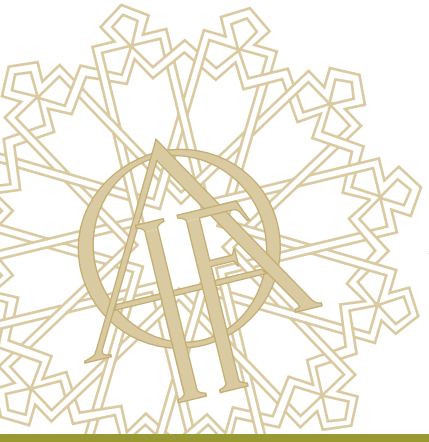
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ANNALES ISLAMOLOGIQUES

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AnIsl 37 (2003), p. 237-260

Lorenz Korn

Iranian Style «Out Of Place»? Some Egyptian and Syrian Stuccos of the 5-6th/11-12th Centuries.

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Lorenz KORN

Iranian Style "Out Of Place"? Some Egyptian and Syrian Stuccos of the 5-6th/11-12th Centuries

ARCHITECTS, artists and craftsmen in different regions of the Islamic world have a long tradition of contact and exchange over considerable distances. The transfer of forms and themes from one region to another, within the Islamic world or with neighbouring cultures, has long been the subject of art historical research and has sparked the most remarkable scholarly works. For the earliest phase of Islamic art, the reception of artistic traditions from different regions has long been recognized as one of its most distinctive features.[1] Originating from more or less separate cultural spheres, Islamic art reached its full maturity in the centuries following the Abbasid revolution, while artistic exchange continued to play an important part. Some apparently parallel developments and similarities between distant regions confront art history with the question of which reasons and which underlying structures can be adduced for this interplay of artistic tendencies.

Some examples may serve to elucidate different approaches to "artistic exchange". The Abbasid court as a pacemaker of fashions can be held responsible for the success of the "bevelled style" of Samarra stucco decoration in many parts of the Islamic world from the 3rd/9th centrury onwards.[2] In contrast, the rapid dissemination of inscription bands of "floriated Kufic" a few decades later cannot be ascribed to the same mechanism, but rather to the inherent qualities of Arabic calligraphy, in combination with a distinct manner of vegetal decoration, which became an idiosyncratic product of Islamic design.[3] Again, one could argue

The idea for this article originated from my research on Salǧūq Iranian mosque architecture, which started during my term as Aga Khan postdoctoral fellow at Harvard University in 1999-2000. It was further developed in a course on Islamic architectural ornament, held together with Heinz Gaube at the University of Tübingen in 2001. Work on this article was made possible by a research grant from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. I am gratefully indebted to the organisations who sponsored my work as well as to the students who participated in the discussion on the subject.

[1] An early and well-known contribution on this subject is E. Herzfeld, "Die Genesis der islamischen Kunst und das Mshatta-Problem", in *Der Islam* 1, 1910, p. 27-63, 105-144.

[2] Cf. R. Ettinghausen, "The 'Beveled Style' in the post-Samarra period", in G. C. Miles (ed.), *Archaeologica Orientalia in Memoriam Ernst Herzfeld*, Locust Valley, N. Y., 1952, p. 72-83; T. Allen, *Five Essays in Islamic Art*, Sebastopol, Cal., 1988, p. 10-11, 50-51.

[3] Cf. S. Flury, *Die Ornamente der Hakim-und Ashar-Moschee*, Heidelberg 1912, p. 13-19 and *idem*, "Le décor épigraphique des monuments fatimides du Caire", in *Syria* 17, 1936, p. 365-376; S. Blair, "Floriated Kufic and the Fatimids", in M. Barrucand (ed.), *L'Égypte Fatimide, son art et son histoire. Actes du colloque organisé à Paris les 28, 29 et 30 mai 1998*, Paris 1999, p. 107-116.

for a centre, from which innovations were spread, in the case of the arabesque as a special case of a vegetal motif which proved so successful that it came to dominate Islamic decorative art for centuries.[4] Obviously, portable objects contributed easily to the propagation of the arabesque as a standard solution for surface design over most of the Islamic world. A similar pattern can be assumed for the *muqarnas*, which could be used so universally in architectural decoration that it took only two generations to wander from Iran, where it had most probably been "invented", to the westernmost fringes of the Islamic world.[5]

In other cases, stylistic parallels between objects or buildings in geographically separated areas are convincingly explained by the migration of craftsmen. Thus, the technique of inlaid metalwork was brought to Mosul most certainly by artisans from Eastern Iran in the early 7th/13th century.[6] In Mamlūk architecture, elements of stucco or tile decoration in Cairo betray influences from the Maghreb and from Iran respectively, as clear signs of foreign craftsmen working in Cairo in the late 7th/13th - early 8th/14th century.[7] The migration of artists alone does not, however, explain why the manners and styles in which they were trained to work were also appreciated in their host region. In order to succeed, the availability of foreign artists had to concur with the receptivity of patrons. The deliberate decision to buy or to commision their product included a decision in favour of the "import". In a phase when regional styles had been established, visual allusions to "foreign" regions were either consciously applied or tolerated. When a building displayed stylistic parallels with monuments elsewhere, this could be understood as an expression of the patron's extravagance, or of his political claims. Terry Allen has termed this phenomenon "Out of place monuments".[8]

Thus, a number of interdependent factors influenced the mechanism of artistic exchange. Be it that artistic efforts were funneled from the provinces to the demanding centre, as one might state for the case of Umayyad Bilād al-Šām, be it that artistic innovations radiated from the imperial core region to the outer lands, as one might see as characteristic for the first 150 years of 'Abbasid rule – a concept of "centre and periphery" becomes invalid in a period of regional styles, when the different regions had acquired their own artistic centres of gravity. Taking the discussion one step further, one could raise the question to which degree and on which structural grounds phases of stylistic diversity and divergence in Islamic art alternated with phases of convergence, so that an overall notion of "Islamic art" (as opposed to a number of regional, then national, styles) was maintained.[9]

A number of *miḥrāb*-s and other ornamented parts of Islamic religious buildings in Egypt and Syria in the 5-6th/11-12th centuries are clearly marked off from the prevailing styles in these countries, in that they display influences from Iran in their stucco decoration. Partly,

[4] A valuable survey on the arabesque remains, E. Kühnel, *Die Arabeske. Sinn und Wandlung eines Ornaments*, Wiesbaden 1949. Allen, *Five Essays* (note 2), p. 2-9, 52-54, gives a deeper analysis.

[5] Cf. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam, new edition*, vol. VII, Leiden 1993, p. 501-506, *s. v. Muqarnas* (D. Behrens-Abouseif), with bibliography.

[6] Cf. D. S. Rice, "Inlaid Brasses From the Workshop of Aḥmad al-Dhakī al-Mawṣilī", in *ArsOr* 2, 1957, p. 284-285.

[7] Cf. F. Šāfiʿī, "West Islamic Influences on the Architecture in Egypt (before the Turkish period)", in *BFA*, Cairo University, 16.2, 1954, p. 1-49, esp. 33-41; M. Meinecke, "Die mamlukischen Fayencemosaikdekorationen: Eine Werkstätte aus Tabriz in Kairo (1330-1350)", in *Kunst*Or 11, 1976/77, p. 85-144.

[8] Cf. Allen, *Five Essays* (note 2), p. 85-110.

[9] Cf. *ibid.*, p. 109.

these Egyptian and Syrian stuccos are so closely related to Iranian parallels that they should be regarded as works of Iranian craftsmen. They are not only examples of (perhaps unexpected) artistic influences from a distant region of the Islamic world, but may also serve to throw light on the artistic landscape of their country of origin.

Examples of late Fatimid Stucco Decoration

The so-called "Iḫwat Yūsuf" at the western foot of the Muqattam is one of several sanctuaries built in Cairo in the late Fatimid period, *i.e.* probably from the early 6th/12th century onwards, which were devoted to the (more or less legendary) important saints of the city.[10] The building has received some attention not only for its architecture, but also for the splendid stucco decoration of its *qibla* wall, forming a triple *miḥrāb* (fig. 1). However, the stylistic pecularities of this decoration have hardly been noted.[11] The three half-round niches of two different sizes are bound toghether by the stucco relief on the surrounding wall surface. The large central niche was once flanked by columns, of which only two recesses remain, whereas flat stucco colonnettes accompany the smaller lateral niches. The principal elements of the stucco decoration are the epigraphic frieze framing all three niches, moving up and down across the wall in turns of ninety degrees, and the filling of the spandrels below the frieze. As additional elements, the epigraphic band on the arch of the central niche, the cornices crowning each section above the niches, and the smaller oblong fields and bands between the niches in the lower zone have to be mentioned.

Some elements in this composition can be deducted from the local Cairene tradition. Among them are the two round bosses filling large parts of the spandrels of the lateral niches, which appear already in the *miḥrāb* of the Ibn Ṭūlūn Mosque. The cornice above the central niche with its laced strapwork pattern has a far ancestor in the crenellations of the Ibn Ṭūlūn roof platform, from which, as a much closer parallel, the parapets of the al-Hakim Mosque might have developed.[12] In any case, this kind of strapwork seems to have been widespread in Egypt well before the end of the 5th/11th century. The same is true for the bell-shaped capitals of the lateral colonnettes, which have their roots in the engaged column capitals of Ṭūlūnid pillars and can be found in the Mosque of al-Hakim, too. In all, if this triple *miḥrāb* shows clear signs of stylistic continuity within the Egyptian tradition, this pertains mainly to its subordinate elements.

[10] For the general phenomenon cf. C. Williams, "The Cult of 'Alid Saints in the Fatimid Monuments of Cairo. Part II: The Mausolea", in *Muqarnas* 3, 1985, p. 39-60. Note that the veneration of the "Iḫwat Yūsuf" had little to do with "'Alid" ideology. For the building and its *miḥrāb*, cf. K. A. C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt* I, Oxford 1952, p. 234-236, fig. 133, pls. 81 b, 112 c, 118 a; Y. Rāġib, "Deux monuments Fatimides au pied du Muqattam", in *REI* 46, 1978, p. 91-110; C. Williams, *art. cit.*, p. 48 f., pls. 11-13. On Creswell's dating, cf. also the remark by C. S. Taylor, "The shi'i role in the development of funerary architecture: The case of Egypt", in *Muqarnas* 9, 1992, p. 5.

