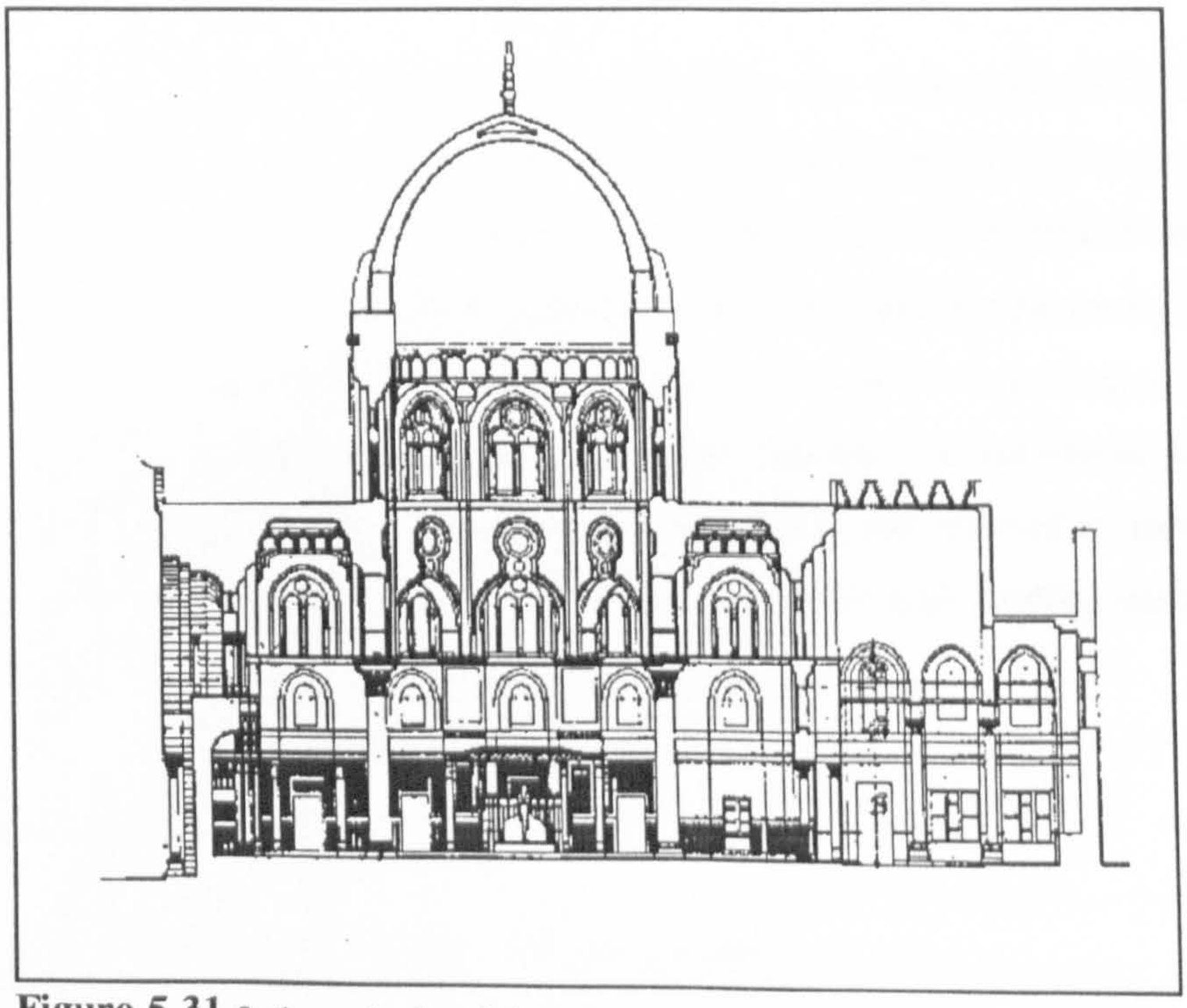


**Figure 5.31** Section passing through the octagonal domed mausoleum chamber. (After Creswell)

[1] For more information on the *madrasa*, see op cit. Creswell, 1937, p.196.

The mausoleum is axially located opposite the *ṣaḥn* of the *madrasa*. Its original entrance was also offset, and was located opposite the original entrance to the *madrasa*. It is approachable through a small arcaded courtyard. The tomb chamber is an octagon in a square - reminiscent of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.[1] (Fig. 5.31) Its pointed arches on square piers and granite columns carrying an octagonal drum, culminate in a circular pointed dome (rebuilt at the turn of this century). Underneath the centre of the dome lie the tombs of al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and his son al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and grandson Alā' al-Dīn Ismā'īl. One is immediately struck by the verticality and the grandeur of scale and extent of the profusion of the use of ornament, colour, and gilding. An octagonal *mashrabiyya* wood lattice work, commissioned by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad shows intricately designed geometrical patterns of excellent quality.[2] (Fig. 5.32)

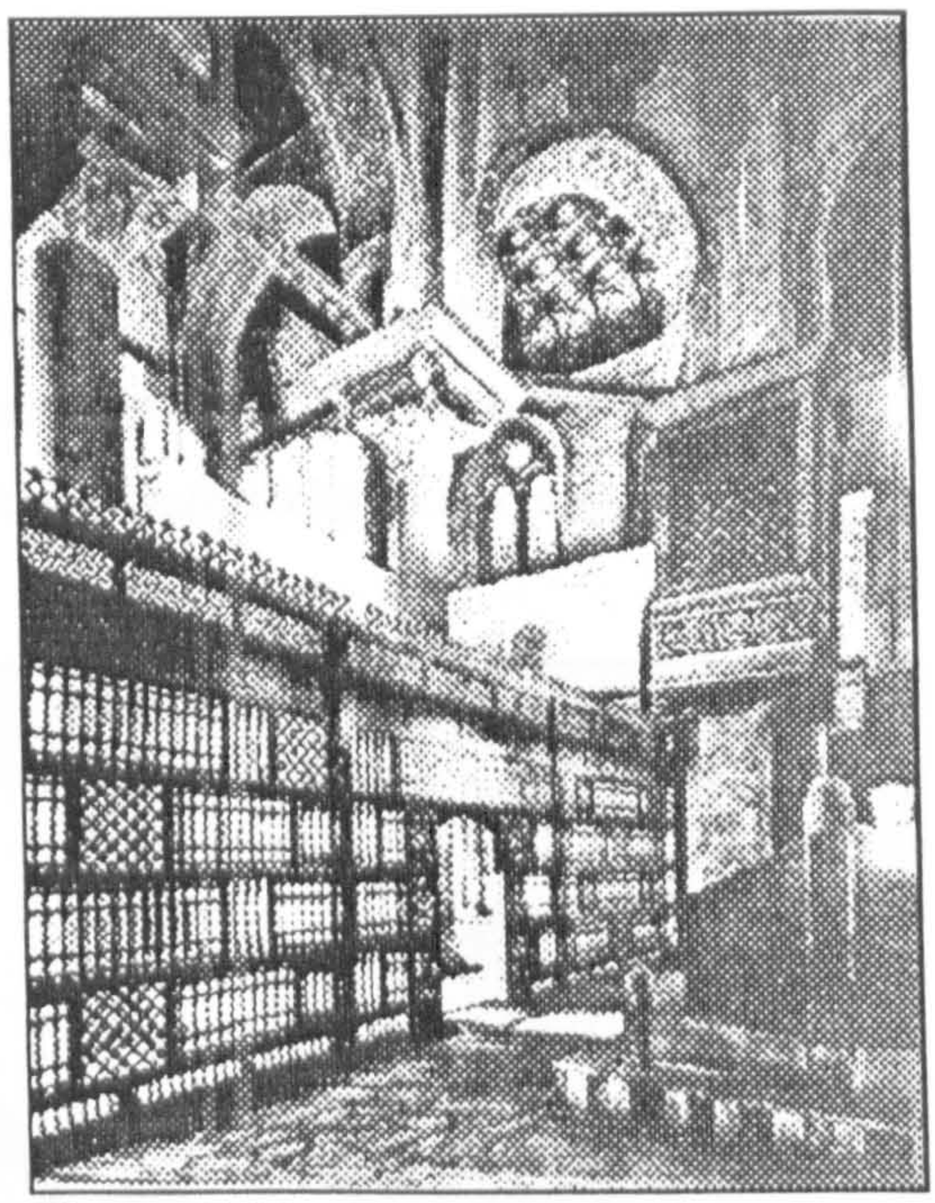


**Figure 5.32** Interior view of the mausoleum chamber showing the *mashrabiyya* wooden screen. (Creswell)

Against the *qibla* is a *miḥrāb*, which resembles that of the *miḥrāb* in the *madrasa*, because mother-of-pearl was used in its decoration. Michael Meinecke accordingly says that Byzantine craftsmen must have worked in it.[3] Doris Behrens-Abouseif says that the mausoleum became a site where rituals such as those of appointing new *emīrs* to Syria took place.[4] She adds that a teaching programme for instruction in the four rites of Islamic Law were carried out in the mausoleum. This teaching programme was considered to be different than that of the *madrasa* of the same complex, because it was planned to have a different *waqf* (endowment). Besides that, the usual sessions of Qur'ānic reading were carried out throughout the day in the deeply recessed window spaces.

---

[1] See op cit. Creswell, 1937, Pp. 192-193.

[2] See full description in op cit. Creswell, 1937, vol.2, p.194.

[3] See Michael Meinecke, "Das Mausoleum des Qalā'un in Kairo - Untersuchungen zur Genese der Mamlukischen Architektur-dekoration", Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo, 27, 1971, Pp. 47.

[4] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, Pp.98-100.

A noticeable characteristic of the mausoleum walls and the *madrasa qibla* wall is the varying depth of the stone thickness. This is apparent in the difference of depth of the windows which allows the façade to be aligned with the street, while the interior orientation is angled so as to conform with the direction of prayer. The excessive thickness of the walls is not structurally necessary and gives an effect of a cave out of which the spaces of the building have been carved. This gives a great feeling of interiority to the complex.

Like many other features of the Qalāwūn complex, its minaret[1] seems to emerge suddenly into the urban setting of Cairo without stylistic precedent either in the city or elsewhere. Unlike previous Cairene minarets, such as that of al-Ḍhāhir Baybars, this minaret is set at a distance from the entrance. It stands on the northern corner of the building with the mausoleum dome and the rest of the complex to its rear. (Fig. 5.33) From this exposed position it faces two of the most prominent gateways of Fatimid Cairo: Bāb al-Naṡr and Bāb al-Futūḥ. These gateways were the starting points for the post-investiture processions of the sulṭāns through the city to the Citadel. The tradition of these processions which was begun by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, ended after the death of Sulṭān al-Nāṡir Muḥammad.

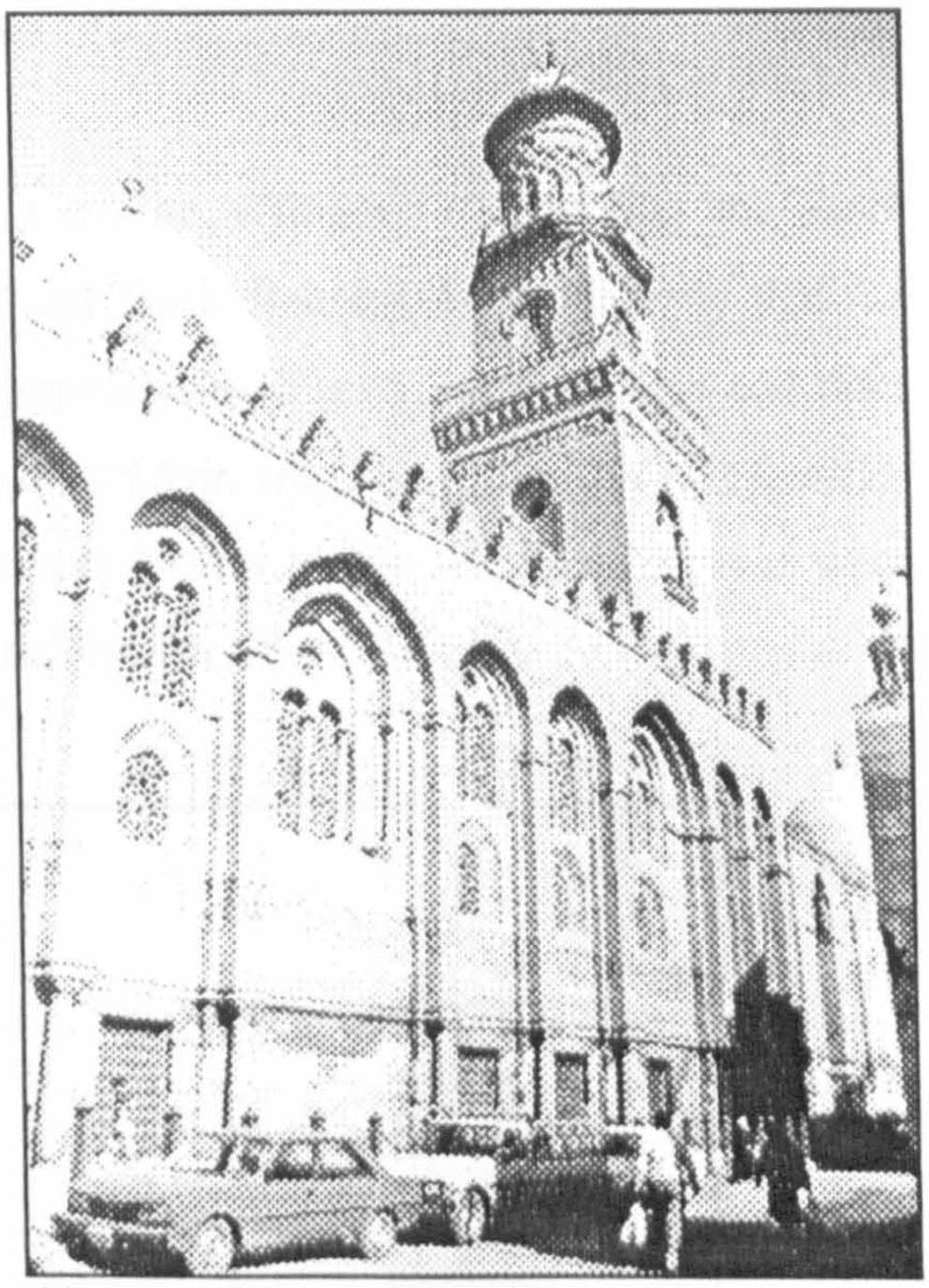


**Figure 5.33** The minaret of Qlāwūn acted as another signpost to the medieval streets of Cairo.

On the summit of the first square storey of the minaret and under its first gallery is an inscription of al-Nāṡir Muḥammad, recording repairs carried out by him in 703 A.H. This was after the great earthquake which occurred in the last month of 702 A.H. This first square bottom storey of the minaret along with the middle one have similarities to the Fatimid Mosque of al-Juyūshī. Yet, the interlacing arcades filled with carvings around the third storey - added by Qalāwūn's son al-Nāṡir - recall Moorish detail and resemble al-Nāṡir's own minaret in the *madrasa* next door. Doris Behrens-Abouseif says that Moorish details are an

[1] See description in op cit. Creswell, 1937, p.195.

indication of the work of craftsmen from Andalusia who were no longer able to practice their skills in Spain and so had gone to Cairo, where building activity was intense at that time. She adds that the unfitting cap crowning the upper cylindrical third storey is an Ottoman contribution.[1] What she misses out while trying to trace the origins of the influences on the minaret is that between the second square section and the third circular section is an octagonal balcony carried on stalactites which was used by the *mu'adhdhin* (he who calls the prayer) - see Fig. 5.33 above. In Chapter Nine we shall see the relevance of this octagon in the sequence of geometrical transformations of form.

Richard B. Parker, Robin Sabin, and Caroline Williams[2] - following the same historical approach as that adopted by Creswell and Doris Behrens-Abouseif - say that the façade of the complex of Qalāwūn has a gothic appearance. (Fig. 5.34) They also add that: *"its interior sumptuousness which was probably no accident, since he [Qalāwūn] was familiar with Crusade churches of Syria, and many artisans of that region displaced by war were attracted to Cairo by the patronage of the new ruling elite."*[3]

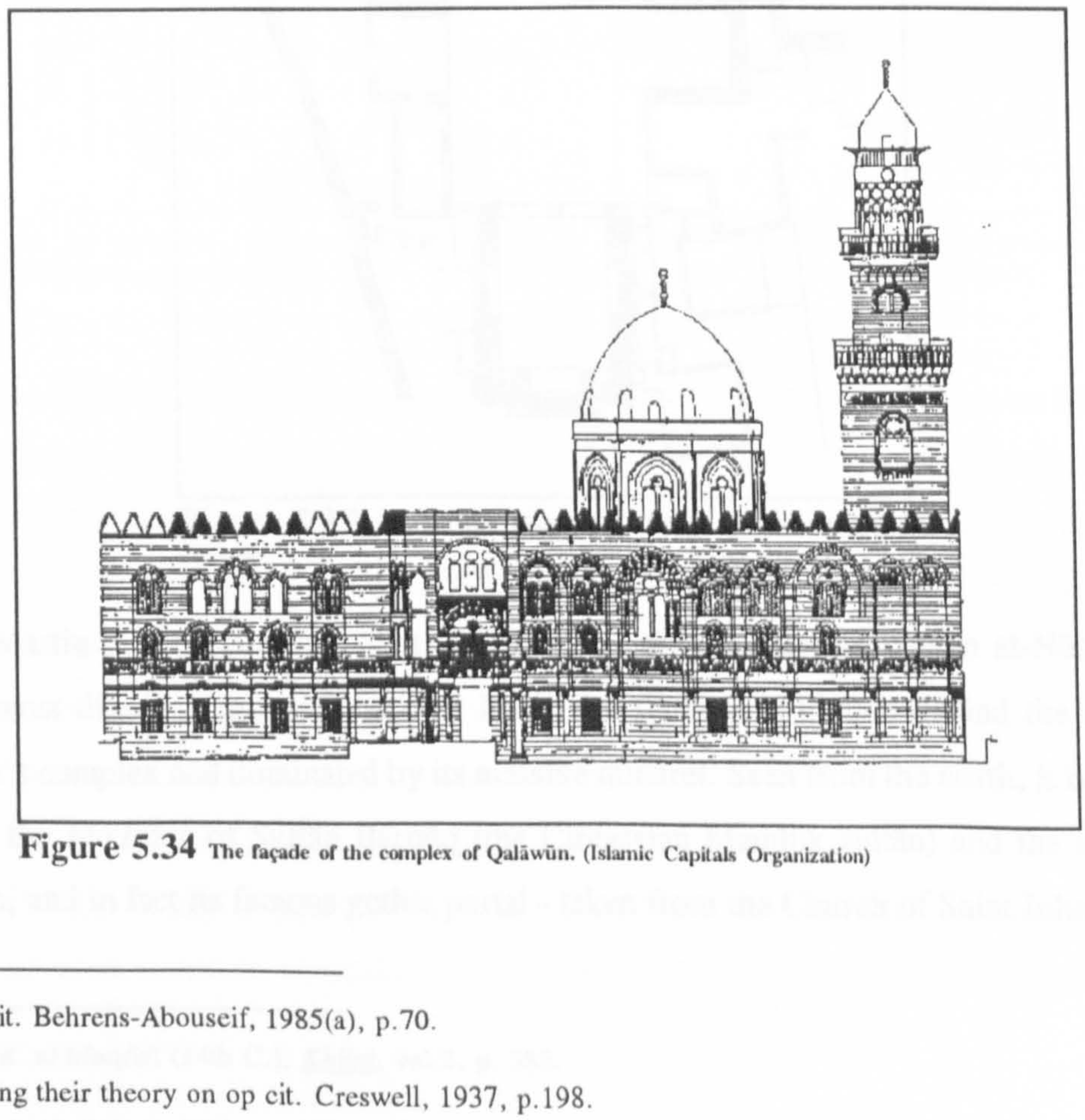


**Figure 5.34** The façade of the complex of Qalāwūn. (Islamic Capitals Organization)

---

[1] op.cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1985(a), p.70.

[2] Basing their theory on op cit. Creswell, 1937, p.198.

[3] op cit. Parker et al., 1985, p. 199.

***Madrasa* and Mausoleum of Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad:** (No.44 on plan)

According to al-Maqrīzī[1], this building was commenced by Ketbugha and rose to the level of the gilded band on the exterior façade which includes the inscription containing the date (695 A.H., 1295-6 A.D.), before Ketbugha was deposed in 696 A.H. In 698 A.H. al-Nāṣir Muḥammad came to the throne for the second time, and ordered the completion of the building, which was finished in (703 A.H., 1303-4 A.D.). (Fig. 5.35)

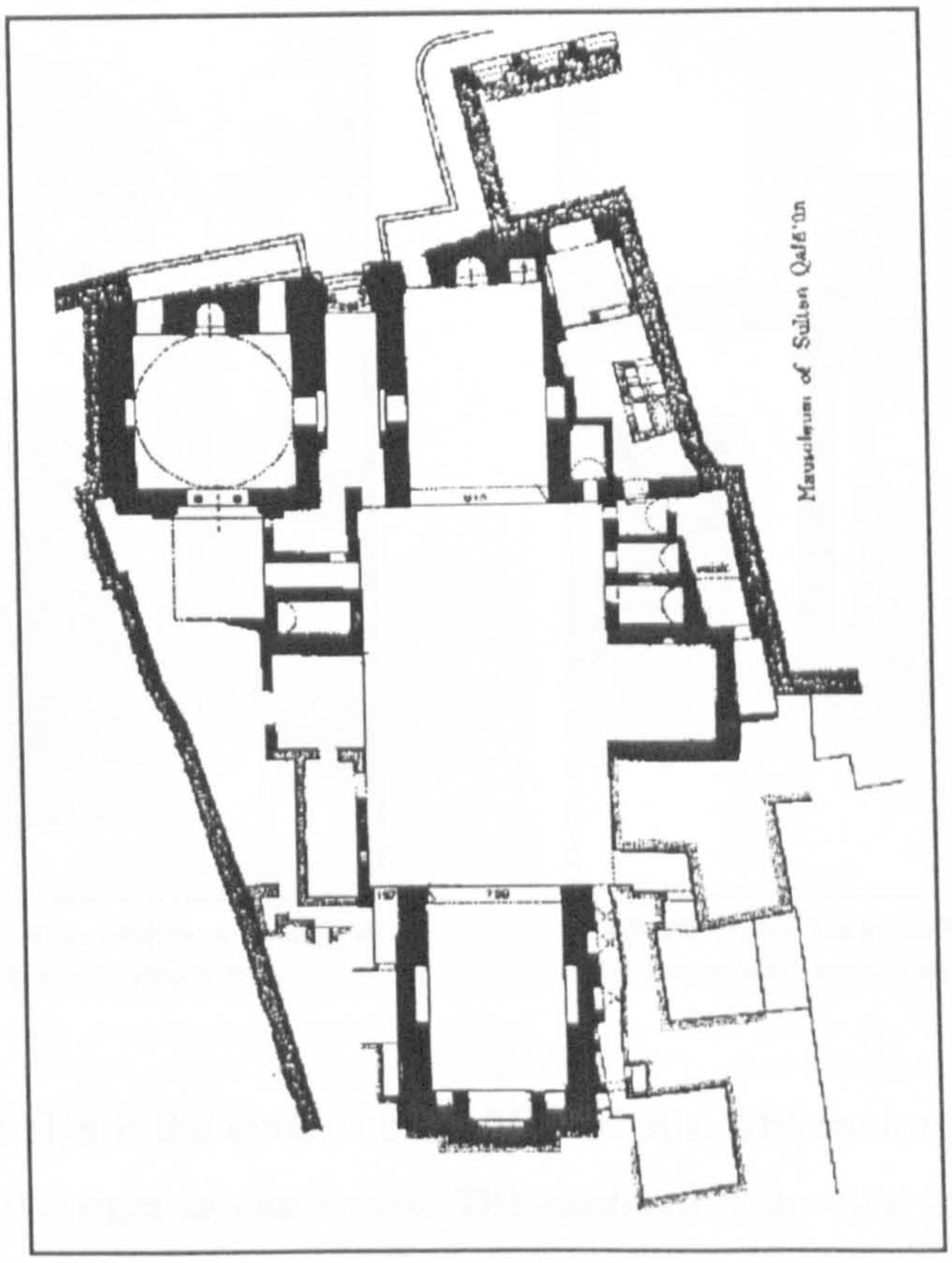



**Figure 5.35** Plan of the *Madrasa* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. (After Creswell)

Martin S. Briggs argues that the façade of the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān al-Nāṣir suffers from a most disadvantageous location.[2] From the south it is hidden behind the corner of Qalāwūn's complex and dominated by its massive minaret. Seen from the north, it is squeezed between the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Barqūq (the Circassian Mamlūk sulṭān) and the minaret of Qalāwūn, and in fact its famous gothic portal - taken from the Church of Saint John in Acre -

---

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khitai*, vol.2, p. 382.

[2] Martin S. Briggs, Muhammadan Architecture in Egypt and Palestine, Dacapo Press, New York, 1974, p.102. Also mentioned in op cit. Creswell, 1937, p.235.

and praised by al-Maqrīzī as one of the most magnificent in the world[1], cannot be seen until one stands right in front of it. (Fig. 5.36) There is an inscription on the lintel of the entrance which opens into a corridor separating the *madrasa* from the mausoleum; it bears the date 698 A.H., which is the date at which al-Nāṣir Muḥammad declared the work complete. It was on that day that an *imām* (leader of congregational prayer) was appointed to lead the people in the five daily prayers.

**Figure 5.36** The portal of the *Madrasa* of al-Sulṭān al-Nāṣir acquired from the Church of Saint John in Acre.

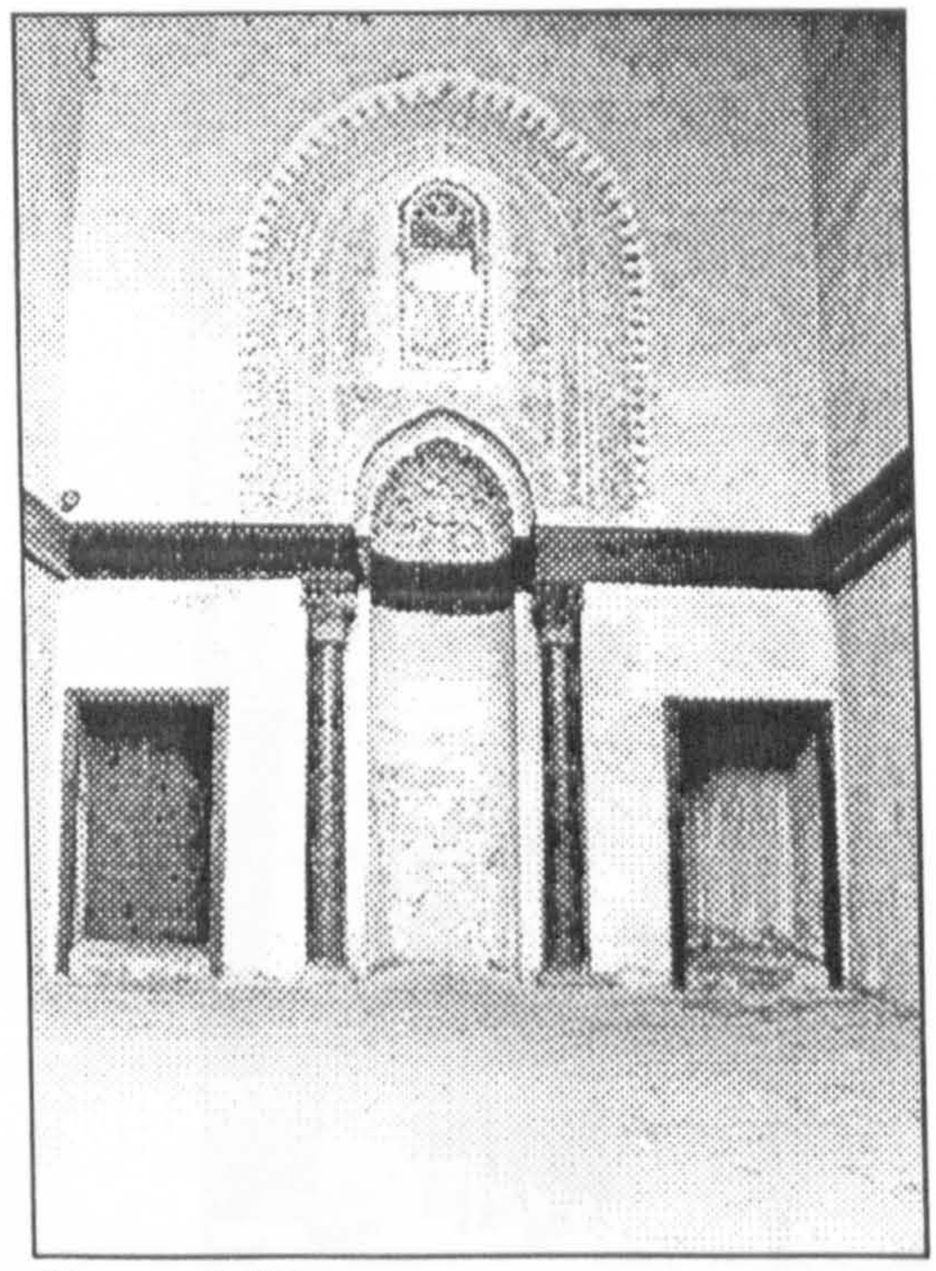


**Figure 5.37** The keel-arched *miḥrāb* of the *Madrasa* of al-Nāṣir located in the centre of the *qibla iwān*.

The general plan is the same as that of Qalāwūn's. The *madrasa* lies on the left and the mausoleum on the right as one enters. The *madrasa* is the first in Cairo to have four pointed vaulted *iwāns* around the same court, one for each of the schools of *Sunnī* jurisprudence: Mālikī (main *iwān*), Shāfi'ī (northern *iwān*), Ḥanbalī (western *iwān*), and Ḥanafī (eastern *iwān*).[2] An octagonal water fountain is located at the centre of the courtyard. The *qibla iwān* is the largest and has a stucco *miḥrāb* in the form of a deep-set keel arch. (Fig. 5.37) The other three *iwāns* are smaller in size but are roofed with pointed vaults.

Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's favourite son Anūk is buried in the mausoleum which is entered from an entrance vestibule; al-Nāṣir himself is buried next to his father in the

---

[1] See al-Maqrīzī's quote translated in ibid., p.234.

[2] See op cit. Creswell, 1937, p.239.

Qalāwūn complex next door. The mausoleum dome collapsed in 1870 A.D. and was never replaced. The zone of transition in the burial chamber is formed of three rows of stalactites transforming the square into an octagon.[1] Following the traditional Mamlūk forms of mausolea, we may presume that the dome would have been pointed. (Fig. 5.38)

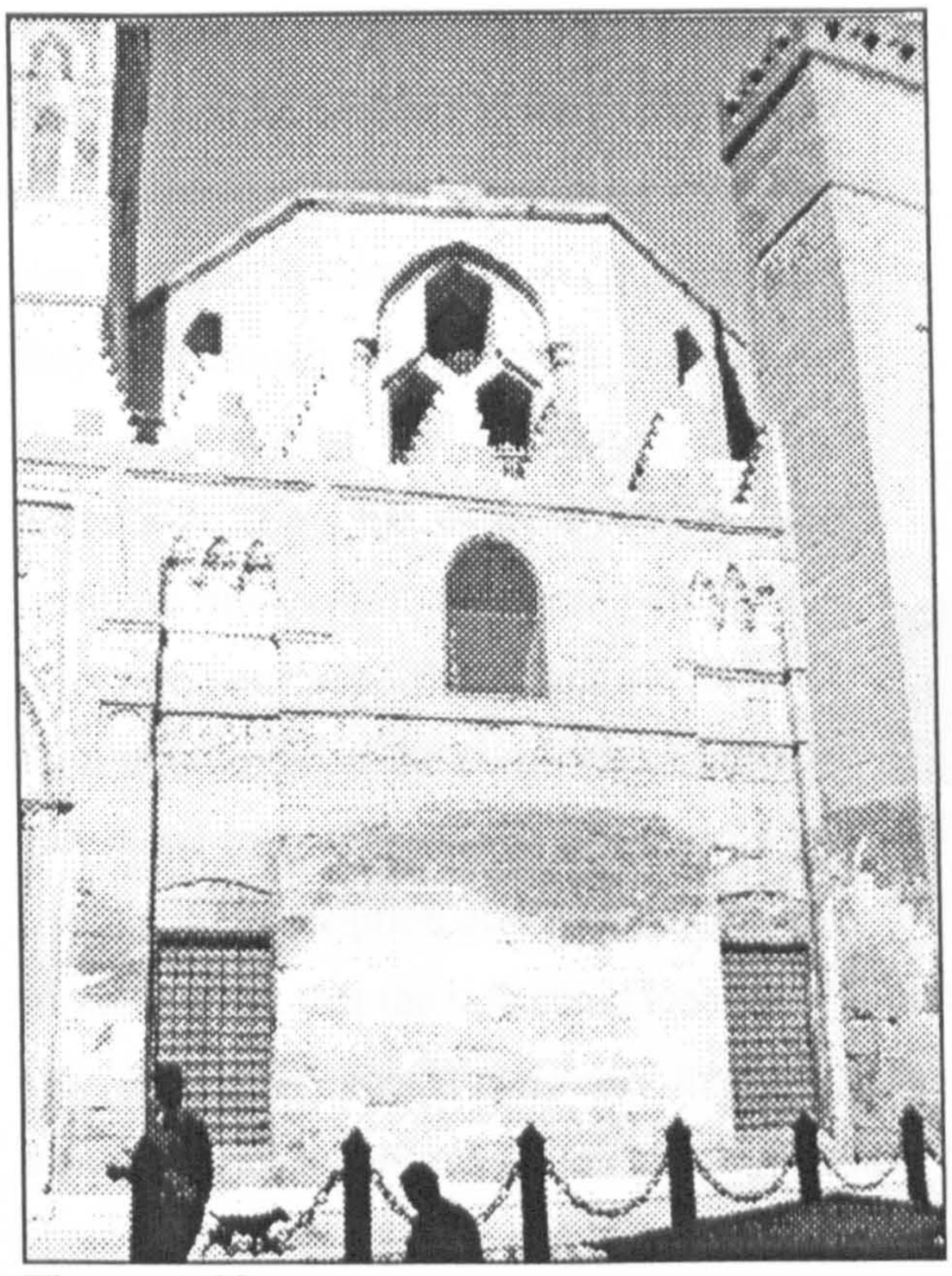


**Figure 5.38** Exterior view of the mausoleum, showing the surviving octagonal zone of transition. It should be noted that had the dome survived, it would have been very close to the minaret shaft.

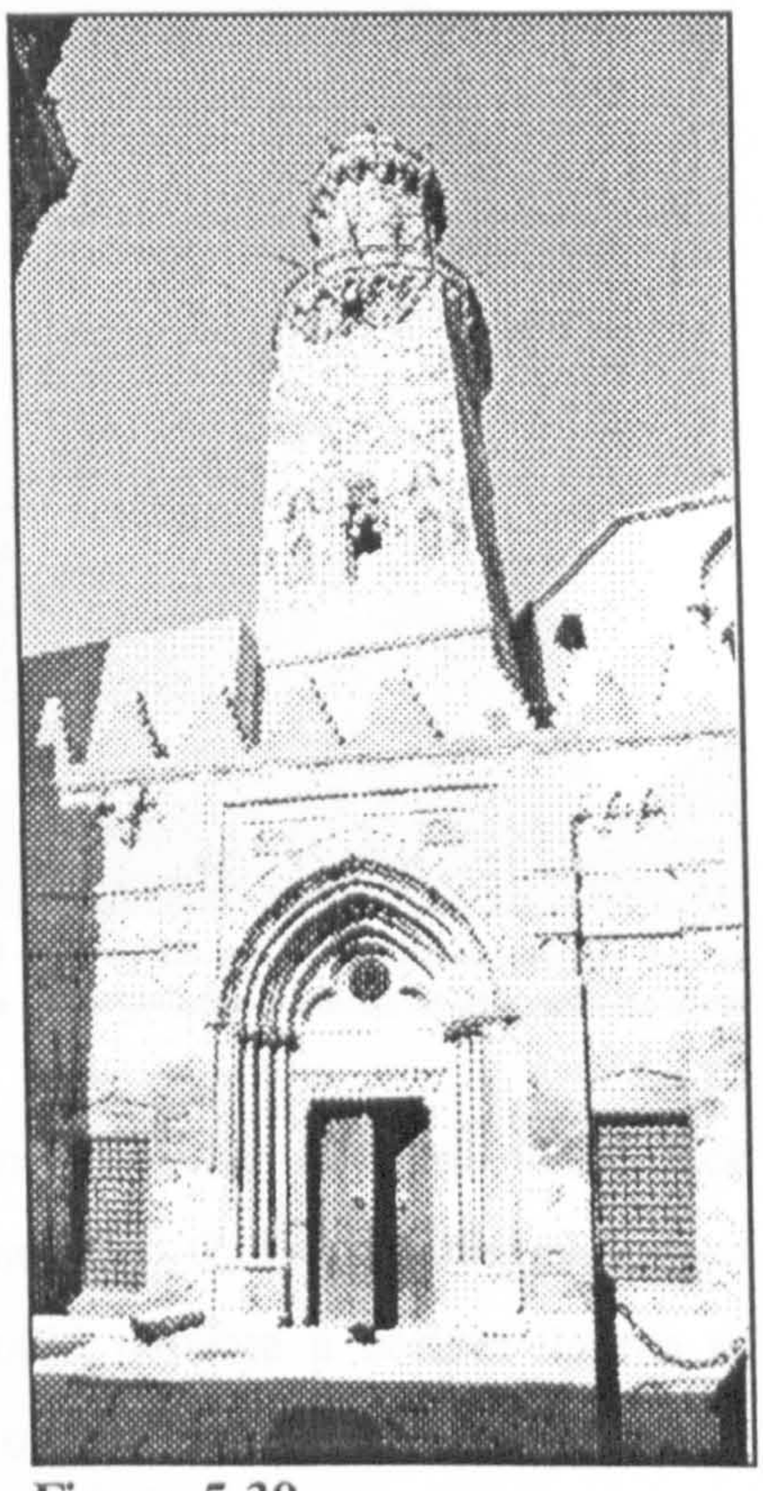


**Figure 5.39** The eastern elevation of the minaret located above the portal.

The minaret of the *Madrasa* of al-Nāṣir is located above the portal, as in the case of the Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī, thus emphasizing it. (Fig. 5.39) The square shaft has an inscription that is very high up and hardly legible - confirming that epigraphy was not always meant to be read. This band of epigraphy and stucco decoration does not cover the whole wall of the minaret, but leaves an undecorated space over the whole length of the western corner of the minaret. (Fig. 5.39) The reason for this is left to speculation. Doris Behrens-Abouseif thinks that one has to consider the difficulty confronting craftsmen at work with the whole building in mind, remembering that there was a mausoleum dome close to the northwestern corner of the minaret - almost touching it, as the surviving base of the dome indicates.

---

[1] See op cit., Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.130.

By the time the construction of the dome was complete, it would have hidden and blocked this corner of the minaret, which would not have been decorated until after the completion of the dome. Behrens-Abouseif thus concludes that the craftsmen in charge of the decoration were obliged not only to leave this portion undecorated, but also to start the inscription at a point where they had enough room to stand and work. Had they started the inscription on the portal side (i.e., the eastern side) as was usual on minarets of the same period, the inscription on the northern band would have been interrupted at the point where minaret and dome met. (Fig. 5.40) It was only by starting the inscription on the northern side of the minaret that the text could have been completed before reaching the dome on the back side. Behrens-Abouseif concludes that it is clear that in medieval Cairo, buildings were not always planned beforehand to the last detail.[1] This would indicate a certain degree of spontaneity in the design and building process, and rules out the use of drawings for design purposes such as we know them today in the form of working drawing details. However, as we shall see in Chapter Six, drawings were made to show the patrons a picture of the finished building.

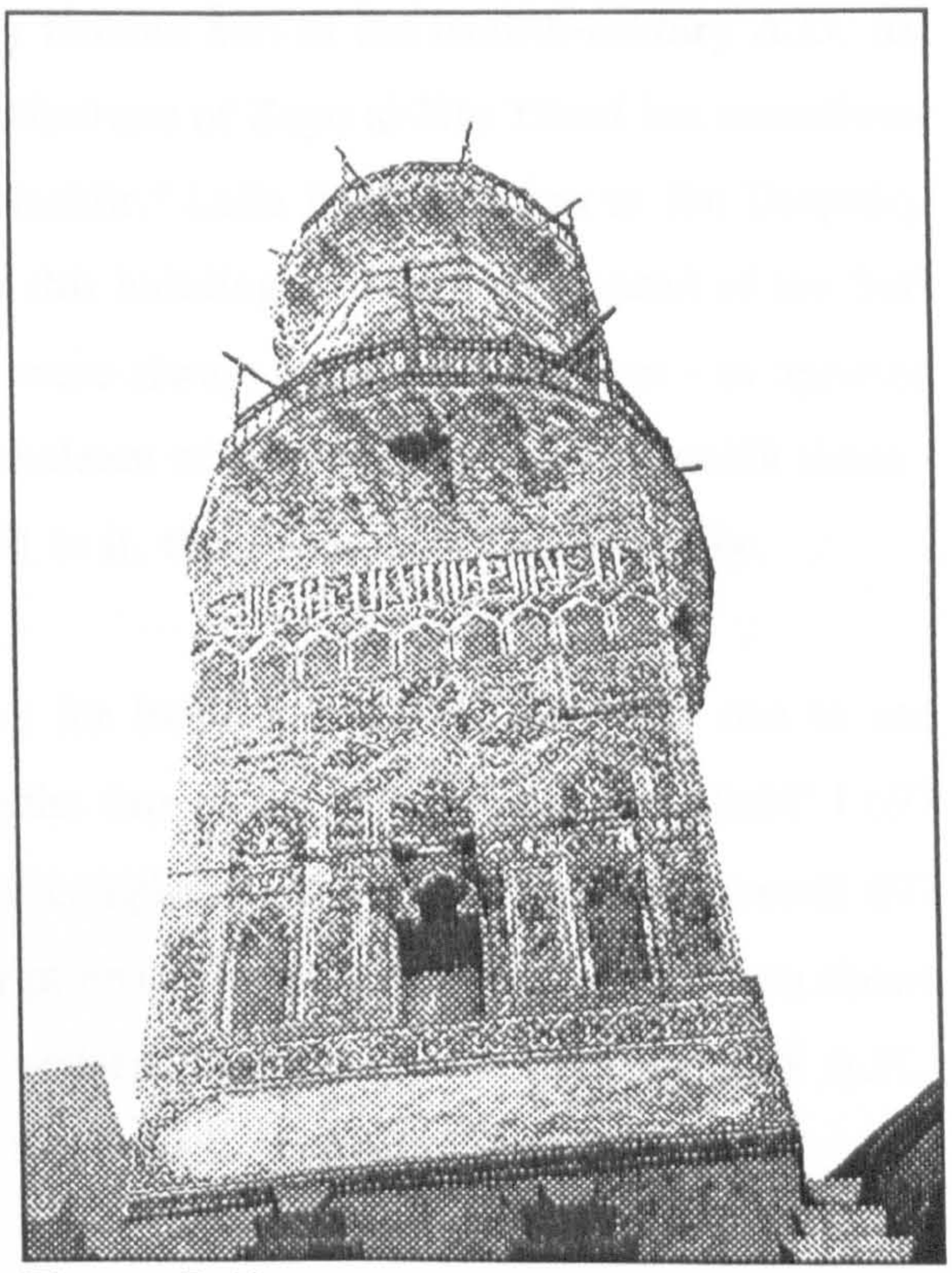


**Figure 5.40** Closer examination shows that the epigraphy does not start on the eastern face of the minaret - unlike all other minarets of this period.

**<u>*Madrasa* and Mausoleum of Zeyn al-Dīn Yūsuf (*Zāwiyat* Zeyn al-Dīn Yūsuf):</u>**

(No.172 on plan)

According to the contemporary historian Laila ʻAlī Ibrahīm, Zeyn al-Dīn Yūsuf was a Ṡūfī as indicated by an inscription over the isolated north-east portal of the monument which refers to him as a *shaykh* of an unnamed *ṭarīqa* (Ṡūfī order). She believes that he was probably the founder of the ʻAdawiyya Ṡūfī order in Egypt because *Shaykh* Zeyn al-Dīn was

---

[1] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1985(a), Pp. 73-74.

related to 'Adiy Ibn Musāfir al-Umawī, a very famous Ṡūfī of the twelfth-century A.D. (d. 557 A.H., 1162-63 A.D.).[1] Accordingly, the *Madrasa* of Zeyn al-Dīn Yūsuf has sometimes been referred to as the *zāwiya* of 'Adiy Ibn Musāfir.[2] Laila Ibrahīm refers to Ibn Duqmāq, the fourteenth-century historian who describes this building as a shrine (*maqām*) of the Ṡūfī *Shaykh* 'Adiy Ibn Musāfir. And since shrines were always single burial places - as opposed to several people being buried in the same mausoleum which was standard in Mamlūk times - this explains why only a single burial was held in it, that of the Ṡūfī *Shaykh* 'Adiy.

Above the main entrance (noteworthy for being the earliest surviving one to use stalactites) is an inscription of 17 lines giving the date of the *shaykh*'s death as (Rabī' I 697 A.H., December 1297 A.D.), and the date of completion of the building as (Shawwāl 697 A.H., July-August 1298 A.D.). Another inscription on the entrance of the mausoleum shows a later year indicating that this building had undergone restoration in the year (725 A.H., 1325 A.D.). Yet, Creswell is doubtful about the sense in which this date is used.[3]

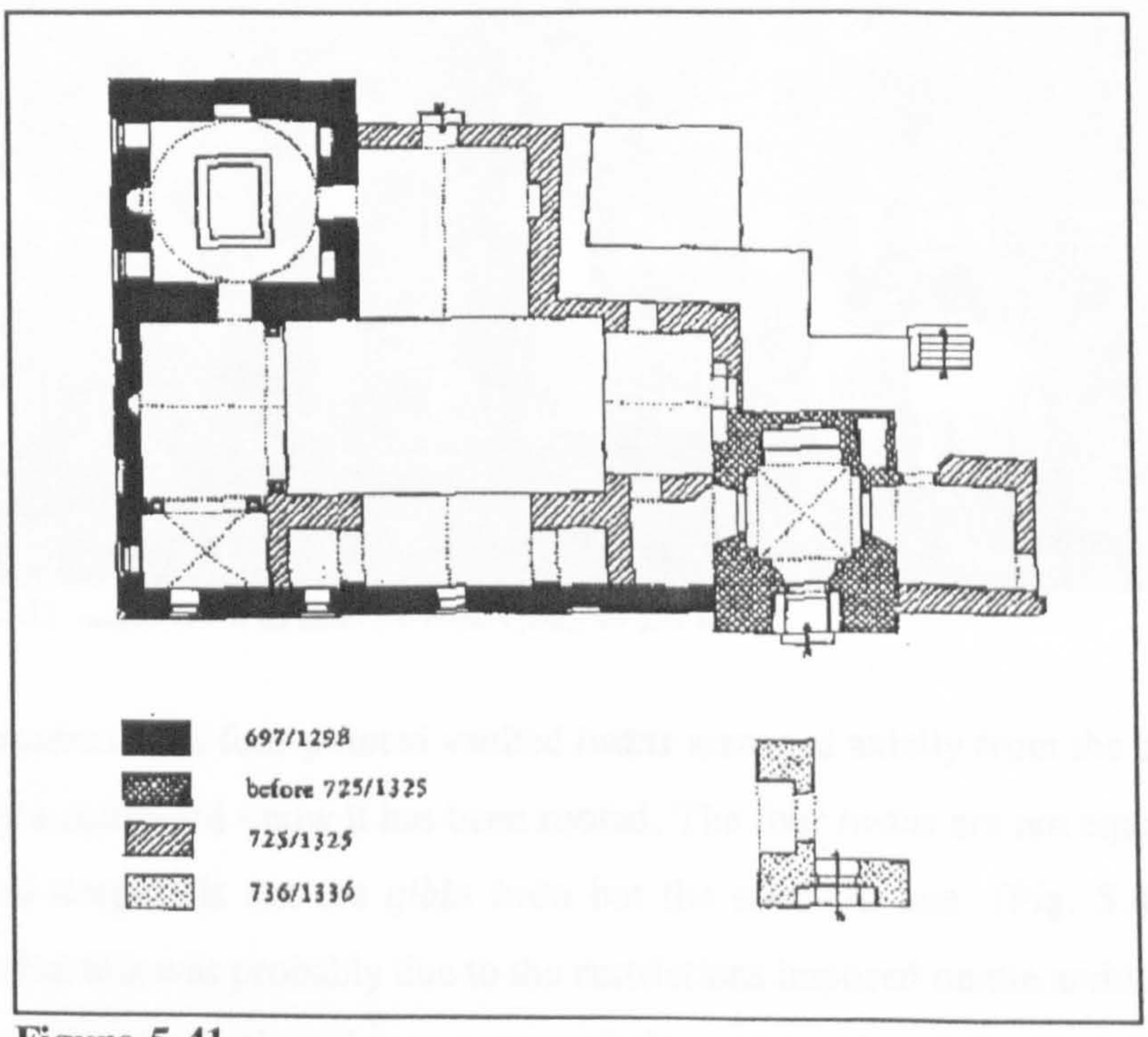



**Figure 5.41** Plan of the *Madrasa* of Zeyn al-Dīn Yūsuf. (Laila 'Alī Ibrāhīm)

---

[1] See Laila 'Alī Ibrāhīm, "The *Zāwiya* of Shaykh Zain al-Dīn Yūsuf in Cairo", Metteilungen des Deutschen Institut, Band 34, Cairo, 1970, p.85.

[2] ibid., Pp. 79-80. Also see op cit. Creswell, 1937, p.229.

[3] See argument in op cit. Creswell, 1919, p.85.

According to Creswell, the way in which the bands of inscription run round the *ṣaḥn* and its four *iwāns* appears to follow the rules of the end of the thirteenth-century, but the fine band of inscription which runs round the base of the dome of the mausoleum is on the contrary very similar to those found in the dome of the Mosque of al-Mihmandār built in (725 A.H., 1324-5 A.D.).[1] This suggests to Creswell that the *madrasa* was either restored or built in two stages. Standing in al-Qādiriya Street is another gateway with a plaque above the doorway containing an inscription according to which the gateway was commenced in (736 A.H., 1335-6 A.D.) which indicates that the building was executed in different periods of time rather than having been restored in a later year. (Fig. 5.41)

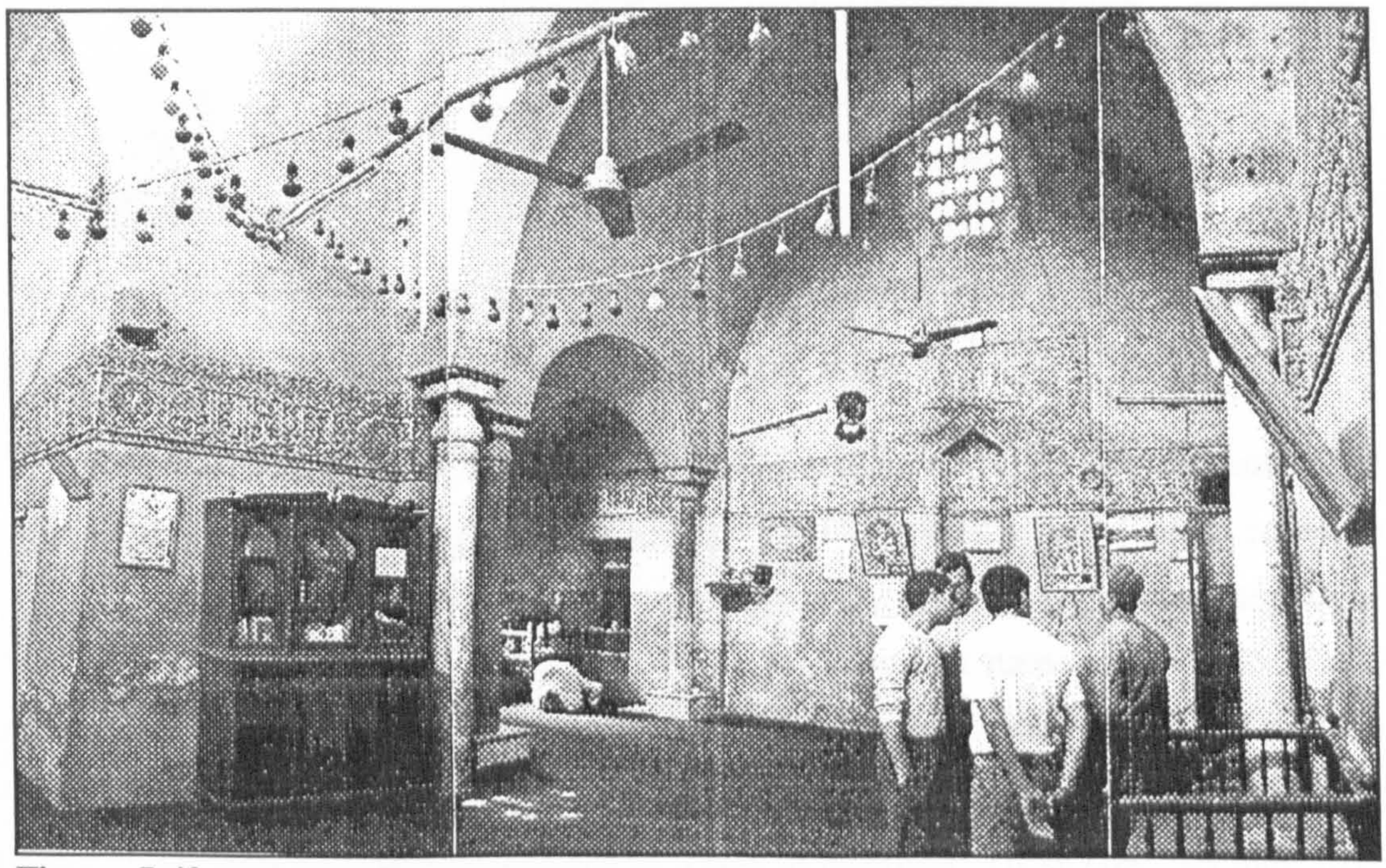


**Figure 5.42** Interior view of the *ṣaḥn - now roofed - facing the qibla iwān.*

The *madrasa* has four pointed vaulted *iwāns* arranged axially from the centre of what was originally a courtyard - now it has been roofed. The four *iwāns* are not equal in size, and the widest and deepest is not the *qibla iwān* but the southern one. (Fig. 5.42) Laila 'Alī Ibrāhīm says that this was probably due to the restrictions imposed on the architect by the site itself. A stucco band of epigraphy runs around the courtyard and the four *iwāns* unifying them, and bears a dedication and prayer (*du'ā'*) to the Ṣūfīs and servants of the building - described here as a shrine (*maqām*):

---

[1] ibid., p.85.

*May God, renew (or return) the baraka (blessings) of the glorious Qur'ān upon whoever founded this maqām (shrine), and the tuqayā' (Ṡūfī residents or visitors, [should be atqiyā']) and the khuddām (servants) with the baraka (intercession) of Sīdī 'Adiy ... (two words are missing)*[1]

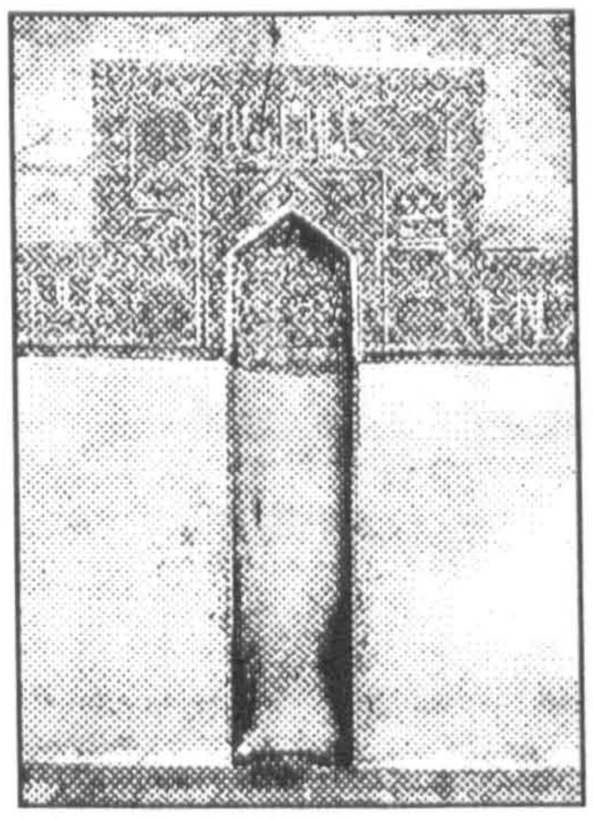


**Figure 5.43** Keel-arched *miḥrāb* in *qibla iwān*. (Creswell)

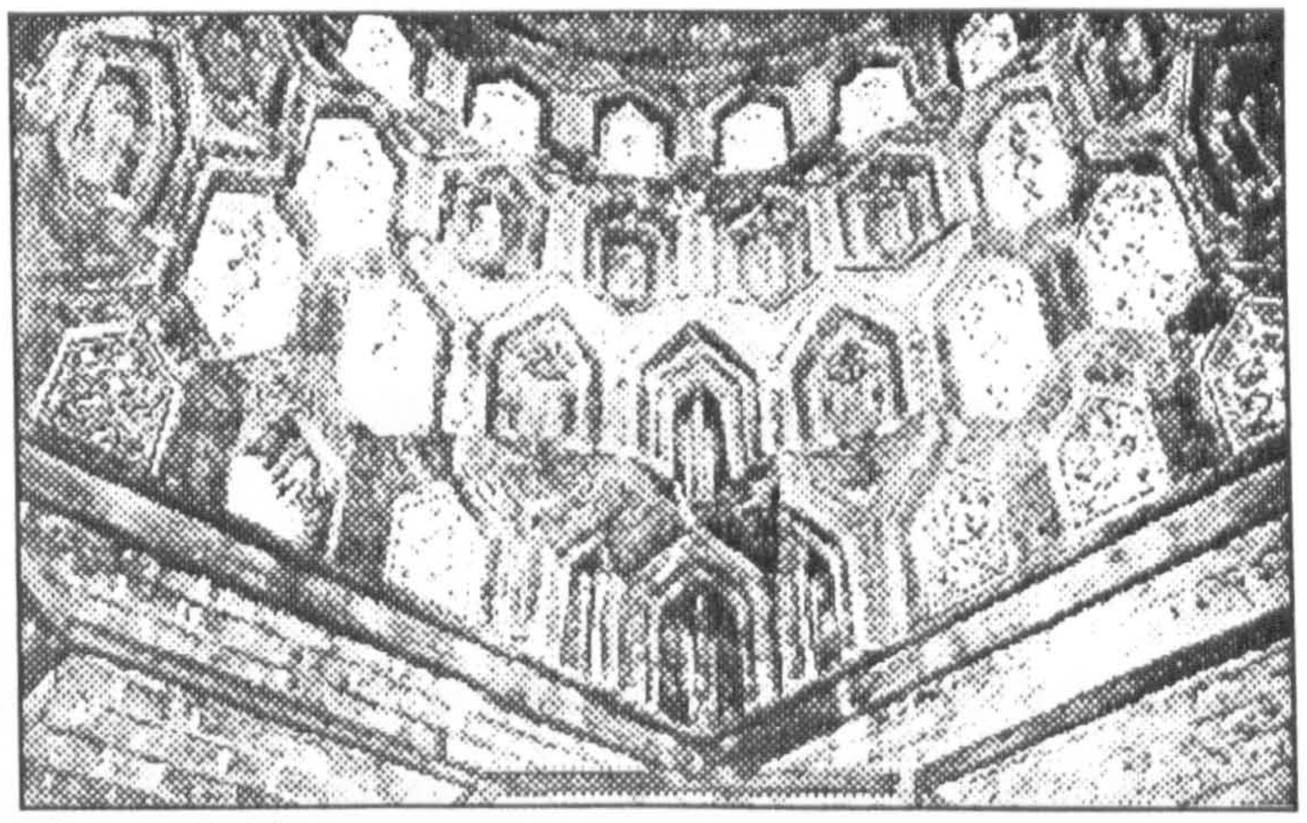


**Figure 5.44** Transition zone in the mausoleum dome showing stalactite-squinch system, and window organization. (Creswell)

The *miḥrāb* of the *qibla* wall is keel-arched and made of stucco, it is reminiscent of that of the *madrasa* of al-Nāṡir Muḥammad. (Fig. 5.43) The tomb is in the south corner to the right of that *miḥrāb*. The dome is unusually high and rests on a triple-tiered stalactite-squinch system which alternates with a triple tier of windows with stained glass insets. These windows decrease in number with height upwards - from three to one. (Fig. 5.44) Another simple keel-arched *miḥrāb* shows the direction of the *qibla* in the mausoleum chamber. Externally, the tomb walls are surmounted by a row of crestings. These crestings must have been continuous throughout the length of the façade, but were removed when the second floor was built - which was the later addition. The upper floor probably consisted of Ṡūfī cells or living units after the building had become a *zāwiya*.

Another external portal, other than the one leading to the *zāwiya* building, has survived. Although separated from the whole building, it can be seen as an indicator of an external portal and wall surrounding the complex; i.e., leading to the several portals within the external wall. Laila Ibrāhīm says that this external portal was probably built to attract the attention of medieval Cairene visitors to the shrine:

---

[1] Translated in op cit. Laila 'Alī Ibrāhīm, 1970, p.82.

> *Cairene Egyptians attached great importance to regular visits (ziyāra) to the tombs of Saints regardless of their sect, and distributing alms. There in the cemeteries, developed a whole organization for such visits headed by a shaykh with guides to conduct the visitors and ziyāra books[1] [manuals] to explain the shrines.*[2]

Accordingly, what Laila 'Alī Ibrāhīm implies is that the external portal took the role of the minaret: it became a "sign" to attract the attention of the passers-by for *ziyāra*.

Mosque of the *Emīr* Āl Malik al-Jūkandār (*al-Madrasa al-Malakiyyah*): (No.24 on plan)

Āl-Malik al-Jūkandār was originally bought as a slave by Baybars in 676 A.H. After having been given to one of his sons, he was promoted several times. He was famous for his intelligence and extreme piety.[3] Āl Malik was assassinated in Alexandria during the reign of al-Kāmil Sha'bān in 747 A.H. During his life, Āl Malik constructed a congregational mosque, a *ḥammām* (bath), a *funduq* (hotel), a stable (*iṣṭabl*), and two houses all of which have not survived.[4] On the other hand, there is a mosque that is attributed to him which was not mentioned by al-Maqrīzī but was mentioned in al-'Asqalānī[5], and Ibn Iyyās[6] but has probably not survived as well. Finally, there is the *Madrasa* al-Malakiyyah[7] which we will examine here, also known as the Mosque of Āl Malik al-Jūkandār.

To categorize this building under mosque or *madrasa*, we should first explore its original functions. Al-Maqrīzī tells us that this building had a storage space for books

---

[1] Such as Ibn al-Zayyāt, *al-Kawākib al-Sayyārah fī Tartīb al-Ziyārah*, Bulaq, Cairo, 1907-8.

[2] op cit. Laila 'Alī Ibraḥim, 1970, p.98. She further says that there were itineraries for one, two, or three-day tours in the cemetery beside the common tours for Thursdays, Fridays, and the feasts.

[3] See op cit. Chahinda Karīm, 1979, Pp. 160-162.

[4] ibid., Pp. 170-171.

[5] Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Durar al-Kāminah fī A'yān al-Mā'ah al-Thāminah*, Hayderabad, vol.1, p.411.

[6] Ibn Iyās (d. after 1525 A.D.), *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr fī Waqā'i' al-Duhūr*, Cairo, 1403 A.H./1982 A.D., p.55.

[7] It is al-Maqrīzī who calls this building the *Madrasa* al-Malakiyyah after Āl Malik's name. op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, p.392.

(*khazāna*), and had a teaching programme of *fiqh* according to the Shāfi'ī rite and *ḥadīth* as ordered by Āl Malik. According to this information we may conclude that it must have been intended as a *madrasa* rather than a mosque.[1] (Fig. 5.45)

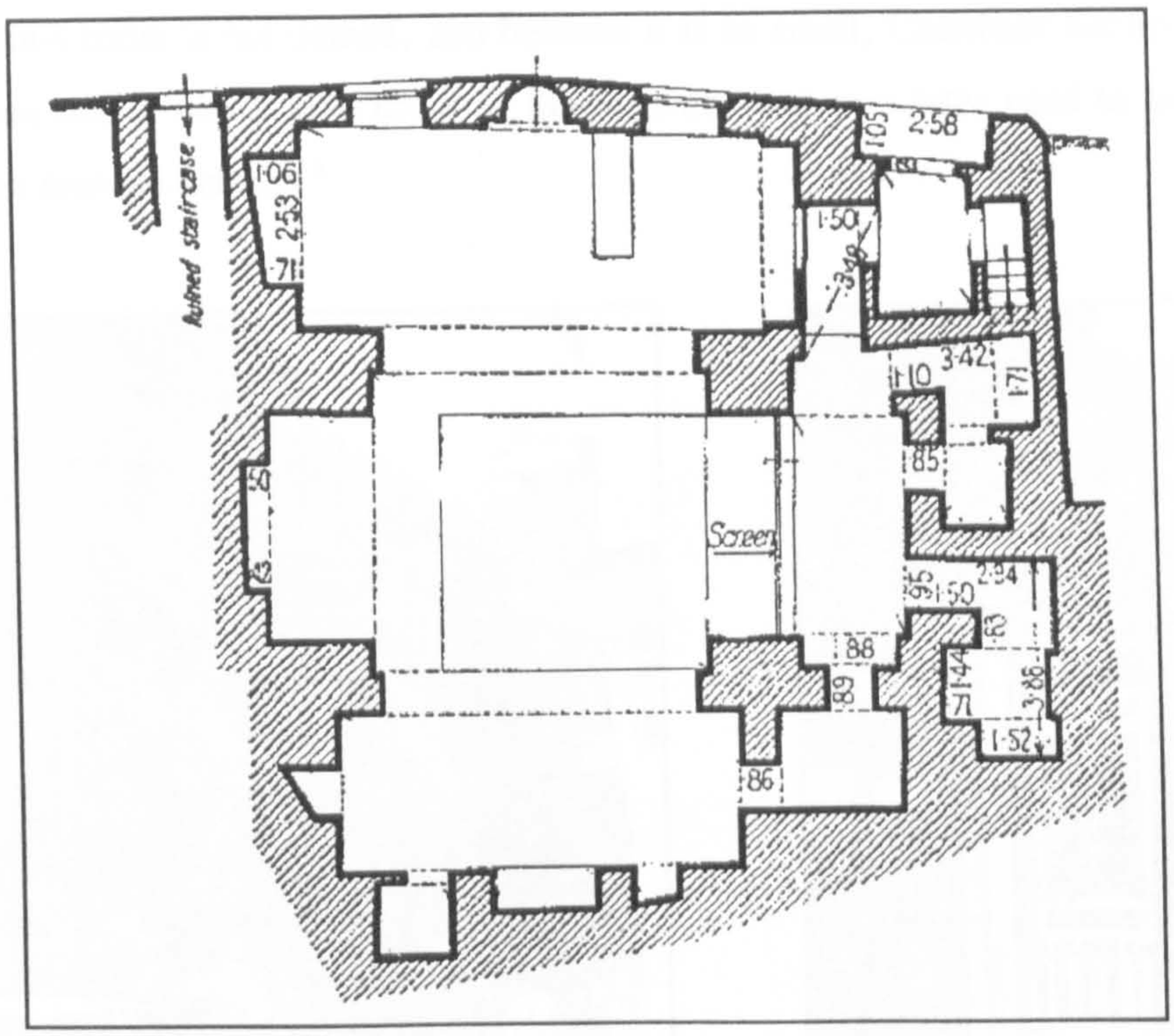



**Figure 5.45** Plan of the *Madrasa* of Āl Malik al-Jūkandār. (Creswell)

In 'Alī Pacha Mubārak's "*al-Khiṭaṭ al-Tawfīqiyyah*"[2], this building is referred to as *Zāwiyat* Ḥalūmah, and it is said that it was a place where Ṣūfīs gathered every Tuesday as well as for the *mawlid* (birthday) every year. Actually, Ḥalūmah was a Moroccan guardian of the *madrasa* who had devoted his life to take care of the place, and hence the place derived its new name "*Zāwiyat* Ḥalūmah".[3]

An inscription to the right and left of the doorway of this building states that it was built in (719 A.H., 1319 A.D.). The portal is a deeply recessed stalactite pointed arch, typical of the Mamlūk period. (Fig. 5.46) The *madrasa* is of the four-*iwān* type, and these *iwāns* are pointed arches in the Mamlūk style. The *qibla iwān* has a pointed *miḥrāb* with a stucco band

---

[1] ibid., vol.2, p.392.

[2] 'Alī Pacha Mubārak, *al-Khiṭaṭ al-Jadīda al-Tawfīqiyyah li-Miṣr wal-Qāhira*, Cairo, 1306 A.H., vol.2, p.243.

[3] For more information on *Shaykh* Ḥalūma, see op cit. Chahinda Karīm, 1979, Pp.177-178.

of Qur'ānic calligraphy running along its silhouette and joining the four *iwāns* as well as the central space together. (Fig. 5.47) The southern *iwān* leads to a small vaulted chamber - instead of being domed - which is the tomb of *shaykh* Ḥalūmah. The sources do not mention where the body of Āl Malik is interred although Creswell claims it is in this vaulted room.[1] But because this room is not domed, and because it is so small, Chahinda Karīm inclines to the conclusion that it was a side room to the *madrasa* and was later used to bury *Shaykh* Ḥalūmah, the mosque servant.[2]

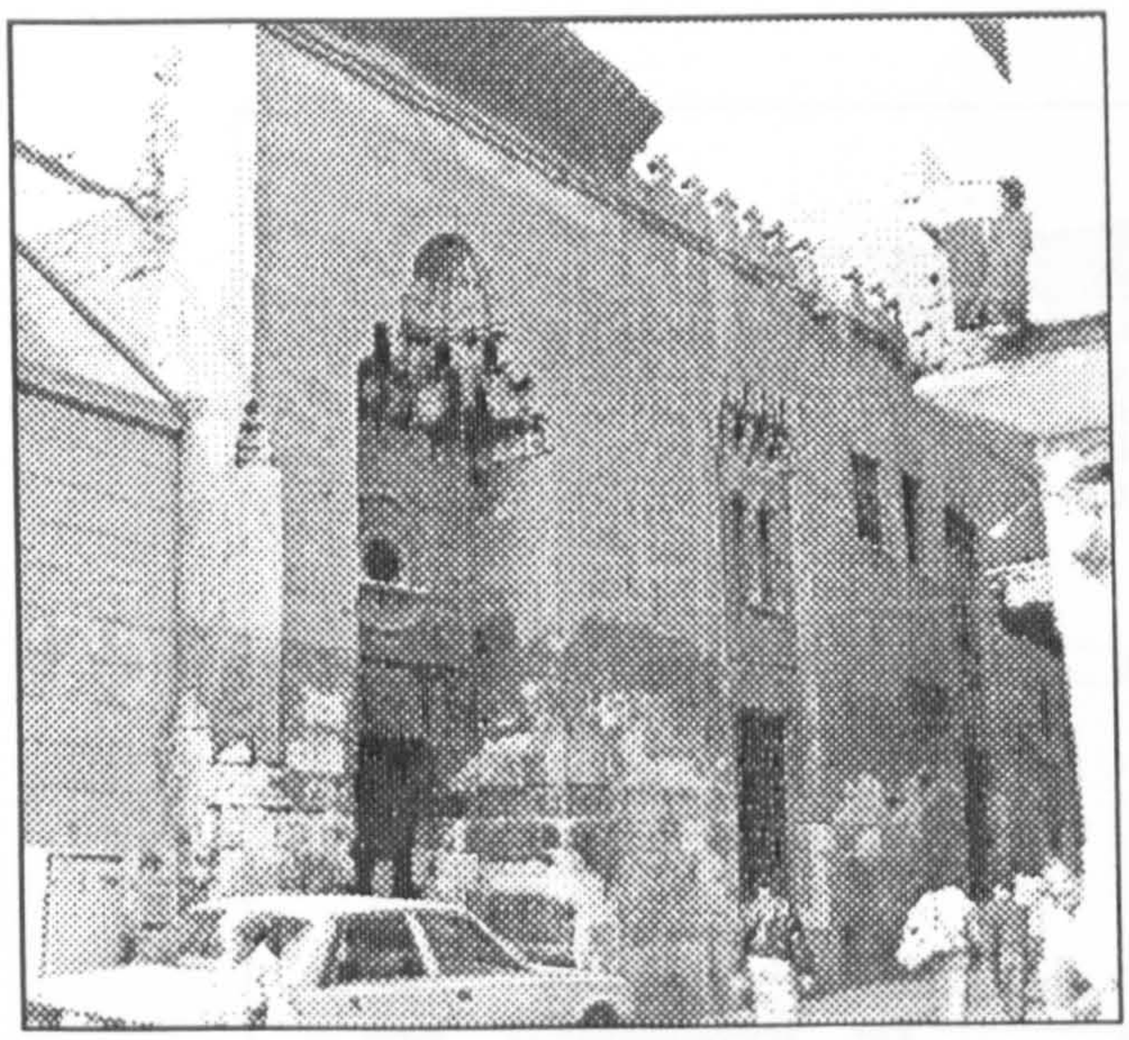


**Figure 5.46** The stalactite portal of the *Madrasa* shows typical Baḥrī Mamlūk features.

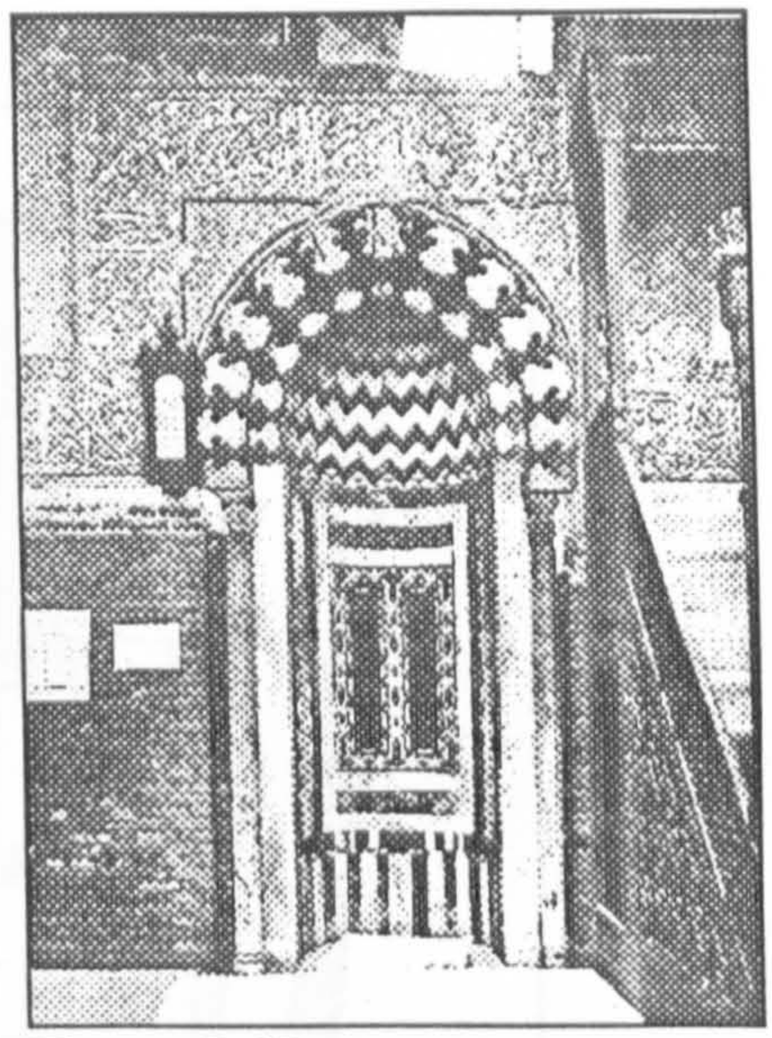


**Figure 5.47** The *miḥrāb* of the *qibla iwān*. (Creswell)

The central *ṣaḥn* of this building is roofed with a wooden ceiling that extends to roof the four *iwāns* as well. This *madrasa* is considered to be the first to have a covered *ṣaḥn*. The existing roofing has a square opening that carries an octagonal lantern in its centre - reminiscent to lanterns in domestic *qā'as* (reception halls) of the Mamlūk period.[3] The base is transformed to the octagon by means of four triangles placed obliquely with their tips pointing downwards - these are usually used externally in the zone of transition of minarets. Because this building has been repeatedly restored, one cannot be sure whether this is the original roof or not.

---

[1] See op cit. Creswell, 1937, vol.2, Pp. 270-272.

[2] See op cit. Chahinda Karīm, 1979, Pp.177-178.

[3] See for example the lanterns of the Mamlūk houses of al-Seḥeīmī, and Katkhuda in Cairo.

**Mosque of *Emīr* Aḥmed al-Mihmandār (*al-Madrasa al-Mihmandāriyyah*):**

(No.115 on plan)

*Emīr* Aḥmed Ibn Āqūsh al-'Azīzī al-Mihmandār was the chief of protocol and of the army (*Naqīb al-Juyūsh*); he died in (732 A.H., 1331 A.D.). This small building dated (725 A.H., 1324-5 A.D.) by a band of inscription which runs across the east façade - lies further down the Ḍarb al-Aḥmar. It is called once a *madrasa* and once a *khanqah* by al-Maqrīzī[1]. It is one of the oldest buildings of the quarter. (Fig. 5.48)

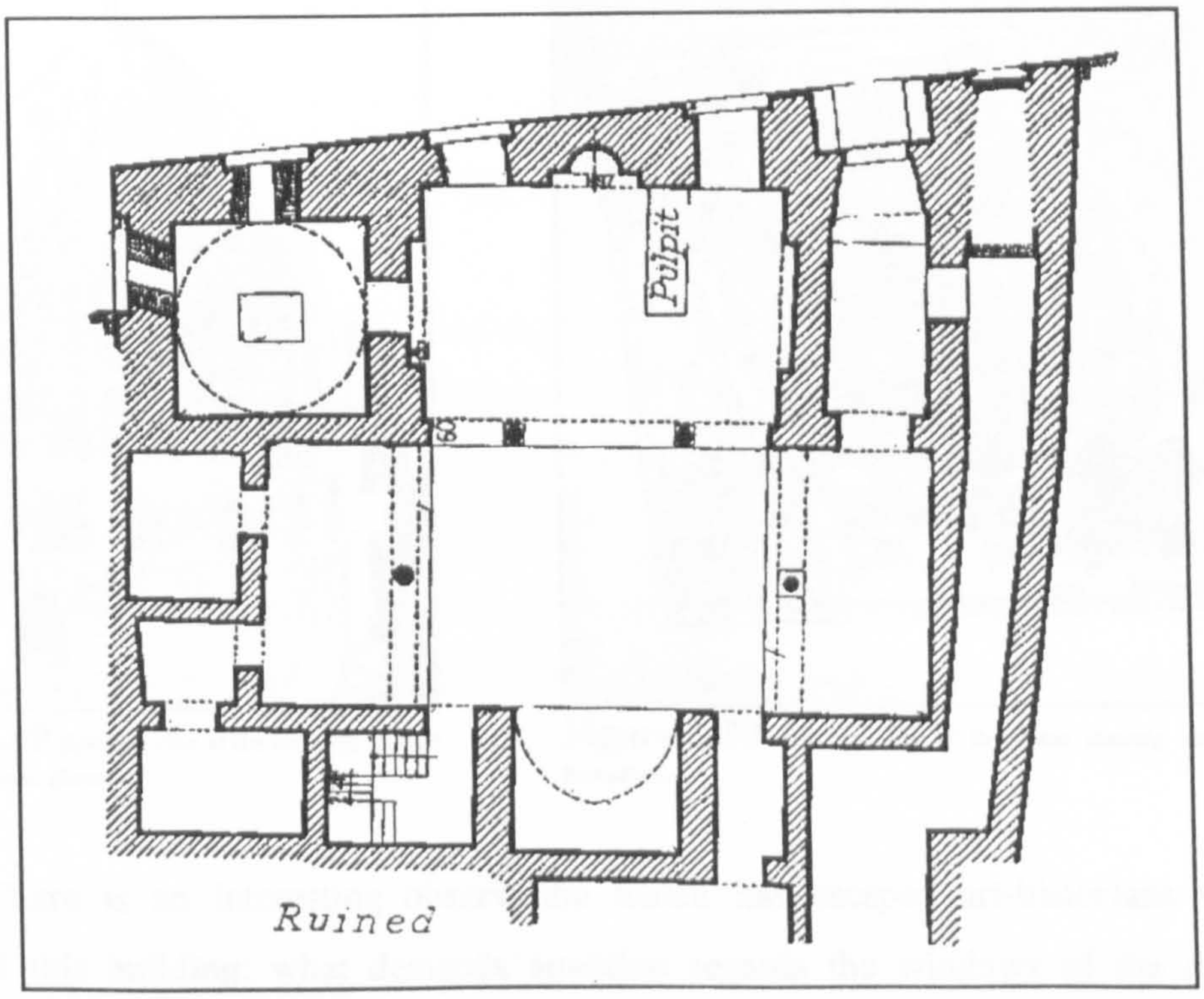



**Figure 5.48** Plan of the *Madrasa* al-Mihmandāriyyah. (After Creswell)

The façade is a very good example of the Mamlūk style. The main portal tapers upwards and ends in a pointed arched semi-dome by means of stalactites. The whole façade is divided horizontally by a great *ṭirāz* or historic inscription band. The wall ends in a row of trefoil crestings exhibiting solid parts that are identical to the voids between every two of these crestings - but are inverted. The minaret is a crude Mamlūk model, representing the traditional change of sections from square to octagon by means of obliquely sculptured triangles. The third stage is missing, and was probably circular.

---

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, Pp.399, 418.

As for the exterior of the mausoleum dome, it typically displays the transitional zone of an octagon, followed by a circular drum, and topped by a pointed ribbed dome. (Fig. 5.49) Internally, the dome passes through a series of transitions: from square to circle by means of stalactites arranged in a squinch-like form. The second row of this stalactite formation clearly delineates the form of an octagon. (Fig. 5.50) The band of Qur'ānic epigraphy in the mausoleum bears the verse of the Seat of the Throne (*al-Kursī*)[1] in which the vastness of both Seat and Throne is described.

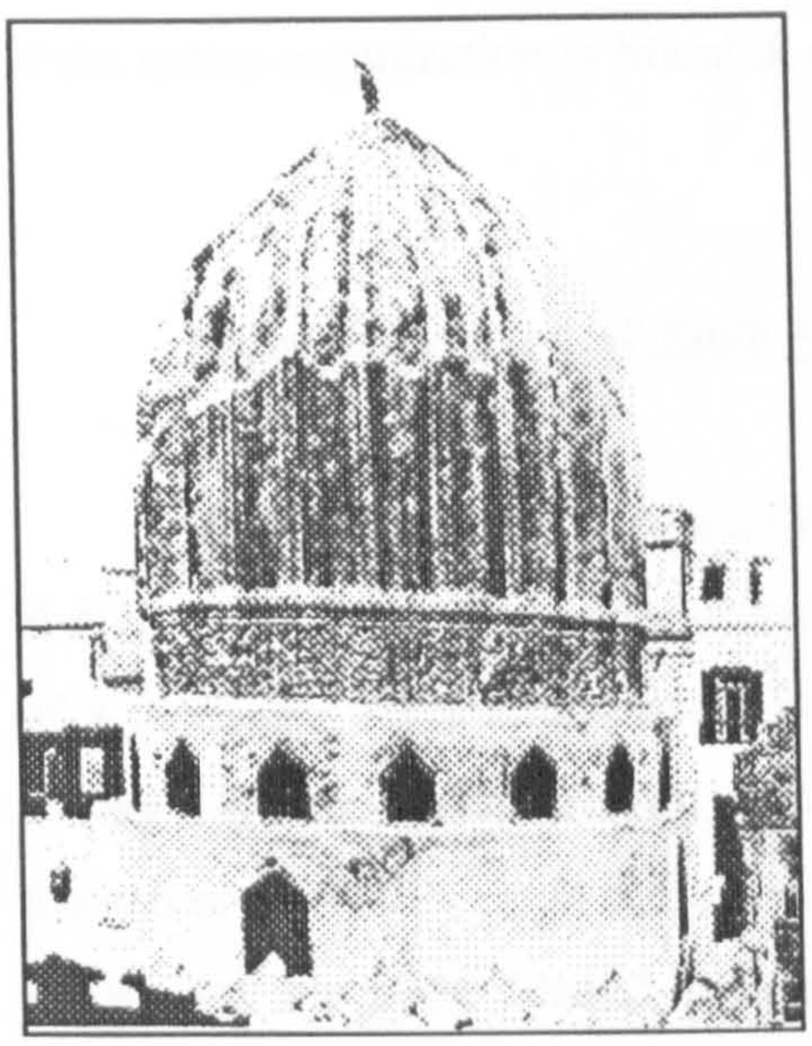


**Figure 5.49** Exterior view of the vertically ribbed mausoleum dome. (Creswell)

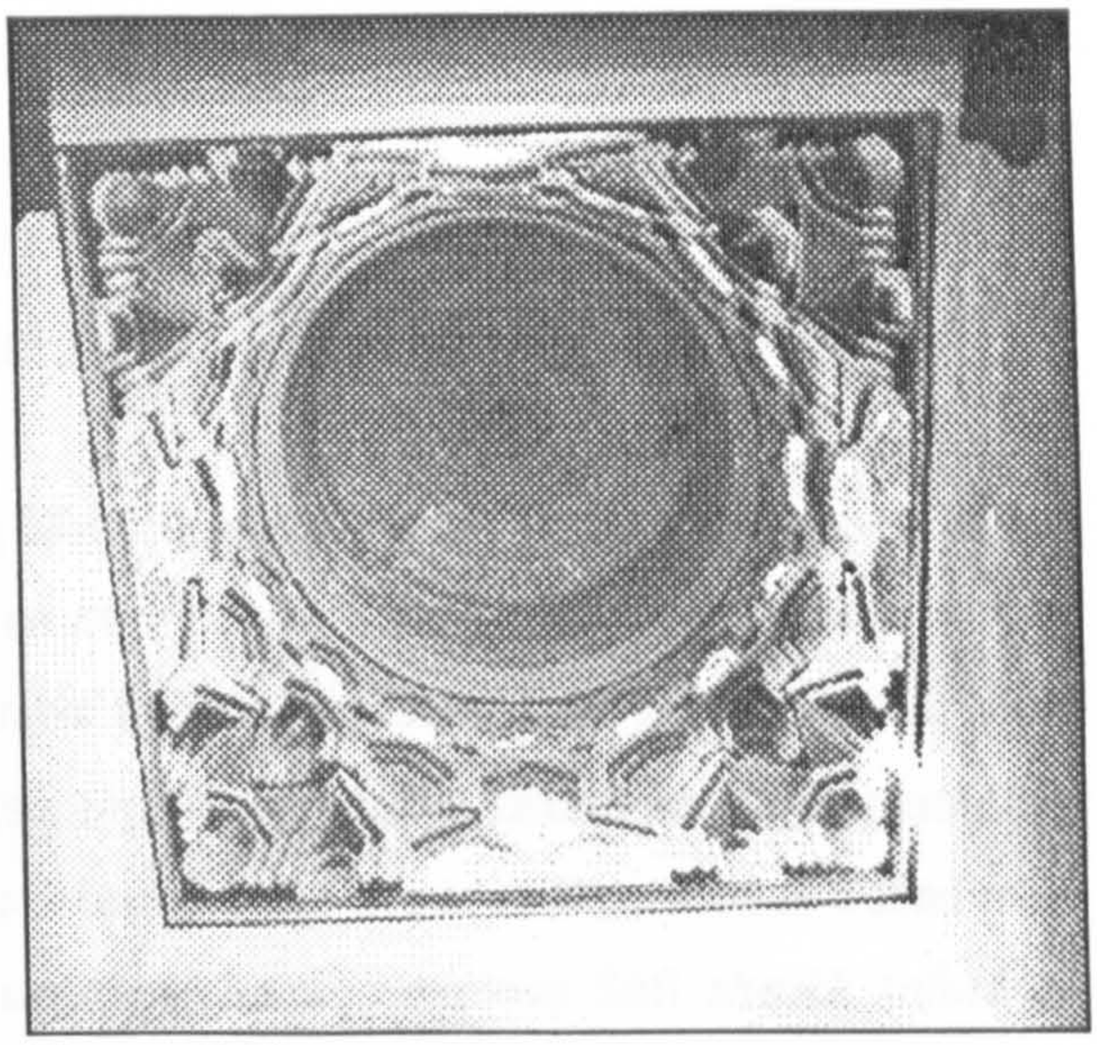


**Figure 5.50** Interior view of the dome showing squinch-stalactite formation.

There is an interesting observation which has escaped art-historians who have examined this building: what demands attention regards the windows of the mausoleum chamber. When closely examined, we find that they are positioned obliquely in the direction of the centre of the tomb - where the cenotaph is placed. This is a substantial indication that asserts that windows of mausolea, were meant to show the tomb to passers-by thus instigating the process of *du'ā'* and hence achieving blessings to the deceased.

---

[1] Qur'ān: 2/225.

> ***Allah there is no god but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Eternal. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there who can intercede in His presence except as He permits? He knows what (appears to His creatures) before or after or behind them. Nor shall they compass any (part) of His knowledge except as He wills. His Throne does extend over the heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He is the Most High, the Supreme(in glory).***

On the other hand, the interior of the building is that of a small courtyard *madrasa* with four *iwāns*. According to Chahinda Karīm, the courtyard has been roofed recently in 1907.[1] The *miḥrāb* is plane and unornamented and takes the shape of a pointed arched semi-domed niche. The north *iwān* is arched and separated from the court by means of an elevated step and two columns. The thickness of the walls varies greatly as in most Mamlūk buildings which had to follow street alignment externally, and *qibla* orientation internally. Because this mosque has been restored twice - the first being by the Ottoman Sulṭān Aḥmad III in 1135 A.H., and the second by the Antiquities department in 1893 A.D.[2] - it is difficult to assess if the entire organization is Mamlūk or not.

Mosque/*Madrasa* of *Emīr* Aṣlam al-Bahā'ī al-Silaḥdār: (No.112 on plan)

Bahā' al-Dīn Aṣlam was a Qipchaq Mamlūk who became the sword-bearer of Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, who appointed him an *emīr* of one hundred soldiers and commander of a thousand. As a victim of vicious slander he was imprisoned for six and a half years having been accused of treason, and his fiefs (*iqṭā'*) were taken from him.[3] It was not until the end of al-Nāṣir's reign that his rank was reinstated. He has been described as a kind man, known for his good deeds.[4] Al-Maqrīzī says that he was a pious Ṣūfī *shaykh* (*aḥad al-Mashāyikh*) who sat at the head of *ḥalqas* or circle of students - that is to say he was a teaching scholar as well.[5]

The site in which this mosque/*madrasa* was built is outside the Bāb Zuwayla area which was until the thirteenth-century a Fatimid and Ayyubid cemetery. It is likely from the arrangement of this building that Aṣlam built his mausoleum first and subsequently added to it the mosque/*madrasa*. (Fig. 5.51) An inscription on a large slab above the south door states that it was commenced (Jumāda I745 A.H., September-October 1334 A.D.), and finished in

---

[1] See op cit. Chahinda Karīm, 1979, p.201.

[2] See op cit. Creswell, 1919, p.95. Also see op cit. Creswell, 1937, p.274.

[3] Chahinda Karīm, "The Mosque of Aṣlam al-Bahā'ī al-Silaḥdār (746/1345)", Annales Islamologiques, Tome XXIV, Cairo, 1988, p.19.

[4] op cit. Parker et al, 1985, p.115. They do not mention the source.

[5] See op cit. al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, p.35.

(Rabī‘ I 746 A.H., October-November 1345 A.D.). The brick dome of the mausoleum at the south-east corner of the main façade is fluted and pointed, resting on an octagonal zone of transition. (Fig. 5.52) It has an inscription of the *al-Kursī* verse, (the Seat of the Throne) as was commonly the case in Mamlūk times.

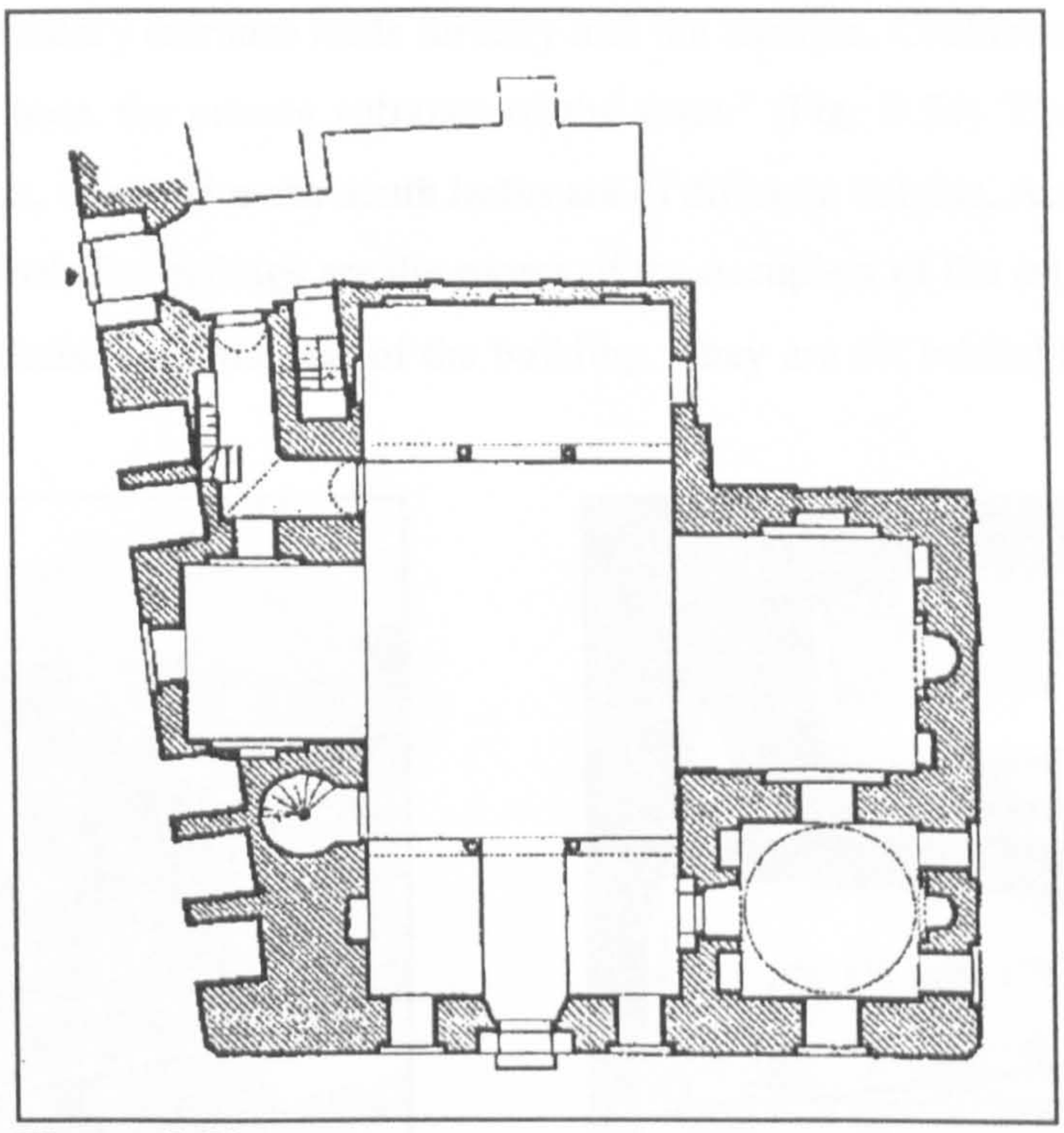


**Figure 5.51** Plan of the *Madrasa* of *Emīr* Aślam al-Silaḥdār. (After Kessler)

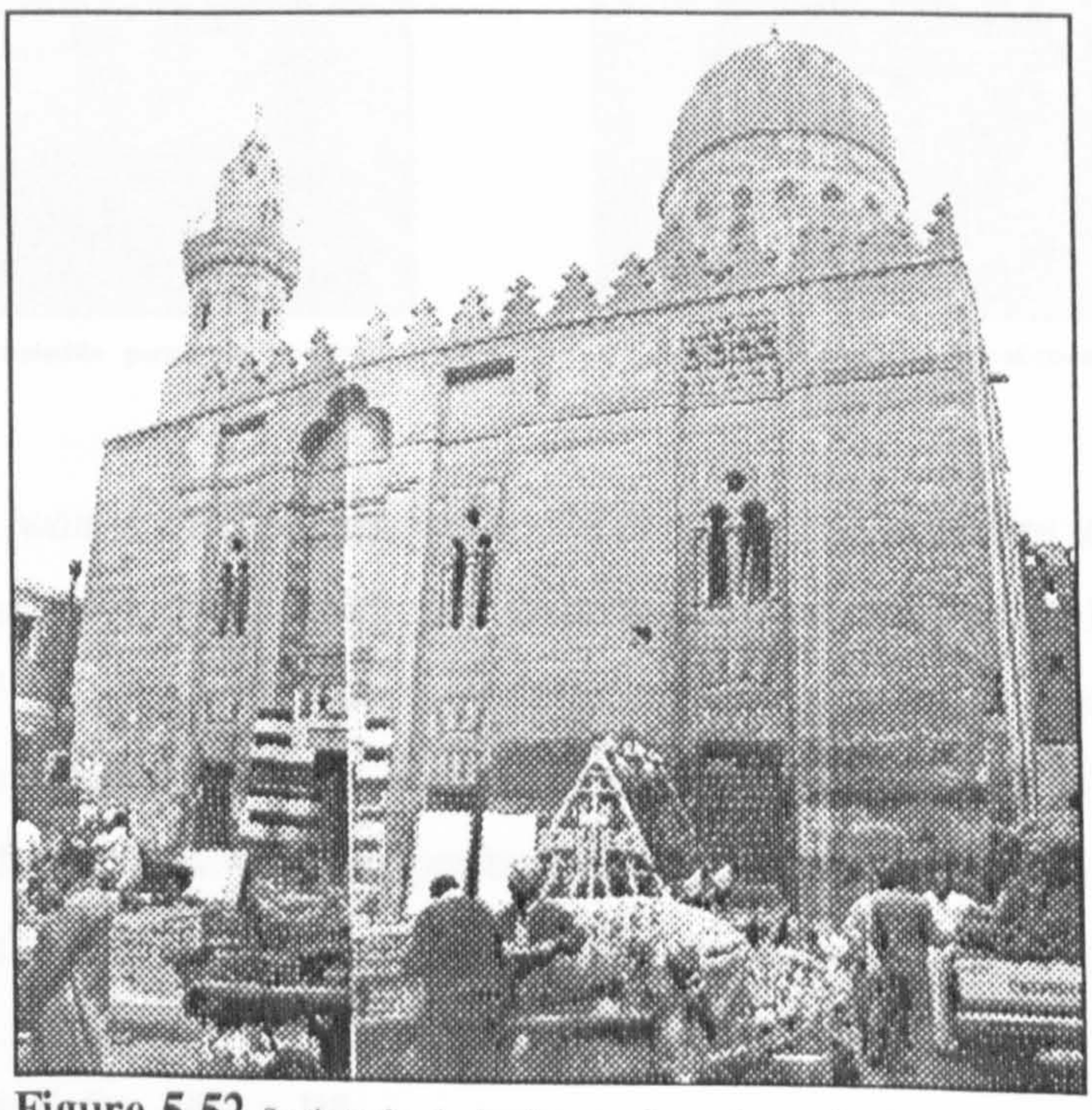


**Figure 5.52** Southern façade showing secondary entrance, dome, and minaret.

The main entrance is a stalactite portal outlined by a trefoil lacing ornamentation. (Fig. 5.53) The secondary door which leads directly into the *ṣaḥn* is trilobed. The main portal leads to an entrance hall which in turn leads to the *ṣaḥn* through a winding corridor (*majāz*). The interior plan is a variation of the four-*iwān madrasa* and presents several surprises. The first is that the secondary entrance leads directly into the mosque. Chahinda Karīm presumes that it must have been the private entrance of the *emīr*.[1] (Fig. 5.54) The second peculiar thing is that the east, west and north-south *iwāns* are of different heights. Above the north and south *iwāns* with their flat ceilings are the rooms of the occupiers of the establishment which are completely isolated from the rest of the building. They are set behind the court façade.

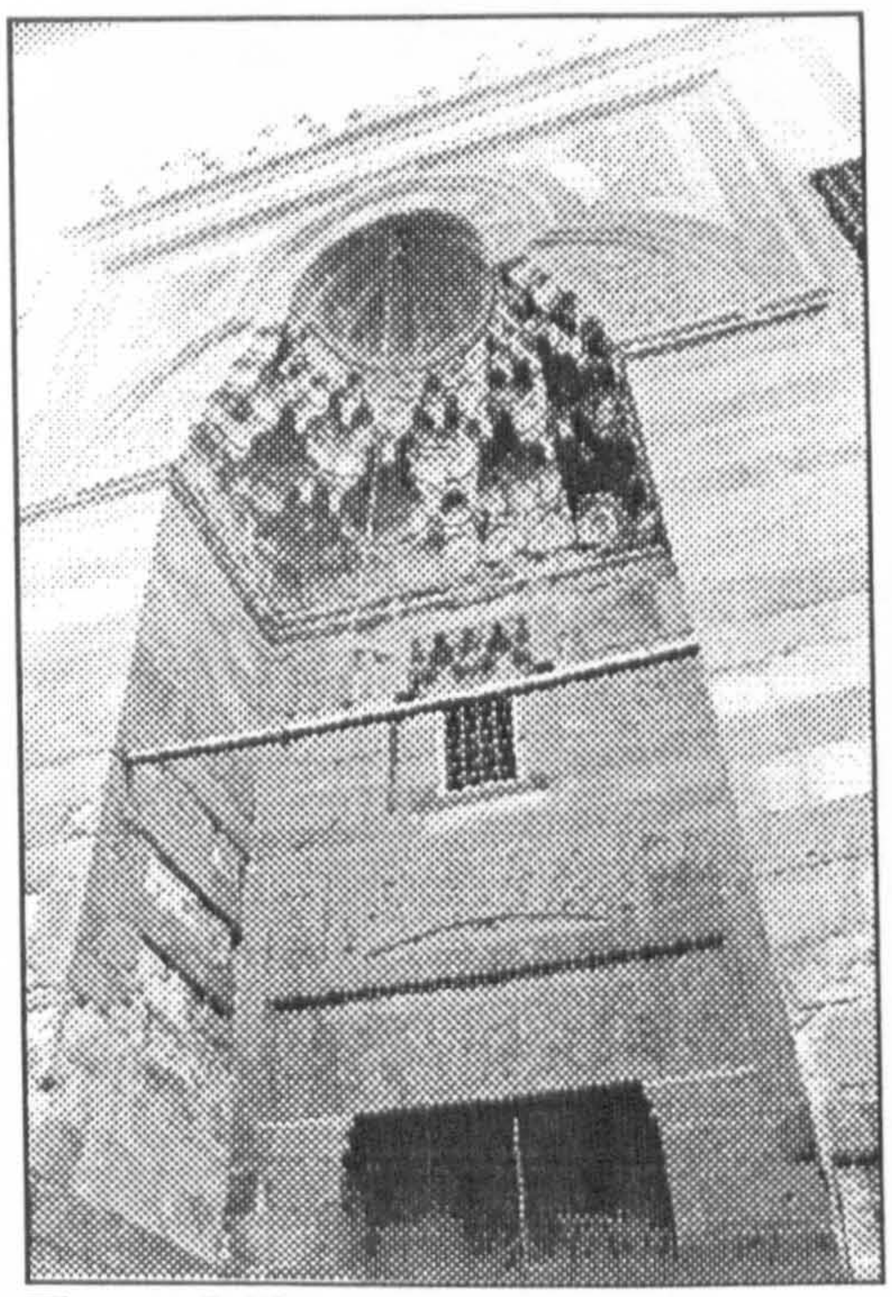


**Figure 5.53** Main stalactite portal, outlined with a trefoil pattern.

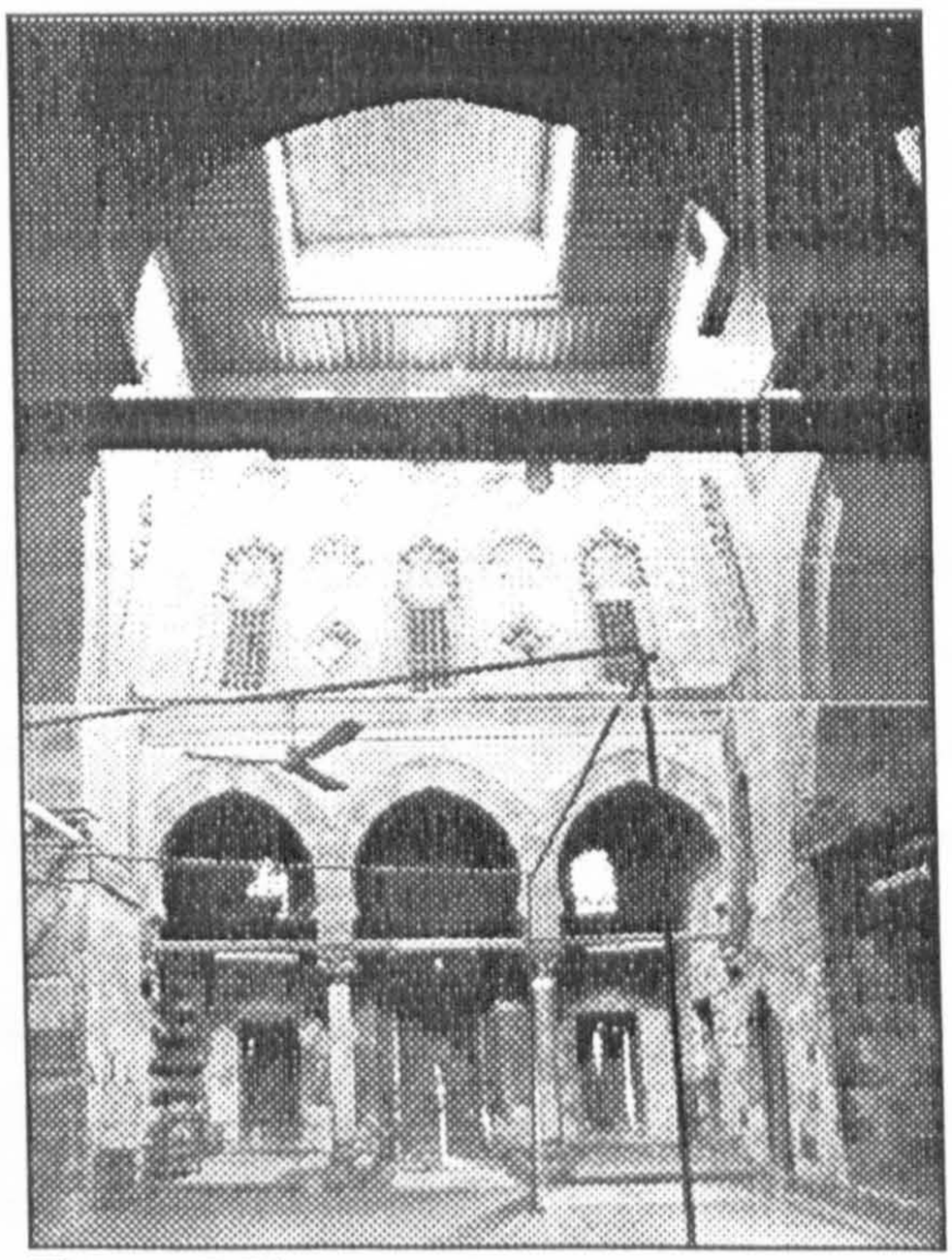


**Figure 5.54** Interior view of covered *ṣaḥn* showing secondary entrance leading to its centre.

The west *iwān* is another surprise; above the arched recess there is an open balcony that overlooks the *ṣaḥn*. (Fig. 5.55) All these features are explained hypothetically by Chahinda Karim[2] who says that the top floor must have been a *mashyakhat Ṣūfiyyah* (meaning that it was not a *khanqah* in the full sense because there are no Ṣūfī cells, but it was a place where Ṣūfī practices would be performed, i.e., *dhikr*, and *ḥuḍūr*). Accordingly, she concludes, such areas would have been used by Ṣūfī students and *shaykhs*.

---

[1] op cit. Chahinda Karīm, 1988, p.238.

[2] See argument in ibid., p.246.

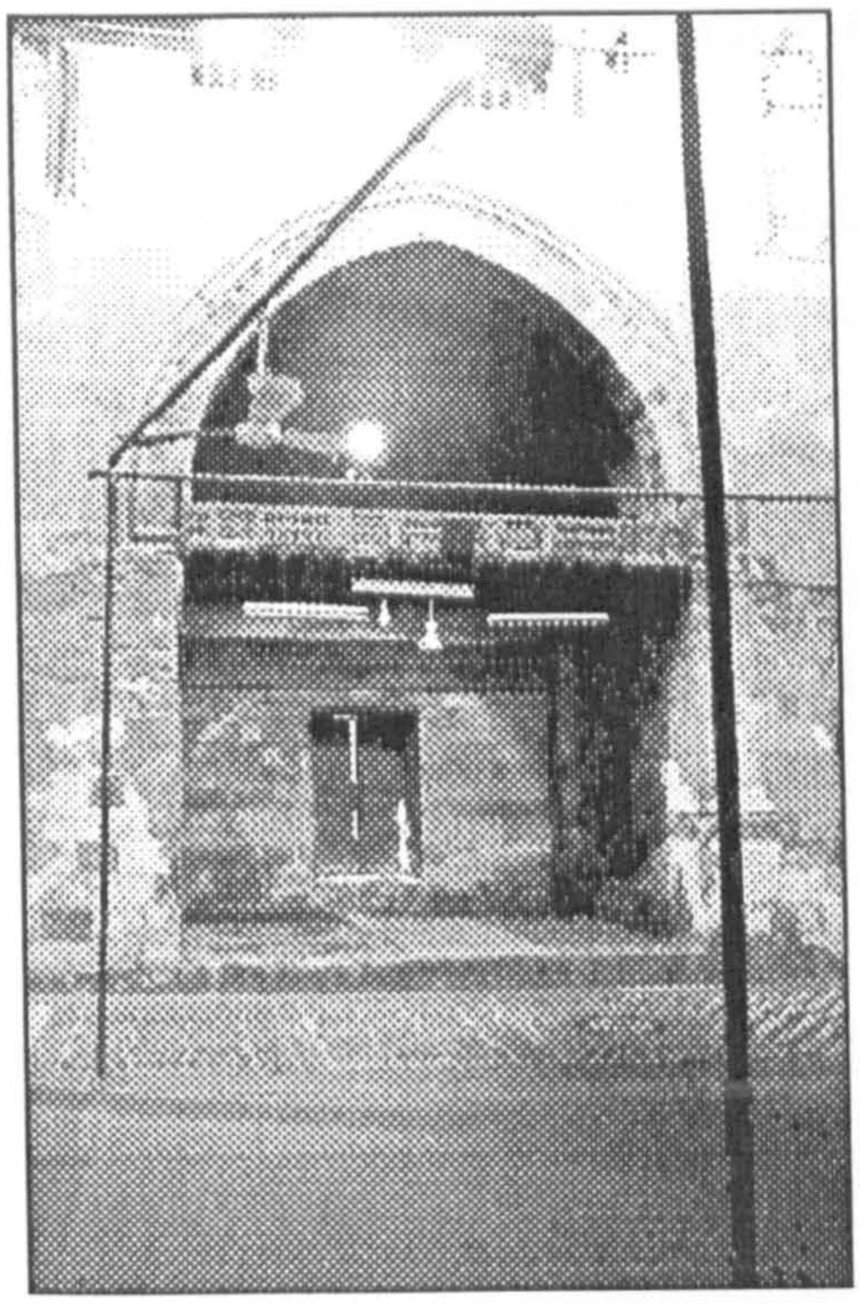


**Figure 5.55** West-*iwān* showing an open balcony.

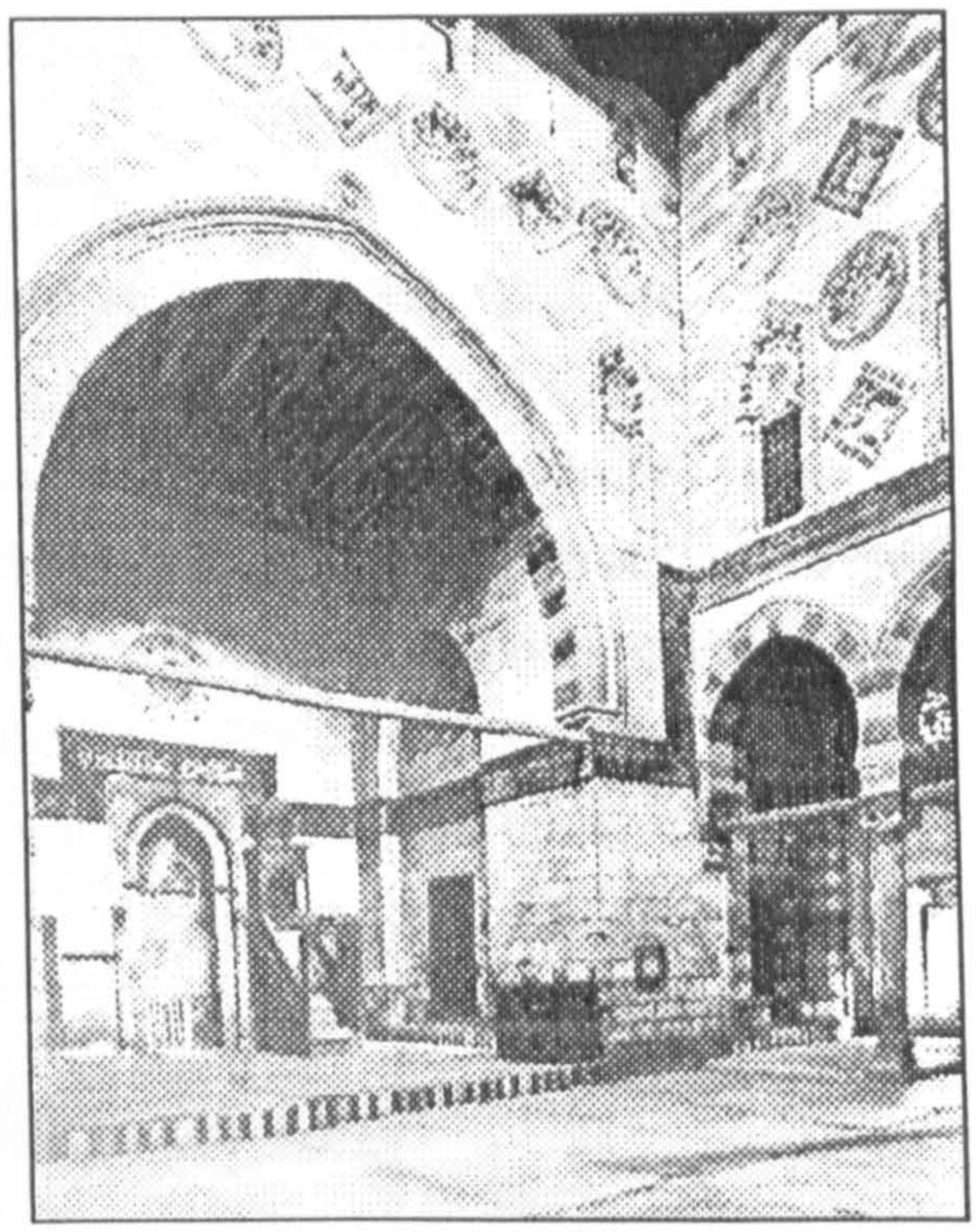


**Figure 5.56** The *qibla iwān* with stucco pointed *miḥrāb*.

A second balcony, no more than a bridge, spans the opening at the base of the west *iwān* - this was probably a *dikka* (bench) of the *muballigh* (literally "informer"; he repeats what the leader of prayer is saying so that the people in the back rows can follow). The *qibla iwān* is arched and has a flat wooden roof - because of the floor above it. (Fig. 5.56) The *miḥrāb* located as usual in the centre of the *qibla* wall is covered in stucco decoration, its form is a slightly stilted pointed arch. This mosque/*madrasa* is amongst the three Baḥrī Mamlūk buildings that have roofed *ṣaḥns*. The present roof and lantern are additions made in 1900[1], accordingly, we do not know what the original roof was like.

The minaret follows the Mamlūk model of square, and octagon; the third section is circular but dates of the Ottoman period. It could be presumed that it was originally circular following the other surviving contemporary cases - see Fig. 5.52. The transition from square base to octagonal second storey is not in the usual inverted sculptured triangles, but of pyramidal shapes that seem to secure the octagon into its place. The crenellations used in the exterior of the mosque are very elaborate versions of the trefoil crestings that are familiar to the Mamlūk period; these consist of five lobes. As is the case with all medieval crestings, the void spaces between every two crestings are inverted replicas of the solids.

[1] ibid., p.247.

**<u>*Madrasa* and Mausoleum of *Emīr* Ṡarghatmish:</u>** (No.218 on plan)

The full name of *Emīr* Ṡarghatmish is Sayf al-Dīn Ṡarghatmish al-Nāṡirī. This Mamlūk renowned for his beauty[1], was acquired by Sulṫān al-Nāṡir Muḥammad and grew up in the corps of *jamadārs* (or keepers of the wardrobe). His prominence dates to the reigns of al-Nāṡir's minor sons when Ṡarghatmish took an active part in the battles waged on their behalf. He was one of the principal agents in the re-election of Sulṫān Ḥassan, and thereafter virtually ruled the kingdom in his stead. Ṡulṫān Ḥassan chafed at this and accordingly ordered his arrest. He died in his imprisonment in Alexandria in (759 A.H., 1358 A.D.). He is buried in this *madrasa*, in the domed-tomb chamber which projects into the street. (Fig. 5.57)

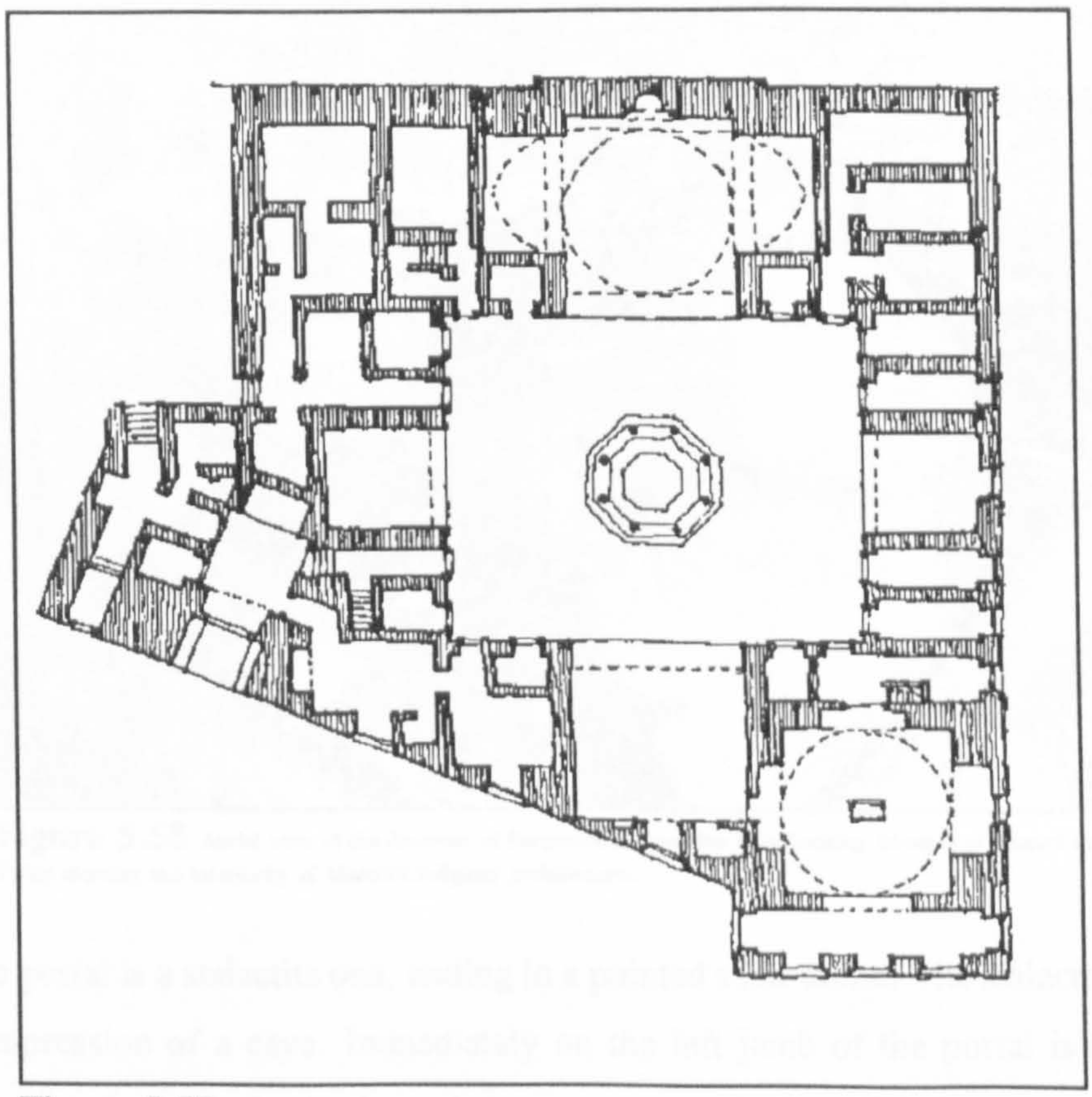


**Figure 5.57** Plan of the *Madrasa* of Ṡarghatmish. (After Islamic Capitals Organization)

This four-*iwān madrasa* planned building lies attached to the north-east wall of the Mosque of Aḥmed Ibn Ṫūlūn. (Fig. 5.58) According to al-Maqrīzī[2], it was in (Jumāda I 757 A.H., May 1356 A.D.) that this *madrasa*/mosque was completed. Al-Maqrīzī describes the

---

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), <u>*Khiṫaṫ*</u>, vol.2, p.405.

[2] ibid., vol.2, p.403.

official opening ceremony of this *madrasa* saying that Ṣarghatmish invited Mamlūk *emīrs*, the judge of judges of the four rites (*qāḍī al-quḍāh lil-arba'at madhāhib*) as well as the *'ulamā'*.[1] He appointed the *fiqh* tutor, arranged for the *ḥadīth* lessons, and decided on its endowment. Its students were preferably to be chosen from Persian origin (*min al-'Ajam*)[2]. Some *madrasas* and *khanqahs* especially in the first few decades of the Baḥrī rule were exclusive institutions that were open to foreigners only. Soon after, this situation changed to incorporate members of the society at large.

**Figure 5.58** Aerial view of the *Madrasa* of Ṣarghatmish from the neighbouring Mosque of Aḥmed Ibn Ṭūlūn showing the interiority of Mamlūk religious architecture.

The portal is a stalactite one, ending in a pointed semi-dome. The stalactite formation gives the impression of a cave. Immediately on the left jamb of the portal is the minaret. (Fig. 5.59) The doorway leads through to an entrance hall, which by means of winding corridors (*majāz*) lead to the central courtyard. Geometrical crenellations are used to crown the walls of both the external façades as well as the internal courtyard. In the centre of the courtyard is an octagonal water fountain which has lost its dome, and around it are four vaulted pointed *iwāns*. Doris Behrens-Abouseif says: "*In the middle of the marble paved*

---

[1] ibid., vol.2, p.404.

[2] See op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.275.

*courtyard is an ablution fountain in the shape of a pavilion of eight marble columns which most likely once had a dome, like that of the Sultan Ḥasan mosque."*[1] (Fig. 5.60) It cannot have been possible to design this fountain to be used for ablutions since a very large area to the left hand side of the *qibla* façade was reserved for an ablutionary (*mayḍa'a*) which would make this specific utilitarian function of the fountain redundant and useless.

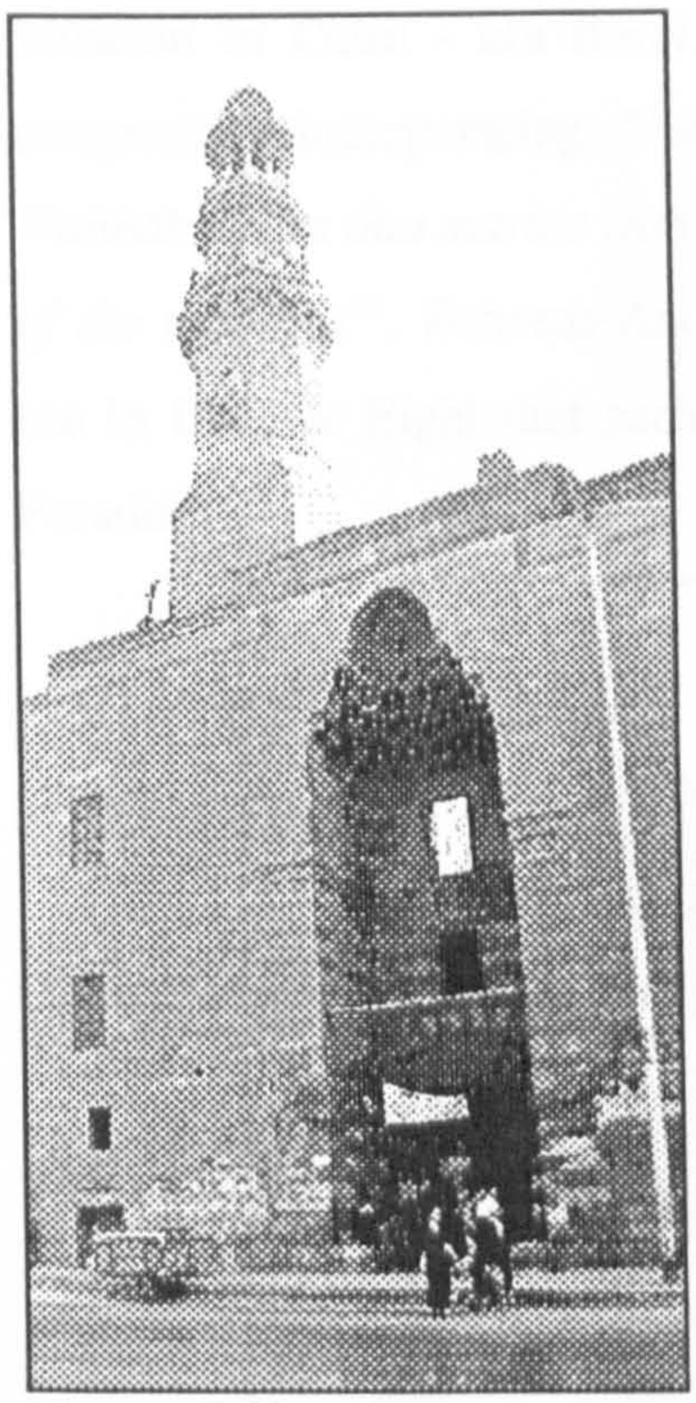


**Figure 5.59** A typical Baḥrī Mamlūk composition of stalactite portal and minaret.

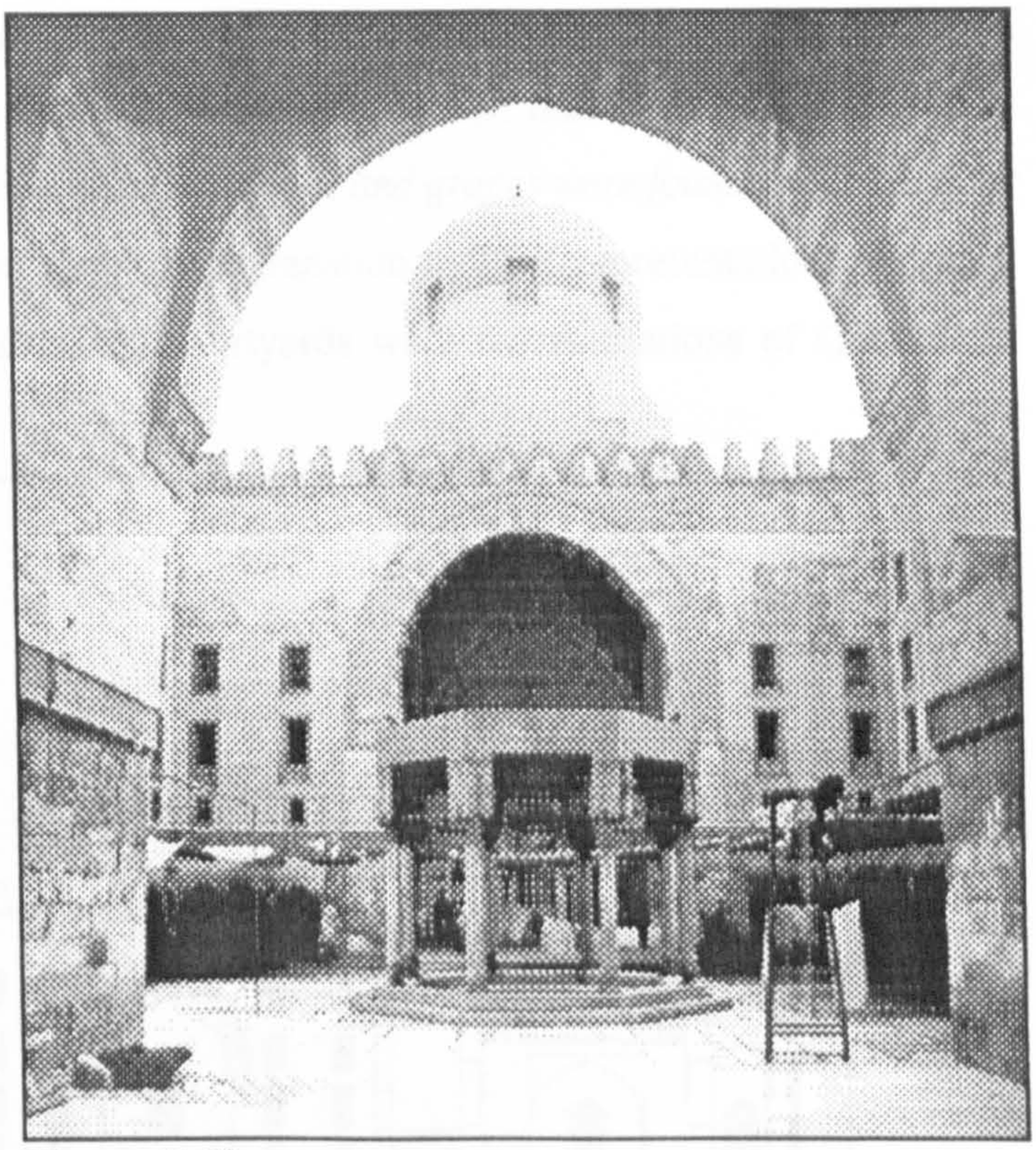


**Figure 5.60** The octagonal fountain placed at the centre of the courtyard of the *Madrasa* of Śarghatmish was originally domed.

In the angles of these four *iwāns* are the dependencies: halls, library, and the living units for the *'ulamā'*, students, and servants. This *madrasa* is a good example of the type founded in the mid-fourteenth century by Mamlūk *emīrs* in support of higher studies of Qur'ān, Prophetic *ḥadīth*, and jurisprudence (*fiqh*). One senior and three junior *'ulamā'* were appointed. Sixty students were enrolled who were to devote themselves exclusively to study the Ḥanafī rite. There was also a school for orphans established and attached to the foundation - a sort of annex. It accommodated forty children, and was run by a teacher and an assistant who taught them the Qur'ān, *al-khaṭṭ* (calligraphy), *'ilm al-ḥisāb* (arithmetic), and other subjects.

---

[1] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.121.

Apart from the pointed *iwāns*, are rooms for the students on the ground level as well as three other floors. The *qibla iwān* is roofed centrally by a dome. I believe that it is because laterality (providing longer rows) is recommendable in the *Ṡunna*, that two spaces accessible to the central domed area project to the right and left of the square domed space, thus providing a rectangular praying area - with the long side parallel to the *qibla*. Doris Behrens-Abouseif says that the marble slabs that were located in the prayer hall - now in the Islamic Museum in Cairo - are floral, and that one of these slabs has an arabesque decorative composition incorporating: "*two hands holding stalks, a lamp, and birds. Ḥasan 'Abd al-Wahhāb writes that marble with animal representations and grapes were found under the floor of the madrasa*"[1]. Behrens-Abouseif finds no explanation to such representations. We will see in Chapter Eight that such patterns in courtyards were representations of Gardens of Paradise.

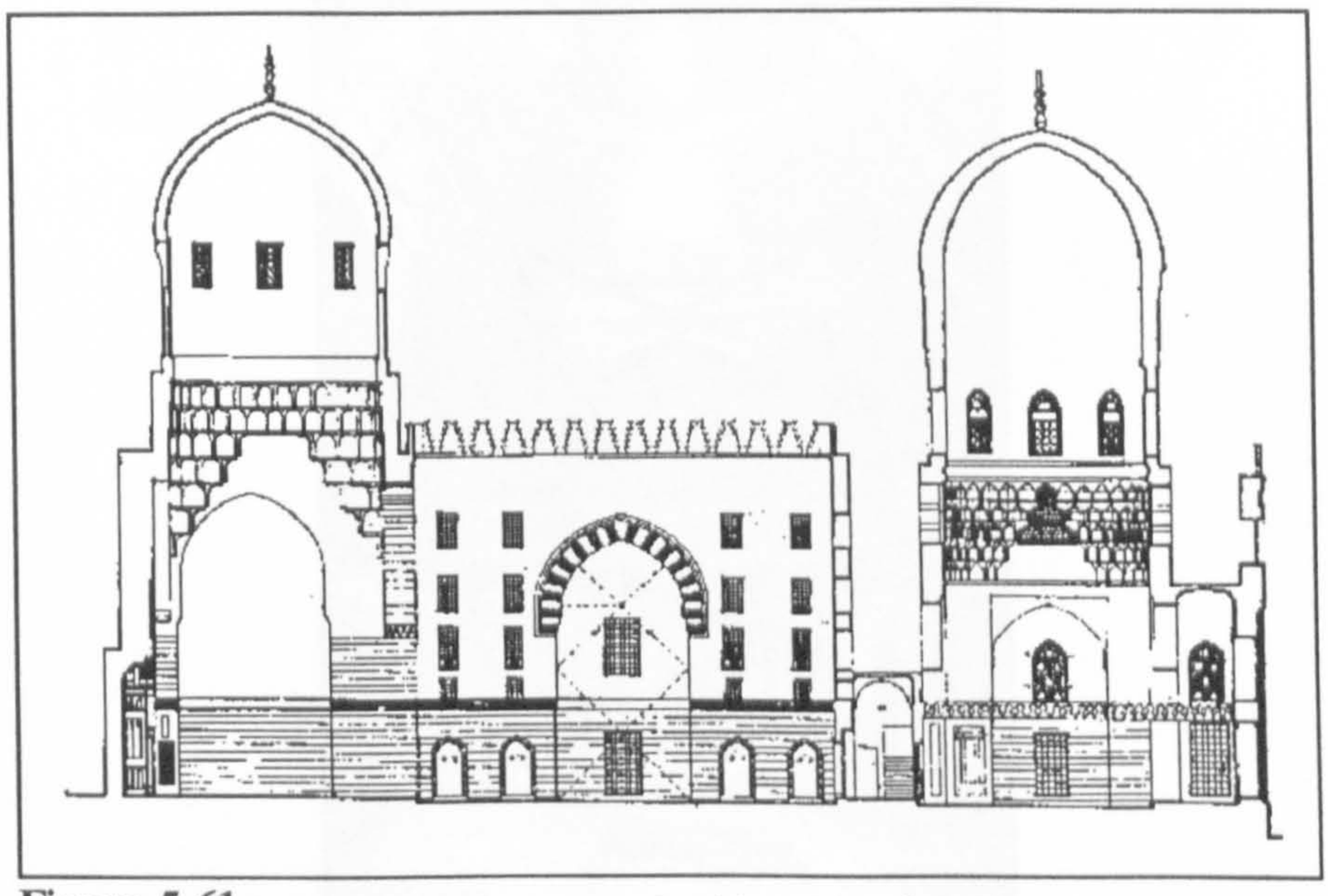


**Figure 5.61** Section in the mausoleum, courtyard, and dome of the *miḥrāb*. (Islamic Capitals Organization)

There are two domes in this *madrasa*. (Fig. 5.61) One is above the *miḥrāb* - it had collapsed and has been rebuilt according to old documentation found of the original dome - and the other is above the tomb of the founder. Both domes are unique in that they have a slightly bulbous shape. This form became characteristic of the domes of Central Asia at the beginning of the fifteenth-century A.D. Externally, the two domes have octagonal zones of transition. Internally, the transition of the dome above the *miḥrāb* is carried out by means of seven rows of stalactites, which change the square into an octagon at the fifth row. The following two rows smooth out the octagon into a circle.

---

[1] ibid., p.121

On the other hand, the mausoleum dome is lined by five continuous rows of stalactites similar to those used during the Ayyubid period. The change in form from square base to circular top is very gradual. An octagonal wooden cantilevered frame is supported at the base of the mausoleum chamber. Four windows pierce the stalactite zone, followed by eight windows piercing the dome itself. (Fig. 5.62) The significance of the octagonal wooden frame, the four, and eight windows in the dome are not discussed in any historical studies.

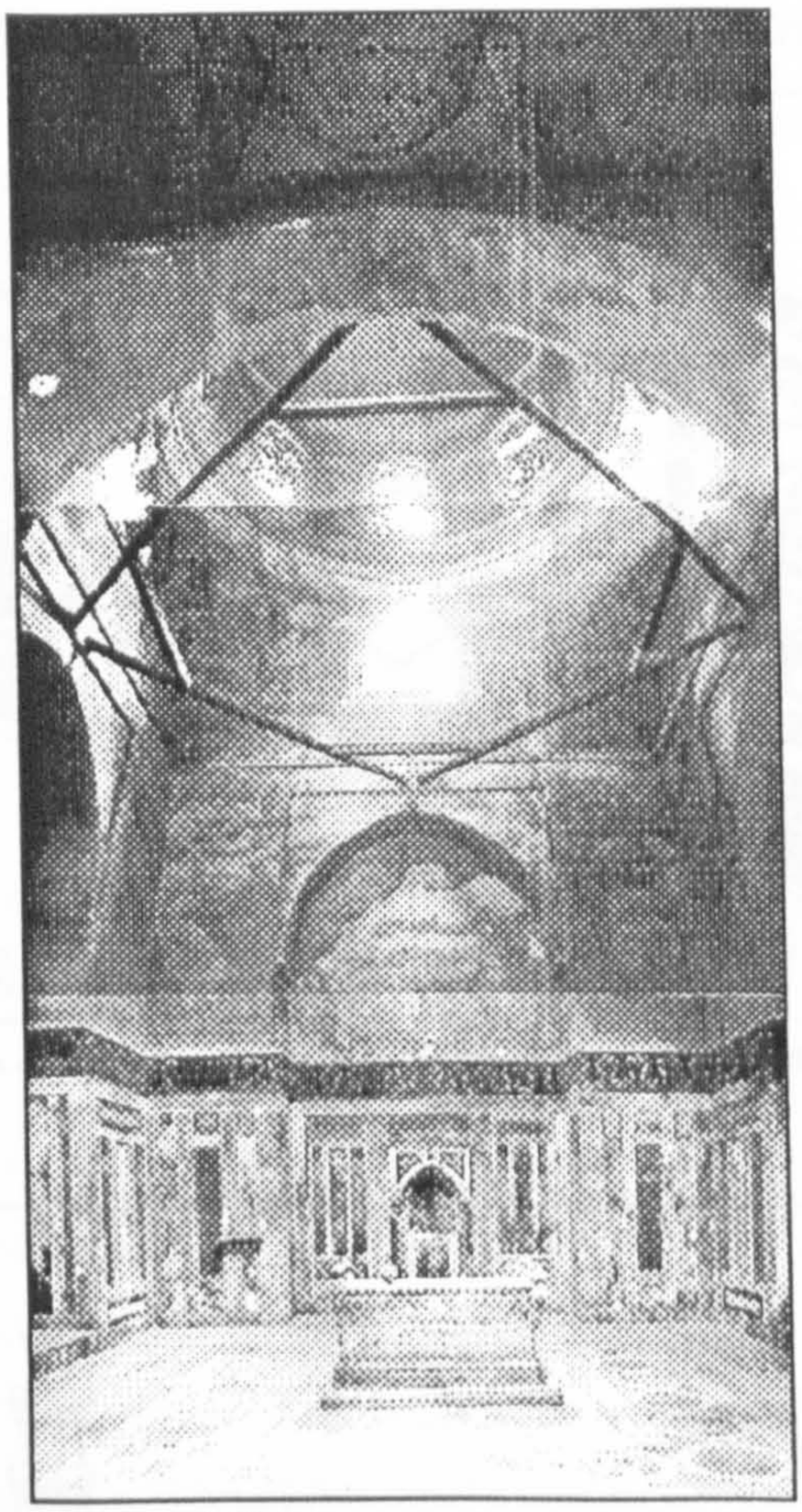


**Figure 5.62** Interior view of the mausoleum dome showing its form organization and zone of transition.

According to Creswell, who applies his theory of evolution of form, the minaret of Ṡarghatmish is a good example of the form to which the minaret of Salār and Sanjar al-Jawlī was leading[1] - this will be dealt with in section 5.1.3. At its base, the square section has been reduced considerably and is set with inclined triangles transforming it to the octagonal second storey. This is followed by yet another octagonal storey, but of smaller proportions than the preceding one. At the top there is a colonnade pavilion with a circular pointed domical top.

[1] See op cit. Creswell, 1937, Pp. 246-248.

***Madrasa*/Mosque and Mausoleum of Sulṭān Ḥassan:** (No.133 on plan)

Sulṭān Ḥassan was one of the sons of Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn whose descendants dominated the Baḥrī period. He had an interrupted reign of 15 years, beginning at the age of 13 in 1347 A.D. Sulṭān Ḥassan was assassinated in 1361 A.D. and did not live to see the completion of his building. He was able to build such an imposing monument (Figs. 5.63 & 5.64) because the estates of victims of the Black Death (the plague of 1348 A.D.) had filled the treasury with money to be used for royal endowments.

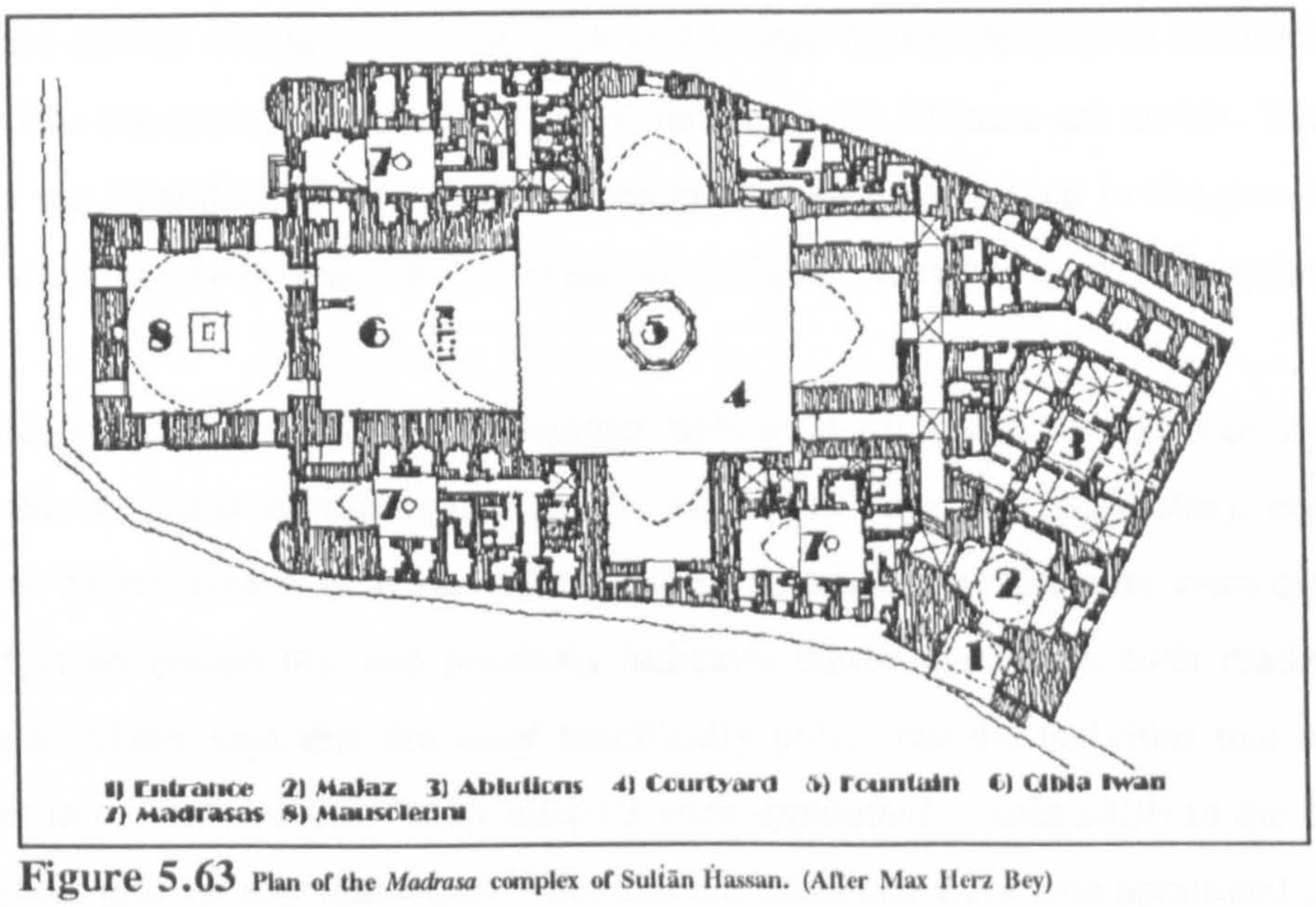



**Figure 5.63** Plan of the *Madrasa* complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan. (After Max Herz Bey)

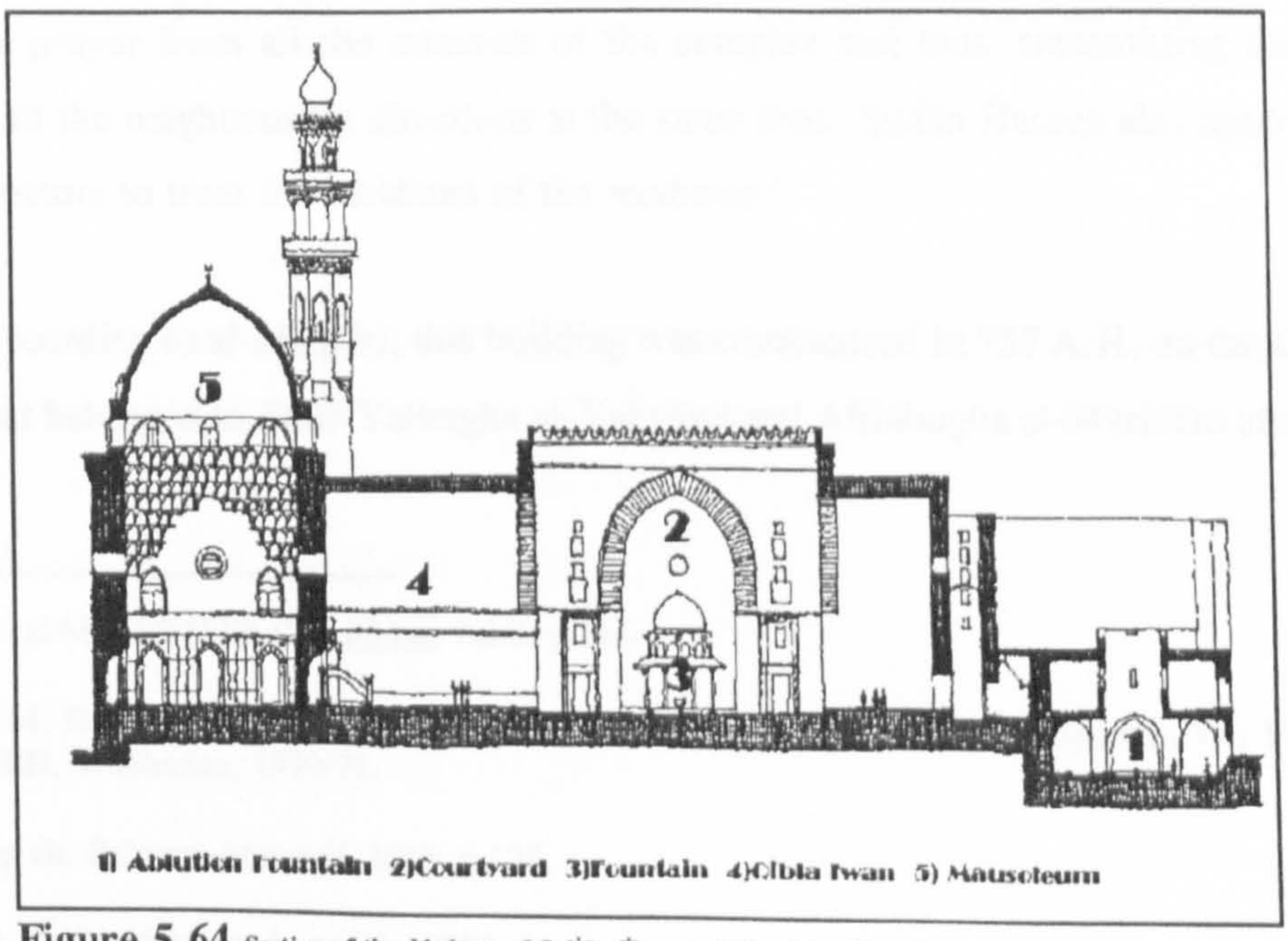



**Figure 5.64** Section of the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan. (After Max Herz Bey)

This *madrasa* is unquestionably one of the masterpieces of Mamlūk architecture in Cairo, if not of the Islamic architectural tradition in Egypt as a whole. It is an excellent example of both the massiveness and the monumental style which characterizes the Baḥrī Mamlūk period and of the four-*iwān madrasa* internal organization. This monument has been categorized as a mosque by al-Maqrīzī[1] although it is obviously a *madrasa*. He also tells us that craftsmen from all over the Muslim world were summoned to contribute in this huge work, which explains a lot of foreign influences in it, especially in the Tabrīz faience work on the windows, and the Anatolian intended portal organization.[2] Doris Behrens-Abouseif says that the carved motifs of the portal show Chinese flower decorative treatments which also show that the craftsmen must have been familiar with Chinese art motifs. She goes on to say that we should not forget that Chinese motifs were daily seen in the porcelains and silks that were imported from China - these were highly cherished by the Egyptians.[3]

The Ṣulṭān Ḥassan's *waqf* document tells us a lot about the curriculum that was taught in this *madrasa* as well as the number of *'ulamā'*, *mu'īdīn* (assistants), and students that were to be enrolled in it. It also tells us of the number of people who were appointed to read the Qur'ān (*muqri'īn*), and precisely indicates where and when such reading should occur. Su'ād Māhir says that the *waqf* specifically points out the activities that were to be carried out in the mausoleum: "*sixty muqri's were appointed to take shifts in the continuous reading of the Qur'ān day and night.*"[4] Several *mu'adhdhins* were also appointed to perform the *ādhān sulṭānī* (royal call for prayer) which involved several *mu'adhdhins* - usually three - calling for prayer from all the minarets of the complex and thus, transmitting the call for prayer to all the neighbouring directions at the same time. Sulṭān Ḥassan also appointed two medical doctors to treat the residents of the *madrasa*.[5]

According to al-Maqrīzī, this building was commenced in 757 A.H. on the site of two palaces that belonged to *Emīr* Yalbugha al-Yaḥyāwī and Alṭinbugha al-Māridānī after pulling

---

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, p.316.

[2] See J.M. Rogers, "Seljuk Influence on the Monuments of Cairo", Kunst Des Orients, VII, Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, Wiesbaden, 1970/71.

[3] See op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.125.

[4] op cit. Su'ād Mahir, n.d., vol.3, p.289.

[5] For a full description of the contents of the *waqfiyyah*, see ibid., vol.3, Pp. 288-290.

them down to replace them with this monument. He goes on to say that the work was continuous for three years. He also adds that the expenditure figures were astronomical at an estimate of 20 thousand dirhams a day (approx. 20 million dirhams for the whole building). Al-Maqrīzī says that the eunuch al-Ṫawāshī Muqbil al-Shāmī told him that he had heard the Sulṫān Ḥassan say that the scaffolding alone that had to be made to construct the large *iwān* cost 100 thousand dirhams. Al-Maqrīzī finally describes this building by saying: "*there is no known monument in the Islamic world that can compare to this mosque*"[1].

From the inscriptions found on the exterior of the mausoleum and on the Mālikī *madrasa*, we are able to know that the main structure of the building (the external and internal shell) was finished before the death of the sulṫān. Above the four doorways leading to the four *madrasas* are inscriptions dating the completion of the building as 764 A.H. The inscription on the wooden dome of the fountain confirms this date. (Fig. 5.65) This water fountain is described by historians such as Doris Behrens-Abouseif[2] and Su'ād Māhir[3] as an ablution fountain, although a huge area located behind the entrance hall accommodates that particular function - see plan. Other historians recognizing this oversight - such as Richard Parker, Robin Sabin, and Caroline Williams - say that: "*the little gazebo in the middle of the court was originally designed as a decorative fountain and not for ablutions.*"[4] Having found no utilitarian function for it, they attributed its incorporation to aesthetic reasons. We will see in the following chapters that this contradicts the traditional understanding of the role of the arts; a traditional artist and designer cannot divorce art, and beauty from utility.

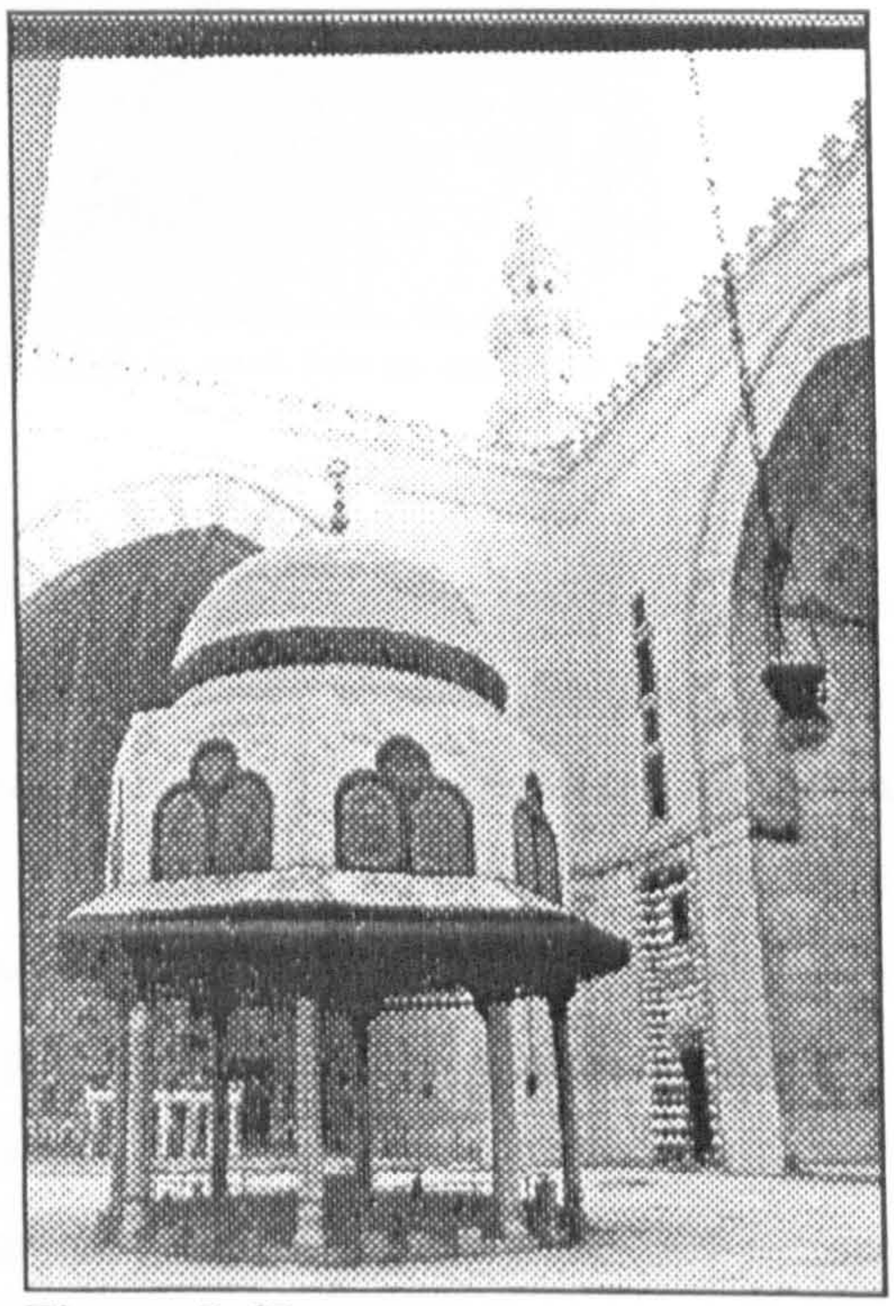


**Figure 5.65** The octagonal water fountain of the Sulṫān Ḥassan - often mistaken for an ablution fountain.

---

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṫaṫ*, vol.2, p.316.

[2] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.125.

[3] op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.284.

[4] op cit. Parker et al., 1985, p.79.

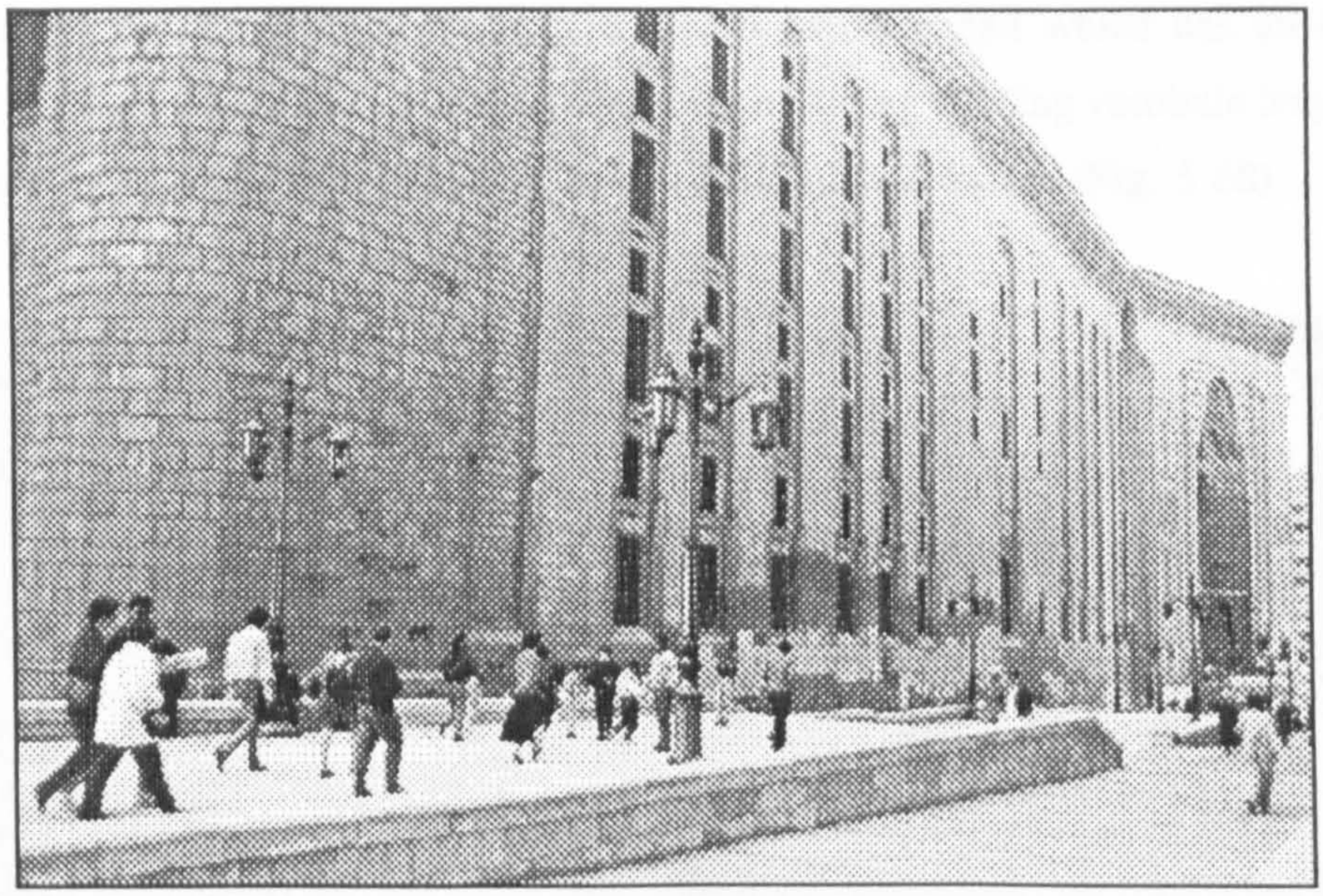


**Figure 5.66** The massive façade of the complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan as viewed from the direction of the Citadel leading to the offset entrance and pointed recessed portal.

The offset entrance is on al-Qal'a Street through a high stalactite portal ending in a pointed semi-dome. (Fig. 5.66) The view of this stretching façade towards the Citadel, is an excellent example of how Baḥrī Mamlūk architecture was intended to dominate the urban setting. The dimensions of the building are colossal: 150 meters long and 68 meters wide. In order to increase the length of the façade it was accentuated by a cornice in the shape of clustered honeycomb stalactites running along the top of the walls. To accentuate the entrance the design was conceptualized with two minarets on either side of the portal. Al-Maqrīzī[1] recounts that in February 1360 A.D., the built minaret toppled killing three hundred people, and that as a result this entrance composition was abandoned.

The height of the recessed portal is emphasized by the spiral pilasters as well as by the vertical panels on each side of the porch. There are also uncarved and unfinished decorative motifs; the design has been sketched in but not carved out. (Fig. 5.67) Passing through the portal doorway into the entrance hall gives the sensation of a cave. This effect is

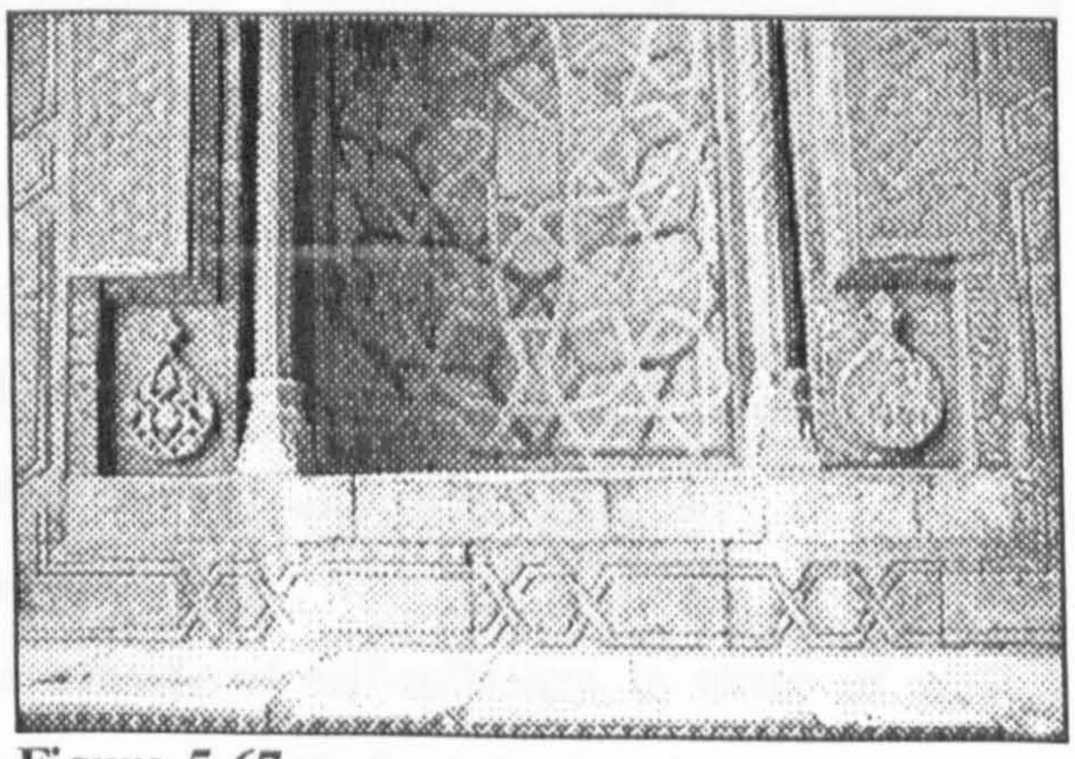


**Figure 5.67** Uncarved patterns at the portal show Chinese influence.

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiiai*, vol.2, p.316.

emphasized by passing through a stalactite-domed entrance hall which has an octagonal cantilevered wooden frame attached to its square base. A long winding vestibule (*majāz*) leads into a quadrangular *ṣaḥn* surrounded by four pointed vaulted *iwāns*. (Fig. 5.68)

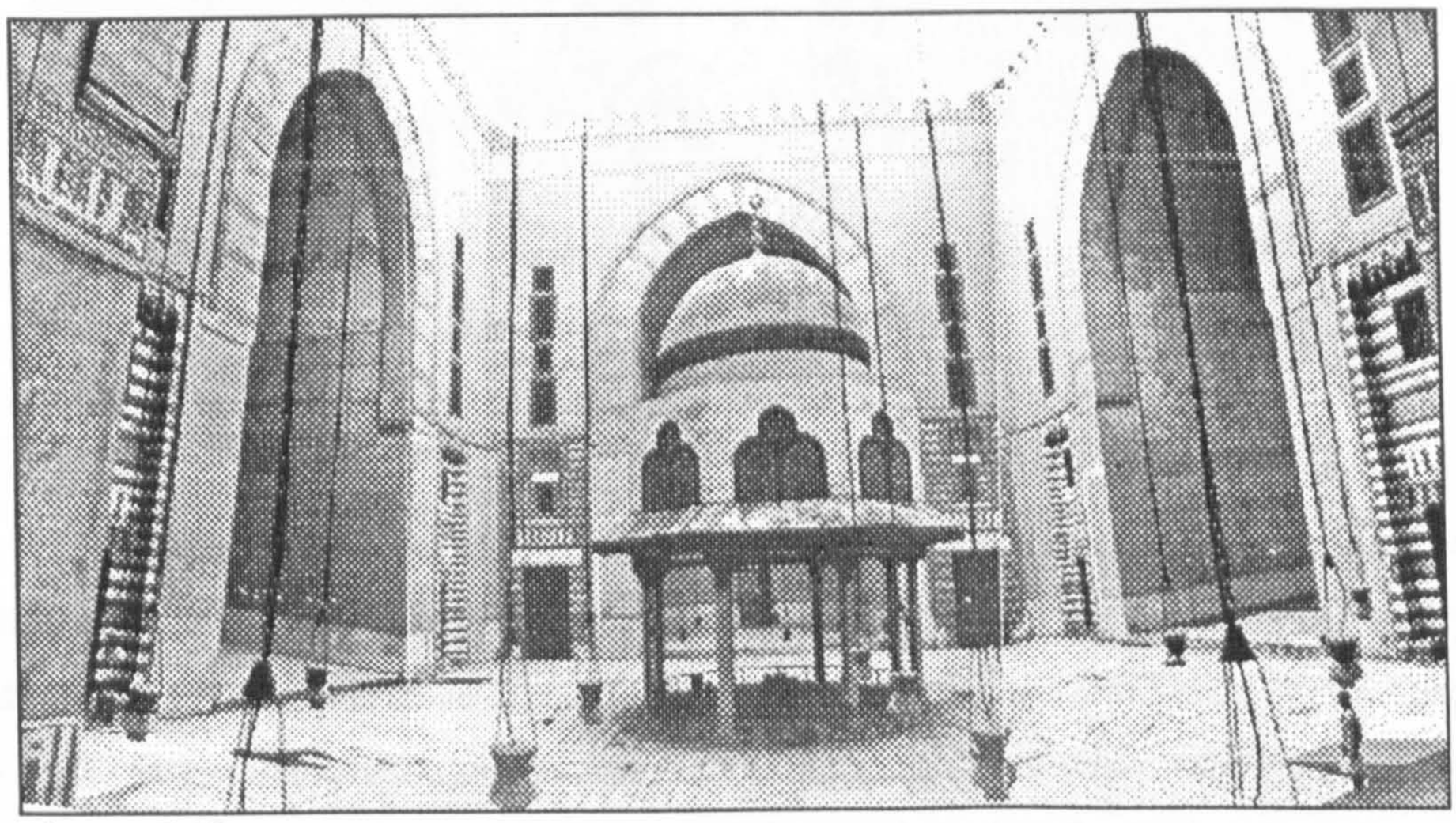


**Figure 5.68** Four *iwāns* are organized about the courtyard with the domed octagonal fountain at its centre.

The flooring of the courtyard shows geometrical marble patterns that are only noticeable from the top floors of the living units. It resembles to a great extent the marble patterned flooring of the *Madrasa* of Ṣarghatmish but without any animal representations or vine-like formations. Each of the vaulted *iwāns* was dedicated to one of the legal rites of *Sunnī* Islam. There are four doors which lead off from the courtyard to the internal areas of the side-*madrasas* and living units designated to each rite. In these corners of the building, between the arms of the *iwāns*, were the lodgings for students and teachers. Each side-*madrasa* had its own courtyard, *iwān*, octagonal fountain, and five floors of rooms. (Fig. 5.69) Accordingly, Su'ād Māhir says that each side-*madrasa* can be considered self-sufficient in terms of what it constitutes - the Ḥanafī *madrasa* is the most interesting of all of the four.[1]

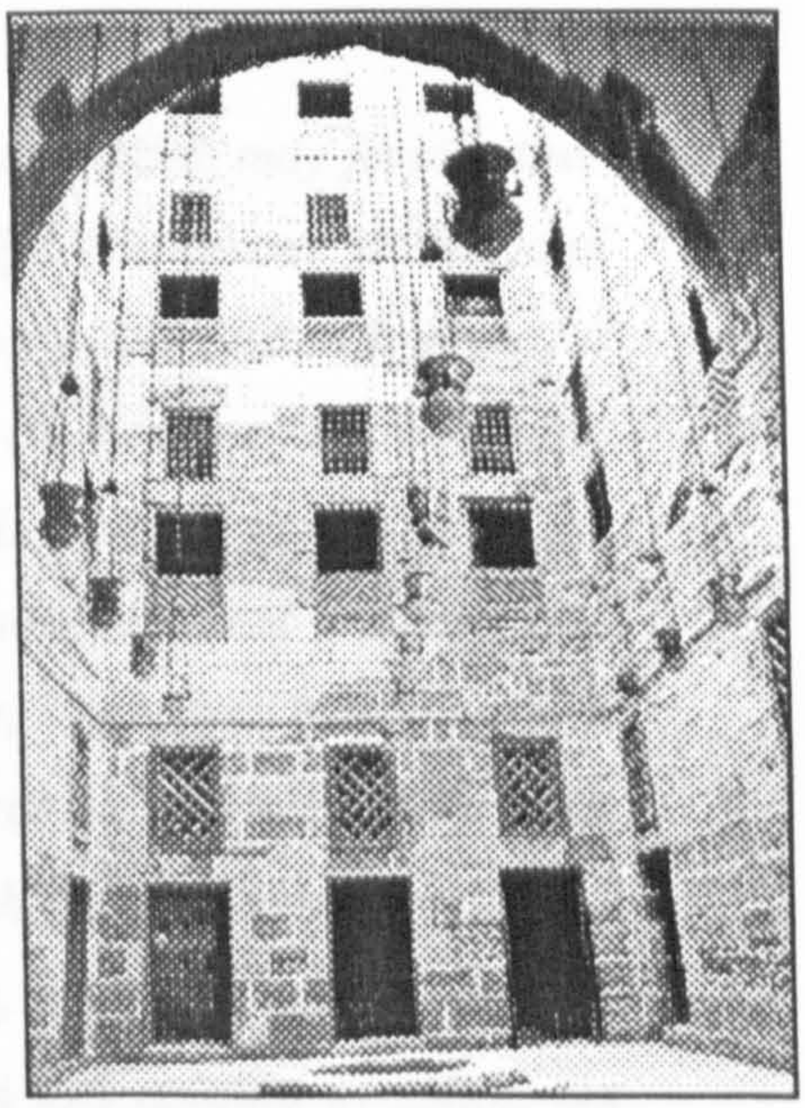


**Figure 5.69** The court of the Ḥanafī side-*madrasa* facing the living units.

[1] op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.284.

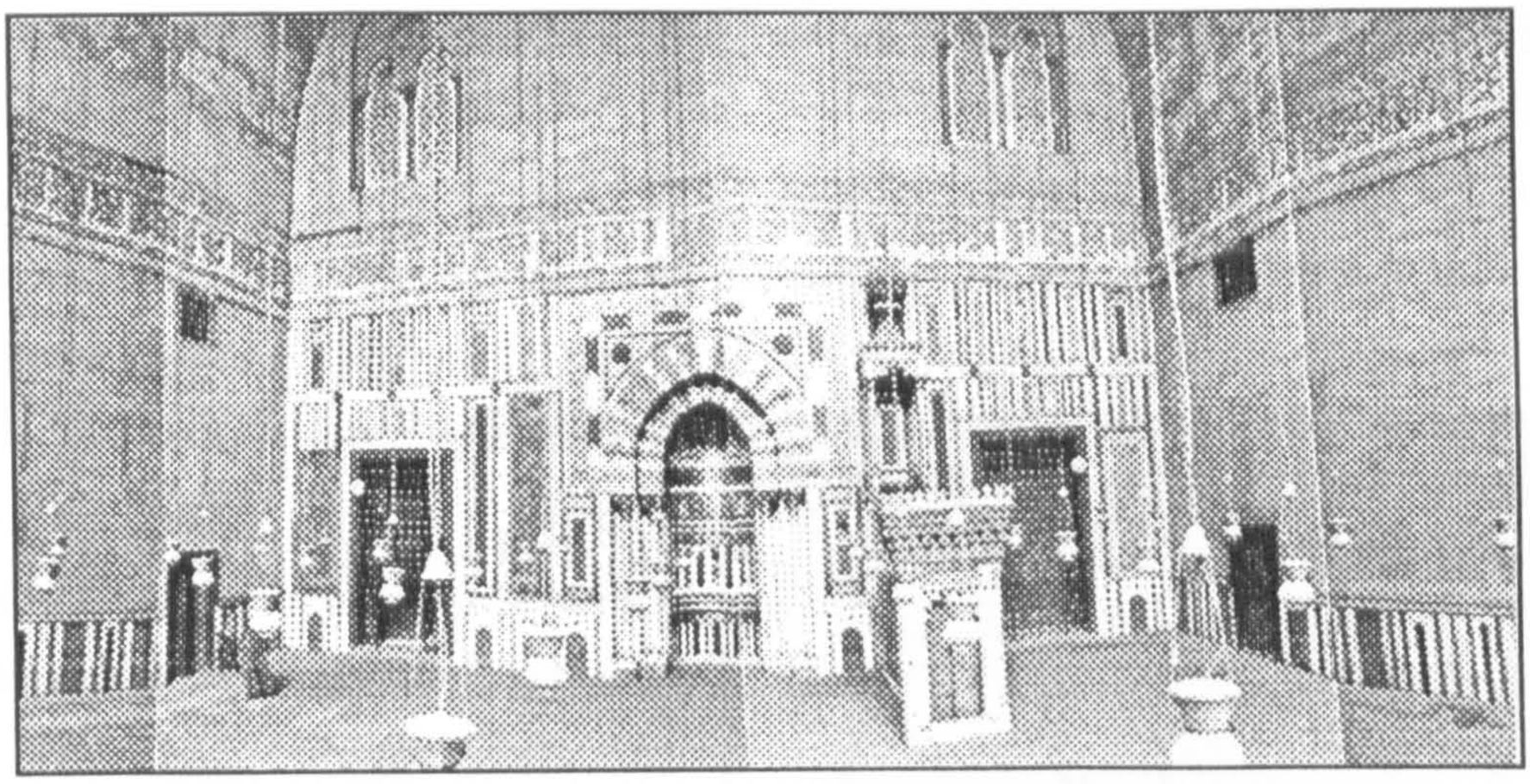


**Figure 5.70** The eastern *qibla iwān* is the widest, highest, deepest, and most colourful of the four *iwāns*.

The *qibla iwān* monopolizes the interior; it has been described by al-Maqrīzī as being roofed by a vault spanning a distance of 65 cubits. He adds that the famous Vault of Cyrus (*Iwān Kisrā*) at Ctesiphon spans 60 cubits, and thus, states that the *qibla iwān* of this complex is 5 cubits larger than the largest known *iwān* at his time.[1] The *qibla iwān* was used as the mosque (praying area). (Fig. 5.70) Circumscribing the *iwān* is a Qur'ānic epigraphy written in Kufic scripture on a background of floral scrolls of chinese-like lotus blossoms:

> ***Verily we have granted thee a manifest victory: that Allah may forgive thee thy faults of the past and those to follow; fulfil His favour to thee;and guide thee on the straight path; and that Allah may help thee with powerful help. It is He Who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers, that they may add faith to their faith; for to Allah belong the forces of the heavens and the earth; and Allah is full of Knowledge and Wisdom; that He may admit the men and women who believe, to gardens beneath which rivers flow (i.e. heavens), to dwell therein eternally, and remove their ills from them; and that is, in the sight of Allah, the highest achievement (for man), and that He may punish the hypocrites, men and women, and the polytheists, men and women, who imagine an evil opinion of Allah. On them is a circle of evil: the wrath of Allah is on them: He has cursed them and made Hell ready for them: and evil is it for a destination.***[2]

---

[1] ibid., vol.2, p.416.

[2] Qur'ān: 48/1-6.

These verses refer to the Straight Path (*al-Ṡirāṫ al-Mustaqīm*), Tranquillity (*al-Sakīnah*) in the hearts of the believers, the extent of Gods Knowledge (*'Ilm*) and Wisdom (*Ḥikmah*), and finally the recompense of the faithful in Gardens of Paradise, and Hell for the hypocrites. Most of these points have Ṡūfī relevance as we will see in Chapter Ten.

The *miḥrāb* itself is a pointed semi-dome with radiating coloured marble patterns, and is flanked by marble columns which Behrens-Abouseif says must have been trophies from the Crusader buildings in Palestine[1] - see Fig. 5.70 above. On either side of the *miḥrāb*, two bronze interlaced doors showing stellar patterns lead into the mausoleum. The proportions of the chamber exaggerate the feeling of verticality. The chamber is circumscribed by a carved and painted inscription in *Thuluth*[2] scripture from the Seat of the Throne verse (*al-Kursī*)[3]. This same verse is to be found on the dome of the water fountain in the centre of the courtyard. To my knowledge, although the Throne verse has been frequently related to domes of the medieval period, historians have not questioned its significance. We will see in Chapter Eight and Ten how this ties to the *ḥadīth* of the Night Journey (*Mi'rāj*). The internal transition of the dome from square to circle is by means of seven rows of stalactites which gradually achieve the necessary internal transformation. An octagonal cantilevered wooden frame is positioned at the springing point of the stalactites. The interior of the mausoleum and the *qibla* wall are the most elaborately decorated parts of this complex; they are both gilded and clad in various types of coloured marble. (Fig. 5.71)

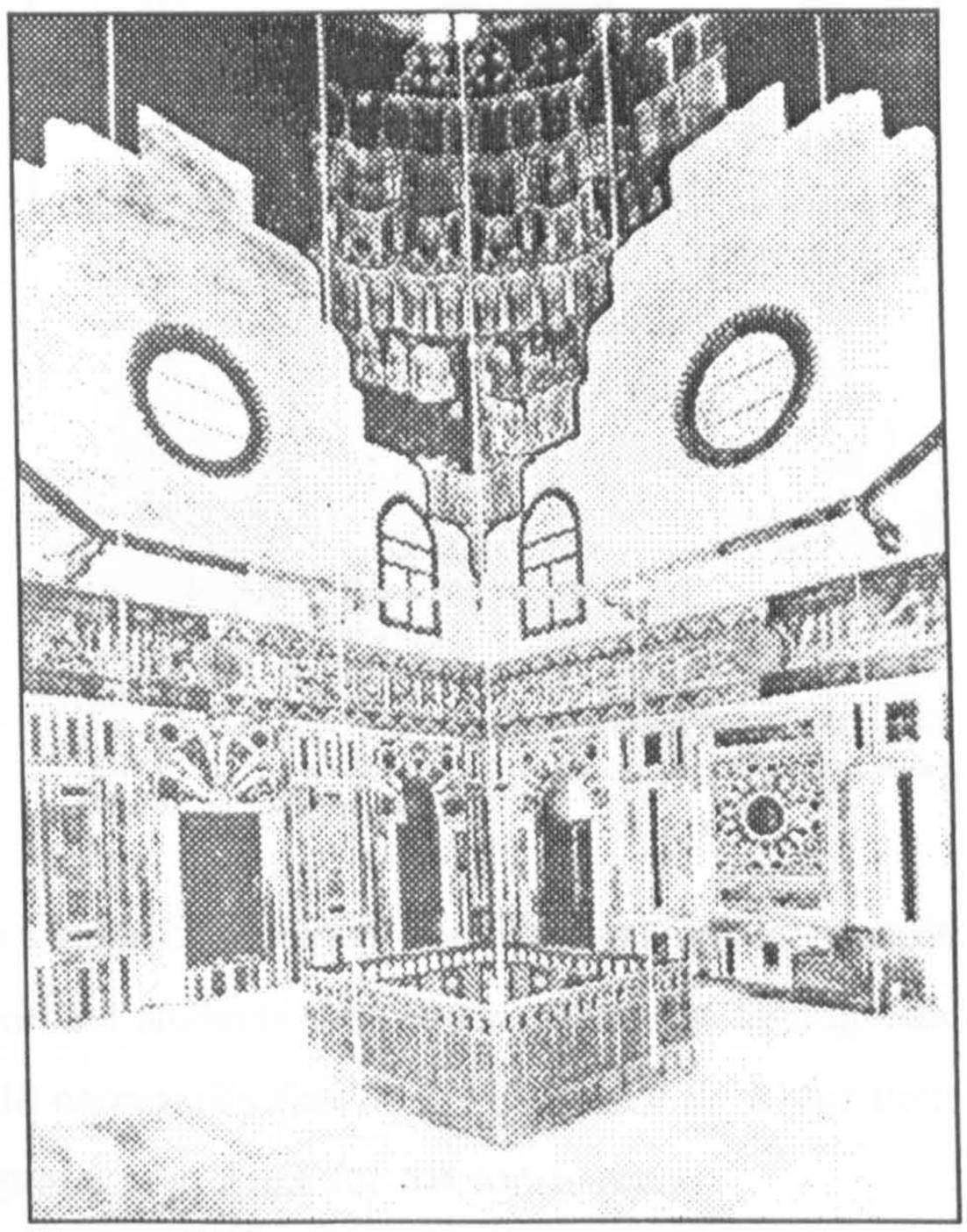


**Figure 5.71** The interior of the mausoleum chamber showing the stalactite zone of transition, and cantilevered wooden octagonal beam.

---

[1] op cit., Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.126.

[2] *Thuluth* means third, and in this script the letters are three times as high as they are wide. *Thuluth* script was much favoured in the Mamlūk period.

[3] Qur'ān: 2/255.

The mausoleum of Sulṭān Ḥassan has been given great prominence. The designer(s) chose its position carefully so as to attain maximum urban visibility and at the same time to achieve maximum *baraka* (blessings) from the worshippers in the mosque. This seems to have been amongst the priorities when laying out a Mamlūk religious building. Externally, the site chosen for the tomb overlooks the square under the Citadel, where religious parades and feasts (*mawālid* and *mawākib*) took place - this had been the case since the time of Ṣulṭān Ḥassan's father al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. (Fig. 5.72) Its internal position is axially located behind the *qibla* wall towards which all those who pray face - see plan. To understand the way blessings could be instigated, one should think in terms of the students who were sponsored through the *waqfiyyah* of the Sulṭān Ḥassan: they would necessarily feel obliged to make *du'ā'* for their benefactor during and after the five daily prayers, and ask for his forgiveness.

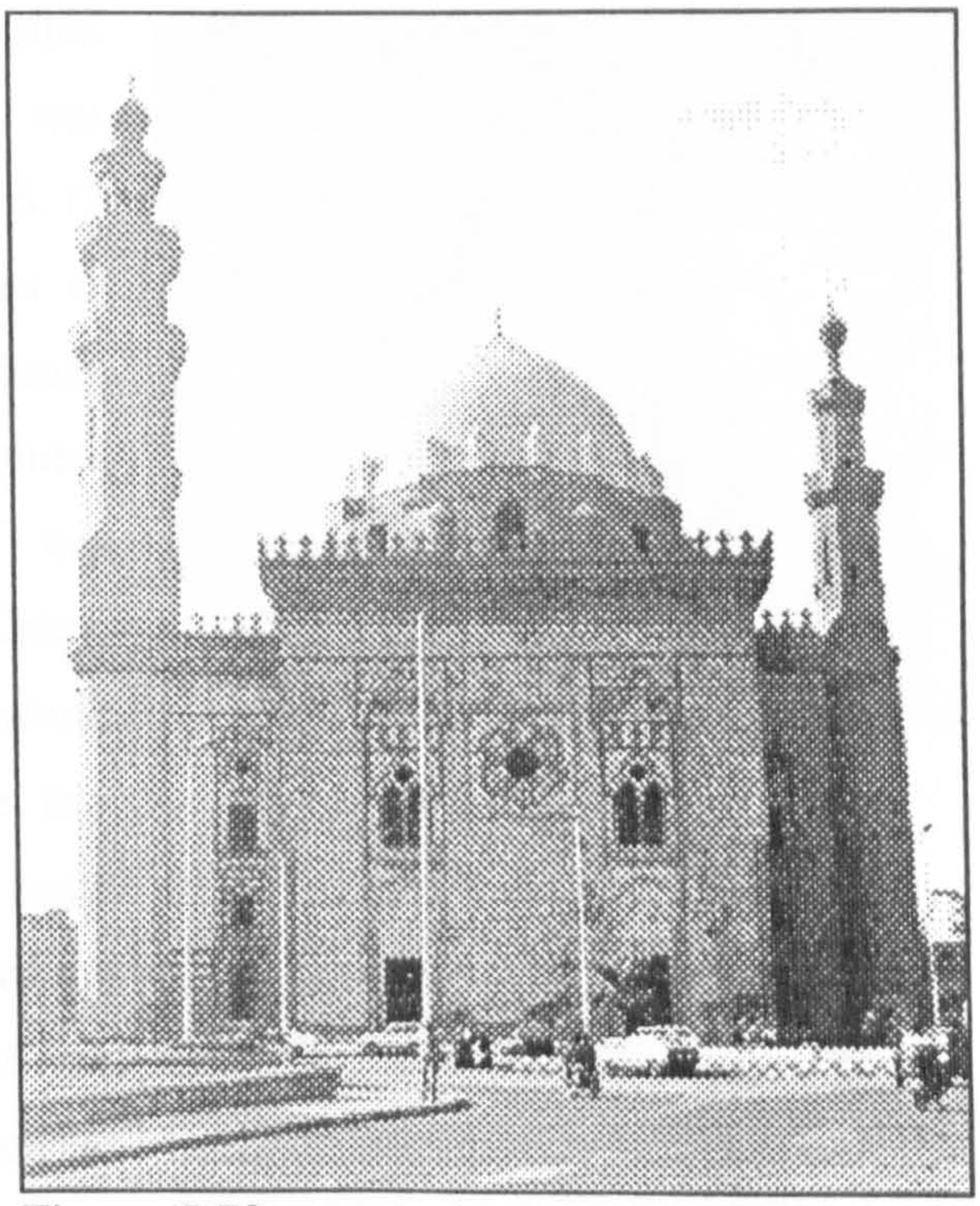


**Figure 5.72** The Mausoleum protrudes with its mass into the square and thus attains maximum visibility.

It is interesting to note that while the *Sunna* forbids Muslims to pray facing a tomb or a grave, the design of the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan was based on the organization of a prayer area facing a mausoleum. It is more surprising to note that in the sources, none of the medieval historians have indicated any objection to this organization. This recalls the argument raised in Chapter Four which dealt with the departure from orthodox beliefs occurring in traditional societies that are centred on religion. This is a good example showing that the mausoleum faced by the *qibla* must have been supported by popular beliefs that were far more important to the medieval society than the otherwise orthodox teachings of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). This should not be misunderstood as a desire to defy the *Sunna*, but that popular beliefs as lived by the members of the society were stronger than the orthodox laws. These ideas are compatible with the traditionalist approach adopted in this thesis and confirms that traditional societies tend to "create" material supports through art and architecture to act as "props" to the tradition, and that these have their explanations in the traditional beliefs as lived by the society rather than in the orthodox religion.

Such an understanding helps to explain why the exterior of the mausoleum was emphasized by two minarets - see Fig. 5.72 above. These minarets are mainly octagonal in shape, they shift from square to octagon by means of oblique triangles and end in bulbous pointed domelets. The southern minaret which has survived is the highest minaret in medieval Cairo. (Fig. 5.73) The northern one, which was rebuilt in the seventeenth-century, is one of the few attempts made in the Ottoman period to build minarets in the Mamlūk way[1]. The quality of the reconstruction is far inferior to that of the original: because it is smaller, the intended symmetry is no longer achieved, the stalactites are of poor quality, and the bulb is set above the second storey without the support of the eight columned stalactite-crowned pavilion. Behrens-Abouseif says that it is made clear that the Ottoman craftsmen had long abandoned the Mamlūk elaborate stalactites, and the four-storied minarets.[2]

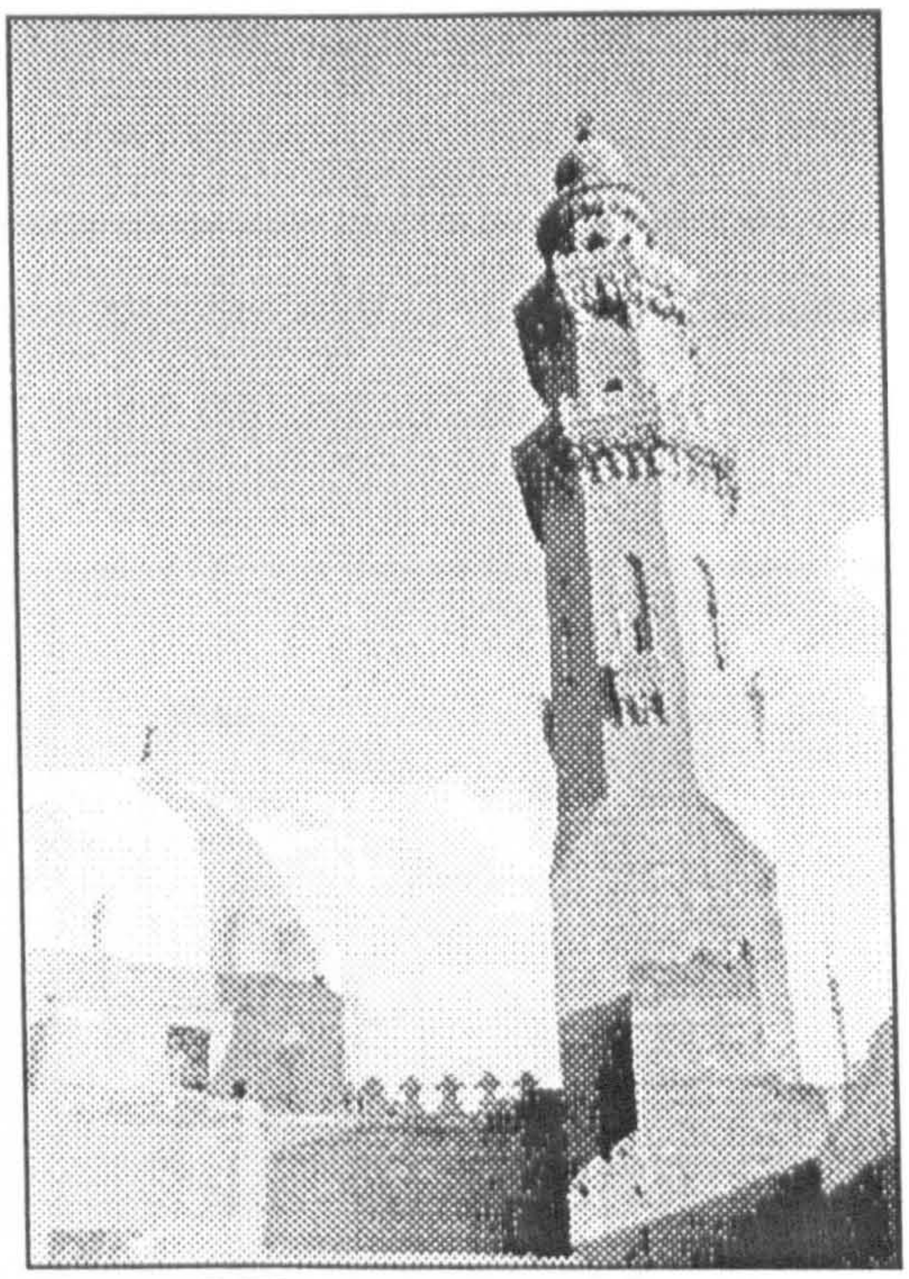


**Figure 5.73** The minaret of the complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan represents a typical Mamlūk prototype.

In 1616 A.D., the dome above the mausoleum chamber was described by an Italian traveller as unique, "*it commences narrow, then swells out, and then contracts to a point like the egg*"[3]. Su'ād Māhir says that the original dome was wooden and covered externally with lead following the Ayyubid model of the famous dome of al-Shāfi'ī[4] - which was also copied in the Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī as seen in section 5.1.1. Because the *madrasa* was used as a stronghold over the centuries, due to its location opposite the Citadel, the dome described was repeatedly bombarded. The dome covering the mausoleum today is not the original and probably dates from the restoration carried out by the Ottoman Ḥassan Aghā in (1082 A.H., 1671-2 A.D.).

---

[1] Such attempts were made in the event that a Mamlūk minaret had to be replaced (normally it was preferred to attach minarets of Ottoman style to new mosques).

[2] op.cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1985(a), Pp. 100-101.

[3] Quoted in op cit. Parker et al., 1985, p.82.

[4] op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, Pp. 283-5.

***Madrasa* of *Al-Emīrah* Tatar al-Ḥijāziyya:** (No.36 on plan)

This *madrasa* was built by Tatar, the daughter of Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn, one of the sisters of Sulṭān Ḥassan (she was also the wife of the *Emīr* Baktamur al-Ḥijāzī). When she died her mausoleum was added to the building. (Figs. 5.74 & 5.75)

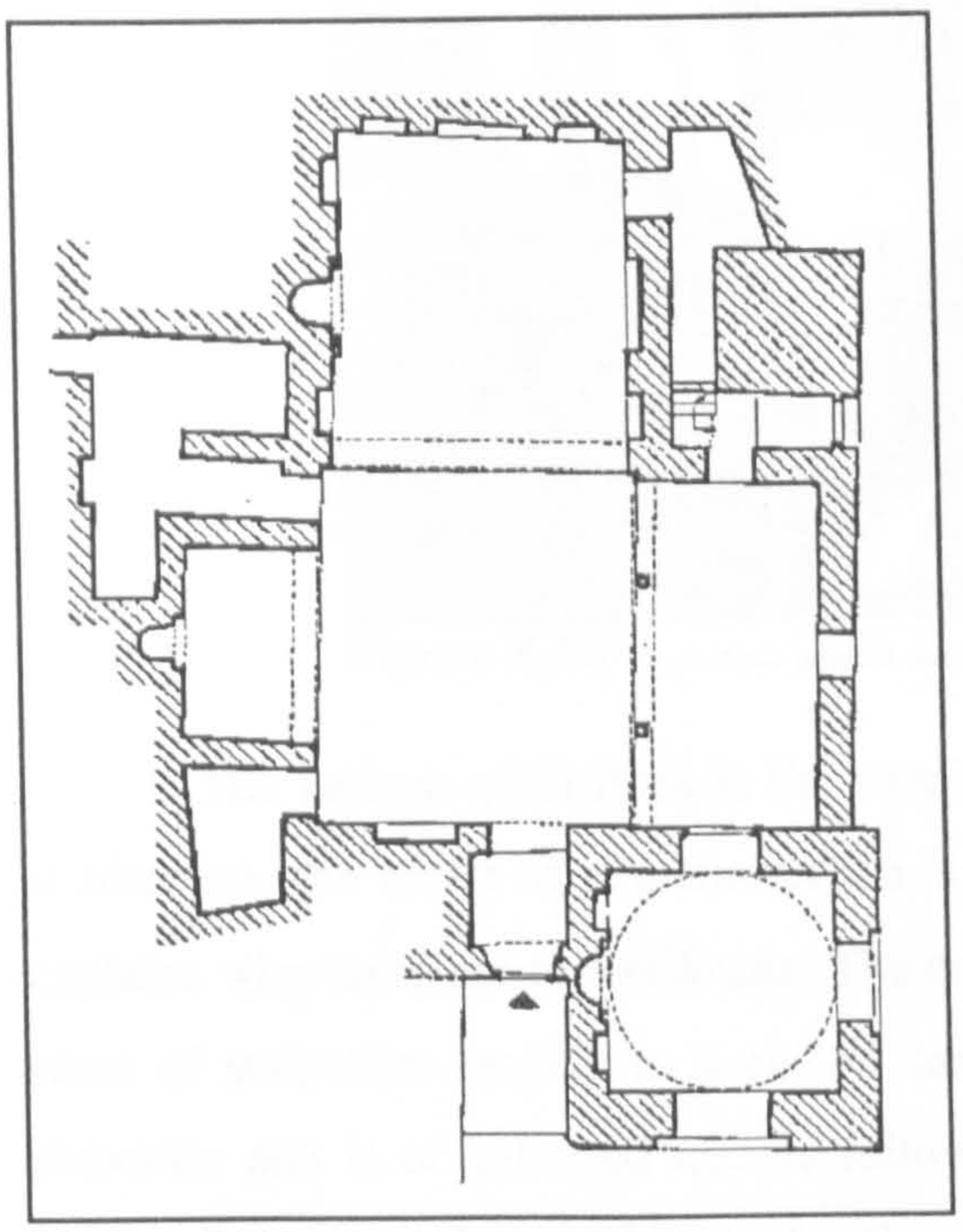


**Figure 5.74** Plan of the *Madrasa* Tatar al-Ḥizāziyya. (After Kessler)

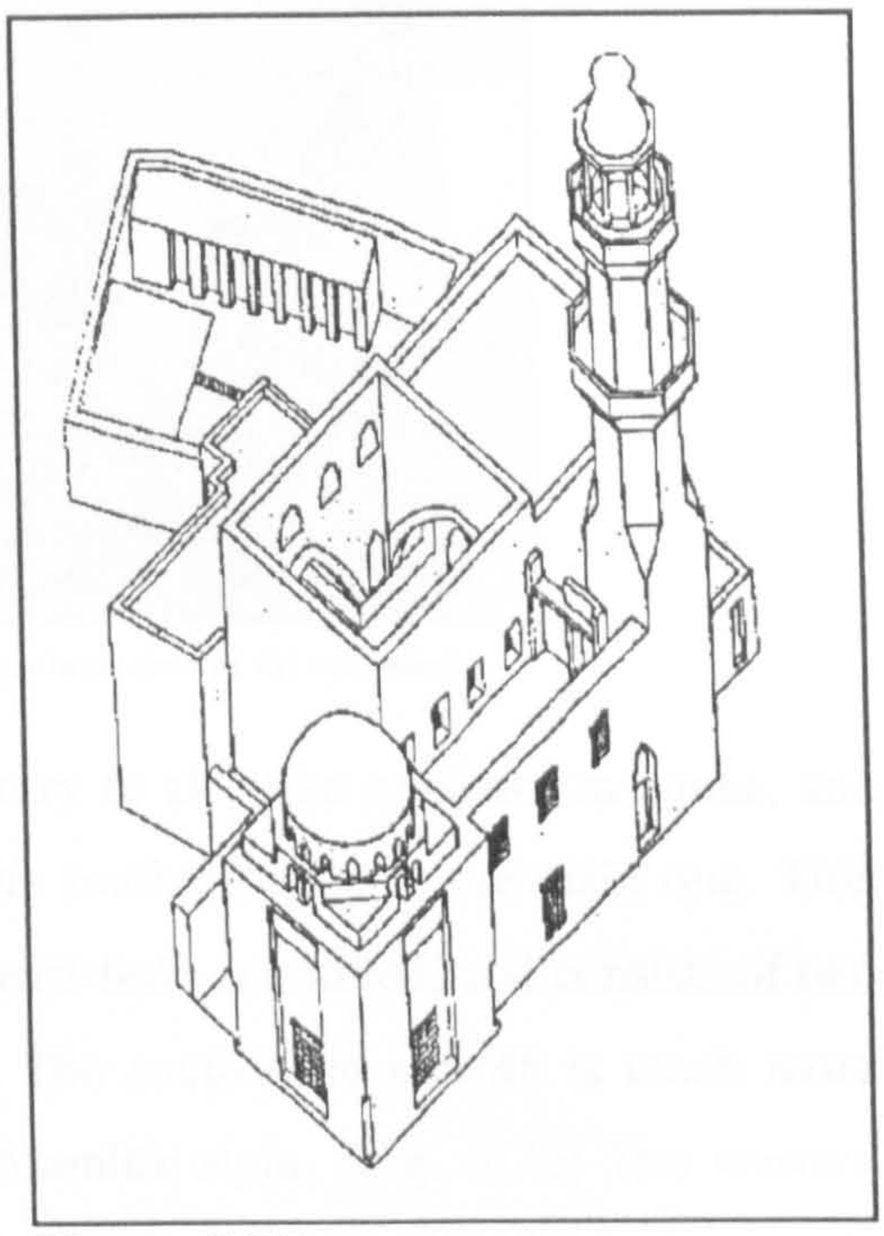


**Figure 5.75** Reconstructed axonometric of the *Madrasa*. (Philipp Speiser)

According to an inscription on a slab of marble above the entrance in the north façade, this *madrasa* was finished in (Ramaḍān 761 A.H., August 1360 A.D.). Al-Maqrīzī[1] confirms this year and says that this *madrasa* taught the Shāfi'ī rite and the Mālikī rite. He also adds that it had a *minbar* from which the *khuiba* (Friday speech) was delivered and that an *imām* was appointed to lead the people in their five daily prayers.

The overall internal organization of this *madrasa* is the result of the two needs of *qibla* orientation and street alignment. It has three *iwāns*: two of them on the *qibla* side and one opposite (see plan). The portal seems to be awkwardly positioned and is unlike all other Mamlūk portals. The reason is that after the mausoleum was added to the complex, the portal was not altered accordingly. Also, due to site constraints, there is no *majāz* (bent corridor) beyond the entrance hall which leads directly into the *ṣaḥn*.

---

[1] op cit al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiiai*, vol.2, p.382.

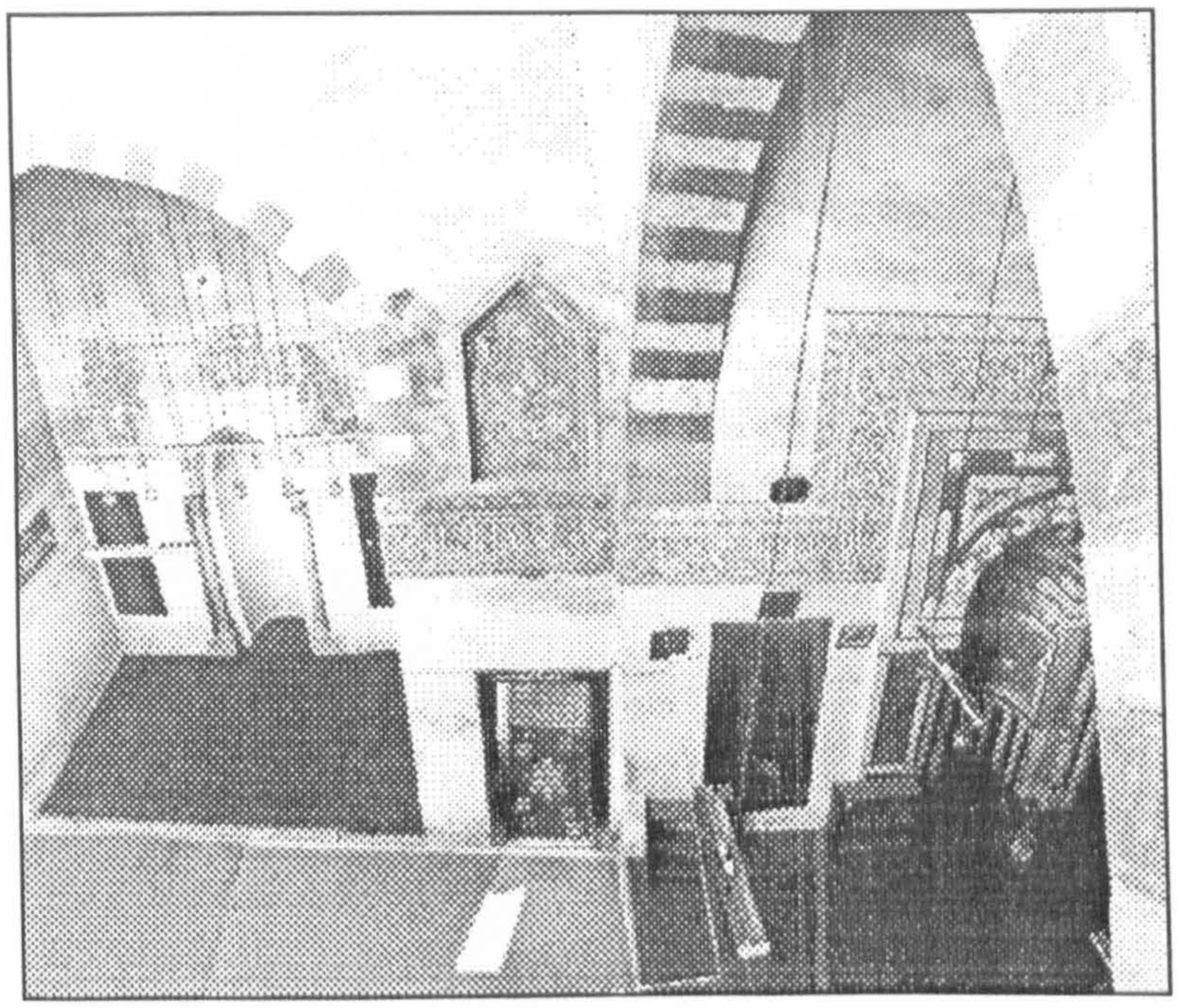


**Figure 5.76** View of the pointed eastern and southern *iwāns* showing the two *miḥrābs*.

The eastern *qibla iwān* is the smallest, contrary to all other *madrasa* mosques, and is likewise, the result of site constraints. Instead, the southern *iwān* is the main one. This explains why there are two *miḥrābs*. The one in the east-*iwān* is pointed, and consists of two rows of stalactites leading to a ribbed semi-dome. The south-*iwān miḥrāb* is much more elaborate and is of coloured marble following the Mamlūk style. (Fig. 5.76) The western *iwān* has a *dikka* (elevated bench) for the *muballigh* (he who repeats what the *imām* says in his prayer to inform the worshippers in the back rows). The band of Qur'ānic inscription on the *iwāns*, with its flowing letters helps to give unity to the interior.[1] The various dependencies - such as ablutions, storage, access to minaret - lie behind doors off the *iwāns*.

One of the most interesting features in this *madrasa* is its marble patterned flooring. At its centre is a circle which radiates eight other circles inscribed in an octagon. By means of four triangles placed at the corners of the octagon, the pattern of a square is completed. Axial to the *iwāns* are several rectangular marble patterns which relate the centre of the *ṣaḥn* to the direction of the *qibla* and that which is perpendicular to it. At the four corners of the courtyard, four marble circles are located one at each end.

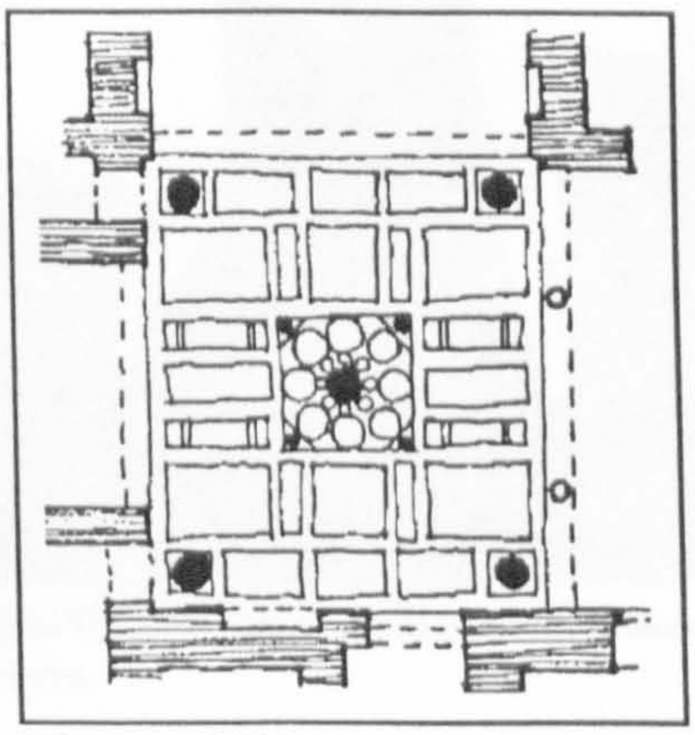


**Figure 5.77** Marble patterned floor.

[1] op cit. Parker et al., 1985, p.230.

This geometrical organization recalls the octagonal fountain which is usually placed at the centre of courtyards. We will see in Chapters Eight, and Nine how this geometrical organization of the flooring abstractly embodies the form of a fountain which symbolically relates to Ṡūfī cosmological beliefs.

The mausoleum is located on the corner of two streets. It has windows connecting it to both of these streets through which passers-by could make a prayer (*du'ā'*) to the deceased - see plan. This emphasizes the importance of street visibility when choosing a location for a mausoleum in the Baḥrī Mamlūk period. The external transition of the mausoleum from square to circle is by means of an octagonal section pierced by eight windows. The dome itself is ribbed and pointed, with a circular drum pierced by 16 windows. Internally, the mausoleum chamber is proportioned to accentuate verticality. The transition from square to circle is by means of three rows of stalactites reminiscent of the Ayyubid style and do not pass through an octagonal section. An octagonal cantilevered wooden frame is located at the springing point of the stalactites.

The outer walls are crowned with a row of crestings which are an elaboration of the trefoil crestings used frequently in the Mamlūk period; these show typical Mamlūk features in the relation between the solid and void parts of the crestings. On the other hand, the minaret is located at the south-west corner of this *madrasa*. It has a missing top section. (Fig. 5.78) The base of the minaret is square, which is transformed to an octagonal second storey by means of obliquely positioned triangles, and is followed by a third octagonal storey. Philip Speiser[1] who has done research on this *madrasa* has theoretically reconstructed the missing fourth storey as an octagonal columned pavilion topped by the usual Mamlūk pointed bulbous domelet - see axonometric Fig. 5.75 above.

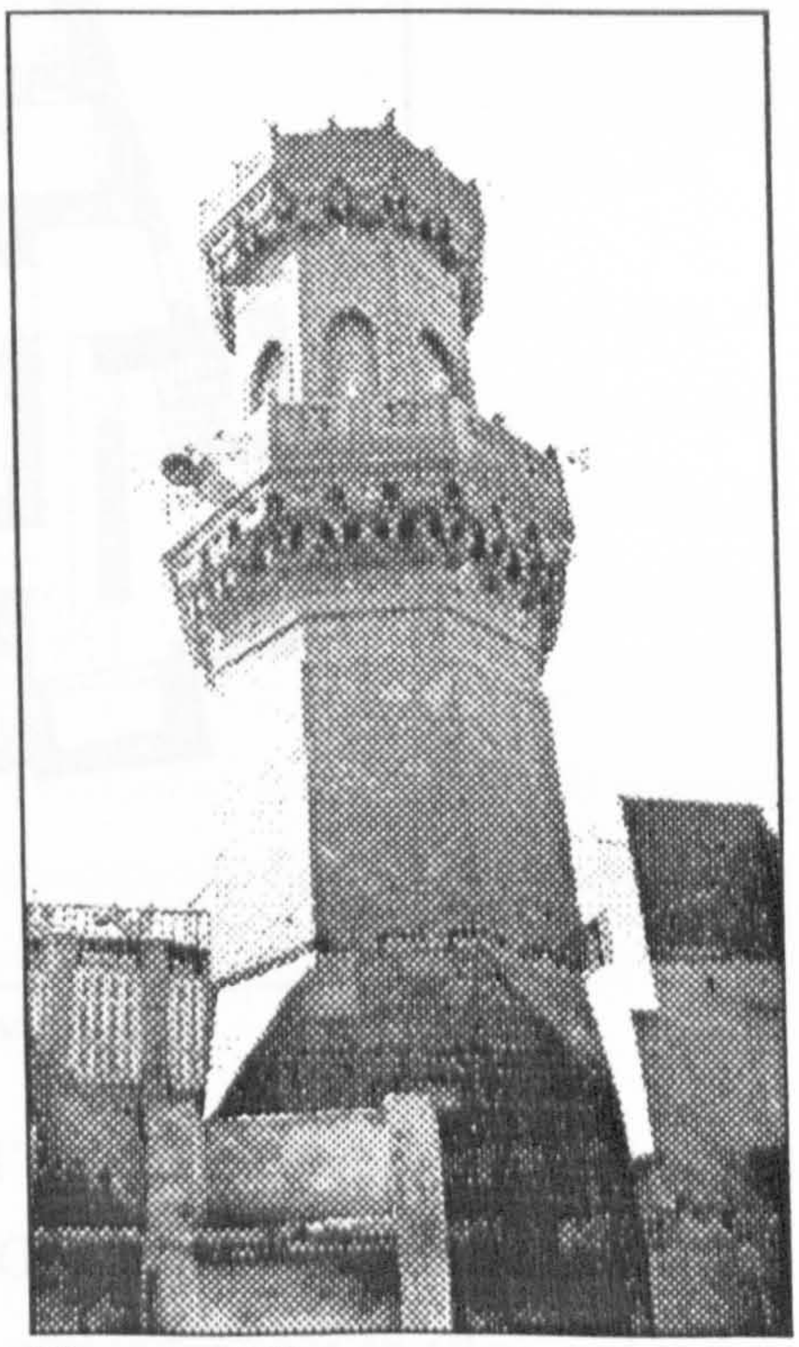


**Figure 5.78** Existing minaret showing missing top section.

[1] Philip Speiser, "Restaurierungsarbeiten in der Islamischen Alstadt Kairos", Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo, Band 38, Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, Mainz, 1982, p.369.

***Madrasa* of *Emīr* Mithqāl:** (No.45 on plan)

Sābiq al-Dīn Mithqāl al-Annūkī was the Abyssinian chief of the eunuchs of the royal palace; he was in charge of rearing the young Mamlūks, a post to which he was appointed by Sulṭān Sha'bān in 1361 A.D.

