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## ABSTRACT

This curriculum project, a lesson on Islamic Cairo, could be used in a unit on Islamic civilization in an advanced placement high school world history or world civilization course, or it could be used in a college level Middle Eastern history or Islamic civilization course. Upon completion of the lesson, students will be able to describe in writing the appearance and function of Islamic Cairo, a living example of a medieval Islamic city. The lesson takes the form of an interactive slide lecture, a simulated walking tour of 25 monuments in Islamic Cairo. The lesson strategy is described in detail, including materials needed and a possible writing assignment. The lesson first provides a brief architectural history of Cairo and a short description of the different minaret styles found in Cairo. The lesson then addresses the slides, each representing a monument, and includes historical and architectural information and discussion questions for each. Contains 12 references. (BT)

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# *A Walking Tour of Islamic Cairo: An Interactive Slide Lecture*

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# *A Walking Tour of Islamic Cairo: An Interactive Slide Lecture*

## *Introduction*

### *Objective*

This interactive lesson can be incorporated into a unit on Islamic civilization in an advanced placement or honors high school-level world history or world civilization course. This lesson can also be incorporated into a college-level Middle Eastern history or Islamic civilization course. Upon completion of this activity, students will be able to describe in writing the appearance and function of Islamic Cairo, a living example of a medieval Islamic city.

### *Strategy*

This lesson will take the form of an interactive slide lecture: a simulated walking tour of Islamic Cairo. This teaching strategy transforms a passive, teacher-centered lesson--a lecture--into an active, participatory experience. As the activity unfolds, students observe, analyze, and act out images of Islamic Cairo that are projected on a screen in front of them. For each slide or groups of slides, the teacher will ask the students a number of questions that progress from basic to complex. At selected points in the lecture, the teacher will ask students to act out a scene being shown to them. During the course of the lesson, the teacher records important notes on a chalkboard or overhead transparency, which is located to the side of the main screen. Seeing images and notes simultaneously helps students learn and remember important facts.

Teachers are not required to undertake the "walking tour" in its entirety. Teachers are free to do all or part of it and can go into as much detail and ask as many questions as they deem appropriate. Some teachers may want their students to experience the whole tour, others may only devote enough class time to "visit" a handful of monuments. Either option is acceptable and will contribute to the student's understanding of what a medieval Islamic city looked like and what life was like for its inhabitants.

### *Materials*

Primary source materials include field notes and slide photographs taken by the author in Cairo in June and July 2000. Secondary source materials include slide photographs, books, and maps purchased by the author in either Cairo or the United States. See the list of references at the end of the project for published works, maps, and professional slides.

Copies of slide photographs taken by the author are available upon request for a nominal fee.

## *Questions*

The use of questions that facilitate the student's understanding of a particular scene is essential to attaining the objective of this interactive slide lecture. For each slide or group of slides, the teacher should prepare a set of questions that are increasingly more difficult. In the lesson that follows, the author has included for each slide one or more sample questions. Some are basic; others are very complex. Some require the simple recall of facts; others require the use of higher level thinking skills. The questions not only analyze the image at hand but also reinforce knowledge of Islamic civilization and Middle Eastern history. For example, for the slide of Qalawun's monument, which contained a hospital, the author has provided two questions: one analyzing the architectural style of the minaret and the other discussing the accomplishments of medieval Islamic physicians.

## *Background Notes*

This project includes a brief architectural history of Cairo and a short description of the different minaret styles present in Cairo. Furthermore, historical and architectural background information is included for each of the monuments "visited" on the "walking tour" of Islamic Cairo.

## *Evaluation*

After completing the walking tour, the teacher may wish to assess the students' knowledge and understanding by requiring them to complete a writing assignment. The following is a sample essay topic:

Imagine that it is 1325 and you are a Venetian merchant who has traveled to Cairo to operate a trade mission. After living in Cairo for six months, you send your family a detailed letter in which you describe what you have seen and experienced for the past half year.

Before you begin to write, consider the following points: (1) What do you think are some of the most remarkable architectural features of fourteenth-century Cairo? (2) What have you learned about the politics, economy, and culture of medieval Cairo? And (3) What have you learned about the way of life of fourteenth-century Cairenes?

Now, write a letter to your family in Venice in which you describe what you have seen and experienced during your stay in medieval Cairo.

## *A Brief Architectural History of Cairo*

This Fulbright-Hays Curriculum Project is designed to acquaint students with Cairo's historic Islamic identity and make it possible for them to gain an appreciation of what life was like in a medieval Islamic city.

Caroline Williams, the author of *Islamic Monuments in Cairo: A Practical Guide*, wrote: "The traveler is commonly pleased to find a dozen buildings from the Middle Ages in a single European city. Cairo has them by the score. It is an unequalled treasure house of Islamic architecture—a treasure house that most visitors pass by in ignorance." Similarly, David McCullough, the narrator of the *Smithsonian World* video "Islam," called Cairo "the best preserved medieval city in the world."

There can be no doubt that the historic Islamic quarter of Cairo presents one of the most remarkable landscapes on earth. If you want to experience the grandeur of classical Islamic civilization or seek to capture the magic of the tales of the *Arabian Nights*, then come visit Cairo's Old City, where many of its medieval monuments still stand and its inhabitants still conduct their personal lives and public affairs as they did in the Middle Ages.

Although the Old City is the subject of this project, a brief overview of the history of Cairo might be beneficial to the reader. Within these pages, the terms Islamic Cairo, Old City, and historic city will be used interchangeably. They refer to the section of Cairo that stretches from Fatimid al-Qahira in the north to the Mosque of Ibn Tulun in the south.

In approximately 3100 BC, the city of Memphis became the capital of the Old Kingdom of Egypt. Memphis was located at the junction of the Nile Delta and the Nile Valley—a strategic position between Upper and Lower Egypt and between the Mediterranean and Red Seas. The site of Memphis is about twenty-three kilometers south of modern Cairo on the west bank of the Nile River.

In the sixth century BC, Persian invaders built a fortress, named Babylon, to guard the old Pharaonic river crossing, which was located near the ancient city of Heliopolis, approximately ten kilometers northeast of modern Cairo. Heliopolis was established on the east bank of the Nile at the apex of the Nile Delta and near the western end of a canal—completed around 2000 BC—which connected the Nile with the Red Sea.

The Romans, who ended the Ptolemaic Dynasty in 31 BC, built a legionary fort on the site of Babylon, calling it Babylon-in-Egypt. The fort, which controlled access to Upper Egypt, became an important frontier outpost and major commercial center. Old Cairo—the Coptic quarter of present-day Cairo—corresponds to the location of the Roman fort.

In the fourth century AD, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, but Egyptian or Coptic Christianity was declared a heresy over its belief that Christ had only one nature. Consequently, Roman authorities persecuted the Egyptian church. Several orthodox Christian churches were built in the fort and surrounding area, which was becoming a populous settlement.

In AD 641, Muslim armies from Arabia wrested Egypt from the Byzantine Empire—the successor to the Eastern Roman Empire—and ended the oppression of the Coptic Church. The Arab general, 'Amr ibn al-'As, founded the city of al-Fustat, the name of which is derived from the Latin word *fossutum* and the Greek word *fossaton*, both of which mean "camp." Al-Fustat

was established near the old Roman fort, which the Muslims popularly called the Fortress of the Greeks. Al-Fustat, initially a camp for the Muslim army, became an important meeting point for Muslims from Asia and North Africa. To prevent tribal conflict within his army, 'Amr assigned each tribe to a different quarter within al-Fustat. The quarters eventually merged into a single settlement. 'Amr also built the first mosque in Africa on a site near the Nile; souqs sprang up near the mosque.

In the middle of the eighth century, the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad replaced the Umayyad caliphs of Damascus. The Abbasid general, Sahih ibn 'Ali, invaded Egypt, burned al-Fustat, and established a new settlement, al-'Askar ("the cantonment"), northeast of al-Fustat. Nothing of al-'Askar remains today, but it provided a prototype for royal cities that would serve later rulers and their courts.

In 868, Ahmad ibn Tulun, a native of Samarra in northern Iraq, became the Abbasid governor in Egypt. He soon became an independent ruler and established the Tulunid Dynasty. Ibn Tulun built a new town, al-Qata'i' ("the wards") northeast of al-'Askar to house the members of his court and elite military forces. Al-Qata'i' was modeled after Samarra. The new town, which was separate from the commercial center at al-Fustat, contained grand buildings, including a hospital, palace, and mosque, and ample open space for tournaments and sporting events. The main square separated the palace on the east side of the city from the mosque on the west side. Ibn Tulun's magnificent mosque is the only building to survive the destruction of al-Qata'i' by loyal Abbasid troops in 905.

By the time the Fatimid ruler al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah and his general Gawhar al-Siqilli took control of Egypt in 969, al-Fustat has grown into a major urban area popularly known as Misr. The larger city had incorporated the remaining portions of al-'Askar and al-Qata'i'. The Fatimids founded a new city, named Mansiriya after a city in their native Tunisia, about three kilometers northeast of Misr. Mansiriya was designed to house the court officials and loyal soldiers of the Fatimid caliphs. The city was surrounded by mud brick walls containing several gates. The walls protected the Shi'a Fatimids from their Sunni countrymen. In 974, Mansiriya was renamed al-Qahira ("the victorious"), after the planet Mars, which was in the ascendant. Al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah proudly made it his capital.

Al-Qahira of the Fatimids was generally square in shape and was laid out with wide, straight streets and plenty of open space for parks, military parades, and religious festivities. Taking up approximately twenty percent of the city's area were two palaces: one for al-Mu'izz and a smaller one for his son al-'Aziz. The two palaces were separated by an open area. South of the palaces, the Fatimids built a large mosque and university, al-Azhar ("the radiant"). Al-Azhar, which was established in 989, started out as a Shi'a institution but eventually became a great center of Sunni learning. The early Fatimids also started construction of the al-Hakim mosque at the northern edge of the city in 990 and began the tradition of burying their nobles in very elaborate mausolea. The Fatimids introduced the dome, the keel arch, and the use of heavy stone masonry. Al-Azhar mosque and university and al-Hakim mosque are the only surviving buildings from the early Fatimid period. The city of the Fatimids would comprise the core of Cairo until the nineteenth century.

For the first one hundred and twenty years of its history, al-Qahira was inhabited by the caliph, his court, close companions, special guests, and loyal troops. The common people were not allowed to enter the city without special permission. On the other hand, al-Fustat functioned



as the financial and commercial heart of the greater metropolis. In the eleventh century, the combined population of al-Qahira and al-Fustat reach half a million.

In 1074, Caliph al-Mustansir ordered the commander of the Fatimid armies, Badr al-Gamali, to put down a revolt within the ranks. Afterwards, Badr enlarged the city, replacing the mud brick walls of Gawhar al-Siqilli with magnificent stone walls and impressive gates. Badr preserved the original street pattern, which is still evident today. Al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah Street runs the length of the city from north to south, and nearly parallel to it to the east is al-Gamaliya Street. Three of Badr's gates are still standing: Bab an-Nasr and Bab al-Futuh to the north and Bab Zuweyla to the south.

In 1168, al-Fustat was burned to keep it out of the hands of Crusaders, who had marched into Egypt from Jerusalem. The Fatimid government permitted the displaced residents of al-Fustat to take up residence inside the walls of al-Qahira, turning the noble town into a crowded metropolis. The once open spaces were soon filled with narrow, irregular streets and thousands of shops and residences.

Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi arrived from Syria in 1169 with an army to rescue Cairo from the threat of the Crusaders. He forced the Crusaders to retreat from al-Qahira, and became a powerful *wizir*, or official, in the Fatimid government. He soon abolished the Fatimid Caliphate and established a new hereditary dynasty, the Ayyubids. With Salah ad-Din's rise to power, Egypt returned to the sphere of Sunni Islam.

Salah ad-Din introduced several new religious and educational institutions to the city. He established *madradas*, schools for the study of Sunni law, and *khanqahs*, hostels for *Sufis*, Muslim mystics. The Ayyubids also built impressive palaces, great residences, and splendid mausolea. They also encouraged commerce in the city; along busy streets, buildings were erected that contained shops on the ground floor and living quarters on the upper floor.

In 1176, Salah ad-Din began construction of the Citadel, a huge fortress located southwest of al-Qahira on the western edge of the Muqattam Hills. Originally built as a defense against the Crusaders, the Citadel would serve as a residence for the majority of Egyptian rulers until the nineteenth century and as a barracks for Egyptian troops into the twentieth century.

From 1250 to 1517, Egypt was governed by the Mamluks, the former slave-soldiers of the Ayyubids. Historians divide Mamluk rule into two periods: Bahri and Burgi. The Bahri Mamluks ruled from 1250 to 1382. They were so named, because they were garrisoned on the Island of Rhoda in the Nile River. (*Bahr* is Arabic for "sea.") The Burgi Mamluks ruled from 1382 to 1517. They were so named because they were quartered in the towers of the Citadel. (*Burg* is Arabic for "tower.")

Despite their martial background and their reputation for ruthlessness, the Mamluks were great devotees of art and architecture, and some of Cairo's most magnificent buildings and monuments date from their era. Furthermore, under the Mamluks, Cairo expanded rapidly in several directions beyond its old Fatimid boundaries. The Mamluks became incredibly rich from their dominance of east-west trade and used their fabulous wealth to make Cairo the most spectacular city in the world.

Cairo of the Mamluks became the city of the *Arabian Nights*: a metropolis of incalculable wealth, magnificent buildings, merchants from far off lands, bazaars full of exotic wares, cruel and capricious rulers, and a population of saints and sinners.

The Mamluks developed the cruciform-shaped madrasa and built huge complexes, which

combined multiple integrated building components, such as mosques, madrasas, and mausolea, into one structure. Mamluk rulers would attach public religious facilities to their mausolea in the hope that the people of Cairo would eventually forget their ruthless deeds and regard them as champions of the faith. The city witnessed the construction of several *wikalas* (multipurpose buildings with commercial spaces and stables on the bottom floor and living spaces on the upper floors), *khanqahs*, *hammams* (public baths), and *sabil-kuttabs* (a combined public cistern and Quranic school for boys). Wealthy benefactors who constructed *sabil-kuttabs* heeded Muhammad's saying that "the two greatest mercies are water for the thirsty and knowledge for the ignorant."

The Mamluks built madrasas of two types. The first type was a cruciform structure containing four great *iwans* (vaulted halls) facing each other across a central courtyard. The second type appeared toward the end of the Mamluk period. It consisted of a modified cruciform plan. The east and west iwans were shrunk to vestigial size, and the central courtyard was reduced and topped with a wooden lantern roof.

The Mamluks also introduced a new plan for the private residences of Cairo's richest inhabitants. Their design featured a large, central hall, called the *qa'a*, flanked by a vaulted room, or *iwān*, on each side.

Mamluk buildings are frequently characterized by two decorative features *ablaq* (interlocking red and white stone) and *muqarnas* (detailed stalactite carvings found inside domes and portals). The Mamluks also transformed the minaret from a short, square tower to a more slender, circular structure. In the middle of the Mamluk era, architects introduced the decorated dome. At first, the decoration consisted of a carved zigzag pattern. This design was followed by star patterns, floral designs, or a combination of the two. The art of stone-carved dome construction was not continued by the Ottomans.

The Mamluks demolished the old Fatimid palaces of al-Mu'izz and al-'Aziz and replaced them with the Bashtek Palace which stands on the east side of al-Mu'izz Street and the great complexes built by the Mamluk sultans Qalawun, an-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun, and Barquq on the west side of the street. The once splendid parade ground between the two palaces evolved into the *qasaba*, the main commercial thoroughfare of medieval Cairo. Nevertheless, the space between Bashtek Palace and the complexes is still known as Bayn al-Qasrayn ("between the two palaces"). Over time, cultural and commercial activity shifted away from the *qasaba* to the area around al-Azhar and the complex of buildings built by Sultan al-Ghuri.

In 1325, when the Mamluks were at the peak of their power and Cairo was at the height of its fortunes, the great Arab traveler Ibn Battuta first visited this fabled medieval city of bazaars, domes, and minarets. He later dictated this tribute to Cairo: "Mistress of broad provinces and fruitful lands, boundless in profusion of buildings, peerless in beauty and splendor, she shelters all you will of the learned and the ignorant, the grave and the gay, the prudent and the foolish, the noble and the base. . . . Like the waves of the sea she surges with her throngs of folk, yet for all the capacity of her station and her power to sustain can scarce hold their number. Her youth is ever new despite the length of days. Her reigning star never shifts from the mansion of fortune."

Max Rodenbeck, the author of *Cairo: The City Victorious*, described living conditions in Cairo at its zenith in the early fourteenth-century:

Its population may have reached half a million or more just before the great plague of 1348, making it the biggest city the Western world had seen since the decline of Rome.



From a distance it was said to look like a lofty mountain. Buildings of ten and, by one account, even fourteen stories towered over streets only a few yards wide and crowded “thick as locusts” with wayfarers. A single such tenement might house hundreds, even thousands of people. . . .

Land values rose so high that architects grew skilled at squeezing their buildings into odd-shaped plots, chamfering corners, retracting entrances, and angling towers and windows to maximize their exposure to the streets. Off the main thoroughfares such tactics were useless. With houses packed tight and leaning closely overhead, many alleys were dark enough for bats to fly in daytime.

During the late Middle Ages, Italian merchants began calling the city “Cairo,” because they were having great difficulty pronouncing al-Qahira.

In 1517, the Ottoman Turks took control of Egypt, ruling the country through a *pasha*, or viceroy, appointed by the Ottoman sultan in Constantinople. Under Ottoman rule and after the discovery of an all-water route to the Far East, Cairo’s prestige, wealth, and trade steadily declined. By the eighteenth century, the magnificent center of Islamic civilization had become a provincial capital, which was falling behind much of the world. Under the Ottomans, however, the city continued to expand, especially westward toward the Nile. The Ottomans constructed several mosques in the Turkish style (large flat domes and pencil-thin minarets) and built over one hundred *sabil-kuttab*s throughout the city.

Hoping to sever Britain from its rich colony in India, the French general, Napoleon Bonaparte, invaded Egypt in 1798. After defeating the Mamluk army and violently suppressing a popular uprising, his forces occupied the country for the next three years. Following the French evacuation in 1801, the Ottoman sultan appointed Muhammad ‘Ali pasha of Egypt. An Ottoman army officer of Macedonian origins, Muhammad ‘Ali established his own dynasty and set out to modernize and westernize his adopted country. Under his leadership, wide boulevards were built, and several buildings were constructed that combined Turkish style and European designs.

In 1863, Muhammad ‘Ali’s grandson Ismail became the ruler of Egypt, and during his sixteen year reign he significantly altered the appearance of Cairo. The western edge of Cairo expanded from the area around today’s Midan Opera to the bank of the Nile. Isma’il’s architects transformed the former marshland into a modern, European-style city. By the end of the nineteenth century, a European Cairo existed along side the historic city.

In 1882, the British occupied Egypt to protect their controlling financial interest in the Suez Canal, which had opened in 1869. During their tenure, the British continued the efforts of Muhammad ‘Ali and his descendants to transform Cairo into a great city amenable to Europeans. The public transportation system was improved and elegant villas were built in Garden City on the east bank of the Nile and Gezira, the larger of the two islands in the river.

Since the July 1952 Revolution, Cairo’s population has grown spectacularly with new communities sprouting up in all directions. The once sparsely populated west bank of the Nile is now built up with the satellite cities, and suburbs are going up in the desert east of the Muqattam Hills.

Today, Islamic Cairo lies at the heart of a gigantic metropolitan area of approximately sixteen million people. Unfortunately, the push for modernization has diminished the identity of the Old City. For example, a major east-west road, Sharia al-Azhar, now cuts Fatimid al-Qahira in two. Furthermore, many of the magnificent buildings and monuments of the Old City are

rapidly deteriorating and in desperate need of repair. Nevertheless, hundreds of classic structures still line its streets, offering the visitor a rich, exciting visual experience. Islamic Cairo is a unique historic environment, because its colorful inhabitants still live, work, shop, socialize, and pray as they did several hundred years ago.

## *The Minarets of Cairo*

No two minarets in the “City of 1000 Minarets” are the same, but they do fit into broad categories. By knowing the categories, it is possible to identify the period in which a monument was built. Students can use the following guidelines to classify minarets as they take their interactive slide tour of the Old City.

- Fatimid and Ayyubid Minarets: These are the earliest surviving minarets. They are usually short, square and often topped with a *mabkhara* (“incense pot”) cap.
- Early Mamluk Minarets: These structures still have a square bases but are usually taller with three tiers.
- Late Mamluk Minarets: These minarets are three-tiered and highly decorated. They are wholly octagonal or cylindrical.
- Ottoman Minarets: These minarets are plain, slender, and circular. They are topped with pointed caps.

(For illustrations of various types of minarets, see pages 28-29 of Caroline Williams, *Islamic Monuments in Cairo: A Practical Guide* and page 28 of Andrew Humphreys, *Lonely Planet: Cairo*.)

## *A Walking Tour of Islamic Cairo*

The instructional material related to our walking tour of Islamic Cairo includes background information on several important monuments, fifty-eight color slides of the Old City, and a number of sample questions and act-it-out activities. Each slide described below will include at least one sample question. Some questions will be basic; others will be complex. For the interactive slide lecture to be effective, the teacher should prepare for each slide a set of questions that progress from the basic to the complex. Some slides will afford the student to step into and act out the scene.

Our tour of the historic city consists of twenty-five stops. We will begin at the Mosque of al-Azhar, which is located on the south side of Sharia al-Azhar near a pedestrian underpass, which connects the area around al-Azhar with the eastern end of Khan al-Khalili and the Mosque of

Sayyidna al-Husayn.

