

**BETWEEN STAGE DÉCOR AND REALITY
THE CAIRO STREET AT THE WORLD'S COLUMBIAN
EXPOSITION OF 1893 AT CHICAGO**

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World's fairs made their appearance in the middle of the nineteenth century: in 1851, the first world's fair, the "Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations", was organised in the Crystal Palace in London. The distant roots of world's fairs can be traced to medieval church fairs, e.g., the annual festivals in commemoration of local church patrons – these were often connected with pilgrimages. Fairs also served commerce as markets where a wide assortment of wares could be acquired. At the same time, the appearance of new products at venues on which great multitudes converged from places near and far helped to popularise them, spreading their fame even to faraway places. Thus these fairs served to promote arts, crafts and industry, too. A wide selection of entertainment of various kinds was perhaps the main attraction of fairs for pleasure-seeking crowds. All these features were present in world's fairs yet on a higher scale than in previous fairs of local or regional relevance. In addition, the aspects of public relations, politics, education and even scholarship emerged and gained considerably in importance in the context of world's fairs. World's fairs became important means of spreading the image of a given country all over the world in the aspect which the given country or its leading circles preferred to display themselves. At the same time, capitalism gained supremacy in various degrees all over the world, a process which caused a previously unknown exacerbation of tensions between various layers of societies. World's fairs also helped maintain social peace in these tension-ridden times by cementing bonds among social classes. Thus it is easily understandable that huge world's fairs were many-sided events with extremely multifaceted systems of sometimes even contradictory allusions and meanings (Goldmann 1987; Greenhalgh 1988).

In connection with fairs in general, novel kinds of entertainment emerged and gained ascendancy in the nineteenth century. Answering a deep urge to get acquainted with the wonders of fascinating distant, unknown lands – partly in order to escape from a dim and bleak present to regions where the erstwhile, primeval happiness of mankind still seemed to survive – the inhabitants of European countries became more and more interested in faraway climates and

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their populations. This was the period when tourism as well as ethnography began to flourish. Wandering peoples' shows were organised where various peoples from distant lands were put on display, often in their customary surroundings, in order to lend the shows as much authenticity as possible. Panoramas, in other words cycloramas, became very popular. These were large-size circular paintings showing breath-taking landscapes or important historical events on a continuous surface, in the centre of which the spectator stood, as if he was part of the landscape or partaking in the event himself. This was the period of historicism, when architects erected buildings in the styles of past ages instead of developing styles of their own for the expression of their messages. Partly as an outcome of this attitude, it became popular to erect copies of town quarters as temporary structures made of ephemeral construction materials. As a rule, these copies of town quarters did not aim at full accuracy; rather, they were meant to evoke the atmosphere of a given city. This they hoped to achieve by creating ensembles consisting of true copies of genuinely extant buildings, of buildings assembled from relatively true copies of sections of buildings, or of completely fictitious buildings erected in a given style. This field of architecture was closely connected to the "stylistic" restoration of monuments of architecture, which was practised in those days: this meant the "re-creation" of a monument in an ideal form which may never have existed in reality at any time in history. An eminent example of this approach was the medieval Pierrefonds Castle in France, creatively re-constructed and re-invented by Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1858–1885), or the medieval Karlštejn Castle in Bohemia (the present-day Czech Republic), similarly re-constructed and re-invented by Friedrich von Schmidt and Josef Mocker (1887–1899). In a similar vein, fairy-tale castles were built which were closely connected to the stage décor of theatres. Some of these were not designed to fulfil practical purposes as living quarters but served as follies, the caprices of rulers, while others were used as residential buildings or as summer homes. King Ludwig II of Bavaria's Neuschwanstein Castle may serve as a good example of the former, while Pena Palace in Portugal (1842–1854/1885) or Peleş Castle in Romania (1872–1914) are examples of the latter. There is a close connection between the stage décor of theatres and this kind of architecture. Stage designers took an active part in the preparation of the designs for Neuschwanstein Castle. Several parts of the castle were in fact re-creations of actual stage sets designed for operas by Richard Wagner at the opera house in Munich. The close connection between theatre sets and the erection of historical town quarters for fairs was also warranted on a professional level because in both cases the building material was of an ephemeral nature – these buildings, just like stage sets, were not meant to exist for long periods but were to be temporary structures of limited life-span. Thus it was by no mere chance that architects specialising in stage décor were

often employed in the erection of copies of historical town quarters. Examples of such copies were the “Venice in Vienna” project by Oskar Marmorek; the exotic sections, including a Cairo Street, at the Great Industrial Exposition of Berlin 1896; the Cairo Street at the International Exposition of 1906 at Milan; the Old Buda Castle (*Ósbudavára*) of 1896 in Budapest and the “Constantinople in Budapest” project, also in 1896. In our context, the most important of all of them was the *Rue du Caire* at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889 in Paris (Volait 2005).

