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Theft, Plunder, and Loot: An Examination of the Rich Diversity of Material Reuse in the Complex of Qalāwūn in Cairo

One of the most interesting architectural traditions known from Egypt is the reuse of elements from monuments erected during earlier periods and their re-incorporation as adornment, apotropaia, and material for foundations and fillings in newer structures. This type of reuse has always played a significant role in the formation of Egypt's built environment, with countless well-documented examples stretching back to antiquity. Blocks from Old Kingdom (ca. 2649–2150 BC) pyramid temples, for example, were reused in Middle Kingdom (ca. 2030–1640 BC) pyramid complexes;¹ and decorated sandstone blocks (*talatāt*) from the dismantled temple of King Amenhotep IV (r. 1353–1336 BC) at Amarna in Middle Egypt were recovered at complexes in Karnak, and other sites as well, where they were reused because they provided good fill for the pylons.² This practice was not exclusive to antiquity, since the reuse of architectural elements was ubiquitous in Egypt.

In the *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings*, one of the most important research tools for Egyptologists and archaeologists, bibliographer Bertha Porter (1852–1941) and Egyptologist Rosalind Moss (1890–1990) analyzed, illustrated, researched, and transcribed a plethora of both published and unpublished ancient artifacts, monuments, and sites in Egypt and the Sudan, as well as in museum collections around the world. In volume four of this indispensable reference series, a list of Old Kingdom to New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1070 BC) monuments and stone blocks reused in Islamic contexts in Cairo, Fustat, and their environs is provided.³ Some of the listed vestiges were found in known Islamic monuments, while the provenance of others are vague unnamed domestic settings. Subsequently, some of these artifacts were transferred to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, where they are currently housed.

¹Dieter Arnold, *Middle Kingdom Tomb Architecture at Lisht* (New York, 2008), 63–64.

²Construction at Karnak began in the Middle Kingdom with the greatest period of expansion occurring during the New Kingdom, and later additions and alterations through the Roman period. To read more about the program of reuse at Karnak, see: Gun Björkman, *Kings at Karnak: A Study of the Treatment of the Monuments of Royal Predecessors in the Early New Kingdom* (Uppsala, 1971), 124–41; and for more on the reuse and recovery of *talatāt* blocks at Karnak, see the first volume of Donald Redford and Susan Redford, *The Akhnaten Temple Project* (Warminster, 1976).

³Bertha Porter and Rosalind Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings* (Oxford, 1968), 4:69–73.



While the list in Porter and Moss' bibliography is essential, it certainly is not exhaustive. A number of the most acclaimed examples of ancient materials and artifacts in reuse during the Mamluk period in particular are not included, such as the columns forming the porticoes (*riwāqs*) of the mosque of Amir Alṭunbughā al-Māridānī (740/1339–40) in Darb al-Aḥmar. These columns previously supported the mosque of Rāshidah (393–95/1002–5) that was built by the Fatimid caliph-imam al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (r. 386–411/996–1021) on the site of an earlier Jacobite church in the vicinity of Fustat.⁴ When the Rāshidah mosque fell into ruins ca. 738/1337, the columns were reused in the mosque of al-Māridānī. In her thesis on this significant Mamluk building, Diana Bakhoun suggested that while some of those architectural elements certainly came from the Jacobite church, the variety of reuse—both chronological and stylistic—indicates that other sites were quarried for their finished stone as well.⁵

One can learn about other examples of reuse by parsing the medieval Arabic sources, which can be supplemented by an empirical inquiry into Cairo's monuments. For example, the Andalusian geographer and traveler Ibn Jubayr (540–614/1145–1217) wrote in his *Rihlah* that the enclosure walls of the Upper Egyptian Roman city of Antinopolis (built by Emperor Hadrian ca. 130 AD) were destroyed by Sultan Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (r. 564–89/1169–93) and the stones were shipped upstream to Cairo,⁶ presumably to build the Ayyubid walls and citadel of Cairo (ca. 572–79/1176–83). A century later, also at the citadel, four ancient monolithic granite columns were incorporated into Sultan al-Ashraf Khalīl's (r. 689–93/1290–93) ceremonial palace, al-Qā'ah al-Ashrafiyah (692/1292), which is now in ruins.⁷ Perhaps the most famous example of ancient materials reused in a building from the pre-modern period is the Rosetta Stone, a stele that helped unlock and decipher the hieroglyphic script. It was discovered by the French in 1799 in the foundation of the citadel commissioned by Sultan al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy (r. 872–901/1468–96) in Rosetta (al-Rashīd), although its original provenance is unknown.⁸ During a saunter through the medieval city one will notice that reuse of ancient materials

⁴Aḥmad Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawā'iz wa-al-i'tibār fī dhikr al-khiṭaṭ wa-al-āthār*, ed. Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid (London, 2003), 4:1:126–27.

⁵Ibid., 4:1:129, note 1, and 4:1:227; and Diana Bakhoun, "The Mosque of Emir Altunbugha al-Maridani in Light of Mamluk Patronage Under al-Nasir Muhammad Ibn Qalawun" (master's thesis, The American University in Cairo, 2009), 40–41.

⁶Tarek Swelim, "Antinopolis," *Encyclopedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Kathryn A. Bard (New York, 1999), 140; and Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Abī al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Jubayr al-Kinānī al-Andalusī al-Balinsī*, 2d ed. rev. by M. J. de Goeje (New York, 1973), 58.

⁷Nasser Rabbat, *Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture* (Leiden, 1995), 156.

⁸Richard Parkinson, *Rosetta Stone* (London, 2005), 26.



in Mamluk architecture was very common, deliberate, impressive, and noticeable. Inscribed Pharaonic blocks were reused as thresholds to mark the entrance to the *khānqāh* of Sultan Baybars al-Jāshankīr (709/1309–10), the mosque of Amir Āqsunqur (747/1346–47) and the *wikālah* of Amir Qawṣūn (741/1341), to name a few; an inscribed cornice from a monument of the Saite King Amasis (r. 570–526 BC) in Memphis surmounts the entrance of the *khānqāh* of Amir Shaykhū (755–56/1355);⁹ while a pair of beautiful granite jambs define the monumental entrance to the complex of Sultan al-Muʾayyad Shaykh (r. 815–24/1412–21), located at the intersection of one of the most significant crossroads in Cairo. In fact, when the Islamic monuments of Cairo are carefully surveyed it becomes obvious that there was a great interest on the part of the builders and elite patrons of the city to repurpose valuable ancient stone.

The largest piece of Christian *spolia* used in an Islamic context in Cairo is the Gothic portal that was removed from a church in Acre and reinstalled in the madrasah of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (694–703/1295–1303) in Bayn al-Qaṣrayn (Fig. 1).¹⁰ It was brought to Cairo after the siege of Acre in 690/1291 by ʿAlam al-Dīn Sanjar al-Shujāʿī (d. 693/1294), an influential vizier active during the reigns of sultans al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (r. 678–89/1279–90) and al-Ashraf Khalīl. Sanjar al-Shujāʿī had a particular interest in collecting objects from antiquity, for it is known from the sources that he sent a plaque from a sarcophagus inscribed in Greek or Latin (*Rūmī*) to Damascus for decipherment, and he collected Roman marble from throughout Syria to reuse in the citadel of Damascus he was charged with restoring in 690/1291.¹¹ There are also documented instances of intra-Mamluk reuse, such as when, on 27 Shawwāl 819/17 December 1416, al-Muʾayyad Shaykh purchased a set of beautifully worked bronze doors from the madrasah of Sultan Ḥasan (757–64/1356–62) to be encased by the aforementioned granite jambs, creating an interesting visual interplay between ancient and medieval Egypt.¹²

Given this chronological, geographic, and material diversity, how should we define building and material reuse of this type, especially since no specific term seems to have entered the medieval Arabic lexicon to describe such activity? In his

⁹Caroline Williams, *Islamic Monuments in Cairo: the Practical Guide* (Cairo, 2008), 61.

¹⁰Wolfgang Mayer, “The Madrasa of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad: The Portal,” in *A Future for the Past: Restorations in Islamic Cairo 1973–2004*, ed. Wolfgang Mayer and Philipp Speiser (Mainz, 2007), 95.

¹¹Julien Loiseau, “Frankish Captives in Mamlūk Cairo,” *Al-Masaq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean* 23, no. 1 (April 2011): 39–40; Donald P. Little, “The Fall of Akka in 690/1291: The Muslim Version,” in *Studies in Islamic History and Civilization in Honour of Professor David Ayalon*, ed. Moshe Sharon (Leiden, 1986), 177; and Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Jazarī, *La chronique de Damas d'al-Jazari, années 689–698 H.*, ed. J. Sauvaget (Paris, 1949), 11, no. 54.