## ***Stop #1: The Mosque of Al-Azhar:***

### Background Notes:

- Al-Azhar is one of the earliest mosques in Cairo and the oldest university in the world. The mosque was founded by the Fatimid general Gawhar al-Siqilli in 970 as the congregational mosque of al-Qahira. The mosque soon became a center for teaching Shi'a theology. After Salah ad-Din al-Ayyubi deposed the Fatimids, the teaching of Shi'a theology at al-Azhar was abolished. Under the Mamluks, al-Azhar began offering instruction in all four schools of Sunni jurisprudence—Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Shafi'i. Even today, students in al-Azhar's Faculty of Arabic and Islamic Studies can be observed sitting in a circle on carpets at the feet of their *shaykh*. However, most students are taught at one of al-Azhar's nine campuses throughout Egypt. Al-Azhar is the home of Egypt's supreme religious authority, the Shaykh al-Islam; therefore, the institution continues to play a dominant role in Egyptian society.
- The mosque is a great blend of architectural styles and historic periods.
- The main entrance to the mosque is through the double-arched Bab al-Muzayyinin ("gate of the barbers")—the place where students once had their heads shaved. The gate leads to a large, marble-floored enclosure, which is flanked by two Mamluk-era madrasas. The madrasa on the left is the Aqbughawiyah Madrasa, which was founded in 1340. The madrasa, which is entered through a portal decorated in red and black marble inlay, contains al-Azhar's valuable collection of Qur'ans and manuscripts. The *mihirabs* (the niche that indicates the direction of Mecca for prayer) in the madrasa are decorated in glass mosaic with mother of pearl. The madrasa to the right is the Taybarsiyah Madrasa, which was constructed in 1309-10. The madrasa contains the most precious manuscripts from al-Azhar's library. Its mihrab is decorated with glass mosaic and polychrome inlaid marble.
- The central courtyard is entered through the Gate of Sultan Qaytbay, which was built in 1469. The stone gate provides an excellent example of delicately carved stalactite decoration from the latter Mamluk period. The gate is topped with a minaret added by Sultan Qaytbay in 1475.
- The central courtyard, which dates from the Fatimid period, is surrounded by a portico colonnade. Behind the *mashrabiyyas* (decorative wooden lattice screens) of the colonnade to the right are the *riwaqs*—rent-free lodgings for students.
- The sanctuary of the mosque contains a basilica-like central aisle, which is wider than the two aisles that flank it. The central aisle is topped with a small dome, which contains windows that illuminate the stucco carvings on the interior façade of the central aisle. The Kufic inscriptions and the floral stucco carving date from the original construction.
- The mosque has three minarets near its main entrance. The minaret atop the Aqbughawiyah Madrasa dates from the fourteenth century. The minaret given by Sultan Qaytbay dates from the fifteenth century. The minaret with the double finial was donated by Sultan al-Ghuri in the early 1500s. The minarets of Qaytbay and al-Ghuri have double

staircases starting at the second level. One staircase is for climbing, the other for descending.

Slides:

1. Wide view of the al-Azhar complex, including the Mosque of al-Azhar (left), the Mosque of Abu Dahab (right), Sharia al-Azhar (foreground), and the footbridge across Sharia al-Azhar (foreground). (Al-Ahram)  
*What is your first impression of this view of Islamic Cairo?  
How many minarets can you count in this picture?*
2. Front view of the Mosque of al-Azhar: façade, main entrance, and minarets. (The Author)  
*Al-Azhar was originally founded to offer instruction in which branch of Islamic theology?*
3. Front view of the three main minarets of al-Azhar: minaret of the Aqbughawiya Madrasa (left), minaret of Sultan Qaytbay (center), and minaret of Sultan al-Ghuri (right). (The Author)  
*Briefly describe each of the three minarets in this picture.  
What styles do they represent? How do you know?*
4. Mosque of al-Azhar: Mihrab of the Aqbughawiya Madrasa. (The Author)  
*How does the decoration of this mihrab reflect the standard of living and values of the inhabitants of medieval Cairo?*
5. Mosque of al-Azhar: Interior of the mosque sanctuary. (The Author)  
*Act-it-out: The teacher calls his or her students forward and directs them to sit on the floor. The teacher then leads a brief discussion of a topic related to Islamic civilization, such as the Five Pillars of Islam. After a few minutes, the students are dismissed and asked to reflect on this educational experience.*
6. Mosque of al-Azhar: View of the central courtyard. (The Author)  
*How did the Fatimid caliphate differ religiously from the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad?*

After touring al-Azhar, we continue our journey through the Old City by taking the pedestrian underpass to the north side of Sharia al-Azhar. Once across the street, we walk over to Maydan Husayn, which is considered the heart of Islamic Cairo. During religious festivals, on feast days honoring Muhammad and al-Husayn, and on Ramadan evenings, the square is packed with huge crowds, colorful lights, and loud music. The celebrations usually last all night. North of Maydan Husayn is the Mosque of Sayyidna al-Husayn. Maydan Husayn and the Mosque of Sayyidna al-Husayn are separated from Khan al-Khalili bazaar by Sharia al-Gamaliya.

## ***Stop #2: The Mosque of Sayyidna al-Husayn:***

Background Notes:

- The Mosque of Sayyidna al-Husayn (“Our Lord Husayn”) was built between 1873 and 1878 and replaces a twelfth century mosque. The main minaret is unmistakably Ottoman.

- Al-Husayn was one of the sons of ‘Ali, the husband of Muhammad’s daughter Fatima, and the fourth and the last of the Orthodox Caliphs. After ‘Ali was assassinated, the caliphate passed to a claimant from the rival Umayyad clan. Al-Husayn led a revolt to recover the caliphate, but he was killed in 680 at the Battle of Karbala, which is located in present day Iraq. In 1153, al-Husayn’s head was brought to Cairo to keep it out of the hands of the Crusaders. The Fatimids built a mosque-shrine for the head on the site of the current mosque. All that remains of the original shrine is part of a gateway—the Bab al-Akhdar—at the southern corner of the current mosque. An Ayyubid-era minaret stands above the remnants of the old gateway. The head of al-Husayn is buried several meters below a shrine in the mosque.
- Non-Muslims are not permitted to enter the mosque, because the shrine of al-Husayn is of great significance to Shi’a and Sunni Muslims alike. To the former, al-Husayn is the ultimate Muslim martyr; to the latter, he is a beloved grandson of Muhammad.
- The mosque serves as an important center for congregational prayer and a major pilgrimage site for people who seek al-Husayn’s intercession in the problems of their daily lives. In 1187, the tourist Ibn Jubayr recorded his impression of a visit to the shrine of al-Husayn: “We observed men kissing the blessed tomb, surrounding it, throwing themselves upon it . . . calling out invocations . . . and offering up humble supplications such as would melt the heart and split the hardest flint.” The mosque attracts 2,000 worshippers a day and 10,000 for Friday noon prayers.
- Max Rodenbeck, the author of *Cairo: The City Victorious*, shared this first-hand account of a festival commemorating the death of al-Husayn:

The funerary mosque of al-Husayn remains Cairo’s most venerated shrine. It is where politicians have shown themselves praying on TV and where, once a year and every night for a full week, a million-strong crowd gathers to celebrate al-Husayn’s martyrdom. It may be that the Shi’ites of Iran mark the saint’s death by public weeping and self-flagellation, but Cairo’s *mawlid* [a religious festival] devotees, joined by the thousands of country folk who pour into the city to snooze and brew tea in the medieval alleyways surrounding the shrine, come for fun as much as for devotion. The revelry begins after dark, gaining momentum far into the early hours. Fairgoers jive and joke and test their skill in shooting galleries and trials of strength. Some, drawn by the rhythm of drums and the whine of reed flutes, join the ritual dances in the dozens of marquees set up by different Sufi brotherhoods. Others press into the shrine itself to gain the saint’s *baraka* or blessing, while Brueghel-faced beggars and weasel-featured pickpockets work the throngs outside.

One night, while squeezing through the crowds some distance from the saint’s tomb, I felt a clutching at my sleeve. I looked, and found the blind eyes of a stooped old man beseeching me. In a thick country accent he begged me to lead him to al-Husayn, and as I piloted him through the noise and confusion, he kept repeating, “Ya Husayn! Praise be to God!” When we merged in the fervent crush at the door of the shrine I felt him tremble with anticipation. His hand slipped down to mine, which he kissed and raised to his forehead. “May the Lord preserve



your sight, my son,” he cried before vanishing over the threshold like a bird released from a cage.

Slide:

7. View of Maydan Husayn (foreground), the Mosque of Sayyidna al-Husayn (right), and Sharia al-Gamaliya (left). (The Author)  
*Briefly describe the minaret in this picture.*  
*What style does it represent? How do you know?*  
*What events and circumstances led to the development of the Shi'a branch of Islam?*  
*Why is al-Husayn so highly revered by both Shi'a and Sunni Muslims?*

After observing the Mosque of Sayyidna al-Husayn, we walk north up Sharia al-Gamaliya toward Bab an-Nasr, which is located in the northern remnant of the wall that surrounded the Fatimid city of al-Qahira. Between Sharia al-Azhar and the northern wall, Sharia al-Gamaliya runs roughly parallel to Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah.

When Bulaq replaced al-Fustat as Cairo's main port during the Mamluk era, Sharia al-Gamaliya became a prosperous commercial district. Goods shipped overland from the Red Sea to Bulaq passed by the northern walls of the city. Under Ottoman rule, al-Gamaliya witnessed the construction of several *wikalas*; *caravansarais* (buildings with lodgings for merchants and spaces for commercial activities); and shops to handle the textile, spice, and coffee trade.

Al-Gamaliya is also a densely populated residential area. It is here that the novelist Naguib Mahfouz was born in 1911. In the foreword to *The Cairo of Naguib Mahfouz*, the great novelist described his old neighborhood and its inhabitants:

Al-Gamaliya has become a center, a refuge, and an abode, with its conglomeration of cafes, squares, roads, lanes, and alleys and its ancient mosques and minarets. Wherever one directs one's eyes one beholds a minaret, an awesome, decorated entrance, a beautifully written passage from the Qur'an; or one will hear a hymn of an unknown dervish who chanted words of wisdom, or tried to reveal some kind of mystery, then was gone. Those were the inhabitants of the city with their traits and heritage, their joys and sorrows, and their daily endeavors in the course of time. They come from all walks of life: traders, workers, artisans, makers of amulets, hawkers, civil servants, café clients, toughs, and dervishes who seek refuge behind the high walls of their *takiyas* (monasteries).

We walk to the north end of Sharia al-Gamaliya, pass through Bab an-Nasr, and walk across the east-west street, which runs along the northern walls. From our vantage point, we look at the magnificent northern walls, which contain Bab an-Nasr to the east, Bab al-Futuh to the west, and the Mosque of al-Hakim in the middle.

The Northern Walls—Background Notes:

- The huge stone walls, which surrounded the Fatimid city of al-Qahira, were built in 1087 by General Badr al-Gamali al-Guyushi to replace the original mud brick walls built by Gawhar al-Siqilli. The two northern gates and the stretch of wall between them constitute one of the best examples of Muslim military architecture. Many of the cut stones used in the construction of the walls were taken from pharaonic complexes in Memphis. Therefore, many of the stones contain hieroglyphics and carved relief decorations.



- The parapet is protected by rounded merlons. Qur’anic verses, carved in beautiful Kufic (angular and unpointed) script, run along the exterior of the wall between the two gates.
- Huge towers, placed at regular intervals, protrude from the walls. The towers contain windows on three sides, which gave defenders a wide field of visions and enable them to deliver withering fire against attackers attempting to scale the walls.
- Within the huge walls run galleries, which are connected by vaulted rooms that are pierced with arrow slits. The walls were designed to permit defenders to move between towers under complete cover. Each section of the wall is essentially a miniature fortress, containing supply rooms, living quarters, and guard stations. Napoleon enlarged the arrow slits to accommodate cannon fire.
- Since Cairo never experienced an enemy siege, the great walls were never put to the test.

### ***Stop #3: Bab an-Nasr:***

#### Background Notes:

- Bab an-Nasr, which means “Gate of Victory,” was originally named Bab al-‘Izz (“Gate of Glory”), but the gate which it replaced was named Bab an-Nasr. Cairo residents preferred the older name, which has remained in use.
- The gate is flanked by two rectangular stone towers, decorated with stone shields—traditional symbols of victory.
- Napoleon named each tower after its respective officer-in-charge. The names are carved near the upper level of the gate: Tour Julien to the west, Tour Corbin to the east.

#### Slide:

8. Front view of Bab an-Nasr. (The Author)  
*Thinking back to the history of Fatimid Cairo, discuss some of the reasons why the Fatimids built strong walls around al-Qahira.*

We now walk west along the northern face of the wall, past the Mosque of al-Hakim, and stop in front of the other massive northern gate—Bab al-Futuh.

