

EGYPT – HERITAGE @ RISK!



Islamic Cairo, endangered houses in the old part of the city

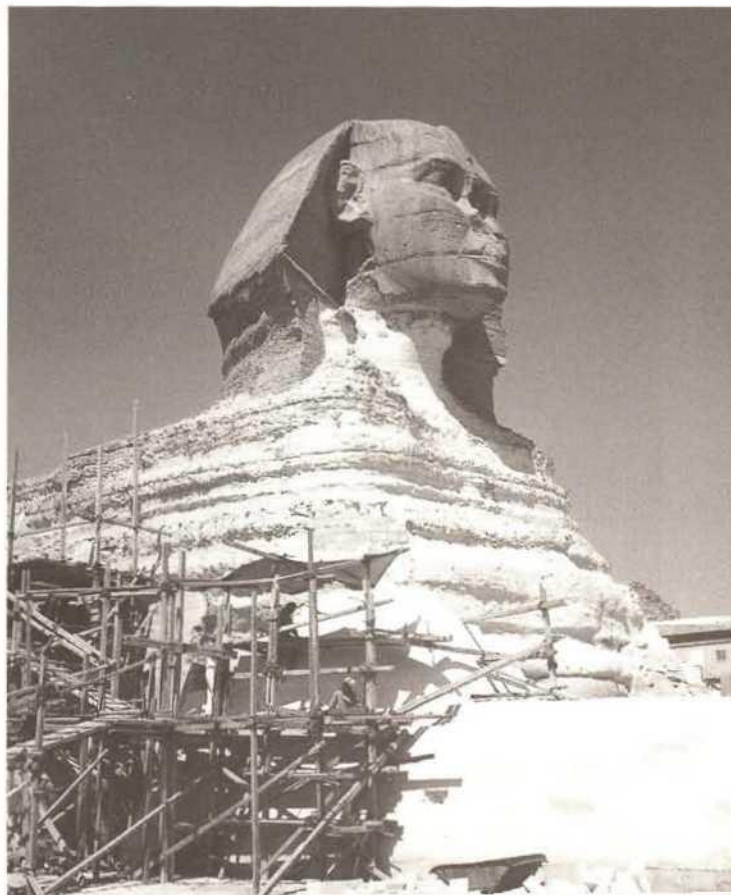
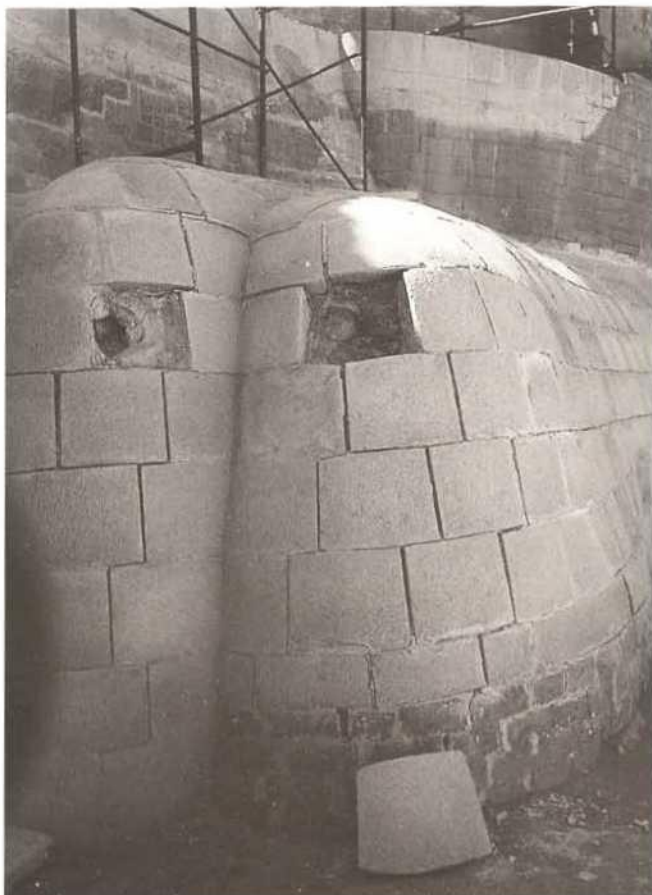


