Conflicted Commodification in Cairo

Until the constriction of the local market, curios had enjoyed a second life on bazaar stalls, as just seen in the preceding chapter. But the very existence of historic artefacts offered for sale opens a new set of questions regarding supply and procurement. Some factors are well known. As elsewhere, warfare and unrest in the Middle East were prime moments favouring the commodification of antiques. In 1801, the French occupation of Egypt is known to have left large mosques in Cairo in complete ruin, and consequently vulnerable to neglect, which inevitably led to dismemberment. Sectarian violence in Damascus resulted in hundreds of Christian houses being burnt to ground in 1860. Later, the economic hardship that seized the Syrian capital in the 1870s compelled many to dispose of household possessions, down to the very last one.¹ The first Damascus room of the South Kensington Museum arrived during these unfortunate circumstances, despite the “superstitious repugnance to sell family relics,” as its buyer recalled.² In parallel, patterns of taste and consumption in relation to one’s domestic sphere shifted drastically: new types of furniture and wall decoration deliberately replaced previous ones, as has been well demonstrated for late Ottoman Damascus and Beirut.³ All in all, it was a period of

turmoil for architecture and material culture, but also one of innovation.

Natural phenomena also had their own role to play. Earthquakes regularly hit Cairo during the nineteenth century: in 1847 (7 August), 1856 (12 October) and in 1863 to list but a few instances.⁴ A total of 111 buildings were partially or completely damaged in the 1847 quake; the Mosque of al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh alone lost eight of the large arches overlooking its courtyard.⁵ Minarets regularly collapsed, or were indeed preventively dismantled, as it happened to the al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh Mosque. As its two minarets threatened to collapse after the 1863 earthquake, their last shafts were pulled down for safety reasons; they were reconstructed only many decades later.⁶ Buildings encumbered with rubble were eventually abandoned and progressively emptied of their fittings.

One is struck by the sight of desolation and ruin emanating from many a photograph of Cairo’s mosques and mausoleums in the 1850s and 1860s.⁷ This is not Orientalist stereotyping of Middle Eastern urban landscapes, as cultural theory would have it.⁸ It is factual information that contradicts a largely shared belief, among historians of Islamic

1 Toru Miura, *Dynamism in the Urban Society of Damascus, The Salihiyya Quarter from the Twelfth to the Twentieth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 277.

2 Quoted in Carey, “Appropriating Damascus Rooms,” 79.

3 Stefan Weber, “Images of imagined worlds: Self-image and worldview in late Ottoman wall paintings of Damascus,” in *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, eds. Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp and Stefan Weber (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg/Orient-Institut der DMG, 2002), 145–71; Toufoul Abou-Hodeib, “Taste and class in late Ottoman Beirut,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 3 (2011): 475–92.

4 Dina Ishak Bakhoun, “Mamluk minarets in Modern Egypt: Tracing restoration decisions and interventions,” *Annales islamologiques* 50 (2016): 147–98.

5 “*Al-hawādith al-dākhliyya*,” [Domestic news], *al-Waqā’i’ al-misriyya* no. 78, 16 August 1847, 1.

6 Jacob [sic] Artin-Bey, “Bab Zoueyleh et la mosquée d’El-Moéyed: notice historique et anecdotique,” *Bulletin de l’Institut égyptien*, no. 4 (1884): 127–52.

7 The pictures taken by French photographer Édouard Jarrot in 1858–60 (online on Gallica: <https://gallica.bnf.fr>), or those published in 1861 by the German Jakob August Lorent (1813–84) are good illustrations; see Mercedes Volait, ed., *Le Caire dessiné et photographié au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Picard, 2013).

8 Derek Gregory, “Emperors of the gaze: Photographic practices and productions of space in Egypt, 1839–1914,” in *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical*

architecture, that organic architectural maintenance was available in Islamic lands through the institution of *waqf* [endowed property serving to maintain religious and charitable foundations or to provide revenues to private beneficiaries].⁹ It is true that the system guaranteed, in principle, the perpetual upkeep of pious foundations, i.e. of major monuments in urban centres, through the revenues of unalienable *waqf* property. However, in practice, it proved dysfunctional and unsustainable in the long run, when one considers actual situations rather than theoretical principles. As revenues shrunk or disappeared with time, so did the means available to repair and provide upkeep for structures. This resulted in countless ruins. In reaction, measures were devised to protect what was left from dilapidated *awqāf*.

1 Urban and Domestic Reform

However, artefacts and architectural salvage did not only reach the market because of natural disaster, pandemic diseases, famine or neglect. They could also be consciously disposed of, for the sake of fashioning new environments or the need to procure cash. Both public and private agencies were involved in this process.

1.1 Sanitising the City

A well-known episode of radical reconfiguration of the urban fabric of Cairo is its so-called “Haussmannisation” at the initiative of Khedive Ismail. While the concept ill-characterises Cairo’s urban planning policy at the time,¹⁰ the work car-

ried out did add its share of rubble. A demolition programme was launched in June 1869 in order to open up new thoroughfares across the historic quarters of the city. One new road alone, the Citadel Street, allegedly cut through 398 building plots. Most were occupied by private houses, but among the affected buildings were also public baths, stables, kilns, and four mosques, including that of al-Qawsun.¹¹ (Fig. 62) The upkeep and sale of the stone rubble [*anqād*, pl. of *nuqā*] and timber ensuing from the construction of that street employed at least sixteen officials in 1872.¹²

Yet, pulling down architecture for the sake of modernisation had a longer history. When it comes to the nineteenth century, the Egyptian chronicler ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Gabarti recalled that in 1815 the new ruler ordered the demolition of all houses threatening ruin in Cairo, and imposed their replacement by new structures. If owners could not afford the reconstruction, the rebuilding was funded by the Treasury and the property consequently reverted to the state. What had allegedly motivated the decision was the collapse of a house causing the death of three individuals, but al-Gabarti suspected that the measure was foremost designed to procure building materials for the sovereign.¹³ He goes on to report other

Imagination, eds. Joan Schwartz and James Ryan (London/New York: Ib-Tauris, 2003), 195–225.

9 For the principles of *waqf* upkeep, see Dina Bakhoum, “The Waqf system: Maintenance, Repair and Upkeep,” in *Held in Trust, Waqf in the Islamic world*, ed. Pascale Ghazaleh (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2011), 179–96; Alaa El-Habashi, “From *athar* to monuments: the intervention of the Comité in Cairo” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2001).

10 For a discussion of the Cairo-Paris comparative perspective, Mercedes Volait, “Making Cairo modern

(1870–1950): Multiple models for a ‘European-style’ urbanism,” in *Urbanism – Imported or Exported? Native Aspirations and Foreign Plans*, eds. Joseph Nasr and Mercedes Volait (Chichester: Wiley-Academy/UK, 2003), 17–50; Khaled Fahmy, “Modernizing Cairo: A Revisionist Narrative,” in *Making Cairo Medieval*, eds. Nezar AlSayyad, Irene Bierman, and Nasser Rabbat (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 173–200.

11 ‘Ali Mubarak, *Al-Khitat al-tawfiqiyya al-jadida li-Misr al-Qahira wa-muduniha wa-biladiha al-qadima wa-l-shahira* (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya [Bulaq], 1306 AH/1888–89 AD), III: 253–54.

12 Cairo, Dar al-Waṭa‘iq al-Qawmiyya, *Muhāfaza Misr, Mahāfiḍ* 1872, 2002–3607, List of appointees in the Administration of parks and gardens and other services, 1872–75.

13 *Merveilles biographiques et historiques ou chroniques du cheikh Abd-El-Rahman El Djabarti*, trans. Chefik Mansour *et al.* (Cairo: National Printing Press, 1889–96), IX: 188–90.

FIGURE 62 Anonymous, *Démolitions nécessitées par le percement du boulevard Mehemet Aly au Caire*, c. 1875 [Demolition required by the opening of the Mehmed Ali thoroughfare]. The print was originally in the collection of architect Ambroise Baudry and captioned on the reverse in his handwriting. Albumen print. 27 × 22 cm
AUCTIONED ON 11 DECEMBER 2000 AT FRANÇOIS DE RICQLÈS IN PARIS, LOT 107. CURRENT LOCATION UNKNOWN

examples of demolition, concerning houses in Bulaq and Old Cairo for instance, geared towards securing stones and bricks for the palaces being constructed by dignitaries in Giza, Imbaba and Rawda. Architectural destruction, therefore, was already in full swing in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

The first new street cut through the historic fabric of Cairo also goes back to the reign of Mehmed Ali; dated 1846, it took the unequivocal name of *al-sikka al-jadida* [literally the New Street], before adopting the name al-Muski. Interestingly enough, its route picked up exactly that of an unrealised

project conceived in 1799 by French engineers attached to the Napoleon's expedition to Egypt. Urban planning has its own rationale, independent of political regimes, and envisioned schemes have a marked endurance, as I have demonstrated elsewhere for Cairo.¹⁴ Renewing the materiality of the city was moreover a project widely shared within society: it went beyond the urban landscape, reaching out to the domestic sphere.

14 Volait, "Making Cairo modern (1870–1950)."

FIGURE 63 Pascal Coste, *Vue de l'intérieur de la maison du cheykh Gabarti, astronome*. [Interior of the house of Sheikh al-Gabarti. The panorama of Istanbul is displayed at the right end of the drawing at mid-height]. Pencil on paper. MARSEILLES, BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE L'ALCAZAR, FONDS PASCAL COSTE, MS 1310, F. 69B

1.2 Refurbishing Interiors

In his article on wall painting in late Ottoman Damascus, Stefan Weber charts the changes occurring in interiors, particularly in mural iconography.¹⁵ He shows that instead – and in place – of the classical panoramic view of Istanbul overlooking the Bosphorus, (Fig. 63) walls started displaying European cityscapes, such as urban *vedute* of Paris, London, Naples, Rome, Venice or Trieste.

