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MOHAMMAD AL-ASAD

THE MOSQUE OF AL-RIFA^{c}I IN CAIRO

In categorizing the phases of the past, the British historian Eric Hobsbawm identifies one as the "twilight zone," the period that separates history from memory. History itself, according to Hobsbawm, is a past distant enough to be studied with objectivity and dispassion; memory is a past that can still be remembered by the living. The twilight zone is a time which remains part of our consciousness, but is no longer within our reach.[1] It is to this period that the royal mosque of al-Rifa^{c}i, constructed between 1869 and 1912 in Cairo, belongs. Although finished about eight decades ago, it remains a work that exemplifies Egypt's entry into a new phase of architectural development which, in its general character, extends into our own day.[2]

The structure is a difficult one to deal with. Although commissioned in 1869 by Khushyar Hanem, the mother of the Khedive Isma^{c}il (r. 1863–79), it was not completed until 1911, at the time of the Khedive ^{c}Abbas Hilmi II (r. 1892–1914). In the interim, its patrons, its architects, and its design all changed. It also belongs to an extremely eventful phase of Egyptian history when, under the dynasty of Muhammad ^{c}Ali, the political conditions of the country were continuously modified and with them the significance and function of this royal mosque. In its planning and its formal organization, it is visually complex. It is surrounded by a number of historical buildings, the best known of which is the mosque of Sultan Hasan, the monumental structure facing it to the south and separated from it by a street no more than ten meters wide.

In spite — or as a result — of its large size, no clear

Fig. 1. Cairo. Mosque of Muhammad ^{c}Ali. General view. (Photo: Visual Collections, Fine Arts Library, Harvard)

view of this mosque is attainable from a distance. Its location in a dense urban fabric prevents it from having a commanding visual exposure like that enjoyed by the mosque of Muhammad ᶜAli, the first major mosque of the Muhammad ᶜAli dynasty, completed in 1848 and located on top of the nearby Cairo Citadel (fig. 1). Even its most conspicuous elements, the central dome and two minarets, lose much of their visibility, partly as a result of their poor location within the structure, and partly as a result of the competition provided by the domes and minarets of the surrounding mosques.

The site of al-Rifaᶜi is surrounded by relatively narrow streets on three sides and by the spacious Sultan Hasan Square on the fourth, or western, side (fig. 2). Muhammad ᶜAli Square borders the mosque from the southeast. The site can be approached from Muhammad ᶜAli Street which leads into Sultan Hasan Square, or through Muhammad ᶜAli Square. The western approach from Sultan Hasan Square affords a full and frontal view of the monumental western facade (fig. 3); the southeastern approach through Muhammad ᶜAli Square provides an off-axis view of the southern and eastern façades distorted by the effects of a sharp perspective (fig. 4). The tight character of the surrounding streets does not allow for a full vista of the southern northern, or eastern sides: their view is possible only through the aid of elevation drawings (fig. 5). These conditions result in a visual fragmentation of the monument.

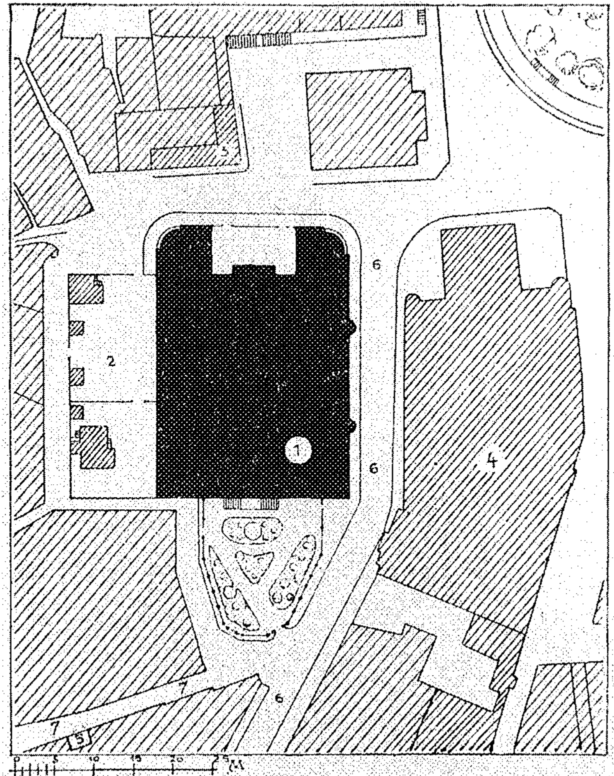

Fig. 2. Mosque of al-Rifaᶜi. Site plan. (From Max Herz, *La Mosquée el-Rifaᶜi*)

Of the structure's façades, the southern one is the most interesting. Its privileged position is more the result of its location facing the mosque of Sultan Hasan and its distance of less than ten meters away from it than of any inherent design feature. The enormous height of both monuments and their proximity give the street between them a canyon effect. The necessarily acute view of that façade gives the impression that it is ignoring the viewer in favor of its historic neighbor. This southern façade and the northern façade of the mosque of Sultan Hasan frame a view centering on the mosque of Muhammad ᶜAli (fig. 6).

In spite of the restrictions imposed by the tight urban surroundings, this mosque was still designed as a freestanding object which would had been better suited for a large and open site. Nevertheless it does not present itself as a three-dimensional composition, but as a juxtapositioning of four separate sides: two of them are symmetrically arranged; on two, the northern and southern sides, the symmetry is partly broken by adding curved bays that connect each of them to the eastern façade. No clear effort was made to differentiate the front, side, and back façades, or to reflect the interior's formal or functional organization. Because of its position facing Sultan Hasan Square, the western side is best qualified to call itself the main façade. It is the only one for which a full frontal view is available, and the only one which has a large central entrance. The southern one is also a contender, however, for it has a monumental arrangement centering on two large entrances, a dome, and two minarets; it is larger than the western one, and its left entry gate is the one currently used as the main public entrance. Even the remaining two, the northern and eastern sides, possess a monumentality that places them in competition with the first two (figs. 7 and 8). In terms of composition, the northern, southern, and western sides are all two-dimensional in design, but the eastern, or qibla, façade has two large projections on the sides that form a court in between and reflect a three-dimensional arrangement.

The only element of visual continuity between the mosque's façades is supplied by the curved corners connecting the structure's southern, eastern, and northern

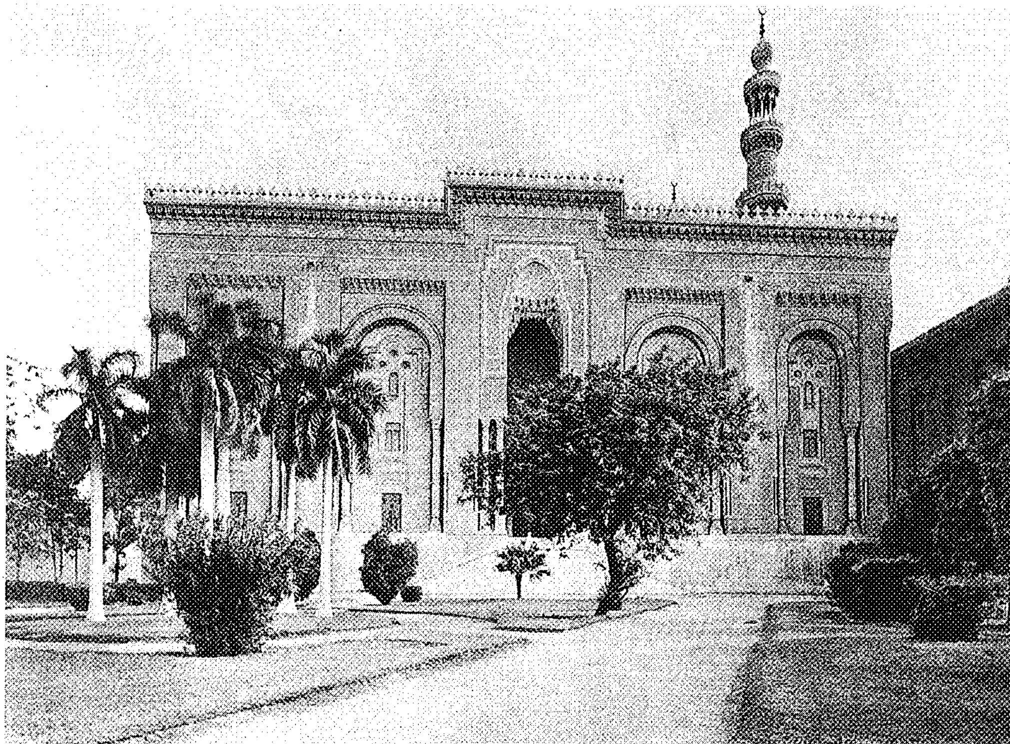

Fig. 3. Mosque of al-Rifaʿi. Western façade. (From Max Herz, *La Mosquée el-Rifaʿi*, fig. 3)

sides, and the upper cornice that wraps around the whole building. Although these features provide a horizontal emphasis, the overall arrangement of the façades stresses verticality by their clear division into bays: eight in the southern and northern elevations, and five in the western one. The surfaces of the structure are heavily articulated with elements such as the cornice composed of an epigraphic frieze, a row of muqarnas half-vaults, and a crenelated top. Each bay is also differentiated by the blind arcades placed within it. These recesses are topped by a muqarnas frieze and are articulated by arches resting on muqarnas capitals and engaged columns, windows (some of which are placed in a cross-shaped outline), carved stone friezes, and half-vaults.

