

The Architectural Patronage of the Fāṭimid Queen-Mother Durzān (d. 385/995): an interdisciplinary analysis of literary sources, material evidence and historical context

Simonetta Calderini (Roehampton University, London) and Delia Cortese (Middlesex University, London)

The mother of the fifth Fāṭimid imām-caliph al-‘Azīz (r. 365-386/975-996) is described by most writers as an Arab slave named Durzān (d.385/995),¹ known as *taghrīd* (lit. twittering) because of her beautiful voice.² Rather than as a singer, Durzān’s legacy is primarily that of an architectural patroness. Her patronage spans a period of more than twenty years, at first marked by significant dates in her role as mother of the heir apparent al-‘Azīz, and flourishing as queen mother after the death in 365/975 of her consort, the imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz. She was to be the first of a number of high-ranking women during the Fāṭimid era, whose architectural patronage, recorded mainly by literary sources, but also by a few material ones, served varied dynastic purposes: genealogical, political and economical.³

The first part of this paper will focus on the significance and meanings of the literary and material evidence relating to the buildings whose sponsorship has been ascribed to Durzān. Two buildings in particular will be discussed, typically dated as the first and the last to be commissioned by her. The first is the pavilion known as Manāzil al-‘Izz, no longer extant but the existence of which is attested in literary sources. The second is a building that has been presumed to be a mausoleum on the basis of a sole piece of evidence, consisting of a slab discovered in an area in the vicinity of Fustāt

*Simonetta Calderini is the main author of the first part of this paper and Delia Cortese is the main author of the second. We are grateful to Dr Daniella Talmon-Heller and Dr Katia Cytryn-Silverman for inviting us to take part in the 14th Annual Workshop of the Department of Middle East Studies at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 30 June – 2 July 2009. Preliminary findings of the research that culminated in this article were presented at the biennial conference of the History of Islamic Art Association, Philadelphia, 16-18 October 2008 and the conference “I Fatimidi e il Mediterraneo”, Palermo, 3-6 December 2008. We are grateful to Prof. Jonathan M. Bloom, Prof. Heinz Halm and Prof. Yaacov Lev for their comments and suggestions while conducting this research.

¹ The date of Durzān’s death is provided by Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī in his *Itti‘āz al-Ḥunafā’ bi-Akḥbār al-A‘imma al-Fāṭimiyyīn al-Khulafā’* [henceforth *Itti‘āz*], ed. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl (al-Qāhira: Lajnat Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-Islāmiyya, 1967), 1:289; she died one or two months after al-‘Azīz’s wife, the *umm walad* al-Sayyida al-‘Azīziyya, either during the second half of Dhū’l-Qa‘da or during Dhū’l-Ḥijja 385/December 995 or January 996.

² According to Ibrāhīm al-Ḥāmidī, Durzān was not a slave but a cousin, see *majlis* 117 in W. Ivanow, *Ismaili Tradition Concerning the Rise of the Fatimids* (London: OUP, 1942), 309. Durzān is also mentioned by the chronicler Abū Ja‘far b. Zubayr (d.708/1308) as participating in her son’s party in the treasury hall at the Fāṭimid court. See D. Cortese and S. Calderini, *Women and the Fatimids in the World of Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 88-9.

³ For other architectural patronesses under the Fāṭimids see D. Cortese, and S. Calderini, *Women*, 163-179 and, additionally for Sitt al-Mulk, see M. Rustow, “A Petition to a Woman at the Fāṭimid Court,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 73, 1 (2010): 1-27, in particular 14-16.

called Iṣṭabl ‘Antar. So far this artefact constitutes the only surviving epigraphic and material evidence of her sponsorship. The second part of this paper will be devoted to two of Durzān’s major architectural works: the mosque of al-Qarāfa and the *qaṣr* (fortress, citadel). Durzān’s contribution to the landscaping of Fustāṭ will be appraised in light of a contextualised analysis of the political, social and economic climates that prevailed in Egypt at the time of her building activity. In sum, the overall aim of this study is to assess the contribution and limitations of the sources at our disposal with reference to Durzān’s architectural patronage and to critically evaluate, through the use of interdisciplinary interpretative tools, the varied purposes her buildings might have served.

The buildings ascribed to Durzān

A list of buildings attributed to Durzān, arranged according to location, was first compiled in 1974 by the historian of Egypt Yūsuf Rāghib.⁴ Below is a tentative chronological list of the architectural works she sponsored, based on data provided primarily by the Mamlūk historian al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442) but also by earlier historians such as Ibn Muyassar (d. 677/1278), Ibn Duqmāq (d. 809/1407), and al-Qalqashandī (d. 821/1418), to name only a few.

- 363-5/ 973-5 Manāzil al-‘Izz in Fustāṭ.⁵
- 365-6/976 -7 Jāmi‘ al-Qarāfa during Ramaḍān.⁶
 Qaṣr al-Qarāfa (or *qaṣr al-Andalus bi’l-Qarāfa*).⁷
- n.d *Bi’r* (well) and *ḥammām*, west of the *qaṣr*.⁸
 Bustān (garden) in al-Qarāfa; al-Tāj garden, known as *ḥiṣn Abu’l-Ma’lūm*.⁹
 Ḥawḍ (cistern), *mī’a* (basin for the ritual ablutions), *bi’r* (well) with *dawālīb*
 (hydraulic pump/wheels) inside the Abū’l Ma’lūm fortress in al-Qarāfa, renewed by
 the aunt of al-Ḥākīm [Sitt al-Malik].¹⁰

⁴ Y. Rāghib, “Sur Deux Monuments Funéraire du Cimetière d’al-Qarāfa al-Kubrā au Caire,” *Annales Islamologiques*, 12 (1974): 67-83, seven plates.

⁵ “Built it the Lady Taghrīd, mother of al-‘Azīz bi’llāh b. al-Mu‘izz,” in: Taqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā’iz wa’l-I’tibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa’l-Athār* [henceforth *Khiṭaṭ*], ed. Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid (London: Mu’assasat al-Furqān li-l-turāth al-islāmī, 2002), 2:576; “al-Mu‘izz built it for his sister when she came from the Maghrib,” in: Sārim al-Dīn Ibn Duqmāq, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār li-Wāsiṭat ‘Iqd al-Amṣār*, ed. K. Vollers (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijārī, 1310/1893), 1:93.

⁶ “Built it al-Sayyida al-Mu‘izziya...*umm walad* from the Maghrib,” quoted from the Fāṭimid *qādī* al-Qudā’ī in al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 4,1: 288; “Built by one of the Maghārib (Maghribi) women in al-Qarāfa, a place outside Fustāṭ” in Muḥammad Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Ard*, ed. J.H. Kramers (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1938), 1:147-8.

⁷ “Built it the Lady Taghrīd, at the hands of *muḥtasib* al-Ḥasan al-Fārisī,” in: al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 580 and 4: 876.

⁸ al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 580.

⁹ “Built it the Lady Taghrīd, mother of al-‘Azīz,” in: al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 4, 2: 876. See also al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 2:580.

