

# The mosque of the Grandson of the Prophet in Cairo:

## A Visit to the mausoleum of Imam Al Hussein Ibn Ali

> Cairo - Mounir El-Fishawy

Al Hussein Ibn Ali was born in Medin on the 5th of the month of Sha'ban of year 4 of Hegira. His distinguished parents were Imam Ali and Fatema Al-Zahra, the daughter of Prophet Mohammad. He was two years younger than his brother Al Hassan and had a remarkable resemblance to his grandfather, the Prophet. He was very knowledgeable, devoted to fasting, praying and giving alms.



The new minaret in Al-Hussein Mosque  
واجهة مسجد سيدنا الحسين والمئذنة الجديدة

**W**ith his brother Al Hassan, Imam Al Hussein took part in the conquest of North Africa, Tabaristan, and Constantinople, as well as the wars of Jamal, Saffin and Khawarej. He refused to pledge allegiance to Yazid Ben Mua'awia Ben Abi Soufian and revolted against his rule, which was not in conformity with Islamic principles. He died in martyrdom

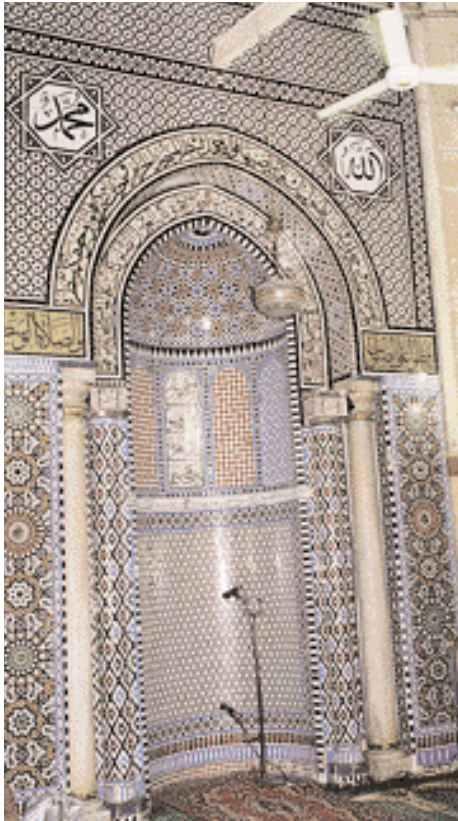
and his body was disfigured in the battle of Karbala on 10th Muharram year 61 of Hegira, the day named "Ashoura" (the Tenth). His head was cut and transported, with members of his family and the families of his partisans, to Damascus.

There are several accounts of the fate of Al Hussein's head. Some say that it was buried in Damascus initially, in Asqalan in Palestine ▶

Facing the Hussein Mosque (from right): Abu Adahab Mosque, Al-Azhar, the Administration building of Al-Azhar

من اليمين: جامع أبو الذهب، الجامع الأزهر، مبنى إدارة الأزهر  
وجميعهم مقابلين لمسجد سيدنا الحسين





The main mihrab  
المحراب الكبير



The door to the relics of the Prophet  
باب حجرة المقتنيات النبوية



The small mihrab of Al-Hussein Mosque  
المحراب الصغير لمسجد الإمام الحسين

and finally in Cairo on Sunday 8th Jumada II of year 547 H (August 31, 1153). The head was buried for a year in the Azzomorode Palace, the largest Fatimid palace in Egypt, in the area of Khan Al Khalili in Cairo, then in the present Al Hussein mosque located between Khan Al Khalili and El Azhar.

The head was placed in a silver coffin and a prestigious mausoleum was built around it, covered with different types of silk and surrounded with white wax columns on gold or silver holders from which silver lamps hung.

its surface. He also built a wooden tomb decorated with shell and ivory with a multicoloured silk curtain. Emir Abdul Rahman Katekhda carried out many restorations in 1175 H and added a basin, a fountain and two halls.