Although these various elements can be found in all four façades, other features are used to differentiate each of them. The western façade is distinguished by the added height of its central bay, the monumental set of stairs leading to it, a set of eight elaborate engaged columns, and a half-vault covering the entrance. The southern façade has minarets with protruding semicircular bases, a sizable dome, and two monumental entrances preceded by a set of stairs. The qibla façade is the only one containing a three-dimensional arrangement of projections and insertions.

Complexity of composition is characteristic of both outside and inside. The monument has entrances on all four façades. How the interior is seen largely depends upon the entrance used. The entrances on the eastern segments of the northern and southern façades lead directly into the prayer hall (fig. 9). The monumental entrance of the western façade opens into a large longitudinal space (fig. 10). The entrances in the western segments of the northern and southern façades lead into bayed chambers connected to both the prayer hall and the longitudinal space flanking the structure's western entrance. The articulate transitional entry process characterizing the Mamluk religious monuments of Cairo is missing. The only spaces separating outside from inside are a few antechambers next to some of the entry gates. Otherwise, the entry is direct. The interior is best described as a faintly lit, heavily and luxuriously decorated group of spaces.

The mosque's plan is essentially a central core surrounded by chambers, five of which are anterooms providing the only transition between inside and out (fig.

Fig. 4. Mosque of al-Rifaᶜi. View from southeast. (From Max Herz, *La Mosquée el-Rifaᶜi*)

11). The central core is dominated by a prayer hall with nine bays; the qibla niche marks the wall of the central eastern bay. The hall can be entered either through one of the two doors in the qibla wall or one in each of the southern and northern sides. A three-bayed area, of which the central one is domed, borders the prayer hall from the west. The two side bays function as transitional spaces connecting the entrances to the various parts of the central core. In turn, the three bays adjoin three narrower ones opening onto a sizable longitudinal space.

The mosque has six domes of which only two project above the exterior cornice line (fig. 12). Of the two, only the one covering the chamber situated between the two minarets is visible from the outside at ground level, and even this one seems undersized considering the dimensions of the façade behind which it is located. The second dome covers the central bay of the prayer hall. Of the remaining four domes, one is located over the central chamber flanking the prayer hall from the west, the remaining three cover chambers located in the northern part of the monument.

The length of the building is 98m. and its width is 72m. The total area is 7,056m^2, of which 1,767m^2 make up the prayer hall. The only open area in the monument, the court defined by the projections located on in its eastern side, occupies 630m^2, leaving 6,426m^2 that are covered. Outside, the building ranges in height from 26.5m. at the eastern side to 33m. at the western side; the range results from a sloping site.[3]

The tradition of Mamluk architecture, which began in the second half of the thirteenth century and continued, though in a modified form, up to the early nineteenth, first comes to mind when one attempts to locate the monument within a historical and geographical framework. Most of the major Mamluk monuments are in Cairo, although important ones were also built in Jerusalem, Damascus, Aleppo, and Tripoli. The mosque of al-Rifaᶜi can easily be mistaken for one of these Mamluk structures, and thus misdated by four to six centuries. Its Cairene Mamluk architectural features include its minarets, which are similar to the one found on the mosque of Asanbugha, among other fourteenth-century Cairene

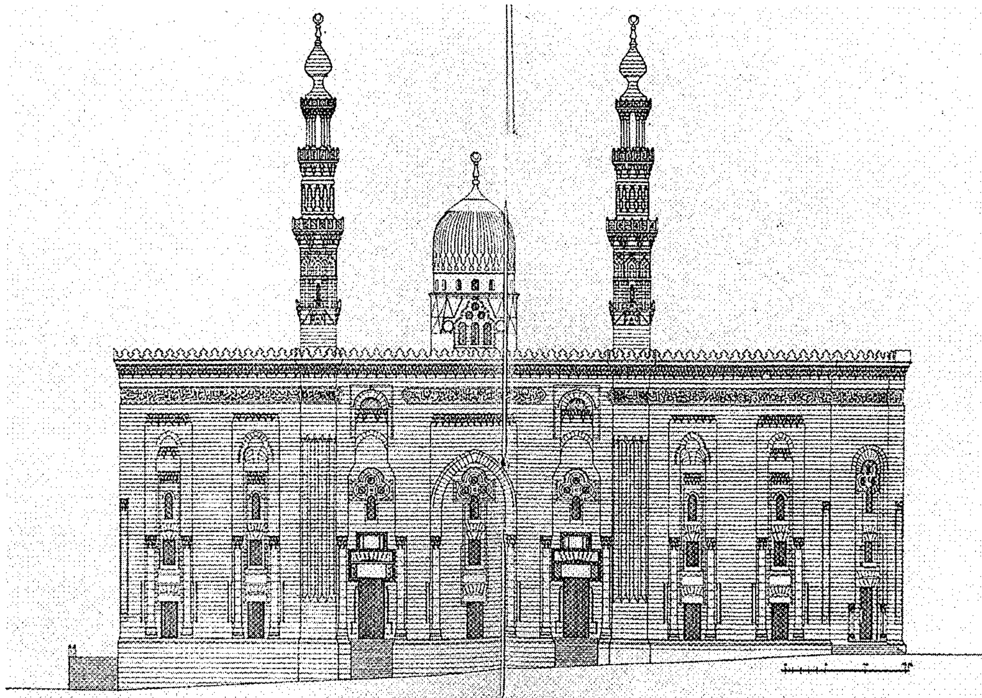

Fig. 5. Mosque of al-Rifa^ci. Southern elevation. (Herz, *La Mosquée el-Rifa^ci*, pl. 13)

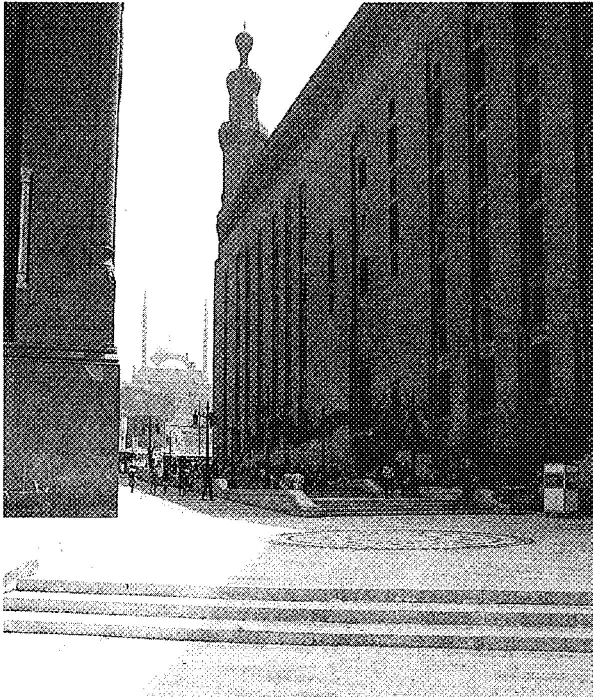

Fig. 6. Cairo. Mosque of Muhammad ᶜAli. (View framed by mosques of Sultan Hasan and al-Rifaᶜi)

Mamluk mosques. The shape of the main dome's exterior supports and the arrangement of its windows can also be found in a number of late Mamluk structures, for example, the mausoleum of Sultan Tuman Bay I (ca. 1500).[4] More importantly, the mosque of al-Rifaᶜi establishes direct references to the neighboring mosque of Sultan Hasan. Ever since the latter mosque was erected, the two have come to be viewed as inseparable. They are similar in their general massing, their use of materials, color, and architectural details. It is therefore not surprising that the two are often conceived as contemporaries. The design of the mosque of al-Rifaᶜi is an attempt to relate it to the golden age of Egypt's Islamic architectural heritage.

Characteristic of Mamluk religious structures was their strong interaction with their surroundings. The composition of medieval Cairo was dense and compact; the streets jagged and narrow, and the structures built close to each other. Sizable spaces providing open vistas were rare, especially in the central parts of the city.[5] Such a tight urban setting affects how Cairene buildings can be seen. Even the more monumental of the city's structures can rarely be perceived in totality, and a medieval Cairene building could present itself neither as a three-

Fig. 7. Mosque of al-Rifa^{c}i. Northern façade. (Photo: Howayda al-Harithy)

dimensional composition nor even as two-dimensional façades, but only as segments of façades. The city's unusual wealth and density of religious structures meant that it also had to compete with a large number of surrounding monuments, all vying for attention.

