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The 'Abd Al-Raḥmān Katkhudā Style in 18th Century Cairo [avec 8 planches].

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THE 'ABD AL-RAḤMĀN KATKHUDĀ STYLE in 18th Century Cairo

'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā, amir of Cairo during the mid-18th century, was one of the greatest sponsors of architecture ever known in Muslim Egypt.* The large number of buildings which he built — or rather rebuilt — in the Egyptian capital bear decorative features so distinctive that they deserve the label “'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā Style”. This style is the subject of the following analysis. However, before discussing the 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā style in particular, and without tackling the complex problem of stylistic definition in Islamic architecture, a few general remarks must first be made about architectural styles in Cairo.

We cannot hope to find much inspiration for a definition of architectural styles in medieval Arabic literary or historical sources. As is well known, these sources are not very eloquent concerning the subject of architecture, especially when it comes to the description of its physical form. Maqrīzī, for example, who wrote extensively about Cairo's topography and its architecture in the 15th century,¹ did not convey any concrete image of the buildings he mentioned. This was likewise the case with 'Alī Mubārak who, at the end of the 19th century, extended Maqrīzī's work by compiling a topography of the Cairo of his time and enumerating its monuments.² Evliya Çelebi, the 17th century Turkish traveller and historian, was somewhat more informative in this respect;³ he often used the term *tarz*, which was equivalent to “style”, to describe types of mosque architecture (for example, whether Ottoman or pre-Ottoman), and he specified whether a mosque had a courtyard or not. Recent studies on geometrical treatises of the medieval Muslim world show that stylistic categorization was used for technical details but not for architectural types.⁴

* The following abbreviation is used : Index. Department of Egyptian Antiquities, *Index of Islamic Monuments of Cairo*.

1. Taqīy al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-mawā'iz wa'l-i'tibār bi dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa'l-āthār*, 2 vol., Būlāq, 1270/1853-1854.

2. 'Alī Mubārak, *al-Khiṭaṭ al-jadida al-tawfiqiyya*, 18 vol., Būlāq, 1306/1888-1889.

3. Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatnamesi, (X) Mısır, Sudan, Habeş*, Istanbul, 1938.

4. Midhat S. Bulatov, *Geometricheskaiia Garmonizatsia v Arkhitekture Srednei Azii IX-XV vv*, Moscow, 1978; Lisa Golombek & Donald Wilber, *The Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan*, Princeton, 1988; I, p. 137-164; Renata Holod, «Text, Plan and Building: On the Transmission of Architectural Knowledge», *Theories and Principles in the Architecture of Islamic Societies*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1988, p. 1-12.

If we cannot hope to find in the Arabic historical literature a perception of distinctive styles of architecture, we should nevertheless expect that the craftsman's terminology be equipped with designations of forms or techniques for the craftsman's own practical use. The term *muqarnas*, which is not mentioned in Arab classical dictionaries, could very well have its origin in the craftsman's milieu. Waqf documents, with their detailed descriptions of buildings, are probably the best source for such a terminology. As far as one can tell from Egyptian waqf documents, forms and techniques applied in architecture were very frequently distinguished according to geographical labels (*'iqd madā'inī* for a trilobe arch, *thūma rūmī* for a type of wooden bulb used in ceilings, *maq'ad qibīī* for a closed loggia, *maq'ad turkī* for an arcaded loggia, *sullam ṭarābulsī* and *sullam sakandarī* for types of staircases, etc.). These labels, however, dealt with technical details of architecture and did not apply to a whole program of aesthetic principles or to style definitions in the modern sense. Similarly, the terms *islīmī* or *islāmī* and *khatā'ī*, used in Timurid sources for the designation of arabesque and Chinese patterns respectively, belonged to the same kind of craftsman's terminology. Such a terminology must have existed at all times, even if it was rarely used in historical sources⁵.

When dealing with early or late Islamic architecture today, it is common to identify stylistic categories by the dynastic period during which they were created, a definition which gives both a chronological and a geographical label. Historians of Islamic art, who still feel they should justify the existence of an "Islamic art" *per se*, against tendencies to see in the Muslim world only a variety of regional arts, have avoided further stylistic classifications based on aesthetic criteria. With the exception of Herzfeld, who coined the definition of the Samarra style, historians of Islamic architecture have not developed their own nomenclature of styles and have preferred instead to borrow labels from historians. The latter, in turn, have followed the classification of the medieval chroniclers who used the names of the ruling dynasties to designate periods of history. Only Eastern European historians have tended to qualify the art of the Muslim peoples by regional rather than dynastic criteria. Dynastic labelling in the history of Islamic architecture has proven to be generally more persistent than in the history of decorative arts, where problems of date and provenance have instead often compelled scholars to categorize objects according to technical and aesthetic criteria.

The association of styles of Islamic architecture with dynastic periods, especially when dealing with imperial arts, is no less adequate than any other classification, as long as the limits of such definitions are generally accepted. A style can, moreover, be associated with the patronage of a specific sponsor if sufficient material is available to allow such an attribution. In this context, the vizier Fakhr al-Din in Saljuq Anatolia⁶,

5. Bernard O'Kane, "Defining a Timurid Aesthetic", (*unpublished article*), p. 17; Thomas W. Lentz & Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision — Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century*, Los Angeles, 1989, Appendix I: "Arzadasht", p. 364.

6. B. Brend, "The Patronage of Faḥr al-Dīn 'Alī Ibn al-Ḥusayn and the Work of Kalūk Ibn 'Abd Allāh in the Development of the Decoration of Portals in Thirteenth Century Anatolia", *Kunst des Orients* X 1/2, 1975, p. 160-186.

Timur in Samarqand, Sultan Qāyṭbāy in Mamluk Egypt or Shāh Jahān in Moghul India can be credited with stimulating the creation of an architecture which characterized their respective reigns. However, a more detailed investigation is still needed into how far the formation of particular styles in Islamic architecture should be identified with the ruling establishment and, further, to what extent this relationship varied through time and space. A comparison with the situation in other cultures might also be interesting. Such an investigation, which could be quite relevant for a deeper understanding of Islamic art, would necessarily deal with the status of the architect and the organization of labour, as well as with the role of the sponsor.

In Egypt, the association of architectural styles with ruling dynasties is usually accepted. For example, one may refer to Fatimid and Mamluk styles, with the additional specification of early or late, because each of these dynasties introduced important innovations which became characteristic of their periods. The terms Fatimid and Mamluk became, then, equivalent to specific features — features, however, which could outlive their respective dynasties. The situation was further complicated when architecture lacked an imperial status and became “provincial”. This was the case with the Ottoman period in Egypt, which started in 1517. Legally speaking, the Ottoman period ended with the proclamation of the British protectorate in 1914. Practically speaking, the French Expedition of Bonaparte in 1798 marked the end of direct Ottoman rule in Egypt. But when it came to architecture, we face the paradoxical situation where, throughout the whole Ottoman period and until Muḥammad 'Alī in the 19th century, Ottoman patterns of architecture and decoration were adopted only to a very limited extent. Ottoman forms of architecture and decoration only started to be used on a large scale during the reign of Muḥammad 'Alī — although it was his reign which achieved the greatest political emancipation from the Ottomans since their conquest of Egypt. The most distinctive form of Egyptian Ottoman architecture was represented in the numerous buildings erected by amir 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā during the 18th century. But these, as will be shown, no longer belonged to the Mamluk style; nor can they be attributed to what we commonly understand by the designation Ottoman architecture.