[11] Cf. note 10. While Creswell dated the building on the basis of some architectural details to the end of the first quarter of the twelfth century, Rāġib sees no evidence for an exact dating within the wider range of c. 1050 to 1150. Williams (*art. cit.*, p. 49) seems to implicitly follow Creswell's dating for the building, while favouring a slightly later date, 1132-1147, for the stucco.

[12] Cf. Creswell, *MAE* I (note 10), pl. 18 b.

The principal elements of the composition are obviously not rooted in the repertoire of Ṭūlūnid and Fatimid architectural decoration; among them, the spandrels flanking the central arch catch the eye. Each is filled with a structure of tendrils and leaves in symmetrical layout on a diagonal axis, marked by a trilobed leaf. The double line tendrils intersect in gentle curves with a few intercalated feathered split leaves. A sixpartite wheel pattern forms the surface of the trilobed leaves, while the other flat leaves display simple chessboard or mesh patterns. All of these features have parallels in Iranian stucco decoration of the Saljūq period: the principle of tendrils and leaves with grid patterns is ubiquitous in Saljūq style stucco decoration, especially on *miḥrāb*-s, and continues into the Ilḫanid period. Well-known examples are the stucco *miḥrāb*-s of the so-called Ḥaidarīya in Qazvīn, or the interior decoration of the Gunbad-i 'Alaviyān in Hamadān.[13] Tendrils with double stems are a common motif, too.[14] Intermittent with split leaves, they occur on the main *miḥrāb* of the Friday Mosque at Ardistān in Central Iran.[15] The diagonal symmetry axis has its parallel in one of the *miḥrāb*-s of the Masjid-i Pā Manār at Zavāre, the neighbour town of Ardistān (fig. 8).[16]

In the main inscription frieze, the epigaphic style as well as the background are reminiscent of Iranian examples. The shapes of its Kūfic letters as such do not appear particularly characteristic – even though the knot in the word "Allāh" above the apex of the right niche gives a clear hint to Eastern origins of this style.[17] But the upper endings of the letters which are bored with a little wedge-shaped slot and a dot have clear parallels in Iran – again, in the main *miḥrāb* at Ardistān, and in the epigraphic frieze of the Imamzāde Yahyā b. Zaid at Sar-i Pul in Afghanistan.[18] The scrolled tendril with punctured leaves as a background of the inscription is a common Iranian motif.[19] Again, the parallels clearly show

[13] For Qazvīn, cf. A. U. Pope – Ph. Ackerman (eds.), *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present*, London/New York 1938-1939, repr. London/New York/Tokyo 1964-1967, p. 1019 f., 1294-1297, 1323, pls. 313-316. For Hamadan, cf. R. Shani, *A Monumental Manifestation of the Shi'ite Faith in Late Twelfth-Century Iran. The Case of the Gunbad-i 'Alawiyān, Hamadān, Oxford Studies in Islamic Art* 11, Oxford 1996, p. 45-57. – The very patterns of the Iḫwat Yūsuf leaves occur already on the outer flanking columns of the *miḥrāb* of the Friday Mosque at Nāyīn; cf. Pope - Ackerman, *Survey*, pl. 267. From Nāyīn, there is a connection with style B of the stucco decoration at Samarra; cf. B. Finster, *Frühe iranische Moscheen. Vom Beginn des Islam bis zur Zeit salǧūqischer Herrschaft, Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran, Ergänzungsband* 19, Berlin 1994, p. 214-218, figs. 103-110, pls. 34-40.1.

[14] See, for example, the soffits of the gallery arches at the Mausoleum of Sanjar in Marv (cf. J. Sourdel-Thomine – B. Spuler, *Die Kunst des Islam, Propyläen Kunstgeschichte* 4, Munich 1973 , p. 295 f., pl. 244, or the inscription in the main *īwān* of the Ribāṭ-i Šaraf halfway between Mašhad and Saraḫs (for this building, cf. A. Godard, "Khorāsān", in *Āṯār-é Īrān* 4, 1949, p. 7-68, with numerous illus.; M. Y. Kiyānī [ed.], *Yādgārhā-ye Robāt-e Saraf*, Teheran 1981, p. 1-39 [pers. section], figs. 1-51).

[15] For this building, cf. A. Godard, "Ardistān et Zawārè", in *Āṯar-é Īrān* 1, 1936, p. 288-296, figs. 185-195; Pope - Ackerman, *Survey* (note 13), p. 990-997, 1019 f., pls. 317-328; for the *miḥrāb*-s cf. *ibid.*, pls. 322, 323 B, 324 A, B.

[16] Cf. S. R. Peterson, "The Masjid-i Pā Minār at Zavāra: a Redating and an Analysis of Early Islamic Iranian Stucco", in *ArtAs* 39, 1977, figs. 7, 8.

[17] Knotted Kūfic appears fully developed with the inscription on the tomb tower of Rādkān (West) in 411/1020-1021; cf. S. Flury, *Islamische Schriftbänder, Amida/Diarbekr XI. Jahrhundert*, Basel/Paris 1920, p. 26-30. Flury (*ibid.*, p. 31-32) also remarks how reluctantly knotted Kūfic was taken up in Cairo. The best comparisons are found in Diyarbakır later in the 5th/11th century; cf. *ibid.*, passim. – For the Iḫwat Yūsuf inscription, it should be possible to establish a parallel on the basis of the idiosyncratic *Rā'* ending in a little bud. However, I have not been able to find other examples for this shape of the letter.

[18] Cf. S. Blair, *The Monumental Inscriptions From Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana, Studies in Islamic Art and Architecture. Supplements to Muqarnas* 5, Leiden 1992, no. 75, figs. 147-148.

[19] The scroll tendril as background motif in Iranian monumental inscriptions is found from the 2nd half of the 5th/11th century onwards; cf. Blair, *Monumental Inscriptions* (note 18), nos. 60, 61, 64, figs. 106, 109, 115-120.

a relation to the mainstream of Iranian stucco decoration, although they are not close enough to justify more than this generalized deduction. The same is true for the background of the inscription on the archivolt of the central niche. The fret pattern consisting of interlocking three-pointed stars is first attested in one of the panels on the western tomb tower at Ḫarraqān between Qazvīn and Hamadān, dated 486/1093-1094, and appears since as a frequent element of Iranian brick decoration and stucco.[20] A telling detail can also be seen in the narrow band which separates the epigraphic frieze from the parts of the decoration below. It is formed by a chain consisting of elongated members with thickened ends, alternating with pairs of punctured lozenges. Bands with very similar sequences of these bone-shaped elements and lozenges belong to the repertoire of Iranian brick architecture and stucco decoration.[21] Also very common in stucco decoration were more complicated, but structurally related elongated net patterns.[22] Comparatively plain elements like these, placed in secondary positions within the structure of the Iḫwat Yūsuf *qibla* wall decoration, are perhaps more significant for its stylistic analysis than the more spectacular leafed tendrils, because they do not as easily originate from intentional copying, which tends to select the seemingly "important" traits of the prototype. In our case, this means that an artist in Cairo who might have wished to achieve the complex impression of Iranian stucco decoration would probably have concentrated on the vegetal ornament, while rendering the details in his own decorative idiom.

The fact that elements which are frequently attested in Iranian stucco decoration form a large part of the Iḫwat Yūsuf *miḥrāb*, and that they also appear "unintentionally", points to a broader stream of Iranian influence in Cairo, which had been able to exert its power over a certain span of time, forming some kind of "school". The second important feature of the Iḫwat Yūsuf decoration, the intermingling of Iranian elements with those from the domestic tradition, shows that the foreign influence did not exist completely secluded from Egyptian stucco production, but that the "school" of Iranizing stucco artists also retained local elements. Both these statements are supported by other examples of Fatimid stucco in Cairo.

In the al-Azhar Mosque, a new colonnade around the courtyard was built at some time during the reign of the caliph al-Ḥāfiẓ (534-544/1130-1149). This included an enlargement of the prayer hall by one bay in the direction of the courtyard. In the new section of the prayer hall, the transept running from the central bay of the courtyard façade to the *miḥrāb* is highlighted by a dome. Covering the first bay of the transept, it rests on a square of four keel arches and a zone of transition with four squinches leading to an octagon from which the circular base of the dome projects slightly.[23] Starting from the level of the four

[20] Cf. D. Stronach - T. Cuyler Young Jr., "Three Octagonal Seljuq Tomb Towers from Iran", in *Iran* 4, 1966, p. 1-20, pls. 19 b, 22 d.

[21] One of the early brick examples is the minaret of the Friday Mosque at Sāve, cf. A. Hutt - L. Harrow, *"Islamic Architecture", Iran 1*, London 1977, pl. 42. In stucco, a close parallel to the shape of the motif at the Iḫwat Yūsuf can be seen on panels from Nīšāpūr, approximately dated to the 3rd quarter of the 4th/10th century, in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, cf. Blair, *Monumental Inscriptions* (note 18), no. 15, figs. 24, 26.

[22] Among the early examples, one is found in a prominent position on the intrados of the inner *miḥrāb* arch of the Friday Mosque at Nāyīn, cf. Hutt - Harrow, *Iran* (note 21), pl. 9. A stucco panel from Nīšāpūr, in the Museum für Islamische Kunst at Berlin, shows that similar net patterns on framing bands occurred in a context very closely connected with style B of Samarra; cf. *Museum für Islamische Kunst Berlin. Katalog (...) Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, Berlin 1979, no. 188, pl. 39.