To these conditions Cairene designers responded with creativity and innovation. Instead of expressing the exterior of their structures as a series of façades or a three-dimensional composition of forms, they placed their emphasis on three elements, the minaret, dome, and portal of the mosque. This concentration allowed them to overcome the strictures imposed by the surrounding urban fabric by strategically locating each element so that it would be easily and powerfully visible at some point. Because of their height, the dome and minaret were intended for the distant viewer; and the portal would impress itself as the viewer approached. This is not to say that the remaining elements of a structure were to be ignored, but they were not emphasized. This selective approach towards design can be seen even in a structure as monumental as the mosque of Sultan Hasan, most of whose façades are as unadorned as a mid-twentieth-century office building, in contrast to the elaborately treated minarets, dome, and portals. The façade containing the minarets and dome attracts attention through its decorative program and its heavy architectural articulation. The portal is distinguished not only by its elaborate decoration and overall composition, but also by a slight shift in axis from the rest of the façade. In the final result, these three elements assume full architectural representation of the monument.

In the nineteenth century a number of drastic changes in Cairo ended this interactive relationship. One of them was the introduction of wide, straight thoroughfares often converging at large squares, a system of urban planning that not only determined the organization of

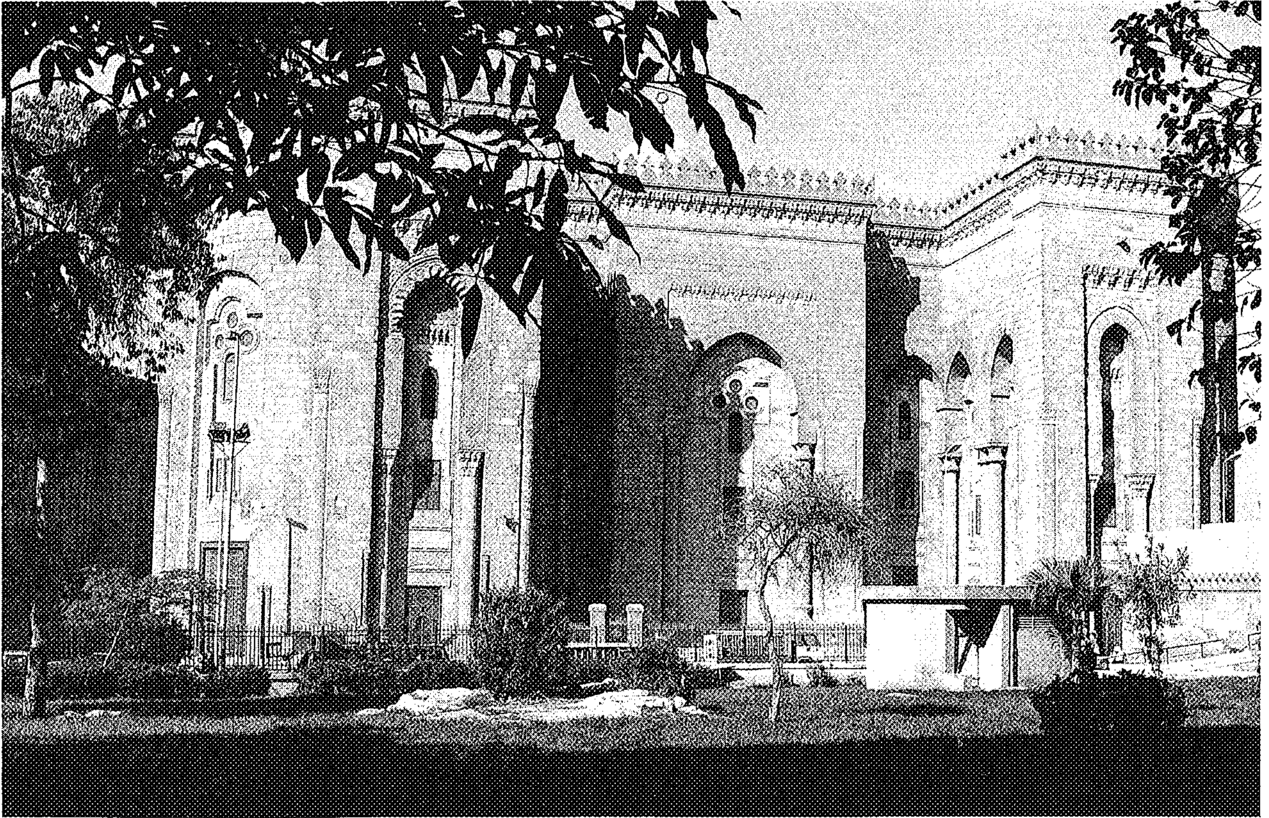

Fig. 8. Mosque of al-Rifaʿi. Eastern façade. (Photo: Howayda al-Harithy)

the new sections of Cairo, but also influenced the old ones.[6] New areas and neighborhoods such as ʿAbbasiyya, begun in 1849, and Ismaʿiliyya and Azbakiyya, begun in 1867, were planned around a network of thoroughfares.[7] In the medieval city, squares were constructed adjacent to historical monuments such as the mosque of Sultan Hasan and Bab al-Futuh. These squares functioned as intersections for the straight and wide thoroughfares which cut through the maze-like fabric of the medieval city. They included the street (*shariʿ*) of ʿAbd al-ʿAziz which set out from al-ʿAtaba al-Khadra Square, and the street of Muhammad ʿAli which connected Sultan Hasan Square to that of al-ʿAtaba al-Khadra.[8]

These innovations were directly imported from Europe. The appearance of a wide boulevard was in fact one of the first and clearest indications of Westernization in any Islamic city. The rationale behind it was practical: to allow the use of wheeled carriages, a method of transportation that required wide and straight roads with no obstructions, a set of requirements not available in a city such as medieval Cairo. Many streets were straightened and widened for this purpose during the governorship of Muhammad ʿAli (r. 1805–48), Egypt's first modern ruler.[9] Khedive Ismaʿil also straightened roads and constructed new ones to relieve Cairo of some of its traffic congestion, although in his case the motive was just as much to give his city the appearance of a contemporary Western metropolis as it was to ease the flow of traffic.[10] These thoroughfares also allowed the ruler's troops easier access to all parts of the city and tightened his control over it, since maneuver was impossible in the narrow crooked lanes of the old city.

This cutting of avenues had a profound effect on architecture. The buildings of pre-modern Cairo had been built to fit into a specific urban fabric. Now that this fabric was altered, a new relationship between the buildings and their surroundings had to be developed. Instead of bordering narrow dead-end streets, the buildings now faced wide and straight arteries, many of them leading to spacious monumental squares. Vistas were created, and alleys that once belonged solely to the immediate neighborhood lost their semi-private character

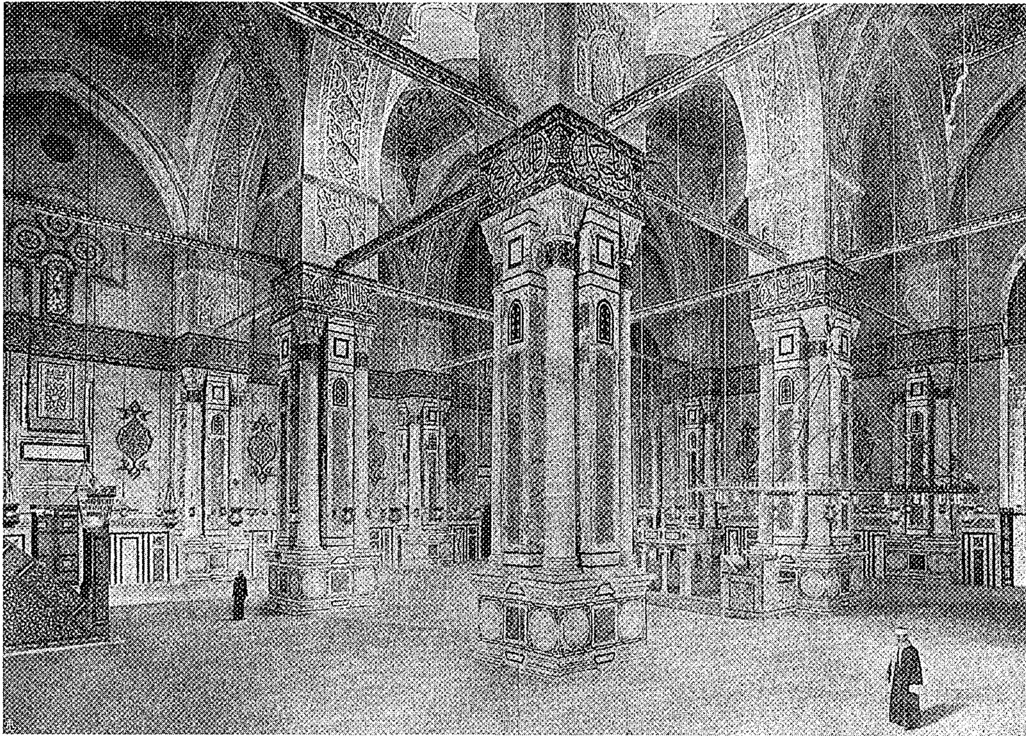

Fig. 9. Mosque of al-Rifaᶜi. Prayer hall. (From Max Herz, *La Mosquée el-Rifaᶜi*, pl. 18)

and were converted into entirely public passageways. The street demanded more attention from the surrounding structures. The buildings of a medieval city that could once turn their backs on the adjacent streets now had to face them, and the introversion of the premodern Islamic urban form was replaced by the extroversion of a Western one. The minaret, dome, and portal, which once exclusively represented the mosque, had to share that privilege with the rest of the structure, which consequently began to receive greater attention from their designer. The full façade became important. The process of exposing the city was initiated.