Although it introduced several innovations in the field of architecture⁷, the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517 added very little to the art of architectural decoration, which remained faithful to Mamluk traditions until the building activity of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā brought architectural ornament back into fashion. To understand the importance of this revival of decoration in the 18th century, it is necessary first to recall the last decades of the Mamluk period, which mainly correspond to the reigns of the sultans Qāyṭbāy (873-901/1468-1496) and al-Ghūrī (906-922/1501-1516).

7. Edmond Pauty, “L'Architecture au Caire depuis la Conquête Ottomane (Vue d'Ensemble),” *Bulletin de L'Institut français d'archéologie orientale* XXXVI, 1936, p. 1-69; John A.

Williams “The Monuments of Ottoman Cairo”, *Colloque International sur l'Histoire du Caire* (1969), p. 453-463.

The reign of Qāyṭbāy, which witnessed one of the most productive periods of architecture in Egypt, was the golden age for stone carving; at the same time, a new style of marble inlay was created and lavishly applied to the facades of the period. Strangely enough, the Qāyṭbāy style of decoration, and the high quality of this decoration, did not outlive the sultan's reign. During the reign of al-Ghūrī, which started only five years after Qāyṭbāy's death, major interest was no longer focused on decoration, but rather on architectural design. As ornamentation decreased, so too did quality decline. This phenomenon applied in particular to stone carving which was often shallow and repetitive, as in the interior of the funerary complex of al-Ghūrī. The dense, deeply carved and embroidery-like arabesques and the sophisticated marble decoration inlay that characterized the mosques of the Qāyṭbāy period were abandoned.

The decline of carving and inlay decoration, however, should not be interpreted as a decline of arts or architecture in general, but rather as a change of taste. In fact, the reign of al-Ghūrī introduced noteworthy architectural innovations as well as a new approach towards architecture, which emphasized form rather than ornamental detail; this could almost be interpreted as a reaction against the Qāyṭbāy style.

The same disregard for decoration characterized the early Ottoman period. While ornament continued to play a rather minor role, several new architectural forms were introduced or developed. At the mosque of Sinān Pasha at Būlāq (Index 349, 979/1571), for example, the architect demonstrated his creativity by combining Ottoman with Mamluk patterns, producing an interesting and original blend. Another innovation of the Ottoman period was the baldachin mosque plan, characterized by four columns carrying a lantern in the middle of the rectangular hall. The pencil-shaped minaret of Ottoman origin was another contribution of the Ottoman period; it was preferred to the more elaborate Mamluk three-storied shaft, although we do not know whether this change was due to aesthetic or political inclinations.

Whereas the architect continued to show innovation, the decorator did not. Except for the sporadic use of Turkish tiles, the art of architectural decoration remained stagnant during the two centuries that followed the Ottoman conquest. At the mosque of Sulaymān Pasha (Index 142, 935/1528), which was of entirely Ottoman plan, the decoration of the interior remained essentially Mamluk. The *sabīl* of Khusraw Pasha (Index 52, 942/1535) was an imitation of the *sabīl* of Sultan al-Ghūrī; the facades of the Takiyya Sulaymāniyya (Index 225, 950/1543), of the mosques of Maḥmūd Pasha (Index 135, 975/1568) and of Yūsuf Aghā al-Ḥīn (Index 196, 1035/1625) were all designed with traditional Mamluk patterning, albeit less densely ornamented than in the past. The mosque of Sinān Pasha at Būlāq, although representing an architectural achievement, was limited in decoration only to a few touches. Many facades built after the mid-16th century were hardly decorated at all: for example the mosques of Murād Pasha (Index 181, 986/1578), Malika Ṣafiyya (Index 200, 1019/1610) and ʿUṭhmān Katkhudā (Index 264, 1147/1734). Portals were rarely adorned with *muqarnas*, the facades lacked the traditional inscription bands, and the lintels with polychrome marble inlay were no longer fashionable. With the exception of a few cases of

ceramic decoration, prayer niches continued to be decorated in the Mamluk style until the 19th century.

And then quite suddenly, for the first time since the reign of Qāyṭbāy, the building activity of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā revived a taste for stone carving used with opulence to ornament facades.

'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā, who died in 1776, was, like his father, a high officer or *katkhudā* in the Janissary corps. Despite a number of evil features attributed to him by the historian Jabartī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā is credited with a long list of pious deeds and works of public welfare all over Egypt. Between the 1740's and 1763 he restored most of the important shrines and mosques of Cairo: al-Azhar, Sayyida Zaynab, al-Ḥusayn, Sayyida Sukayna, Sayyida Ruqayya, Sayyida 'Ā'isha, etc. In addition, he restored the famous hospital of Qalāwūn, the main hospital of Cairo, and rebuilt the dome of Qalāwūn's mausoleum. With more than thirty buildings (several of which have disappeared) attributed to his time in office, he was the greatest builder of Cairo's Ottoman period. His career, however, did not end smoothly; he was exiled to the Hejaz for twelve years, and only returned to die shortly afterwards⁸.

The facade decoration of the 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā buildings displayed the following characteristics :

1. The use of decorative round and segmented arches. These were sometimes scalloped with a curved zigzag border, often in double form or even triple form. Such arches appeared on the facade of the *ribāṭ* of Shaykh Ramaḍān (Index 436, 1175/1761-1762⁹), on the Shawāzliyya mosque [pl. 19 B] (Index 450, 1168/1754-1755), on the *zāwiya* at Mugharbilīn (Index 214, --/1750's¹⁰), and on the facade of the Madrasa Ṭaybarsiyya at al-Azhar (Index 97, 1167/1753-1754).

Round arches were used on the Fatimid gates of Cairo. Bāb al-Futūḥ, built in 480/1085, [pl. 21 B] had a scalloped arch which could have served as a model for the 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā facades. In the early Mamluk period, the round arch continued to be used but was later virtually abandoned in favour of the pointed arch; the round arch only came back into fashion in the 18th century. The segmented arch was widely used on the facades of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā.

2. The revival of elaborate portals. These were in the shape of a fluted conch above *muqarnas* and were framed with a moulding. The most elaborate example occurred at

8. Al-Jabartī, *'Ajā'ib al-āthār fī'l-tarājim wa'l-akhbār*, 4 vol., Būlāq, 1236/1820-1821, II, p. 5 ff.; André Raymond, « Les constructions de l'Émir 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā au Caire », *Ann. isl.* XI, 1972, p. 33-251.

9. For the monuments of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā I have indicated the dates as given by Raymond, "Constructions".

10. This building has no foundation inscription. There is a great gap between the date indicated in the Index, 1142/1729, and the dates of the other works of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā. Raymond, who finds this date unlikely, suggests, for stylistic reasons, the year 1754. "Constructions" p. 240.

the *sabīl-maktab* at Naḥḥāsīn (Index 21, 1157/1744) [pl. 23 A]. At the mosque of al-Muṭahhir (Index 40, 1157/1744) [pl. 22], the conch carried in its middle the signature of a craftsman (according to my reading: *ʿamal ʿAlī Shūsha*). ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā's mausoleum at al-Azhar¹¹ [pl. 25 A] and his mosque known as Jāmi' al-Ghurayyib (Index 448, 1168/1754) [pl. 23 B] had similar devices.

