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CAIRO PAPERS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

**ENVIRONMENTAL THREATS IN EGYPT:
PERCEPTIONS AND ACTIONS**

Edited By

SALWA SHARAWI GOMAA

**SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT:
DIRECTORY OF EGYPTIAN ENVIRONMENTAL
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS**

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CHAPTER SIX

CULTURAL HERITAGE AS ENVIRONMENT: AREA CONSERVATION IN CAIRO'S HISTORIC ZONE

JOHN RODENBECK

Area conservation--which treats the cultural heritage ecologically, rather than as a lesson in history or aesthetics--has become the world-wide norm, but has never been systematically deployed in Cairo's historic zone, where several alternative schemes have been used, all of them dysfunctional in environmental terms. This paper underlines international norms and dysfunctional alternatives. The latter with a few examples, urges that environmental concerns require an area approach to the Cairene cultural heritage, and suggests that this approach may best be implemented by adopting the strategy suggested by UNESCO experts thirteen years ago.

The earthquake of October 12, 1992, was immediately followed by wailing, gnashing of teeth, and many attempts to lock the doors of many barns from which all the horses had long since been stolen. Contrary to local legend, first of all, earthquakes are quite frequent in Egypt. In April of this year, for example--that is a mere six months after the October tremor--I was informed by Rushdy Said, Egypt's great geologist,¹ now living in the U.S., that there had been over 625 additional tremors within that six-month period alone, not just the handful of after shocks that were mentioned in the press. The city has in fact undergone thousands of earthquakes in its history, some of them major, and general measures should have been taken to cope with that fact decades ago.²

¹ For a partial list of publications, see Farouk El-Baz, *Geology of Egypt: An Annotated Bibliography* (Leiden: Briull, 1989) pp. 622-634. Of special importance in the present context is "Subsurface Geology of the Cairo Area," *Memoires de l'Institut de l'Egypte*, tome LX (Cairo: Institut de l'Egypte, 1975).

² The first record of an earthquake in Lower Egypt dates from 2200 B.C. See Sykora, D; Look, D; Croci, G; Koraesman E and Koraesman E, *Reconnaissance Report of Damage to Historic Monuments in Cairo, Egypt, Following the October 12, 1992 Dahshur Earthquake* Technical Report NCEER-93-0016, August 19, 1993 (Buffalo: New York: National Center for Earthquake Engineering Research, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1993) pp. 212-13; R.M. Kebeasy and M. Maamoun, "Seismicity and Earthquake Risk of the Proposed Site of Shoubra al-Khaimah Power Plant," *Bulletin of the International Institute of Seismology and Earthquake Energy*, XIX, 21-33; H. G. Lyons "Earthquakes in Egypt," *Survey Notes*, No. 10 (Cairo: Survey of Egypt, 1907).

Virtually all the destruction attributable to the October earthquake in the city's historic zone was at some time in the past not only predictable, moreover, but had in fact been specifically predicted.³ The most spectacular damage, for example, was in Shari^c Salibah. And Shari^c Salibah, as it happens, was identified at the First International Conference on the Preservation of Islamic Cairo in 1980--almost exactly thirteen years ago--as that area within the historic zone that was even then under most stress. The identification was made by Professor Ron Lewcock of Cambridge, the *doyen* of Islamic restoration and conservation, who was then acting for UNESCO as advisor to the Egyptian Antiquities Organization. At the evening session of 17 December, 1980, he reported that Shari^c Salibah was "lined from one end to the other with buildings that are actually dangerous."

What happened after that remark is most instructive. No work at all was subsequently carried out in Shari^c Salibah except at the complex ascribed to "Umm ^cAbbas" (1869), while the street itself and its extensions were allowed--incredibly--to become a main artery for heavy traffic. Medieval buildings already declared unsafe by an international expert were thus additionally pounded by the passage of buses and lorries day and night--I used to travel into the city that way myself--until the October earthquake finally put paid to the nonsense.

How did the nonsense come about?

First we must consider the fact that responsibility for streets like Shari^c Salibah is always divided among at least two separate agencies and often more: the Governorate is responsible for the fabric of the street itself and the associated infrastructure, including the electricity and water delivery and the sewerage, as well as the routing of traffic; the Egyptian Antiquities Organization is responsible for the upkeep of the older buildings; and private owners presumably remain responsible for those less than 100 years old. In mid-December of 1991, the Ministry of Awqaf promised to transfer its rights as legal owner of virtually all religious structures and many indexed secular buildings to the Egyptian Antiquities Organization "within 30 days," but the step has never taken place.⁴ The Ministry of Tourism now puts an occasional oar in, as do the Egyptian Environmental Action Agency and the Ministry of Development. The Ministry of Public Works has meanwhile created a Groundwater Research Institute, whose director announced at the end of April 1993 that it has prepared its own "complete plan for restoring

³ See, for example, the two-page article by Scott Mattoon, "Time Runs Out for Islamic Cairo," *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 26 march-1 April, 1992, pp. 10-11.

⁴ See *Ibid*, p. 11.

and overhauling antiquities," which may have come as something of a surprise to the Antiquities Organization.⁵

There is, in fine, no single agency with over-all authority for the restoration, upgrading, rehabilitation, conservation, governance, and general maintenance of the city's historic zone. The UNESCO-sponsored conference held in Cairo in 1980, made fourteen recommendations. The second of them was precisely the formation of such an agency, without which, it was foreseen, no real progress could be made.

