
Lorenz Korn

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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 century 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...
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 Mamlûk 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 commission 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 Bilâd al-Šâm, 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 mihrâb-\(s\) 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,


\(^{9}\) 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 “Iḥwat 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. 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 peculiarities of this decoration have hardly been noted. The three half-round niches of two different sizes are bound together 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 Tūlūn Mosque. The cornice above the central niche with its laced strapwork pattern has a far ancestor in the crenellations of the Ibn Tūlūn roof platform, from which, as a much closer parallel, the parapets of the al-Hakim Mosque might have developed. 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 Tūlūnid 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.


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, Rāgbī 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 Tüllüni 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 trifoliate 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 trifoliate leaves, while the other flat leaves display simple chessboard or mesh patterns. All of these features have parallels in Iranian stucco decoration of the Saljuq period: the principle of tendrils and leaves with grid patterns is ubiquitous in Saljuq style stucco decoration, especially on mihrab-s, and continues into the Ilkhanid period. Well-known examples are the stucco mihrab-s of the so-called Haïdariya in Qazvin, or the interior decoration of the Gunbad-i 'Alaviyân in Hamadân.13 Tendrils with double stems are a common motif, too.14 Intermittent with split leaves, they occur on the main mihrab of the Friday Mosque at Ardîstân in Central Iran.15 The diagonal symmetry axis has its parallel in one of the mihrab-s of the Masjid-i Pâ Manâr at Zavâre, the neighbour town of Ardîstân (fig. 8).16

In the main inscription frieze, the epigraphic style as well as the background are reminiscent of Iranian examples. The shapes of its Kûfic letters as such do not appear particularly characteristic – even though the knot in the word “Allâh” 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 mihrab at Ardîstân, and in the epigraphic frieze of the Imamzâde Yahyâ b. Zaid at Sar-i Pol 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


15 For this building, cf. A. Godard, “Ardîstân et Zawärî”, in Ajar-é Ithin 1, 1936, p. 288-296, figs. 185-195; Pope - Ackerman, Survey (note 13), p. 990-997, 1019 f., pls. 317-328; for the mihrâb-s cf. ibid., pls. 322, 323 B, 324 A, B.


17 Knotted Kûfic appears fully developed with the inscription on the tomb tower of Râdkân (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 Kûfic was taken up in Cairo. The best comparisons are found in Diharbûr later in the 9th/11th century; cf. ibid., passim. – For the İhwat Yüsuf inscription, it should be possible to establish a parallel on the basis of the idiosyncratic Kûf ending in a little bud. However, I have not been able to find other examples for this shape of the letter.


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 Ḥarrāqān 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 ʿĪwat 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 ʿĪwat 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 ʿĪwat 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-Hāfīz (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

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21 One of the early brick examples is the minaret of the Friday Mosque at Sāwe, 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 ʿĪwat 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.
arches, the whole interior is decorated with carved stucco. In the lower zone, the two opposing sides on the main axis (looking to the mihrāb 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 Ilhawat Yusuf: the 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 Ilhawat Yusuf decoration, and is quite different from that on the other two arches of the same bay.

In the decoration of the al-Aqmar Mosque, 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. 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 Mas'had of Sayyida Ruqayya, dated 527/1133 by the painted inscription at the foot of the dome. Here, the abundant stucco decoration is at first sight dominated by Egyptian elements. 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 mihrāb-s of the building. Especially on the main mihrāb (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 mihrāb area forms a rectangular panel filled with laced strapwork very similar to that in the Ilhawat Yusuf. 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 Ilhawat Yusuf mihrāb and the mihrāb of the Mas'had al-Çuyüli (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 mihrāb of Sangān-i Pā'īn (see below, note 32; fig. 10).


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


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 mihrāb of the Mašḥad of Sayyida Ruqayya contains numerous elements of Iranian influence.

In the lateral mihrāb-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 mihrāb-s. However, the row of fleurons is an independent element which can by itself be deducted from Iranian prototypes: a mihrāb 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 mihrāb of the Masǧīd-i Sāḥ Abū l-Qāsim in Yazd (fig. 13).31 A simplified version is the frieze above the mihrāb niche of the Masǧīd-i Gunbad at Sangān-i Pā’in, southeast of Ḥvāf in Ḥurāsān (fig. 11).32

It can be debated whether the seeming homogeneity in the central and the lateral mihrāb-s in the Mašḥad 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 mihrāb-s.

