

FROM ALEXANDRIA TO ASWAN: ROLE OF THE COMITÉ DE CONSERVATION DES MONUMENTS DE L'ART ARABE IN THE PROVINCES

من الإسكندرية الى أسوان: دور لجنة حفظ الآثار العربية القديمة في الاقاليم

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ABSTRACT

Due to the massive scale of urbanization in the provinces of Egypt, the protection of architectural heritage is becoming more and more difficult and challenging, most restoration and conservation projects funded by international and governmental bodies consider Cairo as their main priority while architectural heritage in several provinces of Egypt remains undocumented, unprotected or in the verge of being destroyed.

Throughout seventy years of operation, the Committee de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe had unprecedented impact on the architectural heritage of Egypt Despite being halted in 1954, the Committee interventions are still visible on Cairo's urban fabric, however little is known about the committee interventions in the other provinces of Egypt. This research paper aims to shed lights on the formation and evolution of the committee, approaches of interventions and their impact on the built environment, particularly in the provinces. The paper will discuss the formation and the evolution of the committee and its interventions in the provinces. Through the analysis and the re-interpretation of their own annual published bulletins, in order to take advantage from these approaches in future conservation projects.

KEYWORDS

Architectural conservation; Architectural Restoration; Architectural Heritage

المخلص

نظرًا للنطاق الهائل للتوسع العمراني في محافظات مصر، أصبحت حماية التراث المعماري أكثر صعوبة وتحديًا، وتعتبر معظم مشاريع الترميم والمحافظة التي تمويلها الهيئات الدولية والحكومية القاهرة على رأس أولوياتها بينما التراث المعماري في العديد من المحافظات مصر لا يزال غير موثق أو على وشك الانهيار.

على مدار سبعين عامًا من العمل، كان للجنة حفظ الآثار في الفن العربي تأثير غير مسبوق على التراث المعماري لمصر، وعلى الرغم من توقفها في عام ١٩٥٤، إلا أن تدخلاتها لا تزال مرئية على النسيج العمراني للقاهرة، إلا أنه لا يُعرف سوى القليل عن تدخلات اللجنة في اقاليم مصر الأخرى. تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى إلقاء الضوء على تكوين وتطور اللجنة واتجاهاتها في التدخل وأثرها على البيئة المبنية وخاصة في الاقاليم

الكلمات المفتاحية

الحفاظ المعماري؛ الترميم المعماري؛ التراث المعماري

1 INTRODUCTION

The conservation of Islamic architectural heritage was first introduced to the cultural map of Egypt by Edmé François Jomard,, a member of the French scientific mission accompanying the Napoleonic Expedition to Egypt (1798 to 1800). In his work, 'modern' Cairo was given special attention, it was the most detailed and comprehensive map than any previously available with individual buildings historically and architecturally documented and hand crafts surveyed. This encyclopaedic survey of Cairo can be considered a precursory form of large-scale conservation, since it was the starting point towards extensive intervention on historic Cairo in 1882, when the Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe (hereafter Comité), *Laġnat Hifz al-Ātār al-‘Arabiyya al-Qadīma* was established by Khedive Tawfiq in 1881. Its task was the conservation of Arab-Islamic (later on also Coptic) monuments of architecture in Egypt. The committee developed a systematic set of actions for safeguarding the Islamic and Coptic heritage of Cairo: buildings with historic value were registered as monuments; monuments were rescued from urban invasions that would eventually have led to a risk of their expropriation and the parasite structures built in, on and around them were removed; damaged or missing elements of monuments were restored; details and decorations of historic buildings were documented, preserved, completed, and duplicated repeatedly; dialogue was established between the different bodies involved with the different aspects of monuments - such as ownership, craftsmanship, and financing. finally, the whole process was published in the *Bulletins* - yearly publications by the committee. Without doubt, the program developed and implemented by the committee can rightfully be considered the greatest attempt at conserving the Egyptian built environment heritage in the modern era.

Although Cairo was given special attention in the early years of the committee operation, later on, in its most active period being between 1890 and 1914, the committee experiment was generalized throughout the country including provinces like: Alexandria, Damietta, Rosetta, Gharbiya, Fayoum and Aswan, several structures were documented and some of them were restored and conserved.

