

4 Monumental Calligraphy in Fatimid Egypt

Epigraphy in Stone, Stucco, and Wood

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Fatimid epigraphy in Egypt is justly celebrated for the magnificent, often floriated,¹ Kufic inscriptions that appear on many of its monuments. The outlines of the stylistic development of the script have been documented,² yet controversy still rages around several aspects of their interpretation. How novel was the Fatimid use of inscriptions on the exterior of buildings?³ Was their use of floriation an attempt to make their script deliberately ambiguous, or indeed, nearly indecipherable?⁴ Was their later retention of Kufic, at the time when cursive had begun to supplant it in other parts of the Islamic realm, of possible ideological significance?⁵

Yet floriated Kufic itself was not a Fatimid invention. A full century before the Fatimids arrived in Cairo, Mubarak al-Makki carved a tombstone (dated Dhu'l-Hijja 243/March 858), now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, that is one of the earliest mature examples.⁶ Shortly before the Fatimid invasion of Egypt (20 Shawwal 347/4 January 959), a woman named Khadija al-Tara'ifi was interred in the Qarafa al-Sughra (now beside the so-called Mausoleum of the Abbasid Caliphs); the inscription surrounding her tomb is an epigraphic masterpiece in a lightly floriated Kufic

that also, in addition to the floriation of the uprights, includes an *'ayn* derived from a Pharaonic lotus.⁷ These examples on tombstones have been dismissed as being out of the mainstream,⁸ but that is not the case regarding a panel in the Saliba District with an inscription in floriated Kufic erected by the Ikhshidid wazir Ibn al-Furat in 355/966 to commemorate the foundation of wells.⁹ Nevertheless, the inscriptions on tombstones are worth celebrating, particularly in the case of an example from the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo, one side of a grave surround from the early Fatimid period. It is distinguished by, unusually, the employment of foliation for the endings of letters below the baseline, and for the playful way in which the craftsman has varied the symmetry of the *lam-alifs*, two of them in *al-islam* at the beginning of the second line:

بن سهل توفي طفلاً على فطرة
الإسلام وكلمة التقوى وملة

[...] bin Sahl. He died a child with the innate disposition of Islam and the words of devotion [to God] and of the community of the [...]

Panel from a Mausoleum, Egypt,
late 10th–early 11th centuries,
marble, carved, H 25 cm,
L 78 cm, Museum of Islamic Art,
Cairo, Inv. No. 1241.



The first major Fatimid inscriptions in Egypt, on the gates built by Jawhar al-Siqilli (969–972), have been lost. But since al-Maqrizi mentions that some lines of a Kufic inscription were visible on the first Bab al-Futuh, then the first gates must have been built of brick, or more likely stone, for the inscription to have been carved.¹⁰ Given that the Bab al-Futuh had Kufic on it, it is highly likely that it and at least the other major gates had similar inscriptions, probably foundational like those on the replacement gates of Badr al-Jamali.

Floriation was a way of enhancing the aesthetic appeal of Fatimid inscriptions, but it was by no means the only one. More often the letters were left completely plain, and the background instead provided with vegetal or floriated scrollwork. Indeed, the first surviving examples in Egypt, those in al-Azhar Mosque (completed 972), show several styles.¹¹ On the mihrab, the large outer inscription has consistent floriation and occasional knotting, but the smaller inscription surrounding the inner arch is only lightly floriated.¹² There are extensive remains of other stucco inscriptions on the arches of the nave and around the windows on the northeast and *qibla* walls; for the most part they use floriation sparingly.¹³ The only remaining Fatimid

inscriptions at al-Azhar are all in stucco, but it is probable that it had a projecting entrance portal topped by a minaret.¹⁴ Since both the portal and minarets in the second major Fatimid mosque in Cairo, that of al-Hakim, have inscriptions, they may well also have been present at al-Azhar.¹⁵

The stucco and stone inscriptions at the Mosque of al-Hakim (completed in 1013) are similar in their more consistent use of floriation, but there is a major innovation in the stone inscriptions. While the stucco examples just fill the empty space between the letters more prolifically with stems and leaves, the large stone inscriptions on the minarets employ a grooved double stem from which the floriation springs. This double stem is carried under or across the uprights of neighbouring letters, adding a new sense of motion and fluidity.¹⁶

The entrance portal of the Mosque of al-Hakim is not in its original state. It has the remains of a jumbled Qur'anic inscription on one side,¹⁷ but it is possible that a fragmentary inscription now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo formerly appeared on its main entrance. The six blocks, one of which definitely comes from the mosque, were part of a foundation inscription in the



Stucco mihrab (972) of al-Azhar Mosque.

