

Table of Contents

Talking about
Downtown
Vittoria Capresi, Barbara Pampe
PAGE 006

Recording Downtown Cairo
Mercedes Volait
PAGE 010

01
Said Halim Palace /
al-Nasriya School
PAGE 012

The Making of Ismailiyya
and the Origins of Downtown
Ralph Bodenstein
PAGE 016

02
Egyptian Museum
for Antiquities
PAGE 020

03
Tawakul Building aka
Café Riche Building
PAGE 024

Tawakul Building
(aka Café Riche Building)
Karim El Sayed
PAGE 028

04
Townhouse Gallery
Building
PAGE 032

05
Khedivial Buildings
PAGE 036

06
Assicurazioni
Generali
Trieste Building
PAGE 044

07
Davis Bryan or
Welsh Stores aka
Shurbagi Building
PAGE 048

Wust el Balad
and Nasser's Policies
Ola Seif
PAGE 054

08
Tamara Building
PAGE 058

09
16 Hoda Shaarawi St.
PAGE 062

10
Savoy Chambers
PAGE 070

11
Michael Ayoub
Pasha Building
PAGE 076

Cairo: City of Books
Stefan Winkler
PAGE 086

12
Viennoise Hotel
PAGE 086

13
12 Mohamed
Sedki Pasha St.
PAGE 090

14
13 Bustan St.
PAGE 096

Balconies into the City
Vittoria Capresi
PAGE 104

15
Cairo Image Collective
(C.I.C.) Building
PAGE 104

16
Kodak Building
PAGE 110

17
al-Demerdachiyya
Building
PAGE 116

Emad El-Din Street
Galila el Kadi
PAGE 130

18
Gharib Building
PAGE 126

19
3 Orabi Square
PAGE 132

20
Rabbat Building
PAGE 136

21
Baehler Building
PAGE 142

22
24 Adli St.
PAGE 148

23
3 al-Mahrani St.
PAGE 152

Characteristics of flats
Barbara Pampe
PAGE 164

24
55 al-Gumhuriyya St.
PAGE 160

25
Goodluck Building
PAGE 164

26
'aziz Bahri Building
PAGE 168

27
Cinema Metro
PAGE 174

28
Ades Building
PAGE 178

Educational Missions Abroad
and the Affirmation of
Egyptian Architects in Egypt
Shayma'Samir 'Ashur
PAGE 196

29
45 Qasr al-Nil St.
PAGE 190

30
Ahmed Kamal
Building
PAGE 196

31
Immobilia Building
PAGE 200

32
New Assicurazioni
Generali
Trieste Building
PAGE 212

Downtown as seen
by a modernist
Mohamed ElShahed
PAGE 230

33
Avedissian Building
PAGE 224

34
Khoury Building
PAGE 230

35
Cinema Radio
PAGE 234

36
Ouzonian Building
PAGE 240

37
George and Helal
Shama'a Building
PAGE 244

Antoine Selim Nahas (1901–1966)
Creating a New Scale and
Program for Residential Buildings
Shayma' Samir 'Ashur
PAGE 260

38
Soussa Building aka
Air India Building
PAGE 254

Glossary /
Plans Overview / Bibliography /
Sources by Building / Colophon
PAGE 268

01
02
03
04
05
06
07
08
09
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38

Talking about Downtown

Vittoria Capresi and Barbara Pampe

To a European traveler, Downtown Cairo looks extremely familiar. The neoclassical buildings, wide streets, and well-proportioned circular plazas centered around a mandatory statue may all remind the traveler of the architectural style of his home. Thus, the recognizable beauty of Downtown stands out as the first and immediate impression. Looking more deeply at the architecture, one is struck by several things: many buildings are empty; many are neglected; huge advertisements cover the majority of the façades; shops and laboratories occupy what used to be apartments. All this makes up the lively mixture of Downtown. Without romanticism, without saying that these chaotic, dusty, morbid, neon-lit buildings and streets are beautiful, we still have to admit that Downtown is striking exactly because of this impossible congestion of people, architecture, and cheap consumerism. Still, each type of person can find a certain beauty in Downtown, whether it be the inspiring mix of architectural styles, the creative occupation of space, the flexibility of unspoken rules, or the diverse rhythms of movement and use.

We also fell in love with all this immediately; during the past few years, we have organized several projects to foster a better understanding of this area. The last one was in 2013, a twelve-day summer school where students from Egypt and Germany worked together with a team of architects and a historian to survey and analyze several apartments and interview their inhabitants.* Since then, we have continued to work on the architectural plans, take pictures, and have further discussions with the inhabitants to finalize the material presented here.

This book is a further declaration of love to the city—not a conclusion but simply a step— that presents what we have learned from the architecture and the invisible mechanisms that rule this quarter. First, there are the buildings, architects, construction techniques and architectural styles. With this book we have tried to move a step beyond these outer descriptions; with our students, we surveyed many apartments and sketched their floor-plans. All the plans presented in this book are unpublished material, a great treasure for all those who want to discover—like we did—the many tricks and features of the art of living in Cairo between the 19th and 20th centuries.

Still, architecture cannot talk, and we wanted to learn its stories. That's why we rang many doorbells, spoke with building inhabitants, and collected their narratives about the past, their memories of the buildings, and their comments about the city. When we decided to end the interview process, we read through all the recorded conversations and selected what we thought were the most interesting pieces. When we put it together, we heard a chorus of many people talking about diverse and similar things, coming to diverse and similar conclusions, and telling us about their lives. We are not the ones narrating these stories of Downtown; it is as though the city itself is telling its own story.

Our interview fever has still not subsided, and it is already necessary to start a second collection of buildings.

Enjoy your trip around Downtown.

