

# MODERNISM REVEALED:

## DISPLAY OF EGYPTIAN LATE MODERNIST ARCHITECTURE THROUGH THE FRAME OF EL HEGAZ STREET IN 1950–1970 HELIOPOLIS

Maribel Kamal Rizk TU Delft, Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences, AR1A066, Architectural History and Theory

This study presents a thorough historical analysis of El Hegaz Street to develop an understanding of the impact of political, economic and regulatory factors on Egyptian modernist architecture. The study explores the history of Heliopolis to establish the context followed by a more focused historical record of El Hegaz Street. Additionally, the prevailing architectural ideologies are introduced accompanied by an investigation into the appreciation of these modernist buildings. The architecture as an outcome is later explored through analysis of iconic landmarks and regular residential buildings to provide insight into the distinctive features and factors that shaped this style of architecture.

Keywords: Egyptian modernism / El Hegaz street / Urban development of Heliopolis / Architectural language / Heritage

Heliopolis, a satellite city developed on the outskirts of Cairo in the early 20th century as an “oasis in the desert” by Belgian Edouard Empain, featured architectural designs by a combination of European and local architects. Around the 1950s to 1970s, the Heliopolis Oasis Company was nationalised<sup>1</sup>. With the rise in population, this led to new extensions along main roads north-east of Heliopolis such as El Hegaz Street being developed with more experimental buildings constructed by Egyptian architects.<sup>2</sup>

El Hegaz Street displays modernist ideologies of progress, innovation and focus on functionality. It is a new type of heritage that mostly goes unrecognised and underappreciated. This research aims to explore the role of ordinary buildings in shaping post-1950's Heliopolis through a detailed analysis of the buildings in El Hegaz Street. The purpose of framing a particular street rather than a wider region is to prevent the effects of generalization, which emphasizes the most distinctive buildings while ignoring typical buildings that influence most of the urban landscape.

Modernist architecture in Cairo has been previously explored by works such as Cairo since 1900 by Mohamed El Shahed featuring a section about Heliopolis. He mentions the challenge of selecting buildings to be representative of modernism in such a densely urbanised city.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the book presents a biased representation towards the most prominent buildings from that era. Architecture in Heliopolis is also explored by Agnieszka Dobrowolska and Jarosław Dobrowolski in the book Heliopolis: Rebirth of the City of the Sun.<sup>4</sup> However, the focus remains mainly on the earlier belle-epoque era of Heliopolis with European and Islamic influence. Therefore, there appears to be a knowledge gap on the effect of the modernist movement on Heliopolis' non-iconic structures, which this study aims to address to provide an additional perspective that builds on the earlier works.

This study aims to identify events that influenced the architecture and the surrounding urban fabric and understand stages of urban development. Moreover, by identifying buildings that embody modernist ideas, analysing them through an architectural lens and expressing the architectural elements associated with their typology will highlight the qualities of the buildings and express their significance. Through the framing of El Hegaz street and a process of observation, analysis and evaluation, new knowledge can be generated about the modernist ideologies in Heliopolis and how they manifested into the built environment. This historical analysis focuses on architectural qualities, historical events and case studies with the main methods of data collection being a combination of archival research, visual analysis, and collection of oral narratives.

1. Srikanth, Anika. 2024. "City of the Sun: Exploring the cultural legacy of Heliopolis." ArcGIS StoryMaps, May 7, 2024. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/200a20fa3838416f83c059d7cf25e990>.

2. Heliopolis Company for housing & development. 1996. "Heliopolis Company for Housing & Development: Past, Present and future... and comprehensive urban development."

3. Elshahed, Mohamed. 2020. Cairo since 1900: An architectural guide. American University of Cairo Press.

4. Dobrowolska, Agnieszka, and Dobrowolski. 2006. Heliopolis: Rebirth of the city of the Sun. American University in Cairo Press.

# HISTORY OF HELIOPOLIS

In order to gain an understanding of the context this section provides a brief historical overview of the urban development of Heliopolis and the historical events and movements that influenced it. The story of modern-day Heliopolis started on the 20th of May 1905 when the Egyptian government granted Boghos Nubar Pasha and Baron Edouard Empain 2500 hectares that can expand up to 5000 hectares in the desert north-east of Cairo in exchange for 5152 Pounds. The location of this land was considered geographically as the natural expansion direction of Cairo as it was flat sandy plateaus constricted by the Mokattam mountains east of Cairo. It was also neighbouring Matariya and Ain Shams where the ancient Pharaonic city of On, dedicated to the worship of the sun god Ra, was located, later named Heliopolis (City of the sun) by the Greeks which is where modern-day Heliopolis got its name.<sup>2</sup>

The government granted the land for the construction of residential spaces along with their required services. They also agreed on operating metro and tram lines that connect the satellite city of Heliopolis to Cairo and in 1960 the formation of the Egyptian Electric Railways and Ain Shams Oasis Company as a joint stock company was approved.<sup>2</sup>

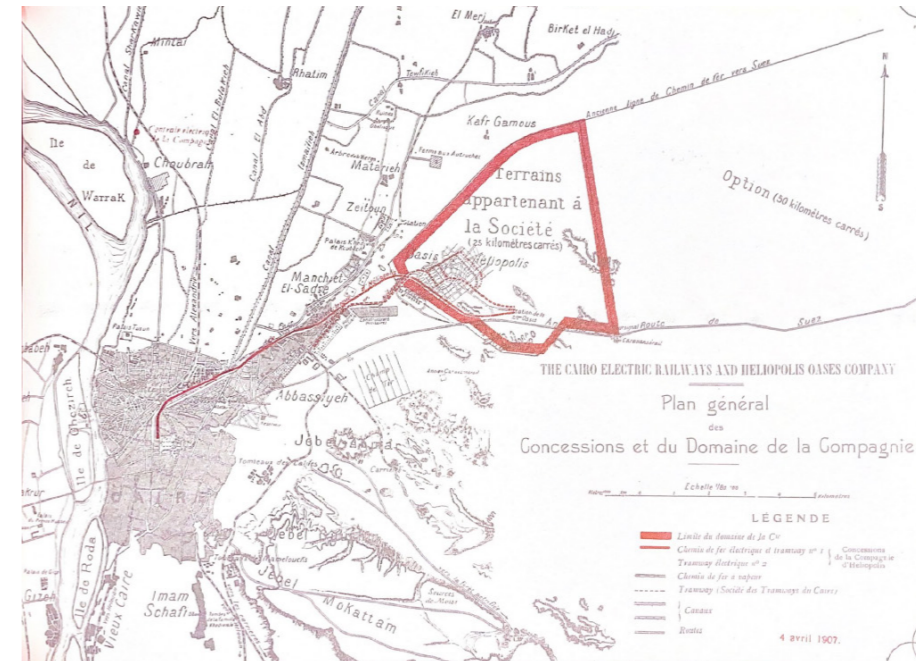


Figure 1: Map showing the area dedicated to the establishment of Heliopolis in the desert north east of Cairo<sup>2</sup>

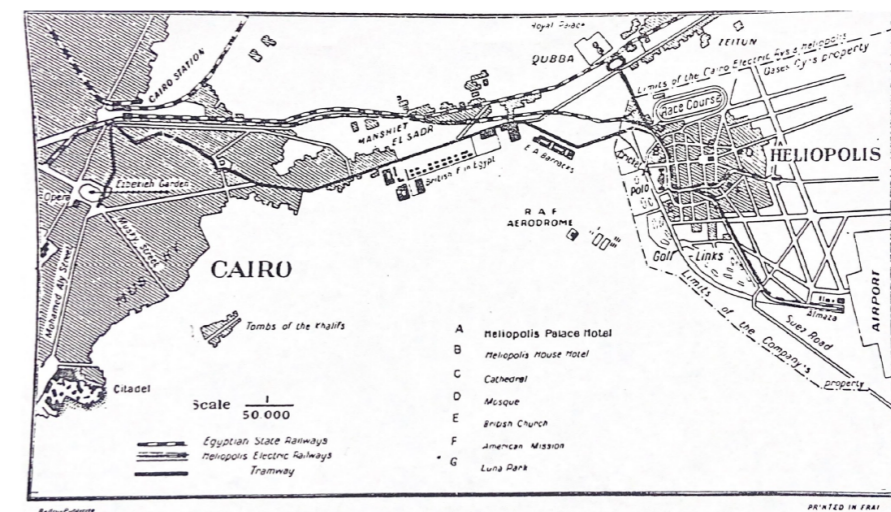


Figure 2: Map showing the tramlines connecting Heliopolis to the rest of Cairo<sup>5</sup>

2. (Heliopolis Company for housing & development 1996)

5. Heliopolis Company for housing & development. n.d. "Heliopolis Suburb: Its establishment and development."

The main planning strategy of the development of the area was inspired by the Garden Cities concept through the creation of semi-independent residential groups in the form of oases separated with areas of desert.<sup>6</sup> These groups were then to be linked together and to Cairo using transportation lines. They defined Heliopolis and Almaza as the two oases. The development of the Heliopolis Oasis started first as it was closer to the rest of the city and over time it became the main project, and the transportation connections aided the rapid development of the area.<sup>5</sup> The social systems at the time led to the division of the Heliopolis Oasis into two neighbourhoods. The first southern district was designated for middle and high-income housing with plot sizes around 1200 meters squared. It was designed along two main perpendicular axes (Al Ahram Street and Ramses Street) enclosed by wide circular streets that acted similarly to a border, restricting the ability of expansions. The second northern district was made for social housing and connects to the first district through its main axis (Haroun Al Rashid Street) which is an extension of Al Ahram Street. Unlike the southern district, the streets in this district are straighter making future expansions easier to implement.<sup>2</sup>

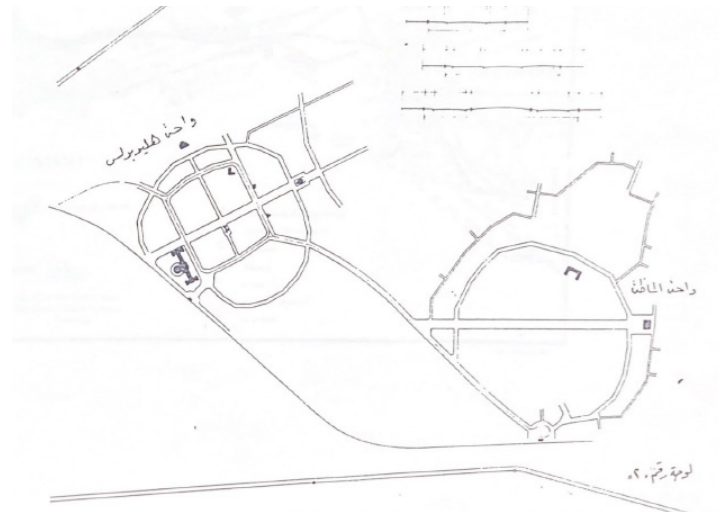


Figure 3: Map showing the two oases, the Heliopolis oasis is located on the left side of the map<sup>5</sup>



Figure 4: Map showing the urban planning of the Heliopolis Oasis<sup>2</sup>

The area was designed with a very distinct architectural style aesthetically inspired by the Islamic architecture through its ornamentation, arches and minarets. However, the interiors didn't reflect principals of traditional Islamic architecture with more modern principals used for the division of spaces. This character demonstrated the vision of Baron Empain of creating an Arab oasis in the desert while reflecting the European influences of the architects and Baron Empain himself.<sup>4</sup>

#### Development 1906–1930

Heliopolis Oasis company and owners of private plots started constructing in both districts with strict regulations on construction such as determining the functions of buildings, their dimensions, architectural qualities and the percentage of built and unbuilt space. The Heliopolis Oasis company maintained the right to approve and reject projects and with close supervision they were able to maintain the character of the area. In 1912, they purchased double the original area and kept expanding the housing and services including establishing the horse racing track. The numbers of residents reached 28000 by 1930 so they needed to expand both districts until they merged to become one district. The district started expanding driven by unconnected land sales rather than strategic urban planning but maintained its character due to strict regulations.<sup>5</sup>

2. (Heliopolis Company for housing & development 1996)  
4. (Dobrowolska and Dobrowolski 2006)

5. (Heliopolis Company for housing & development, n.d.)

6. Mahmoud Mohamed Ibrahim, Adel. 1996. "The Landscape Architecture of the open spaces of Residential Conglomerations-Analytical Study: Heliopolis - 10th of Ramadan." MA, Helwan University.

#### Development 1930–1960

The new approach of urban expansions was easier to implement, less expensive and more successful than the original oasis divisions. Therefore, another agreement was made in 1931 between the company and the government with a new urban plan continuing the old developments while the new developments will be divided into districts separated by desert strips following the directions of the flood channels. They continued the expansion through successive division of land to meet the continuous demand. However, construction was interrupted until the end of the second world war, when construction resumed the construction methods had differed by the introduction of precast concrete. Transportation lines were also expanding along the directions of the new urban expansions.<sup>5</sup>

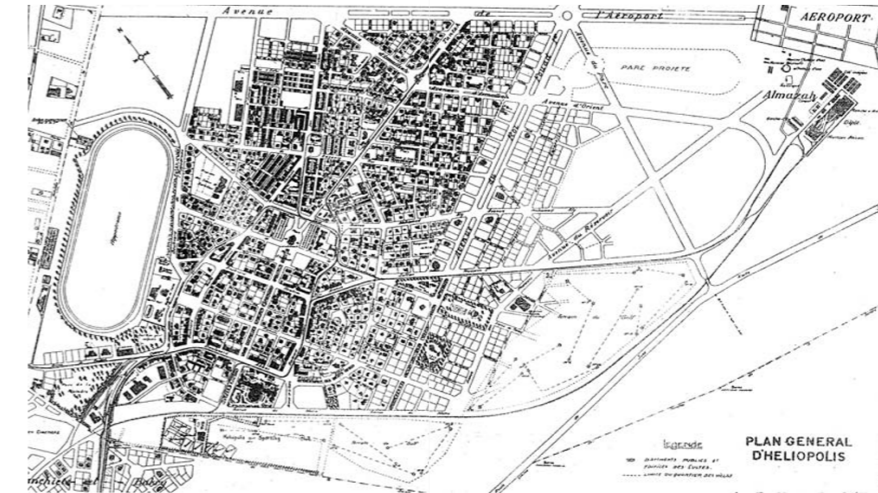


Figure 5: Map showing the urban planning of the Heliopolis expansion in 1931.<sup>7</sup>

#### Development 1960–1990

The previous developments and historical context provide the foundation for the late modernism inspired expansions starting in the late 1950s. Therefore, historical events from this period are the most influential to the rise of modernist architecture in Heliopolis. After nationalisation of the company in 1960 and the population of Heliopolis growing to 120000 people, they developed a new expansion plan based on considering Heliopolis as a semi-independent city dividing the developments to 6 regions each of around 10 neighbourhoods containing 2 residential cells determined by the following guidelines:

Region: Population 40000–50000 people with a service center in the middle and its radius ranges from 800–1000m defined by its main streets

Neighbourhood: Population 3000–4000 people with daily services in the center and a school as its core.