name of al-Hakim.¹⁸ Being of stone, they are likely to have been on the entrance facade. They would have complemented the other foundation inscriptions on the northern and southern minarets. These latter, and their accompanying bands of Qur'anic inscriptions, have been argued to be the first significant examples of officially sponsored writing intended for public consumption.¹⁹ However, this ignores the examples mentioned above of the Ikshidid foundation inscription,²⁰ the possibility of a similar foundation inscription on the now lost entrance of al-Azhar Mosque, as well as the likelihood mentioned above that the main gates in the enceinte of Jawhar al-Siqilli also had prominent inscriptions.²¹

The content and design of the surviving inscriptions on the minarets deserve detailed examination. The foundation inscriptions were large friezes on the northern and western minarets. That on the northern minaret



Detail of foundation inscription (early 11th century) of the north minaret of the Mosque of al-Hakim.

is 68 centimetres high and located about 10 metres above ground.²² It is canted slightly outward, and it has been suggested that this was to make it more legible,²³ but it is not clear that designers were ever that viewer-friendly.²⁴ The outward inclination of 2.5 degrees can hardly have made much difference. In the prayer hall, where the upper part of the stucco inscriptions at the base of the transition zones are curved forward, it may have resulted in extra visibility of the uprights, but since the distinctive feature of Kufic is that the letters are written along a constant horizontal baseline, then the legibility of the inscription would hardly have been enhanced. The lowest inscriptions visible on the northern minaret were in two circular roundels containing the word *Allah*. Farther up on the northern minaret were two other circular roundels on the west and north²⁵ faces. Only that on the north side is legible; it reads Qur'an 5:58²⁶ arranged anticlockwise on its perimeter, and the phrase, "from the darkness into the light," which occurs in several Qur'anic verses,²⁷ in two horizontal lines within the circle.

As Irene Bierman remarked, the design of the roundel resembles that of the radically new coinage, itself possibly reflecting Ismaili doctrine, that had been introduced by al-Hakim's father, al-'Aziz, and continued by al-Hakim.²⁸ Whereas the outer Qur'anic inscription mentions pan-Islamic concerns of prayer appropriate for a mosque, the inner displays a concern with light that is an abiding subject of Ismaili *ta'wil* ("esoteric interpretation"), as evidenced, for instance, by the epithets related to light for their major mosques: al-Azhar ("The Resplendent"), al-Anwar ("The Illuminated," the original name for the Mosque of al-Hakim), and al-Aqmar ("The Moonlit").

Special attention seems to have been given to the foundation inscriptions, in which the name of al-Hakim



Roundel (early 11th century) of the north minaret of the Mosque of al-Hakim.

appears in the centre of the face parallel to the facade, i.e., where it was most visible (see page 144, bottom).²⁹ It is indeed likely that these were designed to be read and to advertise the founder's munificence, a factor that may well have hastened the decision, extraordinary as it was, to hide the minarets behind bastions in Safar 401/September-October 1010.³⁰ There is only one rational explanation for this move. The minarets, being more



Detail of the mihrab of the *mashhad* of al-Juyushi (1085).

than one, and built in tiers of different shapes, were specifically designed to remind viewers of those of the Hijaz. When al-Hakim lost control of this territory following an uprising, he decided to cover up, literally and figuratively, this association.³¹

The wazir Badr al-Jamali was instrumental in restoring order in the troubled middle period of the reign of al-Mustansir (1036–1094) and was rewarded with greatly

increased power for the wazirate. The earliest surviving epigraphic example of his patronage, a panel with plain incised Kufic, is on the Mosque of Ibn Tulun (470/1077). There is greater variety in his *mashhad* (known as that of al-Juyushi after his title *amir al-juyush*, “Chief of the Armies”) on the Muqattam Hills (487/1085). Its foundation inscription is on a relatively modest panel of five lines above the door. At first sight it seems to be heavily floriated, but in most cases the vegetal scrolls emerge from the frame, not from the letters. More surprisingly perhaps, in the much larger and more impressive inscriptions that decorate the mihrab and zone of transition, this tendency is taken to a greater extreme. On the mihrab, the vegetal scroll is much more independent of the letters. On the zone of transition, the Kufic is more stately, with many letters elongated horizontally. The foliation (floriation is rare) is kept to a minimum, with the letters for the first time set off against a geometric background of rosettes formed of six lozenges.

The stucco here is best compared with the mihrab erected by Badr al-Jamali’s son, al-Afdal Shahinshah, in the name of al-Mustansir in the Mosque of Ibn Tulun (datable to 487/1094). This also displays a variety of inscriptions that employ different decorative strategies. The smallest, around the arch, is almost entirely plain. The next largest, the *shahada* on the panel above the arch, has some very slight foliation, the letters being raised above another geometric design employing lozenges arranged in a hexagonal pattern.