Al-Maqrīzī does not give a date for Mithqāl's building, and the only inscription has the name of the founder, who is described as chief of the eunuchs. 'Alī Pacha Mubārak[1], gives the year 763 A.H. as the date of this building, probably relying on archives of the Ministry of *Waqfs* (which possesses many original acts of foundation). Michael Meinecke who has restored the building in the 1970's gives the year (776 A.H., 1365 A.D.) but does not mention on what basis he gives this date.[2]

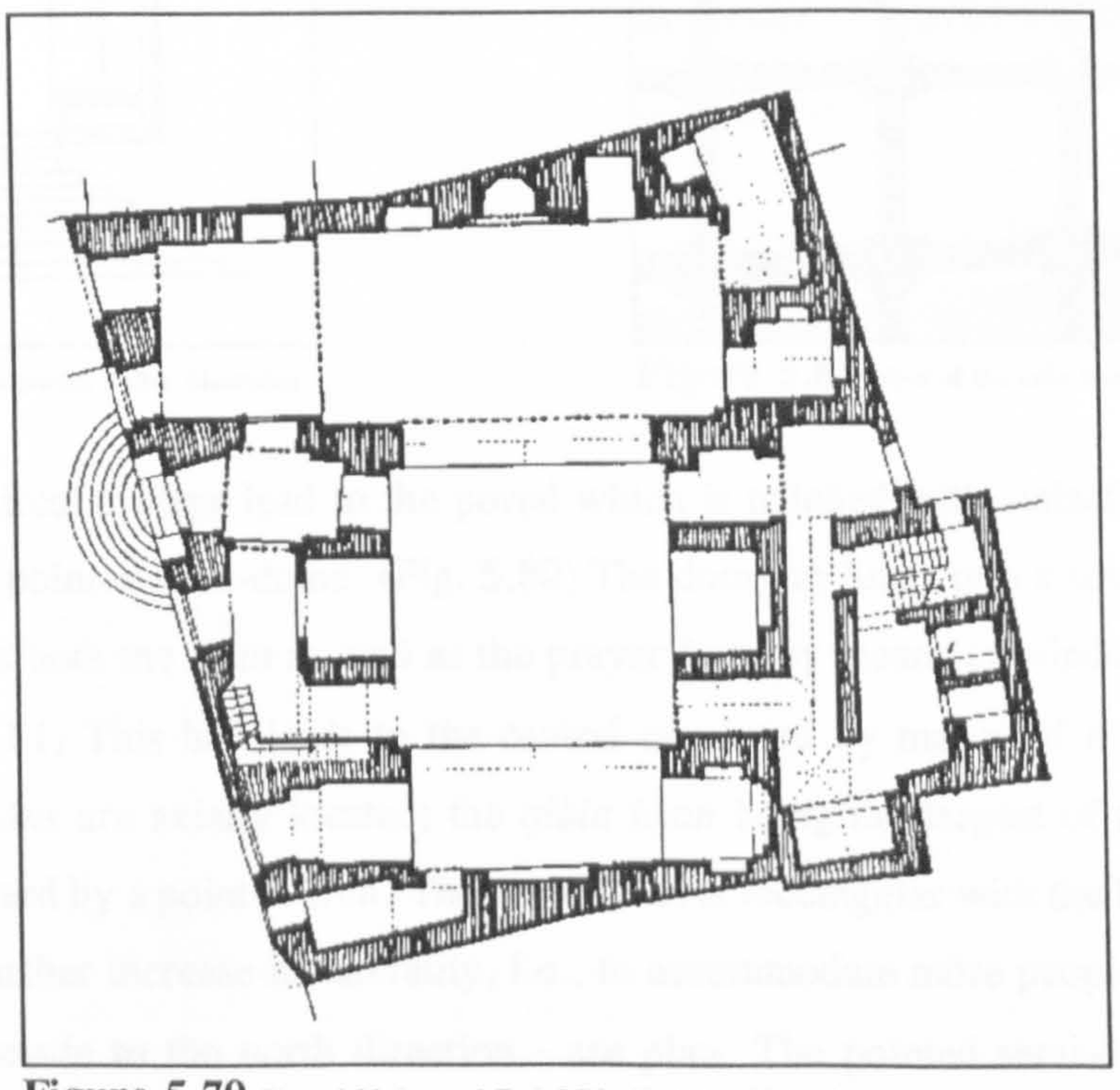


**Figure 5.79** Plan of *Madrasa* of *Emīr* Mithqāl. (After Meinecke)

This structure, built at the high point of Mithqāl's career on part of the original site of the eastern Fatimid palace in the centre of Mamlūk Cairo, speaks for his importance. It was built to teach the Shāfi'ī rite. It is unusual for being suspended over an alley, and is thus

---

[1] op cit. 'Ali Pacha Mubārak, 1306 A.H., vol.6, p.7.

[2] Michael Meinecke, Die Madrasa des Amīrs Mitqāl in Kairo, Deutsches Archaologisches Institut Kairo, Verlag Philipp von Zabern, Mainz, 1976.

a "hanging *madrasa*" - the alley leads to Maydān Bayt al-Qāḍī. On the ground floor are storerooms. The layout of this *madrasa* is in the typical four-*iwān* organization.

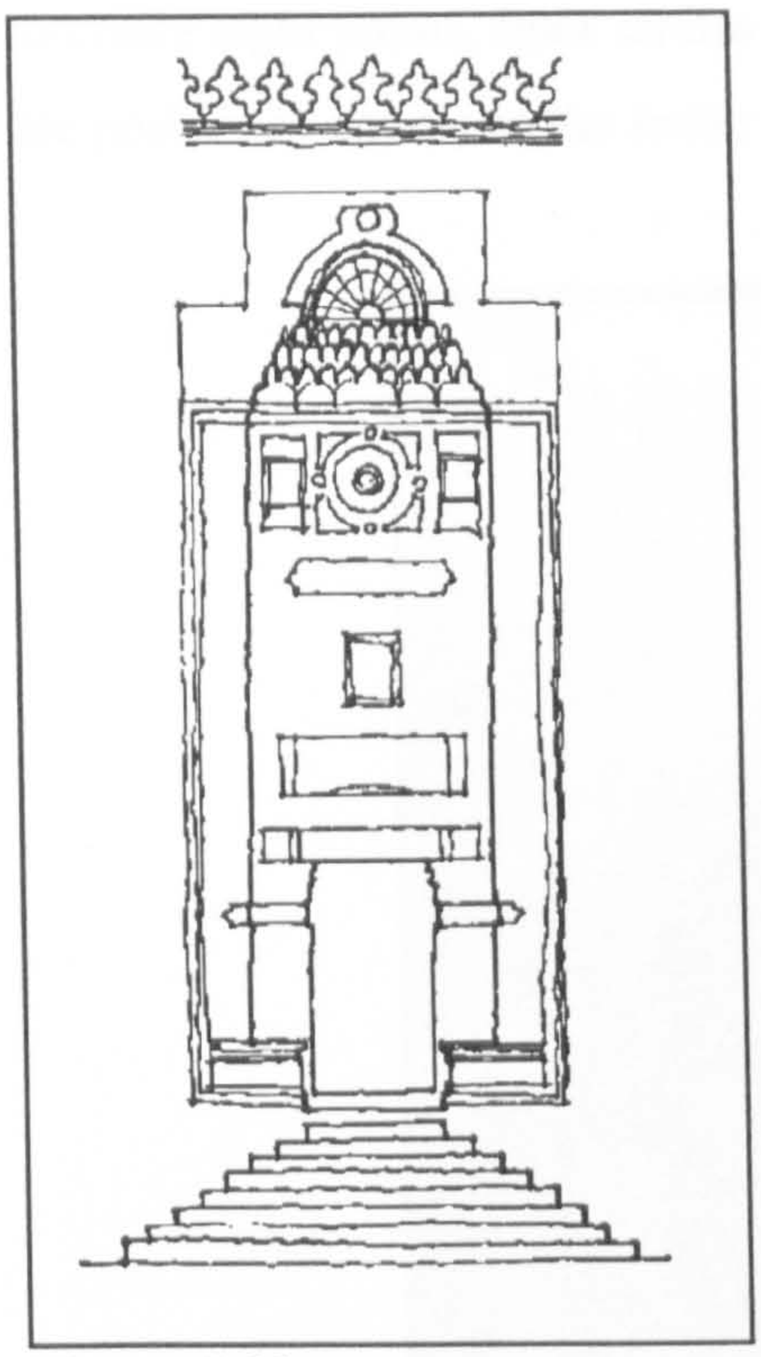


**Figure 5.80** Main portal. (After Meinecke)

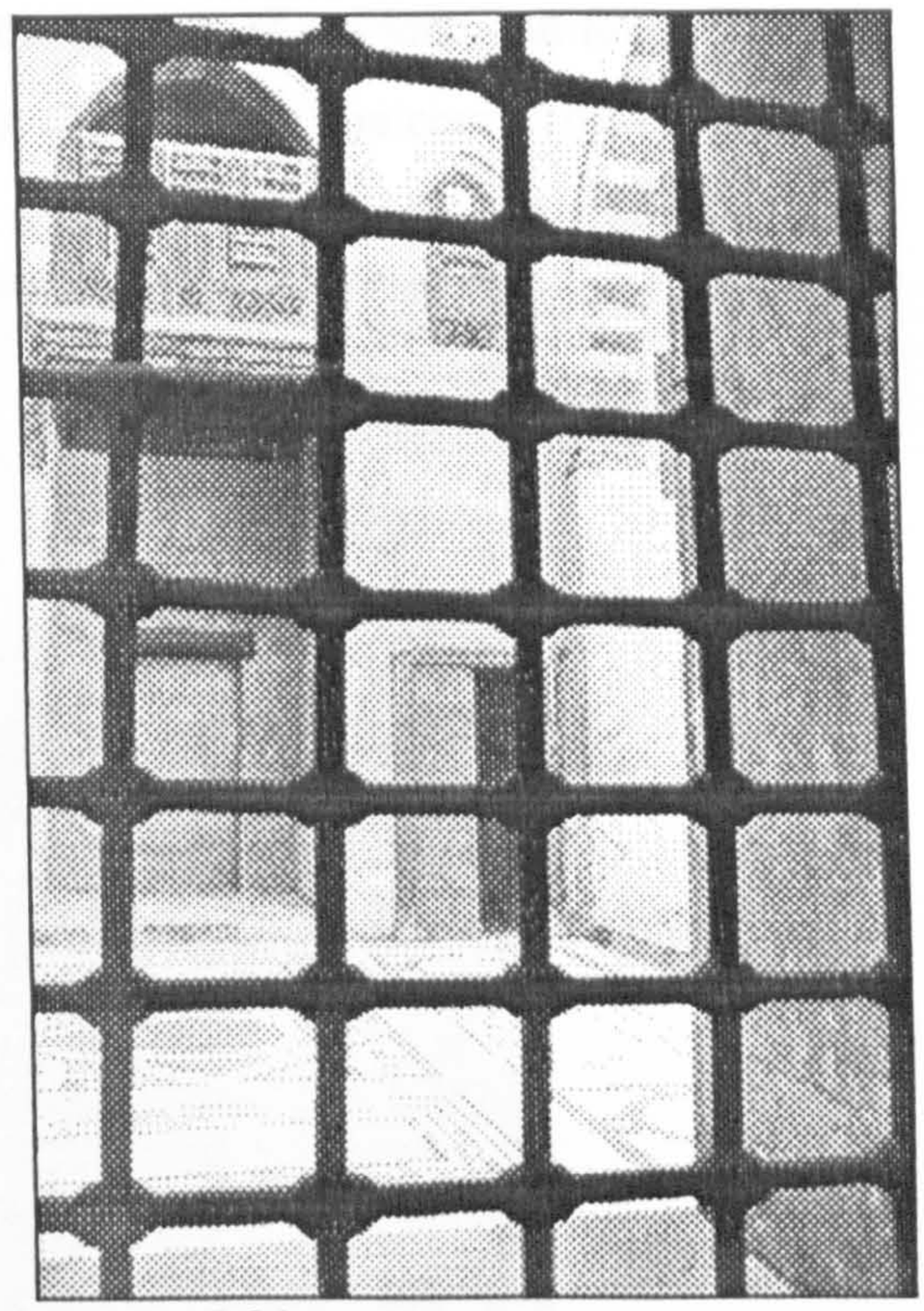


**Figure 5.81** View of the *ṣaḥn* from the entrance hall.

Seven circular steps lead to the portal which is trilobed with stalactites and ends at the summit in a pointed semi-dome. (Fig. 5.80) The doorway leads into a small entrance hall which overlooks both the *ṣaḥn* as well as the prayer *iwān* by means of windows with copper grilles. (Fig. 5.81) This hall leads to the central courtyard by means of a *majāz* with two bends. Four *iwāns* are axially located; the *qibla iwan* being the largest of the four and set from the courtyard by a pointed arch. The prayer hall is rectangular with the large side facing the *qibla*. To further increase its laterality, i.e., to accommodate more people in one row, an extension was made to the north direction - see plan. The pointed semi-dome part of the *miḥrāb* in the prayer *iwān* is clad with coloured marble in radiating patterns.

The west *iwān* is likewise set from the courtyard by means of a pointed arch. Two annexed spaces are connected to it on either side. The northern and southern *iwāns* are very small 3m x 2m, and can hardly be thought of as being used for teaching more than five students. This suggests that the three secondary *iwāns* must have been designed for purposes other than education or prayer.

The courtyard marble flooring shows geometrical organization which is similar to that of the Mosque/ *Madrasa* of Tatar al-Ḥijāziyya. A large central circle is circumscribed in a square. Instead of eight circles circumscribed in an octagon, a square is rotated at 45 degrees to create eight points. Four circles are located at the corners of the *ṣaḥn* and four rectangles are positioned axially to the *iwāns* relating them to the centre of the courtyard. (Fig. 5.82)

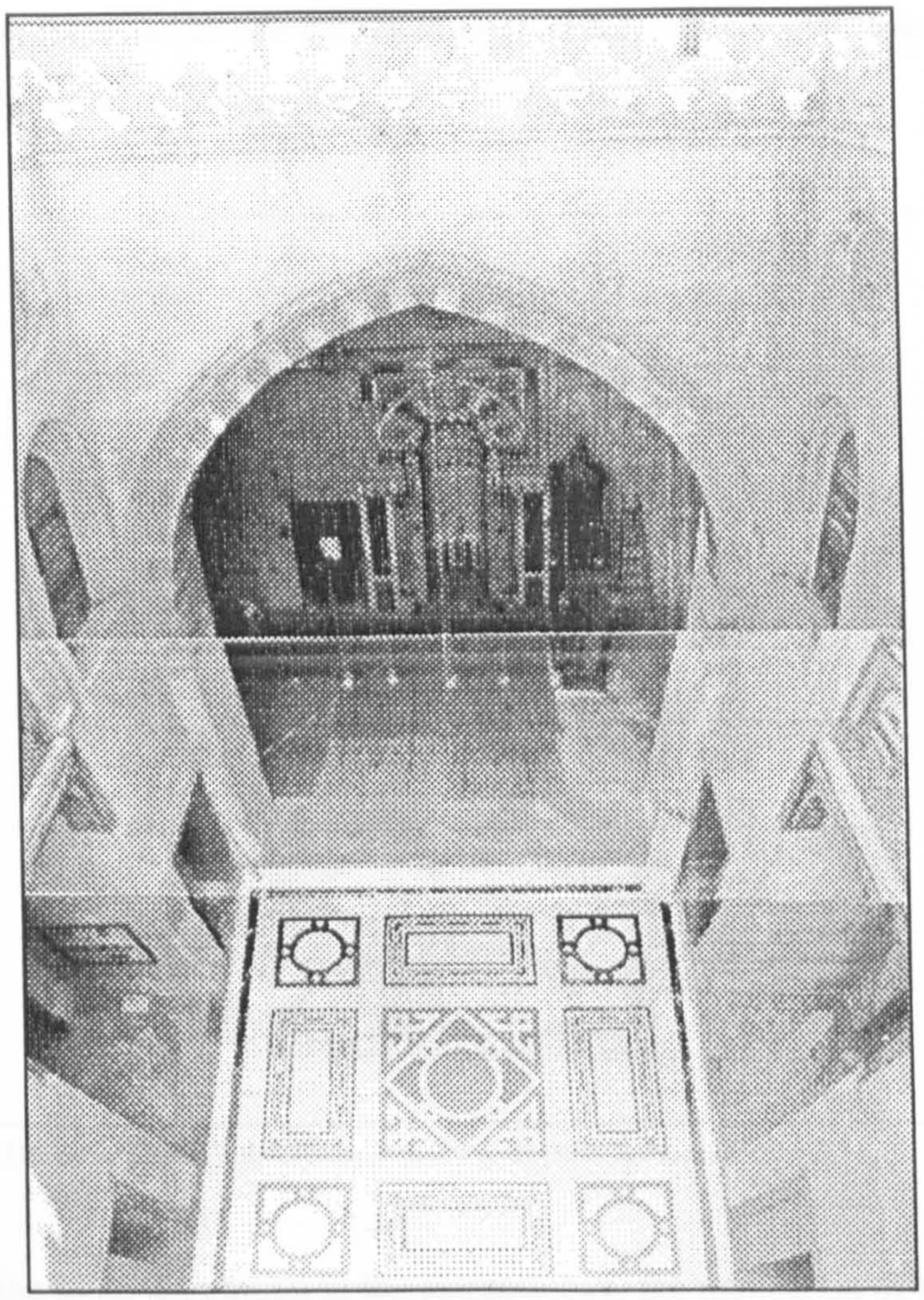


**Figure 5.82** Interior view of the courtyard showing marble pattern flooring, and *main qibla iwān*.

The external and internal walls are crowned with trefoil crestings, which manifest Mamlūk traditional characteristics - mentioned in previous cases. Two staircases lead to the second floor which accommodated the living units for the students. Su'ād Māhir suggests that the staircase which also leads to the rooftop is an indication that there was a minaret[1], but in fact, there are no structural foundations for one.

---

[1] See op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.328.

***Madrasa* of Umm al-Sulṭān Sha'bān**: (No.125 on plan)

Khāwand Baraka was the concubine of Ḥusayn, a son of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, and rose to fame when her son at the age of ten came to the throne. After her first husband died in 1362 A.D., Khāwand married Ulgāy al-Yūsufī, whose monument is in *Sūq* al-Silāḥ (the weapon-market). Sulṭān Sha'bān himself began building a *khanqah-madrasa*-mosque at the foot of the Citadel, but when he was murdered in 1376 A.D. his complex was left unfinished, and he was buried in this building - his mother's *madrasa*.[1] (Fig. 5.83)

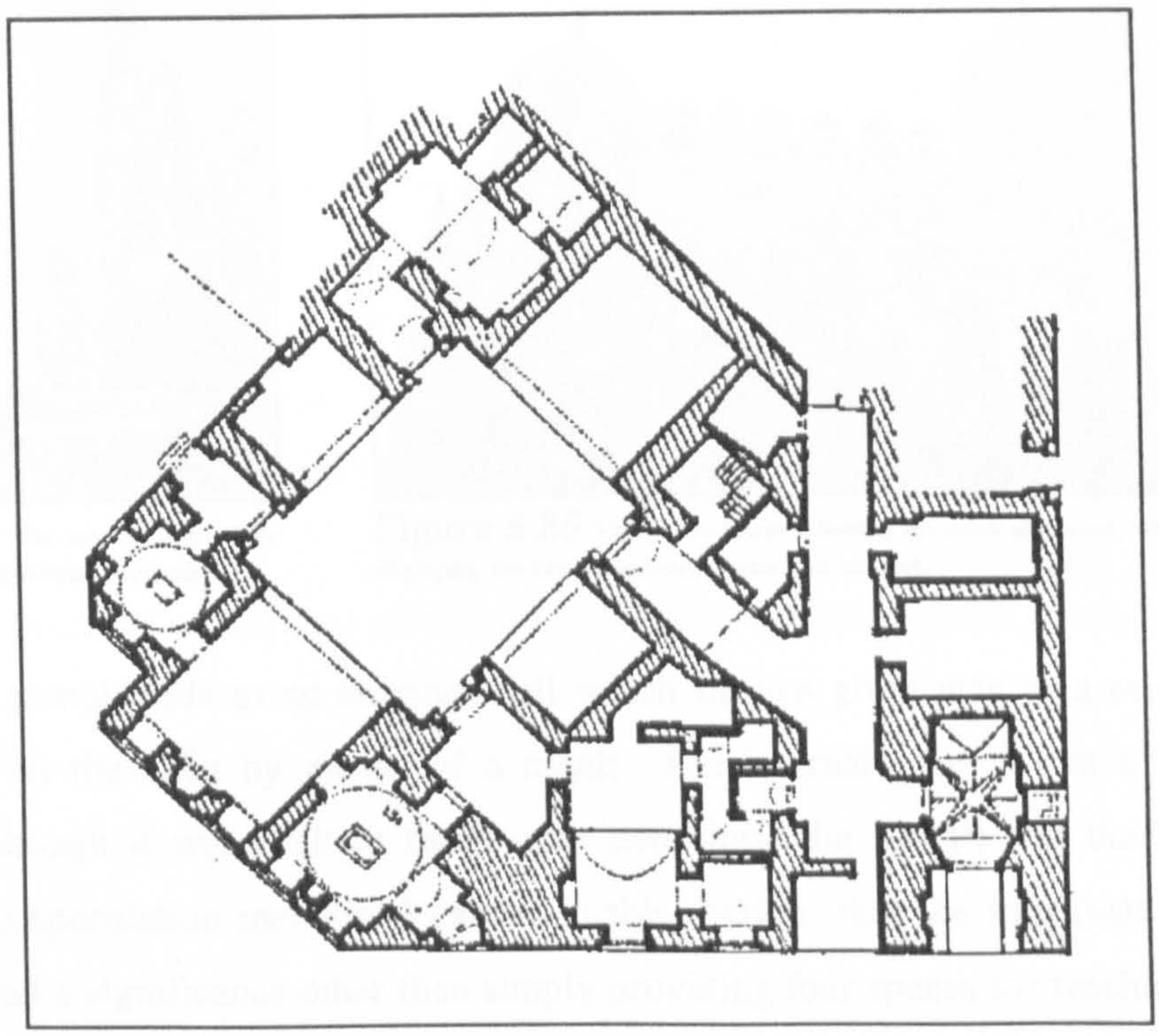


**Figure 5.83** Plan of the *Madrasa* of Umm al-Sulṭān Sha'bān. (Kessler)

According to an inscription in the entrance bay, the foundation of this *madrasa* was ordered by Sulṭān Sha'bān in 770 A.H. - this date occurs also in another inscription on a wooden panel of the adjoining *sābīl* (public drinking fountain). This monument is distinguishable by its façade, its double domes, and its internal organization regarding *qibla* orientation and street alignment.

The main feature of the façade is the entrance portal, which stands in a recess covered by nine rows of stalactites. (Fig. 5.84) According to Doris Behrens-Abouseif, it shows direct

[1] Today, this monument is used as an elementary school.

influence from Anatolian examples.[1] The silhouette that results from such an organization of rows of stalactites is not usual to Mamlūk architecture, but produces the commonly experienced sense of visual verticality. This façade is also unusual because the portal, *sābīl*, and the minaret are aligned with the street then the façade makes a sharp 45 degree turn. (Fig. 5.85)

**Figure 5.84** The unusual form of the stalactite portal emphasizing verticality.

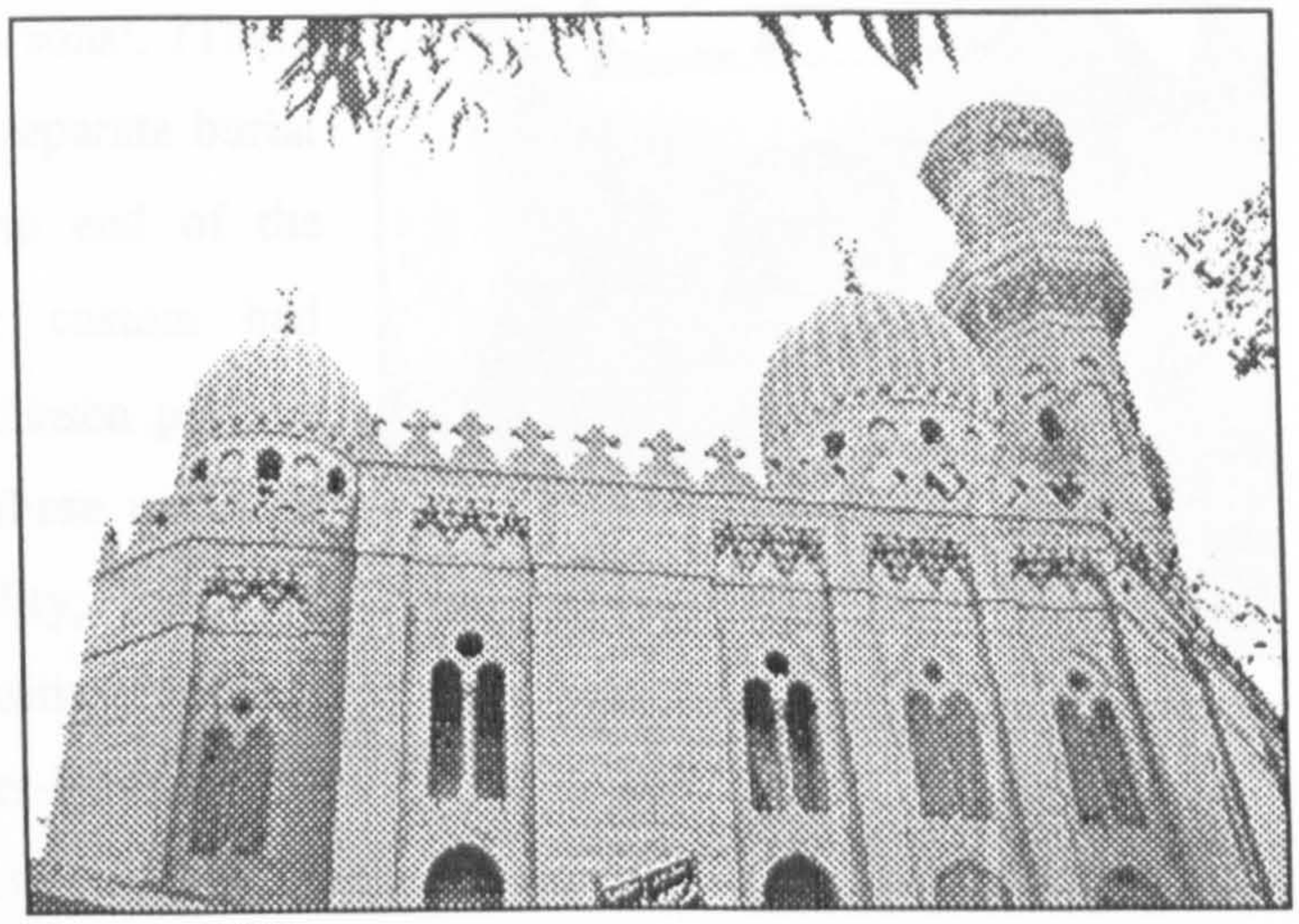


**Figure 5.85** View of the façade following the street alignment, while at the same time displaying the two mausoleum domes and minaret.

The portal leads to an entrance hall which in turn gives way to a secondary side-*madrasa* or to the *ṣaḥn* by means of a *majāz*. The internal plan is that of a four-*iwān madrasa* although it was built to teach only two rites, the Shafi'i and the Ḥanafī. This validates the speculation mentioned earlier in this section: that the four-*iwān* organization must have had a significance other than simply providing four spaces for teaching. The *qibla iwān* is the deepest of the four but does not provide laterality needed for longer rows. The roofing of the *iwāns* is not vaulted, but of flat wooden ceilings. The *qibla iwan* is flanked by two lofty domed chambers.

These mausolea, are internally rather unusual in that the domes are transformed from square to octagon by simple squinches rather than on tiers of stalactites as was the fashion in the Baḥrī Mamlūk period; (Fig. 5.86) only the dome of the Mosque of Āqsunqur (1347 A.D.) has this feature. The octagonal wooden frame which is usually located at the springing point of the stalactites is missing - we will see that this point is vital in the interpretation of domes in Chapter Eight. Each tomb chamber has a window overlooking the *qibla iwan*. The large

---

[1] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.130.

tomb chamber on the left is that in which Khāwand Baraka and her daughter are buried. In front of it is an irregularly shaped room which was probably used for storing large Qur'āns or for special Qur'ān recitations. The smaller tomb on the right is believed to be the resting place of Sulṭān al-Ashraf Sha'bān and his sons[1]. (There is no Islamic Law requiring the separate burial of men and women, but by the end of the fourteenth-century this popular custom had become established).[2] By their chosen position at the corners of the building, these mausolea achieve maximum urban visibility; they also benefit of maximum *baraka* (blessings) by being visually seen externally by passers-by as well as internally (through copper window grills) by the those who pray in the *qibla iwān*.

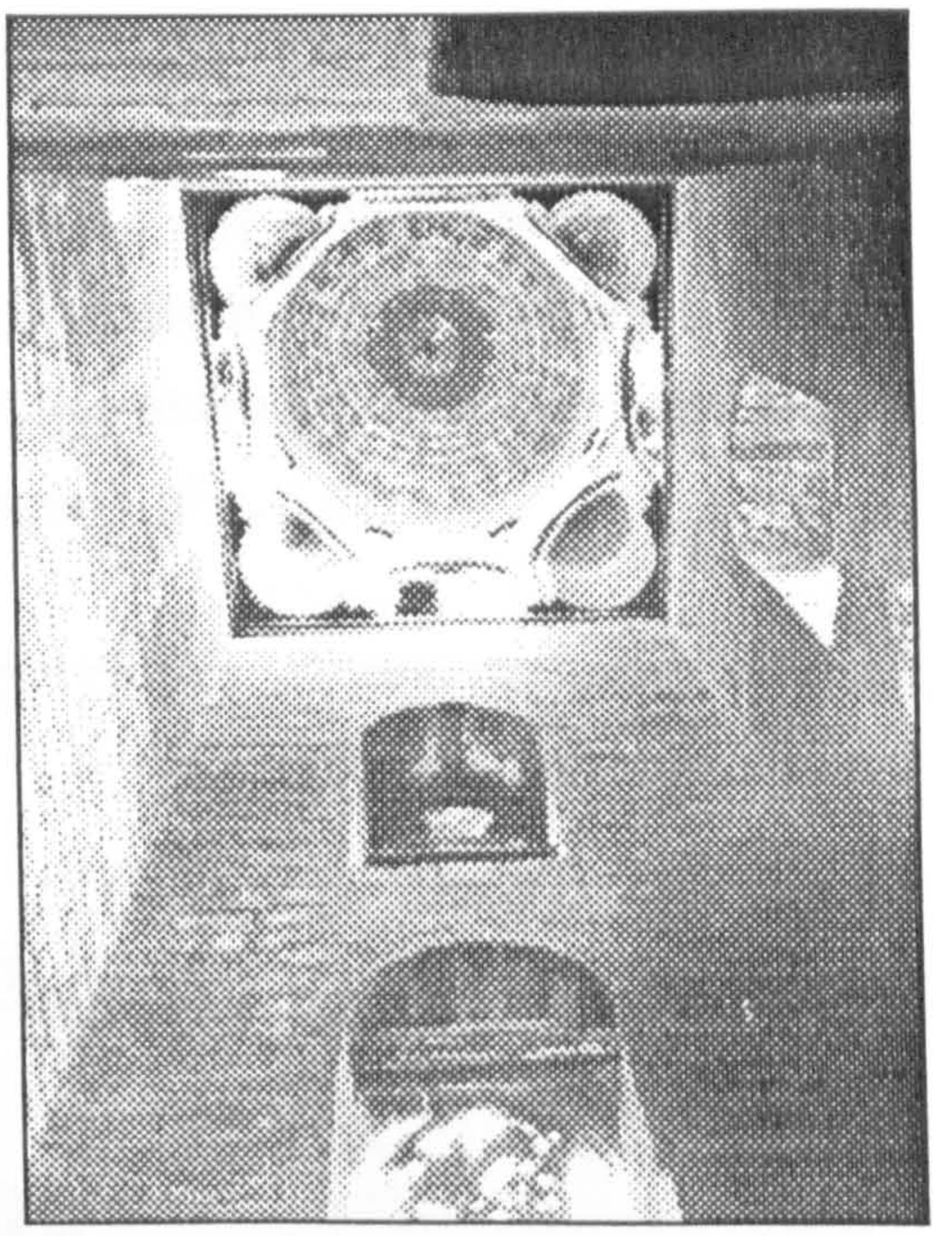


**Figure 5.86** The squinch system change the square to the octagon.

The minaret is composed of either four or five sections: square, octagon, circle, and a fourth octagonal pavilion and pointed bulbous top - or just a bulbous top - which no longer survives. The transition is achieved by pyramids between the first and second storeys and by stalactites between the second and third storeys - see Fig. 5.85 above. The crestings that line the external and internal façades are trefoil and show typical Mamlūk features in the treatment of solid and void.

Christel M. Kessler argues that this complex requires particular attention as it is apparently the first building in Cairo in which - after a lapse of centuries - the rather easterly Makkah orientation of 117 degrees E of N was used (as opposed to the astronomically calculated *qibla* orientation of 127 degrees E of N or its approximation, customarily favoured in Mamluk times). The 117 degrees E of N orientation corresponds to the *qiblat al-Ṣaḥāba*

---

[1] There is no epigraphical or literary evidence for attributing one of the mausoleums to Sha'bān - the literary sources do not even mention the existence of a second mausoleum. Yet it is reasonable to assume that the young sultān, who built "this *madrasa* for his mother", and who implored God's gracious acceptance of this charitable foundation in favor "of both of them", had commissioned the building to include his own funerary monument as well as that of his mother, Khāwand Baraka.

[2] op cit. Parker et al., 1985, Pp. 99-100.

(the *qibla* of the Companions), traditionally believed to have been employed by the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) when the first Mosque of 'Amr Ibn al 'Āṡ in Fusṫāṫ was built in Egypt in (21 A.H., 641 A.D.). Christel M. Kessler explains this as attributable to the site which lies at an angle of 45 degrees. If the 127 degree *qibla* had been used, it would have created a less favourable adjustment (hence the adopted move of the *qibla* axis towards the east by 10 degrees)[1]. (Fig. 5.87)

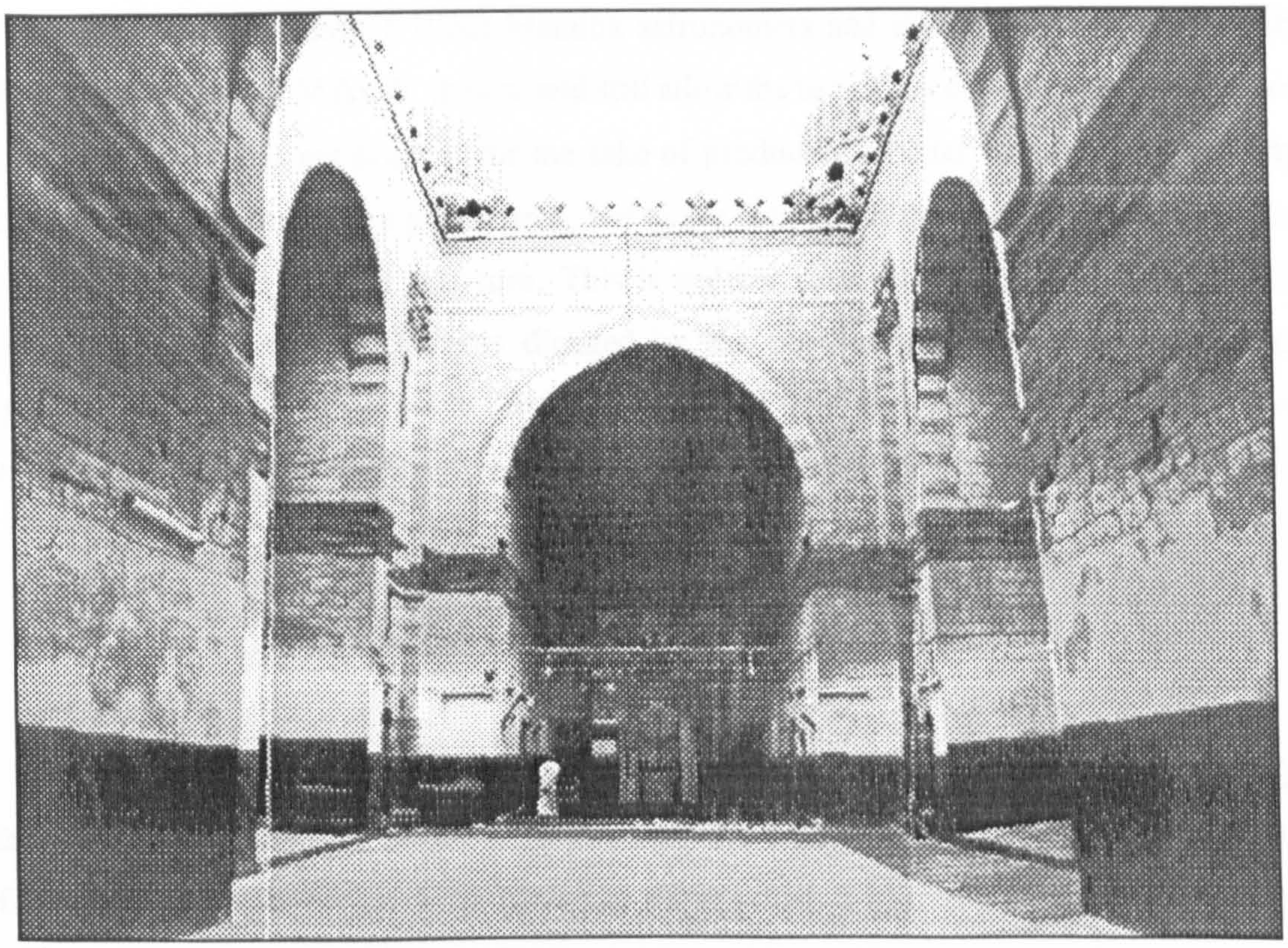


**Figure 5.87** The discrepancy in the *qibla* is accounted for by the internal organization and the positioning of the two mausolea.

Kessler also says that the reuse of the archaic seventh-century A.D. Makkah orientation in this fourteenth-century complex can be taken as evidence that:

> ***To improve the street adjustment layout, Sha'bān's master builder had solicited the collaboration of a qibla specialist whose counsel regarding any question of Makkah orientation would have been at once necessary and final. Moreover, the fact that the eastward move of the orientation was arrested precisely at 117 degrees E of N (and not carried further) is striking evidence of the importance attached to having a prayer orientation that was***

---

[1] Christel M. Kessler, "Mecca-Oriented Urban Architecture in Mamluk Cairo", In Quest of an Islamic Humanism, ed. A.H. Green, The American University in Cairo Press, 1984, p.104.

> ***properly justifiable in terms of Islamic tradition. Although such a collaboration of specialists in qibla determination had long occurred on a regular basis, Sha'bān's complex represents the first time that the qibla of the Companions was used as a device for mitigating problems of street adjustment in adverse urban conditions.***[1]

This point is very important to an understanding of the Mamlūk mentality because it stresses the fact that although Baḥrī Mamlūk astronomers and the *'ulamā'* had realized the calculated direction of Makkah, they would still allow the use of the *qibla* of the Companions, which they knew was not precise, for the sake of producing a better layout of the building. This did not only concern the prayer area, but to the location of the two mausolea in relation to both external and internal exposure. This is another case showing a departure from the orthodox to accommodate elements dictated by the popular tradition; it strengthens the argument that traditional beliefs in the Mamlūk period were the central core to which every decision had to acknowledge.

***Madrasa* of *Emīr* Iljāy al-Yūsufī;** (No.131 on plan)

The *Emīr* Sayf al-Dīn Iljāy, an *emīr* of the sword, rose through the ranks. He married Khāwand Baraka, the mother of Sulṭān Sha'bān. For a few months Iljāy was the real head of the government; however; when Khāwand Baraka died, a quarrel with the sulṭān over her property obliged Iljāy to flee from Egypt.

Two inscriptions in the entrance state that the *Emīr* Seyf al-Dīn Iljāy ordered the foundation of this mosque/*madrasa* in (Rajab 774 A.H., January 1373 A.D.). Al-Maqrīzī[2] contrary to that puts the date as 768 A.H. which according to Creswell[3] is wrong as Iljāy did not occupy an important rank at that time, was imprisoned the following year, and only attained in 774 A.H. the high rank of "Atābīk" (commander-in-chief of the armies), which would have put him in a position to build such a large building. (Fig. 5.88)

---

[1] ibid., p.104.

[2] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, p.399.

[3] op cit. Creswell, 1919, p.113.

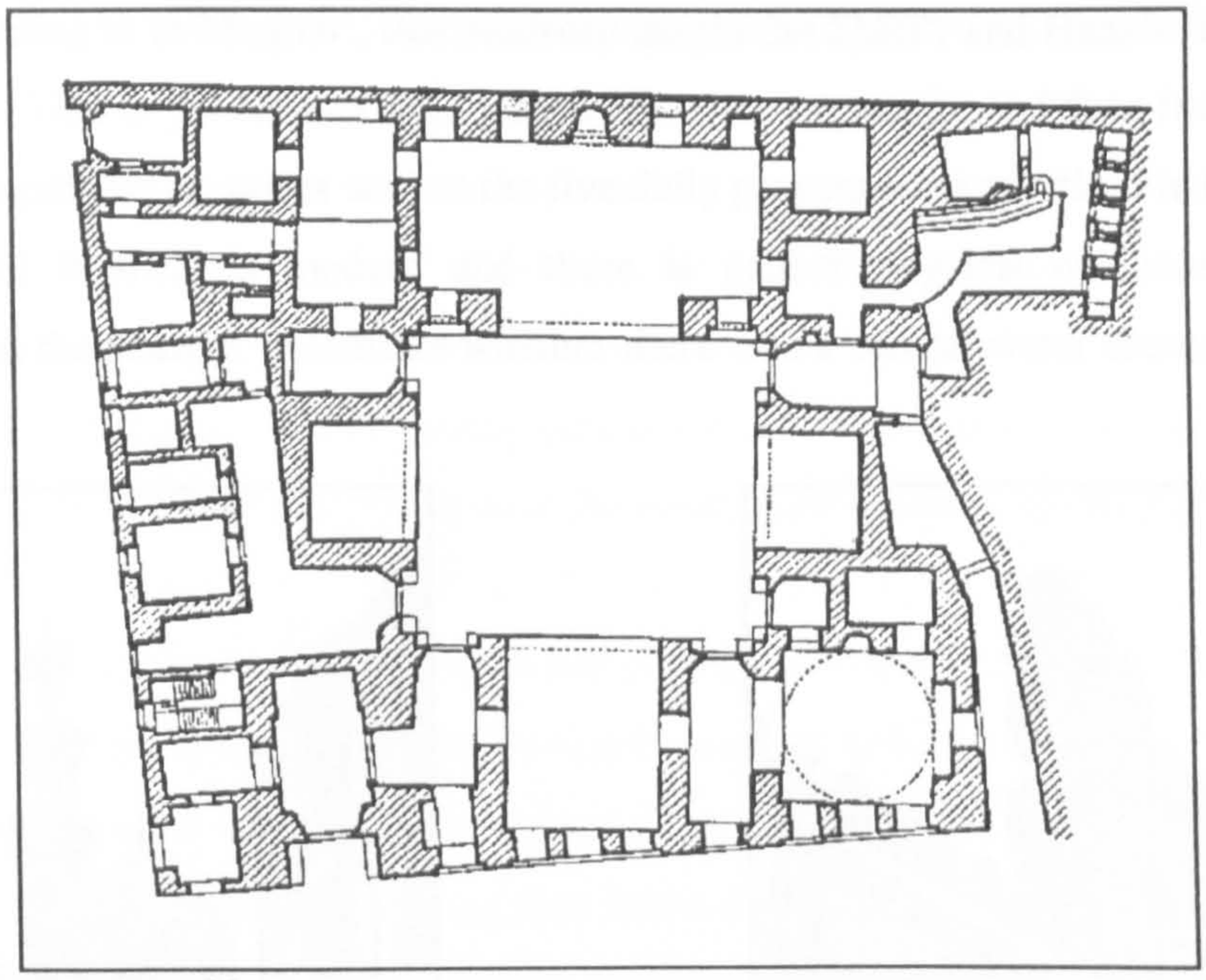


**Figure 5.88** Plan of the *Madrasa* of *Emīr* Iljāy al-Yūsufī. (Kessler)

The portal is typically trilobed, making use of stalactites to reach a pointed semi-dome at its summit. The portal leads to a vaulted entrance hall which resembles an "umbrella".[1] This leads to a *majāz* (in this case a corridor with two bends) leading to the *ṣaḥn*. The interior is of the four-*iwān madrasa* type. (Fig. 5.89) Each of the four *iwāns* has a frontal pointed arch and is roofed by a flat wooden ceiling. The *qibla iwān* is the largest and designed in such a manner so as to provide for laterality, thus longer rows. At the centre of the *qibla* wall is a pointed *miḥrāb* decorated in *ablaq* masonry (alternating colours of red and white, or black and white stone).

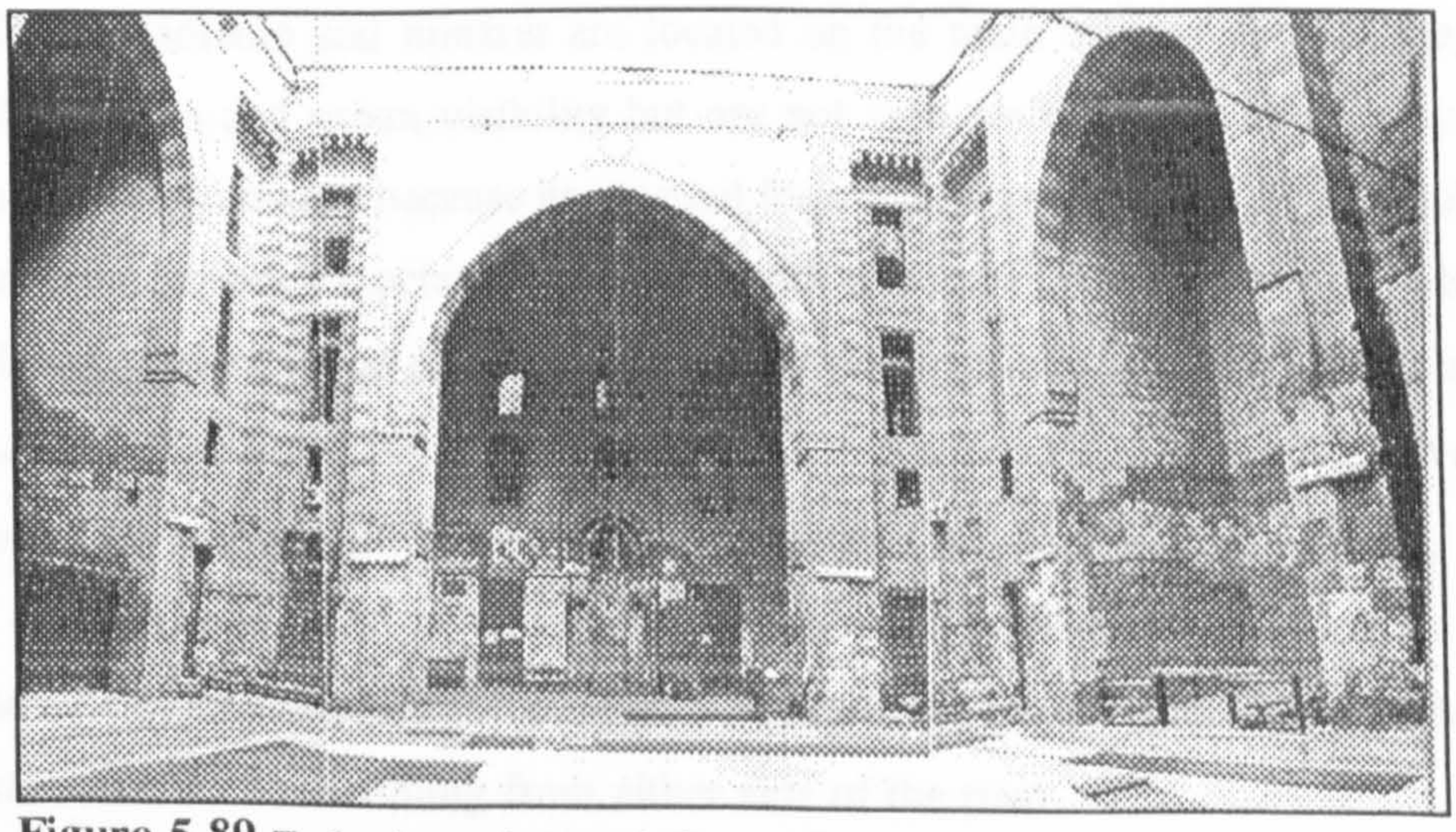


**Figure 5.89** The four-*iwan madrasa* organization centralized around a courtyard.

[1] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.132.

According to al-Maqrīzī[1], this *madrasa* taught the Shāfi'ī and Ḥanafī rites only - not the four rites. This is yet another case where two rites are taught and four *iwāns* designed. Friday congregational prayer as well as the five daily prayers were practised in this *madrasa*. The courtyard flooring is modern and there is neither physical evidence, nor literal descriptions in the sources to indicate whether there was a central water fountain or not.

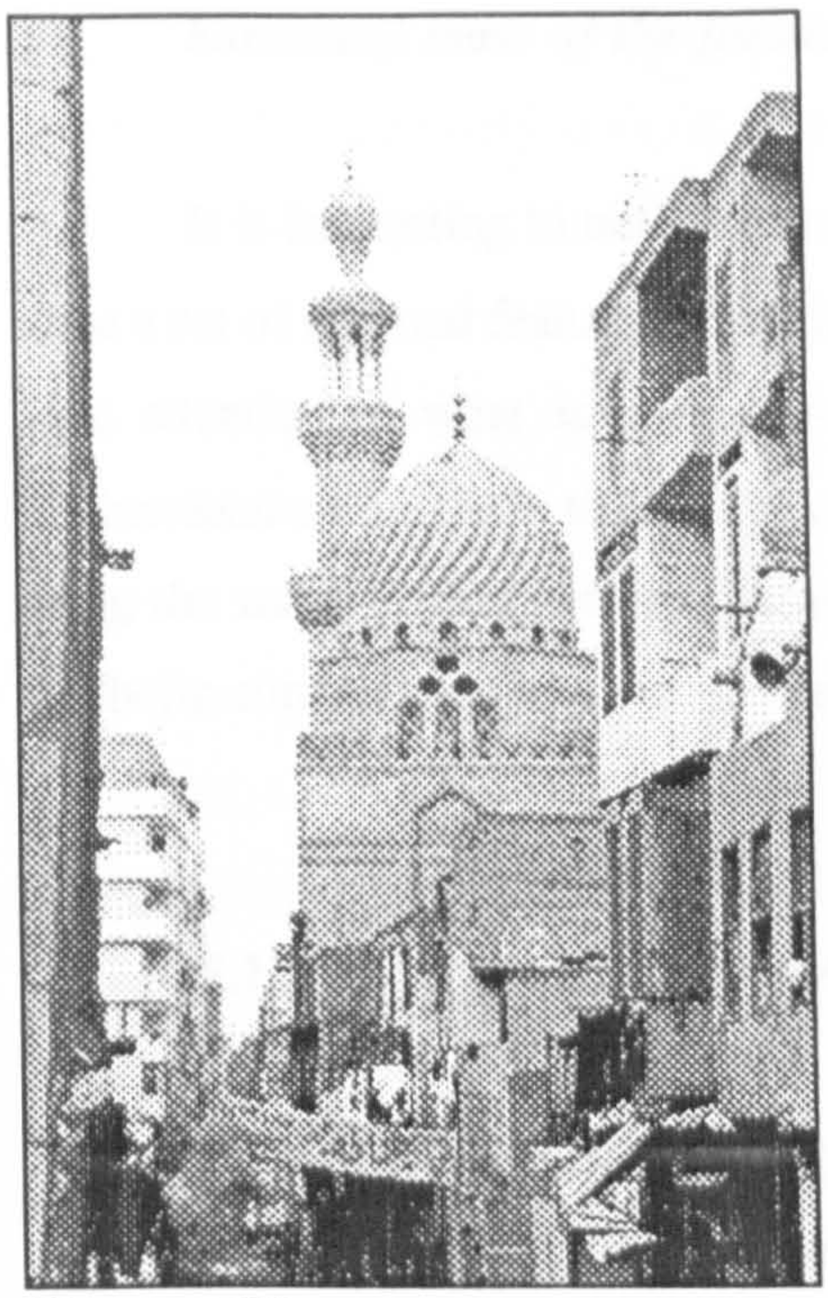


**Figure 5.90** The dome and minaret evidently suggest the function of a signpost.

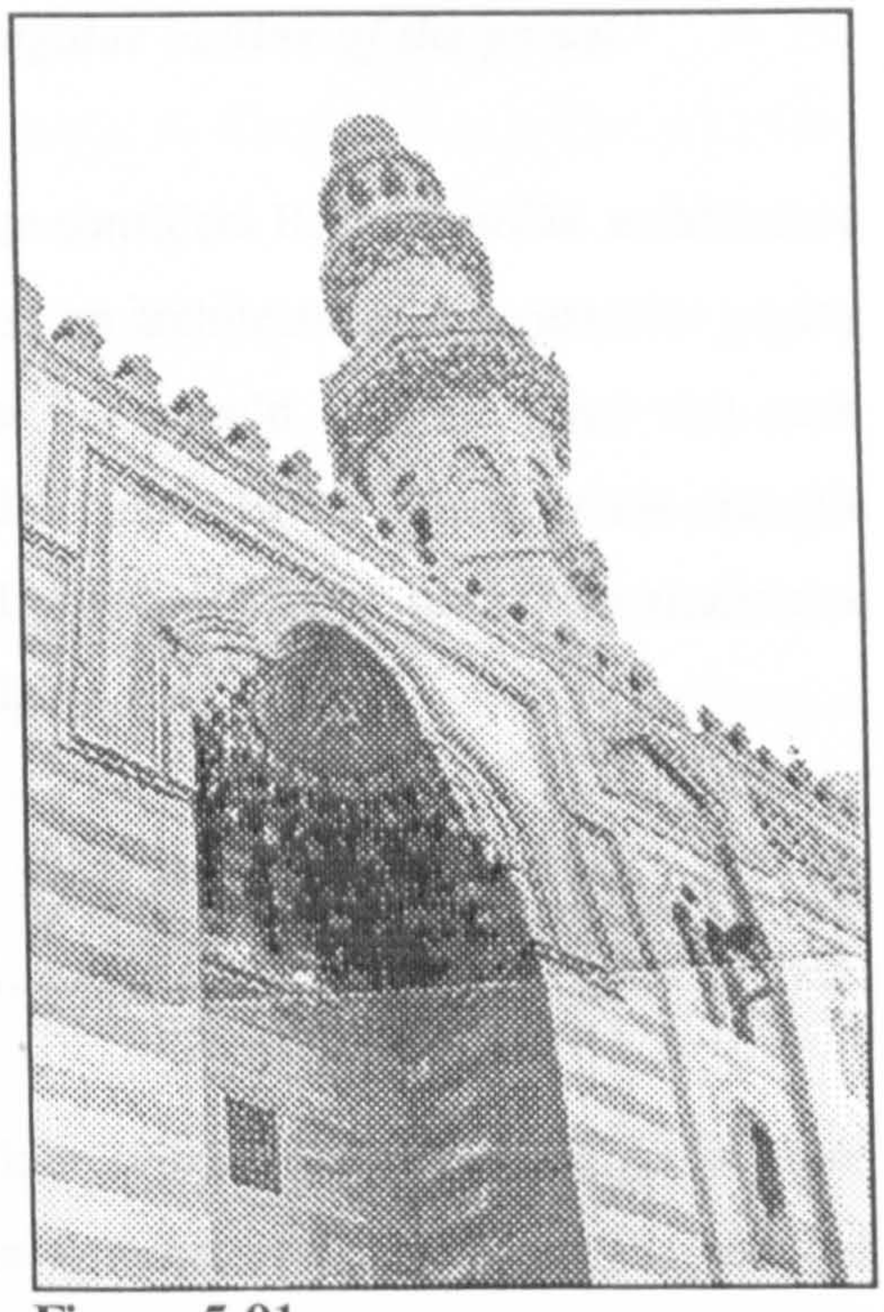


**Figure 5.91** The Mamlūk minaret, in most cases shows a relation to the portal.

The mausoleum and minaret are located on the main western façade; they benefit from their location and urban visibility but are not seen entirely from the courtyard. The mausoleum dome is unusual because its external form has no precedent in the Mamlūk period, it changes from square to octagon and ends with a pointed dome of twisted ribs. These twisted ribs instigate a visual sense of movement from bottom to top. (Fig. 5.90) Internally, the mausoleum chamber changes from square to octagon to circle by means of five rows of stalactites[2]. The minaret on the other hand, consists of four storeys: square, octagon, circular, eight pillared pavilion, and topped by a pointed bulbous end. Its location is on the right hand side of the stalactite portal. (Fig. 5.91) Both the mausoleum dome and the minaret act as landmarks to those coming from either side of the road.

---

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, p.399.

[2] See op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.319.

Richard B. Parker, Robin Sabin, and Caroline Williams, sum up this building by saying:

> ***By the end of the Bahri period the style of Mamluk architecture had been set. The main dramatic and visual interest of a Mamlūk facade lies in the careful positioning of contrasting shapes and masses such as the vertical thrust of the minaret, the hemispherical counter balance of the dome, the horizontal mass of the facade and the rectangular outline of the portal.***[1]

It is interesting to note that the quoted passage considers Baḥrī Mamlūk architecture to be a set of external features found in the façade, i.e., an architecture of the exterior paying little attention to what is within its internal spaces.[2] It should also be noted that such fundamental oversight in terminology as seen in the description of the domes, as for example using the term "hemispherical" rather than "pointed", would lead to conflicting traditional symbolic connotations - as we will see in Chapter Eight.

### 5.1.3 *KHANQAH*, *KHANQAH/MADRASA*, AND *KHANQAH*/MOSQUE TYPE

*Khanqahs* are the third type of Baḥrī Mamlūk buildings to be examined. As has been briefly mentioned in section 5.1.2, in addition to the elements of the *madrasa*, the *khanqah* has Ṣūfī cells and a *qā'a* (hall) for *ḥuḍūr*. We mentioned in Chapter Three that a special relationship between some Ṣūfī *shaykhs* and the Mamlūk ruling elite was common in that period. This special relationship first gave rise to patronage of Ṣūfī *zāwiyas*. For example, we have seen that al-Maqrīzī mentioned that Baybars al-Bunduqdārī had a certain *Shaykh* al-Khiḍr (d.1277 A.D.) who was his protégé, and that Baybars built for him six *zāwiyas* in Egypt and Syria.[3] Likewise, al-Maqrīzī says that the famous al-Nāṣir Muḥammad built several *zāwiyas*, one of which was for the Ṣūfī *Shaykh* Taqiyy al-Dīn Rajab al-'Ajamī.[4] But more importantly, it was only through the officialization of the *khanqah* that the patronage was much more widely spread. Leonor Fernandes comments on this point saying: "*While*

---

[1] op cit. Parker et al., 1985, p.102.

[2] This point will be discussed in this chapter in section 5.2.

[3] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ* vol.2, Pp. 430-431.

[4] ibid., vol.3, p.432.

*patronage of popular Ṡūfism by the ruling class was first cautious and restrained, its endorsement of orthodox Ṡūfism based on the Sunna was more open and led to the sponsorship of official Ṡūfī foundations [the khanqah].*"[1]

The *zāwiya* has not been included in the scope of this thesis because its architecture, influences, and symbolism depends largely on each individual *shaykh* on whom the entire establishment depended; and because the Ṡūfism practised in it was not controlled by the *'ulamā'* (who were only influential in the city as discussed in Chapter Two); that is to say, that *Sunnī* Ṡūfism and the sciences as introduced in Chapter Two were not necessarily applicable to the education administered in the Mamlūk *zāwiya*. Accordingly, only Baḥrī Mamlūk Ṡūfī *khanqahs* will be examined in this section. These are the *Khanqah* of Salār and Sanjar al-Jāwlī, and the *Khanqah* of Baybars al-Jāshankīr. A third complex will also be included comprising two buildings constructed by *Emīr* Sheykhū: his mosque and *khanqah*. The reason that the mosque is also placed in this section is that together with the *Khanqah* (which faces it) they are organized externally as a unity. Furthermore, we will see that before the *khanqah* was built, the mosque used to house Ṡūfī students.

<u>*Khanqah* and Mausoleum of *Emīrs* Salār and Sanjar al-Jāwlī;</u> (No.221 on plan)

*Emīr* Sayf al-Dīn Salār played an important role in the agitated times that marked the beginning of the fourteenth-century. The *Emīr* 'Alam al-Dīn Sanjar al-Jāwlī on the other hand, was for a long time governor of Palestine, he was a Mamlūk as well as one of the *'ulamā'* who specialized in *ḥadīth* and in the *fiqh* of the Shāfi'ī rite[2]. He constructed many buildings while he was in Palestine. Historians have debated who of the two was the founder of the *khanqah* complex and have not been able to arrive at a definite answer. While a *mishkāh* (lamp) has the inscription of Salār[3], al-Sakhāwī, a fifteenth-century historian calls the building "*the Mosque of al-Jāwlī.*"[4] (Fig. 5.92)

[1] Leonor Fernandes, "The Foundation of Baybars al-Jashankir: its Waqf, History, and Architecture", p.21.

[2] See op cit, Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.143.

[3] ibid., p.144.

[4] See Abū al-Ḥassan Nūr al-Dīn al-Sakhāwī (15th C.), <u>*Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb wa Baghyat al-Tullāb fī al-Khiṭaṭ wal-Mazārāt wal-Tarājim*</u>, Cairo, 1937, p.111.

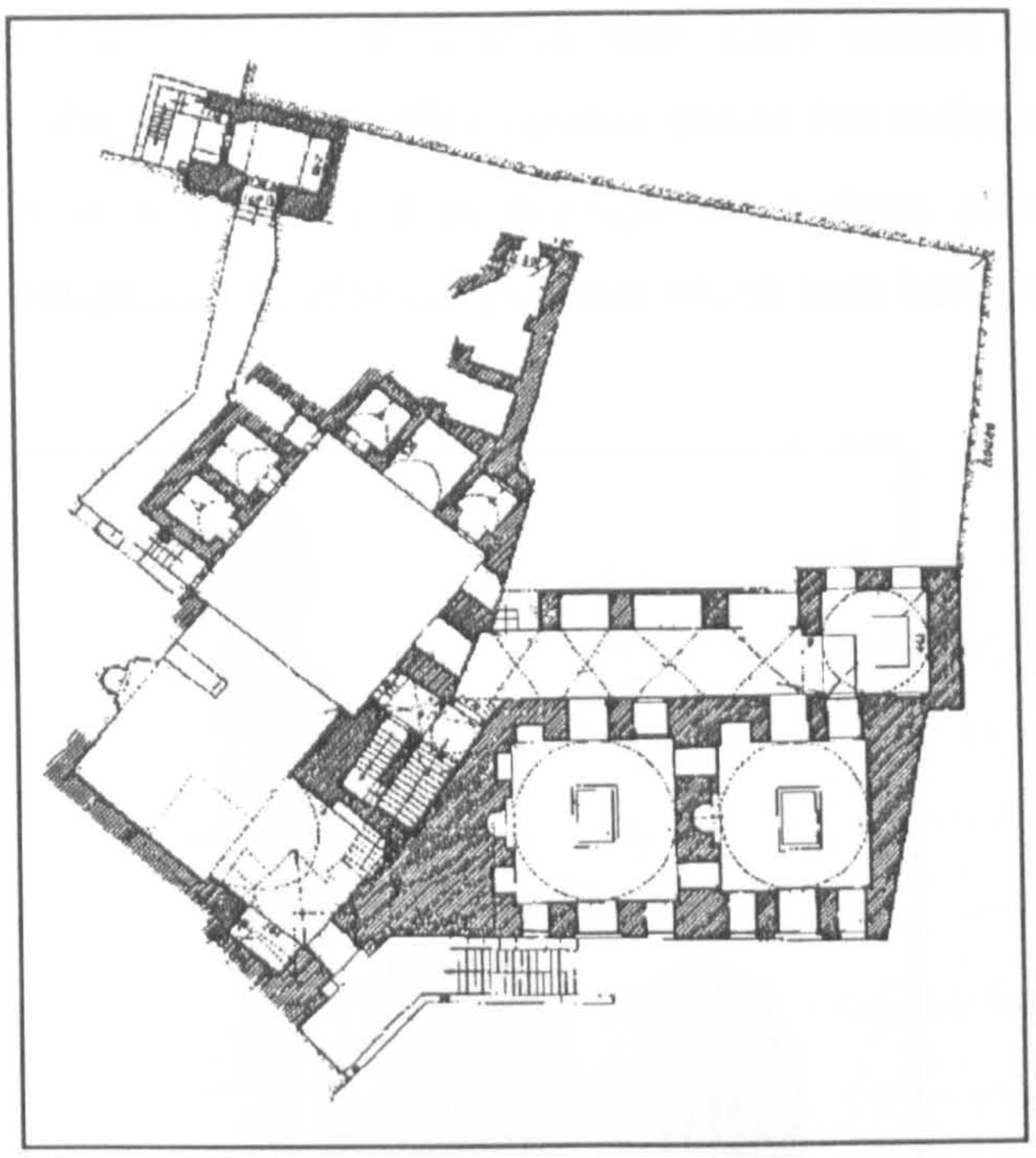


**Figure 5.92** Plan of the *Khanqah* of Salār and Sanjar al-Jāwlī. (Creswell)

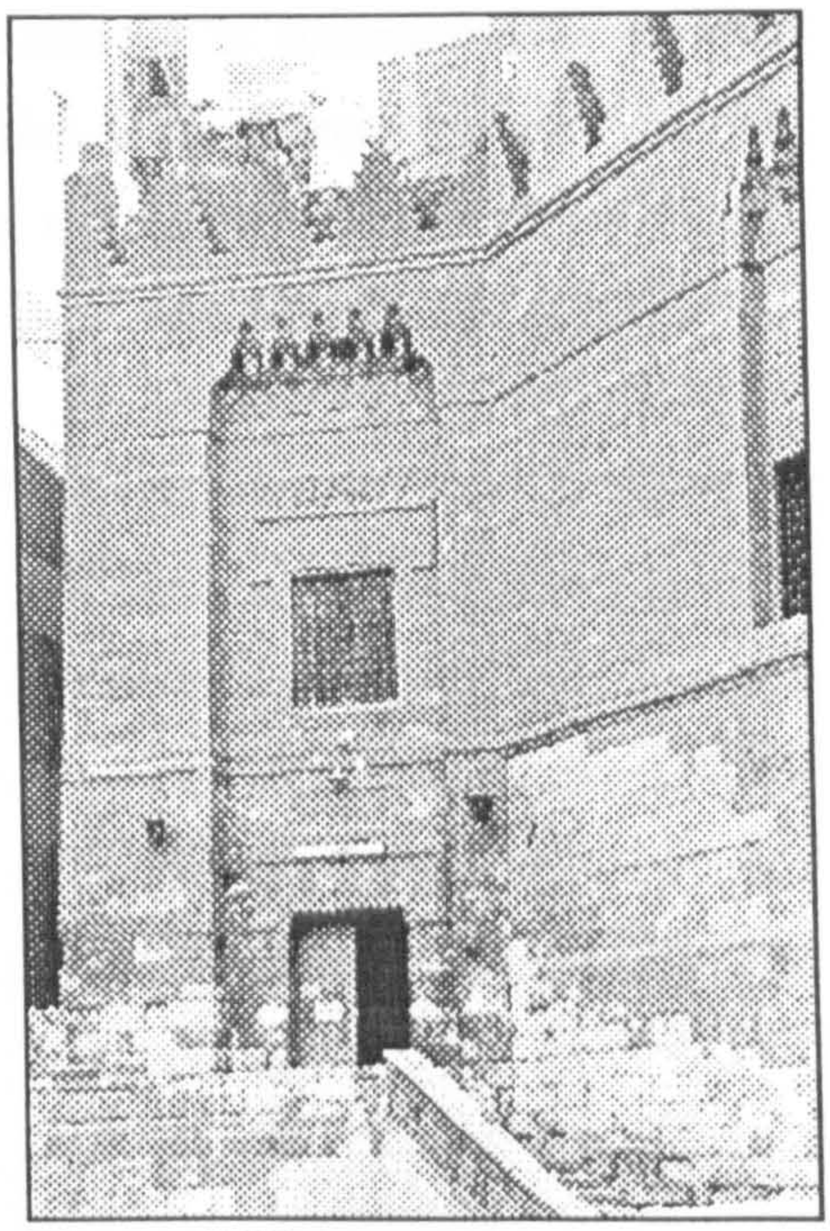


**Figure 5.93** The main portal is treated as a window recess - not the typical stalactite type.

Two inscriptions, one over the north entrance and another on the lintel of the entrance to the mausoleum of the *Emīr* Salār, both give the date as 703 A.H.[1] The building lies on the ridge of Ṡalība Street. It is a *khanqah* complex, built immediately on rock and its entrance is elevated by 3.5m from the street level. There are two portals in this *khanqah* complex, the main one treated as a window recess and lined with three rows of stalactites (Fig. 5.93). The other, which is the secondary one, at the back, is a typical Mamlūk stalactite portal. At the time it was erected, the quarter of Qal'at al-Kabsh behind it had a residential character and Sanjar himself had his palace there. This explains the presence on this side of the stalactite portal leading to the mausoleum complex.

The main façade on Ṡalība Street is unique in having two adjoining unequal domes and a minaret followed by the main portal - all feature elements are aligned one after the other. (Fig. 5.94) The transformation of these domes from the square to the circle is by means of four rows of stalactites followed by a frieze of Kufic scripture (typical dome features of the end of the (seventh-century A.H., thirteenth-century A.D.) such as those seen in the dome of Zayn al-Dīn Yūsuf in section 5.1.2. The minaret has a square base and is transformed vertically into an octagon followed by a cylindrical section and culminating in

[1] op cit. Creswell, 1919, p.86.

a *mabkhara* ribbed domical end. Each section of the minaret is accentuated by rows of stalactites. (Fig. 5.95) Creswell claims that in the evolution of the Cairene minarets, this one is important,[1] as it is amongst the earliest surviving examples of three-storied square, octagonal, circular composition which later became the standard form in the Mamlūk period.

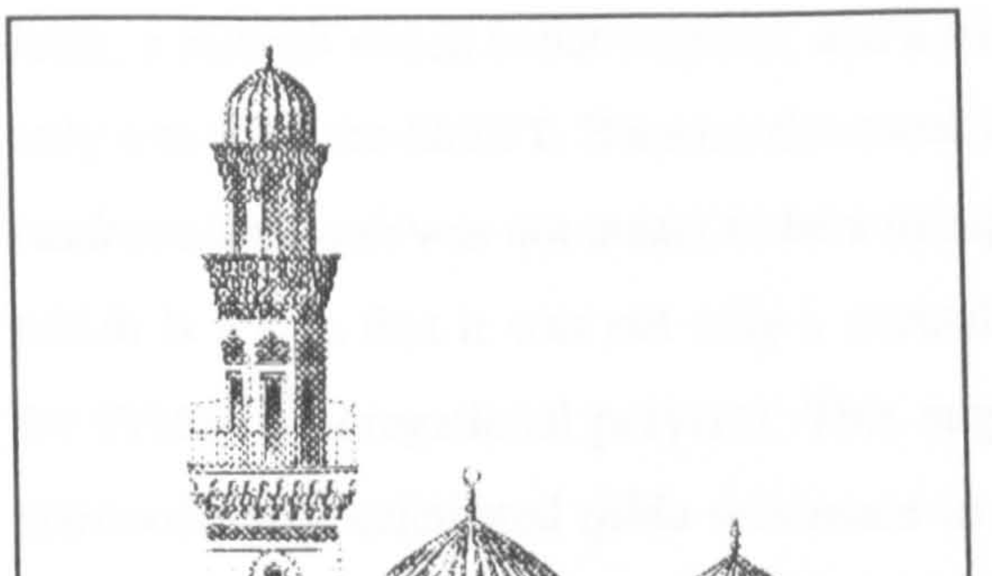


**Figure 5.94** Ṣalība Street elevation showing the array of elements that act as a signpost to the *khanqah*. (Creswell)

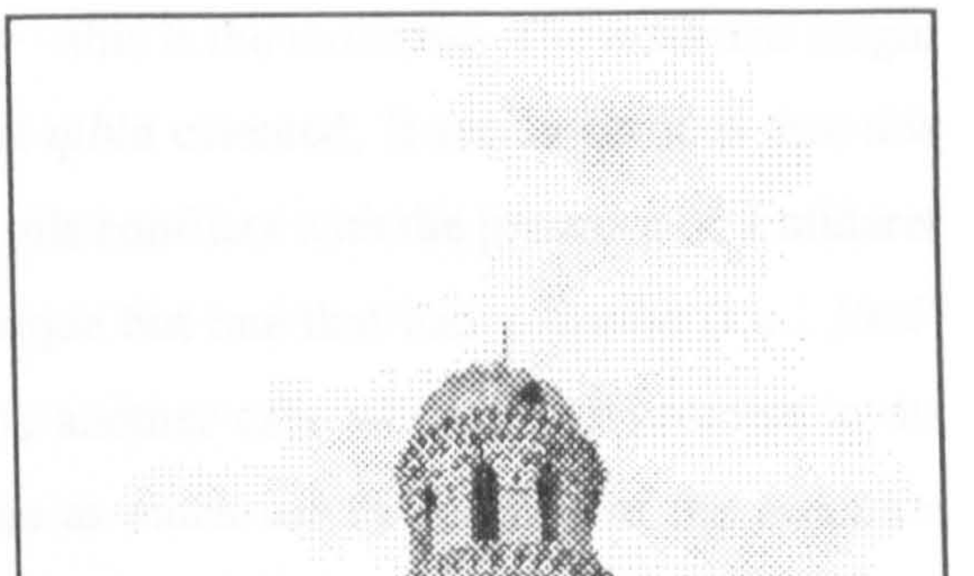


**Figure 5.95** *Mabkhara*-type minaret showing typical Mamlūk change in sections.

The entrance to the staircase of the minaret is at roof-level, and has a trilobed portal. This is an unusual feature. It is explained by Behrens-Abouseif as the result of the desire of the architect to "add aesthetic elements" to the side of the building overlooking Qal'at al-Kabsh (rear side). She adds that the intention of the architect to address viewers on both sides of the building is indicated as well by the arrangement of the Qur'ānic inscription bands which adorn it: while the inscription on the minaret begins facing the main Ṣalība Street and reflects the more public function of the minaret, the inscription on the mausoleum domes faces the rear side of Qal'at al-Kabsh.[2]

---

[1] See Creswell's opinion on his theoretical continuum of evolution of minaret forms in op.cit. Parker et al., 1985, p.58.

[2] For more information on this particular case, see op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1985(a), p.76. It should be taken into consideration that the site of this *Khanqah* is far from being typical of the Cairene urban setting.

The main portal leads to an entrance hall which is roofed by a groined vault. The *majāz* is in two bends, but is different than other precedents in that it is not a corridor but a long flight of steps - arising from the difference in levels between the portal and the *khanqah*. Placed obliquely across the *majāz* landing and to the left, is a large room containing the *madrasa* and the *khanqah*. Inside on the left, raised one step, is a flat roofed room with an *iwān*, a *miḥrāb* which is not original, and a *minbar* - this is the *madrasa*. The *madrasa* taught only one rite, the Shāfi'ī. Because the room is not *qibla* oriented, it seems obvious that this *madrasa/khanqah* was not meant to be a mosque, this conflicts with the presence of a minaret which is a sign that it was not only a normal mosque but one that had a *khuṭba* (i.e., *jāmi'* for Friday congregational prayers). This might be another case where a compromise in the astronomically calculated *qibla* was made to make as much use as possible of the awkward site - as seen above in the *Madrasa* of Umm al-Sulṭān Sha'bān in section 5.1.2. The *khanqah* on the other hand is on the right, and was probably not originally roofed.[1] It consists of a *ṣaḥn*, four cells for Ṣūfīs, and a pointed vault *iwān*.

Straight ahead, on the same landing of the *majāz*, is an intersected vaulted corridor which leads to three burial chambers. To the left of the corridor are three window bays with interlaced stone screens[2]. They show high quality of craftsmanship, and because of the finesse in the carving[3] give the effect of a material more precious that from which they are made. (Fig. 5.96) A small bay next to these three windows leads into a courtyard of unknown function[4]. This courtyard has a stucco *miḥrāb*, some tombs, and what look like the remains of rooms which might be indicative of living quarters for the Ṣūfīs.

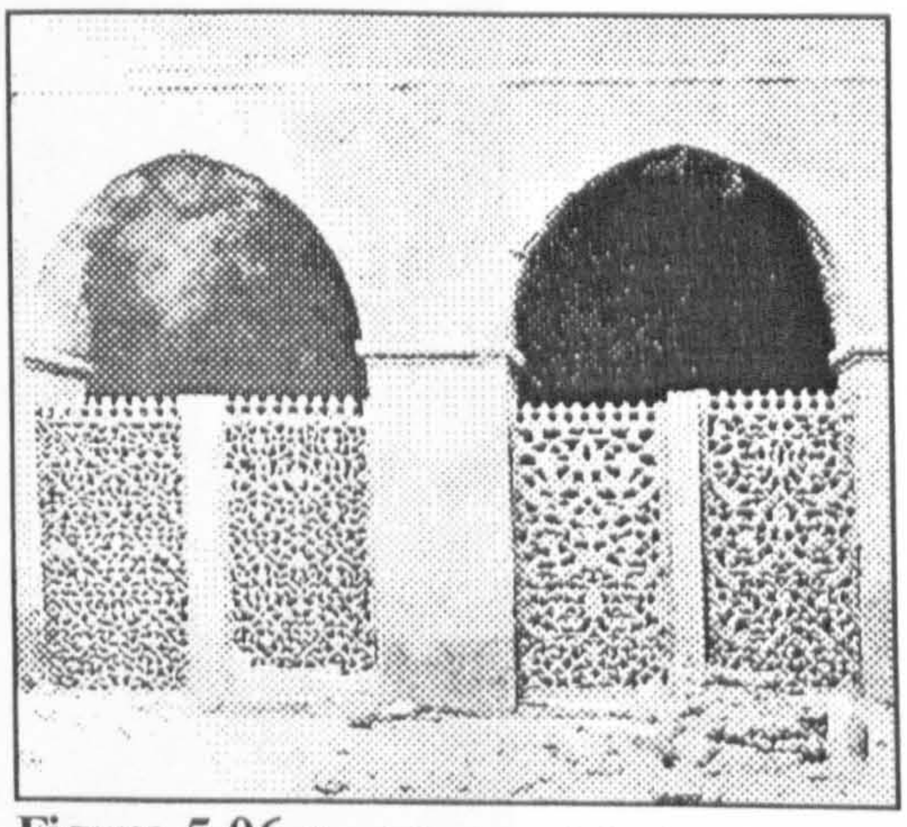


**Figure 5.96** Two of the three window bays showing the fine stone carved floral motifs.

---

[1] op cit. Parker et al., 1985, p.59.

[2] See full description in op cit. Creswell, 1937, p. 243.

[3] We will discuss the matter of ennoblement of materials in Chapter Seven which will be seen to parallel the process of transmutation of a base material to a more noble one, a process of alchemy.

[4] See op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.104. She says that because two of the four sides of the courtyard are modern residential buildings one cannot even reconstruct what the original space looked like.

The small domed chamber at the end of the corridor is not dated and is unidentified. On the right hand side of the corridor are two domed chambers, those of Salār and Sanjar, connected internally. The larger room is that of Salār while the smaller is that of Sanjar. The two pointed domes are identical except for their size. The domes have transition zones formed of three rows of stalactites reminiscent of the Ayyubid fashion. Three tiers of windows placed one on top of the other are located in these zones: their number reduces from bottom to top, so that the bottom row has three openings followed by two then by one. An octagonal wooden frame cantilevered from the square base of each chamber is placed at the transition zone of the dome. Finally, a circular drum pierced by windows supports a pointed dome. The proportions of the chamber are nearly three to one (height to width) which gives a strong impression of verticality. (Fig. 5.97)

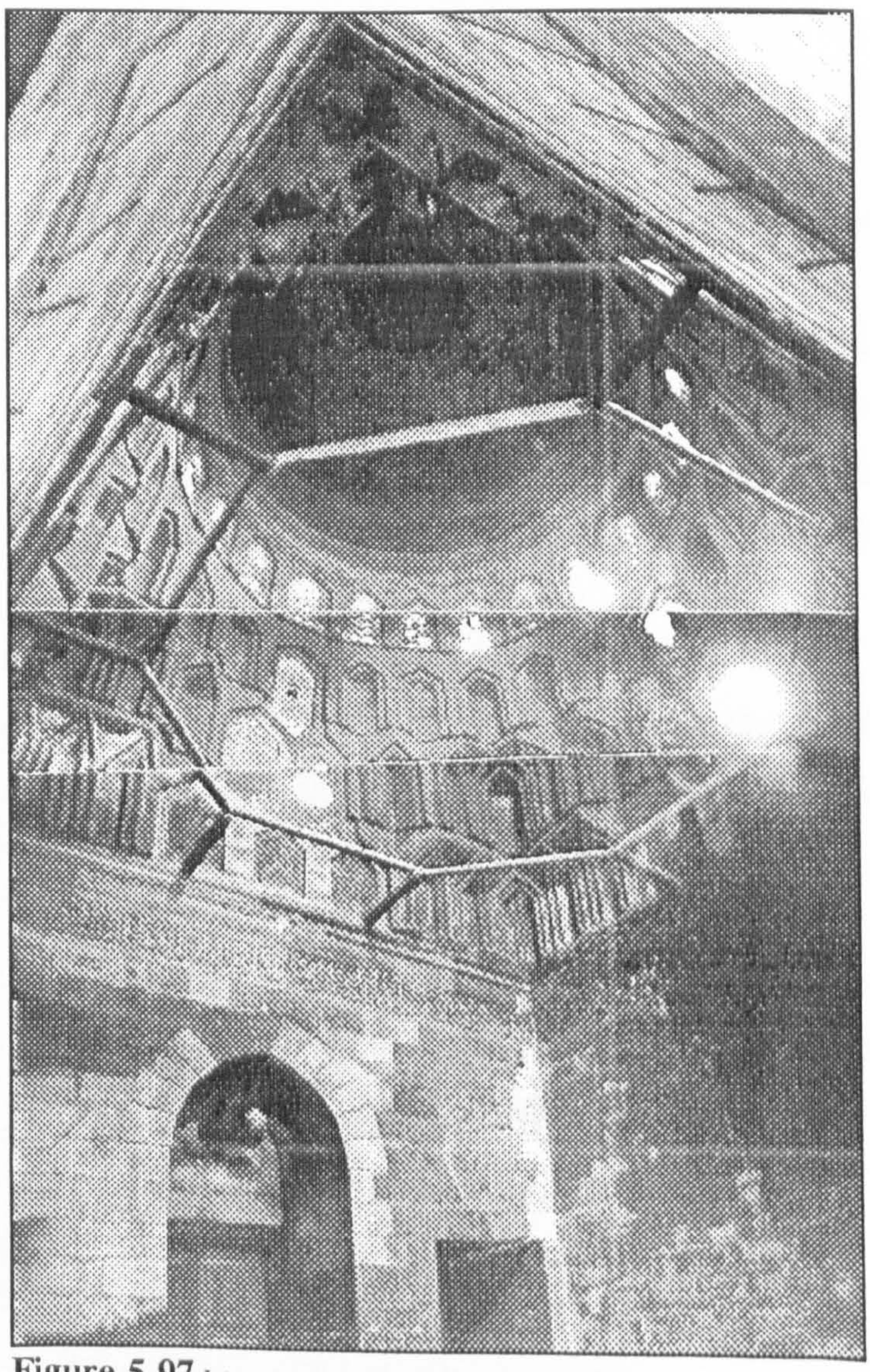


**Figure 5.97** Internal organization of the mausoleum of Sanjar al-Jāwlī showing the zone of transition from square to circle, and cantilevered wooden frame.

The inscription above the entrance of the mausoleum chamber of Salār is of three lines starting with Qur'ānic verses and ending in a supplication that shows a Śūfī choice of verses with words that are largely interpreted through Śūfī *ta'wīl*:

> ***All that is on earth will perish: But will abide forever [yabqā from which the term "baqā'" the opposite of "fanā'" subsistence is derived] the Face of thy Lord, full of Majesty (Jalāl), Bounty and Honour (Ikrām).[1] This is the tomb of the faqīr (poor) to God the Transcendent, Sayf al-Dīn Salār prime-minister of the sultanate who is repentant of his sins, supplicating the forgiveness from his Lord, may God give mercy to those who make a prayer (du'ā') for mercy to him, and to all Muslims...[2]***

The internal epigraphy on the dome itself is the *al-Kursī* verse (the Seat of the Throne verse) that has been seen in this chapter to have been a popular epigraphy in domed chambers. Externally, the Qur'ānic verses that were chosen refer to the soul (*nafs*) which is the non-physical part of man which needs to be trained through Śūfī practices:

> ***Lo! Those unto whom kindness hath gone forth before from Us, they will be far removed from thence. They will not hear the slightest sound thereof, while they abide in that which their souls (anfusahum) desire. The Supreme Horror will not grieve them, (saying): "this is your Day which ye were promised."[3]***

On the other hand, the dome of Sanjar has another set of Qur'ānic verses in the external drum of the dome. Again the choice of Qur'ānic verses refers to the *nafs* along with the relevant Śūfī points of interest:

> ***And those who, having done something to be ashamed of, or wronged their own souls (anfusahum), earnestly bring God to mind (dhakarū) [from the word "dhikr"] and ask for forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive***

---

[1] Qur'ān: 55/26-27.

[2] See op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.148. (My translation).

[3] Qur'ān: 21/101-103. M.M. Pickthall's translation.

> ***sins except God? - and are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in (the wrong) they have done. For such, the reward is forgiveness from their Lord, and Gardens with rivers flowing underneath, an eternal dwelling: how excellent a recompense for those who work (and strive)!***[1]

An unexpected feature of this building is that while the *madrasa* and the *khanqah* are not *qibla* oriented, the mausoleum chambers are. This has not been explained by historians while analysing this building, but indicates that the prime position in terms of façades and priority for *qibla* orientation was given to the mausolea which are from the *Sunnī* point of view elements that should not be built in the first place. This is a clear departure from the orthodox towards the popular tradition, that is to say that the popular beliefs and requirements were given priorities over the most basic of Islamic religious building requirements: to face the direction of Makkah.

**<u>*Khanqah*</u> <u>and Mausoleum of Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Jāshankīr (also known as al-Malik al-Muḍhaffar)</u>:** (No.32 on plan)

Doris Behrens-Abouseif explains that the Persian word *jāshanqīr* means "the taster", a job held by Baybars at one point of his career. Baybars had usurped power from al-Nāṣir Muḥammad after the latter's second period of rule. He paid the price with his life after al-Nāṣir managed to reinstate himself as sulṭān for the third and longest period of his life.[2] Baybars al-Jāshankīr was hated by the Egyptian society for his excesses as well as because after a short period of his rise to power, a severe drought of the Nile occurred. The medieval Egyptian society, superstitious and known for its belief in omens, related the drought to his succession to the sultanate.[3]

Leonor Fernandes who has researched the *waqfiyyah* of Baybars al-Jāshankīr says that Baybars sought to emulate the Ayyubid Sulṭān Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn. She says that Baybars like the Ayyubid Sulṭān:

---

[1] Qur'ān: 3/135-136.

[2] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.104.

[3] See op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, Pp. 163-165. We should remember how the falling of the minaret of the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan was taken as a prophecy of the end of the Mamlūk period.

> ***... was a strong supporter of the Shari'a and was said to be fanatically religious; he chose to build a khanqah to house Sunni Sufism, and he chose to place it near the Fatimid Dar [house] of Sa'id al-Su'ada' which had been transformed into a khanqah by Salah al-Din in 1173.***[1]

Fernandes adds that the foundation deed of Baybars al-Jāshankīr's *khanqah* gives us information of the way Ṡūfīs lived and on the regulations that governed their life in it.[2] It appears that this *khanqah* was to be used by both young and old, by Arabs, Persians (*'Ajam*), or any other race, by people of different social class (*ṭabaqātihim*), or by any rite (*madhhab*), "*provided they adhere to Sufi orders (ṭarīqathum) and their rules of conduct (ādāb).*"[3]

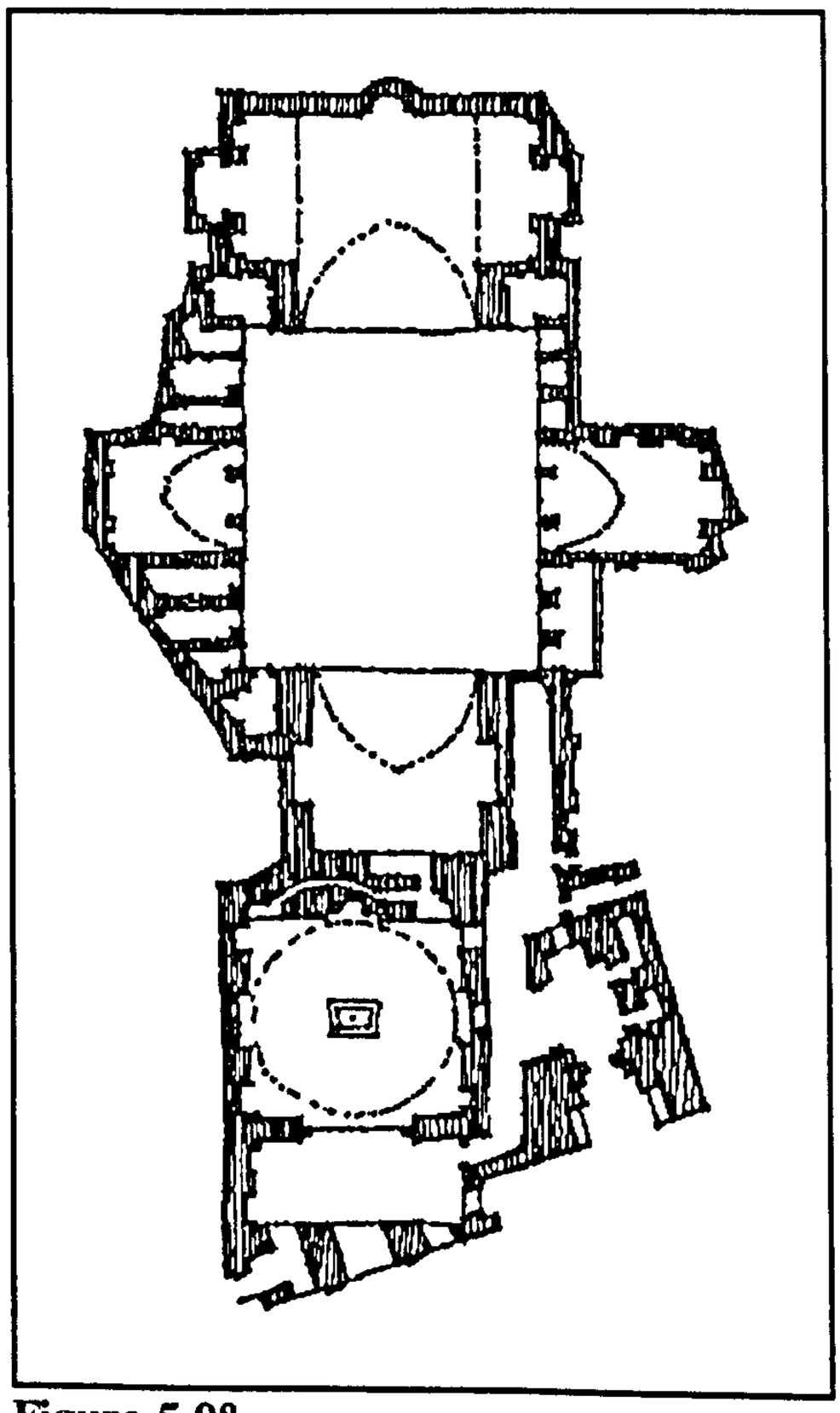


**Figure 5.98** Plan of the *Khanqah* of Baybars al-Jāshankīr.
(After Creswell)

[1] See op cit. Leonor Fernandes, "The Foundation of Baybars al-Jashankir", p.22.

[2] For more details see ibid., p.23.

[3] ibid., p.25.

According to al-Maqrīzī[1], the building was commenced in 706 A.H. before Baybars came to the throne (i.e., when he was still an *emīr*) and was finished in 709 A.H. (Fig. 5.98) When Baybars abdicated, Muḥammad al-Nāṣir sequestrated the endowments of this *khanqah* and erased the name of Baybars from the band of inscription which runs across the façade above the windows. This gap is about a meter, and exists till today. In the interior, on a wooden screen which separates the mausoleum from a small vestibule, is another inscription stating that the whole building, *khanqah*, and mausoleum were finished in (709 A.H., 1309 A.D.).[2] The portal inscription[3] mentions the name of Baybars followed by the term *"faqīr"* (or poor) - a term used by Ṣūfīs to describe themselves - thus indicating that Baybars was a Ṣūfī.

The building was erected on the site of the Fatimid minister's palace. The *waqf* deed indicates that its function was to house 400 Ṣūfīs in this *khanqah*. This was the first case for a *khanqah* to appear in Cairo as part of a royal tomb establishment. Al-Maqrīzī considers that the amount of money that was spent on this *khanqah* makes it the most lavish in Egypt.[4] He adds that when Baybars started its construction, he was kind to the builders and never forced the craftsmen to overwork, "*...on the contrary he bought three houses of important people which he tore down to take and reuse whatever materials he found in them*"[5]. Al-Maqrīzī goes on to relate another story about how the materials used in the mosque were gathered: specifically marble which is hard to find in Egypt:

> ***The Emīr Nāṣir al-Dīn Muḥammad told Baybars that his palace had an underground room - from the time of the Fatimids - full of marble... Baybars sent for that marble and found it to be incomparable to any other he had seen before, and he used it in the khanqah, the mausoleum, as well as his house, while the remaining [marble] was stored in the khanqah.***[6]

---

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, Pp. 416-7. Also for the history and dating, see op cit. Creswell, 1937, p.249.

[2] op cit. Creswell, 1919, Pp. 86-87

[3] See op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.166.

[4] op cit. Al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, p.416.

[5] ibid., vol.2, p.416.

[6] ibid., vol.2, p.417. (My translation).

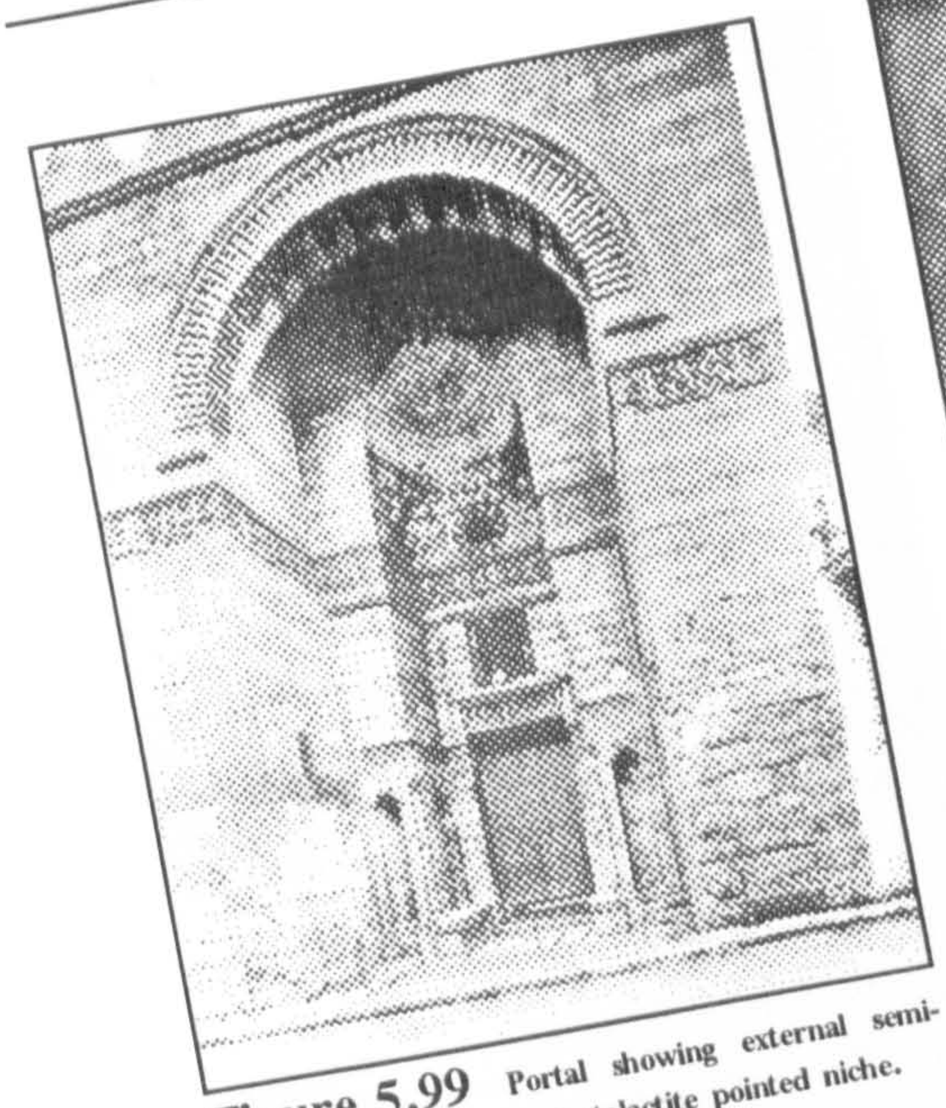


**Figure 5.99** Portal showing external semi-circular arch and internal stalactite pointed niche.

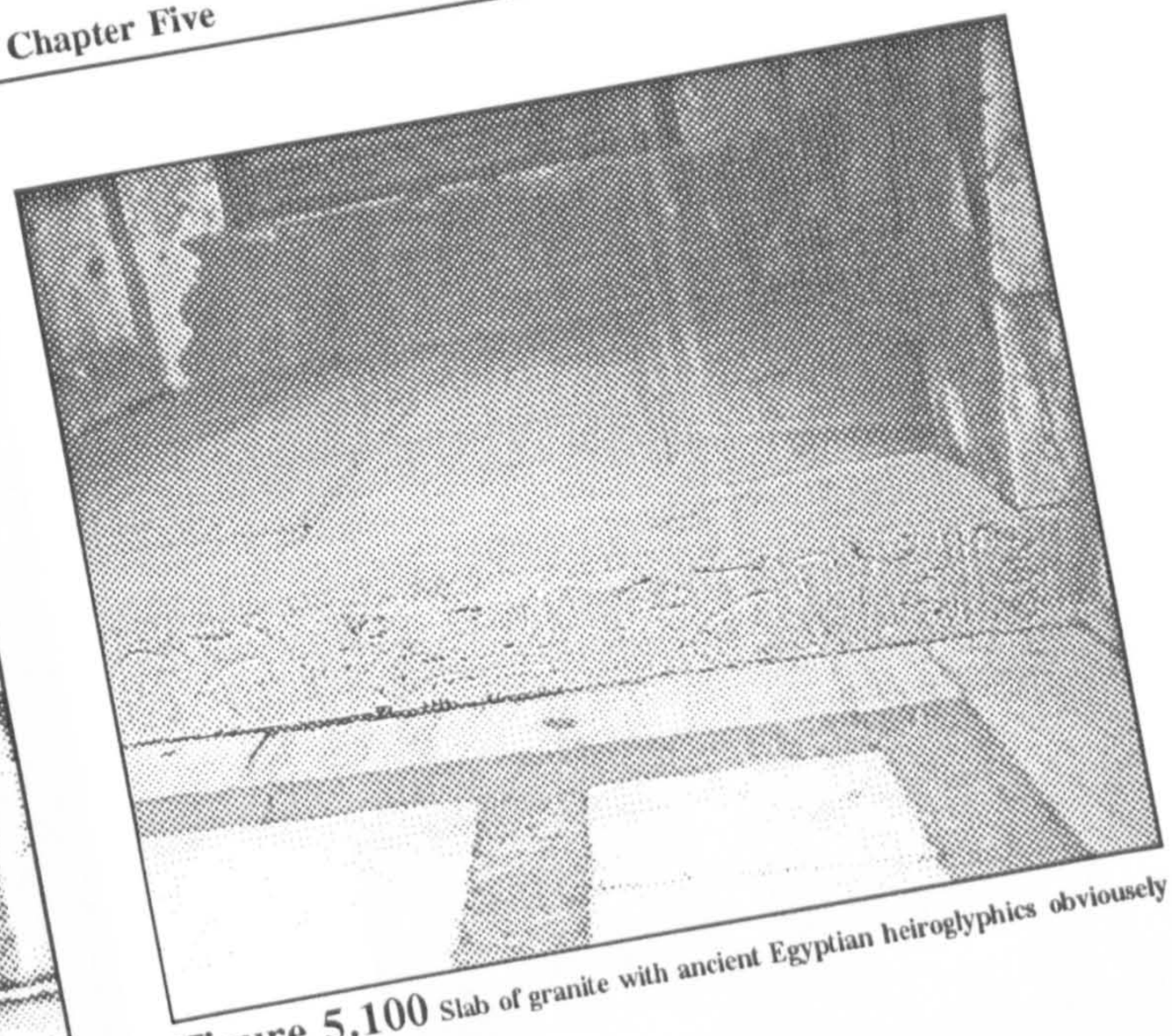


**Figure 5.100** Slab of granite with ancient Egyptian heiroglyphics obviousely reused from a temple.

The entrance is through an unusual portal in that it incorporates two types of arches: the outer is semi-circular - unconventional in Islamic architecture - while the inner is a pointed arched stalactite portal commonly seen in this period.[1] (Fig. 5.99) The threshold which is at the foot of the doorway is a huge slab of granite obtained from an ancient Egyptian temple. (Fig. 5.100) Doris Behrens-Abouseif says that the reuse of ancient Egyptian elements had talsimanic powers[2], but she does not give us a reference to where she obtained this information, so it must remain speculative. We have seen in this chapter that in many cases, columns, column capitals, and even entire portals were reused from monuments dating from Ancient Egyptian, Roman, or Christian periods, or from old mosques. Because they were indiscriminantly reused, Behrens-Abouseif's suggestion is probably not valid. It should not be forgotten that because buildings in medieval times were mostly finished in just over a year, a huge working force and great building expertise was needed. This was not always possible and that is why we find that Baybars for instance bought and tore down three buildings[3] to reuse their material - what is termed by al-Maqrīzī[4] as "*al-anqāḍ*" - in the construction of his *khanqah*.

---

[1] See op cit. Creswell, 1937, p.250.

[2] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.106.

[3] The house of *Emīr* 'Izz al-Dīn al-Afram in the city of Miṣr, the house of the minister Hebat-Allah Ibn Ṣā'i al-Fā'riyy, and the house of al-Anmāt in the *ḥārah* (street) of al-Jawdāriyyah.

[4] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), Khiṭaṭ, vol.2, p.416.

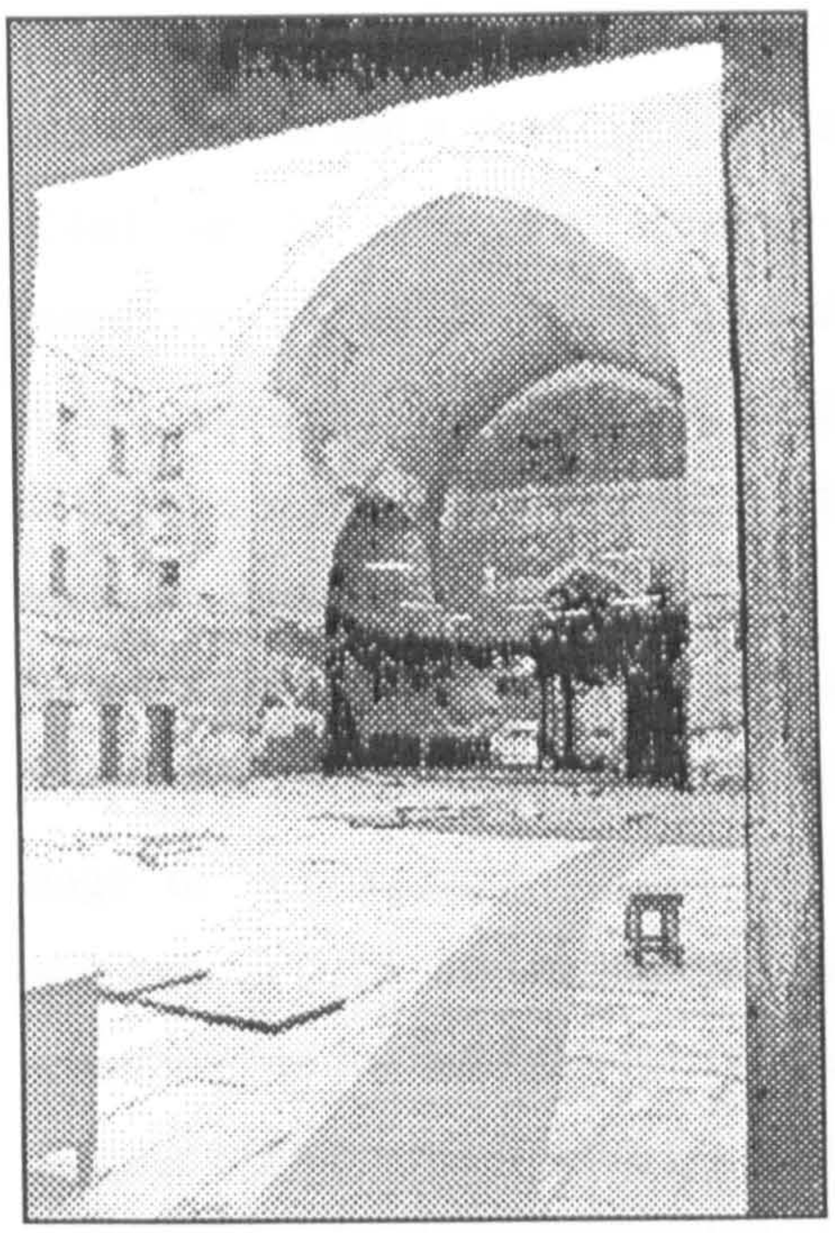


**Figure 5.101** Vaulted eastern *qibla iwān*.

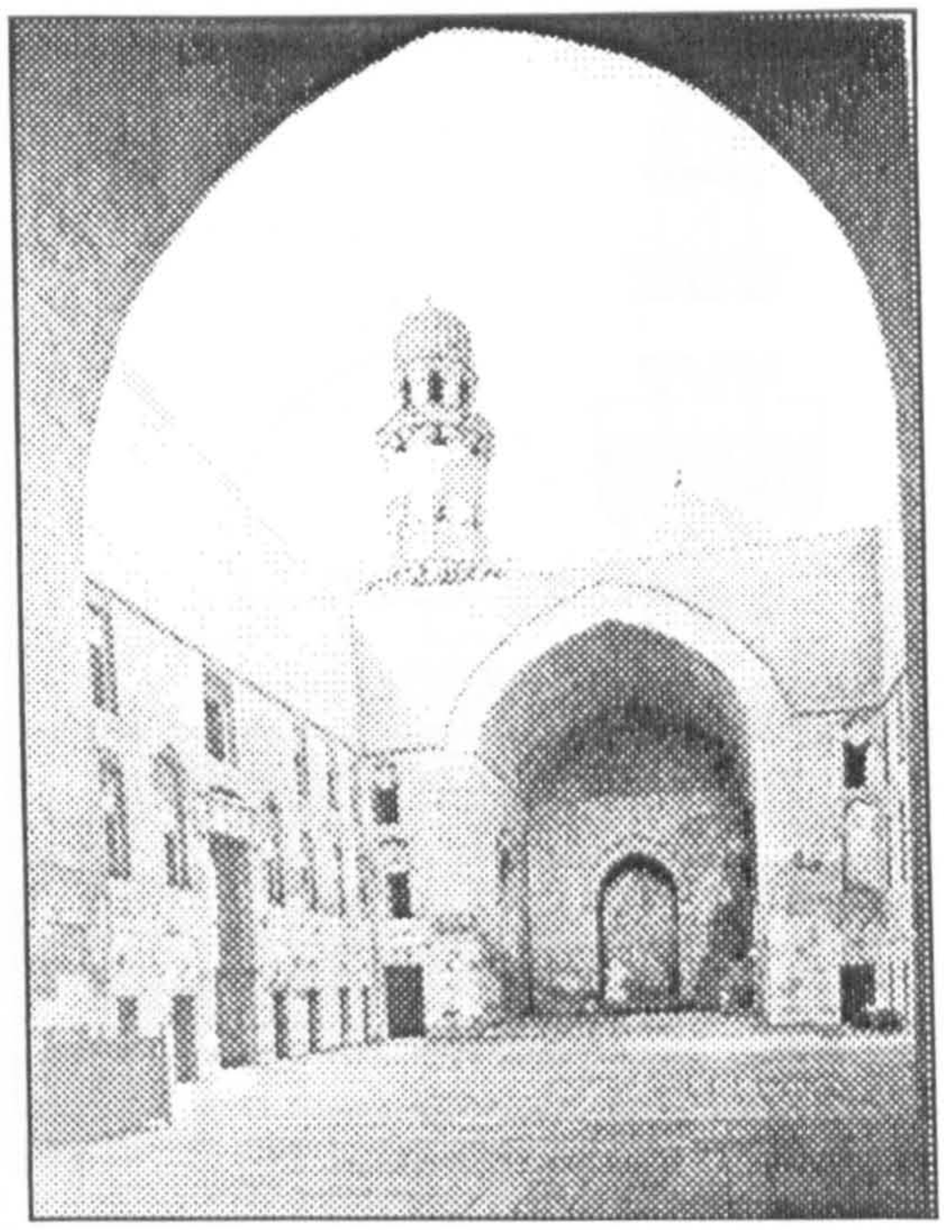


**Figure 5.102** Western vaulted *iwān*.

A *majāz* is used to lead to the mausoleum and courtyard, thus avoiding the direct and sudden entrance to the heart of the building. The plan consists of a *ṣaḥn* and four unequal *iwāns*. The *qibla iwān* is the largest of the four; it is vaulted in a similar manner to that of the western *iwān* opposite it. (Figs. 5.101 & 5.102) Two annexed spaces are added on either side of the simple undecorated pointed *miḥrāb*. (Fig. 5.103) The two other *iwāns* perpendicular to the axis of that of the *qibla* are not vaulted; the *waqf* document mentions that they were a *majlis* (sitting area, probably for eating or for *ḥuḍūr*). Flanking them are 14 *khalwāt* (Ṣūfī cells) on the ground floor. It was there that the Ṣūfīs of the *khanqah* meditated and practised their spiritual exercises in retreat. The rooms in the top two floors were the living quarters, used by the resident Ṣūfīs as well as the visitors. Another block of housing units (outside the building proper) has not survived; it is said to have consisted of 100 housing units not overlooking the courtyard of the *khanqah*[1].

**Figure 5.103** Simple unornamented *miḥrāb* with pointed semi-dome.

The *khanqah* was first built, then the mausoleum dome and the minaret were added. We can deduce this from the foundation deed (*waqf*) of the complex which was written before

[1] op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.170.

the dome and the minaret were erected. It states that a minaret and a dome (*qubbah*) should be added in an adequate location, without specifying where. It was placed above the portal, receding from the façade. In spite of the difficulties which confronted the architect while adding a dome and a minaret to the façade, a balanced composition has been achieved. (Fig. 5.104) It is interesting to note that in the second stage of construction, Baybars allowed his architect to take ten meters of the road to accommodate his mausoleum - we will see in Chapter Six that this is an illegal act according to Baḥrī Mamlūk building regulations.

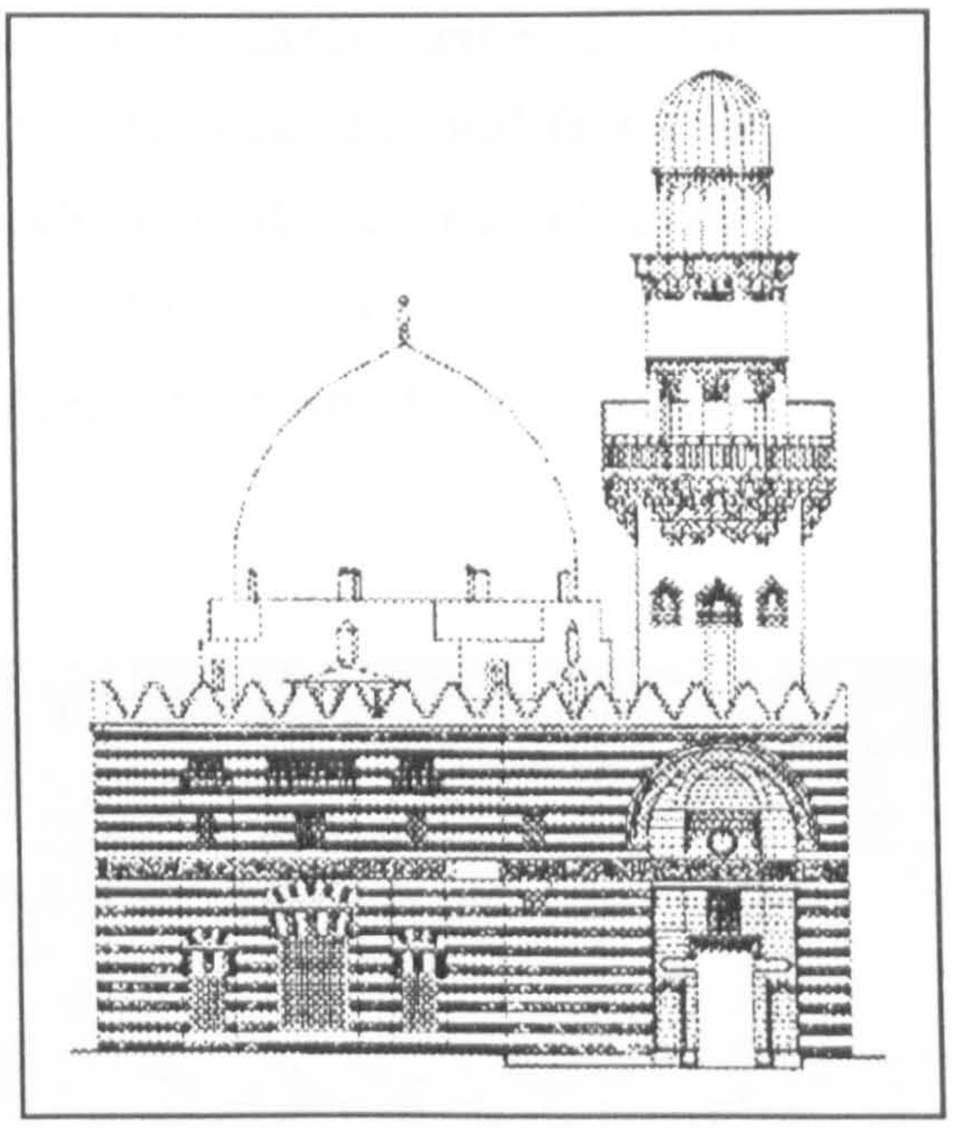


**Figure 5.104** Existing main façade of the *khanqah*.

The pointed dome of the mausoleum is externally very imposing by both its size and form. Externally the square base is transformed into a circle in two octagonal stages. Internally, Doris Behrens-Abouseif says that: "*The sanctuary [qibla iwān] of the khanqah is rather austere, with no wall decorations; the mausoleum of the founder, in contrast, has rich marble mainly black and white panelling.*"[1] But because al-Maqrīzī mentioned that there was no shortage of marble - on the contrary, the rest of the marble was stored in the *khanqah* - Behrens-Abouseif speculates that it might be due to "*the simplicity needed for Ṣūfī prayer.*"[2] Leonor Fernandes on the other hand, while agreeing that there was a feeling of sobriety and austerity said: "*This effect was probably borrowed directly from the khanqah of Salah al-Din, Sa'id al-Su'ada', which Baybars was trying to imitate and which seems to have set the proper tone for Sufi foundations.*"[3]

On the other hand, the epigraphy above the doorway leading to the mausoleum chamber bears several verses that are chosen as to their Ṣūfī connotation; these concern physical death as opposed to spiritual death:

---

[1] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.107.

[2] ibid., p.106.

[3] op cit. Leonor Fernandes, "The Foundation of Baybars al-Jashankir", p.28.

*As to the righteous (they will be) in a position of security, among Gardens and springs; dressed in fine silk and in rich brocade, they will face each other; ... , nor will they there taste Death [lā yadhūqūn fīhā al-mawt], except the first Death; and He will preserve them from the Penalty of the Blazing Fire, as a Bounty from thy Lord! That will be the supreme achievement! ...*[1]

Internally, the dome is transformed from the square to the circle by means of four rows of stalactites. In this transition zone, four groups of four tiers of windows are located, one on each face of the chamber, ascendingly decreasing in number. They start with four windows and decrease to one at the top. Above the four rows of stalactites is the pointed dome, pierced with eight windows. As was customary in Mamlūk times, in the cases of domes that did not actually pass through the octagonal shape in the zone of transition, an octagonal wooden frame was introduced in the top section of the square base (or the springing point of the stalactites). (Fig. 5.105)

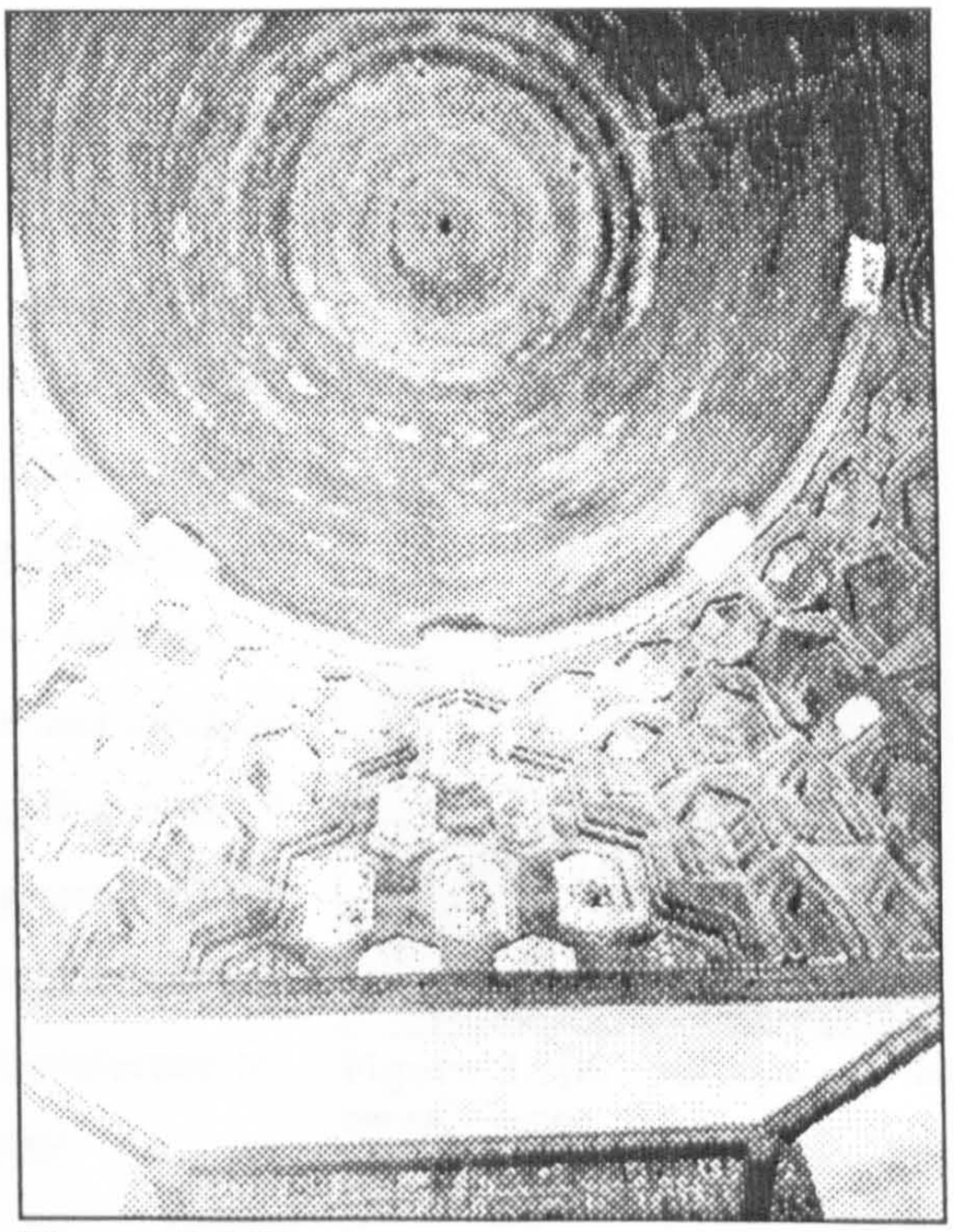


**Figure 5.105** Interior of the mausoleum dome showing its zone of transition. (Hauteceoure & Wiet)

The internal epigraphy in the mausoleum is also worth noting for its Ṣūfī cosmological implications: above the *miḥrāb* of the mausoleum is the Qur'ānic verse[2] ordering the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) to face the *qibla* in Makkah, it goes on to explain that the only "Truth" (*al-Ḥaqq*) comes from God. Another band of carved epigraphy is carved in a wooden window lintel which bears the Qur'ānic verse[3] in which God explains the creation of seven Heavens, and explains how stars and planets are positioned in

---

[1] Quoted here are the verses from the Qur'ān: 44/51-53, 56-57. In the original epigraphy the verses are from 51-59.

[2] Qur'ān: 2/149.

[3] Qur'ān: 67/1-13.

the heavens "*as lamps*" (*maṣābīḥ*) and in the final verse (13), God says: "*And whether ye hide your word or make it public. He certainly has (full) knowledge of the secrets of (all) hearts.*" It is obvious from all these epigraphies, that there are clear hints of relevant Ṣūfī concepts. These will be examined in Chapter Seven, and Eight in relation to the Muslim traditional medieval period in Cairo.

On the other hand, the minaret shows an arrangement which has no parallel among the surviving minarets of Cairo, it has a *mabkhara* top (literally "incense burner" because it resembles its shape) which is characteristic of the early Mamlūk period. This is carried by a circular section resting on a rectangular shaft rather than a square. Doris Behrens-Abouseif says: "*the minaret thus lacks the octagonal part seen in other mabkhara-style minarets, and is one of the few minarets without an octagonal transition between the rectangular and circular sections.*"[1] It seems that she missed observing five rows of stalactites which carry an octagonal balcony used by the *mu'adhdhin* for the call to prayer. This ignored reduced section would thus complete the geometrical transformation seen in all other Mamlūk minarets. (Fig. 5.106)

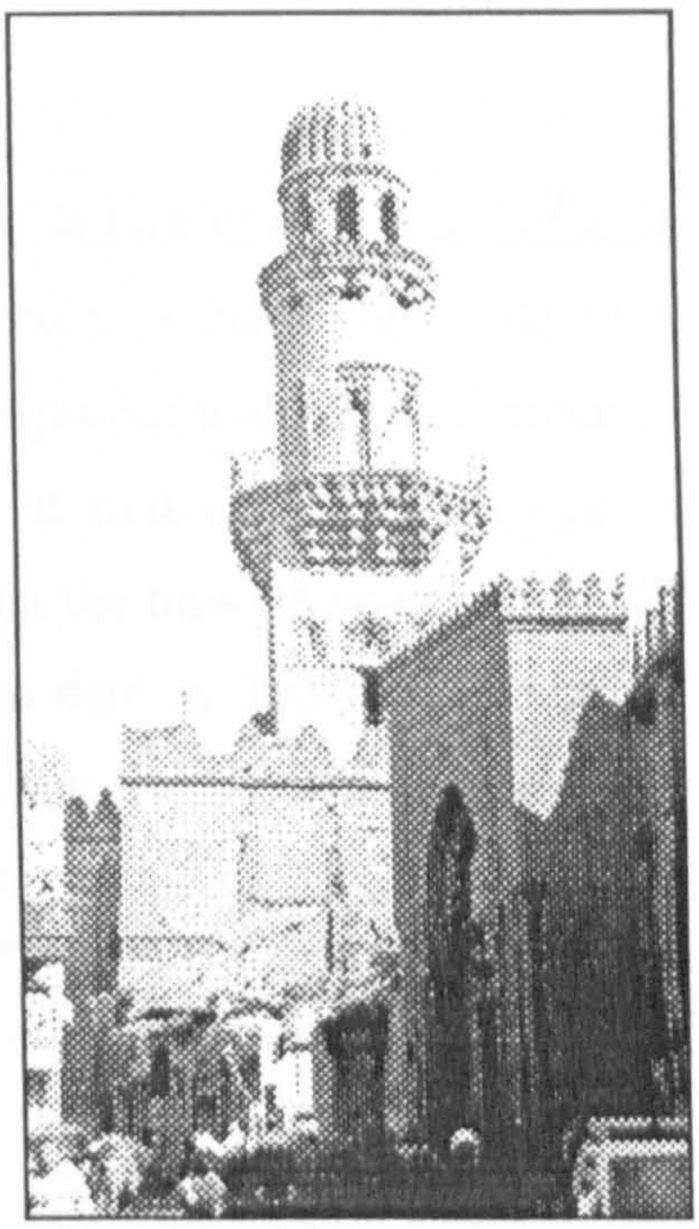


**Figure 5.106** The minaret of the *khanqah* of Baybars.

The ribbed *mabkhara* was once covered with green pieces of faience tile which is rare in Cairo. This was earlier seen to be used in the dome above the *miḥrāb* in the Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in the Citadel and was referred to as a "*qubbah khaḍrā'*" (literally green dome). We have mentioned in section 5.1.1 that when historians have encountered such unprecedented examples, they have referred to the technique by which it was constructed, and its origins - i.e., current in Persian architecture which accordingly shows influences coming from Mongol lands[2]. The problem is that hardly any of them - with the exception of Bloom[3] - refer to the medieval connotation of the *qubbah khaḍrā'* which is vital to understand it.

---

[1] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.106.

[2] op.cit., Parker et.al., P.226.

[3] See Jonathan Bloom, Minaret: Symbol of Islam, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 67.

**Mosque and *Khanqah* of the *Emīr* Sheykhū:** (No.147, 152 on plan)

The *Emīr* Sayf al-Dīn Shaykhū al-Nāṡirī had a brilliant career, rising through the ranks to become a commander-in-chief under the Sulṫān Ḥassan in 1354 A.D., he was also titled "*al-Emīr al-Kabīr*" (the Great *Emīr*) - the first to be so called. His personal character according to al-Maqrīzī alternated between cruelty and asceticism. Sheykhū considered himself a Ṡūfī[1]. He died at the end of 1357 A.D.

Although the *Madrasa*, and *Khanqah* of Sheykhū which face one another in Ṡalība Street, were not built in the same time, they were constructed to share almost identical external features: two long and lofty façades, and two stalactite portals with identical minarets placed on their top. The dating of these two buildings is at first confusing because an inscription under the stalactites of the entrance bay, states that the mosque was built in 750 A.H., which is at variance with al-Maqrīzī[2], who gives the date as 756 A.H. Creswell[3] thinks that al-Maqrīzī was probably wrong here as he says that the *khanqah* was built six years after the mosque, and that it was commenced in the first month of 756 A.H.

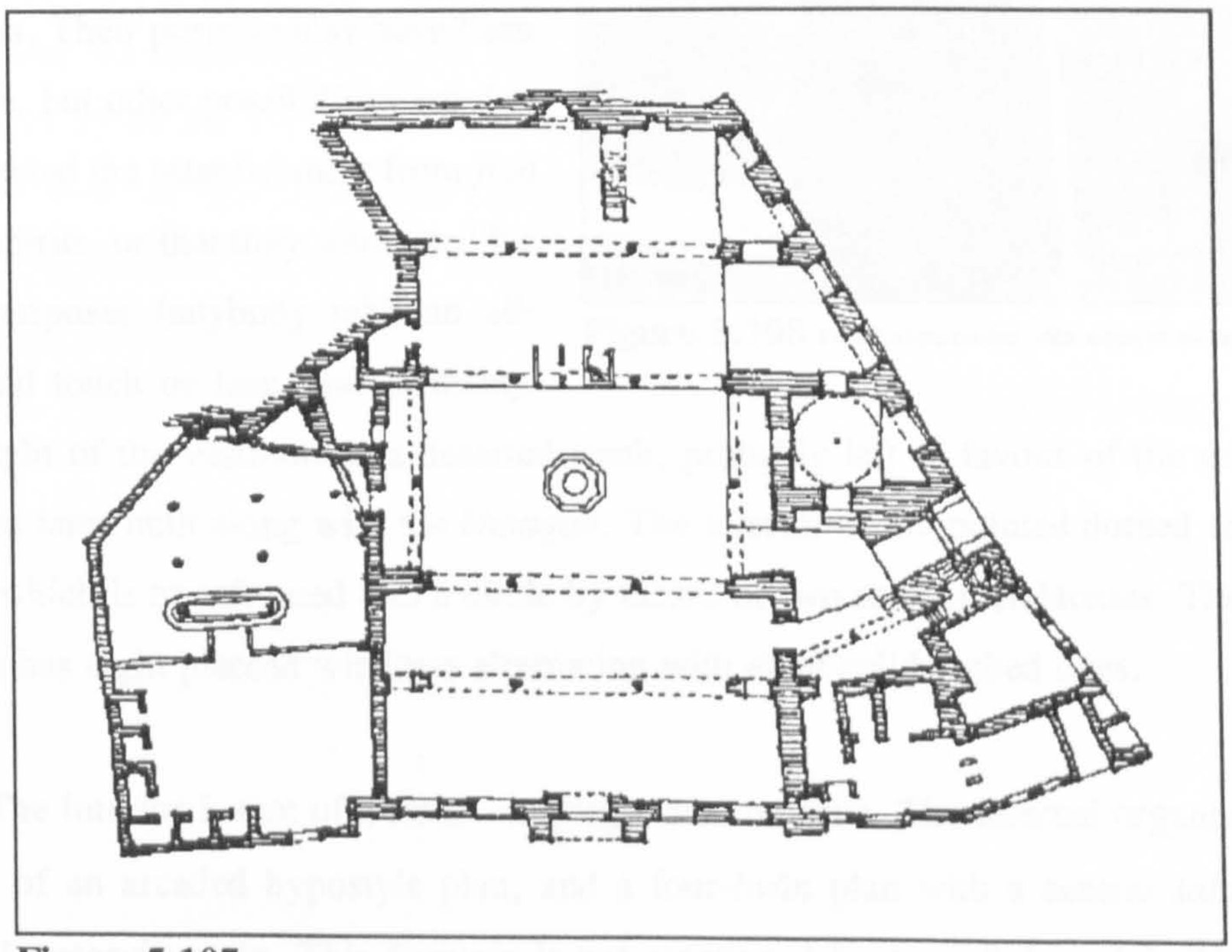


**Figure 5.107** Plan of the *Madrasa* of Sheykhū. (After Islamic Capitals Organization)

---

[1] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.119. Also see epigraphy quoted in op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, p.263.

[2] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṫaṫ*, vol.2, p.313

[3] op cit. Creswell, 1919, p.105.

The mosque/*madrasa* was first built on the north side of the street and accommodated twenty Ṡūfīs[1]. (Fig. 5.107) A manuscript written by Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-Surūr al-Bakrī reveals that *Emīr* Sheykhū was very generous with the builders of this mosque and gave them an extra third of their wages.[2] To endow his mosque/*madrasa*, he purchased property from the merchants and householders living in the area. He appointed *'ulamā'* in the four rites, in *ḥadīth*, and in Qur'ānic reading. The institution was renowned until the end of the Baḥrī line.

A stalactite portal culminating in a pointed semi-dome has a lintel and threshold which are taken and reused from an ancient Egyptian temple. Above the stalactite portal is a minaret that follows the Mamlūk tradition. (Fig. 5.108) The portal of the mosque leads to a trapezoid entrance hall. Embedded in three of the walls are pieces of polished black glass. Their purpose may have been decorative, but other possibilities are that they protected the establishment from *jinn* and evil spirits, or that they were used for healing purposes (anybody with an ailment could touch or lean against them).

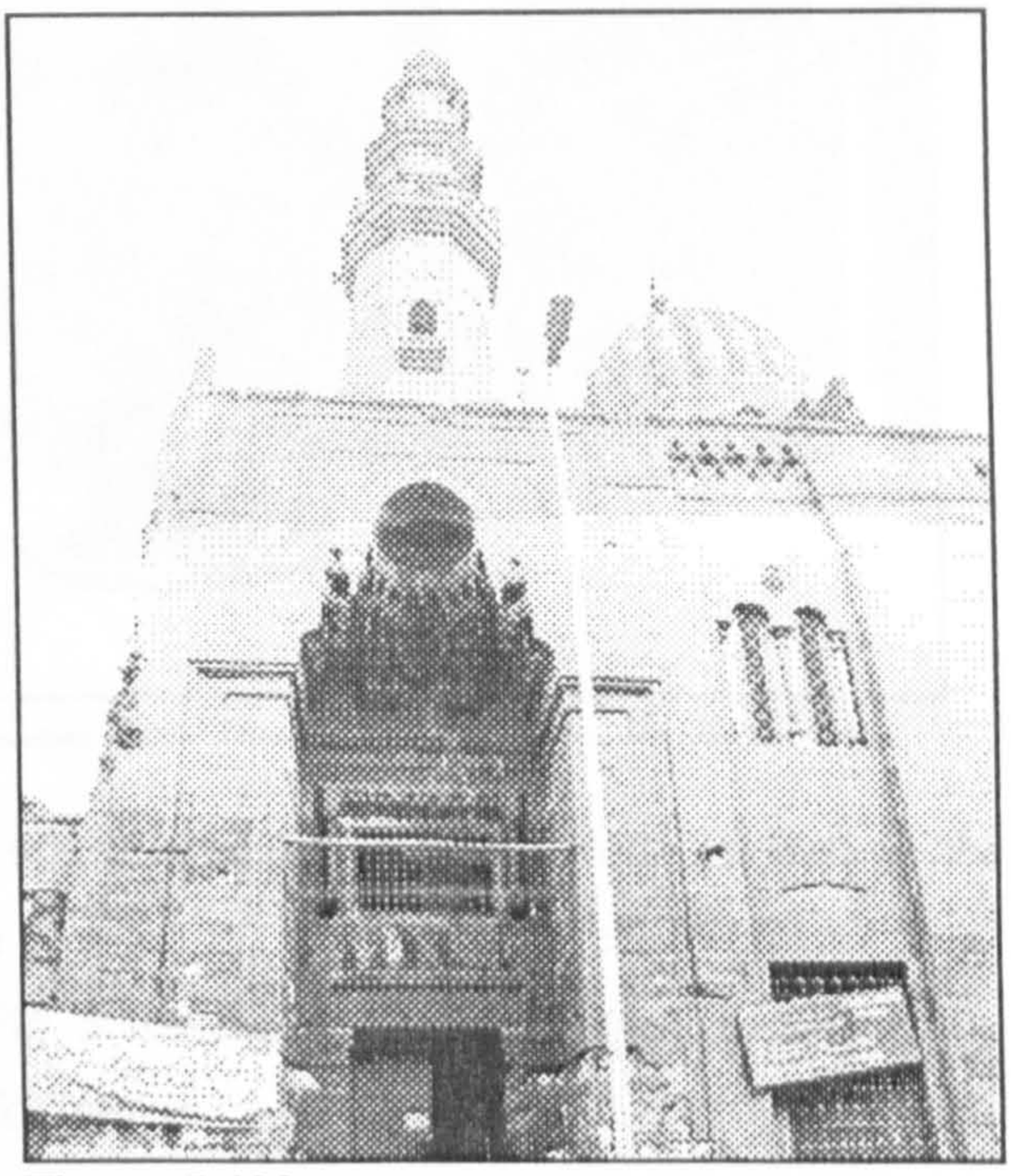


**Figure 5.108** Portal organization with minaret on top.

To the right of the vestibule is a deserted tomb, probably left in favour of the mausoleum which was later built along with the *khanqah*. The interior of the pointed domed chamber is a square which is transformed into a circle by means of two rows of stalactites. The drum of the circle has eight pierced windows alternating with eight solid arched ones.

The interior is that of a small congregational mosque. The internal organization is a "hybrid" of an arcaded hypostyle plan, and a four-*iwān* plan with a central *ṣaḥn* with an octagonal water fountain. This fountain is not mentioned by any of the original sources to

---

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khitat*, vol.2, p.313.

[2] Muḥammad Ibn Abī al-Surūr al-Bakrī, Manuscript 457 (geography), Dār al-Kutub, p.173. Quoted in op cit. Su'ād Māhir, vol.3, p.249.

have been used for ablutions, but Su'ād Māhir[1] while describing it, automatically ascribes this function to it - as is often the case in her discriptions. The flooring of the *ṣaḥn* is of coloured marble set in geometrical patterns resembling to a great extent that of the *Madrasa* of Tatar al-Ḥijāziyyah, and the *Madrasa* of *Emīr* Mithqāl. (Fig. 5.109)

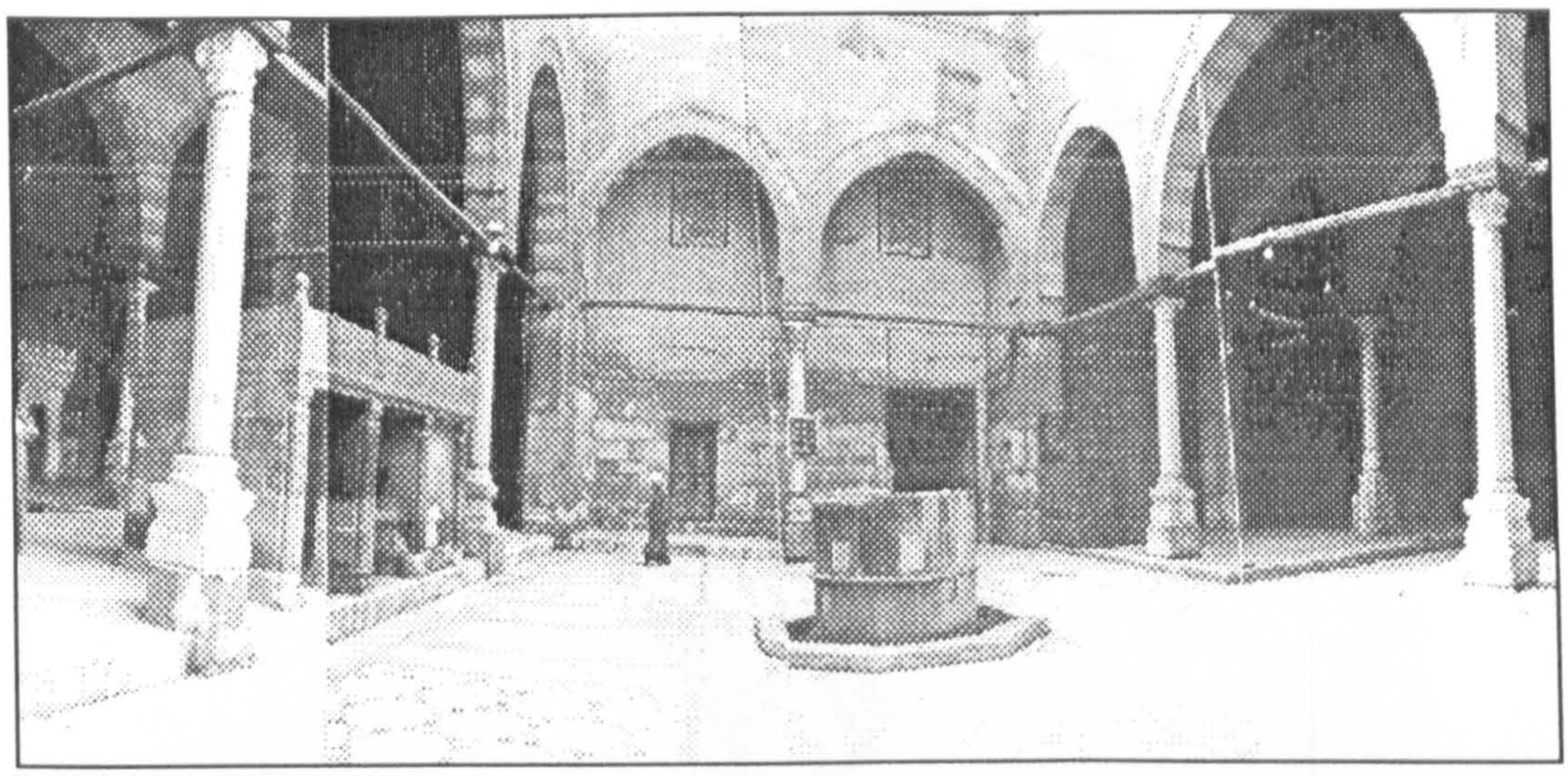


**Figure 5.109** The courtyard with a central octagonal fountain, marble patterned flooring, two *riwāqs*, and two *lateral iwāns*.

From the hypostyle type we find the pillared eastern *qibla riwāq* as well as the western one. From the four-*iwān madrasa* type are the two slightly recessed lateral *iwāns* which consist of two spans of arches - see Fig. 5.109 above. Their small size and awkwardly elongated proportions can neither allow for prayer, nor for students to sit around their teacher. This point has not received any attention from art-historians - apart from the physical description. This suggests that the four-*iwān* arrangement was designed for another function.

Immediately to the left, as one enters the courtyard, is a *mashrabiyya* (wooden lattice work) enclosure which extends from the wall. This is an addition of the eighteenth-century A.D.. The *qibla iwān* is uncommon in that its space is not rectangular, but is bent diagonally away from the street. Doris Behrens-Abouseif says that the architect must have been following the site itself.[2] The *miḥrāb* in the *qibla iwān* is pointed, and clad with coloured marble in radiating patterns. In the centre of the *miḥrāb*'s semi-dome is a medallion carrying the word "Allah" - quite similar to that of the Sulṭān Ḥassan. This pattern of decoration in this particular placement has not instigated historians to probe beyond its physical description.

---

[1] ibid., p.255.

[2] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1989, p.117.

The *qibla iwān* ceiling is flat and roofed by wooden beams. These are painted and decorated with geometrical, floral, and calligraphic patterns executed in bright colours - conflicting with the orthodox teachings of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

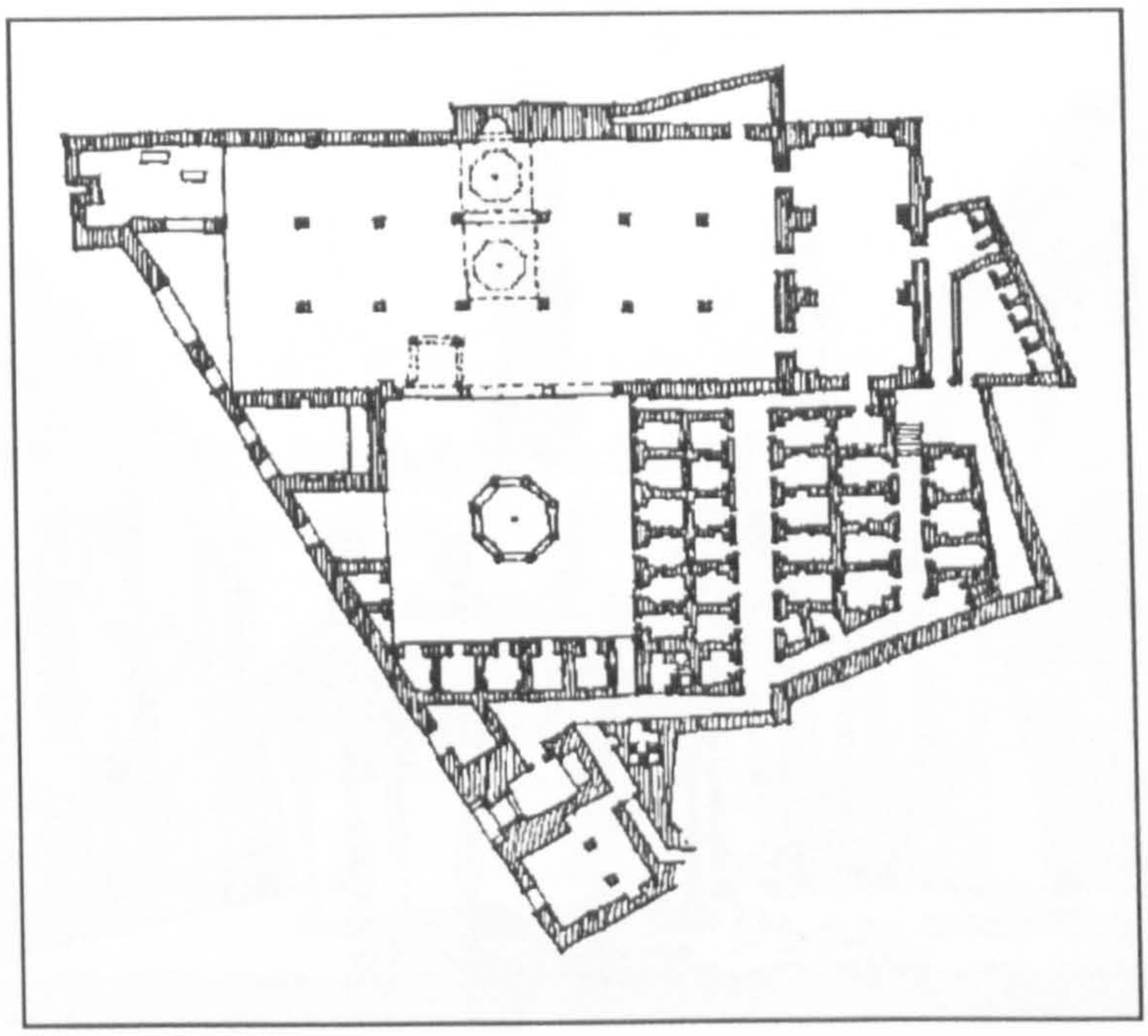


**Figure 5.110** Plan of the *Khanqah* of Sheykhū. (After the Dept. of Antiquities)

Six years later the *khanqah* was built, a much larger building than the mosque. The *khanqah* included Sheykhū's tomb on the south side of Ṡalība street. (Fig. 5.110) According to al-Maqrīzī, this *khanqah* included the teaching of theology as well as the four rites (*madhāhib*) besides the Ṡūfī teachings, this confirms its conformity to *Sunnī* Ṡūfism.[1] Al-Maqrīzī also states in the same passage that the work of clearing the site began in Muḥarram 756 A.H. and that the building was finished the same year. The ancient Egyptian lintel and threshold found in the *khanqah* are repetitious as in the mosque. The portal leads through a winding *majāz* partly covered with a wooden roof and partly open to the sky. The *majāz* leads to the courtyard, a block of three floors of Ṡūfī living units, a *qā'a* (reception hall used for *ḥuḍūr*), and a burial chamber - not domed.

The *khanqah* originally accommodated seven hundred *Ṡūfīs* who lived in the units surrounding the courtyard on the south and west sides. The centre of the courtyard has an octagonal water fountain with eight circular pillars and a missing roof which according to Ibn

---

[1] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, p. 421. He names the four jurists who were in charge of teaching the four rites.

Iyyās[1] was a wooden dome. (Fig. 5.111) According to an inscription in the interior of the courtyard, this *khanqah* was also intended to house pilgrims on their way to Makkah. The *qibla iwān* is a large and spacious hall divided by columns in two arcades. Its *miḥrāb* is pointed and of *ablaq* masonry.

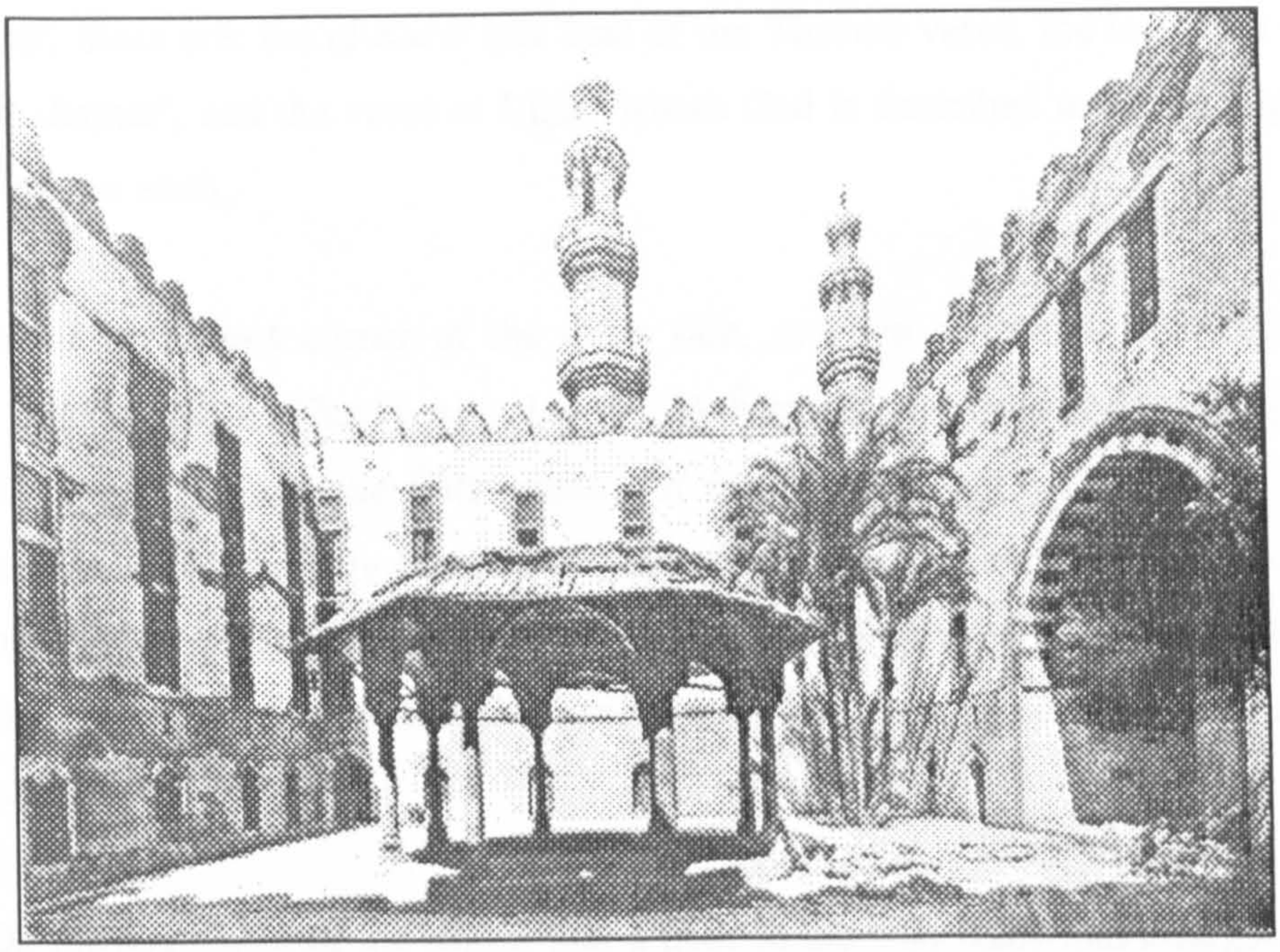


**Figure 5.111** The courtyard comprises two *iwāns*, Śūfī cells, and a central octagonal water fountain - initially domed. (Hautecoeur and Wiet)

There are two wooden domes, one over the middle of the second aisle and another bulbous one over the *miḥrāb*. These two domes pass through an octagonal transition zone. According to Creswell[2], these are unlike other contemporary wooden domes - such as the one over the fountain in the *ṣaḥn* of the Sultān Ḥassan dated 764 A.H. - and accordingly attributes them to the restoration of Bilāl Agha in (1095 A.H., 1683-4 A.D.). The inscription under the beamed ceiling of the *qibla iwān* is Qur'ānic and alludes to the giving of alms to the poor (*fuqarā'*) - in this context it probably indicates the Ṣūfīs who were housed in this foundation.

> ***As to the righteous, they shall drink of a cup mixed with camphor, a fountain where the devotees of Allah do drink, making it flow in unstinted abundance. They perform (their) vows, and they fear a Day whose evil flies far and wide. And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the***

---

[1] See op cit., Ibn Iyyās (15th C.), Badā'i' al-Zuhūr, 1403 A.H., vol.1, p.321.

[2] op cit. Creswell, 1919, p.106.

*orphan, and the captive, (saying), "We feed you for the sake of Allah alone: no reward do we desire from you, nor thanks."*[1]

The external façade of the *khanqah* also bears Qur'ānic verses that have Ṡūfī significance[2], these are: the *al-Kursī* (the Seat of the Throne) verse, the last three verses of the second chapter[3], and the verse of Light[4] where God is described to be the Light of the Heavens and the earth.

In the north east corner of the *qibla* side, are two cenotaphs: one belonging to Sheykhū, and the other to *Shaykh* Akmal al-Dīn Muḥammad, who was appointed by Sheykhū as *Shaykh al-Mashyakhah* (the Ṡūfī master) of the *khanqah* and who died in 780 A.H. Representations of the two holy mosques of Makkah and Madina are painted on its walls. The plaque on the street wall states that restoration of this tomb was carried out by Bilāl Agha in (1095 A.H., 1684 A.D.). It is from this restoration that the painted representations of the holy mosques date.[5]

On the south side of the prayer hall a door in the wall leads into a large room with two arched openings across a roofed central *ṣaḥn* - see plan. There is no *miḥrāb* in the hall; this may have been an assembly space for the Ṡūfīs to gather in for the daily *ḥuḍūr* service at which the communal *dhikr* was performed.[6] Also, foundations were often known to have a space where the founder could converse with the Ṡūfīs and receive blessings from them.

The mosque as well as the *khanqah* each have a minaret over its portal, thus creating a symmetrical composition: two identical portals, each surmounted by a minaret, and facing one another across the street[7]. (Fig. 5.111) The interesting feature of Sheykhū's complex is

---

[1] Qur'ān: 76/5-9.

[2] See op cit. Su'ād Māhir, n.d., vol.3, Pp. 261-262.

[3] Qur'ān: 2/284-286.

[4] Qur'ān: 24/25.

[5] op cit. Parker et al., 1985, p.74.

[6] ibid., Pp. 73-4.

[7] A model may have been provided by Bashtak whose *khanqah* and mosque were on opposite sides of a street, though there is not enough left of Bashtak's complex to establish any further similarity.

that the symmetry of these portals with their minarets framing the street like a gateway (*bawwābah*) has the effect of transforming the street itself (an important processional road leading from the Citadel to the outskirts of the city) into a part of the religious complex.

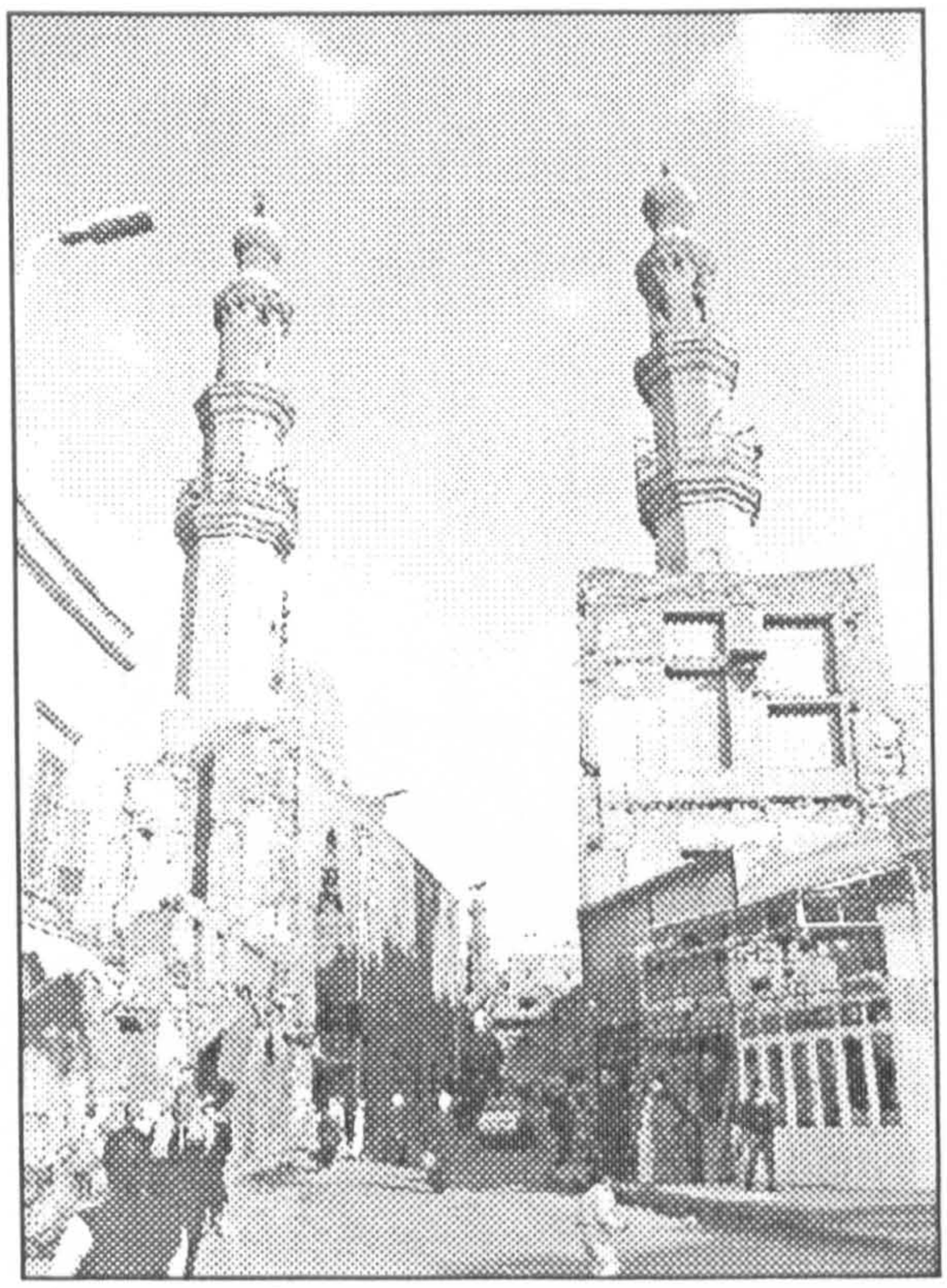


**Figure 5.112** It is obvious that the identical minarets that face one another were an attempt to establish an urban rapport as well as create a point of interest.

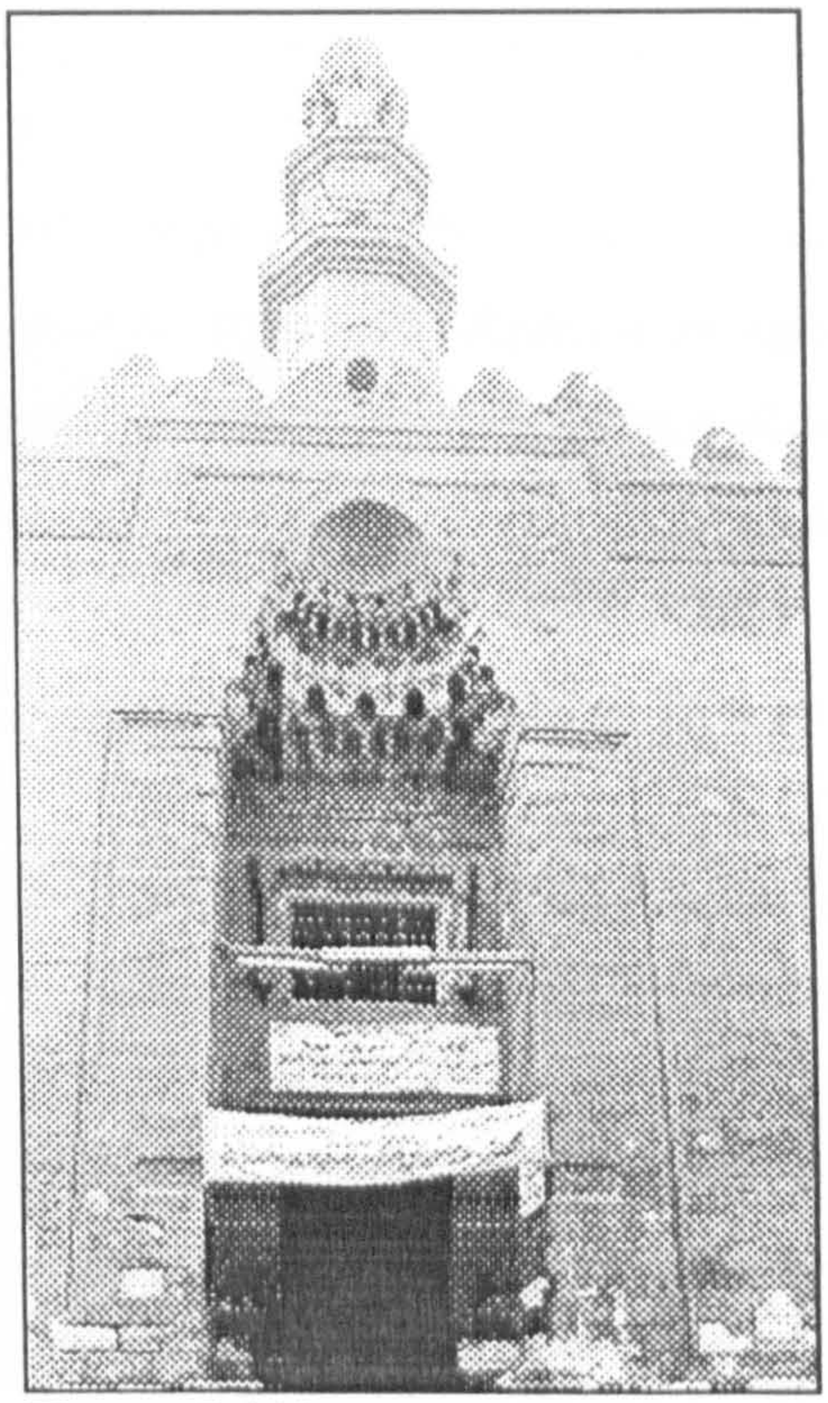


**Figure 5.113** The *khanqah* minaret is identical to that of the *madrasa* in both its proportions, and in its placement above the portal.

The two minarets of Sheykhū change from square to octagon, then to circle, and end in bulbous pointed finials. (Fig. 5.113) They are unusual in the absence of stalactites beneath the minaret galleries that divide its sections - mouldings have been used instead. These two minarets are also not absolutely identical, differing not only in the pattern of their carving, but also in their transitional zones. The transitional zone of the minaret attached to the mosque has a pyramidal shape, while that of the minaret at the *khanqah* consists of triangles pointing downwards. Doris Behrens-Abouseif, comments that the inscription of the *khanqah* minaret is a verse from the Qur'ān rarely used on earlier ones: it refers to the pilgrimage to Makkah. She says that Sheykhū himself is not reported to have fulfilled the pilgrimage commandment, but that the *shaykh* of his *khanqah* most probably did.[1] In Chapter Seven we will see that there is a direct Śūfī relationship between the Ka'ba as a centre and its relation to the vertical axis which links the earth to the Heavens.

---

[1] op cit. Behrens-Abouseif, 1985(a), p.96.

## 5.2 OBSERVATIONS ON RELIGIOUS BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK ARCHITECTURE AND ON LIMITATIONS OF THE HISTORICAL APPROACH

From the examination of Baḥrī Mamlūk mosques, *madrasas*, and *khanqahs*, it is possible to arrive at a list of common characteristics and a series of questions related to their interpretation. Amongst the most striking findings of this chapter is the obvious departure of Mamlūk religious architecture from the *Sunna* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). This is first seen in the incorporation of the mausoleum as a cornerstone in the design, which takes a priority in the laying out of the religious building. We have seen in Chapter Three that the mausoleum actually took on a distinctive religious role and had a utilitarian function in the Mamlūk society linked to the concept of *baraka* (spiritual blessing). This was directly reflected in the design and became *qibla* oriented as well as the prayer hall - although according to Islamic Law it should not be used as a place for worship[1]. Another observation which becomes apparent on measured plans is that in Mamlūk architecture, prayer halls were sometimes displaced and even Makkah orientation occasionally modified so as to achieve a better layout for the mausoleum.[2] This proves how much the mausoleum in the Mamlūk period was given priority over other elements, and how the prayer hall, which should be the basic requirement in a religious building, came after it.

A departure from the *Sunna* can also be seen in the elaborate decoration of the interiors, specifically the gilding and bright paint applied to the ceilings, and the extensive ornamentation of marble used in the *qibla iwāns* and the mausoleum chambers. According to the *Sunna*, monumentality, excessive height, and grandeur, are also signs of a break from Islamic teachings. Likewise, the popular use of *ablaq* masonry in Mamlūk religious architecture (the use of alternating courses of red and white stone, or red and yellow stone) involves colour combinations that were specifically prohibited by the second Caliph 'Omar in mosque architecture. He had said: "*wa lā tuḥammar wa lā tuṣaffar*" (do not colour it red or yellow). Although this *ḥadīth* is usually interpreted as an unspecified indiscriminant disapproval of over-bright colours[3], *ablaq* should have still been disapproved of by the *'ulamā'*.

---

[1] See Chapter Four.

[2] op cit. Kessler, ed. A.H. Green, 1984, p.97.

[3] See Chapter Four.

In more than one occasion while describing the buildings in section 5.1, this unorthodox behaviour has been explained as being instigated by the overpowering influence of the popular beliefs adopted by the society. This suggests why there were rarely any complaints made by the society or the *'ulamā'* against such practices. The occasional uproar manifested by jurists such as Ibn Taymiyya, who strongly resented many Mamlūk customs and innovations (*bid'a*), launched attacks on Ṡūfīs and Ṡūfī practices such as the veneration of saints, and the building of mausoleums. These attacks were not taken seriously by the Mamlūk society. It was only when Ibn Taymiyya, attacked the sulṫāns personally for openly supporting and being involved with Ṡūfism, that he was imprisoned (six times) until he died.[1]

It has been evident amongst the findings of this chapter that Mamlūk mosques and *madrasas* (which by the nature of their function bear no direct relation to Ṡūfism, unlike the *khanqah*) have been seen to involve Ṡūfī influences in one form or the other. This is proof of the natural reflection of the penetration of Ṡūfism throughout the Baḥrī Mamlūk society as a whole. The Ṡūfī influences have been revealed throughout the historical study as follows:

- Baybars al-Bunduqdārī was mentioned in the sources to have had a Ṡūfī spiritual adviser (*al-Shaykh* Khiḍr), and built six *zāwiyas* for him.
- The band of epigraphy in the façade of the Mosque of Ulmās al-Ḥājib refers to Ṡūfī terminology in the *du'ā'* (prayer). Another epigraphy refers to Ulmās as a Ṡūfī (*al-faqīr ila Allāh*).
- Al-Nāṡir Muḥammad is mentioned in the sources to have built several Ṡūfī *zāwiyas* for certain Ṡūfī revered *shaykhs*.
- The *Madrasa* of Zayn al-Dīn Yūsuf has an inscription which refers to the salvation of the Ṡūfīs using this "shrine". Ṡūfī cells were later added to it and it became a *zāwiya* later on.
- The Mosque/*Madrasa* of *Emīr* Āl Malik al-Jūkandār is mentioned in the sources to be a "place for Ṡūfīs". Later it actually changed its function and became a *zāwiya*.
- The sources refer to the Mosque/*Madrasa* of *Emīr* Aḥmed al-Mihmandār as a *khanqah* because of the Ṡūfī practises that were performed in it.

[1] See paper by Donald P. Little, "The Historical and Historiographical Significance of the Detention of Ibn Taymiyya", in History and Historiography of the Mamlūks, Variorum Reprints, London, 1986, Pp. 311-327.

- *Emīr* Aṡlam al-Silaḥdār, who built a Mosque/*Madrasa* was mentioned by al-Maqrīzī to have been a Ṡūfī *shaykh* who participated in teaching. The organization of his *madrasa* indicates that it was a *mashyakhat Ṡūfiyyah*.
- The band of epigraphy in the Mosque/*Madrasa* of the Sulṫān Ḥassan bears Ṡūfī connotations.
- The sources mention that *Emīr* Sheykhū was a Ṡūfī. His mosque was designed to accommodate twenty Ṡūfī students, they were later transferred to the *Khanqah* he built six years later which accommodated 400 Ṡūfīs.

The second striking finding in this chapter, is the similarity in the buildings examined, which shows that there were canons that were respected and commonly shared in the building profession. Christel M. Kessler (Creswell's assistant) in a paper published on the orientation of Mamlūk buildings specifically related to the *Madrasa* of Umm al-Sulṫān Sha'bān[1], confirms that Mamlūk architecture consists of "*unwritten laws*". She does not mention *where*, and *how* such laws arose, but instead produces a list of criteria mainly derived from her examination of the issues related to orientation of buildings - street alignment and *qibla*-orientation, both the astronomical *qibla* and that of the *Ṡaḥāba* (Companions)[2].

The laws she refers to were obviously "unwritten" because they were transferred between Mamlūk contemporaries from master builder (*mu'allim*) to builders and craftsmen (*bannā'īn* and *ḥirafiyyīn*) by word of mouth through a system of apprenticeship - as described in Chapters Two, and Three. These canons were also passed on orally through time, from generation to generation in two ways: through the informal or un-official guild system[3]; and through families of architects and builders. These points will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

In any case, while Kessler produces most helpful observations regarding orientation of Mamlūk buildings and the placement of their minarets and mausolea, she ignores all other

---

[1] See op cit. Kessler, ed. A.H. Green, 1984, Pp. 97-106.

[2] According to the sixteenth-century astronomer Ghars al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī, there were several directions accepted for the *qibla* in medieval Cairo: the most popular being the *qiblat al-Ṡaḥāba* (meaning the *qibla* of the Companions) facing winter sunrise at 27 degrees S of E, and the *qibla* of the astronomers, facing 37 degrees S of E.

[3] Informal in the sense that it was a whole-functioning guild but was not officialized by the Mamlūk state. Master builders were not known to have been appointed by the sulṫān but was elected amongst those of the same profession.

aspects in internal organization as though the architecture of the façade was the only thing that mattered - a rather typical oversight of modernist art-historians. I believe that "oversight" might not be the best term to use in the case of scholars who are extremely meticulous and thorough in their observations, it is more their ideology[1] that causes them to look for certain aspects and unintentionally ignore others such as for instance the "turning inwards" in all Baḥrī Mamlūk buildings. Most illustrations in Islamic architectural historical handbooks focus on exteriors rather than interiors, which suggests a neglect of the vital feature and dimension of traditional religious architecture, which, as we will see in the Baḥrī Mamlūk case, is to be found in the "heart".

But even those art-historians who have not missed the inwardness of Islamic architecture suggest explanations for this interiority which are incompatible with the cases that have been examined. To give an example, Robert Hillenbrand says:

> ***The device of turning the mosque outside in, as it were, had an appealing simplicity; but more than that, it allowed the architect a freedom of manoeuvre that would be denied to him in the world outside the mosque. He [the architect] could plan every detail of the facade, including the vital aspect of its interaction with its immediate surroundings, liberated from the constraints imposed by the secular architecture engulfing the exterior of the mosque on all sides.***[2]

But this suggestion cannot be correct. First, the term "secular" has no existence in classical Arabic, because medieval people did not know the modernistic concept of secularism as opposed to that of sacrality; and second, even buildings which had a potential for visual development and external elaboration were left simple, austere, and empty such as the *Madrasa* of the Sulṭān Ḥassan, the *Madrasa* of Ṣarghatmish, the *Khanqah* of Sheykhū, and the Mosque of Sheykhū to name but four. Furthermore, a building such as that of the *Khanqah* of Baybars al-Jāshankīr was built, and then a successful mausoleum, portal, and minaret added later to its extremely restricted site and small façade. These site restrictions did not prevent the medieval architect in any way from achieving a balanced façade. It is thus

---

[1] I will return to this point below in this section.

[2] See Robert Hillenbrand, "The Mosque in the Medieval Islamic World", ed. Sherban Cantacuzino, Architecture in Continuity: Building in the Islamic World Today, Aperture, New York, 1985, p.50.

obvious that there must have been other reasons for the introvertness of the buildings than simply evading problems of site. We will see in the following chapters that the reasons for their turning inwards were much deeper than that.

Modern architects tend to think of past architecture in terms emphasized by an education which is heavily overburdened with concern for external appearance and issues of style.[1] It is as if the modern architect and art-historian tend to see buildings as though they were models placed on a table so to speak; they walk around them and examine them as "shrunken" exteriors in their minds. It is impossible to follow the same process in terms of the interior spaces *within* these models, because we cannot "shrink" the interior spaces and remain inside them at the same time in order to conceive them. This requires another system of perception and imagination which, *even if* attained for a single space, certainly cannot be achieved for a sequence of spaces[2].

All these problems of perception lie in the fact that when we are taught to analyze or criticize anything, art, architecture, or even literary arts, we are only considered to be "professional" critics when we become subjectively, spiritually, and emotionally distanced from, and *outside* things. We are able to be so, by acquiring opposing qualities, i.e., by seeking what is physical, objective, and rational. These qualities necessarily have to do with "exteriority", which dulls our sensations so that we can no longer understand or relate to "interiority". This argument leads to the hypothesis that with our externalized modernistic perceptions, we are unable to reach *into* the understanding of traditional architecture which is necessarily based on "interiority", and hence, are not capable of releasing psycho-spiritual meaning.

It is most evident and striking from our brief survey of Mamlūk religious architecture in section 5.1, that the interiors are the *real* architecture and not the façades. We can see this by considering the Mamlūks' belief in that what was *inside* the interior was what provided the main "spiritual blessing" - whether through the function of prayer performed *inside* the buildings, or through the blessings that cling to the remains of the *'ulamā'* or Ṣūfī saints who

---

[1] See argument in Chapters One, and Two.

[2] We will see in Chapter Ten that the importance of sequence of experience of internal spaces is a very important dimension in the understanding of traditional buildings.

are buried *in* it[1]. The exterior, as explained in section 5.1, seems to have simply been a series of signs or landmarks to the Mamlūks announcing the presence of the building. These signs took different forms, such as deep-set portals with cave-like features, vertical minarets that soar up in the sky, or the pointed domes of mausolea.

Let us now consider the characteristic features of Mamlūk religious architecture which remain unexplained through the purely historical approach - or at the very best, are partially explained. It is clear that from the point of view of form, Baḥrī Mamlūk mosques were variations and developments of the prototype of the Mosque of the Prophet in Madina and that *madrasas* and *khanqahs* were not. Historically speaking, the latter have their precedents in Seljūk architecture, as mentioned in Chapter Three. Consequently, according to historical interpretations, it seems that the forms of these two educational types of buildings had to be adapted to suit the new functions in the context of the medieval city of Cairo. This historical viewpoint will prove to be valid regarding their forms but not their content: although Mamlūk mosque forms are in no way like those of the *madrasa* and *khanqah*, they share the same traditional symbolism based on traditional Islamic beliefs.

On the level of the elements of the buildings, we find that Islamic historians and art-historians such as Doris Behrens-Abouseif, Chahinda Karīm, Caroline Williams, Su'ād Māhir, and others have described the constituents of the buildings and the elements that constitute their different parts, by laboriously giving dimensions, and seeking origins in older precedents, while placing them as precisely as possible within a time-frame. They have also looked for utilitarian functions wherever they have encountered anything that has no historical interpretation; when they have failed to find any, they have suggested aesthetic reasons or structural needs. Although this may be helpful in many respects, such interpretations do not help explain the continuity of traditional elements and forms throughout the centuries.

The following questions form a brief summary of what has been identified as unexplained during the course of the historical survey of Baḥrī Mamlūk religious architecture:

- Why are mosque *riwāqs* (prayer arcades) and *madrasa* and *khanqah* four-*iwāns* organized in such a manner that they face the centre of the courtyard rather than point towards the *qibla*?

---

[1] See Chapter Three.

- Why are portals built in the form of pointed recessed niche-like shapes resembling caves?
- Why are the buildings constructed with such an exaggerated thickness of the walls - which is structurally unnecessary?
- Why are the bent corridors (*majāz*) connected to the sky by means of light wells, particularly in junctions or in the case of change of orientatition.
- Why are *miḥrābs* always recessed and why do they end in pointed semi-domes?
- Why do minarets and domes follow the same pattern in their transition of form, from square to octagon to circle[1] and end at a point at the apex?
- Why is it that some mausoleum windows are obliquely set (with respect to the façade) so that they are directed to the centre of the burial chamber.
- Why is the *al-Kursī* verse (Seat of the Throne) commonly incorporated as the Qur'ānic epigraphy in domed chambers instead of other verses?
- Why were some Mamlūk domes externally covered with green faience; and why were domes in general termed as *qubbat al-khaḍrā'* (green domes) even when they were not "green".
- Why is it that when a dome is transformed from square to circle by means of stalactites that do not pass through the form of the octagon, a cantilevered octagonal wooden frame is added?
- Why is it that in domes that are transformed by squinches delineating the form of the octagon, these wooden frames are omitted?
- Why is it that *madrasas* and *khanqahs* which are historically proven to have taught one or two rites have layouts which incorporate four *iwāns*?
- Why are fountains placed in the centres of courtyards when they are not used for ablutions?
- Why is it that these fountains usually follow a certain progression of form from octagon to circle to pointed summit?
- Why are the crestings, whether trefoil or geometrical, designed to show solid parts that are inverted replicas of the spaces between them?
- Why do most of the elements[2] incorporated in the design of religious

---

[1] Even in their reduced sections as we have seen in section 5.1.

[2] Portal, minaret, domes, *iwāns*, *miḥrābs*, ... etc.

buildings point to the vertical[1] rather than to the horizontal, which is the direction of the *qibla*?

- Why is it that there is a consistent relationship between the minaret and the portal, and another between the centre of the courtyard, the fountain, the *miḥrāb*, and the dome above the *miḥrāb*?

- Why is epigraphy placed so high up on the elements of a building - whether on a minaret, the exterior of a dome, or its interior, where it is virtually impossible to read it?

- Why were minarets built even if they were not quite necessary, for instance in a place already crowded with other minarets?

We have already seen in the course of our examination of the buildings that the historical approach cannot answer these questions convincingly. Jonathan Bloom[2] has explained that Creswell's approach based on a theory of evolution of form falls short of explaining historical buildings. Bloom says that this controversy is what has prompted scholars, such as R. Stephen Humphreys, to introduce other approaches to explain medieval Islamic architecture. Humphreys' approach is based on the visual perception of the traditional buildings, that is to say, he interprets what he sees in the features of the building and overlays them with historical facts to arrive at a "symbolic" interpretation, one that he refers to as the search for the "expressive intent" of the patron.[3]

Jonathan Bloom, while agreeing to disavow Creswell's purely formalistic evolutionary theory, also disagrees with Humphreys' visual approach. He bases his argument on the fact that Humphreys built his cases on his own modernistic perceptions; i.e., how Humphreys saw the building through modern eyes. He gives an example, Humphreys' argument about the Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī[4], in which he claims that it was intended to resemble fortress architecture (because Baybars was the real founder of the Mamlūk regime and considered himself to be the guardian of the *Sunnī* faith). Bloom points out that this supposition is based on Humphreys' own views and perceptions of what a fortress looks like,

---

[1] Even the horizontal walls of the façades are divided into vertical strips grouping windows together.

[2] See full argument in op cit. Jonathan Bloom, 1982, Pp. 50-51.

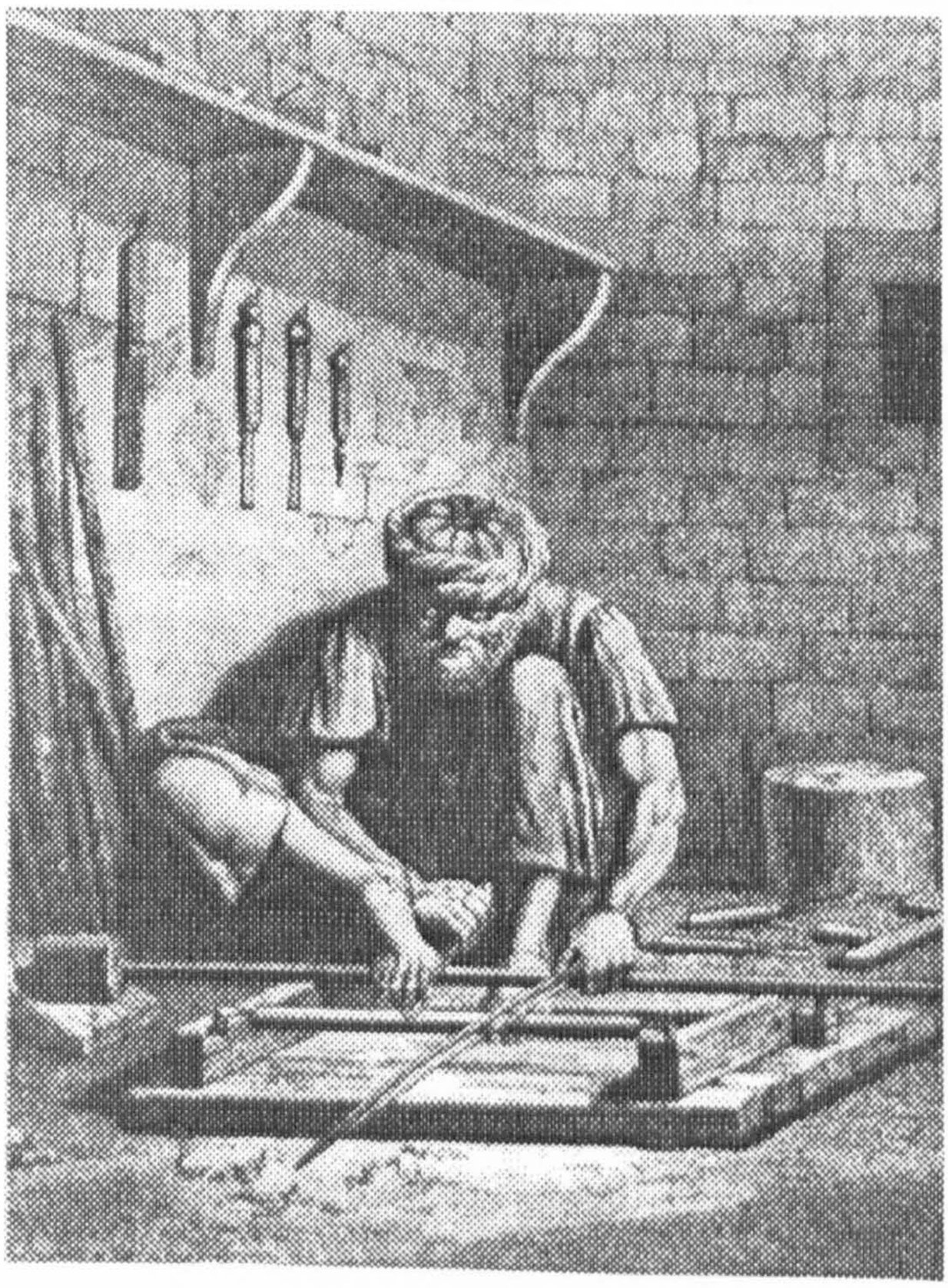
[3] See full argument in op cit. Stephen Humphreys, 1972, Pp. 69-119.

[4] See the analysis of this mosque in section 5.1.1.

and adds that if we examine the medieval fortresses known to the Mamlūks, we will find that they had nothing in common with the features of Baybars' mosque. Hence, he says, the visual impact of its form would not have been a fortress in medieval eyes. This indicates that even amongst historians, there is a controversy about the adequacy of different approaches as understood by contemporary scholars.

The limitations that have been pointed out in this section do not exhaust the list of unanswered questions to be encountered by adopting a purely historical approach. There are also other questions that are raised by the user or visitor while actually moving through the buildings; these mainly relate to the perception a person has while walking through them - i.e., as a series of spaces in time. This temporal aspect is yet another dimension that is overlooked by historians, mainly for the reasons of perception mentioned above.

Int. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11



# CHAPTER SIX

# THE EXAMINATION OF THE TRADITIONAL MAMLŪK PROCESSES OF THE PRODUCTION OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE

We have seen in Chapter Five how most historians and art-historians tend to seek the origin of Islamic art and architecture in the socio-political conditions created by Islam. This purely historical approach was found to produce either inadequate or incomplete explanations of Baḥrī Mamlūk architecture. These findings confirm the argument quoted in Chapter One by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Gulzar Haider, who find dependence on the historical approach alone to be thoroughly non-Islamic - even though it is followed by certain Muslims - because it sees the origin of the inward in the outward and reduces sacred art with its interiorizing power simply to external, social, and economic conditions[1]. The purely historical approach can be easily rejected from the point of view of Islamic metaphysics and theology which see the origin of all things in God, for He is the Knower of all things, and therefore the essences of forms have their reality in the Divine[2]. Islamic thought does not allow the reduction of the higher to the lower, or the sacred to the profane. But even from the non-Islamic point of view, the very nature of Islamic art, the sciences and spiritual realization necessary for its creation, would make it evident to any impartial observer that whatever relation exists between Islamic art and architecture and the Islamic revelation cannot be just on the level of socio-political changes brought about by Islam. This does not mean that these matters are unimportant, for without matters of patronage, encouragement, and expansion, certain crafts would not have been followed or led to works with the quality that is left to us today. Yet, one cannot say that this patronage *created* this particular form of art; the answer must be sought in the religion of Islam itself.

---

[1] See Chapter One. For the full arguments, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic Art and Spirituality, Golgonooza Press, London, 1987, Chapter One. Also see Gulzar Haider, "Islam, Cosmology, and Architecture", paper in Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies, The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Cambridge, 1988, Pp.77-8.

[2] See Chapter Two.

We have argued in Chapters Two and Three that Ṡūfism permeated the life of the Mamlūk society in all its levels, that the essence of the Islamic belief consisted of the Divine Law (*Sharī'a*), a spiritual path (*ṭarīqa*), and the Truth or Reality (*Ḥaqīqah*), and that this latter was considered by the medieval Mamlūk society to be the origin of the Law and the Way. We also saw in Chapter Four that the *Sharī'a*, which defines the relation between God and man and the Muslim community (*umma*) on the level of action, and the *Sunna* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as related to religious architecture, says very little about what a mosque should look like. We also saw that the Mosque of the Prophet at Madina after the first few centuries ceased to be the prototype emulated in religious architecture, and that new elements and forms came to be attached to the mosque indicating that medieval art and architecture could not have had its sources in solely the *Sharī'a* or the *Sunna*. The role of the *Sharī'a* can be described as that of the creator of the Islamic atmosphere for medieval art and architecture and is what set limitations on some forms of art while encouraging others. This Islamic atmosphere, besides providing the general social background, moulded the soul of the architect and craftsman by inspiring him with certain attitudes and virtues derived from the Qur'ān and the *Sunna* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), but it could not provide the means for the creation of a sacred art.

All these factors have been identified as a result of using the traditionalist approach which we have chosen to adopt, and together they support its use as the only means by which we can arrive at an understanding of Mamlūk architecture. It is therefore to the esoteric dimension of Islam, to the *bāṭin* as contained in the Ṡūfī Way and clarified by the Truth (*Ḥaqīqa*), that one must turn to find the true origin of Islamic sacred art and architecture. We have seen that Ṡūfism is dominated by the spiritual dimension of Islam. The term "spirituality" in Arabic (*rawḥāniyya*) comes from the word *rūḥ* (spirit) which is also used to mean "essence" (*ma'nā*), and in both cases denotes interiority. It is within the inner dimension of the Islamic tradition that one must seek the sources of Islamic art and architecture and the power which has sustained it over the ages.

This chapter will deal with several points related to the link between Ṡūfism in the Mamlūk period and the processes of art and architecture. The first point that we will deal with is the relationship between the craft corporations and the Ṡūfi *ṭarīqas*. This will be followed by a reconstruction of the design and building processes of religious Mamlūk architecture. Finally, issues related to the traditional understanding of art and craftsmanship will be discussed.

## 6.1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ŚŪFISM AND THE MAMLŪK "GUILDS"

We discussed in Chapter Three how the first few decades of the Mamlūk regime were marked by intense construction activity under the patronage of Mamlūk sulṭāns and *emīrs* who used Cairo, Aleppo and Damascus as a labour pool for works in the Mamlūk empire. It was also mentioned that Mamlūk *emīrs* had obligations towards their social fief (*iqṭā'*); they had to provide for the needs of the poor and patronize Islamic culture. Besides building palaces, houses, and public baths, they primarily built mosques, *madrasas*, and *khanqahs* and attached to them a mausoleum for themselves (as seen in Chapter Five). Actually, it became a tradition that each *emīr* founded at least one religious building. Laila 'Alī Ibrāhīm tells us that, "*the choice of the religious institution was usually dictated by a shaykh in whose spiritual powers the emir believed.*"[1] She explains that the role of the *emīr* was to provide a prime site either on the *qaṣaba* (main street or artery) of Cairo or at its city gates.

But although due credit should go to the patrons of these buildings, one must not forget that many of the characteristics and much of the quality of the buildings came from the construction workers who, regardless of who was financing the buildings, or to what purpose it was built, used skills that had come down to them from their forefathers and which they had mastered through years of training. Master-craftsmen (*mu'allimīn*) transmitted their skills to the young apprentices they were training, until over the years, the apprentice could master the craft and transmit it to another generation of apprentices. Since the same craft tended to stay in a family for generations, the process would often take place between father and son. We have seen that the role of Śūfism was a potent influencing factor that affected Mamlūk society as a whole, and that, therefore, it would naturally be reflected on the architects, the craftsmen, and builders as well, since they formed a large segment of that social structure. They in turn influenced their products. This has been pointed out emphatically by Ḥassan Fatḥī, the Egyptian contemporary traditionalist architect; he states that:

> ***Mosque architecture has its proper canons and symbols which were preserved by the Sufi sages [shaykhs] who worked closely with the craftsmen-builders, the ones with their revealed knowledge and the others with the skill of their hands. The resultant of this co-operation was handed over from generation to generation by the guild system, developing and***

---

[1] Laila 'Alī Ibrāhīm, Mamlūk Monuments in Cairo, Instituto Italiano di Cultura R.A.E., Cairo, 1976, p.11.

*evolving within tradition while discriminating between the implicit or the constant that has to be respected, or the spontaneous in which the craftsman was free to put in something of his own. In this guild system, the sage initiated the master craftsman in the secret laws and symbols of the sacred art and geometry, and the master craftsman, in his turn, initiated the apprentice into the secrets of the craft and the handling of the materials. The master craftsman was the only person entitled to warrant that the apprentice had reached the degree of master vis-a-vis the community. This was announced to the community by a ritual procession in which the graduate was taken round the town on a donkey, dressed in a cashmere shawl, announcing that he had attained the degree of master.*[1]

The survey of traditional Mamlūk mosques, *madrasas* and *khanqahs* summarised in Chapter Five showed the recurrence of certain design ideas, architectural elements and decorative motifs that bear great resemblance to one another.[2] According to the mathematical laws of probability, this recurrence must mean that there were canons and rules that were consciously transmitted and applied. According to Ḥassan Fatḥī, it is through the Ṣūfī *ṭarīqa*, that the permanence and similarity of forms - the symbols - was ensured in the one region and in all Muslim lands. He explains that this similarity stemming from the oneness of the faith and culture naturally gave rise to the choice of similar symbolic forms denoting the same meaning - just as the Word of God in the Qur'ān has the same meaning for all Muslims.

After an initiatory ceremony of an esoteric nature (which will be discussed in more detail below) the traditional craftsman began to learn the external method as well as the internal spirit of his craft. Through Ṣūfism, symbols were moulded to the arts and crafts so that the craftsman was able to achieve "spiritual perfection" by integrating the inner and outer aspects of his being through his work. He participated in the creative process and by doing so participated in the Divine Art.[3] We will see in Chapter Seven that human "creation" as compared with Divine "Creation" is a matter of degree and not of quality: human creation is all the same a "divine" act.

---

[1] Ḥassan Fatḥī, Mosque Architecture, King 'Abdul-'Azīz University, Jeddah, n.d., p.14.

[2] This would seem to be somewhat applicable also to all traditional religious buildings in all Muslim countries from Iran to Morocco.

[3] Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, The Sense of Unity, University of Chicago Press, London, 1973, p.10.

The medieval processes of designing a building and of architectural "creation" were, of course, totally different from their equivalents in the twentieth-century. Today the procedure and method of design and the processes of building have changed from Śūfī master/craftsman to the architect/contractor system in which the design and the execution of the work are split, and the canons of sacred art are lost. The revealed knowledge of the Śūfī *shaykh* is now replaced by the modern analytical sciences, while the skill of the craftsman's hand has been replaced by the machine. As we saw in Chapter One, the result is that we see today so many mosques in almost all Muslim countries in which the arbitrary outweighs the implicit and holiness is entirely lacking.

We saw in Chapter Two that the mosque, *madrasa*, and *khanqah* came to administer Śūfī knowledge as well as *Sharī'a*-based knowledge during the Mamlūk period. We also saw that the architect or master builder was educated in either the *madrasa* or the *khanqah* which would make him knowledgable about Śūfism. He would thus obtain an *ijāza* (certificate of graduation) indicating that he was a knowledgeable Śūfī *shaykh* or a *'ālim* (scholar) with Śūfī knowledge, depending on which educational institution he belonged to and under whom he had been educated (apprenticed). We also mentioned in the same chapter cases quoted by al-Suyūṭī (14th C.) of masters in crafts (*mu'allimīn*) who were Śūfīs, mathematicians, herbalists, and astronomers all at the same time. Another case such as that of Zayn al-Dīn al-Anśārī, mentioned by al-Sakhāwī (15th C.), who had studied "*fiqh, Arabic, cosmology ('ilm al-hay'ah), geometry, arithmetic, algebra, medicine, and other sciences.*"[1] Al-Sakhāwī also mentions a Śūfī *shaykh* Aḥmed al-Suyūṭī who worked as a judge (*qāḍī*), as a teacher in several *madrasas*, and learned the craft of glass-making until he had reached a mastery of the profession "*and became a master himself.*"[2] Ibn Taghrī Birdī (late 14th C.) gives yet another example of Burhān al-Dīn Ibn Zaqā'ah al-Ghazzī "*who started his life as a tailor, then became an imām (leader of prayer) who could give opinions on the different sciences ('ulūm), especially Śūfī interpretation (ta'wīl), ..., and mathematics.*"[3] It is thus obvious that traditional sciences, Śūfism, and the crafts were interrelated. We will discuss below the organized craft corporations (guilds) in the Mamlūk period and their connections with the Śūfī

---

[1] al-Sakhāwī (15th C.), *al-Dhayl 'al Raf' al-Aśr Aw Baghyat al-'Ulamā' wal-Rowāh*, al-Dār al-Miśriyyah lil-Ta'līf wal-Tarjamah wal-Nashr, Cairo, n.d., Pp. 143.

[2] ibid., p.65.

[3] Ibn Taghrī Birdī (late 14th C.), *al-Manhal al-Śāfī wal-Mustawfī ba'd al-Wāfī*, Dār al-Kutub al-Miśriyyah, Cairo, reprint 1956, vol.1, p.152.

brotherhoods. This accounts for the creation of a pervading traditional atmosphere that was based on *rawḥāniyyah* (spirituality) deriving its essence from Islam.

On the other hand, while Ṣūfī knowledge was taught to the master (*mu'allim*) and the architect (*muhandis*) in the *madrasa* or *khanqah*, the craftsmen and builders would not have had the same access to it. They would have been exposed to Ṣūfism as practised and circulated amongst the society as a whole. But more importantly, it is because Ṣūfism deeply penetrated the craft guilds that Ṣūfī theory and practice were guaranteed to be carried out both implicitly and explicitly in Mamlūk traditional art, architecture, and the crafts in general.

The guild system in Egypt was known since the earliest of Pharaonic times; the various trades and crafts in urban centres throughout the Egyptian empire had been organized into corporations or guilds. In these guilds, membership was compulsory and through them commercial activities were closely regulated by the state. According to A.E.R. Boak, the Muslim conversion of Egypt in the seventh-century A.D. left these inherited occupational corporations relatively intact, and they persisted through the end of the tenth-century A.D. He says that they were chiefly a means for maintaining public regulation over merchants, tradesmen, and artisans.[1] Although it is not important for our purposes to account for existence of precedents of occupational corporations in Islamic cities, it simply shows that this tradition was long present in the region.

Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Āshūr, the contemporary specialist on Mamlūk history, confirms that medieval Muslim craftsmen were organized in corporations.[2] This is applicable on Mamlūk Cairo just by examining the names of its quarters. As mentioned in Chapter Three, whole streets and quarters were reserved for particular crafts (such as the coppersmiths, paper-makers, quilters, tent-makers, ...etc.). 'Āshūr adds that these organizations facilitated the supply of basic materials and precluded dishonest competition through the role of the *muḥtasib* (supervisor of the market) and the *'arīf* or *amīn* (trustee of each craft).

Unfortunately we still lack detailed knowledge of the institutional character of such organizations and of the changes which these institutions appear to have undergone during

---

[1] A.E.R. Boak, Guilds, Late Roman and Byzantine, Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1932, Pp. 206-8.

[2] See Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Āshūr, *Miṣr fī 'Aṣr Dawlat al-Mamālīk al-Baḥariyyah*, Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo, 1959, p.207.

their many centuries of evolution. Indeed, contemporary scholars specializing in the investigation of Islamic guilds (or occupational corporations as they commonly call them) now vigorously deny that, prior to the Ottoman period, anything analogous to the highly structured official guilds that developed in medieval Europe ever existed in Middle-Eastern cities. It is a fact that until the seventeenth-century A.D. there is no formal mention of the term "*niqābat muhandisīn*" (architect's guild) in court records.

Other historians such as Louis Massignon, Bernard Lewis, and Ira M. Lapidus, have rarely been so involved in deep controversy as on the question of guilds. The present consensus is undecided. Earlier scholars, on the one hand, offered a rather firm positive position on the existence of guilds connected to Śūfī brotherhoods. Foremost among them was Louis Massignon[1]; it was he who suggested that the Isma'ili Fatimids (969-1171 A.D.) introduced "*a new fervour of religious and even secret society.*" He described it as an internal cohesion into the professional, craft, and commercial corporations which had been utilized chiefly as agencies for state regulation, and drew a connection between the Isma'ilī Śūfī affiliations and the guilds of Fatimid Egypt. These were adopted in their essentials in the Ayyubid and the later Mamlūk periods but under *Sunnī* Islam. Detailed statements confirming this view of Fatimid corporate organization appeared in an article in 1937 by Bernard Lewis.[2]

For many years this position was widely accepted by scholars. Lately Lewis disavowed his 1937 article suggesting that it required critical revisions; these revisions regarded the use of the term "guild" synonymously to the official ones of the Ottoman period, but not concerning the relationship between Śūfī brotherhoods and the crafts. Weiss & Green resolve this debatable issue by summing up their point of view as follows:

> ***One scholar [they do not mention who, most likely their reference is to Bernard Lewis] who has made a careful study of this question has concluded that, if the term 'guild' be taken to mean an association restricted to a particular trade or craft and designed to serve not merely the***

---

[1] Louis Massignon, whose position can be found in "Les Corps de Metiérs et la Cité Islamique", Revue Internationale de Sociologie, vol. 28, 1920, Pp. 473-89. Also see Luois Massignon, Islamic Guilds, Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, vol.7, 1932, Pp. 214-6.

[2] For more information on the Fatimid guilds see Bernard Lewis, "The Islamic Guilds", The Economic History Review, vol. VIII, Nov. 1937, Pp. 20-37.

*social but also the economic interests of its members, then there were no guilds in the medieval Muslim city. It did happen that occasionally members of a particular trade or craft lived together in a particular quarter or formed a Sufi brotherhood, in which case they maintained an active social life among themselves; but in these cases economic interests seem to have been secondary. Probably all the trades and crafts had some degree of organized social life. This would seem to follow from their being grouped together physically in different sections of the bazaar. Also, there must have been some organized system of apprenticeship whereby skills could be transmitted from generation to generation through an oral tradition.*[1]

For our purposes, whether the term "guild" signifies an informal or a formal relationship between the members of a craft and the state makes no difference. What is important to us is that this relationship existed and that "guilds" were connected to Ṣūfī brotherhoods. The vital step towards understanding how a traditional group of craftsmen functioned as an entity is the point that needs to be studied: to what extent it was cohesive, how it controlled its internal and external matters, what was the role of the Ṣūfī brotherhoods, and what was that of the Ṣūfī *shaykh* or *mu'allim* of such informal "guilds"?

André Raymond, comparing the Ottoman and Mamlūk position of chief architect says that in the Mamlūk period "*ra'īs al-muhandisīn*" or "*kabīr al-muhandisīn*" (chief architect) would have been the head of the "guild". A person in such a position had the authority to enlist into service the stone-cutters, bricklayers and other construction workers for the benefit of the sultān's and *emīrs*' buildings. Thus, Raymond concludes that the post of *ra'īs al-muhandisīn* was held by architects in the Mamlūk period and not by government officials.[2] This *ra'īs al-muhandisīn* who was also *shaykh al-Ṣūfiyyah* (Ṣūfī *shaykh*) was responsible for all matters regarding the members who worked under him. This *shaykh* also saw to it that the internal affairs and regulations of those members of the "guild" were followed. For instance, a certain level of quality was required from workers; a *mu'allim* was not to employ an

---

[1] Bernard G. Weiss and Arnold H. Green, A Survey of Arab History, the AUC press, Cairo, 1985, revised edition, p.159.

[2] André Raymond compares the Ottoman *mi'mār bāsha* to the Mamlūk *nāḍhir al-'amā'ir*. See André Raymond, Artisans et commercants au Caire au XVIII' Siecle, Damascus, 1973, vol.II, p. 610.

assistant or (*ṣanay'i*)[1] who was not well-versed in the skills of his craft; it was the *mu'allim* who handled problems of defective work.

'Āshūr says that the *shaykh al-mu'allimīn* was elected by the members of the "guild". The workers chose him on the basis of moral qualities, his knowledge of his craft and his fair dealings with the other workers of this "guild". The *shaykh* who was invested took it upon himself to respect the regulations of the "guild" and to see that other members respected them as well, both in their dealings with one another and the state.[2] It would follow that since this *shaykh* belonged to a Ṣūfī brotherhood and had been taught by a Ṣūfī master, the members of the "guild" would became automatically the followers of not only a superior leader in their craft but of a religious figure as well, capable of giving *baraka* (blessings) through his teachings. As a result, the closeness of the ties that bonded the members of a Mamlūk "guild" to their *shaykh* was coupled in such cases by deriving from him the sacred arts and the wisdom[3] of the revealed knowledge that was transmitted to him. Ahmad Hassan and Donald R. Hill discussing medieval traditional guilds elaborate on this point saying,

> ***Membership of a guild gave the artisan a feeling of pride in his craft. But in addition to his professional objectives, the artisan had social and religious ideals; attainment of perfection in his craft became a spiritual ideal also. It could not take place except by hard work under skilful guidance of a master of that craft, so the first step was always to seek a master and be initiated into a guild. The guild had a chain (silsila) leading from the master to the patron saint of the craft, thence to the Prophets. Each guild had a shaykh, and all guilds were bound together by the office of shaykh al-mashayekh [head of shaykhs].***[4]

There were three professional grades in each craft: first the apprentice (*mubtadi'*), then the craftsman (*ṣāni'*), who had to pass a mastery examination before becoming a master

---

[1] In Arabic the words for crafts, professions and industries are derived from the root *ṣun'*, which has the basic connotation of "make" or "manufacture". Thus the word for craftsman is *ṣāni'*, while *ṣan'ah* means "manufacture" in one of its senses; and *ṣinā'ah* is often used for any profession or trade.

[2] op cit. 'Āshūr, 1959, Pp. 205-207.

[3] The Qur'ān mentions that this wisdom (*ḥikmah*) is bestowed on whoever He chooses.

[4] Ahmad al-Hassan and Donald R. Hill, Islamic Technology: An Illustrated History, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p.269.

(*mu'allim*)[1] - we mentioned in Chapter Two that mastery certificates (*ijāza*) were sometimes given to craftsmen as was the case in the *madrasa* and the *khanqah*. These "guild" traditions along with initiation rituals became established in the Mamlūk period; they developed from a combination of the rituals of the Ṡūfīs and the craft corporations of earlier periods, starting from Ayyubid times (fifth-century A.H., eleventh-century A.D.).[2]

Edward William Lane witnessed one of the rituals that took place in a family when a son was admitted as a member of a body of tradesmen or craftsmen during the 1800's (in what was still traditional Cairo). He describes it saying that on this occasion the father of the boy went to see the Ṡūfī *shaykh* of the trade or craft and signified his wish that his son would be admitted as a member. The *shaykh* then sent the *naqīb* (from the word *niqāba* or guild) to invite the masters of the craft (*mu'allimīn*) to be present in the admission. Upon their arrival, each person was requested to recite the opening chapter of the Qur'ān (*Fātiḥa*) for the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). Lane goes on to say that after this, they were told to meet at the father's house for coffee. Thus, the invited guests met, took coffee and dined. The *naqīb* then led the apprentice-to-be before the *shaykh*, stated his qualifications and then asked the guests to recite the *Fātiḥa* for the Prophet once again. When this was done, the *shaykh* wrapped the waist of the young man with a shawl over his outer coat and tied a knot with the ends of this shawl. The *Fātiḥa* was then recited again, this time for al-Sayyid al-Badawī, one of the most famous Ṡūfī *shaykhs* in the Mamlūk period (mentioned in Chapter Two; his *ṭarīqa* still thrives in the Delta in Egypt). Lane says that the third *Fātiḥa* might be recited for some other Ṡūfī *walī*, then a second knot was tied. This was followed by a third recitation of the *Fātiḥa* and a bow was tied over the second knot. The young man then became completely initiated, and hence admitted to the trade or craft. The new apprentice kissed the hand of the Ṡūfī *shaykh*, and that of his fellow tradesman. This ritual was called *shadd al-walad* (the binding of the youth); and the person admitted was called *mashdūd* (he who is bound).[3] It is interesting to note that the term "*mashdūd*" and "*majdhūb*"[4] (he who

---

[1] It is important to note that the words *mu'allim* and *ustādh* were both used to denote the master of a trade as well as to describe professors and teachers.

[2] ibid., Pp.268-69.

[3] Edward William Lane, An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, London, 1836, fifth edition, vol.II, Pp.249-50.

[4] The *majādhīb* (pl. of *majdhūb*) are described by Ibn Khaldūn (15th C.) in the "Muqaddimah" as the intoxicated strand of Ṡūfism in Mamlūk Egypt.

is pulled, another term used for those who become Ṡūfīs unwillingly; i.e., by the Will of God) are synonymous in Arabic which further proves that the initiation to a craft was synonymous to the affiliation to a Ṡūfī brotherhood.

Lane's account shows how the acceptance of a new member into a craft was ritualized by means of the bonding of a person to a Ṡūfī *shaykh* and how it was symbolized by a series of knots and a bow on a shawl around his waist; this bonding can be interpreted as a symbol of the Ṡūfī affiliation to a brotherhood. It also shows how religion, the core of tradition, governed this ritual through the repeated recitations of the *Fātiḥa*, which is also repeated by Muslims in every cycle of the ritual daily prayers and is the key to the understanding of the Islamic faith as it refers to the Straight Path (*al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*).[1] The second recitation dedicated to a Ṡūfī saint (*walī*) is particularly significant in that it further stresses the fact that the crafts and the Ṡūfī brotherhoods in traditional times were connected. In its more direct connotation, it is significant in that it is a means by which the new apprentice acquires *baraka* (spiritual blessings). We should not forget that initiation to the Ṡūfī is a turning point in his life; for it is the beginning of the Spiritual Path not only through Ṡūfī spiritual practice and worship, but in its broad sense through a beneficial work.[2] It meant that the new learner had to submit totally to the will of the *mu'allim* to enable him to receive the revealed direct knowledge that he had acquired from the Ṡūfī *shaykh*.

Besides the "guild" system of training and apprenticeship of architects and craftsmen, there was the traditional heredity of occupations through extended families[3]. The sources mention families with five generations of architects; for example the post of *ra'ṭs al-muhandisīn* is known to have been occupied by members of the Ṭūlūni family for long periods in the fourteenth, and fifteenth-centuries A.D.[4] Another famous family was that of the Qarāfī in the sixteenth, and seventeenth-centuries A.D. Nelly Hanna says that:

---

[1] Some say that the *Fātiḥa* can be representative of the whole faith as the profession of faith (*Shahādah*) is in a way a summation of Islam.

[2] See the broad sense of worship in Islam discussed in Chapter Four, encompassing both direct and indirect connotations.

[3] We mentioned in Chapter Three that these extended families were one of the main reasons for solidarity within the Mamlūk city of Cairo.

[4] See al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *al-Mawā'iḍh wal-I'tibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wal-'Āthār*, Bulaq, Cairo reprint, 1270 A.H., p.384. Also see al-Sakhāwī (15th C.), *al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi' Li-ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi'*, Cairo, 1935, vol.1, Pp. 221-2, & vol.4 p.183.

***The Qarafi family, is first mentioned in 989 A.H./1581 A.D. with 'Abd al-Gawwad 'Abd al-Karim al-Qarafi; in 1016 A.H./1607 A.D., another member of the family, Mohammad al-Baj' al-Qarafi participated in the expedition to a place called Nakhl as a mu'allim banna (master builder); by the mid 17th century, his son Sulayman al-Baj' al-Qarafi had become one of the renowned architects of Cairo. 'Abd al-Rahman, the son of Sulayman, accompanied his father in one job or another, remained in the same profession. The transmission of the profession from father to son was certainly a significant factor in the training of a new generation of workers.[1]***

In Chapter Two, we saw that Mamlūk society relied on oral means to transmit knowledge in the mosque, *madrasa*, and *khanqah* from *'ulamā'* and Ṣūfī *shaykhs* to disciples (*murīdīn*). We have also seen that Ibn Khaldūn considered the apprenticeship to the crafts as synonymous to an education in the sciences (*'ulūm*).[2] This oral method of passing on knowledge accounts for the scarcity of any literature regarding the teaching of Mamlūk crafts. As to the content and form of the transmitted knowledge in relation to specific crafts, we can deduce from Ibn Khaldūn that the degree of emphasis on the different subjects would vary from one student to the other according to the vocation that he would be pursuing. An architect for instance would need more emphasis on geometry (*'ilm al-handasah*), on the science of numbers (*'ilm al-'adad*), on the laws of nature (*ṭabī'ah* what is known as "physics" today), in addition to the religious sources of knowledge.

The reason why the transmission of knowledge was oral, whether in the case of the "guild" or in that of the extended family, is that the very nature of the knowledge transmitted was esoteric. This is observable up to the present day in parts of the Muslim world that are still governed by tradition. Martin Lings recounts an illuminating dialogue that occurred between Dr. Marcel Carret and a Ṣūfī *shaykh* called Aḥmad al-'Alawī. The *shaykh* started his conversation with Carret by explaining that there was always a doctrine above religion. Carret then asked him what that doctrine was, and the *shaykh* answered that it was the means of attainment to God Himself. But when Carret asked him what these means were, the *shaykh*

---

[1] Nelly Hanna, "Construction Work in Ottoman Cairo (1517-1798)", Supplement aux Annales Islamologiques, Cairo, 1984, p.49.

[2] See Chapter Two section 2.1.

answered with a smile: "*Why should I tell you, since you are not disposed to make use of them? If you came to me as my disciple I could give you an answer. But what would be the good of satisfying an idle curiosity?*"[1] This accounts for the fact that esoteric knowledge lives within the members of a traditional society and that not anyone can obtain the knowledge from those who have it. It is only for disciples: those who will make use of the knowledge.

## 6.2 DESIGN AND BUILDING PROCESSES IN THE MAMLŪK PERIOD

In Chapter Five, we saw that all the religious buildings we examined were founded by Mamlūk sulṭāns and *emīrs*. In the Baḥrī Mamlūk period alone there were in Cairo more than 150 foundings, reconstructions, or repairs of mosques, *madrasas* and *khanqahs* for Ṣūfīs for which the donors are known.[2] Almost two thirds of endowments of property came from *emīrs*, and the institutions which received them were likely to represent a still greater proportion of the scholarly and religious activity of the community.

It is still difficult to write with certainty about the building industry in Islam prior to the Ottoman period. This is principally due to two factors. First the knowledge that was available has disappeared because it relied on the traditional process of oral transmission, and second, documentation of Islamic buildings is much poorer than one might expect. Although buildings were admired, architecture was seldom written about. The architects themselves have not left us any record of the work they produced. Drawings, estimates and accounts, if they ever existed, have not come down to us. These difficulties are moderated by our ability to extrapolate backwards in time in certain areas where building techniques and social structures have changed less than in most, and by searching for clues hidden in the surviving evidence.

In researching the field of building process, one is faced with the task of finding material dealing with the following: building regulations, writings about architecture, the design process, and the building construction process itself.

---

[1] Martin Lings, A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Aḥmad al-'Alawī His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1961, p. 33.

[2] Many other projects, of course, have escaped the attention of the chroniclers, but these must have been smaller and less important.

### 6.2.1 Building Regulations

By consulting court records of Mamlūk Cairo we can assume that the control of construction operations was not rigid; one never reads for instance, that people had to obtain building permits. Moreover, violations of building regulations were settled in court through the intervention of the *muḥtasib* (supervisor of the trades) with the construction guilds. The courts handled various matters that had to do with the building construction. The *qāḍīs* (judges) saw that the regulations were enforced, and that buildings were kept in good condition. People were allowed to build only on land they owned and certain urban requirements had to be respected. The courts also indirectly controlled the availability of materials to be re-used by the authorization of the sale of *waqf* property which would normally include wood, stone, marble and copper or lead.[1]

On many occasions, al-Maqrīzī reports that *muhandisīn* (architects) were asked to inspect buildings, for a variety of reasons; for instance, they inspected the minaret of the Mosque of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh in (821 A.H., 1418 A.D.) during the early Circassian Mamlūk period because it looked shaky, and they advised that it should be torn down; this matter was brought to the sulṭān and he complied. Likewise, Bahā' al-Dīn Ibn Ḥanna asked the *muhandisīn* to inspect the remains of what was thought to be an old *miḥrāb* near Dayr al Ba'l; when the "architects" confirmed that it really was a *miḥrāb*, a mosque was built in its location. Al-Maqrīzī does not specify which institution these "architects" were attached to.[2]

However the documents published by M.M. Amīn show that the Mamlūk courts used the procedure of the official inspection of buildings (*kashf* or *kashf al-muhandisīn*) when investigating problems related to buildings. Before a building was alienated from a *waqf* through *istibdāl* (exchange or sale), the court appointed architects to inspect it and to testify to its condition. Thus, even though the court procedures of the Mamlūk period are relatively well-known, it is evident that in certain aspects, a continuity of the procedures used can be traced to the Ottoman period.[3] This fact can be helpful in achieving a more comprehensive

---

[1] Nelly Hanna deals with the Mamlūk period in her study of Ottoman period construction work for comparative reasons. op cit. Hanna, 1984, p.4.

[2] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, 1270 A.H., vol.2, p.329 and p.409.

[3] Muḥammad M. Amīn, Catalogue des Documents d'Archives du Caire, Cairo, 1981, Pp. 463-479. Also see S.M Stern's articles on documents of the Ayyubid and Mamlūk periods: "Petitions from the Ayyubid Period", BSO AS 27, 1964, Pp.1-32; and "Petitions of the Mamlūk Period", BSO AS 29, 1966, Pp.233-276.

view of the overall process of executing a building by filling the gaps from previous and following periods - meaning the Ayyubid and the Ottoman.

Building regulations in Mamlūk times were divided into several domains: regulations in regard to land; others in regard to heights and projections, windows and doors; and regulations which had to do with the location of buildings. It would seem that in Mamlūk times, mosque projects were exempted from all building regulations.[1] This is accountable from the fact that frequently land was confiscated from owners - an illegal act according to the building regulations stated by the Mamlūk State - and height regulations were not respected for the obvious reason of the presence of the minaret and dome structures. We have also seen in Chapter Five that Baybars al-Jāshankīr allowed his architect to take ten meters from the public road when he was adding his mausoleum, minaret, and portal to the *khanqah* he was building. This agrees with the assumption that Mamlūk religious buildings were exempted from any regulations which applied to less sacred types of buildings.

As for the regulations regarding maintenance, we find that the *Shar'a* has a basis with regard to the upkeep of buildings. This depends on two factors: the first applies to any kind of building and states that one should not harm one's neighbours by subjecting them to the threat of having a building collapse on their property.[2] The second applied to *waqf* buildings for which the provisions were more specific. It was a religious duty to maintain the charitable and religious institutions - that is the mosque, *madrasa*, public fountain (*sabīl*), *khanqah* ...etc. - and ensure that they could carry out the functions as stated in the endowment deed, and to maintain the revenue producing buildings whose income was needed to ensure that the functions of the charitable religious institution could effectively be carried out for centuries to come.[3] Mamlūk *waqfs* for instance often had architects and other construction workers permanently attached to the *waqf* in order to make sure that regular upkeep was maintained.[4]

---

[1] As is the case today, the building of a mosque is above all other legislative laws decreed by the government.