Residential cell: Population 1500–2000 people and has a public park in the center away from the main road and distributed services.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 6: Map showing the urban planning of the Heliopolis' northern expansion at the end of El Hegaz street.<sup>2</sup>

2. (Heliopolis Company for housing & development 1996)

5. (Heliopolis Company for housing & development, n.d.)

7. Ilbert, Robert, and Centre National De La Recherche Scientifique Centre Régional De Publications: Marseille. 1981. Héliopolis: le Caire, 1905-1922 : genèse d'un ville.

Political influence on Urban planning

The changes in approach of the urban planning and architecture of the 1960's extensions were strongly influenced by the nationalisation of the Heliopolis Oases company. Part of the reason was political influence that supported modernist principles of simplicity and progress. An understanding of the political background at the different stages in the history of the company is therefore important.

The Heliopolis Oases company was established during the British occupation on Egypt. The British, however, had very little involvement in the urban planning rather it was led by private initiatives such as the initiative of Baron Empain which gave Heliopolis a very European urban identity with more organic forms and the placement of monumental buildings to express their significance at the end of large axes and avenues. There was also a very clear social hierarchy in the division of space based on social class. After the revolution of 1952, the strategy behind urban planning completely changed to reflect socialist concepts and an anti-colonial nationalist identity by Gamal Abdel Nasser. This manifested into the urban planning in the form of structured divisions of equally sized plots with central green parks surrounded by building blocks removing the socio-economic hierarchy and monumental buildings. The street names associated with the monarchy, colonialism and European names were also replaced.<sup>8</sup>

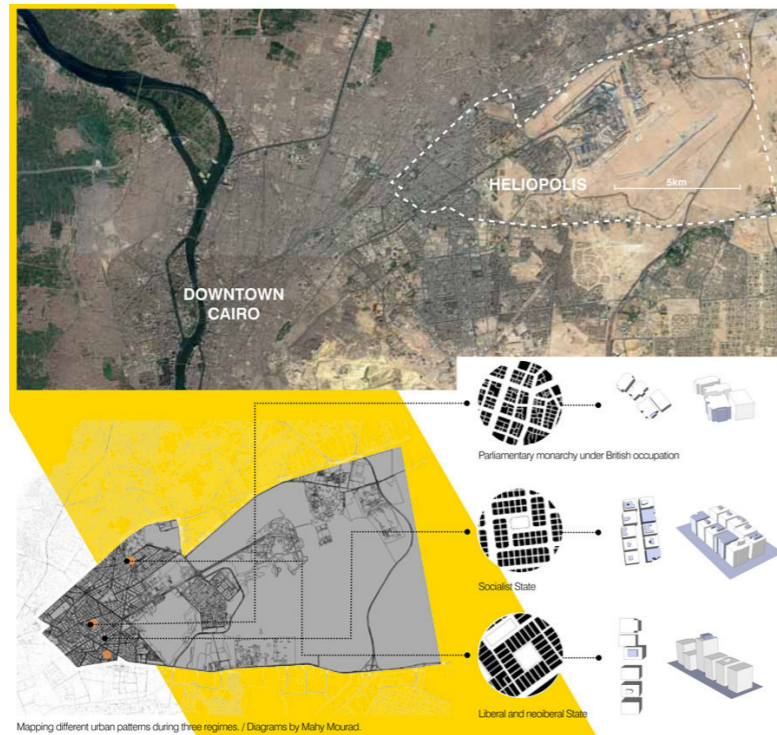


Figure 7: Illustration showing the differences in urban planning in Heliopolis based on different political eras<sup>8</sup>

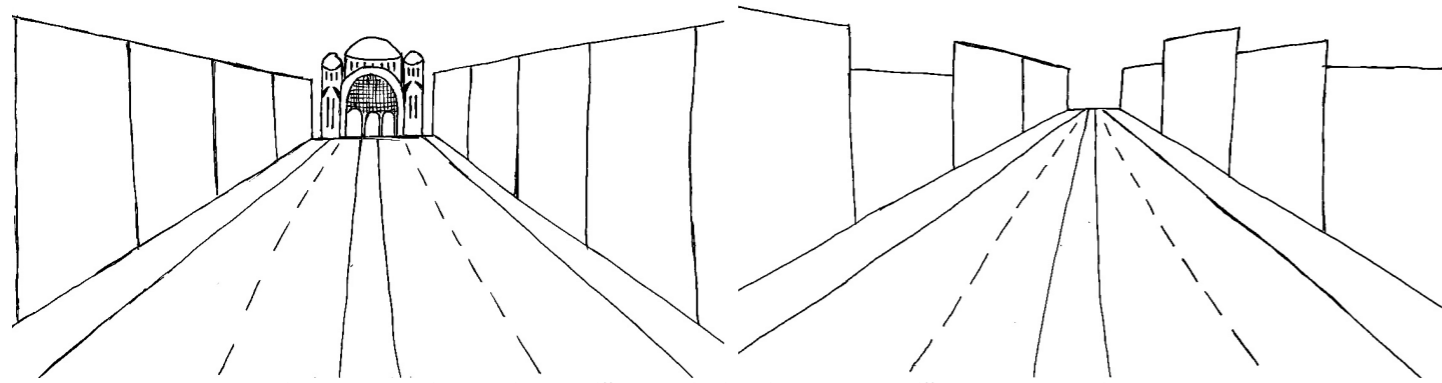


Figure 8: Illustration showing the differences in sight lines based on different urban planning styles

8. Mourad, Mahy. 2017. "Heliopolis, Egypt: Politics of space in occupied Cairo." THE FUNAMBULIST MAGAZINE. February 27, 2017. <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/10-architecture-colonialism/heliopolis-egypt-politics-space-occupied-cairo-mahy-mourad>.

HISTORY OF EL HEGAZ STREET

The general history of Heliopolis discussed previously gives an overview of large factors affecting the bigger scale of the entire area. This section narrows the focus towards the street scale of El Hegaz Street to discuss specific events and trends that influenced the street. As well as, how the bigger scale trends manifested in the context of this street.

Before Urbanisation

Before the building up of the area of El Hegaz street, it was mostly desert, however, it contained cemeteries for Muslims and Christians that were later displaced to provide space for construction.<sup>9</sup>

Due to the limited availability of information about public opinions in the case of removal of the cemeteries in El Hegaz street. An article from a similar circumstance can provide general insight into public opinion on removal of cemeteries for construction. This newspaper article argues against the informal building over cemeteries in a different location in Cairo. The writer describes how "tombstones and domes of shrines disappear from sight, and the earth suddenly opens up to reveal a modern city for the living, and concrete buildings and villas rise, in the latest architectural style and in bright colours, above the graves and bones of the dead.." which was strongly frowned upon in the article as they also explain how it defies religion, law and logic in Egyptian society.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 9: Maps showing the area before urbanisation with the race track connecting to empty desert in the north-east.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 11: Newspaper article about the removal of cemeteries in a different part of Cairo.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 10: Map from 1948 showing the removed cemeteries, present-day El Hegaz Street appears at the bottom.<sup>9</sup>

9. Map Collection. n.d. Uploaded by The Center for Economic, Legal, and Social Studies and Documentation (CEDEJ). <https://cedej-eg.org/map-collection/>.  
10. Al-Ahram Newspaper. 1986. "Life and death in one residential building." Uploaded by Leiden University Libraries Archives & Collections, May 31, 1986.

## Street name

The first part of the street to be established was the horse racing course which resulted in the name of "Al Sabaa Street" originally which translated to "the Race Street" this can be seen in maps of the area from 1939–1948.<sup>9</sup> This street still exists today but as a side street branching from El Hegaz street near the Merryland Park. Then as the street grew beyond the racecourse, maps from 1951 show the name changed to "Abdelaziz Al Saud Street", referring to the former king of Saudi Arabia.<sup>11</sup> It was later replaced with "El Hegaz street" as shown in the maps in figure 15 and Figure 16. This suggest that the name change could have taken place later in the 1950s due to the strained relationship between Egypt and Saudi Arabia at the time of the Arab cold war.<sup>12</sup>

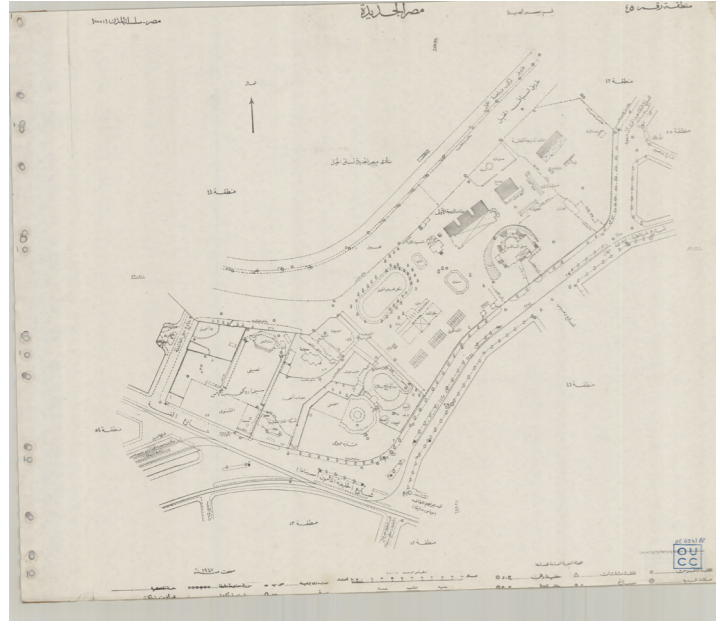


Figure 12: Map from 1948 showing the street name "Al Sabaa Street" and the race course and supporting functions such as ghermata.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 13: Map from 1939 showing street name "Al Sgbaa Street" and initial luxury villas built in front of it.<sup>9</sup>

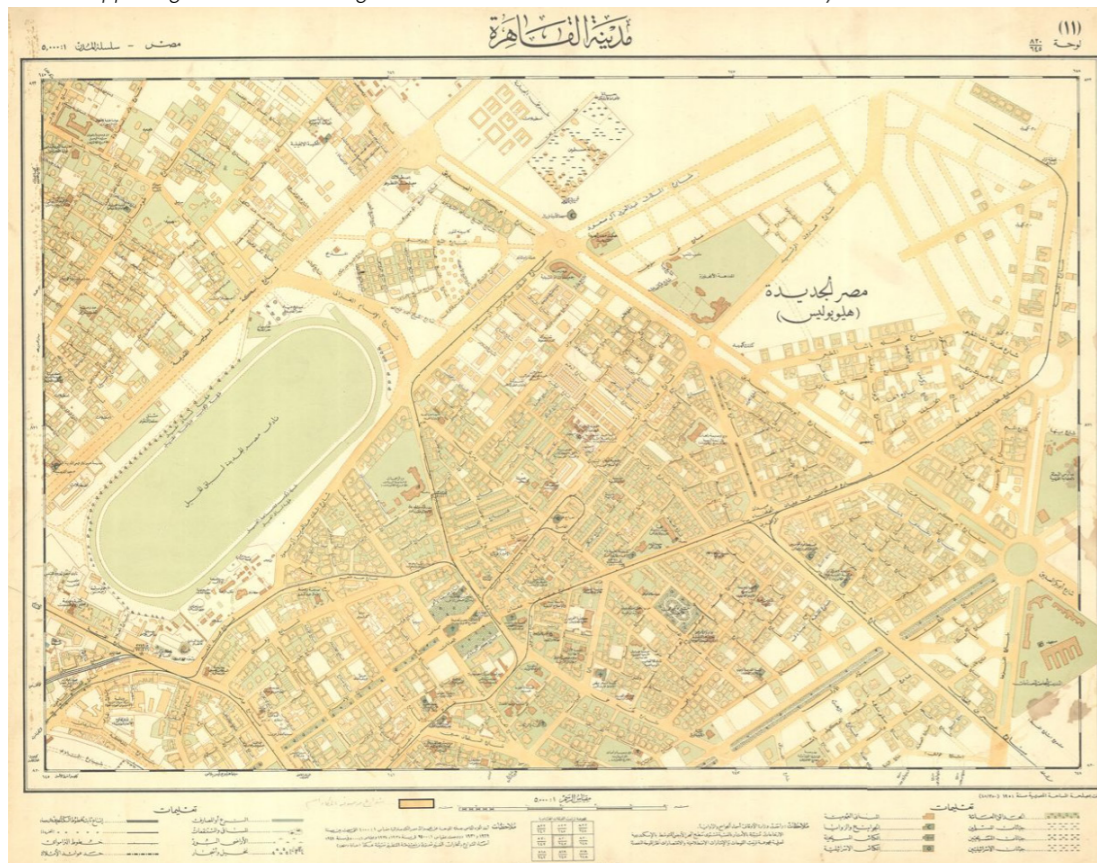


Figure 14: Map from 1951 showing street name "Abdelaziz Al Saud Street".<sup>11</sup>