* Fully financed by the DAAD (transformation grant) to the German University in Cairo, in cooperation with the Al-Ismaelia for Real Estate Investments, German Archaeological Institute DAI Cairo, Cairo Observer, CLUSTER Cairo, DAAD Cairo, and Megawra.

Some general information about the book

Selection of Buildings

Many factors drove the selection of buildings included in the book. Our first criterion was that the building have a resident known to us, so we could access the apartments. Although some of these buildings may seem boring from the outside, the discussions we had with the inhabitants make them important to our collection.

Some other buildings were selected because we received their plans and access to them thanks to Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment, our valuable partner. Additionally, we were able to find information in the magazine *al-'Imarah*, and we asked those inhabitants to talk with us and show us their apartments. And finally, we included our best-of list, those buildings that we highly admire.

The purpose was not to cover all the highlights of Downtown; the focus was instead on displaying the variety of building typologies, on covering a wide time frame, and finally on providing insight into the people living, working, and spending time in Downtown.



Order

The buildings are listed in chronological order. To produce this list we used the construction dates commonly attributed to the buildings. Some of them indicate a time frame, which is why the years of construction of successive buildings sometimes overlaps.

If we could not find information about the year of construction, we left the field empty and made an educated guess about the building's chronology based on our research.

Building Names

Some of the buildings presented in the book represent well-known highlights of Downtown Cairo: everybody in town knows the Khedivial Buildings or Café Riche. We had no problems with these names, which are used both in academic texts and on the street. Nevertheless, this book also includes several lesser-known buildings. The names we used for these are either the ones given them by al-Ismaelia for Real Estate or the names of the original building owners, as reported in the magazine *al-'Imarah* or in secondary sources. In several cases, we have included the names popularly in use.

Whenever possible, we have included the intriguing stories behind buildings' names. Finally, if we were unable to identify a scholarly or popular name, we used the address.

Sources

The main sources used are reported in the bibliography. We based our work on secondary sources, and only in few cases did we have the chance to use the original plans or documents directly related to a building. We also have a specific bibliography for each building.

We indicate our sources for the buildings' dates and architects. If there is no source reported, it means that all consulted sources reported the same data.

Online sources also offered valuable information and are indicated in detail for each building.

→

Recording Downtown Cairo

Mercedes Volait

Ever since their design in the 1860s, the new suburbs of historic Cairo—today’s city center—have always had their *aficionados*. In its early days, the area attracted a mix of well-off pashas, members and attendants of the ruling dynasty, aristocracy from around the world, diplomats, artists in the making, and a number of lawyers, doctors, and contractors. Those who could afford establishing their residence in the area did so, and they enjoyed living surrounded by luxuriant greenery. In 1874 French photographer Émile Bécharde recorded this phenomenon: his photographs show the few dozen buildings that had already been erected and offer astonishing views of construction sites emerging among palm groves and orchards.¹ There were plenty of opportunities for non-residents to experience the up-and-coming neighborhood, too. Burgeoning international-style hotels, as well as more affordable guest houses, provided varied accommodation and employment. A short-lived hippodrome (demolished in 1881) on present-day Mustafa Kamel Square offered equestrian performances open to all. Concerts at bars, cabarets, and cafés took place around Azbakiyya Gardens and spilled out into adjacent streets. During the 1880s, Orientalist painters in the entourage of the famous Jean-Léon Gérôme flocked to the studios offered by the French art collector Baron Delort de Gléon on the grounds of his house at 30 Abd el-Khaleq Tharwat Street (initially Street No. 20 and later Manakh). The villa subsequently hosted the political journal *al-Siyasa* and remains to this day one of the few original houses built during the reign of Khedive Ismail, albeit in a heavily altered condition. Another ghost from khedival times is the former *Cercle artistique*, still extant at 27 Sherif Street; starting in 1896, it hosted the annual Cairo Salon exhibition of paintings.

By the turn of the 20th century, countless villas and palaces were already gone and had been replaced by apartment buildings of ever growing proportions and impressive Art Deco ironwork. Gardens shrank. Empty plots saw the construction of museums, banks, department stores, and office buildings, as well as of market places, auction rooms, masonic lodges, and cinemas. French and English bookshops mingled with learned societies, art galleries, furniture showrooms, antique shops, and jewelers. Existing structures were given additional floors and complete facelifts, as happened in 1911 to 11 ‘Ilwi Street, a modest low structure that was transformed into a prominent building featuring elaborate Mamluk-style ornamentation. Numerous similar projects ensued and contributed their share to the quickly changing physiognomy of Downtown Cairo. Previous exclusive mansions were adapted into teaching facilities or clubs “where argument, loud rhetoric, and no less loud backgammon reigned supreme”, as Magdi Wahba, one of the most subtle memorialists of Modern Cairo, recalled in *Cairo Memories* (1984). The few mausoleums of popular saints still standing disappeared, and the venerated tombs were incorporated into new buildings, as happened in 1951 with the *qubba* of Sheikh Salah al-Din Yusuf Abu al-Maghrabi, a merchant from Fez buried there in the 13th century. Public transportation and motorization expanded. A wave of French-speaking Egyptians moved in. Jacaranda-lined streets burst with life—and, cyclically, with popular dissent.

Amid a climate of political unrest, which had reigned since the end of Second World War and the first Palestine Campaign in 1948, hundreds of buildings—in particular bars, cinemas, clubs, hotels, restaurants and department stores, the very signs of an exclusive modernity unaffordable to the majority of the population—were set on fire by rioters on January 26, 1952; 463 structures fully perished. Large portions of Downtown’s inhabitants were eventually sent into exile by the Suez Crisis and its aftermath. A new phase started, and with it, the gradual dereliction of architecture and infrastructure. Unmaintained sidewalks became impassable; streets were regularly flooded with sewage. Phones, when available, commonly lacked a dial tone; lifts got stuck on one floor for months or even for good. Land and building uses experienced new functions. Roofs became overpopulated; vast flats were transformed into inexpensive pensions where hippies on their way to Kathmandu cohabited with all-year-round guests from local backgrounds and of an advanced age; dwellings were converted into shops and offices. Cosmopolitan Cairo was fading away at a rapid pace.

