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The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**The Potential of Architecture:
The Meaning and Purpose of
Commemorative Architecture in Islamic Civilizations**

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

By

Natasha Pradhan

Under the supervision of
Dr. Ellen Kenney

May 21, 2019

The American University in Cairo

**The Potential of Architecture:
The Meaning and Purpose of
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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Has been approved by

Dr. Ellen Kenney

Thesis Committee Advisor _____
Affiliation _____

Dr. Bernard O’Kane

Thesis Committee Reader _____
Affiliation _____

Dr. Steffen Stelzer

Thesis Committee Reader _____
Affiliation _____

Dept. Chair

Date

Dean of HUSS

Date

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Introduction

As humans we are capable of believing, remembering, and deeply feeling things that need not be materially present before us in any given moment. Were our lives governed exclusively by material needs like hunger, thirst, and hygiene - and by the routine activities that tend to those needs - life would likely feel bleak. One could say it would be inhumane.

The ancient Egyptians had two words for time. One was *neheh* and the other *djet*. *Neheh* is a kind of cyclical time - the movement of the sun, the seasons, the flooding of the Nile, night and day. It renews and repeats. *Djet*, on the other hand, is a time that stands still. It is the time of temples, of pyramids. Peter Hessler writes, “Mummification is a human response to *djet*, and so is art. Something in *djet* time is finished but not past; it exists forever in the present.”¹ By this thinking, humans operate in the realm of *neheh* to survive but we are also profoundly connected with this other kind of time that the ancients called *djet*. We can not just cognitively conceive of this still-standing time but also find depth and meaning in it.

One could make the observation that architecture nowadays is more than often rooted in function. We tend to think first of the need or activity that a built space should serve, and then go about creating a structure that does so efficiently and (perhaps) beautifully. Building in this way results in a host of efficient environments: the tasks we have to do get done in places designed especially for them. A result of building exclusively in this fashion, however, is that it deprives architecture of the medium’s deeper potentials.

The architect and theorist Adolf Loos writes of seeing a mound in the forest. “When we find in the forest a mound, six feet long and three feet wide, raised by a shovel to form a

¹ Hessler, “Cairo: A Type of Love Story”.

pyramid, we turn serious and something in us says: here someone lies buried. *That is architecture.*”² Loos mentions a notably simple example of what I am referring to. Like more complex structures of the same genre, this mound has no apparent day-to-day function. It does not fill the kind of active need that we generally rely on architecture to serve. Why then, does Loos claim with emphasis that *that* - the mound in the forest - is architecture, as if to differentiate it from seemingly more complex though by Loos’ thinking possibly lesser structures?

Loos goes further in his point about the funerary mound, saying that, “Only a very small part of architecture belongs to art: the sepulchre and the monument.”³ Both the sepulchre and the monument represent a unique category of architecture in that they do not directly meet any practical day-to-day need. The *art* of architecture hence implies a different usage of the medium we’ve grown accustomed to for giving form to our environments and to our lives. The mound described by Loos, like other funerary markers, interrupts everyday life and the everyday time of movement and cyclicity. It is similarly the very lack of an explicit day-to-day function of commemorative forms that enclose a space to form an interior that imbues these buildings with a distinct ethical function. This ethical function could be described as one of a personal nature - the feelings and awareness that a confrontation with these works, or the time spent therein, gives to the living visitor. The philosopher of art and architecture Karsten Harries puts it well. Referring still to Loos’ mound, he writes, “Genuine art, as Loos understands it, recalls us to what Heidegger calls authenticity: it invites us to take

² Loos, “Architektur,” 107 as cited in Harries, *Ethical Function*, 293.

³ Loos, “Architektur,” 109 as cited in Harries, *Ethical Function*, 293.

leave from what we usually call reality, but only to free us and to return us to our true selves.”⁴

Only during the 9th century CE did a controversy emerge within Islam (in the Hanbali school) as to the permissibility of commemorative architecture - that is, an architecture that commemorates the deceased. And only recently, from the 18th century onwards, did views condemning commemorative architecture gain a significant following among those that identify with the faith of Islam. Ibn Taymiyya, a revered scholar who can be credited as being one of the most influential of voices against the practice of visiting tombs and who lived from 1263 to 1328 CE, was in his own time jailed for his views on the matter. Ibn Taymiyya became enormously influential only some four centuries after his death among those that shared his objective - to reclaim a pure or pristine Islam, in the form in which it must have existed at the time of the *salaf* (predecessors, or ancestors - a term used in reference to the early pious Believers that lived alongside the Prophet). Yet Ibn Taymiyya was not a man removed from his times in that his writings were a reaction to the expressions of piety that he saw all around him during the 13th and 14th centuries CE. He lived a couple of centuries after what I have termed as the renaissance of commemorative architecture (discussed in Chapter 2) and at a time when the practice of the *ziyara* - or frequenting of tombs of saints and of the righteous - was already a deeply embedded and extremely popular practice in both Egypt and Syria, where he lived.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, I will try to understand what burial practices were like among the early community of Believers (*mu'minin*) that followed Prophet Muhammad's revelations and teachings. I use this terminology for the term *Muslim* did not yet refer to members of the community or faith of Islam as the word has come to mean today. As Fred

⁴ Harries, *Ethical Function*, 293.

Donner has pointed out, the word *muslim* appeared sparingly in Qur'anic revelations and it was used in reference to "those who submit" as contrasted with "those who Believe in their hearts" (*mu'minin*).⁵

It was among this early community of Believers that the Prophet died, and that his resting place - what at the time of his burial was the humble residence of his wife 'Aisha - became a place of visitation. The Prophet's burial room gradually took on the form of a sanctuary-like chamber and eventually a mausoleum, perhaps - partly - in response to the increasing flow of visitors to the site. Two things in particular occurred during the reign of the Umayyad ruler 'Abd al-Malik: (1) Islam began to solidify its self-definition as a unique confession differentiated from other monotheistic confessions and (2) the figure of the Prophet was implored more often and more significantly, perhaps in an effort to differentiate the emergent *Islam* from the pre-existing Christianity and Judaism; accordingly, the Prophet's tomb and resting place was afforded greater monumentality and splendor in its architectural form and was incorporated within the adjacent mosque. The move was met with much dismay and grief on the part of the Medinese community who must have resented the ostentatiousness of the Umayyads along with their decision to raze the original homes of the Prophet's wives which they held belovedly. The simultaneity of the developments mentioned above - the first of attitude and the second of form - is significant for it reveals another function of commemorative architecture in this context - one of spatially rooting the history by which communities came to understand and define themselves.⁶

⁵ See Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 57-58.

Donner cites the Qur'anic *aya* 49:14 to illustrate that at the time of revelation, the term *mu'min* may have carried a higher meaning than the term *muslim*: "The bedouins say: 'We Believe' (*aman-na*). Say [to them]" 'You do not Believe; but rather say, "we submit" (*aslam-na*), for Belief has not yet entered your hearts."

⁶ For an in-depth study of this aspect, see Mulder, *The Shrines of the 'Alids*.

Commemorative architecture in the Islamic world flourished from the 10th century CE onwards. The period between the 10th and 12th centuries CE, coinciding with the rule of the Fatimids in Cairo, is often singled out for the large number of commemorative structures that were built during this time. In Chapter 2, I will look at three examples of commemorative monuments from Fatimid Egypt. I hope that these examples together with that of the tomb of Prophet Muhammad paint a picture of the nature and uses of commemorative architecture in Islamic civilizations, and thereby dispel a narrative that has become canonized within scholarship for explaining the mass patronage and visitation of commemorative architecture during the Fatimid era. This canonized narrative (see below) links the patronage of commemorative structures to Shi'a sectarianism. Its effect on subsequent scholarship, and in turn on present-day ideologies, may be problematic in the same vein as the writings of Ibn Taymiyya are when accepted at face value.

In Chapter 3, I will synthesize what we have seen in chapters 1 and 2. Understanding the nature of this early community of Believers, and whether it was defined by belief (faith) or by doctrine, will help to contextualize - and perhaps confuse - the doctrinal condemnations of tomb visitation that emerge several centuries later. I will also investigate the roots of the canonized sectarian explanation for the renaissance of commemorative architecture that took hold during the Fatimid period (patronage of commemorative architecture henceforth became entrenched in Islamic culture and was continued by medieval and pre-modern Sunni and Shi'a dynasties alike in various parts of the Islamic world). One article in particular by the late Oleg Grabar seems to have spearheaded what became a widely accepted sectarian interpretation of commemorative architecture, though Grabar himself retracted his hypothesis some eleven years later in an essay published as part of a compilation on Isma'ili cultural

contributions.⁷ (The first article seems to have enjoyed a far wider reception than the later essay). In reducing these buildings to pawns of religious or political propagandism, that which gives commemorative architecture a universal appeal and which taps into a timeless human practice is ignored. In contrast to this canonized perspective, I feel that it is precisely the ethical function of these buildings and relatedly, their association with pious practices, that drew certain Islamic regimes to sponsor their construction to a greater extent than others.

I will also, in Chapter 3, look at the lasting influence that the work of Ibn Taymiyya and his disciples has had. Ibn Taymiyya sought to harken back to a pure form of *Islam*, though we must remember that his exercise is a paradoxical one to begin with, for the faith began as a community of Believers which during the Prophet's own lifetime and for decades thereafter included in its folds many Christians and Jews that found favor in Prophet Muhammad's teachings.⁸ While that may not have been lost on Ibn Taymiyya, who despite his steadfastness and unconventionality, was an intellectually rigorous scholar, it certainly is on the strands of Salafist-Wahhabism that were inspired by his thinking, and that perceive the destruction of commemorative architecture as a religious duty. Wahhabist texts, though written in popular language and lacking in Ibn Taymiyya's reflectiveness and intellectual rigor, often cite from Ibn Taymiyya's writings to justify their actions. A modern day visitor to the cemeteries of Hajun (Jannat al-Mulla) in Mecca and al-Baqi in Medina will find all the

⁷ See Grabar, "Earliest Commemorative Structures," and Grabar, "Fatimid Art." I will analyze both essays in Chapter 3.

⁸ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, especially pages 68-74 and 222-223. For a critique of this notion see Elad, "Community of Believers."

the tombs and mausoleums that once stood there, including those of many members of the Prophet's family, deliberately demolished.⁹

Vico, the Neapolitan philosopher writing in the 18th century reminds us that, "In Latin, it was the verb *humare*, to bury, which gave the primary and proper meaning to the noun *humanitas*, human civilization."¹⁰ That we bury and commemorate the dead is a practice that makes us human. In looking at the history of building in the Islamic tradition, mausoleums and *mashhads* cannot be compared with more typical buildings of neither a religious nor secular nature. The embodiment of a human predisposition to look beyond nearsighted exigencies, these architectural forms are perhaps better understood within the realm of art.

Clarification of Terms

Mausoleum and *Mashhad* :

In this thesis, I use two terms often found in scholarship on the subject - funerary architecture and commemorative architecture. The difference is a pertinent one and should be noted. Commemorative architecture is an inclusive term that includes not just mausoleums but also *mashhads* and other commemorative forms. The term *mashhad* has a long history in Islam and at different times may have been defined in different ways. The *Encyclopedia of Islam* defines *mashhad* as a place or structure that, literally, bears witness.¹¹ According to the

⁹ For a detailed description of the demolition of the cemeteries in Saudi Arabia, see Rutter, *Holy Cities*, 256-258.

For an overview of contemporary grave destruction lead by ISIS and its offshoots see Beranek, *The Temptation of Graves*, 172-219.

¹⁰ Vico, *The New Science*, 8.

¹¹ *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. VI (1991), 713.

Encyclopedia, historically the term had a vague connotation, referring to sacred structures that were often - though not necessarily - those containing a tomb, perhaps of a prophet that preceded Muhammad or otherwise of a Muslim who had recited the *shahada* (profession of faith) over him. Later on, it was used to refer to martyriums that had explicit religious features like a *mihrab*.¹²

In this thesis, by invoking the term *mashhad* I draw on its contemporary popular connotation. A *mashhad*, as I mean it, is a commemorative structure whose architectural form and its associated uses are the same as those of a mausoleum; however, a *mashhad*, as defined in this thesis, is not a mausoleum because it either is not built at the physical site of interment, or its being built at the physical site of interment is contested.

The rituals and practices associated with the frequentation of *mashhads* and of mausoleums are nearly indistinguishable from one another. Hence, though I will for the reader's knowledge distinguish between a *mashhad* and a mausoleum when identifying particular sites, my methodology groups these two categories of buildings together for I am interested in the psychological and spiritual impulses to construct and access these sites - the meaning that we give to these forms and the experience of them more so than the practical fact of constructing at the site of an interred body. Relatedly - given the cultural contexts to which this thesis refers, when using the term "mausoleum," I am referring at once to the concept - that of erecting a structure over a grave - and the resulting architectural entity associated with its form.

¹² *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. VI (1991), 713.

Grabar's methodological study on commemorative architecture in Islam includes a lengthy passage on the varying and perhaps blurred usage of the term *mashhad* over time. Grabar, "Earliest," 9-11.

Islam and Islam :

Since this thesis refers to time periods both prior to and post the emergence of a distinct religio-political group identified with the faith of Islam, and also prior to and post the emergence of the religious confession that is implied by the term today (though one that of course accommodates great diversity within itself and is by no means a singular nor homogenous religious confession), I will for the sake of differentiation and to invoke a critical perspective on the part of the reader, italicize *Islam* whenever it means other than its popular contemporary meaning of a distinct religious confession that the term became associated with from the 8th century CE onwards. This process of differentiation, or as some have termed it “*Islamization*”¹³ will be addressed more closely in chapters 1 and 3.

On a related note, when referring to the community of the Prophet’s followers during Islam’s early days, I borrow from Fred Donner in using the term “Believers.”¹⁴

¹³ For a discussion of this process according to two contrasting perspectives (to be analyzed in Chapter 3), see Halevi, “The Paradox of Islamization;” Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, especially 194-224; Asad, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*.

¹⁴ See Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*.

Part I. Historical Context

Chapter 1.

The Prophet's Tomb During the The Age of Transition

Funerary architecture, in its simpler as well as more elaborated forms, has a long history in the Arabian Peninsula. The practice of burying the dead and marking the site of burial was already an ancient practice when the Prophet Muhammad was born. Ibn Battuta tells us of the Nabatean cave-tombs that date to the 1st century CE in Mada'in Salih, formerly al-Hijr: "At this place are the dwellings of Thamud [the ancient peoples of the Arabian Peninsula], in some hills of red rock. They are hewn out and have carved thresholds, such that anyone seeing them would take them to be of recent construction. Their bones lie crumbling inside these houses."¹⁵ The traveller Charles Doughty also wrote about the Nabateans' elaborately constructed tomb chambers, writing some five centuries after Ibn Battuta. According to Doughty's accounts, these tombs were carved in such a fashion that a small doorway lead into a large central chamber off of which were many small alcoves. In the floor of these alcoves one would find bone-filled grave pits.¹⁶

The Nabateans were once nomads who gained their wealth by controlling the spice trade from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. They ruled the area for some 300 years before the Romans took over in 106 CE. Their religion was polytheistic. The moon figured as a prominent deity and was characterized as male. The crescent moon in particular symbolized a primeval archetype of Dionysus. The sun, on the other hand, was a feminine deity. The morning star, or Venus, was the god 'Athtar. Manat, the goddess of fate was embodied by the

¹⁵ Gibb, *Travels of Ibn Battuta*, 162.

¹⁶ LeBaron, "Early Arabian Necropolis," 12.

darkened moon. Besides astral forms, they also worshipped many household deities. Other kinds of ancient and late-ancient funerary constructions in the Arabian Peninsula included mounds formed from earth, mounds formed from rocks, and sculpted or inscribed tombstones.¹⁷ Archaeological excavations have revealed figural sculptures, some employed as gravestone (figs. 1-2) dated close to the cave tombs to the 1st and 2nd centuries CE. Emel Esin writes that in pre-Islamic polytheistic Arabia, some steles and funerary pylons themselves became objects of profound veneration.¹⁸

Tombs were sites of significance also in the early monotheism prophesied by Abraham. One account tells of ‘Abd al-Muttalib, otherwise known as Hashim the son of Qusayy, of the Quraysh tribe who later in his life would become the grandfather of Prophet Muhammad. Tradition has it that ‘Abd al-Muttalib was meditating before Hagar’s¹⁹ tomb - she was buried near the Kaaba in Mecca - when a voice told him to dig beneath where he stood to find a spring of water. He dug at random and indeed did discover the ancient well of Zamzam, the same spring that had provided respite for Hagar and her son Ishmael while they were stranded on these desert sands.²⁰ That ‘Abd al-Muttalib was worshipping Hagar is very unlikely. The anecdote rather reveals that he received some kind of benefit - perhaps rightfully guided intuition - from his meditation at the tomb. What is important is that the habit of visiting tombs of the dead was retained among those partial to the Abrahamic tradition. What may have differed was the understanding of these sites and the meaning awarded to them.

¹⁷ For a comprehensive account of pre-Islamic burial structures see LeBaron’s account of digs at the early Arabian necropolis of Ain Jawan. LeBaron, “Early Arabian Necropolis.”

¹⁸ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 38.

¹⁹ Hagar, the mother of her and Abraham’s son Ishmael.

²⁰ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 65.

The ‘Age of Transition’

An early tombstone from soon after the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad includes a plea for forgiveness for the deceased, a message shared with that of Christian and Jewish tombstones from late antiquity. It dates to the year 652 CE/31 AH.²¹ The inscription reads:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, this grave belongs to ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Khayr al-Hajri. Forgive him, O God, and make him enter [Paradise] by your mercy, and let us go with him. Seek forgiveness for him whenever this inscription is read, and say ‘Amen!’

The inscription reflects two core beliefs that were central to the early community of Believers that followed the revelations and teachings of Prophet Muhammad. The first is monotheism - the belief in One God. The second is the belief in the Day of Judgment that is to confront all, as reflected in the inscription’s plea for the deceased - and for the reciter - to enter Paradise.²² Leor Halevi says of this inscription, “It is by no means clear that the inscriber’s intention was to produce a uniquely Islamic—rather than, more generally, a monotheistic—memorial.”²³

Halevi has carried out an important research that looks at the archaeological record of tombstones dated to the first several centuries following the revelations of Islam. He notes that most of these come from Egypt, for Egypt’s arid climate has been able to preserve gravestones more so than other places have, and so his study is perhaps reflective of practices specific to Egypt. Of course the main caveat of relying on archaeological evidence is that we

²¹ Halevi, “Paradox of Islamization,” 121 and Flood, “Faith, Religion, and Material Culture,” 254.

²² For a description of the core beliefs of what Donner has termed the “Believers’ Movement” (based on the Qur’anic term *mu’minin*) see Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 59.

²³ Halevi, “Paradox of Islamization,” 122.

are drawing conclusions only from what we have been able to find. Halevi so warns: “We must be careful not to confuse the absence of evidence with the evidence of absence.”²⁴ Yet the tombstone record studied by Halevi fits perfectly well with another archaeological timeline. The inscriptions on coins minted by political leaders of the community of Believers and its expanding territories illustrate the development of a uniquely *Islamic* character contemporaneously with the inscriptions on tombstones from the same timeframe.

Two other gravestones were discovered, dating to just before and some forty years after that of ‘Abd al-Rahman, in a cemetery in Aswan. The earlier of the two, dated 650 CE, simply reads: “In the name of God, this is the grave of ‘Urwa ibn Thabit, who died in the month of Ramadan in the year 29 of the Hijra.”²⁵

Besides the explicit reference to the Hijri calendar, there is little else that identifies this inscription as being explicitly *Islamic* in character as distinguished from generally monotheistic. To use the year of the Hijra as a dating system is a prominent development for it acknowledges a new calendar that has the *hijra*, or migration, of the early community of Believers from Mecca to Medina as its founding year. In other words, the Hijri calendar recognizes the number of years for which this community has cohesively existed.

When we look to the second tombstone is when the archaeological record becomes quite interesting. The other tombstone, found in the same cemetery in Aswan, is dated some some forty years later to 691 CE and reads:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

²⁴ Halevi, “Paradox of Islamization,” 135.

²⁵ Halevi, “Paradox of Islamization,” 121 citing Étienne Combe, Jean Sauvaget, and Gaston Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique d’épigraphie arabe* (Cairo, 1931), vol. 1, no. 5.

The greatest of misfortunes for the people of Islam (*ahl al-Islam*) is their loss (*musiba*) of the Prophet Muhammad, may God pray for him and grant him salvation.

This is the tomb of ‘Abbasa, the daughter of Jurayj, the son of Sanad, may the mercy of God, his forgiveness (*maghfira*) and good will be upon her. She died on Monday, with fourteen days having passed of Dhu’l-Qa‘da, of the year Seventy One.

And she confesses (*wa-hiya tashhadu*) there is no God but God, alone, having no partner, and that Muhammad is his slave and messenger, may God pray for him and grant him salvation.²⁶

What begins to emerge in this inscription that was lacking in those prior are explicit references to Islam as a creed - perhaps an intimate community (*ahl al-Islam*), and to the Prophet Muhammad. Hence, it is not only a symbol of monotheism but of a monotheism of the sort that what we in the present day clearly recognize as Islamic.

