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The Fire of 884/1479 at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus and an Account of Its Restoration

Among the series of fires that are reported to have hit the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus during its pre-modern history, the fire of 884/1479 is so far the least known.¹ The well-known sources for this period, such as the contemporary Cairene chronicles of Ibn Iyās and al-Şayrafī, do not mention it; nor does al-Sakhāwī refer to the subsequent substantial restoration of the Umayyad Mosque in his long list of Qāyṭbāy's construction and renovation works.² The Syrian historian Ibn Ṭūlūn (880–953/1476–1546), whose chronicle starts in 884, the same year when the fire broke out, when he was still a child, refers only briefly to the restoration works that followed this fire.³ In his biographical dictionary of the viceroys of Damascus, however, he does not include any reference to this fire under the entry of Qānşūh al-Yahāwī, the viceroy in charge at that time.⁴

However, a detailed description of the catastrophe and the following restoration works can be found in the chronicle *Ḥawādith al-Zamān wa-Wafayāt al-Shuyūkh wa-al-Aqrān* by the Damascene historian Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-

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¹Earthquakes occurred in 132/748, 233/847, 587/1191, 702/1302, and 1173/1759, and fires in 461/1069, 552/1157, 562/1166, 570/1174, 646/1247, 740/1340, 803/1401, 884/1879, and in 1893. Jean Sauvaget, *Les Monuments Historiques de Damas* (Beirut, 1932), 16–18; 'Afīf al-Bahnasī, *Al-Jāmi' al-Umawī al-Kabīr* (Damascus, 1988), 93 f. (his dates are not exact); Muḥammad Muḥammad al-Khaṭīb, *Rawā' i' al-'Imārah al-'Arabīyah al-Islāmīyah fī Sūryā* (Ministry of Awqāf) (Damascus, 1982), 19 f. Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Şaşrā mentions the fire of Sha'bān 794/1392: *Kitāb al-Durrah al-Muḍī'ah fī al-Dawlah al-Zāhirīyah*, ed. William Brinner (Berkeley, 1963), 2 (Arabic text): 117. Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah mentions a reconstruction of the transept dome in 800/1397. In Muḥarram 788/1381 some of its lead sheets had been carried away by the wind: *Tārīkh Ibn Qāḍī Shuhbah*, ed. Adnan Darwich (Damascus, 1977), 1:583, 654.

²Ibn Iyās, *Badā' i' al-Zuhūr fī Waqā' i' al-Duhūr*, ed. M. Muşṭafā (Wiesbaden-Cairo, 1961–75), vol. 3; al-Jawharī al-Şayrafī, *Inbā' al-Ḥaşr bi-Abnā' al-'Aşr*, ed. H. Ḥabashī (Cairo, 1970); al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Ḍaw' al-Lāmi' li-Ahl al-Qarn al-Tāsi'* (Cairo, 1896), 6:201 ff.

³*Mufākahat al-Khillān fī Ḥawādith al-Zamān*, ed. Muḥammad Muşṭafā (Cairo, 1962), 1:6.

⁴*T'lām al-Warā bi-Man Wulliya Nā'iban min al-Atrāk bi-Dimashq al-Shām al-Kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Duḥmān (Damascus, 1964), 92, 98. He was twice governor; the first tenure was 883–86/1478–81, the second 892–903/1487–98.



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Anṣārī Ibn al-Ḥimṣī (1438–1527), who was an eyewitness to the event.⁵

Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's account of the fire of 884/1479 sheds light on an event that he considered to be of major importance to the city of Damascus but which, unlike the fire at the mosque of Medina one year later, did not engage the interest of the historians in the Mamluk capital.

THE AUTHOR⁶

According to his own statements, written in the introduction to his chronicle and scattered in the text, Ibn al-Ḥimṣī was born in Damascus in Rajab 841/January 1438 into a wealthy family of qadis and scholars.⁷ His death is reported in 934/1527, his life thus having straddled the late Mamluk period and the first Ottoman decade of Syrian history.

In the month of Sha'bān 886/1481, while he was chief of the muezzins at the Umayyad Mosque, he was appointed as the deputy of the Shafi'i chief qadi of Damascus, Ibn Farfūr. In 896/1491 he was the qadi of the Syrian pilgrimage caravan. Ibn al-'Imād, who refers to him as Ibn al-Ḥimṣī *al-mu'arrikh*, i.e., the historian, writes that he spent some time in Cairo, where he was deputy of the Shafi'i chief qadi Zakarīyā al-Anṣārī and the *khaṭīb* of the royal mosque of the Citadel of Cairo. Sultan al-Ghawrī (1501–16) appreciated his voice and his performance. Al-Ghazzī quotes him on many occasions among his sources.

Ibn al-Ḥimṣī wrote a great chronicle, so far unknown, to which he often refers in his more concise *Ḥawādith al-Zamān*. The latter was conceived as a *dhayl* or continuation to Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's *Inbā'*⁸; like its predecessor, it is at the same time a biographical encyclopedia of contemporary scholars.

SOME IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF IBN AL-ḤIMṢĪ'S ACCOUNT

Because Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's text is a unique document in Mamluk historiography, a

⁵There are two new editions of this manuscript. I am quoting that of 'Umar 'Abd al-Salām Tadmūrī (Beirut, 1999). The other one, published in Beirut (2000), is by 'Abd al-'Azīz Fayyād Ḥarfūsh. Laylā 'Abd al-Laṭīf Aḥmad has already drawn attention to the importance of this source in *Dirāsāt fī Tārīkh wa-Mu'arrikhī Miṣr wa-al-Shām ibbāna al-'Aṣr al-'Uthmānī* (Cairo, 1980), 171–89.

⁶Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab fī Akhbār Man Dhahab* (Cairo, 1351/1932–33), 8:201; Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahah*, 1:49, 145, 324, 343, 346, 359; Najm al-Dīn al-Ghazzī, *Al-Kawākib al-Sā'irah bi-A'yān al-Mī'ah al-'Āshirah*, ed. Jibrā'īl Jabbūr (Beirut, 1979), 1:5.

⁷This corrects Ibn al-'Imād, who gives two alternative dates for his birth, 851 or 853.