[2] See Besim Selim Hakīm, Arabic Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Regulations, KPI Ltd., London, 1986, Appendix 1, Pp. 142-157.

[3] Maintenance of Islamic religious institutions are discussed in op cit. Hanna, 1984, Pp.16-23.

[4] For example the *waqf* of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhuda no. 940 dated 1190 A.H., p.31 in the Ministry of *Awqāf* in Cairo.

### 6.2.2 Architectural Books and Manuals

*Although buildings might have been admired, architecture was seldom considered a subject worthy of the concern of the literati, the historians and poets; the architects themselves do not seem to have recorded much about their work...*[1]

No books devoted solely to architecture are known earlier than the thirteenth-century, and even then the literature is Persian and not relating to the architecture of Egypt. Only the tables of contents of these Persian architectural books survive. These include chapters on the rules and canons to be followed in building houses, religious buildings and tombs. Unfortunately, the texts have not survived: they would have been of tremendous value in understanding the building process in traditional medieval times - specifically in connection to religious buildings. Whether these canons had to do with the meaning of the elements constituting these buildings, or the system of proportioning that should be used in the design stages, or the rituals to be carried out during the execution stages, will remain unknown. But the fact that we know of the existence of such books is in itself of value to prove that there were canons specific to the different types of Islamic buildings.

The only surviving Mamlūk data on architects' works are found in historical sources such as those of the fourteenth and fifteenth-century A.D. historians: al-Maqrīzī in his "*Khiṭaṭ*" and Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in "*al-Riḥlah*". Neither of these gives accounts of how buildings were designed and executed: the first describes the incidents of inaugurating a newly finished building and other such matters, or narrates abnormal events which occurred in relation to a building, while the second describes the Muslim cities he visited in his travels during the fourteenth-century A.D. mentioning the existence of vast numbers of religious buildings, but not how they were designed or built.

On the other hand, a very interesting early seventeenth-century A.D. Ottoman architectural treatise has been recently published: the "*Rīsāle-ī Mi'mārīyye*"[2]. This treatise was written by Ca'fer Efendi on the life of the imperial architect Meḥmed Agha who built

---

[1] Ronald Lewcock, "Architects, Craftsmen and Builders: Materials and Techniques", George Michell (ed.), Architecture of the Islamic World, Thames and Hudson, London 2nd edition, 1978, p.129.

[2] Ca'fer Efendi, translated by Howard Crane, *Rīsāle-ī Mi'mārīyye: An Early Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Treatise on Architecture*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1987.

the Complex of Sulṭān Aḥmed in Istanbūl. Although this architectural treatise is irrelevant to us because of its period and context (the Ottoman period in Turkey) its value to us is that it is the product of the Muslim tradition, it was written by a member of a traditional society, and it is about a traditional craftsman who later became an architect.

The text describes how Meḥmed Agha was originally an unknown craftsman specializing in mother-of-pearl inlay and became famed for his work until he became master architect (*mi'mār bāsha*). More importantly, throughout his account Ca'fer Efendi lapses into zealous descriptions of the cosmos, the arrangement of the universe, and the seven Heavens and the seven earths (a favourite topic in Islamic metaphysics and cosmology) as well as other supernatural phenomena that are related to a large extent to the Night Journey (*Mi'rāj*) of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). What is also surprising in the *Risāle* is the amount of Ṣūfī poetry incorporated in the text that describes Creation, the Prophet, the Ṣūfīs, the Ascent (*Mi'rāj*), and the sacredness of places (Makkah, Jerusalem, and Madina). One example of such verses will suffice to demonstrate the degree by which Ṣūfī ideas are incorporated in the poetry of this book:

*If you wish to know your master, this is your Way.*
*If you ask who our Master is, he is the Builder of the venerable Ka'ba,*
*Your answer will include Abraham and Seth and Adam.*
*In consequence, O devoted man, salute them all!*
*Thus, pure Prophets are your Masters!*
*Thus, in the science of geometry one becomes profound as the sea.*[1]

Such verses clearly show a potent Ṣūfī influence; they not only state that the only way to know God is through the Ṣūfī Way (*Ṭarīqa*), but also relate the Way to the Centre of the Muslim world (the Ka'ba), to the manifestation of God in His Prophets and Messengers, and finally, to geometry which is described as "*profound as the sea,*" (no doubt a deep sea of meditation that is to be found in geometric forms that have qualitative properties reflecting the archetypes and hence lead to higher levels of Reality).[2]

---

[1] For a wider selection of Ṣūfī poetry used in this treatise, see ibid., p.29. The original translation by Crane uses no capitalization.

[2] Similar issues will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven.

Although we have no known Mamlūk counterpart for such material on architecture, there is much Śūfī poetry that is attributed to Ibn al-Fārīḍ (who greatly influenced the Mamlūk period, as we mentioned in Chapter Two) that carries similar insinuations but of course not related to architecture or art because Ibn al-Fāriḍ was neither an architect nor a craftsman. There may well be books of a similar nature written in the Mamlūk period which lie undiscovered amidst the thousands of manuscripts that are unpublished in both the National Library in Cairo, or the Asad National Library in Damascus.

### 6.2.3 The Architectural Design Process

Before dealing with the design process as such, it is necessary to define the term architect (*muhandis*) and define his role in traditional medieval times. In some of the Mamlūk sources we find the term *al-muhandis al-bannā'* (literally "geometer builder") is used synonymously with architect. The traditional architect is known to have been well-trained in geometry, calculation, and the science of nature (*ṭabī'ah*), both conceptually and structurally, as well as in craft skills related to the construction of buildings.[1] We have mentioned other cases in section 6.1 of architects known to have been scientists who were highly skilled in various disciplines. But it is confusing that the terms used for architect vary according to the city and the period; in the Mamlūk period in Cairo we are sure of the distinction between the term architect (*muhandis*), that of "headman of a craft" (*ra'īs* and *mu'allim*) and that of "builder" (*banna'*). The body of architects resided in Cairo because wealth and power were concentrated there.

Ronald Lewcock, obviously relying on twentieth-century concepts of the design process, speculates that the *muhandis bannā'* category of architects must have been the ones responsible for the production of the bulk of buildings in Islamic cities. What he says implies that his inclination towards this idea is due to the fact that by repeating forms and plans of previous buildings (which were usually simple), with just slight changes, it was possible to achieve originality through the decoration in the hands of the craftsmen.[2] This usage and understanding of the term "originality" was basically inexistent in Mamlūk traditional times as a criterion for the evaluation of a good piece of art or architecture. Similarly, the idea of

---

[1] op cit. al-Hassan and Hill, 1986, p.265.

[2] op cit. Lewcock, 1978, Pp. 129-30.

art as decoration, having no function, jars with traditional notions.[1]

In any traditional society, the judgement of how successful a traditional work of art or architecture was based on the degree of its conformity to the spiritual principles laid down by the tradition itself.[2] The term "originality" in traditional times was understood in its real meaning: that is the realization of an original conception and not the transitory subjective originality of a person. The traditional designer was supposed to be able to see his identification with a primary purpose, his willingness to follow laws laid down by tradition and to avoid all that was superfluous and "non-functional". The idea of "innovation" or "originality" for its own sake was a senseless adventurous gamble to a traditional "creator" of things, and contrasts completely with the endless striving towards continuity in the aim of attaining perfection. Attempts to reach this perfection necessarily needed experimentation which resulted in variations of approaches to deal with each specific architectural problem, and this is what explains the differences in the design of various traditional buildings of the same functional type. To reach perfection or to come as near as possible to the traditional model (prototype) was the goal of the traditional architect and craftsman.

This notion of originality or authenticity to the tradition is affirmed by the fact that on the whole, architects' names hardly ever appear on buildings erected in the Mamlūk period; or in all other traditional periods for that matter. L.A. Mayers says that if any names were carved out, they were those of the patrons.[3] Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar say that in the Persian Muslim tradition, "*the artist realized himself while remaining anonymous.*"[4] In fact, there are a few inscriptions that have been found on buildings and these are of *nāḍhir al-'amā'ir* (building supervisor), who was actually a state official, and who had nothing to do with the design process as such. The term *al-bannā'* (builder) alone has appeared in the chronicles in cases where a contractor built according to the design of others.[5] All these points are quite understandable from the traditional point of view, as the *muhandis* (architect) was but an interpreter of the tradition, his role was to embody traditional beliefs in a material

---

[1] We will deal with this point in section 6.3.

[2] These ideas are supported in op cit. Ardalan and Bakhtiar, 1973, p.10. Also see Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, The Transformation of Nature in Art, Dover Publications, New York, 1934, see Chapter One.

[3] L.A. Mayers, Islamic Architects and their works, Albert Kundig, Geneva, 1956, p.21.

[4] op cit. Ardalan and Bakhtiar, 1973, p.10.

[5] op cit. Lewcock, 1978, p.130.

form. In traditional times, if any building or work of art were to be signed, it should bear the name of the tradition rather than that of a presumptuous architect or artist.[1]

We have pointed out that traditional stability and continuity in the design process did not prevent change because there were constant new challenges to be met by architects on odd sites, new materials, and contextual constraints such as street alignment and *qibla* orientation. But apart from these, one of the major reasons for change was the movement of architects and skilled leading craftsmen from one place to another (through travelling or as war refugees). Their work was probably admired for its unusual method of interpreting the same beliefs in a different manner. We have seen evidence of this in Chapter Five when noting that the architect of the minarets of the Mosque of Qūšūn in Cairo came from Tabrīz, and based his design on those of the Mosque of the Vizier 'Alī Shāh in Tabrīz. Similar cases were also seen in the minarets of the Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in the Citadel which were also influenced by Tabrīzī architecture, and in the Seljūk-like portal organization and decoration of the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan. For the latter, one of the most ambitious projects of the Mamlūk period, al-Ḍhāhirī[2] writes that the Sulṭān Ḥassan invited architects (*muhandisīn*) from all over the Muslim world. Al-Ḍhāhirī says that the invitation was answered not only by Syrian craftsmen who were part of the Mamlūk sultanate, but also by artisans from Persia and "Iraq", who influenced the plan and the decoration of the monument[3].

We can conclude that the achievement of a profound synthesis of materials, techniques, and quantitative functions constituted change in the Mamlūk tradition. Therefore, in the traditional sense, originality had true aspects of both permanence and change. Permanence and traditional originality (authenticity) were achieved following the rules of traditional art forms; change came from the ability of the architects' and craftsmen's creative imagination to produce a new synthesis of materials, techniques and functions. We will see in Chapter Seven that the significance of the creative arts depended on the synthesis of qualitative spiritual as well as the quantitative physical understanding of space, shape, geometry, surface, colour and matter.

---

[1] This point will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

[2] Khalīl al-Ḍhāhirī, *Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik fī Bayān al-Turuq wal-Masālik*, translated by P. Ravaisse, *Zoubdat kashf el-Mamalik*: Tableau Politique et Administratif de l'Egypte, de la Syrie et du Hidjaz sous la Domination des Sultans Mamlouks du XIIIe au XVe Siécle, 1894, p.31.

[3] See J.M. Rodgers, "Seljuk Influence on the Monuments of Cairo", Kunst des Orients, 7/1, 1970-71, Pp. 40-68.

As for the design process itself, there is enough evidence for us to be sure that some Islamic architectural monuments were first drawn in a two-dimensional form before their execution.[1] Al-Balāwī, a historian contemporary to the Fatimid period (969-1171 A.D.), states that a parchment was used for the drawing of the Ṫūlūnīd Mosque in Cairo (867-869 A.D.). He quotes the encounter between the *Emīr* Aḥmed Ibn Ṫūlūn and the architect as follows: "*Ahmed [the emīr] said, 'Come, what is it you say about building the mosque?' the architect answered, 'I will draw it for you to see with your eyes'. Ahmed ordered the skins to be brought to him and the architect drew the mosque.*"[2]

Another building has an inscription which bears the words, "*Builder (bannā'): Mas'ūd, drawings (tarsīm) by Ustādh (scholar) Ja'far Ibn Maḥmūd al-Ḥalabī,*"[3] which further indicates that there were drawings and that they were carried out by somebody other than the builder. But such drawings no longer survive to tell us whether they were of plans, or elevations, or three dimensional representations. Furthermore, this quotation leaves it uncertain as to whether the drawings were for purposes of design or rather simply to show the patron what the architect had already determined in his mind's eye what the building would look like.

The oldest surviving Islamic architectural drawings so far identified are sixteenth-century A.D. (Ottoman period), but artists' drawings and miniature paintings from a much earlier period depict buildings drawn in pure elevation and plan, showing every detail and decorative pattern with great skill and precision.[4] We also know that during the first decades of the sixteenth-century A.D., props of elevations were used in festivities. Wooden models of mosques were also carried in religious processions. But, there is no evidence that architects made use of such models for the design of buildings[5]. Other scaled models such as those of

---

[1] Paper presented by Yasser Tabbaa, "Geometry and Memory in The Design of the Madrasat al-Firdaws in Aleppo", Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies, Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Cambridge, 1988. On the other hand, Ahmed al-Hassan and Donald R. Hill mention that: "*architects used to prepare general and detailed drawings for important buildings which they were designing, and also made scaled models.*" He does not give a reference for this. op cit. al-Hassan and Hill, 1986, p.265

[2] Source al-Balāwī translated in op cit. Lewcock, 1978, p.132.

[3] op cit. al-Hassan and Hill, 1986, p.270.

[4] op cit. Lewcock, 1978, p.132.

[5] Gülru Necipoğlu-Kafadar, "Plans and Models in 15th- and 16th-Century Ottoman Architectural Practice", Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, September 1986, vol. XLV, Number 3, 1986, Pp.236-37.

the sanctified Ka'ba and the Mosque of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in Madina are known in the Ottoman period but serve as physical reminders of such sanctified places; as though by looking at them a person would pay a *symbolic visit* to them[1]. At all events, even if it can be speculated that models were an aid to the design process in the Ottoman period, there is no evidence that similar models were contrived during the times of the Mamlūks. We need have no doubt that there was architectural representation of the traditional buildings on paper or skins showing what was wished to be built; but there is no confirmation that their purpose was to produce "working drawings" to be passed on to the craftsmen.

Part of the following account by al-Maqrīzī has been mentioned in Chapter Five and is considered as one of the rare descriptions of the initiation of a work of architecture and its course to completion; it concerns the construction of the first congregational mosque in the Baḥrī Mamlūk period: that of Baybars al-Bunduqdari.

> ***In the month of Rabi' II, 665 (1267 A.D.), the Sultan (Baybars) occupied himself with building a mosque in the Husayniyya - of Cairo. He sent for a number of muhandis [architects] to look for a suitable place for building the mosque... The Sultan mounted on horseback and went down to the ground of Qaraqush and spoke about the question of the mosque. He had measurements made and settled matters concerning it and details relative to its building... the mosque was drawn out in his presence. He intimated that its door should be like that of the madrasa al-Zahiriyya, and that a dome should be built over its mihrab of the same size as the dome of al-Shafi'i. He wrote letters at the same time to different places requiring marble columns to be sent from every place, ... also that camels, buffaloes and other beasts of burden should be sent from every province. He wrote likewise for iron appliances and good timber for the doors and ceilings.... He appointed officers to supervise the building of the mosque... The building was begun in the middle of Jumada II 665 (1267 A.D.) and on 1 Jumada II 666 (1268 A.D.) the Sultan left Egypt for Syria. He stopped at Jaffa and took the town from the Franks... he took a quantity of wood found in the citadel and slabs of marble, and put them in one of the ships***

---

[1] ibid., p.238.

*at Jaffa and sent the ship to Cairo. He ordered that the screened enclosure in the mosque... should be made of this wood, and the mihrab should be made of the marble. The wood and marble were used accordingly. When the Sultan was back in Egypt... the mosque was finished in Shawwal of that year 667 (1269 A.D.) he went to the mosque on horseback and viewed it. He found it as beautiful as could be and was pleased with its having been finished in so short a time and with so much care. He gave robes of honour to those who had carried out the work.*[1]

What is valuable in this quotation is that it explicitly states that Sulṭān Baybars, the patron, desired certain architectural elements that represented visual forms connected to greatly admired and famed buildings as well as to respected and revered religious figures; furthermore, that the preference for specific materials was dictated by the patron as well. The extent of the influence of the patron here is obvious and gives us an idea about the role of the architect as a "translator" and "composer" of building forms that comprised visual elements dictated by the patron, while naturally conforming to the canons laid out in the tradition. A later Ottoman example, that of Muḥammad Bey al-Alfī also provides evidence that the influence of the patron was stronger than that of the architect. Al-Alfī himself had made a drawing of the palace he was building in 1211 A.H./1796 A.D. and gave them to an architect along with the specifications of the building that he had in mind. However, the palace that was built did not turn out to have followed his requirements and he had it torn down. These two cases show the extent of the influence of the patron over the architect.

Part of the role of "interpreter" of the tradition and the desires of the patron, was the Mamlūk *muhandis*' understanding of how a member of his society perceived a religious building. By pursuing this point, we find that traditional Muslim society has always looked upon the mosque as being the House of God "*Bayt Allāh*" and accordingly, related to a higher level of Reality. This elevated status can be directly seen in the patrons' desire to build sacred shrines and in the enthusiasm displayed by the medieval society to visit these shrines (*ziyāra*) and to create rituals of *mawālid* (sing. *mawlid* which denotes the birthday of a saint as discussed in Chapter five). *Ziyāra* recalls a sacred state, not only at the physical level, but at the psycho-spiritual level as well. The visual symbols embodied in physical elements were communicated on a level of spiritual understanding. This is where I believe the role of the

[1] Translation of al-Maqrīzī by Lewcock. op cit. Lewcock, 1978, p.129.

spiritually aware *muhandis* and master craftsmen came in, for they were the "technicians" who were versed in Ṡūfism and knew how to manipulate the sacred symbols to reflect spiritual meanings.

The following relates to what I have just mentioned, though it concerns the building of a traditional twentieth-century Algerian *zāwiya* (Ṡūfī convent) witnessed by Dr. Marcel Carret and quoted by Martin Lings:

> ***The way in which this Zawiya was built is both eloquent and typical. The architect was the shaykh himself - not that he drew up a plan or manipulated a set-square. He simply said what he wanted, and his conception was understood by the builders.... Among the shaykh's North-African disciples there began an exodus in relays: masons came, carpenters, stone-cutters, workers on the road, or even ordinary manual labourers. Here in the mid-twentieth century, was the same fervour that had built the cathedrals in the Middle Ages, and no doubt the actual building itself had taken place along somewhat the same lines.***[1]

Besides the spiritual knowledge that was necessary in the apprenticeship of the Mamlūk *muhandis*, there were other obvious practical roles that he played in the stage prior to the construction itself. In the first place, it was he who measured the land when it was sold or rented; this had to be very carefully done, because of the legal implications. He was the one who was responsible for drawing the plan on the ground. Nelly Hanna says: "*They [the court records] tell us that when a building was to come up, its plan was drawn up on the ground, probably to indicate the borders and the division of the parts of the building. It seems that this was done with each floor coming up.*"[2]

Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406 A.D.) referred to the use of geometry in architecture saying that it (architecture) required either a general or specialized expertise in the sciences of proportioning and measurement to bring the forms from the 'potential' to the 'actual' in the proper manner, and that to acquire that knowledge of proportions one should have recourse

---

[1] Marcel Carret, quoted in op cit. Lings, 1961, p.18.

[2] op cit. Hanna, 1984, p.39.

to the geometrician *muhandis*.[1] We should not forget that traditional geometry as examined in Chapter Two had qualitative as well as quantitative aspects. The *muhandis* also had to be aware of astronomy to work out the *qibla* direction and to adjust that to the site in question.

Other obvious tasks that were the responsibility of the *muhandis* were that, before the work was started, he was consulted about the number of workers to be recruited or the kind and amount of building materials that should be bought for the buildings. We have already noted that it was during the reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in the Mamlūk period, that the office of *muhandis al-'amā'ir* (architect of buildings) was introduced; he was responsible for all building construction matters, estimates, and for decisions regarding all those employed in the building trade. He was addressed by high official titles such as "the highly dignified", "the respectable", and "the trusty"[2]. The *muhandisīn* who carried out such building estimates knew the prices of building materials as well as the quantities that would be necessary for a particular project; in fact, the reports produced for these tasks were so precise and detailed that they quote the actual number of stones that were to be used for each space and the number of beams to be used for each ceiling. From this, we can deduce that the *muhandis* was probably consulted before the builders were recruited and the materials were bought, or perhaps asked about how many stones should be bought and what their sizes were to be.[3] This also indicates that the building must have been designed in some detail before construction started.

### 6.2.4 The Building and Construction Process

From al-Maqrīzī's quote in section 6.2.3, related to the Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī, we have a few hints of the building and construction process. This usually started with the choice of the building site: in this particular case it was the sulṭān's own piece of land in which he played polo. In other cases, such as that of the complex of Sulṭān Hassan, two palaces were bought and torn down to provide for it.[4] Of course there was some

---

[1] See op cit. Mayers, 1956, Pp.19-28.

[2] op cit. al-Hassan and Hill, 1978, p.266. This shows how highly esteemed the *muhandis* was to the Mamlūk society.

[3] Another definition for *muhandis* given in "*Lisān al-'Arab*" (a late medieval dictionary) is that he is a *muqaddir* (estimator). See Ibn Manḍhūr, *Lisān al-'Arab al-Muḥīṭ*, ed. by Yūsuf Khayyāṭ, Dār Lisān al-'Arab, Beirut, n.d., vol.VI, p.4710.

[4] See Chapter Five.

building land available on the market, but that was usually in the outskirts and not in the sought-after prestigious main thoroughfares of Cairo (such as that of the Fatimid *qaṣaba* of Bayn al-Qaṣrayn). In any case, apart from the plot of land required for the religious building, patrons had to rent other land on a long term basis for *waqf* to provide the necessary income to upkeep the endowed foundation.

The recruitment of skilled craftsmen was the next step in the building process. General labour was recruited from the urban population. Labourers were chosen according to their strength and were not required to have any skills at all; these were sometimes beggars, prisoners, and the rabble of the populace.[1] Skilled manpower could be hired in Cairo, Aleppo and Damascus but in addition Mamlūk sulṭāns maintained a regular work-force for their own use and for the projects of favoured *emīrs*. We mentioned in Chapter Five that during the time of al-Malik al-Nāṣīr Muḥammad in the early fourteenth-century A.D. building was encouraged; we also saw one case where the sulṭān made his master architect design a mosque for an *emīr*, and on another occasion the sulṭān gave building materials (marble) to help an *emīr* construct a *madrasa*. Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad had a state institution founded with a budget specifically allotted to construction projects called *Dīwān al-'Amā'ir*. This institution had its own stores of building materials and its own personnel to manage it.[2] Al-Maqrīzī for example, tells us of cases where workers were forced to work sometimes one day in seven without pay to build a mosque, *madrasa*, or *khanqah*.[3] On the other hand, some sources say that carpenters, masons, and other craftsmen who were slaves of the sulṭān were noted to be fairly well-off and well treated.[4]

In theory the workers recruited for state projects were paid half wages, but unfortunately the available evidence is not sufficient to allow any verification of how this worked out in practice.[5] In addition to these strictly state duties, construction workers and builders were liable to be forcibly recruited by anyone powerful enough to do so with or

---

[1] Ira M. Lapidus, Muslim Cities in the Late Middle Ages, Cambridge University Press, London, Students edition, 1967, p.64.

[2] op cit. al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, 1270 A.H., p.71 and p.308.

[3] ibid., vol.2, Pp. 68, 79, 283-284, & 328.

[4] op cit. Lapidus, 1967, p.65.

[5] Aḥmad Shalabī 'Abd al-Ghanī, *Awḍāḥ al-Ishārat*, Cairo, 1978, p.480.

without payment.[1] On such occasions, street-callers went about in the streets of Cairo announcing that all workers were to present themselves to the site in question. Anyone failing to do so was threatened with a beating.[2]

The collection of building material followed the recruitment of labour. Normally, patrons decided which to use in the construction of religious buildings; in some cases, a certain material was imposed by the decree of the sulṫāns. For example, Ibn Taghrī Birdī reports[3] that Sulṫān al-Nāṡir Muḥammad ordered that all royal buildings should be constructed in stone and explains that this was because it would make them less vulnerable to fire.

Most of the materials used for construction were produced locally and were readily available. Stone was quarried in the nearby hills of al-Muqaṫṫam and Ṫura; bricks were prepared in kilns close to the Nile and the Khalīj (the canal west of the city); gypsum was brought from Ḥelwān and Banī Suwayf and was prepared in the *jabbāsāt* (gypsum kilns) usually situated in the periphery of the city; *jīr* (lime) principally came from Jabal al-Juyūshī near the Citadel of Cairo and was prepared in kilns near this area. Some locally produced woods were used in construction; palm trunks, for instance, could be used for mosque ceilings while the *ṡanṫ* and *nabq* were two other types of wood used in doors, windows, and panelling. Wood could be bought sawn or in the log. Certain centres in the city specialized in the sale and working of wood: Taḥt al-Rab' near Bāb Zuwayla was one of them.

Materials which were not produced locally were mainly metals (iron, lead and copper) and these were imported from the west. Marble was for the most part obtained from older buildings. We have seen in Chapter Five that Baybars al-Jāshankīr bought two buildings and demolished them to use their ruins (*anqāḍ*) as building material for his *khanqah*. Cairo in fact, had an active market in reused building material. Evidently, the market for reused goods was more active when it came to marble and metals, or materials like dressed stone, or granite columns that were known for their durability. Even columns that were broken were not sold cheaply, which suggests that different uses could be made of them, perhaps they

---

[1] op cit. Hanna, 1984, Pp.30-32.

[2] op cit. 'Abd al-Ghanī, 1978, p.423.

[3] Ibn Taghrī Birdī (15th C.), *al-Nujūm al-Ḍhāhirah fī Mulūk Miṡr wal-Qāhirah*, Cairo, 1929, vol.IX, p.181.

were re-carved into smaller columns, or cut up and used in small pieces.[1] The fact that a powerful and influential Circassian Mamlūk Sulṭān like Barqūq had to use marble sparsely in his buildings, or that the famous Sulṭān al-Ghūrī had had to buy re-used marble, indicates that imports were limited at that time.[2] Metal was imported from the west and had various uses in construction: iron nails, lead domes, copper window grills for mausoleum windows were among these. Much reused metal was available in the market, particularly copper. In fact, copper must have been quite expensive if we take into account the number of times that a guardian of a *waqf* building had to sell a copper window grill in order to obtain revenues to allow the *waqf* to repair the entire structure.[3]

Apart from that, we saw in Chapter Five that materials from older buildings were used indifferently in regard to where they came from: ancient Egyptian temples, Greek and Roman temples, Christian churches, or deteriorating mosques. As a result, favoured Mamlūk religious buildings rose up at the expense of older ones. Ira M. Lapidus describes this phenomenon in medieval Muslim cities saying that: "*the cities pillaged themselves, transferring existing stocks from one building to another as priorities and demands changed.*"[4]

The necessary stone required in building was ordered from the stone cutters quarrying at the Muqaṭṭam hills or at Ṭura. It could be cut in large blocks and dressed there, or obtained, new or used, already dressed into shape from the market. It was sold by the piece. Other materials such as bricks, lime and gypsum could be bought from kilns in the north, south, and west outskirts of Cairo; bricks were bought by the thousand, and lime and gypsum by weight. In some very large projects, the kilns were installed on the construction site itself.

Al-Maqrīzī's quote on the foundation of the Mosque of Baybars indicates that materials bought for the construction were then transported on mules, donkeys and camels to the site; rope, scaffolding, containers for the materials to be mixed in were collected as well. The ground then had to be measured. It was very important to make sure that one was

---

[1] See op cit. Lewcock, 1978 p.135; also see op cit. Hanna, 1984, p.33.

[2] Amal el-Emarī, "I'ādat Isti'māl al-Rukhām fil-'Aśr al-Mamlūkī", Islamic Archeological Studies, vol.1, 1978, Pp.259-266.

[3] op cit. Hanna, 1984, Pp. 33-34.

[4] op cit. Lapidus, 1967, p.67.

not building on the street domain or on that of the neighbours. Following this, the land had to be cleared out to prepare for the new building which was to be erected. In some cases, foundations were dug out, but in other cases, old foundations were reused after being made regular.[1]

Various categories of workers were needed for the different stages of construction. Some of them, like the *ṭawwābīn* (brick makers), *ḥajjārīn* (stone-cutters), *naḥḥātīn* (stone dressers), the *jayyārīn* (those who prepared lime), the *jabbāsīn* (those who prepared gypsum), the *nashshārīn* (sawyers), all these prepared the materials that would eventually go into the building. The structure was put up by the *bannā'* (mason) aided by the *fa'ala* (unskilled workers). When that was finished, the carpenters put up the wooden beams that made up the ceiling; if the structure contained a dome, it would be built by a *qabbāb* (dome-maker). The water installations necessary for the ablution fountains were set up by the *qanawātī*. Once the main structure was standing, a variety of other workers would be called upon, depending on the demands of the building. A *muballiṭ* would be called in if the floor was in paving stone or a *murakhkhim* if it was a marble one. The windows would occupy a *kharrāṭ* if they were *mashrabiyya* windows (wooden lattice), a *ḥaddād* or *naḥḥās* if they had iron or copper grills which were popularly used in religious buildings. The *mubayyaḍ* plastered the interior and exterior walls of the building and if any wood needed to be painted, it was done by the *dahhān* or *naqqāsh*.

According to Ronald Lewcock, more than 265 manual occupations existed as separate crafts in Cairo during the Ayyubid and Mamlūk periods. The extent of specialization can be understood from the division of woodworking into seven different crafts. The effect of specialization allowed the range of technical knowledge to be reduced to a minimum, but also gave the opportunity for reaching the highest possible perfection.[2]

The role of the *muhandis* on the construction site is less clearly defined than that of the other construction workers. He could not have had a supervisory role, since *nāḍhir al-'amā'ir* (building supervisor) was charged with this. The *muhandis* would work closely with the *bannā'* with regard to the way the walls were built and the weights that they would bear.

---

[1] op cit. Hanna, 1984, p.29.

[2] op cit. Lewcock, 1978, p.133.

This close relationship between the *muhandis* and the *bannā'* is pointed out by L.A. Mayers[1]. In fact, Mayers says that there are examples of people who did both jobs at the same time, that is they were both *muhandis* and *bannā'*. Another role that the *muhandis* could play on the construction site was to make sure that the building was being constructed in such a way so as not to violate building regulations. But as has been mentioned earlier, building regulations were not enforced on religious buildings.

The number of workers employed on a site would be determined by the scope of the project. The more ambitious construction projects obviously had more workers and more specializations. A whole hierarchy of workers could be participating in any project, starting from the *mu'allim* who had many years of experience in his craft; the *mu'allim* had one or more *ṣanay'ī* (workers) working under his supervision. The *ṣanay'ī* was a worker who had already learnt the skills of the craft through apprenticeship; the *mu'allim*, in fact, had to make sure of this before he employed him. This was one of the unwritten Mamlūk "guild" rules that the *mu'allim* was expected to observe, in order to maintain certain work standards. Finally, some of the simpler jobs could be done by the young apprentices taken on by the *mu'allim* to be trained and gradually introduced to the skills of the craft.[2]

As far as instruments and techniques used by construction workers are concerned, little documentary evidence is available, and the general view of the tools used in the Mamlūk period is far from complete. There is reason to believe that the drawings of the plan on the site was carried out using ropes and pegs. This system allowed the builders to achieve straight lines, right angles and different forms of bisection, congruency and proportioning. An instrument called the *mīzān* (literally "balance", in English "plumb-line") was used in order to make sure that any wall that was built was absolutely vertical. The *muhandis* who was called upon to try to detect if a particular minaret was tilted made use of this *mīzān*. This instrument is still commonly used in construction in Egypt. A nail is hung at the top of the wall with a string, at the end of which is a lead plug. This is let down from a height and allows the onlooker to detect any irregularities. The *munshār* (saw) was used to cut wood, and marble and is mentioned on several occasions in records, but there is no description of what it looked like. There were also chisels and simple lathes that were used in carpentry.

---

[1] op cit. Mayers, 1956, p.19.

[2] Court record: Court al-Bāb al-'Ālī, court book number 152, article number 557, (1081 A.H., 1670 A.D.), p.150.

Once the building was finished several matters had to be attended to. The workers had to be paid; the debris and dirt had to be removed; the accounts, for the construction would have to be made. Often in Mamlūk times, when the building was complete, some kind of celebration was held in the presence of the patron. He made a special distribution of gifts or money to the people who had participated in the construction work. Records show that rewards given by the sulṫān to all those involved in the construction of a mosque, *madrasa*, or *khanqah* extended to the *muhandisīn* and builders. Al-Maqrīzī tells of the festivities that were made on the day of the opening of the *Madrasa* al-Ḍhāhiriya (no longer surviving), built under the auspices of Sulṫān Baybars al-Bunduqdārī in 1260 A.D., and describes how the students and *'ulama'* were distributed among the four *iwāns* designated to the four *Sunnī* rites. The rewards granted to the *muhandisīn* and builders who had participated in the execution of the *madrasa*/mosque are also described.[1] Ibn Iyās also recounts that on the completion of the *Madrasa* of Sulṫān Ḥassan, the *muhandis* was given robes of honour while the masons (*bannā'īn*) received only ten dinars each (apparently a small amount of money). When the repairs of the same *Madrasa* were carried out in the seventeenth-century A.D., the workers were rewarded with textiles of different kinds[2] which indicates that this tradition was passed on to following periods.

## 6.3 THE TRADITIONAL ṠŪFĪ CRAFTSMAN'S UNDERSTANDING OF ART

> ***The traditional Sufi craftsman [be he an architect, artist, or artisan] created the external art form in light of the inspiration which he has received from the spirit; in this way the art form was able to lead man to the higher states of being and ultimately to Unity. With the help of symbols, the traditional craftsman through his intellect, applied ta'wil to the process of nature. Man as conceived in Sufism is related to creation through his outer form, which corresponds to it, not of course as a naturalistic copy but qualitatively, as a parallel work of God.***[3]

---

[1] Al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Kitāb al-Sulūk Lima'rifat Duwal al-Mamālīk*, Cairo, 1956, vol.1, p.504.

[2] op cit. Hanna, 1984, p.8.

[3] op cit. Ardalan and Bakhtiar, 1973, p.7.

Let us first synthesize our understanding of the material that has been provided in the last chapters concerning the Mamlūk tradition: their educational system, their traditional view of the sciences, their belief in Śufism as a way to understand the deeper meanings regarding the religion of Islam, in order to understand how a Śūfī craftsman operated.

We have found out in Chapters Two and Four that according to the Śūfī doctrine of Unity of Being (*Waḥdat al-Wujūd*), man is the microcosm and is the mirror image of the macrocosm; he contains all the possibilities of the universe potentially within himself.[1] The traditional Muslim viewed him/herself as the last manifestation of creation and as the theophany of the Divine, standing between the physical and spiritual worlds (earth and the Heavens). Of all creatures, only the human being could become conscious of the intellect and all its possibilities. The human being was created in the "form" of God according to the Śūfī interpretation of the tradition, "*God created man in His[2] image*". That is why the position of traditional man in the universe was considered to be central. He was placed at the intersection between the transcendent vertical dimension leading towards the Creator and the horizontal dimension of the temporal world. For this reason traditional man's sense of reality included a qualitative and a quantitative aspect and was determined by the balance he was able to achieve between the material world on the one hand and the spiritual world on the other.[3] This qualitative and quantitative balance is vital towards the understanding of the Mamlūk view of the human being.

We have also seen in Chapter Four that the Muslim is the *'abd* (servant) of God, a symbol of perfect passivity; at the same time, he is the *khalīfah* (vicegerent) of God on earth where he has an active role in the universe and mastery and power over creation.[4] We saw that this polarity in function of vicegerent and of servant combine to create a harmonious balanced relationship which allows man to dominate the earth provided only that he remain in perfect submission to God (this is the essence of "*islām*" the verb; to submit to the Will of God).

---

[1] See Chapter Two, Unity of Being (*Wiḥdat al-Wujūd*).

[2] The exoteric interpretation of this *ḥadīth* is different; the word "his" indicates man rather than God. So the *ḥadīth* would be understood as: "*God created man in the image that appertains (intended) to man,*" as all other beings have had a form chosen for their individuality.

[3] op cit. Ardalan and Bakhtiar, 1973, p.9.

[4] Qur'ān: 33/72.

In Chapter Two, the model of this perfect synthesis was seen to coincide with what the Ṡūfīs call *al-Insān al-Kāmil* (Universal Man), whose perfect manifestation to the Ṡūfīs is the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). To the Ṡūfī, Universal Man is the supreme archetype of creation, and it is through him that all things may move to return to the Source. This creative movement towards the Divine (which is a possibility in all mankind) is central to the Ṡūfī's spiritual salvation. It would follow that an architect and craftsman affiliated to a Ṡūfī *ṭarīqa* would seek to emulate this Universal Man, and hence reflect the spiritual journey, which is the ultimate goal to the Source, through his work .

We also mentioned in Chapter Two that the Mamlūk *madrasa* and *khanqah* enabled the education of different men for different vocations through a common set of traditional principles. Through the study of Mamlūk traditional sciences imbued with Ṡūfism and with its strong emphasis on mathematics, the sciences of nature, cosmology, astronomy, and alchemy, a symbolic language was acquired. We will see in Chapter Seven how numbers, lines, shapes, and colours provided coherent systems of articulation for the awakened soul of the Ṡūfī and sought external expression. The physical manifestation of these expressions is of profound importance, for by it the Mamlūk traditional architect and craftsman "created" forms in a parallel process as that of Divine Creation.

In medieval folklore, there is a view that the crafts were divinely revealed through successive Messengers of God - unacceptable from the point of view of the *'ulamā'*. More acceptable was that the act of making from raw materials an object which was both useful and beautiful was recognized as a form of prayer. It is from here that the idea came that the products of a sacred activity carried with them blessings (*baraka*) which encouraged the user to "remember" God and to bring him closer to God[1] - this is the traditional notion of "seeing" God everywhere and in everything that we have mentioned in Chapter Four. It should always be remembered that no traditional civilization could have accepted the idea that there were things which assisted only the physical well-being of man. We also discussed in Chapter Four how prayer and other actions, as traditionally understood, have to involve the whole of Muslim man: body (*jism*), soul (*nafs*), and spirit (*rūḥ*); especially since Islam, the religion of Unity, is the religion of "wholeness". By extension, all traditional artifacts centred on Islam also involved the metaphysical as well as the physical to achieve wholeness.

---

[1] Gai Eaton, Islam and the Destiny of Man, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1985, p.211.

We will see in Chapter Seven that the traditional architect or craftsman participated in the creative process through rituals which prepared him to create works of art that reflected forms in the *malakūt* (the world of the spirit). The aim of these rituals was essentially to create a state of mind that allowed the contemplation of the Divine. A necessary part of this spiritual contemplative state was the traditional Muslim's life pattern which was dictated by the *Sharī'a* and enhanced by the Ṣūfī *ṭarīqa* through the acts of daily prayer, fasting, and *dhikr*. This lifestyle related the traditional Muslim to the first step in his spiritual maturity.

The substance of art is beauty, and this, in Islamic terms, is a Divine Quality. For the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) asserts in a *ḥadīth* that, "*God is Beautiful and He loves beauty.*" This beauty is also related to worship; the notion that worship should be accompanied by beauty and, as it were, related to it, is also confirmed by the Qur'ān: "*Children of Adam! Wear your best clothes [a form of beauty] to every place of prayer....*"[1]

A traditional object created by such a craftsman through this process would be able to release inner beauty beyond the physical form of that object in a degree corresponding to the level of the craftsman or his master (*mu'allim*) had comprehended these esoteric notions. Ardalan and Bakhtiar say that: "*sacred art allowed the spirit to detach itself from the temporal world, and, by virtue of the clarity and lucidity of what was created, to transcend time and climb toward the Infinite.*"[2] Because architecture is a communal art, and because it has an internal aspect in its very nature - you go *into* a building and experience its *internal* spaces, not its external walls - it presents the most vital and all-encompassing traditional artefact and thereby assumes the pivotal position in the arts. It exhibits the most divergent modes of embodying the essence of Islam in both its outer and inner dimensions.

The reason why we of the twentieth-century cannot readily grasp these traditional ideas is because we live in a time where a divorce between art and craftsmanship has occurred. This parallels the schism between art and science which as we have seen were closely akin in Mamlūk traditional times.[3] Formerly, every traditional artist who produced

---

[1] Qur'ān: 7/31-32.

[2] op cit. Ardalan and Bakhtiar, 1973, p.10.

[3] This argument is followed extensively by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic Sciences An Illustrated study, World of Islam Festival, Kent, 1976. Also see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Man and Nature The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man, 2nd edition, Unwin Paperbacks, 1968, Chapters 1,2.

an object was called a craftsman, and every discipline which demanded not only theoretical knowledge but also practical ability was considered to be an art. We saw in Chapter Two that Ibn Khaldūn related traditional art and architecture with crafts and technique (*ḥirfah* and *ṣan'ah*) and with the sciences (*'ulūm*). Not only did this relationship enable the parts of the work to be integrated into a harmonious whole, but the schemes or patterns which it provided acted as a mirror reflecting the archetypes of higher Realities (that movement to the Source through symbols). This asserts that the esoteric quality imbued within the traditional sciences together with art, involved at least implicitly an aspect of wisdom (*ḥikmah*) which linked its physical forms to universal principles.

We will see in Chapter Eight and Nine that these symbolic functions were never sacrificed for technical expertise, structural stability, and utilitarian function. Utility and beauty go hand in hand in traditional art; they are two inseparable aspects of "perfection". The well-known *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) asserts that: "*God has prescribed perfection (iḥsān) for all things*"[1] (where the term "*iḥsān*", which has been translated as "perfection", includes equally the sense of beauty and virtue). To traditional Muslims, this *ḥadīth* would have represented the moral and spiritual basis not only of the arts in the narrow sense of the term but of every craft.

We will see in the following chapter that while the traditional Mamlūk craftsman was to strive for perfection, being the reflective mirror of beauty, he should at the same time not achieve completeness because that was reserved to the Perfect: God. This explains why, for example, when the Arabic word for completeness "*al-Kamāl*" is uttered, a listener automatically answers: "*Completeness is for God alone* (*al-Kamāl li-Allāh waḥdahū*)". It is in this same sense that we must understand the legend mentioned by al-Ṭabarī regarding the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan.[2] According to this, the sulṭān had his architect's right hand cut off after seeing the masterpiece he had created, because he had dared approach completeness, and was probably seen as a way of trespassing on Divine territory. But because we know that Sulṭān Ḥassan did not live to see the completion of his building, it must have been only legend.

---

[1] "*Inna-Allaha kataba al-iḥsān 'ala kulli shay*'".

[2] Al-Ṭabarī, in Noldeke, Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden, p.80. Likewise, according to Gayet, L'Art Arabe, p.121. The architect of the *Madrasa* of Qajmās al-Isḥāqī had his right hand cut off. Legend also says that a Moorish *mu'allim* in the name of Alixares was put to death so as to prevent him from producing a masterpiece.

## CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The more one penetrates into the significance of processes by which Mamlūk architecture was produced, the more one becomes aware of the inescapable relationship between this art and Ṡūfism stemming from the fact that the craft guilds were closely akin to Ṡūfī brotherhoods. Accordingly, whether sponsored by the sulṫāns or *emīrs*, whether used by the religious scholar, the *emīr*, the merchant, or the peasant, traditional Mamlūk art and architecture was created by an inspiration which issued ultimately from the aid of *ḥikmah* which stems from Ṡūfism. It would not be incorrect to say that to grasp fully the significance of this architecture is to become aware that it is part and parcel of the Islamic revelation. This is so because its intentions are to reflect Divine Realities in physical forms.

We have mentioned several points that will receive more attention in the following chapter, foremost among which is the process of "form-giving" in the Mamlūk period. We have discussed here the intentions of design but have not explained how this was externalized in actuality. We have also found that the traditional architect did not choose to express himself in the creation process but remained anonymous. Traditional Mamlūk architecture is unsigned because the architect was an interpreter of the tradition which was in fact the real "designer" so to speak. The tradition provided the canons and the working rules that had their origins in the religion in both its outward and inner dimensions.

The goal of the Mamlūk architect was to work through the tradition and externalize his inner spirit upon the physical world. Through intuition, the viewer and user stimulated by his traditional sense perceptions, internalized the forms and hence, completed the circle of communication. Beauty, which is a Quality and a Name of God is objective, its potential lies within the traditional object and not within the viewer, who may or may not be receptive and capable of understanding it (depending on his background).

We can conclude that the intention of Mamlūk art and architecture was to materialize the inner immaterial realities of the Islamic revelation. Because it was initiated through Ṡūfism it led the Muslim to the inner part of the Divine Revelation. Mamlūk art and architecture, being the result of traditional Islamic esotericism, was the way by which the society was guaranteed a support for its spiritual life by being constantly reminded through traditional artifacts of the spiritual journey to the Source. In other words, this was the means by which members of the Mamlūk society came to "see" God everywhere and in everything.

Int. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## THE REFLECTION OF ṠŪFĪ BELIEFS IN THE TRADITIONAL PROCESS OF "FORM-GIVING"

From Chapters Two, Three, and Six, we have arrived at an understanding of the role of Ṡūfism in the building process as well as the role of the Ṡūfī orders in the governing of Mamlūk informal guilds which in turn controlled the crafts (*al-ṡinā'āt wal-ḥiraf*). In Chapter Six we introduced the atmosphere and state of mind in which the architect and craftsman produced his work, but did not mention how he achieved the externalization of his ideals.

This chapter will deal specifically with Ṡūfī beliefs and cosmological interpretations that are involved in the process of "creating" forms. It is divided into three main sections which I believe are fundamental to lead to the inward dimensions of any traditional Islamic form, thus revealing the reason behind its external appearance. The first section deals with the esoteric meaning of what a symbol is to the Ṡūfīs, which leads to the question of human "creation": does it correspond to and parallel Divine Creation? The second section deals with the basic principles of the three prevalent ideas in traditional Islamic architecture which are: the "Centre", "Vertical Axis", and "Horizontal Orientation". The third section briefly looks at the notions of space, shape, surface, and colour which are inevitably involved in the process of "form-giving".

I have tried as much as possible to rely on original sources that were available either before or during the times of the Mamlūks, but as I mentioned in Chapter Two, Ṡūfism is an orally transmitted body of knowledge, which explains the scarcity of relevant sources. Wherever I have needed to acquire extra support from contemporary Ṡūfī writers, such as Titus Burckhardt or Martin Lings, I have done so to fill in gaps with material that can be obtained from the generality of the ideas of Ṡūfism, i.e., those that do not differ in the different *ṭarīqas* but are universal in Ṡūfī thought. The findings of this chapter, are vitally important for two reasons: they will show how important Ṡūfī belief and symbolism were to the Mamlūk society, and will enable us to analyze in Chapter Eight, the architectural elements that constitute traditional religious buildings, in both their exoteric and esoteric dimensions.

## 7.1 SIGN, SYMBOL, AND THE "CREATION" OF TRADITIONAL FORMS

God and man "communicate" through signs and symbols as a language. God says in the Qur'ān that to search for the Truth (*Al-Ḥaqq*) one should see the signs and symbols (*'āyāt*, *rumūz*, *ishārāt*, *amthilah*). It is by their aid, that one can reach the manifestation of God, can know his existence, and from them he discerns His Majesty, Power and vast Creation.

***Soon will We show them our portents ('āyāt) in the (furthest) regions (of the earth), and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth...***[1]

***Among His Signs ('āyāt) is this, that He created you from dust; and then behold, ye are men scattered (far and wide)!***
***And among His Signs ('āyāt) is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs ('āyāt) for those who reflect.***
***And amongst His Signs ('āyāt) is the creation of the Heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs ('āyāt) for those who know.***
***And amongst His Signs ('āyāt) is the sleep that ye take by night and by day, and the quest that ye (make for livelihood) out of His Bounty: verily are Signs ('āyāt) for those who harken.***
***And amongst His Signs ('āyāt), He shows you the lightning, by way both of fear and of hope, and He sends down the rain from the sky and with it gives life to the earth after it is dead: verily in that are Signs ('āyāt) for those who are wise.***
***And amongst His Signs ('āyāt) is this, that heaven and earth stand by His command: then when He calls you by a single call, from the earth, behold, ye (straightaway) come forth.***[2]

---

[1] Qur'ān: 41/53.

[2] Qur'ān: 30/20-25.

In the above verses of the Qur'ān, the word *'āyah* (pl. *'āyāt*) is used frequently to denote a sign. (From the Qur'anic point of view, the word *'āyah* denotes mainly a verse, but it also means a "mark" or a "sign"). Śūfīs use the words *'ishārah* and *ramz* to denote the sign and symbol, and rely for their usage of such terms on other verses from the Qur'ān where for example God says to Zakariyya: "*He said: 'O my Lord! Give me a Sign!' 'Thy Sign,' was the answer, 'shall be that thou shalt speak to no man for three days but with signs (ramzan)...'*"[1] Ibn 'Arabī, the medieval Śūfī who was seen in Chapter Two to have been influential and in contact with a lot of Egyptian Śūfīs during the Mamlūk period, comments on this[2], saying that in language, the symbol (*ramz*) of a word has an outward meaning which is not immediately visible as the inward meaning of it. Ibn 'Arabī concludes that the neglect of the inward results in a probable misunderstanding of the symbol altogether.

On the other hand, the word *mithāl* or *mathal*, goes back to the Platonic doctrine of forms[3]. This word denotes "similitude" or "likeness" corresponding to a great extent to Plato's intermediary realm. In medieval Islamic times, the word "similitude" was related to the understanding of the Qur'ānic verse: "*Such are the similitudes (amthāl pl. of mithāl) which We propound to men, that they may reflect.*"[4] Ibn Manḍhūr (who was a medieval lexicographer), quotes and comments on the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him): "*Surely I have been given the Book and its likeness (mithl) with it,*"[5] saying that this tradition was interpreted in the twelfth-century by Ibn al-'Āthir (d. 1210 A.D.) to either mean that the revelation gave Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) the inward and outward aspects of the Qur'ān, or that both the Qur'ān and the power to make it understandable were given to him.

It is unquestionable, then, that symbolism to the Śūfīs is a constant "dialogue" between God and His creations. The reason for this certainty lies in the fact that the very natures of God and man are different. According to Ibn 'Arabī, this difference of natures as

---

[1] Qur'ān: 3/41.

[2] Muḥyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, Cairo, 1911, vol.1, p.174. (My translation)

[3] We saw in Chapter Two how Greco-Egyptian thought and Hermeticism found their way into Śūfī thought.

[4] Qur'ān: 59/21.

[5] Ibn Manḍhūr, *Lisān al-'Arab al-Muḥīt*, Ed. by Yūsuf Khayyāt, Dār Lisān al-'Arab, Beirut, n.d., vol.4, p.653.

well as the distance[1] between those who are communicating, necessitates a special language to exist to achieve this dialogue[2]. Ibn 'Arabī gives an example of the existence of the world to explain the need for such a language:

> ***God brought it [the world] into existence not for the sake of its own self, but He brought it into existence for Himself. People (however), became preoccupied with something other than that for whose sake it was brought into existence, [i.e., the outward aspect of the world] and so contradicted the intention of He who brought it into existence.***[3]

Al-Ghazzālī, the medieval Ṡūfī wrote in his "*Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*" that the visible world corresponds to another invisible world; and that everything in this world is a symbol of something in the other invisible one.[4] Accordingly the fourteenth-century Ṡūfī, Afḍal al-Dīn al-Kashānī in his "*Muṣannafāt*" says: "*Sensible knowledge of this world, that is the world of becoming, is a symbol of the intelligible knowledge of that world. The physical world is the symbol and image of the spiritual world.*"[5]

On the process of Divine Creation, the Ikhwān al-Ṡafā'[6], who have also been mentioned in Chapter Two to have influenced the Mamlūks in Cairo, in their well-known "*Rasā'il*" refer to the Divine Creator as the One who is the Artificer and Knower "*Al-Ṣāni' Al-'Ālim*", they refer to the artist and craftsmen with the same terms (but not in capitalized form, i.e., *ṣāni' 'ālim*[7]). This *ṣāni'* is the "externalizer" of form, so that the artefact (*al-maṣnū'*) is a whole, resulting from the materialization of form. The Ikhwān say that this

---

[1] Anything of the revealed message, that is the sciences that cannot be contained in a single message or expression, is a resultant of distance. The ontological distance between God and man makes man in his limited existence far from the limitless Origin of all sciences.

[2] op cit. Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥat*, 1911, vol.2, p.504.

[3] ibid., vol.1, p.174.

[4] Al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, trans. by Maulana Fazlul Karim, Taj Company, Delhi, 1982, p.111.

[5] Afdal al-Din al-Kashānī quoted in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Science and Civilization in Islam, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1968(b), p.296.

[6] The Ikhwān al-Ṡafā'a described in Chapter Two, are a group of philosophers who are identified as followers of Pythagorean and Platonic tradition. Their cosmological doctrine is very compatible to Ṡūfī thought. The epistles "*Rasā'il*" are a valuable source on the concept of traditional art.

[7] Ikhwān al-Ṡafā', *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṡafā' wa Khillān al-Wafā'*, Dār Ṡādir, Beirut, n.d., vol.1, p.277.

process is initiated and supported by the force of the "Universal Intellect", that is by the order of God the Almighty. On such a basis, the Ikhwān conclude that the soul of man imagines - or retains - the form of the known in his soul.

> ***Knowledge is nothing but the form of the known [retained] in the soul of the knower; and art (the ṣan'ah itself) is nothing but the bringing out of that form, which is in the soul of the artificer, the knower, and placing it in matter.***[1]

This bringing out of that form inevitably needs an intellectual capacity of finding the essence of the form by knowledge and science (*'ilm*) and the practical side of physically producing it, that of the product (*'amal*). That is why Ibn 'Arabī finds that forms are of two kinds, the sensible and the intellectual. He says:

> ***Forms are of two kinds: outward, sensible forms, which are the tangible bodies together with all that is sensibly attached to them... and inward, intelligible forms that cannot be sensed, which are the sciences, gnosis and intentions that are within the sensible forms.***[2]

Ibn 'Arabī concludes that an artefact is the result of both intellectual and practical principles and applies to any craft or artistic process. That explains how an artefact can be produced by either one person who has both the knowledge and the skill (a Ṣūfī craftsman), or by two persons, the one with his knowledge (a Ṣūfī) and the other with the skill of his hands (an able craftsman). He explains this point in terms of a relationship that is "active" which he refers to as "fatherly", and "passive" which he calls "motherly" as follows:

> ***If a geometer (muhandis), who is also a carpenter, is not skilful in practice, he may reveal the knowledge he has in the form of words to the hearing of one who is skilful in carpentry. This revelation is a marriage relationship: the speech of the geometer is a father and the receptivity of the listener is a mother. The knowledge of the listener then becomes a father and the organs of his body become a mother (that is in so far as the activities***

---

[1] ibid., vol.1, p.399.

[2] op cit. Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1911, vol.1, p.139.

> ***performed by organs are determined by knowledge). And if you wish you may say that the geometer is a father and the craftsman who is the carpenter, in that he listens to what the geometer tells him, is a mother. Now if the geometer's speech caused an effect in the carpenter (i.e., the carpenter comprehends), then the geometer has imprinted that which he has within himself (his knowledge) in the carpenter's soul. And the form, which is revealed to the carpenter and occurred clearly in his imagination by what the geometer has told him, is as a child to whom his understanding has given birth. Then the carpenter's work is a father with regard to timber, which is the mother of carpentry; and by means of the instruments the marriage ... occurs, which is the effort of every hit of a hammer or cut by a saw, and every cut, separation, and union of the articulated pieces in order to compose forms.***[1]

As we found in Chapter Two, traditional Islamic knowledge was ultimately the striving for the Divine; al-Ghazzālī states quite clearly that the "*nobility of knowledge is in accordance with the nobility of the thing known, and the rank of the knower corresponds to the rank of the knowledge.*"[2] He goes on to say that knowledge is of God the *Ṣāni'* (Maker of things), *al-Ḥaqq* (the Truth), and through that One the knower achieves the knowledge of Unity (*Tawḥīd*). But he says further that a person cannot do this except after having known some other indirect knowledge of sciences such as "*the science of the heavenly bodies and the spheres and the science dealing with the things that God has made...*"[3] This correlates with what the Ikhwān say about those whose "*souls become comparable to, and almost identical with the Universal Soul*" produce more "perfect" products because they are closer to that "Universal Soul."[4] This clearly links up with what Ibn 'Arabī said - quoted above - about the two cases of possibilities of producing a traditional form, either the Ṣūfī craftsman, or the Ṣūfī telling a craftsman what to do - which also validates what was suggested in Chapter Six on the process of apprenticeship in the Mamlūk "guilds".

---

[1] ibid., vol.1, p.140.

[2] op cit. Al-Ghazzālī, 1982, vol.2, p.191.

[3] ibid., vol.2, p.191.

[4] op cit. Ikhwān, *Rasā'il*, n.d., vol.1, p.399.

But since Nature operates by the Knowledge of God or the "Universal Soul" as the Ikhwān say, and the ultimate knowledge is that which brings one closer to the Divine, then these artifacts that are being referred to must be natural artifacts, those that approach the perfection of nature. That explains why the traditional Muslim builders abstracted from nature and represented these abstractions in their buildings rather than copying nature itself. It is true that God loves the skilful in all domains, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) says: "*God loves the person who seeks [strives for] perfection in his work ('amal),*"[1] but we saw in Chapter Six that "perfection" is a quality that is attributed to God alone. Accordingly, the Ikhwān say that philosophy is defined as: "*the similitude of man with God according to human capacity.*" That is why they conclude that if a craftsman sets to make an artefact he should simulate the patterns and qualities of Divine Artifacts because only they are Perfect.[2]

Al-Ghazzālī[3], confirms this by telling us the responsibility that the traditional architect was expected to have:

> ***As an architect draws or conceives (yuṣawwir) all parts of a building in whiteness[4], and then brings them out into existence according to that prototype (nuskhah), so likewise the Creator (Fāṭir) of heaven and earth wrote the (archetypal) copy of the world from its beginning to end on the Guarded Tablet (al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūḍh) and then brought it out into existence according to that prototype.[5]***

Al-Ghazzālī goes on to examine the creative process and says that to bring any object from non-existence into existence there is first the step of *taqdīr* (design), second is *ījād* (bringing into existence), and third *taṣwīr* (form giving). These he says, are reflections of the Divine Names, the Creator (*al-Khāliq*), the Producer (*al-Bāri'*) and the Form Giver (*al-Muṣawwir*) he says:

---

[1] An authentic *ḥadīth* quoted in ibid., vol.1, p.290. Perfection here means in the likeness of the Wise Artificer: God.

[2] See argument in Chapter Six section 6.3.

[3] To illustrate some theological points, al-Ghazzālī often struck examples from the building process as analogies to bring close the meaning of what he was saying.

[4] Whiteness because it can receive an infinity of possibilities of images.

[5] Al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1983(a), vol.3, p.20. (My translation)

> *God is Creator in that he is designer (Muqqaddir[1]); Producer in that He is an inventor (Mukhtari') and able to bring things into existence (Mujīd); and Form-Giver in that He orders the forms of things He invents in the best (aḥsan) order.*[2]

Again al-Ghazzālī takes the opportunity to bring his theological ideas to Divine Creation to his readers by using analogies. He chooses the traditional building process as an example, saying:

> *This is like a building, which requires an estimator (muqaddir) who determines what will be needed in the way of timber, mud-bricks, area of land, the number of stories and their length and breadth. A muhandis who forms and draws out the building, usually undertakes this responsibility. Then there is required a bannā' (builder) who undertakes the works whereby the principles of building occur. Then there is required a muzayyin (decorator) who decorates the building and adorns its form. This is usually undertaken by a person other than the builder. This is the tradition in designing, building, and decorating (taṣwīr).*[3]

Of course, al-Ghazzālī does not leave us with this analogy without telling us that God is all three of these actions involved in the Divine "Design Process", contrary to the human case which involves several persons. He adds that furthermore, a completed building can exist on its own, independent from its makers, while the world cannot, as it depends on God.

When God prohibited man to depict living beings in art, it was because of man's inability to create forms and give them life and hence bring forth their intended qualities. He who attempts to create such forms is condemned because he cannot attain the perfection that was intended to the being in question that is made by the Creator (*Al-Ṣani'*). This clearly indicates that man's creative acts in the crafts and the arts are seen and taken by God as a direct correlation to Divine Creation. From the fact that architectural production was another

---

[1] We saw in Chapter Six that one of the many terms used for architect was *muqaddir*.

[2] Al-Ghazzālī, *Al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fī Sharḥ Ma'ānī Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusnā*, ed. by F. Shihadah, Dār al-Mashriq, Beirut, 1971, p.80.

[3] ibid., p.80.

*ṣan'ah* of traditional man, it would follow that the architect's production involved a creative process that was related to that of God, thus resulting in a reflection of higher Realities. The prototypes they created were thus seen as syntheses of forms which mirrored the cosmic and Divine manifestations mentioned in Islam.

By means of symbols incorporated in the arts and crafts, communication between man and God was insured in spite of the distance between them - that distance mentioned above by Ibn 'Arabī. As long as the viewer of the symbol has insight and can comprehend the symbols made for him, this communication is successful. This makes it obvious that the Ṣūfīs were concerned with the content of the symbol and not the symbol itself[1].

Let us then suppose that a Ṣūfī architect or craftsman wanted to create an artefact to remind himself of God; what would he resort to, to achieve such an endeavour? The first logical outcome would be to resort to God's revealed Names and Qualities, especially those that reveal and express the Divine Characteristics. But then there is a point that needs to be clarified at this stage, that we do not understand any quality unless we know it by its "limited" existence in our human capacity - which is necessarily not similar to the Divine existence, in both its quantitative as well as qualitative aspects. Accordingly, on human participation in the Divine Names, al-Ghazzālī says that as far as the Names "*Al-Khāliq*" (Creator), and "*Al-Bāri'*" (Animator) are concerned, man has no such quality to "share" with the Divine. But he says that the case is quite different when it comes to the Divine Name "*Al-Muṣawwir*" (Form-Giver), for man "shares" in this quality quite considerably.

> ***The share of the servant in this Name (Al-Muṣawwir) is that he acquires in his soul the form of existence (ṣūrat al-wujūd) in its entirety according to its configuration and order, so that he encompasses [in his mind] the configuration and the order of the whole world as though he were observing it. Then he descends to the details.[2]***

These details mentioned by al-Ghazzālī obviously include the knowledge of patterns of both the sensible domain - man, living creatures, minerals - and the intelligible domain -

---

[1] See op cit. Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1911, vol.1, n.d., p.189.

[2] op cit. Al-Ghazzālī, 1971, p.82.

the spiritual and Angelic worlds. He thus concludes that participation in the Divine Name of "Form-Giver" sums up everything that has to do with any art or craft:

> ***...It is the acquisition of the Intellectual form (al-ṡūrah al-'ilmiyyah) that is conformable to the existential form (al-ṡūrah al-wujūdiyyah). For knowledge is a form in the soul conformable to that which is known. God's knowledge of forms is the cause of the existence of these forms as [external] essences, and the existential form revealed in these external essences is the cause of the existence of the intellectual form in the heart of man. By the acquisition of this intellectual form the servant benefits the knowledge through the meaning of the Name "Form-Giver"...and also becomes, by virtue of acquiring this form in his soul, as though he were a form-giver.***[1]

What has been mentioned in this section, explains why we found in the Mamlūk sciences (mentioned in Chapter Two) so much emphasis on astronomy (*'ilm al-Falak*), and cosmology (*'ilm al-Hay'ah*), and explains our inheritance of treatises that deal with compilations of *ḥadīths* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) on such cosmological issues, which at the first instance seem to deal with the unknowns (*umūr al-ghaybiyyāt*) which today only interest a small sector among the intellectuals. It thus appears that according to what al-Ghazzālī says, a very large part of the society would have *needed* to have access to interpretable images of the cosmos, and not only those who were interested to complete their religious knowledge for the sake of completion.

This brief summary forms the Ṡūfī basis of what a Mamlūk architect or craftsman would have believed in concerning the act of "form-giver". We find that it involves "creation" which is an act of participating in the Divine Name (*Al-Muṣawwir*). This participation presupposes the knowledge of the form of the entire cosmos imprinted on the soul of the form-giver (architect and craftsman). Not only that, but that he should encompass it in its wholistic sense as if he were continuously conforming to it. If he does not attain this, by virtue of its presence in his soul, then according to al-Ghazzālī, he cannot become "like" the Form-Giver.

---

[1] ibid., p.83.

## 7.2 THE CENTRE, VERTICAL AXIS, AND HORIZONTAL ORIENTATION

### 7.2.1 THE CENTRE (THE KA'BA)

***Know that the centre of the earth, according to a tradition on the authority of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), is the Ka'ba; it has the significance of the navel of the earth, because of its rising above the level of the earth.***[1]

The Ka'ba in Makkah, can be looked at as a centre of a wheel which radiates imaginary lines that link every place on earth to it (Fig. 7.1). The fact that prayers must be oriented towards it makes it the centre. To Muslims it is the navel of the earth, meaning that it is exalted above the territories surrounding it, it is the origin and the place of communication with the upper and the nether worlds, and it is the medium through which food is distributed over the earth[2]. The idea that the world should have been created from its centre was supported by the interpretation given in the Qur'ān: "*Thus we have suggested to thee an Arabic Qur'ān in order that thou mayest warn the mother of the towns (Makkah) and those around it.*"[3] The words "*and those around it*" are taken to mean the whole earth. This centrality is well illustrated by the people of 'Ād (a nation mentioned in the Qur'ān): "*When they were in need of rain they sent*

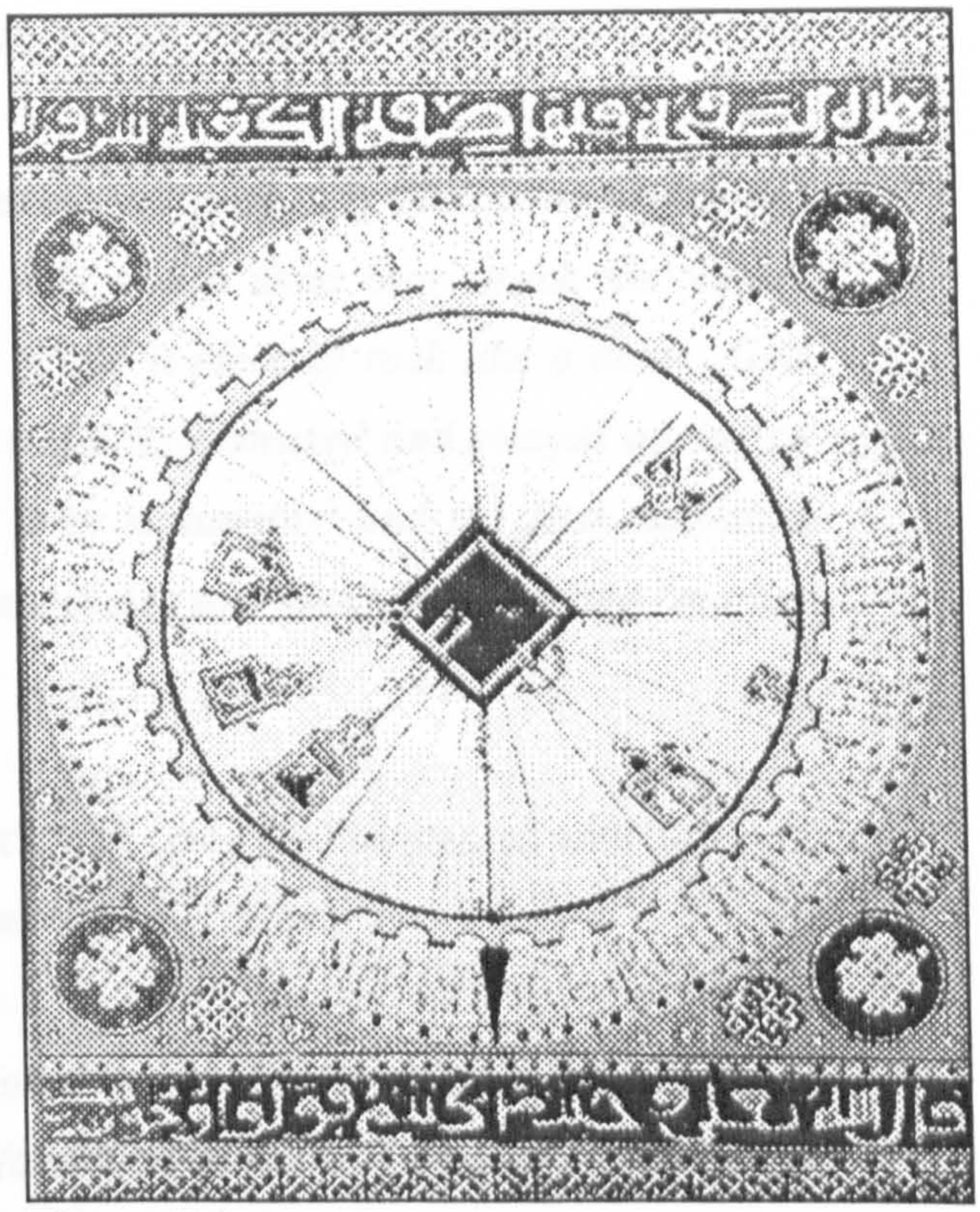


**Figure 7.1** The Ka'ba as a centre of a wheel from which radiates the Islamic cities. The four cardinal points are represented by the corners of the Ka'ba. (16th Century illustration. National Library Paris)

---

[1] Al-Kisāī'i, cited in Wensinck, Studies of A.J. Wensinck, Arno Press, New York, 1978, p.36.

[2] This definition of the navel of the earth is given by Abū al-Walīd al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makkah wa mā Jā'a Fīhā min al-Āthār*, ed. by R.S. Malḥas, Dār al-Andalus, Beirut, 1983, p.18.

[3] Qur'ān: 6/92.

*messengers to Makkah in order to pray for it,"* because their prayer would be heard better there than anywhere else. On their arrival in Makkah, the messengers were advised to ascend Mount Abū Qubays "*because never a repentant sinner had climbed it without being heard.*"[1] The reason for this is shown in the *ḥadīth* by Ibn Abī Ḥātem who quotes 'Aṭā' as saying: "*the first mountain that was set on earth was Abū Qubays in Makkah.*"[2] This confirms that the starting point of the creation of the world was from Makkah.

Ibn 'Abbās, the Prophet's companion, narrates a tradition of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) which gives us insight into the Creation and its relation to Makkah and Mount Abū Qubays linking them together with the idea of centrality:

> ***When, before the creation of heaven and earth, the Throne was upon the water, God Most Transcendent sent a soft wind that struck the water, unveiling at the position of this House a piece of rock like a dome. God stretched out the earths from beneath it; it swayed and swayed again, so God Most Transcendent pegged it by mountains[3] and the first mountain placed therein was Abu Qubays and that is why Makkah was called "mother of towns".[4]***

A *ḥadīth* by 'Ā'ishah, the Prophet's wife (may God be pleased with her) confirms the centrality of Makkah to denote its nearness to the Heavens.

> ***If it had not been for the migration (from Makkah to Madina) I would have lived my entire life in Makkah; for I have never seen a place where the sky (Heaven) was as close to earth as in Makkah, and my heart was never in tranquillity in any place more than at Makkah...[5]***

---

[1] A.J. Wensinck, "The Ideas of the Western Semites Concerning the Navel of the Earth", quoted in "The Sacred Character of Islamic Cities", ed. Dunning S. Wilson, Islam and Medieval Hellenism: Social and Cultural Perspectives, Variorum Reprints, London, 1976, p.28.

[2] ibid., p.28.

[3] As God says in the Qur'ān: 16/15: "*And He has set up on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shake with you; and rivers and roads; that ye may guide yourselves.*"

[4] Ibn 'Abbās cited in op cit. al-Azraqī, 1983, vol.1, Pp.31-32.

[5] Al-Azraqī, cited in op cit. Wensinck, 1978, Pp.14-15.

The middle position and centrality of the Ka'ba is also described by the Ikhwān in their Rasā'il:

> ***The House in the middle of the Holy Mosque, the Holy Mosque in the middle of the sanctuary (al-Ḥaram), the Sanctuary in the middle of al-Ḥijāz, al-Ḥijāz in the middle of the Islamic countries, is in the likeness of the earth in the middle of the atmosphere, the atmosphere in the middle of the lunar sphere, the lunar sphere in the middle of the (celestial) spheres. And those who pray in the horizons oriented towards the House are in the likeness of the planets in the spheres - their radiations are directed towards the centre of the earth. And the rotation of the Heavens with their planets around the earth is in the likeness of the rotation of the ambulants around the house.***[1]

This relation between the Centre and the Heavens means that if an imaginary line were to be drawn between Heaven and earth, the shortest line would be that to Makkah. In other words the centre of the Heaven - that which we see (i.e., the pole star) - should as a result be directly above the Ka'ba. The following tradition cited by al-Kisā'ī, relates to the pole star in correspondence with the Ka'ba:

> ***The pole star proves the Ka'ba to be the highest situated territory on earth, for it (the Ka'ba) is opposite the centre of Heaven. In the centre of this moving part of heaven (the Great Bear) is a fixed star which does not move, and this is the Pole star, around which the Bear and the rest of the stars turn. People are agreed on this point that he who places himself opposite the pole star has at the same time the direction of the qibla, because this star is above the Ka'ba, without ever moving. The Bear may move somewhat but the pole star never does. If the Pole star, which is the centre of heaven, around which the other stars turn, is above the Ka'ba, then, this fact proves that what corresponds with the centre of heaven is most likely to be the centre of the earth; consequently the Ka'ba is the centre of the earth.***[2]

---

[1] op cit. Ikhwān, Rasā'il, n.d., vol.2, p.39.

[2] Al-Kisa'i, trans. in op cit. Wensinck, 1978, p.47.

It would follow to say that the Ka'ba is the centre, due to its position on the intersecting transcending axis that links the terrestrial world with the Heavens. Because this spot is different than any other on earth, God guided Adam, and later Abraham to build a House for Him on it. In verses of the Qur'ān, God tells us about the building of the Ka'ba in relation to its position on earth."*And remember when We prepared for Abraham the place of the (holy) House...*"[1], "*And when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, (Abraham prayed): Our lord! Accept from us (this duty). Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Hearer, the Knower.*"[2]

Al-Azraqī, (the medieval historian who wrote *Akhbār Makkah*), says that God ordered Abraham to rebuild the Primordial House which was originally built by Adam but which had disappeared in the Flood. Adam built the first House on foundations that were laid as deep as the seventh earth. Gabriel is said to have struck the earth with his wing, thus revealing a firm foundation (*uss thābit*) in the seventh earth. The Angels filled up this pit with rocks until it became level with the rest of the earth. Upon this foundation, Adam built the first temple.[3] Al-Azraqī says that when Abraham was ordered to rebuild this House, he asked his Lord where he should do so, and that God had answered him that He would show him. God then, sent him a "speaking Cloud" called the *Sakīnah*[4] and it directed him to the sacred location. Not only that, but God ordered it to take the form of the original Ka'ba and it told Abraham: "*O Abraham, your Lord orders you to design according to the measure of this Cloud.*"[5] Ibn 'Arabī reports differently: "*Build according to the measure of my [the Cloud's] shadow.*"[6] In both cases, Abraham did as he was told, and the House of God was reconstructed.

---

[1] Qur'ān: 22/26.

[2] Qur'ān: 2/127.

[3] The idea of centre is evident in this legendary story since as we will see in a following section that the firm foundation is none other than the central Rock which forms the sacrum of the whole cosmos. op cit. al-Azraqī, 1983, vol.1, Pp.33-36.

[4] *Al-Sakīnah* literally means peace and tranquility, it derives from the word *sukūn* which means "stillness". Since stillness is the quality of the centre, that which is motionless, then it is obvious why in the Qur'ān God says: "*He it is who sent down the stillness (sakīnah) into the hearts of the believers.*" (Qur'ān: 48/4). It should not be forgotten that the heart to the Ṣūfīs is the receptacle of the Divine Presence. Thus the Ka'ba is a visible embodiment of *sakīnah* and is the heart of the world, its centre.

[5] op cit. al-Azraqī, 1983, p.53. Another version of this tradition is: "*O Abraham, take from the land according to my measure, with neither increase nor decrease.*" Abī Ja'far al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī, Maktabat Khayyāṭ, Beirut, n.d., vol.1, Pp.128-134.

[6] op cit. Ibn 'Arabī, Futūḥāt, 1911, vol.2, p.60.

This reconstruction is said to comply with the Divine models of the Ka'bas of the Heavens. According to the following tradition there are fifteen Ka'bas in the universe (seven in the Heavens, seven in the earths and God's Throne itself). Al-Azraqī transmitted this *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) who after his Night Journey (*Mi'rāj*) was describing the Heavenly Ka'ba known as *al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr* which is a counterpart of the first earth Ka'ba (meaning the terrestrial one in Makkah) and said:

> ***This house [the Ka'ba] is one of fifteen, seven in the Heavens up to the Throne, and seven down to the limits of the lowest earth ... if any one of them falls down, the rest would fall down, one upon the other, to the limits of the lowest earth. And every House has its Heavenly or earthly worshippers, like the Ka'ba.***[1]

This correlation between the Heavenly Ka'bas and the terrestrial one is discussed by al-Ḥalabī, the medieval historian, who says that the first Ka'ba that was built on earth was a prototype of the Heavenly *Bayt al-Ma'mūr* (the House Visited, i.e., by the Angels) located in the seventh Heaven. The *ḥadīth* mentioned above explains that this *Bayt al-Ma'mūr* is the counterpart of the earthly Ka'ba. At one time, al-Ḥalabī says, in the spot now taken by the Ka'ba there was a tent-like domical cupola of red hyacinth (*yāqūta* literally meaning ruby) that had been lowered from Heaven[2]. On the other hand, he says that there exists another description of this primeval building as resting on "four pillars of emerald" and crowned with a "hyacinth"[3]. This would then make it a replica of the *Bayt al-Ma'mūr* described by Al-Mas'ūdī as a "*golden cupola resting on four pillars*"[4].

The Throne (which is the fifteenth Ka'ba as well) on which God the Almighty sits above the seventh Heaven, is said to resemble this description given by al-Mas'ūdī.

---

[1] This is an authentic *ḥadīth* cited in Shaykh Hāfidh Ibn Aḥmed Ḥakamī, Mi'rāj al-Qubūl, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, n.d, vol.2, p.73.

[2] 'Alī Ibn Burhān al-Dīn al-Ḥalabī, al-Sīrah al-Ḥalabiyyah, Cairo, 1329 A.H., vol.1, p.165. On the other hand, Ibn Abī Ḥātem and Abū al-Shaykh, on the authority of Sa'īd al-Ṭā'ī, cite this tradition: "*the Throne is a red hyacinth.*" In all cases the use of words such as "hyacinth", or rubies, ...etc. should not be taken for their earthly limited meaning for they belong to the domain of the Divine. Within our human capacities and limits we cannot have the knowledge to understand what they signify.

[3] ibid., vol. 1, p.199.

[4] Al-Mas'ūdī, Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Mulūk, ed. Barbier de Maynard and Pavet de Courteille, Paris, 1861-79, vol.1, p.269.

According to a tradition narrated by Abū al-Shaykh who quotes Ḥammād as saying: "*God created the Throne from a green emerald; and he added four pillars of red sapphire...*"[1] Thus, both the Primordial House of Adam and its celestial model, embody in different modalities the Ka'ba's quadrangular pattern and the navel becomes properly the place where the order of nature is regulated.

Consequently, "*when people watered the navel of the earth, it meant that nature had to do the same.*"[2] In this context a statement like the following, found in Qazwīnī's (d. 1283) "Cosmography" in which the significance of rainfall at Makkah for the rest of the World is discussed: "*When rain beats one of the sides of the Ka'ba, fertility will be during the year on that side; when it beats all sides, fertility will reign on all sides.*"[3]

Therefore, the cosmological significance of the centre to the medieval Muslims is manifested by a belief in a hierarchy of centres, or Ka'bas arranged vertically on top of one another on an axis followed by seven earthly Ka'bas linked to that in Makkah. Horizontally on the earth, there are other centres that vary in their importance: first is the Ka'ba in Makkah, followed by the Mosque of the Prophet in Madina, and the Mosque of al-Aqṣa in Jerusalem, which was the first *qibla* of the Muslims and where the *Mi'rāj* (Ascent) took place. After these three centres which are set apart from all other places in the Qur'ān come tombs of revered *awliyā'*[4], members of the family of the Prophet (*Ahl al-Bayt*), and his *Ṣaḥāba* (Companions). Geographically, there are significant locations which are qualitatively different than others such as cities (Cairo and Baghdad), and mountains (Jabal Abū Qubays in Makkah - mentioned above - which is said to have been the site nearest to God, and Mount Sinai, where God spoke to Moses). Subordinate to these are mosques on earth and palaces of Caliphs and sulṭāns.[5] (Fig. 7.2) These points will be discussed below in more detail in section 7.3.1.

---

[1] A *ḥadīth* quoted by al-Suyūṭī (15th C.), trans. by A. Heinen, Islamic Cosmology: A Study of As-Suyūṭī's *al-Hay'a as-sanīya fī al-Hay'a as-sunniyya* with critical edition, translation, and commentary, Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden, Beirut, 1982, p.133.

[2] Wensinck, quoted in op cit. Dunning S. Wilson, 1976, p.34. We will deal with this point below.

[3] Qazwīnī, Cosmography, ed. F. Wustenfeld, Gottingen, 1848-9, vol.2, p.77.

[4] Many such examples in Mamlūk Cairo and in Iran and Morocco.

[5] These points will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

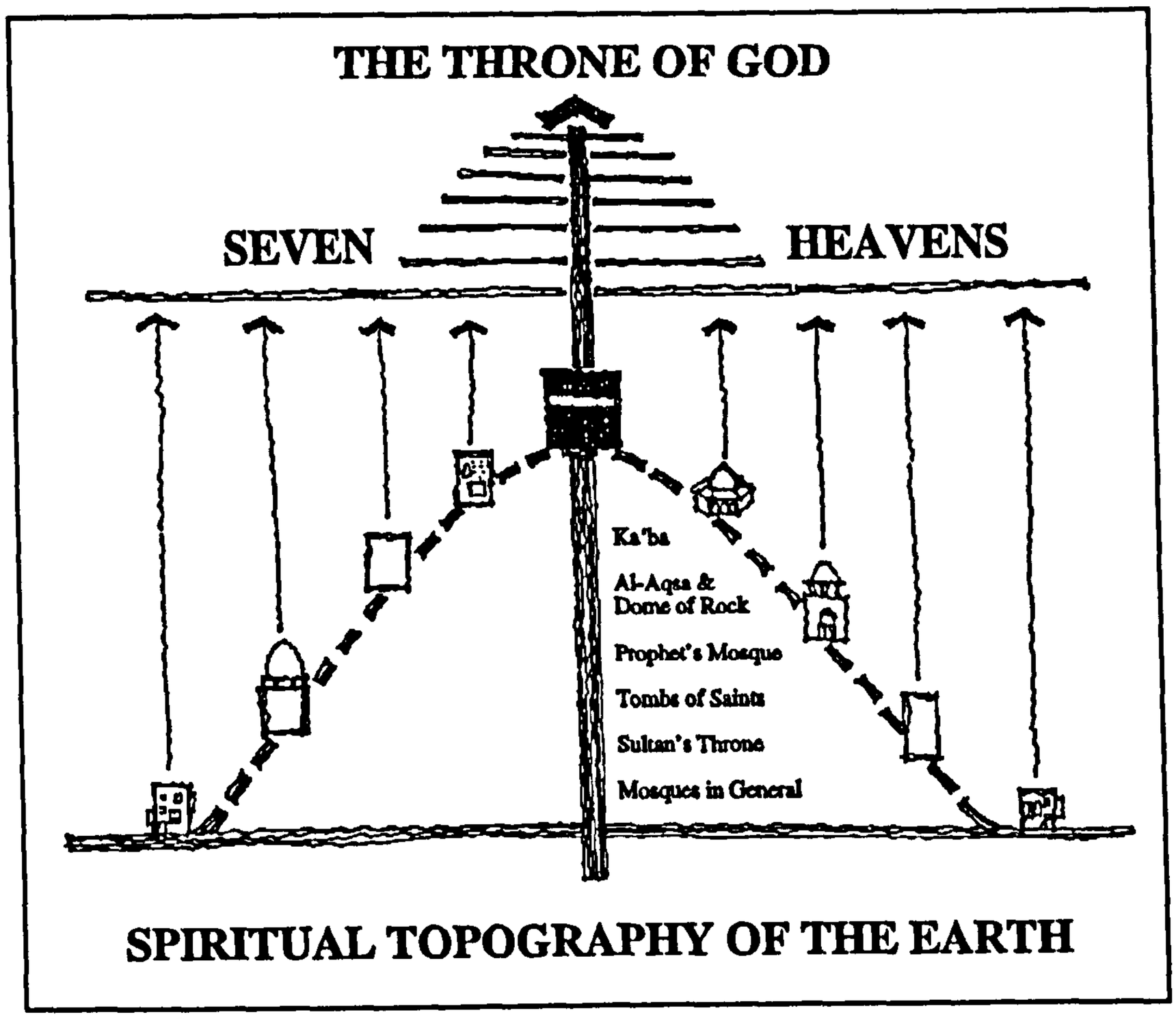



**Figure 7.2** The hierarchy of sub-centres in relation to the Centre (the Ka'ba) and the vertical axis.

### 7.2.2 THE VERTICAL AXIS (COSMIC AXIS)

*Allah it is who raised up the heaven without visible supports, then mounted the Throne...*[1]

We have found that the vertical axis is expressed by an imaginary line which joins a lower centre to a higher one. In Islam the transcendent vertical axis joins the terrestrial earth upwards to the Heavens and the sub-terrestrial earths downwards. We have also seen that God created seven Heavens and earths[2], each of them has a centre (a Ka'ba) and these centres are aligned vertically on an axis one above the other so that if all of them fell they would fall on top of each other.

---

[1] Qur'ān: 8/2.

[2] God says in the Qur'ān: "*It is God Who created the seven Heavens and of earths their like (i.e., seven as well).*" A *ḥadīth* cited in op cit. al-Suyūtī (15th C.), trans. by Heinen, 1982, p.139 confirms this: "*Ibn Abī Ḥātim and Abū al-Shaykh quote Ka'b al-Aḥbār as stating: "Verily, God created seven Heavens, and of earths the like of them ...*"

*Ḥadīths* on the number of Heavens and earths, their divisions, and distances from one another are explicitly cited in medieval treatises on cosmology (*'ilm al-hay'ah*).

> ***Ibn Rahuya in "Musnad", Abū al-Shaykh and al-Bazzār, on the basis of a sound chain of transmission that goes back to Abū Darr, report that God's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) presented the following teaching: "The interval between Heaven and earth is the distance of 500 years.[1] The diameter of every Heaven is also as much, 500 years. And the interval between this Heaven and the one after it is also as big as 500 years. Thus up to the seventh Heaven; and with the earths it is similar. And the distance between the seventh Heaven and the Throne corresponds to all that."[2]***

According to the following two *ḥadīths* we have evidence that the Throne is above the *Kursī* (Seat of the Throne), which is above the Heavens and that the Heavens are domical in shape:

> ***Ibn Abī Ḥātim quotes the following hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) from Jubayr Ibn Mat'am: "God is seated on His Throne, His Throne stands on His Heavens, and His Heavens are on His earth like this! And he indicated with his finger the likeness of a dome."[3]***

> ***Ibn Garīr, on the authority of al-Ḍaḥḥāk, reports that al-Ḥassan (may God be pleased with him) used to say: "The Footstool is (that part) of the Throne that is between the Throne and the seventh Heaven."[4]***

On the other hand, underneath the seventh earth is a Rock which is seen as the sacrum and foundation of the whole universe. It is that Rock on which the foundation of the First House was built by Adam and rebuilt by Abraham. When Gabriel had struck his wing

---

[1] In medieval times, distances were measured in days of travel (by camel), hence, the use of years.

[2] ibid., p.138.

[3] ibid., p.141.

[4] ibid., p.133.

on the earth, he had created a firmness (*uss thābit*) in the seventh earth - as we saw earlier in section 7.2.1.

> ***'Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Ḥātim quote Sufyān al-Ṯawrī as saying: "There is a rock under the earths. We have been told that it is that rock from which the greenness[1] of the sky originates."[2]***

According to this *ḥadīth*, this Rock reflects its qualities throughout the universe by its position in the lowest part of the vertical axis. The "greenness"[3] of the sky that is reflected on the terrestrial sky is amongst those qualities. This is a very important fact supporting the argument to this present point: that Higher Realities - as well as Lower ones, meaning the sub-terrestrial - are all reflective on one another. As God tells us that Angels circumambulate the Ka'bas of the Heavens in the same manner as humans do on earth, so does the Rock in the seventh earth reflect its qualities on the earth we live upon. In the following section, we will also see that the Angels (the Bearers of the Throne) have their feet on this Rock and their heads below the Throne, thus, providing a further vertical link between the earths and the Heavens.

Furthermore, Ibn Kathīr who wrote an exegesis (*tafsīr*) of the Qur'ān in Mamlūk times says that, "*in the centre of this Rock there is a spring of water, called Life (al-Ḥayāh), whose water renders alive whatever it reaches.*"[4] The green colour is directly related to the legendary Qur'ānic figure of al-Khiḍr (literally "the green") who attained direct knowledge from God according to the Qur'ānic verse "...*We had given mercy from Us, and had taught him knowledge from Our presence.*"[5] The Ṣūfīs speak of the Khiḍr as a *walī* who has attained the source of life and has drunk from the water of immortality (from that of the Rock), and

---

[1] Ibn Manḍhūr mentions that *al-khuḍrah* (greenness) is that of the water when it is very pure, and to the sky as well. See op cit. Ibn Manḍhūr, n.d., Pp. 847-849. There is a *ḥadīth* of the Prophet narrated in al-Bukhārī which describes people who sail the "Green Sea" (... *yarkabūna hādha al-baḥr al-akhḍar* ...) See *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhāri*, Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Ḥadīthah, Riyadh, 1984, 2nd edition, vol.4, p.15.

[2] op cit. al-Suyūṭī (15th C.), trans. by A. Heinen, 1982, p.142.

[3] The Prophet referred to the shade from the sky in a *ḥadīth* as the shade of the green (*aḍhallat al-khaḍrā'*). Narrated by al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ: Sunan al-Tirmiḍhī 209-297 A.H.*, Maktabat Maiba'at Muṣtafa al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlādahu, Cairo, second edition, 1975, vol.5, p.669.

[4] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aḍhīm*, Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 1983, vol.3, p.93.

[5] Qur'ān: 18/66.

knows the Truth (through direct knowledge) and is consequently, the "Eternal Youth"[1]. One of Ibn Mandhūr's definitions for *akhḍar* (green) is "youthful".[2] The relation between al-Khiḍr and the Rock is revealed by their relation to the sacrum - the foundation of the cosmos.

To sum up the above findings, we can deduce that the Islamic cosmological vertically aligned model would start with the Creator at the summit of the vertical axis, followed by the Throne, the Seat, the footstool, the seven Heavens, the terrestrial earth, the six other earths, then the Rock as the bottom-most part of that axis. This transcendent vertical axis intersects each of the seven Heavens and the seven earths at its centre; in the case of the first earth (the one we live on) the point of intersection is in Makkah at the Ka'ba. (Fig. 7.3)

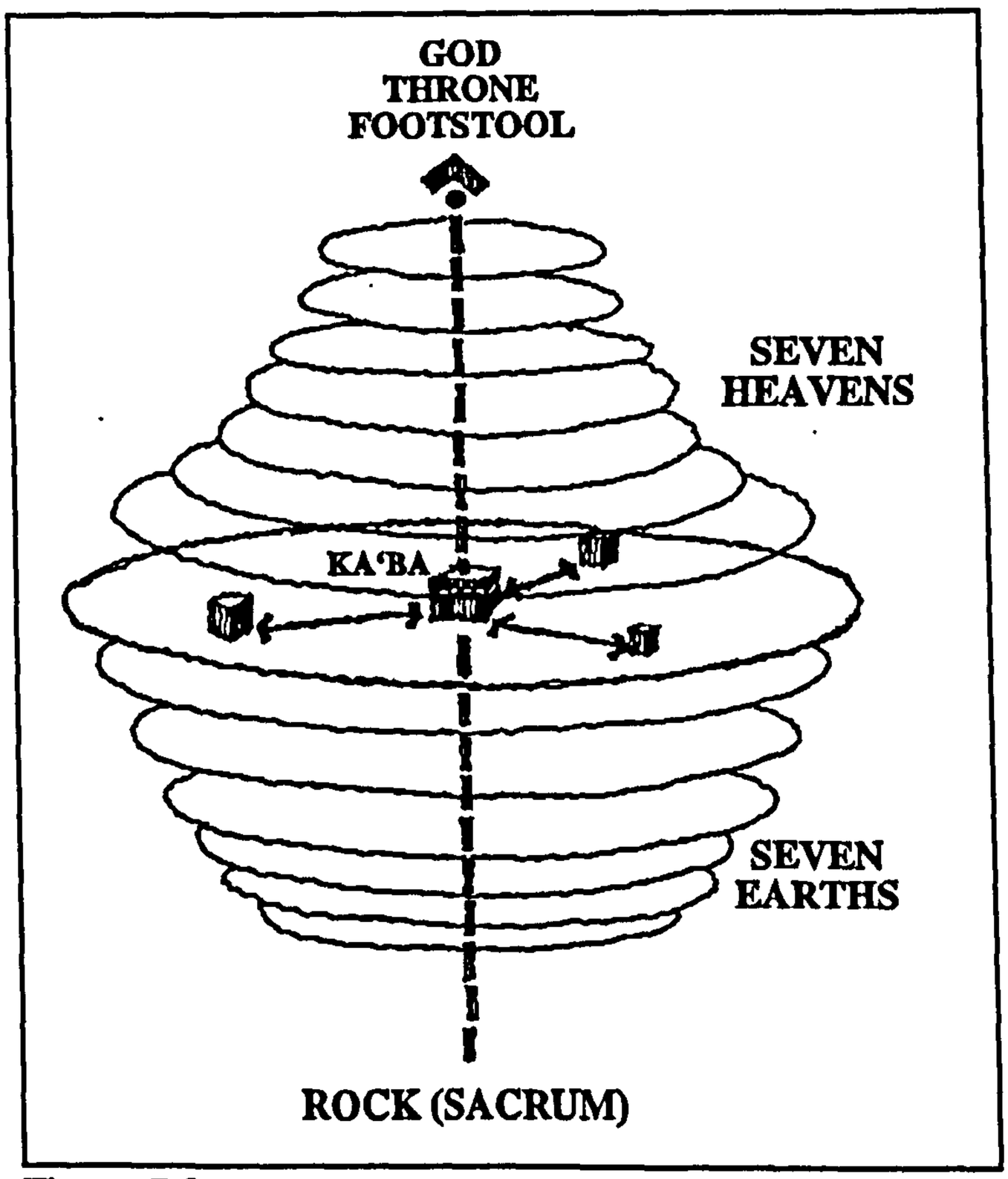



**Figure 7.3** The vertical axis passing through the cosmos intersecting each earth and heaven at its centre. The transcendent vertical axis starts from the rock and culminates at God.

---

[1] Henry Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī, trans. Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series XCI, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1969, p.56.

[2] op cit. Ibn Mandhūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, n.d., p. 847.

A slight problem arises at this stage of the discussion: if Makkah is the centre of the earth and the specific position of the Ka'ba is vertically aligned to the other Heavenly and earthly Ka'bas, then why did God choose to take the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) from Jerusalem on his Night Journey (*Mi'rāj*)? Would it not have been more direct had it been from Makkah, at the Ka'ba itself? There is only one answer to this question (which also resolves similar problems as to the presence of the many "sub-centres" on the earth mentioned in section 7.2.1.): the centre can be anywhere. The

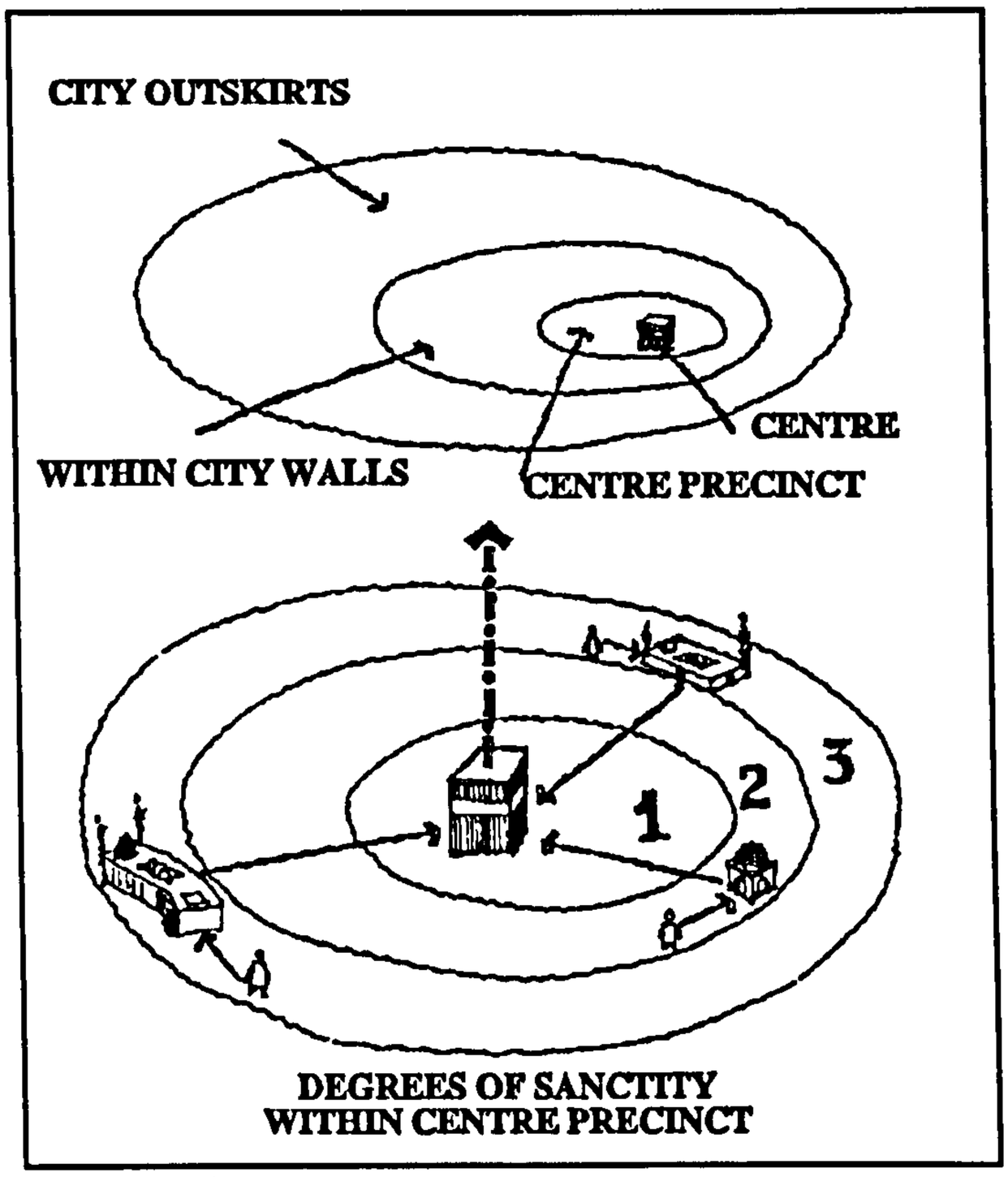



**Figure 7.4** Horizontal degrees of sanctity in an Islamic city: 1, 2, & 3 represent degrees of sanctity due to the proximity of the centre.

confusion between the one ritual centre as opposed to the numerous metaphysical centres can be resolved by understanding that on the ritualistic level the centre is one (the Ka'ba), but metaphysically, the one centre and the one vertical axis can be established anywhere. This explains why al-Ya'qūbī on speaking of the city of Baghdad[1], refers to it as the centre of the earth[2]. Other centres in the Muslim world are: the Mosque of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in Madina, as well as religious buildings to which mausoleums of revered saints are attached. (Fig. 7.4)

As for mosques, they are considered to be centres as they are the hearts of the traditional Islamic cities. The mosque, is the place where man and God communicate, where one is directly connected to Heaven on an individual basis. Therefore, we can say that the vertical axis is that "line of communication" between Heaven and earth, and the thread of communication between the Divine and human levels of existence.

---

[1] Al-Ya'qūbī, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1967, p.233.

[2] In its centre was built a towering 80 cubit high dome *qubbah khaḍrā'* - which will be discussed in detail in chapter 7.3.1.1 - reflecting the heavenly dome or celestial sphere.

### 7.2.3 HORIZONTAL ORIENTATION (THE *QIBLA*)

***We have seen the turning of your face toward Heaven (for guidance O Mohammad). And now We will make you turn toward a qibla which shall please you. So turn your face toward the Sanctified Mosque, and ye (O Muslims), wheresoever you may be, turn your faces toward it.***[1]

There is obviously a ritual orientation in the world of Islam. We have seen that this context of a Centre or an Origin is an essential feature in Islam. To be valid, prayers have to be performed facing the *qibla*, the animal to be slaughtered stands with its head towards the *qibla* as well, the dead are buried with their heads towards Makkah, a Muslim sleeps on his right side facing the *qibla*. On the other hand urinating or defecating should be done while he is not facing the *qibla*[2]. In medieval times, travellers carried an astrolabe to find the *qibla* with the help of the stars; that direction which is necessary for all rituals in Islam is the same as that which points, on the horizontal plane, towards the Centre of the world or the naval of the earth.

To show the extent of the importance of orientation to the centre and not towards any other celestial body, Islam emphasizes in several respects the un-importance of the sun. Primarily, sunrise, zenithal position and sunset are amongst the prohibited prayer times. God says in the Qur'ān: "*Adore not the sun nor the moon; but adore Allah Who created them, if it is in truth Him who ye worship.*"[3] The reason for the prohibition is to avoid the coincidence between praying and these three nodal positions so that those whose *qibla* is aligned to the East or West or who are standing directly below the sun would not appear as though they were worshipping it.

The symbolism of orientation towards the *qibla* is based on the axial symbolism of the Ka'ba, seen as an earthly replica of the celestial archetypes that lie directly above it - it is the symbol of the Throne and the Heavenly Ka'bas in the domain of the earth. According

---

[1] Qur'ān: 2/144.

[2] The following two *ḥadīths* are cited in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: "*Do not face the qibla when you defecate or urinate, but face east or west,*" and "*If you want to defecate, then do not face the qibla or turn your back to it, but face the east or west.*"

[3] Qur'ān: 41/37.

to Ṡūfī thought, the *qibla* is not only related to the physical Ka'ba but has several layers of understanding related to it. In Ibn 'Arabī's treatise the *Risālet al-Aḥādiyyah*, he claims that the *qibla* is fivefold: the first is the *miḥrāb* of a mosque, the second is the Ka'ba, the third is the Frequented House (*al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr*), the fourth is the Throne, and the fifth is the Footstool. The *miḥrāb* is the *qibla* of the soul, the Ka'ba is the *qibla* of intention, the Frequented House is the *qibla* of understanding, the Throne is the *qibla* of the heart, and the Footstool is the *qibla* of the intellect.[1]

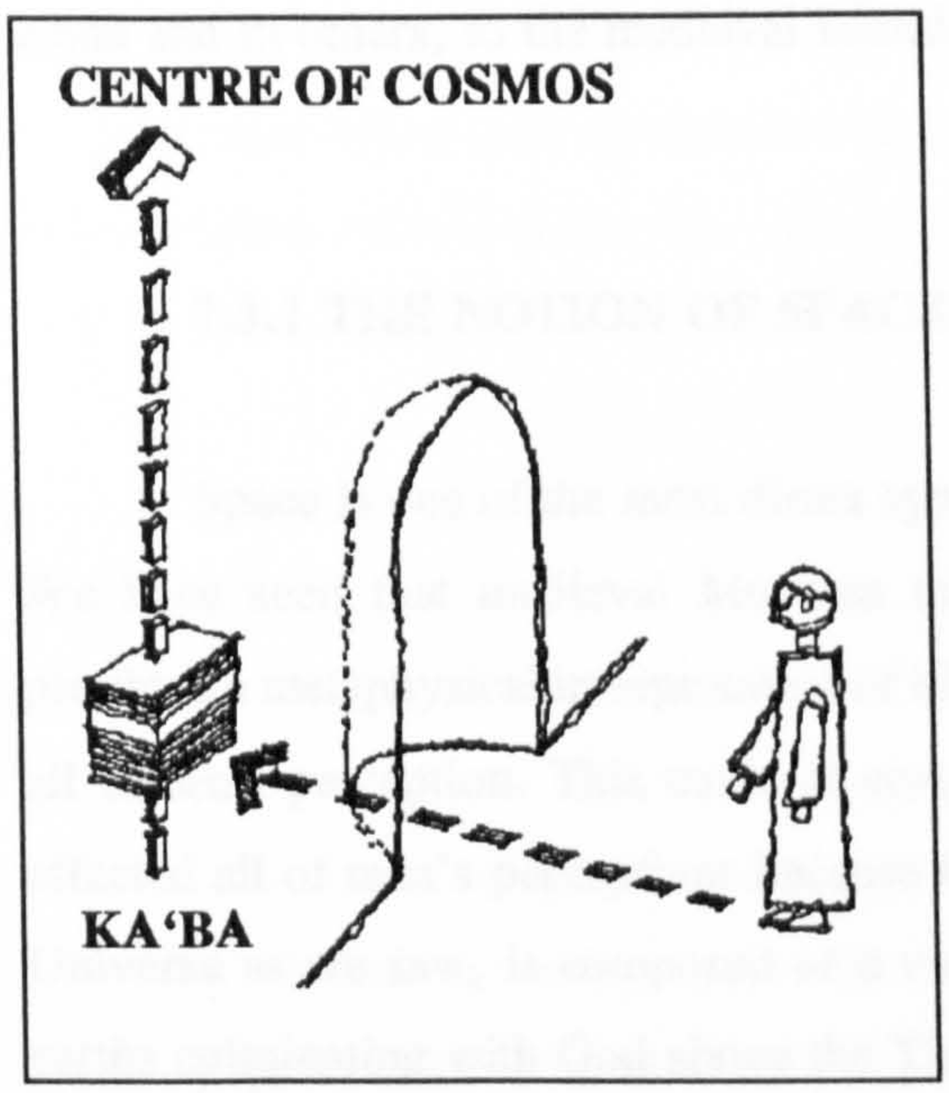



**Figure 7.5** The three principles of Islam: orientation to the centre to attain the vertical axis are all implicit in prayer.

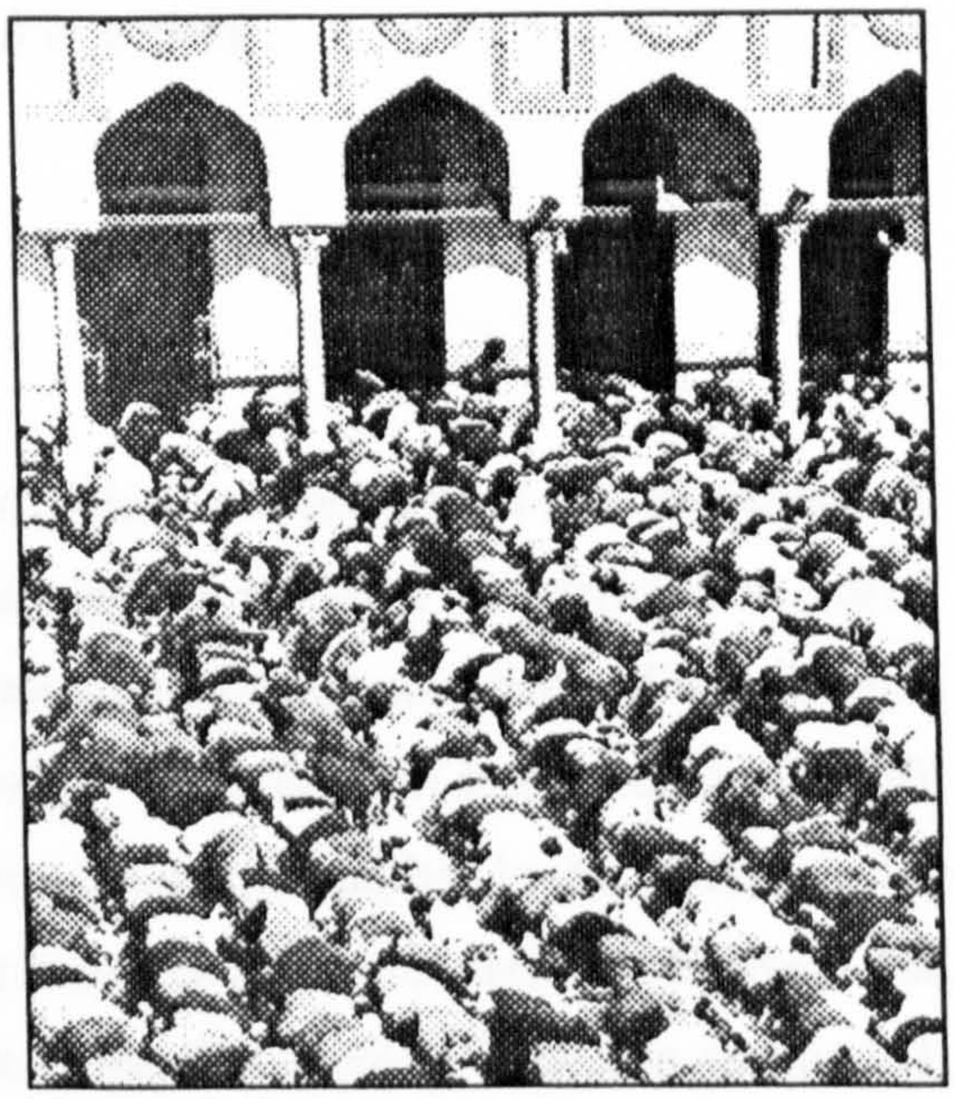


**Figure 7.6** Congregational attainment of the Ka'ba (earthly centre) connects the Muslims to the Source (Cosmic Centre).

That is to say that to orient anyone or anything towards the *qibla*, means to establish a relation with the centre of the earth, which in turn relates to the centres of the higher levels of existence which are attached to the centre of the cosmos by means of the vertical transcendent axis. (Fig. 7.5) This is in fact what happens in prayer: the worshipper orients him/herself to the *qibla* which is the centre, which is in turn connected to the vertical axis. By this way the Ṡūfīs believe that the soul of the worshipper can be seen to be in a "*mi'rāj*" to the Heavens and the Throne of God whenever in prayer. (Fig. 7.6) Thus, orientation is an act of integration with the Creator through the implicitness of the horizontal and vertical movements - earthly centre to cosmic centre.

---

[1] Ibn 'Arabī, *Inshā' al-Dawā'ir wal-Jadāwil*, Manuscript number 123, vol.1, Asad National Library, Damascus, p.18. We will see how this manifold system of layers of understanding of the *qibla* will be reflected in the form of the Mamlūk *miḥrābs*.

## 7.3. NOTIONS OF SPACE, SHAPE, SURFACE, AND COLOUR

This section will deal with four notions which contribute to the process of "form-giving" in traditional Islamic architecture. These are: space, shape, surface, and colour. It should be recalled that there is no distinctive dividing line which severs Mamlūk architecture from the forum of other medieval Islamic architectures; this is obvious from the fact that the traditional Mamlūk period is a period of transformation within this forum. It follows that the points that will be discussed in this section will apply in some cases to the Mamlūk world alone and in others, to the medieval Islamic world in general.

### 7.3.1 THE NOTION OF SPACE

Space is one of the most direct symbols of Being, it is primordial and all-pervading. We have seen that medieval Muslims tended towards a mode of comprehension which provided a metaphysical interpretation of life, an interpretation that preceded and went beyond all external perception. This mode of comprehension, involving Ṡūfī interpretation (*ta'wīl*), affected all of man's perceptions because it began by situating him/her in the Universe. The Universe as we saw, is composed of a vertically bound and parallel series of Heavens and earths culminating with God above the Throne and Seat (Footstool). As seen in section 7.1, part of the responsibility that a truthful craftsman (*ṡāni'*) had, was to reflect the Divine Form-Giver by: first contemplating His Creation (i.e., Nature), then to abstract from it and finally, to emulate that Creation in his art and architecture. That is to say that his buildings - especially the sacred ones - were ultimately seen to "lie between Heaven and earth". We have also seen that these sacred buildings were sacred sub-centres, horizontally connected to the Ka'ba which in turn is vertically connected to the Heavens. It follows that a religious Islamic building considered to be a sub-centre, will tend to emulate the Centre in its spaces; since the "highest" terrestrial Centre (the Ka'ba) is inaccessible except to those who travel to it. A very important point should be made here: if the architectural space itself does not conform with the religious tradition in the design, then no superficial decoration can "naturalize" it *in* the religion. This point by no means deflates the value and significance of decorative elements; as all that goes into the design, like the decoration, texture, materials, acoustics, ... etc., has a symbolic value in tradition as it embraces architecture in its totality with all the elements that together make a religious building.

In an Islamic sacred building that is ordered by using these three principles mentioned above of centre, vertical axis, and *qibla* orientation, man would be able to know where he is. It is only with reference to the Heavens that the apparent indefiniteness of space can be given direction. We shall find out that space acquires its qualitative aspect in this way.

Beyond the Divinely chosen centres, the choice of direction and orientation was directly involved with giving a quality of sacredness to an otherwise "profane" space; but then, in Islam, the whole earth is sacred and is all a potential place to seek God. Sacred space, would then be a defined, qualified, ordered, and significant space bounded physically by limitations which bear quantitative and qualitative parallels with cosmic paradigms[1]. But since in Islam there is no profane, the case is that of degrees of sanctity rather than of type.[2] The question therefore arises: What makes a place more sacred than another?

In Islam, specific places can be consecrated by rituals. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) says in a well-known *ḥadīth* transmitted by Anas Ibn Mālik, and quoted by al-Ghazzālī:

> ***There is no single site, whereupon God is remembered by a prayer (ṣalāh) or by an invocation (dhikr), that does not take pride in this act and consequently becomes superior [higher in rank] to all sites that surround it, and also becomes delighted by the invocation of God (most transcendent) down to its extremity in the seventh earth.***[3]

This idea of the sacredness of certain places is frequently referred to in the Qur'ān on special incidents such as that time when God addresses Moses and tells him: "*Lo! I, even I, am thy Lord. So take off thy shoes, for lo! Thou art in the holy valley of Tuwa.*"[4] In another verse of the Qur'ān, in relation to the *Mi'rāj* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), God says that He has carried him by night from Makkah to Jerusalem, "*the*

---

[1] We will see in the coming section that this ordered sacred space is due to the application of sacred geometry which in turn bears qualitative and quantitative dimensions.

[2] The whole matter that makes the Ka'ba for example, different than the Central Mosque of Edinburgh is the degree of sanctity attributed to it. This can be applied on basically any Islamic building ranging from mausoleum to house and from *sūq* to mosque.

[3] op cit. al-Ghazzālī, 1983(a), vol.1, p.152.

[4] Qur'ān: 20/12.

*neighbourhood whereof We have blessed..."*[1] Also, in another verse of the Qur'ān, in the *sūra* of the Fig, God swears by the "fig" and the "olive", by "Mount Sinai" and by that "Land which is made safe".[2] The twelfth-century historian Ibn 'Asākir, applying *ta'wīl*, explains that the "fig" is the Mosque of Damascus, the "olive", the Aqṣa Mosque of Jerusalem, and "Mount Sinai" as the place where God spoke to Moses, and finally the "Land made safe" as Makkah.

The matter of sacred sites should not be looked at narrow-mindedly to encompass such obvious sacred buildings and sites as those mentioned above, for there are entire cities that have been designed to be sacred places. Mircea Eliade says that in general, sacred places are not chosen by man, but are merely discovered by him by being "revealed" to him[3]. For example, the site of the Dome of the Rock has an imprint of the Prophet's foot as a sign left for man to discover it. According to al-Maqrīzī, the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn in Cairo was said to be a blessed site where prayers were always heard.[4]

Aleppo, was apparently visited frequently by Abraham, a "station" (*maqām*) at the highest point of the Citadel had been his, and thus, a mosque had grown around this site. Another *maqām* at the bottom of the Citadel was found to exist - belonging to him as well - which is believed to have been a place where he frequently sat upon and which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had sacrificed on.[5] In any case a church was built on this site which was later changed into a mosque in 1023-1079 A.D. The upper *maqām*'s sacredness was increased after the head of Yaḥya Ibn Zakariyya (John the Baptist) was buried there after having been discovered in Ba'albek in 1043-44 A.D. The same can be said about the head of al-Ḥusayn after his martyrdom which was brought from Iraq to Cairo to be buried. In this way, the city would acquire whatever blessings that was attached to the head, and consequently to the person as a whole.

---

[1] Qur'ān: 17/1.

[2] Qur'ān: 95/1-3.

[3] Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, Trans. by R. Sheed, New American Library, New York, 1974, p.369.

[4] Taqiyy al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *al-Mawā'iḍh wal-I'tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wal-Āthār*, Cairo Reprint, 1270 A.H., vol.1, p.125, & vol.2, p.265.

[5] J. Sauvaget, Materiaux pour Servir a l'Histoire de la Ville d'Alep, Beirut, 1933-50, vol.I, Pp. 7, 8, 74.

Damascus on the other hand had links with one of the named Prophets in the Qur'ān, Prophet Hūd, who contributed to its development as well as Adam. According to reliable authority, the latter was a frequent visitor of a place now called Bayt Anāt, and Eve at Bayt Liḥya, whereas Abel settled in Muqra and Cain in Qanīna - all in the Damascus area. The murder of Abel occurred on Mount Qaśiyūn in the heart of present day Damascus. Other sources explain that Noah's house before the flood was located in what was to become the larger precinct of Damascus. Furthermore, the city of Damascus is deeply woven into eschatology as it is the place of the return of Jesus, meaning his second coming - it is believed that it will be precisely from the North-Eastern minaret (the minaret of Christ) of the Umayyad Mosque.

We have already discussed the case of Cairo in Chapter Three, and explained that newly converted Muslims have always sought an Islamic genealogy related to their cities, so to speak, to convince themselves that their origins were truly Islamic or perhaps that the origin of their cities' sanctuaries had been connected with some Muslim figure - preferably Prophets who are acknowledged in Islam.

In other cases, sites were chosen on certain dates and times according to astrological determinations - hence, becoming qualitatively distinct. Baghdad, for instance, was selected on a particular date when the ascendent zodiacal sign was Leo[1], and al-Maqrīzī tells us that the city of Cairo was founded and its wall foundations were dug up according to a date that was chosen by the astrologers. He says that all the workers were ordered to start their work simultaneously upon hearing the ringing of the bells that were erected throughout the building site; the signal was given when the astrologers saw the ascent of the stellar reference. In the founding of other cities that have no reference to a particular sacred place or moment, such as Baśra and Kūfah, there, prayers were offered on the site to make it sacred. Ibn al-Āthir describes what happened on these two occasions and says that the rulers had liked these sites and consequently stayed there, "*prayed there and asked God to make it a place of firmness.*"[2]

How then is such a sacred space set out with boundaries, so that it is made into a place in which sacredness is respected and consequently specific conduct followed? Going

---

[1] According to evidence acquired by Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar who say that the site was chosen on the 1st of August, 762 under the sign Leo.

[2] Ibn al-Āthir, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, Dār Shādir, Beirut, 1982, vol.2, p.528.

back to the original sources, we find that the process by which the boundaries of the mosques of Baśra and Kūfah were laid out has been well documented by Ibn al-Āthir. From the centre of what was planned to be their courtyards, an archer shot four arrows towards the four directions. The space thus determined was marked out and a ditch dug. What lay within the ditch was the sacred space of the mosque while that which lay outside these boundaries became the less sacred residential areas and market.[1]

In relation to the above account, a thirteenth-century Śūfī called 'Abd al-Salām al-Maqdīsī dealt in a short treatise with a very interesting analogy between the body and a prosperous kingdom. He first describes the founding of a centre, that constant reminder of Unity. He says that the creation of Adam was constructed in the likeness of a prosperous city, which contained numerous perfectly designed buildings (thus demonstrating the power of "The Builder"). By this, he says, God made it evident that the *Muṣawwir* is One. In its centre, God built a palace which He called the "Heart" being the House of the Lord. He made the entire city circular around this centre, and set the order of everything to rotate around its centre.[2] This analogy is based on the Prophetic *ḥadīth* which says that: "*In the body there is a piece of flesh called "muḍghah", the goodness of which makes the body good, and the corruption of which makes the body corrupt [this piece of flesh is the heart].*"[3] It is interesting to examine in the light of this the circular city of al-Manśūr (Baghdad), which was laid out in concentric circles with the palace and mosque at its centre - the heart. These were immediately surrounded by vast gardens and finally with equally divided sectors, each of which was a neighbourhood which had equal distances from the centre. (Fig. 7.7)

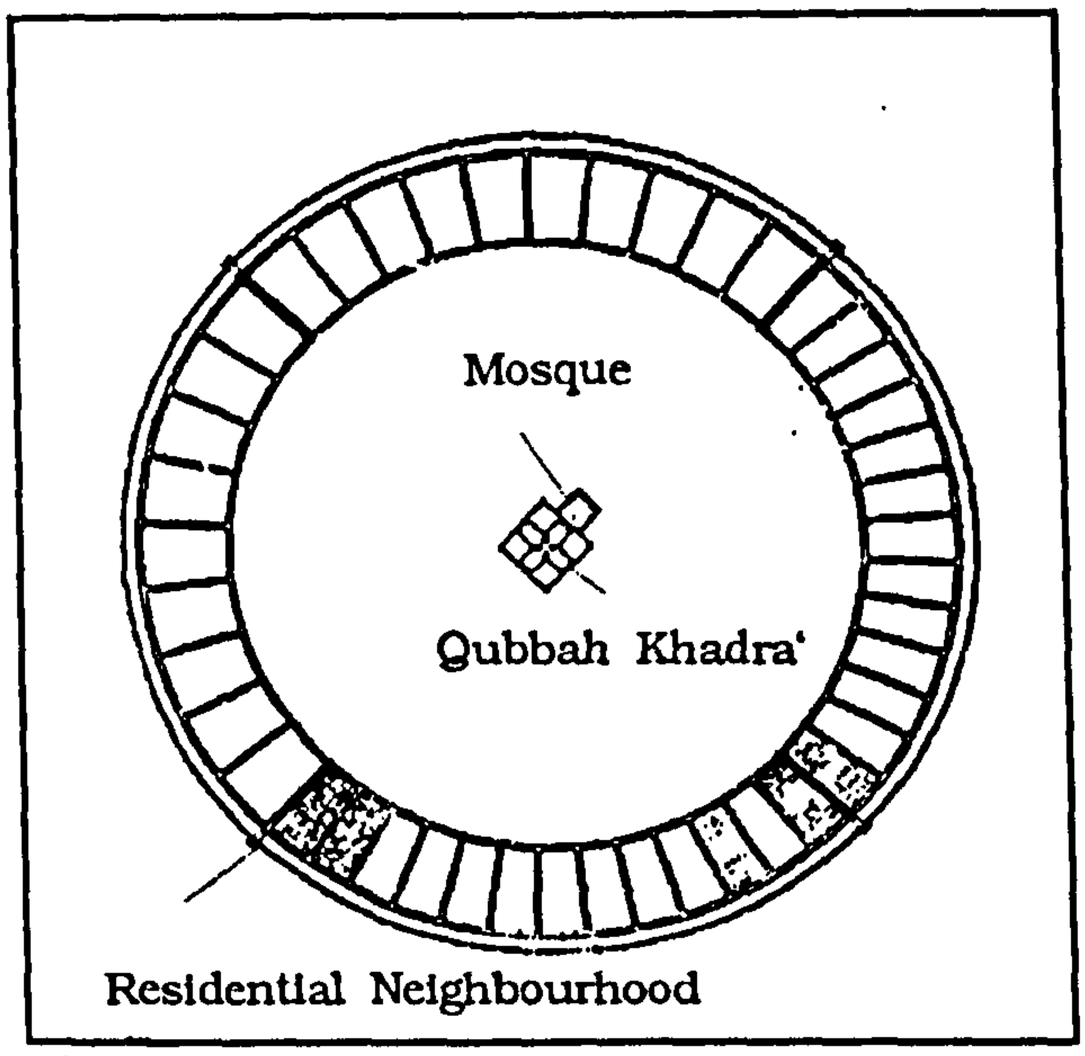



**Figure 7.7** The round city of al-Mansūr with the palace and mosque at the centre. (After Burckhardt, 1976(a))

[1] ibid., vol.2, p.529.

[2] 'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-Salām Al-Maqdīsī, *Risālet Tashbīh al-Insān bi-Mamlakah Kāmilat al-Bunyān*, Manuscript number 1442, Asad National Library, Damascus, folio 42.

[3] ibid., folio 42.

On the other hand, the blessing of an important saint's or Prophet's tomb would make for a certain sacralization of the town that was privileged to harbour the remains. Reflections on the sanctity of a locality suggest that there are three types of context in which a place may represent different levels of religious significance: 1) Sanctity stemming from the *baraka*, or blessing, of a prophetic tomb or the shrine of a saint, from the presence in a locality a number of descendants of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) or of another personage of a high religious rank, or else, combined with this distinction, from the spiritual effect of accumulated religious learning. 2) Such sanctity may be overlaid by sanctity resulting from the part which the locality is called upon to play in salvation. 3) On an even higher level, its sanctity may derive from the role assigned to the locality cosmologically.

The following *ḥadīths* that go back to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) are narrated by al-Iskāfī, the famous traditionist (d. 963), who was one of the teachers of the famous *ḥadīth* compiler al-Dārāquṭnī (d. 995). These *ḥadīths* are related to the alternative pilgrimage to the tomb of Abraham in Hebron.

***The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Whoever cannot make pilgrimage unto me (i.e. my tomb in Madina), let him make pilgrimage unto the tomb of Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (the friend of God)."[1]***

***"Verily a visit to the tomb of Ibrāhīm, and prayer there, is a pilgrimage (to Makkah) for the poor and (the cause of) an elevated rank for the wealthy."[2]***

***"Petitions there (at Abraham's tomb) are granted, and no one makes entreaty through him to Allah about any matter without His unfailing granting the request sooner or later."[3]***

Although these *ḥadīths* show that pilgrimage to the tomb of Abraham was commendable and not prohibited, it was not until the tomb of the Prophet with the graves of

---

[1] Al-Iskāfī, quoted and translated in C.D. Matthews, Journal of Palestine Oriental Society, XVII, 1937, p.118. Not recognized by the *'ulamā'*.

[2] ibid., p.118. Not recognized by the *'ulamā'*.

[3] ibid., p.119. Not recognized by the *'ulamā'*.

his first two successors, the Caliphs Abū Bakr and 'Omar, by its side, became incorporated inside the centre of his Mosque at Madina that the extreme sanctification and attraction of people to mausolea became common.[1] But even before that, the sanctity of the Prophet's Mosque was set by God above other places, as prayer in it is more efficacious than anywhere else except for Makkah.[2] It may be observed that in general, the assignment of relative ratings of efficacy to prayer in different localities is a common method of ranking towns in terms of their holiness and it is by no means only sacred cities in the narrow sense of the word which boast of a Prophetic dictum assigning special value to devotions performed within their confines.[3] By extension from the second of these, many a mosque has been built round the tomb of a saint as we have seen in the case of medieval Cairo. To visit such a shrine (*ziyāra*)[4] is to partake, if only remotely, of the wisdom of all the stations that lie personified and unified there.

From this brief summary of the medieval Muslim view regarding the sanctity of space, we find that sanctity was connected to a place through the rituals that were performed in connection to its founding. On another level, the degree of sanctity of a locality could be increased through the number of Prophets or *awliyā'* (saints) buried in it - Cairo had a considerable number by the Mamlūk period (see discussion in Chapter Three). Following the same argument, a religious building would have been considered sacred through prayer itself, its degree of sacredness would be coupled by the attachment of a mausoleum to it. This last point, the connection of prayer to the sanctity of a mosque is elaborated by Martin Lings, the contemporary Ṡūfī writer, who gives an analogy between man and the mosque: the holiness of man[5] through his worship to the heart of the mosque. He goes on to explain that this heart is none other than the worshipper himself.[6]

---

[1] The visit to Madina in conjunction with that of Makkah is a recommended *Sunna* but never an obligation as the pilgrimage to Makkah.

[2] See Chapter Four.

[3] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, Dār al-Ishrāq, Beirut, 1866-73, vol.3, Pp. 136-37.

[4] See Chapter Five, section 5.2, the shrine of Zayn al-Dīn Yūsuf.

[5] According to the Ṡūfī interpretation of being created in the likeness of God. We have differentiated between the *tafsīr* (explication) of the verse in which this is mentioned and that of its Ṡūfī *ta'wīl* (interpretation). See full discussion in Chapter Four.

[6] Martin Lings, Symbol and Archetype: A Study of the Meaning of Existence, Quinta Essentia, Cambridge, 1991, p.125.

### 7.3.2 THE NOTION OF SHAPE

Space and shape are two complementary notions in the conception of any architectural form. Space is the resultant of the boundaries formed by a shape. Therefore, it is the circumstance of the encounter of space with the "boundary shapes" that determines the particular architectural expression. Creative excellence depends upon the strength of that encounter and the clarity of its expression. This is what renders each epoch its character; as for example, the distinction between Mamlūk and Ottoman architectures.

This relationship of space to shape, realizing specific physical forms, needs to be translated into mathematical and geometrical terms. We will see that in Śūfī terms, it was not the unit of measure that was important as much as the quality of the spaces that resulted from certain shapes. Every number can be interpreted into a geometrical shape which when projected in the third dimension creates a space bearing the same significance and quality of the number. Through ordering the shapes, the traditional architect achieved a hierarchy of sacred spaces. Any Islamic artefact can be seen and understood when examined and interpreted esoterically in this manner - we will see this in the discussion that will follow in Chapters Eight and Nine.

The Ikhwān al-Ṡafā' in their "*Rasā'il*" define geometry as the science dealing with measures and dimensions (*maqādīr* and *ab'ād*) in both their qualitative and quantitative dimensions.[1] Geometry, according to them, is one of the four parts that constitute the mathematical sciences: the science of number (the principle of Unity), the science of geometry (the principle of the point), the science of astronomy (the principle of the movement of the sun, stars, planets, and the arrangement of the constellations in the universe), and the science of music (the principle of proportion).

#### 7.3.2.1 Numbers

Medieval Muslims viewed all creation as an emanation from the One, and proceeded on the basis of the revelation that God shared with nature a commonality of structure and proportion that was quantifiable through mathematics. That is to say that the traditional science of numbers stood above nature as a way of comprehending Unity. The Ikhwān al-

---

[1] op cit. Ikhwān, *Rasā'il*, n.d., vol.1, p. 78.

Ṡafā', wrote that numbers are the principle of beings and the root of all sciences, and that *"Number is the spiritual image resulting in the human soul from the repetition of Unity."*[1]

The concept of number in Islam, as discussed earlier in Chapter Two, is similar to the Pythagorean system, where numbers (being qualitative as well as quantitative entities) are not identified simply with addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Al-Suyūṭī cites the following *ḥadīth* which I believe is vital to the understanding of this point on the difference between quantity and quality:

> ***Ibn Abī al-Dunya and Abū al-Shaykh mention this saying of Ibn 'Abbās: "The rain receives its nature in Paradise: So, when its nature is higher its blessings is greater, even though there may be less rain. And when its nature is lower its blessings is smaller, even though there may be plenty of rain."***[2]

The outer expression or form of a number does not exhaust its possibilities. Each contains a *bāṭin*, or an essence, which distinguishes it from another. This *bāṭin* is a projection of Unity which continuously links the number to its source. Numbers understood in the Pythagorean sense, identified with certain shapes in the sensible world, integrate those shapes through their essences into Unity.

From al-Bīrūnī, and Ikhwān al-Ṡafā', we arrive to the following qualitative meanings of numbers in Islam[3]: *One* is primordial Unity, the beginning, the Creator, the Essence, the Centre, the Indivisible, and the Principle from which multiplicity arises. *Two* is the Spirit or Intellect, it represents the balance of two poles: masculine and feminine, hot and cold, *Jalāl* and *Jamāl*, ...etc., and is the symbol of stability. *Three* is the Soul, and the triad of body, spirit, and soul which constitute a whole balanced man. It is also the three stages of understanding religion: *Islām* (Submission), *Īmān* (Belief), and *Iḥsān* (Love of God). *Four*

---

[1] The Ikhwān al Ṡafa', *Rasā'l*, vol. 1, p.25, trans. by Nasr in, An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, Belknap Press, Cambridge Mass., 1964.

[2] op cit. al-Suyūṭī (15th C.), trans. by A. Heinen, 1982, p.163.

[3] See Al-Bayrūnī, The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology, trans. R. Ramsay Wright, , Luzac and Co., London, 1934, Pp. 20-26., also see op cit. Ikhwān, *Rasā'il*, n.d., vol.1, Pp.75-85. For implications of numbers on other traditional cultures see Robert Lawlor, Sacred Geometry, Thames and Hudson, London, 1982, second edition.

is the static completion as opposed to the dynamism of the point which represents beginning and/or end. Four is also the primordial matter, and is indicated by the four cardinal points, the seasons, the rivers of Paradise and the four *Sunnī* schools of jurisprudence. Also, there are four Caliphs after the Prophet Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him). *Five*, represents a whole as the circle does. There are five pillars in Islam, five prayers, five senses, and five Divine Presences. *Six* is the body, and is represented in the physical domain by the six directions[1]. Creation was also in six days. *Seven* is the number of the universe. There are seven days in a week, seven earths, seven Heavens, seven gates of Hell, seven colours, seven Prophets[2], seven states or stations (*maqāmāt*) of the heart, and seven circumambulations of the Ka'ba. *Eight*, is the first cubic number and is the goal of the initiate - having passed through the seven Heavens and is thus the number of the attainment of the Seat and Throne of God which is supported by eight Angels (or eight rows of Angels). It also recalls the eight qualities,[3] the eight winds[4], and the eight gates of Paradise. *Nine* is the number of spheres. *Ten* is perfection.

### 7.3.2.2 Man, the Cardinal Directions, and the Units of Measure

Systems of measurement and proportioning are the first thing that one has to deal with and understand as determinants of shape and form generation. Pre-Islamic Arabs used man's figure as a reference for qualifying the directions in space. The very names of the four winds are derived from the directions of man. The Eastern wind *al-qabūl* derives from *al-qubl* (man's front) - it is also called *al-ṣaba* from *ṣaba* "to yearn", for it yearns for the Ka'ba - the Western wind *al-dabūr* derives from *al-dubr* (man's back), the name of the Northern wind *al-shamāl* derives from *al-shimāl* (man's left hand side), and the Southern wind *al-janūb* derives from *al-janb* (literally man's side, which customarily refers indirectly to his right hand side[5]).

---

[1] As will be discussed in the following section.

[2] Nūḥ (Noah), Ibrāhīm (Abraham), Isḥāq (Isaac), Ya'qūb (Jacob), Mūsā (Moses), 'Īsa (Jesus), and Mūḥammad (peace and blessings be upon them all).

[3] Cold/dry, cold/wet, hot/wet, and hot/dry.

[4] Source mentioned with the *mitn* (body) of the *ḥadīth* later in this section.

[5] Roots and meanings in op cit. Ibn Manḍhūr: Lisān al-'Arab, n.d., vol.5. It should be taken into consideration that the *Sunna* recommends that the Muslim do everything with his right hand such as eating, shaking hands,... etc., and that impure acts such as cleaning oneself after defecating or urinating with the left hand.

According to David King[1], traditional sources say that the exact directions of these above mentioned four winds are astronomically determined, and that the four sides of the Ka'ba are aligned so as to correspond to these winds. Thus the alignment of the Ka'ba corresponds to both man's directions as well as to the stellar references that determine the directions of the four winds. This alignment with man's four directions should be correlated to the account mentioned above of the shooting of the arrows in the four directions to determine the site of the mosques of the cities of Baṡrah and Kūfah. Al-Ṫabarī the famous tenth-century historian refers to these directions as the right hand side, the left hand side, the front and the back of the archer[2], while the ninth-century historian al-Baladhūrī relates them to the directions of the winds[3].

Within the co-ordinate system that man represents, the units of spatial definition became the members of the body. A basic system of six evolved[4], related to man as proportional extensions of his own anatomy. The finger (*iṡba'*), palm (*kaff*), foot (*qadam*), and cubit (*dhirā'*) developed as the fundamental units of measure. The height of man was taken as six feet, and the distance from his elbow to the tip of his fingers as one cubit or six palms, the width of a palm as four fingers, and the finger, or digit, as six grains of barley placed side by side. The foot was taken as four palms or sixteen fingers. Six, as the first mathematically complete number (1 x 2 x 3 = 6 also 1 + 2 + 3 = 6), not only expressed the proportional height of man but also represented the basic directions of motion and the surfaces of a cube *muka''ab* - from which the word Ka'ba comes. That is why the number six is considered to be the number of the body (*jism*) and the most appropriate proportional system to define or extend in space.[5]

---

[1] David King, "Astronomical Alignments in Medieval Islamic Religious Architecture", Annales of the New York Academy of Sciences, 385, 1982, Pp.303-312. King is particularly interested in examining traditional medieval sources related to astronomy and astrology, to see their relation to the Ka'ba and elements of architecture such as the *badhahanj* (wind-catcher).

[2] op cit. al-Ṫabarī, *Tārīkh*, nd., vol.1, p.191.

[3] Al-Balādhūrī cited in Shākir Muṡṫafā, *Al-Mudun fī al-Islām ḥattā al-'Aṡr al-'Uthmānī*, Dār al-Salāsil, Riyadh, 1988, vol.1, p.339.

[4] During Fatimid times in Egypt, this system had been well established and used in documents of *qudāh* (judges) in cases of *waqf* documentation. Ever since this system was known in Islamic Egypt. It is interesting to note that in the ancient Egyptian tradition the same anthropomorphic units were used as their methods of measure.

[5] See op cit. N. Ardalan & L. Bakhtiar, 1973, p.25. Also see M. Verstockt, The Genesis of Form: From Chaos to Geometry, Muller, Blond & White, Antwerp, 1982, second edition, p.89.

### 7.3.2.3 Geometry

Ṣūfīs tend to speak of two types of geometry, the "intelligible" and the "sensible". The sensible starts from the point, grows into the line, then to the plane, and finally forms the third dimension of a solid. From the intelligible point of view, all this process of form generation is based on the transcendent principles of the growth of the point as Unity. The Ikhwān say that it "*is part of the craft of al-muḥaqqiqīn (those who seek the Truth) to contemplate these dimensions (the intelligible ones) divested of bodies.*"[1] They discuss elaborately the two different sensible movements - or rather growths - of a point to line, then plane through rotation into a circle or laterally to form a rectangle or square. This is followed by the further movement to produce a sphere or cube. It is obvious through their *Rasā'il* that although they give detailed accounts of the sensible geometry the final aim is the intelligible one. They conclude that some architects (*muhandisīn*) and people in general who are interested in the sciences, suspect that these dimensions of length breadth and depth are independent in their existence for their own sake, and that this is incorrect.

> ***Only if they knew that the ultimate aim of studying mathematical sciences is the training of the students' souls to be able to abstract, through the senses, the forms of the sensible bodies, conceiving their essences by the intellectual faculty; so that when the sensible bodies disappear from being contacted by the senses these forms - which have been transmitted from the senses to the imagination, and from the imagination to the intellectual faculty to the memory - remain formed in the substance of the soul. The soul, then, when turning into its essence, will dispense with using the senses in perceiving the information. It will find the forms of all information in its substance.***[2]

This clearly denotes that the essence of any form is not its visual final shape as much as the principles on which it was based. To give an example, if a mausoleum chamber is produced out of engulfing an imaginary sphere, the viewer should feel the sphere with his soul (intuitively) rather than just perceive the walls (the outcome) engulfing the space. By this means, the viewer can be involved in the process by which the form was conceived.

---

[1] op cit. Ikhwān, *Rasā'il*, n.d., vol.1, p.80.

[2] ibid., vol.1, p.103.

The circle and sphere, and the square and the cube are not merely different shapes which measurement alone will reveal[1], just as the essential difference between red and blue cannot be discovered through quantitative means alone; essentially they incorporate a reality which when understood through *ta'wīl* leads man to their essence and ultimately to the Truth.

Let us now discuss the basic geometric moves starting from the point, and reach the formation of the first area or value contained by the least number of points. We find it to be the circle and sphere. The circle and sphere are the most evident symbols of Unity and their division by inscribed regular polygons constitute the basis of all traditional laws of proportion.[2] They represent what is whole, boundless and symbolize a cyclic infinity. That explains the reason that the circle with its centre represents Unity in Islamic Cosmology.

Ibn 'Arabī says that since the circumference of a circle is the result of the meeting of its starting and ending points, the centre is caused by the existence of the circumference. He draws an analogy to this by explaining that one cannot know the essence of God - the Centre - except through the understanding of his Names - the Circumference.

The circle symbolizes the first comprehensible form of Unity. It resolves the paradox of Unity and multiplicity. On this Ibn 'Arabī writes:

> ***Every line that projects from the centre to the circumference is equal to its companion and terminates at a point on the circumference. In itself, the centre neither multiplies nor increases despite the multitude of lines that project from it to the circumference. It relates to every point on the circumference by its [same indivisible] essence. For if it relates to one point on the circumference by other than that by which it relates to another point, it would be divisible and it would not be true that it is one, whereas it is. Therefore, it relates to all points [on the circumference], in spite of their number, by its one [indivisible] essence. So certainly, multiplicity is manifested out of the One without this being multiplied in its Essence.***[3]

---

[1] See op cit. Verstockt, 1982, Chapter Three.

[2] Keith Critchlow, Islamic Patterns: an Analytical and Cosmological Approach, Thames and Hudson, London, 1976, p.9. Also see op cit. Ardalan and Bakhtiar, 1973, p.23.

[3] op cit. Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1911, vol.1, p.260.

But the problem seems still unresolved, and singleness is seen to involve a triplicity of centre, radius, and circumference. Ibn 'Arabī goes on to say that the whole of creation is based on singleness, and that this singleness appears from a triplicity. Three, being the first odd number, he says, correlates with the existence of anything that is Divinely created - which is based on the Essence of God, followed by His Will, and finally His command "Be" which is the Word[1]. Ibn 'Arabī translates, or rather superimposes, this triplicity on the geometry of a circle where the Essence is the centre, the Will is the radii "*representing Divine orientation (al-tawajjuh al-Ilāhī),*" and finally the command "Be" is the point that constitutes the multiplicity of points on the circumference which he calls "*the circle of potential beings (dā'irat al-mumkināt).*"[2]

The symbolism of the circle does not stop there but is interpreted further by Ibn 'Arabī to denote the Qur'ānic verse of *Tawḥīd*, "*He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward,*[3]" where the first is the centre and the Last is the circumference. He also makes another esoteric interpretation based on the Qur'ānic verses: "*And Allah, all unseen, surroundeth them,*[4]" and "*Lo! Is not He surrounding all things?*"[5] where the words surrounding (*muḥīt*) is the circumference. The circle also denotes the cycle of life to death and returns once again to God: "*And unto Him the whole matter will be returned.*"[6]

Besides these meanings, the centre, circle, and sphere represent the Heavens or the Celestial Dome. This has been asserted from several traditions compiled and quoted by al-Suyūṭī in his treatise on Islamic cosmography (mentioned earlier in this chapter). We found that Heaven is described as being vaulted over the earth like a dome[7], and was further

---

[1] "*Whenever We decide something, We only say to it "Be!" and it comes into existence.*" Qur'ān: 16/40.

[2] op cit. Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1911, vol.1, p.260.

[3] Qur'ān: 57/3.

[4] Qur'ān: 85/20.

[5] Qur'ān: 41/54.

[6] Qur'ān: 11/123.

[7] From Iyyās Ibn Mu'āwiya he relates this saying: "*This Heaven is vaulted over the earth like a dome.*" op cit. al-Suyūṭī (15th C.), trans. by A. Heinen, 1982, p.141.

described as "*a roof over the earth like a dome-structure.*"[1] Al-Suyūṭī cites on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās[2], Abū al-Shaykh and Ibn Abī Ḥātīm the following tradition:

> ***No one can correctly assess the magnitude of the Throne except He who created it. As for the Heavens, they are when compared with the creation of the Merciful, like a dome in relation to a wide desert.***[3]

Likewise, al-Suyūṭī quotes the following traditions in relation to the domical interpretation of the Heavens in Islamic cosmology. From Iyās Ibn Mu'āwiya he relates this saying: "*This heaven is vaulted over the earth like a dome.*"[4] From Ibn Abī Ḥātim he quotes the following *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) from Jubayr Ibn Maṭ'am: "*God is seated on His Throne, His Throne stands on His Heavens, and His Heavens are on His earth like this! And he indicated with his finger the likeness of a dome.*"[5] The domical shape of the Heavens is thus asserted.

Inside a sphere, one can inscribe only five regular polygons. Known as the "Platonic bodies," they have been described by al-Bayrūnī, the medieval astrologer and mathematician, in his "Elements of the Art of Astrology". He finds their symbolic meaning in the four elements and the universe as follows:

> ***These five are related by resemblance to the four elements and the sphere (Universe). With regard to the five, they are, first, the cube (hexahedron) bounded by six squares called 'earthy'; second, the icosahedron, by twenty equilateral triangles, the 'watery' one; third, the octahedron, by eight equilateral triangles, the 'airy' body; fourth, the tetrahedron, by four***

---

[1] Ibn Abī Ḥātim quotes al-Suddī as giving the following explanation of God's word 'Heaven an edifice' (*wal Samā'a Binā'an*): "*The edifice of Heaven spans over the earth like a dome-structure; it is a roof over the earth.*" ibid., p.141.

[2] Ibn 'Abbās is well known to have been a cosmologist in pre-Islamic times, when he became a Muslim he constantly asked the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) about Islamic cosmogony and cosmology related issues. This explains why the known *ḥadīths* on such issues are transmitted through him rather than the usual variety of companions of the Prophet.

[3] ibid., p.130.

[4] An authentic *ḥadīth* cited in ibid., p.141.

[5] ibid., p.141.

***equilateral triangles, the 'fiery' body; and fifth, the dodecahedron by twelve pentagons, the symbol of the universe as a whole.***[1]

The symbolic significance of the sphere and the cube was discussed by traditional Muslim philosophers such as al-Kindī (ninth-century) who regards the sphere as being pre-eminent with respect to the five regular solids mentioned above, as he says it expresses the unity whence diversity proceeds. Because no matter how we cut a sphere the result is always a circle, the sphere he says is not manifold but is contained within one single surface without plurality. He also points out that all radii are equal, the curvature at any point on the surface is the same as any other position, its motion is also eternal and ceaseless, for it moves in its place without translocation. Thus, al-Kindī concludes a sphere is not capable of expressing either diversity or multiplicity.[2] Accordingly, such interpretations of the geometrical implications of the circle and sphere led Ibn 'Arabī to assume that the world in its entirety is a circular form, and the implication of this is that all forms that are triangular, quadrangular, hexagonal, or octagonal are contained in this circle.

On the other hand, the square as the number four (or the cube as six), is the most rigid and inactive of shapes. It thus represents in Islamic Cosmology the most externalized and fixed aspect of creation. Ibn Abī Ḥātim quotes al-Qāsim Ibn Abī Bazzā as saying: "*Heaven is not quadrangular but it is vaulted...*"[3] This negation of the quadrangularity of the Heavens would lead to the implicit quadrangularity of the earth, and that the Heavens are *not* like it. By the projection of the square in the third dimension, it would follow that the cube is also regarded as the symbol of earth.[4] Al-Kindī discusses the cube and gives us more evidence that this particular solid relates to the earth; he says that it has a feminine quality because the earth is the lowest of all the elements. He says that the cube has six sides, and six is a stable number. The cube, is thus attributed to the earth which is the most stable element and is located beneath all the other elements and everything tends towards it.[5]

---

[1] op cit. al-Bayrūnī, 1934, trans. by R.Ramsay Wright, p.20.

[2] See Nicholas Rescher, Studies in Arabic Philosophy, Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1966, Pp. 24-37.

[3] Ibn Abī Ḥātīm quoted in op cit. al-Suyūṭī, trans. by A. Heinen, 1982, p.145.

[4] Guénon also says that "*the square or cubic forms refer to the earth, and the circular or spherical forms refer to the Heavens.*" See René Guénon, "Meaning of the Octagon", Avaloka, vol. V, Nos. 1 & 2, 1990, p.33.

[5] See op cit. Rescher, 1966, Pp. 24-37.

The cube is linked to the idea of the centre since it is a crystalline synthesis of the whole of space; we saw above that each face of the cube corresponds to one of the primary directions, namely the zenith, the nadir and the four cardinal points. The positioning of the Ka'ba does not entirely correspond to this scheme, because it is the four corners, and not the sides of the Ka'ba which face the cardinal points. Titus Burckhardt comments on this, saying that it is doubtless so because the cardinal points mean, in the Arab context, the four "corner pillars" (*arkān*) of the Universe.[1] Also noteworthy, is the fact that after the creation of the Throne, God added four pillars beneath it, again representing *arkān* or corners. As we mentioned earlier, Abū al-Shaykh quotes Ḥammād as saying: "*God created the Throne from a green emerald; and he added four pillars of red sapphire....*"[2]

Actually, quadrature occupies an important position in every medieval treatise on geometry. Ibn 'Arabī, finds the root of the four elements in quadrature. He takes the Qur'ānic verse which implies that every living thing was made of water, where water is mentioned to be the primary element and is as Life to which it relates. He relates the elements to the sphere of the constellations (*al-falak al-aqṣa*) and attributes the final result (the cosmos) to the Design (*Taqdīr*) of the "Almighty the Knower."[3] He explains that quadrature is the underlying pattern of the state of Nature, based on four principles: the active (heat and cold) and the passive (dry and moist) these, he says are related to the Universal Soul.

Ibn 'Arabī goes on to describe the Seat of the Throne (*Kursī*) and the Throne itself (*'Arsh*) and describes it to have four (*arkān*) or corners and four faces[4]. The corners have four Angels who are the Bearers of the Throne (*Ḥamalat al-'Arsh*) as well as four Prophets[5]. According to Ibn 'Arabī, these four Bearers of the Throne and four Prophets correspond to the four Divine Pillars - Life, Knowledge, Will, and Power - and the four Paradisiacal Rivers which are said to flow in a pattern of this quadrature. A problem poses itself at this stage of Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation: firstly that the Qur'ānic verse in relation to the Throne is that "...

---

[1] Titus Burckhardt, Art of Islam, World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd., Kent, 1976(a), p.4.

[2] op cit. al-Suyūṭī (15th C.), trans. by A. Heinen, 1982, p.132.

[3] op cit. Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1911, vol.1, p.293.

[4] ibid., vol.3, p.431.

[5] Ibn 'Arabī says that they are the four Archangels: Seraphīel (Isrāphīl), Gabriel (Jibrā'īl), Michael (Mīkā'īl), and Riḍwān. As well as four Prophets: Adam (Ādam), Mūhammad, Abraham (Ibrāhīm), and Mālik.

*eight will uphold the Throne of their Lord that Day (Judgement Day), above them."*[1] God does not say four. This arrangement of the Bearers as a quadrangular form, rather than an octagonal one is explained by Ibn 'Arabī as follows: as long as life is still there before the Day of Judgement, the Throne is quadrangular borne by four sets of two - one Prophet and one Angel in each corner - but on the Day of Judgement this organisation will change into an octagonal form. He says that: "*when the resurrection occurs, God will assign those who shall bear them, so they will be eight in the hereafter while in this world they are four."*[2]

This ties up with the Prophetic *ḥadīths* compiled by al-Suyūtī in his cosmological treatise "*al-Hay'ah*" which indicate that, "*there is a Rock under the earths...*"[3], that Rock which is the foundation of the centre of the earth in the bottom-most place on the vertical axis. Al-Āmidī, based on the following tradition, says that the Bearers of the Throne have their foundation on this Rock: "*The Rock which is beneath the earth is the end of the created world; upon its borders there are four Angels, whose heads are below the Throne.*"[4] This *ḥadīth* confirms Ibn 'Arabī's version of the quadrature of the Bearers of the Throne before the day of Judgement[5].

From the cosmological point of view, the number eight is an outcome of the duplication of quadrature. This is geometrically achieved by rotating a square half way (i.e., 45 degrees) to achieve an octagon. The number eight thus corresponds to the number of sides as well as the number of corners of a cube and hence, ties to the idea of the eight winds[6]

---

[1] Qur'ān: 69/17. On the other hand, in relation to the Islamic cosmological meaning of the number eight manifested as an octagon, describes the Divine Throne which encompasses the worlds it is octagonal, lifted by eight Angels - or rows of Angels as the Qur'ānic verse implies. This Throne that encompasses the Worlds - Heavens and the earths - is as exact a translation as possible, of the Arabic expression *al-'Arsh al-Muḥīt* (literally meaning the Circumscribing and Engulfing Throne).

[2] op cit. Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 1911, vol.3, p.432.

[3] Al-Suyūtī quotes 'Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Ḥātīm on the authority of Sufyān al-Ṭawrī. op cit. al-Suyūtī (15th C.), trans. by A. Heinen, 1982, p.145.

[4] Ibrāhīm al-Qarmānī al-Āmidī, *Risālah fī Bayān 'Adad al-Samāwāt wal-Arḍīn wal-'Arsh wal-Lawḥ wal-Qalam wa 'Ajā'ib al-Samāwāt wa Makān al-Jannah wal-Nār*, Manuscript #6102, Asad National Library, folio 19.

[5] Reflecting on another dimension inherent in this *ḥadīth*, we find that since the Throne is the highest element - above the seventh Heaven - in the Islamic cosmological model, and the Rock is the lowest - beneath the seventh earth - then it follows that the Bearers of the Throne, these four Angels, act as vertical transcending axes that intersect the Universe.

[6] See Adrian Snodgrass, Architecture Time and Eternity: Studies in the Stellar and Temporal Symbolism of Traditional Buildings, vol. 2, D.K. Fine Arts Press, Delhi, 1990, Pp. 410-24. Also see J.C. Cooper, An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols, Thames and Hudson, London, 1978, third edition, p.122.

which are related to the Ka'ba in relation to the eight directions. This is shown in the following two traditions compiled by al-Suyūṭī in his cosmographical treatise:

> *Abu 'Ubayd, Ibn Abī Ḥātīm, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī al-Dunya and Abū al-Shaykh mention the following statement of Ibn 'Amr: "There are eight winds; four of them are a blessing, and four of them are a punishment. As to the blessing, they are: Al-Nāṣirāt, Al-Mubaṣṣirāt, Al-Mursalāt, Al-Dhāriyāt. And as to the punishment, they are Al-'Aqīm and Al-Sarsar (these two being on land) Al-'Āṣif and Al-Qāṣif (these two on the ocean)."*

> *Abū al-Shaykh quotes this saying from al-Ḥassan: "The winds are determined in relation to the Ka'ba. So, when you want to ascertain this, lean your back against the door of the Ka'ba: Then Al-Shamāl (north) will blow from your left side, namely the side on which the stone is. Al-Janūb (south) will blow from your right side, where the black stone is. Al-Ṣaba will be opposite you, in front of the door of the Ka'ba. And al-Dabūr will blow from behind the Ka'ba."*[1]

This last *ḥadīth* not only indicates the names of the eight winds in respect to the sides and corners of the Ka'ba, but suggests that there is a sort of "communication" between the winds and the Ka'ba itself. This puzzling fact can be answered by consulting the following two traditions on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās. As we mentioned earlier, Ibn 'Abbās was a cosmologist in pre-Islamic times and was amongst the most inquisitive of the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in such fields[2]:

> *Abū al-Shaykh quotes Ibn 'Abbās as saying: "The water and the wind are two of God's armies. The wind is God's greatest army."*[3]

> *Ibn Abī Ḥātīm and Abū al-Shaykh cite the following statement of Ibn 'Abbās: "Truly, God sends the wind that carries the water from Heaven.*

---

[1] op cit. al-Suyūṭī (15th C.), trans. by A. Heinen, 1982, p.157. Eight is also eternity and eternal happiness.

[2] That also explains why he is the one who has transmitted the *ḥadīths* on the *Mi'rāj* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

[3] ibid., p.156.

***Then He casts it at the clouds, pouring it out as the seeds are poured out.*** "[1]

These two *ḥadīths* suggest that the source of the winds is in Heaven, and since we saw that the Heavens and the earth are nearest to one another along the vertical axis, then it seems obvious that the Ka'ba will be that closest point on earth, and consequently ties to its relation to the eight winds.

### 7.3.3 THE NOTION OF SURFACE

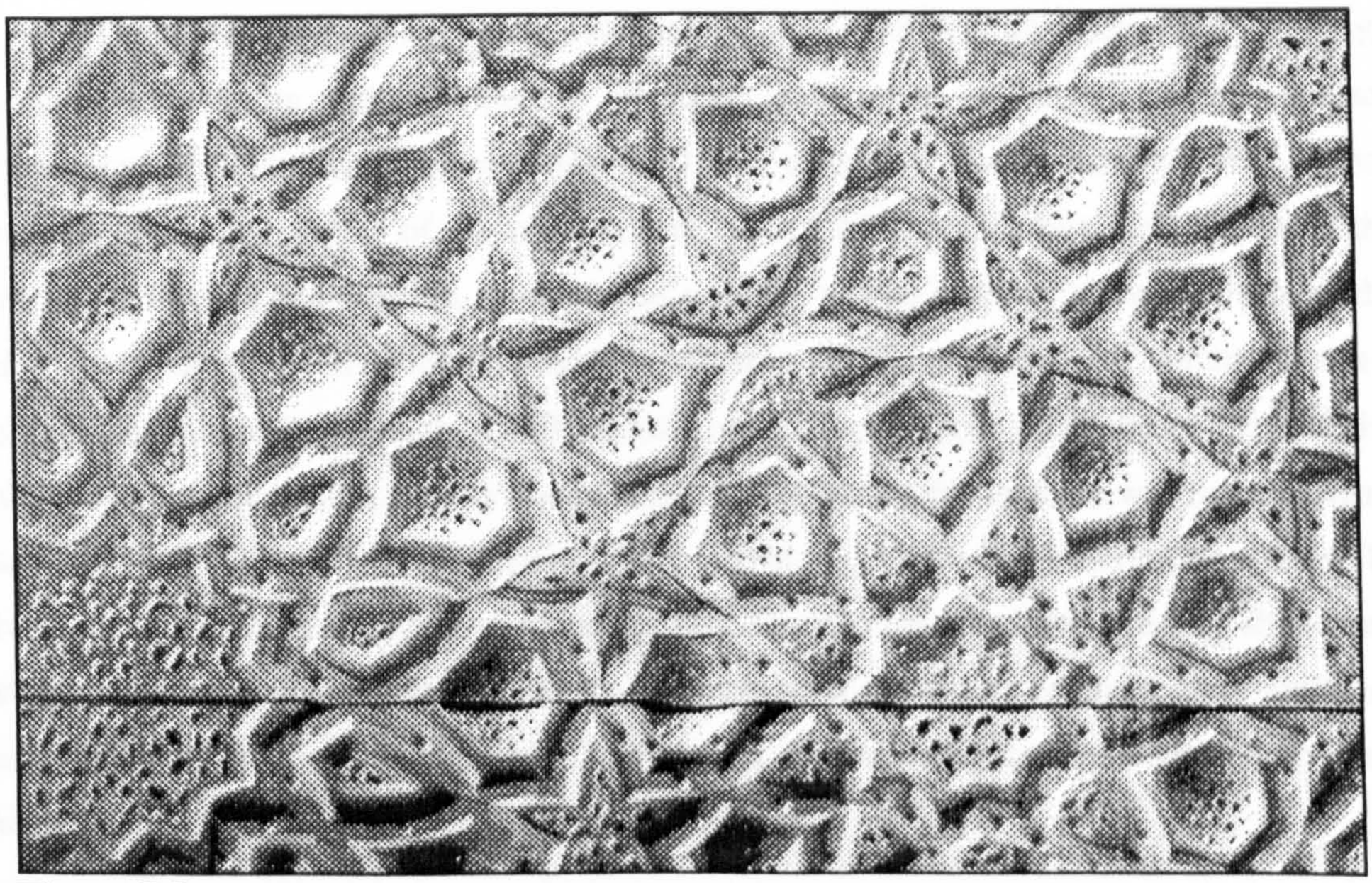


**Figure 7.8** A polished metal surface engraved with stellar shaped patterns creates a visual radiating effect. (The Mamlūk door of the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan: Cairo).

The surface of any form is essential for its conception. It is not possible to visualize the overall effect of a form before it gains its qualities by its surface material and texture. The difference between a medieval brass door before and after being polished can bring this idea closer to the mind. When the unpolished surface is perceived (bearing the same craftsmanship, details, and patterns carved on it), it appears dull and heavy; it is only when it is polished that it radiates and stirs feelings of its lightness. By this way, the viewer is led to see an ennoblement of that door, an effect that materializes illumination, light, and transcendence. (Fig. 7.8)

---

[1] ibid., p.160.

In the Qur'ān, God describes some of the rewards that will be granted to the believers who will enter Paradise: "... *And amongst them (the believers) will be passed round the vessels of silver and goblets of crystal; Crystal clear, made of silver: they will determine the measure thereof...*".[1] The phrase of "*Crystal clear, made of silver*," is extremely interesting as it shows a quality of a "silver" material that is not comprehensible through our human capacities. We know that the most highly polished silver can, at its best, achieve the quality of a mirror but it cannot *be* crystal clear. From this "sign" (*āyah*), God gives us a clue that there is a dimension beyond the physical in surfaces and it is this very dimension that the Ṣūfī craftsman tries to emulate.

There are three ways by which surfaces gain transcendent qualities: firstly, through the inherent nobility and richness of materials themselves; secondly, through surface ornamentation; and thirdly, through the combined effects of noble materials and surface ornamentation. The nature of the transcendent quality of materials is an outgrowth of the material's physical composition, its degree of opacity, and its inherent ability to "move" the mind. For example, a translucent marble, reflecting a variegated pattern, communicates a cold, implacable feeling of richness. Black iron or tarnished copper on the other hand, is also cold but its opacity weighs heavily upon the mind. If lightness for instance was required from such materials, complementary aspects were sought, to relieve the inherent heaviness, by giving texture to its dull surface and thereby allowing it to cast shadows, creating shade, and catching highlights (such as the carved stone windows of the *Madrasa/Khanqah* of Salār and Sanjar al-Jāwlī discussed in Chapter 5.3). In short, those transfigurations necessary to make the materials reach perfect harmony had to be sought.

The techniques of achieving this state of equilibrium exhibited strong, natural, geometric, and harmonic tendencies. The selection of materials that exhibited a noble nature without need of further transformation constituted the most elementary or "natural" technique of creating this equilibrium. There is an economy of means apparent here which was dictated by the material itself. As we saw earlier in Chapter Six, in the case of wood, the rich-grained variety was sought whenever possible. This attribute was developed, and parts were assembled as directed by the very nature of the material. When poorer qualities were available, wood was cut into very small pieces, turned and assembled into lattice wood (*mashrabiyyah*), a technique that medieval Muslims mastered (see *mashrabiyya* work

---

[1] Qur'ān: 76/15,16.

described in Chapter 5.1 in the Mosque of al-Māridānī; and Chapter 5.2 in the Complex of Qalāwūn). Geometric techniques combined one or more materials in patterns which depended less on the natural attributes of the materials than on the transcendent quality of the assembled surfaces. A single material might have been used, such as plaster, which was transformed by geometric space-filling patterns carved into its surface.

We saw in Chapter Two, that one of the traditional sciences was *al-Kīmyā'* (alchemy); that science which led - at least symbolically - to the transmutation of base materials into nobler ones, of lead into gold. We also saw that the Ṡūfīs understood that man was as lead, and that through his spiritual quest to achieve transcendence and commune with God his soul would be transmutated into "gold".

By this analogy one can see that by combining the fluidity of nature with the geometric transfiguration of surfaces, the characteristic achievement of this alchemic technique was introduced in the ennoblement of surfaces. The structure of materials did not generate either a visual or an intellectual emphasis; rather, the structural organization of surfaces promoted form - exactly as the goal of the Ṡūfī is not the "journey" in as much as it is the communion with God. By this method and process, the transcendent quality was attained.

We also saw in Chapter Six and in section 7.1 of this chapter, that the Ṡūfī craftsman wished to express to his utmost ability his love for his Creator by approaching "perfection" in his work so that in return God returns His Love for him: "*God loves he who seeks [strives for] perfection in his work ('amal).*"[1]. The craftsman (*ṣāni'*) who is close to "Nature in her mode of operation" cannot help but be overwhelmed by the amplitude of patterns, designs, and colours in the manifestations of God in the Creation. Traditional man sought to express the same multiplicity, not in a naturalistic art that copied nature but in a symbolic art that copied the Divine process of manifestation. Thus, he was ennobling surfaces as the earth was ennobled in the Divine creation. This cosmic process applied whether the object was monumental architecture, a carpet, or a small brass tray. The result was to draw the object *away* from any subjective interpretation and to place all art in the realm of the eternal.[2]

---

[1] *Ḥadīth* quoted in op cit. Ikhwān, Rasā'il, n.d., vol.1, p.290.

[2] See Chapter Six.

Consequently, no factitious element or material is tolerated in any sacred building (as unfortunately is seen today with plaster simulating stone, to name but one example). Falsity is never found in traditional mosques. If in stone, the architecture is stone architecture and decorative elements express plaster and never imitate stone[1]. This brings us to an important point which seems at the first instance more of an issue of practicality than symbolism: that buildings, and building materials age differently. The reason I bring out this point is that traditional buildings age with dignity, they either improve or simply do not lose any of their qualities in time.[2] Whenever the architecture is true to the material, the building usually ages nobly, but where plaster or artificial stone for example is used to simulate real stone, the result is always degrading to the architecture. Dust usually collects in the places such as the mortar joints, the cornices, the stalactites and the decorative patterns, drawing the attention of the beholder to these places. These elements were originally conceived in the specific material in which they were first created, and they bear the imprint of the constraints imposed by the materials used, and the marks of the tools with which they were made. A carved element in stone is quite different in character from one cast in plaster or concrete, and the dust collecting at these joints brings out loudly the falsehood, making the building more and more obviously a fake with time.[3]

Going back to al-Maqrīzī's passage from his "*Khiṭaṭ*" quoted in Chapter Six (describing the initiation of the work on the Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī), we saw that Baybars had shown a great concern about the materials to be used in the different parts of his building.

> ***... He wrote letters at the same time to different places requiring marble columns to be sent from every place, ... He wrote likewise for iron appliances and good timber for the doors and ceilings... and on 1 Jumada II 666 (1268 A.D.) the Sultan left Egypt for Syria. He stopped at Jaffa and took the town from the Franks... he took a quantity of wood found in the***

---

[1] We have good examples of this in the earlier mosques of Ibn Ṭūlūn and in the Mamlūk mosques of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī and Ulmās al-Ḥājib in Cairo.

[2] Contrary to the case of contemporary architecture which is at its best when it is completed and it is only a matter of time that it starts losing its qualities. With the best maintenance and care possible, one cannot bring it any better than its initial condition.

[3] Certain mosques with factitious plaster that were built in Cairo no more than ten years ago, look now very shabby, dusty and unholy, while old traditional mosques built in real stone like the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan, or with plaster architecture, like the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn have not lost any of their beauty and dignity.

***citadel and slabs of marble, and put them in one of the ships at Jaffa and sent the ship to Cairo. He ordered that the screened enclosure (mashrabiyya) in the mosque... should be made of this wood, and the mihrab should be made of the marble. The wood and marble were used accordingly.***[1]

This shows that not only the *mu'allim* was concerned with the choice of materials and surfaces, but so also was the patron. We should not forget that to the Mamlūks, marble, fine wood and copper were noble materials which were highly esteemed and were as a result used in any grand construction.[2]

It is because surfaces contain within themselves a sense of place (*makān*, its root is *kawn* and also means "cosmos") that each material possesses a distinct purpose and symbolizes a particular metaphysical concept. Within the hierarchy of surfaces, patterns participate in linking one surface to another. All is bounded by what is above it - door by wall, wall by roof, and roof by sky.

The horizontal dimension of a floor in Islamic architecture symbolizes the earth upon which man and his buildings stand. A hierarchy of designs have evolved, from the simply defined horizontal "place" to the most sacred symbolic uses of the horizontal in the concept of the floor. The more pronounced and varied realizations of the horizontal dimensions developed within the courtyard. The use of symmetrical lines and geometrical patterns emphasizes the sense of balance and equilibrium which in turn help in defining the centrality of the space[3]. The courtyard floors range from single surfaces to elaborate marble patterned courtyards in the centre of which are placed mirror-like pools. The verdant, spontaneous growths contained within the gardens of Paradise are archetypically recapitulated in the conception of the courtyard (as will be discussed in Chapter Eight). Perpetuating this view, the mirror-like pools cause the Heavens to be reflected in their shimmering surfaces, thus uniting Heavens with earth, in a profound symbolism central to the Islamic perspective.

---

[1] Al-Maqrīzī translated by Ronald Lewcock, in "Architects, Craftsmen and Builders: Materials and Techniques", edited by Mitchell G., Architecture of the Islamic World, Thames and Hudson, London, second edition, 1978, p.129.

[2] See Chapter Six for more details.

[3] The symbolic connotations of the courtyard, will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

The Ṡūfīs are known to have sought esoterically for the four Gardens of Paradise in their spiritual ascent to the Truth. Each of these Gardens is visualized - through the *ḥadīths* of the Prophet (peace be upon him) of the *Mi'rāj* - by its attributes of plantations, orchards, water fountains, and springs through which the Ṡūfī could attain Wisdom, Direct Knowledge, and Illumination. By deduction, the medieval Ṡūfī *muhandis* or craftsman only had to apply *ta'wīl* to his created elements to recall these archetypes symbolically and incorporate them in his design.

By reviewing the Mamlūk religious buildings summarized in Chapter Five, we find the hierarchy of vertical surfaces that define shapes begins with the simple notion of a single material and simple proportions that literally express a two dimensional plane. This was usually used in circulation corridors (*majāz*). The next layer is the surface of multiple materials, a surface with incised planes that uses more elaborate proportions and constitutes a second level of conceptual development. This sort of wall treatment is found in the parts of the religious building that introduce the climax - in the courtyard (*ṣaḥn*) or praying hall (*riwāq al-ṣalāh*). A third layer extends the idea of the incised surface and creates the *iwān*. Its manifestation is by the use of a single or multiple materials in single patterns made up of multiple planes. A manifestation of this case is the *qibla* wall in which a multiplicity of materials are employed in cladding and the niche or *miḥrāb* which forms the focal point of that wall.[1]

Calligraphy, largely used in the Mamlūk buildings examined in Chapter Five, can be considered a "special" type of surface. We saw in Chapters Two and Six that the revealed Word of God retains its exaltation in its descent. The Qur'ān is not created, and therefore in Ṡūfī terms, every quotation from it constitutes no less than a Divine Presence (*Ḥadrah Ilāhiyyah*). Martin Lings explains:

> ***It must not be forgotten that one of the great purposes of Qur'ānic calligraphy is to provide a visual sacrament. It is a wide-spread practice in Islam to gaze intently at Qur'ānic inscriptions so as to extract a blessing from them, or in other words, so that through the windows of sight the soul may be penetrated by the Divine radiance of the signs of God, as the verses are called. Questions as to how far the object is legible and how far the***

[1] All these points will be discussed individually in Chapter Eight.

*subject is literate would be considered as irrelevant to the validity and to the efficacy of this sacrament.*[1]

Calligraphy is thus the visual body of the Divine Revelation, sacred in both form and content. Corresponding in many ways to the iconographic image of Christ in Christianity, this calligraphy embodies the Word and its very presence obviates the use of any imagery. The sensible form of the Arabic language, its very sound and utterances, constitutes the most sacred Islamic art.[2] In a similar manner, when applied to the wall of a building, it will bring about a sense of sacredness which will increase its degree of holiness.

Encompassing the full range of expressions between naturalistic and geometrical forms, a timeless quality is evoked by calligraphy that allows it to be integrated into every sort of surface adornment. Appearing as the Word, its presence breathes life into compositions, highlights particular relations in a building through Qur'ānic allusions. Through the practice of placing it at the zone of transition between dome and its square base, calligraphy promotes the transformation of the physical structure of a chamber into one that "embodies" sacredness, thus, transforming the space into one that has transcendent qualities. This explains why epigraphy was placed so high up on the walls of Mamlūk portals, minarets, or mausoleum domes: it denotes a significance that is related to spiritual reasons connected to the sanctification of the place. Moreover, there is a correlation between the choice of epigraphy and its precise location. For example, the Light verse[3] in which God is described to be the "Light of the Heavens and the Earth" and is likened to a "lamp in a niche", is commonly associated with bands of epigraphy on the *qibla* wall of religious buildings, and more specifically on the *miḥrāb* itself. The visual connection between the Word and the architectural element linked to it, reminds the viewer of the spiritual significance of what is seen.

It is appropriate to conclude the notion of surface with reference to Ibn 'Arabī who, speaking of the Divine Word present in the Qur'ān, says that: "*it [the Qur'ān] exhibits the total harmony of Unity and multiplicity, coalesced through the Breath of the Compassionate -*

---

[1] Martin Lings, The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination, World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, Kent, 1976, p.16

[2] See Annemarie Schimmel, Islamic Calligraphy, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1970, Pp. 1-14.

[3] Qur'ān: 24/35.

*that which brings life into every living thing."* He goes on to say in his well-known work *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, that God manifests Himself through the cosmos by means of the Breath of the Compassionate (*Nafas al-Raḥmān*).

> ***The breath of the Compassionate is the substance in which flower all forms of material and spiritual being... Physical bodies are manifested in the material cosmos when the Breath penetrates the material substance which is the receptacle of the corporeal form.***[1]

It follows that the Word in the Qur'ān considered as a surface contains within its very structure the balanced and sacred formula which God uses in the process of Creation, and stands as the symbolic guide *par excellence* to traditional Islamic architecture and its decoration.

### 7.3.4 THE NOTION OF COLOUR

Colour is the result of the incidence of light on any surface material. Colour in traditional times, was rarely rendered by means of a brush and paint, it was the outcome of the use of different materials bearing different textures and finishes and as a result reflected a variety of shades and hues (consequently bearing different esoteric meanings). With the help of the vividness of the sun in Egypt, which appears nearly every day of the year, the different colours of materials were given life by the movement of the sun. This resulted in a continuous change of the amount of incident and reflected light that was cast on the building by means of the courtyard and light wells. It should be remembered that windows are minimized in a mosque but are not so in a *madrasa* or *khanqah*, in which the residential areas were treated much the same way as domestic architecture of the time.[2]

Colours, reveal the interior richness of light. Light viewed directly is blinding; it is through the harmony of colours that we guess its true nature, which bears every visual phenomenon within itself. Burckhardt likens the art of playing with light to alchemy. Lead is the base metallic substance, shapeless and opaque, whereas gold, the solar metal, is in some way "light made corporeal". In the spiritual order, alchemy is none other than the art

---

[1] Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, p.328, in op cit. Corbin, 1969, p.298.

[2] Refer to Chapter Four for the fundamentals of mosque design in the *Shari'a*.

of transmuting bodily consciousness into spirit: "body must be made spirit", say the alchemists, "for the spirit to become body." By analogy, one can say of traditional Islamic architecture that it transforms stone into light which, in its turn, is transformed into crystals.[1]

Colour is hardly mentioned in texts contemporary to the Mamlūks; whether it was part of the orally transmitted information from generation to the next or whether no texts survive cannot be certified. The question is: did colour have any specific significance to architecture? The available material shows that under the 'Abbasids the colour black was taken for the banners of the period. Black had been the colour of mourning in pre-Islamic Iran and was taken further after the death of 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (the fourth Caliph). It is interesting to note that the black colour, taken as an emblem by the *Shī'īs* thus came to signify the mourning for 'Alī as well as a wish to revenge his death - the Umayyads were held responsible for his martyrdom. But soon afterwards, black simply represented the 'Abbasid dynasty until al-Ma'mūn came to replace it with the colour green. Green was the colour of the Prophet and of the *Shī'ite* opposition.[2]

As for the use of colour in architecture, one thing is obvious: externally the Mamlūk *muhandis* inclined to the use of *ablaq* masonry. We mentioned in Chapter Five that *ablaq* in its basic sense refers to the contrast between black and white. However, in Cairene architecture, it is applied to wall decoration in any two contrasting colours: black and white, red and white, or red and yellow. *Ablaq*, though known on façades and minarets from the time of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī onwards, was curiously not used on minarets for more than a hundred years[3]. Even more curiously, although *ablaq* came to be regarded as an essential decorative element of both exteriors and interiors, it was never used for the domes of mausolea. In fact, it was never used above the upper border of the drum of a dome, either inside or out.[4] This would probably imply that *ablaq* was considered to be a tool devised to

---

[1] op cit. T. Burckhardt, 1976(a), p.80.

[2] Dominique Sourdel, "La Politique Religieuse du Caliphe 'Abbaside al-Ma'mūn", Revue des Etudes Islamiques, #30, 1962, p.35.

[3] Only on a group of six, all dating between 1350 and 1375 A.D. on which it forms the only decoration. Sheykhū (1349 A.D.), Tatar al-Ḥijāziyyah (1348-60 A.D.), the *Madrasa* of Sarghatmish (1356 A.D.), the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan (1356-62 A.D.), the Sulṭāniyyah (1369-70 A.D.), and though on a somewhat different way, on Iljāy al-Yūsufī (1373 A.D.).

[4] *Ablaq* decoration is however used on transitional zones and for the domes of entrance halls, in particular, for that of the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan. Laila 'Alī Ibrāhīm, "The Transitional Zones of Domes In Cairene Architecture", Kunst Des Orients, X, Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, Wiesbaden, 1975. Pp. 20-21.

indicate the earthly. God says: "*And it is He who spread out the earth [i.e., into layers]...*".[1] The *ablaq*'s repeated horizontality in different contrasting colours, conveys these layers in contradictory function to the Heavenly quality symbolized in smooth continuous "domical heavens". Had *ablaq* been applied to them, it would have hindered the ascent from earth to Heaven.

Otherwise, colour was applied to *qibla* walls, which were covered with marble cladding to give emphasis to the direction the architect wanted to focus on. We have also seen the use of colour in the coloured marble patterns used in flooring of courtyards (it will be discussed in Chapter Eight to have been an abstraction of a garden plan).

Another point worth mentioning, is that throughout the medieval *Sunnī* period the colour green was associated with tombs and mausolea. Tombstones were enrobed with green cloths. We mentioned in this section that "green" has always been the colour revered in *Sunnī* Islam; this has not been accounted for exoterically in the *Sharī'a*. Upon examining the word for green (*akhḍar* or *khuḍr*) in the Qur'ān, we find that its use is always in relation to the silk robes that have been promised to be given to those who will enter Paradise. This might explain the covering of tombstones with green cloth.

> ***For them will be Gardens of Eternity; beneath them rivers will flow: they will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and they will wear green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade ...***[2]

Externally, the most famous instance of the use of green is the dome of the tomb of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in Madina - which was a Mamlūk addition to the mosque complex. We mentioned that in medieval sources, domes were termed *qubbah khaḍrā'* (literally meaning green dome, but we will see in Chapter Eight that in medieval times this was synonymous to the "dome of Heaven"), al-Maqrīzī in the chapter dealing with Cairene houses says quoting Ibn Sīdah: "*The Persians did not allow grand construction of imposing appearance ... for example, construction such as ... green domes (qubbāt khuḍr).*"[3]

---

[1] Qur'ān: 13/3. Also in the Qur'ān: 43/10: "*Has made for you the earth (like a carpet) spread out...*"

[2] Qur'ān: 18/31.

[3] Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, quoted and translated in op cit. Laila Ibrāhīm, 1976, Pp.17-8.

In another case, that of the round city of Baghdad - mentioned earlier - the centre of the city was a square throne chamber that was covered by a dome, eighty cubits high, that was also termed a *qubbah khaḍrā'*. By consulting the following three *ḥadīths* which mention the word green, we find that the first deals with the designation of the green colour to the Heavenly vault. The second explains the origin of that green colour and attributes it to the Veil which in turn renders the sky green. The third, gives another cause for the greenness[1] of the sky - but this time an earthly rather than Heavenly cause - where the foundation Rock under the seventh earth (the sacrum) gives the greenness of the sky:

> ***Ibn Abī Ḥātīm quotes al-Qāsim Ibn Abī Bazzā as saying: "Heaven is not quadrangular, but it is vaulted. To the humans it appears green."***
>
> ***Ibn Abī Ḥātīm and Abū al-Shaykh cite this explanation of Ka'b al-Aḥbār concerning God's word 'Until it [the Sun] had disappeared behind the veil': "The veil is a green mountain consisting of a hyacinth; it surrounds the creatures, and from it originates the green colour of the sky, which is called al-Khaḍra' (the Green). The green colour comes from the sky; therefore it is called al-Baḥr al-Akhḍar (the Green Sea)."***
>
> ***'Abd al-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Ḥātim quote Sufyān al-Thawrī as saying: "There is a rock under the earths. We have been told that it is that rock from which the greenness of the sky originates."***[2]

We thus understand that the green colour of the Heavens, the Veil, and the Rock came to signify the "Dome of Heaven" to the medieval Muslims, those who lived by first situating themselves in a place in the cosmos, whether in a palace, house, mosque, *madrasa*, or *khanqah*.

Furthermore, (as mentioned in section 7.2.2) in the Qur'ān, the legendary figure called "al-Khiḍr" (literally the green man), links up with the cosmological implications

---

[1] See Ibn Mandhūr's definition in "*Lisān al-'Arab*" mentioned above in section 7.2.2. where *al-khaḍrā'* (the green) is interpreted synonymously to *al-samā'* (the sky or Heaven).

[2] op cit. al-Suyūtī (15th C.), trans. by A. Heinen, 1982, Pp. 141-2 & p. 171. I have not been able to trace these three *ḥadīths* in regard to their authenticity.

mentioned above, for it is God Who, "*had taught him [al-Khiḍr] Knowledge*" from His Presence.[1] We also saw that Śūfīs took this al-Khiḍr as a *walī* who has attained direct knowledge and consequently has seen the Truth. So it is not surprising that domes of mausolea, or palaces, ...etc., were termed *qubbah khaḍrā'*, either because they represented the "dome of the Heaven" or because of the tie to al-Khiḍr. Once more, we find esoteric and cosmological correlations between Mamlūk medieval practice - here in the use of colour - and the striving towards a linkage between their religious buildings and the union between the Heavens and the earth.

One cannot speak of colour without mentioning light. Light not only unifies the different parts of a building, but it also acts as a "magnet"[2] to draw the soul of man into the unity which he beholds[3]. Titus Burckhardt says that the *muhandis* who wished to express the idea of Unity (*Tawḥīd*), had actually three means at his disposal: *geometry*, which translated unity into the spatial order, *rhythm*, which revealed it in the temporal order and also indirectly in space, and *light*. Light is in fact, itself indivisible; its nature is not altered by its refraction into colours nor diminished by its gradation into clarity and darkness.[4] Darkness is also visible only by contrast with light, to the extent that light makes shadows appear. God says in the Qur'ān:

> ***Hast thou not turned thy vision to thy Lord? How He doth prolong the shadow! If He willed He could make it stationary! Then do We make the sun its guide; then We draw it in towards Ourselves, a contraction by easy stages.***[5]

"*God is the Light of the Heavens and the earth.*"[6] It is the Divine Light which brings out from the darkness of nothing. The Śūfīs believe that there is no more perfect symbol of the Divine Unity than Light. For this reason, the traditional *mūhandis* sought to transform the

---

[1] Qur'ān: 18/66.

[2] op cit. M. Lings, 1991, Pp.135-6.

[3] This brings us back to the worshipper as an integral part of the mosque, that is, its living centre.

[4] op cit. T. Burckhardt, 1976(a), p.76.

[5] Qur'ān: 25/45-46.

[6] Qur'ān: 24/35.

work he was fashioning into a vibration of light. We will see in Chapter Eight that it is for the same purpose that the traditional Mamlūk *muhandis* transformed other surfaces into perforated reliefs to filter the light. The stalactites (*muqarnasāt*) which the Mamlūks perfected and made their main tool of architectural decoration also served to trap light and diffuse it with the most subtle gradations. Their use of the *iwān* and dome was also designed with a consciousness of how to trap light indirectly through either the reflection of incident light from the courtyard or through eight or sixteen windows in the zone of transition of domes.

## CONCLUDING SUMMARY

In this chapter we have been able to arrive to vital points that will enable us to examine, in Chapter Eight, the elements of Mamlūk religious buildings. We have seen how the Ṡūfī craftsman viewed his artifacts as symbolic objects carrying qualitative as well as quantitative dimensions. The souls of the architects and craftsmen realized these two dimensions; all they needed was a craft (*ṡan'a*) to bring them out through a process of creation that emulates Nature "in her mode of operation". They embodied the symbols in physical forms in a manner that paralleled Divine Creation.

We saw that the traditional understanding of the centre, vertical axis, and horizontal orientation, were the three basic principles regulating the traditional process of "form-giving". The centre was not only seen as the Ka'ba, but could be anywhere and in anything by its implicit symbolic connotation of these three principles. We will see in the following chapters that it was through these principles that Mamlūk religious architecture (mosques, *madrasas*, and *khanqahs*) became sub-centres - when viewed from a metaphysical position.

The traditional notions of space, shape, surface, and colour as discussed in this chapter, have clearly shown the qualitative and quantitative understanding from the Ṡūfī viewpoint as understood by the Mamlūk architect and craftsman. Al-Suyūṫī's compilations of cosmologically related *ḥadīths*, and the writings of Ikhwān al-Ṡafā', al-Ghazzālī, and Ibn 'Arabī (three influential figures on the Mamlūk society) have provided the criteria by which we have been able to re-create the Mamlūk architect's and craftsman's comprehension of the basis of his work: that of "form-giver" in the mode of the "Form-Giver".

Int.

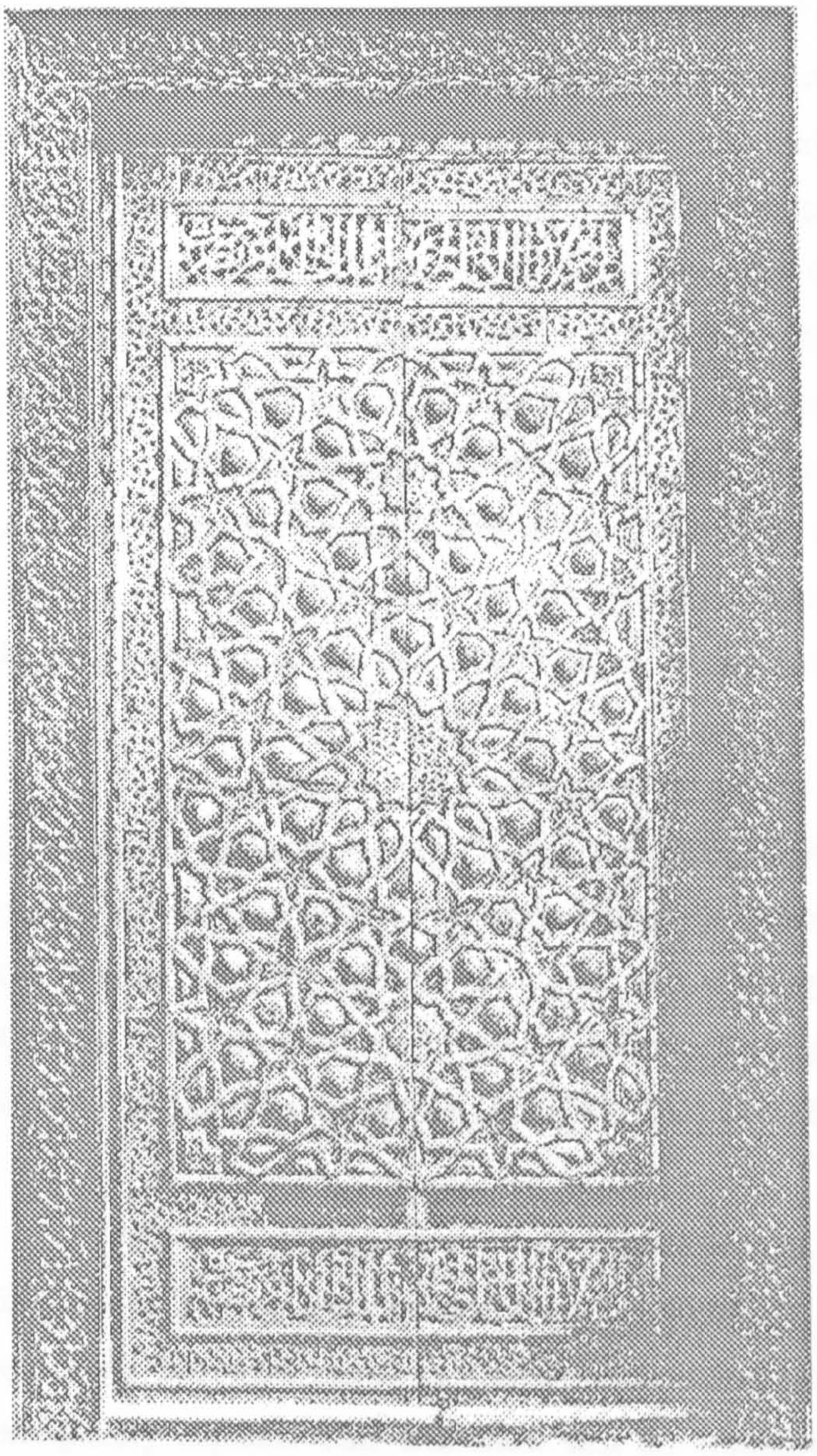
1

2

3

4

5



6

7

8

9

10

11

# CHAPTER EIGHT

## ELEMENTS OF TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

We saw in Chapters Six and Seven that it is inconceivable for any element of traditional Muslim art or architecture to belong to a framework other than that of traditional belief as practised by the medieval society. This is because a work of sacred art presupposes the context of a spiritual tradition, and a spiritual tradition in its turn necessarily embraces such a framework. We also saw that any traditional principle or artefact has within it both quality and quantity; it is quantifiable in the sense that it is an externalized physical form, and qualitative to the extent that it carries its principle within itself. We saw that the three main principles on which traditional artifacts are based carry spiritual and cosmological qualities which are reflected through physical forms. Such temporal forms are those which serve as a bridge between the qualitative abstract world of the imagination, and the quantitative artifacts of man. Within such an understanding, these principles are externalized and are formed according to the traditional notions of space, shape, surface, and colour.

In this chapter we will attempt to reveal the inner symbolic meaning of the main architectural elements used in Cairene medieval religious buildings. These elements are: the portal, the entrance hall, the offset corridors, the courtyard and fountain, the arch and *iwāns*, the praying hall, the *miḥrāb*, the dome, the crestings, the minaret, and the stalactites. In Chapter Nine we will prove that the general findings of this chapter, based on medieval Cairene architecture in general, apply to Baḥrī Mamlūk religious architecture specifically.

While examining the qualitative dimensions of function of these architectural elements in order to uncover their intended spiritual meanings, we will be able to answer most of the questions that were raised in Chapter Five, which the historical approach alone could not adequately explain. This will show that the traditionalist approach that has been adopted provides a better understanding of medieval traditional architecture because this approach depends on an esoteric view of sources of knowledge that were ignored in the purely historical approach.

## 8.1 THE PORTAL (*BĀB* or *BAWWĀBAH*)

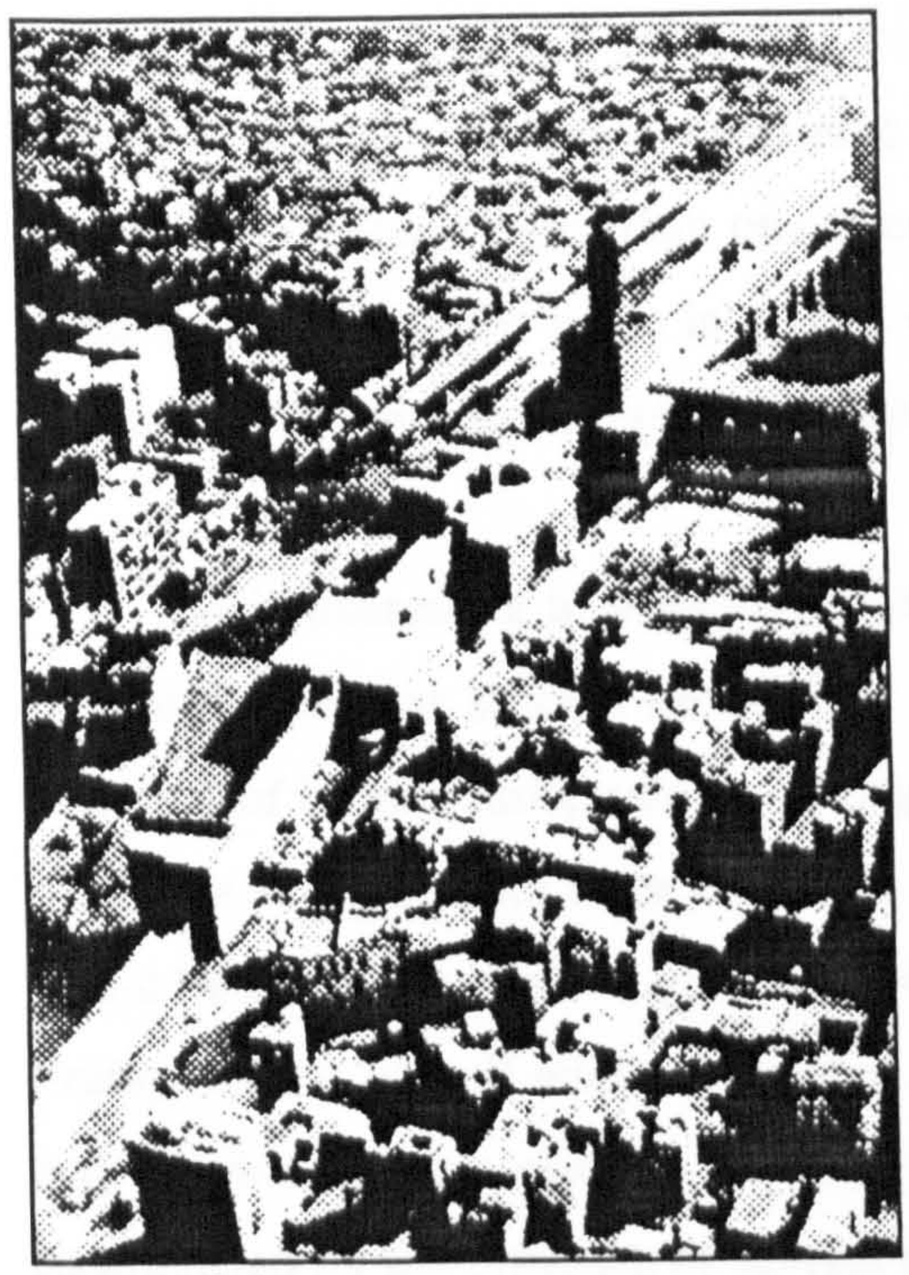


**Figure 8.1** The Fatimid wall of Cairo. The gateway is emphasized by the minaret of the Mosque of al-Ḥākim.

**Figure 8.2** The medieval Bāb Zuweylah in Cairo. (David Roberts engraving).

The traditional expression *bāb* (the root of *bawwābah*), when referring either to architecture or literature, indicates a movement through a defined space that occurs over a certain length of time. A gateway of a city, a portal of a building, and a chapter of a book are all known as *bāb*. Throughout the history of medieval Islamic architecture, we find that portals of buildings, and gateways of cities were emphasized and focused on, in the demarcation of the boundaries of the space involved. This demarcation was made by means of walls. City walls came to mark a division of two distinct areas or parts: the city precinct, and the city outskirts outside its walls. Based on the findings of Chapters Three and Seven, medieval Muslim cities were found to have been built "to be sacred".[1] Accordingly, the city precinct was the more sacred, while the outskirts were the less sacred.[2] City gateways were those carefully chosen points on the boundary wall that allowed a "communication" between what was within and what was outside. (Figs. 8.1 & 8.2)

---

[1] We have seen in Chapter Three the example of the medieval city of Cairo; and in Chapter Seven, the cities of Damascus, Aleppo, and Baghdad were mentioned. Rituals, sacred sites, specific days and moments in time were chosen to ensure that the foundation of a city met with the requirements that gave these cities their sacredness.

[2] Based on the notion that there is no secularity in Islam, i.e., the difference is always set in degree rather than of kind.

In general, traditional mosques have only a single doorway. This symbolizes the Oneness of God, and through it the worshipper - body, soul, and spirit - passes physically and spiritually through a point of "transformation", meaning that he, in his tripartite existence, discards his worldly concerns and affairs to stand within God's Presence to pray to the One. To have more than one door would contradict this idea of Unity, spoiling the essence of the mosque: to be in a state of emptiness as far as his earthly transitory life is concerned, and to concentrate to "communicate" with God, the Truth (*Al-Ḥaqq*).

It is interesting to observe that even Baḥrī Mamlūk mosque/*madrasas*, or mosque/*khanqahs* with four schools for the four rites, have only one door - thus indicating that the four rites of Islamic jurisprudence belonged to the one God. In Mamlūk examples of pillared hypostyle mosques with three doorways (as examined in Chapter Five[1]), only the main one would be opened during the gathering of the congregation for the five daily prayers and the Friday prayer, and all would be opened after prayers for easy exit. By bearing in mind the way in which the mosque was used, we find that the symbolism of a single doorway is not contradicted by the presence of several doors on an architectural plan.

In general, any door demarcates the passage between interior and exterior, and more so, in the case of a religious building, it marks the passage from the lesser holy street to the more holy constantly purified space. To be inviting and at the same time to demand discretion, the doorways of medieval religious buildings were made recessed into the façade rather than protruding into the relatively profane street[2]. The doorway expresses aspirations towards the Divine by its verticality and by its loftiness worthy of the entrance to the "House of God" (*Bayt Allāh*). This is realized by the composition of the portal going to the full height of the façade, with the silhouette of the recessed area leading up to a semi-dome or a vault with the curvature of a pointed arch covering this recess, thus continuing ascension beyond the building top into the sky. (Fig. 8.3) It is inconceivable that such portals should have flat lintels or semi-circular vaults or domes, as these do not suggest ascension. The first stops the eyesight abruptly, while the second takes the eyesight to the top and leads it back again to the earth. (Figs. 8.4 & 8.5)

---

[1] Such as that of the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn which has fifteen, while the Mosques of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī, al-Māridānī and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in Cairo have three.

[2] Some contemporary architects - for innovation - have overlooked the tradition and have designed mosques with projecting porches for the entrance. These porches protrude into the lesser holy space of the street. This unholy concept makes the entrance lose its intended meaning.

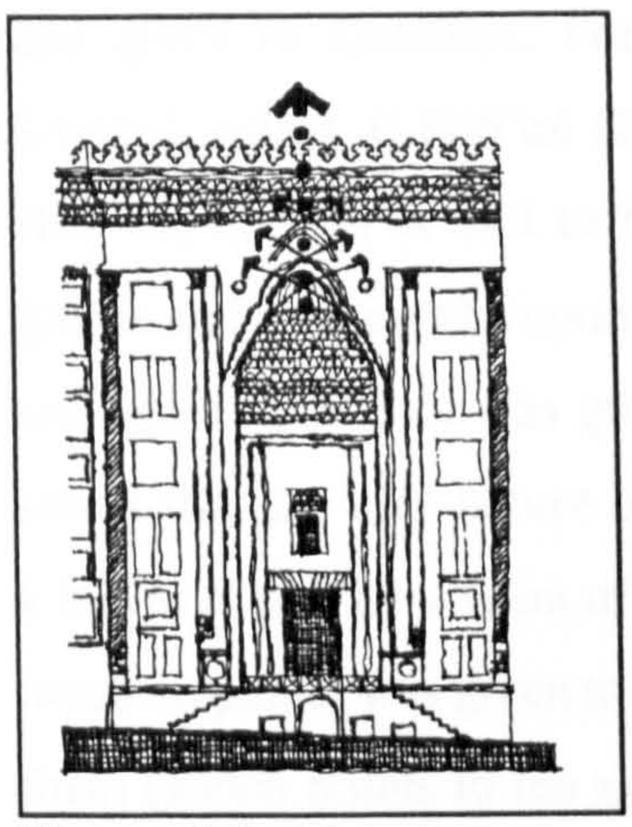


**Figure 8.3** Verticality expressed by the form of the pointed portal.

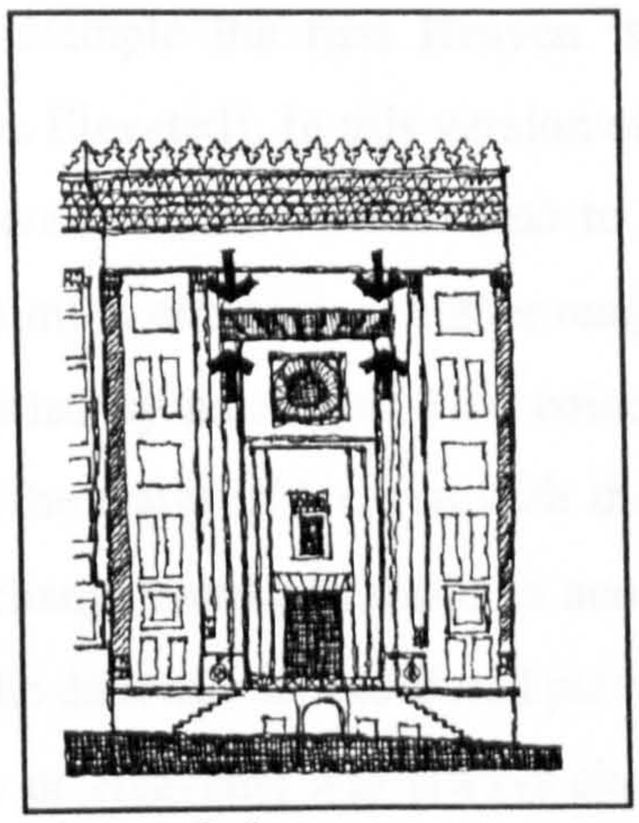


**Figure 8.4** The sightline stops at the beginning of the flat lintel.

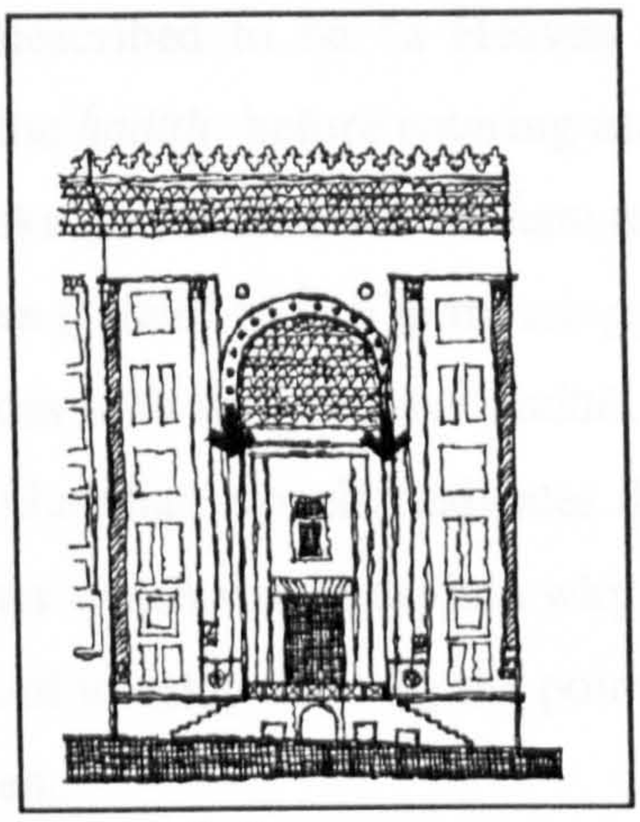


**Figure 8.5** The sightline ascends and descends in a "cyclic" motion.

As we observed in Chapter Five when examining Mamlūk buildings, the inner surface of the recessed entrance is brought out to the surface of the façade at the top by means of grouped stalactites in numerous tiers. Such devices were used to bring the inner surface of the portal of the pointed semi-dome out to fuse with the outer surface of the façade and from there upwards to the sky. Visually, looking at such a composition from top to bottom, creates a cave-like effect which draws the visitor inside and at the same time, visually indicates how small man is in comparison to this "cave".

We can find more about the meaning of a "gate" or "door" by examining the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* literature. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said that during the call for prayer (*ādhān*), the Gates of Heaven (*Abwāb al-Samā'*, literally "Doors of the Sky") were open, and that never was a supplication left unheard. Actually, the use of the "Gates of Heaven" is evident in the Qur'ān and *ḥadith* literature especially in the parts related to the *Mi'rāj*. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) ascended the seven Heavens until he reached the Throne of God (*'Arsh*). Upon entering each one of these Heavens, he was brought by Gabriel to a *Bāb* of the *Abwāb* of that Heaven[1]. Many of these Gateways are emphasized and named such as the case of *Bāb al-Ḥafaḍhah* (Gateway of the Guardians) which is guarded by an Angel called Ismā'īl. For example, in Ibn 'Abbās's version of the *ḥadīth* of the *Mi'rāj*[2] (popular among the Mamlūks), each Heaven that was visited was named

---

[1] *Ḥadīth* transmitted by al-Khaḍrī on the *Mi'rāj*, see Ibn Hishām, Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah, Part 1, Maṭba'at Mustaphā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlādahū, Cairo, 1955, p.403.

[2] Ibn 'Abbās, Al-Isrā' wal-Mi'rāj, al-Jumhūriyyah Press, Cairo, n.d., Pp.6-7.

and given its Qualities. For example the first Heaven is described to be "a Heaven of Smoke", called *Al-Rāfi'ah* (The Elevated). In this version of the *ḥadīth*, before entering each Heaven, Gabriel is said to have knocked on each *Bāb* to take permission for Muḥammad (peace and blessings be upon him) to enter into a higher *maqām* ("state" in Ṣūfī terminology), and again each door was guarded by an Angel. This coincides with the previous *ḥadīth*. It seems that the very nature of the Gates of Heaven with the Guardian Angels, indicates that a *bāb* is primarily a point of change from one status to another which would explain why so much emphasis was given to the doorway in traditional places of worship and why the pointed form (which points to the sky or Heavens) was always chosen.

Within the pointed forms of Mamlūk portals, are the doors. They are usually covered in brass metal sheets and engraved with star and polygonal patterns that give radiating effects and esoterically recall the verse of Light in which God is described to be "*the Light of the Heavens and the earth.*"[1] These stellar shapes also remind the worshipper entering the mosque, *madrasa*, or *khanqah* of the numerous verses of the Qur'ān which ask man to contemplate the stars and the universe; by doing so, he is told that he will reach an affirmation that there is no God but One. Accordingly, these patterns are based on a centre which unfolds to produce a multiplicity of shapes thus recalling the Ṣūfī belief of Unity in multiplicity (*al-Waḥdah fī al-kathrah*) and multiplicity from Unity (*al-kathrah min al-Waḥdah*). As for the surface of these brass doors, they resemble the soul of man which is tarnished and needs ennobling. While man needs a spiritual alchemy to train his soul to be elevated, so is the brass material that needs polishing, and engraving to ennoble its surface, thus bringing about a visual message of transcendence. (Fig. 8.6)

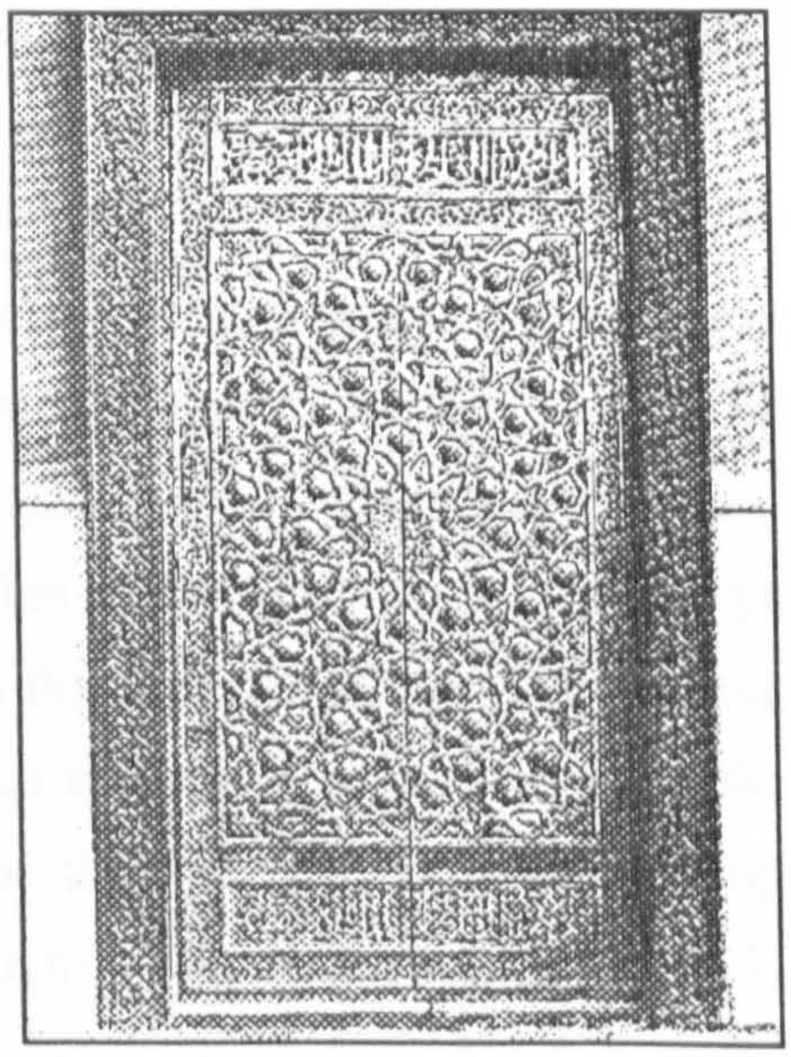


**Figure 8.6** A solid brass door with star and polygonal radiating patterns reflecting the verse of Light. (*Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan in Cairo).

Thus, the medieval understanding of the portal and doorway developed in both exoteric and esoteric directions. Exoterically, it was a smaller version of the "City Gateway".

---

[1] See Chapter Seven, section 7.3.3.

At the same time the idea of the verticality of the door developed as an inspired symbol generated by purely esoteric needs, that of the aim of the passage itself, to be elevated spiritually through the prayer - which as we mentioned earlier, is to the Ṡūfī the "communication" with God through the "*mi'rāj*" of the soul. It is thus obvious, that there is more to the shape of a portal than simply matters of historical style.

## 8.2 THE ENTRANCE HALL AND OFFSET CORRIDORS (*MAJĀZ*)

In general, the entrance hall is the first place of the building receiving the worshipper entering into the mosque through the portal. Its interior is empty, and is accentuated vertically by having either a dome on squinches and stalactites, or an elaborate groined vault for its roof. We saw in Chapter Five, that due to the rarity of Mamlūk entrance façades ever following both the alignment of the street, and the orientation of the prayer area (towards Makkah), an architectural problem arose. We mentioned in Chapter Five that C. Kessler concluded that this gave rise to the *majāz* (bent corridors) between the entrance and the *ṣaḥn*. The *majāz* is a convenient area in the building which takes up the bends necessary to cope with the discrepancy between these two orientations. In this area the ablutionaries and the service quarters are located. These elements do not need to be regular in form as do the entrance and the prayer hall, and the irregularities of the building are thus taken up comprehensively. In such utilitarian functions, the *majāz* is explained by historians. (Fig. 8.7)

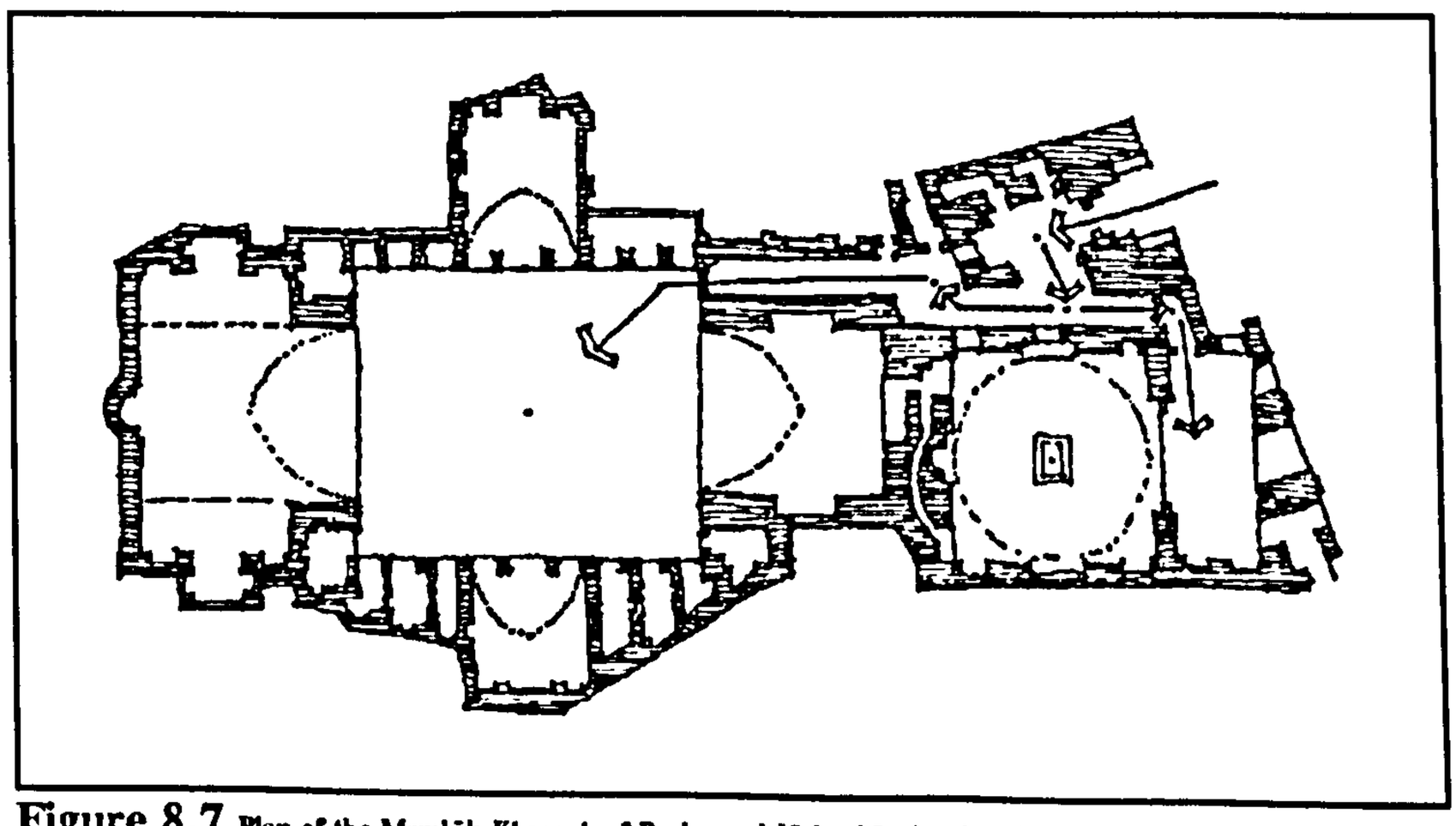


**Figure 8.7** Plan of the Mamlūk *Khanqah* of Baybars al-Jāshankīr showing the number of bends that the visitor passes through to reach the *ṣaḥn* and mausoleum.

But esoterically speaking, this solution results in the shutting off of the view of the street from the interior, and is what leads to the interiority of the building. This part of the building is the place where the worshipper further discards the remnants of his earthly concerns and directs his thoughts to God. Being empty, dark, and winding tube-like spaces, the series of bends that he passes through can be seen as a bodily assertion of the mental transformation - that of discarding of earthly concerns to "meet" God. (Fig. 8.8) By every turn of the body, he realizes that he is *turning away* from the outside to the inner part of the mosque (which is the exact opposite of the *turning towards* the *qibla*). Furthermore, to enter the mosque, is also to be immediately and profoundly impressed by its emptiness, both as antidote to the false plentitude of the outside world and symbolic of inner purity. This, in the consistent heat of a country such as Egypt, is confirmed from yet another angle, since to pass through the monumental portal into the entrance hall is to be met by a wave of coolness which conspires with the silence, darkness, and emptiness.

