

Exploring the Paradoxical Architecture of Al-Aqmar Mosque in Fatimid Cairo (519 AH / 1125)

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Abstract:

The Aqmar Mosque is a striking example of Islamic architecture in Historic Cairo, known for its visually dramatic façade, which seems to defy gravity due to its significant projection and street alignment. It has long been linked to the unique hanging architectural style that originated in Cairo during the Fatimid era. This paper thoroughly analyzes this Mosque's architectural characteristics and style to determine whether it represents a unique approach within the more extensive Fatimid architectural history or falls into the typical hanging architectural style of the Fatimid era. The study also comprehensively analyzes the Mosque's exterior, interior, and structural elements. Additionally, the study sheds light on the building's significance as an architectural marvel renowned for its inventive design and symbolic portrayal of Fatimid patronage. Fieldwork, historical research, and comparative analysis create a solid basis for analyzing the mosque's features and defining its importance as a symbol of Fatimid architectural achievements.

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Keywords:

Aqmar Mosque; Fatimid Architecture; Hanging Architecture; Fatimid Cairo; Islamic Architecture.

Methodology:

This study adopts an analytical-comparative approach to thoroughly examine the architectural style of the Aqmar Mosque in detail. An extensive field documentation and architectural assessment of the Aqmar Mosque were conducted as the first steps in the research process. This includes thorough photographic documentation and careful on-site direct eye observation. To place the Aqmar Mosque within the larger architectural and cultural context of the Fatimid era, the study uses a variety of archival and contemporary historical sources in addition to a thorough review of secondary sources on Fatimid architecture and urbanism in Cairo, as well as the travelers accounts. In order to determine the common architectural aspects and any variations that would set the Aqmar Mosque apart from the established hanging style, the study process also includes a critical comparison analysis with other notable hanging structures from the Fatimid period.

Objectives of the Study:

This paper seeks to uncover the innovative and sometimes perplexing qualities that have made the Aqmar Mosque a topic of enduring interest for scholars of Islamic architecture. This research aims to contribute significantly to the ongoing scholarly discussion on the Aqmar Mosque and the unique architectural heritage of the Fatimid caliphate in medieval Cairo.

Literature Review:

Numerous archaeological and historical studies have been conducted on this mosque, focusing on its decorative and architectural elements as well as its construction style. These studies have aroused controversy regarding the architectural nature and style of the mosque. Renowned archaeologist Hasan

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‘Abd al-Wahāb suggested that the mosque follows a hanging architectural style based on historical descriptions¹, which Doris-Behrens Abouseif also supported.² On the other hand, Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Rāziq and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Sattār ‘Uṭmān dismissed the idea that the mosque followed the hanging architectural style.³ Surprisingly, Caroline Williams and Bernard O’Kane did not delve into the architectural style of this mosque, focusing instead on describing the façade and its alignment with the road. This sparked the researcher’s curiosity to profoundly investigate this mosque’s exceptional architectural style and determine whether it adheres to the hanging architectural style or not.⁴

I. Introduction:

When the Fatimids⁵ arrived in Egypt in 358 AH / 969 AD, they initiated a series of architectural projects.⁶ The Aqmar Mosque, built in 519 AH / 1125 AD

¹ Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Tārīḥ al-Masāğid al-Āṭariya* (Cairo, 2014), I: 70 – 73.

² Doris-Behrens Abouseif, *Islamic Architecture in Cairo: An Introduction* (Cairo, 1989), 72 – 74; Doris-Behrens Abouseif, “The Façade of the Aqmar Mosque in the Context of Fatimid Ceremonial.” *Muqarnas* 9, (1992): 29 – 38.

³ Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *Tārīḥ wa’ Āṭār Miṣr al-Islāmiya min al-Faṭḥ al-‘Arabī ḥatā Nihāyat al-‘Aṣr al-Fāṭimī* (Cairo: Dār Al-Fikr Al-‘Arabī, 1999), 249, 251 – 255.

⁴ Caroline Williams, *Islamic Monuments in Cairo: The Practical Guide* (Cairo, 2008), 198 – 200; Bernard O’Kane, *The Mosques of Egypt* (Cairo, 2016), 28 – 31.

⁵ The Fatimids were a branch of the Shiite sect known as Ismā‘īliya, who believed in the succession of leadership (Imāms) from Muḥammad to his son-in-law ‘Alī, to Ḥasan and Ḥussayn (his grandsons), and then to the descendants of Ḥussayn through Ḥussayn’s son ‘Alī Zayn Al-‘Abidīn. Williams, *The Practical Guide*, 199.

⁶ According to Al-Maqrīzī, Cairo was founded in 358 AH / 969 AD and completed in 361 AH / 972 AD by Ġawhar Al-Saqlabī, the chief commander of the Fatimid army, during the reign of the Fatimid Caliph Al-Mu‘izz li-Dīn Allāh. Throughout the Fatimid period, Cairo played a significant role and had a rich historical background, known for its impressive intellectual, religious, and scientific legacy. Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū’ l-Faḍl ‘Abdullāh Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir Naṣwān (D. 692 AH / 1293 AD), *Al-Rawḍah al-Bahiyah al-Zāhira fī Ḥiṭaṭ al-Mu‘izziya al-Qāhira*, ed. Ayman Fū‘ād Sayyid, 1st edition (Cairo, 1996), 14 – 16; Abū Bakr Abdu-Allāh Ibn Aybak Al-Dawādārī (D. 736 AH / 1335 AD), *Kinz al-Durr wa Ḡāmi’ al-Ġurr: Al-Durra al-Muḍiy’a fī Aḥbār al-Dawla al-Fāṭimiya*, ed. Ṣalāh al-Dīn Al-Munḡğid (Cairo: 1961), VI: 139; Taqī al-Dīn Abī’ l-‘Abbās Aḥmad Al-Maqrīzī (D. 845 AH / 1442 AD), *Iṭī‘āz al-Ḥunafā bī- Aḥbār al-‘Ā’imah al-Fāṭimīn al-Ḥulafā*, ed. Ḡamāl al-Dīn al-Ṣayāl, (Cairo, 1996), I: 114; Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Mawā‘iẓ wa’ l- I’tibār bī- Ḍikr Al-Ḥiṭaṭ wa’ l- Āḡār*, ed. Ayman Fū‘ād Sayyid (London: Al-Furqan Institution for Islamic Heritage, 2004), II: 56- 58, 80, 212- 222; Ḡamāl al-Dīn Abī’ l-Maḥāsīn Yūsuf Ibn Taḡrī-Bardī (D. 874 AH / 1470 AD), *Al-Nuḡūm al-Zāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa’ l- Qāhira*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥussayn Ṣams al-Dīn, (Beirut, 1992), IV: 35 – 39, 76 – 79; Abī’ l-‘Abbās Ṣihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Al-Qalqaṣandī (D. 821 AH / 1418 AD), *Ṣubḥ al-Ā’šā fī Ṣinā’at al-Inṣā* (Cairo, 1919), III: 345; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Zakī, *Bunāt al-Qāhira fī Alf’ Āam* (Cairo, 1996), 3, 4.

