

Mattia Guidetti (Bologna)

Sarajevo's city hall as seen from Cairo

This paper investigates the sources of selected features characterizing 19th-century Orientalizing architecture. It takes as case study Sarajevo's former city hall, erected when Bosnia was under Habsburg rule. Identifying Cairo as the main source of inspiration for the building in Sarajevo illustrates how Mamluk and other Islamic architectural elements were recombined in one single building.

Orientalizing architecture and the art of assemblage

Different channels nourished the perception and knowledge of Islamic architectural legacy in Europe at the time of the Sarajevo city hall's (*Vijećnica*) erection (1892–95 – fig. 1). Travellers and surveys increasingly introduced artworks and architecture from Islamic lands to a European audience. Some of these publications were part of the Arts & Crafts movement, which spread across Europe patterns extrapolated from various objects and buildings. At the same time, museums and private collectors accumulated objects from Islamic lands at an increasing pace. These multiple stimuli invite some reflections about 19th-century Europe's reception of 'Islamic' architecture.

The first reflection regards terminology. What is nowadays known as Islamic art was, in the 19th century, parcelled out along ethno-linguistic lines. Moving from East to West, Indian, Persian, Turkish, Arab, and Moorish art were identified as entities. The latter two terms considerably overlapped, as the term Moorish referred to the art and architecture produced in al-Andalus, which at its inception was largely dependent on the rest of the Islamic Mediterranean's artistic achievements. With the passing of time, however, al-Andalus's architectural style developed autonomously.

The familiarity of forms, architectural elements, and decorative patterns across such ethno-linguistic units slowly made room for the first efforts to conceive one single term that encompassed all regional artistic traditions. Paradoxically, it was during the rise of Middle Eastern nationalisms that terms such as 'Saracenic', 'Muhammedan', and 'Islamic' art emerged to define the field. In fact, scholars, mainly European, highlighted how the mobility of forms and styles across the Islamic lands, or the Turkish background of several rulers of Arab lands, weakened categories that anchored artistic production to the pair of 'ethnos and territory'. The concept of Islamic art, instead, organised material and visual culture on a trans-regional level by reuniting under one single umbrella the territories governed by Muslim rulers.¹

1 Gülru Necipoğlu, "The concept of Islamic art: Inherited discourses and new approaches," *Islamic art and the*



Fig. 1. General view of the Vijećnica of Sarajevo (1892–95). Photograph by Anida Krečo.

Within such a scholarly context, it is worth mentioning that a large share of the elements that eventually flowed into so-called Orientalizing architecture drew upon historical buildings that, by then, fell under the Arab and Moorish art label.² There are notable exceptions, such as the case of the Zacherl factory in Vienna (1888–92), which displays disparate elements, with Persian-inspired features dominating.³

The second reflection deals with the process of ‘fragmentation’ that was a feature of 19th century interest in Islamic art. In the case of Egypt, for instance, before the first catalogues and manuals of Arab art started appearing, richly illustrated volumes helped to spread Islamic era art’s visual imagery. It was the case of Émile Prisses d’Avennes, who published an illustrated atlas of Arab art in 1869–1877, and Owen Jones, who included samples labelled as “Arabian art” in his *Grammar of Ornament* of 1856, which followed an 1842 publication on the Alhambra.⁴ Slightly different, because of his role as court architect in Cairo, was the

Museum, ed. Benoit Junod, Georges Khalil, Stefan Weber, and Gerhard Wolf (London: Saqi Books, 2012), pp. 57–75, here 57–62.

2 Francine Giese, “Reassessing the Moorish Revival in 19th-century Europe,” *Mudejarismo and Moorish Revival in Europe: Cultural negotiations and artistic translations in the Middle Ages and 19th-century Historicism*, ed. Francine Giese (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 59–78.

3 On the Zacherl factory, see: Markus Ritter, “Eine neue Richtung geben’: Islamische Kunst in der Rezeption des Historismus in Mitteleuropa,” *Gezimmertes Morgenland: Orientalische und orientalisierende Holzinterieurs in Mitteleuropa im späten 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. Maximilian Hartmuth and Julia Rüdiger (Vienna/Cologne/Weimar: Böhlau, 2021), pp. 15–44, here 35–42.

4 Owen Jones, *The grammar of ornament* (London: Day and Son, 1856); Émile Prisses d’Avennes, *L’art arabe*

case of Pascal Coste, who published his *Architecture Arabe, ou Monuments du Kaire* in 1839 as the result of his survey of Islamic Cairo's historical architecture.⁵

Illustrations dominate all these publications and a distinctive taste for ornamental features pervades the selection of subjects. The abovementioned publications presented views of the buildings and, especially in Pascal Coste's *Architecture Arabe*, ground plans of Islamic Cairo's main buildings. The illustrations' majority focuses on decorative details, sometimes presented as a collage of patterns from different buildings or objects on one plate. This choice emphasizes ornamental qualities and formal familiarities among samples. Moreover, it favours architectural decoration over architecture.

A consequence of this approach was the fragmentation of buildings into pieces, which were often decontextualized from the time and place in which they were originally erected. This was especially true when, as exposed by Mercedes Volait, later publications reproduced single drawings and images leaving aside the text accompanying them, thus definitively disconnecting patterns and motifs from their historical context.⁶

The composition of the plates included in the abovementioned publications was the result of the material's creative manipulation in response to the taste of both the author and his readership. De-contextualization and manipulation, which addressed contemporary expectations, also affected some objects from Islamic lands collected in Europe. Detached from their original context and scattered in various European collections, objects became repositories of ornamental values, admired for their technique and design.

A case in point is the *minbar* (pulpit) of the mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo. The mosque itself was a ninth-century foundation, while the *minbar* was a 13th-century votive offering by the Mamluk Sultan Lajin (r. 1296–99) to the mosque's endowment when he acceded to the throne. This donation to thank God for saving Lajin from earlier persecution consisted of the chair's inner structure and the hundreds of geometrical shapes carved with interlaced stems and leaves that decorated it.⁷

In a magnificently researched and curated exhibition at the Museum of Applied Arts of Vienna (MAK), the scholar and artist Adriana Czernin recently exposed the dispersion of Sultan Lajin's *minbar* pieces. She highlighted the trajectory of the fragments collected in

d'après les monuments du Kaire depuis le VII^e siècle jusqu'à la fin du XVIII^e (Paris: J. Savoy & Cie éditeurs, 1869–1877).