¹⁰ “Built it the *muḥtasib* al-Fārisī in the days of the mother of al-‘Azīz,” in al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 4, 2: 905. This

385/995	<i>Fawwāra</i> (basin or fountain) built in the centre of the courtyard of the Ibn Ṭūlūn mosque. ¹¹
n.d.	[Tomb or mausoleum ?] in Iṣṭabl ‘Antar.
385/995	Durzān dies

The Manāzil al-‘Izz

The first building Durzān is reported to have sponsored is the pavilion called Manāzil al-‘Izz. This structure was first studied by Paul Casanova in his 1913 *Essai on Fustāt*, and he located it at the end of al-Sūq al-Kabīr Road. According to his findings, the pavilion overlooked the Nile, facing the south-east end of the island of al-Rawdā, almost opposite the north-west wall of the Qaṣr al-Sham‘ and a short distance from the renowned mosque of ‘Amr.¹²

In his *Khiṭaṭ*, al-Maqrīzī states in this regard: “the Lady Taghrīd, mother of al-‘Azīz, built it, there was no better building in Fustāt, it was used for promenades, a *ḥammām* was located nearby and the pavilion had a gate.” Al-Maqrīzī further informs us that “the caliphs after al-Mu‘izz continued to make frequent use of it”¹³; from this we can infer that the Manāzil was built during al-Mu‘izz’s lifetime, which would make 363/973, when the imām-caliph is reported to have settled in al-Qāhira, the *terminus post quem* and 365/975, the year of his death, the *terminus ad quem*.

A similar chronology for the construction of the Manāzil, with a more detailed account of its location, can be inferred from another source, Ibn Duqmāq, a colleague and neighbour of al-Maqrīzī. In the part of his *Kitāb al-Intiṣār* dealing with Fustāt, Ibn Duqmāq states that it was the imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz who built this pavilion for his sister when she arrived from the Maghrib.¹⁴ Ibn Duqmāq continues with the description of the view from the pavilion of the crucial landmarks of the area: the Nile, the fertile strips of land and the Miqyās, the Nilometer.

During 363/973, when the caliphal family settled in Egypt (or the year after, according to some sources) the heir apparent ‘Abd Allāh died in Egypt. al-Mu‘izz’s formal appointment of his new successor did not take place until two years later, that is shortly before his own death, or on his deathbed according to some accounts. Even though there is an *a posteriori* claim that al-Mu‘izz had already indicated that his successor would be his son Nizār from his consort Durzān, we can assume that by

could be the same as *Ḥawḍ al-Qarāfa* built in Sha‘bān 366/March 977, by Sitt al-Malik (or al-Mulk), daughter of Durzān. But al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 4, 2: 904 read “Ordered its construction the Lady Sitt al-Malik, daughter of al-Mu‘izz.”

¹¹ “It is said that the person who built it (*‘amarahu*) was the mother of al-‘Azīz by the hands of Rashīd al-Khafīfī,” in: Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Intiṣār*, 1: 123. But al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 4, 1: 74 reads “Ordered its construction al-‘Azīz in Muḥarram 385/Jan-Mar 995 to replace the burnt one, by the hands of Rashīd al-Ḥanafī.”

¹² P. Casanova, *Essai de Reconstruction Topographique de la Ville d’al Foustāt ou Miṣr*, MIFAO (Cairo:IFAO, 1913), 1:8, 96-99.

¹³ al-Maqrīzī, *Khiṭaṭ*, 2: 576.

¹⁴ Ibn Duqmāq, *al-Intiṣār*, 1: 93.

363-364/973-974 it is improbable that the name of the heir apparent would be commonly known. How likely is it then that Durzān, an *umm walad*, and mother of a not yet formally appointed heir apparent, would commission and build al-Manāzil? If she did, that was indeed a swift response to ‘Abd Allāh’s death and assumes it could have been possible only if she already had the funds, the status and the palace backing to sponsor such a building.

On the other hand, if it was al-Mu‘izz who built it for a sister, who could this sister be? The sources do mention at least five sisters or step-sisters of al-Mu‘izz, four of whom are reported to have died in Egypt, while the fifth, Maṣūra, died in North Africa.¹⁵ So, with the exclusion of Maṣūra, any of the other four sisters could have been the beneficiary of such a superb gift.

The pavilion’s location and date acquire significance when considered within the context of the first years of Fāṭimid rule in Egypt, with the newly built al-Qāhira serving as the administrative capital and the residence of the caliphal family and some élite officials, while Fuṣṭāṭ continued to be the main commercial and industrial centre of Egypt. In this light, it is relevant to note that the new “Maghribī” dynasty, with a new northward capital, built a pavilion in Fuṣṭāṭ, which was strategically placed between the two main symbols of Egyptian identity at the time of their take-over. These symbols were the original fortification of the city and the vital hub of religious and commercial activities, the ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ mosque (and in the vicinity of the ritually and economically focal Miqyās, the Nilometer, as mentioned by Ibn Duqmāq). The landmark was probably intended to be a sign of continuity with the past as well as a statement about the caliphal presence near the main residential and commercial city. Moreover, the location of the pavilion near the Christian cemetery around Qaṣr al-Sham‘ and the Jewish cemetery further south might have been chosen to make the dynasty visible to the whole population of Fuṣṭāṭ, Sunni Muslim as well as non-Muslim.

Irrespective of the different attribution of sponsors for the Manāzil building and the longer narrative in Ibn Duqmāq, both Ibn Duqmāq and al-Maqrīzī include, *verbatim*, the same expression “...*wa mā zāla*...” (...and it did not cease...) about the use the caliphs made of the pavilion after al-Mu‘izz’s time. This raises questions about the authors’ informants, the sources they had access to (and that they could be quoting), or whether one of them made use of the work of the other without acknowledging it. Frédéric Bauden in his exhaustively argued and, in many respects, foundational study of al-Maqrīzī’s *Khiṭaṭ*, has convincingly shown the complexity and nuances of the concepts and practices of plagiarism and inter-textuality among some pre-modern Muslim scholars.¹⁶ With reference to the no longer extant *Khiṭaṭ* of Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Awḥadī (d. 811/1408), who,

¹⁵ al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, 1: 91; Ṭaqī al-Dīn al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Muqaffā al-kabīr*, ed. M. Ya‘lawī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1991), 2: 178; Jamāl al-Dīn Ibn Zāfir, *Akhhbār al-Duwal al-Munqaṭi‘a*, ed. A. Ferré (al-Qāhira: IFAO, 1972), 20. Idrīs ‘Imād al-Dīn, *Uyūn al-Akhhbār wa-Funūn al-Athār*, ed. M. Ghālib (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1973-78), 6: 185 states that they all died in Egypt.

¹⁶ F. Bauden, “Maqriziana IX: Should al-Maqrīzī Be Thrown Out with the Bath Water? The Question of His Plagiarism of al-Awḥadī’s *Khiṭaṭ* and the Documentary Evidence,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 14 (2010) 159-232.

like Ibn Duqmāq, predeceased al-Maqrīzī by at least thirty years, Bauden concludes that al-Maqrīzī in his own *Khiṭaṭ* did plagiarise al-Awḥadī, as some scholars have accused him of doing.¹⁷ Was this the case for some of the work of Ibn Duqmāq too?

On his part, al-Maqrīzī does not shy away from accusing others of borrowing from him without his permission; after Ibn Duqmāq's death, al-Maqrīzī states that he came to the realization that Ibn Duqmāq himself had used the notes he had lent him and had copied them without acknowledging their origin; al-Maqrīzī called such a reprehensible behaviour "negligence".¹⁸ It is well known, and at times expressly documented, that scholars borrowed books, notes and drafts from one another and that, upon a colleague's death, would acquire the deceased's notes and drafts and use them for their own works without acknowledging their authors.