By the late nineteenth century, the assimilation of Western details and design patterns, a process initiated by Muhammad ᶜAli, proceeded rapidly until it became a dominant phenomenon. One result was the disappearance of traditional elements such as the mashrabiyya and the introduction of new ones such as the classical order and its accompaniments, symmetry and frontal axiality. These innovations also changed people's attitudes towards old buildings. They began to appreciate their historical significance and to express that appreciation by clearing away surrounding additions so that monuments could become visible and free-standing objects.[11]

Both local inhabitants and Western visitors commented on this break with the past. The author and administrator ᶜAli Pasha Mubarak, while Minister of Public Works during the 1860's, was in charge of executing many of the urban and architectural projects ordered by the Khedive Ismaᶜil.[12] In his *al-khiṭaṭ al-tawfīqiyya al-jadīda li-Miṣr al-Qāhira wa Muduniha wa Bilādiha al-Qadīma wa'l-Mashhūra*, Mubarak tells us how a member of Egypt's ruling elite viewed these changes. He divides the architecture around him into two categories: "Rumi," or European buildings built in the "new" style, and the older, or indigenous, ones built in the "old" style. He clearly prefers the imported models: wide thoroughfares and large squares solve the problems of congestion and provide for much needed ventilation in old, overcrowded neighborhoods. The new structures are aesthetically superior to the old ones because they emphasize proportions and provide three-dimensional surface elements such as cornices; they are less expensive, more spacious, and more responsive to functional requirements; they utilize more efficient circulation patterns and express a better distribution of spaces than the old houses. In con-

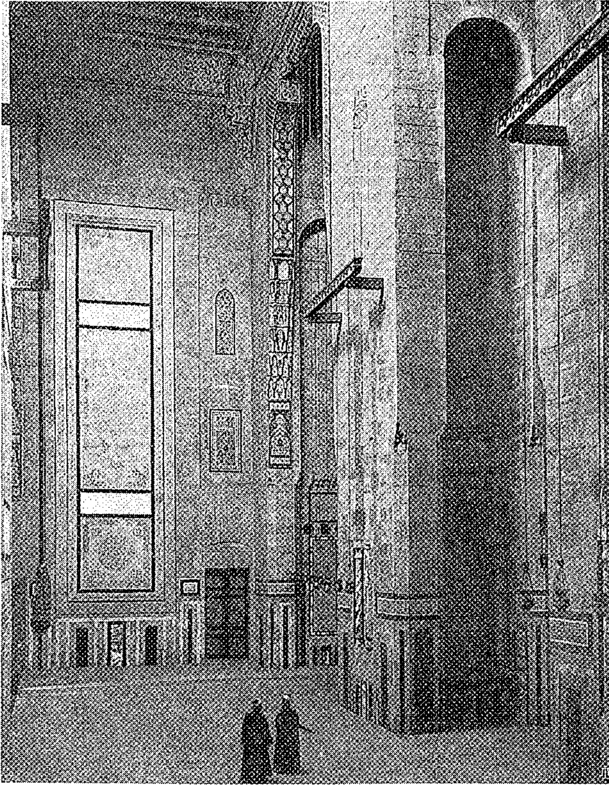

Fig. 10. Mosque of al-Rifa^{c}i. Interior (From Max Herz, *La mosquée el-Rifa^{c}i*, pl. 20)

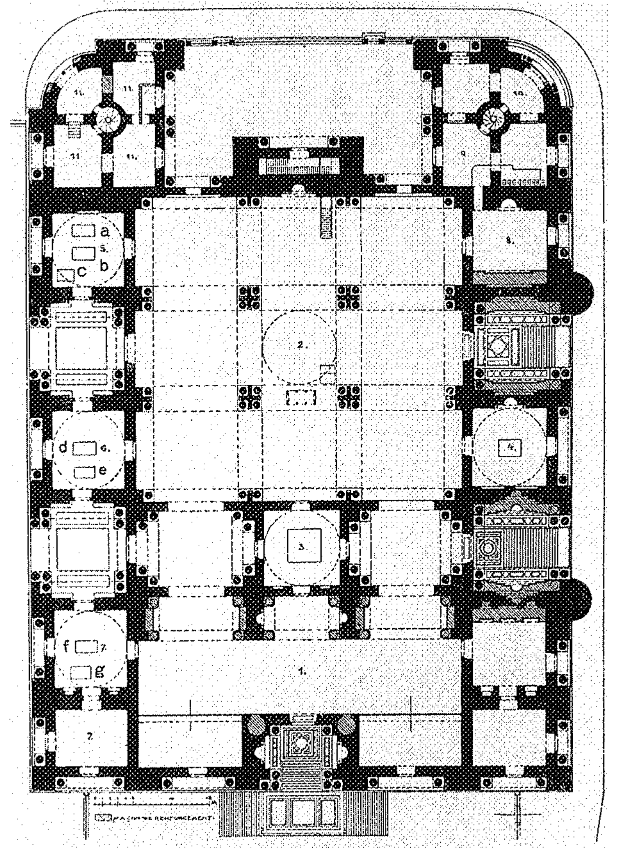

Fig. 11. Mosque of al-Rifa^{c}i. Plan. (From Max Herz, *La mosquée el-Rifa^{c}i*, pl. 10)

trast to the buildings of the "old" style, the buildings of the "Rumi" style have no *qā^{c}a* taking up a disproportionately large segment of a house and avoid the unpleasant arrangement of placing living quarters adjacent to odor-emitting latrines; they are sensitive to sanitary considerations and provide the necessary light and ventilation. Mubarak attributes their introduction to Muhammad ^{c}Ali who employed European architects to design some of his palaces, a practice that spread to members of his family and to his high officials. The popularity of Western design methods reached its culmination during the rule of the Khedive Isma^{c}il, when traditional architectural vocabularies were totally supplanted in the secular works commissioned by members of Egypt's ruling elite.

About architectural revival, Mubarak mentions that a number of new buildings were made to "emulate older Arab ones," a practice introduced by Julius Franz (whom he refers to as "Franz Pasha"), a German architect working in Cairo.[13] Mubarak presents the introduction of the Mamluk revival, not as a continuation of Egypt's premodern Islamic traditions of building, but as the product of Western approaches to architecture. To him, the return to Mamluk architecture was a totally imported phenomenon.

Somewhat inconsistently, Mubarak shows some appreciation for certain monuments of Islamic architecture, but that did not keep him from having hundreds of medieval mosques and houses torn down and replaced by new boulevards and squares during his tenure as Minister of Public Works.[14] The monuments he admired, however, he liked to isolate from their surroundings and set in large squares. In his description of the changes made to the area of the mosque of Sultan Hasan, he writes: "The monument has increased in splendor by the completion of the square to be erected at the western end adjacent to it and to the mosque of al-Rifa^{c}i. With that, the mosques become disengaged from the buildings which neighbor them, and their beauty becomes apparent to the perceiver from every direction."[15] Other members of the Egyptian elite began to appreciate their

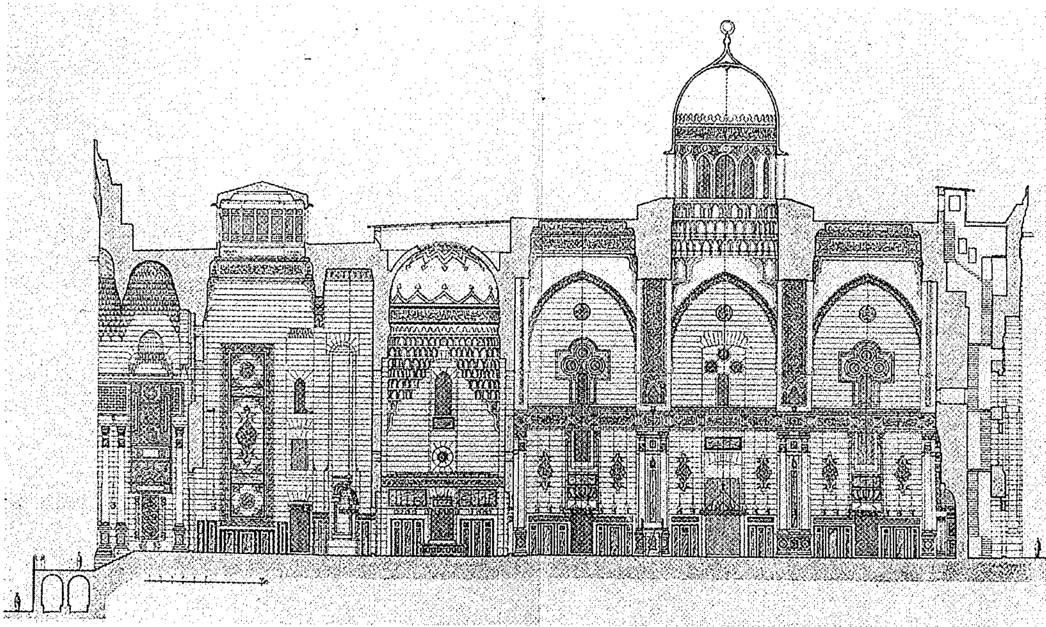

Fig. 12. Mosque of al-Rifaʿi. Longitudinal section. (From Max Herz, *La mosquée el-Rifaʿi*, pl. 16)

country's architectural heritage, and the Islamic architectural revival provided one avenue through which this interest was expressed. The revival of a given architectural tradition of course involved a modification, rather than a total re-creation, of the qualities that distinguish that tradition from others, because the architectural vocabulary of the past is usually used within the framework of contemporary architectural conception. Mubarak meant by revivalist buildings those built in the "new" style, but emulating masterpieces of the Islamic architectural heritage. The modern nature of the structure is taken for granted. However, the use of revivalist vocabularies provides the contemporary building with an added level of significance. This significance can include a quality of exoticism, a whimsical effect, or a specific mood. It can also emphasize specific historical or regional connections, or even propagate specific ideological beliefs. But whatever the significance, the Islamic architectural revival remained a phenomenon imported from the West.