Conches with flutes radiating from their bases were first used in early Muslim Islamic architecture in the form of a shell motif, for example in the niches on the facades of the mosque of Ibn Ṭulūn. Later they looked more like a sunrise motif; in the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods, they were common in niches and *miḥrāb*-s. In the Mamluk period, this pattern was applied by means of inlaid stone rather than carved flutes. The fluted conches on the ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā portals seem to have taken some inspiration from Fatimid and Ayyubid architecture. However, on the portals of al-Azhar, the architect was inspired by another prototype, namely, the trilobed recess of the portal at the *madrasa* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (Index 44, 695-703/1295-1304) [pl. 21 A]. This Gothic portal was removed from a church at Akko and brought to Egypt by Sultan al-ʿĀdil Kitbughā. Perhaps Maqrīzī's claim that it was one of the most wonderful portals in the world¹² inspired ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā to copy some of its patterns (such as the trilobed arch, the carved scrolls of the spandrels and the carving of the voussoir), and to use them on the southern portal at al-Azhar. But only the elements of the patterns were copied; they were then rearranged in quite a different layout.

Another case of archaism was the reappearance of the cushion voussoir of Byzantine origin; this element was used at the gate of Bāb al-Futūḥ and on several early Mamluk buildings, such as the minarets of Qālawūn (Index 43, 683-684/1284-1285) and Sanjar (Index 221, 703/1303-1304), and the portal at the *khanqāh* of Baybars al-Jashankīr (Index 32, 706-709/1306-1310). The *zāwiya* of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā in the Mugharbilin quarter [pl. 19 A] and the southern portal of the al-Azhar mosque also had arches adorned with such a voussoir at their portals [pl. 20 B].

3. The use of *muqarnas* on various parts of the facade. These *muqarnas* were hitherto unparalleled in Cairo's Ottoman architecture. Pierced in an à-jour-like manner, they recalled some fine examples of the Qāyṭbāy period. They appeared on cornices underneath the balconies of both *maktab*-s of the Muṭahhir mosque and the *sabīl* at Naḥḥāsīn, on the balcony of the *zāwiya* at Mugharbilin and on several minarets.

4. Carved bands with floral and geometric motifs, displaying a variety of patterns hitherto unknown. These bands decorated all the facades built by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā. They may owe their inspiration to the mosque of Sultan Ḥasan (Index 133,

11. The mausoleum has no Index number of its own. The cenotaph indicates the date of the founder's death 1190/1776. Its foundation

was probably simultaneous with the restoration and enlargement of al-Azhar.

12. Al-Maqrīzī II, p. 382.

756-764/1356-1362) [pl. 24 B] and the mosque of Sultan al-Mu'ayyad (Index 190, 818-823/1415-1420) and his hospital (Index 257, 821-823/1418-1420), the facades of which were adorned with bands of carved arabesques, probably of Saljuq-Anatolian influence. The actual patterns of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā were, however, very different and all seem to have been newly invented.

5. Engaged columns and colonettes carved with ribs, diagonal in the upper and vertical in the lower half. Frequent in Saljuq-Anatolian architecture, these appeared on many facades, such as the *sabīl* at Naḥḥāsīn [pl. 18], the *sabīl* of the Muṭahhir mosque, the Shawāzliyya mosque and the *zāwiya* at Mugharbilin. Their inspiration may have come from the mosque of Sultan Ḥasan, where engaged columns carved with diagonal ribs adorned the exterior corners of the mausoleum.

6. Carved rectangles filled with roundels, sometimes pierced as windows. These also characterized most of the 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā facades. They have no earlier prototype.

7. Epigraphy. Rarely used in the Ottoman architecture of Cairo after the mid-16th century, epigraphy was reintroduced on buildings of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā: on the main portal of al-Azhar [pl. 20 A], on the portal of the *sabīl* at Naḥḥāsīn and on the Ghurayyib mosque. Here, the Ottoman style of architectural epigraphy was adopted; cartouches, including inscriptions and verses written in *ta'liq* script, adorned the portal of the Ghurayyib mosque, whereas the *rayḥānī* script was adopted for the inscriptions at al-Azhar and at the *sabīl* at Naḥḥāsīn.

8. Motifs of Turkish Ottoman origin. Carvings with floral, naturalistic patterns (on the facades of the *sabīl* at Naḥḥāsīn and the Muṭahhir mosque) and the motif of the cypress tree (on the main portal of al-Azhar, on the facade of the Ṭaybarsiyya and on the *zāwiya* at Mugharbilin) were integrated into the 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā repertoire. Elaborate iron grills, also of Turkish Ottoman style, adorned the windows of the *sabīl* at Naḥḥāsīn, the facade of the Ṭaybarsiyya, and the Muṭahhir mosque.

Not only patterns but also techniques, which had been forgotten for centuries, were revived in the buildings of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā. The arabesque carvings of the Qāyrbāy period were characterized by the presence of a groove which divided the surface of the arabesque stalk in its middle all along its length, thus enhancing the light and shade effect of the relief. This groove can be seen on most of the arabesque carvings of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā [pl. 24 A, C].

Although elements of earlier Cairene, as well as Ottoman, architecture were incorporated into the decoration program of the 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā buildings, the general character of this combination was neither Mamluk nor Ottoman. The designer, searching everywhere for ideas, did not hesitate to use, in addition to his own inventions, forgotten and archaic patterns which he integrated into an unusual combination. The

result was — and obviously was intended to be — very distinctive, and deserves therefore to be distinguished as a style in its own right.

With the exception of the reign of Sultan Qāytbāy, I cannot find a repertoire of stylistic elements in Cairo's Islamic architecture that can be so closely associated with a specific sponsor as that of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā's facades. The architecture of the Muḥammad 'Alī period, although very distinctive, was obviously imported from Istanbul without much variation, whereas the 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā style appeared as a purely local invention based on a variety of sources of inspiration. What is remarkable is that this style was not created by a sultan or pasha but by a single amir, one amongst many. For this there was no precedent, as far as is known from surviving evidence or historical sources, in the long history of Cairo's architecture.

In the decades that followed, several more buildings in Cairo were influenced by the 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā style. The facade of the *madrassa* of Sultan Maḥmūd (Index 308, 1164/1750) has carved bands, a cushion voussoir and a scalloped arch, as well as elaborate iron grills. However, later facades, although they displayed the same repertoire of decorative patterns, were more heavily ornamented and represented a more flamboyant version of this style: for example, the mosque of Yūsuf Shurbajī (Index 259, 1177/1763). The *sabīl*-s of Ruqayya Dūdū (Index 337, 1174/1761) [pl. 25 B] and Nafīsa al-Bayḍā' (Index 395, 1211/1796) combined elements of the 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā decoration with the semi-circular facade imported from Istanbul.

As well as inherited and imported patterns of Mamluk and Ottoman origins, and their various shades of combination, Ottoman Cairo also witnessed an alternative style that was created *ad hoc* to meet the requirements of an ambitious building program. This style may well be considered the major innovation of the Ottoman period for the architecture of Cairo, and it was most probably the invention of the sponsor himself. We know from the biography of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā that he himself contributed to the designing of his buildings and that he did so without even being present on the spot. Since the majority of his buildings were not, as already noted, erected but only restored by him, we may assume that his contribution consisted of designing the decoration. The large amount of work to be done within a relatively short period of time must have challenged the designer to exhibit great creativity.

It is of particular interest to note that the revival of decoration introduced by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā applied only to facades; the interiors of the buildings he restored remained on the whole very plain, if not shabby. The only exception was the interior of his *sabīl* at Naḥḥāsīn, which was decorated with Turkish tiles. But this interior was intended to be seen from the street, through the large windows open on three sides. The fact that most of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā's work consisted of restoring existing buildings might explain why his interest focused on decoration rather than architecture, where the possibility for change would have been more limited. Facade decoration, rather than architecture, was a field where his own contribution could be most fully advertised. As his restored buildings were scattered all over the city, the message could reach the passerby everywhere. With his richly decorated facades,

'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā could show to the population of Cairo that his pious deeds exceeded all those of the Ottoman governors who had so far built in the capital.