[23] Cf. Creswell, *MAE* I (note 10), p. 254-257, esp. 255 f., pls. 90-91, 113 c; D. Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic Architecture in Cairo. An introduction*, Cairo 1989, p. 59 f., pls. 5, 46.

arches, the whole interior is decorated with carved stucco. In the lower zone, the two opposing sides on the main axis (looking to the *miḥrāb* and to the courtyard) and the two on the transverse axis correspond with each other in the same manner of decoration. The ornament of the spandrels in the main axis of the transept (fig. 2) shows remarkable similarities with the *qibla* wall of the Iḫwat Yūsuf:[24] tendrils spread across the plane in clear, if occasionally intersecting, curves and spirals, enclosing several leaves of different shapes with grid-patterned surfaces. The ornament is organized along a diagonal axis within each spandrel, even if it lacks complete symmetry. It appears as a somewhat dry, although not wholly uninspired, derivative of the Iḫwat Yūsuf decoration, and is quite different from that on the other two arches of the same bay.[25]

In the decoration of the al-Aqmar Mosque,[26] where usually the inventive design of the façade receives the greatest attention, the courtyard arcades also display a feature which connects them with Iranian stucco decoration. In the epigraphic band running along the arches, the background is filled with a scroll tendril trimmed with leaves of different shapes, their surfaces perforated with the characteristic grid patterns.[27] Since there are no traces of alterations or changes in the concept of the courtyard design, the date of the building 519/1125 may well be accepted for the stucco decoration.

A slightly different approach is taken in the Mašhad of Sayyida Ruqayya, dated 527/1133 by the painted inscription at the foot of the dome.[28] Here, the abundant stucco decoration is at first sight dominated by Egyptian elements.[29] The shell-like ribbed niche head, introduced in ashlar on the al-Aqmar façade a few years before, appears multiplied in stucco in the five *miḥrāb*-s of the building. Especially on the main *miḥrāb* (fig. 3), the three-dimensional effect of this motif is enhanced by the *muqarnas* cells arranged in stepped rows on the front of the arch, so as to create a radiating effect. The cornice which crowns the stuccoed *miḥrāb* area forms a rectangular panel filled with laced strapwork very similar to that in the Iḫwat Yūsuf. Between these two dominating elements, however, several of the Iranian elements which have so far been identified on other monuments can be made out: the background of the epigraphic panel below the cornice is filled with an elaborate scroll tendril, including feathered split leaves and broader leaves with grid patterned surface, and knotted hastae ornate the letters of the inscriptions. In the spandrels below, the field around the two empty disks is again filled with a mesh of tendrils, from which a five-lobed leaf, filled with a pattern of angular whorls, stands out on each side. The narrow band

[24] The similarity has been observed by Flury, *Ornamente* (note 3) and Williams, *art. cit.* (note 10), p. 48. Both authors recognize a direct stylistic connection between the the Iḫwat Yūsuf *miḥrāb* and the *miḥrāb* of the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī (see below).

[25] The latter is organised in large, tight spirals filled with two opposing leaves – a composition for which I have found only a single parallel, namely, in the *miḥrāb* of Sangān-i Pā'īn (see below, note 32; fig. 10).

[26] For this building, cf. Creswell, *MAE* I, (note 10), p. 241-246, fig. 141, pls. 82 c, 83, 84, 85 a; C. Williams, "The Cult of 'Alid Saints in the Fatimid Monuments of Cairo. Part I: The Mosque of al-Aqmar", in *Muqarnas* 1, 1983, p. 37-52; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo* (note 23), p. 72-74, fig. 17, pl. 54; *idem*, "The Façade of the Aqmar Mosque in the Context of Fatimid Ceremonial", in *Muqarnas* 9, 1992, p. 29-38.

[27] Cf. Creswell, *MAE* I (note 10), p. 244, pl. 84 b.

[28] For the building, cf. Creswell, *MAE* I (note 10), p. 247-253, pls. 86-87; Y. Rāġib, "Les mausolées fatimides du quartier d'al-Mašāhid", in *AnIsl* 17, 1981, p. 1-29; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo* (note 23), 74 f., pls. 55-56.

[29] Cf. Creswell, *MAE* I (note 10), p. 249, fig. 143, pls. 87 b, 119 a-d, 120 a.

bordering the cornice, the epigraphic panel, and the spandrels are one of the more complicated variants of the bone-and-lozenge-band of the Iḫwat Yūsuf, for which prototypes are amply documented in Iran. Thus, despite its "typically Fatimid" air, the main *miḥrāb* of the Mašhad of Sayyida Ruqayya contains numerous elements of Iranian influence.

In the lateral *miḥrāb*-s (fig. 4), these elements present themselves rather conspicuously in the cornice at the top: seven bulbous fleurons, standing upright in a row, are decorated with a variety of grid patterns. Simple chessboard designs, six-spoked wheel patterns formed by cutting out equilateral triangles, interlocking three-pointed stars, and six-spoked whorl patterns are applied to the surfaces of the fleurons. Thus, the range of motifs on the secondary level is essentially the same as on the Iḫwat Yūsuf *miḥrāb*-s. However, the row of fleurons is an independent element which can by itself be deducted from Iranian prototypes: a *miḥrāb* from Rayy, today in the National Museum in Teheran (fig. 12),[30] features a topmost panel with three rows of upright leaves alternating with fleurons, which are also filled with a variety of grid patterns. Closer to the shape in which it appears in Cairo, this element occurs on the *miḥrāb* of the Masǧid-i Šāh Abū l-Qāsim in Yazd (fig. 13).[31] A simplified version is the frieze above the *miḥrāb* niche of the Masǧid-i Gunbad at Sangān-i Pā'īn, southeast of Ḫvāf in Ḫurāsān (fig. 11).[32]

It can be debated whether the seeming homogeneity in the central and the lateral *miḥrāb*-s in the Mashad of Sayyida Ruqayya displays more of a routine handling of the "foreign" decorative elements than in the Mausoleum of the Iḫwat Yūsuf. All the examples analysed here have in common that Iranian stucco elements, which have their parallels in monuments of the Saljūq period, are interspersed with elements which can be traced back to Egyptian sources. The impression that some time had already elapsed since Iranian influence had added the new elements to the repertoire in Cairo is supported by two well-known earlier stucco *miḥrāb*-s.

The *Miḥrāb*-s of Badr al-Ǧamālī and his Son al-Afḍal

Overlooking Cairo from the plateau of the Muqattam, the building known as al-Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī was, according to the building inscription, erected by the *amīr al-ǧuyūš* Badr al-Ǧamālī in 478/1085.[33] The building type of the *mašhad* – a small courtyard mosque, supplemented by a minaret over the entrance and a mausoleum added on the north side – was new to Egypt. The dome surmounting the *antemiḥrāb* bay contrasts with the other,

[30] Cf. A. U. Pope, "The National Museum in Teheran", in *Bulletin of the American Institute for Iranian Art and Archaeology* 6/7, 1946, p. 88, figs. 18-20. The date proposed by Pope is approximately 1180 A. D., but the current label in the museum puts it into the 5th/11th century. – Although the surface appears homogenous, it is not altogether clear whether the *miḥrāb* has been changed by restoration.

[31] Cf. Pope - Ackerman, *Survey* (note 13), pl. 312 B.

[32] Cf. R. Hillenbrand, "Mosques and Mausolea in Khurāsān and Central Iran", in *Iran* 9, 1971, p. 160, pl. 6 b; after Hillenbrand, cf. Peterson, *art. cit.* (note 16), p. 79 f., pl. 18. Most likely, the *miḥrāb* is contemporary with the stucco inscription at the foot of the dome, dated [5]31/1137.

[33] For this monument, cf. Creswell, *MAE* I (note 10), p. 155-160, fig. 79, pls. 46-48; Y. Rāġib, "Un oratoire fatimide au sommet du Muqattam", in *StudIsl* 65, 1982, p. 51-67; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo* (note 23), p. 66 f., pl. 50, fig. 16. For the inscription, cf. M. van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum,* première partie, *Égypte*, vol. I. *Le Caire, MMAF* 19, Paris 1903, p. 55, no. 32, pl. 17; É. Combe – J. Sauvaget – G. Wiet (eds.): *RCEA*, Cairo 1931 ff., vol. VII, no. 2752.

cross-vaulted parts of the prayer hall. Several attempts have been made to explain the purpose of the building, either as a victory monument for Badr al-Ǧamālī, who had successfully dealt with rebellions at the beginning of his vizierate, or as his mausoleum.[34] Architectural decoration in the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī is concentrated on the central bay of the prayer hall, namely the interior of the dome, a surrounding cornice below, and the stucco *miḥrāb* (fig. 5).[35] The deep prayer niche was formerly flanked by columns, of which only the empty recesses remain today. It is framed with a stilted, four-centered arch. On a smooth plastering, the interior of the niche, like other parts of the room, is painted with a floral design which is due to a restoration in 1144/1731-1732. The stucco decoration covers a rectangular area of c. 3 × 5 m around the niche, with a concave molding at the top forming the transition to a slightly projecting cornice.

While the eye might be puzzled at first sight by the wealth and the complexity of decoration on the *miḥrāb*, its layout follows the simple principle of a framing border around flat areas at the sides of the arch. The border is formed by three bands of different width: a Kufic inscription band in the middle, with a narrow chain of perforated lozenges below and a zigzag-meander frieze above. The three bands run along the edge of the rectangular area, bending inwards at the lower corners so as to follow the contours of the niche, including the column recesses. In the lower zone at both sides of the niche, the total width of the three bands is such that no space is left between the two courses of the border, with the lozenge bands lying back to back. Above the apex of the niche, the lozenge bands encircle a projecting roundel.[36] The areas of the spandrels at both sides of the arch are filled with leafed tendrils. This part of the decoration is essential for the impression of complexity of the whole *miḥrāb*. Above, the broad cornice is now largely destroyed. Within a frame which was probably a continuation of the zigzag-meander band from the lower border, the oblong was filled with an angular strapwork pattern. Here, we find the first parallel with the later stuccos which have been analysed above. The other elements of the *miḥrāb* in the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī reveal a much more direct linkage with Iran than could be observed in the *miḥrāb*-s from the early 6th/12th century.

