Galila El Kadi • Alain Bonnamy

Architecture for the Dead

Cairo's Medieval Necropolis

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The great medieval necropolis of Cairo, comprising two main areas that together stretch twelve kilometers from north to south, constitutes a major feature of the city's urban landscape. With monumental and smaller-scale mausolea dating from all eras since early medieval times, and boasting some of the finest examples of Mamluk architecture not just in the city but in the region, the necropolis is an unparalleled—and until now largely undocumented—architectural treasure trove.

In *Architecture for the Dead*, architect Galila El Kadi and photographer Alain Bonnamy have produced a comprehensive and visually stunning survey of all areas of the necropolis. Through detailed and painstaking research and remarkable photography, in text, maps, plans, and pictures, they describe and illustrate the astonishing variety of architectural styles in the necropolis: from Mamluk to neo-Mamluk via baroque and neo-pharaonic, from the grandest stone buildings with their decorative domes and minarets to the humblest—but elaborately decorated—wooden structures. The book also documents the modern settlement of the necropolis by families creating a space for the living in and among the tombs and architecture for the dead.

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To Hakim

Preface

The first edition of this book was published in French in 2001. It represented the culmination of a research project undertaken jointly by the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD, formerly the ORSTOM) and the General Organization for Housing, Building, and Planning Research (GOHBPR) between 1985 and 1990. Several parts of this project appeared independently in various contexts—notably, in two articles and in a film, *Le Caire, la cité des morts*, which was shown at the International Film Festival on Architecture (FIFARC) in 1987 and at the Georges Pompidou Center as part of the "Les magiciens de la terre" exhibition. Some of the photographs in this book were shown in an exhibition at the French Cultural Center in Cairo and at the headquarters of the GOHBPR in May 1990. The text was initially drafted as a report to mark the end of the study, and was reworked for the 2001 French edition.

More than seventeen years have passed since this research project began and this text first appeared. Six additional years separate the publication of the French edition from the current English one. In these two decades, many things have changed in the city of the dead. The number of inhabitants has been growing continuously, as we saw during our regular visits there to seek out additional information, show colleagues and friends around, and serve indirectly as guides to foreign visitors, since we also drew up an itinerary through the Cairo necropolis for the most recent Guide Gallimard to Egypt, published in 1994.[1] As for the general condition of the necropolis described in this book, it has deteriorated considerably: sewage water has flooded the tombs of the southern and eastern necropolises, causing some buildings to collapse and visible damage to appear on those remaining above ground level. As for the Bab al-Nasr necropolis, its beautiful wooden tombs are nothing but a pile of ruins. The environs of restored, classified monuments have grown denser as housing encroaches, canceling out all the efforts undertaken since the early 1980s. Ruined buildings, fetid swamps, piles of rubbish, and tombs devoured by housing: such is the desolate spectacle that Cairo's Muslim necropolis offers today. Unfortunately, this observation confirms the conclusion of Chapter 5, which predicted the worst: the gradual transformation of the prestigious city of the dead into a fourth- or fifth-rate city.

This new edition, then, provides a picture of what the city of the dead still was at the close of the second millennium. Some of the topographical and iconographic information, however, remains relevant. Equally relevant are the importance of the architectural heritage and the urgent need to save it and bring it to light.

We would like to thank all those who helped us carry out the work that yielded this book in its French and English editions. Our thanks go first to Abu Zeid Rageh, former head of the GOHBPR, for the interest he showed in the subject and the material and for the moral support his institution provided in the initial phase of the project. The team of young researchers assigned to help us during that first phase was later supplemented by students at Cairo University's faculty of urban planning. The motivation, dynamism, and curiosity of these young architects increased our enthusiasm, and we owe them much by way of gratitude.

We would also like to thank Émile Le Bris and Jean-Paul Duchemin, respectively director and assistant director of the IRD's former department D (urbanization and urban social systems). Their support and encouragement allowed this project to be carried through. Nor is it possible to overestimate what we owe René de Maximy, research director at the IRD, and Francine Arakelian, both of whom read the manuscript scrupulously and provided very valuable comments. The advice of André Raymond, professor emeritus at the University of Provence and eminent connoisseur of Cairo, were also of immense value in putting together the final manuscript.

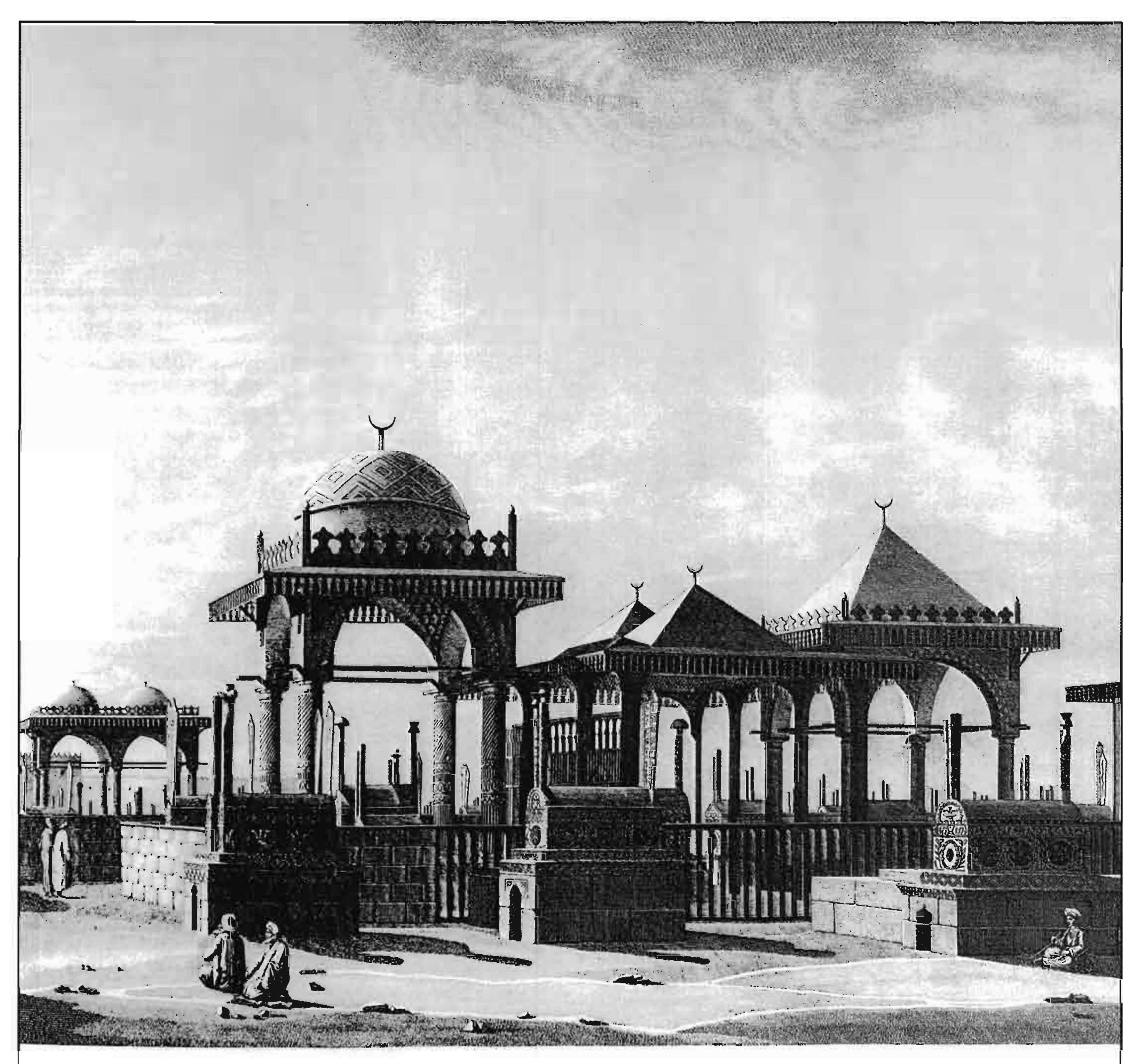
Thanks are also due to Aliyya Sherif for welcoming us when the photographs were being developed in Cairo; to those responsible for publication on both sides of the Mediterranean (Neil Hewison at the American University in Cairo Press; Marie-Noëlle Favier and Thomas Mourrier at the IRD); and, last but not least, to the translators, Philippe Dresner and Pascale Ghazaleh.

Note

[1] *Égypte*, (Paris: Gallimard, Nouveaux Loisirs Éditions, 1994).

"Of all the monuments, tombs may offer the widest scope for the studies of the archaeologist, the artist, even the philosopher. Civilizations of every kind have made manifest the nature of their belief in an afterlife in the way they have treated their dead." Viollet le Duc, Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture, *vol. 3, bk. 9, p. 21.*

Source: *Description de l'Égypte: État Moderne*, Cairo, vol. 1, pl. 66.



VUE PERSPECTIVE D'UNE PARTIE DE LA VILLE DES TOMBEAUX.

Introduction

It all began with stories in the Egyptian press about staggering numbers of people—as many as a million according to some—living in the cemeteries of Cairo. The figures, it later transpired, had been grossly exaggerated, but we were not to know that at the time. The capital, although not blighted by shantytowns, seemed to be facing its own particular brand of urban calamity: mass necropolitan squatter settlements.

Intrigued by the idea of the living cohabiting with the dead, we set out to investigate what seemed to be a vast field of research for sociologists and urban planners alike: 1,000 hectares of tombs, a thirtieth of the Greater Cairo urban area, inhabited by hundreds of thousands of people. The French Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD) became interested, and Egypt's General Organization for Housing, Building and Planning Research (GOHBPR) seized the opportunity to diagnose a situation of some concern to politicians. The thought of returning to the cemeteries brought back vivid memories of my games and adventures there as a child. I remembered clearly our family excursions on the Muslim high festivals of *'Id al-Fitr* (end of Ramadan) and *'Id al-Adha* (the sacrifice), when we would leave home at the crack of dawn for a day in the company of our dead. Traditionally, those visits could last for several days on end, but a government ban on remaining in the cemeteries after dark had put a stop to that. As soon as we arrived at the door to our tomb, a crowd of needy people would rush toward us and we would hand out offerings of money and food: *sholeik* (a raisin brioche baked especially for the occasion), oranges or dates, depending on the season, and mutton at *al-Adha*. Then we would take to the oratory to join the *muqri'* in a recitation of passages from the Qur'an. The thirty-minute ceremony seemed to my sister and me to go on forever, as we had to wait until it was over before being allowed to go out to play.

My father's family tomb was like a villa, with high stone outer walls surrounding an open courtyard on either side of which there stood two similar-looking, single-story, rectangular buildings. One was the oratory. Up four steps and across a veranda was a front door flanked by symmetrical windows and leading to a room with three ceremonial sarcophagi marking the places where the vaults were located below ground. Two were made of marble, and rising from each was a marble column crowned with a carving, a plait of hair on one and a turban on the other to mark the different sexes. Promiscuity had to be avoided in death as in life, and so men and women were kept apart in separate vaults. The third sarcophagus, made of finely crafted wood and much smaller than the others, was for the children. Across the courtyard stood the building for the living: a tomb keeper's lodge, which was occupied year-round, and reception areas equipped with washrooms and a kitchen: everything but a bathroom.

I remember the oratory in our neighbors' tomb, which we visited from time to time: the floor covered in rugs, the sarcophagi surrounded by silk veils, and cushion-filled recesses for visitors set into the back wall. My mother's family tomb, on the other hand, was rather more humble: no oratory or sarcophagi, just a raised tombstone in the courtyard and a two-room reception area with a small washroom. Some neighboring tombs had several tombstones set out around a courtyard, or a covered gallery in place of the rooms for receiving visitors. From the outside, however, they all looked the same to us.

My sister and I preferred our father's family tomb. With its monumental outer walls towering over the deserted streets it made us feel as though we were living in a fantastic city. In that desert of sand and stone, where any games liable to wake the dead were strictly forbidden, we went in search of that intermediate world where the dead waited, in limbo, for the day of resurrection. We would press our ears to the ground, straining to hear a snatch of their conversations or wails, desperate for a tangible sign of their presence, but in vain. So we let our imagination run wild, seeing a reincarnated soul in a passing black cat or the ghost we were so longing to meet in the white robes of a *muqri'* as he disappeared around a bend in the road, at which point we would take to our heels and flee.

Our frequent visits and the childish games that kept us busy made these places more familiar to us, and helped tear down the myths built up around the afterworld.

As customs changed from the 1950s onward, the tradition of visiting the cemeteries—although still popular among the lower classes—gradually died out among the bourgeoisie. Our visits became less and less frequent, and increasingly shorter, just long enough to perform a couple of rituals. Later we stopped accompanying our parents altogether, making do with a tender thought for our dead and reciting a few verses of the Qur'an. Then came the age of doubt and agnosticism, when the rites began to look ridiculous. We found the idea of human beings communing with a god or with the souls of the departed to be absurd. Our relationship with the city of the dead was over.