The Mihrāb-s of Badr al-Ḡamālī and his Son al-Afḍal

Overlooking Cairo from the plateau of the Muqattam, the building known as al-Mašḥad al-Ḡuyūṣi was, according to the building inscription, erected by the amīr al-Ḡuyūṣ Badr al-Ḡamālī in 478/1085.33 The building type of the mašḥad – 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 antemihrāb 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 mihrāb has been changed by restoration.
31 Cf. Pope – Ackerman, Survey (note 13), pl. 312 B.
32 Cf. R. Hillenbrand, “Mesques et Mausolée à Khurāsān et 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 mihrāb is contemporary with the stucco inscription at the foot of the dome, dated 531/1137.
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. The architectural decoration in the Maḥād al-Ǧuyūṣī 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). 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. 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 Maḥād al-Ǧuyūṣī 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 (pišṭāq or iwān). The continuation of the framing

34 Cf. Rājīb, 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-Ǧuyūṣī”.
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. Rājīb, 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 Qurʾān 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 Qurʾān 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 mihrāb-s of the Ribāṭ-i Šaraf east of Mashad, and the Maṣğīd-i Gunbad at Sangān-i Pā’in (fig. 11). 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-Ḡuyūšī, 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 Ḥuyūšī mihrāb cannot have served as a direct prototype for the Iḫwat Yūsuf mihrāb, 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 iwan arch at Ribaṭ-i Šaraf (fig. 9), which is also a close parallel for the shapes of the leaves. The repertoire of the Mašhad al-Ḡuyūšī mihrāb 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 Ribaṭ-i Šaraf. On the other hand, there is less overlapping and dense background filling in the Mašhad al-Ḡuyūšī 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 mihrāb in the courtyard of the Great Mosque at Bistām, dated to the early 8th/14th century (fig. 14). 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-Ḡuyūšī. Yet, the leaves at Bistām 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-Ḡuyūšī decoration can be compared: the mihrāb in the southern bay of the Maṣġīd-i Pā Manār at Zavāra (fig. 8) shows a much

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 Kufic inscription. At closer examination, this decoration features almost the same shapes of leaves and grid patterns as that of the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūši, and the loose circles in which the tendrils form the background of the inscription are in some way comparable to the movements of the Ǧuyūši 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 Ǧuyūši miḥrāb also offer some characteristic elements. The Kufic inscription containing Koranic quotations 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-Ǧuyūši itself. 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 Kufic can be found on Egyptian monuments, but the style of the tendrils, leaves and fleurons has no exact parallel. Examples from Damascus and Diyarbakîr appear far more similar. In Iran, most inscriptions of the period in question feature letters on a background of scroll tendrils, but floriated Kufic is also well attested. 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 Masqīd-i Ṣāḥ Abū l-Qāsim in Yazd (fig. 13), and the miḥrāb from Rayy in the Teheran Museum (fig. 12).

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 Ǧuyūši 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’an 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.
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 sultan Ṣutuḵān, 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 Diyarbakîr in great detail in a separate study (cf. note 17). – A clear geographical attribution is rendered difficult by the gradual development of floriated Kufic 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 Ṣadākān-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 mīhrāb of al-Afdal ibn Badr al-Γamālī in the Mosque of Ibn Tūlûn (fig. 6). While the main mīhrāb of the mosque dates back to the days of Ahmad Ibn Tūlûn (altered by the restoration under al-Mansūr Lāğīn at the end of the 7th/13th century), four later stucco mīhrāb-s are situated on the pillars flanking the central axis leading to the main mīhrāb. The mīhrāb of al-Afdal, on the second pillar to the right, bears an inscription mentioning his name and that of the caliph al-Mustanṣir. Since al-Afdal came to reign in 487/1094, a few months before al-Mustanṣir died, this should be taken as the date of the mīhrāb. In the publications of the mīhrāb, its “Persian” appearance has been noted, without further discussion of its style.

The mīhrāb 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. This arrangement of two superimposed arches can already be seen in the Friday Mosque of Nāyīn and has since been widespread all over Iran. To be sure, the flatness of the mīhrāb was more or less dictated by its position on a pillar, and had precedents in the two older mīhrāb-s further behind. Apart from these, flat mīhrāb-s are very uncommon in Egypt. Creswell already noted the Iranian influence in the composition of the mīhrāb, while his general intention was to refute the assumption of Persian influence on Fatimid architecture.