The idea of carrying out a systematic analysis of the architectural heritage of a historical period is one which, in a rudimentary form, can be traced back to mid-fifteenth-century Italy and the Renaissance. In architecture, this period is characterized by a fascination among Italians with their classical (i.e., Roman) past and attempts to re-create it. These attempts amounted to individual interpretations of the past rather than imitation based on scientifically acquired evidence. The first attempts at more accurate architectural documentation did not come until the eighteenth century and the carrying out of excavations at historical sites such as Herculaneum and Pompei.[16] This more systematic investigative spirit soon spread beyond the confines of classical antiquity to include other architectural vocabularies, both Western and non-Western. Of the non-Western vocabularies, those of the Islamic world were among the earliest to be examined, and by the mid-nineteenth century, studies documenting the architecture of regions such as Algeria (by M. A. Delannoy), Egypt and Iran (by Pascal Coste), and individual monuments such as the Alhambra (by Owen Jones) had been published.[17] When in the nineteenth century the Western world began to question the dominance of the classical revival and to search for alternative prototypes, the architectural heritage of the Islamic world provided a possible (though never widespread) source of inspiration. Also, for the first time, a significant body of information dealing with Islamic architecture was accessible not only in the West, but, theoretically at least, in the Islamic world itself; the reintroduction to its own architectural heritage was achieved through Western mediation.

The systematic analysis of the Islamic regions began in the nineteenth century with the publication of the

Description de l'Égypte, the multi-volume work compiled by scholars accompanying Napoleon's army during its occupation of Egypt from 1798 to 1801.[18] In it, various elements of Egyptian life, including its architecture, are thoroughly documented in both writing and illustration. As Edward Said has pointed out, one consequence of the *Description de l'Égypte* for the West was the modernizing of its knowledge of the Orient. For Egypt, it supplanted Egyptian history which now lost its autonomy and became directly identified with European history.[19] The position of both the examiner and the object of examination and their relationship to each other were to be modified.

It is within the context of these various physical and cultural frameworks that the mosque of al-Rifaᶜi can be understood most fully. The mosque is a product of the urban and architectural transformations which a city such as Cairo had undergone in the nineteenth century. It is a monument which would be best suited for large open spaces and would be best viewed through wide vistas. It clearly reflects the loss of the portal-minaret-dome supremacy over mosque design, their integration into the rest of the mosque, and the ascendancy of the façade as a unified whole. It is a monument designed according to principles of total symmetry, frontal axiality, and a clear articulation of façades into equal bays. In plan, it maintains almost nothing of the systems of organization distinguishing the medieval mosques of Cairo. Its entry sequence has none of the intricacies of its Mamluk predecessors, and the courtyard and iwans, around which Mamluk mosques were organized, are nonexistent. The arrangement of a prayer area surrounded by such a large number of funerary chambers is alien to the Mamluk architectural tradition. The incorporation of Mamluk features is limited to elements of surface decoration. In the final result, this is a monument which combines a Mamluk morphology with a nineteenth-century Beaux-Arts classical-revival syntax.

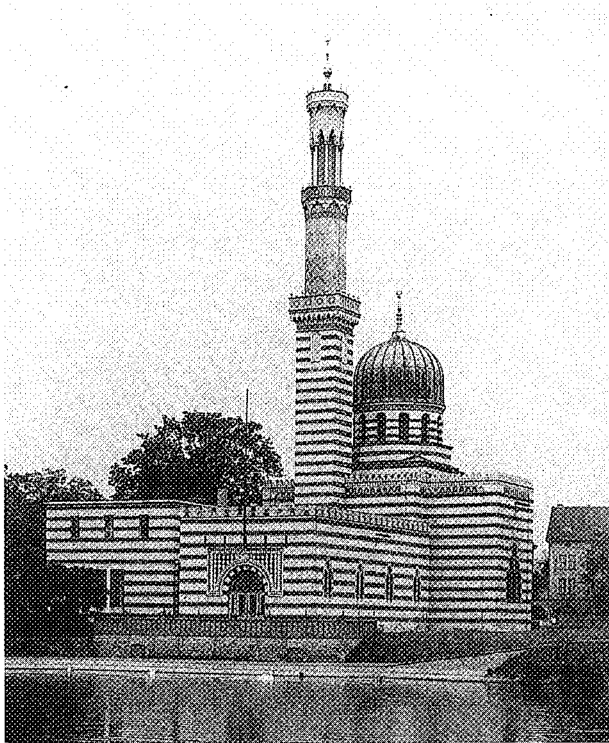

Fig. 13. Potsdam, Germany. Water-pumping station. (From Stefan Koppelkamm, *Der imaginare Orient*, p. 88)

The design of a monument such as the mosque of al-Rifaᶜi provides a practical extension of Western scholarship on the Islamic world as applied to architecture. It is related directly to the study of the Mamluk heritage by Westerners, a process initiated in the first half of the nineteenth century and exemplified by the publication of the *Description de l'Égypte* and Pascal Coste's *Architecture arabe, ou monuments du Caire.*[20] In these publications, Mamluk architecture, a term often used interchangeably with Arab architecture, was for the first time consciously presented as an identifiable and coherent historical system of architectural expression. The next step was to revive elements of this newly documented vocabulary and incorporate them into contemporary architectural practice. In Europe, an early example of a Mamluk-revival structure is a water-pumping station designed by Ludwig Persius in Potsdam (1841–45; fig. 13).[21] Even in Egypt, this process was carried out by European architects working in the country, such as Julius Franz.[22] Consequently, Western efforts are to be credited not only with documenting the Mamluk architectural heritage, but also with reintroducing it into the late-nineteenth-century architectural production of Egypt.

The argument that the mosque of al-Rifaᶜi is a product of Western architectural practice is strengthened when the people responsible for its design and execution are identified, a task complicated by the over forty years that separated the date the monument was commissioned from its completion. As a result, a number of architects and artisans were involved in the various stages of its realization. Originally, the architect Husayn Fahmi Pasha was commissioned by Khushyar Hanem to draw up plans for the monument. Construction using his design then began under the supervision of Khalil Aga, the chief eunuch of Khushyar Hanem's palace. However, for a

variety of financial and technical reasons, building was soon halted. Ismaᶜil was not pleased with the increasing costs of the monument, which were expected to exceed half a million Egyptian pounds.[23] He sought the advice of a European architect named Gai concerning the completion of the mosque. Gai's recommended modifications did not please the patron, so he was dismissed and work was eventually continued according to the original plan.[24] Soon after Ismaᶜil's abdication in 1880, construction again came to a complete stop. Then, Princess Khushyar died in 1885, and the mosque was left untouched until 1905 when the Khedive ᶜAbbas Hilmi II ordered its completion. This time, the task was entrusted to the Austrian architect Max Herz, the then head architect of the Committee for the Conservation of Arab Monuments in Cairo.[25]

In addition to the participation of Husayn Fahmi, Gai, and Max Herz, an Italian architect by the name of Carlo Virgilio Silvagni worked on the completion of the mosque during the second phase of its construction.[26] Mubarak also contributed his share of suggestions. He mentions that in order to deal with structural problems encountered with the four central piers of the prayer hall, he recommended their elimination and the utilization of a large steel dome to cover that area. He even consulted a "famous workshop in Europe" to study his suggestion, evaluate its feasibility, and provide cost estimates.[27]

In spite of this relatively long list of architects and experts, the two who left their mark on the monument are Husayn Fahmi and Max Herz. However, Fahmi, who died during the first phase of construction, left behind only one visual document relating to the monument, a preliminary elevation sketch of the southern façade (fig. 14) which bears little resemblance to what had actually been built by the time construction came to a halt in 1880 (fig. 15).[28] Thus, the main problem faced with assessing Fahmi's contribution is the lack of documentation. Published information dealing with him is limited. We do know that he was a prince of the Egyptian royal family, and that he was referred to as Husayn Fahmi Pasha *al-miᶜmar* (the architect). In 1840, he was sent to study in France as part of Muhammad ᶜAli's fifth and largest educational mission. Among the members of this mission were the Khedive Ismaᶜil and ᶜAli Mubarak. Like Mubarak, Husayn Fahmi specialized in the military sciences, but also developed an interest in architecture and related fields. Concerning his professional career, he held the position of deputy-director (*wakil*) of the Waqfs Department.[29]