The rectangular frame around the prayer niche follows a basic principle of geometrical organisation and as such needs no special deduction. For the epigraphic band as a border of a rectangular plane, there seems to be no earlier example in Egypt, while it is common in Iran on *miḥrāb*-s as well as on façade elements (*pīštāq* or *īwān*). The continuation of the framing

[34] Cf. Rāġib, *art. cit.* (note 33). Apparently, other traditions of sanctity were later transferred on this building, so that it became connected to a legendary saint named "Sīdī ʿAbdallāh al-Ǧuyūšī".

[35] Illustrations of the *miḥrāb* have been published in several works, among them Flury, *Ornamente* (note 3), p. 40 f., pl. 17; L. Hautecœur - G. Wiet, *Les Mosquées du Caire*, Paris 1932, p. 231, pl. 25; Ministry of Waqfs (ed.), *The Mosques of Egypt from 21 H. (641) to 1365 H. (1946)*, Cairo 1949, vol. I, p. 25, pl. 20; Creswell, *MAE* I (note 10), p. 157 f., fig. 80, pls. 48 c, 110 a, 116 a; Y. Rāġib, *art. cit.* (note 33), p. 54; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo* (note 23), p. 67. The only commentary to go beyond these rough descriptive presentations is found in J. Sourdel-Thomine – B. Spuler, *Die Kunst des Islam, Propyläen Kunstgeschichte* 4, Munich 1973, p. 250, pl. 172. – The inscription bands in the dome, which are not discussed here, quote Qur'an 35, 41. – The cornice has been briefly described by Creswell, *MAE* I, p. 158, pl. 110 a, 116; a drawing is published in *Mosques of Egypt* (see above), p. 25. Its inscription contains Qur'ān 48, 1-5.

[36] On the published photographs, the roundel looks as if inscribed with the word *Allāh*, upside down. Close examination could make it clear whether this is the result of an awkward repair.

inscription on the archivolt of the niche seems unique, whereas combinations of two separate inscriptions on the frame and the archivolt can be found in Eastern Iran, e. g. on the *miḥrāb*-s of the Ribāṭ-i Šaraf east of Mašhad, and the Masǧid-i Gunbad at Sangān-i Pā'īn (fig. 11).[37] From this time onwards (i. e. from the second quarter of the 6th/12th century), the combination of framing and archivolt inscriptions becomes very common in Iran.

After what has been said above, it is clear that the spandrel fillings have many parallels in Iranian stucco decoration. At the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī, the tendrils do not actually spring from a definite point and do not grow organically in stems and branches, but cover the whole area in swinging curves and interpenetrating spirals, the interstices filled with leaves in a variety of shapes. Just as in the Iḫwat Yūsuf, the tendrils have double stems. However, for its general layout, the spandrels of the Ǧuyūšī *miḥrāb* cannot have served as a direct prototype for the Iḫwat Yūsuf *miḥrāb*, because they are not organised symmetrically to diagonal axes.

The larger, three- or five-lobed leaves show a variety of grid patterns, based on a sixty-degree net of equilateral triangles. Two smaller leaves in the central zone of each spandrel are different, featuring horizontally lined triangles and a narrow honeycomb pattern respectively, which are not constructed on a sixty-degree net. Of the two split leaves clinging to the archivolt of the niche, one is covered with a chessboard pattern and the other with a net of three-pointed whorls. Nearly all of these patterns occur in the leafed tendril network on the soffit of the main *īwān* arch at Ribāṭ-i Šaraf (fig. 9), which is also a close parallel for the shapes of the leaves. The repertoire of the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī *miḥrāb* is, however, richer and applied with greater refinement. One has only to look at the large leaves in the outer corners with their sharply bent upper tips, the pearls bordering the other three lobes, and the extra trimming of the base of the leaf, to state that nothing directly comparable can be found at Ribāṭ-i Šaraf. On the other hand, there is less overlapping and dense background filling in the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī decoration. This allows the background to shine through between the leaves, while the tendrils seem to curve around them in an orderly way, whatever boldness there is in their interpenetrating spirals. In this "orderliness", they are closely resembled by a chronologically distant specimen, namely the *miḥrāb* in the courtyard of the Great Mosque at Bisṭām, dated to the early 8th/14th century (fig. 14).[38] The hood of its niche is decorated with double-stem spiral tendrils and leaves with grid patterns which, at first sight, seem very similar to those of the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī. Yet, the leaves at Bisṭām fit so neatly into the spirals that they hardly overlap at all, and the whole composition appears much dryer and more schematic. The pendulum swings to the other extreme with another example to which the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī decoration can be compared: the *miḥrāb* in the southern bay of the Masǧid-i Pā Manār at Zavāra (fig. 8)[39] shows a much

[37] For the Ribāṭ-i Šaraf, cf. above, note 14. For Sangān-i Pā'īn, cf. above, note 32.

[38] Cf. Pope - Ackerman, *Survey* (note 13), p. 1084 f., 1309, pls. 392, 394.

[39] Cf. Peterson, *art. cit.* (note 16). The date of the stucco at Zavāra is probably contemporary with the minaret, dated by inscription to 461/1068-1069, or slightly later, because the same patron seems to be mentioned in the inscription tablet above (which has suffered from later restorations); cf. Blair, *Monumental Inscriptions* (note 18), p. 137-139, pls. 90-92.

more dynamic picture, due to the lively interplay of the vegetal ornament with a heavily knotted Kūfic inscription. At closer examination, this decoration features almost the same shapes of leaves and grid patterns as that of the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī, and the loose circles in which the tendrils form the background of the inscription are in some way comparable to the movements of the Ǧuyūšī tendrils. A major difference lies in the extensive use of feathered leaves, especially in the central part of the niche at Zavāra.

The bordering bands of the Ǧuyūšī *miḥrāb* also offer some characteristic elements. The Kūfic inscription containing Koranic quotations[40] would justify a deeper epigraphic study in comparison with other examples from this period. While at first sight its style seems not particularly marked, the slightly wedge-shaped verticals and some occasional knots make it nevertheless quite different from the contemporary inscriptions on the city walls, on the Bāb al-Naṣr and on the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī itself.[41] The lettering is supplemented by tendrils springing from the upper lengths of the letters and filling the space between them. In a simpler shape, forerunners for this kind of floriated Kūfic can be found on Egyptian monuments,[42] but the style of the tendrils, leaves and fleurons has no exact parallel. Examples from Damascus and Diyarbakır appear far more similar.[43] In Iran, most inscriptions of the period in question feature letters on a background of scroll tendrils, but floriated Kūfic is also well attested.[44] The geometric pattern of the outer band is constructed from two identical intermittent zigzag bands with T-shaped projections standing between the teeth. The filling of the spaces between the diagonals creates solid rectangles which stress the zigzag pattern. Almost identically, this ornament occurs on two *miḥrāb*-s in Iran which have already been mentioned: the one in the Masǧid-i Šāh Abū l-Qāsim in Yazd (fig. 13), and the *miḥrāb* from Rayy in the Teheran Museum (fig. 12).[45]

Together with its early date, the character of the decorative elements of this *miḥrāb* suggests that influence from Iran was still fresh and direct. While the practice of covering the area around the *miḥrāb* with stucco had precedents in Egypt – mainly, the al-Azhar Mosque comes to mind –, there was no domestic tradition either for the arrangement of the decoration or for its single elements. As a contrast to the later *miḥrāb*-s, nearly all motifs of the Ǧuyūšī *miḥrāb* – except for the cornice at the top – have close parallels in Iran. The intermingling with Egyptian elements was only about to begin.

[40] Qur'ān 25.10 and 24.36-37 on the outside, the continuation of 24.37-38 and 9, 128 on the inner part of the band.

[41] Cf. Van Berchem, *MCIA, Le Caire* (note 33), pls. 17.2-3, 18.1-2, 19.2.

[42] E. g. on the cornices under the domes of the prayer hall in the Mosque of al-Ḥākim, and on the relief decoration of its minarets; cf. Flury, *Ornamente* (note 3), p. 18 f., pls. 2-3, 28.

[43] Cf. the inscriptions in the Great Mosque of Damascus commemorating the restorations under the *atabeg* Ṭuġtakīn, cf. *RCEA* (note 33), vol. VIII, no. 2933 (the inscriptions of the Great Mosque have not been included in the publication of the early Arabic inscriptions of Damascus by D. Sourdel – J. Sourdel-Thomine, "Dossiers pour un corpus des inscriptions arabes de Damas", in *REI* 47, 1979, p. 119-171). – S. Flury has presented the inscriptions from Diyarbakır in great detail in a separate study (cf. note 17). – A clear geographical attribution is rendered difficult by the gradual development of floriated Kūfic in several parts of the Abbasid caliphate from the early 4th/10th century onwards; cf. also Blair, *art. cit.* (note 3).

[44] An example is the stucco inscription of the tomb tower at Rādkān-West, dated 411/1020-1021; cf. Blair, *Monumental Inscriptions* (note 18), no. 31, fig. 48.

[45] Cf. above, notes 30-31.