It was against this background that the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago took place. It was organised to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. Originally it had been planned for 1892 but owing to organisational difficulties it was postponed to the following year. It was not the first world’s fair in the United States, nor was it the last. As a world’s fair, it followed the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889 in Paris, which had been an unprecedented success in the history of world’s fairs. The aim the organisers set before them was to surpass it in every respect, a circumstance which determined many aspects of the fair right from the beginning. It was generally felt in America that the presence of the United States at the Paris fair of 1889 had not reflected its industrial power or the importance it had acquired in the world economy in previous years. It was also thought that the time had come for the United States to take the place it rightly deserved in world culture, too. Since there were prospects of considerable gains, both material and in terms of prestige, there was fierce competition among possible candidates such as New York, Washington DC, St. Louis and Chicago to acquire the rights to host this important event. At the same time, it was clear that only one fair could be organised and that it should be a federal event. In the end Chicago won. Many agreed that Chicago, the “City of « I Will »” was just the right place to demonstrate the American miracle to the world: about ninety years old, with more than a million inhabitants, Chicago was a major industrial, commercial and transportation centre of the United States. At the same time, it had something of a bad reputation within America, owing to the dismal living conditions, the high crime rate and the acute social tensions, while outside the country it was mostly unknown. The time had come, the local leaders thought, to present their city to Americans on the one hand, as a haven of culture and refinement in addition to its position of economic might, and on the other hand to put it on the world map as a major metropolis. Time was very short but in the end the organisers succeeded in meeting the deadline: the fair was officially opened by President Grover Stephen Cleveland on 1 May 1893. This was a real miracle in view of the relatively little time at the organisers’ disposal compared to the huge tasks to be accomplished. And while it is true that some projects were still incomplete by the time of the official opening, this was nothing new or unusual in the history of world’s fairs.

The fair was located on the shore of Lake Michigan and consisted of two major sections, the White City and the Midway Plaisance. The White City was the official part of the fair and it consisted of an impressive ensemble of magnificent edifices erected in the Beaux Arts style. They were arranged along lagoons connected to Lake Michigan, resulting in a Venetian landscape. Originally as a time- and money-saving measure, the buildings were painted white and gleamed in the sunshine, thus giving rise to the name White City. The so-called Midway Plaisance was a mile-long strip of land adjoining the White City. In contradistinction to the White City, where the exhibits of official bodies were located, such as US government agencies, the states and territories of the United States, foreign governments in their official capacity, on the Midway Plaisance one could find displays by private exhibitors, both from the United States and abroad. The exact status of this latter section of the fair was somewhat precarious. Anthropology was a nascent and upcoming field of studies at this time and played an important role at the World's Columbian Exposition, too, and the Midway Plaisance was officially regarded as belonging to the anthropological section with its numerous displays of foreign peoples and types, in accordance with contemporary scholarly theories. On the other hand, many of these shows also served the entertainment industry, which was accorded great importance at the fair on account of the considerable income it generated. In contradistinction to European fairs, which were financed mostly by governments, the Chicago fair, like most American fairs, was privately financed. Thus material questions played an important role, especially on the Midway Plaisance: whenever the number of visitors fell at a show or exhibit, swift adjustments were undertaken in order to redress the situation. Consequently, in addition to the scholarly aspects, material considerations greatly influenced the standard of the shows on the Midway Plaisance, although the extent of this varied greatly from place to place. The dignified appearance of the White City was greeted with universal admiration. The references of the Beaux Arts style to Classical Antiquity displayed Chicago and the United States as the ultimate heir and torchbearer of Western civilisation. The dignity that the White City radiated presented Chicago to the world as a haven of culture and refinement. At the same time, the White City was the first example of town planning in the United States and initiated important trends in this field. The Midway Plaisance, on the other hand, consisted of a wide selection of ensembles and shows at highly different scholarly and artistic levels. Common to all, however, was the fact that entertainment played an important role in them. It was very popular with visitors to the fair: they enjoyed tremendously the various sights, especially since they could participate in local activities in many of them. In the aftermath of the fair it seemed that this was in fact the first time in their history that Americans had a good time and enjoyed themselves.

The White City consisted of so-called “thematic buildings” (e.g., agriculture, industry, forestry, dairy, women, horticulture, fish and fisheries, etc.), of US government buildings, of buildings erected by the states and territories of the United States, and of structures set up by foreign governments in their official capacities. In this way, foreign countries could be represented on as many as three levels at the fair: in the thematic buildings of the White City, in the edifices erected by their respective governments in the White City, and also by private firms on the Midway Plaisance.¹

Some saw the contrast between the White City and the Midway Plaisance as akin to that between the Heavenly Jerusalem and Babel-Babylon. In general, biblical allusions appeared very often in descriptions of the fair: the great majority of Americans were churchgoing Protestants, who read and studied the Bible regularly.

The World’s Columbian Exposition was a many-sided event with multifaceted, often even contradictory, ideological messages, where various strands on various layers coexisted and were simultaneously present. As a rule, single exhibits cannot be interpreted on their own, taken out of the context of the fair as a whole, (a mistake many students of the fair are wont to commit), but must always be seen alongside the entire fair as a complex structure.

Contemporary scientific and ideological theories played an important role in the shaping of the fair’s messages. Some of these theories sound odd now, often even politically incorrect, yet they were mostly adequate scientific theories at the time, representing a given stage in the meandering development of human knowledge. Foremost among these theories was “Social Darwinism”, which exercised great influence on the intellectual, academic and cultural life of the period. It was assumed that Darwin’s highly influential theory of evolution and its corollaries were valid not only in biology but also in human societies. It implied, among other things, that various peoples represented different evolutionary stages in intellectual, cultural, and moral qualities, which passed from generation to generation via inheritance. This involved approaches which in some cases would be classified as racist today. Another influential theory, which laid great emphasis on quantification – that is on size and weight – in natural sciences, assumed that women were less gifted intellectually than men because the parietal lobe in their brain was smaller. This was called the “physiological imbecility of women” in the parlance of the period (Möbius, *Schwachsinn*). Both theories had widely ramifying and complex implications.