⁸Ibn Ḥajar's best known historical works are *Al-Durar al-Kāminah fī A'yān al-Mī'ah al-Thāminah* (Hyderabad, 1348–50/1929–31, and Cairo, 1966), and *Inbā' al-Ghumr bi-Abnā' al-'Umr* (Beirut, 1967, 1986). For his biography see F. Rosenthal, "Ibn Ḥadjar al-'Asqalānī", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed.



translation of all the dispersed passages in the chronicle which deal with the outbreak of the fire and the subsequent restoration has been appended to the following discussion of the text.

Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, whose report consists of several passages integrated into his chronicle among various other events, provides a detailed and lively step-by-step description of the outbreak of the fire and its consequences. In his reconstruction of the scene that led to the outbreak of the fire, his presentation of the sequence of the restoration with all the data concerning the costs and the sponsors' contributions, and the account of the respective tasks performed by the craftsmen's teams, Ibn al-Ḥimṣī demonstrates the kind of accuracy that one would expect from a project manager. His account provides valuable information on the architectural history of the Umayyad Mosque and on building crafts in late Mamluk Damascus. Moreover, while he mentions the sequence of actions taken by the Damascene authorities to repair the damage, the author sketches a vivid picture of various episodes around the event, which add to the interest of this extraordinary document.

Ibn al-Ḥimṣī writes as a patriotic Damascene commoner emphasizing the solidarity between the various groups of the city's population facing the catastrophe and their involvement with the fate of the mosque. He painstakingly records the contributions made by individual volunteers and sponsors to supplement the sultan's share of the restoration costs.

The description of the collective grief of the Damascene population across its social and religious groups is remarkable. Following the first selfish reactions of those who sought to rescue their belongings while others were looting, a civic sense prevailed, which led people to cooperate in order to limit the damage. Did the religious establishment play a role here? The author himself writes that he helped in removing the furnishings and urged others to do the same.

Ibn al-Ḥimṣī does not provide any information concerning the existence in medieval Damascus of provisions for a fire emergency. He mentions only rescuing, not fire fighting measures. It seems, however, that it was common knowledge that in such cases beams should be removed from the wooden ceiling through which the fire progressed. The private and spontaneous initiative of an amir, who dwelt in an adjacent palace, of removing the beams on his side ultimately brought the fire to a halt. For this reason, the sultan's master-builder was blamed for not having ordered this measure at an earlier stage. It thus appears that the responsibility for coordinating emergency responses resided in the office of the sultan's master-builder of Damascus

The account sheds light also on the relationship between Muslims and *dhimmīs*. We are told that the marble craftsmen were Christians and that the non-Muslims grieved equally at the sight of the burning mosque. The episode of a Jewish



merchant who attempted to acquire the lead debris reveals another aspect of the Muslim-*dhimmī* relationship.

It is interesting to note that Ibn al-Ḥimṣī does not mention any *dhimmī*, i.e., Christian or Jew, by name. Similarly, Ibn Ṭūlūn, when he referred in his chronicle to the craftsmen who worked at the restoration of the mosque, explicitly wrote that he would name the Muslims among them, which implies that the non-Muslims were supposed to remain anonymous. There is a purpose in this attitude; some medieval Muslim historians considered it "blackening the paper with unimportant things" to write about Christians and Jews.⁹

It is obvious from Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's account that the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus was a true icon for the city's population. In his picture of that particular moment, all those who participated in the rescue shared a common identity. This may explain why the author takes care to name the craftsmen, an exceptional occurrence in chronicles of that time. Similarly, the credit he gives to the private sponsors makes clear that the reconstruction of the mosque was made possible by the populace, not just the sultan.

THE EFFECT OF THE FIRE ON THE Umayyad MOSQUE

A history of the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus in the post-Umayyad period has not yet been written; this makes it difficult to assess the real effect of this fire on its structure.

As in earlier cases, the fire originated in the surrounding markets and reached the interior of the mosque through an opening. This indicates that the markets and dwellings must have been adjacent to the walls of the mosque. This is further confirmed by the fact that rubble falling from the mosque during the works killed prisoners in a jail located nearby. The northern portico seems to have been damaged only on its western side. It has preserved to this day a restoration inscription dating from the reign of the Mamluk sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh in 1416, referring to its reconstruction by a builder from Alexandria.¹⁰

Because of the great fire in 1893, which severely damaged the mosque, it is difficult to assess how the mosque looked after the restoration described by Ibn al-Ḥimṣī. The latest detailed description of the Umayyad Mosque so far known prior to the fire of 884 is that of Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-'Umarī. In a brief passage about the contemporaneous mosque, he mentions mosaics around the courtyard and in the upper part of the transept. He also refers to the local production of glass mosaics, though of a lesser quality, for the restoration of the Umayyad Mosque, which also provided the tesserae for the decoration of the mosque of Tankiz in the

⁹Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden, 1952), 267.

¹⁰Sauvaget, *Les Monuments Historiques*, 23–25.



fourteenth century.¹¹ A stock of these tesserae, which were stored in boxes, was destroyed by the fire of 740/1340.¹² Ibn al-Ḥimṣī does not mention any damage to the mosque's masonry, nor does he say anything about the mosaic decoration, which had dazzled so many eyewitnesses in the past. In fact, the mosque at that time had already lost many of its mosaics as a result of the series of previous fires and earthquakes. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's use of the term *fuṣūṣ* to describe what fell during the fire is ambiguous; the term could refer either to mosaic tesserae or to the glass pieces that are inserted in stucco grille windows (*qamarīyahs*).¹³ It is astonishing, however, that the largest part of the surviving mosaics are located in the western portico, which was severely damaged by the fire. This raises the question as to whether the walls at that time were coated with plaster, which would have preserved the mosaics underneath. The coating could have been applied during the restoration that followed the devastating fire resulting from Timur's invasion. In any case, it is important to note that mosaic decoration no longer characterized the image of the mosque in the mind of the Damascene population at the time when Ibn al-Ḥimṣī was writing.

In the prayer hall the decoration of the qiblah wall, which was just being renovated and was not yet completed, was destroyed alongside grille windows and some of the metal doors. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī himself was involved in the rescue actions, removing furniture and books and directing others to help.

