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Artistic and Cultural Dialogues in the Late Medieval Mediterranean

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María Marcos Cobaleda
Editor

Artistic and Cultural Dialogues in the Late Medieval Mediterranean



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*To Leonardo,
the fruit of your games and dreams*

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PART I

Al-Andalus Beyond al-Andalus: The
Maghreb and the Mashriq



Spolia and Classical Revivals in Legitimacy Discourses: From Cordoba to the Mamluk Mosques of Cairo

Susana Calvo Capilla

3.1 STRATEGIES AND SOURCES OF SELF-AFFIRMATION IN AL-ANDALUS IN THE TENTH CENTURY

3.1.1 *Continuity and Rupture from the Eighth to the Tenth Century*

During the first century of the Umayyad Emirate of Cordoba, the emirs undertook the construction of Friday Mosques and new infrastructures in

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the provincial capitals. In these buildings, Roman and Hispano-Visigoth shafts, bases, capitals, and shell-niches were used. At that time, the use of *spolia* could also be found with a very similar function in the Carolingian Empire and the Kingdom of Asturias. They answered an analogous purpose of legitimising imperial power: Charlemagne sought materials in Rome, Ravenna and Jerusalem for his palace in Aachen, in an act of *translatio* or *renouatio Romae* (Brenk 1987).

In the Great Mosque of Cordoba, the capital's Friday Mosque, this kind of materials was placed both at the foundation stage and the first enlargement, started by 'Abd al-Raḥmān II (d. 852) in 848. As in the Alcazaba of Merida, also an official building ordered by the same emir in 835, the use of *spolia* comes within what Settis called *continuitá*, or survival (Settis 1986). The columns and ancient materials are prestigious items conferring the *auctoritas* of Antiquity to the building as a way of endorsing the emir's authority, which was of enormous importance in both cities: Merida, considered the great capital of Roman Hispania, and Cordoba, the capital of al-Andalus. In this sense, as Guidetti has recently pointed out, special sacrality was conferred by the columns of the churches when transferred to mosques (Guidetti 2016).

As the study by Antonio Peña has found, the scarcity of recyclable materials in Cordoba, where the large imperial monuments had already been dismantled in the fourth and fifth centuries, must have led the emir's architects to content themselves with secondary and domestic materials or to seek for pieces out of the city (Peña 2010). It is worth noting that the ruler was the only one with the prerogative of recovering these materials. Materials of a similar colour, size and shape were collected and arranged respecting their original function, without detriment to classical architectural syntax. Therefore, pilasters were used as jambs, columns were used to support series of arches, and shell-niches were intended to mark a "commemorative" place like the *miḥrāb* (in Merida but also probably in Cordoba and elsewhere). These pieces were always disposed in a symmetrical layout as seen in the *qibla* of the emir's extension. Moreover, this classical survival can also be found in the four Corinthian capitals and bases made for the extension's *miḥrāb* (now visible in the caliphal niche) by the sculptors of 'Abd al-Raḥmān II.

The reuse of classical *spolia* in the tenth century seems to be a different phenomenon. These are not the same architectural pieces as for the mosque, but Roman sarcophagi with reliefs and statues for a palace. They have been appearing since the first archaeological digs undertaken by

Ricardo Velázquez Bosco, at the start of the twentieth century, until today, in several buildings of Maḍīnat al-Zahrā', the palace-city founded by the first caliph, 'Abd al-Rahmān III (d. 961) about 936. Indeed, all the sarcophagi have openings on the bases and sides, as well as new carvings on the upper edges to adapt them to their later use as basins and fountains (Calvo Capilla 2012; Calvo Capilla 2014).

It is difficult to establish whether these Roman sculptures and reliefs originally came from Cordoba. The enormous expansion of Cordoba during the caliphal period, while a new palace-city (Maḍīnat al-Zahrā') was being built, may suggest that they were uncovered during the development of the new Western and Northern suburban neighbourhoods, some of which were built on the site of a Roman necropolis. The abundance and use of *spolia* was probably intimately related with the periods of urban expansion (Grabar 2001; Greenhalgh 2008; Guidetti 2016). But from the unusual abundance of pieces in Cordoba and their extraordinary quality, we may also assume that the Muslims might have brought Roman sarcophagi from other Roman capitals such as Seville or Merida, or, more unlikely, from beyond the Iberian Peninsula (Calvo Capilla 2012).