¹²Al-Maqrizī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 4:1:342.



seminal work on the monuments, topography, and urbanism of Egypt, *Khīṭaṭ*, the late Mamluk historian al-Maqrīzī (ca. 766–845/1364–1442) used the verbs *akhadha* (to take) and *naqala* (to transfer) when referring to architectural reuse, effectively stripping them of any intended agency or efficacy. The term loosely used in English by scholars today to describe this practice derives from the Latin *spolia* (sing. *spolium*), literally meaning “spoils of war.” However, although the physical and technical changes denoted by reuse are similar, the intention behind each specific case had a wide net of meanings that were different in form and could, therefore, be categorized into separate groups.¹³ Depending on the circumstance, a reused artifact/element could be a case of appropriation or usurpation. The understanding is that material from a building was “reused” in order to economize on time and reduce expenses in the construction of another one, although there were surely other motives as well. Another incentive—as suggested by the etymology of the Latin term connoting political victory and triumph—was to demonstrate the superiority of one political regime over another. To understand the nuances of this phenomenon one should not reduce it to merely efforts to cut building costs, for political messages were conveyed too. In a recent article on the subject, Dale Kinney differentiated between “reuse” and “*spolia*,” emphasizing that they should not be treated as one and the same: the former is value-laden and waste-reducing, whereas the latter marks “the forcible transfer of ownership where an object is taken as booty or salvaged.”¹⁴ In other words, to use these terms interchangeably without providing clarification of the terminology or consideration for potential theoretical problems is inaccurate.

The Complex of Qalāwūn: a Case Study

Having briefly presented different examples and described some of the reasoning behind architectural reuse (or *spolia*) in Egypt, an investigation of the practice in one building would allow for a more nuanced discussion on the topic. The complex of Qalāwūn (683/1284–85)—best known to specialists today for its monumentality and for introducing the concept of the multifunctional urban space—is a fitting case study because of the rich variety of decoration and stones employed.¹⁵ It remains one of the most powerfully emphatic and imposing buildings in the

¹³Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “Between Quarry and Magic: the Selective Approach to Spolia in the Islamic Monuments of Egypt,” in *Dalmatia and the Mediterranean: Portable Archaeology and the Poetics of Influence*, ed. Alina Payne (Leiden, 2014), 402.

¹⁴Dale Kinney, “Introduction,” in *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine*, ed. Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney (Burlington, 2011), 2–4.

¹⁵The complex included a charitable hospital (*bīmāristān*), a madrasah, a mausoleum, and a *maktab-sabīl*: Rukn al-Dīn Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat al-fikrah fī tārikh al-hijrah*, ed. Donald S. Richards (Beirut, 1998), 248; Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, *Tashrīf al-ayyām wa-al-‘uṣūr fī sirat al-Malik al-*



city, besides epitomizing architectural grandeur (Fig. 2). To build his complex, Qalāwūn acquired one of two palaces built by the Fatimid caliphs in the ceremonial and commercial heart of Cairo, Bayn al-Qaṣrayn, specifically the *qāʿah* of Sitt al-Mulk of the Western Palace (al-Qaṣr al-Gharbī).¹⁶ By building the complex on this site, elements from the palace were reused as building material.

While scholars have examined some of the relics from the Fatimid palace, a comprehensive study and look at the breadth and scope of reuse in the complex has not been carried out. Why is this exercise important and what can be learned from it? Close inspection of the specific history of a building could provide a synchronic reading of Mamluk economy, politics, and society; and since the subject of reuse/*spolia* has often revolved around the aesthetics of the reused/spoliated artifact, art historians have prioritized visually appealing examples over others, leaving gaps in how both a building and its material culture are studied. Moreover, there are many questions that could be asked by putting the later life of these artifacts into broader contexts: what made reuse/spoliation desirable or not; were reused materials of different heights and periods a problem for the architects of a building; what were the logistics behind acquiring such material; and how were these reused artifacts received over time?

Returning to the complex of Qalāwūn, al-Maqrīzī cited two specific instances of reuse in this monument in his *Khīṭaṭ*. At the center of both stories is the aforementioned Sanjar al-Shujāʿī, the Superintendent of Royal Constructions (*shādd al-ʿamāʾir*), who supervised the building of this complex.¹⁷ He is identified in the sources as the key figure responsible for the acquisition of the *qāʿah* and the fourteen-month period during which the complex was built. To that point, one anecdote refers to marble and granite taken from the citadel of Qalʿat al-Baḥr, built by al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb on Roda Island.¹⁸ When this citadel was initially built in 638–41/1240–43, a Jacobite church, houses, mosques, temples (*barābī*), and palaces on Roda were demolished and the debris was integrated into it.¹⁹ While

Manṣūr: wa-tatanāwalu al-ḥiqbah mā bayna sanatay 678H.–689H., ed. Murād Kāmil (Cairo, 1961), 56; and K. A. C. Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt* (New York, 1978), 2:204.

¹⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 2:495 and 499.

¹⁷ Baybars al-Manṣūrī, *Zubdat*, 248; Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir, *Tashrīf al-ayyām*, 56; and al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 4:1:513.

¹⁸ Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 3:581–88.

¹⁹ Ibid., 3:581–82. The Ayyubids had a huge reserve of material on Roda Island, where it is believed Frankish prisoners of war worked as craftsmen: Viktoria Meinecke-Berg, “Spolien in der mittelalterlichen Architektur von Kairo,” in *Ägypten, Dauer und Wandel: Symposium anlässlich des 75 jährigen Bestehens des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo, am 10. und 11. Oktober 1982* (Cairo, 1985), 136. Loiseau has noted that *corvée* labor by Frankish captives can be traced back to the Ayyubid period, when many of them were tasked with hard labor and worked as craftsmen at building sites in Cairo: “Frankish Captives in Mamlūk Cairo,” 38–39.



efforts were made by Sultan al-Zāhir Baybars al-Bunduqdārī (r. 658–75/1260–77) to restore the Ayyubid citadel, Qalāwūn ordered its demolition, leaving Sanjar al-Shujāʿī to siphon off all that he needed in columns, sills, and capitals. Sanjar al-Shujāʿī reportedly rode to the ruins of Roda daily to carry off the spoils.²⁰ In a twist of fate, just as the landscape of Roda was permanently changed and the architecture recycled to build the citadel, the latter was similarly destroyed and the site used as a quarry to build one of the most splendid and grandiose buildings erected during the Mamluk period.

Al-Maqrīzī rather briefly informs the reader of this incident, so it is not known how much material was taken, where it was placed, or whether all of the marble and stone employed came only from Roda. Judging from the variety and capaciousness of the material integrated into the complex of Qalāwūn, we find a combination of capitals and columns reused whole, as well as columns that were possibly cut down for the pavement and the dado (Figs. 3–4). Clearly these elements were intended to enhance the appearance of the complex since they were included in a very concise, organized, and systematic manner, like the similar, if not identical, composition of their display on the Gothic-inspired facade (Fig. 2). The chronological spread and rich materiality of these artifacts—as evidenced in the mausoleum today—unequivocally added to the beauty and magnificence of the complex’s perception over the *longue durée*. Thus, the main purpose of the inclusion of such material in these areas was not only to facilitate the speed of construction, but to maintain a specific aesthetic principle.

Fatimid Relics

The second account relayed by al-Maqrīzī regards the site on which the complex was erected, the *qāʿah* built by the second caliph-imam al-ʿAzīz (365–86/975–96) in 358/972 for his daughter Sitt al-Mulk.²¹ With the ascendancy of the Ayyubids in 567/1171, this *qāʿah* was passed on to Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn’s brother al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Sayf al-Dīn, which then went to his son Quṭb al-Dīn Aḥmad, hence the eponymous Dār al-Quṭbiyah in some of the later sources. Once possession of the *qāʿah* was sealed, it was Sanjar al-Shujāʿī who kept the existing layout of the four-*iwān* plan “as is” (*ʿalā ḥālīhā*). In fact, what he appears to have done was simply insert the *bīmāristān* on the foundation of the Fatimid *qāʿah*.²² A number of ulama

²⁰ Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 3:586 and 4:2:698; and Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks: A History of the Architecture and its Culture* (Cairo, 2007), 134.

²¹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 2:495 and 499. On the east side of Bayn al-Qaṣrayn stood the Eastern Palace built by Caliph al-Muʿizz (r. 341–65/953–75).

²² Ibn ʿAbd al-Zāhir, *Al-Rawḍah al-bahīyah al-zāhirah fī khiṭaṭ al-Muʿizzīyah al-Qāhirah*, ed. Ayman Fuʾād Sayyid (Cairo, 1996), 60–61; and al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 2:499 and 4:2:692 and 695.



were furious with Sanjar al-Shujā'ī's decisions, accusing him of forcibly extracting the *qā'ah* by hastily evicting the occupants and stealing materials to build the complex.²³ The usurpation of space and architectural elements was certainly not uncommon in Cairo, so there might have been other reasons why the ulama felt provoked by Sanjar al-Shujā'ī's actions.