Its memory, though, did not. While international audiences may have discovered the spirit of the place in *The Yacoubian Building* (2004) or the screen adaptation that was made of the novel two years later, tributes never ceased to be paid to that part of town, the symbol of a society that “could not exist elsewhere in quite the same way,” in the words of Magdi Wahba. An early initiative was the photographic show that the *Société des Amis de l’Art*, a group of Egyptian art amateurs, devoted to “Bygone Cairo” in 1946. The show encouraged so-called Cairophiles such as the late Max Karkegi to collect every available photograph on modern Cairo, a passion to which he dedicated himself his entire life and which he enjoyed sharing with fellow enthusiasts on a global scale. Feature films of the Golden Age of Egyptian cinema saved on celluloid some of Downtown’s landmarks and its urban rhythm. Vivid recollections of specific places appeared in a number of personal memoirs and in fiction, such as cult novel Waguih Ghali’s *Beer in the Snooker Club* (1964). Street names retained glimpses of the not-so-distant past. Francophones continued to meet daily at *Livres de France*, the tiny bookshop opened in 1947 by Yvette Farazli in the Immobilia Building (closed in 2006), to exchange gossip and souvenirs over coffee.

As the nostalgia for a lost “Belle Époque” gained currency among the bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia in the 1990s, so did Khedival Cairo, increasingly, among architecture fans, art historians, and heritage preservationists. Photographic surveys endeavored to capture reminiscences of the former atmosphere by documenting ornamental details, vanishing lettering on walls, or neglected spaces. Collections of data on buildings developed. Architectural drawings recorded the variety of surviving façades. Some oral history provided further material.

Nowadays, architectural tours of Downtown Cairo are being offered by benevolent guides. Its visual history is being actively shared and discussed on social media. Prominent inhabitants are being interviewed for documentary films. Everyday voices are being recorded, as in the present publication, in relation to the ways they have made the place their own. A vast multimedia “imaginary museum” is taking shape. It does not replicate the past but instead offers ample testimony of its contemporary appropriation and relevance. May it be continued and rendered digitally accessible on a broad scale.

side (east) are ground-floor and basement offices. The left side (west) is still occupied by the library; in the basement a children's museum has recently opened.

The roof and the dome were built using the Hennebique system of reinforced concrete, one of the first in Cairo.

In 1992, the competition for the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM) was launched. The building will be completed in 2015 in Giza, close to the Pyramids, and will host part of the collection now exhibited in the Egyptian Museum at Tahrir Square.



Mrs. I.

The majority of people visiting the museum are tourists. But Egyptians, they started thinking about the museum around 2000, and coming to visit it, too. But it is not just a matter to come and see. What do you want to learn during the visit? [...]

People living around the Egyptian Museum are happy because they open their windows and see the museum. Even if Egyptian people don't understand what a museum is.

Even the people working in the museum have no idea about the message and the role of the museum. We have to educate people about the role of museums in society!



Mrs. I.

In the 1950s, there was the first renovation; a second one followed in the 1980s, so that now there are two different types of show-cases in the museum. The three rooms for Tutankhamen were renovated twice —first by the Holland fund (around 1996), which chose to paint the walls blue. During a second renovation the walls were re-painted gray, while other rooms stayed the same.

The two rooms of mummies were added later, in the late nineties. And in 2000 the lab was renovated; it was extended by taking parts of the museum. The lab is a research area for archiving, restoring, and collecting objects, among other things.

Air conditioning was also added for the lab and for the three Tutankhamen rooms. The electricity network was also completely renewed for the use of air conditioners, etc.



Mrs. I.

What are the museums doing for the community?

We have to rethink the role of the existing museum in Downtown now before thinking about building a new one [the new Great Egyptian Museum in Giza].