1.1 Research Problem

Due to the massive scale of urbanization in the provinces of Egypt, the protection of architectural heritage is becoming more and more difficult and challenging, most restoration and conservation projects funded by international and governmental bodies consider Cairo as their main priority while architectural heritage in several provinces of Egypt remains undocumented, unprotected or in the verge of being destroyed.

1.2 Research Purpose

The paper will discuss the formation and the evolution of the committee and its interventions in the provinces. Through the analysis and the re-interpretation of their own annual published bulletins, to take advantage from these approaches in future conservation projects.

1.3 Research Methodology

The adopted approach is analyzing and reinterpretation of the annual published bulletins of the comite from 1882 to 1961, The paper hypothetically investigates the topic from a different point of view in which provinces are the key player instead of cairo.

In addition, the paper discusses briefly the steps of the comite from formation to dissolution and their approaches of intervention with an eye on their contributions and impact on built environment of the provinces. Finally, reaching conclusions, results, and recommendations providing a recommendations for future conservation projects in the provinces inspired by the comite works but in a modern way suitable for the current era.

2. LITREATURE REVIEW

This research paper depends mainly on the annual bulletins of the comite from 1882 to 1961 which document over 303 official meetings and commissioned over 919 technical reports during lifetime of the comite.

In addition , Several scholars and researchers discussed the works of the comite from different points of view. The work of (I Ormos - 2009), highlighted the life and career of an important figure in modern Egyptian history and Cairo's history: Max Herz Pasha.

who was born in Hungary, studied in Hungary and Austria, spent his active life in Egypt, Max Herz (1856–1919) became chief architect to the Egyptian Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe in 1901. He occupied this position until the end of 1914. which was considered as the golden era of the comite , As chief architect, he played a key role in the conservation of Arab-Islamic architectural monuments in Egypt, in Cairo primarily.

The work of (AEDE El-Habashi - 2001) showed the comite works as a multi-disciplinary approach in conservation where architects, planners, scientists, economists, historians, politicians collaborate to preserve historic objects.

The work of (Ishak Bakhoum, D., 2021), analyzes the Comité's interventions on minarets, domes and minbars of Mamluk mosques, examining the restoration and reconstruction methodologies, approaches and the rationale for the decisions taken.

Therefore, the gap concluded from the literature review, includes the lack of studies on the contributions of the comite in the provinces.

2.1 Situation Before The Formation Of The Comité

The creation of Le Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe (the committee) in 1881 was the result of mounting pressure on the Egyptian authorities by European amateurs of Arab/Islamic art. The committee was the first modern body mandated with the conservation of the built heritage in Egypt. It was the fruit of campaigns by European intellectuals in Europe and Egypt who criticized the loss of urban heritage and architectural fabric in the face of grand urban projects by the Ministry of Public Works and the reconstruction of historic mosques by the Ministry of Awqaf. One of the critics was Stanley Lane Poole, who wrote in the academy of the difficulty of convincing the Khedive to change approaches:

... such a measure would involve very delicate negotiations with the Khedive, who is the principal sinner in the matter of art-demolition, and the negotiations, we may confidently prophesy, would end in smoke. If anyone is to move in this matter it is the Khedive himself: and the Europeanizing tendencies of his Highness do not favor the supposition he would be willing to take any steps in the conservative direction. He would perhaps ask whether Parisian boulevards and Italian villas planted in the historical soil of Egypt were not more artistic than tumble-down mosques and ruined houses? And would it be possible even with the temper of an angel, to answer such a question? (Lane Poole, 1874: 36).

The great majority of the committee's members were Europeans, and their approaches towards the conservation of the built heritage mirrored those in Europe at the time. When the committee

addressed the particular nature of Islamic architectural and urban heritage, it was within the viewpoint and framework of Orientalism. The working language of the committee was French, and its approaches differed little from prevailing approaches in France at the time. Restoration was preferred over preservation.

2.2 The Formation Of The Comité

The Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe was an organization established in December 1881 by Khedive Tawfiq which was responsible for the preservation of Islamic and Coptic monuments in Egypt. It was an Egyptian institution, part of the Ministry of Charitable Endowments (Awqaf in Arabic).