In the case of the accounts of al-Maqrīzī and Ibn Duqmāq regarding the sponsorship of the Manāzil, the similarities are more relevant than their differences. On the basis of the details provided, one could concur with K. Vollers, Ibn Duqmāq's editor, that the sources at his disposal, especially referring to Fustāṭ, were more accurate than al-Maqrīzī's, even though other scholars such as Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid would disagree and praise the more detailed, yet at times confusing, description of Fustāṭ provided by al-Maqrīzī.¹⁹

Whether they relied on different sources, or they selected specific versions of accounts from common sources such as al-Quḍā'ī and al-Kindī, the differences between al-Maqrīzī's and Ibn Duqmāq's narratives about the sponsorship of the Manāzil reveal the writer's individual perspective and interpretation of past history. Indeed, to select a main source or a main narrative can in itself be an indication of meaning, of expressing the writer's approach or agenda. It is in the reworking, processing or selecting of shared material that the original and edifying contribution of a writer can be identified. In her comparison of the retrospective descriptions of al-Qāhira and Fustāṭ by Ibn Duqmāq and al-Maqrīzī, Sylvie Denoix has identified a common nostalgic literary genre, a shared theme of a golden age, the Fāṭimid era, which had in itself the seeds of its own decline but which is used implicitly to refer to (or to critique) the decline and crisis of the writers' own times. However, from the differences in their narrative details and in emphasis, Denoix was also able to identify to some extent the writers' specific approaches and worldviews.²⁰

The example of the different attribution of al-Manāzil is an indication of how reliant we are on our choice of sources to reconstruct a historical period or event. Depending on whether we take Ibn

¹⁷ Bauden, "Maqriziana IX," 160-5 and ff.

¹⁸ Bauden, "Maqriziana IX," 197. As suggested by Bauden, if the similarities in expression between the two were to become known, al-Maqrīzī would have been at a disadvantage as he was younger and Duqmāq's *Intiṣār* was written well before his *Khiṭaṭ*. For approximate dates of composition of the two works see S. Denoix, *Décrire le Caire: Fustāṭ – Miṣr d'après Ibn Duqmāq et Maqrīzī* (Cairo: IFAO, 1992), 11-12.

¹⁹ Ayman Fu'ād Sayyid, "L'Évolution de la Composition du Genre de *Khiṭaṭ* en Égypte Musulmane," in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c 950-1800)*, ed. H. Kennedy (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2001), 88.

²⁰ Denoix, *Décrire le Caire*, 13-21.

Duqmāq or al-Maqrīzī as our principal informant, we can reconstruct two different scenarios relating to the significance of the building of the Manāzil. On the basis of Ibn Duqmāq, the Manāzil was a gift on the part of the imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz for the newly arrived extended caliphal family with a significant strategic location - commercially, religiously and politically - for the newly installed dynasty. On the basis of al-Maqrīzī, in addition to the above, the significance of the Manāzil becomes mainly genealogical, a tool for the palace entourage to flag Durzān's new status as the mother of the “informally designated” imām-caliph to be, to mark the continuity and success of a new dynasty in Egypt.

The “Mausoleum” (?)

It was after al-Mu‘izz’s death that Durzān’s sponsoring activity came to the fore and, this time, there is little disagreement among literary sources as regards to the identity of the sponsor. The sheer number and variety of the buildings she commissioned in the Qarāfa is evidence of their significance. According to Ibn Duqmāq, Durzān even extended her sponsoring activity further north, inside the mosque of Ibn Ṭūlūn, though al-Maqrīzī suggests another sponsor for that project. The buildings attributed to her mark the landscape as symbols of her piety, her status and, above all, mark the visible presence of the Fāṭimid dynasty through the consort of the first Fāṭimid caliph to reside in Egypt, and the mother of his rightful successor.

The thus-far unique and uncontested material evidence of Durzān’s sponsoring activity amounts to a single inscription-bearing fragmentary limestone slab, which was unearthed during excavations in the 1930s. It was found south of Fustāt, near the northern “shore” of the Pond of the Abyssinians (*birkat al-Ḥabash*), an area locally known today as Iṣṭabl ‘Antar but which - for instance in al-Maqrīzī - is named as either al-Rasad or the Rāshida quarter. In the 1970s, the Durzān slab and its inscription were analyzed by Gaston Wiet and, subsequently, by Yūsuf Rāghib.²¹ The two scholars provide different information about the piece, regarding its material (marble according to Wiet and limestone according to Rāghib), the location of the finding (Fustāt according to Wiet and specifically al-Qarāfa according to Rāghib), and the date of its unearthing (1951 according to Wiet - in fact the year in which it was registered - and 1930 according to Rāghib).

These discrepancies can be partially solved thanks to further information about the slab provided by another scholar of Islamic architecture, Roland-Pierre Gayraud, in a number of contributions since 1987.²² The articles contain the publication of the some of the findings resulting

²¹ G. M Wiet, *Catalogue Général du Musée de l’Art Islamique du Caire, Inscriptions Historiques sur Pierre* (Cairo: IFAO, 1971), 33-34 and Y. Rāghib, “Sur Deux Monuments,” 68-9 and plate 1 facing p. 84.

²² R.-P. Gayraud, “Iṣṭabl Antar (Fostat) 1986. Rapport de Fouilles,” *Annales Islamologique* 23(1987): 55-71; idem, “La Nécropole des Fatimides à Fostat,” *Dossier d’Archéologie; Special Issue Égypte: L’Âge d’Or des*

from excavations that have been conducted at Iṣṭabl ‘Antar since 1985. Gayraud informs us that the area was used as a necropolis from the ‘Abbāsīd period down to 1952, and contains edifices such as mosques, *ḥammāms* and funerary buildings. Among the latter, the one marked as B7 is where the slab in question had been found in what, according to Gayraud, might have well been its original location: i.e. the small basin/cistern of the complex.²³

Gayraud calls B7 the “Grand Fāṭimid mausoleum,” on account of its huge dimensions (1500 m²), and he identifies ‘Abbāsīd foundations for this building, which he believes was restored towards the end of the fourth/tenth century. Gayraud suggests the dates of this Fāṭimid necropolis as 370/980-463/1070, with the latter date coinciding with the *shidda*, the massive economic and social collapse that hit Egypt during the reign of the imām-caliph al-Mustaṣṣir (d. 487/1094),²⁴ when the necropolis was destroyed and its best quality stones re-used elsewhere. The slab featuring the inscribed title “*al-sayyida [al-mu‘izziyya]*”, i.e. Durzān, gave Gayraud the impetus for identifying B7 as a Fāṭimid mausoleum, where - he claims - Durzān might have been buried. However, none of the literary sources consulted thus far mentions a mausoleum among Durzān’s sponsored buildings. Gayraud bases his claim that the slab belongs to a mausoleum on the location in which it was found and on his interpretation of the text (and of a lacuna) of the inscription. Gayraud argues his point forcefully, but in my opinion, far from conclusively.

To go back to the hard evidence, the slab, truncated and burnt, was reproduced by Yūsuf Rāghib.²⁵ Its inscription reads:

She ordered [the construction of] the blessed, [she] the Lady (*sayyida*) [al-Mu‘izziyya], may God prolong her permanence in this world, the mother of Abū al-[Manṣūr] the imām al-‘Azīz bi’llāh, our master and our lord, the prince of believers, the blessings of God be upon him and upon his excellent, noble and righteous ancestors ... God stated in its noble Book: “The day on which neither wealth will be of any use, nor children [when only he/she be happy who comes before God with a heart free of evil (Qur. 26:88-89)].”²⁶

Interpretations of material evidence

Fatimides, 233(1998): 34-4 idem, “Le Fouilles Fatimides de Fostat”, in *Trésors Fāṭimides du Caire* (Paris: Institut du Monde Arabe, 1998), 168-9; idem, “Le Qarāfa al-Kubrā, Dernière Demeure des Fāṭimides”, *L’Egypte Fāṭimide: Son Art et Son Histoire*, ed. M. Barrucand (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris – Sorbonne, 1999), 443-64.

²³ Gayraud, “Le Qarāfa al-Kubrā,” 462.