Savoy Chambers

ARCHITECT
Ariston St. John
Diamant

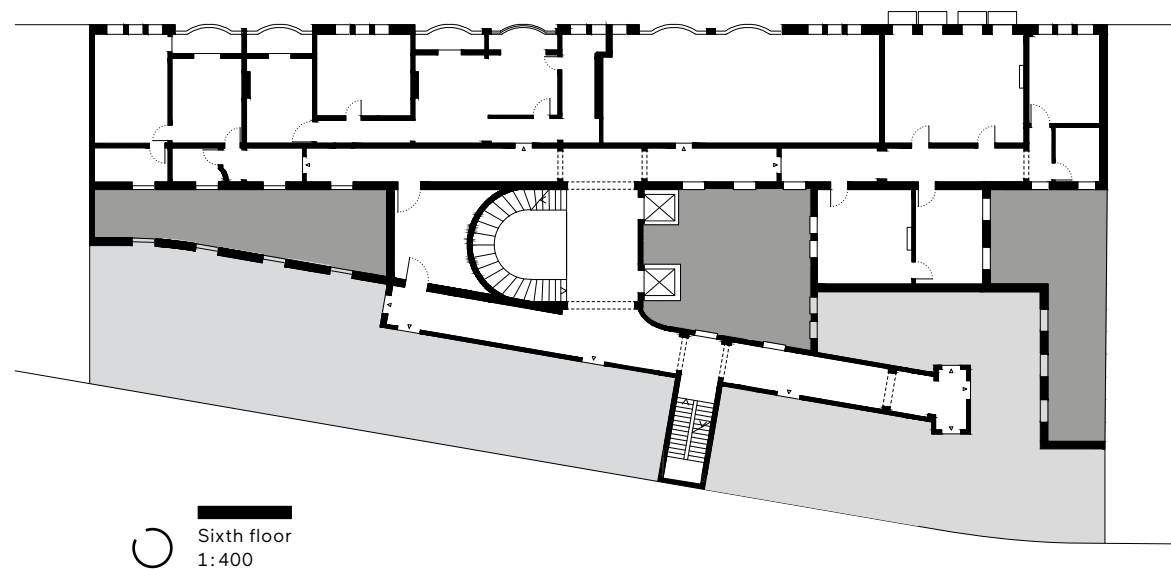
YEAR OF
CONSTRUCTION
around 1907

“al-Bursa al-Gadida Street” was a later addition to the street network of Ismailieh, opened in the first decade of the 20th century to connect Talaat Harb St. (then Soliman Pacha St.) and Qasr al-Nil St. as part of the redevelopment of a vast villa garden plot remaining from the founding years of the quarter. Its name refers to the “new stock exchange”, a.k.a. the “Bourse khédiviale du Caire”, built in 1908–1909 on the eastern side of the street.

Along the western side of the street we find an elongated six-storey building that used to be known as “Savoy Chambers”, a prominent business address that featured regularly in advertisements during the first half of the 20th century. One such advertisement in the Egyptian Gazette for the Anglo-Belgian Co. of Egypt Ltd. already dates from 1908. Thus, the building must have been erected before the Bourse khédiviale, almost contemporary to the creation of the street.

The name and location of the Savoy Chambers relate to the Savoy Hotel, the first-class hotel founded in 1898 that occupied most of the same street block towards Midan Talaat Harb (then Midan Soliman Pacha), and was demolished in the later 1920s to be replaced by the present Baehler Buildings. Standing in the “backyard” of the Savoy Hotel, and being less grand, but two storeys higher, the Savoy Chambers was more of a furnished-apartment hotel combined with commercial and office uses.

In 1910, British author Douglas Sladen remarked that “Cairo is so overbuilt, a bachelor can get a self-contained flat from 4 pound a month, even in Savoy Chambers, the huge building near the Savoy Hotel opposite the Bourse, and he can take it by the months, though a year before he would have had to pay 12 pound to 18 pound a months under



back, a passageway that houses popular coffee-shops runs behind the building. The façades are horizontally divided by a basement now occupied by shops, a ground floor accessible via steps, and two upper floors. Vertically, the alternation of double balconies, windows without balcony, and single balconies lend the building's façade a certain rhythm. The entrance doors are quite imposing: on the two sides facing Champollion and Mahmoud Bassiouny Streets, the doors are richly decorated and their height includes the basement and ground floor. Crowning the building, a cornice recalls Renaissance palaces, as does the overall design, while somber neoclassical decorations adorn the windows-frames and balconies.

Nowadays the Hotel Viennoise is empty and it hosts temporary art events and exhibitions.

(plans based on surveys of Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment)

In addition to hosting art events as part of D-CAF [Downtown-Contemporary Art Festival], La Viennoise has been the site of other iconic art exhibitions and experiments in recent years: but how did it all start? The first art event in La Viennoise took place in 2001 as part of al-Nitaq Art Festival when the artist Lara Baladi welcomed the public to view her photographic installations, which were shot and shown in La Viennoise.*

*from Cairoobserver



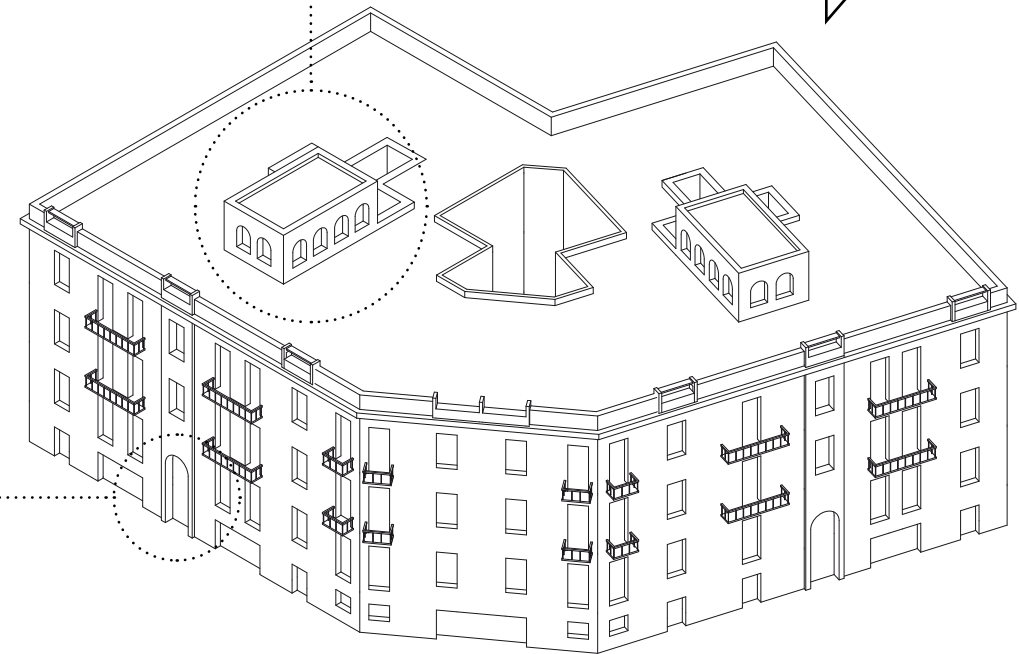
Baladi shot and exhibited her photographic project in La Viennoise. The artist asserts, "the 'box' was in fact La Viennoise. My work was both the space itself and in the space." The main piece was a large-scale collage upon which the viewer would stumble after losing oneself and strolling through the corridors [...] This artistic intervention initiated La Viennoise as a unique space for art and exhibitions. La Viennoise was and remains everything the white cube gallery space is not.*