(Figure 1, The khedive decree of the comite formation in 1882(comite bulletins, the first report 1882))

The committee became part of the Ministry of Education in 1936 and was formally dissolved in 1961. Its responsibilities passed to the Permanent Committee for Islamic and Coptic Monuments, under the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, now known as the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

Members who formed the Commission at the date of the publication of the first Report [the committee's annual report of 1891].included : Ali Pasha Riza, the Director General of Waqfs, and Sir C. Scott-Moncrieff, Minister of Works, they included Yakub Pasha Artin, Under-secretary of Public Instruction, a highly-cultivated man; Mustafa Pasha Fehmy, President of the Council; Tigrane Pasha, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Franz Pasha, the ex-architect of the Waqfs Department, and a first-rate authority on Saracenic architecture; Dr Vollers, the Khedive's librarian; M. Grebaut, Director of the Giza Museum.

The committee's membership was not limited to permanent members, but the committee invited several honorary and associate members to join, creating a network of well-known experts including K. A. C. Creswell and Stanley Lane-Poole. *(Figure 2, The committee member in the first 10 years of formation (committee bulletins, the eighth report 1890))*

However, with independence in 1952, the foreign members of the committee left the country and were replaced by Egyptians. The administrative structure and name of the organization changed, though without any essential change in approaches. Little money or political will was directed to

the conservation of Islamic heritage in Cairo during the 1950s and 1960s, mainly for political and ideological reasons.

2.3. The Committee: Structure And Goals

It was composed of two commission ,The first one was entrusted with the task of drawing up a complete inventory of the arab monuments of Egypt , the brief of the other comite the second commission (later known as the “technical commission”) was to visit the various mosques, hammams ,water fountains etc which appeared to be most urgently in need of attention to report upon their condition and to recommend steps for their preservation .

The main goals of the comite was to create a comprehensive list of arab monuments including several building typologies : mosques , hammams ,zawiyas etc ... The committee must observe the maintenance of Arab antiquities and consider what needs to be repaired , The committee should

fully document its works and save its drawings in the museum of arab art so that it can be a documented source for all researchers in the future.



(Figure 1, The khedive decree of the committee formation in 1882 (committee bulletins, the first report 1882) (Figure 2, The committee member in the first 10 years of formation (committee bulletins, the eighth report 1890))

2.4. The Committee: Financial Situation

The primary duty of the comite was the preservation of the monuments and not their restoration , but preservation of monuments was a question of money , the comite and its architect knew what needed doing but could not do it without an increased staff and a larger budget.

The comite budget was always rather small and this meant that herz was frequently compelled to restrict his activities to preservation rather than undertaking complete restoration. The comite made an important decision under his guidance: instead of spending the limited means at its disposal on complete restoration projects it opted to carry out limited measures of preservation on a relatively large number of monuments thus salvaging them for happier future when it would be possible to execute all the necessary restoration measures . The comite undertook the complete restoration of monuments in a relatively small number of cases only , there can be no doubt that herz would have gladly undertaken the complete restoration of monuments of much greater number of monuments if he had the means at his disposal.

During the quarter of a century of its existence the comite had carried out two hundred and sixty five projects including the complete restoration of eight islamic religious monuments , one islamic style house and two coptic monuments. which is a considerable number regarding the lack of fund and political support.

Despite the tight financial situation ,the comite works was not centralized in cairo only, provinces were always considered in the comite fiscal year ,even if with less amount than that of cairo .