5 Pascal Coste, *Architecture arabe, ou monuments du Kaire, mesurés et dessinés, de 1818 à 1826* (Paris: Typographie de Firmin Didot Frères, 1839); Nasser Rabbat, "The formation of the Neo-Mamluk style in modern Egypt", *The education of the architect: Historiography, urbanism, and the growth of architectural knowledge*, ed. Martha Pollak (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 363–388, here pp. 364–366, and pp. 368–373; Mercedes Volait, "Les monuments de l'architecture arabe' vus par Pascal Coste", *Pascal Coste, toutes les Egypte*, ed. Dominique Jacobi (Marseille: Parenthèses/Bibliothèque municipale de Marseille, 1998), pp. 97–131.

6 Mercedes Volait, "Le goût mamelouk au XIX^e siècle: D'une esthétique orientaliste à un style national générique," ed. Mercedes Volait and Emmanuelle Perrin, *Dialogues artistiques avec les passés de l'Egypte* (Paris: InVisu/CNRS-INHA, 2017), accessed June 30, 2022, <http://inha.revues.org/7207>.

7 Tarek Swelim, *Ibn Tulun: His lost city and great mosque* (Cairo: The American University Press, 2015).

Vienna, focusing on the manipulation they incurred when they were publicly displayed, at the museum first and later in the exhibition *Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst* (Masterpieces of Muhammadan Art), shown in Munich in 1910.⁸

Sultan Lajin's *minbar* became popular in Europe through its reproduction by the above-mentioned Pascal Coste and other travellers, such as, for instance, James William Wild, who sketched several drawings of Cairo's Islamic art and architecture, including the wooden pulpit.⁹ On the occasion of the 1867 Paris World Exhibition, the wooden tiles composing the decoration of the mosque pulpit's two parietal walls were brought to Europe by the private collector Hussein Pasha Meimar.¹⁰ Later on, several European museums, including the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry (the later MAK) in Vienna and London's South Kensington Museum, acquired many *minbar* pieces from the Egyptian collector. The pulpit's fragments became "a must-have collectible".¹¹

While some wooden pieces remained in the Museum of Arab Art in Cairo's (after 1952: Museum of Islamic Art) possession, the *minbar*'s skeleton remained like a whale's carcass in the derelict mosque of Ibn Tulun. Czernin's research unveiled how by 1892 at the latest, the *minbar* fragments in Vienna were arbitrarily configured as a rosette and publicly presented as the *Vienna tableau* (fig. 2), with the pieces arranged concentrically. The geometrical composition offered a balanced and symmetrical pattern, which, however, did not correspond to how single pieces had fitted in the pulpit in 13th-century Cairo. For the creators of the *Vienna tableau*, the pieces' provenance and original arrangement were not a main concern. The result was not a historically sensitive reconstruction and did not prioritize the fragments' reconnection to the original work. The newly created work responded, instead, to contemporary taste and expectations. The fragments' manipulation appealed to experts and scholars – to the extent of being included in the abovementioned 1910 Munich exhibition of Islamic art masterpieces.¹² To

8 Adriana Czernin, "Fragment" (Exhibition), MAK – Museum für angewandte Kunst, Vienna, 18.04.2018–30.09.2018, https://www.mak.at/en/program/exhibitions/adriana_czernin (accessed June 20, 2022); on 1910 Munich's exhibition, see: *After one hundred years - The 1910 exhibition "Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst" Reconsidered*, ed. Avinoam Shalem and Andrea Lermer (Leiden; Brill, 2010), and Eva-Maria Troelenberg, *Eine Ausstellung wird besichtigt: Die Münchner 'Ausstellung von Meisterwerken muhammedanischer Kunst' 1910 in kultur- und wissenschaftsgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2010).

9 Coste, *Architecture arabe*, pl. V; James William Wild, *Sketchbook, 1840–1845*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Inv. E.3841: 56–1938. On Wild's work on Cairo, see: Abraham Thomas, "James Wild, Cairo and the South Kensington Museum," *Le Caire dessiné et photographié au XIX^e siècle*, ed. Mercedes Volait (Paris: Picard, 2013), pp. 41–68.

10 Mecces Volait, *Antique dealing and creative reuse in Cairo and Damascus 1850–1890* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 42–50; fig. 16, 29–31.

11 Volait, *Antique dealing*, p. 48; Désirée N. Heiden, "Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Minbar: Verstreute Kunstobjekte in der internationalen Museumslandschaft," *Von Gibraltar bis zum Ganges: Studien zur Islamischen Kunstgeschichte in memoriam Christian Ewert*, ed. Marion Frengel and Martina Müller-Wiener (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2010), pp. 75–95.

12 See a report on Adriana Czernin's work at the MAK – Museum für angewandte Kunst, and of following projects on minbars in Egypt at <https://blog.mak.at/mamluk-minbars/>, accessed June, 30, 2022.

Fig. 2. The *Vienna tableau*, late 19th-century composition with fragments of the *minbar* of sultan Lajin (13th century), print of 1912. New York Public Library Digital Collections, image ID 1597159. <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-966b-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99> (accessed April 18, 2023).



improve the final composition and create a work fitting an ideal Islamic artwork, some pieces were even newly produced. According to Czernin, new triangular drop-shaped pieces allowed the transition from the eight-pointed star at the composition's centre to the trapezoidal pieces that followed on the exterior. The additions completed the rosette and made it something perceived as an accomplished piece, worthy of being displayed as a unit.