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during the Fatimid rule, stands out as a notable example of medieval Cairo's architectural creativity and cultural vibrancy. Situated in the heart of the historic city, this mosque is renowned for its unique façade that defies gravity with its striking projection and artistic elements. Many scholars consider the Aqmar Mosque a prime illustration of the hanging architectural style that emerged in Fatimid-era Cairo.⁷ However, there is ongoing scholarly debate about the precise architectural style of the Aqmar Mosque and its connection to the hanging style. While the mosque's high-rise design is attention-grabbing, further exploration is needed to determine its alignment with the defining features of Fatimid hanging structures.⁸ Placing the Aqmar Mosque in the broader context of Fatimid architecture in Cairo can provide valuable insights into its cultural, technological, and symbolic significance, enriching our understanding of its legacy. By examining the Aqmar Mosque within the evolving architectural styles and cultural priorities of the Fatimid era, this study aims to illuminate its importance as both an architectural marvel and a symbol of Fatimid power and patronage.

II. Historical Context:

Architectural Index No.	33.
Founder	Caliph Al-Āmir bī' Aḥkām-Allāh.
Dates	519 AH / 1125 AD.
Type	Mosque.
Current Location	Al-Naḥḥāsīn district: Al-Mu'izz Street.
Location on the Map	Map 1: 3ḥ.
Coordinates	30°03'05"N 31°15'42"E.
Era	Fatimid.
Other Names	<i>Al-Ġāmi' Al-Aqmar.</i>
Accessibility	Open to the public.
Current State	In excellent status of preservation.

⁷ Cairo is one of the most significant cities established in Egypt during the Islamic era. The Fatimids founded it upon their arrival in Egypt, and it successively developed over time to become a destination for scholars, thinkers, and merchants, as well as a metropolis of civilization and history. Ibn Taġrī-Bardī, *Al-Nuġūm*, III: 3, 18 – 20; Šārim al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Al-'Alā'aī Ibn Duqmāq (D. 809 AH / 1406 AD), *Al-Intiṣār li- Wāṣit 'Aqd al-Amṣār* (Beirut, 1894), I : 2 – 8; Paul Ravaisse, *Essai sur l'Histoire et la Topographie du Caire d'Après Maqrizi: Mémoires de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire* (Paris, 1889), I: 415- 417, 420; Alfred Patler, *Faṭḥ al-'Arab li -Miṣr*, trans. Muḥammad Farīd Abū Ḥadīd (Cairo, 1946), 289.

⁸ 'Abd al-Raḥmān Zakī, *Bunāt al-Qāhira fī Alf 'Ām* (Cairo, 1996), 5; Šihātah 'Issā Ibrāhīm, *Al-Qāhira: Tārīḥahā, Naš'ihā, Imtidādihā, Taṭūrihā* (Cairo, 1959), 14, 15, 35, 36; Ayman Fū'ād Sayyid, *The Topography and Urban Evolution of Cairo* (Cairo, 2015), 65, 66, 67.

- **The Location:**

According to Ibn Muyassir and Al-Maqrīzī, who quoted Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, the current location of this mosque was once a place of a trough and fodder shops where animal feed was sold. However, Ma’mūn Al-Baṭā’ihī decided to demolish these shops and construct the mosque in their stead in 519 AH/1125 AD. Additionally, shops and warehouses were built underneath it on the northern side, specifically facing Bāb Al-Futūḥ.⁹ It is currently located in Al-Mu’izz Street or the Qaṣaba at Al-Naḥḥāsīn district.¹⁰ (Fig. 1)

- **The Founder:**

This mosque was built by Ma’mūn Al-Baṭā’ihī, the vizier of the Fatimid Caliph Al-Āmir bī’ Aḥkām-Allāh (495 - 524 AH / 1101 – 1129 AD), who became the vizier just four years before the mosque was finished.¹¹

⁹ Ḡalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Zuhīrah Al-Maḥzūmī (817 AH / 1414 AD), *Al-Faḍā’il al-Bāhira fī Maḥāsīn Miṣr wa’l- Qāhira*, eds. Muṣṭafa Al-Saqqā and Kāmil Al-Muhandis (Cairo: Dār Al-Kuttub, 1969), 42; Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, *Al-Rawḍah al-Baḥīyah*, 73, 74; Taḡ al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn ‘Alī Ibn Yūsuf Ibn Muyassir Ibn Ḡalab (D. 677 AH / 1278 AD), *Aḥbār Miṣr*, ed. Henry Massey (Cairo: IFAO, 1919), II: 44, 49 – 52; Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Ḥiṭaṭ*, II: 480, 513 – 515; IV: 150; Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Muntaqā min Aḥbār Miṣr li-’ bn Muyassir*, ed. Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid (Cairo: IFAO, 1981), 91; Šārim al-Dīn Ibrāhīm Al-’Alā’āī Ibn Duqmāq (D. 809 AH / 1406 AD), *Al-Intiṣār li- Wāṣṭit ‘Aqd al-Amṣār* (Beirut, 1894), IV: 121; Henri Lavoix, *Catalogue des Monnaies Musulmanes de la Bibliothèque Nationale: Egypte et Syrie* (Paris, 1896), 60 – 63; Keppel Archibald Cameron Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt “MAE”* (London, 1959), II: 239 – 241.

¹⁰ According to Al-Maqrīzī, Al-Qaṣab is considered the largest market in Egypt. He learned from a long-time resident that it boasts an impressive twelve thousand shops. Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Ḥiṭaṭ*, III: 316

¹¹ Caliph Al-Āmir bī- Aḥkām-Allāh was born in 490 AH / 1087 AD and became the caliph on the day of his father’s death in the same year (495 AH / 1101 AD). At that time, he was only about five years old, and his rule was managed by the vizier Al-Afḍal Šāhn Šāh, the son of chief commander Badr Al-Ḡammālī. The Caliph was known for his generosity, and his reign was marked by prosperity and well-being. The coin minting house was established during his Caliphate in 516 AH / 1122 AD. However, one criticism against him is his negligence in the jihad, which resulted in the Franks gaining control over most of the coasts. Moreover, Ibn Ḥillkān described him as opinionated, unjust, reckless, and someone who feigned playfulness, amusement, immorality, and arrogance. In 524 AH / 1129, he was assassinated on his way to *Al-Rawḍa* Island, orchestrated by his vizier Ma’mūn Al-Baṭā’ihī. Abū Muḥammad Al-Murtaḍā Ibn Al-Ṭawīr Al-Qaysarānī (D. 617 AH / 1220 AD), *Nuḥḍat al-Muqḍatīn fī Aḥbār al-Dawlatīn*, ed. Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid (Beirut, 1992), II: 8, 11, 24 – 31; Ibn Muyassir, *Aḥbār Miṣr*, II: 150 (40); Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Muntaqā min Aḥbār Miṣr*, 69 – 73; Ibn ‘Abd al-Zāhir, *Al-Rawḍah al-Baḥīyah*, 73; Šihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahāb Al-Nūwīrī (D. 733 AH / 1332 AD), *Nihāyat al-’Irāb fī Funūn al-Adab*, eds. Naḡīb Fawāz and Ḥikmat Fawāz (Beirut: Dār Al-Kuttub Al-’Ilmiya, 2004), XXVIII: 159, 160, 175 – 177; Abī’ l-’Abbās šams al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Ḥillkān (D. 681 AH / 1282 AD), *Waḡyāt al-’A’yān wa ‘Anbā’ Abnā’ al-Zamān*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut, Undated), V: 299 – 320; Ḡamāl al-Dīn Abū ‘Alī Ibn Al-Ma’mūn Al-Baṭā’ihī (D. 588 AH / 1192 AD), *Nuṣūṣ min Aḥbār Miṣr*, ed. Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid (Cairo: IFAO, 1983), 38, 39; Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ al-Ḥunafā*, III: 27 – 35, 120 – 128; Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Ḥiṭaṭ*, IV: 156 – 162; Ibn Taḡrī-Bardī, *Al-Nuḡūm*, V: 145, 153, 166 – 178, 183 – 230; Samuel Stern, “The Succession to the Fatimid