An intermediary stage of development is marked by the *miḥrāb* of al-Afḍal ibn Badr al-Ǧamālī in the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn (fig. 6).[46] While the main *miḥrāb* of the mosque dates back to the days of Ahmad Ibn Ṭūlūn (altered by the restoration under al-Manṣūr Lāǧīn at the end of the 7th/13th century), four later stucco *miḥrāb*-s are situated on the pillars flanking the central axis leading to the main *miḥrāb*.[47] The *miḥrāb* of al-Afḍal, on the second pillar to the right, bears an inscription mentioning his name and that of the caliph al-Mustanṣir. Since al-Afḍal came to reign in 487/1094, a few months before al-Mustanṣir died, this should be taken as the date of the *miḥrāb*.[48] In the publications of the *miḥrāb*, its "Persian" appearance has been noted, without further discussion of its style.[49]

The *miḥrāb* is flat and has no rounded niche. Instead, an arched profile divides the field within the framing inscription. The area above the spandrels is filled with an ornamental and an epigraphic band, while below, a second arch on colonnettes encloses a calligraphic panel.[50] This arrangement of two superimposed arches can already be seen in the Friday Mosque of Nāyīn and has since been widespread all over Iran.[51] To be sure, the flatness of the *miḥrāb* was more or less dictated by its position on a pillar, and had precedents in the two older *miḥrāb*-s further behind. Apart from these, flat *miḥrāb*-s are very uncommon in Egypt. Creswell already noted the Iranian influence in the composition of the *miḥrāb*, while his general intention was to refute the assumption of Persian influence on Fatimid architecture.[52]

Again, elements of the decoration consist of epigraphic bands, patterned fields and geometric bands. At this stage, the Iranian share in the decoration clearly dominates the few features which are better explained from the domestic tradition. The framing epigraphic band is less characteristic for its knotted Kūfic than for its background, composed of delicate tendrils swinging in wide curves and filled with small-scale fleurons. A very close parallel

[46] For the building, cf. K. A. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, Oxford[2] 1969, vol. II, p. 332-359, figs. 245-257, pls. 96-114. – The *miḥrāb* of al-Afḍal has been published in illustrations and with brief comments, cf. Flury, *Ornamente* (note 3), pl. 16.2; *Mosques of Egypt* (note 35), p. 10, pl. 21; Creswell, *MAE* I (note 10), p. 220-222, fig. 119, pls. 36 d, 77, 116 b; Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo* (note 23), p. 54, pl. 6.

[47] One of these, on the fourth pillar to the right, has been analysed by S. Flury: "Ein Stuck*miḥrāb* des IV (X.) Jahrhunderts", in *Jahrbuch der asiatischen Kunst* 2, 1925 (= *Festschrift für Friedrich Sarre zur Vollendung seines 60. Lebensjahres*), p. 106-109; and F. Shāfiʿī, "An Early Fatimid Miḥrāb in the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn", in *BFA* (Cairo, Fouad I University) 15.1, 1953, p. 67-81. Shāfiʿī's stylistic analysis is, in my view, too biased in favour of a North African origin of the ornament.

[48] For the inscription, cf. Van Berchem, *MCIA, Le Caire* (note 33), p. 32-34, no. 12, pl. 20.1; *RCEA* (note 33), vol. VIII, no. 2806. – On the basis of this implicit dating, al-Afḍal's *miḥrāb* also confirms that the *miḥrāb* in the Mašhad al-ǧuyūšī dates most probably to 478/1085, when the building was erected. A hypothetical restoration, which might be suggested as an occasion for the building of the *miḥrāb*, on the grounds of the later parallels in Iranian stucco, can be excluded. – The lower line of the inscription mentions a certain Abū l-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Ḥākim b. Wuhaib b. ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān, with the title *faḫr al-aḥkām*, who was probably in charge of supervising the work. The passage of the inscription which probably mentioned his function (e. g. *ʿalā yaday*) is destroyed.

[49] Cf. note 46.

[50] The inscriptions contain different religious texts: The epigraphic band in the panel above the apex of the molded arch bears the Shiʿite version of the *šahāda*. The molded arch is accompanied by two Qurʾānic inscriptions, 29, 45 above and 35, 34-35 (until *min faḍlihi*) below, closing with *ṣadaqa Llāh al-ʿaẓīm*. The calligraphic panel in the lower centre contains, at least in its present state, Qurʾān 53, 26: *Fa-sǧadū li-Llāh wa-bʿadū*.

[51] For Nāyīn, cf. Finster, *Frühe iranische Moscheen* (note 13).

[52] Cf. Creswell, *MAE* I (note 10), p. 221 f. The field of the *miḥrāb* is divided in ratios of 2:1 and 2:3. Creswell attributed these proportions to the Abbasid tradition, but they are equally attested for Iranian stucco of the 6th/12th century; cf. the detailed presentation by Shani, *Gunbad-i Alawiyān* (note 13), p. 45-57.

is the inscription band on the middle portal of Ribāṭ-i Šaraf (fig. 10). In the horizontal epigraphic band above the apex of the molded upper arch, containing the Shīʿite version of the *šahada*, the heads of the hastae are pierced in the same manner as described above at the Iḫwat Yūsuf with its Iranian parallels.[53] A sixty-degree grid pattern forms the background of this inscription in a now familiar fashion. The ornamented panels also contain well-known elements: the upper band of bell-shaped leaves alternating with knots of arabesques is a precursor of the cornice on the lateral *miḥrāb* of the Mašhad of Sayyida Ruqayya. However, the parallels from Rayy, Yazd and Sangān noted above cannot count as direct prototypes, because they lack the arabesque knots. The spandrels are filled with the same pattern of interlocking three-pointed stars as has been already been observed on the central arch of the Iḫwat Yūsuf decoration. The centrepiece of al-Afḍal's *miḥrāb* is the lunette under the molded arch. Here, large-scale leafed tendrils form an intricate composition with branches growing out of a chalice on top of heart-shaped central loop, bending downwards and penetrating with the ends of their leaves back into the loop. While the general treatment of the leafed tendrils recalls the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī *miḥrāb*, the composition has its closest parallels in stucco *miḥrāb*-s at Zavāra and other places in Central Iran.[54]

Against these elements, the lateral panels in the lower part of the field appear much more "Mediterranean". With their grooved tendrils, arranged on a vertical axis of symmetry, they could be derived from late antique ornament, and show the same level of abstraction as the ornaments on the al-Hakim minarets.[55] Equally, the strapwork covering the molded arch and the colonnettes are part of the Egyptian heritage.[56] In this *miḥrāb*, the Iranian layout and principal decorative elements are supplemented by local motifs in secondary positions.

Although different from each other in composition and ornamental repertoire, I believe that the two *miḥrāb*-s are products of direct influence from Iran. The process of rapid integration of the Iranian features with the domestic tradition, visible in the development from the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī to the Mašhad of Sayyida Ruqayya, suggests that this influence was still very fresh in 478/1085, when the *miḥrāb* in the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī was made. One could even venture to say that this work of art marks its very beginning. It can hardly be guessed how many other monuments were subject to this stylistic current. That there were more than nowadays preserved, is demonstrated by the so-called "al-Ḫaḍrā al-Šarīfa".

[53] Cf. above, note 18.

[54] Cf. R. Shani, "On the Stylistic Idiosyncrasies of a Saljūq Stucco Workshop from the Region of Kāshān", in *Iran* 27, 1989, p. 67-74. – The term "Kāšān school" for these stucco works may elicit further discussion.

[55] Cf. Creswell, *MAE* I (note 10), pls. 17, 25, 26.

[56] The lower calligraphic panel is so much the result of recent restoration that it is not discussed here. However, it seems that its epigraphic style is related to that of the framing inscription.

Creswell documented this ruin on the cemetery of al-Qarāfa al-Kubrā, which possessed a *miḥrāb* with "Iranian" stucco decoration (fig. 7).[57]

Some examples demonstrate that the reception of Iranian elements was not universal. For example, the stucco *miḥrāb* in the Mausoleum of Sayyida ʿĀtika shows none of the typical "Iranian" elements.[58] In the Mausoleum of al-Ḥasawātī, Iranian influence is restricted to a few feathered split leaves and some knots in the framing inscription.[59] But on the whole, the Iranian style, apparently first applied in works of high-ranking patronage, met with broad acceptance. Otherwise, it would be hard to explain why the subsequent works of Fatimid stucco decoration display such a large portion of Iranian elements, mixed into the Egyptian repertoire. It seems as if the advent of the Iranian stucco had given the domestic production a new boost after a long period of inertia. By the end of the 5th/11th century, the Iranian elements were firmly embedded in the Egyptian practice of stucco decoration, and thus had become part of the late Fatimid style. Under these circumstances, it is only logical that art historical comments on the stucco decoration of this period take them as unquestionable parts of Fatimid Egyptian art. If they recognize Iranian influence at all, they mention it only in passing. It is merely in one case that the attempt is made to name examples from Iran for comparison.[60]

Mechanisms of Artistic Exchange

Given that in stucco decoration, stylistic development was determined by workshop tradition much more than by other factors, the exact correspondence of the two *miḥrāb*-s of Badr al-Jamālī and al-Afḍal with contemporary Iranian examples stronlgy suggest that they were created by Iranian artisans, or at least that the artisans had been trained in an Iranian workshop. It is hard to see how details like the zigzag-meander of the Ǧuyūšī *miḥrāb* could otherwise be explained. Influence through graphic media would have been limited to the composition or to some striking features, which the artist would have tried to imitate by his own means. Those portions of al-Afḍal's *miḥrāb* which are clearly not Iranian are in my opinion best explained by a cooperation with local craftsmen, who in this case had to execute some parts of secondary importance. We do not know exactly how Iranian stucco workers came to Cairo. In the 5th/11th century, travels between Iran and Egypt were by

[57] Published by Creswell, *MAE* I (note 10), p. 224-226, fig. 127, pls. 79 g, 116 c. Creswell suggested that the building is identical with the Masǧid al-Šarīfa, mentioned by Maqrīzī with the construction date 501/1107-08. – Y. Rāġib, "Sur deux monuments funéraires du cimetière d'al-Qarāfa al-Kubrā au Caire", in *AnIsl* 12, 1974, p. 72-83, contradicts this hypothesis and proposes a dating one century earlier. Creswell's photograph shows a flat calligraphic panel flanked by colonnettes and a framing inscription band. The style of the latter can be compared to the painted inscription in the Mausoleum of Sangbast (cf. Pope - Ackerman, *Survey* [note 13], p. 986-988, figs. 372 a, 374 a, 460, pls. 260 B. C. – The dating of this monument to Maḥmūd of Ġazna's rule has been contradicted by D. Sourdel – J. Sourdel-Thomine, "À propos des monuments de Sangbast", in *Iran* 7, 1969, p. 109-114, where a date around 500/1100 is suggested). A similar epigraphic style can be found in a stucco inscription at Laškar-i Bāzār, where it might also date from the late Ġaznavid period; cf. J. Sourdel-Thomine, *Lashkari Bazar. Une résidence royale ghaznévide et ghoride,* vol. I B, *Le décor non figuratif et les inscriptions, MDAFA* Paris 1978, pl. 61 e. This seems to speak in favour of Creswell's rather than Rāġib's dating, at least as far as the stucco is concerned. Thus, the comparison to Iranian examples may also help in placing debated Egyptian monuments more reliably into a chronological framework.

