MINISTÈRE DE L'ÉDUCATION NATIONALE, DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPÉRIEUR ET DE LA RECHERCHE

ANNALES ISLAMOLOGIQUES

en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne en ligne

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268

Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane

The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.

Conditions d'utilisation

L'utilisation du contenu de ce site est limitée à un usage personnel et non commercial. Toute autre utilisation du site et de son contenu est soumise à une autorisation préalable de l'éditeur (contact AT ifao.egnet.net). Le copyright est conservé par l'éditeur (Ifao).

Conditions of Use

You may use content in this website only for your personal, noncommercial use. Any further use of this website and its content is forbidden, unless you have obtained prior permission from the publisher (contact AT ifao.egnet.net). The copyright is retained by the publisher (Ifao).

Dernières publications

9782724711660 *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales 41* Adrien Candiard (éd.)
9782724711745 *Bulletin archéologique des Écoles françaises à l'étranger (BAEFE)*
9782724711271 *Du côté de chez Zeus* Emmanuel Botte (éd.), Hélène Cuvigny (éd.), Michel Reddé (éd.)
9782724711677 *La Description de l'Égypte* Paul-Marie Grinevald
9782724711714 *La pensée et la pratique pharmacologiques d'Avicenne* Sylvie Ayari
9782724711899 *BCAI 40*
9782724711288 *Karnak-Nord XI* Colin Hope
9782724711622 *BIFAO 126*

© Institut français d'archéologie orientale - Le Caire

THE MADRASA OF BADR AL-DĪN AL-ʿAYNĪ AND ITS TILED MIḤRĀB*

Laila IBRAHIM and Bernard O'KANE

As a glance at the list of Mamluk monuments built in Cairo will confirm, the most frequent patrons other than the ruling Mamluk hierarchy and its amirs were *qāḍī*-s. This is a reflection of the practise whereby the chief *qāḍī*-s frequently held other governmental administrative posts which contributed to their wealth and influence. As examples one can point to Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Bāsiṭ (d. 854/1450), who erected buildings in Cairo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Mecca and Medina, and held several positions before his promotion to controller of the army (*nāẓir ǧayš*) [1], or Qāḍī Yaḥyā (d. 874/1469), the builder of three mosques in Cairo, who rose to the eminence of major-domo (*ustādār*), but paid for this eminence with his life at the hands of Qayt Bāy [2].

The builder of the present monument, Maḥmūd b. Aḥmad Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī or al-ʿAynṭābī, was in addition to being chief judge (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) for several years, also frequently held the lucrative posts of controller of trust properties (*naẓir al-aḥbās*) and market inspector (*muḥtasib*). It is thus surprising that this is the only structure which he is known to have built.

ʿAynṭāb, Al-ʿAyni's birhtplace in 762/1361, is the modern Gaziantep, located some 90 km north of Aleppo. After studying religious sciences there and in Aleppo and Damascus, his first stay in Cairo was in 788 / 1386-1387 as a Sufi in the newly built complex of Barqūq [3]. He went back destitute to ʿAynṭāb shortly thereafter, but returned to Cairo to continue religious studies and was appointed *muḥtasib* in 801 H., displacing the historian Maqrīzī in the process [4]. Three years later he was also made *nāẓir*

* An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the 8th International Congress of Turkish Art, Cairo, September 1987.

1. See M. van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum, Égypte, Le Caire* (Cairo, 1900), p. 345-346.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 387-388.

3. The most complete biographies are those of Šams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Saḫāwī, *al-Ḍawʿ al-lamiʿ li-ahl al-qarn al-tāsiʿ*, IX (Cairo, 1354/1935), p. 131-135; *al-Ḏayl ʿalā rafʿ al-iṣr*, ed. ʿA. al-Baǧāwī (n.d., n.p.), p. 428-440; for a shorter account see W. Marçais, « al-ʿAynī », *EI*², p. 790-791.

4. Saḫāwī, *al-Ḏayl*, p. 432; al-Maqrīzī, Ṭaqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ʿAlī b. ʿAbd al-Qādir Muḥammad,

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

al-aḥbās [5]. Although regularly dismissed and reappointed to these positions in the succeeding years, his continuing favour was manifested in his appointments as teacher of *ḥadīṯ* in Sultan al-Mu'ayyad's complex at Bāb Zuwayla from its foundation (819/1416), and from 829/1426 as chief judge (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) of the Ḥanafīs [6]. In the meanwhile the opportunity had arisen for him to show his diplomatic skills : the continuing weaknesses in Anatolia after Tīmūr's passage in the early fifteenth century were finally exploited by the Mamluks in a push into Karamanid territory, their capital Laranda (the modern Karaman) being occupied in 822 / 1418-1419 [7]. In 823 / 1420-1421 al-ʿAynī was sent into the newly occupied territory in order to tale the oaths of allegiance from the commanders of the fortresses there [8]. Undoubtedly a strong reason for the choice of al-ʿAynī for this task must have been his fluency in Turkish. This was evidently sufficiently close to the Central Asian dialects spoken by the Mamluks (who were frequently ingorant of Arabic [9]) to be readily understood by them, since in the reigns of al-Ẓāhir Ṭaṭar and al-Ašraf Barsbāy he used to personally translate histories and other texts for the Sultan from Arabic to Turkish to the extent that the latter claimed that his knowledge of Islam would have been faulty were it not for al-ʿAynī [10]. His knowledge of Turkish too must have been a strong factor in Barsbāy's choice of him as a companion for a trip to Amid (modern Diyarbakr) [11].

Al-ʿAynī's complex is not mentioned by Maqrīzī in his *Ḫiṭaṭ*, undoubtedly on account of the enmity between the two [12]. There were two reasons for this, firstly al-ʿAynī's displacement of Maqrīzī from the post of *muḥtasib*, mentioned above, and secondly his

Kitāb al-sulūk li-maʿrifat duwal al-mamlūk, ed. Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ ʿAšūr (Cairo, 1970-73), III/3, p. 970.

5. Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, III/3, p. 1080.

6. Saḫāwī, *al-Ḍayl*, p. 433.

7. A.H. de Groot and H.A. Reed, « Laranda », *EI*², p. 677.

8. Saḫāwī, *al-Ḍayl*, p. 433; al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, IV/1, p. 524.

9. This emphasised in C. Petry, *The Civilian Elite of Cairo in the Late Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1981), p. 70.

10. Saḫāwī, *al-Ḍawʿ*, p. 132; *idem*, *al-Ḍayl*, p. 433; al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, IV/2, p. 698; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *al-Nuǧūm al-ẓāhira fī mulūk Miṣr wa-l-Qāhira*, tr. W. Popper as *History of Egypt, 1382-1469 A.D.*, University of California Publications in Semitic Philology, XVIII (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1958), p. 157-158.

11. Saḫāwī, *al-Ḍawʿ*, p. 132; *idem*, *al-Ḍayl*, p. 434.

12. Ibn Taġrībirdī gives another example of this enmity : he notes that Maqrīzī records one occasion when al-ʿAynī was *muḥtasib* and persuaded al-Ašraf Barsbāy to order reprisals against the populace who had participated in bread riots, but that Maqrīzī had failed to mention al-ʿAynīs' stoning at the hands of the people as a legitimate cause for his action : *al-Nuǧūm*, tr. Popper, XVIII, p. 29; al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-sulūk*, IV/2, p. 698.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

gaining of the unofficial but prestigious position of court historian. The reason for his success in the latter sphere was also undoubtedly due to his native knowledge of Turkish, of which Maqrīzī was ignorant [13]. It was thus to al-ʿAynī's advantage to stress his associations with his homeland, and we shall see that this is reflected in the decoration of his madrasa. When he reached eighty-eight in 853/1449) he was understandably removed from the office of controller or trust properties (*nāẓir al-aḥbās*) on account of his age [14]. He died in 855/1451 and was buried in his madrasa after funerary prayers were held in the nearby al-Azhar — ironically, since he had established a *ḫuṭba* in his own madrasa, claiming that one should not attend al-Azhar on account of its Shīʿī foundation [15].

Al-Ṣayrafī mentions that al-ʿAynī's complex near al-Azhar was finished in Ramaḍān 814 / December 1411 - January 1412, and that the complex was near to both al-ʿAynī's house and the house of Ibn al-Ġannām [16]. Across the street from al-ʿAynī's madrasa on the east [17] is a medieval residence which is known as Manzil Zaynab Ḫātūn. On the northeast side of the latter is the only remaining section of the house of Ibn al-Ġannām, separated from Zaynab Ḫātūn by a distance of, at present, not more than twelve metres. The Manzil Zaynab Ḫātūn is largely Ottoman, but it has a fifteenth century Mamluk *qāʿa* on an upper floor [18]. It has been suggested that the builder of this was Miṯqāl al-Sūdūnī (d. 895/1490), who bought and restored a house near al-Azhar [19]. Given that it fits al-Sayrāfī's mention of its location exactly, the possibility should be considered that the Zaynab Ḫātūn residence was erected on that of al-ʿAynī's, and that the *qāʿa* was built by al-ʿAynī, whether or not it was later altered by Miṯqāl al-Sūdūnī [20].