The first recommendation, of course, was that the conservation strategy outlined by the UNESCO team be adopted by the agencies responsible for the historic zone. A month after its ratification, however, the whole list of recommendations was abandoned by the major agency in charge, the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, and even after Dr. Ahmad Kadry was appointed to head of the EAO eight months later, it was never reinstated. And though infinitely better than anything attempted before or since, Dr. Kadry's own program obviously contained no strategic element that would put him in conflict with other agencies. It did not envisage rehabilitation of the entire historic zone, for example, only the patching up and beautifying of parts of it. It did not even envisage dealing with groundwater.

It is groundwater, of course, by universal consensus, that has been the major cause of deterioration in the historic zone for the past three decades and more. This deterioration is not due in any direct way either to overpopulation, as certain supposed experts used to claim, or to the alleged low cultural level of the Cairenes who live there, as other supposed experts claimed. The population of most of the historic zone is in fact declining, as more and more people find living conditions more and more intolerable. Nor is the groundwater due to the Aswan High Dam, as still other supposed experts used to claim. Studies carried out as part of the Greater Cairo Wastewater project demonstrated, for example, that levels of groundwater in the historic zone are up to several meters higher than the Nile and are due entirely to a defective water-delivery and sewerage system.

This system is the same one, completed in 1914 and given then an estimated life-span of forty years, that has been replaced everywhere else in Cairo as part of the Greater Cairo Wastewater project. From this ten billion dollar rehabilitation scheme, sponsored by the American and British governments and paid for by American and British tax-payers, the historic

⁵ In January 1993, the World Bank sponsored a meeting that involved the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, the Egyptian Environmental Action Agency and a group of foreign experts who considered projects at three sites, one of them in the city's historic zone, viz., the World Bank's own long-standing plan for development of the northern Gamaliyyah. For the role assumed by the Ministry of Public Works, see, "Plan to combat ground water effects on antiquities," *The Egyptian Gazette*, April 30, 1993, p. 2.

zone was for some reason totally excluded. No one has actually explained why this decision was made, taken responsibility for it, or even revealed whether it was made in Washington, London or Cairo, but the result has been to condemn the city's heart to a lingering and dirty death.

If the UNESCO-sponsored program of attack had actually been implemented, it would now be more than halfway through its third five-year phase. By the end of 1985 all the monuments of Bayn al-Qasrayn, Shari^c Gamaliyyah, the Ghuriyyah, Bab Zuwayla and the Suq al-Khiyamiyyah, Shari^c Darb al-Ahmar, Shari^c Bab al-Wazir, and Shari^c Salibah would have been restored to the highest international standard, individually isolated from groundwater pending the installation of effective drainage. By the end of 1990, the surrounding neighborhoods would presumably have been upgraded and would have begun to be filled in with new structures, while monuments in other areas--the Citadel, certainly, but especially those areas linking the six original groupings--would have been restored to the same high standard. By December of 1993 we would have been well on the way to a complete rehabilitation of the historic zone. Instead of which the historic zone is very much worse off in every way than it was in 1979.

The 1980 Conference on the Preservation of Islamic Cairo underlined the authority of the Venice Charter and the Lahore Statement as embodying the guidelines that should be adhered to in any restoration work carried out in the world we now live in. An official Arabic translation of The Venice Charter was published in 1982 and there is probably a copy somewhere at the Egyptian Antiquities Organization. The Lahore Statement was the major result of the Lahore Symposium on Conservation and Restoration of the Islamic Architectural Heritage sponsored by UNESCO in 1980. It represents an updating of the Venice Charter and is aimed specifically at the special problems and needs of the Muslim World. I have made fifty copies of the English draft text, accompanied with maps of the city, available to this conference.

Even more than the Venice Charter, the Lahore Statement emphasizes the concept of conservation as focused upon sites or areas, rather than simply upon single monuments. It does not, in fact, even use the word *monument*, but refers only to "Sites." The attitude, the approach to the problem, the notion of things--the "philosophy"--that is implied by the Venice Charter and the Lahore Statement is universally taken as a basis and is thus presumed not only among professional restorers and conservationists these days, but among people whose interests are less specialized or are only incidentally related to restoration.

At the Ninth Aga Khan Awards Symposium, held in Cairo in November 1984, for example, the Second Workshop was devoted in the historic zone of Cairo, "its rehabilitation and incorporation into the modern metropolis." After 40 minutes of discussion, Oleg Grabar, the great art

historian, looking puzzled, called a momentary halt to proceedings. He turned to the assembled historians, architects, city-planners, and conservationists, professional and amateur. "It sounds to me," he said, "as if you were at least as interested in preserving streets as you are in monuments. Which is it, streets or monuments?" From the whole room, without a single demurrer, came the shouted answer "streets!" Most participants in this workshop were young Egyptians. What that highly correct answer showed was that outside the EAO the concept of area conservation is now quite widely understood as the only valid basis for action that is intended to go beyond mere cosmetics.