Cairo, graves of the Caliphs

Case Study 1 – Cairo: Fatimid Town Centre and Tombs of the Caliphs

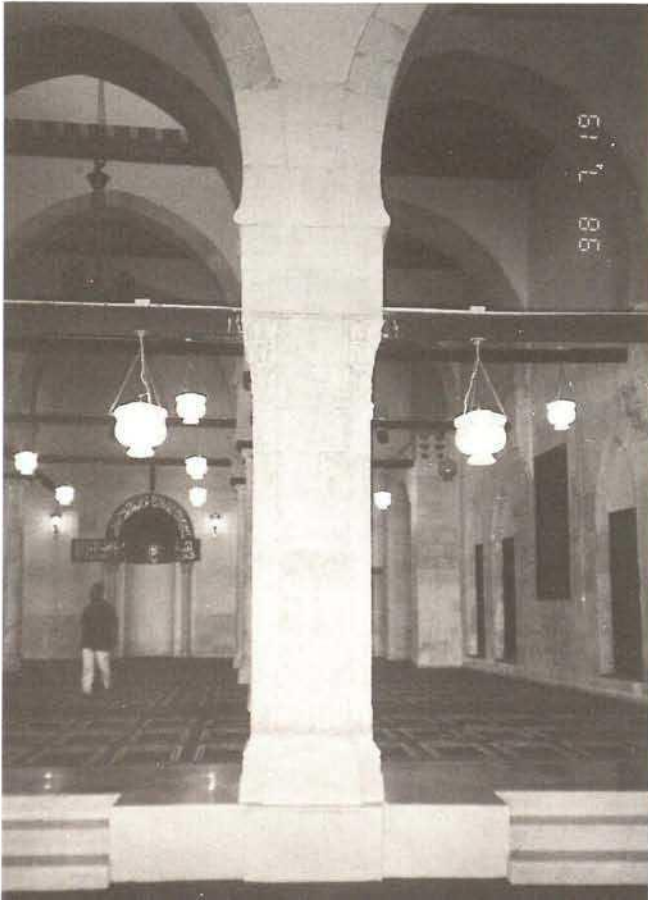
The medieval town centre of Cairo inside the city walls is in extreme danger. Soil conditions have worsened due to changes in the ground water level. In many buildings the upper storeys have been removed, because they were affected by corroded water

pipes. Today, the historic buildings mostly consist of a ground floor and one upper storey only, in which rubbish and waste are accumulated. The Tombs of the Caliphs outside the old city walls are also mostly inhabited by the poor and are expected to have the same fate as the historic medieval town centre. Parts of the buildings have already collapsed simply because of a lack of maintenance. Only a careful conservation and redevelopment plan could help to save the old structures and the historic fabric of the buildings.





Azhar Mosque in Cairo, Fatimid Riwaq after “restoration”: new reinforced concrete base with marble facing (complete renovation)



◀ Azhar Mosque in Cairo: an example of inappropriate restoration as the coloured stained glass was installed with lead instead of gypsum lattice.

Case Study 2 – Restoration of the Azhar Congregational Mosque

The Azhar Congregational Mosque is the first mosque built in the Fatimid Historic City of Cairo (359-361 A.H./ 972 AD). The mosque was developed and several additions were made since its construction. It was originally on a rectangular plan of about 88x70 m in the form of a central courtyard surrounded by three covered areas.

Three years ago the mosque was completely renovated. It has therefore lost its original spirit, its distinguished Fatimid style as well as its historical value. The mosque is now almost a new one because of the works done without taking into consideration either the authenticity of the original material, craftsmanship or the originality of the design, regardless even of the Egyptian Law of Antiquities (Law no.117/1983) as well as of article no.58 of the Operational Guidelines of the World Heritage Convention. The traditional continuous wall-footings were consolidated by an underpinning using micro piles; a very radical solution which is also very expensive.

There was no real monitoring to control and evaluate the cracks and soil deformation, therefore it was not possible to put in the minimum reinforcement necessary for the foundation and to control the structural behaviour before and during work. Instead of repositioning the leaning columns using flat jacks, the main Fatimid aisle was demolished and reconstructed, losing the oldest stucco floral decorations. The wall-filling was grouted with Portland cement mortar, so now conductive salt-efflorescence is a normal feature of the wall surface. Stone façades were cleaned using dry sand blast, and now more stone surface deterioration can be noticed everywhere. Regrettably the mosque was a field for experiments for unqualified architects and contractors.

Caravanserai Uda Pacha, lack of maintenance and bad use