The major foundation inscription, which runs around the outer frame, offers the biggest surprises. The letters are again almost entirely plain, with some mild foliation, but they are set against a foliate scroll the stem of which appears to be almost continuous. It is made more conspicuous by weaving under and on top of up to three consecutive stems, as in the *lams* and



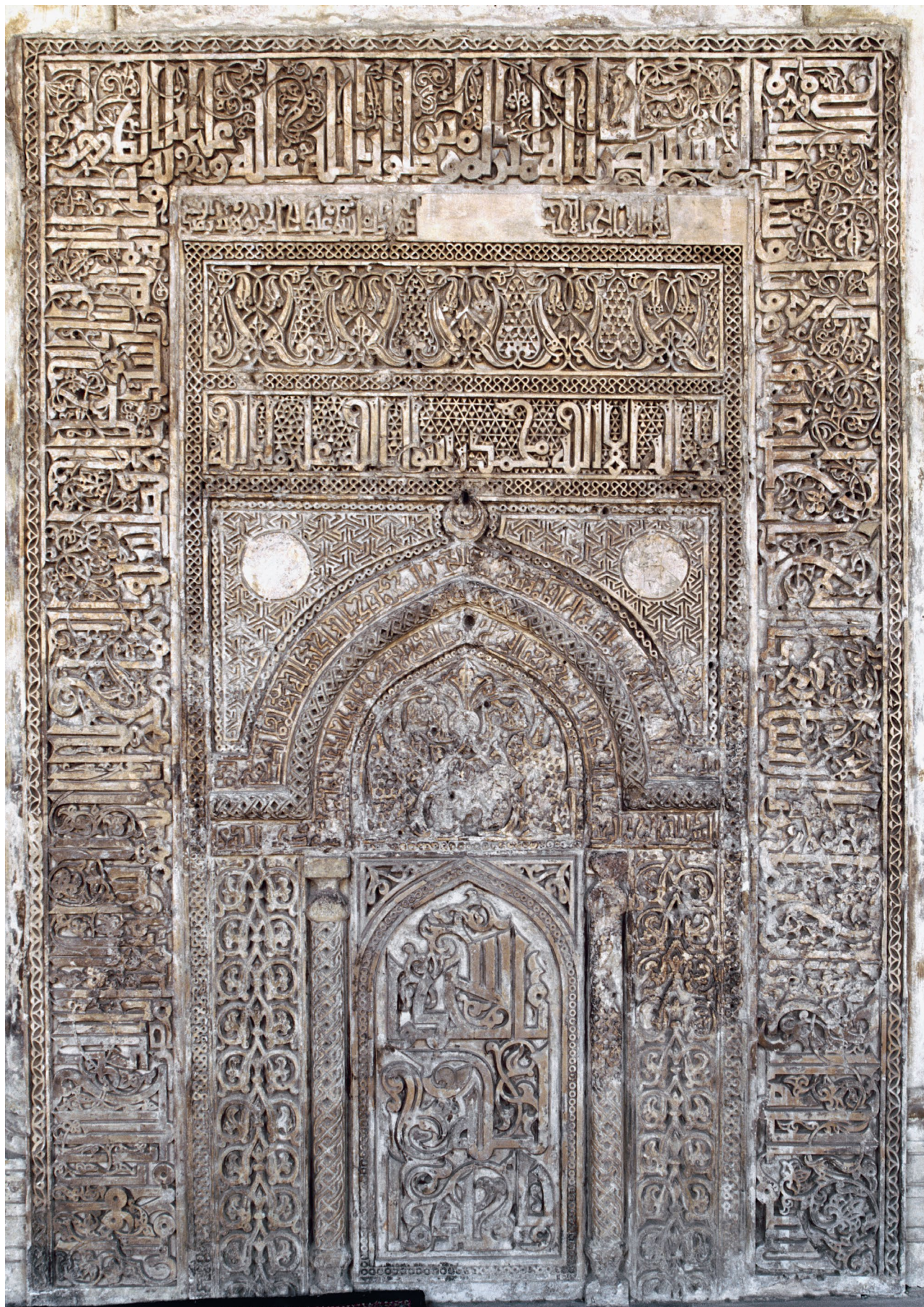
Detail of the inscription below the zone of transition of the *mashhad* of al-Juyushi.

following the *alif* of (*al-Mustansir bi*)-*llah a(mir)* ... The name of the patron here is carefully placed at the top right of the horizontal frame where the eye would fall first. More surprising is the layout of the inscription. It starts in stately fashion and then becomes more crowded, with parts of words increasingly written above the baseline, such as the *minin* of *al-mu'minin* after the name of the caliph. At the end of this line the words '*ala aba'ih* *al-tahirin*' appear on as many as three horizontal registers, against all the usual rules of Kufic calligraphy.