What can be inferred is that the *qā'ah* was in a relatively good state of preservation at the end of the thirteenth century, which might explain why parts of the Fatimid *qā'ah* survived in the complex. In her study on the *qā'ah* of Sitt al-Mulk, Sabiha al-Khemir proposed that some of the walls of the *qā'ah* were not totally destroyed and that the stucco windows with Quranic inscriptions in the *bīmāristān* might well be from the tenth century.²⁴ She was specifically referring to the stucco window on the north wall of the *bīmāristān*'s south-east *īwān* (Fig. 5), and another currently in the Museum of Islamic Art (4046) that is thought to have been removed from the south wall as per a photograph taken by Creswell (cf. Figs. 6 and 7). Al-Khemir's reasoning is two-fold: the windows feature the same type of floriated *kūfic* inscription that is in keeping with the Fatimid spirit and period,²⁵ which she connected to a reference by Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir ([620–92/1223–92], the private secretary [*kātib al-sirr*] under Baybars, Qalāwūn, and al-Ashraf Khalīl) to Quranic inscriptions executed in stucco that decorated the walls of Dār al-Qutbiyah.²⁶

In the nineteenth century, Egypt's medieval monuments were in a poor state of preservation. Consequently, the *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe* (Comité)—a committee established in 1881 by Khedive Tawfiq (r. 1296–1309/1879–92) to oversee the preservation of Egypt's Islamic and Coptic monuments—surveyed, documented, excavated, photographed, and carried out restoration and repair work in the complex of Qalāwūn from 1884 to 1961.²⁷ The greatest

²³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 4:2:698.

²⁴ The Comité also suspected that some of the walls of the *qā'ah* were incorporated into the *bīmāristān*: *Bulletin du Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe*, Fascicule XXVII (1911), 144; and Creswell, *MAE*, 2:208.

²⁵ The window currently in the MIA was removed when the wall supporting it disappeared (was destroyed). Creswell indicated that the decoration of these two windows are similar to those in the madrasah and mausoleum: *MAE*, 2:207 and 210. Al-Khemir concluded that the quality of the carving and style of decoration on the *in situ* and MIA windows differ from those elsewhere in the complex: Sabiha al-Khemir, "The Palace of Sitt al-Mulk and Fatimid Imagery" (Ph.D. diss., London University, School of Oriental and African Studies, 1990), 1:73–78. It should also be stated that there is a stucco window inscribed with the same type of floriated *kūfic* on the south wall of the mausoleum.

²⁶ Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, *Al-Rawḍah al-bahīyah*, 60–61; and al-Khemir, "The Palace of Sitt al-Mulk," 1:78.

²⁷ This time frame was identified by culling all of the Comité's published bulletins, as well as their unpublished notes and correspondence, that are preserved in the Ministry of Antiquities'



and most intense period of activity in the complex was from 1903 to 1914 under the supervision of Max Herz (1856–1919), a Hungarian architect, conservator, and scholar, who was appointed the chief architect and de facto head of Comité during this period.²⁸ In 1910, during the course of routine renovation work, a number of elaborately carved wooden panels were discovered by Herz in the rooms behind the *bīmāristān*'s north-east *īwān*, more specifically the short branches of the T-plan space.²⁹ The carvings on many show princely and daily life scenes, while others are decorated with geometric patterns, vegetal motifs, and inscriptions in *kūfic* reminiscent of Fatimid carving and decoration (Figs. 8–9).³⁰ So, in addition to the previously mentioned stucco windows that al-Khemir attributed to the earlier Fatimid *qā'ah*, there was now solid evidence of Fatimid woodwork repurposed in the building of the complex. Most of these panels were discovered with their decorated Fatimid side inverted and the exposed face showing designs from the Mamluk period.³¹

Edmond Pauty (1887–1980), a French architect who worked as an expert under the auspices of the Comité,³² found more panels in the long branch of the same T-shaped space in 1933, which went unnoticed by Herz in 1910 because they were obstructed by a wall at the time.³³ While the overwhelming majority of the panels were transferred to the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA), a few remain *in situ* in the north-east *īwān* (Fig. 10). This impressive corpus of richly decorated woodwork has been the subject of numerous publications, primarily because they add to our knowledge about Fatimid palatial decoration and furnishing and because they defy misconceptions regarding figural representations in Islamic art. These representations have been compared to iconography in other branches of

Department of Islamic and Coptic Archives in Cairo.

²⁸István Ormos, *Max Herz Pasha (1856–1919): His Life and Career* (Cairo, 2009), 1:255.

²⁹*Bulletin du Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe*, Fascicule XXVII (1911), 15, 144–46; al-Khemir, "Palace of Sitt al-Mulk," 1:20, 51–52, and 56; and Creswell, *MAE*, 2:208, Fig. 124 for the floor plan.

³⁰Fig. 8 (MIA 441) was published in Edmond Pauty, *Catalogue general du musée arab du Caire: les bois sculptés jusqu'à l'époque Ayyoubide* (Cairo, 1931), 47–47, pl. XLIV; and Bernard O'Kane, *Treasures of Islamic Art in the Museums of Cairo* (Cairo, 2007), 74, no. 64.

³¹Al-Khemir, "Palace of Sitt al-Mulk," 1:20–21.

³²Donald Malcolm Reid, *Contesting Antiquity in Egypt: Archaeologies, Museums, and the Struggle for Identities from World War I to Nasser* (Cairo, 2015), 186. In the minutes of the 1927–29 bulletin, Pauty is listed as the technical expert of the Comité: *Bulletin du Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe*, Fascicule XXXV (1934).

³³Al-Khemir, "Palace of Sitt al-Mulk," 1:58–59. Pauty published most of the panels in 1931 and 1933: Pauty, *Catalogue general du musée arab du Caire*, and idem, "Un dispositif de plafond fatimite," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* 15 (1933): 99–107. All of the panels, those *in situ* or in museum collections, were studied more recently by al-Khemir in her dissertation.



Fatimid art and ultimately provide us with insights into contemporary taste and aesthetics.³⁴ Despite these publications, there are some limitations to any thorough study due to the paucity of archival data: the Comité did not leave accurate records documenting how the woodwork transferred to the MIA was arranged,³⁵ so the order of the panel's original display sequence is not known, making it even more difficult to reconstruct an accurate narrative cycle.³⁶ Besides, there are other panels in museum collections outside of Egypt with similar motifs, themes, deep carving, and openwork that might have been removed from the complex.³⁷

More Relics from the Fatimid Palace?

When and how were these panels collected? Between the Comité bulletins and the MIA register books, it is easy to determine when the panels were transferred to the museum in Cairo.³⁸ The chain of possession of the panels in museums outside of Egypt is less well documented. Unfortunately, the records of the al-Sabah Collection in Kuwait were destroyed during the Iraqi invasion of 1990, so the museum no longer has the complete provenance or acquisition history of their two panels.³⁹ One of them, LNS55W (Fig. 11), was published in a catalogue on the al-Sabah collection in which it is stated that the panel was purchased on the art market in the 1970s–1980s and was formerly in the collection of Sharif Sabri Pasha, brother of Queen Consort of Egypt Nazli Sabri (tenure 1919 to 1936).⁴⁰ It has the same theme of two addorsed gazelles flanking a central palmette as two other

³⁴ Al-Khemir, "Palace of Sitt al-Mulk," 1:23.

³⁵ Ibid., 1:84. The 1910 Bulletin of the Comité discusses the discovery of the panels, but makes no mention of their arrangement: *Bulletin du Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe*, Fascicule XXVII (1911), 15 and 144.

³⁶ The themes depicted in the Fatimid wooden panels discovered in Qalāwūn's complex are similar to those in the ceiling of the Cappella Palatina erected a century later (1134–42); however, since the former were reused during the Mamluk period and collected during the late nineteenth–early twentieth centuries, we cannot make any literary or useful associations since it is not known how the panels were originally displayed. Pauty and al-Khemir attempted to reconstruct some of the panels: Pauty, "Un dispositif de plafond fatimite," 99–107; and al-Khemir, "Palace of Sitt al-Mulk," 1:53–64.

³⁷ The Metropolitan Museum of Art (11.205.2); the Sabah Collection (LNS 6W and LNS 55W); Musée du Louvre (OA 4062; Fig. 13); the Victoria and Albert Museum (785A–1896, 785B–1896, 785C–1896, 785D–1896, 785E–1896, 785F–1896, and 785G–1896); and unnamed private collections: al-Khemir, "Palace of Sitt al-Mulk," 1:22, 54, and 126–27.

³⁸ Unfortunately, a careful review of the register books was difficult at the time of writing as the MIA was closed to the public from January 2014 to February 2017.

³⁹ As per correspondences with The Sabah Collection curatorial staff members.