²⁴ F. Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed. 2007), 194-5.

²⁵ Rāghib, “Sur Deux Monuments,” plate I facing p. 84.

²⁶ Rāghib, “Sur Deux Monuments,” 68-9.

Though the reference to Durzān is brief (and incomplete), it is manifest that her standing is attributable to her being the mother of the imām-caliph of the time, al-‘Azīz, who, understandably, receives the longest mention in this fragmentary piece. Her role as consort of the late imam-caliph al-Mu‘izz is not explicitly mentioned, even though the missing reference after *al-sayyida* is most likely her title “*al-sayyida al-mu‘izziya*”, which is the customary way she is consistently referred to in the literary sources. Her son, on the other hand, is referred to by his agnomen (Abū al-Manṣūr), his dynastic name (al-‘Azīz) and his titles.

The extant inscription does not explicitly state what type of building Durzān commissioned. Wiet and Rāghib propose two different suggestions. Wiet tentatively states that it would be “tempting to attribute this inscription to the well-known mosque of Qarāfa, founded by this princess”²⁷ but does not take his suggestion any further. Rāghib, on the other hand, commits to a firmer, more explicit, argument. On the basis of the location of the recovery of the slab in the Qarāfa, as well as the verses toward the end of the inscription that are known to have been used in a few funerary inscriptions, Rāghib deduced that this slab must have belonged to a funerary building.²⁸ Having commented earlier on in his paper that Durzān showed a taste for grand buildings - and presumably in view of her status - Rāghib concludes that such a funerary building is nothing less than a mausoleum where she could have been buried.²⁹ As we saw earlier, this is the hypothesis that Gayraud fully endorses.

These last two statements raise some further questions. While it is reasonable to assume that this fragment comes from a funerary building, given the context of the site, it is more difficult to justify the opinion that the building was a mausoleum, let alone the one where Durzān was to be buried. Presumably, had it been such a grand building, there would be some mention of it in the literary sources. However, lack of mention or inclusion is not in itself a sufficient reason to dismiss the existence of a given building.³⁰ Moreover, the material of this “foundation” slab (limestone rather than marble) could point to a building of more modest nature than a mausoleum.³¹

How likely is it that the resting place of the mother of the imam-caliph of the time and consort of the former imam-caliph was a rather remote area so far away from the caliphal palace and its own burial chamber (*turbat al-za‘farān*, *turbat al-qaṣr*)? In his very concise entry on the death of Durzān, al-Maqrīzī specifies that upon hearing of his mother’s death, al-‘Azīz went back to al-Qāhira (i.e. the

²⁷ Wiet, *Catalogue*, 34; Ayman Fu’ād Sayyid seems to endorse Wiet’s view when he states in his monumental edition of the *Khīṭaṭ*, that the slab in the Islamic Museum in Cairo, found in the area of Iṣṭabl ‘Antar around 1930, is believed to have originated from the Qarāfa mosque, see al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 4, 1: 288, n. 1.

²⁸ Rāghib, “Sur Deux Monuments,” 71.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 71-2.

³⁰ See in this regard P. Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fāṭimid History and its Sources*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 94, 100-4 where he briefly discusses inscriptions on buildings as historical sources and the issues they raise in terms of their meaning and relevance, and specifically of al-Maqrīzī reporting certain inscriptions while omitting others.

³¹ Yūsuf Rāghib himself expresses surprise about the fact that, unlike other Fāṭimid foundation stones, this is not made of marble. Rāghib, “Sur Deux Monuments,” 67, n. 2.

palace) from his encampment in Munā Ja‘far , where he performed prayer for her.³² Al-Maqrīzī provides no further details about her death and the location of her burial. However, on reading al-Maqrīzī one could be justified in thinking that Durzān’s resting place was the same as the place where she died and where her daughter-in-law, deceased a few weeks earlier, had - on the basis of al-Maqrīzī’s detailed account – been laid to rest.

Unfortunately, the evidence from the historical sources regarding the place where female consorts of members of the caliphal family were buried is not conclusive. On the basis of the fifth/eleventh century Fāṭimid chronicler al-Musabbiḥī, it appears that the wife of al-‘Azīz, the *Sayyida ‘Azīziyya*, was buried in the palace burial chamber (*turbat al-qaṣr*)³³; similarly the concubine of al-Mu‘izz’s son ‘Abd Allāh was buried in the palace. Al-Musabbiḥī, however, also reports that other women of the palace, albeit not royal or consorts, like Taqarrub, the maid of *al-Sayyida al-‘Azīziyya*, were instead buried in the Qarāfa.³⁴

The missing part of the puzzle in the inscription, the building itself, is defined with the term “blessed” in the feminine. This adjective could, of course, refer to a *turba* (a tomb, burial ground, cemetery but not necessarily a mausoleum), to a *qubba* (a domed shrine, cupola), but also to a *bi‘r* (well, water pit) or a *fawwāra* (basin or fountain); after all, the slab was found in the small basin or cistern of the complex. The last two options, however, would not tally with the Qur’ānic verse with its possible funerary connotation (26: 88-9), unless we consider the context for which they were built, that is a funerary complex or area. All in all, the questions regarding the type of building Durzān commissioned and even whether B7 was indeed the original site for the slab remain unanswered.

Whatever the building this slab belonged to, it is of primary importance as material evidence of Durzān’s architectural patronage in the area broadly defined as al-Qarāfa, of her prominent role as queen mother and the function of her patronage as a material advertisement for the authority and legitimacy of her son, the imām-caliph, and through his “pure ancestors,” for the Fāṭimid dynasty as a whole.

All in all, the findings set out in the first section of this paper attempt to show that -for instance in the case of the attribution of the Manāzil - literary sources can be contradictory and the differences in their narratives can lead to the reconstruction of slightly diverging contexts and aims of building and sponsoring activity. Moreover, historians such as Ibn Duqmāq and al-Maqrīzī, who wrote centuries after the building work took place, relied on other sources closer to, or contemporary with, the Fāṭimid era. By selecting one version of a narrative over another (assuming they both had access to the same primary Fāṭimid sources), or by emphasizing some details above others, they might have conveyed

³² al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, 1: 289.

³³ Muḥammad al-Musabbiḥī, *Nuṣūṣ Ḍā‘i‘a Akhbār Miṣr*, ed. Ayman Fu‘ād Sayyid (Cairo: IFAO, 1981), 15. See also a quote in note 571 from al-Maqrīzī *apud* Tāj al-Dīn b. Muyassar, *al-Muntaqā min Akhbār Miṣr*, ed. Ayman Fu‘ād Sayyid (Cairo: IFAO, 1981), 172-3.

³⁴ al-Musabbiḥī, *Nuṣūṣ*, 111.

meaning and illustrated their own reconstruction of the past, while possibly commenting upon their present. In more than one occasion, al-Maqrīzī states that some of the buildings he refers to are no longer extant, partially as a result of the *shidda Mustanşiriyya*, which prompted the dislocation and reuse of building material. It is also unclear whether any of the Fāṭimid or later writers ever saw the inscription on the slab in Iṣṭabl ‘Antar, or rather, mostly relied on local knowledge when attributing a building to a specific sponsor. Finally, it was shown that material evidence, such as the slab under investigation, can open up more questions than it answers and that even when it is possible to identify a sponsor for a building clearly, the motives, extent of agency and meaning of that sponsorship can only be conjectured through a thorough analysis of historical, genealogical, geographical and economic contexts.

