

## Cairos Plaster Casts

During Napoleon's Egypt expedition the important encyclopaedic work "La Description de l'Égypte" was written. It was the most accurate description of a single country up to that time. The richly illustrated books describe, among other things, the remains of ancient Egyptian culture, nature, geology, everyday culture and the Islamic art and architecture of Egypt. Napoleon's expedition, the artefacts brought back as trophies and „la Description“ put Egypt in focus of the French. This can be seen in the replicas of the Islamic city centre of Cairo and the ancient Egyptian tombs and pyramids, that became permanent fixtures at the World's Fairs.

Europe is fascinated by the Orient. The Khedive Ismail Pasha plays an important role in this context. He returned to Cairo from Paris in 1863 as heir to his uncle's throne. Ismail Pasha spent his entire youth in Europe and is accordingly socialised as a European. After coming to power, he tries to turn Cairo into a western model city. Cairo's downtown is designed after Hausmann's Paris.

Accordingly the interior architecture of the new city corresponds to the ideas of the European Belle Époque. The walls and ceilings are lavishly decorated with fashionable stucco. This can be seen for example in the neo-baroque Abdeen Palace, build in 1863 and in the Sakakini Pasha Palace, a neo-rococo building, realised in 1897. Both the technique and the aesthetic ideas of this period live on to this day. Late Belle Époque stucco is still an essential part of the facades and of the decoration of the "Reception", the representative Egyptian living room.

The photo series I would like to present at the conference show the workshops in which this stucco is prefabricated. The walls of these workshops serve as showrooms. They are covered with ornaments and resemble the European plaster cast workshops of the 19th century.

Private interiors in Islamic culture are accessible only to family members. Therefore these workshops are also interesting because they offer a rare glimpse of the aesthetics of Cairo's private interiors.

The plasterers disassemble historical ornamental systems into their individual parts. These are distributed ad hoc and seemingly randomly across the walls. This results in a new order. Classicism is deconstructed and replaced by collage-like compositions. The properties of the prefabricated stucco play the central role.

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