The president of the United States sent letters of invitation to all major countries of the world inviting them to participate in the World’s Columbian

¹ The best overall description of the fair is Bancroft, *Fair*.

Exposition. The Egyptian government received the invitation, too. Egypt had already participated in earlier world's fairs with great success: especially impressive was the Egyptian presence at Paris in 1867 and at Vienna in 1873. In 1867, Ismā'īl Pasha, the ruler of Egypt, personally visited the *Exposition Universelle* at Paris. The Egyptian government was fully aware of the international propaganda effects of such an event and there was no question in their minds: the Egyptian government wanted to participate in the fair at all costs. However, the British Treasury Secretary was not willing to grant more than a sixth of the sum deemed absolutely necessary by the government. Though officially an Ottoman province with special status within the Empire, Egypt was under British military occupation at the time and key posts in ministries were held by British officials. Thus the Egyptian government felt compelled to back down and gave up their plan, with the result that the country did not participate in the World's Columbian Exposition on an official level.

A private enterprise organised the project known as "Cairo Street". The manager was George Pangalo, an Egyptian subject with Greek, British and Italian roots and an Ottoman background, active in the banking sector. He raised the necessary capital and managed to obtain the concession from the world's fair authorities. This involved numerous trips to Chicago. Pangalo had several competitors, but according to contemporary press reports, the high quality of the designs presented by him convinced the authorities to declare him the winner. Pangalo also secured the cooperation of an outstanding Chicago-based architect, Henry Ives Cobb, for his project. This step was of great significance. Cobb's task was to supervise the on-the-spot erection of Cairo Street on the basis of the designs supplied by Pangalo. Cobb was a close friend of Daniel H. Burnham, director of works, which meant that his participation in the project was a guarantee of reliability and seriousness in the eyes of the fair's authorities. It was also an important consideration that only architects licensed in the State of Illinois were permitted to be active professionally in Chicago at the time – and Cobb possessed such a licence. In fact, it was Cobb who officially presented the plans supplied by Pangalo to the fair's authorities.

As far as the architectural side of the project was concerned, Pangalo obtained the participation of Max Herz, chief architect to the *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe* at the time. This body functioned within the Waqf Ministry (Ministry of Pious Religious Endowments) and was in charge of the conservation of monuments of Arab-Islamic architecture all over Egypt. (The conservation of monuments of ancient Egyptian [pharaonic] architecture, a task of supreme significance in Egypt, was the responsibility of a different government agency.) The chief architect directed the work of the Comité although he was not its head in a legal sense. In this capacity, Herz was regarded as the foremost expert

on Arab-Islamic architecture in Egypt: no mean achievement, especially in view of the fact that Cairo was – and still is – the richest repository of Arab-Islamic architecture in the world. In addition to the quantity, the quality of Arab-Islamic monuments in Cairo is truly unique (Ormos, *Max Herz Pasha*).

In the case of the present project, Herz was in charge of the preparation of designs. The Comité granted him permission to participate in the project on the condition that he would work for Pangalo after regular office hours only. It was also understood that Herz would travel to Chicago in the final stage of the project and would personally supervise erection works, adding to the project the final touches. A bureau was set up especially for this project in Cairo. An Austrian architect of Czech descent, Eduard Matasek, was employed direct from Vienna. Owing to Herz's connections with the Imperial capital, where he had conducted part of his studies and where he had many professional as well as family connections, it is to be assumed that it was through his mediation that Matasek was hired. In Vienna, Matasek worked with the studio of Fellner & Helmer, which had acquired great fame in Central Europe with its theatres, which the studio designed and erected in great numbers mainly in Central Europe but on occasion also further afield: the biggest and most lavish theatre the firm ever built was the opera house in Odessa in the Russian Empire (present-day Ukraine). We have already drawn attention to the close relationship between the ephemeral architecture of fairs and the world of the theatre: in our context it is highly significant that Matasek was recruited for the present project from the orbit of the theatrical world. After the conclusion of the Cairo Street project Matasek did not return to Vienna but settled in Cairo: he started to work with the Comité and was also active as a private architect. We do not know the exact details of how Herz and Matasek collaborated. There can be no doubt, though, that Matasek worked under Herz's guidance and direction, elaborating part of the detailed designs. Both Herz and Matasek were excellent draughtsmen. The designs prepared for Cairo Street have not survived, but we know that Pangalo was awarded the concession on the basis of designs of very high quality that had been presented to the fair's authorities. This means that some designs must have been prepared at an early stage. It is to be assumed that the remainder of the designs were prepared after Pangalo had acquired the concession.