*from Cairoobserver



Baladi's family owned the building at the time; five sisters inherited it from their Lebanese-Egyptian businessman father, who had purchased it in the 1940s. During the period of nationalization that followed, the Egyptian government confiscated the property. It was only during Sadat's mandate that it was returned to them. After years of lawsuits, the five daughters, in their 80s then, were able to get back, among other parts of the building, an entire floor, which a hotel occupied, the Pension Viennoise. Some of the other apartments in the building, as well as the shops, were being rented out by the state to tenants, and had been ever since the building's confiscation. Further lawsuits were necessary to get those individual tenants out. By the early 90s many of the lawsuits had been settled and most of the building, except for the shops, was in the hands of the five daughters of Abdallah Mirshak, Baladi's great grandfather.*

*from Cairoobserver



Balconies into the City

Vittoria Capresi

As the main link between the outside and the inside of the apartments, balconies in Downtown are the connection point between the inhabitants' private sphere and the city's public events.

Ever since their construction, these balconies has served as places that enable people to take part in landmark historical events while still remaining protected by the familiarity of the well-known home at their back. During the interviews, we heard about people watching the opera house burning, glimpsing the guests of the Shepard's Hotel driving away in beautiful cars, throwing down milk and onions to the revolutionaries on the street to help them protect their eyes from tear-gas.

On a balcony, everybody turns into something of a voyeur. Watching something from above still invokes the thrill of being a part of it while not exposing one to the danger and dust of the street-level events.

Still, this surface that provides an open-air view over the world has served diverse functions over time. Some people remember having spent time outside drinking tea. Today, the same people affirm that the traffic and noise make such a relaxing pastime untenable. Some others, with the introduction of washing machines, abandoned the outbuildings on the roof, which had been initially designed as a place for washing and drying laundry, and transferred the drying to the balconies—except for the underwear, which is considered too private to dry in public.

Today balconies mainly host air-conditioning blocks, old furniture, or piles of useless old papers, collected from the offices occupying many Downtown apartments. Many balconies have been closed to create more living space. This repurposing of balcony spaces, which were originally designed geometries of the buildings, has resulted today in a reinvented patchwork of materials and forms. With the many glass winter gardens and brick walls with extra windows, the inhabitants have had the final say over the buildings' planned design.

But beyond the functional aspect, balconies are rarely used any more as a living space. Some people seem to use balconies as further protection from the outside, an extra layer between the privacy of the inside and everything that could happen outside. As Alia Mossallam astutely pointed out, it is a question of whether people become part of the buildings or the buildings become part of people's lives. Some of the people we interviewed were keen on keeping their apartments as they were forty to fifty years ago; they were somehow living around the apartment's and the building's existing structure and ultimately becoming a part of it rather than changing it to suit their evolving needs. In talking with many inhabitants, we realized that it was as if people were shutting the outer world out in an attempt to "keep things as they were." In a private silent act of disagreement against Cairo as it is today—with the traffic jams, the social discrepancies, the noise, the

criminality—many inhabitants have transformed balconies into a timeless chamber of isolation. These balconies are mainly empty and full of dust and the access doors generally permanently closed.

In Downtown there are different typologies of balconies, including the so-called French balconies, which let more light in via windows that open to the ground; the balconies themselves, however, are too small for sitting outside. There are bigger balconies, which are deep enough to fit a chair and finally the veranda, usually placed on the top floor; it serves as a corridor forming an outside border on the building. The building techniques used can assist in dating the buildings. Late-19th-century balconies are still made of wooden beams, wooden flooring, and a metal handrail. We also find balconies made from one slope of thin marble and supported by metal I-beams. And finally, the most common typology, the concrete balcony with a concrete or metal handrail can be dated to around the early 1920s.





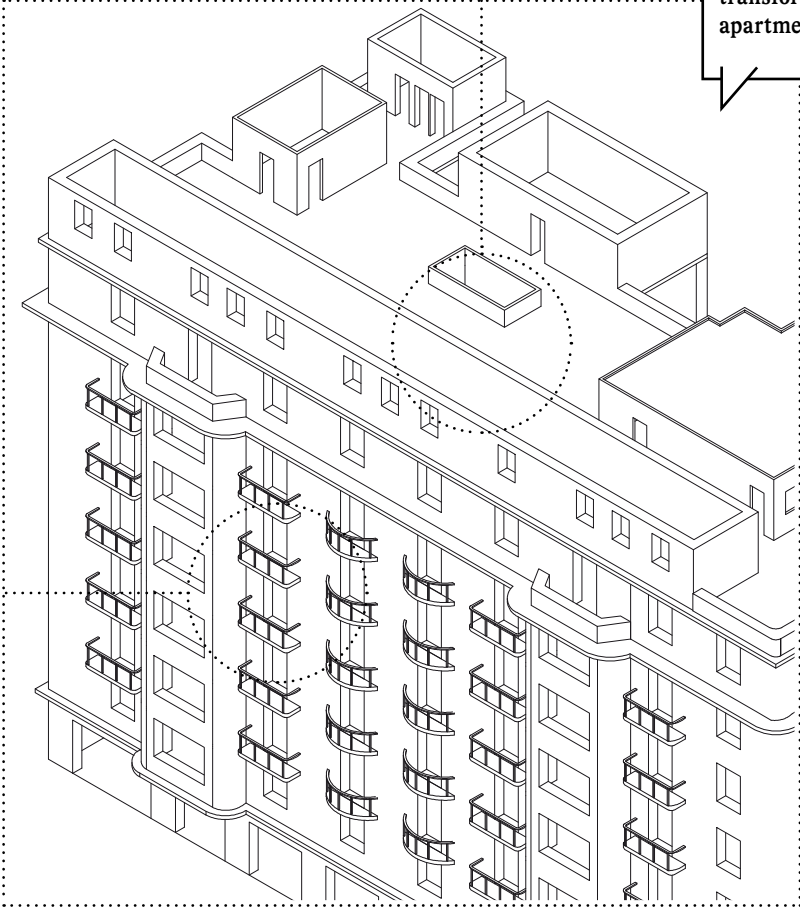
Mr. H.M.
 There were no common areas in the building where neighbors met. And the relations with the neighbors were somehow formal, not too close. Our contact with the neighbors wasn't like in the movies. There was a neighborly protocol in Downtown: the "bonjour" and "bonsoir."
 There were more foreigners living in Egypt. Everybody respected each other's spaces; if you had a party you would end it around 11 pm.