⁴⁰ Giovanni Curatola, *Art from the Islamic Civilization: the al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait* (Milan, 2012), 83, no. 59.



panels in the MIA (4061 and 4062) that were recovered from Qalāwūn, safely attributing it to the complex and the *qā'ah* of Sitt al-Mulk before.⁴¹

In The Metropolitan Museum of Art there is another panel (11.205.2) with two symmetrically arranged addorsed bridled horse heads carved in deep relief, that was purchased from Lucy Olcott Perkins (1877–1922) in 1911.⁴² It is almost identical to a panel bearing a similar composition currently in the collection of MIA (3391) that was purchased in 1909 from a Syrian antiquities dealer named Ilyās Khātūn al-Tajī (Elias Hatoun) (Fig. 12).⁴³ Although both museums list an unknown provenance for these respective panels, Richard Ettinghausen believed the one in New York to be from the Western Palace and al-Khemir narrowed down the attribution of both to the *qā'ah* of Sitt al-Mulk by comparing the style of carving with other known panels removed from the complex.⁴⁴ The museum's records do not reveal how Perkins acquired this piece, although she did have connections to Egypt around the time of the sale.⁴⁵ She began her career as a collector and historian of Sienese art who studied under the tutelage of Bernard Berenson, an authority on Renaissance art, and later worked as his first secretary. Perkins seems to have broadened her experience during her affiliation with The Metropolitan Museum of Art (ca. 1905–11), where she worked in education, in addition to collecting pho-

⁴¹Pauty, *Catalogue general du musée arab du Caire*, 44 and pl. XXXVIII.

⁴²In addition to this wooden panel there appear to be four other objects with an Egyptian provenance in The Metropolitan Museum of Art's collection that have a connection to Perkins: 11.194, 11.205.1, 11.205.3a–d, and 11.138.1. Textile fragment 11.194 is listed in the 1912 bulletin as a gift of Mrs. L. O. Perkins: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 7, no. 1 (Jan. 1912): 16.

⁴³O'Kane, *Treasures of Islamic Art in the Museums of Cairo*, 88, no. 80. Khātūn donated other objects to the MIA in 1904: Gabriel Leturcq, "Jeu de miroirs et orientalisme dans les arts de l'islam: Le Musée national de l'art arabe du Caire, 1869–1914" (Diplôme d'études approfondies, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en sciences sociales, 2003–4), 150. A third panel, MIA 3552, recovered from the complex has a very similar composition of addorsed horses: Pauty, *Catalogue general du musée arab du Caire*, 45, pl. XLI.

⁴⁴Richard Ettinghausen, Oleg Grabar, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650–1250* (New Haven, 2001), 201; Bernard O'Kane, *Treasures*, 88, no. 80; Maryam D. Ekhtiar, Priscilla P. Soucek, Sheila R. Canby, and Navina Najat Haidar, *Masterpieces from the Department of Islamic Art in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 2011), 163, no. 122; and al-Khemir, "Palace of Sitt al-Mulk," 1:199–202 and pls. 88–89.

⁴⁵The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Egyptian Department Archives, Letter from Herbert E. Winlock to Albert M. Lythgoe, 17 March 1911: refers to a Mrs. Perkins who was actively "...looking for Arab stuff in Cairo..." Another correspondence from the same year reveals that Lucy Olcott Perkins had "...a small appropriation from Brooklyn to purchase for them in Egypt some of the material Mr. Lythgoe very kindly..." informed her of: Letter from Lucy Olcott Perkins to Edward Robinson, 3 January 1911, Perkins, Lucy Olcott (Mrs.) - Personal, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.



tographs and purchasing artifacts.⁴⁶ She appears to have traveled to Egypt thrice: first in 1904–5, in 1911, then again in 1913, when she joined J. P. Morgan on his last expedition. During her third visit she worked as the Egyptian agent for the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the eclectic objects she purchased in preparation for the museum's June 1916 inauguration became the foundation of the Egyptian Art Collection.⁴⁷

The Musée du Louvre has a rectangular panel (OA 4062; Fig. 13) with an even more interesting provenance history, that shows a musician and gazelle on a field of delicately carved scrolls.⁴⁸ It was acquired from French architect and early collector of Islamic art Ambroise Baudry (1838–1906), who relocated to Egypt in 1871 and was active there for 15 years. Baudry received many commissions during this period, both private and royal, and belonged to a group of mostly European connoisseurs of art who actively campaigned for the conservation of Cairo's architectural heritage and built environment, which eventually led to the formation of the Comité.⁴⁹ According to the Louvre's inventory register, the panel was found in 1874 in the demolition area of the Western Fatimid place, presumably from the complex of Qalāwūn and not one of the adjoining madrasahs built along Bayn al-Qaṣrayn decades to a century later. Baudry subsequently sold part of his collec-

⁴⁶ As per communications in the archives of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the position of "Instructor" was alternatively referred to as School Supervisor and Museum Supervisorship, and was designed for an individual who would act as an intermediary between public schools and the museum: Letters from Kent to Perkins, 3 December 1905 and 11 December 1905, Perkins, Lucy Olcott (Mrs.) - Personal, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York. On 1 June 1906, she was appointed the Purchasing Agent of Photographs, authorized to select and purchase photographs on the museum's behalf, and appears to have traveled abroad for this purpose: Letter from Edward Robinson, Acting Director, 1 June 1906, Perkins, Lucy Olcott (Mrs.) - Personal, Office of the Secretary Records, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York. This appointment corresponded exactly with the reorganization of the Department of Photography: Letter from Balliard to H. W. Kent, 13 September 1906, Photograph Department Reports, Office of the Secretary Subject Files, The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, New York.

⁴⁷ David Cox, "The Strange Case of Lucy Olcott Perkins," *Apollo: the International Magazine of Arts* 394 (December 1994): 43–44; and Cleveland Art Museum, *Catalogue of Egyptian Art: The Cleveland Art Museum* (Cleveland, 1999), 3–4.

⁴⁸ Sophie Makariou, *Islamic Art at the Musée du Louvre* (Paris, 2012), 56–57. Since al-Khemir was more focused on the imagery of the panels, she did not research the provenance history of those currently in museum collections outside of Egypt.

⁴⁹ Mercedes Volait, "Appropriating Orientalism? Saber Sabri's Mamluk Revivals in late 19th c. Cairo," in *Islamic Art in the 19th Century: Tradition, Innovation and Eclecticism*, ed. Doris Behrens-Abouseif and Stephen Vernoit (Leiden, 2005), 132–33. Baudry is listed as a member (architect) in the very first bulletin of the Comité and remained through 1886 when he left Egypt, after which he was made an honorary member until his passing in 1906: Leturcq, "Jeu de miroirs et orientalisme dans les arts de l'islam," 126.



tion to the Louvre in 1898, including this panel, although he had no particular or direct connection with the museum.⁵⁰ Thus, according to this chronology, Baudry acquired the panel some years before the Comité was founded in 1881, confirming that the complex was in a regrettable state prior to their intervention. Certainly by the end of the eighteenth century, the *bīmāristān* was in a poor state of preservation until it was repurposed by Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha (r. 1220–64/1805–48). After attempts were made to restore it, parts of the *bīmāristān* were demolished and replaced with a modern ophthalmic clinic that was built in the center of the courtyard in 1910.⁵¹ In the interim, the ruins of the *bīmāristān* must have been an ideal quarry site for collectors and art dealers alike, just as the Ayyubid citadel had been plundered by Sanjar al-Shujā‘ī six centuries earlier to build the complex.

This leaves us with eight rectangular wooden panels in the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), probably from a door, that are stylistically very similar to others in the MIA (441/Fig. 8 and 554) that were recovered from the complex. They share the same composition: a central motif enclosing animals from which spiraling scrolls are symmetrically set against a deeper carved ground.⁵² According to the V&A’s records, these panels were purchased on 10 December 1896 for £25 from an English painter, ceramics expert, and author named Henry Wallis (1830–1916).⁵³ Aside from these details the records do not provide any earlier provenance information, so it is not known when Wallis acquired them or from whom. Yet, some conclusions can be inferred from his biography. Besides his interest in ceramics, Wallis was an assiduous collector who visited Egypt regularly to buy antiquities to sell in England. With the help of other leading British artists and Egyptologists, he was the prime mover for the Society for the Preservation of Monuments of Ancient Egypt (SPMAE was active from 1888 to 1910), which lobbied to raise funds for this purpose.⁵⁴ Accordingly, he was both concerned with the preservation of Egyptian monuments and a connoisseur of Egyptian artifacts. However, his name does not appear in connection with the Antiquities Service (first in-

⁵⁰Thanks are due to Carine Juvin (Curator for Medieval Near East in the Department of Islamic Art at the Musée du Louvre) for providing me with this information from the register book.

⁵¹Creswell, *MAE*, 2:206; al-Khemir, “Palace of Sitt al-Mulk,” 21; and Adam Sabra, *Poverty and Charity in Medieval Islam: Mamluk Egypt, 1250–1517* (Cambridge, 2000), 73.

⁵²Anna Contadini, *Fatimid Art at the Victoria and Albert Museum* (London, 1998), 113, and pls. 51 and 53A–E; and Pauty, *Catalogue general du musée arab du Caire*, 51, pls. LX–LXI.

⁵³The papers relating to the acquisition of these wooden panels are in the V&A Archive: MA/1/W330, nominal file: Wallis, Henry, registered papers RP/1896/107278.