The concept of the Cairo Street project was not new. Its direct forerunner was the *Rue du Caire* at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889 in Paris. In general, it was a widely popular idea at the time to erect ensembles of more or less authentic copies of quarters of towns, of certain characteristic buildings of a town, or of parts of buildings. The aim was to create an ensemble evoking the authentic atmosphere of the given town. In order to heighten the authenticity of a project, the architectural ensembles were sometimes populated with authentic inhabitants

of the given city. “Venice in Vienna”, which was erected by the Austrian architect Oskar Marmorek in 1895, serves as an excellent example. It was a typical section of Venice, with waterways and gondolas, and was erected in the Prater, the famous amusement park of Vienna. It became so popular with the inhabitants of the city that it was dismantled only fifteen years later, in 1910. Marmorek described it briefly in the following words, which – *mutatis mutandis* – could stand for Cairo Street or any similar venture: “It is not a copy of an exact place but, as it were, a paraphrase of Venice. Every single house is either a direct copy or has been designed from a given basic Venetian motif... The overall aim was to demonstrate the *character*, the *atmosphere* of the Queen of the Seas in the small space at our disposal.” (Kristan 1996:187–188). We know from the memoirs of his second, Hungarian wife that Khedive ‘Abbās II Ḥilmī loved this project and visited it quite often during his regular stays in the Imperial capital (Djavidan, *Harem* 333). Of course, Marmorek erected his “Venice in Vienna” after the Chicago fair, so it cannot be considered as a model for Cairo Street there. However, it can be regarded as an excellent example of this type of project in general.

Not only the designs but many constituent parts were prepared in Cairo. The latter were shipped to Chicago, assembled, adjusted and on occasions repaired there by Egyptian craftsmen.

Cairo Street was an enclosed compound approximately 183 × 44 metres in area, in the vicinity of the Ferris Wheel in the eastern section of the Midway. Its walls were plain from the outside showing nothing to the outer world, in accordance with Middle Eastern custom. It had three doors. Proceeding from east to west, the Street proper changed direction four times, bifurcating towards the end. It was along this Street that the various buildings were located. As a rule, the lower parts of most buildings, that is to say, of the humbler ones, were occupied by merchants’ booths.

It is sometimes claimed that Cairo Street was an exact copy of a certain section of the medieval part of Cairo, namely of the *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn* area. This area is well known: it is the area where the two Fatimid palaces once stood, hence the name (Ar. *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn* “Between the Two Palaces”). It is the area where some of the most beautiful mosques of the Arab-Islamic world stand today. However, this statement is not true. As stated before, Cairo Street was an architectural ensemble of units, some of which contained copies of sections of well-known architectural monuments while others were average buildings in local, i.e. Cairene taste. None of the buildings was an authentic one-to-one copy of any actually existing monument. However, the “great” buildings erected in Cairo Street contained some very conspicuous and clearly identifiable parts of important architectural monuments in Islamic Cairo, after which they were usually named. And the result, the overall effect, was absolutely convincing. The great

buildings and the humbler ones, assembled in carefully measured proportion, added up to a solid and impressive – while at the same time very pleasant – ensemble which made a breathtakingly powerful impact. This was enhanced by the fact that visitors were, so to say, “taken captive” by the Street on account of its narrowness and high buildings. Everybody enthused about the architectural “authenticity” of Cairo Street. Comparisons with the *Rue du Caire* at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889 at Paris always came out in favour of Chicago. Of course, many of those who found Cairo Street absolutely authentic had never actually visited Cairo. It is to be assumed, though, that the emphasis on authenticity in these cases was partly based on second-hand information while also partly being a metaphoric expression for the high artistic quality of the Street.

The present author has found three things which, in his opinion, detract from the much praised authenticity of the Street. Firstly, there was a balcony with a keel arch – typical of the Maghreb but alien to Cairo – on one of the buildings (see below). Secondly, the pavement was made of bricks, a method also unknown in Cairo. However, this latter feature considerably facilitates the identification of photographs taken in Chicago but offered for sale in Cairo in the aftermath of the fair as “typical” scenes taken in Cairo. Thirdly, in Chicago everything seemed brand new in Cairo Street, which was hardly the case in the medieval section of Cairo itself, as can be seen in contemporary photographs. In fact, much of the magic of the medieval section of Cairo experienced in the nineteenth, twentieth as well as twenty-first centuries is based on the romantic feeling coupled with the antiquity of the monuments.

We shall now proceed to survey the most important “great” monuments.

The most conspicuous monument in the whole Street was the mosque with its high minaret, which could be seen from afar from outside the Street. It was claimed that this mosque was an exact copy of Qāyitbāy’s funerary mosque (1474) in the Northern Cemetery, apart from its minaret, which was supposed to be an exact replica of the Circassian mosque of Abū Bakr ibn Muzhir (1480) in the tortuous *Bargawān* lane in the medieval part of Cairo. This statement seems to have originated with Max Herz. Circassian mosques, of which we are lucky to possess quite a number, are without exception really very beautiful. Max Herz, who was by no means a dispassionate art historian, in addition to being a fine conservator of monuments, had a clear predilection for Mamluk architecture and a very high regard for Qāyitbāy’s funerary mosque. He wrote: “Arab art in Egypt has never produced a more harmonious ensemble.” He praised the minaret in the following words: “It can be reckoned beyond doubt among the most beautiful spire-shaped edifices of any style.” (Herz, *Islām* 164; cf. Ormos 2009: 260–261). The minaret of Abū Bakr ibn Muzhir’s mosque is nearly contemporary with Qāyitbāy’s minaret. It is in the same style and is equally beautiful. During his long