Mr. C.M.
 The roof had the laundry outbuildings, and each apartment had a lady that used to come by and take the laundry to do it upstairs. This continued 'til the mid-1960s. Then everybody had a washing machine. Twice a week we also had a woman come and pick up the laundry.
 The last floor of the building was for the maid rooms. So each apartment had a room in that floor for the maid; then later on it was transformed into a normal apartment floor.

Mr. C.M.
 When I still lived here, Downtown was the central place, the commercial node where everyone came for those services. There were not as many facilities in other areas like Mohandessin or Heliopolis, like there are now.

Mr. H.M.
 The balconies on the Kodak Building were not the type of balcony where you could go out and put a chair and have a gathering. They are really small, about sixty or eighty centimeters in depth, and they were mainly used to ventilate the apartments and mainly as architectural elements, I would assume. It acted more like a window than a balcony. And they still have the same use today. And it was forbidden to hang laundry before!
 There are few tenants now, about six or eight tenants now. The other apartments were taken over by the Al Ismailia Company as offices.





Goodluck Building

The apartment building on the corner of Bassiouni Street facing the Egyptian Museum is named the Goodluck Building. It occupies a triangular plot, but smooths the plot's hard corner with a forty-five-degree façade. Its three sides are designed as one continuous façade, with an entrance on the side. It has one raised ground floor, six main floors, and an attic. The façade is characterized by massive continuous balconies, which accentuate the building's horizontality. The balconies wrap uninterrupted around the whole building; at regular intervals, bay-window rooms protrude to the edge of the balconies, reaching the maximal width of the building without breaking the continuity of the horizontal lines.

The originality of this design, with dramatic deep balconies running continuously along three sides, and, moreover, the cleanness of the lines contrast with the other more heavily decorated buildings in Mahmoud Bassiouni Street; thus, the Goodluck Building represents one of the street's notable landmarks.

Each floor contains three apartments with staff quarters and laundry rooms in the attic—one room for each floor. The attic rooms are not accessible from outside the building; they open only onto a rooftop terrace. From here, two metal spiral staircases in enclosed shafts connect the domestic staff to each floor and all the apartments.

The structure is made of reinforced concrete, while the filling walls are constructed of silica stones bricks.

ARCHITECT
Guglielmo E.
Falorni

YEAR OF
CONSTRUCTION
1933–34
(*Rassegna di
Architettura*)

(plans based on surveys of Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment)



○ Typical floor
1:400

Mr. M.D.

Among Downtown cinemas, some were “multazima” [meaning they had a contract with a particular production company, like 20th Century Fox or Metro Goldwyn Mayer, and only showed films produced by that company]. In Cinema Cairo, Fox brought films in “cinemascope” to Cairo, meaning wide-screen films on larger, wider screens. These cinemas, tied to American film companies] were always introducing innovations, like Metro. Cinema Metro also showed a 3D film, which was watched with special glasses.

Mr. M.D.

I am eighty-five years old; I was a film critic and judge. I moved here in 1967 because Downtown was the center for cinemas.


Mrs. N.

I have lived here in Downtown since July 1996, the year I had my daughter.

Mr. M.D.

Most of the people living in Downtown were foreigners. There were many cinemas; the most important were Diana, Royal, Metropol, Metro. There were also open-air cinemas with the screen in front of you and the sky over you. [...] Now they have disappeared.

Diana, Royal, and Metropol were not air-conditioned. The first [air-conditioned] one was in 1941; it was the Cinema Metro. And it was built by Metro Goldwyn Mayer, that's why [it was called] Metro.

**Mrs. N.**

Recalling my childhood memories, I remember our walking through Soliman Pasha Street to go shopping for clothes and everything else, eating ice cream at al-Abd store, and going to the cinema, eating popcorn in the break. My favorite theaters were the Metro and Miami.

I remember that sometimes in the intermission a man played some music on the piano. However, nowadays I don't go to the cinema in Downtown anymore because I think it is not safe.



