

## Islamic Cairo, Egypt

Cairo is Islamic, though some areas are more so than others. Actually, this area is no more Islamic than Central Cairo, but as though walking through a time machine we are transported back to Cairo's past Islamic heritage, to a world of [ancient mosques](#) and 1,500 hundred year old markets; to medieval forts and the city that was Salah ad-Din's.

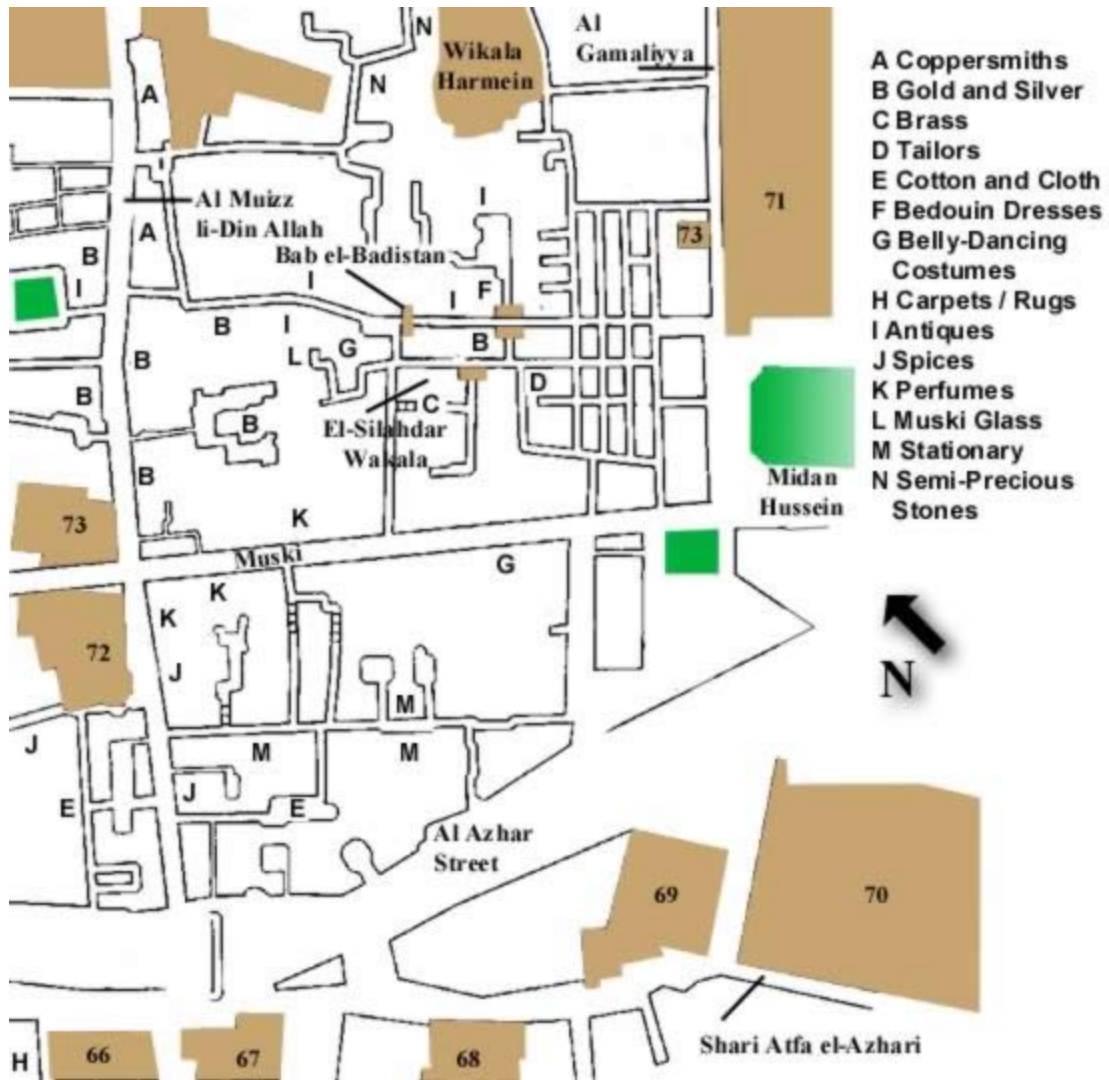
One should dress appropriately if sightseeing is in order, though it is not necessary when simply shopping in the Khan. Appropriate clothing involves clothing which will be acceptable in the mosques, with little skin showing, and particularly not legs and shoulders. Wear comfortable shoes that can be easily removed.