Understanding what was happening within the expanding community of Believers around the years 650 CE and 691 CE can help us to make sense of the vastly different nature of these two tombstones. Following the Prophet’s death, leadership of the community along with command of the forces that were actively spreading the Believer’s Beliefs into new territories was handed over first to Abu Bakr, a companion of the Prophet. Then, upon his death, to ‘Umar - who also accompanied the Prophet, and upon ‘Umar’s murder to the Prophet’s companion ‘Uthman. Though all three had been close to the Prophet Muhammad during his lifetime, each was brought into his position of leadership or *amir al-mu’minin* (Commander of the Believers) by a different method of selection since neither the Prophet nor his revelations that came to be compiled in the Qur’an left clear instructions as to the

²⁶ Halevi, “Paradox of Islamization,” 125 citing Hussen Rached, Hassan al-Hawary, and Gaston Wiet, eds., *Catalogue général du Musée arabe du Caire: Stèles funéraires*, 10 vols. (Cairo, 1932–42), vol. 9, no. 3201.

succession of his leadership.²⁷ While the community faced immense success in its well-being and conquests under the leadership of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, the leadership of ‘Uthman stirred many doubts and divisions within the community. Suspicions of what resembled corruption, related to ‘Uthman’s favoring members of his family for powerful posts and providing handsome land contracts for a few, grew. As did a skepticism of whether ‘Uthman was leading the community in the same spirit on which it was founded, that of belief in the Prophet’s message and the desire to act righteously. (Donner notes that the Believers would have understood their political ambitions as a consequence of their piety and desire to spread faith in the Prophet’s revelations).²⁸ The result was the first major civil dispute within the community of Believers which was only exacerbated by the fact of ‘Uthman’s assassination in his own home. The setting of ‘Uthman’s murder is important for it reflects that not only was he under the threat of his assassins - Believers that came from Egypt - but that he also by then had lost the unshakeable loyalty and strong defenses of the Medinese community at home. Subsequent leaders inherited the fragmented nature of the community and following ‘Uthman’s murder, the first ruler to come close to achieving the cohesion - if only politically - that the community of Believers had enjoyed during its early days was an Umayyad son of

²⁷ The title of *amir al-mu’minin* has been documented in sources, including on coinage, as referring to these first three leaders of the community, with the possible exception of Abu Bakr. The title of *Caliph* was only found in use as early as during the Umayyad period and has retrospectively been applied to the first three leaders, both popularly and in scholarship. See Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 98-99. For a critique of this notion, see Elad, “Community of Believers,” 255-256.

²⁸ While I am relying heavily on Donner’s thesis, I wish to include an extremely valid criticism of Donner’s work by Robert Hoyland who writes: “...though I do not doubt that Muhammad’s message included a call to greater piety and a more God-fearing attitude, this does not explain why tens of thousands of the denizens of Arabia felt motivated to respond to his message. To understand this we would need to try and appreciate the socioeconomic context of their lives, to treat them as ordinary humans with material wants and needs as opposed to superhuman beings concerned only with God and Judgment Day.” Hoyland, 576.

Marwan known as ‘Abd al-Malik.²⁹ He did so by seizing control of Kufa in 691 CE from his main contender for power, Ibn al-Zubayr, and then by killing Ibn al-Zubayr during his successful seize of Mecca in 692 CE.³⁰ Prior to these final consolidations of power, ‘Abd al-Malik already enjoyed control of Syria, Palestine, and Egypt which he ruled since 685 CE. It was under ‘Abd al-Malik’s rule, roughly between the years 685 and 705 CE (his death), that we see the first prominent signs of *Islamization* both as a state policy and a cultural fact.

The effects of this transformation are far-flung and have shaped the way in which Islam is understood today both by adherents of the faith and by the public at large. As only a slice of what could be a much larger discussion of this transformation, I wish to share how the tonal shift in state-sponsored inscriptions on coinage from ‘Abd al-Malik’s time closely reflects that of the inscriptions on tombstones. A coin minted in 672 CE by the governor Ziyad ibn Abi Sufyan, under the orders of Mu’awiya - a predecessor of ‘Abd al-Malik, simply contains the slogan *b’ism Allah* - “In the Name of God.”³¹ Coins minted in 694-695 CE under ‘Abd al-Malik read “In the name of God, there is no God but God alone; Muhammad is the apostle of God.”³²

A later coin issued in 696-697 CE that is purely epigraphic with no imagery quotes directly from the Qur’an, which by this time had become somewhat standardized.³³ Halevi has found that between the years 690 CE and 720 CE, direct citations from the Qur’an

²⁹ For a brief overview of the events during the rule of ‘Uthman in so far as they affected the emergence of Shi‘ism, see Suleman and Jiwa, “Shi‘i Art and Ritual,” 17.

³⁰ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 188.

³¹ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 113.

³² Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 210.

³³ Rutter, *Holy Cities* vol. 2, 98. Rutter writes, “It is generally believed that the first to standardise the Koran in this way was Othman, the third Khalifa; though Abu Bakr appears to have attempted it. Since the time of Othman, who was assassinated in 656 A.D., the text has remained unchanged.” Uthman’s standardization was met with much hesitation and discord as many religious leaders among the Believers had their own compilations which they held close to their hearts.

become a common theme on tombstones in Egypt. As mentioned above, the tombstone from Aswan dated to 691 CE explicitly mourns the loss of the Prophet Muhammad and implores his salvation while mentioning *ahl al-Islam*; that dated only forty years earlier to 650 CE from the same cemetery simply invokes God (*b'ism Allah*) and uses the Hijri calendar, but contains no mention of the Prophet nor of the *ahl al-Islam* - likely, the concept did not yet exist. The earliest surviving tombstone that cites from the Qur'an dates to 721 CE, and is also from Aswan. It uses the same language as that of the Qur'anic *aya* 67:1. Another, from the same cemetery, affirms the oneness of God according to the Qur'anic verse 112. Halevi says that by the 9th century CE, a trend is established and citations from the Qur'an, particularly of the verses 22:7 and 9:33, on tombstones become "formulaic."³⁴

We cannot be entirely sure whether or not 'Abd al-Malik's reforms - one of which included the building of the Dome of the Rock, a monument that also seeks to crystallize *Islam* and explicitly differentiate its message from Christianity and the concept of the trinity - were a catalyst for *Islamization* on a popular and cultural level or if he was merely responding to a popular phenomenon in order to strengthen his own power and appeal as a ruler. It is possible that the *Islamizing* policies of the regime and the parallel leanings that developed among the population only fueled one another. We should bear in mind that during this time, Believers who had lived contemporaneously with the Prophet were on the verge of dying out and so the new community of the faithful sought to live by the same faith and ideals based only on that which could be passed down. It is hence very likely that in branding *Islam* so firmly, and often with such a flourish, 'Abd al-Malik's policies had mass appeal among the populations over which he ruled. His ostentatious display of what was advertised and understood as an embracing of the Prophet's message - which in addition to coinage took

³⁴ Halevi, "Paradox of Islamization," 127.

the form of grand architectural projects like the Dome of the Rock and numerous impressive mosques - must have solidified his rule over a people whose collective identity was founded on the basis of being followers of the Prophet Muhammad and Believers in his revelations and teachings.

Finbarr Flood makes a similar observation in his chapter “Faith, Religion, and the Material Culture of Islam,” published as part of a compilation of texts that look at the 7th to 9th centuries CE, referring to this period as the “Age of Transition” between Byzantium and Islam. Flood notes that the word “Muslim” is only first found, written down, in the year 741 CE. Previous texts used simply the terminology of *mu'min* or “believer.”³⁵ Flood’s language points to two differing concepts that are useful for understanding the cultural and social moment referenced by the Age of Transition. Flood uses language like “the nascent Muslim community”³⁶ that existed around the year 622 CE. In reference to a slightly later moment, when discussing Syria which became the heart of the Umayyad dynasty, he uses language like “territories of the emerging Islamic state.”³⁷

We have two perhaps contradicting definitions of what Islam is - one defining it as a faith that is a cumulation of monotheistic religious traditions and that emphasizes righteousness, and another that understands Islam as a distinct religio-political entity. We also know that inscribing gravestones - along with more simply, marking the place of burial - was a practice that preceded the lifetime of the Prophet and that continued after his passing among the early Believers. When Islam began to emerge as a distinct confessional identity, gravestones were part of the process, so to speak, for they were used as a medium for

³⁵ Flood, “Faith, Religion, and Material Culture,” 246. See also Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*.

³⁶ Flood, “Faith, Religion, and Material Culture,” 245.

³⁷ Flood, “Faith, Religion, and Material Culture,” 245.

expressing this emergent identity (as is evident when comparing the inscriptions on the two tombstones from Aswan dated to 650 and 691 CE respectively).

This will be relevant to our later discussion on burial practices and their legality for it hints that it would be many decades after the *hijra*, and well after the death of Prophet Muhammad, that Islam, now understanding itself as a confession with perhaps distinct ritual practices from other People of the Book (*ahl al-kitab*), could have begun to develop its doctrinal emphases. This will be important in my later discussion of the *hadith* and on Salafist perspectives on commemorative architecture.

Burial Practices During and Near the Prophet's Lifetime

At its early stages, one of the most easily identifiable formal innovations by the Prophet was an aversion to idols. The prevalence and worship of idols represented the formal manifestation of polytheistic practice.³⁸ Save for a mural of Jesus and Mary that had been there since the sixth century CE,³⁹ the Kaaba in Mecca was cleaned of all figurative objects when Prophet Muhammad re-entered the cube upon the Believers' conquest of Mecca in 630 CE. In destroying each of the Kaaba's idols with a stick, he recited upon the destruction of each: "Truth has come and falsehood has vanished" (Qur'an 17:81).⁴⁰ We could, by proxy, venture to guess that sculptural tombstones, particularly those depicting the human form would have been associated with idolatrous practices and hence discouraged by the Prophet and his early followers (fig. 1).

³⁸ See Pancaroglu, "Figural Ornament," and Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, 72-98.

³⁹ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 55. See also King, "The Prophet Muhammad and the Breaking of the Jahiliyyah Idols" and King, "The Paintings of the Pre-Islamic Ka'ba."

⁴⁰ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 109.

We can turn to biographers' accounts to understand what form burial practices during the lifetime of the Prophet may have taken. Tradition has it that during the first burial of one of the Prophet's followers at al-Baqi cemetery, the Prophet himself requested the placement of a rock in honor of the deceased, 'Uthman ibn Maz'un. Ibn Maz'un died in 624 CE. He was an early Believer and had fought for the community at the Battle of Badr. The Prophet, it is said, said to place a rock upon Ibn Maz'un's grave "so that I will recognize him by it."⁴¹ Al-Baqi cemetery just outside Medina, named Baqi al-garqad after the crimson-colored berries that grew on it, is where many of the Prophet's companions and family members came to be buried. It is here that his second and third daughters Ruqayya and Umm Kalthum are buried and also his oldest daughter Zaynab. The Prophet's son Abraham who died as an infant is said to have been buried at al-Baqi.⁴²

The visitation of cemeteries - and the visiting of specific graves therein was a practice undertaken even by the Prophet himself. Biographers' accounts relay that the grown Prophet visited the tomb of his late mother, who died while he was still a young child, in the village of Abwa. Of the visit he said, "I remembered her mercy and I wept."⁴³ Another heartfelt account tells of the Prophet's return to Mecca from which he was initially exiled. The return was possible only eight years after the *hijra* when the Muslims successfully conquered the same city from which they once had to flee. It was in Mecca that the Prophet grew, married, and lived for many years and where he fathered his children including Fatima, the Prophet's only heir that survived to bear children of her own. Resit Haylamaz writes, "On his way into

⁴¹ Halevi, "Paradox of Islamization," 145 citing Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madinah al-munawwarah/Akhbar al-Madinah al-nabawiyah* 1:68, no. 315.

⁴² Beranek, *The Temptation of Graves*, 105; Rutter, *Holy Cities*, vol. 2, 256; Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 103.

⁴³ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 70.

the city, he went to the cemetery in Hajun to the grave of his loyal wife, the one who would never fade from his memory....He stood by her grave and God knows what memories passed before his eyes and what prayers he uttered. Perhaps her dedication, sacrifice, and commitment to God's way came alive again for him. He prayed for her for hours."⁴⁴ Ibn Sa'd shares that years prior, at the time of Khadija's death in 619 or 620 CE, the Prophet took Khadija to the Hajun cemetery (also known as Jannat al-Mulla), "put her in the soil himself and leveled the ground himself."⁴⁵

The emphasis placed on the Prophet's act of leveling the ground is significant for the account reveals the burial practices undertaken by the Prophet. Or, more correctly, it informs us as to how these practices have been passed down and are retold. Yet one must assume that Khadija's grave was marked somehow at its conception or else one would not have been able to identify it in order to pay a visit. In later times, Khadija's grave was covered by a beautiful domed structure (fig. 7) which, later still, was razed by Wahhabist Saudis in the early 19th century and once again in the mid-1920s following an Ottoman reconstruction (fig. 30). These demolitions will be analyzed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The Prophet's daughter Fatima was said to have often frequented the tomb of a martyr known as Hamza. Her visits there were facilitated by the stone marker by which she recognized his grave.⁴⁶ An account by the historian Ibn Shabba shares that inscribed gravestones were found for Umm Salama and Ramla, whose epitaphs named them both as having been wives of the Prophet.⁴⁷ What is most pertinent about these ritual and material

⁴⁴ Haylamaz, *Khadija*, 85-86.

⁴⁵ Haylamaz, *Khadija*, 71, citing Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqat*, 8/18.

⁴⁶ Halevi, "Paradox of Islamization," 147 citing Ibn Shabba, *Ta'rikh al-Madinah al-munawwarah/Akhbar al-Madinah al-nabawiyah* 1:86, no. 382.

⁴⁷ Halevi, "Paradox of Islamization," 147 citing Ibn Shabba, *The History of Medina*.

practices contemporary to the Prophet's lifetime is that they gesture at a continuity of burial practices before the Prophet's revelations (in the example of the burial of his mother Amina) as after (in the examples of the burials of his wives, Ibn Maz'un, and Hamza). The grave marker was not a unique introduction of Islam but a selective continuation of past practices. It is possible that the Believers' monotheism led them to embrace humility in burial practices, perhaps seeking to break from marking graves in ways that would have resembled the polytheistic practices of their Arabian contemporaries. The example of the grave marker of 'Uthman ibn Maz'un, commissioned at the direct request of the Prophet himself, is notably simple - a mere rock.

The Prophet's Resting Place

The Prophet's house in Medina, where he settled after the *hijra*, consisted of a large *hosh* - an open-air enclosure surrounded by four walls.⁴⁸ On the south wall, huts were added to form the individual private dwellings for the Prophet's family. The open courtyard came to function as a prayer and gathering space for the early Believers in Medina. Of the huts built on the south corner of the east side of the Prophet's home, Creswell cites the *Tabaqat* which I will cite again here:

There were four houses of unburnt bricks, with apartments partitioned off by palm-branches; and five houses made of palm-branches plastered with mud and without any separate apartments, and over the doors were curtains of black hair-cloth. Each curtain (*sitr*) measured 3 x3 dhira, less a fraction...Some say that they had leather curtains for the doors. One could reach the roof with the hand.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Jeremy Johns makes the argument that the primary function of the Prophet's house was as a mosque, and only secondarily a house. See Johns, "House of the Prophet."

⁴⁹ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* vol. 1, 9.

The Prophet had no room for himself at his house in Medina. The huts along the east wall belonged to each of the Prophet's wives. 'Aisha, the daughter of Abu Bakr who was married to the Prophet in her youth, lived in one such hut made from brick and covered by a thatched roof of palm leaves and mud. It is said that Prophet Muhammad fell ill thirteen days before he passed away and during this time, he expressed his desire to rest in 'Aisha's room.⁵⁰

Since the Prophet did not leave instructions for his own burial when he died in 632 CE, some of his followers put forth the idea to bury him in the nearby al-Baqi cemetery. The idea was rejected in favor of burying the Prophet beneath the very earth where he passed away, the way in which it was said that prophets ought to be buried.⁵¹ So a grave was dug beneath the very spot where he had passed his final days, and the Prophet was buried there in 'Aisha's hut.⁵²

The room did not cease to function as a domestic space, for 'Aisha still lived there after the Prophet's death,⁵³ perhaps soothed by the proximity to her late husband's remains. It is said that it was only after she had a dream in which the Prophet asked her to withdraw that she placed a partition in the room, forming two spaces from what was originally one.⁵⁴ The partition may have also been a consequence of a practical need to accommodate the throngs of visitors that had already begun to pay visits to the Prophet's grave and to limit the intrusive effects of these visits on 'Aisha's privacy.

⁵⁰ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 116.

⁵¹ Leisten, "Between Orthodoxy and Exegesis," 17 cites Abu Bakr as having advocated for a burial in 'Aisha's home for he claimed that no prophet had been buried anywhere other than where he died.

⁵² Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 23 citing Ibn Ishaq. Some more recent scholarship opens up doubts as to whether the Prophet was buried where he has always said to be. A summary of these perspectives can be found in Munt, *Holy City of Medina*, 109.

⁵³ Creswell, *A Short Account*, 5.

⁵⁴ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 118.

Testimonials differ as to whether the Prophet's grave was leveled. Some posit that the rear section (*musannam*) had a slight elevated mound over it.⁵⁵ One testimony from the later medieval period reveals that regardless of the placement of this mound, it must have been so simple that it was not of a lasting nature. The account of Nur al-Din al-Samhudi, an Egyptian-born 'Alid who was present in Medina during the repair work at the Prophet's burial chamber during the 15th century CE reveals the following: "[Samhudi] entered the burial chamber with his eyes closed, and only opened them after he had mentally asked the Prophet's forgiveness. He looked around but saw no sign of a mound; evidently the sand had subsided with time. From tradition, however, Samhudi knew that Muhammad's grave was close to the southern wall, and with this knowledge three new mounds were made for the Apostle and his two companions."⁵⁶

The two companions mentioned are Abu Bakr and 'Umar who eventually came to be buried in this same room beside the Prophet in 634 CE and 644 CE respectively. (For the reasons discussed earlier, we can understand why the Believers did not bestow the same honor upon 'Uthman). We can paint a vague picture of the behavior that took place at the Prophet's resting place after his burial - that is, the *use* of the space - by looking at accounts of the architectural developments that followed to accommodate these uses.

The Prophet's home continued to serve as a residence for his family, including Abu Bakr, after his death.⁵⁷ The room in which the Prophet was buried (and where Abu Bakr and 'Umar also came to rest) was at first separate from the space of the mosque. During the time of the second and third leaders - 'Umar and 'Uthman, the space of the mosque was expanded

⁵⁵ Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 23.

⁵⁶ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 160.

⁵⁷ Creswell, *A Short Account*, 5.

to accommodate larger congregations on all sides but the east where lay the rooms of the Prophet's family (fig. 5). In 638 CE, 'Umar enlarged the mosque, increasing it to measure 140 cubits from north to south and 120 from east to west. Two rows of columns were added to the west side but the east side did not change. To the south, 10 cubits was extended and to the north, 30. The enclosing wall was of stone and the roof was still a thatched roof made from palm branches and mud. Ibn Sa'd also credits 'Umar with placing pebbles or flintstones on the ground of the mosque so that those worshipping there were protected from the dust.⁵⁸

'Aisha's room was covered by layers of waxed cloth and surrounded by a low fence. The partition of which 'Aisha had dreamed was still there, forming an antechamber for visitors to the Prophet's grave.⁵⁹ In this configuration, Esin writes that visitors would enter by one doorway and leave by another. The site must have already been a well established site of pilgrimage. Esin writes, "The dead as well as the living came here, brought by their relatives to receive a blessing from the Apostle's spirit."⁶⁰

'Uthman expanded the mosque once more during the years 649 and 650 CE. According to Diyarbakri these works lasted for ten months.⁶¹ At this time a roof of *saj* wood (teak) was erected over the burial chamber. ('Uthman lived in the same house and was murdered in the room beside where the Prophet lay buried in 655 CE. Figure 8 shows 'Uthman's tomb, dated to the twelfth century CE and later restored by the Ottomans).

It was only in 657 CE when 'Ali, taking power after the chaos that ensued following the murder of 'Uthman, moved the seat of the government to Kufa that the Prophet's once home came to be understood purely as a sanctuary and ceased to be a residence. 'Aisha's

⁵⁸ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* vol. 1, 28.

⁵⁹ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 123.

⁶⁰ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 123.

⁶¹ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* vol. 1, 40.

political interests took her Mecca and Basra, though she did eventually return to Medina. It was in Medina that she died in 678 CE and was likely buried, along with many companions of the Prophet, in al-Baqi cemetery.

It was during the opulent reign of the Umayyads that the huts along the eastern wall, once home to the Prophet, his wives, and his daughter Fatima - and now unoccupied - were demolished. The renovations were directed by 'Abd al-Malik's son, al-Walid, between 707 and 709 CE, and included orders to demolish these huts and encompass their area within the mosque.⁶² The decision was met with much grief by the people of Medina who were already not enthusiastic about the ruling Umayyads and who mourned the destruction of the original homes of the Prophet. During these renovations, one wall of the room in which the Prophet and now also Abu Bakr and 'Umar were buried collapsed.⁶³ Double walls were built around this space. What had by now come to be known as the "tomb of Muhammad"⁶⁴ was constructed by a man known as Ibn Wardan. The burial chamber was given a pentagonal enclosure. The popular explanation for this shape was that the chamber's pentagonal form would avoid any resemblance to the Kaaba, so as to dispel any temptation to use the Prophet's burial place as a *qibla* towards which to pray.⁶⁵

This set of renovations under Walid was carried out in an altogether different flavor than the humility that had initially come to define both the faith of the Believers and their material culture. Walid, with a lavishness typical of the Umayyads, wrote to the Emperor of Rum, Justinian II to inform him of his plans for the mosque and tomb in Medina and request

⁶² Crewswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* vol. 1, 143.