Returning to the al-Juyushi *mashhad*, the epigraphic roundel on the ceiling presents us with another novelty. At its centre is an epigraphic six-sided star, comprised of *Muhammad* arranged in a triangle, laced with *wa 'Ali* in the other triangle. This is the earliest Egyptian example of sacred names woven into the format of an epigraphic star. The earliest is found in Samanid metalwork.³² Many other varieties are known from later dynasties such as the Saljuqs, Ilkhanids, and Timurids, but the Fatimid examples in the series are among the



Medallion at the apex of the dome of the *mashhad* of al-Juyushi.



Fatimid mihrab (1094)
of the Mosque of
Ibn Tulun.



Main mihrab at the
shrine of Sayyida
Ruqayya (1333).



Detail of the foundation inscription of Bab al-Futuh (1087).



Detail of the foundation inscription of Bab al-Nasr (1087).

earliest. Other Fatimid instances include a five-pointed star of *Muhammad*, with *wa 'Ali* in the centre, on the left facade of al-Aqmar; and similar versions but with a six-pointed star of *Muhammad* in the main mihrab of Sayyida Ruqayya³³ and in that of the Mausoleum of Hasawati.³⁴

Badr al-Jamali's rebuilding of the gates and walls of Cairo provided a great opportunity to advertise his and his patron's accomplishments. Although only a fragment is left on Bab Zuwayla, the complete text is preserved on the Bab al-Futuh, Bab al-Nasr, and Bab al-Tawfiq gates. Their differences are surprising. The most elegant is that on the gate of Bab al-Futuh. The gate itself was left plain and the inscription placed on the curtain wall to its left, continuing around the neighbouring salient.³⁵ The fact that it is the only Fatimid stone inscription in Cairo that is round instead of right-angled in section is a measure of the extra care taken with it, as was its material, marble slabs, held (superfluously) in place by bronze nails that were probably gilded. Its use of floriation is restrained but carefully placed to add emphasis to important words in the inscription.³⁶

The first right-angled turn in the inscription is interesting for the way in which the word *al-mu'izziyya* is spread on two slabs; the designer or carver, realizing there was not enough room at the end of the first slab for the whole word, had to elongate the horizontal connection between the *mim* and the following *'ayn*, employing a technique (*mashq*) known to contemporary calligraphers on paper.³⁷

On Bab al-Nasr, the inscription starts and ends on the face of the flanking towers and thus has four right-angled turns. On two of the turns spacing is provided to separate words. On one of the others, the *ya'* at the end of *al-Mustansiri* is around the corner from the rest of the word. On the first turn, however, the

designer decided to advertise his expertise by placing the *alif* of *bi-ma*³⁸ exactly on the corner, with half on one angle and half on the other.

The script here is much more sober than that of Bab al-Futuh,³⁹ but the name of the nominal patron, al-Mustansir, is placed almost over the central arch. However, the titles of Badr al-Jamali in the inscriptions on all of the gates take up much more space than those of al-Mustansir, in a nod to the real holder of power. At Bab al-Nasr, the Shi'i *shahada* is placed within the tympanum below in equally sedate Kufic, but while the first three lines are within a carefully sculpted frame,⁴⁰ the fourth⁴¹ is carved on the voussoirs of the relieving arch below. Although it starts in line with the other three above, it is longer than they are, evidence of it being a hastily executed afterthought.

The third gate, Bab al-Tawfiq, is much smaller than the others and unlike them was not used in Fatimid ceremonial. Much less care was therefore taken over the design and execution, with the completely plain letters being incised rather than carved in relief.⁴²

On al-Aqmar Mosque (519/1125–1126), we have the most comprehensive scheme of inscriptions on a building facade to date. The largest runs all the way along the facade, just below the top. Another, slightly smaller, is just above mid-height. Surprisingly, they are virtually identical, consisting of foundation inscriptions in the name of the Fatimid caliph al-Musta'li and his wazir, al-Ma'mun. Some variety is provided by the style, the upper being floriated and the lower plain with a foliate scroll behind. Here, too, care was taken with the placing of the name of the caliph: on the top line, it was at the beginning of the panel on the top right of the projecting portal;⁴³ on the lower band, it is exactly in the middle, immediately above the entrance doorway. Directly above the caliph's name is the epigraphic roundel



Detail of the entrance
facade of al-Aqmar
Mosque (1125).



Detail from the Cenotaph of Sayyidna al-Husayn (ca. 1160–1170), wood, H 136 cm, L 186.5 cm, W 132.5 cm, Museum of Islamic Art, Cairo, Inv. No. 15025.

mentioned above. Another innovative feature of the inscriptions in the roundel, both the circular and that in the middle, is that the background is fully cut away to form a grille; at night with illumination within the mosque the inscriptions would be seen in silhouette.