### Development of the mosque

Abu El Kassem Yahia Ben Naser Assoukari, during the reign of the Ayyoubide, in 633 H/1235, built a minaret on the door of the mausoleum (the green door), which his son finished in 1236. It was richly decorated with beautiful arabesque on gypsum, but only the square base with two foundation plates remained.

Under the reign of King Al Naser Mohamed Ben Qallawoun, the mosque was widened, with the construction of an esplanade and rooms for the Alawuite jurists added in 684 H.A. During the Othman era, Sultan Selim the 1st extended the mosque to accommodate the increasing numbers of worshippers and visitors. From 1004 to 1006 H, the Othman Wali Mohamed Pasha undertook the restoration of the mosque and its decorations. Emir Hassan Katekhda made the same improvement and increased

In 1279 H the Khedive Ismail ordered the rebuilding of the mosque completed in 1290 H. Its ground was covered with luxurious carpet, and it was illuminated by candles and special oils placed in crystal lamps. Important personnel were employed in the mosque: muezzins, imams, and domestic staff. The mausoleum was located apart from the mosque, on the right of the mihrab, within the esplanade on the left. A door linked it to the mosque, another to the esplanade and a third to the boulevard of the Green Door reserved for women visitors. The marble columns of Constantinople and three white marble doors on the side of Khan Khalili were added.

After 1952, Al Hussein mosque was restored and its area extended to 3340 m. The restorers took care to preserve the original architectural style. The thick 80 cm walls were rebuilt with old stones, and covered from inside and out by artificial stones resembling the old walls. ▶