This collection of Roman sculptures displayed in the caliphal palace of Maḍīnat al-Zahrā' is what has led me to rethink the reasons why materials from Classical times were reused in Islamic architecture and the role played by Antiquity in the construction of al-Andalus.

3.1.2 *The Written Sources: An "Illustrated History"*

The reports on appreciation of ruins and materials from the past are rather more than general *topoi*. Preserved historical texts from al-Andalus, mostly written during the caliphate era, provide a theoretical framework in which such reports started making sense. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Rāzī (d. post 961) started his *Ta'rīj mulūk al-Andalus (History of the Kings of al-Andalus)* with Hercules, the first "Greek" king of the peninsula, followed by Romans and Visigoths. To illustrate and enrich the bare historical facts gathered, he generally includes in the narrative references to the monuments raised. While it is true that his words of admiration for the faded beauty of the ruins could be considered a literary *cliché* which also appears in eastern Arabic texts (Picard 1996, p. 105–116; Rubiera 1988, p. 27–68), al-Rāzī provides precise details implying knowledge about what is described. In fact, he gives a description of the peninsula mentioning the ancient origin of its cities and establishes a difference between the

Roman monuments of Seville and Merida, and the Roman and Visigothic heritage in Toledo (Calvo-Capilla 2012, p. 132–34).

In my view, the historians at the service of the Umayyad dynasty partially outlined the theoretical discourse upholding the use of *spolia* in the tenth-century monuments. Chroniclers, such as Aḥmad al-Rāzī and Ishaq b. Salama, were commissioned by al-Ḥakam II (d. 976) to write a history of al-Andalus. They composed a continuous historical discourse that could be called “integrator”, stating the continuity from Antiquity to al-Andalus, from the Roman emperors to the Visigoth kings, and from these to the Umayyad emirs and caliphs. To do this they had at their disposal important Latin historical sources, such as *Etymologiae* and *De Natura Rerum* by San Isidoro of Seville, and the *Book of Orosio*, the *Historiae adversus paganos* translated into Arabic.

The most relevant point of their narrative is not the misinterpretations (mythological figures became historical characters), but the fact that they did a continuous and coherent reading of the history of the peninsula. In my opinion, by including these data about the ruins of the past, they are not praising the conquest and the victory of Islam over the infidels. Quite the contrary, the assimilation of the Hispanic Roman and Visigoth legacy allowed the Umayyads of Cordoba to create a corpus of Andalusi knowledge and, consequently, a national and independent identity that served to legitimate their assumption of the emir and the caliphal titles. As Daniel Konig summarised, the

Roman and Visigothic past had become part of a regional collective memory that was specifically ‘Andalusi’. (Konig 2015, p. 165–66)

As I have addressed in previous works, the Umayyads of Cordoba adopted an old and well-known instrument of self-affirmation. In fact, collecting books, building huge libraries and surrounding themselves by scholars of ancient sciences were part of a legitimation policy developed by rulers since Classical Antiquity and naturally assumed by Muslim rulers. Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ (d. 544/1149) gave a specific name to the set of scientific activities taking place in the palatine library of Cordoba during the Caliphate: *bayt al-ḥikma*, the same name that Abbasids gave to their House of Wisdom in Baghdad (Calvo Capilla 2018).

This phenomenon of recovering Antiquity prompted by the Caliphal court explains why reliefs and Roman sculptures were properly accepted and understood in Maḍīnat al-Zahrā’ and some of the features introduced

in the enlargement of the Great Mosque of Cordoba commissioned by al-Ḥakam II in 961. Architects adopted the basilical aulic model (three naves) previously used in the reception halls (*maʿyilis*) of Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ, monumentalised through domes at both ends (in the *maqṣūra* and the access). The Andalusī caliphs recovered that way the Roman tradition of ceremonial space, used for the cult of the sovereign that the Oriental Umayyads had introduced before in their palaces (Calvo-Capilla 2017). It was a consciously historicising structure and constitutes a clear example of transfer between the secular and the religious architecture, very frequent in the early Umayyad art. As mentioned by Rabbat in the case of Mamluk Cairo, they

politicised the religious and sanctified the political to create and disseminate a powerful set of images and messages. (Rabbat 2015, p. 102)

In addition, the mosaic technique of golden glass tesserae, the imperial and sacred emblem *par excellence* in the Byzantine realm and in the Caliphal Golden Age (the Umayyad and Abbasid periods), was revived in the peninsula to decorate both the *qibla* of the Mosque of Cordoba and some of the palaces of Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ (Calvo Capilla 2008). This legitimisation strategy visible in al-Andalus, especially during the tenth century in Cordoba, presents similar principles to the one used, centuries later, in the Mamluk architecture in Cairo. Faced with similar needs of justification, the Mamluk sultan adopted resembling historicist formulas, recovering architectural prototypes and visual forms from the same places, Damascus and Jerusalem.