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III. Architectural Features and Design:

Al-Aqmar¹² Mosque is a compact congregational mosque that is now located in the heart of the Fatimid city, specifically in the Bayn Al-Qaṣrīn district at Al-Muʿizz Street.¹³ It stands on the northeastern corner of the previously magnificent eastern Fatimid palace. The mosque follows a hypostyle architectural plan, featuring an open courtyard and four *Riwāqs*, with the Qibla *Riwāq* being the largest.¹⁴ The street level has risen significantly over the centuries, so one must go downstairs to enter the mosque. In 799 AH / 1397 AD, during Sultan Barqūq's sultanate, Amīr Yalbugā Al-Sālīmī restored the mosque in 799 AH/1397 AD and added a minaret and stalls on the right side of the entrance.¹⁵ (Fig. 2)

This building is unique as it has a street projecting-façade at a different angle from the Qibla. The Fatimid mosques directly inspire the projecting entrance of this mosque in the city of Al-Mahdiya. (Pl. I) The interior was designed to be symmetrical, with additional rooms on the north side. The façade facing the Qibla was parallel to the street, possibly due to its proximity to the Fatimid palace. This may explain why the mosque initially lacked a minaret, despite it

Imam Al-Āmir, the Claims of the Later Fatimids to the Imamate, and the Rise of Tayyibī Ismailism." *Oriens* 4, No. 2 (1951): 193 – 255; Gaston Wiet, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum* (Cairo, 1954), II: 183, 184.

¹² The term "*Al-Aqmar*" does not refer to the founder's name; instead, it is an epithet that can be interpreted as "moonlit." During the Fatimid era, it is noteworthy that the naming convention utilized the exaggerated Arabic sound "*Afal*" to highlight the grandeur of the structures, as exemplified by the name "*Al-Aqmar*," which signifies radiance, illumination, and splendor. Abouseif, *An Introduction*, 72; Muḥammad 'Abd Al-Sattār 'Uṭmān, *Mūsū'at al-'Imāra al-Fāṭimiya* (Cairo, 2006), I: 389; Williams, *The Practical Guide*, 199.

¹³ *Bayn Al-Qaṣrīn*, also known as the *Qaṣaba*, is the central avenue of Fatimid and medieval Cairo. Its name means "Between the Two Palaces." It served as a ceremonial ground between the grand Eastern Palace and the lesser Western Palace of the Fatimid caliphs. Williams, *The Practical Guide*, 185.

¹⁴ The term "*Riwāq*" in religious buildings refers to a covered area between rows of columns running from north to south (portico or bay), or it can be an architectural unit consisting of columns perpendicular to one of the walls of the building (*Balāṭa* or *Zulla*). Āmīn and Layilā, *Al-Muṣṭalahāt al-Mi'māriya*, 57, 58; Ḥasan 'Abd' l-Wahāb, *Al-Muṣṭalahāt al-Fanniya li' l-'Imāra al-Islāmiya* (Cairo, Undated), 30, 31; 'Aṣim Rizq, *Mu'ḡam Muṣṭalahāt al-'Imāra wa'l-Funūn al-Islāmiya*, 1st edition (Cairo, 2000), 125.

¹⁵ Su'ād Māhir, *Masājid Miṣr wa' Awliya' whā al-Ṣāliḥīn* (Cairo: High Council for Islamic Affairs, 1970), I: 322, 323; Caroline Williams, "The Cult of 'Alid Saints in the Fatimid Monuments of Cairo: The mosque of al-Aqmar," *Muqarnas* 1, (1983): 37 – 52; Kamāl al-Dīn Sāmīḥ, *Lamahāt fī Tārīḥ Al-'Imāra al-Miṣriya Munḍu Aqdam al-'Uṣūr hatā al-'Aṣr al-Ḥadīṭ* (Cairo, 1986), 57; Asmā' Muḥammad Ismā'īl, "*Aṭar al-Takadus al-Umrānī 'alā 'Imārat Madīnat al-Qāhira fī l-'Aṣrīn al-Ayyūbī wa'l-Mamlūkī*," (Master diss., Cairo University, 2001), 16; Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid, *Al-Dawla al-Fāṭimiya Tafsīr Gādīd* (Cairo: Al-Dār Al-Miṣriya Al-Lubnāniya, 2007), 236, 237.

being a standard feature in other Fatimid mosques in Cairo.¹⁶ A Fatimid jurist had previously criticized minarets for allowing the praying caller (muezzin) to see into neighboring homes, but overlooking commoners' houses was deemed acceptable.¹⁷ However, overlooking the palace was a different matter. It appears that secular concerns, rather than religious ones, may have influenced the dynasty's decision-making in this case.¹⁸

1- The Exterior Projecting Façade

Al-Aqmar Mosque was constructed during significant political and spiritual turmoil within the Fatimid regime. It is a pivotal structure in Cairo's architectural history. This mosque was the first in Cairo to have its entrance not aligned with the Qibla wall, with the façade following the street's alignment while the Qibla wall faces the Mecca orientation. **(Fig. 3)** This was the initial instance of a ground plan being adapted to Cairo's existing street layout, a trend

¹⁶ The original construction of this mosque lacked minarets. Al-Maqrīzī reported that he spoke with Amr Yalbugā Ibn 'Abdullāh Al-Sālamī, the renovator of the mosque during Sultan Barqūq's reign. He praised him for adding a minaret on the northern side of the *Mihrāb*, coating the mosque, adding shops with barracks above it in its north façade, and decorating the frontal wall with lapis lazuli and gold. However, Al-Maqrīzī criticized him for adding a pulpit, as there was no need for sermons in this mosque since they were delivered at nearby mosques like Al-Azhar and Al-Hākim. The ablution fountain's placement in the courtyard was also criticized for making the mosque too narrow. In defense of his renovations, Amr Yalbugā explained that this layout was originally from the Fatimid era and aimed to facilitate ablution. He cited Ibn Al-Ṭawīr's accounts about this mosque, who mentioned that the preacher of Al-Azhar was giving sermons in this mosque, followed by the preacher of Al-Aqmar. Amr Yalbugā placed a slab above the *Mihrāb* detailing the mosque's original elements and his renovations. Historical sources do not explain why that mosque lacks a minaret in its original plan. Scholars speculate it was to maintain privacy and sanctity for the nearby Fatimid palaces. The presence of minarets in all Fatimid Mosques, relatively far from the palaces and built before and after the Aqmar Mosque, supports this theory. It seems safe to say that building minarets near the Fatimid palaces may not have been a priority, given the exclusive nature of the ruling family's area. The call to prayer may have been made from the mosque's roof close to the royal residences. The Aqmar Mosque was initially reserved for the ruling class, possibly explaining the absence of a minaret. Al-Ṭawīr, *Nuzhat al-Muqlatīn*, 219; Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Ḥiṭaṭ*, IV: 150 – 155; Aḥmad Fikrī, *Masājid al-Qāhira wa Madārisha: Al-'Aṣr al-Fāṭimī* (Cairo, 2008) I: 95, 96.