3. ATTITUDES OF THE COMITE TOWARDS CONSERVATION

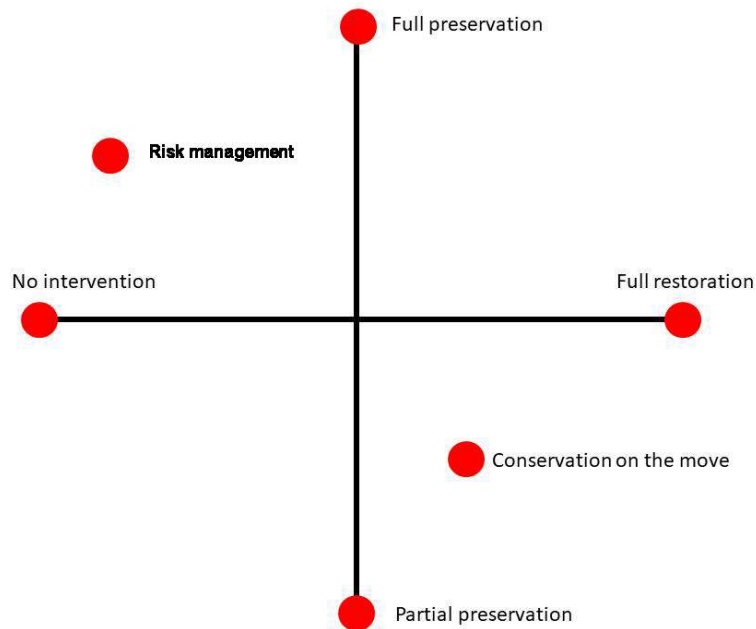
Naturally, the attitude towards conservation that was adopted by the Comité was not much different from attitudes in Europe at the time, both towards conservation of historic buildings and towards Islamic, Arab and Egyptian cultural and architectural heritage. The Comité’s practice followed the French school of conservation to a certain extent. Priority was given by the Comité to stylistic and artistic values over historic and archaeological values. Monuments were treated like museum pieces that should be protected from the encroachment of surrounding buildings, even if these encroachments were already historic. Clearing around monuments and sometimes prohibiting their development were practised for many listed buildings such as the historic Mosques of Malika Safiyya and Saleh Tala’e.

Evacuating inhabitants or users from historic buildings was also common practice. Much of the Comité’s budget went to compensating relocated people. No attention was given to functional, economic, urban, sociological, political, symbolic or religious values.

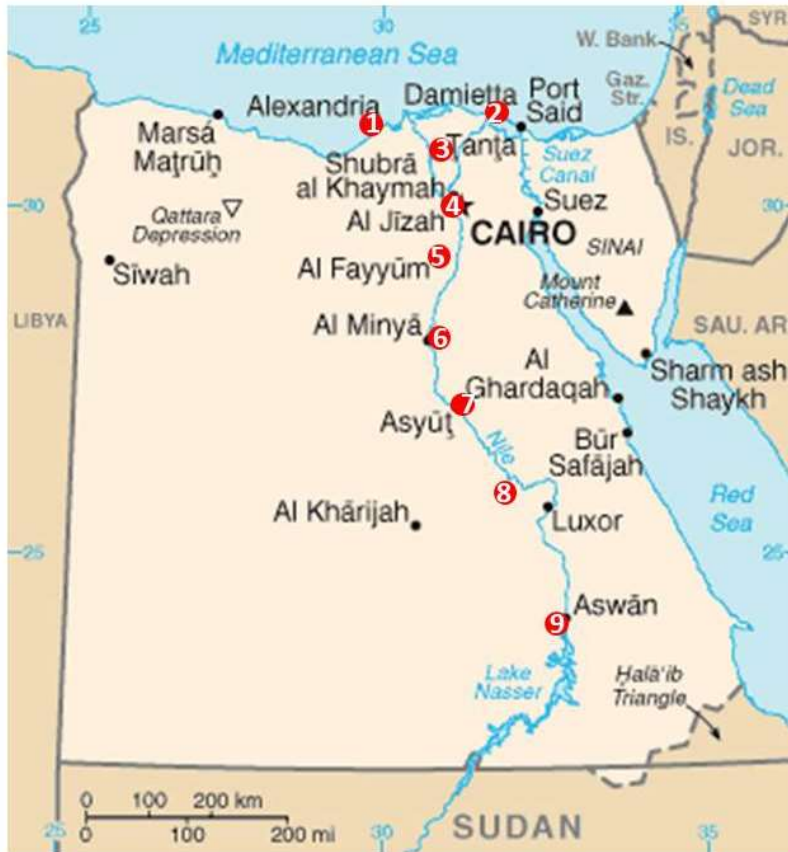
3.1 Approaches Of Intervention

Throughout its years of operation the comite adopted a systematic process depending on the technical commission reports which decided monuments in need of attention, it recommend a course of action. Decisions were made based on the monument's condition at the time as well as its architectural or artistic value. The courses of action undertaken ranged from strict preservation to large-scale restoration of single monuments. Strict preservation, which characterized the vast majority of cases, involved the reinforcement, repair, or cleaning of existing structures, while restoration involved the reconstruction of a monument to varying extents, which could make it usable again for the community (as a mosque, for example). Many examples of such reconstructions by the Comité still remain today.