career, Herz was involved with both mosques: he carried out complete restoration on both of them. In view of his admiration for Qāyitbāy's minaret it is difficult to understand why he should have replaced it with another one, even though it is itself a very fine specimen. As a possibility it comes to mind that perhaps in order not to upset religious sensitivities he wanted to avoid even the suspicion of reproducing a mosque actually extant in reality. It should be stated as a preliminary that in general, Circassian mosques, especially their minarets, closely resemble each other. A careful comparison of the three minarets in question shows that they look very similar yet are all slightly different. This means that it is not true to say that the minaret in Chicago was an exact replica of Abū Bakr ibn Muzhir's minaret. It is hard to know why Herz should have claimed this if it was not so. One is at a loss for an answer. It may be that he preferred to give a clear cut, seemingly precise statement for propaganda purposes. Another possibility is that the booklet which this piece of information seems to have originated from was printed at an earlier stage of the project and that the finalisation of the plans occurred later. If we look at the "body" of the mosque we can see that it really evokes the appearance, the impression of Qāyitbāy's funerary mosque without being a true and exact copy. There are important differences which, however, do not disturb the overall effect. The original in Cairo is basically a free-standing monument, while its counterpart in Chicago is one of a series of buildings lining a street. A conspicuous and very significant constituent part of the complex in Cairo is the ruler's mausoleum with its splendid dome displaying intricate arabesque decoration; this basic constituent part of the original was not reproduced in Chicago. Also, a conspicuous foundation inscription appears above the *sabīl* window in Chicago: there is no inscription in the Cairo original. Little is known about the mosque's interior. Some conclusions can be drawn from the ground plan of Cairo Street at our disposal, which includes the mosque. It displays the customary ground plan of a cruciform *madrassa*-mosque with recesses as reduced lateral *īwāns*. The construction of the entrance was unusual. In Mamluk mosques, the passageway from the entrance to the courtyard (*ṣaḥn*) is not straight but deflected, changing direction more or less at right angles. It is assumed that this feature was employed by Mamluk builders in order to facilitate the defence, by making direct assault and entry by hostile forces impossible. In Chicago, however, the entryway leads directly, without deflection, to the covered courtyard, the *ṣaḥn*, entering it at a right angle. We do not have photographs of the interior. Contemporary descriptions mention a gallery from which visitors could watch the regular prayers of the Egyptian Muslims. There was no gallery in Qāyitbāy's funerary mosque in Cairo. However, there was an impressive pulpit (*dikkaṭ al-muballig*) at the western corner of the covered courtyard (*ṣaḥn*), which appears in contemporary photographs and on ground plans from the period but which has

since disappeared. There were very few Muslims in America at the time of the World's Columbian Exposition. Therefore it was an exceptional and exotic experience for local visitors to the fair to be able to watch Muslims performing their prayers in a mosque. Similarly, the muezzin's call to prayer resounded regularly from the minaret, another highly unusual and exotic feature in Chicago at the end of the nineteenth century. When night fell the minaret was lit by many electric bulbs, transforming Cairo Street into an enchanted medieval city straight from the Arabia of the *Thousand and One Nights*. An interesting feature of Qāyitbāy's mosque in Chicago was its lantern. There had been much discussion in the Comité in connection with the eventual restoration of Qāyitbāy's funerary mosque about whether the *ṣaḥn* had originally been covered or not. And if it had been covered, what had the roof looked like? It was assumed that there would have been a lantern in the centre of the roof but it was not clear what shape it had been. The question was especially vexed in the case of the lantern roof. Would it have been flat or pointed? Without going into the details of this long dispute, it can be stated that the final answers to these questions were not known at the time. Nevertheless, Herz and the Comité opted for a slightly pointed, nearly flat roof so as not to interfere with the overall impression of the *madrasa*-mosque of this type. As a matter of fact, all lanterns of this Circassian type were designed by Herz's office under his guidance. The problem was ultimately solved long after Herz's departure and death when the *waqfiyya* (foundation deed) of Qāyitbāy's funerary mosque, containing an architectural description of the monument, came to light. It stated clearly that the courtyard had been covered and that there had been a lantern in its centre. It was described as a *kušk*, but it was not clear what its precise shape had been (Ormos 2008; Ormos 2009:264–266). In this context it was remarkable to see that as early as around 1890 Herz already opted for a flat roof in the replica of Qāyitbāy's funerary *madrasa*-mosque in Chicago, when the debate was still going on: Qāyitbāy's lantern was reconstructed around 1899–1900, relatively late in the course of the complete restoration of the monument carried out by Max Herz.

In the detailed ground-plan at our disposal the public fountain (*sabīl*) bears the inscription "Fortune Teller". Thus we must assume that a fortune teller offered his/her services in it.

Qāyitbāy's funerary *madrasa*-mosque was located in the centre of Cairo Street, in the area indicated as "Marketplace" on the ground plan, next to the "Camel Station". Now, a market place is a typical European concept; there are of course markets, i.e. bazaars in the Orient, but there is no market place in the centre of a town in the European sense of the word. The "Camel Station" was next to the *sabīl*, the public fountain forming part of the mosque. It is to be assumed that it was there that the camels rested between rides and waited for customers. In the

photographs at my disposal there are no camels in this location. However, their kneeling rugs are there. This can be accounted for by the circumstance that camels were very popular and were probably out carrying customers around most of the time.