Scenes inspired by the latest news and innovations also made their appearance on Damascene walls. Archaeologist Melchior de Vogüé was amused to observe in 1872 that:

Un autre fait peindre des médaillons par un badigeonneur de passage, et, nous prenant à témoin de ses sentiments français, il nous

montre sur le mur, entre un railway et un steamboat ... la maison de M. Thiers! Le bon Damasquin était à Paris pour son négoce à l'époque de la Commune; justement indigné de la destruction de l'hôtel du président, il l'a fait reproduire dans sa galerie.¹⁶

While sojourning in Damascus in 1875, French architect and draughtsman Jules Bourgoin (1838–1908) reported that he was offered three “Arab

16 Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, *Syrie, Palestine, Mont Athos; voyage aux pays du passé* (Paris: E. Plon, 1876), 80 (his visit to Damascus took place in 1872): “One of our hosts had medallions painted by a visiting would-be artist, and to prove his good will towards France, he pointed to us, between a railway and a steamboat, the house of Mr Thiers [French president] illustrated on his wall! The brave Damascene was in Paris for his business during the Commune; duly revolted by the destruction of the President’s residence, he had it reproduced in his gallery.” [My translation].

15 Weber, “Images of imagined worlds.”

ceilings, old and in a perfect condition" for 400 francs – a nominal cost – on condition that he provided as replacement "a painted canvas, or better said, a canvas painted in the Frankish [European] manner."¹⁷ The ceilings were meant to be transported to Cairo on the request of a French patron, as we shall see in the following chapter. In other words, house owners in Damascus were willing to get rid of their coffered ceilings or *'ajamī* [lit. Persian] ones,¹⁸ as long as cash and a Western-style alternative came in exchange. It can be inferred that swapping old (Damascene) for new (European) may not have been uncommon practice, although no mention in the sources has been so far recorded. One explanation was economic. As previously recalled, the 1870s were times of hardship in Syria, and from the 1850s, European goods had been dominating the Syrian markets in most domains thanks to their appeal to local consumers in price and function. But shifting aesthetics cannot be disregarded either; renovating one's interior also corresponded to changing tastes in matter of decoration.

A telling example offering material substance to the mechanisms of domestic transformation in Cairo is offered by the refurbishment of the grand reception hall in the family house of the al-Sadat al-Wafa'iyya. A prominent Sufi family claiming descent from a royal dynasty in the Maghreb, the Idrisids, with roots in the Tunisian city of Sfax, the al-Sadat had been in Cairo since the fourteenth

century. Over time they had amassed significant wealth and by the mid-eighteenth century had risen to become one of the most prestigious families in the city, thanks to their *sharīfī* lineage, the religious and administrative functions they were entrusted with and the official protection they enjoyed. Their affluence was gained by trusteeships of lucrative endowed properties [*awqāf*, pl. of *waqf*] and tax-farms (*iltizām*).¹⁹ Besides a large funerary complex in Cairo's southern cemetery and a Sufi lodge in the heart of the city, the family possessed a home on Rawda Island. It had another one built in the southern outskirts of the city, on a site overlooking the pond of Birkat al-Fil. The new residential complex must have experienced several phases of construction as a number of dates are associated with it. It was dated 1070 AH (1659 AD) when it was registered as an historic monument around 1920;²⁰ the year is consistent with the surviving blue, white, and turquoise Iznik tiles adorning one of the main rooms since few Izniks were available in Cairo after the 1660s.²¹ An inscribed cartouche on one of the walls bears the date of 1089 AH (1678/79 AD),²² suggesting that some renovation took place twenty years after construction. An extension to the house was built in 1755. New living quarters were added to the complex in 1228 AH (1812 AD) by the then head of al-Sadat al-Wafa'iyya, Shams al-Din Muhammad Abu al-Anwar al-Sadat at the end of his life; he died the following year. These additions, and the

17 Pierrefitte-sur-Seine (France), Archives nationales, F¹⁷2941, item no. 21 bis, Report from Jules Bourgoin dated February 1875, to the director of the Sciences and Lettres' division in the Ministry of Public Instruction in Paris: "On me propose trois plafonds arabes, anciens et dans un bon état de conservation, à condition de faire les frais de trois plafonds en toile peinte ou plus exactement peinturlurée à la franque."

18 *'Ajamī* décor is a characteristic technique of Ottoman Syria, where the woodwork is covered with elaborate floral designs that are densely patterned and richly textured. Relief was obtained by applying a thick gesso to the wood; Anke Scharrahs, *Damascene 'Ajami Rooms: Forgotten Jewels of Interior Design* (London: Archetype Publications, 2013).

19 Richard Mc Gregor, *Sanctity and Mysticism in Medieval Egypt: The Wafa Sufi Order and the Legacy of Ibn Arabi*, 2004; Id., "Is this the end of medieval sufism? Strategies of transversal affiliation in Ottoman Egypt," in Rachida Chich *et al.*, *Sufism in the Ottoman Era (16th–18th c.)* (Cairo: Publications de l'IFAO, 2010), 83–100.

20 Ali Bahgat and Harry Farnall, "Maison waqf as-Sâdât al-Ouafaïa," in *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe. Procès-verbaux de l'exercice 1915–1919*, no. 32 (1922): 724–26.

21 Hans Theunissen, "The Ottoman tiles of the Fakahani Mosque in Cairo," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 53 (2017): 287–330.

22 André Raymond *et al.*, *Palais et maisons du Caire* (Paris: CNRS éditions, 1983), 11: 265.

other transformations carried out at the time, are described in detail by al-Gabarti in his long obituary of the Sufi sheikh.²³ When the house was surveyed in 1932, it consisted of an ensemble of structures extending over a vast stretch of land; the estate then encompassed several living units, three ceremonial halls, a prayer hall opening onto the first courtyard, as well as a library at the back of the gardens.²⁴

Cross-checking the map of the premises with al-Gabarti's account helps to identify the transformations undertaken in the 1810s. They consisted of the addition of new structures and the complete reconstruction of previous ones. A prime new structure was a square room overlooking Birkat al-Fil on two sides, with a marble column erected at its centre; the room was known as *qā'a al-ghazāl* [the room of the gazelle]. The rebuilding, on the other hand, concerned three parts of the premises. Firstly, some changes were made to the most beautiful and celebrated room of the house, named *umm al-afrāḥ* [lit. the mother of ceremonies, hosting the Sufi meetings of the order]. Dated to the building of the house in the 1660s, the room was described by al-Gabarti as the most beautiful in the house, because its walls were covered "with Chinese ceramics" [*al-qīshānī al-ṣīnī*], meaning blue-and-white Iznik tiles, and "polychromatic marble" [*al-rukhām al-mulawwan*], that is the typical *opus sectile* mosaic in stone of distinct colours covering the bottom of the walls. The room was

FIGURE 64 Frank Dillon, *In the Harem of Sheik Sadat*, c. 1878. The watercolour almost certainly depicts the *qā'a al-anwārīyya* erected in 1812. Watercolour. 29 × 44 cm
ISTANBUL, THE ÖMER MEHMET KOÇ COLLECTION

enlarged over the adjacent courtyard in a manner that is not entirely clear. Opposite *umm al-afrāḥ*, Shams al-Din Muhammad Abu al-Anwar had demolished an old *maq'ad* [elevated loggia used as seating place], graced with a "column and [two] arches," and replaced it with an open oratory, completed with a pulpit for delivering the Friday's sermon.²⁵ Finally, a large hall bordering the gardens, with a central fountain, was built in place of a previous one. It was named *qā'a al-anwārīyya* in honour of its patron and is very plausibly the one depicted in a watercolour by Frank Dillon, aptly entitled by the artist *Dans le harem du cheikh Sadat*.²⁶ (Fig. 64) A photograph of the courtyard by Bonfils shows, on the left, the entrance to the private quarters of the house, with its door covered with *appliqué* fabric, and a Black servant (possibly a eunuch) sitting on the adjoining elevated bench; on the right stood the elongated prayer hall behind a turned-wood screen, furnished with a

23 'Abd al-Rahman al-Gabarti, *'Aja'ib al-athar fi al-tarajim wa-al-akhbar* (Cairo: Bulaq, 1879–80), IV: 190–91; *Merveilles biographiques et historiques ou chroniques du cheikh Abd-El-Rahman El Djabarti*, trans. Chefik Mansour et al., (Cairo: Imprimerie nationale, 1896), IX: 50–1 (French translation); *'Abd al-Rahmān al-Gabartī's History of Egypt*, trans. Thomas Philipp et al. (English translation) (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1994), IV: 265–66.

24 Map surveyed on 9 June 1932 by the Service des antiquités islamiques d'Égypte, a sketch of which is reproduced in Bernard Maury, "Maison al-Sadat," in *Palais et maisons du Caire du XIV^e au XVIII^e siècle*, ed. B. Maury (Cairo: Publications de l'IFAO, 1983), 67–86 (69 for the map).

25 'Abd al-Rahman al-Gabarti, *'Aja'ib al-athar fi al-tarajim wa-al-akhbar*, IV, 190.

26 The watercolour was auctioned as lot 188 of *Dessins anciens et objets d'art et d'ameublement*, sale on 27 March 2009 at Thierry de Maigret's auction house in Paris. It had been exhibited under no. 32 in The British Fine arts section (Group 1, Class 2) of the 1878 *Exposition Universelle* in Paris.

FIGURE 65 Félix Bonfils, *Cour de maison arabe, Le Caire* [Prayer hall and harem entrance in the courtyard of the house of al-Sadat, in Cairo], 1880s. Albumen print. 22.9 × 28.3 cm
CHARENTON-LE-PONT, MÉDIATHÈQUE DE L'ARCHITECTURE ET DU PATRIMOINE, APMFO011855

minbar. (Fig. 65) Not much of the house is extant today, with the exception of *umm al-afrāḥ*, and a few smaller rooms, including an upper *qā'a*, not mentioned by al-Gabarti, that notably rests on a rather short marble column (possibly reused from the old *maq'ad*?). (Fig. 66)

Renovations were allegedly carried out again in 1279 AH (1862 AD).²⁷ If the date is correct, they would have been the initiative of Ahmad Abu al-Nasr (d. 1280 AH/1863 AD), the twenty-first *khalīfa* of the Sufi order, shortly before his death. They may have been made at the instigation of his son, Ahmad 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Sadat

(1263 AH/1846 AD–1324 AH/1907), nicknamed Abu al-Futuhāt, who succeeded him in 1864.²⁸ The nature of the refurbishment can be grasped, if not fully comprehended, through a few sources. British decorator John Dibblee Crace (1838–1919), accompanied by photographer Frank Mason Good (1839–1928), visited the renovated hall on 7 December 1868 and reported on it.²⁹ The British artists were invited to eat with the owner of the house on this occasion and both were asked to make his portrait, in painting and photography,

27 Edmond Pauty *et al.*, "La protection des maisons et des palais anciens," in *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe, Procès-verbaux de l'exercice 1930–1932* 36 (1936), 140–48. In 1932, it was still a private *waqf*, managed by Colonel Abdel Rahim Fahmy pacha.