Fragmentation, de-contextualization, manipulation, and arbitrary rearrangement are some of the underlying concepts of the reception of art and architecture from Islamic lands in 19th-century Europe. This background helps in understanding the rationale underpinning Orientalizing architecture's principles and choices. The pastiche nature of Orientalizing buildings draws on the mobility of Islamic architecture's elements and motifs that reached Europe, often disconnected from the architectural context to which they belonged. Just before the European coinage of the term Islamic art at the beginning of the new century, an increasing number of publications canonized Arab art in Egypt, refining chronology and typologies.¹³ It was the conclusion of a century that started with Napoleon's occupation of Egypt (1798). Related to it was the launch of the documenting mission of the *Description de l'Égypte*, which had a strong impact on Orientalizing architecture in Europe as well as on Historicist architecture within Egypt.

13 See, for instance, Albert Jean Gayet, *L'art arabe* (Paris, Librairies-imprimeries réunies, 1893); Max Herz, *Catalogue sommaire des monuments exposés dans le Musée National de l'Art Arabe* (Cairo: G. Lekegian & Cie., 1895); Henri Saladin, *Manuel d'art musulman* (Paris: A. Picard et fils, 1907); Vincenzo Fago, *Arte araba* (Rome: Officina di fotoincisione in San Michele a Ripa, 1909).

The *Vijećnica* of Sarajevo (1892–95) and Cairo's neo-Islamic architecture

The Sarajevo town hall (*Vijećnica*) is a monumental building facing the Miljacka River in the downtown area of Bosnia and Herzegovina's capital. It was inaugurated as Sarajevo's town hall in 1896 and converted into the National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1949. In 1992, it caught fire after a bombing by artillery; it reopened after extensive restoration works as a multi-functional centre in 2014.¹⁴

The *Vijećnica*'s planning and construction were a multi-stage process that involved three architects. The first project, produced by Karel Pařík, was rejected by the authorities though its principles were later taken up by the architects Alexander Wittek and, following the death of the latter, by Ćiril Iveković.¹⁵ Despite a certain continuity (the building's triangular shape and the presence of an avant-corps on each façade), the transition from Pařík to Wittek implied a change in the building's stylistic outline. While the first plan accentuated neo-Renaissance (or Romanizing) architectural aspects, the final one redesigned the *Vijećnica* according to a style that adopted several features of historical Islamic architecture.

The building has a triangular shape with three wings that share at their centre a hexagonal courtyard covered by a glass ceiling. Each side has a central body slightly projecting off of the complex's footprint. The projection is more accentuated around the main entrance, while the building's three corners feature towers used as joints between the three sides. Wittek's Islamic-inspired additions include polychrome bands, horseshoe and pointed arches, crenellations, round medallions, intricate-carved panels, and *muqarnas* cornices.¹⁶ As the detailed analysis of some features in the next paragraph shows, most of the *Vijećnica*'s planning drew on Egypt's historical architecture.

In the same years the *Vijećnica* was erected, several buildings in Cairo were planned by adapting historical Islamic architectural elements to modern and functional structures.¹⁷ Among the several terms adopted to define the revivalist architecture of historical Islamic buildings ('Islamic revival', 'neo-Islamic', 'Fuad I style', 'neo-Moorish', 'arabisation', 'Saracenic'), the category 'neo-Mamluk' was coined to identify a style imbued with direct quotations from buildings attributed specifically to the Mamluk period (1250–1517).¹⁸ Fur-

14 *Vijećnica Sarajevo: gradnja, razaranje, obnova*, ed. Nedžad Mulaomerović Valerijan Žujo, Ferhad Mulabegović, Smajo Mulaomerović (Sarajevo: Studio Urbing, 2014).

15 See recently: Julia Rüdiger, "Bauen für die bosnische(n) Partikularität(en) im habsburgischen Vielvölkerstaat," *Kritische Berichte* 47/2 (2019), pp. 38–49.

16 Emily Gunzburger Makaš, "Sarajevo," *Capital cities in the aftermath of empires: Planning in Central and South-eastern Europe*, ed. Emily Gunzburger Makaš and Tanja Damjanović Conley (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 241–267.

17 Robert Ilbert and Mercedes Volait, "Neo-Arabic Renaissance in Egypt, 1870–1930," *Mimar* 13 (1983), pp. 26–34.

18 Ilbert and Volait, "Neo-Arabic Renaissance", pp. 28–29; Rabbat, "The formation of the Neo-Mamluk style," p. 364; Mercedes Volait, "Appropriating Orientalism? Saber Sabri's Mamluk revivals in late 19th c. Cairo," *Islamic art in the 19th century: Tradition, innovation and eclecticism*, ed. Doris Behrens-Abuseif and Stephen Ver-noit (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 131–155.

thermore, the term reveals an affinity with Historicism's wider phenomenon through the prefix *neo-*, implying the deliberate selection of a period in a nation's history that was elected as the most representative of a specific national identity.

Nasser Rabbat explains the reasons for selecting the Mamluk period as Islamic Cairo's most representative era as follows. On the one hand, Mamluk architecture was the culmination of developments taking place under earlier dynasties; on the other hand, regarding the public and religious cityscape, and given the paucity of Ottoman additions to the city, on the eve of the French occupation Cairo was still the city shaped under the Mamluks.¹⁹ Several factors affected the 'neo-Mamluk' style's genesis. In sum, scholars highlight architect Pascal Coste's role, the activities of the *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe*, and a patronage that responded to the Egyptian elite's political aspirations for independence and the growing local bourgeoisie.²⁰

Coste was entrusted with planning two mosques – one in Alexandria and one in Cairo – by the *wali* (governor) of Egypt, Muhammad Ali. Building upon the template of the *Description de l'Égypte*, Pascal Coste spent time (1821–24) surveying Cairo's Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk buildings. The survey's results inspired the two mosques' plans and were later assembled in his publication *Architecture arabe, ou Monuments du Kaire*. Though both mosque projects were aborted, Coste's publication became seminal not only in Europe but also at the newly established technical school in Cairo. In contrast, the *Comité's* activities directly influenced the neo-Mamluk architectural style's development as it promoted and nourished an interest for the preservation of historical architecture and objects that involved both Europeans working in Egypt and Egyptians. The *Comité* had a long-lasting impact on Cairo's layout, counterpointing the city's coeval modernization with the conservation of its medieval past.²¹ Regarding the political implications of deliberately adopting the neo-Mamluk style, it is worth recalling how the 19th century's last part was a period during which the Egyptian elite increased the effort to distance itself from the Ottoman Empire's influence. Such a process included the search for intellectual references and values that were no longer exclusively dependent on Ottoman taste.