⁶³ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 133.

⁶⁴ Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* vol. 1, 143.

⁶⁵ Munt, *Holy City of Medina*, 108.

his participation by sending workmen. He brought to Medina what was rumoured to be a hundred Byzantine and Coptic artisans along with large quantities of gold slabs and mosaic stones.⁶⁶ Ibn ‘Abd Rabbihi, writing in 940 CE, writes of the opulent decor of the southern wall of the mosque, recounting the presence of a marble dado that reaches a man’s height, a painted panel, fourteen gilt decorated windows, more marble paneling on which the Qur’anic *suras* termed as Qisar al-Mufassal were inscribed in gold, ornamented shields, and a marble band adorned with vegetal motifs in gold relief. It was also during Walid’s renovations that minarets were added to the four corners of the mosque’s outer wall.⁶⁷

The historian Harry Munt writes of these renovations, “never before during the preceding eighty years had Muhammad’s grave been so prominently memorialized.”⁶⁸

Doctrinal Perspectives on Funerary Architecture

Perhaps as a direct consequence of the emergent *Islamic* identity and new emphasis placed on the role of the Prophet from the late 7th century CE onwards, Muslims began to compile *hadith* - defined as “reports about the sunna (actions, words, and unspoken acquiescence) of the Prophet Muhammad and his closest companions”⁶⁹ The compilation of the *hadith* took place during the 8th and 9th centuries CE - not before.⁷⁰ This time period makes sense for the compilation for it was at this time that all of the early Believers that may

⁶⁶ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 130.

⁶⁷ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 133.

⁶⁸ Munt, *The Holy City of Medina*, 109.

⁶⁹ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 168.

⁷⁰ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 195.

have lived alongside the Prophet would have passed away. The current community of Believers, having no direct memory of its founder, must have been craving knowledge of his deeds in order to guide their own righteous ways in life. The timing and nature of the compilation and transmittance of *hadith* is important and especially helpful to keep in mind when faced with several *hadith* that may seem to contradict one another. Many a time, *hadith* were selectively cited to suit the agenda or views of the compiler himself, perhaps with respect to acts contemporaneous with his own time (i.e. the 8th or 9th centuries CE).⁷¹

Trying to gage the permissibility of constructing tombs and of visiting them in Islam is a bit of a paradoxical exercise; in the first place, one in the present day is confronted by the very nature of what Islam is - whether it ought to be defined as the beliefs and teachings of the Prophet; or rather as the religio-political entity that emerged from this early community of Believers, taking on its more distinguished form during the Umayyad period? The number of sects and interpretations that exist of Islam today, and their diversity, is testament that the question does not have a simple answer.

If one looks to the *hadith*, one could find oneself perplexed. Certain *hadith* preach against the construction of built structures over buried bodies. Others, still, emphasize the virtue of spending time at resting places of the dead. One *hadith* cites the Prophet as having

⁷¹ See Halevi's detailed tracking of specific *hadith* from one generation to the next. Halevi, "Paradox of Islamization," 140-143.

Halevi has a particularly controversial view on the *hadith* and the questionable nature of their compilation which can be summarized by: "...this opposition [to funerary structures] did not derive from abstract contemplation of a golden past for despite themselves traditionalists lived in their own age. Their opinions emerged in reaction to a practice that arose in the eighth century, long after Muhammad's death, and thus have no relation to the Prophet's own preoccupations with the matters of his day" (Halevi, 150).

It is worth noting that Halevi's full book on the subject titled *Muhammad's Grave* was censored in Egypt by the Ministry of Information and accordingly removed from the library of the American University of Cairo. A dispatch released by Human Rights Watch concerning academic freedom and the nature of the Ministry's literary censorship was also blocked from access within Egypt.

said, “I was prohibiting you from visiting graves, but now you can visit them, because it will remind you of the Afterworld.”⁷² Another, cited in reference to the Prophet’s desire to visit the tomb of his late mother, relates him saying, “So visit graves, because they remind you of death.”⁷³

The first significant opposition to funerary architecture and the visitation of the dead among Muslim jurists emerged during the 9th century CE in Iraq and once again during the 11th century CE in Syria. This opposition was concentrated within the Hanbali school. The scholar with undoubtedly the most lasting influence on the matter, however, was Ibn Taymiyya.⁷⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, who lived from 1263 to 1328 CE, was brought up in the Hanbali tradition though his originality and convictions eventually lead him to steadfastly promote his own thought even when he diverged from mainstream Hanbali thinking. Though sometimes taking up arms on behalf of the Muslims against the Mongols, he spent the bulk of his adult life in and out of prison due to the radical nature of his writings. It seems that he accepted this fate welcomingly. The threat of imprisonment does not appear to have held Ibn Taymiyya back from uninhibitedly advocating for what he saw as a return to a pristine or true Islam - that of the Prophet and his early Believers.

Ibn Taymiyya’s views on the one hand can be summed up as extreme. He does not hesitate to specify that anyone not following the true tenets of Islam or engaging in practices of *shirk* (literally: to associate [something] with God, or polytheism) should be killed as a consequence. Yet his thought was backed by a stringent intellectual rigor and thoroughness. It

⁷² Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 56 citing Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu’at al-fatawa*, vol. 27, 69. Beranek notes that there are many versions of this *hadith*.

⁷³ Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 56.

⁷⁴ The *Encyclopedia of Islam* cites Ibn Taymiyya as being one of the writers with the greatest lasting influence on Islam, along with Ibn al-‘Arabi and al-Ghazali. *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. III, 955.

is perhaps due to his thoughtfulness and the impressive breadth of his work that his writings were picked up again later (by groups I will look at in Chapter 3) and have had an important influence from the 18th century through the present day. In their later renditions, aspects of Ibn Taymiyya's work were not just accepted but enforced; and, one could argue, were removed from the intellectual rigor of his original body of work. Ibn Taymiyya's method went farther than to simultaneously call upon both reason (*aql*) and the teachings of the Qur'an and *hadith*. He insisted that the two were not in opposition but needed to be understood as one in the same - that there is, in fact, a *Qur'anic reasoning*. The method could be summarized as follows: "[Ibn Taymiyya] attached much importance to reasoning by analogy (*qiyas*), which consists first of all in seeking the cause (*'illa*) of a judgement (*hukm*) resulting from the Kur'an or from the Sunna and then in extending this judgement to all cases which share the same cause."⁷⁵

Ibn Taymiyya spent most of his life in Damascus and in Cairo. Both cities at the time fell under the reign of the Mamluks. The time in which Ibn Taymiyya was writing was a time in which funerary structures had become commonplace in the Islamic world. During his lifetime he must have witnessed an immense architectural growth in Cairo's cemeteries - and of related activities of the *ziyara*. The *ziyara* - practice of visiting tombs - was widespread in Egypt, a phenomenon carefully documented by the plethora of *ziyara* guidebooks that came to be published during his lifetime. These guidebooks represent a genre of travel literature for the pious, giving careful instructions as to how to locate tombs of particular saints and of other virtuous souls buried in Cairo's vast cemeteries and sharing accounts of their lives and

⁷⁵ *Encyclopedia of Islam* vol. III, 954.

their virtues.⁷⁶ Devotional culture as manifest in shrine visitation was at the time a practice common to Muslims, Christians, and Jews (see references to Sanders in Chapter 3). Various local powers often sponsored the restoration of small shrines, condoning these devotional practices as a means of implying their own legitimacy.⁷⁷ During Ibn Taymiyya's lifetime, the Prophet's mosque (*al-Masjid al-Nabawi*) in Medina was already expanded to include the Prophet's burial place - what was formerly 'Aisha's hut, now reconstructed and heavily ornamented by the Umayyads and those that came to follow.

Ibn Taymiyya's final imprisonment in 1326 CE (he died while in detention) was a result of his *risala* condemning the immensely popular tomb culture of the time.⁷⁸ The irony seemed to be lost on his disciples when after Ibn Taymiyya's death, his tomb in a cemetery in Damascus came to be a venerated site itself. Though Ibn Taymiyya had loyal disciples during his lifetime who continued to venerate him and his teachings after his passing, his views did not gain much traction in terms of being realized by any faction of the Islamic community during his lifetime or even close to it.⁷⁹ As we will learn in the following chapter, approximately a century after Ibn Taymiyya's work came into being, the Prophet's burial chamber in Medina was topped by a monumental dome - a deed which may well have had Ibn Taymiyya turning in his own grave.

What has since come to be a very influential "doctrine" of Islam is the concept of *taswiyat al-qubur* - literally, leveling of the graves. The widespread acceptance of this

⁷⁶ See Taylor's chapter in *In the Vicinity of the Righteous* titled "Images of Righteousness and Piety" for vividly retold tales of virtue, extracted and translated from medieval *ziyara* guidebooks.

⁷⁷ Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 43.

⁷⁸ *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. III (1971), 951-955.

⁷⁹ Ibn Taymiyya had been persecuted for leading destructive acts against tombs, aided by a small army of his disciples. This is significant for it illustrates that he was convicted enough in his beliefs that he sought to bring his thought to fruition despite the repercussions.

doctrine is evident in Christopher Taylor's passage that reads, "Islamic law is virtually unanimous and unambiguous in its prohibition against the construction of large commemorative monuments over graves, as the doctrine of the leveling of graves with the surrounding earth (*taswiyat al-qubur*) makes clear. Most scholars recommend nothing more than the placement of an uninscribed stone marker, or a circle of stones around the grave. In theory, the less imposing a grave marker the better."⁸⁰ The origins of this concept which in many instances have come to be accepted as representative of Islamic law are rather murky.⁸¹

Thomas Leisten writes, referring in particular to Ibn Taymiyya's lifetime, that, "Whenever cemeteries began to turn into proper cities of the dead, the question of compatibility of funerary structures with the creed was generally debated."⁸² Ibn Taymiyya's distaste for tombs did not stem from the buildings' existence in and of itself but from the practices that took place at tombs - mainly, the public's eagerness to perform supplicatory prayers when in the presence of the dead. He writes nostalgically for the time before the rule of al-Walid when the Prophet's tomb in Medina was not incorporated into the mosque but separate from it, saying that back then the Believers performed ritual acts of worship in the mosque proper.⁸³ Ibn Taymiyya argued in favor of destroying prominent tombs so as to efface even the *temptation* posed by these places to engage in idolatrous practices.⁸⁴

In his *al-Jawab al-bahir*, Ibn Taymiyya takes to practical matters in citing a *hadith* that relays the Prophet as having directly forbidden the plastering of a tomb or the placing of

⁸⁰ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 182.

⁸¹ For an alternate discussion on some of the contradictions in the *hadith* and the emergence of funerary architectural forms, see Daneshvari's Introduction in his book on tomb towers in Persia. Daneshvari, *Medieval Tomb Towers*.

⁸² Leisten, "Between Orthodoxy and Exegesis," 13.

⁸³ Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 54, citing Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmuat al-fatawa* vol. 27, 48.

⁸⁴ Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 55, citing Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmuat al-fatawa* vol. 27, 70.

a dome above a tomb, or simply the building of any structure over a tomb.⁸⁵ The specification of a dome stirs one to question the accuracy of the *hadith* for we have little evidence of domed structures in Medina during the Prophet's lifetime. Yet a deeper look at Ibn Taymiyya reveals a nuanced - almost reasonable - perspective on tomb visits. He acknowledges that visiting tombs can be beneficial for they remind one of death and its inevitability, and that it is good to follow in the example of the Prophet and his companions and pass by the resting places of the dead and pray for their forgiveness (provided they are Believers, he says).⁸⁶ Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Bukhari, a collector of one of the two largest collections of *hadith* that died in 870 CE, reported the Prophet's sayings that initially prohibited the visitation of graves, but failed to acknowledge those later ones that rescinded the initial prohibition. Ibn Taymiyya's own reasonableness is further revealed in that he was the first to draw attention to this fallacy of al-Bukhari's.⁸⁷

While during Ibn Taymiyya's age, the concept of *taswiyat al-qubur* surfaced in Hanbali and Shaf'i texts and in Ibn Taymiyya's own writings, it did not become widely accepted as a doctrine in keeping with the tenets of Islam and therefore a *duty* on the part of believers to enforce until the time of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab who lived in the 18th century CE and who founded the eponymous sect of Wahhabism (see Chapter 3). With time, the doctrine of *taswiyat al-qubur* implied not simply abstaining from building above graves, but more fervently preached the destruction of existing funerary structures (perhaps as a reactionary interpretation of "leveling").

⁸⁵ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 182 citing Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawab al-bahir*, 12.

⁸⁶ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 188.

⁸⁷ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 191.

Chapter 2.

A Renaissance of Commemorative Architecture: the Fatimid Era Onwards

Oleg Grabar attributes the period from the 10th to 12th centuries CE in Cairo, during the rule of the Fatimids, with the “democratization” of the mausoleum as an entity and architectural form.⁸⁸ He is referring to the fact that prior to this so-called democratization, tombs in Cairo’s *qarafa* were restricted to those of religious dignitaries or popular saints. However, during the Fatimid period, architectural patronage in the *qarafa* consisted not only of dynastic patrons constructing mausoleums of ‘Alids or saints and restoring or rendering more grand those that already did exist, but also of ordinary citizens building commemorative structures for the deceased.⁸⁹ These structures ranged from simple four-walled courtyards - a *hosh* - to miniature domed structures.⁹⁰ Their collective presence transformed Cairo’s cemeteries into enchanting urban atmospheres.

Further, there exists a general consensus among scholars of Islamic art and architecture that the Fatimid dynasty was - for its time - an anomaly in its widespread patronage of the mausoleum, setting a lasting trend that we see followed by most medieval and pre-modern Islamic dynasties that came to follow.⁹¹ Grabar extracts from his reading of

⁸⁸ Grabar, “Earliest,” 41.

⁸⁹ El Kadi citing Muqadisi in *Architecture for the Dead*, 29. For an idea of architectural patronage in Cairo’s cemeteries before the Fatimids see Russell, “A Note on the Cemetery of the Abbasid Caliphs of Cairo and the Shrine of Saiyida Nafisa.”

⁹⁰ Many writers have mused on the commonalities between homes and commemorative architecture. For an interesting discussion along these lines, see Rabbat, “In the Beginning was the House.”

⁹¹ Grabar, “Fatimid Art,” and Grabar and Ettinghausen, 180.

geographers' accounts from the 10th century CE onwards the following: "It becomes quite apparent that an intense life was developing in the cemeteries of the great cities...A great deal of attention was given to the places where people were buried; and it was a new form of piety to visit cemeteries and tombs."⁹² The writer, technically, would be mistaken in saying that visits to the cemeteries and tombs were a *new* form of piety. Rather, it was an ancient one that by the Fatimid period already had an established history even among Muslims as we have seen by the example of early visits to the Prophet's tomb.⁹³ It seems though, that the writer is seeking to emphasize the changing nature of the *qarafa* during this time and the increase of pious practices therein.

Cairo's *qarafa* was known to be blessed long before the Fatimids descended into Egypt in 969 CE. Medieval tales tell of an attempt by the last Byzantine governor of Egypt, Cyrus, to secure a perpetual title to this plot of land for Christian texts mentioned the earth of the *qarafa* as containing "seedlings of heaven."⁹⁴ Taylor, citing Ibn al-Zayyat's *al-Kawakib*, writes, "It was here, in the shadows of Jabal al-Muqattam, that descendants of Noah were said to have settled before establishing Memphis, the first city in Egypt. Here too, Jacob once lived, and Joseph was initially buried."⁹⁵ Upon learning why Cyrus sought to sacrifice such seemingly obscene amounts of wealth for what appeared to be a section of arid land, Egypt's early Muslim rulers denied his wish, keeping the blessed *qarafa* for themselves.

Buildings in the cemeteries also existed prior to Fatimid rule of Cairo. When Durzan, the wife of the first Fatimid Imam-Caliph that ruled in Egypt, Al-Muizz, decided to construct

⁹² Grabar, "Earliest," 12.

⁹³ For an account of early funerary structures of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad, see Allen, "The Tombs of the 'Abbasid Caliphs."

⁹⁴ Taylor, 56-57. Citing Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam's *The History of the Conquest of Egypt*, 156-57. The story is also found in al-Maqrizi, *Khitat*, 2:443.

⁹⁵ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 56, citing Ibn al-Zayyat, 7.

a mosque in the *qarafa*, she did so at the site of an earlier mosque, known as Masjid al-Qubba (Mosque of the Dome).⁹⁶ Taylor notes that, “From the late eighth and early ninth century, when we first begin to find sizable numbers of grave markers from Egypt, it is clear that visiting the tombs of the dead was already an accepted and well-established practice.”⁹⁷ Later on we have evidence that these grave markers were often dwarfed by commemorative structures of a grander nature. Bloom cites Maqdisi as having written that he found in Egypt, by the 10th century CE, “tombs (*maqabir*) of the greatest beauty...only equalled by those of the kings of Daylam at Rayy in the way they place high *qubbas* (domes) on their graves.”⁹⁸

The sources imply that Fustat, Egypt’s urban center prior to the Fatimid’s founding of Cairo, already had an established culture of marking tombs and visiting them. Still, a significant rise in the number of commemorative monuments is credited to the period between the 10th and 12th centuries CE.

Domed Squares

What we witness during the Fatimid period is an important and lasting change in the conception of funerary architecture within Islam. I will analyze the reasons for this in greater depth in Chapter 3. It is important, however, to emphasize that the Fatimid period in Egypt did not invent the form of monumental mausolea in the Islamic tradition. Other than the example of the Prophet’s tomb, notable pre-Fatimid commemorative structures include the

⁹⁶ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 24.

Durzan’s mosque was remarkable in both its size and its painted decoration. Behrens-Abouseif ventures to say it may have been even larger than Al-Azhar Mosque. See Behrens-Abouseif, “The Fatimid Dream of a New Capital,” 50.

⁹⁷ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 41

⁹⁸ Bloom, *Qarafa*, 14.

mausoleum of Fatima, the sister of ‘Ali ar-Rida, in Qum and that of ‘Ali in Najaf which both date to the late-9th or early-10th century CE; also the tomb of the Abbasid caliph al-Muntasir in Samarra which dates to 862 CE.⁹⁹ Since the original form of this latter tomb has been relatively well preserved, we know that its form was not different than what we will become very common in monumental mausolea of later times: a domed square around which there was an octagonal ambulatory.¹⁰⁰ The mausoleum of the Samanids in Bukhara, finely decorated with brickwork, dates to before 943 CE and is also in principle a square structure topped by a central dome.¹⁰¹

Grabar and Robert Hillenbrand have related musings on the origins of this common form of monumental mausolea - the domed square.¹⁰² Grabar writes, “Although simple domical mausoleums had existed in Hellenistic times, there is no way in which one could explain a genetic passage from the first or second centuries CE to the 10th century. We must, then, assume that the Muslim world rediscovered the simple domical mausoleum at the moment when its own cultural and spiritual development demanded a monumental tomb.”¹⁰³ Of the Fatimid mausoleums in Aswan (fig. 15), Grabar writes, “Their ultimate origin undoubtedly lies in the ancient mausoleums and canopy tombs of Syria and Anatolia, but how this form, which was rarely used in Christian and early Islamic times, came to be revived here in the tenth century is still unclear.”¹⁰⁴ Finding a reason for the re-emergence of this

⁹⁹ Allen, “The Tombs of the ‘Abbasid Caliphs,” 428.

¹⁰⁰ Ettinghausen, “The Man-Made Setting,” 67.

¹⁰¹ Allen, “The Tombs of the ‘Abbasid Caliphs,” 430-431. Also, Ettinghausen, “The Man-Made Setting,” 67.

¹⁰² In Persia, we also see an other form of monumental mausolea - the tomb tower. For a well-researched investigation of this form, see Daneshvari, *Medieval Tomb Towers of Iran*.

¹⁰³ Grabar, “Islamic Dome,” 194.

¹⁰⁴ Ettinghausen and Grabar, *Art and Architecture*, 180. See Creswell, *MAE*, 111-113.

form during the Fatimid period is one thing that Grabar identifies as a problem in need of solving.

Hillenbrand, while not solving the problem posed by Grabar directly, puts forth a convincing hypothesis to explain the domical squares that we see emerge in Islamic mausolea. He writes, “The ineradicable human desire to commemorate the dead is reason enough for the existence of Islamic mausolea, but it does not explain, for example, why they do not take the form of prehistoric European barrows, Indian *stupas* or Egyptian pyramids, or indeed why Muslim burial itself did not take place in structures comparable to Jewish catacombs of Etruscan hypogea.”¹⁰⁵ Like Grabar, and in keeping with the history of the emergence and development of Islam, Hillenbrand acknowledges the commonalities that exist between Christian and Islamic martyria - but why did Islam come to embrace this form for commemorative structures? Hillenbrand’s thesis links the forms of mausolea in Islam with those of domestic architecture. He does so by engaging in a cross-cultural analysis of mausolea in various parts of the Islamic world that emerged from the 10th century and beyond. Of the tomb tower that became popular in Anatolia and northeastern Iran, he writes, “This building type reproduced, sometimes with remarkable accuracy of detail, the monumental tent of the Turkic peoples.” Hillenbrand posits that the form of the the Taj Mahal, too, resembles the pleasure pavilions that would have housed Mughal royalty during their lifetimes. “These latter expressions of the equation between house and tomb help to place the Islamic adoption of the martyrrium in its proper perspective...Mausolea may, in short, be expected to exhibit no less varied a range of types than domestic architecture - and the latter category embraces simple hut and royal palace alike.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 268.

¹⁰⁶ Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 268.