Almost all of the old Mosques and Islamic Monuments will have Markers

To start this journey, we return to Midan Ataba. However, before proceeding into the Islamic district, let's head southwest along Mohammed Ali street to the intersection of Port Said (Bur Said) street and visit the Islamic Museum, which will provide us with some additional knowledge and resources prior to entering Islamic Cairo. We can then proceed northeast on Port Said street until it intersects with Sharia al-Azhar, which we will take to the east (right). We will first pass the carpet market (H) and then the [Mosque-Madrassa of al-Ghuri](#) (66) and then his [Mausoleum](#) (67) (the black and white buildings, circa 1505 AD), which are both worth a visit. This complex is a beautiful reminder of the Mamluk era of Egypt, when slaves were kings, but it was al-Ghuri who turned the rule over to the Ottomans with his defeat in Syria. Of note is that there are Sufi performances held in the mausoleum. This whirling dance is a must see in the author's opinion. The [Wikala of al-Ghuri](#) (68) (the best preserved wikala in Cairo) is just east of the complex, which serves as a theater and concert hall, along with artist's galleries. Skirting the Khan and continuing on al-Azhar street, past the Mosque of Abu Dahab (69) (circa 1774 AD), which currently houses students of the al-Azhar Mosque University, we arrive at the [al-Azhar Mosque](#) (70), which was founded in 970 AD. It is one of Cairo's oldest mosques, but perhaps more importantly, it is the [world's oldest university](#) and certainly worth a

look. The street which runs along the side of the al-Azhar Mosque is Shari Atfa el-Azhari and at the end of this street is [Beit Zeinab Khatun](#) (not indicated on map), built in 1468 and refurbished in 1713. The first floor reflects the style of the Mamluks era while the second is Ottoman. Opposite the house is the El-Ayni Mosque, and beyond that are two old houses at the end of Shari Atfa el-Ayni. They are the [Beit al-Harrawi](#), built in the 1700's and close by is Beit Sitt Wassila (circa 1637 AD).





Turning back and heading back up to the front of the Al-Azhar Mosque, we can head north a short distance and we will arrive at Midan Hussein (pictured left). This was the center of medieval Cairo and today remains an important area for some Islamic religious festivals, including Ramadan. To the north of this is a relatively new (1870) [Mosque of Sayyidna al-Hussein](#) (71). Though new in terms of Egypt, it is a very sacred site to Muslims and those not of that faith should not enter.

Across the street is the Ahmed Pasha Sabil (73), while to the south of the Al-

Hussein mosque is the new [al-Azhar Park](#), a mega project that has transformed the surrounding neighborhoods as well as adding needed greenery to the City. The al-Azhar Park offers an excellent view of the surrounding area and is a nice place to take a rest at the Hilltop or Lakeside Cafes.

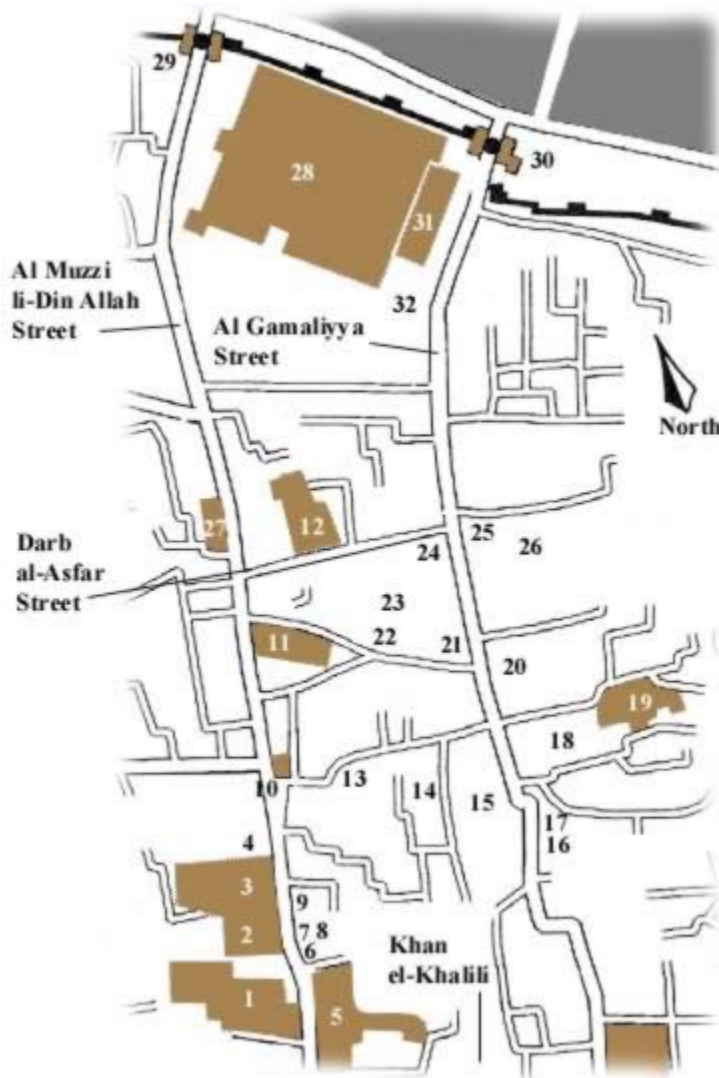
The 'knowing' traveler sometimes dismisses the [Khan el-Khalili](#) as a tourist trap, and indeed, all manner of souvenirs may be purchased there, from statues to 'personalized' cartouches to papyrus art. But the Khan (meaning market) predates tourism to the area and was established in the 14th century. Further, most tourists tend to buy souvenirs, and for many items, this is the best and least expensive place to buy them with the most variety. But many things are sold here, and one discovers that the Egyptians are here as well, buying their fabrics and clothes, pots, and other ordinary household needs. Step into this world by heading west Muski street from Midan Hussein. Many of the shops for specific goods are clustered along specific streets, or in specific areas. For example, there is the Coppersmith's street. However, this is less true than most guide books would have one believe. Many shops, particularly those catering specifically to tourists have a variety of different products.