The information available on Herz's contribution to the design and construction of the mosque of al-Rifaᶜi is more complete. He wrote a monograph devoted to this mosque in which he mentions that he was responsible for designing the upper seven meters of the structure, its minarets and domes, and the central entrance bay of the western façade. When he completed the exterior, he emphasized that he attempted to remain faithful to the intentions of the original architect as revealed in the unfinished building. However, since no information was left to aid him in executing the interior and its decorative program, his contribution there was most substantial.[30]

The reliance on foreign expertise for the design and construction of the mosque was extensive. A foreign architect was brought in for advice when work on the building was interrupted, and a European architect was put in charge when the second phase of construction was begun. Even Mubarak, when suggesting his modifications, sought the opinion of European experts. This dependence on Europe also extends to include some of the materials and fixtures. Although much of the marble was either of Egyptian origin or imported from Turkey — the center of the Ottoman Empire to which Egypt still owed nominal allegiance — a good portion was also imported from Belgium, Germany, Greece, and Italy. Even some of the lamps, though made to resemble fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Mamluk prototypes, and decorated with Arabic inscriptions, were manufactured in Bohemia.[31]

The functions of the mosque of al-Rifaᶜi are related to the significance of the site on which it is located. Part of it contained residential structures, but another part had a zawiya named after a medieval popular saint, Ahmad al-Rifaᶜi. It housed the tombs of two important saints, ᶜAli Abi-Shubbak, a descendant of Ahmad al-Rifaᶜi, and Yahya al-Ansari. These tombs were visited by those seeking cures from illness. The patron bought the area with the intention of replacing the zawiya and residential buildings with a structure containing a mosque and its necessary annexes, *maqāms* for the two holy men, and burial areas for herself and her offspring.[32] In the new mosque, the tomb of Yahya al-Ansari is placed in the chamber located between the two southern entrances, and that of ᶜAli Abi-Shubbak is in the central chamber to the west of the prayer area. The royal tombs are in the rooms occupying most of the southern, western, and northern peripheries of the structure. The northeastern and southeastern parts of the complex contain a sabil and a *kuttāb*.

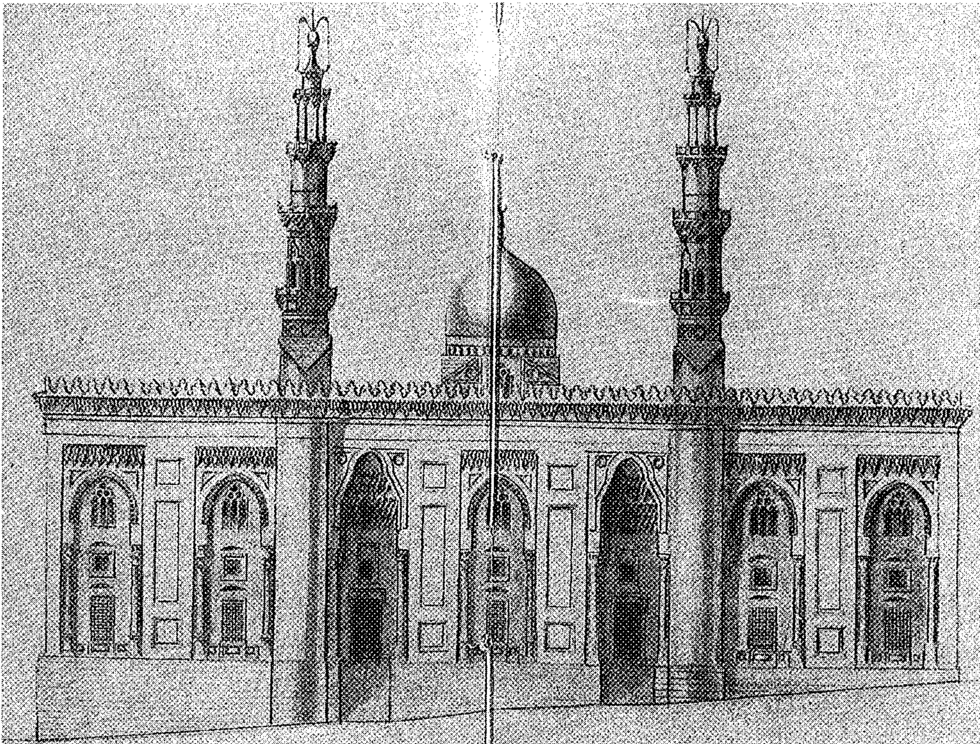

Fig. 14. Mosque of al-Rifa^ci. Southern elevation, preliminary sketch. (Max Herz, *La mosquée el-Rifa^ci*, pl. 5)

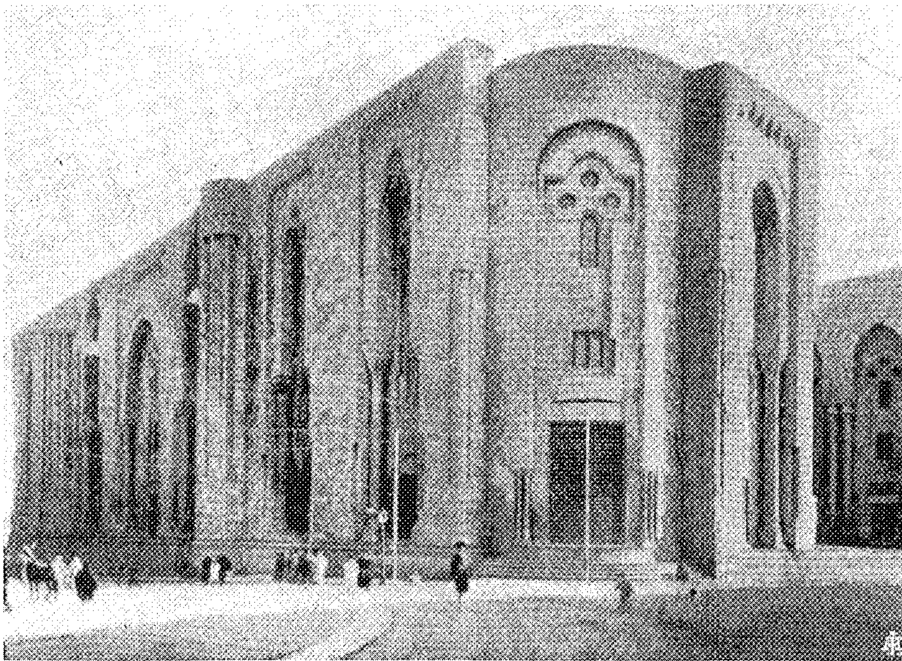

Fig. 15. Mosque of al-Rifa^ci. View before completion. (Max Herz, *La mosquée el-Rifa^ci*)

The mosque is now the final resting place for numerous members of the Egyptian royal family. In addition to the patron, Khushyar Hanem, her son, the Khedive Ismaᶜil, his three wives, two of his daughters, and two of his sons are buried there. Also buried in the mosque are Sultan Husayn Kamil (r. 1914–17), King Fuᵓad (r. 1917–36) and his mother, and King Faruq (r. 1936–52). The latest addition to the monument is Muhammad Riza Pahlavi, the last shah of Iran who died in Cairo in 1980. At one point, the Shah's father, Riza Pahlavi, who also died in exile, was buried there, but his son had later moved the body to Tehran. Obviously, the building's primary significance is as a royal burial mosque for the Muhammad ᶜAli dynasty. Beginning with Ismaᶜil, all the rulers of the Muhammad ᶜAli line, with the exception of Tawfiq and ᶜAbbas Hilmi II, were buried in it. ᶜAbbas Hilmi II died in exile and was therefore not buried in the mosque which he had completed.

As a royal mosque, this structure is different from the earlier major royal mosque of the Muhammad ᶜAli dynasty, the mosque of its founder, Muhammad ᶜAli, completed more that half a century earlier. The name of the later mosque makes no references to any members of the royal family, but to a medieval saint. It is located, not on one of Cairo's most conspicuous sites, the Citadel, over the remains of the palaces of the Mamluk rulers, but in a popular area inside the medieval city. Unlike the mosque of Muhammad ᶜAli, which functionally displaced the preexisting Mamluk mosque of al-Nasir Muhammad (1318–35), there was no attempt to displace the old zawiya, but instead to draw upon its importance and to provide it with a more glorified setting.

The structure shows an effort to establish links with Cairo's Mamluk past, in contrast to the heavily Ottomanized mosque of Muhammad ᶜAli. The Mamluk heritage rejected by Muhammad ᶜAli had become a source of legitimization under his successors. During the two and a half centuries of Mamluk rule, Egypt was the center of a powerful empire which effectively defended the lands of Islam against the Mongols and the Crusaders. The Mamluk period also produced one of the most impressive traditions of Islamic architecture. Consequently, the mosque is built opposite one of Cairo's best-known Mamluk monuments, the mosque of Sultan Hasan. In its general mass and its use of details and materials, the design of the mosque of al-Rifaᶜi expresses a willingness, if not an aspiration, to coexist with its Mamluk neighbor. Instead of attempting to overpower or ignore it, it establishes a dialogue with it. It also establishes a reference to Egypt's modern history in the person of Muhammad ᶜAli himself: the mosques of al-Rifaᶜi and Sultan Hasan frame a view centering on his mosque. In sum, the mosque of al-Rifaᶜi expresses three levels of association: to Egypt's popular heritage, to its Mamluk past, and to its recent history.