13. Petry, *op. cit., loc. cit.*

14. Ibn Taġrībirdī, *al-Nuǧūm,* tr. Popper, XIX, p. 118.

15. Saḫāwī, *al-Ḍawʿ*, p. 133; *idem, al-Ḍayl,* p. 434; Ibn Taġrībirdī, *al-Nuǧūm,* tr. Popper, XVIII, p. 29.

16. Ǧawharī, ʿAlī ibn Dāwūd al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-nufūs w-al-abdān fī tawārīḫ al-zamān,* ed. Ḥ. Ḥabašī, II (Cairo, P1970-74), p. 290. For the remains of the house of Ibn al-Ġannām, see A. Lézine, « Les salles nobles des palais mamlouks », *Annales islamologiques* X (1972), p. 112-115.

17. For convenience directions are given on the assumption that the *qibla* faces east.

18. The building is described in detail in J. Revault and B. Maury, *Palais et Maisons du Caire,* III (Cairo, 1979), p. 1-12.

19. *Ibid.,* p. 1, after al-Saḫawī.

20. There is unfortunately a dearth of dated *qāʿas* between that of Ibn al-Ġannām (774 / 1372-1373) and those of the late fourteenth century (i.e. that of the period of Qāytbāy in the Bayt al-Razzāz; see J. Revault and B. Maury, *Palais et Maisons du Caire,* v. 1 (Cairo, 1975), p. 57-60). This makes it more difficult to say whether, on stylistic grounds, the *qāʿa* in Manzil Zainab Ḫātūn should be located in the first or second half of the fifteenth century.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

The madrasa of al-ʿAynī : the exterior. The building has two façades, each of which is articulated by recessed window niches topped by two tiers of stalactites, with trefoil crenellations above. The main entrance portal on the east façade is vaulted with a tri-lobed arch containing four rows of stalactites leading to a shallow semi-dome (pl. I). The stonework below this area has been plastered over recently. While the stone lintel is original, the Quranic inscription set in cartouches on either side of the portal below it seems a later reworking.

A minaret rises from the façade to the right of the entrance (pl. I). The solid mass of masonry below this point on the ground plan (fig. 1) indicates that the complex was always intended to have a minaret here. The relaying of the roof has made it impossible to determine whether the present base is part of the original, but the flaccid detailing above points to an Ottoman pastiche of Mamluk style [21].

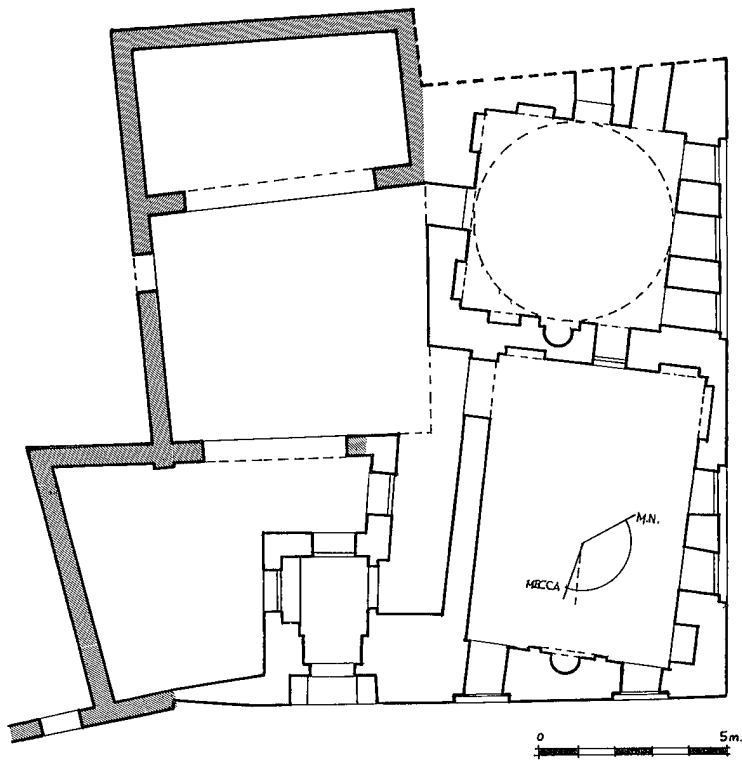


Fig. 1. — Madrasa of al-ʿAynī : ground plan (after Kessler); hatching indicates later work.

21. It was omitted from discussion in D. Behrens-Abouseif, *The Minarets of Cairo* (Cairo, 1985), an indication that the author did not think it original.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

The vestibule. The frieze immediately below the ceiling of the vestibule contains the foundation inscription painted on wood. In its present state it has been rendered almost illegible through splashing from the repainting of the lower walls; the present reading of Laila Ibrahim was recorded some decades ago before this happened. The foundation inscription is followed by extracts from Qur'ān XXXIX/73 and VII/43 as follows [22].

أمر بتجديد هذه المدرسة السعيدة . . . العبد الفقير إلى الله تعالى الشيخ ابو محمد محمود بن أحمد العيني – الحنفي قاضي (القضاة) الفاضل وذلك بتاريخ الثالث والعشرين من شهر // ربيع الاخر سنة احد وثلاثين . . . // وصلى الله عليه وسلم ورضي الله عن اصحاب رسول الله . . . حسب الله ونعم الوكيل

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم ادخلوها خالدين // الحمد لله الذي هدانا لهذا وما كنا لنهتدي لولا ان هدانا الله

« Ordered the renovation of this fortunate madrasa the poor slave of God most high, Abū Muḥammad Maḥmūd b. Aḥmad al-ʿAynī al-ḥanafī the eminent chief judge ... and that in the month of Rabīʿ II year (eight hundred) and thirty one / March-April 1428 ... may God pray for him and the peace and contentment of God on the companions of the Prophet ... the love and favour of God ... basmala, so enter ye (the garden of delight) to dwell therein. The praise to God, who has guided us to this. We could not truly have been led aright if God had not guided us. »

The wooden ceiling of the vestibule is decorated with a series of intersecting eight-petalled rosettes [23]. Within four of these are circular shields divided into two with a penbox in the upper field and what seems to be a vase flanked by two six-petalled rosettes (pl. II) [24]. The vase is of an unusual shape, having a small ring above the foot and curving inwards to a narrow neck before widening sharply at the top. The penbox

22. The reading of Yūsif Aḥmad in K.A.C. Creswell, « A Brief Chronology of the Muḥammadan Monuments of Egypt to A.D. 1517 », *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale,* XVI (1919), p. 120, was reproduced in abridged form in L.A. Mayer, *Saracenic Heraldry* (Oxford, 1933), p. 150. It erroneously includes « *hāḏā'l-saqf bānī hāḏā* » after « *taǧdīd* »; and gives the date as 835 (Creswell) or 853 (Mayer, in the translation only) instead of 831.

23. The pattern, and the floral decoration within the rosettes can be compared with the frontispiece of a Qur'ān made waqf in 770/1369 by Sultan Šaʿbān : see M. Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination* (London, 1976), Pl. 69.

24. See Mayer, *Heraldry,* p. 150, Pl. LXI/3; M. Meinecke, « Zum mamlukischen Heraldik », *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaologischen Instituts — Abteilung Kairo,* XXVIII/2 (1972), p. 284-285, fig. 13, n° 63. The latter does not show the shape of the vase accurately, missing the ring above the foot.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

is well-known as the heraldic emblem of the secretary (*dawādār*), although in the later Mamluk period it was consistently used in the middle of a three-part field, sometimes, as here, with other decorative devices added, for non-Mamluk dignitaries such as *qāḍī*-s [25]. According to Qalqašandī, however, the penbox of the *qāḍī al-quḍāh* was more magnificent than that of other office holders, and was placed upon a special stand [26]. This account is echoed by Maqrīzī, who mentions that he was the most important of the non-military office holders (*arbāb al-ʿamā'im wa arbāb al-aqlām*), and that his penbox was inlaid with silver from the citadel treasury, had a bearer who was paid a monthly salary by the government, and that it had a special stand [27]. While there is no indication of a stand in al-ʿAynī's emblem, one may be depicted in another artifact of a Mamluk *qāḍī*, an underglaze-painted blue and white tile in the Islamic Museum in Cairo (pl. Va) [29]. This has a vase which is of the same unusual shape as that of al-ʿAynī [28], underneath which is a *kūrsī*, although the presence of a comb to one side is a puzzling feature. The two grilled grave surrounds which flank the vase are illustrations of the graves (*qubūr*) mentioned in the inscription above which stresses the transitoriness of life [30].

25. Mayer, *Heraldry*, p. 12-13; Meinecke, « Heraldik », p. 250-252; 281-285; *idem*, « Die Bedeutung der Mamlukischen Heraldik für die Kunstgeschichte », *XVIII. Deutscher Orientalistentag*, ed. W. Voight, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Supp. II (1974), p. 238-240.