Where Muski street crosses al-Muizz li-Din Allah street, two mosques sit opposite each other on either side of Muski. The southern one is the [Mosque of al-Ashraf Barsbey](#) (circa 1425 AD) (also known as the Ashrafiya Medersa) (72), which is a complex consisting of a mosque-medersa, a mausoleum and sabil-kuttab, while the northern one is the Mosque of al-Mutahhar (73) (circa 1744 AD) built by Abd el-Rahman Katkhuda. The Mosque of al-Mutahhar has a wonderful marble covered floor. Al-Muizz li-Din Allah street was named for the Fatimid caliph who conquered Cairo in 969 AD and was the main street of medieval Cairo.

### **North of the Khan el-Khalili**

Up Al-Muizz li-Din Allah past the gold and copper merchants at the northern end of the Khan is the area known as Bein al-Qasreen (between the Palaces) and at one time there

were two great palaces here. Today, its minarets, domes and towering buildings leave visitors impressed with the Islamic tradition of the area. We first encounter the [Madrassa and Mosoleum of Qala'un](#) (1) to the left (east) side of the street. The Madrassa and Mausoleum of Qala'un is the earliest building in the area (circa 1279 AD) and probably the most interesting to visit. A madrassa was a hospital, and there is still a clinic here, which, remarkably means that this madrassa has been providing medical care for some 700 years. Just behind this building is the [Taghri Bardi Mosque](#). Just north of the Madrassa and Mausoleum of Qala'un is first the [Madrassa and Mausoleum of an-Nasir Mohammed](#) (2) (circa 1304 AD, with an ornate arched door seized from a church in Acre), and then the [Madrassa and Mausoleum of Barquq](#) (3) (circa 1386 AD), both on the east (left) side of the street and both of which make for interesting visits. To the north of these, but in the same complex is the [Kamiliya Madrassa](#) (4) (Circa 1180-1238 AD) built by Sultan el-Kamil, but little remains of this.



The [Madrassa and Mausoleum of as-Salih Ayyub](#) (5) (circa 1242-1250 AD) is the first building on the west side of the street across from the Madrassa and Mosoleum of Qala'un. This is one of the first Ayyubid Madrassas and one of the few that survive, though all that remains is a wall surmounted by a minaret. Next is Baybar's Madrassa (6), followed by the Ismail Pasha Sabil-Kuttab (7) (circa 1535), behind which is the Uthman Katkhuda Palace (8) (circa 1350) which was once a Mumluk residence. Continuing North up Al-Muizz li-Din Allah after the Ismail Pasha Sabil-Kuttab is the [Beshtak Palace](#) (9) built in 1334 AD by Emir Beshtak. A small, outer door leads to the 13th century Beshtak or El-Fijl Mosque on the first floor of the palace.

Further up the street one the right (east), we find the [Sabil-Kuttab of Abdel Katkhuda](#)

(circa 1744 AD) A sabil is a fountain, while a kuttab is a Quranic (religious) school, and there are several of these remaining in Cairo (the school its atop the fountain). While this



may sound like a strange combination, they satisfy two basic recommendations of the Prophet, which are water for the thirsty and spiritual enlightenment for the ignorant. After the Sabil-Kuttab of Abdel Katkhuda, still on the east side of the street is the [Mosque of al-Aqmar](#) (11) (meaning Moonlit, and built in 1125 AD. Sometimes called the Gray Mosque). Up the street just a bit further is Darb al-Asfar street. Making a right here and heading east a few steps we come to [Beit as-Suhaymi](#) (12) (house of as-Suhaymi and probably the finest example of an Ottoman house in Cairo).