* * *

By 1985, it had been fifteen years or so since I had last set foot in the cemeteries. Although they were still present in my memory, I was going to have to look at those places in a very different light. I did not go straight back to my ancestors' tombs, but took the main routes to the funerary complexes of sultans Qaytbay and Barquq and the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i. Arriving at Qaytbay, I was surprised, to say the least, at the density of the population. The mosque was now surrounded by 'regular' tenement buildings several stories high, with laundry hanging

from the windows, shop fronts on the sidewalks, and children kicking balls around the streets. Indeed, the area had evolved into a bona fide residential district stretching north to Barquq, and it was the same to the south, at al-Shafi'i. But moving away from these poles of attraction—the mosque–mausolea—the fabric gradually evolved into an inconsistent patchwork of tenements, tombs, and tombs made into apartment buildings with the addition of an upper story, and then nothing but tombs, completely uninhabited.

So we continued on our way, maps in hand, and ended up spending the next three years combing the thousand hectares tomb by tomb, taking stock of those that were vacant and those that were occupied. The cemetery settlements turned out to be isolated residential enclaves whose development had been due, in large part, to the history of the cemeteries, permissiveness on the part of the authorities, the absence of surrounding walls, and the customary rivalry between the cities of the living and of the dead. As for the numbers, the 1986 census put the size of the necropolitan population—including parts of the urban fringe and, of course, the enclaves—at 109,673. We, on the other hand, found actual tomb dwellers to number no more than thirteen thousand. Either way, it was some way short of a million.

The tomb dwellers have often been likened to the people reduced, in other parts of the world, to living in shantytowns. There may well be parallels in terms of their social and economic circumstances, but there is no comparison when it comes to the quality of their housing. Most live in solid stone or brick buildings with several rooms and stone or marble-tiled floors, on walled plots of land, maybe even with trees. The dead lie in vaulted stone tombs below ground, reached via a staircase sealed off from the outside by a stone slab; they do not present a health hazard to the living due to the quality of the sandy desert soil, the lack of moisture preventing polluting agents from rising to the surface. Conditions in the tombs of Cairo are better than in the unhealthy housing of its old town, the emergency shelters, or the makeshift dwellings filling the interstices of the city.

Once we had realized that the squatter settlement issue was nowhere near as serious as the stories that initially sparked our interest had claimed, our attention turned to other—architectural and urbanistic—aspects of the cemeteries.

What intrigued us to begin with was the conflict we observed between the cities of the living and the dead: on the one hand the residential enclaves eating ever further into the funerary fabric of the latter, and on the other the Islamic cemeteries encrusted in the urban fabric of the former. We chose to concentrate on three of Cairo's six cemeteries: Imam al-Shafi'i to the south of the Citadel, the Mamluk cemetery to the east, and Bab al-Nasr beyond the northern Fatimid wall.[1] Both the authorities and property developers had high stakes on the space occupied by the cemeteries, which they saw as barriers to the city's expansion to the east. This was highly coveted land, given the soil structure and the fact that their proximity to urban neighborhoods meant that they would be easy to equip with basic infrastructure—not to mention the authorities' efforts to steer urban growth eastward in order to offset the unplanned proliferation of farmlands to the north and west. The option favored by planning officials was to transfer the tombs to sites out in the desert and use the freed-up land to develop high-class residential districts.

Meanwhile, another issue had claimed our attention: the fact that the cemeteries needed safeguarding as architectural heritage. Funerary monuments dating back to each successive era since the Arab conquest—including many newer tombs of genuine aesthetic, symbolic, and historic value—were in a state of ruin and decay and in danger of vanishing without trace. These places need to be explored on foot for their rich architectural and spatial diversity to be appreciated. One can legitimately talk about them in terms of cities and urban planning without fear of straying into the metaphorical: the surface area of tomb plots ranges from a few to a few dozen to several hundred square meters; and the 'fabric' features both regular, orthogonal grids that are the product of conscious attempts at organized and cost-effective land use and the loosest and most complex patchwork of plots, which are the fruit of chance and customary practices. The two extremes coexisted in separate and distinct areas. But they had also interpenetrated, producing all manner of variants. Obviously, volumetric composition is bound to differ depending on whether one is working with two, twenty, or two hundred square meters, and the diversity of plot sizes had engendered a wealth of architectural diversity: simple stone parallelepipeds adorned with a stela at either end, marvelous cabin-like structures adorned in fine wooden 'lacework,' villas with several outbuildings, and even great domed mosquemausolea—truly proud monuments standing majestically in vast green gardens.

Later, upon closer inspection, we came to identify perhaps a thousand years of architectural history, but we were already able to make out a wide range of building techniques, influences, echoes, and trends—especially the Egyptian people's enduring desire to use the tomb as a medium for projecting an image of themselves, thus reflecting its cultural importance in Egyptian society.

The cemeteries have been a source of fascination and wonder to many a visitor through the ages, yet the authorities had never granted them the attention they deserved, either as heritage to be safeguarded or as areas in need of structuring and development. For one thing, they lacked the necessary assessments, statistics, and cataloguing, so we set out to fill that particular gap.

We began our inventory by updating the most recent existing maps, which were based on aerial photographs taken in 1977, filling in the missing details and, most importantly, outlining which zones were occupied and which were not. We then set about determining the state of the built environment and identifying the areas that had fallen into disuse or ruin as a first step toward pinpointing those that were in need of safeguarding or that were unfit for human habitation. This yielded the basic data with which to devise alternative solutions to the demolition advocated by the authorities—a

devastatingly ill-conceived approach rooted in ignorance and short sightedness: ignorance of the exact situation on the ground, of the financial, social, and cultural costs involved in moving tombs and redeveloping the land, and of the laws protecting the tenth of Fatimid Cairo's historic monuments that happen to be located in its cemeteries, and a complete lack of the overarching vision needed to undertake the difficult task of urban development planning upon which the capital city's future depends.

Preparing an overall structural plan complete with a more detailed pilot project for a specific zone (Bab al-Nasr cemetery) would, in our view, provide enlightening guidelines for official decision-making. But our goal went beyond the familiar limits of a purely operational process. We wanted to restore the funerary art and architecture that constitutes a key part of the city's history and its contemporary fabric to its rightful place in the cultural heritage of Egypt. Given the haziness of the heritage concept in the prevailing socio-political climate at the time, it was set to be an uphill struggle.

Unsure of our chances of success, we set out to raise awareness of these little-known treasure troves among experts and non-experts alike by every means available to us: surveying the tombs and photographing the most outstanding and unusual ones; publishing articles and interviews in the local press; presenting papers and organizing and leading round-table debates at scientific symposia, and so on.

After three years, our campaign began to bear fruit. In 1991, two years after the Egyptian Sociologists Association had launched a socioeconomic survey based on our fieldwork findings, the minister of housing retracted his earlier statements on demolishing the cemeteries. Our structural plan was incorporated into the Greater Cairo master plan. State officials and the media began discussing the cemetery settlements issue in much more measured terms, and members of the state housing commission watched a film about the city of the dead being screened at the French cultural center[2] and began to see the cemeteries in a new light.

While ambitious plans to move the tombs were off the agenda, this did not mean an end to the indiscriminate damage being done by other, smaller-scale projects. It did not stop the Governorate of Cairo, for instance, from going ahead with the partial demolition of Bab al-Nasr cemetery, with a view to clearing access to the Fatimid walls. Our response to the destruction was to mount an exhibition about the necropolis[3] that would serve to show both what had been—and was in danger of being—lost for good, and to unveil our pilot project for a funerary heritage protection area geared to the enhancement of the wooden tombs in need of safeguarding. The exhibition prompted the launch of a national competition for the development of the area in and around this cemetery.

Meanwhile, alongside all the action being taken to bring about a shift from destructive practices to proper urban planning, something also needed to be done to address the paucity of knowledge about the present-day cemeteries of the descendants of the pharaohs. That is the aim of the seven chapters of this book.

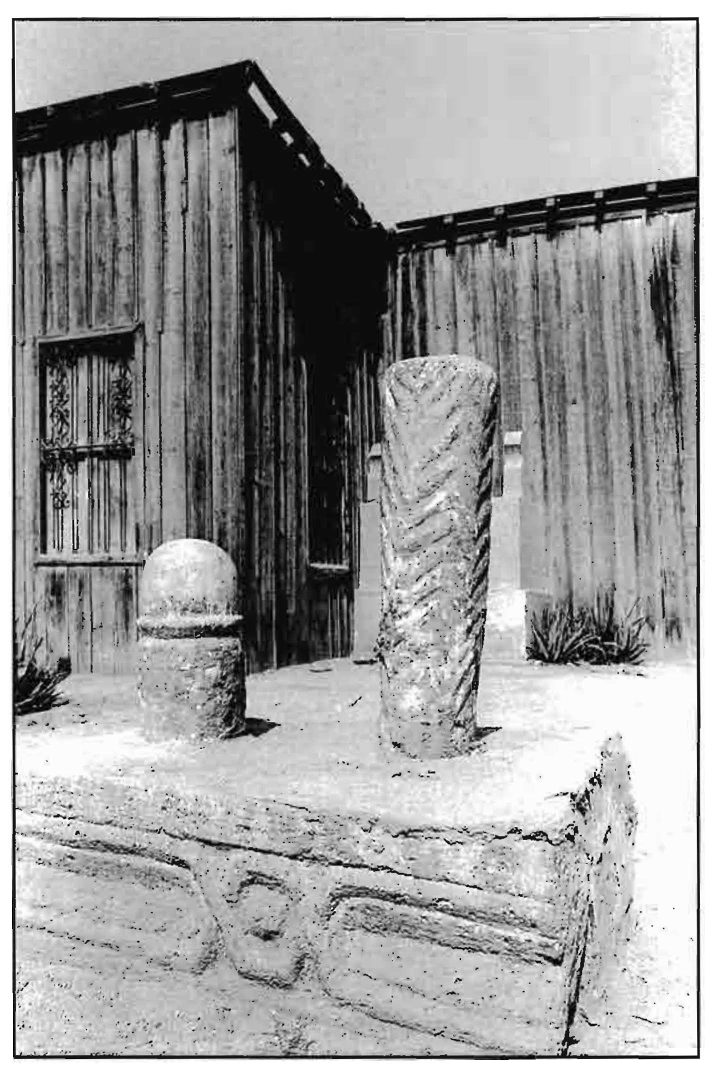
Chapter 1 is an overview of the origins and evolution of funerary rites in the Nile Valley, whose inhabitants appear to have preserved and protected their dead since protohistoric times; no evidence has been found of cannibalism or of bodies being left for the birds, dumped in the river, incinerated, and so on. A succession of poly- and monotheistic belief systems in this region has cultivated a reverence of the dead and their burial places. Embalming bodies may have fallen out of practice over two thousand years ago, and nothing is done to ensure the survival of the departed beyond the grave, but people continue to build impressively large posthumous dwellings to house their bodily remains in materials designed to withstand time—eternity for the dead being reliant upon the durability of stone in this ever-changing realm. Some customs may have changed altogether, but current practices and beliefs remain steeped in the past. This chapter looks at the continuity and change in the social practices surrounding death. To guide us on our way we referred to Ragon (1981) and Auzelle (1965) for the architectural and urbanistic aspects, Posener's extremely useful *Dictionary of Egyptian Civilization*, together with Montet (1970) and Raaké (1952) for background data on pharaonic Egypt, and the remarkable work of Egyptian sociologist Sayed 'Eweiss for his insights into the religious beliefs of the Copts and Muslims in contemporary Egypt ('Eweiss 1966, 1972).

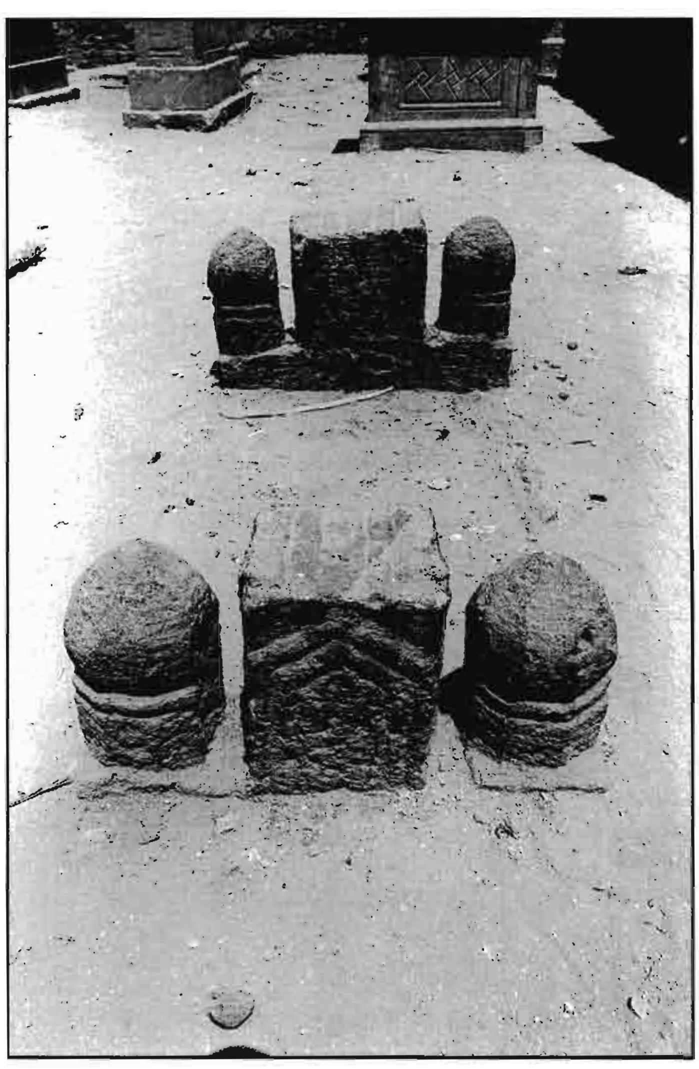
The next three chapters take the reader on a voyage of discovery through the three main cemeteries of Cairo, tracing their history from their earliest beginnings and describing their current state. Inventories, maps, plans, photographs, and old illustrations help relay the architectural morphology and spatial layout of the tombs. This part of the book is based on fieldwork and documentary research to collate historical data scattered throughout a host of bibliographic material dealing not with the cemeteries in particular, but with the whole of the city of Cairo. Of the works cited in the bibliography, we found the following especially useful here: Massignon (1958), on the historical topology of the city of the dead; Hamza (1986), on the Mamluk-era cemeteries; and Raghib (1972, 1974, 1977), a series of articles on the Fatimid period.