Just opposite the “Camel Station” stood what was described as a replica of the Mansion of Gamāl ad-Dīn aḍ-Ḍahabī (1634). It was the luxurious abode of a rich merchant. From an architectural point of view it was remarkable that although this monument was built more than a century after the Ottoman occupation of Egypt (1517), it was erected in the architectural style of the preceding Mamluk period instead of in the Ottoman style. This was certainly a case of historicism, proving that this stylistic approach existed in earlier periods too and not only in the nineteenth century. The reasons are not wholly clear. However, it seems reasonable to assume that the owner wanted to erect a building in the local style as he knew it instead of availing himself of the architectural style of the conquerors. Personal aesthetic preferences may have played a role too: maybe the patron simply found the architectural style of the Mamluks more to his taste than the style fashionable at the time in the core provinces of the Ottoman Empire. He may have been an early forerunner of Max Herz in this respect: we know that he personally liked the style of the Mamluk period very much, while he had rather a low opinion of the Imperial Ottoman style. As a matter of fact, Herz was deeply involved with Gamāl ad-Dīn aḍ-Ḍahabī’s mansion. He carried out a complete restoration of it. And it is perhaps even more important that it is generally acknowledged that it was thanks to Herz that the building had survived at all and had not shared the fate of many of its counterparts which had perished without a trace. The salvage of this mansion was all the more significant because very few secular buildings could be found among the relatively great number of surviving monuments of architecture in Cairo, most of which belonged to the sphere of religion. The building erected in Chicago under this name must be regarded as a free pasticcio rather than a replica of the original. Especially odd is the open balcony with the keel arch characteristic of the Western part of the Arab world, the Maghreb, which is conspicuously out of place here. It is very difficult to attribute such a stylistic incongruity to Herz. Maybe it was added by some local builder before Herz’s arrival? One of the main interests of this mansion was a fabulous bronze or brass door, which had been made expressly for the fair according to one report, while another stated that it was about 500 years of age and had once been the property of the Circassian Mamluk Sultan Barqūq (d. 1399). This door seems to have been one of a number of Sultan Barqūq’s doors, at least some of which were probably fakes. The late Professor Géza Fehérvári

(1926–2012) was involved with these doors for more than a decade. His monograph devoted to this subject appeared posthumously (Fehérvári 2012)².

In the vicinity of the mosque stood the *sabīl-kuttāb* of ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Kathūdā, which after the mosque was the most conspicuous monument in Cairo Street. Its original (1744) stands at a bifurcation of the main thoroughfare as a landmark of medieval Cairo. It was built in a special local variety of the Imperial Ottoman style named after its inventor, ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Kathūdā, the most prolific builder in eighteenth century Cairo. On account of its pleasant appearance and dramatic location, this monument is widely regarded as one of the most picturesque sights in the Egyptian capital, the Mother of the World (*Umm ad-Dunyā*). So it was in Chicago too. The edifice erected there was a very fine, though not exact, replica of the original building in Cairo. In any case, it reproduced the impression of the original very accurately. Little is known about the *sabīl*'s interior in Chicago. The interior of the original in Cairo is covered with glazed ceramic tiles displaying plant motifs in blue and green on a white ground. This kind of tile was very popular in the Ottoman Empire at the time but was only rarely employed in Cairo. There is no evidence that the *sabīl*'s interior in Chicago was covered with such tiles. Instead of dispensing water to passers-by, as in Cairo, the *sabīl* in Chicago was employed as a music pavilion. However, the *kuttāb* fulfilled its original purpose: it served as an elementary school for the Egyptian children in Cairo Street. Great importance was attributed by the manager, George Pangalo, to the proper education of children during the fair. There is no denying that the *kuttāb* was an important feature of Cairo Street: the shrill noise the children made while learning to read and write could be heard all over the place and contributed greatly to the authentic Oriental atmosphere of the Street.

Just opposite the *sabīl-kuttāb* stood the *wikāla* (okel, okella) or caravanserai, which represented a building type which played a very important role in pre-modern Cairo, right until the beginning of the twentieth century, providing travelling wholesale merchants with accommodation and storerooms. As far as its exterior was concerned, it was not a copy of any identifiable single edifice. Rather, it was a free pasticcio, a capriccio combining elements from typical representatives of this building type. The possibility cannot be ruled out that the architect preparing the designs also relied on printed albums with representations of *wikālas* in the Near and Middle East. In its interior, there were two rows of galleries with pointed arches running around the courtyard. They housed a great number of shops. The interior was also a free pasticcio using characteristic elements of this building type. There was one part of the *wikāla* which was of

² It is not known whether the text represents the final results of his research in a form approved by him.

special interest. It had a beautiful door as its main entrance, which was a copy of a door in Darb al-Labbāna in the vicinity of Sultan Ḥasan's mosque. It is still standing today, connected at right angles to the door of the *takiyya* (~convent) of Taqī d-Dīn al-Biṣṭāmī. The exact identification of this door presents difficulties but in all probability it was built in the fourteenth century.³ A few years after the Chicago fair the well-known tobacco manufacturer Nestor Gianacis asked Max Herz to remodel his villa in the centre of modern Cairo. Herz must have been fond of this door because he installed a copy of the same door as the new main entrance to the remodelled villa. Later Gianacis sold his villa, which finally became the property of the American University in Cairo. The villa is still standing in its erstwhile location: it is the old, Neo-Mamluk, central building of the American University in Cairo in Taḥrīr Square, and the door in question leads now to the President's Staircase.