By embellishing prominent shrines, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā hoped that his name, like that of a great sultan, would be coupled with Egypt's most venerated religious traditions. This attitude was especially reflected in his enlargement and restoration of the eminent al-Azhar mosque, to which he added three minarets and two portals, as well as his own mausoleum directly attached to the sanctuary. No predecessor, not even a sultan, had chosen such a prestigious place to build a mausoleum for himself¹³. This is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that al-Azhar, at that time, had eclipsed in importance all other religious institutions. Moreover, it was no longer customary for amirs of the period to build domed mausolea for themselves¹⁴. In the words of Jabartī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā dressed sumptuously, was fond of himself (*mu'jaban bi nafsihi*) and, when he passed, people would point to him. Accordingly, his pious foundations reflected, with their elaborate facade decoration, his desire for attention and admiration.

However, the 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā style was not only the mere reflection of an eccentric individual. It also symbolized a very significant historical reality of the time: the awakening of the local aristocracy of amirs. After the Ottoman conquest, Egypt continued to recruit Mamluks from the Caucasus for its army, thus maintaining a system which had characterized its military society under the past Mamluk regime. With time, and during the decline of Ottoman authority, this Mamluk aristocracy consolidated its power by increasing recruitments and by infiltrating the whole military, as well as the administrative establishment. The economic resources of Egypt were thus gradually brought under its control. During the first two centuries that followed the conquest, the Mamluk aristocracy kept a rather low profile. It was not the amirs, but rather the Ottoman governors or pashas, who erected or restored important religious foundations during the 16th and 17th centuries¹⁵. The restoration of shrines had been of special interest to the Ottoman governors, who thus stressed the role of their sultans as guardians of the Holy Places of Islam. In fact, one may say that the main contribution of the Ottomans in Egypt was the upkeep and maintenance of what had been founded by their predecessors.

'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā's large-scale restorations represented an initiative that was unprecedented for a notable of his class. Moreover, judging from the size of his pious deeds, he surpassed all Ottoman governors and challenged the rulers in their status as guardians of the Holy Places. And his care for Egypt's religious heritage

13. The mamluk amirs Aqbughā and Jawhar al-Qanqabā'i were buried in their mutual *madrassa-s* (Index 97, 740/1340 and ca. 844/1440) which adjoin al-Azhar, but which form architectural structures of their own.

14. Ibrāhīm Aghā Mustahfīzān built a domed

mausoleum for himself which he later dedicated to one of his mamluks, and built another one attached to the mosque of Amir Aqsunqur which he has restored (Index 123).

15. I am preparing a study on this topic.

and its architecture did not remain an isolated case. It rather set an example for the famous ʿAlī Bey al-Kabīr, who was the first amir of Egypt to challenge seriously Ottoman supremacy. ʿAlī Bey, originally ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā's ally and friend, later became his main rival and enemy. In addition to his unsuccessful attempts to achieve independence from the Ottomans, ʿAlī Bey's name is associated with the restoration of two major shrines: that of Imām Shāfiʿī in Cairo and that of Aḥmad al-Badawī at Ṭanṭa. A few years later another amir, Murād Bey, restored the mosque of ʿAmr, the first mosque of Egypt. These restorations, which occurred simultaneously with a Mamluk independence movement, had a political significance: they advertised the ascendancy of the Mamluks as masters of Egypt and guardians of its Holy Places. Like the Mamluks of the past, the Mamluks of the late Ottoman period were associating their names with religious foundations and their monuments.

It should also be noted here that the amir Riḍwān Katkhudā, a contemporary of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, was likewise inspired by the past when he built the gate of Bāb al-ʿAzab at the citadel of Cairo (Index 555, 1168/1754); it was constructed in the style of the Fatimid Bāb al-Futūḥ¹⁶. The parallel between the Mamluks of the past and those of his own time was an argument which ʿAlī Bey used to discard the legitimacy of the Ottomans as rulers of Egypt: he referred to himself and his Mamluk companions as the successors of the “kings of the past” who shared with him the same origins¹⁷. It is interesting to add that the portal of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān's *sabil* at Naḥḥāsīn and the cenotaph of his mausoleum were each adorned with a medallion in which, together with the founder's name, the names of *ashāb al-kahf* (Coran XVIII, 9-26) or the Sleepers of Ephesus and their dog, were inscribed¹⁸. These names were sometimes used in a talismanic sense for averting evil¹⁹. In the case of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā, the significance of such inscriptions could be interpreted as a simple evocation of *baraka*, or perhaps also as symbolic of a “revival”, which is what occurred to the Sleepers.

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā, by restoring Cairo's image as a capital with a great Islamic tradition, was contributing in his way to the political emancipation of the military aristocracy. His choice and revival of forgotten patterns might have even been motivated by nostalgia for a pre-Ottoman past, when Mamluks like himself had been amongst the greatest builders of Islam. His stylistic innovations, however, remained purely individual.

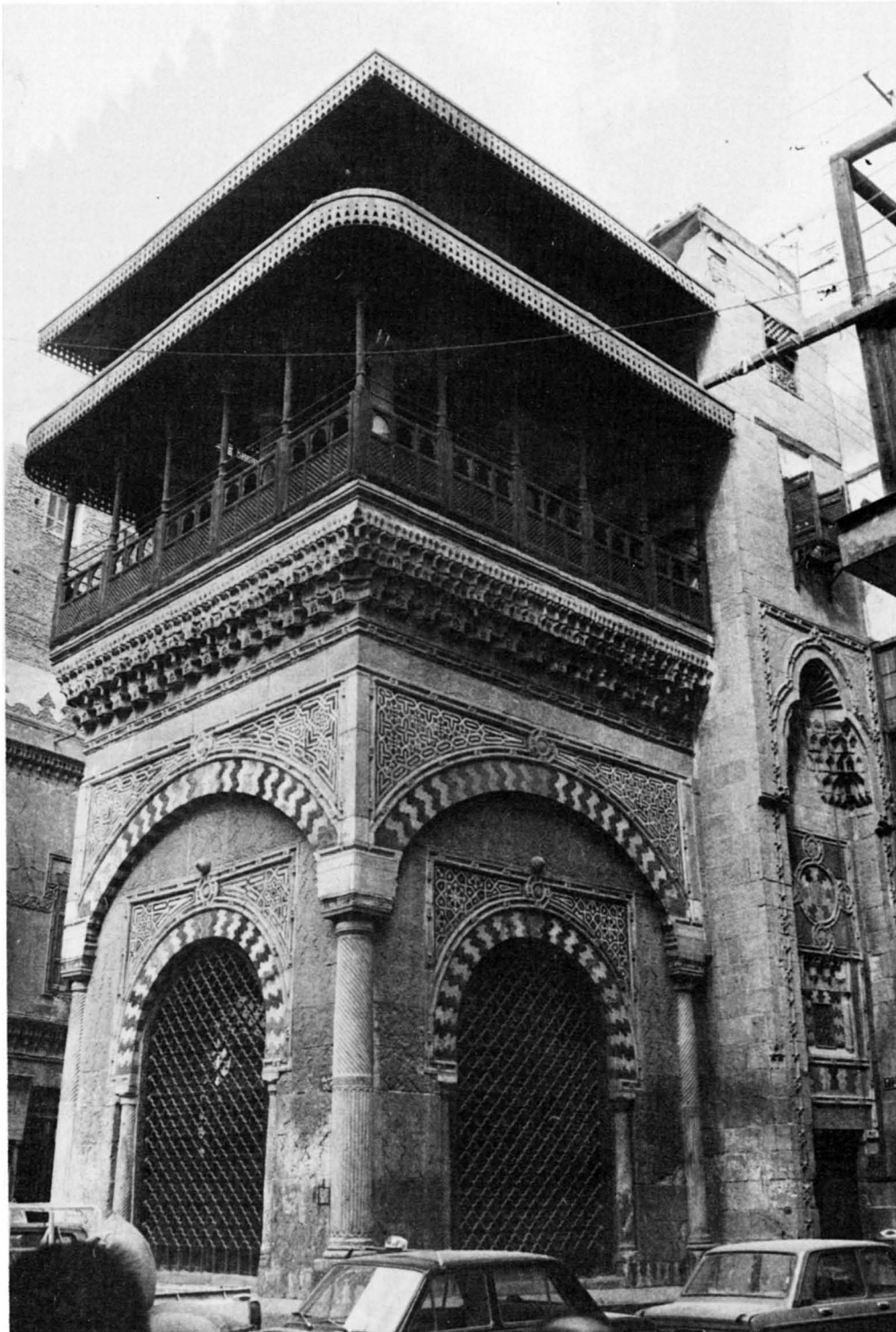
16. Al-Jabartī I, p. 192.