Chapter 5 brings us back to the necropolitan settlement issue—the original focus of the research that culminated in this book—looking at how it ties in with the Egyptian housing crisis and with the close relationship that the Egyptian people have maintained with their burial sites for thousands of years.

Chapter 6 revolves around a discussion of heritage and its conservation, asking questions about the emergence of the heritage concept, what it covers, what safeguarding practices it requires, and where the cemeteries have figured in the policies enacted in the late nineteenth century that are designed to safeguard Egyptian monuments. Analyzing how the heritage has been treated at various points in history has proved useful here and has helped us gain insight into the nature of the challenges facing the cemeteries and their monuments today. Reports of the *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe* and the archives of the *Service des Antiquités* provided us with the basic data we needed to

In Islam, only a few stones indicating the location of the tomb are allowed.





understand both those challenges and the reasons for the Egyptian elite's growing interest in safeguarding the heritage.

The final chapter reflects on what the future holds for the city of the dead in light of the draft planning proposals put forward by UNESCO for the safeguarding and development of the medieval old town of Cairo (Fustat, Bulaq, and the southern and eastern necropolises) by the Governorate of Cairo for the Greater Cairo master plan, and by the authors of this book within the framework of the Bab al-Nasr safeguarding and development pilot project.

Galila El Kadi

Notes

[1] The other three being Zayn al-'Abidin, which was completely disused and awaiting demolition, and Heliopolis and Madinat Nasr, two modern cemeteries in the eastern suburbs, where the tombs were very much smaller and enclosed within walls.

[2] Alain Bonnamy, *Le Caire, la cité des morts* (1986), first screened at the 1987 FIFARC international architecture film festival, in Bordeaux, France, 10–15 March 1987, and then at the Center Georges Pompidou as part of the "Les magiciens de la terre" exhibition, 17 May–2 July 1989.

[3] "Bab al-Nasr: Une Nécropole en Bois," an exhibition of 31 plates of photographs and plans mounted by Galila El Kadi and Alain Bonnamy and staged at the French Cultural Center in Cairo from 9–18 May 1990 and at the headquarters of the GOHBPR from 20 May–10 June 1990.

1 Continuity and Change in Religious Beliefs

"I awake underground, in solitude, and I implore God to be my friend."

(Harawi, late twelfth century)

Long before the dawn of history as we know it, Egyptians were demonstrating their belief in an afterlife by burying their dead, curled up in the fetal position, in primitive graves dug straight into the desert soil.[1]

Infused with an intense love of life on the lush grasslands of the banks of the Nile and in dread of death, the people of Egypt conjured up an idealized realm that was a corollary to—and a perfected copy of—the earthly world around them.

Through the ages, many religious beliefs may have evolved and diversified beyond all recognition, but those that have to do with an ideal, everlasting life beyond the grave have remained unchanged. They are at the root of every transcendental faith.

The funerary rites and practices of modern-day Islam and Christianity have been influenced greatly by pagan and ancient beliefs and the customs to which they gave rise. Both believe death to mean the separation of the intangible and immortal soul—the spiritual part of a living being—from its tangible and ephemeral physical body.

The ancient Egyptians believed much the same, only they went further, developing a highly sophisticated breakdown of the soul into distinct forms and manifestations:

- The *akh* is the immortal element, an unseen force that lent its powers to human beings or to the gods, sometimes acting as a spiritual intermediary for dead kings and ghosts.[2] Among the Copts, demons that once used to be dignitaries are called *akhu*.[3] Among Muslims, intimate relations or close contacts with spiritual forces, be they good or evil, are called *mikhawi*.
- The *ba* is the spiritual part of a person which, after death, recovers its personality and is free to wander at will.[4] It can linger around the dead body in the tomb, possibly in the shape of a bird, or visit the places where the person had liked to live.[5] A similar idea exists in Islam, where the souls of some great martyrs metamorphose into green birds flying free in paradise.[6]
- The *ka* is a hard-to-define manifestation of vital creative and sustaining forces.[7]

These abstract elements had to be reunited and reincorporated into a human being's physical body before a new life could begin, hence the emergence of embalming practices whose goal was to preserve that body. The substratum of Egypt became a vast storage space for the bodies of the dead and, of course, for the many treasures they carried with them into the tomb, together with everything else they would need for eternal life.

The monotheistic religions also believe in the soul returning to the body and being resurrected, although not according to the pharaohs' timescale. For the latter it happened seventy days after death, after the mouth-opening ceremony.[8] Muslims and Copts, on the other hand, must wait an unspecified length of time for Judgment Day, when the Almighty will bring their bones back from the dust and ensure that each and every soul can recognize its body.[9] In the meantime, the soul does not lie idle.

According to the Copts, the pure souls of the pious go to a place where they are given a foretaste of the everlasting happiness to come, while the tarnished souls of sinners are confined in prisons and subjected to small doses of the eternal torment awaiting them in hell.[10]

To Muslims, the posthumous 'interworld' is more hierarchic, organized according to the gradation of sins and acts of piety. Those with the most favored status are the prophets, whose "incorruptible bodies God cradles in the tomb, like the seven sleepers."[11] The *musabilin* (holy war martyrs), after their earthly demise, go straight to paradise and a place close to the Almighty, "in the bodies of green birds who have their nests in chandeliers hung from the throne of the Almighty."[12] But those who have committed no sin are differentiated from those who are riddled with it. The latter must wait at the gates of paradise until they have paid their debts, whereas the souls of ordinary people go straight to heaven. Three days after their arrival has been registered, however, they return briefly to earth to rejoin their bodies in the grave for questioning by the judging angels, Munkir and Nakir.[13] Whether they end up in heaven or in hell will depend on how they measure up to the two basic principles of Islam: belief in the oneness of God and acknowledgment that the Prophet Muhammad is His messenger.[14] Once this has been decided they die a second death; the souls of sinners remain enclosed in the tomb, where they are subjected to terrible suffering, and those of the faithful return to their creator to await the final judgment day in an indeterminate place.

The soul is widely believed to return to the tomb not just on the third day after the person's death, but also on the seventh, the fifteenth, and the fortieth days, and every Friday thereafter. "The belief is that the prophet's spirit comes every Monday and Friday morning to breathe in the fragrance of the aloe planted near the tomb."[15] The souls of deceased Muslims and Copts alike spend the rest of the time 'under house arrest' in one of two specific places: paradise or the underworld.

The ancient Egyptians, in contrast, never regarded the earth as out of bounds to the dead. A soul could return to inhabit its still-intact body or choose to metamorphose into a bird, a flower, or a snake. It could stay in the vicinity of its tomb—to take part in its own funeral rites, for instance—or travel out to its fields, visit close relatives, and so on.[16]

The posthumous journey was divided into two separate stages, with judgment before Osiris, the god of the dead, in between. In the first stage the person's soul, released from his or her dead body, would emerge in the afterworld and then, blinded by the light, return to

earth to rejoin the body in the tomb. This could be likened to the Muslim soul's journey through the seven heavens to the great beyond and its subsequent return to the grave for questioning by the judging angels. While the route back to earth is relatively uneventful for the latter, however, ancient Egyptian souls were confronted with a host of challenges: avoiding traps, crossing areas of darkness, and using the appropriate incantations to triumph over the dangers. Those that made it would arrive in Amenti, where Osiris dwelt, in the western reaches of the underworld. The rest of the underworld, Duat, was a darker, more desolate region containing a burning lake or island, fields of fire, and the subterranean torture chambers.[17] These places correlate to the lowest levels of what Christianity and Islam call hell, where souls are made to burn in the eternal flames or swim in lakes of blood before being pelted with stones.[18]

"Standing before Osiris, the ancient Egyptian deceased glorify the god with the unbeating heart and, after uttering the traditional incantation, unite and identify with him, as Christians die in Christ."[19] Next came the psychostasia, or weighing of the soul, with Horus, son of Osiris and Isis, bringing the deceased before a learned assembly of forty-two judges presided over by his father and watched by his mother, her sister the goddess Nephthys, and sometimes the great judge Ra. The soul would be placed on one side of the scales and Maat, goddess of truth and justice, represented by a feather, would note its name on the other. While the weighing was under way—under the watchful eye of the clerk of the court, Thoth, the god of wisdom, who would engrave the results on a stone tablet—the deceased made a two-part negative confession.[20] If the judgment went against him, he was forbidden to leave the realm of Duat for an unspecified length of time. If it went in his favor he became a blessed spirit, granted complete freedom. "Days would be spent resting peacefully in the tomb, with the occasional outing to walk the earth; at night, the dead would accompany the sun on a subterranean voyage to the other world, towing his boat and stopping on the way in the fields of Osiris. Then, when radiant dawn returned the sun to our world, the errant soul would fly back hastily to the coolness and shade of its tomb."[21]

A psychostasia-type rite also appears in the Qur'an in the scene of the final judgment, except the dead person's sins and good deeds are weighed against infinitely tiny particles, or 'atoms,' in place of the name penned by Maat's feather, and the judging angels Munkir and Nakir attend the sentencing of the condemned in case she tries to refute the statements she had made during initial questioning in the tomb.

Funerary practices

Some of the religious beliefs of both Muslim and Coptic Egyptians have thus been inspired by those of the pharaohs, and the same is true of their funerary practices and popular customs relating to death. Countless echoes of ancient Egypt can be detected in their burials and funerary rites, customary mourning, regular visits to the graveyard, local festivals, and the funerary foundation. The most striking similarity is evident when a person dies: female kith and kin become 'professional' mourners, wailing over the body and—depending on how closely related they are to the deceased—rolling on the floor, scratching their cheeks, beating their breasts, and tearing their clothes. And we see them as well in the funeral procession of Ramose, the last vizir of Amunhotep III and the first in the reign of Akhenaten: the beautiful, full-figured, hired mourners "draped in their long veils, seated in huddles, letting out high-pitched screams, and plunging an entire district of the village into grief with their clamorous dirge."[22]

Such outpourings of grief are still quite common in rural and working-class urban districts today, where veiled women in long black robes follow the deceased person's coffin, slapping their cheeks and rolling their eyes heavenward. Their heart-rending elegies—which vary according to the person's age and gender and the cause of death—convey the depth of pain felt at the loss of a loved one[23] as, like Isis and Nephthys over the body of the great Egyptian god-king Osiris, they implore a brother, sister, parent, or child to return to earth. The tragedy of Osiris's death continues to fill the souls of contemporary Egyptians with sorrow, pain, fear, and anguish in the face of death. "Like a contagion, the death of Osiris affected the male gods of every rank and stature: Ra and Horus, Ptah and Amun, Hapi, Qebhsenuef, and others. Gods die. . . . And goddesses? They live on to weep and lament. A mournful, eerie, unreal atmosphere spreads through the whole of Egyptian life, an atmosphere of necrobiosis, necrophilia, necromancy . . . ."[24]

And today, don't people still go to offer their condolences, to weep and lament? First with the mourners and wailers during the three days of mourning after the burial, and then every Thursday until *Arba'in*, the fortieth day? Indeed, on the last Friday—or even last day—before *Arba'in*, they actually move into the cemetery with recitations of the Qur'an and meals of fruit, fresh basil, palm leaves, and roses to place on the tomb.

These two monotheistic religions condemn such spectacular displays of pain in the face of death, of course, because they see death as an honor, the deceased having been chosen by the Creator for a better life in the eternal hereafter. Death should therefore be greeted with joy, and all suffering must be silent, all pain kept to oneself. Although deeply shocked that the lower classes indulge in open expressions of grief, however old the practice might be, upper-class Egyptians have nonetheless continued to abide by the equally age-old custom of regularly visiting the cemetery and performing what the clergy regard as equally intolerable rites.