At this ninth Aga Khan Seminar Dr. Kadry's work as head of the EAO was rewarded with a public accolade, as having played "a major role in awakening an awareness of the cultural heritage among the Cairene population." Dr. Kadry's program was based upon a report submitted in 1981 by Director General Mahmoud Hadeedy, which estimated that only one out of every ten monuments in Cairo was in reasonable shape and that 90 per cent required immediate attention, being on the verge of collapse or in need of total restoration, if not merely "in bad condition." Among the monuments classified as on the verge of collapse, four were listed as typical examples: the minaret of Amir Husayn at Bab al-Khalq, the house of Zaynab Khatun behind al-Azhar, the mosque of Fakahani, and the mosque of Amir Qani-Bay Qara al-Rammah (1506, Index 254) on Shari^c al-Nasriyyah in ^cAbdin, five hundred meters east of the Sa^cad Zaghlul Metro station.

Dr. Kadry was fired by Faruq Hosni, the Minister of Culture in 1988, before his program could be completed, and has since died. The autonomy of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization was instantly reduced and the revenues to which it was entitled under Law 117 were taken over by the Ministry of Culture, which provided the Egyptian Antiquities Organization in its first year under the new regime with a budget for restoration that cut the last annual expenditure for restoration made under Dr. Kadry by 72 per cent. The restoration program he had created was thus effectually abolished.⁶

On 14 March 1990, however, two years after these events, a woman and a child were killed by the collapse of the minaret of the mosque of Amir Qni-Bay Qara al-Rammah. Reporting on the matter as a consultant to the

⁶ Having surrendered its revenues, the EAO also seems to have lost its initiative. At a conference in Tanta in early December 1993, Ibrahim al-Nawawi, a former Director-General of Museums in the Organization reported that of the LE100 million allocated to the EAO for repair of damage allegedly caused by the earthquake, only seven million have actually been spent, a million on studies, two million on belated attempts to drain portions of Shari^c Mui^czz li Din, and four million to rent scaffolding, most of it of purely theatrical value. See, "Archaeologist reveals fat dossier of long-standing farce," *The Egyptian Gazette*, December 8, 1993, p. 2.

Egyptian Antiquities Organization was Dr. Saleh Lam^cei Mostafa, Egypt's only internationally qualified architectural conservationist and head of the only firm in the Arab World that specializes in such work, winner of an Aga Khan Award during the fourth cycle for a major restoration in southern Lebanon. Dr. Saleh Lam^cei declared that the collapse had been directly due to grave negligence: no measures had been taken to counter damage done by groundwater, constantly replenished by a locally defective sewerage system, which had risen to within half a meter of street level. When American engineers and seismological experts brought in by ARCE were shown the same site in November 1992, incidentally, they were told that the minaret had fallen during the October earthquake, but they were not fooled.⁷

There have, of course, been many views of urban conservation and rehabilitation in the past, many of which are still very much operative in the present. Let us consider five of these alternative theories, mistaken versions of How It Should Be Done:

1) The scorched earth approach. The rule here is "Pull it all down, cart off the rubble, level the site, lay drains, dig new foundations, and build something big, expensive, and new." This approach is perfectly exemplified by the work of Baron Haussmann in Paris, the town-planner who destroyed medieval Paris, doing for the French capital between 1853 and 1870 what the Great Fire had done for London in 1666. Until the Second Empire, life in much of Paris was very little different from life in Cairo. One of the reasons for preserving medieval Cairo, of course, is precisely because it resembles what a medieval London or Paris must have been like, but of which we can no longer have any first-hand experience.

In 1968, in preparation for the observance during the following year one of the many millenaries of the Fatimid foundation of Al-Qahirah, the major committee controlling the celebration came within one vote of decreeing the total destruction of all the medieval buildings in the neighborhood of the Sayyidna Husayn mosque in order to build a huge California-style parking lot on the site. Included in the destruction would have been not only the entirety of Khan al-Khalili, but also the major monuments of Shari^c Mui^czz li-Din and Bayn al-Qasrayn. The parking lot would not have been intended especially for worshippers at the mosque--such a motive might make at least a modicum of sense--but for tourists, who would have presumably have

⁷ See James K. Wight, Roman D. Hryciw and Antoine E. Naaman, "Field Investigation of 1992," Report No. UMCEE 92-31, December 1992 (Ann Arbor: Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, College of Engineering, The University of Michigan, 1992) pp. 7-8, 22-24. The Michigan team correctly guessed that most of the damage they were shown at this mosque had antedated the earthquake.

come to see things that were in fact no longer there. The dissenting vote that made the difference, incidentally, was cast not by an architect or a historian, but by a senior academic sociologist with a very logical mind, the father of our novelist friend, Ahdaf Soueif.

A more recent example of similar official moves is the bulldozing by the Cairo Governorate of the stalls of *bouquinistes* at Azbakiyyah and Al-Azhar in February and March 1993. These traditional booksellers, like those along the seine in Paris, provided the cheap books that constitute the evidence of real culture beneath the ugliness of the city's poverty and dirt. Civilized people were sorry to see them go.

2) The fruit-cake or certified-artificial-monument approach. The tactic here is to tear down everything but a few isolated monuments, architectural chefs-d'oeuvres, large-scale museum pieces, to survive, encysted in the modern urban fabric and dolled-up for viewing, like dyed parasites in a microscopic slide. Such embalmed monuments were expected in the nineteenth century to serve an educational or aesthetic function; nowadays one would add a mumble or two about attracting tourism. Europe has plenty of them: Canterbury Cathedral, Carcassonne, the Sainte Chapelle, the Acropolis in Athens as it is now, with its plastic caryatids holding up the plastic entablature of a plastic Erechtheum.