The Comité’s reports that documented their interventions show examples of the different levels of interventions carried out.



(Figure 3, approaches of intervention adopted by the comite (author,2021))



(Figure 4, Map of Egypt with the committee projects in different cities and governorates (author,2021))

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1-Alexandria | 6-Al minya |
| 2-Damietta | 7-Asyut |
| 3-Tanta | 8-Souhag |
| 4-Aljizah | 9-Aswan |
| 5-Al fayum | |

3.1.1 Conservation on Move

If a monument was so wholly ruined that conservation would be both useless and impossible, the committee removed any objects or elements of artistic value would be transferred to the Museum of Arab Art, now known as the Museum of Islamic Art. for examples minbar of farchut mosque in upper Egypt was moved to be restored and exhibited in the museum of cairo.

3.1.2 Risk Management

In some cases, fast and straightforward steps should be made to preserve and protect the monument immediately from rising threats that endangered its safety including: groundwater level rise or urban encroachment ..etc.

Fortifications of Alexandria were clear examples for this intervention type , the old structures were supported by iron Scaffoldings temporarily until further intervention .

The same approach was adopted In the case of qaytbay mosque after being partially demolished due to british invasion of alexandria in 1882. max herz pasha proposed risk management plan and called for fast intervention before it is too late (committee bulletin 1883), as the second floor was in the verge of being destroyed.

In another case, some residents of al batatoun village (near to tanta) reported that their old cemetery (dated back to the seventh century) suffered from lack of sanitation and informal new structures, after the comite representative visited the site, the comite decided to inform the police to help in removing these informal structures and protecting the old cemetery from future violations.



(Figure 5, Risk management of Alexandria fortifications, (committee bulletins, the 30th report 1912)

3.1.3 No Intervention

The committee received many messages from local authorities or citizens calling for field research in their properties as they doubt of its historic importance, the comite members including its leader max herz pasha conducted field researches periodically, some of these visit were of great benefit, others were with no notable impact such as visit to assiut when max herz pasha visited mohamed el bakali mosque and he reported that it is an old and derelict structure with no aesthetic or historic importance hence the comite decided no intervention in such case.

In another case, while repairing the ablution yard at Al-Bahr Mosque in Damietta, the General Administration of Endowments noticed that some parts of the old ceiling might be of interest to the committee, after one of the representatives of the committee’s administration carried out the necessary examination. He decided to raise the issue to the technical comission who refused to document it as it had no historic singnificance.

3.1.4 Partial Preservation

Due to modernization and mass urbanization specially in post world war era 1945-1961, several sites with historic significance deteriorated quickly and were replaced by new structures hence the comite decided to protect what remained before it is too late.

For example : the comite decided to preserve the old parts of a factory in fawa with a fence with buffer zone 10 meters away from new structures. This same approach was adopted in several wekalas in Alexandria including : Wekalat el Shorbaghy in 1950s .

Pl. II.



(Figure 6, Abu el Abbas el Horeithi mosque in Al Mahalla el Kobra (committee bulletins, the 40th report 1922))

In other example , the comite members visited abu el abbas el horeithi mosque in al mahalla el kobra (*Figure 6*) and decided that the current building had no significance except the large clay minaret which is built in delta style so they decided to document and preserve it without intervention in the building itself.

3.1.5 Full Restoration

This type of restoration was widely adopted by the *committee*, whose restoration of Citadel of Qaitbay is one of the most famous examples. Today, the same approach is adopted by the SCA

in many of its interventions, this is not for theoretical or philosophical reasons, but rather is a continuation of practices that have always been followed and which the *committee* started. this type of restoration is considered the most accepted by both citizens and government today.