Downtown as seen by a Modernist Mohamed ElShahed

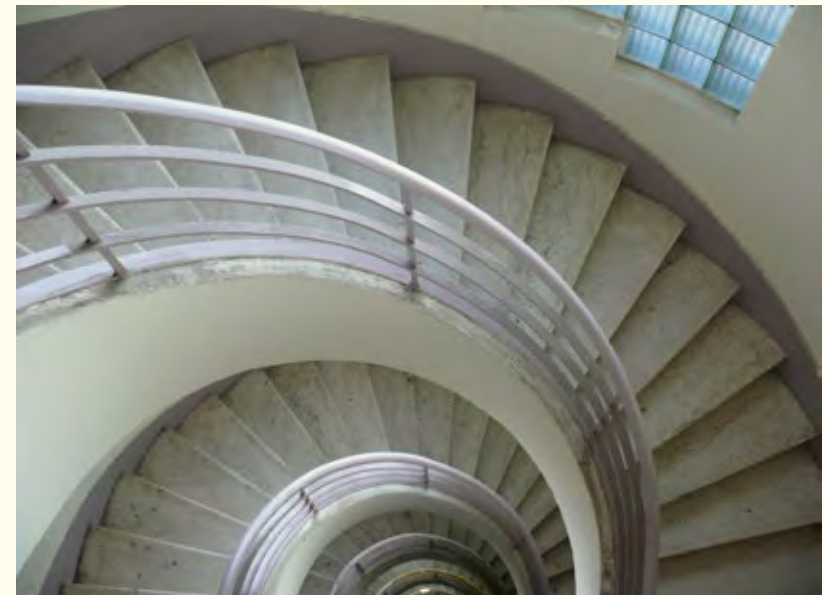
In 1945, the architect Sayed Karim published an article in *al-Ithneyn wa al-Dunya*, one of Egypt's most popular magazines, titled "If Cairo Were Destroyed?"¹ An illustration accompanied the article that imagined a bridge crossing from Garden City to Giza with buildings suspended on the structure. Karim writes, "Alas, Cairo was not damaged by war." He suggested that large-scale destruction would have offered the opportunity to rebuild the city based on the latest planning principals. He writes, "World architects are busy designing the reconstruction of cities destroyed in the war." Karim asks, "If we had the opportunity to destroy Cairo and rebuild it, where would we begin and what would we do?" According to Karim, peacetime resulted in slow but widespread damage to Egyptian cities and delayed a process of rapid modernization similar to what had commenced in Europe with the mass destruction of European cities during the war.

The offices of Sayed Karim and other architects were located in the heart of 20th-century Cairo, the al Ismaliyya District, the city's downtown that was planned in the 19th century. As he reflected on the condition of Cairo in 1945, how did Sayed Karim understand the history of the city's modern development, particularly its 19th-century origins?

In 1945, Sayed Karim dedicated a special issue of *al-Imarah* magazine to Khedive Ismail and his patronage of art, architecture, urban planning, and monument conservation.² *Al-Imarah* was Egypt's premier architectural journal focused on modern design. It is no coincidence that after the end of the war and during the same year that he published "If Cairo Were Destroyed?" Karim chose to celebrate Khedive Ismail's urban legacy. The issue opens with a letter addressed to King Farouk. The letter boasts of Ismail's enlightenment, long-term vision, and his patronage of modernization projects. The issue's contributors include the palace architect Mustafa Fahmy who wrote about public works, palaces, and gardens during the reign of Ismail. Mustafa Fahmy recounts various urban projects such as the new streets and squares; various architectural projects including museums, palaces, and theaters; and the founding of various institutions essential for urban management and planning. Like Karim, Fahmy credits these developments in Cairo's urban modernization to the monarch's vision.

Ironically, architects such as Karim and Fahmy, in reflecting on the history of 19th-century Cairo, underplayed the role of the architects and planners of that era, and they neglected to recognize the role of the city's builders, workers, investors, and residents, thus foreshadowing histories of Cairo written "as if the city has been emptied of its inhabitants."³ The making of modern Cairo is presented not as the outcome of political, social, and economic transformations but as material evidence of the enlightenment of the ruler.

Sayed Karim's presentation of Khedive Ismail's role in modernizing Cairo is deeply informed by the contemporary moment in which he is writing. There is a nationalist tone to Karim's narrative, which, on the one hand, points to the urban achievements accomplished during Ismail's reign and recognizes the impact of Haussmann and Paris on planning approaches during that era. However, on the other hand, Karim points to European despise for Cairo's urban modernization by citing European travel writers and journalists who scoffed at Cairo's seeming mixture of European and oriental. European writers and journalists, Karim tells us, smeared the city's image by complaining that its new buildings were architecturally trivial and the new straight streets were mundane and uninteresting compared to the city's historic areas. However, Karim insists that Ismail's urban reforms were fundamental in the process of nation building. Furthermore, for Sayed Karim, Ismail's Cairo was an international city in tune with the urban development taking over cities across the world. In Karim's nationalist view of Ismail's Cairo, the city was modernized in spite of Europe not because of it. Writing in 1945 at a time when Cairo was in desperate need for urban modernization and reform, Ismail's Cairo presented an architect such as Sayed Karim with a tangible historical precedent to that which he sought to achieve.



- 1 Karim, Sayed. "If Cairo was destroyed?" *al-ithnyn wa al-dunya*, no. 586 (1945): 12-13.
- 2 Karim, Sayed. "Ismail's Cairo in the history of architecture." *al-Imarah* 5/6-7 (1945): 17-26.
- 3 Fahmy (2002): 182.

Glossary

Bawab: The building doorman. Usually from Upper Egypt, the Bawab sits in front of the building (or in the entrance hall) and takes care of all issues related to the building and its inhabitants.

Eid fest: An important celebration marking the end of Ramadan.

Elhamdulillah: Literally “Thank God!” or “Thanks be to God”

Foul: A typical Egyptian stew made of red fava beans. People typically eat pita bread with foul for the second breakfast in the morning. In Downtown there are several mobile kiosks, which open in the late morning to serve this special dish.

Galabeya: The typical dress of Bawabs from Upper Egypt. It is a long chemise or cotton shirt, with a brown or green color palette.

Hennebique: A reinforced-concrete construction system patented in 1892 by the French engineer François Hennebique. It uses iron only at the points where the slabs are in tension and concrete for the compression zones. The vertical and horizontal columns and beams are thus linked into one monolithic element.