¹⁷ Some historians have mentioned that the construction of this small mosque adjacent to the Grand ruling palace can be attributed to various factors, with political and power struggles particularly significant. One crucial motive behind its establishment was to enhance the mosque's security as it is conveniently located within its premises. Additionally, the mosque's small size allows for efficient monitoring of the individuals within its premises. This ensures the Caliph's safety during prayers and while delivering the Friday sermon (*Ḥuṭba*). Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Ḥiṭaṭ*, II: 424, 425; Muḥammad 'Abd al-Sattār 'Uṣmān, *Dirāsāt Aṭāriya fī l-'Imāra al-'Abbāsiya wa l-Fāṭimiya* (Cairo, 2003), 348 – 351.

¹⁸ Doris-Behrens Abouseif, *The Minarets of Cairo* (Cairo: AUP, 2010), 12, 13; O'Kane, *The Mosques of Egypt*, 28, 29.

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that would become more prevalent and intricate in the following centuries. Additionally, it was the first mosque in Cairo to feature a highly sophisticated decoration scheme on its outer stone façade.¹⁹

The façade of this building in Egypt is unique as it features decorative elements not only on the portal but also on the adjacent walls. **(PI. II)** The foundation inscription, which includes the names of the patron and caliph, runs along the entire length of the façade and is repeated at mid-height and the top. The stylized scallop shell motif is prominent throughout, with variations in the curvature of the arches and the fluting. The central arch contains a medallion with intricately carved vegetal bands and a Quranic inscription stating, “*And God only wishes to remove all abomination from you, Members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless,*”²⁰ referencing the People of the House (*Ahl Al-Bayt*), which the Shiites took as a reference to their legitimacy. The medallion also features the names of Prophet Muḥammad (peace and prayers be upon him) and Imām ‘Alī. **(PI. III)** Additionally, a unique motif resembling a door is carved on the side, possibly symbolizing a cupboard door found near the main prayer hall. **(PI. IV)** Two plausible interpretations have been proposed for these doors; the first interpretation is religious, based on weak hadith commonly agreed on among Shiite states that prophet Muḥammad is the city of knowledge, and ‘Alī is its gate, whoever seeks knowledge would enter through it.”²¹ It refers to the significance of Imām ‘Alī as the gateway to knowledge. The second interpretation is secular, noting that one of the founder’s titles was *Ṣāhib Al-Bāb*, meaning the Gate Keeper. This title

¹⁹ Abouseif, “The Façade of the Aqmar Mosque,” 29 – 32.

²⁰ “*Bī’sm Allāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm, Inn mā Yurīd Allāh lī-Yuḏhib ‘ankum al-Riḡis Ahl al-Bayt wa Yuṭahirakum Taḥīrā.*” Quran, XXXIII: 33. Translation after: Yūsuf ‘Alī, (<https://quranyusufali.com/33/>).

²¹ “*Anā Madīnat al-‘Ilm wa ‘Alī Bābuhā, fa-man Arāda al-‘Ilm fa’ li’tihī min Bābih.*” Most Muslim scholars consider this hadith weak (*Da‘īf*) due to its weak chain of transmission, but its meaning is still considered good. However, the Shiites have extensively used it. Šams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Al-Sīḥāwī (D. 902 AH / 1497 AD), *Al-Maqāṣid al-Ḥasana fī Bayān al-Aḥādīṯ al-Muṣṭahra ‘alā al-‘Alīna*, ed. Muḥammad Al-Ḥuṣṭ (Cairo: Dār Al-Kitāb Al-‘Arabī, 1985), 169 – 171.

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highlights his power to control access to the caliph.²² The second interpretation seems to be more convincing as it pertains to the founder of the mosque.

On the left corner of the façade, a unique feature in Cairo is the beveled lower corner designed to facilitate traffic flow in the narrow lane. It is adorned with an elegant muqarnas niche inscribed with the names of Prophet Muḥammad (*PPUH*) and Imām ‘Alī. The courtyard façade still showcases original Kufic inscriptions with intricate vegetal background carvings in stucco.²³ The current crenellations were added during the Bohra restoration. **(Pl. V)** Moreover, Amīr Yalbuḡā replaced the original prayer niche (*Miḥrāb*) decoration with marble paneling, which was later replaced in the recent restoration. **(Pl. VI)** The upper part of the minaret, added by Amīr Yalbuḡā, partially collapsed in 815 AH/1412 AD and was replaced with a simple cylinder, likely during the Ottoman period. The lower part of Yalbuḡā’s minaret was brick-covered with stucco, while the stone muqarnas above it featured delicately carved arabesques and openwork bosses often mistaken for stucco.²⁴ **(Pl. VII)**

Notably, the façade decoration showcases a unique and uncommon iconographic composition in Islamic architecture, featuring explicit Shiite ideology. The name of Imām ‘Alī, whom Shiite rulers claim descent from, is prominently displayed alongside that of Prophet Muḥammad (*PPUH*) in multiple locations. Roundels with the words “Muḥammad” and “‘Alī” are positioned on each side of the top niche and in the sided beveled corner, conveying the message that verily God is with Prophet Muḥammad (*PPUH*)

²² Hasan ‘Abd al-Wahāb, *Tārīḥ al-Masāʿid*, I: 71 – 73; Williams, *The Practical Guide*, 199.

²³ Fikrī, *Masāʿid al-Qāhira*, I: 100.

²⁴ Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *Al-Imāra al-Islāmiya fī Miṣr munḍu al-Faṭḥ al-‘Arabī ḥatā Nihāyat al-‘Aṣr al-Mamlūkī* (Cairo: Dār Al-Fikr Al-‘Arabī, 2009), 112 – 117; O’Kane, *The Mosques of Egypt*, 29.

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and Imām ‘Alī.”²⁵ (Pl. VIII) Moreover, the entrance’s ribbed-shell fluted hood features a distinctive pierced medallion. It was the original design for the cusped, ribbed, blind, keel-arch decoration that is still popular on buildings in Cairo.²⁶ Some scholars believe that the radiant ribbed-shell fluted hood (*Ġāma Mušī’a*) on the façade represents the sun with its rays, referring to light and guidance. The inclusion of Imām ‘Alī’s name suggests a Shiite connotation. It is more accepted that these decorative elements are designed to catch the attention of passersby, with the central sun shape serving as a focal point.²⁷ (Pl. IX)

The panels of stalactites and the shell-topped niches also made their first appearance here. (Pl. X) Moreover, the entrance lintel features jogged voussoirs (*Ṣunġāt Mu’aṣaqa*), a design element seen for the first time in religious architecture following the construction of the Al-Naṣr and Al-Futūḥ military Gates. (Pl. XI) Additionally, the decoration on the panel has several symbolic references. The top left features a mosque oil-lamp (*Miškāh*) and a *Miḥrāb*, signifying light and guidance through prayer, and it was repeated several times in the mosque’s windows. (Pl. XII) The lozenge below depicts a plant growing out of a pot with two interlocking branches, which alludes to Ḥasan and Ḥussayn, as the Prophet referred to them as his two sweet-fragrant basils in the world.”²⁸ (Pl. XIII) Finally, the panel’s top right decoration resembles the period’s doors, including a closet door in the mosque where Qurans were stored.²⁹

²⁵ The script here is as follows: “*Inna Allāh ma’ all-aḏīn ltaqaw wa’ ll-aḏīn hum Muḥsinūn.*” This means, “For God is with those who restrain themselves, and those who do good.” Quran, XVI: 128. “*ḥasbunā Allāh wa Ni’mā...*” This verse affirms that God is always with the righteous, explicitly referring to the Prophet Muḥammad and Imām ‘Alī, whose names were inscribed around the niche.

²⁶ Williams, *The Practical Guide*, 199, 200.

²⁷ Fikrī, *Masāḡid al-Qāhira*, I: 101, 102; ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *Al-‘Imāra al-Islāmiyya fī Miṣr*, 113, 114.