The Great Mosque (*jāmi‘*) of al-Qarāfa and the (*qaṣr*): Durzān’s patronage in its political, social and economic contexts

To what extent were the Fāṭimid royal women directly involved in the financing, commissioning, and choosing the location and nature of the buildings that carried their names? What does it mean when chroniclers ascribe the construction of buildings to women of the Fāṭimid dynasty? In al-Maqrīzī’s *Khiṭaṭ* we can identify several levels of a patron’s personal involvement in the process of commissioning a building, ranging from the choice of a site and allocation of funds to contributing physical labour.³⁵ Such degrees of participation, however, mostly relate to male patrons of the Mamlūk period. As for the reasons behind architectural patronage by Fāṭimid (and other) men of power, they range from public display of personal or dynastic authority to financial status and investment, piety and self-promotion. In contrast, the motivations behind female patronage are rarely so manifest.

It has been suggested that Durzān and her daughter Sitt al-Malik (or al-Mulk) resorted to the construction of important buildings in al-Qarāfa as a way to express their exercise of power.³⁶ While a clear link between females’ exercise of power and building activity is visible in the case of royal women of dynasties like the Ottomans, such a nexus is problematic when considering Fāṭimid female patronage and Durzān’s case in particular. In the very limited sources referring to her, Durzān is never portrayed as a ‘career’ woman; there is no evidence that she had any overt influence on court politics, or, that she openly exercised power of any sort. It was not Durzān but one of her contemporaries, ‘Ā’isha, a concubine of ‘Abd Allāh, who was singled out by medieval chroniclers and historians as one of the most powerful women of the court.

³⁵ S.Jarrar, “Al-Maqrīzī’s Reinvention of Egyptian Historiography through Architectural History,” in: *The Cairo Heritage: Essays in Honour of Laila Ali Ibrahim*, ed. D. Behrens-Abouseif (Cairo, New York: AUC, 2000), 47.

³⁶ J. M. Bloom, “The Mosque of the Qarāfa in Cairo,” *Muqarnas*, 4 (1987): 17.

The political context

Accepting that architectural patronage is a typical expression of exercise of power, with whose power are we dealing in Durzān's case? The building activity ascribed to Durzān coincided with a major upward shift in her status from 'mere' consort of al-Mu'izz to queen mother of the reigning al-'Azīz, a change that occurred at a particularly significant time in the history of the Fāṭimid dynasty. Durzān became a widow and queen mother in 365/975, that is, just two years after the Fāṭimid imām-caliph al-Mu'izz had moved to his new capital, al-Qāhira. Al-Mu'izz's death took place during a phase of transition for the Fāṭimids, from being a North African 'provincial' dynasty to becoming, once in al-Qāhira, a dynasty with imperialistic ambitions. This transformation manifested itself in the upgrading of the court to 'royal court', displayed through an increasingly elaborate court ceremonial; in the rapid urban expansion of al-Qāhira, reflecting its status as a capital city with imperial pretensions; and in a growing degree of complexity in the management of the regime. This transformation culminated in the adoption of the institution of the vizirate and the formal appointment of the Iraqī Ya'qūb b. Killis to the post of vizier in 368/978-9.³⁷ At this juncture, Durzān found herself to be the very first Fāṭimid queen mother within a newly established 'royal' court, the organization and functioning of which was overseen by Ibn Killis (d. 378/989 or 380/991). After al-Mu'izz's arrival in al-Qāhira, Ibn Killis was initially placed in charge of the Fāṭimid treasury, of revenues and all the state financial affairs. In time, his portfolio of offices expanded further, but we are told by al-Maqrīzī that in 365/975 he relinquished his duties in the *dīwān* in order to dedicate himself completely to overseeing al-Mu'izz's affairs in his palace.³⁸ A sign of the formalization of Durzān's ensuing status as queen mother is reflected in her being the first Fāṭimid royal consort and mother of an imam recorded as being addressed with the title of 'Sayyida'. Her new royal status became formally sanctioned two days before al-Mu'izz's death when, as the 'Sayyida', she is reported to have summoned the high dignitaries of the regime, including Ibn Killis, to the bed of the dying imam-caliph.³⁹ The creation of a fully-fledged royal court meant devising hierarchies and diversifying the allocation of political, executive and symbolic powers among royal family members, personnel and holders of offices. In this context, Durzān, as the first 'proper' Fāṭimid queen mother, can be regarded as a locus of symbolic power of the first order that would, in turn, empower those (men) who might have operated in her orbit.

³⁷ On the life and career of Ibn Killis see Y. Lev, "The Fāṭimid vizier Ya'qūb ibn Killis and the Beginning of the Fāṭimid Administration in Egypt," *Der Islam* 58 (1981): 237-49.

³⁸ al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, 1:225. Lev, "The Fāṭimid", 241, based on al-Maqrīzī, clarifies that in the previous year the *dīwān* was transferred from Dār al-Imāra, outside al-Qāhira, to a chamber within the royal palace. This could imply that rather than relinquishing his duties, Ibn Killis managed his offices from the very heart of the court.

³⁹ This is so far the only reference to a direct encounter having taken place between Ibn Killis and Durzān. al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, 1: 229.

Al-Maqrīzī reports that Durzān built the mosque and the *qaṣr* in al-Qarāfa in 366/977, through al-Ḥasan (or al-Ḥusayn) b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Fārisī, mentioned as a *muḥtasib*,⁴⁰ an inspector of Persian origins as his *nisba* clearly indicates. The appointment – in the early stage of Fāṭimid rule in Egypt - of *mashriqīs* (‘Easterners’) to key offices, coinciding with Ibn Killis’s (himself an ‘Easterner’) take-over of the regime’s administration, could be interpreted as part of Ibn Killis’ plan gradually to marginalise or limit the hold that the *maghribī* (North African) contingent had on the Fāṭimid royals and their court.⁴¹ At the time under discussion, Ibn Killis had not only taken charge of the private affairs of the court but had also the *ḥisba*, among other offices, under his control. The fact that the administration of finance, inheritance matters, *ḥisba* and the internal affairs of the court converged in one person just prior to Durzān’s sudden emergence as ‘builder’, suggests that Ibn Killis, either directly or through his team of dignitaries, was most likely the effective agent behind her nominal activities.

Further supporting the view that points to Ibn Killis and his team of officers as the shadow agents behind Durzān’s architectural patronage are the circumstances surrounding a mysterious cover up. This occurred during the seventeen-month period between the death of al-Mu‘izz in Rabī‘ II 365/Dec. 975 and Durzān’s constructions in al-Qarāfa, the mosque in particular, completed in Ramaḍān 366/May 977. Al-Maqrīzī reports, on the authority of the Fāṭimid historian Ibn Zūlāq (d. 386/996), that al-Mu‘izz’s death was kept hidden for eight months thus effectively moving forward, as far as the general public was concerned, the date of al-‘Azīz’s succession to Dhū’l Ḥijjah 366/August 976.⁴² Because of their complexity and size, we can assume that Durzān’s building projects, in particular the mosque and the *qaṣr*, took longer than nine months from inception to completion.⁴³ This would mean that at the very least the initial plans for such buildings were made at a time when al-Mu‘izz was dead but not ‘officially’ so and al-‘Azīz was ruler, but only *in pectore* of the high dignitaries around him. Again, Ibn Killis emerges as the best placed person to oversee and manage the affairs of the court throughout this power vacuum, which would include building plans promoted by the royals.

It is perhaps no coincidence that, in the immediate aftermath of Ibn Killis’ death, with the institution of the vizirate falling into total turmoil, limited royal female architectural patronage is

⁴⁰ It should be noted here that the roles of the *muḥtasib* are somewhat obscure for the Fāṭimid period. A. F. Sayyid, *La Capitale de l’Égypte jusq’ à l’Époque Fatimide: al-Qāhira et al-Fuṣṭāt: Essai de Reconstruction Topographique* (Beirut: F. Steiner, 1998), 673.