⁵⁴Jason Thompson, *Wonderful Things: A History of Egyptology from Antiquity to 1879* (Cairo, 2014), 255; Donald Malcolm Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (Cairo, 2002), 182–83; Warren R. Dawson and Eric P. Uphill, *Who was Who in Egyptology* (London, 1995), 431; and Christina Riggs, *Unwrapping Ancient Egypt* (London, 2014), 199.



carnation of the Ministry of Antiquities) or the Comité: a search through Wallis' personal papers in Oxford University's Bodleian Library and SPMAE's archives at the Egypt Exploration Society in London produced no reference to connections that might shed more light on his acquisition habits and associations.⁵⁵

Unfortunately, despite these limitations, scholars of Islamic art and architecture have highlighted these Fatimid carved wooden panels to the detriment of other interesting relics in the complex that warrant further inquiry. For instance, discreetly fixed above the entrance on the south wall of the mausoleum is a rectangular plaque inlaid with small pieces of colored stone and mother-of-pearl forming a geometric composition. Carved on two bone/ivory inserts on the short sides of the plaque is a verse of poetry that reads (Fig. 14):

ألا يا دار يدخلك حزن

ولا يغدر بساكنك الزمان

"O, home, may no sorrow enter you; and fate
will not betray your inhabitant"⁵⁶

The renowned Egyptian scholar and historian of Islamic art and architecture Ḥasan 'Abd al-Wahhāb (1898–1967) authored an article on *spolia* in Egypt's Islamic monuments in which this plaque was published and where he claimed it was a relic from the Fatimid palace; however, he provided no reference or context for it.⁵⁷ Perhaps this is a detail that he was privy to given his previous work as an Inspector with the Comité from 1919 to 1958, during which time he was credited with making many important discoveries in the field.⁵⁸ Yet, when one looks at the plaque more closely, one notices that it is poorly executed and the geometric pattern does not look particularly Fatimid: the quality of the craftsmanship is not in keeping with the refinement of artifacts from a palatial context; and the asymmetry of the composition is also questionable.⁵⁹ On the contrary, the plaque looks like a crudely assembled piece that does not resemble any of the other geometric

⁵⁵C. Parker, "Catalogue of the papers of Henry Wallis, 1846–1952, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford" <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/1500-1900/wallis/wallis.html> (2002). Carl Graves of the Egypt Exploration Society was very helpful in providing insight into the activities of SPMAE.

⁵⁶I would like to thank Noha Abou-Khatwa (independent scholar of Islamic art and architecture) for helping with this translation.

⁵⁷Ḥasan 'Abd al-Wahhāb, "Al-Āthār al-manqūlah wa-al-muntaḥalah fī al-'imārah al-Islāmiyah," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte* 38, no. 1 (1955): 246.

⁵⁸Muḥammad Fawzī Rahīl, "Ḥasan 'Abd al-Wahhāb wa-kitābuhu: Tārīkh al-masājīd al-athariyah," *Al-Hayāt*, 14 November 2014, <http://www.alhayat.com/m/story/5701820>.

⁵⁹With thanks to Eric Broug (independent researcher specializing in Islamic geometric design) for examining a photo of this panel and casting doubt on its Fatimid authenticity.



panels in the mausoleum, so it is rather odd that a scholar of ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s repute would make assertions about its origin without any additional explanation.

If this panel is not from the Western Fatimid palace, is it still evidence of spolia? The inscription is a verse from an anonymous couplet that is found in several classical *adab* literary works, such as the well-known canonical anthology *Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaṭraf* (*A Quest for attainment in each fine art*) by Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ibshīhī.⁶⁰ Although al-Ibshīhī died in 850/1446, the verse can be traced back to Mālik ibn Dīnār (d. 130/747–48), the narrator of the anecdote cited in the anthology, giving us an eighth-century *terminus ante quem*. The inscription is definitely out of place in the mausoleum and is more suited for domestic contexts,⁶¹ which might be why ‘Abd al-Wahhāb attributed it to the Fatimid palace.⁶² Nevertheless, it was surely appropriated from a domestic setting.

Crusader Spolia

In addition to the use of ornament, media, and material from the Fatimid palace and the Ayyubid citadel, the complex of Qalāwūn bears witness to the deliberate despoliation of other artifacts from the contemporary and ancient Mediterranean world. The impact of Latin (Romanesque and Crusader) architecture on the complex is very obvious in the rendering of the tall arched recesses that undulate on the mausoleum and madrasah’s facade overlooking Bayn al-Qaṣrayn (Fig. 2). A more subtle and less obvious reference to Latin architecture is the double-arched window above the main entrance (Fig. 15), which Creswell attributed to contemporaneous French workmanship due to the similarity in the hammering of the iron grille work. The grille is probably Crusader loot that made its way back to Cairo subsequent to wars fought with the Mamluks,⁶³ making it a clear case of literal “spolia.” Qalāwūn was at the height of his power by the time his complex was built, having suppressed internal and external threats to his reign. Like other

⁶⁰ Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ibshīhī, *Mustaṭraf fī kull fann mustaṭraf*, ed. Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ (Beirut, 2004), 2:327.

⁶¹ Adam Talib (Assistant Professor of Classical Arabic Literature at Durham University) identified this line and directed me to several sources, including a story in *Alf laylah wa-laylah* (One Thousand and One Nights) in which the Abbasid Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (148–93/766–809), a great epigrapher according to classical Arabic literary works, found a building with this inscription on it. For more on the caliph’s investigation of old buildings and reading their inscriptions, see: Adam Talib, “Topoi and Topography in the histories of al-Ḥīra” in *History and Identity in the Late Antique East (500–1000)*, ed. P. Wood (New York, 2013), 141.

⁶² According to Mamdouh M. Sakr (architect and architectural historian) this verse is still commonly used in the same way on doorways in Egypt today.

⁶³ Creswell, *MAE*, 2:191; and Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “European Arts and Crafts at the Mamluk Court,” *Muqarnas* 21 (2004): 45.



examples of Latin spoils embedded in Mamluk monuments in Cairo, this grille is a tangible reminder of the sultan's authority over the Crusaders, who were gradually being evicted from the eastern Mediterranean.⁶⁴ Qalāwūn and Sanjar al-Shujā'ī were probably making a profound statement establishing the Mamluks as new conquerors by placing the grille above the entrance portal, while simultaneously expressing a symbolic continuity with the Fatimid caliphs vis-à-vis the choice of site, the Western Palace. The Mamluk ascension to power, after all, occurred only decades before Qalāwūn erected his centerpiece of royal Mamluk architectural patronage.

Pre-Islamic Spolia

Equally ignored are the examples of pre-Islamic *spolia* found throughout the complex, namely the large variety of reused columns, capitals, sills, and thresholds that might have come from the Ayyubid citadel and the other buildings that were demolished on the island of Roda to erect it. It can be very difficult at times to differentiate between material re-used in a secondary context vs. that which was newly quarried for a building. One solution is to try to identify the stone type of the architectural element in question, which will lead to an identification of the quarry from where it came.⁶⁵ For example, according to a study by James A. Harrell, Professor Emeritus of Geology in the Department of Environmental Sciences at the University of Toledo, some of the stone (*marmor luculleum*, *marmor celticum*, *marmor lesbium*, *fossiliferous marble*, *marmor carium*, *marmor phrygium*, *marmor thessalicum*) used for the wall veneer, columns, capitals, and pavement are native to France, Greece, Italy, and Turkey.⁶⁶ Unless there was a marble import business active in the thirteenth century between Egypt and these regions, it can be conclusively established that these architectural elements were reused from

⁶⁴Behrens-Abouseif, "Between Quarry and Magic," 415. For more examples of Crusader spolia inserted in Cairene monuments of the Mamluk period, see: Cathleen A. Fleck, "Crusader Spolia in Medieval Cairo: the Portal of the Complex of Sultan Ḥasan," *Journal of Transcultural Medieval Studies* 1, no. 2 (December 2014): 249–99; and Behrens-Abouseif, "European Arts and Crafts at the Mamluk Court," 45–49.

⁶⁵James B. Heidel (architect and epigraphic artist for the Epigraphic Survey of the University of Chicago in Luxor, Egypt) carefully reviewed photos of the stones employed in the complex and suggested this methodology, and offered other pointers for identifying reused Roman stone as outlined in this article.

⁶⁶Prof. Harrell has already identified the different types of Roman ornamental stones reused in the complex of Qalāwūn and several other medieval buildings in Cairo: http://www.eeescience.utoledo.edu/faculty/harrell/egypt/mosques/survey_intro.htm



earlier Greco-Roman period buildings and are in secondary use position because they are standing in a building dating to 683/1285.⁶⁷

Attached to several columns is a bell-shaped piece of marble used in the *bīmāristān* and madrasah alternately as a capital and as a base that also suggests reuse (cf. Figs. 16–17). This shape is unknown in any classical style building from the Greco-Roman period anywhere around the Mediterranean littoral,⁶⁸ so as with the Fatimid woodwork these are most probably examples of intra-Islamic reuse. Moreover, in the medieval period architectural elements taken from earlier buildings were often cut down into smaller elements, and in these cases it is difficult to tell by style if the material is spoliated; but, again, if the stone type is known and if its quarry was closed by the Mamluk period, then these elements are spolia. This supposition can be applied to the small stone elements, inlays, and colonnettes in the *mihrahs* of the madrasah, as well as the porphyry discs in the pavement of the mausoleum: they were likely all cut down from larger, older pieces (Figs. 3–4).⁶⁹

Where did the other columns and capitals throughout the complex come from? There are six identical pink granite columns with a loop supporting the madrasah (Fig. 18). Called palm capital columns because the shafts mimic palm fronds bound at the top by several cords forming a loop, the prototype for this type of column was first used in pyramid complexes of Abusir and Saqqara and can be traced back to the Old Kingdom, where they were exclusively carved in granite. Egyptologists have suggested that to identify the origin of these columns they would have to be properly surveyed and inspected for the remains of inscriptions that might have been erased and are no longer visible to the naked eye.⁷⁰ Monolithic granite columns also support the dome of Qalāwūn's mauso-

⁶⁷The importation of marble was already scarce during the Mamluk period and there was no market supplying it, although reused marble "...was sold in the form of columns, large or small, intact or broken, with or without bases": Nelly Hanna, *Construction Work in Ottoman Cairo (1517–1798)* (Cairo, 1984), 32–33.