²⁸ “*Al-Ḥasan wa l-Ḥussayn humā riḥānatāy min al-Duniyā.*” Aḥmad Ibn ‘Alī Ibn Ḥaġar Al-‘Askalānī (D. 852 AH / 1449 AD), *Faṭḥ al-Bārī bi-Ṣarḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*, ed. Muḥammad Fū’ad ‘Abd al-Bāqī (Beirut, Undated), VII: 95, Index 3753.

²⁹ Fikrī, *Masāḡid al-Qāhira*, I: 102; Abouseif, *An Introduction*, 72 – 74; Williams, *The Practical Guide*, 198; O’Kane, *The Mosques of Egypt*, 28 – 31; Radwa Mohamed Salah El Din et al, “Reviving the Architectural

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2- The Simple Interior Design

The interior of the mosque has undergone significant changes from its original form. The small *Riwāq* features three aisles facing the courtyard, with only a triple arcade. The other three arcades have only one aisle each. A unique aspect of the interior architecture is the shallow brick domes covering each *Riwāq*'s ceiling, except for the wider aisle parallel to the Qibla wall, which has a flat wooden ceiling. (Pl. XIV) The mosque was entirely restored in 799 AH/1397 AD by Mamlūk Amūr Yalbugā Al-Sālīmī, who likely added the domed ceilings. This roofing style was not typical of the Fatimid period but was seen in the early fifteenth century at the mosque of Farağ Ibn Barqūq. (Pl. XV) Creswell noted that these shallow domes resting on spherical pendentives are a Mamlūk legacy seen during the mosque restorations by Amūr Yalbugā during Sultan Barqūq's sultanate. However, similar domes were also found in the Iḥṣīdī Mašhad of Aāl-Ṭabātābā and some gates of Cairo, suggesting a possible Fatimid origin.³⁰ Aside from some wood carving on beams and doors and a stucco inscription band on certain arches, the original interior decoration has not survived. The mosque underwent another restoration in the nineteenth century under Muḥammad 'Alī's reign by Amūr Sulīymān Aḡā Al-Silāḥdār, who constructed a mosque across the street from Al-Aqmar.³¹

Heritage Values of Al-Aqmar Mosque as an Architectural Inherited and a Source of Inspiration for Contemporary Interior Design," *Journal of Design Sciences and Applied Arts* 1, (2020): 134 – 143.

³⁰ Creswell, *MAE*, II: 245.

³¹ Māhir, *Masāğid Miṣr*, I: 322 – 324; Abouseif, *An Introduction*, 74.

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3- The Hanging Architectural Style:

The hanging structure, or “*Mu'allaq*,” refers to a building unit elevated above another. Egyptian architects were skilled in using the space underneath to incorporate architectural elements without impeding road rights. Egypt pioneered the emergence of hanging structures, which combined innovation, functionality, and aesthetics, offering a unique perspective on design while defying traditional construction norms. Historical sources indicate that the first appearance of this style was in the Hanging Mosque in the Ribāṭ of Al-Minastīr (180 AH/ 796 AD) and the Hanging Mosque in the Ribāṭ of Sūsah (206 AH/ 821 AD), both built on the upper floor of the Ribāṭs. The initial examples of this architectural phenomenon in Egypt were under the Fatimids in the three now-vanished Shrines-mosques of Caliph Al-Ḥākim, known as *Al-Mašāhid Al-Ḥākimiya Al-Mu'allaq*a, which were once situated in the ancient Fatimid Cemetery between Al-Fuṣṭāṭ and Cairo. The Ṣalāḥ Ṭalā'ī' Mosque, which includes several architectural features not found in any other Fatimid Mosque, is considered the first hanging mosque in Cairo. This style may have existed even before the Fatimid era, as the Prophet's Sunnah permits the construction of mosques above lower buildings but prohibits the construction of buildings above mosques. The hanging style was probably profoundly influenced by the hanging church in Cairo, which was built over two towers of the Babylon fortress. Throughout the Islamic era, the Coptic tradition of constructing hanging (high-rise) buildings persisted, adapting to the site's topography.³²

³² . Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Ḥiṭaṭ*, II: 220, III: 360 – 368, IV: 827 – 884; Abī 'Ubīd 'Abdullāh Ibn Muḥammad Al-Bakrī (D. 487 AH / 1094 AD), *Al-Masālik wa'l- Mamālik*, ed. Ġamāl Ṭulba (Beirut: Dār Al-Kuttub Al-'Ilmiya, 2003), II: 145; Abī 'l-Ḥasan Nūr al-Dīn Al-Sīḥāwī Al-Ḥanafī (D. 903 AH / 1497 AD), *Tuḥfat al-Aḥbāb wa Bugḥyat al-Tulāb ft' l-Ḥiṭaṭ wa'l- Mazārāt wa'l- Tarāḡim wa'l- Bīqā' al-Mubārakāt*, eds. Maḥmūd Rabī' and Ḥasan Qāsim (Cairo, 1937), 114; Ibn Taḡrī-Bardī, *Al-Nuḡūm*, IV: 57; 'Alī Bāṣā Mubārak, *Al-Ḥiṭaṭ al-Ġadīda li- Miṣr wa'l- Qāhira wa Muduniha wa Bilādihā al-Qadīma wa'l- Šahīra* (Cairo, 1888), II: 154; Yūsuf Rāḡib, “Un Épisode Obscur d'Histoire Fatimide,” *Studia Islamica (SI)* 43, (1978): 125 – 132; Rāḡib, “Les Mausolées Fatimides,” 3, 4; Zakī Muḥammad Ḥasan, *Funūn al-Islām* (Cairo, 1948), 64, 65; Fikrī, *Masāḡid al-Qāhira*, I: 102; Muḥammad Al-Kaḥlāwī, “Aṭr Murā'āt Itiḡāḥ al-Qibla wa Ḥaṭ Tanzūm al-Tariq 'alā Muḥaṭṭāt al-'Amā'ir al-Dīniya al-Mamlūkiya bi- Maḍīnat al-Qāhira,” *Journal of the Faculty of Archaeology* 7, (1996): 88; Nūra 'Abd' l-Qādir, “The Psychology of Architectural Design of Mamluk Religious Building in Cairo 648 – 923 AH / 1250 – 1517 AD,” *Journal of the General Union of Arab Archaeologists* 23, No. 2, (2022): 437 – 440; Sāmīḥ,

IV. Identifying the Mosque's Architectural Style

Historians, travelers, and archaeologists differed about the nature of the Aqmar Mosque's construction style. Some scholars considered it among the hanging buildings based on the description of Historians Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir and Al-Maqrīzī, while others rejected this view since it was designed to be reached by a flight of steps.³³ Ḥasan 'Abd al-Wahāb mentioned that the Aqmar Mosque is hanging because it was described in primary sources as having “shops underneath it.”³⁴ Similarly, The Committee for the Preservation of Arab Antiquities also supported the same claim. Likewise, Doris Abouseif noted that “this mosque once stood above a row of shops. As a result of the rising level of the street, the shops were buried and never excavated.”³⁵ (Fig. 4) The confusion arises from the fact that this mosque was the first building to recognize the right of way (*Ḥaq Al-Ṭarīq*) and align itself with the direction of the road. Moreover, the spatial juxtaposition significantly impacted and played a vital role as the now-demolished hanging Mosque of Al-Fiḡil³⁶ was situated near the Aqmar Mosque. Consequently, there was uncertainty regarding the