In his report of the restoration works Ibn al-Ḥimṣī describes the aisles of the sanctuary as three individual segments (*jamalīn*, his plural of *jamalūn*, which means gabled aisle) on each side of the transept to the east and the west.¹⁴

Referring to the transept, he distinguishes between a northern and a southern *nasr*, both of which he praises for their beauty. This description, however, is confusing and difficult to reconcile with the well-known tripartite composition of the transept. Ibn Jubayr's detailed description of the transept in the twelfth century refers to a large central dome, *qubbat al-raṣāṣ*, with a rounded profile and a wooden double-shell, covered with lead and supported by a canopy of piers. This dome was flanked to the north and south by two smaller ones. Because he misunderstood the meaning of the word *nasr*, he compared the transept with an

¹¹The mausoleum of Tankiz, which alone survives, has preserved parts of its mosaic decoration. Michael Meinecke, *Die mamlukische Architektur in Ägypten und Syrien* (Glückstadt, 1992), 1:97.

¹²Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār fī Mamālik al-Amṣār*, ed. Aḥmad Zakī (Cairo, 1924), 193.

¹³The mention of the glass is in an addition in the margin of fol. 84.

¹⁴Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn and Laylā ʿAlī Ibrāhīm, *Architectural Terms in Mamluk Documents, 648–923H/1250–1517M* (Cairo, 1990).



eagle spreading its wings.¹⁵ By referring to a northern and a southern *nasr*, however, Ibn al-Ḥimṣī seems to view the transept as being composed of only two parts. He might have viewed the bay in front of the mihrab, which he calls *maqṣūrah*, as distinct from the rest of the transept.

Ibn al-Ḥimṣī mentions that the original ceiling was double-layered and that it was rebuilt with a single upper layer. The northern *nasr*, however, was single-layered prior to the fire.

In the Mamluk period the mosque had four mihrabs.¹⁶ The fourth, on the very western end of the sanctuary, seems to have been added during the years 1326–38, when Tankiz, the governor of Syria, rebuilt the qiblah wall. Each of the four mihrabs served one of the four *madhhabs* of Sunni Islam. During these restoration works Tankiz pulled down the two minarets at the north corners of the mosque and reused their stones for the sanctuary.¹⁷

According to Ibn Baṭṭūṭah¹⁸ and al-ʿUmarī the *miḥrāb al-ṣaḥābah*, the oldest one, was on the eastern side of the transept, and used by the Maliki community. The one on the western side of the transept was that of the Hanafis, followed by that of the Hanbalis further west. The axial main mihrab was that of the Shafīʿis. The three other mihrabs were the core of three madrasahs, each with its own imam, muezzin, and teacher serving the three other *madhhabs*.

During the restoration works in 1479 the *khuṭbah* was delivered at the Hanafī mihrab on the western side of the transept, then at the *miḥrāb al-ṣaḥābah*, or mihrab of the Prophet's companions, on the eastern side. Once the restoration was completed, Friday prayer returned to the *maqṣūrah*, i.e., at the axial mihrab.

The account of Ibn al-Ḥimṣī draws attention to a hardly noticed feature of the Umayyad Mosque, which is the four oblong rooms located on each side of the sanctuary and the courtyard (see plan). Described as a *mashhad* or shrine, they were named initially for the four rightly-guided caliphs; however, the names changed with time.¹⁹ They were used for diverse purposes, including ceremonial and teaching. It is interesting to note, however, that the *mashhad al-muʿadhdhinīn*

¹⁵Ibn Jubayr uses the word *nasr* for the entire transept (*al-gharīb al-mustaṭīl al-musammá al-nasr*). Ibn Baṭṭūṭah refers to the entire transept area as *qubbat al-nasr* (*Riḥlat Ibn Jubayr* [Beirut, 1959], 266 f.). Creswell already noticed that the word *nasr* did not refer to an eagle, but that it must be the translation of the Greek word *aétos*, which means both eagle and gable, the latter being meant in this context. K. A. C. Creswell and James Allan, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture* (Aldershot 1989), 52 f.

¹⁶Creswell and Allan believe that the fourth is "quite modern." *Short Account*, 53.

¹⁷Sauvaget, *Les Monuments Historiques*, 17; al-Bahnasī, *Al-Jāmiʿ al-Umawī al-Kabīr*, 78.

¹⁸Ibn Baṭṭūṭah, *Riḥlah* (Beirut, 1985) 1:103 ff.

¹⁹According to Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, the southeastern one, named for the caliph Abū Bakr, included a library; the northeastern was named for ʿAlī; the southwestern, named for ʿUmar, was



was used as a treasury, where people could deposit their valuables in safety boxes. These were modernized after the fire, to be fixed in the wall with a uniform shape.

Qāyrbāy's minaret at the southwestern corner of the mosque, which has well preserved its original features to the present day, seems to be all that remains from the restoration works that followed the fire of 1479.²⁰ Its octagonal shaft is decorated with Damascene *ablaq* masonry. Although the octagonal configuration vaguely recalls Cairene minarets, its proportions and the minaret's profile differ too much from the metropolitan style to be attributed to Cairene craftsmen, as has been suggested by Meinecke.²¹ In fact, Ibn al-Ḥimṣī himself says nothing about an Egyptian contribution to the construction of the minaret. The tower, which forms the base of Qāyrbāy's minaret, is the only one of the four Roman corner towers to have survived to the present day. The original structure, although it was restored in 680/1184 and 803/1400,²² seems to have retained its initial proportions until 1479. Its size must have been impressive, since Ibn al-Ḥimṣī describes the minaret as having only one quarter the size of its predecessor.

THE PATRONAGE

The costs of the restoration were estimated by the viceroy of Damascus at 58,700 dinars. However, the sultan originally allocated only 15,000 and ultimately paid 22,500, including the reconstruction of the minaret! Obviously he did not trust his viceroy's estimate. He, moreover, seems to have been either unable or unwilling to come up with the entire cost of the mosque's repair, sponsoring the restoration of the prayer hall and the reconstruction of the minaret, and leaving the restoration of the western portico to other sponsors. In addition to the physical damage caused to the bazaar and the mosque, the destruction of the markets, which belonged to its *waqf* estate, deprived the mosque, for a while, of its natural source of revenue. Therefore, only the restoration of the *sāghah*, or goldsmiths' market,

endowed with a chair of hadith and also included a library. The northwestern one was named for 'Uthmān. This was the place where the viceroy of Syria used to perform his prayer near a window, accompanied by the Shafī'i qadī. This *mashhad* also functioned as a tribunal and as the seat of the four chief qadis when they met to discuss political matters. Each of these *mashhads* had an imam and a muezzin of its own. Al-'Umarī, *Masālik al-Abṣār*, 196.