The use of different levels in the Kufic on the mihrab of al-Afdal in the Mosque of Ibn Tulun mentioned above heralded the next major change in Cairo's epigraphy: the introduction of cursive. The earliest monumental datable example of this is on a cupboard

that was formerly in the Mosque of al-Salih Tala'ī' (550/1155–1156) and is now in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo; it displays panels inscribed with good wishes in both cursive and Kufic.⁴⁴ But there is another Fatimid example that uses cursive more extensively that is almost certainly contemporaneous, namely, the cenotaph from the Mosque of al-Husayn, also now in the Cairo Museum. It was formerly considered to be Ayyubid work on account of the presence of cursive, but Caroline Williams has convincingly demonstrated

that a Fatimid date is much more likely.⁴⁵ It is also notable for the variety of Kufic styles employed. Surprisingly, one of the smallest, that on the topmost frieze, is the only one to have floriation. The largest is also the finest, being round in section and in greater relief than the others. It ingeniously elaborates the end of letters, adding a notch to the middle of the stem of many,⁴⁶ and placing all on a vegetal scroll. Despite the extra care taken with it, however, the carver still had to cram the last word, *amnu*, in a separate line at the end.

One may wonder why the endings of some inscriptions do not seem to have been well planned. What was the division of labour between calligrapher and craftsman? In his detailed study of the carved stone ornament from the Mosque of al-Hakim, Terry Allen compares the floriation on the inscriptions with the non-epigraphic vegetal ornamentation and raises the important point of the respective responsibilities of the stonemason and the calligrapher.⁴⁷ One would expect, as he concludes, that they collaborated. But the instances where words in an inscription are crammed in smaller size in an extra line above the main text at the end are many. This occurs, for instance, in the date at the end of the foundation inscription on the northern minaret at al-Hakim⁴⁸ and at the end of the foundation inscription of Bab al-Futuh.⁴⁹ In long inscriptions like these (that of Bab al-Futuh reaches 59 metres), it may be understandable that the spacing needed to be fudged at the end, but even in epigraphic roundels the problem is common.

In the roundel mentioned above on the north minaret of al-Hakim, the last word of Qur'an 5:58, *raki'una*, is in smaller letters above the penultimate word on a separate line at the end.⁵⁰ Even when the inscription in the roundel was a mere eleven words, as in Qur'an 33:33 above the entrance to al-Aqmar Mosque,⁵¹ the last

word of the verse (*tahiran*) had to be squeezed in. In the medallion at the apex of the dome of the *mashhad* of al-Juyushi, *min ba'duhu* is squeezed above the previous words from Qur'an 35:41. In the Mausoleum of Yahya al-Shabih, three earlier graves had wooden panels added to them at the time when the new mausoleum was built (1154–1160), each with part of Qur'an 2:255, the Throne Verse. But each ends at a slightly different point, and on two of the three, some letters were accidentally omitted.⁵² On the final half of the fourth side of the band below the zone of transition at the Mausoleum of Sayyida 'Atika, the carver realized that he was running out of space and in three places added smaller letters in the space above the main text.⁵³

Finally, on the dome of al-Hafiz at al-Azhar Mosque (1130–1143), not only did the calligrapher run out of space but he committed many spelling mistakes, even substituting one word for another. As Bahia Shehab has pointed out, they are mnemonic mistakes of a literate craftsman, implying that he was working from memory rather than a drawing.⁵⁴ Even when the text had to be written out beforehand, as in the majestic chancery prose of the Fatimid gates, it was evidently not written out exactly to scale — otherwise the mason at Bab al-Futuh would not have had to split up his last word on two lines.

It has been argued that the rejection of cursive by the Fatimids was an ideological reaction to its promotion as a sign of Sunnism by the Zangids,⁵⁵ but there are many examples to the contrary. These include the examples from the Mosque of al-Salih Tala'i' and the cenotaph of al-Husayn mentioned above, as well as Fatimid caliphal decrees⁵⁶ and textiles.⁵⁷ In the opposite direction, more evidence for the lack of ideological underpinnings of the change from Kufic to cursive is seen in a recently discovered inscription of Salah



End of the foundation inscription of Bab al-Futuh.



Detail of the inscription below the zone of transition of the Mausoleum of Sayyida 'Atika (ca. 1125).

al-Din relating to construction of the eastern wall in Cairo, the earliest known Ayyubid inscription in Egypt (573/1177–1178).⁵⁸ It is in a Kufic unchanged from late Fatimid examples.

The Fatimids enhanced their calligraphy in various ways. From the beginning, this was partly dependent on the size of the letters, the smallest frequently having very little embellishment, the largest, the most amount of floriation. But the foliate ornamentation also greatly varied, from true flower-like growth from the letters, to much more often, plain letters with vegetal scrollwork on the ground, or even, in stucco, standing against a geometric ground.⁵⁹ Great freedom seems to have been employed by the craftsmen who executed these inscriptions, in the embellishment as in the spacing. This often resulted in awkward compromises at the end of panels in spelling mistakes and even in word substitutions.