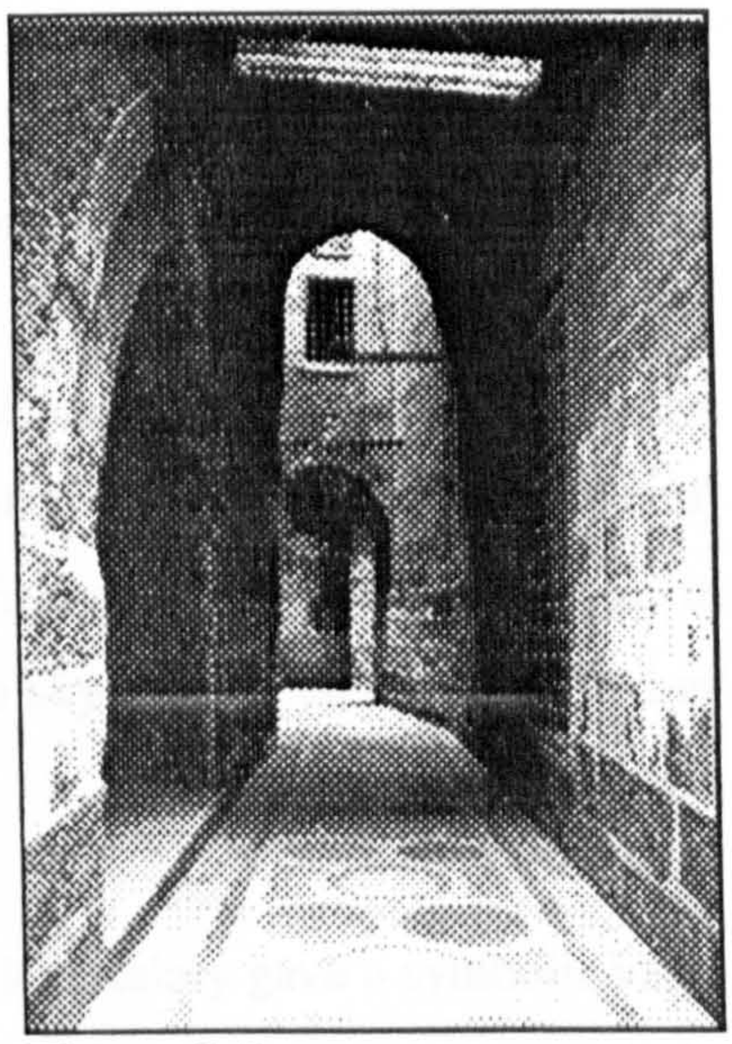


**Figure 8.8** The baffle-like *majāz* of the *Khanqah* of Baybars al-Jāshankīr, Cairo. Notice light wells at points of change in direction.

The atmosphere of the entrance hall followed by the *majāz* leaves the visitors' senses shocked by the sudden changes: from the noisy street to silence, from light to darkness, and from heat to coolness. As the body needs to accommodate physically to these changes, so does the soul to be able to attain the state of mind to stand in the Hands of God.

## 8.3 THE COURTYARD (*ṢAḤN*) AND WATER-FOUNTAIN (*FAWWĀRĀ*)

Before dealing immediately with the esoteric and exoteric dimensions attributed to the *ṣaḥn*, I will first recall the origins of the world views attributed to the Arab Egyptian people; that is to say, what might not be explicitly apparent in them but nevertheless is implicitly imbedded in their character.

Because the Arab Egyptian comes from the desert, his experience of its nature is bitter, the desert is for him burning, glaring, and barren. That is why he does not find any

comfort in opening his buildings to nature at ground level. The kindly aspect of nature for him is the sky[1], it promises coolness and life-giving water. It is no wonder that even in pre-Islamic times, for the desert dweller, the sky became the home of God. This tendency to see the sky as the kindly aspect of nature gradually developed into a theological proposition in which the sky or Heaven (*Samā'* pl. *Samāwāt*) became the abode of God. We saw in Chapter Seven that in the Islamic context, God resides above the Throne (*'Arsh*) and the Seat (*Kursī*) which lies above the seven Heavens. Now with his adoption of Islam, the Arab began to apply architectural metaphors in his cosmology, so that the sky or Heaven was regarded as a dome supported by four columns *da'āmāt* or *arkān*.[2]

Whether or not this description was taken literally, it certainly gave a symbolic value to traditional buildings, considering that they were modelled to be a microcosm of the universe. In fact, the metaphor was extended further to the eight sides of the octagon that supports a dome symbolizing the sky or the Heavens being manifested in the fountain in the centre of the courtyard. These eight sides were held to represent the eight Angels who will support the Throne of God on the Day of Judgement[3]. Because the sky and Heaven was to the traditional Muslim the "home" of God and the soothing face of nature, he naturally wanted to bring it into his own buildings, particularly in the more sacred ones. The means of doing so was the courtyard.

As a consequence, the prototype of traditional medieval buildings in Egypt became a hollowed cube, turning blind, windowless walls to the outside, with all the spaces of the building looking inwards into a courtyard from which only the sky can be seen. (Fig. 8.9) This courtyard was the users' private view of the sky. This space, enveloped by the enclosures and rooms of the building could alone induce a feeling of calmness, and security. In the courtyard, the sky was joined to the building, interlocking with it into an intimate contact by means of crestings (will be discussed in section 8.8.), so that the spirituality of the building was constantly replenished from Heaven.

---

[1] In the first instance, the Nile might be thought to be that source of comfort, but in reality, the medieval Egyptians had seen the unpredictability of this river too many times by sequences of droughts that lasted seven years each time.

[2] As discussed in Chapter Seven, section 7.2.

[3] These points have been dealt with in detail in chapter seven and will be discussed in the following section under the "Dome".

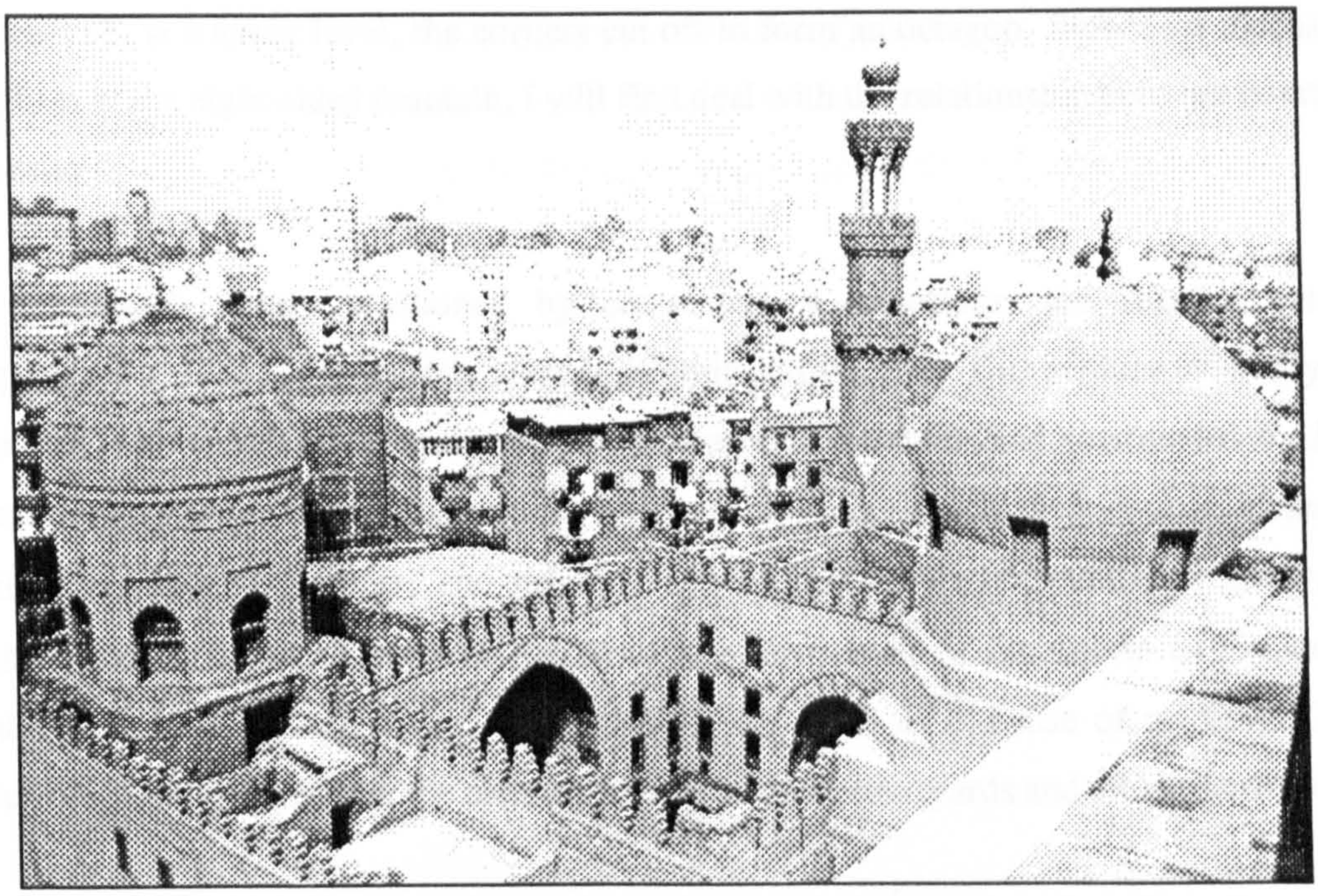


**Figure 8.9** The internal orientation of traditional Islamic buildings in Cairo can be seen in examples such as the Mamlūk *Madrasa* of Sarghatmish.

The serenity of an enclosed courtyard is not imaginary, it is not a piece of far-fetched symbolism, but a fact to be experienced by anyone who walks into the heart of a medieval mosque, *madrasa*, or *khanqah*.[1] Esoterically, the evident turning inwards in these traditional religious buildings suggests the interiorization of Islam and recalls the essence of Ṣūfism: to recognize the inner qualities of man because they are the true self. Based on these observations, it could be deduced that in Ṣūfī terms, this centre (the *ṣaḥn*) with its interiority and openness, signifies man's inward dimension.[2]

The courtyard as explained by art-historians is no more than just a utilitarian architectural device to socially provide privacy and protection, and to ameliorate the harshness of the climate. In fact, it is part of a microcosm that parallels the order of the universe itself. In this symbolic pattern, the four pillars (*arkān*) of the courtyard represent the four columns (*da'āmāt*) that carry the celestial dome (as discussed in Chapter Seven). The sky itself roofs the courtyard, and is reflected in the water fountain in its centre. This fountain is in fact an exact projection of the transitional zone of a dome. Its form is precisely the same, basically

---

[1] The value of the enclosed space was recognized not only by desert-dwellers but by all who lived along the Mediterranean seaboard: the Ancient Greeks and Romans, the Spaniards, as much as the Arab architects in the mosques of Cairo, Fez, Damascus, and Sāmarrā'.

[2] Similar views are discussed by Martin Lings, Symbol and Archetype: A Study of the Meaning of Existence, Quinta Essentia, Cambridge, 1991, p.124.

a square with, at a lower level, the corners cut off to form an octagon. Before we discuss the symbolism of the eight-sided fountain, I will first deal with the relationship between courtyard and garden.

Although hardly mentioned by contemporary historians, the relation between courtyard and garden is particularly close in Islamic architecture. This is more evidently seen in the medieval period when courtyards centred around fountains and surrounded by *iwāns* became prototypes for both "secular" and religious buildings - such as *madrasas*, *khanqahs*, hospitals (*māristāns*), *wikālas*, and palaces. The synthesis between courtyard and garden became complete in some parts of the Muslim world (such as the courts of Granada in Andalusia) while in others it was reflected abstractly such as the case of medieval Cairo. Generally speaking, however, the element present in most courtyards and all gardens is water.

We have pointed out in Chapter Five that it is a common fallacy that fountains placed in the centre of courtyards were meant for ablutions. We can be sure that this was not their purpose by examining several medieval mosques which accommodated specific areas for that function either in the transition area between entrance and courtyard (the *majāz*) or outside the mosque altogether. To give an example, Ibn Duqmāq (the medieval historian) says that the *fawwāra* (fountain) of the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn was not used for ablutions, as he tells us of complaints that were made by people for having to go outside the mosque proper to perform this ritual. Ibn Ṭūlūn, the ruler and founder of this mosque, answered by saying that he wanted to keep the mosque pure and unsoiled at all times - probably since the fountain was at the centre of the *ṣaḥn* itself.[1] It should be remembered that prayers can be performed in the *ṣaḥn* when the covered area is full of worshippers.[2] K.A.C. Creswell having found no utilitarian purpose for this fountain, attributed its presence to aesthetic reasons.

Actually, the symbolic importance of water among near eastern peoples was known and firmly established long before Islam. Pre-Islamic Arabs of Makkah seem to have

---

[1] Ibn Duqmāq, vol.4, p.123, vol.2, Pp. 2-3, cited in K.A.C. Creswell in Early Muslim Architecture, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1932-40, p.303, who attributes it to aesthetic reasons. See Chapter Five for other cases of interpretation, specifically: Su'ād Māhir, Doris Behrens-Abouseif, and Richard B. Parker et al.

[2] The mosque has two distinct areas: the clean, comprising the courtyard and the prayer hall - amongst the rituals of prayer is prostration, thus, no one is allowed to step into the clean area with his shoes on or without having performed the necessary ablutions - and the unclean, comprising the passages leading to the ablutionaries. The *ṣaḥn* or courtyard and the prayer areas are clean areas. Normally, these ablutionaries would come in the transitional area between the entrance and the *ṣaḥn*.

celebrated their absolute dependence on water symbolically. Recent research shows that the city was divided into four parts having lines drawn from the four corners of the Ka'ba (considered sacred even then), which contained a water spout so that each tribe had at least symbolic control of the spill-over water from its roof.[1]

The Qur'ān further emphasizes and crystallizes the centrality of water in the consciousness of the Muslims by: attributing the creation of every living thing "*from water*"[2]; and by its connection to the Throne of God (*'Arsh*), God says that "*His Throne lies on water*," and that Throne lies on the vertical axis transcending the seven Heavens intersecting the horizontal earth at the centre, in Makkah. Furthermore, in the Qur'ān God speaks of the Gardens of Beatitude where rivers flow: "*Lo! those who believe and do good deeds, theirs will be Gardens underneath which rivers flow,*"[3] this is mentioned more than 25 times in the Qur'ān. These rivers are classified into four types:

> ***Here is a Parable of the Garden which the righteous are promised: in it are rivers of Water incorruptible; rivers of Milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of Wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of Honey pure and clear. In it are for them all kinds of fruits ...*** [4]

On the other hand, Ṡūfīs have been effected by the detailed description of these Gardens in the following verses in which God says:

> ***And because they (the believers) were patient and constant, He will reward them with a Garden and (garments of) silk.***
> ***Reclining in the (Garden) on raised thrones, they will see there neither the sun's (excessive heat) nor (the moon's) excessive cold.***
> ***And the shades of the (Garden) will come low over them, and the bunches (of fruit), there, will hang low in humility.***

---

[1] Ibrāhīm 'Illāwī, "The *Khiṭaṭ*: Early Islamic Cities", Lecture at Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, 1985. He relies primarily on al-Ṫabarī's *Tārīkh al-Ṫabarī*.

[2] Qur'ān: 21/30 "*He has created from water everything that is alive.*"

[3] Qur'ān: 85/11.

[4] Qur'ān: 47/15.

*And amongst them will be passed round the vessels of silver and goblets of crystal,*
*Crystal clear, made of silver: they will determine the measure thereof (according to their wishes).*
*And they will be given to drink there of a Cup (of Wine) mixed with Zanjabīl (a spice),*
*A fountain there called Salsabīl (a stream of running water).*[1]

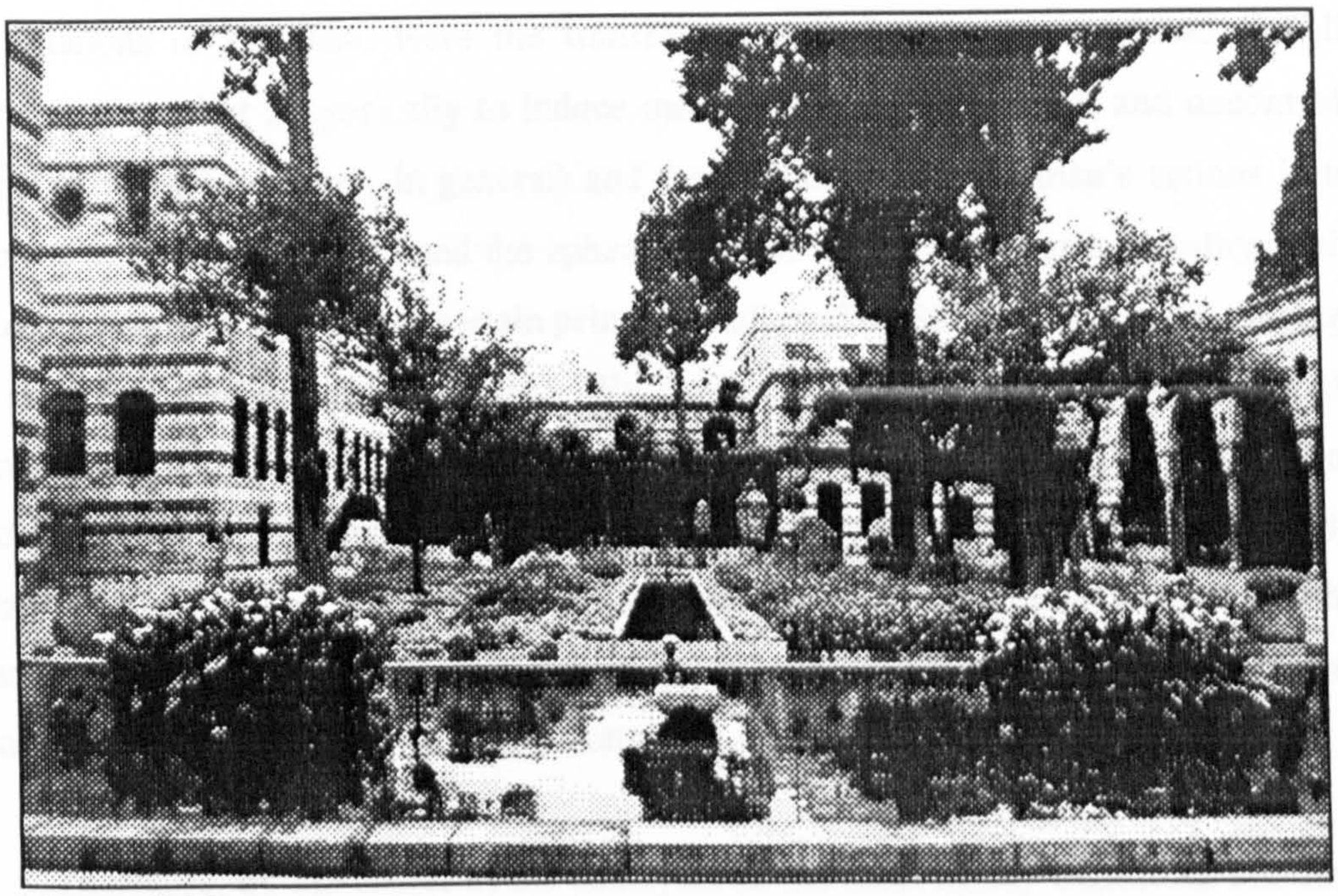


**Figure 8.10** An interior view of the courtyard of the Palace of al-'Aḍham in Damascus. It clearly reflects the above mentioned Qur'ānic verses in an attempt to recreate an earthly image of Paradise.

Thus, these images from the Qur'ān have led to an acceptance of the idea that the medieval Islamic Garden represented an earthly Paradise[2], (Fig. 8.10) Its centre was a water element recalling the source of all creation, the Almighty on His Throne on the waters. Bearing in mind that the Throne is octagonal, it follows that the form of the medieval fountain was chosen to be eight-sided. This immediately dismisses any utilitarian, aesthetic, or climatic claims on the existence of the fountain.

---

[1] Qur'ān: 76/12-18.

[2] See Annemarie Schimmel, "The Celestial Garden in Islam", in The Islamic Garden, Fourth Year Symposium Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, 1976. See Jonas Lehrman, Earthly Paradise: Garden and Courtyard in Islam, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1980. Also see John Brookes, Gardens of Paradise: The History and Design of the Great Islamic Gardens, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1987.

The *salsabīl* (mentioned in the above Qur'ānic quotation), like all other architectural forms, enjoyed a period when the element and its meaning were connected, or their expressive intent was clear; that is when the form was originally understood by its viewers in the way it was intended[1]. In time, this original meaning was weakened, but the form continued to be used, and in fact further elaborated by the *mu'allim* because it had taken its place in the tradition for its own sake.[2]

It then follows that the pool, fountain, and *salsabīl* were nothing but symbolic representations of Paradise. Here the transformations of water are not used literally to illustrate a river, but allegorically to induce meditation on the inevitable and uncontrollable changes of water (or nature, in general) and the ultimate futility of man's actions in trying to control it. Such meditations and the ephemerality of matter, and man's inability to change the physical world seem to echo certain principles adopted by Ṡūfīs and medieval theologians, such as al-Bāqillāni (eleventh-century). We saw in Chapter Two that Ṡūfīs believed in a universe composed of atoms and accidents. The world could not be sustained from moment to moment unless God continuously went on creating these moments; it was only by His constant intervention that the universe was kept from collapsing[3]. These fountains with their still and moving constituents (solid structure and ephemeral water), convey to the viewer this message, which in turn leads to meditation about God, the only Permanent.[4]

Therefore, by the choice of the courtyard as the heart of any traditional building, the traditional designers obtained a more feasible "urban" form, capable of providing that basic contact with nature so essential to traditional Muslim life. This architectural tool dominated the architectural activity of "place making" and within the Islamic medieval period in Egypt became the prototype of place (*makān*), unifying the individual parts of a building with the whole. Within the tranquil *ṣaḥn*, the placement of the traditional water fountain with all its

---

[1] See Stephen Humphreys, "The Expressive Intent of Mamlūk Architecture: A preliminary essay", Studia Islamica, 35, 1972, Pp.69-119. Also see Oleg Grabar, "Signs and Symbols in Islamic Architecture", in Architecture and Community: Building in the Islamic World Today, ed. Renata Holod, Aperture, Millerton, N.Y., 1983, Pp. 25-32.

[2] In other words, a form may leave the realm of intense meaning but remain embedded in the repertory of the of the architect, perhaps to be revived at a later point and given a different meaning. Or it might simply cease to exist.

[3] Al-Bāqallīnī, *al-Tamhīd*, Librairie Orientale, Beirut, 1957, p.18.

[4] Yasser Tabbaa, "Towards an interpretation of the use of water in Islamic courtyards and courtyard gardens", Journal of Garden History, vol.7, No.3, 1987, Pp.197-220.

attributes and abstractions provides a centre which acts as a generator of form. The whole organization of medieval Islamic buildings seems to start from that centre extending the design outwards, while the central *fawwāra* generates a centripetal force. Through the use of the courtyard with the source of water at its centre, the building was linked to the vertical axis, and man's recapitulation of Paradise was complete. Actually this link with the vertical also results from the fact that the centre of the courtyard was aligned with the *miḥrāb* (in a following section we will see that it represents the joining of the *qibla* orientation to the vertical). (Fig. 8.11)

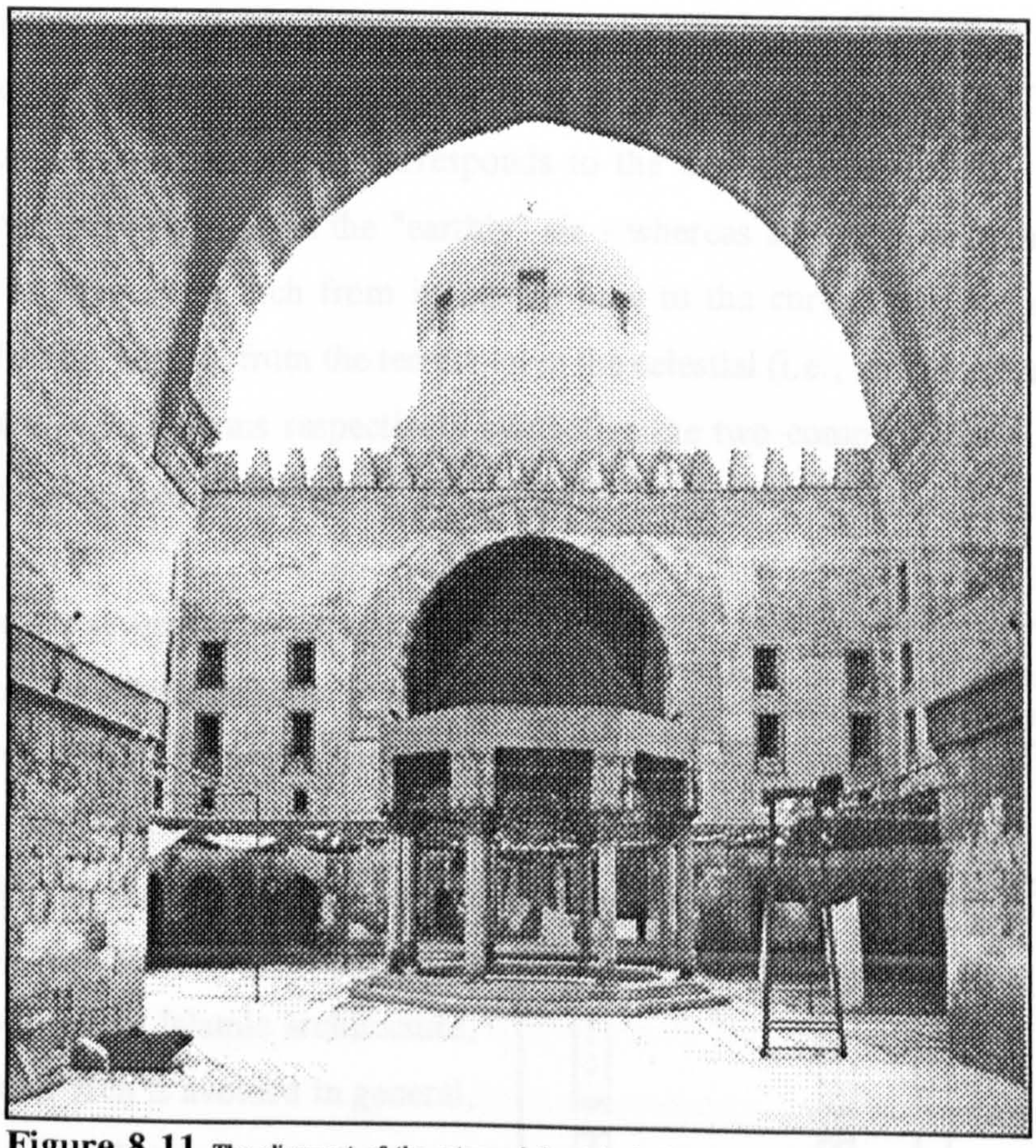


**Figure 8.11** The alignment of the octagonal fountain in the centre of the courtyard with the *mihrāb* and the dome in the Mamlūk *Madrasa* of Sarghatmish.

Unity was achieved in the courtyard through the visual interaction of space, shape, and surface, complemented by their qualitative correspondences. Space, as the place of the physical and spiritual aspects of anything that is traditional, is enclosed by shape, just as in traditional man, the body encloses the soul which encompasses the spirit. We saw in Chapter Seven that space boundaries (walls), are thus a prerequisite for defining and isolating this sacred place within which the soul can be sensed and its spiritual demands fulfilled. The result

of the interaction of shape and surface in Mamlūk architecture created a space devoid of tensions and conducive to contemplation. Such a shape was the cubic void: the perfect form used in all courtyards. As we mentioned in Chapter Seven, the symbolic essence of the cube is derived from the number six (which is earthly and stable).[1]

## 8.4 THE ARCH (*AL-'AQD*) AND *IWĀN*

The use of arches in medieval Islamic buildings is to carry the roof and the dome which they support, and so join in their symbolism. Examining the form of an arch, we find it to consist of two parts: a quadrangular base and a curved top. We saw in Chapter Seven that the rectangle or square shape corresponds to the earthly number four - which when projected in the third plane gives the "earthly" six - whereas all that is circular or curved is celestial. By looking at an arch from its square base to the curved top, we will find it to represent in fact the passing from the terrestrial to the celestial (i.e., earth to Heaven). Hence, the circular and square forms respectively symbolize the two complementary principles by which earth is connected to Heaven.[2]

There are several types of arches in the history of traditional Islamic architecture. Each arch with its particular curvature consequently has its own symbolic inner meaning. This is due to the qualitative dimension of the geometry involved in producing its form. In Islamic architecture, the semi-circular arch is avoided in general, and only the pointed, segmental, or horse-shoe shaped arches are used; such facts are historically explained in terms of style. But as seen when discussing the portal, the

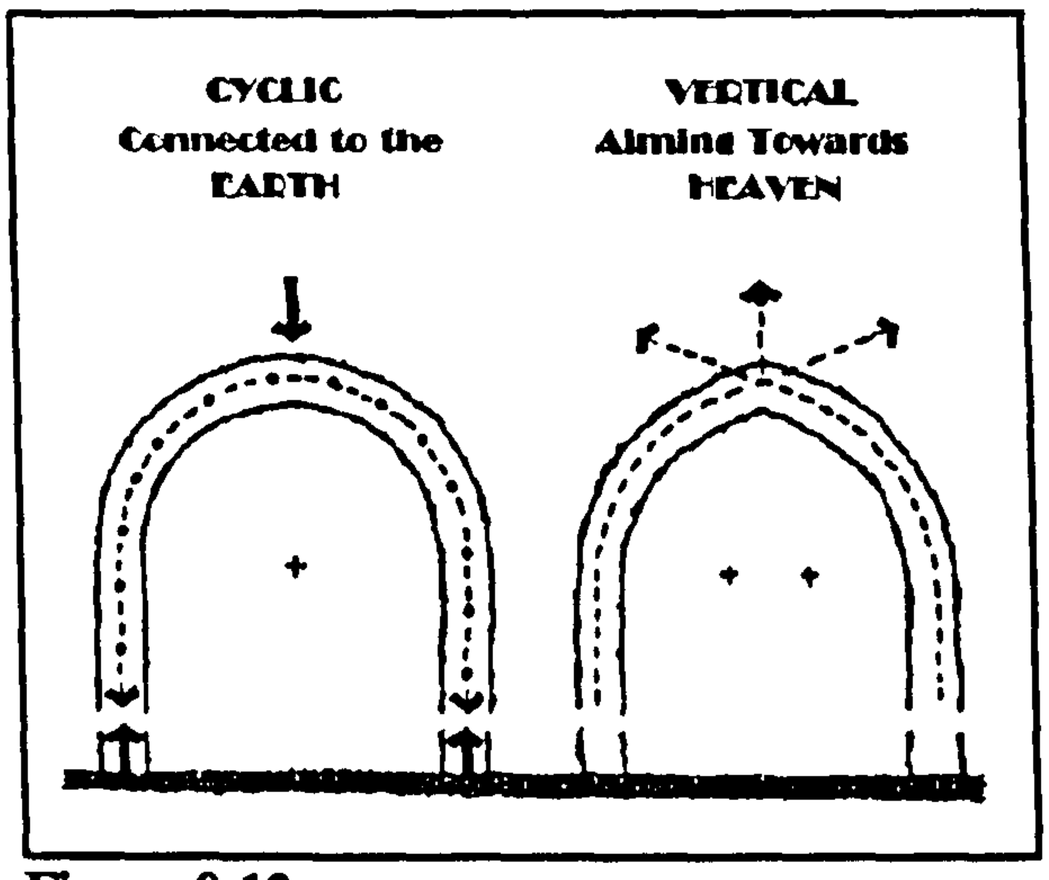



**Figure 8.12** The traditional conception of the semi-circular and pointed arches.

[1] See Chapter Seven, section 7.3.2.

[2] In this connection, since there has been already mention of the correspondence between a work of art and works of Divine Art such as the human microcosm, Martin Lings says that it is relevant to recall here that in the bodily microcosm its "heaven" mainly the head, is round, whereas the shoulders, which may be said to mark the end of the corporeal frame, are square. op cit. M. Lings, 1991, p.120.

semi-circular arch represents the cyclic journey of life to death, rising from the earth and returning back again to it. This visual impact hinders transcendence and for this reason the semi-circle has always been avoided.[1] (Fig. 8.12)

Observing the form of the pointed arch, we find that the curved parts meet at the top at an angle with reaction lines at the keystone running out of the structure tangentially to the two curves meeting at the top. These two tangential lines suggest a vertical resultant, and are thus, associated with the vertical. This vertical insinuation connects to the Ṡūfī understanding of man, the only created being who was set apart over the rest of creation: it is man who was given the "Trust" and the "freedom of choice".[2] God made man into a moral being and says in the Qur'ān that He has elevated, honoured and distinguished mankind.

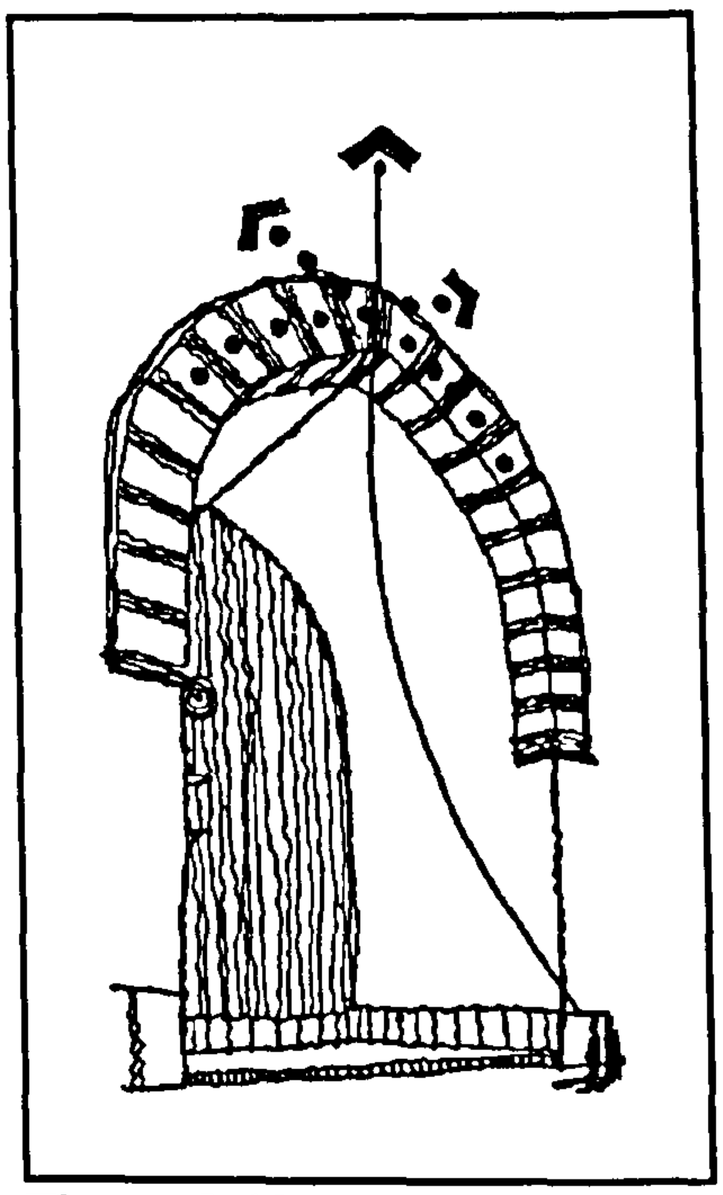


**Figure 8.13** Joining the earth with the Heavens.

On the other hand, the *iwan* is the three dimensional space resulting from the growth of the arch (be it pointed or semi-circular) along a horizontal axis. Naturally, in Islamic architecture the pointed *iwān* is chosen in favour of the semi-circular due to its vertical connotation. (Fig. 8.13) This, suggests that in Islamic cosmology, the pointed *iwān* represents another process of "place making" - i.e., other than the courtyard - which by extension of the symbolism of the arch, has the qualities of unifying the earth with the Heavens. Esoterically, it is the place in which the soul may seek union with God from the spiritual point of view. It should be remembered that apart from the Ṡūfī *shaykh*'s journey to the One, in which he acquires Direct Knowledge, there is the daily ritual prayers in which al-Ghazzālī says that the soul of the Muslim should perform (or rather achieve) a "*mi'rāj*" to the Heavens while the body remains on earth performing the physical prayer.[3]

---

[1] It is interesting to know that symmetry in Egypt has been associated with death since Pharaonic times, and the semi-circular vault or arch in Pharaonic culture is described as Osiran - belonging to Osiris, god of the dead - coming up from below and returning back down to earth.

[2] See Chapter Three.

[3] See Chapter Four.

Furthermore, the horizontality of the pointed *iwān* - resulting from the growth of the arch along a horizontal axis - under which the Muslim meditates can be seen as the "way to the Straight Path"; in the *Fatiḥa* (the opening chapter of the Qur'ān recited in every cycle "*rak'a*") Muslims ask God: "*show us the way to the Straight Path (al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm).*"[1] As we have seen in Chapter Two, in Ṣūfī terms by applying *ta'wīl*, this way is none other than the transitional space between the temporal and spiritual worlds in which the Ṣūfī travels in his journey to the Truth. This transition from earthly to Heavenly is best manifested by the form of the *iwān* - earthly base, celestial top. (Fig. 8.14)

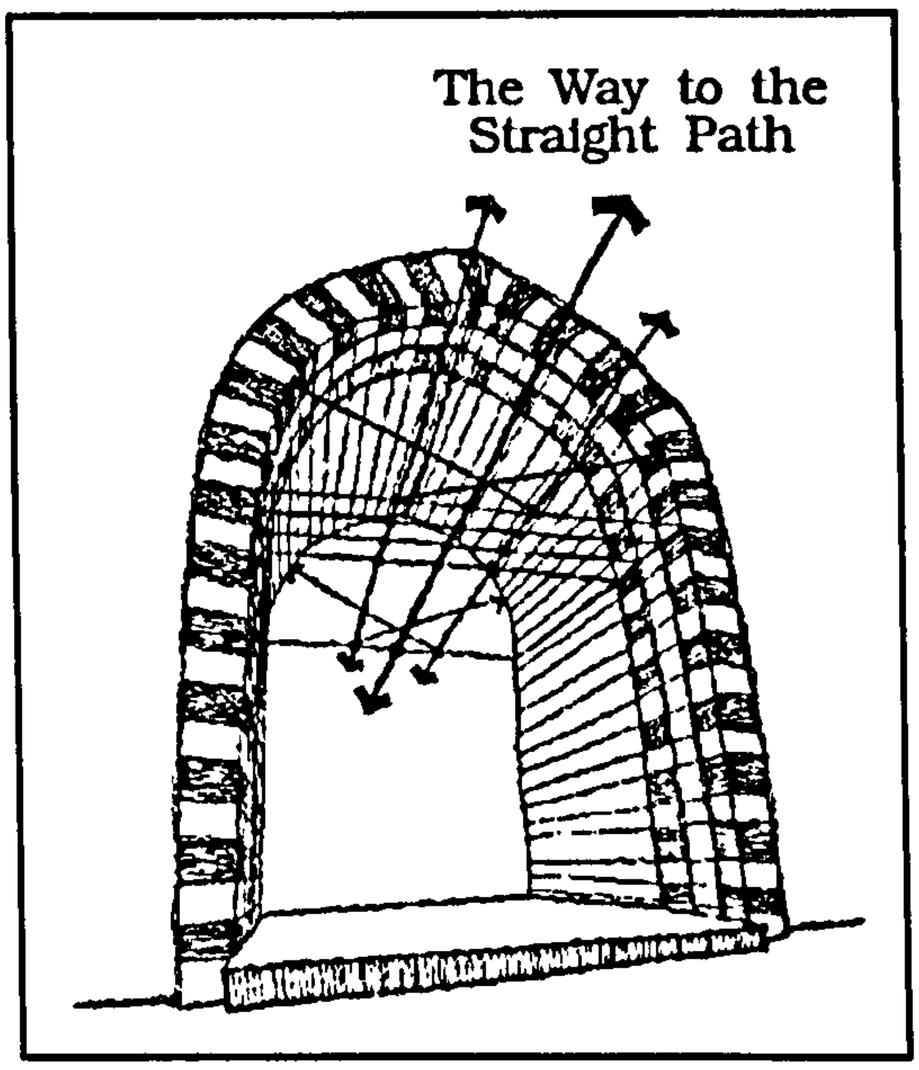



**Figure 8.14** The implication of the horizontal growth of the pointed arch in the pointed *iwān*.

Each of the surfaces of the *iwān* has a distinct purpose. The floor, is elevated from the central courtyard, recalling the elevated status of man above all other earthly creatures. Some of the Ṣūfīs believe that man is exalted even above the Angels and Prophets, due to the freedom of choice that man was offered (which the first two do not possess).[2] From this viewpoint, it follows that this elevated floor provides a base on which man in his elevated status prays. The walls as they rise up are met by bands of Qur'ānic epigraphy bringing the Word of God to the space, that which is sacred in both its form and content and at once sanctifies the surface (as was argued in Chapter Seven). Finally, the walls curve upwards and inwards giving a feeling of the transcendent vertical dimension beyond the physical limits of the place itself. An interesting observation that is relevant here, is the fact that all Ṣūfī cells (*khalwāt*) in *madrasas* and *khanqahs* of the Mamlūk period are vaulted in the same manner as the pointed *iwān*. The Ṣūfī used to retreat in these cells for forty days to perform prayers, *dhikr*, and *i'tikāf* (meditation). These activities were frequently said to be best performed in the dark[3] which means that by being in such a place, the implicitness of the form of the *iwān*

---

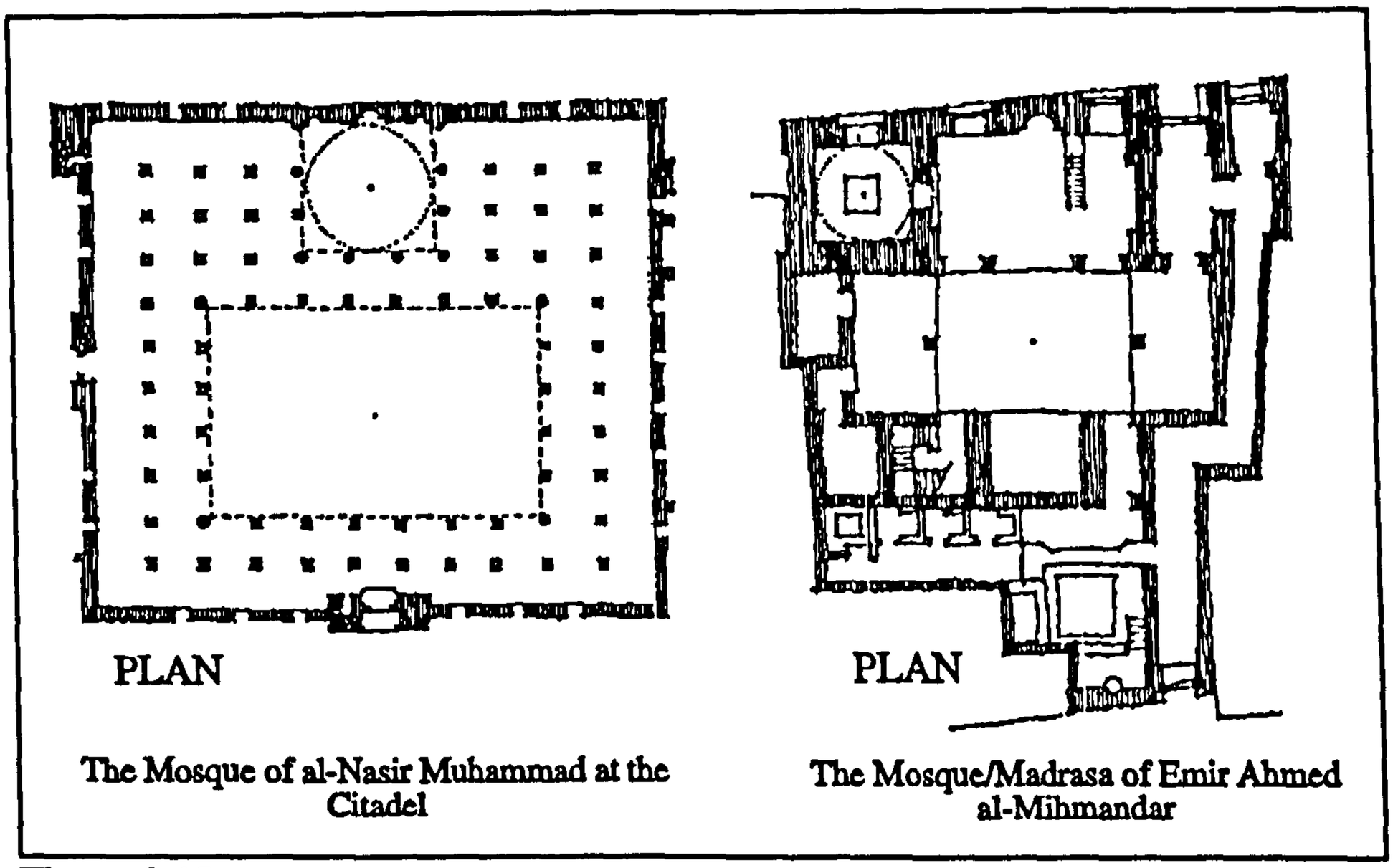
[1] Qur'ān: 1/6.

[2] See Chapter Two.

[3] See section on *i'tikāf* in al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, trans. F. Karim, Delhi, 1982, vol.1.

was still functioning even though one could not physically see it. We should not forget that in Ṡūfī terms, vision as we have just talked about, is the outward dimension of vision, while the ultimate vision is that of the heart. Bearing these points in mind, it is not surprising to find that ever since the *iwān* was introduced in the Ayyubid period into Egypt[1], the form was a success and was used ever since in the *madrasa* and *khanqah* as a space for prayer, teaching, and performance of Ṡūfī rituals. From this brief analysis, it is clear that the choice of the pointed arch and *iwān* (as explained here) dismisses "style" as the only reason behind the frequency of their usage.

## 8.5 THE PRAYING HALL (*RIWĀQ AL-ṠALĀH* OR *IWĀN AL-ṠALĀH*)




The Mosque of al-Nasir Muhammad at the Citadel

The Mosque/Madrasa of Emir Ahmed al-Mihmandar

**Figure 8.15** The two major types of medieval religious buildings: the hypostyle (pillared) mosque, and the four-*iwān madrasa* type.

It was mentioned in Chapter Four that apart from the Friday congregational prayer and the five daily prayers, the hypostyle hall of the mosque was used in teaching before the introduction of the *Madrasa* type. It was also mentioned that by the advent of the Ayyubid period in Egypt, *Sunnī* Islam returned to take its place as the Islamic way of practice. As a means of ensuring this *Sunnī* return, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn introduced the *madrasa* which housed the

[1] We should not forget that it was Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn who opened the door to *Sunnī* Ṡūfism as an antidote to the Fatimid *Shī'is*.

four schools of *Sunnī* jurisprudence[1]. (Fig. 8.15) In the *madrasa*, teaching took place in the prayer hall in the form of an *iwān*. We saw in an earlier section the exoteric and esoteric implications of the form of the pointed *iwān*, which validated it to be chosen as a form compatible to prayer, meditation, and spiritual transcendence.

We saw earlier in Chapter Four, that from the *Sunna* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), the prayer area is preferably rectangular with the large side facing Makkah. This disposition has two main reasons: the first was explained in Chapter Four and has to do with the greater merit of those worshippers who are praying in rows nearest to the *imām* (consequently the rows have to be laterally the longest possible); the second is that one has to be able to recognize the direction of Makkah immediately upon entering the central space (be it a *ṣaḥn* or a domed area). This should be obvious by the layout without the need arising to look for the *miḥrāb*. In this case, the laterality of the hall accommodating the rows gives the direction.[2]

Following this major guideline, three generic forms appeared to accommodate the prayer hall, mainly in the forms of pillared rectangular areas in hypostyle mosques, or *iwāns* discarding the pillars (as we saw in the last section), or square domed spaces such as Persian and Turkish examples. These three types are "naturally" explained by art-historians as stylistic outcomes. Furthermore, some historians, falsely considering the octagonal Dome of the Rock as a mosque, add to the repertory of generic forms the octagon. It is true that the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem has an octagonal plan but this is a very special case. The Dome of the Rock was built to be a "centre" and a sanctuary in itself - like the Ka'ba in Makkah - rather than a mosque. It is termed a *mazār* in Arabic which is directly translated as a "visiting place" exactly as a mausoleum. We saw in the last chapter that a *mazār* or centre was designed as a meeting point of all directions. That is why the Dome of the Rock, architecturally, had to be expressed by a non-directional form - otherwise, the centre would be somewhere else outside the sanctuary in the direction where the building pointed to.

---

[1] At the beginning, learning in the mosque/*madrasa* was limited to one, that of the *emīr* or sulīān who built it. Later it comprised two schools of jurisprudence and became the *madrasa thunā'iyya* or "double *madrasa*". This was followed by the triple and quadruple *madrasa* for all four schools of jurisprudence.

[2] We see nowadays new mosques in which the prayer area is designed with an octagonal or circular plan, for reasons of individuality and novelty. Such plans are discordant with the row configuration. Also, such plans are non-directional, the circle expressing chaos, as far as direction is concerned, as the eye goes from one point to the other round the circumference without conceiving where it starts and where it ends. Such designs are found to have had no precedents in all the traditional Islamic models, for these obvious reasons.

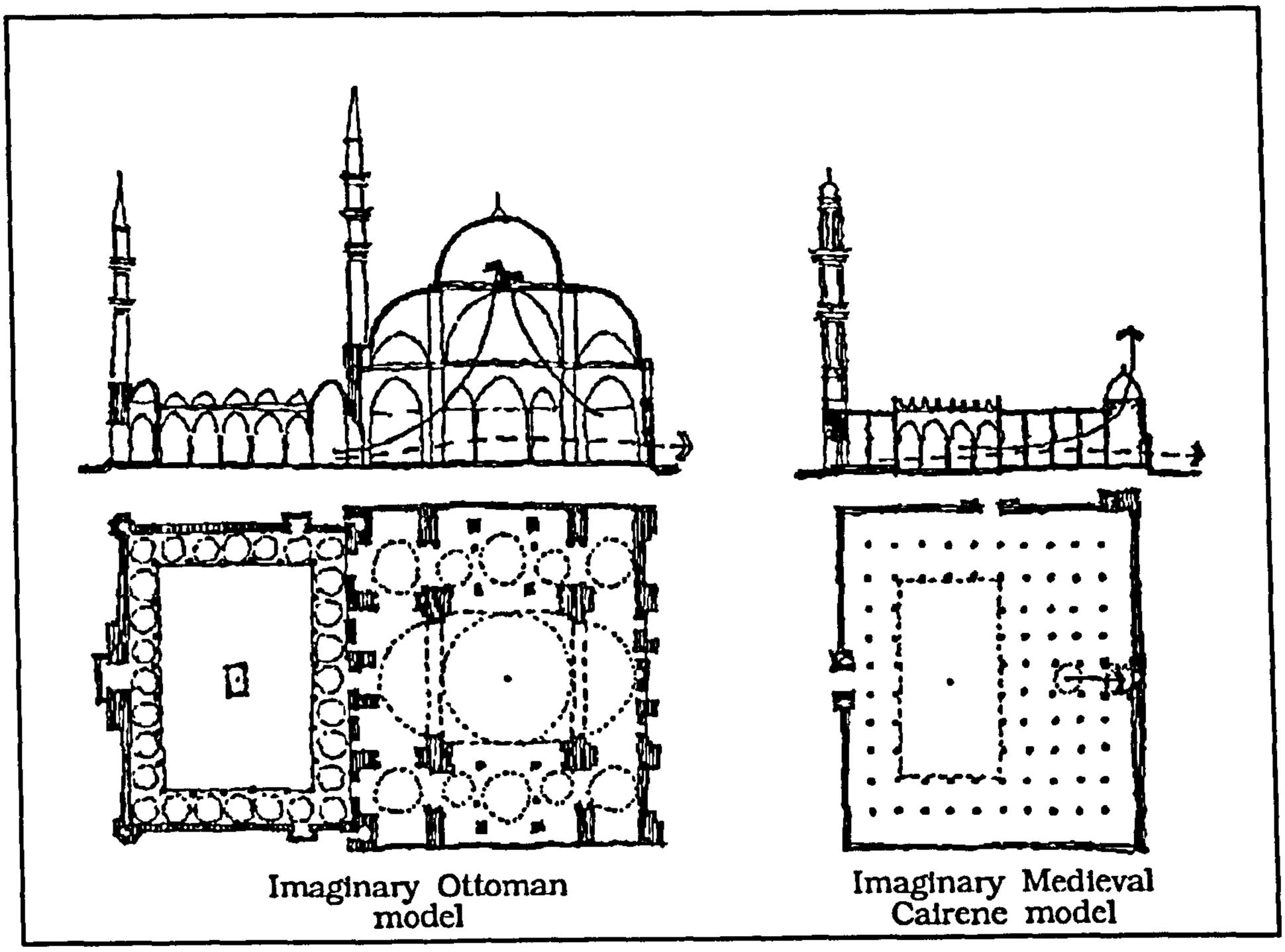



**Figure 8.16** Ottoman vs. Mamlūk medieval attitudes towards the use of the Dome and its consequences *towards qibla* orientation.

On the other hand, the more conservative form of the square was never used before the later eighteenth-century Ottoman models. Because of their reliance on Byzantine domed models, the praying hall had to start with a square. The reason for not having seen prototypes of the square in the design of prayer halls before that period, is that it is non directional. In a square space the four sides are equally expressed by their equal sides, and secondly, by having a pointed dome in a central position (although expressing contact with the sky as will be discussed in section 8.7) shifts the focal orientation of the internal space away from Makkah towards the centre of the space. That is why we find that in the earlier medieval mosques, *mu'allims* dealt with the dome in a different manner by shifting it from the geometrical centre of the praying area towards the *qibla* above the *miḥrāb* to express verticality at that particular point where the horizontal axis symbolizing the Ka'ba meets the vertical axis pointing at the Heavens. (Fig. 8.16)

Going back to what constitutes a prayer *riwāq* in a hypostyle mosque, we find it to be the pillar. When we compare the notion of a pillar to that of an *iwān*, we find that the former is static as opposed to the upward dynamic movement of the later. But in the domain of the static, the pillar is dynamic in virtue of the tenseness of its architectural function. The pillar, by its upward thrust counteracts gravity which corresponds to the natural forces of

nature. Stone is by nature inert and heavy, but through the hands of the architect it may be inspired with a heavenward inclination by applying to it decorative attributes that suggest verticality (such as vertical tapering for example). The verticality of the pillar recalls the Ṡūfī notion of the creation of man which is mentioned in the Qur'ān to be: "*in the fairest uprightness*"[1]. In Ṡūfī terms, it is this uprightness (outwardly prolonged in man's vertical stance), which marks him, and him alone, as the mediator between Heaven and earth, a function manifestly symbolized in a building by that which mediates between the roof and floor. The pillar can be seen by its verticality to symbolize an image of uprising, vigilance and alertness. According to Martin Lings, the likeness of the pillar to the number one makes him see it as an expression of the qualitative aspect of that number representing the Absolute, he says: "*it is thus, the inner act of affirmation.*"

This argument is true even in prayer halls consisting of a "forest" of pillars, (Fig. 8.17) in the same manner that we argued in Chapter Seven the presence of numerous meta-physical centres as opposed to the one ritual Centre (the Ka'ba). Apart from that, collectively, the repetition of the pillars can be explained as the repetition of the *Shahādah* (Affirmation of Faith), which without being uttered again and again, has no duration in time. We have to remember that the *dhikr* of the Ṡūfīs is nothing but a way to constantly remember God. It is by uttering His Name time and time again that the Ṡūfī becomes overtaken by the Divine Presence.

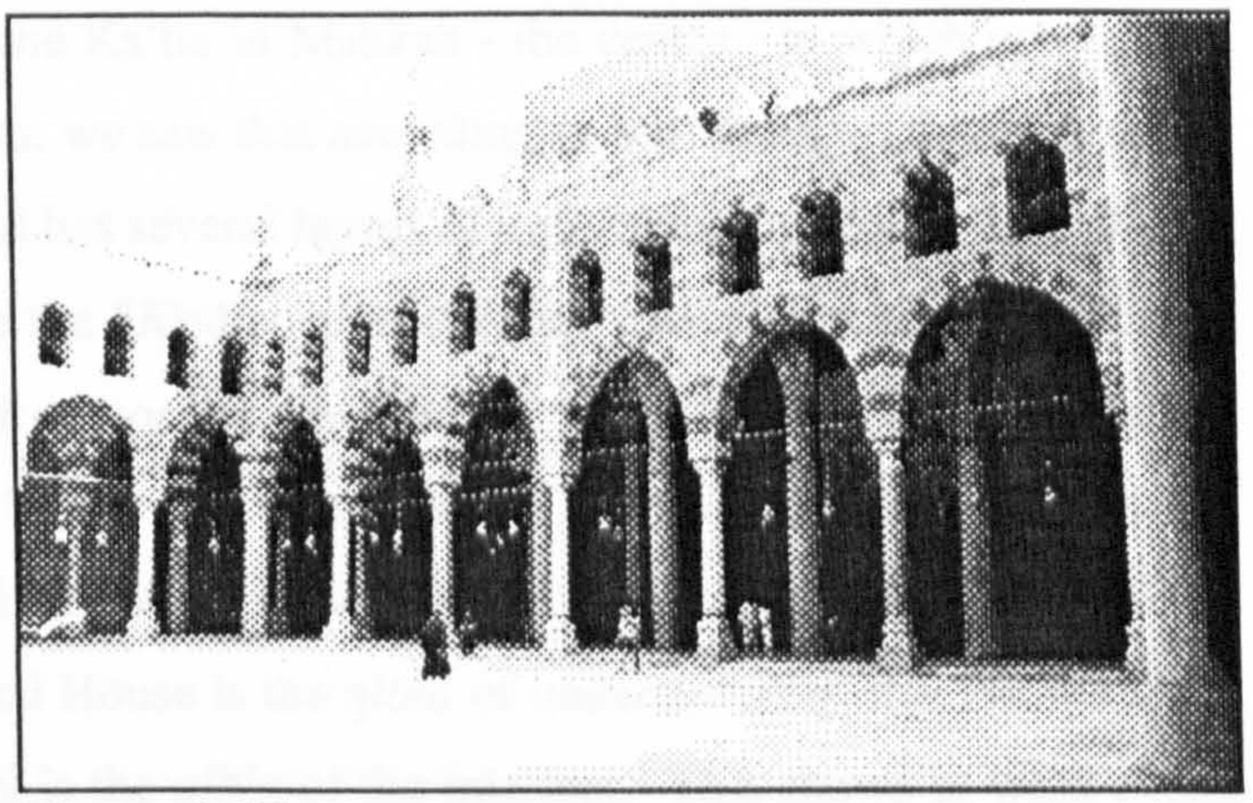


**Figure 8.17** The columns in the space of the Mosque of al-Nāṡir Muḥammad, can be interpreted as a constant invocation of the Divine Name "*Allāh*".

In more general terms, the pillared hall reflects Islamic values and rituals. It recalls the equality of mankind[2] in the eyes of God - it is only by being more virtuous that one is

---

[1] As mentioned above, the Ṡūfīs relied heavily on their interpretation of this verse of the Qur'ān: 95/4.

[2] Equality but not similarity. In Islam there is a very big difference between these two terms.

"better" than ones fellow[1]. By the nature by which it is ordered and divided into equal rectangles or squares in a manner that does not differentiate any position from another (by visual signals for example such as a dome over a particular space in the mosque or an elevated area above another ...etc.) it expresses the "democracy" of Islam. Furthermore, the use of pillars also eases the formation of straight lines which are a prerequisite to prayer. The *imām* of a mosque, before every prayer says: "*Make straight lines. Making straight lines (order) is part of the completion (perfection, "tamām") of prayer.*"

## 8.6 THE PRAYER NICHE (*MIḤRĀB*)

As we saw in Chapter Four, the most important rite in Islam is that of *qibla* orientation. Orientation, is towards the Ka'ba in Makkah - the centre - to which one orients one's daily prayers. In Chapter Seven, we saw that according to Ṣūfī thought, the *qibla* is not only related to the physical Ka'ba but has several layers of understanding related to it. As we saw earlier, in Ibn 'Arabī's treatise the "*Risālet al-Aḥādiyyah*", he claims that the *qibla* is fivefold: the first is the *miḥrāb* of a mosque, the second is the Ka'ba, the third is the Frequented House (*al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr*), the fourth is the Throne, and the fifth is the Footstool. Ibn 'Arabī further explains that the *miḥrāb* is the *qibla* of the soul, the Ka'ba is the *qibla* of intention, the Frequented House is the *qibla* of understanding, the Throne is the *qibla* of the heart, and the Footstool is the *qibla* of the intellect.[2] This shows to what extent traditional elements in Islam were looked upon as a series of hierarchical levels (or states "*maqāmāt*").

The Divine announcement of the turning towards a specific direction was made in the Qur'ān: "*We have seen the turning of your face toward Heaven (for guidance O Muḥammad). And now We will make you turn toward a qibla which shall please you. So turn your face toward the Sanctified Mosque, and ye (O Muslims), wheresoever you may be, turn your faces toward it.*"[3]

---

[1] The Prophetic *ḥadīth* says: "*He who is better is the most virtuous.*"

[2] Ibn 'Arabī, *Inshā' al-Dawā'ir wal-Jadāwil*, Manuscript # 123, vol.1, Asad National Library, Damascus, p.18.

[3] Qur'ān: 2/144.

The *qibla* is the focal point or centre in relation to which the community is balanced. To grasp this extremely subtle idea, it helps to think of Islam as an immense wheel with Makkah at its heart and which rotates on this city as axis. The spokes of this wheel radiate outward to all corners of the earth and whenever the canonical hours of prayer fall in any country, the Muslims of that place must turn toward its magnetic cynosure. (Fig. 8.18) That is why the most important wall in a mosque is that of the *qibla* demarcated by the *miḥrāb*.

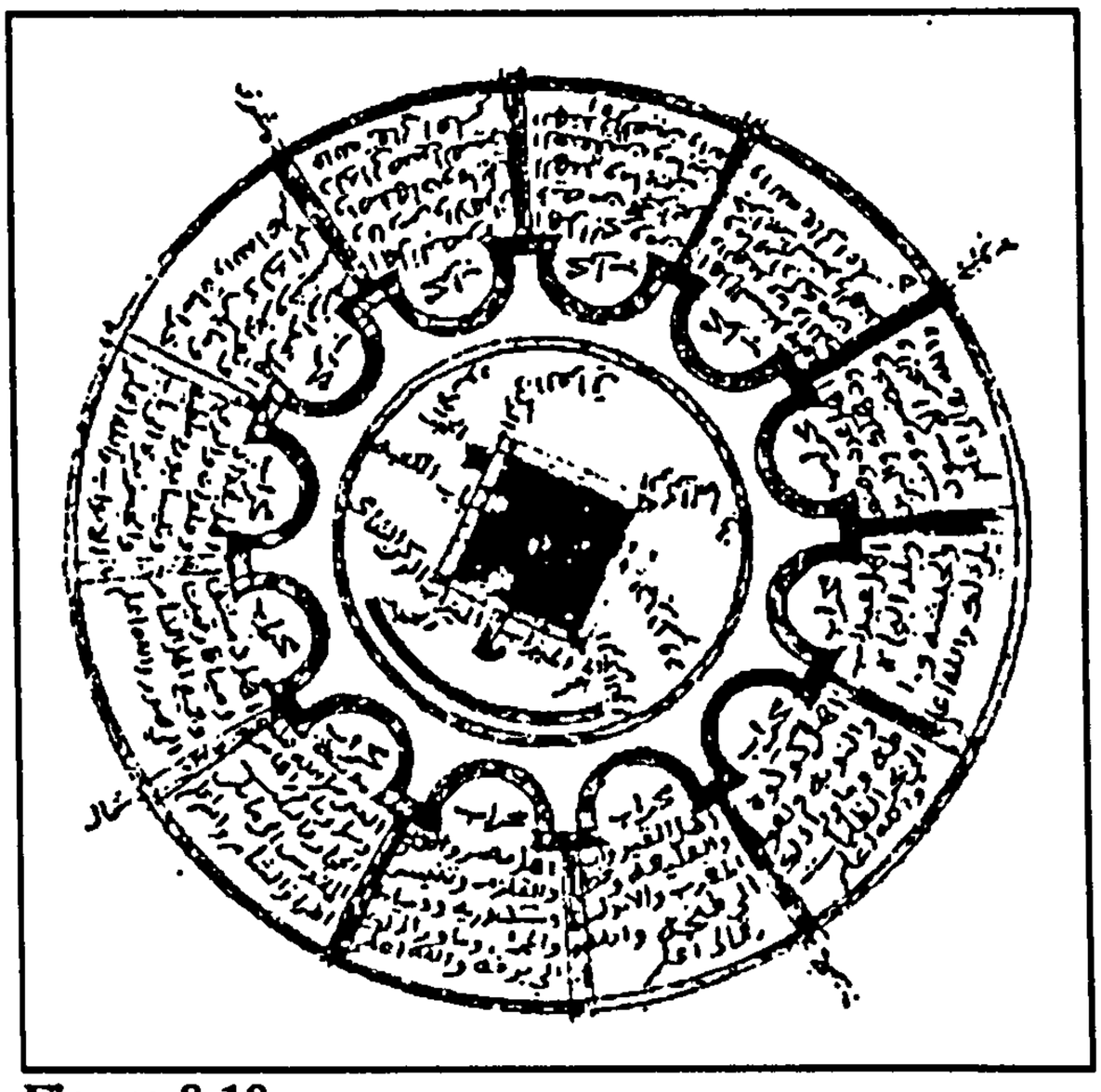


**Figure 8.18** A 14th century astronomical manuscript showing the world divided into 12 sectors radiating from the Ka'ba. (Manuscript #DM 637, Egyptian National Library.)

The word "*miḥrāb*" occurs more than once in the Qur'ān and means chamber for prayer and praise of God; it appears in relation to figures from the Judeo-Christian tradition:

> ***... Every time that he (Zakariya) entered the chamber (miḥrāb) to see her (Mariam), he found her supplied with sustenance ...***[1]
>
> ***While he was standing in prayer in the chamber (miḥrāb), the Angels called unto him: "God doth give thee glad tidings of Yaḥya, witnessing the truth of a Word from God, ...***[2]
>
> ***So Zakariya came out to his people from his chamber (mihrab): He told them by signs to celebrate God's praises in the morning and evening.***[3]
>
> ***Has the story of the disputants reached thee (David)? Behold, they climbed over the wall of the private chamber (miḥrāb).***[4]

---

[1] Qur'ān: 3/37.

[2] Qur'ān: 3/39.

[3] Qur'ān: 19/11.

[4] Qur'ān: 38/21.

Historically speaking, the *miḥrāb* was not introduced as an element of mosque design until well after the death of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). In 707-709 A.D., 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz the Ummayyad Caliph, rebuilt the Prophet's Mosque in Madina by commissioning Coptic Egyptian architects.[1] These craftsmen reproduced at Madina a niche in the *qibla* wall not in the form of an altar but of an empty *miḥrāb*. A few years later, in 710-712 A.D., the Mosque of 'Amr in Fustāt - the first mosque erected in Egypt - was rebuilt with a *miḥrāb*. Ever since, this acquired element has been a standard feature of mosque architecture. Indeed the alignment of the *miḥrāb* with the central axis of the building, forms the constant unifying factor in religious architecture; the eye is led to the culmination at the far end of the prayer hall to the *miḥrāb*. No matter how complex the architectural organisation, whether we are dealing with the most elaborate *miḥrāb* of a state mosque or a simple recess in a mud-brick mosque of a Nilotic village, its articulation is invariably the same.

The *miḥrāb* in a mosque is the place where the *imām* stands and performs the daily prayers. The niche reflects his recitations of the Divine Word to the congregation, who then follow him. The Divine words which reverberate from the *miḥrāb* are symbols of the Presence of God. That is the reason why Titus Burckhardt says that the primary function of the *miḥrāb* is acoustic[2]. He says that it is a device which echoes the words directed towards it. Traditionally, a lamp was hung from it, this lamp recalls the "niche of light" of which it is said in the Qur'ān: "*God is the Light of the Heavens and of the earth. His Light is like a niche in which there is a lamp; the lamp is in a glass, which is like a shining star...*"[3]

The *miḥrāb*'s relation to the verse of Light should not be slighted, as it is especially relevant to our discussion of inward depth seen by the degrees of brightness depicted in the Qur'ānic verse (quoted above) increasing in proportion to its interiority, first the niche, then the glass, then the oil, then the flame (the inwarder the brighter). That is why light is important when dealing with medieval Islamic architecture, where it unifies the different parts of the building in a hierarchy of depth.

---

[1] James Dickie, "The Development of the Mosque Form in relation to the needs of the Muslim Liturgy: With a special reference to Mosque Architecture in Egypt", The Islamic Review, Woking, Sept.- Oct. 1965, p.14.

[2] Titus Burckhardt, Sacred Art in East and West: Principles and Methods, Perennial Books, 1967, Pp.117-118.

[3] Qur'ān: 24/35.

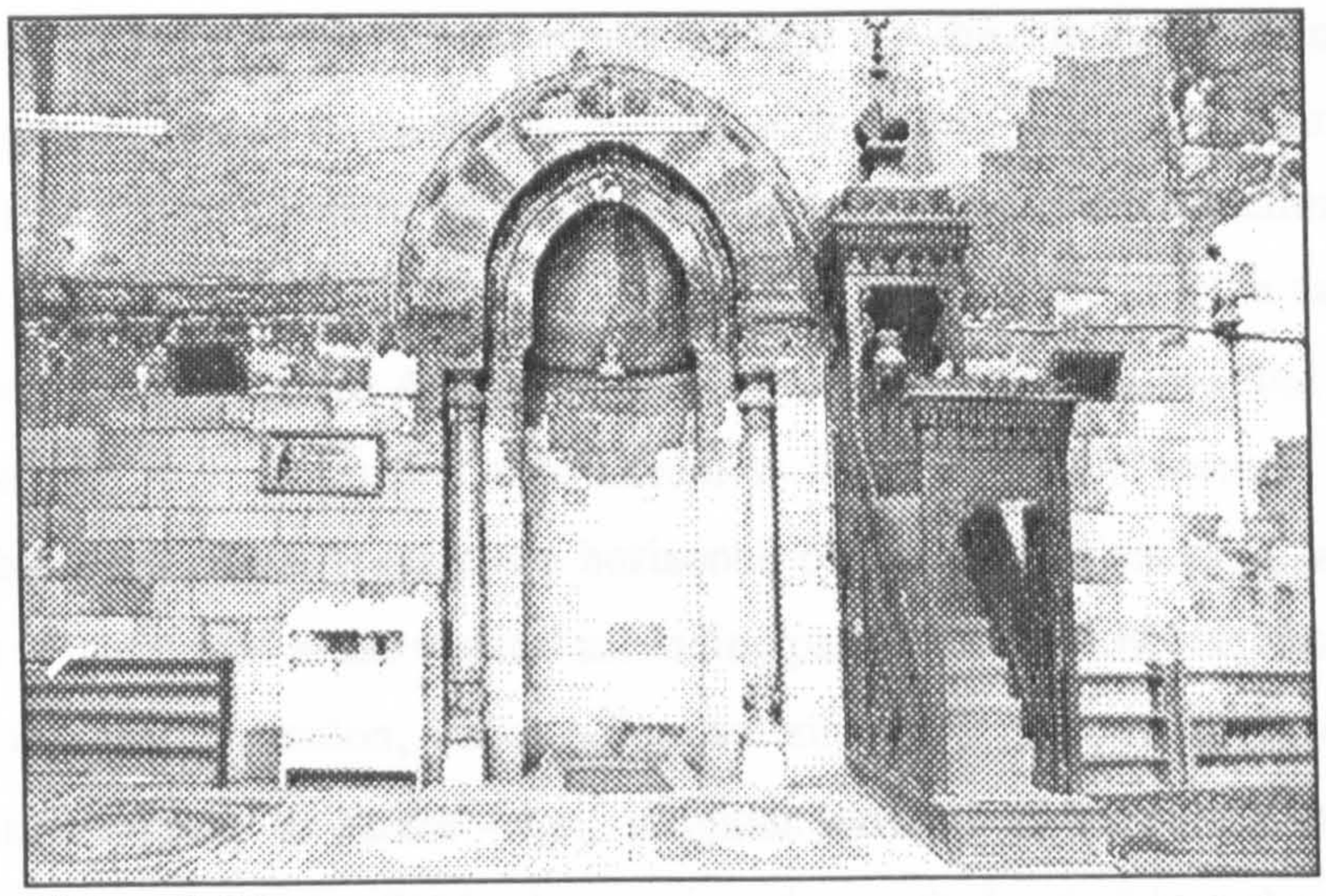


**Figure 8.19** The *miḥrāb*, the focus of the *qibla* wall. (The *Khanqah* of Baybars al-Jāshankīr).

Al-Ghazzālī, writes in the chapter entitled "Secrets of Prayer" in his "*Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*": "*... if the worshipper cannot attain the Ka'ba in Makkah with his body, he can reach it with his soul through this niche.*"[1] In this way, the *miḥrāb* appears in some mosques to be like an "opening" in the otherwise unpunctured *qibla* walls. More generally speaking, it is likewise evident that in every mosque, the walls are a barrier to the outer world, whereas the niche is an opening to the inner world of the Hereafter. (Fig. 8.19)

Upon looking at the form of the *miḥrāb* we find that it is usually a semi-circular niche covered by half a dome[2]. The dome's privilege as a remarkably apt vehicle for symbolism is shared by the *miḥrāb*. The dome as we will see, rests effortlessly on the structure. The primary significance of the prayer niche is to give worshippers their orientation: it demands that they turn their faces towards the All-Merciful and it shows them how to turn. The words "*turning towards*" is an intensely loaded phrase which is an essential aspect of this place. Frithjof Schuon rightly puts it as the place where "*the melting of the heart in the heat of the Divine*," and where the "*opening of mercy*" occurs.[3] Orientation always implies an activity, a turning *towards* Heaven in order to be attracted *by* Heaven; and the inviting nature of the niche's roundly recessed hollow is a symbol of this Heavenly attraction.

---

[1] op cit. al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā'*, 1982, Chapter IV "Secrets of Prayer", p.157.

[2] This niche reminds us of the recesses in Pharaonic tombs in doors wrongly named "false doors". Falsehood cannot be associated with religion. The Pharaonic term is, "the threshold of eternity", for the soul to pass through.

[3] Frithjof Schuon, Stations of Wisdom, trans. G.E. Palmer, Bedfont, Middlesex, Perennial Books, second edition, 1961, p.150.

The *miḥrāb* has a quality of movement because it is the domain of the movements of the ritual prayer which signify a gradual "melting of the heart" until, in the prostration, the body, and with it the soul, finally "pours" itself out as it were, in the direction of Makkah. When the *Fātiḥah* is uttered in the Islamic ritual prayer in which the Muslim says: "*guide us upon the Straight Path*"[1] and the Arabic word for straight is *mustaqīm*, we find that the word *mustaqīm* does not suggest whether this directness is horizontal or vertical. The exoteric meaning of this word in that context is a horizontal path that Muslims shall walk upon, but esoterically it is interpreted as the vertical ascending path. There is however, no contradiction between this and the orientation, which points not simply from place to place on the same level but from periphery to centre - i.e., religious building to Ka'ba. In other words, it interiorizes; and interiority *implicitly* places us on the vertical axis (since the Ka'ba itself is the point of intersection on the vertical axis). Therefore, in Ṣūfī terms, prostration in or towards the *miḥrāb* is the symbol of an inner movement towards the heart (the centre of man) which is the only way to the transcendant.

It should be remembered in this connection that there is not only a certain symbolic equivalence between inwardness, centrality, and depth, but also between interiority and height, for they all imply transcendence. We saw in Chapter Two that in Ṣūfī belief, the Heart is the gateway to the Spirit, which is hierarchically "above" the Heart; yet it is nonetheless true to say that access to the Spirit lies "in the depth" of the heart. In a parallel way, the sky is the great symbol of God's Kingdom; but according to the Ṣūfīs, this Kingdom is *within* every one of us. The equivalences in question spring from the antinomy that the Absolute is both All-Encompasser and Centre from which all radiates.[2]

We have noted above, that in no religion is orientation more stressed than in Islam, it might therefore seem a paradox at first sight that there is, in the mosque, no architectural "movement" or "flow" from entrance to *miḥrāb*. The reason is that primarily, the *miḥrāb* is not an end in itself; it serves to indicate the direction towards something which is a certain distance, and although that object, the Ka'ba, is often named "the House of God" (*Bayt Allāh*), this must not be understood as a localisation of the Divinity. God says in the Qur'ān:

---

[1] Qur'ān: 1/6.

[2] See Ibn 'Arabī's views on the symbolism of centre and circumference of a circle in chapter 7.3. Similar ideas in op cit. Martin Lings, 1991, p.121.

"*Wherever ye turn, there is the Face of God. Verily God is Vast, All-Knowing.*"[1] Also dominant in a similar sense are two verses that were addressed to the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him): "*If My slaves ask thee of Me, say I am Near. I answer the prayer of the worshipper when he prayeth,*"[2] and "*We (Allah) are nearer to him (man) than his jugular vein.*"[3] These verses are amongst the main cornerstones on which Ṡūfī thought is based. This revealed expression of the Divine Omnipresence is what dominates traditional medieval architecture and accounts for instance the absence in the mosque of anything equivalent to the nave of a church. Surely, because the nave in Islam is the prayer itself, that which *guides to* the Straight Path.

Such verses help to explain why upon entering a medieval religious building one finds emptiness; it is the idea of this space being the receptacle for the Divine Omnipresence. This is also what explains the absence of any tension between Heaven and earth in Islam. It is by its immobility that the atmosphere of a mosque, *madrasa*, or *khanqah* is distinguished from all things that are transitory. One can hardly fail to be aware of the conformity between such a setting and the hands of a Ṡūfī in supplication, "contained" within a *miḥrāb*, which are held in a position of passive receptivity with palms open and upward like those of a beggar (for he is "poor" in his love for God "*faqīr ila-Allāh*") hoping to have his supplications answered.

## 8.7 THE DOME (*QUBBAH*)

Throughout the medieval Islamic period, domes have been connected to the different types of traditional buildings. For example, high domes crowned audience halls of early Muslim Caliphs consistently. Mu'āwiya, the Umayyad Caliph, erected a residence adjacent to the Mosque of Damascus which was known as the *qubbat al-khaḍrā*[4] (mistranslated as the "green dome"). Likewise, according to Ibn 'Asākir[5], al-Walīd's palace in northern Syria

---

[1] Qur'ān: 2/115.

[2] Qur'ān: 2/186.

[3] Qur'ān: 50/16.

[4] K.A.C. Creswell, A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture, Lebanon Bookshops, Beirut, 1958, second edition, p.90.

[5] Ibn 'Asākir quoted by Oleg Grabar, "al-Mushatta, Baghdad, and al-Wasit", The World of Islam: Studies in Honour of P.K. Hitti, ed. R.B. Winder, London, 1959, p.106

had a *qubbat al-khaḍrā'* over its audience hall. The centre of the famous round city of Baghdad mentioned in Chapter Seven, had an audience chamber roofed by a dome, this room was surmounted by another audience hall crowned by yet another dome, a *qubbat al-khaḍrā'*, and was crowned by a weather vane in the shape of a horseman[1].

We have seen in Chapters Five and Seven that the term *qubbat al-khaḍrā'* has been translated by historians for a long time as the "green dome" because in Arabic the colour green is *akhḍar*. What validated this translation to contemporary Islamic art-historians, is that medieval domes were covered with copper which turned green with time, and hence the association. That is why art-historians have explained the consistent desire of medieval patrons to build domes covered with green faience as a representation of power and authority (relating these domes to the earlier mentioned audience halls). Actually, we have seen in the last chapter that the Arabic term "*akhḍar*" had many other meanings in medieval times, basically it referred to the sky (*samā'* as defined in Ibn Manḍhūr's "*Lisān al-'Arab*"). Also, by consulting Edward William Lane's Lexicon which relies on *Tāj al-'Arūs*,[2] we find that the meaning of *qubbat al-khaḍrā'* is "the Dome of Heaven". The expression here refers to a *celestial* dome rather than a *coloured* one, a far more convincing interpretation. Actually it is enough to return to the following *ḥadīths* that were compiled by al-Suyūṭī, in his treatise on Islamic cosmology to acknowledge that the dome in Islam referred to the Heavens:

> ***Ibn Abī Ḥātim quotes the following saying of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) from Jubayr Ibn Maḥ'am: "God is seated on His Throne, His Throne stands on His Heavens, and His Heavens are on His earth like this! And he indicated with his finger the likeness of a dome."***
>
> ***Ibn Abī Ḥātīm quotes al-Qāšim Ībn Abī Bazza as saying: "Heaven is not quadrangular, but it is vaulted. To the humans it appears green."***

---

[1] The 'Abbasids considered the horseman on the dome as an omen, as well as a convenient metaphor for the Caliph's power and authority. When it was seen to point to a certain direction, the Caliph knew that rebels would be coming from that direction, (i.e., like a weather vane he should predict trouble before it "blew" in). Consequently the fall of this *qubbat al-khaḍrā'* and the horseman was an omen for the fall of the empire. This is a typical attitude in comparison to the toppling of the minaret of the *madrasa* of the Sulṭān Ḥassan which heralded the end of his reign in the Baḥrī Mamlūk period.

[2] Edward William Lane quoting "*Tāj al-'Arūs*", an 18th C. dictionary in: An Arabic-English Lexicon, Edinburgh, 1863-93, p.756, under the root "*khudr*".

*From Iyyās Ibn Mu'āwiya he relates this saying: "This heaven is vaulted over the earth like a dome."*

*Ibn Abī Ḥātim quotes al-Suddī as giving the following explanation of God's word 'Heaven an edifice' (wal Samā'a Banāha): "The edifice of Heaven spans over the earth like a dome-structure; it is a roof over the earth." And Ibn Jarīr following the tradition from Ibn Mas'ūd cites: "A roof over the earth like a dome-structure."*[1]

This celestial quality can be seen explicitly in the decoration of many domical structures starting with the bath complex (*ḥammām*) of Qušayr 'Amra in Jordan which has a *dā'irat al-falak* (zodiacal circle) painted on the ceiling[2]. In several other baths, the hot rooms are domed with pierced openings which resemble stars and recall this expression of the celestial sphere on the surface of the dome (such as in the Mamlūk houses of al-Sehīmī in Cairo, and in the Damascene bath in Qasr al-'Aḍham). It is interesting to see how Jonathan Bloom, the contemporary Islamic art-historian criticizes such domes:

*The painter copied his model (the celestial dome) with little understanding; the building's interior decorator displayed a somewhat bizarre or overly eager imagination when he used celestial imagery over a medieval hot tub.*[3]

Not realizing the relation between water and the Heavens[4] and the transcendant vertical axis connecting the process of Creation to the Divine cosmos, he failed to see the connection. Also, a typical misconception made by art-historians regarding traditional art, is the resort to abstracted images as opposed to realistic ones. To copy the real celestial dome would have been considered a presumptuous and even blasphemous act on behalf of the craftsman - he would be considered to be vying with the *Muṣawwir* of the Universe - while on the other hand, when abstracting from nature, he produced a symbol of what he had

---

[1] These four *ḥadīths* are cited in op cit. al-Suyūtī (15th C.), trans. by A. Heinen, 1982, p.141.

[2] Another example of a *qubbat al-khaḍrā'* is the dome of the Khirbat al-Mafjar.

[3] Jonathan Bloom, Minaret: Symbol of Islam, VII, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p.69.

[4] Mentioned above in relation to the courtyard and water fountain.

wanted to indicate to, thus, delivering the message[1]. There is a vast difference between a modern quantitative depiction, and a traditional symbolic depiction of the Heavens.

In any case, within the Islamic tradition the dome provided a symbol of the dome of the Heavens, which is fundamental in medieval Islamic cosmology. The circle symbolizing multiplicity and unity corresponds to the circumference and the centre in that order. It would follow that by means of symbolic transfer, the Islamic attributes of centre, circle, and sphere inherent in the dome are fully realized. Apart from the foremost Śūfī correlation of the circle and sphere with Unity, is the idea of the "Spirit," which at once surrounds and pervades all being, much as the dome encompasses its enclosed space, and the vault of the sky encompasses all Creation. The passage of this Spirit from the apex of the pointed dome to the circumference of the circle, is viewed as taking the viewer from Unity into multiplicity.

We have discussed how there are two worlds which are being constantly corresponded by the traditional *mu'allim*: the terrestrial or earthly world, and the celestial or heavenly one. Traditionally, these two reflect on one another. In order to attain the path from earthly to heavenly one has to pass through an intermediary world, one that is transitional bridging the earth with the Heavens. In the case of the dome, this transition is represented by the octagon transforming the square to the circle of the dome.

In speaking of his Night Journey to Heaven (*Mi'rāj*)[2], the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) described an immense Mother-of-Pearl dome (*Durriy*) resting on four corner pillars, on which were written the four parts of the Qur'ānic formula: "*In the name - of God - the Compassionate - the Merciful*", and from which flowed four Rivers of Beatitude (mentioned earlier): one of Water, one of Milk, one of Honey and one of Wine. Al-Suyūtī quotes the following *ḥadīths* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in relation to these four pillars, and the four rivers:

> ***Abū al-Shaykh quotes Ḥammād as saying: "God created the Throne ... and he added four pillars of red sapphire ..."***[3]

---

[1] See argument in Chapter Seven, section 7.1.

[2] This relates to the Śūfī version of the Ascent and not the one cited in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari*.

[3] op cit. al-Suyūtī (15th C.), trans. by A. Heinen, 1982, p.132.

*Al-Ḥārith Ibn Abī Usāma, in his "Musnad", and al-Bayqatī in "al-Ba'th" mention the following of Ka'b al-Aḥbār: "The river Nile is the river of Honey in Paradise; the river Tigris corresponds to the river of Milk in Paradise; the river Euphrates to the river of Wine in Paradise; and the river Sayḥān is the river of Water in Paradise."*[1]

These *ḥadīths* represent the spiritual model of every domed structure. The Ṣūfīs applied *ta'wīl* and symbolized "the Mother-of-Pearl" to the Spirit (*al-Rūḥ*), the dome of which encloses the whole creation. The universal Spirit, which was created before all other creatures, is also the Divine Throne (*al-'Arsh al-Muḥīṭ*) on the Seat or Footstool (*Kursī*) which encompasses all things. But from another tradition cited by al-Suyūṭī, we find that: "*The Footstool is (that part) of the Throne that is between the Throne and the seventh Heaven.*"[2] And God says that the Footstool (*Kursī*) is as "... *vast as the Heavens and the earths,*"[3] then it follows that the symbol of the Throne which is much larger than the Footstool must be the indivisible space extending beyond the seventh Heaven.

While in Ṣūfism, the dome represents the universal Spirit, the octagonal drum that supports it symbolizes the eight Angels or the eight rows of Angels, more known as the Bearers of the Throne (*Ḥamalat al-'Arsh*), who in their turn correspond to the eight winds (mentioned in Chapter Seven in relation to the sides and corners of the Ka'ba):

*Abū 'Ubayd, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Abī al-Dunya and Abū al-Shaykh mention the following statement of Ibn 'Amr: "There are eight winds; four of them are a blessing, and four of them are a punishment. As to the blessing, they are: Al-Nāṣirāt, Al-Mubaṣṣirāt, Al-Mursalāt, Al-Dhāriyāt. And as to the punishment, they are Al-'Aqīm and Al-Sarsar (these two being on land) Al-'Āṣif and Al-Qāṣif (these two on the ocean)."*[4]

---

[1] ibid., p.174.

[2] Al-Suyūṭī who quotes Ibn Jarīr, on the authority of al-Daḥḥāk, reports that al-Ḥassan (may God be pleased with him). ibid., p.133.

[3] Qur'ān: 2/255.

[4] op cit. al-Suyūṭī (15th C.), trans. by A. Heinen, 1982, p.157.

The cubical part of a domed space then represents, the earth, with the four corner pillars (*arkān*) as its elements. An octagonal zone of transition reflects the connection between earth and Heaven which is none other than the eight-sided Throne and Footstool which are related to the eight winds. This zone of transition connects the earthly cubical part to the heavenly sphere. Such a built form, as a whole, expresses equilibrium, the reflection of the Divine Unity in the cosmic order. Thus, the concentric plan of a mausoleum, formed of a cube, octagonal zone of transition and ending in a pointed dome, can be seen effectively as a spiritual centre of the world. This is based on the externalization of the vertically aligned cosmological model starting with the earth, passing through the seven Heavens, to the Throne and reaching the One at the summit (which also explains why medieval domes are not semi-circular). (Figs. 8.20 & 8.21)

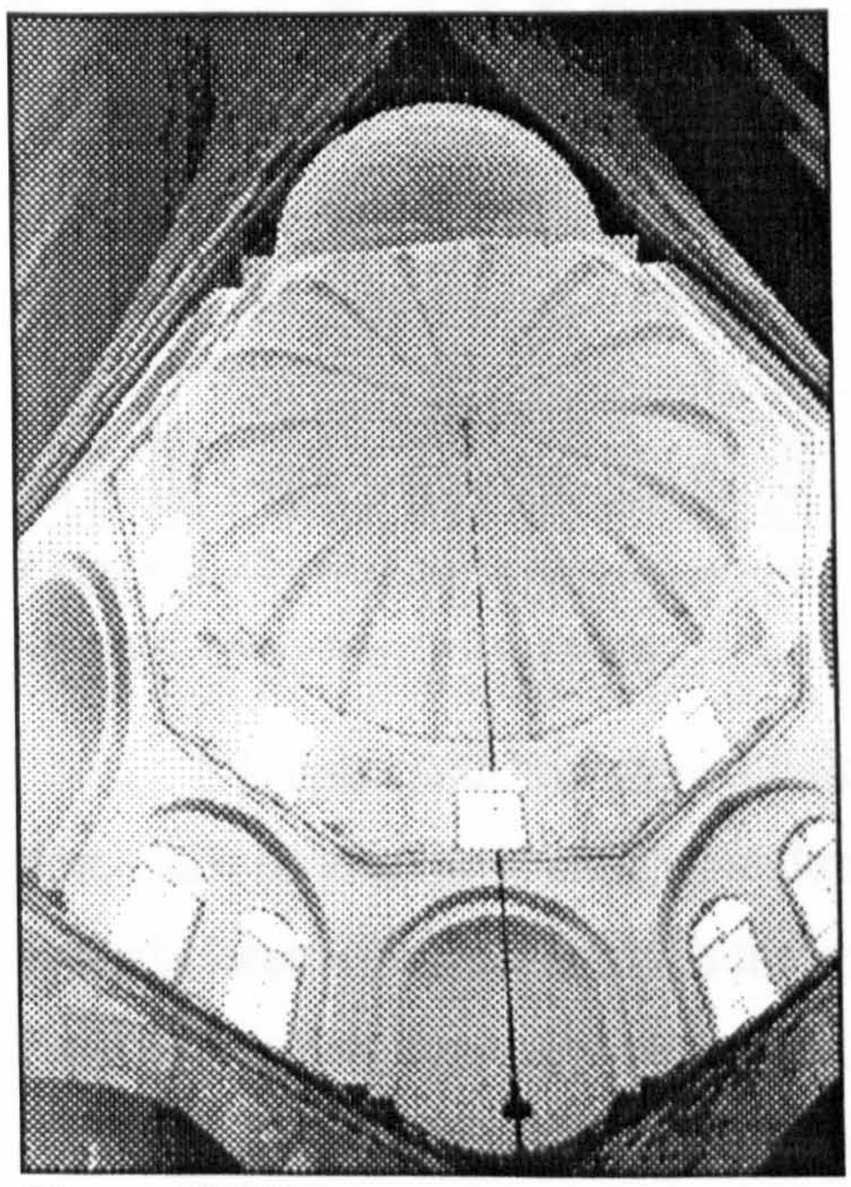


**Figure 8.20** The internal transformation in the Ayyubid Mausoleum of Śalāḥ al-Dīn, Damascus.

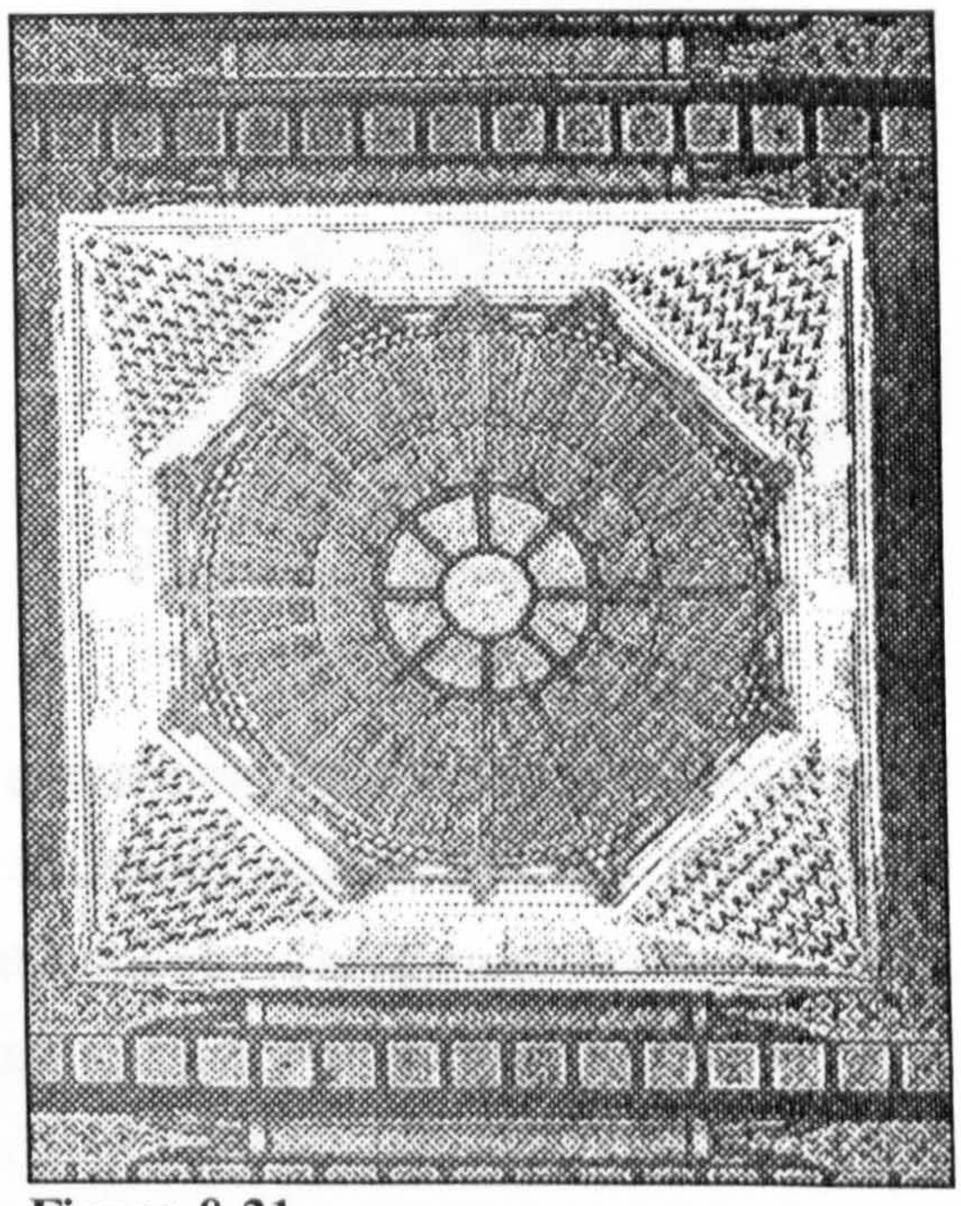


**Figure 8.21** Interior of the Circassian Mamlūk Mausoleum of Sulṭān al-Ghūrī, Cairo. (Photo: Timothy Keating).

Lightness and ascension of medieval domes are accentuated by sculpturing their outer surface either by radiating tapering ribs, or by foliage and geometrical patterns (more so in the Circassian Mamlūk period[1]). In the first case, the ribs are chosen for their vertical suggestion pointing upwards to the sky. (Fig. 8.22) As for the foliage, the surface is carved in interlacing and geometrical patterns expressing growth upwards. (Fig. 8.23) The Qur'ān frequently reminds us that plants and trees are considered to be one of the signs (*āyāt*) of the

[1] See Christel Kessler, The Carved Masonry Domes of Medieval Cairo, AARP, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, June 1976.

Creator. These signs are manifested in their growth from seeds (that appear dead) to produce full-grown plants producing fruit and further seeds. It is also the symbol of the will to grow, shooting up against gravity, thus promoting the sensation of ascension.

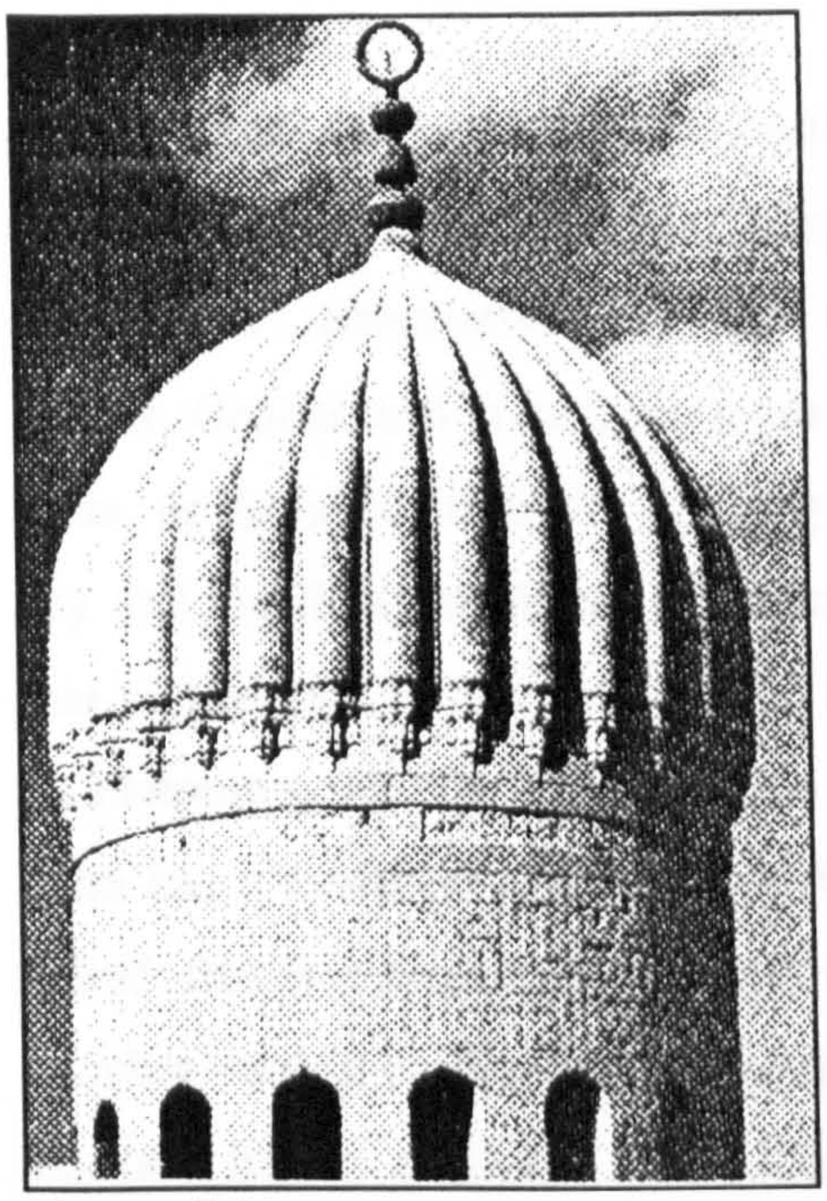


**Figure 8.22** Ribbed dome of the Mausoleum of al-Sulṭaniyyah, Cairo. (Photo: Timothy Keating).

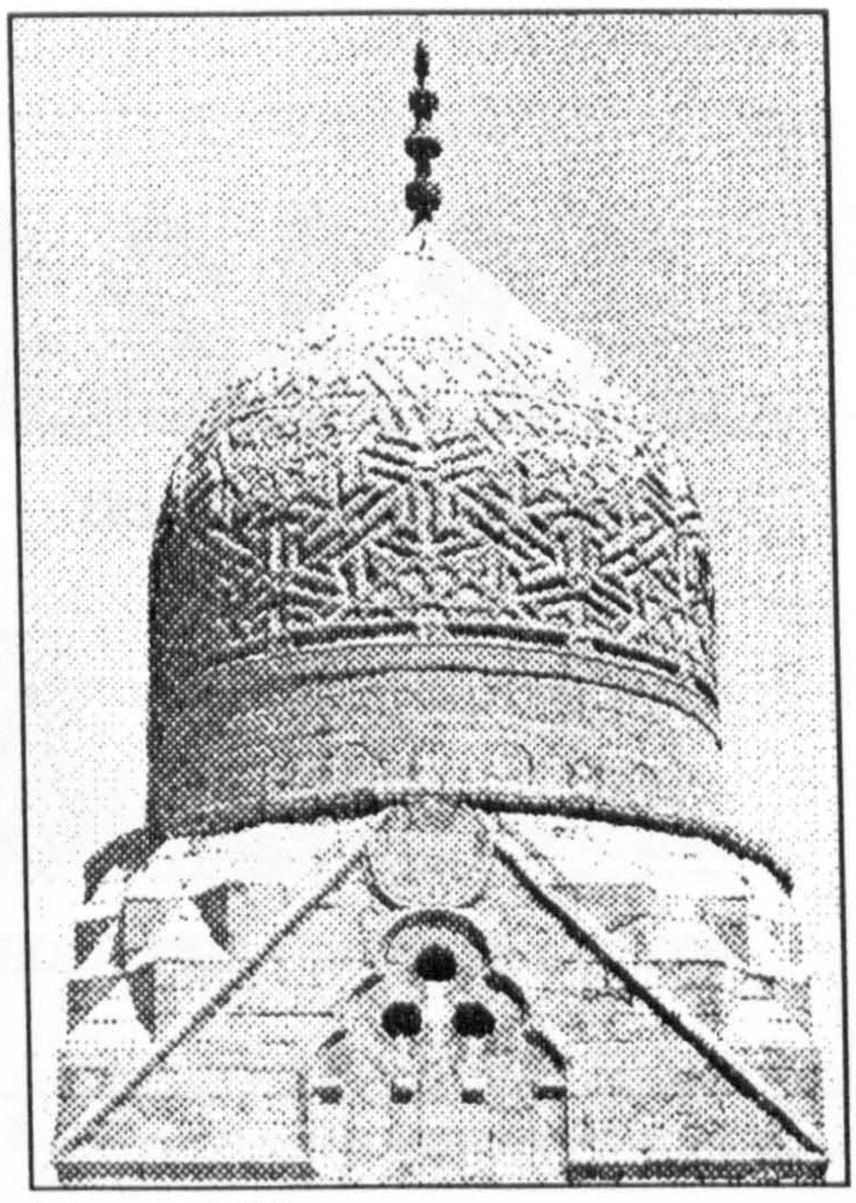


**Figure 8.23** Interlacing star and foliage patterns express verticality and infinity. (Photo: Timothy Keating).

It is thus clear, that the exoteric historical explanation of the Muslim medieval pointed dome falls short of producing an understanding as that which we have arrived to (by including esoteric interpretations) through the adoption of the traditionalist approach. In light of these findings we can approach the analysis of Mamlūk mausoleum chambers in Chapter Nine, without worrying too much on stylistic issues.

## 8.8 THE CRESTINGS (*SHARAFĀT* OR *'ARĀYIS AL-SAMĀ'*)

To help connect earth with sky in medieval religious architecture, the traditional builders crowned the walls with crestings which grip the sky (both in the external as well as the internal façades). These crestings have solid parts which are a replica of the empty spaces lying between them: the voids representing the sky and the inverted mirror solid parts representing earth; esoterically, this could be seen as soul and body. The idea of the positive image and the exact replica of the void, reminds us of the union of the earthly material with

the Heavenly spiritual to achieve the balance of traditional man and his artifacts which are formed of qualitative and quantitative dimensions, and symbolizes the Ṣūfī's quest to fill his soul with the Spirit which he pursues by his spiritual ascent to commune with God and thus achieve Unity.[1]

Crestings used in medieval religious architecture are either in the shape of geometrical crenellations or of trefoil shapes. Geometrical crenellations are either plain, or decorated triangles pointing to the sky and recall the attributes of the triangle that seeped into the Islamic culture (based on Platonic symbols). The use of the trefoil form had a symbolic meaning as well, it is a bud that has two opened petals out of which a vertical calix points upwards to the sky (and hence, attributed to the Heavens); at the same time, it recalls the significance of plant motifs which have esoteric connotations (as discussed in section 8.7). (Fig. 8.24)

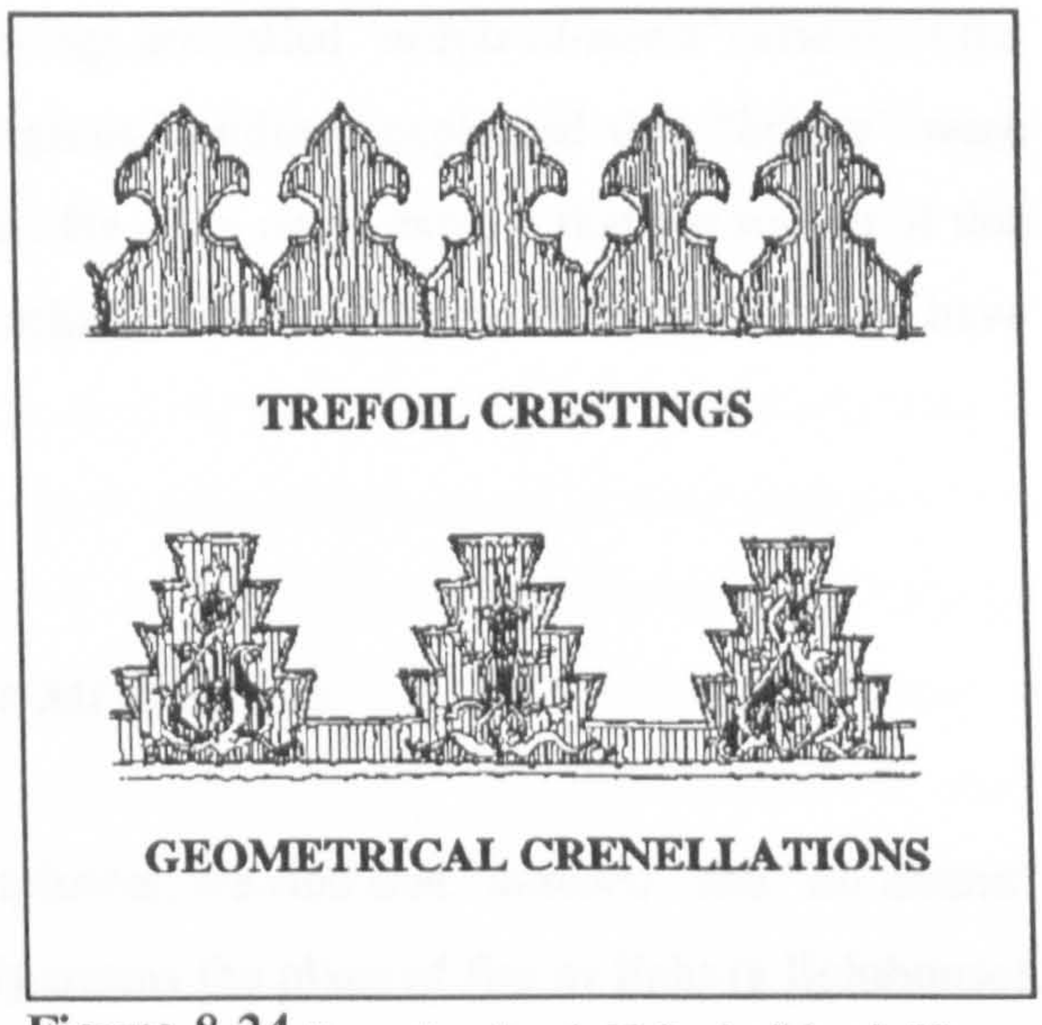



**Figure 8.24** Types of crestings in Medieval religious buildings.

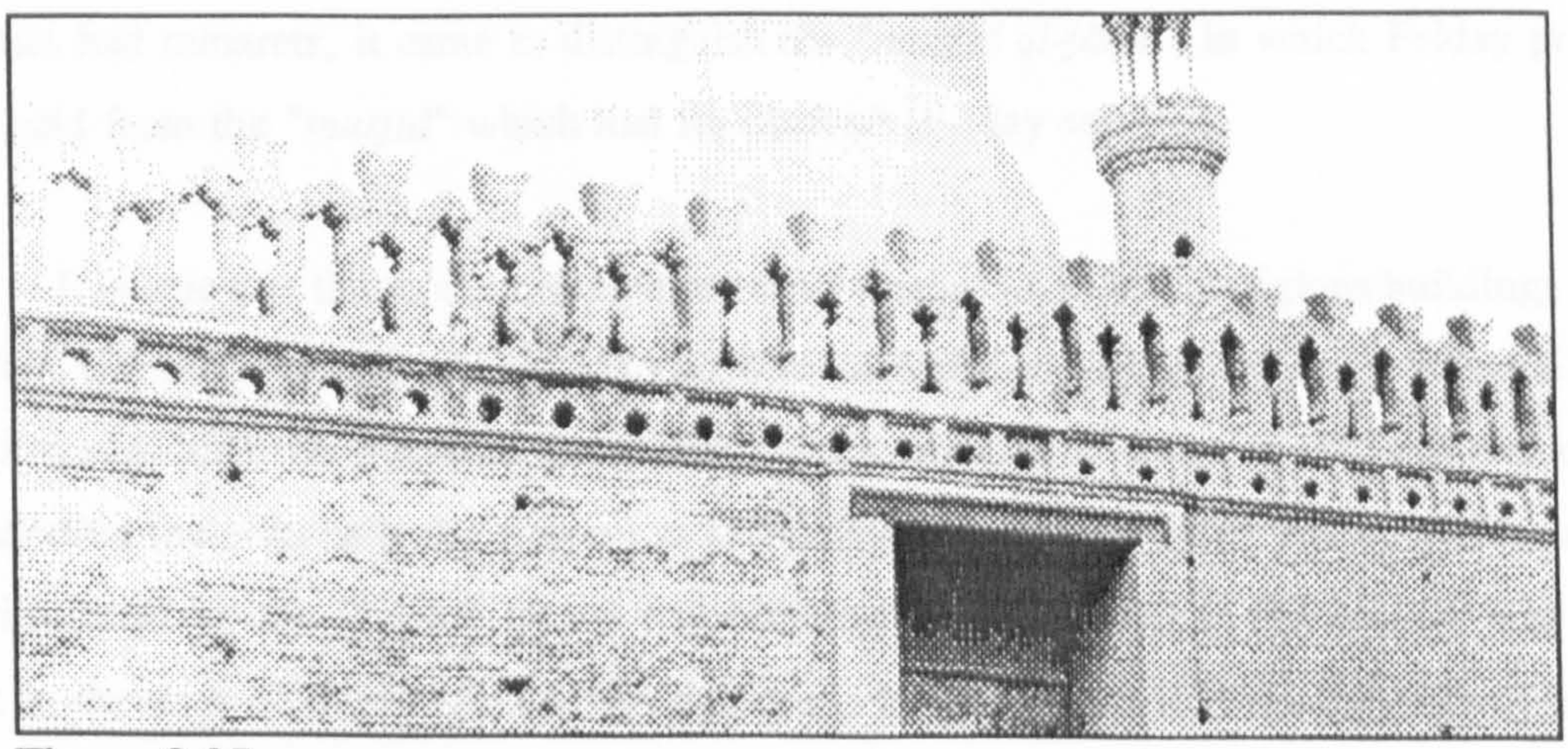


**Figure 8.25** The crestings of the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn, Cairo.

By means of these crestings, the traditional Muslim architect realized the idea of earth joining the sky throughout the length of the walls despite their horizontality. By this interpretation of mass and void at the individual scale of each cresting he symbolized contact

[1] See Chapter Two.

between earth and sky at the individual level. In their being set in a row they symbolize the idea of equality of all mankind, illustrating the *ḥadīth* which says: "*To God all believers are equal like the teeth of a comb.*" This connection can best be seen in the medieval Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn in Cairo, where these crestings are in the actual form of men in a row. (Fig. 8.25)

In colloquial Arabic in Egypt, the crestings are called *'arāyis al-samā'* (brides of the sky). Ḥassan Fatḥī in a tour of Mamlūk religious buildings explained that "brides" were usually associated with the notion of happiness. He went on to explain that the source of this happiness was that of the worshippers having achieved union with the Heavens, (i.e., to have reached Unity).

## 8.9 THE MINARET (*MANĀRA*, or *MI'DHANA*)

By examining the terms used for the minaret, we find that "*manāra*" and "*mi'dhana*" are the most commonly used. *Manāra* literally means the place of fire or light (a lighthouse), while *mi'dhana* means the place where the *ādhān* (call to prayer) takes place. Exoterically, we have seen in Chapter Five that art-historians have explained the minaret as a "landmark" or "guide-post", thus, marking the congregational mosque. Because only congregational mosques had minarets, it came to distinguish the "*masjid al-jāmi'*" in which Friday prayers were held from the "*masjid*" which had no *khuṭbah* (Friday sermon).

It is true that the most prominent external feature of Islamic religious buildings is the minaret. Unlike the dome, it is linked to a utilitarian function without which the mosque could not properly fulfil its purpose. Functionally, the minaret is intended for the use of the *mu'adhdhin* (he who calls the prayer) as he summons people to fulfil this duty. The *ādhān* was instituted by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in the second year A.H. Even in the days of the Prophet it was necessary for Bilāl - the first *mu'adhdhin* of Islam - to climb to a neighbouring rooftop to be heard. This was then changed to the construction of an element - said to be mobile and traditionally circular[1] - which was the forerunner of the minaret.

---

[1] See Doris Behrens-Abouseif, The Minarets of Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, 1985, p.10.

Apart from prayer, the minaret is linked to two more of the five pillars of Islam: the duty of *Shahāda* (Proclamation of Faith) and the duty of fasting during the month of Ramaḍān. Several times a day it broadcasts the *Shahāda* to bear witness: "*There is no god but Allah, and that Muḥammad is the Prophet of Allah*"; while in Ramaḍān, until the advent of the nineteenth-century, a lantern attached to the top of the minaret used to announce (by its extinction) that time had come again to start the day's fast. Actually, the *ādhān* not only called people to prayer, and represented the new liturgical time of Islam, but also expressed the *presence* of Islam in a given locality. Other uses of the minaret are written in 'Alī Mubārak's "*al-Khiṭaṭ al-Jadīda al-Tawfīqiyya li-Miṣr wal Qāhira*". He says that when an important religious man died, the *mu'adhdhins* of al-Azhar as well as other mosques used to repeat certain prayers from the minarets, so that the population would be informed about his death. Special recitations of the Qur'ān during the month of Ramaḍān also used to take place at the minaret and were performed by the *mu'adhdhin*.[1] The galleries (sometimes referred to as balconies) attached like rings to the minaret were built so that the *mu'adhdhin* could make his call from all sides (and thus be heard in all directions).

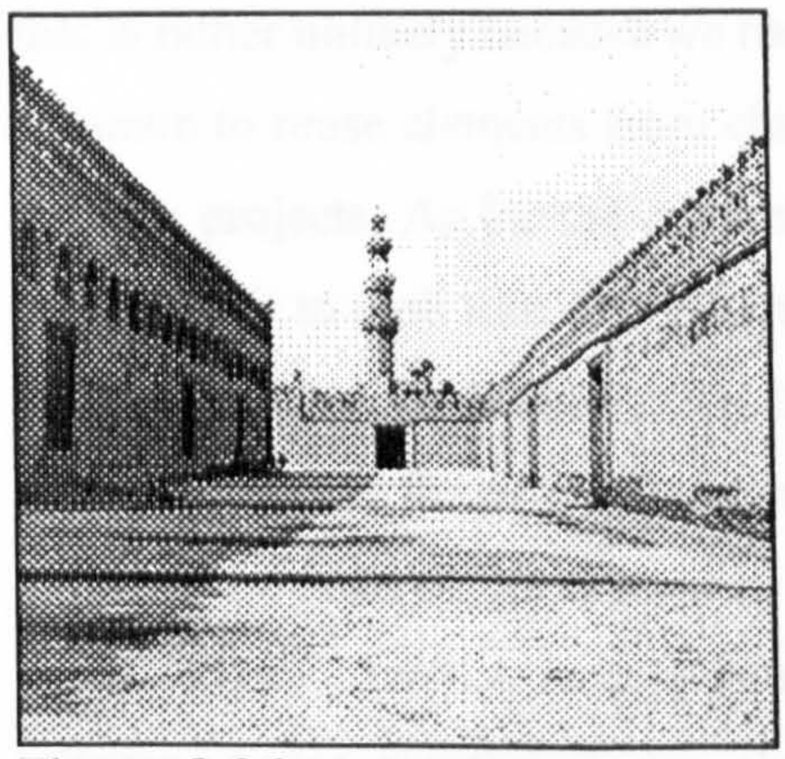


**Figure 8.26** The *ziyāda* of the Ṭūlūnid Mosque which has no utilitarian explanation.

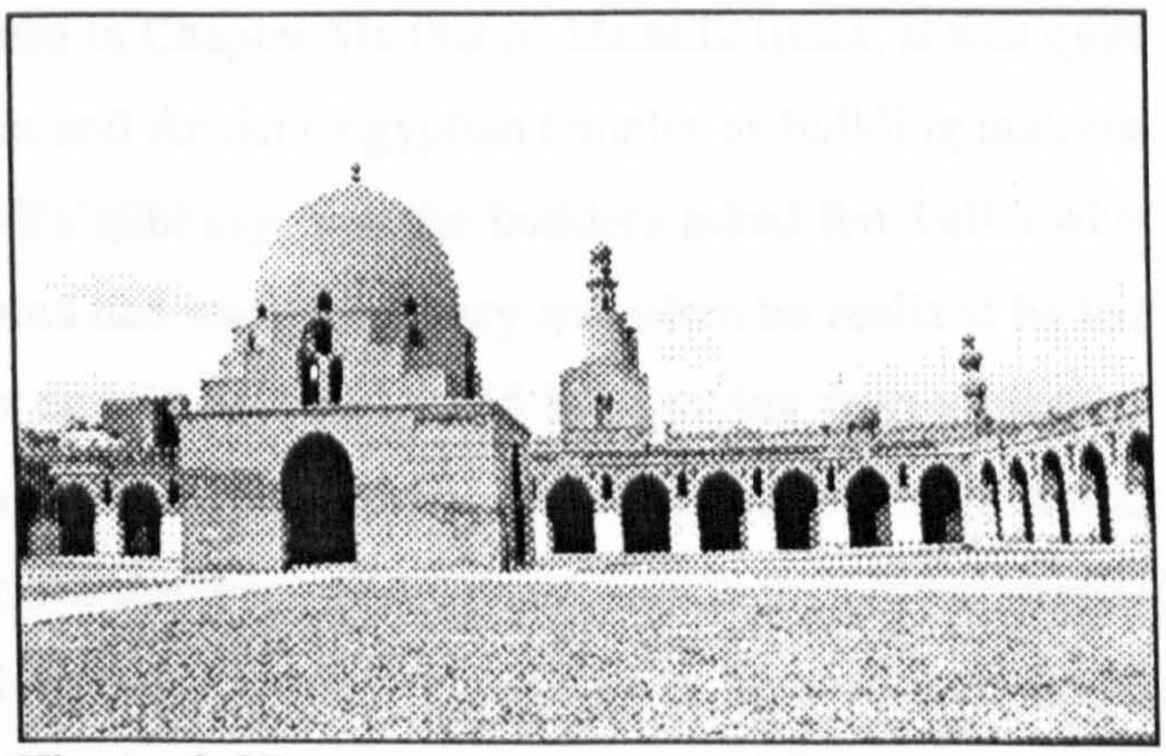


**Figure 8.27** The *ṣaḥn* of the Ṭūlūnid Mosque showing piers, water fountain, and the spiral minaret (never used for the call to prayer).

It is interesting to read al-Maqrīzī's report on the Egyptian's surprise when Aḥmed Ibn Ṭūlūn built a minaret in his new mosque in 967-979 A.D. This suggests that the idea of a massive tower in a mosque was unfamiliar to them[2]. The present minaret of the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn has been much debated by modern historians, (including Creswell) who have unanimously agreed upon a theory that the whole mosque imitates that of the Great Mosque

---

[1] 'Ali Mubārak quoted in ibid., p.11.

[2] al-Maqrizi, *al-Mawā'iḍh wal-I'tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wal-Āthār*, Cairo, 1270 A.H., vol.2, Pp. 264-265.

at Sāmarrā' and that the minaret was a spiral. Basically they laid their foundations on three points: first the matter of the *ziyādas* (external courts) surrounding the mosque on three sides (Fig. 8.26); secondly, the use of brick piers in favour of the usual use of columns; and thirdly, the form and siting of the minaret. (Fig. 8.27)

By consulting medieval sources written by historians who were quite familiar with Sāmarrā', we find no mention of such a theory. Instead we find that they explain these "un-local" features as the result of dreams and anecdotes that occurred to Ibn Ṫūlūn, the patron. Firstly he dreamt that God appeared to him in a neighbouring oratory, came near the mosque, and refused to enter it. According to al-Ya'qūbī (a medieval historian contemporary to the Ṫūlūnid period), the patron consulted the interpreters of dreams and they advised him to pull down the constructions around the mosque saying that he should let it stand alone[1]. He did so and the result was the form of the *ziyāda*. Other medieval contemporary sources explain that the use of brick was a fire and flood precaution as it was frequent that such happenings devoured buildings in medieval times. Other medieval historians explained the use of these piers as a means of breaking from the pillar-system that the Christians used in their churches - this is rather unlikely because we have seen in Chapter Six that in Mamlūk times, it was quite common to reuse elements from churches and Ancient Egyptian temples as building material for new projects. As for the minaret, al-Ya'qūbī says that the builders asked Ibn Ṫūlūn what he wanted it to look like. Ibn Ṫūlūn's mind had wandered away and when he realized he had been inattentive, he looked at his hands and found that he had been toying with a piece of paper around his finger which formed a spiral. Consequently, to get out of the embarrassing situation, he ordered the minaret to look like the shape of the paper, which they did according to al-Ya'qūbī[2]. Even a century later, al-Muqaddisī, who was known to be a very observant witness, never mentioned any similarities between it and that of the Great Mosque at Samarra'.[3]

From this medieval historical evidence, if the patron and his *mu'allimīn* had intended contemporaries to relate to the 'Abbasid Sāmarrā', then they had failed. The viewers and

---

[1] Ya'qūb Ibn Ja'far Ibn Wahb al-Ya'qūbī al-'Abbāsī, Kitāb al-Buldān, ed. M.J. de Goeje, Leiden, 1967, p.371 And Abū al-Maḥāsin quoted by al-Ya'qūbī in Kitāb al-Buldān, trans. by Gaston Wiet as Les Pays, Cairo, 1937, p.243

[2] op cit. al-Ya'qūbī, ed. M.J. de Goeje, 1967, p.371.

[3] See op cit. Jonathan Bloom, 1989, p.128.

users were not aware of the referent. They just thought that it was strange, and thus invented stories about its forms. Intention and performance were clearly at odds. In any case, the spiral minaret had very little impact on Egyptian architecture[1] but it remained a landmark in the medieval city of Cairo. It should be noted that the spiral shape is an excellent form to externalize the notion of verticality and transcendence.

The strange and surprising fact is that the *ādhān* was *never* mentioned to have been called from this minaret throughout the Ṭūlūnid period. Al-Maqrīzī says that it was called from the central *ṣaḥn* dome of the fountain which had a sundial on its top by which the timekeeper (*muwaqqit*) used to establish the right hours for prayers (this dome no longer survives). After having been rebuilt according to another design by the Baḥrī Mamlūk Sulṭān Lagīn, al-Maqrīzī tells us that this new dome was *again* used for the call for prayer rather than the minaret.[2] (Fig.28) This clearly indicates that contrary to any historical study, the cause for building the minaret was not its utilitarian function. This is a very important point which deserves a lot of attention because it strongly suggests that the minaret must have been introduced for its symbolic value, and hence, re-affirms the validity of the traditionalist approach that has been adopted.

In general, by examining the minaret, we find that it is that part of the building which reaches for the sky. The Prophet in several *ḥadīths* has been reported to say that during the call to prayer the Gates of Heaven (*Abwāb al-Samā'*) are open, and that prayers (*du'ā'*) made at that time would not be rejected. The minaret, with its sacred Qur'ānic inscriptions, is thus a permanent bearer of worship heavenward. To make the minaret lead vision upwards, the architect used the inherent qualities of geometry in his design. Taking the case of perceiving a vertical line, the eye follows its components from end to end, pointing upwards or downwards. However, when it is divided into sections, each one shorter than the other as we go upwards, then the eye moves by inertia

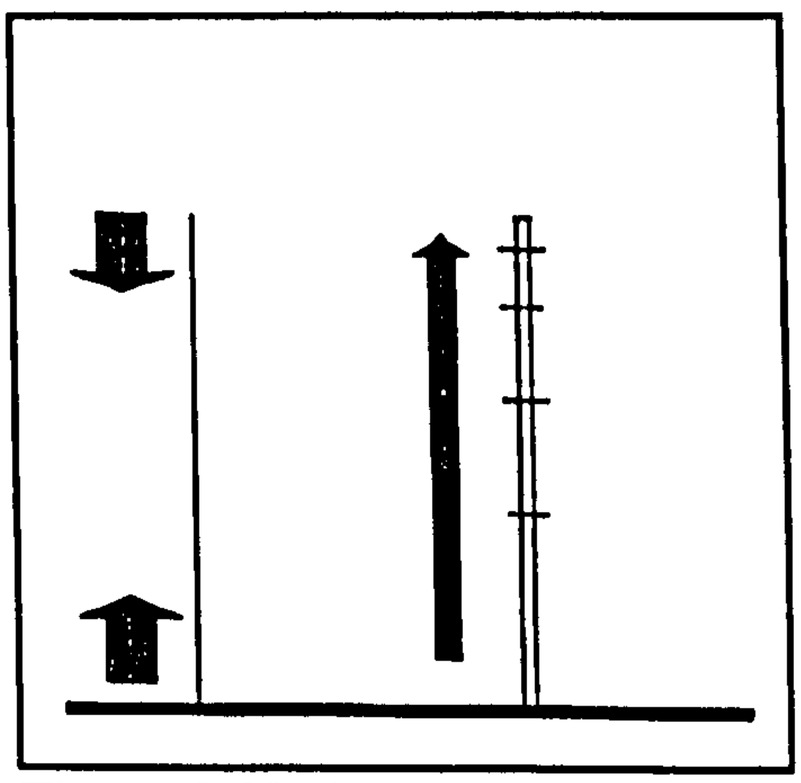


**Figure 8.28(a)** Perception of a vertical line, before and after its division.

---

[1] Only the now lost minaret of Sayf al-Dīn Tashtimur (d. 743 A.H., 1343 A.D.) is said to have been spiral.

[2] op cit. al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 1270 A.H., vol. 2, p.268.

from the longer sections to the shorter, following up the direction giving the least resistance. (Fig. 8.28a) If these sections were shortened using a harmonic system of proportioning, then we shall have specified a harmonious movement upwards. Taking two vertical lines instead of one, upon placing these two lines at an angle, the eye follows them in the direction of their meeting point. Dividing such a figure pointing upwards by horizontal lines into sections that are shortened as we go upwards, the vertical acceleration will have been increased. (Fig. 8.28b)

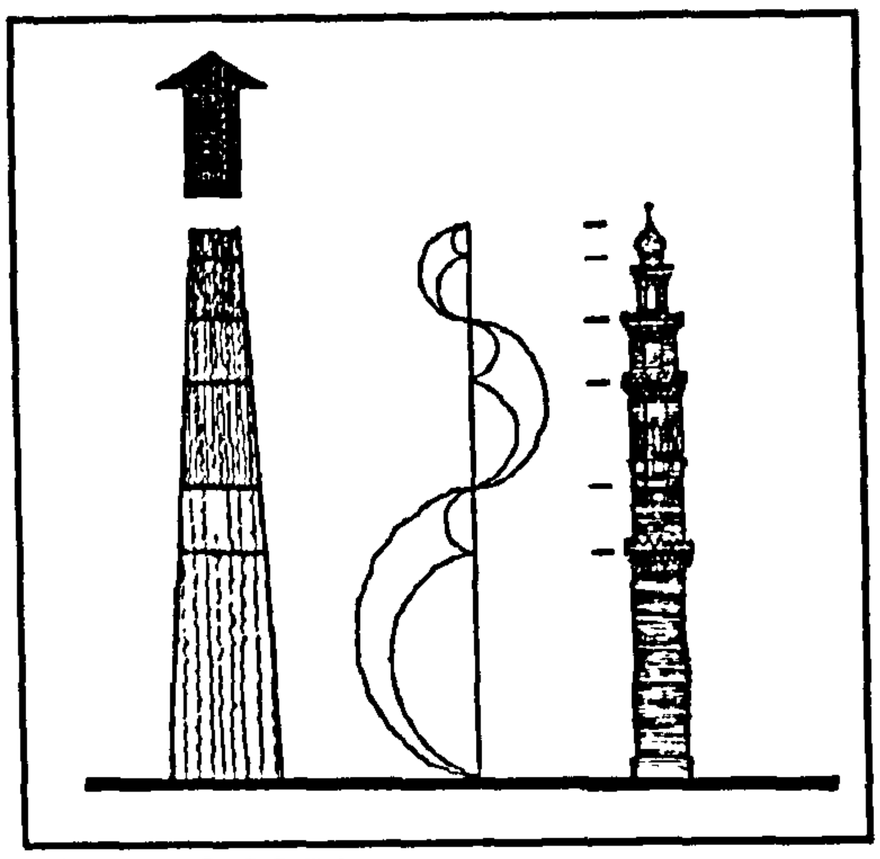


**Figure 8.28(b)** Two slanted lines proportionally divided into sections to speed the vertical effect.

Examining the architecture of the minaret, we shall find these principles underlying its design. Most minarets are divided into sections by means of balconies for the *mu'adhdhin*, with the same rhythmical shortening, and the tapering effect is produced by reducing the size of each section, as we go upwards (see Fig. 8.28(b)).

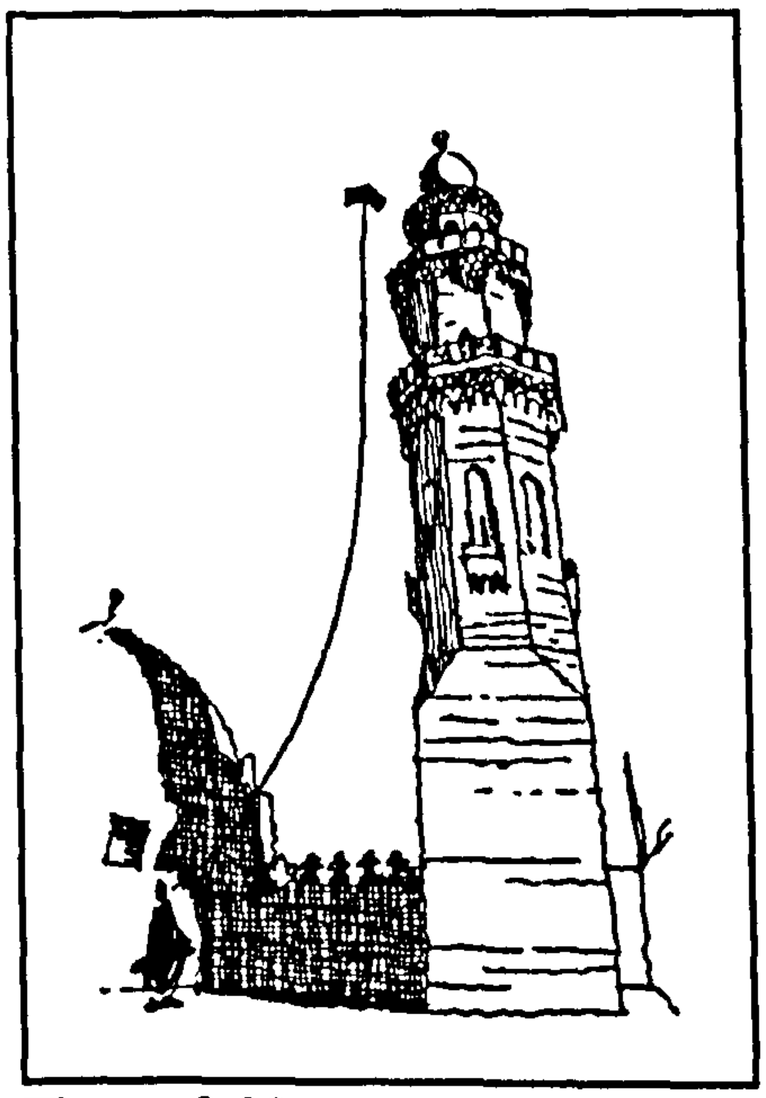


**Figure 8.29** The minaret with its sections, is traditionally seen as the symbol of transcendence.

This effect is often accentuated by transforming the shape of these sections successively from the square to the octagon, to the eight-pillared pavilion, to the cylinder as we go upwards, thus adding to the acceleration[1]. These geometrical qualities together with the architectural and decorative features as applied to the design of the minaret, were intended to convey: the earthly (square) meeting the Heavenly (circle) through the intermediary world of the Divine Throne (octagon) carried by eight Angels (eight-pillared pavilion), in a manner similar to that discussed when dealing with the symbolism of the dome. This explains the form of the Cairene Minaret in terms other than of style. (Fig. 8.29)

[1] In Egypt, aside from anomalous early examples of the Ṭūlūnid and Fatimid periods, the typical minaret had a square shaft supporting a finial dome resting on an octagon, each storey separated by stalactite cornices. In time, the square shaft became longer and the dome more elaborate. In the Baḥrī Mamlūk period, the two upper storeys underwent a marked elongation creating the triple storey type; but nevertheless retaining the same geometrical transformation.

Aspiration towards the Divine is thus expressed in mosque architecture by the minaret shooting up above the building in contrast with the horizontality of the façade. As mentioned earlier, the crestings symbolize earth meeting the sky at the individual level, the minaret on the other hand, symbolizes this contact at the communal level. Esoterically, the incorporation of the minaret into the Islamic tradition archetypically, reflects man's ontological axis, the vertical and transcendent dimension which provides a spiritual depth to man's otherwise "horizontal" material existence. It represents man who alone among God's creations stands upright on the earth. Thus, the vertical shape of the minaret serves as a landmark exoterically, while carrying within it its esoteric meanings.

Like the pillar, the minaret stands upright as the number "one" representing the *Aḥad* the Supreme Name, the Divine Oneness; but, unlike the pillar, it has no weight to carry. It remains a purely static and objective affirmation of Truth - objective because its function is to be a clear object of sight from far and wide, a symbol of the Evident (*Al-Ḍhāhir*). Its function is also, and above all, to be a clear object of hearing, for it is ritually the place of the call to prayer. This summons, in which the words "*come to the prayer*" are pronounced, consists mainly of affirmations of the Transcendent Oneness of God the "*Lā ilāha illā Allāh*" and of His Transcendent Greatness "*Allāhu Akbar*"; and in virtue of its height, by which it far transcends the rest of the building, the minaret is itself the very image of transcendence. Moreover it is free from multiplicity, for even if a mosque has more than one minaret, only one is needed (as was discussed previously when dealing with the pillar). Its formal symbolism of Oneness is thus confirmed from both angles.

## 8.10 THE STALACTITES (*MUQARNAṢ*)

In practice, the *muqarnaṣ* (described by the very approximate term of "stalactites") consists of items which are carved according to a certain number of models and which can be variously assembled. The ways they are used vary according to the profile of their arches and the degree of concavity of their semi-domes. Titus Burckhardt attributes the success and spread of the use of the *muqarnaṣ* throughout the Islamic tradition to the fact that it permits space to be articulated in both a geometrical and rhythmic manner. We saw in Chapter Five that stalactites were one of the tools which Mamlūk craftsmen excelled in. There is not a Mamlūk religious building that does not make use of stalactites whether in its portal or dome.

The *muqarnaṣ* obviously permits the clear articulation of the change of planes in the case of the portal (from recess to façade plane), and in the transition between the circular part of a dome and its square base. It was for this same purpose, that the Romans employed the pendentive, which provides a continuous and as it were, smooth transition between the semi-circular dome and the right angle of the base. From the geometrical point of view, the dome and the pendentive belong to two spheres of different sizes and the transition from one to the other suggests a change of profile which the eye hardly perceives. This is the reason why the pendentives did not satisfy the needs of the traditional Muslim architect who was looking for geometrical identification of form and rhythmic articulation. As for construction with corner squinches, that was no more satisfactory than the first, because it did not ensure all-round continuity (and thus unity) between the square base and the dome.

Instead of a squinch mounted obliquely in the corner walls of a domed chamber, medieval craftsmen devised the stalactite system by which a number of honeycomb niches were brought together to create a gradual transition between the corner and the dome's circular base. Vertically, the niches mount one upon the other; horizontally they are joined together by their arrises. When these arrises are extended into space, they look rather like stalactites (and thus explain the *muqarnaṣ*' translation). (Fig. 8.30)

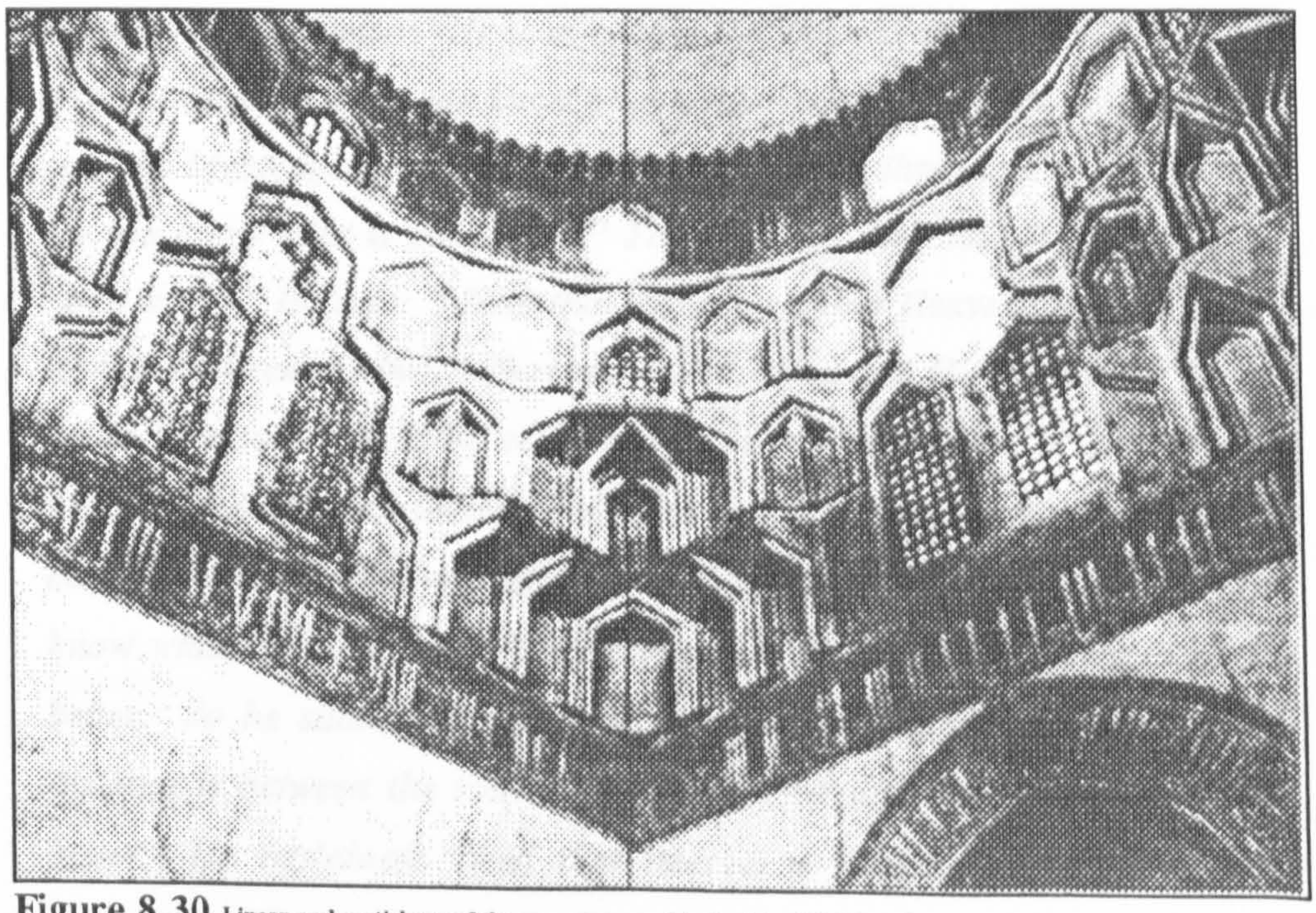


**Figure 8.30** Linear and spatial use of the muqarnas used in the Mamlūk Mausoleum of *Emīr* Sunqur Sa'dī. (Creswell).

The synthesis of geometry and rhythm is surely to be found in the *muqarnaṣ*, a form which is not simply linear but spatial. As all the other elements that have been examined so far, the *muqarnaṣ* has both outward and inward dimensions to its function. Art-historians explain these stalactites as structural supports to domes when the stylistic demands shifted from the use of squinches. Esoterically, in their repetition in hundreds and thousands along the cornice of a façade, or in the internal transition of a dome (instead of the octagon) the stalactites serve to embody the notion of multiplicity, limitlessness, and boundless infinity. They externalize the vastness of the creation of God, and the sheer size of the limitless cosmos. There are many *ḥadīths* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), which have descriptions that are incalculable regarding their size and distance. For example al-Suyūṭī cites the following *ḥadīth* narrated by Al-Tirmidhī, and Abū al-Shaykh quoting the tradition from Abū Hurayra:

> ***We were sitting with God's Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) when a cloud passed over us. He said: 'Do you know what this is?' They responded: 'God and His Messenger know better.' He explained: 'This is the one that covers, this is the one that waters the earth. God leads it to the people of a land who do not worship Him and who do not return thanks to Him.[1] Do you know what is above that?' They replied: 'God and His Messenger know better.' He said: 'Above that there is an enclosed wave and a secured roof. And do you know what is above that?' They answered: 'God and His Messenger know better.' He said: 'Above that there is a Heaven. Do you know what is above that?' They replied: 'God and His Messenger know better.' He said: 'Above that there is another Heaven. Do you know what is between the two?' They responded: 'God and His Messenger know better.' He said: 'Well, between the two there is a distance of 500 years.' (And so he continued) until he had enumerated seven Heavens, the distance between each two Heavens being that of 500 years. Then he asked: 'Do you know what is above that?' They replied: 'God and His Messenger know better.' So he said: 'Above that is the Throne. And do you know what distance is between the two?' They said: 'God and His Messenger know better.' He explained: 'Well that interval is like the one between two***

[1] Meaning a flood or deluge.

*Heavens,' or as he had said. Then he continued: 'Do you know what this is, this earth? Do you know what is below it?' They said: 'God and His Messenger know better.' He said: 'Another earth; and the distance between the two is 500 years.' And so on, until he had enumerated seven earths, the interval between every two earths being 500 years.*[1]

If and when the traditional architect and craftsmen wanted to depict this vastness of space (as described in such a *ḥadīth*), no other element in Islamic art other than the *muqarnaṣ* could give both a horizontal as well as a vertical assembler and generator of space. Each row, esoterically symbolizes a "state" (*maqām*) of the Ṣūfī's journey to the Truth, and consequently corresponds to one of the Heavens[2]. It follows that several rows, piled one on top of the other, would consequently symbolize a set of Ṣūfī spiritual Stations (i.e., the synthesis of the journey) or a group of Heavens. Because each entity (Heaven or Station), is intangible in human terms and falls in the domain of the "unknown" (*'ulūm al-ghaybiyyāt*), then the traditional craftsman would tend to use an abstracted device to interpret and externalize such a form.[3] The repetition of stalactites horizontally in a row signifies vastness and at the same time, because of their appearance as an endless array of the same unit, they convey infinity and endless growth. The *muqarnaṣ* in fact, is the best element to indicate "Unity in multiplicity" and "multiplicity from Unity" - since the unit is the same and by its repetition and assemblage in different ways, it is possible to produce a multiplicity of spatial forms. This understanding of the use of the *muqarnaṣ* shows a perfect compatibility with the form of the pointed dome which was also seen to embody the notion of "Unity in multiplicity" and "multiplicity from Unity" in both the circumference of the dome (circle) and its summit (point).[4]

---

[1] op cit. al-Suyūṭī (15th C.), trans. by A. Heinen, 1982, p.139. Here the use of years to measure distance should be understood, as explained in Chapter Seven, in terms of days of travel (by camel), as understood by the contemporaries of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

[2] According to the esoteric understanding of the *ḥadīth* of the *Mi'rāj*, each Heaven visited represents a *Maqām* or state (sometimes referred to as station).

[3] This sort of abstract representation recalls the argument discussed earlier in section 8.7 when analysing the dome.

[4] As explained in section 8.7 when discussing the form of the pointed dome.

## CONCLUSION

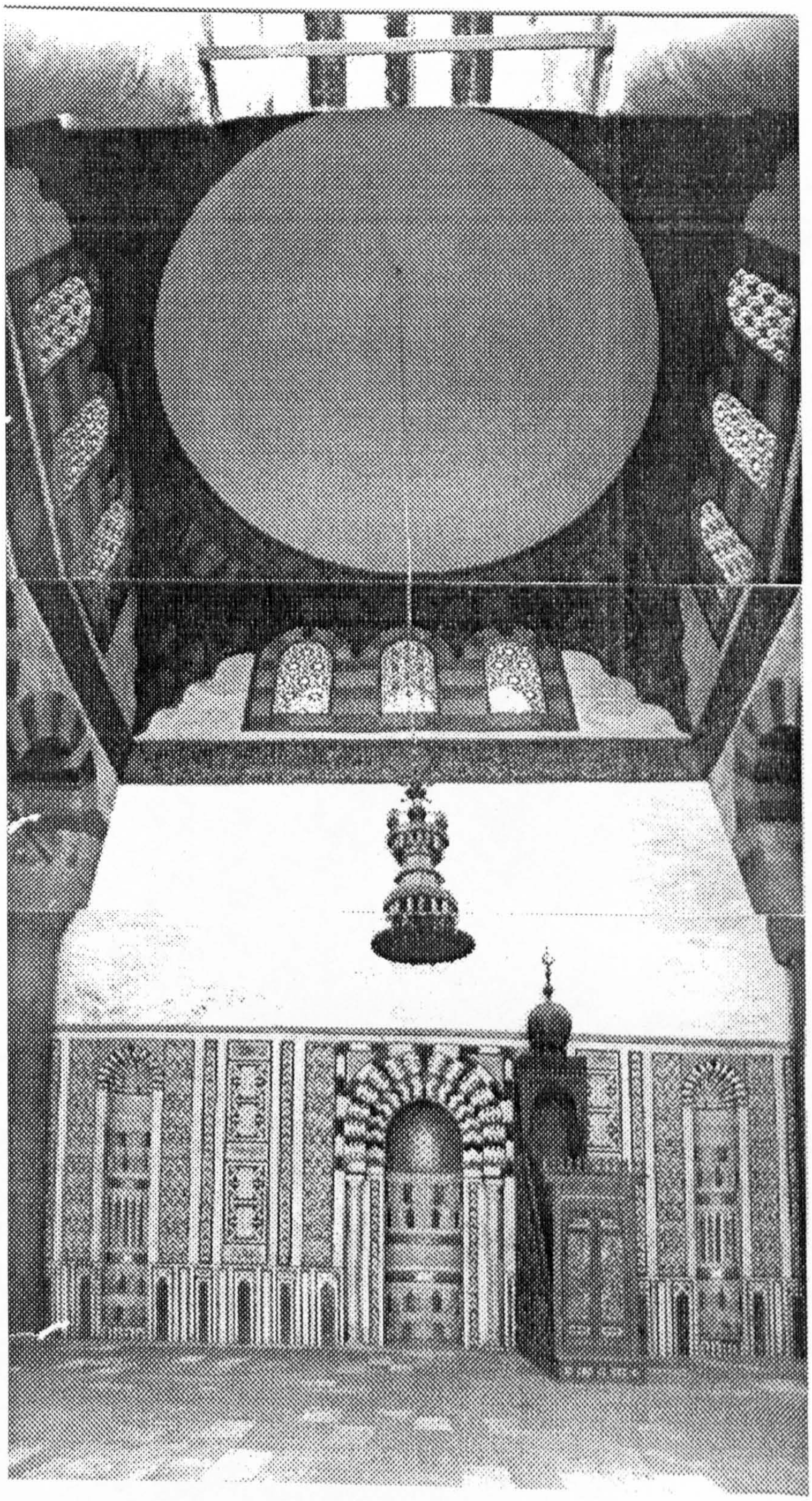
By having generally examined the elements that constitute medieval Islamic religious buildings, we have managed by means of cosmological and esoteric methods of interpretation to see the "other side of the coin." Some of the elements that have appeared to the Islamic historian and art-historian to exist for their exoteric utilitarian functions, have been found to be based upon esoteric meanings. It has been made clear that without the esoteric dimension, one cannot arrive to their true intention. Not only that, but some elements have been built and documented in the sources to have never been used (that is from the point of view of utility). The water fountains in the courtyards of religious buildings, and the minaret of the Mosque of Ibn Ṫūlūn are excellent examples of this.

Several questions that were earlier raised in Chapter Five (inadequately answered using the historical approach) have been answered when adopting the traditionalist approach in the analysis carried out in this chapter; these are:

- The reason behind designing portals that are consistently pointed, recessed and niche-like.
- The cause for the bent entrances (*majāz*).
- The reason behind the form of the *miḥrāb*.
- The reason behind the transition of form in both the dome and the minaret.
- The explanation of why fountains are octagonal, and why they follow the geometrical progression from octagon to dome.
- The reason why crestings, whether triangular or trefoil, are designed to show voids that are identical to the solid parts (but are inverted).
- The cause for building minarets that were not used for the *ādhān*.

Only several questions have been answered and not all of the list produced in Chapter Five, because although we have examined the elements that constitute medieval religious architecture through the traditionalist approach, we have dissociated the elements from their context - i.e., in regard to spatial location and visual relationship. Having understood the elements, it is now possible to attempt their reconstruction into relationships as they are experienced visually in the different assemblages as they occur in Baḥrī Mamlūk religious buildings. The resulting set of relationships between the elements will produce a much more realistic view of the intentions of the Ṣūfī architects and craftsmen.

Int. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11



# CHAPTER NINE

## THE ANALYSIS OF BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS IN TERMS OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THEIR ELEMENTS

In the last chapter, the elements incorporated in the design of traditional medieval religious buildings were discussed and analyzed. Some elements which have been commonly believed to have been for practical use were shown instead to have had symbolic or spiritual functions. Examples include minarets which were built and never used for the call to prayer; fountains that were never used for ablutions; floors that were designed to represent Gardens of Paradise; crestings that have no utilitarian function and yet were consistently designed to show identical inverted shapes of their solid parts and their voids. These findings, coupled with interpretations based on Ṣūfī understandings, have given a fuller explanation of the meanings carried by these elements. This has confirmed that the traditionalist approach that is adopted yields a deeper understanding of the intent of traditional medieval architecture when compared to the findings based on conventional historical methods summarized in Chapter Five. It was concluded in Chapter Eight we were unable to answer all of the questions that were raised earlier because it is not realistic to analyze buildings in terms of isolated elements. This indicated that we had to re-examine them in terms of the recurrence of these elements as relationships in the buildings. In this way, we can further enhance our understanding of their intent.

In this chapter, I will first analyze twelve Baḥrī Mamlūk religious buildings. This will follow the division of elements introduced in Chapter Eight in order to show the applicability to Baḥrī Mamlūk cases of what was generally attributed to the medieval period. The twelve buildings that have been chosen are not "exceptional" in any way, they have been selected randomly for their common Mamlūk features. The outcome of this analysis results in a set of observations which show the recurrence of certain relationships arising from the use of these different elements, not only in these selected buildings but more generally in the religious architecture of the Baḥrī Mamlūk period.

## 9.1 BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK CASES

The following twelve Baḥrī Mamlūk cases have been selected from the catalogue of buildings summarized in Chapter Five:

1) Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī.
2) Complex of Qalāwūn.
3) *Khanqah* and Mausoleum of Baybars al-Jāshankīr.
4) Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn.
5) Mosque of Altinbugha al-Māridānī.
6) Mosque of Aṣlam al-Bahā'ī al-Silaḥdar.
7) Mosque of Sheykhū.
8) *Khanqah* of Sheykhū.
9) *Madrasa* of Sarghatmish.
10) *Madrasa* of Tatar al-Ḥijāziyyah.
11) *Madrasa* of Umm al-Sultān Sha'bān.
12) *Madrasa* of Mithqāl.

Each case is presented in a set of sheets starting with the "name" or "title" given to the building as it appears in al-Maqrīzī's "*Khiṭaṭ*". This is followed by the neighbourhood, area or street that it lies in, and the date - either following the inscriptions on the building or following Creswell's method of dating[1] where no inscription has survived. The building is then classified according to its function and building type. The term "*Madrasa* Type" has been used to mean that the building was used only as a *madrasa* and that the five daily prayers were held in it, as distinct from the term "*Madrasa*/Mosque Type" by which I mean the above functions as well as the Friday congregational prayer (i.e., including a *Khuṭba*). The terms "*Khanqah* Type", and "*Khanqah*/Mosque Type" are used similarly - i.e., *khanqah* for Ṣūfīs where students lived, performed Ṣūfī practices, and prayed the five prayers, and *Khanqah*/Mosque where Friday congregational prayer was held as well. The term "Hypostyle Mosque Type" has been used to denote the traditional prototype of the Mosque of the Prophet at Madina[2] (as discussed in Chapter Four). This is followed by a representation of the

---

[1] K.A.C. Creswell, "A Brief Chronology of the Muhammadan Monuments of Egypt", Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archeologie Orientale, 1919, Pp. 35-164. This is the same method of dating used in Chapter Five.

[2] Occasionally referred to as the "pillared mosque" or "courtyard mosque" in some reference books.

building in plan and elevation, when an elevation is available and documented. In other cases I have either used an axonometric or an external view of the façade.

Subsequent to this, the elements of each of the chosen buildings are analyzed and evaluated both visually and symbolically according to the criteria introduced in Chapter Eight. These elements are: portals, entrance and *majāz*, courtyard and fountain, arches and *iwāns*, praying hall, *miḥrāb*, domes, crestings, minaret, and stalactites. Some elements, such as the crestings and minaret, visually and symbolically recur frequently in the buildings that are examined; in such cases a description and an explanation will be given only the first time they are encountered and referred back to in later cases: for example "See crestings of the Mosque of Baybars".

The main aspects of each case are summarized in a section entitled "remarks" to identify which are typical traditional features and which are "innovations" as far as form is concerned, and the impact of the new form on the meaning and symbolism of the element. The medieval sources and contemporary references that are relied on for the historical facts of each case are the ones referred to in Chapter Five.

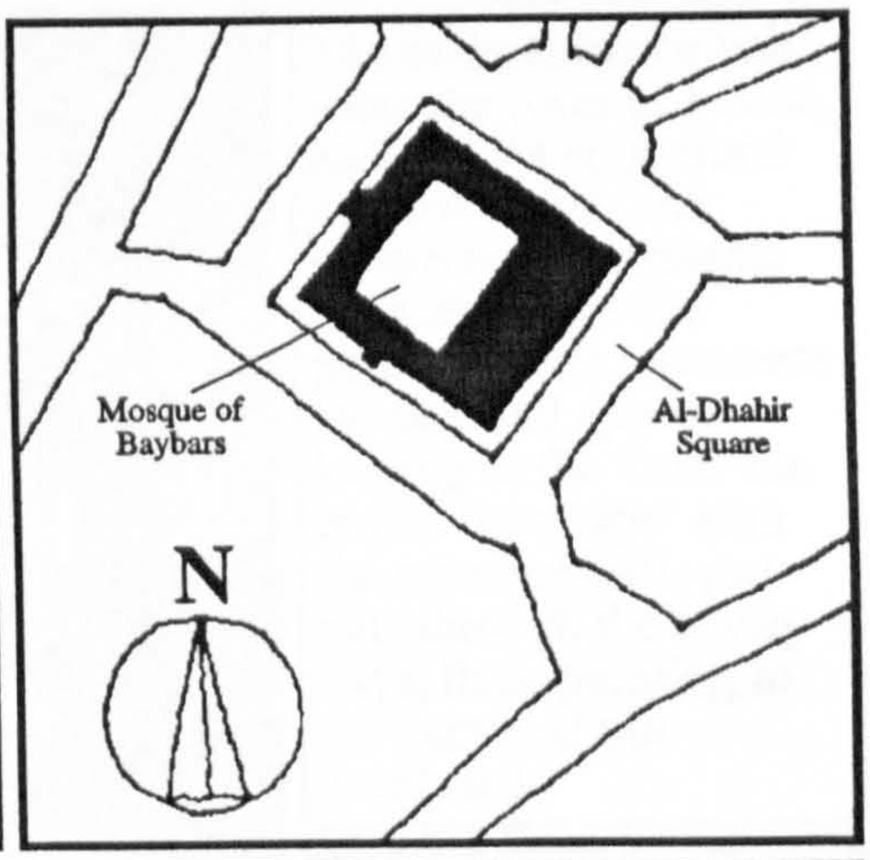
Although I have arranged the buildings according to their chronology, I would like to emphasize that any arrangement according to *date* or *type* is irrelevant; it is not "stylistic" changes, "evolution of form", or" chronology" that we are concerned with, but the medieval Islamic traditional symbolism incorporated in all the types of Mamlūk religious buildings regardless of any time-frame[1].

Note: In the following analysis, italics and diacritical marks for Arabic words and names have been omitted due to technical constraints.

[1] See arguments in Chapters One, Five, and Six.

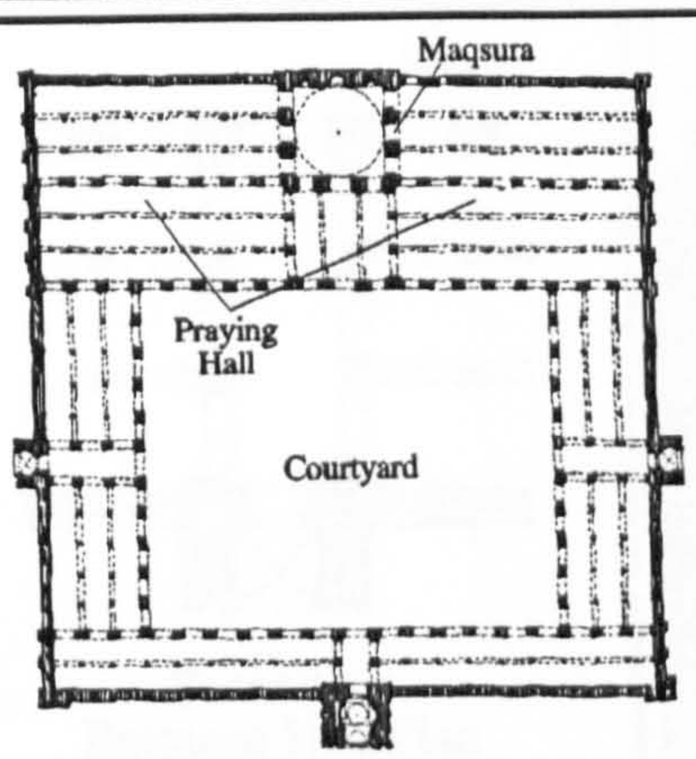
# Mosque of Baybars Al-Bunduqdari (Al-Dhahir Square)

## (665-67 A.H., 1266-69 A.D.)

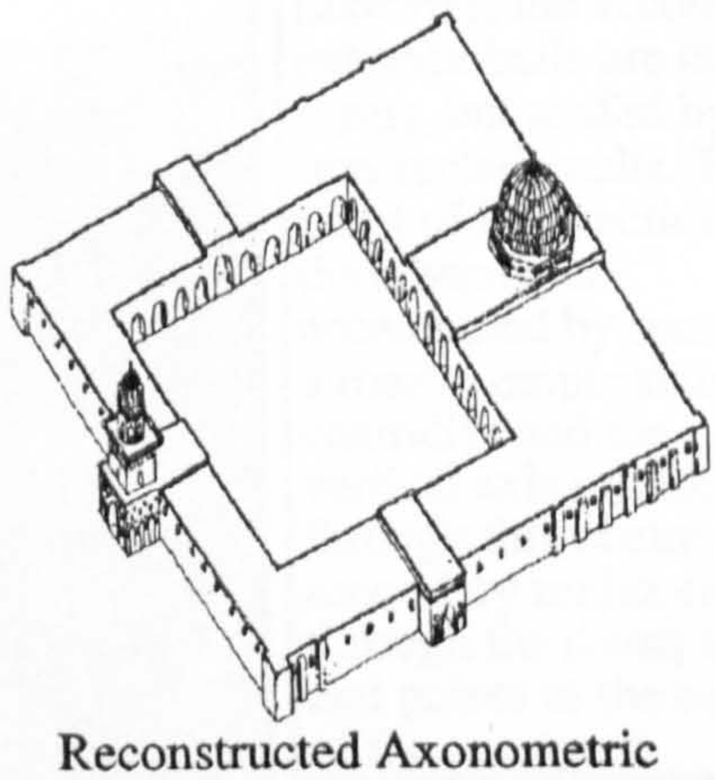



## Hypostyle Mosque Type

## (Columns, Piers, Maqsura)

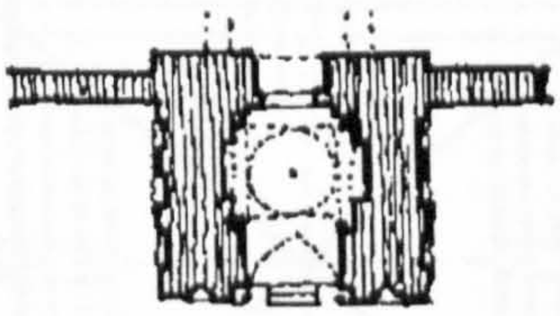



Plan

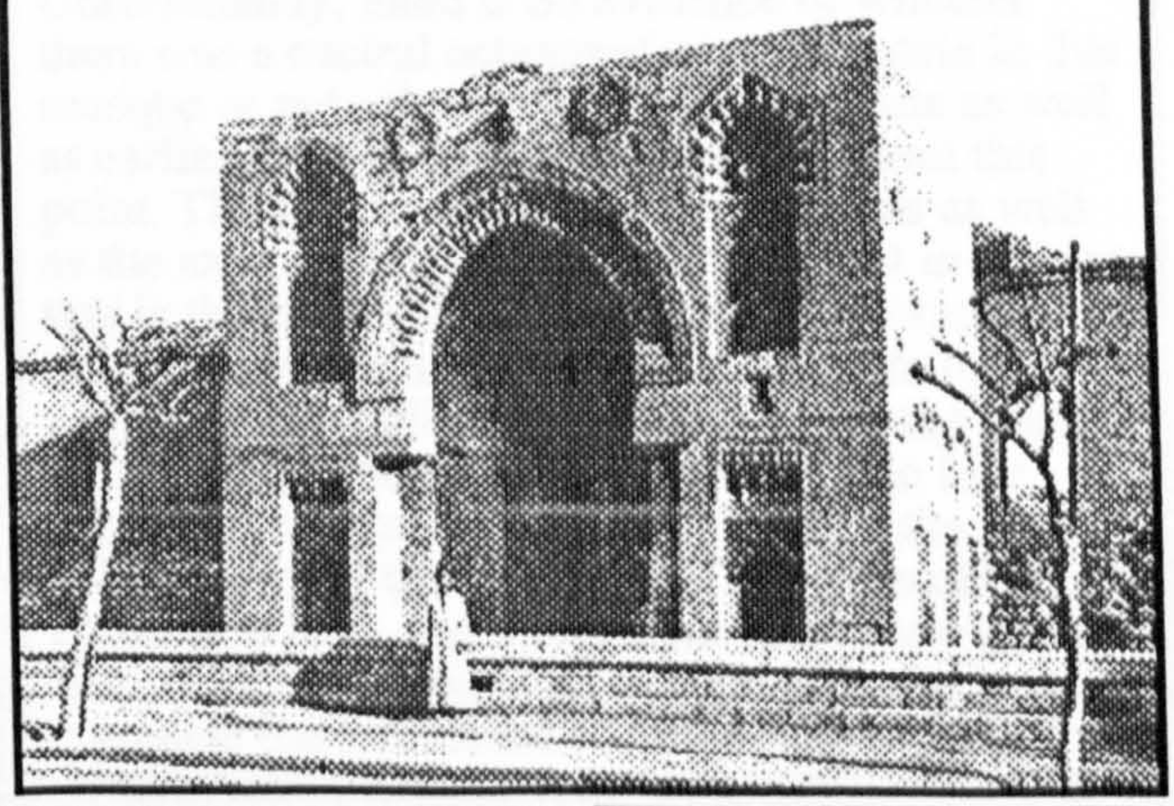


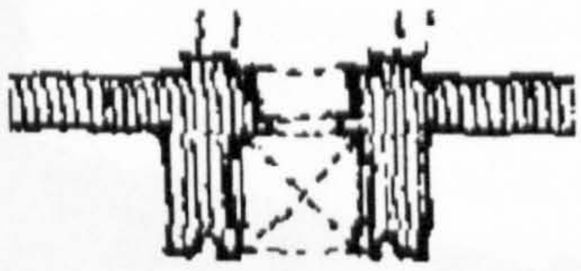
Reconstructed Axonometric

PORTALS



Main Portal Plan

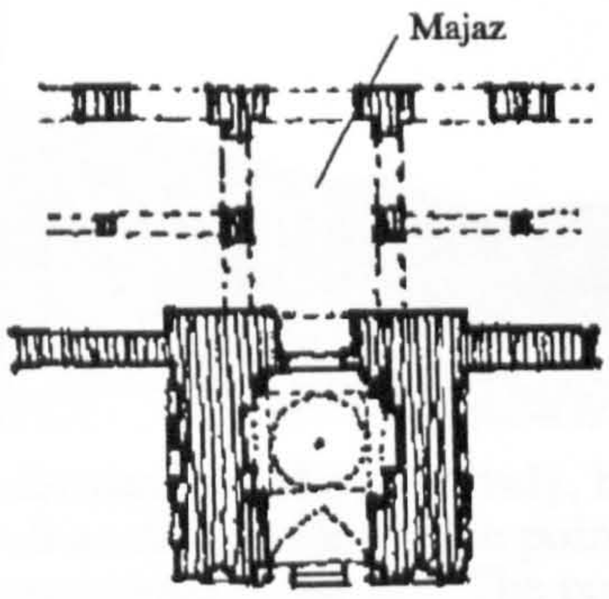




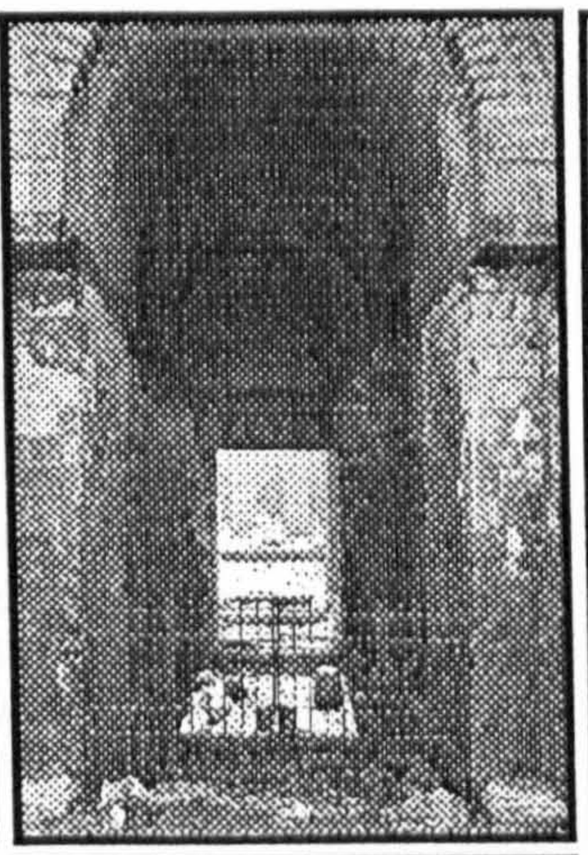
Secondary Portals Plan

The main and secondary portals of this mosque are recessed in projecting "cubes" that are added to the external facades. These portals are pointed and traditionally lead vision upwards beyond the building top to the sky. In their axial arrangement, they implicitly emphasize the centre of the courtyard.

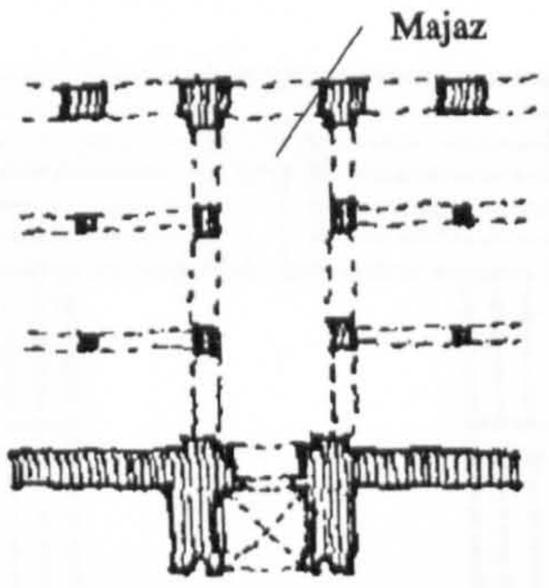
## ENTRANCE HALL & MAJAZ



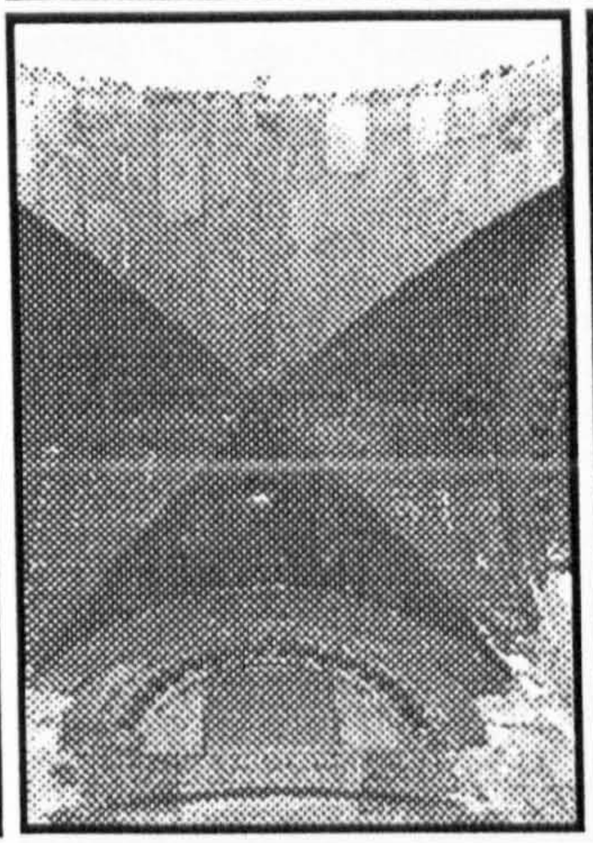

Main Entrance Hall Plan



The main entrance hall takes the form of a cube, roofed by a compound pointed dome. The square base represents the earth while the pointed dome represents the celestial sphere leading to the One. The majaz "overlaps" with the entrance hall, and cuts through the riwaq bays, thus, pointing to the centre of the courtyard.

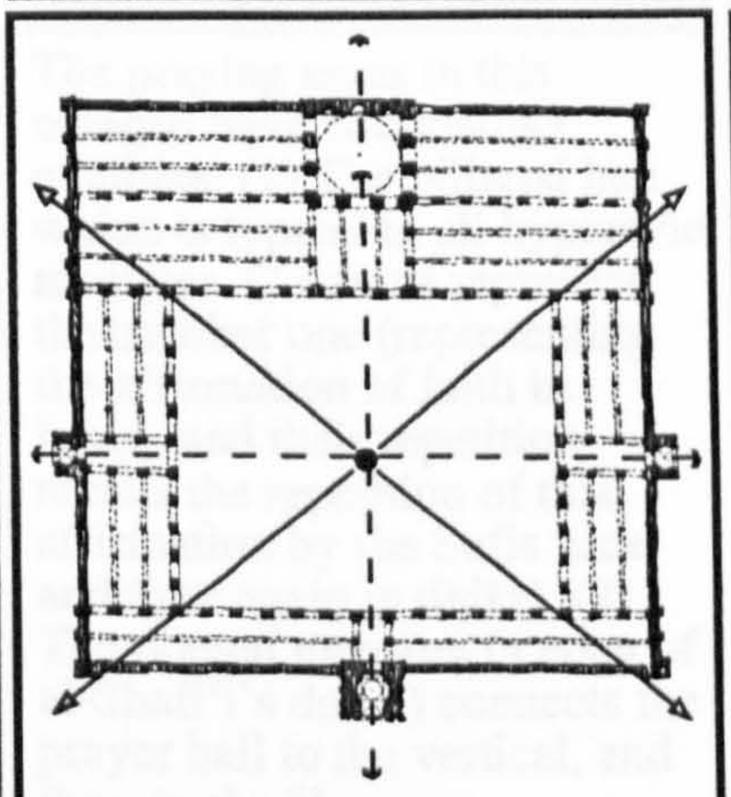



Secondary Entrance Hall Plan

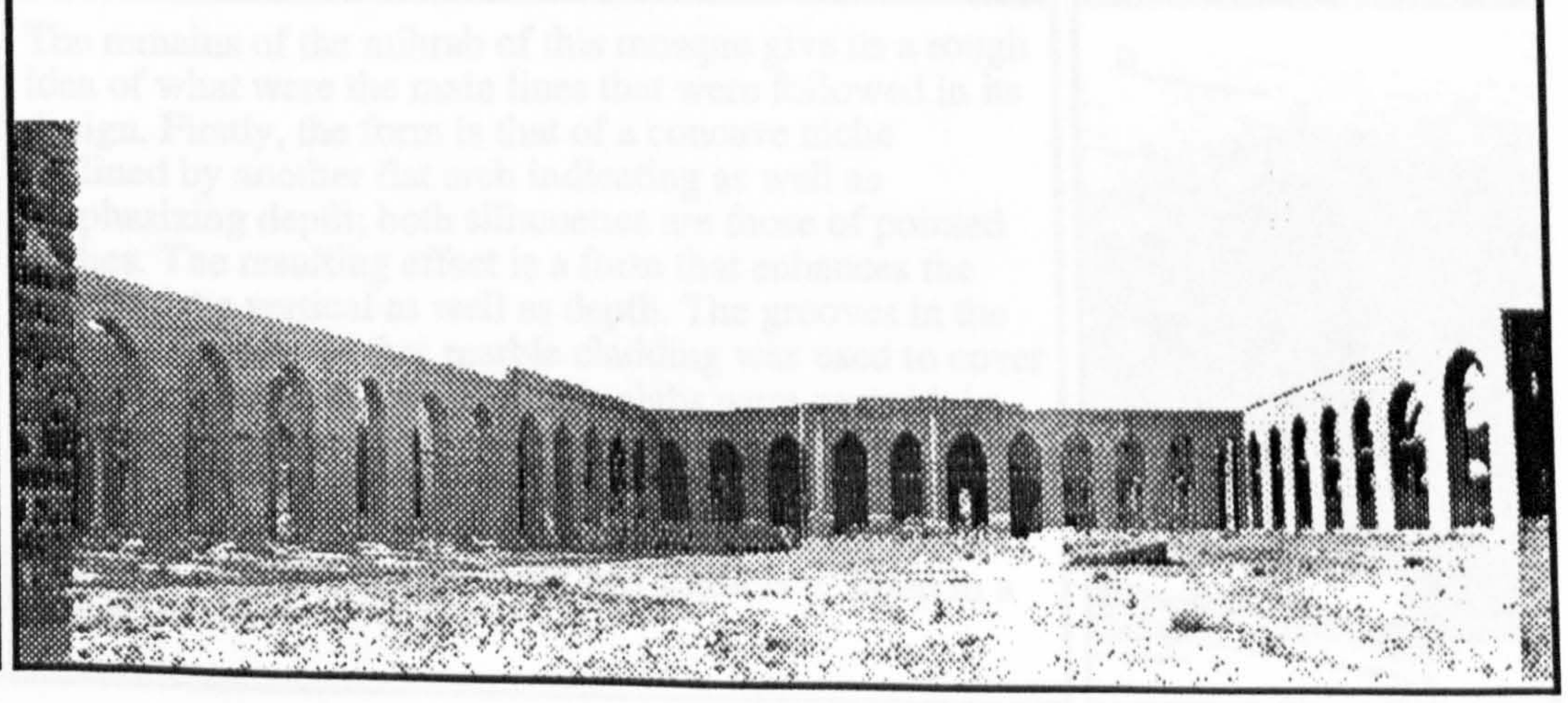


Likewise, the secondary entrance halls are cubic forms, but roofed by intersected vaults. The point of intersection of these vaults is accentuated by means of a rosette emphasizing centrality and the vertical axis running through this centre. The secondary majaz cuts through the riwaq bays and points to the centre of the courtyard.

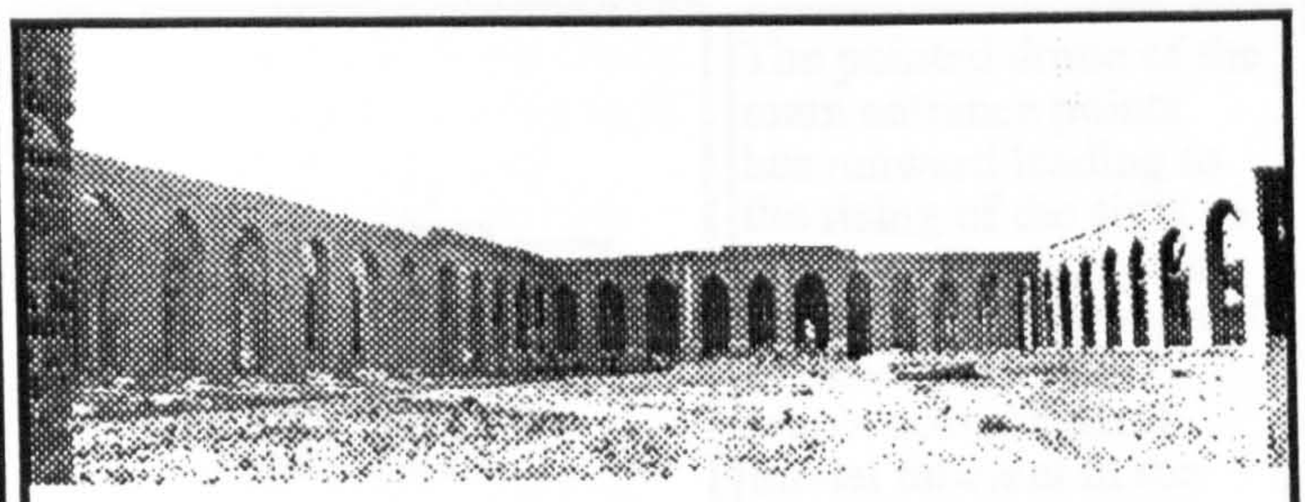
## COURTYARD & FOUNTAIN



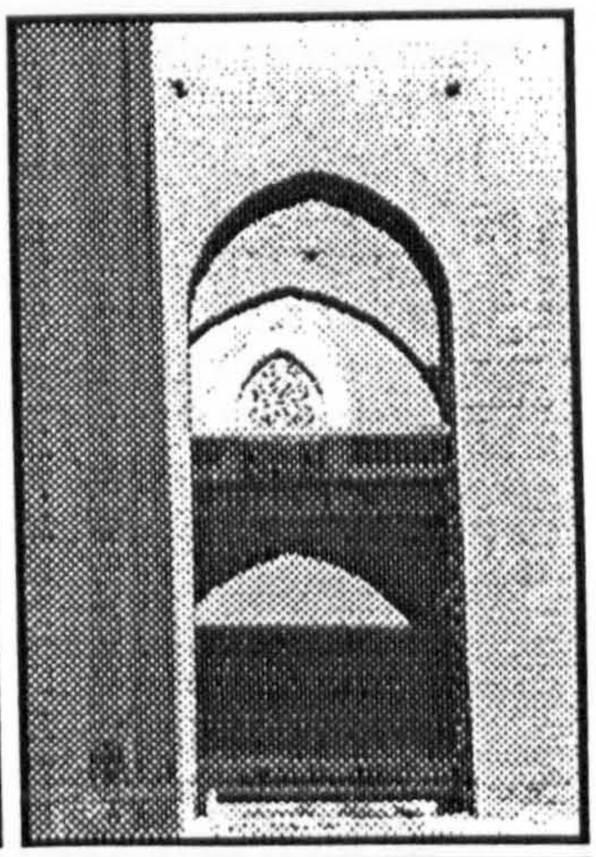
Unfortunately, there is no evidence of whether there was a central octagonal water fountain in this mosque or not - the mosque's present state as well as earlier sources do not tell us much about this point. The positioning of the three portals as well as the axes of the entrance halls intersect in a point that is the centre of the courtyard. Furthermore, the centre is aligned and axial to the maqsura in the prayer hall as well as the minaret above the main portal, which increases its centrality. The four corners of the quadrangular court recall the four pillars carrying the "Heavens". The form of the building is thus, generated from this centre (most likely to have included an octagonal fountain to complete the traditional cosmological model).



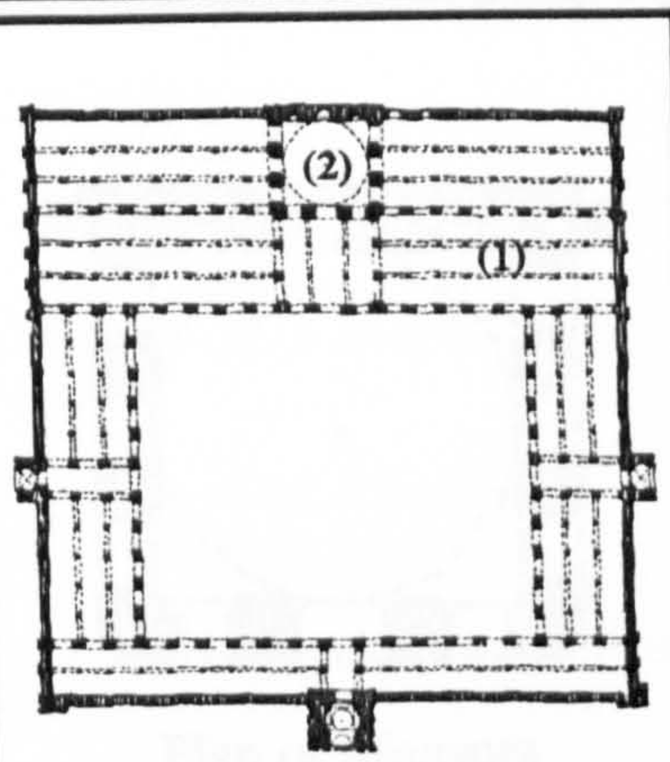
## ARCHES & IWANS

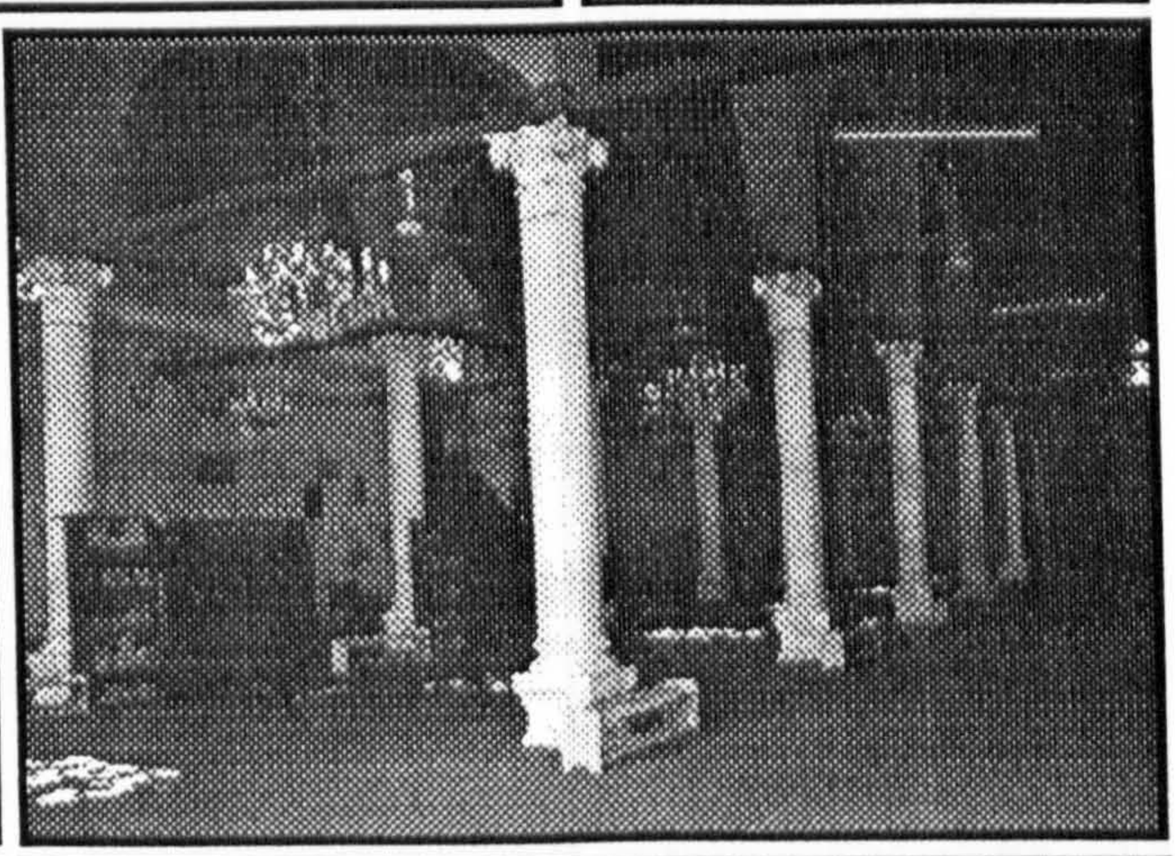


Individually and collectively, by their physical forms as well as their shadows, the pointed arcades point heavenward to the sky. The pointed arch represents the union between the terrestrial (quadrangular base) and the celestial (curved parts) and ends with the One (summit point).

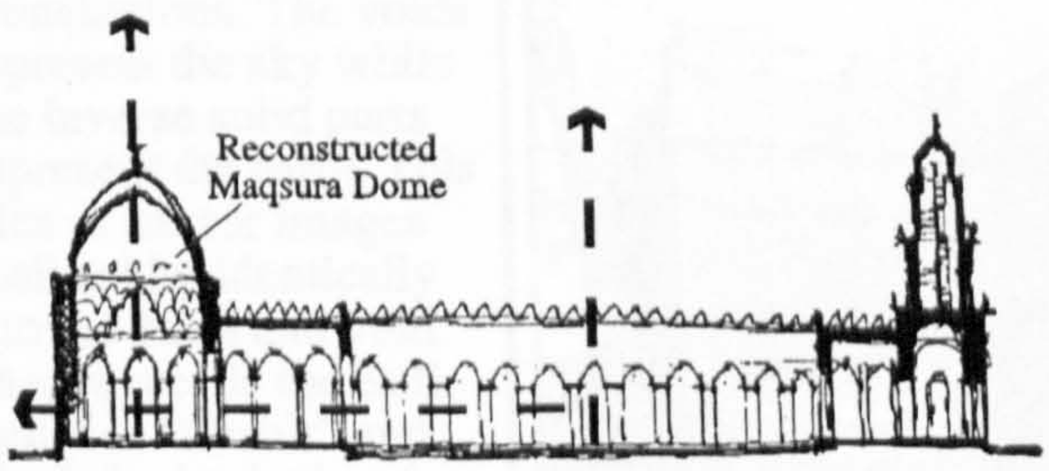


## PRAYING HALL



The praying areas in this mosque have two distinct qualities: (1) The pillared hall which is typical in all hypostyle mosques. Columns represent the number one (representing the affirmation of faith in Islam, and their repetition recalls the repetition of this affirmation by the Sufis time and time again in dhikr). (2) The domed maqsura (a copy of al-Shafi'i's dome) connects the prayer hall to the vertical, and thus, to the Heavens.

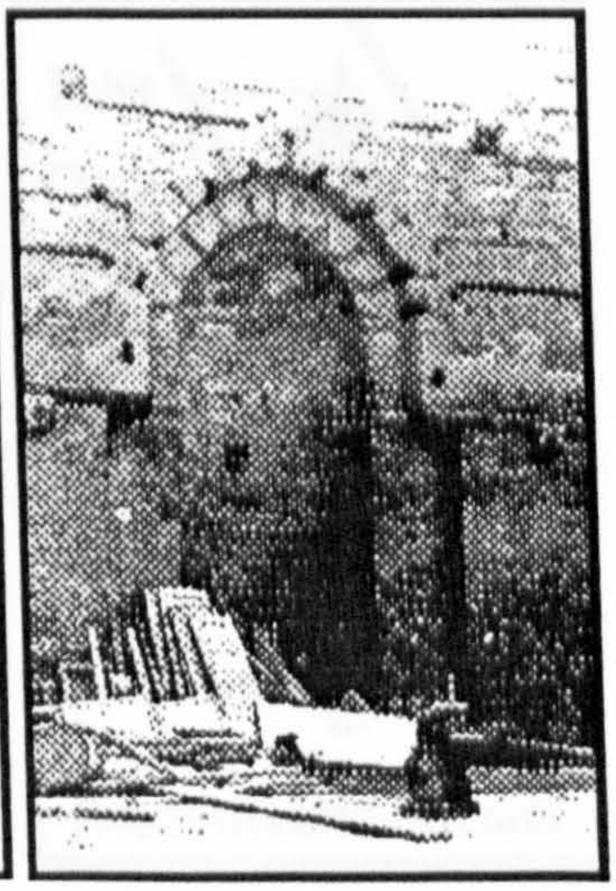



Reconstructed Section
(My Reconstruction)

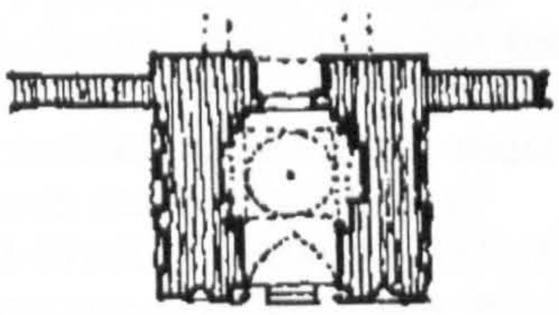
(2)

## MIHRAB

The remains of the mihrab of this mosque give us a rough idea of what were the main lines that were followed in its design. Firstly, the form is that of a concave niche outlined by another flat arch indicating as well as emphasizing depth; both silhouettes are those of pointed arches. The resulting effect is a form that enhances the sense of the vertical as well as depth. The grooves in the brickwork indicate that marble cladding was used to cover this mihrab and that these marble slabs were centred, i.e., radiating from the centre of the curved part of the niche. This would recall the verse of Light (Qur'an: 24/36) in which God is described as the Light of the Heavens and the earth, the analogy taken for this Light is a "lamp in a niche".



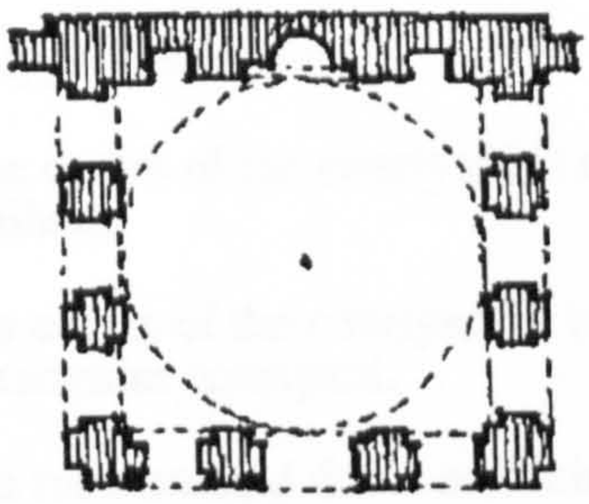
DOMES



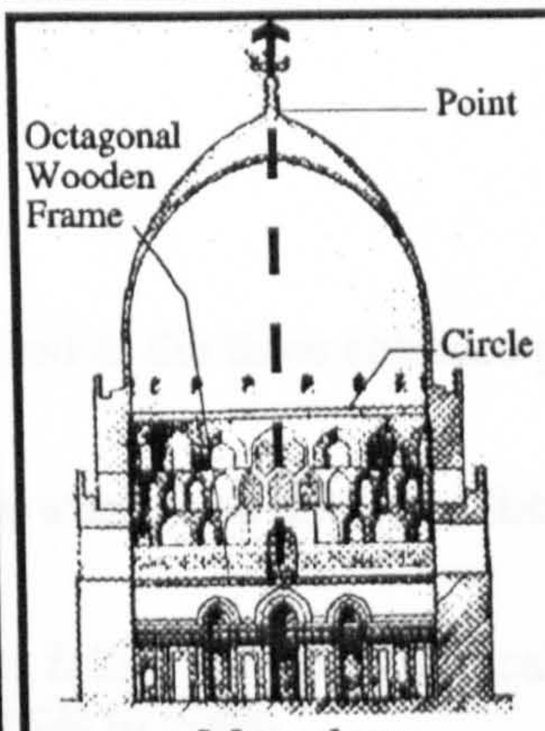
Main Entrance Hall Dome →

The pointed dome of the main entrance points heavenward leading to the rising of the sight to its apex. The octagonal transition is missing and is remedied by the whole cosmological model inherent in the minaret (built above it, i.e., nearer to the real Heaven) which changes sections from square to octagon, to circle, and to the point.

Using the reconstructed form of the maqsura dome (following al-Maqrizi's account of Baybars's wish for a replica of the Imam al-Shafi'i's dome) we find that the octagonal transition is structurally missing. To remedy this, the architect introduced an octagonal cantelevered wooden frame below the springing of the stalactites from the square base. Thus, the form is ascendingly arranged from square to octagon, to circle, to point according to the cosmological model. This octagon completes the otherwise incomplete form (from the qualitative point of view of numbers and forms) and joins the horizontal qibla axis to the vertical cosmic axis.

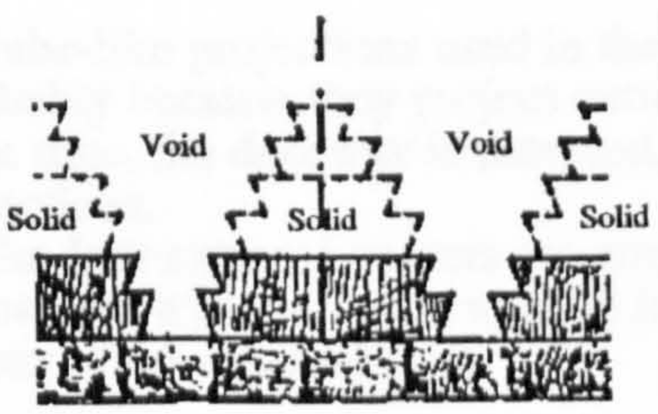


Plan of Maqsura




Mausoleum of al-Shafi'i →

CRESTINGS

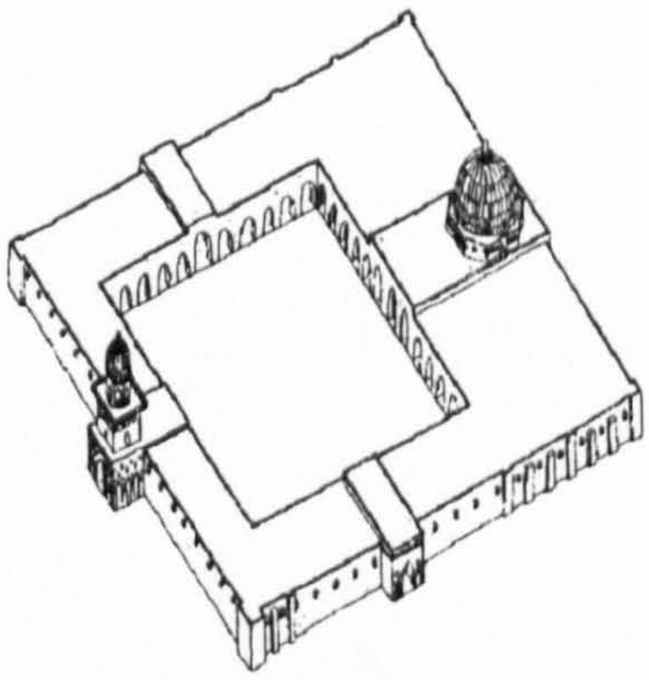



Geometrical Crenellations

(n.b. The hatched parts are the existing remnants of the crestings, while the dotted outline is a reconstruction of what they would originally have been.)

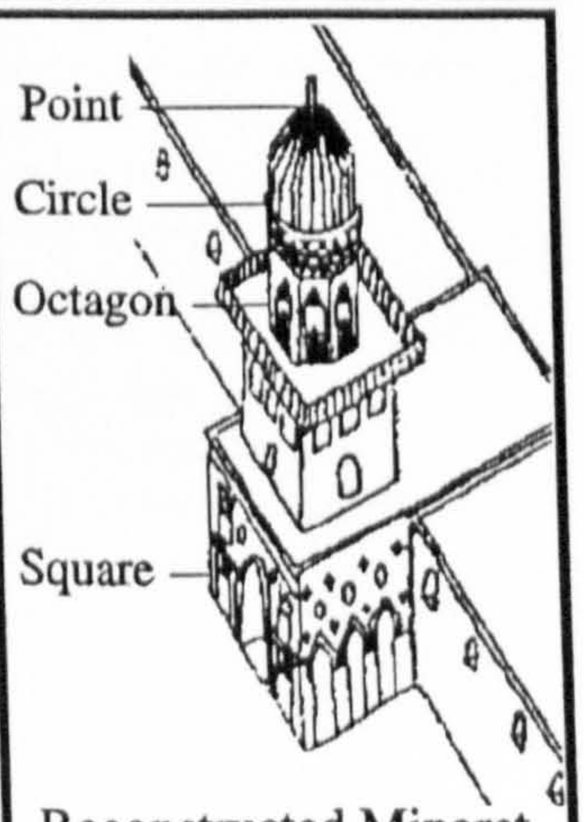
The crestings take the form of geometrical crenellations. The voids represent the sky while the inverse solid parts represent the earth. This idea of mirror images realized by identically formed solid and void shapes recalls the Sufi belief in "dhahir" and "batin", physical and spiritual, earthly and heavenly, ... etc.

MINARET



Reconstructed Axonometric of the Mosque

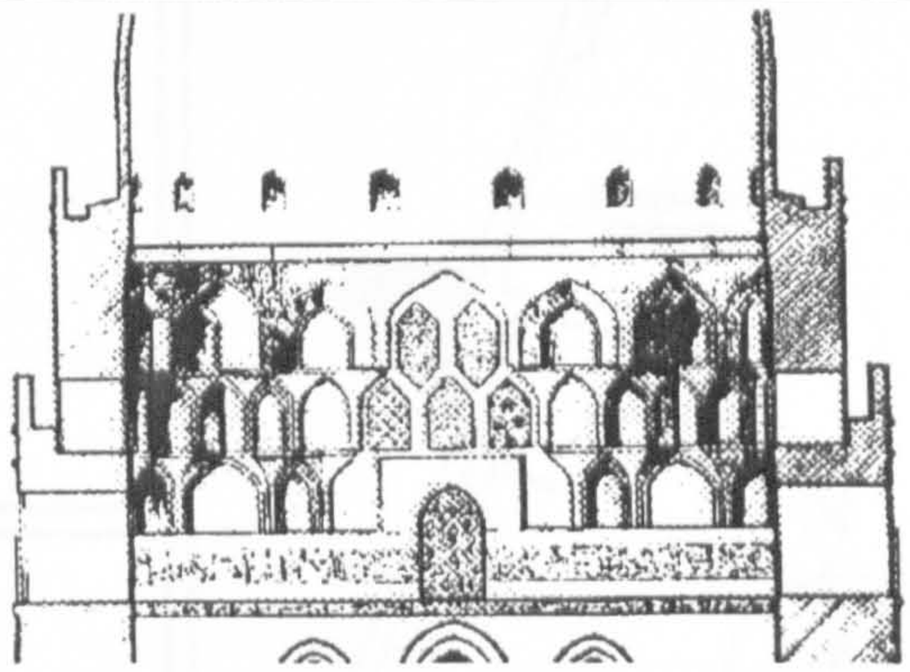
The reconstructed minaret (see Chapter Five) shows typical Mamluk traditional features: it is tapering upwards; and it changes sections from square base to octagon (zone of transition), followed by the circle, and culminating at a point. The form is a symbol of transcendence and follows the cosmological model.




Reconstructed Minaret

STALACTITES

If we consider the dome above the maqsura to have been built a replica of that of Imam al-Shafi'i, it follows that the stalactites used in the zone of transition of the dome must have resembled those of al-Shafi'i's dome as well. Each muqarnas individually points upwards while collectively in their horizontal and vertical "growth", the stalactites give a sense of vastness and of multiplicity from Unity and Unity in multiplicity.



Stalactites of the Mausoleum of Imam al-Shaf'i

## Remarks:

Prototypic Features:

1) The centre of the courtyard is aligned to the three entrance portals, the maqsura, and the mihrab.

2)The centre of the courtyard is at the same time related to the four corners of the quadrangular courtyard.

3)The recontructed dome and minaret follow the cosmological model changing sections from square to octagon to circle to point.

Unique Features:

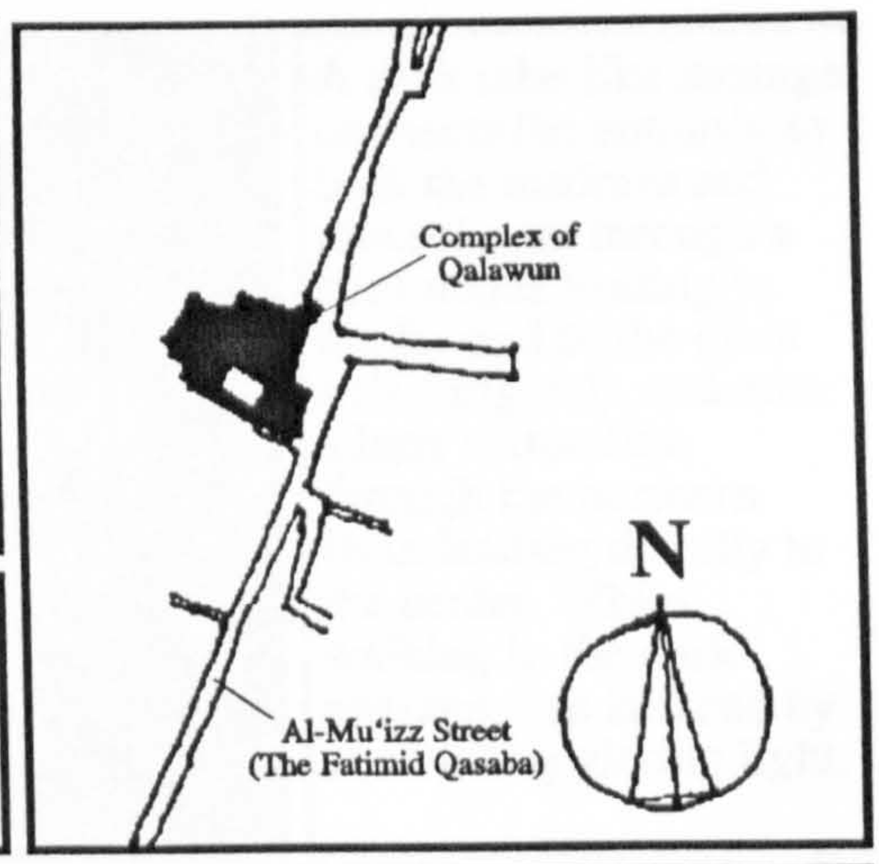
1) Cube-like projections used in the three portals, are unique and never used again (probably because they project outwards into the less sacred space of the street. At the same time, the doorway is recessed, and thus, counteracting the symbolic effect of the projections.
2) The four external corners are emphasized by means of towers. In the examples that follow, we will see that it was the inner courtyard corners that were emphasized in favour of the external ones.

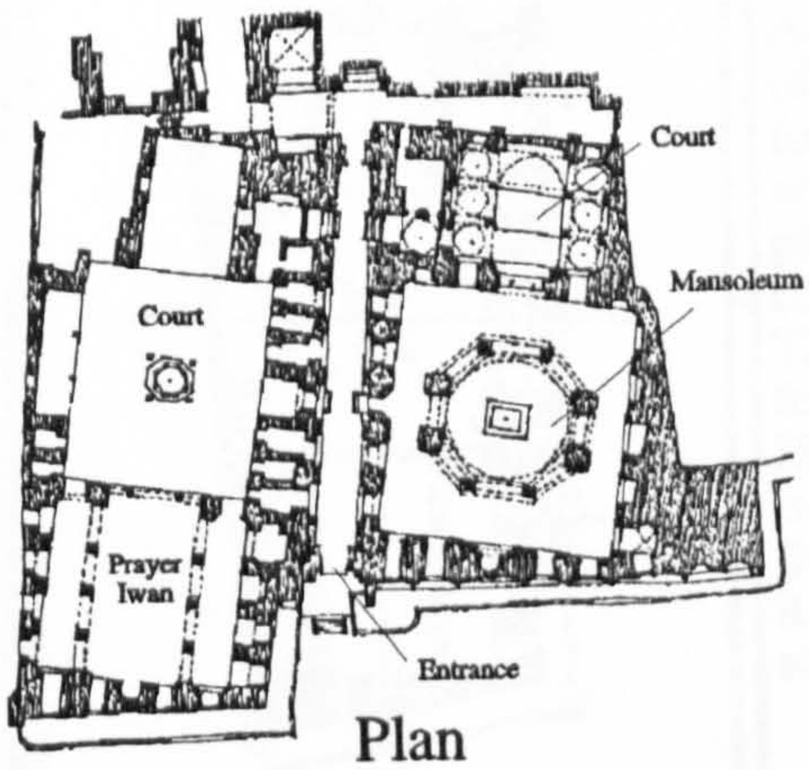
# The Complex of Qalawun (Al-Nahhasin)

## (683-4 A.H., 1284-5 A.D.)

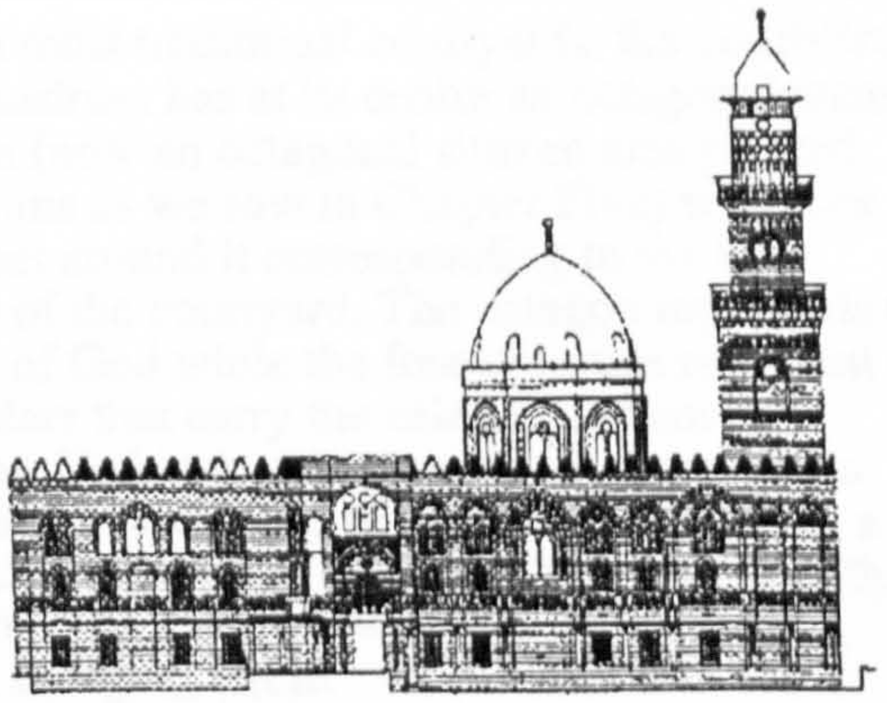
## Madrasa / Mosque Type

## (4 Iwans, Mausoleum, Sufi Cells)



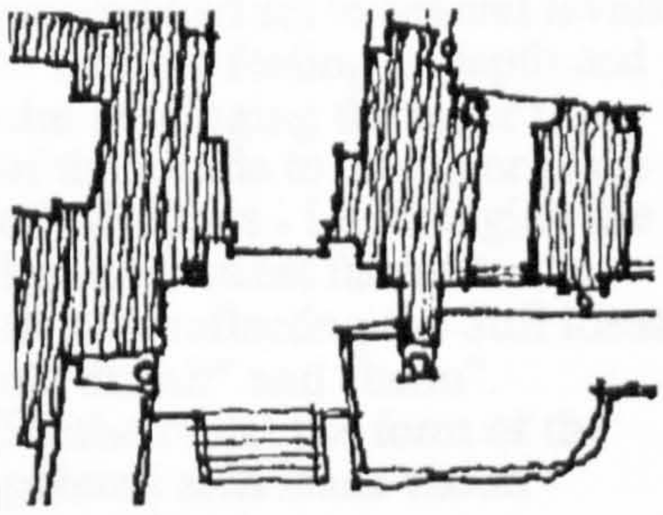




Plan

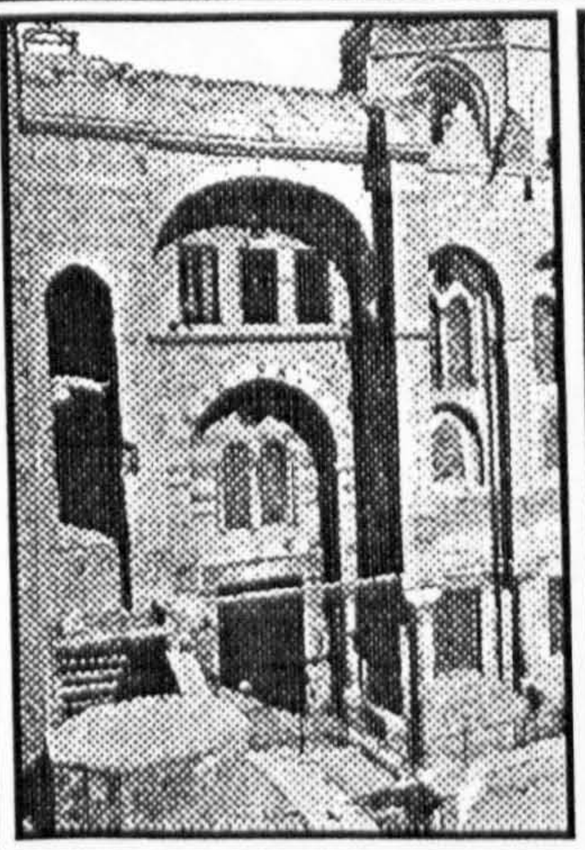


Elevation

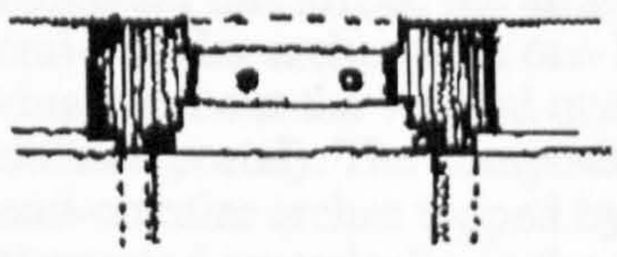
PORTALS



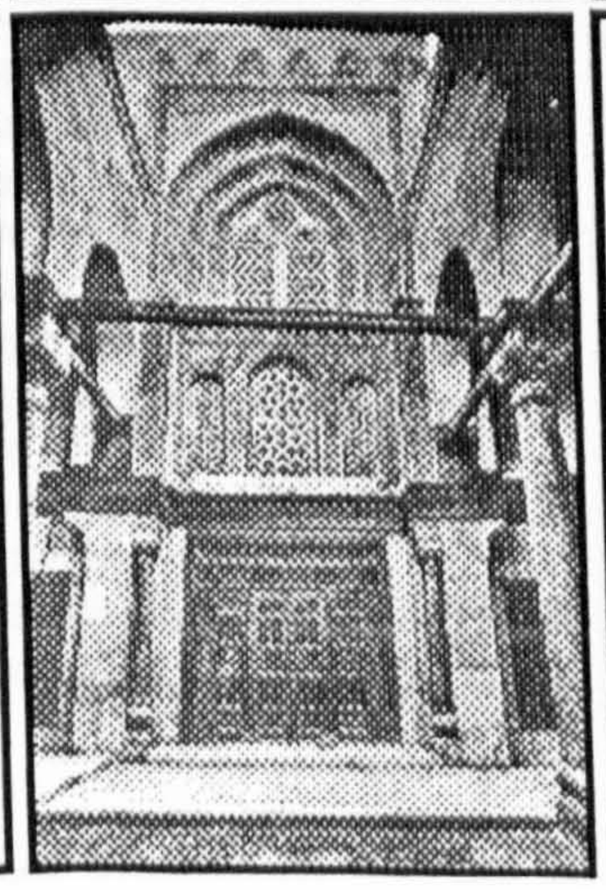
Main Portal Of Complex



A non- typical Mamluk portal composed of two arches: the inner is pointed while the outer is in the form of a horse-shoe. The pointed arch points upwards to the heavens while the horse shoe, giving the sensation that its centre has been shifted upwards defies the descending movement of the otherwise semi-circle.

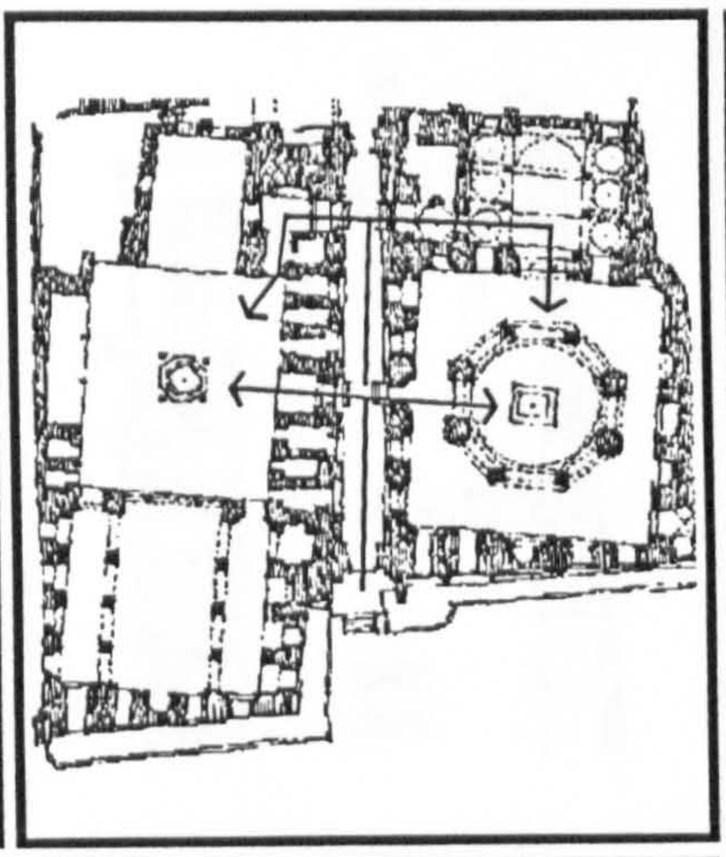


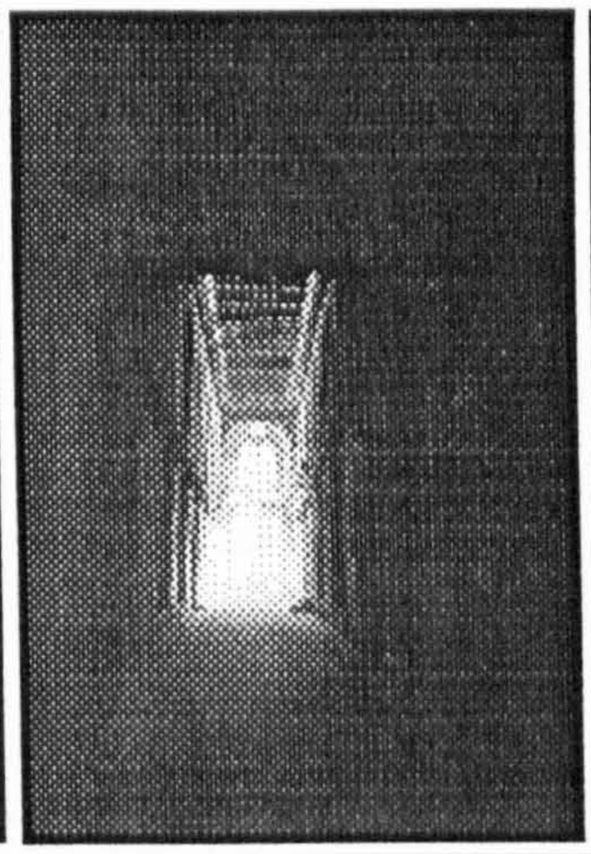
Mausoleum Portal



The mausoleum portal is one of the most magnificent features of this complex. It is composed of a series of layers of pointed arches with three tiers of windows (first 3, followed by 2, then 1). This composition superimposed by the qualitative meaning of the 3, 2, and 1 ultimately leads to the vertical.