3.2 CLASSIC MOSQUES FOR MAMLUK SULTANS IN CAIRO: FROM BAYBARŞ TO AL-NĀŞİR

Between 1266 and 1269, Sultan al-Zāhir Baybarş al-Bunduqdārī (r. 1260–1277) built an enormous Great Mosque in the Northern part of the city of al-Qāhira. It was the first one erected after the return of Sunnism to the capital of Egypt. Baybarş became a mythical figure in the Islamic World as demonstrated by the romance *Sirat al-Malik al-Zahir Baybars*, a long Egyptian folkloric epic poem that narrates his life and heroic feats (Bohas and Hassan 2000–2018). Its fame expanded also across the Christian lands: its relationship with Alfonso X is well known, with whom he exchanged embassies, as can be seen in the *Cantigas* (Martínez Montávez

1962; Calvo Capilla 2014). The reign of Baybars marked the start of the Mamluk period in Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean. He engaged in a combination of diplomacy and military expansion, reason for which he was remembered as the second great conqueror of the territories in the hands of the Crusaders after Saladin (Tourau 1992) (Fig. 3.1).

Baybars, a Mamluk slave of the last Ayyubid sultan al-Malik al-Şālih, was self-proclaimed sultan and placed himself under the protection of a fictitious Abbasid Caliphate. After the entrance of the Mongols in Baghdad in 1258, the survivor members of the Abbasid family were taken to Cairo, where the Caliphate was restored. The two first Abbasid Caliphs under the Mamluk protection, al-Mustaşir billāh (1261–62) and al-Ĥākīm bi-Amr Allāh (1262–1302), delegated full authority as *amīr al-mu'minīn* to the Mamluk emir Baybars, legitimising his rule as sultan and granting him legal and moral authority (Holt 1984). As a result, Baybars claimed authority over all the Ayyubid lands (Aleppo, Damascus and Jerusalem), recovering the cities that were still in the hands of the Latins, such as Jaffa or Bethlehem, apart from Egypt and Yemen. He also took control and assumed the protection of the sacred cities, Medina and Mecca. In fact, he is the first ruler, according to al-Maqrīzī, who, assuming the caliphal prerogative, dispatched the *mahmal* (the ceremonial palanquin) with the *kiswa* (the covering of the Ka'ba) from Cairo to Mecca in 664/1266 (Taragan 2000, p. 32).

The importance of Sultan Baybars is reflected in the titles that accompany his name in the inscriptions of his multiple religious foundations in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. As studied by Aigle, some of the nicknames or *laqab* received by Baybars in the inscriptions appear in the mirror for princes to identify an ideal ruler, such as *al-'ādil*, “the just”, and *al-'ālim*, “the sage”. In some inscriptions he is even called *Iskandar al-zamān ṣāhib al-qirān*, “Alexander of [his] time” and “Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction”, a title that had been previously used in Hellenic and Roman Antiquity (Aigle 2003, 2014; Eddé 2012).

Baybars chose for the construction of the new Great Mosque a large space used as *maydān* (polo ground) that was located in the Northern suburb of al-Qāhira called al-Ĥusaynīya, not far from the Fatimid Mosque of al-Ĥākīm and Bāb al-Futūh. Saladin and the Ayyubid sultan, followers of the *Shafi'i* law school, only allowed the construction of one mosque for the *khutba* in Cairo: the Fatimid Mosque of al-Ĥākīm (1173). Baybars,