⁴¹ This process of ‘easternization’ was particularly visible and relevant in the army. By the end of al-‘Azīz’s reign, the rivalry between *maghāriba* and *mashāriqa* was fully blown, with the latter finally having the upper hand. For evidence of *mashriqī* officers charged with the *ḥisba* under Ibn Killis soon after al-Mu‘izz’s arrival in al-Qāhira see al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, 1: 217.

⁴² al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, 1: 229.

⁴³ This can be inferred on the basis of the fact that al-Azhar was completed with remarkable speed in little more than a year. J. M. Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious: Islamic Art and Architecture in Fatimid North Africa and Egypt* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 60.

recorded to have taken place. This would be the state of affairs until the full ‘resurgence’ of the institution of the Fāṭimid vizirate under the Armenian general Badr al-Jamālī (d. 487/1094). His arrival at the Fāṭimid court during the reign of the imam-caliph al-Mustanṣir marked the beginning of a major shift in the imam-vizier power relationship, with the power of the imam-caliph becoming predominantly nominal and effective rule resting mostly in the hands of the vizier.⁴⁴ This role reversal meant, among other things, that the vizier no longer had an interest in promoting the power of an already existing queen mother. Instead, he saw her as a potentially dangerous figure that needed to be sidelined. The fraught relationship between Badr al-Jamālī and Rasad, mother of the imam-caliph al-Mustanṣir, is testimony to this. It indeed projected on the landscape: Badr al-Jamālī was the big builder of his time while no architectural activity is ascribed to Rasad with certainty.⁴⁵ With the viziers now poised to play dynastic politics to their advantage by - among other means - seeking to marry their daughters to the caliphs’ sons⁴⁶ we see, in the context of court women, the locus of power being transferred from the queen mother to the consorts of the caliph and ‘establishment’, yet non-royal, women.⁴⁷ The fact that the mixed fortunes of Fāṭimid female architectural patronage appear to coincide with significant phases in the history of the Fāṭimid vizirate, suggests a correlation between the extent of Fāṭimid female patronage and court politics as orchestrated by the vizier in charge.

The social context

If the planning of Durzān’s buildings fell under the control of the powerful men of the Fāṭimid Ismā‘īlī court in the heart of al-Qāhira, the location of most of her constructions in Fuṣṭāṭ situates her activities in a context that was, on the whole, religiously, juridically and intellectually Sunnī. The implementation of Durzān’s building projects can therefore be seen as the outcome of an interaction that must have taken place between two realms and power structures: the politically/economically-oriented al-Qāhira and the juridically/socially-oriented Fuṣṭāṭ.

Upon arriving in al-Qāhira, al-Mu‘izz followed a policy already adopted by his father al-Manṣūr in Ifrīqiya and kept Sunnīs in charge of religious offices. He merely imposed the application of Ismā‘īlī ritual and law in specific matters. Al-Mu‘izz retained the services of the famous Mālikī jurist Abū Ṭāhir al-Ḍuhlī (d. 368/978) from the previous Ikhshīdīd regime to head the judiciary in Egypt. If on the one hand, al-Mu‘izz had instructed Ibn Killis (with ‘Uslūj b. al-Ḥasan) to take responsibility over Fuṣṭāṭ in matters of revenues, pious endowments, taxation, inheritance matters and policing, on the other, at least until the very end of al-Mu‘izz’s reign, Ibn Killis had to have the witness of the *qāḍī* Abū Ṭāhir to certify the authenticity of the orders that the imam-caliph had

⁴⁴ Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 194-5

⁴⁵ On Rasad see Cortese, and Calderini, *Women*, 110-14.

⁴⁶ A notable example is indeed the marriage between Badr al-Jamālī’s daughter and al-Mustanṣir’s son.

⁴⁷ On the building activity attributed to the consort of the caliph al-Āmir (d.524/1130), ‘Alam al-Āmiriyya, and that of other court women during the late phase of the Fāṭimid period see Cortese, and Calderini, *Women*, 171-6.

instructed him to carry out.⁴⁸ Under al-‘Azīz, Abū Ṭāhir co-shared some of his duties with ‘Alī (d. 363/974), the son of the famous al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān, but continued to enjoy the overwhelming support of all the jurists, the merchants and the population at large who consistently attended his sermons and publicly prayed for him.⁴⁹ According to the eye-witness account of the fourth/tenth century Arab geographer al-Muqaddasī, although most of the jurists were Mālikī, all the other schools were openly represented in Fustāt.⁵⁰ During Durzān’s time and beyond, Fustāt was and remained a thriving centre of Sunnī learning and *ḥadīth* transmission. Prominent scholars included Abū Bakr al-Qatālī (d. 380/990) and Abū Bakr al-Udfuwī (d. 388/998), the *qāḍī* al-Daqqāq (d. 382/992)⁵¹ as well as Qur’ān reciters like Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. Quraysh al-Ḥalīmī and Abū’l-Ṭayyib b. Ghalbūn, who both met with al-Muqaddasī while he was in the city.

Bearing this background in mind, it is important to note that the architectural works ascribed to Durzān constitute the first known set of major public constructions erected by the Fāṭimids outside al-Qāhira’s walls. Durzān’s buildings can therefore be regarded as the earliest known major attempt by the Fāṭimids at projecting themselves on a broader landscape. Given the nature of this imposing venture, loaded as it was with symbolic, political and doctrinal implications, one could legitimately question why - with so many powerful men at the Fāṭimid court – did the choice fall on Durzān as the most appropriate court figure through whom the dynasty could initially advertise itself in Fustāt? And why the choice of building in al-Qarāfa in particular?

Although the al-Qarāfa area is typically associated with its famous cemetery, the nature of Durzān’s buildings and the urban context in which they are reported to have appeared show that they were primarily intended to serve al-Qarāfa’s living residents. There is indeed sufficient evidence pointing to al-Qarāfa as an urban, inhabited space for the living between the 4th/10th and the 5th/11th centuries. For example, the population of al-Qarāfa was served by a congregational mosque whose *imām*, in 362/973, was Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Samī’.⁵² The area suffered the incursion of *maghāriba* soldiers in search of housing, an incident clearly pointing to al-Qarāfa as a well-established living quarter. The account of al-Muqaddasī who, beside mentioning Durzān’s mosque in the context of the rapid urban expansion he saw taking place in the area between al-Qāhira and Fustāt, describes the town as characterized by a dusty colour, contrasted by the whiteness of its cemeteries.⁵³ We have references to mundane services supplied for its residents ranging from various water supplies, gardens

⁴⁸ For an example of one such instances cf. Jiwa Shainool (tr.), *Towards a Shi‘i Mediterranean Empire. Fatimid Egypt and the Founding of Cairo. The reign of the Imām-caliph al-Mu‘izz from al-Maqrīzī’s Itti‘āz al-Īnūfā’* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2009), 206.

⁴⁹ Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Raf‘ al-Isr ‘an Quḍāt Miṣr*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad ‘Umar (Cairo: Maktaba al-Khanjī, 1418/1998), 281-3; 445-6.

⁵⁰ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, al-Muqaddasī, *The Best Division for Knowledge of the Regions/ Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm fī Ma‘rifat al-Aqālīm*, tr. B. Collins (Reading: Garnet Publishing, 2001), 171.

⁵¹ al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā*, 5: nos. 1928, 2078; 6: no. 2712.

⁵² Jiwa, *Towards a Shi‘i*, 112.