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 in the Mosque of Ibn Tūlûn, who was probably in charge of supervising the work. The passage of the inscription which probably mentioned his function (e. g. ‘alā yaday) is destroyed.

The Inscriptions contain different religious texts: The epigraphic band in the panel above the apex of the molded arch bears the Shi‘ite version of the sahīda. The molded arch is accompanied by two Qur‘ānic inscriptions, 29, 45 above and 35, 34-35 (until min fa‘l thā‘) below, closing with ša‘lāt Lāh b. wa-b‘adº li-Llæh wa-b‘adº li-Llæh al-‘rajm. The calligraphic panel in the lower centre contains, at least in its present state, Qur‘ān 53, 26: Fa-sÎadº li-Llæh wa-b‘adº li-Llæh wa-b‘adº li-Llæh wa-b‘adº li-Llæh wa-b‘adº li-Llæh.

49 Cf. note 46.
50 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-Afdal’s mīhrāb also confirms that the mīhrāb in the Mašhad al-guyūṣī 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 mīhrāb, on the grounds of the later parallels in Iranian stucco, can be excluded. – The lower line of the inscription mentions a certain Abû l-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Hāsim b. Wuhāb b. ‘Abd ar-Rahmān, with the title fa‘l al-adhām, who was probably in charge of supervising the work. The inscription is destroyed.
52 The inscription which probably mentioned his name and that of the caliph al-Mustanṣir.

An Isl en ligne
https://www.ifao.egnet.net
is the inscription band on the middle portal of Ribāt-i Šaraf (fig. 10). In the horizontal epigraphic band above the apex of the molded upper arch, containing the Shi‘ite version of the šahada, the heads of the hastae are pierced in the same manner as described above at the Ilywat Yūsuf with its Iranian parallels. 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 mihrāb 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 Ilywat Yūsuf decoration. The centrepiece of al-Afdal’s mihrāb 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-Ǧuyūši mihrāb, the composition has its closest parallels in stucco mihrāb-s at Zavāra and other places in Central Iran.

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. Equally, the strapwork covering the molded arch and the colonnettes are part of the Egyptian heritage. In this mihrāb, 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 mihrāb-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-Ǧuyūši to the Mašhad of Sayyida Ruqayya, suggests that this influence was still very fresh in 478/1085, when the mihrāb in the Mašhad al-Ǧuyūši 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-Ḥadrā al-Šarifa”.

53 Cf. above, note 18.
54 Cf. R. Shani, “On the Stylistic Idiosyncrasies of a Saljiq Stucco Workshop from the Region of Kāšān”, in Iran 27, 1989, p. 67-74. – The term “Kāšān school” for these stucco works may elicit further discussion.
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-Qaräfa al-Kubrâ, which possessed a mîhrâb with “Iranian” stucco decoration (fig. 7).  

Some examples demonstrate that the reception of Iranian elements was not universal. For example, the stucco mîhrâb in the Mausoleum of Sayyida ʿĀtika shows none of the typical “Iranian” elements. In the Mausoleum of al-Hasawâtî, Iranian influence is restricted to a few feathered split leaves and some knots in the framing inscription. 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.

**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 mîhrâb-s of Badr al-Jamâli and al-Afḍal with contemporary Iranian examples strongly 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 Ġuyûsî mîhrâb 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 mîhrâb 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

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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 Masjid al-Šarîf, mentioned by Maqrizî with the construction date 501/1107-08. – Y. Ræfî, “Sur deux monuments funéraires du cimetière d’al-Qarâfa al-Kubrâ 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 Mahmûd of Gazna’s rule has been contradicted by D. Sourdell – J. Sourdël-Thomine, “À propos des monuments de Sangbâst”, 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 Bâzâr, where it might also date from the late Ġaznavîd period; cf. J. Sourdôl-Thomine, Lashkari Bazar. Une résidence royale ghâznevide et ghôrîde, 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 Ræfî’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 dā‘ī-s prove. The temporary success of Ismā‘īlī 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 Mashhad al-Guyūsī, and I shall not discuss it here. Similarly, the circumstances of al-Afdal’s patronage for the Mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn are insufficiently documented. According to Maqrizi, the quarters of al-‘Askar and al-Qātā‘ī 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 Lāḍīn took the initiative to restore the building.62 He remains silent on the restoration of the north-east gate under Badr al-Ḡamālī, and does not mention al-Afdal’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-Afdal indicates that this impression, which rests mainly on Maqrizi’s reports, is not wholly correct. This is not to say that al-Afdal 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-Ḡamālī and by his son al-Afdal was probably not the result of particular values or events in the Fatimid political landscape.