**Beit as-Suhaymi**

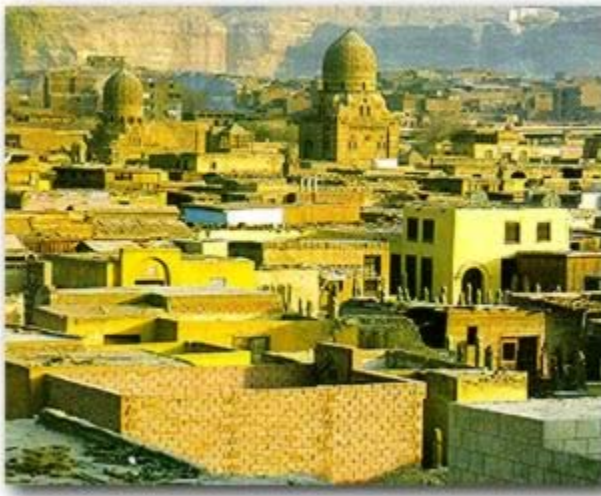
To the east in the area between the Sabil-Kuttab of Abdel Katkhuda and the Beit as-Suhaymi (17th Century) are winding streets with a myriad of Islamic buildings one may wish to wonder through. One finds in the streets just behind the Sabil-Kuttab of Abdel Katkhuda the Sheikh Sinan Mausoleum (13), then the Mithqal Mosque (14), followed by the El-Higaziya Mosque (15) and across Al-Gamaliyya the El-Ahmedi Mosque (16) (17th century) is located on the corner of Darb el-Tabalawi to the south, with the Muharram Mosque (17) (circa 1539 located on the corner of Atfa el-Qaffasin and Shari al Gamaliyya) just north of it, the Oda Bashi Wakala (18) behind that which is in front (west) of the Musafirkhana Palace (19) (circa 1779), which is now destroyed by fire. To the north of Muharram Mosque back on Al-Gamaliyya is the Oda Bashi Sabil-Kuttab (20) (circa 1673), whose front has decorative green and blue tiles and surmounted by a wood canopy, and up Al-Gamaliyya on the left (west) is [El-Ustadar Mosque](#) (21) and between that and the El-Aqmar are the Bazaraa Wakala (22) (17th century) to the south and the Said el-Saada Mosque (23) to the north. Behind the Beit as-Suhaymi (on Al-Muizz li-Din Allah) to the east is the Qitasbay Sabil-Kuttab (24) and behind that across

Al-Gamaliyya is the Qara Sunqur Medersa (25) and behind that the Suleyman Aga Sabil.(26)

Back on Al-Muizz li-Din Allah, and heading north again, we next come to the [Mosque of Suleyman Aga el-Silahdar](#) (27) (circa 1839 AD) which is worth a visit, and finally to the southeast corner of the [Mosque of al-Hakim](#) (28) (completed in 1010 AD).

Continuing to the northeast corner of the mosque will bring one to [Bab al-Futuh](#) (29) (Gate of Conquest) and the Northern walls, which were built in about 1087 AD to defend the Fatimid city of Al-Qahira. Notably, along the way one may notice the garlic and onion market on the east side of the street. Until about 1850, this was the last slave market in Egypt. Exit the gate and turn right (west) to get a feel for this massive and grand military defense. Walking along the wall, one will next come to the [Bab an-Nasr](#) (30) (Gate of Victory) with its square towers. reenter the area through this gate and to ones right sitting along side the al-Hakim Mosque is the Wikala of Qaytbay (31) (a medieval merchants inn circa 1481). One will certainly wish to visit both the al-Hakim and [Wikala of Qaytbay](#), as well as the El-Jashankir Mosque (32) which sits south of the Wikala, but also of interest is the entrance to the top of the Northern Wall from the roof of al-Hakim Mosque. From there, one may walk along the top of the wall and explore the inside of the gates. Just as a note, looking north one sees housing, but this is also what is left of the Bab an-Nasr cemetery.

### **The Northern Cemetary**



Just outside the North Wall is Al-Galal Street, which we now wish to take along the wall to the south and the Bab an-Nasr Cemetery to the North. Heading east (right, as one exits either of the Northern Gates away from al-Hakim) on this street will finally bring us to the Northern Cemetery.

The Northern Cemetery, also known as the City of the Dead, is a true curiosity. It is a cemetery, but also a city of the living. Originally, Cairo's rulers selected the area for their tombs outside the crowd medieval city in a

location that was mostly desert. However, dating back to early pharaonic times, Egyptians have not so much thought of cemeteries as places of the dead, but rather places where life begins. Hence, tombs were often thought of as places to entertain, and guest facilities for visitors were often appended to the tombs. So it came to be that squatters as early as the 14th century took up residence in the tombs, living easily alongside the dead. Today, cenotaphs are used as tables, and clothing lines are strung between headstones

and the area is fully recognized by the government as both a cemetery and a residential area. One more mystery in a city that once required kings to first be slaves.

Upon entering the Cemetery along Al-Galal street, past Salah Salem street, we will encounter the 1967 War Cemetery at the intersection of Ahmed Ibn Inal Street. We can take a short jaunt to the right (north) just past the War Cemetery where we will first find the [Mosque of Amir Qurqumas](#) (1507) and then the [Religious and Funerary Complex of Sultan Inal](#) (1456). These are, are have been restored by a Polish team. Now back down the street retracing our steps to the south and the intersection with Al-Galal where we entered, make a left heading east and we will pass the tomb of Asfur on the right (south) and come to the [Khanqah and Mausoleum of Ibn Barquq](#) which was completed in 1411 AD. Ibn means 'son' and this is the mausoleum of Farag, Ibn Barquq's son. From there, head due south on the road and very shortly we come to the [Complex of Sultan Ashraf Barsbey](#) (1432). The dome of the complex is carved with a wonderful star pattern. Inside, the floors are fine marble, and the pulpit is inlaid with ivory.