⁵³ al-Muqaddasī, *The Best*, 177, 183 (additional paragraph from the version MS C).

and mills to *ḥammāms* and ovens, some built near the Qaṣr - ostensibly by Durzān herself - during the reign of al-‘Azīz. Al-Musabbiḥī refers to the *qarāfiyya* as the inhabitants of the area and records one episode involving dwellers, houses and shops in that quarter.⁵⁴ The Ḥanafī jurist Ibn Abi'l-‘Awwām, chief judge during al-Ḥākim’s reign, lived in al-Qarāfa in a house that was his own property.⁵⁵ In the 5th/11th century the famous Fāṭimid physician Ibn Riḍwān proclaimed al-Qarāfa to be one of the best residential areas of the capital⁵⁶ and its streets became noted as the stage of scholarly encounters.⁵⁷

The building of Durzān’s mosque and her Qaṣr will be examined here within the broader context of the urban and demographic turmoil that affected al-Qāhira and Fuṣṭāṭ after al-Mu‘izz’s arrival. In reporting the events concerning the Fāṭimids for the year 363/973, al-Maqrīzī tells us that a group of people had ravaged the Qarāfa area and that al-Mu‘izz had the troublemakers beheaded. In the same year the *maghāriba* ‘swarmed’ in the areas of al-Qarāfa and al-Ma‘āfir and settled there by expropriating the houses of the local residents and deporting them elsewhere. They began inhabiting the city even though al-Mu‘izz had ordered them to live in the outskirts.⁵⁸ In time, the *maghāriba* were further displaced and were eventually recalled by order of al-Mu‘izz to settle in al-Qāhira.

The fact that, less than three years after these events, Durzān’s Qaṣr was erected in al-Qarāfa and her mosque was built in the quarter of al-Ma‘āfir, on the site of a pre-existing mosque called Masjid al-Qubba, points to a policy of regeneration and ‘claiming’ of the area. Several purposes guided this policy: to provide new facilities for the residents; to accommodate the religious and commercial needs of a demographically expanding area as a growing number of people moved from further afield closer to al-Qāhira to serve the court;⁵⁹ to ‘Fāṭimidise’ the landscape. Indeed, the erection of large scale structures meant the razing to the ground of vast built spaces as well as land purchase or confiscation. Additionally, the claiming of this area served to secure a strategic route between ‘establishment’ al-Qāhira and commercial Fuṣṭāṭ. A number of factors point to the pursuing of a ‘regenerative’ policy underlying Durzān’s building activity in that particular area: in 365/975, the Fuṣṭāṭ bridge had already been repaired, allowing the transit of people after years of disruption. In the same year, it was announced in the Jāmi‘ al-‘Atīq of Fuṣṭāṭ that the pilgrimage was to proceed on land

⁵⁴ Muḥammad al-Musabbiḥī, *Akhbār Miṣr*, eds. A. F. Sayyid and T. Bianquis (Cairo: IFAO, 1978), 1: 57, 58.

⁵⁵ Ibn Ḥajar, *Raf‘ al-iṣr*, 73.

⁵⁶ ‘Alī Ibn Riḍwān, *Daf‘ Maḍar al-Abdān*, trs. M.W. Dols and ed. ‘A. G. Jamāl, *Medieval Islamic Medicine. Ibn Riḍwān’s treatise ‘On the Prevention of Bodily Ills in Egypt*, (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1984), 105-9.

⁵⁷ al-Maqrīzī, *al-Muqaffā*, 5: no. 1903.

⁵⁸ al-Maqrīzī, *Itti‘āz*, 1: 145.

⁵⁹ Cf. al-Muqaddasī’s comments about a beautiful mosque called al-Qarāfa, built by Umm al-Maghribī, standing in the area around Fuṣṭāṭ that, by his time, had expanded all the way up to al-Qāhira. Noteworthy is his use of ‘Umm al-Maghribī’ to name the builder of the mosque, instead of the more commonly used ‘Durzān’ or ‘Taghrīd’, perhaps as a result of witnessing how Durzān and her mosque were popularly referred to in al-Qarāfa. al-Muqaddasī, *The Best*, 183.

after it had been suspended for some years⁶⁰; the mostly ‘muscular’ quality of Durzān’s constructions (a mosque, a fortress, various hydraulic services) and the appointment of the *muḥtasib* as the person in charge of carrying out the works.⁶¹ On the whole, he could be described as a municipal officer, responsible for –among other things- the repairing of houses and erection of shops, public safety, cleaning the streets, repairing of the city walls and ensuring water supplies.⁶² As for the ‘Fāṭimidisation’ of the landscape outside al-Qāhira, at an ideological level, that took the shape of advertising the dynasty by ‘marking’ the land with ‘Fāṭimid’ buildings such as Durzān’s mosque, which was ostensibly built in the style of the more famous al-Azhar in al-Qāhira.⁶³ However, although Durzān’s mosque might have been ‘Fāṭimid’ in looks, this does not necessarily mean that it was Ismā‘īlī in *madhhab*. In this master plan, Durzān, as queen mother, was elevated to become a symbolic locus of power to serve political and economic dynastic agendas.

The economic context

The Ismā‘īlī Persian missionary and poet Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 465/1072-3) who visited Egypt in 439/1047 tells us that all the property in al-Qāhira belonged to the imam-caliph as no one could own either houses or real estate there, except those the imam had commissioned to build.⁶⁴ This preserve of exclusive rights presented disadvantages and advantages. On the one hand it caused property stagnation, on the other however, exclusivity meant that any chance of competition in the property market, within al-Qāhira, was automatically removed. This meant that, if the imam was not able to gain revenues through buying and selling properties, he and the few other property owners in al-Qāhira retained the monopoly of rentals.⁶⁵ It is difficult to estimate the number of income-generating properties existing in al-Qāhira in the early years of al-‘Azīz’s reign. Al-Muqaddasī, on the basis of the *Kitāb al-kharāj* (the Book of Tribute) by Qudāma b. Ja‘far (d. ca. 337/948), claimed that a few decades before the arrival of the Fāṭimids, the revenue derived from property in Egypt was two and a

⁶⁰ Jiwa, *Towards a Shi‘i*, 198, 203-4.

⁶¹ See n. 40 above and reference there.

⁶² C. Cahen and M. Talbi, “Hisba” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 3: 488.

⁶³ al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 4,1:288.

⁶⁴ His claim should not be taken too literally. By ‘sulṭān’ he might have actually meant the royal family and its closest entourage. After all, women of the Fāṭimid royal family are reported to have owned properties in al-Qāhira during al-Ḥākim’s reign. Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s own experience as a lodger in al-Qāhira also points to the existence of landlords other than the imam. It is, however, safe to assume that the imam, his immediate family and his closest high dignitaries monopolized all aspects relating to property in al-Qāhira.

⁶⁵ The fundamental principles of property rental laws in the Fāṭimid period were codified by al-Qāḍī al-Nu‘mān and can be found in his *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, ed. A. ‘A. A. Fayḍī (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Ma‘ārif bi-Miṣr, 1379/1960), 74-6. For an overview of legal theory regarding the rental of properties in medieval Islam see R. Brunschvig, “Propriétaire et locataire d’immeuble en droit musulman médiéval (jusque vers l’an 1200),” *Studia Islamica* 52 (1980): 5-40.

half million *dīnārs*. Within a year of the Fāṭimid commander Jawhar taking over the administration of Egypt, the annual revenues rose to three and a half million *dīnārs*.⁶⁶

In Fustāṭ al-Muqaddasī saw buildings that were four or five storeys high and he heard that about two hundred people could live in one building.⁶⁷ Nāṣir-i Khusraw, who visited Egypt some seventy years after al-Muqaddasī, reports that in al-Qāhira there were at least twenty thousand shops, which were all owned by the sultan (i.e. the imam-caliph), mostly let at ten *maghribī dīnārs* per month and none for less than two *dīnārs*. Both in al-Qāhira and Fustāṭ there were twenty thousand rented out houses that belonged to the imam. The rent was collected every month. At his time of visiting, a four-storey house in al-Qāhira was rented out at eleven *maghribī dīnārs* per month. Nāṣir-i Khusraw laments that in the one he rented only three floors were occupied. He tells us that he asked the owner if he could let the top floor to someone else for about five *dīnārs* per month. The owner refused on account that he would rather leave that floor vacant as he would visit the city every now and then. As it turns out, Nāṣir comments, during a whole year the owner did not come more than twice.⁶⁸ Nāṣir-i Khusraw's predicament clearly shows that the scarcity value of housing in al-Qāhira left him – as a lodger - with no bargaining power.