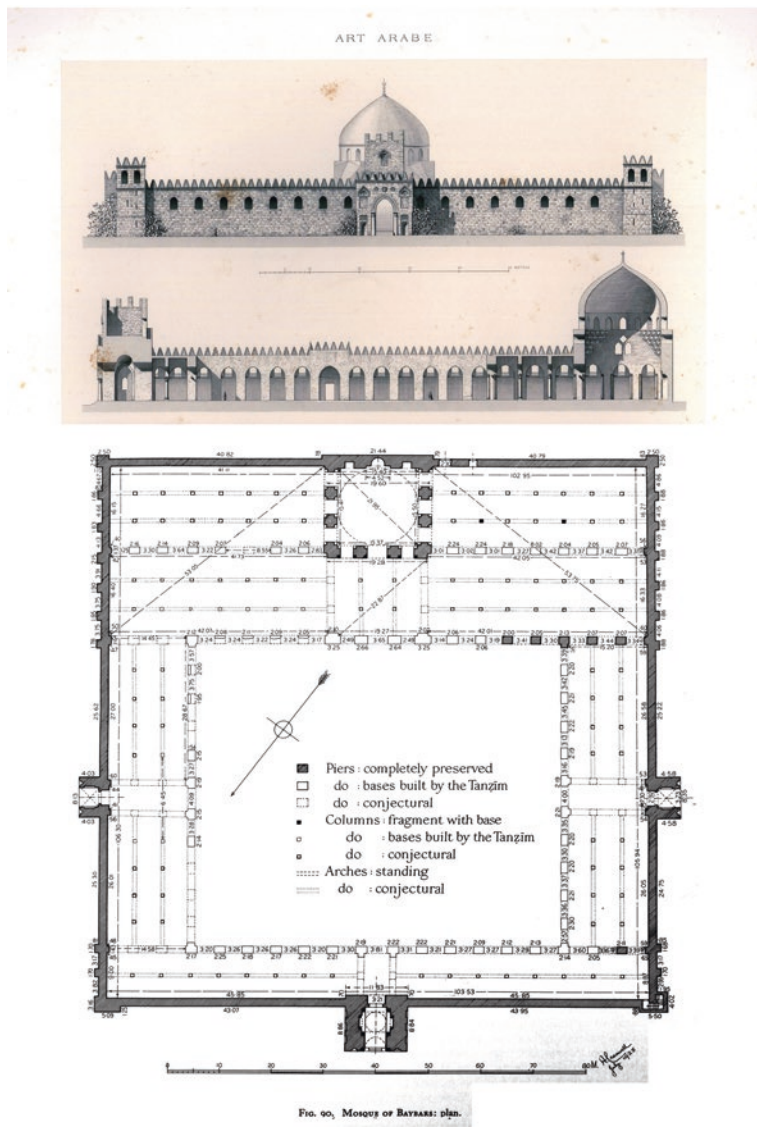


Fig. 3.1 Mosque of Sultan al-Zāhir Baybars, Cairo. (a) Elevation and section after Prisse d'Avennes 1869–1877. (b) Floor plan after Creswell (1978)

from the more permissive *Hanafī* school, ordered to open the closed ones and built a new mosque that would take his name (O’Kane 2017).

The ground plan of the mosque, chosen by the sultan himself according to the chroniclers, was a declaration of intent, since it recovered the most classical hypostyle, exceptional in Cairo at that time as have demonstrated the specialists (Meinecke 1985; Behrens-Abouseif 2007). In addition, the structure resumed and monumentalised another series of characteristics clearly inspired in the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus and the Syrian architecture (not necessarily Umayyad), such as the axial nave and the dome set in front of the *mihṛāb* (*maqṣūra*). Placing the minaret above the northern door of the mosque, aligned with the *mihṛāb*, like in the Great Mosque of Damascus, was also something exceptional.¹ According to al-Maqrīzī, pieces of wood and marble *spolia* from the citadel of Jaffa were used in the construction of the great *qubba*, which connected the building with the conquests of the founder, who could this way show his status as unique ruler (Sherif 1988) (Fig. 3.2b).

Creswell and other authors suggest an Egyptian model, the main features of which follow, for instance, those of the Fatimid Mosque of al-Ḥākim: the towers in the corners, the monumental portals and stepped merlons, elements also used in Umayyad mosques (Creswell 1978; Meinecke 1992; Korn 2006). Similarly, they have also found parallels for the plan in the twelfth century Ilkhanid and Anatolian Mosques that would follow the model of the Friday Mosque of Iṣfahān, where the Seljuq sultan inserted a dome into the hypostyle prayer hall in the late eleventh century (Creswell 1978; Meinecke 1985; Bloom 1982; Behrens-Abouseif 2007; O’Kane 2017; Keser-Kayaalp and Wheatley-Irving 2017). Nevertheless, the projecting monumental portals incorporated multiple significant stylistic features from the Syrian architecture, both Islamic and of the Crusaders, such as the striped masonry (*ablaq*), the cushion voussoirs and zigzag decoration, and a *muqarnaṣ* vault, intended, according to some researchers, to symbolise Baybars’ triumphs over the Crusaders (Bloom 1982; Taragan 2006) (Fig. 3.2c).