Lamaḥāt, 50, 58; Kamāl al-Dīn Sāmīh, *Al-'Imāra al-Islāmiya fī Miṣr* (Cairo, 1991), 64, 69; Sayyid, *Al-Dawla al-Fāṭimiya*, 177 – 179; Aḥmad 'Abd al-Rāziq, *Al-'Imāra al-Islāmiya fī Miṣr*, 120- 124; Ḥasan 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Tārīḥ al-Masāgīd al-Āṭariya*, I: 98, 99; Maḥmūd Abū al-Maḡid, Ḡamāl 'Abd al-Riḥīm, 'Ā'īṣa Al-Tuhāmī, “Al-Ta'tīrāt al-Maḡribiya al-Andalusiya 'alā' l-'Imāra al-Islāmiya”, *International Journal of Heritage, Tourism, and Hospitality* 15, No. 2, (Cairo, 2021): 479; Richard Yeomans, *The Art and Architecture of Islamic Cairo* (London: Garnet Publishing, 2006), 65; Ḥasan Al-Bāšā, *Al-'Alqāb al-Islāmiya fī' l-Tārīḥ wa' l- Waṭā'iq wa' l-Āṭār* (Cairo: Al-Dār Al-Fanniya, 1989), 466, 467; Muḥammad Āmin and Layilā 'Alī Ibrāhīm, *Al-Muṣṭalaḥāt al-Mi'māriya fī' l-Waṭā'iq al-Mamlūkiya 648 – 923 AH / 1250 – 1517 AD* (Cairo: AUP, 1990), 63, 82, 111; Rizq, *Muḡam*, 290, 291; 'Abd al-Rāziq, *Al-'Imāra al-Islāmiya fī Miṣr*, 316; O'Kane, *The Mosques of Egypt*, 38.

³³ Aḥmad 'Abd al-Rāziq, *Al-'Imāra al-Islāmiya fī Miṣr*, 111; Ḥasan 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Tārīḥ al-Masāgīd*, I: 70.

³⁴ Ḥasan 'Abd al-Wahāb, *Tārīḥ al-Masāgīd*, I: 70.

³⁵ Abouseif, *An Introduction*, 74.

³⁶ Al-Maqrīzī noted that the Fiḡil Mosque is located in the line of *Bayn Al-Qaṣrīn* in front of Bāb Al-Bisriya. Originally a Fatimid Mosque, it was renovated in 735 AH / 1334 AD by Amūr Baštāk Al-Nāṣirī during the Mamlūk era. Al-Maqrīzī disputed the claim that the mosque's name was due to the washing of radish plants (*Al-Fiḡil*) in this area because of the Nile's passage through it. He stated that the name dates back to the Fatimid era, as the person in charge of the mosque's work was called “*Fiḡil*.” Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Ḥiṭat*, II: 249, 250, IV: 556, 720, 721, VI: 417 – 419.

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classification of architectural styles during the Islamic eras. In certain Western cultures, any building elevated above the ground and accessed via stairs is also called a hanging building.³⁷ Some scholars have mentioned that during the Mamlūk period, the Arabic word “*Taht*” usually meant “next to,”³⁸ and the shops were located adjacent to the mosque from the northeastern side rather than below it. This misunderstanding in identifying the structural pattern occurred due to the differences in the meaning and context of words across languages, cultures, regions, and periods.³⁹ Moreover, several excavations have been conducted beneath the mosque on the side of Bāb Al-Futūḥ in search of shops, but none have been found. Furthermore, the presence of spherical-shallow domes on the western side of the mosque serves as tangible evidence that no architectural alterations were made to the mosque, neither during the Fatimid era nor afterward. It is quite evident that the shops were built adjacent

³⁷ Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Sattār ‘Uṣmān, “Aḥkām Ḍarr al-Kaṣf wa’ Aṭarḥa ‘alā al-‘Imāra al-Islāmiyya Dirāsa Āṭariyya fī Maṣdr Fiqhī: Kitāb al-‘Ilān bī- Aḥkām al-Bunyān,” *Dirāsāt wa Buḥūl fī l-‘Āṭār wa l- Ḥaqāra al-Islāmiyya* 2, (2001): 109, 110; Abouseif, *An Introduction*, 72 – 74; Abouseif, “The Façade of the Aqmar Mosque,” 29 – 38; Asmā’ Muḥammad Ismā‘īl, “Al-Ta’īrāt al-Mutabādala ‘alā ba’d Muḥtaṭāt ‘Amā’ir Maḍīnat al-Qāhira wa ba’d ‘Anāṣirha al-Mīmāriyya al-Zuḥrifiyya ‘alā Mar al-‘Uṣūr,” *Journal of Faculty of Archaeology South Valley University* 5, (2010): 216; ‘Uṣmān, *Mūsū‘at al-‘Imāra al-Fāṭimiyya*, I: 374 – 377.

³⁸ Historians defined the word “*Taht*” as an adverb of place meaning “below” and as an adjective or noun meaning “next to.” Thus, it seems safe to say that several terms have multiple meanings in Arabic, and one such term is “underneath” (*Taht*), which can also mean “next to.” A notable example is the prominent area called *Taht Al-Rab’*, which refers to the region adjacent to the *Rab’* of Sultan Baybars I, which no longer exists. This area is located outside Al-Mutawālī Gate. Likewise, the term “*Taht Al-Qal’a*” refers to the area around the Citadel of Al-Ġabal. In historical sources, the word “*Tahta*” was mentioned by Al-Maqrīzī in his description of the drums house (Tablahāna), as situated beneath the Citadel of Al-Ġabal (*Taht Al-Qal’a*), between Bāb Al-Sillila and Bāb Al-Mudarraġ. Typically, it is located next to the Citadel in its southern side, while the Sultan Ḥasan Madrasa is described as “towards the Citadel.” Based on the above-mentioned examples, the researcher deduced that it was common in that era to describe places near higher structures as “below” them and those farther away as “towards” them. Moreover, Al-Maqrīzī would verbally indicate if a building was a hanging one, as seen in his account to the three hanging shrines of Caliph Al-Ḥākim and the Faġīl Mosque. Furthermore, he described the shops in Baštāk Palace as being “below it” (*fī asfilh*), and similarly, the shops of the Aqmar Mosque were mentioned as being “below it” (*asfilh*) without the preposition “fī” (in). This proves that the shops of the Al-Aqmar Mosque were located next to it, not below it. Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Ḥiṭāt*, III: 95 – 98, 227, 228, 655 – 659, 688 – 691, IV: 556, VI: 417 – 419; Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Sulūk*, II: 236; Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Muqaffā al-Kabīr*, II: 454 – 457; Ibn Taġrī Bardī, *Al-Nuġūm*, IX: 62; Ibn Taġrī Bardī, *Al-Dalīl al-Šāfi*, I: 193, 209; Ibn Ḥaġr Al-‘Askalānī, *Al-Durr al-Kāminah*, I: 481; Abī l-Faḍl Ġamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn Manẓūr (D. 711 AH / 1311 AD), *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Al-Riyād: Undated), II: 322; Maġd al-Dīn Al-Širāzī Al-Šāfi‘ī (D. 817 AH / 1414 AD), *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Dār Al-Kutub Al-‘Ilmiyya, 1995), I: 194; Al-Maqrīzī, *Al-Ḥiṭāt*, II: 244; ‘Uṣmān, *Mūsū‘at al-‘Imāra al-Fāṭimiyya*, I: 356, 357.