28 A biography is given by Muhammad Tawfiq al-Bakri, *Kitab Bayt al-Sadat al-Wafa'iyya* (Cairo: n.p., 1910), 8–11; see also Sara Rose Nimis, "Between Hands: Sanctity, Authority and Education in the Making of Modern Egypt" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2013).

29 London, V&A Archive, AAD/2001/6/328; John Dibblee Crace, *Letters from Egypt and Syria, 1868–69*, 7 December 1868, f. 89.

FIGURE 66 An upper *qā'a* at the house of al-Sadat, resting on a column possibly from a previous construction demolished in the early 1810s
 PHOTOGRAPH BY MATJAZ KACICNIK, 2016

FIGURE 67 Frank Dillon, *Reception room (mandara) in the house of the Sheikh al-Sadat, December 15, 1873*. Watercolour on paper. 42.9 × 28.9 cm
LONDON, VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, 855–1900

which they did. Frank Dillon produced a watercolour of the room dated 1873. (Fig. 67) German diplomat Max von Oppenheim (1860–1946) took photographs of *umm al-afrāḥ* between 1896 and 1910,³⁰ when the house was still inhabited (Fig. 68) – which was no longer the case in 1915 because of water damage.³¹ Traces of the 1860s renovation are still visible today; as is now the

rule, the restoration undertaken in 2016 under the supervision of architect Tariq al-Murri kept the different layers of the hall visible, from the original construction to the changes introduced in the 1860s and the recent intervention carried out in the 2010s. (Fig. 69)

The nineteenth-century revamp realistically depicted by Dillon's watercolour seems to have been motivated by decorative concerns. The most striking feature is the uniform surface decoration given to the walls. As on-site inspection confirms, this was obtained by closing all the recesses with wooden partitions (now removed, but made apparent by fragments left visible). Representations of similar partitions in other houses can be glimpsed at in engravings of the 1860s (see Fig. 108 in Chapter 4) and can still be observed in some historic houses in Cairo, such as Bayt al-Sihaymi (built 1648 AD). It was not an unusual initiative, but common practice. The marble mosaic dados, mentioned by al-Gabarti and that covered the bottom of the walls, were most probably removed before installing the partitions. Imprints of the marble slabs on the mortar used to fix them to the walls have been left visible nowadays. The same occurred with the tiles above the marble mosaic; there are a few remnants, but it is mainly their imprint that can be seen today. There is no evidence that the removal of marble followed financial reasons (profit could be made from its sale) or aesthetic ones (obtaining a homogeneous wall), but the latter is more likely. Wall paper imitating the designs of Iznik tiles was then laid on the wooden partitions, as suggested by photography, while the upper part of the walls received (or had previously received) a coat of painted plaster, still visible today. Since the two parts of the walls display distinct patterns, the facsimiles may have been put in place at different dates. (Shams al-Din would have needed more tiles, already impossible to procure, for his transformation of the room in the 1810s). Surmounting the painted tiles was a wooden frieze decorated with a peculiar colour scheme alternating vivid red, green, and blue, that corresponds to the decoration of *qā'a al-anwārīyya*

³⁰ I am grateful to Daniel Budke for providing approximate dates of the photographs. Max von Oppenheim's diaries, kept in Cologne, may help narrowing them.

³¹ Bahgat and Farnall, "Maison waqf as-Sādāt al-Ouafaīa," 725; according to another source, the house was already unoccupied in 1914 (Jehan d'Ivray, *Bonaparte et l'Égypte* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1914), 252).

FIGURE 68 Max von Oppenheim, *Haus des Schech es Sebat* [Grand hall named *umm al-afrāh* at the house of Sheikh al-Sadat], 1896–1910
COLOGNE, MAX FREIHERR VON OPPENHEIM FOUNDATION, FOTOSAMMLUNG MAX VON OPPENHEIM, 8001519,06

and may then be dated to the 1810s. It is consistent with al-Gabarti's account of a major transformation of the property taking place in those years. The new dados were left plain in the latest refurbishment, as Crace remarked³² and Dillon's watercolour (Fig. 67), as well as von Oppenheim's photograph, (Fig. 68) confirm. Crace was impressed by the magnificence of the room, and in particular by the luxurious Iznik tiles in white, blue and turquoise, but resented the renovation: "much has been renovated and badly. [...] The walls are, to a great extent, lined with old Persian tiles; blue,

green and white and the rest is painted to imitate them."³³ The homogeneous coating also concealed a monumental vertical fountain [*salsabīl*]; its connected basin was also taken away, possibly to avoid humidity in the room. In its place, the floor was carpeted with a patterned rug featuring large motifs that recalled a European (possibly British) import.

A complete new physiognomy was thus given to the hall, meant to achieve grandeur and distinction. On special occasions, the chief of the al-Sadat al-Wafa'iyya would be seated on the sofa lining the main *dīwān*; this is where ceremonies specific to their Sufi order would take place. The lineage was famous for its poets and the sessions

32 John Dibblee Crace, "On the ornamental features of Arabic architecture in Egypt and Syria," *The Builder*, 12 February 1870, republished in *Sessional Papers of the RIBA* (1870): 71–90.

33 Crace, *Letters from Egypt and Syria*, f. 90.

FIGURE 69 The grand reception hall named *umm al-afrāḥ* in 2017. The fountain and the basin are modern interpretations of what stood before the carpeting and panelling of the hall in the 1860s
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHOR, 2017

where musical instruments were played, “in spite of the displeasure of the orthodox Muslims.”³⁴ It is also in this room that the two British artists were invited to share a meal with the owner on 7 December 1868, seated on chairs set around a local table, made of “a large circular metal tray placed upon a small movable table” (probably a

kursī).³⁵ There were spoons to serve the meal, but the meat offered was eaten by seizing the bone with one’s fingers. Afterwards, the two Britons were invited to rest on a divan and were offered “English cigars,” although Crace would have preferred to smoke the chibouk as their host did. In short, life at the house of al-Sadat encompassed a mixture of Egyptian and non-Egyptian commodities and goods. When von Oppenheim photographed the place a few decades later, it was populated with seats, armchairs and tables; lighting was provided by Murano-like glass lamps and windows were dressed with curtains, as in any European interior of equivalent status.

The refurbishment of the main hall of the family house of the al-Sadat al-Wafa’iyya represents a deliberate decorative arrangement driven by distinctive ideas on aesthetics and comfort. The room was intentionally made anew, and its surface decoration made uniform. Getting rid of out-dated marble panelling and other trappings, such as the dados and the fountain with its basin in marble mosaic, does not seem in this instance a matter of necessity, as happened with the 1875 Damascene case reported earlier. It was a matter of status, self-projection and well-being. There may have also been the desire to avoid clashing colour schemes, as the Iznik-covered part was distinctively in cold blue tones, while the lower part of the room was initially in the warm reddish and yellow tones.

It makes sense that the work was carried out after the young Ahmad ‘Abd al-Khaliq al-Sadat had become head of the order, after his father’s death in 1863 and once having performed the customary rituals preparing him for his tenure (including the *hajj*). During this time, he regained resources and positions that the old elite household had lost during the reign of Mehmed Ali. In 1864, despite his young age, he was appointed to official functions in the legal and advisory bodies newly created by Khedive Ismail and received once more the endowed properties that had been confiscated

34 Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule, 1517–1798* (London: Routledge, 1992), 189.

35 Crace, *Letters from Egypt and Syria*, f. 91.

from the family. The new hall may have been a way to mark his ascension as the head of the family. It was a material gesture engaging with innovation in the context of a house with an established history. It can be seen as reflecting the young sheikh's dual education. Ahmad 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Sadat had been traditionally trained in religious matters at al-Azhar but he had also acquired a new kind of education at the government schools. He had attended the School of Languages, the government school founded and overseen by the famous figure of the *Nahda* [Arabic renaissance], Sheikh Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (1801–73). There, he learned Turkish, calligraphy and arithmetic, skills that became beneficial in his new responsibilities. In other words, Abu al-Futuh al-Sadat possessed the resources needed to navigate diverse social and cultural spheres, and could do the same in the realm of interior design.³⁶ On the other hand, the continuous rebuilding going on at Manzil al-Sadat since the 1810s (if not before) suggests that architecture is never frozen in time, as books on Islamic built heritage may want readers to believe. Buildings are caught in a permanent cycle of change; above all they are palimpsestic creations.

1.3 *Engaging Innovation: The Evidence of Photography*

One is prompted to associate the name of the young sheikh with a portrait by Frank Mason Good titled "Sheik Sadad" [sic] and dated c. 1868. (Fig. 70) It could well be the one taken, at his request, on the visit of Crace and Good to his house on 7 December 1868, although the sitter seems somehow older than Sheikh al-Sadat actually was (twenty-two years old). The inner fur of the robe worn by the young man suits the winter weather; it is a mark of opulence, and possibly of courtly rank: "it was an ancient Turkish tradition to grant fur-lined robes of honour to newly

appointed officials" at the Porte.³⁷ The portrait epitomises the composite material world that was his. The man leans, in elegant attire (possible made of yellow silk, the colour of the order), on an upholstered fauteuil covered with a glossy flowered fabric typical of Second Empire furniture, with a chibouk by his side and an *appliqué* hanging behind him. While the latter displays a technique said to be characteristic of Egyptian folk art,³⁸ some of its patterns denote external interference. The design of the bi-colour palmettes recall the aesthetics of Fraktur art, a form of book illumination practiced by Dutch *émigrés* to the United States in the early nineteenth century, as can be inferred from examples kept at the Free Library of Pennsylvania.³⁹ Could it be that such art reached Egypt through missionary activity, in the country itself or in the Holy Land? The sheikh's world was one with multiple external connections, although little is known about them.

The sheikh holds a relaxed, yet assertive, pose that suggests ease in front of the camera, while avoiding its gazing. The portrait exudes self-confidence. It makes an eloquent accompaniment to the rejuvenated hall, illustrating the embracing of global contemporary aesthetics and technology by a member of the traditional Egyptian elite within his centuries-old family residence.