17. Al-Jabartī I, p. 381.

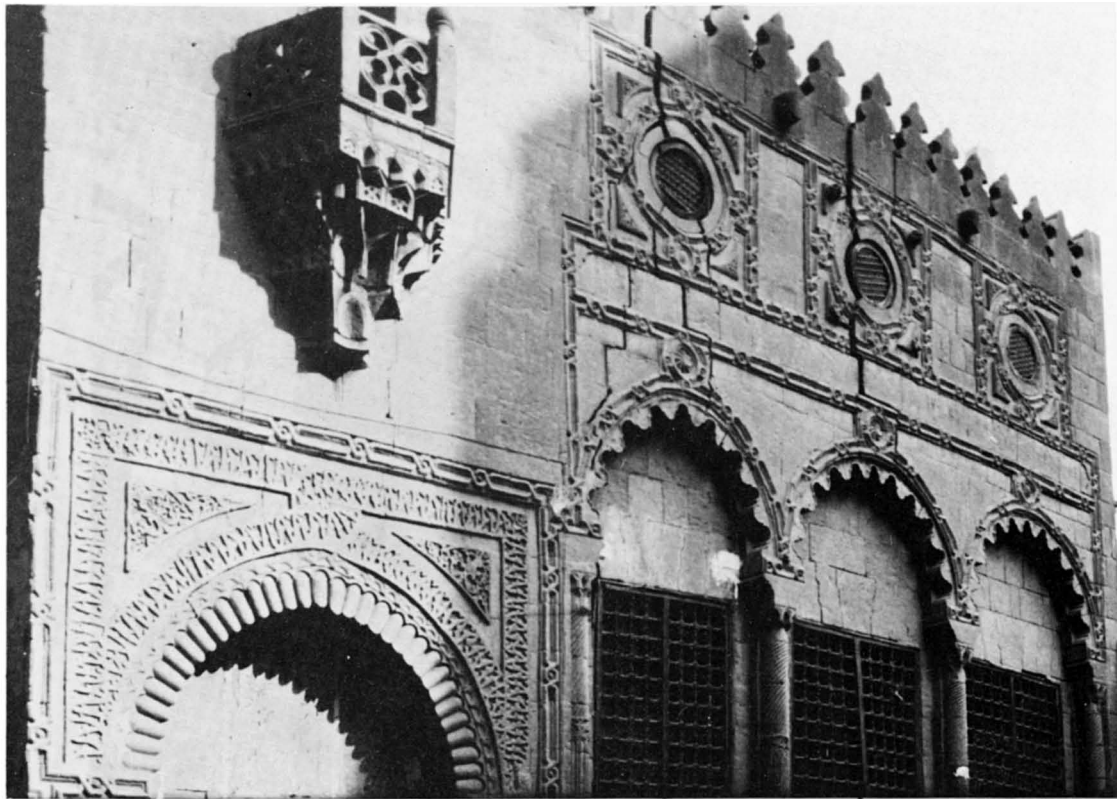
18. ʿAlī Mubārak IV, p. 22; Maḥmūd Ḥāmid

al-Ḥusaynī, *Al-asbila al-ʿuthmāniyya bi-madinat al-qāhira*, Cairo, 1988, p. 223.

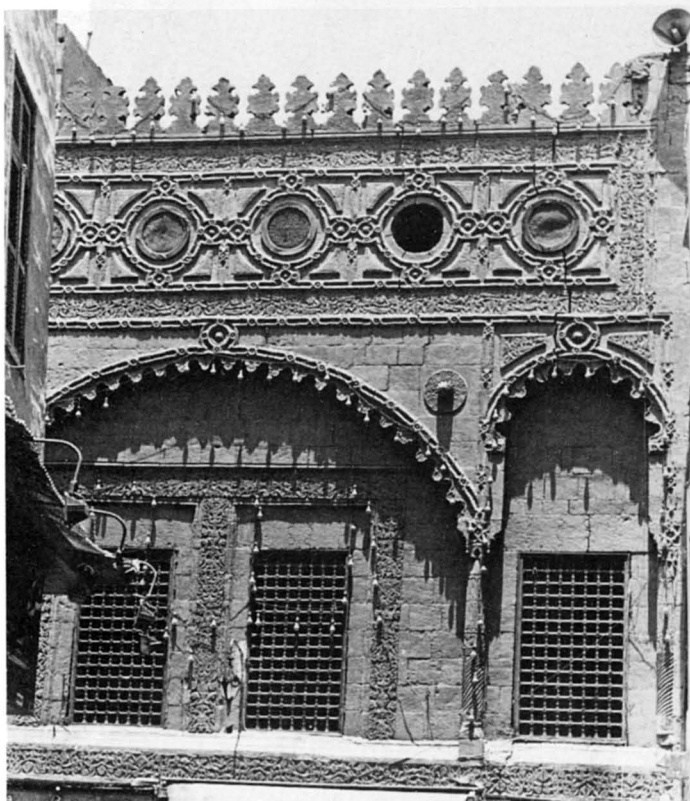
19. R. Paret; “Aḥḥāb al-Kahf”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*² I, Leiden, 1986, p. 691.



The *sabil* of 'Abd al-Rahmān Katkhudā at Nahhāsīn.