When we think of the Prophet's mausoleum - which began as a humble home and remained so even long after his passing and interment therein - Hillenbrand's thesis resonates all the more. Grabar does not make as direct a connection between a home and a mausoleum but does put forth an idea which helps us to make sense of the use of a dome in monumental mausolea. He writes: "Instead of assuming the unlikely perpetuation of antique funerary domes, one might suggest that their common use in palaces and around princes had maintained for domes in the early Muslim world the abstract significance of honor and prestige which had been theirs for centuries and that it is this abstract significance rather than a concrete funerary meaning which explains their adoption for mausoleums."¹⁰⁷

If we are to synthesize the the thoughts of both, we can say that domes have a noble and princely association in architecture, including in domestic architecture. To erect a dome over a funerary or commemorative structure hence awarded it a sense of nobility. Another observation in support of Hillenbrand's thesis is that many buildings in the cemeteries - domed or not - resemble archetypal houses of varying degrees of simplicity and sophistication. The most simple of these being the *hosh* - an open-air enclosure surrounded by four walls. The Prophet's mausoleum, discussed in Chapter 1, was similarly at first a room around one such *hosh* that came to be covered by a thatched roof. Only over time was it transformed into the monumental and princely domed structure that it is today. (As I will detail later in this chapter, the dome built over the Prophet's tomb was erected only in the 15th century CE after the form of the domical mausoleum was already very well established in Islamic civilizations).

¹⁰⁷ Grabar, "Islamic Dome," 197.

I will now visit three examples of commemorative structures dated between the 10th and 12th centuries CE from the Fatimid capital of Cairo. I have selected these three structures for two reasons. The first is that I feel they do a good job of illustrating the diverse nature of commemorative architecture from this period (pertaining to ‘Alids, saints, and common citizens); as well as of revealing the nature of commemorative architecture itself - one of the buildings I will look at is a *mashhad* while the other two are not questioned for their having been constructed at actual burial sites. The second and related reason is that given their diversity, I hope that the collective examples of these structures along with the themes explored elsewhere in this thesis serve to dispel the canonized sectarian explanation for the widespread construction of commemorative monuments that takes place during the Fatimid era. I find this perspective, that interprets the patronage of commemorative architecture during this period as an act of Shi‘a religio-political propaganda, to be not only flawed but also problematic. I will address this view directly in my analysis in Chapter 3.

Al-Sab‘a Banat

On a side-street that leads uphill in present-day Fustat, one finds a bizarre juxtaposition of elements. A large pit to the side of the road used more or less as the neighborhood landfill has four free-standing structures with square bases and a round top open to the sky (figs. 9-14). We are so accustomed to such forms being topped by a dome that seeing the Sab‘a Banat today stirs one to mentally fill in the fallen domes that would have once crowned these buildings.

What is now four was certainly once six, as excavations have unearthed two more structures. Though the original number may in fact have once been seven, for these buildings

are linked to “Seven Domes” written of by Maqrizi.¹⁰⁸ Each structure would have had three superposed tiers. Creswell has written that the square base of each measured between 6.5 and 7 square meters. Each side had an arched entrance with a corresponding opening on the middle story which formed a zone of transition - finishing with an octagonal upper story with a window on each face. Comparing these remnants with structures from the same time period, we can conclude that the octagonal drum would have once supported a dome. Creswell has identified that the lowest story was built from Muqattam limestone. The zone of transition and octagonal drum were of small dark-red bricks. The largest standing mausoleum has two small *mihribs* - one on each side of one of the doors.¹⁰⁹ We know the buildings were once plastered for Creswell claims, “Each mausoleum retains considerable remains of a stucco coating internally, but less externally, on all three storeys.”¹¹⁰ The same basic form of the Sab‘a Banat buildings is shared with the series of mausoleums found in Aswan, likely constructed to commemorate martyrs (fig. 15). A formal difference is that many of the Aswan mausoleums adopt a smaller format and have only one doorway in lieu of four.

What precedes the construction of the Sab‘a Banat domes is an account of betrayal that took place during the rule of the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Hakim. Al-Hakim’s then vizier was a man named Abu’l-Qasim al-Husayn ibn al-Maghribi. Born in 981 CE, he came to be known as al-Wazir al-Maghribi. Al-Maghribi was an author and a poet, having written many poetic treatises in a form parodying instructive manuals. As a preface to one abridgment of his works is a text by al-Maghribi’s father that relays that al-Maghribi knew the Qur’an by

¹⁰⁸ Maqrizi, *Khitat* vol. 2, 459.

¹⁰⁹ Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 313.

¹¹⁰ Creswell, *MAE*, vol. 1, 110.

For other discussions of the Sab‘a Banat see Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious*, 71; Williams, *Practical Guide*, 240; Mousa Abdoh, *Fatimid Architecture*, 45-46.

heart as well as about fifteen thousand verses of ancient poetry. Even before the age of fifteen, he was a gifted writer of poetry and prose and skilled in algebra. The vizier's poetry, as relayed by the biographer Ibn Khallikan, portrays al-Maghribi as one of great ambition and pensiveness even in the folds of youth. One poem goes:

Whilst the camels were saddling for their journey, I said to my mistress:
“Prepare all your firmness to support my absence. I shall spend, with
unconcern, the best of my youth and renounce the pursuit of rank and fortune.
Is it not a serious loss that our days should pass away without profit, and yet
be reckoned as a portion of our lives?”¹¹¹

Another reads:

I shall relate to you my adventure, and adventures are of various kinds—I one
night changed my bed and was abandoned by repose; tell me then how shall I
be on the first night which I pass in the grave?

In 1010 CE the caliph al-Hakim, for reasons unknown to us, ordered the execution of al-Maghribi's father, son, and uncles. Accounts vary as to whether the execution inspired al-Maghribi to flee to Palestine, or if his decision to flee preceded the executions. In the latter case, we could perceive the executions as an act of retribution on the part of al-Hakim. While in Ramla in Palestine, al-Maghribi inspired al-Jarrah of the tribe of Tai to join him against al-Hakim. He then went to Mecca and excited the governor there with hopes of overthrowing al-Hakim and taking over Egypt. Al-Hakim responded to these threats by winning back al-Jarrah's loyalty by imposing a military threat while simultaneously sending lavish gifts as was characteristic of Fatimid rulers. Upon the reconciliation between al-Hakim and al-Jarrah, al-Maghribi was forced to flee once again. He left Palestine for Iraq where he also faced trouble, as the Abbasid rulers questioned al-Maghribi's intentions and loyalties. Nevertheless, al-Maghribi's political career did not stop. At the time of his death in 1027 CE, he was vizier

¹¹¹ Ibn Khallikan, *Biographical Dictionary*, 451.

to Ahmad ibn Marwan, the ruler of Diarbakir. A verse al-Maghribi composed for his own death, inscribed at his tomb in Kufa, reads:

I had long travelled in the path of error and ignorance; it was time for me to arrive at my journey's end. I have repented of all my sins, and this last part of my conduct may perhaps efface the former. After five and forty years, I had hoped for a longer respite, did I not know that my creditor is generous.¹¹²

What exactly stirred al-Hakim to execute al-Maghribi's father, son, and uncles remains a mystery. According to the historian Moshe Gil, the execution of these members of al-Maghribi's family is not to be understood as an isolated incident during al-Hakim's rule. Gil writes, "In Egypt, the father [of the vizier] suffered the fate of many of those close to the throne when he was executed on al-Hakim's orders, together with many members of his family."¹¹³

It is possible - especially given the eccentricity for which the Imam-Caliph al-Hakim has come to be known - that al-Hakim was so enraged by a treasonous act of al-Maghribi's that he saw it a greater punishment to execute the vizier's nearest family while allowing the vizier himself to live on. Alternatively, had al-Maghribi fled as a result of some prior intelligence of his own looming execution, the killing of his closest family members in his place could have been perceived as an appropriate punishment for the fugitive vizier.

More relevantly - why were prominent domed mausolea erected for a group of citizens executed by the Imam-Caliph?

When the Comité excavated the site of Sab'a Banat in 1944 and found two more mausoleums, bringing the found total up to six, they also made another discovery. Each individual mausoleum was found to be surrounded by its own *hosh* - defined by Creswell as

¹¹² Ibn Khallikan, *Biographical Dictionary*, 454.

¹¹³ Gil, *A History of Palestine*, 381.

“funeral enclosure.” The enclosure was a thick wall varying between 73 cm and 1 m in thickness and surrounded each mausoleum on every side with an opening on the north-west through which visitors presumably entered and left. Figure 9 shows remaining elements of this enclosure and figure 14, Creswell’s plans of the Sab‘a Banat. The presence of the *hosh* shows us that these monuments formed a unified site - a sort of complex, in the contemporary sense of the term. The enclosure’s single opening on the north-west side shows us that the monuments must have drawn visitors to enter, or at least that was the builder’s intention.

Ibn Khallikan’s account specifies that the executed members of al-Maghribi’s family included al-Maghribi’s father, son, and uncles - all male. The popular name of this set of buildings today, however, is “Sab‘a Banat” - seven girls. The name has its origins in popular folklore. Yusuf Raghīb writes that, “Popular tradition ascribes these monuments either to seven virgin warriors, said to have fought by the Prophet’s side, or to the seven women whom the Amir al-Guyushi loved and supposedly watched from atop the Muqattam hills, where he is buried.”¹¹⁴

The precise dating of these structures - if we knew it - would perhaps help elucidate the reasons for their having been erected. The execution of the members of al-Maghribi’s family took place in 1010 CE, which is why Creswell has awarded these structures the same date. Grabar gestures that it may be more sensible to assume these mausoleums were erected some years later. He writes, “Whether, on the other hand, these mausoleums were likely to have been erected immediately after the execution of the Maghrebis is perhaps less certain and they might have to be dated after al-Hakim’s death in 1021.”¹¹⁵ Bloom dates the

¹¹⁴ El Kadi and Bonnamy, *Architecture for the Dead*, 97 citing Raghīb, “Sur un groupe de mausolées.”

¹¹⁵ Grabar, “Earliest,” 23.

monuments to precisely 1012 CE but does not offer a detailed explanation for his dating of them as such.¹¹⁶

Grabar's desire to date these structures to after al-Hakim's death is likely based on his doubting that a monumental funerary structure would be erected over the burial place of someone that has been executed on orders of the Caliph under the rule of that same Caliph. However, the hypothesis is unlikely for a number of reasons. We are reminded by a text co-authored by Grabar that, "By [the early decades of the eleventh century] the mausoleum was no longer either a royal prerogative or a place of religious commemoration, but a widely available form of conspicuous consumption. The social and pietistic conditions of the time suggest that the new patrons of architecture in this field were the growing middle class of merchants and artisans."¹¹⁷ One could wonder, given all the seeming contradictions surrounding the Sab'a Banat, if these buildings were even a product of royal patronage, whether during al-Hakim's rule or later. I am not attempting to rule out entirely the possibility raised by Grabar - that the structures could have been built after al-Hakim's death. However we must keep in mind that even during these later years al-Maghribi would still have been remembered as a fugitive or traitor to the Fatimid regime, and it is unlikely that a succession in leadership would change this impression.

Two possibilities remain. If the monuments today known as Sab'a Banat were a product of royal patronage, they could have been markers of death more broadly - honoring the deceased while simultaneously serving as a long-standing memory of the event or events that lead to the executions (for instance, al-Maghribi's treason or fleeing). The existence of a *hosh* and the resulting expansiveness of the complex hints that these buildings were likely a

¹¹⁶ Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious*, 71.

¹¹⁷ Ettinghausen and Grabar, *Art and Architecture of Islam*, 180.

product of state patronage. If this is true, the structures may as well have been built close to the executions themselves in 1010 CE as Creswell has concluded or in 1012 CE as per Bloom's dating. The second possibility is that the buildings were a product of private patronage seeking to honor the deceased who themselves were not guilty of a crime but were executed on behalf of their relative the vizier. The situation of these buildings in Fustat does gesture that the monuments were meant to be seen and visited by even those individuals that perhaps do not regularly visit the cemeteries. The presence of two *mihrrabs* in one mausoleum alerts us of the pious overtones of what could otherwise perhaps be interpreted as a series of secular monuments.

What is also helpful for our understanding is how these structures have been popularly remembered. The name of Sab'a Banat and the association of the buildings with seven virgin warriors, or alternatively seven maidens, bears no association with the story of al-Maghribi and the execution of his family members. This implies that these buildings were remembered as a kind of homage or tribute to a number (seven) of anonymous though honorable or otherwise endeared figures.

Though much mystery remains, we can conclude one thing from the example of the Sab'a Banat as relevant to this thesis. While we know little about al-Maghribi's father, son, and uncles, we do know that they were executed (and subsequently entombed) for the unlucky fact of being close relatives of al-Maghribi. It is unlikely that these structures were built with the objective of venerating those buried. The reason for the Sab'a Banat's construction, very likely, would have been to symbolize - as with all commemorative architecture - death, which the buildings continue to do to this day despite the specifics of who lays buried there having been forgotten or rendered irrelevant, and the popular narrative having been altered with time into that of the *Sab'a banat* (seven maidens).

The Mausoleum of Shaykh Yunus

About 350 m north of Bab al-Nasr on one of the main streets that runs through the peaceful Northern cemetery, is a small neighborhood mosque. Entering its doorway to pass through the mosque, one finds two tombs dating to the Fatimid era that are well-maintained and that receive visitors to this day. The more prominent of the two is known as the mausoleum of Shaykh Yunus (figs. 19-22). Creswell references a claim by Hasan ‘Abd al-Wahhab of the Arabic Monuments Department that this must be the mausoleum of Badr al-Jamali. The claim is a weak one however. The claim was made simply on the grounds that Badr al-Jamali is reported to have been buried in the Northern cemetery and the mausoleum of Shaykh Yunus is the only tomb with a monumental quality from that timeframe that remains. As Creswell writes, “it is impossible to say that of all the mausoleums constructed here between, say, A.D. 1094 and 1125 the one which has survived is precisely that of Badr.”¹¹⁸

The mausoleum is well maintained to this day and has become encapsulated within a small mosque-complex that serves the nearby residents of the Northern Cemetery. It contains a small *mihrab* with a kufic inscription in the interior. Visitors can sometimes be found using the small space between the cenotaph and its four outer walls for contemplation or even *salat* (prayer). When I asked the guard if this could in fact be the tomb of the Fatimid vizier Badr

¹¹⁸ Creswell, *MAE*, 234

Grabar, “Earliest,” 36.

Raghib, “Le mausolée de Yunus,” 306-307.

Raghib acknowledges Creswell’s argument but refutes it on account of a 1798 map in *Description de L’Egypte* which designates the mausoleum of Shaykh Yunus as “*zaouyet el-Seyd Badr*.” Raghib does not, however, probe further as to understand why the mapmaker designated the site as such. It is possible that the mapmaker made the same error as ‘Abd al-Wahhab in concluding that the only remaining Fatimid dome in the Northern cemetery was the mausoleum of Badr al-Jamali.

al-Jamali, he greeted the question with a gentle laugh as though he has been asked it many times before. But the guard insisted that the mausoleum is as it is named, that of “Sayyid Yunus” - a saintly man of Syrian origins in Golan who came to Egypt at the time of the Fatimids. In the domed chamber immediately adjacent to this one, the guard informed, are the remains of the members of the Shaykh Yunus’s family.

Creswell does not give a precise dating for the mausoleum, saying only that it could be from the first half of the 12th century based on its architectural counterparts. The mausoleum has a high two-tier drum featuring a high reaching dome for a structure of otherwise fairly modest proportions. It is notably more complex than the Sab‘a Banat, its dome resting on pendentives in lieu of a drum.

The proportions of this mausoleum are particularly of note. The dome is 3.56 m high, and the rectangular lower portion is approximately 4.5 m on each side and 4.05 m high.¹¹⁹ Hence, while the body of most domed structures tends to be much taller than the height of the dome, at the mausoleum of Shaykh Yunus the two are close in height, and so, seen from the interior, the dome feels exaggeratedly tall in relation to the rest of the structure which is rather intimate in scale. The inside of the dome is a matte shade of sky-blue which only adds to the calm atmosphere that greets visitors of the mausoleum’s interior.¹²⁰

Shaykh Yunus is not accounted for in the genealogies of the Prophet’s family that would reveal he is an ‘Alid; nor does he appear in texts as a prominent saint. His tomb appears to be one of what once was probably many such Fatimid-era structures that dotted the cemeteries and received visitors performing a *ziyara*.

¹¹⁹ Creswell, *MAE*, 232.

¹²⁰ For other writings on the mausoleum of Shaykh Yunus, see Creswell, *MAE*, 232-234; Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 314-316; Mousa Abdoh, *Fatimid Architecture*, 55-56.

The term *ziyara*, to this day, is commonly used in reference to the act of visiting a tomb. Individual habits of the *ziyara* may widely differ from one person to another or from one site to another. For instance, visitors to the mausoleum of Sayyida Nafisa often deposit flowers in the metal grills surrounding the cenotaph. The mausoleum is in Cairo at the site of her home and was rebuilt under the Abbasids and subsequently restored several times from the Fatimid-era into the modern period. At the *mashhad* of al-Husayn in Cairo, it is not uncommon, particularly on holidays, for visitors to chant phrases of *dhikr* - literally, remembrance (of God) - in unison. Given the diversity of *ziyara* practices and the personal or individual nature of the *ziyara* (as contrasted with *salat* prayers which have a clearly defined form and more than often, are collective), the *ziyara*, as a pious practice, is of a comparatively intangible nature. Given this limitation, Taylor has performed a comprehensive and insightful research on the subject of the *ziyara* in his book *In the Vicinity of the Righteous*. He relies on information he has extracted from a body of literature that we see emerge during the Mamluk period following Fatimid rule that function as guidebooks for pious visits to the cemeteries. Taylor's conclusion could be summarized as such: "By identifying saints, and then venerating them through visits to the sites of their tombs, where accounts of their distinctive actions or qualities were related, a broad cross-section of Egyptians in the later Middle Ages collectively participated in identifying exemplars of probity, righteousness, honesty, mercy, generosity, and other virtues that were deemed worthy of widespread contemplation and emulation. The saints personified these values in readily comprehensible and tangible ways, and their tombs marked the exact locations where pious visitors might go to reflect upon those qualities."¹²¹

¹²¹ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 123.

We have seen, in the introduction of this thesis, the ethical function of commemorative architecture that is of a personal nature. Taylor's research highlights a related but perhaps distinct ethical function of the *ziyara* - one that has public consequences and may contribute to the virtuousness of society at large and the values embraced by society.¹²² Many of the tales relayed in Taylor's book, extracted and translated from the pilgrimage guidebooks, tell stories of honesty, generosity, and unwavering faith.

While Taylor focuses on literature that dates to the Mamluk period, particularly during the 14th and 15th centuries CE, we know that the *ziyara* emerged before that and was a practice common to Sunni Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Shi'a Isma'ili Muslims alike.¹²³ The centuries following Fatimid rule in Egypt witnessed the continued patronage of tombs in the cemeteries - often of an increasingly monumental nature - by the Ayyubids and Mamluks that came to rule; and also the continuation of the *ziyara*.¹²⁴

Taylor's research on the *ziyara* is an important contribution to scholarly research on commemorative architecture for it gives us a view rarely addressed elsewhere in scholarship on the actual practices and beliefs associated with small mausolea in the cemeteries, such as that of Shaykh Yunus. He writes, "Participation in the *ziyara* was an important expression of late medieval Muslim piety focusing on the cultivation of one's character and personal qualities. By improving oneself through this activity, the *zuwwar* might ultimately hope to grow in both their devotion to God and in their relationship with the divine."¹²⁵

¹²² Taylor, "Saints, Ziyara, Qissa."

¹²³ See Sanders, *Ritual and Politics*, 75 on pious practices in the cemeteries during the Fatimid era.

¹²⁴ Robert Hillenbrand writes: "There is no evidence that any of the Fatimid caliphs was buried in a monumental tomb. Thus there is no hint of what was to come under the Mamluks." Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 312.

¹²⁵ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 126.

The *Mashhad* of Sayyida Ruqayya

Sayyida Ruqayya is the daughter of ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib, though not by way of his first marriage to Fatima, the Prophet’s daughter, but by Sahba’ bint Rabi’a al-Taghlibiyya. She lived during the 7th century CE. A beautiful building along al-Ashraf Street, just beside the Fatimid-era tombs of Sayyida Atika and al-Ja’fari, is the *mashhad* of Sayyida Ruqayya (figs. 16-17). The structure consists of a central domed hall with two adjacent side halls that have flat wooden roofs. All three halls have a *mihrab* in the interior, and the structure has two additional exterior *mihrabs* on each side of the main door. Very likely, a front courtyard formed part of the *mashhad*’s complex giving formal use to these exterior *mihrabs*.¹²⁶

Some texts describe the building as first having been a small yet exquisite neighborhood mosque, and the plan of the structure would not refute this claim (fig. 17). A look at the dates on the structure’s inscriptions may further this claim. The inscription on the inside of the dome of the building dates it to 1133 CE. The original wooden cenotaph (fig. 18), itself an extraordinary carved piece, contains an inscription that says it was made by order of the widow of the Caliph al-Amir in 1139 CE.¹²⁷

Maqrizi references the space as being a mosque called al-Andalus and also the mosque of Ruqayya.¹²⁸ It is unclear whether the structure was always intended to be a *mashhad* or if it was first built as a mosque and then converted into a *mashhad* in 1139 CE, as reads the date on the wooden cenotaph.