[58] Cf. Creswell, *MAE* I (note 10), pls. 80 c, 117 b.

[59] Cf. *ibid.*, pls. 88 b, 120 b.

[60] Cf. above, note 35.

no means exceptional, as the contacts between the Fatimid court and their Iranian *dāʿī-s* prove. The temporary success of Ismāʿīlī propaganda in Iran was partly due to personal links, sustained by travelling agents. Unfortunately, the biographies of three well-known Iranian individuals who came to Cairo for important stages of their careers contain no information on artists or craftsmen as travel companions.[61]

One might ask what intentions the patrons expressed when they employed Iranian stucco workers for the *miḥrāb*-s. As mentioned above, the purpose of the building is altogether unclear in the case of the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī, and I shall not discuss it here. Similarly, the circumstances of al-Afḍal's patronage for the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn are insufficiently documented. According to Maqrīzī, the quarters of al-ʿAskar and al-Qaṭāʾiʿ had badly suffered from the crisis of the 1060s and were partly dilapidated. He notes that the decay of the mosque had begun in those days and continued into the Ayyūbid and Mamlūk period, until al-Manṣūr Lāǧīn took the initiative to restore the building.[62] He remains silent on the restoration of the north-east gate under Badr al-Ǧamālī, and does not mention al-Afḍal's *miḥrāb*.[63] From the point of view of urban history, it appears that the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn did not rank prominently in the planning of Cairo under the Fatimids. At least, it played no part in the official processions on holidays.[64] The installation of a new *miḥrāb* by al-Afḍal indicates that this impression, which rests mainly on Maqrīzī's reports, is not wholly correct. This is not to say that al-Afḍal imbued the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn with overarching importance in terms of redefining the urban structure. Neither did it have to imply a particular religious or political statement, when he had this mosque reinstalled as a place of prayer after a period of decay. The framing inscription with the names of the caliph and the vizier, unusual as it is on a *miḥrāb*, asserts the political leadership of the Fatimid government; its affirmative character includes no hint to any special meaning beyond. The conclusion is that the exceptional style of the stucco *miḥrāb*-s commissioned by Badr al-Ǧamālī and by his son al-Afḍal was probably not the result of particular values or events in the Fatimid political landscape.

[61] Al-Mu'ayyad fī al-Dīn al-Šīrāzī had to emigrate from Šīrāz because of his Ismāʿīlī activities and settled in Cairo from 438/1046 onwards, rising to the position of a chief *dāʿī* at the Fatimid court; cf. V. Klemm, *Die Mission des fāṭimidischen Agenten al-Mu'ayyad fī d-dīn in Šīrāz, Europäische Hochschulschriften* 27/24, Frankfurt am Main 1989, esp. p. 42-60. – The travel account of Nāṣir-i Ḫusrau reports his impressions from Cairo in the years 439-441/1047-1050; cf. his "Safar-Nāme", ed. and transl. Ch. Schefer, *Relation du voyage de Nassiri Khosrau en Syrie, en Palestine, en Égypte, en Arabie et en Perse pendant les années de l'Hégire 437-444 (1035-1042)*, Paris 1881, p. 42-55 (text), 124-159 (transl.). – Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ had received his training in Rayy, travelled to Cairo, where he arrived in 461/1078, and after his return to Iran acted as a missionary for the Fatimids, before the split in the Ismāʿīlī movement occurred. He became the head of the Nizari branch of the Ismāʿīlīya, the Assassins of Alamut; cf. Rašīd ud-Dīn Faḍlallāh Ḥamadānī, *Ǧāmiʿ at-tavārīḫ. Qismat-i ismāʿīliyān-o-fāṭimiyān-o-nizāriyān (...)*, ed. M. Taqī Dāneš-Pažōh – M. Mudarrisī Zangānī, Teheran 1338/1960, p. 77-137; al-Juwaynī, ʿAlā' ad-Dīn ʿAṭā' Malik, *Tārīḫ-i Jahāngušā*, ed. M. Muḥ. Qazvīnī, Leiden/London 1912-1937, vol. III, p. 186-216. – The sources do not allow to conclude that Ḥasan was dwelling in Cairo when the caliph al-Mustanṣir died in 487/1094, and that he personally tried to influence the decision in favour of Nizār as heir to the throne; the report of events given by S. B. Dadoyan, *The Fatimid Armenians. Cultural and political interaction in the Near East, Islamic History and Civilization* 18, Leiden 1997, p. 128-130, seems to stem from such a misreading.

[62] Cf. al-Maqrīzī, Taqiyy ad-Dīn Aḥmad, *K. al-Mawāʿiẓ wal-iʿtibār fī ḏikr al-ḫiṭaṭ wal-āṯār*, Bulaq 1270/1853-54, vol. II, p. 268.

[63] This lacuna has already been remarked by van Berchem, *MCIA, Le Caire* (note 33), p. 30-32.

[64] Cf. P. Sanders, *Ritual, Politics, and the City in Fatimid Cairo*. Albany 1994, passim.

This hypothesis might be taken further, to the point that the "Iranian stucco style" was apparently not even connected with Ismāʿīlī matters, since it was not restricted to the realm of the Fatimids. Two examples from Central and Southern Syria demonstrate that the same kind of "Iranian stucco" found its way into a region where Fatimid influence seemed minimal due to a strong Sunnī government. The first of these examples is the *miḥrāb* in the Masǧid al-Fulūs at Damascus, in the suburb of al-Mīdān (fig. 15).[65] This little undated mosque, with an unassuming façade a few meters south of the Bāb al-Muṣallā Square on the main street of al-Mīdān, features a *miḥrāb* with lavish stucco decoration in the upper parts of the niche: the epigraphic frieze which crowns the cylindrical part of the niche consists of Kūfic letters in angular bends, on a background of tendrils with feathered split leaves. The hood of the niche is filled with a puzzling mesh of spiral tendrils, densely interspersed with feathered split leaves and broader leaves with grid pattern surfaces. Although the vocabulary is essentially the same as on the Ǧuyūšī *miḥrāb*, its syntax is much more complicated. The tendrils bifurcate and intersect in such a way that no hierarchy can be made out between the different branches. This seems to speak in favour of a somewhat later dating of this decoration, perhaps as late as the second half of the 6th/12th century. On the other hand, the broad stylistic range within the Egyptian stuccos, and the masterly handling of tendril decoration displayed in the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī *miḥrāb*, make it hard to exclude a date close to the latter, which would suit the style of the Kūfic inscription. This is also in keeping with Ibn ʿAsākir's remarks that the cemetery next to the mosque was used in the Salǧūqid or Būrid period.[66]

The other Syrian example is the Great Mosque (al-Ǧāmiʿ al-ʿUmarī) at Bosra. From Michael Meinecke's structural analysis, it seems clear that this monument as it stands today is mainly the result of a complete rebuilding under the *isfahsalār* Abū Manṣūr Gümüštegīn, who held Bosra as a fief from the hand of the *atabeg* Ṭuġtakīn.[67] The construction is dated to 506/1112-1113 by an inscription. It must have been at this date, or shortly after, that the *qibla* wall was decorated with stucco (fig. 16). Of the two main parts of the decoration, the large inscription frieze has already been analysed by Solange Ory, who compared its epigraphic style to Iranian examples, e. g. that of the painted inscription in the Mausoleum of Sangbast.[68] Little remains of the stucco decoration around the *miḥrāb*, formerly covering a rectangle of c. 5 × 6 m, above the springing of the *miḥrāb* arch. But the few preserved parts make it clear that here, too, Iranian influence was at work. The dense pattern of tendrils and patterned leaves in the large central field is a clear indicator, just as the style of the epigraphic band and the six-pointed star pattern in the lower rectangle

[65] Cf. Y. Roujon – L. Vilan, *Le Midan. Actualité d'un faubourg ancien de Damas*, Damascus, Ifead, 1997, p. 64, 73.

[66] Ibn ʿAsākir ad-Dimašqī, Abū l-Qāsim ʿAlī, *Tārīḫ madīnat Dimašq*, quoted after the manuscript in the National Library at Damascus by J.-M. Mouton, *Damas et sa principauté sous les Saljoukides et les Bourides (468-549/1076-1154)*, *Ifao, TAEI* 33, Cairo 1994, p. 282, n. 134.

[67] Cf. M. Meinecke, "The Great Mosques of the Hauran", in *AAASyr* 41, 1997, p. 96-99, figs. 1-4, 6, 13 (caption exchanged with that of fig. 7); *idem*, "Patterns of Stylistic Changes in Islamic Architecture. Local Tradition versus Migrating Artists", *Hagop Kevorkian Series on Near Eastern Art and Civilization*, New York/London 1996, p. 35-37, fig. 9, pl. 10.

[68] Cf. S. Ory, "Inscriptions de style iranien à Buṣrā", in *MUSJ* 43, 1968, p. 50-56. On Sangbast, cf. above, note 57.

on the right. In both cases, the motifs are not as crisp as in the Ǧuyūšī *miḥrāb*. In quality and in the relationship to works of primary Iranian influence, the Bosra stucco appears similar to that of the Iḫwat Yūsuf.

