

Not to be confused with Al Husayn Mosque of Karbala.

The Imam Hussein Mosque (Arabic: مسجد الإمام الحسين) or Jame Sayyidna Husayn (Arabic: جامع سيدنا الحسين) is a mosque and mausoleum of Husayn ibn Ali, originally built in 1154, and then later reconstructed in 1874.[1] The mosque is located in Cairo, Egypt, near the Khan El-Khalili bazaar, near-by the famous Al Azhar Mosque, in an area known as Al-Hussain.[1] It is considered to be one of the holiest Islamic sites in Egypt.[2] Some Shia Muslims believe that Husayn's head (ra's mubarak) is buried on the grounds of the mosque where a mausoleum is located today and considered to be what is left of the Fatimid architecture in the building.[2]

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Architecture[edit]

Following the beheading of Hussain ibn Ali in Iraq during the Battle of Karbala, in 1153 his head was sent to Cairo, Egypt to be protected by building a mausoleum for it completed in 1154.[2] Of this original Fatimid architectural structure, only the lower part of the south side gate called Bab Al-Akhdar remains original in the mosque today.[1] A couple years later, a minaret was added to the original Fatimid gateway by Ayyubid Salih Nagm al-Din in 1237.[1] The minaret has panel carvings of overlapping lines that create patterns called arabesque popular in Islamic Architecture.[1] The different minarets among this mosque play a role in portraying the various powers that ruled Cairo and the way they laminated their power through architecture.[3] Finally in 1874, Isma'il Pasha (Khedive Isma'il) reconstructed Al-Hussein mosque inspired by the Gothic Revival Architecture.[4] Wanting to modernize Cairo, Isma'il Pasha created a mosque with Italian Gothic style and Ottoman style minarets.[1] This mixture of various architectural styles famous is Islamic architecture during the khedival time period is called Islamic eclecticism.[1]

Today, the latest addition to Al-Hussein Mosque are three large canopy umbrellas.[5] It was added to protect those praying outdoors from the sun during the summer days and from the rain during the winter.[5] They are mechanically operated and follow the designs of many Saudi Arabian mosques made from steal and teflon.[5] Many people still come to this mosque to pray and visit the mausoleum on a normal basis.[1] Although non-Muslims are not allowed into the building, the structure is still viewed from the outside by tourists.[1]

Ras al-Husayn[edit]

The Fatimid Period[edit]

According to Fatimid tradition, in the year 985, the 15th Fatimid Caliph, Abu Mansoor Nizar al-Aziz Billah, traced the site of his great-grandfather's head through the office of a contemporary in Baghdad. It remained buried in the town of Ashkelon for about 250 years, until 1153.[6][7]:184–186 It was "rediscovered" in 1091 at a time when Badr al-Jamali, the

grand vizier under Caliph al-Mustansir, had just reconquered the region for the Fatimid Caliphate. Upon the discovery, he ordered the construction of a new Friday mosque and mashhad (memorial shrine) on the site.[8]

After the 21st Fatimid Imam At-Tayyib Abu'l-Qasim went into seclusion, his uncle, Abd al Majid, occupied the Fatimid Empire's throne. Fearing disrespect and possible traitorous activity, the Majidi-monarch, Al-Zafir, ordered the transfer of the head to Cairo. Husayn's casket was unearthed and moved from Ashkelon to Cairo on Sunday 8 Jumada al-Thani, 548 (31 August 1153).[7]:192–193 Yemeni writer Syedi Hasan bin Asad described the transfer of the head thus in his Risalah manuscript: "When the Raas [head of] al Imam al Husain was taken out of the casket, in Ashkelon, drops of the fresh blood were visible on the Raas al Imam al Husain and the fragrance of Musk spread all over." [6]