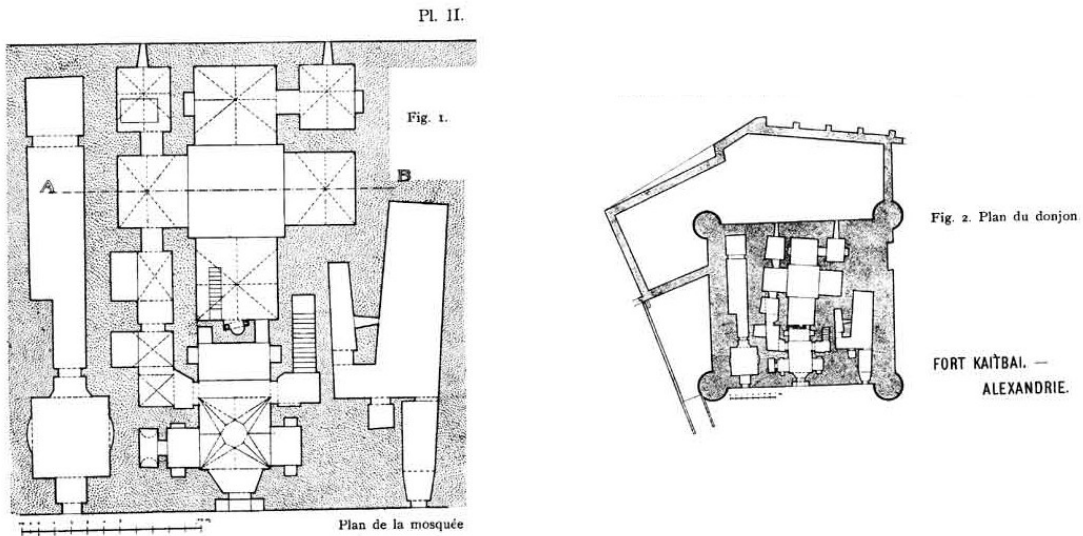
The citadel (or tabia) is an impressive example of Mamluk military architecture. It was built by the Mamluk Sultan “Al-Ashraf Abu Al-Nasr Qaitbay” in the fifteenth century (around the

year 1479 AD) in the borders of Alexandria to confront the threats of the Ottoman Empire to Egypt.

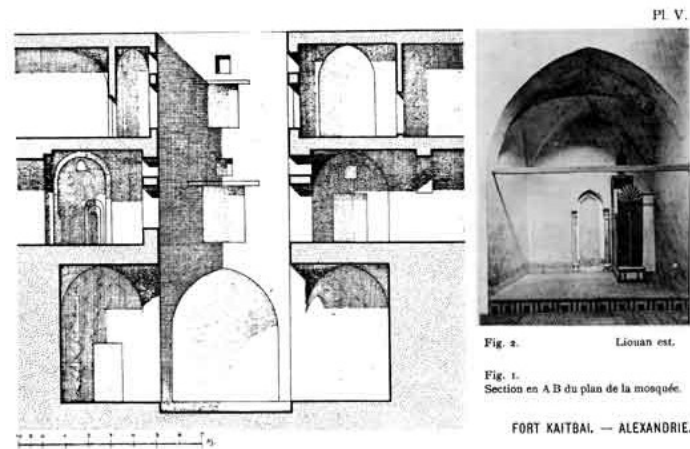
The castle had been severely damaged as a result of the bombing of the British fleet of Alexandria in June 1882. Years later, some limited repairs were made to the building and it remained unchanged until the demolition order was issued by the British authority and the citadel was about to be destroyed entirely but the committee leader Max Herz Pasha refused this decision and succeeded in convincing the authorities of its historical significance. over the years, the Committee for the Preservation of Arab Antiquities completely restored the Citadel of Sultan Qaitbay. The Committee adopted the old drawings of the castle (Description of Egypt drawings in 1801). The castle was totally restored to its original form using the same building materials, but it was never used again in defensive functions, later in 1920s it was reused for touristic purposes.



(Figure 7, citadel of qaytbay before and after full restoration (comite bulletins, the 40th report 1922))