Novel forms of inscription include not just the epigraphic roundel (in the form of a grille at al-Aqmar) but also the epigraphic star with sacred names.

On the exterior of buildings, a foundation inscription was usually prominently displayed, a sure sign that they were meant to be read by anyone literate who was passing. Like other stone decoration in Cairo, the inscriptions would originally have been painted, which would have greatly enhanced their legibility.⁶⁰ Even with their current lack of colour, they remain one of Egypt's greatest cultural legacies, however greater their impact might have been in their original condition.

NOTES

1. The common usage of the term precludes its replacement, although one should note its inappropriateness: “The term foliated Kūfic is poorly chosen: while flowers appear later, in these inscriptions, anyway, what grows from letters and stems is leaves, rarely or never flowers,” Terry Allen, *The Carved Stone Ornament of the Mosque of al-Hakim*, accessed 17 March 2017 at www.sonic.net/~tallen/palmtree/csomh/chapter.nine.csomh.htm.
2. The most comprehensive survey is Faraj Husayn al-Husayni, *al-Nuqush al-kitabiyya al-fatimiyya ‘ala al-‘ima’ir fi Masr* (Alexandria, 2007).
3. This is a key component of Irene A. Bierman, *Writing Signs: The Fatimid Public Text* (Berkeley, CA, 1998). For opposing views, see Jonathan M. Bloom, “Walled Cities in Islamic North Africa and Egypt with Particular Reference to the Fatimids (909–1171).” In James Tracy, ed., *City Walls in Early Modern History* (New York, 2000), 241, n. 70, and Sheila S. Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions* (Edinburgh, 1998), 57–58.
4. Yasser Tabbaa, *The Transformation of Islamic Art During the Sunni Revival* (Seattle and London, 2001), 56–57, 70–71; idem, review of Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*; Bierman, *Writing Signs*; Eva Baer, “Islamic Ornament,” *Ars Orientalis* 29 (1999): 182.
5. Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Topkapı Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture* (Santa Monica, CA, 1995), 107, 125, n. 39; Tabbaa, *Transformation*, 70–71; Blair, *Islamic Inscriptions*, 57–58; idem, “Floriated Kufic and the Fatimids.” In Marianne Barrucand, ed., *L’Égypte fatimide: son art et son histoire* (Paris, 1999), 108–109.
6. Adolf Grohmann, “The Origin and Early Development of Floriated Kufic,” *Ars Orientalis* 2 (1957): 208 and fig. 21; Blair, “Floriated Kufic,” 108; Bernard O’Kane, ed., *The Treasures of Islamic Art in the Museums of Cairo* (Cairo, 2006), fig. 36.
7. *Bulletin du Comité de Conservations des Monuments de l’Art Arabe* 27 (1910): 139, pl. 13; Etienne Combe, Jean Sauvaget, and Gaston Wiet, eds. *Répertoire chronologique d’épigraphie arabe* (Cairo, 1931–1991), vol. 3, 144, no. 1491.
8. Tabbaa, review, 181. However, this itself is highly debatable. It assumes, first, that the masons who carved tombstones were never those also responsible for monumental inscriptions, and second, that they were more likely than the carvers of monumental inscriptions to have been in the forefront of stylistic development. One might equally assume that the more prestigious work on monuments was more likely to display the latest fashions.
9. Blair, “Floriated Kufic,” 112.
10. K.A.C. Creswell, *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt: Ikhshids and Fatimids A.D. 939–1171* (Oxford, 1952), vol. 1, 31–32. The first walls were built of mud brick. Creswell also thought that ‘Ali Pasha Mubarak’s reference to a Kufic inscription on the Bab al-Qantara was to the gate of Jawhar, but Stéphane Pradines, “Les fortifications fatimides, x^e–xii^e siècle (Ifriqiyya, Miqr et Bilad al-Šam),” in Mathieu Eychenne and Abbès Zouache, eds., *La guerre dans le Proche-Orient médiéval* (Cairo, 2015), 240, n. 40, more plausibly assigns it to Badr al-Jamali’s work.
11. Only in 1933 was the original decoration here revealed when the painted wooden panels lining it were removed: Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, vol. 1, 55.
12. The smallest inscription, running horizontally between the flanking columns, is a complete restoration apart from a tiny fragment at the end: see the photograph in *ibid.*, pls. 7b–c.
13. The purported illustration of the “consistent use of fully formed, floriated Kufic” in al-Azhar Mosque reproduced in Tabbaa, *Transformation*, 88, fig. 18a, is, in fact, from the bays in front of the *qibla* wall of the Mosque of al-Hakim.
14. Bernard O’Kane, review of Jonathan Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt* (London, 2007), for College Art Association (CAA): www.caareviews.org/reviews/1224; www.academia.edu/5420176/review_of_Jonathan_Bloom_Arts_of_the_City_Victorious_Islamic_Art_and_Architecture_in_Fatimid_North_Africa_and_Egypt_New_Haven_and_London_2007.
15. Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *The Minarets of Cairo* (London, 2010), 106, notes that the original minaret was probably of brick, since in 1397 when Barquq decided to make a higher one (as had been done already in Salah al-Din’s time), a vault of stone was added to support it. The portal was probably therefore also of brick. But that does not preclude it as having had inscriptions, either brick, or more likely, on a stone revetted panel.
16. Samuel Flury, *Die Ornamente der Hakim- und Ashar-Moschee, Materialien zur Geschichte der älteren Kunst des Islam* (Heidelberg, 1912), pls. 28, 29, and 33. A surprising parallel is found in Saljuq monuments in Khorasan, in paint on the frieze