Continuing south, we will come to the [Mosque of Qaytbay](#) (circa 1474 AD), who was the last Mamluk ruler in Egypt with much power. The gateway is south of the Mosque. Now heading east again to leave the Northern Cemetery, on Salah Salem, we need to look for Al Azhar street which should be near, and head back to the area of the Khan.

### South of the Khan el-Khalili to the Citadel

We must first trace our way back east to Al-Muizz li-Din Allah past the Khan el-Khalili, and take a left heading south between the buildings of the al-Ghourri complex. Just before we pass the Mosque of al-Fakahani (48) (circa 1145 but rebuilt in the 17th century) there is a small street leading east where [Beit Gamal ad-Din](#) (47) (1637) is located at 6 Hara Hoch Qadam (circa 1637). The house is typical of Cairo's upper class of the 17th century. The front has two projecting mashrabiya panels overlooking the street, and is entered via an arched doorway. It has an inner courtyard and a second floor harem chamber.

To the east of Al-Muizz li-Din Allah is Hara el-Rum, the old Christian Quarters, which was built outside the city walls originally. In the 11th century, the walls were moved to encompass this area. It was the seat of the Coptic patriarchate until the 19th century. There are a few old Christian monuments here, including the Church and Monastery of St. Tadros and the 6th century Church of the Virgin (El-Adra), which was rebuilt after being destroyed by fire in the 11th and 14th centuries



Continuing south on Al-Muizz il-Din Allah we find the Tussan Pasha Sabil (49) (circa 1820) to the east (left), which was built by Mohammed Ali in memory of a son who died at the age of twenty. The kuttab are rooms scattered throughout the building. East of this at the end of Atfa el-Tateri is the Beit Shabshiri (50) built during the 17th century. The house is small, but there is an interior courtyard which is overlooked by projecting mashrabiya panels, lattice windows and galleries. The harem chamber encompasses the whole of the east wing and overlooks the street and courtyard through mashrabiyas.

Finally, back on Al-Muizz li-Din Allah we continue south and arrive at another complex of Islamic monuments. Here we find the [Bab Zuweila](#) (51), which was built at the same time as the Northern Gates, but which has a much more gruesome history. The [Mosque of al-Mu'ayyad](#) (52) is the building to the east (right), completed in 1422 by Al-Mu'ayyad (known as the Red Mosque). The view from the top of the mosques' minarets is said to be about the best in Cairo. Just east of the Bab Zuweila is the Wakala and Sabil-Kuttab of Nafisa al-Beida (53) which is an information center for Islamic Cairo. Built during the 18th century, the rabaa section is still inhabited. The sabil-kuttab is located in the southern section of the building. We can continue south on Al-Muizz li-Din Allah where we will pass the Frag Ibn Barquq Zawia (54) (circa 1408 AD, but all that remains are two reception rooms) Next is the Mahmud el-Kurdi Mosque (55) (circa 1395 AD) on the left (east) which has a mosque-medersa and mausoleum. About 20 more yards to the south is the Inal el-Yusufi Mosque (56) (circa 1392 AD) on the left. It was built in the same style as the Mahmud el-Kurdi Mosque, with the only real difference being the shape of the minarets and decorations. Qaytbay Palace (57) is behind that, but all the remain of this palace built in 1485 is the maqaad, which consist of two ancient columns surmounted by three Gothic arches. However, we want to trace our way back north up Al-Muizz li-Din Allah to Darb al-Ahmar to continue.

Just to the south of this intersection is the [Mosque of as-Salih Tala'i](#) (58) (founded in 1160 by the emir As-Salih Talai, vizier to the last of the Fatimid caliphs). We will make a right off Al-Muiz li-Din Allah and heading more or less east on Darb al-Ahmar (Red Road). By the way, behind (south) of as-Salih Tala'i is the tent maker's market, which is in fact Radwan Bey Kasbah (59), the only remaining covered market which was built in the 17th century by emir Radwan Bey. This area of Islamic Cairo is called Darb al-Ahmar after the street name, and the first building of interest we come to will be the [Mosque of Qijmas al-Ishaqi](#) (60) (circa 1481 AD). This area was built up in the late Mamluk era and this is one of the finest examples of the era's architecture. Though plain on the outside, inside are wonderful stained glass windows, inlaid marble floors and stucco walls. Next door to this is the el-Mihmandar Mosque (61) (circa 1324-5 AD), which has a central courtyard and four iwan. The mausoleum located in the northeast corner has a fluted stone exterior.

A little further down Darb al-Ahmar (now actually Sharia at-Tabana) we next come to the [Mosque of al-Maridani](#) (62) (circa 1339 AD), known for its confusion of styles and incorporation of pharaonic



Mosque of al-Maridani



columns. The mosque is virtually a self contained history of Egypt, with arch designs from the Roman, Christian and Islamic eras. The fountain is Ottoman.

Further down Sharia at-Tabana, we pass the [Madrasa of Umm Sultan Sha'ban](#) (63) on the right (east). West and behind this mosque is the Beit er-Razzaz (64). The house was refurbished by Katkhuda er-Razzaz in 1778 from the palace originally built by Sultan Qaytbay in the 15th century. It has two courtyards and a beautiful harem chamber. Note the carved work on the vertical wood bays which extend from floor to ceiling. One of the entrances is reached from inside the shops on the Shari el-Tabbana.