26. Al-Qalqašandī, ed. Abū'l-ʿAbbās Aḥmad b. ʿAlī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿša fī Ṣināʿat al-inšā* (Cairo, 1340/1922), III, p. 486.

27. *Ḫiṭaṭ*, I, p. 403. The term used is *kursī al-dawāh*, lit. the stand of the penbox, indicating that it was like no other.

28. Registration n° 14394.

29. Meinecke, « Heraldik », p. 284 n. 427 compares al-ʿAynī's vase with those of early Mamluk blazons, but these are consistently different, without the narrow neck of al-ʿAynī's.

30. It reads as follows :

رأيت الدهر مختلف يدور فلا فرح يدوم ولا سرور
رأيت الناس كلهم سكارا وكأس الموت بينهم يدور
فواعجبا لمن يصبح ويمسي ويعلم أن مسكنه القبور
فقد بنت الملوك لها قصورا فلا دام الملوك ولا القصور

« I saw time passing, and no happiness or pleasure persists,
I saw all the people drinking while the cup of death moves about each one,
How strange that one who rises and goes to bed each day forgets that his (final) dwelling is the grave,
The kings built palaces, but nothing remains of the kings or the palaces. »

In the cartouche below :

مما عمل برسم القاضي . . . الفاخور (؟)

« That which was ordered by the Qāḍī ... al-fāḫūr (?). » (The last word is not clear).

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

The plan. The vestibule leads with two turns to a courtyard flanked by two *īwān*-s on one side, and a rectangular room with a *miḥrāb* on the other. A square mausoleum occupies the north corner.

As a glance at the plan (fig. 1) will affirm, there is a strong contrast between the mausoleum and its adjoining prayer hall, and the courtyard with two *īwān*-s. This is manifested clearly in the care with which the mausoleum and the prayer hall are aligned to the *qibla,* with windows and recesses of varying widths compensating for the slightly different street axis, while the courtyard and *īwān*-s are aligned to neither of these directions. Moreover, the *īwān*-s are of differing width and their centres are not on the same axis. They have obviously been added at some later stage. They are decorated with a simple neo-Mamluk moulding which could date any time from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries. The entrance vestibule with its inscription is clearly original, but to the left of the main entrance portal the wall changes direction noticeably. Although at this point the upper courses of stone are keyed together, a cursory examination of the lower courses shows a clear break in bond, indicating that the wall beyond this point was added on at some stage. Exactly when this occurred is difficult to say, as the added section is, like the *īwān*-s, in the form of a Mamluk pastiche. From fig. 1 it can also be seen that the break in bond of the façade coincides with a line extrapolated from the side of the present courtyard, strongly suggesting that this line formed the original boundary of the complex. If this section was added on, what did the original building consist of? The remaining space may have contained a small courtyard with one *īwān*, similar, for instance, to those of the complex of Sultan Ḥasan, although unlike them the *īwān* here could only have been on the side opposite the *qibla.* The area further south could have contained, as today, space for ablutions [31]. There would have been an awkward remaining space to the south of the vestibule, although it is possible that a common element of contemporary complexes, the *sabīl-kuttāb,* could have fitted here. The natural place for this on the plan would have been the space to the left of the portal. There are signs here of the well having been altered, particularly towards the top, although it must be admitted that the seemingly original lower section shows no sign of having accomodated a *sabīl.*

The resulting plan would have been an idiosyncratic one — no other madrasa complex has a plan which is exactly comparable, with a vestibule and corridor leading to a small rectangular prayer hall, the main room of the madrasa, on one side, and to a courtyard

31. The present ablutions area is modern; poor maintenance of pipes in these areas of medieval buildings is often responsible for subsidence of adjacent structures.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

on the other. But Cairo is full of contemporary buildings whose chief characteristic is the ingenuity with which they have been fitted into the irregular spaces which were the only building land available in the crowded medieval city [32]. These demanded individual solutions to individual building problems, so it need be no surprise that the complex of al-ʿAynî is unlike any other. However, its sitting of the mausoleum on the corner of the building, where it was visible on two sides, is typical of earlier funerary architecture within the city in its maximum exposure of the mausoleum to the potential *baraka* of the prayers of passers-by.

The mausoleum. Within the mausoleum itself, the only part which conserves any original decoration is the wooden *muqarnas* of the zone of transition. The three tiers which encircle the base are extended to five at the corners, forming *muqarnas* pendentives (pl. IIIa). These have the remains of gilded arabesques and foliate scrolls against a dark (probably originally dark-blue) background (pl. IIIb). In a notice of al-Mu'ayyad's death, al-Ṣayrafī gives a list of his constructions, and mentions the gilded dome which he built over the mausoleum of al-ʿAynī's madrasa, of which (meaning the dome) there was not the like [33]. Despite the latter qualification, it would be unprecedented for a dome to be gilded on the exterior in Mamluk Cairo, so it is probably to the painting on the *muqarnas* (or possibly to now vanished painting on the interior of the dome itself) that this passage refers. In addition to the founder, Šaiḫ Aḥmad al-Qasṭalānī was buried in the mausoleum in 913/1517 [34].

The Miḥrāb (fig. 2-3; pl. IVb). The glory of the complex was, until recently, the tiled *miḥrāb* of the prayer hall adjacent to the dome chamber [35]. This had already

32. Examples include the funerary complexes of Aḥmad al-Qāṣid (c. 735/1335, N° 10), Aydumur al-Bahlawān (before 747/1346, N° 22) and Aytmiš al-Baġāsī (785/1383, N° 252), each of which has a single irregularly shaped prayer hall in addition to a mausoleum. For a discussion of the principles which underlay the siting of the various parts of complexes in crowded spaces, see C. Kessler, « Funerary Architecture within the City », *Colloque international sur l'Histoire du Caire*, ed. A. Raymond, M. Rogers and M. Wahba (Gräfenhainichen, 1972), p. 257-267.

33. Ǧawharī, ʿAlī ibn Dāwūd al-Ṣayrafī, *Nuzhat al-nufūs*, II, p. 492 : « *wa minhā al-qubba al-muḏahhabiyya allatī waḍaʿahā ʿalā al-madfan illaḏī bi-l-madrasati-l-badriyya bi-l-ġarb min al-ǧāmiʿ al-azhar illatī lā naẓīr lahā* ».

34. ʿAlī Mubārak, *al-Ḫiṭaṭ al-ǧadīda al-tawfīqiyya li Miṣr al-Qāhira* (Būlāq, 1306/1888) VI, p. 11.

35. After part of the ceiling had fallen on it, it was destroyed in the summer of 1980 to make way for the more modern one visible in Pl. 7.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