At the western end of Cairo Street proper, within the compound, was a courtyard in which stood the Temple of Luxor. This pharaonic monument was in fact an independent project which did not belong to Cairo Street in the strict sense of the word. On the other hand, the general public regarded it as part of Cairo Street, and thus it usually appears as such in descriptions of the fair. It is often emphasised that these two features, the Temple of Luxor and Cairo Street, represent the two cornerstones of the most important continuous civilisation in world history: pharaonic and Islamic Egypt. The Temple of Luxor at Chicago was a rather free pasticcio on pharaonic architecture designed to evoke the atmosphere of an actual pharaonic temple, specifically that of the Temple of Luxor. It was stated in many publications that the monument in Chicago was actually an exact replica of the Temple in Luxor. This was not the case; the monument in Chicago bore little resemblance to the actual Temple, one of the major sights from the ancient Egyptian, pharaonic period in Egypt on the east (right) bank of the Nile, on the site of ancient Thebes. However, by choosing to reproduce as central elements two of the most conspicuous constituent parts, the double towers of the grandiose pylon, the builder skilfully achieved his aim, although even the function of the pylon was completely modified: in Chicago it appeared as the façade of the pharaonic temple. The interior in Chicago served both as a museum and a lecture hall, and was decorated with ancient Egyptian paintings. Replicas of the mummies of outstanding ancient Egyptian "celebrities" were displayed in glass cases. These had been executed in wax in the workshops of Thomas Cook & Son at Būlāq. Alongside Demetrius Mosconas, the director of the "Temple of Luxor" enterprise, a close friend of his, John Mason Cook, was heavily involved with the project. John Mason Cook was none other than the only son of Thomas Cook, the founder

³ It is listed as a protected monument under no. 325.

of modern tourism, whose firm was very active in Egypt. In fact, John Mason Cook was joint proprietor of the celebrated firm at the time. A genuine enthusiasm for and love of Egyptian culture along with a sharp eye for publicity added up to an irresistible force that drove Cook junior to participate in the project with heartfelt vigour. Inside the Temple, pharaonic music was played and pharaonic dances were performed. The Temple of Luxor was less popular than Cairo Street proper and attendance was much lower. It must be mentioned that the majority of American visitors to the fair were strict churchgoing Protestants, closely acquainted with the Bible. Ancient Egypt thus represented first and foremost for them a scene of Biblical history, where some of the best-known stories of both Testaments were set, stories which they had known since childhood. This aspect was conspicuously present at the fair. In connection with the Temple of Luxor, references to personalities and events from the Bible were constantly made, with the result that visitors found themselves in familiar surroundings populated with persons whom they had known from Biblical stories from their earliest years.

In addition to the authenticity from an architectural point of view, the organisers placed special emphasis on enhancing the authenticity of Cairo Street by populating it with original inhabitants shipped to Chicago straight from Cairo. In this way, visitors had the impression that they were in fact strolling along the streets of the Middle Eastern metropolis. This was not a new idea. It had been applied in Paris in 1889, too. What was new in Chicago was the high quality of the design and execution. Manager Pangalo carefully selected 175 persons (men, women and children) in Cairo who were then transported to the New World. They included donkey-boys, camel-drivers, farriers, waiters, forerunners or *saises* (Egyptian Arabic sg. *sāyis*), water-carriers, cooks, barbers, conjurers, wrestlers, jesters, coffee-grinders, musicians, scribes, and men of religion in characteristic attires commanding respect. All sorts of animals from Egypt, such as camels, donkeys, monkeys and snakes, were also transported to Chicago to enhance the Street's authenticity.

In addition to simply strolling up and down Cairo Street, there were all sorts of activities to watch and – what was even more captivating for visitors – to participate in. They could mount donkeys and take a ride, which very many people did. Much more fun both for riders and onlookers alike was a ride on a camel, an extraordinary looking animal with which Americans were completely unfamiliar. Mounting the camel and descending from it was usually an ordeal for the bold riders, and simultaneously a great occasion for hilarity and uproar for all the onlookers who always gathered in great numbers to watch the unusual event. There were regular activities within Cairo Street, such as the Prophet's birthday, the *Mawlid an-Nabī*, the birthdays or festivals (*mawlids*) of various holy men, wedding processions, and the departure and arrival of the Mecca pilgrims with the

Sacred Litter, the *Maḥmal* (Porter 2011). There were regular programs involving the whole Midway Plaisance, too. Processions were repeatedly organised in which the denizens of the Midway paraded up and down, drawing attention to their shows. There were also various special days, events, involving the whole fair, in which the inhabitants of Cairo Street also participated with great enthusiasm and high visibility. All the events involving Cairo Street were colourful and noisy, something that Americans were not accustomed to. The ebullient *joie de vivre* of the Egyptians was something absolutely new for Americans and many were carried away by the irresistible atmosphere. An important aspect of Cairo Street, just as with the Midway Plaisance, was the emphasis on the material aspect. Whenever profit seemed jeopardised by a fall in visitor numbers, decisive steps were taken to redress the situation, for instance by sending out a noisy procession made up of groups of native Cairenes from Cairo Street in their colourful attire, accompanied by conspicuous animals, mainly donkeys and camels. Such a noisy cavalcade of people laughing and joking in their colourful attire with their partly unusual, even exotic animals, never failed in its effect.