⁶⁸There are five orders of classical architecture—Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite—and the bell-shaped capital is not known in any of them. For a description of the features in each of the five orders, see: Robert Chitham, *The Classical Orders of Architecture* (New York, 1985), 45–94.

⁶⁹Porphyry ceased to be quarried in the Eastern Desert of Egypt during Late Antiquity, limiting builders to stone kept in reserves or previously carved for older buildings: William Tronzo, "Medieval Porphyry: The Subliminal Narratives of a Material," in *Le plaisir de l'art du Moyen Âge: commande, production et réception de l'oeuvre d'art: mélanges en hommage à Xavier Barral i Altet*, ed. Xavier Barral i Altet (Paris, 2012), 45.

⁷⁰Deiter Arnold, "Hypostyle Halls of the Old and Middle Kingdoms?" in *Studies in honor of William Kelly Simpson*, ed. Peter Der Manuelian and Rita E. Freed (Boston, 1996), 1:39, 44. Two palm columns with the same diameter of 183 cm support the *qiblah riwāq* in the mosque of al-Māridānī.



leum, but as they have no distinguishing features it would be difficult to postulate where they originally stood.

Unmentioned in any of the modern sources on the complex of Qalāwūn is the supposed discovery of a significant ancient *naos* over a century ago (Fig. 19) that was registered in the *Journal d'Entre* (JE 35128) when it entered the Egyptian Museum in 1901.⁷¹ As per the incomplete inscription on the front of the *naos*, it was dedicated to the God Onuris, Son of Ra, Lord of Sammanud (Sebennytos), and is dated to the time of Nektanebo II (r. 360–343 BC). It was published several years later in a cursory fashion in the *Catalogue Général* (CG 70012) volume on *naoi* in the museum's holdings.⁷² According to its author, the German Egyptologist Günther Roeder (1881–1966), it was brought to the museum from the *Muristan Kala'un*:⁷³ “Herkunft: 1901 aus dem *Muristan Kala'un* (*Krankenhaus in Kairo*) ins Museum gebracht; Maspero vermutet als Herkunft Sebennytos.”⁷⁴ However, there are several issues that loom over this particular object. In the first edition of the *Guide du visiteur au Musée du Caire*, French Egyptologist and director of the Antiquities Service Gaston Maspero (1846–1916)⁷⁵ wrote: “Il a été trouvé dans les fondations d'une maison du Caire.”⁷⁶ The JE entry specifically states that the *naos*

Egyptologist Stephen Harvey was instrumental in identifying this column type, and suggesting that the columns should be surveyed.

⁷¹I would like to thank Nicholas Warner (architectural historian) for alerting me to this find, and David Klotz (Egyptologist) and Cynthia May Sheikholeslami (Egyptologist/independent scholar) for guiding me to relevant references.

⁷²Günther Roeder, *Catalogue Général des Antiquités Égyptiennes du Musée du Caire: Naos* (Leipzig, 1914), 1:42–43, and pls. 14, 47b–c and e: it is erroneously listed as CG 70015 whereas in fact it is CG 70012.

⁷³The Egyptian Museum in Cairo has three separate sets of catalogues: the *Journal d'Entre* (JE) is the main register book of the Egyptian Museum, in which objects are registered as soon as they enter the museum and the numbering system is serial; the *Catalogue Général* (CG) is a series published according to the typology of objects, where those published receive a number that is also treated as an official museum number; and the *Special Register* (SR) is the registration book that is organized according to the objects in the custody of each section head.

⁷⁴Roeder, *Catalogue Général des Antiquités Égyptiennes du Musée du Caire: Naos*, 1:42–43. Neal A. Spencer states that it was actually found in a Cairo hospital in 1901: “The Epigraphic Survey of Samanud,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 85 (1999): 82, n. 113. I suspect “Muristan Kala'un” became “Krankenhaus in Kairo,” which was then translated into “Cairo hospital.”

⁷⁵Maspero headed the Antiquities Service from 1881 to 1886 and again from 1899 to 1914, and was a member of the Comité during his second term: Leturcq, “Jeu de miroirs et orientalisme dans les arts de l'islam,” 128.

⁷⁶Gaston Maspero, *Guide du visiteur au Musée du Caire* (Cairo, 1902), 102; and idem, *Guide to the Cairo Museum*, tr. by J. E. and A. A. Quibell. (Cairo, 1903), 173, no. 657: this is the English translation of the 1902 French *Guide* and the provenance is stated as “It was found in the foundations of a house in Cairo.”



was found in “Le Caire moristan,” but does not specifically name the *moristan* (hospital) of Qalāwūn. The term “*bīmāristān*” and variants of the word (*muristan* and *moristan*) have always been a specific reference to Qalāwūn’s hospital since the complex was founded in 683/1284–85; and at times “*bīmāristān*” has referred to the entire campus of buildings in the medieval and modern sources. The fact that the JE is the official register of the Egyptian Museum, which Roeder consulted, lends some credibility to the content of the CG entry.⁷⁷

The Egyptian Museum’s third catalogue, the *Special Register* (SR 5/9088), only lists a Cairo provenance, and the record in the Museum’s Registration, Collections Management, and Documentation Department’s (RCMDD) database mentions that it was found in Cairo and originally came from Tel Atrib (ancient Athribis) in the Delta.⁷⁸ Even more problematic, to date, this author has been unable to uncover any trace of the unearthing of the *naos* in the published bulletins or unpublished notes of the Comité, since they were certainly actively restoring the complex in 1901 when the shrine was supposedly transferred. This possible omission is not surprising given that the Comité did not always fully document all of their activities, as was the case with the arrangement of some of the Fatimid woodwork when first discovered in 1910.

Regardless of where this *naos* was found, there are two pieces of evidence that suggest it was positioned lying on its back. First, the projecting cavetto cornice at the top was clumsily removed (Fig. 20). This would make sense if the *naos* was installed on a floor, whereby removing the cornice would allow it to fit flush with the rest of the surface or against a wall. One could imagine that the *naos* was analogously reused as a basin or trough of a fountain in the complex, even though there are no holes for drainage at the bottom or back as one might expect for an object of this size that was reused in such a way. The uninscribed right jamb is definitely slightly worn down in a way that suggests long repeated contact as when feet wear down thresholds. If the *naos* was indeed used as a basin, people reaching down into it would wear one edge like the right jamb. Another indication that it might have been re-used as a basin is a sarcophagus of Nectanebo II now in the collection of the British Museum (EA10, dated to 345 BC) that has drilled drainage holes at the bottom and was re-used as a ritual bath in Alexandria’s Mosque of a Thousand Columns (ex-Church of St. Athanasius built

⁷⁷In his preface to the 1903 English *Guide*, Maspero admitted that there were errors in the first edition due to the rush to publish in advance of the inauguration of the Egyptian Museum on 15 November 1902: *Guide to the Cairo Museum*, III–VI.

⁷⁸With thanks to the RCMDD for providing me with details on the *naos* and furnishing photographs for publication.



ca. 282–300).⁷⁹ Perhaps the *naos* was also associated with ritual since Qalāwūn's complex was a site of several significant royal ceremonies,⁸⁰ or it could have been put to more practical use in the *bīmāristān*.

Concluding Remarks

In addition to the “reuse” vs. “*spolia*” debate there are other considerations that need to be fleshed out. The fact that the complex of Qalāwūn features so much *spolia* is fascinating in and of itself, resulting in a visual cacophony of a harmonious, discriminating, and sophisticated display where attention was paid to the quality of material and detail. If one wants to delve even deeper into specific aspects of the broader concept of reuse/*spolia*, there are a number of avenues to pursue. One could examine the sources, manners of acquisition, and transport patterns of architectural elements over great distances from different parts of Egypt to be reused in buildings in Cairo. Judging by the distance of locations from which the architectural elements were taken, we can speculate on their worth to the medieval builders. Such elements were not simply picked up from the nearest ruin as one might gather from al-Maqrīzī's bland account of the Roda citadel. On the contrary, they were selectively procured because there was an obvious appreciation for finely cut and precious materials that were no longer mined or readily available during the Islamic period. The matching columns and capitals throughout the complex also suggests that care was taken to select material with suitable dimensions and uniformity.⁸¹

What was the selection process or motives? In other words, to borrow from Esch, why were certain remnants of a previous culture chosen (or discarded) out of the rich repertoire of stone available in Egypt?⁸² All the *spolia* found in the complex of Qalāwūn, regardless of period, were incorporated for different purposes resulting in the co-existence of, and a distinction between, architectural elements that were salvaged (Fatimid woodwork) and those that were purposefully removed from intact buildings (Ayyubid citadel), ultimately disfiguring them permanently. The most obvious reason for integrating material from older buildings is practical, coupled with the relatively quick access to stone from Egypt's rich Pharaonic, late antique, and early Islamic heritage. Patrons and builders made use of dis-

⁷⁹Porter and Moss, *Topographical Bibliography*, 4:3–4. I would like to thank Tom Hardwick for bringing this sarcophagus to my attention.