Ibn al-Ḥimṣī uses different names: Shaykh Khaṭṭāb instead of 'Alī, 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr or *mashhad 'Urwah* or *mashhad al-mu'adhdhinīn* instead of *mashhad 'Umar*, *mashhad al-nā'ib* instead of *mashhad 'Uthmān*, and *mashhad al-zanāyī* instead of *mashhad Abī Bakr*.

²⁰The balconies of the minaret were restored after the earthquake of 1173/1759. Mehmet Yaşar Ertaş, "1759 Şam Depremin'de Büyük Hasar Gören Emeviye, Selimiye ve Süleymaniye Camilerinin Onarımı," in *Papers Submitted to the International Symposium on Ottoman Heritage in the Middle East, 28 October 2000, Hatay, Iskenderun* (Ankara, 2001), 1: 241–49, 245.

²¹Meinecke, *Die mamlukische Architektur*, 1:198.

²²Al-Khaṭīb, *Rawā'i' al-'Imārah*, 21.



could be covered by *waqf* funds, while the rest had to be sponsored by the merchants and other individuals, including Mamluk dignitaries.

Ibn al-Ḥimṣī is quite precise in defining at each stage of completion what the sultan sponsored and what other donors did. Although a clear distinction between public funds and privy is difficult to make in the Mamluk period, the reference to *māl al-sultān* should not be understood as the sultan's private purse, but rather as the public treasury, or *bayt al-māl*.

The reconstruction of the southwestern minaret dragged on for a strikingly long period, lasting from Rabī' II 887/1482 to Dhū al-Qa'dah 893/1488, over six years.²³ Furthermore, the work began more than two years after the outbreak of the fire, once the interior restoration was completed. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī's statement that the minaret was visibly smaller than the original is confirmed by the discrepancy between the size of the minaret's base and that of the Roman tower on which it stands (see figure). The fire of 886/1481 in the Prophet's mosque in Medina, which required funds and craftsmen from Cairo and Damascus, must have contributed to the delay in its restoration.²⁴ All this indicates that the restoration of the Umayyad Mosque was a substantial burden even for such a great builder as Sultan Qāyṭbāy. Obviously Damascus did not enjoy a priority status in the sultan's otherwise ambitious building program.²⁵ Considering that the reign of Qāyṭbāy produced in Cairo an impressive number of new buildings and restoration projects at a much speedier pace, the duration of two years for the restoration of the roof and the prayer hall of the Umayyad Mosque appears rather long, indicating that the building craft in Damascus was not adequate for important architectural projects.

THE BUILDING CRAFTS

Unlike the restorations of the mosques of Mecca and Medina by Sultan Qāyṭbāy, the restoration of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus took place without the contribution of Egyptian craftsmen. The author explicitly denies the participation of the marble workers whom the sultan sent from Cairo, due to the death of their master; the work was executed by local Christians. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī also seems to follow, though not explicitly, the general opinion which put the blame on the sultan's master-builder Ibn al-'Aṭṭār for the magnitude of the damage. He gives all the credit for the work to the local workshops, whose names and contribution are mentioned individually.

Four teams of builders were involved in the project: Aḥmad al-Zanīk²⁶ and his

²³ An inscription in the minaret indicates the completion date as 893/1487–88.

²⁴ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Sultan Qāyṭbāy's Foundation in Medina, the *Madrasah*, the *Ribāt* and the *Dashīshah*," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 2 (1998): 61–72.

²⁵ Meinecke, *Die mamlukische Architektur*, 1:193f.



partners ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and Aḥmad ‘Abbās, who worked together with the apprentices of Ibn al-‘Aṭṭār. The *mu‘allim* Muḥammad ibn al-‘Ajlūnīyah repaired the *mashhad* of Abū Bakr. In his short reference to the restoration work at the Umayyad Mosque, Ibn Ṭūlūn writes that a man called al-Zubdānī ibn al-‘Izqī, who is not mentioned by Ibn al-Ḥimṣī, almost died in jail where he was kept in connection with the fire in the mosque. He does not clarify this connection, however.²⁷ Ibn Ṭūlūn adds that the fire necessitated a great deal of restoration work. The list of the craftsmen he cites as having been involved in the work differs slightly from that of Ibn al-Ḥimṣī; they are: ‘Abd al-Wahhāb al-Ḥalabī, Ibn al-‘Ajlūnīyah, Muḥammad ibn al-Mu‘adhdhin, al-A‘sar, al-Dafīh ibn al-Tāzī, and his brother ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.

Ibn al-‘Aṭṭār, the sultan’s master-builder, was not personally involved in the work, probably because of the accusations brought against him of not having taken the necessary measures to halt the fire. Another person, Fakhr al-Dīn ibn al-Bayrutī, is mentioned as having been the *mu‘allim al-sultān* and to have died in Sha‘bān 886/1481;²⁸ it is not clear whether he shared Ibn al-‘Aṭṭār’s position or was his successor. Ibn al-‘Aṭṭār, however, later regained his position as the *mu‘allim al-sultān*.²⁹

As was usual in the Mamluk period, construction works of such significance took place under the supervision of an amir; in this case it was Yashbak, the viceroy’s chamberlain. The viceroy of Damascus, assisted by the governor of the Citadel and other bureaucrats, were in charge of estimating the restoration costs.

The craftsman who made the grille windows had the *nisbah* “al-‘Ajāmī,” which in Mamluk texts could mean either Iranian or Turcoman from Iranian lands, or could also refer to someone who had lived or worked in Iran. Ibn al-Ḥimṣī refers to anonymous metalworkers (beaters) from Aleppo who made some of the doors, and he names Awlād al-Zu‘aymah as another team of metalbeaters also in connection with the doors. The craftsman who cast and applied the lead was an Anatolian Turk (*rūmī*), the *Ḥājj* Aḥmad Ishāq al-Rūmī. As expected, none of these men is mentioned in contemporary biographical encyclopedias.

²⁶Ibn Ṭūlūn mentions Ibn al-Zafīk, who died in jail in 886/1481, having been beaten to death by order of the sultan in connection with the construction of a *khān* at Wādī al-Tīm. *Mufākahah*, 1:46. My reading of Ibn al-Ḥimṣī’s manuscript is, however, Ibn al-Zanīk, who must be identical with this person. The *fā’* and *nūn* could have been confused.

²⁷Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufākahah*, 1:6.

²⁸Ibid., 56.

²⁹Ibid., 107, 318. Meinecke, *Die mamlukische Architektur*, 1:194.