19 Rabbat, "The formation of the Neo-Mamluk style," p. 365.

20 Ilbert and Volait, "Neo-Arabic Renaissance"; Rabbat, "The formation of the Neo-Mamluk style"; Volait, "Appropriating Orientalism?"; Nadania Idriss, "Architecture as an expression of identity: Abbas Hilmi II and the Neo-Mamluk style," *International conferences on recent advances in geotechnical earthquake engineering and soil dynamics* 1 (2010).

21 Paula Sanders, "The Victorian invention of Medieval Cairo: A case study in medievalism and the Construction of the East," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 37/2 (2003), pp. 179–198; *Making Cairo Medieval*, ed. Nezar Al Sayyad, Irene A. Bierman, and Nasser Rabbat (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005); Paula Sanders, *Creating Medieval Cairo: Empire, religion, and architectural preservation in nineteenth-century Egypt* (Cairo: American University Press, 2008). On the Comité, see recently: István Ormos, "The Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe: Towards a balanced appraisal," *The Arabist: Budapest Studies in Arabic* 40 (2019) pp. 47–140.

Max Herz, a Hungarian architect trained in Budapest and Vienna and working as the chief architect of the Cairo *Comité*, planned several private buildings for the local elite, and directed the al-Rifa'i mosque's completion, achieved in 1912.²² Located in front of the Mamluk complex of Sultan Hasan (1361), and an iconic building of the Mamluk age which the same Herz had previously studied, Herz took on the al-Rifa'i mosque's architectural project in place of the Egyptian architect Husayn Fahmi.²³ Husayn Fahmi started working on the mosque's plan as early as 1869 – a keydate for Egypt as it was the year of the Suez Canal's inauguration for which the Khedive Isma'il hosted many foreign guests and showcased Cairo's new 'Parisian-style' urban layout. Fahmi's work suggests that he based his al-Rifa'i's plan on Pascal Coste's interpretation of Mamluk buildings, especially with regard to the rigid symmetry of the façade.²⁴

The neighbouring Sultan Hasan complex obviously inspired the 19th-century mosque of al-Rifa'i, which, however, also included a central prayer hall with massive pillars reminiscent of old Egyptian temple architecture. In reworking the existing building, Herz decided to heighten the interior arches so to make the building "plus agréable et plus en rapport avec la tradition de l'art arabe".²⁵ The mosque, which also included the royal family's mausoleums, was decorated and furnished by applying the same Mamluk revival principles to objects such as lamps and the *minbar*.²⁶

Around the turn of the century, the number of buildings echoing historic Islamic architecture built in Cairo by both local and foreign architects increased. The Italians Ciro Pantanelli and Alfonso Manescalo worked on a public fountain and a library respectively. Pantanelli built, together with the above mentioned Husayn Fahmi, the *Sabil-Kuttab* (a public fountain with a school and library on top of the building) in the Bab Hadid quarter ca. 1870, while Manescalo's building, located in the Bab al-Khalq quarter, was inaugurated in 1903 as the Khedivial Library and the House of Arab Antiquities (fig. 3). The two buildings show the transition from a generic 'neo-Islamic' style, in part imbued with the late Ottoman style's legacy, to the 'neo-Mamluk' style that drew upon a selection of Mamluk-era buildings and artistic details.

22 Mohammad al-Asad, "The mosque of al-Rifa'î in Cairo", *Muqarnas* 10 (1993), 108–124; Rabbat, "The formation of the Neo-Mamluk Style," pp. 377–380; István Ormos, *Max Herz Pasha 1856–1919: His Life and Career* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 2009), pp. 430–445.

23 Max Herz, *La mosquée du Sultan Hassan au Caire* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1899); Max Herz, *La mosquée el-Rifâi au Caire* (Milan: Humbert Allegretti, 1911).

24 Rabbat, "The formation of the Neo-Mamluk style," pp. 378–379.

25 Herz, *La mosquée el-Rifâi au Caire*, p. 40.

26 Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Orientalism and the artisanal revival in 19th- and 20th-century Egypt," *The Arabist: Budapest Studies in Arabic* 41 (2020), pp. 1–18; Mercedes Volait, "Revival, replica, and reuse: Fashioning 'Arabesque' furniture in Khedivial Cairo," *The Arabist: Budapest Studies in Arabic* 41 (2020), pp. 229–243; Marcus Milwright, "Reviving the past and confronting the present: Crafts in Syria and Egypt, c. 1875–1925," *The Journal of Modern Craft* XIII/1 (2020), pp. 7–21.



Fig. 3: The Khedivial Library and the House of Arab Antiquities by Alfonso Manesca (inaugurated in 1903), Cairo. Historic postcard in author's collection.

Besides several private residences, other public buildings reinforced the preference for the neo-Mamluk style as the most representative Historicist style used in Egypt. One example is Cairo's Central Railway ("Ramses") Station (1893) for which the English architect Edwin Patsy planned a neo-classical façade interspersed with Mamluk architectural motifs. The Awqaf Ministry building, built in three stages in 1898, 1911, and 1929 under the initial supervision of Mahmud Fahmi, the chief architect of the Awqaf Ministry (Ministry of Religious Endowments), was a further public construction displaying a reinterpretation of Mamluk elements. After completion, the structure displayed all of neo-Mamluk architecture's features, with rectangular recesses crowned by *muqarnas* (stalactite vaults), pointed arches, and *ablaq* (alternation of white and light red stones) masonry.

The origins of historic Islamic elements in the Vijećnica of Sarajevo

It is possible to extrapolate single elements from the Sarajevo city hall and trace them back to historical Islamic buildings. As already stated, a single building did not inspire the Sarajevo city hall, but rather multiple buildings served as sources.