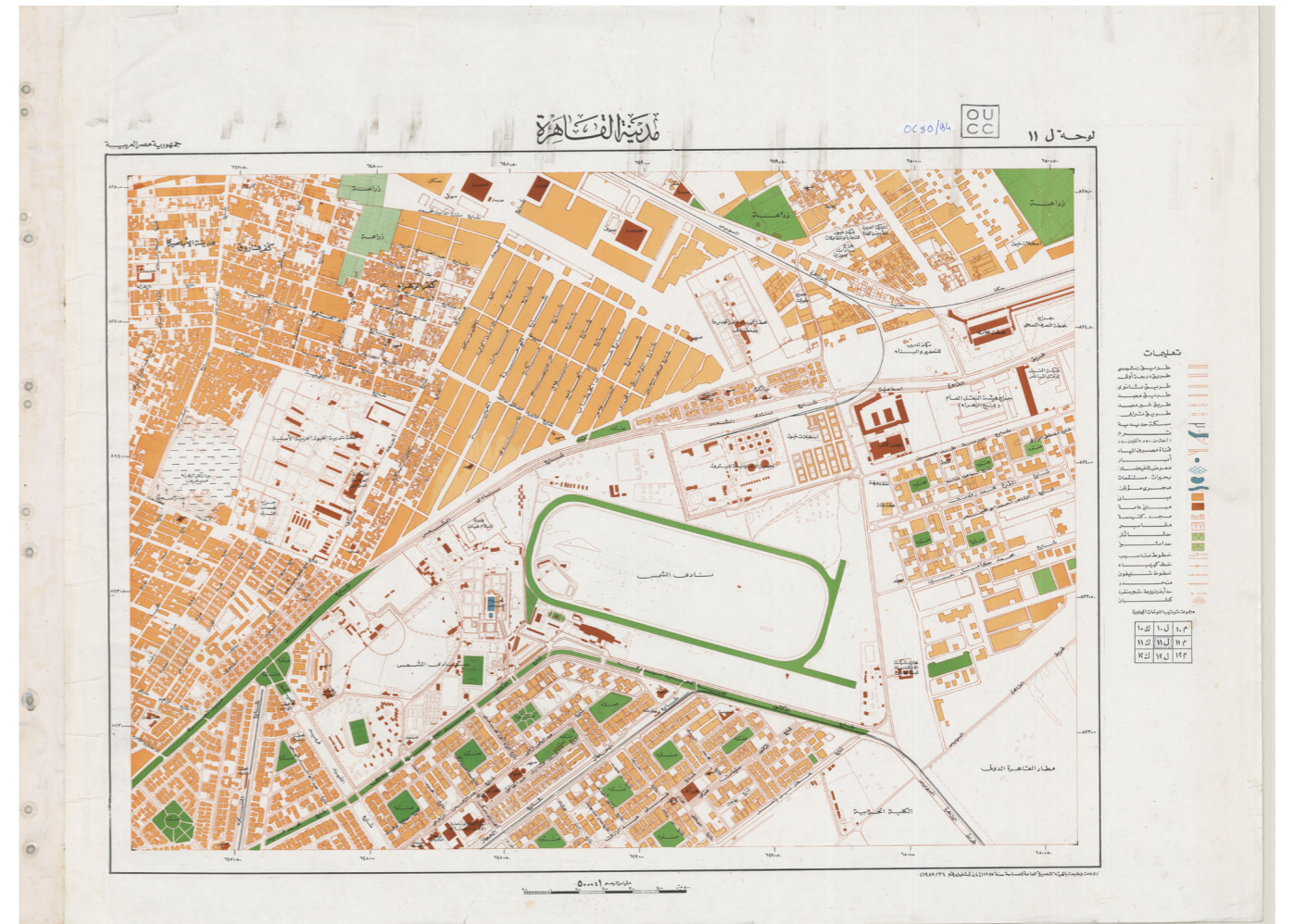


Figure 15: Map showing street name "EL Hegaz street" and the street's development in its final stages.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 16: Map showing street name "EL Hegaz street" and the street's development in its final stages.<sup>9</sup>

9. (Map Collection, n.d.)

11. Cairo [Heliopolis], 1951. Uploaded by the American University in Cairo. Rare Books and Special Collections Library. <https://digitalcollections.aucegypt.edu/digital/collection/p15795coll6/id/723/>.

12. "The Arab Cold War - The map as History." 2018. 2018. <https://www.the-map-as-history.com/History-of-Middle-East-20th-century/the-arab-cold-war>.

9. (Map Collection, n.d.)

## Order of building

The street was generally built up in chronological order starting from the Merryland where the horse racing course used to be along with the Hippodrome (Ghernata), and a few surrounding luxury villas.<sup>13</sup> The street only started extending north-east in the 1950s which was considered the natural direction of extension of Heliopolis by the company in the new urban plans with multiple main roads extending along the same direction.<sup>5</sup> Most of the street was built up by the 1970s due to rapid urbanisation.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 17: Map showing estimated building order

## Architectural Style

The initial buildings built around 1930s-1940s usually followed the European styles common in Heliopolis at the time such as belle epoque with a lot of ornamentation and more traditional materials and construction.

In terms of the buildings built in the 1950s-1970s, due to the practical socialist mindset and influences of the modernist style, the structural engineers had more influence on the buildings than architectural engineers. Therefore they started displaying their skills by making large balcony overhangs, exaggerated structural elements, increased use of modern building materials such as steel and concrete and lack of ornamentation or alternatively giving function to the ornamentation in the form of sun shading patterns.<sup>13</sup> Also in a time after the British colonialism there was concepts of building and progress<sup>8</sup> and with the rising population of Heliopolis<sup>5</sup> this led to creation of high density buildings with concepts of modularity and repetition.

In the 1990s to 2000s, a new typology emerged of higher buildings attempting to imitate aspects of the 1930s-1940s style through ornamentation, such as floral and organic motifs. However, it doesn't carry the same value and richness of the original style as they are not made with the same craftsmanship and materials.<sup>14</sup>

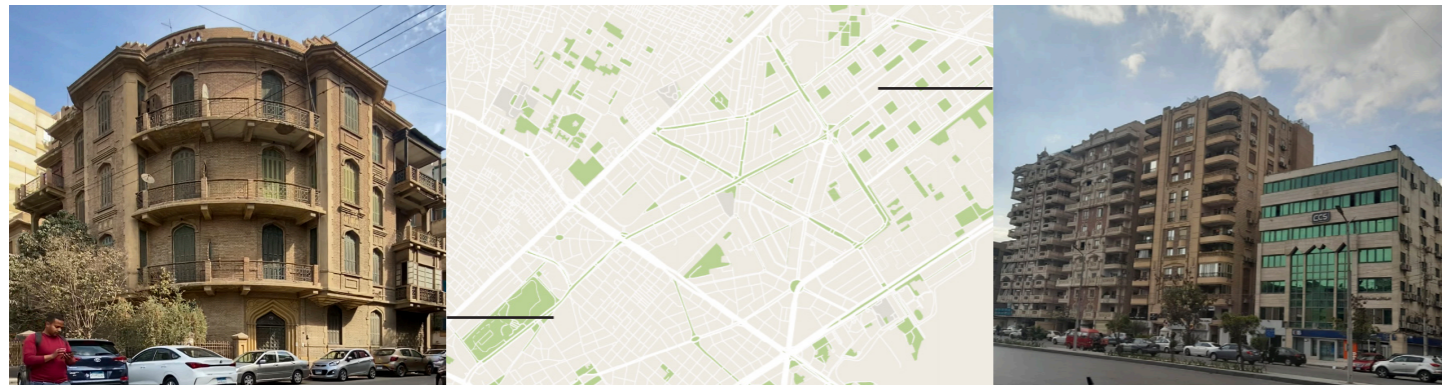


Figure 18: Images showing contrast of style in buildings built in 1930s-1940s to buildings built in 1990s-2000s

## Economic influences

The luxury villas previously mentioned were owned by people that usually bought the land for very cheap and built luxurious residences for a relatively low cost. However, over time as the area became more inhabited and had a higher demand, the taxes on these owners started becoming too high and they weren't able to afford their luxurious houses anymore, leading them to selling their homes to developers that would demolish them and built larger scale apartment buildings instead to increase profits. This process of demolition and replacing is still ongoing today in many parts of Heliopolis and El Hegaz street. This also applied to small scale apartment buildings of 4-5 dwellings that were demolished for larger scale buildings to house more dwelling and increase profits.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 19: Images showing buildings that appear to be in the process of demolition currently in EL Hegaz street.

Developers also often started buying one building design and repeating it in multiple plots to save expenses of hiring architects.<sup>14</sup> This can also be seen in the images below. These buildings were usually placed on scattered yet relatively close plots avoiding a monotonous street view. An exception to this is the buildings in Exhibit D in figure 20 which were built by Heliopolis company for Housing and Development. They built multiple identical buildings next to each other with empty plots in between.<sup>14</sup> Newer buildings were later built in the plots in between adding variation and splitting them up.



Figure 20: Diagrams showing examples of repeating architectural designs in EL Hegaz street.

5. (Heliopolis Company for housing & development, n.d.)

8. (Mourad 2017)

13. Mahmoud Mohamed Ibrahim, Adel. personal communication. 2025, February 5

14. Kossa, Samer. personal communication. 2025, February 3

13. (Mahmoud Mohamed Ibrahim 2025)

14. (Kossa 2025)



# APPRECIATION OF MODERNIST BUILDINGS OF EL HEGAZ STREET

To gain an understanding of how the buildings created with these modernist ideologies had personal influence on residents and how they were evaluated by users, this section discusses the appreciation for these buildings.

The modernist architecture from the 1950s-1970s is the most common typology in El Hegaz Street and this street in particular provides a strong display of modernist architecture in the context of Heliopolis, which is often disregarded and rarely discussed in literature. There is consequently a lack of appreciation for these buildings as architecturally significant among regular citizens. However, the more these buildings start getting lost in the urban landscape the more they are being appreciated and documented informally through social media as they carry a lot of sentimental value to the residents this is very well-articulated in the Archiving Heliopolis Instagram caption of "documenting the familiar before it's gone". Through these informal archives starting discussions about these buildings, they are gaining appreciation as architectural and heritage value not only sentimental value, highlighting the modernist movement and the influence and ambitions of Egyptian architects on Heliopolis. This is also the aim of this study to express their architectural value and understand the architectural aspiration behind them. Leading to the next section, which discusses how the modernist style appears in the built environment through an analysis of individual buildings.



archivingheliopolis Follow ...  
 342 posts 5,001 followers 1,073 following  
 Archiving Heliopolis  
 documenting the familiar before it's gone | reflecting on space and identity | submissions always welcome  
 Cairo, more  
[linktr.ee/archivinghelio](https://linktr.ee/archivinghelio)

Figure 25: Instagram caption of the Archiving Heliopolis account.<sup>20</sup>



Figure 26: Discussion over restoring El Hegaz street architecture as a showcase for modernist architecture.<sup>21</sup>

cairountitled • Follow  
 Heliopolis, Al Qahirah, Egypt  
 I honestly believe that with only minor restorative interventions, el-Hegaz street can be easily transformed into a showcase for modernist architecture in Heliopolis. While too much focus has often been given to the eclectic architecture of Korba and the older parts of Heliopolis, el-Hegaz street brings a rich case for the district's subsequent expansions. Think of the numerous examples of small and medium-sized apartment houses built on both sides of the street in simplistic forms with clean and minimal lines. It is also home to a number of iconic examples, such as Sayed Karim's Socialist Union Institute, the Merryland, the Court before turning into a pastiche after its most recent facelift, Heliopolis Hospital and Wissa Wassef's St. George's church.  
 Residential building, el-Hegaz Street, Heliopolis  
 September 2020  
 Tags: #heliopolis #architecture #heritage #photography #heliopolisheritage #cairoheritage  
 Edited - 180w  
 I really second that, the "Post Korba" Heliopolis is underappreciated in the pages that document the history of modern architecture in Cairo. The area to the north of Ismailia square specially around Salah Salem contains some of the finest modern architecture practices that ever happened in Cairo.  
 179w 2 likes Reply  
 Add a comment... Post

# MERRYLAND PARK

Starting the individual building analysis with iconic landmarks, such as the Merryland park, which is placed on the plot of the former horse racing course. After the nationalization of the Heliopolis Oasis Company, the Horse Racing Course was transferred to the current Shams Club area as seen in figure 15 and plans for turning the area of the original race course to a park started in 1949.<sup>22</sup> The Park was thriving in the 60s with a popular central casino adjacent to a pond fostering nature and biodiversity.<sup>22</sup> The park itself is designed using geometric forms with an asymmetrical organisation creating a more interesting experience as visitors are guided through more random paths creating engagement with the space.<sup>3</sup> The paths lead to several focal points the main one being the central concrete building, where the casino used to be, seen in figure 26. It was accompanied by some smaller distributed focal nodes, similarly highlighted by concrete structures such as the one in figure 31.<sup>23</sup> The central concrete building embodies a lot of characteristic of modernism such as simplicity and functionality. An example of this is the large, emphasised overhangs and very impressive structure, expressing the new capabilities of modern materials with a glass facade from the north side for lower heat gains showing the focus on useability. Additionally, the original gate seen in figure 30 highlights the entrance with a statement sculpture that was used to create a strong first impression and to make a memorable impact on the visitor. The park was later mostly abandoned and neglected as the visits plummeted over time.<sup>23</sup> However, it has undergone a comprehensive renovation in 2018 to attempt to bring it to its former glory days,<sup>24</sup> with this renovation there was introduction of a few more contemporary architectural elements alongside the original modernist style.