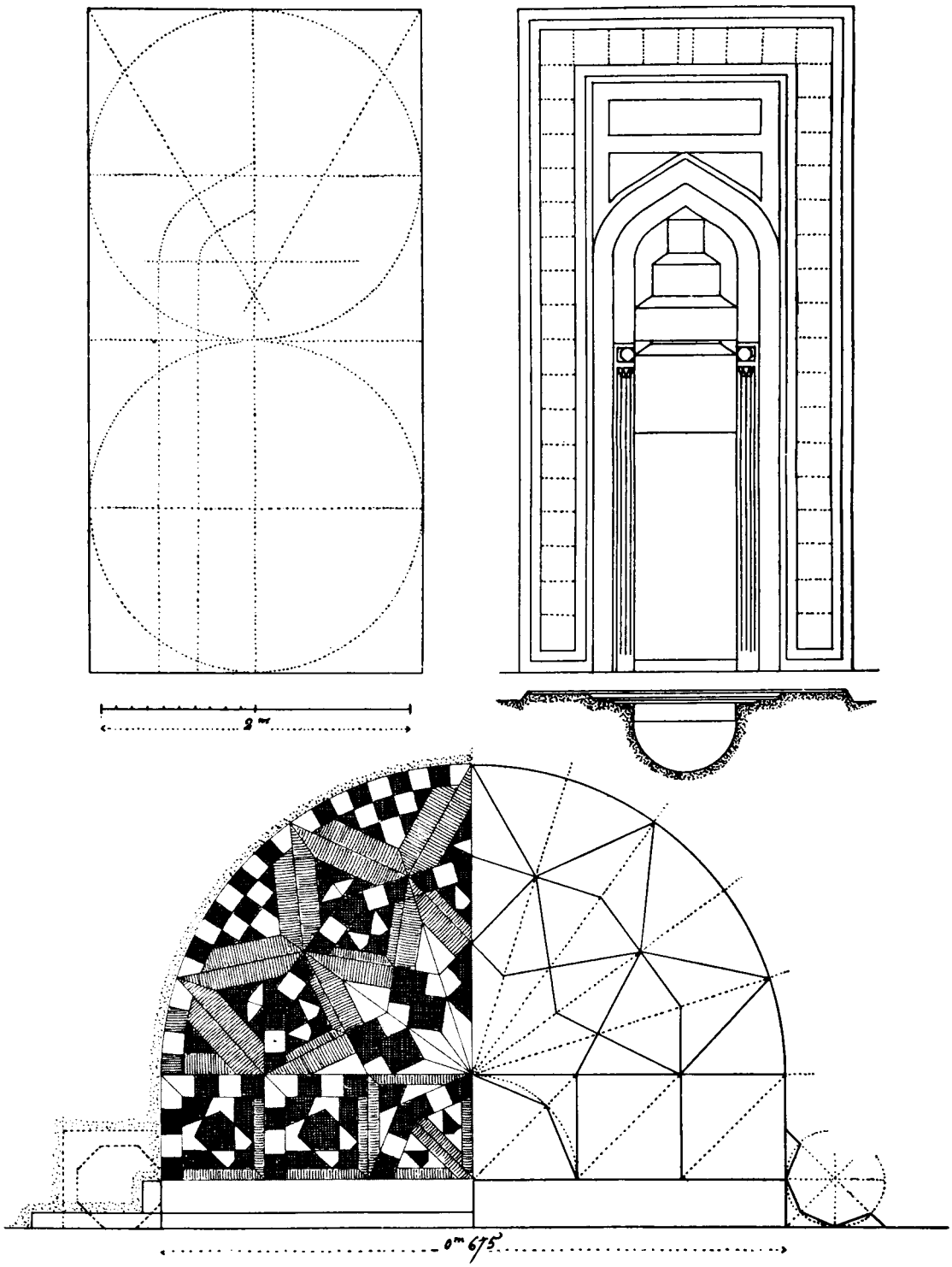


Fig. 2. — Madrasa of al-ʿAyni : plan and elevation of *miḥrāb* (after Bourgeoin).

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

gained some fame in the nineteenth century after its copious illustration by Bourgoin in his *Précis de l'Art arabe* [36]. Bourgoin in his notes to the plates did not suggest any possible date for the *miḥrāb*, but the next person to comment on it, Herz Bey, regarded it as an addition to the original at an unspecified time in Maghribī or Spanish style [37]. This is perhaps what influenced Prost in his monograph on Egyptian tile revetment to classify it as Maghribī work of the 18th century [38], an attribution which has remained uncontested up to the present.

This *miḥrāb* has many features which show that it is foreign to the artistic traditions of Cairo. First is the technique, one of tile-mosaic in a limited range of colours, white, and light- and dark-blue. Secondly, there is the form of the stalactite conch of the *miḥrāb*, consisting of rows of stalactites which regularly decrease at the top to a single stalactite, unlike the more usual Cairene practice of having a larger semi-dome taking the place of the last several rows. Thirdly is the placing of the major inscription, just above the arch instead of following the rectangular frame, and fourthly is the content of the inscription, a spurious *ḥadīṯ* instead of the more usual Quranic excerpt. A fifth oddity is the style of the letters of the inscription, with the teeth of the *sīn* of *sāʿa* completely flattened. Sixth, clearly visible in earlier drawing of the lower concave niche of the *miḥrāb* (fig. 3), its use of a repeated motif of *Allāh* in square Kufic. Although square Kufic is used occasionally in Mamluk architecture [39], it is entirely absent from other Cairene *miḥrāb*-s. The reciprocal design of the square Kufic (fig. 3) caught the attention of Gombrich, and one can do no better than to repeat his words : « it shows the letters for *Allāh* arranged in such a way that they appear both as figure and ground, as if to proclaim that God is everywhere. There is a touch of sublimity here which may remind one of the mighty canons by a master of church music » [40].

36. II (Paris, 1892), Pl. I-IV.

37. M. Herz, *Catalogue raisonné des Monuments exposés dans le Musée national de l'Art arabe* (Cairo, 1906), p. 233 n. 1.

38. C. Prost, *Les revêtements céramiques dans les monuments musulmans de l'Égypte*, Mémoires de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale du Caire, XL (Cairo, 1916), p. 44-45. His conclusions in the text are all the more remarkable for having ignored the similarity to two Anatolian Seljuk miḥrābs which he pointed out in p. 44 n. 6. M.S. Briggs, *Muhammadan Architecture in Egypt and Palestine* (Oxford, 1924), p. 233, attributed it to workers from Morocco and Tunis in the middle of the eighteenth century; H.R. Devonshire, *Rambles in Cairo* (Cairo, 1931), p. 38, wrote that « Experts agree in ascribing the work to North African craftsmen who came to Egypt in the XVIIIth century; it certainly is more recent than the mosque itself ».

39. E.g. in the Mausoleum of Qalawun and on the portals of the Complex of Sultan Ḥasan, of al-Mu'ayyad at Bāb Zuwayla and of the Māristān of al-Mu'ayyad.

40. E.H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order : a Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art*

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

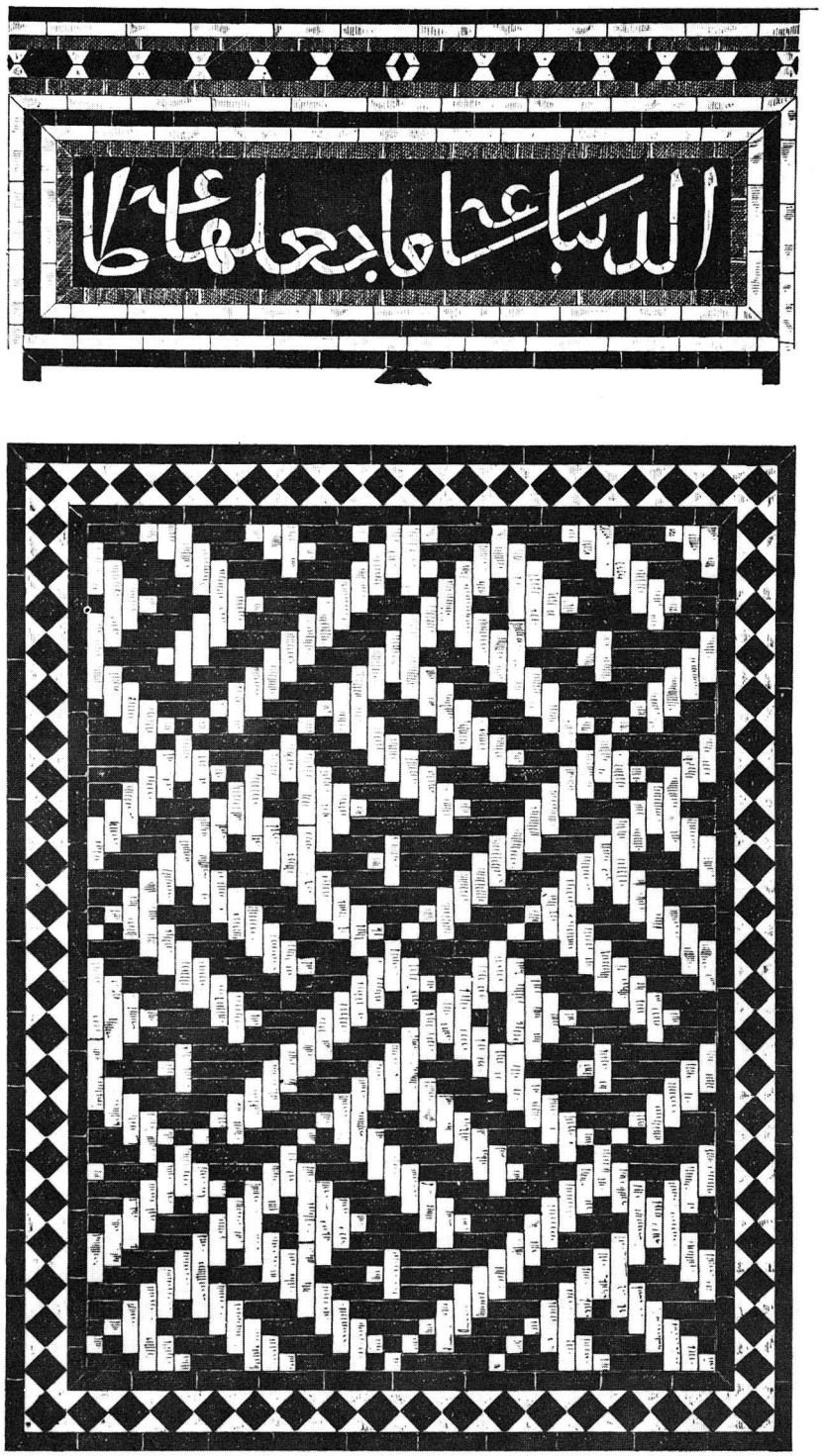


Fig. 3. — Madrasa of al-ʿAynī : square Kufic of *miḥrāb* (after Bourgoin).

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

The use of tiled revetments in Egyptian architecture was known in the Pharaonic period [41], and there are several earlier Mamluk examples of it known. What is surprising is not that it appears, but that it does not appear more often. In Iran and Anatolia tilework had been featured primonently on buildings from the end of the twelfth century onwards, but it somehow failed to capture the imagination of the patrons or of the public in Egypt. This is all the more surprising when the flourishing state of the contemporary local pottery industry is considered, showing that lack of technique was hardly a factor.