However, the biggest attraction of Cairo Street was the belly dance or *danse du ventre* as it was usually referred to. It had been a great success at the *Exposition Universelle* of 1889 in Paris, at the same time generating record profits for its manager, so there was no doubt that it was a must for Chicago too. It was staged at several venues, not only in Cairo Street. It seems, though, that the belly dance shown in Cairo Street was generally regarded as the most authentic, at the same time representing the highest standard as far as the Midway Plaisance was considered. Belly dancing was performed by Egyptian dancers in the theatre located next to 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Kathūdā's *sabīl-kuttāb*, right in the centre of the Street. It elicited contrary reactions. On the one hand, visitors stormed the theatre and everybody wanted to see the show. On the other hand, many regarded it as immoral. What visitors saw was not in accordance with contemporary American ideas of public decency, which was determined by the strict morals of a somewhat puritan society. Yet it cannot have been as immoral as is often suggested because the authorities never intervened in Cairo Street: there can be no doubt that they would have done so without hesitation had anything really subversive been going on which infringed the law. It is true that regular newspaper articles appeared either demanding the prohibition of the show or announcing its imminent closure. However, it is possible that many of these articles were in fact part of a carefully orchestrated propaganda campaign: after the publication of such an article attendance always rose sharply. Belly dancing had an ambivalent position: partly it was regarded as an ethnographic feature in the field of anthropology because the Midway Plaisance belonged to the Department of Anthropology, displaying cultural features of various nations. On the other hand it was perceived as an early

variety of sex show which seemed to violate the strict moral codes of contemporary society.

Cairo Street was a multifaceted feature at a multifaceted world's fair. One may attempt to disentangle the various layers and strands of its often contradictory meanings only in the context of the whole fair. Yet one can say with reasonable certainty that, notwithstanding certain indisputably negative aspects pertaining to Orientalism in the Edward Saidian sense, as well as to colonialism and imperialism, Cairo Street was a very serious venture of high professional quality which did much to disseminate information on Arab-Islamic as well as ancient Egyptian culture, and even in a broader sense on Islam, to strata of society which did not normally come into contact with Egypt, thus creating a positive image or heightening it in circles otherwise impervious to such an effect.

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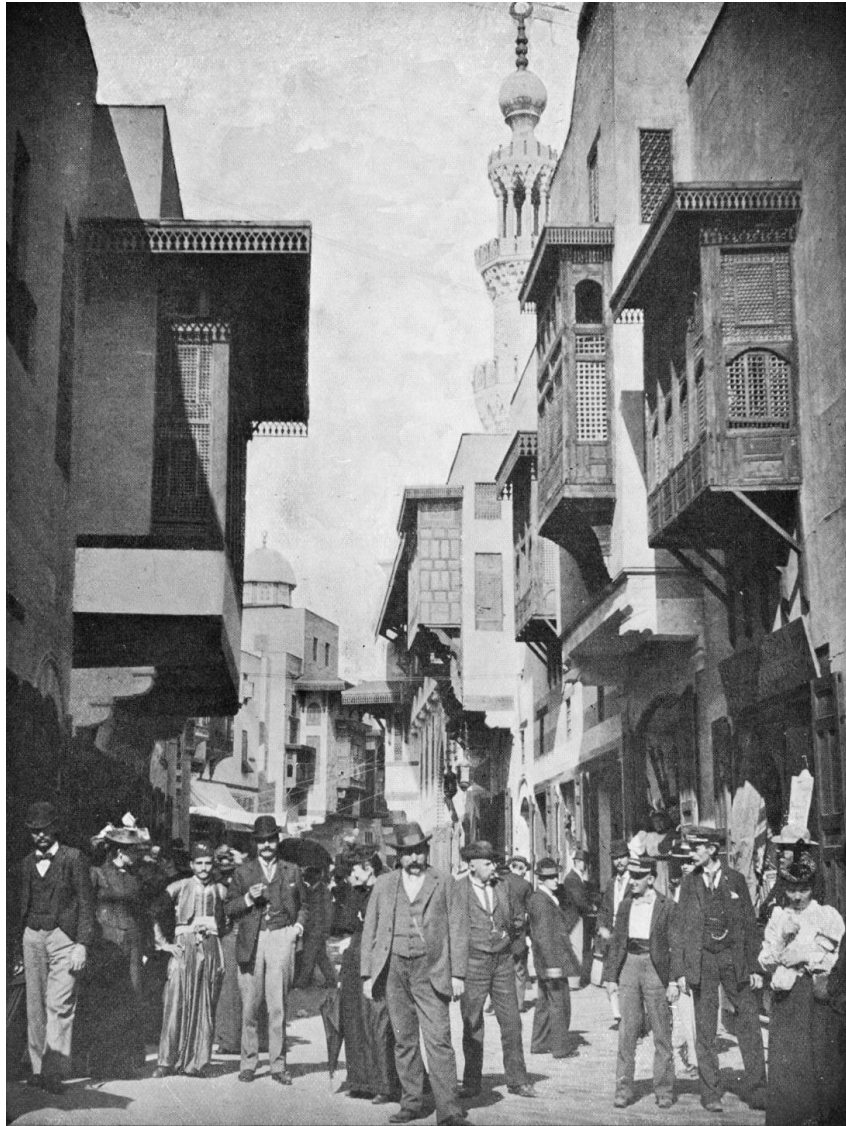
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1. Cairo Street. Shepp, *Fair* 507.



2. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Kaḥudā's *sabīl-kuttāb* with the entrance to the Dancing Theatre to the right. *The dream city*.