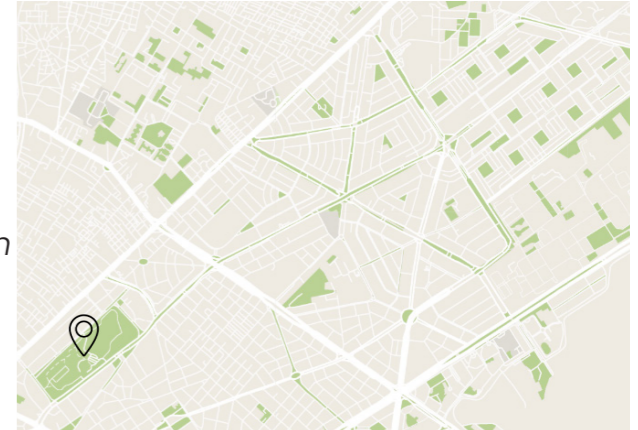


Figure 27: Location of the Merryland park



Figure 28: Merryland park in the 1960's.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 29: Merryland park casino building 1960's.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 31: Example of a focal node highlighted by a concrete structure.<sup>23</sup>



Figure 30: Images of the Merryland park entrances new at the top and old at the bottom

3. (Elshahed 2020)  
 22. Gamal, Islam. 2019. "It started as a horse racing club. This is the story of 'Maryland' Park, the most famous park in Heliopolis." Al-youm Al-sabee. January 6, 2019. [https://www.instagram.com/archivingheliopolis/](https://m2.youm7.com/story/2019/1/6/%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%A3%D8%AA-%D9%B3%D9%B6%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%89-%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AE%D9%8A%D9%B4-%D9%87%D8%B0%D9%87-%D9%82%D8%B5%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B2%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AA/4094055)  
 21. Cairo Untitled. 2020. "El-Hegaz street can be easily transformed into a showcase for modernist architecture in Heliopolis." Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/cairountitled/>  
 23. Cairoserver. 2011. "Merriland." Tumblr. <https://cairoserver.com/post/6905339195/merryland>  
 24. Habib, Nader. 2018. "Making New Memories in Heliopolis: Chronicles of the Merryland Park." Ahrām Online. August 6, 2018. <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/P/3/30917/Travel/Making-new-memories-in-Heliopolis-Chronicles-of-thaspx>

20. Archiving Heliopolis. n.d. "Social media caption." Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/archivingheliopolis/>  
 21. Cairo Untitled. 2020. "El-Hegaz street can be easily transformed into a showcase for modernist architecture in Heliopolis." Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/cairountitled/>

# HELIOPOLIS HIPPODROME (GHERNATA)

The Ghernata complex located opposite the Merryland park was built in 1909 designed by the French architect Camille Robida as one of the first structures in the area.<sup>25</sup> It was a complex consisting of a main building and a royal pavilion. The main building contains the stands for the racecourse it is divided into the balcony for the king of Egypt, boxes for high personalities and bleachers for the public.<sup>3</sup> The buildings are inspired by the Andalusian style and Islamic architecture so include a lot of ornamentation, and elements such as arches, towers and domes.<sup>25</sup> For the royal pavilion, it is topped by a large, faceted dome similar to the renaissance style domes.<sup>3</sup> After the race was moved the buildings were converted into a place for leisure hosting multiple functions.<sup>26</sup> The building was then neglected for almost 15 years.<sup>25</sup> in 2017 renovations of the complex started by the Arab Contractors company using the original maps and drawings of the buildings to restore them to their original design.<sup>27</sup>

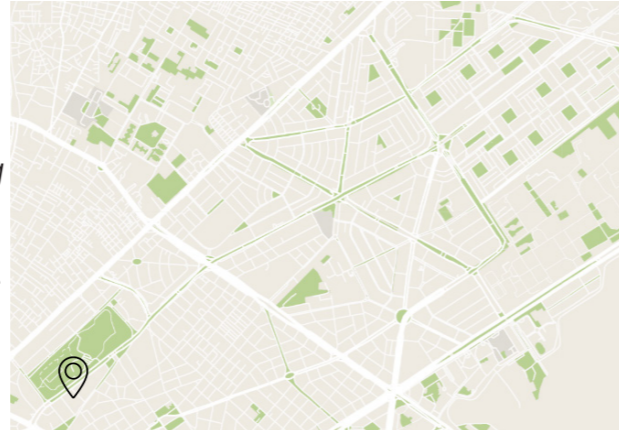


Figure 32 : Location of the Ghernata complex



Figure 33 : Image showing the empty landscape at the start of the creation of the Ghernata complex.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 34 : Image showing the exterior renovation<sup>27</sup>



Figure 35 : Image showing the interior renovation.<sup>27</sup>

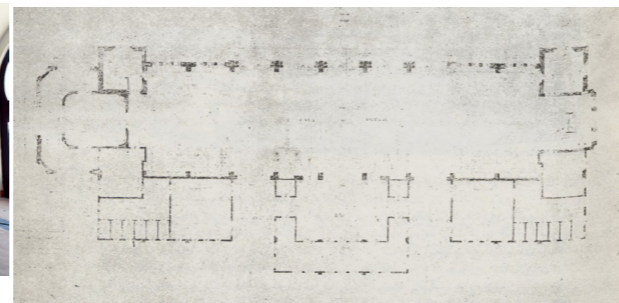


Figure 36 : Floorplan of the race stands.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 37 : Horse racing and Ghernata complex. The dirt section is now Hegaz Street.<sup>30</sup>

3. (Elshahed 2020)  
 25. Salem, Abdel Halim. 2024. "Full details of the development of the historical Granada complex in Heliopolis." Al-yum Al-sabee, December 15, 2024. <https://www.youm7.com/story/2024/12/15/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%8A%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84%D8%A9-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B7%D9%88%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%BA%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AE%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF%D8%A9/6812850>.  
 26. Khairy, Sherif. 2018. "Heliopolis to get a new cultural hub." Cairo 360 Guide to Cairo, Egypt. July 30, 2018. <https://www.cairo360.com/article/sights-travel/heliopolis-to-get-a-new-cultural-hub/>.  
 27. The Arab Contractors. n.d. "Restoration and renovation of Granada City in Heliopolis." <https://www.arabcont.com/english/project-604>.  
 28. Heliopolisawy group. 2018. "Royal pavilion Ghernata." Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Heliopolisawy/permalink/1439863049456816>.  
 29. Farag, Fouad. 1946. "Heliopolis." Archnet, 1946. <https://www.archnet.org/display?source=https://archnet-3-prod-iiif-cloud-c0fe51f0b9ac.herokuapp.com/public/resources/8aa90daf-a677-427b-949e-e7bd38d35f8d/content>.  
 30. we grew up in Heliopolis-The family. 2024. "Horse racing that used to take place in the Maryland area of Heliopolis. This dirt section is now Hegaz Street." Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/212101206721368/permalink/1141758320422314>.

# THE SPECIALIZED NATIONAL COUNCILS

Near Ghernata, this governmental building can be found. It is designed in a brutalist style by Architect Sayed Karim in 1964, as the headquarters of the Socialist Union Institute.<sup>31</sup> It currently houses the Specialized Council for Community Development, Education and Scientific Research, Economic Development and finally for Foreign Policy and National Security.<sup>32</sup> The style links to and is coherent with the architecture of the street but has a unique sense of heaviness. The building uses massiveness to display status and importance through a closed raw concrete facade with small, recessed windows. The facade has a lot of repetition using concrete vertical elements that can act as shading. The deep-set windows with shading elements are intended to reduce heat gain showing climate considerations. The building's mass is made up of simple geometric forms, including the front ship-shaped concrete volume. This creates a more visually interesting facade with a large cantilever highlighting structural capabilities of reinforced concrete.

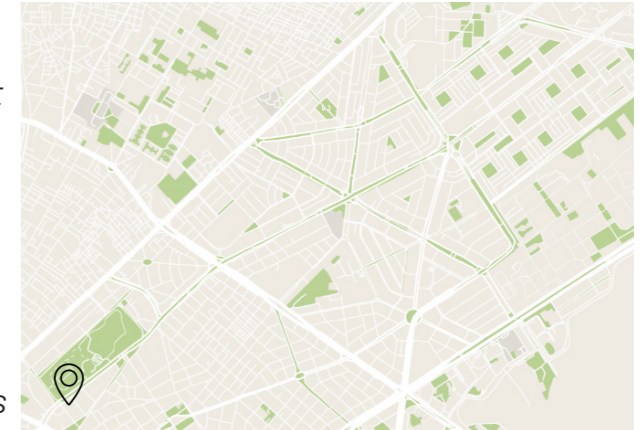


Figure 38 : Location of the specialised national councils



Figure 39 : Image of the specialised national councils



Figure 40 : Image of the specialised national councils

31. Cairo untitled. 2022. "Cairountitled: Designed by Sayed Karim for the Heliopolis Suburb Foundation, it was chosen in 1964 as the headquarters of the Socialist Union Institute. It is currently the headquarters of the National Specialized Councils." Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CegZGfCszfJ/>.  
 32. "Presidential specialized councils." 2025. State Information Service. April 17, 2025. <https://www.sis.gov.eg/section/29/9374?lang=en-us>.

# AL KHOLAFAA AL RASHDEEN MOSQUE

There are many mosques along El Hegaz Street. However, this mosque, located near the Merryland park is very distinct due to its monumental scale. It was constructed on the 30th of July 1971.<sup>33</sup> Although it is built during the modernist era, due to its function as a mosque and the traditions associated with that, it follows the style of Islamic architecture through the use of geometric patterns and elements such as pointed arches and a high minaret. The use of ornamentation is selectively placed along important features of the building to highlight them.

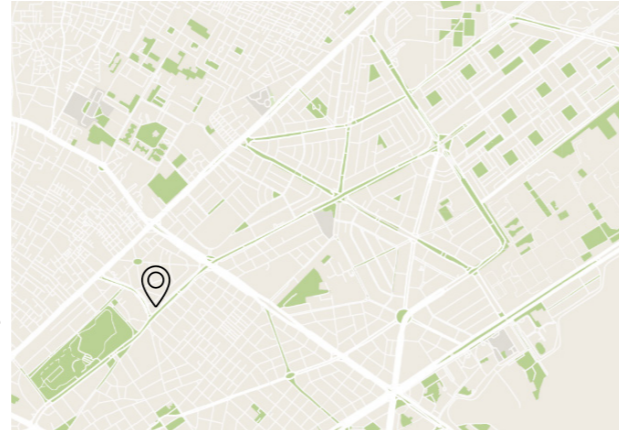


Figure 41 : location of AL Kholafaa Al Rashdeen mosque.



Figure 42 : AL Kholafaa Al Rashdeen mosque.<sup>33</sup>



Figure 43 : AL Kholafaa Al Rashdeen mosque ornamentation.<sup>33</sup>

# AL TAHREER MOSQUE

Al Tahreer Mosque formerly known as Princess Ferial Mosque is the first mosque and one of the first buildings built on El Hegaz Street.<sup>11</sup> Its name was changed to Al Tahreer meaning freedom potentially during Abdel Nasser's era as the previous name was related to the monarchy. The Mosque has very delicate geometric ornamentation on the minaret and the parapet but remains simple and blank for the majority of the facade.

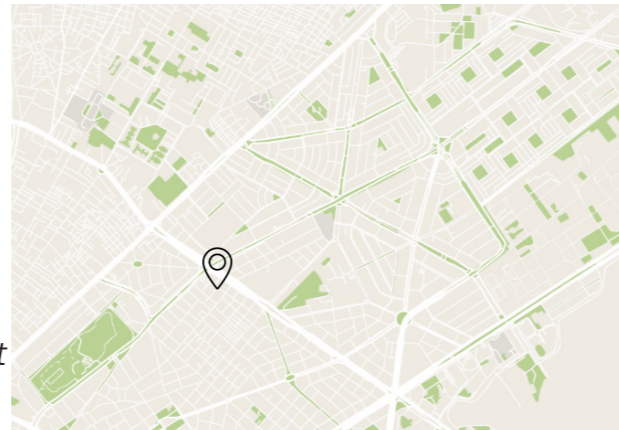


Figure 44 : location of AL Tahreer mosque.



Figure 45 : Map showing mosque name as Princess Ferial.<sup>11</sup>



Figure 46: Image showing mosque in early stages.<sup>34</sup>



Figure 47: Image Al Tahreer mosque

# HELIOPOLIS COURTS COMPLEX

Heliopolis courts complex is located across the street from Al Tahreer Mosque and was established around the 1950s based on historical maps.<sup>11</sup> It is designed as a merge of neoclassical architecture, modernist architecture and Islamic architecture. The modernist aspects of the design are visible in its simple organisation and forms with modern material use such as metals and concrete. The design however contains a lot of repetitive ornamentation made up of geometric pattern that are common in Islamic architecture. The neoclassical aspects include the exaggerated dramatic column at the entrance with a lot of Roman and Greek influence. This merge of styles can be explained as the building was built in multiple stage over time. It started as only the middle section with the neoclassical style inspired entrance to represent the function and status of the court. Later the side extensions were added with the addition of Islamic influence in the form of geometric ornamentation. The core of the design still follows the modernist style with some external influences in the form of ornamentation and a dramatic entrance as an approach to present the status of the courts.

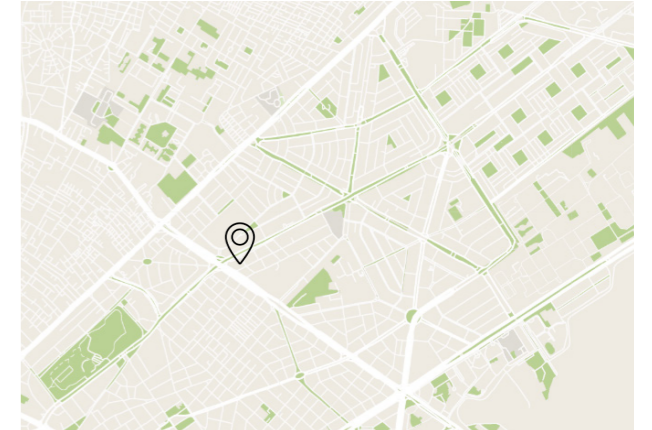


Figure 48 : location of Heliopolis courts complex.



Figure 49 : Heliopolis court complex.



Figure 50 : Heliopolis court complex entrance

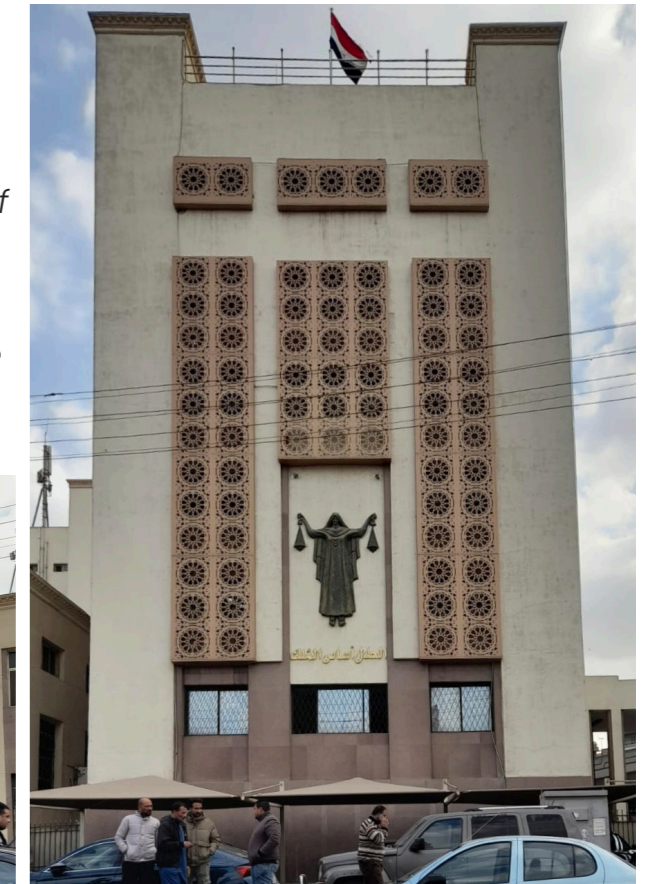


Figure 51 : Heliopolis court complex.