### ***Stop #4: Bab al-Futuh:***

#### Background Notes:

- Bab al-Futuh, which means the “Gate of Conquests,” is located at the northern end of Sharia Mu’izz li-Din Allah. The gate was originally named Bab al-Iqbal (“Gate of Prosperity”), but, again, local inhabitants preferred to keep the name of the gate it replaced—Bab al-Futuh.
- The gate is flanked by two large rounded towers, each containing three carved rectangles with arrow slits. The towers are embellished with fine examples of decorative masonry. The gate is topped with a splayed arch decorated with a diamond-shaped motif. The cornice over the entrance provides openings through which boiling oil could be poured on an attacking army. The gate is decorated with rams heads, which signify the planet Mars.

Slides:

9. Three Egyptian men playing dominoes at a coffee shop outside Bab al-Futuh. (The Author)  
*How did common people spend their leisure time in medieval Cairo?*
10. Front view of Bab al-Futuh. (The Author)
11. Front view of Bab al-Futuh (right) and northern minaret of the Mosque of al-Hakim (left). (Al-Ahram)
12. Front view of Bab al-Futuh (right) and northern minaret of the Mosque of al-Hakim (left). (The Author)  
*Examine the three pictures of Bab al-Futuh.*  
*What advantages did the defenders have over an attacking army?*  
*If you were a soldier in an attacking army, describe the various injuries you might suffer standing at the base of Bab al-Futuh.*

We walk inside Bab al-Futuh and encounter the first of several market areas along Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah: the onion, garlic, and lemon market. Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah is the *qasaba*—the main commercial street—that runs the length of the old Fatimid city, all the way to the southern gate of Bab Zuweyla. At the beginning of the fifteenth-century, the *qasaba* contained approximately 12,000 shops. From our position in the wide market area, we observe the Mosque of al-Hakim.

### ***Stop #5: The Mosque of al-Hakim:***

Background Notes:

- Al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (“Ruler by God’s Command”), the third Fatimid caliph, was famous for his brutality, eccentricities, and arbitrary edicts. He slaughtered all the dogs in Cairo, forced women to stay in their homes, dumped all of Cairo’s honey in the Nile, and ordered the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. He frequently roamed the streets of Cairo on the back of his donkey Moon, checking on the affairs of his subjects and seeing that his edicts were being followed. If al-Hakim discovered a dishonest merchant, the man would be brutalized by a large slave, who accompanied him on his tour. The residents of Cairo generally tolerated their ruler’s caprices until he had himself declared divine by his closest followers. Not long afterwards, he disappeared one night while taking a jaunt on Moon in the Muqattam Hills. One of his disciples, al-Darazi, escaped to Syria where he preached of al-Hakim’s divinity and lent his name to the Druze sect.
- The mosque was begun by al-Hakim’s father al-‘Aziz in 990 and completed in 1013. It was built as an arcaded congregational mosque and was constructed of brick and plaster. The mosque was originally located outside Gawhar al-Siqilli’s brick walls, but it was incorporated into the stone walls built by Badr al-Gamali.
- The mosque consists of an irregular rectangle with four arcades surrounding a courtyard. The huge entrance contains a projecting stone porch, and the two minarets,

located at either end of the façade, resemble the great entrance pylons of a pharaonic temple. The stone minarets—the oldest surviving minarets in Cairo—originally stood apart from the walls of the mosque, but massive trapezoidal bases were added for support shortly after the mosque was constructed. The northern salient, or base, projects from the northern wall, while the southern salient protrudes into Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah. The salients are actually hollow; each mosque stands within its base and is joined to it with brackets.

- In 1980, the Bohras, an Isma'ili Shi'a sect from India, rebuilt the interior of the mosque, dressing the mihrab with white marble and gold trim and adding a chandelier. Although these additions have little to do with the original mosque, several original decorations remain on the wooden tie-beams, in the Qur'anic inscriptions, and in the stucco carvings of the clerestory.
- Over the course of its long history, the mosque was used as a prison for Crusaders, a stable for Salah ad-Din's horses, a warehouse and fortress for Napoleon, a boys' school during the Nasser era, and an insane asylum.

#### Slides:

13. Close view of the northern minaret of the Mosque of al-Hakim. (The Author)  
*How would you characterize the reign of Caliph al-Hakim?  
How did he become the inspirational founder of the Druze religion?*
14. Wide view containing the southern minaret of the Mosque of al-Hakim (left), Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah (center), and the onion and garlic market (right). (The Author)  
*Examine the pictures of the northern minaret and southern minaret.  
Thinking of ancient Egyptian architecture, what do the huge bases of the minarets resemble?*
15. Wide view of Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah facing Bab al-Futuh, including the onion and garlic market, Bab al-Futuh, and the northern minaret and wall of the Mosque of al-Hakim. (The Author)  
*Describe the lively commerce taking place in this picture.  
Recalling the history of Mamluk Egypt, how was the northern portion of al-Qahira transformed into a prosperous commercial center?*

After studying the Mosque of al-Hakim, we continue our journey down Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah toward Khan al-Khalili. Along the way, we will experience several market areas of the *qasaba* and visit several impressive monuments.

### ***Stop #6: The Mosque and Sabil of Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar:***

#### Background Notes:

- The mosque and sabil, completed in 1839, were built under the patronage of Sulayman al-Silahdar (“the Armorer”), who was in charge of the arsenal during the reign of Muhammad ‘Ali Pasha.

- The mosque-sabil complex is an outstanding example of Islamic architecture from the Muhammad 'Ali era, containing a mixture of Mamluk, Turkish, and European styles. Its most notable features are the beautiful undulating façade, which was derived from European baroque and rococo forms and contains plant and palm frond decorations; the windows of varying sizes; the upward slanting wooden eaves; and the rounded sabil, which is covered in white marble and decorated with beautiful bronze window grills.
- The pencil-thin minaret is unmistakably Ottoman.

Slides:

16. Wide view of Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah northward toward the Mosque and Sabil of Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar. (The Author)  
*Why is Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah dominated by pedestrians, not cars?*
17. Front view of a coppersmith's shop along Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah: coffeepots, teapots, and water pipes for sale. (The Author)  
*Examine these two pictures of Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah.  
Does this commercial area cater to tourists or local inhabitants? How can you tell?*
18. Front view of the Mosque and Sabil of Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar: rounded sabil, façade, and minaret. (The Author)  
*Examine the minaret in this picture.  
What style does it represent? How do you know?  
Describe the various architectural styles present in this monument.*

## ***Stop #7: The Mosque of al-Aqmar:***

Background Notes:

- The mosque was built by Ma'mun al-Bata'ih, the grand wazir to the Fatamid caliph al-Amir, from 1121-1125. Al-Aqmar means "the moonlit," referring to the blue-gray color of the stone used in its construction. The mosque was built on the southwest corner of the once great palace of Caliph Mu'izz li-Din Allah.
- The small mosque contains several architectural innovations:
  - It was the first mosque in Cairo whose façade was aligned with the street, while the qibla wall was oriented toward Mecca. Therefore, it was the earliest example of a Cairo monument being adjusted to accommodate an existing street pattern.
  - It was also the first mosque in Cairo to display a decorated stone façade. The following decorative features appeared for the first time: a ribbed shell hood above the entrance, muqarna vaults, shell-topped niches, and an inscription below the cornice. The highly stylized decorations of the façade are explicitly Shi'a in their content.
- The interior is laid out as a congregational mosque with a square courtyard, surrounded by a highly decorative band of ornamental Kufic script.
- In 1980, the Bohras restored the mosque, adding several new inscriptions and windows to the sanctuary area.

Slide:

19. Front view of the façade and minaret of the Mosque of al-Aqmar. (The Author)  
*Examine the minaret in this picture.*  
*What style does it represent? How do you know?*  
*List and describe the architectural innovations contained in this mosque.*

***Stop #8: The Sabil-Kuttab of ‘Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda:***

Background Notes:

- ‘Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda was an amir of the vaunted Qazdughli regiment of Mamluks. He was well known for his debauched life style and patronage of the arts. He built or restored more than thirty buildings around Cairo. This building, which was completed in 1744, occupies a narrow triangle of land where Sharia Mu’izz li-Din Allah separates into two branches.
- The tall two-story structure incorporates several Mamluk and Ottoman features, such as interlocking patterns on the stone façade and realistic floral designs. The upper story has a timber balcony screen open on three sides. The high walls and bronze grills of the sabil on the ground floor are framed by large double arches and delicate columns on the corners.
- The interior of the sabil is finished with tiles from Syria with many of them displaying a representation of Mecca.
- The kuttab on the second floor has a carved wooden loggia (balcony) mounted on decorated corbels. It is topped with a beautifully carved ceiling and overhanging wooden roof supported by decorated stone pillars.

Slide:

20. Front view of the Sabil-Kuttab of ‘Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda. (The Author)  
*According to the Prophet Muhammad, what are the two greatest mercies?*  
*Explain how building a sabil-kuttab satisfies those mercies.*  
*Why did so many wealthy Cairenes donate money for the construction of sabil-kuttab?*

After viewing the Sabil-Kuttab of ‘Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda, we continue walking south on Sharia Mu’izz li-Din Allah and soon reach the portion of the street known as Bayn al-Qasrayn. This was the heart of Fatimid Cairo: the ceremonial area between the palaces of Caliph Mu’izz li-Din Allah and his son al-‘Aziz. Although the palaces fell into ruin after the passing of the Fatimid Dynasty, Bayn al-Qasrayn remained the most important public area in medieval Cairo. Its great marketplace teemed with shops, entertainers, and eateries. Furthermore, it became a favorite place for later rulers to build magnificent monuments. On the west side of Bayn al-Qasrayn stand the three great Mamluk complexes of sultans Barquq, an-Nasr Muhammad, and Qalawun. On the left side of the street stands one of the last monuments of the Ayyubid era.

Walking through Bayn al-Qasrayn, we pass by the monuments erected by Sultans Barquq and an-Nasir Muhammad and stop in front of the southernmost monument, the huge complex built by Sultan Qalawun. We will study these three structures in the order they were built.