at the base of the zone of transition of the dome chamber at Sangbast, and in stucco in the caravanserais at Ribat-i Mahi and Ribat-i Sharaf.

17. Partially inverted: Bierman, *Writing Signs*, 89, fig. 29.
18. Gaston Wiet, *Catalogue général du musée arabe du Caire: inscriptions historiques sur pierre* (Cairo, 1971), 35–36, Cat. No. 52.
19. Bierman, *Writing Signs*, 75–95.
20. See note 8 above.
21. See note 9 above.
22. The distance is approximate, since the original ground level is not certain.
23. Bierman, *Writing Signs*, 84–85.
24. The outward inclination of 2.5 degrees can hardly have made much difference. In the prayer hall, where the upper part of the stucco inscriptions at the base of the zones of transition are curved forward (Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, 83, where he notes that this is exactly as in the Great Mosque of Susa, but my own observations of this inscription show that it is, in fact, entirely vertical). This may have resulted in extra visibility of the uprights, but since the distinctive feature of Kufic is that the letters are written along a constant horizontal baseline, then the legibility of the inscription would hardly have been enhanced.
25. Reckoning the *qibla* as east.
26. It contains a phrase appropriate to mosques: “Believers ... those who establish regular prayers and regular charity, and they bow down humbly (in worship).” Illustrated in Bierman, *Writing Signs*, fig. 25.
27. Qur’an 2:257; 14:1; 14:5; 33:43; 57:9; and 65:11.
28. Bierman, *Writing Signs*, 82. The extent to which even a Fatimid audience would have been cognizant of the symbolism is debatable, given the tendency of designs to be repeated by craftsmen.
29. The placement of his name on the north minaret is visible in the drawing in Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, fig. 36, which shows the view facing the northwest side. However, the corresponding drawing of the southern minaret shows the southwest side, which has a Qur’anic inscription. The beginning of the foundation on the northwest side is visible in *ibid.*, pl. 30a.
30. The inscriptions on the bastions have been interpreted as reinforcing this argument, owing to their inclusion of the Qur’anic phrase (9:107) “taken a mosque in opposition and

unbelief”: Paula Sanders, “Writing Identity in Medieval Cairo.” In Irene A. Bierman, ed., *Writing Identity in Medieval Cairo*, UCLA Near East Center Colloquium Series (Los Angeles, 1995), 47–48; Bierman, *Writing Signs*, 94–95. However, as Montaser first pointed out (Dina Montaser, “Modes of Utilizing Qur’anic Inscriptions on Cairene Mamluk Religious Monuments.” In Bernard O’Kane, ed., *Creswell Photographs Re-examined: New Perspectives on Islamic Architecture* [Cairo, 2009], 195), owing to confusion of the Flügel and Egyptian Qur’anic verse numberings, the verse in question is not actually present on the bastion.

31. The argument was first put forward by Jonathan Bloom, although renounced by him when he later denied that the towers were minarets to begin with: Bernard O’Kane, “The Rise of the Minaret,” *Oriental Art* 38 (1992): 108.

32. Unpublished; I owe this reference to the kindness of Assadullah Souren Melikian-Chirvani.

33. Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, pl. 120a.

34. This is now damaged, but the original arrangement can be seen in older photographs: *ibid.*, pl. 120b.

35. *Ibid.*, 188.

36. Bahia Shehab, “Fatimid *Kufi* Epigraphy on the Gates of Cairo: Between Royal Patronage and Civil Utility.” In Mohammad Gharipour and Irvin Cemil Schick, eds., *Calligraphy and Islamic Architecture in the Muslim World* (Edinburgh, 2013), 282–283.

37. Alain George, *The Rise of Islamic Calligraphy* (London, 2010), 102.

38. Part of the Throne Verse, Qur’an 2:255.

39. Shehab, “Fatimid *Kufi* Epigraphy,” 279–280.

40. They are: (1) *Basmala ... la ilāha illā*; (2) *Allāh wahdahu la shārik lahu Mumammad*; (3) *rasūl Allāh ‘Alī walī Allāh*.