Fig. 4. Detail of the façade of the *Vijećnica* of Sarajevo (1892–95). Photograph by Anida Krečo.



Fig. 5. The upper façade of the portico of the mosque of al-Azhar (II phase of the mosque added under al-Hafiz li-Din Allah, 1129–49), Cairo. <https://www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk> (accessed April 27, 2023), image ID 101287. Photograph by Ross Burns.

Exterior

Prominent features of the *Vijećnica* of Sarajevo's façade are the keel arches that crown the upper storey's windows (fig. 4). The definition of keel arches derives from the fact that the arch's profile resembles a boat's inversed keel.²⁷ The arch forms visible in Sarajevo start to appear in Egypt in the Fatimid period (969–1171). Fatimid architecture presents two distinctive arch form phases. The first one dates to the late tenth and the eleventh century and features pointed arches. This is visible in the al-Azhar mosque's first phase, coinciding with Cairo's foundation (969–970), as well as in the mosque of al-Hakim (990–1003). Keel arches dominate the second phase, which finds its inception date in the mosque of al-Aqmar (1125). They also appear in the courtyard arcade added to the mosque of al-Azhar (under al-Hafiz li-Din Allah, 1129–49).²⁸ Al-Azhar's upper portico façade displays an alternation of round medallions placed on top of the arches and elongated blind keel arches in correspondence with each column (fig. 5). The combination of decorative medallions and blind arches in al-Azhar's por-

27 "Arches in Islamic architecture," *The Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Jonathan M. Bloom and Sheila S. Blair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Oxford Islamic Studies Online, Jun 1, 2022, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t276/e87>, accessed June 30, 2022.

28 Jonathan M. Bloom, *Arts of the city victorious: Islamic art and architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 139–155.



Fig. 6. Portal under the minaret, *madrasa* of the sultan al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub, Cairo (1243). Photograph by Maximilian Hartmuth, 2023.

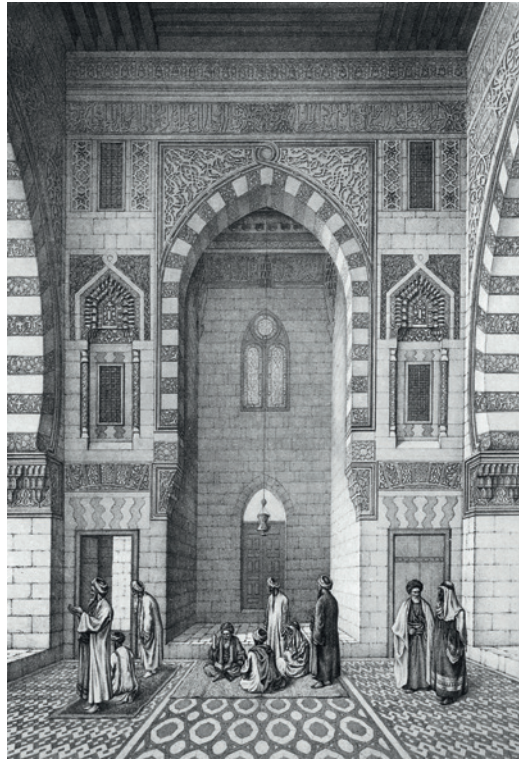
tico arcades draws upon Cairo's previous Friday Mosque, the mosque of Ibn Tulun (876–79), established by the Abbasid governor Ahmad Ibn Tulun. In the latter, however, the arches are slightly pointed, and those added on top of the pillars (alternated with rosette medallions) are windows, thus creating a contrast between the dark interior and the sunlit façade.

The blind arches decorating the upper section of al-Azhar's portico present another feature found at the *Vijećnica* in Sarajevo. The flat niche displays a fluted hood radiating from a polygonal centre. This is an element also visible in the niches of the al-Aqmar façade arches, where they radiate from circular medallions set at the hood's centre. Such a combination between the arch's new shape and its decoration develops further during the Fatimid period. The prayer niche at the mausoleum (*mashhad*) of al-Sayyida al-Ruqayya in Cairo (1133) is a case in point. There, the stucco flutes end in the cornice with a delicate stalactite form that replicates the niche's keel arch. The work is completed with a band decorated with a Kufic inscription and interlaced stems.²⁹

Later Cairene examples quote earlier Fatimid innovations. An important further step can be found in Sultan al-Salih Najm al-Din Ayyub's *madrasa* (1243). It was built on the site of a previous Fatimid dynasty palatial complex. This *madrasa* is a late Ayyubid building

29 Keppel A. C. Creswell, *Muslim architecture of Egypt*, III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), pp. 247–249.

Fig. 7. Interior of the mosque of Qaytbay (1474), Cairo. Émile Prisse d'Avennes, *L'art arabe* (1869–77), in: *Oriental art* (Cologne: Taschen, 2016), p. 94.



for teaching Islamic law's four rites, together with the sultan's domed mausoleum. The main façade quotes the nearby mosque of al-Aqmar. Especially noteworthy is the portal located under the minaret (fig. 6). On top of the entrance there is a blind niche flanked by two rectangular recessed panels. All panels display a stalactite form that gradually connects the recess with the building's façade. In the central blind niche, the stalactites appear on a central rectangular panel's edges. In Mamluk architecture, blind keel arches spread even into buildings' interiors. That is the case of the walls flanking the smaller *iwans* (recessed rooms) of the mosque of Qaytbay (1474), in which keel-arched recesses top the upper rectangular windows.³⁰ The arch consists of a triangular band that simplifies the keel arch's shape. On top of the arch, the band develops into a circular knot and continues into an outer rectangular frame. The spandrels, that is, the spaces between the arch and the rectangular frame, feature interlaced tendrils. The Qaytbay mosque marks the final stage in the development of a decorative feature introduced in Cairo during the Fatimid period.³¹ A detailed repro-

³⁰ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic architecture in Cairo: An introduction* (Leiden: Brill, 1992) (1. ed. 1989), pp. 144–147.