IBN AL-ḤIMṢĪ'S ACCOUNT OF THE FIRE³⁰

(fol. 74v f.) On the night of Wednesday 26 to 27 Rajab 884/13 October 1479 a catastrophe of unprecedented extent—even by comparison with Timur's calamity—occurred when a fire broke out in the Umayyad Mosque, burning it entirely (*min awalihī ilā ākhirihī*), sparing only the *mashhad al-nā'ib*, also known as *mashhad 'Uthmān*, and the *mashhad al-shaykh Khaṭṭāb*, also known by the name of 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn [*sic*] and a section of the northern portico (*riwāq*). The *mashhad al-nā'ib* was spared only because its ceiling was lower than that of the rest of the mosque [see plan].

In the northern *riwāq* only a small area escaped the fire. The western minaret caught fire and collapsed, killing a man.

The fire started in the bazaar, destroying the respective markets of the shoemakers (*akhfāqīyīn*),³¹ the amber-dealers (*'anbarīyīn*), the sword-makers (*suyūfīyīn*), the silk-weavers (*ḥarīrīyīn*), the small market of the merchants (*tujjār*) and weavers (*ḥayyākīn*) known as the farmers' market (*sūq al-zurrā'*), and the great old goldsmiths' market (*al-ṣāghah al-kabīrah al-'atīqah*). In this night people lost fortunes and shops and stores were looted; it was an abominable night, the thought of which makes one shudder (*yuqash'ir al-julūd*).

The fire broke out when a shoemaker called Abū Bakr ibn 'Alwān al-Budyūkī, who dwelt in a flat at the Bāb al-Barīd, asked his wife to prepare candle fat (*duhn sham'*). While she was doing so, fat dripped on some hemp [that was there] which then caught fire without any of them noticing it. When the two of them realized what had happened they were so scared that they removed their belongings without informing anyone. The fire increased and spread into the shoemakers' market. People rushed to move their belongings instead of extinguishing the fire, (fol. 75v) while others were looting. The fire went on destroying the shoemakers' market (*adamīyīn*) and spread further to destroy the amber market, from where it penetrated the mosque through a broken grille window (*qamarīyah*) near the door of the southwestern minaret. It got to the ceiling on the southwestern corner and progressed to all other parts. It is reported that the sultan's *mu'allim*³² Muḥammad ibn al-'Aṭṭār, who was present, replied to those who reported the fire to him that

³⁰The passages concerning the fire and the restoration which are dispersed in the chronicle have been here pasted together. For this free translation I am using a microfilm of the manuscript from the Institute of Arabic Manuscripts in Cairo (Ma'had al-Makḥṭūṭāt al-'Arabīyah MS 239), not the published texts, which have gaps. In Tadmurī's edition, the passages referring to the fire are 1:232–63, 313, and in Ḥarfūsh's edition, 1:147–73.

³¹Elsewhere the author uses the synonymous term *adamīyīn*.

³²This term in late Mamluk historiography refers to the court master-builder. See my "Muhandīs, Shādd, Mu'allim: Note on the Building Craft in the Mamluk Period," *Der Islam* 72 no. 2 (1995): 293–309.



the ceiling was too high to catch fire; he [therefore] did not remove any beams [to prevent its advance]. However, the amir al-Şārimī Ibrāhīm ibn Manjaq, who dwelt in the Manjaq palace adjacent to the gate of the Clocks (Bāb al-Sā'āt), ordered some beams on his side to be removed and thus succeeded in stopping the fire short of his residence. The *mashhad al-shaykh Khaṭṭāb*³³ located nearby and the rest of the *riwāq* could thus be rescued. As for the *mashhad al-nā'ib*, it was not reached by the flames because its ceiling is lower than that of the mosque, with a gap between them.

I was present most of the time, carrying away with my colleagues the carpets from the mosque to the courtyard and urging others to do the same. As the fire was progressing, I gave orders to remove the minbar and carry out the Quran of 'Uthmān and the Quran fascicles (*rab'āt*) and the *ḍarīḥ* which belonged to the *waqf* [of the mosque].³⁴ We had just had straw mats (fol. 76) of unparalleled fine quality newly made. They were placed near the window of *mashhad al-nā'ib* where they all burned. However, the *mashhad* itself did not; it had also escaped the fire of Timur.

Two months earlier the viceroy Qānṣūh al-Yaḥāwī had ordered the renovation of the mosque and the estate that belonged to its *waqf*. The marble paneling in the southern wall had been entirely renovated by Christian craftsmen (*naṣārā murrakhimīn*), as far as the shrine (*ḍarīḥ*) of Sīdī Hūd. The fire also destroyed the gilded *ṭirāz* (inscription band) that had been entirely renovated. The marble burned down and collapsed like melting salt. Glass bits fell alongside a grilled glass window and the lead from the roof melted down. The beauty of the mosque vanished and it was wrapped in smoke.

Every time a part of the roof collapsed, one heard a formidable thunder-like noise. People could see each other in the night because of the brightness of the fire. All grieved profoundly; even *ahl al-dhimmah* wept at the sight, as did the people who flocked in from the villages. (fol. 76v) On Friday 29 Rajab (15 October) a bench (*kursī*) for the *khaṭīb* was placed in the courtyard before the transept dome (*qubbat al-nasr*). He performed the sermon while the audience was heavily weeping (*wa-baká al-nās bukā'an 'aẓīman*). It was a terrible moment.

On 27 Sha'bān (12 November) Shaykh Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Ḥiṣnī came to the Umayyad Mosque and gave orders to remove the debris of the three eastern and three western aisles (*jamalīn*) and those of the *mashhad al-mu'adhdhinīn*. The debris of the western portico was removed on the first day, that of the three

³³This is another name for the *mashhad* of 'Alī, located behind the eastern portico of the mosque, and is not to be confused with the *mashhad* of 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, which is on the western side of the prayer hall.

³⁴It is not clear what is meant by *ḍarīḥ* here; perhaps the shrine of Hūd.



western aisles [of the sanctuary] the next day, and that of the eastern aisles on the third day. An overwhelming number of people were present during these three days, including women and children, each carrying according to his capacity, so that the task was achieved at an unusual speed. (fol. 77) I saw qadis, scholars, and *ashrāfs* loading the debris on animals and dumping it outside in the ruins (*kharāb*). This task would otherwise have taken a year to accomplish, but the zeal of the knowledgeable and virtuous made this possible. The mosque was filled with ovations and recitations (*tahlīl wa-takbīr*); it was a great moment.