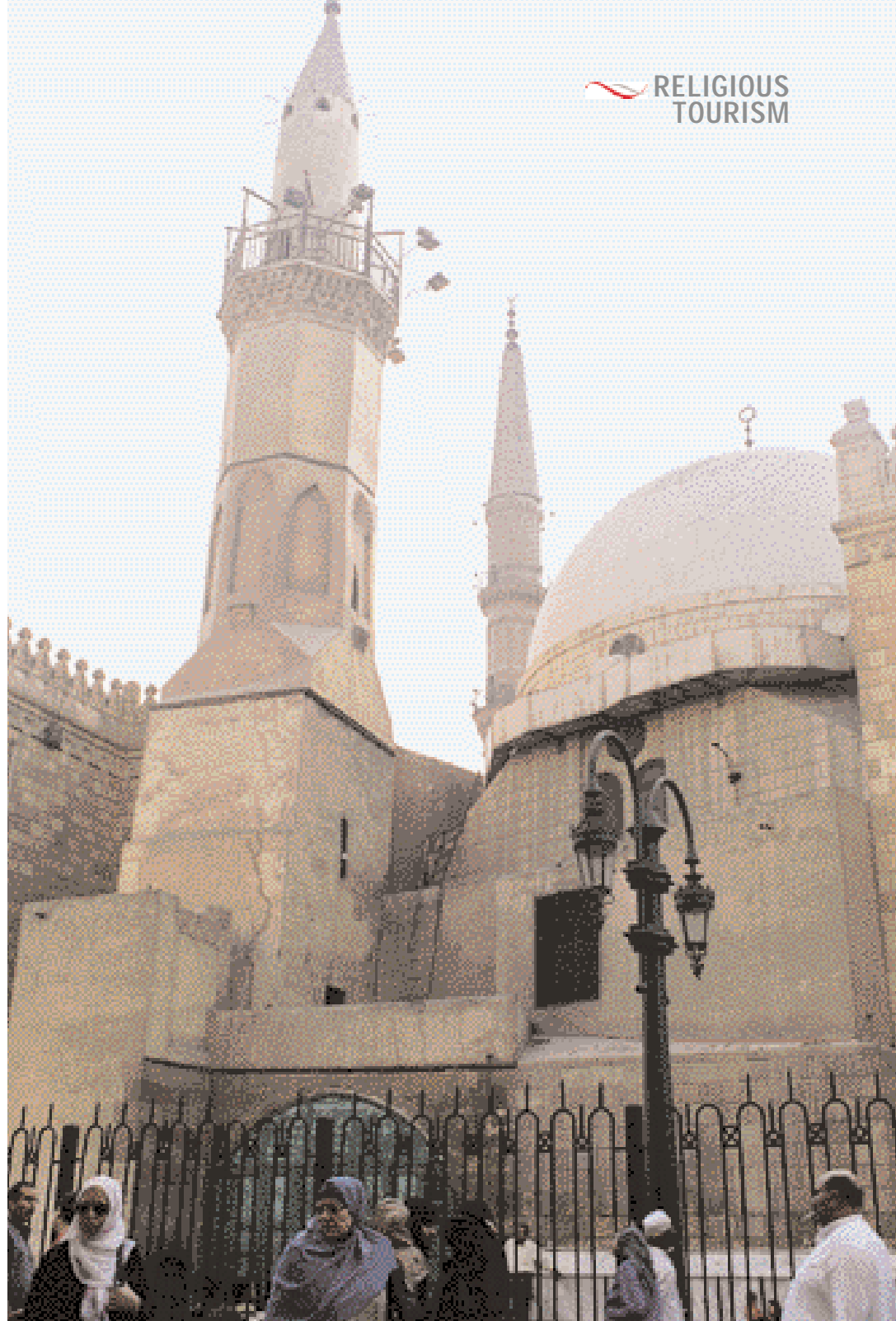


In the neighborhood of the mosque  
في جوار الحسين

A two-storey building reserved for administration was added to the mosque and a library with an area of 144 m<sup>2</sup> built in the east side. Sheik Yasser Mghawri Abdul-Hamid was presented with copies of Islamic Tourism for the library.

### Inside the Mosque

There is a splendid wooden minbar in the mosque gilded with gold, which was originally in the Azbek mosque, in the green door area. The esplanade comprises 44 columns carrying a wooden ceiling covered with very fine, multicoloured plant paintings and gilded geometrical shapes. There are about thirty big bronze windows covered with gold, with small windows at the top, surrounded by marble circles. The mosque has two minarets. One was built by Abou Al Kassem Ben Yahia Ben Naser Assoukary, known as "Azzarzour" (the starling) in 634 H/1236. The second 17.5m minaret, located at the back, is characterized by Othman architecture and carries two plates from 1266 H, one with 90 verses of soura Al Ana'am and the second a hadith of the Prophet: "Al Hassan and Al Hussein are the dearest members of my family to me". The grounds of the esplanade of the green door are covered with Turkish carpets. In the mosque, one finds a door leading to the room of the relics of the Prophet, founded by Abbas Hilmi II in 1311 H. Illuminated by lamps and crystal chandeliers, this room has marble-covered walls, a small mihrab, a carved wooden ceiling, windows decorated with gypsum and multicoloured panes. The cupboard of holy relics was put in the front of the hall. The hall floor, walls and ceiling were covered with a green felt fabric. This room has two doors: one leads to the mosque, the other to the dome. On its walls one finds the inscription Basmallah (In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful) and sourat "Al Inshirah". The relics of the Prophet and his companions include a piece of his shirt, the container of kohl, "marwad" (eyeliner pencil), part of his stick, two hairs from his beard and two Korans written in kufic style, one by Imam Ali and the other by Othman Ben Affan. This last Koran was transferred to the library of the Zaynab mosque. These relics were kept by someone from Yanbou' in Saudi Arabia and were bought to Egypt by an Egyptian minister, Tajuddine, in the 17th century.