Visits to the tomb

Islam has not outlawed the practice of visiting the dead. On the contrary, both the Prophet and the Qur'an positively recommend it.[25]

This endorsement has contributed to the endurance, in the land of the pharaohs, of the ancient custom of regular extended stays in the cemetery. According to Massignon (1958), the most fundamental characteristic social feature of the Qarafa, Cairo's southern cemetery, is the throng of women taking their children to pray among the tombs on Fridays.[26] Up until the early 1900s, it was the only time of week that they ever went out. Amin (1953) describes the Qarafa as a cemetery "where people gather, especially on a Friday morning, to hear the usually blind *fiqi* reciting the Qur'an and to give bread and fruit as alms for the dead. It used to be customary to camp there overnight, far from the town, which led to immoral acts and an official ban."[27]

As far back as the Fatimid period, the clergy already regarded the crowds moving into the cemeteries as an intrusion and a constant source of outrage. They found it intolerable to see a city of the dead "sullied by the living who camped there for days on end in the stone-walled tombs, thus escaping Cairo and laws that tolerated neither theatre, nor forum, nor learned assembly; feasting day and night in festooned residences; singing and dancing around the flowerbeds on holy days; commemorating the dead they are polluting with their trash."[28]

While Massignon (1958) refuses to see these practices as a "resurgence of the dissolute ways of the pagan hordes of Bubastis," Serge Sauneron and many other Egyptologists, sociologists, and anthropologists have described them as among the most spectacular relics of ancient Egypt.[29] Such views need qualifying, perhaps, for visiting a cemetery, taking strolls there, and meeting others is not a uniquely Egyptian custom: it has been observed among other peoples in the Muslim East and in the West, especially in past centuries. In Paris in the 1700s, charitable institutions would assemble in the galleries of the *cimetière des Innocents*, which were "adorned with tapestries, draperies, and flowers. Notwithstanding the foul stench and the incessant carting of corpses, the mass graves of the *Saints Innocents* were as animated a place for walkers in the eighteenth century as the arcades of the Palais Royal were in the nineteenth."[30] Customs such as these may have died out in industrialized societies due to changing mores and secularization, but they continue to prevail in Muslim countries.

Gathering in the cemetery on a Friday is an age-old tradition throughout the Islamic world. "Friday takes precedence over the two high festivals just as the Sabbath day takes precedence over Passover in Judaism. It is the day when the creation was completed, when Adam was born and entered paradise on earth, and when the hour of judgment will sound. And joining the community in prayer, rather than going on a pilgrimage, is the way to earn forgiveness for one's sins (of the week). The people see that forgiveness as a prelude to resurrection, and a brief return of the souls of the dead to their tombs."[31] Yet this is no more than a throwback to pagan beliefs; according to the Qur'an, resurrection takes place once, and once only, at a date to be determined on Judgment Day.[32]

While the women pray in the cemetery, the men are at the mosque, thus keeping up a tradition of gender segregation. Mixed visits take place on festivals and during the night of mid-*Sha'ban*.[33] But Massignon concludes that, "for ten centuries, the only Muslim capital where women have periodically left their homes en masse to go to the cemetery and, by extension, attend readings of the Qur'an for the dead *(maqra'a)*, has been Cairo."[34]

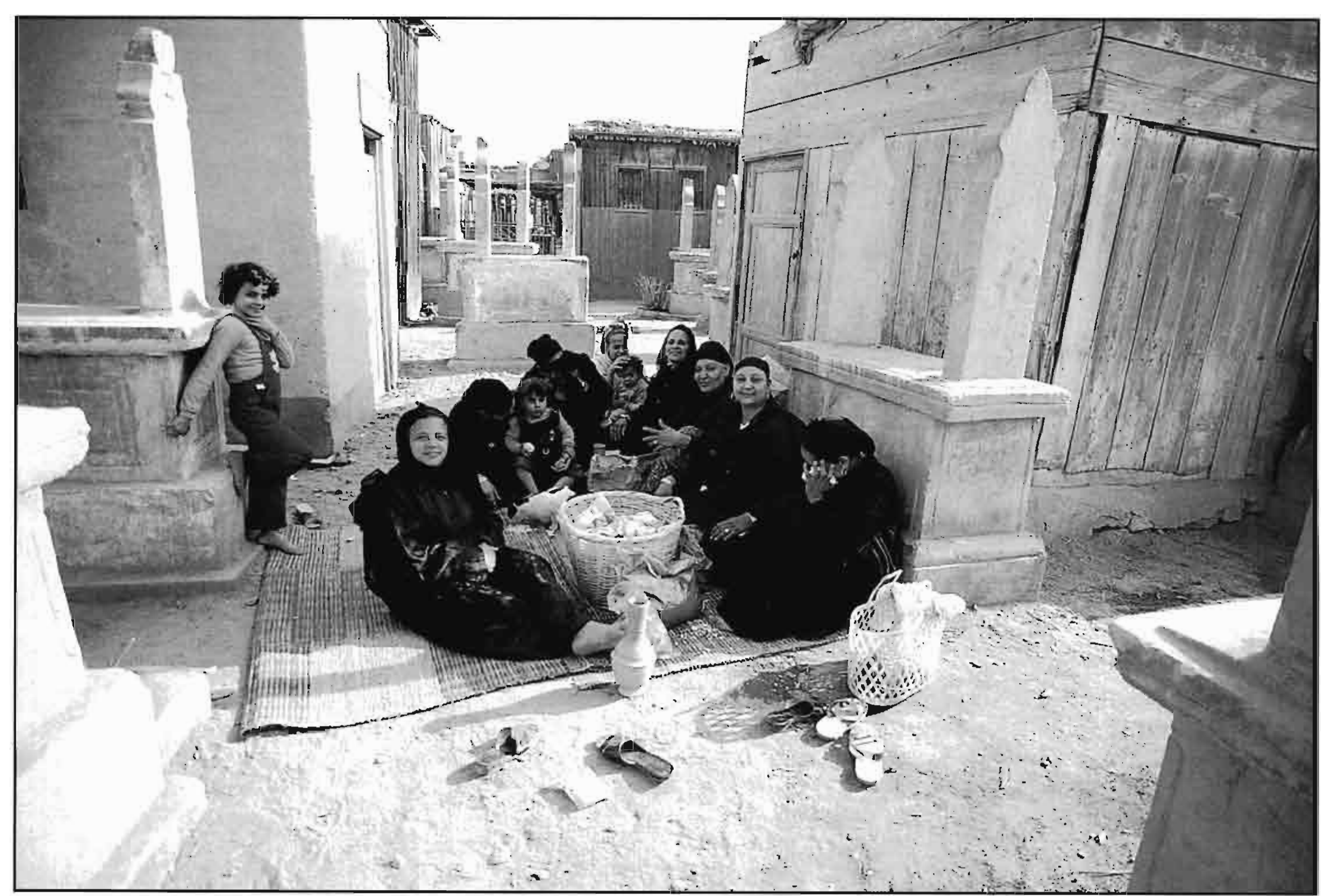
Another distinctive feature of Egypt is the pilgrimage route of the seven tombs, which was made official by the Ayyubid Malik al-Kamil in 1237 with encouragement from the sovereign's spiritual guide, Fakhr al-Farsi. Then came a pilgrim's representative *(naqib)*, religious leaders in charge of visits *(shuyukh al-ziyara)*, and a chief of police *(sahib al-shurta)* for the Qarafa.[35]

"Such a system, the only one of its kind in the Islamic world, became necessary due to the quantity of private pilgrimages—both women only and mixed—spending days and nights unsupervised in the Qarafa among the tombs."[36] A list was drawn up of seven shrines, including the tombs of revered 'Alid martyrs (Shi'ite followers of 'Ali), Sufi mystics, and holy men. The starting point of the route was set at the tomb of Sayyida Nafisa, "where Shafi'i went on a posthumous pilgrimage."[37]

There are now eight days every year when Egyptians go to the cemetery, apart from the weekly Friday visits.[38] Such customs, although still observed among the lower classes, have been more or less abandoned by the bourgeoisie, who make do with the *ziyara*s (visits) on the two high festivals. In addition to the accepted visiting days, however, there are countless *mulid*s to commemorate the birthdays of holy men and women buried in the cemeteries,[39] when spectacular displays of religious song and dance—or *dhikr*—take place, turning the cemeteries into something of a fairground. Alongside the people who have come from across Egypt to camp among the tombs, one finds merchants selling food, candy, and children's toys, and even carousels and swings.

While the *mulid*s of Cairo may differ in detail from the festive rites of pharaonic times, those of Upper Egypt are astonishingly similar. The mere sight of the men of Luxor carrying aloft through the crowds a boat representing the holy man Abu Hagag, whose mosque still stands in the middle of Luxor temple, is like watching the same scene as it might have unfolded in the past in honor of Amun.[40]

Women paying a visit to the Bab al-Nasr cemetery.



Where the Egyptians differ from other contemporary Muslim societies, then, is in their regular, frequent visits to cemeteries, in the length of time they spend there with their dead, and in the intermingling of men and women during the visit. Do these features amount to relics of ancient Egypt?

Letters to the dead

Among the stranger surviving traces in the beliefs and practices revolving around death are the letters sent to the dead. A survey of Egyptian intellectuals in the early 1970s revealed that 14 percent of the country's intelligentsia continued to partake in this ancient practice.[41] As in ancient times, Egyptians write to a deceased close relative explaining their troubles and asking for help. Even more often such appeals are made to a venerated dead person, a saint, or a prophet; the appelant is thus claiming from God the testimonial right of the venerated dead to have a prayer answered.

The obituary columns of Egyptian daily newspapers, some of which can run to several pages, are brimming with short letters to the dead like a mournful farewell, expressing heartbreak and regret at a separation, and wishing them happiness in the great beyond. The Copts go to even more extreme lengths to demonstrate their sorrow and their commitment to ancient traditions.

Among the many other ways for the living to communicate with the dead, apart from letter-writing, is to induce dreams through *istikhara*,[42] or, on the days when they are meant to visit their tombs, to "grasp in their right hand and embrace the *shahid* or marker—the stela standing on top of the tomb—and to say the Salam over it. . . ."[43]

From the funerary foundation to the *waqf*

Of the many other examples attesting to the presence of ancient Egypt in a host of funerary beliefs and practices, the most noteworthy can be seen in the Muslim world's *waqf* endowment system—together, by extension, with that of mortmain developed under the Catholic Church in Medieval Europe—whose origins can be traced back to the funerary foundation made necessary by the mortuary cults that proliferated in the days of the pharaohs.

Keeping a mortuary cult meant having regularly to replenish stocks of food for the deceased, who were presumed to continue leading a normal life in the tomb, with the exact same needs and, apparently, faculties as those of the living. According to Serge Sauneron, even in prehistoric times the dead were already taking whole larderfuls of provisions with them underground into the grave.[44] Their direct heirs, especially eldest sons, were duty-bound to ensure that the tomb remained well-stocked and to feed the cleric in charge of its upkeep. But it was a duty whose fulfillment eventually proved beyond the means of the living. With each successive generation, mortuary cults proliferated. This eventually led to the creation of the funerary foundation, which consisted of allocating to a deceased person's mortuary cult a property whose proceeds were to be plowed back into that cult. Originally a privilege strictly for kings, the only landowners in Egypt, this system was later extended to nobles and worthies and then, in the early Middle Kingdom, to the whole of society.[45] "Thus, every Egyptian had his own means with which to try and ensure the sustainability of a future mortuary cult before he died. Any that could afford it set up a small foundation with a resident *ka*-priest to perform the appropriate rituals and make sure there were enough food offerings in the tomb. Similar foundations had provided a living for the masses of people working in the service of a single dead person in the Old Kingdom. But it soon became clear that the dividing up of original endowments as inheritance would lead slowly but surely to the provision of offerings being abandoned, hence the introduction in the Middle Kingdom of a new system under which endowments must remain undivided and be handed down to none other than one of the sons of the originally instated priest. These arrangements were set out in a contract between the tomb's owner and his future priest-in-charge."[46]

The funerary foundation system was dropped at the end of the pharaonic period, after which the only duties of the living toward their dead were to perform a libation of symbolic water once every ten days and to say the name of the deceased, "enough to give her, in the sadness of the great beyond, another few moments of pale survival."[47]

It was not until the tenth century that the Fatimids revived the system to ensure the upkeep of the magnificent tombs, mausolea, and mosques built in the cities of the dead and the living. Funerary foundations also, by extension, came to ensure an income for life for the donor's designated heirs and the staff charged with the upkeep of those posthumous 'residences'—with enough to cover offerings for the poor and the needy on feast days and to pay Qur'anic chanters to lead prayers for the deceased person's soul. Such practices were condemned by the Mu'tazalites, incensed that the rich should be able to treat themselves to posthumous rites to the exclusion of the poor. But in Islam, the dead in their graves profit from every prayer that is said for them, whether by a hired *muqri'*, a relative, or even a passerby. Massignon (1958) highlights the inscriptions on Turkish and Indo-Afghan tombs imploring every passerby to "say the Fatiha for my soul, the appeal for recourse to the King on the day of judgment, and we shall both of us find peace."[48] Many such inscriptions can be seen on Egyptian tombs too. Once again, it is tempting to draw parallels with ancient Egypt and the appeals of the dead to those visiting their tombs: "O ye who live on earth, my fellow servants, following in the footsteps of the gods shall be they that say: thousands of loaves, jugs of beer, oxen, and birds for the one and only friend, Pepieni."[49]

Some seek to avoid a second death in the grave by appealing for food, others to escape punishment in the afterworld. The wording may have changed, but the aim has remained almost exactly the same.