A closer look at the situation in Syria under the rule of the Būrid Dynasty reveals that the politico-religious frontiers were actually less clear than one might presume, and certainly more so in the early 6th/12th century than in the decades before. Relations between the Sunnī government at Damascus and the the Ismāʿīlī movement underwent a change during the reign of the *atabeg* Ṭuġtakīn. The formerly hostile attitude towards the Fatimids gave way to collaboration, albeit limited, in the struggle against the Crusader states. Ismāʿīlīs even gained some influence at Ṭuġtakīn's court and enjoyed the protection of the *atabeg*, especially after the arrival of the *dāʿī* Bahrām, probably some time before 516/1122.[69] One might wonder whether the stuccos of the Masǧid al-Fulūs and in the Great Mosque of Bosra were in some way connected to one of the embassies exchanged between Cairo and Damascus. But even if they were, their "Iranian style" should not necessarily be considered indicative of an Ismāʿīlī message, however vague that might have been. After all, the ruling elite remained Sunnī, and Gümüštegīn, the patron of the Great Mosque in Bosra, founded a Ḥanafite *madrasa* at the same place in 530/1136.[70]

Instead of looking for religious or political factors which might have motivated the Fatimid and Būrid patrons' choice of Iranian and Iranian-style stucco craftsmen, it seems more promising to consider the intrinsic qualities of their works. The bold composition of vegetal and geometric elements, the intricately knotted letters and interwoven tendrils, delicate branches and leaves with perforated surfaces, the great variety of geometric patterns were much more than the craftsmen of Egypt and Syria could compete with. What they had to offer was more or less reduced to a shadow by the fireworks of invention which Iranian stucco artisans had launched.[71] How the influx of the new current in architectural decoration in Cairo was actually triggered – whether Iranian craftsmen had come to Cairo on their own initiative, or whether they had been brought there by Fatimid agents from Iran, we do not know. Yet, it is easy to imagine that the Iranian-style stuccos of the Fatimid *miḥrāb*-s were indeed perceived as "out of place" monuments in the first years after the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī was built, and that their style inspired other patrons and craftsmen. It can also be assumed that two generations later, after Iranian elements had been picked up in the stucco decoration of a number of Cairene monuments, this style was no longer considered exotic.

[69] Cf. Mouton, *Damas et sa principauté*... (note 66), p. 101-103, 129-131.

[70] Cf. Meinecke, *Stylistic Change* (note 67), p. 37 f., pls. 8 b, 9 a.

[71] Examples of earlier Syrian stucco decoration are known from Bālis on the Euphrates; cf. G. Salles, "Les décors en stuc de Balis", in *Mémoires du III^e congrès international d'art et d'archéologie iraniens*, Leningrad 1935, p. 221-226. One large ensemble of wall decoration from Bālis is exhibited in the National Museum at Damascus; cf. M. Abu l-Faraj al-Ush – A. Joundi – B. Zouhdi, *A Concise Guide to the National Museum of Damascus*, Damascus, n. d., p. 239, no. 16, fig. 116 B. Although Iranian influence in a broader sense is visible in the stuccos from Bālis, their style is distinct from that of the pieces at Bosra and Damascus. The stucco niches from the Temple of Bel at Palmyra (now also in the National Museum at Damascus), show an interesting mixture of late Fatimid elements (partly of Iranian origin) with the classisizing form of a shell-headed niche, flanked by free-standing columns; cf. al-Ush – Joundi – Zouhdi (see above), p. 237 f., nos. 4-5; *L'Orient de Saladin. L'art des Ayyoubides. Exposition (...)*, Paris 2001, p. 32, no. 1.

The two *miḥrāb*-s in the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūšī and in the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn are important witnesses not only for the history of Egyptian, but also for Iranian stucco, from the tradition of which they originated and in the line of which they have to be considered. After the Great Mosque of Nāyīn, these belong to the first major stucco *miḥrāb*-s preserved. There are a few examples of Iranian stucco in the 5th/11th century which come close to these two in their wealth of motifs and consistency of composition, among them the already mentioned *miḥrāb*-s of the Pā Manār at Zavāra, the *miḥrāb* at Dandānaqān, and the tomb of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmiḏī at Tirmiḏ.[72] Apart from these masterworks, the stucco ensembles from Nīšāpūr and the connection of stucco and brick decoration at Isfahan attest to the wide range of stucco styles which must have been current in Iran in the 5th/11th century. The variety of styles in which works from the 6th/12th century present themselves could only have originated from a variegated background, the abundance of which can only be guessed from the surviving examples.

In this respect, Islamic art history continues to face a huge task. The internal division of the artistic landscape of Iranian stucco decoration under the Salǧūqs has hardly been defined.[73] However, with regard to the two *miḥrāb*-s of Cairo, a region can be determined with some certainty in which their styles were rooted. Since the closest parallels, as demonstrated above, come from Ribāṭ-i Šaraf, Bisṭām and Rayy, it seems most probable that the artists working in Cairo, too, originated from the Northern Iranian Highland, or from somewhere on the road between Rayy and Ḫurasān. Tentatively, I would put forward as a hypothesis that the Cairene *miḥrāb*-s represent the style of the stucco of Rayy, so much of which is lost. On the other hand, it is clear that one should not neglect the examples from Central Iran (Zavāra and Yazd) which offer parallels on important points. Already from its offshoots in Cairo, Iranian stucco of the 5th/11th century presents itself in a stylistic complexity which points to the difficulties to distinguish between its regional varieties. The ways of artistic exchange within Iran at this early stage will certainly not be as easy to follow as those of the export of its stucco style.

[72] Cf. Blair, *Monumental Inscriptions*, nos. 51, 63, 72, pls. 92, 112-114, 142.

[73] Also, further discussion is needed with respect to the method of stylistic analysis. It is far from clear on which level features of stucco decoration can be regarded as "characteristic", i. e. relevant for stylistic comparison, in the sense that they indicate a more than accidental relationship between given examples. The valuable contributions by Raya Shani (*Gunbad-i 'Alaviyān* [note 13]; and *art. cit.* [note 54]), while making explicit some of the features used to define groups of stucco decoration, still leave room for debate in this respect.



1 a. Cairo, Mausoleum of Iḫwat Yūsuf, *qibla wall* (photograph by the author).



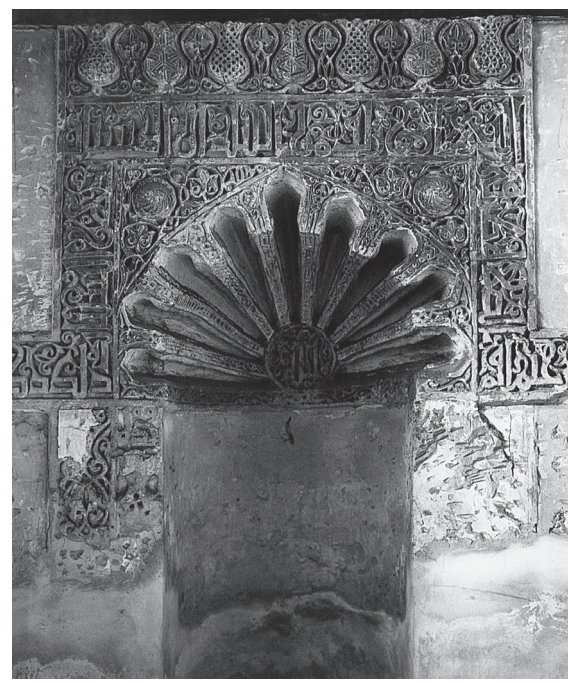
1 b. Cairo, Mausoleum of Iḫwat Yūsuf, central *miḥrāb* (photograph by the author).



2. Cairo, al-Azhar Mosque, arch under transept dome (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Creswell Archive no. C.3046).



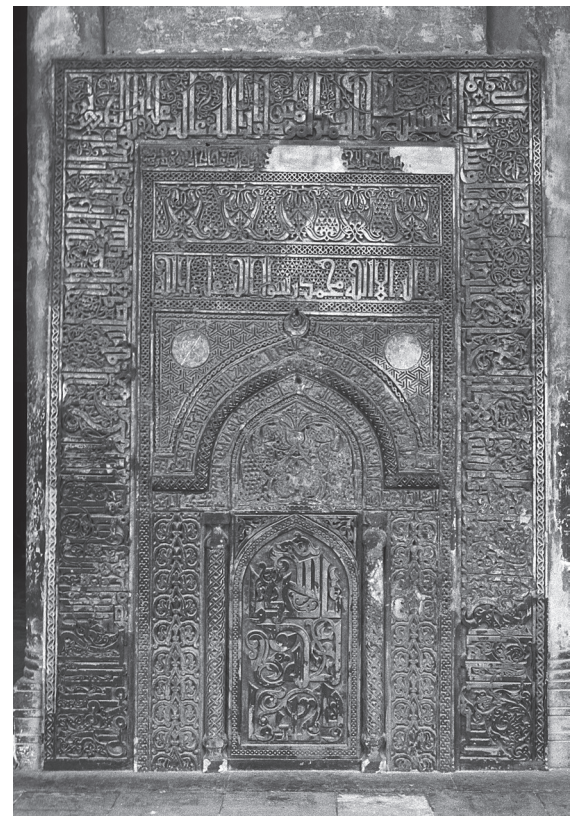
3. Cairo, Mašhad of Sayyida Ruqayya, central *miḥrāb* (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Creswell Archive no. C.3907).



4. Cairo, Mašhad of Sayyida Ruqayya, lateral *miḥrāb* (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Creswell Archive no. C.3905).



5. Cairo, Mašhad al-Ğuyūšī, *miḥrāb* (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Creswell Archive no. C.3411).



6. Cairo, Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn, *miḥrāb* of al-Afḍal (photograph by the author).



7. Cairo, al-Ḥadrā al-Šarīfa, ruin of *miḥrāb* (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Creswell Archive no. C.1008).