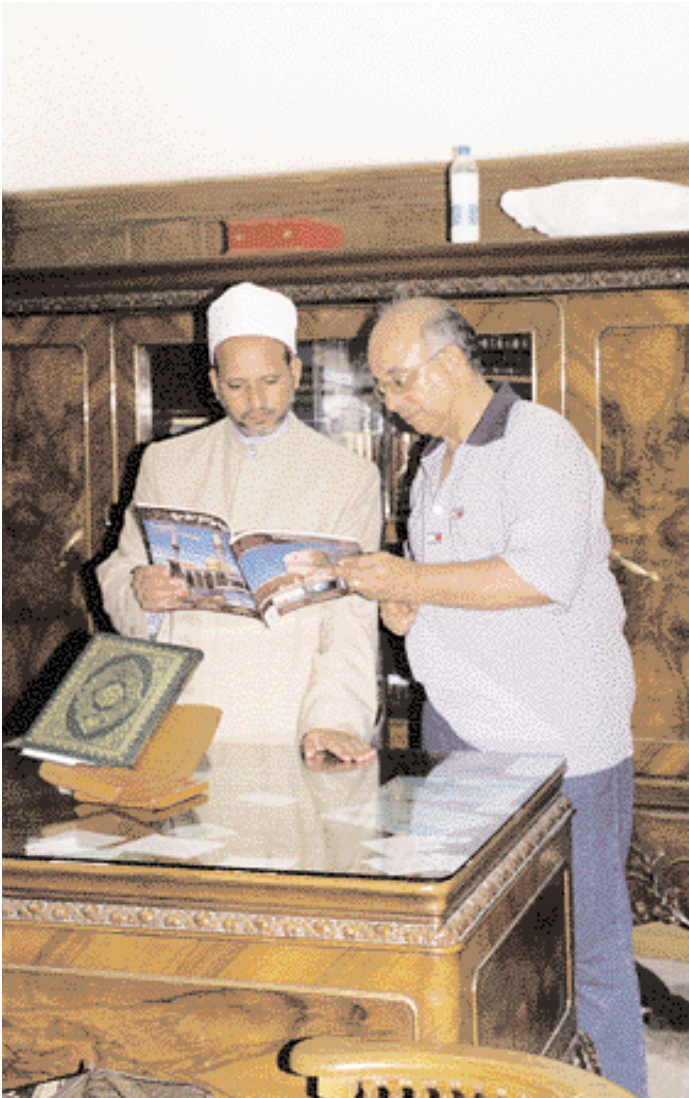
The old minaret and dome together with the new minaret

المئذنة القديمة والقبعة القديمتين لمسجد سيدنا الحسين ويظهر بينهما في خلفية الصورة المئذنة الجديدة

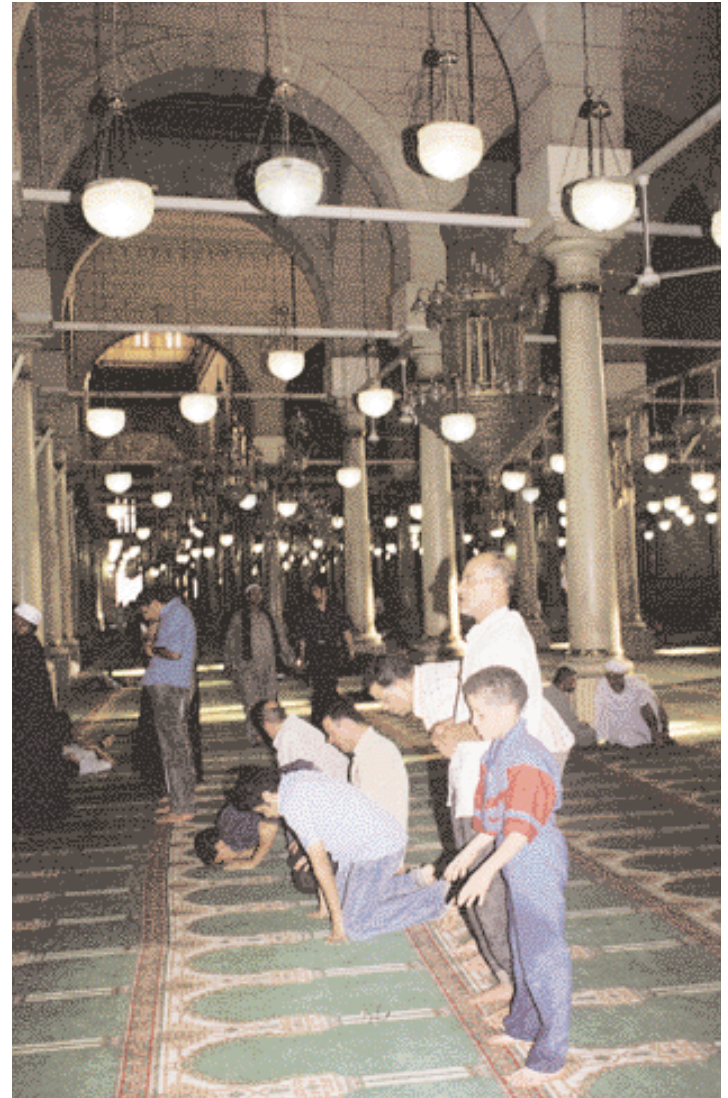
“ The dome of the mosque of Imam Al Hussein dates back to the middle of the 19th century. ”