**Tarbay as-Sharifi Mosque**

Next, we arrive at the [Mosque of Aqsungur](#) (65) (originally circa 1347 AD, but added to since then), popularly known as the Blue Mosque for the blue-gray marble on the outside of the building. It is considered a major, must see attraction. A little further we will pass (remainder of monuments are not shown on map), all on the left (east) first the [Khayrbak Mosque](#) (circa 1502 - 1520 AD), the Alin Aq Palace (circa 1293 AD), the Tarabay as-Sharifi Mosque (circa 1503 AD) and the [Aytmishi Mosque](#) (circa 1383 AD). Just a little further south we pass the el-Mu'ayyad Madrasa (circa 1418 AD), and from here, we soon arrive at the medieval fortress called the [Citadel](#), one of Cairo's best known attractions.



Mosque of Khayrbay

### Leaving the Citadel



Just north of the Citadel is Midan Sala ad-Din. The square was built in the 12th century at the same time as the Citadel, and was once a parade ground. To the north is the [El-Gawhara el-Lala Mosque](#) (76) (circa 1430 AD) which is very small. East and southeast are the [Qanibey Medersa](#) (77) (circa 1503 AD) and the [Mahmudiya Medersa](#) (78) (circa 1567-8 AD). Northwest of this is a complex of two mosques, consisting of the [Mosque and Madrassa of Sultan Hassan](#) (33) (circa 1356-63 AD), and across from it, the



Umm Abbas Sabil-Kuttab

[Mosque of ar-Rifai](#) (34) (circa 1869 AD) which is a much newer mosque begun in 1867 with additions as late as 1912. It was built on the site of the Sheikh ar-Rifa'i zawia built in 1122 AD. The Mosque and Madrassa of Sultan Hassan, however, dates from between 1356 and 1363, and is believed to be one of the finest examples of Mamluk architecture in Cairo. Just a little east of this complex on Suyufiya street is the [Madrassa of Sungur Sa'adi](#) (35) (circa 1315 AD) and the old [Dervish Theater](#), where the original Dervish monks performed their magnificent whirling dances. However, back at Midan Salah ad-Din we want to head east back towards Central (Modern) Cairo on Saliba (Abdel Meguid) street. Very shortly, we first come to the [Sabil-Kuttab of Qaytbay](#) (36) (circa 1479 AD) on the left (south) with its beautiful marble inlays. Next we will pass the Qanibey el-Mohammedi Mosque (circa 1413 AD) on our left, which has a single iwan and a wood ceiling over the courtyard. We will pass between the [Mosque of Shaykhu](#) (37) (circa 1349-55 AD) on the right (north) and his Khanqah (38) to the left, then past the Umm Abbas Sabil-Kuttab on the right, which was built in the 19th century, and then the [Medersa of Tagri Bardi](#) (circa 1440 AD) (39) on the right and finally arrive at the [Sarghatmish Medersa](#) (circa 1356 AD) (40) on the left. North, several blocks from here, are the [El-Yusufi Mosque](#) (74) and the Ahmed Efendi Sabil (75).



**Mosque of Ibn Tulun**

However, our interest lies in the large [Mosque of Ibn Tulun](#) (41) (circa 876-9 AD) behind this, which is a very early Abbasid structure dating to 876 AD, only around 200 years after the Islamic conquest of Egypt. Behind the Mosque is the [Gayer-Anderson Museum](#) (42), where the houses which form the museum are at least as interesting as the exhibits within.

After visiting the Gayer-Anderson Museum, we need to head back to Abdel Meguid street and continue our journey east past the [Sangar Salar Mosque and Mausoleum](#) (circa 1304 AD) (43) on the left and the Sayyida Zeinab Cultural Park on the right and on to Midan Sayyida Zeinab where we will be entering Central Cairo once again. However, The Sabil-Kuttab of Sultan Mustafa (44) is on the north side of the Midan, while the Haram Zeinab Fatatri (45) is on the east side of the Midan. The building on the west side is the [Mosque of Sayyida Zeinab](#) (46) which is contemporary with the El-Husseini but rebuilt in 1549, 1761 and 1884.

We have not touched upon all the monuments in Islamic Cairo, Exploring can be a fun thing in Egypt, and we hope viewers who visit will take the time to look around, find new sites, and even report them back to us at Tour Egypt.

This concludes our tour of Islamic Cairo. Next, please take our tour of Old Cairo, with some of the oldest churches and mosques in the world.







## Egypt Feature Story A Walk Along Mui'z Street in Islamic Cairo

*by Seif Kamel*

There are many important streets and districts around [Cairo](#). The Kornish El Nile Street, for example, is one of the major traffic streams in the city. It goes from Shubra and Shubra El Khiema in the north, all the way to Helwan, the last neighborhood of greater Cairo in the south. There is also the famous Street of Salah Salem, which begins in Heliopolis in the east and ends in [Islamic Cairo](#), near downtown.