The space of the *maqṣūra* was decorated with marbles and mosaics that even seemed to imitate the thematic of the ones from Damascus: trees and buildings. According to Ibn Shaddād, a contemporary author of Baybars, the dome had

¹All three portals probably had minarets as recently proposed by Behrens Abouseif (2007: 124).

lavish decorations and materials [...] it was carried on sixteen columns and decorated with gold, lapis lazuli paint and faience. (*Tarikh al-Malik al-Zahir*: Sherif 1988, p. 54–55)

Today the building is under reconstruction after having seen many vicissitudes following its ruin (Fig. 3.2a and b).

In short, the specialists have dissected each one of the elements that shape the mosque plan and decoration to discern their origin. Here, I prefer to consider it as a whole, as an imposing and emblematic building. One of the most remarkable aspects of the hypostyle plan of the Baybars



Fig. 3.2 Mosque of Sultan al-Zāhir Baybars, Cairo, in its state in 2019. (a) Epigraphic decoration and window. (b) Interior of the *maqṣūra*. (c) North-eastern gateway. (d) North face of the *maqṣūra* with the springing of four arches of the triple aisle basilica leading to the courtyard (Photos by the author)

mosque is that the connection of the great dome facing the *miḥrāb* with the courtyard is done, not through a nave, as usual, but through an elevated triple aisle. The dome covers a bay resulting from the intersection of three naves (Creswell 1978). This central structure is elevated, almost independently from the rest of the prayer hall consisting of six aisles running parallel to the *qibla* wall and separated by arcades on columns. The Mamluk chroniclers al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Shaddād indicate that the sultan took as a model the enormous wooden dome of the Ayyubid Mausoleum of the Imām al-Shāfi‘ī (1211), and compare the building with the Umayyad Mosque of ‘Amr, both Sunnī monuments in Cairo (Sherif 1988) (Fig. 3.2d).

This configuration of an axial basilica with dome, flanked by transverse aisles, points to the classical hypostyle type associated with the Golden Age of the caliphate, that is, with the Umayyad and Abbasid mosques. Some scholars have noted that it would constitute a strong reminder of the resurgence of Sunnism in Egypt. Actually, the origin of the complex structure of the first Mamluk Great Mosque seems to be found, first, in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, where the Seljuq dome (Blair 1991) is placed over a large axial aisle that has a monumental classic façade formed by three arches and a pediment.² But in Cairo, the structure was further complicated, so that the *maqṣūra* and its access from the courtyard are, in fact, a basilical space of three naves (the central aisle was higher) with a great dome on the chevet. This is a meaningful association of structures that remind us the models of the Christian architecture of the fourth and fifth centuries in the area of Syria and Palestine, in particular the combination *martyrium-basilica* from the Constantinian Age onwards (Fig. 3.3).

Let us remember the churches of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, or Saint Simeon Stylites (*Qal‘at Sim‘ān*), as well as other sanctuaries that Baybarṣ may have visited himself during his travels across the region, through conquest and construction campaigns (Frenkel 2001; Thorau 1992; Troadec 2014–2015).³ For example, the Constantinian Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, a place venerated by the Muslims, had a five-aisle basilica with a chevet in the form of *martyrium* that had been

²In Mamluk time the Umayyad Mosque should look like in the Anonym picture (circle of Gentile Bellini), *Reception of the Venetian Ambassadors in Damascus*, ca. 1511 (Museum of Louvre, Inv. 100).

³These authors studied the legitimising strategy of Baybarṣ in Syria expressed through the construction and restoration of a large number of monuments.



Fig. 3.3 Umayyad Mosque of Damascus from the courtyard (Photo by the author)

reconstructed in the sixth century by Justinian. Between 1161 and 1169, the central nave had been decorated with glass mosaics, clearly inspired in the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus. According to the Venetian Marino Sanudo (d. 1338), Baybars would have destroyed the *monasterium* of Bethlehem and taken to Cairo some of the marble and columns from the church in 1263 (Sanudo Torsello 2011, p. 351, 411–412; Pringle 1993; Hourihane 2012). This combination of *martyrium/rotonda* and *basilica* of the Holy Sepulchre was reviewed in the eighth century with the construction of *al-Masjid al-Aqṣā* next to the Dome of the Rock on the *al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf*, the “Noble Sanctuary” of Jerusalem, as shown by Grabar (2006, p. 24–26) and Hillenbrand (1994, p. 74) (Nees 2016).