⁸⁰Behrens-Abouseif, *Cairo of the Mamluks*, 138; and al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭat*, 4:2:518–22.

⁸¹Arnold Esch, “On the Reuse of Antiquity: the Perspectives of the Archaeologist and of the Historian,” in *Reuse Value*, ed. Brilliant and Kinney, 15; and Behrens-Abouseif, “Between Quarry and Magic,” 405.

⁸²Esch, “On the Reuse of Antiquity,” 22–23.



carded secondhand structural elements in order to speed building projects and reduce their cost, making labor-intensive quarrying inessential. One should keep in mind, though, that ancient monuments were not only selected because they were ancient, but because they were impressive, monumental, and sturdily built out of precious, valuable materials (including wood). As is evident in Qalāwūn's complex, pre-Islamic monuments were not the only ones exploited: with the fall of the Fatimids in 567/1171, additional materials from the caliphal palaces located in the heart of the city became available, as well as objects brought to Cairo from the conquered Crusader cities in Syria.⁸³

Was the practice of reuse ideologically charged? Perhaps one could argue that Sanjar al-Shujā'ī looked to antiquity with a gaze that was both approbative and exploitative. To methodologically recycle architectural material from the citadel on Roda when masons were available seems to reflect a conscious choice, especially given his discerning eye and predilection for collecting impressive pieces that were ancient and contemporary.

As previously mentioned, modern scholarship has emphasized and fixated on the Fatimid woodwork found in the complex, leaving Creswell and others to focus on reconstructing the *qā'ah* of Sitt al-Mulk. However, that the woodwork was given priority by scholars of the last century because of their decoration does not imply that the Mamluk-period builders felt the same way. Proof of this lies in the fact that the decorations of the Fatimid panels were purposefully obscured or placed in areas that were not particularly visible to the visitor because they valued the precious wood. Contrast this with the columns, capitals, and sills, none of which appear to have been plastered over, that contributed to the grandeur and efficacy of the space over time. It is the latter that are commented on in the sources and continue to impress visitors to the complex today.

In response to these oversights, this study aims to reflect a different kind of reconstruction: to draw equal attention to all of the reused elements and their later multiple contexts and lives; but also to have a meaningful discussion about how some of these elements were received in the modern period, which ultimately led to their "reuse" as artifacts in museum collections. Should we, for example, distinguish between the large variety of reused elements that are still *in situ*; the provenanced and unprovenanced Fatimid "objects" in museum collections; and the ancient *naos* said to have come from the complex but with inconsistent documentation? A closer look into the biographies and travels of the collectors and dealers associated with these artifacts will certainly show a connection between them—they belonged to the same art historical and social milieu—and their role in supplying museums in Europe and the US with unique "objects." Moreover, this has not been an exercise in futility, rather an attempt to explore the fabric

⁸³ Meinecke-Berg, "Spolien in der mittelalterlichen Architektur von Kairo," 131.



of *spolia* in order to fill holes in the scholarship by assembling and interpreting evidence from medieval and archival records in the complementary disciplines of history, archaeology, art history, and Egyptology.



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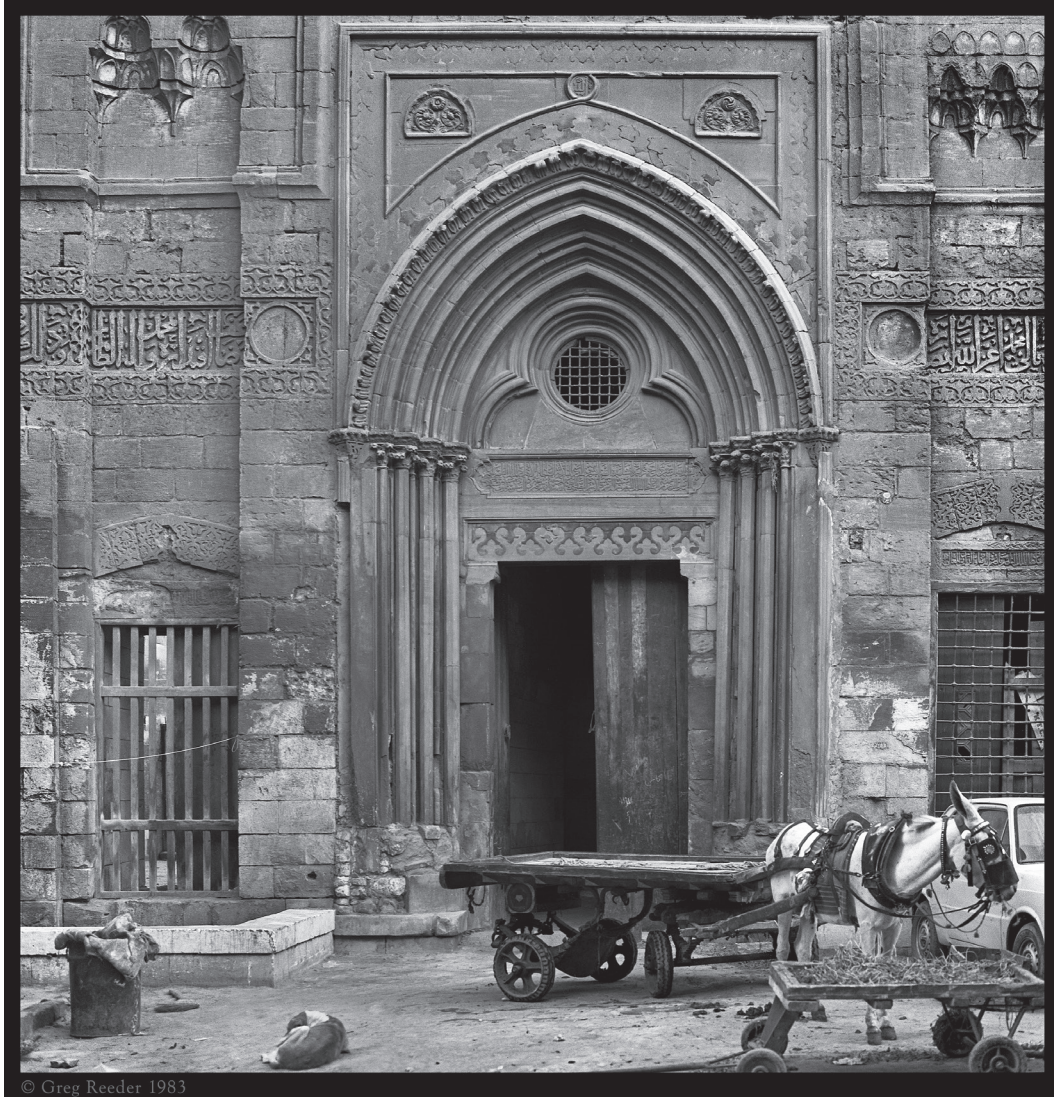


Figure 1: Gothic portal, madrasah of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. (© Greg Reeder, 1983)