El Mui'z Li Din Allah was once the principal street in [Cairo](#). It is named after the Fatimid Caliph who conquered Cairo in 969 AD and who was responsible for much of Cairo's building programs at that time. El Mui'z Street was the main route of this period. Back then, people would access the road through [Bab Zuweila](#) in the south and exit through [Bab El Futuh](#) in the north. Over the centuries many buildings have been

constructed on this street. Of course, it is no longer a central street in Cairo. It is very narrow these days in comparison with more modern avenues, but it is nevertheless one of the most historical, representing Cairo's largest open-air museum of Islamic and medieval monuments.



El Mui'z Street still starts out at [Bab Zuweila](#), the only remaining gate of the southern walls of Fatimid, Cairo. The gate itself was not constructed until the [Mamluk Period](#), during the 11th century. The Caliph used to watch the annual pilgrimage caravan going to Mecca from here, and this gate was also notorious as the site for public execution. The criminals were hung from the gate's walls. This gate is named for the tribe that was garrisoned nearby.

[Bab Zuweila](#) was also called Bab Al Mutawali, which can be translated as the "gate of the responsible" because the individual responsible for communicating the problems of the people to the Caliph sat beside this gate. Next to Bab Zuweila there is the [Mosque of Sultan Mu'ayyad](#), which was built in 1415. One can climb the minaret of the mosque through a door in the prayer hall and have an

excellent view of [Islamic Cairo](#) from above.



After [Bab Zuweila](#), one must go straight along Mui'z Street and through the [Wakala of Ghuri](#), which is a large market that mainly specializes in products made of cloth. There are many shops that sell colorful pieces of cloth of different materials. This is in addition to the traditional souvenir and gift shops. This part of the street is very interesting. You feel that you are really a part of the Old [Islamic Cairo](#) as you walk between the shops and hear the loud voices of buyers and sellers.

At the end of Al Ghuria, there is [Wikala of Al Ghuri](#). The word wikala means a hostel built for merchants who came from Africa in caravans full of goods. They used to rest in these hostels, and they used to have a place for trading as well. Usually, the wikala is rectangular shaped building consisting of three to five floors. The only remaining wikala in [Cairo](#) is the Ghuri Wikala which was built in the 17th century. It has three floors and provides good examples of the art of the period. It is now used as a center for arts and crafts like wood, portraits and Bedouin crafts.

Across the Mui'z Street and on the other side of [Wikala of Ghuri](#) lies the [Ghuri complex](#), which are black and white buildings facing each other. It was constructed by Qansuh El Ghuri, the last powerful ruler of the Mamluks in Egypt. Qansuh died at the hands of the Ottomans and his body was buried in this complex. This complex is now used as a cultural center and theater. [Whirling dervishes](#) perform there two times a week.





To continue walking in the interesting Mui'z Street now, one must pass through Azhar Street. Azhar Street is one of the important streets in [Cairo](#) as it connects Salah Salem Street to Opera Square, downtown. This street is usually very crowded, although the Egyptian police exert a lot of effort to make it easier to pass through it. But you don't have to worry, because there is this small walking bridge that makes passing the Azhar Street very easy and enjoyable at the same time. You can see much from this small bridge, including the famous [Mosque of Al Azhar](#) founded in 970 AD and the Azhar Islamic University. On the other side of the street, there is the Saydena El Hussein Mosque. It was built in 1870 and it replaced another mosque of the 12th century. Beside the Hussein Mosque lies the most famous tourist market in the whole world I believe, [Khan El Khalili](#) with its famous cafes and many souvenirs shops.



Just beside the [Khan El Khalili](#) is the entrance to the other part of El Mui'z Street. It starts with Al Sagha, which means 'the gold sellers'. There are many gold and silver shops at the beginning of this part of the street. You can buy wonderful gifts there at the best prices. There are also many spice and perfume dealers, as well as the traditional gift shops that sell papyrus, gifts, shishas and other kinds of souvenirs.

A few steps after these shops, you will enter the area of Bein El Qasrein. The word means "between the two palaces". These two palaces used to exist 600 years ago, facing each other and opening on a public square that was the center of Fatimid, Cairo, founded in 969 AD. Other dynasties replaced the buildings of the street with buildings of their own but the street remained reserved for grand buildings.

The western side of Bein El Qasrein has the spectacular facades belonging primarily to three early Mamluk complexes. The most southerly is the [Madrassa and Mausoleum of Sultan Qalawun](#) and it is the oldest of the three, being completed in 1279. Three hundred prisoners worked in the construction of the complex, which was completed in 13 months.



The re is a dark corridor that goes from the Madrasa to the

Mausoleum, which is one of the most stunning interiors in [Cairo](#).

The [Qalawun complex](#) is undergoing restorations and it will be ready for visits in a few months. However, its view from outside is amazing with all the Islamic decorations on the walls and the minarets of the complex. There are verses of the Quran carved on its walls. They are still in good enough shape to read them.