Inspiration for this mode of attack come jointly from Haussmann and Viollet-le-Duc and was typified in nineteenth-century Cairo by ^CAli Mubarak, the Khedive Isma^Cil's great city-planner and minister-of-all-work. Mubarak had been a student in Paris, a member of the famous "Mission des Princess," at exactly the same time when the Renoir family was settling into its picturesque slum next to the Tuileries Palace. In 1867, more than 20 years later, he was sent back by the Khedive to see what Haussmann had meanwhile done to Paris; and he returned full of admiration and wonder, ready to do the same in Cairo.

His opposition to the work of the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe was quite obviously not due to nationalist political sentiment, as Donald Malcolm Reid implied in a strange article in *IJMES* last year, but arose out his awareness that the Comité would attempt to balk his ruthless modernizing.⁸ His famous *Khitat at-tawfiqqiyyah al-*

⁸ Donald Malcolm Reid, "Cultural Imperialism and Nationalism: The Struggle to Define and Control the Heritage of Arab Art in Egypt," *IJMES*, XXIV (1992) pp. 57-76. A good history of the Comité, this article goes astray when it attempts to link politics with genetics, in the tradition that descends from Gobineau to Edward Said. To suggest that K.A.C. Cresswell represented British imperialism at Fu'ad University and on the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe is as absurd as to suggest that Philip Hitti or Albert Hourani represented Arab oil interests at Princeton and Oxford.

jadidah li-Misr al-Qahirah was written with the help of several assistants between 1883 and 1888, during five years of retirement from government service. It includes a meticulous description of the old city he had proposed to replace with an entirely new one, while his huge novel *Alam ad-Din*, outlines the Positivist philosophy that provided his motivation. Begun within months after his return from seeing Haussmann's Paris and published in 1882, the same year as his brief brush with the Comité, his novel records Mubarak's recognition that a medieval French city is essentially no different from a medieval Egyptian one. It also records his admiration of Haussmann for having erased in Paris nearly all traces of the former and his own willingness in Cairo to carry out the same task on the latter.⁹

Lest [^]Ali Mubarak's attitude be mistakenly thought uncommon or backward, please observe that the same philosophy prevailed more than half a century after his death throughout Western Europe, especially in both Germanies, in the decades after World War II, when far more permanent damage was done by planers and real estate developers than had been done by Allied bombers.

3) The gasoline alley approach is another Haussmannian variation: leave the old buildings, but drive new wide thoroughfares straight through them, thus destroying the environment they had created. This approach was introduced into Cairo by Bonaparte, then used locally in a small way under Muhammad [^]Ali (who extended and widened Shari[^] Muski), more lavishly under Khedive Isma[^]il (who drove Shari[^] Muhammad [^]Ali through the Hanafiyyah, the Habbaniyyah, and the Darb al-Ahmar), under Fu'ad (whose planners not only created one of the worst disasters ever to befall Cairo's historic zone by pushing Shari[^] al-Azhar though the heart of Al-Qahirah itself, but also perpetrated an unforgivable crime in Alexandria by creating the Corniche, thus destroying countless antiquities and separating the city from the sea forever), and under Gamal [^]Abd an-Nasir (whose engineers destroyed a couple of world-class popular urban amenities by using Shari[^] Fu'ad--now called 26 July--to split Azbakiyyah in two and by installing another Corniche along the riverbank in Cairo: like Fu'ad's royalist planners, the republican engineers thus deprived the great majority of the populace--who still do not own cars--of another place where they might enjoy the simple pleasure of safe pedestrianism).

⁹ See B.F. Musallem, "The Modern Vision of [^]Ali Mubarak" in *The Islamic City: Selected papers from the colloquium held at the Middle East Center, Faculty of Oriental studies, Cambridge, United Kingdom, from 19 to 23 July 1976* (Paris: UNESCO, 1980) pp. 183-99.

A similar destruction was contemplated in the historic zone by the Governorate in 1980: to accommodate a proposed massive increase in bus traffic through the historic zone, Shari^c Ahmad Maher was supposed to be extended eastward through several monuments, including a piece of Saladin's wall, to join Shari^c Salah Salem. This project was halted only by a protest from Dr. Shehata Adam, head of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, who got wind of the plan at the last moment from a casual remark by someone who had read about it in a local newspaper. Dr. Adam nearly went into cardiac arrest.

The gasoline alley approach has been much favored as a mode of city planning everywhere in the Middle East. The Fifth (and last completed) Development Plan of the late Shah Muhammad Pahlevi of Iran, for example, for the years 1973-1978, designated Isfahan, Tabriz, Mashad, and Shiraz for industrialization, with construction of wide new roads through old quarters given top priority. Subsequently an entire issue of *Architectural Review* was devoted to shock and horror at the fate of Isfahan alone.¹⁰ Similar plans have been carried out in Syria and Saudi Arabia.

4) **The nouveau cordon sanitaire** designates an approach that is a reverse adaptation--influenced by Colonial Williamsburg and the genius of Walt Disney--of the city-planning attitudes and tactics that were characteristic of French North Africa, where the so-called *Madinah*, the walled "native city," was generally left to its own devices and a new town supplied with all modern facilities was built some distance away. Despite repulsive and misleading references in the literature to Cairo as divided into a "Western" and an "Eastern" city, a "modern" and an "Arab" city, or even a "European" and "Muslim" or "Moslem" city, Cairo has never been a *madinah* and there have never been such functional divisions.