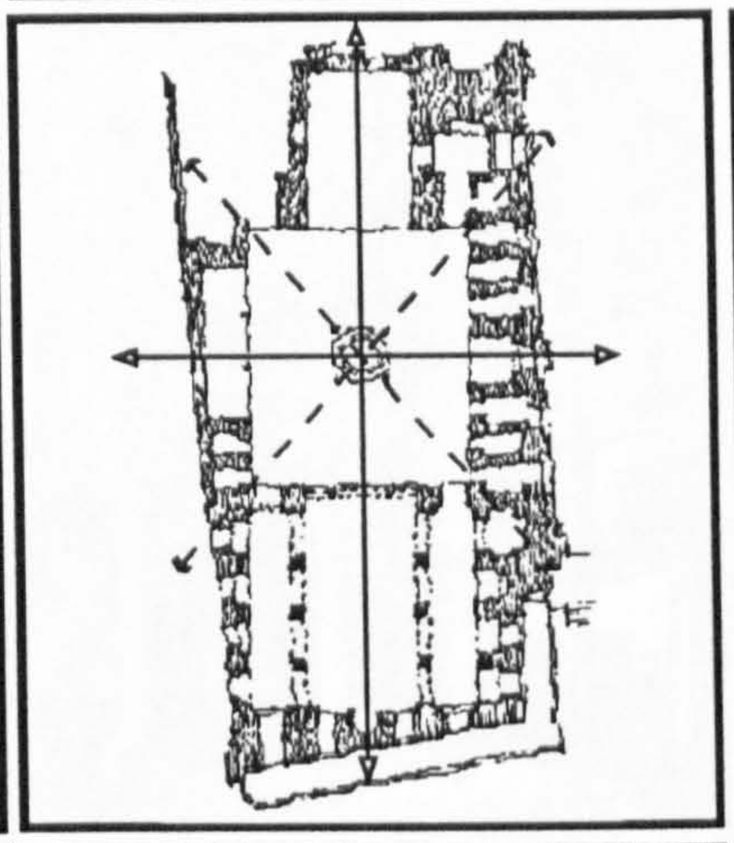
## ENT. HALL & MAJAZ





A dark tube-like passage connects the entrance to both the madrasa and mausoleum: through a bent majaz leading to the far end of the qibla axis (original), and after a later restoration through the northern iwan leading directly to the centre. While walking in the dark passage, one is faced by contrasting glaring light.

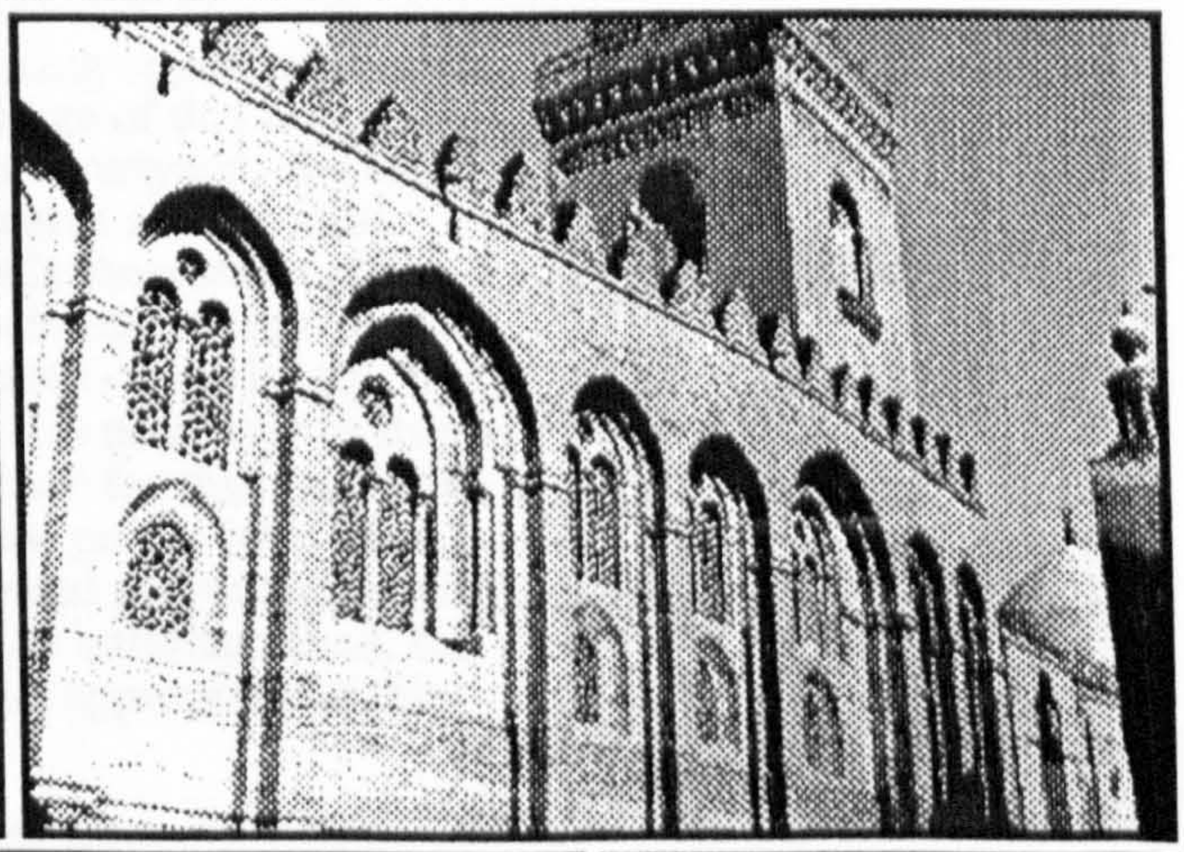
## COURT & FOUNTAIN



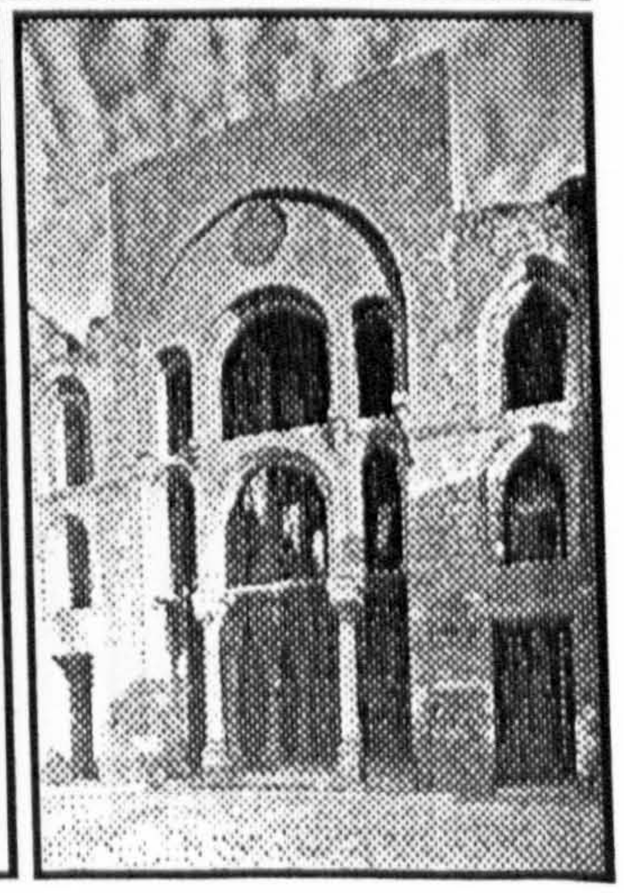
As with most traditional courtyards, the courtyard of the madrasa has at its centre an octagonal water fountain (now an octagonal sunken area planted with palms as we saw in Chapter Five) with four pillars set around it corresponding to the four corners of the courtyard. The octagon represents the Throne of God while the four columns represent the four pillars that carry the celestial sphere or Heavens. Unfortunately sources do not mention whether this octagonal structure was roofed by a domical shape or not, but it is highly probable that it did to complete the cosmological model of square, octagon, circle.

## ARCHES & IWANS

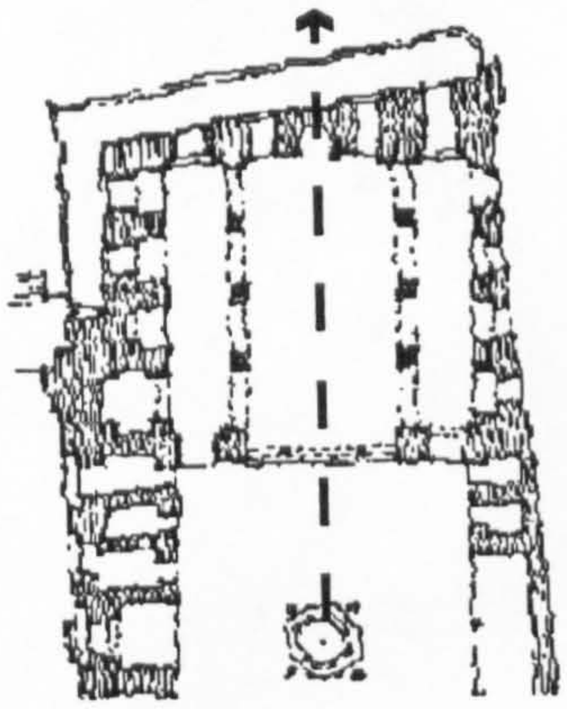
Externally, arches are all pointed and set in several levels to create a feeling of depth and aim at bringing the outer plane of the facade to the inner plane of the recess - i.e., bringing the less holy street facade to the interior reflecting the Sufi ideas of "dhahir" and "batin". Furthermore, the form of the pointed arch leads vision upwards.



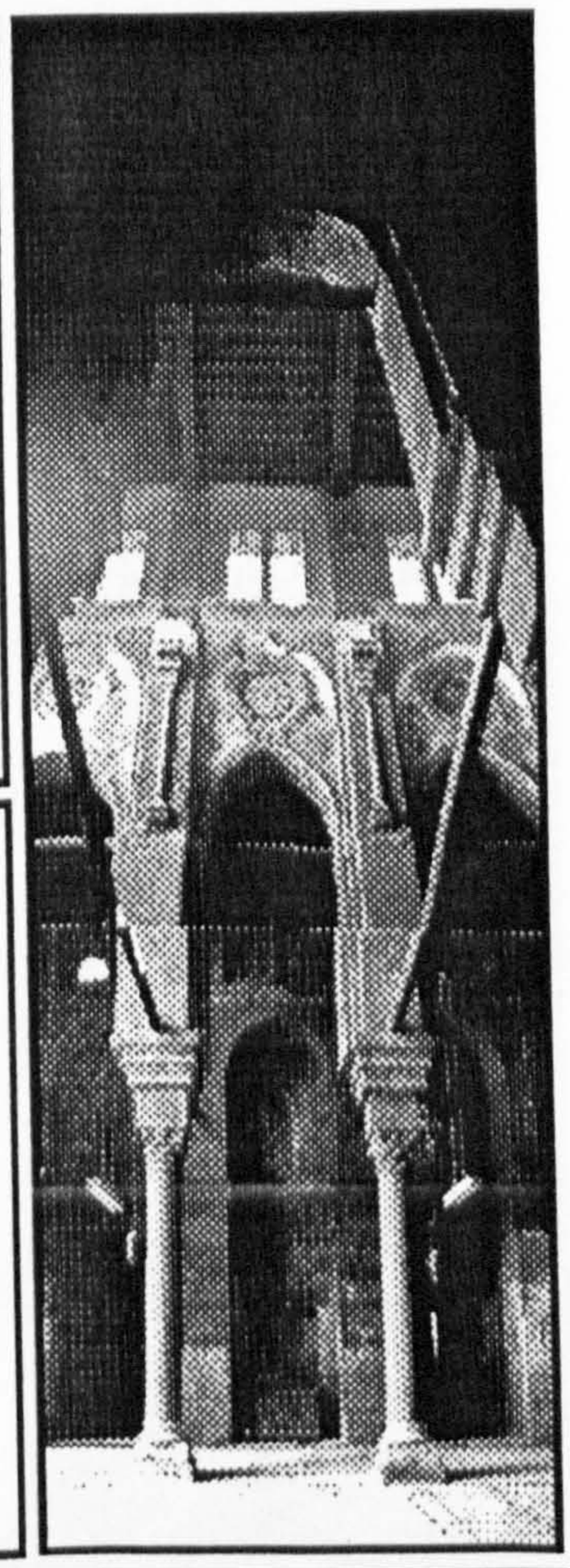
On the other hand, internally, two types of arches are used: the semi-circular in two tiers, and the pointed traditional arch. The semi-circular arch symbolizes an earthly connotation in Islamic cosmology, so, to counteract this effect, the architect engulfed the grouped semi-circular arches with one large pointed arch, thus bringing about the vertical quality needed (compare with entrance portal). The composition of the arches, the three semi-circular arches topped by a circle, could also be interpreted esoterically as the tripartite structure of terrestrial man - body, soul, and spirit - united by God the One - the circle - seeking transcendence in the Heavens by the pointed arch.

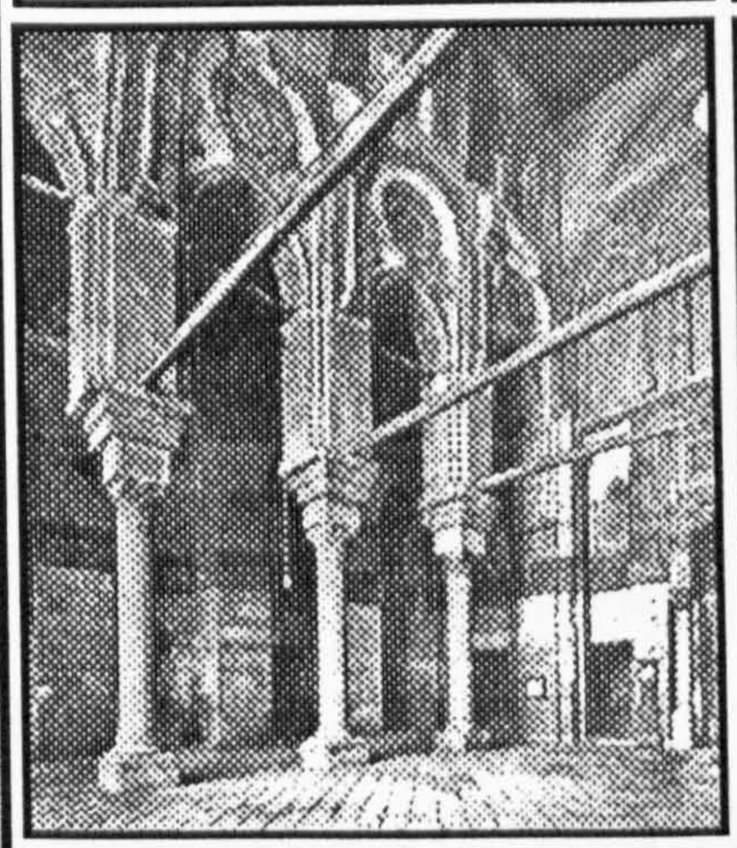


## PRAYING HALL



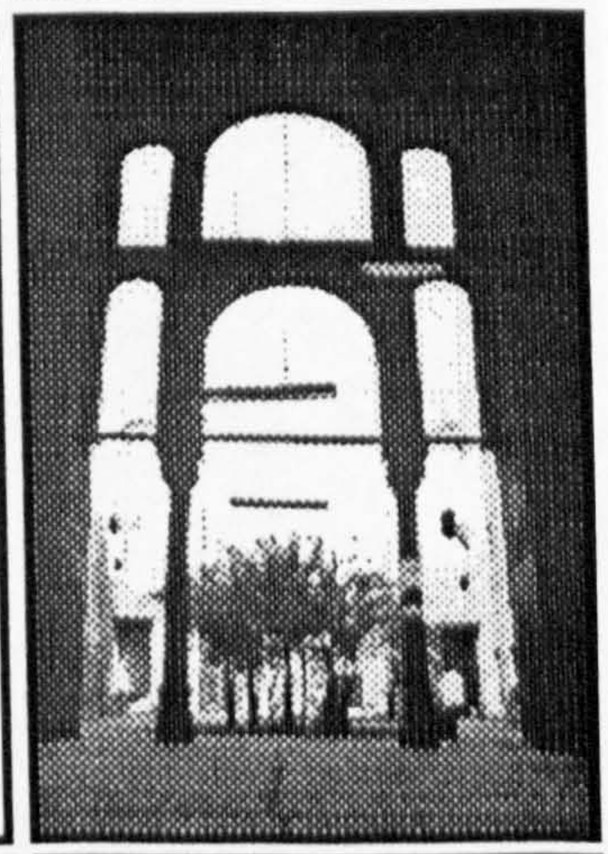
The adjustment between the direction of the qibla and the street orientation is accomodated by the exessive thickness of the walls. This gives an effect of a solid mass in which some spaces have been carved out (as a cave). This causes a visual sensation that helps enhance the feeling of interiority (that of the batin).





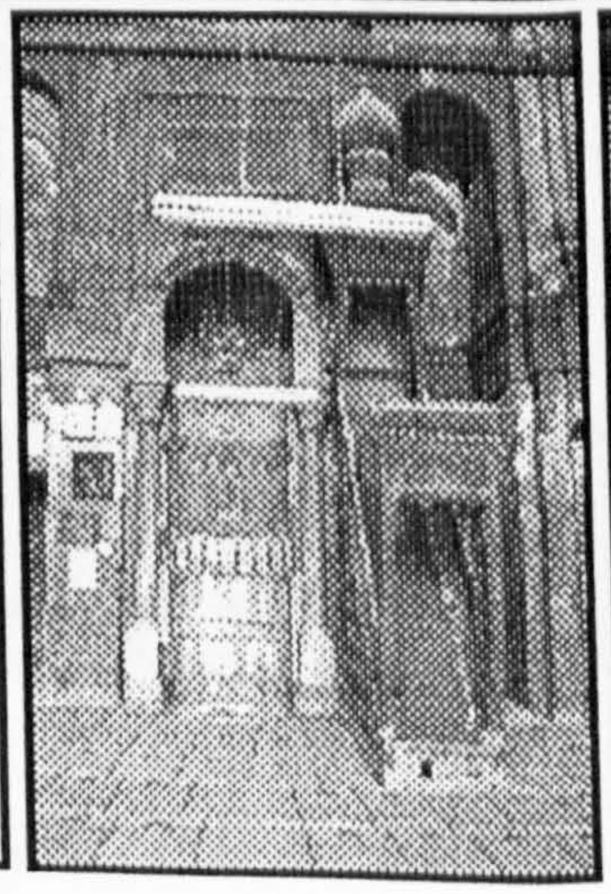
Depth in the prayer hall is achieved by dividing the square space into three parts leading to the qibla axis. The central aisle is the widest, and leads directly to the mihrab. Height is accentuated in the entire praying space without emphasizing the bay of the mihrab. At the same time, laterality is not diminished by this iwan organization.

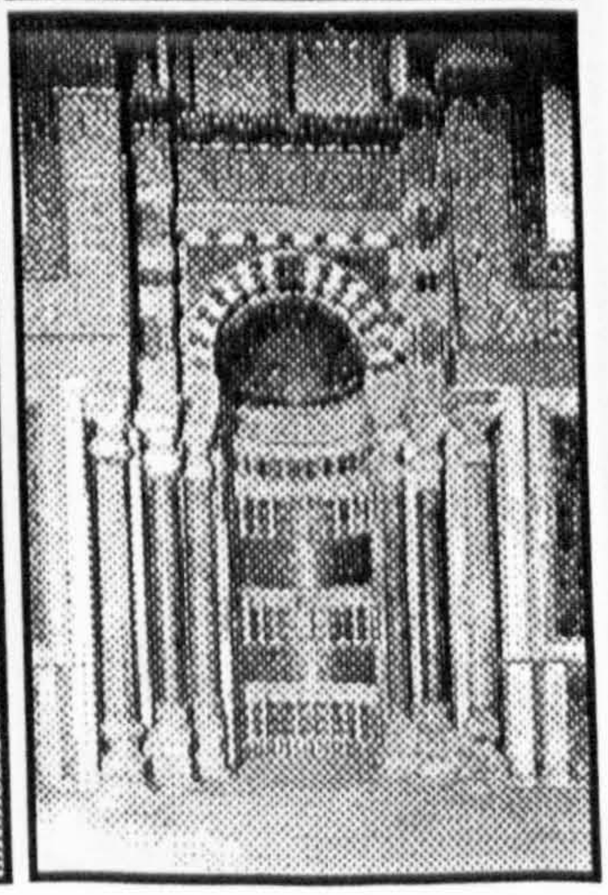
From within the prayer hall (looking opposite the qibla direction) one sees a negative image of that seen when one faces the same wall from the courtyard - the same effect of the crestings where positive and negative images are duplicated. This recalls the notions of "dhahir" and "batin". The semi-circular arches are symbolically connected to the earth - there is nopointed arch here to hint at the vertical. It is necessary to stop at this point to contemplate the reason for this: one looks at this side of the wall seperating the prayer iwan from the court when one has already finished prayer and leaving the religious more holy part of the building. Thus, the insinuation of earthly attributes is appropriate at this stage of the use of the building.



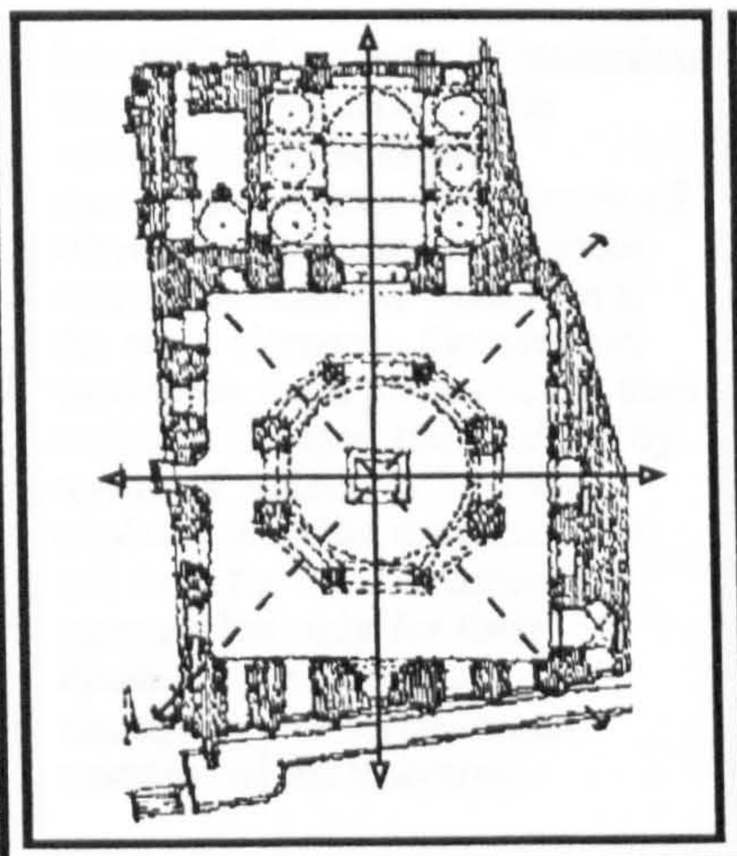
## MIHRABS

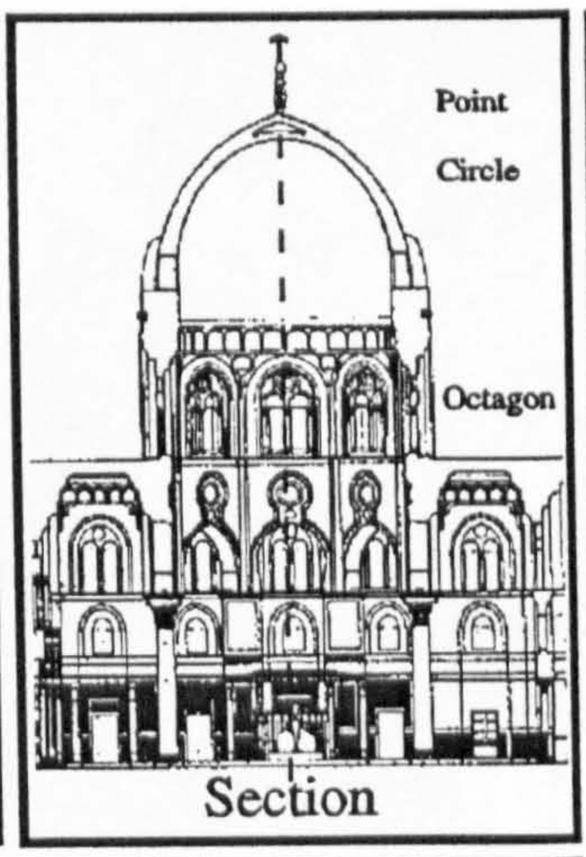
The praying hall and mausoleum mihrabs are horse-shoe shaped (and slightly pointed). They give an emphasized feeling of depth by their exessive concavity and hence, embody the feeling of interiority. Both mihrabs are clad with radiating marble patterns which recall the verse of Light (see interpretation in mihrab of Baybars).



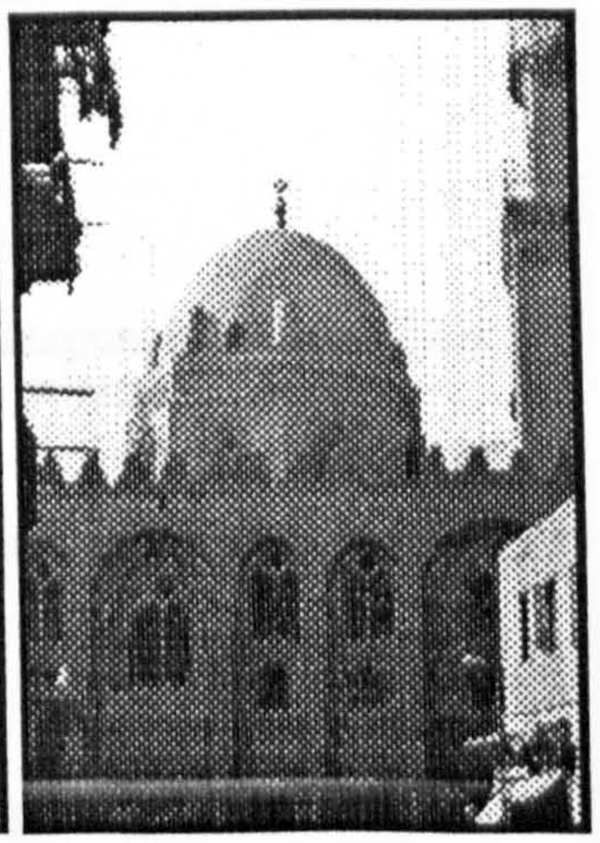


## DOME

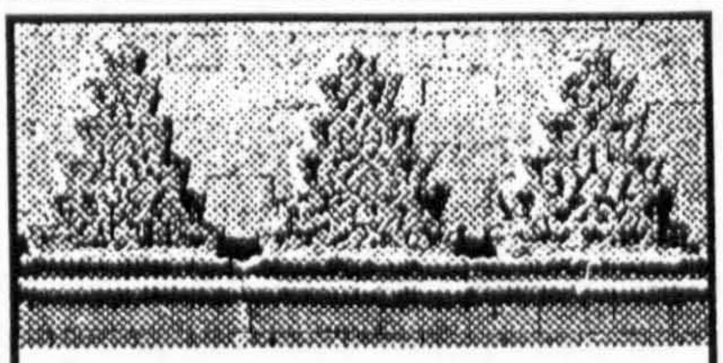




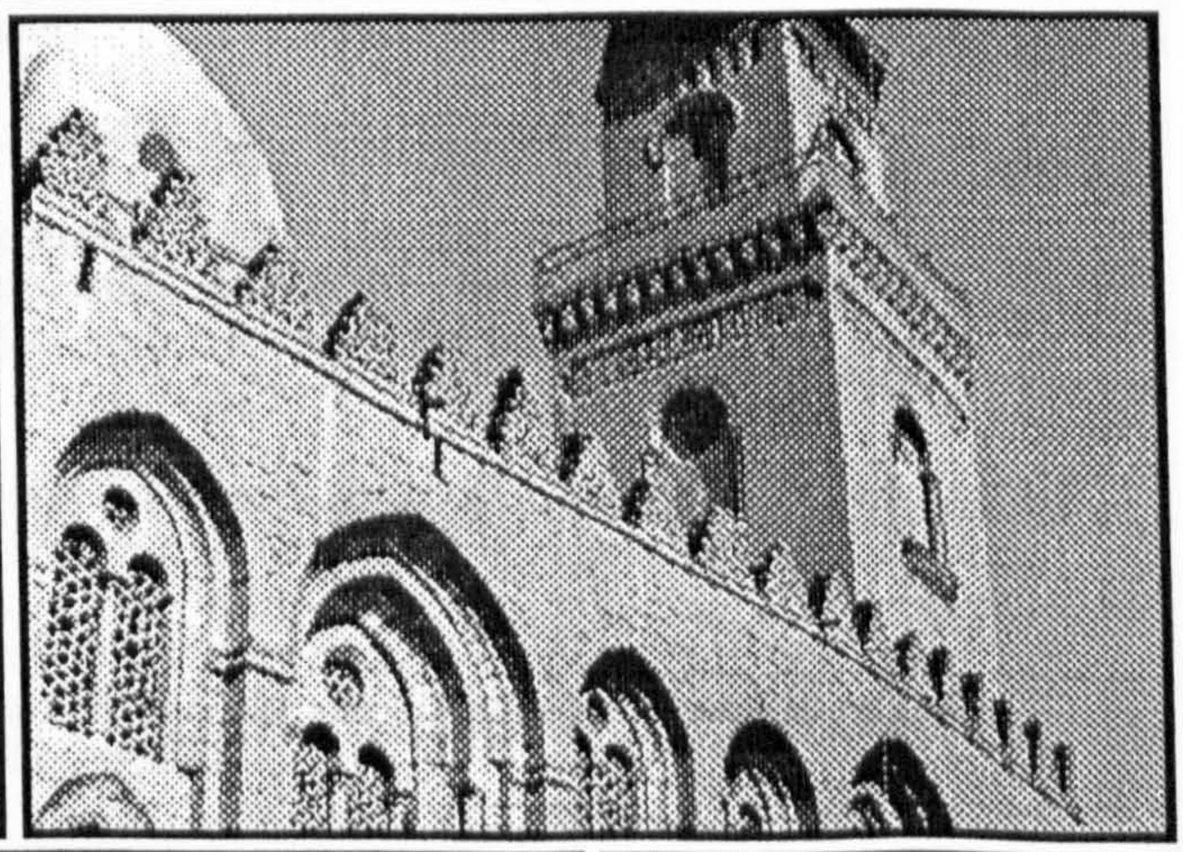
The square form of the base of the dome (recalling the four pillars carrying the "Heavens") houses at its centre the tomb of the patron. By looking upwards at the pointed dome, we find that it is carried on four alternating piers and columns. These eight supports are connected together by eight arches and eight wooden tie-beams to accentuate the octagonal quality of this transition zone (the Footstool, and Throne carried by the eight Angels or Bearers of the Throne). This is culminated by a pointed dome which leads vision upwards and ends at the summit of the dome at a point representing the One.



## CRESTINGS



The crestings show the Islamic notion of "equality" but "non-similarity" of mankind. Equality is manifested by the form of the solid and void (see interpretation in crestings of Baybars) while each cresting has its own decorative pattern, reflecting differentiation.

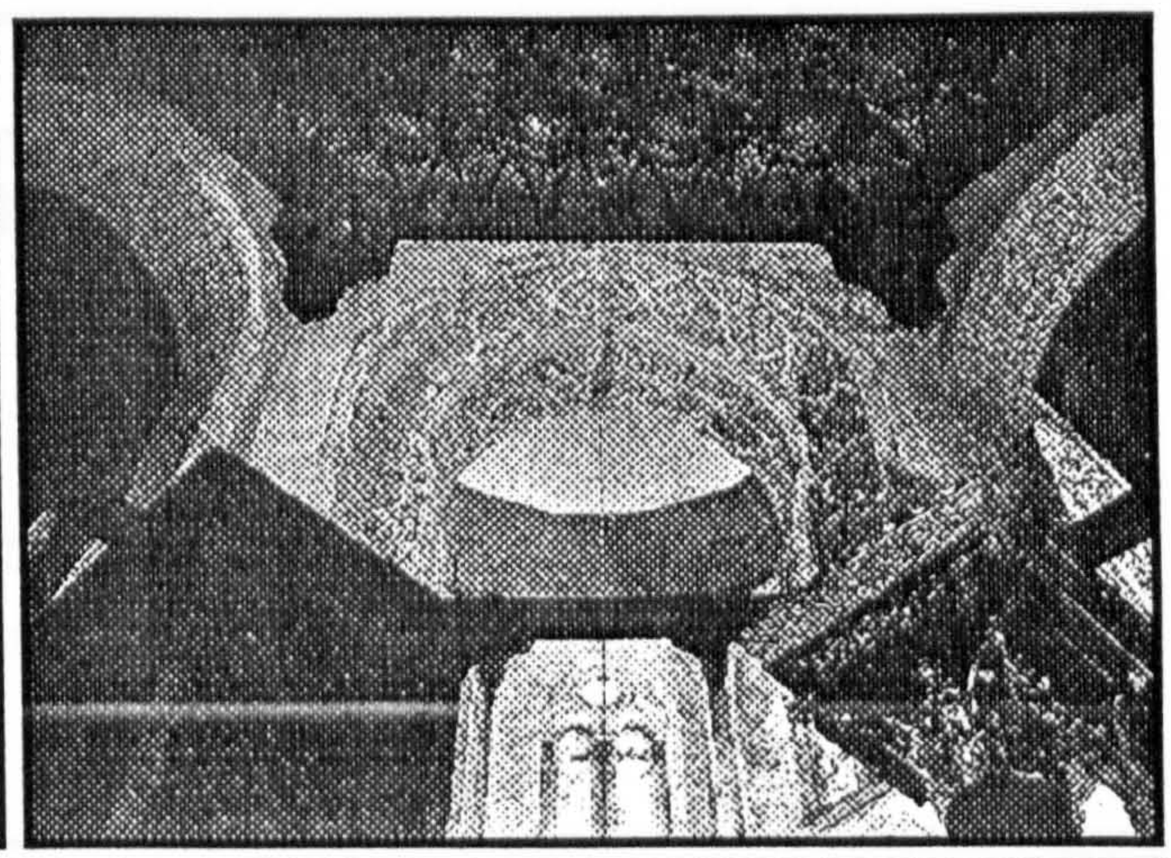


## MINARET

Although the minaret's sections appear to change from square to circle to point, without passing through the octagon, we find that in fact, the octagon was placed as the projecting second balcony of this minaret. It does not take a whole section of the minaret and it is not apparent at a first examination but it still completes the cosmological model. This shows how important each constituent of the cosmological model was to the traditional designer and explains why architects would not sacrifice the symbolic meaning in a composition that was aesthetically pleasing by omitting a traditional constituent. (See interpretation of minaret of Baybars)

STALACTITES

Internally, three rows of stalactites smooth the transition from octagon to circle in the mausoleum dome. Contrary to all other Mamluk traditional dome structures, here the transition is the main element - the octagon carried on eight pillars rather than a square changed into a circle by means of stalactites - which explains why the muqarnas are not used for their structural purpose but only for their symbolic meanings, i.e., multiplicity of creation and vastness of the universe.



## Remarks:

Prototypic Features:

1) The centre of the courtyard coincides with the centre of the octagonal fountain. This fountain generates the four iwans and is axially positioned to be related to the four corners of the courtyard.

2) Both the dome and minaret follow the Sufi cosmological model of square, octagon, circle, culminating at a point.

Unique Features:

1) The horse-shoe shaped arch of the portal (the outer less holy plane), followed by a pointed arch (the inner more holy plane).

2) The centre of the courtyard is aligned with the centre of the mausoleum.

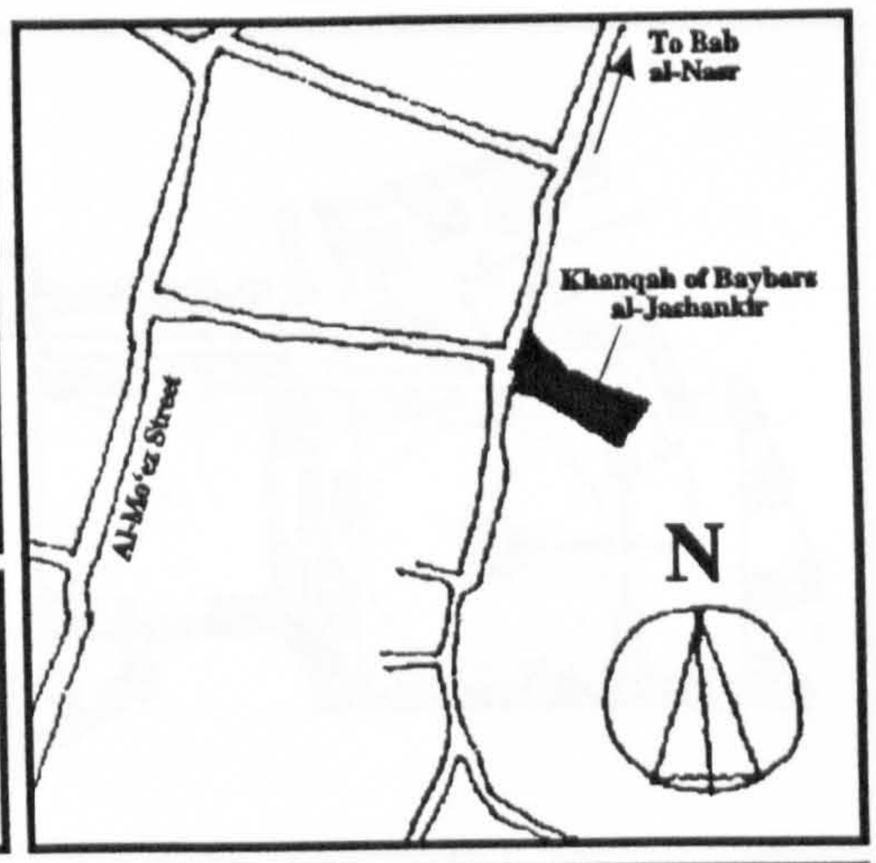
3) Internally, facing the qibla iwan, a group of semi-circular (descending) arches are circumscribed by a pointed (ascending) arch. Within the prayer iwan, facing the courtyard, the descending semi-circular arches indicate the outside less holy world (earthly as opposed to Heavenly).

4) The relation between the octagon and the square mausoleum chamber is emphasized and duplicates the form of the water fountain in the neighbouring madrasa courtyard.

5) The crestings appear to be identical but in fact are only similar (i.e., varying in details) which furthermore proves the idea that the crestings represent man as both material and spiritual, differentiated but unified.

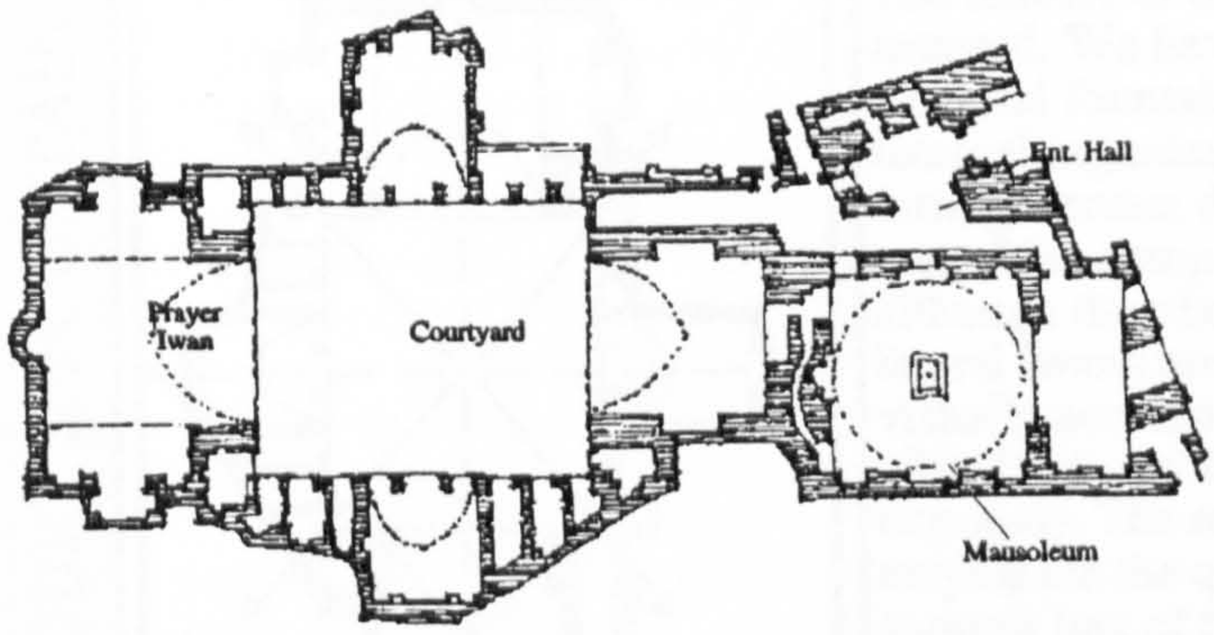
# Khanqah & Mausoleum of Baybars al-Jashankir (al-Jamaliyyah)

## (706-9 A.H., 1306-10 A.D.)

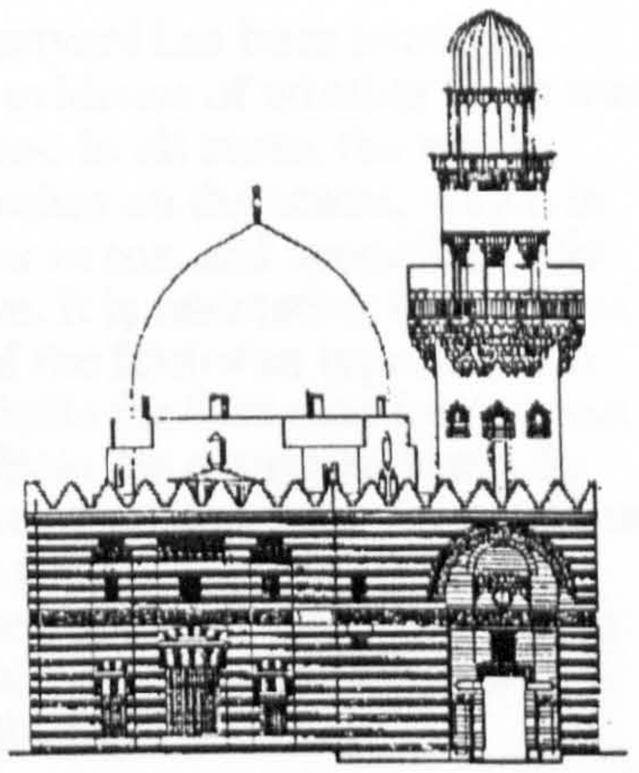



## Khanqah / Mosque Type

## (4 Iwans, Mausoleum, Sufi cells)

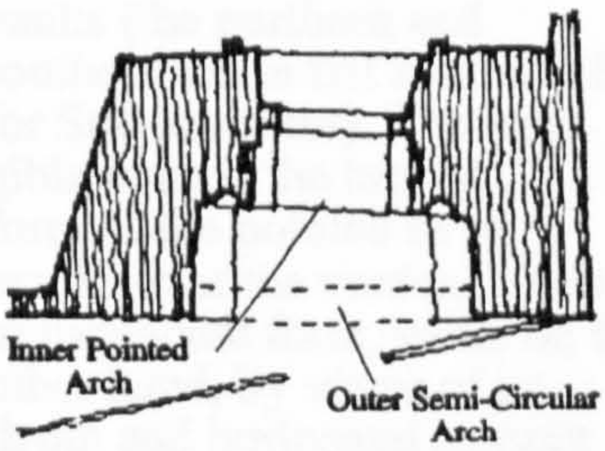



Plan

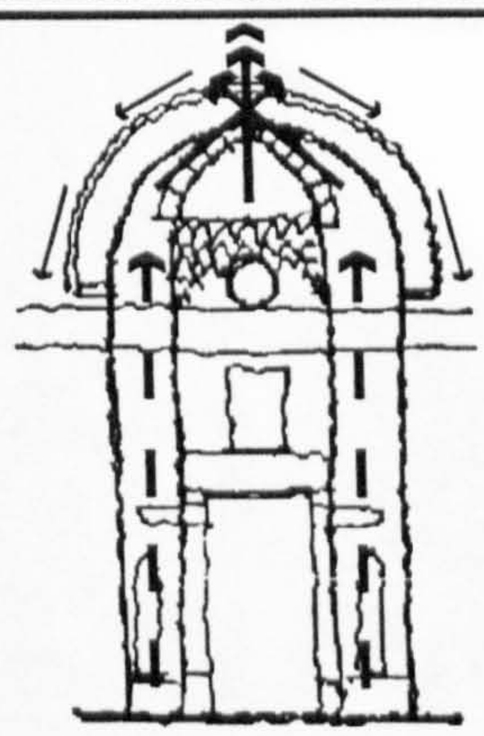


Elevation

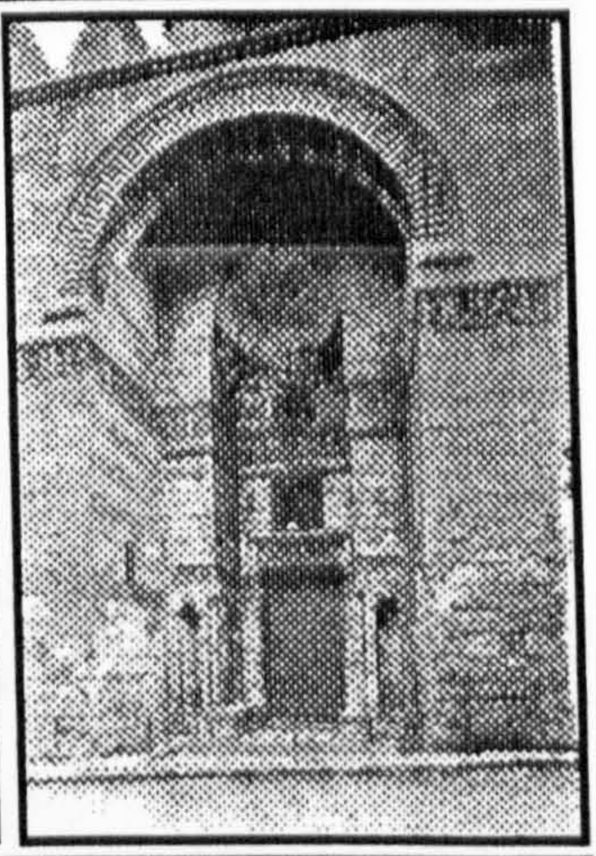
PORTAL

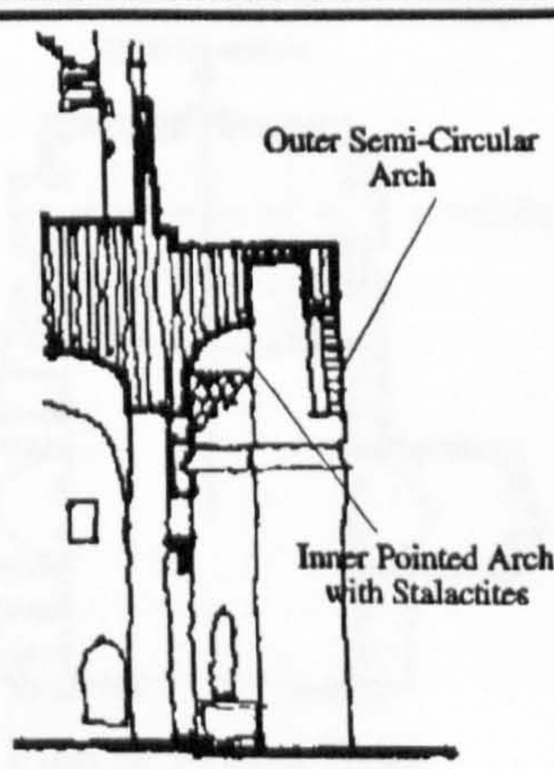



Main Portal Plan



Portal Elevation



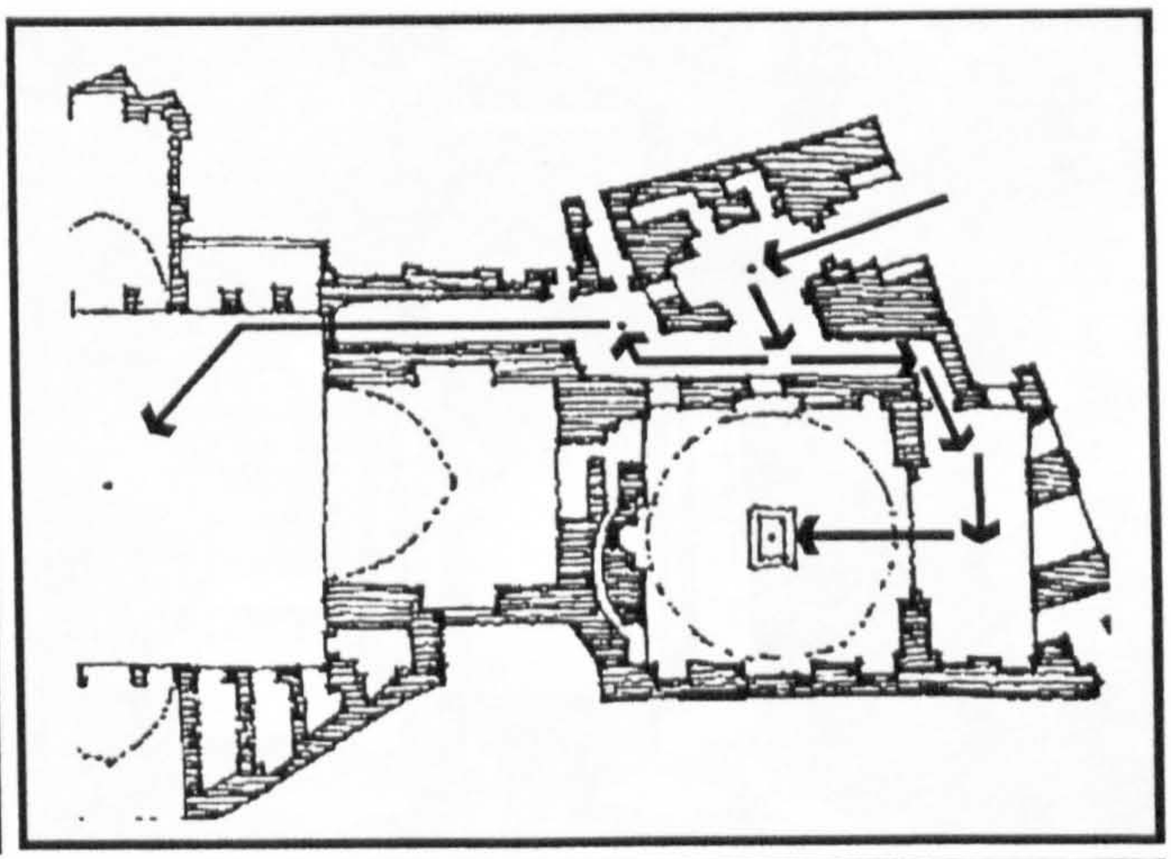



Section in Portal

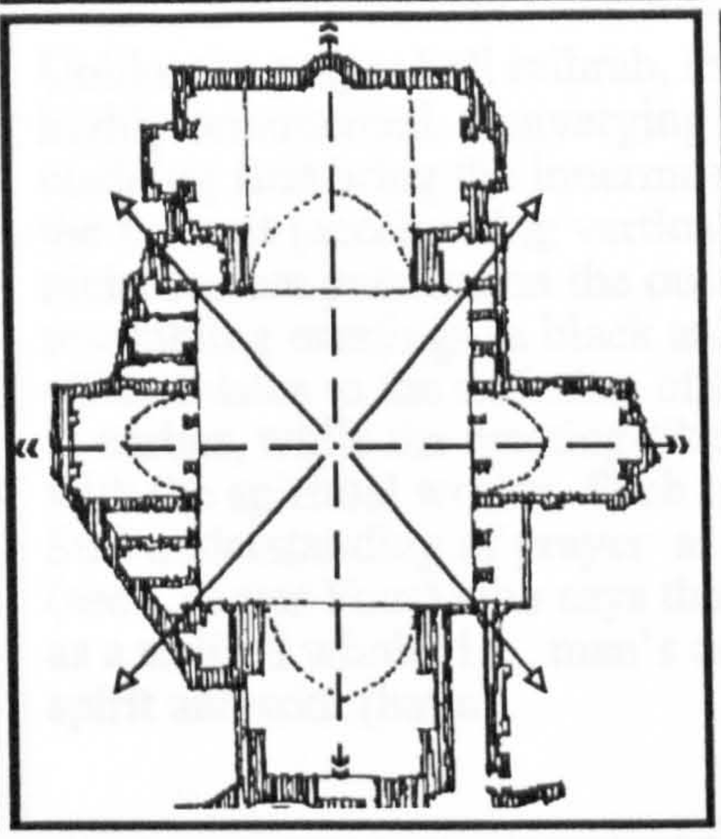
The outer less sacred portal opening is a descending semi-circular arch (connected to the earth) while the inner more sacred part of the portal, is a pointed arch with stalactites. The inner composition visually counteracts the outer earthly one by pointing upwards to the sky. Had the reverse been the case (i.e., the choice of inner semi-circle, and outer pointed arches) it would have opposed the traditional principles of Mamluk design.

## ENT. HALL & MAJAZ

Dark, winding, tube-like passageways help to disconnect the visitor from his outer concerns to change his disposition in order to stand in the "Hands" of God. The majaz together with the exaggerated thickness of the walls, help to orient the building (and consequently man) to interiority - in both physical and spiritual dimensions.



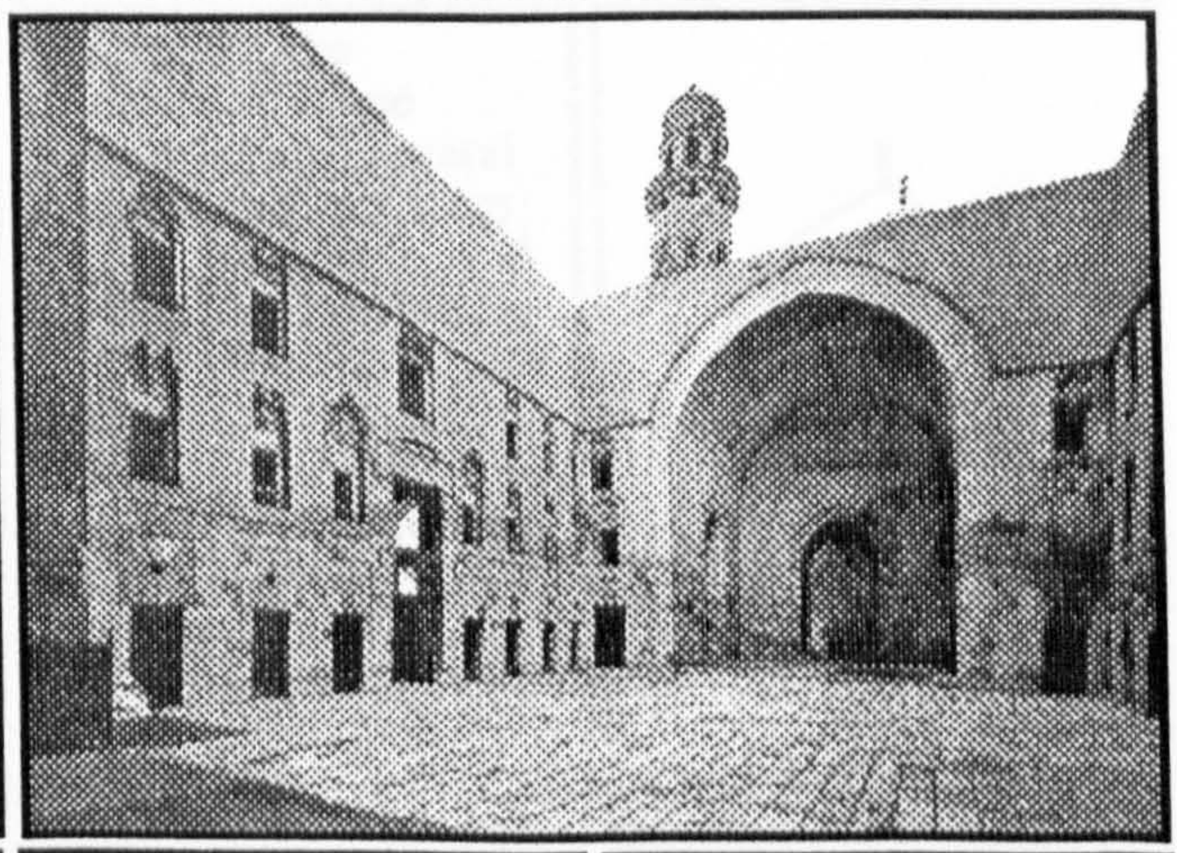
## COURT & FOUNTAIN



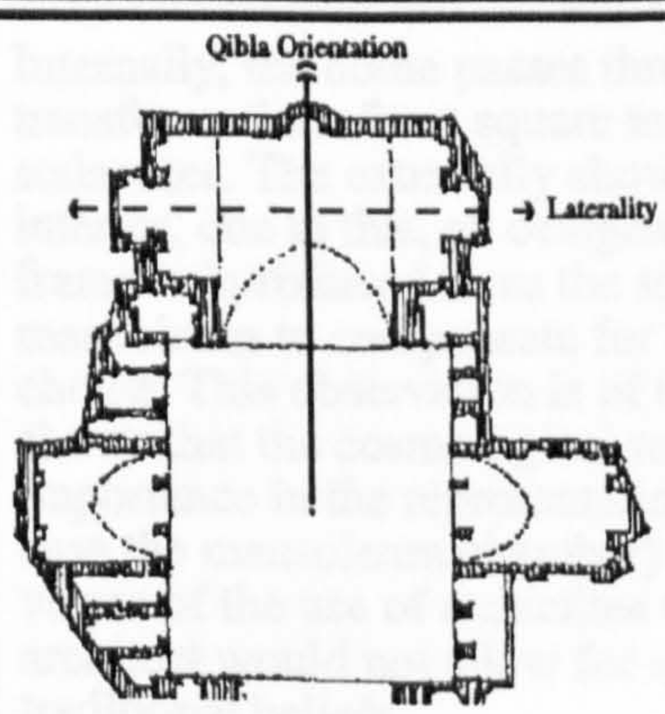
The interior of the courtyard has been heavily restored. We have no evidence of whether there was a central fountain or not. In all cases, the whole internal organization relies on the centre, which in turn, generates the four iwans, and accordingly the rest of the composition. It is interesting to note that although the plan is of the four-wan type, the two lateral iwans used as halls for Sufi practises are not visually accentuated from the courtyard (only the qibla iwan and the one opposite are the ones that are exposed). The reason for this is probably to emphasize the qibla orientation represented by the summit line of the vault from the courtyard which symbolizes the Straight Path.

## ARCHES & IWANS

Internally, the main eastern and western iwans are pointed vaults (the northern and southern are in flat roofed halls for Sufi practises). The main qibla iwan is the largest. The form of the pointed iwan emphasizes the vertical by its transcendant form, while on the other hand, by virtue of its depth and horizontal summit line, indicates interiority towards the qibla and esoterically recalls the Straight Path to salvation.



## PRAYING HALL

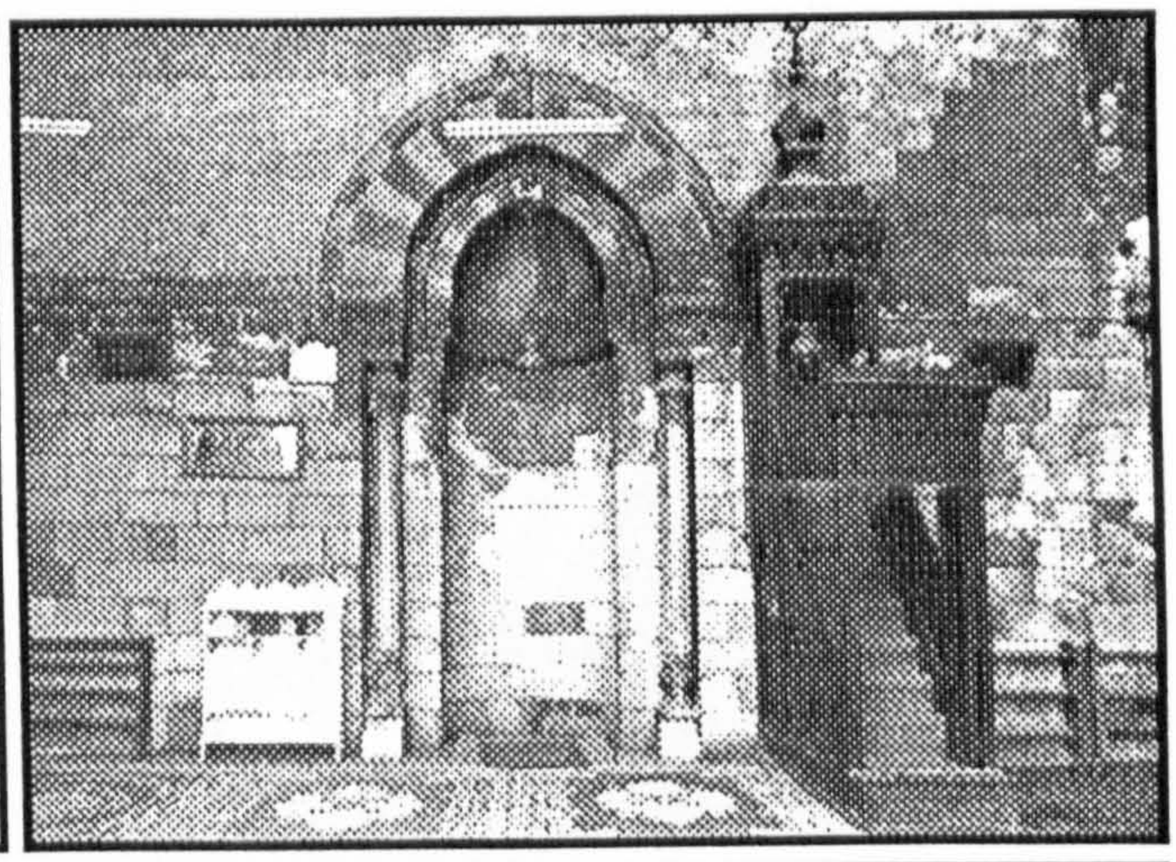



Plan of Prayer Iwan

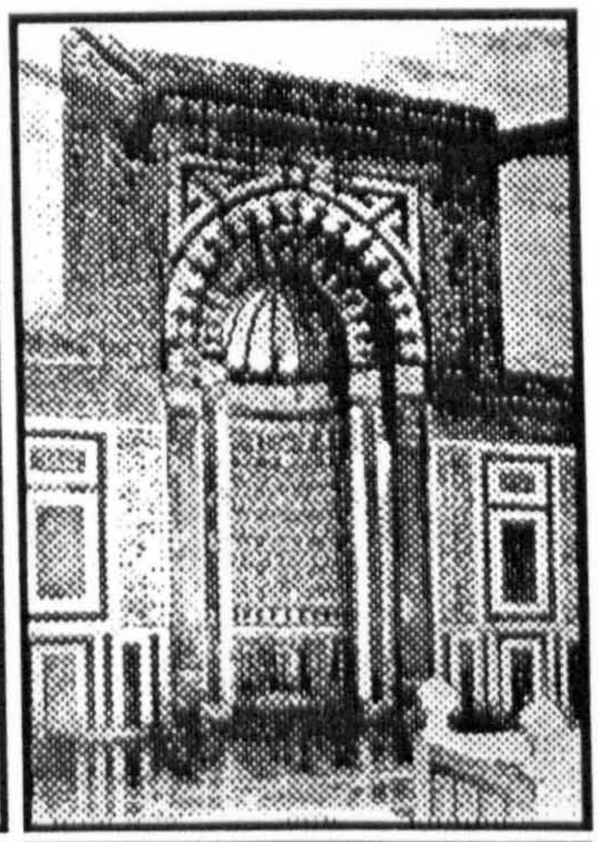
To achieve the visual and symbolic qualities of the use of the form of the iwan and at the same time, to provide the required laterality (longer rows), two vaulted annexed spaces were added "growing" laterally from the main vault. By this way, qibla orientation, the vertical axis, as well as laterality of rows were achieved.

## MIHRABS

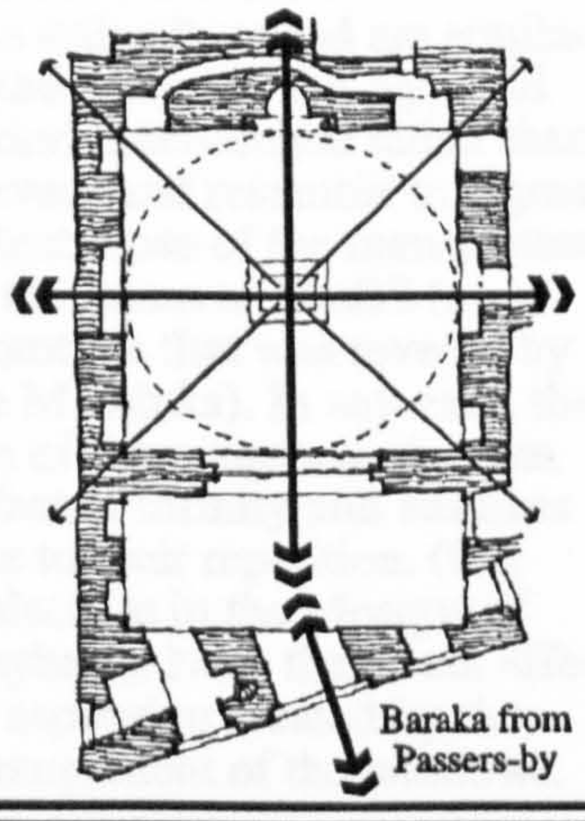
The prayer hall mihrab is an undecorated niche consisting of several layers of pointed arches in different levels. From the innermost niche, an oil lamp is hung recalling the verse of Light (see interpretation of the mihrab of the Mosque of Baybars).



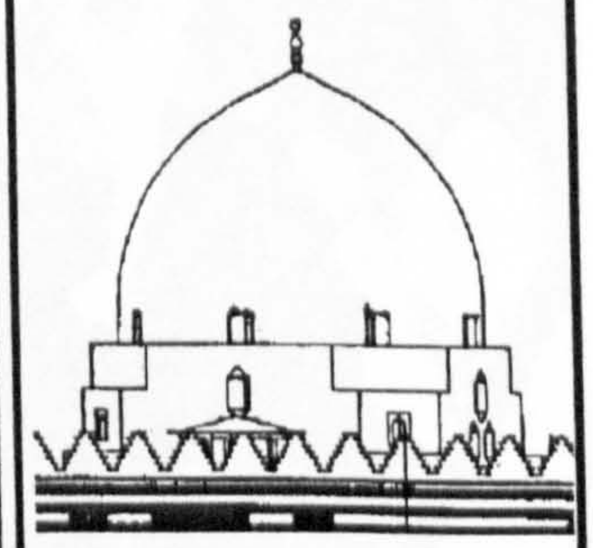
Unlike the prayer hall mihrab, the mausoleum mihrab is highly ornamented. Converging patterns of marble cladding first bring the innermost niche level to a point at the summit (accelerating verticality). From the innermost niche radiate patterns on the outer arches in shapes resembling crestings in black and white. This radiating effect relates to the radiation of Light in the verse referred to earlier, while the cresting-like shapes fuse the material with the spiritual worlds. Such interpretations recall the Sufi understanding of prayer as expalined by al-Ghazzali (see Chapter Four) who says that both body and soul pray as a unified whole; i.e., man's outer body (dhahir) and his spirit and soul (batin).



## DOMES

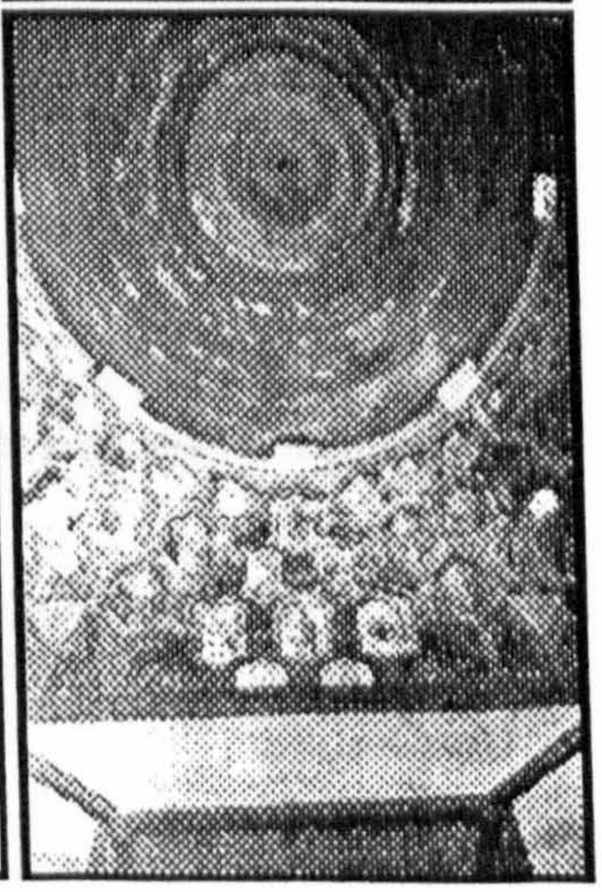



Externally, the mausoleum dome passes through several changes in form: from square, to octagon, and ending in a circular section culminating in a point at the summit. This follows the cosmological model of transition from earth, to Footstool and Throne, to the celestial dome, and finally to God the One.

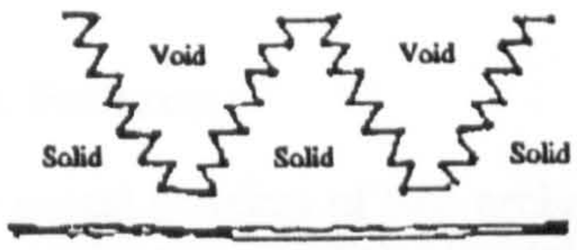


Dome
Elevation

Internally, the dome passes through a series of transformations from square to circle by means of stalactites. The externally shown octagon is missing in the interior, due to this, an octagonal cantelevered wooden frame is introduced from the square base of the mausoleum to compensate for the utilitarian structural choice. This observation is of the utmost importance as it shows that the cosmological model was of primary importance in the representation of the microcosm (in this case the mausoleum chamber) and that even if the current vogue of the use of stalactites was to be followed, the architect would not allow for any compromise regarding traditional beliefs.

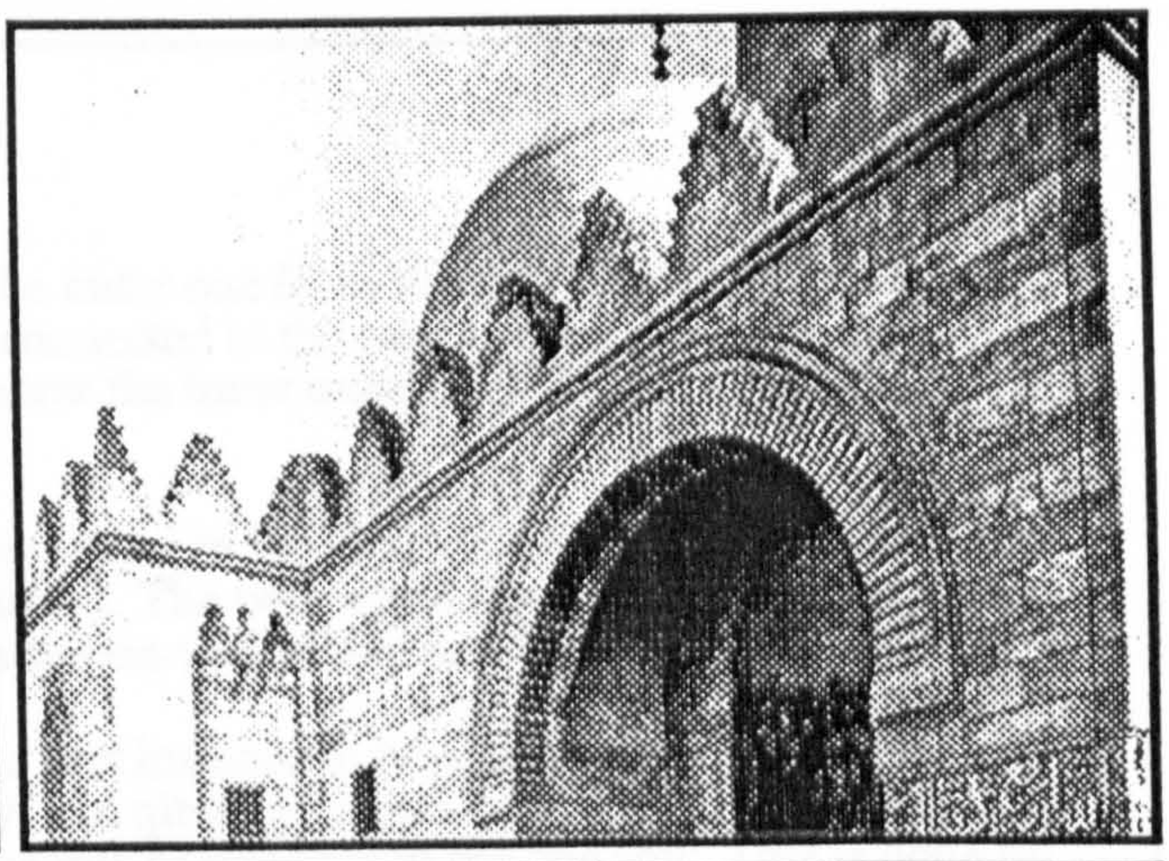


## CRESTINGS

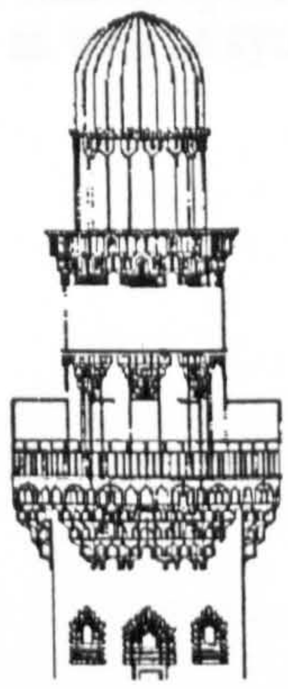



Geometrical Crenellations

Internally, no crestings survive. Externally, geometrical crenellations are used similar to those of the Mosque of Baybars and those of Qalawun (see interpretation of the crestings of the Maosque of Baybars).

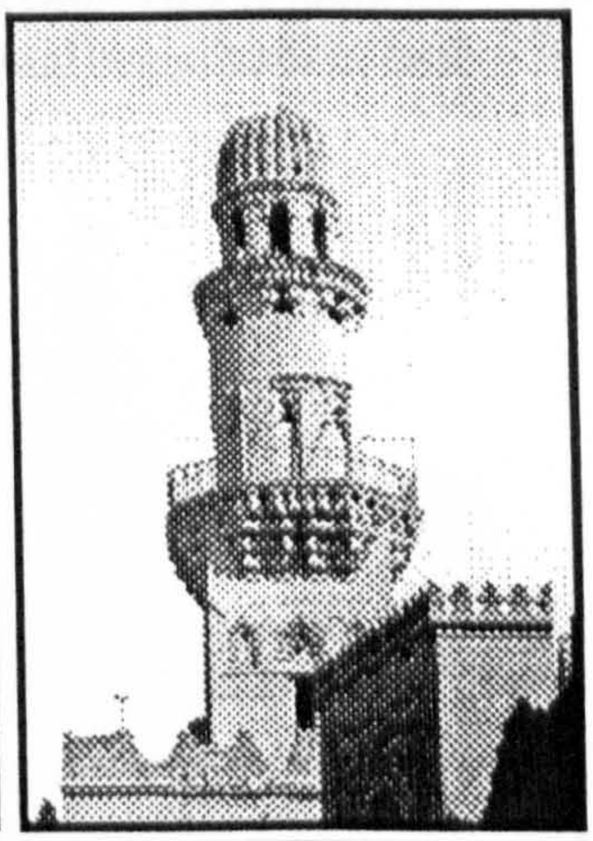


## MINARET



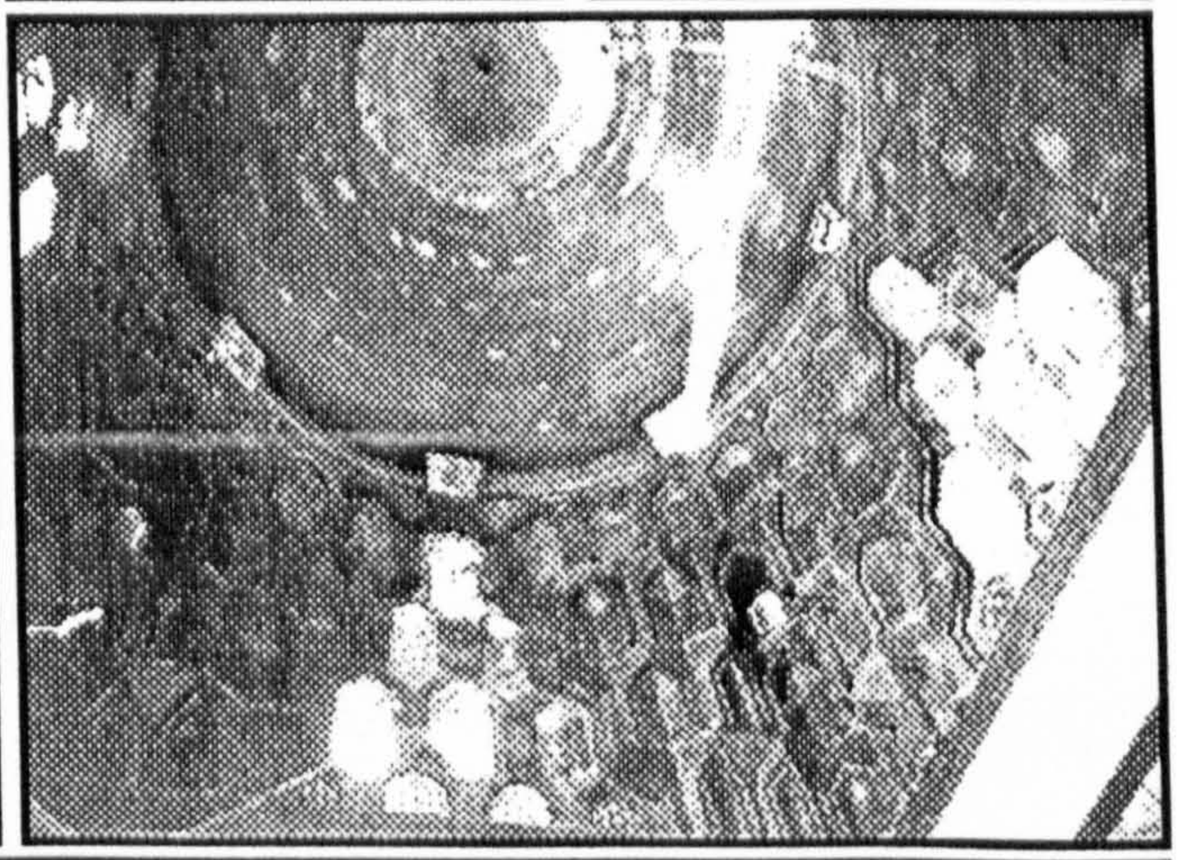
Minaret Elevation

The transformation of form of the minaret is from square to circle to point. The octagon takes the form of the balcony of the mu'adhdhin which is cantelevered on stalactites. Although it does not constitute a section of the minaret, it completes the cosmological model.



## STALACTITES

The stalactites used are similar to those used in the Ayyubid period (keel-arched rather than curved) and resemble to a great extent those of the mausoleum of the Imam al-Shafi'i (a prototype that was revered by the Mamluks). In any case, the use of the muqarnas gives an effect of infinity and vastness due to their repetition. (See stalactites in the Mosque of Baybars). Note the visual effect of ascension created by the arrangement of the windows.



## Remarks:

Prototypic Features:

1) The courtyard elements are all axial to the centre, and are "generated from it (e.g. the two pointed vaulted iwans, the two lateral flat-roofed iwans, prayer hall, and mihrab. The four corners of the courtyard are diagonally related to the centre.

2) Both the sections of the exterior of the dome and the minaret follow the Sufi cosmological model (from square, to octagon, to circle, and culminating at a point).

Unique Features:

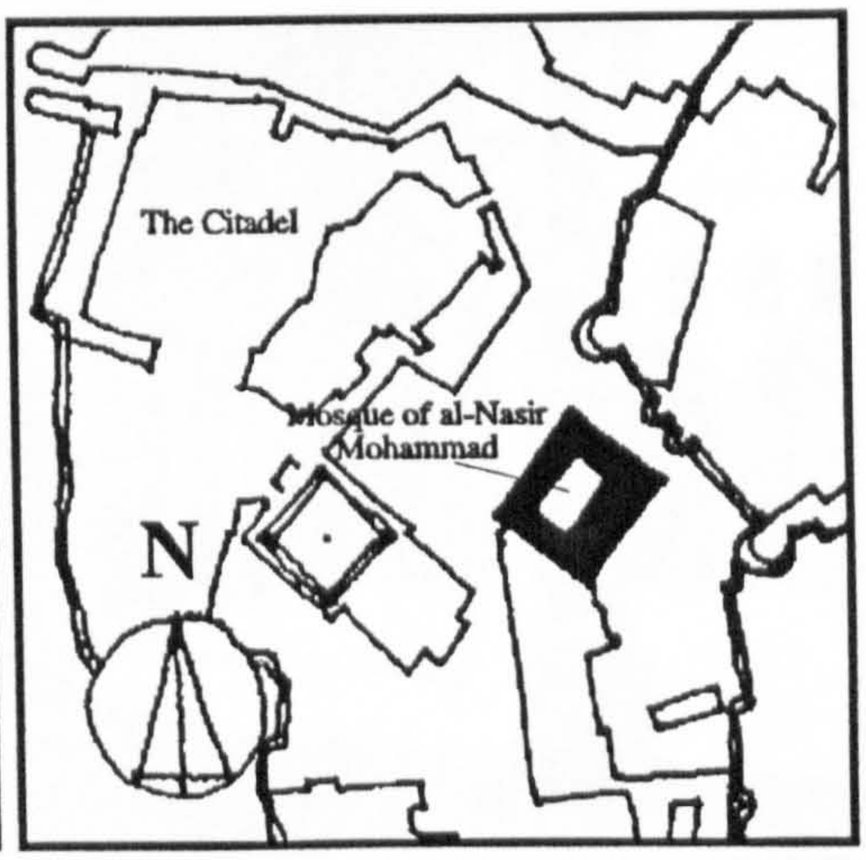
1) The portal consists of two arches: the outer one faces the less holy street and is chosen as the semi-circular (which is connected to the earth), while the inner pointed arch with stalactites is chosen to be nearer the inner more holy "House of God" (and thus connected to the Heavens).

2) The internal organization shows four iwans in its plan, but visually, only the eastern qibla iwan and the western one are vaulted. The two lateral flat-roofed ones (used in Sufi practices) are concealed behind a screen-wall which acts as a "veil".

3) The prayer hall space appears at the first instance to be a usual deep pointed vault iwan (providing interiority, verticality, and qibla orientation) but in fact is laterally prolonged to accommodate as many people as poosible in the one row. This is done by annexing two vaulted spaces to the main iwan space. By this internal organization, both the utilitarian as well as symbolic functions were achieved.

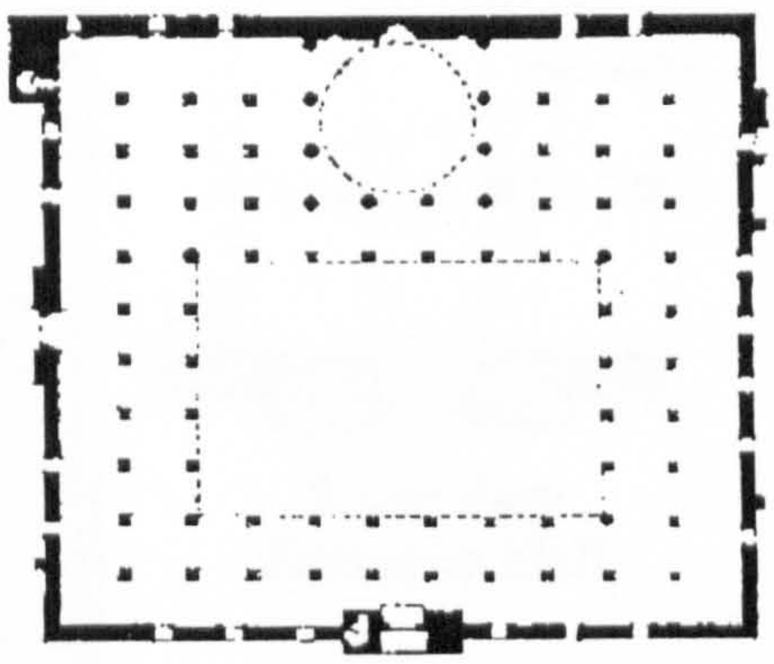
# The Mosque of al-Nasir Mohammad Ibn Qalawun (The Citadel)

## (735 A.H., 1334 A.D.)

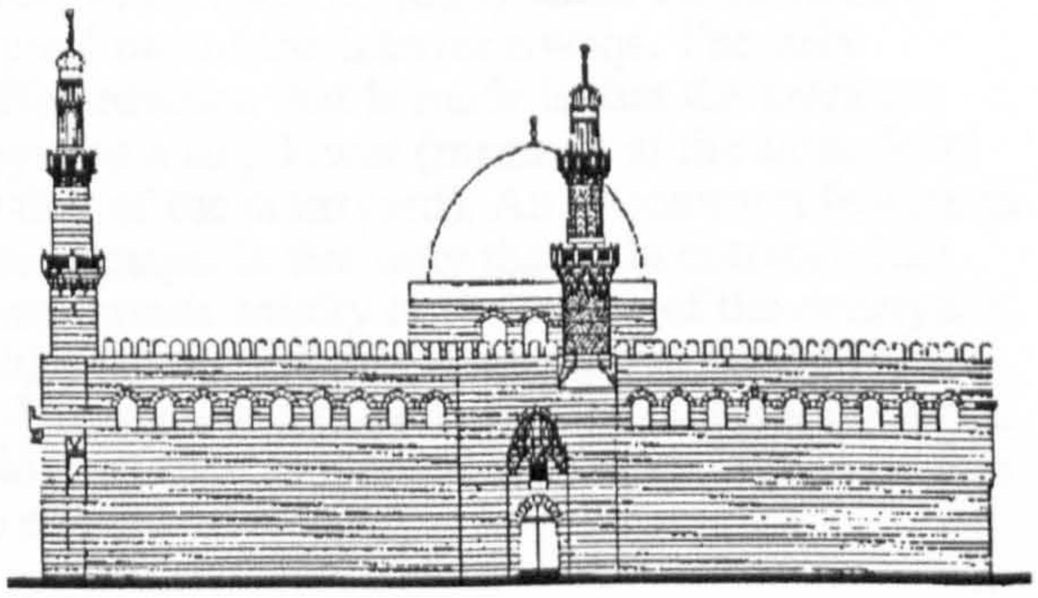



## Hypostyle Mosque Type

## (Columns, Maqsura)



Plan



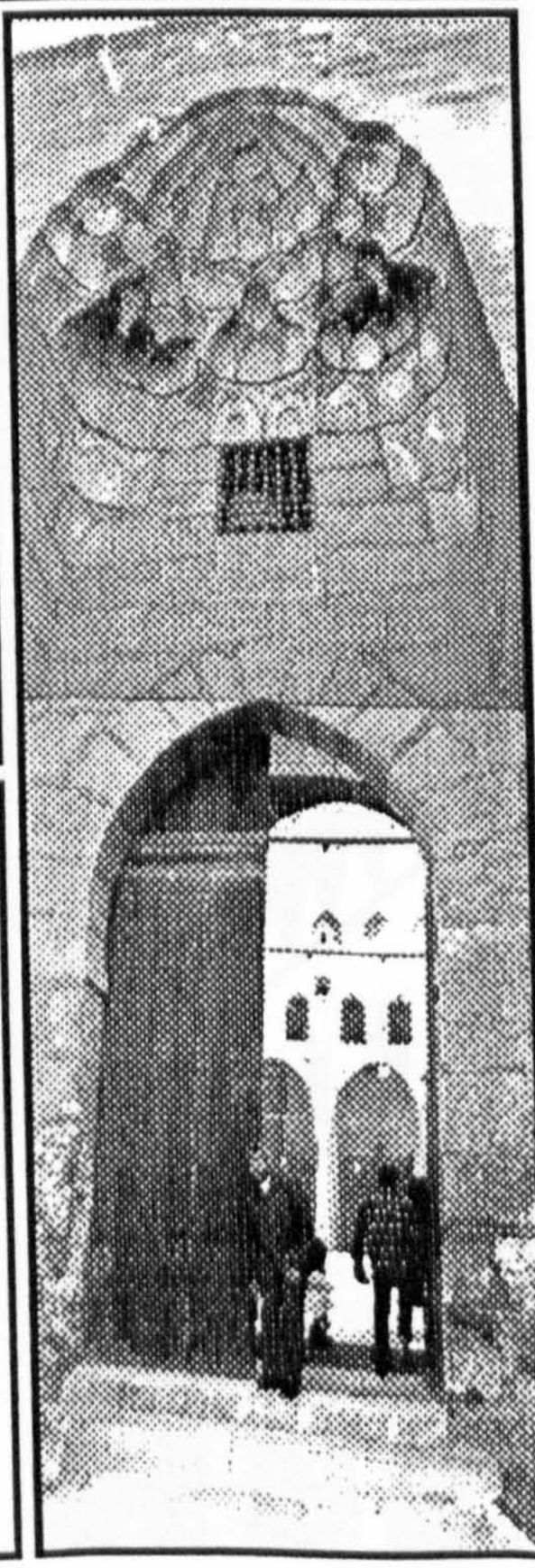
Elevation

PORTALS

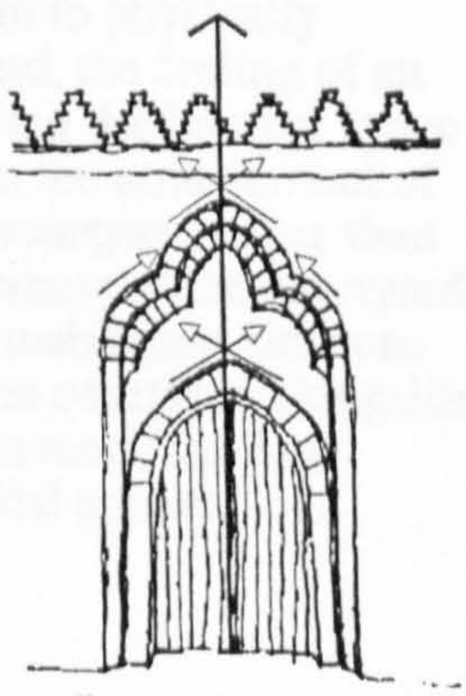
Main Portal

Secondary Portal

The main and secondary portals are recessed from the less holy outer precinct of the Citadel. Both portals create a cave-like effect which serve as an introduction to the interiority of the mosque.

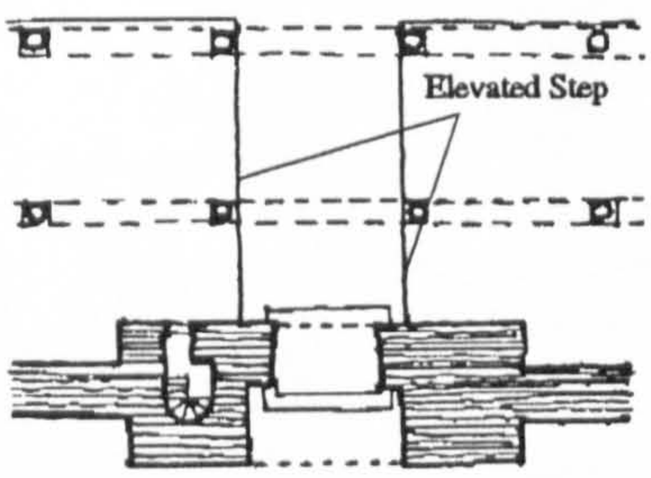


The inner doorways of both the main as well as the secondary portals are pointed arches which point to the vertical. This is followed in both cases by trilobed portals (with stalactites in the csae of the main one) which in turn, further lead vision upwards.

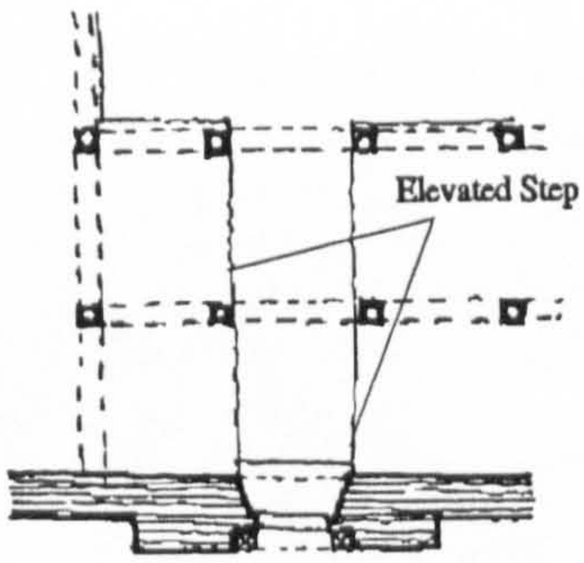


Secondary Portal Elevation

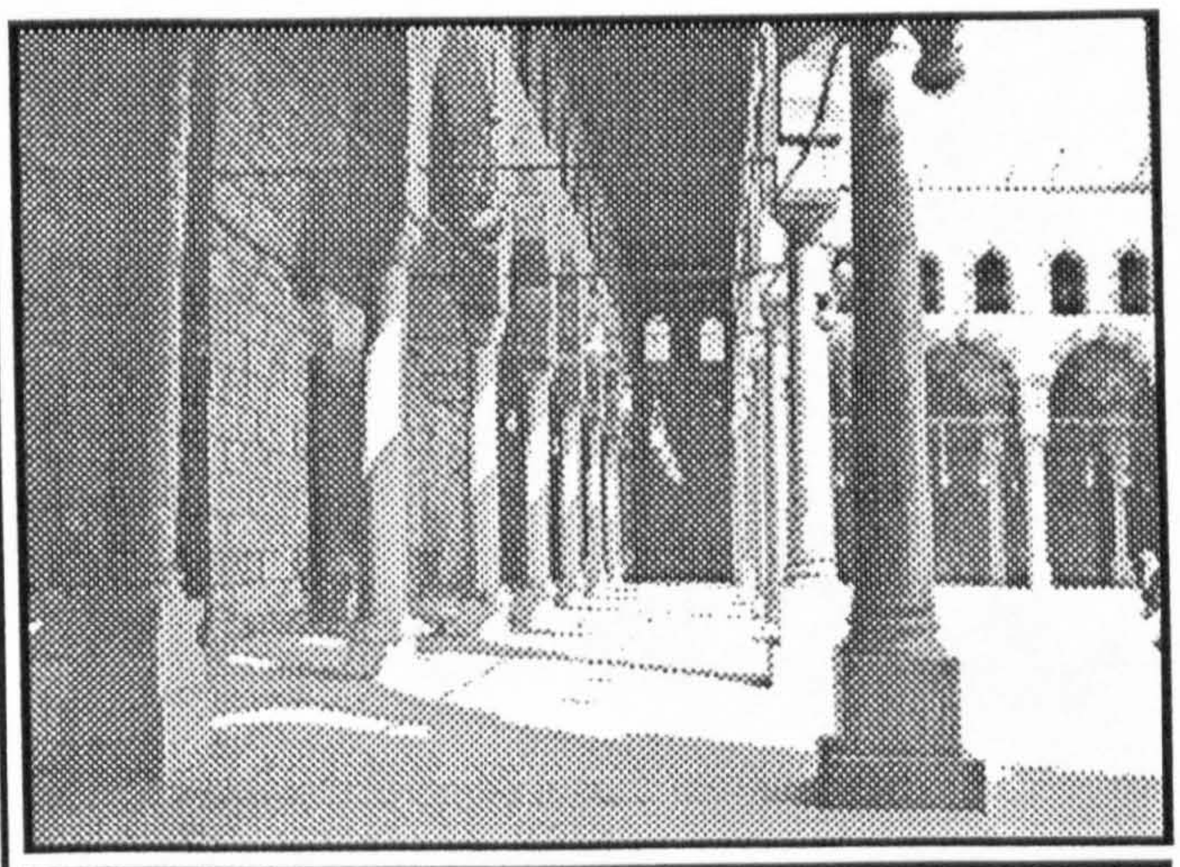
## ENTRANCE HALL & MAJAZ




Main Entrance Hall

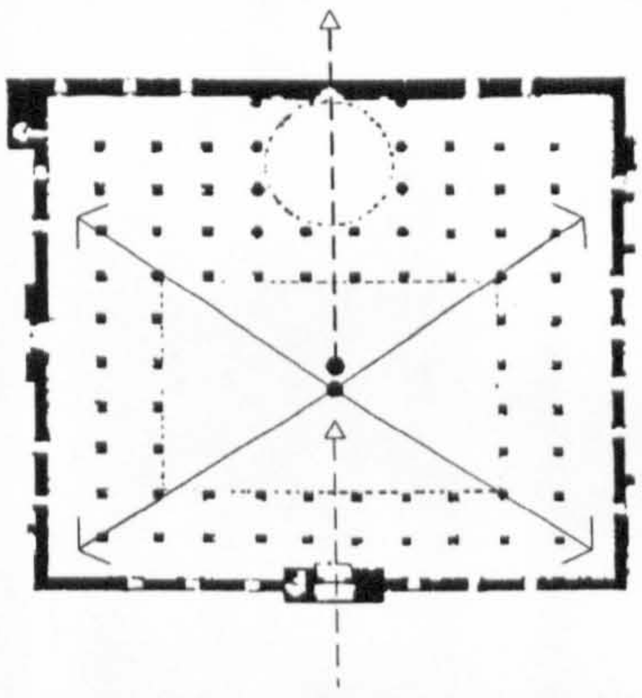


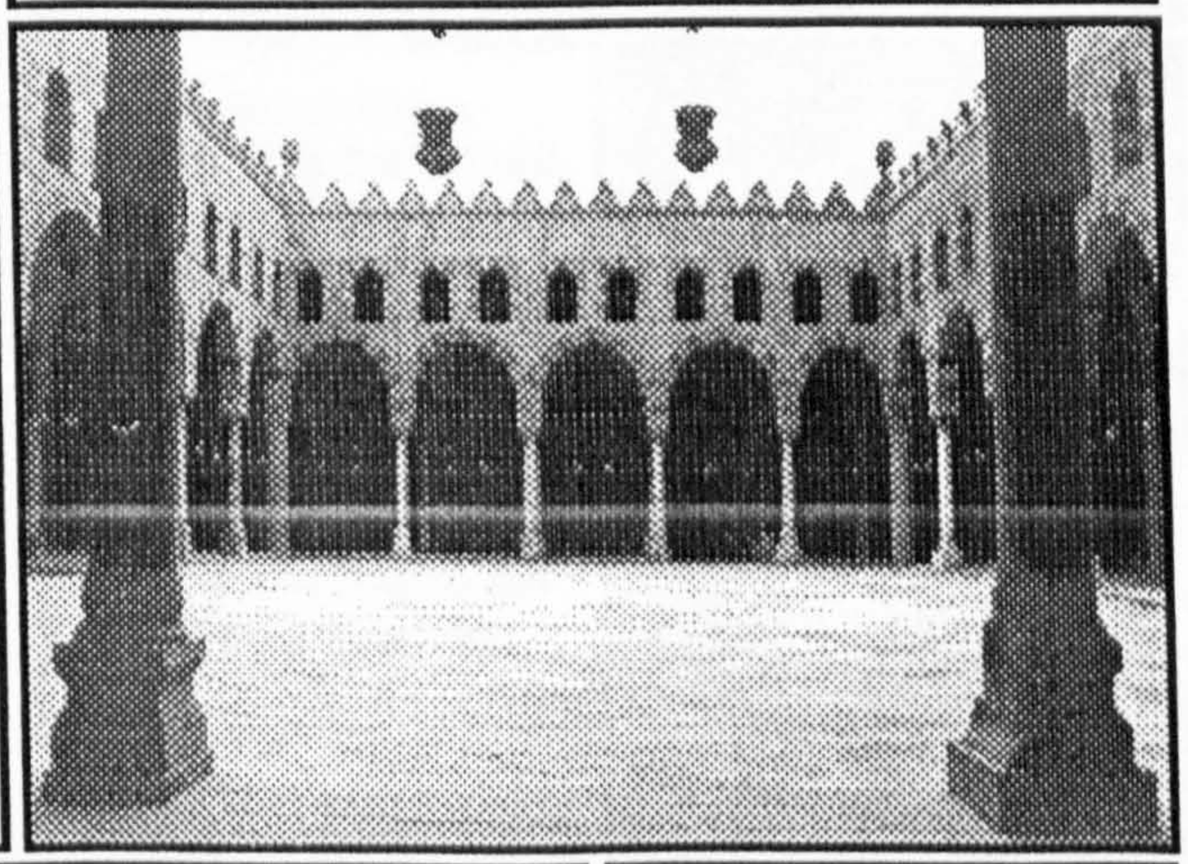

Secondary Entrance Hall



The entrance hall does not comprise a spatial entity of its own. It simply takes the form of a typical bay of the interior riwaqs. The only differentiation that is made is that the entrance bays are a step lower (meaning at the same level as that of the courtyard). An uncommon feature in this Mosque is that only the main entrance hall corresponds axially to the centre of the courtyard, while the second portal which was used by al-Nasir leading directly to his maqsura, does not. This has been explained in Chaper Five to be due to site constraints.

## COURTYARD & FOUNTAIN

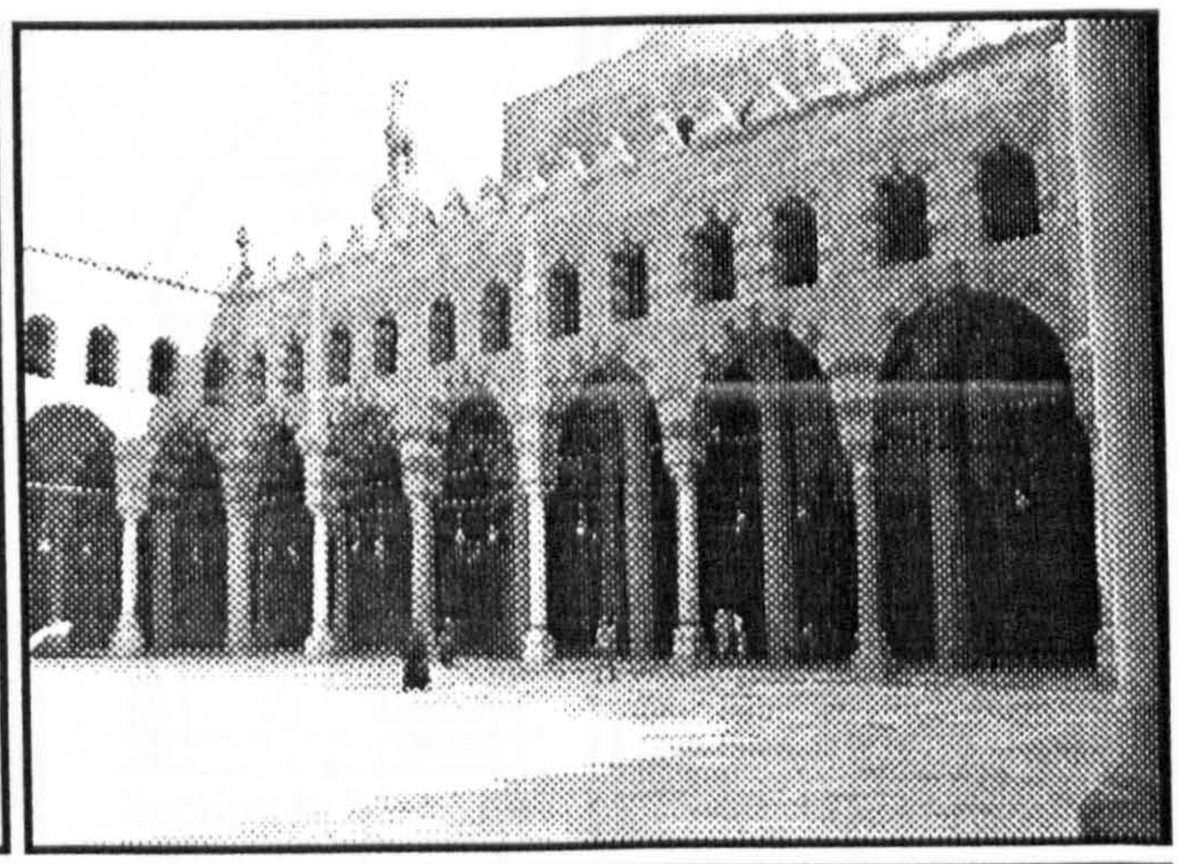




Although there is no central fountain to physically emphasize the centre of the courtyard, the feeling of an implicit centre regulating and ordering the internal space is sensed (specifically manifested in the arrangement of the riwaqs facing the centre of the courtyard rather than the qibla). Furthermore, the four corners of the courtyard are emphasized by four sculptured mabkharas (incense burners) located in the parapet of the courtyard alongside the crestings. These four mabkharas recall the four corners (arkan) that carry the celestial sphere.

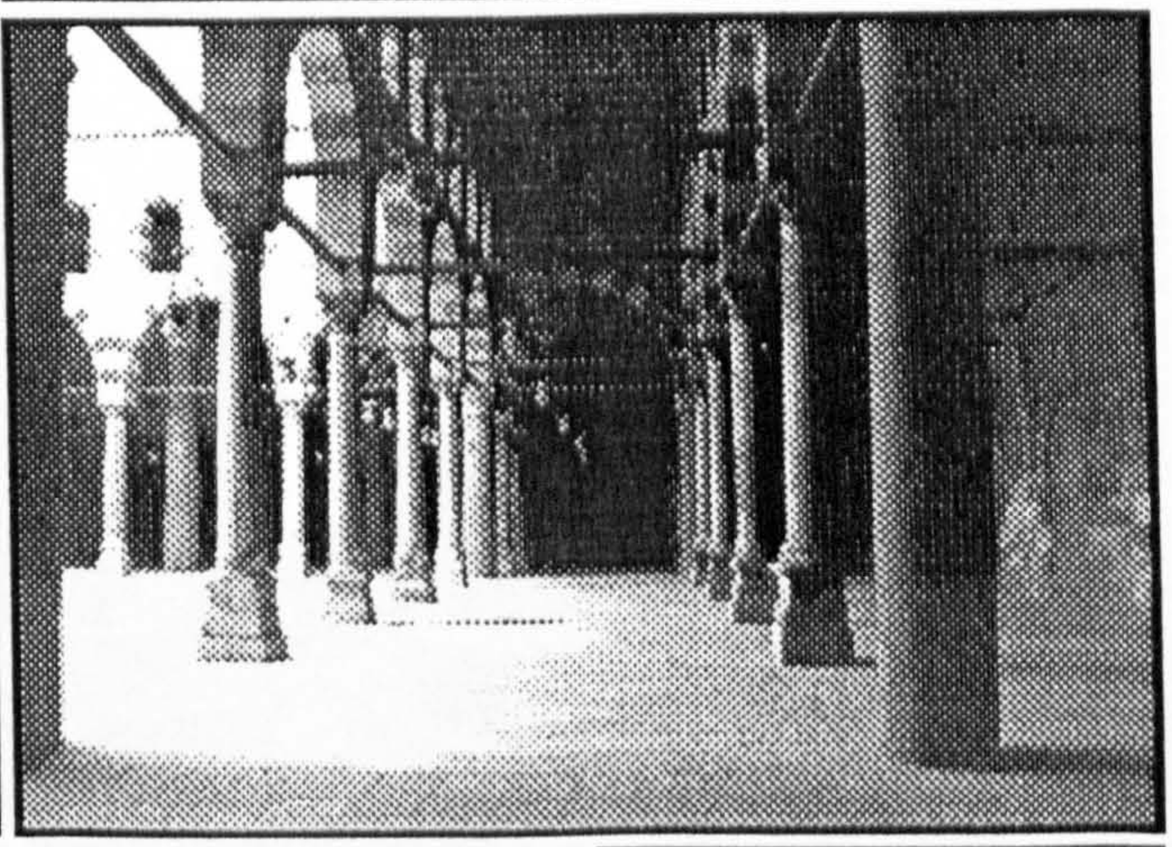
## ARCHES & IWANS

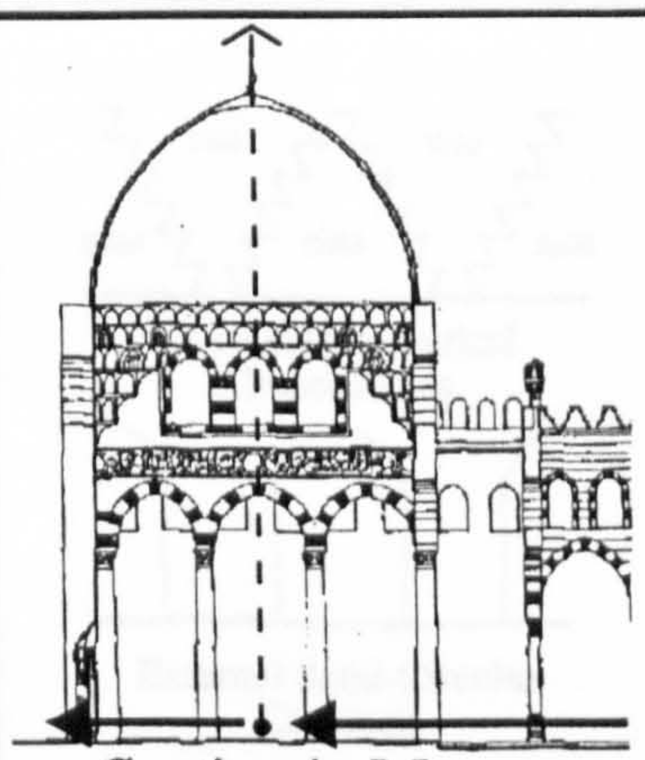
All arches are pointed; individually and collectively the pillars point heavenward to the building top (aided by their tapering), and then to the sky. Their equality in size reflect the concept of equality of all mankind in the eyes of God. The use of ablaq in the pointed arch creates a radiating effect quite similar to that of mihrabs clad in marble.



## PRAYING HALL

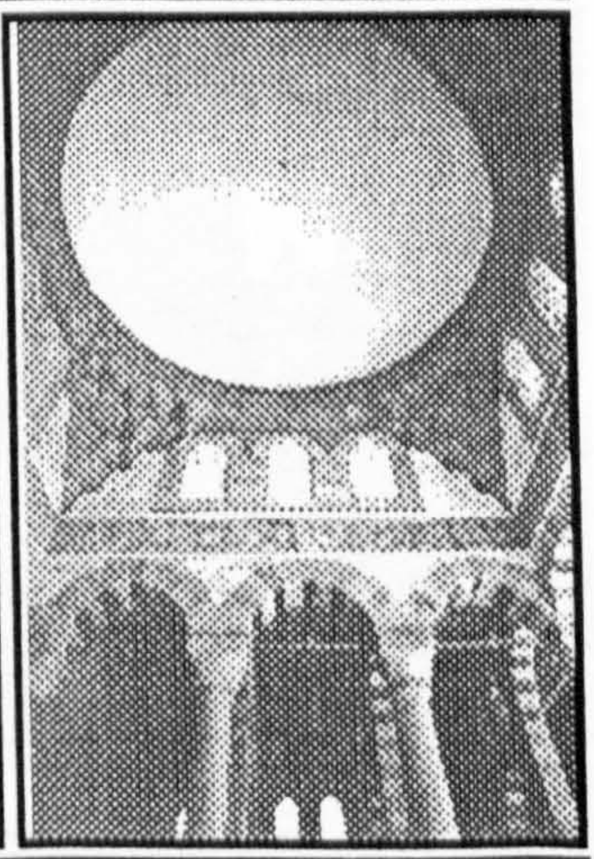
The prayer riwaq arcades face the centre of the courtyard rather than the qibla direction. The arrangement of the pillars in the riwaqs results in equal spaces that recall the egalitarian principles on which Islam is based regarding mankind - that all men and women are equal in the eyes of God, it is only by being virtuous that one can be better than a fellow human being.





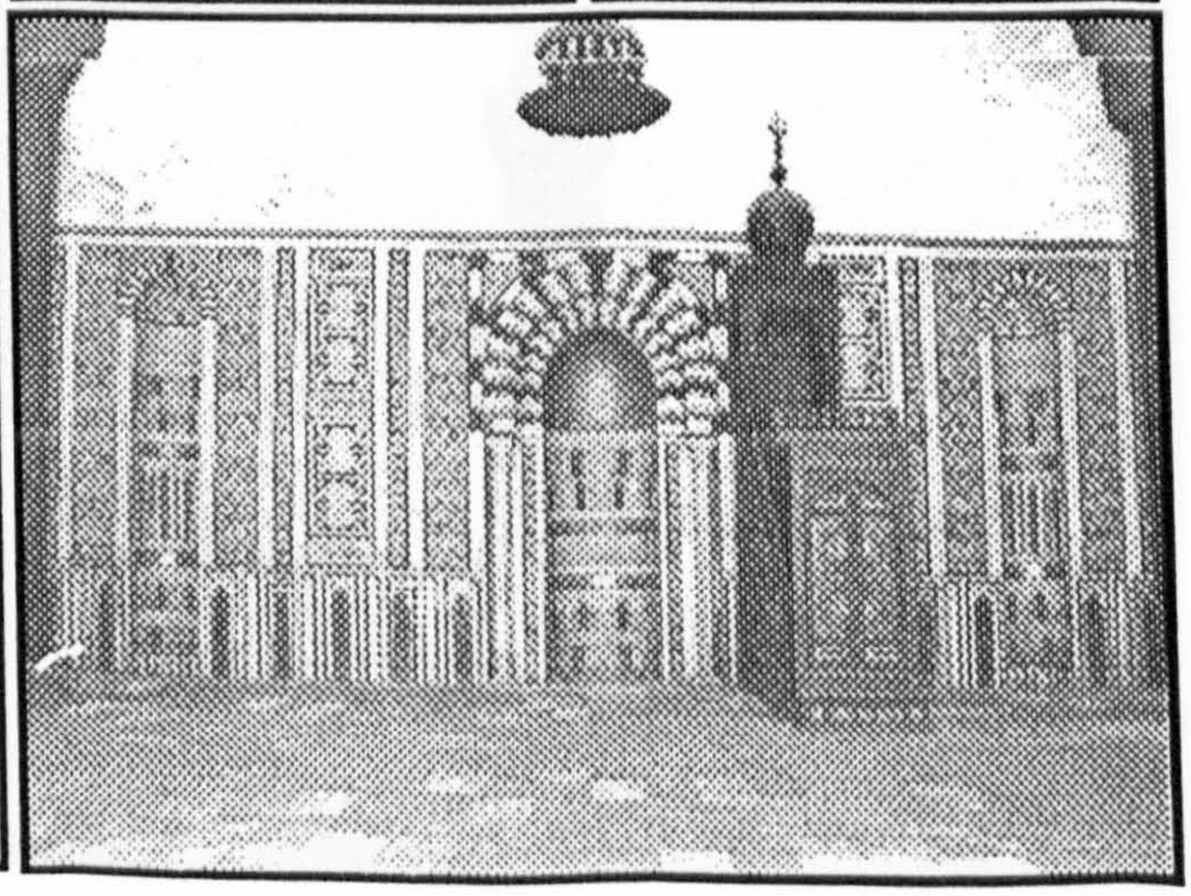
Section in Maqsura

The maqsura dome connects the horizontal direction of the qibla to the vertical axis. The dome changes section from square to circle by means of rows of stalactites, passing through the octagonal shape according to the cosmological model.

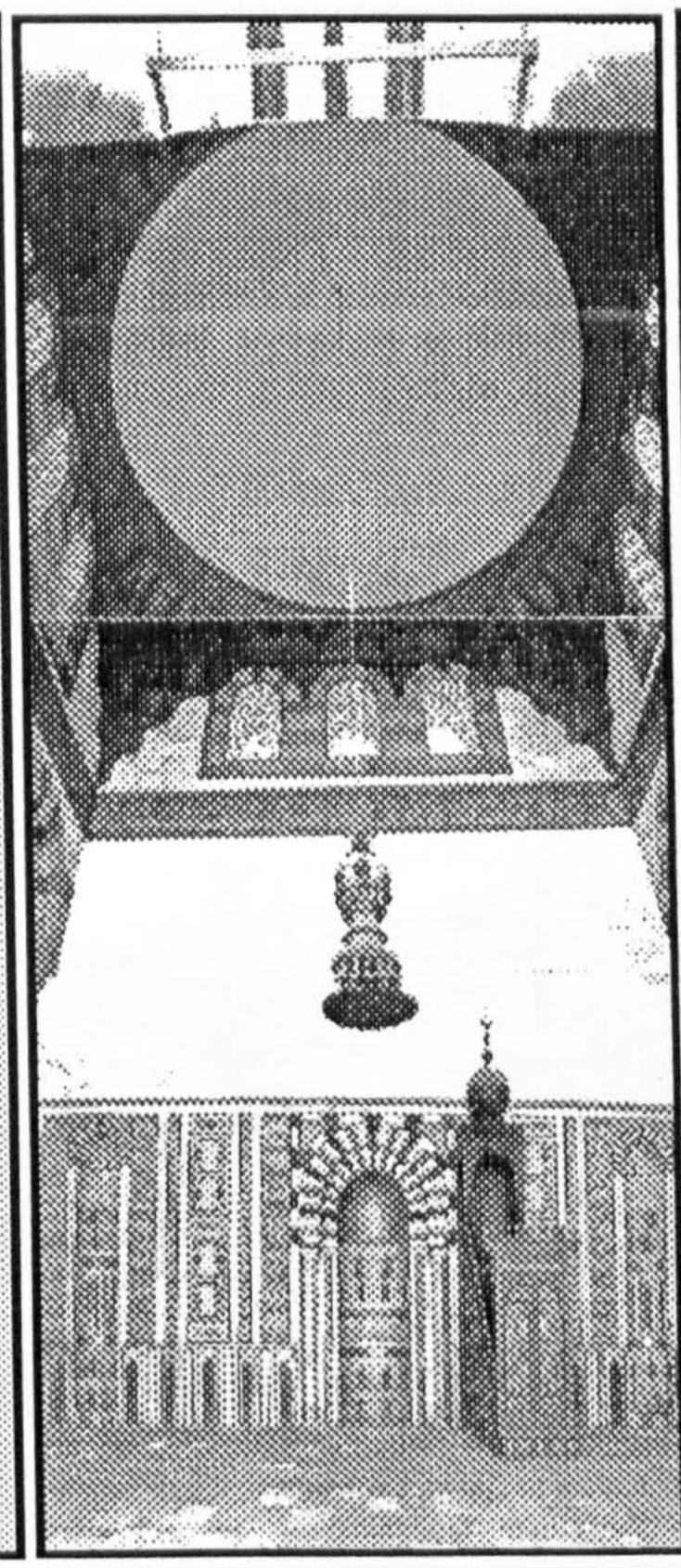


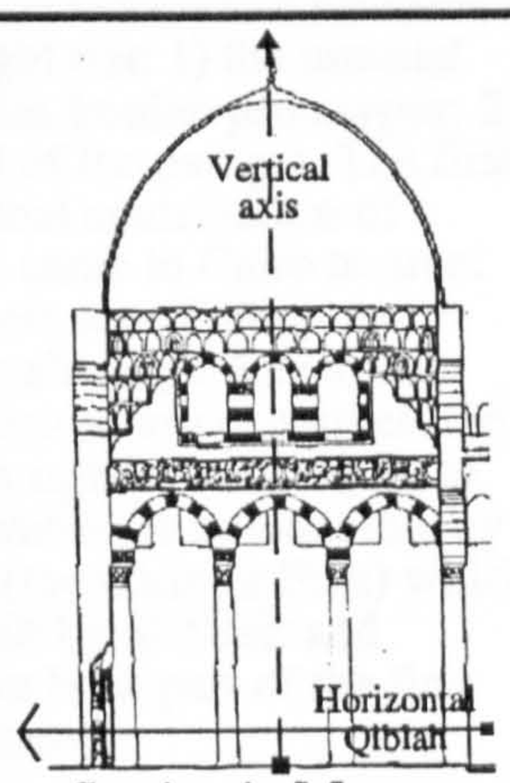
## MIHRAB

The mihrab of this mosque (renovated by the Department of Antiquities) is a pointed niche with radiating patterns on different planes reflecting the Sufi interpretation of the multiple meanings and depths of the mihrab stated by Ibn al-'Arabi. Likewise, the radiating patterns recall the verse of Light (earlier interpreted in the case of the Mosque of Baybars).



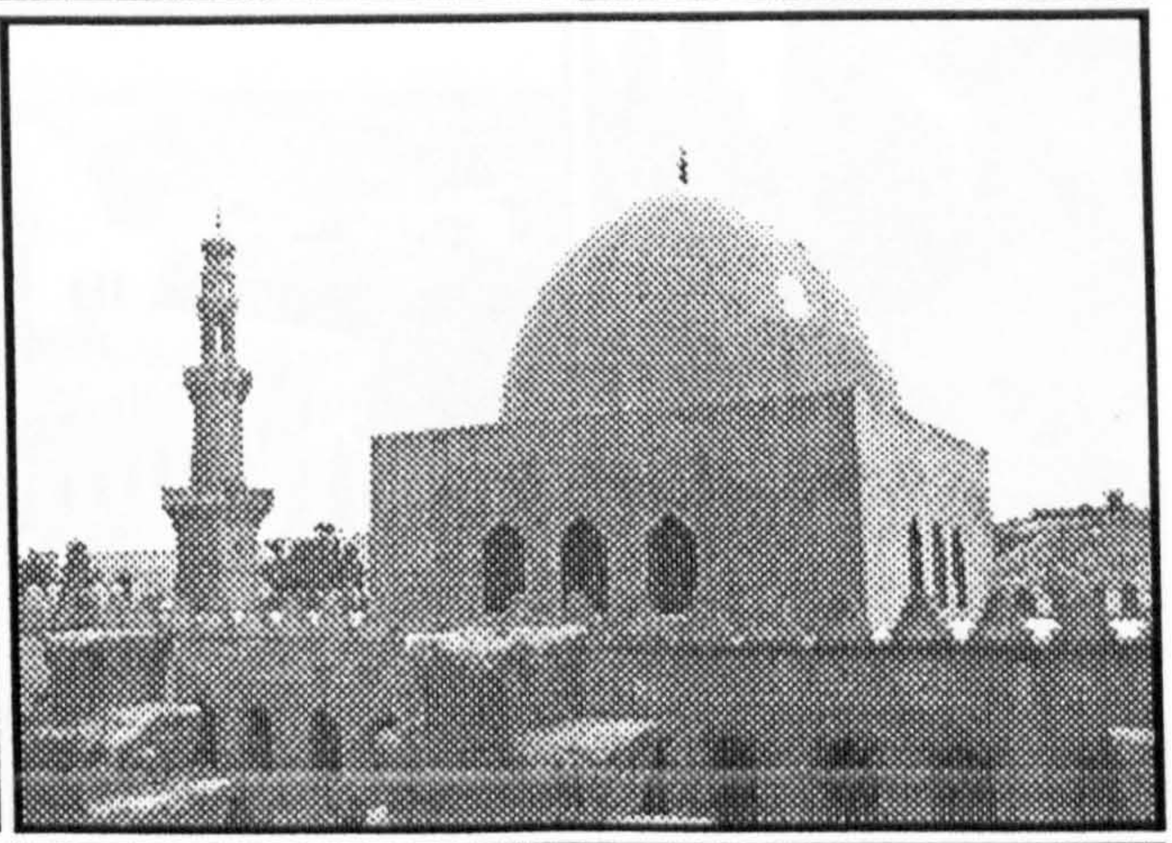
## DOMES



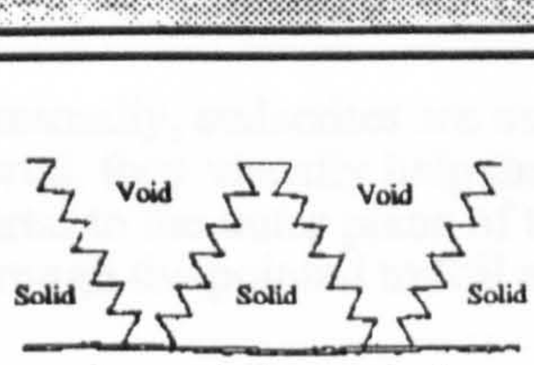


Section in Maqsura

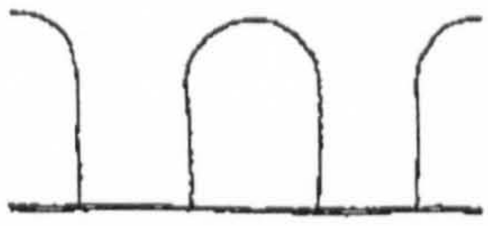
The square (earthly) section of the maqsura is vertically transformed into the circular (celestial) by means of stalactites which delineate the form of the octagon (the Footstool and Throne) according to the cosmological model. Externally, the dome is covered with green faience recalling the traditional use of the qubbat al-khadra'.

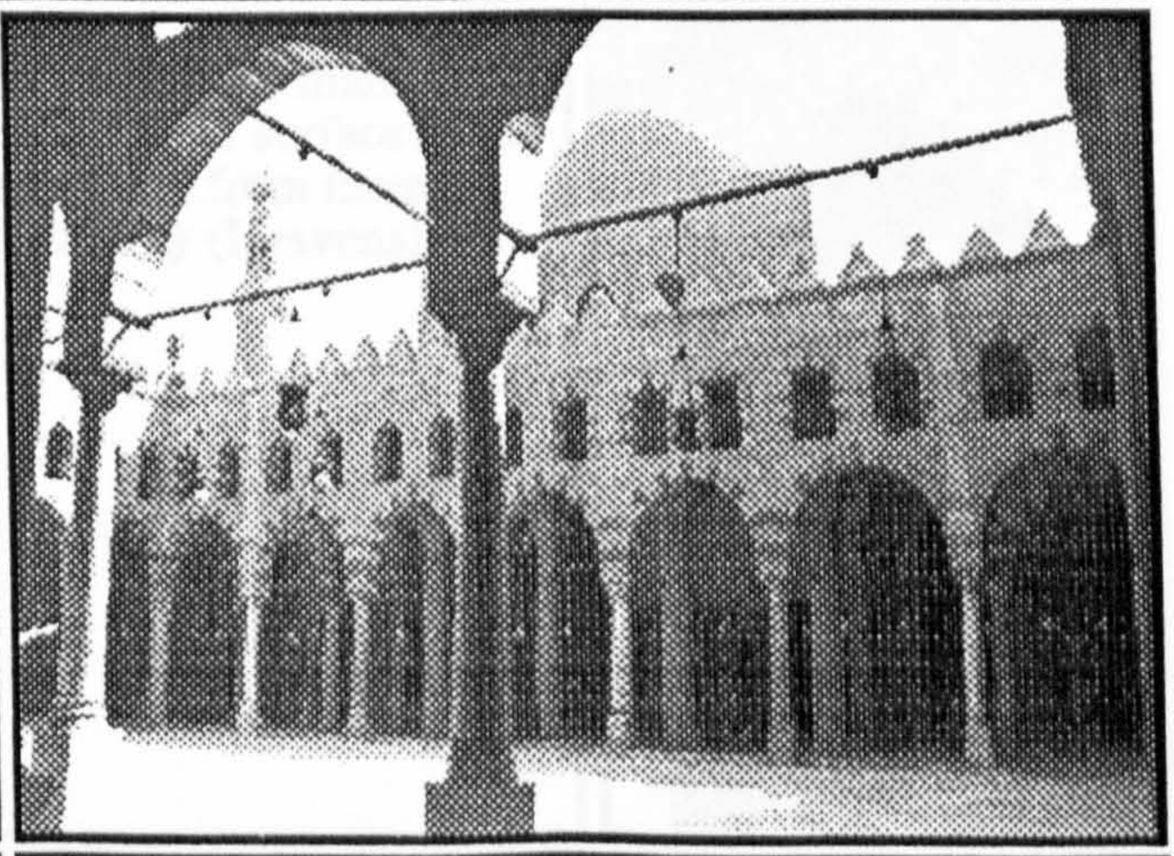


## CRESTINGS

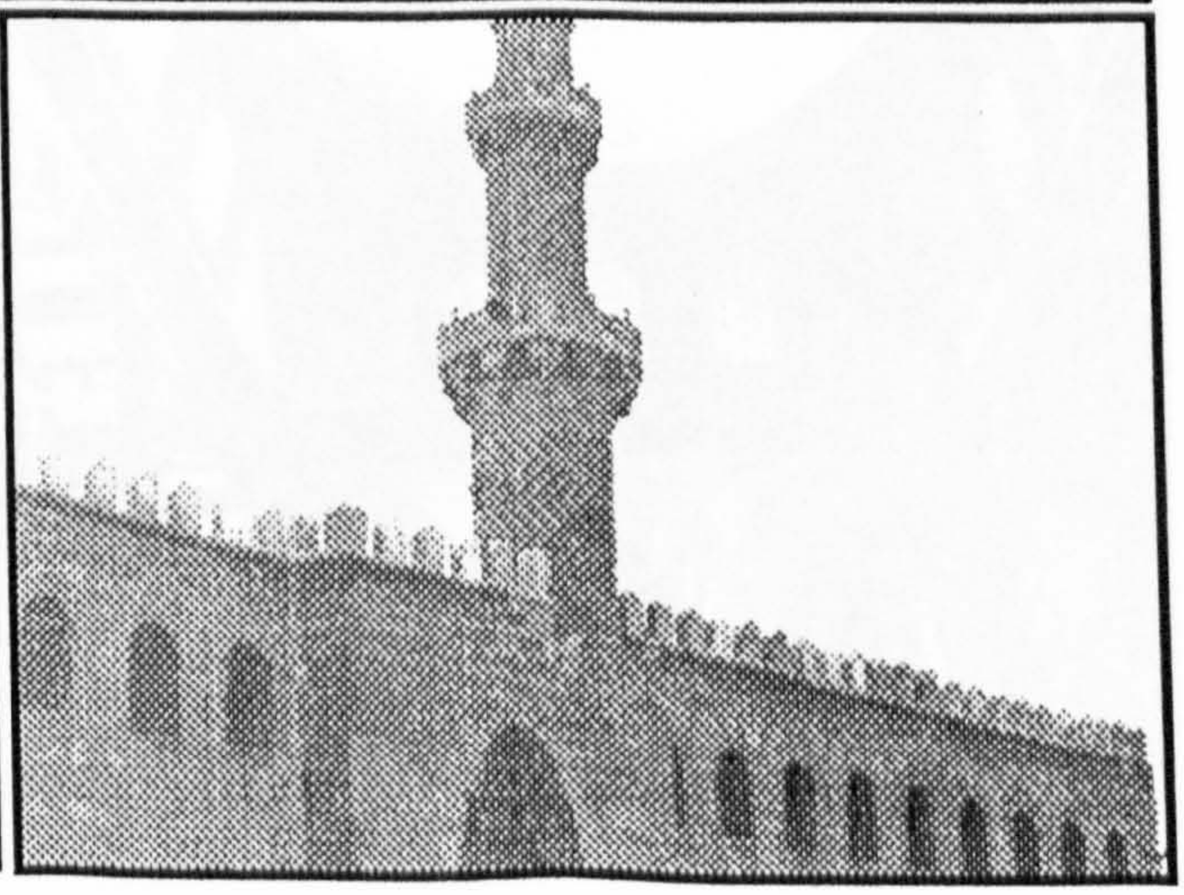


Internal Geometrical Crenellations


External Semi-Circular Crestings

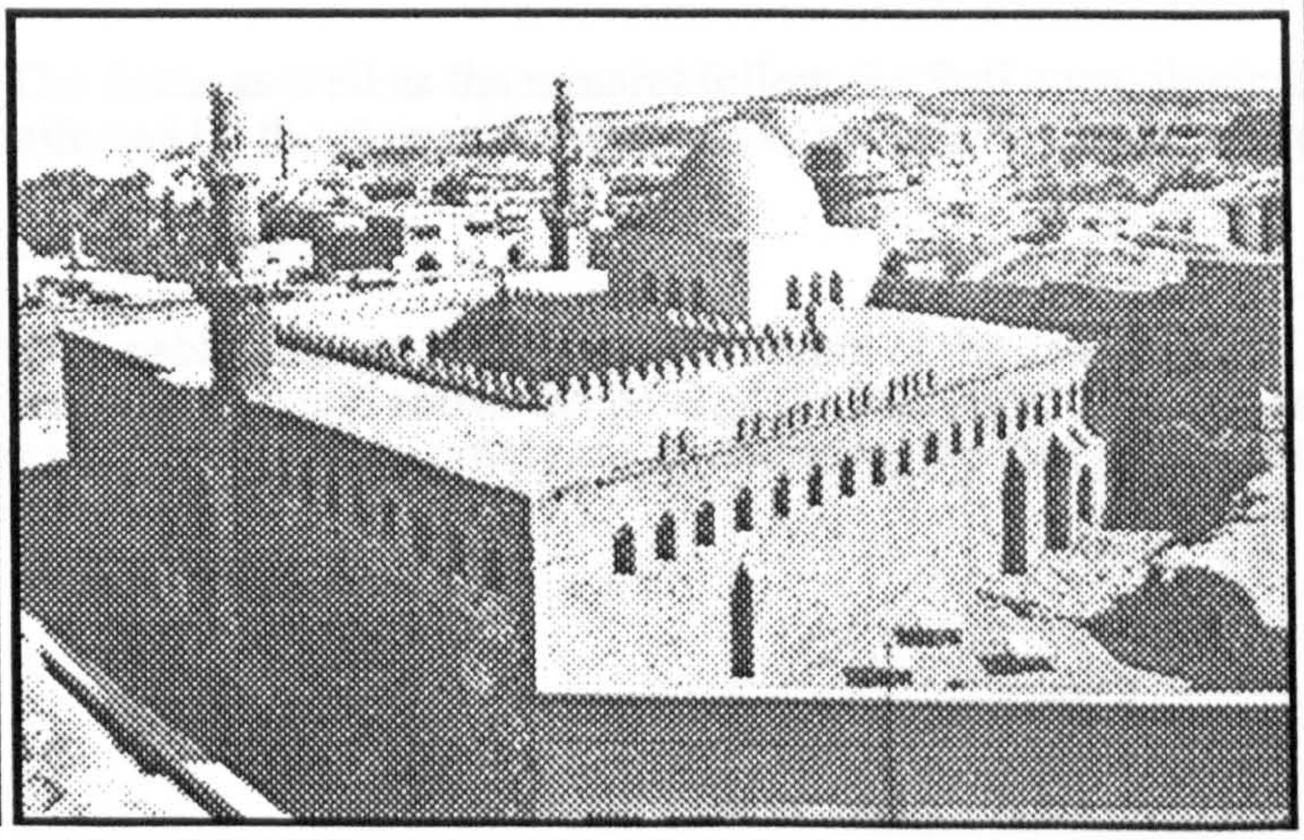


The semi-circular crestings are foreign additions during the British occupation of Egypt, when the Citadel was a stronghold (see Chapter Five). The crestings used in the courtyard are geometrical crenellations similar to those used in the Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdari. (See interpretation of the crestings of the Mosque of Baybars).



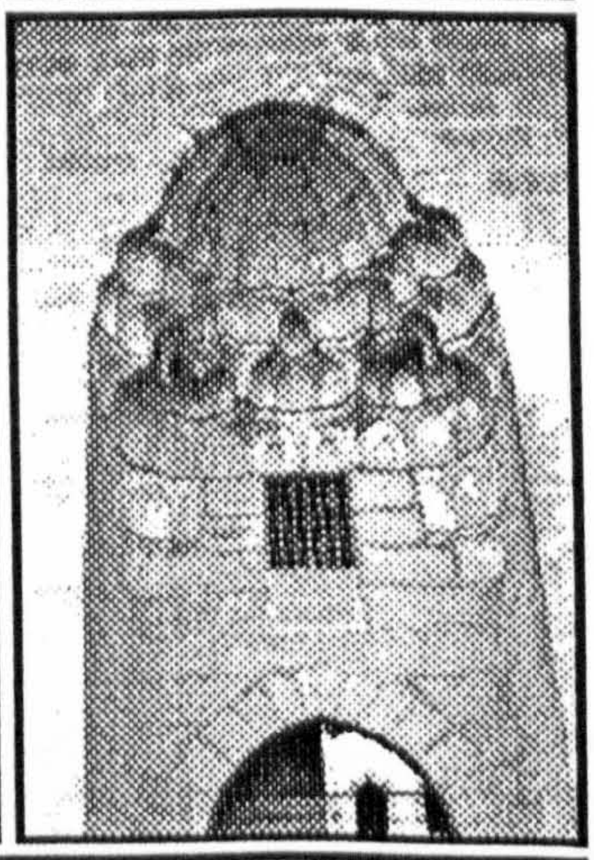
## MINARETS

Two observations need to be brought out: 1) the unusual form of the minaret which resembles Iranian prototypes; 2) the minaret is built below the level of the parapet. The first observation is explained by the actual contribution of craftsmen from Tabriz in Iran who came to Cairo to erect these minarets. It is evident that their contribution was limited to a certain extent, because although the overall forms are different than other contemporary examples, they follow the change of sections from square, to octagon, to circle, to Unity. The second observation is accountable by returning to the historical sources (see Chapter Five) which indicate that the mosque was rebuilt by al-Nasir and explains that the minaret must have been part of the first stage before the walls were heightened.

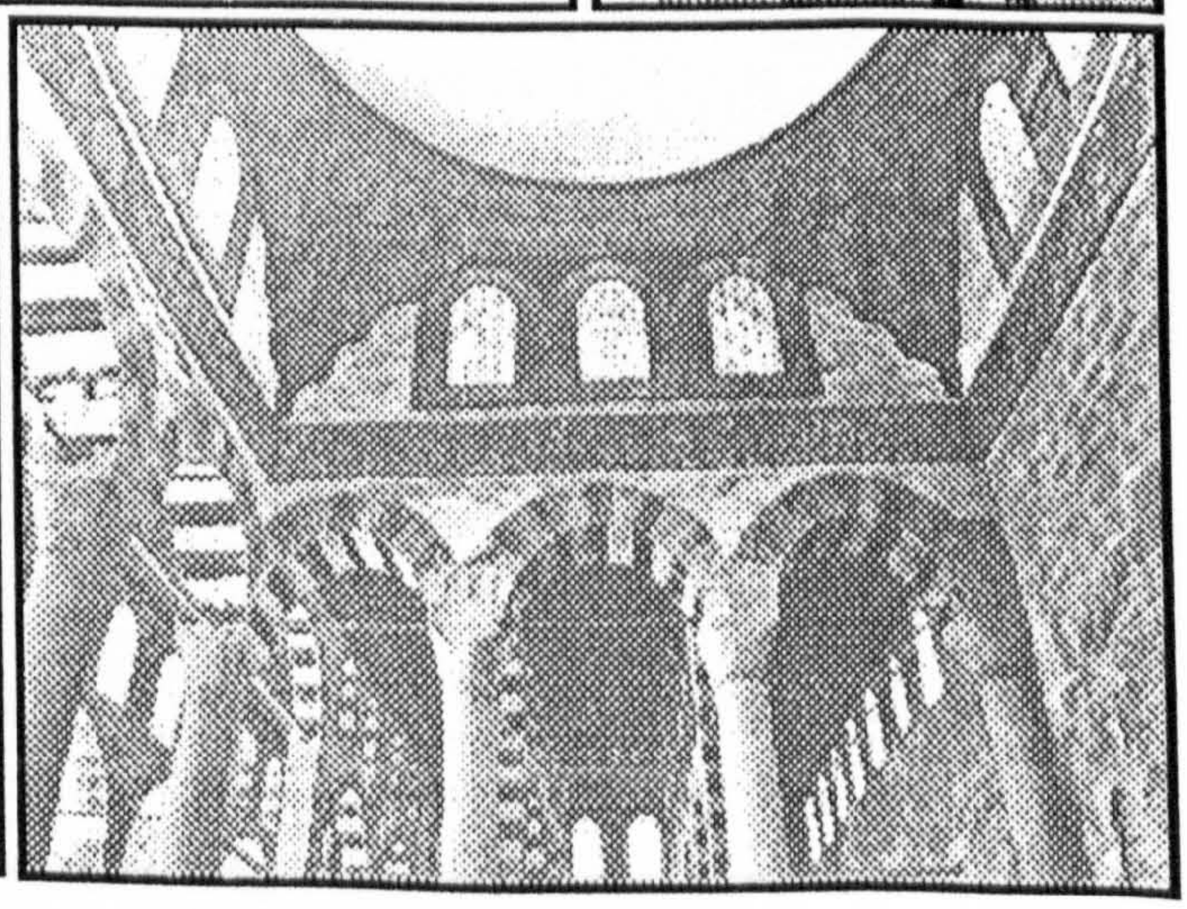


## STALACTITES

Externally, stalactites are uniquely used in the main portal. they visually help the bring the inner surface of the portal to the outer plane of the facade and from there, through the pointed trefoil arch to the sky (Heavens).



Internally, stalactites are used as a means of transition in the dome, transforming the square to the circle as mentioned earlier. See the interpretation of the stalctites explained in the Mosque of Baybars.



## Remarks

Prototypic Features:

1) The centre of the courtyard acts as the generator of the elements of the interior of the mosque. The main entrance, maqsura, and mihrab are all aligned and axial to the centre which in turn is related to the four corners of the quadrangular sahn.

2) The riwaq arcades are organized in such a manner so as to face the centre of the courtyard rather than to face the qibla.

3) The internal crestings follow the Mamluk traditional prototype of solid and void relations.

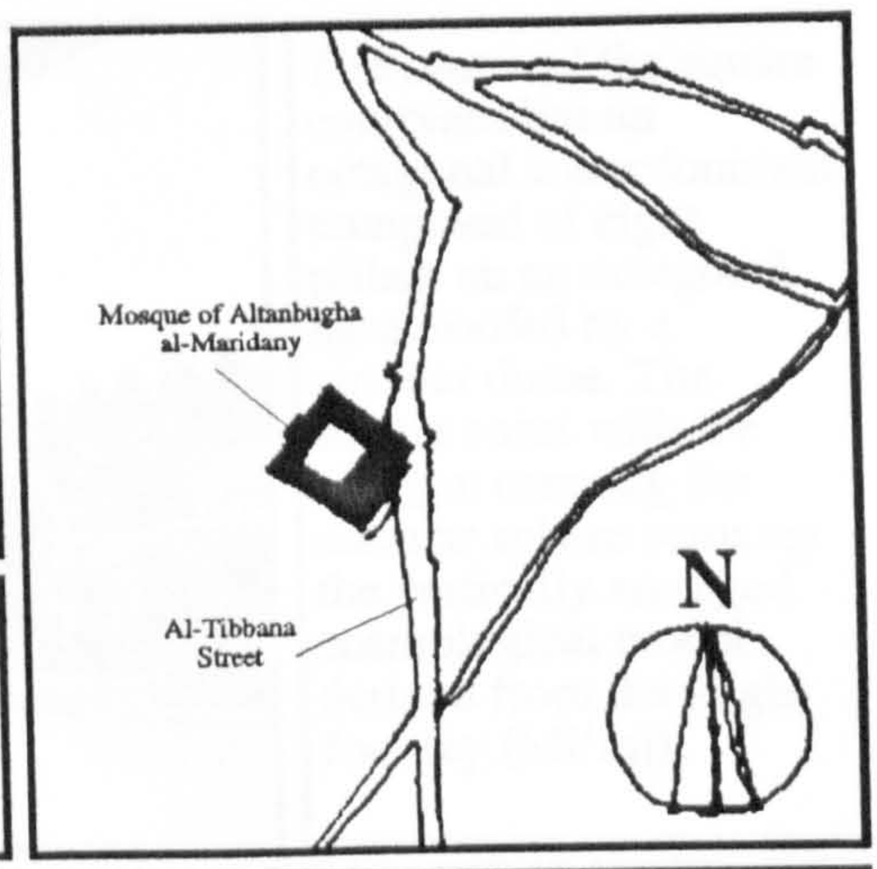
4) The dome as well as the minaret follow the Sufi cosmological model. This is manifested by the change from square to octagon to circle and culminating in a point.

Unique Features:

1)Four mabkharas are located at the corners of the crestings and are accentuated by being set higher and above the level of the crestings. This emphasizes the quadrangularity of the courtyard symbolizing the four pillars carrying the celestial spheres.

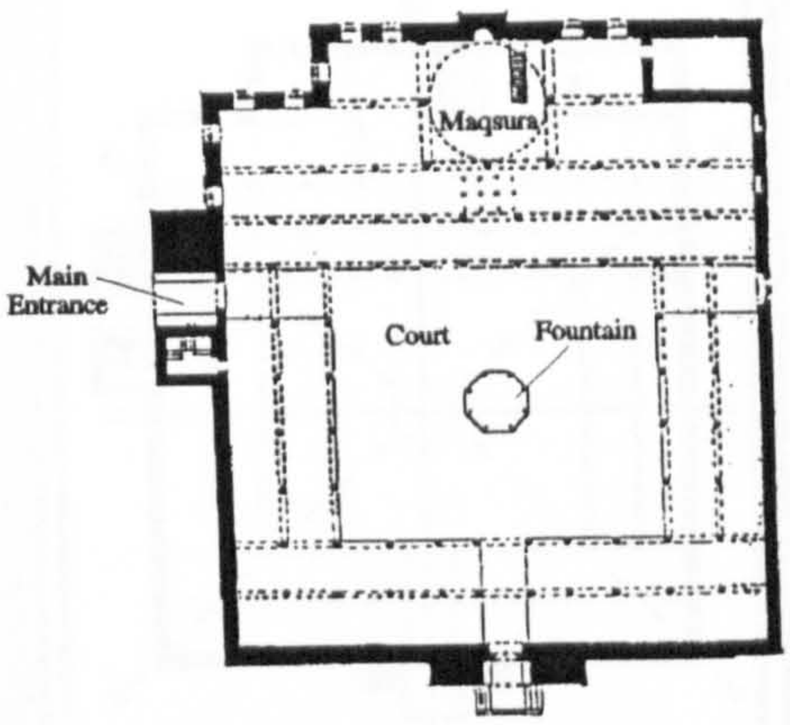
# Mosque of Altanbugha al-Maridany (al-Tibbana Street)

## (739 A.H., 1339 A.D.)

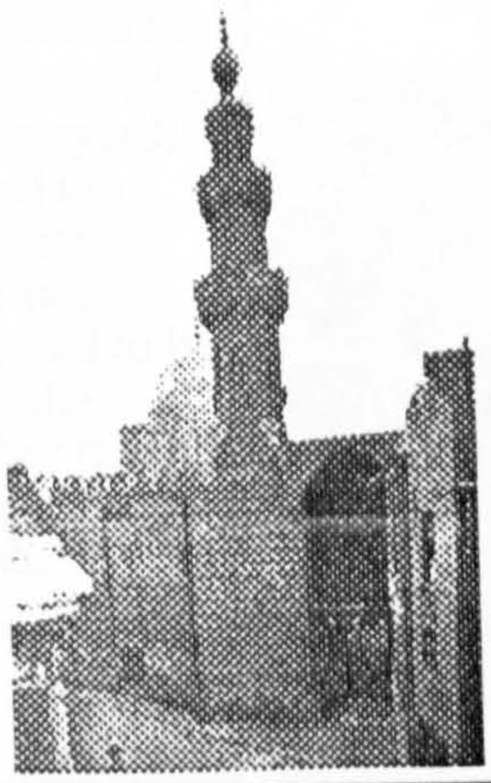



## Hypostyle Mosque Type

## (Columns, Maqsura)




Plan

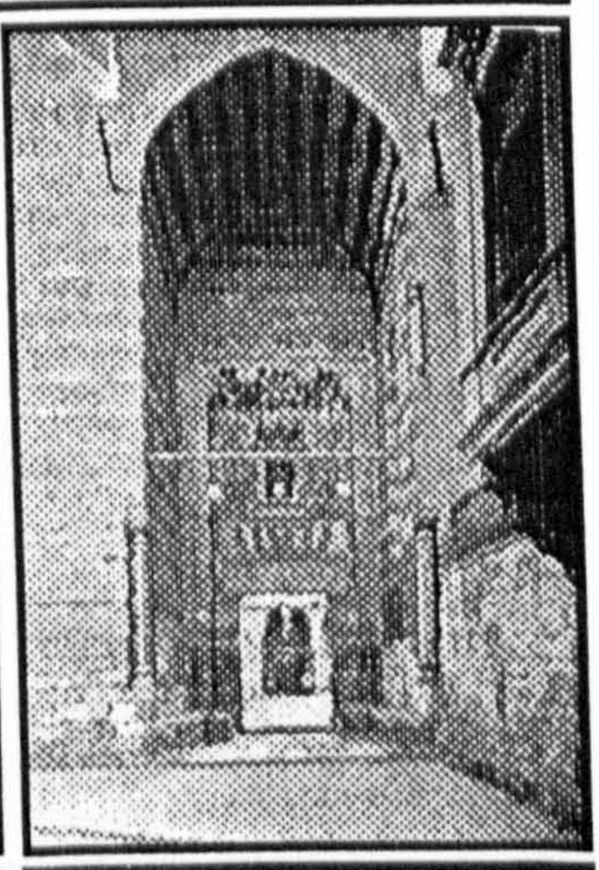


External View

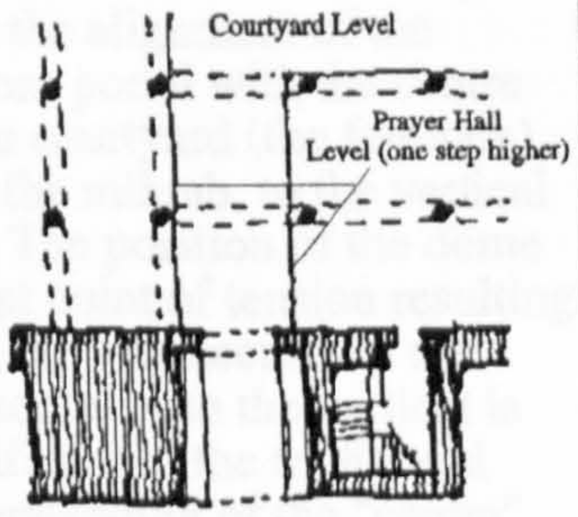
PORTALS

Main Portal Plan

One of the few cases of Mamluk portals that are shaped in the form of a pointed vault or iwan (rather than a niche with stalactites). The pointed form leads vision upwards while the horizontal line in the summit of the vault visually directs the visitor to the interior, thus bringing about a feeling of interiority.

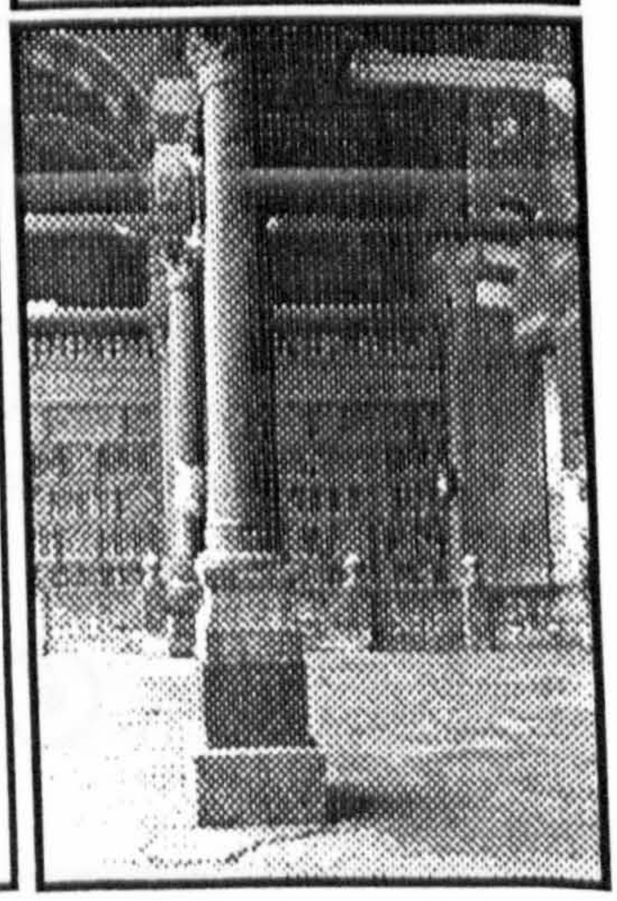


ENT. HALL & MAJAZ

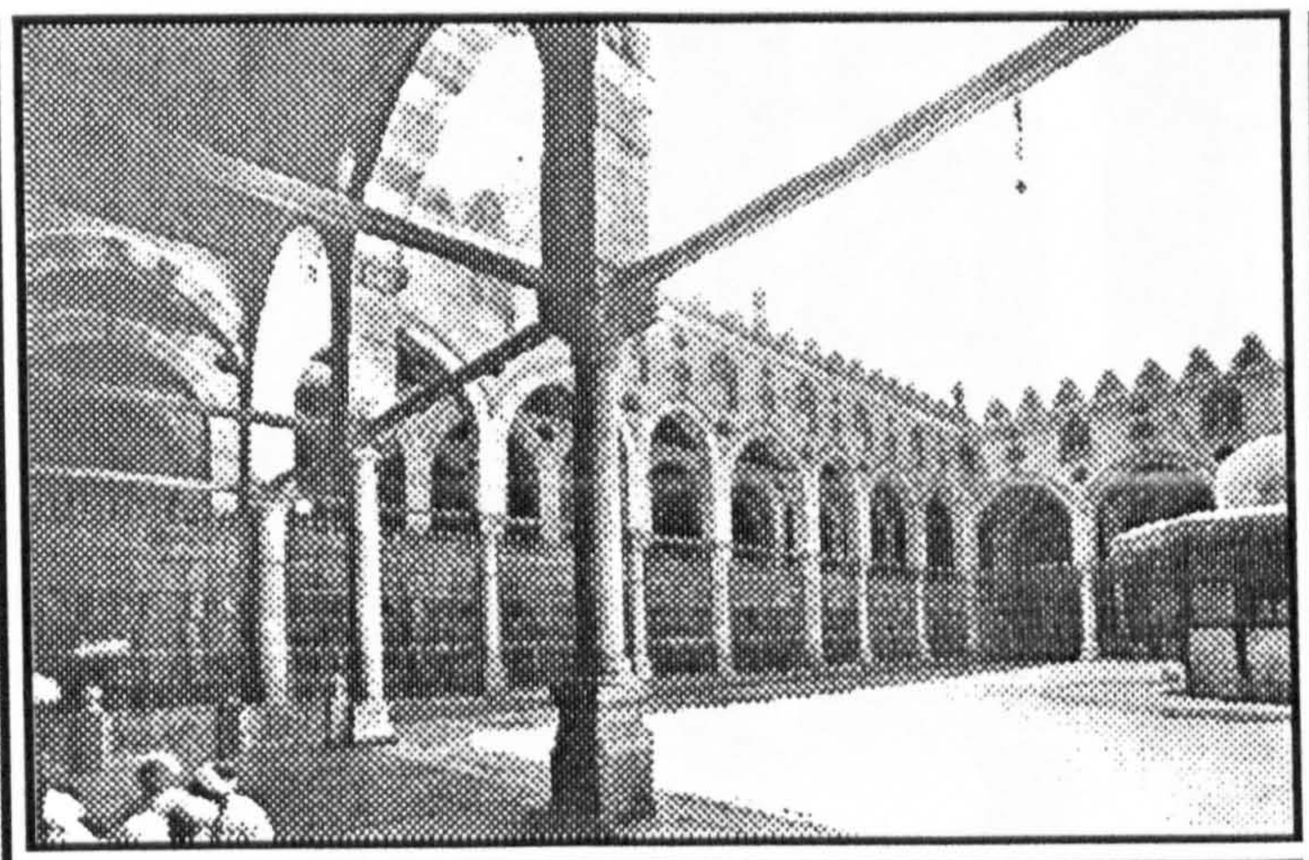



Main Entrance & Majaz

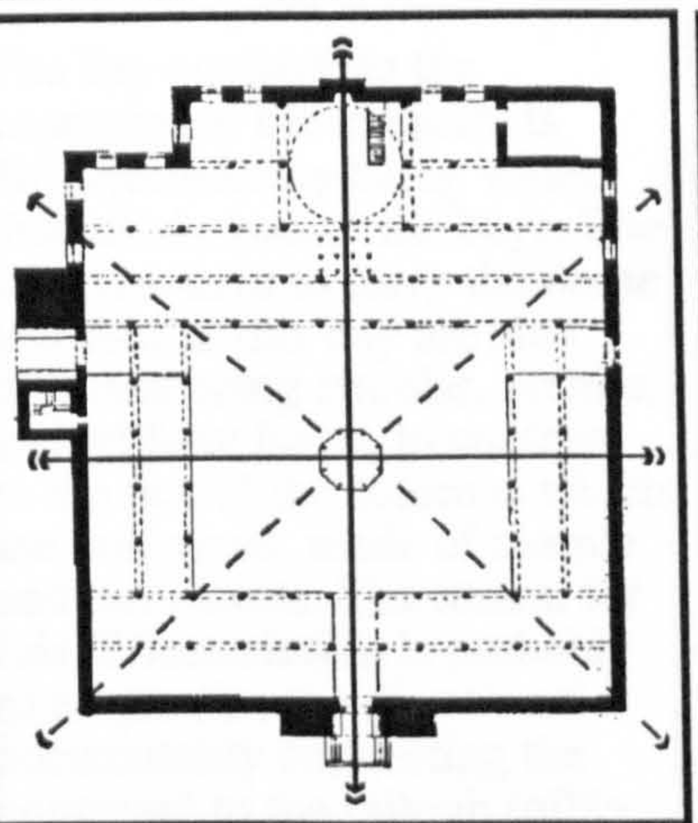
The majaz and entrance hall are one and the same (as is the case with hypostyle mosques). As seen in the Mosque of al-Nasir, they are indicated by a difference in ground level (one step lower) than the prayer areas. To further accentuate this difference, the prayer riwaqs are further set from the circulation area by means of a banister.



## COURTYARD & FOUNTAIN



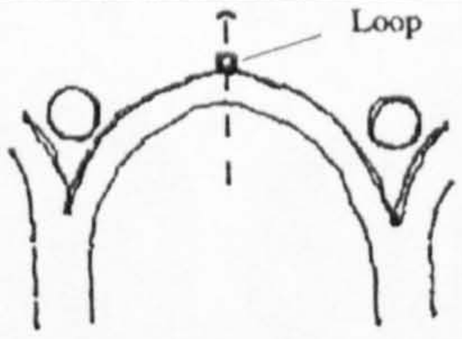
The centre of the square courtyard has an octagonal water fountain composed of eight pillars on an octagonal base, roofed by a circular dome. The square court with the octagon carrying the circular sphere sums up the vertically arranged cosmological model derived from the Night Journey (Mi'raj).



The western entrance is axial to the fountain (the centre of the courtyard), the maqsura, and the mihrab. Due to site constraints, the two other entrances had to be shifted towards the prayer area rather than in their traditional location on the axis of the fountain.

## ARCHES & IWANS

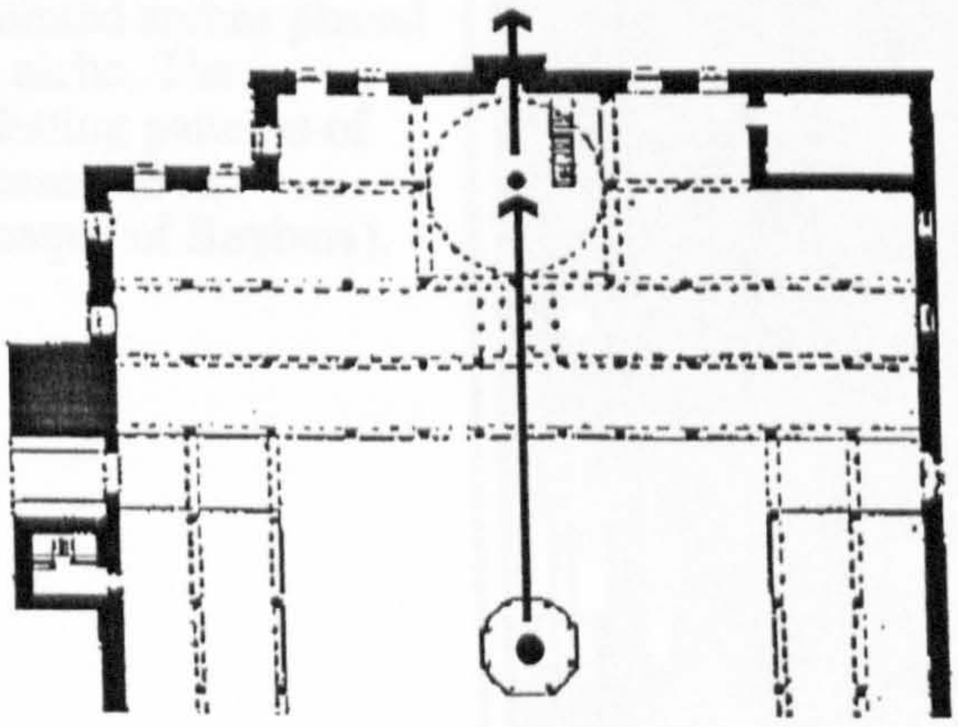
All arches are pointed. Individually, each arch points heavenward to the building top, and from there to the sky. Their equality in size reflects the Islamic egalitarian principles. The use of ablaq in the pointed arches create a radiating effect and resemble the use of marble in radiating motifs in mihrabs. Besides its vertical insinuation, the arch brings about the celestial properties implicit in its curved part leading to Unity.

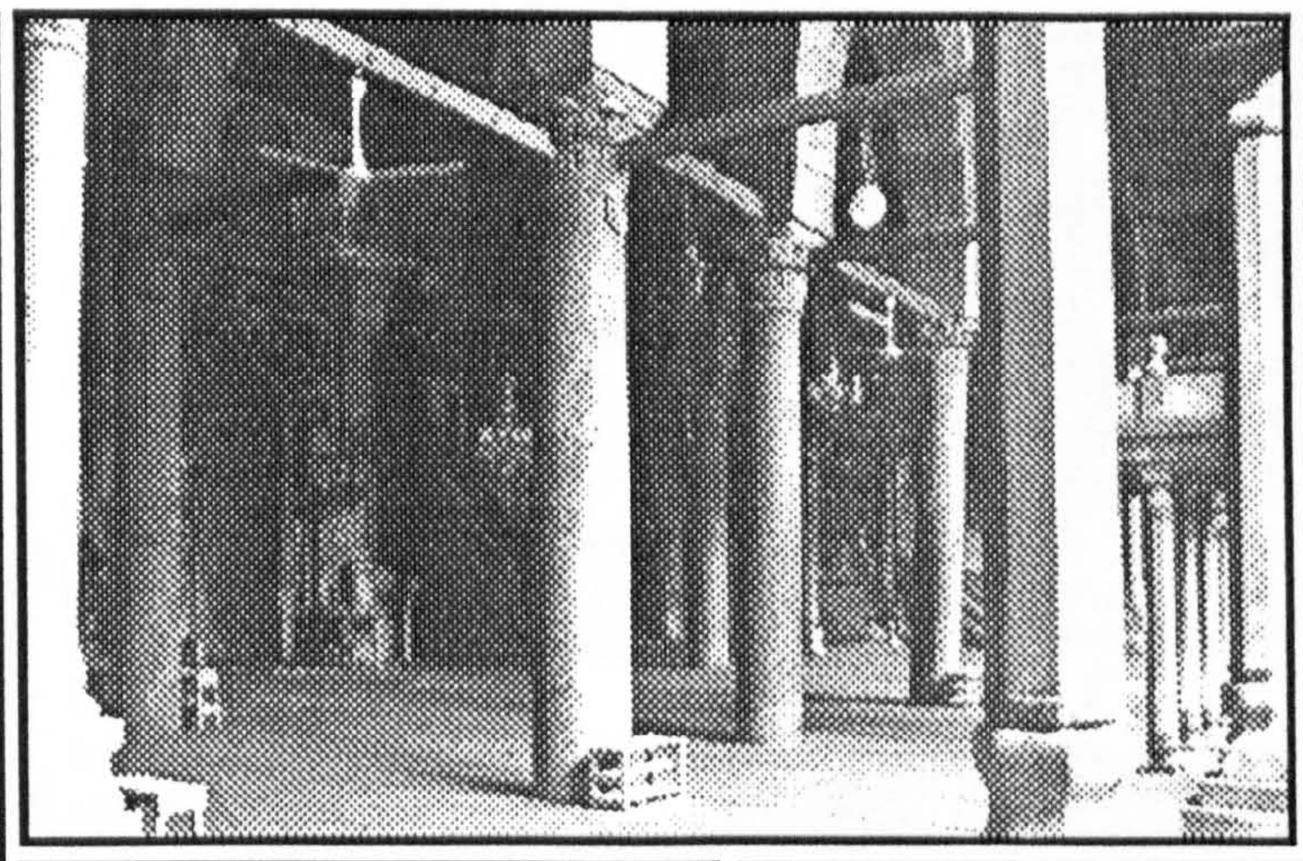



The summit of each pointed arch ends in a loop-like motif carved in stone which emphasizes the culminating point from which the sight is taken upwards - this point representing Unity.

## PRAYING HALL

The maqsura dome connects the horizontal axis resulting from the alignment of the western portal with the centre of the courtyard (the fountain) with the mihrab, to the vertical axis. The position of the dome in that point of tension resulting from the intersection of the horizontal with the vertical is significant to the traditional understanding of the "centre"

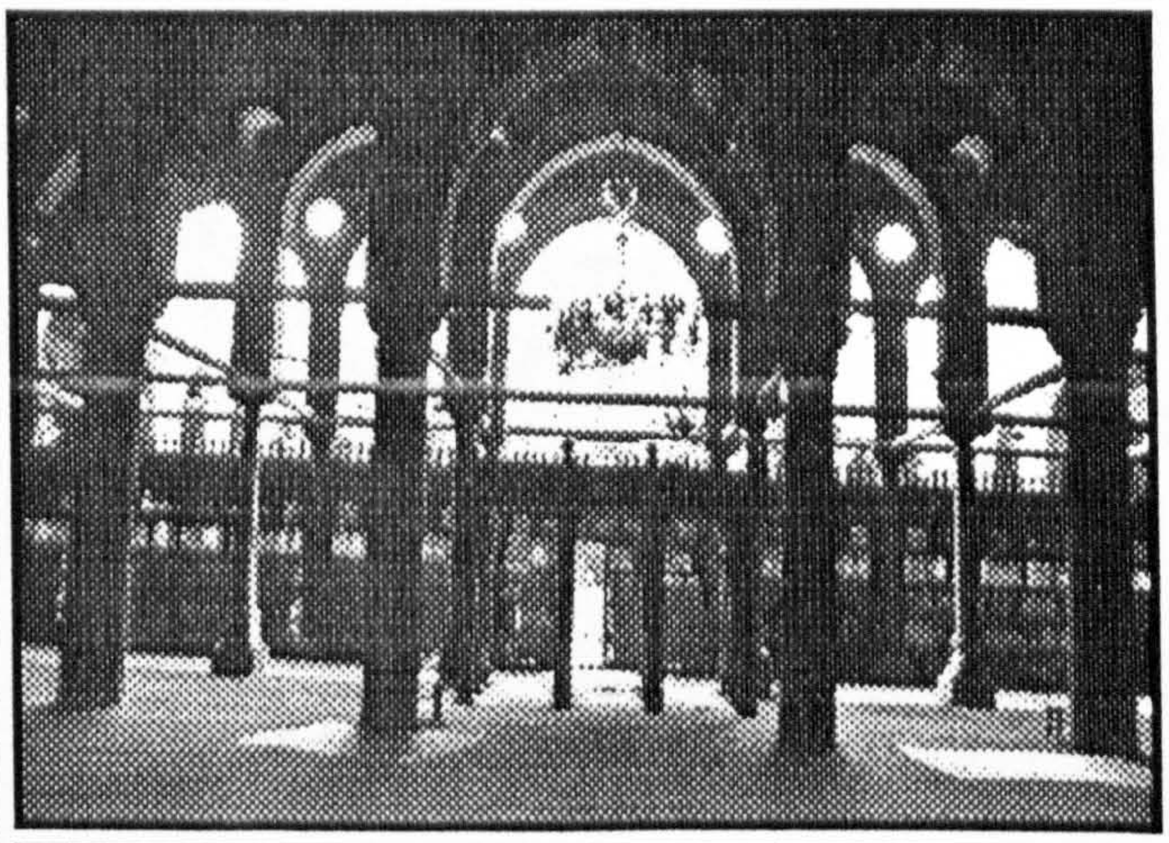


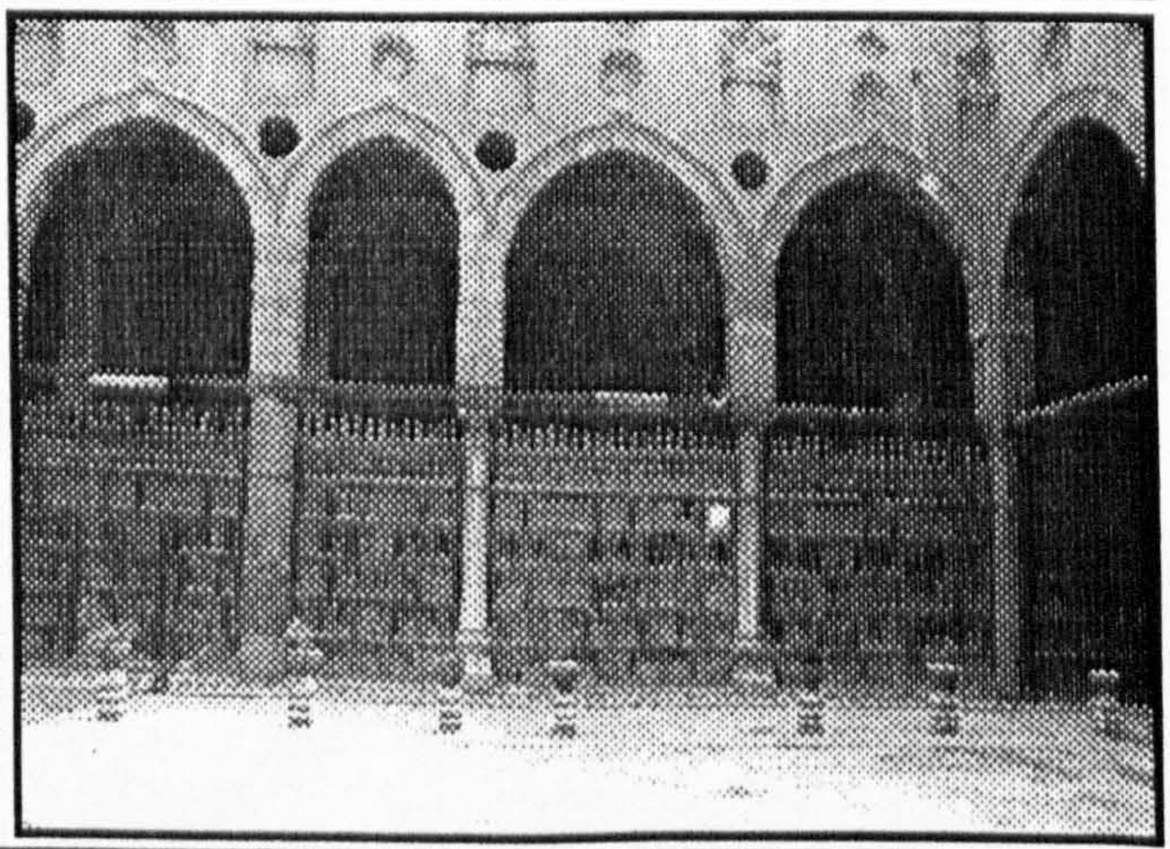


A forest of pillars, each in the form of the number one, seem to reiterate the profession of faith (the shahada) that there is only One God. Collectively, they represent the repetition of this shahada time and time again as Muslims do whether in dhikr or in prayer ...etc.

## PRAYING HALL

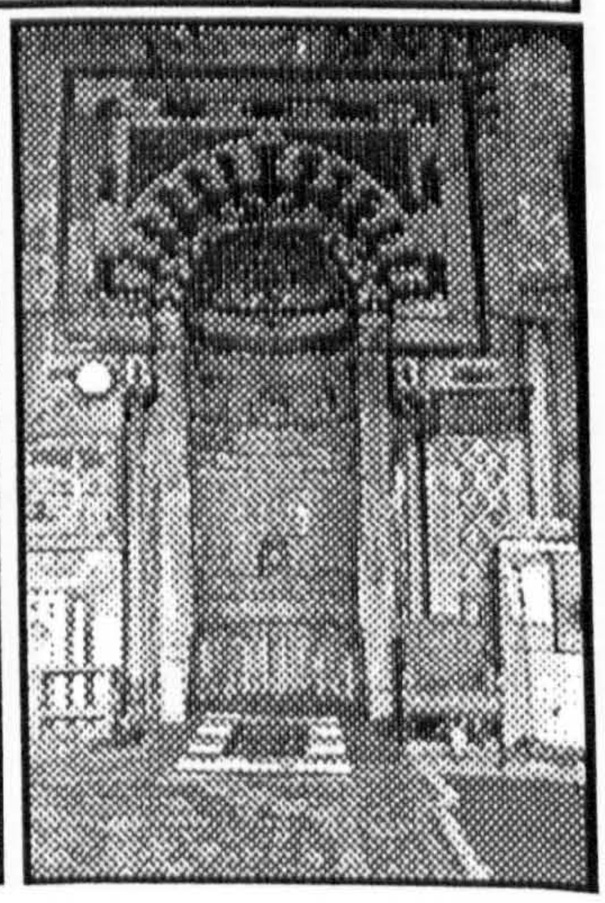
The bay connecting the courtyard to the maqsura is differentiated by being wider than all the rest of the bays. The columns used to carry the dome and roof of this bay are also different being circular, granite, and without bases, in contrast to the rest of the columns which are polygonal, made of marble and have bases. The reason for this differentiation is probably to emphasize the directional horizontality connecting the courtyard to the mihrab (qibla orientation). The prayer hall is defined by a set of mashrabiyya partitions (turned wood). The visual effect of this partition when seen from either side is dramatic and to a great extent resembles the effect created by the crestings - i.e., positive and negative, light and darkness; reflecting the Sufi notions of dhahir and batin.





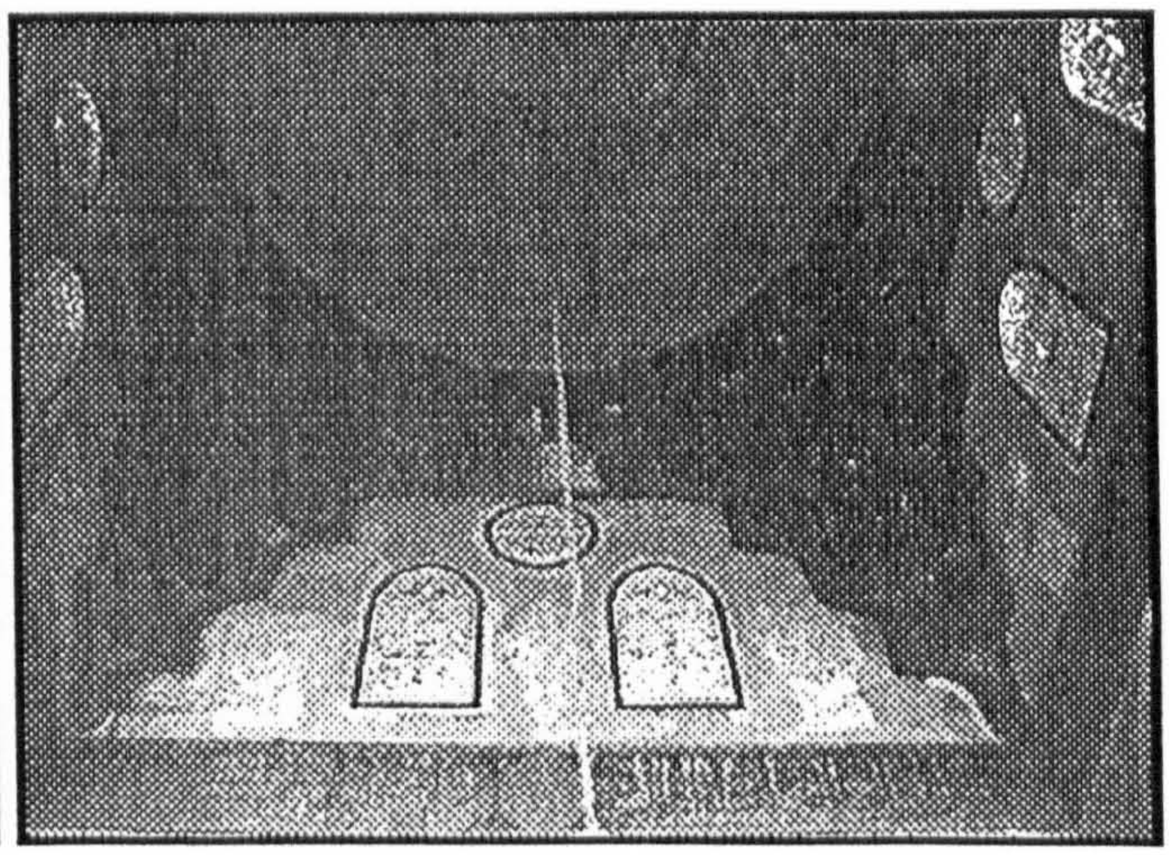
## MIHRAB

The mihrab is composed of several pointed arches placed in different planes, the innermost is a niche. The decoration of the mihrab relies on radiating patterns of coloured marble as seen in previous cases. (See interpretation of the mihrab in the Mosque of Baybars).

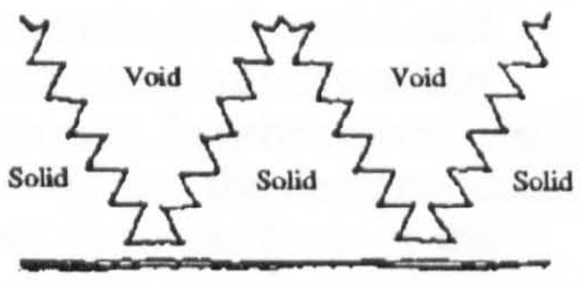


## DOME

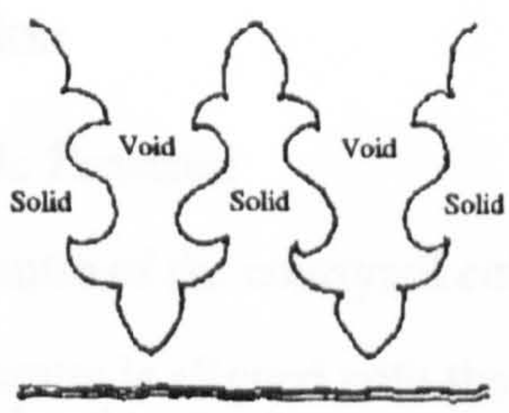
The maqsura dome is transformed from square to circle by means of stalactites; the octagon is pointed out by an intermediate row of stalactites that corresponds to the octagonal form (seen by straight lines on the four sides of the cubic part). Eight pointed windows correspond to the eight winds, while four circular windows represent the four Rivers of Paradise following the cosmological model.



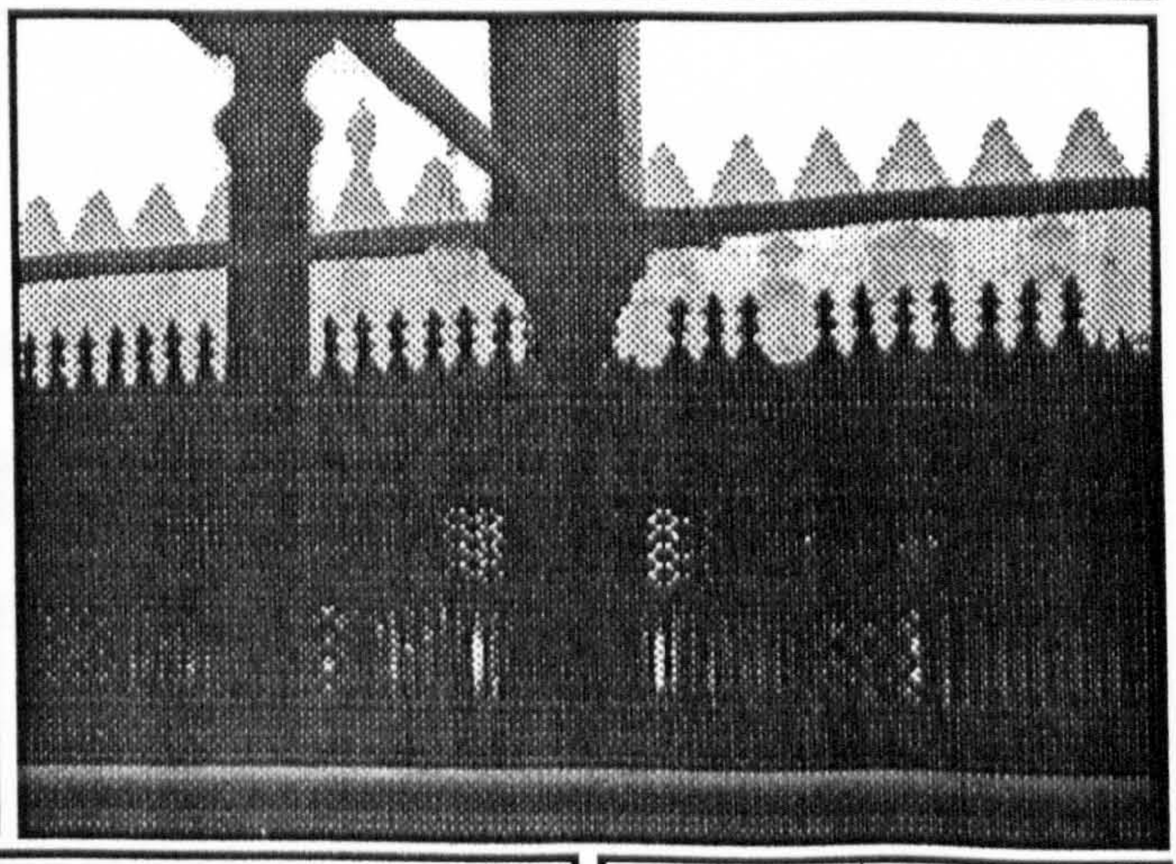
## CRESTINGS




External & Internal
Geometrical
Crenellations

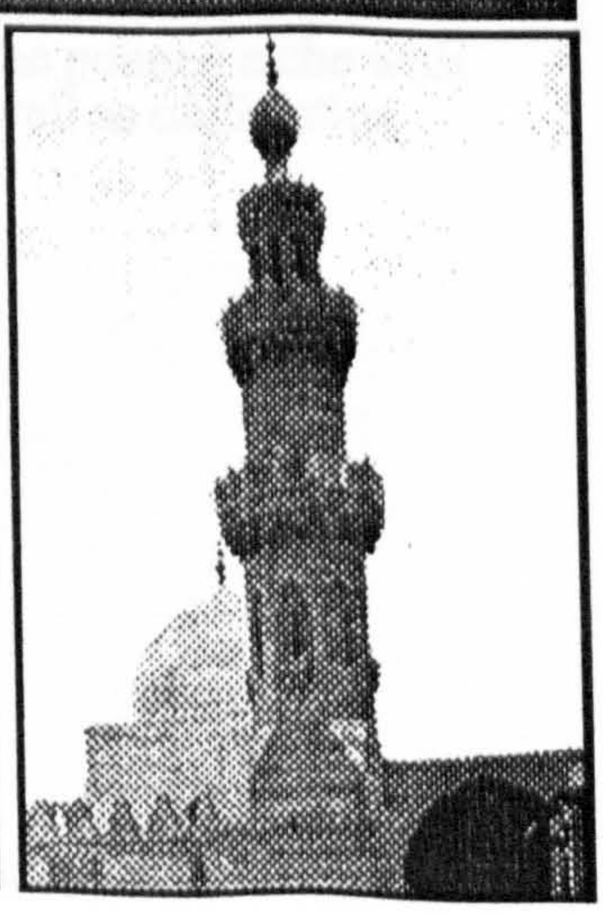



Wooden Mashrabiyya
Elaborated Trefoil
Crestings



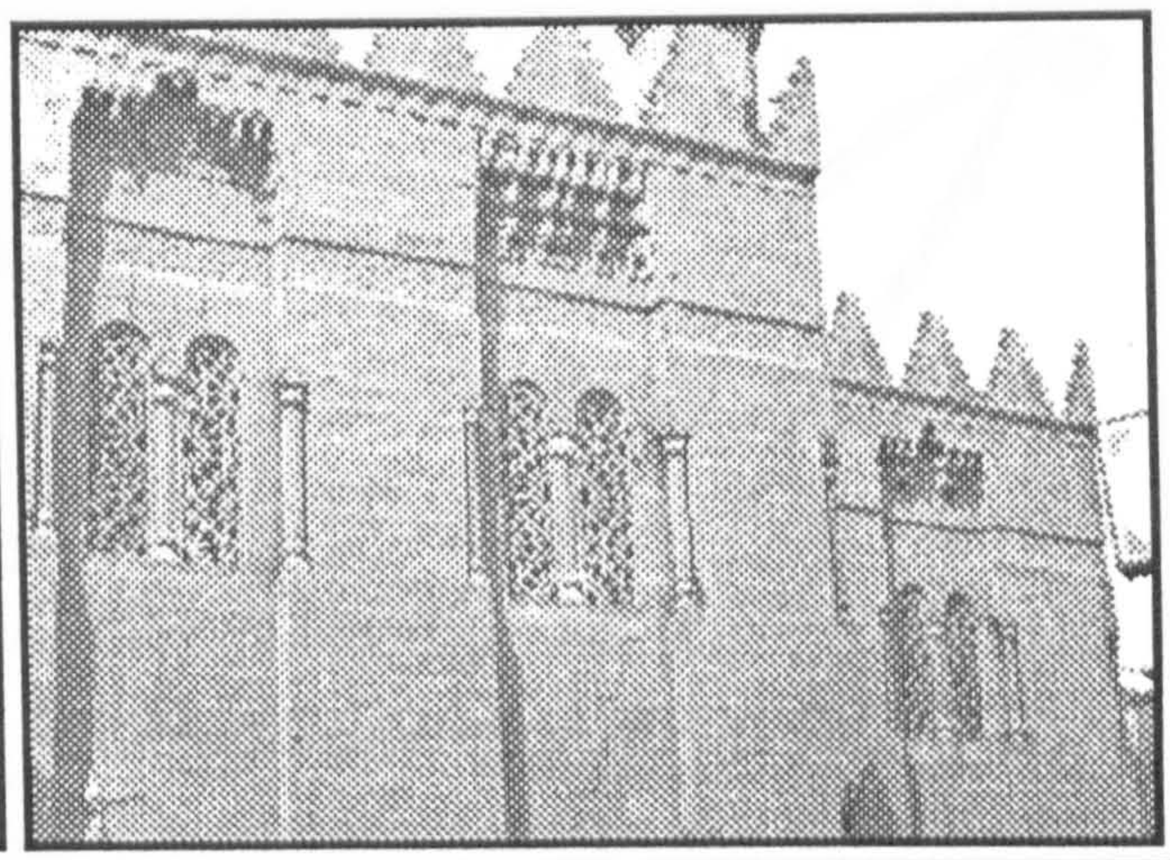
## MINARET

The minaret follows the traditional Mamluk form changing section from square, to octagon, to circle, and culminating in a point (earth, Throne, heavens, Unity). Apart from being a landmark, the vertically pointing element is the symbol of transcendence. The reduced square section obviously shows that it was included in the composition to embody the cosmological model - it cannot be attributed to aesthetic reasons as it is too short to play any significant role in the proportion of the minaret.

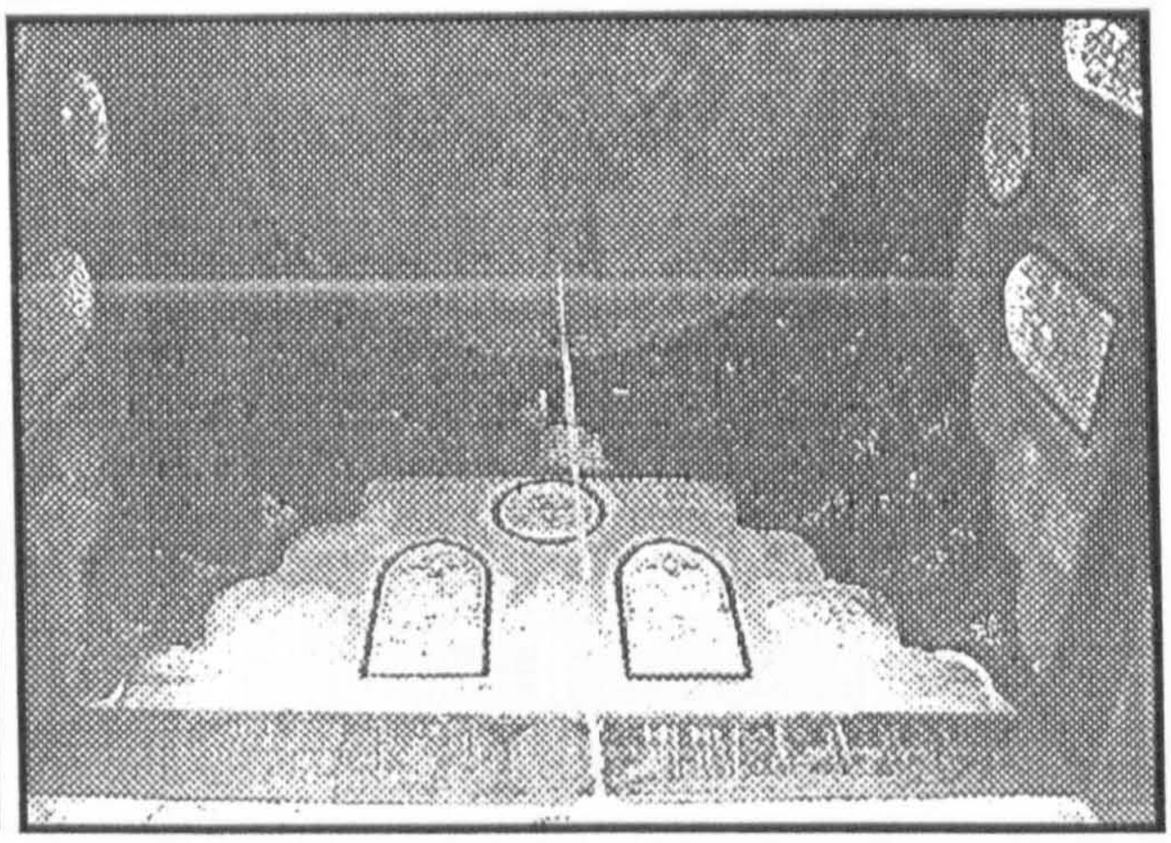


STALACTITES

Externally, stalactites bring the outer less holy plane of the facade to the inner more holy plane of the religious building. Furthermore, they are grouped and shaped in such a manner so as to give a hint towards a vertically pointing form at the summit of the stalactites(far left and far right).



Internally, stalactites transfer the square in the maqsura dome into an octagon then to the circle, thus completing the cosmological model and indicating infinity of the cosmos. In other cases, we found that the designer could not show the form of the octagon by using stalactites; in this case, by outlining four of the eight sides of the octagon on the plain sides of the cube, the viewer can implicitly complete the octagonal form.



**Remarks:**

Prototypic Features:

1) The centre of the courtyard coincides with the centre of the octagonal water fountain.

2) This centre is aligned with the maqsura, the mihrab, the four riwaqs, and at the same time is related to the four corners of the quadrangular courtyard.

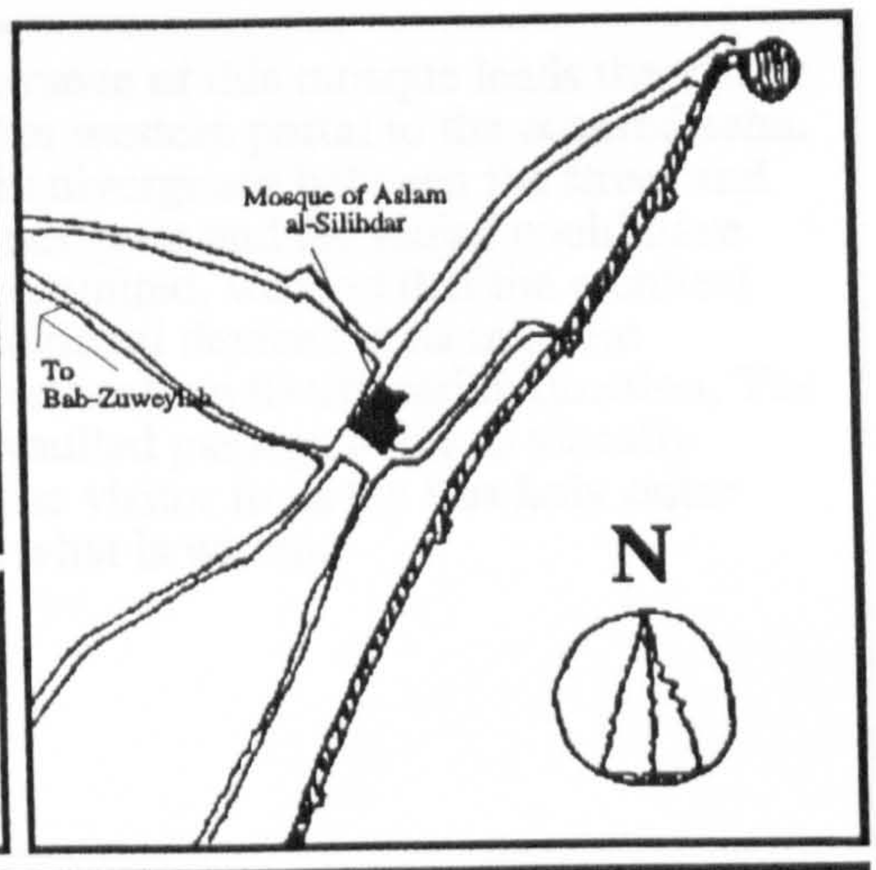
3) Both the minaret and the maqsura dome follow the cosmological model of square, octagon, circle, and point.

Unique Features:

1) The main portal takes the shape of a pointed iwan rather than the pointed niche with cave-like stalactite decoration. The effect is one of verticality as well as of direction towards the interior.

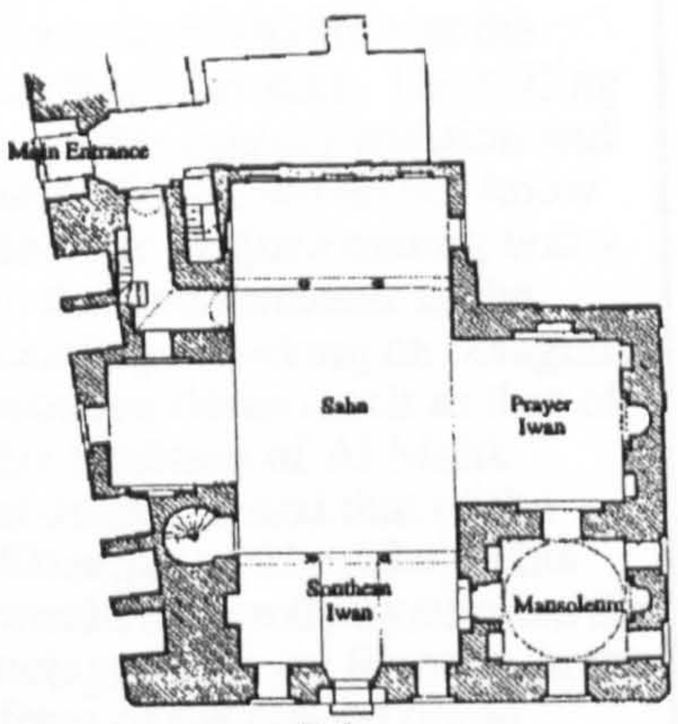
# The Mosque of Aslam al-Baha'i al-Silahdar (Bab Zuwaylah)

## (745 A.H., 1334 A.D.)

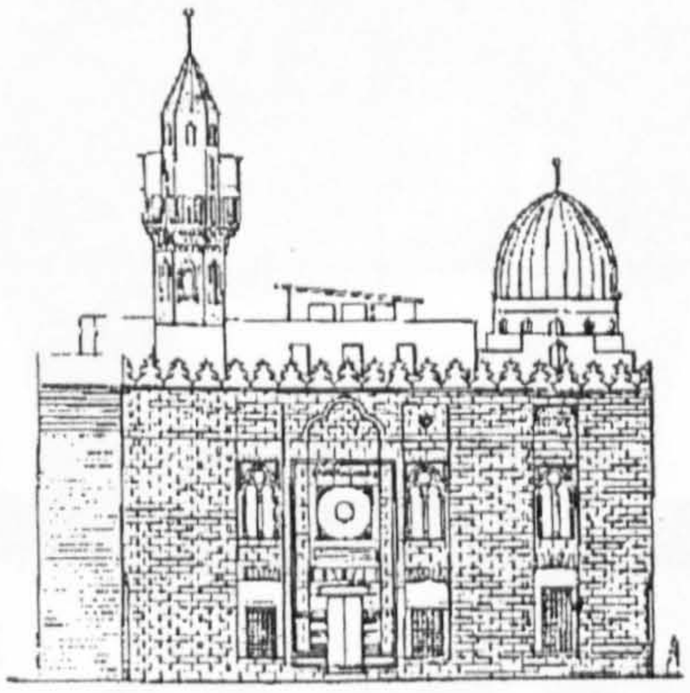



## Mosque / Madrasa Type

## (4 Iwans, Mausoleum)

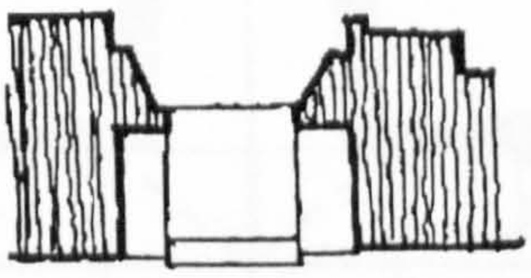



Plan



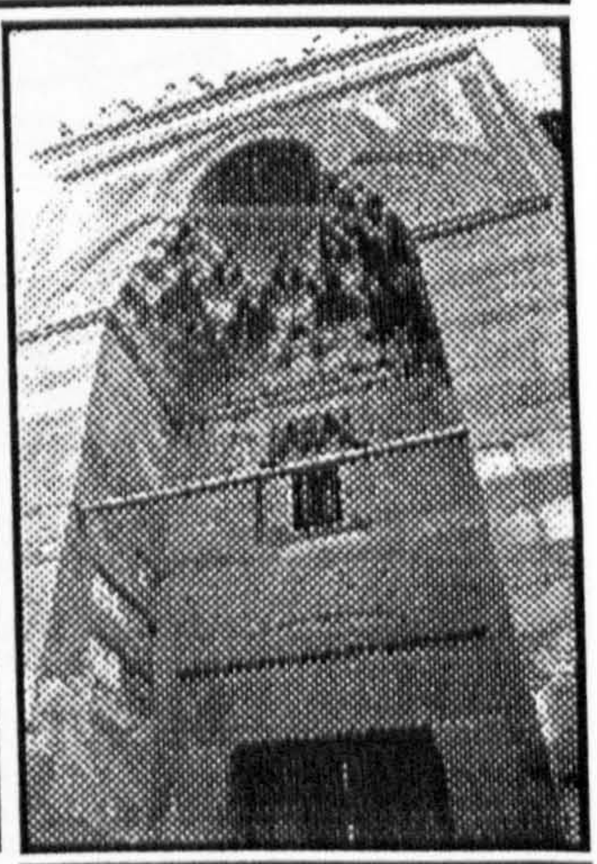
Southern Elevation

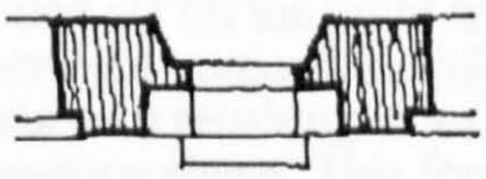
PORTALS



Main Portal (West)

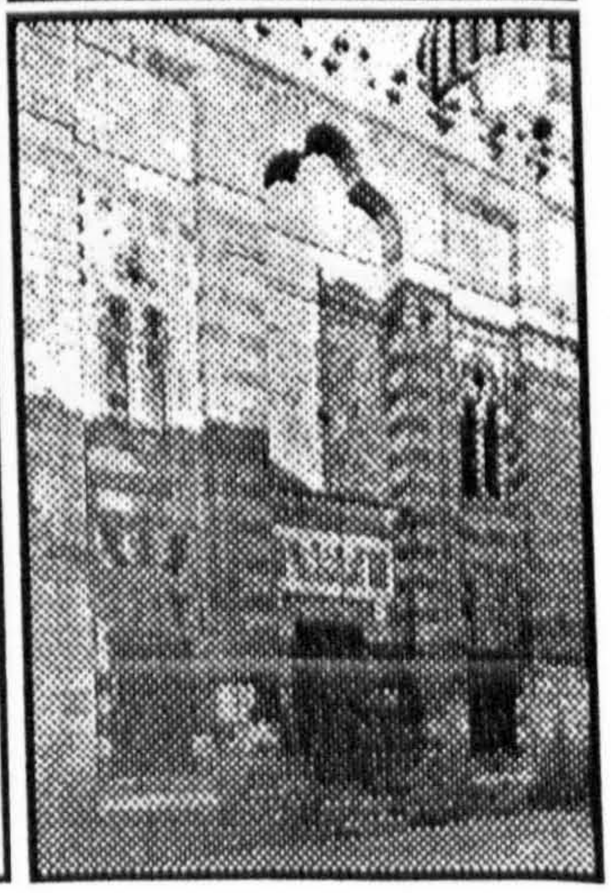
The cave-like main portal consists of a pointed form, outlined by a trefoil pattern decoration. Each of these silhouettes on its own creates visual ascension to a point at the summit of the portal. The use of stalactites enhances this vertical movement while adding a layer of symbolism, that of Unity in



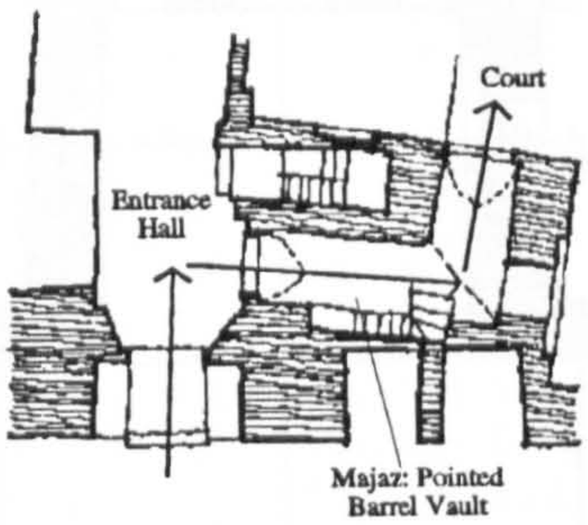


Secondary Portal (South)

The secondary portal, used only by the emir, (see Chapter Five) is a trefoil recessed flat niche, which clearly sets out in the southern facade by its summit. The trefoil arch leads vision upwards in two stages; first from the bottom two lobes, then together lead to the third pointed arch lobe at the top.



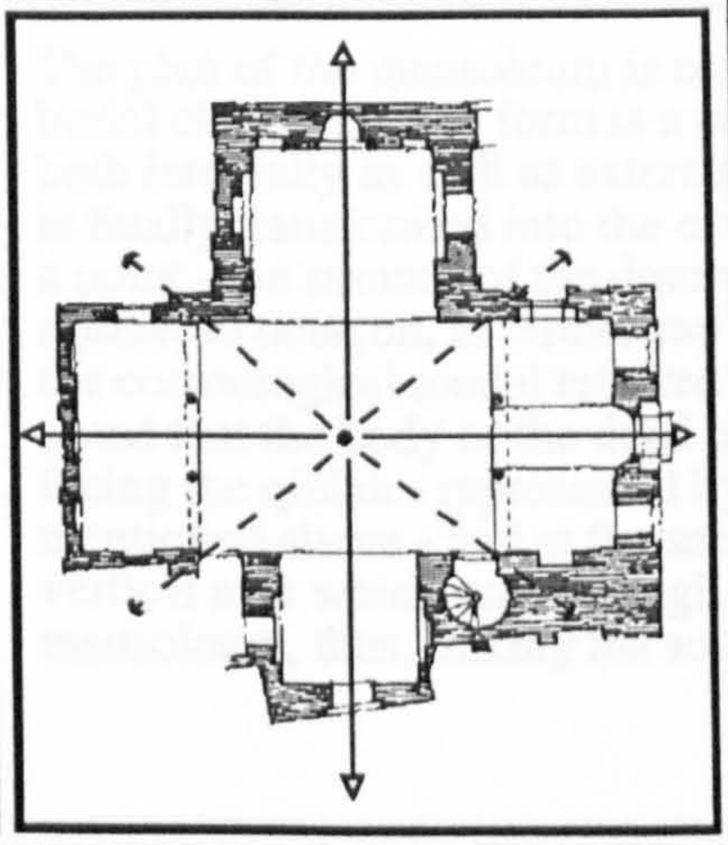
## ENT. HALL & MAJAZ

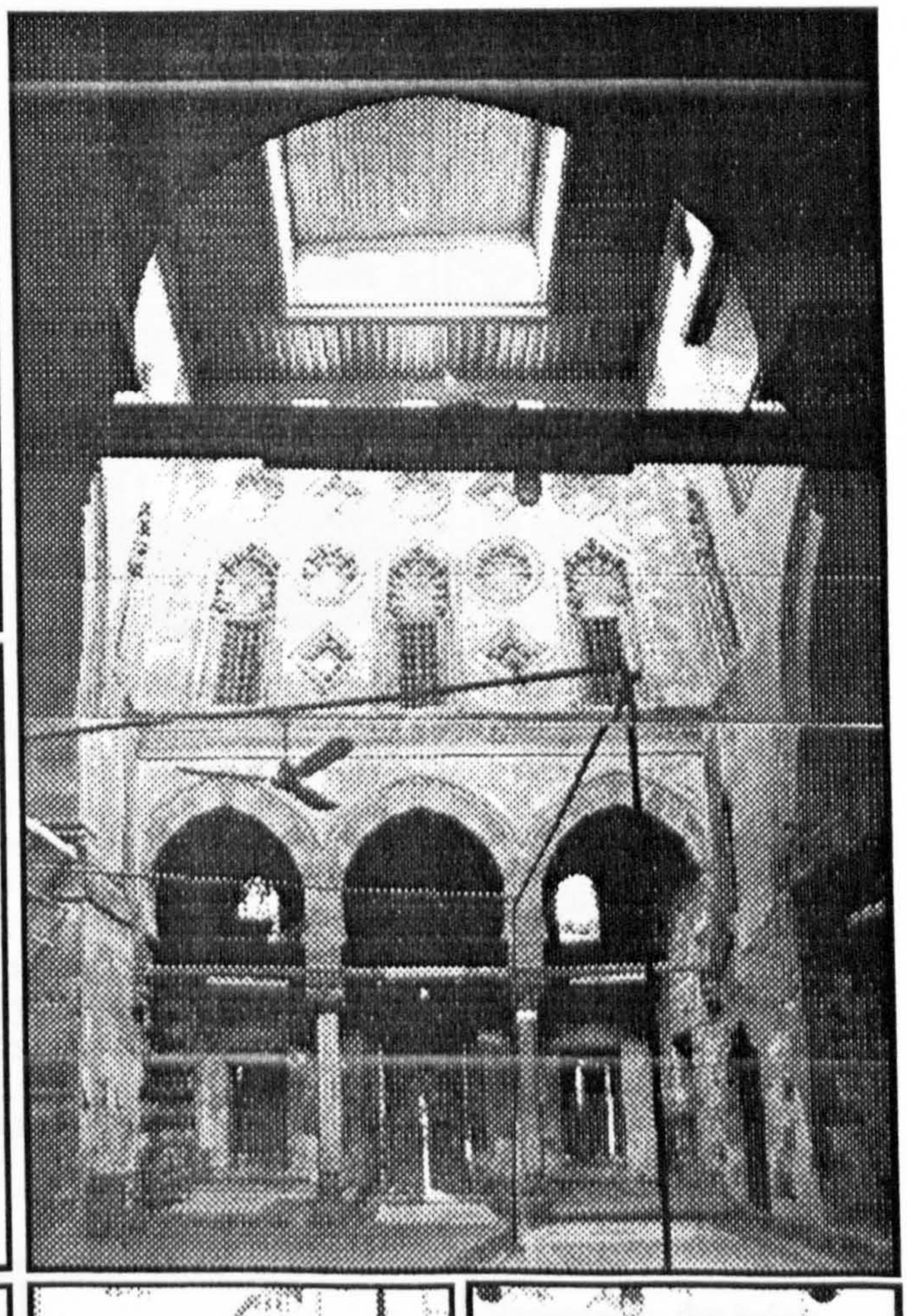



The bent entrance of this mosque leads the visitor from the main western portal to the covered sahn. Although the divergence between the street and the qibla is not great and the majaz could have been easily ommited, we find that the architect used the traditional device for its inherent symbolism rather than its utilitarian function. The bent, dark, vaulted passage helps to visually disconnect the visitor from the less holy outer world from what is within.

## COURTYARD & FOUNTAIN

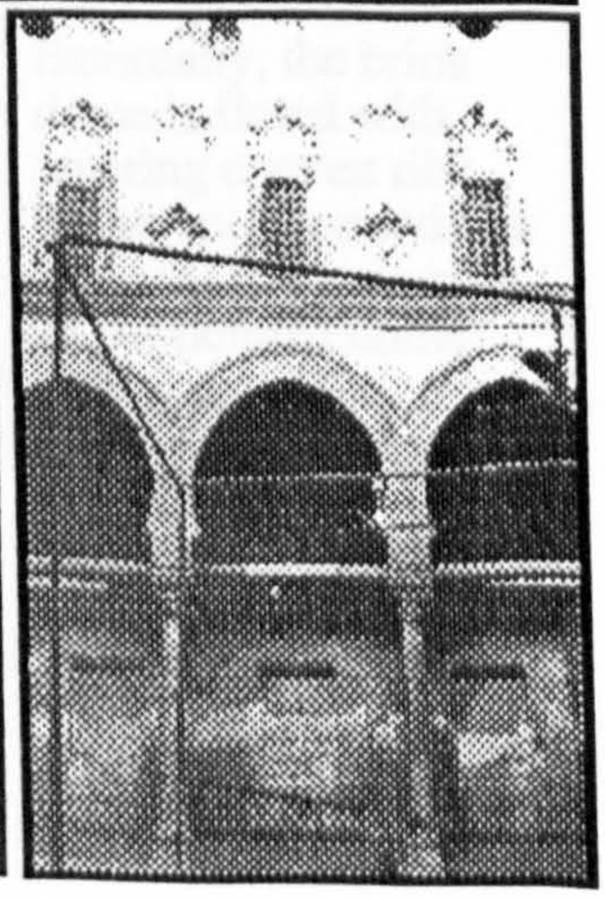
There is no fountain at the centre of the sahn. The ceiling is a 19th-century addition and accordingly, we do not know how the original ceiling was - in the same manner as the existing or having an octagonal wooden dome (such as that of the Madrasa of Al Malik al-Juqandar and that of the Khanqah of Sheykhu). This would abstractly symbolize the octagonal water fountain in the form of the central dome.



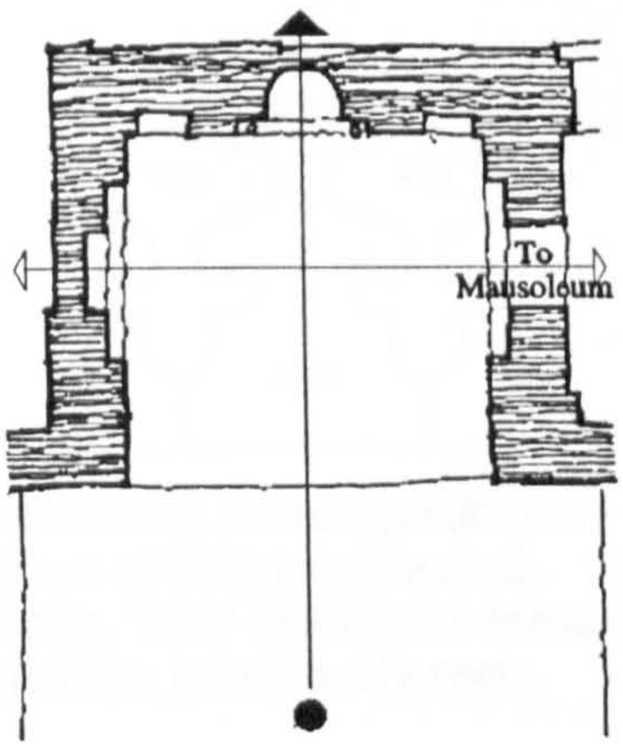


## ARCHES & IWANS

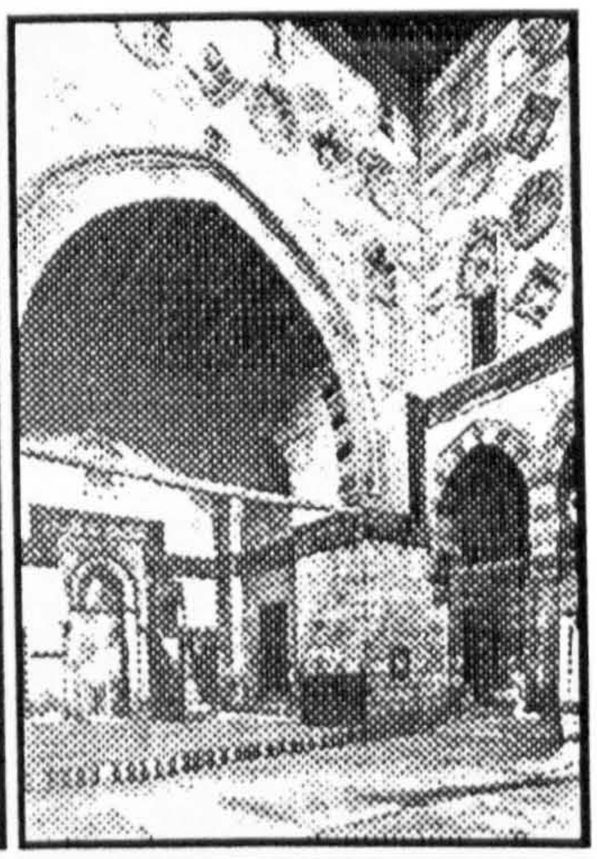
Iwans and arches are pointed carrying flat wooden beamed roofs. The arches are slightly rounded off (at the point where the straight vertical line joins the curved) resulting in a slight horse-shoe shape. This form emphasizes the vertical by accelerating ascension. (See the interpretation of the arch in the Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdari and the iwan in the Khanqah of Baybars al-Jashankir).