¹²⁶ See Ettinghausen and Grabar, *Art and Architecture of Islam*, 197; Creswell, *MAE*, 247-253; Williams, *Practical Guide*, 121-122; Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 314; Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious*, 146-149; Yeomans, *Art and Architecture*, 65; Freeman-Grenville, *Beauty of Cairo*, 53; Mousa Abdoh, *Fatimid Architecture*, 33-35.

¹²⁷ Creswell, *MAE*, 251.

¹²⁸ Williams, “The Cult of ‘Alid Saints,” 47 and Mousa Abdoh, *Fatimid Architecture*, 33.

Williams describes the monument as a *mashhad ru'ya* - meaning a spiritual *mashhad* but not a literal burial place, for it is said that its builder had a dream instructing her to dedicate a structure at that site to Sayyida Ruqayya. Caroline Williams shares that Sayyida Ruqayya was likely buried in Damascus, and writes, “That a shrine should have been built for her in Cairo in response to a dream or vision was for that particular time not so extraordinary.”¹²⁹

My reason for drawing the reader’s attention to this structure is the question of the cenotaph itself and what is meant by its role in commemorative architecture. This building is an interesting one for its likely being a *mashhad ru'ya*. We know from the sources - and also from the gap in time between Sayyida Ruqayya’s life in the 7th century CE and when this *mashhad* was built in the 12th century CE - that she was almost surely not buried at the site of the *mashhad*. When thinking of the role of the cenotaph itself, two possibilities come to mind. Could the building have been built as a *mashhad ru'ya* to Sayyida Ruqayya from its initial conception (i.e. at the time of the earlier dating of 1133 CE), and have received the cenotaph only later in order to strengthen the building’s commemorative function and further differentiate it from an ordinary mosque? If this possibility is true, we must look at the symbolic importance of the cenotaph. If the building was always conceived of as a *mashhad* and even completed as such, but the need for a cenotaph was still perceived and added some six years after the building’s completion, it tells us that the cenotaph - a marker - was for some reason critical to the building’s true functioning as a *mashhad*. The building’s purpose - to commemorate and witness the life of Sayyida Ruqayya - is fulfilled by the presence of the cenotaph. That this was not possible or less possible without the presence of a cenotaph takes

¹²⁹ Williams, “The Cult of ‘Alid Saints,” 45

us back to Loos' mound in the forest. It is the mound itself - the marker - that is an example of an architecture that achieves the true potential of the medium.

The second possibility is that the structure was initially conceived of as a small and elegant neighborhood mosque - perhaps al-Andalus Mosque as Maqrizi's account states - and that only some years later did the widow of the Caliph al-Amir desire to convert the mosque into a *mashhad ru'ya* of Sayyida Ruqayyah. The second possibility reveals even more meaning contained by the form of the cenotaph alone - for the addition of the exquisitely carved cenotaph would be what converted the building's use and meaning from that of a mosque into that of a *mashhad*.

One evening, I decided to ask the attendant at the *mashhad* of Sayyida Ruqayya what was the purpose of the cenotaph in the *mashhad* - was there really a body buried beneath? My question was only met with confusion. He was neither concerned nor curious as to whether the structure had been built at the site of someone's interment. He went on only to explain that a cenotaph was a common thing in *mashhads*. In a paternal fashion, he advised me to venture nearby to the famous and large *mashhad* of al-Husayn or even the tomb of Sayyida Nafisa to see that there, too, I would find a prominent cenotaph.

Meanwhile in Medina

The changes that took place at the Prophet's tomb in Medina following the Fatimid-era renaissance of commemorative architecture and resultantly, the popularization and normalization of the medium in an Islamic context, reflected these new attitudes. In 1256 CE

a fire reduced much of the Prophet's mosque in Medina to rubble.¹³⁰ Renovations began nearly two decades later once the threat of a Mongol invasion had been quelled by Baybars, then the Mamluk Sultan of Egypt. In the year 1279 CE under the orders of the Mamluk Sultan Qalawun, a wooden dome posted on an octagonal drum was added over the burial chamber.¹³¹ Prior to that the burial chamber had been covered simply by a flat wooden ceiling and five layers of waxed cloth.

Further repair work specific to the mausoleum took place in 1490 and 1491 CE under Qaytbay. The nature of this work is most interesting. In reference to the work undertaken by Qaytbay's architect Shams al-Zaman - I ask the reader's forgiveness for citing the same passage referenced in Chapter 1 - Nur al-din Samhudi's account was: "Samhudi fulfilled an official function in the mosque, and in this capacity he had to witness the repairs that were made. He entered the burial chamber with his eyes closed, and only opened them after he had mentally asked the Prophet's forgiveness. He looked around but saw no sign of a mound; evidently the sand had subsided with time. From tradition, however, Samhudi knew that Muhammad's grave was close to the southern wall, and with this knowledge three new mounds were made for the Apostle and his two companions."¹³²

These renovations under Qaytbay in the 15th century CE emphasized the burial chamber and transformed it into a particularly grand rendition of what by this time had become the quintessential form for a mausoleum in the Islamic world. The renovation efforts sought to purposefully re-establish mounds that had perhaps flattened with time; and also to replace Qalawun's wooden dome over the burial chamber with one of stone. Covered in

¹³⁰ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 159.

¹³¹ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 160.

¹³² As quoted in Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 160.

polished lead, the new dome reflected sunlight and the mausoleum of the Prophet came to be known by its white dome.

In 1850 CE the Ottoman caliph sent a team to begin major renovations to the Prophet's mosque and mausoleum. Esin writes that, "Only the most devout were allowed to penetrate within the railing of the mausoleum."¹³³ At this time the mausoleum's double wall was fortified with a third wall upon which a new dome was mounted to replace the current dome which was in a weak state. The Mamluk design for the dome was maintained though this time it received a painted green lead cover, thereafter known as the Green Dome as it still is today (figs. 23-25).

The story of what happened at the Prophet's grave is maybe one of the most telling when it comes to illustrating the change in attitudes towards commemorative architecture from the faith's early days through the centuries following Fatimid rule. The change that took place was neither altogether gradual nor as sudden as though the burial chamber was transformed from 'Aisha's dwelling into the monumental structure that it is today in a single step. This evolution and the changing attitudes it reflects will be analyzed in the following chapter.

¹³³ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 183.

Part II. Analysis

Chapter 3.

The Meaning and Purpose of Commemorative

Architecture in Islamic Civilizations

A great tradition like that of Islam has a unity which does not lend itself to a rigid dichotomy of the religious and the secular. For better or worse, this dichotomy is a product of modern history. It is not an authentic reflection of primordial human cultures.

- Aziz Esmail in *The Poetics of Religious Experience*¹³⁴

Islam: Belief and Doctrine

To begin to first answer the question posed by my analysis as to the meaning and purpose of commemorative architecture in Islamic contexts, we must situate what we are referring to when invoking the term “Islam.” Do we mean Islam the belief, or the distinct confession and its emergent doctrinal aspects? Though answering this question is admittedly beyond the scope of this thesis, it is pertinent to raise when attempting, as I am, to understand the meaning conveyed by an architectural form for a particular community - in this case, the community of those who identify as Muslims. In this capacity I am drawing on Oleg Grabar’s method which he describes in the initial chapter of *The Formation of Islamic Art* titled “The Problem.” To support his method, Grabar says, “there is an Islamic art of India which was certainly not entirely an art of Muslims.”¹³⁵ The point itself is that, “‘Islamic’ in the expression ‘Islamic Art’ is not comparable to ‘Christian’ or ‘Buddhist’ in ‘Christian Art’ or

¹³⁴ Esmail, *Poetics of Religious Experience*, 25.

¹³⁵ Grabar, *Formation*, 2.

‘Buddhist Art.’ An alternate and far more common interpretation of the adjective ‘Islamic’ is that it refers to a culture or civilization in which the majority of the population or at least the ruling element profess the faith of Islam.”¹³⁶ To define Islamic in this way - for the purposes of our analysis at least - is interestingly in keeping with how one would also have defined the early communities of Believers. Historical accounts reveal that up until the reign of ‘Abd al-Malik, and perhaps even a short time thereafter, the community of Believers included within it many Christians and Jews. The Beliefs advocated by the Prophet Muhammad did not exclude these two faiths nor their ritual practices until much later when Islam began to develop as a distinct confessional identity.¹³⁷ Similarly, during the Fatimid period, the practice of visiting tombs as a form of piety was common across the many confessions that lived in Egypt at the time and was not restricted to the Sunni Muslim majority.

In *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam*, Talal Asad draws our attention to the mistaken notion put forth by many anthropologists including Clifford Geertz and Ernest Gellner that there exist two categories within Islam - one of an orthodox nature emphasizing piety and scripture and another that is nonorthodox defined by colored ritual and saint veneration.¹³⁸ Asad’s contribution, presented in anthropological terms, does not stray far from the art historical approach that Grabar advocates. Asad’s definition of Islam will be of particular importance to us, as will the nuances associated with that definition. He defines Islam not as a distinctive social structure, nor a heterogenous collection of beliefs, customs, and morals but rather as a tradition. He acknowledges that not everything said or done by

¹³⁶ Grabar, *Formation*, 2.

¹³⁷ See Donner’s discussion on pages 222-223 of evidence that reflects Christianity’s explicit differentiation from Islam only being expressed in the last years of the 7th-century and during the 8th century CE. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*.

¹³⁸ Asad, *Anthropology of Islam*, 6.

Muslims necessarily belongs in this tradition, and nor must a tradition merely imitate what was done in the past. “For even where traditional practices appear to the anthropologist to be imitative of what has gone before, it will be the practitioners’ conceptions of what is *apt performance*, and of how the past is related to present practices, that will be crucial for tradition, not the apparent repetition of an old form.”¹³⁹

To apply this to a discussion of the mausoleum - and of commemorative architecture more generally - the examples I have looked at in the preceding chapters have no explicit theological explanation within Islam for their existence and for their taking on the form that they do. Rather, these buildings were an organic phenomenon that developed gradually, in response to cultural needs. Hence, for the purposes of looking at commemorative architecture in Islamic civilizations, we can define Islam as a living practice (Asad would call this a tradition). That is to say, we can frame our discussion as pertaining to one of many formal manifestations of faith in Islamic civilizations.

The word tradition as used by Asad has to be understood with a keen distinction from another word commonly used in this discussion - traditionists. The term traditionists with respect to Islam tends to refer to those scholars or jurists that emphasize a perceivably “pure” or “clean” form of Islam that is devoid of innovations. Hence, one will find that in many discussions concerning Islamic jurisprudence, the term “innovation” carries with it a notion of deviating from the correct path.

Halevi has written of the “paradox of Islamization.” *Islamization* here refers to the process by which Islam established itself and distinguished itself from other monotheistic faiths. In Chapter 1 we have seen that this was a gradual process that took place following the death of the Prophet. The paradox as Halevi has termed it, lies in the contradiction that he

¹³⁹ Asad, *Anthropology of Islam*, 15.

perceives between the traditionists' discouragement of certain practices like inscribing tombstones and liturgical ceremonies which involved reciting the Qur'an, and the fact that it was by these supposedly heterodox practices - like inscribing tombstones - that Islam became rooted and by which the religion spread.¹⁴⁰ In reference to the practice of inscribing gravestones, Halevi writes, "Such practices, though foreign to the Medina of Muhammad's age, became an essential mechanism by which Islam, over the course of the eighth century spread to and grew rooted in South Arabia, Mesopotamia, and the Mediterranean world, and other regions where a culture of tombstone inscriptions had existed before the rise of Islam...In fact, it is difficult to imagine how Islam could have become a world religion had Muslims...not developed novel practices that contradicted traditionist notions of Islam while transforming pre-Islamic forms."¹⁴¹

The tension within this paradox is in fact extremely intriguing. Yet, Ian Straughn presents a very valid criticism of Halevi's argument. Like the anthropologists Geertz and Gellner, Halevi falls into the tempting trap of grouping traditionists as one body and popular practitioners as another.¹⁴² This is far from the reality. The orthodox vs. popular dichotomy could in some ways be an understandable, though mistaken, modern reaction to the rift that has emerged in the global Islamic community between (popular) groups advocating Salafi interpretations of Islam and (similarly popular) groups referring to the former as extremist ideologists. Prior to the 18th century CE, that which in a contemporary sense could be called the traditionist view was in fact a marginalized intellectual movement (or series thereof) that did not carry much weight in the actual practice of Islam among the masses. Beranek and

¹⁴⁰ Halevi, "Paradox of Islamization," 151.

¹⁴¹ Halevi, "Paradox of Islamization," 151.

¹⁴² Straughn, review of *Muhammad's Grave*, 388-389.

Tupek write that, “The suspicion surrounding the veneration of saints and their shrines that had emerged in the Islamic Middle Ages concerned only a small fraction of ulama and was entirely academic, theoretical and, save to say, highly unpopular...Ordinary believers were barely affected by the ulama’s legal opinions, and continued their usual practices regardless.”¹⁴³ Hence, while the paradox that Halevi identifies is a dramatic and hence appealing concept, in reality *Islamization* is a process that unfolds, perhaps indefinitely, in the light identified by both Asad and Grabar.

Scholars of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) have formulated teachings based not only on the Qur’an but also the *hadith*. *Shari‘a* law - sometimes called “Islamic law” in keeping with the *sunna* is often based on these teachings. Since this law is born from an extensive process of interpretation, there exists much debate among jurists, and accordingly, much diversity within the global Muslim community as to the exactitude of certain practices that came to be linked with the confession of Islam. Taylor, acknowledging this “flexibility” in interpretation writes that, “Defining the limits of this flexibility has sometimes proven problematic for specific Muslim communities but a general willingness to accept varying interpretations of specific details of the Shari‘a and even differences regarding subsidiary sources of the Law has not only contributed to the global spread of Islam, but has also assured a remarkable degree of cohesion and transcendent sense of unity within the Muslim community (*umma*) over more than fourteen centuries.”¹⁴⁴

Taylor’s views imply that despite there being differences in the views of Muslim jurists, these differences have rarely been strong enough to tear apart the global Muslim community and to render the singular category of “Islam” or “Muslim” invalid. A Muslim

¹⁴³ Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 168.

can still feel a sense of cohesion between his religion and that of another Muslim even if each has a varying interpretation of the faith. (I would consider the Wahhabi movement a major exception to this pluralistic notion).

I therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, define Islam not as the adherence to a doctrine borne by jurists within the faith that historically have held marginal amounts of influence, but rather as a living practice or tradition (tradition meant in the Asadian sense). It is important also to note that I employ the term Islamic civilizations in the plural. I use the term in the fashion described by Grabar - to refer not to any monolithic body, but to civilizations in which the majority of the citizenry, or the rulers, identify with the faith of Islam.

Defining an Anthropology of Art History

In observing the emergence of the mausoleum as an architectural entity in the context of Islamic civilizations, what one observes is not the emergence of a new entity but rather a change in that existing. Grabar writes that, “change consists not only in modifications to the visually perceptible features of form and subject matter but also to an interplay between these features and a feature that is less easy to comprehend, the mind of the beholder....In other words, it is likely, or at least possible, that the fact that a Muslim looked at or used a form gave a different sense to that form, and that this difference of visual understanding or of practical use is largely what affected the making of further forms.”¹⁴⁵ Grabar is stating that while a form can remain static, it can carry an entirely different meaning based on (1) the user’s understanding and (2) the practice, or use, the user associates with the form. Likewise,

¹⁴⁵ Grabar, *Formation*, 5.

pre-existing or inherited forms may gradually evolve based on new understandings and evolving practices. This concept, again, is not so different from Asad's understanding of tradition.

I would like to build on this framework - not claimed as Grabar's own but rather from his own extractions of an art historical methodology. In looking at the mausoleum as it existed at the dawn of Islam, and as it experienced a significant and lasting change between the 10th to 12th centuries CE, we can and must reference the form of these buildings. Yet, looking at the forms alone would prove vacant if we do not understand the meaning contained by these forms *for the user* and its associated uses. Commemorative architecture is not an example of sterile materiality but rather, as historically as in the present, forms part of a living meaningful practice.

It was Hegel that is said to have first founded a philosophy of art history, based on the idea that art discloses the truths of the world by lending appearance to those truths. Further, "independent" or "symbolic" architecture, for Hegel, was the primary inaugural art. The category of symbolic architecture as he defined it is of particular relevance when describing commemorative spaces. Of symbolic architecture, which need not even enclose a volume (as is true of "canopy tombs" - Creswell's term - like the Sab'a Banat and the Aswan mausoleums), Hegel posits that there is no distinction between a building's purpose and its structure. The two are one. That is to say that commemorative architecture does not have a reason for its existence outside of itself. The cenotaph in the *mashhad* of Sayyida Ruqayya (fig. 18) is a good example of this fact of commemorative architecture. Symbolic or

independent architecture, as classified by Hegel, need not *function* in the common sense of the term. It could simply be a marker or an object in space, like Loos' mound in the forest.¹⁴⁶

The points added by Grabar to this method build upon Hegel's statements about art and culture, and essentially, the art historical method. While some aesthetic forms of early Islam were a direct continuation of those pre-Islamic, others were modified or completely let go of in order to give rise to new forms. Grabar writes, "By searching for an identification of uses and attitudes, we may indeed be able to discover an essential inspiration of any given artistic tradition."¹⁴⁷ In approaching architecture not only by its formal elements but as part of a continuous and evolving living practice - as forms that have "uses" and that are understood on the basis of the "attitudes" of the users - we could consider this method an anthropology of art history.¹⁴⁸

Uses and Attitudes

Funerary architecture, in which I mean to include structures as variant as simple mounds, rock sculptures, tombstones, and built shrines, would have carried different meanings to the user (in this case, to the passerby or visitor) before a widespread belief in monotheism as it would have after, even when comparing situations where the form itself is the same. In the context of Islam, we can ask the question: what is this meaning that funerary

¹⁴⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Fine Art*, vol. III, 32-38.

For an abridged version, see Paolucci, *Hegel: On the Arts*, 68-69.

¹⁴⁷ Grabar, *Formation*, 5.

¹⁴⁸ It may be of interest to note that in one of his final published lectures, Grabar said the following: "Both a theoretical investigation of forms that would have become restricted in their associations and any attempt to list ways developed within the Islamic world to illustrate religious, cultural, or social differences require investigative techniques developed in many different fields, especially ethnography and anthropology, rather than those of art history and criticism." Grabar, "Are there Shi'i forms of art," 31.

markers carried for the early Believers? And subsequently, the related question, what was the function of this architecture?¹⁴⁹

If we recall Fatima's visits to the grave of Hamza, which she recognized by a simple rock, we know that this architecture had a function in the early days of the faith. The Prophet, similarly, requested that a rock be placed over the grave of Ibn Maz'un so that he could "remember him by it." Following the Prophet's death and burial, we know that his tomb drew visits from many early Believers - so much so that 'Aisha erected a partition between herself and the Prophet's grave so that she could still live with a degree of privacy. These early Believers and companions of the Prophet were devoted to breaking from the polytheistic context that surrounded them and joining the Prophet in spreading his faith that preached a belief in the one God. Hence, it is hard to imagine that these early Believers, in greeting the Prophet at his tomb - and likely praying to God for his forgiveness - approached the Prophet's grave as an idol or object of worship in itself. It was more likely a site of remembrance of the Prophet's life, faith, and virtues which had come to heavily influence their own paths.

The changes in form that occurred at the Prophet's tomb from then until now reveal a tremendous change in form, but perhaps not in meaning for the user. Esin shares her stylized account of a modern pilgrim's experience at the Prophet's tomb in Medina:

Suddenly, he finds himself standing before the brass railing of the burial chamber itself...A round brass disc indicates the site of the Prophet's head...The pilgrim stands there, mute...he has forgotten all that he had planned to say. Prompted by the others, he tries to repeat the ancient words of the salutation: "Peace be upon Thee, O Muhammad..." But no sound comes from his lips. He stands there dumb and transfixed, unaware of the tears rolling down his face.

The last day, the last hour, the last moment of the pilgrim's visit to the Radiant City comes at last. The aircraft bears him towards Jiddah, while he sits immersed in introspection. It seems as if, from the moment when he first stood dumbfounded before Muhammad's "holy

¹⁴⁹ Grave markers as a kind of architecture would fall under Hegel's characterization of symbolic architecture, in which he often refers to the pyramids. Symbolic architecture need not necessarily enclose a volume but can simply be an object in space that marks or assembles.

countenance,” his stay in Madinah had been a long vigil at that spot. Time might have been standing still, were it not for the melodious regularity of the call to prayer, repeated five times a day from all the minarets of the Apostle’s Mosque. The words he had forgotten as he stood before the tomb now came back to him, but they seem insignificant. He wants to say: “Farewell, Muhammad !”, yet he knows that there can be no farewell, no end, to an encounter that had taken place beyond time and space.¹⁵⁰

If we return to the question of form then, what predicated the radical evolution - if we are to stick with this example - of the Prophet’s burial place from being a simple piece of raised earth in a humble dwelling to the elaborate domed structure that it is today? The form of the domical mausoleum flourished in an Islamic civilizational context, along with other more simple instances of commemorative architecture, between the 10th and 12th centuries CE. At the same time, the *use* of these forms (whether of the domical mausoleum or otherwise) was not an innovation unique to this period. (The use, or practice associated with tombs is a use that cannot be easily likened to *function* in the more basic or quotidian sense, and one that is as a result difficult to articulate. I hope that the preceding examples have served to paint a picture of the *uses* of commemorative architecture).