The closest work in Egypt to that of our *miḥrāb* is that which was undertaken by the Tabrīz workshop in the second quarter of the fourteenth century [42]. Direct evidence for its work comes in Maqrīzī's statement that the architect (*bannā'*) of the *ǧāmiʿ* of Qawsūn was a Tabrīzī who built its minarets in the style of those of the Mosque of ʿAlī Šāh in Tabrīz [43]. These are likely to have been very similar to the minarets of the Mosque of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad in the citadel, whose tile-mosaic summits are indeed like contemporary Il-Ḫānid work [44]. Full tile-mosaic is also seen in the inscriptions on the drums of the mausoleums of Amīr Aṣlam al-Silāḥdār (745-746 / 1344-1345) and Ḫawand Tuġāy (749/1348) [45]. The work of this school, however, seems to have died out with the complex of Sultan Ḥasan (757-764 / 1356-1362), where the use of tile is restricted to strips outlining the hexagons of the tympanum of a window [46].

In the Burǧī Mamlūk period colour was achieved by more traditional methods of marble mosaic and glass paste, methods which had remained popular in Mamluk Cairo since their first use in the complex of Qalāwūn (683-684 / 1284-1285). For example, the complex of al-Mu'ayyad at Bāb Zuwayla (818-823 / 1415-1420) has a *miḥrāb* which

(Oxford, 1979), p. 292. The comparison with music may not be entirely out of place in Islamic architecture — Mehmet Agha, the architect of the Sultan Ahmet Mosque in Istanbul, was learned in music, and his biographer expiated at length on the tones produced by the marble used for the decoration of the mosque. See Ca'fer Efendi *Risāle-i mi'māriyye*, tr. H. Crane, Studies in Islamic art and architecture, v. 1 (Leiden, 1987), p. 25-28, 68-69.

41. W. Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancien Egypt* (Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 288.

42. This has been exhaustively researched by Michael Meinecke in « Die Mamlukischen Fayencemosaikdekorationen : eine Werkstätte aus Tabrīz in Kairo (1330-1350) », *Kunst des Orients* XI (1976-1977), p. 85-144.

43. *Kitāb al-mawāʿiẓ wa-l-iʿtibār fī ḏikr al-ḫiṭaṭ wa-l-āṯār* (Būlāq, 1853-1854 / 1270), II, p. 307; *idem, Kitāb al-sulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Ziyāda (Cairo, 1934-1958), II/2, p. 320; Meinecke, « Werkstätte », p. 91-92.

44. Meinecke, « Werkstätte », p. 100-107.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 117-119, 121-124.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 129, fig. 40.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

uses light-blue faience extensively, but it is the solid which had been popular since Pharaonic times, not the thin surface glaze of the tiles of al-ʿAynī. The strapwork which frames the entrance to the complex has large insets of turquoise and red glass paste, while a variation of this pattern with turquoise insets is found in two panels to either side of the window at the back of the entrance portal of his hospital (821-823 / 1418-1420) [47]. There are, however, two rectangular panels of square Kufic on the sides of this portal which have what seem to be blue tiles inset into the stone. Close examination of these has not been possible, but the possibility exists that rather than being glass paste, they have a surface glaze like the tiles of al-ʿAynī. In several other square panels on the portal, what now looks like a brick-like substance, has been inset into the stone to make interlacing patterns. The colour of these is now almost indistinguishable from the surrounding stone, but the possibility can be raised that the insets were also glazed originally. Although the resulting effect would still have been far from the tile mosaic of al-ʿAynī, it represents the closest parallel to it in Cairo.

Given the obvious need to look for parallels to al-ʿAynī's *miḥrāb* outside Egypt, where else in the Islamic world was glazed tilework used in the early fifteenth century? There are three main traditions which can be compared, Iranian, Maghribī and Anatolian.

Contemporary Maghribī work can certainly be ruled out as an influence. The colour scheme of tile-mosaic there is very different, consisting mainly of green, brown, black and white. The arch profiles are usually rounded and horseshoe-shaped, unlike the stalactite niche of al-ʿAynī. Finally, tile-mosaic almost never appears on *miḥrāb*-s there, painted stucco being the norm.

Iranian tilework had developed the techniques which are seen in the *miḥrāb* of al-ʿAynī in the early fourteenth century; by the early fifteenth century different styles were in fashion. In addition to occasional uses of underglaze-painted and *cuerda seca* tiles, tile-mosaic with arabesque and floral, as well as geometric patterns and in a much greater range of colours than the blue and white of al-ʿAynī, was the norm [48]. The large tiles in square Kufic (in bannā'ī-technique [49]) in al-ʿAynī's *miḥrāb* are usually found in Iranian tilework only on exteriors, as their patterns have maximum impact when viewed from a distance.

The two main powers in contemporary Anatolia were the Ottomans and the Karamanids. The early fourteenth century had seen an importation of Iranian-style tile-mosaic

47. Illustrated in L. Hautecœur and G. Wiet, *Les mosquées du Caire* (Paris, 1932), pl. 178.

48. A survey of tilework of the period is to be found in B. O'Kane, *Timurid Architecture in Khurasan* (Costa Mesa, 1987), p. 64-71.

49. See *ibid.*, p. 67-68.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

and *cuerda seca* in the Yeşil Cami in Bursa (822-827 / 1419-1424), while the contemporary Muradiye (824/1421) in Edirne featured chinoiserie underglaze-painted tiles. Probably the finest example of Karamanid tilework is also *cuerda seca* technique : the *miḥrāb* from the Imaret of Ibrahim Bey in Karaman (836/1432) [50].

The closest examples of tilework and tiled *miḥrāb*-s to al-ʿAynī are indeed in Anatolia, but they date mostly from the Seljuk period. Over a dozen are known, in varying states of preservation [51]. All of them share at least three features with al-ʿAynī's *miḥrāb* : the technique of tile-mosaic, the colour scheme of while and two shades of blue, and the use of regularly decreasing tiers of stalactites. The latter are mostly set within a rectangular surround, although two examples are framed by a four-centred arch like that of al-ʿAynī (pl. VI) [52]. Several also have analogues to al-ʿAynī's angular engaged columns [53]. The fragmentary remains of a tiled *miḥrāb* from the madrasa of Emir Mūsā in Karaman (c. 1350) show stalactites of identical colour and design to many Seljuk examples and indicate that the same decorative tradition was still being carried on in the fourteenth century [54]. Even though the Karamanids used *cuerda seca* for their most prestigious projects, their appreciation of the earlier style is shown by the addition, probably in the early fifteenth century, of some underglaze-painted tiles to the Seljuk *miḥrāb* of the Kazimkarabekir Ulu Cami [55]. Even more important for our purposes, however, is the *miḥrāb* of the Hasbey Dalülhuffaz in Konya (pl. Vb). This building has an inscription on the exterior dated to 824/1421. The *miḥrāb* is so similar to Seljuk examples that it had been suggested that the Karamanid work on the

50. Now in the Çinili Köšk in Istanbul; see Tahsin Oz, *Turkish Ceramics* (n.p., n.d.), pl. XVII.

51. The most convenient reference to these is M. Meinecke, *Fayencedekorationen seldschukischer Sakralbauten in Kleinasien*, I-II, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Istanbuler Mitteilungen Beiheft 13 (Tübingen, 1976), from which the following plate and catalogue numbers are taken. The miḥrābs include those of the Misri Cami, Afyon Karahisar (Cat. n° 1; pl. 1/1); Ulu Cami, Aksehir (Cat. n° 7; pl. 3/1); Arslanhane Cami, Ankara (Cat. n° 18; pl. 8/3); Esrefoğlu Cami, Beysehir (696-699 / 1296-1300, Cat. n° 23; pl. 10/1); Ulu Cami, Birgi (Cat. n° 26; pl. 11/1); Ibn Arapsah Mescit, Harput (678 / 1279-1280, Cat. n° 42; pl. 17/1); Külük Cami, Kayseri (Cat. n° 52; pl. 20/1); Ulu Cami, Kazimkarabekir (Cat. n° 54; pl. 20/2-3); Sirçali Mescit, Konya (Cat. n° 69; pl. 26/1); Sirçali Medrese, Konya (Cat. n° 71; pl. 29/3); Sahip Ata Cami, Konya (Cat. n° 77; pl. 32/4); Beyhekim Mescit, Konya (1270-1280, Cat. n° 81; pl. 35/2); Sadreddin Konevi Cami, Konya (673 / 1274-1275, Cat. n° 85; pl. 36/4).