## ***Stop #9: The Maristan, Madrasa, and Mausoleum of Sultan al-Mansur Qalawun:***

### Background Notes:

- Sultan al-Mansur Qalawun (Qalawun means “duck”) was a Tatar from the region of the lower Volga River. He and other Tatars were brought as slaves to Cairo by the Ayyubid caliph al-Salih Ayyub. Qalawun was one of al-Salih’s Mamluks, and in 1279 he became sultan, establishing a dynasty of Mamluks that would rule for nearly one hundred years. He died in 1290 at the age of seventy, en route to fight the Crusaders at Acre. According to Max Rodenbeck, Qalawun’s monument “perfectly embodied the character of the Mamluk regime, combining ruthlessness, extravagance, and aesthetic refinement with a craving for popularity. . . . Qalawun intended for his monument to establish his own and the city’s glory beyond all question.”
- Qalawun’s complex of buildings was built in thirteen months over 1284-85. It provides the earliest example of new techniques and styles imported from Syria and stunningly illustrates what will become the signature of Mamluk architecture: grand scale and abundant ornamentation.
- The Maristan (Hospital): The hospital, which is reached by a gate at the south end of the building, was built on a cruciform floor plan with four central iwans and adjoining halls and chambers. Each iwan was equipped to handle a specific medical condition: fevers, eye ailments, dysentery, and surgery. Qalawun’s hospital was arguably the finest medical facility of the medieval world, having on its staff the best physicians and druggists of the age. The Arab traveler Ibn Battuta, who visited Cairo in 1325, wrote that the hospital of Qalawun contained “an innumerable quantity of appliances and medicaments.” Priority of medical care was extended to “the most needy, the unlucky, the weak, the helpless, and the wretched.” According to Max Rodenbeck, “Qalawun’s origins and his unpopularity while he ruled were eventually forgotten. . . . His hospital treated patients for hundreds of years—at the rate of 4,000 a day in its fourteenth-century prime.” Medical treatment has always been available here; today an eye clinic occupies the site of the original hospital.
- The main entrance on Sharia Mu’izz li-Din Allah opens to an imposing corridor, which runs between the madrasa on the left and the mausoleum on the right. (The end of the corridor once marked the main entrance to the maristan, but this entrance is now blocked.) The doorway was constructed with interlocking ablaq stone. The spectacular façade, which emphasizes the vertical over the horizontal, includes stair-step crenellations on the parapet; arched bays with triple-tiered windows; and above the first tier, a huge band of inscription in *thuluth* script—a calligraphy style in which the height of the letters is three times their width.
- The Madrasa: The door of the entrance to the madrasa was set in a round arch and decorated with bronze geometric designs, which were very popular with the Mamluks. The madrasa consists of a courtyard with iwans at its eastern and western ends. The sanctuary iwan at the eastern end resembles a basilican church from northern Syria, with classical columns, three aisles, and a clerestory containing double-tiered arches. The hood of the mihrab was decorated with glass mosaics.



- **The Mausoleum:** The entrance to the atrium of Qalawun's mausoleum consists of a beautiful carved stucco arch above a mashrabiya doorway. The magnificent tomb chamber was built on an octagon-in-a-square floor plan with arches mounted on square piers and red granite, pharaonic era columns. The chamber's towering ceiling and its exquisite, diverse ornamentation are overwhelming. Sultan Qalawun and his son Sultan an-Nasir Muhammad are buried under the cenotaph, which is surrounded by a mashrabiya screen. The eastern or qibla wall is of varying thickness, allowing the façade to be aligned with the street and the inner wall to conform with the direction to Mecca. The original dome was demolished by 'Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda; a new dome was installed in 1903.
- The current minaret reflects foreign influences. The square bottom and middle levels are made of stone and resemble Syrian minarets. The round top level is made of brick and reflects Spanish and North African styles. It contains interlacing arcades and carved stucco decoration. This minaret replaced the original minaret, which was badly damaged in a 1302 earthquake.

Slide:

21. Bayn al-Qasrayn: the minarets of the Maristan, Madrasa, and Mausoleum of Sultan al-Mansur Qalawun (left) and the Madrasa and Mausoleum of an-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun (right) and the main entrance and façade of the Madrasa and Khanqah of Sultan az-Zahir Barquq (foreground). (The Author)

*Why is this section of Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah called Bayn al-Qasrayn?*

*What principal activity takes place on the street now?*

*How do the monuments of Qalawun, an-Nasir Muhammad, and Barquq reflect the wealth and values of Mamluk Egypt?*

*Examine the minaret of the Maristan, Madrasa, and Mausoleum of Sultan al-Mansur Qalawun.*

*What style does it represent? How do you know?*

*List and describe some of the advancements in medicine achieved by Muslim physicians in the Middle Ages.*

*Why did rulers and wealthy people provide medical services for the poor?*

## ***Stop #10: The Madrasa and Mausoleum of Sultan an-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun:***

Background Notes:

- Sultan an-Nasir Muhammad (an-Nasir means "the victorious") was one of Qalawun's five sons. He ruled for forty-two years in three separate stretches. A very complex man—he has been described as both despotic and enlightened--his reign marked the zenith of Mamluk culture and Islamic civilization in Egypt.
- The complex was begun in 1296 during the brief reign of Sultan al-'Adil Kitbugha and completed by an-Nasir in 1304.
- The doorway of the main entrance was taken from the Church of St. George in Acre, which had been liberated from the Crusaders in 1291 by an-Nasir's older brother and

predecessor al-Ashraf Khalil. The word Allah has been added at the apex of the pointed arch.

- The narrow façade contains tall windows and a band of script honoring Sultan an-Nasir.
- The first level of the three-tier minaret is decorated with a closely patterned, exceptionally detailed, carved stucco surface. It is probably a product of North African craftsmanship. The original minaret was built about the same time Qalawun's minaret was replaced. The second level was added approximately one hundred years later; the third level is Ottoman.
- The layout of an-Nasir's madrasa-mausoleum complex is similar to Qalawun's. Once inside the main door, the madrasa is on the left; the mausoleum, on the right. The madrasa was built as the first cruciform madrasa in Cairo and has four iwans around a central courtyard, one for each school of Sunni theology. The eastern iwan contains a beautiful stucco mihrab. The mausoleum contains an-Nasir's mother and favorite son.

Slides:

22. Front view of the main doorway leading to the Madrasa and Mausoleum of an-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun. (The Author)  
*Explain how this doorway, which was originally part of a church in Acre, found its way to the Madrasa and Mausoleum of Sultan an-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun. The madrasa of an-Nasir Muhammad was the first madrasa in Cairo built on what type of floor plan?*
23. Close view of the façade and minaret of the Madrasa and Mausoleum of an-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun. (The Author)  
*Examine the minaret in this picture. What style does it represent? How do you know?*

## ***Stop #11: The Madrasa and Khanqah of Sultan az-Zahir Barquq:***

Background Notes:

- Sultan az-Zahir Barquq (Barquq means "plum") was the first Circassian Mamluk sultan. The Circassians, who were from the Caucasus region, were first brought to Egypt as slave soldiers during the reign of Qalawun. These Mamluks were quartered in the Citadel and became known as the Burgi ("tower") Mamluks.
- Barquq's complex was completed in 1386. The complex contains a khanqah, madrasa, and tomb chamber. Although it was built a century after Qalawun's complex, it retains many of the architectural features of the latter structure: a broad horizontal façade broken up by tall, shallow recesses; a band of inscriptions; a semi-spherical dome; and an impressive minaret. The minaret is composed of three octagonal stories decorated with dramatic carvings.
- The main entrance is located at the south end of the complex. A panel of black and white marble surmounts a set of bronze-plated doors, which are decorated with geometric star patterns inlaid with silver. Barquq's name is visible on the center star. The doors open to a vaulted, crooked corridor, which leads to the open courtyard of the cruciform-shaped madrasa. An elegant ablution fountain is located in the center of the courtyard. Four

bronze doors lead upstairs to the residential quarters and facilities for 60 Sufis and 125 students. The sanctuary iwan is divided into three aisles by two rows of lateral arches. The beautiful ceiling of the iwan is supported by four pharaonic-era columns. The iwan also contains a wooden *dikka* (a raised platform used for Qur'an recitations) and a finely decorated minbar.

- The domed tomb chamber is reached through a door off the sanctuary iwan. The chamber is decorated with a marble floor, bands of inscriptions, muqarnas in the transition zone between the walls and the dome, and stained glass windows. The original dome collapsed in the nineteenth century and was replaced in 1893. One of Barquq's daughters, Fatima, is buried in the tomb chamber. Barquq and other members of his family are buried in the Northern Cemetery.

Slide:

24. Bayn al-Qasrayn: the minaret of the Madrasa and Khanqah of Sultan az-Zahir Barquq.  
(The Author)

*Examine the minaret in this picture.*

*What style does it represent? How do you know?*

*For rulers and wealthy people, what was the advantage of attaching one's mausoleum to a public religious institution?*

After viewing the Khanqah and Madrasa of Sultan az-Zahir Barquq, we reverse course and continue south on Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah. Across the street from Qalawun's complex stand the remnants of the Madrasa and Mausoleum of as-Salih Nagm ad-Din Ayyub.

## ***Stop #12: The Madrasa and Mausoleum of as-Salih Nagm ad-Din Ayyub:***

Background Notes:

- As-Salih Nagm ad-Din Ayyub was the last member of Salah ad-Din's dynasty to rule Egypt. He died in 1249 fighting the Crusaders in the Delta. His wife Shagar ad-Durr kept his death a secret and ruled in his stead for nearly three months, holding the throne for as-Salih's son Turan, who was off fighting in Mesopotamia. When Turan was assassinated, Shagar assumed the throne outright. To strengthen her standing in a male-dominated country, she married the chief Mamluk, al-Mu'izz Aybek, and ruled the country through him. Aybek's sultanate marks the beginning of the era of Mamluks. A few years later, Shagar had Aybek murdered following his marriage to the daughter of a power Syrian official. The new chief Mamluk imprisoned Shagar, and the mother of Aybek's son, al-Mansur 'Ali, brutally beat her to death with wooden bath clogs. This fascinating story aside, al-Salih's complex was begun in 1242 and completed by Shagar ad-Durr in 1250.
- Except for the façade and the minaret, very little of this monument remains, and most of the façade is hidden behind street-level shops. The monument is significant, because it represents a transition—politically and architecturally—between the Fatimid and Mamluk eras. The monument introduced what would become a standard Mamluk architectural

formula: a madrasa combined with a mausoleum. The chief *qadis* (religious judges) of the four Sunni theological schools decided cases in the madrasa, the first to house all four schools. Thus Bayn al-Qasrayn became the seat of the supreme tribunal of the country.

- The minaret dates from the Ayyubid period and shows the evolution of minaret styles from the late Fatimid to the early Mamluk periods. The minaret consists of three levels: the bottom is square; the middle, octagonal; and the top, a fluted keel-shaped cap, called a *mabkhara* (“incense burner”). The shapes of the arches are Fatimid; the stalactite collar beneath the cap is a new development.
- The original madrasa consisted of two blocks of buildings separated by a narrow street. Each block contained two iwans; only two of the original four survive.
- The decoration of the doorway and the north and south façades dates from the late Fatimid period. Only eight bays of the south façade and nine bays of the north façade remain. The southern bays are obscured by trinket shops; the northern bays, by coppersmith shops.
- The tomb of as-Salih is in the domed mausoleum, which is connected to the north end of the façade. Shagar ad-Durr buried him in the tomb in 1250.

Slide:

25. Bayn al-Qasrayn: wide view of the Madrasa and Mausoleum of as-Salih Nagm ad-Din Ayyub, including façade, minaret, and coppersmiths’ shops. (The Author)

*Examine the minaret in this picture.*

*What style does it represent? How do you know?*

*The Madrasa and Mausoleum of as-Salih Nagm ad-Din Ayyub was finished by his widow Shagar ad-Durr. Briefly describe the turbulent political career of Shagar ad-Durr.*

*How does this mosque represent the transition architecturally between the Fatimid and Mamluk eras?*

After visiting the Madrasa and Mausoleum of as-Salih Nagm ad-Din Ayyub, we head south past the shops of the coppersmiths to the gold market with its enticing window displays. We have arrived at Khan al-Khalili, the fabled bazaar where Egyptians and tourists shop and bargain in more than a thousand shops for perfumes, spices, rugs, antiques, jewelry, and articles made of gold, silver, copper, brass, leather, glass, wood, and stone. The narrow lane Sikket al-Badistan, which runs between Sharia Mu’izz li-Din Allah and Maydan Husayn, is the central axis of Khan al-Khalili.