Taylor writes, “The evidence suggests that the Fatimids came to Egypt and found the cult of Muslim saints already well established there...In cultivating the veneration of ‘Alid saints the Fatimids surely added their own contribution to the cult of the saints as a whole, but the cult itself preceded them and it endured long after their demise.”¹⁵¹ While Taylor’s statements are true, they only stir more questions as to why the domical mausoleum (or *mashhad*) became so widespread during this period. Why did the Fatimids sponsor commemorative architecture in such notable numbers? Surely the Abbasids that came to power in Egypt before them would have encountered similar ritual circumstances.

¹⁵⁰ Esin, *Mecca the Blessed*, 204.

¹⁵¹ Taylor, “The Shi‘i Role,” 8.

Methodologically, Grabar reminds us, “It is usually only when a facet of the new Islamic culture developed in a manner which demanded or permitted monumental expression that monuments developed to express it. Therefore, the fact that there were mausoleums in the pre-Islamic world does not by itself explain the existence of Islamic mausoleums; an explanation of their appearance must be given in the cultural terms of the time where they appeared.”¹⁵² The reason that commemorative architecture experienced what I’ve termed as a renaissance during the Fatimid era demands an explanation specific to this era.

Recontextualizing Commemorative Architecture as a Form of Fatimid-era Expression

The time of the Fatimid caliphate is notable for many reasons, including the rulers’ profession of the Ismaili faith; its embracing of religious pluralism, lavish ceremoniality, intellectualism, and extensive patronage of the arts in a variety of mediums.¹⁵³ Many surveys of the Fatimid period read their patronage of commemorative architecture as being a consequence of sectarian religious or political motives, and do not witness and assess commemorative architecture for its ethical function or non-sectarian pious associations. Given the functionalism of the architecture of our day, it is not strange that a large portion of the recent scholarship searches for a functional explanation for the patronage of structures that have no easily explicable quotidian function.

What is perhaps the most common explanation floating around among scholarship on the subject links commemorative architecture to Shi‘a sectarian beliefs. Taylor - I feel accurately - posits that the Shi‘a role in the development of this architecture has been

¹⁵² Grabar, “Earliest Islamic Commemorative Structures,” 8.

¹⁵³ See Daftary, *An Illustrated History*, 90-93 for a brief illustrated survey on this period including a discussion of the arts during the Fatimid period.

exaggerated, mainly due to the canonization of early academic voices that mistakenly emphasized the Shi‘a role. Taylor has written an article in which he “reevaluates” the Shi‘a role in the patronage of commemorative architecture. Taylor probes much further than the other scholars participating in a discussion - past and present - on Fatimid patronage of commemorative architecture among whom are Grabar, Caroline Williams, Doris Behrens-Abouseif, Jonathon Bloom, and Paula Sanders. Taylor, as mentioned, understands this phenomenon not as a unique introduction of the Shi‘a Fatimids but as one that dips into deeply rooted ancient forms of piety in Egypt. While I agree with this point, I wish to expand on it to point out that these ancient forms of piety, though established in Egypt, have a universal human appeal. It was partly the Fatimids’ internationalism that allowed them to sponsor many mausoleums and *mashhads* - an attitude which was then mirrored by the population as evident in the popularization of the form.¹⁵⁴

A scholarly investigation that I feel would bring us closer to a genuine understanding of the phenomenon that emerges during this period is one that integrates Fatimid patronage of commemorative architecture alongside Fatimid patronage of other arts. The Fatimids are well-known for their extensive patronage of the arts across many mediums, often expanding beyond the typical confines of what was considered to be an *Islamic Art*. Their generous patronage of commemorative architecture could also be viewed in this lens.

The canonized perspective that explains Fatimid patronage of commemorative architecture as a form of Shi‘a sectarianism exists, in a big way, thanks to a text by Grabar. In his article titled “The Earliest Islamic Commemorative Structures,” which was published in

¹⁵⁴ For an engaging overview and interpretation of the Fatimids’ dispositions, as relevant to their artistic contributions, see Melikian-Chirvani’s “Introduction.”

1966, Grabar's analysis leads him to believe that "the overwhelming majority of early mausoleums served either to emphasize Shi'a holy places or to glorify princes from smaller dynasties, usually heterodox. This is not surprising, for the very basic Shi'a emphasis on descent from the Prophet and the mystical significance of the succession of imams might naturally result in the desire to transform into places of veneration the real or alleged places where the members of the holy family were buried or lived." He subsequently also states that, "Many of the early sunni shrines were probably built in answer to the growth of Shi'ite places of veneration," while noting that, "It is, of course, unlikely that *all* sunnite mausoleums and *mashhads* were built as a reaction to shi'ism..."¹⁵⁵

Grabar's statement about Sunni shrines coming up in response to those of importance to the Shi'a displays a grave misunderstanding of the nature and function of these shrines in their meaning and usage, at least at the time of his writing this article. The language Grabar uses to describe patronage of commemorative architecture on the part of Sunnis is demonstrative of the author's misunderstanding: "In their search for personages around whom cults and ceremonies were to be developed, the sunnis tended either to use scholars, Companions of the Prophet and early conquerors, or Old Testament Prophets, whose Islamic associations are particularly strong."¹⁵⁶ The statement implies that Sunnis sought to patronize mausoleums simply for the sake of keeping up with the Shi'as who they may have perceived as rivals. If the Sunni rulers nor their populace had no use for these structures, surely their resources would have been more cleverly portioned towards constructing other structures that could still outdo their rival Shi'as (to follow Grabar's thinking) in grandeur or monumentality while also being of relevance to the Sunni community.

¹⁵⁵ Grabar, "Earliest," 39.

¹⁵⁶ Grabar, "Earliest," 39.

There are also factual grounds upon which one could refute Grabar's conclusions. The first is that some 'Alid shrines were first erected by Sunni regimes. Sayyida Nafisa, the great granddaughter of Hasan, dug her own grave inside of her home and was buried there upon her passing in 824 CE. Her home had been a place of visitation throughout her life and her grave continued to receive visitors following her death. The site was converted into a shrine to accommodate these visitors by the Sunni Abbasid governor 'Ubaydallah b. al-Sari.¹⁵⁷ Even the Prophet's tomb in Medina was transformed into a shrine by the Sunni Umayyads and ultimately crowned by a dome under the auspices of the Sunni Mamluk ruler Qaytbay.

Secondly, we have to keep in mind that the Isma'ili Fatimids were a religious minority in their own country. The population over which they ruled was overwhelmingly Sunni while also including Jews, Christians, and a Shi'a Ismaili minority. The "cult of saints" referenced by Taylor and "cults and ceremonies" referenced by Grabar was a practice which, in practice, drew far more Sunnis than Shi'as (because they formed the majority of the populace).

Grabar's sectarian explanation for the patronage of commemorative forms had loud echoes within the academic community. Both Williams, in an article on the Cult of Saints published in 1985, and Bloom, in a piece on the Qarafa Mosque published in 1987, feed off of Grabar's hypothesis. Williams and Bloom seem to have accepted the sectarian explanation as the basis for their further analysis without much criticism of Grabar's approach or method. Neither delves into the actual practices of visitation of these sites nor - to quote Grabar directly in the method he prescribes in *The Formation of Islamic Art* - searches for "an identification of uses and attitudes."¹⁵⁸ In associating a building's patrons with the building

¹⁵⁷ Russell, "Cemetery," 168 and Grabar, "Earliest," 29.

¹⁵⁸ See above section on methodology titled "Defining an Anthropology of Art History." Grabar, *Formation*, 5.

based merely on the patron's sectarian affiliation and not seeking to investigate the uses and attitudes associating the 112 examples of commemorative architecture listed in his 1966 article (or acknowledging the need to), Grabar fell shy of the more comprehensive and more integrated approach that he himself advocated some years later in *The Formation of Islamic Art* (first published in 1973).

Williams dives even deeper into the sectarian hypothesis by advocating that more buildings were officially sponsored in the cemeteries during the later Fatimid period during and after the viziership of Badr al-Jamali in order to promote the Shi'a regime that by then was severely weakened politically.¹⁵⁹ Bloom begins to interpret tombstone inscriptions as being either Sunni or Shi'a and makes the mistake of classifying a very commonplace inscription that blesses the Prophet and his family - and that was used by Sunnis and Shi'as alike - as being a phrase embraced exclusively by Shi'as and evident of their influence.

Taylor has done a clever job of identifying the various weaknesses in both their arguments in his article published in *Muqarnas* in 1992.¹⁶⁰ He points out, among other things, that Williams' thesis relies on a later dating of several structures on the weak basis that because the early travelogues of Nasir Khusraw did not mention certain mausolea or *mashhads*, that they must not have been there. He also acknowledges Bloom's grave mistake of crediting a certain formulaic inscription as being used exclusively by Shi'as when in reality it was found on the tombstones of Sunnis and Shi'as alike.

Raghib's research is useful in countering Grabar's early hypothesis for he identifies commemorative structures that date to the very dawn of Islam, prior to the death of the Prophet. The early dating of these structures - prior to the civil strife that emerged within the

¹⁵⁹ See Daftary, *An Illustrated History*, 111-113 for a brief overview of the hardships of the later Fatimid period; for a more detailed account of the same, see Daftary, "The Fatimid Caliphs."

¹⁶⁰ Taylor, "Reevaluating the Shi'i Role."

community of Believers and resulted in the two main sects of Sunnism and Shi'ism that exist today - serve to dispel the associations drawn between commemorative architecture and Shi'a sectarianism. Raghīb finds that in 628-629 CE, a mosque was built over the burial place of Abu Basir, one of the companions of the Prophet. He also documents other funerary structures that sprung up near to the founding of the community of Believers, illustrating that despite the teachings of some *hadith*, commemorative architecture was built during the earliest days of the faith.¹⁶¹

Sanders brings an informed perspective on the Fatimid era that many scholars whose research is restricted to the field of art and architectural history are lacking. Her book on the rituals and ceremoniality of Fatimid Cairo allows us to understand the actual uses and daily conduct associated with the buildings mentioned in this study. Though Sanders does not focus on the role of funerary architecture and buildings in the cemeteries specifically, her findings reveal the emphasis placed on rituals and ceremonies during the Fatimid era and shed light on why the Fatimids were such generous patrons of commemorative structures. Sanders writes, “[The vizier Ma'mun] created out of the landscape, court ceremonies, and popular religious practices of the population of Fustat a ritual *lingua franca*. In the early twelfth century, the Fatimid state was still Isma'ili...Many of the caliph's staunchest allies and supporters were Sunnis. The Fatimid imam was Isma'ili, but neither his capital city of Cairo nor the neighboring city of Fustat was. Ritual unity had to be expressed in a broadly Islamic, not specifically Isma'ili or even Shi'i, context.”¹⁶² I would hence argue that it was precisely the intersectorian and universal appeal of the practice of visiting tombs that may have inspired the Fatimids to become such extensive patrons of commemorative architecture.

¹⁶¹ Raghīb, “Les premiers monuments,” 36.

¹⁶² Sanders, *Ritual, Politics*, 75.

In a chapter titled the “Symbolic Appropriation of the Land” in *The Formation of Islamic Art*, Grabar looks at three case studies in order to understand how Islam during its nascent phases did “relate meaningfully to the conquered world.”¹⁶³ In all three cases (the desert bath of Qusayr Amrah, the Dome of the Rock, and round city of Baghdad), Grabar finds that “the forms and symbols used were not new creations of Islam but forms and symbols that belonged to earlier cultures.”¹⁶⁴

What the Fatimids engaged in in Cairo in sponsoring commemorative structures is an example of the very same phenomenon. Commemorative architecture allowed the Fatimids to relate meaningfully to the society which they had come to rule. Yet that does not mean to imply this was the sole motive of the Fatimids as some have ventured to say. Of Durzan’s Qarafa mosque, Behrens-Abouseif writes, “The foundation of the Qarafa Mosque by the wife of the first caliph of Egypt must have been motivated by political considerations in order to connect the new ruling establishment to the people of Fustat on the shared funerary ground.”¹⁶⁵ Behrens-Abouseif’s perspective implies that funerary building must have carried little meaning for the Fatimid patrons themselves.

I don’t think I am being naive in supporting, along with Taylor, a “perspective that might view royal involvement, whether Fatimid or Ayyubid, in, and patronage of the cult of saints in a more integrated and less utilitarian fashion.”¹⁶⁶ To interpret things in this way, Taylor states, “the mausoleum of Imam Shafi’i might be reasonably interpreted as simply a

¹⁶³ Grabar, *Formation*, 68.

¹⁶⁴ Grabar, *Formation*, 68.

¹⁶⁵ Behrens-Abouseif, “Fatimid Dream,” 50.

¹⁶⁶ Taylor, “The Shi’i Role,” 6.

genuine expression of piety, reflecting traditional norms, rather than as a calculated attempt to exploit the cult of saints for specific political or doctrinal objectives.”¹⁶⁷

We know from the existence of the Turbat al-Za‘afaran within the grounds of the Fatimid palace that housed the remains of the previous Fatimid Imams that sites of burial were of significance to the Fatimids. These remains were brought along with the Imam-Caliph al-Mu‘izz when he arrived in Cairo from al-Mansuriyya.¹⁶⁸ We also know that the Fatimid Imam-Caliphs often catalyzed ritual activity in the cemeteries, constructing many a *jawsaq* (ceremonial pavilions) in the cemeteries as well as residences for themselves there. Visiting tombs of the dead was a practice with deep roots in Egypt and that appealed to various sections of the population including Christians, Jews, and Sunni Muslims. Hence what the Fatimids were doing was not propagandizing a certain religion or sect - they did not seem to be overly concerned with converting the population of Cairo and Fustat to Isma‘ilism - but rather carving out a ritual “*lingua franca*,” thereby culturally and ritually unifying a diverse populace. Further, it is likely, that the Fatimids’ intellectualism and emphasis on ceremoniality - combined with their overwhelming patronage of many other art forms in original and unprecedented ways¹⁶⁹ - could be what lead them to become such large patrons of the commemorative form. Grabar writes of the Fatimid dynasty: “Its literary and intellectual creativity was not comparable to contemporary activities in Spain, Iraq, or Khurasan, but its art was original and different from much of what is known elsewhere at the time.”¹⁷⁰ He adds in the same essay, in addressing the “degree of originality of forms and functions” of Fatimid architecture, that, “Only one architectural function is truly new in

¹⁶⁷ Taylor, “The Shi‘i Role,” 6.

¹⁶⁸ Bloom, “Origins of Fatimid Art,” 33.

¹⁶⁹ See Grabar, “Fatimid Art,” and Melikian-Chirvani, “Introduction.”

¹⁷⁰ Grabar, “Fatimid Art,” 210.

Fatimid times, even though its roots are older than the dynasty. It is the mausoleum, whose development certainly owed something to Shi‘ism but whose real sources are both secular and religious.”¹⁷¹

Some commemorative patronage and restorations undertaken by the Fatimids pertained to structures commemorating ‘Alid saints for obvious reasons that these sites had a spiritual resonance - not only with the Shi‘a Isma‘ili Fatimids, but with all Muslims.¹⁷² At the same time, many examples of commemorative architecture from the period are not of ‘Alids. The three examples I have visited in Chapter 2 - namely, the Sab‘a Banat, the mausoleum of Shaykh Yunus, and the *mashhad* of Sayyida Ruqayya - present us with a cross-section of the types of commemorative structures that came to be during this period. Non-‘Alid tombs could have been those of saintly figures or venerated scholars and were therefore approached during the *ziyara* in the fashions described by Taylor. Ibn Battuta, writing in the 14th century CE, gives a description of what Cairo’s *qarafa* had by then developed to be:

These people build in the Qarafa beautiful domed chapels and surround them by walls, so that they look like houses, and they construct chambers in them and hire the services of Qur’an-readers, who recite night and day in beautiful voices....Amongst the monuments [in the Qarafa] is the tomb of the Lady (Sayyida) Nafisa, daughter of Zaid b. ‘Ali b. Al-Husain b. Ali (upon them be peace). She was a woman answered in prayer and zealous in her devotions. This mausoleum is of elegant construction and resplendent brightness, and beside it is a convent which is visited by a great concourse...Another is the tomb of the Imam Abu ‘Abdallah Muhammad b. Idris al-Shafi‘i, close by which is a large convent. The mausoleum enjoys an immense revenue and is surmounted by the famous dome, of admirable workmanship and marvelous construction, an exceedingly fine piece of architecture and exceptionally lofty, the diameter of which exceeds thirty cubits. The

¹⁷¹ Grabar, “Fatimid Art,” 211.

¹⁷² See Mulder, *The Shrines of the ‘Alids*. Mulder’s research in Syria reveals that the visiting of ‘Alid shrines is far from being a practice that appeals only to Shi‘a Muslims and that these shrines have an intersectarian appeal.

Qarafa of Cairo contains also an incalculable number of graves of men eminent for learning and religion, and in it lie a goodly number of the Companions and of the leading figures of both earlier and later generations (God be pleased with them).¹⁷³

The tomb of Imam Shafi'i mentioned by Ibn Battuta was built by the Ayyubids during the early 13th century CE. The Fatimids saw value in commemorative architecture, whether understood in terms of ritual piety or a reflection of positive ethical ideals and the dynasties that came to rule after them did too. Even Ibn Taymiyya, who prolifically wrote against the *ziyara* and also against the Fatimids' extensive patronage of mausoleums, conceded that there is virtue in visiting tombs if to be reminded of death and its inevitability.¹⁷⁴ The two parties diverge not in their understandings of the virtues of tomb visits, but of the nature of Islam itself. Taylor, writing of the pilgrimage guidebooks of the *ziyara* that were published during the period of Mamluk rule in the 14th and 15th centuries CE, says, "The understanding of Islam that the [pilgrimage] guides reveal is not always a faith with which we are familiar."¹⁷⁵ The *ziyara* guidebooks reveal pious practices that fall outside of conventional definitions of Islam by which the confession has come to be defined - for instance, the five pillars. Yet, the practices associated with tomb visitation were very much guided by Belief and by the desire to act righteously. Stephennie Mulder, who has carried out extensive research on Islamic shrines in Syria, similarly acknowledges the wide gap between doctrines that have come to be associated with Islam and the ways in which Islam is practiced. She writes, "On the popular level, Islamic history is unimaginable without these sites. The visitation of shrines and the historical and religious knowledge conveyed there was a primary means by which ordinary

¹⁷³ Gibb, *Travels of Ibn Battuta*, 46-47.

¹⁷⁴ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 188.

¹⁷⁵ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 7.

Muslims understood their place in history - and in this sense, it was Islam itself that was literally emplaced.”¹⁷⁶

In an essay of Grabar’s published as part of a compilation on Isma’ili Contributions to Islamic Culture in 1977, he seems to soften if not altogether withdraw the sectarian hypothesis he put forth in his article “The Earliest Islamic Commemorative Structures” published eleven years earlier. While acknowledging the sectarian hypothesis and saying that one could make the argument that mausoleums, among other Fatimid artistic contributions, were “expressions of a Shi’ite taste,” Grabar writes: “I doubt that Fatimid art [among the main contributions of which he lists the mausoleum] should be interpreted on sectarian grounds. A more plausible explanation of their originality may lie in the coincidence under their aegis of imperial ambitions, of a mercantile society, and of cultural self-confidence. The forms and techniques created over the previous centuries were sufficient for their aims and there no longer was any need to control or limit the endless range of self-expression.”¹⁷⁷

This later essay of Grabar’s seems to have had a relatively smaller circulation, at least in so far as one does not see it mentioned or cited in scholarship as one so often sees his article “The Earliest Islamic Commemorative Structures” that first put forth a sectarian explanation for the erection of commemorative structures. Though Grabar himself may have rethought a sectarian hypothesis, it had loud and lasting echoes in later scholarship.¹⁷⁸

In one of Grabar’s last published works, based on a lecture he gave in 2009 that was published posthumously in 2015, he wrote that, “the commemoration through building and

¹⁷⁶ Mulder, *The Shrines of the ‘Alids*, 258.

¹⁷⁷ Grabar, “Fatimid Art,” 221.

¹⁷⁸ Taylor, “Reevaluating the Shi’i Role.”

inscriptions as well as through pious behavior and perhaps even liturgies, the commemoration of the dead, religious or secular, was first developed by and because of Shi‘ism.”¹⁷⁹ We have already seen through earlier examples that commemoration of the dead was a practice that preceded the birth of sectarian factions within Islam and the subsequent emergence of Shi‘ism (or Sunnism for that matter). A gap in Grabar’s attitude and the one adopted by this thesis is revealed by the fact that Grabar defines commemorative architecture to mean monumental [domed] constructions. He does not take into account the more humble or primitive forms of commemorative architecture that existed at the time of the early Believers and which tradition has it that Prophet himself had commissioned (as, for instance, in the case of the rock placed over the grave of Ibn Maz’un in al-Baqi cemetery in Medina). In the same essay, Grabar immediately continues, “And here a distinction should be made in our thinking. It may be argued that the growth of the mausoleum of al-Shafi‘i in Cairo [built under the Sunni Ayyubids] and other examples in Syria or Iraq were the result of a direct impact of Shi‘i practice, but this does not make these monuments or the forms they use Shi‘i. The importance taken by the dome in these ensembles is easy to explain for all funerary architecture between India and the Atlantic, but it is difficult, I think, to argue for a Shi‘i meaning of the dome in general or even for specific domes in Shi‘i sanctuaries of Iran, Central Asia, or Iraq (and now Syria) of Safavid and later times.”¹⁸⁰ Without putting it too directly, I feel that Grabar credits the origins of *monumental* renditions of commemorative architecture to Shi‘a contexts, while gesturing that the meaning of this architecture cannot be interpreted solely within the religio-political contexts in which he understands it to have emerged.