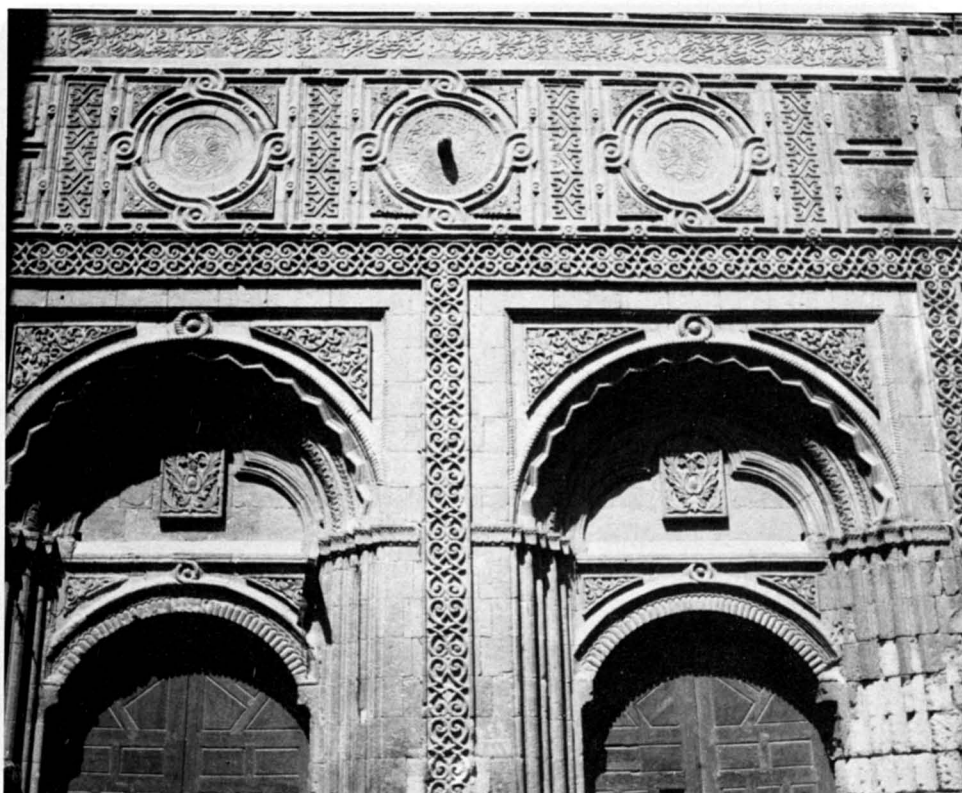
a. The *zāwiya* of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā at the quarter of Mugharbilin. An arch with cushion voussoir decorates the entrance and lobed arches with engaged colonettes adorn the facade.



b. The Shawāzliyya mosque at the Mūski quarter with lobed arches, colonettes, carved bands and roundels.



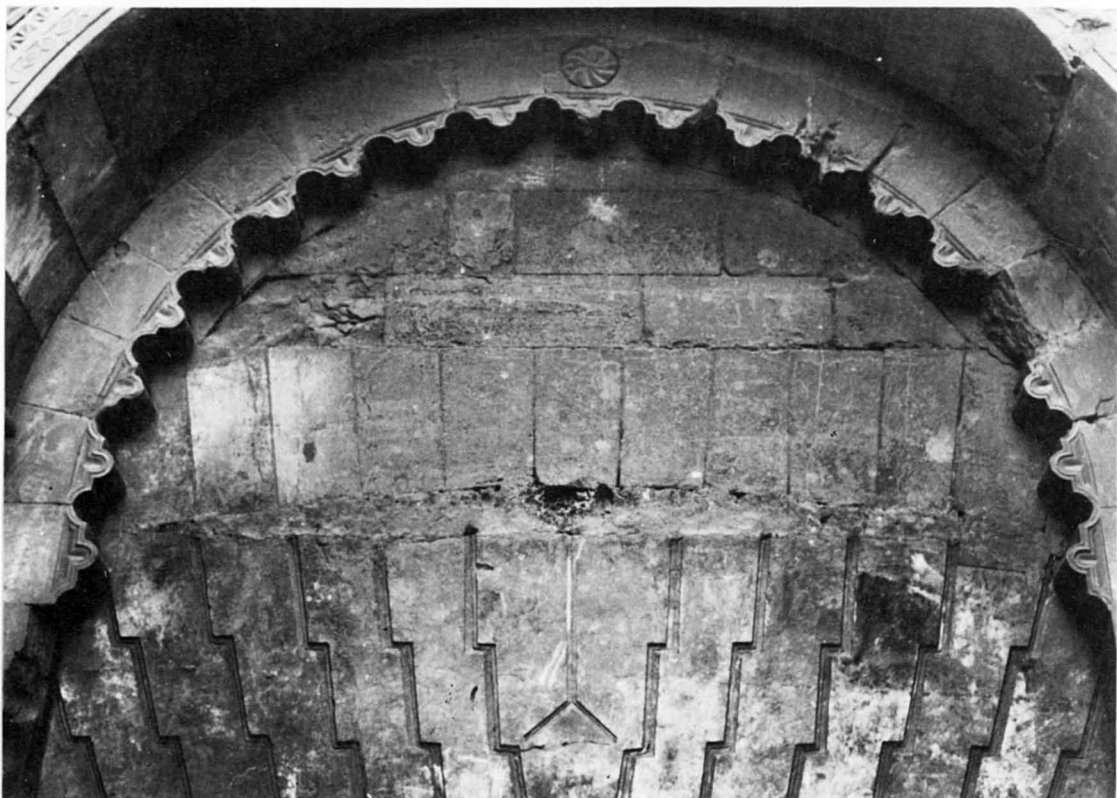
a. The main portal at the Azhar mosque.



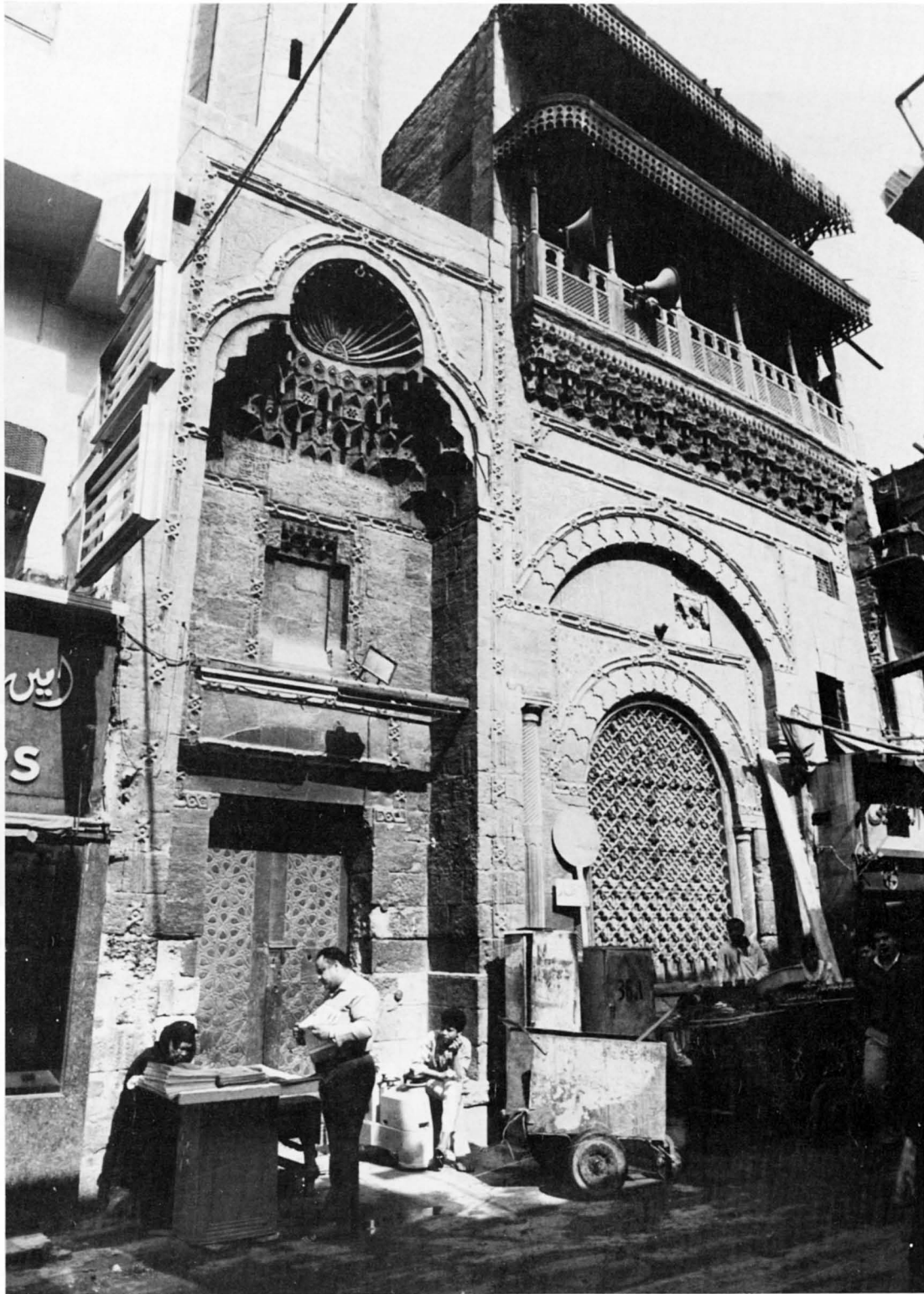
b. The southern portal of the Azhar mosque. Trilobe arch, carving in the spandrels and frieze recall the portal of the *madrasa* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.



