

The Fatimids | Mosque and Palace

'A new capital al-Qahira was built, enclosed by a city wall with eight gates.'

After General Jawhar had conquered Egypt for the caliph al-Mu'izz in 358 / 969, a new capital al-Qahira ('The Victorious') was built, enclosed by a city wall with eight gates. Typically, the caliph's imposing palatial complex, known as al-Sharqi or the Eastern Palace, lay at the very heart of the new capital, Cairo, and covered more than 17 acres, one-fifth of the entire city. Later, the so-called Western Palace was built opposite, and a public square was laid out between the two. Little remains or is known of these palaces, but historical sources mention that there were burial areas for Fatimid royals within the complex, a fact that would have enhanced the air of sanctity surrounding the caliphate. Fatimid-inspired palaces sprang up as far afield as Sicily, and continued to inspire royal architecture there until well after the Norman conquest.



Name:
Bab al-Futuh

Dynasty:
Hegira 480 / AD 1087 Fatimid

Details:
Cairo, Egypt

Justification:
Bab al-Futuh (Gate of Conquest) is one of the north entrances into the old Fatimid city of Cairo. The wall was built to enclose the spiritual beacons of the capital: the caliphate palace, the Mosque of al-Azhar and the Mosque of al-Hakim bi Amrillah.

Name:
Uscibene

Dynasty:
Second half of the 12th century Norman

Details:
Palermo, Italy

Justification:
The architectural design and decoration of this 6th- / 12th-century Norman palace echoes many Fatimid features, such as the characteristic muqarnas, a stalactite-like decorative feature often used to soften the transition between wall and dome.



Name:
Panel

Dynasty:
Hegira late 3rd century / AD late 9th century Tulunid

Details:
Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities (Medelhavsmuseet)
Stockholm, Sweden

Justification:
Elaborately carved panels such as this, which graced the interiors of Fatimid palaces, echo the carved stuccoes of Abbasid Iraq.