³⁹ Fikrī, *Masāḡid al-Qāhira*, I: 88 – 93; Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *Tārīḥ wa’ Āṭār Miṣr al-Islāmiyya min al-Fatḥ al-‘Arabī ḥatā Nihāyat al-‘Aṣr al-Fāṭimī* (Cairo: Dār Al-Fikr Al-‘Arabī, 1999), 249, 251 – 255.

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to the mosque rather than underneath it, thus disproving the notion that the Aqmar Mosque was once suspended.⁴⁰

It is noteworthy that the founder of the mosque established several shops (now disappeared) on its northeastern side, marking the first instance of combining multiple functions within one structure in Islamic Egypt. Additionally, if the Caliph did not desire the inclusion of shops, they would not have been incorporated into the new building following its demolition. This demonstrates the founder's aspiration to create distinctive architectural marvels.⁴¹ The validity of this claim is supported by historical sources, which have documented that the Caliph himself requested Al-Baṭā'hī to construct the mosque. Despite the presence of more prominent Mosques, such as Al-Azhar and Al-Ḥākim, in the same vicinity, the Caliph opted for a smaller size. This decision marked the initial stages of what would later develop into something significant. Consequently, this can be seen as the first endeavor to integrate shops into such structures. Although this attempt was rudimentary and incomplete, as the shops were situated next to the mosque, it eventually paved the way for placing shops beneath various structures in later periods.⁴²

Discussion and Contribution

I-Comparative Study:

When comparing the Aqmar Mosque to other notable mosques from the Fatimid period in Cairo, including Al-Azhar, Al-Ḥākim, Al-Aḥḥar, and Al-

⁴⁰ Asmā' Ismā'īl, "Aṭar al-Takadus," 16, 17; 'Uṭmān, *Mūsū'at al-Imāra al-Fāṭimiya*, I: 356, 357; Asmā' Ismā'īl, "Al-Ta'īrāt al-Mutabādala," 314 – 317.

⁴¹ Asmā' Ismā'īl, "Aṭar al-Takadus," 18; Abouseif, *An Introduction*, 74.

⁴² 'Uṭmān, *Dirāsāt Āṭariya fi' l-Imāra*, 347, 348; 'Uṭmān, *Mūsū'at al-Imāra al-Fāṭimiya*, I: 322 – 330.

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Ṣāliḥ Ṭalā'ī, the researcher identified key similarities and differences that place it within the broader architectural context of the era:

Similarities:

1. **Fatimid Patronage:** Like other significant mosques of its time, the Aqmar Mosque was commissioned and supported by the ruling Fatimid dynasty, showcasing their dedication to architectural and urban development.
2. **Passion for Decoration:** The Aqmar Mosque highlights the Fatimids' passion for intricate architectural decoration, featuring elaborate geometric patterns, muqarnas, and other embellishments on its surfaces.
3. **Incorporation of Calligraphy:** The Aqmar Mosque features extensive calligraphic inscriptions, especially Quranic verses, on its façade and interior. These inscriptions showcase the distinctive style of Fatimid-era Mosque architecture, combining beauty and practicality.

Differences:

1. **Exterior Projection:** The Aqmar Mosque stands out with its dramatic façade projection, distinguishing it from other Fatimid mosques that typically feature flush, recessed, or modular exterior designs.
2. **Spatial Organization:** Unlike many Fatimid mosques, such as Al-Azhar, which have a central courtyard and axial prayer hall, the Aqmar Mosque features a more compact and asymmetrical interior layout.
3. **Scale and Massing:** The Aqmar Mosque is more modest than grand mosques like the Azhar Mosque or the Ḥākīm Mosque.
4. **Structural Innovation:** The non-hanging Aqmar Mosque, with its projecting façade, is a pioneering architectural feature that distinguishes it from other mosques of the Fatimid era. Unlike the typical hanging architectural design prevalent in many mosques of that time, the Aqmar Mosque stands out with its innovative freestanding structure.

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These comparative observations emphasize the Aqmar Mosque's adherence to the Fatimid architectural tradition while showcasing its unique qualities, distinguishing it as a significant and iconic example of medieval Islamic architecture in Cairo. The mosque's unique features and design approach reflect the Fatimids' willingness to innovate and embrace various aesthetic styles during their reign.

II-The Enduring Impact of the Aqmar Mosque

The Aqmar Mosque, notable for its unique architectural style and inventive characteristics, significantly impacted the evolution of Islamic architecture in Cairo in the centuries following its construction, including:

1. Inspiration for Projecting Façades:

The striking façade projection of the Aqmar Mosque led subsequent architects to duplicate the same architectural style. This is evident in the design of later Mamlūk-era monuments, such as Sultan Ḥasan Madrasa and Al-Mū'ayyad Ṣayḥ Mosques, which had similarly prominent, projecting façades.

2. Adoption of Structural Innovations:

Placing shops next to the mosque has paved the way for developing the hanging architectural style in the Afḡar and Al-Ṣāliḥ Ṭalā'i' Mosques, optimizing land use and effectively maximizing spatial exploitation. The innovative use of these techniques to create its overhanging appearance was a pioneering development that later builders adopted and improved upon. This structural approach enabled the emergence of more dynamic and visually captivating architectural forms during the Mamlūk and Ottoman periods.

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3. Perpetuation of Decorative Traditions:

The novelty of some decorative and architectural patterns that appears for the first time, such as shallow domes, jogged voussoirs, radiant hoods, panels of stalactites, extensive Shiite calligraphy, geometric motifs, and various artistic elements became a defining feature of the Fatimid architectural style. This style was later adopted in Islamic monuments in Cairo, creating a cohesive link between different dynasties.

4. Precedent for Integrated Urban Design:

Integrating the Aqmar Mosque into medieval Cairo's urban fabric and adherence to the right of way set a precedent for architects and urban planners, and this approach influenced the development of historic Cairo. In spite of the inconvenience of space, the Fatimid architect skillfully adapted the irregularly shaped plot of land to maximize the facility's potential, showcasing innovative architectural solutions to overcome construction challenges in the limited building space of the Fatimid palaces area. Hence, it appears clearly that the Aqmar Mosque in Cairo had a lasting impact on Islamic architecture through innovative design, decorative traditions, and integrated urban planning. Its influence persisted in the city long after the Fatimid era.

Conclusion

This study has revealed the multifaceted significance of the Fatimid-era Mosque through an analysis of its historical context, distinctive architectural features, and the scholarly debate on its stylistic classification. Located in Cairo, the Aqmar Mosque's strategic position and its connection to the influential Fatimid caliph Al-Āmir highlight the building's significance as a symbol of Fatimid power and patronage. The Aqmar Mosque is known for its striking exterior, featuring a projecting façade and intricate decorative elements. Scholars have often classified it as a prime example of the hanging architectural style from the Fatimid period. However, this paper argues that

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while the mosque's design is innovative, it may not entirely fit the typical characteristics of the hanging style. Instead, it represents a unique approach within the broader Fatimid architectural tradition. Additionally, the interior of the Aqmar Mosque features a relatively simple and understated layout, adding complexity to its stylistic classification. This hints at the diverse and sometimes enigmatic nature of Fatimid architectural expression.

After thoroughly examining the Aqmar Mosque, it is evident that it possesses distinctive architectural and artistic features that set it apart from other buildings and have influenced subsequent structures, establishing it as a unique architectural heritage. The study revealed that although designated as a compact mosque, it was meant to serve as a congregational mosque. It also showed the mosque's adherence to the road's path without infringing on its right, setting a precedent for future constructions. Moreover, it demonstrated that the mosque includes beveled corners that improve safety and safeguard the structure from vehicular friction, accompanied by decorative elements conveying messages related to the Shiite ideology. Furthermore, the mosque featured unique decorative elements for the first time, such as jogged voussoirs, symbols of light like the sun and its rays, and oil lamps (*Miškāh*).

