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10. THE MAWLAWIYYA AND THE MADRASA OF SUNQUR AS-SADI WITH THE MAUSOLEUM OF HASAN SADAQA*

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The complex of the Theatre and Monastery of the Mawlawis (Whirling Dervishes) is situated in as-Suyufiyya street not far from the Mosque of Ibn Tulun in the historic quarter al-Khalifa of Cairo (Fig. 1).¹ It is under restoration by the Archaeological Section of the Italian Institute of Culture, to be used as a cultural centre for the inhabitants of the quarter.

The central part of the architectural complex with the *madrasa*, covering an area of 25 x 30 m., consists of three rooms: a mausoleum, an *ivan* and the dervish theatre (Figs. 2, 3).² The first to be entered from an uncovered passage following the street portal is the Mausoleum of Hasan Sadaqa (A), dating from 1315/715.³ The mausoleum has a square plan; it includes four wooden cenotaphs and is characterised by a large window on the street and by a dome on a circular tambour pierced by windows with stained glass. On the north-eastern side of the mausoleum stands the two storeyed minaret with a square shaft surmounted by an octagonal part with a *muqarnas* decoration and crowned by a ribbed dome.

From the western corner of the tomb chamber a door leads to another room (B), which has a large window looking onto the street. The full length of the opposite side is a large cusped opening, while the whole room is covered by a wooden ceiling with decorations. By its shape and peculiar position in relation to the whole, this room has been identified as one of the longitudinal *iwans* of Sunqur Sa'di's *madrasa*, which originally followed the plan type with four axial *iwans*. The mediaeval historian al-Maqrizi⁴ reports that this *madrasa* was one of the most honoured in Egypt, and that many scholars taught there.

The third part — originally perhaps the interior courtyard of the former *madrasa* — is now occupied by the theatre of the Mawlawi Dervishes erected on a 3 m. high base (C): the wooden theatre occupying a square area of 15 x 15 m. has a round central part for performances, covered with a wooden dome 10.65 m. in diameter (Fig. 3). Around it are two concentric floors opening onto the central area with balustrades. The first floor and the roof lean upon two rows of 12 slender wooden columns. The arches of the upper floor columns carry the circular base of the dome. The sandstone walls of the room are partially panelled. The dome, constructed with typical wooden strips nailed on ribs, is entirely covered with plaster and painted with landscapes and decorations.⁵ These paintings substantially altered the previous form of the dome, which was originally pierced by eight

windows. Where the painted plaster has fallen off it is still possible to recognise several rectangular openings, referring to earlier phases in the dome construction. The adjacent convent (B) was formerly reached by two doors which are now blocked.

Interest in the restoration of this architectural complex stems from the importance of the theatre — the only surviving monument of this function in Cairo — and the long period during which it has been used. The most ancient parts are dated 1315/715, but they subsequently underwent repairs and alterations; a calligraphic panel still *in situ* in the theatre is even dated 1922-23/1341.⁶ Although restorations by the Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe date back to the beginning of 1900, all previous work was limited to the Mausoleum. Now the poor condition of the theatre's dome, being unstable and damaged all round above the base, requires urgent restoration.

After the general survey and study effected on the initiative of the Italian Institute of Culture by Professor Guiseppe Fanfoni during December 1975 and January 1976, it was decided to first examine the structure in order to fix the sequence of steps required to restore the theatre. Scaffolding was necessary to reach the apex of the dome from inside and from the outside to be able to undertake the necessary repairs. During the first working season in 1977-1978, cooperation with the Egyptian Antiquities Organization permitted work to proceed onto arranging restoration and the preparation of urgent operations on the dome. Thus some irreparable damage to the dome's stability was avoided.

Scaffolding was built to enable the repair of the wooden structure's main points and to support the inner shell of the dome so that restoration of the painted surface of the dome could begin. The scaffolding was built in conformity with local methods, using wooden beams tied with ropes. During the erection metal clips were avoided, as the percussive vibrations set off by their use might have damaged the painted plaster. When examining the structural conditions of the first floor and the roof, it was possible to locate the main points of weakness and also to temporarily stabilise the structure to ensure stability during the stages of restoration. After this work inside the dome it was possible to start restoration on the outside, where the dome was most seriously damaged (Fig. 4): for this it was strengthened by several steel wire ropes and connecting rods 1.5 m. from the base to relieve the pressure. Then the dome's outer face was covered with



Fig. 1. Eastern view.