Majallat al-‘Imarah: A magazine edited by the architect Sayed Karim and considered to be the most important information source and vehicle for circulating concepts of modern architecture in Egypt. With a publication run from 1939 until 1950 (1934–44 excluded) and from 1952 until 1959 under the title *Majallat al-Imarah wa-al-Funun*, it presented national and international examples of architectural and urban interventions, covering topics related to art, architecture, engineering, and town planning.

Khawaga: A foreigner.

Manwar: The inner courtyard of a building.

Mashrabiya: A wooden oriel lattice window projecting into the street. It offers a visual screen to the outside, while remaining permeable to air and light.

Mawa’ed Rahman: During Ramadan, tables with free food set up on the street so poor people can eat at the end of the fasting hour.

Molokheya: A typical Egyptian soup prepared out of jute leaves.

Sandara: A space created from building a suspended ceiling, used for storage, like a crawl space.

Serliana: An architectural element composed of a round arch symmetrically flanked by trabeated openings on each side.

Shisha: A water-pipe often smoked in coffee shops.

Shonat Ramadan: Bags of food, usually prepared for poor people during the month of Ramadan.

Silico Stones: Manmade stones produced from quartz sand and lime.

Sofragi: A cook employed by a family.

Studio Misr: Founded in 1936 and financed by the industrialist Talaat Harb, it was the Egyptian counterpart to Hollywood. The peak of production was in the 1940s–50s and 60s, mainly with comedies with happy endings.

Tarbush: A red felt cap with a black tassel (also known as a fez), usually worn by Bawabs.

Tawla: A backgammon game, popularly played in coffee shops.

Authors

Shayma' Samir 'Ashur

Architect, Lecturer at Department of Architectural Engineering & Environmental Design, College of Engineering & Technology, Arab Academy for Science, Technology & Maritime Transport AASTMT, Cairo Campus.

Ralph Bodenstein

Architecture and Urban Historian, DAAD visiting Professor at the faculty of Archaeology, Cairo University, and Research fellow at the German Archaeological Institute, Cairo Department.

Vittoria Capresi

Architect, co-founder of baladilab, Professor in History of Architecture at the German University in Cairo – GUC and initiator of the Downtown-project.

Gallia El Kadhi

Research Director at the *Institut de Recherche pour le Développement* – IRD, France.

Barbara Pampe

Architect, co-founder of baladilab, Professor in Architectural Design at the German University in Cairo – GUC and initiator of the Downtown-project.

Karim El Sayed

Historian, currently living and working in Cambodia.

Mohamed El Shahed

Architect, PhD in Middle East Studies, post-doctoral fellow at the Berlin-based Forum *Transregionale Studien*, and funder of Cairoserver.

Ola Seif

Art and photography historian, freelance photographer, and collector of all Egypt-related visuals.

Mercedes Volait

Research professor of CNRS at *Institut national d'histoire de l'art* in Paris and director of the research center InVisu, France.

Stefan Winkler

Project manager at the Goethe Institute, concerned with cultural practices and policies in the Arab world and beyond.



Colophon

The Downtown Summer School was financed by the German Academic Exchange Service – DAAD on behalf of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This book was made possible mainly by the generous financial support of the DAAD.

We also thank our sponsor Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment and our partner the Goethe-Institut Cairo, who generously supported this book.

DAAD Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst
German Academic Exchange Service



Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment
“We aim to revive Downtown Cairo”
www.al-ismaelia.com



© 2015 by **jovis** Verlag GmbH
Texts by kind permission of the authors.
Text p. 18–21 by Ralph Bodenstein.
Map p. 21 Ministère des travaux publics,
“Plan Général de la Ville du Caire et des
Environs”, 1897, detail.
Pictures p. 22, 32, 34, 48, 42, 46 (bottom),
54, 62, 66, 76, 84, 88, 94, 100, 106, 114, 124,
134, 142, 148, 152, 166, 170, 176, 178, 182,
192, 198, 202, 214, 226, 234, 241, 242, 243,
244, 248 © Maria Hänichen, Sandra Mrowetz.
Picture p. 41 (center) courtesy of Maryse Helal.
Picture p. 61 courtesy of Ola Seif.
Picture p. 81 (center) courtesy of
Mahmoud Abbas.
Image p. 108 (top) courtesy of Lucie Ryzova.
Picture p. 126 (top) courtesy of Jana Holla.
Image p. 205 postcard, private collection.
All the other pictures by kind permission
of the photographers / holders of the picture
rights
© Summer School Downtown Cairo 2013
All rights reserved.

Editors:
Vittoria Capresi, Barbara Pampe

Idea and concept:
baladilab

Copy editing:
Mara Taylor

Proofreading:
Brigette Brown

Drawings:
Summer School Downtown Cairo 2013,
Barbara Pampe, Carla Schwarz, Leonie
Weber, Reem Ashraf Elattar, Rana El Rashidy,
Rana Abdelsammad, and Rowaa Ibrahim

Graphic design:
Studio Matthias Görlich
(Matthias Görlich, Charalampos Lazos)

Typeface: Maax (Editions205), DeVille (Grilli Type)
Paper: Luxo Art Samt
Printing and binding: Graspo CZ a.s., Zlín

Bibliographic information published
by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists
this publication in the Deutsche
Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic
data are available on the Internet at
<http://dnb.d-nb.de>

jovis Verlag GmbH
Kurfürstenstraße 15/16
10785 Berlin

www.jovis.de

jovis books are available worldwide in
selected bookstores. Please contact your
nearest bookseller or visit www.jovis.de for
information concerning your local
distribution

ISBN 978-3-86859-296-2