¹⁷⁹ Grabar, “Are there Shi‘i forms of art,” 33.

¹⁸⁰ Grabar, “Are there Shi‘i forms of art,” 33.

The Iconoclasm of Commemorative Architecture

In my discussion in Chapter 1 of Ibn Taymiyya, I revealed the marginal nature of Ibn Taymiyya's views during his own lifetime. He had a loyal following among his disciples but was persecuted for much of his thinking, including for his condemnation of the construction and visiting of tombs. Yet *taswiyat al-qubur* - leveling of the graves, what some authors now refer to as a “doctrine” of Islam, did not come to be understood in the way in which it is today until the time and work of a man known as Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab.

Al-Wahhab lived from 1703 to 1792 CE. He was heavily influenced by the work of Ibn Taymiyya, though his own writings were stripped of the former's intellectual rigor and complexity of reason and of thought.¹⁸¹ During his lifetime, Islamic civilizations had considerably developed since the age of the early Believers. Al-Wahhab perceived the world he lived in to be replete with innovations (in the traditionists' sense of the term). Unlike Ibn Taymiyya, al-Wahhab's texts are very clear cut and direct, as if meant to be understood by the masses. He often uses colloquial diction rarely seen in written texts.¹⁸² And unlike that of Ibn Taymiyya, al-Wahhab's work did win a considerable following during the course of his own lifetime. In 1744 al-Wahhab partnered with Ibn Saud (of the Saudi family) over their shared objective to harness back to a true or pure Islam in the form in which al-Wahhab had conceived. They merged forces and during the late 18th century, the term Wahhabis was used in reference to members of the first Saudi state, the Emirate of Diriyah.

¹⁸¹ Rutter, *Holy Cities*, vol. 2, 196.

Rutter writes, “The Wahhabis and other puritans are largely guided in matters of ritual by the writings of Ibn Taymia. I have heard it declared by more than one learned shaykh that it was through reading the books of this jurist that Ibn Abdul Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi brotherhood, was impelled to begin his campaign of puritanism.”

¹⁸² Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 83.

The Wahhabis first took control of Mecca and Medina from 1805 to 1806. Evidence of their victory over the two towns was rendered visible to the Meccans and Medinese by the Wahhabi's destruction of important religious sites. Beranek writes that the people of Najd (Wahhabis) destroyed over 80 domes and mausoleums of the *ahl al-bayt* (family of the Prophet) upon entering Mecca.¹⁸³ The Wahhabi's iconoclasm was not restricted to mausoleums but also touched the sites of important historical events like the birthplace of the Prophet and the house of his wife Khadija in Mecca where the Prophet had received many revelations.

Daniel Howden reports that The Gulf Institute publicized a *fatwa* issued by the senior Saudi council of religious scholars in 1994 that states that preserving historical sites "could lead to polytheism and idolatry."¹⁸⁴ Beranek elaborates on this view: "In the Salafi [purist] understanding...even the mere fear of idolatry associated with graves, the so-called temptation to worship and venerate graves (*fitnat al-qubur*), justifies their removal."¹⁸⁵

Johann Burckhardt, in an account of his travels to the Hijaz in 1814 and 1815, wrote, "Wherever the Wahabys carried their arms, they destroyed all the domes and ornamented tombs...At Mekka, not a single cupola was suffered to remain over the tomb of of any renowned Arab: even those covering the birth-place of Mohammed, and of his grand-sons, Hasan and Hosseyn, and of his uncle, Abou Taleb, and his wife, Khadydje, were all broken down."¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 72.

For a discussion of the concept of *ahl al-bayt*, see Suleman and Jiwa, "Shi'i Art and Ritual," 16.

¹⁸⁴ Daniel Howden, "The Destruction of Mecca," in *The Independent*, August 6, 2005.

¹⁸⁵ Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 1.

¹⁸⁶ Burckhardt, *Notes*, vol. 2, 108-109 quoted in Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 101.

In 1818 the Ottomans took control of the Hijaz and from 1848 to 1860 sponsored extensive restorations of the structures destroyed by the Wahhabis, working in tandem with Ibn Saud's forces. Among these restorations were the mausoleum built above Khadija's grave in Jannat al-Mulla in Mecca and 'Uthman's mausoleum in Medina (figs. 7 and 8).

After the first quarter of the 20th century the Saudis regained control of the Hijaz as part of what was known as the Sultanate of Najd. This period witnessed some of the most violent destructions of commemorative monuments in both Mecca and Medina. The tombs in al-Baqi cemetery were violently razed in April of 1925. Eldon Rutter, a skillful writer and British convert to Islam, set off for the Hijaz in the midst of much violence in May of that year. His two-volume account reveals in illustrious detail what life, culture, and the perceptions of the Meccans and Medinese people were like during this time of conflict in the Arabian Peninsula.

Of Al-Baqi cemetery in Medina, Rutter wrote:

When I entered the Bakia [al-Baqi cemetery] the sight which I saw was as it were a town which had been razed to the ground. All over the cemetery nothing was to be seen but indefinite mounds of earth and stones, pieces of timber, iron bars, blocks of stone, and a broken rubble of cement and bricks, strewn about. It was like the broken remains of a town which had been demolished by an earthquake...All was a wilderness of ruined building material and tombstones—not ruined by a casual hand, but raked away from their places and ground small.¹⁸⁷

He continues,

Demolished and gone were the great white domes which formerly marked the graves of the members of Muhammad's family, of the Third Khalifa, Othman, of the Imam Malik, and of others. Lesser monuments had suffered a like fate, and even the little cages of *jerid* sticks with which the poor cover the graves of their dead, had all been crushed and thrown aside, or burnt.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Rutter, *Holy Cities*, vol. 2, 256-257.

¹⁸⁸ Rutter, *Holy Cities*, vol. 2, 257.

In approaching the site of where ‘Uthman’s tomb at once been (fig. 8) Rutter finds an old man leading a party of Indians, “Straight before him he gazed, and tears fell from his eyes in a ceaseless stream.” Rutter interpreted the old man’s grief as a response to the state of destruction in the cemetery:

We had come upon a slight rise in the ground, and now I saw the cause of the old mans grief. There on the ground before us was a long thin erection, scarcely more than six inches high. It was apparently made of a wooden framework, with rough pieces of tin nailed upon it. This was the tomb of Othman, the Third Khalifa. A mound of earth would have been a better monument. Beside it sat a large-turbaned Indian, chanting the Koran. Another sat near him, sobbing.¹⁸⁹

Earlier in his trip, Rutter writes of his experiences during an episode of fever and delirium just before he was to depart Mecca for Medina. He says of this state between consciousness and delirium, “Sometimes I visualised, with a terrible intensity, the stony grave-yard of El Maala [Jannat al-Mulla in Mecca], with its broken tomb-stones flung by the Wahhabis into the grey sand and the dust of millions of departed hajjis.”¹⁹⁰

The graves in al-Baqi and Jannat al-Mulla cemeteries remain in a similar state today, the Hijaz still falling under the control of the Saudis (figs. 29-30). The destruction of tombs did not stop at these initial demolitions. In 1998, the grave of the Prophet’s mother Amina in al-Abwa village - where tradition has it that the Prophet wept during his visit - was demolished. Amina’s grave was bulldozed and subsequently “doused in gasoline and burnt.”¹⁹¹ The tomb of the son of Ja‘far al-Sadiq near the Prophet’s mosque in Medina was

¹⁸⁹ Rutter, *Holy Cities*, vol. 2, 258.

¹⁹⁰ Rutter, *Holy Cities*, vol. 2, 130.

¹⁹¹ al-Alawi, “The Destruction of Holy Sites in Mecca and Medina.”

blown up on August 13, 2002.¹⁹² Both these destructions took place under the auspices of the Saudi regime.

In 2003, the daily *Al-Watan*, a prominent liberal newspaper in Saudi Arabia, ran an op-ed that openly criticized Ibn Taymiyya, in light of recent acts of Wahhabist-inspired terrorism in Riyadh. The attacks targeted Westerners and were carried out in May of that year at three different residential compounds in Riyadh. The then editor of *Al-Watan*, Jamal Khashoggi, was ordered to leave his position shortly after the op-ed ran. The Middle East Media Research Institute released a dispatch in July of that year concerning Khashoggi's dismissal: "It recently became known that the last straw that led to Khashoggi's termination was an op-ed on the Riyadh bombings that appeared in the May 22 edition; the op-ed criticized Ibn Taymiya (1263-1328), the spiritual father of Wahhabism."¹⁹³

Shahab Ahmed and Yousef Rapoport have published a compilation of essays that seek to understand Ibn Taymiyya's work in context, while also investigating the reasons behind the popularity and influence that his body of work has gained in modern times - an influence that would have been unimaginable in Ibn Taymiyya's own day. Ibn Taymiyya's work unquestionably emphasized what he saw as the need for "a reassertion of pristine, uncorrupted Islam," which according to Khaled El Rouayheb could have gathered a modern following as a response to the technological and political successes of the West. Of this rise in *salafism* (the purism of the ancestors/predecessors), Ahmed and Rapoport write, "What is at stake, of course, is not so much a return to the values of the early Islamic community, but

¹⁹² Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 187.

¹⁹³ The Middle East Media Research Institute, Special Dispatch No. 535 "Saudi Editor-In-Chief Fired Following Criticism of Ibn Taymiyya, Spiritual Father of Wahhabism," July 9, 2003.

rather a rejection of the layers of interpretation and exegesis, which are seen as obstructing an Islamic revival.”¹⁹⁴

The teachings of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, along with Ibn Taymiyya, have shaped the policies (and iconoclastic acts) of not only the Saudi regime but also of the group commonly known as ISIS.¹⁹⁵ Not long after seizing Mosul, agents of ISIS began to bulldoze tombs in the city. Among these were the tomb of historian Ibn al-Athir, the Mosque of Shaykh Fathi, and the mosque/tomb complex of the Prophet Jonah (Yunus).¹⁹⁶ The tombs the group destroyed in Dabiq included that of the seventh Umayyad ruler Sulayman ibn ‘Abd al-Malik. Some ISIS videos cite directly from Ibn Taymiyya emphasizing the need to level graves.¹⁹⁷ Beranek shares that the group’s leaflets are “written in simple language and in a comprehensible style, obviously with the intention of being easily absorbed by common people.” One, advocating the necessity to destroy the tombs of four Prophets buried in Mosul, contextualized the destruction “within the broader intention of ‘annihilating the sources of *shirk* (idolatry, or associating something with God)...and removing them from the hearts of people.’”¹⁹⁸ Beranek reports that ISIS fighters also openly call for the destruction of the Prophet’s grave in Medina.¹⁹⁹ Other significant tomb destructions have been carried out by ISIS and its offshoots or groups adopting a common ideology in Yemen, Bahrain, Afghanistan, Libya, Tunisia, Somalia, Pakistan, Malaysia, and in Alexandria and the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.

¹⁹⁴ Ahmed and Rapoport, *Ibn Taymiyya*, 18.

¹⁹⁵ See Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 177-178 for a detailed discussion on the complicated relationship between the Saudi state and ISIS. It is worth noting that while both ISIS and the Saudi regime are heavily influenced by al-Wahhab’s ideology, each officially declares the other an enemy.

¹⁹⁶ Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 179.

¹⁹⁷ Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 181 citing a video by ISIS entitled “Changing of the Swords, Part 4”

¹⁹⁸ Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 181-182.

¹⁹⁹ Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 179.

The journalist Robin Wright recently made a trip to a Syrian camp that holds captured ISIS fighters. One American man from Chicago that joined the group at his own will and was currently being held at the camp told her, “I wanted to make hegira...I wanted to live under Sharia.”²⁰⁰ *Hegira* or *hijra* could refer simply to the act of migration that the early Believers took from Mecca where they were threatened to Medina where they could safely live as a community and practice their faith. The *hijri* calendar sets the point of this migration and the safe establishment of the early Believing community as its year zero. However the way in which this ISIS captive uses the term seems to carry a more particular connotation that demands further explanation.

According to Donner, the Qur’an includes at least one reference to the concept of making *hijra* as meaning to escape a sinful environment, or to leave home for the purpose of practicing and defending one’s beliefs (as was precisely the case of the early Believers).²⁰¹ Al-Wahhab has perhaps borrowed from this understanding in a treatise of his known as *The Three Principles*. Beranek explains that in *The Three Principles*, al-Wahhab advocates for a renewal of a pure Islam through *hijra* from the world of *jahiliya* (polytheism or disbelief) of his own day. Beranek writes, “The fact that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab places stress on the *jahiliya* of his day being even worse than that of the pre-Islamic or early Islamic period means that emigration to the world of Islam was not only a duty for the early Muslim community, but, in his view, it also constituted an urgent duty in his own day.”²⁰² Al-Wahhab’s conception of

²⁰⁰ Wright, “The Dangerous Dregs of ISIS.”

²⁰¹ Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*, 86.

Donner cites the Qur’an 8:72 “Verily, those who have Believed and made *hijra* and strive [*yujahidun*] in God’s way with their property and themselves, and those who gave asylum and aided [them]—those shall be mutual helpers of one another. But those who have Believed and [yet] have not made *hijra*, they have no share in the mutual assistance [of the others], until they make *hijra*...”

²⁰² Beranek, *Temptation of Graves*, 86.

what Islam is has a direct influence on present-day ideologies that result in much regrettable violence - of which the destruction of commemorative architecture is only a part.

As Taylor acknowledges, “the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya and [his most famous disciple] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, particularly as they relate to the *ziyara*, constituted a minority and distinctly unpopular position among the ‘ulama’ of their time.”²⁰³ Yet their ideas gained considerable posthumous traction in al-Wahhabi’s movement that emerged some four centuries later. Though al-Wahhab drew heavily on Ibn Taymiyya’s writings, he ignored much of the nuance and complexity in Ibn Taymiyya’s thinking that could reveal more moderate dispositions than those he professed and that have come to have such a wide and regrettable influence.²⁰⁴

In the days of the early Believers, engaging in humble burials was a practice selected from those pre-existing (as contrasted with pagan practices that sometimes involved figural tombstones). A little over three centuries later, the Islamic community - and the times - evolved so as to embrace commemorative architecture. The phenomenon is not, however, illustrative of a regression to pagan beliefs or pagan times. This later renaissance of commemorative architecture was rather a manifestation of cosmopolitan ritual practices and universalist aesthetics. The pattern by which commemorative architecture came to become popular in Islamic civilizations between the 10th and 12th centuries CE mimics that with which other forms categorized as “Islamic” came to be during the early days of the faith. It was a pattern of selectively picking and choosing elements from the past that contain and transmit a desired meaning, and of hence relating meaningfully to the existing context so as

²⁰³ Taylor, *In the Vicinity*, 195.

²⁰⁴ For a profile of Ibn Taymiyya’s work in context see Ahmed and Rapoport, eds. *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times*.

to shape the future that is desired. The Fatimids must have seen pious value in structures that commemorate the dead, and so did most medieval Muslim dynasties that came to follow.

Conclusion

Commemorative architecture fulfills an “ineradicable human desire”²⁰⁵ and has a distinct ethical function (of a personal nature) that is entirely in keeping with the faith and spirit of the early community of Believers and subsequently Islam *within the civilizational contexts in which it emerged*. That is to say that the discouragement of building above graves at the dawn of Islam - during and near the Prophet’s lifetime - would surely have resembled polytheistic practices contemporary to this time and risked being understood as another form of *shirk* or idolatry. However, during the course of even just a couple of centuries after the emergence and spread of Islam, polytheism was no longer rampant. The structures that came to be erected over graves serve an entirely different purpose in an Islamic context as their counterparts may have once served in a pagan one. These buildings, unlike everyday functionally-oriented architecture, honor death and allow people to connect with otherwise submerged parts of themselves. In this capacity, these buildings can be interpreted as genuine works of art.

Doctrinal interpretations condemning both funerary architecture and the visitation of tombs were immensely unpopular during the times in which they were written and did not seem to impact the people’s actions. In Ibn Taymiyya’s case, he was persecuted and jailed for his views against tomb visitation. A monumental dome (then white, now green) was erected over the Prophet’s burial chamber about a century after Ibn Taymiyya’s death. While his views gained little traction near his own time, they were an important inspiration for the

²⁰⁵ Quoting from Robert Hillenbrand writing on the same subject. Hillenbrand, *Islamic Architecture*, 268.

Salafist-Wahhabi movement founded in the 18th century CE. Regimes that have since come to power and adopt Salafist-Wahhabism as representative of the rightful and correct Islam embrace many of these once unpopular views (of Ibn Taymiyya and other Salafist writers) and rigidly enforce aspects of their thinking. The House of Saud destroyed many mausoleums in its territory as an illustration of its devoted Wahhabist orthodoxy. The regime demolished the structures in al-Baqi cemetery in Medina and Jannat al-Mulla in Mecca in the early 19th-century and once again in the early 20th-century after regaining power following an Ottoman-led reconstruction of the destroyed sites. Al-Baqi cemetery houses the graves of several of the Prophet's family members and close companions that were instrumental in the establishment and early successes of the early community of Believers. It once housed many beautiful mausoleums but today looks like barren land (figs. 28-30). It is said that the Prophet would often visit this cemetery to pray for forgiveness for those buried.²⁰⁶ Our own time has witnessed the destruction of the graves of the Prophet's mother Amina and the son of Ja'far al-Sadiq.

As we have seen in the archaeological record and through the work of Fred Donner, Finbarr Flood, and to an extent Leor Halevi, Islam was founded as a community of Believers - *mu'minin*, and not a doctrinal confession. Christians and Jews were among the early community of Believers and saw no distinction between their faith, their existing ritual practices, and the teachings professed by the Prophet. Given Islam's message of monotheism, we can understand why the Prophet emphasized humility in burial practices. In a context rich with paganism and in which idolatrous markers of burial may in fact have been the object of polytheistic veneration, having flat, simply marked graves was a way of protecting the nascent Muslim community from engaging in these practices. Yet, no clear doctrinal

²⁰⁶ Al-Baqi by Ali Bahramian in *Encyclopedia Islamica*.

instruction was attached to the matter which is illustrated in the ambiguous treatment of the Prophet's own burial for which he left no instructions.

I have in this thesis laid out a methodology that can be classified as an anthropology of art history, inspired by the methods of Oleg Grabar and the thoughts of Talal Asad. It could be briefly summarized as seeking to define a work of art or architecture not by its form alone but by the meaning that these forms carry for the user and the user's attitude towards the work. Hence the works of commemorative architecture that emerged during the renaissance of commemorative architecture between the 10th to 12th centuries CE at the time of the Fatimids must be understood in the context of those whom these works served and the meaning these users lent to the structures. Christopher Taylor's extensive research on the effects and practices of the *ziyara*, or tomb visitation, in Cairo illustrates that the purpose of the individual *zuwwar*'s journey was not to worship the saints and righteous buried in Cairo's cemeteries but to receive guidance, *barakah* (blessings), and to better him or herself by contemplating the positive virtues of the deceased. The ethical value of commemorative architecture also extends, of course, to contexts beyond Islam. Funerary architecture could easily be one of the most primitive and yet one of the most distinguishedly human art forms.

We have read, in this thesis, some explanations for why commemorative architecture did flourish in an Islamic context during the period in which it did. A more integrated view of these buildings that accepts their meaning and use as a genuine expression of piety and not as political or sectarian propaganda - for which the arguments in favor are weak - would also explain why the patronage of commemorative architecture extended far beyond the Shi'a Fatimids both in time and in geography. Given the diversity of the populace in Fatimid times which included Christians, Sunni Muslims, Jews, and only a minority of Shi'a Ismailis, adding to pre-existing forms of piety that took expression in visits to the tombs in Cairo's

cemeteries built upon a ritual *lingua franca*, to use Paula Sanders' terminology. It could be in some way due to the internationalism of the Fatimid era that embraced many other art forms and reintroduced them in an Islamic context that allowed commemorative architecture to flourish and become entrenched in Islamic civilizations.

While the uses and meaning of various examples of commemorative architecture may differ by context and by user, the connection these buildings have to death is clear. That we even award death its own architecture reveals a human need and ability to cognize times and truths beyond the immediate. Robert Harrison writes, "A place is where time, in its human mode, takes place...We dwell in space, to be sure, but we dwell first and foremost within the limits of our mortality. Those limits are not merely restrictive but are in fact *generative* of the boundaries - spatial and otherwise - of the worlds where history, in its temporal unfolding, takes place."²⁰⁷ Commemorative architecture imbues the everyday with a truth that is beyond the limits of our mortality while at the same time shaping this time - living time - and imbuing it with the richness and depth that defines the human experience, interpreted in religious and secular terms alike.

²⁰⁷ Harrison, *Dominion of the Dead*, 19.

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Figures



Figure 1. A calcite gravestone dated to approximately the 2nd century CE, likely from Qataban in Southern Arabian.

Source: Emel Esin



Figure 2. A limestone idol excavated in South Arabia. Undated.

Source: Emel Esin



Figure 3. Nabatean tombs in Nabatu (Petra) from approximately the 1st century CE.

Source: Emel Esin



Figure 4. A map of the Arabian peninsula showing the locations of Medina, Mecca, and Mada'in Salih.