³¹ On the Fatimid period's legacy in later Islamic architecture in Cairo, see: Jonathan Bloom, *ibid.*, pp. 176–181.

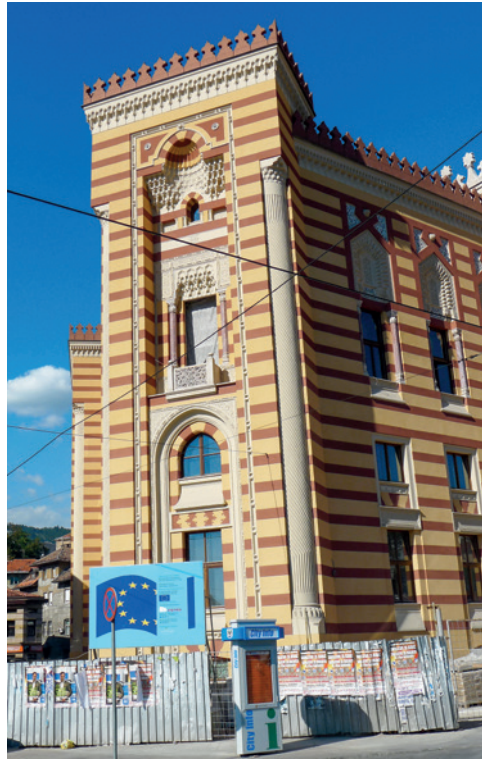


Fig. 8. Square panel on the façade of the Vijećnica of Sarajevo (1892–95). Photograph by Maximilian Hartmuth.



Fig. 9. Detail of the façade, The zawiya of 'Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda (1729), Cairo. Émile Prisse d'Avennes, *L'art arabe* (1869–77), in: *Oriental art*, p. 127.

Fig. 10. Corner tower of the *Vijećnica* of Sarajevo (1892–95). Photograph by Maximilian Hartmuth.



duction is included in one of the several plates *Prisse d'Avennes* dedicated to the Qaytbay complex (fig. 7).³²

The upper façade of the *Vijećnica* avant-corps presents a decorative pattern also retraceable in Cairo's historical architecture. It is a square panel with a central circular grille, which allows the passage of light and air (fig. 8). The panel is connected to four smaller medallions with central protruding bosses. The corners of the square panels display the same interlaced tendrils pattern already observed elsewhere in the façade. Each square panel corresponds to the width of the arch or window below it. Such a solution appears in Cairo's Ottoman era architecture. Though purely decorative in the mosque of al-Burdayni (1616), the square panel with a central grilled medallion performs the same function as in Sarajevo in the *zawiya* of 'Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda (1729) in Cairo (fig. 9). Under the amir 'Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda (d. 1776/77) such medallions were disseminated on top of several façades, including the new portal added to the al-Azhar mosque's main entrance.³³ 'Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda's Ottoman period buildings reflect Mamluk features. In fact, the square panel with a central medallion also appears in the Mamluk period's latest phase on the drum of the tomb of al-

32 Prisses d'Avennes, *L'art arabe*, p. 94.

33 Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic architecture*, pp. 30–31.



Fig. 11. Portal of the mosque of Amir Bashtak (1336), Cairo. Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic architecture in Cairo: An introduction* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pl. 12.

Ghuri (1503–05), and in the back wall of Sultan Tarabay’s mausoleum (1503–04), in which the central medallion has the function of an oculus.³⁴

The *Viječnica*’s main avant-corps consists of a distinguished two-tier gallery dominated by pointed horseshoe arches. Horseshoe arches are typical of western Islamic art, retraceable to the first phase of the Great Mosque of Cordoba (785). Its prayer hall features two-tier arcades with round arches on the upper tier and horseshoe arches on the lower.³⁵ Pointed horseshoe arches also appear in ninth-century north African architecture, as, for instance, in the Great Mosque of Qayrawan’s (Tunisia) main prayer hall entrance (dated to the mosque’s second phase, ca. 862). Arches display a double-centre pointed profile, with a maximum width slightly larger than the distance between the two side supports.³⁶ Horseshoe arches, however, never became a dominating form in Cairene architecture. After a first hesitant example in the mosque of Ibn Tulun, pointed horseshoe arches were reintroduced to Cairo during the Mamluk period, as exemplified by the great arch giving access to the Qaytbay mosque’s prayer hall, also illustrated in the work by Prisses d’Avennes.³⁷ The Mamluk era emerges as a period of synthesis during which stylistic choices developed during previous centuries were reinterpreted and combined together, offering a great variety of forms and decorative solutions.³⁸

34 Prisses d’Avennes, *L’art arabe*, pp. 104–107; 120–121; 126–127.

35 Jerrilynn D. Dodds, “The Great Mosque of Córdoba,” *Al-Andalus: The art of Islamic Spain*, ed. Jerrilynn D. Dodds (New York: Abrams, 1992), pp. 11–26.

36 Keppel A.C. Creswell, *A short account of early Muslim architecture* (London: Penguin Books, 1958), pp. 282–283.

37 Prisses d’Avennes, *L’art arabe*, p. 95.

38 Michael Meinecke, *Die Mamlukische Architektur in Ägypten und Syrien: 648/1250 bis 923/1517* (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1992); Nasser Rabbat, *The citadel of Cairo: A new interpretation of Royal Mamluk architecture* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Nasser Rabbat, *Mamluk history through architecture: Monuments, culture and politics in Medieval Egypt and Syria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

A peculiar solution in the articulation of the *Vijećnica's* exterior façade is the choice for the architectural elements placed at the corners of the building's three sides (fig. 10). The vertical façades mimicking the form of Mamluk portals, among the most distinguished innovations of Egypt's late medieval architecture, replaced the round domed towers in Karel Pařík's original design. In reality, in Sarajevo the corner towers are a pastiche of elements encapsulated into a vertical rectangular recess. They are the result of adopting a form while rejecting its function, namely providing access to the building. However, the rectangular frame that delimits the recess and the slightly pointed arch on top of it, which crowns a stalactite cascade that allows the transition from the recess's deeper surface to the building's façade, directly recalls numerous Mamluk buildings. In 14th-century Cairene architecture, the portals of religious complexes received great attention and developed distinctive features, among which were the tri-lobed arch on top and the stalactite vault.³⁹ In Sarajevo, the corner towers seem to be inspired by models preceding the introduction of the Circassian Mamluk period's (1382–1517) iconic tri-lobed profile. A case in point, including the scalloped half-dome and the 'dripping' stalactites above the main entrance, is the portal of the mosque of Amir Bashtak (1336 – fig. 11).⁴⁰