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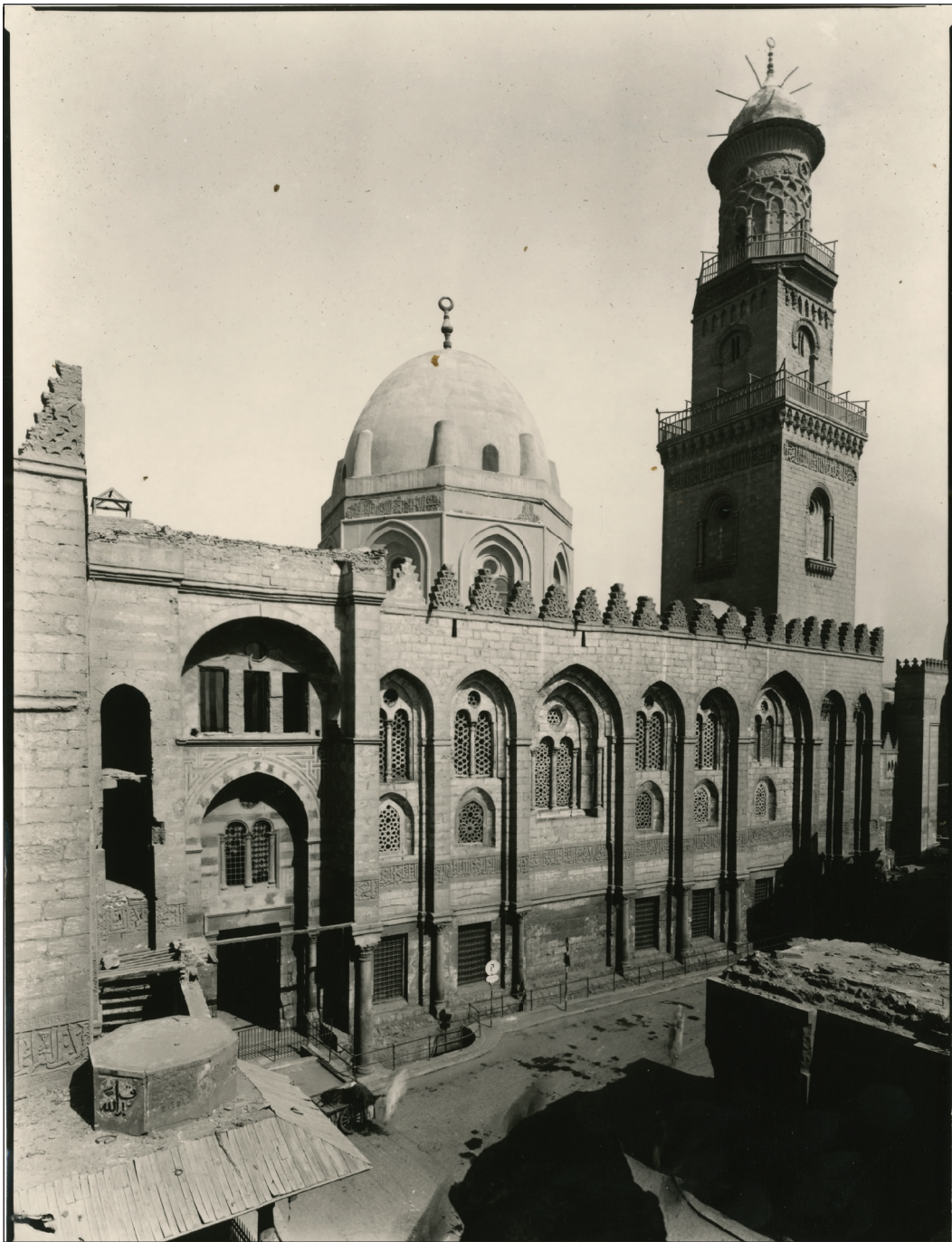


Figure 2: Exterior, complex of Qalāwūn. (© Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo)



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Figure 3: Decoration in the *mihrab* of the mausoleum, complex of Qalāwūn.
(Photo by the author)



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Figure 4: Detail of pavement in the mausoleum, complex of Qalāwūn. (Photo by the author)



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Figure 5: Stucco window on the north wall of the *bīmāristān*'s south-east *īwān*, complex of Qalāwūn. (Photo by the author)



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Figure 6: Stucco window in the Museum of Islamic Art, Accession No. 4046. (© Sandro Vannini/Laboratoriorosso)



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Figure 7: Stucco window, complex of Qalāwūn. (© Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo)



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Figure 8: Fatimid wooden panel from the palace of Sitt al-Mulk, Museum of Islamic Art, Accession No. 441. (Photograph by Boulos Isaac from *The Treasures of Islamic Art in the Museums of Cairo*, edited by Bernard O’Kane, copyright © 2005 by the American University in Cairo Press)



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Figure 9: Fatimid wooden panel from the *qāʿah* of Sitt al-Mulk. (© Center for the Documentation of Islamic and Coptic Antiquities, Ministry of Antiquities, Egypt)



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Figure 10: In situ Fatimid wooden panels, complex of Qalāwūn. (Photo by the author)



Figure 11: Fatimid wooden panel from the *qā'ah* of Sitt al-Mulk, Accession No. LNS 55W. (© The al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait)



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Figure 12: Fatimid wooden panel from the *qā'ah* of Sitt al-Mulk, Museum of Islamic Art, Accession No. 3391. (© Sandro Vannini/Laboratoriorosso)



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Figure 13: Fatimid wooden panel from the *qā'ah* of Sitt al-Mulk, Accession No. OA 4062. (© 2007 Musée du Louvre /Claire Tabbagh/Digital Collections)



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Figure 14: Inscribed plaque on the south wall of the mausoleum, complex of Qalāwūn. (Photo by the author)



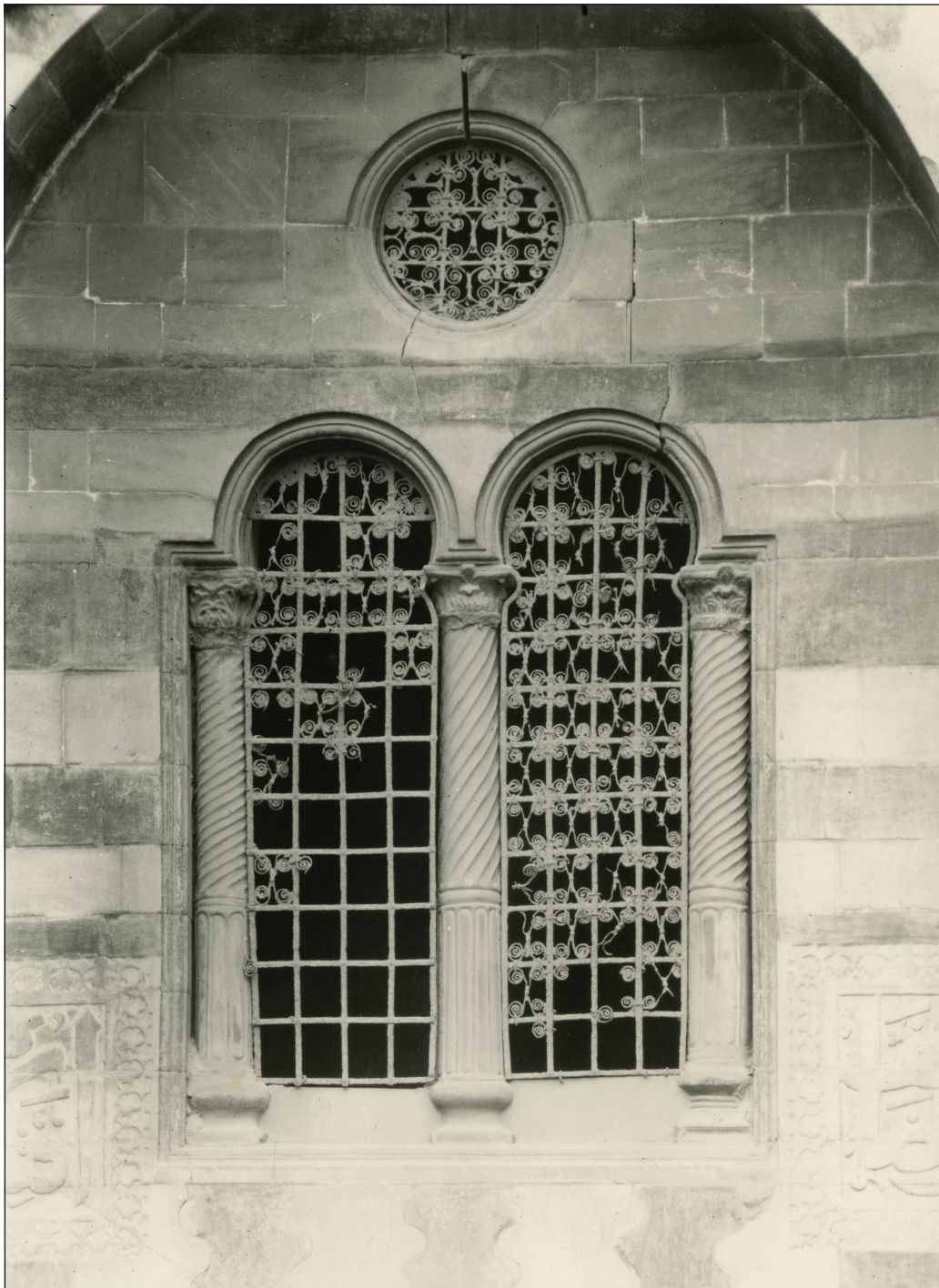


Figure 15: Iron window grille above the entrance, complex of Qalāwūn. (© Rare Books and Special Collections Library, The American University in Cairo)



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Figure 16: Bell-shaped capital in the *bīmāristān*, complex of Qalāwūn. (Photo by the author)



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Figure 17: Bell-shaped base supporting a column in the madrasah, complex of Qalāwūn. (Photo by the author)



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Figure 18: Palm columns in the madrasah, complex of Qalāwūn. (Photo by the author)



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Figure 19: *Naos* of Nectanebo II, Accession No. JE 35128. (© The Egyptian Museum in Cairo)



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Figure 20: Cornice, *naos* of Nectanebo II, Accession No. JE 35128. (© The Egyptian Museum in Cairo)



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