On Sunday, the last day of Sha‘bān (14 November), the sultan ordered the viceroy to make a cost estimate of what the mosque and its *waqf* estate would need. The viceroy Qānṣūh al-Yahāwī, alongside the qadi of the army (*qāḍī nāẓir al-jaysh*), Muwaffaq al-Dīn, the Maliki chief qadi, Bahā‘ al-Dīn al-Marīnī,³⁵ and Yashbak, the chief chamberlain and great *dawādār*, and many others, including master-builders (*mu‘allimīn*) with the sultan’s master-builder Ibn al-‘Aṭṭār, came to inspect the mosque. Some people believed that Ibn al-‘Aṭṭār was responsible for the spread of the fire because he opposed the removal of beams from the ceiling, a measure that would have stopped the fire. For this reason, when the angry populace saw him arrive with the viceroy, while people were busy removing the debris, they shouted to prevent him from entering the mosque and some tried to kill him. While the mamluks were taking his defense, the populace began to throw stones at the viceroy with ever increasing vigor. The angry viceroy grasped an axe to attack while his mamluks were hitting people who were running away. (fol. 77v) At that point the viceroy saw a Turk (*rūmī*) carrying his *tanbūr*,³⁶ which increased his fury, so that he and the mamluks beat him almost to death with a burnt log from the mosque. It was a terrible sight. After the populace had run away, the viceroy and his men eventually estimated the costs of the repair at 58,700 dinars and sent their report to the sultan.

On 3 Ramaḍān (17 November), the *shaykh al-balad*, the Shafi‘i shaykh Taqī al-Dīn ibn Qāḍī ‘Ajlūn³⁷ began to collect money from the merchants and other sponsors and set out to repair the *mashhad* of ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, also known as *mashhad al-mu‘adhhdhinīn*, as well as the northern portico between the gates of Bāb al-Kallāsah and Bāb al-Barīd.

(fol. 78) In the same month an order came from the sultan announcing the allocation of 15,000 dinars from the sultan’s treasury in the Citadel of Damascus, which should be sufficient to cover the restoration works. This should be [a

³⁵ According to Ibn Ṭūlūn, the Maliki chief qadi at that time was Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Marīnī, who died in 897/1492.

³⁶ A musical instrument.

³⁷ Al-Ghazzī, *Al-Kawākib al-Sā‘irah*, 1:114ff.



donation], not a loan to be reimbursed (*wa-lan tustadān thumma tudfa' li-ajlin ājil*).

On Thursday 23 Shawwāl (6 January 1480) the sultan departed for pilgrimage.

In this same month [Shawwāl], the ceiling of the *mashhad al-mu'adhdhinīn* together with that of the vestibule of Bāb al-Barīd and the ceiling of the western portico were repaired. It used to be a double ceiling before the fire, but it was rebuilt, for structural reasons (*li-ajl al-khiffah*), with a single layer. This part was exclusively sponsored by generous donors from among the merchants and others.

On 5 Dhū al-Qa'dah (17 January) the viceroy ordered the carpenters and builders (*al-mu'allimīn wa-al-khashshābīn*) and the attendants of the Umayyad Mosque to tour the Damascene province in search of timber and beams suitable for the restoration of the mosque, which they did. (fol. 78v) The timber was purchased at a fair price and in a just manner (*bi-al'adl wa-al-inṣāf*) with funds from the sultan's treasury handed out by his deputy the qadi Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-'Arīkī(?).

On Monday the 13th, the viceroy ordered the demolition of the mihrab of the *mashhad* of 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr, also known as *mashhad al-mu'adhdhinīn*, which was a beautiful marble mihrab flanked on both sides by cells, to be replaced by a new one and new cells. A new one was carved in the wall.

(fol. 79 f.) On 24 Dhū al-Ḥijjah (6 March) the restoration work sponsored by the sultan began in the sanctuary. The supervisor of the work was the amir Yashbak, the viceroy's second chamberlain, alongside the notaries (*shuhūd*) Shaykh Zayn al-Dīn ibn al-Jāmūs al-Asadī and his companion, Shaykh Nūr al-Dīn al-Jabṣīnī. A few months later, however, the sultan appointed Aydakī, the governor of the Citadel, as the financial trustee (*nā'ib alā al-maṣrūf*); he eventually replaced the previously-mentioned *shuhūd*, although they were men of outstanding piety and honesty, by Burhān al-Buṣrawī and Maṣṣūr al-Ismā'īlī. Amir Yashbak continued to work with the governor of the Citadel.

In Muḥarram 885 (March), a Jew came to buy the debris of the burnt lead that used to roof the aisles of the mosque, offering the amount of one thousand dirhams for it. They took him to the deputy-supervisor of the mosque, who refused to sell for less than 3,000 dirhams, to which the Jew also agreed. The reason for this purchase was that someone caught the Jew while he was stealing the lead debris. Fearing a scandal he offered to buy it. When he was asked to pay, he changed his mind and declared that he was short of cash. At that point someone outbid him by raising the price to 250 *ashrafīs*, which the Jew eventually paid. Later on he began, along with his wife, to complain about having been forced into this deal he had no need for. Another person came up and outbid them, so that by 7 Muḥarram (18 March) the price of the debris had reached 20,000 dirhams. On the 25th the debris was eventually sold for 1,250 dinars to Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bahnasāwī, the treasurer (*ṣayrafī*) of the Citadel in the Umayyad Mosque, in the presence of a



large crowd. The Jew then returned, saying “‘indī fīhi bi-al-amānah 10,000 dinars,”³⁸ but Nāṣir al-Dīn replied that he would buy it himself for any amount, disregarding profit, for the benefit of the mosque.

The mosque had lead at the southern aisles, the two *nasrs* (*nasrayn*), and the ‘*abbārāt*(?). What escaped the fire was stored in a room in the mosque. What was burnt was sold with the debris.

The sultan’s restoration of the *mashhad al-zanāyi*’, also known as *mashhad Abī Bakr*, was completed by (fol. 80) the *mu’allim* Muḥammad ibn al-‘Ajlūnīyah.

In the same month the restoration of the safes of *mashhad al-mu’ adhdhinīn*, or *mashhad ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr*, was completed. A total of fifty-two safe-boxes were replaced. This was done with the funds provided by the viceroy’s secretary (*dawādār*). They were better than the original ones, which had different shapes and were not attached to the wall.

