

The Monuments in the Vicinity of Bab Zuwayla, Cairo



Bab Zuwayla
city gate with the minarets
added by Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh

1 Sabil and School of Muhammad 'Ali in memory of Tusun Pasha A.H. 1236/A.D. 1820 (the sabil) Monument number 401

Built by order of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha as a memorial to his son Tusun (1793-1816), this building reflects the ruler's commitment to charitable acts by providing free drinking water while signalling wealth and power. The architecture imitates an imperial Ottoman baroque style rather than the traditional Egyptian model typical of Cairo (compare with building 3 below). Muhammad 'Ali then added a European style school on an upper level. Today the building is open to visitors, with information panels about the sabil, the school and the life of Muhammad 'Ali. The large underground cistern can also be visited.

4 Mosque of Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh A.H. 818-23 / A.D. 1415-20 Monument number 190

This open court style (*riwaq*) mosque was built by order of the Mamluk Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh on land earlier occupied by a prison and in which the future sultan had been incarcerated. He promised to destroy it if he was released and empowered to do so. He was. A massive entrance with a beautiful stalactite (*muqarnas*) ceiling was included in order to enhance the visual presence of the building complex where he and one son are buried. Al-Mu'ayyad Shaykh also had two minarets placed on the top of Bab Zuwayla so that they could be as visible as possible.

7 Mosque of al-Salih Talai'c A.H. 555 / A.D. 1160 Monument number 116

This was the last mosque built by the Shi'ite Fatimids (A.D. 969 – 1171) and the only Fatimid Friday mosque built outside the Fatimid city walls. Its patron was the minister al-Salih Talai'c. The front of the mosque is oriented in the qibla direction indicating that the current street pattern had not yet been established. The mosque rests on 31 shops built on the original ground level. Floriated Kufic Arabic inscriptions in plaster around many of the windows are original. The *minbar* (pulpit) was donated to the mosque in 1300 and, recently restored, is an excellent example of Mamluk woodwork.

2 Wikala of Nafisa al-Bayda A.H. 1211 / A.D. 1796 Monument number 395

Nafisa al-Bayda was a very wealthy Muslim woman who, in the late 18th century, was married to two powerful military leaders in Egypt. She endowed the building through a *waqf*, a Muslim endowment designed to secure income for charitable deeds. Merchants brought their goods into the wikala where they could be stored, taxed and sold. Accommodations for merchants were available in rooms on the upper floors. Some of the original *mashrabiya* style screens on the windows overhanging the street still remain. A display case inside the entrance gateway displays archaeological finds discovered during the restoration work.

5 Bab Zuwayla (al-Mitwalli) City Gate A.H. 485 / A.D. 1092 Monument number 199

Badr al-Gamali, the de facto ruler of Egypt in the late eleventh century A.D., expanded the walls of the original Fatimid settlement from A.D. 969 (al-Qahirah or Cairo) and had this stone gate built as the southern entrance. The architects were Armenians, as was Badr himself. During restoration work it was discovered that the two massive doors, each weighing almost 4 tons, moved on ball bearings. The remains of these original ball bearings can be seen in the exhibition space in the upper level of the monument. The gate is also known as Bab al-Mitwalli after a popular Sufi saint who is associated with the location.

8 Qasaba of Radwan Bey (al-khayamiyya or Tent-makers' Bazaar) A.H. 11th cent./ A.D. 17th cent. Monuments 406, 407, 408 & 409

From the twelfth century A.D., the area immediately to the south of Bab Zuwayla was a major center of economic activity. In the middle of the seventeenth century a powerful Mamluk leader named Radwan Bey, who for 25 years was the commander in charge of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, built a covered market here. The bazaar had living quarters above the ground floor level. Originally intended for shoemakers, over time the bazaar became the center for the production of tents of all sizes. It is famous as well for its applique work still made and sold here today.

3 Sabil and Kuttab of Nafisa al-Bayda A.H. 1211 / A.D. 1796 Monument number 358

Nafisa al-Bayda endowed this building as an act of charity. Passersby could receive free drinking water through the bronze grills in the ground floor windows. Above the sabil, there was a small room without furniture which served as a school for young boys where they sat before their teacher to learn to read, write and memorize the Quran. It is estimated that there were over 300 such sabil-kuttabs in Cairo in the early 1800s. The architecture of this one displays many features of the style that had continued in Egypt for centuries, in contrast to the building described under No 1.

6 Zawiya and Sabil of Sultan Farag Ibn Barquq A.H. 811 / A.D. 1408 Monument number 203

The Mamluk Sultan Farag ibn Barquq built this monument outside Bab Zuwayla to include a small prayer hall (*zawiya*), a sabil and a kuttab. When the street in front of Bab Zuwayla was widened in 1923, the building was moved, stone by stone, almost 12 meters south to its present location, but by then only the *zawiya* and sabil remained. The restored building contains beautiful examples of Mamluk painted and gilded wooden stalactite (*muqarnas*) ceilings and stone tile work. The prayer area now includes a large map of all the monuments of Historic Cairo and information panels for visitors.

Bab Zuwayla, the southern gate of al-Qahira, was never put to the test militarily. Instead, it became a landmark within the city, and for centuries legal documents and geographical accounts described buildings and property in Cairo by their location inside or outside the gate. Bab Zuwayla is at the crossing of two main streets in the historic city. One is the main axis of al-Qahira from which the Fatimids ruled in the 10th - 12th centuries; this road continued south towards the earlier urban center. The other is the Darb al-Ahmar leading to the Citadel, the seat of power of Mamluk sultans and later Ottoman governors. Monuments from different periods clustered around the gate in this pivotal location.

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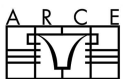
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