To understand fully the significance of this structure, one has to place it within the general political conditions affecting Egypt during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The monument was commissioned just before the opening of the Suez Canal, when the Khedive Ismaᶜil was spending enormous sums of money on a variety of items, most prominently his palaces at Gazira, Giza, and ᶜAbdin. By the time construction on the mosque had come to a halt in 1880, the situation had drastically changed. The foreign debt which Egypt accumulated during Ismaᶜil's reign had reached astronomical levels. It had risen from three million pounds in 1863, when Ismaᶜil ascended the throne, to ninety-four million pounds in 1876. Much of Egypt's revenues had to be devoted to paying off that debt, which made Egypt ever more vulnerable to the demands and interventions of its European creditors and their governments. Eventually, European countries forced Ismaᶜil to abdicate in 1879, and in 1882 British troops landed in Egypt and assumed full control of the country. Ottoman suzerainty was nominally still acknowledged, and the rule of the line of Muhammad ᶜAli was allowed (also nominally) to continue through the appointment of Ismaᶜil's son, Tawfiq, as the new, but ineffective, khedive.[33]

Between 1905 and 1911, construction on the monument was completed. Although Khedive ᶜAbbas Hilmi II, who ruled Egypt during that period, was not as accommodating to the occupying British as his predecessor, Tawfiq, or his successor, Husayn Kamil, real power still remained in the hands of the British who exercised their control by deposing him at the beginning of the First World War in 1914 and placing the country under mandate. Considering these political developments, the mosque of al-Rifaᶜi, in spite of its lavishness and monumentality, was clearly not a true expression of the power and sovereignty of the Egyptian royal family because that power and sovereignty simply did not exist.

The mosque of al-Rifaᶜi could only serve as a hollow expression of the sovereignty of the Egyptian royal family. However, as a royal mausoleum it has continued to function as a symbol of the Muhammad ᶜAli line, and even as a general symbol of royalty. Its royal connections were maintained even after the monarchy was abolished — both King Faruq and the last shah of Iran were buried there after Egypt had become a republic. Although the

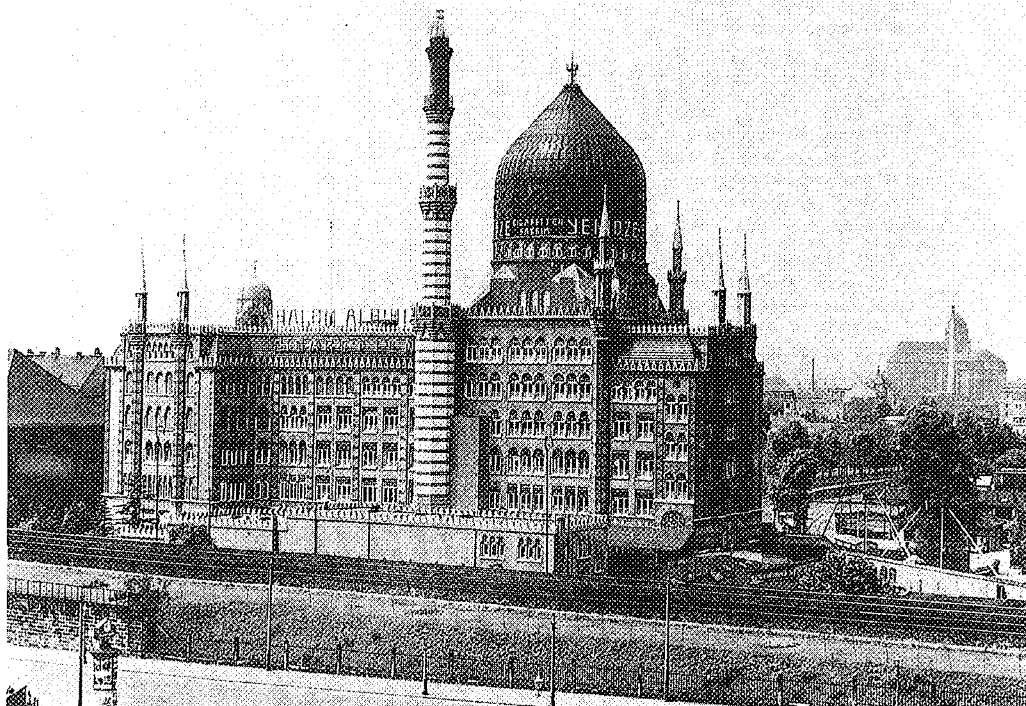

Fig. 16. Dresden, Germany. Tobacco factory. (From Stefan Koppelkamm, *Der imaginare Orient*)

mosque's political importance was neutralized, its royal commemorative significance has survived.

In the history of nineteenth-century architecture in the Islamic world, the mosque of al-Rifa^{c}i still holds a prominent position. It is the largest and most expensive mosque to have been built during its time; this lavishly decorated structure cost the then impressive sum of 640,000 Egyptian pounds.[34] Its design indicates a shift from Muhammad ^{c}Ali's pan-Islamic Sunni (or Ottoman) identification to a nationalist (or Egyptian) one. It is among the earliest nineteenth-century structures in Egypt to emphasize the country's Mamluk heritage. It attempts to go beyond the chaotic eclecticism that had characterized the state of Egyptian architecture since the second quarter of the nineteenth century, when architectural prototypes were imported from both Europe and Turkey, and to return to the pre-modern architectural vocabularies of Egypt. Even elements introduced by the Ottomans after their defeat of the Mamluks and conquest of Egypt in 1517 were avoided. The result was not an eclectic form of historicism, but a selective one expressing an attempt to instill a sense of order and discipline into Egyptian architecture. Although the Egyptian identity is strongly emphasized, the mosque is far from being an indigenous product or the result of autonomous contemporary Egyptian architectural practices. The process of returning to Egypt's Mamluk architectural heritage was initiated and controlled by Westerners. The return was to a period of Egyptian architectural history that had already been documented, studied, and analyzed in the West, but was only beginning to be understood in Egypt itself.

This emphasis on architectural historicism more thoroughly integrated the state of architecture in Egypt with that of the Western world where the debate concerning historical styles and the manner in which they should influence contemporary architectural practices reached new levels of intensity. The mosque of al-Rifa^{c}i not only expresses increased contact and reliance on Europe, but also indicates an act of integration with the conceptual issues defining its architecture. As this integration increased, as Islamic architecture was being investigated by Western scholars and Islamic revival monuments were being created under the guidance of Western experts, it could no longer be viewed as the exclusive property of the region in which it was located. It became the property of the world at large, and examples of neo-Mamluk architecture could be found in projects intended for

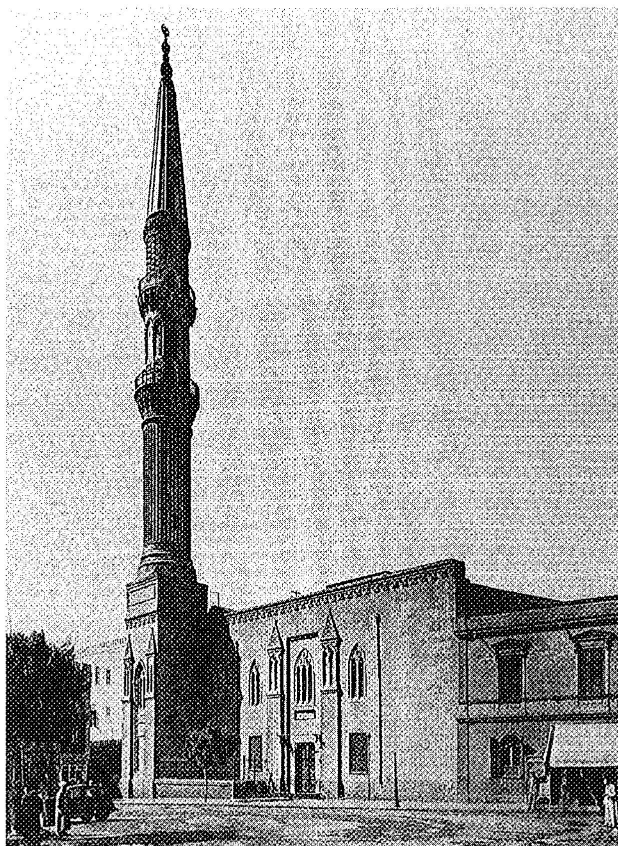

Fig. 17. Cairo, Mosque of al-Husayn. (From Ministry of Waqfs, *The Mosques of Egypt*)

non-Egyptian Islamic cities such as Istanbul and European ones such as Dresden (fig. 16).[35]

The Mamluk revival in late-nineteenth-century Egypt contrasts with the function of Mamluk themes in the West where their primary use was to inject an element of the exotic. The significance which can be attributed to the Mamluk revival in Egypt can be better compared to the Gothic revival in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, which was regarded not merely as a picturesque vocabulary, but as an architectural representative of the nation, as expressed in the construction of Charles Barry's neo-Gothic design for the Houses of Parliament in London (1835–52).[36] In the same manner the Mamluk revival provided an architectural symbol of the national identity that had come to unite Egyptians over the course of the nineteenth century.[37]

Still, the conscious use of the Mamluk revival for nationalist purposes should not be overemphasized. The mosque of al-Husayn, which is believed to hold the head of Husayn, the son of the Prophet's cousin ᶜAli, is considered among the most important of Cairo's mosques. But when it was rebuilt in the 1870's, neo-Gothic elements were chosen for the decoration of its façades (fig. 17). This incorporation of a vocabulary so closely associated with church architecture is surprising, and raises doubts about the degree to which the religious and political connotations of architectural revivals were understood in late-nineteenth-century Cairo.