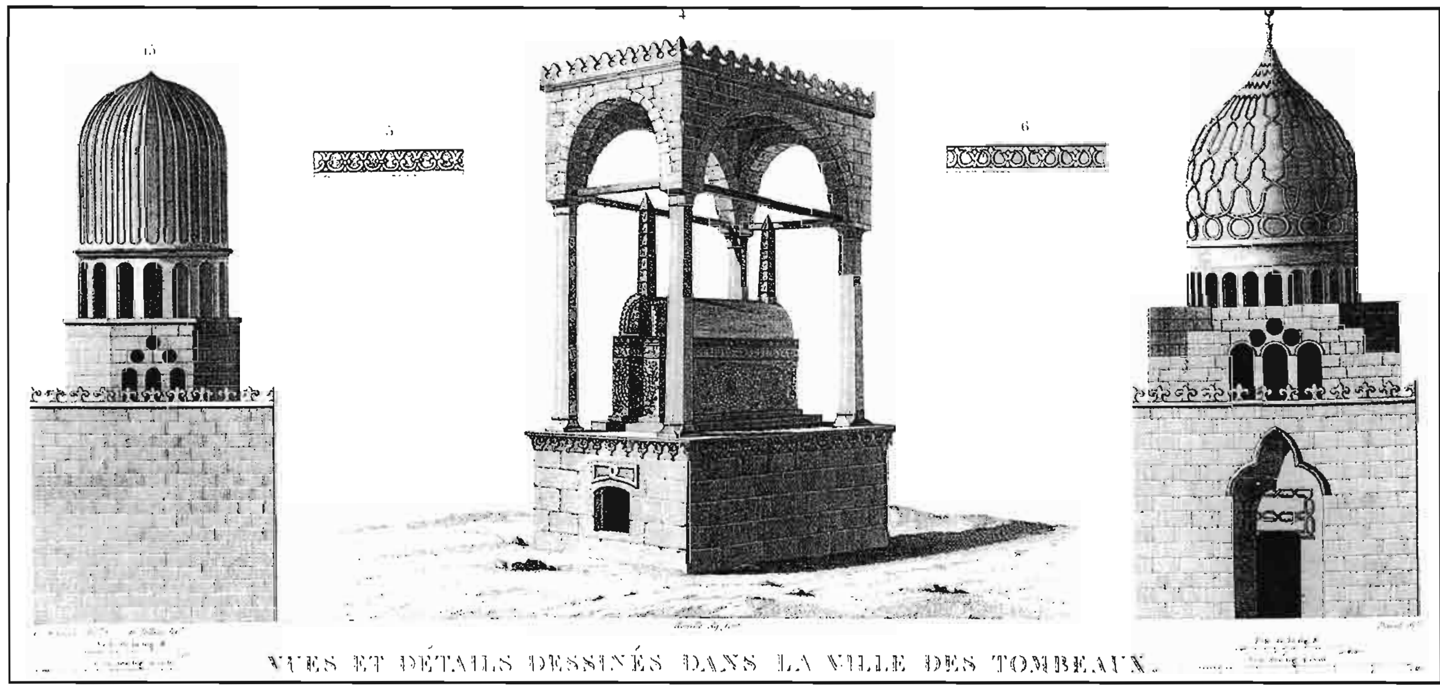
One finds that selfsame desire for redemption beyond the grave—or rather "to purchase a place in paradise"—among the Copts and throughout Catholic Christendom, where masses held for the peace of departed souls led to the creation of funerary foundations and the obligation to donate to the Church.

Ragon (1981) describes how the Church in thirteenth-century Europe institutionalized the last will and testament that had previously existed in Roman law as a civil deed, rendering it sacred and compulsory for even the poorest members of society. It "specified the number of masses to be held for the peace of a deceased person's soul, masses that were invoiced and paid for out of the inheritance. In the eleventh century, the nobility spent a fortune on pious donations to atone for a life that had been anything but pious."[50]

Helplessness in the face of the mysteries of death, the inequalities and injustices reigning over the earth, and the grief felt at separation from a loved one have driven humans, since very early history, to conjure up an imaginary idealized world and to develop rites and beliefs that have remained unchanged to this day. Many a Muslim or Christian funerary custom is no more than a branch or variant of—even a mere sequel to—pagan practices. Striking likenesses can be seen between certain ancient Egyptian practices and those of Europe in the Middle Ages or, more recently, modern-day Greece or Corsica: the funeral processions, the mourners, the pouring of libations on tombs, or the burying of the dead with precious objects. Not every people's practices hark back to ancient Egypt, of course, but reactions to the universal phenomenon of death have been broadly similar, notwithstanding distinctive local and regional features, differences in the ways in which customs and mores have evolved down the ages, and changes in how death is actually perceived. These, not least in industrialized societies, have entailed a certain indifference to death and the demise of religious beliefs relating to the afterlife.

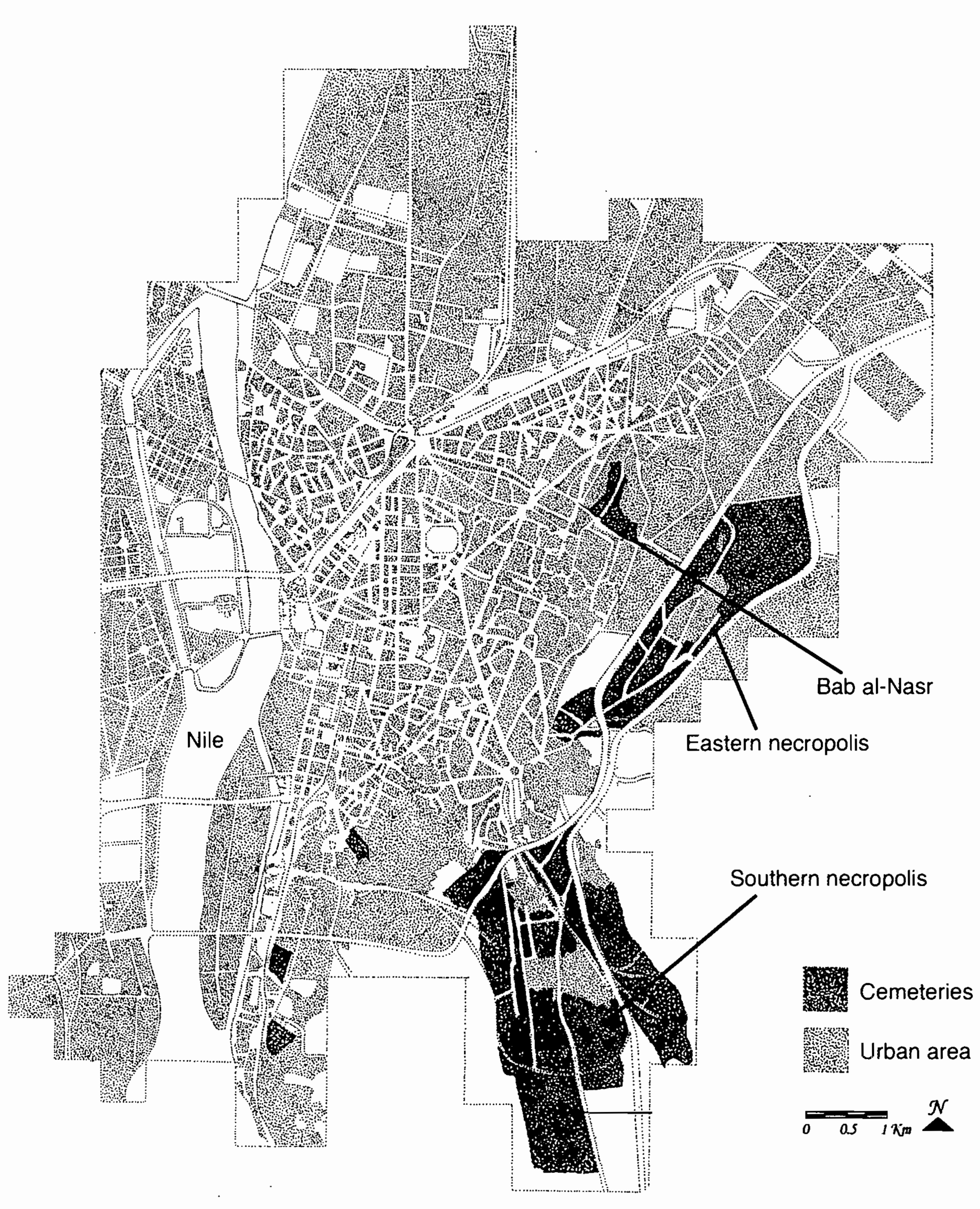
But the tombs and funerary architecture of the cemeteries still form part of our urban landscapes and continue to enjoy a significant amount of care and attention from the living. More so in Egypt, yet again, than anywhere else. Evidence of this can be seen in the enormous and disproportionate scale of its cemeteries and funerary complexes, the size and variety of tombs designed as idealized replicas of the houses of the living, and the multifunctional nature of the city of the dead.

Source: *Description de l'Égypte: État moderne,* Cairo, vol. 1, pl. 65.



Notes

[1] Posener 1989, 72.
[2] Posener 1989, 9.
[3] Posener 1989, 9.
[4] Posener 1989, 9.
[5] Posener 1989, 9.
[6] 'Eweiss 1966, 103.
[7] Apart from the *akh*, the *ba* and the *ka*, which united in the body to form a complete being, an Egyptian's personality comprised several other elements that expressed his or her inner essence, e.g., the shadow and the name (Posener 1989, 10).
[8] A ritual performed on the mummified body and statues in the embalming rooms on burial day—seventy days after the person's death—and designed to give or restore full use of the organ needed to eat, drink, and issue orders to people and things (Posener 1989, 208).
[9] Qur'an 39:42
[10] Matthew, 25:31–34, 41–46.
[11] Cited in Massignon 1958, 38.
[12] *USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Texts*, "Translation of Sahih Muslim," Bk. 20, Ch. 33, No. 4651, Trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, http://www.usc.edu/dept /MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/020.smt.html (accessed 10 April 2007).
[13] In a *hadith* quoted by Abu Hurayra, the Prophet says that "when a man is buried, two angels appear: the blue one is Munkir and the other, the black one, is Nakir" ('Eweiss 1966, 102).
[14] 'Eweiss 1966, 102.
[15] Massignon 1958, 46.
[16] Posener 1989, 73.
[17] Kolpaktchy 1983, 20.
[18] Ibn al-Qayyim, *Al Roh*, Cairo, 115–17.
[19] Kolpaktchy 1983, 20.
[20] The first confession addressed the assembly as a whole: "I have not treated any person unjustly. I have not mistreated any animal. . . . I have not committed blasphemy against any god. . . ." and so on. The second confession comprised forty-two denials addressed to each of the forty-two judges in turn: "Oh judge, I did not witness this . . . . " and so on. At the foot of the scales was Ammut, the Devourer of the Dead, awaiting the ruling and ready to pounce on the deceased if the ruling went against him (Posener 1989, 234).
[21] Posener 1989, 74.
[22] Description of the moving picture on the southern wall of Ramose's tomb in Thebes (Posener 1989, 243; 277).
[23] 'Eweiss 1972, 80–81.
[24] Kolpaktchy 1983, 13.
[25] "When someone dies, his life's work is interrupted in all but three respects: ongoing charity, contributions to science that benefits others, and having dutiful children praying for him." *Hadith* cited in Massignon 1958, 3.
[26] Massignon 1958, 29.
[27] Amin 1953, 322.
[28] Massignon 1958, 31.
[29] "Like the ancient Egyptians, the relatives of the deceased regularly go to visit the tombs, where they burn incense, offer sacrifices, and even deposit food. . . ." (Posener 1989, 278).
[30] Michel Ragon, *L'Espace de la mort, essais sur l'architecture, la decoration et l'urbanisation funéraires* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981), 65.
[31] Massignon 1958, 29.
[32] Ibn Muhammad ibn Hazm, *al-Malal wa-l-nahl XXX*.
[33] Massignon 1958, 30.
[34] Shari'a jurists such as Ibn Haj condemned these moonlight outings. As a rule, *rabbat al-khudur* (veiled women of whom one must see not even a shadow) can only go out at night, with an escort (Massignon 1958, 31).
[35] Massignon 1958, 43.
[36] Massignon 1958, 43.
[37] Massignon 1958, 43.
[38] The first Friday of Muharram (Islamic calendar); 'Ashura (Persian new year); one day in the month of Ragab—a separate date for the bourgeoisie, the people of Cairo and Bulaq, and the peasants of Giza and Imbaba; the 13th and 14th of mid-Sha'ban; the last day of Sha'ban; 'Id al-Saghir , when the end of Ramadan is celebrated with a meal of dates and oranges; and 'Id al-Kabir, the festival of the sacrifice, when a sheep is slaughtered and a meal of rice, meat, and *fatta* bread is shared with the poor (Massignon 1958, 45).
[39] Sixteen *mulids* honoring imams and holy men and women figure in the first list drawn up by Roland Michel (Michel 1900).
[40] Posener 1989, 277.
[41] 'Eweiss 1972, 19, note 25.
[42] Performing *istikhara*, or hierognosis, is a tenet of Islam. It occupies the same place spiritualism does in Christianity and among the better-off sections of society: the above-mentioned survey of Egyptian intellectuals showed that while 54.3 percent of those questioned turned to spiritualism in order to enter into contact with and ask favors of the dead, 27.6 percent performed the *istikhara*, plunging into dream after readings from the Qur'an and special prayers ('Eweiss 1972, 154).
[43] Massignon 1958, 46.
[44] Posener 1989, 76.
[45] Posener 1989, 76.
[46] Posener 1989, 76.
[47] Posener 1989, 76.
[48] Massignon 1958, 78.
[49] Posener 1989, 78.
[50] Posener 1989, 86.