### ***Stop #13: Khan al-Khalili Bazaar:***

Background Notes:

- The area of Khan al-Khalili was once the cemetery for Fatimid nobility. In 1384, long after the tombs had been removed, one of Sultan Barquq’s amirs, Jarkis al-Khalili built a huge *khan* (hostel for merchants and travelers and place where goods are produced, stored, and sold). The khan was three stories tall and became the most successful commercial building in the area. Major traders sold spices, porcelain, jewels, and fabrics

from the East. Other merchants soon followed, as did food vendors and water sellers. Small shops spread out into nearby streets and alleys. In 1511, Sultan al-Ghuri tore down the khan and replaced it with a large wikala bearing his name. Other wikalas were added, making the area a vibrant business center. The area declined under the Ottomans but revived under Muhammad 'Ali. Throughout it all, it was the name of Jarkis al-Khalili that stuck.

- Today, the labyrinthine streets and alleys of Khan al-Khalili are packed with shops and small factories, selling goods ranging from the genuinely exotic to the unmistakably kitsch. Generations of Cairo residents have lived within its narrow thoroughfares, making and selling their crafts or trading a wide range of merchandise.
- Of special interest is Fishawi's *ahwa* (coffeehouse or coffee itself), which has been open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for the past 200 years. The coffeehouse, which is decorated with huge hung mirrors, is always packed with Egyptian and foreign patrons, enjoying a cup of Turkish coffee or a glass of mint tea and a *sheesha* (water pipe). Entertainment comes in the form of a steady stream of vendors hawking their tacky merchandise.
  - When the novelist Naguib Mahfouz was an employee at the Waqf Ministry, he spent many evenings at Fishawi's, enjoying a *sheesha* (water pipe) and contemplating the characters and plots of future novels. "In those days," he noted sadly, "the water pipes were enormous and tobacco came in many varieties and grades. Ya salam!" (Those were the days.)
  - During the French occupation, Napoleon's men counted 1,350 coffee houses in Cairo; today, it is estimated that the number exceeds 30,000.

Slides:

26. View of al-Qasaba northward toward the Khan al-Khalili Bazaar; in the distance: the minarets of the Mosque and Sabil-Kuttab of Shaykh Mutahhar (near) and the Madrasa and Sabil-Kuttab of Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay (far). (The Author)
27. Wide view of a coppersmith's shop in the Khan al-Khalili Bazaar. (Al-Ahram)
28. Close view of merchant and his shop in the Khan al-Khalili Bazaar: lamps and water pipes for sale. (The Author)

*Examine these three pictures of Khan al-Khalili.*

*Does this market cater mainly to tourists or local residents? How can you tell?*

*Act-it-out: Two students conduct the interplay between shop owner and customer, bargaining over a souvenir, such as a necklace or brass plate.*

29. Khan al-Khalili Bazaar: three customers enjoying a *sheesha* (water pipe) at Fishawi's Coffee House. (The Author)

*Describe the role of the coffee house in the daily lives of Egyptian men?*

After exploring Khan al-Khalili, we regroup at the intersection of Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah and Sharia Muski, where we will examine the Mosque and Sabil-Kuttab of Shaykh Mutahhar on the northwest corner of the intersection and the Madrasa and Sabil-Kuttab of Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay on the southwest corner.

## ***Stop #14: The Mosque and Sabil-Kuttab of Shaykh Mutahhar:***

### Background Notes:

- The monument was completed in 1744. The mosque was attached to the sabil-kuttab, which was built earlier.
- The tiles above the door and the minaret above the main entrance are part of the mosque.
- The sabil-kuttab, which was built by ‘Abd ar-Rahman Katkhuda, is nearly identical to the Sabil-Kuttab of ‘Abd ar-Rahman Katkhuda.

### Slide:

30. Wide view of the minaret of the Mosque of Shaykh Mutahhar; view of al-Qasaba southward toward Bayn al-Qasrayn; the minaret of Qalawun’s monument in the distance. (The Author)

*Examine the minaret in this picture.*

*What style does it represent? How do you know?*

## ***Stop #15: The Madrasa and Sabil-Kuttab of Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay:***

### Background Notes:

- The complex, which was completed in 1425, dominated the nearby spice bazaar. Sultan Barsbay turned the spice trade into a state monopoly and used the profits to finance his building projects and foreign expeditions. He conquered Cyprus in 1426 and forced the descendents of Crusader rulers in Jerusalem to pay him tribute.
- The madrasa was built in a cruciform plan. The inscription around the iwans is a statement of how the *waqf* (perpetual endowment for religious, educational, or charitable purposes) funds are to be spent on the upkeep of the monument. The ceiling of the northwest iwan is a beautiful tapestry of blue and gold.
- The sabil-kuttab is located next to the portal entrance at the south end of the façade. A long, crooked corridor connects the entrance with the courtyard. In the corridor, behind a mashrabiya screen, stands the cistern that supplies the sabil.
- The tall, square tomb chamber is located in the northeast corner of the monument. The domed room contains the marble cenotaphs of the wife and son of Barsbay, who himself is buried in the Northern Cemetery.

### Slide:

31. View of the Madrasa and Sabil-Kuttab of Sultan al-Ashraf Barsbay: portal, façade, minaret, and dome over the tomb chamber. (The Author)

*Examine the minaret in this picture.*

*What style does it represent? How do you know?*

*The madrasa contains an inscription explaining how waqf funds are to be spent. What is a waqf?*



Completing our visit to the two monuments at the corner of Sharia Muizz li-Din Allah and Sharia Muski, we walk south on Sharia Muizz li-Din to Sharia al-Azhar. Along the way, we pass the aromatic spice and perfume markets. At Sharia al-Azhar, we take the metal footbridge to the south side of the street, where we immediately encounter the buildings of the Ghuriya.

## ***Stop #16: The Ghuriya:***

### Background Notes:

- The two buildings of the Ghuriya--the madrasa-mosque on the west side of Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah and the mausoleum-sabil-kuttab on the east side--are attributed to Sultan Qansuh al-Ghuri, the next to last Mamluk sultan. At the age of seventy-five, al-Ghuri died on the field of battle, fighting the Ottomans. His body was never found; consequently, he is not buried in the beautiful mausoleum he built for himself.
- Al-Ghuri's monuments were built between 1503 and 1505. They marked the last major Mamluk construction before Ottoman occupation.
- The mosque-madrasa was built in the Mamluk cruciform style. The courtyard contains marble panels, a lantern ceiling, and arches decorated with carved geometric and arabesque designs. The facade along Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah contains three windowed recesses, which present an irregular front along the street. The tall arched entrance is decorated with carved stalactites. The square, four-tiered minaret represents a departure from the circular-octagonal shape that had become prevalent by the late Mamluk period. The sides are painted in red and white checkerboard squares. The minaret is topped with five bulbs, which replaced the original four.
- The mausoleum-sabil-kuttab is used extensively as a community cultural center. The original dome of the mausoleum was never sturdy, and in 1860 it was replaced with a wooden ceiling. To the right of the entrance vestibule is the mausoleum, which now serves as a library. Al-Ghuri's son, daughter, mother, and short-lived successor, Sultan Tumanbay, are buried here. The chronicler Ibn Iyas commented on the splendor of the mausoleum and the irony of al-Ghuri's demise: "How amazing that al-Ghuri is not buried in the magnificent tomb on which he had spent 100,000 dinars, but else was destined and he lay stretched out in the wilderness the prey to wolves and leopards." To the left of the vestibule is a non-residential khanqah. This small, T-shaped room has a mihrab and is used as a theater, where whirling dervishes perform their spectacular dance on Wednesday and Saturday evenings. The show is open to the public free of charge. A large sabil-kuttab is located at the north corner of the building.
- The facade of both buildings is finished in beige sandstone with black and white marble trim.
- In the eighteenth century, the two buildings were connected by a massive wooden roof across Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah. This became the Silk Bazaar, and the site was made famous by the Scottish-born artist David Roberts who sketched the scene in 1839. Although the silk merchants are gone, vendors still profit from a lively trade in bolted cloth, finished clothing, and carpets.

Slides:

32. Wide view of the Ghuriya: the mausoleum-sabil-kuttab on the left; the mosque-madrasa on the right. (The Author)
33. View of the old Silk Bazaar located between the mosque-madrasa on the left and the mausoleum-sabil-kuttab on the right. (The Author)  
*Examine these two pictures of the Ghuriya.  
How does this complex, which was built by Sultan al-Ghuri, reflect the wealth and values of Mamluk Egypt?*
34. The Ghuriya: Sufi musicians performing in the khanqah of the mausoleum-sabil-kuttab. (The Author)  
*Who are Sufis and what do they hope to achieve?*
35. The Ghuriya: Sufi musicians and a whirling dervish performing in the mausoleum-sabil-kuttab. (The Author)  
*What are some of the methods by which Sufis hope to achieve a closer and more emotional relationship with God?*

Following our visit to the Ghuriya, we proceed south down Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah toward Bab Zuwayla. This section of the street is a busy *souq* (market), which caters mainly to the needs of local inhabitants. Here Egyptians purchase household products, cloth, everyday clothes, spices, and herbal remedies. Not far from the Ghuriya are two of Cairo's surviving *tarboosh* (fez) makers. Along the way, we will pass the Mosque of al-Fakahani ("the fruitseller"), originally built by the Fatimid caliph al-Zahir in 1148. The mosque was rebuilt in 1735 by Ahmad Katkhuda al-Kharabutli as an Ottoman-style congregational mosque. All that remains of the original mosque are the beautiful arabesque doors.

### ***Stop #17: The Mosque-Mausoleum of Sultan al-Muayyad:***

Background Notes:

- Sultan al-Muayyad Shaykh ruled Egypt from 1412 to 1421. Earlier, he was thrown into a prison on the site of his future monument. Suffering terribly, he vowed that if he ever came to power he would destroy the prison and convert the site into a "saintly place for the education of scholars." Al-Muayyad kept his promise and spent 40,000 dinars on its construction, which was started in 1415 and was completed in 1422. The madrasa enjoyed great prestige and became one of the leading institutions of higher learning of the fifteenth century.
- The monument has a soaring exterior facade. The portal is framed in red and turquoise geometric patterns. On either side of the portal are panels containing the *shahada* (the Muslim profession of faith: "There is no god but God; Muhammad is the Messenger of God") written in beautiful Kufic script. A Qur'anic inscription tops the portal and bays on either side.
- The entrance vestibule leads to the tomb chamber where al-Muayyad and his eldest son are buried. The largest cenotaph is decorated with a panel filled with Kufic script. The mausoleum is covered with a beautiful dome.
- The mausoleum leads to the sanctuary of the congregational mosque. The mosque was

originally built with a huge, four-facade, open courtyard. In the late nineteenth century, the courtyard was converted into a garden. The grand, elegant decorations of the interior are atypical of the late Mamluk period. The qibla wall, *minbar* (pulpit), and ceiling are particularly exquisite.

- A door in the sanctuary leads to the second-story platform in Bab Zuwayla. From there, one can reach the massive minarets placed atop the towers of the gate.