Hence, not only was al-Zāhir Baybars inspired by the Umayyad monuments, but also his architects reviewed a sacred formula present in the Syrian-Palestine area in a case of copy of the architectural iconography like the ones studied by Krautheimer. In his classic study, he concluded that

the models were never imitated in toto; on the contrary, copies were defined by

the disintegration of the prototype into its single elements, the selective transfer of these parts, and their reshuffling in the copy. (Krautheimer 1942, p.13–14)

There was often a tenuous visual link between a model and its copies, a connection that was probably evident in the Medieval Ages but not always readily apparent in the present days. In Cairo, the selective transfer would explain the free use of numbers and measurements in a completely new context.

The link of Baybars with Syria, where he spent most of his life, is a well-known theme (Frenkel 2001; Troadec 2014–2015; Banister 2014–2015; and Thorau 1992). He had a palace in Damascus, *Qaṣr al-ablaq*, where the Mamluk sultans would be lodged from that time. Among his outstanding actions in those lands, are the restoration works of the most emblematic Umayyad buildings: the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (1261 and 1294–1296), the Great Umayyad Mosque in Damascus (1269–1270) and the al-Aqṣā Mosque (1269), in which he invested large sums of money; never after their construction had that much attention paid to them. He also restored the Seljuq dome and the mosaics of the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus. The exterior mosaics of the Dome of the Rock and the decoration of the *Qubbat al-Silsila* were also recovered under his rule (Nees 2016, p. 66–68). Those works marked the revival of the glass mosaic decoration techniques and workshops, used in several Mamluk buildings in Syria and Egypt, between the end of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century (Meinecke 1992; Flood 1997; Kenney 2006). With his death, in 1277, Baybars was buried in his Damascene mausoleum in the madrasa al-Zāhiriyya, located near the Umayyad Mosque and the Saladin Mausoleum. Baybars' mausoleum, finished by his son, was decorated with glass mosaics inspired in those of the Umayyad Great Mosque. The following Mamluk sultan to intervene in the buildings in Jerusalem—the Dome of the Rock (in 1318–1319) and the al-Aqṣā Mosque (in 1329)—and in the Damascus Mosque (in 1328–1329) was Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 1341), of whom we will talk next.

The glass golden mosaics had been an imperial-caliphal emblem of great significance, used in the Umayyad and Abbasid Mosques, as indicate

the rests found in Samarra by Herzfeld (Schibille et al. 2018). This would certainly be the main reason for which they were recovered by Baybars for his monuments, the mind behind the restoration of the Caliphate. There were probably mosaics also in his *madrassa* in Cairo, built in 1262–1263, as well as in the *Qubba al-Zāhiriyya*, palace erected by the sultan in the Citadel, both now disappeared. The mosaics in this *Qubba* showed figurative scenes where the Sultan and the Emirs appeared in procession, as well as war scenes and *furūsiyya* exercises (Rabbat 2012; Abdulfattah and Sakr 2012). As Kenney argued, Mamluk glass mosaic was a medium rich in historical value and message-bearing potential, reason for which it was used in a deliberate way “to communicate polyvalent ideas and connotations” (Kenney 2006, p. 200). Glass mosaics were a historicist language used in the construction of the legitimisation of Baybars’ authority.

Finally, the election of a classical hypostyle design mosque with a domed *maqṣūra* could have also been related to the ceremonial function of the mosque. In the building inscriptions, Baybars receives for the first time the title of “the one who ordered to take an oath to the two caliphs” (*āmīr bi-bay‘at al-jalīfatayn*), a very meaningful formulation, referring to the two Abbasid caliphs mentioned earlier (Aigle 2003, p. 65). According to Peter Thorau, the Abbasid caliph settled in Cairo, al-Ḥākim, took care of pronouncing the first and the second *khutba* in that new Friday Mosque (Thorau 1992, p. 108), which means that it was conceived as a space of special political and religious significance. The Abbasid caliphs were “used” by Mamluk sultans to lend religious sanction to official ceremonies (Steenbergen 2013; Banister 2014–2015). The importance of the Friday prayers in which Baybars participated together with the Abbasid Caliph is underlined by what happened on a Friday of 1261 (659H), before the arrival to Cairo, when Baybars and the Caliph al-Mustansir made separate grand entrances at the Umayyad Great Mosque of Damascus to attend the *khutba* and the prayers together (Hassan 2018, p. 76). The authority of a universal caliphate legitimised the Mamluk sultanate as a classical Islamic state.