A plan was nevertheless put forward in 1980 to lay down a cordon of highways around an area bounded by the northern Fatimid wall, Shari^c Salah Salim, maydan Sayyidah ^cAisha below the Citadel, Shari^c Muhammad cAli (Shari^c Qala^ca)--where it would now be thwarted--and Shari^c Port Said. This area would then be transformed into an Islamo-Disneyland. The present population would be evacuated and in their place natives in picturesque dress would be installed, working at so-called "traditional" industries, i.e. turning out portable curios and trinkets for foreign tourists, who would be expected to be trundled into the area in bus loads: decorative brassware, items of plastic-inlaid wood, carved bone, cheap leather work, applique in pharaonic designs, and *Mushrabiyyah*.

¹⁰ Volume CLIX, No. 951 (May 1976), edited by Sherban Cantacuzino and Kenneth Browne.

Such a plan has nothing to do with re-incorporation of the historic zone into the modern metropolis, promoting instead its further alienation from the rest of the city. At the session of the First International Conference on the Preservation of Islamic Cairo where the plan was put forward, moreover, the public price tag was announced as reading 20 million Egyptian pounds at which many people actually guffawed. It is quite usual in Egypt to tender an absurdly low bid for a large project in order to land the contract--after which, of course, the real negotiation begins.

5) **The purist approach**, finally, has had a revival among young professedly fundamentalist Egyptian architects, who have belatedly discovered the work of Hassan Bey Fathy--and found it decadent. This approach derives directly from Western attitudes, however, not Eastern ones and might most accurately be described as an Middle-Eastern architectural version of Midwestern American Political Correctness. It was wonderfully exemplified in Cairo as long ago as 1980 by a recognized Western expert, a convert to Islam who had done architectural conservation in a Moroccan city where the sheer meanness of the citizens, for which they are famous, has prevented the sort of changes in overt taste that normally take place everywhere else in the world. Guided through the Darb al-Ahmar by Dr. Husam ad-Din Isma'îl of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, this expert kept looking around with dismay and exclaiming, "But **that** building isn't Islamic!"

What he had expected, obviously, was an urban vista as uniform and introverted as the one he had known in Morocco. The variety and liveliness of Cairo bothered him. He was particularly upset by the Darb Al-Ahmar's nineteenth-century police station, with its charming garden, which is quite open to and visible from the street. And it became clear that if he were given a free hand, he would uproot all visible greenery, tear down every building that failed to fit into his canon of Islamic city, and erect new ones in a far more introverted, Moroccan, and thus supposedly "Islamic" style.

Purism is sometimes incurable. For treatable cases, however, there are a couple of antidotes. One is residence in one of the world's great metropolises, like Cairo, for a period long enough to enable one really to open one's eyes and look around. Another is reading and research in the true traditions of any place in question. Cairene Muslim architecture, for example, has been described by the best authority on its style as typically extroverted--which would mean, according to purist dogma, that even though it may have been built by Muslims within Muslim architectural traditions

for Muslims to use in a Muslim country, it is not really Muslim at all. And that proposition, of course, is an absurdity.¹¹

A disturbing example of purism in conservation in Cairo is the work of the Bohra Shi^ci sect from India. Forbidden to engage in new projects in Cairo during Dr. Kadry's incumbency at the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, they are now once again undertaking to rebuild every mosque believed to have been in use during the Fatimid era and to do so in what they believe to be a Fatimid style. Removing traditional elements that date from later than the middle of the twelfth century--some of them quite sizable, like the tomb of the lesser Qurqumas; which stood in front of the Al-Hakim mosque--they thus replace them with neo-Fatimid inventions, imitations, or designs taken from books. Though this practice and others they employ clearly violate the norms of both the Venice Charter and the Lahore Statement, they have been given a free hand by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization--or practically a free hand. When Dr. Shehata Adam, then head of the Egyptian Antiquities organization, was asked in 1980 why they had been given permission to carry out the rebuilding of the Al-Hakim mosque, he answered quite guilelessly: "But they gave us two million dollars!" Presumably similar sums are paid these days.

What will the future bring? None of the above, perhaps, and probably far worse. "Things are in the saddle," as Emerson said, "and ride mankind."

The German Archaeological Institute will undoubtedly continue its good work at Bayn al-Qasrayn, in some ways a model of its kind. For the past decade and a half, under Michael Meinecke, Phillip Speiser, and most recently Nairy Hempikian, it has been carrying out this significant area conservation project piecemeal, despite obstruction and even opposition--not from local residents, but from such powerful parties as a developer who has persuaded a court to suspend Law 117 of 1983 in his favor, permitting him to build over the remains of the Eastern Palace of the Fatimid Caliphs.

The Italian Foreign Ministry's Direzione Generale della Cooperazione allo Sviluppo will continue, I hope, with the Scuola Orientale dell'Universita di Roma "La Sapienza," to sponsor the wonderful conservation work of Professor Giuseppe Fanfoni, whose Centro Italo-Egiziano per il Restauro e l'Archeologia is headquartered in its Cantiere Scuola de Specializzazione at 31 Sharic as-Siyufiyah in the Hilmiyyah.