The mosque is 74.22 m x 45 m. It has fine architecture, with a frontage decorated with seven arcades, each one pressed on two marble columns. These arcades are surrounded by a ribbon of splendid

decorations on gypsum. Three of these arcades are used as doors. The four remaining ones are windows covered with bronze. On the walls delimited by arcades, ornaments with beautiful forms are suspended, with a



Our representative in Cairo discusses ITM with Sheikh Mohammad Mohammad Said, Imam of the Hussein Mosque  
فضيلة الشيخ السعيد محمد محمد علي إمام مسجد سيدنا الحسين يطالع المجلة مع مندوبنا بالقاهرة



Prayer in Al-Hussein Mosque

صلاة في المسجد

circle of gypsum decorations on top. In the south-eastern part of the mosque is an identical minaret to that of the south-western part. A new minbar was also made for the mosque out of Turkish walnut tree and decorated with shells and ivory.

The dome of the mosque of Imam Al Hussein dates back to the middle of the 19th century. It has an almost square form. The base of the dome is covered from inside and outside by decorated marble and a shell mosaic. The dome is supported on arcade columns in half-circles and decorated with circular niches at the corners.

On Tuesday 24 Rabi' II 1427 H/ May the 22nd 2006 the Egyptians celebrated the Mawlid (birthday) of Imam Al Hussein.

### The vicinity of Al Hussein mosque

Al Hussein mosque of Cairo is located between Khan Al Khalili and Al Azhar mosque. Khan Al Khalili, is the old souk made up of numerous narrow lanes filled with shops offering various crafts, bronze plates encrusted with beautiful engravings, wooden pieces decorated with shell and ivory and silver and gold articles. It is very well patronised by Arab and foreign tourists. Al Azhar Mosque is next to the university with the same name. Al Hussein Mosque has a garden surrounding a fountain. In front of it is the Boulevard Al Qaid Jawhar, separating Al Hussein mosque and Al Azhar and Abu Dahab mosques. The area surrounding the mosque is a historic place. Its neighbourhoods were immortalised by the novelist of international reputation, Najib

Mahfoud, winner of the Nobel Prize for literature who made Bayn Al Qasrayn, Qasr Ashawq, Assukariya and Khan Al Khalili famous. Al Hussein, Al Ghouriya and Al Mouski are mentioned in well-known songs. Al Jamaliya District is the place for studies with Bayt Al Qadi, Bab Al Nasr, Assaghah (gold market), Kharanfashe and others.

These districts, enhanced by the smell of incense and perfumes, are teeming with people, travelling tradesmen, shops, popular restaurants, historical cafes and Arab and foreign visitors. The axis is the mosque and mausoleum of Imam Al Hussein. The believers read "Fatiha" and beseeched him to benefit from his blessing, hoping that God will grant their requests. ■