Sheikh al-Sadat features in many other individual or group portraits taken by European or local photographers. The French Émile Béchard portrayed him a decade later for a series exhibited at

37 Hülya Tezcan, "Furs and skins owned by the Sultans," in Suraiya Faruqi and Christoph K. Neumann, eds. *Ottoman Costumes: From Textile to Identity* (Istanbul: Eren Press, 2004), 63–79.

38 Seif El Rashidi and Sam Bowker, *The Tentmakers of Cairo, Egypt's Medieval and Modern Appliqué Craft* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2018), 158–59.

39 On Fraktur art and samples very similar to the *appliqué* hanging at the house of al-Sadat, see Lisa Minardi, *Drawn with Spirit: Pennsylvania German Fraktur: from the Joan and Victor Johnson Collection* (Philadelphia and New Haven: Philadelphia Museum of Art/Yale University Press, 2015), 89.

36 Nimis, *Between hands*, 122–4.

FIGURE 70 Frank Mason Good, *Sheikh Sadat* [Portrait of the Sheikh al-Sadat, possibly taken on 7 December 1868]. Albumen print. 21 × 15.5 cm. HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY ARCHIVE, COLLECTION OF ARCHIVIST PATRICK MONTGOMERY. OBJECT NO. 2016.281

the *Exposition universelle* of 1878 in Paris. The views were intended to illustrate “popular types and costumes” in Cairo, but were shot against distinctive architectural background rather than in a studio.⁴⁰

40 “Ce sont des photographies nouvelles de M. Béchard sur les costumes et types populaires du Caire, où quelques détails intéressants d'architecture arabe viennent toujours former un fond de tableau,” Arthur Rhoné, “L'Égypte à l'Exposition universelle de 1878,” *L'Illustration*, 30 July 1878, no. 1853, 131; 68 prints in this series, on the format 27.2 × 20 cm, are kept at the Rare books and Special collections of the American University in Cairo's library, as part of the Philip Maritz collection. An album titled *Collection de types égyptiens*, with elaborate binding monogrammed “I.H.” for Prince Ibrahim Hilmi, presents 60 prints of the same

One is titled *N° 19 Cheikh Sadat/Descendant de Mahomet*; two others with similar setting are *N° 35 Cheik Sadat* and *N° 42 Cheik Sadat*. It is winter again; the sheikh's robe is linen with fur. The circumstance seems more official: in *N° 19* the sitter wears a large turban and is surrounded by books, with Persian rugs hanging behind him; he holds a *sabha*, the string of beads used for prayer and meditation. (Fig. 71) He is now over thirty years old and has put on some weight, but his face shows the characteristic cheekbones visible in the previous portrait. Other likenesses are more casual. In *N° 42* the sheikh is portrayed without his shoes while projecting an almost absent-minded face in front of Béchard's camera. A later, seemingly happier, portrait by Garabed Lekegian is plausibly a direct commission.⁴¹ (Fig. 72) This time, the sheikh wears a number of decorations over his ceremonial garb and seems to be slightly amused at the action taking place. The rugs or appliqué hanging are replaced by a painted screen but the view is still shot at his house, as evidenced by the armchair (identical to the one featuring in Good's photograph, except now upholstered in plain dark velvet-like fabric) and the design of the carpet (present as well in many other photographs taken at the house).

The last *khalifa* of the al-Sadat obviously enjoyed photography, and indeed willingly opened his house to photographers. A good part of Béchard's 1878 stills were shot in its main courtyard, as evidenced from their background. *N° 1. Écrivain public*, *N° 2. Cheikh lisant le Koran*, *N° 5. Groupe des Ulémas lisant le Koran*, *N° 7. Derviche Tourneur*,

series, without number and caption in the negative; it was auctioned in Paris on 13 November 2020 by Ader. Another copy of the same work is kept at Musée d'Orsay (PHO 1986 139).

41 Garabed Lekegian is said to have opened his studio in Cairo in 1887 and was mostly active during the 1890s–1910s; Ken Jacobson, *Odaliques & Arabesques: Orientalist Photography 1839–1925* (London: Quaritch, 2007), 54.

FIGURE 71 Émile Béchard, *N° 19 Cheikh Sadat/Descendant de Mahomet*, c. 1878. [Ahmad 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Sadat posing at his house, surrounded by books]. Albumen print on card. 27 × 21 cm
AUCTIONED ON 2 DECEMBER 2015 IN PARIS BY GROS-DELETTREZ, *LIVRES, MANUSCRITS & PHOTOGRAPHIES ORIENTALISTES*, LOT 195. CURRENT LOCATION UNKNOWN

N° 22. Derviche and *N° 33. Derviches tourneurs (groupe)* are taken at the entrance or in front of the prayer hall; *N° 4. Groupe des ulémas (Docteur en religion)*, *N° 11. Cheikh se rendant à la mosquée de nuit* and *N° 24. Iman arabe* stand by the doorstep to the private quarters of the house, while *N° 37. Repas arabe* can be located in the eastern corner of the courtyard. *N° 17. Sakkas (Porteurs d'eau)* takes place in a little recess next to the entrance to the private quarters. *N° 46. Sakka (Porteur d'eau)* is staged by the recognisable large tree standing in front of *umm al-afrāḥ*, (Fig. 73 and 74), as are *N° 39* and *N° 40. Marchandes d'oranges*.⁴² All are genre scenes meant for commercial distribution.

42 Cairo, American University in Cairo, Rare books and Special collections of the Library, Philip Maritz

FIGURE 72 Garabed Lekegian, *Son Excellence le Cheikh El Sadate*, 1890s [Ahmad 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Sadat in ceremonial garb]. Albumen print. 27.5 × 20.9 cm
LOS ANGELES, THE GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, KEN AND JENNY JACOBSON ORIENTALIST PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION, 1788–1960, 2008.R.3-3235

Some of the participants can be recognised across a number of photographs. The two bearded men in *N° 4* (Fig. 75) pose again in *N° 37*; one of them features in *N° 1*. Other figures, such as the man embodying the water carrier, appear in views signed Pascal Sebah. (Fig. 76), either because photographic sessions brought together several practitioners at the house, or Sebah purchased the plate from Béchard. In any case, photographers were joined by painters. Walter Charles Horsley (1855–1934) used the setting of the courtyard for *Unwilling Evidence* (1882), as demonstrated by the stonework

collection, Béchard's "Oriental studies" (as the series have been renamed).

FIGURE 73 Beniamino Facchinelli, *Cortile di Sceik-el-Sadat (Cairo)*. [The courtyard of the house of al-Sadat]. Mounted albumen print. 19 × 25 cm. *Raccolta artistica di fotografie sull'architettura araba, ornati ecc. dal XII° al XIII° secolo fotografia italiana del Cav. B. Facchinelli*, Cairo (Egitto) MDXXXLXXXVII [sic: XXX for CCC, i.e. 1887], f. 52

PARIS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE L'INHA, FOL PHOT 65

and the pattern of the colourful *khayyāmīyya* over a door on the far left side of the canvas.⁴³ In his

Striking a Bargain (1896),⁴⁴ one can discern part of the prayer hall in the background. Were the models brought by the artists? Were they recruited from among the personnel serving the household? What was going on there? Was it for leisure?

43 The canvas, 67 × 53 cm, is illustrated in El Rashidi and Bowker, *The Tentmakers*, pl. 25 and discussed p. 150 with no identified location.

44 *Striking a Bargain*, 92 × 71.5 cm, was sold in Paris at Hôtel Drouot, 18 March 1996, by Maître Tajan, lot 109.

FIGURE 74 Émile Bécard, *N° 46 Sakka (Porteur d'eau)*, c. 1878. [A model posing as water carrier in the courtyard of the house of al-Sadat]. Albumen print. 26.2 × 20.2 cm

LOS ANGELES, THE GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, KEN AND JENNY JACOBSON ORIENTALIST PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION, 1788–1960, 2008.R.3-587

Business? Exchanges of favour, as it happened with the sheikh's early photographic portrait? Patronage of the new medium? The British water-colourist Walter Tyndale (1855–1943), who had the chance to install his easel in the house in the 1890s, recalled a “unique and delightful place” and held fond memories of the aged “oriental prince”

who inhabited it. He remembered his deep laughter when being told jokes. They communicated through an intermediary, but the encounter was nonetheless pleasurable.⁴⁵

45 Walter Tyndale, *L'Égypte hier et aujourd'hui* (Paris: Hachette, 1910), 60.

FIGURE 75 Émile Béchard, N° 4. *Groupe des ulémas (Docteur [sic] en religion)*. [Ahmad 'Abd al-Khaliq al-Sadat poses with other sitters in the courtyard of his house, c. 1878. The calligraphic epigram on the appliqué fabric behind them reads "Oh opener of doors, open for us a blessed door"]. Albumen print. 26.9 × 21 cm

LOS ANGELES, THE GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, KEN AND JENNY JACOBSON
ORIENTALIST PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION, 1788–1960, 2008.R.3-588

FIGURE 76 Pascal Sebah, N° 368 *Sakka (Porteur d'eau)*. Before 1886. The model posing as water carrier in the courtyard of the house of al-Sadat was also photographed by Bécharé in identic attire. Albumen print on card. No dimensions provided
LOS ANGELES, THE GETTY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, PIERRE DE GIGORD
COLLECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, SERIES
III. 96.R.14 (F3.079)

2 Inducement and Resistance to Commodification

More insidious dynamics further shaped the commodification process of historic material culture in the Middle East. The gradual disposal of assets and structures belonging to pious foundations represents one such force. The phenomenon is still

poorly understood, for lack of research, but also because *waqf* is in essence a system of estate perpetuation that generally revolves around theoretical considerations, rather than working practice.