In 1335, during his third mandate, the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (d. 1341), designated “the wise”, ordered the reconstruction of the Friday Mosque of the Cairo Citadel (erected in 1318). While it is true that under al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, with the Mamluk economy flourishing and the population expanding, a great number of mosques were built in the city, the one built in the Citadel was outstanding. Just like the great reception hall, the Great *Iwān* al-Nāṣir (started two

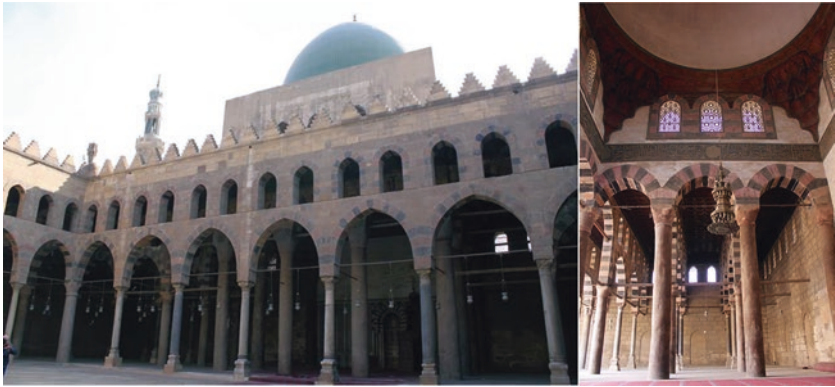


Fig. 3.4 Mosque of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in the Citadel, Cairo. (a) Courtyard. (b) *Maqṣūra* (Photos by the author)

years earlier), the mosque stood out for its great green dome, a clear allusion to the famous *qubbat al-khaḍrāʾ* of Damascus and Baghdad, as well as the *ablaq* walls finished with a stepped crenellation in the court (Rabbat 1995). The scenography of both monuments played with the urban environment: the dome of the mosque was visible from the East, from the cemeteries of the *qibli* side, while the *Iwān* was elevated on the *mayḍān* and the city. The mosque has a domed *maqṣūra* taking up the space of nine bays in the hypostyle plan, similar to Baybars' mosque, even though it lacks the axial basilica. They share other features: a minaret on top of the projecting entrance portal, in the northern side, and lacks *ṭirāz* epigraphic bands on the exterior walls. This was not the only building inspired in Baybars: in 1313–1314 the Citadel *Qaṣr al-Ablaq* was built, which copied, fifty years later, the one from Damascus (Fig. 3.4a,b).

The characteristic that has drawn our attention in the mosque and in the great hall of the Citadel, both erected by al-Nāṣir, was that their domed central space was held by giant red granite columns (Aswan granite) brought from Pharaonic or Ptolemaic ruins in Egypt (the exact origin varies depending on the source). Up to thirty-two columns were used in the Citadel by the architects of al-Nāṣir (Behrens-Abouseif 2007, 2014; Rabbat 1995, p. 37–38, 266–267). The presence of these spectacular *spolia* materials was most likely linked to a legitimising Mamluk discourse previously used by his father at the Qalāwūn's Complex of *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn*.

And here again appears a parallelism with the Umayyad buildings from the Syrian-Palestine area (Fig. 3.4b).

In the Qalāwūn's Complex (1283–1284), the combination of a *madrassa*, a hospital, and a mausoleum, the dome with ambulatory of the mausoleum, as has been often noted, copies the Dome of the Rock of Jerusalem, and just like there, it lies on giant reused columns, in red granite. The *madrassa* mosque, located in the *Iwān qibli* (or south), almost in parallel with the mausoleum, is a three-nave basilica, also held by large reused shafts. There, the use of *spolia* material and ornamental Umayyad devices, glass mosaics, marble and *karma* (vine scrolls), both so significant in the prayer hall of the Great Mosque of Damascus (Flood 1997), reinforce the symbolic character obtained by the basilical model in this early Mamluk period.

Hence, and similarly to the Baybarṣ Mosque, the Sultan al-Nāṣir's Mosque in the Citadel brings together two features clearly associated with the mosques of the classical period: the hypostyle plan with dome and the *spolia* columns from Ancient Egypt, red granite shafts from Pharaonic, Ptolemaic, and Roman buildings.