Three further details on the *Vijećnica* exterior façades originate in Mamluk architecture, but are difficult to pinpoint to specific models. One is the bichromy (pale yellow and brick red) of the brick architecture's plaster covering. The second is the upper cornice with stalactite tiers, especially visible on the avant-corps in which it develops into four *muqarnas* tiers. The third is the crenellation on top of the building's exterior (fleur-de-lis, alternating with taller seven-lobed leaves motives on top of the avant-corps). In the early Bahri period of Mamluk façade bichromy (called *ablaq* in the terminology of Islamic architectural historiography) was more often limited to arch voussiors. Starting with the mid-14th century (the madrasa of Amir Sarghitmish, 1356; the madrasa of Umm al-Sultan Sha'ban, 1368/9), the *ablaq* masonry characterized the architectural complexes' exterior, a feature later widely adopted during the Circassian Mamluk period. Introduced in the Fatimid era, cornice *muqarnas* spread in the Mamluk period. They were initially placed so as to facilitate a transition between different levels of the cylindrical Bahri minarets. Later, they were extended to the recesses and upper cornices of building exteriors. The fleur-de-lis is widely disseminated in Mamluk material culture, including coins as heraldic blazon.⁴¹

While all the elements touched upon so far relate to the Mamluk period's Cairene architecture (including the horseshoe arch, which is renowned for its presence in al-Andalus and was adopted in Egypt under the Mamluks), one aspect of the *Vijećnica's* façade looks radically

39 Hilary L. Roe, *The Bahri Mamluk monumental entrances of Cairo*, I-II (MA dissertation: American University of Cairo, 1979); Daad H. Abdel Razik, *The Circassian Mamluk monumental entrances of Cairo*, I-II (MA dissertation: American University of Cairo, 1990); Mohamad Kashef, "Bahri Mamluk muqarnas portals in Egypt: Survey and analysis," *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, VI/4 (2017), pp. 487–503.

40 Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic Architecture*, pp. 16–17.

41 Paul Balog, "New considerations on Mamluk heraldry," *Museum Notes (American Numismatic Society)* 22 (1977), pp. 183–211, here 197–199.

foreign to the language of Mamluk and Islamic architecture. It deals with the façade's volume and articulation, which look foreign to the Islamic architectural tradition. The avant-corps's two-tier gallery is largely dependent on other architectural legacies, such as the main façades of some Venetian palaces (see, for instance, the *Ca' d'Oro*, 1428–30).

Interior

Moving to the *Vijećnica*'s interior, there are further elements that explicitly quote or echo historical Islamic architecture. Among the echoes is a wooden staircase with a sidewall displaying an interlaced pattern that creates six-pointed stars. This appears as a translation of the side wall decorations of *minbars*, the Muslim pulpits. These objects, mainly dating to the Mamluk period, were highly appreciated, as discussed above on the example of the *minbar* of Sultan Lajin. The *Vijećnica*'s staircase woodwork is a simplified version of Mamluk examples, offering a low relief subdivision into geometrical tiles that lacks both the plasticity obtained in the Mamluk *minbars* and arabesque patterns carved on each tile surface.

A connection between the *Vijećnica* and historical Islamic architecture is visible in the roofed courtyard placed at the building's centre. The courtyard's six sides present a double order of arches, pointed horseshoe arches on the ground floor, and round horseshoe arches on the first floor. The arch profile on both floors is scalloped – a feature, though perhaps ascribable to late medieval Andalusian models, also appearing in Mamluk Egypt. It is the case, for instance, of the profile of the arch crowning a stalactite cascade in the portal recess of the palace of Yashbak min Mahdi (late 15th century), located on the Cairo Citadel's western side.⁴² The stained-glass roof of Sarajevo's hexagonal courtyard represents a further adaptation of a specific element of Mamluk architecture. The glass roof is a skylight allowing the courtyard's illumination. Bands connecting the opposite sides subdivide it into seven smaller hexagons. The crossing of the diagonals is highlighted by stars, while each hexagon is decorated with a coloured flower (fig. 12). The careful design intermingles a geometrical scheme together with a decorative pattern. Mamluk Egypt offers some parallels. Firstly, the obvious reference lies in the roof-cum-skylight *durqa'a* in Mamluk madrasa complexes. The *durqa'a* is the name taken by the central roofed courtyard that gives access to contiguous rooms, like, for instance, in buildings such as the madrasa of Qujmas al-Ishaqi (d. 1486) and the complex of Sultan Qaytbay (1423–96 – fig. 13). In both cases, the octagonal drum is pierced with several windows and the wooden roof displays a geometrical scheme. In the former, radiating interlaced bands create octagonal shapes, while in the latter broken lines connecting the opposite sides of the octagon generate nine stars, each one decorated with further geometrical and floral patterns.⁴³ The roof's whole concept, including a stalactite cornice at the drum's bottom, is ingeniously transplanted in the *Vijećnica* of Sarajevo, in which the stained-glass

42 Museum With No Frontiers (ed.), *L'arte mamelucca: splendore e magia dei sultani* (Milan: Electa, 2001), pp. 88–89).

43 *Ibid.* p. 100, 119.



Fig. 12. The stained-glass roof of the hexagonal courtyard in the *Vijećnica* of Sarajevo (1892–95). Photograph by Anida Krečo.