2.1 *Embezzling waqf Property and Assets*

When observed at close glance, physical endurance of *waqf* can be shown as coexisting with

many other situations. The study of the condition of madrasas [religious colleges] in Damascus and Cairo at the turn of the twentieth century shows a panorama of ruin and dilapidation. Out of a total of 152 such institutions identified in Ottoman Damascus, only half had survived as standing buildings and only twenty-four were still active as places for religious instruction; some of them had been converted into houses and made private property. In Cairo, only one-third of the madrasas listed during the nineteenth century still existed in the next one; out of the surviving thirty-seven, twenty-two partially retained their original state of construction while fifteen were reduced to mere vestiges.⁴⁶ This was the result of a usurpation process, alternatively named “embezzlement,” “cannibalisation” or “misappropriation” in the literature.⁴⁷ It could be caused by famines, economic recessions or exceptional taxation, or indeed, as already mentioned, by natural catastrophes such as fires or earthquakes. A number of circumstances had the capacity to turn *mawqūf* [lit. immobilised] structures into despoiled sites from which material assets, from utensils to manuscripts down to stones, would be gradually taken away until the place was abandoned, and ultimately erased. A low Nile flood was one such cause. Endowed institutions used the revenues from the agricultural land (or urban land for that matter) made *waqf* for them, to maintain their buildings and pay the wages of their employees. When incomes contracted, the personnel of the relevant foundations were downsized, and repairs kept at a minimum. The outcome was invariably the dilapidation and ultimate abandonment of the corresponding structure.⁴⁸ (Fig. 77)

46 Miura, *Dynamism in the Urban Society of Damascus*, 37, 283.

47 Miura, *Dynamism in the Urban Society of Damascus*, 37; Theunissen, “Ottoman tiles,” 296; Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 133.

48 Gaston Wiet, “La ‘grande pitié’ des mosquées du Caire. Les Wakfs,” in Louis Hauteceur and Gaston Wiet, *Les Mosquées du Caire* (Paris: Leroux, 1932), 1: 151–62. The title of the chapter echoes the plea made by writer and

It is telling that regulations on endowments promulgated in the early nineteenth century all had provisions regarding ruined and abandoned *waqf* properties. In 1837, a regulation stated that if insufficient funding was found for the reconstruction of a dilapidated *waqf*, its remains were to be sold and “the vacant land rented to those who display an interest.” Another article of the same regulation stipulated that budget surplus was to be prioritised for investment in destroyed *waqf* properties, with the prime objective of building mosques. Moreover, in 1864, the ruler decided to confiscate the *awqāf* whose private administrators had committed an offence against shari‘a.⁴⁹

The dismemberment of *waqf* property was therefore not necessarily illegal. Licit measures, such as *istibdāl* [exchange], had long been incorporated into *waqf* practice and allowed for all sorts of transformations of *waqf* property.⁵⁰ It is also admitted that the *istibdāl* regulation was abused in many ways and that such encroachments were unsuccessfully fought against when denounced in court.⁵¹ In a provocative text criticising *waqf*, sadly without proper referencing but based on the meticulous study of a series of endowment deeds, historian Gaston Wiet (1887–1971) highlighted types of misappropriation supported by a Hanafi judge in the years 1405–09, that became customary.⁵²

The fate of manuscripts belonging to endowed libraries in medieval times, such as the Ashrafiyya in Damascus,⁵³ offers numerous illustrations of

politician Maurice Barrès in favour of the incorporation of all French churches into the public domain in order to preserve them (Maurice Barrès, *La Grande pitié des églises de France* (Paris: Émile Paul frères, 1914)).

49 Miroslav Melčák, “The development of *Dīwān al-awqāf* in Egypt in the 19th century: Regulations of 1837 and 1851,” *Archiv orientální* 78, no. 1 (January 2010): 1–33.

50 Richard van Leeuwen, *Waqfs and Urban Structures: The Case of Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 160.

51 Miura, *Dynamism in the Urban Society of Damascus*, 283–84.

52 Gaston Wiet, “La ‘grande pitié’ des mosquées du Caire. Les Wakfs.”

53 Konrad Hirschler, *Medieval Damascus: Plurality and Diversity in an Arabic Library, The Ashrafiyya Library*

FIGURE 77 Gustav Steitz, after Karl Werner, *Tombs of the Kalifs of Cairo*, 1871 [The dilapidated condition of the late Mamluk Mausoleum of Ya'qub Shah al-Mihmandar in the outskirts of Cairo in 1871]. Chromolithograph, c. 1878
LONDON, WELLCOME COLLECTION, ATTRIBUTION 4.0 INTERNATIONAL (CC BY 4.0)

waqf embezzlement. Contrary to what is commonly assumed, books were highly mobile and migrated easily from one collection to another. "Many endowed books that were 'mobilized' in breach of the endowment's stipulations ultimately made their way to the shelves of another endowed library."⁵⁴ Konrad Hirschler warns against misreading the process. The restructuring of dissolved libraries in new collections during invasions, crises, catastrophes and revolts was a recurrent phenomenon that allows for insights into social processes of transformation and changing cultural practices. The misappropriation of holdings may primarily mean that a specific madrasa was about to stop teaching after 150 years of existence. Manuscripts

were sold because the library's income had drastically declined and was no longer able to fund the librarian's salary. In addition, the library could have lost its significance due to the foundation of other libraries. Equally, the restructuring of holdings could indicate the relative economic decay of a region. An Iraqi scholar travelling in the eleventh century to Egypt was able to buy large quantities of low-priced manuscripts during a famine. However, to transfer an endowed manuscript into a private collection was theoretically illegal and could be scandalous, as endowment deeds always stipulated that the manuscripts were inalienable. Modern scholarship has occasionally taken up this normative rule and has depicted such changes of status as one of the main factors for the purported decline of libraries in the Mamluk period. But in fact, the phenomenon is, above all, evidence of displacements from one institution to another,

Catalogue (Edinburgh: The Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 45–53.

54 Hirschler, *Written Word*, 131–34.

rather than a sign of decline. The rise of a local endowed library (in madrasas for instance) hastened the dissolution of existing libraries.

This had probably been the destiny of the Madrasa of al-Sultan Barquq in Cairo. It could explain how folios from a Mamluk Qur'an bearing his name were bequeathed to a library in Europe as early as 1851 (see Chapter 1). Another part of that very Qur'an had been in the hands of the Algerian emir 'Abd al-Qadir (1808–83) during his exile in Damascus in 1855. The leader offered the precious folios to his secretary Léon Roches probably a few years later; they were ultimately acquired by the Musée du Louvre in 2015.⁵⁵ The disposal of a copy of the holy book from the madrasa should be understood first and foremost as an indicator of its cessation as a teaching institution. The story epitomises the motion of *mawqūf* portable assets between Cairo and Damascus, from a religious foundation to private hands, in the 1850s. The prime difference is that the new hands ended up being European.

The “book drain to Europe” had been in full swing in Cairo since the early 1800s. In 1809, one single book hunter, the German “hobby Orientalist” Ulrich Jasper Seetzen (1767–1811), was able to ship home no less than 1,574 manuscripts, despite resistance encountered from mosques' custodians and with no assistance from the eleven booksellers established in the Khan al-Khalili who had claimed “that the French had taken all the manuscripts.”⁵⁶ Ultimately, the weakened state of institutions in charge of books left them unable to fight the disruption.

2.2 *Fighting Commercial Transactions of Religious Artefacts*

There are known instances when misappropriations of endowed objects was noticed, and drastically punished. The famous encyclopaedia of Egypt's historic topography drafted during the 1880s by the engineer and high official 'Ali Pasha Mubarak (1823–93), under the title of *Al-Khitat al-tawfiqiyya al-jadida*, includes at least one such story about the sale of a major endowed asset that sparked off open conflict and castigation.

The episode takes place in Cairo. In his entry on the Mosque of al-Sultan Shah in Bab al-Khalq (close to 'Abdin Palace), 'Ali Mubarak narrates in some details a story involving its pulpit. The mosque was in very poor condition and had been standing half destroyed and dilapidated for some while. Its custodian [*nāzir*] was one Muhammad Effendi al-Giridli/al-Kiridli [al-Geretly in contemporary Western sources, meaning someone from Crete]. The mosque possessed a finely executed minbar made from the precious wood known as *khashab al-'ūd* [cedar or epicea]. According to Mubarak, Muhammad al-Geretly sold it to a European traveller [*siyyāh min al-Afrang*] for 25,000 piasters [*qirsh*] *dīwānī* and the buyer took it home. When the news reached Khedive Ismail, the ruler condemned both the custodian, and the carpenter who had helped to dismantle the minbar, to be banned to the White Nile, where the custodian died. Deportation to the White Nile started after 1865 and applied to men sentenced with more than ten years of forced labour. Here it indicates that a case of *waqf* embezzlement by the person who oversaw it was considered a very serious offense. Since appropriation of *waqf* assets was common, one is left wondering what motivated such exceptional condemnation.⁵⁷ The Khedive ordered the renewal [*tajdīd*] of the mosque, and the work was completed in 1289 AH (1872–73 AD)

55 Paris, Musée du Louvre, MAO2281.

56 Ahmed El Shamsy, *Rediscovering the Islamic Classics: How Editors and Print Culture Transformed an Intellectual Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 10–20. Seetzen's acquisitions, with available information on their provenance, are kept at the Gotha Research Library, University of Erfurt, in Germany, Tilman Seidensticker, “How Arabic manuscripts moved to German libraries,” *Manuscript Cultures* no. 10 (2017): 73–82.

57 Rudolph Peters, “Egypt and the age of the triumphant prison: Legal punishment in nineteenth century Egypt,” *Annales islamologiques* 36 (2002): 253–85.

FIGURE 78 The prayer hall of the Mosque of al-Sultan Shah after its reconstruction in the 1860s
 PHOTOGRAPH BY MATJAZ KACICNIK, 2019

according to the *Khitat*.⁵⁸ There is no inscription on the building to corroborate the date given, but the mosque itself is visibly a nineteenth-century reconstruction incorporating only very few fragments from the previous structure.⁵⁹ Strikingly enough, its stone columns are sculpted along patterns directly echoing those found on the structure of Mamluk wooden pulpits; the feature is quite unique, with few equivalents in the city.⁶⁰ (Fig. 78)

Was the idea to eternalise in stone what had disappeared in wood?

It is tempting to relate the sale of al-Sultan Shah's pulpit to the Qaytbay minbar proposed by Husayn Fahmi *al-mi'mār* to the South Kensington Museum at the *Exposition universelle* of 1867 in Paris. The dates do match, considering that the sale of the minbar at al-Sultan Shah took place at some point between 1865 (the *terminus post quem* of deportation to the White Nile) and 1872 (the end of the mosque's renovation). The coincidence was detected after an Egyptian collector, Markus Simaika Pasha (1864–1944), had observed, when visiting the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1932, that the pulpit attributed to the Mosque of al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh bore an inscription in the name of Qaytbay. A report on the issue by the Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe pointed out that both a Qaytbay Mosque in Rawda Island, and the al-Sultan Shah Mosque

58 'Ali Mubarak, *Al-Khitat al-tawfiqiyya al-jadida* (Cairo: Bulaq, 1888–89), V: 30. Mubarak reports that the mosque celebrates an annual *mawlid* at the end of the month of Sha'ban (III:54).