The remarkable complex at this site includes the remains of the *madrasah* of Sunqur Sa^cdi with the mausoleum of Hassan Sadaqa, dating from 1315, and several elements of a much later Mawlawiyyah or Mevlevi dervishry, one of which is a domed *sama-khana*, a dancing place that was in

¹¹ See, for example, Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Quelques traits de l'habitation traditionnelle dans la ville du Caire," *La ville arabe dans l'Islam* (Tunis: C.E.R.E.S.; Paris: C.N.R.S., 1982) pp. 442-459.

use down to at least 1923.¹² It embodies every conceivable problem in restoration and has been in Professor Fanfoni's careful hands since December 1975. In Cairo Professor Fanfoni's sponsorship is administered through the Sezione Archeologica dell' Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Zamalek at 3 Maydan Shakyh al-Marsafi, where the earliest official enthusiast for Professor Fanfoni's project, Dr. Carla Burri, has returned as head.

Fred Leemhuis is likewise back as head of the Netherlands Institute, but there is no sign of a revival of the Dutch interest in the Wakalah Bazar^ca that existed when he was previously in that position a dozen years ago. It appears to have expired, as did so much enthusiasm of other kinds. Why this particular *wakalah* should have survived the past ten years as well as it has is therefore, in fact, a bit of a puzzle. At the Goethe Institute seminar on the conservation and urban development of Cairo's historic center in 1978, Flemming Aalund described 15 other *wakalat*, most of which were still extant then only in a battered and piecemeal fashion;¹³ and there was no reason to expect the Wakalah Bazar^ca to fare any better, especially when a new owner announced that he would demolish the building. At the same seminar Fred Leemhuis declared that Dutch concern in the project was balked by uncertainty as to what would happen in the area where the Wakalah Bazar^ca is situated, the Gamaliyyah.

Knowledge of the projects--their content and the degree of certainty of their execution--that are to be undertaken by the USAID, the World Bank and the Cairo Municipality in the area will help clear away doubts on the side of the responsible Dutch authorities.¹⁴

¹² In one or two reports in English, the word *sama-khana* was sometimes rather loosely translated as "theater". An interim head of the EAO, who never visited the place in his life and had no idea what it was for, was thus led to declare in an interview that he would "reopen it for performances of Shakespeare."

¹³ Flemming Aalund, "The Wakalat Bazar^ca: The Rehabilitation of a Commercial Structure in the Old City," *Islamic Cairo: Architectural Conservation and Urban Development of the Historic Center*. Proceedings of a seminar organized by the Goethe Institute, Cairo (October 1-5, 1978) edited by Michael Meinecke (London: Art and Archaeology Research Papers/Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung, Kairo, June 1980) pp. 35-41. [N.B. This volume was originally scheduled to appear in *Art and Archaeology Research Papers*, volume XIV in December 1978 and is referred to as such by James Dickey (Yaqub Zaki) in "The Mawali Dervishry in Cairo," *Art and Archaeology Research Papers* XV (June 1979) 9. The volume did not actually appear, however, until more than a year after Dr. Dickey's reference to it as already published.]

¹⁴ Fred Leemhuis, "A Further Note on The Wakala Bazar^ca," *Islamic Cairo Architectural Conservation and Urban Development of the Historic Center*, p. 73.

In the end, of course, nothing whatever of any substantive nature happened in the Gamaliyyah thanks to either USAID or the World Bank or the Cairo Municipality.¹⁵

We thus have a certain sense of *deja vu* which deepens when we learn that the "northern Gamaliyyah" is once again an object of study by a team of foreign experts, this time French. In November 1993 a Franco-Egyptian team under Bernard Maury completed work near Al-Azhar on Bayt ^cAbd ar-Rahman al-Harawi (1731, Index 214), which stands next to Bayt Sitt Wasila at the head of Zuqaq al-^cAyni, between Darb al-Azhar and Harat al-Madrasah. M. Maury himself informed me that although the work itself had required only a few months, the project as whole had taken six years, thanks mainly to financial difficulties. sponsored by IFAO and the Center de Restauration et Traitement des Œuvres d'Art in Avignon, the work was completed with technical assistance from the National Electricity Authority of Italy (ENEL): and the extraordinarily beautiful book that commemorates the work with texts by Bernard Maury and Chafik Chamass, was produced in Rome.

A matter of considerable concern to the French team was the question of what uses, if any, the building would be put to after its restoration. The precedents visible in such residential structures Bayt Kiridiyyah (Index 321), Bayt as-Sihaymi (Index 339), Bayt Gamal ad-Din adh-Dhahabi (Index 72), the Musafir-khanah (Index 20) and even the German-restored Qasr Bashtak (Index 34) are by no means encouraging. The present [January 1994] head of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, Dr. Abdel Halim Nourreddine, is therefore to be applauded for having taken the decision to allow a group of seventeen architectural students from the University of British Columbia to put the building to practical use as a studio throughout their four-month sojourn in Cairo. Their inauguration of it as a work-space represents the first time since 1952 that any restored building in the historic zone other than a mosque has been reintegrated into the world of the living.