52. The Külük Cami, Kayseri, and the Ibn Arapsah, Harput (see n. 51).

53. Misri Cami, Afyon Karahisar; Sahip Ata Cami, Konya; Beyhekim Mescit, Konya (see n. 51).

54. Meinecke, *Fayencedekorationen*, Cat. n° 46; pl. 18/1-3.

55. *Ibid.*, Cat. n° 54; pl. 20/2-3.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

building was confined to a redoing of the façade, but the latest study suggests that it is rather an archaic work in Seljuk style [56]. If the Karamanid craftsmen were capable of reproducing a Seljuk *miḥrāb* in Konya, there is no reason why a craftsman imported from Anatolia by al-ʿAynī into Cairo could not have worked in the same style.

The inscription on the *miḥrāb* also points to possible Anatolian influence (pl. 8). It reads as follows :

الدنيا ساعة فاجعلها طاعة

« Life is short, spend it in obedience (to God). »

This phrase is unknown on other Cairene monuments. We know of only two other occurrences of it on architecture, one on the mausoleum of Uljaytu at Sultaniyya (713-716 / 1313-1316), the other on the Mosque of Gauhar Šhad in Mašhad (821/1418) [57]. Sheila Blair has pointed out that while this is not listed among the canonical *ḥadīṯ*-s, a paraphrase of it is contained in Ǧalāl al-Dīn's *Maṯnavī* [58]. But in the above instances it was preceded in the first case by *ṣadaqa rasūl Allāh,* and in the second by *qāla'l-nabī,* indicating that it had gained orthodox acceptance by the fourteenth century. Studies on *ḥadīṯ*-s are just beginning to be made and recorded on monuments, but it is surely significant that with the limited number published, the links are with Anatolia and Iran.

We have seen that there are three building periods connected with the madrasa : 814 / 1411-1412, the date of its foundation, restoration by al-Mu'ayyad to the dome at an unspecified time (815-824 / 1412-1421), and 831/1428, when restoration works which included the renovation of the vestibule were carried out. Since with the *miḥrāb* we are dealing with a case of archaism, it is unfortunately impossible on stylistic grounds to decide between these dates. On historical grounds, however, it may have been later in his career that al-ʿAynī realized the desirability of stressing the Turkishness of his building. Apart from the obvious cachet which a form of decoration unique to Cairo would give him, al-ʿAynī, as mentioned above, owed much of his power and influence over successive Mamluk sultans, especially al-Ašraf Barsbāy, to his Turkish background, both in his ability to function as an ambassador in Mamluk-controlled Anatolia, and to his ability to translate historical and religious sources from Arabic to the Turkish which was the spoken language of the court. The reasons for his undertaking of a

56. *Ibid.*, Cat. n° 92; pl. 41/1.

57. For the former see S. Blair, « The epigraphic Program of the Tomb of Uljaytu in Sultaniyya : Meaning in Mongol Architecture », *Islamic Art* II (1987), inscription n° 49e; for the latter B. O'Kane, *Timurid Architecture in Khurasan* (Costa Mesa, 1987), p. 125, n° 22.

58. Blair, *op. cit.*, p. 56; Badīʿ al-Zamān Fīrūzanfar, *Aḥādiṯ-i Maṯnavī* (Tehran, 1347/1969), p. 12-13, n° 28.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

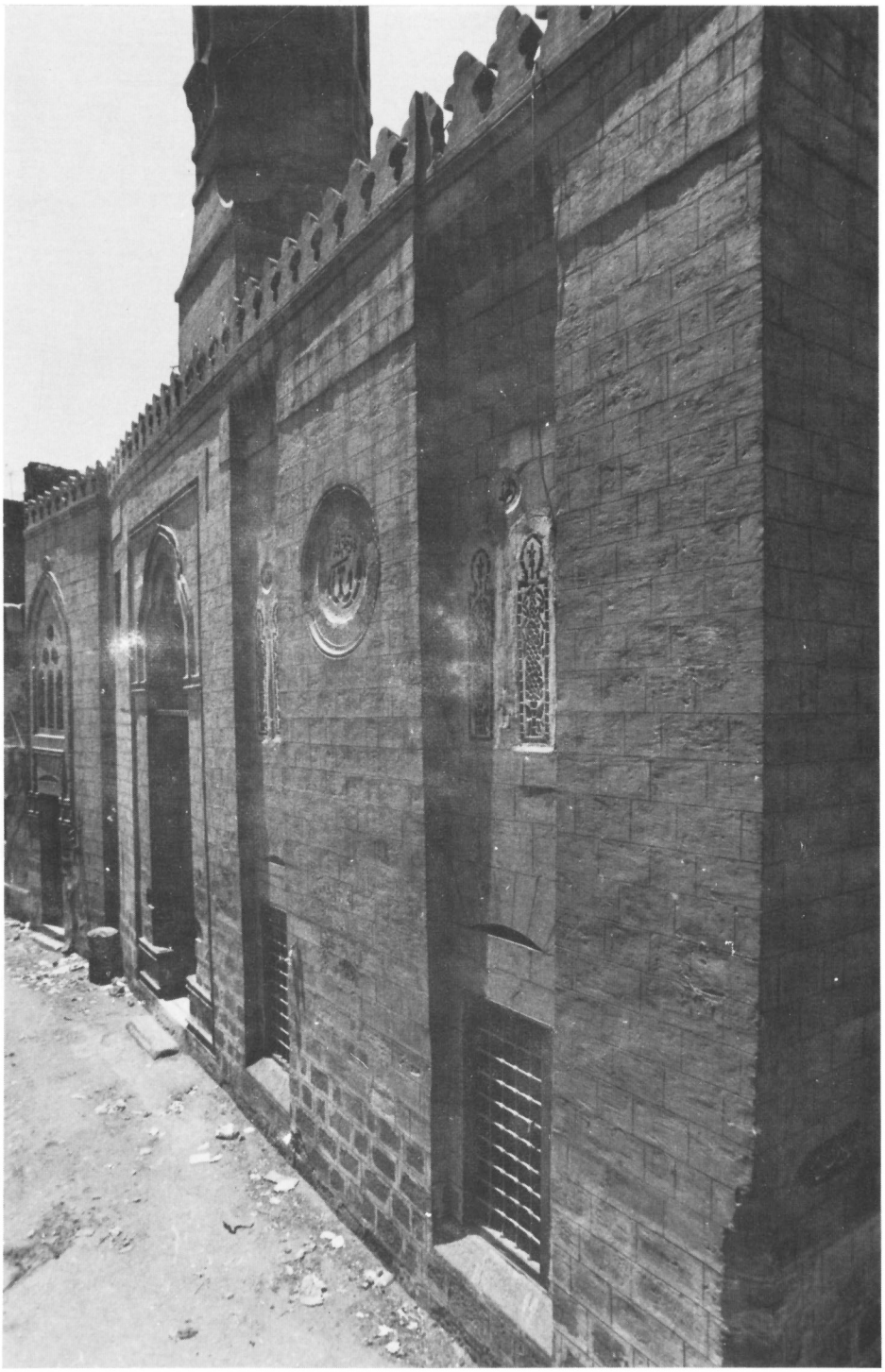
restoration of his complex in 831/1428 may also be relevant here. Having enjoyed the favour of the post of *qāḍī al-quḍāh* for three years perhaps he felt it was time that his new status was reflected in the decoration of his building. Given the fact that he was removed from the office in the following year (although he was subsequently reinstated) [59] this could indeed be seen as a timely move. The painted emblem in the vestibule is the most obvious evidence of his new-found status, while a tiled *miḥrāb* with (for Cairo) unique decoration might serve to emphasise this. The date of 831/1428, could therefore be selected as the most likely one on historical grounds for the *miḥrāb,* although it should be stressed that this can only be speculation.

An early twentieth century writer described the *miḥrāb* as « more bizarre than artistic » [60]. While it may be easy to dismiss this remark as that of an amateur of the traditional fashions of Cairene decoration, and one of who was totally ignorant of those of Anatolia, such, in fact could well have been the reaction of many of al-ʿAynī's contemporaries. Indeed, its strangeness in the context of Mamluk decoration could have been the reason for its failure to convince Cairenes of the desiribility of decoration in the tile-mosaic, rather than any technical difficulties which the technique involved. But this had been the case previously with the work of the Tabriz master in the time of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. If those state-sponsored buildings had failed to make the technique fashionable, we should be less surprised that one erected by a *qāḍī* should have no impact. Nevertheless, it still remains an interesting example where a religious patron may have tried to underline his non-native origins by stylistic means, in order thus to stress his affinities with the ruling class.