In Ṣafar (April) the first southwestern aisle (*jamalūn*) was completed with the sultan’s funds by the *mu’allim* Aḥmad Ibn al-Zanīk and the *mu’allim* ‘Abd al-Wahhāb under the supervision of Amir Yashbak al-Ḥamzāwī, the second chamberlain and overseer of the Umayyad Mosque.

The works progressed rapidly, thanks to the ingenious mechanical device of an old carpenter from Ṣāliḥīyah called Muḥammad al-Kuftī. It consisted of a pole (*sārī*) and a wheel (*dūlāb*) which could easily lift the beams, so that all the beams of an aisle could be raised in one morning. This was a great blessing that saved a great deal of money.

(fol. 80v) In Rabī‘ I (May) the roof of the second southwestern aisle was completed with the sultan’s funds by the *mu’allim* Aḥmad ‘Abbās and his team of Ibn al-‘Aṭṭār’s apprentices.

In the same month the first southeastern aisle was completed by the *mu’allims* Aḥmad al-Zanīk and ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. It included a great *maqṭū’* (cross-beam?)³⁹ above the shrine of St. John.

In Jumādā I (July) the sultan’s restoration of the third southwestern aisle was completed by the *mu’allim* Aḥmad ‘Abbās along with the apprentices of Ibn al-‘Aṭṭār.

(fol. 81) In the same month they began the restoration of the marble dado sponsored by the sultan, beginning with the southwestern side. Aydakī, the governor of the Citadel and the sultan’s financial trustee (*amīn ‘alā al-maṣrūf*), ordered the repainting of the white frieze of the sanctuary with red (*zanjafar*) color. (fol. 81v)

³⁸I am not able to interpret this sentence. Could it perhaps mean that he had already pledged some security to fulfil his obligation?

³⁹Literally this is an adjective meaning “cut”; here it might refer to a perpendicular section in the beams to mark the site of the shrine of St. John.



The original white was better and more pleasant; but the one who gave the orders was popular (*maḥbūb?*), namely the Citadel's governor.

In Jumādā II (mainly August) the sultan's restoration of the third southeastern aisle was done by *mu'allim* 'Abd al-Wahhāb and his partner Aḥmad al-Zanīk, thus completing the six aisles of the sanctuary with the exception of the two parts of the transept (*nasrayn*). They also began to replace the grille windows (*qamarīyah*) of the southern wall.

In Rajab (mainly September) the floor of *mashhad al-mu'adhhdhinīn* was paved with stone (*al-balāṭ al-lāṭūn*) with funds provided by the sultan.

(fol. 82) The works began at the inner doors, paid for by the sultan.

(fol. 83v) On the 27th (1 October) they began to cast the lead for the two transepts (*nasr*) and the 'abbārāt. The lead was carried to the *madrasah balkhīyah* to be processed there.

(fol. 84) On 15 Sha'bān (19 October) the southern *nasr* was covered with lead; it took 77.25 *qinṭārs*. This was done by a Turk (*rūmī*) called al-Ḥājj Aḥmad Ishāq al-Rūmī, who came on his own initiative without having been summoned. He was paid 20 dirhams per *qinṭār* for casting and mounting the lead, in addition to the wage of his apprentices. This man had previously produced the lead for Jerusalem. In the same month also the northern *nasr* was covered with lead with the sultan's funds.

(fol. 84v) During the month of Ramaḍān (November/December) the mosque was painted at the sultan's expense; the chandeliers and the lamps were then suspended. The chandelier (*fanūs al-qanādīl*) was hung at the shrine of St. John. The *khuṭbah* and the *tarāwīḥ* prayer were then performed at the *miḥrāb al-ṣaḥābah* on the eastern side of the transept, instead of the Hanafī mihrab on the western side, where the *khuṭbah* was being held since the fire. Everyone was delighted.

(fol. 85f.) In Shawwāl (December 1480/January 1481) the great grille windows of the transept were mounted.⁴⁰ They were made by Muḥammad al-'Ajamī. At the same time the painting of the northern *nasr* was completed. This and the other *nasr* are of unparalleled beauty. They were decorated with gold and lapis and the sultan's name with the date were inscribed on the southern *ṭirāz*. The northern *nasr* had no lower ceiling before the fire. Three doors were mounted in the area of the southern *nasr*, made by master metal-beaters (*al-mu'allimīn al-daqqīyah*) from Aleppo. The southwestern doors were made by the beaters Awlād al-Zu'aymah. The southeastern doors, which had not been damaged, were polished and returned

⁴⁰The original mosque had arched windows with marble grilles of geometric design (*qamarīyah*) in the Roman tradition. Six of them are extant in the western portico. (Creswell and Allan, *Short Account*, 69f.). Because of the fire of 1983 it is not possible to say if the *qamarīyahs* destroyed by the fire were Umayyad or later ones.



to their place. The sultan paid for all of this.

The 15,000 dinars allocated by the sultan were now almost exhausted. The sultan had sent marble specialists from Cairo but their *mu'allim* died and they did not do any work.

(fol. 86v) In Muḥarram 886 (March 1481) the copper door of Bāb al-Ziyādah,⁴¹ also known as the gate of the *'anbariyyin*, was mounted. It was restored at the sultan's expense and came out better than before.

On Saturday the 16th (13 March) the bench of the muezzins was mounted in its original location in the *maqṣūrah*; it was decorated with gold and lapis and cost 25,000 dirhams. The repainted minbar was returned to its place, more beautiful than ever.

On Friday the 29th (30 March) a celebration service was held in the *maqṣūrah*, the chief qadi Sirāj al-Dīn al-Ṣayrafī performing the sermon. After the end of the sermon and the prayer, the Hanafī chief qadi Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-Qaṣīf, the Maliki chief qadi Shihāb al-Dīn al-Marīnī, the Hanbali chief qadi Najm al-Dīn ibn Muflīḥ, the great chamberlain Yashbak, and the sultan's *dawādār* Yalbāy came, and the Quran fascicles (*rab'ah*) were distributed among them in the *maqṣūrah*—the muezzins were also there; they dedicated their prayers and recitations to the sultan in gratitude for his having restored the mosque. So far the costs of the restoration had amounted to 16,000 dinars.⁴²

(fol. 88) On Friday 24 Rabī' II (22 June) another service was held in honor of the sultan, in the presence of the viceroy Qijmas. Robes of honor were bestowed on the supervisor of the construction work and the governor of the Citadel, Aydakī, as well as on the qadis and the *khaṭīb* of the mosque representing the Shafī'i chief qadi Sirāj al-Dīn ibn al-Ṣayrafī. By that time the restoration costs amounted to 17,000 dinars.