Notable in Cairo for its generous and civilized support of research, even after the mistakes of 1956, the French government has otherwise never hitherto supported any substantive conservation project. It has intensified and diversified the French cultural presence in Egypt steadily for more than a decade, however, and now appears to have added the Historic Zone to its areas of special interest. According to a report in the Egyptian press, it has allocated Egypt 50 million francs--30 million as a grant and 20 million in the form of a 40-year "soft" loan--to be used "for the face lifting of Al Gamalia district [sic] and restoring the Islamic antiquities located in that

¹⁵ UNESCO, however, sponsored an important study by a leading expert. See Michael Meinecke, "Rehabilitation of the al-Gamaliya Quarter in Cairo." Restricted technical report RP/1977-78/4,121,8 serial no. FMR/CC/CH/80/1180 (Paris: UNESCO, 1980).

district."¹⁶ The Institute d'Aménagement et Urbanisme de la Région d'Ile de France has meanwhile been collaborating for the past three years with the General Organization for Physical Planning in the Ministry of Development, New Communities, Housing and Public Utilities in putting together a plan for radical changes in what they call "North Gamaliya." I shall return to this plan later.

The name "Al-Gamaliyyah" has a nice ring, especially for historians of the city, and it is not surprising that it has been seized upon by developers for their own less altruistic purposes. Historically, it designates only the northeastern most quarter within the Fatimid enclosure of Al-Qahirah. This small quarter's most impressive building is the mosque erected in 1407 by an *ustudar* or *major-domo* of Sultan Farag ibn Barquq, Amir Gamal ad-Din Yusuf, from whom both the quarter and its main street subsequently took their name. Under Bonaparte, however, the French occupiers set about creating Parisian-style *arrondissements* and decreed that the same name be used to refer not only to Al-Gamaliyyah itself, but also to a larger administrative grouping around it, roughly equivalent to an eighth of the city.¹⁷ Subsequent governments retained these administrative divisions, which are now called *aqsam*, the plural form of *qism* (*arrondissement*, precinct). The *qism* designated as Al-Gamaliyyah bus contains not only Al-Gamaliyyah itself, but 16 other neighboring administrative sub-districts (*shiakhat*), six of them outside the walls of Al-Qahirah altogether. Playing fast and loose with both the city's earlier history and its topography, this political and administrative designation inherited from Bonaparte suggests connections rather than distinctions and is therefore useful in creating vagueness and muddle.¹⁸

¹⁶ *The Egyptian Gazette*, March 27, 1993, p. 2. The deadline, however, for the Egyptian acceptance of this French largesse was January 31, 1994; and since authorities in Paris had still been unable by January 20 to secure the signature of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture to an agreement that would actually allow the money to be expended, the offer may well have lapsed. An announcement in the *Gazette* on January 25 1994 (p. 8) is ambiguous. "In a new protocol recently signed between the two countries, France is prepared to give Egypt \$40 million non-refundable grant [sic]."

¹⁷ See Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Cairo: 1001 Years of the City Victorious* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) p. 84.

¹⁸ A similar debasement has resulted from the Egyptian government's adoption, likewise under foreign influence of "Al-Qahirah" as the official name of Cairo, a city that Egyptians themselves have hitherto always referred to correctly as *Misr*. Since this historically genuine name in *Misr al-Qadimah* and *Misr al-Gadidah*, which get translated as "Old Cairo" and "Heliopolis", the absurdity is complete. See Wlodek Kubiak, *Al-Fustat: Its Foundation and Early Urban Development* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1978) p. 10.

The Gamaliyyah proper was the site of one of the two projects that the School of Architecture of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts agreed to undertake in 1974: a structural survey of Bayt as-Sihaymi, carried out under terms of a specific cultural agreement which expired before serious restoration could begin. The defects it showed were therefore precisely those that remained to be exposed again by the earthquake of October 1992.¹⁹ The other Danish project was the restoration of the *madrasah* of Amir Gawhar Qunqubay at Al-Azhar, which was completed in 1982. Although Danish experts are as familiar as anyone with the problems of medieval Cairo, there have been no further Danish contributions in the field.

Not one single restoration project undertaken in the historic zone since 1881 has ever been completed thanks to either British or American participation as such.²⁰ British-administered charity is represented by the World of Islam Festival Trust, however, which has been ready for fifteen years to finance rehabilitation of the Qalaun complex in Bayn al-Qasrayn and has been thwarted by a variety of factors. British commercial interests are currently represented by one energetic firm, the Conservation Practice, with offices in London and West Sussex, which was commissioned by UNESCO several months ago on behalf of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization to carry out a survey in the historic zone. In January 1993 it filed a report with the Egyptian Antiquities Organization that includes several general prescriptions and preliminary estimates for the execution of nine specific model projects. Among these projects is the repair of the Qalaun complex, deeply endangered by the effects of groundwater, where the Osman Ahmed Osman construction firm, hired by the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, is deploying some very dubious modes of attack. According to the estimates of The Conservation Practice, adequate repair alone will cost close to two million Egyptian pounds. Another British firm interested in doing business in Cairo's historic zone is the Grant Leisure Group.

What American input may amount to waits to be seen. A major hinderance to American involvement in the past has certainly been the specific long-standing prohibition in USAID rubrics against engaging in any project that might be construed as involving the least possibility of being tainted by a tinge of culture, lest one might have to answer for it to

¹⁹ A contract for restoration of this building was signed between EAO and Dr. Asaad Nadim in January 1994, more than a decade after completion of the Danish structural survey. Dr. Nadim estimates that the work will require three years.