## PRAYING HALL

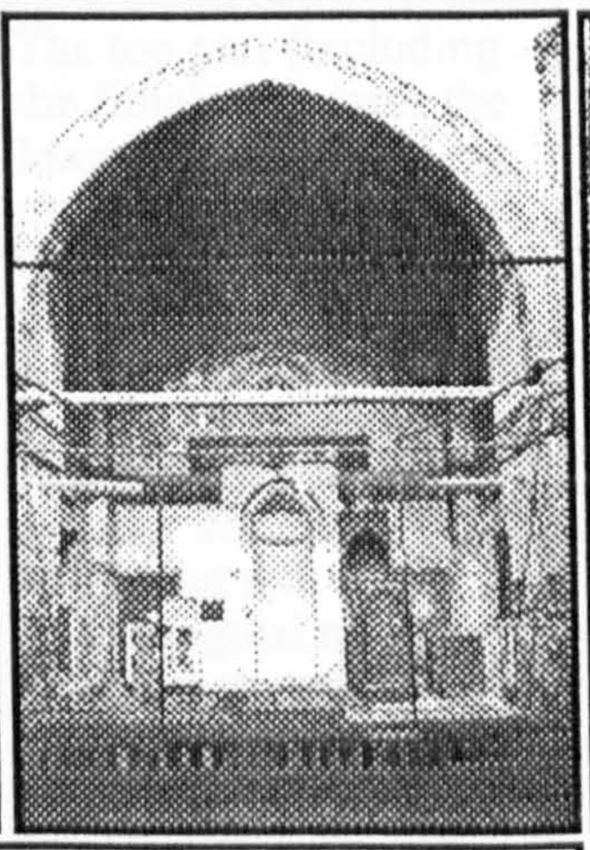



The eastern iwan is the largest and deepest of the four. It clearly points to the qibla by its depth. It is visually connected to the mausoleum by means of a copper grill window, this visual connection was considered to be a source of blessings to the deceased.



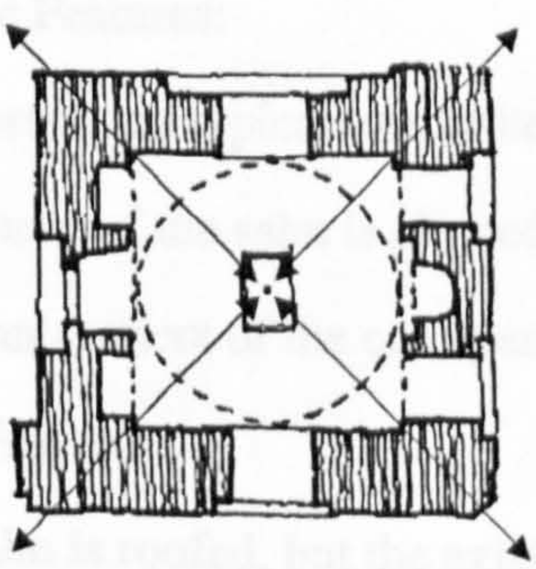
## MIHRABS

The mihrab of the praying hall (left) is considered to be amongst the simplest and most abstracted of all Mamluk mihrabs. It is a simple pointed recess with a pointed border visually revealing a multi-layer effect. Its depth reflect interiority while its pointed shape points to the vertical. On the other hand, the stucco mihrab of the mausoleum is stilted and pointed and more elaborate than the former

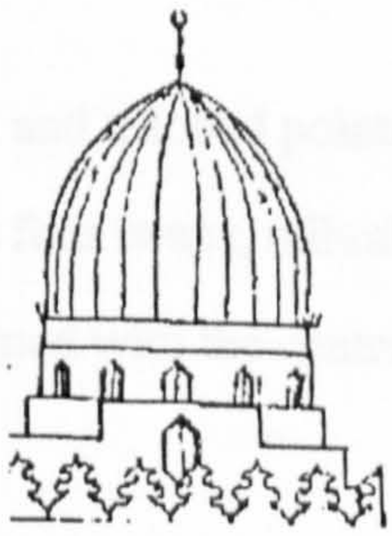


## DOME

The plan of the mausoleum is centralized like all Islamic burial chambers. The form is a square which changes both internally as well as externally into an octagon, and is finally transformed into the circle which culminates at a point - the summit of the dome. This change from square, to octagon, to circle, and finally to point follows the cosmological model referred to earlier. It should be noted that the body of the dead patron lies on its right side facing the qiblah - represented by the stucco mihrab mentioned above - and at the same time lies on the vertical axis which runs through the centre of the mausoleum, thus, linking his soul to the cosmic axis.



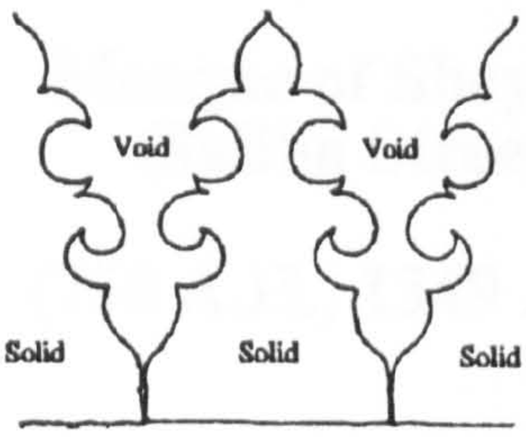
Mausoleum Plan



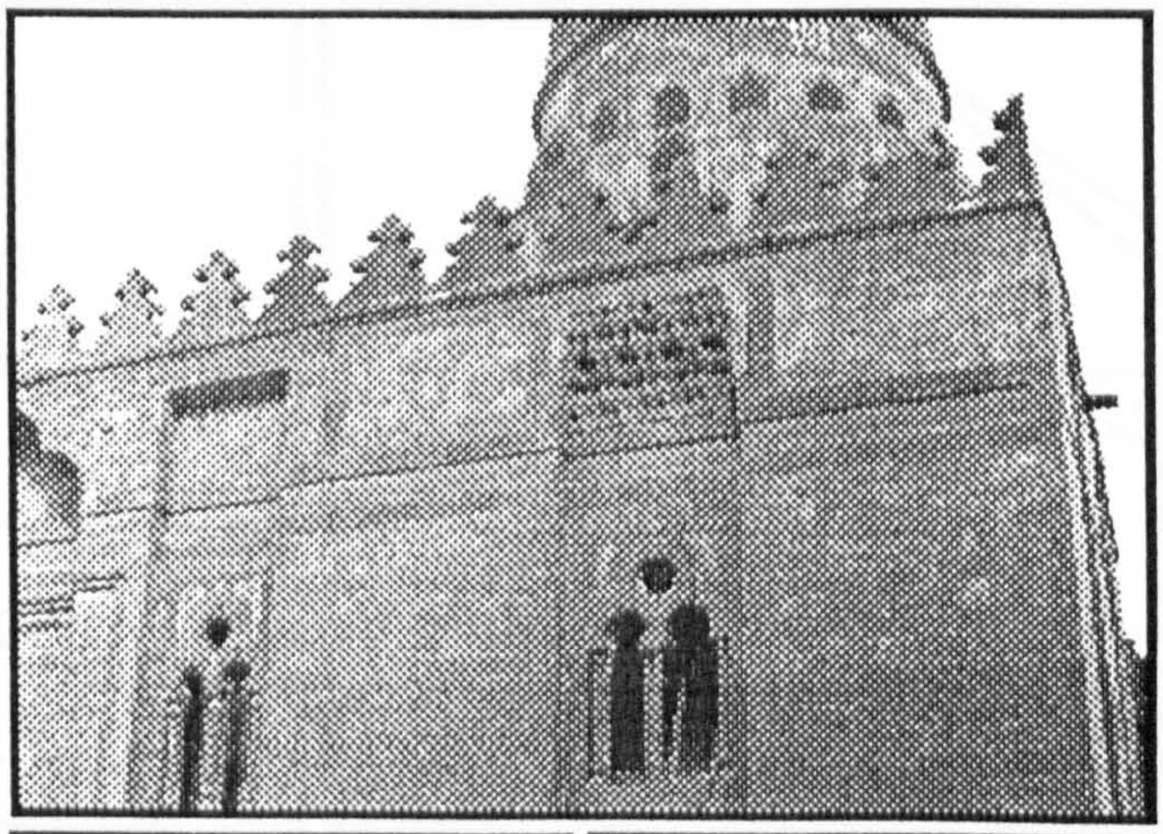
Mausoleum
Dome Elevation

Externally, the brick dome is fluted with tapering convex ribs. These accelerate vision upwards to the summit of the pointed dome. The walls of the mausoleum chamber are pierced with windows in its four sides maximising exposure and hence, du'a' (whether from the students, worshippers, or passers-by).

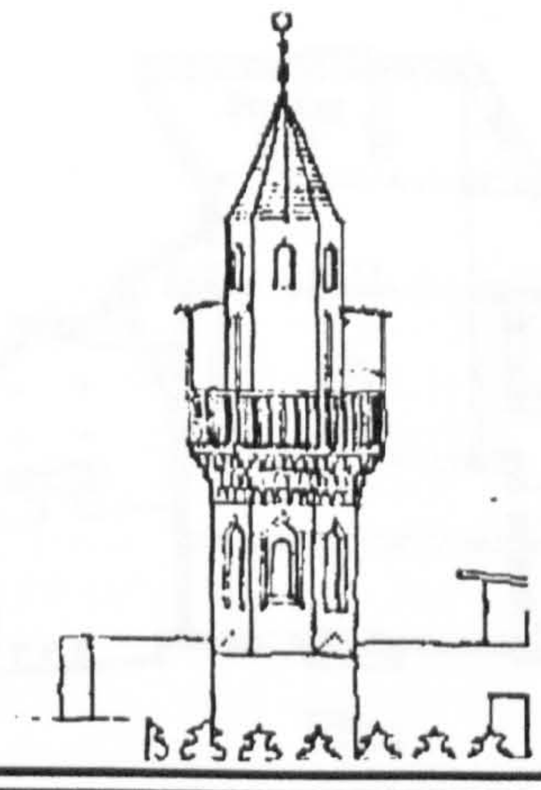
## CRESTINGS



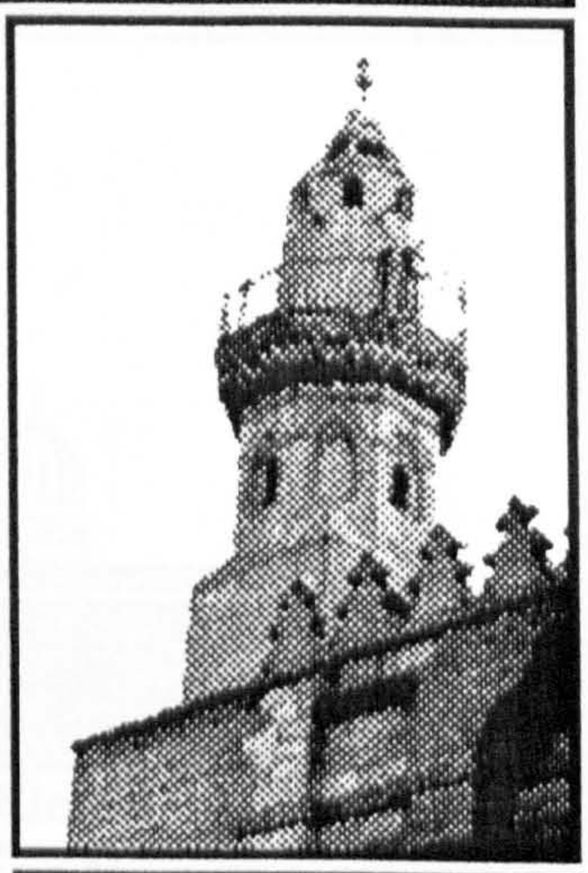

Externally, crestings take the shape of elaborated trefoil forms. They exhibit the same qualities previousely seen.



## MINARET

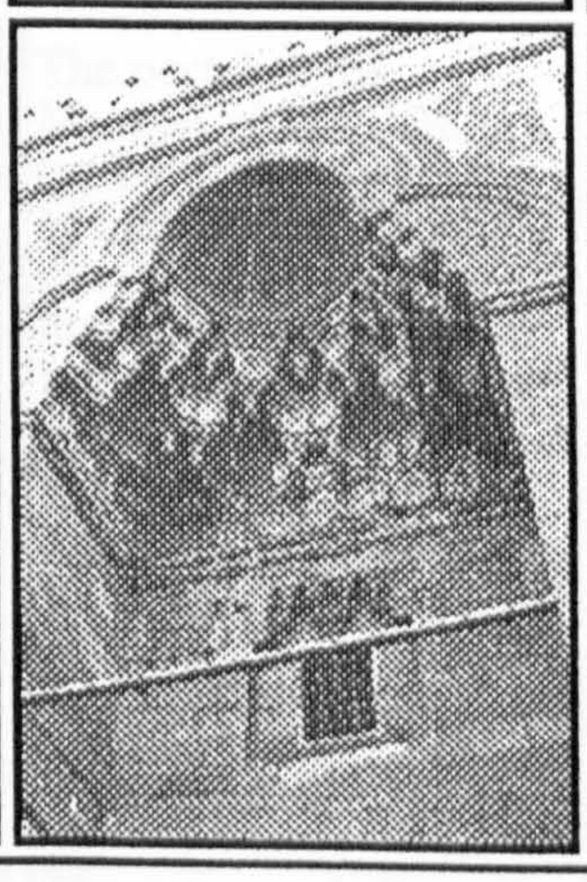


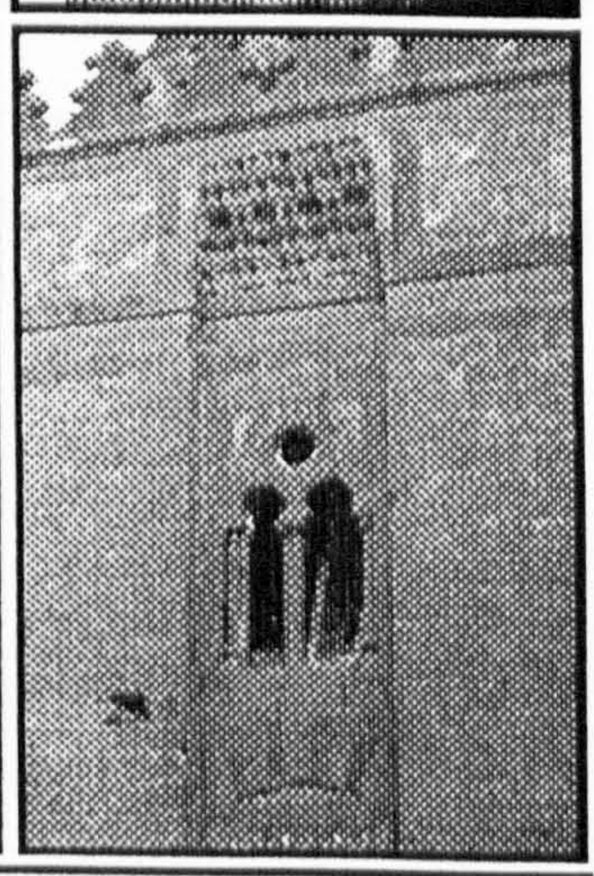
The top part (including the finial) postdates the Mamluk period and is probably Ottoman. The original remnants of the minaret show typical features as far as change in form: from square to octagon to probably circular section to Unity following the cosmological model. (See interpretation of minaret in Mosque of Baybars).



## STALACTITES

Externally, stalactites are used in the main portal and window recesses. In both cases, stalactites merge the inner plane with the outer one, i.e., merging the lesser outer holy with the inner more sacred. Stalactites must have been also used in the original minaret either as a means of changing its different sections, or as a means to carry its balconies.





## Remarks:

Prototypic Features:

1) The portals are typical: stalactite pointed, and trilobed pointed niches.

2) The centre of the sahn is aligned with the four iwans, mihrab, and secondary entrance.

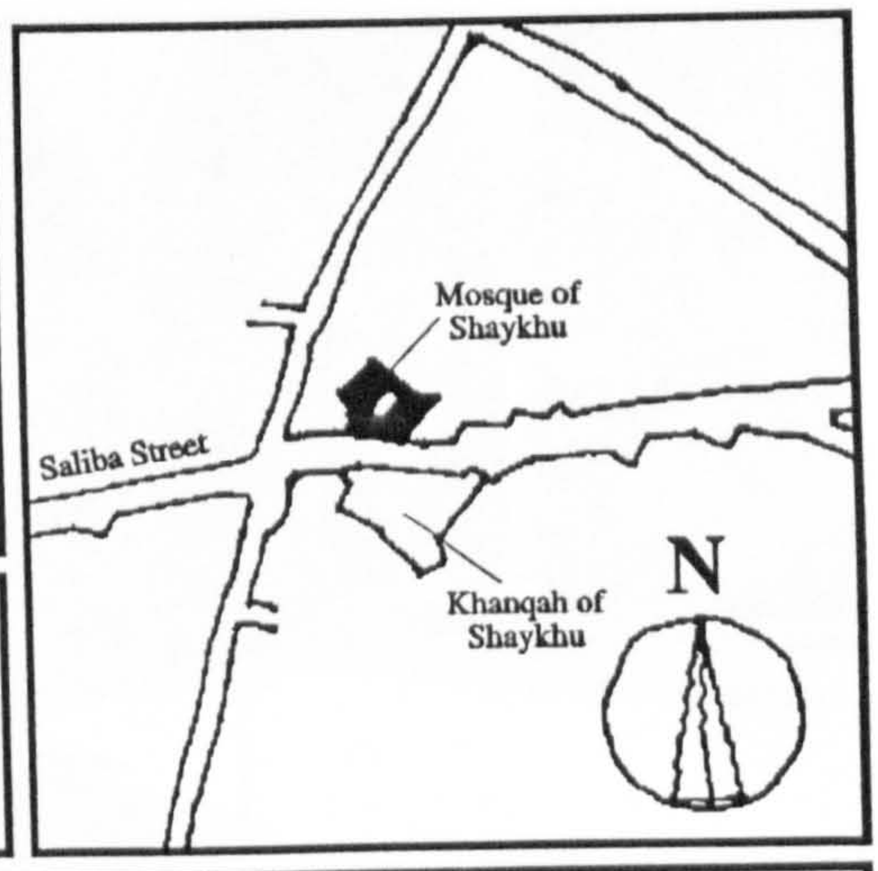
3) The four corners of the courtyard are aligned with the centre.

Unique Features:

1) The sahn is roofed, but the existing one is of a later date. Accordingly, it is difficult to assess whether the centre was referred to in the original roof or not.

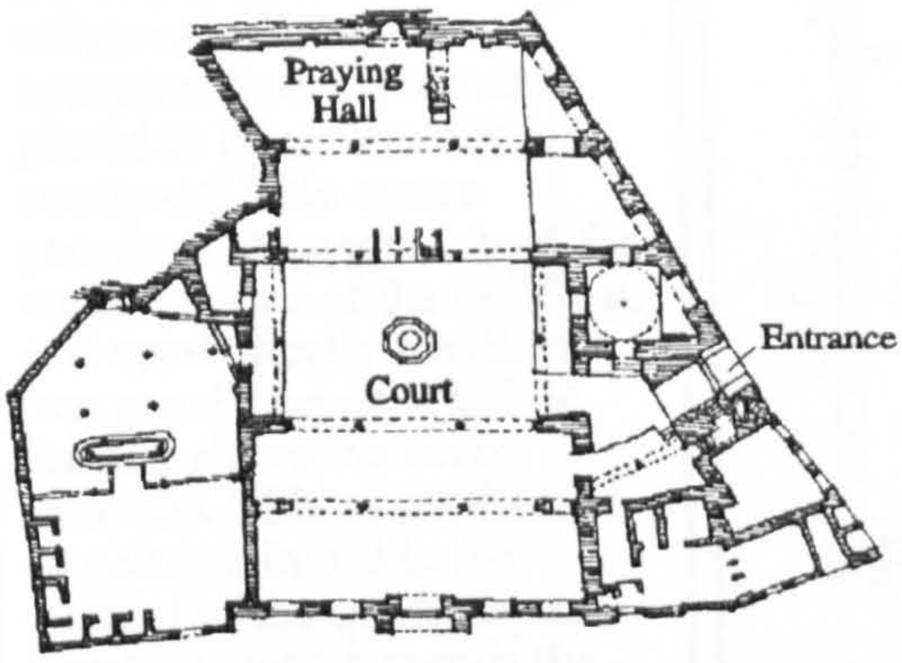
# Mosque of Sheykhu (Saliba Street)

## (750 A.H., 1349 A.D.)

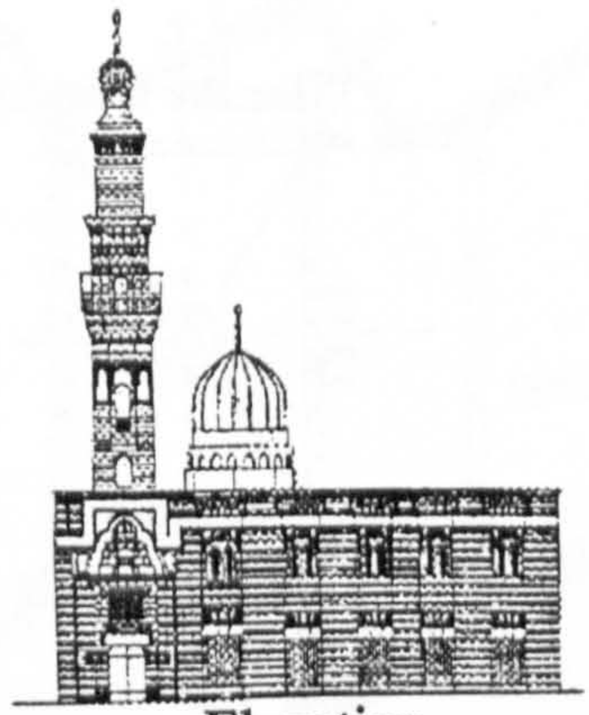



## Madrasa / Mosque Type

## (4 Iwans, Mausoleum)

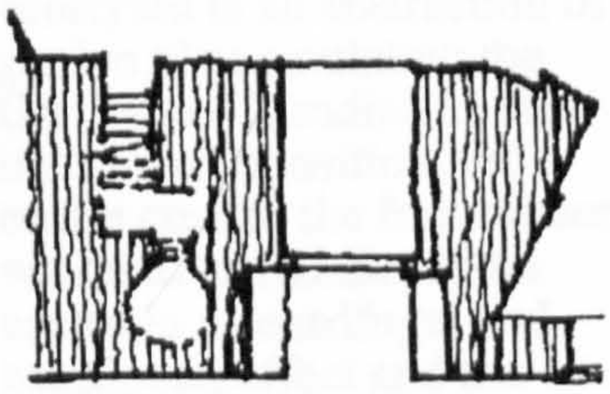



Plan



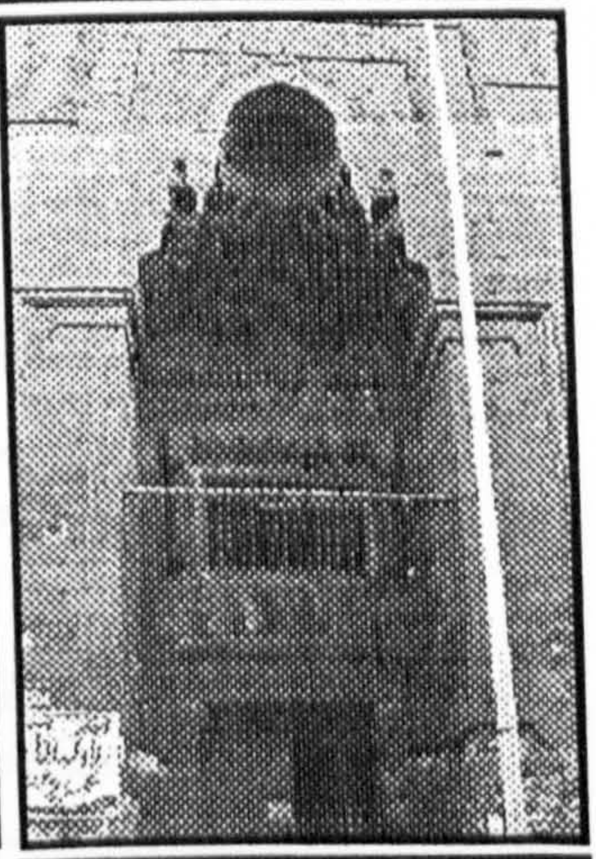
Elevation

PORTALS

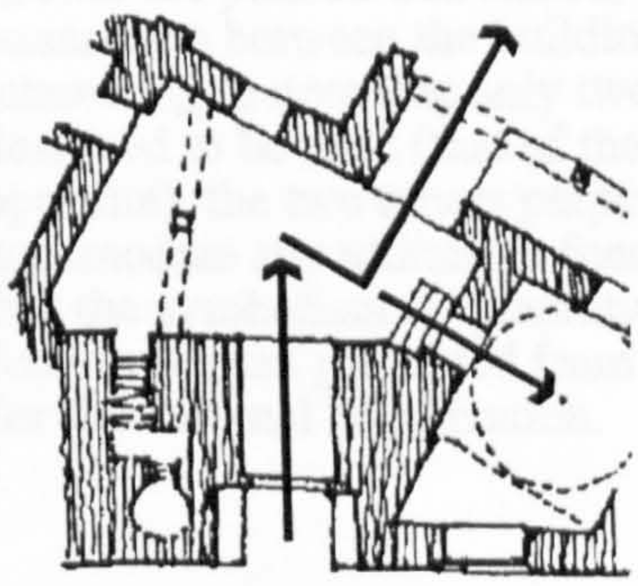


Portal Plan

The portal of the Mosque of Sheykhu is a typical traditional Mamluk portal. It is a deeply recessed, pointed niche with stalactites to bring the outer less holy plane of the facade to the inner more holy plane of the religious building.

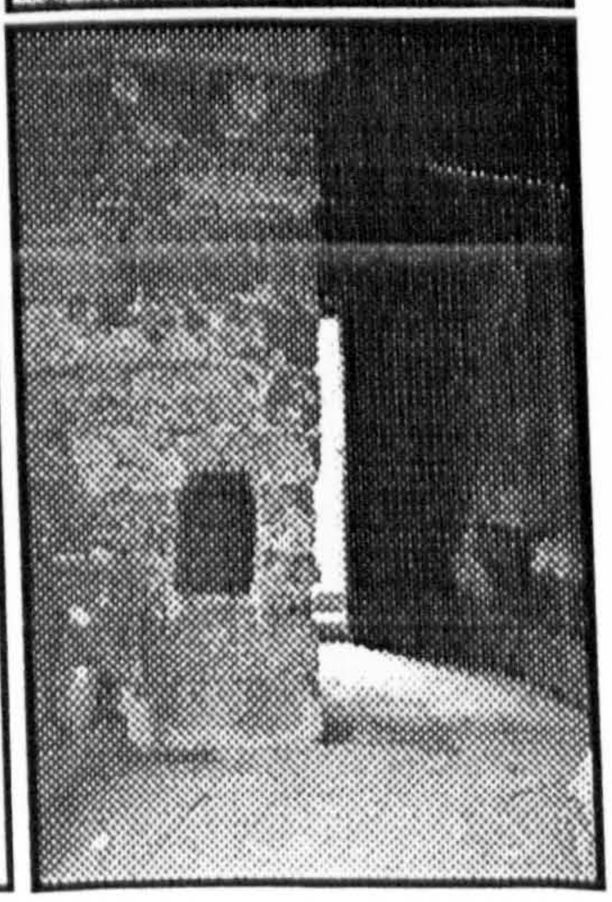


ENT. HALL & MAJAZ

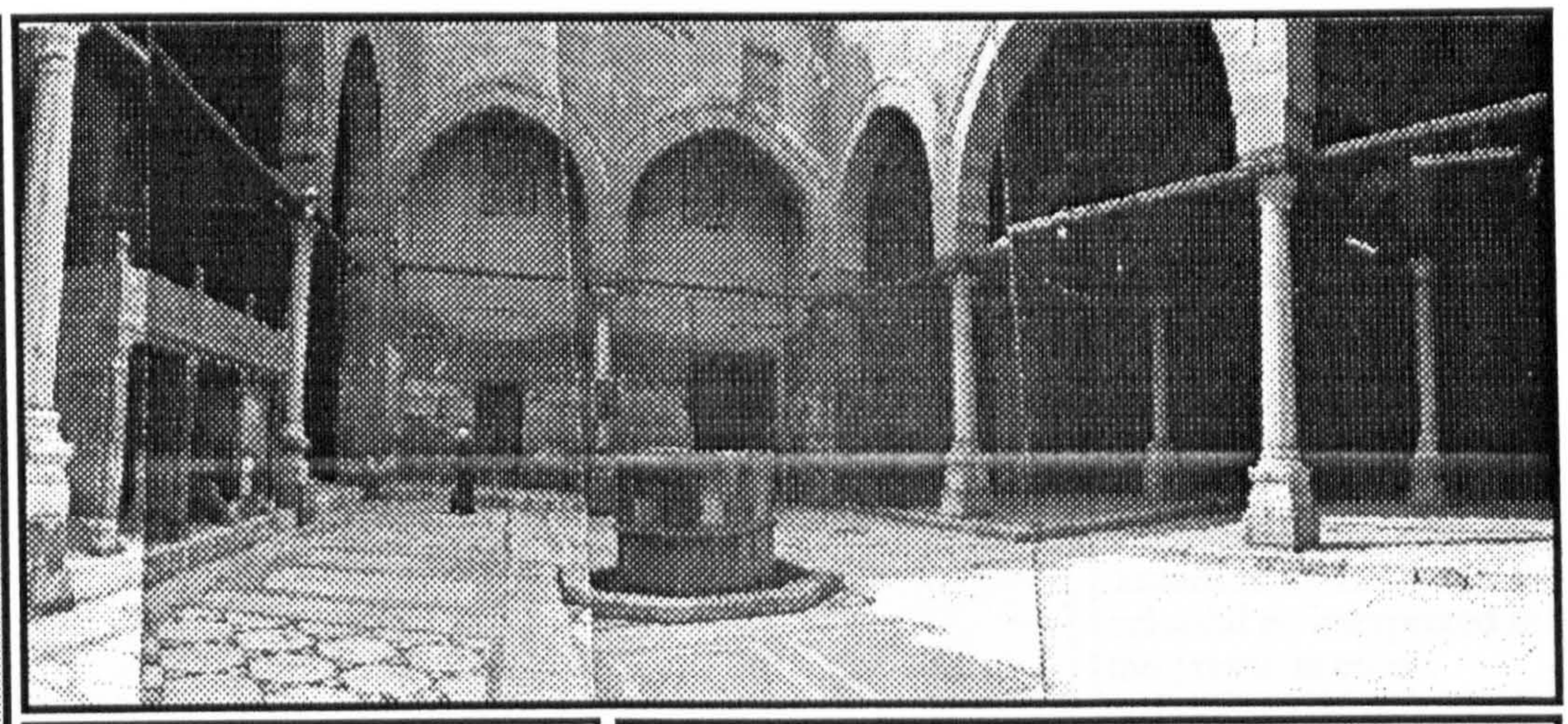


Entrance Hall & Majaz Plan

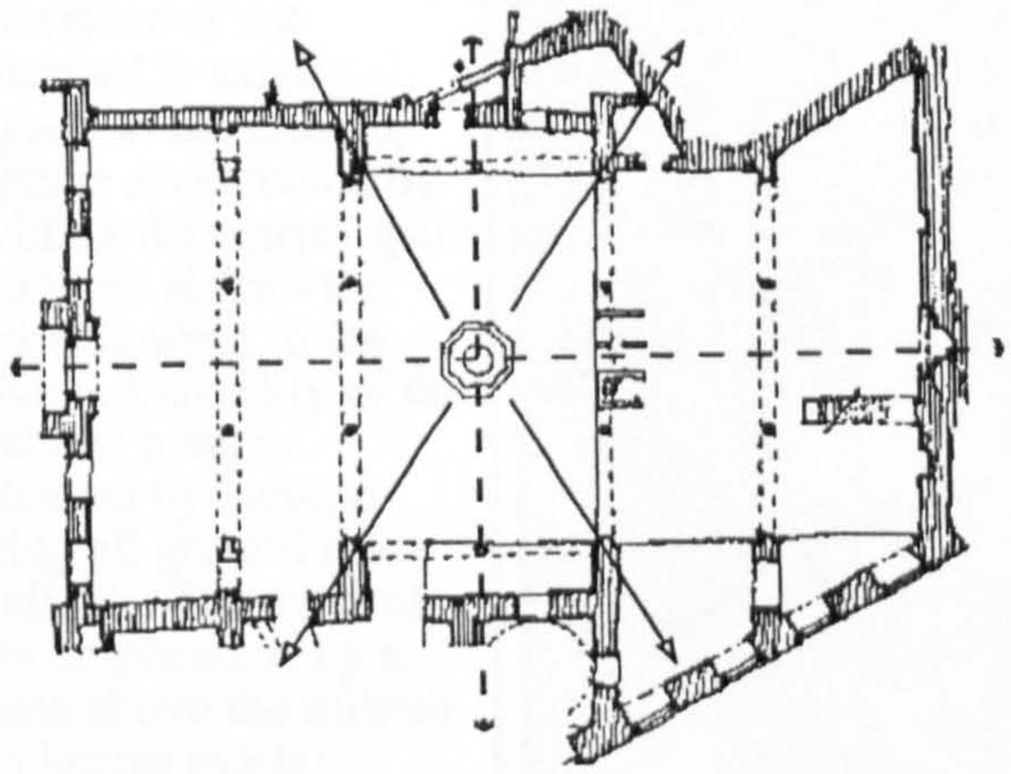
The entrance hall, and majaz overlap in this mosque. It takes an irregular form to accomodate the difference between street and qibla orientations. In the majaz, three slabs of black polished glass are embedded in the wall (believed to have had healing powers as well as being protective from the jinn).

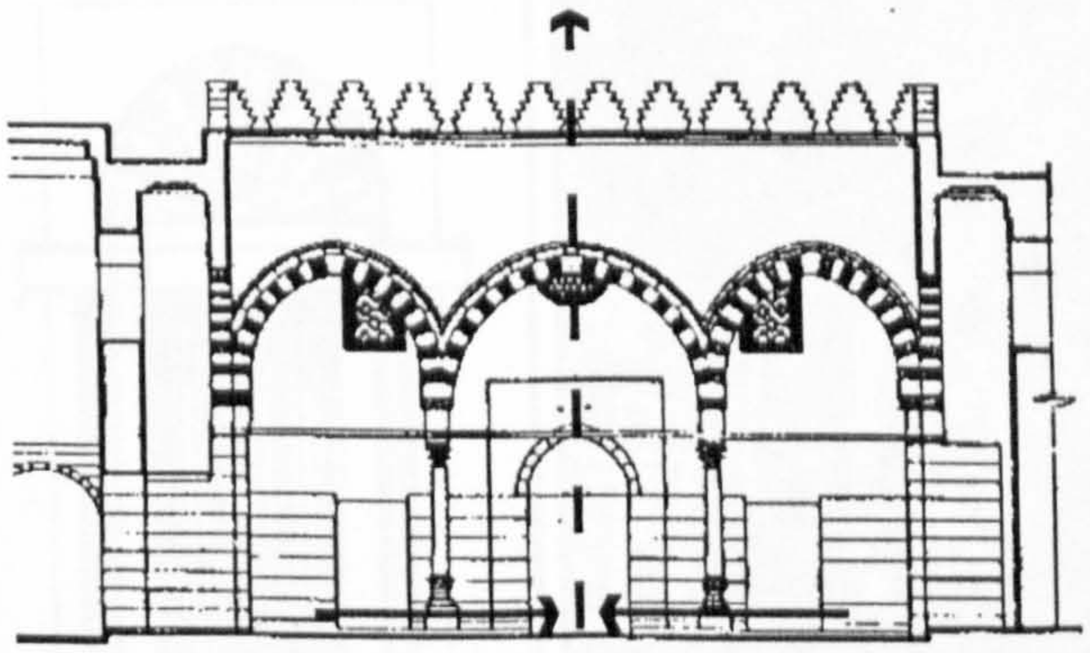


## COURTYARD & FOUNTAIN



As in most traditional Mamluk religious buildings, an octagonal water fountain is placed at the centre of the courtyard. This centre generates the geometry of the entire interior of the building, and symbolically recalls the octagonal Throne which is located above the seven Heavens. This symbolism is more meaningful in the context of the quadrangular courtyard which recalls the four pillars carrying the celestial spheres. Furthermore, the marble flooring of the courtyard is an abstraction of a garden plan emulating the Gardens of Paradise. In this internal composition, the centre creates the four corners which in turn indicate the centre in a centrifugal and centripetal effect and the octagon is related to the sky (Heavens) by an implicit vertical axis.

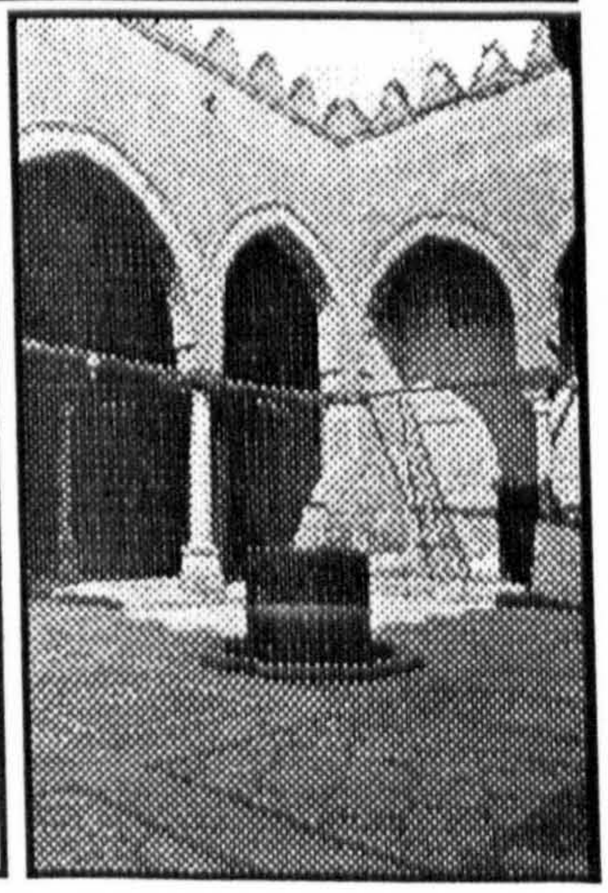




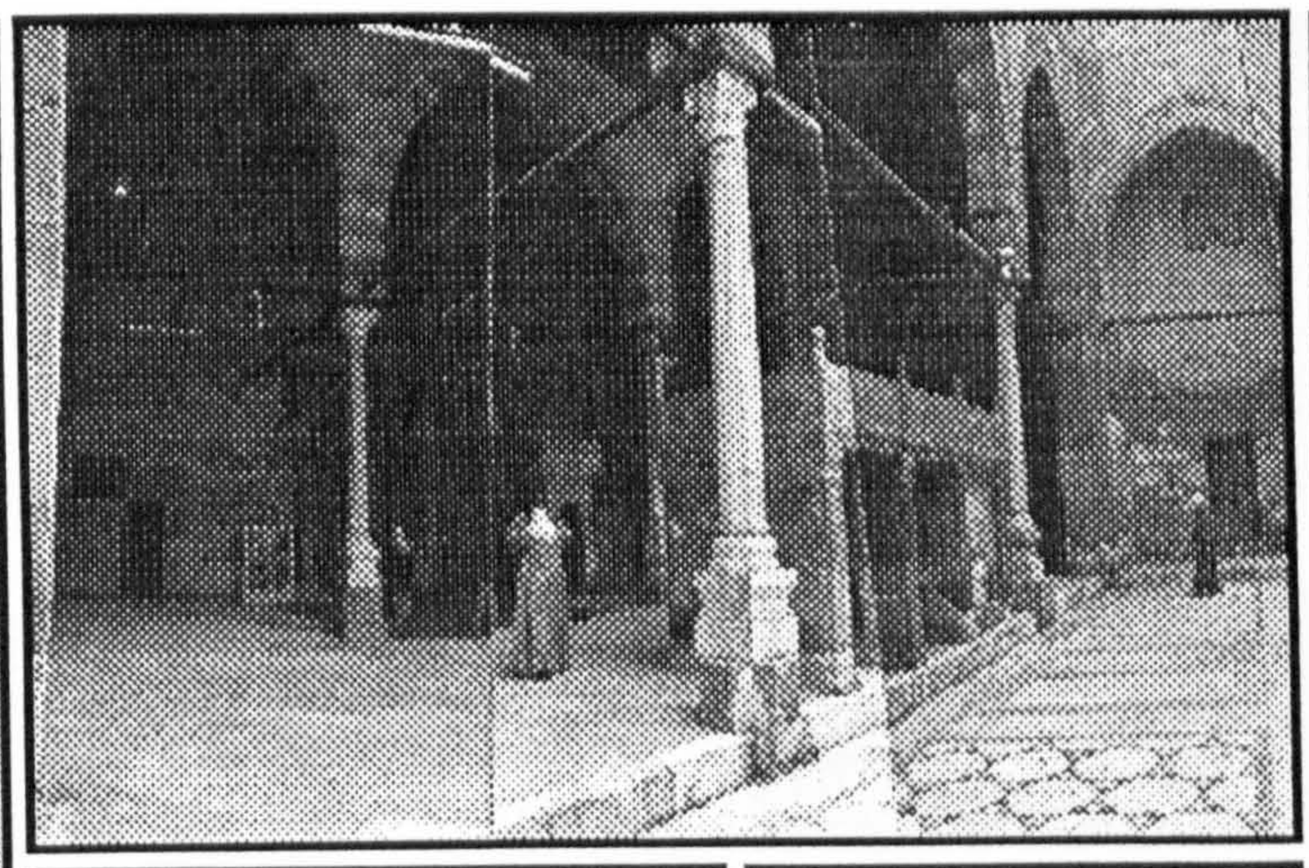
Section

## ARCHES & IWANS

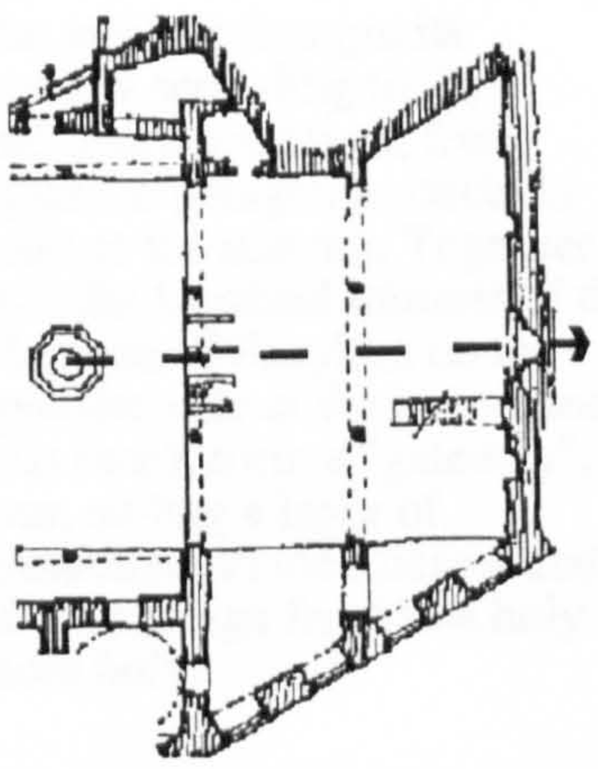
Arches are pointed and stilted, emphasizing the vertical connection between the building and the Heavens. It is interesting to note that only two of the iwans were designed to be used (that of the qibla and the one opposite), the two others perpendicular to the first did not accomodate any utilitarian function. This clearly indicates that the symbolism of quadrature arising from the four-iwan plan generated from the centre was responsible for this internal organization.



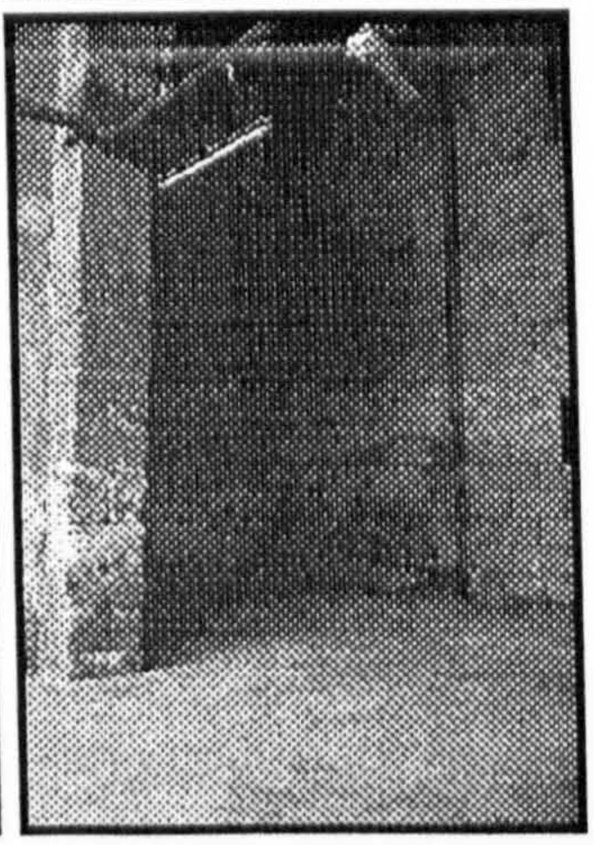
## PRAYING HALL



The qibla iwan is the most dominant in the interior, thus, indicating the direction of prayer. Pillared arcades support the roof: the pillars recalling the image of transcendence and of the number one (the oneness of God), while the pointed arches representing the transition of terrestrial to celestial as interpreted in the previous cases.

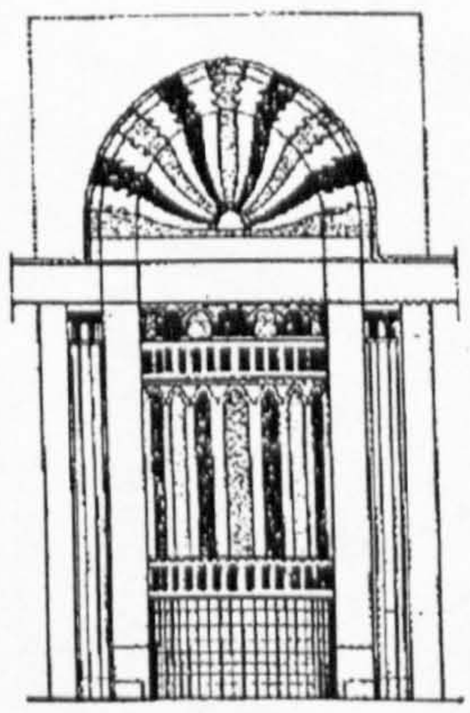


The centre of the courtyard is axially aligned to the mihrab, depth is accentuated by dividing the square space into three aisles - the widest leading to the mihrab. Laterality of the first few rows is achieved by incorporating all ground space available. The vertical was emphasized by a dome above the mihrab (no longer exists).



## MIHRAB

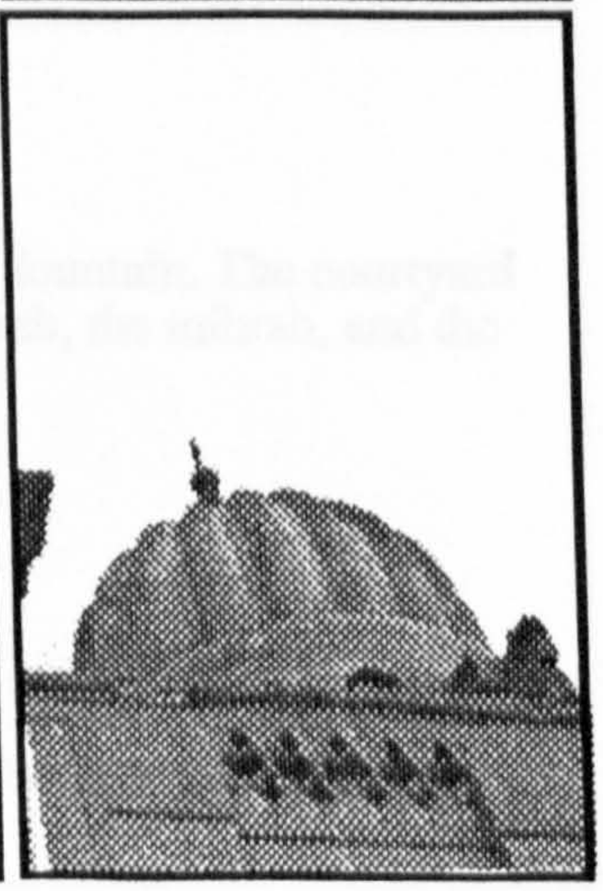
The multi-layered mihrab is composed of a series of pointed arches in different planes, the deepest forming a niche. The overall effect is one of depth as well as of verticality. The innermost niche, has a lozenge in its centre which radiates marble patterns in different colours, recalling the verse of Light (see interpretation of the mihrab of the Mosque of Baybars)



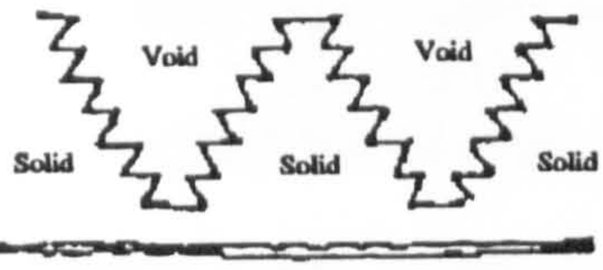
## DOME

The mausoleum dome is ribbed, tapering and pointed so as to accelerate ascension. The dome follows the traditional change of sections from square (terrestrial pillars) to octagon (Divine Throne) to circle (celestial sphere or heavens) culminating at a point (Unity) in the apex according to the cosmological model explained earlier.

Dome Elevation

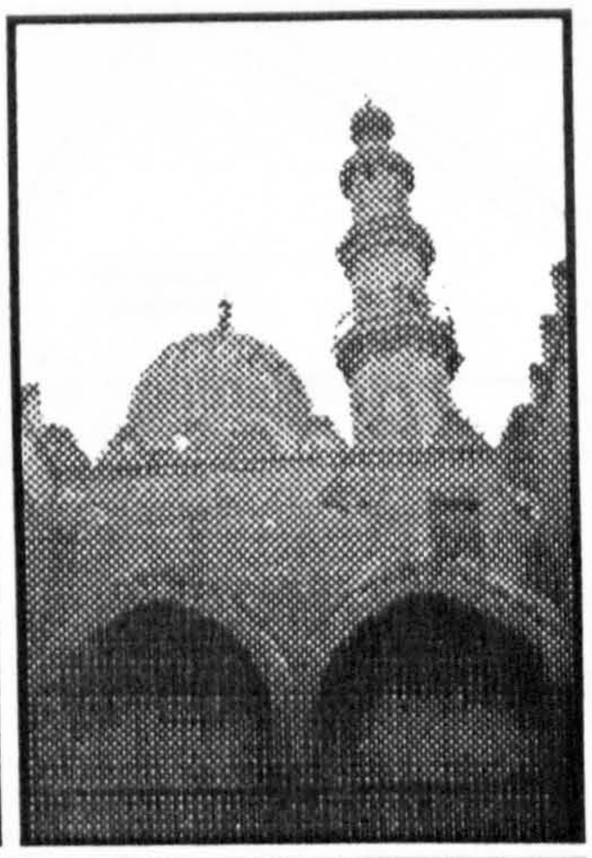


## CRESTINGS



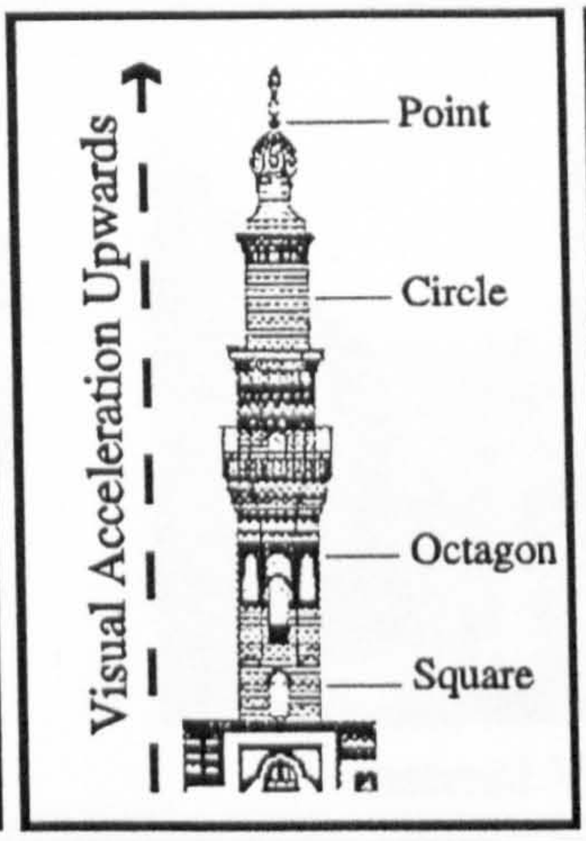

External & Internal Geometrical Crenellations

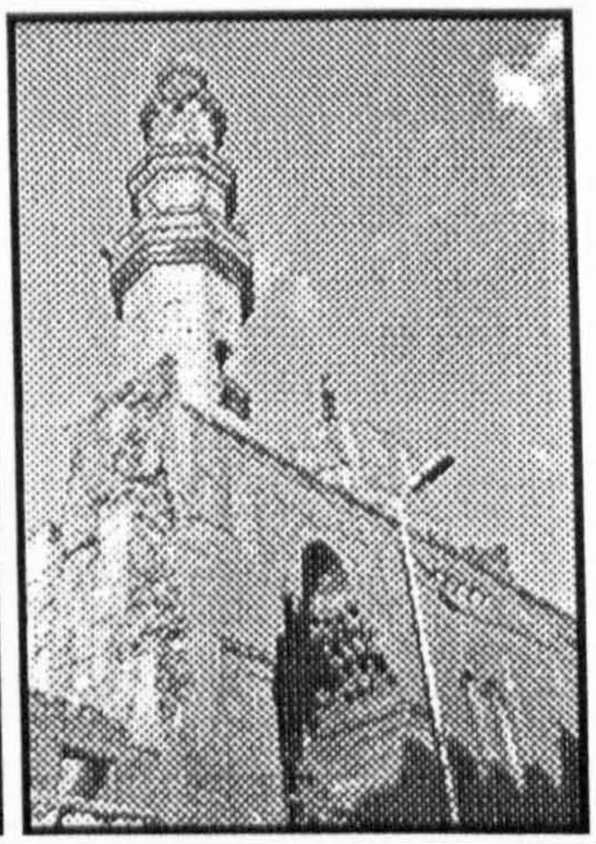
Geometrical crenellations are used for the crestings both internally and externally. (See interpretation of the crestings of the Mosque of Baybars).



## MINARET

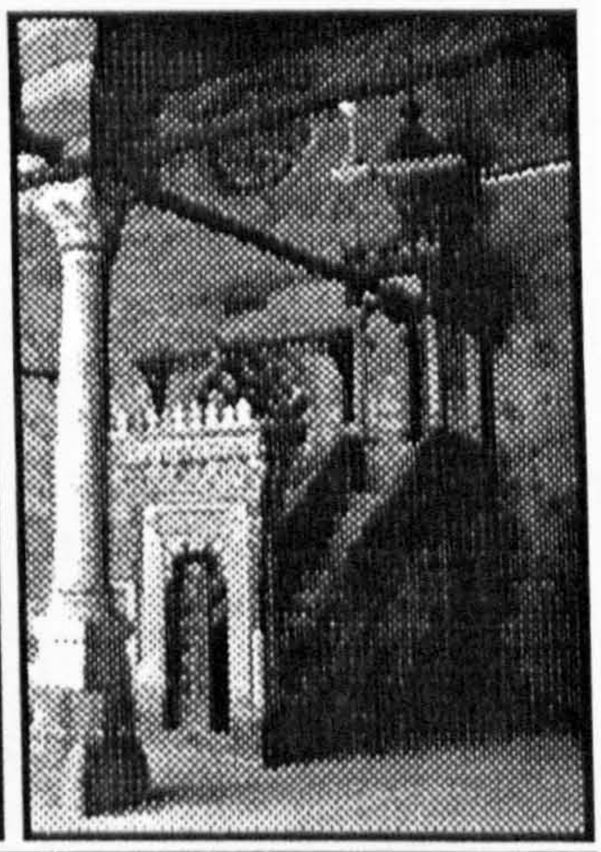
The minaret changes its sections according to the traditional prototype, from square to octagon to circle to point at the summit. Together with the identical minaret of the Khanqah of Sheykhu on the opposite side of the street (see next case), form a "gateway", thus, adding a layer of symbolism to the minaret that of the passage from less holy to more holy.



## STALACTITES

Externally, stalactites are used in the portal; they create a cave-like effect by smoothely bringing in the lesser holy facade to the inner more holy one. Internally, stalactites are used in the "built-in" marble minbar, they are set in rows and "growing" horizontally and vertically. (See symbolism of stalctites in the Mosque of Baybars).



**Remarks:**

Prototypic Features:

1) The courtyard centre coincides with that of the octagonal water fountain. The courtyard elements are aligned with the centre; e.g. the dome above the mihrab, the mihrab, and the four iwans.

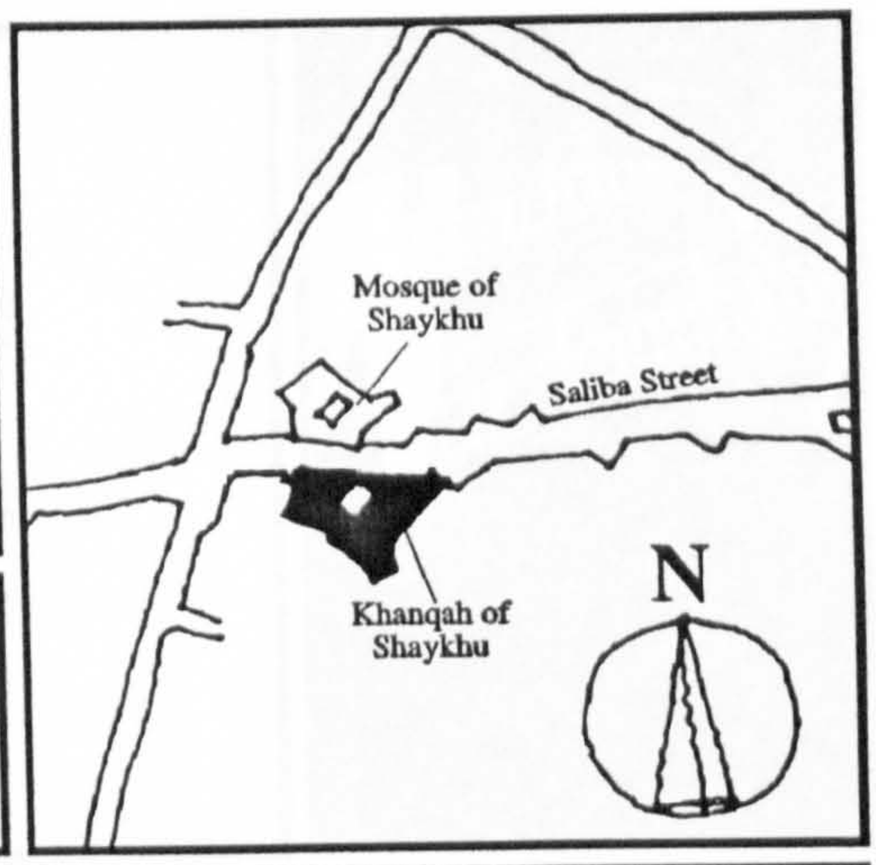
2) The dome and the minaret follow the Sufi cosmological model.

Unique Features:

1) Four iwans are incorporated although two of them cannot have been used due to their small size. This shows that the symbolic organization was more important than the utilitarian function.

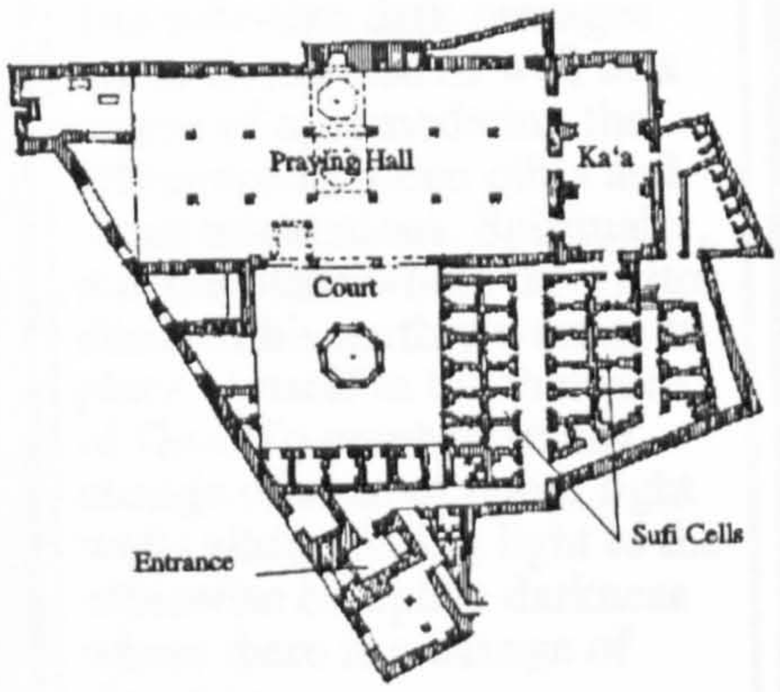
# The Khanqah of Sheykhu (Saliba Street)

## (756 A.H., 1355 A.D.)

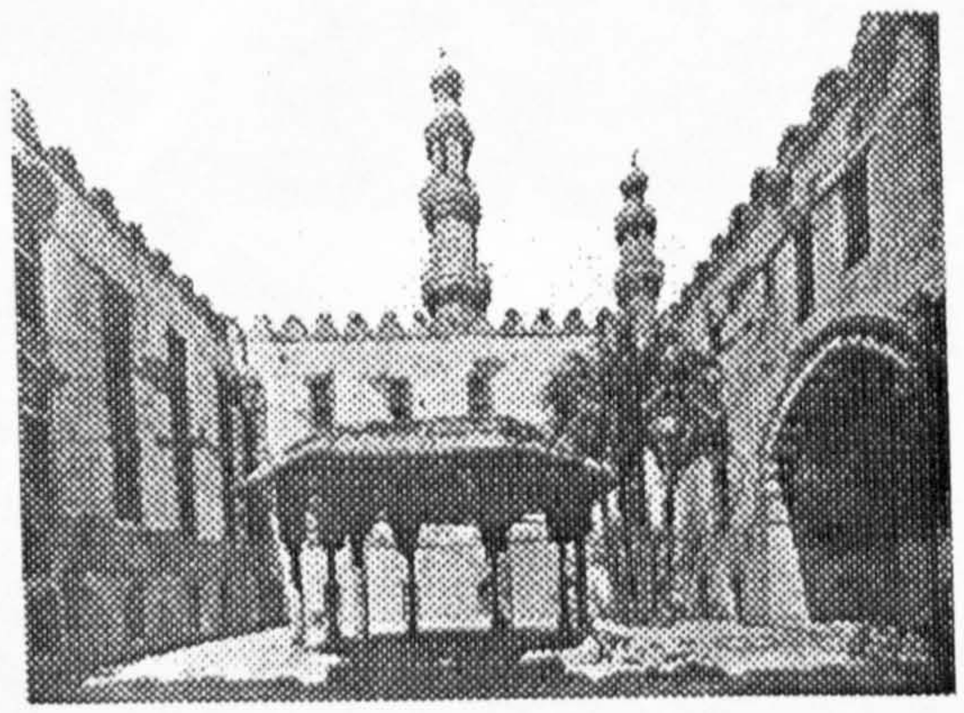



## Khanqah / Mosque Type

## (Riwaq, Iwan, Sufi Cells, Domes)

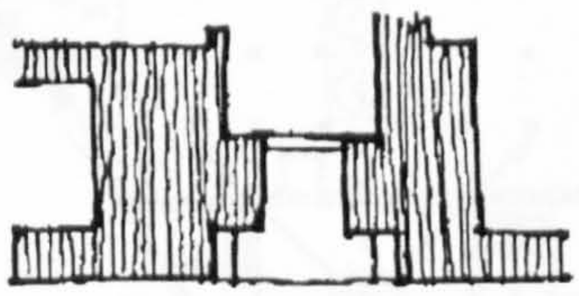



Plan

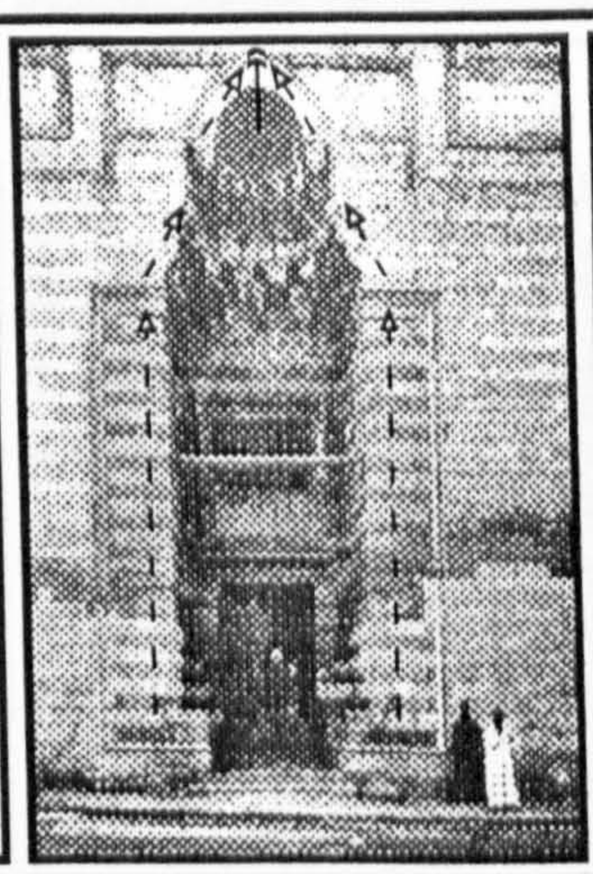


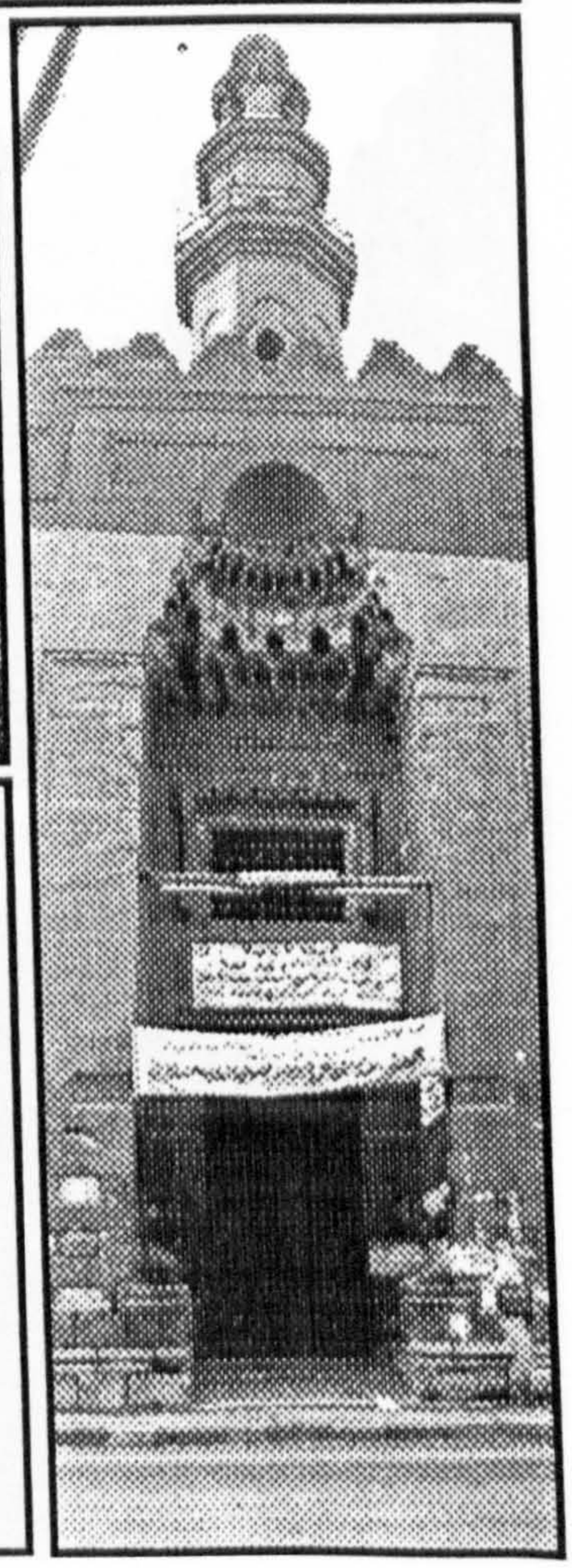
Internal View of Sahn

PORTALS



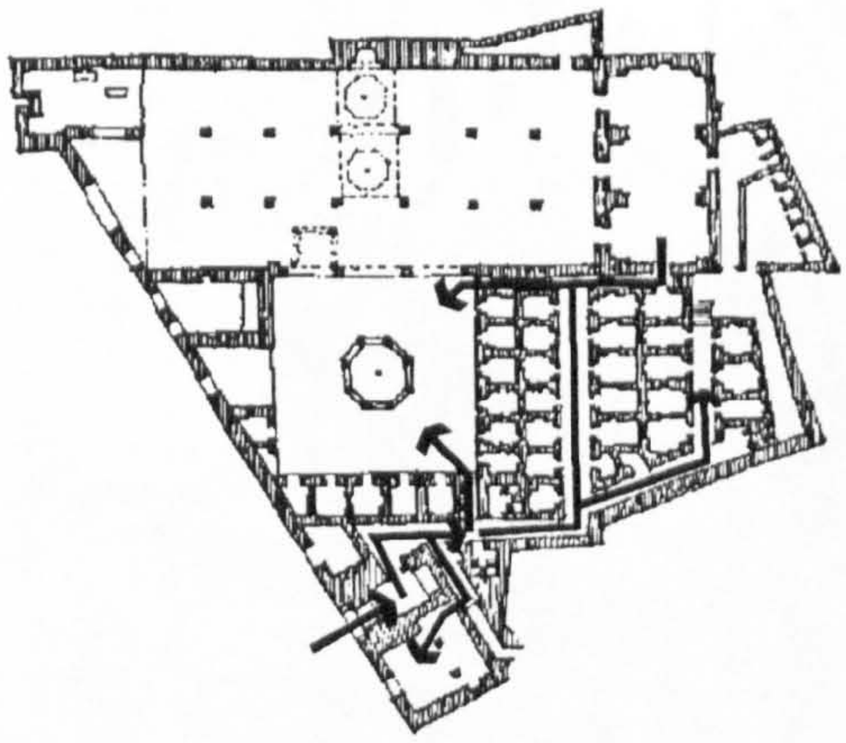
Portal Plan

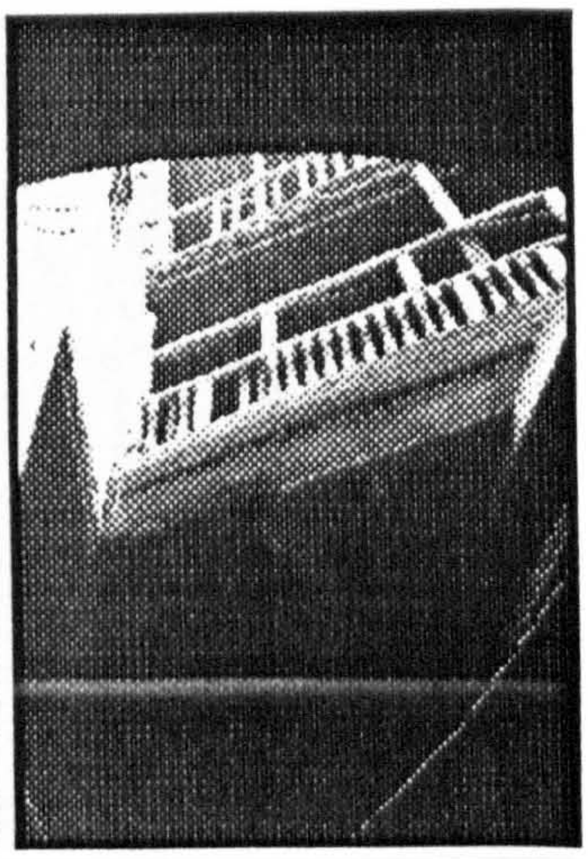




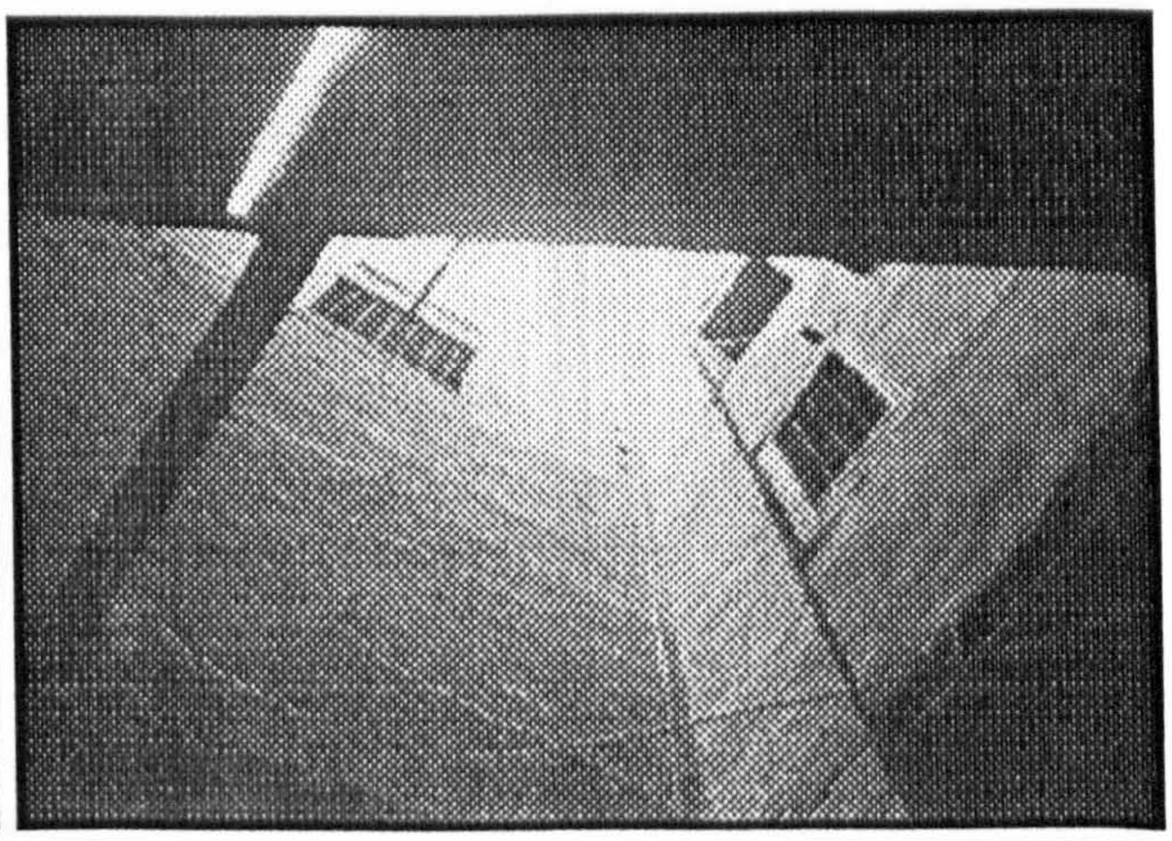
The main portal consists of a pointed arched niche with stalactites. The form of the portal duplicates that of the Mosque of Shaykhu on the opposite side of the street (built six years earlier by the same patron). The shape of the silhouette of the recessed portal promotes verticality, while the use of stalactites creates a cave-like effect and as all the previous cases, brings the outer less holy plane of the facade to the inner more holy interior. The sight, led to the summit of the pointed arch is lifted by momentum to the building top to meet the crestings, then the ascending form of the minaret, and from there to the sky.

## ENTRANCE HALL & MAJAZ

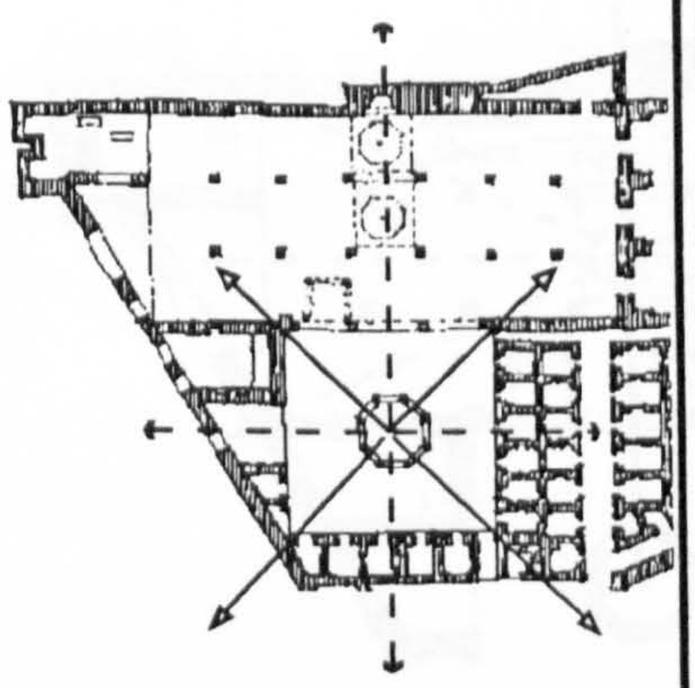


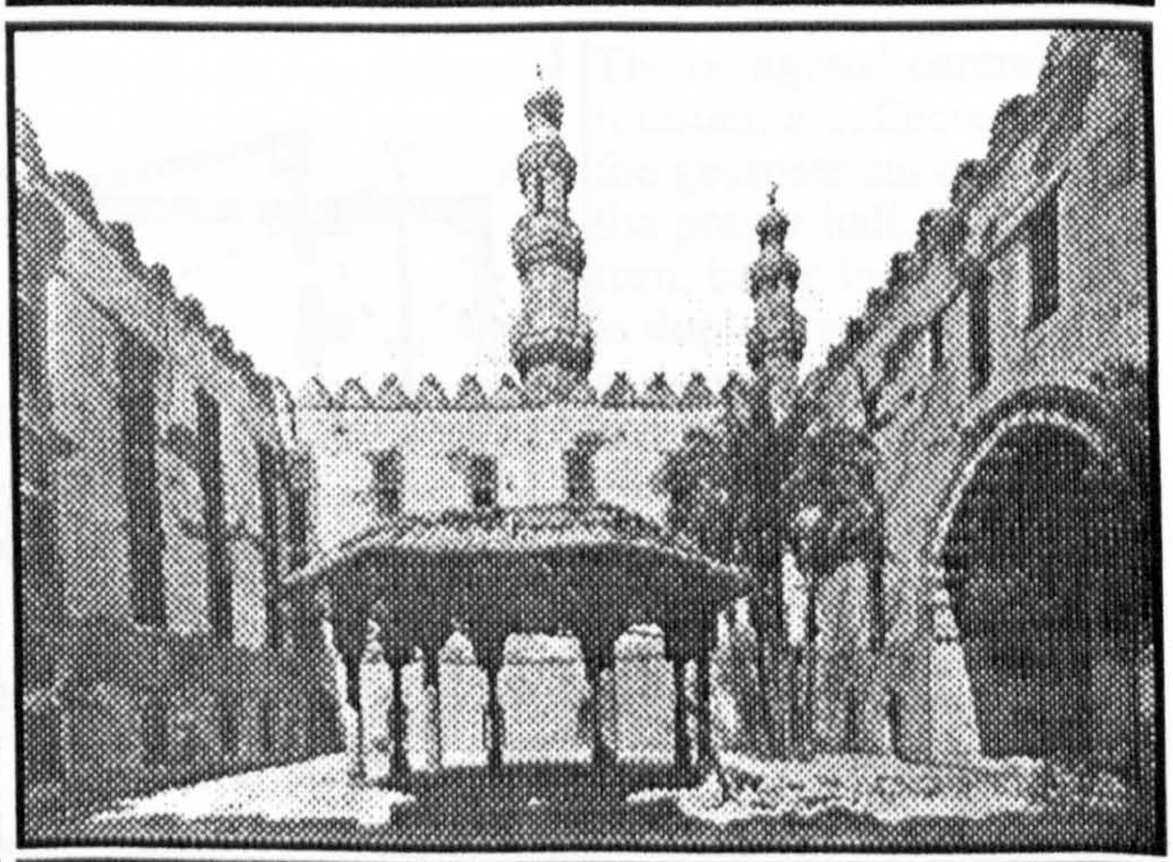


The tube-like dark passages act as circulation as well as a means of accomodating the difference between qibla and street orientations. Spiritually, it is the place where the visitor discards his earthly worries to place himself in the Presence of God. To emphasize this change of state of mind, light wells allow glaring light to the otherwise complete darkness where there is a change of direction.

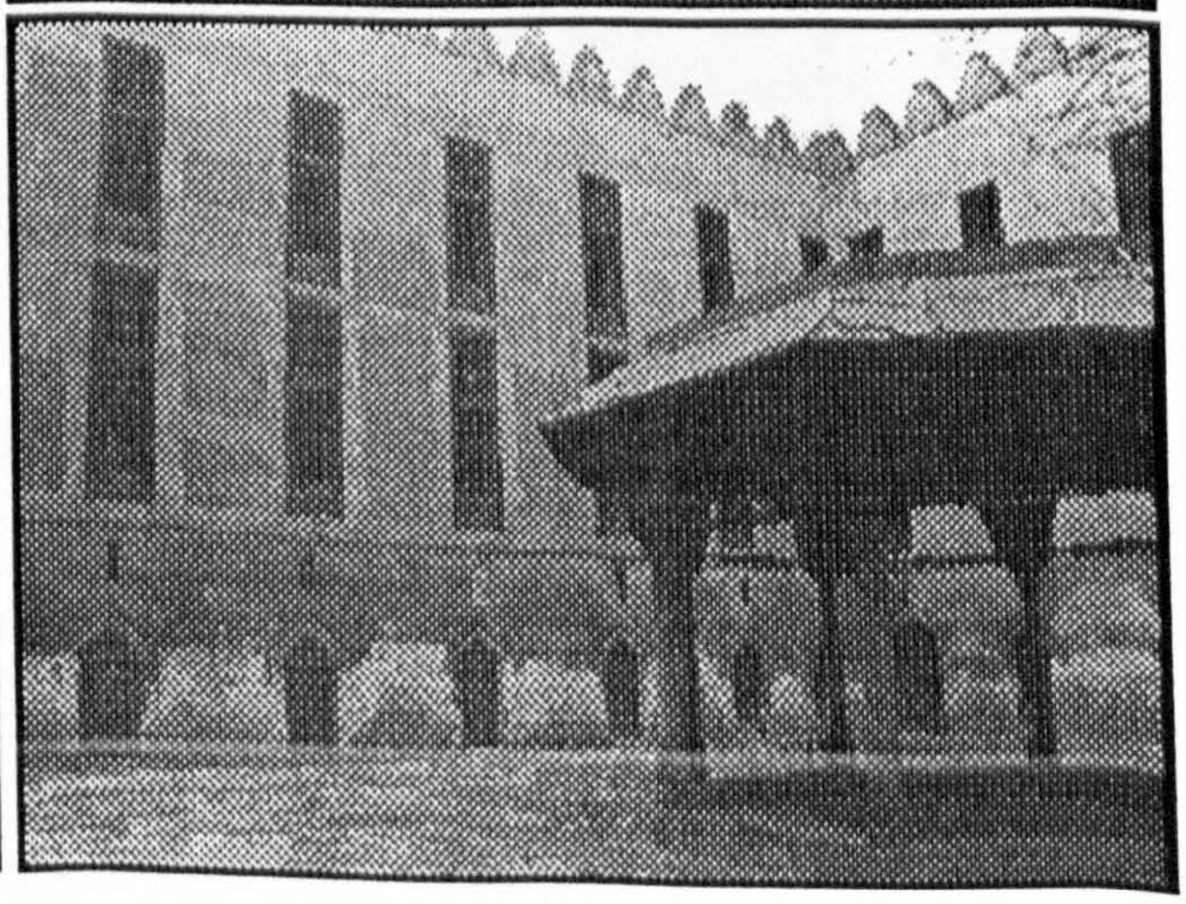


## COURTYARD & FOUNTAIN

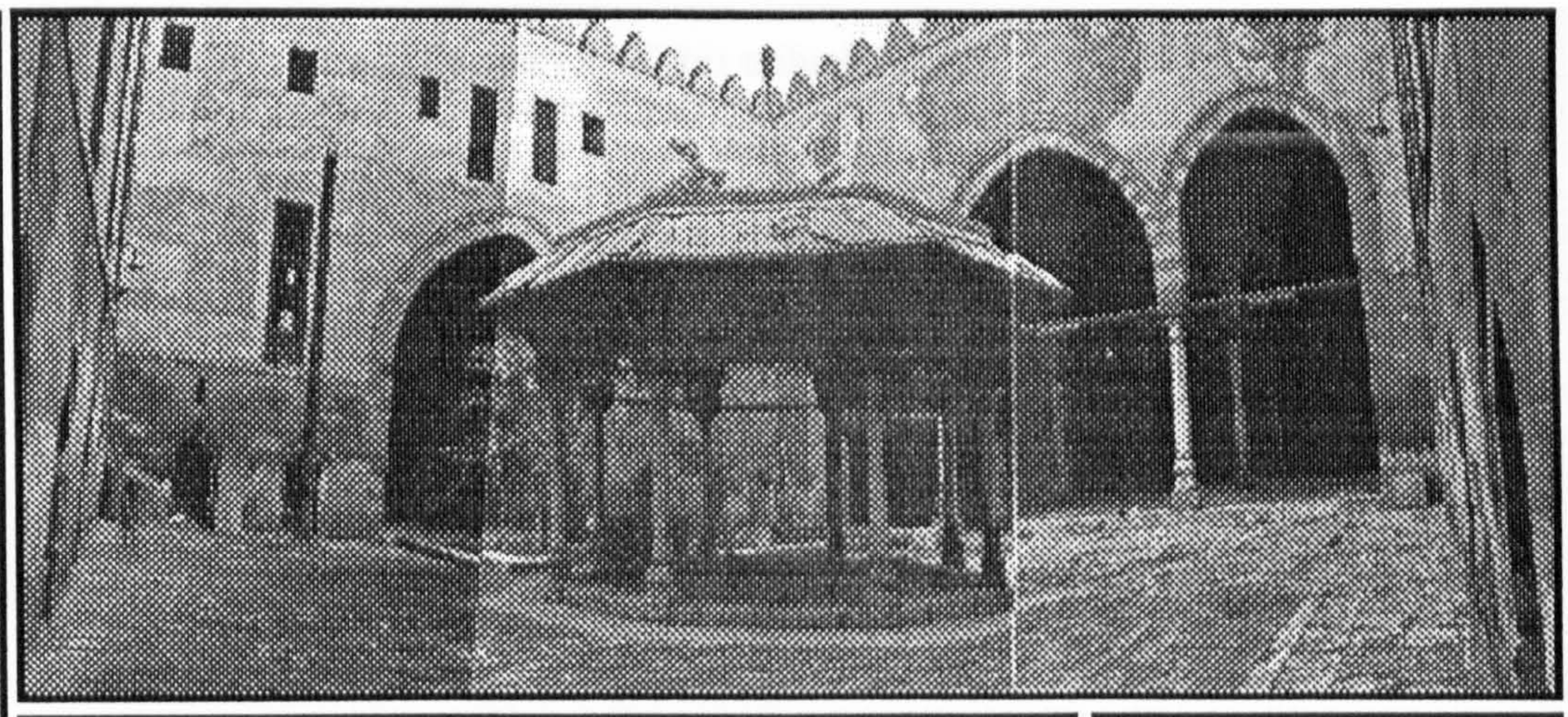




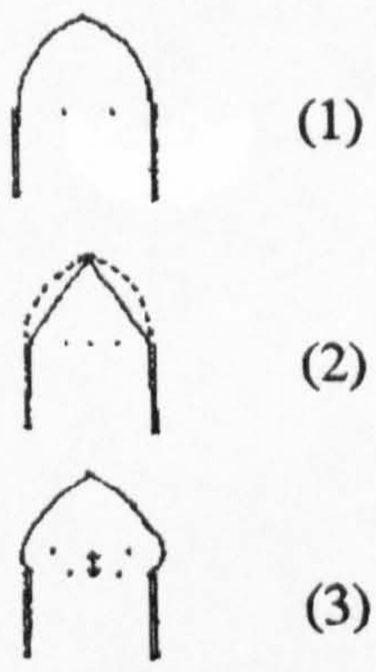
The centre of the courtyard is emphasized with a traditional octagonal water fountain - originally roofed by a wooden dome which no longer survives. This central fountain is the generating point of the entire internal organization of the khanqah. The octagon in the centre of the quadrangular courtyard (emphasized by four mabkharas above the crestings at the corners) represents the Throne and the four pillars carrying the celestial sphere.



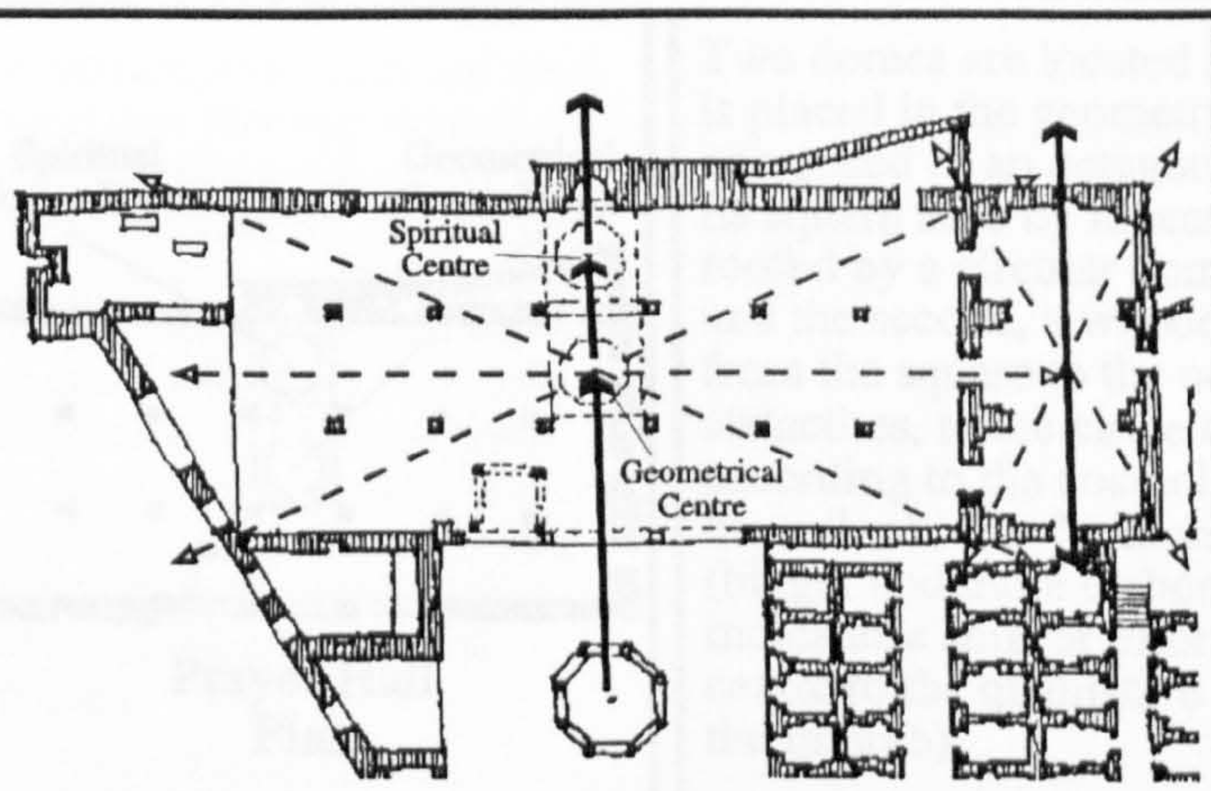
## ARCHES & IWANS



Arches used in this Khanqah are of three types:
1) Pointed arches in the prayer hall that gradually lead vision upwards to the summit at a point.
2) Triangular arches used in the Sufi cells which have a vertical resultant but do not shift from terrestrial to celestial as smoothely as in the case of the pointed arch.
3) Slightly horse-shoe shaped pointed arches of the iwan which produce a composite effect aiming at the vertical: first, by the pointed effect, and second, by the upward sensation of shifting the centre upwards (resulting from the horse-shoe shape).

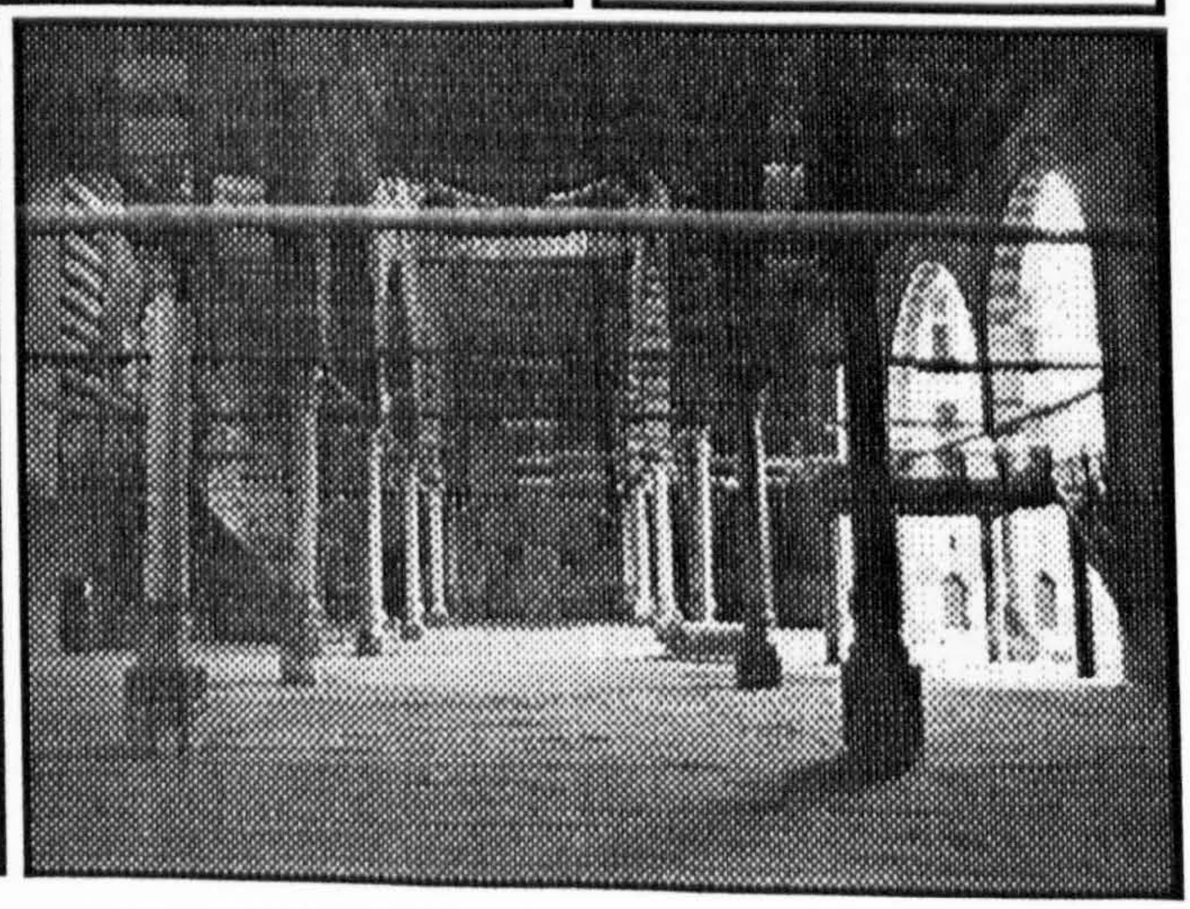



## PRAYING HALL



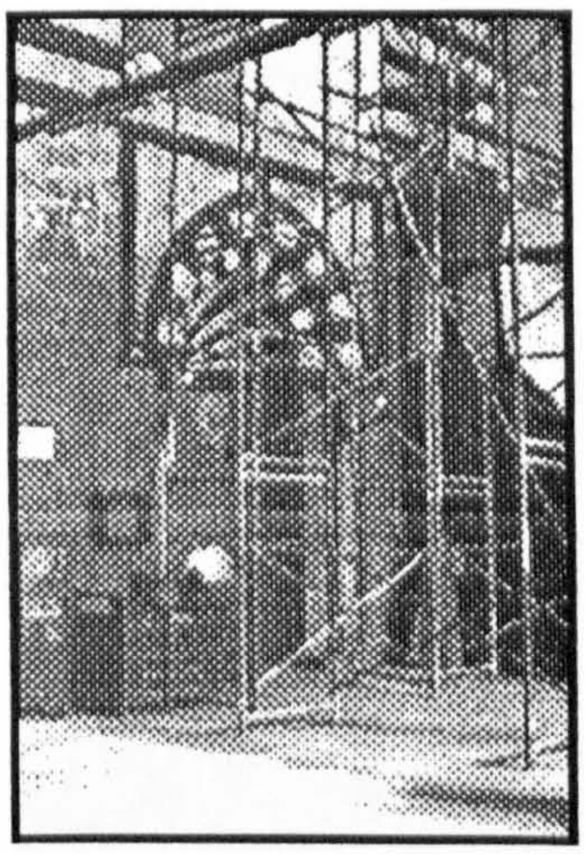

The octagonal central fountain is reflected in the geometrical centre of the prayer hall. This in turn, being insignificant is duplicated in an elaborated form in the dome above the mihrab (the mihrab is the symbol of the Ka'ba which is the spiritual centre in Sufi terms).

The pillar repeated in the prayer iwan borrows the attributes of the hypostyle mosque in this iwan madrasa plan. Symbolically, the internal organization of these pillars represent the repetition of the affirmation of faith (the Shahada) in Sufi terms; while their extension in space bringing about the celestial qualities mentioned in the previous cases.

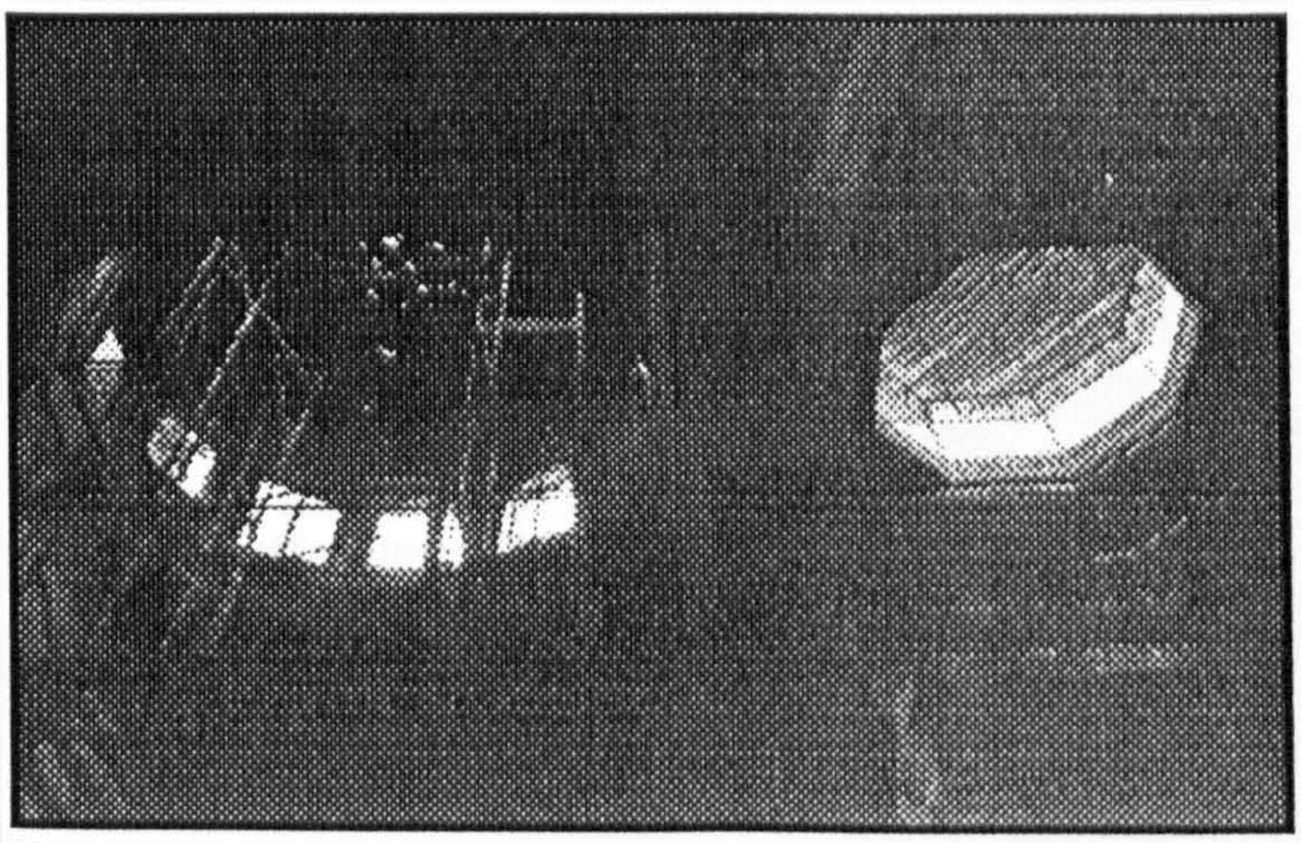


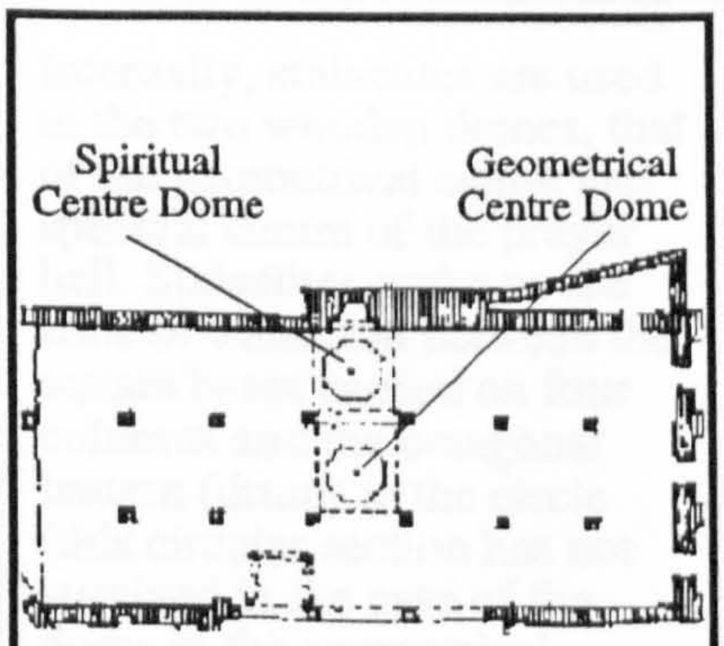
## MIHRAB

The typical form and decoration of this mihrab reflects verticality by its pointed shape and depth (interiority) by its concavity and execution in several planes. At the centre of the semi-pointed dome in the niche is a rosette from which radiate alternatingly coloured marble patterns that recall the verse of Light. (See interpretation of the mihrab in the Mosque of Baybars).



## DOMES

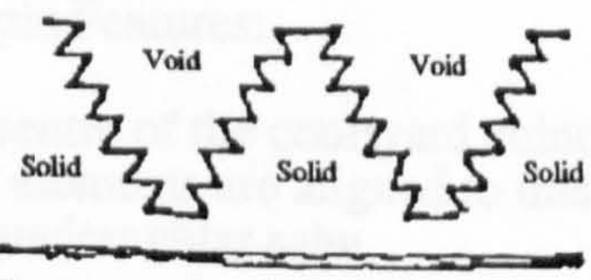





Prayer Hall
Plan

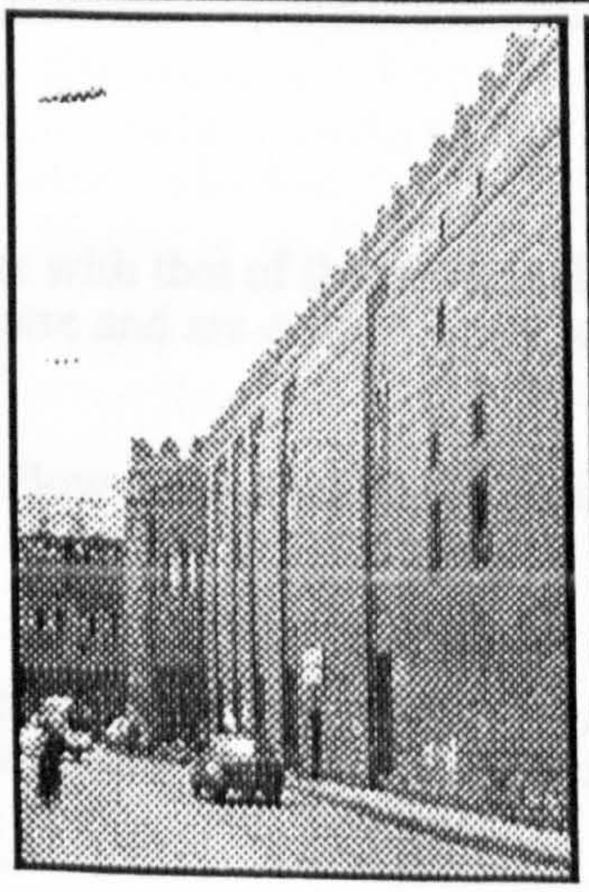
Two domes are located in the prayer hall: the first is placed in the geometrical centre, and is composed of an octagonal lantern that connects to its square base by means of stalactites (and was roofed by a circular dome that no longer survives); and the second, a wooden dome that shifts sections from the square to the octagon by means of stalactites, to the circle and finally to Unity according to the cosmological model, placed above the mihrab. The "seniority" of the later dome (bigger and more elaborate than the other) clearly indicates a shift of priority from the quantitative centre to the qualitative centre (to the bay above the mihrab).

## CRESTINGS



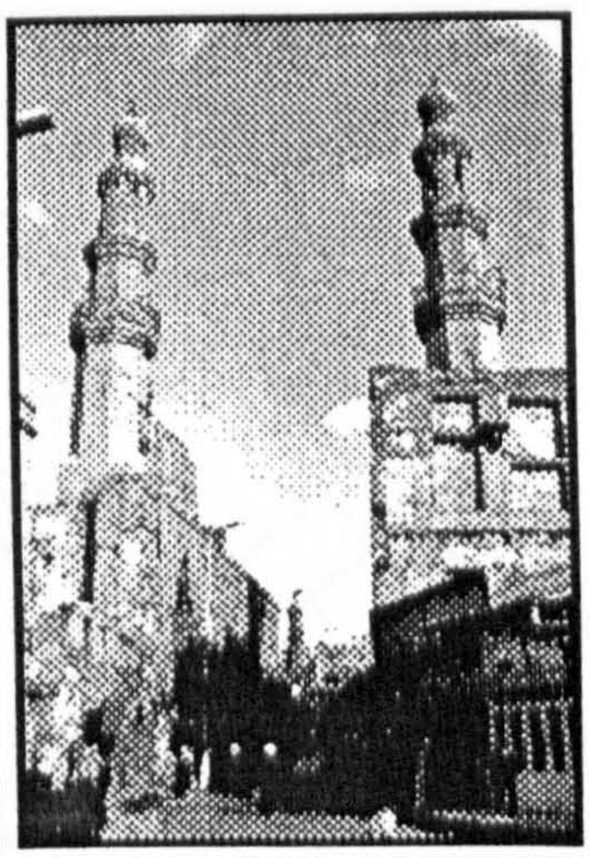

Geometrical Crenellations

Externally, and internally, geometrical crenellations are used. (See interpretation of crestings in the Mosque of Baybars).



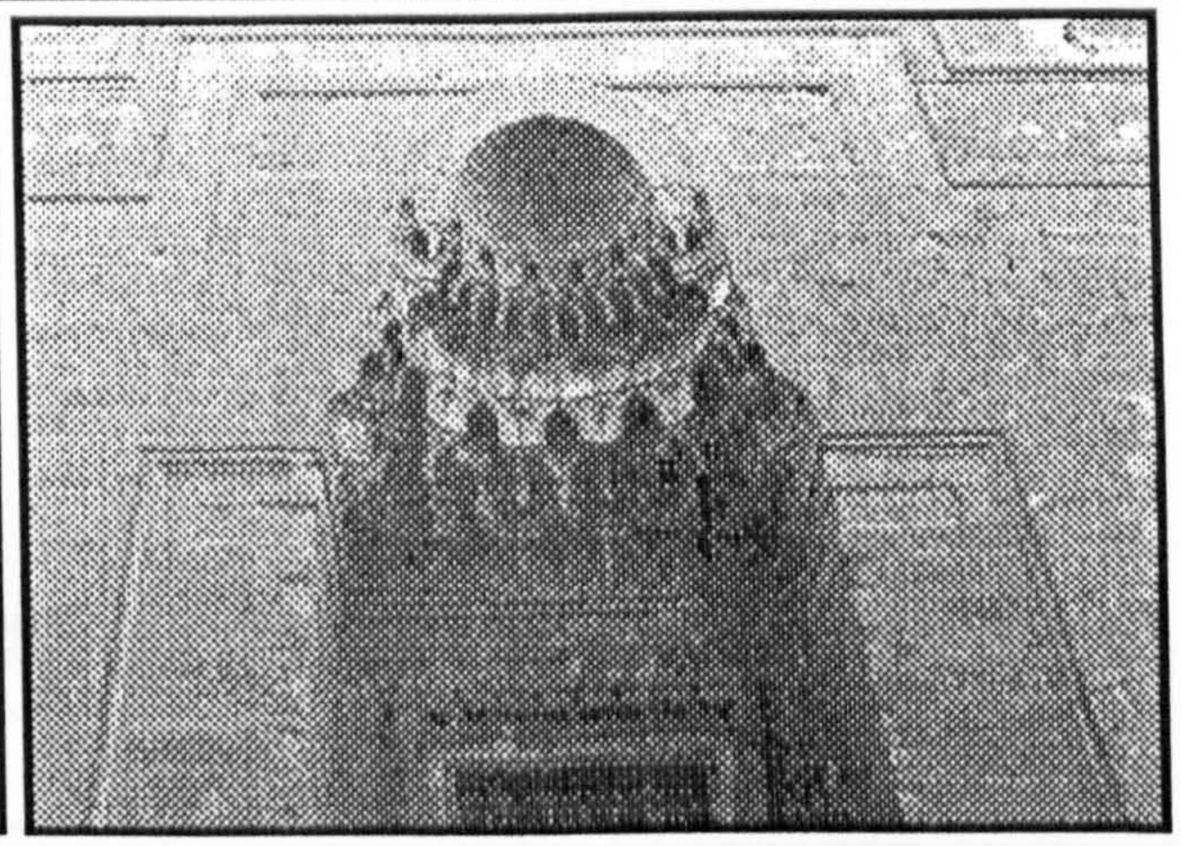
MINARET

The minaret of the Khanqah of Shaykhu is identical to that of the Mosque built on the opposite side of the street. Both are symbols of transcendence and have visual ascending qualities that are accelerated by the change in sections from square to octagon to circle to point (as seen in the previous cases). Whether intentional or not, the two minarets opposite one another recall the earlier Fatimid gateways of Cairo in al-Mu'ezz street. This would add a further dimension to their symbolism, that of transition from exterior (less holy street) to interior (more holy interior).

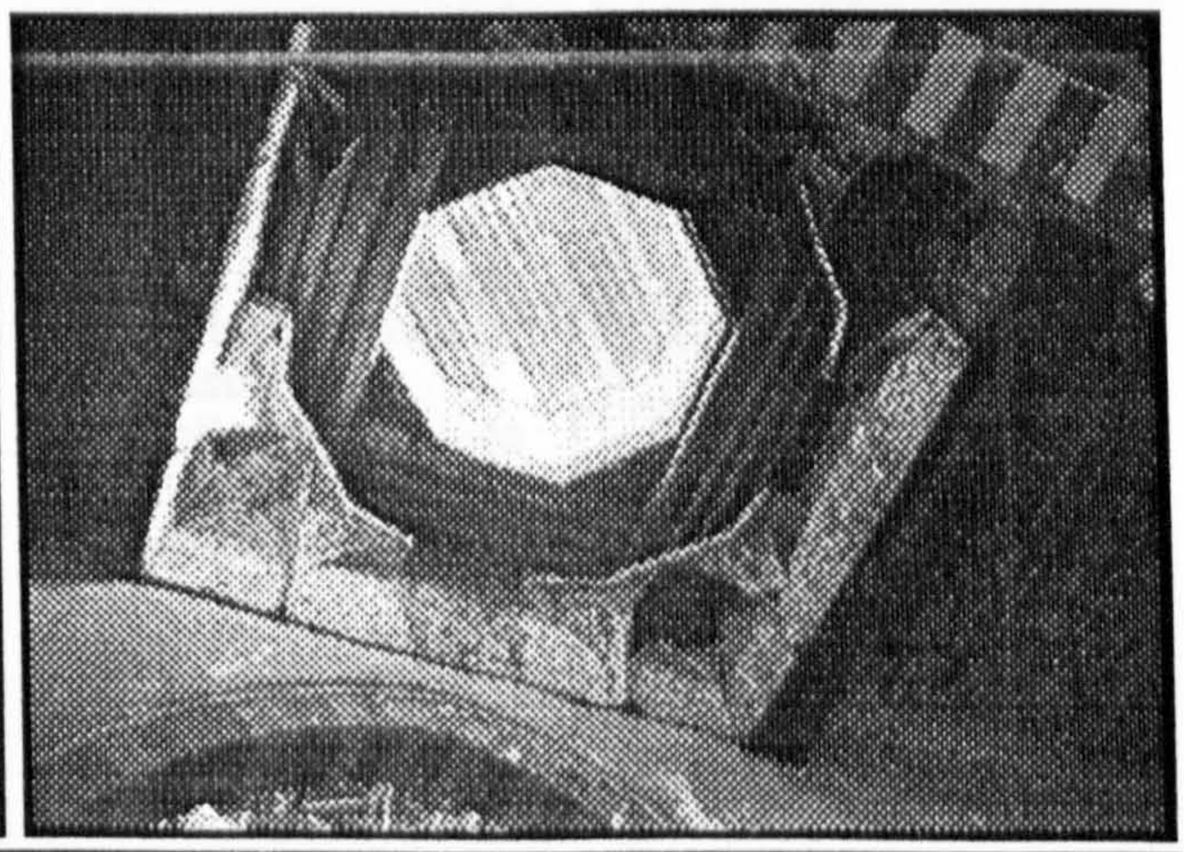


STALACTITES

Externally, stalactites are used in the portal to smoothely merge the outer facade with the inner in a manner that is not abrupt. The elaborate use of the muqarnas in this khanqah (identical to that of the opposite portal of the Mosque of Sheykhu) creates a cave-like effect involving the symbolism mentioned earlier.



Internally, stalactites are used in the two wooden domes, that of the geometrical centre and spiritual centre of the prayer hall. Stalactites make up the zone of transition between the square bases carried on four columns and the octagonal lantern (drum) to the circle (this circular section has not survived in the case of the dome in the geometrical centre).



**Remarks:**

Prototypic Features:

1) The centre of the courtyard coincides with that of the octagonal water fountain. The internal elements are aligned to this centre and are consequently related to the four corners of the quadrangular sahn.

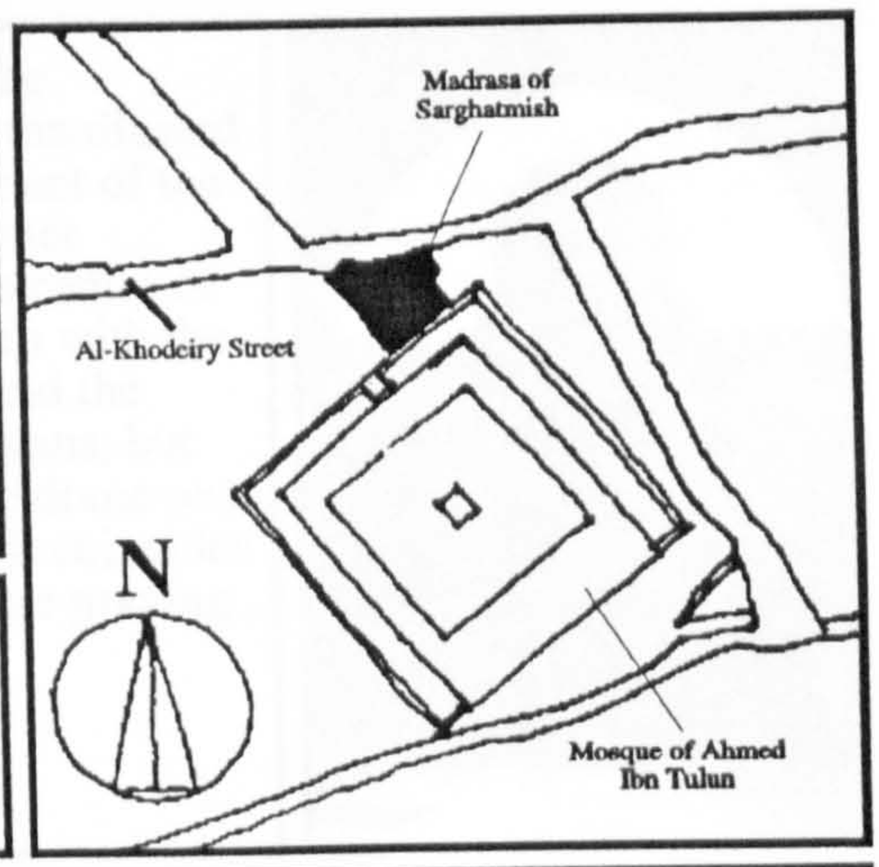
2) The domes, fountain, and minaret follow the Sufi cosmological model.

Unique Features:

1) The geometrical centre of the praying area (the quantitative) is a wooden domical structure, while the spiritual centre (the qualitative) is an elaborate wooden dome placed over the mihrab.

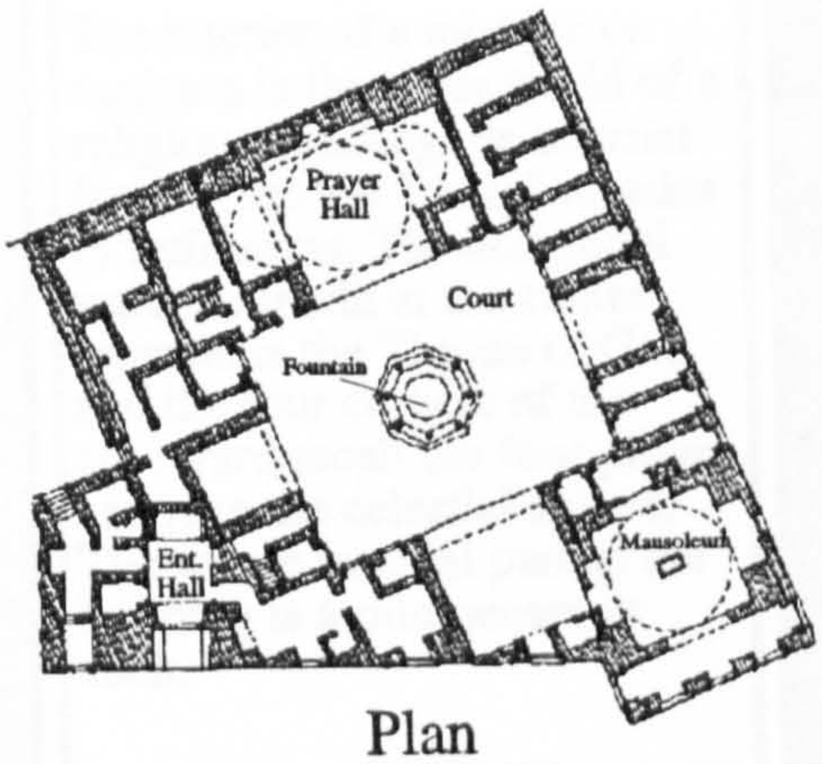
# The Madrasa of Sarghatmish (Al-Khodeiry Street)

# (757 A.H., 1356 A.D.)

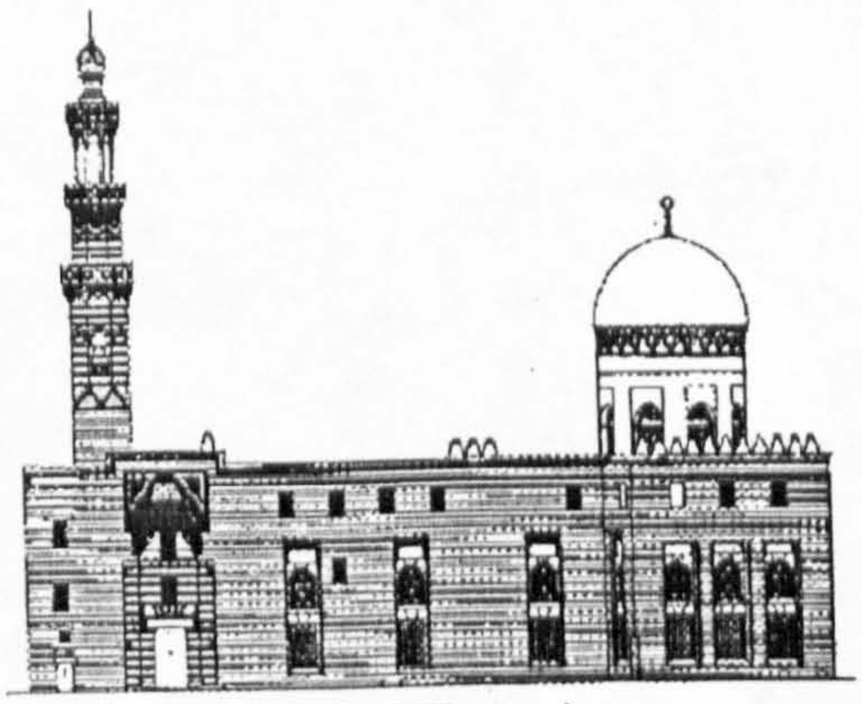



## Mosque / Madrasa Type

## (4 Iwans, Mausoleum, Sufi Cells)

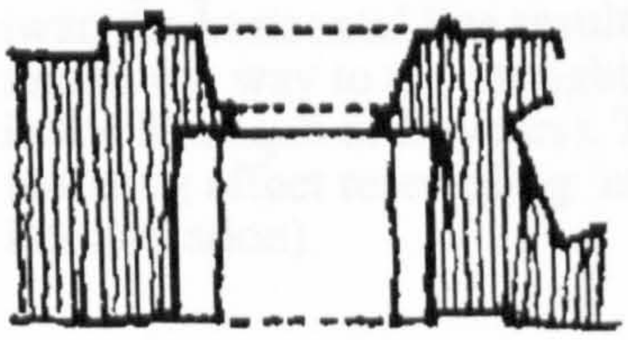



Plan



Main Elevation

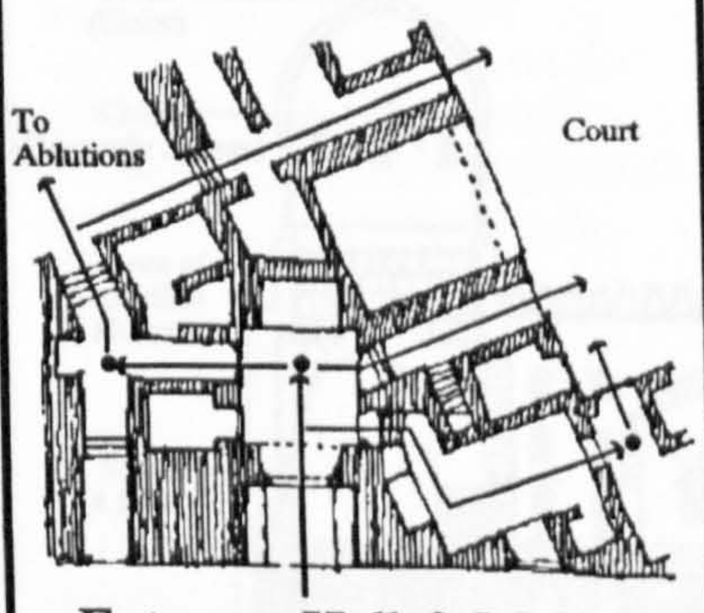
PORTAL



Main Portal Plan

A typical prototype of a Mamluk portal: cave-like, recessed from the less holy street, pointed arched, and with stalactites. (See visual and symbolic implications of the portal of the Mosque of Aslam).

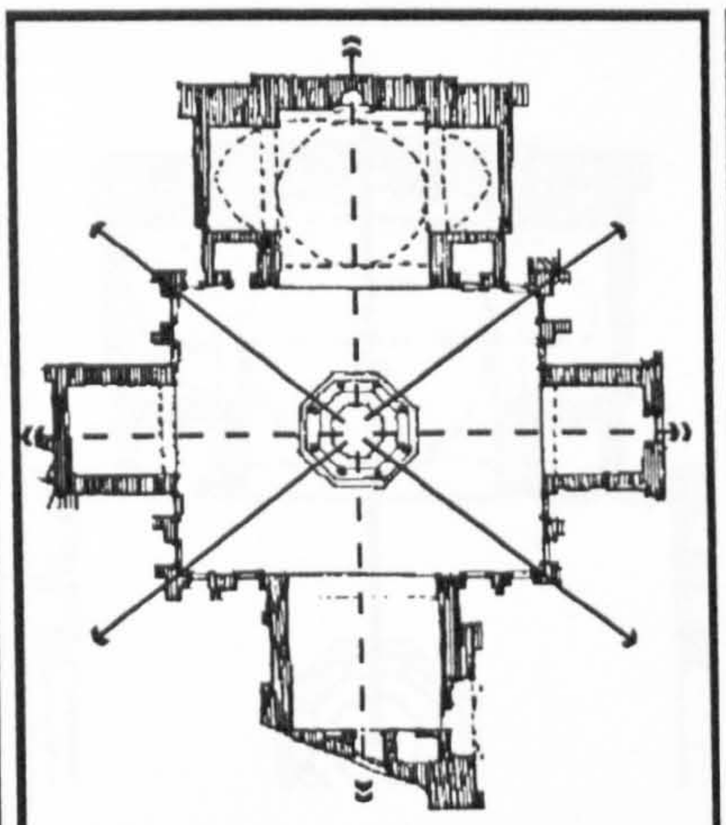
ENT. HALL & MAJAZ




Entrance Hall & Majaz Plan

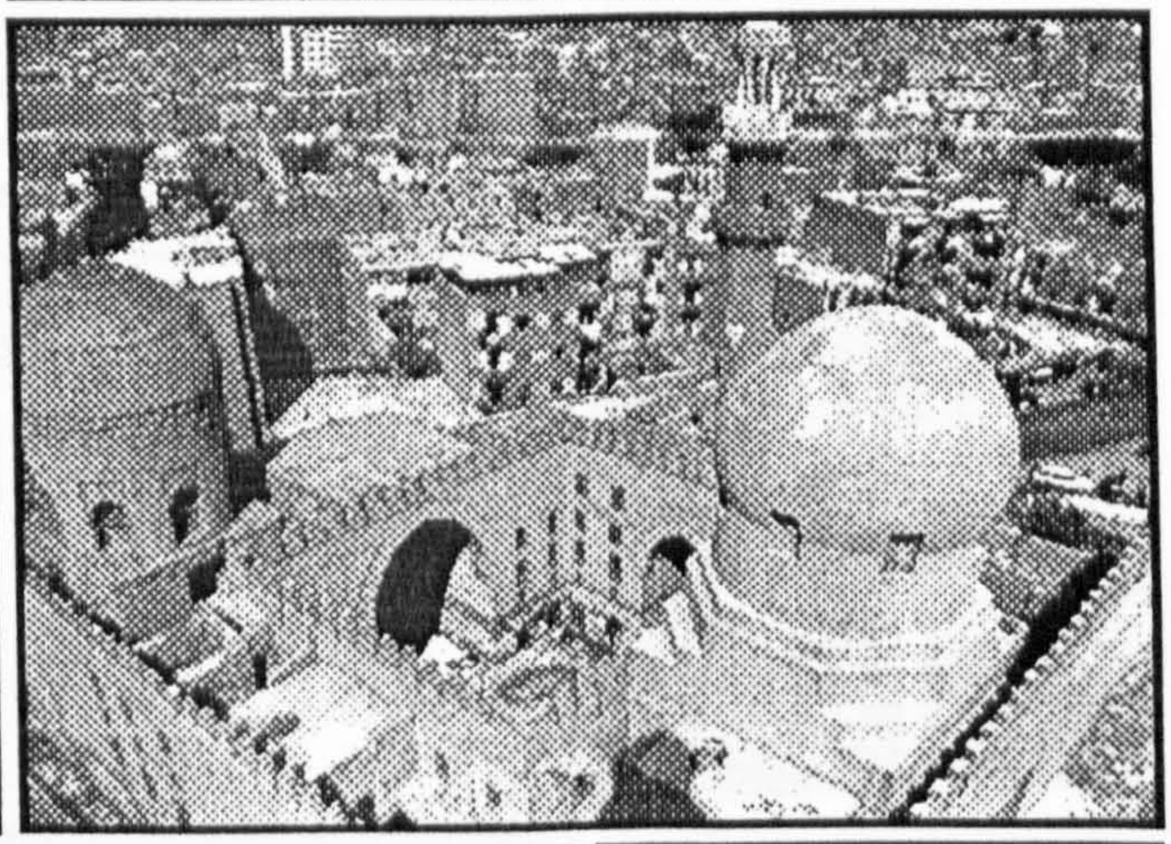
The entrance hall and majaz take the form of dark, winding passageways that help to disconnect the visitor's atate of mind from the outside less holy concerns. It is by seeing the glaring light at the end of the majaz corridors that he knows that he is approaching the inner more holy space of the building: the central court.

## COURTYARD & FOUNTAIN



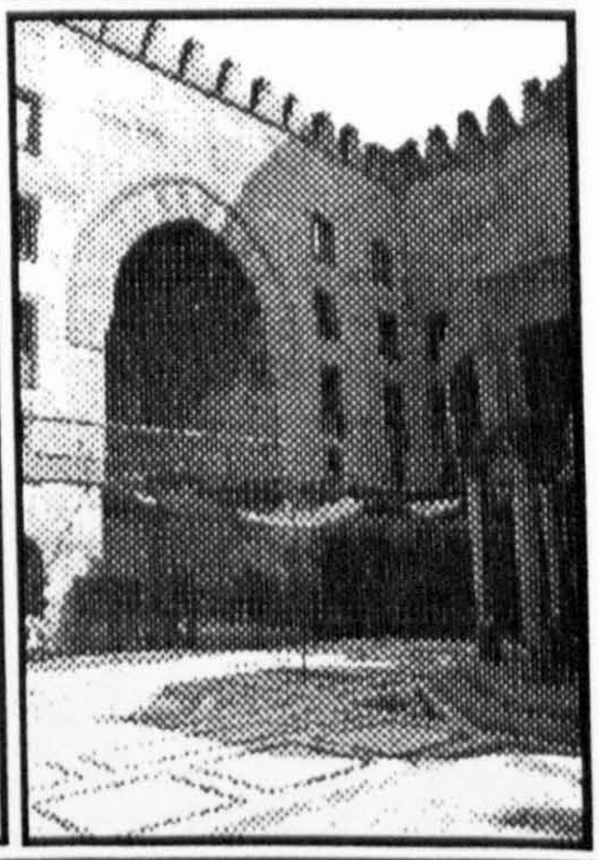
Axiality in the courtyard is manifested in the alignment of the octagonal water fountain (the centre of the courtyard) with the prayer hall and the remaining iwans, but also with the dome over the mihrab (it coincides with the entire praying hall space).

The interior of a mosque or madrasa is the inner world of a religious building, its internal facades are the "inner" facades in Sufi terms. The octagonal water fountain at the centre represents the Throne of God and the four corners of the courtyard recall the four pillars carrying the celestial sphere. The whole internal part of the building is a microcosm as such.

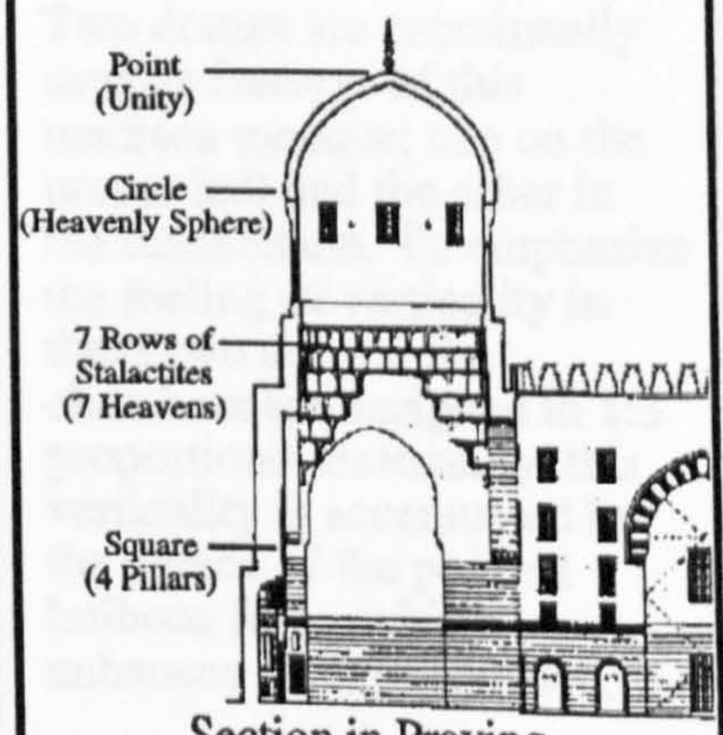


## ARCHES & IWANS

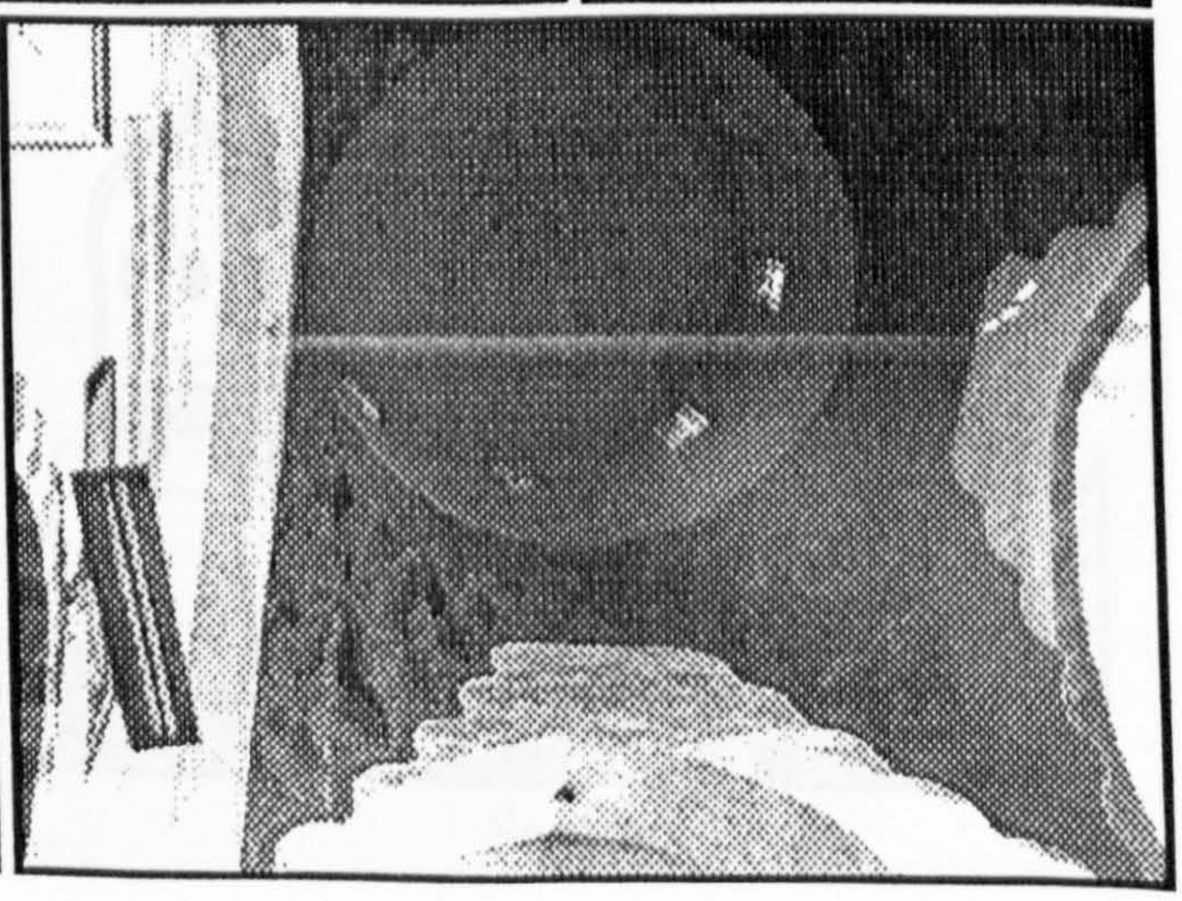
Arches and iwans, are pointed and constructed in ablaq masonary (alternating red and white stones). The pointed form of the arch and the iwan produces a vertical sense leading upwards to the Heavens, while in the pointed iwan the horizontal line resulting from its "growth" recalls the way to the Straight Path (as explained earlier in the Khanqah of Baybars). The use of ablaq creates a radiating effect resembling mihrabs (see earlier interpretation).



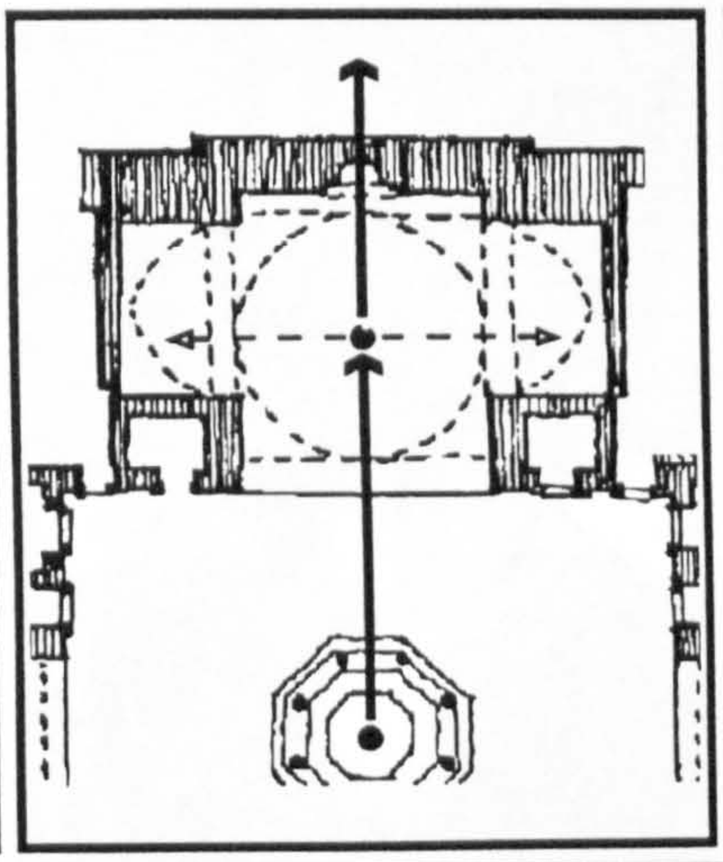
## PRAYING HALL




Section in Praying Hall Dome



## PRAYING HALL

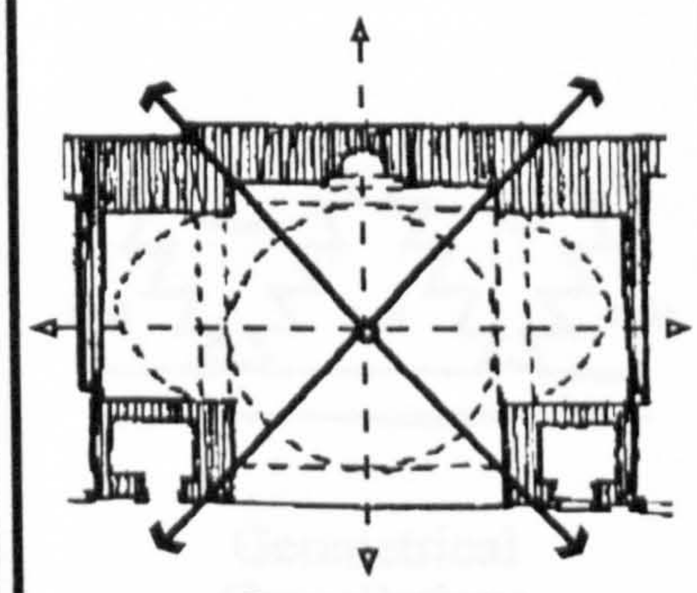


The prayer hall is roofed by a dome which gives both the feeling of centrality as well as an accentuated sense of verticality. To bring about the laterality of the prayer hall (required for longer rows), two pointed iwans extend the central space on either side of the domed area. By the axiality of the prayer area with the centre of the interior (fountain), depth and qibla orientation are achieved. Thus, the prayer hall organization sums up the requirements of horizontal Makkah orientation, laterality, and verticality.

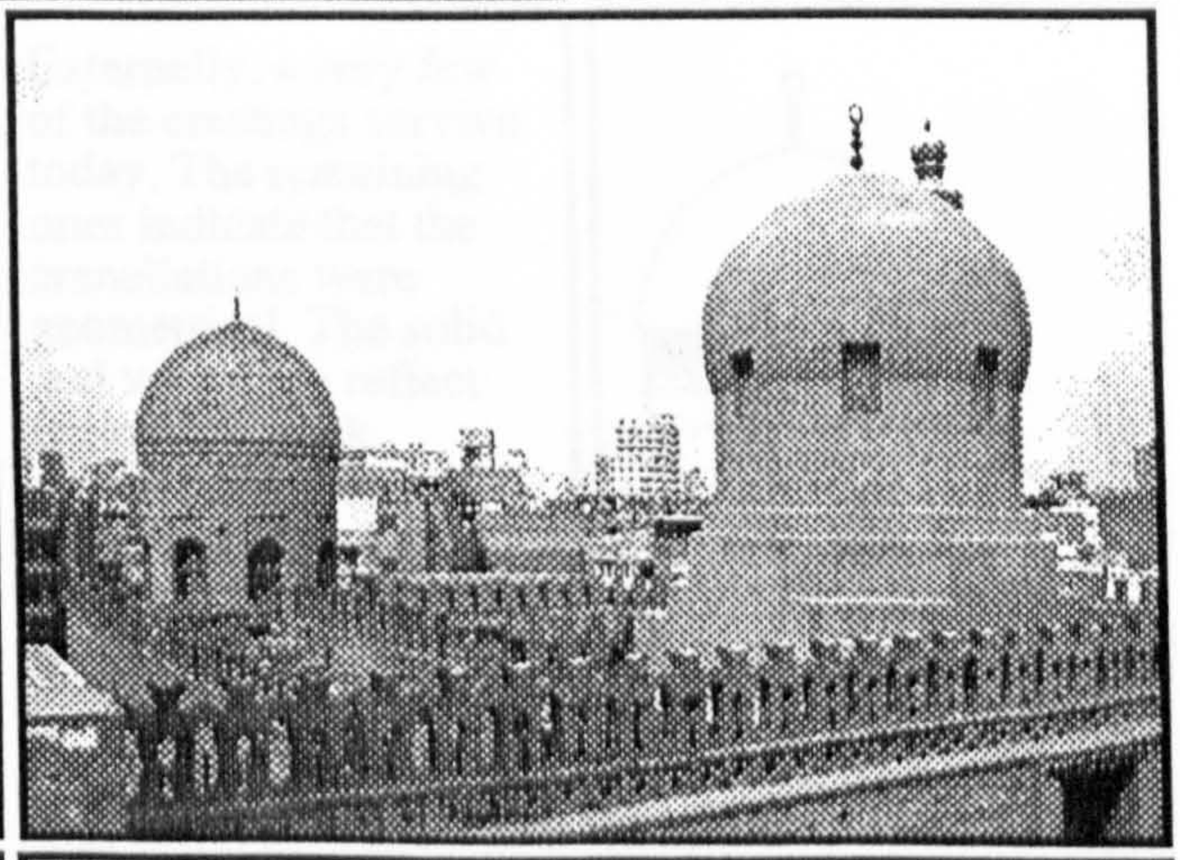
## MIHRAB

The mihrab of this mosque madrasa follows the usual Mamluk prototype of several planes of pointed niches (flat while the innermost is niched). The pointed part of the mihrab is executed by radiating interlocking marble patterns which recall the verse of Light (see interpretation of the mihrab of the Mosque of Baybars).

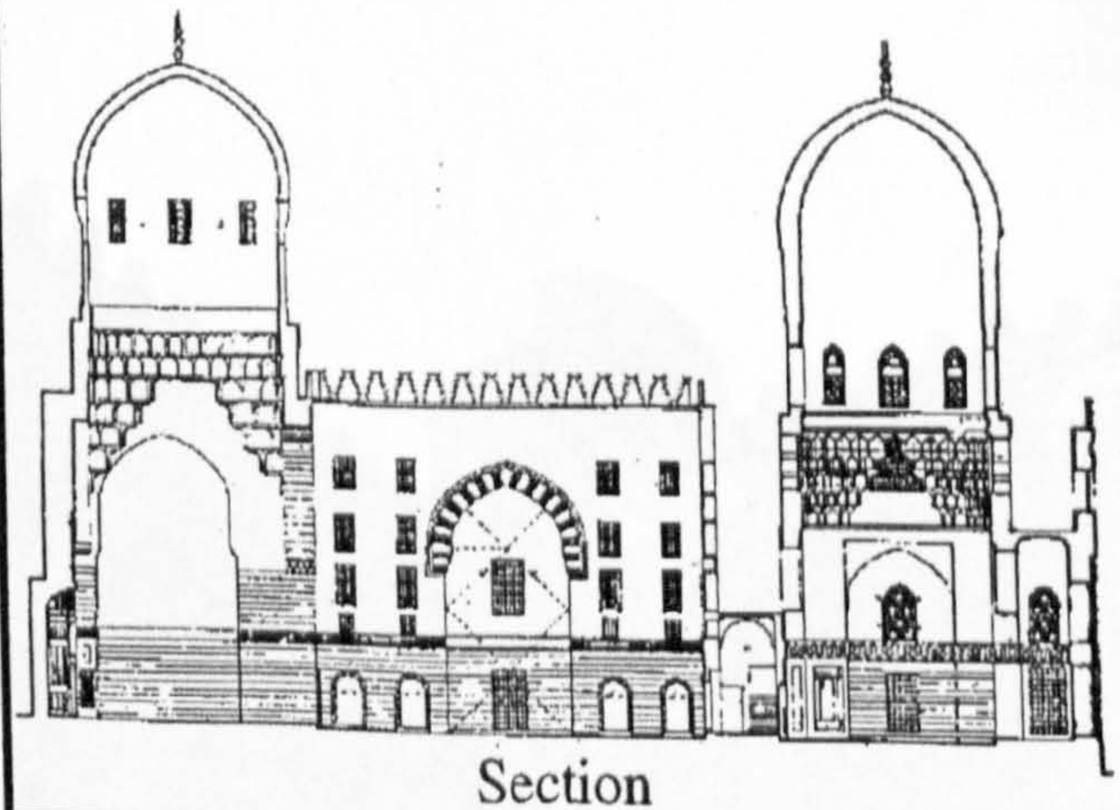
## DOMES



Prayer Hall
Dome Plan

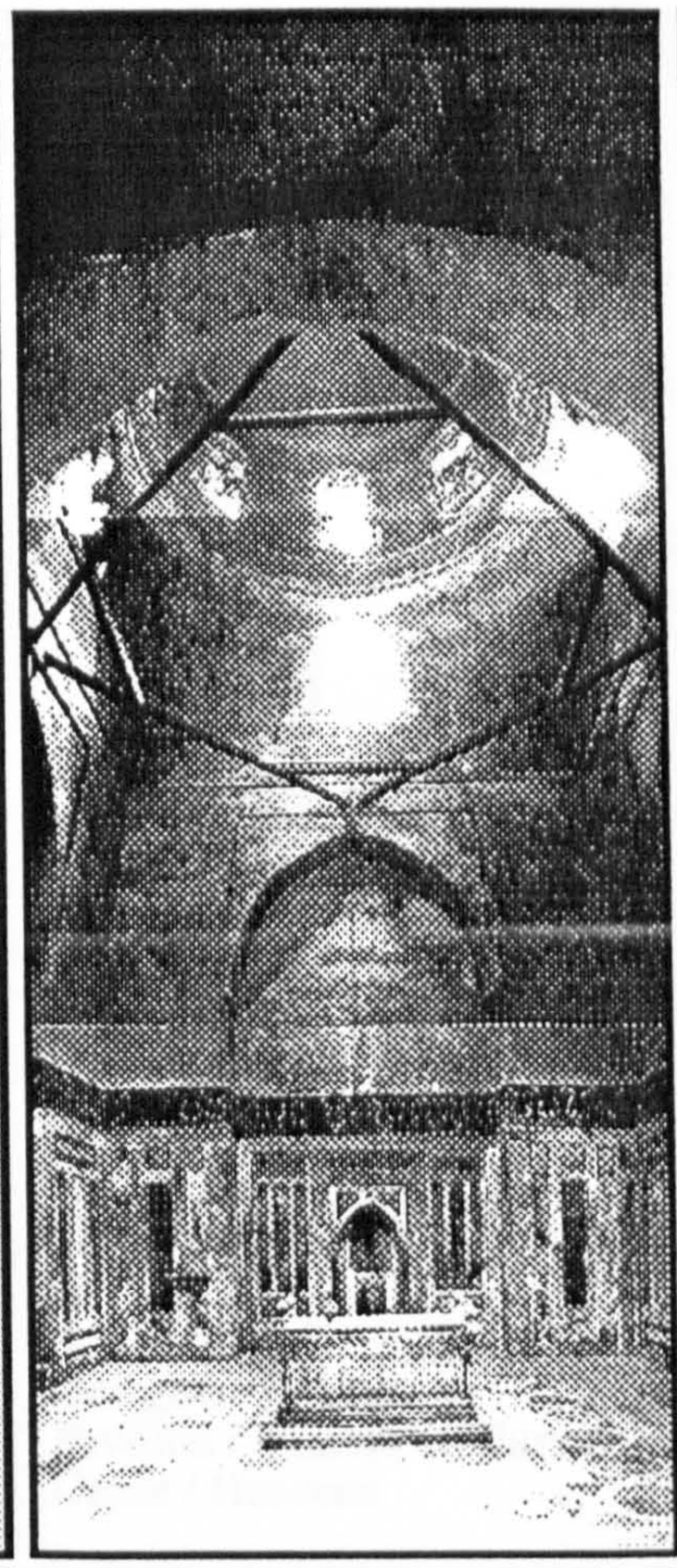


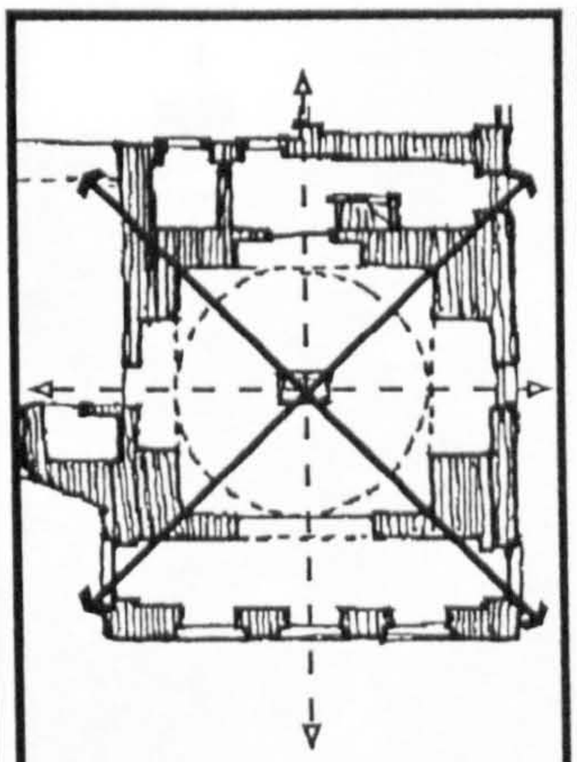
Two domes are prominantly used as features of this madrasa mosque; one on the prayer hall and the other in the mausoleum. To emphasize the feeling of verticality in these two domes, the chambers are designed in 1:3 proportions. Externally, this verticality is accentuated by the choice of the pointed bulbous form, which enhances visual ascension.



Section

DOMES



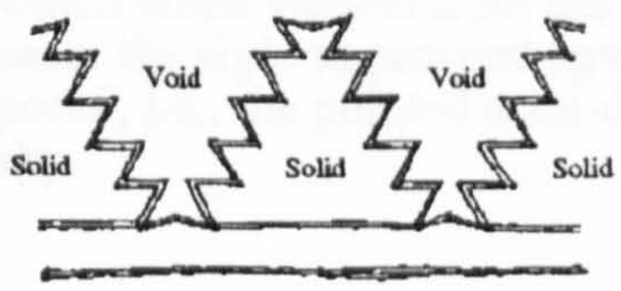


Plan of Mausoleum

The mausoleum is centralized by its square chamber organization; the tomb of the Emir is located at its centre (coinciding with the summit of the dome along the vertical axis that passes through it). Visual exposure from the street and the western iwan ensure "du'a' from the worshippers as well as the passers-by.

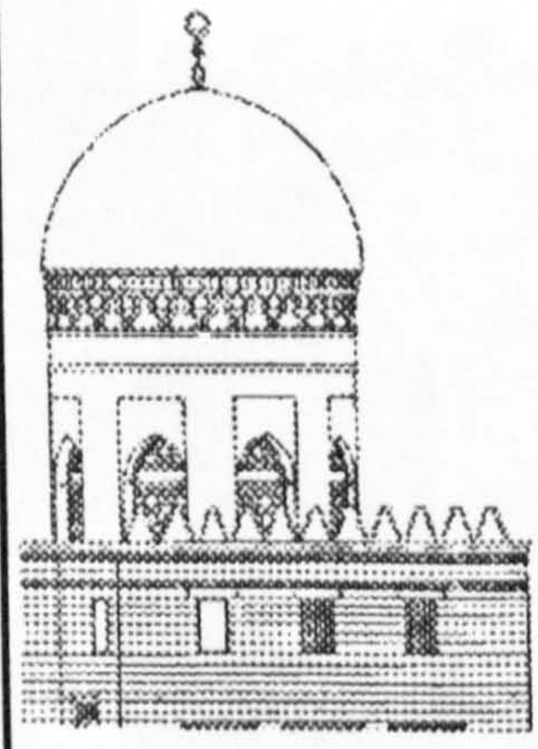
The dome roofing the mausoleum is transformed from the square to the circle by means of stalactites. The change is subtle and gradual in such a manner that the octagon is hardly perceived. To make up for this important symbolic constituent of all domed structures, the architect introduced a cantelevered wooden octagonal frame "floating" in space to complete the cosmological model.

CRESTINGS

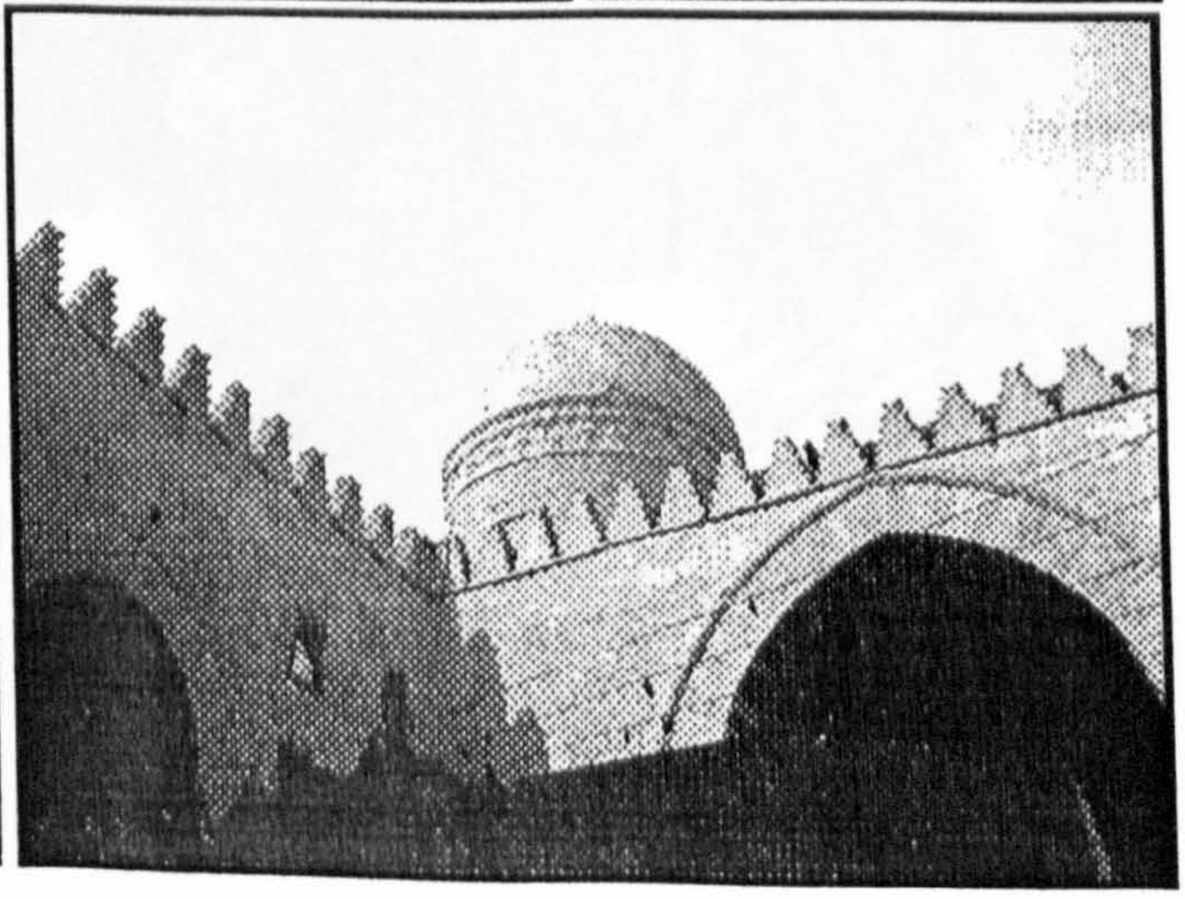



Geometrical Crenellations

Externally, a very few of the crestings survive today. The remaining ones indicate that the crenellations were geometrical. The solid and void parts reflect typical Mamluk features. (See the interpretation of the crestings of the Mosque of Baybars).

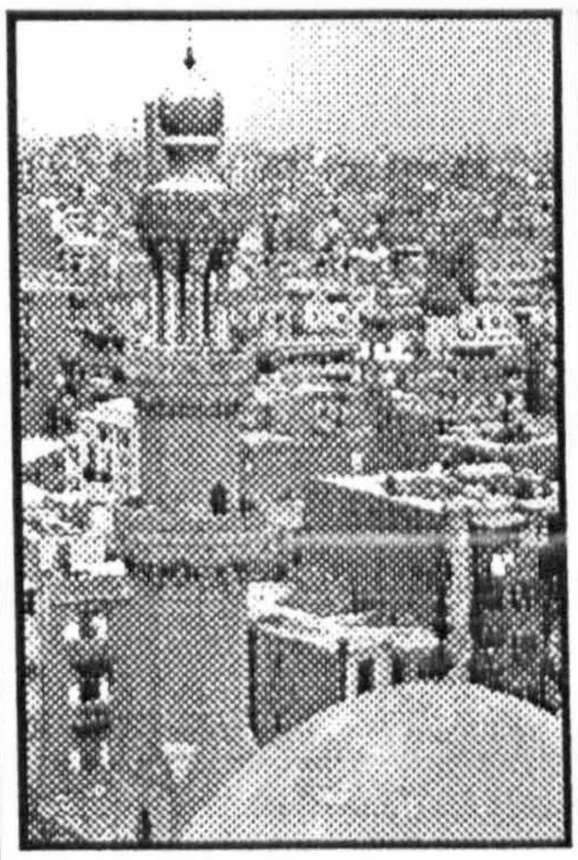


Internally, the same crestings are used reflecting the same notions.



## MINARET

Square / Earth
Octagon / Throne
Pavilion / Bearers of Throne
Circle / Heavens



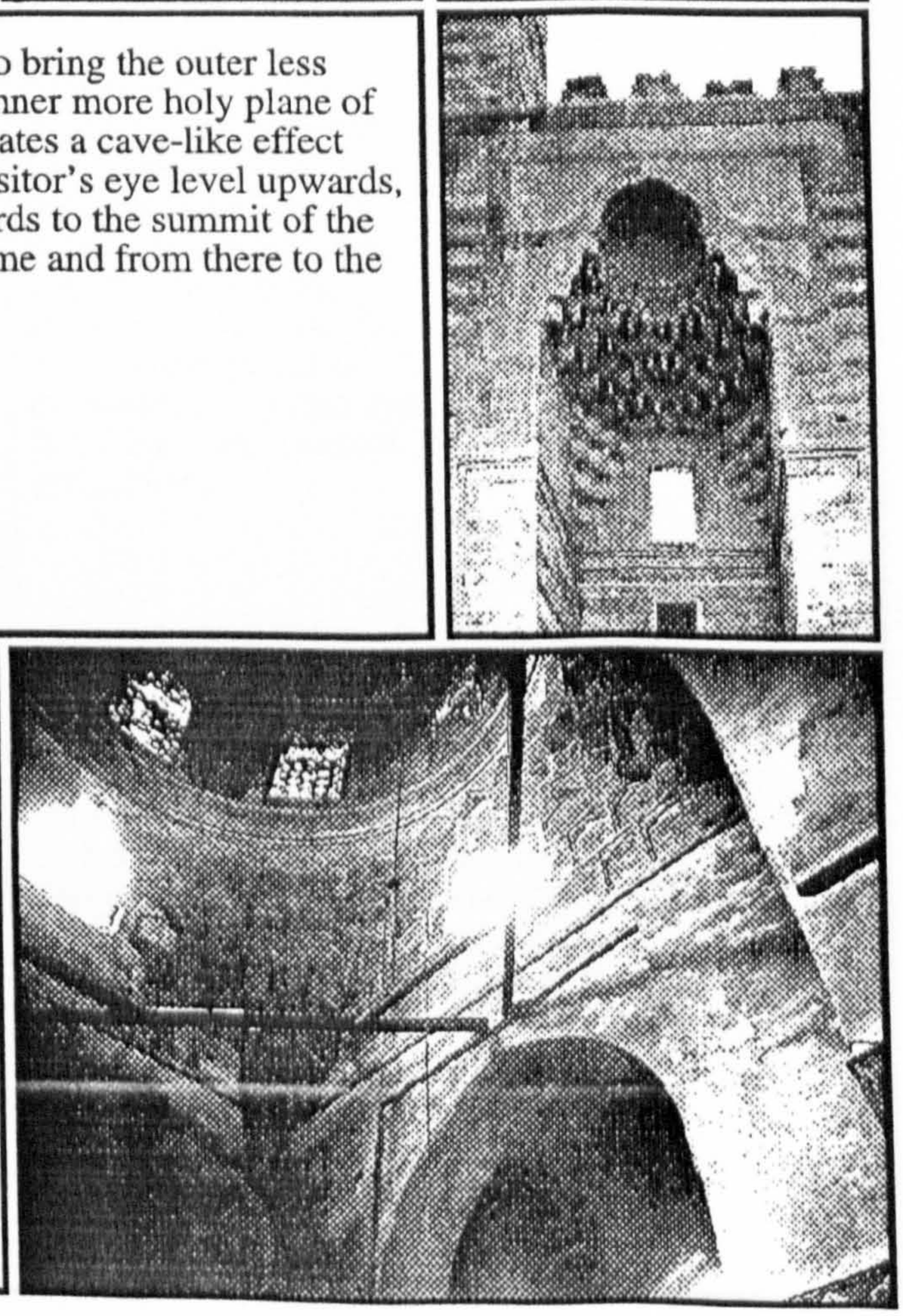
This represents one of the typical Mamluk minarets. A symbol of transcendence, it points upwards to the heavens by means of its tapering and its sequential change of sections. This transformation of form follows the Sufi cosmological model of square, octagon, eight columned pavilion, and circle culminating at a point.

## STALACTITES

Externally, stalactites are used to bring the outer less holy plane of the facade to the inner more holy plane of the recess of the portal. This creates a cave-like effect which when viewed from the visitor's eye level upwards, eases the sight to proceed upwards to the summit of the portal, i.e., the pointed semi-dome and from there to the sky.



Internally, stalactites are used as the means by which the square base of the mausoleum is transformed into a circle. (See visual effect and symbolism of the stalactites in the Mosque of Baybars).



## Remarks:

**Prototypic Features:**

**1) The centre of the courtyard coincides with that of the octagonal water fountain. This centre is at the same time axial to the four iwans, the mihrab, and the prayer hall dome.**

**2) The four corners of the quadrangular sahn are diagonally aligned to the centre of the courtyard.**

**3) The two domes (mausoleum and prayer hall dome) as well as the minaret follow the Sufi cosmological model (sqaure to octagon to circle to point).**

**4) The marble patterned flooring follows garden layouts (representation of a Garden of Paradise).**

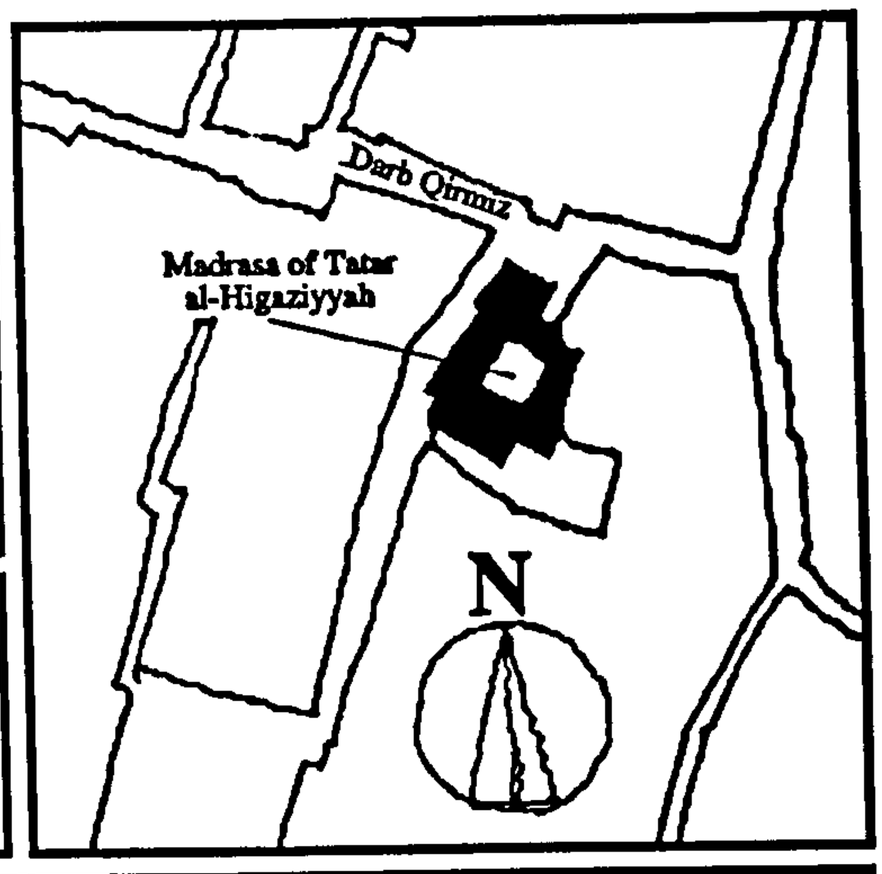
**Unique Features:**

**1) The prayer hall dome takes up the entire prayer iwan so that the geometrical and spiritual centres coincide.**

**2) Two annexed vaulted spaces are connected to the square prayer hall to allow for longer rows (laterality).**

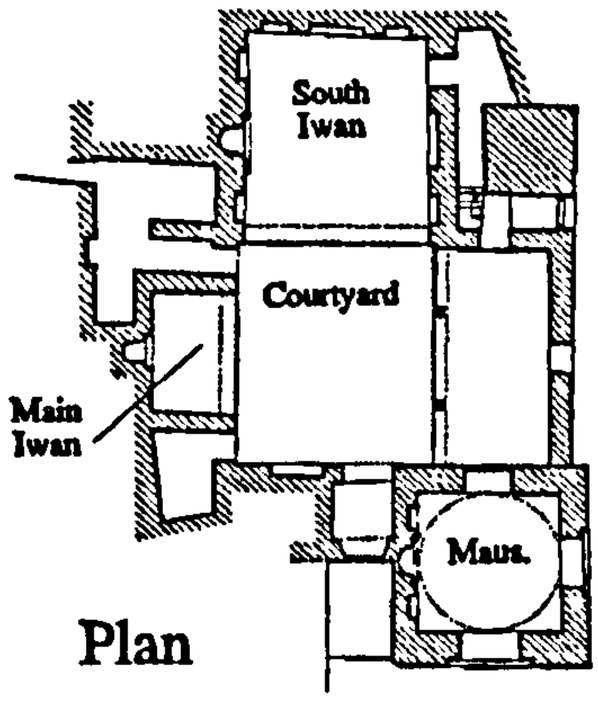
# Madrasa of Tatar al-Hijaziyyah (Darb Qirmiz)

## (761 A.H., 1360 A.D.)

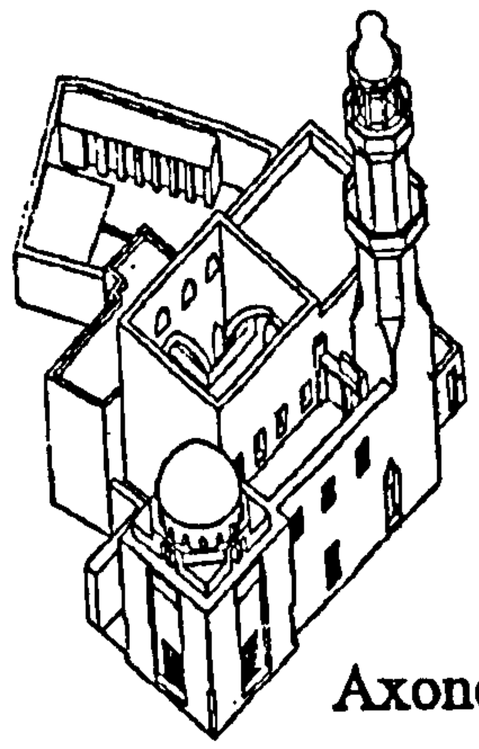



## Madrasa / Mosque Type

(3 Iwans, Mausoleum)

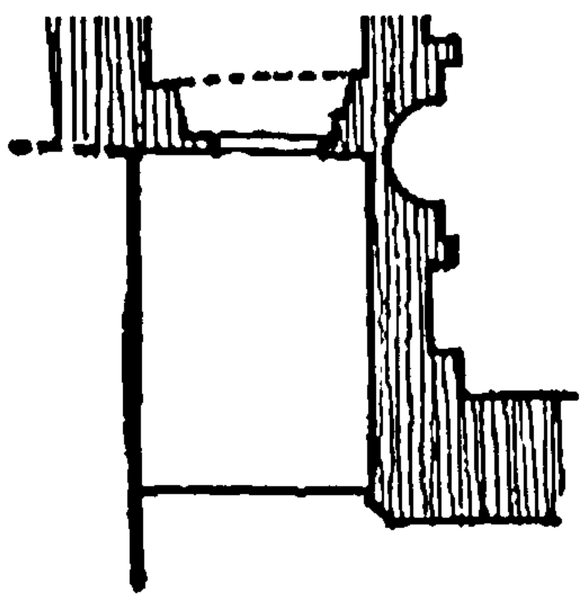



Plan



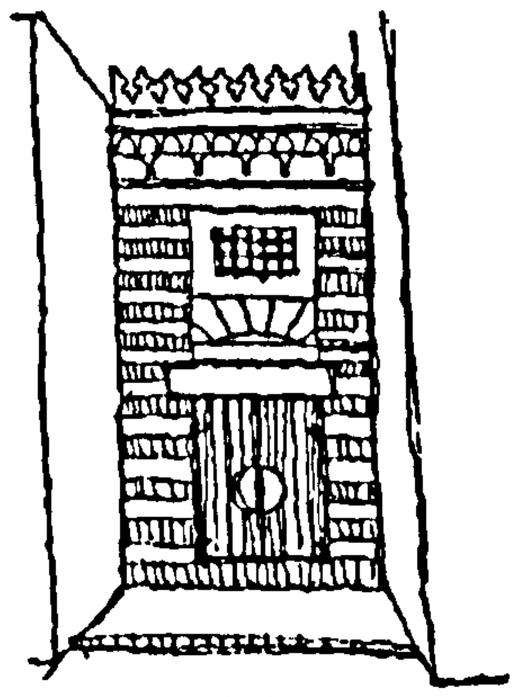
Axonometric

PORTAL



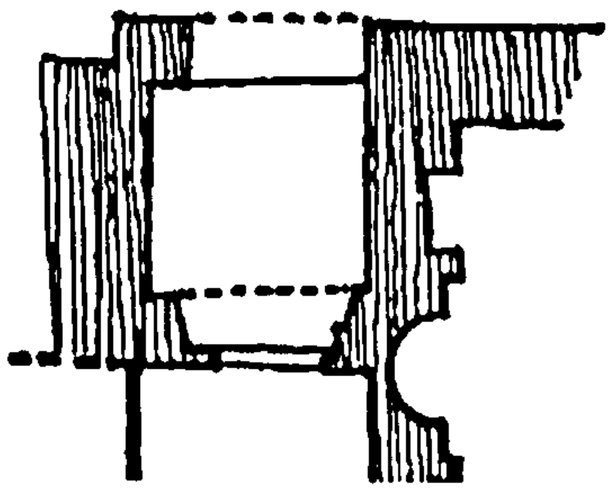
Portal Plan

Due to the site constraints, and the two phases of the building (see Chapter Five), the portal is flush with the facade, neither recessed nor arched. A group of stalactites bring out the plane of the portal to the building top (the flat lintel does not promote verticality).



View of the Portal

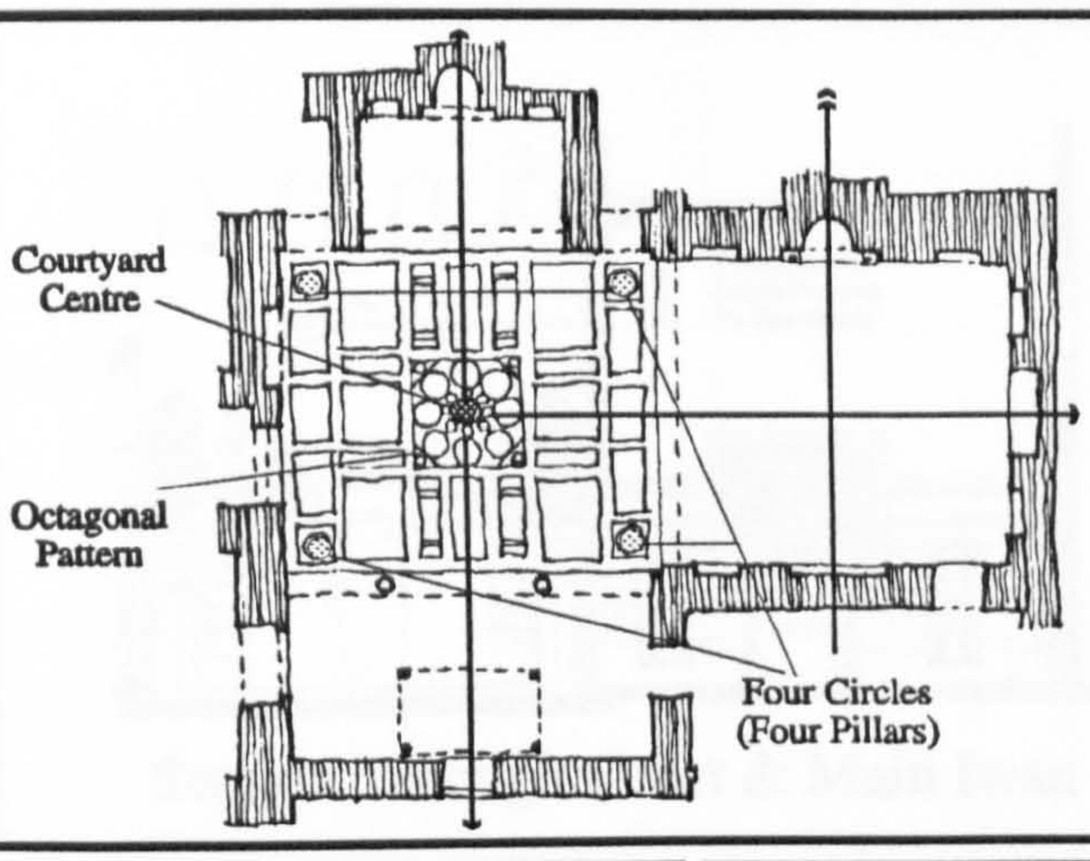
ENT. HALL & MAJAZ



Entrance Hall Plan

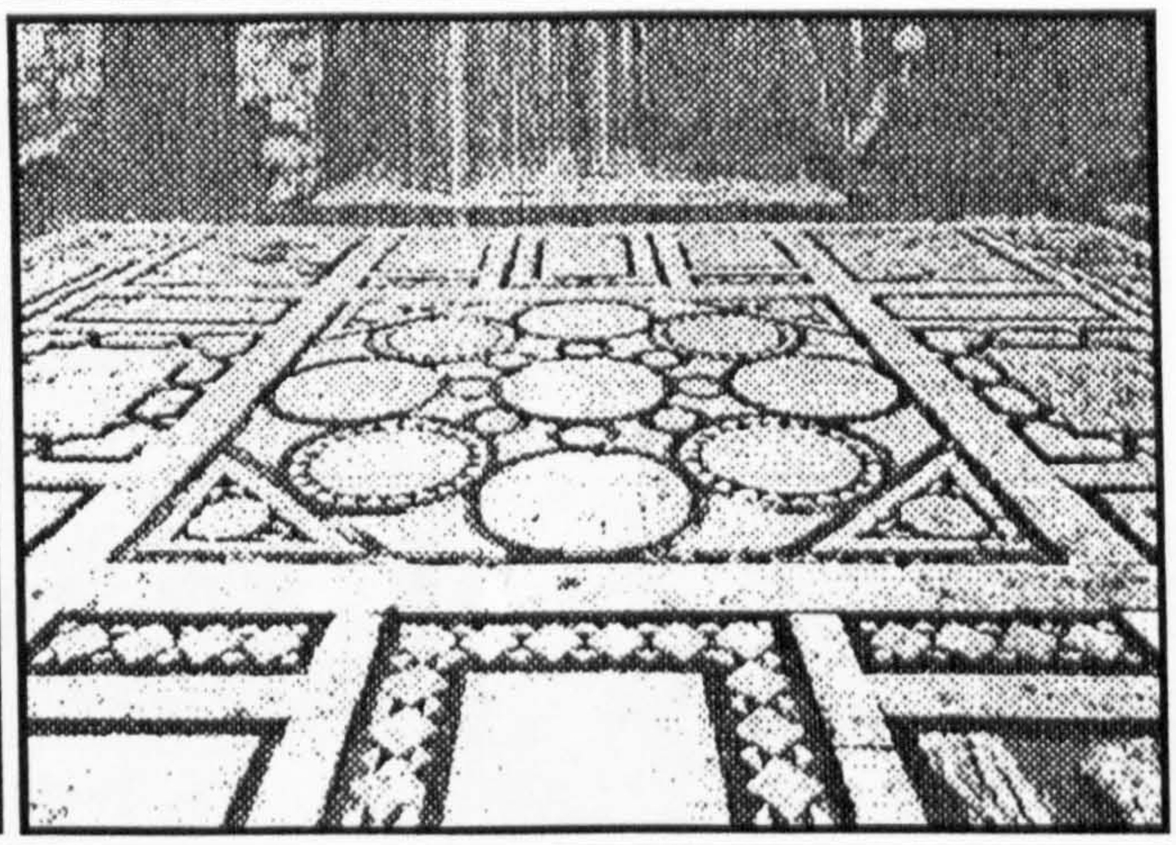
Due to site constraints, the majaz has been reduced in this madrasa to be the same as the entrance hall. It leads directly to the courtyard without leading the visitor through a series of dark winding corridors. In general, this solution is not common and far from the traditional norms of the Mamluk Period. It seems that had the mu'allem chosen the traditional majaz, he would have had to sacrifice the internal space and its organization (the microcosm).

## COURTYARD & FOUNTAIN



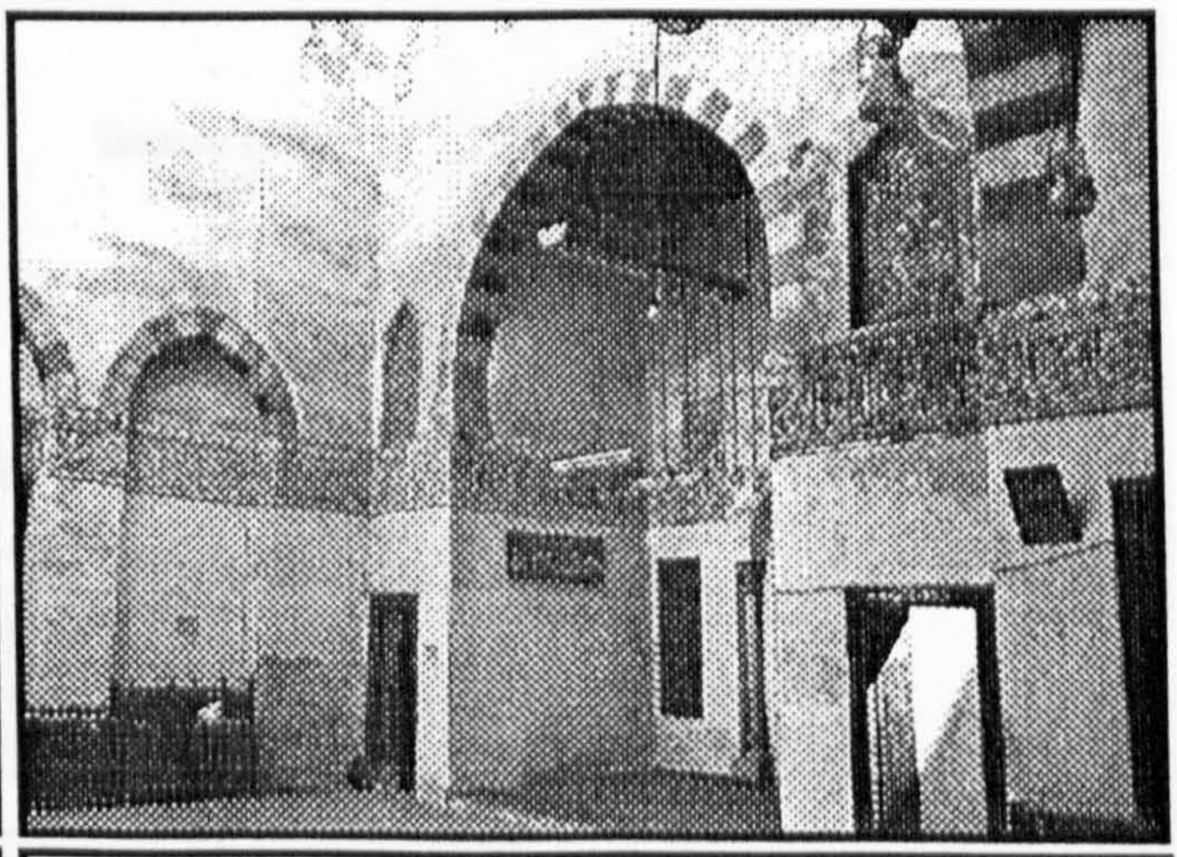

The centre of the courtyard generates the geometry and organization of the whole building, as if "growing" from that starting point. This reflects the Islamic notion of Unity in multiplicity and diversity from Unity.

The sahn has no water fountain, instead, an abstracted marble pattern of an octagon replaces it in the centre of the courtyard floor. Four circular patterns are placed in the corners of the octagon recalling the four pillars carrying the celestial dome. Furthermore, to emphasize quadrature (in relation to the whole court), four circles are placed at the corners of the courtyard.



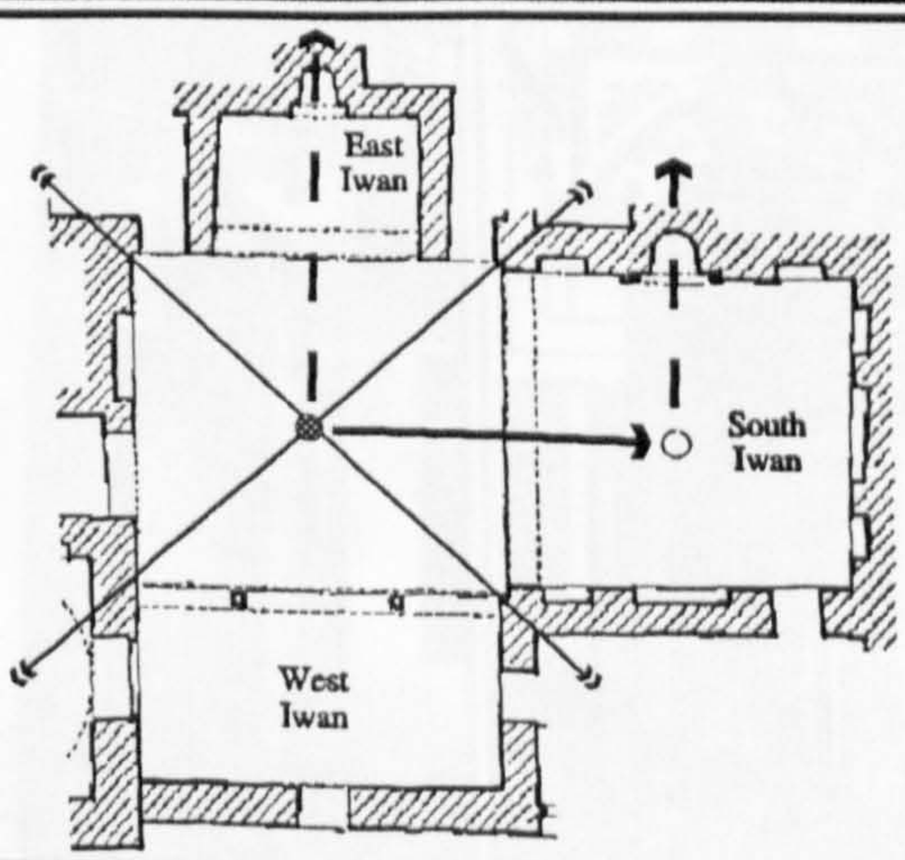
## ARCHES & IWANS

The iwan arches are pointed and constructed in ablaq masonary (alternating red and white stone in this case). The pointed shape of the arches leads vision upwards while the use of ablaq creates a radiating effect. (See interpretations mentioned earlier).

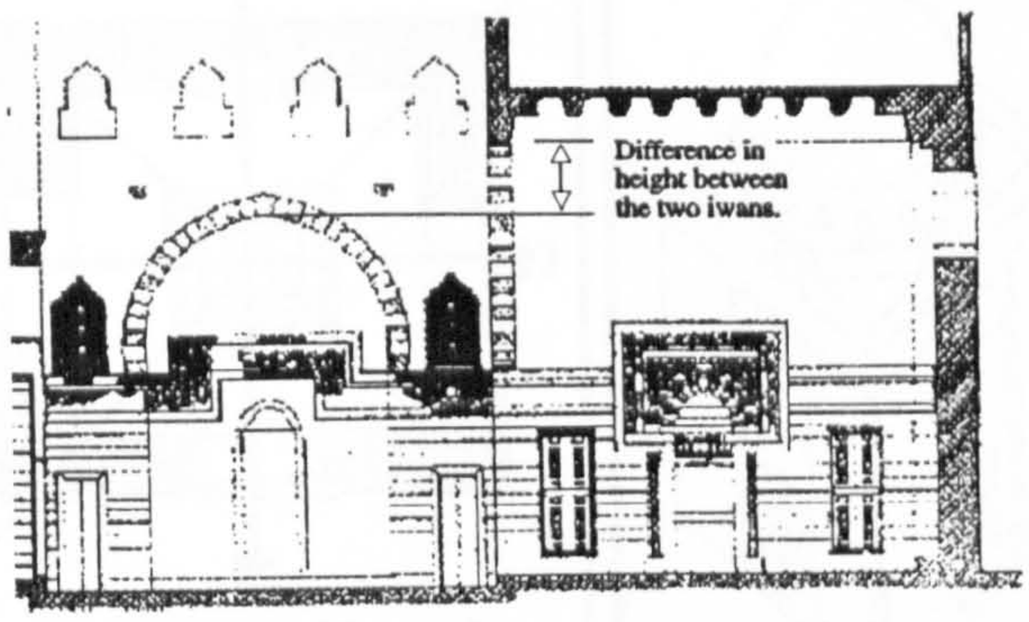


## PRAYING HALL

Although in all traditional Mamluk mosques the eastern iwan is the main prayer hall, in this madrasa, we find that the mu'allem had to resort to a symbolic eastern iwan while the main one was located in the south side. This has been accounted for in Chapter Five to have been due to site constraints. As a result of this, there are two prayer mihrabs in this madrasa.



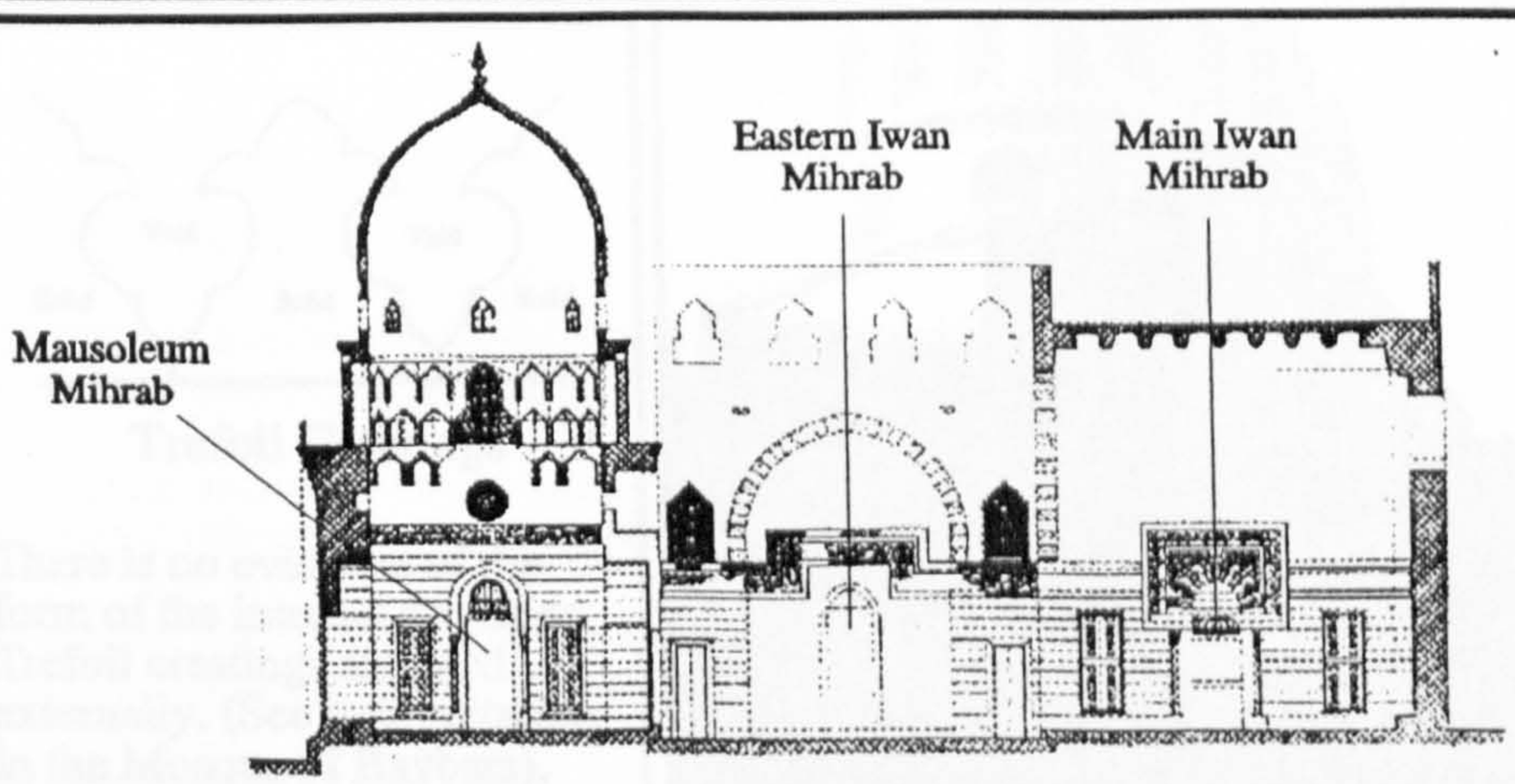
## PRAYING HALL



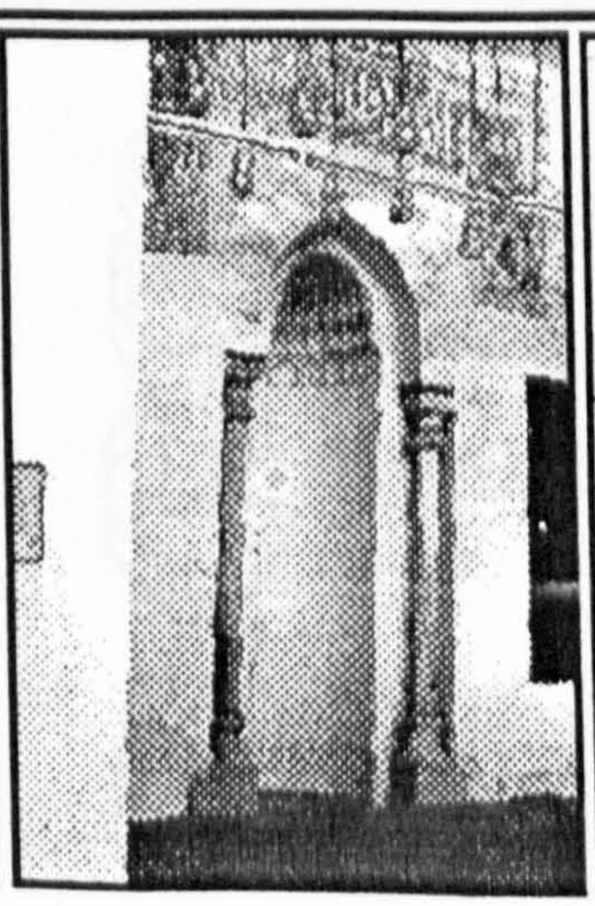

Section Through Court & Main Iwan

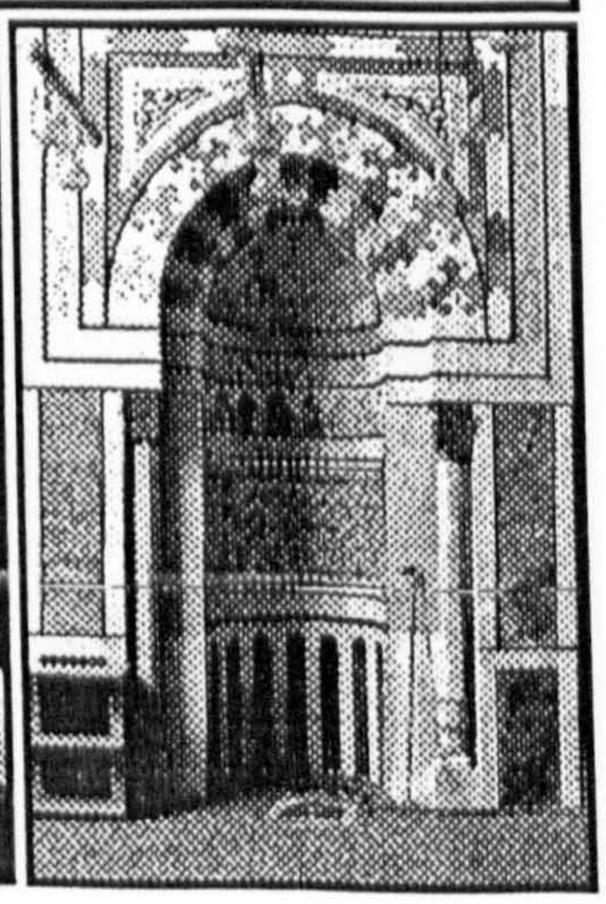
The main southern iwan is the largest, deepeest and highest of all the three iwans. Accordingly, it dominates the internal space. This exaggeration in height and depth was probably made to remedy the fact that the eastern iwan (in this particular case) is not the main prayer area.

## MIHRABS

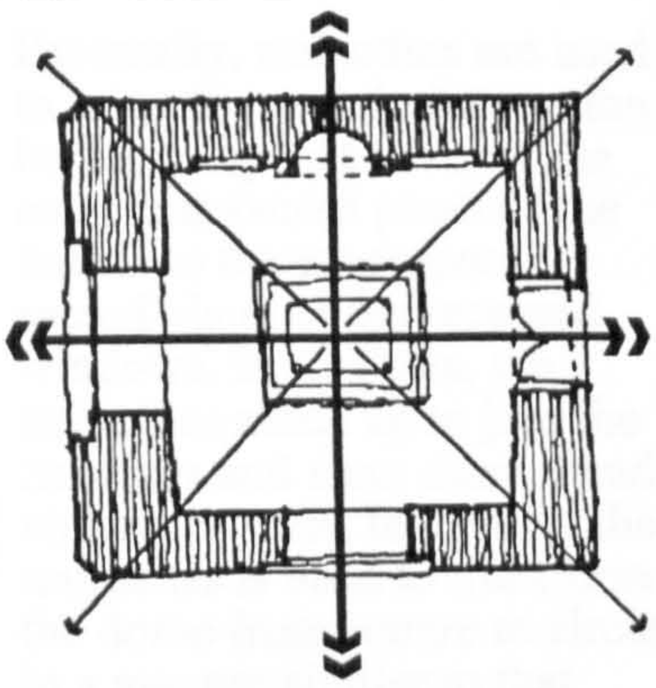



Both mihrabs are designed in the usual pointed form and have qualities that "interiorize" while pointing upwards. Furthermore, the main southern-iwan mihrab, is clad with radiating marble patterns recalling the verse of Light (see interpretation of the mihrab of the Mosque of Baybars).

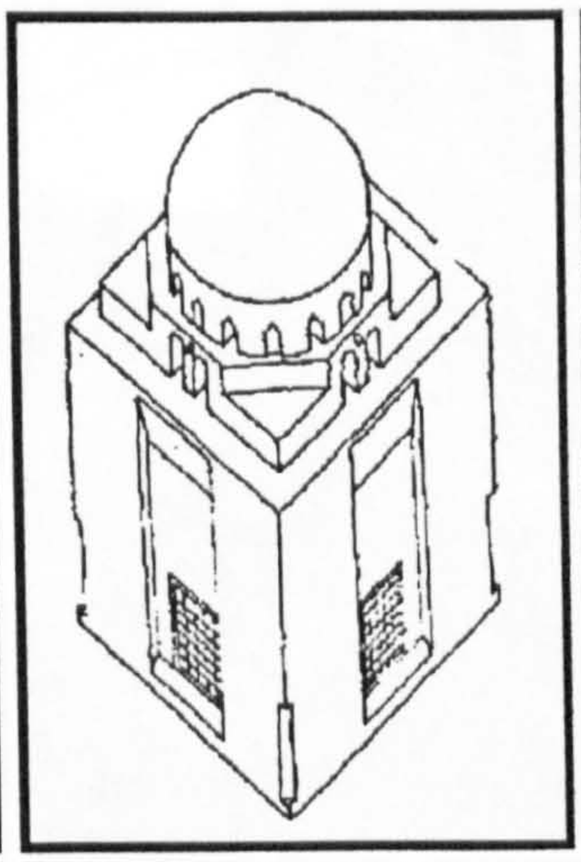


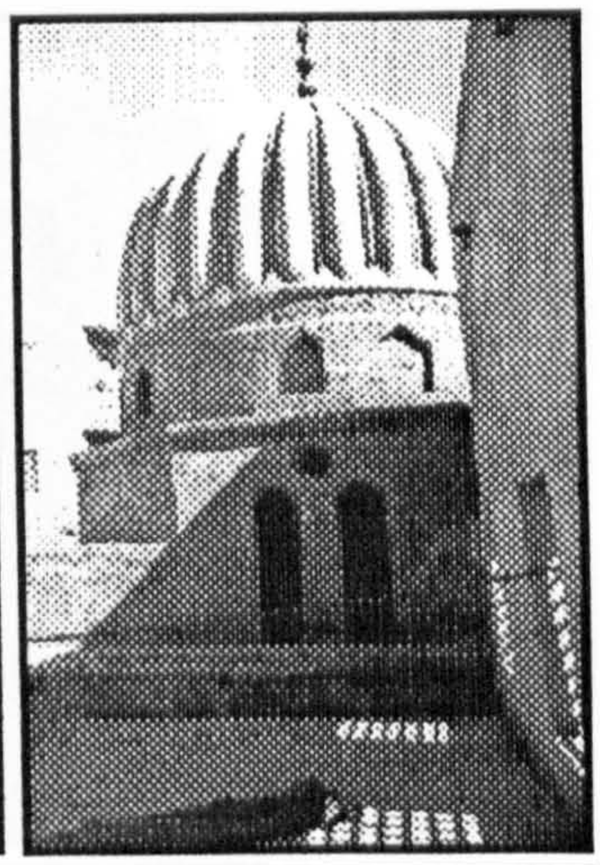


## DOME

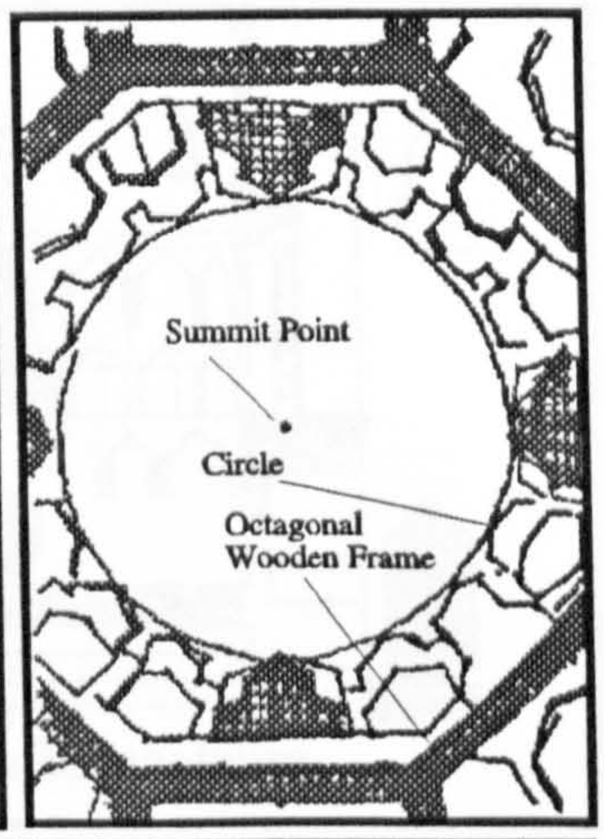


Centralized Plan of Mausoleum

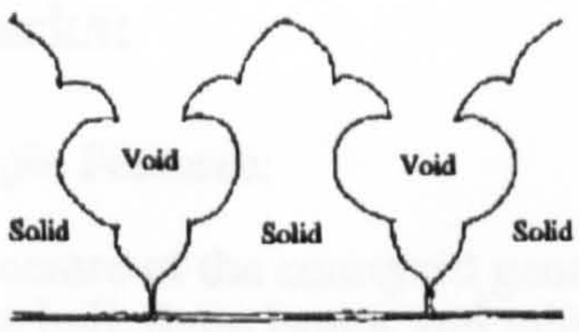




Externally, the section of the centralized structure of the mausoleum changes from square to octagon to circle to Unity. Internally the square is transformed into the circle by means of stalactites. A cantelevered, octagonal wooden frame is introduced in the square base of the mausoleum to complete the cosmological model. At the centre of the burial chamber is the tomb. Windows connect the mausoleum to the street as well as the interior to attain "du'a'" and hence spiritual blessings from passers-by and worshippers. To emphasize verticality, the external form of the dome is pointed, ribbed, and tapering upwards.

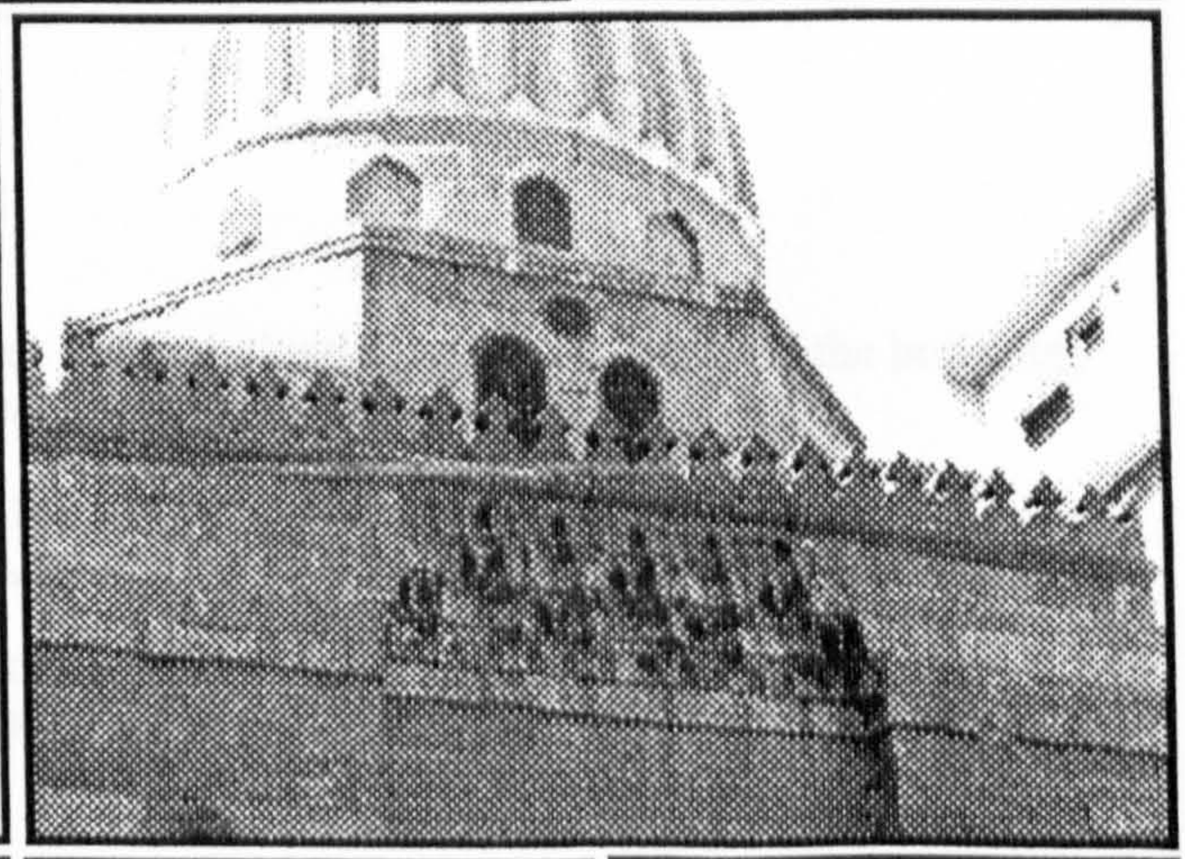



## CRESTINGS



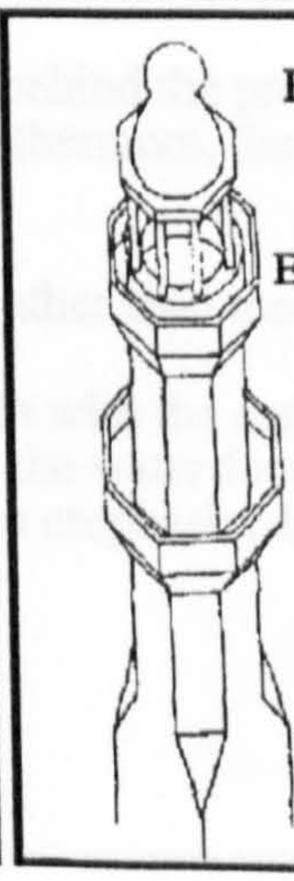

Trefoil Crestings

There is no evidence of the form of the internal crestings. Trefoil crestings are used externally. (See interpretation in the Mosque of Baybars).



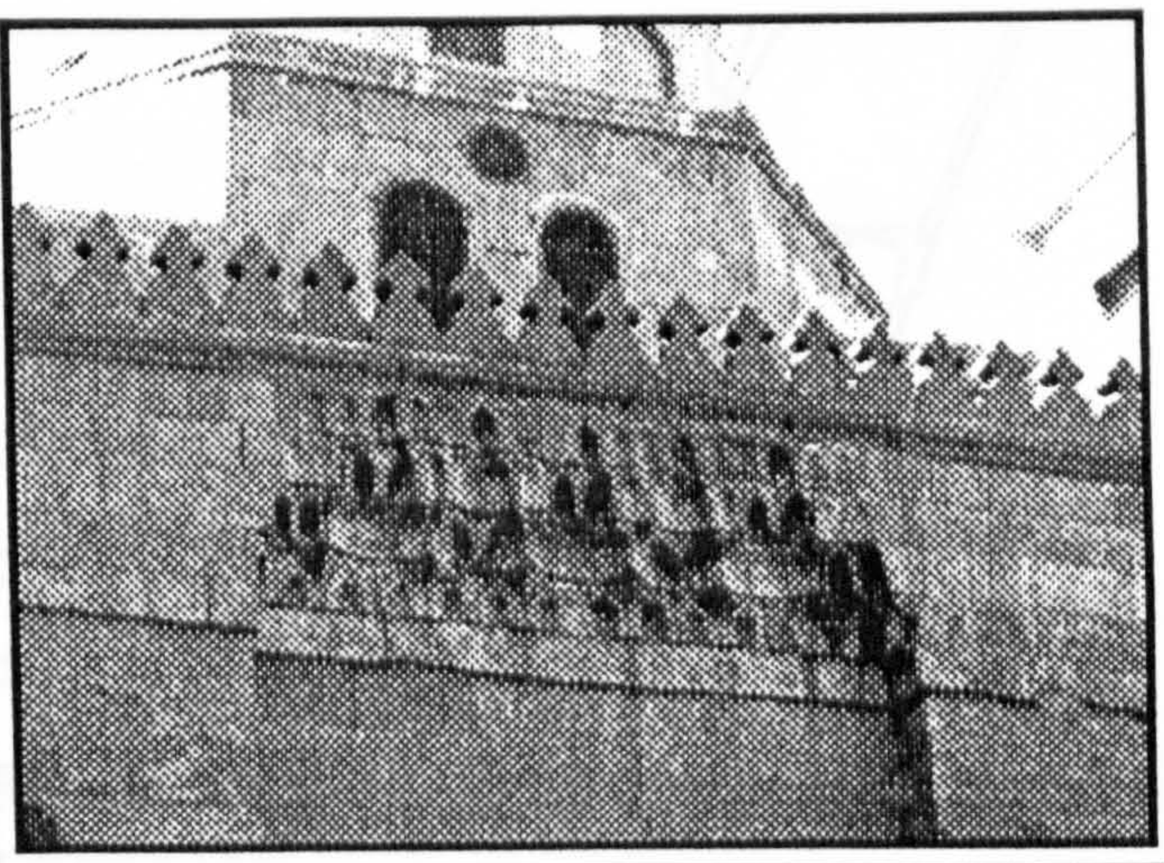
## MINARET

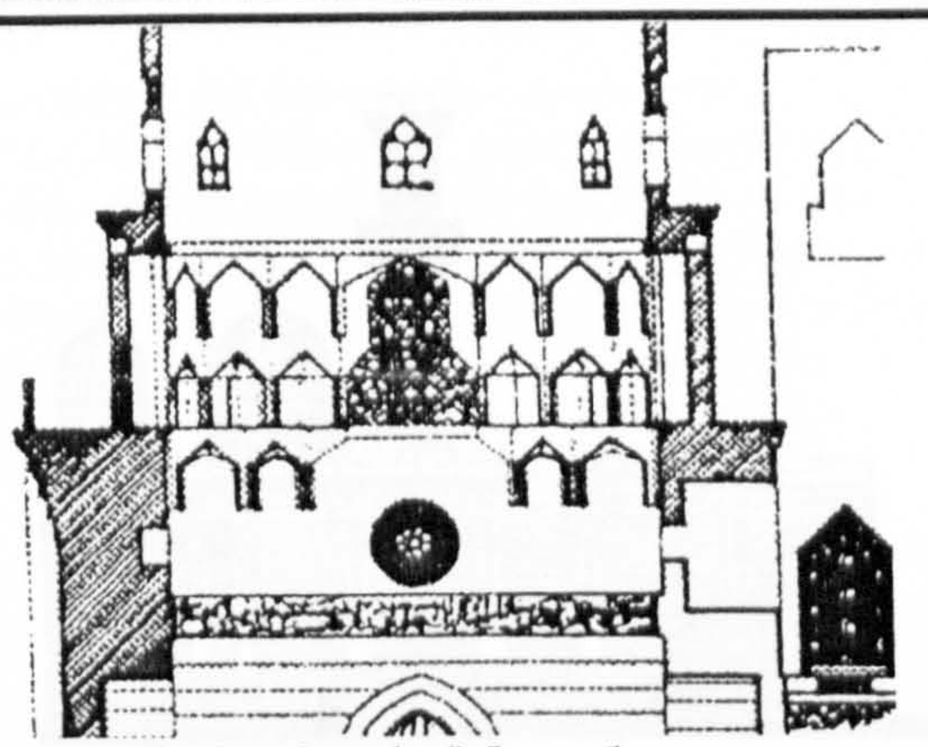
According to the information presented in Chapter Five, the sections of the minaret change from square to octagon to octagonal pillared pavilion, to circle to point conforming to the traditional cosmological model. The octagonal pavilion and domelet have not survived.



STALACTITES

Externally, stalactites are used to bring the portal plane to the building top and to bring the outer less sacred plane of the facade to the inner more sacred plane of the recessed windows. In all cases, the stalactites reach up to join the crestings and from there, lerad vision upwards. Internally, the muqarnas is used to transform the dome from square to circle in a manner similar to that used in the mausoleum of the Imam al-Shafi'i in Cairo; i.e., keel-arched rather than curved stalactites. (See interpretation of the stalactites of the Mosque of Baybars).





Stalactites in Mausoleum

## Remarks:

Prototypic Features:

1) The centre of the courtyard generates the organization of the elements of the building; entrance hall, three iwans, and mihrab.