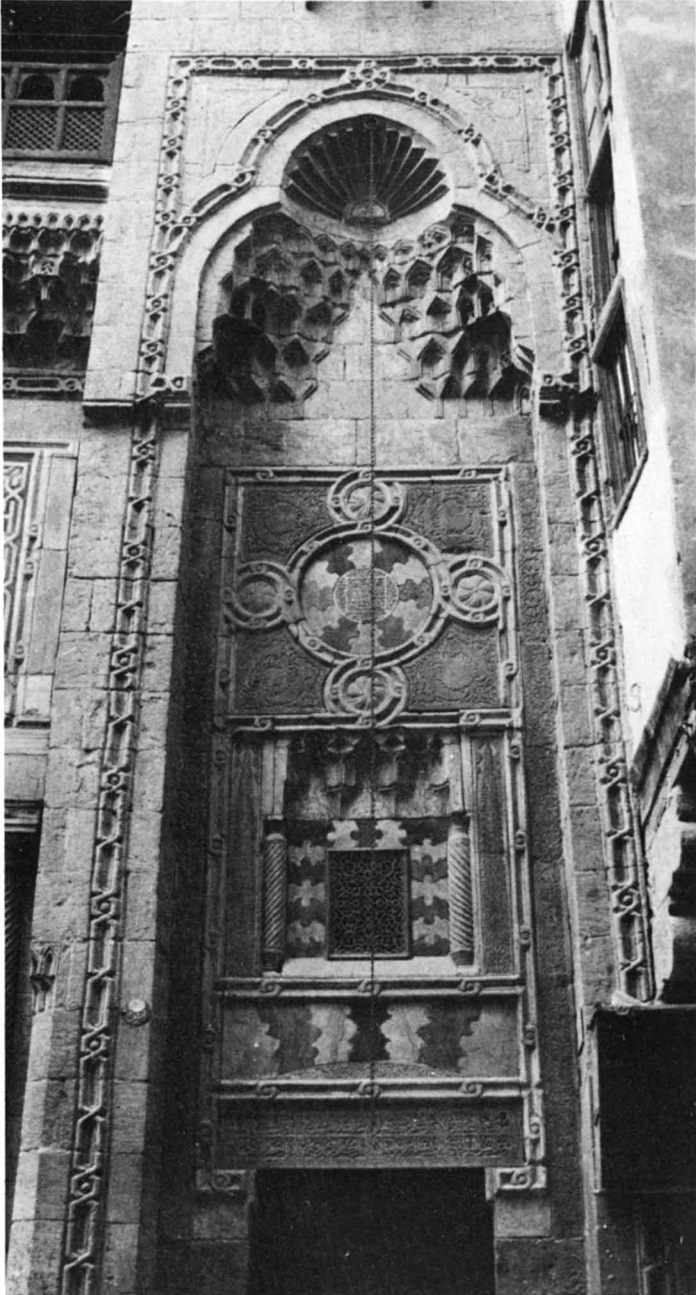
a. The Gothic portal at the *madrasa* of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad.



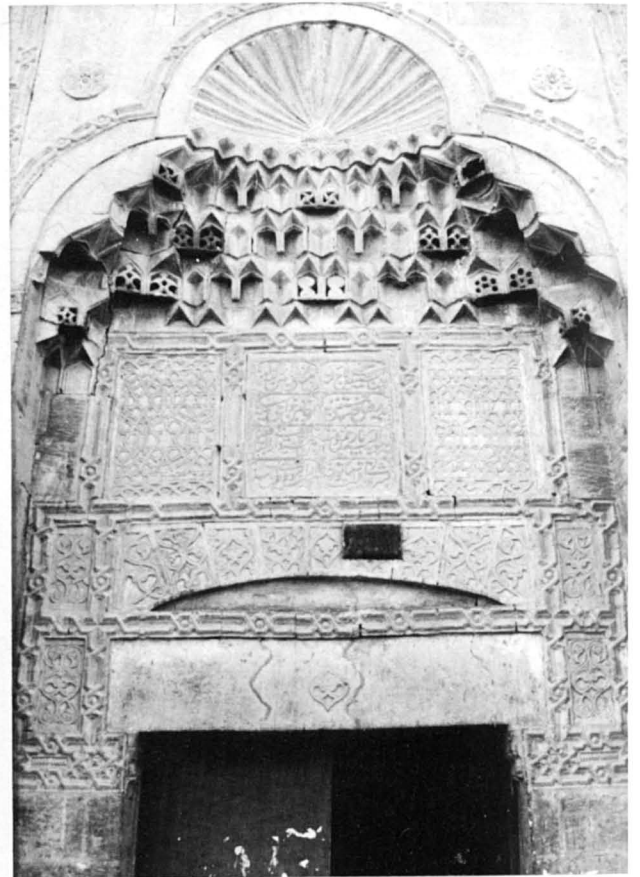
b. The scalloped arch at the Fatimid gate of Bāb al-Futūḥ.



The facade of the Muṭāhhir mosque with the craftsman's signature in the conch of the portal.



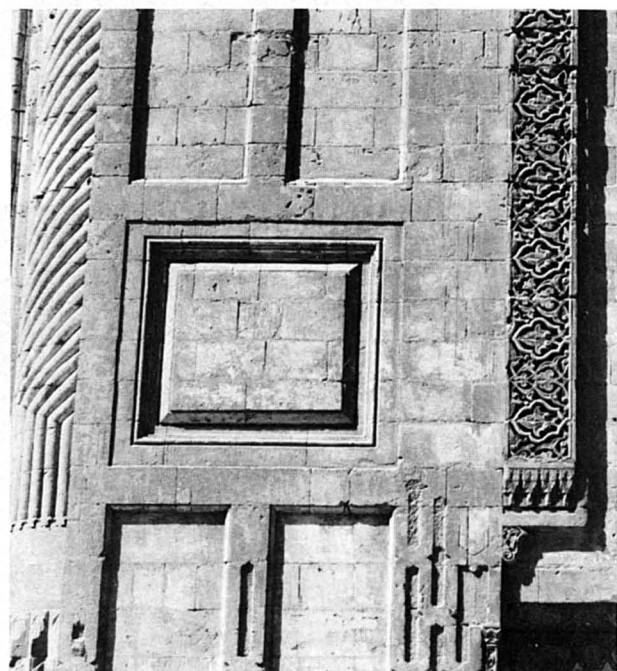
a. The portal of the *sabil* of 'Abd al-Rahmān Katkhudā at Nahhāsin.