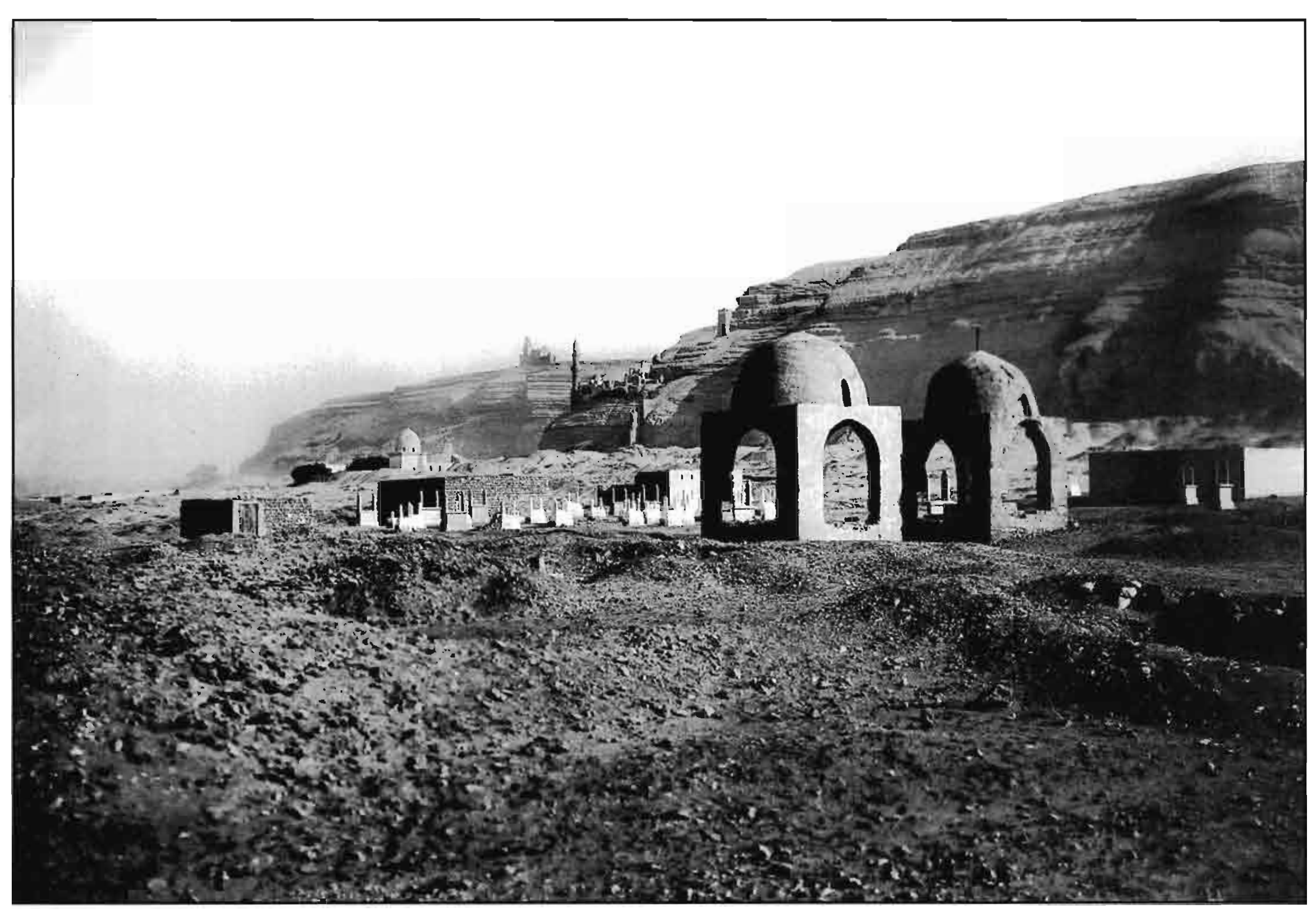


Map indicating the location of the cemeteries (base map: 1/1000, Cairo 1930, updated by the authors).

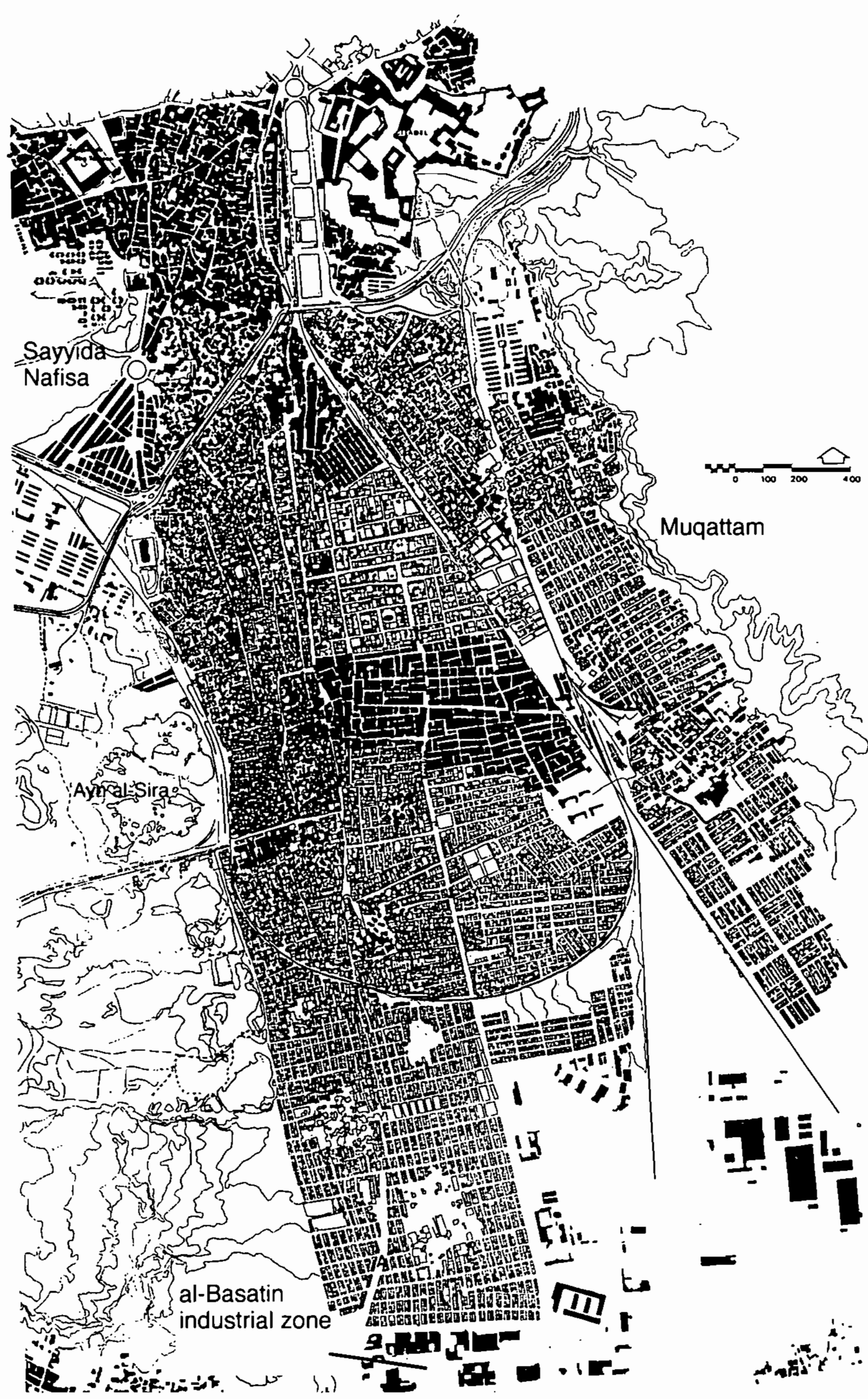
2 The Southern Necropolis: The Qarafa

Photograph by Lehnert and Landrock, beginning of the twentieth century.

Primitive site of the southern necropolis (photograph by Lehnert and Landrock, early twentieth century).



Access map (drawing by G. El Kadi and G. Amer, base map by SFS/IGN, France, 1978, updated by the authors).



The southern necropolis has not always been located south of the city. Back in the days when Cairo was still confined to the area around Fustat,[1] it spread to the north and east. We shall come back to that later, however, when we look at how the necropolis has evolved over time.

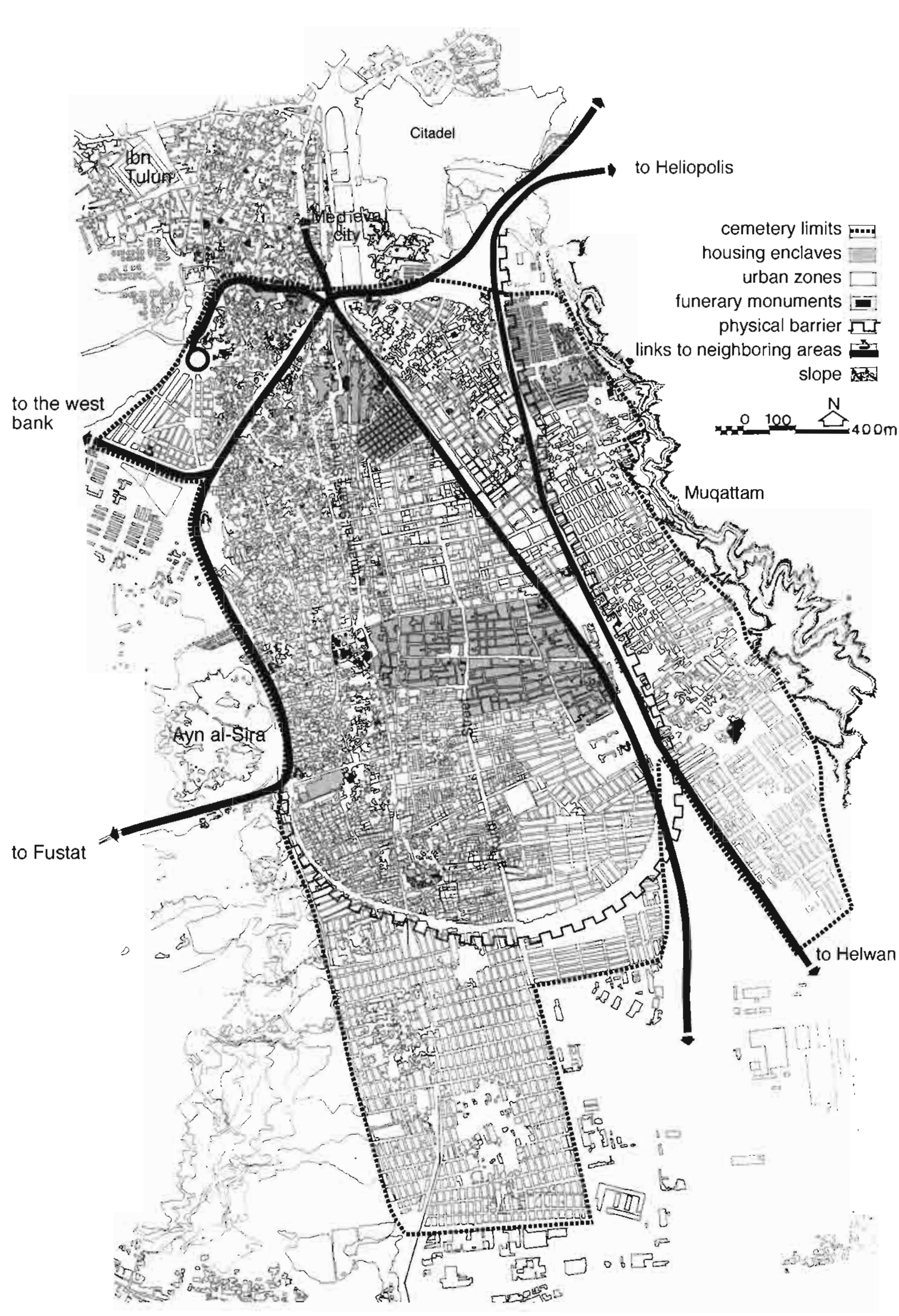
The Qarafa[2] currently covers an area of some five hundred hectares, but it was around three times that size in the Middle Ages.[3] Its outer limits have long been shifting and ill-defined. Now straddled, sliced up, and intersected by roads, it is hemmed in by:

- the natural barrier of the Muqattam hills to the east;
- an area of wetlands to the west—a vast no man's land unfit for burials and encompassing the 'Ayn al-Sira sulfur springs (now a leisure resort), the terrain used by the Egyptian cavalry, and the flooded excavations of abandoned quarries;
- and the Basatin factories to the south—a real barricade preventing the cemetery from spreading any further in that direction.