59. For his vagaries in this post, see Ibn Taġrībirdī, *al-Nuǧūm,* tr. Popper, XVIII, p. 31, 68, 82; XIX. p. 6.

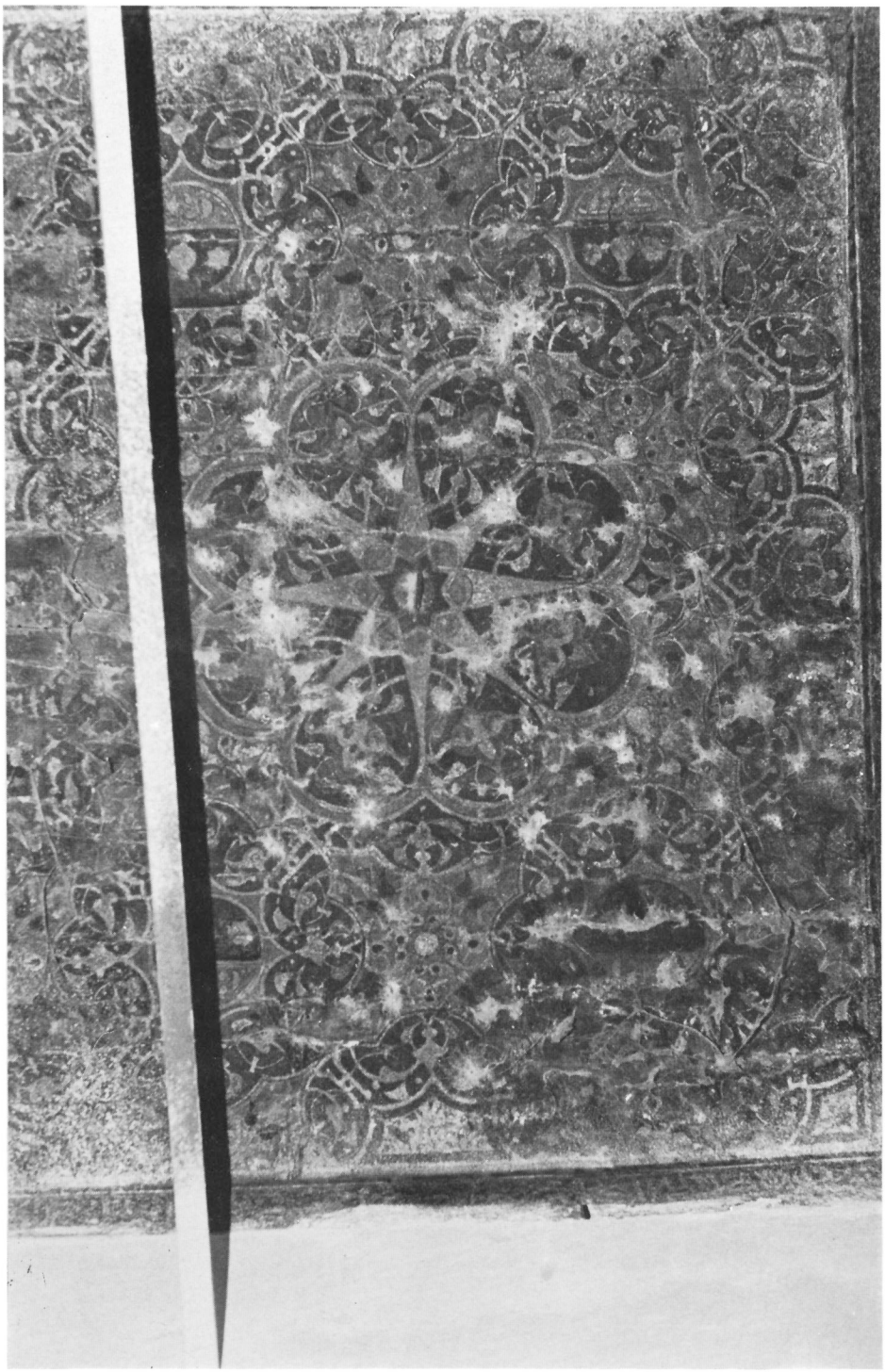
60. Devonshire, *op. cit.,* p. 38.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net



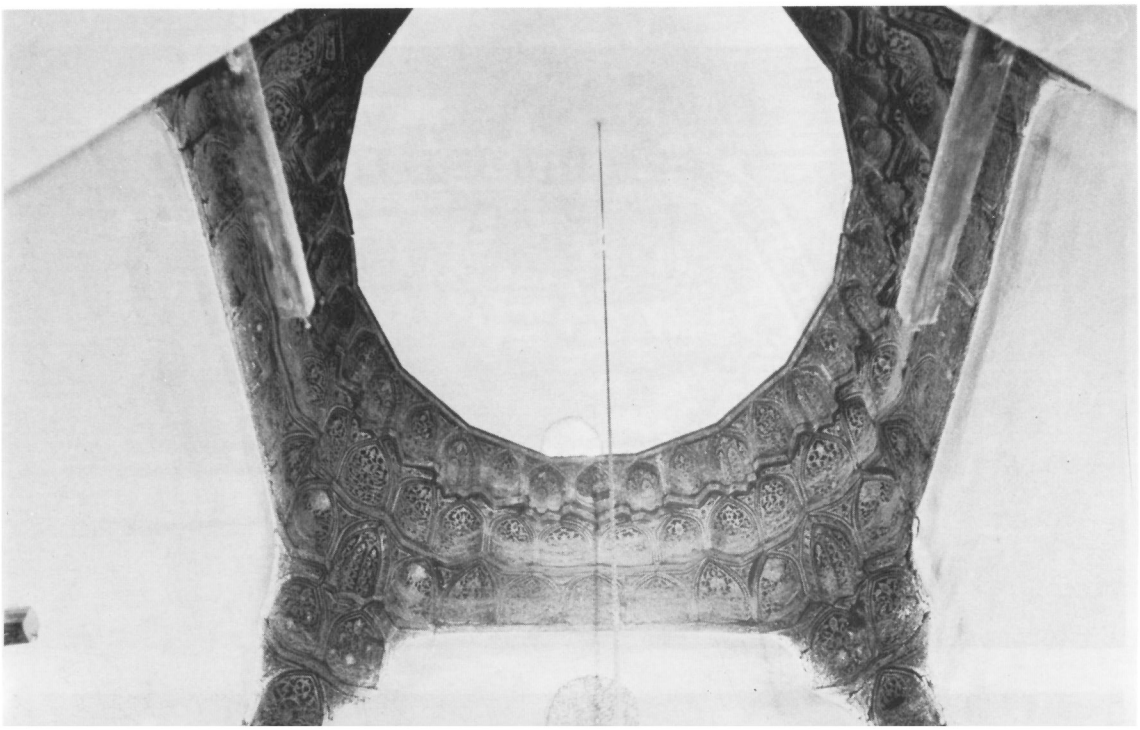
Madrasa of al-ʿAynī : east façade.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

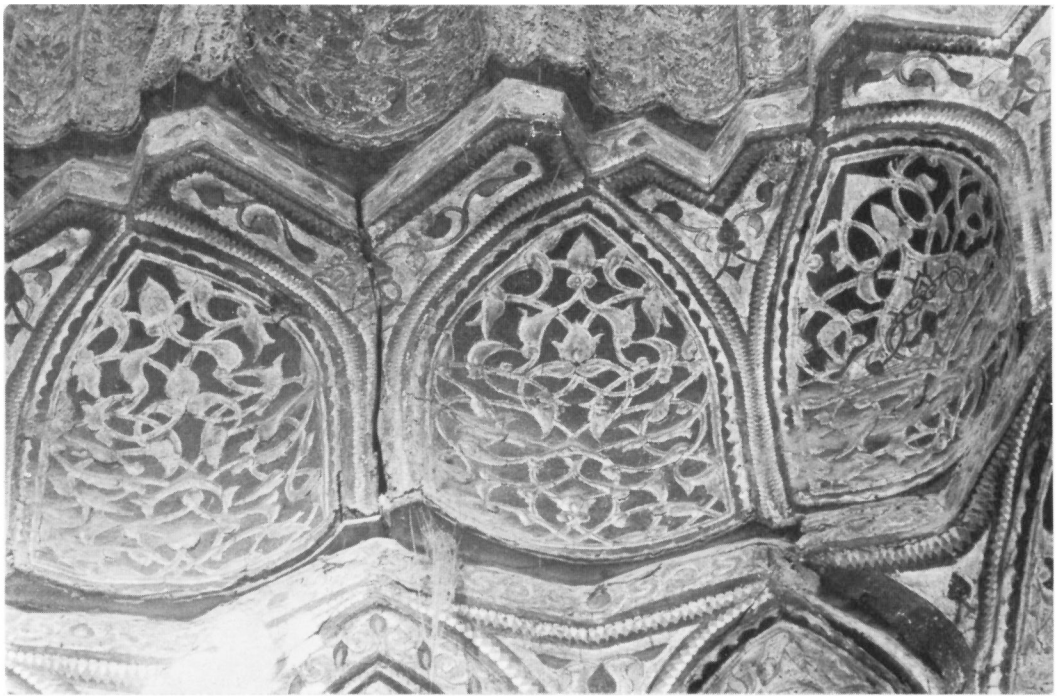


Madrasa of al-ʿAynī : ceiling of vestibule.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