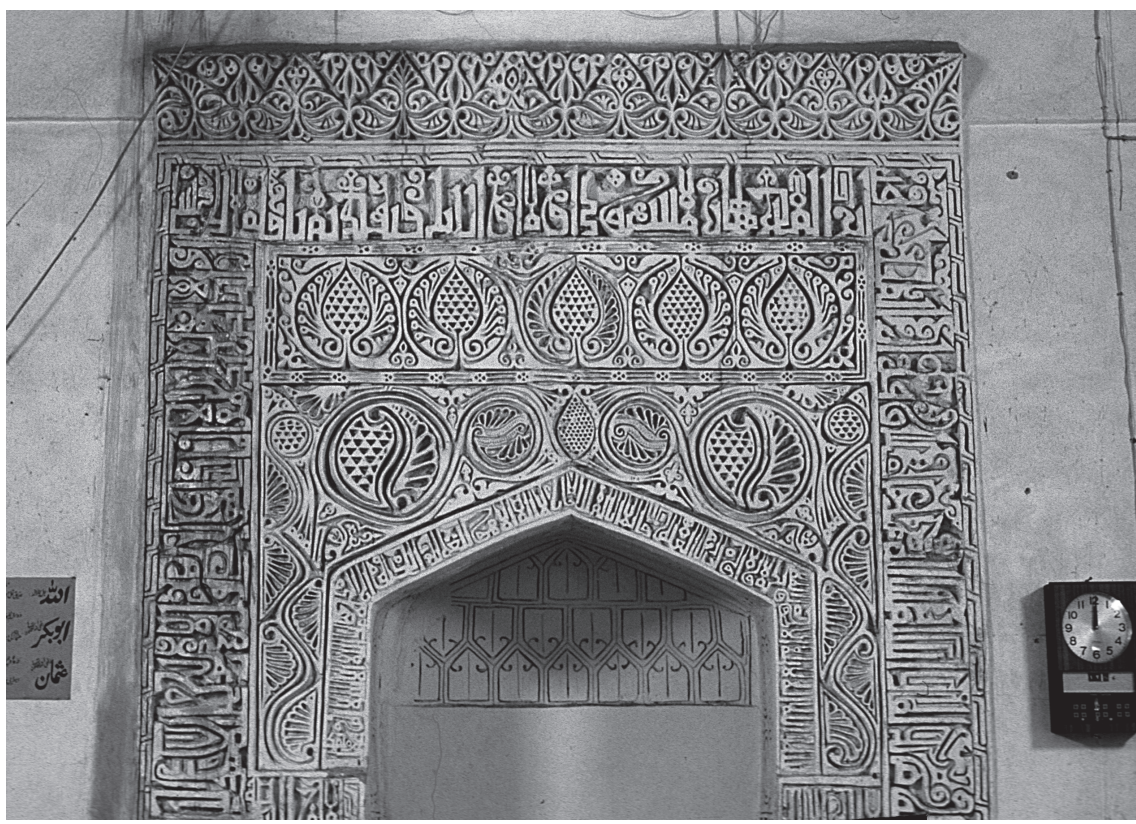
8. Zavāra, Masğid-i Pā Manār, *miḥrāb* in the southernmost bay (photograph by the author).



9. Ribāṭ-i Šaraf, arch of main *īwān* (photograph by the author).



10. Ribāṭ-i Šaraf, portal *īwān* leading to main courtyard, left jamb (photograph by the author).



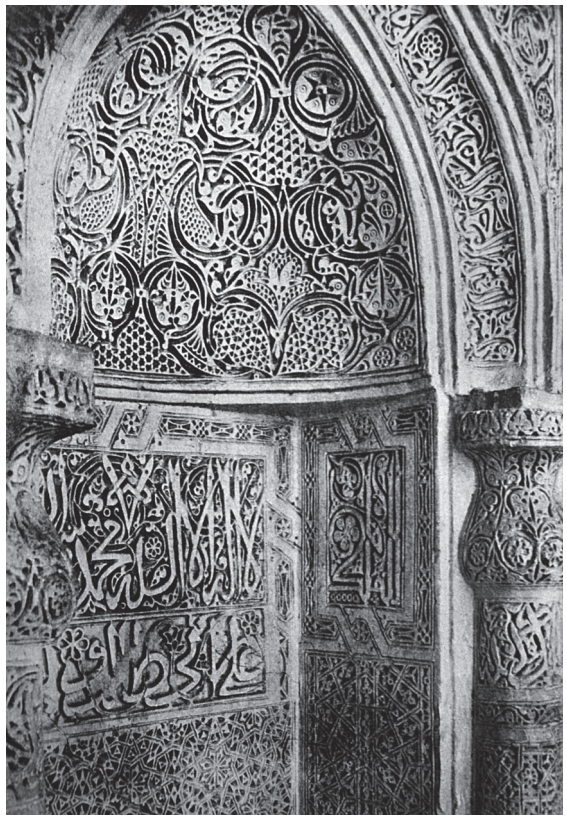
11. Sangān-i Pā'īn, Masǧid-i Gunbad, *miḥrāb* (photograph by the author).



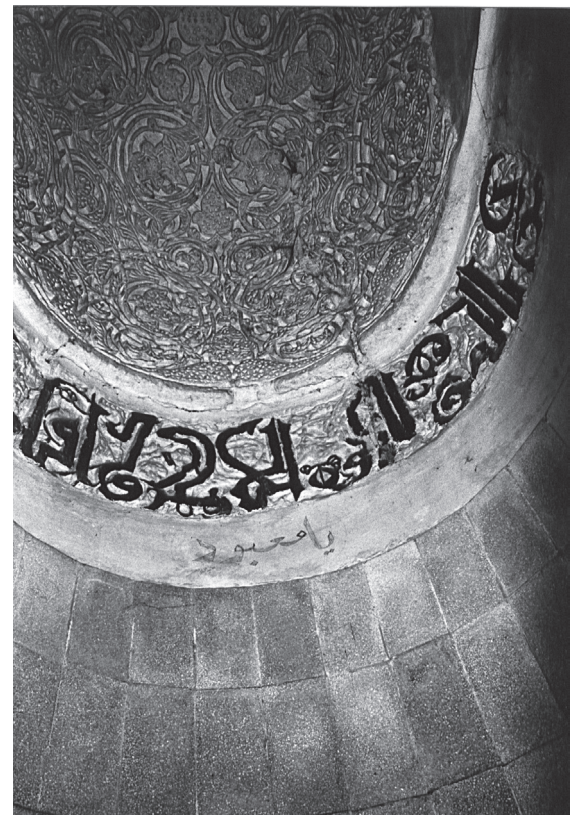
12. *Miḥrāb* from Rayy (photograph by the author).



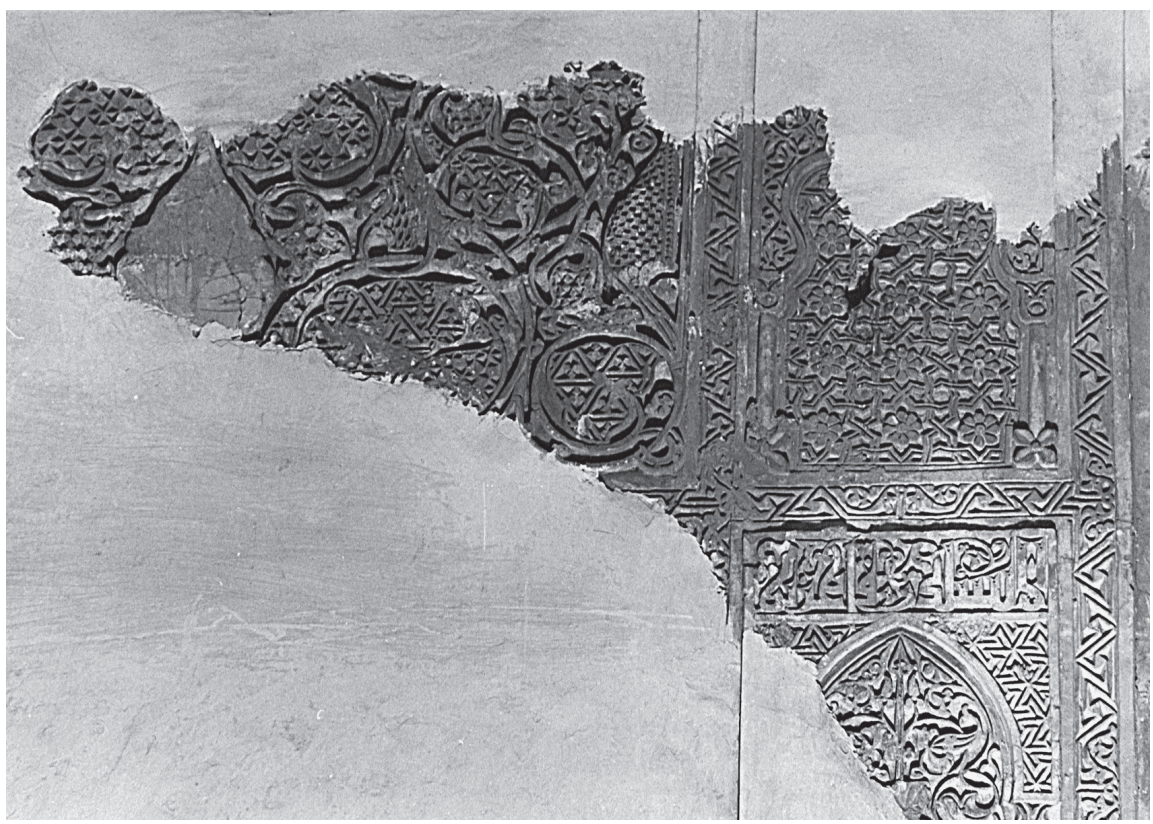
13. Yazd, Masǧid-i Šah Abū l-Qāsim, *miḥrāb* (after Pope – Ackerman, *Survey*).



14. Bisṭām, Great Mosque, *miḥrāb* in the courtyard (after Pope - Ackerman, *Survey*).



15. Damascus, Masǧid Fulūs, *miḥrāb* decoration (photograph by Michael Meinecke, 73/28-3A).



16. Bosra, Great Mosque, *qibla* wall decoration (photograph by Klaus Anger, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Damascus, 83/1186).