One problem with scarcity value is that the steady profitability that derives from it relies, amongst other factors, on the financial ability of the 'demand', to meet the high scarcity-determined rent expected by the 'supply'. We can therefore assume that the growing number of court officials, staff, emerging merchant classes, and all those who sought the privilege of living and working in al-Qāhira, had also to be made able to meet high rents since there would be no point in charging rents that people could not afford to pay. Since, in turn, the revenues of existing al-Qāhira tenants or aspiring ones came by and large from lands, properties and real estate outside al-Qāhira, it became imperative for the court administrators to find a way by which less desirable, lesser profit yielding lands and properties in neighboring areas outside al-Qāhira could be turned into more sought-after, higher yielding ones.⁶⁹

Where does Durzān, as locus of power and as the first Fāṭimid public patron to build outside al-Qāhira, fit within an analysis centered on economic discourse as a tool of interpretation? Durzān, as queen mother, was the only senior royal, beside the imam-caliph, whose status could be safely, visibly advertised. To ascribe buildings to royal brothers, thus potentially signalling their power, was

⁶⁶ H. Monés, "Djawhar al-Ṣikillī", *EI2*, 2: 495.

⁶⁷ al-Muqaddasī, *The Best*, 167, 179.

⁶⁸ Although the figures given by Nāṣir-i Khusraw could be considered notional, they nevertheless indicate the perceived scale of the caliph's investment portfolio. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Sefer Nameh, Relation du Voyage de Nassiri Khosrau*, ed. C. Schefer (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1970), 127, 132-3.

⁶⁹ Evidence that land owners outside al-Qāhira were targeted as source of state revenue at the outset of the Fāṭimid administration of Egypt is shown by the report that as soon as Ibn Killis and 'Uslūj took over the overseeing of the landed estates, they increased taxes, a move that was met with remonstrations by the people (al-Maqrīzī, *Itti'āz*, 1: 146-7).

asking for genealogical trouble and possible factionalism; to promote the imam's children as 'powerful' was ineffective since, until the actual moment of succession, the outcome of the succession lottery was effectively open. At this particular junction in the history of the dynasty, the queen mother was the only royal figure whose loyalty could not be questioned since her own status was sanctioned by the blood link with the reigning imam-caliph. For the high dignitaries at the Fāṭimid court to project the queen mother as a figure of prestige and distinction through imposing architectural patronage in al-Qarāfa meant providing services to people while safely advertising the dynasty in an additional way. More importantly - in economic terms – they were able to generate 'positive externalities' that would increase the value and desirability of properties and real estate in the neighborhoods graced by her landmarks.

The lavishness of the al-Qarāfa mosque can be appreciated from the description of its interior provided by al-Qudā'ī (d.454/1062), quoted in al-Maqrīzī:

the Mosque of the Qarāfa was decorated with paintings in blue, vermillion, verdigris and other colours and, in certain places, painted a uniform colour. The ceilings were entirely painted in polychrome and the intrados and the extrados of the arcades resting on the columns were covered with paintings of all colours. This decoration is the work of the painters of Baṣra and of the Banū Mu'allim, of whom Kutāmī and Nazūk were the masters. Opposite the seventh door [of the mosque] one can see the intrados of one of the arches, a painting representing a *shadhirwān* [stepped fountain], with decoration in black, white, red, green, blue and yellow. When one stands under the keystone of the arch and raises one's head towards this decoration, one might imagine that the painted steps were like a *muqarnas* made of wood. But if one stood under one of the flanks of the arch, where the semicircle ends and when, keeping to the beginning of the arch, one raises the head to look at it again, one sees that it was an optical illusion and that the surface was quite flat without any relief.⁷⁰

The owners of estates in the area surrounding Durzān's buildings would reap financial benefits that would, in turn, enable them to meet the higher expenditures in al-Qāhira.⁷¹ That Durzān's buildings played a significant role in transforming al-Qarāfa into an upmarket, sought-after area can be gathered from al-Maqrīzī's remarks that in Fāṭimid times the nobility was known to gather at her mosque and the area around the Qaṣr she built became a favorite meeting point during festivals and

⁷⁰ From Bloom, *Arts of the City Victorious*, 113. While it is commonly accepted that this description refers to Durzān's mosque, it is difficult to establish whether the mosque underwent major alteration between the time of construction and al-Qudā'ī's time. Therefore, the description of the mosque could be that recalled by al-Qudā'ī but not necessarily that of the original construction.

⁷¹ al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ*, 4, 1: 288.

celebrations for the caliphal palace entourage, and the owners of the houses of court employees who did not reside at the palace.⁷²

Conclusions

What, then, shall we make of Durzān's patronage? In the course of our research we have analyzed primarily the literary, material and 'circumstantial' evidence relating to four of the buildings ascribed to her. In conducting our study we adopted two different methodologies. In the first part, inter-textual analysis and criticism of primary and secondary sources were used as the main guiding principle through which the attribution, role, function and nature of Durzān's buildings could be appraised. Beyond the specific reference to Durzān's patronage, such analysis leads to two considerations: one concerning the writer's role in conveying and selecting specific narratives; the other concerning the political, genealogical or other contexts that can be inferred from such selective narratives and the impact that such contexts can have on the reader's interpretation of the roles that specific buildings might have played. As for epigraphic sources, in view of the much more limited individual and personal role of the inscriber in choosing the text, the focus of analysis is on the interpretation of the material evidence (e.g. the type of building the slab might have belonged to) as a means to convey dynastic, political or religious meanings.

In the second part of the paper, a "discourse" approach was adopted as a key to evaluating the role and function that Durzān's constructions might have played in the early Egyptian political, social and economic history of the dynasty. The questions raised about the figure and role of Durzān as architectural patron have led us to a dynamic 'reading' of Fustāṭ's political, economic and social landscape and the dynasty's intervention in it. In the context of the crucial formative years of the newly established dynasty in Egypt, the seemingly unremarkable Durzān emerges as a woman situated in the fluid intersection between court affairs, religious organizations and the logistics of urban construction. By being named as patroness, Durzān found herself –willingly or by default– being transformed into a figure that could be symbolically flagged with safety as a mediating link between secular and religious arenas, between the private realm of the court and the public realities of Fustāṭ, between female and male domains.

The paper shows how, in the face of the obstacles imposed on the scholar by the limited availability of literary and material evidence directly pointing to Durzān and her buildings, resorting to varied methodologies informed by interdisciplinary lines of enquiry opens up the possibility of alternative interpretations. If we cannot claim to know more about Durzān's buildings *per se*, the scanty references to their existence have –nevertheless– served as a focal point to question the perspectives and reliability of the sources that inform us and to alert us to the possibilities for enquiry that can derive from revisiting and contextualising such sources.

⁷²Ibid., 2: 445, 449.

