

## **The Cairo Takiyya Mawlawiyya (1033H/ 1623AD): Spirit of the Arts and Sufi Inscriptions**

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### **Abstract:**

The architectural complex of the Mawlawi Derwish order in Cairo is located at the foot of the Citadel, the seat of government at time of Ottoman Empire, in the Hilmiyya district near the Sultan Hasan mosque, or, more precisely, in the so-called Hilmiyya Qadima sector at the beginning of Shari' al-Suyufiyya, the current name of this part of the ancient artery running along al-A'zam Street.

The whole area (sq. m. 3.850) comprises buildings of different ages, recovered and reused by Mawlawis, between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries.

The Takiyya Mawlawiyya in Cairo is a unique example of architecture in form, design and function, and the complete model of the takiyya ,which was created specifically for the ceremonial Mawlawi Derwishes rituals, as well as the rest of the architectural complex includes the mausoleum, the service building and Sufis rooms retain their form, character and original architecture. It is also a vivid example of the splendor of this architectural style that combines Islamic poetry, music and rituals of the Sufi order.

Sunqur's foundation is one of the earliest of al-Nasir's third reign. It is located in the quarter of Hadarat al-Baqar behind the mosque of Sultan Hasan, and consisted of a mausoleum, perhaps a khanqah and a ribat or asylum for women. In the Ottoman period it became a tekke for the derwishes of the Mawlawi order.

The facade with a minaret and a dome are all that remain today from the Mamluk period The madrasa or khanqah, which has recently been excavated, had a courtyard with a central fountain surrounded by cells.

The mausoleum, keeping its original function in the new plan, continued to be the resting-place of the derwishes, and maintained the tombs of Nasr al-Din Sadaqa and his nephew, Hasan Sadaqa, after whom the mausoleum had been named. It was enriched over time with other tombs, which could be installed for other shaykhs of the takiyya. All of these tombs were covered with embroidered fabric in accordance with the custom of the Mawlawis.

This architectural complex of the Turkish Mawlawi Derwishes in Cairo witnessed the legacy of the Mamluk architecture represented by the dome and the original minaret, and the characteristics of Ottoman architecture distinctive in the domes construction; it comprises buildings of different ages. The Mawlawis preserved the original plan of the garden that was surrounded by the palace. Concerning the edifices erected by the Mawlawis on the first floor.

The presence of the Mawlawis in this area is well documented in a ministerial act by which the Yemenite Yusuf Pasha Sinan allotted to the order the site on which the Mawlawi takiyya is found today.

The reference to the Sunqur Sa'di Madrasa at the same locality leads to hypothesize that the place of the sama' according to the Mawlawi custom, was adjacent to the Hasan Sadaqa

Mausoleum, which was, evidently, the original cult reference for all of the subsequent structures. While the eventual monasterial part of whatever sort the accommodations of the takiyya were if this were to really correspond to all the above described needs, it would have had to develop southward from the madrasa, since all the other areas were to become available only after Sinan's donation. We have no exact dates for this early settlement, nor, furthermore, do we have in general very precise indications as to the Mawlawis arrival in Egypt.

Some texts refer to travel made by members of this order even before the Ottoman conquest, leading us to suppose that there was already some kind of Mawlawi presence in Egypt. It is, however, likely that the Ottoman conquest was itself decisive, if not for their initial arrival, at least for their permanent and secure settlement.

We have no exact date for the early settlement. It is, however, likely that the Ottoman conquest was decisive for their permanent and secure settlement. In fact, the presence of the Mawlawis in this area is well documented in a ministerial act dated to the 17 Safar 1016 A.H. I 1607 A.D. The latest phases of constructive activity on the Sama'-khana may be referred to the first half of the nineteenth century. The building seems to have been one of the last of such constructions to be built in the Islamic world, and was probably the last one in use after the Ataturk decree to close the Turkish derwisheries in 1923.

Traditionally, the Mawlawis were bound to the central Ottoman power, and to them was entrusted the investiture of the new Sultan. Moreover, during the time of their close affiliation with the governing forces and the social elite this connection became more and more strengthened, due to a strong literary tradition and a certain musical culture, so much so that, especially after the 17th century, the order assumed a more official organization with an increased government involvement in the appointment of all in charge at the various Mawlawi centres.

Throughout the whole period of their stay in Cairo, till the first half of the twentieth century, the Mawlawis received many other donations (subsequent to those of Yusuf Sinan) that bear witness to an economic security, evidently owing to their good relations with government parties and with the upper classes of contemporary Cairen society. Important personalities of Cairo high society used to attend the sama' ceremony.

The ultimate closure of the takiyya cannot be due to economic or social factors, but must be referred to Turkish political events, particularly to Ataturk's bill of 1925, which decreed the dissolution of the derwish orders. After this date the central seat of the Mawlawis was moved to Aleppo, where, protected by the French government, the Mawlawis could operate until 1944, the year in which Syria acquired independence, and thereafter ordered the closure of the Aleppo center.

At the same time, the trouble in which the orders as a whole were involved as a result of the loss of a central reference point, gradually lead to the closure also of the Cairo Mawlawiyya, The most recent dates related to the activity of the takiyya are, firstly, the inscription of the large plaque (lawh) situated over the post, where it is written "Ya hadrat Mawlana" (1341/1922), which bears witness for that period of a certain vitality and security for the organization; and next, 1928, the date of a feature article published in al-Ahram, giving a description of the sama' along with a photograph of a group of Mawlawi derwishes who were living in the takiyya at that time; and, lastly, 1932, the date in which the Congress of Arabic music was held in Cairo, during which were presented eight pieces of Mawlawi music.

Sometime after this date, evidently, the final dissolution of the order took place, and in 1942 all the Ministry of Awqaf to the Jam'iyya qahiriyya, which proceeded to turn them into a hospice for elderly people with a connected dispensary for the poor, gave the buildings.

This situation obtained until the time finally came for the indispensable restoration of the complex, when it has been gradually devoted to the purpose of school for training of Egyptian students and technicians of restoration and archeology, in cooperation with the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

Based on the previous introduction, this research aims to study this unique architectural structure; which seems to have been one of the last and comprehensive example of such constructions, Ottoman takiyya, to be built in the Islamic world and Egypt.

The research paper addresses, using the analytical-archaeological method, the importance of this establishment from architectural and artistic point of view, as a symbol of Sufi architecture and arts in Egypt. Where it briefly sheds light on the Mawlawis order as one of Sufi doctrine in Egypt during the Ottoman era, then tracing the history of construction of the architectural complex before building of the Mawlawiyya.

It is mainly based on a study of history and architecture of the Mawlawi Derwishes theatre "Sama'-khana", aiming at highlighting the architectural symbolism of the Mawlawi takiyya, its Ottoman decorative arts, and inscriptions written in Arabic letters and Persian script that considered to be tangible model of the spirit of the Sufi Mawlawiyya order in Egypt.

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