59 The mosque is misdated and mislocated in the Archnet database [<https://archnet.org/sites/2357>].

60 Engaged columns at the Mosque of Qijmas al-Ishaqi (built 1480) exhibit equally sculpted surfaces, as pointed out by one of the anonymous reviewer of the manuscript, but their patterns diverge from those on minbars.

(itself having been repaired by Qaytbay), lacked their original minbar. It meant that the pulpit in London could have come from either of these monuments, and very likely from the latter.⁶¹ A careful material analysis of the wood of the pulpit now in London, of remnants of Qaytbay's patronage in the current al-Sultan Shah Mosque (inscriptions and ornaments on stone in particular) and of the decorative scheme of its reconstruction, should in due time clarify the matter.

On the other hand, the values paid for each – possibly the same – minbar differ significantly. The amount charged to the “European tourist” for the pulpit in al-Sultan Shah Mosque is almost three times less than the one reported by Husayn Fahmi *al-mi'mār* (£700, equating 68,250 piasters *dīwānī*, against the 25,000 reported by Mubarak) for the pulpit now in the V&A. Did the European traveller act as an intermediary for the Egyptian official? Did the price put forward by Husayn Fahmi take into account the heavy repair that he had to incur before being able to resell the pulpit? As a matter of fact, its canopy looks entirely new, and other parts also had to be completed in modern wood. Its current condition suggests that the original piece of work was truly worn out. What was sold at the time was not exactly a pulpit, but most probably fragments of one. It remains to be ascertained if the reinforcement, or indeed re-erection, of the pulpit was done in Paris or in Cairo. In any event, the sums talked about are considerable and it presupposes substantial cash availability. At the time, the annual wage of a master-carpenter averaged 3,000 piasters *dīwānī*: eight years of income would need to be sacrificed in order to procure the pulpit of al-Sultan Shah.⁶² In comparison, Husayn Fahmi

al-mi'mār's purchase represented for him almost two years' earnings.⁶³

However extraordinary the sale of this pulpit had been, this disposal of mosque furnishings was not unique. A similar story is recorded for carved stonework with epigraphy from the madrasa of al-Zahir Baybars in Cairo (adjacent to the Mausoleum and College of al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub in the historic centre of the city). The buyer this time was one Sheikh al-Babli, the chief of the guild of jewellers. The opening in 1874 of a new street had required the dismantling of the monumental portal of the madrasa. Its main bronze door was ultimately transferred to Cairo's Islamic Art Museum, but a pillar and further inscribed stones had remained on site. Part of the land was acquired by the sheikh from the *waqf* administration around 1882. The transaction was later denounced as having no legal basis, “whatever the administrative procedures through which it had gone.” The sheikh was asked to give back the land and the architectural salvage he had appropriated. He eventually did, at least in part, and was reimbursed for what he should not have been able to acquire, but still had managed to make his by legal means.⁶⁴ These were clearly contentious issues, but not fully illegal ones.

To counter material misappropriation, measures were taken as early as February 1870 to protect endowed assets. A Frenchman with some

61 Marcus H. Simaika, Muhammad Shafik, Robert Hyde Greg, John Home, Pierre Lacau, Mustafa Fahmy, Sayed Metoualli, Edmond Pauty, “7. Minbar de Kāyṭbāy déposé dans un musée de Londres,” *Procès-verbaux du Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe* 37, exercice 1933–35 (1940): 44.

62 The daily earning of a master-carpenter was 8.3 piasters; E. de Régný, *Ministère de l'Intérieur. Statistique de*

l'Égypte. Année 1873–1290 de l'Hégire (Cairo: Mourès, 1873), Annex 1, 1, 220.

63 The exchange rate of the pound sterling (£) was ninety-seven piastres and twenty paras in 1873 (Régný, *Statistique*, 1). The annual income of the *ma'mūr* Urnato [chief officer of Cairo's embellishment], a position Husayn Fahmi held until 1873, was 45,600 piasters *dīwānī* in 1872, which equated £470 (Cairo, Dār al-Waṭā'iḳ al-Qawmiyya, *Muhāfaza Misr, Mahāfiḍ* 1872, 2002–3607, List of appointees in the Administration of parks and gardens and other services with their monthly salaries, 1872–75).

64 Julius Franz, Ambroise Baudry, Ezzat Ismaïl, Pierre Grand, “Mosquée et tombeau du Sultan Saleh Nedjm-ed-Din Ayoub, au quartier de Nahassin, au Caire,” *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe* 3 (exercice 1885) (1886): 13–6.

experience in restorations in the Holy Land, Auguste Salzmann (1824–72),⁶⁵ was appointed as “curator of Cairo’s monuments” and director of an “Arab Museum” to be created, in order to complement the Egyptian Museum with a structure dedicated to Islamic artwork. Salzmann proposed, as the Khedive had suggested, selecting a disused mosque, albeit a restorable one, for the purpose in order to acquire a “remarkable site perfectly adapted to its new function” at low expense.⁶⁶ Objects could then be shown in their almost original context. On 24 February 1871, the Minister of Interior instructed Customs that the Khedive had decided that the “antiquities produced by the Arabs” could neither be traded nor exported.⁶⁷ In a report dated April 1871, Salzmann insisted that fragments of interest from a historic or artistic point of view, taken from on-going demolitions or belonging to dilapidated or abandoned mosques, were daily sold and exported abroad despite the Khedive’s instructions, and that a place to temporarily store such objects was urgently needed.⁶⁸ He reiterated his proposal to allocate one deconsecrated mosque to the purpose and suggested choosing the very large Mosque of al-Sultan Zahir

Baybars, which stood, abandoned, outside Cairo’s walls.⁶⁹

The project materialised ten years later, but another disused mosque was opted for, that of al-Hakim. All furniture and valuables held in mosques were systematically transferred to its galleries. (Fig. 79 and 80) This explains why images of furnishings and fittings in place, such as candlesticks, rugs, and stands in the mosques of Cairo are so rare (Fig. 81): most photographs were taken after the removal of their portable historic artefacts, and therefore give a distorted view of what mosques looked like prior to these conservation policies.

On 20 April 1880, directives were reiterated to prohibit the departure of objects or fragments coming from mosques or mausoleums – only elements from private houses could be taken out of the country.⁷⁰

In line with this, in all reported cases so far, the concern for preservation targeted exclusively religious architecture and objects. But the institutionalisation of conservation did not radically change the situation. In 1881 it was significantly within the Administration of Endowments [*awqāf*] that the Comité de conservation des monuments de l’art arabe was created and tasked with preserving historic mosques, and more importantly controlling their restoration. Surveillance over religious buildings increased.⁷¹ Legal control over the exportation of Islamic artefacts was reinforced in 1887. But

65 On Salzmann in Egypt, see Mercedes Volait, *Fous du Caire*, 51–2; for his contribution to photography, Lise Brossard-Gabastou, *Auguste Salzmann (1824–1872) Pionnier de la photographie et de l’archéologie au Proche-Orient* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2013).

66 Cairo, Dār al-Waṭā’iq al-Qawmiyya, *‘Aṣr Ismā’īl*, Antiquities, file 7/2, Note relative à la préservation des monuments arabes et à l’organisation du musée, 2 avril 1871.

67 Antoine Khater, *Le Régime juridique des fouilles et des antiquités en Égypte* (Cairo: Publications de l’IFAO, 1960), 69. The order was dated 3 Zū al-Ḥijja 1287 AH; a translation was issued to all Foreign consuls on 7 March 1871, Filib Jallad, *Qamus al-idara wa al-qada’* [*Dictionnaire d’administration et de jurisprudence*] (Alexandria: Yani Lagoudakis, 1890) 1: 83–4.

68 Cairo, Dār al-Waṭā’iq al-Qawmiyya, *‘Aṣr Ismā’īl*, Antiquities, file 7/2, Note relative à la préservation des monuments arabes et à l’organisation du musée, 2 avril 1871.

69 Cairo, Dār al-Waṭā’iq al-Qawmiyya, *‘Aṣr Ismā’īl*, Antiquities, file 7/2, Note relative à la préservation des monuments arabes et à l’organisation du musée, 2 avril 1871. Salzmann considered that the location of the mosque on the road to ‘Abbasiyya would make it very visible and an ideal destination for walks.

70 “Décret du Conseil des ministres en date du 20 avril 1880,” Filib Jallad, *Qamus al-idara wa al-qada’*, 84; Khater, *Le régime juridique*, 280.

71 Abundant literature, not always grounded on solid evidence, exists on the creation and working of the institution; for a substantial critical literature review, see István Ormos, “The Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe: Towards a balanced appraisal,” *The Arabist* (Budapest) 40 (2019): 47–140.

FIGURE 79 Anonymous, *Untitled* [Early objects from mosques moved to storage in the Mosque of al-Hakim, c. 1880]. Albumen print on card. 27 × 21 cm
MUSÉE DU LOUVRE, DOCUMENTATION DU DÉPARTEMENT DES ARTS DE L'ISLAM, PAI-59

there was still a long way to go for the protection of secular architecture and material culture.

2.3 *Chasing "Arab Rooms" in Cairo*

The attempt to purchase a Cairene "Arab room" for the Victoria and Albert Museum at this exact time offers further clues on the range of agencies and attitudes involved in the commodification of tangible heritage from the region. The idea came about in 1886, when British artist and collector Henry Wallis (1830–1916) returned from a visit to Cairo. Passionate about early ceramics and a leading figure in the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in London, Wallis had started spending time in Egypt in 1885 and would sojourn

there during most winters until 1901.⁷² Since 1880, he had also been acting as external art referee to the London museum, advising on opportune acquisitions. Having observed that houses were fast disappearing in Cairo, and their interior decorations on the verge of being destroyed or dispersed, he had ventured that the Victoria and Albert Museum could make good use of rooms "fitted up in Oriental fashion" [...] "to display the

⁷² Ronald Lessens, "Henry Wallis (1830–1916), a neglected Pre-Raphaelite," *The British Art Journal* xv, no. 1 (September 2014): 47–59.