The Qarafa's last remaining point of contact with the city is in the northwest corner, around the mosque–mausoleum of Sayyida Nafisa, after which this part of the cemetery is named. The best way to discover these places is to start out from Ibn Tulun mosque along al-Khalifa—a road lined with mausolea still visited daily by large numbers of pilgrims, and whose interweaving with residential buildings gives a fairly good idea of how Cairo has interrelated with its cemeteries down the ages. In the fifteenth century, the chronicler al-Maqrizi noted that the urban fabric of Cairo was so close-knit that it formed "a single space made up of gardens, landscapes, palaces and houses, *suq*s and hotels, *khan*s and *hammams*, roads, lanes, alleyways, paths and cul-de-sacs, mosques and *zawyas*, *rab'*s and *mashhads*, schools and tombs [all the

Northern access to the necropolis:
Above, Imam al-Shafi'i Street with Bab Qaytbay on the right; below, the intersection of al-Muwasla and Imam al-Shafi'i streets.

The southern necropolis, morphology (drawing by G. El Kadi and G. Amer, base map by SFS/IGN, France, 1978, updated by the authors).



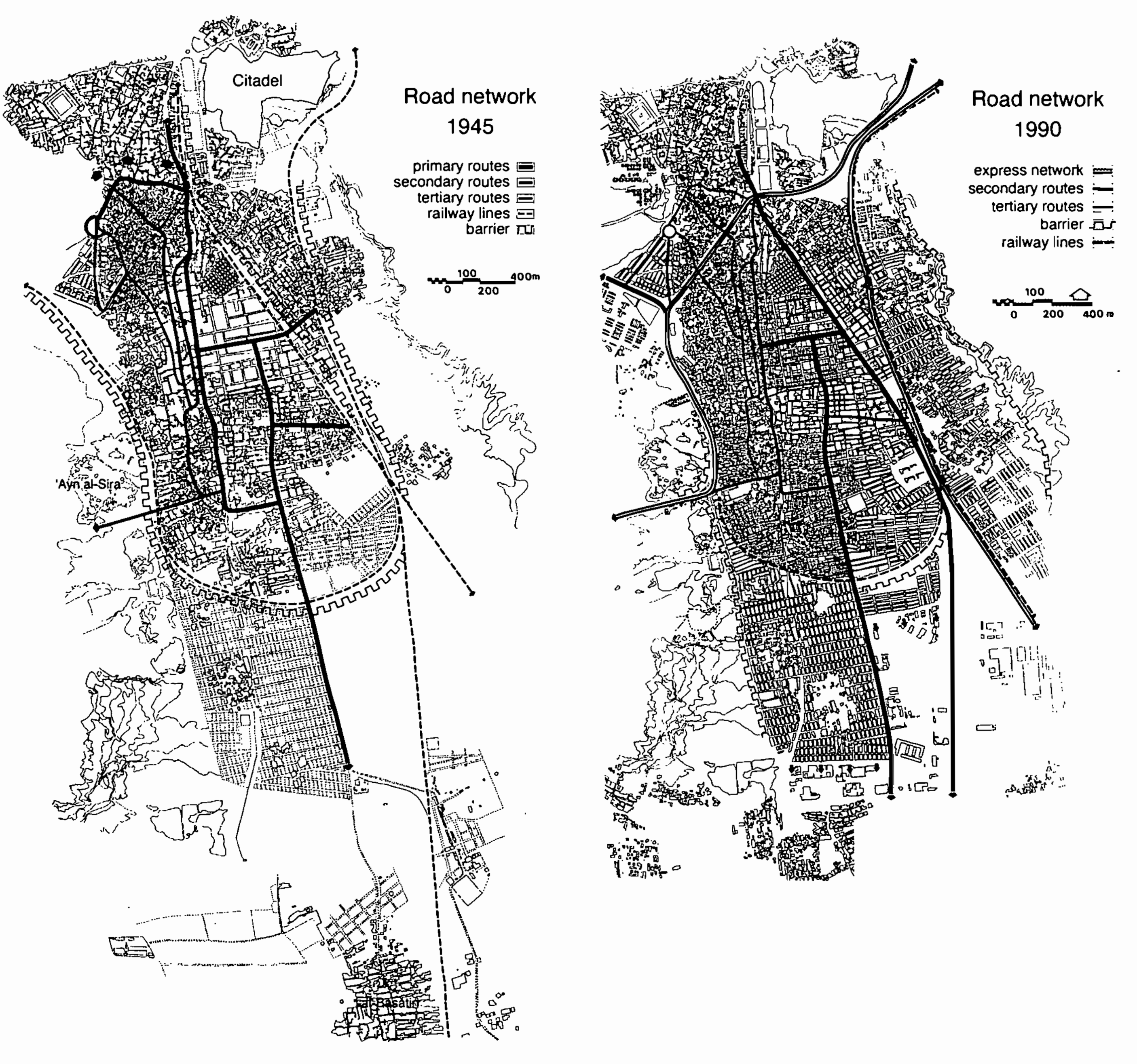
way] from Tibr Mosque to Basatin al-Wazir and Birkat al-Habash in the south, from the banks of the Nile in the west to Muqattam in the east."[4]

In those days, the only break in that otherwise seamless fabric was the aqueduct bringing the water to the Citadel from the Nile. Then, in the late nineteenth century, three railway lines were built to the Muqattam quarries. One curved in a huge arc between the city and the main Imam al-Shafi'i sector of the Qarafa. But the other two, after running north–south along the foot of the Muqattam hills, actually cut through the Qarafa, delimiting and separating two other spaces: 'Umar ibn al-Farid and the cemetery of the Mamluks.

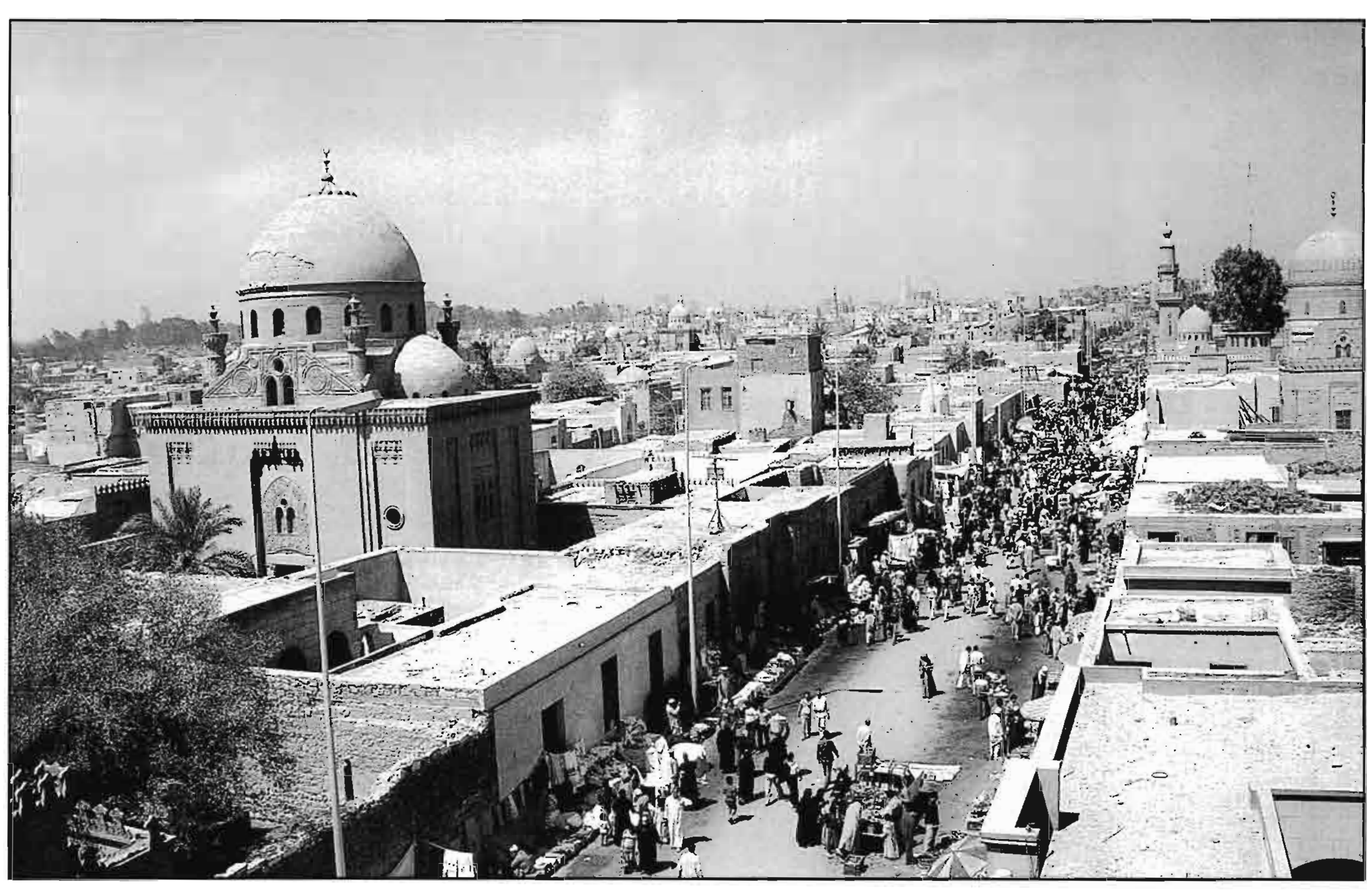
Road system

Originally, there were five routes from the urban core in the north to the most revered mausolea in the south. The most important, although by no means the oldest, is considered to have been that of Imam al-Shafi'i, a three-hundred meter road running between the old residential districts of 'Arab Quraysh and al-Qadiriya to the east and west respectively from Bab al-Qarafa,[5] one of the gates of Cairo, to a place called al-Khala', meaning 'emptiness,' 'desert,' or 'solitude'—a name that has not really reflected the reality of the place for quite some time. In 1910, al-Shafi'i was widened to provide room for a new streetcar line and then bus services from the Citadel to Imam al-Shafi'i mausoleum. The second most important road—from the functional rather than the historical point of view—was al-Kurdi, which was built at the same time as the above-mentioned housing estate. These two roads are now interconnected by three recently built transverse roads. A third worth mentioning is al-Qabr al-Tawil, which was once the main route between the mausolea of Imam al-Shafi'i and Sayyida Nafisa, a role it lost after the construction of Salah Salem Road.

The southern necropolis, evolution of the road network (drawing by G. El Kadi and G. Amer, base map by SFS/IGN, France, 1978, updated by the authors).



The flea market on Imam al-Shafi'i Street, which has now moved further south to al-Basatin, with the tomb of Sa'id Pasha Tanak (1881) on the left (photograph by G. El Kadi).



By the time we arrived to carry out our survey in the late 1980s, the situation had changed completely. A spate of public works had left the Qarafa hemmed in and even dissected by an impressive network of expressways, highways, and bridges that relegated the old main roads to secondary-road status. To the north, Salah Salem Road had cut the whole of the Qarafa off from the city and left Sayyida Nafisa cemetery completely isolated. To the east, the twenty-meter-wide al-Muwasla Street, following the route of the old disused railway lines, had isolated the Mamluk cemetery, which in turn had already been separated from the eastern fringe of the Qarafa by a new bypass opened to traffic in 1986. And to the west, the necropolis now came to an abrupt end at a fifty-meter-wide expressway that then headed off to the river, right through the middle of Fustat.

The new roads may well have severed the Qarafa from the city, curbing its growth for good. But they also acted as a powerful factor of integration, opening the Qarafa up to the outside world. There were now fifteen bus routes running across it and two terminuses actually located inside: one on Imam al-Shafi'i Square and the other in the eastern al-Tunsi district.