Source: Ibn Battuta

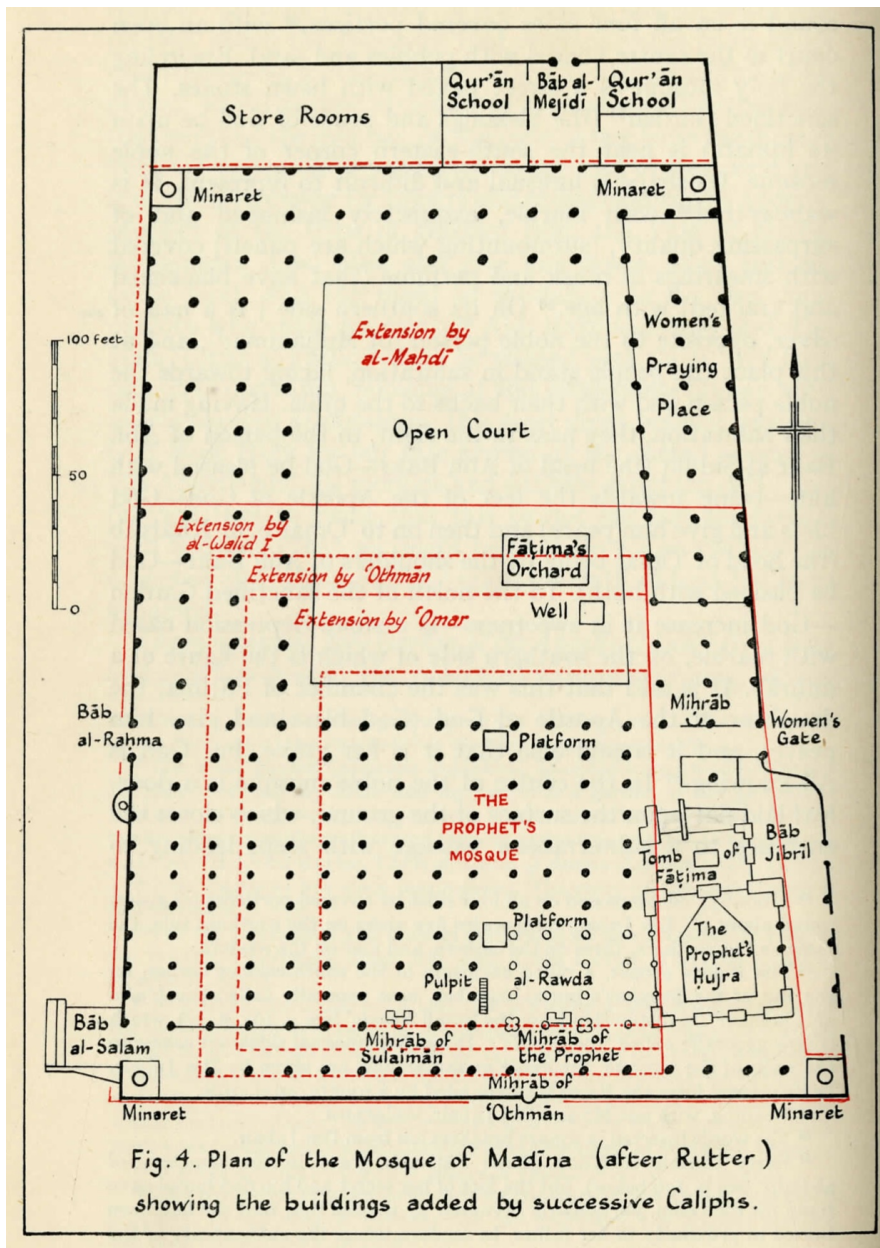


Figure 5. A plan of the Prophet's home, mosque, and burial chamber in Medina.

Source: Ibn Battuta



Figure 6. A view of Jannat al-Mulla cemetery in Mecca. The structures in the photograph have since been leveled.

Source: Ibn Sa'udi



Figure 7. An old photograph showing the tomb of Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet, in Jannat al-Mulla cemetery in Mecca. The tomb no longer stands.

Source: WikiCommons



Figure 8. The tomb of the third caliph 'Uthman, dated to the 12th century CE and reconstructed by the Ottomans during the 19th century CE.

Source: Ibn Sa'udi



Figure 9. A present-day view of the Sab'a Banat in Fustat.

Source: NP



Figure 10. A present-day view of the Sab'a Banat in Fustat as seen from the road.

Source: NP



Figure 11. A present-day view of the Sab'a Banat in Fustat as seen from the road.

Source: NP



Figure 12. The interior of one of the four standing mausoleums that form the Sab‘a Banat in Fustat.

Source: NP

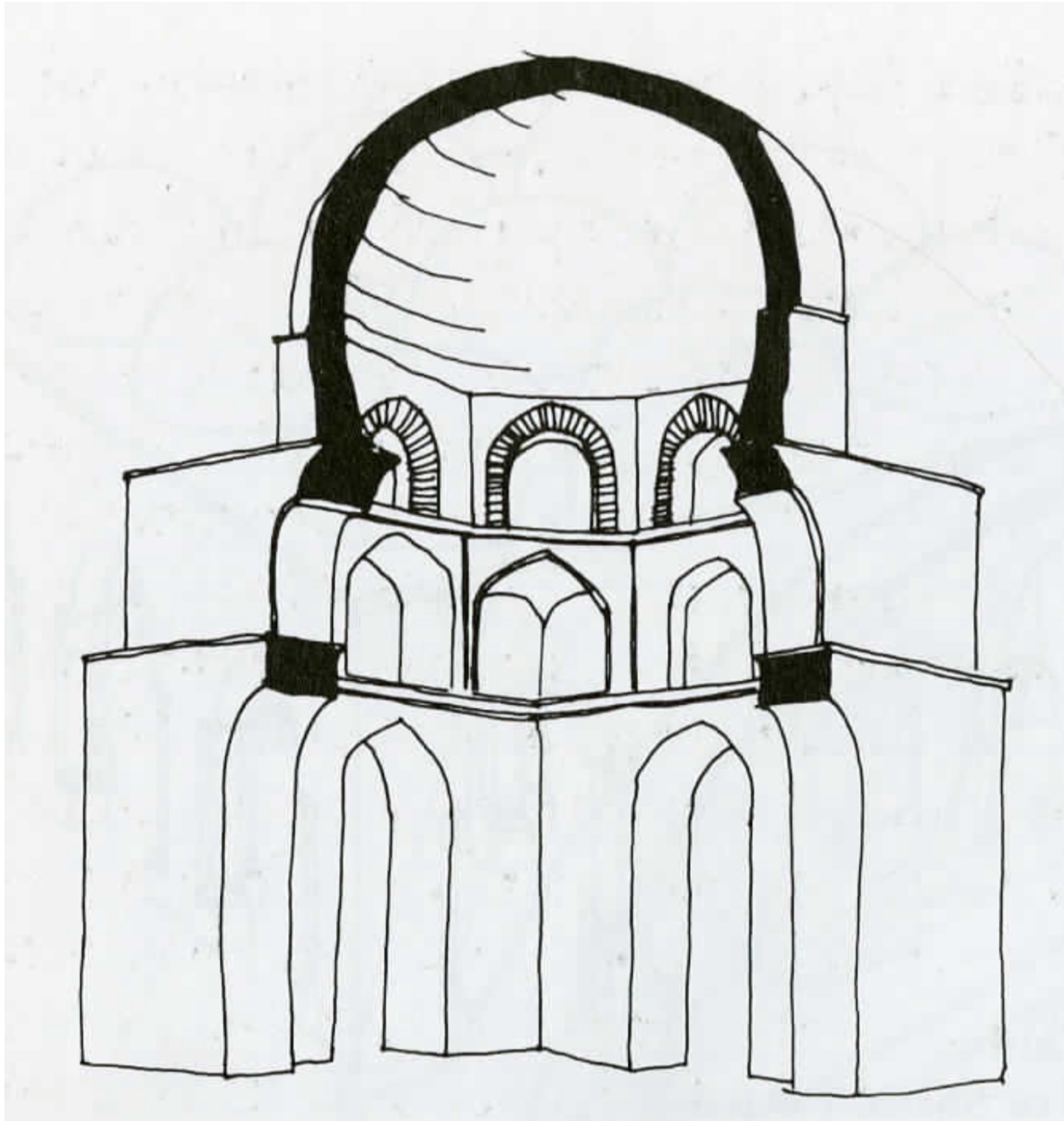


Figure 13. A perspectival section sketch of one of the Sab‘a Banat mausoleums.

Source: Robert Hillenbrand



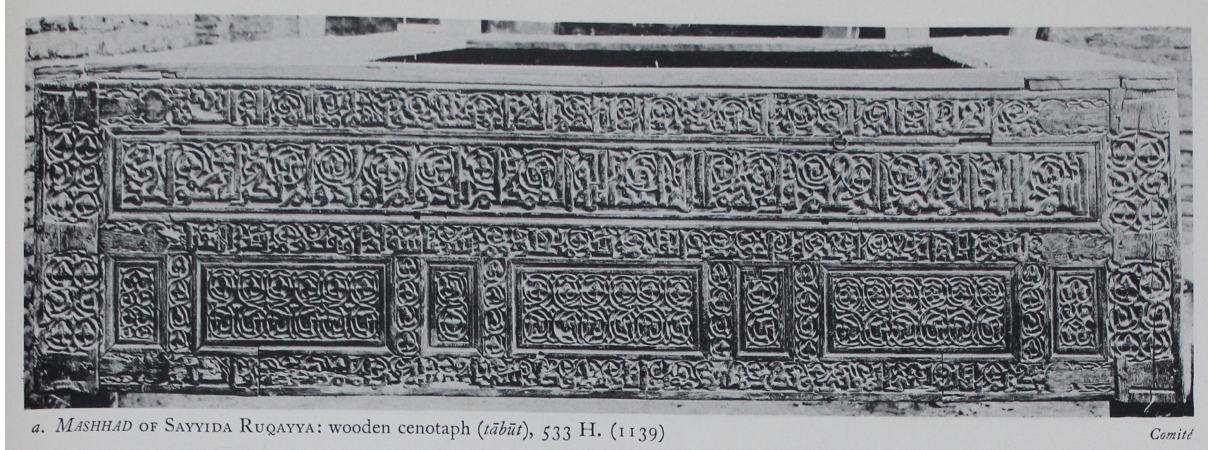
Figure 15. The Fatimid-era mausoleums in Aswan.

Source: Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar



Figure 16. The *mashhad* of Sayyida Ruqayya on Al-Ashraf street. Exterior.

Source: Unknown



a. MASHHAD OF SAYYIDA RUQAYYA: wooden cenotaph (*tābūt*), 533 H. (1139)

Comit

Figure 18. The original wooden cenotaph at the *mashhad* of Sayyida Ruqayya dated to 1139 CE, now housed in the Museum of Islamic Art.

Source: Sir Archibald Creswell



Figure 19. A view of the mausoleum of Shaykh Yunus in Cairo's Northern Cemetery.

Source: Sir Archibald Creswell

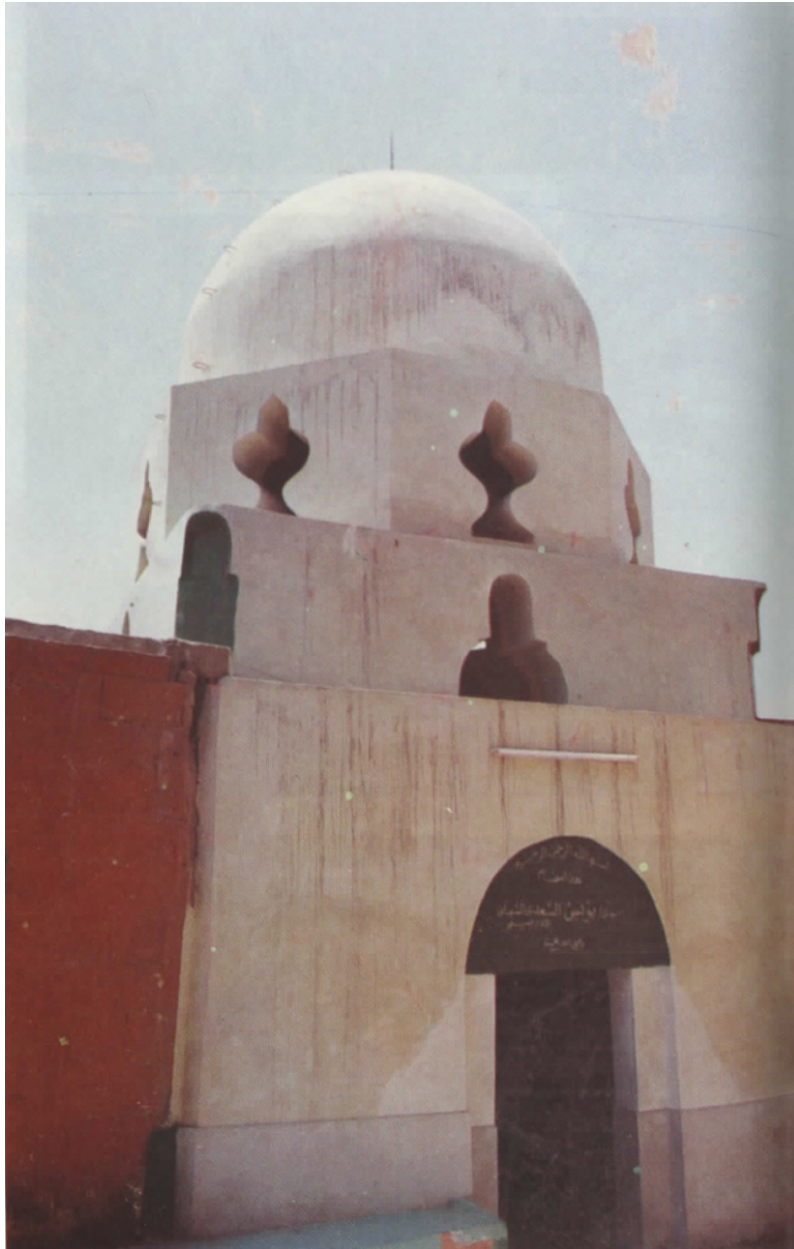


Figure 20. The exterior of the mausoleum of Shaykh Yunus in Cairo's Northern Cemetery.

Source: Abdellah Kamel Mousa Abdoh



Figure 21. The interior of the mausoleum of Shaykh Yunus in Cairo's Northern Cemetery.

Source: Abdellah Kamel Mousa Abdoh

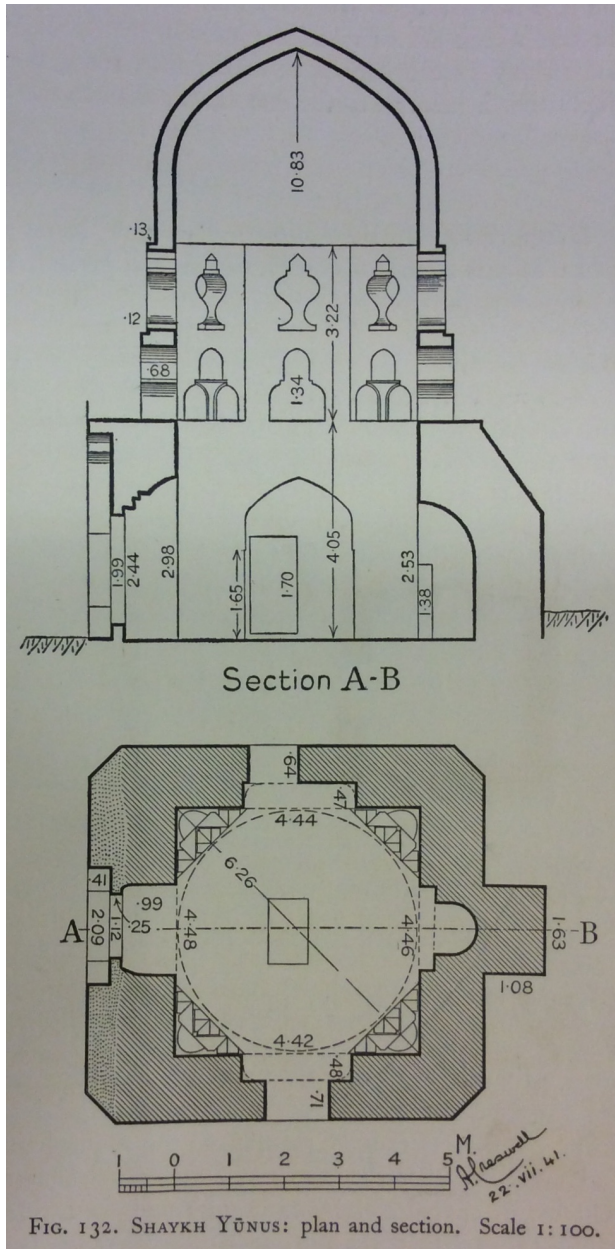


Figure 22. A plan and section of the mausoleum of Shaykh Yunus in Cairo's Northern Cemetery.

Source: Sir Archibald Creswell



Figure 23. A view of the rooftops of Medina showing the distinguished green dome that crowns the Prophet's burial chamber.

Source: Ibn Sa'udi



Figure 24. The Green Dome over the Prophet's burial chamber in Medina.

Source: Emel Esin



Figure 25. The interior of the Prophet's Mosque in Medina with a view of the Green Dome.

Source: Emel Esin



Figure 26. The brass gate leading to the Prophet's tomb in Medina.

Source: Ibn Sa'udi



Figure 27. A detailed view of the brass grill outside the Prophet's tomb in Medina.

Source: Emel Esin

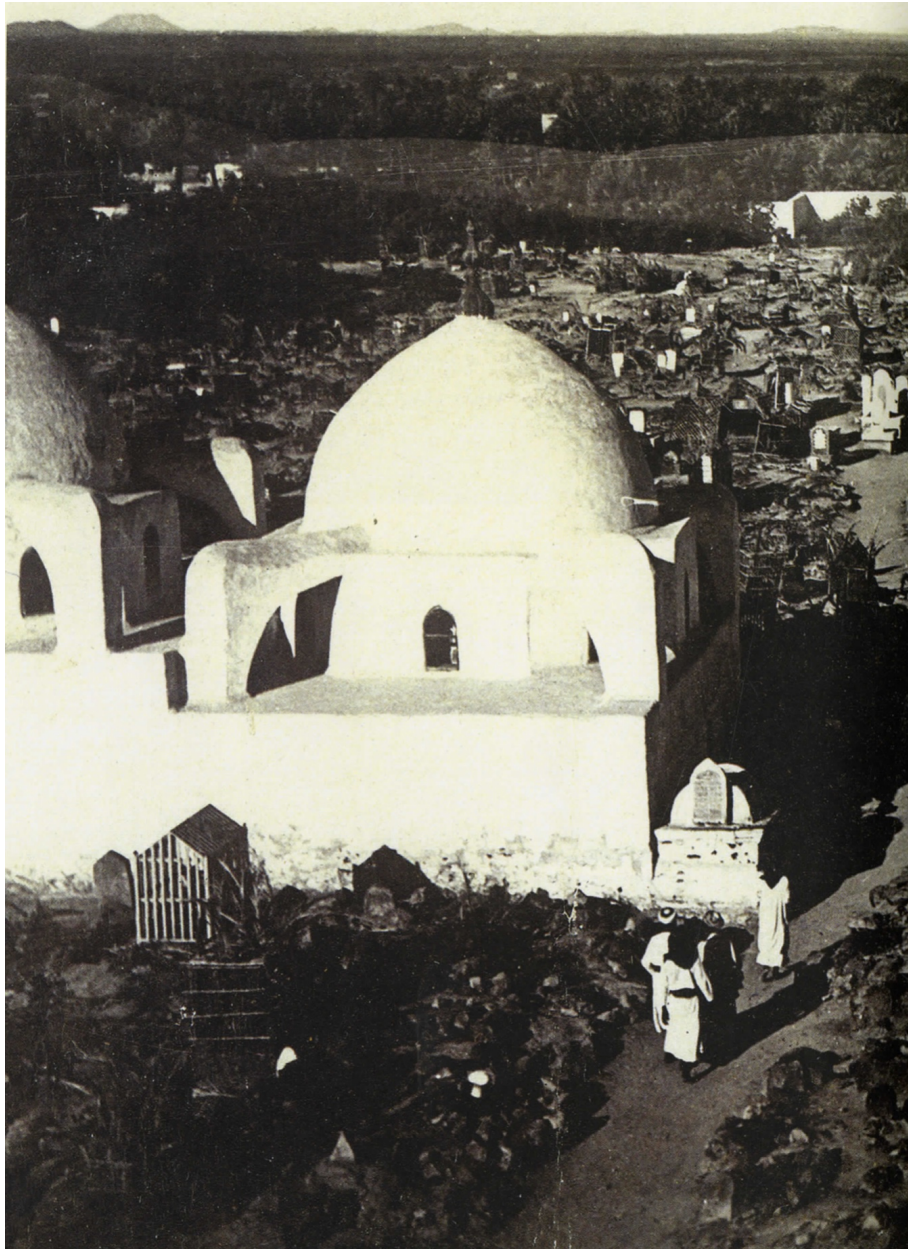


Figure 28. A photo of al-Baqi cemetery in Medina taken between 1904 and 1908 CE. The tombs in the photograph have since been leveled during demolitions lead by the House of Saud in 1925.

Source: Ibn Sa'udi



MAKKAH

The Blessed Grave Of Hazrat Khadija r.a.

4.520 visualizzazioni



Figure 29. A present-day view of Jannat al-Mulla cemetery in Mecca, created by one YouTube user's attempt to capture the cemetery following Saudi-led demolitions.

Source: YouTube



Janat-e-Muala (Hazrat Khadija Grave) (Mian Umar Sharif)

25.965 visualizzazioni

Figure 30. A present-day view of the grave of Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet after it has been leveled by Wahhabist forces. The site bears not a trace of the structure that once honored the site (see fig. 7).

Source: YouTube