#### Slides:

36. Wide view of Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah northward toward the Ghuriya; traditional Egyptian souq. (The Author)
37. Wide view of Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah near the Mosque of al-Fakahani; traditional Egyptian souq. (The Author)  
*Examine these two pictures of Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah.*  
*Does this commercial area cater mainly to tourists or local inhabitants? How can you tell?*  
*What are some of the products for sale?*
38. Front view of the Mosque-Mausoleum of Sultan al-Muayyad: façade, dome over the tomb chamber, and portal. (The Author)  
*Examine the façade of this mosque.*  
*How does it epitomize the Mamluk architectural style?*

### **Stop #18: Bab Zuweyla:**

#### Background Notes:

- The only surviving southern gate of medieval al-Qahira, Bab Zuwayla was part of Badr al-Gamali's construction program. It dates from 1092. The gate was named after Fatimid soldiers from the Berber al-Zawila tribe, who were garrisoned in the vicinity of the original gate built in 969.
- The area in front of the gate became a major public gathering area during the Mamluk era, and it served as a site for public executions. It was here that the Ottomans hanged the last Mamluk sultan Tumanbay and that Muhammad 'Ali displayed on spikes the heads of the 500 Mamluks he had slaughtered.
- In the early Mamluk era, sultans watched from a platform extended between the two towers the start of the annual *mahmal* (ornamental caravan) to Mecca. The caravan delivered the new *kiswa* or decorative cloth covering for the Ka'ba. The custom of the mahmal and the kiswa lasted until 1926.
- In Ottoman times, the gate was known as Bab al-Mitwalli, because the headquarters and residence of the *wali* (commander) of the police force were located nearby.
- In the nineteenth century, the gate became associated with a local saint, Mitwalli al-Qutb, who lived near the gate and was reputed to perform miracles.
- While the gate may be structurally mundane, visually, it is stunning, with its large towers topped with great fifteenth-century minarets. The gate dominates the southern part of the old Fatimid city.

- The gate's protruding, rounded towers are connected by a covered walkway, which tops a huge, arched portal. The towers are more Syrian or Byzantine, than Arab, in style and inspiration. The two massive minarets belong to the Mosque of al-Muayyad, located just inside the gate to the west.

Slide:

39. Front view of Bab Zuweyla and the minarets of the Mosque of Sultan al-Muayyad. (The Author)

*Think back to Bab al-Futuh. How does Bab Zuweyla differ from Bab al-Futuh?*

*Examine the minarets in this picture.*

*What style do they represent? How do you know?*

*In past centuries, what were some of the public functions that took place at Bab Zuweyla?*

After passing through Bab Zuweyla, we head south on Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah and soon encounter the Qasaba of Radwan Bey, popularly known as Sharia al-Khayamiyya or the Street of the Tent Makers.

### ***Stop #19: Sharia al-Khayamiyya--The Street of the Tent Makers:***

Background Notes:

- Sharia al-Khayamiyya is the last surviving example of a covered market in Islamic Cairo. The market was built in 1650 by Radwan Bey, the amir al-hajj from 1631 to 1656. The *amir al-hajj*--the commander of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca--was one of the most important government positions in Mamluk and Ottoman Egypt. In this capacity, he was responsible for purchasing supplies and equipment; distributing food; and providing security for the pilgrims. Radwan Bey developed the area south of Bab Zuweyla, constructing religious, private, and commercial buildings. He used profits from the commercial district to finance the upkeep of religious and educational buildings and fund part of the cost of the pilgrimage. While the Ottoman government contributed funds for the pilgrimage, Radwan Bey donated large sums of money from his private fortune.
- Al-Khayamiyya is covered with a wooden roof pierced with windows, which permit light to illuminate the street and shops below. Small shops and stalls still line both sides of the street.
- The street takes its name from the craftsmen who once manufactured trappings and accoutrements for caravans and tents and saddles for Islamic armies since the time of the Fatimids. Craftsmen still make brightly colored tent fabrics to decorate walls and ceilings of large tents used for wedding parties, funerals, and religious festivals. They also produce beautiful appliqué work, largely for the tourist trade.

Slide:

40. Inside view of Sharia al-Khayamiyya—the Street of the Tent Makers. (The Author)  
*Identify some of the unique architectural features of this market.*

After taking in the Street of the Tent Makers, we continue south on Sharia Mu'izz li-Din

Allah.

## ***Stop #20: The Mosque of Mahmud al-Kurdi:***

### Background Notes:

- Mahmud al-Kurdi was the *utsdar*, or major-domo, under Sultan Barquq. The mosque was completed in 1395.
- The exterior decoration of this mosque is particularly interesting. The dome is built from stone and the zig-zag pattern is one of the first attempts at genuine stone-carved decoration. The round minaret predicts the future Ottoman style.
- The central area consists of a long room with iwans at either end. On the side walls, in place of iwans, are three wooden covered windows. The ceiling over the central area is higher than the iwans. The central area resembles the qa'a of a private residence, and there are numerous examples of homes being converted into mosques. This mosque may have been a former residence.

### Slide:

41. Wide view of the Mosque of Mahmud al-Kurdi: minaret and dome; view of Mu'izz li-Din Allah northward toward al-Khayamiya. (The Author)  
*Describe the dome and minaret of this mosque.*  
*What style does the minaret represent? How do you know?*

## ***Stop #21: The Madrasa of Inal al-Yusufi:***

### Background Notes:

- This monument was also built by an official in the court of Sultan Barquq. It was completed in 1392.
- The exterior arrangement of the madrasa is very similar to that of the mosque of al-Kurdi except the positions of the dome and minaret have been switched. The dome is made of stone, but its molded-rib finish is not carved but is made instead of brick and stucco. A sabil-kuttab stands at the south end of the facade.
- The sanctuary consists of a central courtyard covered with a lantern ceiling; a wide qibla wall; and two large, opposing iwans. The presence of two iwans, instead of four, may be due to the fact that the great majority of Egyptians adhere to only two Sunni schools of theology: the Shafi'i in Lower Egypt and the Maliki in Upper Egypt.

### Slide:

42. Front view of the Madrasa of Inal al-Yusufi. (The Author)  
*Describe the dome and minaret of this madrasa.*  
*What style does the minaret represent? How do you know?*  
*Compare the decoration of this dome to that of the Mosque of Mahmud al-Kurdi.*  
*Compare the positioning of this dome and minaret with that of the Mosque of Mahmud al-Kurdi.*

After examining the two late fourteenth century monuments, we pause for a moment to look back toward Bab Zuweyla. This section of the street is extremely picturesque and medieval in character. The corbelled upper stories of buildings project over the narrow, winding street below, providing some shaded relief during hot summer days.

We continue south on Sharia Mu'izz li-Din Allah until we reach Sharia Muhammad Ali, where we turn left and head south until we arrive at the man-made canyon formed by two massive monuments: the Madrasa of Sultan Hassan to the west and the Rifa'i Mosque to the east.

## ***Stop #22: The Madrasa of Sultan Hassan:***

### Background Notes:

- The Madrasa of Sultan Hassan is one of the great masterpieces of Mamluk architecture. It exemplifies the grand monumental style of the Bahri Mamluks and the cruciform floor plan. It was built between 1356 and 1363.
- Sultan Hassan was one of the sons of Sultan an-Nasir Muhammad. He ruled from 1347 to 1351 and from 1354 to 1361. He was assassinated before he could see the completion of his monument. Sultan Hassan was able to build such an imposing structure, because the estates of wealthy victims of the Black Plague of 1348 had swelled the treasury with money earmarked for religious endowments.
- The awesome façade is seventy-six meters long and thirty-six meters high. It is divided into narrow vertical bays topped with a strong honeycomb cornice that runs along the top of the façade. The stalactite-topped portal is off center and inclines from the façade by thirty degrees. The terrific height of the portal is enhanced by the spiral pillars and vertical panels on either side of the porch. Originally, the portal was to be topped by two great minarets, but the first collapsed in 1360 killing three hundred people and work was halted on the second. The black basalt stone imbedded in the façade is probably reminiscent of the Ka'ba in Mecca. The façade, which is made of stone, is unfinished; several oval medallions and the vertical panels are not carved.
- From the richly decorated vestibule, which is covered by a stalactite dome, one travels down a long, double-bent corridor, which leads to the tremendous, marble-floored courtyard, which contains a beautiful fountain and is surrounded by four massive, vaulted iwans. The interior is made of brick covered with stucco, except for those areas of finished stonework. The fountain dates to the Ottoman era, and on special occasions it served up sherbet. At one time, hundreds of enameled glass lamps hung from the great arches of the iwans. The marble flooring dates back to restoration work completed in 1912.
- Each iwan is dedicated to the teaching of a Sunni school of jurisprudence. The shaykh would sit on a stool or platform, while his students sat on the floor around him. The highly decorated doors in each iwan lead to the interior of the madrasa complex. Each of the four schools had four or five stories of rooms for the housing of teachers and students.
- The eastern iwan, which serves as the Hanafi madrasa, is also the mosque sanctuary. The iwan is decorated with a combination of marble panels and stucco friezes. Around the



iwan is a carved Qur'anic inscription in huge Kufic script. The stone minbar was originally decorated with an inlaid pattern, but now it is plain. A dikka stands in front of the minbar. On either side of the mihrab, doors lead to the mausoleum. The highly decorated door on the right is made of bronze inlaid with gold and silver. The design combines star shapes with small polygons.

- The mausoleum has a very high ceiling, and its walls are covered with marble panels. Running above the panels, a Qur'anic inscription in thuluth script surrounds the tomb chamber. In the corners of the chamber, stalactite pendentives support the dome. A pendentive is the triangular area formed by cutting away corners at the internal angles of a square room to accommodate the round base of a dome. The royal Qur'ans rested on a large wooden *kursi* or lectern. The sides of the *kursi* are decorated with a geometric star pattern.
- The tomb of Sultan Hassan enjoys a very prominent location from both an external and internal viewpoint. Externally, it projects onto Maydan Salah ad-Din at the base of the Citadel. The maydan was site of parades and religious festivals since the time of Sultan an-Nasir Muhammad. Internally, the tomb lies behind the qibla wall, which Muslims must face when they pray. Max Rodenbeck noted: "Just as his subjects had prostrated themselves before him when he was alive, so they would bow their foreheads to the ground before him after his death." Unfortunately, Sultan Hassan is not buried in his own mausoleum; his body disappeared after his assassination. His two sons are buried behind the lattice screen enclosure.
- The original dome was described by an Italian traveler in 1616 as exceptional, "in that it commences narrow, then swells out, and then contracts to a point like the egg of a hen." The elegant dome was twice damaged by cannon fire. In 1391, Sultan Barquq attacked the madrasa, which was being used as a fortress by dissident amirs. The amirs had set up an artillery battery on the terrace of the madrasa and fired projectiles into the Citadel. In 1517, the Ottoman army bombarded the monument after the last Mamluk sultan, Tumanbey, had taken refuge there. The dome collapsed in 1660 as the result of an earthquake.
- The mosque-mausoleum was originally flanked by huge, twin minarets. Today, the minarets are of unequal heights. The southernmost minaret--an original minaret--is the second tallest in Cairo at 68 meters. Its twin collapsed in 1659. The smaller, replacement minaret and the current dome date to restorations that were performed in 1671-72.