It is worth noting those Pharaonic columns placed in a privileged environment of one of the most important buildings in the city, holding the domes of the Justice Hall or Great *Iwān* and the Friday Mosque of the Citadel. In my opinion, this reutilisation was neither accidental, nor marginal, nor devoid of meaning (Greenhalgh 2008, p. 458–64). It could not have been only a question of cost (it actually took a great effort to take those materials to Cairo) or technical inferiority. Neither is the apotropaic character view defensible, as it was probably the case for other Pharaonic materials used for the construction of the Fatimid buildings or as lintels and thresholds in the Circassian Mamluk Mosques (Barrucand 2002; Behrens-Abouseif 2014, p. 408–09).⁴

As Flood (2011), Guidetti (2016), and other scholars have recently studied, the reused elements in Medieval Islamic architecture had multiple layers of meaning. In this particular case, these are clearly conscious choices of materials from Ancient Egypt, which needs further explanations. Pharaonic shafts were chosen to hold the monumental domes (instead of pillars, like in the al-Zāhir Mosque), in addition to smaller size columns, probably coming from churches, for the rest of the mosque naves.

⁴About magical associations, see Gonnella (2010).

In 1980, Haarmann talked about a “regional sentiment in medieval Islamic Egypt” and defended that, among Muslim and Coptic Egyptians, in Medieval Egypt, the texts reflect arousal of a national feeling (*shu‘ūbiyya*) that brought them to value their past as singular (Haarmann 1980). Pharaonic history and monuments were introduced in the Islamic history of the territory, even though the popular culture considered them as magical and apotropaic; in fact, they were periodically destroyed.⁵ Sijpesteijn (2011) identified, in the ninth century, the period under the Tulunids rule, as the moment in which Egyptians (Muslim Arabs and Copts) felt the need to revendicate an identity of their own and different from the rest of the Islam territories, as well as to forge their own Egyptian history. And the pre-Islamic monumental heritage was essential to the latter.

The use of ancient materials coming from different places across Egypt (Ptolemaic, Pharaonic, Roman and Late Antiquity) appears to be a clear case of self-conscious historicity, “tacit recognitions of earlier chapters of the site’s biography” (Yasin 2016, p. 236). By appropriating these visually recognisable Egyptian materials and re-installing them in visible places of their political sceneries, the Mamluk sultan assumed a discourse of continuity with the prestigious past of that territory, with the long history of the lands of Egypt. The monumentality of the Mamluk buildings, stone buildings of large dimensions, could also be considered an attempt of visual association with the Pharaonic, Ptolemaic, and Roman patrimony of Egypt. In fact, according to Rabbat, the perception of the Mamluk sources was of

praising the monumentality of their patrons’ buildings was at times coupled with downplaying the monumentality of those of other sovereigns. (Rabbat 2002, p. 160–61; O’Kane 1996)

In parallel, resorting to the architectural revival of the first caliphs, typology, mosaics, and ornamentation, Sultan al-Nāṣir established a political and religious connection with the Umayyad past (“symbol of continuity and stability”, according to Flood 1997) and with the founder of the Mamluk sultanate, the hero, Baybars. All of this constituted a visual proclamation of the legitimacy of the power of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn, who was so questioned at the beginning (he was ousted in two occasions, in 1294 and 1309).

⁵ See also Cannuyer (1999); Mathews (2004). An opposite view in Cook (1983).

Mamluks claimed, through the sources, to be the restorers of a Golden Age that, in their collective memory, lay in the Umayyad Caliphate (Rabbat 2002). The Mamluk state recovered some of the signs of glory of that Golden Age: they had ousted the Crusaders from the Middle East and had stopped the Mongols; they controlled all of the territory of Bilad al-Sham, the Syrian-Egyptian territories; they had restored Sunnism; and had “invented” a new caliphal legitimacy by installing the Abbasid Caliph in Cairo. The Mamluk historical sources recovered the pan-Islamic spirit of the historians from the eighth and ninth centuries, who lived, at least in theory, in a unified Islamic world. Hence, and in the light of the present analysis, we will conclude with Rabbat’s words:

[the] visual references to the venerated monuments of the early Islamic period which do the early Mamluk architecture and sources (at the time of Baybars, Qalāwūn and his sons) embody and reinforce the rekindled Mamluk sense of historical continuity and represent a conscious effort to give it shape. (Rabbat 2002, p. 162)

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