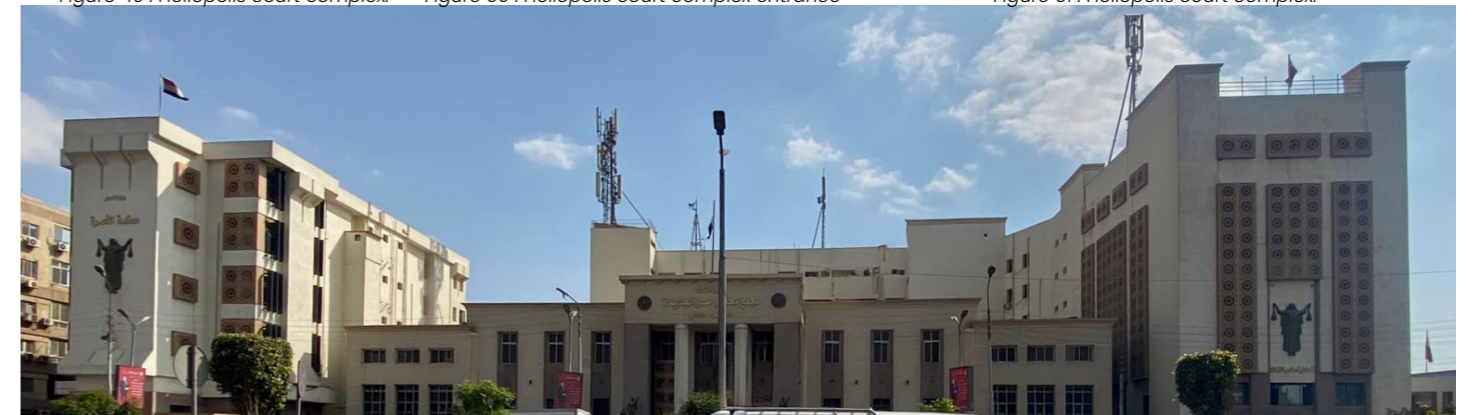


Figure 52 : Entire front facade of Heliopolis court complex.

11. (Cairo [Heliopolis] 1951)  
 33. Al Kholafaa Al Rashdeen mosque. 2024. Google Maps. [https://www.google.com/maps/place/Al+Kholafaa+Al+Rashdeen+Mosque/@30.1010215,31.3243996,17z/data=!4m1!1m1!1s0x1458158e8a7df2b9:0x93be0cb034dd4a412sAI+Kholafaa+Al+Rashdeen+Mosque!8m2!3d30.1010215!4d31.3243996!10e5!14m1!1BCgigAQ!16s%2Fg%2F1b63vpjd8!3m5!1s0x1458158e8a7df2b9:0x93be0cb034dd4a412sAI+Kholafaa+Al+Rashdeen+Mosque!8m2!3d30.1010215!4d31.3243996!16s%2Fg%2F1b63vpjd8?entry=ttu&g\\_ep=EgoyMDI1MDQxNC4xIKXMDSoJLEWmJExNDUISAFQAw%3D%3D](https://www.google.com/maps/place/Al+Kholafaa+Al+Rashdeen+Mosque/@30.1010215,31.3243996,17z/data=!4m1!1m1!1s0x1458158e8a7df2b9:0x93be0cb034dd4a412sAI+Kholafaa+Al+Rashdeen+Mosque!8m2!3d30.1010215!4d31.3243996!10e5!14m1!1BCgigAQ!16s%2Fg%2F1b63vpjd8!3m5!1s0x1458158e8a7df2b9:0x93be0cb034dd4a412sAI+Kholafaa+Al+Rashdeen+Mosque!8m2!3d30.1010215!4d31.3243996!16s%2Fg%2F1b63vpjd8?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI1MDQxNC4xIKXMDSoJLEWmJExNDUISAFQAw%3D%3D)  
 34. Heliopolisawy group. 2017. "Heliopolis district building and Mosque." <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Heliopolisawy/permalink/1355731567869965/>.

11. (Cairo [Heliopolis] 1951)

# HELIOPOLIS HOSPITAL

The Heliopolis Hospital located further along the street was formerly known as Princess Ferial hospital. It was built in 1950 designed by architects Mustafa Shawky and Salah Zeitoun.<sup>35</sup> It was built due to the increase of the population of Heliopolis to 250,000 residents to aid the access to healthcare in the area.<sup>36</sup> It embodies a very modernist style in its appearance and organisation. This is presented in the functionality of the building as the layout is very logical and clear. The orientation and layout was designed for ease of circulation and access through linear organisation along multiple axes. The orientation is also meant to provide equal amount of sunlight to the different spaces.<sup>3</sup> The entrance of the hospital is highlighted by a concave structure, with a very repetitive facade made of vertical concrete elements that act as sun shading louvers and an overhang in front of the entrance doors.

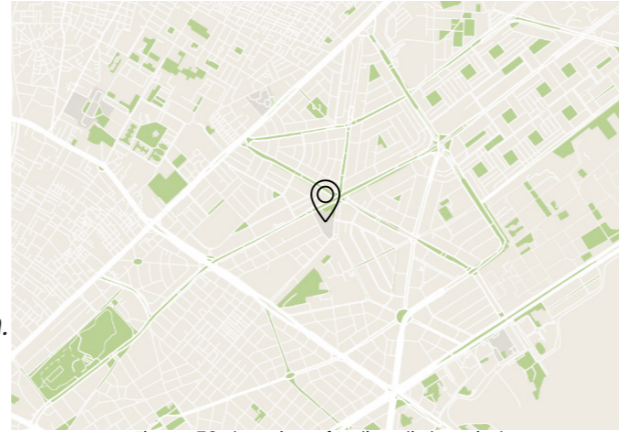


Figure 53 : location of Heliopolis hospital



Figure 54 : Heliopolis hospital

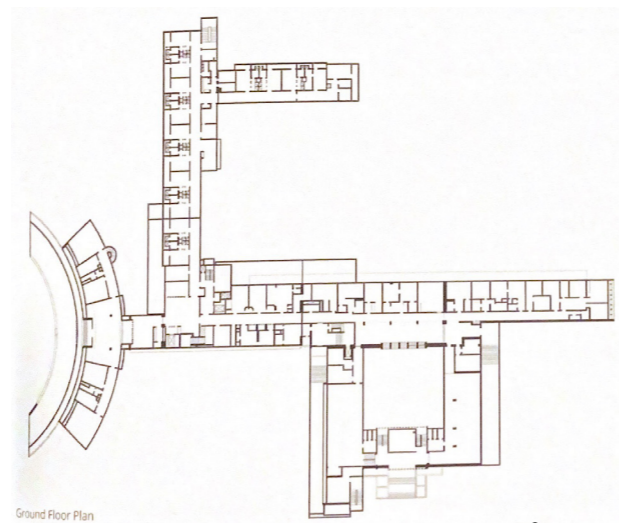


Figure 56 : Heliopolis hospital ground floorplan.<sup>3</sup>

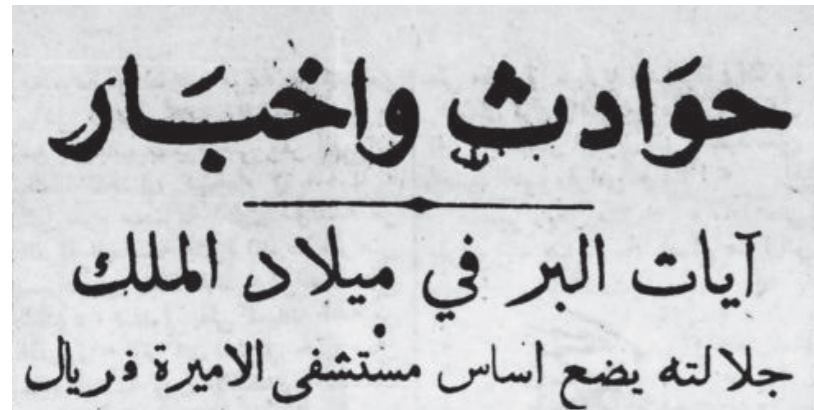


Figure 55 : Newspaper article announcing setting the foundation for Princess Ferial hospital.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 57 : Heliopolis hospital

# CHURCH OF SAINT GEORGE AND ANBA EBRAM

The St. George Church was designed by Ramses Wissa Wassef in 1954.<sup>37</sup> It is designed with a simple interior and exterior. the walls are blank highlighting the structure rather than the ornamentation. The church has an impressive concrete structure with large spanning domes and pointed arches and vaults. The ornamentation is mainly within the alter. The wooden alter is designed based on Coptic tradition with a modern essence in its simplicity and geometry. The exterior is only ornamented with a wooden lattice shading over the windows. The design is slightly asymmetrical in floorplan and elevation for a cohesive yet more interesting appearance highlighting the minaret. The layout of the church also follows a centralised logical organisation.

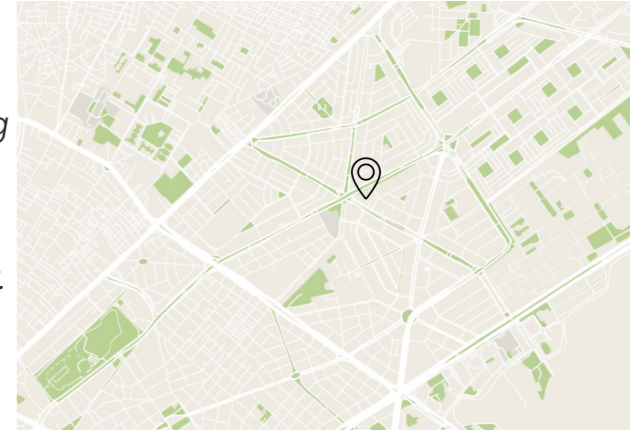


Figure 58 : location of St. George church



Figure 58 : St. George church



Figure 58 : Sketch of alter.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 59 : exterior of St. George church.

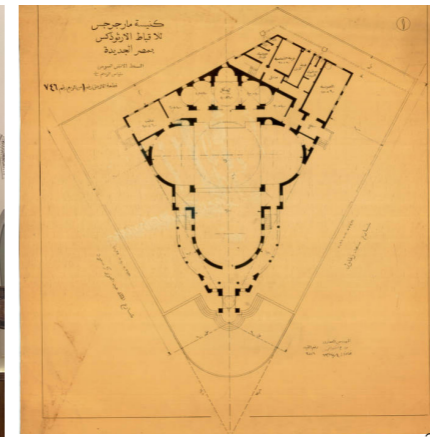


Figure 60 : Floorplan of St. George church.<sup>37</sup>

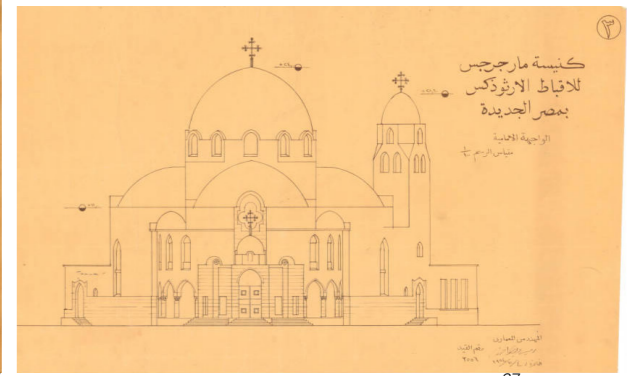


Figure 61 : Elevation of St. George church.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 62 : St. George church.

3. (Eishahed 2020)

35. "ACA Archives - Heliopolis Hospital." n.d. <https://arab-architecture.org/db/building/heliopolis-hospital>.

36. Al Ahram. 1950. "Incidents and news-verses of righteousness On the birth of the King, His Majesty lays the foundation of Princess Ferial Hospital," February 15, 1950.

37. Wissa Wassef, Ramses. 1954. St. George Coptic Orthodox Church. Uploaded by the American University in Cairo. Rare Books and Special Collections Library. <https://digitalcollections.aucegypt.edu/digital/collection/p15795coll15/id/168>.



Figure 63: Map showing an overview of non-iconic modernist buildings in El Hegaz street and their locations

# NON-ICONIC BUILDINGS ANALYSIS

Following an exploration of the street's iconic public buildings and landmarks. The next section discusses a few examples of residential buildings that stand out in the street. Some of these are regarded as iconic buildings, like Sayed Karim's Merryland complex, which has been explored in literature previously. Others were architecturally and visually appealing but less widely recognized. By examining each of these structures separately, recurring characteristics and patterns may be investigated. Variations of it are then found along the remainder of the street, defining the style of the street and the characteristics that define Egyptian Modernism in Heliopolis.

## MERRYLAND BUILDINGS

The Merryland buildings designed by Sayed Karim were constructed between 1958-1960.<sup>38</sup> They were designed based on concepts of modularity and repetition during a time where the population of Heliopolis was rising quickly, leading to their very high capacity. The original design included a three-building complex from which only two were built. These, le Corbusier inspired buildings, were built on pilotis meant to elevate the buildings which were later incorporated to create a commercial ground floor; since the original elevated commercial floor design meant to connect the buildings was never realised.<sup>3</sup> The slightly curved building includes three entrances with their individual cores and is made up of duplexes<sup>13</sup> suggesting an interesting internal layout optimising space and circulation. The buildings both follow a grid facade, however, their volumes follow slightly irregular shapes making them more interesting through shape rather than ornamentation. The repetitive overhang white balconies in the tower contrasting with the rest of the building emphasise the concrete structure.