Slides:

43. View of the Rifa'i Mosque (left) and the Madrasa of Sultan Hassan (right). (The Author)  
*What is your first impression of this view of the two monuments?  
How do these monuments reflect the wealth and values of the Muhammad Ali Dynasty and Mamluks, respectively?*
44. Front view of the portal of the Madrasa of Sultan Hassan. (The Author)  
*What Mamluk architectural features are evident in this portal?*
45. Madrasa of Sultan Hassan: the courtyard, fountain, and western iwan. (The Author)  
*What is the purpose of this fountain?*

46. Madrasa of Sultan Hassan: front view of the eastern iwan with mihrab. (The Author)  
*List and briefly describe the teachings of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence.*  
*Why did Sultan Hassan build his mausoleum behind the qibla wall and near Maydan Salah ad-Din?*

### ***Stop #23: The Rifa'i Mosque:***

#### Background Notes:

- This enormous monument is located directly across the narrow pedestrian street from the Madrasa of Sultan Hassan. It was built over the former site of the *zawiya* of Shaykh 'Ali ar-Rifa'i, a saint who was buried there. (A *zawiya* is a residence for Sufis centered around a shaykh and particular path of Sufism.) The site was obtained by Princess Khushyar, a consort of Ibrahim Pasha (one of the sons of Muhammad Ali) and the mother of Khedive Isma'il. Princess Khushyar charged the architect Husayn Pasha Fahmy to build a mosque to contain the tombs of Rifa'i and Shaykh 'Abdullah al-Ansari, a companion of the prophet and mausolea for herself and her descendants. Construction started in 1869, but a number of architectural and financial problems led to a suspension of the project in 1880. By that time, both the princess and her architect were dead. Work was resumed in 1905, and the mosque was finished largely according to the plans of Husayn Pasha Fahmy. Since Husayn Pasha left no plans for the interior, it was completed by Max Herz, the chief architect of the Committee of the Preservation of Arab Monuments, which was founded in 1881 to save and maintain Islamic monuments. The massive building was completed in 1912.
- One enters the mosque from the entrance facing the Madrasa of Sultan Hassan. Immediately inside the entrance, behind a sandalwood screen, is the tomb of Shaykh 'Ali ar-Rifa'i. To the left of the tomb, behind a mashrabiya screen are the cenotaphs of King Fuad (ruled 1917-36), his mother, King Faruq (ruled 1936-52), and Muhammad Pahlevi, the last shah of Iran.
- To the right of the tomb of Rifa'i is the impressive sanctuary of the mosque. It is monumental both in size and ornamentation. The decorations are a stunning compilation of ornamental styles found in Cairo. Nineteen different types of marble, from seven different countries were used to decorate the sanctuary. Each of the forty-four grand columns and the eighteen intricate window grilles cost 1,000 Egyptian pounds. Gold for the ceiling was imported from Turkey at LE 25,000, a tremendous sum of money for the early 1900s.
- Princess Khushyar and her descendants are buried in tomb chambers along the northern walls of the building. The chambers are reached through a door to the left of the Qibla wall. Family members interned in the mausolea are Khedive Isma'il (ruled 1863-79), his two daughters, two sons, and three wives. Sultan Husayn Kamil (ruled 1914-17) and his wife are also buried there.

#### Slides:

47. Rifa'i Mosque: front view of the portal and minaret. (The Author)

48. Rifa'i Mosque: interior of dome of the mosque sanctuary. (Al Ahram)  
*Examine these two pictures of the Rifa'i Mosque.*  
*How does the mosque reflect the wealth and values of the Muhammad 'Ali Dynasty?*
49. Rifa'i Mosque: children attending a Qur'anic school with their teacher in the mosque sanctuary. (The Author)  
*What role does the Qur'an play in elementary education?*  
*At what age will boys and girls be segregated in their education?*
50. Rifa'i Mosque: the tomb of Khedive Isma'il. (The Author)  
*What were some of Isma'il's greatest achievements and failures?*  
*What do you think the tarboosh on top of the cenotaph symbolizes?*

After exploring the two massive monuments, we walk out to Maydan Salah ad-Din, which is located between the monuments and the Citadel. We then walk west on Sharia Saliba until we reach the magnificent Mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun.

### ***Stop #24: The Mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun:***

#### Background Notes:

- Ahmad ibn Tulun was sent to Egypt in 868 by the Abbasid caliph to serve as the governor of al-Fustat, but within two years he became the governor of the province of Egypt. He soon halted the annual payment of tribute to the court in Baghdad and established himself as the independent ruler of the country. The Tulunid Dynasty ruled Egypt until 905, when the caliph reasserted his control.
- Ibn Tulun built the city of al-Qata'i a few miles northeast of al-Fustat. According to a number of legends, this area was the site where Noah's Ark landed after the great flood; where God spoke to Moses; and where Moses confronted the magicians of the pharaoh. Nearby, at Qal'at al-Kabsh, Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son according to God's order. When the Abbasids regained control of Egypt in 905, they destroyed all of al-Qata'i except for its magnificent mosque.
- The mosque was built between 876 and 879 and is significant for several reasons. First, it is the oldest intact, functioning mosque in Cairo. Second, it serves as a repository of Islamic art and architecture from the ninth and tenth centuries, particularly Mesopotamian styles of the early Abbasid era. Third, the mosque is the first building to use the pointed arch, two hundred years before it appeared in Christian Europe. And finally, it is one of the best examples of a mosque constructed according to the classic congregational courtyard plan.
- The mosque is enclosed in a double-walled enclosure. The area between the two walls is the *ziyada* (addition), which serves as a dry moat, separating the mosque from the bazaars and other secular building that surround it. The walls are topped in a unique crenellation, resembling paper cut-outs of human beings with linked arms.
- Designed as the main congregational mosque of Ibn Tulun's city, the vast mosque covers six and a half acres. The courtyard was not paved but was filled with pebbles, because it was intended to hold the entire community for prayer. It is surrounded by four arcades consisting of pointed arches, mounted on brick piers. Engaged columns are imbedded in

each corner of the piers. The interior and side of each arch are covered with carved or stamped stucco decorations. The use of red brick and stucco ornamentation is an architectural feature brought from Samarra, an Abbasid court city in northern Iraq.

- The sanctuary arcade is deeper than the other arcades. It is five aisles deep. In the middle of the qibla wall is the main mihrab, which is simply a frame surrounding a niche. Above the mihrab is an inscription of the shahada carved in Kufic script. Over the years, patrons have endowed the mosque with five other mihrabs.
- A band of inscription on sycamore wood, containing verses from the Qur'an, runs just under the ceiling and around the entire mosque. The inscription is over two kilometers in length and contains about one fifteenth of the whole Qur'an. Legend states that some of the sycamore planks were salvaged from Noah's ark.
- The interior of the mosque is lighted by one hundred and twenty windows. The windows are pointed and contain plaster grilles displaying a variety of geometric patterns.
- In 1296, Sultan Lajin carried out a restoration of the mosque. He enhanced several important features of the mosque. He added marble lining and a glass mosaic inscription to the main mihrab, placed a dome over the main mihrab, and installed a beautifully decorated wooden minbar. Lajin also built the beautiful dome over the ablution fountain, which stands in the middle of the courtyard. Lajin also rebuilt the spectacular minaret, which was probably inspired by the spiral minaret of the Great Mosque of Samarra. He added the square base and the mabkhara finial on top. From the top of the minaret, we get a great view of the mosque below and Cairo in all directions. There is no doubt that Cairo is "the city of a thousand minarets."
- The Mosque of Ibn Tulun was one of the first monuments restored by the Committee of the Preservation of Arab Monuments.

#### Slides:

51. Mosque of Ibn Tulun: view of inner courtyard, fountain, and sanctuary arcade. (The Author)  
*What are some of the unique architectural features incorporated in the Mosque of Ibn Tulun?*
52. Mosque of Ibn Tulun: interior of sanctuary arcade. (The Author)
53. Mosque of Ibn Tulun: main mihrab of the sanctuary arcade. (The Author)  
*Examine the pictures of the interior of the sanctuary arcade and the main mihrab. How do the size and decoration of the mosque reflect the wealth and values of the Muslims of the early medieval period?*
54. Mosque of Ibn Tulun: view of the fountain from within the sanctuary arcade. (The Author)  
*Compare and contrast the decoration of this fountain with that of the fountain in the courtyard of the Madrasa of Sultan Hasan.*
55. Mosque of Ibn Tulun: view of the minaret and western arcade from within the sanctuary arcade. (The Author)  
*This minaret is modeled after which famous minaret in Iraq?  
Identify some of the Iraqi architectural features incorporated into the mosque?*

We leave the mosque and visit the Gayer-Anderson Museum, which is located right next door. We reach the museum through a gate, which is located in the outer court of the mosque just south of the main entrance.

## ***Stop #25: The Gayer-Anderson Museum:***

### Background Notes:

- The Gayer-Anderson Museum is also known as Bayt al-Kritliya (“House of the Cretan Woman”). The house was so named either because a woman from Crete purchased it about two hundred years ago or because a family named Kretli once lived there. The museum is actually two late medieval houses joined together. They were restored and furnished by John Gayer-Anderson, a British major, who lived there from 1935 to 1942. The two homes are very well preserved and exquisitely furnished and provide the visitor with an appreciation of the high levels of luxury and comfort that could be achieved by prosperous Cairo residents about three hundred years ago.
- A narrow alley separates the houses. The house on the right, which was built in 1631, once belonged to ‘Abd al-Qadar al-Haddad (“the smith”). The house on the left, which once belonged to Amna bint Salim al-Gazzar (“the butcher”), was built in 1540. The smith’s house has a sabil in its southwest corner. The sabil is identified by two grilled windows. When the two homes were joined, this house became the *haramlik* (“the forbidden area;” the women’s quarters). The butcher’s house became the *salamlik* (“the greeting area;” the men’s room). We enter the smith’s house through the courtyard.
- The smith’s house contains a *maq’ad* (“a sitting space;” an open, arch-fronted area, on an upper floor, overlooking a courtyard), an indoor reception room, and a harim qa’a. The roof is enclosed in mashrabiya screens, which filter the light and provide ventilation. The screens permit the women to enjoy outside air without being seen. From the roof, we can cross over to the butcher’s house.
- The butcher’s house has a large qa’a on the bottom floor, which is arguably one of the finest examples of a qa’a in Cairo. The room contains a multi-colored central fountain, decorated ceiling beams, ornate carpets, covered alcoves, and an upper gallery concealed by a bank of mashrabiya. Behind the screens, women could observe the proceedings below.
- There are a number of legends that belong to the smith’s house:
  - The domed tomb on the side street belongs to Sidi Harun, son of al-Husayn, grandson of ‘Ali, great-grandson of Muhammad, and patron saint of the house. Sidi Harun supposedly brought blessings, prosperity, and protection to the house.
  - The house was built around a well, which can still be seen in a corner of the courtyard. The well holds water left over from the Great Flood, and the water is believed to be magical and beneficial to its users. The well is also believed to be the entrance to the huge underground palace of Sultan al-Watawit, the Sultan of the Bats and King of the Jinn. The palace contains a vast treasure, guarded by al-Watawit’s magic powers. His seven daughters, each in a golden bed, slumber under his spell.

- The Gayer-Anderson Museum with its exotic decor has become a popular film location. Scenes from the James Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me* and the film *Ruby Cairo*, starring Liam Neeson, were shot in the museum.

Slides:

56. Gayer-Anderson Museum: view of the courtyard from the roof. (The Author)  
*Explain how the courtyard-garden of a private residence is a metaphor for paradise.*
57. Gayer-Anderson Museum: mashrabiya-screened window of the haramlik. (The Author)  
*Explain the purpose of a mashrabiya.*
58. Gayer-Anderson Museum: the qa'a with fountain in the salamlik. (The Author)  
*Describe the functions of the haramlik and salamlik of the home of a wealth Cairene.*

With our visit to the Gayer-Anderson Museum, we complete our walking tour of Islamic Cairo. Before returning to our downtown hotel, we walk over to a relatively quiet ahwa, where we enjoy sheesha and a cup of ahwa or a glass of *karkadey* (a drink made from boiled hibiscus leaves) and discuss all that we have seen and experienced. At one point in our discussion, someone asks: "When are we going to visit the Citadel, the Northern Cemetery, and the Southern Cemetery?"

"That, my friend," I respond, "will be the subject of another tour."

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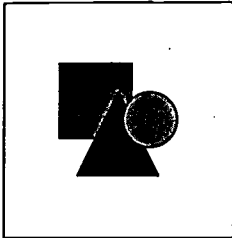
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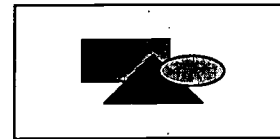
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