63 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 Ismā‘îlî 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 Sunni government. The first of these examples is the mihrah in the Maṣṣād al-Fulūs at Damascus, in the suburb of al-Midan (fig. 15).65 This little undated mosque, with an unassuming façade a few meters south of the Bāb al-Musallā Square on the main street of al-Midan, features a mihrah with lavish stucco decoration in the upper parts of the niche: the epigraphic frieze which crowns the cylindrical part of the niche consists of Kūfī 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 Īuyūšī mihrah, 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 Maḥād al-Īuyūšī mihrah, make it hard to exclude a date close to the latter, which would suit the style of the Kūfī inscription. This is also in keeping with Ibn ‘Asākir’s remarks that the cemetery next to the mosque was used in the Saljuq or Būrid period.66

The other Syrian example is the Great Mosque (al-Ḡāmiʿ al-ʿUmarî) 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 isfahsalâr Abū Mansūr Gümüştegin, who held Bosra as a fief from the hand of the atabeg Tuğtakin.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 mihrah, formerly covering a rectangle of c. 5 × 6 m, above the springing of the mihrah 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

on the right. In both cases, the motifs are not as crisp as in the Ġuyūṣī mihrāb. In quality and in the relationship to works of primary Iranian influence, the Bosra stucco appears similar to that of the Īḥwāt 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 Sunni government at Damascus and the the Ismā‘īlī movement underwent a change during the reign of the atabeg Tuğtakin. The formerly hostile attitude towards the Fatimids gave way to collaboration, albeit limited, in the struggle against the Crusader states. Ismā‘īlīs even gained some influence at Tuğtakin’s court and enjoyed the protection of the atabeg, especially after the arrival of the dā‘ī Bahram, probably some time before 516/1122.69 One might wonder whether the stuccos of the Masjīd 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 Ismā‘īlī message, however vague that might have been. After all, the ruling elite remained Sunni, and Gümüştegin, the patron of the Great Mosque in Bosra, founded a Hanafite 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 mihrāb-s were indeed perceived as “out of place” monuments in the first years after the Mašhad al-Ġuyūṣī 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.

70 Cf. Meinecke, Stylistic Change (note 67), p. 37 f., pls. 8 b, 9 a.
The two mihrāb-s in the Mašhad al-Ḡuyūṣī 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 Nāṣīrīn, these belong to the first major stucco mihrāb-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 mihrāb-s of the Pā Manār at Zavāra, the mihrāb at Dandānaqān, and the tomb of al-Hakim al-Tirmiḏī at Tirmiḏ. Apart from these masterworks, the stucco ensembles from Niṣāpūr and the connection of stucco and brick decoration at Isfahān 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 Salḵūqs has hardly been defined. However, with regard to the two mihrāb-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 Ribāt-i Šaraf, Bistām 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 Ḫurāsān. Tentatively, I would put forward as a hypothesis that the Cairene mihrāb-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 Ḥālāmīyān [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 Ilywat Yusuf, qibla wall (photograph by the author).

1 b. Cairo, Mausoleum of Ilywat Yusuf, central mihrab (photograph by the author).
IRANIAN STYLE "OUT OF PLACE"? SOME EGYPTIAN AND SYRIAN STUCCOS OF THE 5-6TH/11-12TH CENTURIES


6. Cairo, Mosque of Ibn Ǧuln, miḥrāb of al-Afdal (photograph by the author).

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8. Zavāra, Masjid-i Pa Manār, mihrāb in the southernmost bay (photograph by the author).

9. Ribât-i Şaraf, arch of main āvān (photograph by the author).
10. Ribat-i Šaraf, portal īwān leading to main courtyard, left jamb (photograph by the author).

12. Mihrâb from Rayy (photograph by the author).

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

15. Damascus, Masjid Fulūs, mihrāb 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).