41. *Ṣalā Allāh ‘alayhima wa ‘ala al-a’imma dhurriyatahuma ajma’in*.

42. *Ibid.*, 286–287.

43. It is now missing but from what follows its placement is certain.

44. See Edmond Pauty, *Catalogue général du musée arabe du Caire: les bois sculptés jusqu’à l’époque ayyoubide* (Cairo, 1931), pl. 95.

45. Caroline Williams, “The Qur’anic Inscriptions on the *Tabut* of al-Husayn in Cairo,” *Islamic Art* 2 (1987; published 1991).

46. Used sparingly also in the painted foundation inscription of Sayyida Ruqayya (1133), and in many earlier Iranian Kufic inscriptions; for examples, see Sheila S. Blair, *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana* (Leiden and New York, 1992), Radkan West (1016–1020), fig. 52; Shah Fadl (1055–1060), fig. 79; Sar-i Kucha (ca. 1100), fig. 146; Sar-i Pul (ca. 1100), fig. 148.

47. “Now while I would expect the foliate ornament of these inscriptions to have been designed by the calligrapher, it may not have been so: the calligrapher may have provided only the letters, or he may have indicated the layout of the ornament but not its details, or the man carving the inscription may have substituted his own familiar motifs for those indicated by the calligrapher. Perhaps most plausibly, the stonework designer collaborated with the calligrapher (which is likely in any case for the laying out of the inscription if not its enlargement from a smaller-scale original). Such an arrangement would not have required the stonecarvers to execute unfamiliar foliate forms, which they might not have been expected to do well”: Allen, *The Carved Stone Ornament*.

48. Flury, *Ornamente*, pl. 29.1; Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, pl. 25c.

49. In the word *wakil* at the end, *kil* is inserted in an upper line. The end of the inscription, that after the date, is missing in earlier records of it; for a translation, see Shehab, “Fatimid Kufi,” 282.

50. Illustrated in Bierman, *Writing Signs*, fig. 25.

51. The end of the verse, starting at *innama*: Bernard O’Kane, *The Mosques of Egypt* (Cairo, 2016), 28.

52. O’Kane and Shehab, “Mausoleum,” 54–55.

53. Illustrated in al-Husayni, *al-Nuqush*, 272.

54. Shehab, “Fatimid Kufi,” 282.

55. Tabbaa, *Transformation*, Chapter 3. He also argued (*ibid.*, 96 and 185, n. 48), regarding the Husayn cenotaph, that the cursive and “especially the signature of this Aleppine artisan argue for an Ayyubid date.” However, ‘Ubayd ibn Ma‘ali’s signature (nor that of any other craftsman) does not occur on the Husayn cenotaph; Husayn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, who first published it, merely suggested, on account of its similarity to that of Imam al-Shafi‘i, that he might have been responsible for it: *Ta’rikh al-masajid al-athariyya* (Cairo, 1946), 77–93.

56. George, *Rise*, 141–142. He notes that the Qur’an (dated 1064), which mentions the Fatimid imam al-Mustansir and is dedicated to ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Sulayhi of Yemen is in cursive, adding, “It is unlikely that a close ally of the Fatimids, himself a convinced Isma‘ili, would have endorsed this Quran and associated it to their authority, had there existed any ideological biases against cursive scripts,” *ibid.*, 142.

57. Williams, “The Qur’anic Inscriptions,” n. 23.

58. Frédéric Imbert, “Une nouvelle inscription de Saladin sur la muraille ayyûbide de Caire,” *Annales Islamologiques* 42 (2008): 409–421.

59. In addition to the examples of the *mashhad* of al-Juyushi and the Mosque of Ibn Tulun noted above, the inscription (in plain Kufic) around the central arch of the Ikhwat Yusuf shrine is also on a geometric background, this time one of inverted Y-shapes.

60. Allen, *Carved Stone Ornament*: “Exterior Color in the Mosque of al-Hakim,” accessed 10 February 2018 at www.sonic.net/~tallen/palmtree/csomh/introduction.csomh.htm. This factor seems to have been omitted from previous considerations of legibility; the colour of letters was probably distinguished from that of the floriation or foliated background. For the continuing use of colour in the Mamluk period on stone inscriptions in Cairo, see Bernard O’Kane, “Medium and Message in the Monumental Epigraphy of Medieval Cairo.” In Mohammad Gharipour and Irvin Cemil Schick, ed., *Calligraphy and Islamic Architecture in the Muslim World* (Edinburgh, 2013), 416–417.



Central mihrab of the Ikhwat Yusuf shrine (ca. 1125–1150).

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