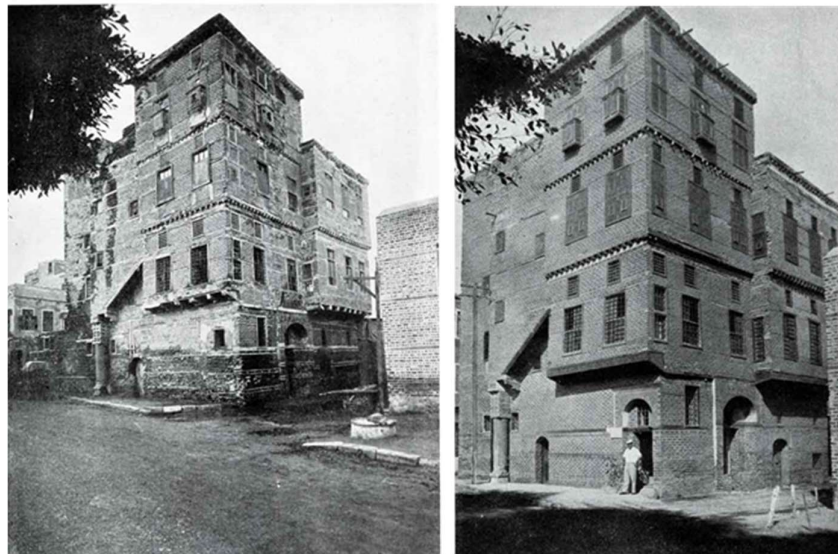


(Figure 8, square plan of the Qaitbay castle after full restoration (committee bulletins, the 40th report 1922))

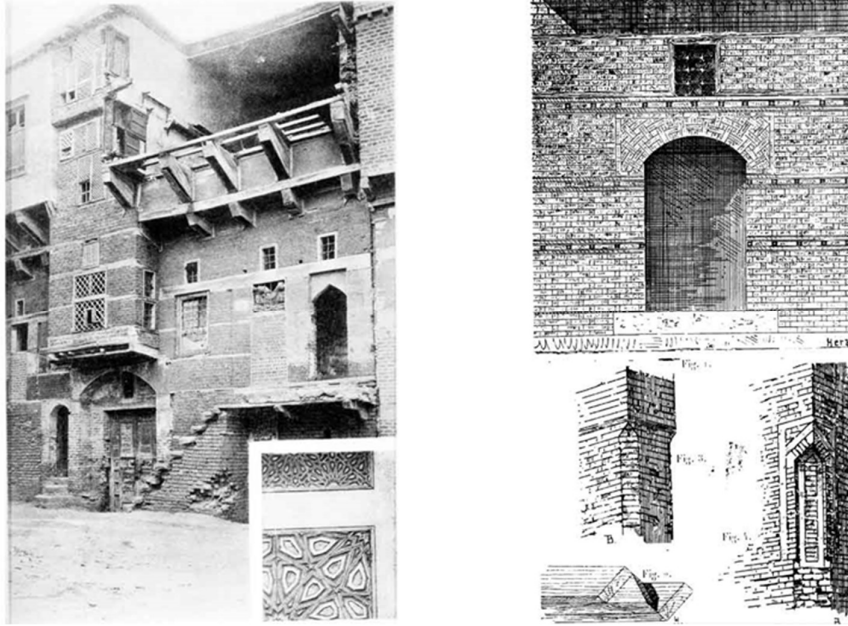


(Figure 9, section of the Qaitbay castle after full restoration (committee bulletins, the 40th report 1922))

In Rosetta, 38 houses had been classified as historical monuments. Only 22 of them were fully restored by the committee. Their plan was nearly always the same, a ground floor and one or two stores. Part of the ground floor was for business and storage rooms. The first floor was for men and the second for women. Some of the façades were decorated with polychrome bricks, red, black and white and are quite unique in the whole of Egypt. The first two floors, always corbelling out into the street, have splendid Mashrabeya (worked wood windows). most of the facades were in bricks with no plaster or paints as usual.



(Figure 10, Ali el Fatiri house before and after restoration, Rosetta (committee bulletins, the 40th report 1922))