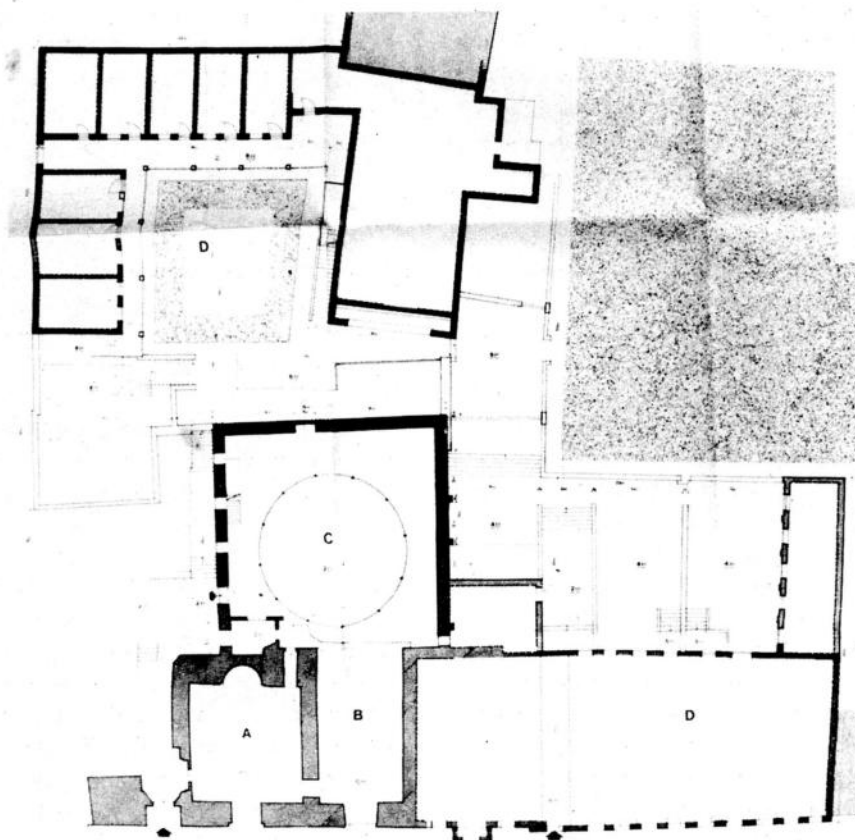


Fig. 2. Ground plan.

a plastic band 3 m. high, to avoid humidity penetration and to prevent the collapse of the dome.

The apex of the dome (A on Fig. 5) is filled by a circular oil painting 5 m. in diameter with calligraphy in gold on a blue ground, dating from 1857/1274. The lower part to the base of the dome shows several landscapes painted in tempera alternating with stylised floral ornaments (section C) continued as a sky with flying birds (section B).⁷ The strip of 41.5 cm. below contains an inscription frieze interrupted by squares of floral ornaments painted in oil. On the spandrels between the 12 arches of the balcony below are floral designs with central medallions (section E). Every medallion contains the name of a Dervish, except in one case (no. 12) which is possibly that of the Iranian painter: 1. Sen El Abdin, 2. Oh Hasan (invocation), 3. Oh Hasan, 4. Ali, 5. Mo'ammed Ma'di, 6. Hasan El Askari, 7. Ali Et Taki, 8. Mo'ammed Taki, 9. Ali Adler, 10. Musa Kasam, 11. Jafar Sad'ek, 12. Mo'ammed Baker.

These paintings have been thoroughly examined. Although the surface of section A is rather damaged, it is still in a state of good conservation and thus restoration here does not pose special problems. As a first measure therefore this part was chemically strengthened. The condition of sections B-C-E is worse: there the paintings are reduced to little, dry and friable particles curled and lifting from their plaster ground. Temperature and humidity variations have caused this damage, due to the holes and cracks in the outer plaster layer of the dome allowing the air to infiltrate. Structural movements have in the same way affected section D in many points, particularly where the dome drum is. Consequently the paintings of section D were oxidised and covered by dust and dirt fallen during the rain.

The precarious state of sections B-C-E required urgent measures which could not be carried out for lack of time — these had to be postponed until November (1978). Section C and the most damaged parts of sections B and E were chosen for the first operation, when the flaky surface was dampened with a 5% paraloid solution. Then the flakes were reattached to the support in a preliminary fixing. During the next stage it is planned to thoroughly clean and restore the whole surface of about 200 sq. m. A series of cleaning tests has already suggested suitable solvents for these future operations. In section D these tests revealed brightly coloured paintings. Similar cleaning and strengthening tests have been carried out with substances of several compounds, in anticipation of a thorough and systematic treatment of the masonry of sandstone.

The data gathered so far will enable a detailed plan of operation for the work of next season from November 1978 to January 1979. Then it will be necessary to remove the external shell of the dome, as its heavy load is currently endangering its precarious stability. By that time the repair of the damaged wooden parts will be possible. The roof will also be repaired and finally the protective mantle of the dome will be reset. Before this



Fig. 3. Interior of Mawlawiyya.