FIGURE 80 Félix Bonfils, *Minaret de la mosquée El-Hakem*, 1890s. [Architectural salvage stored in the courtyard of the Mosque of al-Hakim]. The gallery built for smaller objects can be seen on the left hand; it was added in the 1890s. Albumen print on paper. 21.2 × 28 cm
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS RESEARCH CENTER, 257A

splendid collection of Oriental art possessed by the Museum.”⁷³

Wallis initially had in mind rooms at al-Musafirkhana, an uninhabited eighteenth-century

house that was part of the endowments of the ruling family, and was then placed under the control of the *Waqf* administration. The house had provided exhibition material in the form of a mashrabiya at the Paris *Exposition universelle* in 1867 (Chapter 1). Since then, it had occasionally served to lodge artists – for instance, a group of German and Austrian painters during three

73 London, Victoria and Albert Archive, MA/2/P6, Purchase of an Arab room, Letter of Henry Wallis to T. Armstrong, 12 July 1886.

FIGURE 81 Beniamino Facchinelli, *Interno della Moskea Suliman Pacha (Citadella) (Cairo)*. [The prayer hall in the Mosque of Sulayman Pasha before its furnishings were transferred to the Mosque of al-Hakim]. Mounted albumen print. 27 × 22 cm. *Raccolta artistica di fotografie sull'architettura araba, ornati ecc. dal XII° al XIII° secolo fotografia italiana del Cav. B. Facchinelli*, Cairo (Egitto) MDXXXLXXXVII [sic: XXX for CCC, i.e. 1887], f. 30
PARIS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE L'INHA, FOL PHOT 65

months in 1875–⁷⁴ but otherwise it was seldom occupied. Ten years later, the house was “past all reparation, whole sets of apartments having fallen into ruin.”⁷⁵ During the ‘Urabi Revolt of 1882, the house had sheltered refugees and many of the fittings that could be stripped from walls

and floors disappeared in those circumstances.⁷⁶ (Fig. 82 & 83)

Since the mid-1870s, there had been an interest in British artistic circles for “Arab rooms,” especially for those coming from Damascus because of their floral ornament. The painter Frederic Leighton had a Damascene-inspired “Arab Hall” erected at his London studio in 1877–79. It was highly artificial, yet an inspiring place. Museums were not necessarily inclined to acquire real rooms, for lack of space and a bias towards artworks lined up in

⁷⁴ *Orientalische Reise: Malerei und Exotik im späten 19. Jahrhundert*, eds. Erika Mayr-Oehring, Elke Doppler, Andre Gingrich (Vienna: Wien Museum, 2003), 48 sq.

⁷⁵ Henry Wallis, “Ancient Cairo houses,” *Art Journal* (London) (May 1888): 144–49.

⁷⁶ Wallis, “Ancient Cairo houses,” 148.

FIGURE 82 Beniamino Facchinelli, *Salone della casa Ibrahim Pacha (Cairo)*. [The grand hall in the house of al-Musafirkhana after 1882]. Mounted albumen print. 22 × 27 cm. *Raccolta artistica di fotografie sull'architettura araba, ornati ecc. dal XII° al XIII° secolo fotografia italiana del Cav. B. Facchinelli, Cairo (Egitto) MDXXXLXXXVII* [sic: xxx for CCC, i.e. 1887], f. 100
PARIS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE L'INHA, FOL PHOT 65

FIGURE 83 Beniamino Facchinelli, *Pavimento in mosaico (Ibra. P.)* [Marble mosaic floor before its looting at the house of al-Musafirkhana], Mounted albumen print. 28 × 21 cm. *Raccolta artistica di fotografie sull'architettura araba, ornati ecc. dal XII° al XIII° secolo fotografia italiana del Cav. B. Facchinelli, Cairo (Egitto) MDXXXLXXXVII* [sic: XXX for CCC, i.e. 1887], f. 109

PARIS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE L'INHA, FOL PHOT 65

show cases.⁷⁷ However, to some, times seemed propitious to get Cairo specimens. In 1883, Stanley Lane-Poole had cynically reported that:

The present is a particularly favourable time for such purchasing [of Arab artworks]. The late war has caused many changes which bring private property into the market; old houses are being broken up, and persons are now ready to sell heirlooms which they have hitherto carefully preserved. At the same time the present predominance of England

in Egypt gives an English purchaser unusual facilities.⁷⁸

However, Lane-Poole turned out to be misguided on all counts. The Museum's authorities thought it unlikely that they could store such imposing items inside their already overcrowded building. Moreover and somewhat ironically, British power in Cairo proved less effective than expected. The British consul-general in Egypt, Sir Evelyn Baring (later 1st Earl of Cromer), agreed to mediate with the Khedivial family, but to no avail. Truly enough,

77 Moya Carey, "Appropriating Damascus Rooms."

78 London, V&A archive, Nominal file MA/1/L257, S. Lane-Poole to the Director, 4 January 1883.

however, a preliminary agreement was reached in 1887 with the Khedive and the *Waqf* administration for the acquisition of the main room of al-Musafirkhana for £300, a price covering the “cost of restoring the room to habitable condition” – that is of replacing the lost elements with new ones. What mattered for an endowment was to serve the purpose for which it had been created; in this case, the stake was to get a habitable residence, whatever the age and shape of its walls and ceilings. Conservation was not the central concern. The agreement was conditional on the written consent of the brother of the Khedive, Prince Husayn. In 1888, Baring reported that the latter had accepted to “let the roofs be taken away if the Khedive would see him through any family difficulties.” But the current ruler, Tefvik (r. 1879–92), declined responsibility on the matter. The only way out was to have all the members of the three families involved agreeing to the purchase, a “hopeless task,” considering the number of parties concerned. Baring humorously concluded his reporting to the V&A that the five-million pound loan he was simultaneously negotiating for the Egyptian finances proved an easier matter than the £300 roof!⁷⁹

Discussions resumed three years later. In view was now an entirely different interior, a room well known to many artists and travellers. It belonged to the estate used by the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Muhammad al-Abbasi al-Mahdi (1827–97). The residence had been built at the very beginning of the eighteenth century according to a date identified on one column (1704–05). It had been granted to the Sheikh al-Abbasi upon his appointment as Grand Mufti in 1848. Architects and painters had access to the reception hall since then, starting with the Bernese Theodor Zeerleder (1820–1868) who produced the oldest known watercolour of the room that very year. Many other artists followed

suit.⁸⁰ (Fig. 84 and 85) All depicted an empty place, devoid of any furnishing. In 1882, the room was deemed one of the most elegant and complete specimen of an “Arab reception hall”, albeit a decaying one. The section and plan drafted by Czech architect Frantisek Schmoranz (1845–92) in 1874, although not an accurate survey but a “restoration” in the style of a seventeenth-century room, shows a place reduced to its ground-floor reception room, the main room with lateral recesses known as a *qā’a* or *mandara*, and its attached *maq’ad* [loggia overlooking the courtyard].⁸¹ The date 1280 AH/1863 AD inscribed on the top of one of the coloured glass windows alludes to some work done that year. In all likelihood, the Mufti did not use the rooms – according to local rumour, he had at his disposal a much finer reception hall, which might have meant one arranged *alla franca*.⁸² In the vicinity of the old hall, was indeed a newer mansion, decorated in the Ottoman Rococo genre so popular in the early nineteenth century.⁸³

Talks regarding the disused room appear to have taken place in early 1891. The Museum was now ready to spend £500 on the transaction. The Mufti was approached by the dragoman of General Grenfell, a then Major-General of the Egyptian Army, and one of his officers. The two men endeavoured to “cajole” the Sheikh al-Abbasi but found him “obdurate.” They reported that he would

80 Georg Ebers, *Egypt Descriptive, Historical, and Picturesque* (New York: Cassell and Co, 1885) 11: 77; Francine Giese et al., *Mythos Orient. Ein Berner Architekt in Kairo*, exhibition catalogue (Oberhofen Castle) (Oberhofen: Stiftung Oberhofen, 2015); Mercedes Volait, “Figuration et fortune artistique des intérieurs du Caire au XIX^e siècle,” in *The Myth of the Orient: Architecture and Ornament in the Age of Orientalism*, eds. Francine Giese and Ariane Varela Braga (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), 17–33.

81 Volait, ed., *Le Caire dessiné et photographié*.

82 Arthur Rhoné, *Coup d’œil sur l’état du Caire ancien et moderne* (Paris: A. Quantin, 1882), 35–6.

83 While the “Mufti room” is gone since the 1920s, remnants of its nineteenth-century additions were still visible in 2018. For their description in the 1980s, see Mercedes Volait, “Grandes demeures du Caire au siècle passé,” *Cahiers de la recherche architecturale* 20/21, (1987): 84–93.

79 London, V&A archive, Purchase of an Arab room, MA/2/P6, Note of T. Armstrong, 19 August 1886; Caspar Purdon Clarke to Baring, 13 May 1887; Baring to director of the Museum, 11 February 1888.

FIGURE 84 Anonymous, *Untitled* [An artist at work in the reception room of the Mufti's house]. Albumen print on paper. 13 × 18 cm
BOSTON, THE ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM, ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER'S TRAVEL ALBUMS, EGYPT, 1874 (N.F.)

“prefer to see the room wrecked and the ornamentation demolished to selling it.” Wallis could not figure out if the response was determined by “religious fanaticism” or “pure cussedness...”⁸⁴ This

was quite an unperceptive comment, and one telling as to the little attention given to local voices. In the context of British-occupied Egypt, adamant opposition to anything British from someone who could afford it should hardly come as a surprise. Wallis extended his bitterness to the British authorities. To him, Britain's consul-general had never been supportive of the efforts to bring home

84 London, V&A Archive, MA/1/W330, Henry Wallis nominal file, part 1, Letter of Henry Wallis to Sir Philipp Cunliffe-Owen, 5 February 1891.

FIGURE 85 Frantisek Schmoranz, *Mandara des Mufti* [Mandara of the house of al-Mufti], 1874. Watercolour on paper.
56 × 40 cm
CHRUDIM, SOKA STÁTNÍ OKRESNÍ ARCHIV [DISTRICT ARCHIVES]

an “Arab room.” The British broker was told by Baring that there only remains to see “whether the Khedive will bring the Mufti to reason,” but the promised audience was never arranged. Wallis lamented the lack of support of the British authorities in Egypt when it came to matters of artistic interest, imagining that the French or German representatives would have acted very differently and succeeded in getting the room!⁸⁵ British-occupied Egypt was decidedly very different from what one would imagine today.