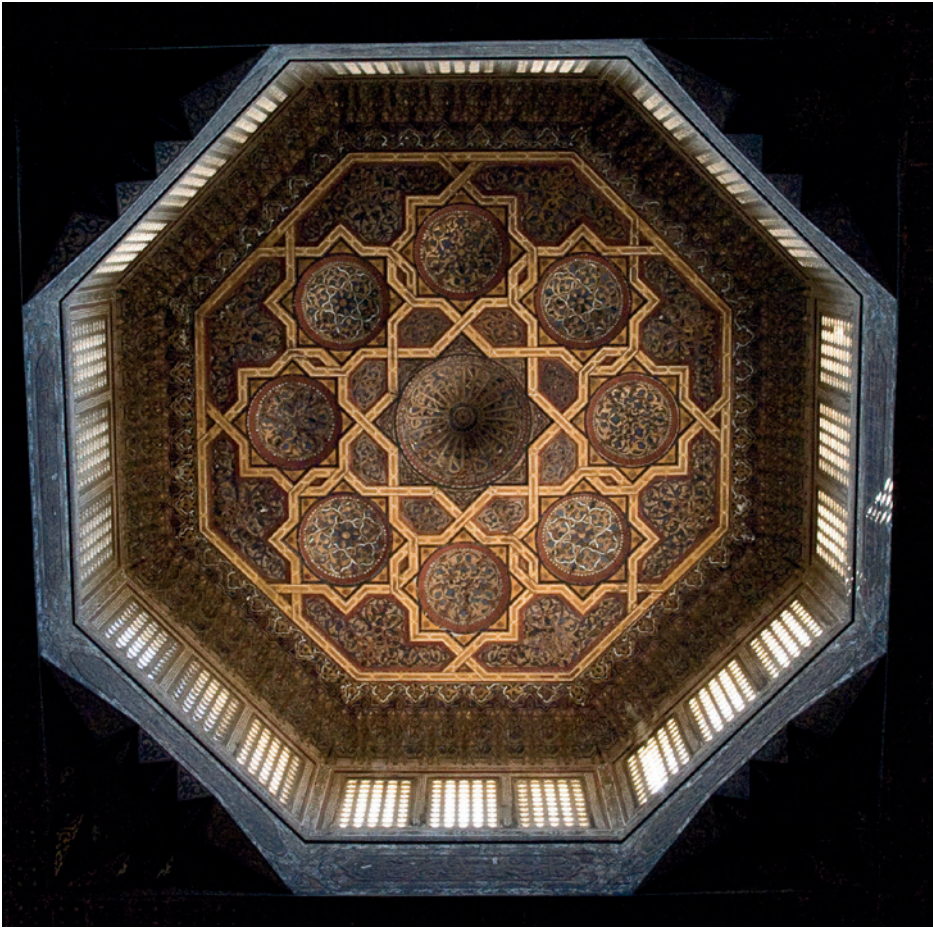


Fig. 13. The ceiling of the *durqa'a* in the complex of sultan Qaytbay (1470–74), Cairo. <https://www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk> (accessed April 27, 2023), image ID 123095, cropped. Photograph by Ross Burns, 2010.

roof performs both the covering and enlightenment functions. It is also worth mentioning that in the Mamluk period stained-glass windows were known, as shown, for example, by the windows in the mausoleum of Sultan Qalawun in Cairo (1284–85).⁴⁴ The specific hexagonal pattern decorating the roof's inner surface might find its source in other objects displaying the same decoration principle, though on a different scale. It is the case, for instance, of the geometrical wall-sides of wooden *minbars* and of Mamluk Quranic carpet pages.⁴⁵

44 Ellen Kenney, "Mixed metaphors: Iconography and medium in Mamluk glass mosaic decoration," *Artibus Asiae* 66/2 (2006), pp. 175–200.

45 *Islamic art in Egypt 969–1517*, ed. Ahmad Hamdy (Cairo: Ministry of Culture, 1969), pls. 51–55.

Conclusion

A great share of architectural and ornamental elements inserted in the *Vijećnica* appears to have been extrapolated from Mamluk buildings. However, several features appearing in Mamluk buildings, in turn, derived from Cairo's previous Islamic architecture, notably from the Fatimid period. The continuity and inner development of Islamic architecture in Cairo made the Mamluk period a sort of heyday of Cairo's historical architecture. The concomitant growth of the neo-Mamluk style in Egypt offered a selected vocabulary of Mamluk forms and elements ready to use.

Some elements distinguish Sarajevo's building from the contemporary neo-Mamluk architecture. It is the case of the avant-corps's gallery, a composition foreign to historical Islamic architecture. Viennese Historicist architecture, such as the former Armoury Museum (the present *Heeresgeschichtliches Museum*), offers a similar focus on the avant-corps with its lattice-like structure that might have been influential on the *Vijećnica's* planning. The horse-shoe arches, though appearing in Mamluk Cairo as well, belonged to al-Andalus's architectural legacy, whereas the square frames with medallions appeared more frequently in Ottoman-era productions.

Although complexes such as the mosque and tomb of Qaytbay seem to have played a greater role than other buildings, inspiration from Cairo drew on several models and not on a single prototype. These models mainly pertain to religious architecture: this is not the result of the choice to transplant religious themes into a secular building such as the *Vijećnica*, but rather the consequence of the preservation of Cairo's historical architecture.⁴⁶

The *Vijećnica's* assembledness is unsurprising given the late 19th-century European habit to fragment and reunite bits of Islamic art and architecture. This leads to a further aspect, which is the knowledge of Cairene architecture by those who planned the *Vijećnica*. On the one hand, it seems easier to speculate that published works reproducing architectural and decorative details might have worked better than on-site surveys. Printed works or photographs, in fact, allowed selecting and freely combining disparate elements. At the same time, however, certain aspects resonate a knowledge of a range of Mamluk architecture that is difficult to attain through reproductions only. This is the case, for instance, of the corner towers, that, without replicating the Mamluk vertical portals' original function, represent perhaps the most outstanding and ingenious insertion of Islamic architectural features into a modern one.

46 One reason for religious architecture's preservation is the *waqf* institution (inalienable charitable endowment), which protected religious architecture from later transformations.