2) The minaret and mausoleum dome follow the Sufi cosmological model (square, octagon, eight pillared pavilion, circle, point).

3) The marble patterned floor of the courtyard abstractly represents a garden layout which symbolizes a Garden of Paradise.

Unique Features:

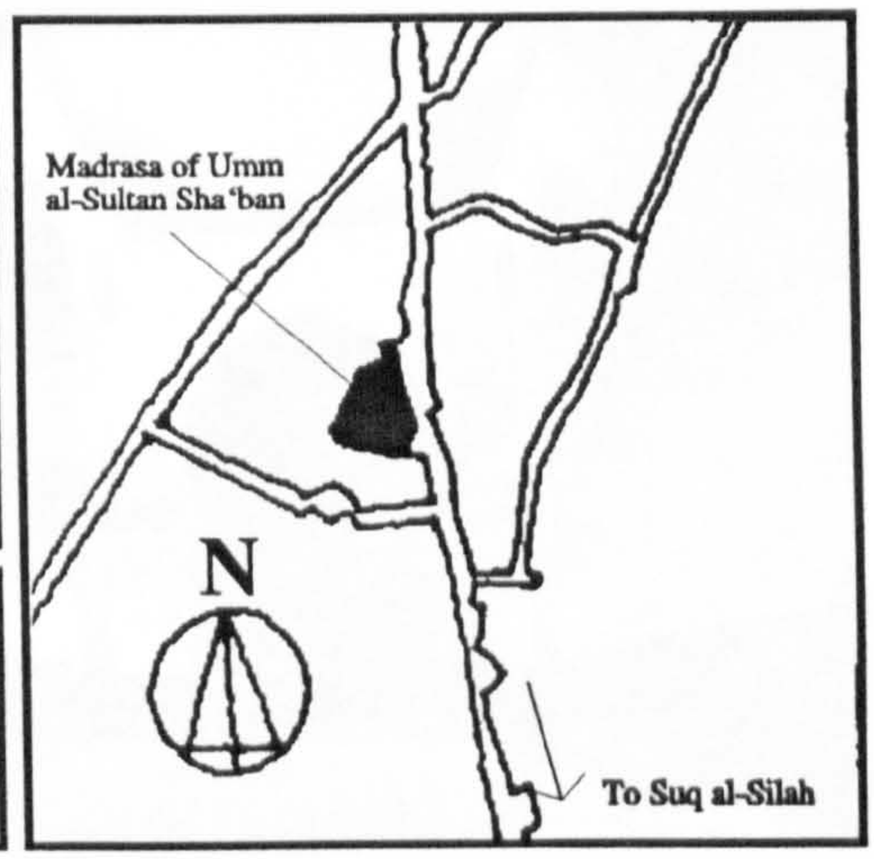
1) The location of the portal is hidden behind the projecting mausoleum chamber (the latter was a second stage addition). Furthermore, the portal and entrance hall lead directly to the courtyard due to site constraints.

2) The main iwan is the southern one rather than the eastern (also due to site constraints).

3) The centre of the courtyard coincides with the centre of an octagonal marble pattern on the floor of the sahn (an abstraction of the water fountain). The four pillars or corners of the courtyard (quadrangularity) are also emphasized in the marble patterns.

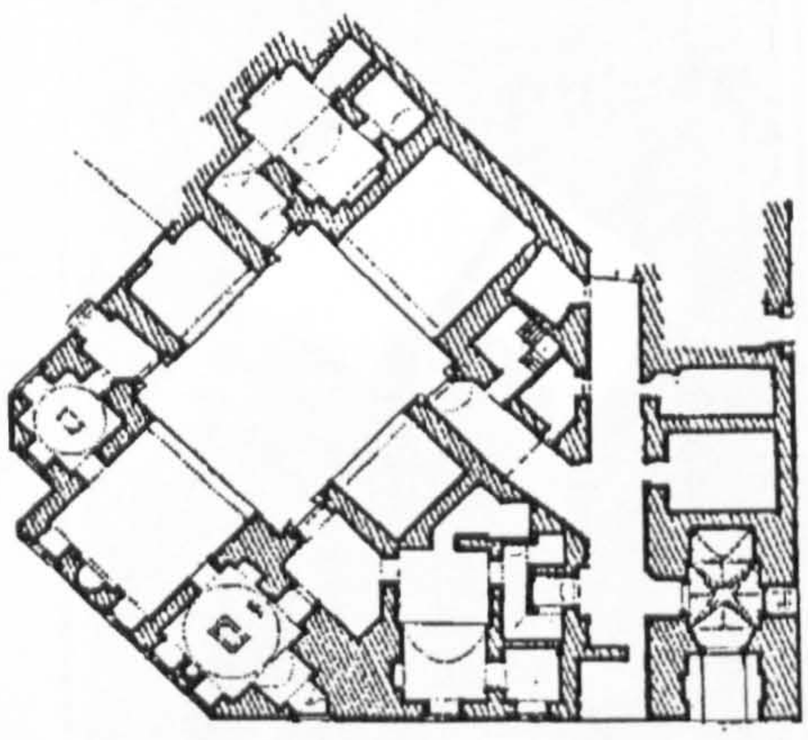
# The Madrasa of Umm al-Sultan Sha'ban (Near Suq al-Silah)

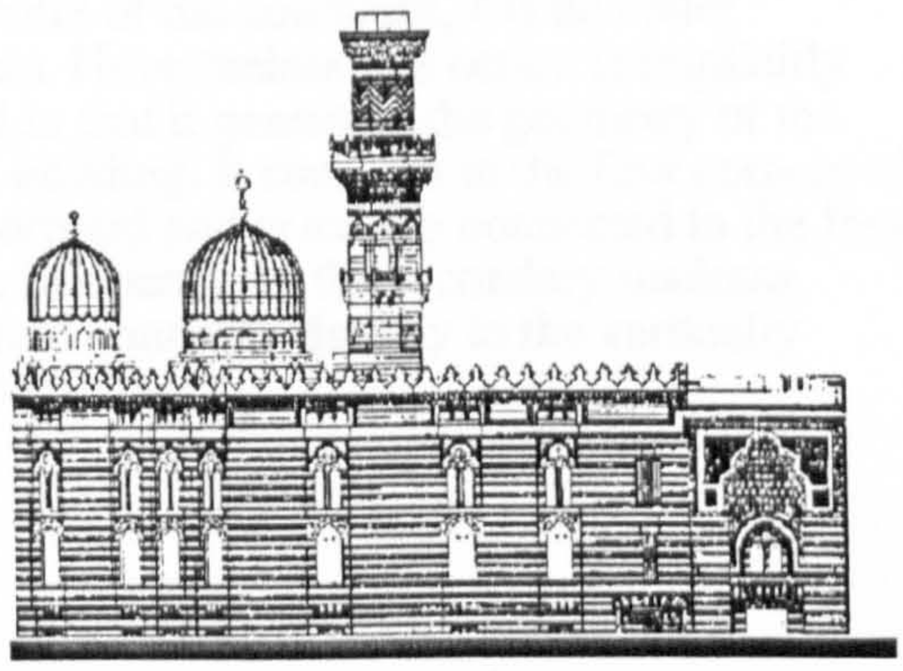
## (770 A.H., 1368-69 A.D.)




## Mosque / Madrasa Type

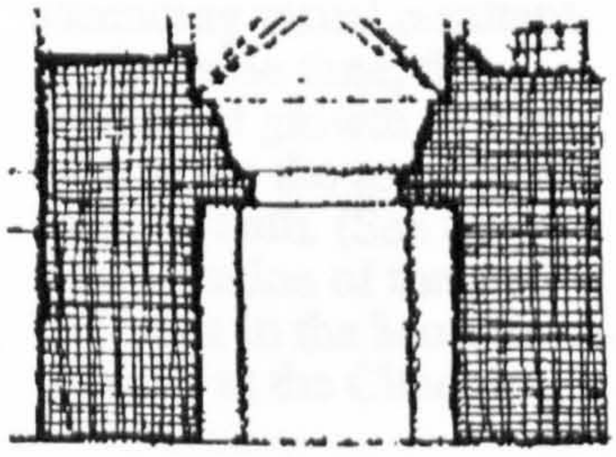
(4 Iwans, 2 Mausolea, Public Fountain)





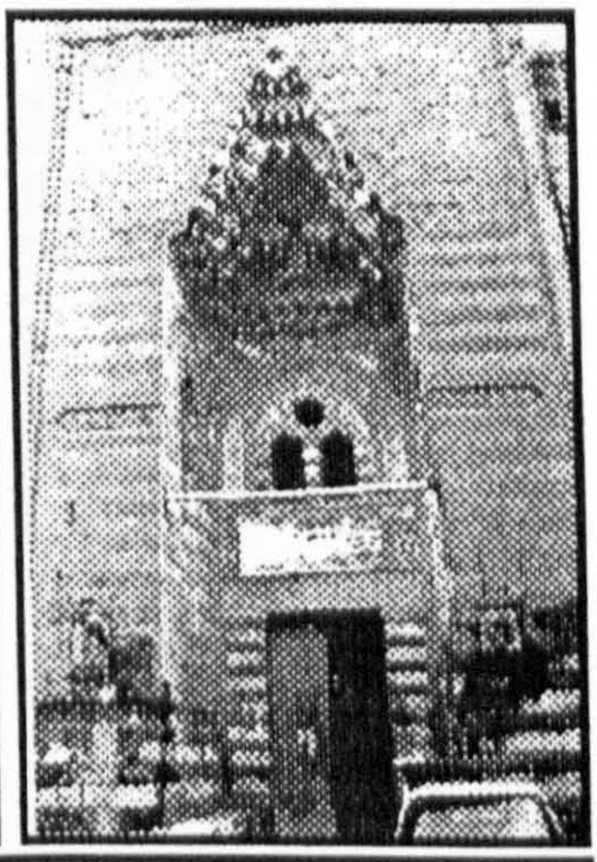
Elevation

PORTAL



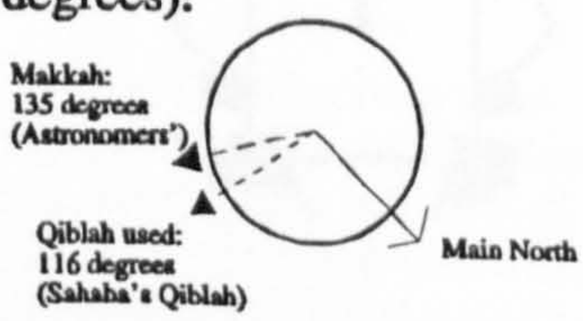
Main Portal

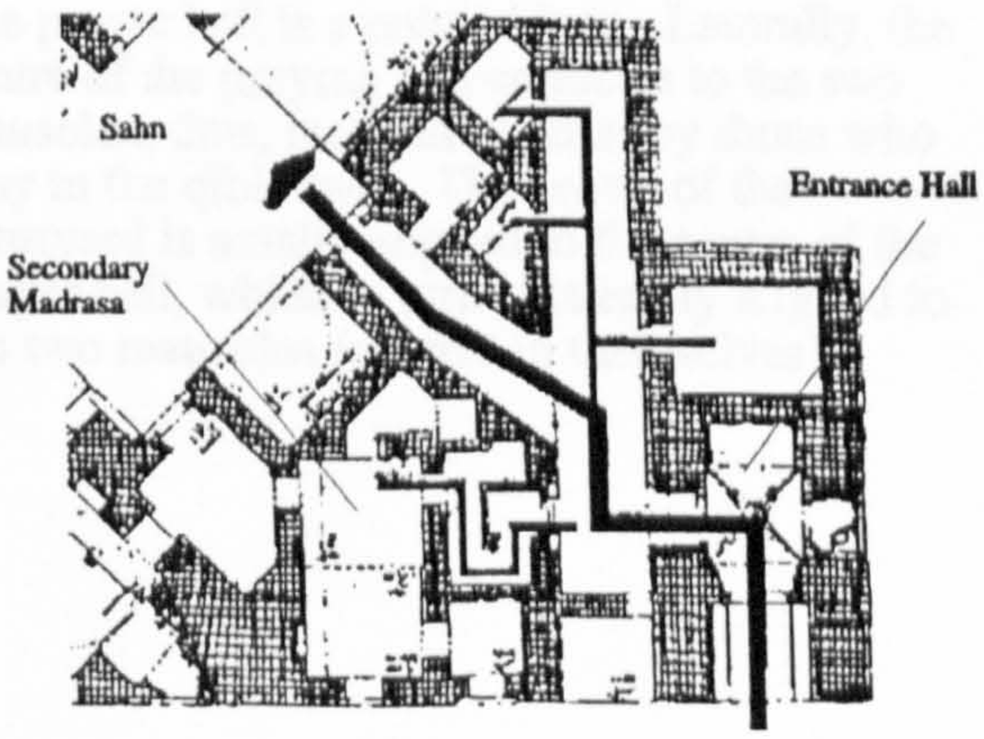
Cave-like effect resulting from the use of stalactites. The pointed triangular silhouette at the top of the portal is the best example of pointing at the vertical.



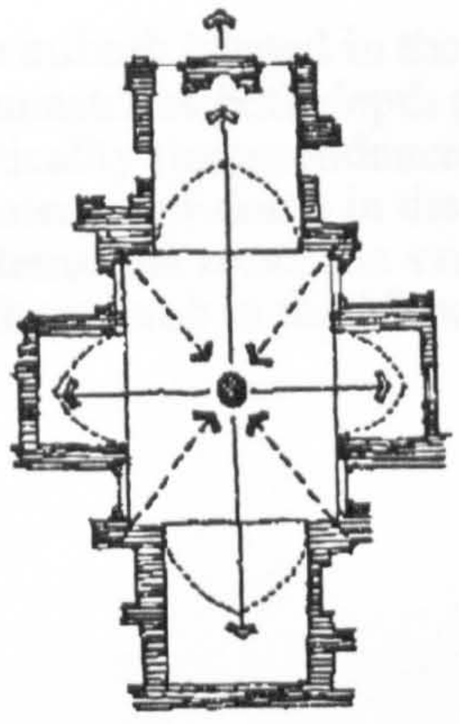
ENT. HALL & MAJAZ

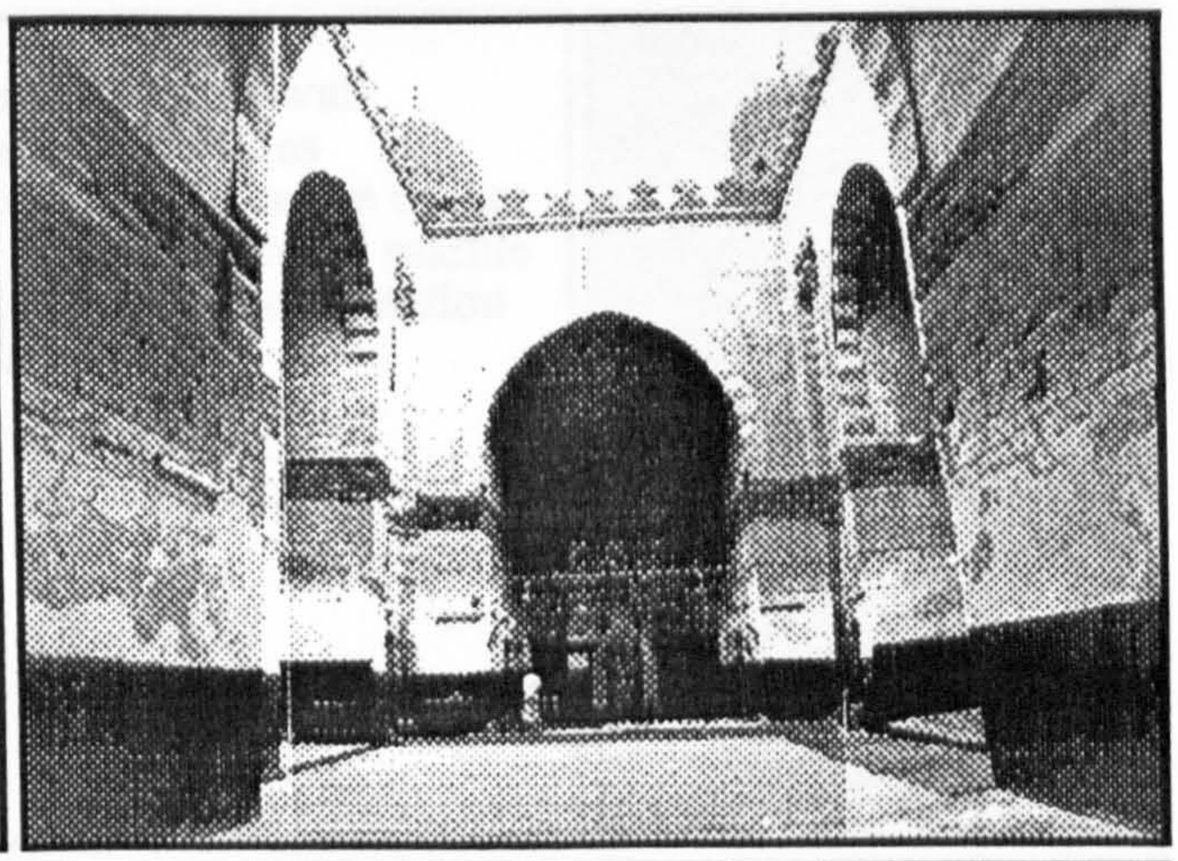
Bent dark tube-like passages connect the cross-vaulted entrance hall to the courtyard and to the secondary madrasa taking up the divergence of the street in relation to the qibla orientation (116 degrees rather than the usual 135 degrees).

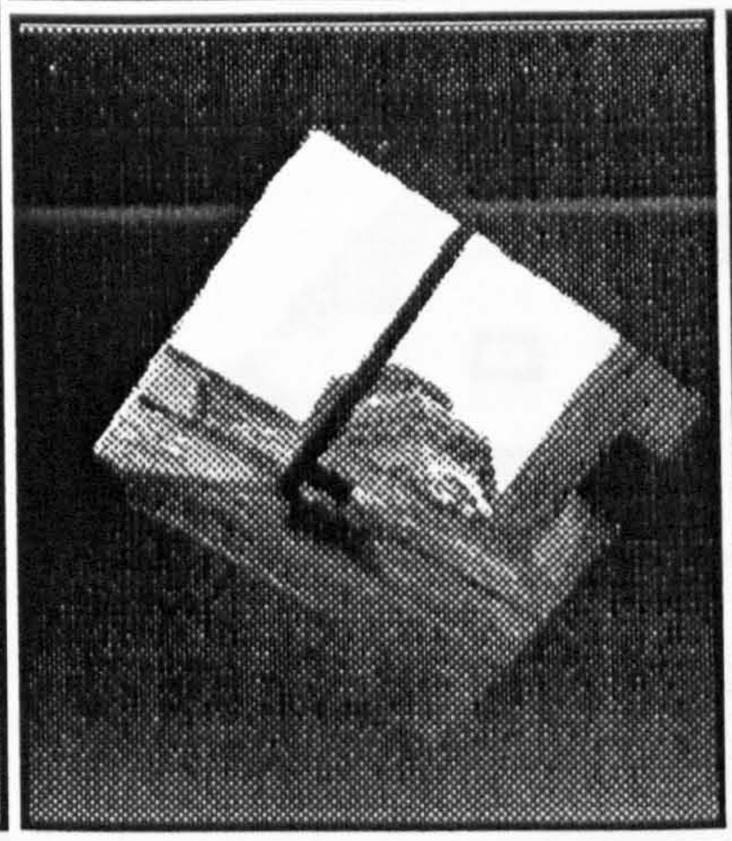


## COURTYARD & FOUNTAIN



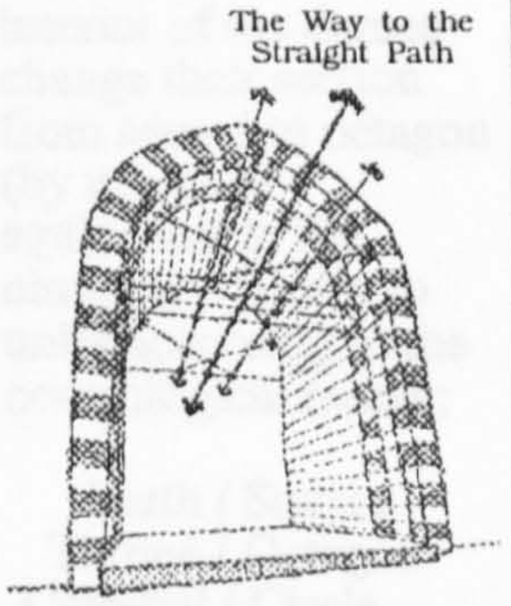


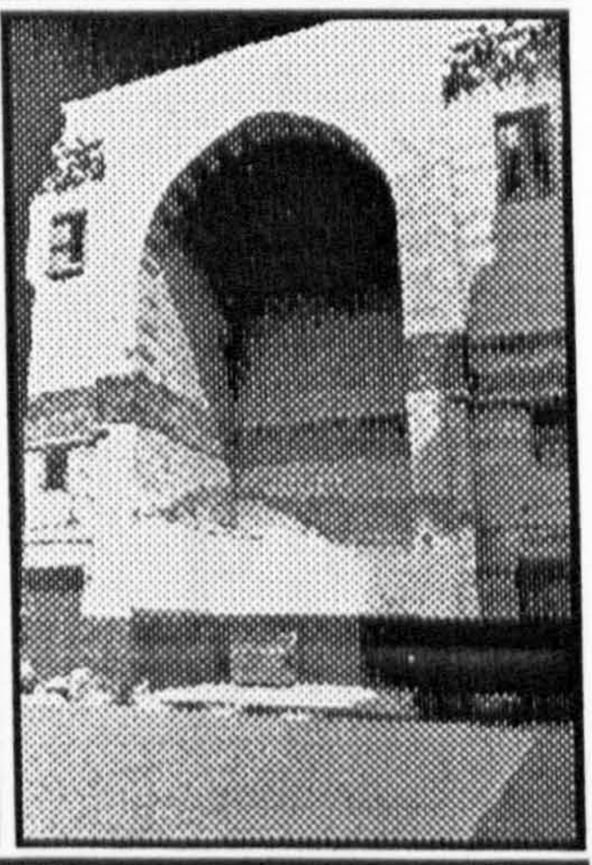


The centre of the courtyard, has no water fountain. Nevertheless, the centre is implicitly sensed in that it generates the geometry of the whole building. It connects to the four corners of the courtyard and is axially connected to the four iwans. Furthermore, the secondary madrasa courtyard connects visually to the vertically pointing minaret.

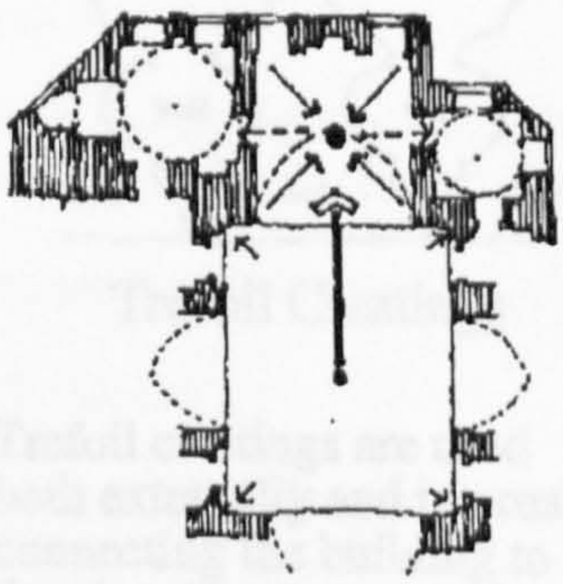
## ARCHES & IWANS

Pointed iwans emphasize the vertical by their ascending visual resultant. At the same time, the horizontal growth of the iwan gives the sense of the Straight Path. (See the interpretation of the arch and iwan in the Mosque of al-Nasir at the Citadel).



## PRAYING HALL

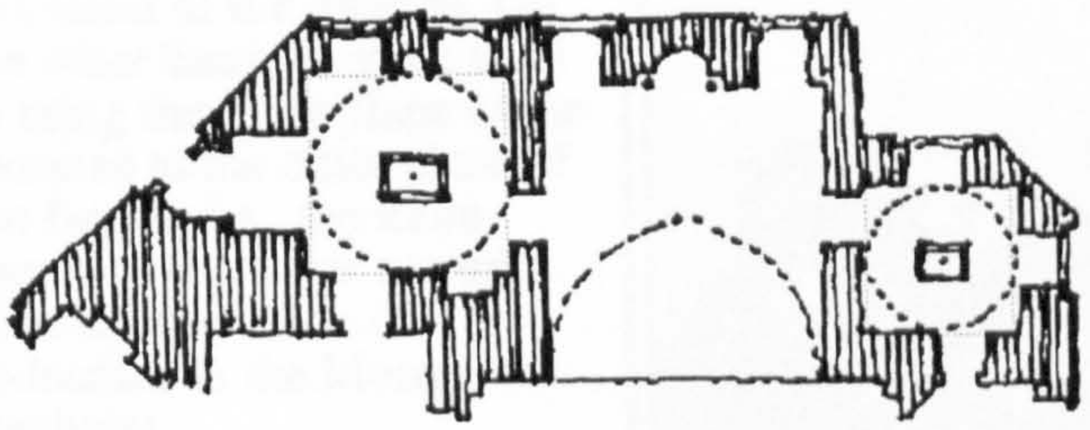


The prayer hall is a pointed iwan. Laterally, the centre of the praying hall connects to the two mausolea, thus, instigating du'a' by those who pray in the qibla iwan. The centre of the courtyard is axially aligned to the centre of the prayer hall, which in turn is laterally aligned to the two mausolea (centres in themselves).

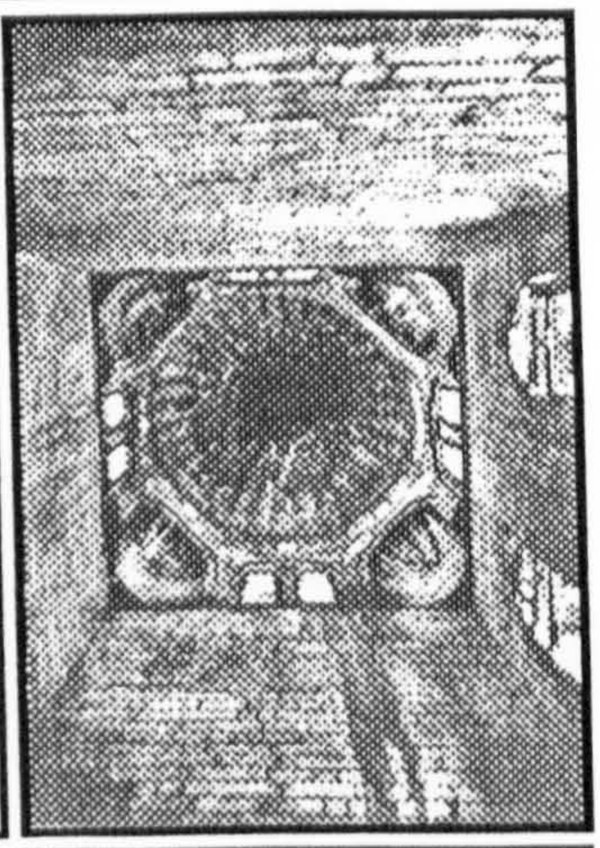
## MIHRAB

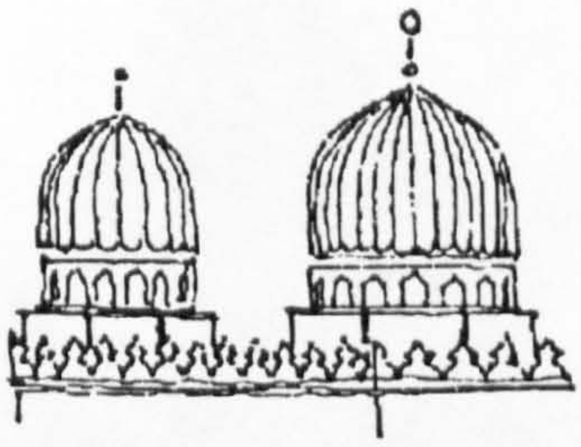
The mihrab located in the centre of the qibla wall demonstrates both depth (interiority) as well as verticality (transcendence). A rosette at the centre of the pointed semi-dome in the niche radiates coloured marble patterns that recall the verse of light. (See interpretation of the mihrab in the Mosque of Baybars).

## DOMES



Plan of Mausolea

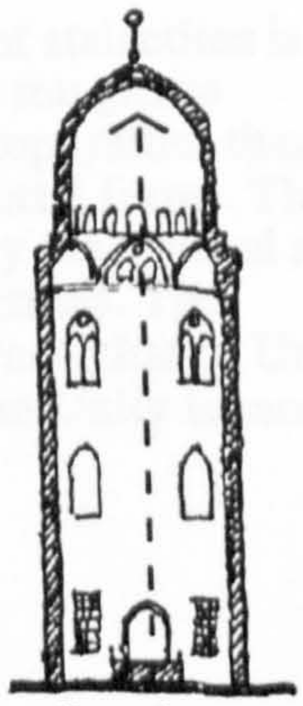




Elevation of Domes

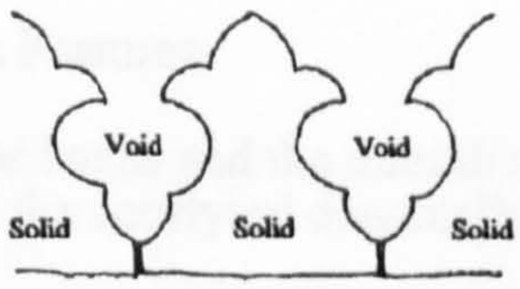
The exterior and interior of the domes change their section from square to octagon (by means of squinches) to the circle, and finally to unity according to the cosmological model:

Earth / Square
Throne / Octagon
Celestial / Circle
The One / Point



Section

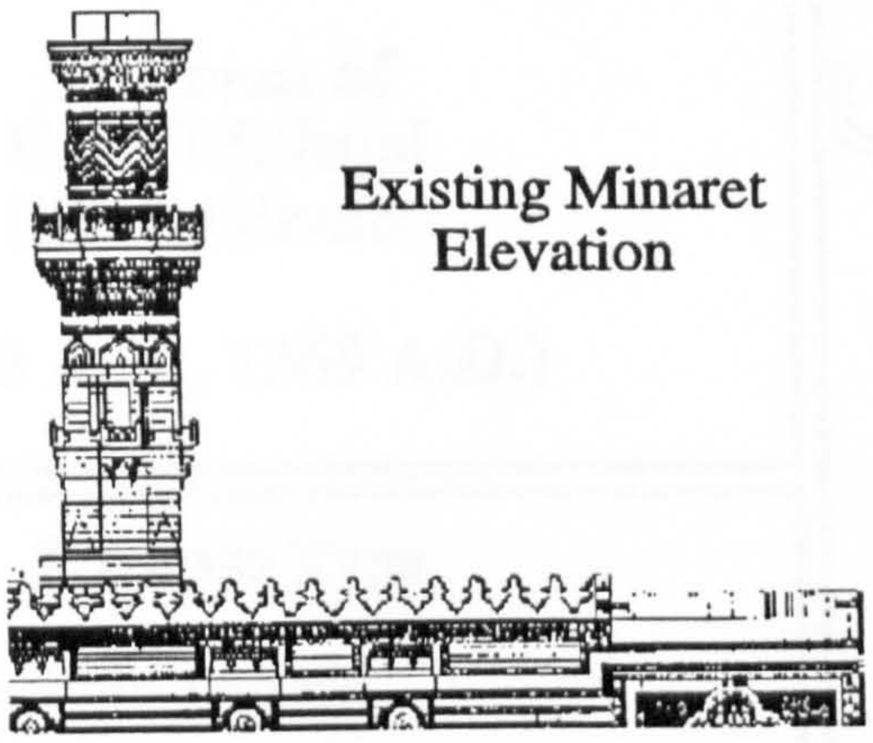
## CRESTINGS




Trefoil Crestings

Trefoil crestings are used both externally and internally connecting the building to the sky. (See interpretation of crestings in earlier cases).

MINARET

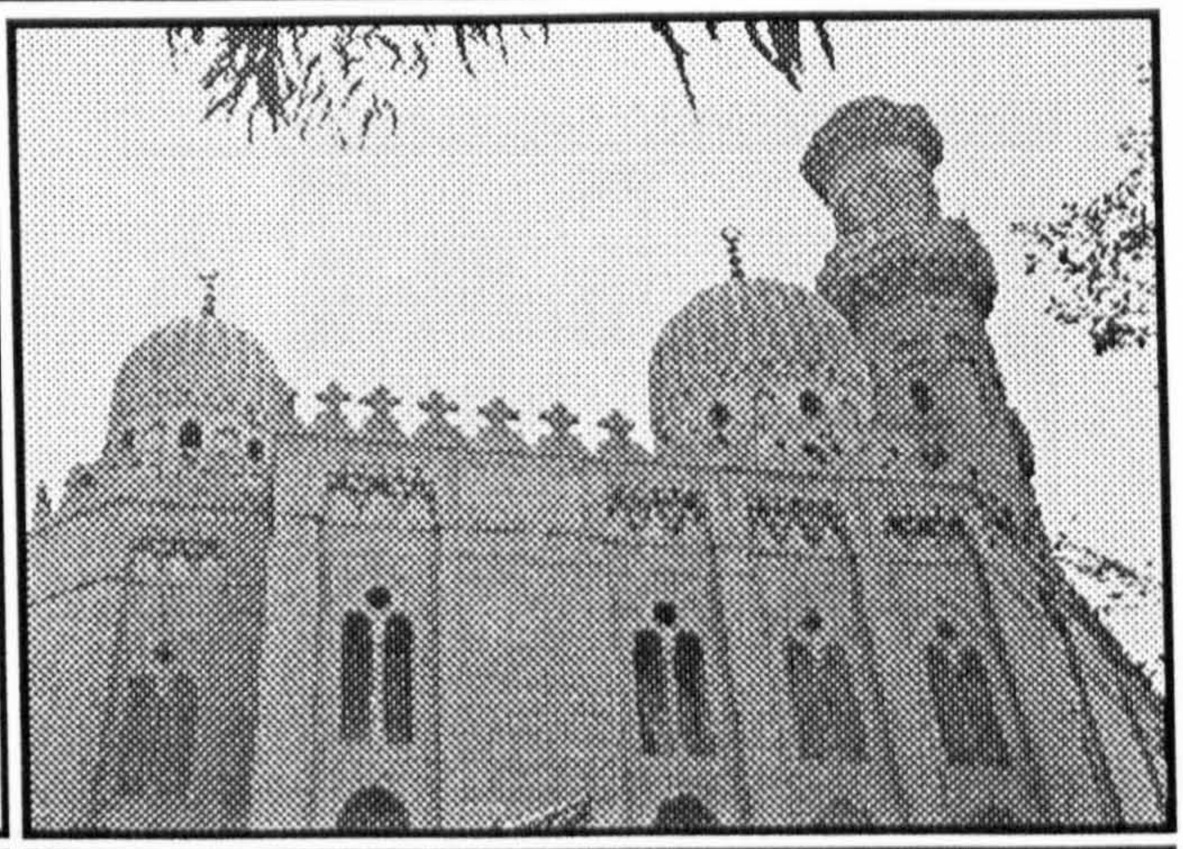


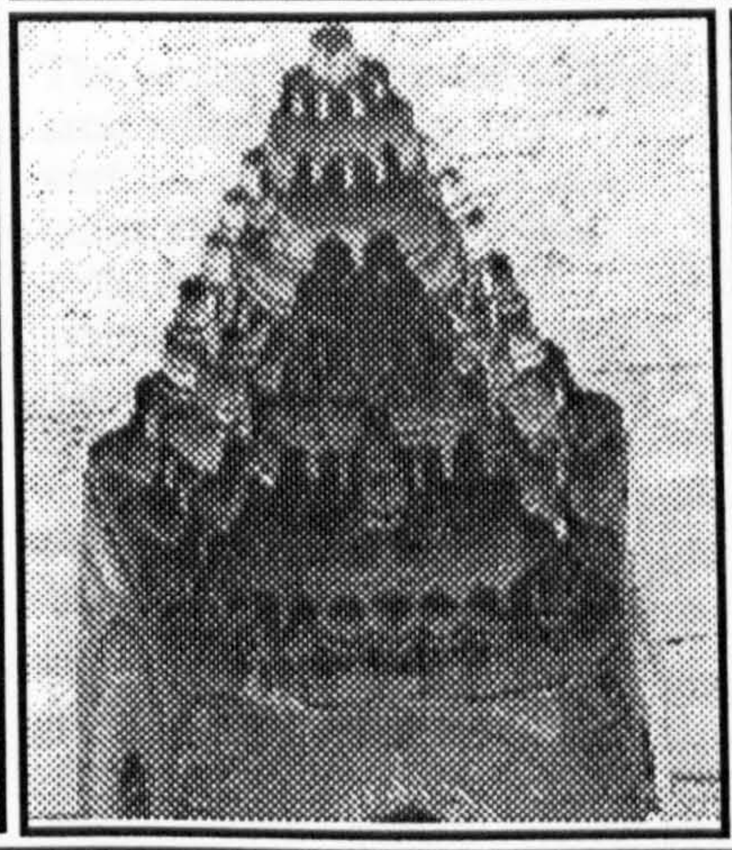
Existing Minaret Elevation

The remains of the minaret changes section from square to octagon to probably an octagonal pavilion, culminating in a circular pointed top (as all other minarets of the period). (See interpretation of the minaret as explained earlier).

STALACTITES

Stalactites are used structurally to carry the balconies of the minaret. On the other hand, they are used to bring the inner plane of the recesses to the outer plane of the facade; i.e., the more sacred to the lesser sacred. (See interpretation of stalactites in the Mosque of Baybars).





One of the most elaborate uses of stalactites is found in this building where the muqarnas actually forms the entire portal top (rather than being incorporated within the portal form). This is achieved by corbelling, and by the vertical and horizontal repetition of the muqarnas. The symbolic meaning of the muqarnas, that of Unity in diversity and multiplicity from Unity is most evident.

## Remarks:

Prototypic Features:

1) The four iwans and the mihrab are aligned to the centre of the courtyard. The four corners of the courtyard diagonally correspond to this centre.

2) The minaret and the two mausoleum domes follow the Sufi cosmological model.

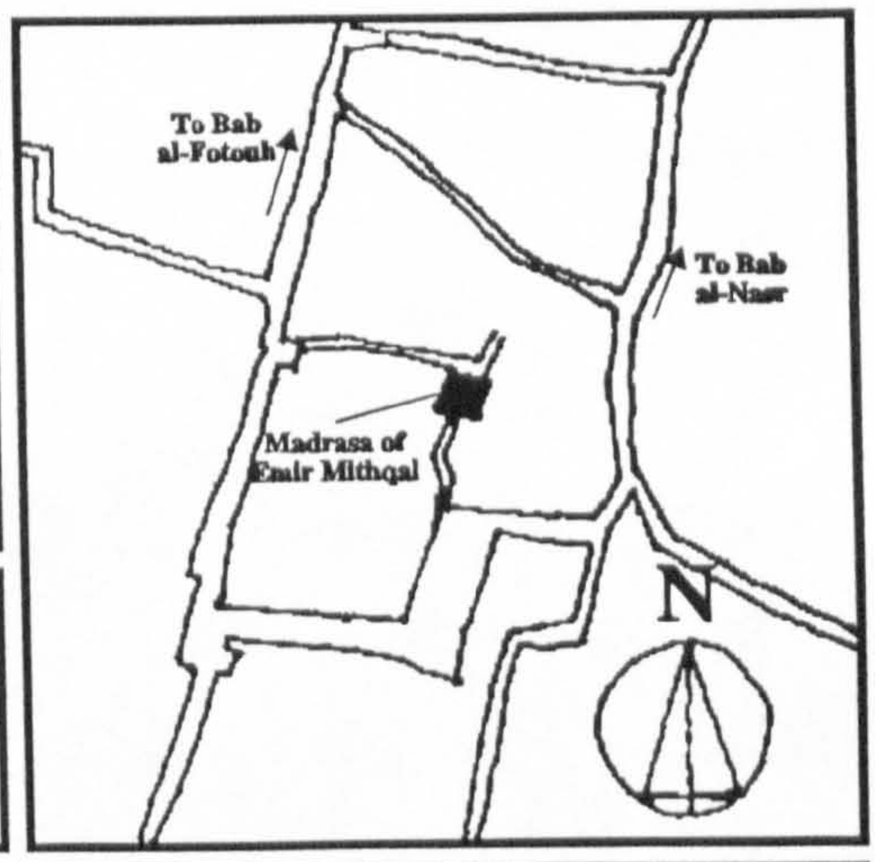
Unique Features:

1) The silhouette of the portal is triangular rather than a pointed arch (embodying verticality).

2) Squinches are used instead of stalactites in the transition of the mausoleum dome.

# Madrasa of Emir Mithqal (Darb Qirmiz)

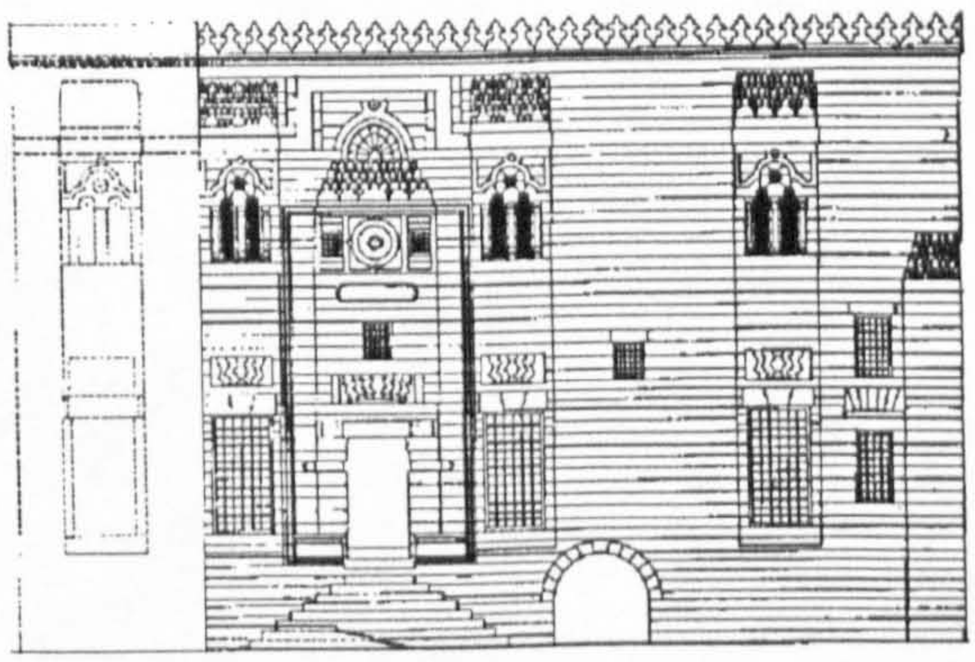
## (776 A.H., 1365 A.D.)




## Madrasa Type

## (4 Iwans)

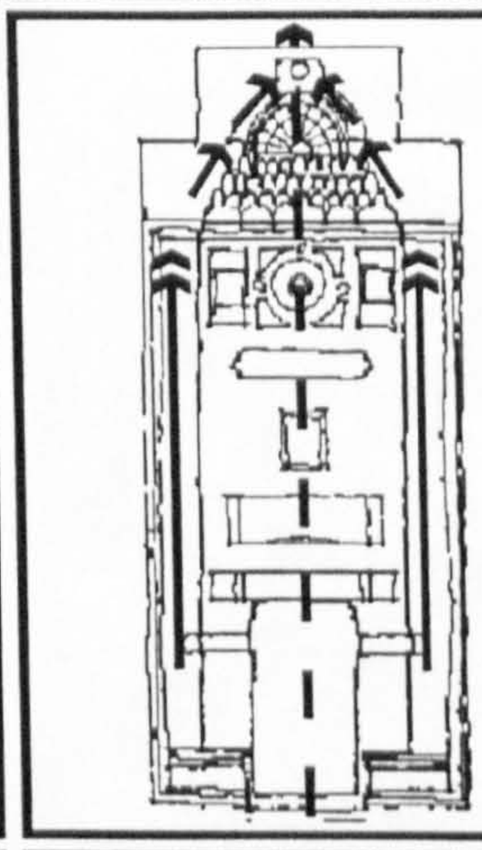
**Plan**

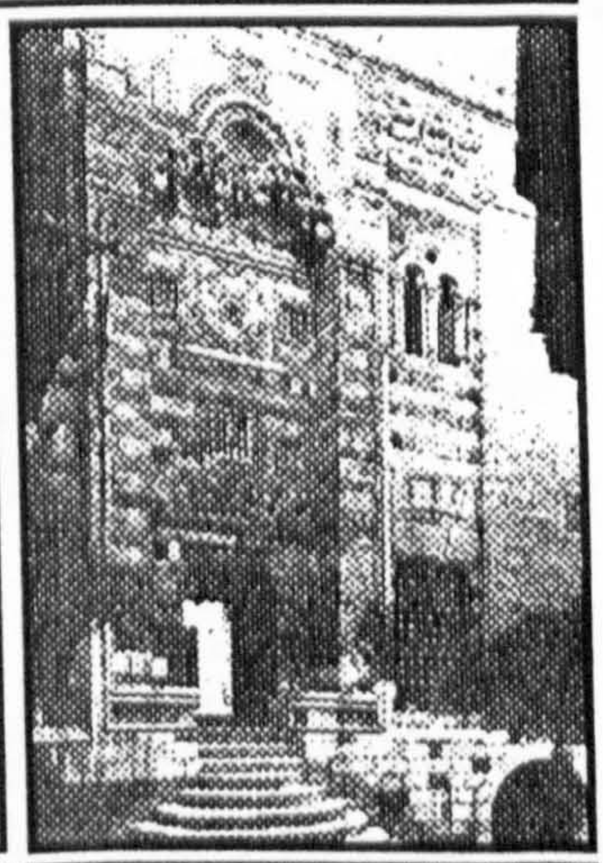


**Elevation**

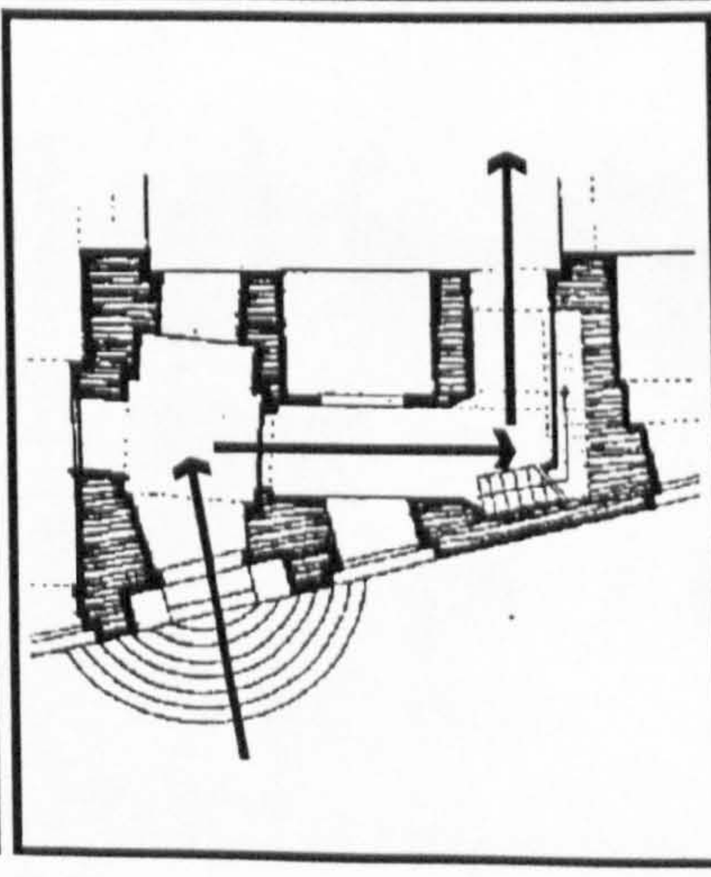
PORTAL

The portal is a pointed trilobed arch which points to the vertical and culminates at a point at the summit of the arched niche. The use of stalactites, smoothely merges the outer less sacred plane of the street facade to the inner more sacred plane of the recessed portal. (See interpretation of the portal of the Mosque of al-Nasir at the Citadel).

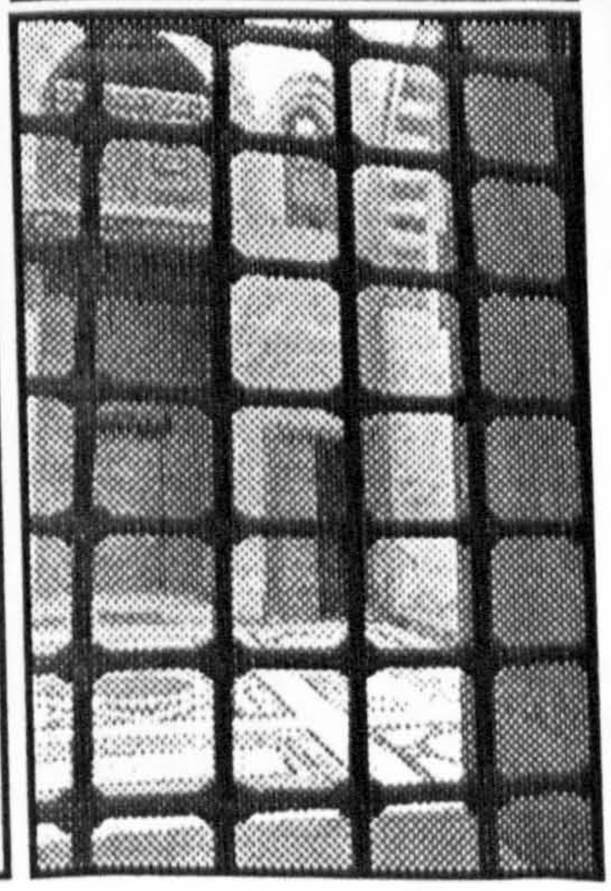




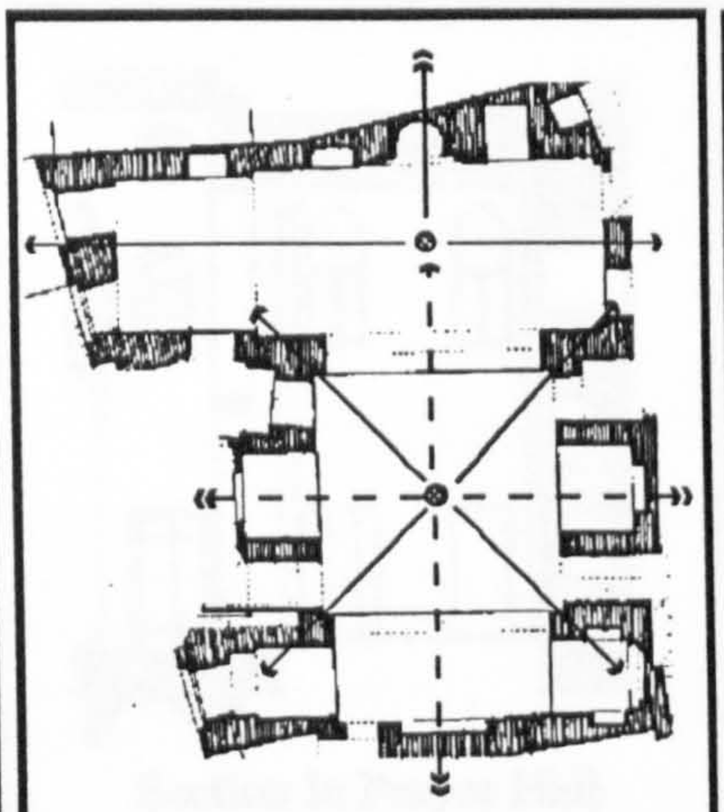
ENT. HALL & MAJAZ



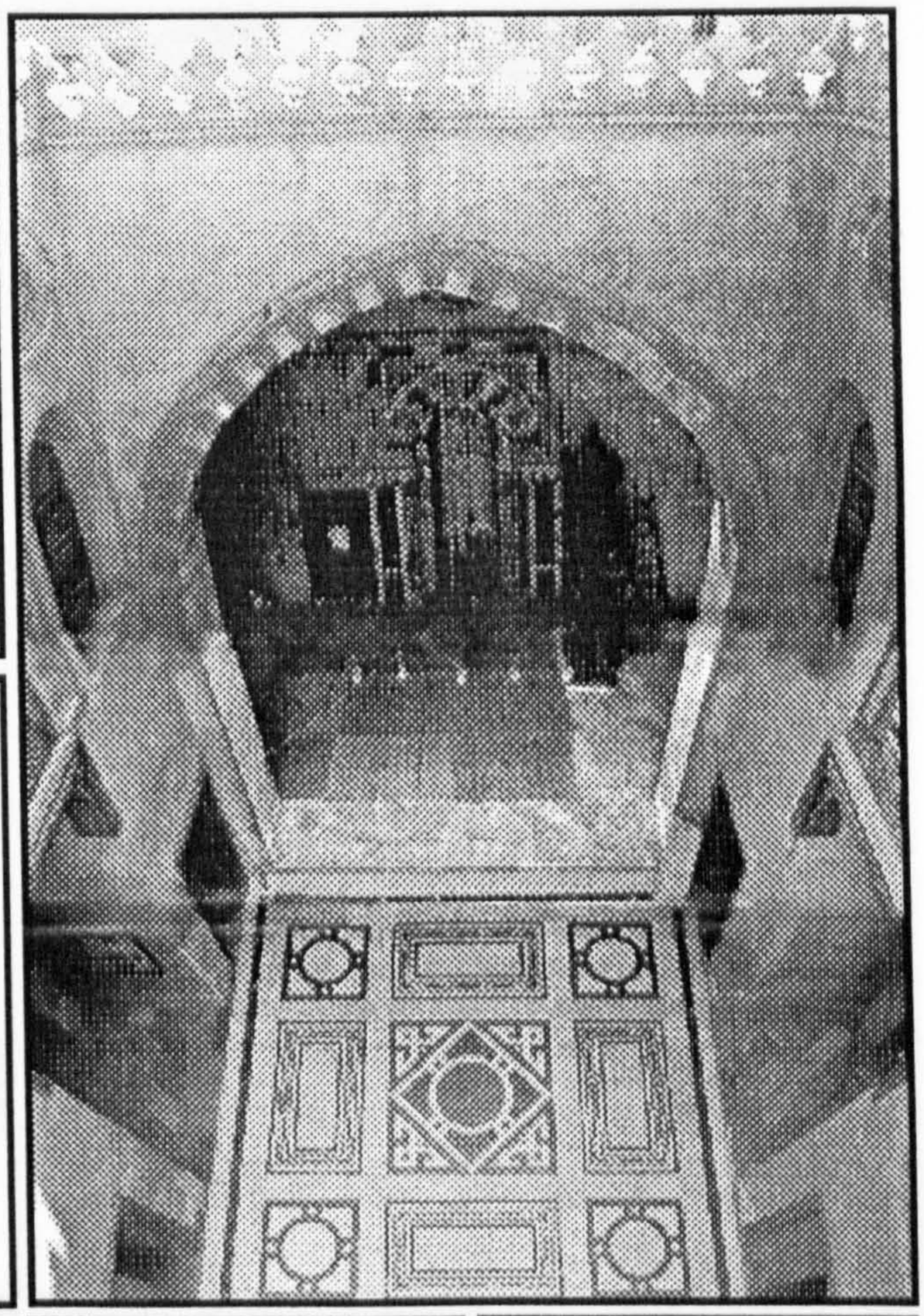
The majaz is a bent passageway which visually disconnects the visitor from the outside world. Halfway through the majaz, one gets a glimpse of the centre (source of Unity) of the sahn through a copper grill window.



COURTYARD & FOUNTAIN



Although the central fountain is missing, the rotation of the marble patterned square in the centre of the courtyard gives an abstract eight sided form representing the octagonal fountain. The whole composition consists of a square (the earth), rotated to give the octagon (the Throne), and an inscribed circle in its centre (the celestial sphere).

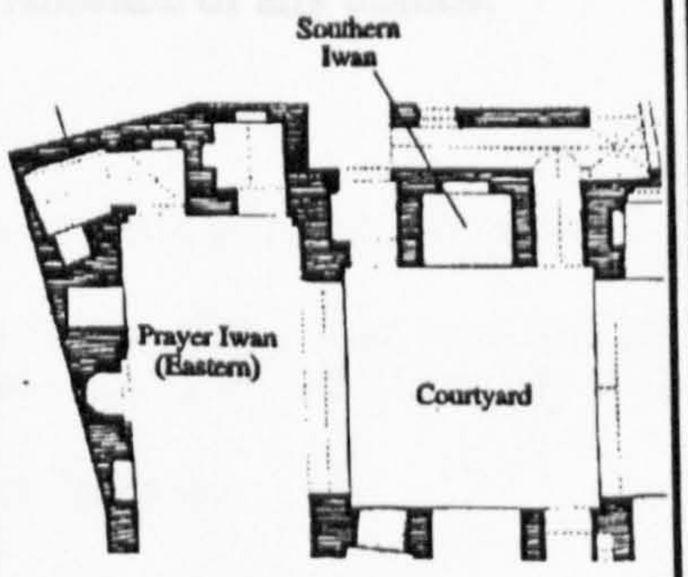


ARCHES & IWANS

Arches are not used externally except in the portal (see above). Internally, the four iwans are pointed, leading vision upwards. They are constructed in ablaq masonry, resulting in radiating effects (see interpretation of arches in the Mosque of al-Nasir at the Citadel).

Prayer Iwan

The Prayer Iwan is the largest and deepest of all four Iwans, its width gives it its laterality (long rows). As all traditional prayer iwans, it culminates in a central point of focus, the mihrab. Thus, accentuated depth gives the horizontal direction of the qibla, while the height and shape of the arch connects it to the vertical.



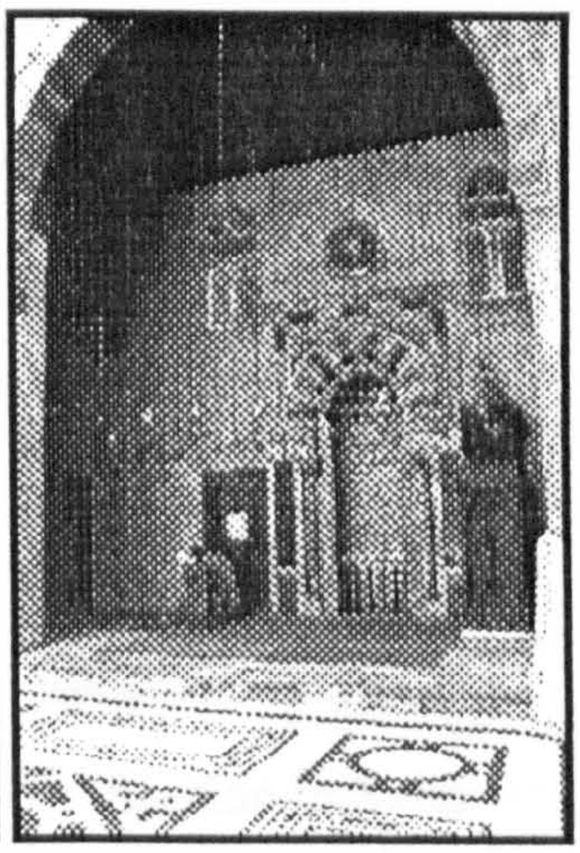

Plan of Iwans

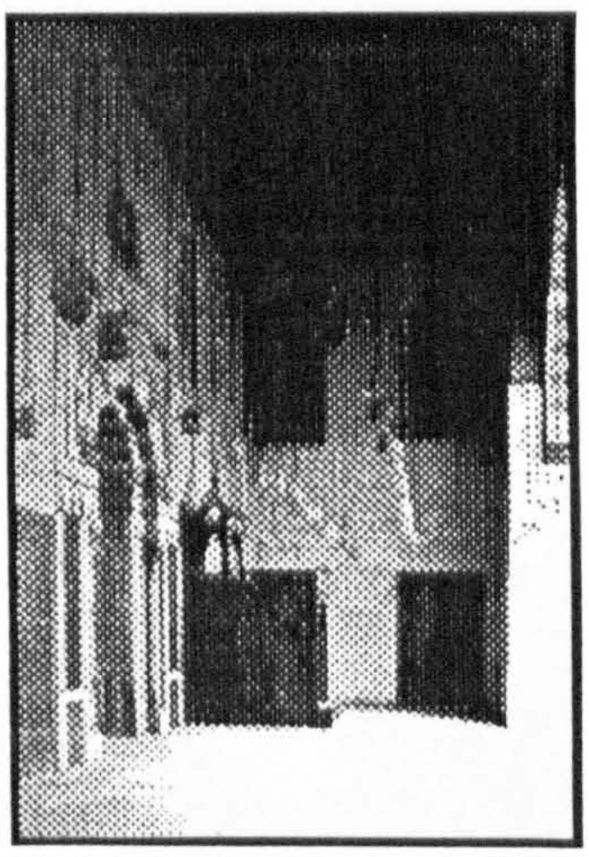
Southern Iwan

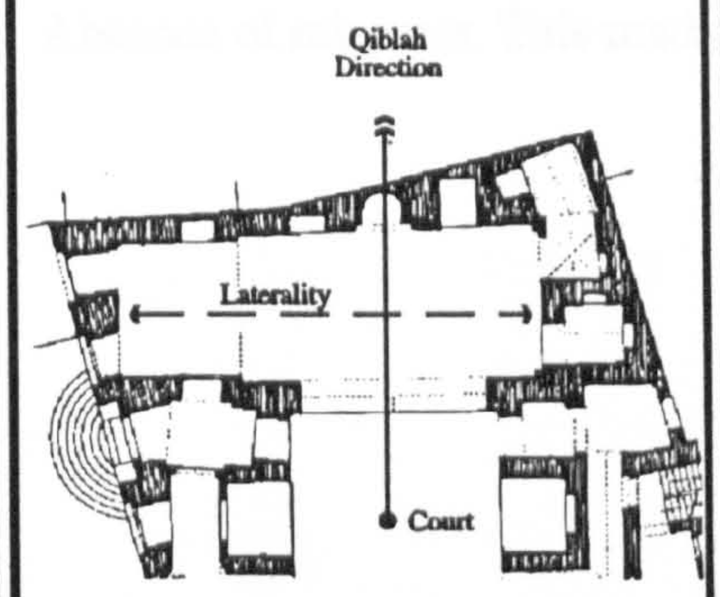
The size of the northern and southern iwans (2.5x3.5 m) makes them unusable for either teaching or prayer. This fact, that iwans were designed not to be used (in terms of utility) indicates that they were incorporated for their symbolic function, to complete the quadrature resulting from the centre of the court.

PRAYING HALL

Section in Prayer Hall





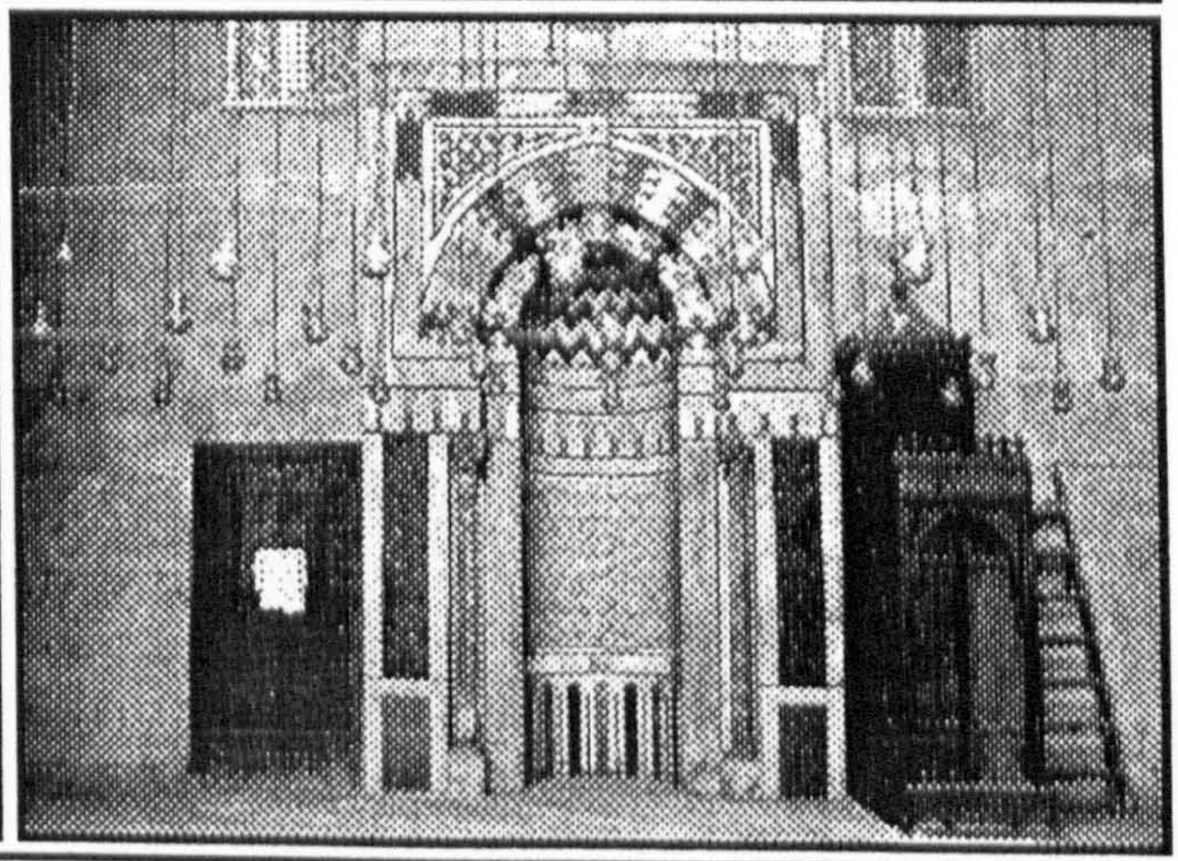



Plan of Prayer Hall

Laterality and depth have been realized by the chosen iwan organization. The most striking feature of this prayer iwan is its emptiness. Very little decoration is applied, and whatever is incorporated leads vision upwards (e.g. pointed arched windows, shape of mihrab, ...etc.). The accomodation of the praying area in the direction of the qibla as opposed to the street orientation, is taken up by the thickness of the walls.

MIHRAB

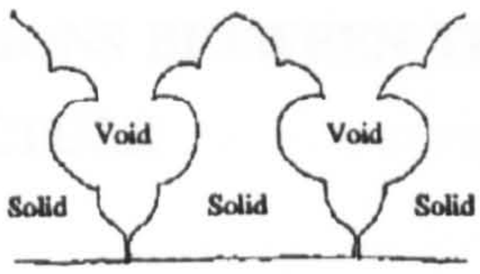
The mihrab is clad with coloured marble patterns with radiating effects recalling the verse of light. (See interpretation of the mihrab of the Mosque of Baybars). The mihrab composition seems to resemble a window (to Heaven) in the midst of a vast empty wall.



DOME

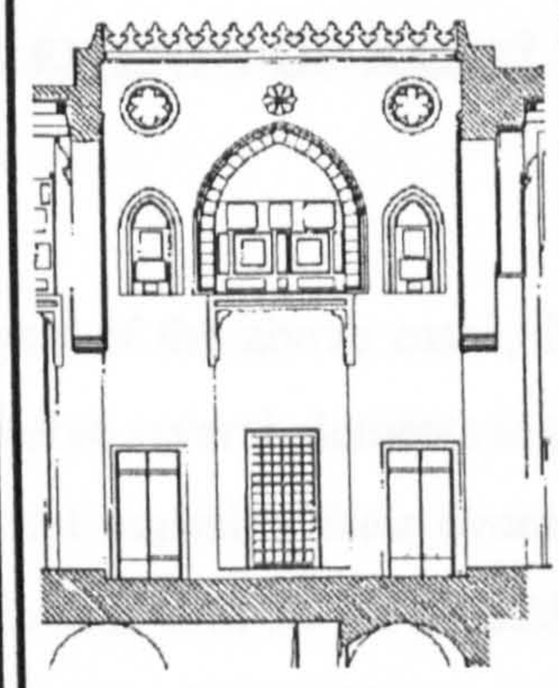
Absence of any domes.

## CRESTINGS

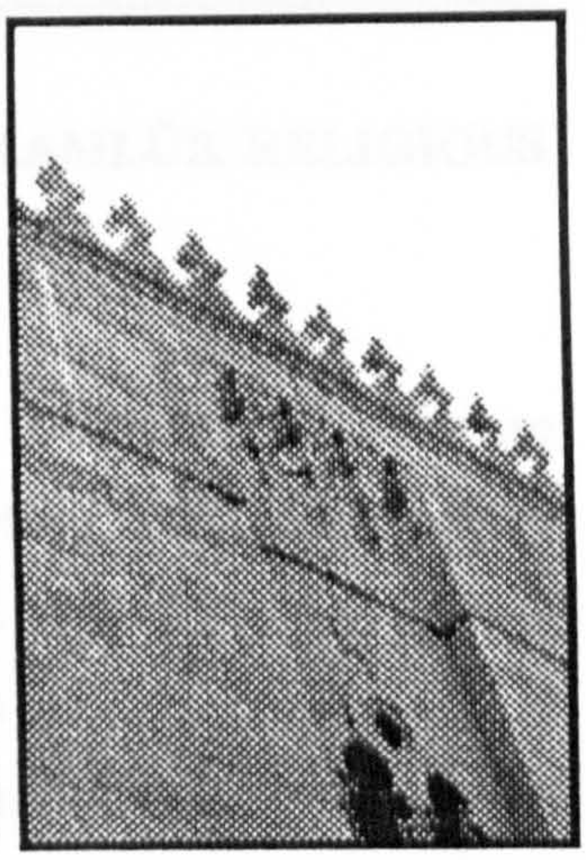



Trefoil Crestings

Externally, as well as internally, trefoil crestings are used. (See earlier interpretation of crestings).



Section in Sahn

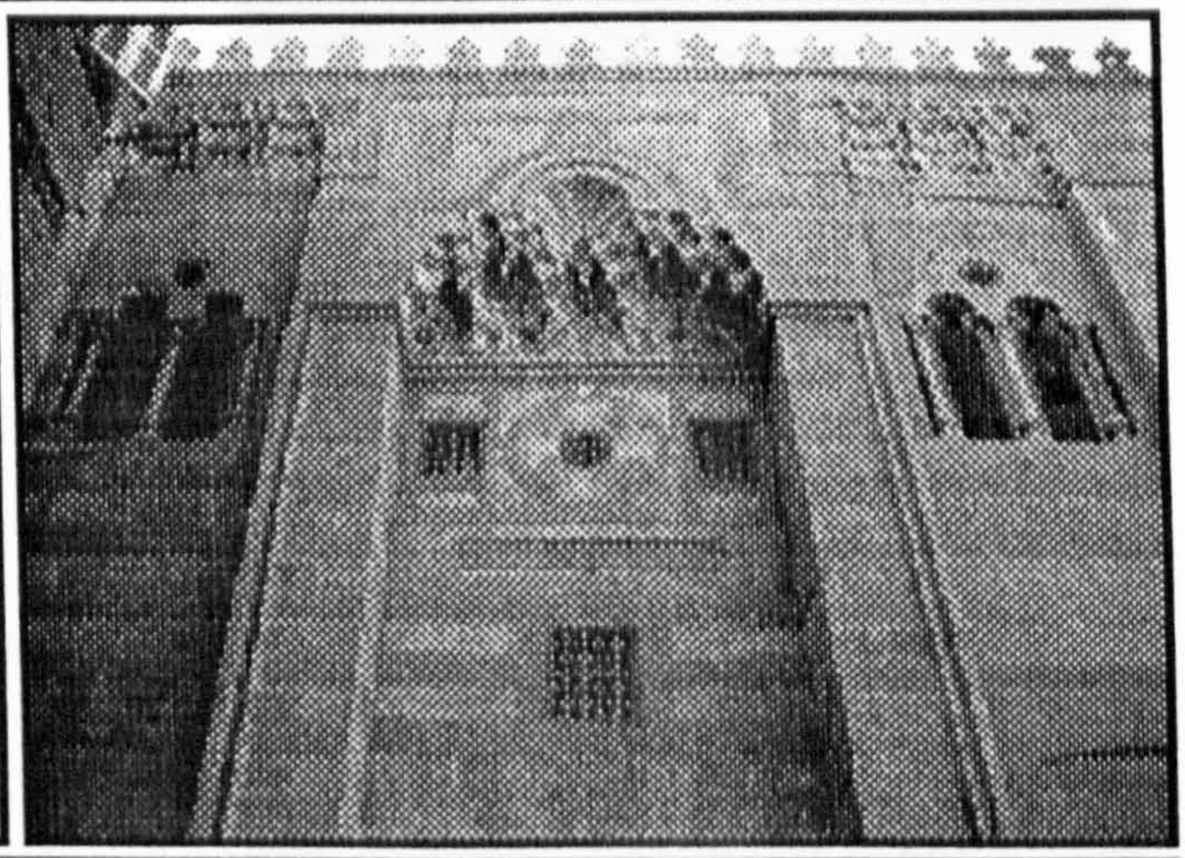


## MINARET

Absence of minarets. This madrasa was not used as a congregational Friday mosque.

## STALACTITES

Internally, there are no stalactites. Externally, they are used to bring the outer less sacred planes of the facades to the inner more holy planes of the recesses of the portal and of windows. (See interpretation of stalactites in the Mosque of Baybars).



## Remarks:

Prototypic Features:

1) The portal is pointed and recessed, leading to an entrance hall and a majaz.

2) The centre of the courtyard is axial to the four iwans, and the mihrab. The centre is at the same time aligned diagonally to the four corners of the quadrangular courtyard.

Unique Features:

1) The centre of the courtyard coincides with the centre of a rotated square marble pattern (45 degrees) forming an octagon circumscribing a circle. This pattern is an abstraction of the octagonal water fountain following the traditional cosmological model .

## 9.2 RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ELEMENTS OF BAḤRĪ MAMLŪK RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

From the examination and analysis of the above cases, it is obvious that there are certain architectural compositions that involve several elements together, and that, by looking at these elements on their own we are not exposing their overall symbolic effect in their specific context. In this section, I will not deal with all the possible sets of relations between the elements of Mamlūk religious architecture, but rather concentrate on four of the most obvious relations in order to illustrate how the elements are organized and perceived by the viewer.

### 9.2.1 The Entrance Relation

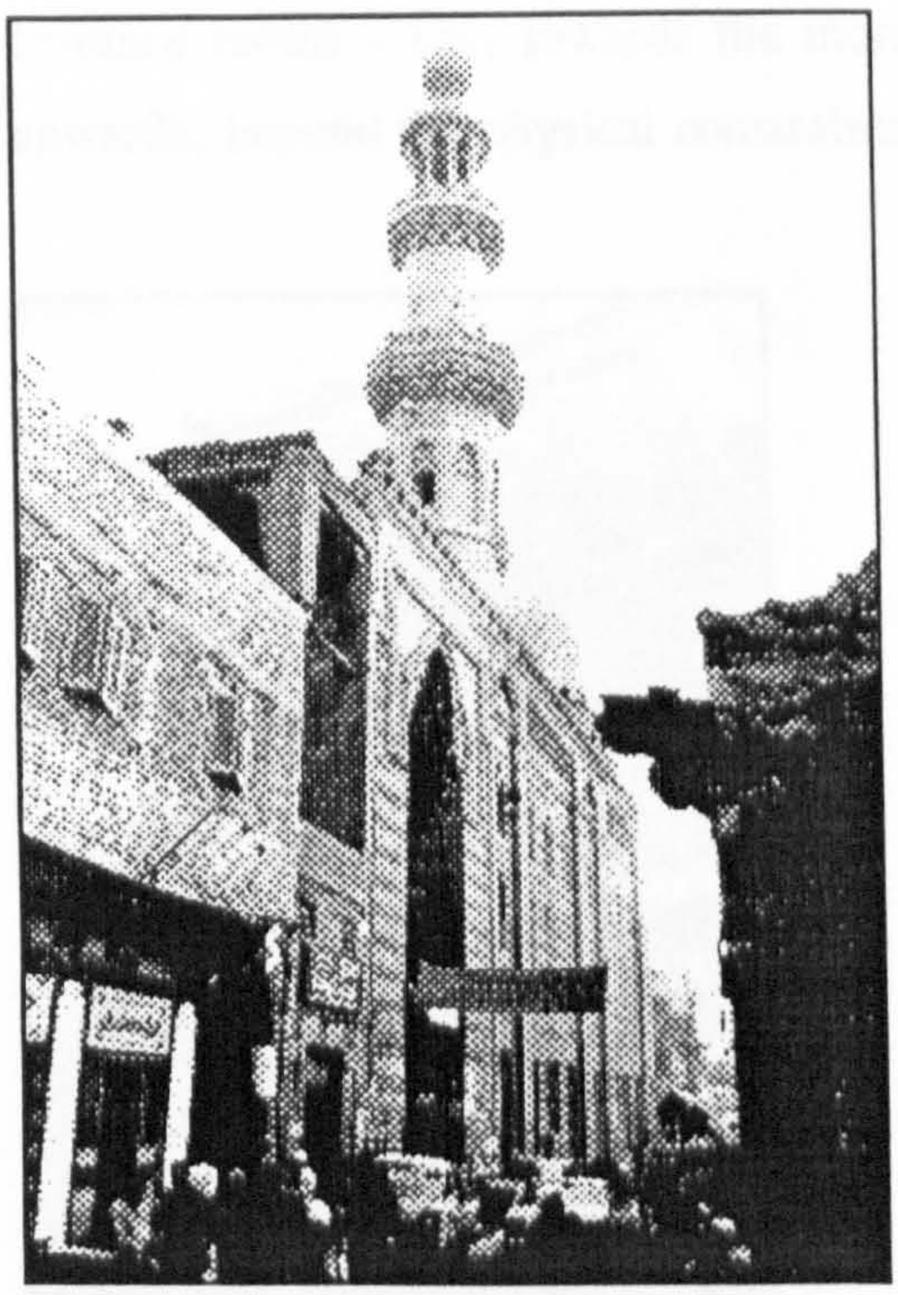


**Figure 9.1** External view of the *Madrasa* of Iljāy al-Yūsufī showing the dark recessed portal in contrast with the rest of the façade.

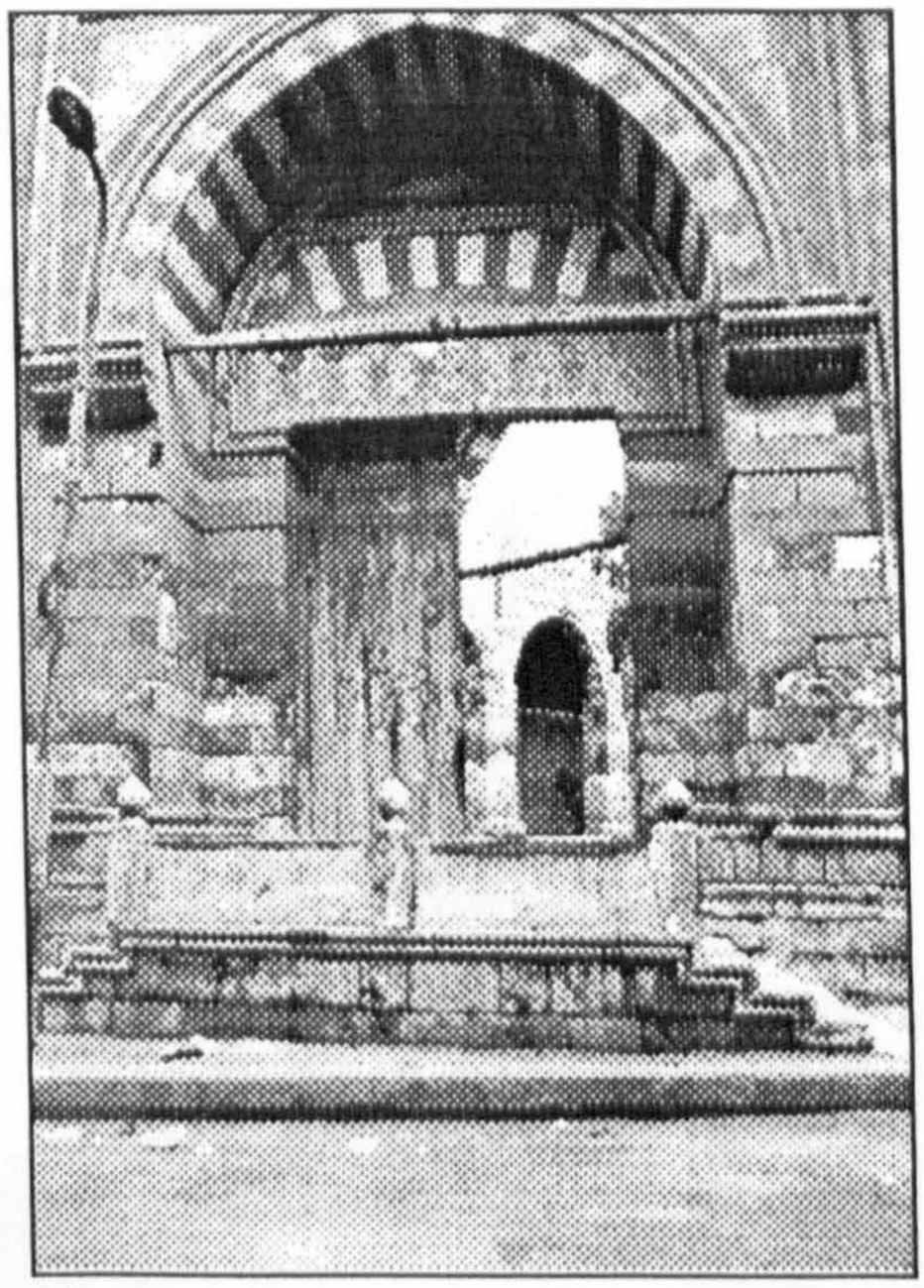


**Figure 9.2** The portal of the Mosque of Āqsunqur showing steps leading to the pointed arched *iwān*.

We saw earlier in Chapter Eight and in the cases just analyzed that the entrance is the main point of focus in the façade. It is strikingly represented by a set of grouped elements that are inter-related, punctuating the austere walls of Mamlūk religious buildings. (Fig. 9.1) We have seen how the prototypical entrance involves a flight of rising steps which lead to a

pointed niche-like portal (Fig. 9.2), culminating in a group of stalactites, followed by a row of crestings, and topped by a towering minaret.[1]

By examining this characteristic entrance composition, we find that the steps form the first element that takes the sight of the viewer upwards. These are usually either outside or within a pointed arched recess, which further takes the sight upwards, along the vertical straight lines (the terrestrial) to join with the curved parts (the celestial) to culminate in a point at the summit of the arch. As was discussed in Chapter Eight, the momentum of this visual movement is coupled with the use of stalactites which in a spatial sense give the feeling of a cave. (Fig. 9.3) Looking at the effect of these stalactites externally, we find that they take the eye smoothly from bottom to top. On the other hand, passing through the portal recess and looking upwards, we find that the same composition gives an opposite effect, that of the outer plane of the façade being brought *down* and *in* towards the inner plane of the entrance recess - i.e., towards the more holy. (Fig. 9.4) In any case, the sight is taken upwards, beyond the physical constraints of the silhouette of the "space" of the portal.

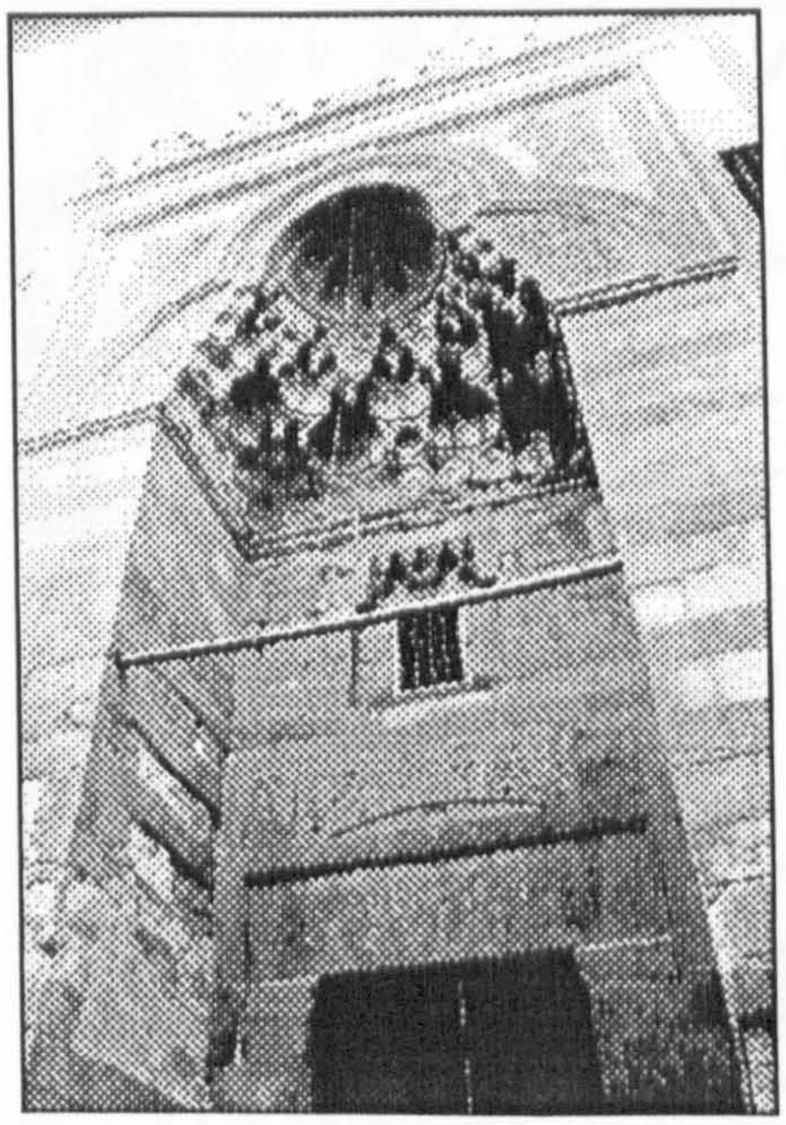


**Figure 9.3** **Portal of the Mosque of Aślam al-Silaḥdār pointing upwards. Looking at the stalactites while facing the portal intensifies ascension.**

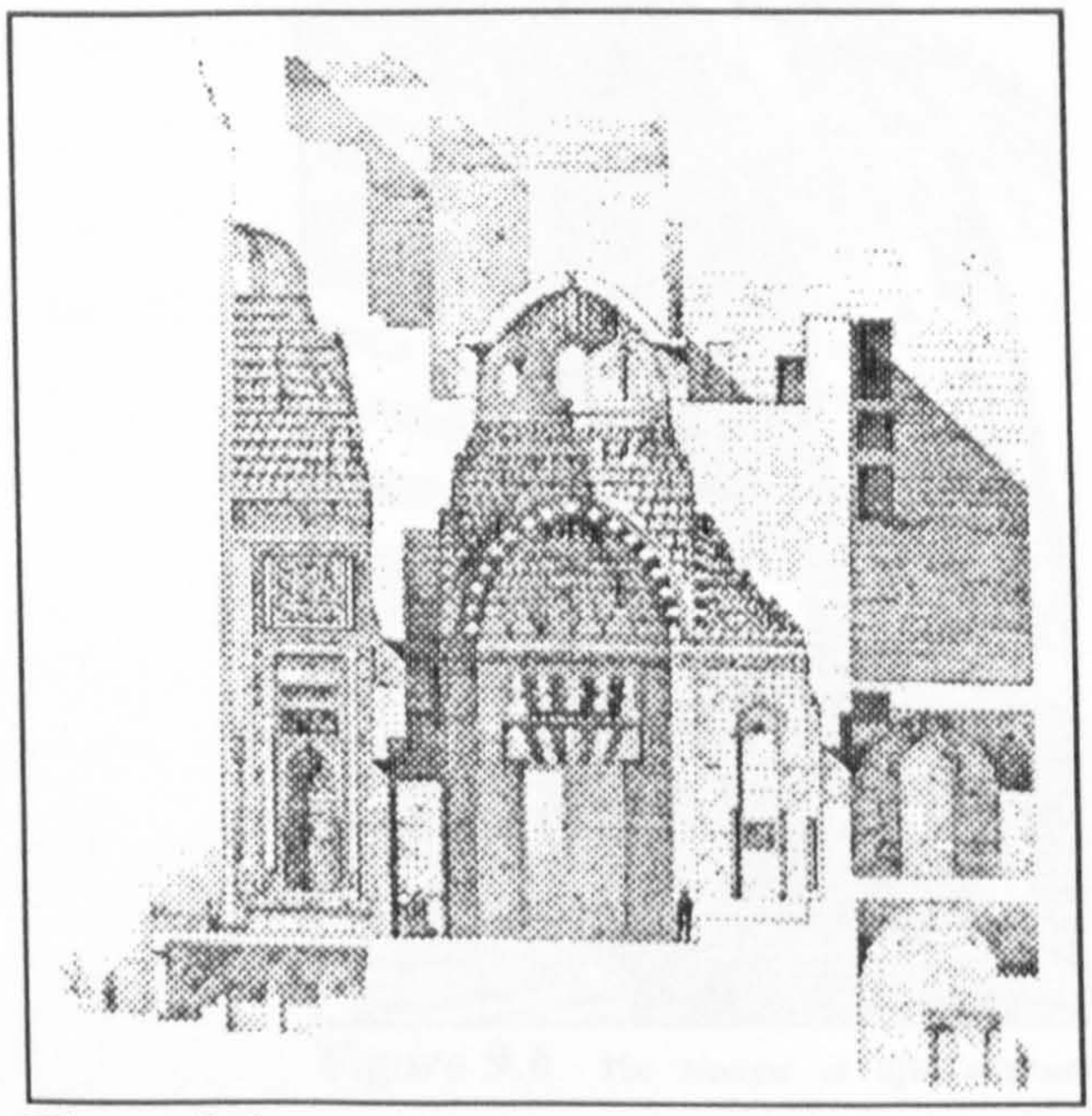


**Figure 9.4** **Section through the portal of the Complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan. While passing through the portal, the stalactites help "pull" the visitor inwards towards the more holy interior.**

[1] Examples of this composition are found in the Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī, *Khanqah* of Baybars al-Jāshankīr, Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, Mosque of al-Māridānī, Mosque and *Khanqah* of Sheykhū, and the *Madrasa* of Sarghatmish.

Looking upwards at this composition once again, we find a row of crestings beyond the silhouette of the portal recess. These crestings are either identical to one another, or similar but not identical (see Complex of Qalāwūn). We saw in Chapter Eight that these rows of crestings create voids that are the inverse images of the solid parts. We also found that these grip the sky and that they symbolize the union between the physical and the spiritual, the earthly and the Heavenly. It thus follows that the vertically escalating sight would reach this stage where the shift from terrestrial to celestial is completed by the actual meeting of the building with the sky - this is not only visual "meeting", but rather "interlocking" within the tooth-like geometrical crenellations or curved trefoil crestings.

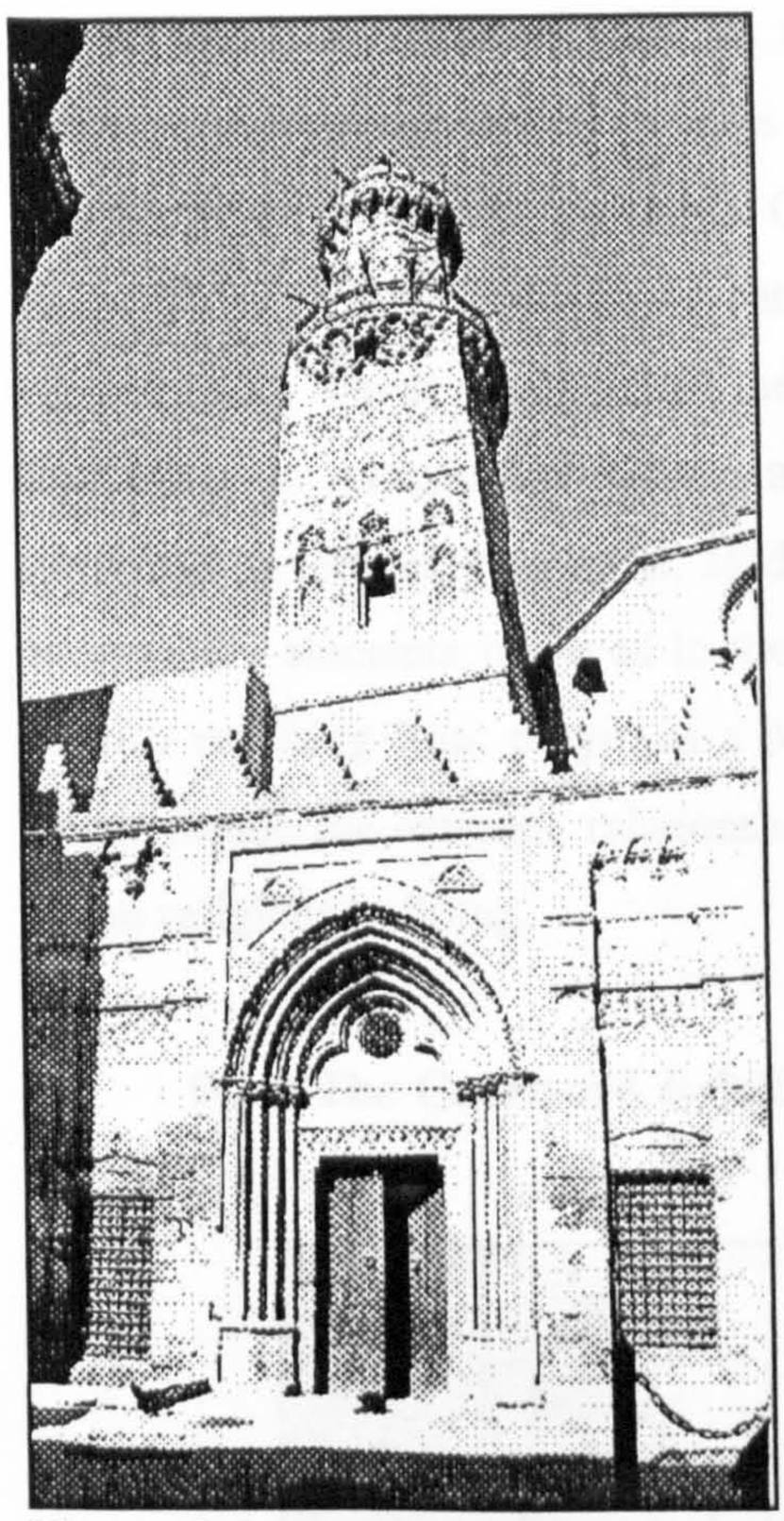


**Figure 9.5** The *Madrasa* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad showing a typical example of an entrance relation where the minaret is placed above the portal.

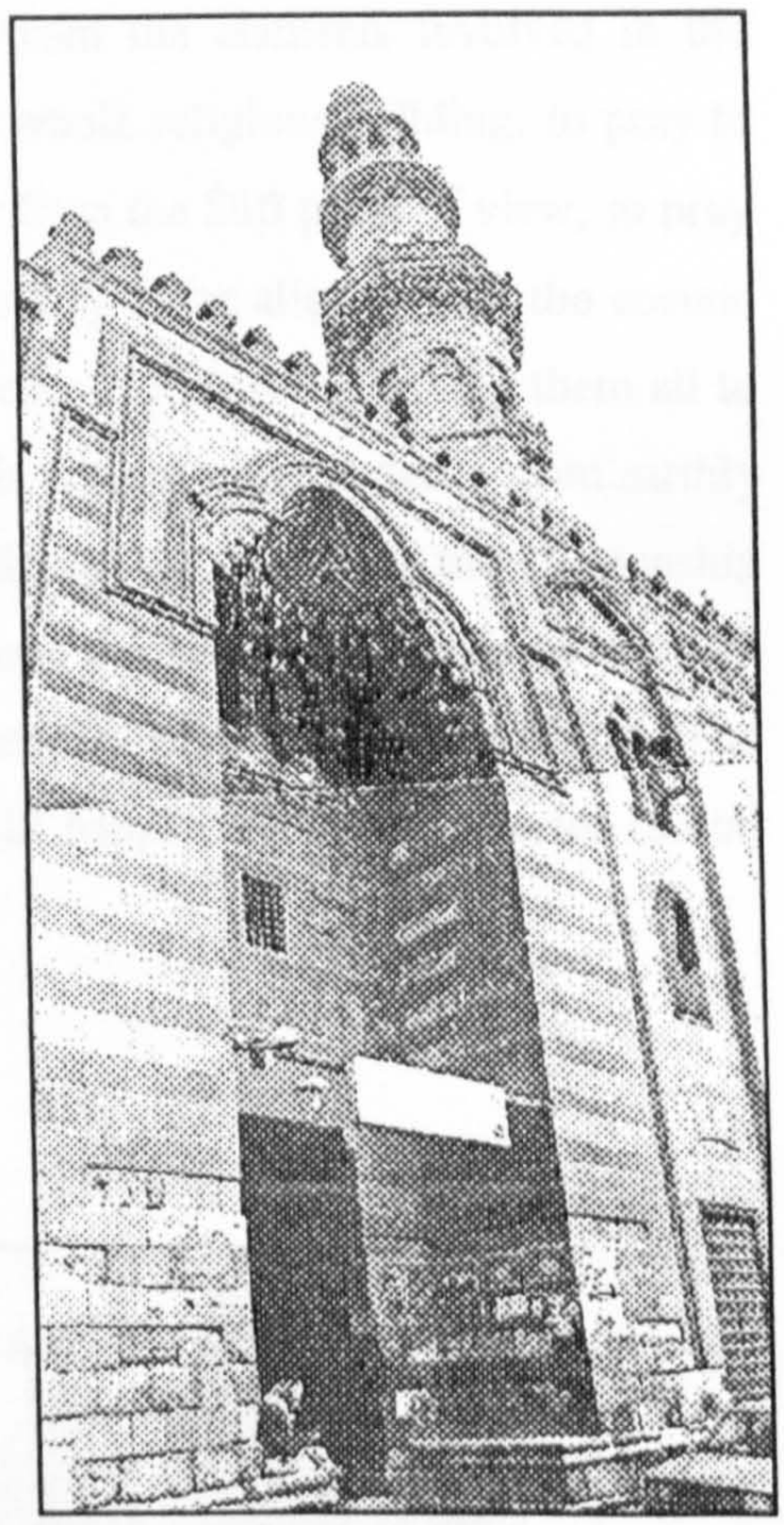


**Figure 9.6** The *Madrasa* of Iljāy al-Yūsufī showing a prototypic entrance relation where the minaret is placed immediately to the side of the portal.

To further accentuate this relationship, the minaret is either located above this composition or immediately above one of the sides of the portal. (Figs. 9.5 & 9.6) This choice of positioning is of the utmost importance as it further carries vision upwards, but this time in a qualitative cosmological ascendance through the symbolism inherent in geometrical

shapes. The minaret changes section from the square (the quadrangular representing the earth) to the octagon (representing the Throne) to the circle (representing the Heavens) culminating at a point (representing the One). According to the findings of Chapters Seven and Eight, this Ṡūfī cosmological model represents the order of the cosmos from the earths to the Heavens to the Throne and finally to God. From this qualitative point of view, the ascending sight would be further taken upwards by this element shooting up in the sky in an ascension resembling that of the person who is taking "a journey to meet God". We should not forget that Ṡūfīs derived their stages of ascent (*maqāmāt*) from the Prophet's *Mi'rāj* (peace and blessings be upon him).

Thus, it is evident that the relation resulting from the elements involved in the entrance, symbolizes as well as sums up the aim of the whole religious building; to pray to God and to *be* with Him. We saw in Chapter Seven that from the Ṡūfī point of view, to pray means to be oriented towards the centre which is ultimately to be aligned with the cosmic vertical axis - which runs through the centres of the earths and Heavens linking them all to God. Since the relationship we are examining leads to this vertical transcendence from earthly terrestrial to Heavenly celestial, leading to God, it follows that in a way, the relationship between the elements involved in the entrance symbolizes the path which leads to the end-product resulting from prayer as a process. In the otherwise blank, external (*ḍhāhir*), and empty façade the entrance relationship tells us what will happen within the interior (*bāṫin*) of the religious building.

### 9.2.2 The Courtyard Relation

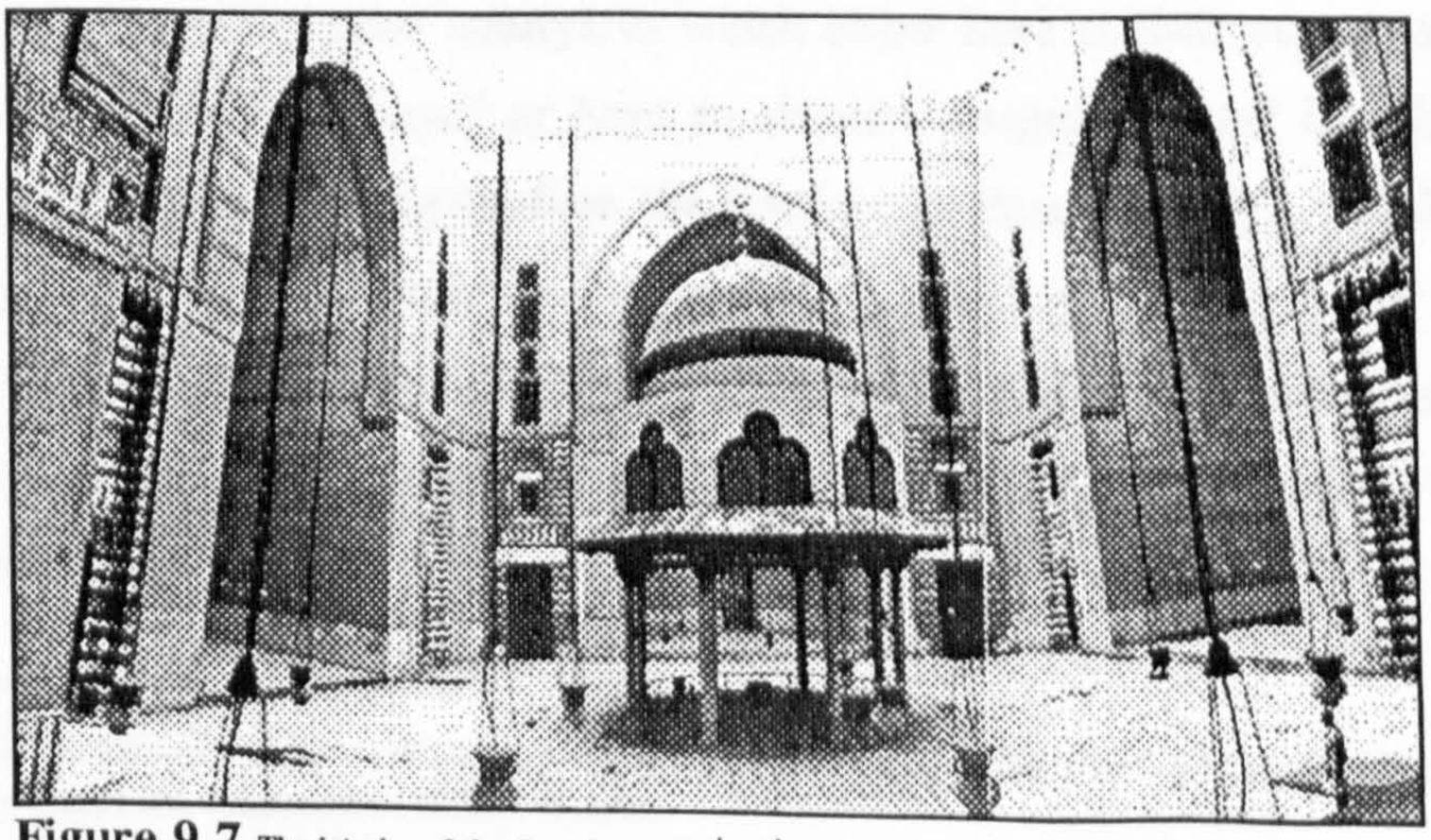


**Figure 9.7** The interior of the Complex of Sulṫān Ḥassan sums up the courtyard relation.

We mentioned in Chapter Eight that the courtyard represents the heart of the Islamic traditional building. Whether this central space is roofed by a dome or open to the sky (Heaven), from it the whole geometry and order of the buildings comes to be realized. The traditional building appears to be "generated" from within until it meets with the external wall boundaries. (Fig. 9.7)

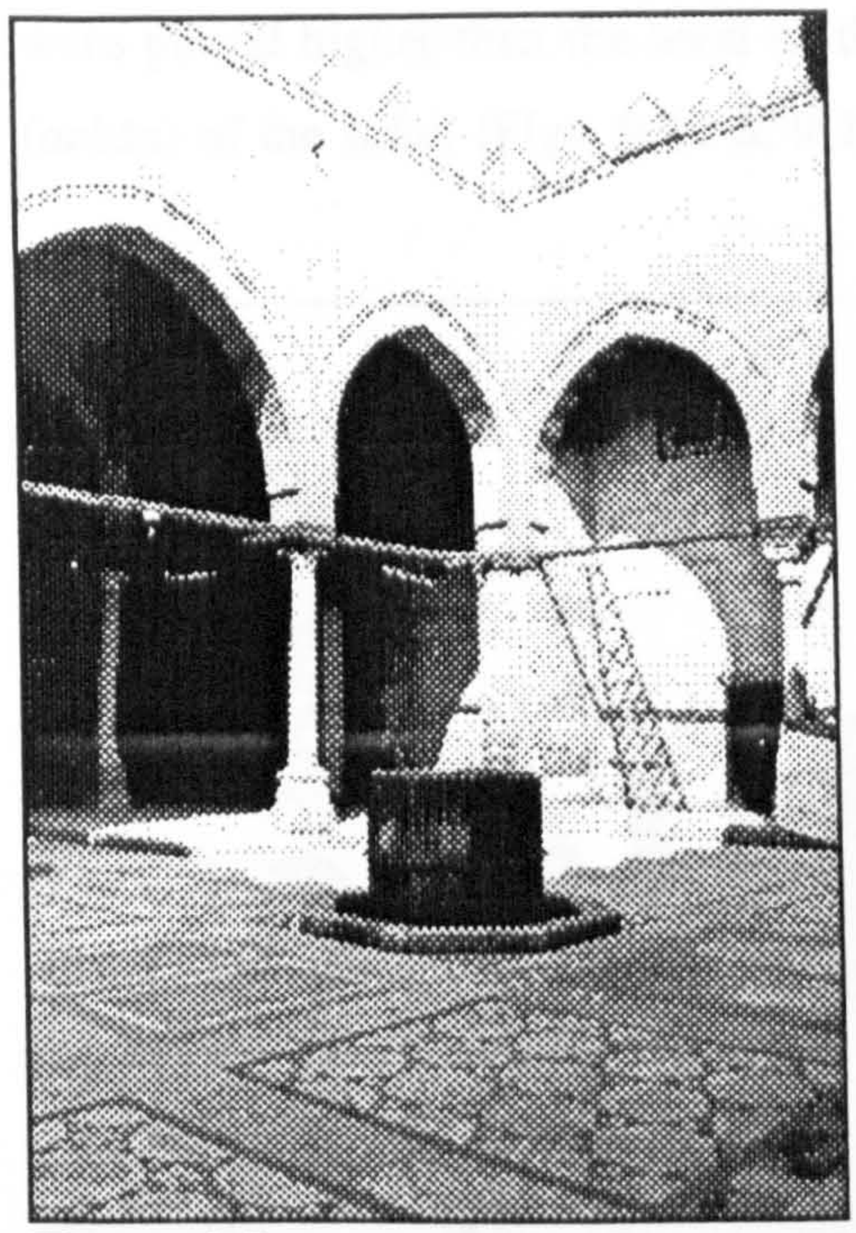


**Figure 9.8** The interior of the Mosque of Sheykhū showing an example of one of the simplest of Mamlūk cases central fountains. It is composed of an octagonal basalt block in which a circular basin is carved out.

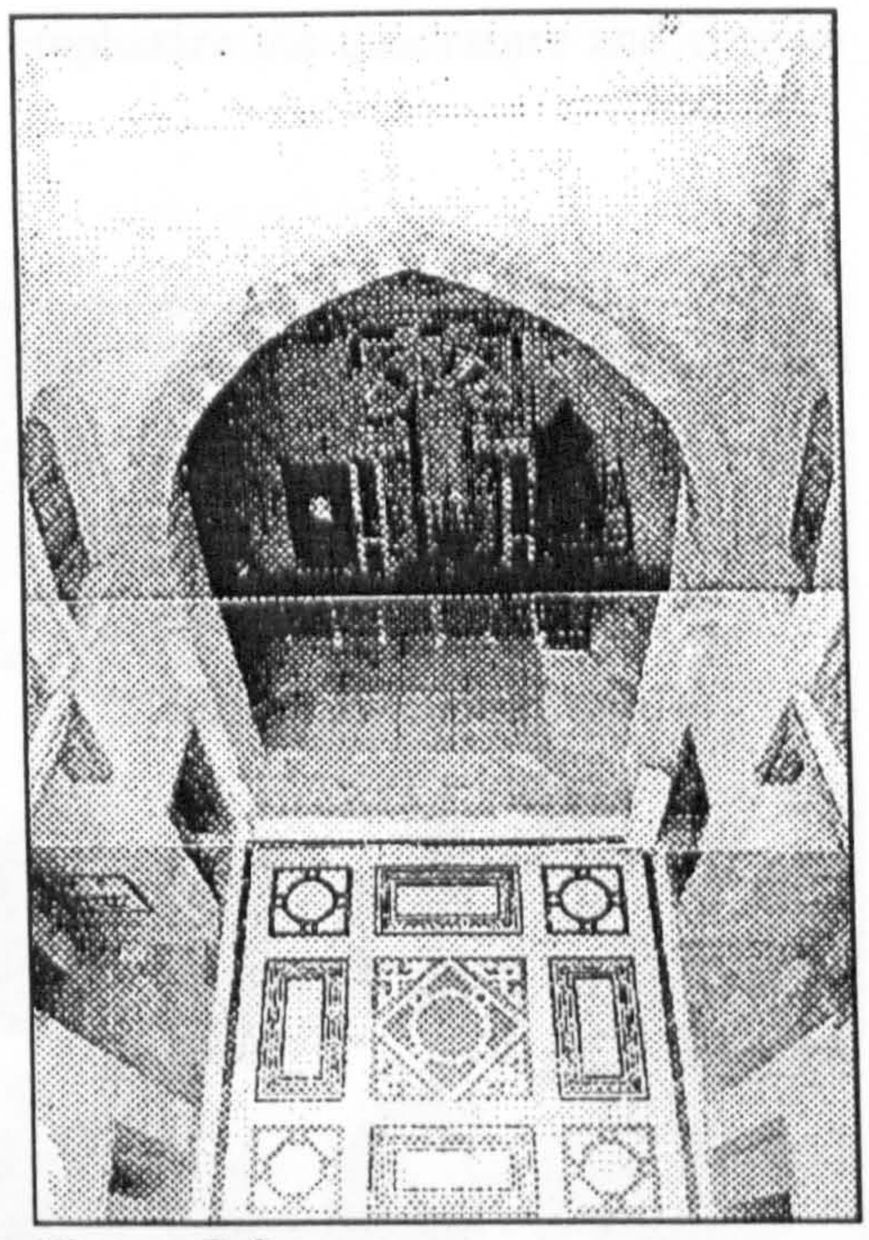


**Figure 9.9** The interior of the *Madrasa* of Mithqāl showing the rotation of a marble square pattern at 45 degrees (to produce an octagon). The final square inscribes a circle representing the abstraction of a dome.

From the examination of the Mamlūk cases, we find that Mamlūk religious buildings are centred about quadrangular courtyards which either have at their centres an octagonal water fountain roofed by a dome[1] or have an abstract octagonal shape[2] inscribing a circle in the marble flooring which symbolizes the Gardens of Paradise. (Figs. 9.8 & 9.9) From these centres, four pointed *iwāns* (in the case of *madrasas* and *khanqahs*) or four *riwāqs* composed of rows of pointed arcades (in the case of the hypostyle mosque) are generated axially from the centre: the eastern and western in the axis of the Ka'ba and the northern and southern perpendicular to it.

---

[1] See the Complex of Qalawun, Mosque of al-Māridānī, Mosque of Sheykhū, *Khanqah* of Sheykhū, *Madrasa* of Sarghatmish, and the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan.

[2] See the *Madrasa* of Tatar al-Ḥijāziyyah, and the *Madrasa* of *Emīr* Mithqāl.

The four corners of the courtyard seem to have been purposefully emphasized to show the relation between the four directions and the four corners to the centre. This was carried out by first making the *iwāns* or *riwāqs* slightly smaller than the side of the courtyard, which visually gives a sense that it is a space that is related to the courtyard, generated from it, yet is not part of it[1]. Secondly, in some of the cases we saw that at the corners of the crestings in the courtyard, *mabkharas* (literally "incense burners" because they resemble them in shape) were placed higher than the level of the crestings to emphasize the quadrature and corners (*arkān*) of the *ṣaḥn*. (Figs. 9.10 & 9.11)

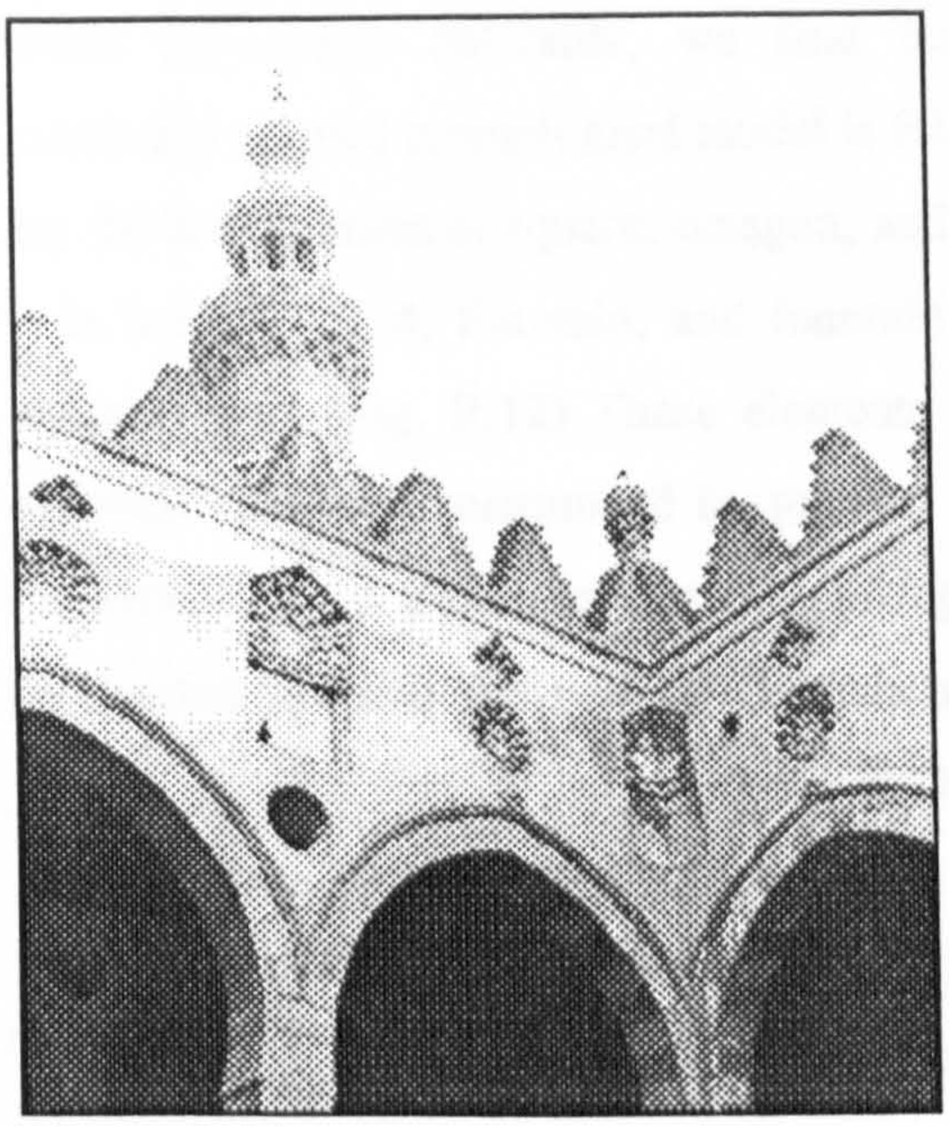


**Figure 9.10** *Mabkharas* **used in the corners of the courtyard of the Mosque of al-Māridānī.**

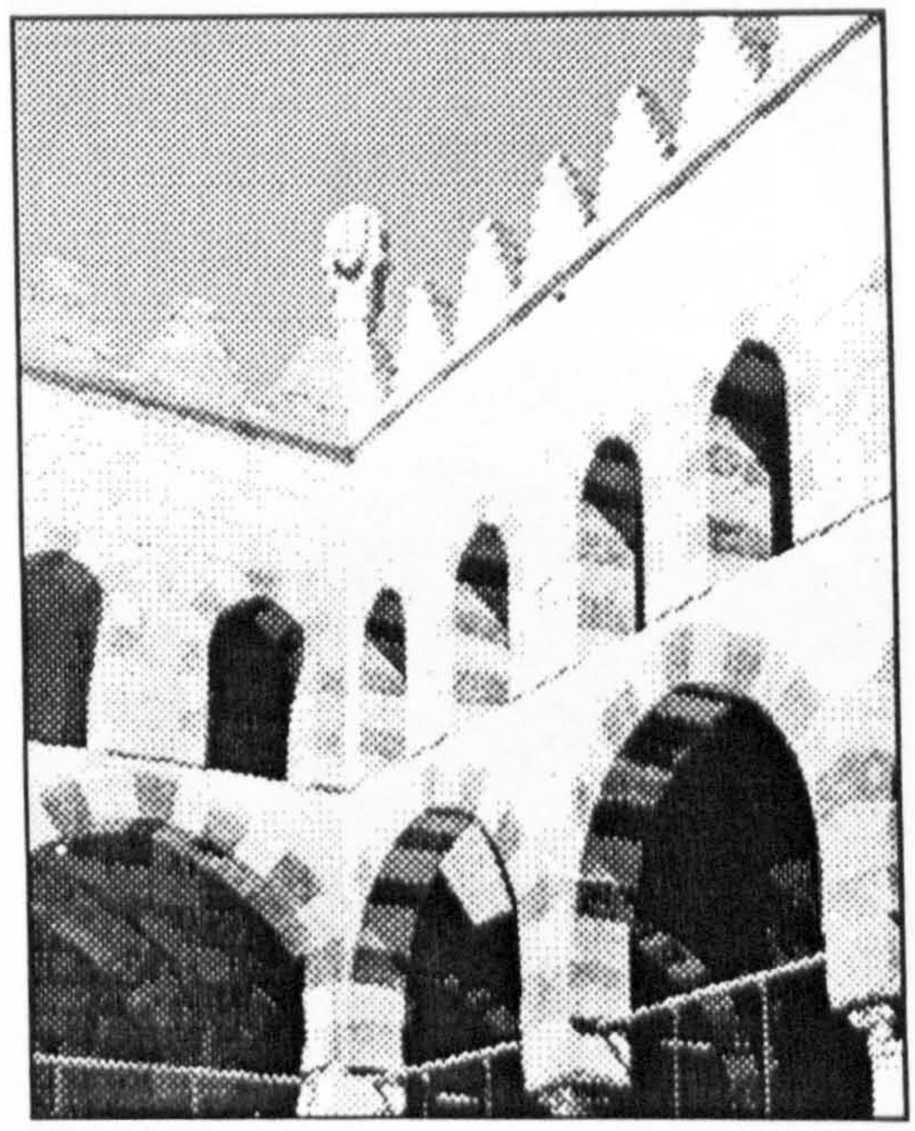


**Figure 9.11** Four *mabkharas* **used in the Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad at the Citadel.**

We found in Chapter Eight that this quadrature of the courtyard is a representation of the four pillars carrying the celestial sphere[2] (Heavens). This was either represented directly by the sky or symbolically by a dome in climates that could not make use of the courtyard. On the other hand, the octagonal water fountain represents the Throne of God on the primordial waters recalling creation. It is directly related to the marble flooring of the courtyards which abstractly represents the Gardens of Paradise - with orchards, fields, rivers and springs.

---

[1] Contrary to the effect that would have been created had the size of the *iwān* been exactly the same as that of the side of the courtyard.

[2] See Chapter Seven.

This is a good example of how the individual meanings of elements are reinforced when they are seen in combination. The water fountain alone represents the Throne on the waters and the representation of the garden of Paradise on the other hand, is a valid and understandable element in such a *place* in the religious building. But when the use of "water" in the case of the Throne is linked to the use of "water" in relation to the Qur'ānic descriptions of the Gardens of Paradise[1], it is then that one sees the correlation and discerns the traditional usage of these two elements in relation to one another.

Looking at the whole internal composition from the centre outwards, we find that the vertically aligned cosmological model is followed by the arrangement of square, octagon, and circle - in the courtyard, fountain, and fountain dome respectively. (Fig. 9.12) These elements in the internal space are surrounded by pointed arches or *iwāns* in such a manner that an uplifting force is created towards the vertical. We should not forget that the aim of prayer to the Śūfīs is to achieve the "*mi'rāj*" of the soul, and that a vertical representation of the cosmos would help to achieve this spiritual "journey". Furthermore, the rows of crestings complete this relation, spelling out the joining of the building with the sky while at the same time reminding us of our composite existence of material and spiritual attributes.

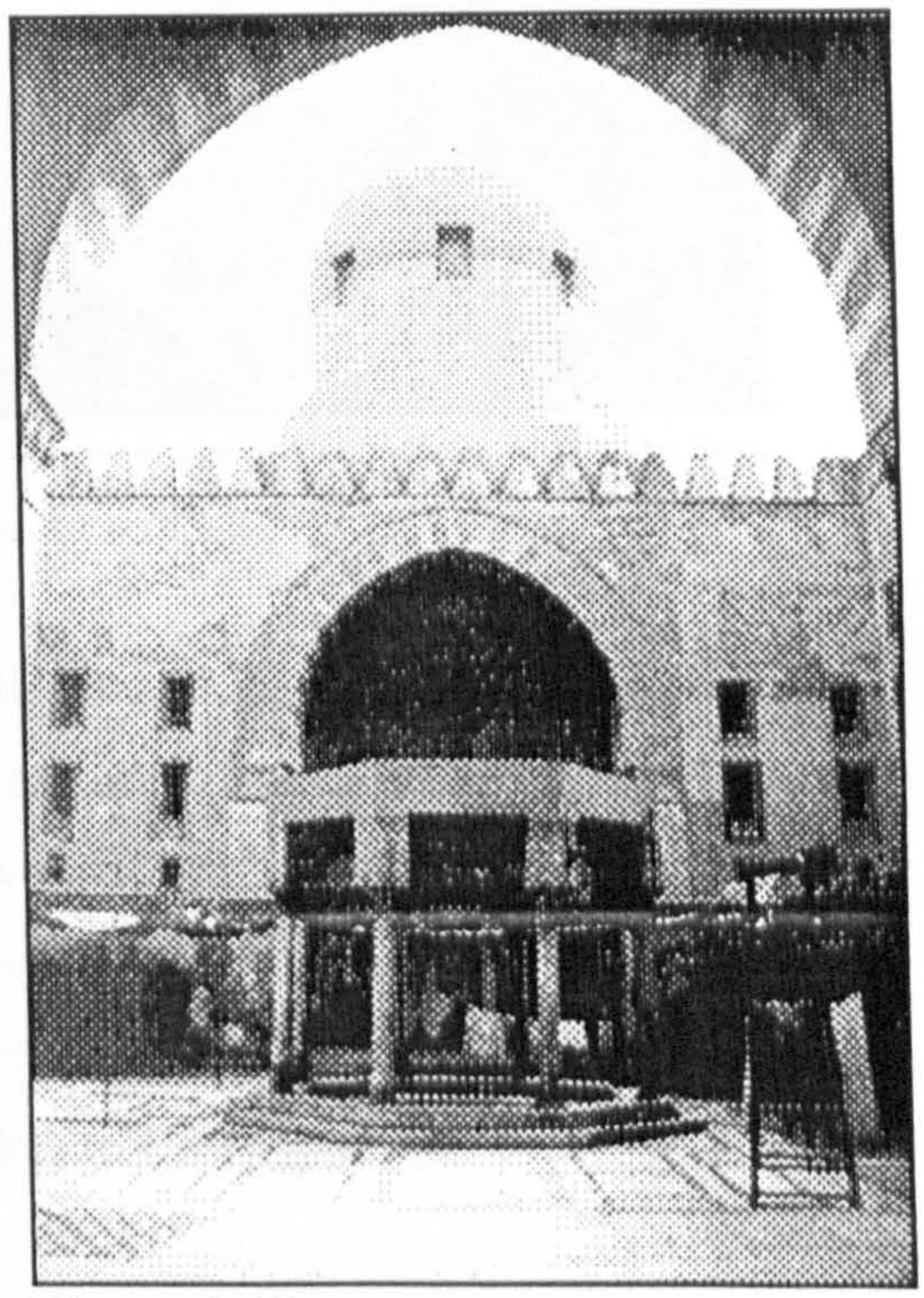


**Figure 9.12** The axis of the *iwāns* of the *Madrasa* of Sarghaṭmish passes through the centre of the water fountain as well as the centre of the *maqṣūra* dome.

From the interior of the courtyard, one sees the soaring minaret with its geometrical transformations easing visual ascension. In the context of the symbolism created by the elements that have been discussed above, by their organisation, and choice of forms, the minaret and its geometrical transformation becomes yet another device emphasizing the vertical and the cosmic levels; i.e., joining the building to the Heavens. (Fig. 9.13)

[1] See Chapter Seven.

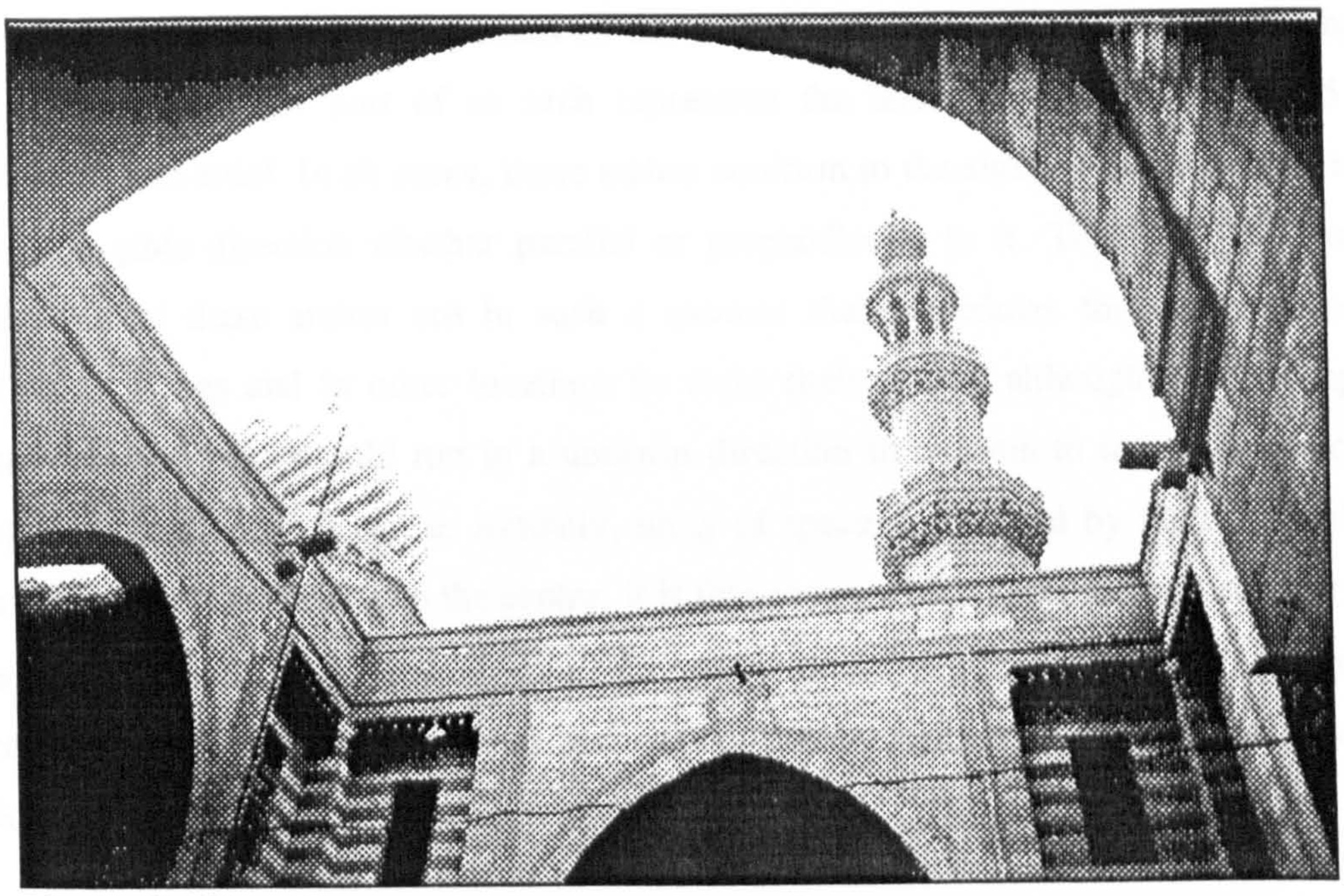


**Figure 9.13** The minaret in relation to the courtyard of the *Madrasa* of Iljāy al-Yūsufī visually achieves the union between the Heavens and the building. The transition of form aids ascension qualitatively.

The elements that are related to one another in the internal space of the courtyard seem to achieve the same objectives as those of the entrance: first to achieve an obvious sense of the centre, and secondly, to show the implicit vertical axis as explicitly as possible. The relation between the elements of this internal space makes it a microcosm, a representation of the cosmos ranging from the terrestrial (quadrangular shape) to transitional (octagonal shape) to Heavenly celestial (domical shape and sky) to Unity (point).

### 9.2.3 The Prayer Hall Relation

The final destination and aim of the worshipper entering the house of God, is to pray in the area designated for prayer (usually called the *riwāq al-qibla* in a hypostyle mosque or *iwān al-ṣalāh* in a *madrasa* type). As we said earlier in Chapter Four, a Muslim can perform his prayers in any place - that is except at a grave or in a place that is impure, e.g. near toilets, ... etc. It follows that in the buildings under study, prayer would be primarily performed in the *iwāns*, or *riwāqs*, and would extend into the courtyard in the case of a large congregation.

In the case of the hypostyle mosque type, the prayer area is composed of rows of arches that are carried by pillars, piers, or both in a combination. These pointed arches aim

at the vertical within the covered areas of the mosque.[1] As we have discussed in Chapter Eight, the quadrangular part of an arch represents the terrestrial while the curved part represents the celestial. In all cases, these arches conform to the sides of the courtyard rather than to the *qibla* direction whether parallel or perpendicular to it. That is to say that the organization of these arches are in such a manner that sometimes the visitor faces the elevation of arches and in other locations he faces their sides - although it would appear obvious that the rows should run in a uniform direction in relation to the *qibla* to achieve homogeneity and unity of space. Actually, unity of space is achieved by the conformity of the orientation of the arcades to the centre; it is that centre which generates an ordering force to the whole composition of the building. This point is vital to understand the importance of the centre as the point of beginning and end in the conception of the Muslim medieval religious building. (Figs. 9.14 & 15)

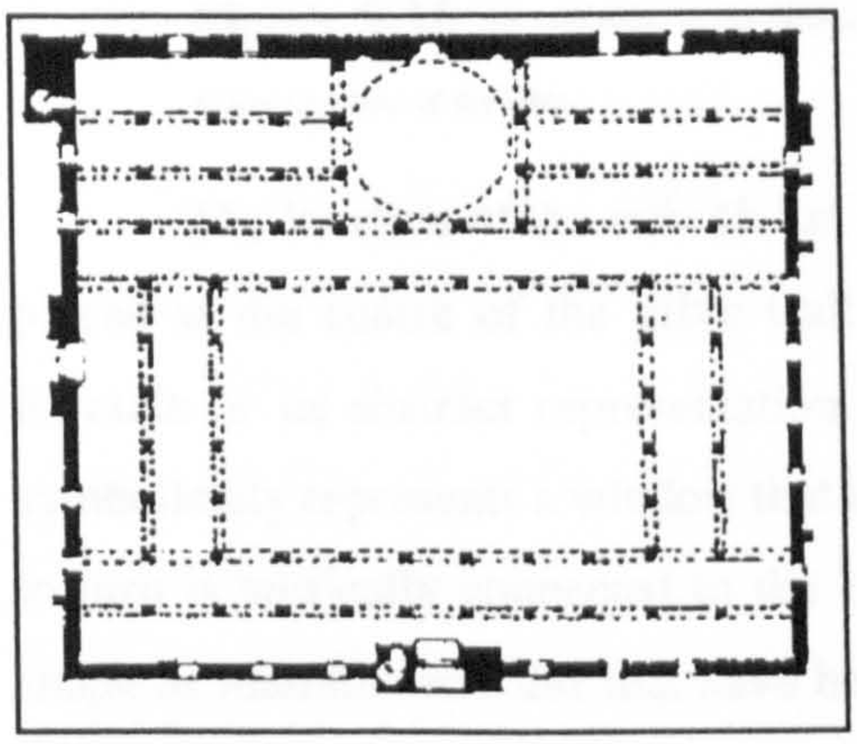


**Figure 9.14** Plan of the Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad at the Citadel showing arrangement of arcades in the four *riwāqs* in relation to the centre.

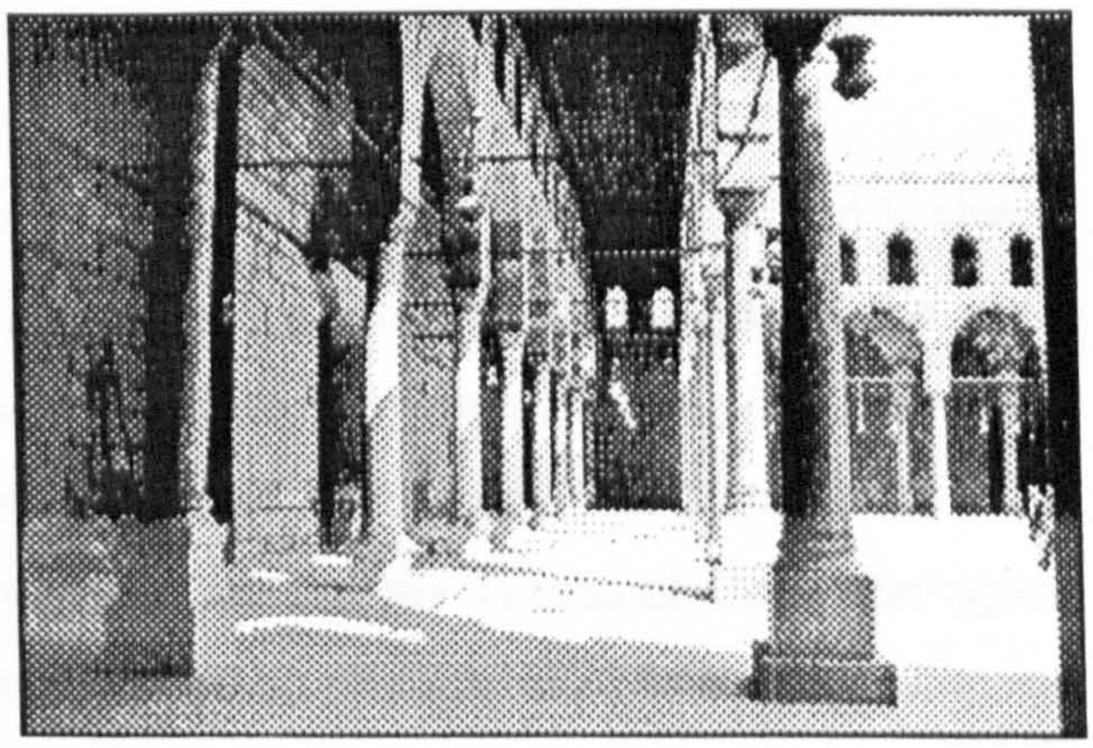


**Figure 9.15** View of the direction of the arcades in the western and northern *riwāqs* of the Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.

The same method is applied in the *madrasa* type where *iwāns* are "generated" from the centre of the courtyard and "grow" axially from it rather than in the direction of the *qibla* itself, so that those who would be praying in the *qibla iwān* would be praying in the direction of the growth of the *iwān* while those praying in the two *iwāns* perpendicular to it, would be praying perpendicular to its direction.[2] This indicates clearly that no matter what elements were involved, whether *riwāqs* or *iwāns*, the priority was to conform to the centre. (Fig.9.16)

---

[1] See the hypostyle mosques of al-Ḍhāhir Baybars, al-Māridanī, and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.

[2] Of course it should not be forgotten that the accentuation of depth of the prayer area whether *riwāq* or *iwān* was always made to be the deepest, setting it out in the interior of the mosque. This excessive depth resulted in a horizontal line at the summit of the *iwān* which symbolize the "Straight Path" (*al-Ṣirāt al-Mustaqīm*).

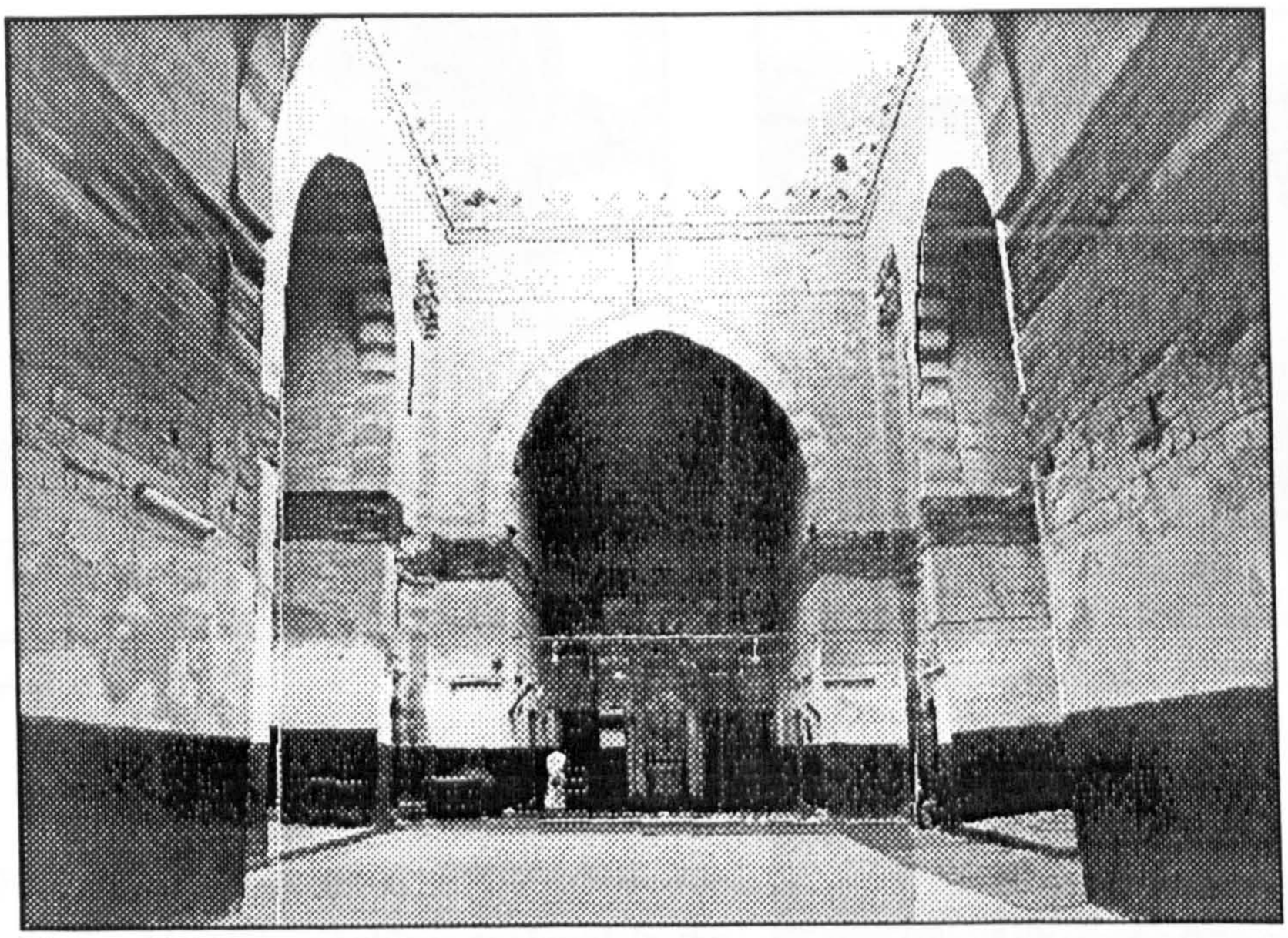


**Figure 9.16** The four *iwāns* in the *Madrasa* of Umm al-Sulṭān Sha'bān are generated from the centre irrespective of the direction of the *qibla*.

The location of the *miḥrāb* has remained constant in all Islamic periods and is always placed at the centre of the *qibla* wall, aligned to the centre of the courtyard - the water fountain or its abstract representation. It was mentioned in Chapter Eight, that the *miḥrāb* symbolically represents a window that is open to Heaven by its symbolism of the Ka'ba which in turn is vertically connected to the Heavenly Ka'bas and the Throne of God. The typical shape of Mamlūk *miḥrābs* that have been investigated can be described as a niche composed of a series of pointed flat arches, one inside the other, ending in a deeply set concave semi-circular form. The whole composition is covered with coloured marble cladding in different geometric patterns except for the curved part of the *miḥrāb* which usually "radiates" patterns from the centre outwards. This niche located at the centre of the otherwise plain *qibla* wall, points both inwardly as well as to the vertical. This "interiority" is seen in the depth and concavity of the niche, while the vertical results from the radiating marble cladding outwards and upwards by the form of the pointed arch. (Fig. 9.17) This symbolism ties strongly with the symbolism of the *maqṣūra*[1] which is usually placed immediately in front of the *miḥrāb* bay - whether in hypostyle mosques or in *madrasa* and *khanqah* types.

[1] We have discussed in Chapter Five that historically speaking, the need arose for the introduction of the *maqṣūra*, basically for reasons of security for the sultans and emirs who prayed in state mosques. This was an inevitable reaction to the death of two of the four Caliphs during their prayer in mosques.

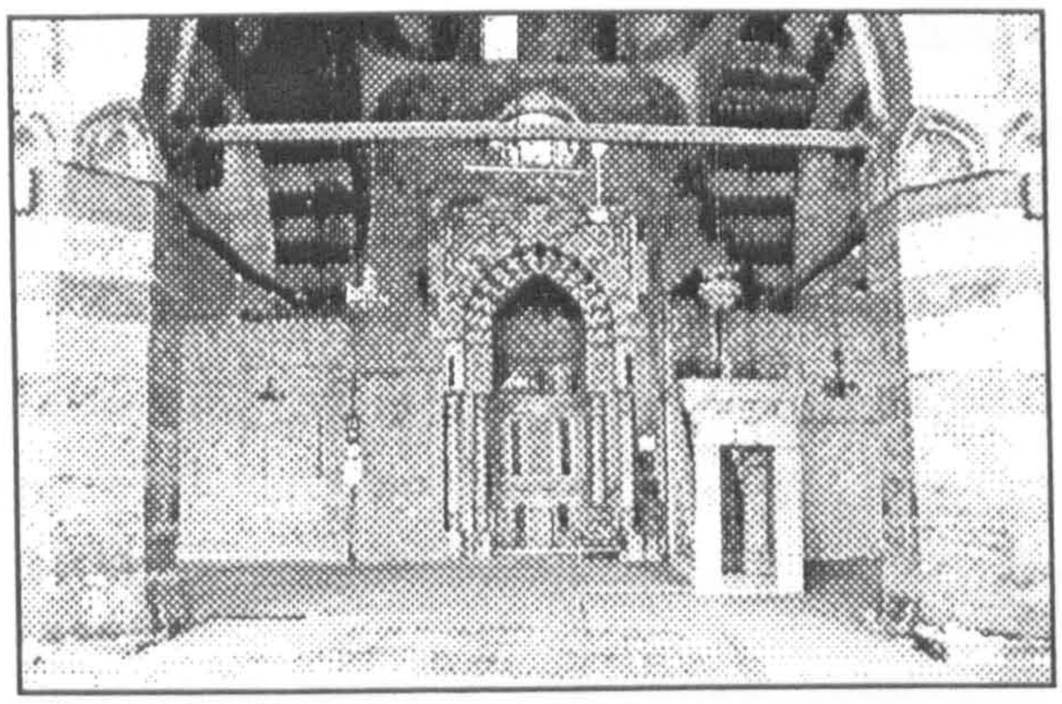


**Figure 9.17** The *miḥrāb* is the only articulated element in the qibla of the Mosque of Āqsunqur. The columns of the *maqṣūra* bay are octagonal on square bases.

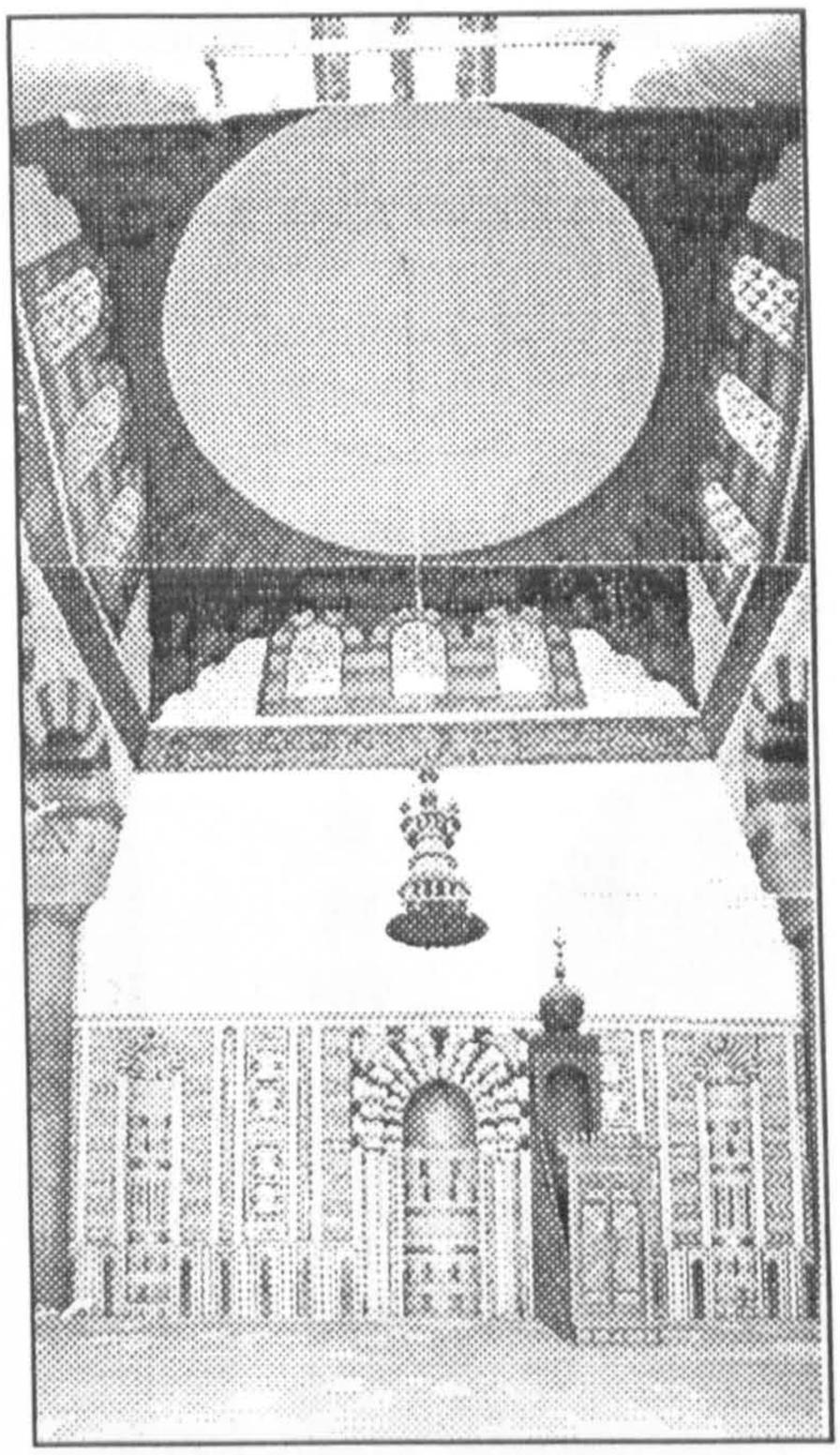


**Figure 9.18** The *maqṣūra* bay of the Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad shows a change of form - from square to octagon to circle to point.

The form of this *maqṣūra* gradually developed into a square pillared space that was domed. In the Mamlūk *maqṣūras* analyzed in the cases examined[1], the square base was transformed into the circle by means of rows of stalactites that formed pendentive-like shapes. These stalactites were arranged in such a manner so as to indicate an octagon half way between the square and the circle. This square base represents the quadrangularity of the earth while the octagonal "insinuation"[2] represents the Throne of God, and the spherical top represents the celestial Heavens. The *maqṣūra* then, complies with the vertically arranged cosmological model, and completes the vertical ascension provided by the *miḥrāb*. Consequently, we find that the relation between these *miḥrābs* and the *maqṣūras*, symbolized and represented both the horizontal centring to the earthly Ka'ba, and the vertical centring of the earthly Ka'ba and the celestial ones along the cosmic axis. (Fig. 9.18)

Once again, we find that the elements that are inter-related in the prayer hall represent the same objectives mentioned in the above two sets of relations (that of the entrance and courtyard). The *miḥrāb* and *iwāns*, although having shapes that promote visual ascension,

---

[1] Those of the Mosques of al-Ḍhāhir Baybars, al-Māridānī, and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, as well as the *Madrasa* of Sarghatmish for example.

[2] The reason I say "insinuation" is that it is neither omitted nor emphasized in the forms. See the *maqṣūras* of the *Madrasa* of Sarghatmish, and that of the Mosque of al-Māridānī.

symbolize the horizontal direction towards the terrestrial centre (the Ka'ba). On the other hand, the *maqṣūra* represents the vertical axis by changing the quality of the space within it from square to octagon to circle - which is in turn related axially to the earthly centre.

### 9.2.4 The Mausoleum Relation

We saw in the last few chapters that the mausoleum forms a fundamental constituent of Mamlūk religious buildings, and that this was due to the common belief in saints whose *baraka* could be acquired even after their death. The question that arises is: does the presence of the mausoleum in relation to the religious building strengthen its sacredness and *makes it* a centre, or does the annexation of a mausoleum to a religious building bring *baraka* to the dead person buried in it? To answer this question, one needs first to examine the building process of complexes involving different parts and stages of construction; i.e., whether a mausoleum was first built, then the religious building added to it or vice versa. In fact, historical evidence shows that both cases occurred. For instance, the *Madrasa* of Tatar al-Hijāziyya was added to the mausoleum she had built, while in cases such as that of the Complex of Sulṭān Qalāwūn and of Sulṭān Ḥassan, both the *madrasa* as well as the mausoleum were built simultaneously. There are also cases that show that a mausoleum was added to already existing mosques such as that of the Mosque of Āqsunqur (the Blue Mosque).

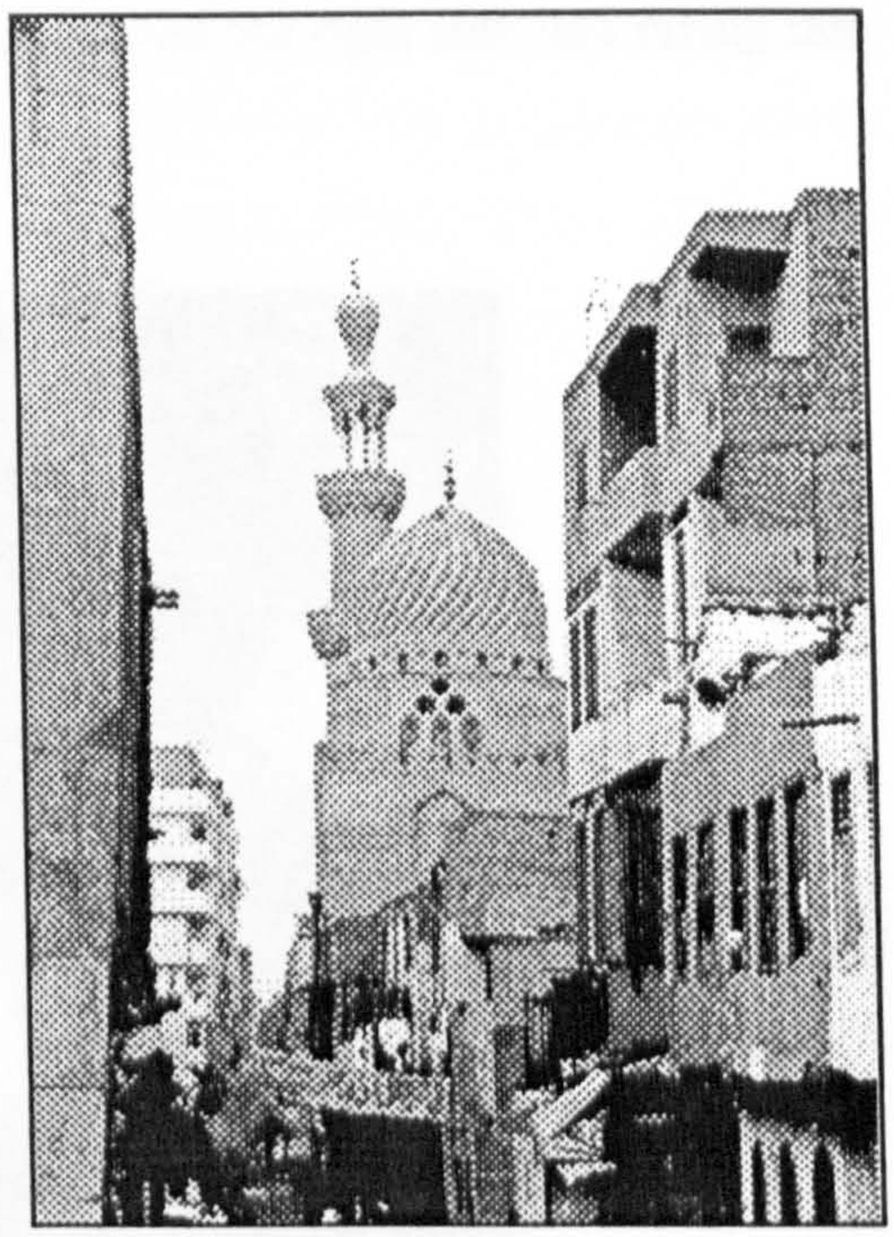


**Figure 9.19** The view of the mausoleum dome of the *Madrasa* of Iljāy al-Yūsufī is striking; it reflects the importance of the location of the burial chamber in relation to the street.

In the light of these findings it seems that the religious building and the mausoleum, each on its own, was considered as holy and sacred, and the attachment of one to the other could only strengthen this sanctity. That is why we find that great care was taken in choosing the sight and location of the mausoleum chamber, and that it usually occupied a space on the main street or square.

We also saw in Chapters Five and Eight, that the typical form of a mausoleum consists of a square chamber, with a *miḥrāb* (non-functional as far as prayer is concerned), roofed by a pointed dome. A band of Qur'ānic epigraphy is located at the top part of the square base around the chamber. Usually, the Throne verse or some other appropriate verses are chosen such as those reminding of the Day of Judgement, or the peace in which the souls of those who have fought for the sake of Allah dwell, ...etc. The body of the dead patron or saint is entombed in the centre of the square base, buried on his right side and facing this *miḥrāb*.

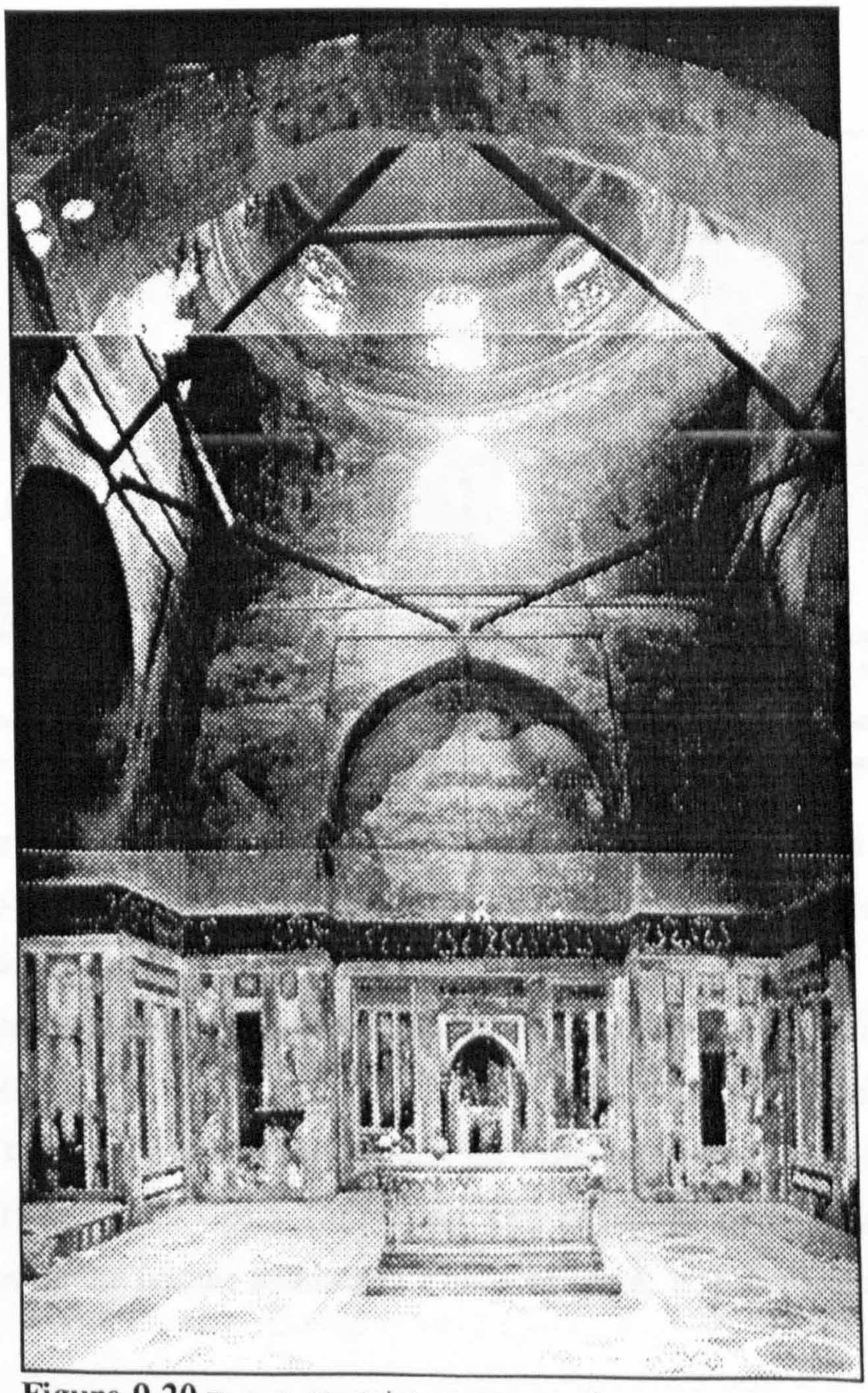


**Figure 9.20** The tomb of Sarghatmish is axial to the *miḥrāb*, and vertically connected to the centre of the dome. The octagonal wooden frame completes the cosmological model.

In most of the Mamlūk cases, the transition from square base to circular top is carried out by means of stalactites, which usually do not delineate the octagonal form, while a few cases show the use of corner squinches positioned saddle-wise on the four corners of the square[1]. In the latter case, the octagon becomes the form of the zone of transition. Realizing the symbolic function of the octagonal zone in the mausoleum form, the Mamlūks introduced a cantilevered wooden frame at the top part of the square base[2] when using stalactites for their transition zone. In such examples, although the form is complete and the transformation smooth from bottom to top using *muqarnaṡāt*, the designer knew that this was non-functional from the symbolic point of view - as an abstraction of the cosmos. Without the octagon there would be no Throne (*'Arsh*) or Seat (*Kursī*) in the cosmological model.

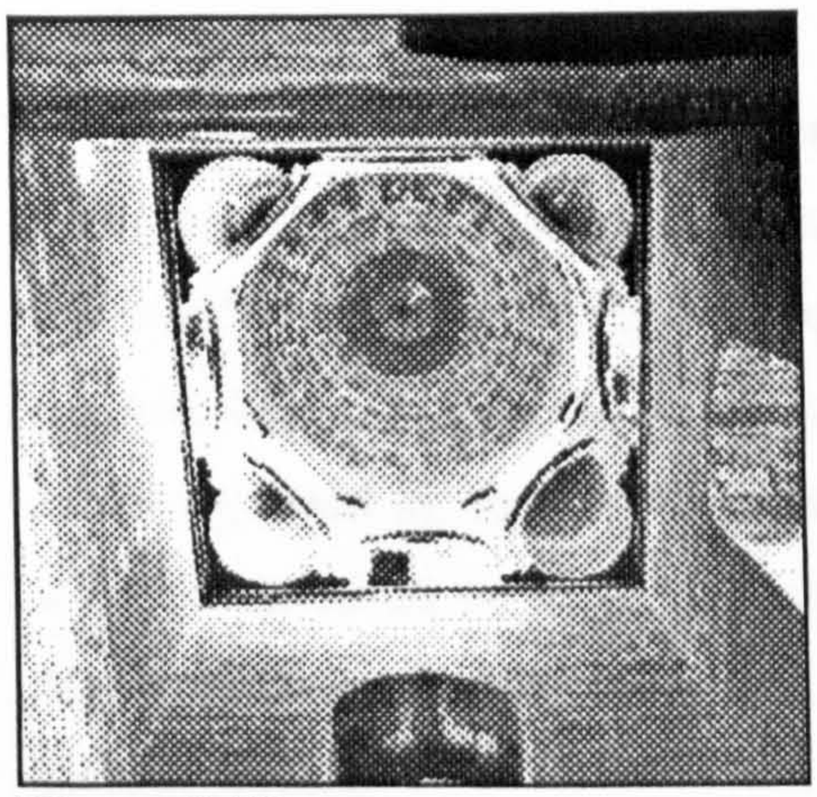


**Figure 9.21** The squinches used in the mausoleum of the *Madrasa* of Umm al-Sulṭān Sha'bān, n.b. the octagon is clearly formed by the squinches.

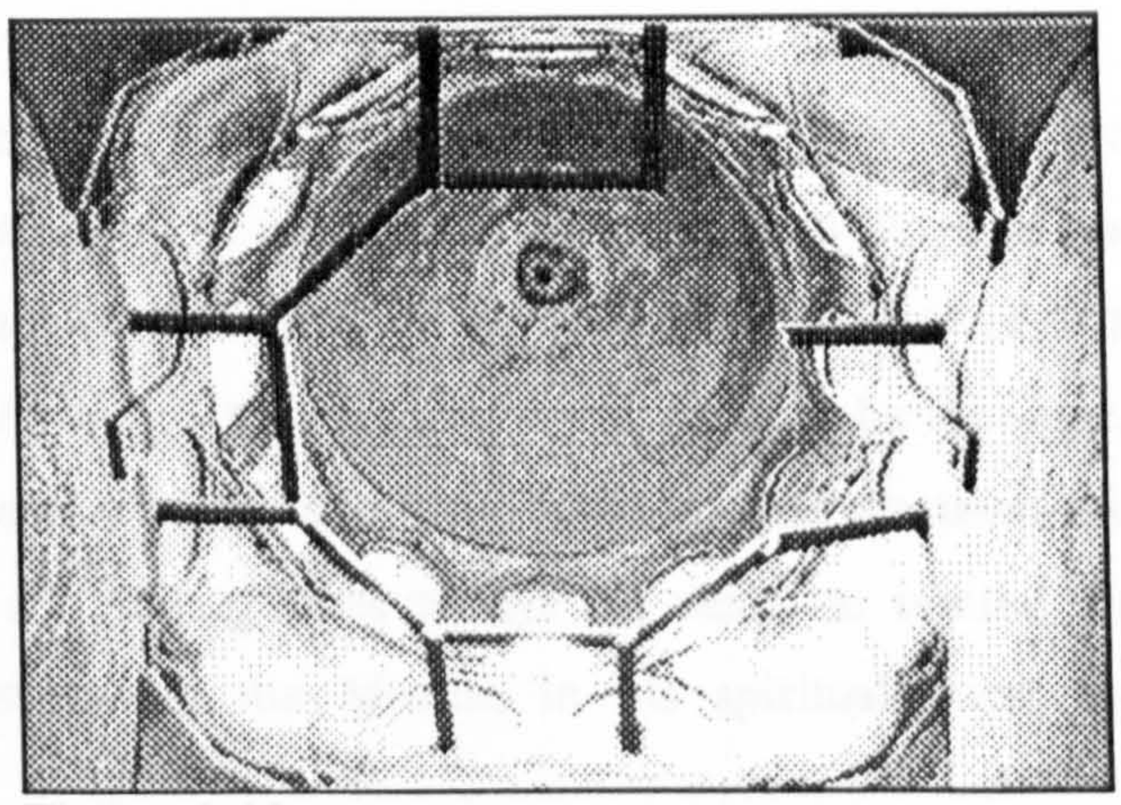


**Figure 9.22** The dome of the mausoleum of the Mosque of Āqsunqur; n.b. Although it uses squinches, the octagon is not clearly delineated, as a result, the need for the octagonal wooden frame arose.

The overall relation between the elements in a mausoleum is again an attempt to strike the balance between the horizontal *qibla* direction and the vertical axis which represents the linking of the earthly Ka'ba to the celestial ones. This balance is created by the organization of the mausoleum, the body at the centre facing the horizontal *qibla* and at the same time lying on the vertical axis at the centre of the chamber. Vertically, the change in sections from square to circle by means of stalactites indicates the vastness of creation and the universe, and the octagonal frame recalls God's Throne and Seat above the seven Heavens. Thus, the mausoleum sums up the Islamic building in a unity of space; it is a microcosm in itself.

---

[1] See the case of the *Madrasa* of Umm al-Sulṭān Sha'bān for example.

[2] Such as the dome of *Khanqah*/Mosque of Salār and Sanjar al-Jawlī, the *Khanqah* of Baybars al-Jāshankīr, the Complex of Qalāwūn, the Complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan, the *Madrasa* of Tatar al-Ḥijāziyyah.

## CONCLUDING SUMMARY

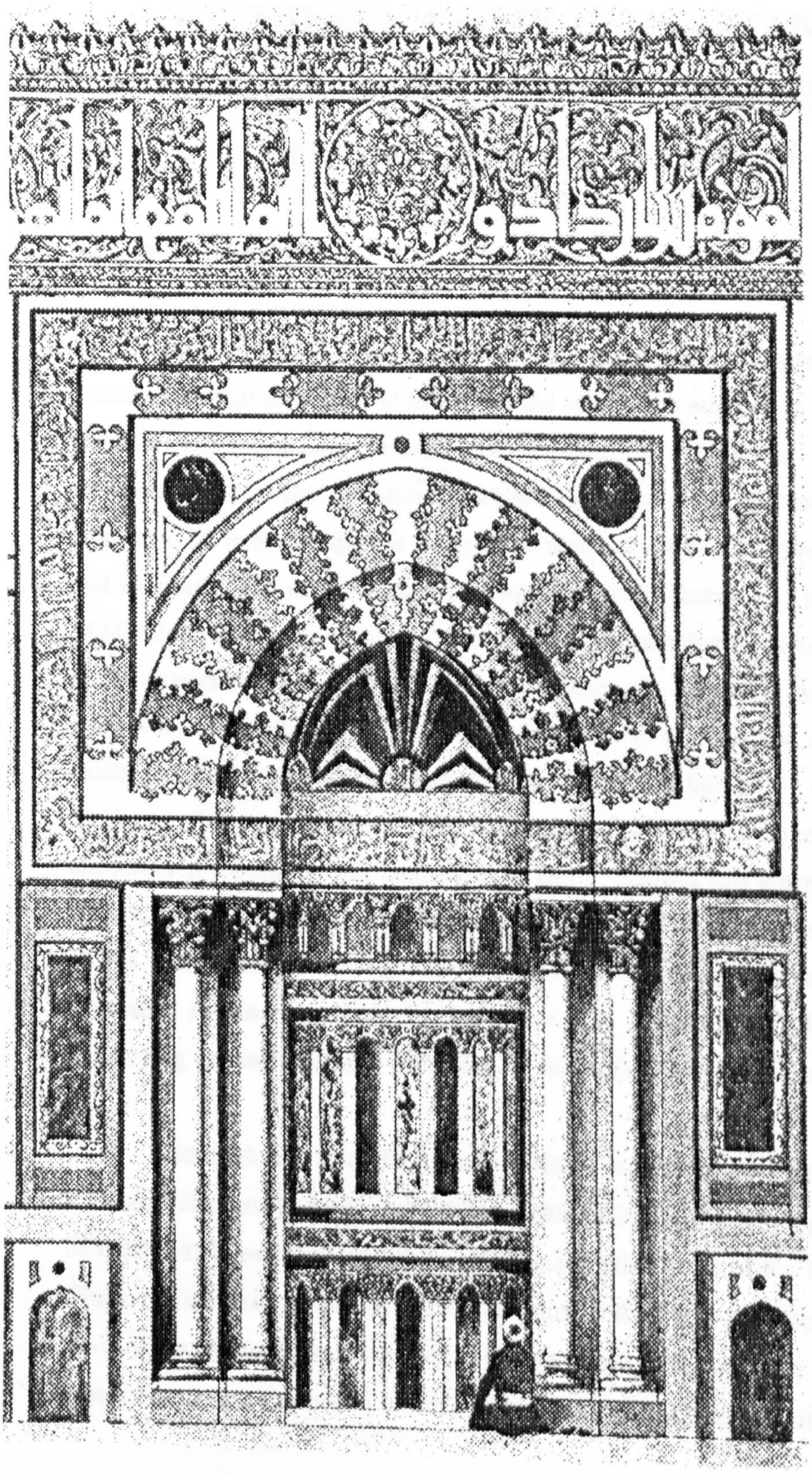
There are several striking observations resulting from the analysis of the cases in this chapter:

The first observation concerns the evident clustering of the different elements into forms in Baḥrī Mamlūk religious architecture. This is seen in the vertical harmoniously proportioned minarets, the quadrangular *ṣaḥn*, the cave-like accented entrances, and the pointed ornamented domes. Although these elements were found to be significant on their own in Chapter Eight, they have been found to be "inoperative" except in their context in relation to the elements in their proximity.

The second observation concerns these relations. The symbolism involved in the relation between the elements of the entrance was seen to be the same as in those of the courtyard and in the praying hall, and the representations of the prayer hall conformed to a great extent to those of the mausoleum. Although, the symbolism was found to be the same, it was repeated by using different elements in each case. This indicates that whatever the elements involved in the relationships, the message was always the same: to remind the Muslim of the Presence of God, and to aid the Muslim in his spiritual quest for transcendence.

The third observation is that the elements examined in combinations have proven to answer many more of the questions that were raised in Chapter Five. But there are still some questions that remain to be answered. I believe that there is another level of understanding which has to be revealed, because the analyses that have been made of the elements (in Chapter Eight) and the relationships (in this chapter) both deal with the buildings *statically* as though they were objects to be scrutinized and "anatomically" analyzed. In fact, of course, these religious buildings were designed to be used, and to be *dynamically* experienced in their totality. This suggests the need for a description of at least one of these buildings in a sequence, following the footsteps of a visitor passing through its different spaces, seeing them and using them. This "journey" through a building will shed light on the importance of the sequential ordering of the elements and their combinations (i.e., their integrated symbolism).

Int. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11



# CHAPTER TEN

# SYNTHESIS: A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF MAMLŪK RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

## A Case Study of the *Madrasa* of Sulṫān Ḥassan

### 10.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters of this thesis we have attempted to re-create Mamlūks' understanding of architectural form, and the symbolism inherent in the elements and relations that were incorporated in the design of religious buildings. So far, we have dealt with single elements and with static relationships between two or three of them at a time. What we will attempt to do in this chapter is to show the unity of a whole composition, both architecturally and as a reflection of the Unity upon which Islam is centred, by studying a single example of Mamlūk religious architecture. We should not forget that this sense of Unity was not meant to be extracted from plans and other architectural drawings, but it was intended to be experienced. The building that will be examined in this chapter will show that such unity exists and that it can be experienced by a visit to the building - which implies a temporal sequence of events and views. This is the only way by which a medieval visitor would have encountered a building and conceived its Unity; actually this emerges even for a twentieth-century visitor provided he understands something of the symbolism embodied at all levels of the architecture. Although the visit is a personal and factual one, it is nevertheless obviously reconstructed and in that sense also a little fictional so as to bring out the underlying rationale beneath a number of subjective and qualitative "events".

Although, the integrity of the remaining traditional settings in Cairo today have only a distant relationship with what the Mamlūks aimed at, and although the spiritual awareness of Islam has been cheapened there, as in many other parts of the Muslim world, we saw in Chapter Nine that an indescribable emotional link with a great spiritual past has remained alive in the monuments that are left. This emotional link, which we can almost touch with our hands but cannot capture in words, speaks to us out of every stone of the ancient city.

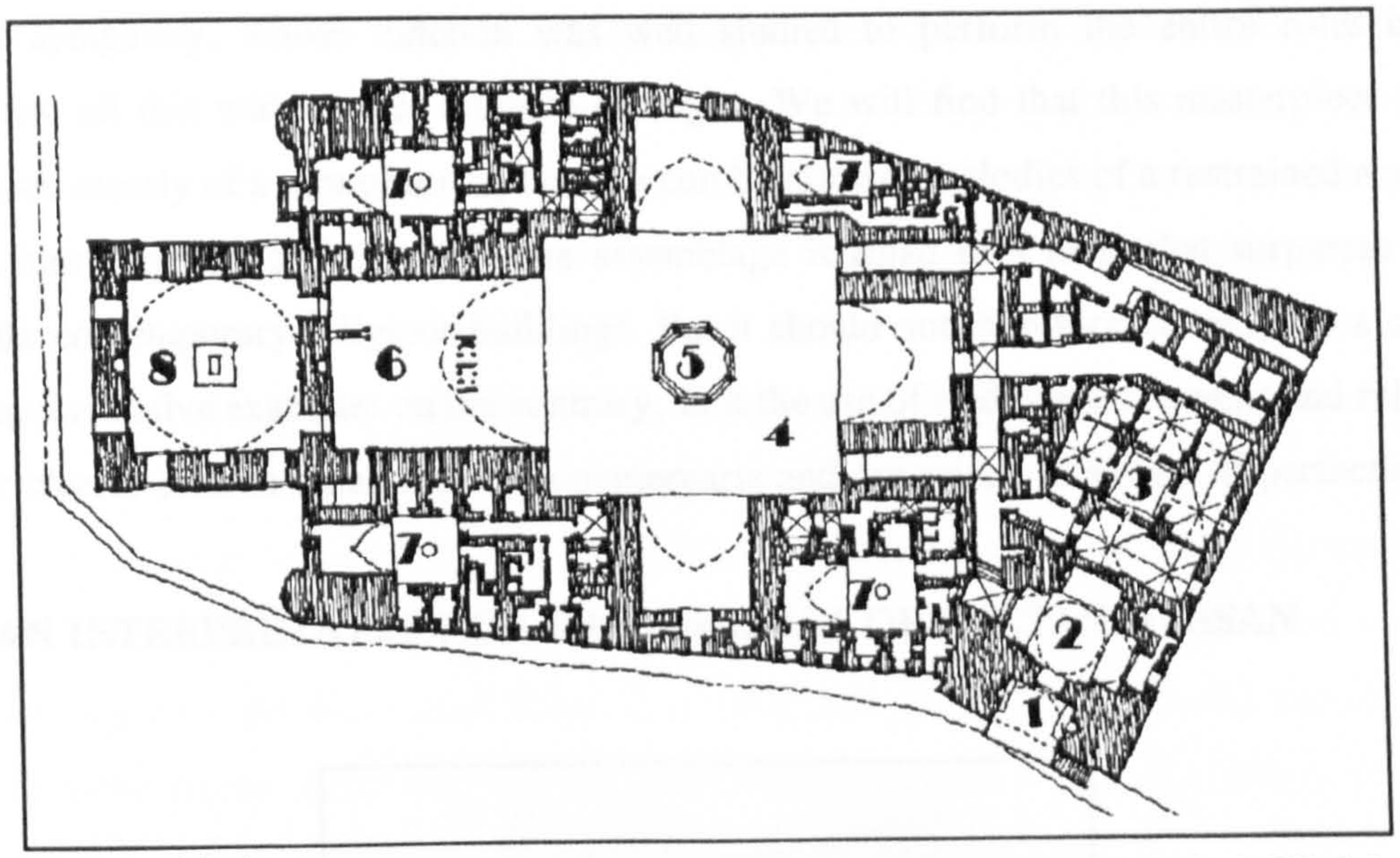



**Figure 10.1** Plan of Complex: 1) Entrance 2) *Majaz* 3) Ablutions 4) Courtyard 5) Fountain 6) *Qibla Iwān* 7) Internal *Madrasas* 8) Mausoleum.

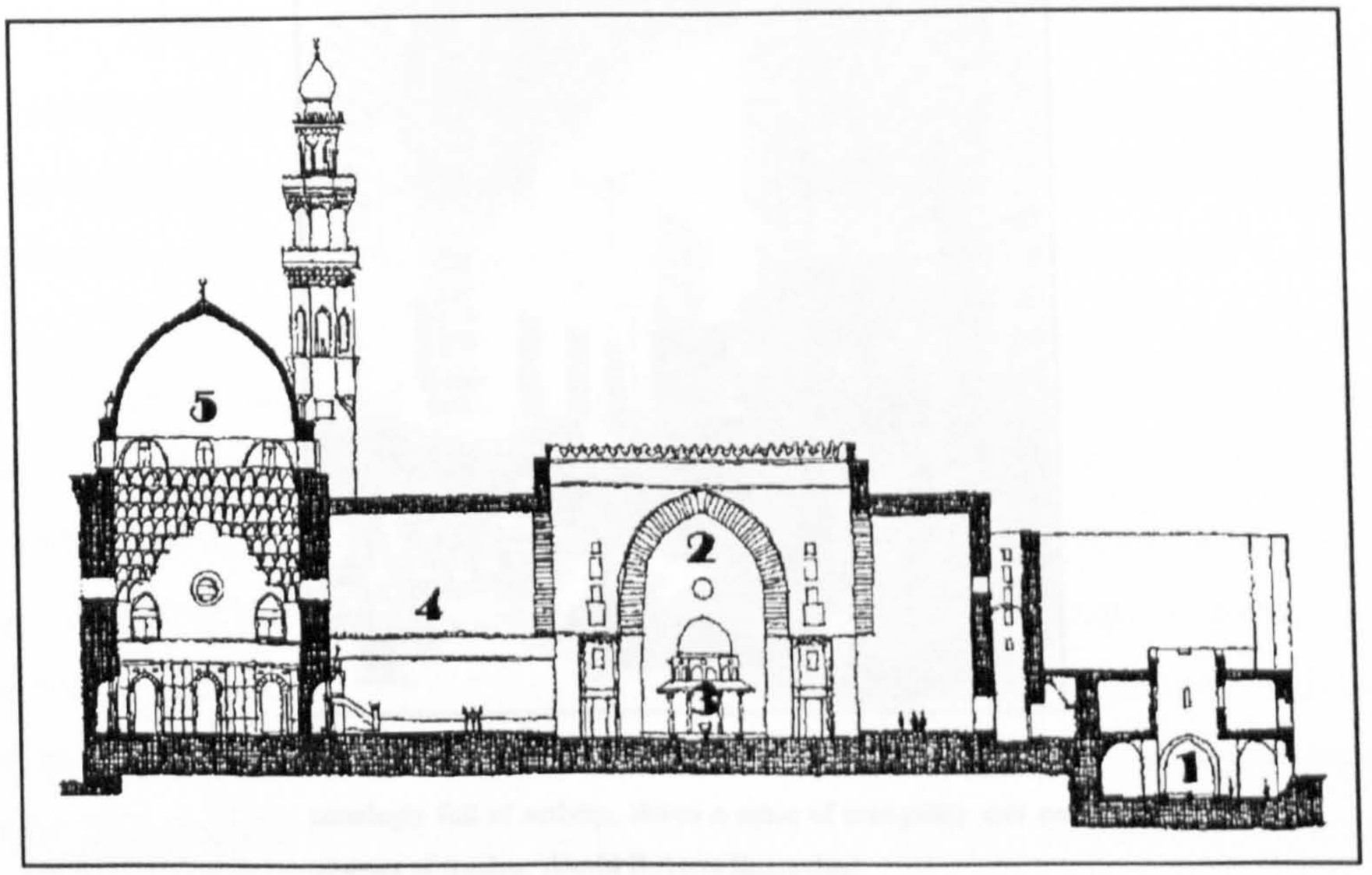



**Figure 10.2** Section in Complex: 1) Ablutions 2) Courtyard 3) Fountain 4) *Qibla Iwān* 5) Mausoleum.

The Complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan has been chosen for this visit. (Fig. 10.1 & 10.2) Often described of "olympian beauty" and "artistic insolence", it has qualities which are addressed to universal reasoning, and is also admirable in its resultant conception which is absolutely logical. It is an incisively pure work, of which criticism is futile: it is the epitome and pinnacle of medieval Cairene architecture. We are hence describing and analysing a

perfect symphony, whose function was well studied to perform the entire roles of the orchestra, all this with subtle, intimate passages. We will find that this masterpiece is not composed merely of a sum of notes, but of a combination of melodies of a restrained number. By its harmony and orchestration, the assemblage is *lifted* to a level that surpasses other Mamlūk contemporary religious buildings. But it should not therefore be taken as a unique non-representative example: on the contrary, in it the use of traditional elements and relations appear clearer than in other Mamlūk counterparts and are raised to a state of perfection.

## 10.2 AN INTERPRETATION OF THE *MADRASA* OF SULṬĀN ḤASSAN

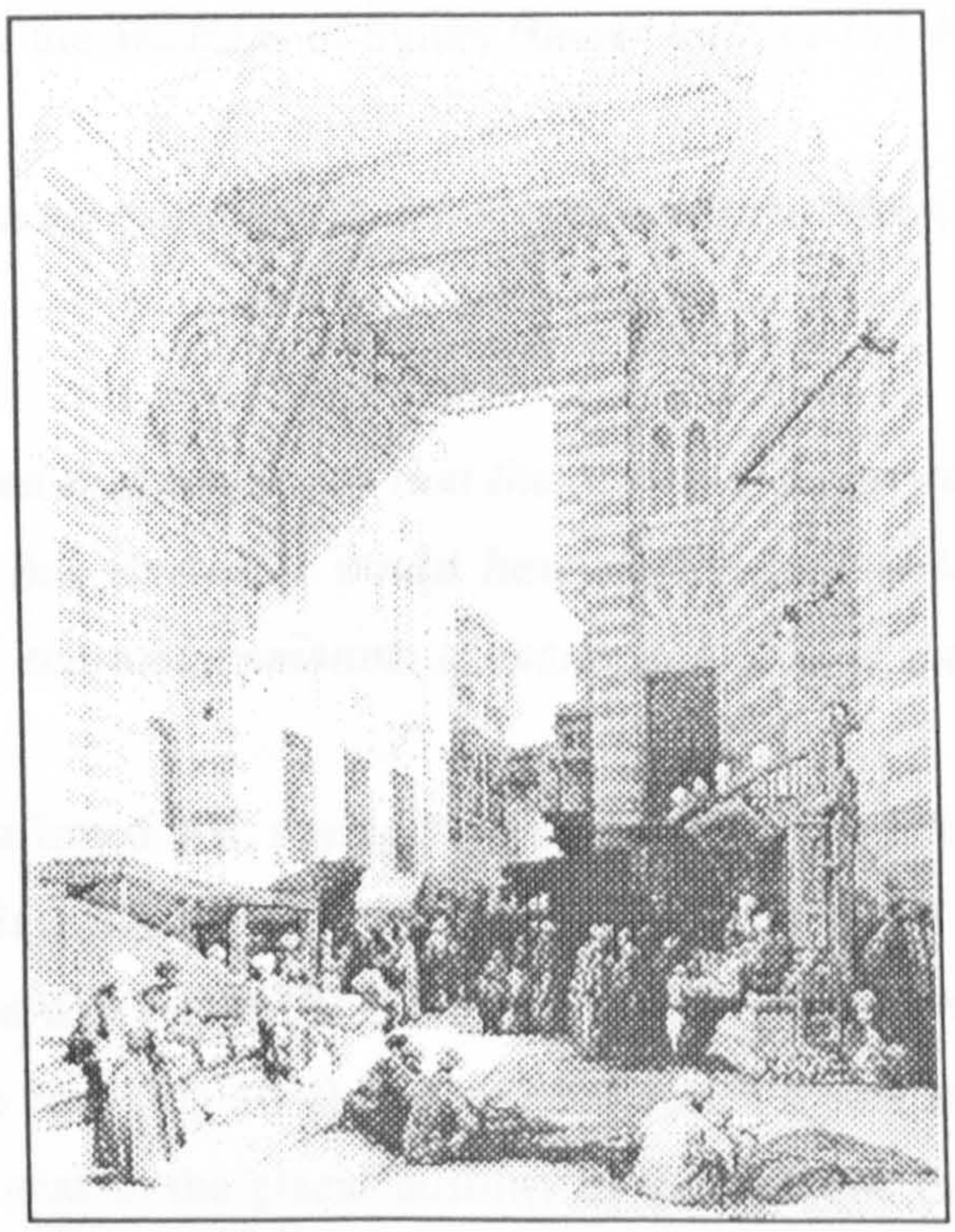


**Figure 10.3** The *sūq* of al-Naḥḥāsīn in Cairo, although seemingly full of activity, shows a sense of tranquility and an absence of tension. (David Roberts Engraving)

> ***Those who have not visited Cairo, do not know the vastness of Islam. It is the metropolis of the Universe, the garden of the world, the abode of human space, the portal of Islam, the throne of royalty: it is a city embellished by castles and palaces, ornamented with sufi khanqahs, madrasas, illuminated by moons and stars of enlightenment.***[1]

[1] Ibn Khaldūn describing Cairo in his "*Muqaddimah*".

To visualize the medieval Cairene setting described above by Ibn Khaldūn one must first re-create in one's mind its streets. According to the findings of Chapter Three, medieval Cairene *ḥāras* were punctuated continuously with houses, bazaars, public baths, caravansaries, and religious buildings. Its old stone buildings were said to have appeared to have grown out of the soil. Views of dark, arched passageways, silent squares and courtyards, carved windows - all have been described. (Fig 10.3) As I stood in the old part of the city beneath the Citadel, I re-created in my mind these buildings with their stone façades and wooden balconies, "alive" even in their stillness; accompanied by the absence of all hurry, all this came to me with feelings of a restfulness which embraced me and made me wish that my own life was rooted there. It is with such feelings that I found myself before the grey stone façade of the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan built in 757 A.H./1356 A.D.

Al-Nāṣir Ḥassan the patron of this monument made the following statement about his own project:

> ***Had I not feared that people say that the Sultan of Egypt cannot complete a building he has started, I would have definitely deserted this project because of the enormous amounts of money that I have spent on it.***[1]

Al-Maqrīzī confirmed this, saying "*there is no known building in the Islamic world that can compare to this madrasa.*" The Ottoman Sulṭān Selīm called it "*a puissant fortress!*" These reflections chime with reality. The chosen site for its construction is at the foot of the Citadel dominating the city. (Fig 10.4) It must have been a trying wager to attempt to build an austere monument next to the placid hostility of the walls of the Citadel. Although the Citadel is a vast fortress, the Complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan does not diminish by an inch in its proximity to it, instead it is set off visually in a superb statement. In fact, this huge building seems to crush the Citadel, due to its position in relation to the esplanade which separates it from its rival. (Fig 10.5) It is indeed, an excellent example of both the massive monumental style of the Baḥrī Mamlūk period that was meant to dominate the urban setting, and of the four-*iwan madrasa* plan[2].

---

[1] Al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, p.316.

[2] What Creswell prototypically calls the cruciform plan of Cairene *madrasas*. I find this to be an inappropriate term to use especially since the cause of the rise of this prototype is the four *Sunnī* schools of jurisprudence and not the cross. Furthermore, from the geometrical point of view, the form is not of a cross, but of four spaces connected to a central court.

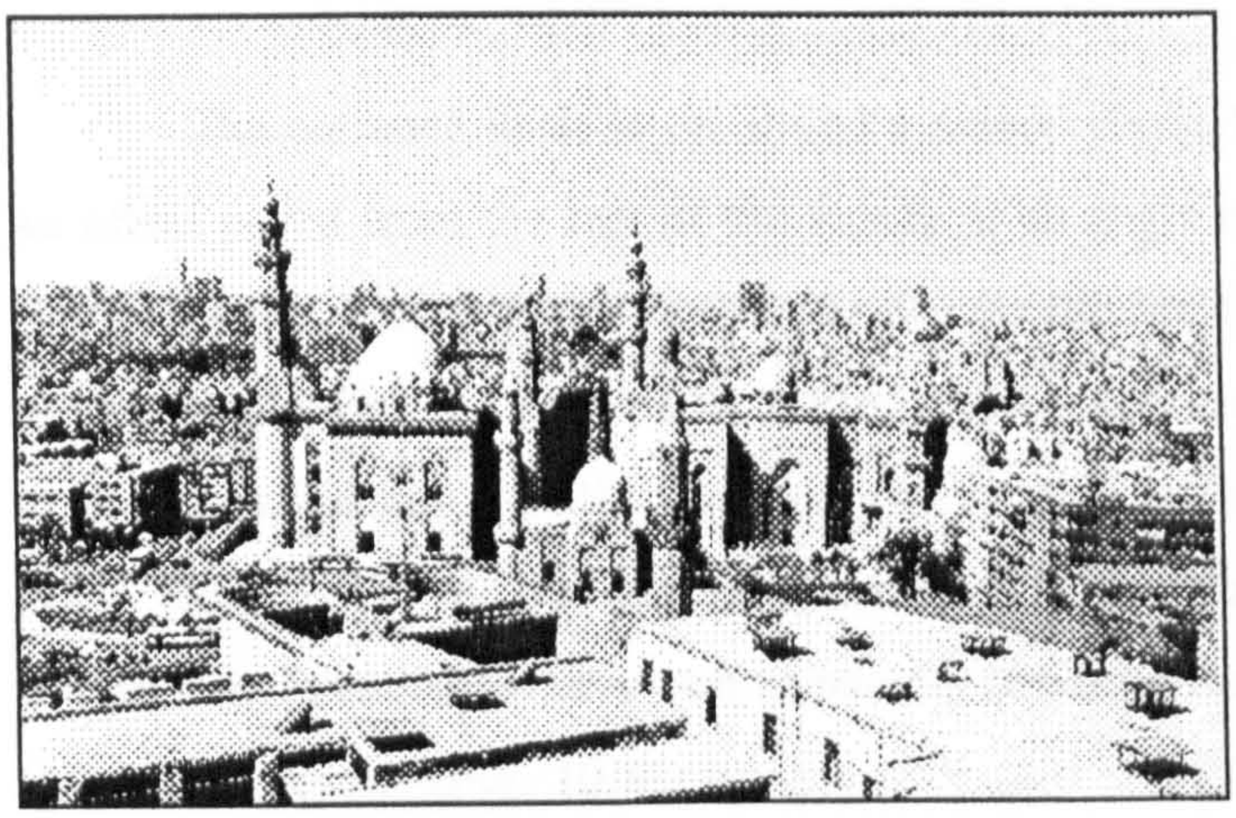


**Figure 10.4** **View showing the dominance of the mass of the Complex. The Mosque of al-Rifā'ī (right) dates early 19th century and is an external copy of Mamlūk architecture.**

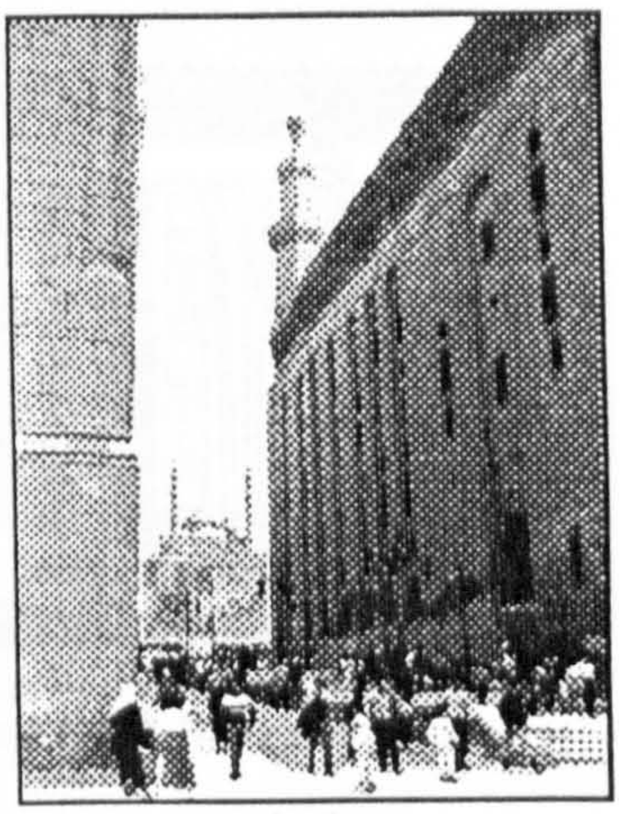


**Figure 10.5** **The relatively reduced size of the distant Citadel in comparison to the *Madrasa* exterior.**

Standing outside and facing the main façade, I realized how impossible it would be to judge this building in twentieth-century terms; I could not relate to what was inside[1] but I could understand why it was built in this manner, for in traditional Ṡūfī terms the truth "*lies in the heart*" and not in the surface. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) narrated the authentic *ḥadīth qudsī*[2] which asserts that God does not look at one's image or deeds but at one's heart. It thus makes sense to concentrate one's efforts on expressing what lies within (*bātin*), rather than what is outward (*ḍhāhir*). This shows how sensitive the *mu'allim* was, to regard the inward looking face of that building as the main one, and leaving the external façades to show a distinctive verticality, that of ascendance towards the sky. (Figs 10.6, 10.7)

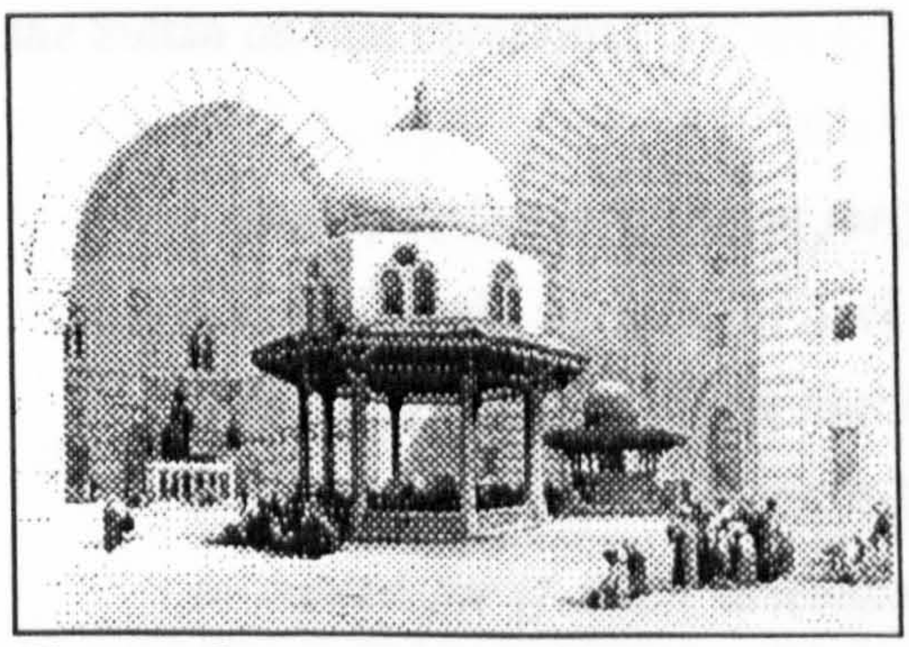


**Figure 6** **The design of the Complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan transports the user from the less holy external to the more holy internal environment. (David Roberts Engraving)**

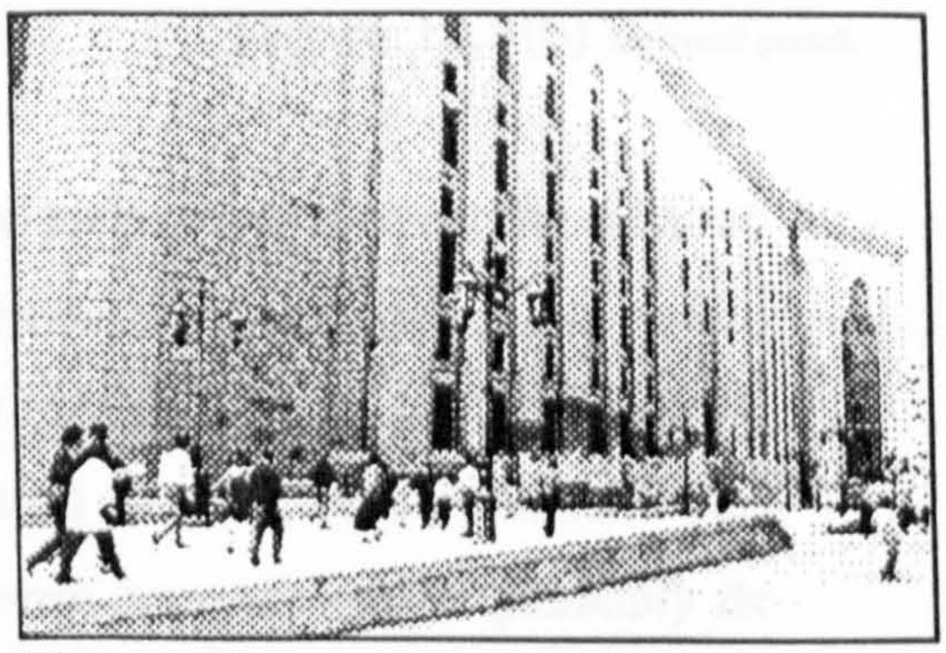


**Figure 7** **The plain expressionless façade of the Complex is highlighted by the verticality of the strips of windows, and the oblique entrance with the vertical portal.**

[1] Its external form does not tell us anything of the functions inside: outward form does not follow function.

[2] A *ḥadīth qudsī* is considered to be the most revered type of *ḥadīth* as it is the "Word of God" said by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him); n.b. Ordinary *ḥadīths* are the words of the Prophet said by him.

The entrance itself is on al-Qal'a Street[1] through an offset portal from the rest of the façade at an angle of thirty degrees. This offset is noticeable despite the length of the façade and is a successful device which gives the recessing portal bay a distinctive status in relation to the plain façade. To further accentuate the entrance, the design was intended to have two minarets, one on either side of the portal. (Fig. 10.8(a,b))

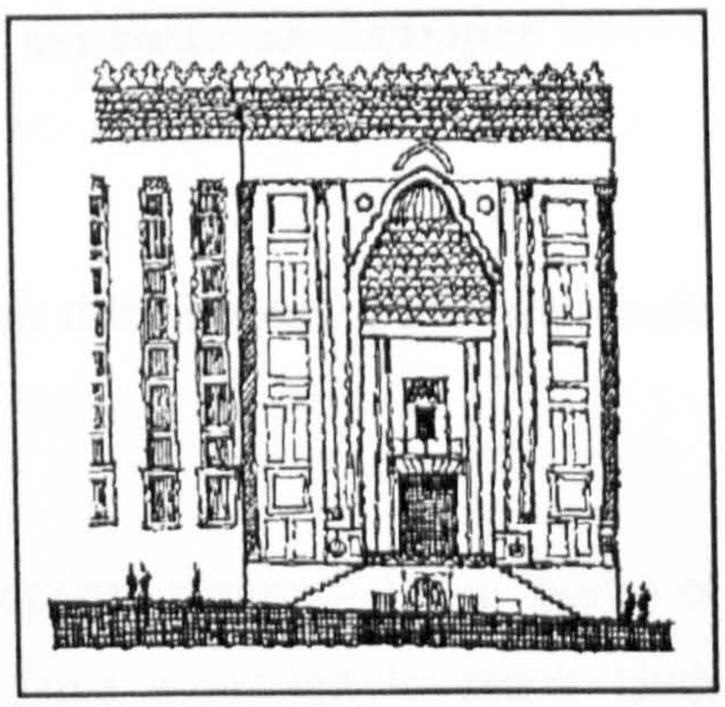


**Figure 10.8(a)** Existing portal.

Al-Maqrīzī recounts that in 762 A.H. the first minaret to be built toppled killing three hundred school children in the neighbouring site. This naturally resulted in the abandonment of the erection of the other. This incident reveals how susceptible to signs the Egyptians were, for they took the toppling of the minaret as a sign that an imminent disaster would occur and that the Mamluk era was probably coming to an end. Shaykh Bahā' al-Dīn Abū Ḥāmid al-Subkī (one of the illustrious Mamlūk poets who is cited more than once in al-Maqrīzī's "*Khiṭaṭ*") is said to have written and recited this poem to the Sulṭān on that occasion:

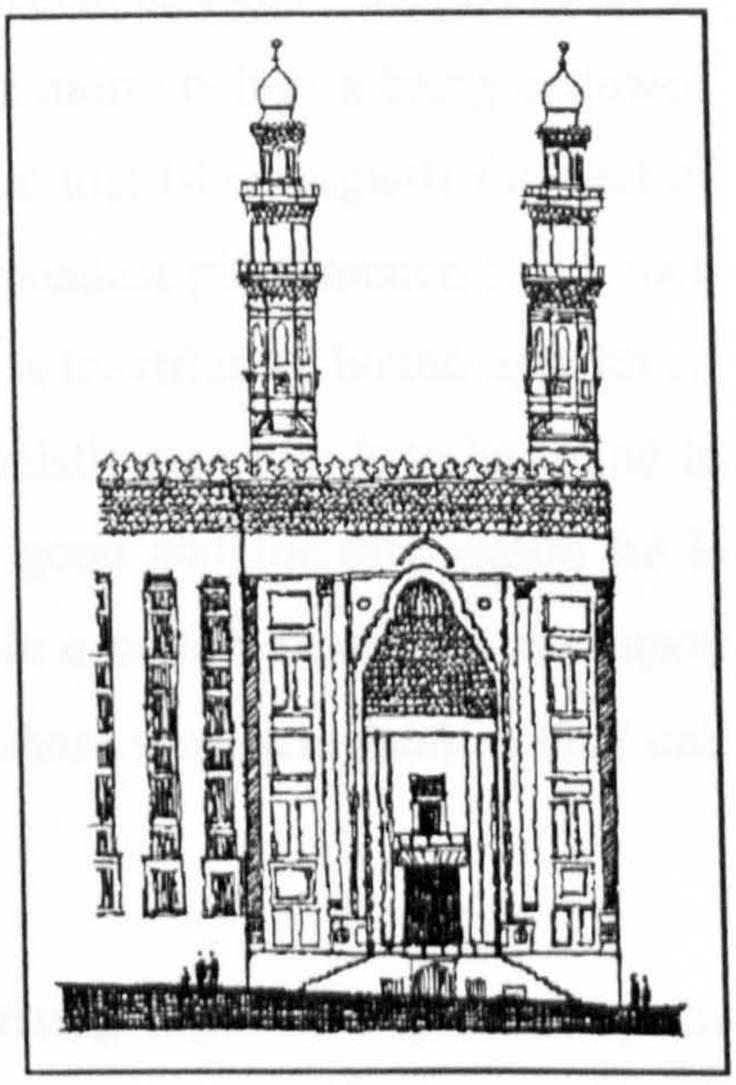


**Figure 10.8(b)** Intended portal.

***Be happy O Sultan of Egypt for your good fortune has arrived, the minaret did not topple because of lack of expertise in construction, but rather because of a hidden secret that has been revealed only to me. Underneath it the Koran was recited and it (the minaret) heard it, became humble and so leaned for if Allah descended the Koran on a mountain, probably its summit would smash from the effect of devotion[2]. These stones did not fall,***

---

[1] Since Ayyubid times, al-Qal'a Street was considered to be one of the major arteries of the city of Cairo. The particular site of the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan happens to be at the meeting end point of that artery and the square (*maydān*) at the foot of the Citadel itself.

[2] The example of the mountain is taken from the Qur'ān: 59/21 where God says: "*Had we sent down this Qur'ān on a mountain, verily, thou wouldst have seen it humble itself and cleave asunder for fear of God. Such are similitudes which We propound to men, that they may reflect.*"

*but descended out of fear of Allah and not of weakness or improper design.*[1]

But al-Maqrīzī also tells us that thirty-three days after this incident, a plot was made to kill the Sulṭān.

A flight of rising steps[2] seems to be the most appropriate approach for a "house of God". In Ṣūfī terms the goal of the Muslim is to achieve ascension to reach God. Furthermore, God mentions in the Qur'ān that He has revered man *above* other earthly creatures, and that He has *elevated*, honoured and distinguished mankind. The freedom of choice that God gave man made him, and him alone, into a moral being: a being endowed with a spirit and a soul[3]. It is on the basis of this conception that Islam regards the soul of man as one aspect of his "personality" and not as an independent phenomenon in its own right. Consequently, to the Muslim, man's spiritual growth is inextricably bound up with all the other aspects of his nature.[4] The root of this almost monistic assertion is to be found in the Islamic view that man's original nature is essentially good and for that reason he is elevated. God says in the Qur'ān: "*Verily, We create man in a perfect state*[5] *and thereupon We reduce him to the lowest of low, with the exception of those who have faith in God and do good works.*"[6]

This elevated state is not only expressed by the rising flight of steps, but by the verticality of the windows which are grouped into longitudinal strips along the entire length of the façade as well. Standing in front of the portal, I sensed its emphasized verticality, as if a finger was being pointed upwards. (Fig 10.9) I remembered the well known *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon Him) who met a slave and asked her: "*Where is God?*"

---

[1] Al-Maqrīzī (14th C.), *Khiṭaṭ*, vol.2, p. 316. (My translation).

[2] Rather than having the entrance on the same level as that of the pavement or on a sunken level.

[3] See discussion in Chapter Four.

[4] Physical urges are an integral part of this nature: not the result of an " original sin" but positive, God-given forces, to be accepted and sensibly used as such: hence the problem for man is not how to suppress the demands of his body but, rather, how to co-ordinate them with the demands of his spirit in such a way that life might become full and righteous.

[5] A state of purity that may be destroyed only by subsequent wrong behaviour.

[6] Qur'ān: 95/4-6.

She answered by pointing upwards to the sky; as a reward, she was freed from her slavery as the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon Him) told her master: "*Free her, she is a believer.*"

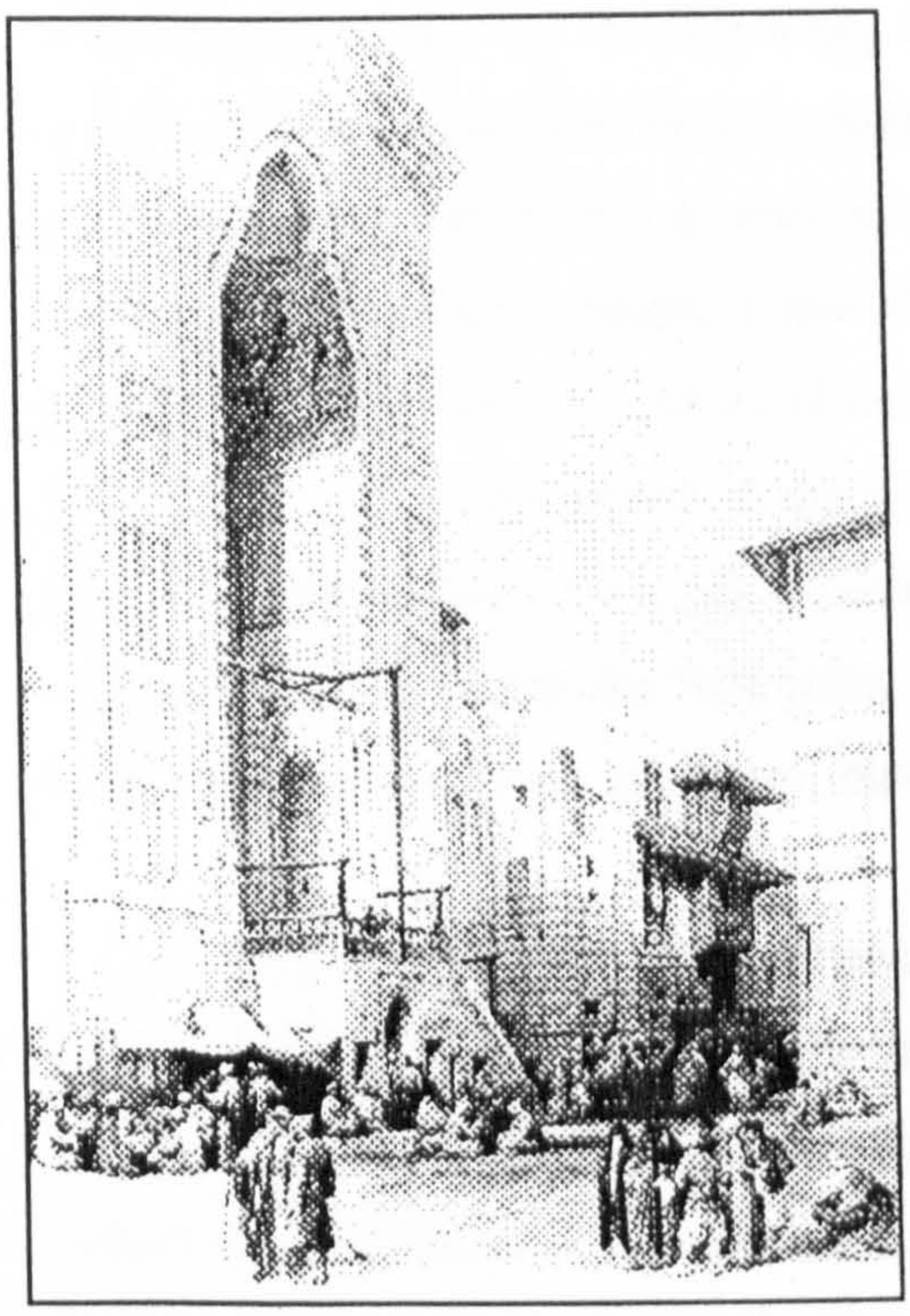


**Figure 10.9** **The verticality of the entrance is obvious in both its form and detail. (David Roberts Engraving).**

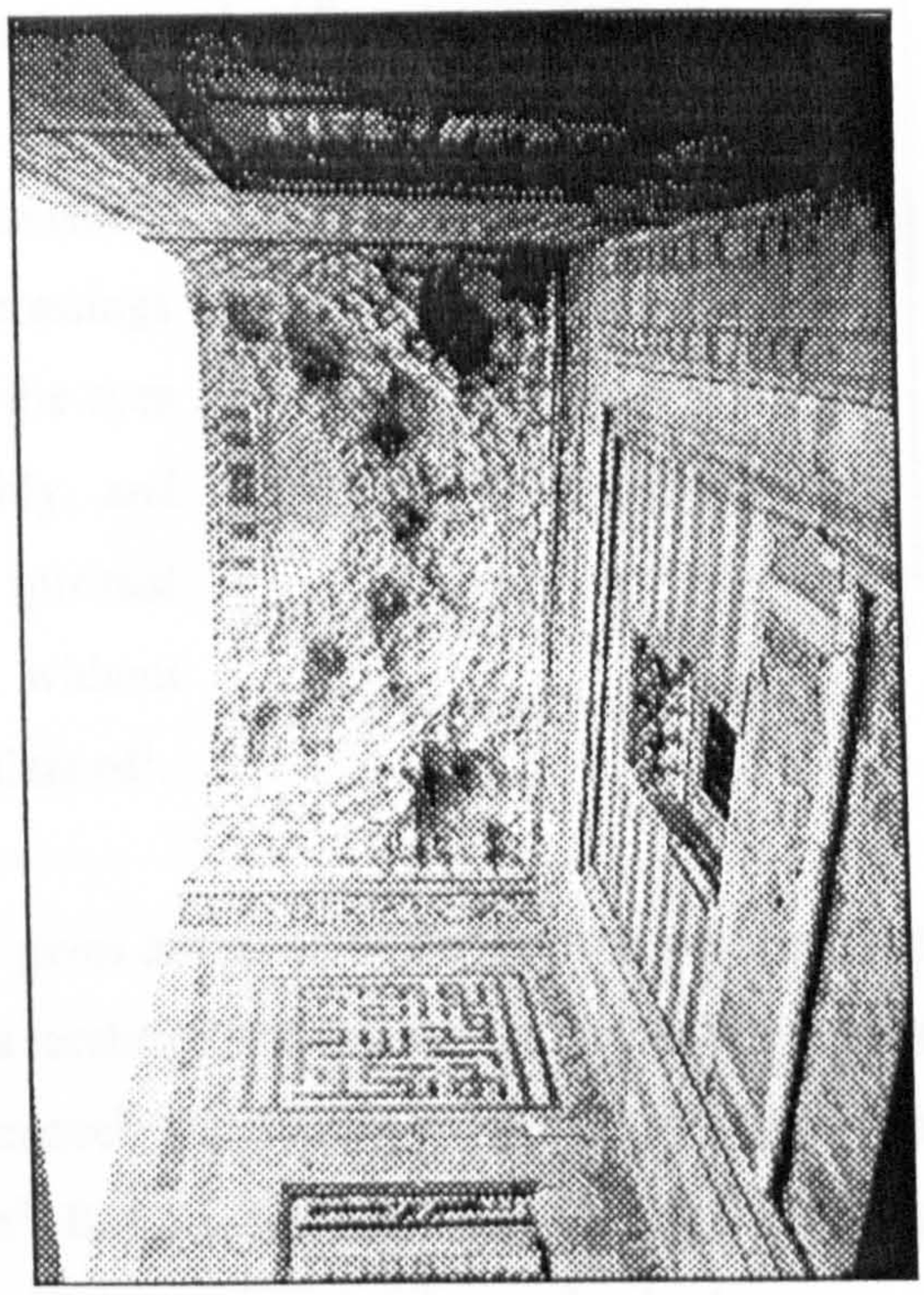


**Figure 10.10** **The cave-like effect created by the stalactites seen as one passes through the portal.**

I stood facing the portal thinking that in any Muslim religious building the portal marks the passage from the less holy to the more holy[1]. Just before stepping through the portal of the *Madrasa* of the Sulṭān Ḥassan and looking upwards at the effect produced by the stalactites (*muqarnasāt*) over the entrance, I felt as though I was entering a cave, passing through to an otherworldly experience, a feeling that is inviting but demands discretion. (Fig. 10.10) The portal is recessed from the façade; it does not protrude into the street. By its architecture it expresses aspirations towards the Divine through loftiness and verticality: the composition rises to the full height of the façade, with the lines of the recessed area leading up to a silhouette of a pointed semi-dome covering the recess. After my eyes had brushed the surface of this pointed semi-dome, my vision was lifted still higher by a slightly recessed niche on top of the pointed arch, thus continuing ascension beyond the building into the sky.

[1] It should not be forgotten that in traditional Muslim societies, the whole earth is considered holy, it is just a quantitative difference and not a qualitative one.

As in other Mamlūk mosques, the top of the building does not meet the sky abruptly. In this case two devices are introduced in the design to enhance this relationship (Fig. 10.11): first, several rows of stalactites corbelling outwards, and running along the whole length of the façade are repeated identically, time and time again, giving the feeling of infinity as well as the inexhaustible multiplicity of creation; second, a row of trefoil crestings give the symbolic view of equality of mankind in the eyes of God, as well as the union of the solid, earthly, and physical attributes with the void, heavenly, and spiritual attributes of man. From the Ṣūfī point of view, without the vertical union of both attributes, man is imbalanced[1].