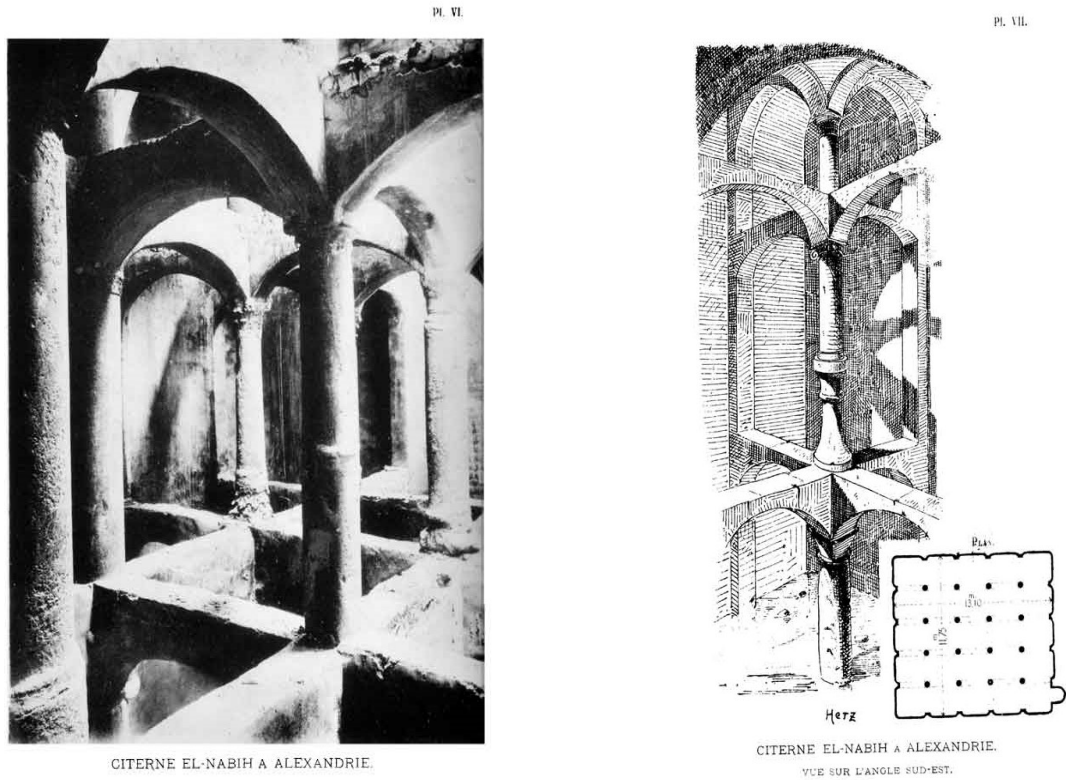


(Figure 11, samples of the committee architectural drawings and photographic documentation for Ali-elfatiri house restoration project, Rosetta (committee bulletins, the 40th report 1922))

3.1.6 Full Preservation

In this case, the building is preserved in its present state; only minimum interventions are applied to prevent or to slow down deterioration. No restoration, alteration or addition is made.

The decision not to restore is often adopted formally when there is a lack of funds or political interest in the heritage. This approach was adopted in several remaining cistern of Alexandria, most of them were preserved and stop functioning, few of them were used again. In southern Aswan, the kufic cemetery (dated back to the ninth century) was neglected for long time and subjected to threats from antiquity dealers, hence the committee decided to document the whole cemetery and build a new wall to surround the area, the committee also appointed 2 full-time security guards to protect the new walls.



(Figure 12, El Nabih Cistern documentation after preservation, Alexandria (committee bulletins, the 30th report 1912))



(Figure 13, modern photo for remaining kufic cemetery, aSwan (Author, 2019))

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of the different approaches leads to the following conclusions:

- From its initial formation, the Committee introduced photography as a necessary tool for the development of a restoration project as seen in figures (4,5,6,9). The systematic photographic coverage of all the restoration sites in progress made it possible to report on the progress of the sites and document the state of deterioration of the monuments during the second half of 19th century and the first half of 20th century.
- As stated in the case of Alexandria fortifications (figure (5)). The committee decision was affected by lack of funds, so they decided to take the cheapest and fastest measure to protect the structure. Until further intervention when enough budget is available.
- As stated in the case of Abu el Abbas el Horeithi mosque in al Mahalla el Kobra (figure (6)), The committee conducted bi-annual field researches in the provinces to follow-up the situation of the buildings with historical significance.
- As stated in the case of Mohamed el Bakali mosque in Assiut (page 11), The committee contacted periodically with local authorities of provinces to inform them of any buildings of significance.
- As seen in figure (4) most of the committee works were concentrated on the delta region and upper Egypt, despite its rich and unique architectural quality, no Islamic monuments from Sinai Peninsula or western oasis were considered by the committee.

The paper suggests for other research to apply analytical studies to document and protect architectural heritage of the provinces, by taking in consideration:

- Consider the committee approaches and how can be modernized to be used today.
- Produce some guidelines to protect the architectural heritage from uncontrolled mass urbanization.
- Consider alternative and sustainable sources of funds for conservation projects.
- Re-applying periodical field visits that was conducted by the committee members bi-annually as local authorities should have more power to intervene protecting the architectural heritage from damage.

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