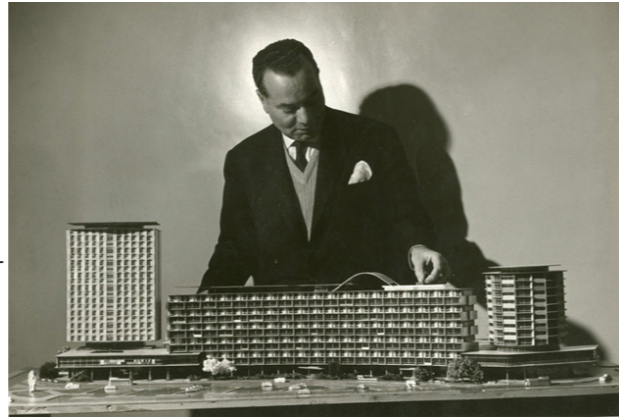


Figure 64: Image of Sayed Karim with models of the original plan.<sup>18</sup>

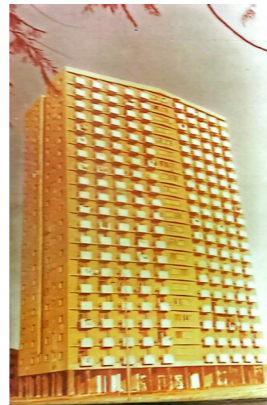


Figure 65: Early image of Merryland tower showing pilotis.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 66: current image of Merryland tower.



Figure 67: entrances of curved building.



Figure 68: Image of curved building.

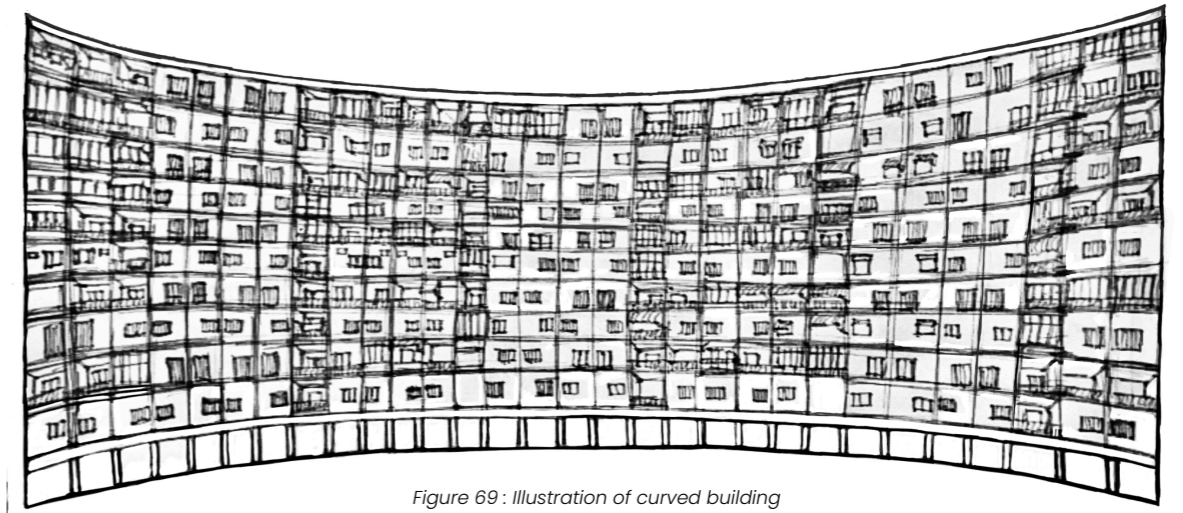


Figure 69: Illustration of curved building

The three-building plan by Sayed Karim was only partly realised as previously mentioned and this building was built in the location of the third building of the complex, it is however unclear if he has also designed it. However, the building carries many of the same features such as being more interesting by shape through its extruded and recessed volumes, creating a strong yet simple geometry with a lack of ornamentation. The intended pilotis visible in the old photographs were also similarly later incorporated into the ground floor. The building is also made from a concrete structure emphasised by large overhanging balconies. The building is likely to have been constructed using prefabricated parts as there are visible subtle grooves on the facade suggesting the connecting points of different prefabricated elements. The entire structure is painted completely white which is also part of the modernist ideology of purity and simplicity and emphasising the clean lines of the original design.



Figure 70: building in the location of the third unbuilt building of the Merryland complex by Sayed Karim



Figure 71: Illustration of the third Merryland building



Figure 72: Early image of third Merryland building showing pilotis.<sup>2</sup>

2. (Heliopolis Company for housing & development 1996)

3. (Eishahed 2020)

13. (Mahmoud Mohamed Ibrahim 2025)

18. ("ACA Archives - Sayed Karim (Korayem)," n.d.)

38. "ACA Archives - Merryland Housing Project in Heliopolis." n.d. <https://arab-architecture.org/db/building/merryland-housing-project-in-heliopolis>.

2. (Heliopolis Company for housing & development 1996)

# OTHMAN AHMED OTHMAN BUILDINGS

This complex was built by The Arab Contractors Othman Ahmed Othman &co. therefore it is known among residents as the "Othman buildings". The very high density of these 8 connected towers made up of 22 floors and 309 residential units<sup>39</sup> expresses the concept of rapid development and progress of the modernist movement in Cairo as well as the rise in population. The high density of these towers allows a dynamic facade due to changes based on use of residents such as closing balconies without disrupting the overall form. The towers are connected with a commercial plinth to provide various services and increase the functionality of the buildings. The form of the buildings follows their function since the form is defined by the divisions of apartments which follow a very simple grid with recessed volumes for the circulation cores connecting the towers. The building's structural cores are higher than the rest of the building to highlight them as well as for functionality to access the roofs. The construction process used raised slabs construction and a sliding formwork for walls. The buildings used 65,000 meters cubed of concrete and 6400 tons of reinforced steel expressing material progress as well.<sup>39</sup>



Figure 73 : Othman ahmed Othman buildings.



Figure 73 : Othman Ahmed Othman buildings.



Figure 74 : Othman Ahmed Othman buildings.

39. The Arab Contractors. n.d. "Merryland Towers." <https://www.arabcont.com/project-224#--text=%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AC%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%20%2D%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%87%D8%B1%D8%A9%20%2D%20%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%BI&text=%D8%A5%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%8A%20%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%AD%D8%A9%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B9%20%3A%20I7000%D9%85%D8%AA%D8%B1%20%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%B9%D9%88%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D8%AF%D8%AF%D8%AA%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B2%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A9%20%D9%81%D9%8A%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B7>

# MERRYLAND MALL BUILDING

This building effectively integrates a commercial mall with residential functions, based on a tripartite division with a commercial plinth, a residential center and crown. The pilotis are positioned in front of the commercial plinth in advance, demonstrating an understanding of practicalities in the area. This approach anticipates the need for commercial spaces while preserving the aesthetic qualities of the pilotis and emphasizing the structural elements. This understanding of user dynamics is also evident in the lack of modification done to the balconies compared to other buildings. Suggesting that the user needs are met so they don't need to utilise part the balconies for additional living space. This building is designed with expressive geometry, very clean edges and sharp corners. The initial design shows a very clean, simple white facade with red intentionally placed along the edges emphasising the clean edges of the balconies and the overhang structure. However, the current state of the building shows tones of red, pink and yellow that seem to be randomly placed. This is again visible in the lack of ornamentation in the initial design with ornamentation later added to the pilotis. The initial render also shows intended large amount of glass. However, the building is constructed with more closed walls potentially due to climate considerations made later.



Figure 75 : Merryland mall building.



Figure 76 : Merryland mall building.



Figure 77 : Merryland mall building design render.<sup>2</sup>

2. (Heliopolis Company for housing & development 1996)

# BUILDING A

This very elegant building was considered as the peak of creative and artistic design by residents of the area at the time.<sup>14</sup> This is also clear through its many artistic features such as the mosaic decorated balconies. The mosaic design uses simple geometric shapes and each balcony has its own unique design. Green is used as a base colour with primary colours for the geometric shapes which is in line with the modernist ideologies on use of primary and earthy colors.<sup>40</sup> Green is used again in the entrance, curved balcony slabs and columns to make them stand out. The building has a very grand entrance that covers a large area with surrounding sculptural pilotis, an elongated walkway inviting visitors, a decorative metal door, green tiled columns and marble floors to create a strong impression on visitors as they are entering. The volume of the building is fairly simple following the shape of the plot, giving it its curved corner. The building is designed considering the climate using geometric overhangs over windows as well as deep set balconies for lower heat gains. The building is also elevated on Pilotis on the ground floor with the open space used for parking for residents.



Figure 78 : Building A front view.



Figure 79 : Building A side view.



Figure 82 : example of the mosaic patterns.



Figure 80 : Sculptural pilotis.

Figure 81 : Entrance of building A.



Figure 83 : Entrance of building A.

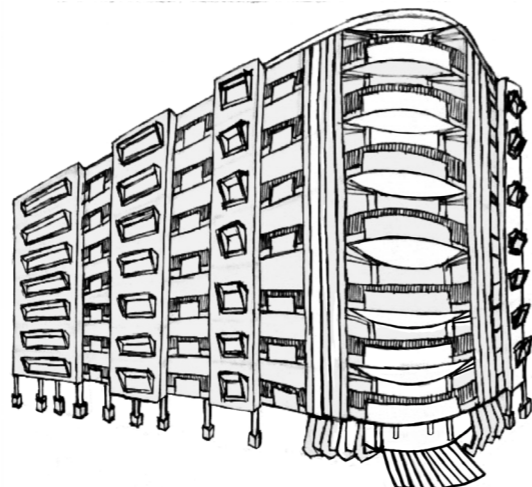


Figure 84 : Illustration of building A.

# BUILDING B

This building carries a lot of the same concepts in its design as building A but is executed in a more moderate way suggesting they're designed by the same architect. The building has a curved corner as it is shaped after the plot giving it an interesting shape and volume juxtaposing with the more rigid geometrical elements. The use of blue in this building under the overhang balcony slabs highlights the structure and the curved volume. The light blue in combination with white also provides the building with a very calm expression. This building also has a grand entrance with surrounding vertical louvres, an elongated walkway, a decorative metal door, and blue and white tiled columns to create a strong impression on visitors. Some of the louvres around the entrance extend upwards to create a crown at the top of the building creating a tripartite division with pilotis elevating the ground floor to make space for parking on one side and commercial functions on the other with the central partition being residential spaces. The building is designed considering the climate using geometric overhangs over windows as well as deep set balconies for lower heat gains. It also utilises clerestory windows to enhance natural ventilation and daylighting within the interior spaces while adding a decorative element to the facade.



Figure 85 : Building B front view.



Figure 86 : Building B side view.



Figure 87 : Entrance of building B.

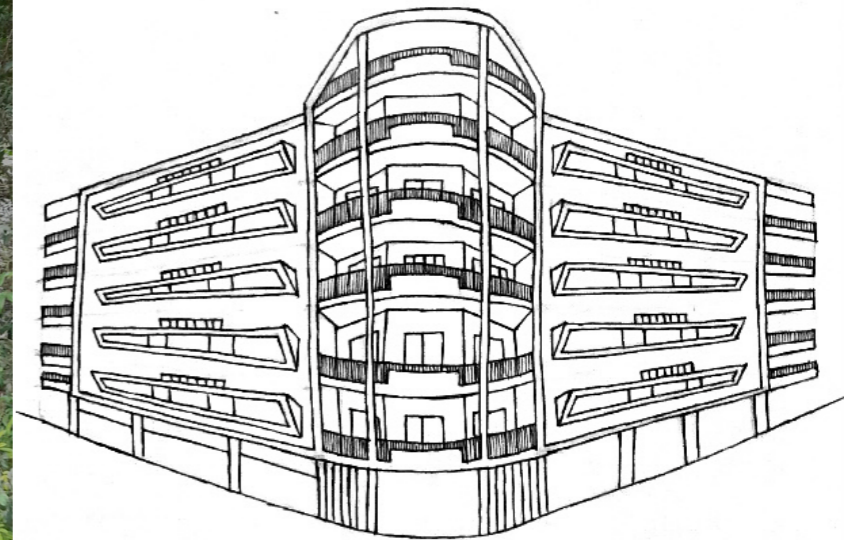


Figure 88 : Illustration of building B.

14. (Kossa 2025)

40. Florian, Maria-Cristina. 2025. "The Myth of Pure white architecture: How architects of modernity used color." ArchDaily. February 3, 2025. <https://www.archdaily.com/1004970/the-myth-of-pure-white-architecture-how-architects-of-modernity-used-color>.

## BUILDING C

This building is recognised as the residence of the former president Hosny Mubarak before his presidency.<sup>41</sup> The building follows the shape of the street which gives it this unique curve as the street corner doesn't follow a 90-degree angle. The building shape becomes even more interesting through the contrasting shapes on each corner of the front facade one with a sharp edge and the other is a completely curved smooth edge. The building lacks ornamentation and emphasises the volumetric shapes and the alternating concrete balustrades which give it a more dynamic appearance. The building is completely white aside from the entrance highlighting the entrance while maintaining a pure expression of the form. The entrance of the building is exaggerated in multiple ways including the large overhang marking the entrance. The stairs leading up to the main metal doors extend the experience of entering the building. The massiveness in height and the marble covered columns as you enter also adds a sense of luxury to the entrance. The building considers the climate using deep set balconies for lower solar heat gains and higher privacy. The concrete balustrades also help shade the windows behind.



Figure 89 : Building C.



Figure 90 : Entrance of building C.