According to historians Al-Maqrizi,[citation needed] Ahmad al-Qalqashandi,[citation needed] and Ibn Muyassar,[citation needed] the casket reached Cairo on Tuesday 10 Jumada al-Thani (2 September 1153). Taken by boat to the Kafuri (Garden), the casket was buried there in a place called Qubbat al-Daylam or Turbat al Zafr'an (currently known as al-Mashhad al-Hussaini or B'ab Mukhallafat al-Rasul).[6] All Fatimid Imam-Caliphs, from Abdullah Al Mahdi to Al-Amir bi-Ahkami l-Lah, were buried at Turbah al-Zafaran,[9] in the vicinity of the mosque and of the main Fatimid Palaces.[10]

The Grand vizier Tala'i ibn Ruzzik subsequently intended for the head to be moved to a new mosque and shrine he purposely built in 1160 (the Mosque of al-Salih Tala'i, south of Bab Zuwayla), but this transfer never occurred.[11]:124[12]

The Ayyubid Period[edit]

Regarding one of the "custodians" who brought Husayn's casket to Cairo, the famous Mamluk historian of Egypt, Mohiyuddin Abd al-Zahir, wrote:[13][14]

"When Salahuddin came to power he seized all the Palaces of the Aimmat Fatemiyeen and looted their properties and treasures. He destroyed the valuable and rare collection of hundreds of thousands of books available in libraries, along the river Nile. When he learned through his intelligence agents that one of the custodians of Raas al Imam al Husain was highly respected by the people of the city of Qahera, he surmised that perhaps he would be aware of the treasures of the Aimmat Fatemiyeen. Salahuddin issued orders to present him in his court. He inquired of him the whereabouts of the Fatemi treasures. The nobleman flatly denied any knowledge of the treasures. Salahuddin was angered, and ordered his intelligence agents to ask him through 'third-degree-torture', but the nobleman bore the torture and repeated his previous statement that he knew nothing of any treasures. Salahuddin ordered his soldiers to put a cap containing centipedes on the head of the nobleman, such a type of punishment was so severe and unbearable that none could survive even for a few minutes.

"Prior to putting the Cap of Centipedes on the head, his hair was shaved, to make it easy for the centipedes to suck blood, which in turn made holes in [his] skull. In spite of that punishment the noble custodian of Husain's Head felt no pain at all. Salahuddin ordered more centipedes to be put on the nobleman's head, but it could not kill or pain him. Finally, Salahuddin Ayyubi ordered for a tight cap full of centipedes to accomplish the result. Even this method could not torture or kill him. The Ayyubid brutes were greatly astounded

further when they saw, on removing the cap, the centipedes were dead. Salahuddin asked the nobleman to reveal the secret of this miracle. The nobleman revealed as follow[s]: When Raas al Imam al Husain was brought to Qasar, Al Moizziyat al Qahera, he had carried the casket on his head. 'O Salahuddin! This is the secret of my safety.'"

Recent History[edit]

To mark the site of burial, known as Ra's al-Husayn (Arabic: رَأْسُ الْحُسَيْن) or Mashhad Ra's al-Husayn, Taher Saifuddin had a zarih built in Mumbai,[15][16] which was later installed at the mosque in 1965 just before his death. It was subsequently inaugurated by his son, Mohammed Burhanuddin.[6]

According to tradition: The zarih was originally meant for Al Abbas Mosque, in Karbala, Iraq but could not be installed there: The location and the zarih had previously been measured precisely, but it simply didn't fit. Taher Saifuddin, the maker of the zarih, received divine guidance by way of intuition that out of loyalty, Al-Abbas ibn Ali—who was martyred along with his step brother, Husayn, at the Battle of Karbala—could not allow Ra's al-Husayn be without a zarih. As a consequence, Al-Abbas' zarih was flown to Cairo and installed at Ra's al-Husayn at the Al-Husseini mosque, instead.[6]

Bab al-Mukhallafat al-Nabawiyya al-Sharifa[edit]

Next to Ras al-Husayn is a crypt housing artifacts believed to belong to Muhammad.[17][18] A door laden with silver and gold was built by Mohammed Burhanuddin II and installed at the site in 1986.[19]:134