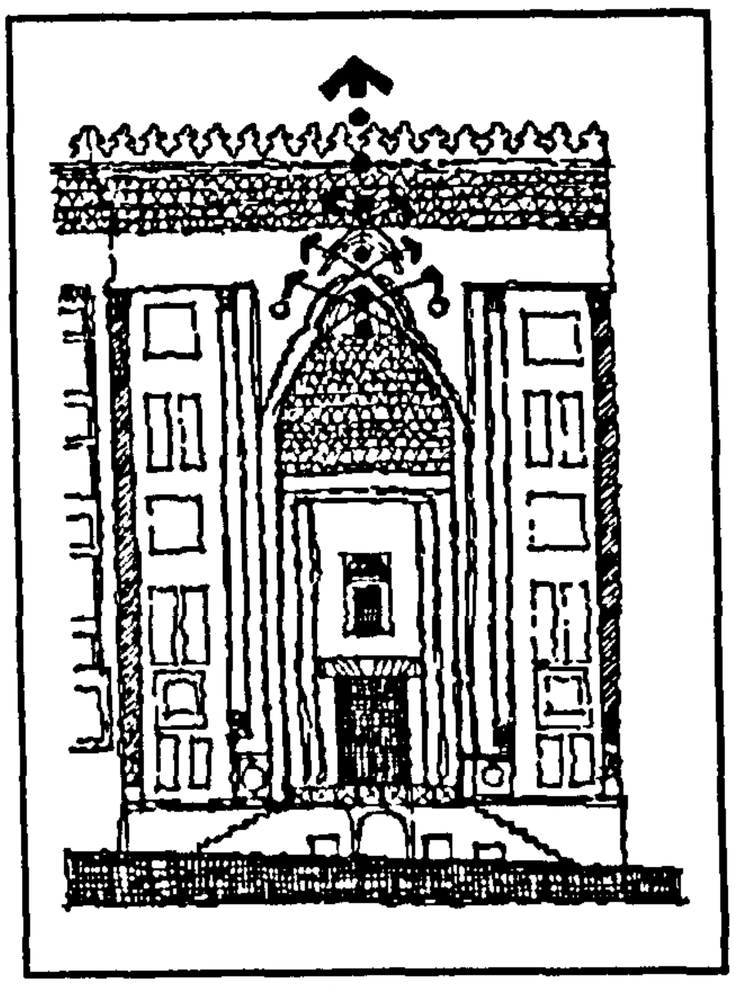


**Figure 10.11** Ascension is achieved by several devices in the design of the portal.

I stood opposite the only doorway which gives access to this enormous building and thought that it would be ridiculous in today's architectural principles to even suggest designing such a building and have only one entrance[2]. But I knew that it is Unity that was behind this choice and not any utilitarian function[3]. Besides the idea of the unifying doorway used by all the students entering the four schools of jurisprudence, the use of a single entrance ensures that every user or visitor passes through the same sequence of spaces. The effect is to face every visitor with a *miḥrāb*-shaped recessed space that resembles a cave; the outer silhouette of which promotes verticality by the ascending flight of steps, the array of pointed arches, the crestings, and finally in this case, by the pair of intended minarets. Apart from the fact that the entrance relationship does not face the *qibla* direction one could say that it sums up and *embodies* the religious building at a glance. In the otherwise expressionless façade, it tells us what is expected to be experienced *within* the introverted building; it is like a preface to a book that suggests a little of what it contains.

---

[1] As we saw in Chapter Two, the goal of the Ṣūfī is to achieve this union of his physical and spiritual existence by his vertical, spiritual journey to God following the footsteps of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) in his Night Journey (*Mi'rāj*).

[2] Not only from the point of view of fire protection and emergency, but as Louis Kahn's modern principles of *Servant and Served*.

[3] Actually, four doors could have been easily incorporated in the design, as the four schools are located next to the three streets circumscribing the site.

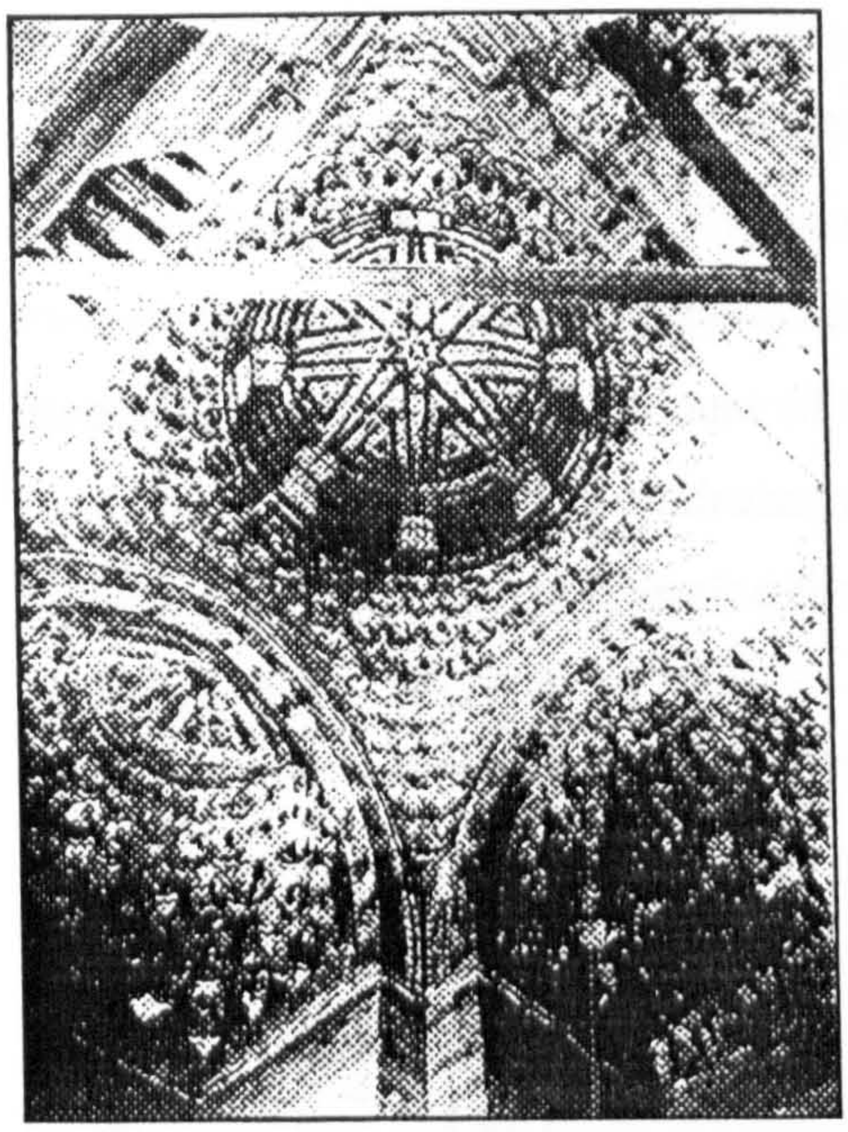


**Figure 10.12** A stalactite dome roofs the entrance hall showing an eight star pattern motif leading to a point. (See symbolism of octagons).

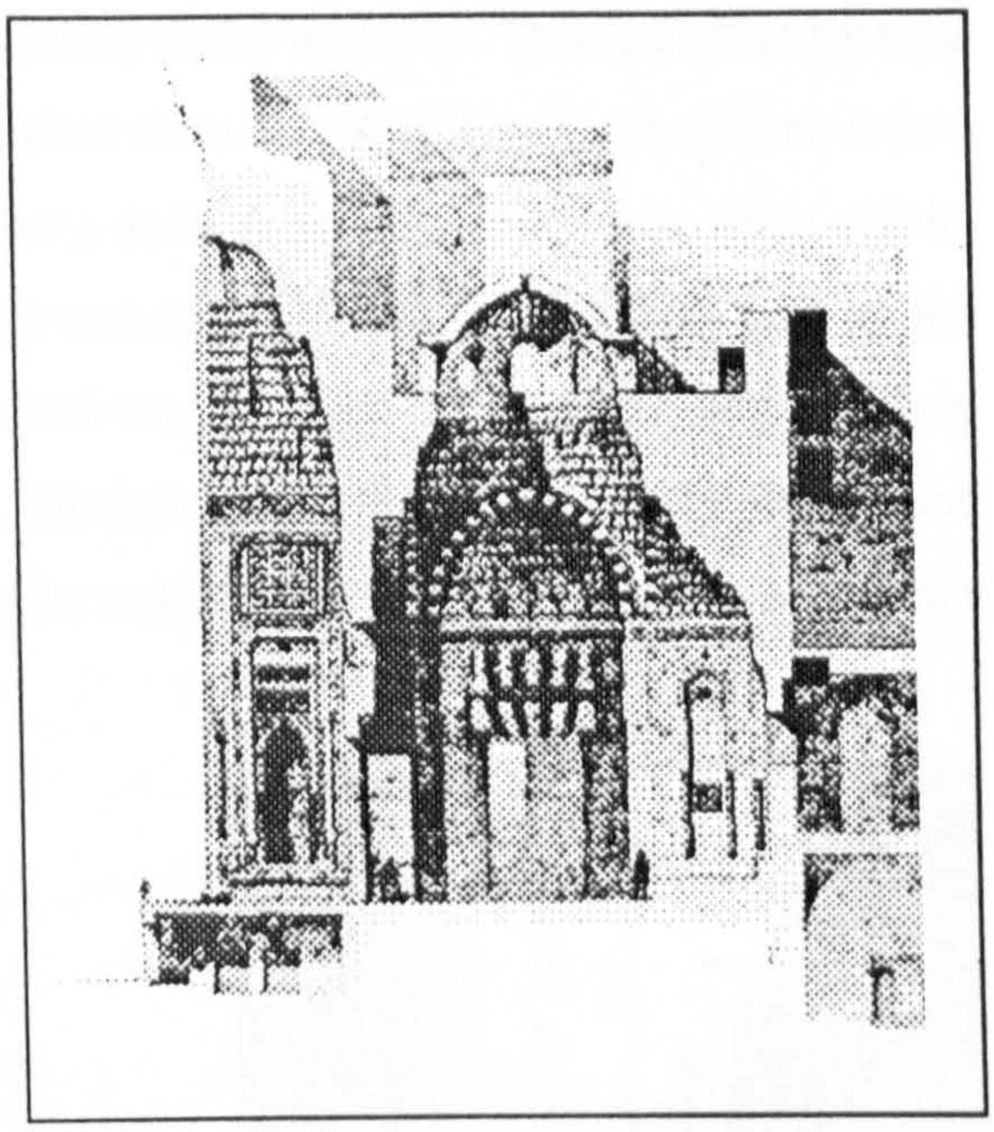


**Figure 10.13** Section through the entrance showing the continuity of stalactites from exterior to interior emphasizing the sensed cave-like effect.

Passing through the doorway into the entrance hall, I was greeted with all the dignity worthy of the holiness of a "house of God". I was not surprised to find the interior of the entrance hall to be high and dark; this is so in all other Mamlūk buildings. In this complex, the noticeable height is due to the lofty roofing of the hall by a dome entirely formed of *muqarnasāt*. (Fig. 10.12) I sensed that these stalactites and the ones used in the portal were the obvious continuity of one theme. It struck me that this continuity emphasized the cave-like effect that I had sensed earlier. (Fig. 10.13) I could find only one reason for this cave-like intention in that particular part of the building, it is the drawing of the worshippers *into* the more holy space rather than using a flush plane that is "neutral"[1] or one projecting into the less holy street.

I moved on into the *majāz* which in this building is formed of four bends leading from the entrance to the courtyard. All Mamlūk religious buildings make use of this architectural device. Although it is said to be an adequate way of accommodating the difference between the street alignment and the *qibla* direction, here was a building that had the luxury of space and three façades - unlike the restricted conventional single façade in the

[1] By the term "neutral" I mean neither introvert nor extravert.

populous central areas of Cairo[1] - and yet the *mu'allim* chose to use it. This indicates that the *majāz* was designed this way for its own sake rather than for its utilitarian function: it had found a place in the tradition. The bends have three main functions: first, they close off the view of the street from the interior; secondly, the transitional passages or offsets take up the divergence between the alignment of the street and the direction of Makkah[2] which rarely coincide in any mosque or *madrasa*; and third, the passages, which are usually simple and undecorated, work as a preparation for reaching the magnificent *ṣaḥn* and praying hall (*iwān al-qibla*). (Figs. 10.14 & 10.15)

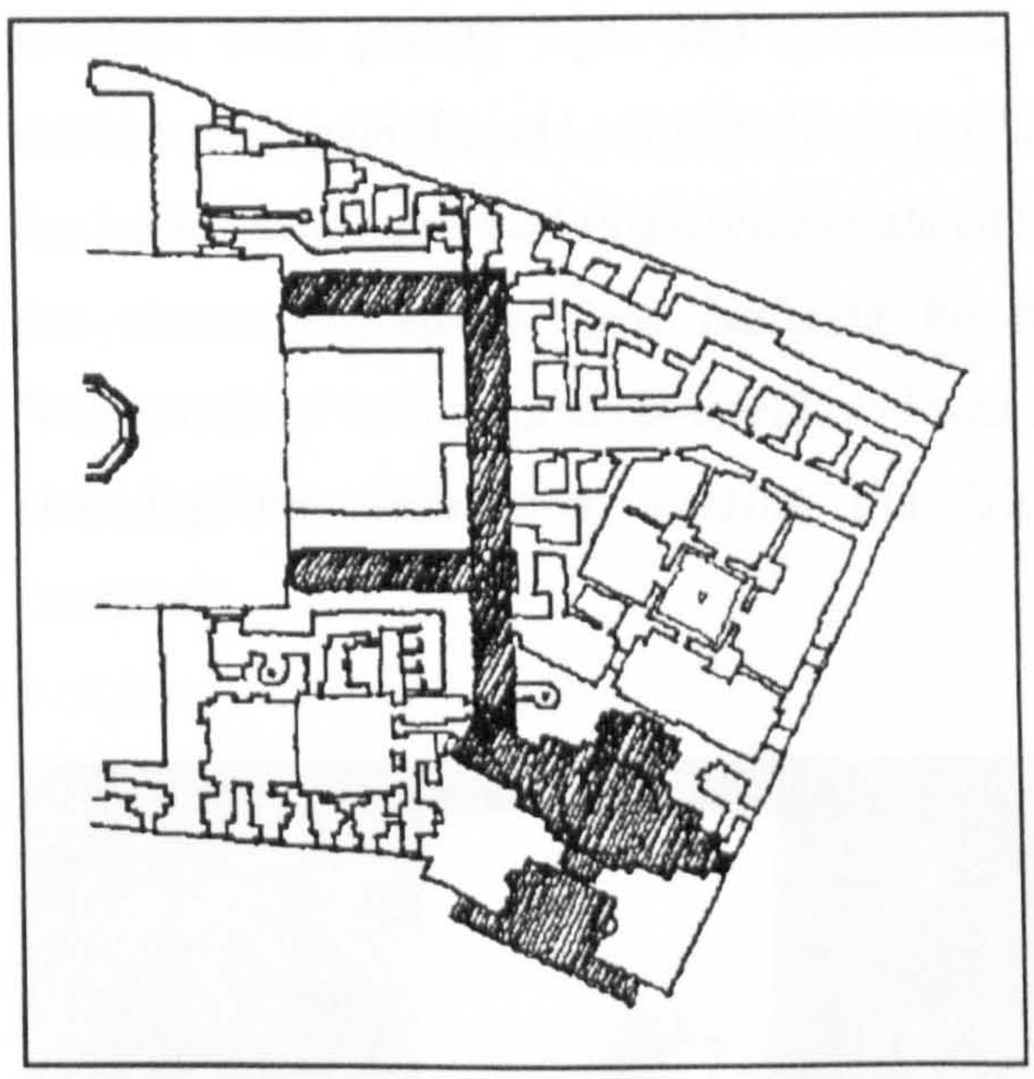


**Figure 10.14** Plan of the *majāz* used in the *Madrasa* with four bends leading to the internal more holy courtyard.

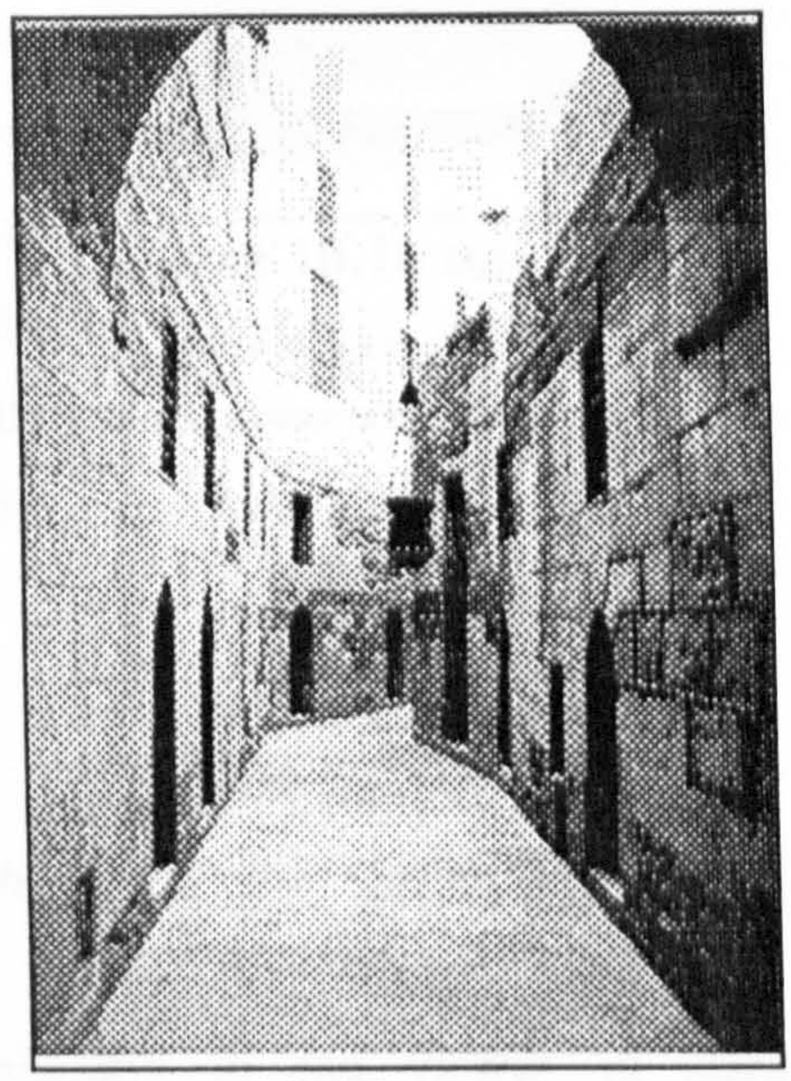


**Figure 10.15** Winding, plain, and undecorated passages leading to ablution area.

Basically though, these horizontally winding tube-like plain passages, besides creating a visual barrier from the inside, are a wonderful opportunity to discard the temporal garb one enters with. If the visitor does not pass through this transitory sombre atmosphere he would not have another chance to recollect himself before entering the mosque proper. This sense of transition in which one leaves behind the "secular" urban scene for the peaceful grandeur of the interior, is very dramatic and obviously deliberate.

I suddenly felt chilled by a cool breeze that was stirred in the *majāz*. It reminded me

---

[1] Such as the streets of Bayn al-Qasrayn and al-Mu'izz Street.

[2] op cit. Christel Kessler, 1984, p. 97; and op cit. David King, 1984, p.119

of what we colloquially describe today as "*a breeze that recalls the spirit to the body*"[1]. It never fails. As I walked on in the darkness, it dawned upon me that there was a certain pattern of breeze, light, and my own bodily movement, related to my horizontal change of direction. Whenever I passed through a bend, whether a 90 degree or lesser one, I was connected vertically to the sky by a shaft - more like a light well (Fig. 10.16) - which flooded each junction with glaring light and accounted for the air movement. Again, I could not stop thinking of the genius of the *mu'allim* to have used this device to *shock* the system of the viewer repeatedly, into realizing he had left the "horizontality" of the mundane world, and was consequently changing his orientation towards the Divine in the "vertical".

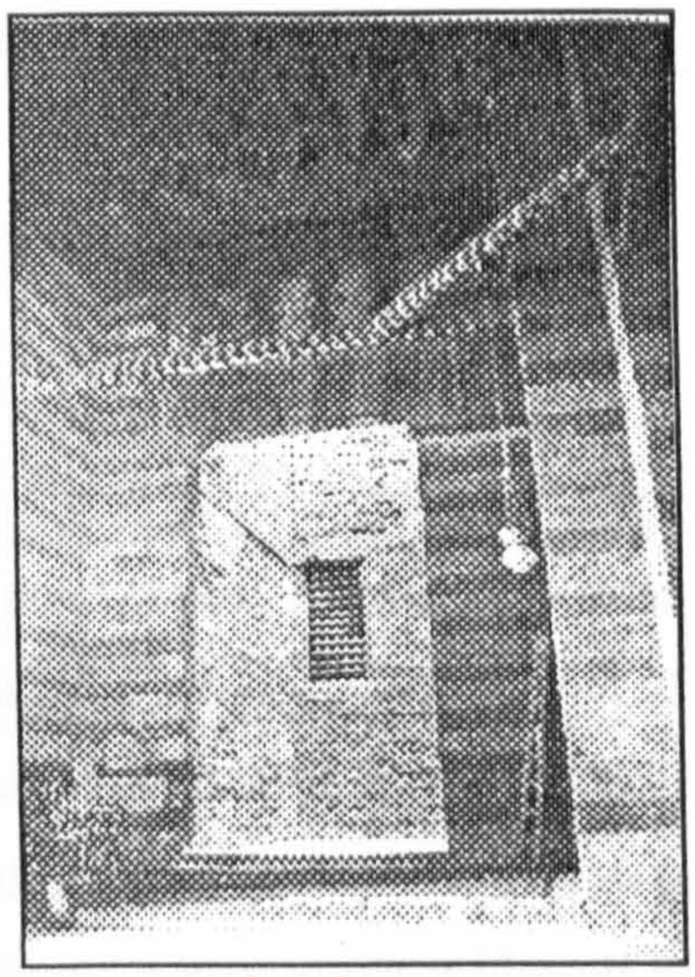


**Figure 10.16** **Light well connecting the visitor to the vertical where change of direction occur in the *majāz*.**

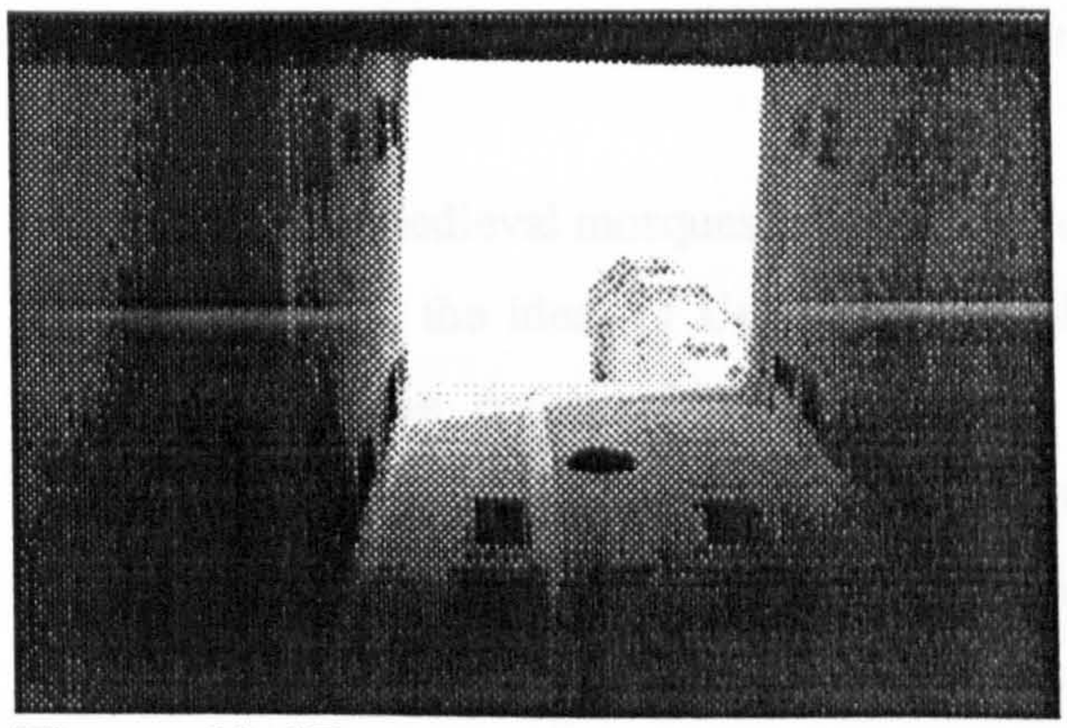


**Figure 10.17** **The vertical connection to the sky emphasized by the minaret (the symbol of the vertical) accelerating ascension.**

God is "*the light of the Heavens and the earth*" the Qur'ān says. What better than to bring this light intermittently to the viewer in stark contrast to the darkness created by the *majāz*? This was no coincidence, as throughout the building, even minor circulation corridors were connected vertically to the sky at every junction, always related to the physical change of direction. To further emphasize this feeling of verticality, I found my sight being taken higher by the minaret which seems to "hold" the square opening to the sky of the shaft. (Fig. 10.17)

At this stage, I began to feel impatient to reach the end of the journey. I had already visited this *madrasa* often and knew it thoroughly, but it was a further layer of understanding that I was anticipating this time. Abruptly, I could see a glimpse of the centre. (Fig. 10.18)

---

[1] In colloquial Egyptian dialect: "*hawā' yerod al-rūḥ.*"

I was drawn by a strange expectancy, as if this spiritual centre were a kind of promise, a gateway to a wider world than the one in which I was living. This was the internal world to me, in which I would feel contained, not just in any *space*, but in a *place* of inviting silence, one with transcendent qualities.

Upon entering the courtyard I recalled the traditional canons governing the design of a traditional Muslim space. In the medieval mosque, these laws emphasized three cosmological ideas: the idea of *centre* or *centrality* representing the essence of Islam, that of Unity (*Tawḥīd*), and two directions: the one *vertical* tending upwards linking it with the sky, and the other *horizontal* linking it with Makkah. It is through the understanding of the relation between these three cosmological notions that Mamlūk man found a way to place himself in the cosmos; it is through these constant points of tension resulting from the meeting of these two axis in relation to the centre that static buildings "move" and are rendered alive and vibrant. Movement is manifested by shifting centres of gravity or focal points in the visible space from their geometrical "centres of gravity" towards the direction that is symbolically functional. This dimension of function would undoubtedly have been understood by the *mu'allim* who was a member and servant of that traditional society.

In other medieval mosques prior to the Complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan, the ideas of Unity and centrality are established by the courtyard with a central focus, usually a fountain - or the pattern of an octagonal fountain in the marble flooring of the ṣaḥn. The upward movement is expressed by the dome symbolizing the sky, and the horizontal movement is manifested by shifting this dome forward from its expected position in the geometrical centre of the prayer area towards the *qibla* wall in the bay of the *miḥrāb*. (Fig. 10.18) An interesting case is that of the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn in Cairo, where the prayer areas are covered by flat wooden roofs except for the bay in front of the *qibla* which is covered by a dome on squinches - i.e., passing through the octagonal transition - expressing the contact with the vertical axis linking earth with sky.

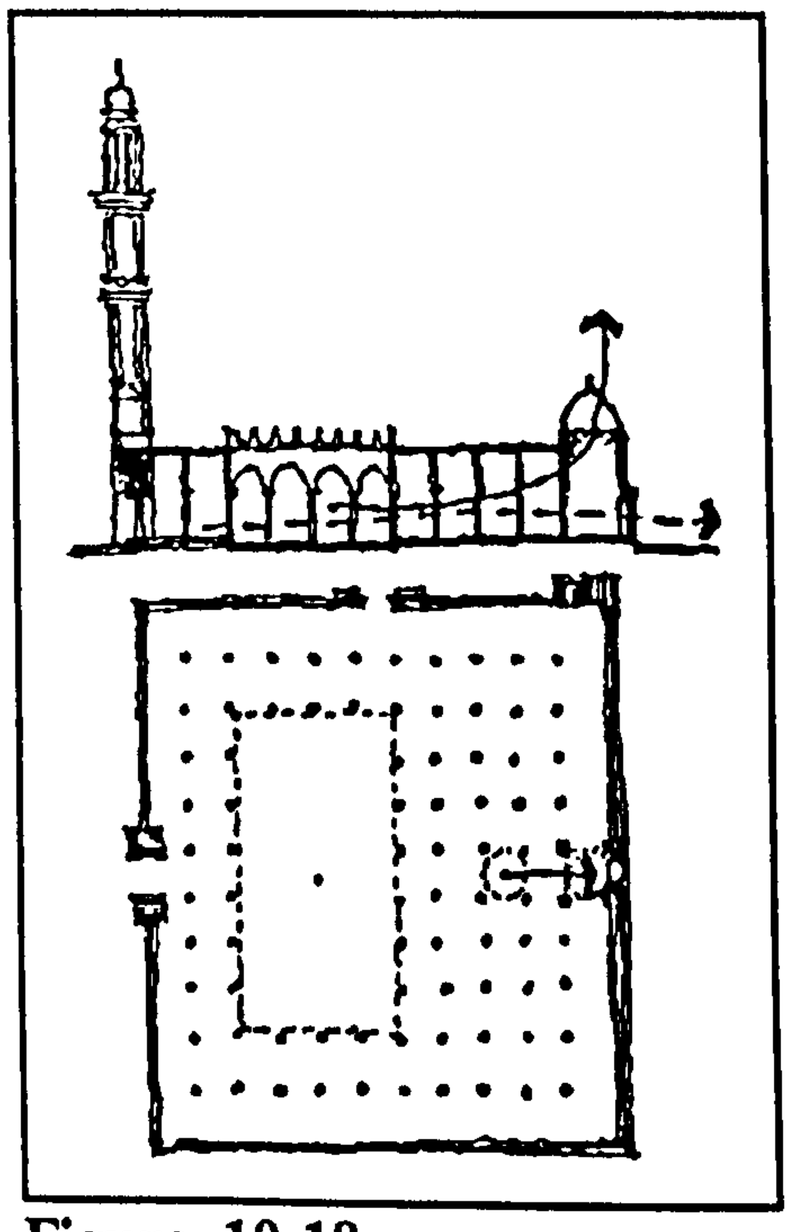


**Figure 10.18** The Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad where the dome is shifted from the geometrical centre to the point of tension between the vertical and horizontal.

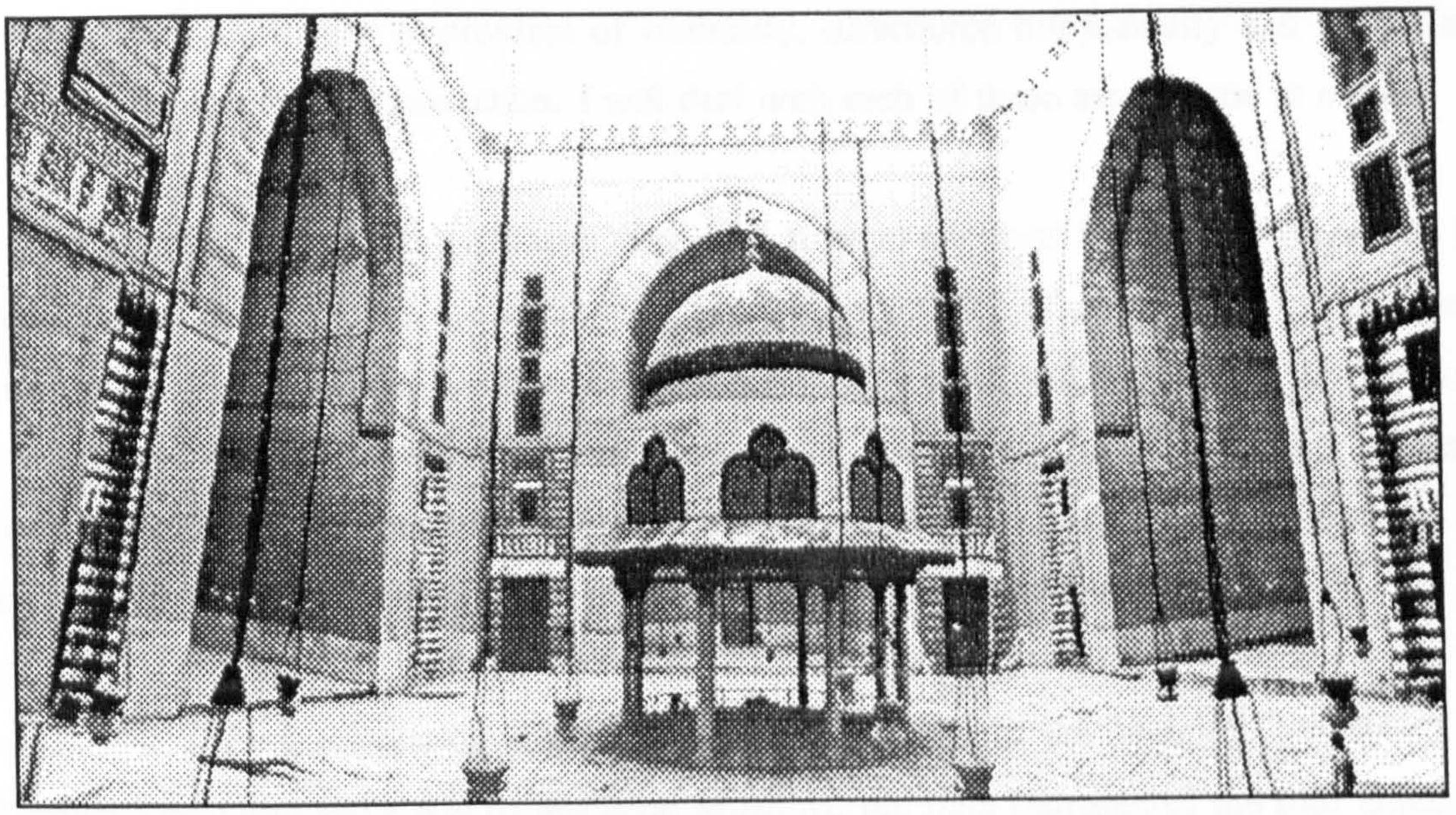


**Figure 10.19** The central octagonal water fountain in the *ṣaḥn* seems to generate the geometry of the whole building.

Remembering this, I entered into the vast *ṣaḥn* of the Complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan. (Fig. 10.19) It was here that I found the true gravity of the Islamic sentiment. I was struck by the slight use of colour - reserved to emphasize only climactic points. The *mu'allim* was obviously well versed in Islamic art, and had a firm sense of synthesis. Instead of sacrificing the whole to an arbitrary juxtaposition of ornamental themes, he emphasized a unifying order which was the common denominator of this architecture. More than any other Cairene monument, this *madrasa* is probably the one that is most striking in its emptiness, wholistic order, and hierarchical progression.

This simplicity did not prevent the *mu'allim* playing with the contrast arising from the ample light of the *ṣaḥn* and the shade of the *iwāns*. In this interior, aided by the height of the *iwāns* and walls, by the harmony of the lines, and the emphasized depth of the *qibla iwān*, one is at once plunged in an atmosphere of religious meditation. (Fig. 10.20) Based on the four-*iwān* type generated from the centre of the courtyard, this arrangement gives in the first instance a sense of centralization rather than that of direction. But upon close analysis, it is clear that the *mu'allim* of the Sulṭān

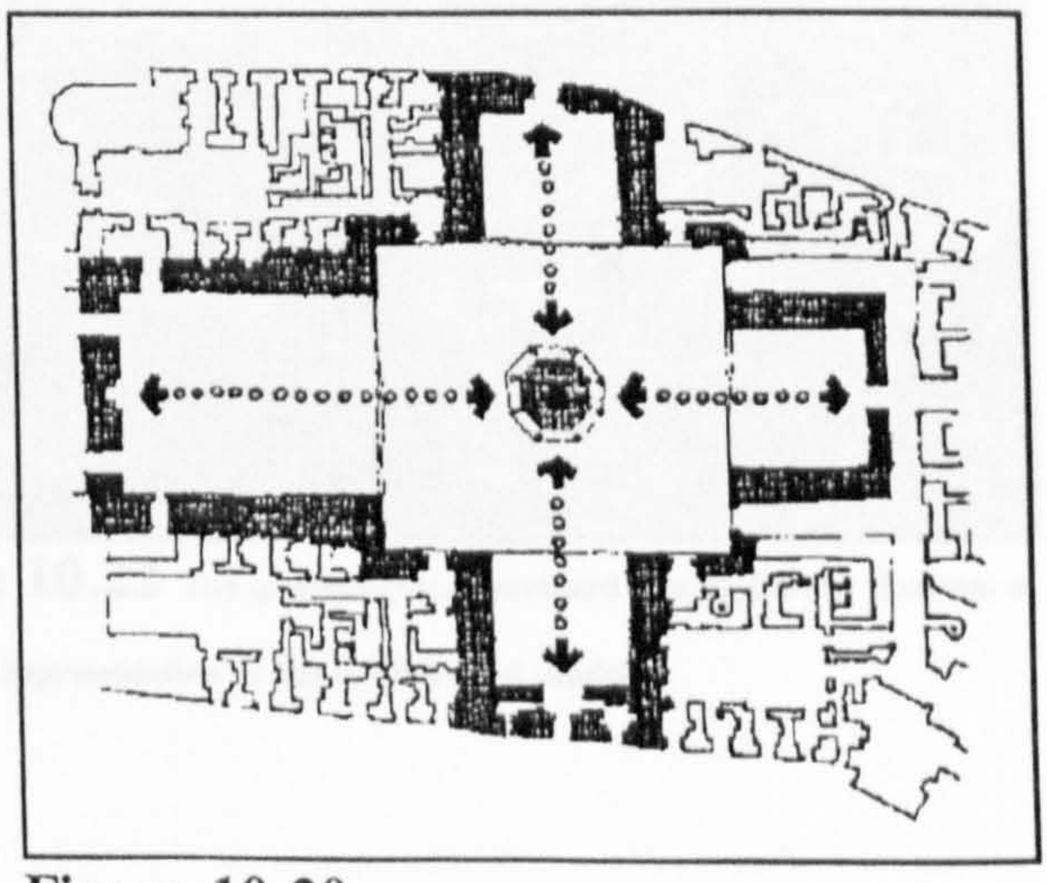


**Figure 10.20** The feeling of centralization resulting from the four-*iwān* organization.

Ḥassan solved the tripartite problem of centrality, directional horizontality and verticality brilliantly by that *iwān* organization. I will deal with each of these aspects one at a time.

We saw in Chapters Eight and Nine, how in most medieval Islamic buildings, and in Mamlūk ones in particular, the problem of expressing the idea of centre was respected and accentuated by emphasizing the centre of the *ṣaḥn* by an octagonal water fountain that was in many cases not used for ablutions. We also saw that accordingly, historians explained these fountains on aesthetic grounds after having found no utilitarian use for them in the case of mosques, or in climatic terms in the case of other types of Islamic buildings.

But upon investigating cosmological texts available to the Mamlūks we found in Chapters Seven and Eight that to medieval Muslims, the *ṣaḥn* represented the four columns carrying the celestial dome encompassing the earth. (Fig. 10.21) In the Cairene context, the *mu'allim* discarded the dome which manifested Heaven, for what better Heaven could be represented other than the true one. (Fig. 10.22) In other regions with less fortunate climates, *mu'allimīn* resorted to the dome following the numerous relevant *ḥadīths* of the Prophet.[1] But in this case, the notion that the open courtyard with the sky above was meant to join the Islamic building to the sky or the Heavens is found to be valid.

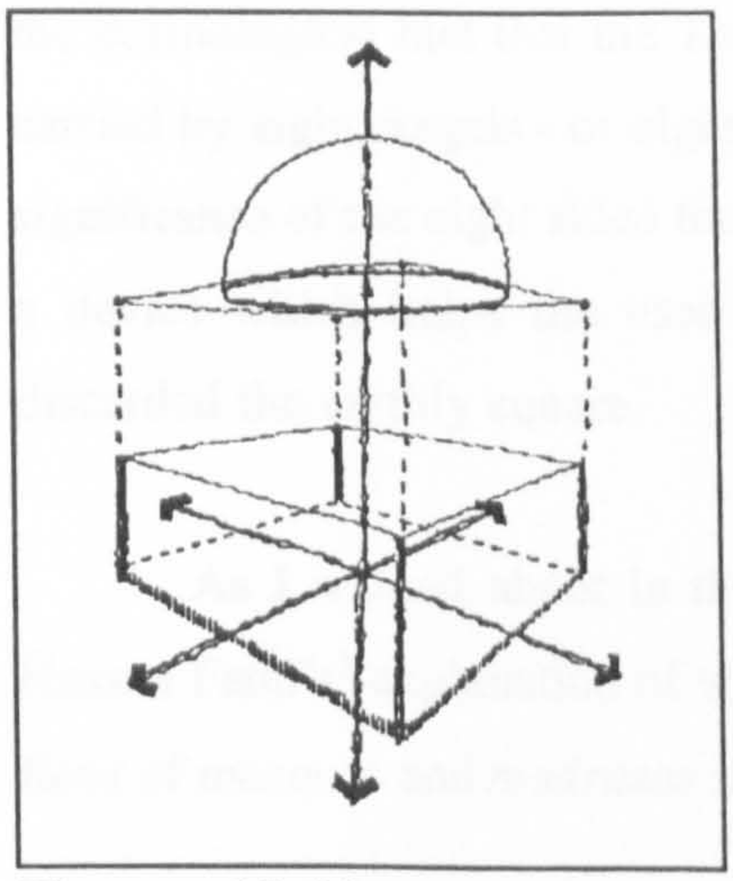


**Figure 10.21** Cosmological model representing the celestial dome meeting earth.

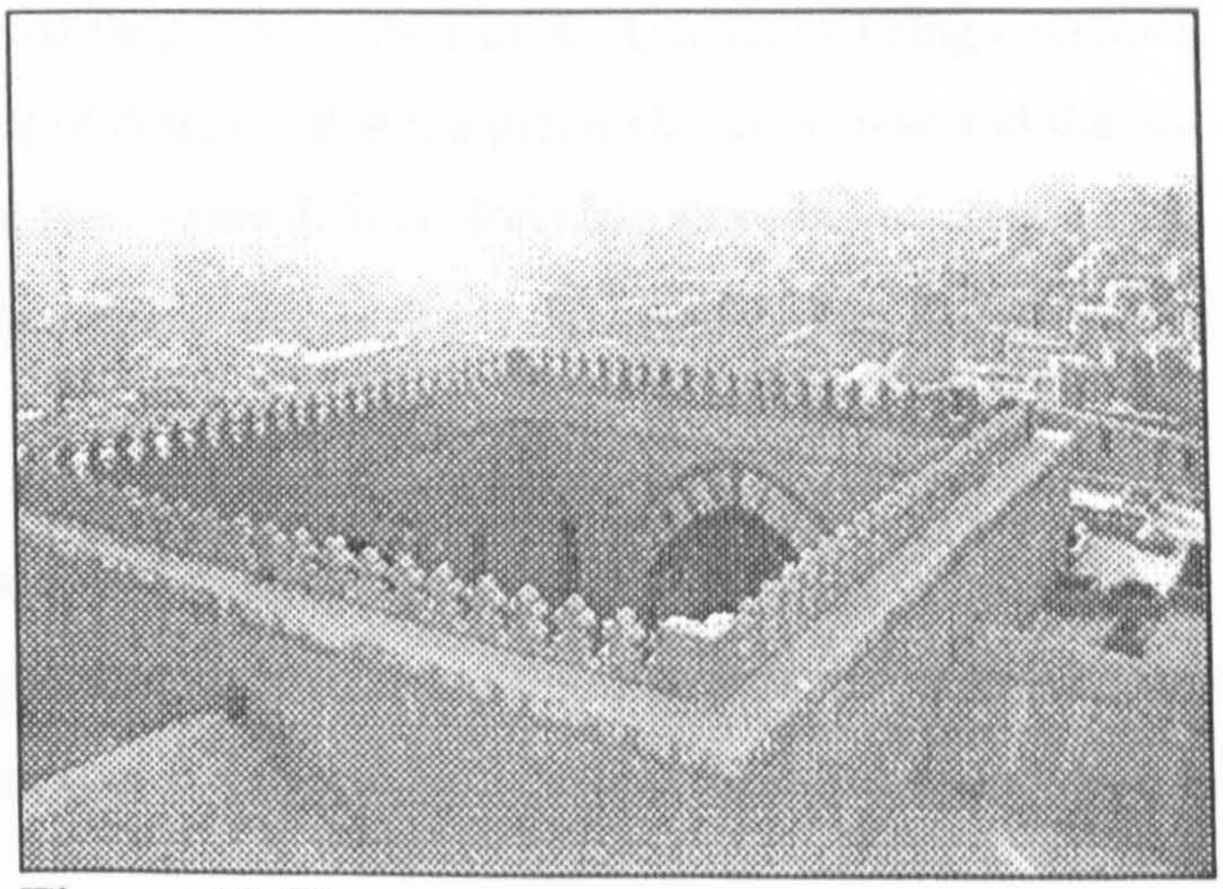


**Figure 10.22** The quadrangular courtyard joining the sky (heaven) as a physical representation of the cosmological model.

[1] The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) asserted that Heaven was vaulted over the earth like a dome and indicated with his fingers the likeness of a dome. Ibn Abī Ḥātim quoted the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon Him) explaining God's word "*Heaven He built*," (*wa al-samā'a banāha*), and said: "*The edifice of Heaven spans over the earth like a dome structure; it is a roof over the earth.*"

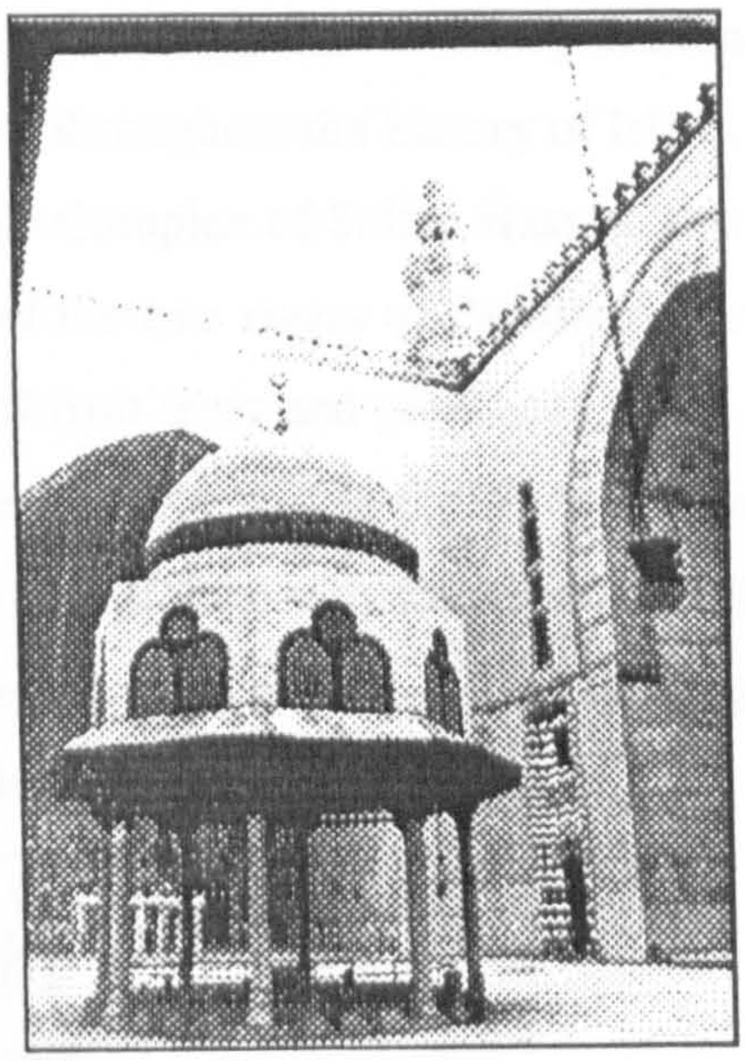


**Figure 23** **The octagonal fountain is a centre, cosmologically it resembles the qualitative geometry of the Dome of the Rock.**

The dominant central octagonal water fountain (Fig. 10.23) is composed of eight columns carrying an octagonal drum and culminating in a bulbous dome - the original bulbous dome roofing the mausoleum is said to have had the same shape. It is reminiscent of the popular Islamic prototypes of a mausoleum, but with one difference, that the fountain does not meet with the earth in a square form. It brings to mind the famous "centre" of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem - not that there is any historical connection between the two, but this too is a symbol of a centre, is octagonal, and does not have an earthly quadrangular base. I looked at the octagonal basin contemplating the sparkling water of the fountain and remembered the well-known verse of the Qur'ān where God states that "*He has created from water everything that is alive*"[1]; I also recalled the numerous verses where water is said to be one of the manifestations of Paradise in the form of water springs and underground rivers; and the verse where God says that "*His Throne lies on water.*"[2] But it was only when I correlated that with the cosmological fact that the Throne of God is described in the Qur'ān as being octagonal carried by eight Angels - or eight rows of Angels - that the picture became clear and the full significance of the eight sided fountain was exposed. It is obviously a symbol of creation and a device which helps the user to remember the Creator; no wonder the *mu'allim* had discarded the earthly square.

As I walked about in the courtyard looking at the marble flooring, I remembered Ḥassan Fatḥī's[3] explanation of what all these patterns and colours express; he interpreted the floor of mosques and *madrasas* as images of the Garden of Paradise. He relied on the marble

---

[1] Qur'ān: 21/30.

[2] Qur'ān: 11/7.

[3] Ḥassan Fatḥī (born 1900 died 1988) is considered to be one of the pioneers of the study and revival of traditional architecture in Egypt. He specialized in indigenous building processes and has traditional views on Mamlūk religious architecture. He considered the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan to be the epitome of Cairene Medieval architecture.

patterns of the flooring of courtyards found in most Mamlūk buildings[1] for his interpretation and said that these patterns were abstractions of garden plans throughout the history of Islam. He told me once, while walking through the courtyard of the Complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan, that we were walking along the River Kawthar, which is one of the two rivers of Paradise[2]. He then pointed out that we were going through an orchard of fruit trees and plantation fields. I could not understand what he was referring to until he took me to the top floor of the residential quarters in the *Madrasa* and asked me to look down on the courtyard. (Fig. 10.24) It was then that I saw that the complex geometry of the coloured marble of the flooring appears to indicate channels of rivers and streams encircling trees and plantations.

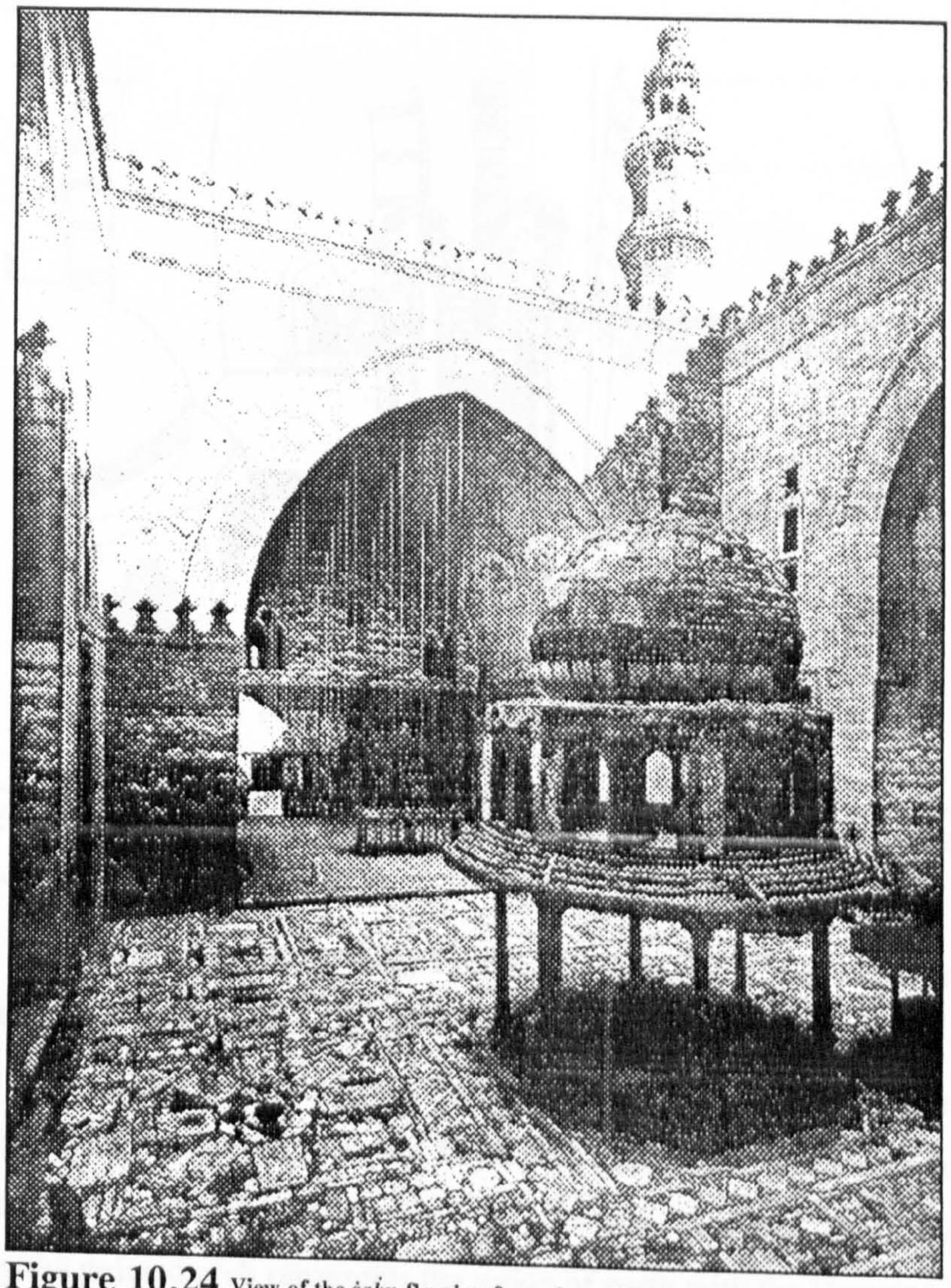


**Figure 10.24** View of the *ṣaḥn* flooring from the residential quarters of the *Madrasa* showing an intentional organization of patterns. (Max Herz Bey)

[1] Such as those of *Emīr* Mithqāl, Tatar al-Ḥijāziyya, and al-Ghūrī.

[2] For more details on this point see Chapter Seven.

God says: "*For the righteous are Gardens in nearness to their Lord, with rivers flowing beneath; therein is their eternal abode;...*"[1] and in another verse God says, "*There are two other Gardens, ... dark green in colour, ... in them will be two springs pouring forth water in continuous abundance, ... in them will be fruits, and dates and pomegranates ...*". I imagined this as a garden, planned around the central focus of the octagonal water fountain pouring water forth in continuous abundance, recalling the Throne of God lying on the waters, the source of all creation and a characteristic of Paradise. (Fig. 10.25) The *mu'allim* once again had chosen the appropriate tool to make the visitor "see" the Almighty in everything and in every place, and what better place than at the centre.

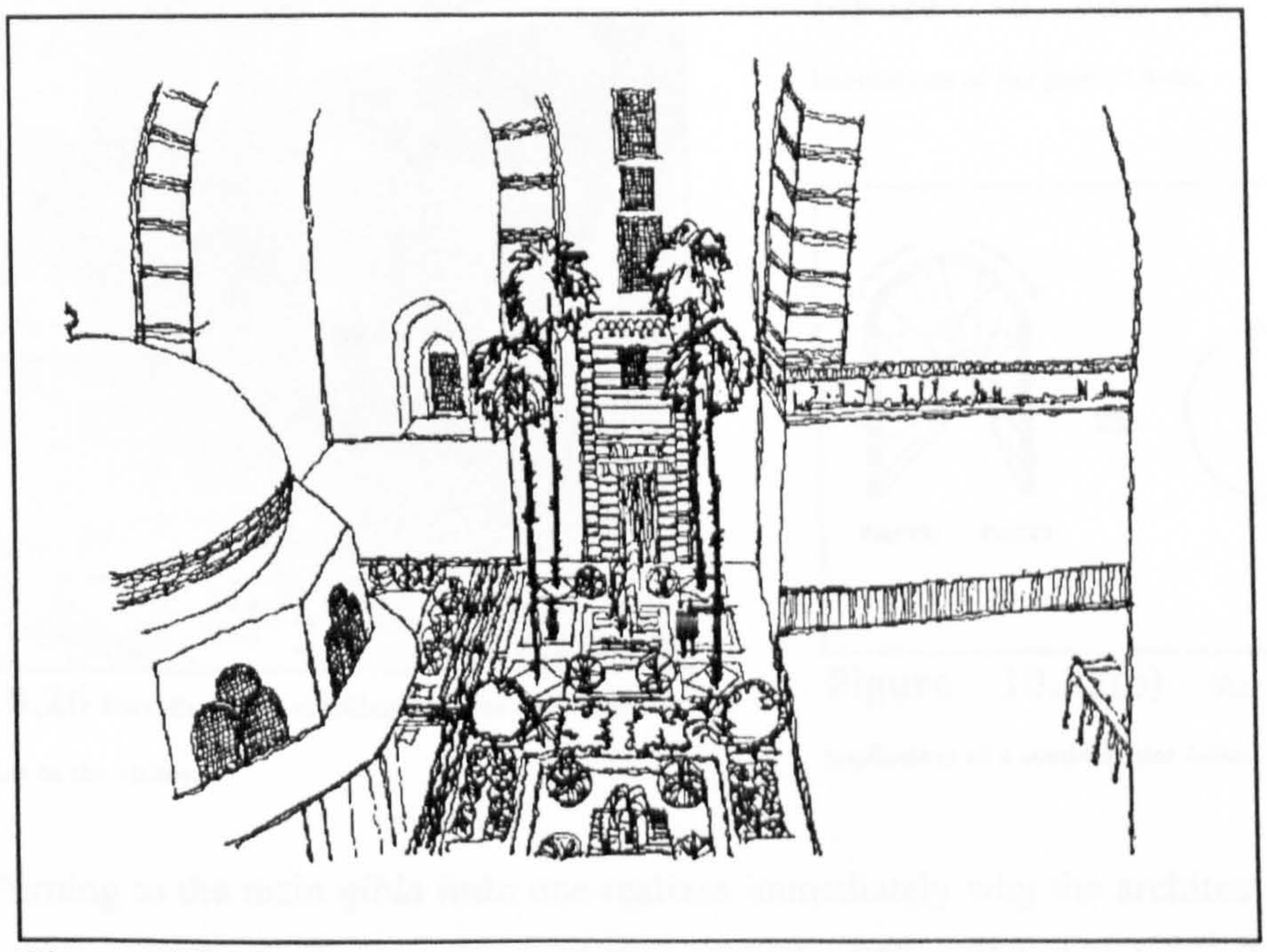


**Figure 10.25** Ḥassan Fatḥī's visual representation of the marble patterned flooring according to Islamic Paradisiacal gardens.

From the centre of the courtyard, I turned to face one of the *iwāns* and considered its form and how it is generated. (Fig. 10.26) The pointed *iwān* is the result of the growth of the pointed arch along a horizontal axis. In the case of the pointed *iwān*, the lines of force meet at an angle with reaction lines at the keystone running out of the structure at the top. These two tangential lines of force imply a vertical resultant, thus suggesting that cosmologically the pointed arch represents the union of earth with the Heavens. That is surely why the *mu'allim* chose the pointed *iwān* to indicate the connection between the earth with the sky, in favour of the semi-circle which in Islamic cosmology represents the cycle of life

[1] Qur'ān: 3/15.

to death as it starts from earth and returns back again to earth.[1] (Fig. 10.27(a,b))

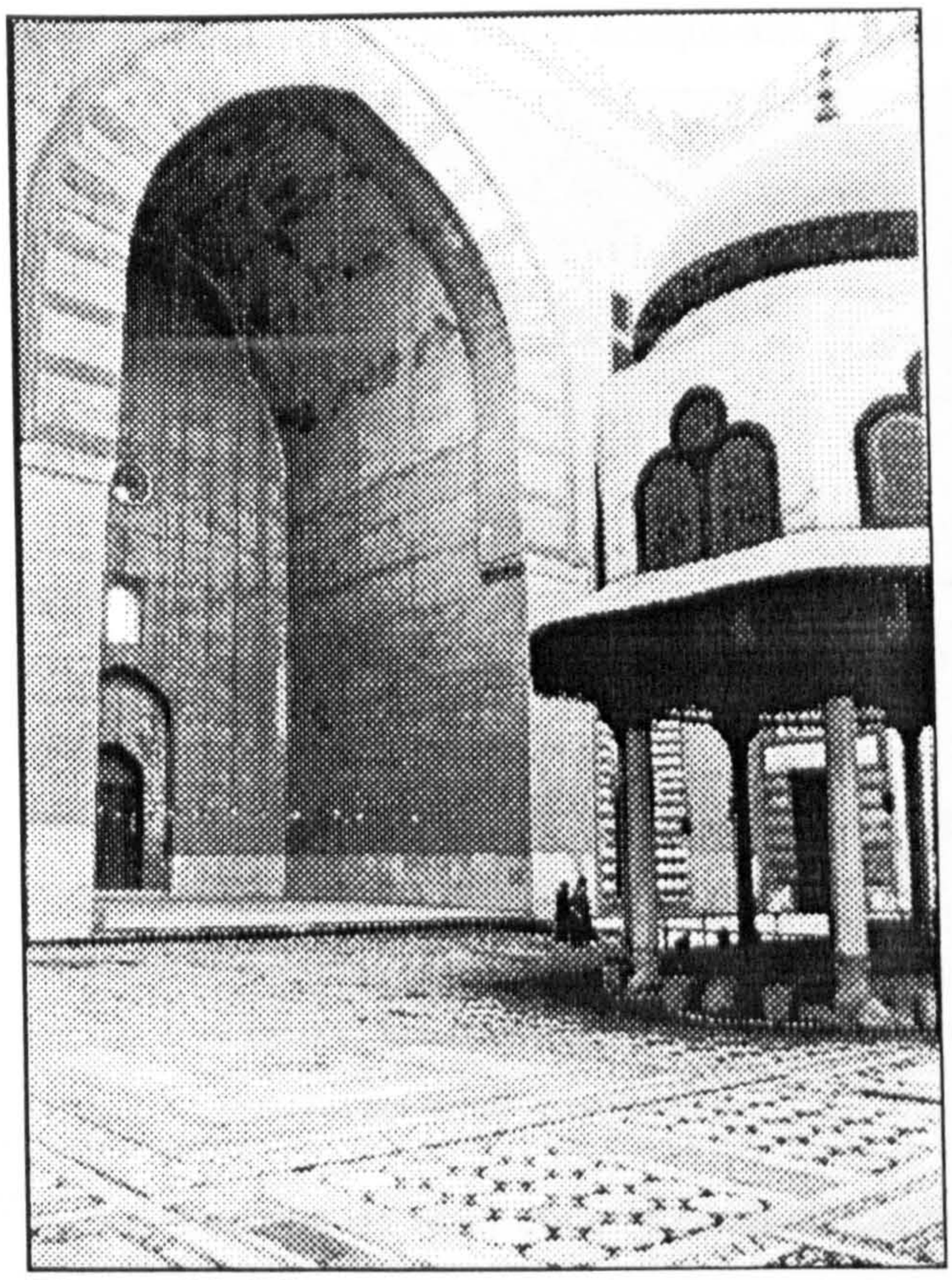


**Figure 10.26** Dwarfing effect resulting from the sheer size of the *iwān* in relation to the visitor.

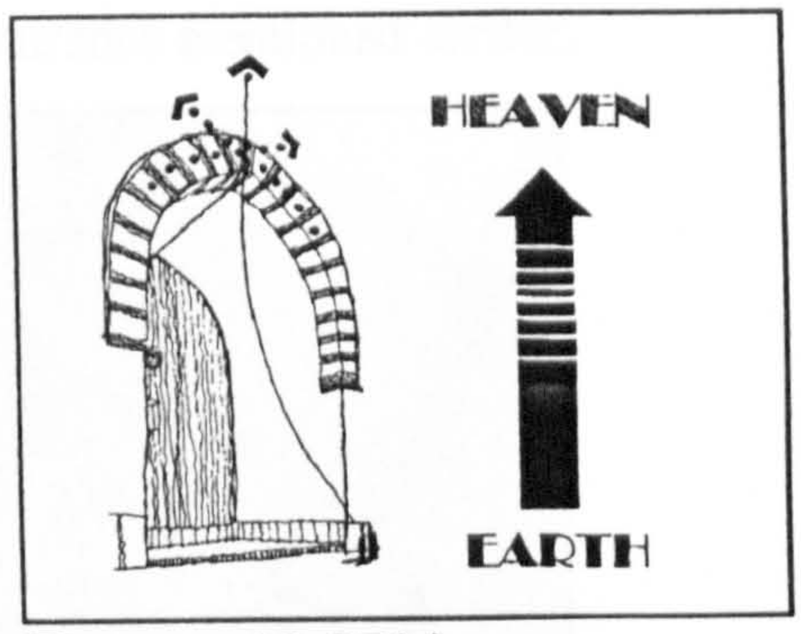



**Figure 10.27(a)** The cosmological implications of the pointed *iwān*.

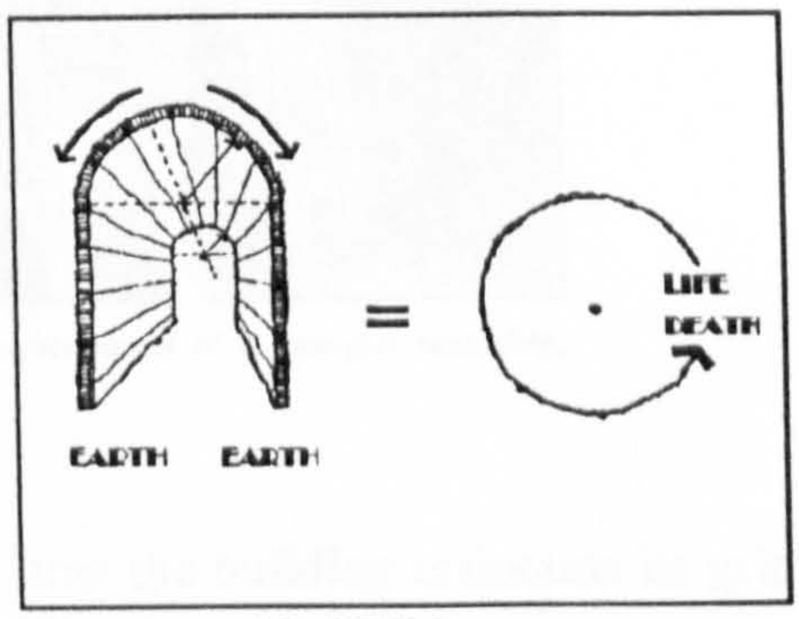



**Figure 10.27(b)** The cosmological implication of a semi-circular *iwān*.

Turning to the main *qibla iwān* one realizes immediately why the architect of the the Sulṭān Ḥassan, continuously conscious of the vertical, differentiated it by making it the deepest of all of the four. By this choice, the horizontal is emphasized by the summit line resulting from the growth of the pointed arch in the direction of the *qibla*. In Ṣūfī terms, this summit line represents the Straight Path (*al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*) which all Muslims are advised to follow. In this manner, the space of the *qibla iwān* immediately leaves the viewer without any doubt that this is the area designated for prayers. It is also emphasized by being covered with coloured marble cladding which is absent from the rest of the interior walls of the building. According to al-Maqrīzī, this *iwān* is five cubits wider than the others[2] and consequently is the highest of all of the four, thus achieving an accentuated verticality at the *qibla* wall. (Fig. 10.28) By the choice of these features, the *mu'allim* arrived at the ideal

[1] See argument in Chapter Eight.

[2] The laterality or width, helps to attain longer rows which is preferable in the *Sunna*. See Chapter Four.

prototypical form which gives centrality (*qibla* or *miḥrāb*), directional horizontality (summit line of *iwān*), and verticality (the form of the pointed *iwān*); in other words, the prayer *iwān* is an *embodiment* of the whole mosque and echoes the entrance mentioned earlier.

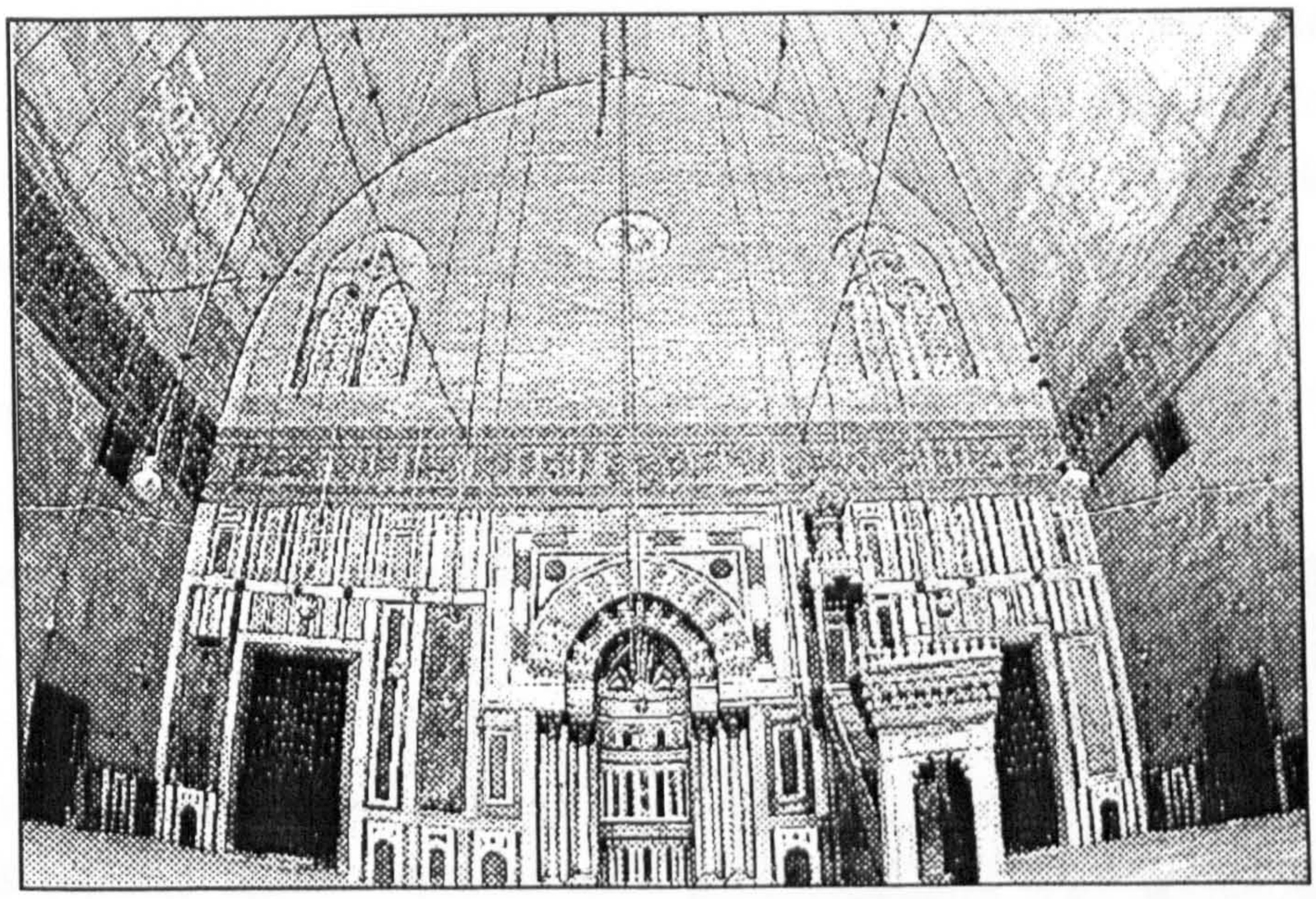


**Figure 10.28** The *qibla iwān* designed to sum up the requirements of a mosque: centrality, verticality, and directional horizontality.

Looking up from the *qibla* wall, it can be seen how the building maintains its grip on the sky by the crestings joining this central space vertically to the Heavens. The medieval builders crowned the walls with these crestings whose solid parts are a replica of the empty spaces lying between them: the voids representing the sky and the inverted mirror solid parts representing earth, or from the Ṡūfī point of view, soul and body. (Fig. 10.39) For the traditional Muslim builder, these crestings realized the idea of earth joining the heaven throughout the length of the wall despite the horizontality of such long external and internal façades as those of the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan. The balance between solid and inverse void is also a reminder of both our existence and unknown destiny. Set in a row, they symbolize the idea of equality of all mankind in the eyes of God illustrating the authentic *ḥadīth* which says: "*To God all believers are equal like the teeth of a comb.*"

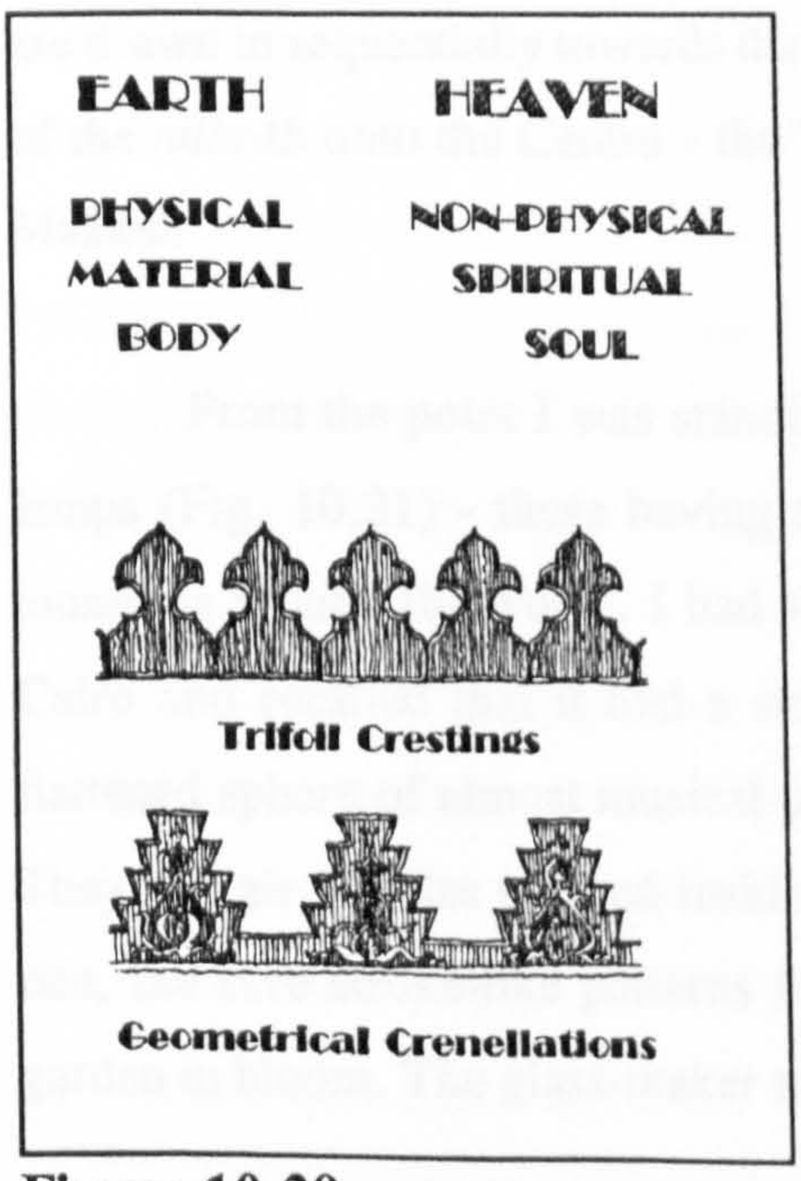



**Figure 10.29** Cosmological implications of the crestings.

With these thoughts, I turned to look at the *miḥrāb*. The direction of the Ka'ba, as well as being given by the architectural design of the mosque, is especially marked by this architectural element. We saw in Chapter Eight that the meaning of the *miḥrāb* is quite explicitly explained in commentaries such as those of Imām al-Ghazzālī, the medieval Ṡūfī, who says in his *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*: "*If the worshipper cannot reach the Ka'ba in Makkah with his body, he could reach it with his soul through the mihrab.*"[1] From this we can understand that medieval Muslims saw the *miḥrāb* as a "window" to the Centre.

The prayer hall *miḥrāb* of the *Madrasa* has a circle with the word "Allah" in its centre. Marble rays radiate from it to meet the sides of the pointed semi-dome. These rays, upon reaching the outer-most level of the inner *miḥrāb* join new rays of interlaced coloured marble which in turn spread to the outermost level - that of the *qibla* wall itself. (Fig. 10.30) This sequence of depths from outer to inner, emphasized by the radiating patterns is a reminder to the Muslim that it is here that his eye and soul are drawn in sequentially towards the window of the *miḥrāb* onto the Centre - the Ka'ba in Makkah.

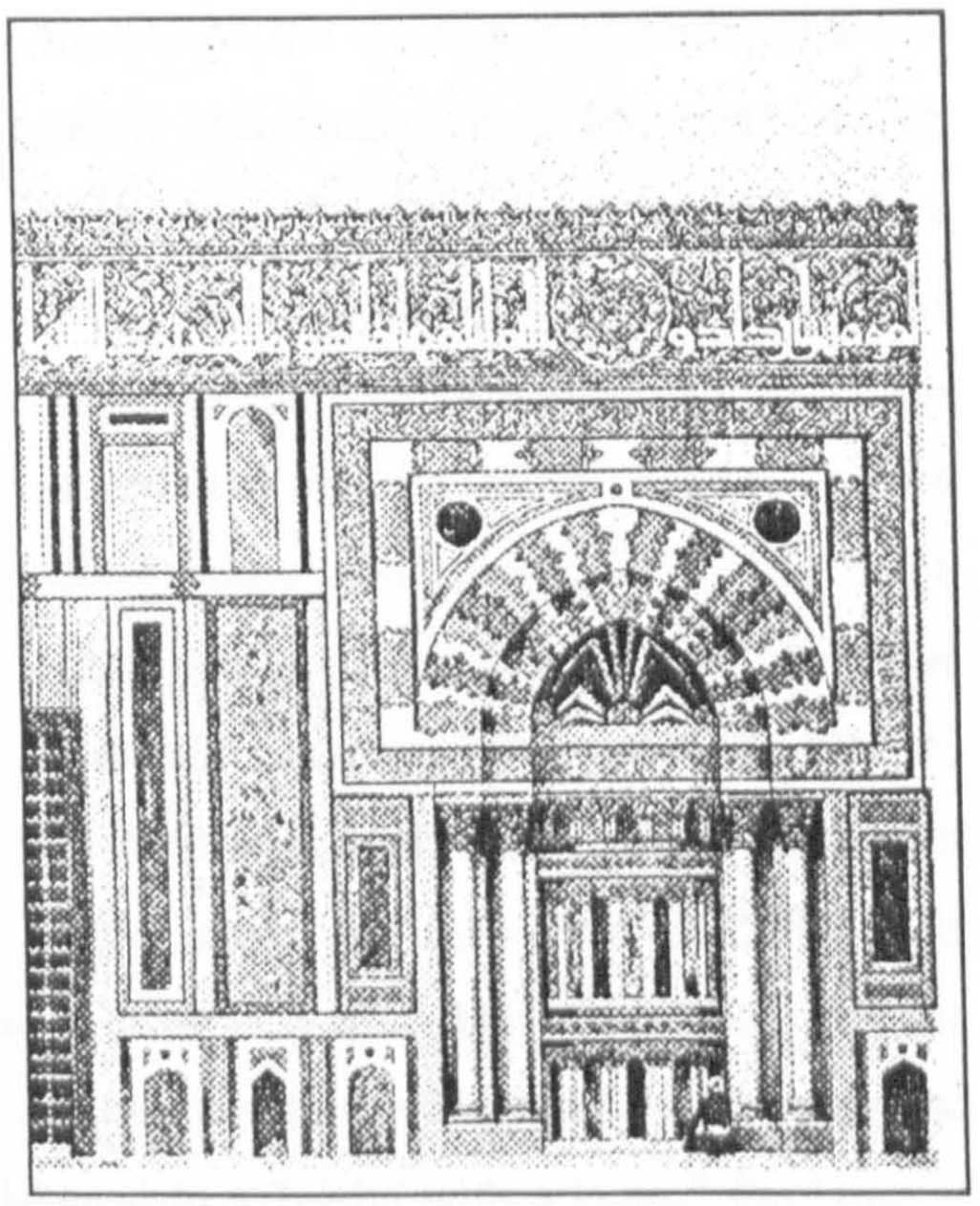


**Figure 10.30** *Qibla* **wall** *miḥrāb* **showing radiating marble patterns from its centre bearing the word "Allah".**

From the point I was standing, I could see a forest of iron chains holding glass oil-lamps (Fig. 10.31) - these having replaced the original enamelled ones which are now in museums around the world. I had seen one of the original lamps in the Islamic Museum in Cairo and recalled that it had a strangely solemn shape: big and round, like a somewhat flattened sphere of almost musical proportions. The original lamps were individually blown. They had air bubbles trapped inside the glass and were enamelled around the lamp's bottom rim, the sure stroke-like patterns forming a delicate arabesque resembling a hint of a rose garden in bloom. The glass-maker must have been working quickly, almost negligently, when

[1] See chapter on prayer in op cit. al-Ghazzalī, 1982, vol.1.

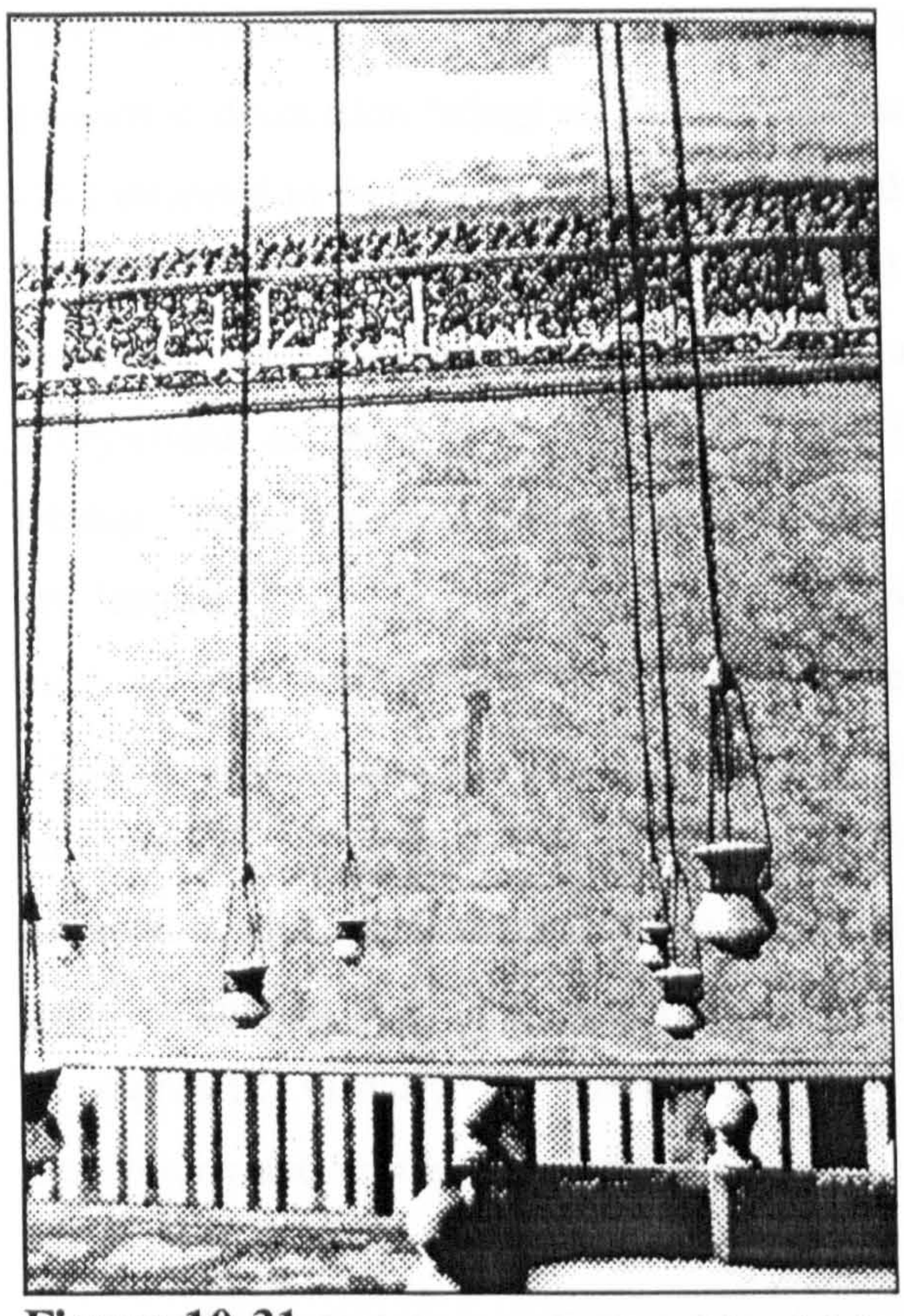


**Figure 10.31** The lamps appear to descend from infinity, recall the similitude to the "stars" which adorn the lowest Heaven; this in turn symbolically corresponds to the *iwān*.

he created this splendid simplicity which brought to mind all the glories of past glass-making one so admires in museums. He had not intended to create a work of art: all he was making was an oil lamp, such as any person could buy in any bazaar in medieval times. He and all other craftsmen had shared in a tradition that did not rest merely on the creative excitement of a few select individuals, on a few peaks which only men of genius could reach, but on what was common to all. I remembered the verse of the Qur'ān which tells us of the adornment of the lower heaven (which corresponds cosmologically to our sky), with lamps. God says: "*And We have adorned the lowest heaven with Lamps*[1]*, and We have made such (Lamps) missiles to drive away the Evil Ones* ..."[2] But it is when we correlate these verses with the famed verse of Light (Qur'ān: 24/35) that the symbolism is fully revealed. In this verse God is described as the "*Light of the Heavens and the earth*," and the metaphor of this Light is likened to a "niche with a lamp," the lamp in a glass, and this glass is likened to a "brilliant star." This Light is explained by the Śūfīs in this verse to be the source of guidance which makes man see the Truth; it is this Light of guidance which leads the way to the Straight Path (*al-Śirāt al-Mustaqīm*) represented by the summit line of the *iwān*.

The *qibla* wall displays a rich interplay of colours, textures, materials, and decorative motifs. I saw in these motifs, the stylization of Islamic decoration: they are either derived from the flower or are geometric. In both cases, they are voluntarily altered in an Islamic sense, recombined time and time again in inexhaustible invention. Considering these floral

---

[1] In another verse in the Qur'ān: 37/6, this is explicitly stated: "*We have indeed decked the lower heaven with beauty (in) the stars.*"

[2] Qur'ān: 67/5.

motifs as elements of movement or "mobility", the geometric decoration brings us back to the inert calm intended in the prayer area. It is obvious that *ḥirafiyyīn* (craftsmen) at all times have had a fondness for star-like polygons. They are everywhere: on the portal, the *miḥrābs*, and the *minbar*. Those used on the *minbar* (Fig. 10.32) are "crowded" for their own sake, as though they have no role to play in the whole ensemble. Squares and lozenges, trapeziums and star patterns, all are interconnected. Through their expansion and contraction, these geometrical shapes reminded one of the essence of Muslim art: to represent visually the notion of unity in multiplicity and multiplicity from unity.

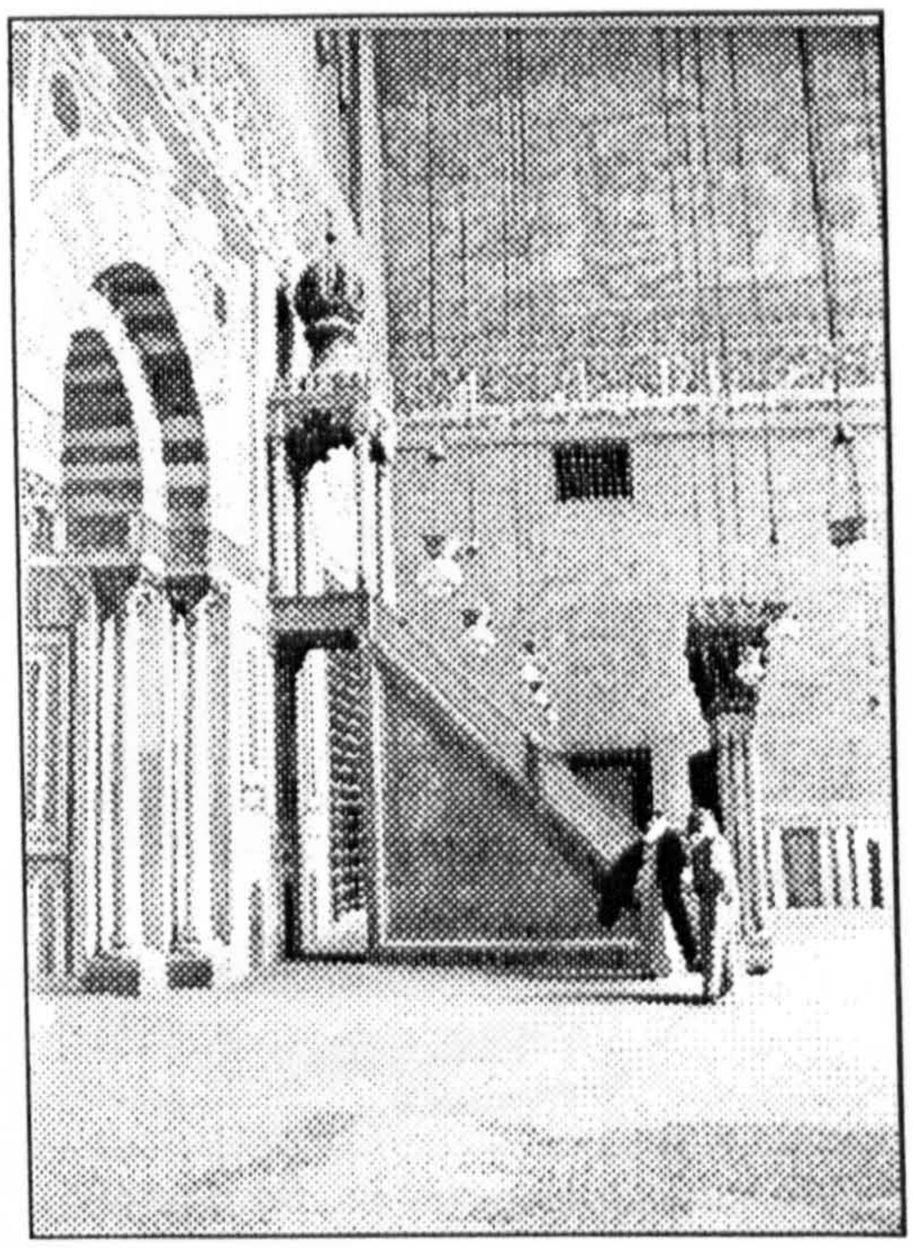


**Figure 10.32** The *minbar* in the prayer *iwān* displays the essence of Islamic art.

The four *īwāns* are linked to the courtyard by a band of Qur'ānic inscriptions which flow from corner to corner, expressing the unity of the interior (*bāṭin*) of the building. The use of calligraphy has a religious significance, a touching intention to sanctify God, not only in connection to religious buildings, but also, by extension to every aspect connected to man's life. Here, in the Complex of the Sulṭān Ḥassan is a testament that Qur'ānic calligraphy, is not the least attraction of Muslim monuments and artifacts.

This band of Qur'ānic inscriptions is interrupted by the four doorways leading to the four internal *madrasas* located in the areas between each two *iwāns*. I entered one of them and found the same relations and elements I had seen in the internal space of the mosque proper repeated, but this time on a smaller scale[1]. The elements that were used were the *majāz*, light wells, a pointed main *iwān* facing the *qibla*, a *ṣaḥn*, an octagonal fountain, a *miḥrāb*, and a forest of lamps. (Figs. 10.33 & 10.34) The only difference between the central *madrasa* and these side ones, is the presence of a staircase leading to five levels of lodgings for the students. Again the centre, the vertical and horizontal are constantly applied and emphasized, each in its proper connotation.

[1] The sizes of the elements, and the extent of artistic elaboration might be different but the symbolic impact is the same i.e., quantitatively different but qualitatively the same.

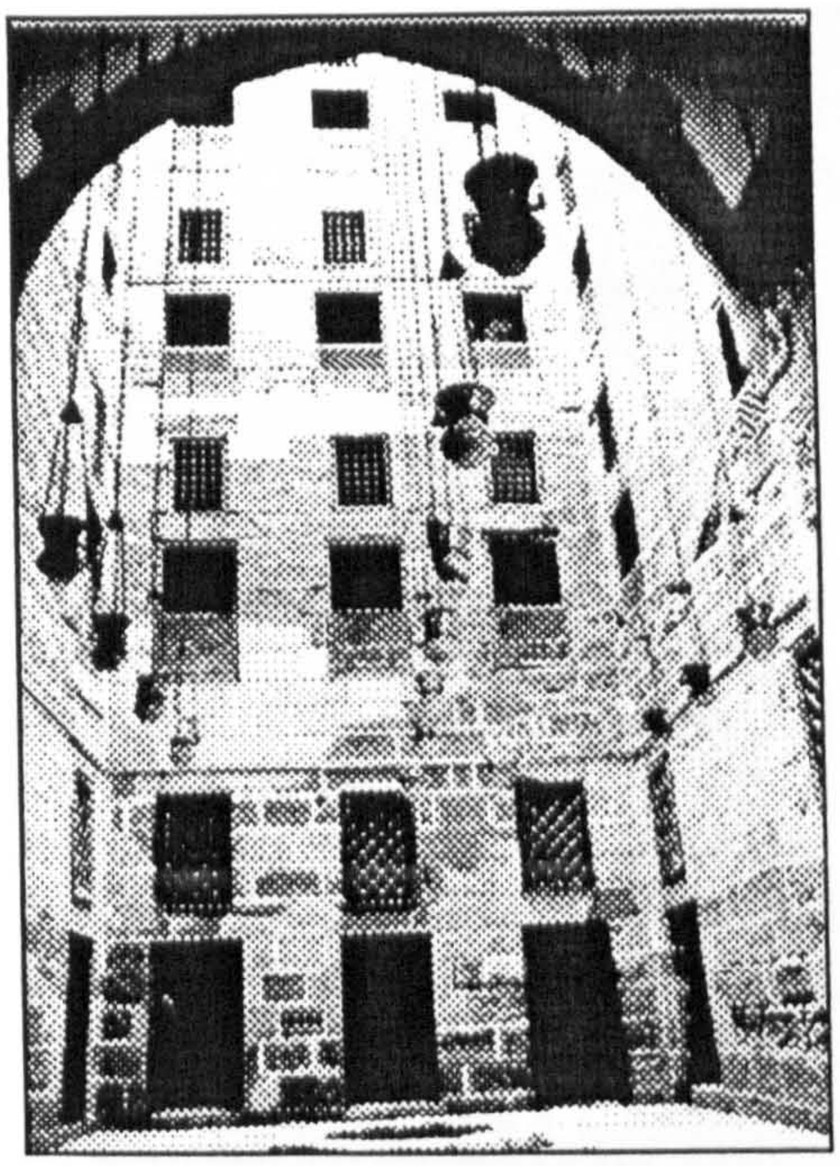


**Figure 10.33** The same elements are used in the internal Ḥanafī *madrasa*.

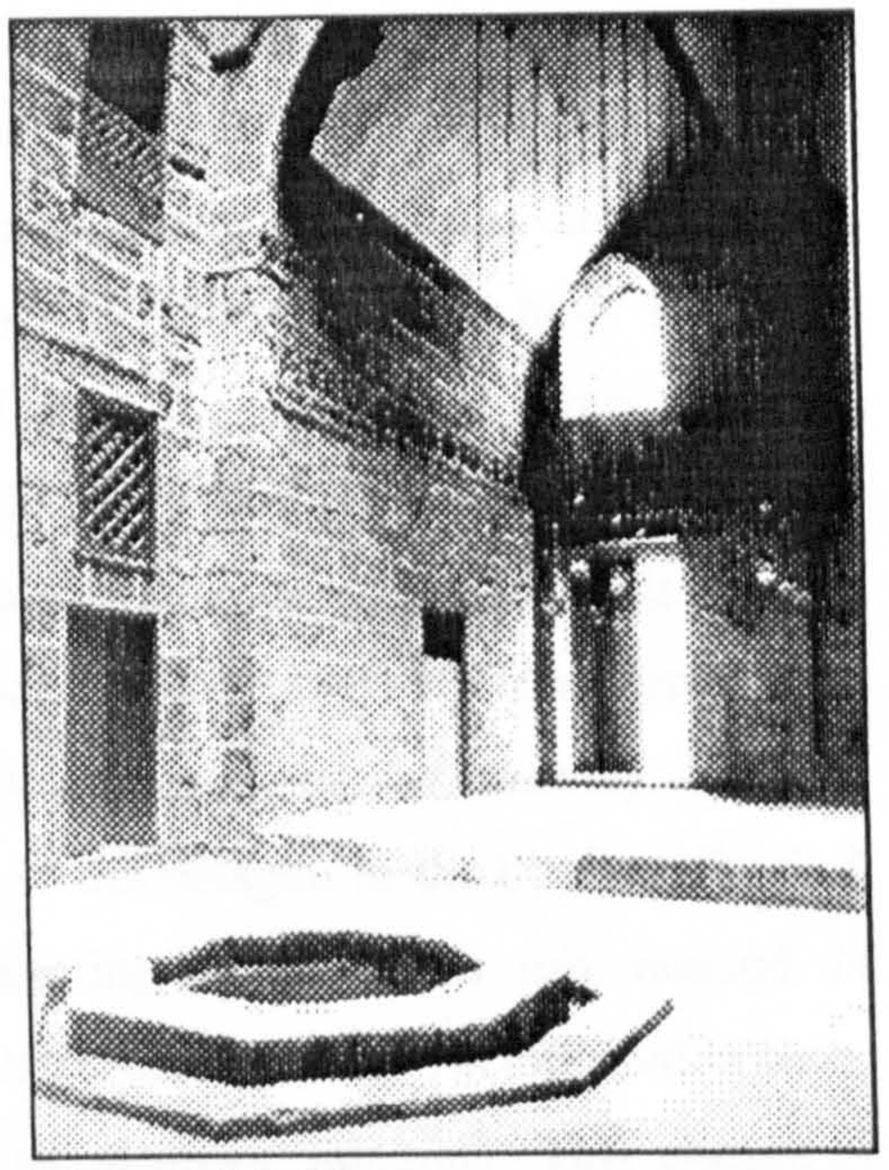


**Figure 10.34** The octagonal fountain and *iwān* in the Ḥanafī *madrasa* show simpler designs.

I emerged from the internal *madrasa* to the courtyard once again, and found my eyes involuntarily being drawn to the sky by the vertically pointing minarets. The minarets of the Complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan reminded me of the typical minarets that are being copied today all over the Muslim world as the "prototype" for a successful design. As discussed earlier in Chapter Eight, we find that aspiration towards the Divine is expressed both internally and externally in mosque architecture by the minaret shooting up above the building in stark contrast to the horizontality of the façade. If the crestings symbolize earth meeting sky at the individual level, the minaret symbolizes this contact at the communal level. I saw how a mosque without a minaret can be perceived as an autonomous building expressing completeness in itself; but as soon as the minaret is introduced to the architectural composition, it makes the seemingly descending building join the sky. (Fig. 10.35 (a,b))

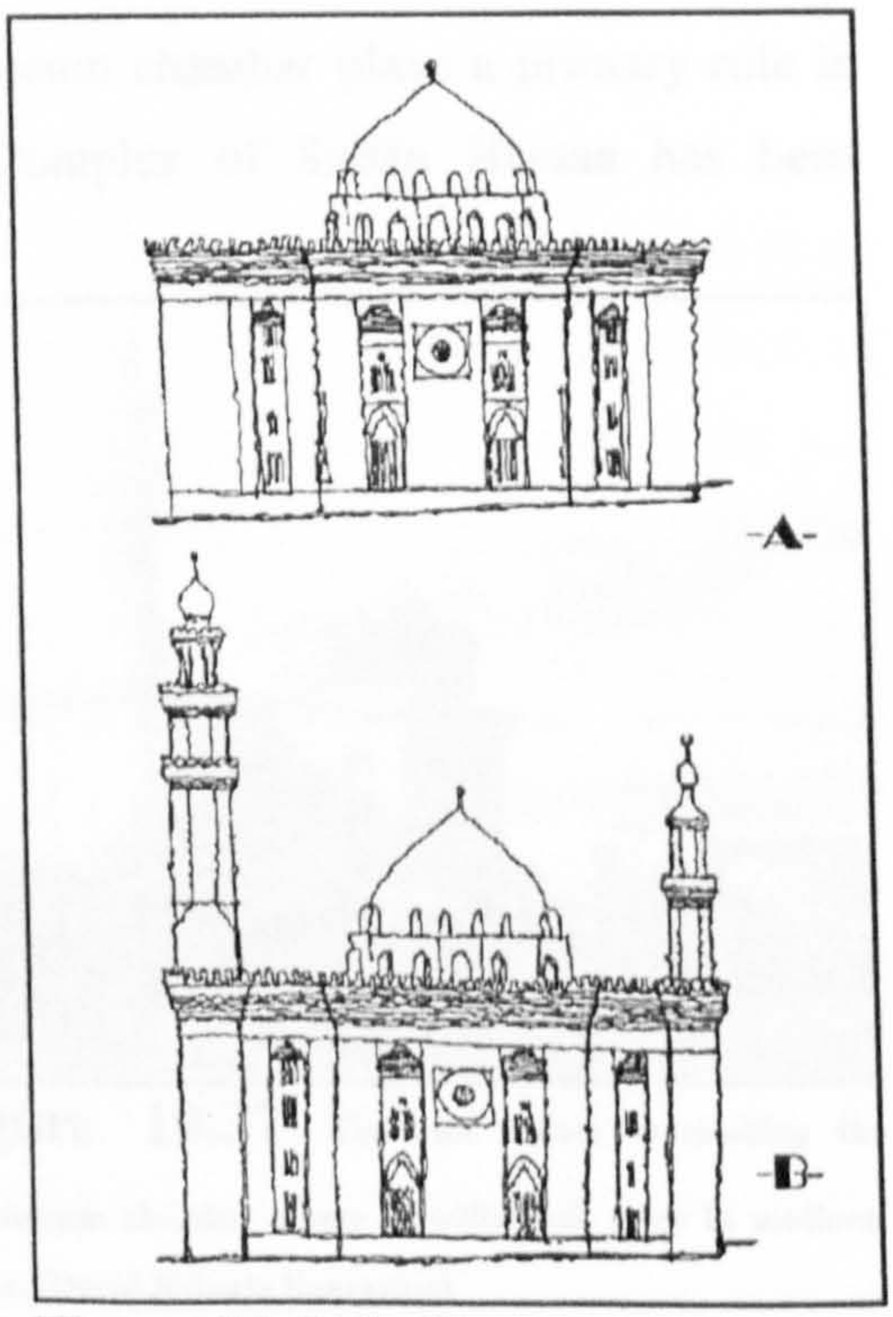



**Figure 10.35(a,b)** (a) The building expresses completeness in itself. (b) After the minarets are added, the building joins the sky.

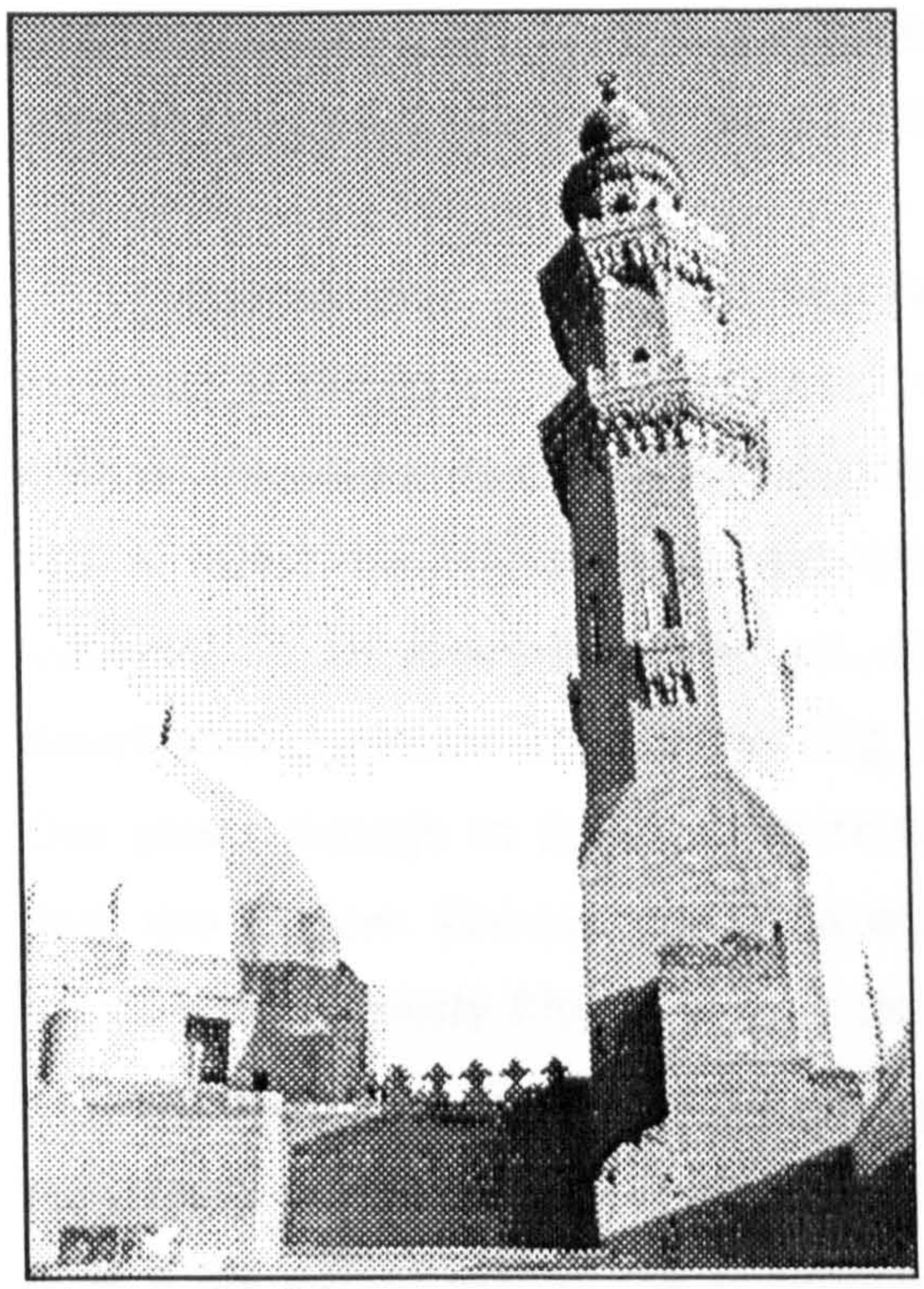


**Figure 10.36** **The traditional geometrical divisions of the minaret aid the process of visual ascension.**

To enable the minaret to lead vision upwards, the *mu'allim* used the inherent qualities of geometrical forms in his design. We saw in Chapter Eight how the mere verticality and tapering of the minaret and the rhythmical reduction in its sections accelerates the eye upwards. (Fig. 10.36) This vertical ascension is accentuated by transforming the shape of these sections, successively, from the square to the octagon to the domical finial. It is interesting to note that this method of geometrical transformation is followed in most, if not all medieval minarets. This change of shape and form from one section to the other is not haphazard; it is not *utilitarian* but is *spiritually functional*.

Similar geometries are used in the mausoleum which forms a fundamental constituent of any Mamlūk complex. The location of the mausoleum chamber plays a primary role in organizing the whole composition. That of the Complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan has been specifically given great prominence. The *mu'allim* chose its external location to provide maximum urban visibility and maximum religious blessing. The location that was chosen overlooks the square under the Citadel, in which religious festivities (*mawālid* and *mawākib*[1]) took place in medieval times. Its internal position is axially located behind the *qibla* wall towards which all Muslims face when saying their prayers - hence the blessings. The architectural conception of the mausoleum is also very dramatic. The

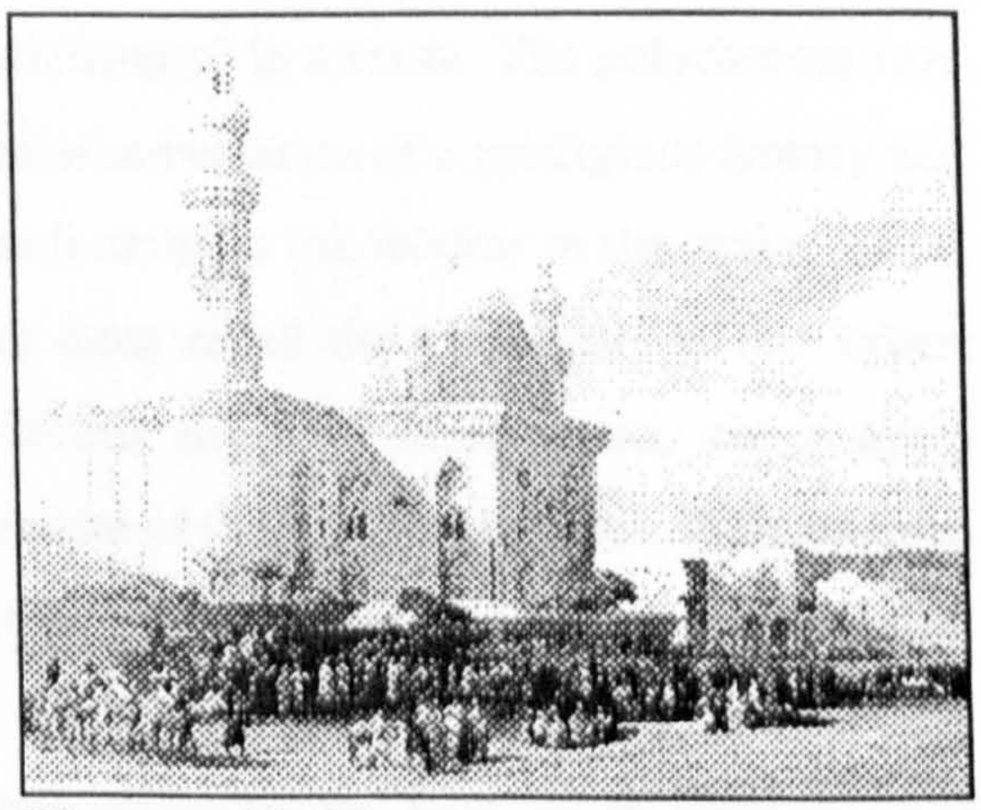


**Figure 10.37** **The vast square overlooking the mausoleum chamber where *mawālid* took place in medieval times. (David Roberts Engraving)**

[1] The most famous of these festivals are the commemorative birthdays of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), his family members, and those of the *awliyā'* or saints (literally "friends of God").

chamber, flanked by two minarets is conceived as projecting in full mass into the square, thus achieving maximum exposure to the passers-by. (Fig. 10.37)

Internal access to the square mausoleum is by means of two doors, one on either side of the *miḥrāb*. Upon entering the space of the chamber one is struck by its verticality and becomes immersed in an atmosphere that can only be described as mysterious and sublime. (Fig. 10.38) One passes through an intricately worked brass door into shadow. The sun's rays that enter the chamber are vibrantly filtered through the panes of coloured glass which give them a quality of an opaqueness resembling slanted pillars of light. It is as if the visitors seemed not to move through them, but that they, the shining pillars, seemed to penetrate the shadowy people. The essence of traditional alchemy was to change the properties of a material into another more noble one.

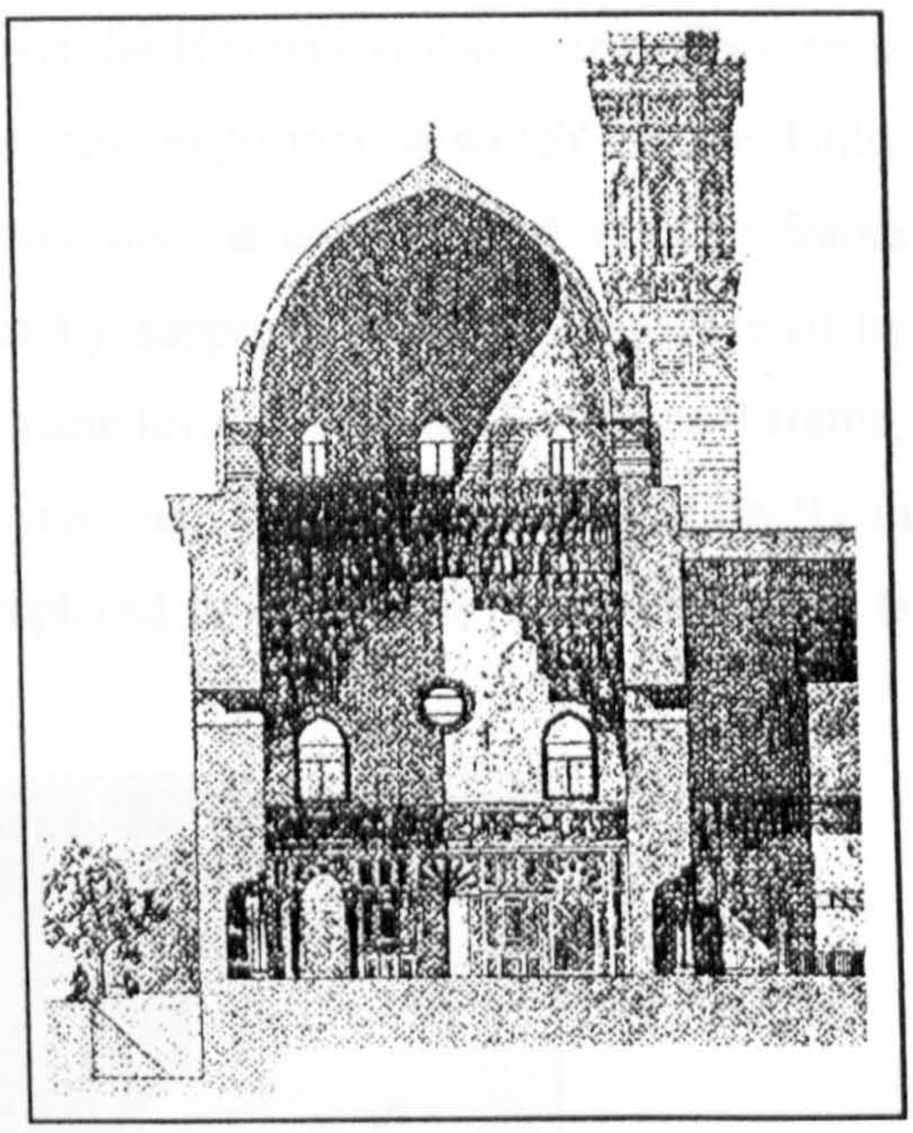


**Figure 10.38** Section in the mausoleum showing its verticality and the position of its *miḥrāb* on the same axis, and behind the *qibla miḥrāb*.

After the eyes are accommodated to the shade in this interior, one finds oneself in an "angelic" plane of decoration, of "geometric deliriousness" in a sense. The polychrome rays of veiled light cast from the stained glass reveal an ornamentation of a prodigious fantasy and melancholy poetry. As I had noticed earlier when looking at the *minbar* in the prayer *iwān*, to analyze the decoration of the mausoleum one must recall the vocabulary of the minor crafts: gilding, lacing, engraving, embroidery. In this ambience of calmness, one is again struck by the delicacy of Islamic art, by the enthusiasm of the polygonal shapes, their rhythm, their variety and suppleness, and by the spark of their interlacement.

I turned to the exact centre of the chamber where lay the body on its right side and facing the *qibla* marked by a second *miḥrāb*[1]. (Fig. 10.39) Looking up from the tomb to the summit of the pointed dome, one sees that the interior passes through the ever familiar

[1] It should be noted that this *miḥrāb* is purely symbolic as it is strictly prohibited for a Muslim to pray in a place where people are buried (graveyards or mausoleums).

Mamlūk series of geometrical transformations. The first thing encountered is a carved band of Qur'ānic inscription bearing the verse of the Seat of the Throne[1]. This verse was always related to domes of mausolea in medieval times and is amongst a few that describes the all-encompassing Seat of Allah (*Kursī*) which extends over the Heavens and the earth. This verse also states some of the major Qualities of God, the most important of which are His Unity and His Eternity. Immediately above this inscription there is an octagonal wooden frame which seems to be floating in the space but is actually supported from the square wall by eight wooden cantilevers. At each corner and at the same level as that of the octagonal frame, seven rows of stalactites spring to transform the square into a circle to culminate finally in a pointed dome. The original dome - which was replaced in 1082 A.H./1671-72 A.D. - is said to have been pointed but of a bulbous shape.

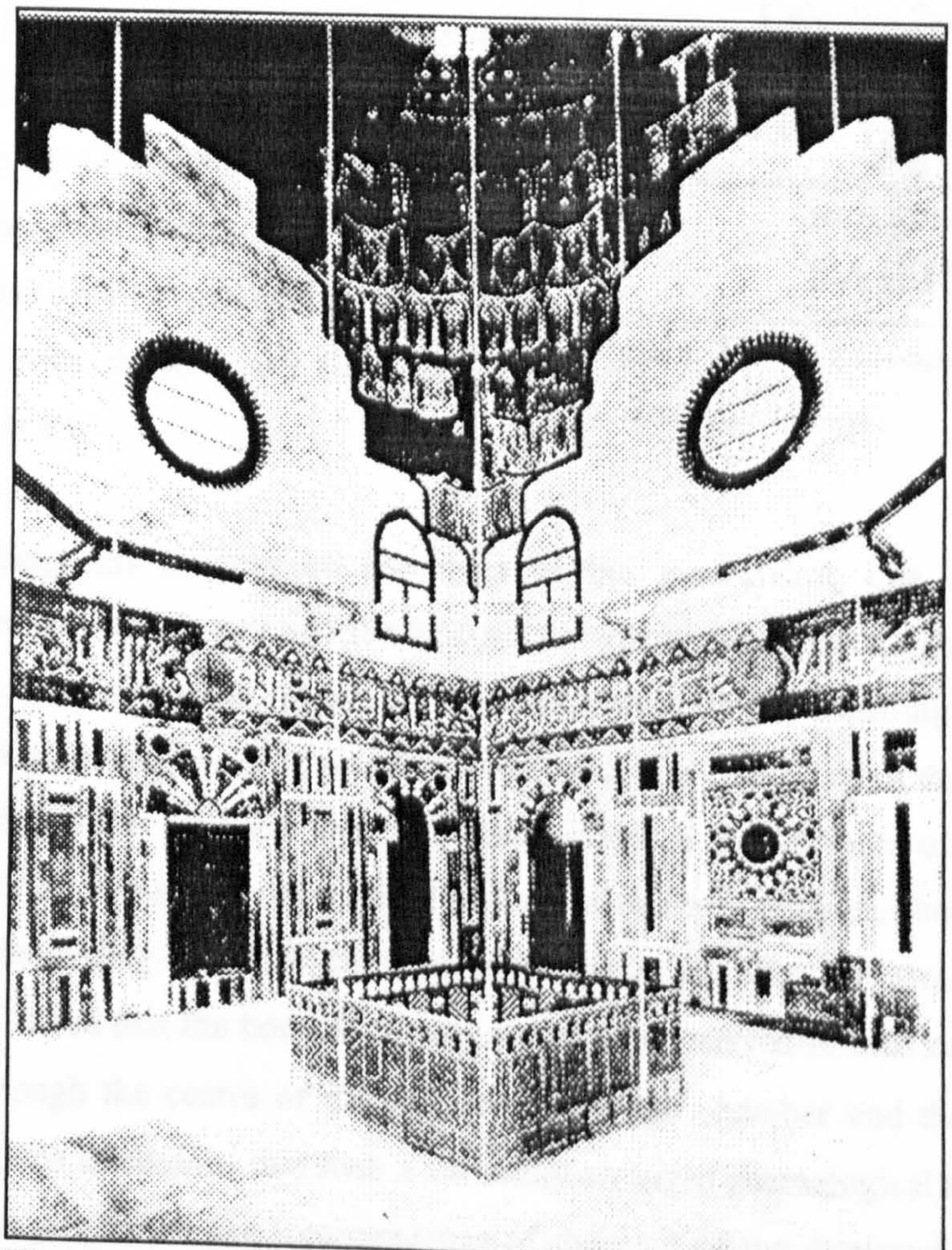


**Figure 10.39** A sensed vertical axis running through the interior of the chamber links the tomb to the summit of the dome through the different "stations" of the cosmological model.

[1] Qur'ān: 2/255

There are many authentic *ḥadīths* and Ṣūfī commentaries which tell us about what the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) experienced on his Night Journey (*Mi'rāj*) when he passed through the seven Heavens, reached the Throne, and approached God[1]. According to the Ṣūfī version of this *ḥadīth*, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) tells us that first there were four Angels bridging the earth with the seven Heavens. He then visited these seven Heavens one by one and described them in detail. Then he arrived near the Throne where there were eight Angels - or eight rows of Angels according to another version of the *ḥadīth* - carrying the *Kursī* or the Seat of the Throne which is described as vast and infinitismal, above which is the *'Arsh* or the Throne itself above which God, the One resides. (Fig. 10.40)

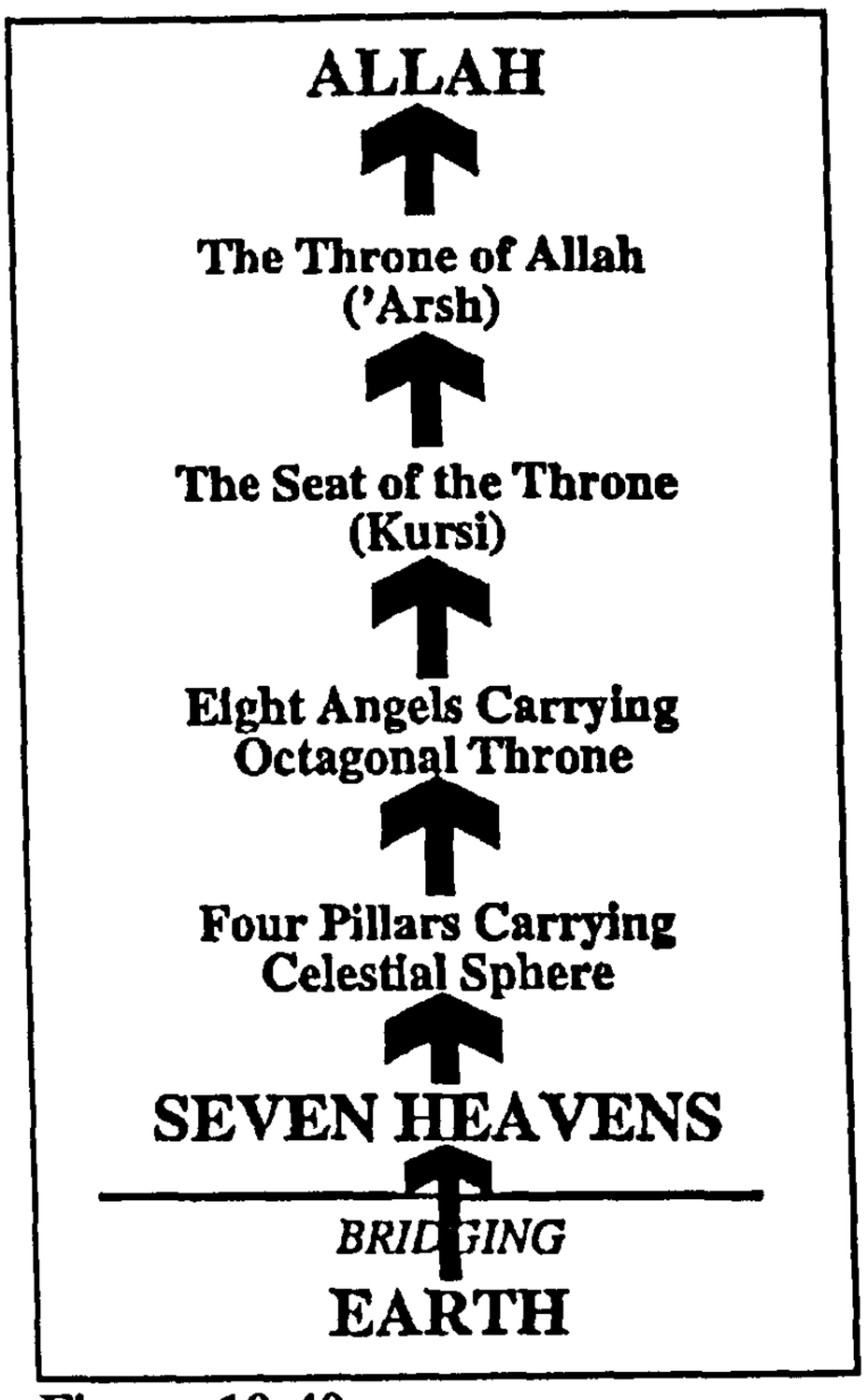



**Figure 10.40** Cosmological model derived from the *Mi'rāj* (Night Journey).

Overlaying this account on the form of the mausoleum, one sees the square corresponding to the four Angels and the four pillars representing the celestial dome - resting over the centre of the first earth. This is followed by the inscription recalling the Seat and the Throne of Allah the Almighty. The seven rows of stalactites remind us of the seven Heavens and recall the feeling of vastness and of infinity which is the attribute of the Seat which encompasses the Heavens and the earth. Finally the dome is pointed, thus leading to the vertical, and culminating in a point representing Unity or the One, the Creator, the Source of everything. I noted that the body of the dead sulṭān lay centred in relation to this vertical axis passing through the centre of the square base of the chamber and the summit of the dome. It strikes one as obvious that such a vertically arranged cosmological model must have been intended to emphasize the transcendence of the soul of the deceased. We should not forget that from the "orthodox" Islamic point of view, the form of the mausoleum would have had no effect on the salvation of the dead, it is the vertical Ṣūfī path along which the

[1] *Ḥadīth* of the *Mi'rāj* as narrated by Ibn 'Abbās, n.d., p. 29

invocations, prayers and appeal of blessings for the benefactor that is to be directed that is of importance here. These invocations were carried out daily - according to the endowments by grateful students who were benefitting from the institution - through a ritual of Qur'ānic reading and prayer[1] (*du'ā'*) in the mausoleum chamber.

But the above interpretation is cosmologically incomplete. The number eight which forms a fundamental constituent of this cosmological model has been omitted. It is a fact that when domes were built on octagons using squinches this problem did not arise. The solution of the structural problem also resolved the needs of both the cosmological and spiritual model. When the vogue for the extensive use of stalactites was introduced in the end of the Ayyubid period, the transition from square base to circle was gradually achieved without the form passing through the octagon. The Mamlūks, conscious of the vitality of the qualitative function of the eight sided form in the model, solved this problem by introducing a cantilevered octagonal wooden frame as part of the composition. Visually, this frame appears to be floating in air. Similar examples are found in all of the mausolea of the medieval Mamlūk period[2]. As I mentioned in Chapter Nine, this octagonal wooden frame has baffled scholars, thus generally having inclined to the utilitarian explanation that the Mamlūks thought it more practical to hang their oil-lamps from it rather than from the curvature of the dome itself. But this is not convincing as we find that in all examples of lofty domes on squinches which structurally pass through the octagon, there are no wooden frames to hang lamps from.

Leaving the mausoleum behind, I returned once more to the courtyard, looked at the minaret only to find that this same cosmological model can be applied to interpret its geometrical transformation. It, too, explains the choice of square, octagon and circular ascension culminating in a point. I walked on and stopped near the centre of the courtyard, and it occurred to me that the centre of the *ṣaḥn* (the octagonal fountain), the embodiment of the earthly centre (the *qibla iwān* and *miḥrāb*), the centre of the mausoleum with the buried body, and the mausoleum *miḥrāb* were all aligned in a "parade" of centres. (Fig. 10.41) These centres which are points of tension between the vertical axis and the horizontal attainment of the earthly centre (the Ka'ba) abstractly embody the ideal form of a mosque and are microcosms in themselves. (Fig. 10.42) As I looked around me I knew that this *Madrasa*

---

[1] Prayer (*du'ā'*) here, is used in the sense of supplication rather than actual prayer (*ṣalāh*).

[2] See the domes of Salār and Sanjar al-Jāwlī, Baybars al-Jāshankīr, Qalāwūn, and Āqsunqur; to name but a few.

was a centre; I felt that it was the receptacle of my soul; facing it, being in it, was the ultimate seclusion from the outside world. I sensed I was finally at home, this visit had driven me towards a readiness to understand the physical and spiritual deeds demanded of a medieval Muslim to aid him in his spiritual ascent (*mi'rāj*) of his soul.

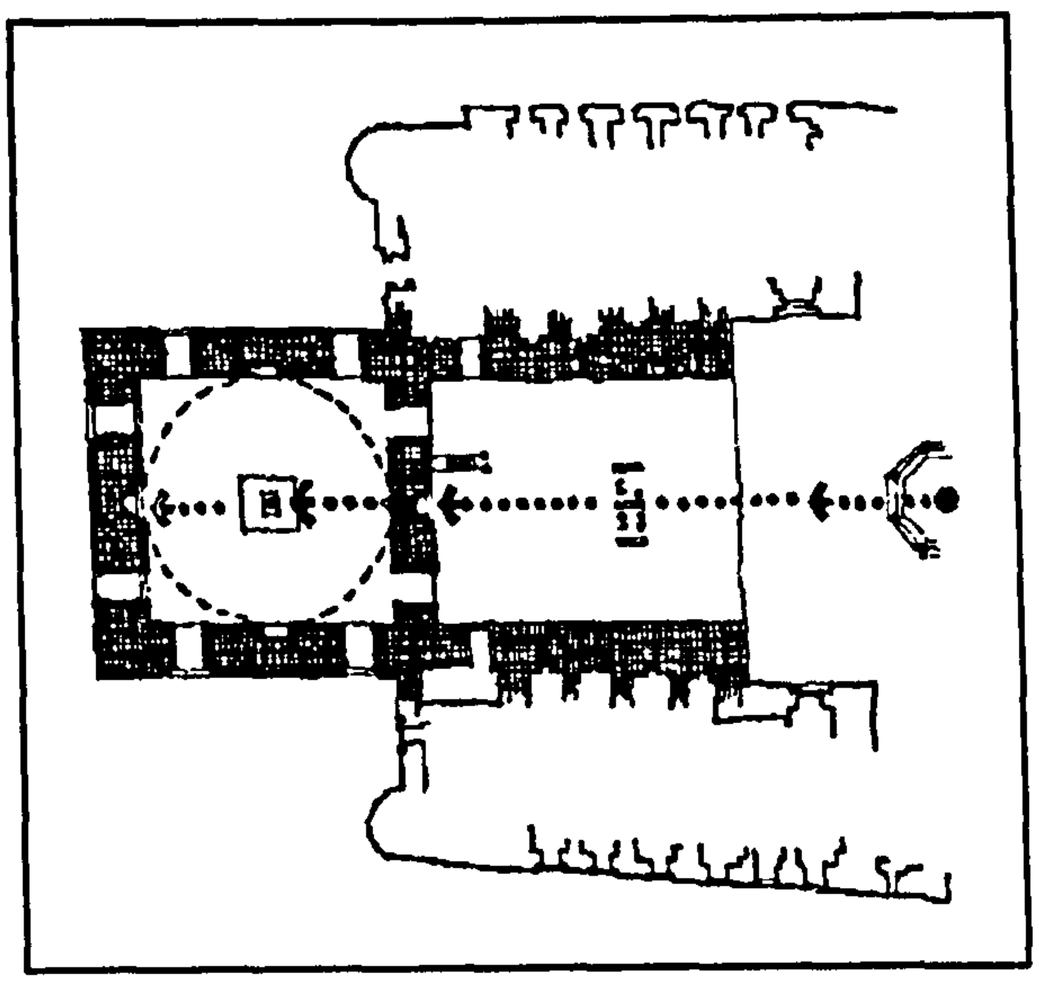


**Figure 10.41** A horizontal axis joins the three centres together, while each centre is a device to achieve the vertical.

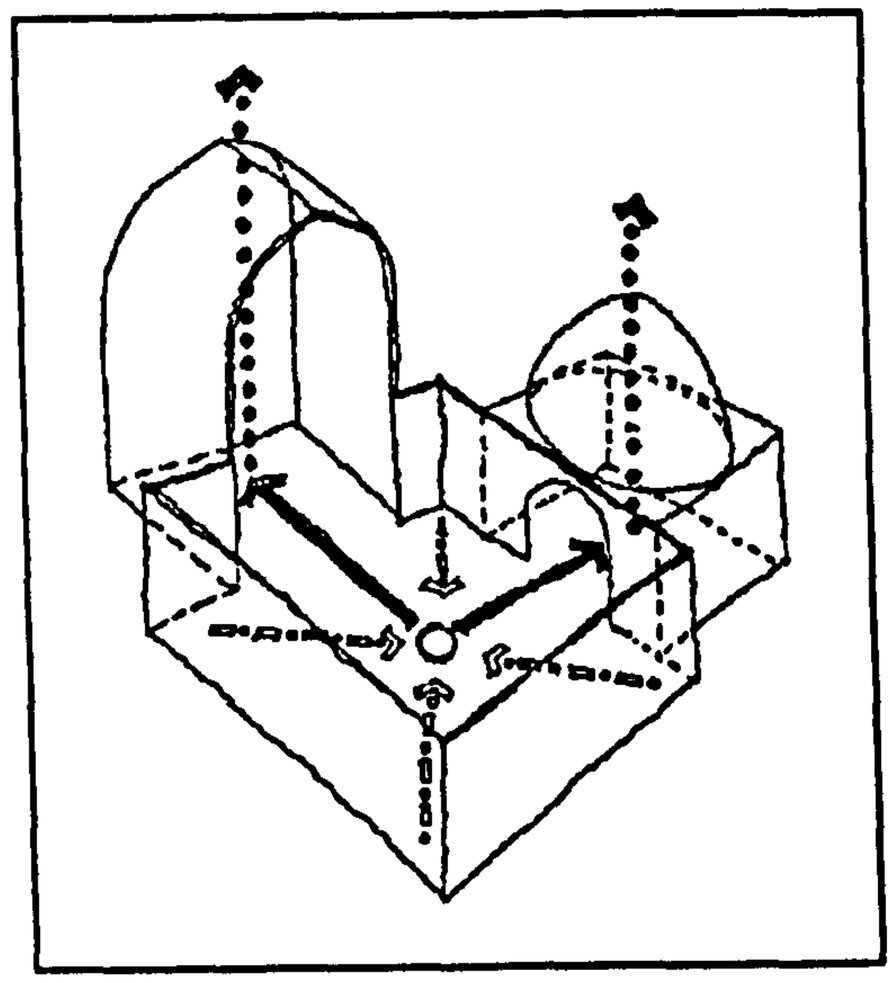


**Figure 10.42** Diagram showing different symbolic "motions" within a *madrasa*: from corners, to centre, to *iwāns*, to mausoleums, and from there to the vertical.

## 10.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter sheds light on two layers of findings resulting from the analysis carried out on the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan. The first level is specific to the case that is chosen, and shows the benefit of a personal spatio-temporal "journey" in a particular building; the second level is more general, and in a sense, can be considered as a summing up of the architectural findings of all the previous chapters and at the same time affirms and demonstrates the presence and impact of Ṣūfī thought.

Although the use of the traditionalist approach has succeeded in unveiling most of the meanings of the elements and relationships discussed in Chapters Eight and Nine, these interpretations lacked comprehensiveness. This limitation resulted from the examination of the constituents of these buildings *statically*, rather than *dynamically* in their sequential experience through time and space. Typical examples of this are the use of darkness in association to the winding corridors of the *majāz* and the intermittent introduction of light

wells at turning points which finally lead to the fully illuminated courtyard. Statically, if this same *majāz* were to be examined without the temporal dimension and the resulting spatial sequence we would have lost its meaning altogether. This immediately confirms the value of an actual visit to a particular building.

The journey through the Complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan also emphasized the inter-relations of the three cosmological notions of centre, the vertical ascending axis, and the horizontal directional axis in the built spaces, as dominant characteristics of the Mamlūk building and its forerunners. In their response to these notions of order, the Mamlūks achieved a "spatial positioning" in relation to the macrocosm. The *mu'allim* formed spaces with certain properties and functions; he achieved what was needed - and what was possible within the limits of matter, time, and space - for the medieval Cairene Muslim in terms of the understanding he had received from the Ṣūfī master.

Amongst the most valuable findings was the *Unity* that is immediately evident in the assemblage which bonds together the elements, relations, decorative motifs, colours, textures, materials, and light. This was missing in the last two Chapters when we dealt with elements and relationships disregarding a spatio-temporal frame. This accounts for the use of the word "symphony" to describe the *Madrasa* of Sulṭān Ḥassan - it could be used liberally to describe other traditional buildings - where not the *sum* of separate "notes", but the *combinations* of "melodies" create the harmony and unity. We have seen in this case-study that elements and relations are used in different parts of the building so as to have external as well as internal impacts that are complementary. This complementarity induces the visitor to sense that unity. Unity is also the Ṣūfī notion of a balanced artefact which communicates visually to a balanced man who is conscious of his external body (*jism ḍhāhir*) as well as his internal spirit and soul (*rūḥ wa nafs bāṭiniyyah*); through both of these in harmony, sane existence is achieved.

Symbolically, the traditional Mamlūk religious building can be considered to reflect serenity, fidelity, and tranquillity. It is a piece of sober eloquence which is simple, yet bursting with layers of symbolic implication. In the first instance it seems to be attached fervently to the earth by its horizontal flow of spaces, but upon close analysis, the hidden *originality* of this architecture measured by the value of the quality of its spaces reveals that in a mosque there is a "space" that is referred to as *muslim*. The mosque, *madrasa*, or *khanqah* stress unity, the oneness of God, the oneness of the *umma*, living in just a small part

of the oneness of the cosmos. Although the levels of sacredness have been found to be quantitatively different in the various parts of such a sacred place, they are qualitatively similar. We saw that the sensed abstract movements towards the different centres and along the different directions followed the same process and resulted in identical implications which emphasize our findings that such relations are constant and are achieved by using the different elements of Mamlūk architecture.

This chapter brings out as clear as possible the reciprocal notion of the *belief* safeguarding the *tradition* and, of the *tradition* safeguarding the *belief*. The power of traditional architecture lies in this dual role, as a reflection and protection of culture and of nature. It communicates silently but insistently that the cultural order in which the individual is embedded is a natural one and that the world is indeed in order as it should be. We saw in Chapter Seven that generally nature and the universe to the traditional Muslim were the only logical proof of the unity of all things; linking the society, its artifacts and the Creator. Thus, traditional architecture and the built environment was seen as an extension of the Divine Order of things. Achieving the order of the built environment in accordance with the order of the cosmos not only placed traditional man in the cosmos, but also guaranteed him a sane and balanced life.

Int. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

# CONCLUSION

# CHAPTER ELEVEN

# CONCLUSION AND PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In the previous chapters of this thesis, we have followed the traditionalist approach to re-create Mamlūk attitudes towards both esoteric and exoteric aspects of religion, the sciences, their crafts and buildings, their understanding of architectural conception, and the symbolism inherent in the elements and relations they used. This argument culminated in an account of a personal visit to one of the landmarks of medieval architecture, the *Madrasa* complex of Sulṫān Ḥassan. This *madrasa* can be considered to sum up the whole thesis, not in the sense that it is comprehensive in terms of the elements and relations of the Mamlūk period, but rather in its comprehensiveness in the esoteric flow of ideas manifested in the form of the building down to the smallest detail incorporated in its design.

Throughout the thesis, questions have been raised about the application of the traditionalist approach as a means of gaining an understanding of the truth behind the symbolism of the Mamlūk period. Some such questions were answered within the process of unveiling findings, while others of a more general or speculative nature were not tackled at all. This chapter will attempt to sum up the work as a whole while at the same time discussing these points.

## 11.1 PROBLEMS FACED WHILE RECONSTRUCTING TIIE MAMLŪK TRADITION

The major goal of this thesis has been to make a "journey" into the Mamlūk period: a region whose difference from our contemporary world is too great to be easily bridged. Let us not deceive ourselves that in that *other* world we may have perhaps comprehended this or that of the many things that have come our way, but we can never have consciously grasped the total picture. The reason is that there is a conceptual gap between us and the medieval people - it is more than space and time that separates us from that "other" world. It is not enough merely to be able to read what they wrote and left behind. In order to comprehend

their perceptions, one would have to enter into their traditional environment fully and begin to live within their associations. Another reason for saying that we cannot *fully* grasp and re-create in our minds the traditional setting along with its expressive intents, is that we cannot completely exclude ourselves from the modern world that we know today. In this modern world we live in, we are wont to underestimate the creative value of the unfamiliar and are always tempted to do violence to it, to appropriate it, to take it over on our terms into our modernistic "intellectual" environment. It seems to be that our age of disquiet no longer permits such attempts to disconnect ourselves from our modern eyes; many of us are beginning to realize that cultural distance can and should be overcome by means of surrendering our senses to it.

But because this unfamiliar Mamlūk world is different from all that one has known in our contemporary lives, and because it offers so much that is conceptually strange, it brushes us with a momentary remembrance of things long known and long forgotten: those intangible realities of our own life. And when this remembrance reaches us from beyond the void that separates our world from the other, one asks oneself whether it is not perhaps herein that the meaning of all wandering lies - to become aware of the strangeness of the world around us and thereby to reawaken our own, forgotten reality.

When we travel to another place or imagine ourselves in another time, we continue to move within ourselves. Perhaps we become a bit wider in our perceptions of the new environment, and thus can easily grasp the difference between the things that habit has made familiar to us and the newness that now comes our way. The point is, when we travel to places similar to ours, we live within a well-defined orbit of associations, we are able to understand one another and to make ourselves understood through those associations as if through a common "language". The existence of such a language is an advantage undoubtedly; but like all advantages that stem from habit, this one is a disadvantage as well, for sometimes we find that we are wrapped up and lulled by it into a laziness of the heart to an extent that it has made us forget the tightrope-walk of our earlier, more creative times - that reaching out after intangible realities. In those earlier days, they would perhaps have been called "intangible possibilities". Medieval travellers such as Ibn Baïtūta and Ibn Khaldūn who went out in search for them were always seeking only the innermost spring of their own lives. We late-comers are also seeking our own lives but we are obsessed by the desire to secure our own life before it unfolds itself. By the adoption of the traditionalist approach, I

believe we have been able to succeed in resolving at least some of our modernistic affective and mental barriers, and in loosening the "knots" of the heart.

This approach, based on the understanding of the available traditional sciences to the Mamlūks in both their inner and outer dimensions, has enabled a re-creation of the attitudes towards the processes of creating medieval artifacts. In this way, we have been able to arrive to a more realistic interpretation of Mamlūk art and architecture. Using the same approach, we have been able to unveil the hidden symbolism inherent in their religious architecture.

## 11.2 THE PROCESS OF CREATION OF A TRADITIONAL SACRED MODEL: A PROTOTYPE

We saw in Chapter Seven that Muslim traditional sacred art is not only a spiritual expression but is also informed by *ideal beauty*. We have proven that bare utility is not, and cannot be a form of religious art. Nor has traditional art and architecture as such a merely informative value confined to its explicit external meaning (*ḍhāhir*). That is why traditional forms are not produced through an empirical determination, but rather designed as far as possible according to a metaphysical tradition conforming to the Divine Order. It follows that a member of a traditional society - or the modern viewer for that matter - cannot rationally enjoy any of these specific arts without the recognition of the metaphysical principles upon which they are based, for objects can only be enjoyed in proportion to their intelligibility, that is functionally - both materially and spiritually - and not merely in utilitarian terms.

Furthermore, as was shown in Chapters Eight, Nine, and Ten, in traditional art and architecture the user or viewer could not have differentiated between what the artefact was and what it signified. For example, the shape of a portal whether trefoil or a single pointed arch did not change its significance in the eyes of the user, for he knew what a portal symbolized and knew how to comprehend it accordingly. In Ṡūfī terms it is the "eye of the heart" which sees both functions. From this, it is evident that there is an inseverable relationship between an esoteric product and a symbolic one. We also found that certain restricted groups of themes were adhered to in the Mamlūk tradition, generation after generation in Cairo, and that technique was controlled by elaborate rules and canons and could only be acquired through long years of patient practice through the learning of the

Śūfīs. It is the historical conditions and the environment that yielded this inheritance of older symbolisms and specific sensibilities. As for the Mamlūk craftsman who had his art which he was expected to practice, this was the means by which he secured a continued comprehensibility of his art and its value as communication.

In Chapter Seven we saw that medieval Islamic art and architecture had their origin and formulation in the Universal. That is why the role of this art was to release the spirit from all inhibitions of vision; it was then and only then that the Heavens and the earth were united in a perfected analogy. This accounts for the fact that no matter how many times one visits Mamlūk religious buildings, one never fails to feel that the *mu'allimīn* (architects) and the *ḥirafiyyīn* (craftsmen) must have been spiritually "touched" by the Divine. In other words, one thinks of them as having "visited" the Heavens, and after having seen the forms of Divine Origin - for God is "The Fashioner" and "The Designer" (*Muṣawwir*) - "descended" to earth and reproduced earthly representations of these sacred models.

The whole process of the creation of a prototype can be explained as a cycle of *influencing* and *influenced*, both initiated and ending with the Śūfī's quest for transcendence. We saw in Chapter Two that the Śūfī achieves this spiritual transcendence through a journey of "ascent"; this is referred to as the "journey of spiritual maturity" and is carried out after the maturity of the physical body has been gained. In this journey, he learns about Divine Wisdom, is given Direct Knowledge, and thus sees the Truth in everything; i.e., he sees the external as well as the internal meanings in any object. It is a sort of transparency that can at times appear to be illogical when debated through a materialistic, or modernistic perspective. Having witnessed the phenomena in the Heavens and having also seen the Divine prototypes[1], he "descends" having achieved his spiritual maturity to become a *shaykh* fit to transmit this knowledge to a group of disciples. Some of these disciples, always described as a "putty" in the hands of their master, were affiliated to both these Śūfī *ṭarīqas* and the different crafts, which could be described as an informal guild as seen earlier in Chapter Six. Having been "fed" by their master with his visions and experiences of his journey, the disciples formed not only a set of canonical rules to be followed, but a repertory of elements and relations that remained as memories residing in the craftsman's brain. (Fig. 11.1)

[1] Such as the seven Ka'bas, palaces, rivers, springs, orchards, gardens, and other forms of Paradise.

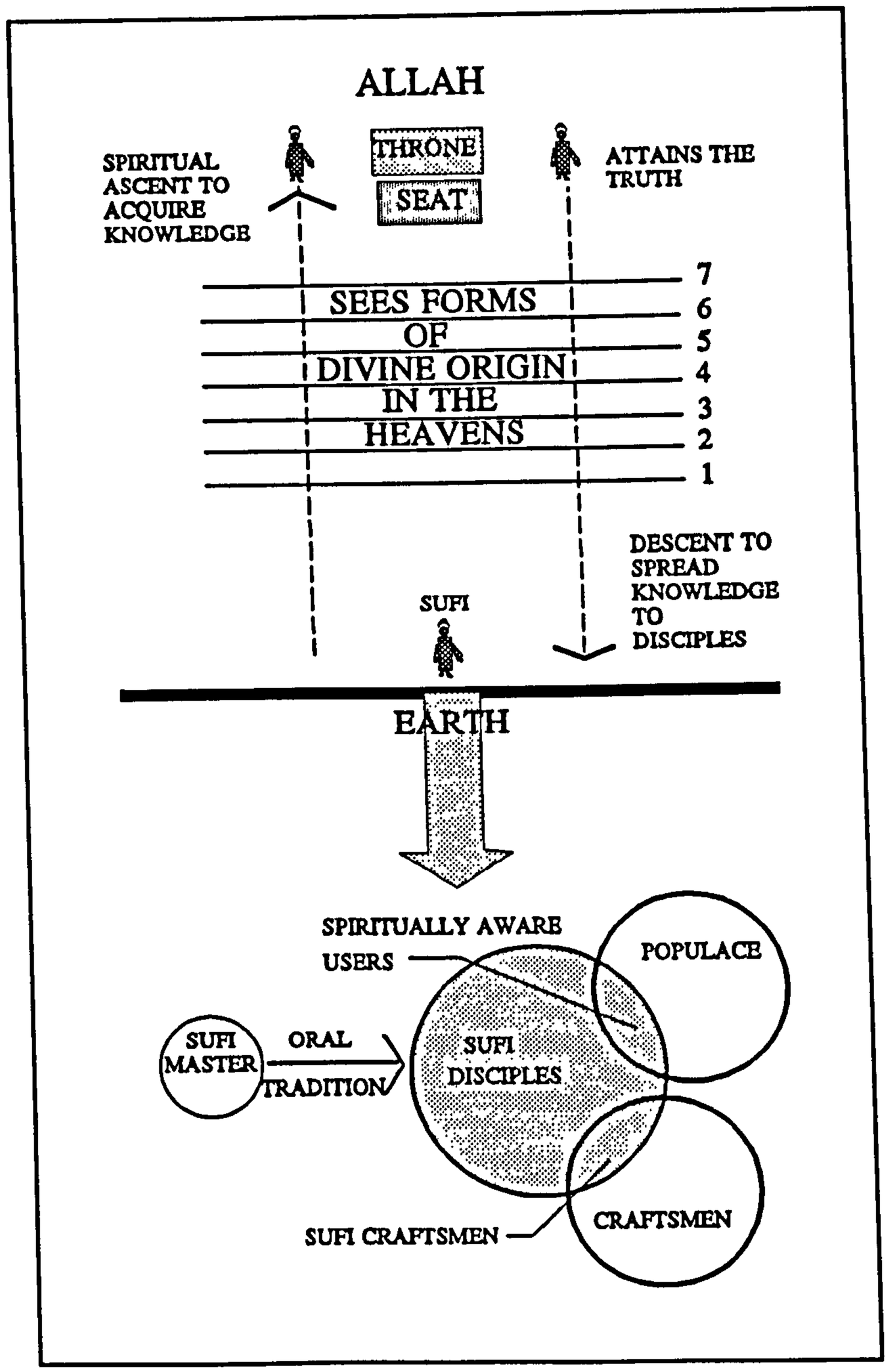



**Figure 11.1** The Process of Creating a Prototype through Transmission of Knowledge both Horizontally as well as Vertically.

When assigned the task of producing a work of art or a more ambitious task such as a religious building, craftsmen and designers applied the canons and drew from this repertory. This process was based on the ultimate desire to emulate the sacred models and accordingly produced earthly representations in a broad sense. Each of these spiritually aware Śūfī craftsmen with his own views, capabilities, and imagination sought to come as close as possible to these ideal Divine models. Thus, the tradition was fed from these attempts to reach the perfection of the sacred representations and in turn influenced those craftsmen and

designers who had really never been touched by, any direct personal spiritual experience. The Heavenly sacred was transmitted to the earthly privileged (the Mamlūk Śūfīs who saw an internal as well as an external reality in every object); they in turn influenced the tradition which consequently influenced the earthly unprivileged (every craftsman, designer, or member of the society who saw only an external reality in things).

This view of the traditional process of design and of the development of prototypes answers many of the questions that are raised when dealing with the traditionalist approach. The most important of these is whether there is the need for every contributor in a tradition - I mean designer, user, and viewer as they are all equally important - to be a spiritually aware individual, one who sees the Truth inherent in forms, and is in a very large degree intellectual, educated in the outer and inner realities of forms, aware of the existence of Spiritual Stations and Archetypes, ...etc. Of course if anyone claims this, it would be both incredible and unnecessary at the same time.

It is true that historically speaking the chronicles and treatises that deal with the Mamlūk period in Cairo emphasize time and time again the spread of Śūfism among the sulṭāns, *emīrs*, *'ulamā'*, and the populace; accordingly, this would account for a very large percentage of the craftsmen having been Śūfīs themselves (as discussed in Chapter Six). Moreover, Śūfism spread implicitly to imbue the entire members of the guild corporations through the system of apprenticeship. But the vertical transmission of Divine Knowledge through the Śūfī journey to the Heavens, followed by the horizontal transmission of earthly to earthly through traditional apprenticeship resulted in the spiritually aware craftsman passing over the revealed information to the other members of the craft who were not necessarily spiritually awakened. This furthermore explains how after the establishment of a new method of dealing with a design issue, it becomes part of the tradition - not only that, it becomes the *only* proper way to deal with it. At this stage the artefact ceases to be a representation of its sacred counterpart, or prototype, and instead acquires a quality wholly self contained, implicit within itself. This can be called the stage of maturity. When the traditional artefact reaches it, it takes its place as an "original"[1], genuine, and trustworthy contribution to the tradition and consequently becomes *valid to use again*.

---

[1] Coomaraswamy, says that: "... *it should be enough to say that when there is realization, when the themes are felt and art lives, it is of no moment whether or not the themes are new or old.*" See full argument in Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, The Transformation of Nature in Art, Dover Publications, New York, 1934, Pp. 34-35.

It does not strike me as incongruous to read in the "*Muqaddimah*" of Ibn Khaldūn that an unlettered member of the Mamlūk populace was quoting the verses of al-Mutanabbi[1] (a great Arabian poet who lived in the tenth-century A.D.); certainly not as incongruous as it would be to hear a contemporary Egyptian quoting any modern "intellectual". For very wide segments of the uneducated and even illiterate medieval Muslims shared consciously and daily in the cultural achievements of their past; just as in this example of a simple man who has called to mind an appropriate verse of al-Mutanabbī to illustrate a situation of which he was a witness. By following similar incidents quoted by Ibn Khaldūn we find that many a ragged person without schooling[2] carried in his memory innumerable verses of other famous poets and have been heard to weave them with evident enjoyment into everyday conversation. These people knew the implicit beauty of these verses by *intuition*.

It follows by analogy that the general contributor to the tradition will be partly aware of the spiritual dimension implicit in things, or of certain applications that arise with the limits and rules of his craft through his *intuition*. These rules would enable him to design and construct a building without its being necessary for him to know the ultimate significance of each of the symbols he would be working with, as long as he believed in what the tradition dictates. Since it was tradition that transmitted the sacred models and the working rules, it thereby guaranteed the spiritual validity of the forms throughout time. In fact, tradition has within itself a secret force which is communicated to an entire civilization and determines even arts and crafts the immediate objects of which include nothing particularly sacred. This force creates the "style" of a traditional civilization. This does not diminish the uniqueness and individuality of the forms in traditional architecture, on the contrary, it is the meaning in eternity that is the fundamental ingredient to the success of that architecture.

Another question arises at this stage: if there were canons to be followed and elements and relations derived from these sacred models that created such a "style", how is it that

---

[1] A simple man of the streets was heard to quote al-Matanabbī the famous tenth-century poet who recited the following verses which were related to the fourteenth-century Mamlūk sulṭān:

*I met him when his gleaming sword was sheathed,*
*I saw him when it streamed with blood,*
*And always found him best of all mankind:*
*But best of all in him was still his noble mind...*

[2] Such as water carriers in bazaars and soldiers in outlying frontier posts.

tradition is always associated with a vibrant spontaneity and intuition? We do know for a fact that there is a large variety of examples solving building details and structural problems in Mamlūk monuments - such as zones of transition in domes and minarets to name but two. Actually, this does not contradict the "eternal prototypes" mentioned above as traditional spontaneity and intuition were above the canons, and above the rules. The liberated Ṡūfī saw himself in a state of grace (that is why he is called *walī*) and thus, free to act without deliberation as to duty. We have to remember that for the Ṡūfīs, the following of explicit orthodox canons was never a strong point, they were notorious for the exemptions and allowances that they permitted themselves. If we think in Ṡūfī terms and try to put ourselves in their position as best as we can, we will find that there is no distinction between *self* and *non-self*. That is to say that they were very far from achieving any egotistical glory as they believed that they were far from perfection. God is the Supreme Designer (*Muṣawwir*) and the word "creation" is His alone[1], they were not "creating" buildings or artifacts, but simply following His Guidance through the emulation of the sacred models. At the same time, within the requirements of each prototype they were spontaneous in devising the best methods to "materialize" them into their art and architecture.

Working within this framework of understanding, it was inconceivable for them to think in our modern terms that they were "innovating" or involved in a process of "creation" to outshine others in earthly terms. They would definitely have taken pride in solving a certain building problem in a more adequate way than others had previously attempted, but the main issue should never be forgotten: they were spontaneous and intuitive in the variables (the elements) and not the constants (the relations). For example, as we have seen in Chapters Eight, Nine, and Ten, there is hardly a medieval Muslim portal that does not point to the vertical, nor a minaret that does not accelerate vision upwards, for these were the *constant* inherited forms. They saw no innovation in a circular, or octagonal *ṣaḥn* as opposed to the conventional quadrangular one, nor could they conceive a prayer hall without a *miḥrāb* or one with say six niches. Yet, what the minarets, portals, *miḥrābs*, or flooring of a *ṣaḥn* were made of, which materials were used, or whether a certain decoration was applied or another, these were the *variables* that were left to the spontaneity and intuition of the team consisting of the *mu'allem* and his craftsmen. They allowed their imagination to flow in such a way that

[1] The very concept of "creation" is a religiously loaded word having the meaning of manifestation, procession, expression or basically as Coomaraswamy puts it "the coming to be", depending on mediate causes. In our case it is Allah the Almighty.

hundreds of different portals, minarets, domes, ...etc., were created with equal impact resulting from different architectural treatments.[1]

Another point which is related to "innovation" is the notion of "perfection" and "decline" in any historical period. We find that there are instances within any period where a certain craft reaches its zenith and is usually referred to as the "time where that craft reaches perfection". On the other hand, other periods are described as those of decline. The point I want to turn to is not the historical reasons behind the decline and rise of a certain craft, but rather the implication for the user in either case. It is not worthwhile to labour through a discussion arguing how the user would conceive an element when the craft was at its height, because it is obvious that the workman's first concern then was the good of the work - hence, the product did its job, the symbol was expressed adequately, and the message conveyed to the user. The more tricky part is whether the same element produced in a time of decline would still convey the same message to the user. Actually, since the element was never the designer's invention to start with, but was inherited, the user would still recognize and understand it through its imperfect embodiment; it could still evoke a true experience, for the viewer will use his own imagination and intuition to supply himself with what is lacking in the element.

The other pressing question which is a corollary to the last point is the matter of foreign influence. This is something the historical approach relies upon intensely, and which historians often regard as the key towards the understanding of physical forms and "innovations" of "style". I will discuss this point by taking the Islamic traditional sciences as an analogy to architecture. To the Muslims, acquisition of scientific notions and methods was never considered as imitation or borrowing: and certainly not in the case of a people whose faith commands them to search for knowledge wherever it is to be found. Science, to them, was considered to be neither western nor eastern, for all scientific discoveries are only links in an unending chain of intellectual endeavour which embraces mankind as a whole.[2] Every

---

[1] For example as we mentioned earlier, all portals lead vision upwards and all are recessed from the less holy street to the inner more holy religious building yet, none is an identical copy of another one. This reflects clearly the Muslim ideals of *equality* of mankind but not its *similarity*.

[2] Of course there are times when one nation, is able to contribute more to the general fund of knowledge: but in the long run the process is shared, and legitimately so, by all. In medieval times, the Muslim civilization transmitted to the west many technological inventions, and the principles of the "scientific method" on which modern science and civilization are built. Nevertheless, Jābir Ibn Ḥayyān's fundamental discoveries in chemistry did not make chemistry an Arabian science: nor can algebra and trigonometry be described as Muslim sciences,

scientist builds on the foundations supplied by his predecessors, be they of his own nation or of another; and the process of building, correcting and improving goes on and on, from man to man, from age to age, from civilization to civilization: so that the scientific achievements of a particular age or tradition can never be said to belong to it alone.

If, therefore, the Muslims adopted, as adopted they did, foreign methods in science and technology, they did no more than follow the evolutionary instinct which causes men to avail themselves of other men's experiences. But these traditional Muslims did not adopt western or eastern forms of life, manners, customs, or social ideals that were contradictory to their traditional ethics because they knew that they would not gain thereby: for what the West or the East could give them in this respect would not be superior to what their own tradition had given them and to what their own faith pointed the way. The traditional Muslims accepted progress in the art of building as in the sciences as a *means* and not an *end* in itself.

Similarly, western and eastern goods that are mentioned by medieval historians to having flooded the Cairene bazaars and *sūqs* (markets), do not appear to have taken the form of "intruders" among the traditional products; rather their utility had given them a natural place of their own. With their wide-awake sense of reality, the traditional community seemed to take easily to all these new things which but yesterday had been beyond their ken, and to make them their own without betraying their old selves. Likewise, the adoption of architectural devices and elements from other regions - even re-used material from other religious buildings - such as columns and lintels from Ancient Egyptian temples[1], Roman temples[2], and pillaged Christian churches[3] hardly seem alien in the ensemble of the building. The overall spirit is much stronger in itself than the constituents of each element seen individually; it is not the capitals or lintels that give the notion of Islam, but the manner by which they are used. These elements were appropriated to fit their needs and beliefs. If they

---

although the one was evolved by al-Khawārizmī and the other by al-Baïtānī, both of whom were Muslims: just as one cannot speak of an English theory of gravity, although the man who formulated it was an Englishman. All such achievements are the common property of the human race.

[1] Such as the columns of the *maqṡūra* of the Mosque of al-Nāṡir Muḥammad in the Citadel, in the threshold and lintels of the Mosque and *Khanqah* of Sheykhū, and the threshold of the *Khanqah* of Baybars al-Jāshankīr.

[2] Most of the Mamlūk hypostyle mosques, such as those of the Mosque of al-Māridānī, the Mosque of al-Nāṡir Muḥammad, the Mosque of Aqsunqur, and the Mosque of al-Ḍhāhir Baybars.

[3] Such as the portal of the *Madrasa* of al-Nāṡir Muḥammad Ibn Qalāwūn in al-Naḥḥāsīn, which belonged to a church in Akra and was transported to Cairo by the officer in charge of the buildings of Sulṭān Qalāwūn in 1291 A.D.

proved incompatible they were refuted; if they proved successful they were adopted and soon found a place in the tradition - this is the process of traditionalization.[1] It was by absorption and organic change that the traditional society was externally "influenced" yet retained its own inner identity.

To return to the essence of the conception of a work of traditional sacred art, we have found that Baḥrī Mamlūk religious buildings were outwardly designed to be used, and inwardly to delight the spirit as well as the reason. The necessity that the soul should be already prepared for this liberation, the requirement of self-identification with the ultimate theme, on the part of both designer and spectator, were prerequisites to visualization in the first instance, and reproduction of the prototype in the second. Finally, the conception of ideal beauty was unconditioned by natural affections, indivisible, and indistinguishable from Divine Knowledge - all these characteristics of the theory have been demonstrated in the last four chapters and have been found to have had their logical connection with the predominant trends of Mamlūk Islamic thought.

All the evidence is that the purpose of all sacred art is to confront man with a symbolic representation, a prototype, reflecting Divine Perfection which he is seeking to bring from virtuality to actuality; and the particular art that is our theme - religious architecture - is all the more operatively effective in that it gives man a setting which he can physically enter and by which he can be surrounded. In making him conscious of the dimensions of holiness which he has acquired within himself through his belief, architecture offers him its own various aspects as prolongations of those dimensions. From being merely an object outside him, it thus becomes one with the subject. The *mu'allem* was actually reconstructing the world by means of a process which imitated the process of universal manifestation. As God caused the cosmos to "Be" and ordered order to come out of chaos, so is the laying out of a plan of a mosque which transforms an indifferent, less sacred space into an ordered, more holy place. These considerations clearly apply to all sacred Mamlūk monuments which are places of worship, whether mosques, *madrasas*, or *khanqahs*. To be within any such building is to wear a majestic robe of sanctity which is both a challenge and an injunction to the soul to make itself, by spiritual growth, adequate to this investiture, that is, adequate to the magnitude which was willed by Heaven for man at his creation.

---

[1] See the process of traditionalization discussed in Chapter One.

## 11.3 BENEFITS OF THE TRADITIONALIST APPROACH VS. THE PURELY HISTORICAL

The traditionalist approach adopted in this thesis has allowed us to arrive at interpretations and understandings of the *raison d'être* of several elements and relations found in Mamlūk religious architecture. These have been otherwise either ignored or attributed to aesthetic, structural, or climatic purposes when no utilitarian reasons could be found by using the otherwise purely historical approach. The reason, as stated in Chapter One, is that the historical approach relies only on written evidence that has come down to us through the ages and disregards any orally transmitted knowledge - which is one of the bases on which the traditionalist approach operates. We have seen that Ṡūfism is an extremely rich and fertile source of Islamic interpretation which is almost entirely based on oral transmission. It is very seldom that we find Ṡūfī *shaykhs* who have written about Ṡūfism as such, let alone the symbolism of Ṡūfism. The reason is that the very essence of the *ṭarīqas* as we mentioned in Chapter Two is based on disciples (*murīdīn*) who learn from their master (*shaykh al-ṭarīqah*) by watching him, listening to him, and practising in front of him. In such a method of "apprenticeship", there is no need or place for learning from a book, and this explains the scarcity of manuscripts. But as we also mentioned in Chapter Two, this scarcity of textual evidence should not lead to our dismissal of such a major influence in the history of Islam as the evidence of its impact is found in the art and architecture that has come down to us.

Examples of the benefits resulting from the use of the traditionalist approach have been crystallized in Chapters Eight, Nine, and Ten. For instance, we have seen that historians have concluded that any water fountain present in a *ṣaḥn* is for ablutions (even though there is no written evidence for it). On the other hand when some *waqf* documents state that the central water fountain was not used for ablutions, and that specific areas were built for that function outside the mosque proper or near the entrance, then historians have inclined to attribute the fountain to aesthetic requirements. We saw in Chapter Eight that the traditionalist approach allows us to penetrate beyond the limitations of utilitarian or aesthetic interpretations into the symbolic domain to arrive at the inner meanings behind these octagonal fountains which relate to the Throne of Allah, and to water which is closely tied to the process of Creation, and to Paradise. Likewise, the division of the sections of a minaret or the interior transition of the parts of a mausoleum are attributed by the historical approach either to style or to structural needs, but the traditionalist approach has allowed us to find that this sequence

of geometrical transformations was spiritually functional following a cosmological model as well as meeting structural demands. Not only that, but that when the structural solution used did not fulfil the spiritual function, new elements had to be devised to remedy the deficiencies of the utilitarian solution. An example of this is the introduction of the octagonal cantilevered wooden frame in the zone of transition of domes, from square to circle, using stalactites. Similar cases that demanded better explanations than these offered by the historical approach are: minarets that were built and not used for the call to prayer for several centuries; crestings that were persistently designed to create voids that were replicas of the solid parts; courtyard floors that reproduce garden patterns; and many other elements and relations that have been shown to carry symbolic meanings that surpass their basic utilitarian purpose.

These findings, along with the other examples that have been discussed in the last three chapters, clearly indicate that the interpretations of the traditionalist approach overlaid upon those of the historical approach complete one another. But, the possibility of a comprehensive understanding of Islamic architecture through this approach can be achieved only if scholars come to terms with the reality that all traditional knowledge is composed of the union of the qualitative and the quantitative, the esoteric and the exoteric. Without this union there is no Truth (*Ḥaqīqah*) as there is no reality in a man made only of body (*jism*) but without spirit (*rūḥ*) or soul (*nafs*). God says: "*When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My Spirit* ..."[1], which clearly implies that there is both a physical and spiritual dimension to creation. The same dimensions are to be found in Islamic religious architecture - at least of the Baḥrī Mamlūk period.

## 11.4 RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE

If we can agree that the traditionalist approach is the key to a better and fuller understanding of medieval religious buildings, then how - if at all - could this have implications for today's contemporary mosque architecture? To answer this question realistically, one has first to examine the process by which a contemporary "sacred" product is produced; second, ask how it is related to the belief of the people; and third, discover the symbolism inherent in this process - if any such thing exists.

---

[1] Qur'ān: 15/29.

Nowadays, the Ṡūfī *shaykh* is absent from the design process and the canons of sacred architecture are lost. The production of sacred architecture has been exploited by architects who are arbitrarily experimenting here and there. We saw in Chapter One that some have relied on the external copying of elements from traditional forms and mixed them together eclectically to create new compositions. Others have resorted to twentieth-century Western styles - Modern or Post-Modern - while at the same time throwing hints of distorted traditional elements into their compositions[1]. Neither of these two trends is successful and both do an injustice to the Islamic heritage. As a result of these two approaches to the design of contemporary religious buildings, we find that there is no relation between Muslim belief and the artefact.

Today, due to the alienation of the context that we live in, the tradition is dead. The contemporary designer is unaware of the symbolism inherent in the traditional forms he is copying and using arbitrarily, and so are the user and the viewer. Although Ṡūfism is alive in many rural and urban parts of Egypt[2], it is not approved by the "formal" government representatives such as the Azhar, or Ministry of the Awqāf, or Dār al-Iftā'[3]. The religiously educated part of the society looks down on Ṡūfīs, likening them to charlatans or madmen (*majādhīb* which is the same word that was used to describe the intoxicated strand of Ṡūfīs in medieval times). The reason for this is that much of Ṡūfism today in Egypt has become a means by which idle people make a living by convincing the society that they are touched by the Divine and attribute *karāmāt*[4] to themselves - which is more of a "miracle" than they seem to understand[5].

---

[1] For example by using pointed arches that are inverted with their point facing the earth, or by using semi-circular forms for *miḥrābs* and arches, or minarets that change sections from octagon to square disregarding any cosmological implications ...etc.

[2] In the rural parts, it is spread from the Delta to Upper Egypt and Nubia; while in the urban parts there are entire cities such as Ṭanṭa whose economic base relies on Ṡūfī festivities such as the *Mawlid* (literally birthday) of Sayyed al-Badawī one of the *awliyā'*.

[3] The "Azhar" is the oldest University teaching Islamic Sciences in the Muslim world, it was established over one thousand years ago; the Ministry of Awqāf is in charge of the implementation of *waqf* endowments; while Dār al-Iftā' is an organization in charge of passing decrees on matters related to the *Sharī'a*.

[4] *Karāmāt* or *baraka* as discussed in Chapter Two, are literally interpreted as blessings from God that are bestowed on chosen people. Examples of such blessings are: going from place to place without physically moving, walking on water, being fed without buying any food, ...etc.

[5] Those who know that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said that the time of miracles has ended, realize that contemporary Ṡūfīs claiming such *karāmāt* must be charlatans.

To reintroduce traditional symbolism into a modernized society that only sees and believes in an empirically two-dimensional existence, it would first be necessary to re-educate the people into understanding their true Muslim dual nature: that, as the Qur'ān says, man is part physical (*ḍhāhir*) and part spiritual (*rūḥ* and *nafs*). God says in the Qur'ān that when one asks about the spirit, say *"The Spirit (comes) by command of my Lord: of Knowledge it is only a little that is given to you, (O mankind)"*[1], meaning it is beyond man's comprehension, it is not physical and will never be accounted for in terms of "modern" quantitative science. By acknowledging the fact that man is created a balanced human being with both inner and outer attributes, it would then follow that his entire existence should follow this pattern, and that whatever he produces should bare these attributes. The lessons we have learnt by analysing cases from the medieval past would be inestimable to the contemporary Muslim architect in reconstructing his identity, but only once he had arrived at the conviction that existence is three-dimensionally qualitative as well as quantitative. The problem lies in the fact that this so-called "modern man" believes that adopting a conviction of the reality of the immaterial means launching mankind back into chaos and the primitive. We have indeed found that medieval life cannot by any means be characterized as "primitive". To be sure, it was unruly, full of contradictions, of "obscure" ideas[2], and prone to a degree of superstition: all the same it was a mature, developed, and *slowly changing* traditional continuum as opposed to our abruptly *transformed* modern society. Unlike our modern times, this medieval tradition showed man not merely how to *feel*, but also how to *live* rightly.

I believe that with an instinctive feeling of having been somehow let down by this religious life, modern Muslims have over the centuries lost all real faith in their tradition. With the loss of this faith, they have lost the conviction that the universe is an expression of One Mind and thus forms one organic whole; and because this is lost, they are now living in a spiritual and moral vacuum.

The problem of contemporary architecture in an Islamic society has been aggravated by the use of new techniques of construction and new building materials which have freed the architect from the constraints that traditional materials imposed on him in the past. This freedom has offered the modern architect possibilities that are difficult to resist, but it cut him

---

[1] Qur'ān: 17/85.

[2] "Obscure" to our modern contemporary eyes.

off from the benefits of the accumulated experience of the generations that had crystallized into a tradition. In such circumstances, the contemporary Muslim architect should have exercised his creative genius and his artistic sensitivity to create new forms that suit the new materials without losing touch with the established tradition, preserving the implicit and not overlooking the spiritual and social virtues and the cultural values of the past.[1] I strongly believe that antiquating the traditional standards of reference without creating comprehensive substitutes would mean launching man back into chaos. We cannot repeat what was adequate six or seven centuries ago in our present time because our needs as well as our technical knowledge and skills have changed. Had the Islamic tradition evolved to our present time, it would have been completely different from what we have seen it to be in medieval times.

Nowadays, to remedy this situation, while realizing that the role of the Śūfī *shaykh* and the living canons of sacred architecture are lost, the contemporary architect has to learn from the examination of traditional mosques to sort out the features that are common amongst them and could not have come about by chance. By maintaining a conscious awareness and intention, he could try to rediscover the canons that governed them, and respect them in his new designs. If he cannot do that, let him then at least respect what is constant in form and design and not change it by a combination of eclecticism and ignorance.

We have found that the soul of tradition corresponds to the communion of man with the Divine forms and phenomena which incarnate eternal wisdom (*ḥikmah*). This wisdom has materialized in the artistic forms of the traditional Mamlūk epoch as well as other periods that are waiting to be examined. All that the contemporary architect has to remember is that this wisdom does not belong just to the past, it belongs to all times. It is present today as it was yesterday, and can be realized by anyone who desires it with sincere intent. I believe that an architect is in a unique position to revive the Egyptian's faith in his own culture. If, as an authoritative critic, he shows what is admirable in traditional forms, and even goes so far as to use them himself, then the community of users and clients will at once begin to look on their own products with pride. What was formerly ignored or labelled old fashioned would become suddenly something to be proud of, and moreover, something that the Cairene could boast about knowingly!

---

[1] Some contemporary Muslim architects such as 'Abd al-Ḥalīm Ibrāhīm, 'Abd al-Wāḥid al-Wakīl, and Rāsim Badrān, having realized this cultural and architectural crisis and have accordingly implemented such traditionalist ideas to their designs. The problem is that the society is ignorant, unaware, and uneducated in their own traditional heritage and hence their architecture does not communicate its implicit psycho-spiritual meanings because it cannot communicate with the users - because they do not know their tradition.

## 11.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

From this perspective, several points need to be further investigated: some regarding the traditional buildings of past periods within the Islamic history of Egypt, others regarding contemporary architects' understanding of medieval Islamic architecture and the possibility of arriving at feasible guidelines for mosque design.

Concerning traditional Mamlūk architecture, I believe that although the overall examination of Baḥrī Mamlūk mosques, *madrasas*, and *khanqahs* on the level of elements and relationships has yielded a deeper dimension to their meaning. No doubt we could find more evidence by pursuing the analysis and examination - using the same approach - on a smaller scale, for example in the epigraphic bands, decoration, woodwork, and stucco motifs.

I also believe that more research on the available Mamlūk Ṣūfī poetry, such as that of Ibn al-Fāriḍ[1], might help to give us a lead on the specific Ṣūfī ideas that were circulating in Mamlūk society. This would help achieve a better understanding of the extent of the influence of Ṣūfism on the Mamlūk period, not only through the visual arts, but through literature as well, and to focus on specific Ṣūfī issues rather than a general and broad viewpoint as adopted here.

It would likewise be advisable to analyze other Baḥrī Mamlūk buildings in the same manner that we have presented the case of the complex of Sulṭān Ḥassan; i.e., in terms of spatio-temporal visits. This would further demonstrate that this particular chosen *Madrasa* is not a special case, but simply one of the more elaborate examples within the Baḥrī Mamlūk tradition.

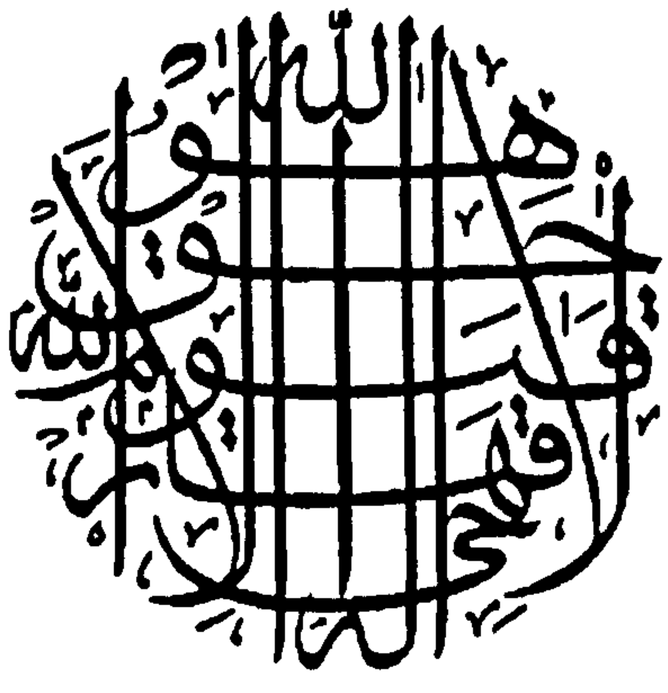
Furthermore, it would be very helpful and interesting to test the traditionalist approach on other periods in the history of Islam that shared both esoteric as well as exoteric dimensions of interpretation - such as the *Shī'ite* Fatimid period, and the *Sunnī* Ottoman period in Cairo. If compatible results appeared, these would raise the question of what caused these similarities, whether it was the common medieval belief in Islamic esoterism, or whether it was the *Shī'ite* influences that were precipitated into the *Sunnī* Ayyubid and Mamlūk tradition which in turn, were later to be inherited by the Ottomans.

---

[1] We mentioned in Chapter two how Ibn al-Fāriḍ was a key figure amongst the influential Ṣūfī *shaykhs* in the Mamlūk period.

On the other hand, there is a vital need to evaluate contemporary mosque architecture in Cairo as well as the Muslim world to make the public, as well as the designers, more aware of the symbolic void that contemporary architects have thrust onto Muslim society in the name of the modern and post-modern Islamic style.

Finally, there is a need to examine the possibility of incorporating traditional understandings of local Cairene forms in contemporary designs of mosque architecture. This should not be prompted by a sentimental desire to keep some souvenir of our past, but to restore to the Egyptians their Islamic heritage of a vigorous locally-inspired building tradition, involving the active co-operation of informed clients and users and skilled craftsmen. The notion that all the community's problems can be solved by importing modernistic planning principles to building is a fallacy. What is required is neither faked tradition nor faked modernity, but an architecture that will be the visible and permanent expression of the character of a community. This suggests finding a new architecture, a "bridge" that would connect traditional Islamic architecture with contemporary twentieth-century architecture. This would provide a solid and visible link between these two architectures in the shape of relationships or features, common to both, in which the Egyptians could find a familiar point of reference from which to enlarge their understanding of the new, and which the architect could use to test his own work's truth to the people, to the place, and to the principles of Islam.



THERE IS NO GOD BUT ALLAH

HE IS TRUTH, ALL-KNOWER, MOST POWERFUL, ALIVE.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY


'Abd al-'Āṫī, 'Abd al-Ghanī.
1975 *Al-Ta'līm fī Miṣr Zaman al-Ayyūbiyyūn wal-Mamālīk*, M.A. Thesis, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University, Cairo.

'Abd al-Ghanī, Aḥmad Shalabī.
1978 *Awḍaḥ al-Ishārāt*, Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo.

'Abd al-Wahhāb, Ḥassan.
1946 *Tārīkh al-Masājid al-Athariyya*, Ministry of Awqāf, Cairo.

Abdelḥalīm, I. Abdelḥalīm.
1984 "Transformations in Architecture and Urbanism: Public Projects and Private Initiatives", Designing in Islamic Cultures 4, Continuity and Change: Design Strategies for Large-Scale Urban Development, M.I.T. Press, Cambridge.

1989 "On Creativity, Imagination, and the Design Process", in Space for Freedom, ed. Ismail Serageldin, Aga Khan Award for Architecture, New York.

Abū al-Dardā'.
1957 *Ṭabaqāt*, al-Maṫba'ah al-Kātholīkiyyajh, Beirut, reprint.

Abu-Lughod, Janet L.
1971 Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Abul Quasem, Muhammad.
1983 The Jewels of the Qur'an: Al-Ghazzali's Theory, Kegan Paul International, London.

Affifi, A.E.
1939 The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyid Dīn-Ibnul 'Arabī, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Aḥmad, Maḥmūd.
1939 Concise Guide to the Principal Arabic Monuments in Cairo, Government press, Cairo.

Aiden, Brother
1991 "Icons - mysticism versus mistiness in art", Modern Painters, vol.4.

Akkash, Samer.
1990 The Sacred Pattern of Traditional Islamic Architecture According to Sufi Doctrine, PhD Thesis, University of Sydney.

Al-Albānī, Muḥammad Nāṣir.
1983 *Ṣifat Ṣalāt al-Nabiyy min al-Takbīr ila al-Taslīm Ka'annaka Tarāhā*, al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut.

Amin, Muhammad Mahmoud.
1980 The Waqfs and Social Life in Egypt, Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo.

1981 Catalogue des Documents d'Archives du Caire, Cairo.

Arberry, A.J.
1979 Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam, Mandala Unwin Paperbacks, London.

Ardalan, Nader. & Bakhtiar, Laleh.
1973 The Sense Of Unity, The University of Chicago Press, London.

'Āshūr, Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ.
1959 *Miṣr fī 'Aṣr Dawlat al-Mamālīk al-Baḥariyyah*, Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo.

1962 *al-Mojtama' al-Miṣrī fī 'Aṣr Salāṭīn al-Mamālīk*, Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo.

n.d. *Al-Ayyūbīyyūn wal-Mamālīk fī Miṣr wal-Shām*, Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo.

Al-'Asqalānī, Ibn Ḥajar.
1966 *Al-Dorar al-Kāminah fī A'yān al-Mā'ah al-Thāminah*, Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, Cairo, second edition.

Attar, Farid Al-Din.
1966 Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya', Arkana publications, London.

Al-Azraqī, Abū al-Walīd.
1983 *Akhbār Makkah wa mā Jā'a Fīhā min al-Āthār*, ed. by R.S. Malḥas, Dār al-Andalus, Beirut.

Badeau, John S., et al.
1975 The Genius of Arab Civilization: Source of Renaissance, Eurabia Publishing Ltd, MIT Press.

Bakhtiar, Laleh.
1976 Sufi: Expressions Of The Mystic Quest, Thames and Hudson, Singapore.

Baldick, Julian.
1989 Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism, I.B. Tauris and Co Ltd, London.

Al-Bāqillānī.
1957 *Al-Tamhīd*, Librairie Orientale, Beirut.

Behrens-Abouseif, Doris.
1985(a) The Minarets of Cairo, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo.

1985(b) "Change in Function and Form of Mamluk Religious Institutions", Annales Islamologiques, vol.XXI, Cairo.

1986 "Locations of Non-Muslim Quarters in Medieval Cairo", Annales Islamologiques, vol.XXII, Cairo.

1989 Islamic Architecture in Cairo: An Introduction, E.J. Brill, Leiden.

Berger, Morroe.
1970 Islam in Egypt Today: Social and Political Aspects of Popular Religion, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Al-Bīrūnī, Abū Rayḥān.
1934 The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology, trans. R. Ramsay Wright, Luzac and Co., London.

Bloom, Jonathan.
1982 "The Mosque of Baybars al-Bunduqdārī in Cairo", Annales Islamologiques, Tome XVIII, Cairo.

1989 Minaret: Symbol of Islam, Oxford University press, Oxford, 1989.

Boak, A.E.R.
1932 "Guilds: Late Roman and Byzantine", Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, The MacMillan Company, New York.

Bosworth, C.E.
1967 Islamic Survey 5: The Islamic Dynasties, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Briggs, Martin S.
1974 Muhammadan Architecture in Egypt and Palestine, Da Capo Press, New York.

Brolin, Brent C.
1982 The Failure of Modern Architecture, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, London.

Brown, L. Carl. (ed.).
1973 From Madina to Metropolis: Heritage and Change in the Near-Eastern City, The Darwin Press, Princeton.

Al-Bukhārī.
1974 *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Hilāl Yayinlari, Ankara, 12 vols.

Burckhardt, Titus.
1967(a) Alchemy: Science of the Cosmos Science of the Soul, trans. By William Stoddart, Element Books, Dorset.

1967(b) Sacred Art in East and West: Principles and Methods, Perrenial Books Ltd., Middlesex.

1976(a) Art of Islam Language and Meaning, World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd., Kent.

1976(b) An Introduction To Sufi Doctrine, trans. D.M. Matheson, Thorsons Publishers Ltd., Northamptonshire.

1977 Mystical Astrology According to Ibn 'Arabi, trans. from French by Bulent Rauf, Beshara Publications, Cheltenham.

Cantacuzino, Sherban. (ed).
1985 Architecture in Continuity: Building in the Islamic World Today, Aperture, New York.

Coomaraswamy, Ananda K.
1934 The Transformation of Nature in Art, Dover Publications, New York.

Cooper, J.C.
1978 An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols, Thames and Hudson, London.

Corbin, Henry.
1969 Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī, trans. Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series XCI, Princeton University Press, New Jersey.

1978 The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism, Trans. Nancy Pearson, Shambhala, London.

Crane, Howard.
1987 *Risāle-i Mi'māriyye*: An Early Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Treatise on Architecture, E.J. Brill, Leiden.

Creswell, K.A.C.
1919 "A Brief Chronology of the Muhammadan Monuments of Egypt", Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archeologoi Orientale, Pp. 35-164.

1937 Muslim Architecture of Egypt, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2 vols.

1958 A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture, Lebanon Bookshop, Beirut.

Critchlow, Keith.
1976 Islamic Patterns: an Analytical and Cosmological Approach, Thames and Hudson, London.

Danishpazhūh, Muḥammad Taqī.
1952 "Ikhwān-i Ṣafā", Mihr, number 8, Tehran.

Al-Dāwūdī, Muḥammad.
1986 *Al-Masjid fī al-Kitāb wal-Sunna wa Aqwāl al-'Ulamā'*, Dar al-Wafā' lil-Ṭibā'ah wal-Nashr, al-Manṣūrah.

Devonshire, R.L.
1921 Some Cairo Mosques And Their Founders, Constable & Company Limited, London.

Devonshire, R.L.
1925 Quatre-Vingts Mosquées et Autres Monuments Musulmans Du Caire, Société Royale de Géographie D'Egypte, Cairo.

Al-Ḍhāhirī, Khalīl.
1894 *Zubdat Kashf al-Mamālik fī Bayān al-Ṭuruq wal-Masālik*, trans. P. Ravaisse, *Zoubdet Kashf el-Mamalik*: Tableau Politique et Administratif de l'Egypte, de la Syrie et du Hidjāz sous la Domination des Sultans Mamlouks du XIIIe au XVe siécle, Le Caire.

Dickie, James.
1965 "The Development of the Mosque Form in Relation to the Needs of the Muslim Liturgy: With a Special Referance to Mosque Architecture in Egypt", The Islamic Review, Woking, Sept-Oct.

Dodd, Erica Cruikshank & Khairallah, Shereen.
1981 The Image of the Word: A Study of Quranic Verses in Islamic Architecture, American University, Beirut, Vols. I & II.

Dunlop, D.M.
1971 Arab Civilization, Longman & Librairie du Liban, Beirut.

Ḍumayriyyah, 'Othmān Jom'ah.
1982 *Al-Taṣawwur al-Islāmī lil-Kawn wal-Ḥayah wal-Insān*, Dār al-Arqam, Kuweit.

Durkee, Abdullah Nuridin.
1987 "Tradition and Technology", in Muslim Education Quarterly, vol.4, No.3, Spring Issue, The Islamic Academy, Cambridge.

Eaton, Gai.
1985 Islam and the Destiny of Man, George Allen and Unwin, London,.

Eisenstadt, S.N. (ed.)
1972 Post-Traditional Societies, W.W. Norton & Company, New York.

El-Emary, Amal.
1978 *"I'ādat Isti'māl al-Rukhām fī al-'Aṣr al-Mamlūkī"*, Islamic Archeological Studies, vol.1, Cairo.

Eliade, Mircea.
1959 The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, trans. W.R. Trask, Brace & World Inc., New York.

1974 Patterns in Comparative Religion, Trans. by R. Sheed, New American Library, New York.

El Said, Issam & Parman, A.
1976 Geometric Concepts in Islamic Art, The World of Islam Festival Trust, Scorpion Publishing Ltd., Guildford.

Faris, N.A.
1946 The Arab Heritage, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Al-Farouqi, Lois Lamya.
1985 Islam and Art, National Hijra Council, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Fatḥī, Ḥassan.
n.d. Mosque Architecture, Conference in King 'Abdul-'Aziz University, Jeddah.

Fernandes, Leonor.
1980 The Evolution of the Sufi Khāngāh, PhD thesis, Princeton University, New Jersey.

Foster, George M.
1965 Traditional Cultures ; and the Impact of Technological Change, Harper and Row, New York.

Gaudefroy-Demombynes, Maurice.
1984 Muslim Institutions, Greenwood Press, Publishers, Connecticut, Revised Edition.

Ghali, Mirrit Boutros.
1972 Tradition for the Future: Human Values and Social Purpose, The Alden Press, Oxford.

Al-Ghazzālī, Abī Ḥāmid.
1971 *Al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fī Sharḥ Ma'ānī Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusnā*, ed. by F. Shehadah, Dār al-Mashriq, Beirut.

1982 *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, trans. by Maulana Fazlul Karim, Taj Company, Delhi, 4 vols.

1983 Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship, Translated from the *Iḥyā'* by Muhtar Holland, The Islamic Foundation, London.

1983(a) *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 4 vols.

Grabar, Oleg (ed.).
1959 "Al-Mushatta, Baghdad, and al-Wasit", The World of Islam: Studies in Honour of P.K. Hitti, ed. R.B. Winder, London.

1973 The Formation of Islamic Art, Yale University Press, London, second edition.

1983 "Sign and Symbols in Islamic Architecture", Architecture and Community: Building in the Islamic World Today, ed. Renata Holod, Aperture, Millerton, New York.

1984 Muqarnas: An Annual on Islamic Art and Architecture, Volume 2, Yale University Press, New Haven.

Green, A.H. (ed.).
1984 In Quest of an Islamic Humanism: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Memory of Mohamed al-Nowaihi, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo.

Al-Gu'barī, 'Abd al-Raḥīm.
1884 *Al-Mokhtār fī Kashf al-Asrār*, Dār al-Ṭibā'ah wal-Nashr, Damascus.

Guénon, René.
1942 The Crisis of the Modern World, Luzac and Co., London.

1990 "Meaning of the Octagon", Avaloka, vol. V, Nos. 1 & 2.

Gülgönen, Ahmet.
1988 "A Typo-Morphological Approach to Design Thinking", Symposium held by the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies, Cambridge.

Haeri, Shaykh Fadhlallah.
1990 The Elements of Sufism, Elements Books Limited, Dorset.

Haider, Gulzar.
1985 "The City Never Lies", Inquiry 2, 6th June.

1988 "Islam, Cosmology, and Architecture", Symposium held by the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies, Cambridge.

Ḥakamī, Shaykh Ḥāfiḍh Ibn Aḥmed.
n.d. *Mi'rāj al-Qubūl*, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 2 vols.

Hakim, Besim Selim.
1986 Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles, KPI Limited, London.

Al-Ḥalabī, 'Alī Ibn Burhān al-Dīn.
1329 A.H. *Al-Sīrah al-Ḥalabiyyah*, Cairo, 2 vols.

Al-Ḥamawī, Yāqūt.
1866-73 *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, Dār al-Ishrāq, Beirut, 6 vols.

Ḥamzah, ʻAbd al-Laṭīf.
1947 *Al-Ḥarakah al-Fikriyyah fī Miṣr fī al-ʻAṣrayn al-Ayyūbī wal-Mamlūkī al-Awwal*, Dār al-Fikr al-ʻArabī, Cairo.

Hanna, Nelly.
1984 "Construction Work in Ottoman Cairo (1517-1798)", Supplement aux Annales Islamologiques, Cairo.

Al-Hassan, Ahmad Y. and Hill, Donald R.
1986 Islamic Technology: An Illustrated History, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Hautecoeur et Wiet, Gaston.
1932 Les Mosquées du Caire, Paris, 2 vols.

Helmi, Mahmoud.
1983 *Al-Taṣawwuf: al-Ittijāh al-Salafī fī al-ʻAṣr al-Ḥadīth*, Dār al-Da'wah, Alexandria.

Herz Bey, Max.
1899 La Mosquées du Sultan Hassan au Caire, Comité de Conservation, Le Caire.

Al-Ḥijjī, Ḥayāt Nāṣir.
1984 *Aḥwāl al-ʻĀmmah fī Ḥukm al-Mamālīk: Dirāsah fī al-Jawānib al-Siyāsiyyah wal-Iqtiṣādiyyah wal-Ijtimāʻiyyah*, Sharikat Kādhimah lil-Nashr, Kuwait.

Hill, Derek.
1964 Islamic Architecture and its Decoration, Faber and Faber, London.

Hjärpe, Jan.
1978 "The Symbol of the Centre and its Religious Function in Islam", Religious Symbols and Their Functions, ed. Haralds Biezais, Almqvist & Wiksell International, Sweden.

Holt, P.M.
1986 The Age of the Crusades: The Near east from the Eleventh Century to 1517, Longman, London.

Hourani, George F. (ed.).
1975 Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science, State University of New York Press, Albany.

Humphreys, R. Stephen.
1972 "The Expressive Intent of the Mamluk Architecture of Cairo: A Preliminary Essay", Studia Islamica, 35, Pp. 69-119.

Ḥusayn, ʻAli al-Ṣāfī.
1964 *Al-Adab al-Ṣūfī fī Miṣr fī al-Qarn al-Sābiʻ al-Hijrī*, Dār al-Maʻārif bi-Miṣr, Cairo.

Ibn 'Abbās
n.d. *Al-Isrā' wal-Mi'rāj*, al-Jumhūriyyah Bookshop, Cairo.

Ibn 'Abd al-Barr.
1968 *Jāmi' Bayān al-'Ilm*, Cairo, 12 vols.

Ibn al-Āthir, 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad.
1982 *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, Dār Shādir, Beirut, 13 vols.

Ibn al-Ḥajj, Muḥammad al-'Abdarī.
1929 *Madkhal al-Shar' al-Sharīf 'Ala al-Madhāhib*, al-Maṭba'ah al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo.

Ibn Hishām.
1955 *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, Maṭba'at Muṭaphā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlāduhū, Cairo.

Ibn al-Jawzī.
1966 *Talbīs Iblīs*, Maktabat Iḥyā' al-'Ulūm, Cairo.

Ibn al-Zayyāt.
1907-08 *Al-Kawākib al-Sayyārah fī Tartīb al-Ziyārah*, Bulaq, Cairo.

Ibn 'Arabī, Muhyiddīn.
1911 *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, Cairo.

1975 The Wisdom of the Prophets (*Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*), trans. by Titus Burckhardt & Angela Culme-Seymour, Beshara publications, Gloucestershire.

Ibn Baṭṭūṭah.
1880 *Tuḥfat al-Nuḍḥār fī Gharā'ib al-Amṣār wa 'Ajā'ib al-Asfār*, Paris.

Ibn Iyās.
1963 *Badā'i' al-Zuhūr fī Waqā'i' al-Duhūr*, reprint of the Franz Steiner edition, by Maktabat 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, Cairo, 1963, 2 vols.

Ibn Jamā'a, Badr al-Dīn.
n.d. *Tadhkirat al-Sāmi' wal-Motakallim fī Adab al-'Ālim wal-Mota'allim*, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Copy of the Hayderabad edition.

Ibn Kathīr, Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'īl.
1983 *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aḍhīm*, Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, Beirut, 4 vols.

Ibn Khaldūn, Abī Zayd Ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān.
1959 *Shifa' al-Sā'il li-Tahdhīb al-Masā'il*, al-Maṭba'ah al-Kāthūlīkiyyah, Beirut.

1967 The *Muqaddimah*: An Introduction to History, Trans. Franz Rosenthal, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London.

Ibn Manḍhūr.
n.d. *Lisān al-'Arab al-Muḥīṭ*, Ed. by Yūsuf Khayyāṭ, Dār Lisān al-'Arab, Beirut, 8vols.

Ibn Taghrībirdī, Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Maḥāsin.
1929 *Al-Nujūm al-Ḍhāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wal-Qāhirah*, ed. W. Popper, Bulaq, Cairo.

1956 *Al-Manhal al-Ṣāfī wal-Mostawfī ba'd al-Wāfī*, Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah Press, cairo, reprint, 2.vols.

Ibn Taymiyya, Taqiyy al-Dīn.
1348 A.H. "Al-Ṣūfiyyah wal-Fuqarā'", in *Majmū' Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām*, Cairo.

Ibrāhīm, Laila 'Ali.
1970 "The *Zāwiya* of Zain al-Dīn Yūsuf in Cairo", Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Institut, Band 34, Cairo.

1975 "The Transitional Zones of Domes in Cairene Architecture", Kunst des Orients, X, Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, Wiesbaden, Pp. 1-23.

1976 Mamluk Monuments of Cairo, Instituto Italiano di Cultura Per la R.A.E., Cairo.

Al-Idfawī, Kamāl al-Dīn Ja'far.
1966 *Al-Ṭāli' al-Sa'īd al-Jāmi' Asmā' Nujabā' al-Ṣa'īd*, al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah lil-Ta'līf wal-Tarjamah, Cairo.

Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'.
n.d. *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' wa Khillān al-Wafā'*, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, 4 vols.

'Illāwī, Ibrāhīm.
1985 "The *Khitat*: Early Islamic Cities", Lecture at Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge.

Irwin, Robert.
1986 The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250-1382, Croom Helm, London.

Islamic Capitals Organization
1990 *Usus al-Taṣmīm wal-Takhṭiṭ al-Ḥaḍarī fī al-'Uṣūr al-Islāmiyyah al-Mukhtalifah: Dirāsah Taḥlīliyyah 'ala al-'Āṣimah al-Qahirah*, International Press, Cairo.

'Issa, A.
1979 Ḥaqā'iq 'An al-Taṣawwuf, Diwan Press, Norwich.

Jairazbhoy, R.A.
1962 "The History of the Shrines at Mecca and Medina", Islamic Review, 50, Jan-Feb.

Al-Jīlī, 'Abd al-Karīm.
1983 Universal Man, trans. by Titus Burckhardt, Beshara Publications, Paris.

Jolivet, Jean.
1980 Islam Philosophy and Science, Four Public Lectures Organized by the Unesco, The Unesco Press, Vendome, June.

Kabir, Humayun.
1955 Science, Democracy and Islam and Other Essays, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London.

Al-Kālābādhī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad.
1960 *Al-Ta'arruf li-Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, trans. by Arberry, Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo.

Karīm, Chahinda.
1979 *Masājid Umarā' al-Sulṭān al-Nāṣir Ibn Qalāwūn*, PhD thesis, Cairo University, Cairo.

1988 "The Mosque of Aṣlam al-Bahā'ī al-Silaḥdār (746/1345)", Annales Islamologiques, Tome XXIV, Cairo.

Kessler, Christel
1976 The Carved Masonry Domes of Medieval Cairo, AARP, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo.

Khalīfah, Ḥaji.
n.d. *Kashf al-Ḍhunūn 'an Asāmī al-Kutub wal-Funūn*, al-Mathnī Bookshop, Baghdad, Offset Reprint.

Khan, Khan Sahib Khaja.
1982 Studies in Tasawwuf, Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, Delhi.

Al-Kindī.
1908 *Ṭabaqāt al-Wulāh wal-Quḍāh*, Maṭba'at al-Ābā' al-Yasū'iyyūn, Beirut.

King, David.
1982 "Astronomical Alignments in Medieval Islamic Religious Architecture", Annales of the New York Academy of Sciences, 385, Pp. 303-312.

Kuban, Dogan.
1974 Muslim Religious Architecture, Institute of Religious Iconography State University Groningen, E.J. Brill, Leiden, Part I.

1985 Muslim Religious Architecture, Institute of Religious Iconography State University Groningen, E.J. Brill, Leiden, Part II.

Lane, Edward William.
1836 An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, East-West Publications, London, fifth edition.

1863-93 An Arabic-English Lexicon, Edinburgh.

Lane-Poole, Stanley.
1900 A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London.

1906 The Story of Cairo, J.M. Dent & Co., London.

Lapidus, Ira M.
1967 Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages, Student edition, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

1972 "Ayyubid Religious Policy and Development of the Schools of Law in Cairo", Colloque International Sur l'Histoire du Caire (1969), Cairo.

1988 A History of Islamic Societies, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Lawlor, Robert.
1982 Sacred Geometry, Thames and Hudson, London.

Lehrman, Jonas.
1980 Earthly Paradise: Garden and Courtyard in Islam, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.

Lewcock, Ronald.
1978 "Architects, Craftsmen and Builders: Materials and Techniques", in George Michell (ed.), Architecture of rthe Islamic World, Thamesda Hudson, London, second edition.

Lewis, Bernard.
1937 "The Islamic Guilds", The Economic History Review, No. VIII, November.

Lings, Martin.
1961 A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth-Century: Shaikh Aḥmad al-'AlawI His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy, George Allen and Unwin LTD., London.

1976 The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination, World of Islam Festival Publishing Company, Kent.

1981 What is Sufism?, A Mandala Book, Unwin Paperbacks, London.

1991 Symbol and Archetype: A Study of the Meaning of Existence, Quinta Essentia, Cambridge.

Little, Donald P.
1986 History and Historiography of the Mamlūks, Variorum Reprints, London.

Locher, G.W.
1978 Transformation and Tradition and Other Essays, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague.

Maḥmūd, A.
n.d. *Al-Falsafa al-Ṣūfiyya fil Islām*, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, Cairo.

Māhir, Su'ād.
n.d. *Masājid Miṣr wa Awliyā'uhā al-Ṣaliḥūn*, Ministry of *Awqāf*, Cairo, 4. Vols.

Al-Maqrīzī, Taqiyy al-Dīn.
1270 A.H. *Al-Mawā'iḍh wal-I'tibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wal-Āthār*, Bulāq, Cairo Reprint, vols. 1 & 2.

1956 *Kitāb al-Sulūk li-Ma'rifat Dowal al-Mulūk*, Maṭba'at Lajnat al-Ta'līf wal-Tarjamah wal-Nashr, Cairo, 2 vols., second edition of reprint.

Massignon, Louis.
1920 "Les Corps de Métiers et la Cité Islamique", Revue Internationale de Sociologie, Vol.28.

1932 "Islamic Guilds", Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences, The Macmillan Company, New York.

Al-Mas'ūdī, Abī 'Abd al-Raḥmān.
1861-79 *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar*, ed. Barbier de Maynard and Pavet de Courteille, Paris, 2 vols.

Matthews, C.D.
1937 "Al-Iskāfī", Journal of Palestine Oriental Society, XVII.

Mayers, L.A.
1956 Islamic Architects and Their Works, Albert Kundig, Geneva.

Meier, Fritz.
1955 "The Mystery of the Ka'ba: Symbol and Reality in Islamic Mysticism", The Mysteries: Papers From The Eranos Yearbooks, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

Meinecke, Michael.
1971 "Das Mausoleum des Qalā'ūn in Kairo - Untersuchugnen zur Genese der Mamlukischen Architektur-dekoration", Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo, 27, Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, Mainz.

1973 "Die Moschee des Amirs Āqsunqur an-Nāṣirī in Kairo", Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo, Band 29, 1, Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, Mainz.

1976 Die Madrasa des Amīrs Mitqāl in Kairo, Deutsches Archaologisches Institut Kairo, Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, Mainz, 1976.

1985 "Mamluk Architecture. Regional Architectural Traditions: Evolutions and Interrelations", Damaszener Mitteilungen, Band 2, Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, Mainz.

Mo'nis, Ḥussīn.
1981 *Al-Masājid*, al-Majlis al-Waṭanī lil-Thaqāfah wal-Funūn, Kuweit.

Mubārak, 'Alī Pacha.
1306 A.H. *Al-Khiṭaṭ al-Jadīda al-Tawfīqiyyah li-Miṣr wal-Qāhira*, Cairo, 20 vols.

Mubārak, Zakī.
1938 *Al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī fī al-Adab wal Akhlāq*, Cairo, 4.vols.

Muir, Sir William.
1896 The Mamluke or Slave Dynasty of Egypt: 1260-1517 A.D., Smith, Elder, & Co., London.

Muṣṭafā, Shākir.
1988 *Al-Mudun fī al-Islām Ḥattā al-'Aṣr al-'Uthmānī*, Dār al-Salāsil, Riyadh, 2 vols.

Al-Nabbāhīn, 'Alī Sālim.
1981 *Niḍhām al-Tarbiyyah al-Islāmiyyah fī 'Aṣr Dawlat al-Mamālīk fī Miṣr*, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, Cairo.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein.
1964 An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, The Bleknap Press, Cambridge.

1968(a) Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man, Unwin Paperbacks, London, second edition.

1968(b) Science and Civilization in Islam, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.

1975(a) Ideals and Realities of Islam, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London.

1975(b) Islam and the Plight of Modern Man, George Allen and Unwin, London.

1976 Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study, World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd, Kent.

1981 Knowledge and the Sacred: The Gifford Lectures, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

1982 (ed.). Philosophy, Literature, and Fine Arts, Hodder and Stoughton, Kent.

1985 (ed.). Islamic Spirituality, SCM Press Ltd., New York.

1987(a) Islamic Art and Spirituality, Golgonooza Press, London.

1987(b) Traditional Islam in the Modern World, KPI Ltd., London.

Necipoğlu-Kafadar, Gülru.
1986 "Plans and Models in 15th- and 16th-Century Ottoman Architectural Practice", Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, September 1986, vol. XLV, Number 3.

Netton, Ian Richard
1982 Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the thought of the Bethren of Purity, George Allen and Unwin, London.

1989 Allāh Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology, Routledge, London.

Nieuwenhuijze, C.A.O.
1985 The Lifestyles of Islam: Recourse to Classicism Need of Realism, E.J. Brill, Leiden.

Prochazka, Amjad Bohumil.
1986 Mosques, MARP, Zurich.

Parker, Richard B. Sabin, Robin. & Williams, Caroline.
1985 Islamic Monuments in Cairo: A Practical Guide, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo.

Qadir, C.A.
1988 Philosophy and Science in the Islamic World, Routledge, London.

Al-Qalqashandī, Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad.
1918 *Ṣubḥ al-A'shā fī Ṣinā'at al-Inshā*, n.d., reprint by Dār al-Kutub al-Miśriyyah, Cairo, 16 vols.

Qazwīnī.
1848-9 Cosmography, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, Göttingen, 2 vols.

Raymond, André.
1973 Artisans et Commercants au Caire au XVIII' Siecle, Damascus, 2 vols.

Rescher, Nicholas.
1966 Studies in Arabic Philosophy, Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh.

Richmond, Ernest Tatham.
1926 Moslem Architecture: 623 to 1516 Some Causes and Consequences, The Royal Asiatic Society, London.

Rogers, J.M.
1970-71 "The Seljuk Influence on the Monuments of Cairo", Kunst Des Orients, VII, Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, Wiesbaden.

Al-Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn.
1929 *Fīhī mā Fīhi*, trans. by Arberry and Schimmel, Azamgarh.

Sābiq, Sayyid.
1988 *Fiqh al-Sunna*, Maṭābi' al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah, Madina, 4 vols.

Al-Sakhāwī, Abū al-Ḥassan.
1936 *Al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi' Li'ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi'*, Cairo.

1937 *Toḥfat al-Aḥbāb wa Baghyat al-Ṭullāb fī al-Khiṭaṭ wal-Mazārāt wal-Tarājim*, Cairo.

n.d. *Al-Dhayl 'ala Raf' al-'Aṣr aw Baghyat al-'Ulamā' wal-Ruwāh*, al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah lil-Ta'līf wal-Tarjamah wal-Nashr, Cairo.

Sardar, Ziauddin.
1984 The Touch of Midas, Manchester University Press, London.

Satō, Tsugitaka.
1986 "*Iqta'* Policy of Sultan Baybars I", Orient, Vol. XXII, Tokyo, 1986.

Sauvaget, J.
1933 Materiaux pour Servir a l'Histoire de la ville d'Alep, Beirut, 2 vols.

Savory, R.M. (ed.).
1976 Introduction to Islamic Civilization, Camnridge University Press, Cambridge.

Schimmel, Annemarie.
1970 Islamic Calligraphy, Leiden, E.J. Brill.

1975 (and often) Mystical Dimensions of Islam, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.

1976 "The Celestial Garden in Islam", The Islamic Garden, Fourth Year Symposium Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington.

1984 Calligraphy and Islamic Culture, I.B. Tauris and Co Ltd, London.

Schuon, Frithjof.
1961 Stations of Wisdom, trans. G.E. Palmer, Bedfont, Middlesex, Perennial Books, second edition.

1969 Dimensions of Islam, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London.

1972 Understanding Islam, Penguin Books, Baltimore.

Sheḥātah, 'Abdallah Maḥmūd.
1974 *Arkān al-Islām*, al-Hay'ah al-Miṡriyyah al-'Āmmah lil-Kitāb, Cairo.

Shemanel, Philip.
1990 The Sacred in Life and Art, Golgonooza Press, London.

Shils, Edward.
1981 Tradition, Faber and Faber, London.

Snodgrass, Adrian.
1990 Architecture Time and Eternity: Studies in the Stellar and Temporal Symbolism of Traditional Buildings, D.K. Fine Arts Press, Delhi, 2 vols.

Sourdel, Dominique.
1962 "La Politique Religieuse du Caliphe 'Abbaside al-Ma'mūn", Revue des Etudes Islamiques, 30.

Speiser, Philip.
1982 "Restauierungsarbeiten in der Islamischen Altstadt Kairos", Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo, Band 38, Verlag Philipp Von Zabern, Mainz.

Stern, S.M.
1964 "Petitions from the Ayyubid Period", BSO AS, 27.

1966 "Petitions of the Mamluk Period", BSO AS, 29.

Stewart, Desmond.
1968 Great Cairo: Mother of the World, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo, second edition.

Stoddart, William.
1983 Sufism The Mystical Doctrines and Methods of Islam, Taj Company, Delhi.

Al-Subkī, Tāj al-Dīn 'Abd al-Wahāb.
1948 *Mu'īd al-Ni'am wa Mubīd al-Niqam*, Maktabat al-Khangi bi-Miṡr bil-Ishtirāk ma' Maktabat al-Mathnā bi-Baghdad, Cairo, reprint.

Al-Suyūṭī, A.
1968 *Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍarah fī Tārīkh Miṡr wal-Qahirah*, Dār Iḥyā' al-Kitāb, Cairo.

1982 Islamic Cosmology: A study of As-Suyuti's *"al-hay'ah as-saniyyah fil hay'ah al-sunniyyah"*, trans. Anton Heinen, Beirut.

n.d. *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirīn*, al-Nuskhah al-Ūrobbiyyah, Cairo.

Tabaa, Yasser.
1987 "Towards an Interpretation of the Use of Water in Islamic Courtyards and Courtyard Gardens", Journal of Garden History, vol.7, No.3.

1988 "Geometry and Memory in the Design of the Madrasat al-Firdaws in Aleppo", Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies, Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, Cambridge.

Al-Ṭabarī, Abī Ja'far.
n.d. *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, Maktabat Khayyāṭ, Beirut, n.d., 13 vols.

Al-Ṭawīl, Tawfīq.
1946 *Al-Taṣawwuf fī Miṣr Abbān al-'Aṣr al-'Uthmānī*, Maktabat al-'Ādāb, Cairo.

Al-Tirmidhī.
1975 *Al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ: Sunan al-Tirmidhī 209-297 A.H.*, Maktabat Maṭba'at Muṣṭafa al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Awlādahu, Cairo, second edition, 12 vols.

Tibawi, A.L.
1930-31 "*Jamā'ah Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā*", Journal of the American University of Beirut, Beirut.

1972 Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National Systems, Luzac and Company Ltd., London.

Trimingham, J. Spencer.
1973 The Sufi Orders in Islām, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Verstockt, M.
1982 The Genesis of Form: From Chaos to Geometry, Muller, Blond & White, Antwerp, second edition.

Al-Wakīl, 'Abd al-Wāḥid.
1984 "Identity, Tradition and Architecture", in Arab Architecture Past and Present, Arab British Chamber of Commerce, London.

Watson, Major C.M.
1931 The Mosque of Sultan Nasir Mohammad Ebn Kalaoun in the Citadel of Cairo, Cairo.

Watt, William Montgomery.
1962 Islamic Philosophy and Science, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Weiss, Bernard G. & Green, Albert H.
1985 A Survey of Arab History, revised edition, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo.

Wensinck, A.J.
1978 Studies of A.J. Wensinck, Arno Press, New York.

Wiet, Gaston.
1964 Cairo: City of Art and Commerce, trans. Seymour Feiler, University of Oklahoma Press, Oklahoma.

1966 Les Mosquées du Caire, Les Livres de France/Hachette, Poitiers.

Williams, Caroline,
1983 "The City of Cairo: The Mamluks, The Burgi period, 1382-1517", Cairo Today, Cairo, April, Pp. 58-62.

Wilson, C.B.
1984 "The Centre of the World and the Interpretation of Architecture", Edinburgh Architecture Research, vol.11.

1989 "Architect and Community: Traditional Processes and Modern Products", 3rd Asian Congress of Architects, Seoul, 1988, published in Bulletin of the Institute of Industrial Science, Keimyung University, Korea, vol. 11.

1990 "On Modernist Reactions to Traditionalist Interpretations of the Art and Architecture of Traditional Societies - Part I", Edinburgh Architecture Research, vol.17.

1992 "On Modernist Reactions to Traditionalist Interpretation of the Art and Architecture of Traditional Societies - Part 2", Edinburgh Architecture Research, vol. 19.

Wilson, Dunning S. (ed.).
1976 Islam and Medieval Hellenism: Social and Cultural Perspectives, Variorum Reprints, London.

Al-Ya'qūbī.
1967 *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. M.J. de Goeje, E.J. Brill, Leiden.

Al-Zarnūbajī, Burhām al-Islām.
n.d. *Ta'līm al-Muta'allim Ṭarīq al-Ta'allum*, Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo.

## MANUSCRIPTS


'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhuda.
1190 A.H. *Waqfiyyah*, Document number 940, Ministry of Awqāf in Cairo.

Al-Allūsī, No'mān.
n.d. *Ijāza*, Manuscript number 11325, Al-Asad National Library, 3 pages.

Al-Āmidī, Ibrāhīm al-Qaramānī.
n.d. *Risālah fī Bayān 'Adad al-Samāwāt wal-Arḍīn wal-'Arsh wal-Lawḥ wal-Qalam wa 'Ajā'ib al-Samāwāt wa Makān al-Jannah wal-Nār*, Manuscript 6102, Asad National Library, 32 folios.

Al-Hamadhānī, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt.
n.d. *Tamhīdat*, no 1, Basel University Library, MS.MIII (45), 6a.

Al-Manāwī, 'Abd al-Ra'ūf.
1947 *Al-Kawākib al-Dorriyyah*, Manuscript number 260, 259 (*Tārīkh*), Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo.

Al-Maqdīsī,'Izz al-Dīn 'Abd al-Salām.
n.d. *Risālet Tashbīh al-Insān bi-Mamlakah Kāmilat al-Bunyān*, Manuscript number 1442, Asad National Library, Damascus, folio 42.

Al-Ṣarghatmishī, Kāfūr.
n.d. *Waqfiyyah*, Document number 76, Folio 12, Ministry of Awqāf in Cairo.

Al-Suyūṭī, A.
n.d. *Ta'yīd al-Ḥaqīqah al-'Aliyyah wa Tashyīd al-Ṭarīqah al-Shādhiliyyah*, Manuscript number 3014 (*Taṣawwuf*), Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo.

'Awaḍ, al-Shaykh 'Abd al-Raḥīm.
n.d. *Ijāza*, Manuscript number 10775, Al-Asad National Library, 6 pages.

Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyiddīn.
n.d. *Inshā' al-Dawā'ir wal-Jadāwil*, Manuscript number 123, Asad National Library, Damascus.

Author unknown
n.d. *Shifā' al-Qulūb*, Manuscript number 51 (*Taṣawwuf*), Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, Cairo.

Court of al-Bāb al-'Ālī.
(1081 A.H.) Court Record, Court Book number 152, Article number 557.