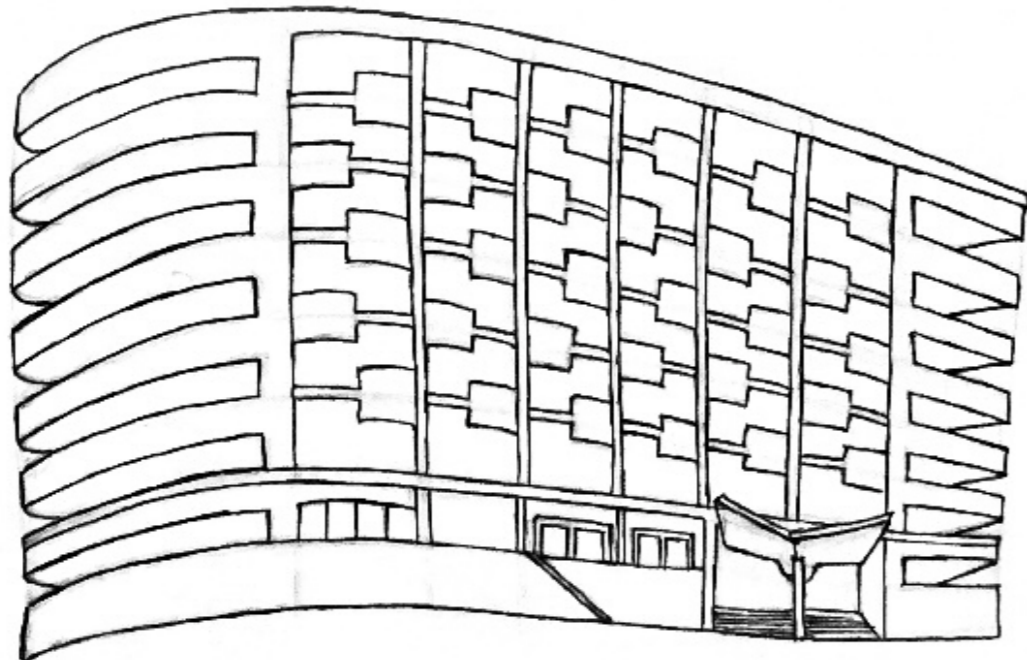


Figure 91 : Illustration of building C.

## BUILDING D

This building demonstrates a great example of concrete being used simultaneously for ornamentation, expression, and functionality. This is seen in the ornamentation being used as sun shading to provide the building with functionality and aesthetic quality. The sun shading uses a simple repetitive geometric pattern along the side facades of the building. The entrance is also highlighted by the decorative sun shading pattern above it. The geometric shapes projecting along the edges of the balconies further emphasizes this strong geometric expression. The slightly folded concrete balustrades along the front facade function for addition privacy and shading. Their folded design interacts with light and shadow, creating a dynamic effect that adds depth to the building's expression. The slenderness of the metal balustrades creates transparency keeping the focus on the concrete while ensuring safety. The deep balconies and various shading methods utilised, significantly lower the potential solar heat gains showing the climate considerations made during the design to combine form and function through the versatility of concrete.



Figure 92 : Building D front view.



Figure 93 : Building D front view.

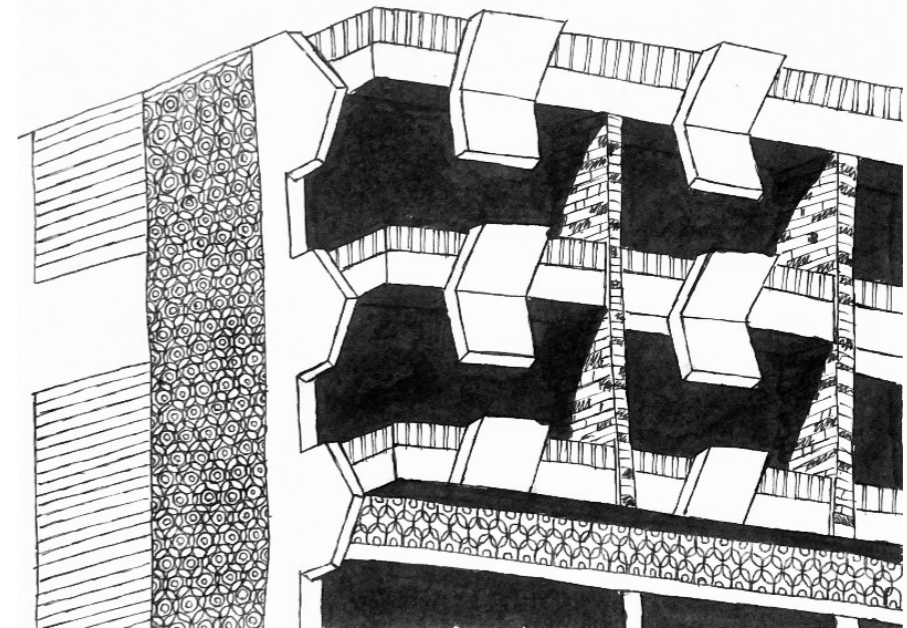


Figure 94 : Illustration of building D.

41. Heliopolisawy group. 2017. "User comment: Hosni Mubarak lived in this building when he was vice president." Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Heliopolisawy/permalink/1311123002330822>.

## BUILDING E

The defining feature of this building is its distinctive crown common for the modernism style in Heliopolis. This crown juxtaposes the straight edges throughout the rest of the building with its curved pattern creating a more interesting use of different forms. The building shape with a chamfered corner complements the surrounding context. The use of ribbed textured concrete adds tactile quality to the facade and emphasises the horizontality of the building and shows the versatility in expression of concrete based on texturing. The steel balustrades on the balconies in the corner provides openness and transparency in contrast with the otherwise closed facade and creating a lightness and floating effect to the overhanging balcony slabs.



Figure 95 : Building E.

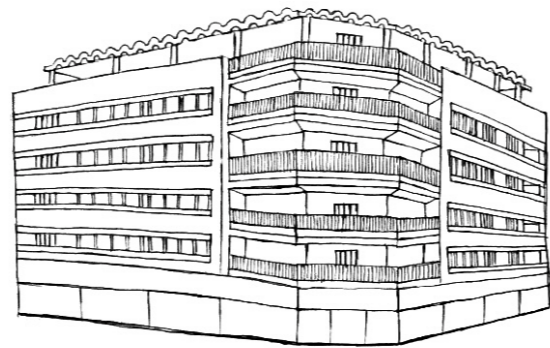


Figure 96 : Illustration of building E.

## BUILDING F

The defining feature of this building is also its distinctive crown. The roof of the building appears to be potentially functional for residents to use with the crown acting as sun shading. This crown is made of rigid rectangular shapes complimenting the rigid geometric nature of the whole building. This rigid geometry is also carried into the balustrade panels placed over the thin steel balustrades. The lightness of the steel balustrades further emphasises these decorative panels. The large overhang balconies also express the structural capabilities of concrete and provide shading to reduce solar heat gains but many balconies were later closed by resident showing potential imbalance in division of space between the balconies and living spaces. The building also has a very unique entrance through as spiral stair leading to the first floor.



Figure 97 : Building F.

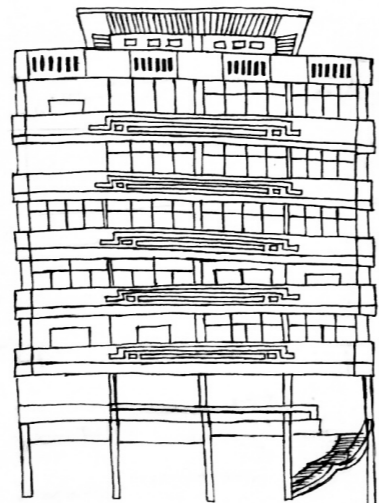


Figure 98 : Illustration of building F.

## BUILDING G

This building includes many elements common in the modernist architecture in Heliopolis, such as the decorative concrete sun shading patterns on the side walls as well as on the balconies. The patterns are made up of repeating simple geometric shapes and show a combination of aesthetic and functional qualities. The balconies also have extruded elongated concrete rectangles in the facade, these add depth and interaction between light and shadow. Similarly, the ribbed textured concrete placed in a stripe also gives more tactile quality and allows more interesting visuals without excessive ornamentation. The entrance is fairly modest, however, still noticeable by being more recessed into the facade and combined with a small overhang leading to a decorative steel door. The building is shaped by its context on the corner of the street giving it a chamfered corner. The chamfered corner also helps compliment the sharp edges and the overall rigid geometry of the building. The building also seems to have been built in multiple stages since the top floors have some differences mainly in the balconies suggesting that they were extended later due to weakening of regulations.



Figure 99 : Building G front view.



Figure 100 : Building G side view.

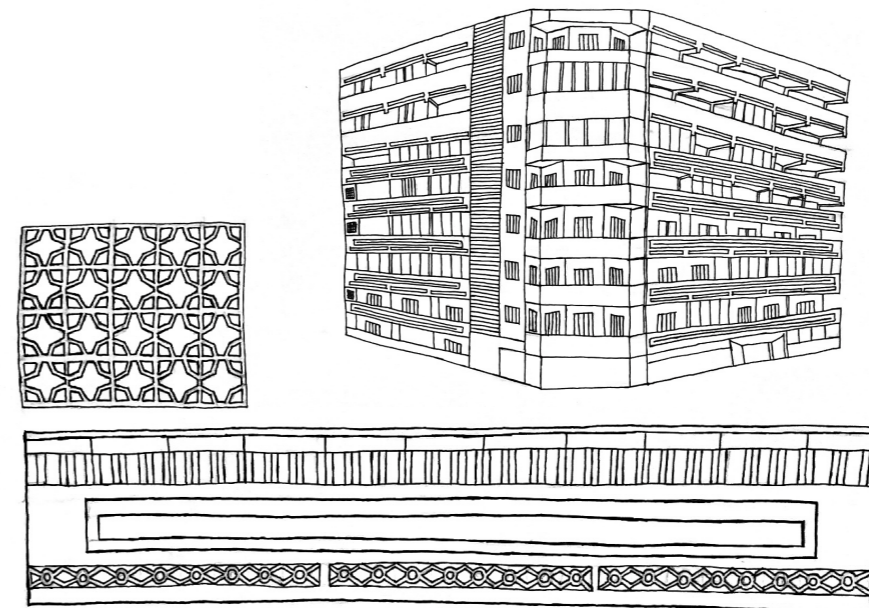


Figure 101 : Illustration of building G showing balcony and sun shading details.



Figure 102 : Image of building G showing sun shading.

# BUILDING H

This building is placed along one of the main traffic nodes along EL Hegaz Street the curvature of the building is based on the large curves of merging main roads. The curvature demonstrates the concrete's ability to be moulded into fluid, dynamic shapes. The depth and size of the balconies also demonstrates the structural capabilities of concrete. The thin concrete railing acts as a framing element to enhance the visual composition of the facade complimented by the concrete louvres on the side of the building. The concrete continues to increase the aesthetic quality of the building using the ribbed textured concrete. The entrance of the building is recessed to create a more sheltered transition space, offering a sense of intimacy and privacy before entering the building to reduce the effects of its proximity to the main road.

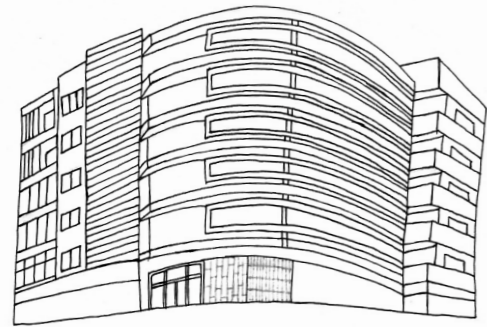


Figure 103 : Illustration of building H.



Figure 104 : Building H.

# BUILDING I

This building creates a simple yet intriguing form that transforms as you move past it. As you approach, the dominating curved edges transition into rigid rectangular forms. The contrast created by the white strips of concrete going around the circumference of the entire building creates a strong emphasis on shape. The concrete geometric balustrades provide a more dynamic form through insets and extrusions. The large balconies provide shade and a sense of privacy. The building is divided into three partitions with the commercial plinth slightly elevated from the ground using steps, then recurring middle floors, ending with a crown that follows a slightly different aesthetic using overhanging sun shading panels and a relatively tall parapet maintaining a clean, sharp appearance.

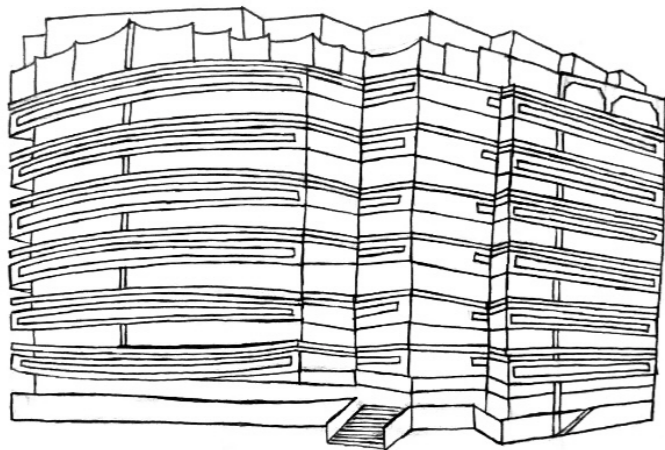


Figure 105 : Illustration of building I.



Figure 106 : Building I.

# BUILDING J

This building is designed by Girgis Asaad Farag for the owner Youssef Salama Ibrahim. The building was built in approximately 1975.<sup>43</sup> It has a very strong chamfered corner following the street corner. The organisation is central with the circulation space surrounded by three apartments on each floor. The layout includes two mirrored apartments with the line of symmetry perpendicular to the chamfered corner and one unique apartment along the opposite corner. Two light-wells are placed with services, such as kitchens and bathrooms, clustered around them demonstrating the focus on functionality. The entrance is prolonged leading to the central circulation. On the exterior, the entrance is recessed from the facade and framed by a contrasting white overhang and exposed columns. The ground floor and entrance are slightly elevated with steps. This allows space for commercial functions that are partially sunk into the ground. The facade of the building is decorated with a grid pattern covering the majority of the facade, except for the large balconies which maintain their raw concrete expression to highlight the structural capabilities of concrete.



Figure 107 : Building J.

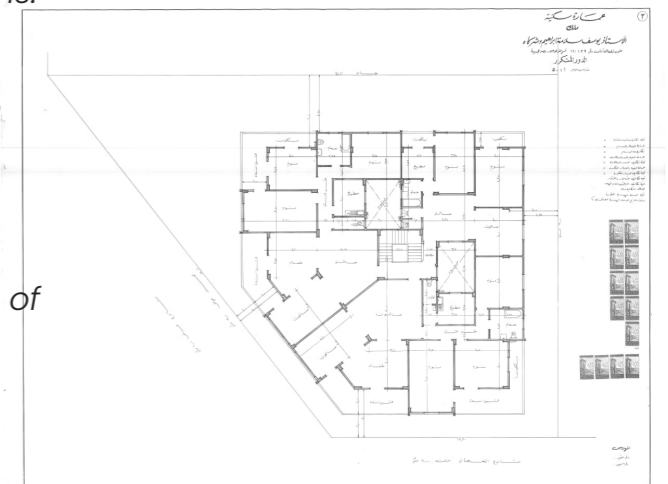


Figure 108 : Repeating floorplan for building J.<sup>42</sup>



Figure 109 : Section and facade elevation for building J.<sup>42</sup>

42. Farag, Girgis Asaad. n.d. Architectural drawings.

43. Farag, Alphonse Girgis. personal communication. 2025, February 20.

Through the Analysis of the buildings on an individual level as well as observation of trends on the street level. The following chapter will examine the distinguishing characteristics and architectural elements associated with the modernist architecture of EL Hegaz Street. This will be supported with a variety of examples from the street to express regularity and consistency.