Continuing north and adjoining the [Qalawun complex](#), is the less expansive façade of the [Madrasa and Mausoleum of Sultan Al Nasser Mohamed](#). It was built between 1299 and 1304 by a sultan who was forced to leave his throne twice. He was able to regain power in both cases and he ruled for a total of 42 years. During this time he built around 200 buildings, all over [Cairo](#). The most famous among them is [his mosque](#) in the [Citadel](#). However, his monument in the Mui'z Street is in ill repair and is in the process of being restored. However, the North African style minaret is a wonderful sight to see.

Going north you will find the [Madrasa of Sultan Barquq](#), which was built around the year 1384 to 1386. The Madrasa looks similar to a mosque from the outside. It was a school for teaching Islamic law. The most interesting thing in this complex are the four doors which are covered with bronze. There is also the fascinating mausoleum building that looks like an ornate jewelry box. Sultan Barquq wasn't buried there, but his daughter was. He was buried in the north cemetery.

The Bein El Qasrein area is very famous worldwide. Naghuib Mahfouz, the famous Egyptian author who won the noble literature prize in 1988, used to live in this area. Most of his writings were inspired by the place. The first novel of the Cairo Trilogy, the most famous Egyptian novels, was even called Bein El Qasrein after this area.

Continue walking to the north, and on your right you will find the [Beshtak Palace](#) of





Qaser Beshtak. It can easily be missed from the outside because it is only a two story building with some mashraby windows. However,

there is a narrow lane right to the house that enters a beautiful Islamic reception. Beshtak was a powerful prince who married the daughter of the Caliph and had great wealth and influence. His palace, which was built in 1334, was the host for many great parties and ceremonies. The house contained five stories but only two remain. The second floor is a roof now and it has a wonderful panoramic view of [Islamic Cairo](#) with all its minarets and buildings. The Beshtak palace is in a period of restoration now, just as many of the monuments of the Mui'z Street.

Moving along, in the middle of the street there is the [Sabil and Kuttab of Abdel Katkhuda](#). [Islamic Cairo](#) has many dotted odd shaped buildings that look like huge windows. These buildings are 'sabils', or fountains of fresh water. Copper cups were placed next to these fountains so that the people would come and take their supply of water. Wealthy people used to build sabils to make the people love them, and they believed they would become closer to God by helping others. The second floor of the sabil was usually used as a kuttab, a place to teach Quran and Islamic subjects. This sabil was built in the year 1744 and it is being restored along with Qaser Beshtak, which is usually associated with it.

Going north again, you will find the [Mosque of Al Aqmar](#) on the right. This mosque is also called the 'grey mosque' because of the color of its walls. The mosque was built in 1125 by one of the last Fatimid caliphs. It is well known and famous as the oldest stone built mosque in Egypt. The decorations of the mosque are remarkable. Different geometric shapes and verses from the Quran are carved into the stone.

Walking along the street, you will find Darb Al Asfar Lane. This lane is famous for two



reasons. First, it will take you to the [Khan El Khalili](#) market very fast and easily. Second, it hosts the amazing [house of Suhaymi](#), a very good example of how a wealthy family used to live in Old [Islamic Cairo](#). The house is a two store building full of beautiful

decorations in the Islamic style.

To the left of Darb Al Asfar, there are the remarkable [mosque and sabil of Soliman Al Selhdar](#) which was built in 1839. It also contains a madrasa. This mosque is remarkable because it is unlike any other mosque in the area. It was designed in the Turkish style, apparent by the pencil shaped minaret of the Mosque. It doesn't have a lot of decorations, which is unlike many of the other mosques of the area.

If you continue walking on Al Mui'z Street, you will find yourself in the middle of the garlic and onion market. There are many garlic shops in the area and it is famous for this kind of trade. At the end of this market, there is the [Mosque of Al Hakim Be'amr Allah](#), the third Fatimid Caliph. He ruled when he was only eleven years old and had his tutor murdered when he was fifteen. He is famous for his strange actions and violence. He even ordered shoemakers to stop manufacturing shoes for women to prohibit them from leaving their homes or walking in the street. This mosque was actually built by his father by Al Hakim, completed in 1013, and was used as a prison for crusaders in the period of Mohamed Ali. It was restored in the 1980's and is now a good example of the Islamic art of the period.

The exciting walk in Al Mui'z Le Din Allah Street ends with the northern walls and gates, including [Bab El Naser](#), Gate of Victory, and [Bab El Futuah](#), Gate of Conquests. They were both built in 1087 and were enlarged by Salah El Din Al Ayouby. It is possible to walk on the walls and near these gates by jumping from the roof of [Mosque of Al Hakim](#) and then to the walls. These gates demonstrate a great example of how [Cairo](#) was protected in the [Fatimid period](#).

Walking in the Mui'z Street is like walking through the history of Islamic Egypt. The street is full of Islamic monuments. You can pass through the streets, view the monuments from outside, and enter the ones you feel attracted to. People in this area are

quick to help you with anything. After this appealing walk in Mui'z Street, it is great to freshen up in the Fishawy Café, the most famous café in [Khan El Khalili](#).