



### Name of Monument:

Madrasa al-Ashrafiyya

### Location:

The building is located on the western border of the Haram al-Sharif between Bab al-Silsila (Gate of the Chain) and Bab al-Qattanin (Gate of the Cotton Merchants), both of which lead to the Haram al-Sharif, Jerusalem

### Date of Monument:

Hegira 887 / AD 1482

### Architect(s) / master-builder(s):

The names of those who designed and executed construction are not known but it is believed that they were Egyptian workmen headed by a Coptic architect.

### Period / Dynasty:

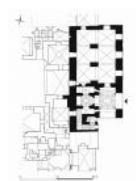
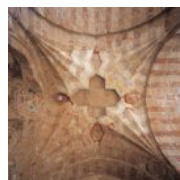
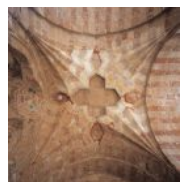
Mamluk

### Patron(s):

The founder of the madrasa was Sultan Zahir Sayf al-Din Khashqadam (r. AH 865–72 / AD 1461–7) but he died before it was finished. Sultan Ashraf Saif al-Din Qaytbay (r. AH 872–901 / AD 1468–96) ordered its completion, but when he saw the madrasa for the first time in AH 880 / AD 1475, he was not satisfied and ordered it to be demolished and rebuilt.

### Description:

Madrasa al-Ashrafiyya is the most beautiful and grandiose of the madrasas of Mamluk Jerusalem. The historian, Mujir al-Din al-Hanbali (d. AH 928 AD 1521), described it as the third jewel of the Haram al-Sharif, after the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque. The Madrasa al-Ashrafiyya consists of two levels: the ground floor and the first floor. The ground floor extends eastwards, thereby entering the Haram al-Sharif, and stretches out over the western wall of the Haram. This is contrary to the other madrasas in the vicinity, since the Mamluk madrasas were erected on the borders of the Haram (Sanctuary) and not within it. The entrance to the Madrasa opens on the eastern and southern side with two tapered arches. The entrance is covered by a fan-shaped vault, built of alternating colours of red and white stone. The door is set into a recessed wall covered by a semi-dome, and enriched with carved decorations that are also inset with glazed ceramic tiles. Standing on either side of the entrance are two mastabas of stone. And at the height of two courses from the surfaces of the mastabas, there is an inscription stating the date of construction and extolling the most prominent titles of Sultan Qaytbay. The entrance leads to the vestibule, to the north of which was once a large hall known as the assembly hall (Qaat al-Majma). On the eastern wall of the hall there is a door and two windows opening onto the terrace of the Haram al-Sharif. In the northern wall there is also an entrance and window; while on the southern wall there is another window and a mihrab decorated with coloured marble. Once the assembly hall of the Aqsa Mosque Library, it has recently become a training centre for the restoration and preservation of manuscripts and documents. To the south of the vestibule there is a stone stairwell which leads to the first floor and to a minaret that towers above Bab al-Silsila.



The first floor of the madrasa consists of a hall, which has four iwans in a cruciform plan; the largest being the southern iwan, which contains the mihrab. Today large parts of the first floor are in ruins, and nothing remains of the iwans except the walls. Despite this, the ground plan is clearly evident, for it corresponds with the Mamluk design of the four-iwan cruciform plan, in the middle of which is the central courtyard.

#### **View Short Description**

This is a large Mamluk architectural complex and the historian Mujir al-Din al-Hanbali considered it the third most beautiful building of al-Haram al-Sharif. The entrance of the madrasa is a rare artistic piece, composed of a number of different elements and Mamluk decorative motifs. The madrasa has two storeys and includes halls of study, residence rooms, a mosque, library and rooms for other amenities. The top storey has a four-iwan cruciform plan around an open courtyard. The building was partially destroyed in an earthquake in 1927, resulting in extensive damage especially to the top storey.

#### **How Monument was dated:**

The building is dated by the inscription at the entrance and by the waqf document specific to the madrasa. Historic documents also provide evidence for the date.

#### **Selected bibliography:**

Burgoyne, M., Mamluk Jerusalem: An Architectural Study, London, 1987 Al-Hanbali, Mujir al-Din, (d. 927 / 1520), Al-Uns al-Jalil fi Tarikh al-Quds wa al-Khalil [The Significant Ambiance in the History of Jerusalem and Hebron], Amman, 1973. Ibrahim, Abd al-Latif, "Watha'iq al-Sultan Qaytbay: Silsalat al-Dirasat al-Watha'iqiyya 2 [Documents of Sultan Qaytbay: A Series of Documentary Studies 2]", in Al-Mu'tamar al-Thalith lil Athar fi al-Bilad al-'Arabiya [The Third Conference for Archaeology in Great Syria], Cairo, 1961. Walls, A., "The Third Jewel of the Third Shrine of Islam", in Arts and the Islamic World, No. 2, 1984, pp.7–12. Pilgrimage, Sciences and Sufism: Islamic Art in the West Bank and Gaza, pp.88–90.

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