## DECORATIVE BALCONIES

The large overhanging balconies are one of the most distinct features of the buildings in the street as they emphasize the structural capabilities of concrete, prevent direct sunlight from increasing the solar heat gains in the apartments. They also provide a lot of the character and aesthetic quality of the building as well as being a strong component in defining the overall form of the building. The balconies aesthetic expression is usually achieved through the geometric shape, colour and the contrast between steel and concrete used in the balustrades.



Figure 110 : Balconies with Geometric concrete shapes combined with thin steel balustrades



Figure 111 : Balconies with rectangular opaque panels combined with thin steel balustrades



Figure 112 : Balconies emphasising structure using exaggerated beams or ribbed slabs

## DECORATIVE BALCONIES



Figure 113 : Balconies highlighted by contrast of the white balustrades



Figure 114 : Balconies highlighted by vibrant coloured balustrades



Figure 115 : Balconies with geometric concrete forms shaping the side of balconies

# ENTRANCES

The entrances of the buildings in El Hegaz Street often serve as defining features of the buildings and provide a strong impression on visitors and residents as they are entering by creating memorable experiences. Multiple strategies are used for this, some of the most common is through the use of overhangs that act as a gate and enclosure for people walking through. These are often designed with bold geometric forms to express significance and leave a lasting impression. The opposite is also done by having the entrance recessed into the building which provides a sense of enclosure and privacy before entering and also creates a buffer between the door and the street. The buildings also often have an elevated ground floor with steps leading to the entrance, this adds movement to the experience of entering the building while simultaneously serving a functional purpose by raising the ground floor, the residents have a sense of safety and buffer from the street while allowing space for commercial functions that are sunk slightly underground. Often the buildings also use decorative geometric patterns on their large metal doors or concrete motifs on the facade to highlight the entrance and to express importance.



Figure 116 : Entrances marked with geometric Patterns



Figure 117 : Recessed entrances marked with columns and stairs

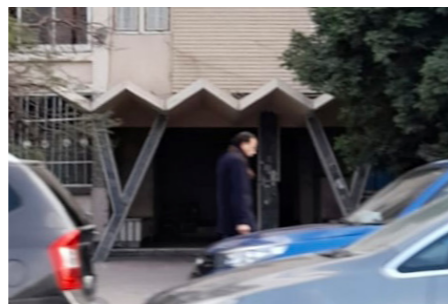


Figure 118 : Entrances marked with overhangs and gates

# CROWN

Many of the buildings also have a crown on top to give the building a distinct character and to compliment the shape and composition of the building. The crowns are often designed using sharp geometric shapes that extrude from the top of the building such as triangular zig zags, curves and rigid rectangular silhouettes while others just follow the shape of the building. They break up the shape of the flat roof to give buildings more character. The crowns are also often made with openings for a more dynamic interaction with light and shadow. Some are also made to appear floating over the building which can serve as shading if the roof of the building is accessible or to shade the balconies of the top floors. The crown can also serve as an element to reduce the appearance of appliances placed on the roofs.



figure 118 : Crowns with openings elevated above the building



Figure 119 : Crowns extruded from top floor

# SUN SHADING

Due to the warm climate that these buildings are located in many buildings provide sun shading along their large balconies to boost their functionality by reducing direct sunlight and heat gains. These sun shading patterns are also used as ornamentation for the buildings, using simple geometric shapes such as squares, circles and Hexagons. These sun shading elements both increase the aesthetic qualities of the buildings while being functional and not purely decorative to not contradict modernist ideologies. These shading elements are more often placed along the side of the buildings to maintain a simpler front facade while other buildings utilise it in the center of the front facade to increase their visibility. The patterns also transform the facade into a more dynamic state as the appearance of the patterns and their shadow change based on sun placement throughout the day.



Figure 120 : Close view of sun shading pattern.



Figure 121 : Sun shading on side of balconies



Figure 122 : Sun shading on front facade

# STRONG GEOMETRY AND FORM

Due to lack of ornamentation in modernist architecture the form of the building and the geometry defining the volumes has a large role in the expression of the building. The geometry used in many of the modernist buildings of El Hegaz Street is made of simple shapes that have strong sharp edges which make them have a more powerful impression on the appearance and character of the buildings. The buildings usually use the concrete for massing to create massiveness or heaviness contrasted with lightness in other parts especially in overhangs to give the illusion of the stacking floors floating to create a visually impressive view, highlighting the structural capabilities. Many of the buildings also use repetition in their forms to create uniformity that strengthens the overall expression. Some building use multiple extruded and recessed volumes to break up the facades giving the buildings more depth and more prominent visual characteristics. The scale of the buildings and proportions also define the expression of the form as the larger buildings create a more impressive structure while smaller buildings create a stronger connection to the human scale.

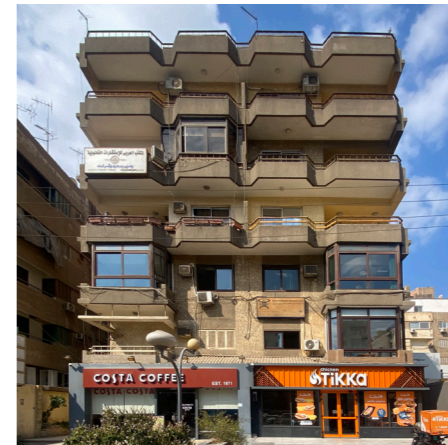


Figure 123 : Buildings with strong geometry

# CURVED CORNERS

There are many buildings within the street where their form is defined by their curved corners. The corners are very useful for making buildings more interesting through shape without affecting functionality. These buildings with curved corners are also often placed along an intersection, therefore, the corners are also responding to context by following the contours of the road. The curve also softens the edges contrasting the harsh edges and rigid geometry in a lot of the building elements and surroundings. While most of the curved edges are concave curves following lines of the connecting facades to create a fillet effect; the curved corners also come in multiple variations, as some are more recessed in the volume, some are convex and some are more extreme with multiple curves along the facade complimenting each other.



Figure 124 : Buildings with curved corners.

# CHAMFERED CORNERS

In contrast to the curved corners there are also a lot of chamfered corners with straight edges. They have a lot of similarities to the curved corners such as making buildings more interesting through shape without affecting functionality and following the road structures. The chamfered corners, however, strongly compliment the rigid edges found in a lot of the buildings in the area and the simple geometry often preferred in modernism. They carry less variation than the curved edges as they only vary in the angle and the width of the chamfer.



Figure 125 : Buildings with chamfered corners.

# TYPICAL LAYOUT

This floorplan drawing is provided by the architect Girgis Asaad Farag.<sup>42</sup> This layout system is extremely common in the buildings of El Hegaz Street this is also recognisable by the front facades having two windows in the center and two balconies on the edges which is very common throughout the street. It is mostly recurrent in the buildings built during the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> This layout demonstrates a strong focus on functionality, with its intuitive arrangement of spaces and simple composition. The centralised organisation containing the circulation reduces wasted space on corridors and creates a close proximity between all entrances and the central circulation. The composition is symmetrical along two axes, meaning the floor is divided into 4 equally sized apartments. The layout of the divisions in a grid format of equal spans simplifies the structure making it more efficient and easier to build. The building features two light-wells connecting the services, such as the bathrooms and kitchens, that allow indirect sunlight and ventilation for these spaces. The interior layout of the apartments transition from more public, near the entrances, to more private. The functions' proximity from the facade is also based on their requirement of direct sunlight. The overall layout is very simple and intuitive which allowed these buildings to be built very efficiently and to function well. These principles are recurring in the residential layouts in the entire street however manifesting differently due to differences in context and architectural expression of different architects.

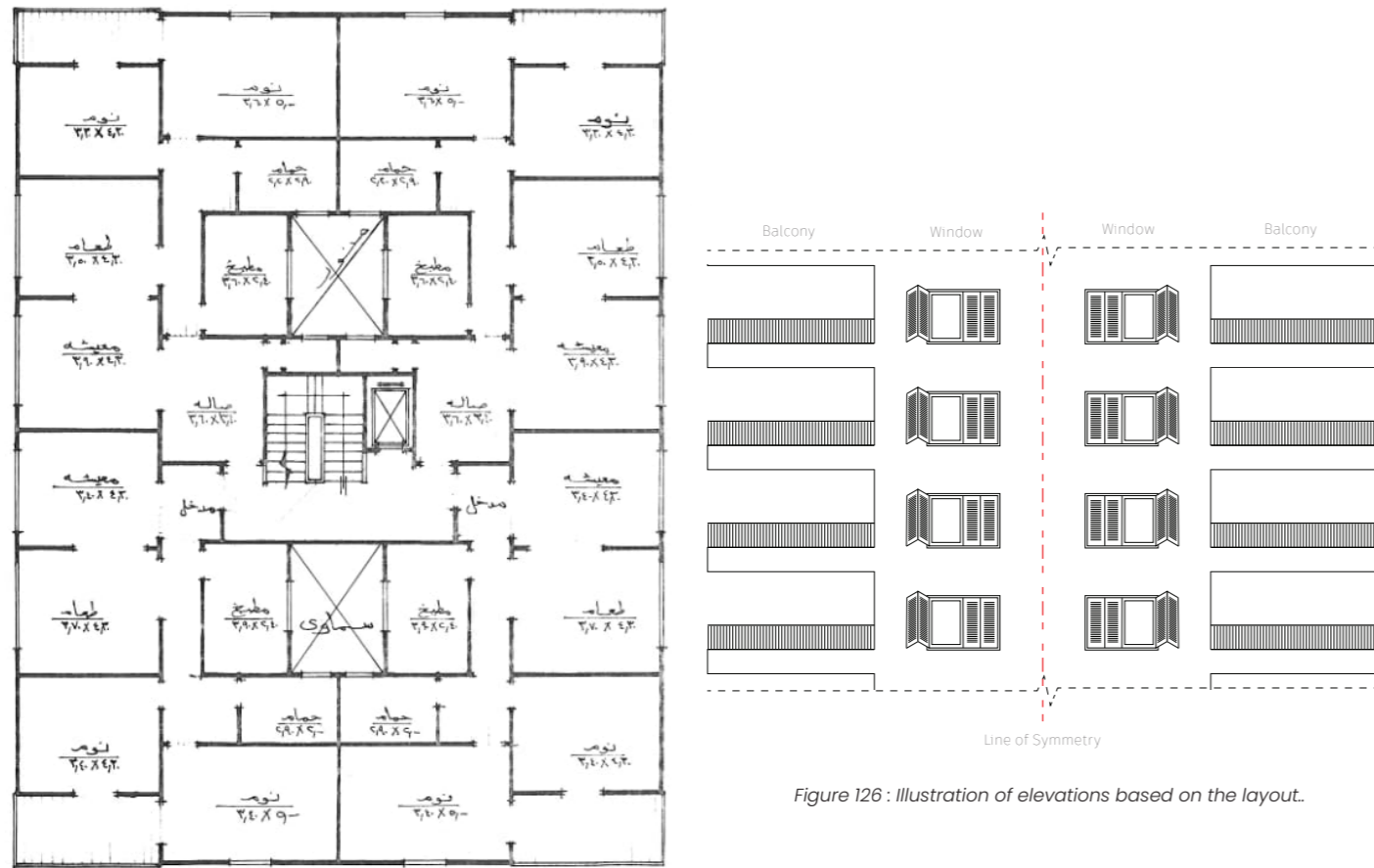


Figure 126 : Illustration of elevations based on the layout.

# CONCLUSION

This exploration of El Hegaz Street highlights the events and values that shaped Egyptian late modernism in Heliopolis. By framing one street and exploring it in detail in its architecture, and evolution. This enables a deeper understanding of the layers of economic, political and cultural factors that affected the architecture. The street scale can then be interpreted as a lens through which the broader narrative of the entire area can be understood.

El Hegaz Street exhibits multiple architectural styles starting with a few European inspired belle-epoque and Andalusian style buildings that were built before the full urbanisation of El Hegaz Street's area. This style was largely influenced by the fact that the Heliopolis Oases company during that era had strong regulations maintaining the character of the area.

The nationalization of the Heliopolis Oasis Company in the 1950s, during Nasser's era of progress, socialism and anti-colonialism marks a turning point for the architectural style of the street. The street was developed mainly during that period between the 1950s-1970s with the style transforming towards modernist architecture. It was an era of exploring Egyptian identity beyond colonialism giving the opportunity for Egyptian architects and structural engineers to experiment with new materials and concept. The weakening of regulations and company monitoring also meant there was space to deviate from the old styles of Heliopolis. This combined with economic factors such as the tendency of developers to prioritize profit by favouring repetitive, tall, high density building designs led to ambitions aligning with modernist architecture ideologies.

The architectural landscape began to shift due to these economic, political and regulatory changes. The urban planning became more uniform in a structured grid format dividing equally sized plots. The architecture focused on functionality and simplicity with simple intuitive layouts and strong geometry. The buildings also had many distinctive features such as exaggerated overhanging balconies to express structural capabilities. Other defining features include the grand entrances, crowns and decorative sun shading designed with bold geometric forms to create a visual impression on users while also serving a functional purpose. The combination of the mentioned features gave the street a context-specific style based on climate and personal architectural ambitions while expressing modernist ideologies of lack of ornamentation, simplicity and innovation.

The effect of the modernist style is visible in El Hegaz Street in both the iconic public buildings and ordinary residential buildings which are often underappreciated and unrecognised. There is however a recent rise in appreciation for these buildings showing their value as heritage as well as their sentimental value to residents of the area. This is still a slowly developing rise in awareness of the architectural value of these buildings as they are starting to be replaced throughout the urban fabric with higher contemporary and neoclassical inspired buildings that are disrupting the overall cohesion of the street.

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