²⁰ The assertion that Professor Creswell, who would have preferred to be a German, could have been acting either consciously or unconsciously as an agent of British imperialism is as preposterous now as it was in 1956. See footnote 8 above.

politicos, who tend to be professionally Philistine.²¹ A lack of alternatives has finally brought an end to this prohibition in Egypt's particular case; and as I write these words USAID is settling an agreement with the ARCE to spend some 15 million dollars of US taxpayers' money on projects of an as yet unspecified kind, connected somehow with propping up Egyptian monuments. But 15 million dollars is really so pitifully small a sum that it hardly amounts even to a minimal gesture. In the autumn of 1991, for example, Egypt itself is reported to have spent close to 900 million Egyptian pounds--between 200 and 300 million dollars--of someone's money to put on the week-long spectacle of the African Games. One would have thought that the Egyptian Government would regard the country's medieval and Islamic heritage as having somewhat more value than a week's entertainment, but all indications are that that is not the case.

The Polish mission, finally, remains engaged in its long-term archaeological research and restoration projects at the complexes of Amir Qurqumas al-Kabir and Sultan Inal, the latter having been finally vacated by the Egyptian army. It has also been assigned several tasks connected with other monuments in the Northern Cemetery, which would suggest that the Egyptian Antiquities Organization at least intends to maintain that portion of the historic zone as it is. Elsewhere, however, neither the future of the past nor the lives of the dead are going to be at all the same. Plans were unveiled three years ago, for example, to remove the Bab an-Nasr cemetery, a historic graveyard immediately in front of the two northern gates of the eleventh-century enclosure of Al-Qahirah, from which the city takes its present name.

This graveyard provided not only the setting for the last half of Naguib Mahfuz 1960 novel *The Thief and the Dogs*, one of his masterpieces, but also a last resting place for the great general who built the two gates themselves, Badr al-Gamali, al-Amir al-Guyushi (d. AD 1094), as well as for the historians Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) and Maqrizi (1364-1442), and for the courageous Anglo-Swiss explorer-ethnographer John Lewis Burckhardt (1784-1817), among thousands of other less celebrated folk. Ibn Khaldun

²¹ My guess is that this prohibition was one reason why the historic zone was deliberately excluded from the joint British-American Wastewater project, which is lowering the ground water everywhere else in the city. Certainly, no one at any time suggested that draining the historic zone might be harmful to the buildings in it. This idea, based on experience in England during the drought of 1976, when the ground water around many buildings dried out for the first time in centuries and receded from foundations, is a red herring irrelevant to Cairo's situation: all buildings in the historic zone require repair--including extraction of salts and reconstruction of the fabric of their walls--upward from their very foundation footings, which are often many meters below ground-level, in any case, whether or not the area is even properly drained.

and Maqrizi were asphalted over years ago when the governorate widened Shari^c Galal; and only Husam ad-Din Isma^cil of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization knows where they are. The Ottoman-style cenotaph put up in 1871 over Burckhardt's grave, however, which used to be such a landmark that it was indicated on maps, was rescued after the bicentenary of his birth by Phillip Speiser of the Swiss Institute, who built a new brick shelter over it. And the tomb of Al-Guyushi, a true savior of the city, the kind of man whose memory elsewhere would be celebrated, remains one of the most interesting, least visited, and least spoiled in Cairo.

Destruction of the Bab an-Nasr Cemetery is the first phase of the french-sponsored "Northern Gamalia Project" being promoted by the General Organization for Physical Planning within the Ministry of Development, New Communities, Housing and Public Utilities.²² Once it is gone and development in its site has begun, ambitions for the rest of the historic zone may change radically. Land values have already begun rocketing, as property-owners in the historic zone and the judges who hand down decisions on their behalf are both well aware. Last April an article by me was published in the *Financial Times' Special Number on Egypt* in which I conclude with a consideration of the Bab an-Nasr Cemetery and the remark that tourists who want to see what remains of the medieval quarters of Cairo had better hurry.

The fact is, we'd all better hurry. Speaking as an observer, I do not expect, quite frankly, that twenty years from now there will be a historic zone left in Cairo. Where it once was there will certainly be a few old buildings, as there are in nearly any ordinary European city. But they will be far outnumbered by the new ones, laid out along new streets that are wide and straight, if somewhat coarse and mean in their construction, and specifically engineered to be motorcar-friendly. Civilization, as seems its wont these days, will have taken another lurch downward. So will Cairo's urban environment. And in this respect it will be no different from the present world's classical wetlands, rain forests, or zone layer, which are also falling victim to greed, stupidity, the inadequacy of political instruments, and--above all--lack of will to make things change for the benefit of anyone other than one's own immediate self. Of the world that will ensue twenty or

²² The proper name of the district to which the cemetery belongs is *Al-Biriqdar*, "The Standard-Bearer." Its history connects it closely with the Husayniyyah. See Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "A Circassian Mamluk Suburb North of Cairo," *Art and Archaeology Research Papers*, XIV, "The City in the Islamic World and South Asia" (December 1978), 17-23; Andre Raymond and Gaston Wiet, "Appendice I.2, Husainiyya," *Les Marches du Caire: tradition annoté du texte de Maqrizi, Textes Arabes* and *Études Islamiques*, tome XIV (Cairo: IFAO, 1979) pp. 222-23.

thirty years hence, I have no strong wish--like most people I know who are my age--even to be an observer. It can carry on without me.