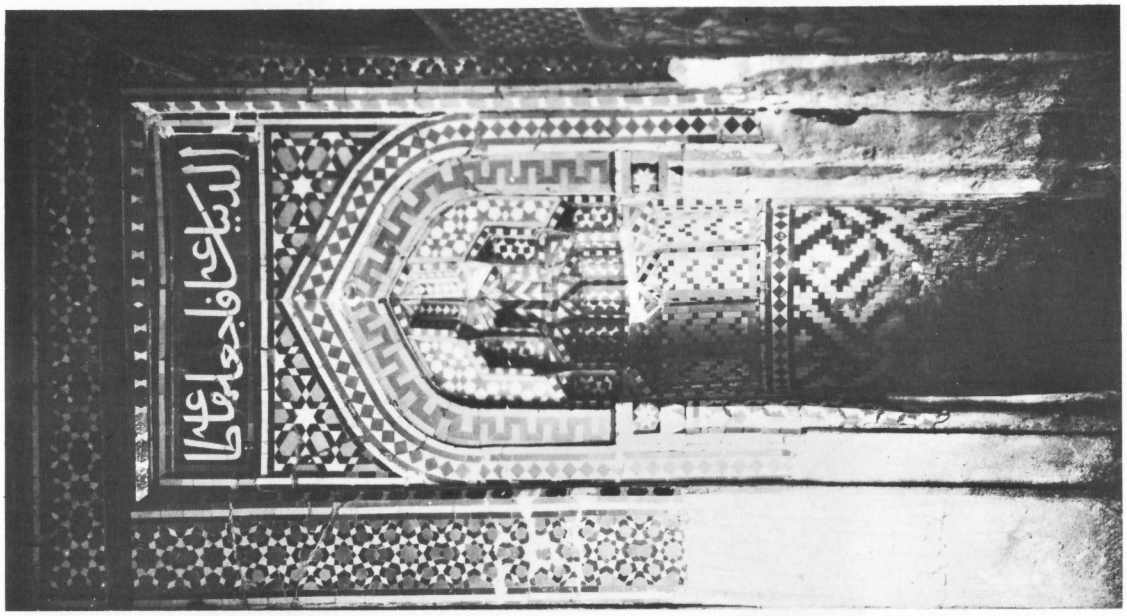


a. Madrasa of al-ʿAynī : zone of transition of mausoleum.

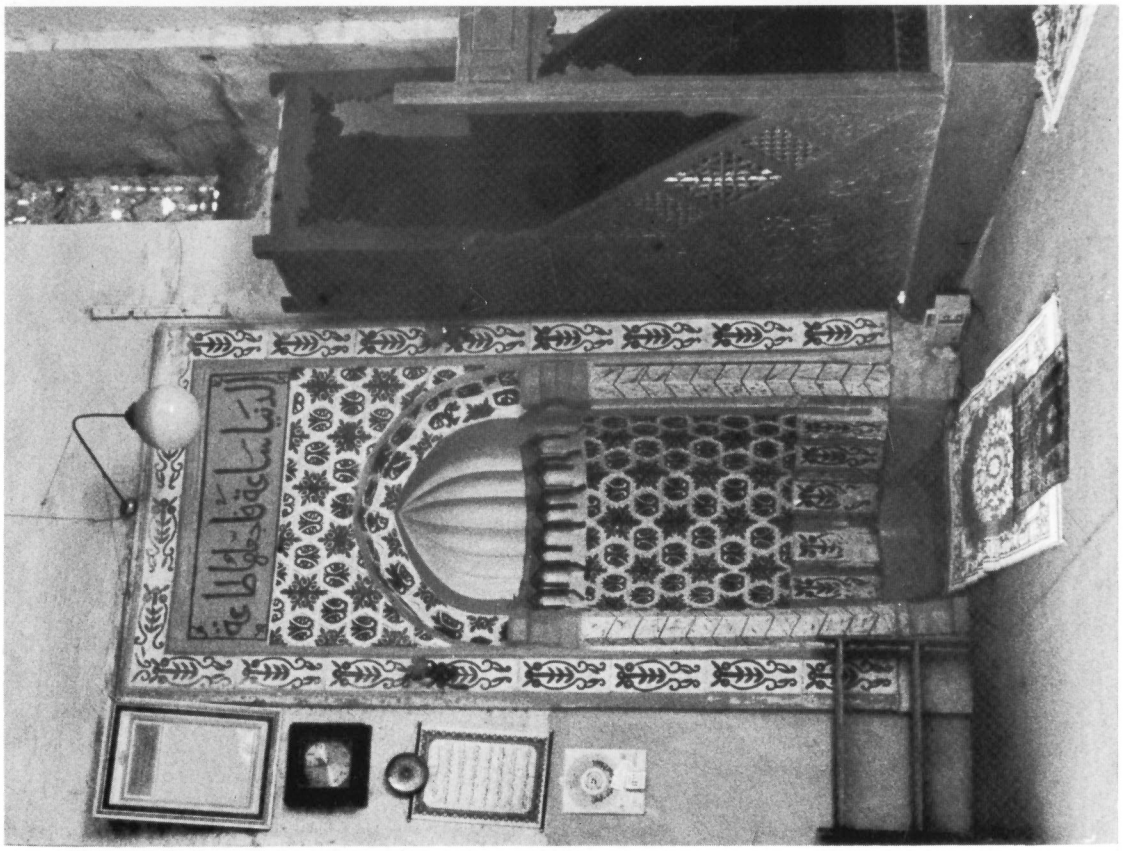


b. Madrasa of al-ʿAynī : detail of zone of transition of mausoleum.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

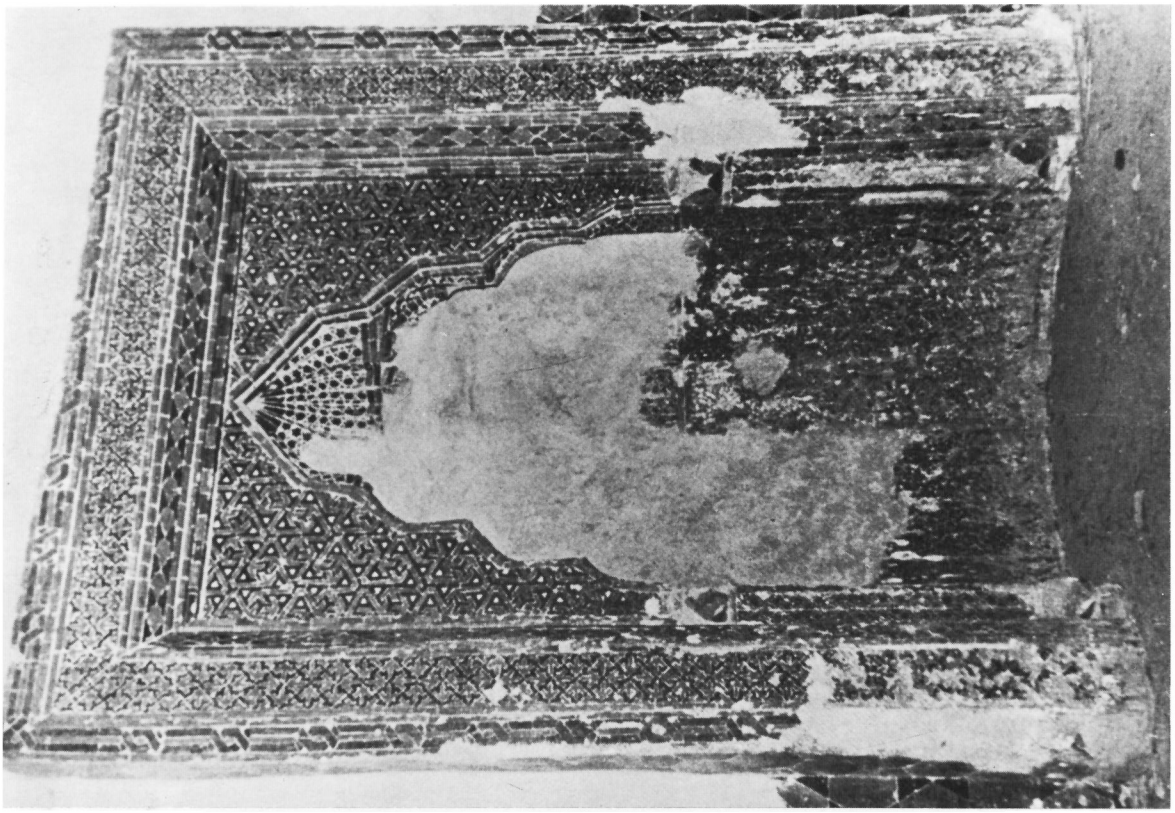


b. Madrasa of al-ʿAynī : original miḥrāb.



a. Madrasa of al-ʿAynī : prayer hall, present state.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net



b. Konya : miḥrāb of Hasbey Darülhuffaz (after Meinecke).

a. Islamic Museum, Cairo : underglaze-painted tile.

© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net

PLANCHE XVII

Kayseri : miḥrāb of Külük Cami.

AnIsl 24 (1989), p. 253-268 Laila Ibrahim, Bernard O'Kane
The Madrasa of Badr al-Dīn al-'Aynī and its Tiled Miḥrāb.
© IFAO 2026 AnIsl en ligne https://www.ifao.egnet.net