(fol. 88v) In Jumādā I 886 (June/July) the merchants and others returned to the now-restored markets of the farmers (*zurrā'*), the silk-makers, the amber-dealers, and the sword-makers. The funds had been provided by the sale of the lead debris, which brought 1,250 dinars, along with funds provided by the *waqf* of the mosque. The goldsmiths' market and parts of the shoemakers' market were not restored yet because of the western minaret.

(fol. 90v) On Wednesday 9 Sha'bān (3 October) an accident occurred at the gate of the Bāb al-Barīd. While the builders were dismantling the gate to rebuild it, rubble fell and killed a number of prisoners in the adjacent jail.

The restoration work took two years and fifteen days to complete and amounted

⁴¹The gate of the exterior extension of the mosque, at the western end of the sanctuary.

⁴²Ibn Ṭūlūn, *Mufaḥkahah*, 1:34, who gives the date 19 Muḥarram. This must be an error, however, as this date could not be a Friday.



to 18,000 dinars, not including the reconstruction of the western minaret.⁴³

In Dhū al-Qa‘dah (December) news arrived that a fire had broken out at the Prophet’s mosque in Medina; the sultan summoned builders who had worked at the Umayyad Mosque, among them the above mentioned Muḥammad al-Kuftī who had raised the beams.⁴⁴

(fol. 96) In Rabī‘ II 887 (May/June 1482) the sultan ordered the reconstruction of the western minaret and the restoration of the lead in the remaining parts of the mosque.⁴⁵

(fol. 97) In Rajab (August/September) the restoration of the goldsmiths’ market, which belonged to the endowment of the mosque, was completed with *waqf* funds.

(fol. 148) In Dhū al-Qa‘dah 893 (October/November 1488) the reconstruction of the western minaret was completed to the best standard. It cost the sultan 4,500 dinars. It was built on the foundations of the former one, reusing its stones, albeit on a smaller scale of about one quarter of its original dimensions.

⁴³According to Ibn Ṭūlūn the restoration was completed in Rabī‘ II 886. *Ibid.*, 1:42.

⁴⁴Muḥammad al-Kuftī is also mentioned by Ibn Ṭūlūn, who similarly credits him for having raised the beams of the mosque. *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 54.





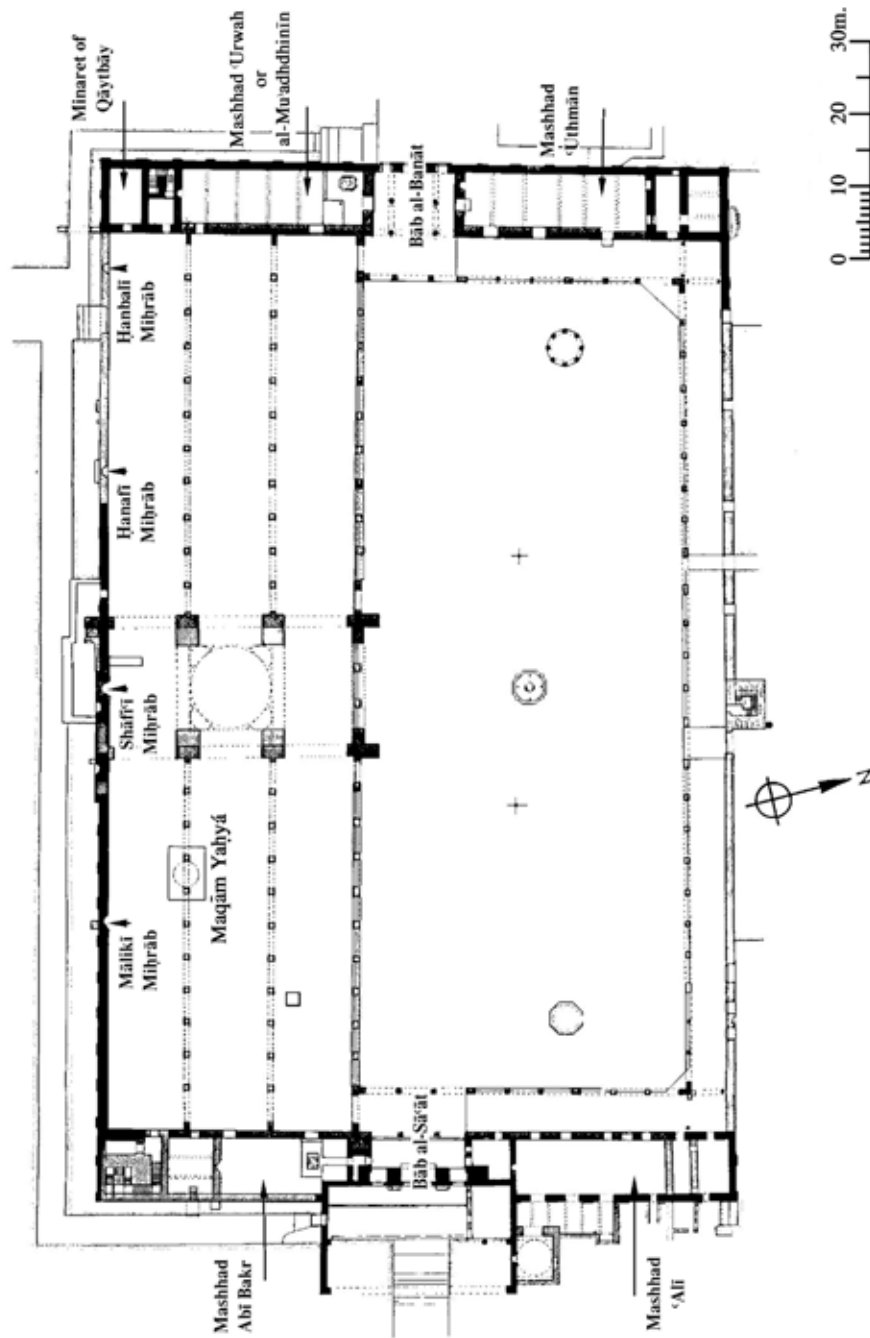
The minaret of Qāyṭbāy above the Roman tower



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Plan of the Umayyad mosque indicating the *mashhads* in the late Mamluk period



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