Likewise, Shiite practices were utilized through various decorations and writings for preaching and promoting purposes, departing from mere ornamental use. Notably, the initial absence of a minaret, later added, was due to its proximity to the Fatimid palaces. Besides, it possibly served as a congregational mosque for the ruling family while maintaining the sanctity and privacy of the palaces. It is noteworthy that shops were included adjacent to the mosque to generate revenue for its maintenance, a practice later seen under

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mosques like Al-Aḥḥar and Al-Ṣāliḥ Ṭalā'ī'. The study also proved the use of shallow domes, contrasting with the larger domes of Al-Azhar, influencing architectural trends in subsequent periods. Moreover, the decorations of this mosque hold significance as they reflect the architectural style and grandeur of the period, with elaborate designs meant to catch the eye of observers. The fact that most of these decorations are on the exterior rather than the interior suggests they serve as a showcase for Fatimid art.

In conclusion, the Al-Aqmar Mosque is a remarkable, pioneering, and enigmatic architectural masterpiece within the historic urban fabric of medieval Cairo that has significantly impacted Fatimid and Mamlūk architecture and serves as a model for Islamic architectural artistry. The Aqmar Mosque's enduring legacy and impact are seen in its influence on later architectural styles and its status as a cherished landmark undergoing preservation efforts. Scholars are still uncovering the secrets of this fascinating structure, making it a valuable topic for interdisciplinary research on the architectural and cultural heritage of the Fatimid caliphate in the Islamic world.

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The Figures



Fig. 1: The Egyptian Survey Authority (ESA), “The Location of the Aqmar Mosque (No. 33) in the Al-Nahhāsīn district,” 2024. In the Archaeological Map of Cairo: (1: 3h).⁴³



Fig. 2: O’Kane, “The plan of the Aqmar Mosque at Al-Nahhāsīn district, showing its Riwaq style, and its alignment with the street and Qibla wall,” 2024. In O’Kane, *The Mosques of Egypt*, 29.

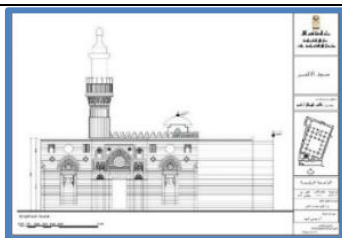


Fig. 3: The Supreme Council of Antiquities, “Section views of the stunning façades of the Aqmar Mosque. In Islamic and Coptic Antiquities Registration Center: Islamic, Coptic, and Jewish Antiquities Sector at the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

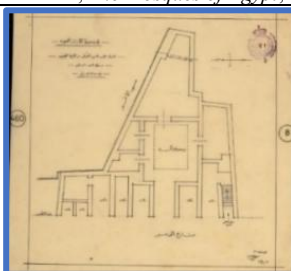


Fig. 4: Comité, “The plan of the Aqmar Mosque, featuring the side shops,” 19th century. In ICARC: ICJAS, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

The Plates

⁴³ The Egyptian Survey Authority (ESA) is an organization responsible for conducting surveys and collecting data in Egypt. It is important to note that the Egyptian Survey Authority (ESA) has prepared a map consisting of two portions for the Monuments of Islamic Cairo. The first section is partitioned into vertical segments labeled with Arabic alphabet letters (ranging from A to K) and horizontal lines labeled with Arabic numbers (ranging from 1 to 7). The second section of the map also includes vertical parts that are labeled with letters from the Arabic alphabet, specifically from A to I. Additionally, the horizontal numbering on the second map continues from where it left off on the first map, starting at 7 and going up to 14. In addition, the maps utilize different colors to depict the architectural features of each Islamic period. The Abbasid and Tūlūnīd states are displayed in brown, the Fatimid era in red, the Ayyubīd era in green, the Bahrī Mamlūk era in light orange, the Circassian Mamlūk era in dark blue, the Ottoman and Alawite eras in purple, and the current era is portrayed in gray.

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Pl. I: Aḥmad 'Issā, “The projecting entrance in the Aqmar façade, showing the Mahdiya Influence,” 2024.



Pl. II: Aḥmad 'Issā, “The stunning façade of the Aqmar Mosque, with various decorative elements,” 2024.



Pl. III: Aḥmad 'Issā, “The central medallion that features the names of Prophet Muḥammad (peace and prayers be upon him) and Imām 'Alī,” 2024.



Pl. IV: Aḥmad 'Issā, “The two doors flanking the main entrance of the Aqmar Mosque,” 2024.



Pl. V: Aḥmad 'Issā, “The current crenellations that was added by the Bohra sect,” 2024.



Pl. VI: Aḥmad 'Issā, “The current Mihrāb that went through several stages of restorations,” 2024.



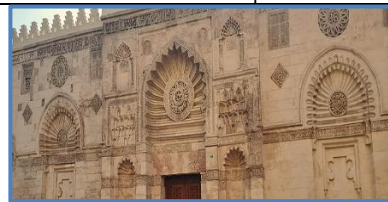
Pl. VI: Aḥmad 'Issā, “The Ottoman minaret at the Aqmar Mosque,” 2024.



Pl. VII: Comité, “The façade of the Aqmar Mosque before restorations. In ICARC: ICJAS, the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.



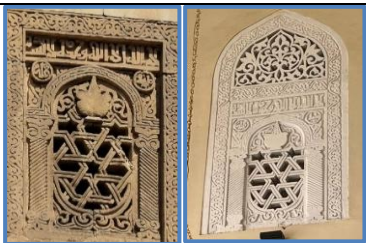


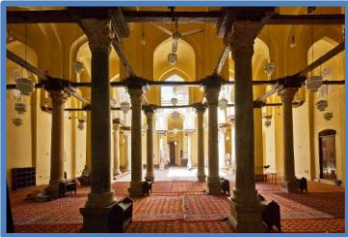


Pl. VIII: Comité, “The beveled corner at the left side of the façade of the Aqmar Mosque with the message “God is with Prophet Muḥammad and 'Alī,” 2024.



Pl. IX: Aḥmad 'Issā, “The seven radiant ribbed-shell fluted hoods on the façade with the prophet and Imām 'Alī names represents the sun with its rays, referring to light and guidance, suggesting a Shiite connotation,” 2024.

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 <p>Pl. X: Aḥmad 'Issā, "The panel of stalactites or muqarnas that appears for the first time in the Aqmar Mosque around its main façade," 2024.</p>	 <p>Pl. XI: Aḥmad 'Issā, "The jogged voussoirs in the main entrance lintel of the Aqmar Mosque are a unique feature that first appeared in religious architecture in this mosque," 2024.</p>
 <p>Pl. XII: Aḥmad 'Issā, "The representation of Miškāh and a Mihrāb, signifying light and guidance through prayer, which was repeated several times in the mosque's windows and façade," 2024.</p>	 <p>Pl. XIII: Aḥmad 'Issā, "The lozenge depicts a plant growing out of a pot with two branches, which alludes to Hasan and Hussayn," 2024.</p>
 <p>Pl. XIV: Aḥmad 'Issā, "The Qibla Riwāq, representing the mosque's simple interior design," 2024.</p>	 <p>Pl. XV: Aḥmad 'Issā, "The Riwāqs with shallow brick domes at the Aqmar Mosque," 2024.</p>