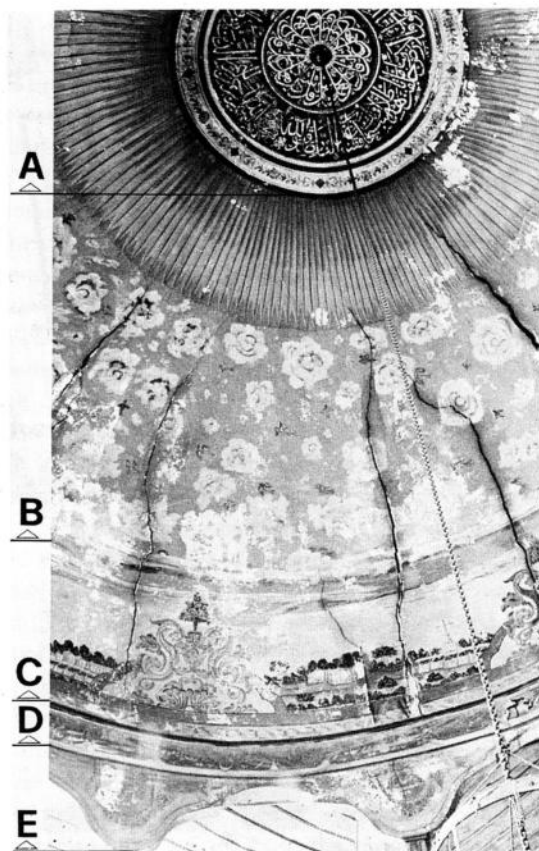


Fig. 5. Mawlawiyya: paintings in the dome.



Fig. 4. Mawlawiyya: dome before restoration.



Fig. 6. Mawlawiyya: detail of painting in dome.

the stability of the external wall will have to be supported.

EDITORIAL NOTES

- * A short description of this restoration project by the same authors appeared in *AARP* XIV, 1978, pp. 75-76: "Notes on the restoration of the small Theatre of the Dancing Dervishes at Share Helmei in Cairo". On the basis of this report the typological significance of the building has recently been pointed out by James Dickie (Yaqub Zaki): "The Mawlawi Dervishery in Cairo", *AARP* XV, 1979, pp. 9-15, with 6 figs.
- 1. On this traditional quarter see Edmond Pauty, *La mosquée d'Ibn Touloun et ses alentours*, Cairo, [1936], esp. pp. 15-16, figs. 6-7.
- 2. This building was studied in detail by K. A. C. Creswell, *The Muslim architecture of Egypt* II, Oxford, 1959, pp. 267-269, figs. 147-148, pls. 101/c-d, 102/a-e, 114/a, 122/a-b, 126/c; cf. also Max van Berchem, *CIA Égypte* I/4, 1904, pp. 733-736, nos. 529-530; K. A. C. Creswell, "A brief chronology of the Muhammadan monuments of Egypt to A.D. 1517", *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale du Caire* XVI, 1919, p. 92, pl. XVIc; Achille Patricolo in *Comité* XXXII, 1915-1919 (1922), pp. 80-82, pls. LXXX-LXXXIII; *RCEA* nos. 5354-5355, 5443. Strangely enough until now the Mawlawiyya has not been accorded any scientific description.
- 3. Although the cenotaph of Hasan Sadaqa in the mausoleum is dated 1315/715 (*RCEA* no. 5354) the interior stucco frieze of the same mausoleum contains the date 1321-22/721 (*RCEA* no. 5443). The latter probably belongs to a second phase of decoration, as al-Maqrizi (*al-khitat wa l-athar fi Misr wa l-Qahira* II, Cairo,

1853-54, p. 397) confirms the completion of the complex in 1315-16/715.

- 4. See the source quoted in note 3.
- 5. For similar Mawlawiyyas in Turkey as well as for the tradition of painting calligraphy of the Mawlawis, see Şehabettin Uzluk, *Mevlevilikte resim-resimde mevleviler*, Ankara (Türkiye İş Bankası kültür yayınları I/5), 1957.
- 6. Six other panels from the Mawlawiyya — all dated 1907-08/1325 and some signed by Salah ad-Darwish al-Mawlawi, Yusuf Darwish or Yusuf Dada — are now in the workshop of the restoration department of the Antiquities Organization at the Bait as-Sinnari, where they were previously treated.
- 7. These landscapes are closely related to paintings in Turkey; see for instance Rüçhan Arık, *Batılâşma dönemi Anadolu tasvir sanatı*, Ankara (Türkiye İş Bankası kültür yayınları 168, sanat dizisi 24), 1976; Günsel Renda, *Batılâşma döneminde Türk resim sanatı, 1700-1850*, Ankara (Hacettepe Üniversitesi yayınları XVII), 1977.

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