In the end, the “Moufti room” never headed to London. Power relations, even in colonial circumstances, proved to generate more unfortunate

interactions than anticipated. A whole range of obstructions was possible, and the British authorities in Egypt were not last at slowing action. Attitudes towards the disposal of historical assets could greatly differ from one individual to another, and this held true way beyond the European-Egyptian divide. Responses, whether Egyptian or British, were themselves diverse, ranging from reluctant assent to adamant refusal. As for the room itself, it did not survive the passing of time. Its condition was surveyed as pitiful in 1908. A restoration was contemplated but abandoned, because the owners “were not willing to contribute to the expenses.”⁸⁶ Photographs taken in 1913

85 London, V&A Archive, MA/1/W330, Henry Wallis nominal file, part 1, Letter of Henry Wallis to General Donnelly, 18 February 1891.

86 Albert Boinet *et al.*, “Procès-verbal n° 149,” *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l’Art Arabe* 24, exercice 1907 (1908): 1–5, 24.

showed walls despoiled of all their tiles.⁸⁷ The room ultimately disappeared when a new major thoroughfare, the al-Azhar Street, was opened in 1922–25 through the property, leaving the modern quarters built in the 1850s as the sole remains.⁸⁸ Preservationists may argue that the removal of the room would have guaranteed its survival. As we have seen, decontextualisation did not always guarantee conservation and moreover, the reasoning pays little attention to how such act would have been perceived locally.

2.4 *Unrelenting Misappropriation*

Misappropriation continued in parallel, whenever given a chance. A later episode relates to the Mosque of al-Ashraf Barsbay in Khanqa, a locality in the northern outskirts of Cairo, in the province of Qaliubiyya. In 1894 a petition was sent by inhabitants of the adjoining district of Shubra to the *Waqf* Administration to signal the existence of the mosque, which had fallen out of use, probably many decades earlier. The Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe was summoned to inspect the building. It reported that the minaret of the mosque had only retained one original storey; at the entrance was a door with fragments of bronze plating featuring animal iconography and inscriptions relating to another building. The door had been commissioned in 600 AH /1203 AD by one Shams al-Din Sunqur al-Tawil; it was an example of reuse from another structure.⁸⁹ (Fig. 86) More *spolia* stood inside the mosque: one column had a capital with a cross, most of the other capitals were Corinthian, and many served as bases rather than capitals. The minbar kept only one

of its doors. A *sabil* [fountain] was added during the reign of Abbas I (1854–59) according to oral tradition. Inhabitants knew of revenues included in the *waqf* of the Mosque of Al-Ashrafiyya in Cairo. The *Waqf* Administration was requested to provide information on these resources.⁹⁰ The final conclusion was that the mosque had been abandoned long ago, but could be repaired. Yet, no course of action was immediately taken. Meanwhile rumours developed that the mosque hid a treasure that included gold. The building was looted during one night in 1897 in hopes of finding it.⁹¹ Following this, its security was reinforced, and some repairs were made afterwards. The precious bronze door was taken away to be restored. When the work was completed in 1900, it was considered safer to keep the artwork in the Museum of Islamic Art, where it still stands today.⁹² Along the same rationale, the mosque's minbar did not return to the sanctuary after its restoration in 1914; after some hesitancy, it went to another al-Ashraf Barsbay foundation, closer to town, and hence better watched over.⁹³ For safety reasons, the mosque was furthermore locked up. It became a home for bats. A 1921 photograph reveals a structure in derelict condition, with a minaret stripped of its upper shafts.⁹⁴ It would take another hundred years to have the mosque reverted to its initial splendour. The restoration work was ultimately completed in December 2017.⁹⁵ Thus, the afterlife of historical monuments in Cairo follows quite unpredictable

87 "Maison du Moufti. Caire. Vue intérieure de la Ka'a." *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe* 29, exercice 1912 (1913): 10, pl. VI–X.

88 Themselves in dilapidated condition today; on the new *salāmlīk* of the Moufti residence, Mercedes Volait, "Grandes demeures au Caire."

89 Ismaïl, Pierre Grand *et al.*, "8° Rapport sur la mosquée du sultan Barsbaï au village de Khanka," *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe* 11, exercice 1894 (1895): 151–55.

90 Pierre Grand *et al.*, "Mosquée du sultan Barsbaï au village el-Khanka," *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe* 12, exercice 1895 (1896): 22–4.

91 Louis Hauteceur and Gaston Wiet, *Les Mosquées du Caire* (Paris: Leroux, 1932), 1: 137.

92 Cairo, Museum of Islamic Art, 2389.

93 F.R.H Darke *et al.*, "Minbar de la mosquée d'al-Achraf Barsbâi, à al-Khanqah," in *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe* 33, exercice 1920–1924 (1928): 141–42.

94 London, v&a, Photograph by K.A.C. Creswell, 932–1921.

95 I am indebted to Karima Nasr, from 'Ayn Shams University, for the information on its full restoration (including the reconstruction of the minaret).

FIGURE 86 Beniamino Facchinelli, *Porta Moschea de Khanka*. [The entrance door of the Mosque of al-Ashraf Barsbay in Khanqa before its restoration in 1900, and subsequent transfer to the Museum of Islamic Art]. Albumen print. 17.4 × 12.2 cm
PARIS, BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE, ESTAMPES ET PHOTOGRAPHIE, BOITE FOL B-EO-1717

ways and in the process, buildings experienced all sorts of reconfigurations.

3 Contrasting Attitudes

A large range of dynamics was involved in the commodification process of Cairo's artefacts and salvage. Urban obsolescence, social aspirations to change and economic necessities were among the factors that hastened it: local factors determined the type of goods successively available. The driving forces were a combination of enduring realities and novel dynamics. On the one side, was a centuries-old history of shrinking *waqf* resources and waning assets, as well as a tradition of architectural reuse; on the other, the unprecedented pressure of European goods and the constraint to adjust to their influx. The amalgamation of both forces stirred the shift from traditional commercial flows and activities to the trade of historical valuables and Revival handicrafts, as personified by the trajectory of a Damascene alleged *shāh bandar al-tujjār* [head of the merchants' guilds] turning into a successful dealer in Islamic antiques by the mid-nineteenth century, as seen in Chapter 2. As a collateral effect, new artefacts from the region became global commodities, as the fate of the modern *kursī* demonstrated.

Recorded events suggest that the transformation of endowed assets into commodities was not a linear process. It was eventually contested and fraught, as exemplified by the Khedivial reaction to the dismantling of the pulpit of the al-Sultan Shah Mosque in Cairo. The true novelty in the 1870s was the authorities' opposition towards the disposal of endowed artefacts in Egypt. But the idea of conservation was not necessarily supported by everyone across society. The "father of Coptic archaeology," Marcus Simaika recalled in his memoirs:

In the Coptic Church, unfortunately, there is a rule that objects used in place of worship should be burnt rather than fall in profane hands as soon as they became unserviceable.

This has made the collection of religious relics of historic value very difficult. The lumber rooms in the monasteries and churches are crammed with old woodwork, icons and fragments of manuscripts, etc. store for use as fuel for baking the bread used for Holy Communion.⁹⁶

Attitudes towards what could be disposed of, or not, were not unequivocal. The Egyptian Grand Mufti adamantly opposed the dismantling of the decoration of a disused room adjoining his residence, while another considerable religious figure, the Sheikh al-Sadat al-Wafa'iyya, got rid of similar decoration adorning his own reception hall in order to replace it with new fixtures. The former case was a room that had lost its *raison d'être*; the latter was a living place. At the demand end of the transaction, the forces at play were no less divergent. An exclusive group of Western *connoisseurs* supported from the 1870s onwards the idea of collecting architectural salvage for museographical purposes, but official authorities, from museum curators in Britain to British representatives in Egypt, were reluctant to provide assistance and did not fully support salvaging initiatives.

Stepping outside the Egyptian situation for a moment provides further perspective. Reflecting in the 1910s on the Indian antiques market, Lockwood de Forest similarly depicts a context changing at rapid pace and tightly dependent on local responses. He outlined the drastic change since he had visited in 1881 and 1891, when he used to operate through his Indian associate and a network of brokers who would gather objects from which he made his selection. There were now established dealers with shops in all the large cities controlling the market: "they have learned the kind of objects for which there is a demand and

96 Excerpts from the *Memoirs of Marcus Simaika Pasha* (unpublished manuscript), f. 14–15, my gratitude to Ola Seif for providing a copy; Samir Simaika, Nevine Henein, *Marcus Simaika, Father of Coptic Archaeology* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2017).

prices have advanced." Yet everything was not readily available, or had not been until then. As far as he could tell, for instance, "no object belonging to a temple had ever been sold except when it was injured, which destroys its sacredness." In his experience, it was the revival after 1892 of all the native religions and the subsequent remodelling or enlarging of many a temple or a mosque that changed the situation. The architectural transformations now offered unprecedented opportunities to the "scientific collector," as he described himself. He cites the case of a temple being rebuilt of marble as in fact the unique occasion to secure its old wood carving, much of which however perished in the process. Salvaging, even when possible, was a delicate enterprise.⁹⁷

97 Washington, Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art, Lockwood de Forest papers, 1858–1980, Box 1, folder 66, "Indian Domestic Architecture"

In the case of Egypt, measures were simultaneously taken by the ruling authority to fight misappropriation. By 1870, an emblematic banning order had been pronounced against a guilty *waqf* custodian and a conservation programme had been allotted to a specialist in restoration. An *ad hoc* committee, the Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe, was installed in December 1881 within the administration of *awqāf*. Its efficiency was to be questioned,⁹⁸ but it suggests that conservation concerns and historical consciousness were gaining momentum in Egypt.

Typescript, circa 1919, Part 3, views 79 to 84 (foliated 218 to 233).

98 In a letter dated 1913, Wiet expressed serious doubts about the capacities of the Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe: "Ils sont tellement paresseux à ce Comité;" Bibliothèque de Genève, Correspondance Max van Berchem, Box 29, f. 97, Letter of Gaston Wiet to Max van Berchem, 21 April 1913.