The mosque of al-Rifaᶜi has been criticized as "architecturally unimportant" and a "patchy imitation of the Mamluk style."[38] True, its use of a Beaux-Arts syntax is inadequate for its urban setting and its design fails to deal effectively with the characteristics of its surroundings. However, this does not detract from its importance as a monument which articulates the theoretical, cultural, and political issues that have affected the evolution of Egyptian architecture during the modern era. In addition, it has become one of Cairo's best-known mosques; it remains a symbol of Middle Eastern royalty even after the dynasties it represented had come to an end. It is also immensely popular with the inhabitants of Cairo and its visitors. It is among the few stops that tourists make in Islamic Cairo on what is usually otherwise a tour of ancient Egyptian monuments, and it seems to leave a stronger impression on visiting laymen than its neighbor, the mosque of Sultan Hasan, considered one of the masterpieces of Islamic architecture. When recently a visitor to Cairo asked a taxi driver to take him to the mosque of Sultan Hasan, the driver, not sure of its location, inquired if it was the one next to the mosque of al-Rifaᶜi!

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NOTES

1. See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), pp. 3–5.
2. Publications discussing the mosque of al-Rifaᶜi include Louis Hautecoeur and Gaston Wiet, *Les mosquées du Caire* (Paris: Librarie Ernest Leroux, 1932), pp. 132 and 353; Max Herz, *La mosquée el-Rifaᶜi au Caire* (n.p., [1912]); ᶜAli Pasha Mubarak, *al-Khiṭaṭ al-tawfīqiyya al-jadīda li-Miṣr al-Qāhira wa Muduniha wa Bilādiha al-Qadīma wa'l-Mashhūra,* vol. 4 (Bulaq: al-Maṭbaᶜa al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya, 1888), pp. 114–19; Hassan ᶜAbd al-Wahhab, *Tārīkh al-masājid al-athariyya al-lati sallā fīhā farīdat al-jumᶜa al-malik al-Sālih Fārūq al-Awwal* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyya, 1946), pp. 363–71; and Ministry of Waqfs (Egypt), *The Mosques of Egypt from 21H. (641) to 1365H. (1946)* (Giza: Survey of Egypt, 1949), pp. 125–26. References to the monument are also made

in general guidebooks including Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *The Minarets of Cairo* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1985), p. 186; and Richard B. Parker, Robin Sabin, and Caroline Williams, *Islamic Monuments in Cairo, A Practical Guide* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1985), pp. 83–84.

3. Information concerning the dimensions of the monument can be found in Mubarak, *Khitat*, 4: 116; and Herz, *Rifaʿi*, p. 14.
4. The reference to the mosque of Asanbugha is found in Behrens-Abouseif, *Minarets*, p. 168. A photograph of the mausoleum of Tuman Bay I can be found in Ministry of Waqfs, *Mosques of Egypt*, pl. 221.
5. For a discussion of the urban composition of medieval Cairo, see Janet Abu-Lughod, *Cairo, 1001 Years of the City Victorious* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 27–36.
6. For a discussion of the urban transformations that effected Cairo in the nineteenth century, see ibid., pp. 83–117; and Robert Ilbert, "Note sur l'Égypte au XIXème siècle: Typologie architecturale et morphologie urbaine," *Annales Islamologiques* 27 (1981): 343–57.
7. For information on these new areas, see Abu-Lughod, *Cairo*, pp. 100 and 103 f.
8. Ibid., pp. 107 f.
9. Ibid., p. 95.
10. More specifically, these changes are related to Ismaʿil's visit to the 1867 Exposition Universelle where he was impressed by the new Paris that had been created by Baron Haussmann. These transformations were intended to convert Cairo into a city worthy of the various royal dignitaries who were to attend the elaborate celebrations planned for the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal (see ibid., pp. 104 f).
11. See Ilbert, "Note," p. 347.
12. Mubarak's views on the contemporary state of architecture are found in *Khiṭat*, 1: 83 f.
13. For more information on the work of Julius Franz (1831–1915), see Stefan Koppelkamm, *Der imaginare Orient: Exotische Bauten des achtzehnten und neunzehnten Jahrhunderts in Europa* (Berlin: Wilhelm Ernst & Sohn Verlag fur Architektur und technische Wissenschaften, 1987), pp. 93–95; and Mercedes Volait, "Grandes demeures du Caire au siècle passé," *Les Cahiers de la recherche architecturale: espace centré, figures de l'architecture domestique dans l'Orient méditerranéen*, nos. 20–21 (1987): 88.
14. Abu-Lughod, *Cairo*, p. 112.
15. Mubārak, *Khiṭat*, 4: 87.
16. Leonardo Benevolo, *History of Modern Architecture*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977), p. xxiv.
17. Ibid., p. 87.
18. *Description de l'Égypte*, 23 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Imperiale, 1809–1826).
19. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 43 and 86.
20. Pascal Coste, *Architecture arabe, ou monuments du Caire* (Paris: Typographie de Firmin Didot, 1839).
21. See Koppelkamm, *Imaginare Orient*, pp. 85–89.
22. In 1863, Franz helped design Khedive Ismaʿil's Gazira palace, one of the earliest Islamic revival structures to be built in Cairo. See ibid., pp. 93–95; and Robert Ilbert and Mercedes Volait, "Neo-Arabic Renaissance in Egypt, 1870–1930," *Mimar*, 13 (1984): 28 f.
23. The value of the Egyptian pound during the late nineteenth century was almost equal to that of the pound sterling. See Charles Issawi, ed., Appendix II, in *The Economic History of the Middle East, 1800–1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Midway Reprint, 1975), pp. 522–24.
24. Herz, *Rifaʿi*, p. 21. For a history of the monument through 1880, see Mubārak, *Khiṭat*, 4: 114 f.
25. For a history of the monument during this second phase of construction, see Herz, *Rifaʿi*, pp. 35 f.
26. Ilbert and Volait, "Neo-Arabic Renaissance," p. 33.
27. Mubarak, *Khitat*, 4: 115–16.
28. Herz, *Rifaʿi*, p. 35.
29. ʿAbd al-Rahmān al-Rāfiʿi, *ʿAsr Muhammad ʿAlī*, 4th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1982), pp. 414 and 417–18.
30. Herz, *Rifaʿi*, p. 48.
31. Ibid., pp. 55 and 56, n. 5.
32. Mubārak, *Khiṭat*, 4: 114.
33. William R. Polk, *The Arab World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 86 f. For a more detailed survey of modern Egyptian history, see P.J. Vatikiotis, *The History of Egypt from Muhammad Ali to Mubarak* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).
34. For an account of al-Rifaʿi's expenses, see Herz, *Rifaʿi*, pp. 58 f.
35. See Zeynep Çelik, *The Remaking of Istanbul* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), pp. 108–9; and Koppelkamm, *Imaginare Orient*, pp. 171–72.
36. For more information on the Houses of Parliament, see Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival: An Essay in the History of Taste* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 108–21.
37. One source dealing with the conscious utilization of the Mamluk revival in Cairo is Robert Ilbert and Mercedes Volait, "Neo-Arabic Renaissance in Egypt," pp. 26 f. It should be added that for a brief interlude during the 1920's and early 1930's, the Mamluk revival's position as an architectural representative of Egyptian nationalism was challenged by the emergence of the ancient Egyptian, or Pharaonic, revival. The supporters of Pharaonicism believed that the Mamluks were foreign conquerors, but that the ancient Egyptian rulers were indigenous leaders. They also argued that, at best, the Mamluk revival could only represent the Muslims of Egypt, but that the Egyptian revival represented all Egyptians, Muslims, and Copts. Such reasoning led in 1928, to a mausoleum for Saʿd Zaghlul, the Egyptian nationalist leader, being designed to resemble an ancient Egyptian temple. A reference to the debate between advocates of the two architectural vocabularies is made in Hassan Fathy, *Architecture for the Poor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 19–20. For more information on the mausoleum of Saʿd Zaghlul and the rise of Pharaonicism in Egypt during that period, see Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 164–90.
38. William Lyster and Max Rodenbeck, *Medieval Cairo, SPARE Map Two, Sultan Hasan to al-Azhar* (Cairo: Society for the Preservation of the Architectural Resources of Egypt, 1984).