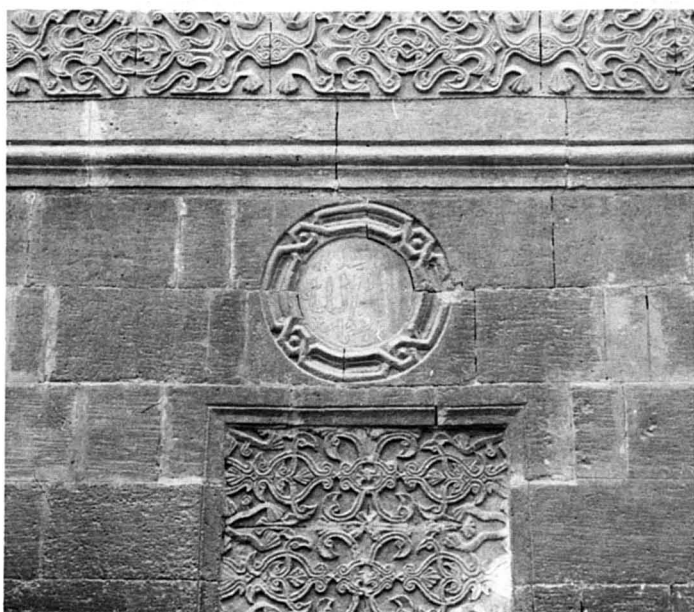
b. The portal of the Ghurayyib mosque with inscribed cartouches.



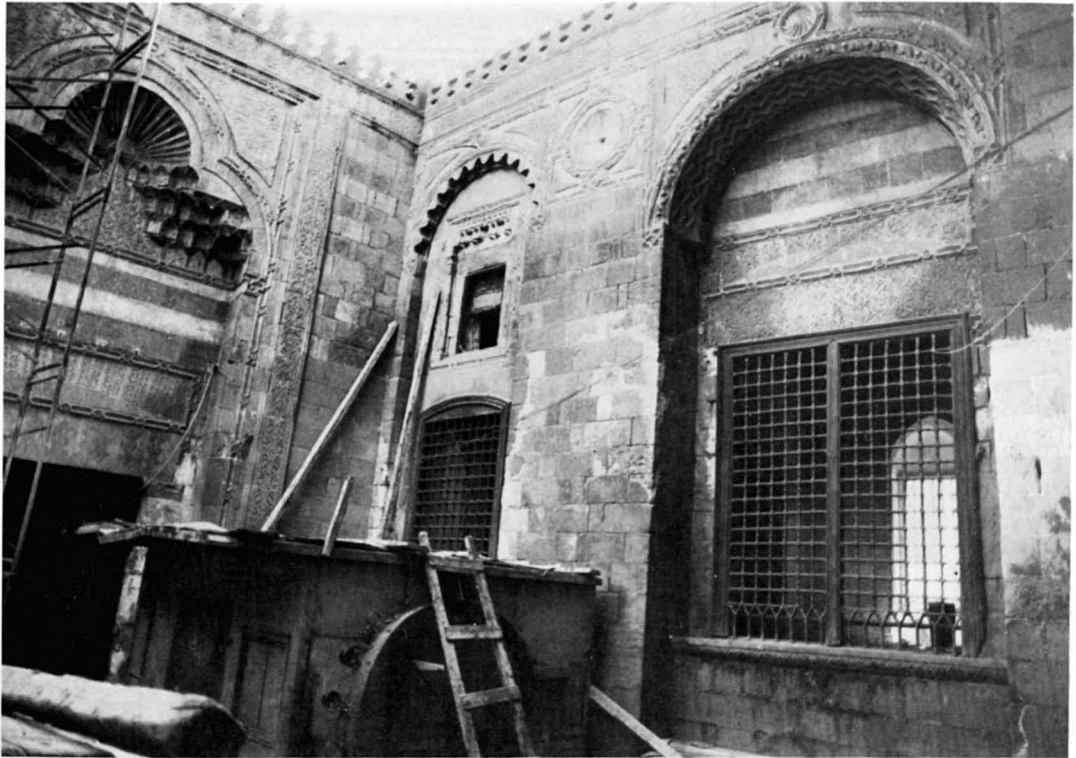
a. Carved lintels at the mausoleum of 'Abd al-Raḥmān Katkhudā.



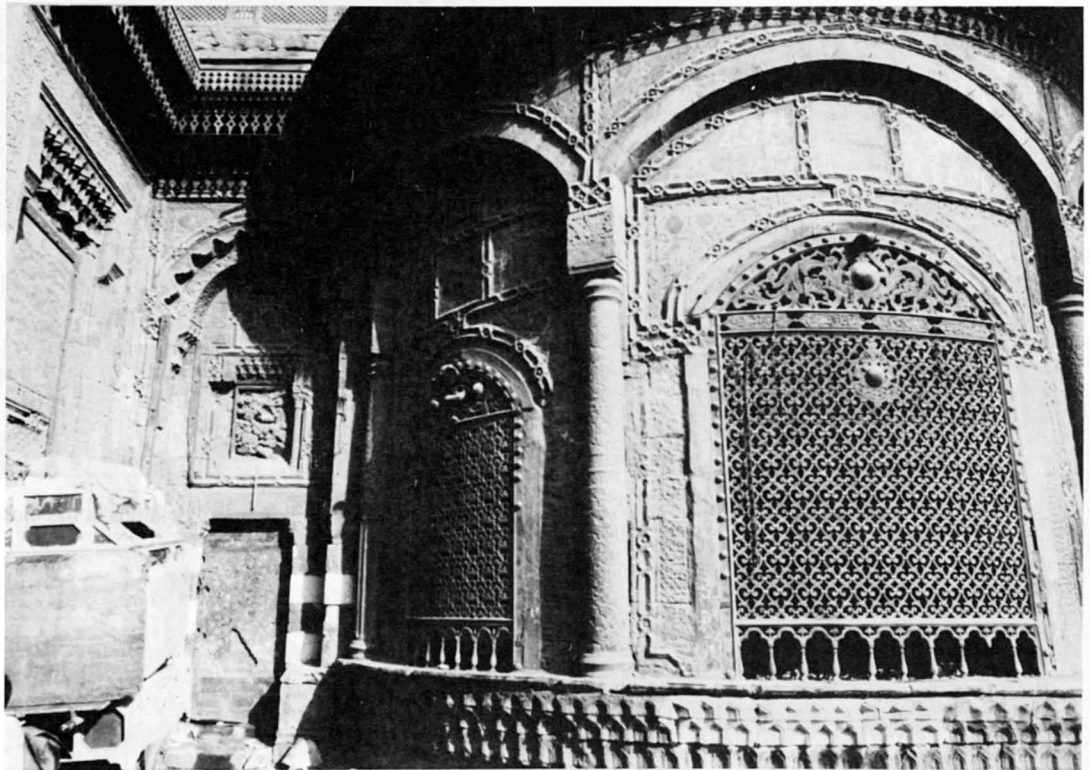
b. Carved band and engaged columns at the mosque of Sultan Hasan.



c. Carving at the facade of the Madrasa Ṭaybarsiyya.



a. Courtyard of the mausoleum of 'Abd al-Rahmān Katkhudā at the Azhar mosque.



b. Facade of the *sabil* of Ruqayya Dūdū.