Solitude and silence are strangers to much of the necropolis today. The interweaving of tombs and housing blocks, old and new, that fill the once vacant spaces between them has turned it into a bustling place, with heavy traffic on the roads. The bustle peaks on a Friday, which is market day and the day when people come to visit the tombs. It begins to mount in intensity on Thursday, when the first visitors arrive to mingle with the traders setting up their stalls for the grand *suq* the next day. At Friday noon the

roads are closed to traffic and given over to pedestrians and market stalls, and a holiday atmosphere reigns over Imam al-Shafi'i Street. Crowds of people fill the streets and side streets as far as the eye can see. This huge open-air *suq*, set up between two rows of tombs, is one of Cairo's biggest flea markets, stretching nearly a kilometer down Imam al-Shafi'i Street to Imam al-Shafi'i Square and spilling into the side streets along the way. Beyond the square and mosque–*madrasa* is the poultry market, which is followed by a succession of other specialized stalls selling sheep, then calves, then camels, stopping just a few meters short of the mausoleum of Sidi 'Uqba. Meanwhile, away from the main *suq*, the bird and carrier pigeon stalls along al-Muwasla Street attract a host of enthusiasts and sightseers. In the midst of this throng, nothing is further from one's mind than death until suddenly a funeral cortège arrives, followed by its procession of wailing mourners. But their cries are drowned out by the hubbub of the crowds and cries of traders. On this day of festivities, the dead, as intruders in the lives of the living, must be seen but not heard.

A relative calm returns to Imam al-Shafi'i Street at sundown. It is but a temporary lull, broken at daybreak by the first buses of the morning, then the cars and the motorbikes, and all the rest. The square becomes crowded once again, but less densely packed, as wave after wave of men, women, and schoolchildren—who live in the huge housing estate encircling the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i and in the surrounding tombs—arrive to wait at the bus station. A new day has begun in the city of the dead.

Choice of site

The plains at the foot of the Muqattam hills were once, like Josaphat, considered hallowed ground. Bodies there stayed better preserved for much longer, and the dead were believed to rise from the grave every Wednesday, Thursday, and Holy Friday.[6] Al-Muqawqis, chief of the Copts, is said to have let 'Amr ibn al-'As, commander of the conquering Arab armies, in on the secret that all those buried there would come back to life on Judgment Day without having to explain themselves before the Almighty. "May God will it that I be among them," replied 'Amr, upon which the Arabs laid waste to the Coptic tombs and cleared the land for their own.[7]

Gabal Yashkur in the northwest corner of the plains, the site of the mosque of Ibn Tulun, was also reputed to be hallowed ground. Was this not the place where Moses was said to have conversed with God? And where Aaron turned to idolatry, and was later buried?[8] People would come from far and wide to pray there in the hope that they would receive a special blessing, and that their prayers would be answered.[9]

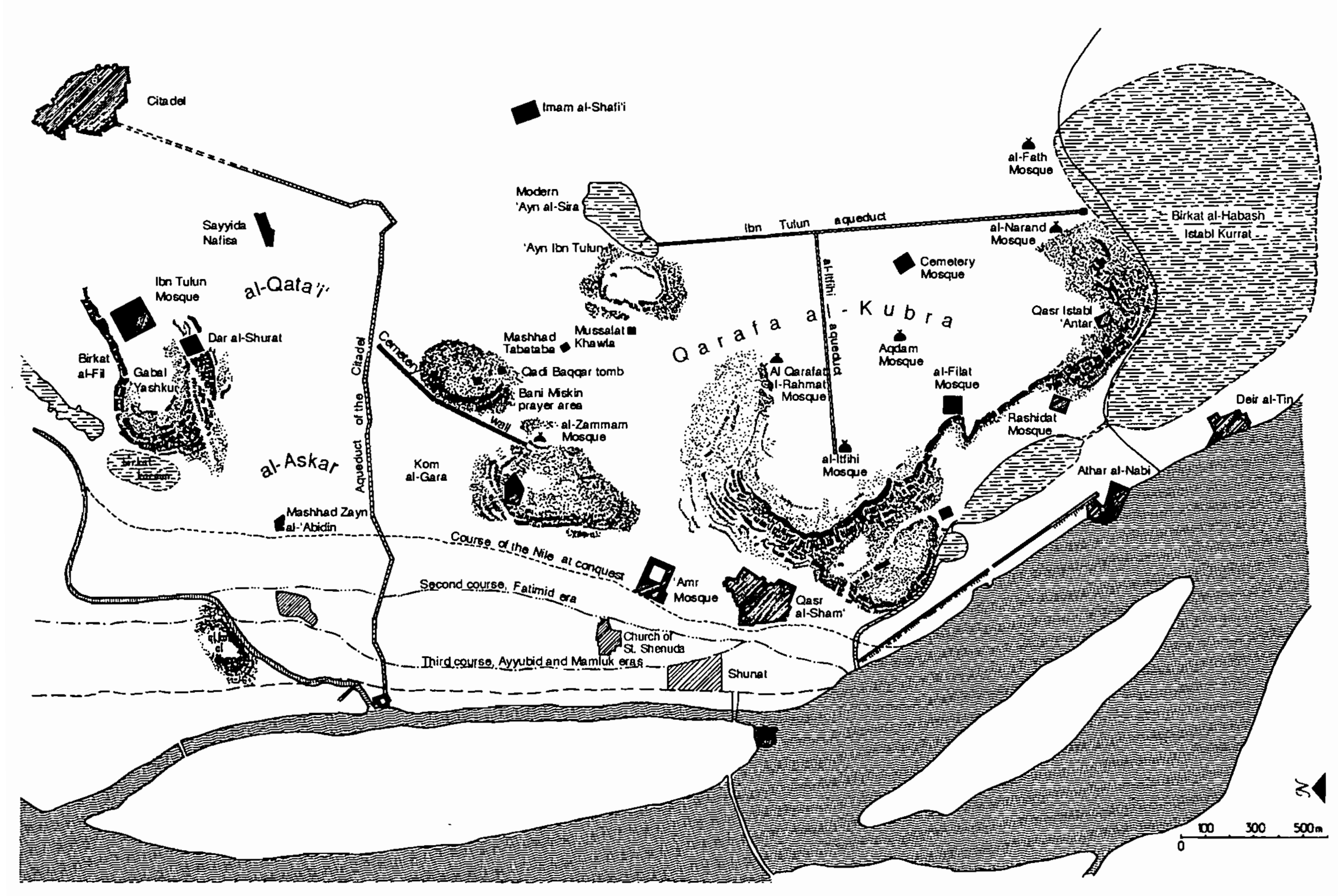
That is what drew people to using these as the places to bury their dead. But the more down-to-earth reasons have more to do with their geomorphology, especially the soil structure: not far from the banks of a large river—the Nile, an abundant source of water for sustaining human life—across an alluvial plain vulnerable to flooding yet suitable for cultivation, the land abruptly changes into a desert of sand and stone, almost uninhabitable terrain without irrigation, yet ideal for the desiccation of corpses. The sight of human bodies so well preserved must have made quite an impression on the Muslim Arabs arriving with their newfound belief in resurrection and the reconstitution of the physical body after 'judgment.' When they established their first settlement in Fustat, they naturally chose to locate their cemeteries in the desert just beyond its eastern fringes.[10] And so began the history of the Qarafa.

History of the Qarafa

The geography of this vast expanse of desert provided ample space for the establishment of a scattering of funerary cities. None of Egypt's successive ruling dynasties arriving from distant and different lands could bear the thought of living and being buried in the same places as their predecessors, so they established several urban cores and built a large number of funerary foundations of which the only structural elements remaining today are the mausolea. All of the urban fabric in between has undergone constant renewal, making it harder still to understand the course of its fourteen-century evolution.

The first Muslim necropolis in Egypt seems to have developed as a mirror image of the first Arab settlement, Fustat. Kubiak (1987) describes how tribes with a *khitta* (allotted plot of land) in the town built their own funerary districts, with a mosque surrounded by tombs, in the neighboring desert to the east.[11] It has been established that the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i now stands on the site of the Maqabir Quraysh cemetery in the *khitta* of the *ahl al-raya* ('the flag people'), who belonged to the dominant tribe of Mecca, the Quraysh, which was also the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad.[12] This *khitta* formed the core of Fustat. We are also told that in 740 the city comprised twenty *khittat* covering an area of eight hundred hectares from Birkat al-Habash in the south to Gabal Yashkur in the north, and running west to east from the Nile to the sulfur springs of 'Ayn al-Sira. Its three-hundred-hectare necropolis had no clear boundaries except for the wall on the west side separating it from the city.[13] In 750, the 'Abbasids (750–1218) seized control of the nascent Islamic empire from the Umayyads (661–750), and the center of power shifted northeast from Fustat to the new administrative district of al-'Askar. In 870, it shifted still further northeast to al-Qata'i' ('the concessions'), an urban settlement built by the

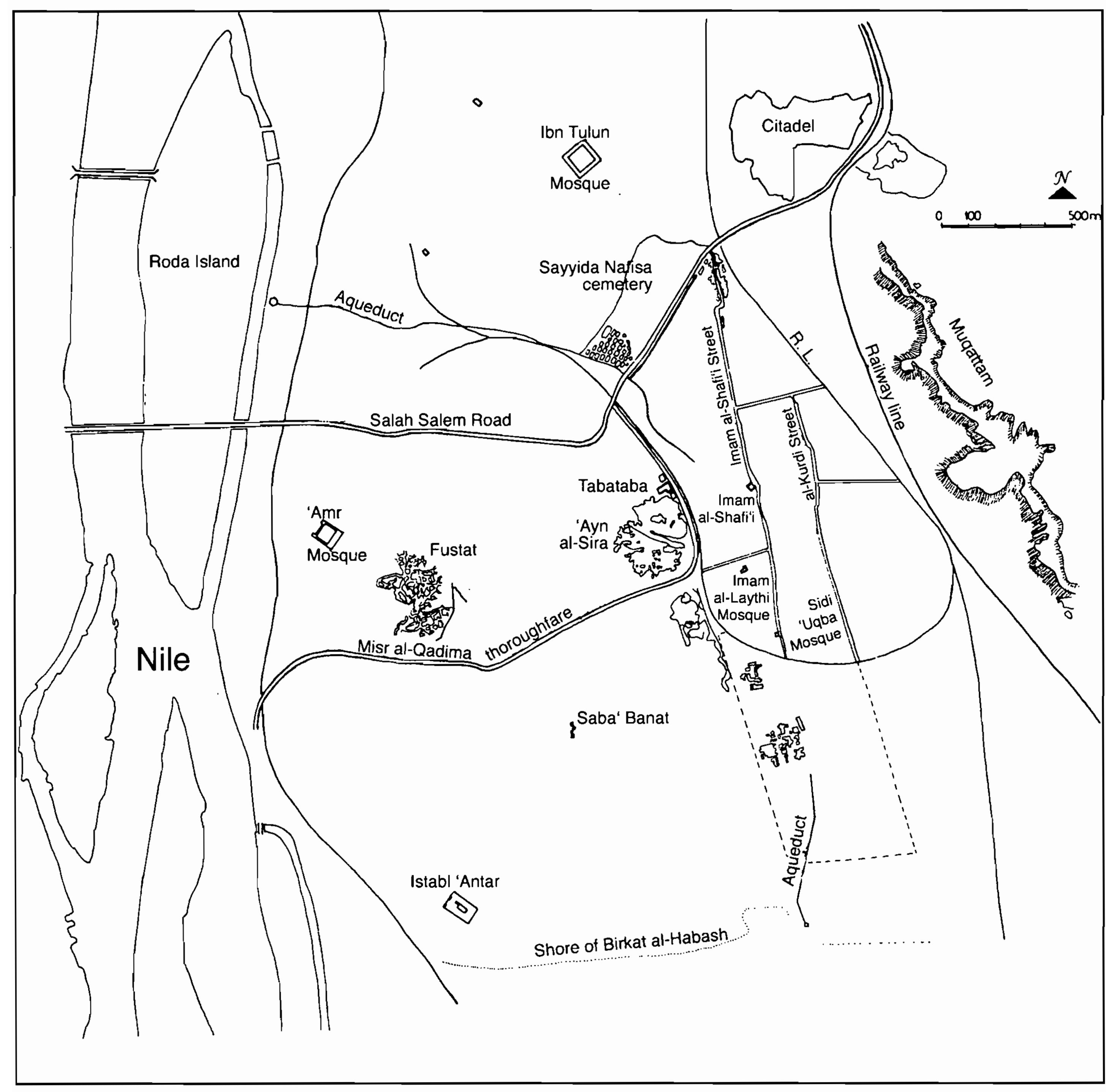
Site of the southern necropolis, after Ravaisse (drawing by G. El Kadi).



'Abbasid governor Ahmad ibn Tulun to serve as the capital city of his newly founded Tulunid dynasty. Covering 270 hectares, al-Qata'i' extended north to Birkat al-Fil and east to the foot of the rocky spur that would later become the Citadel; Jewish and Christian cemeteries were razed to clear the site for its construction.[14] Meanwhile, a new cemetery appeared beyond the southern fringes of al-Qata'i', although north of Bab al-Qarafa. Ibn Tulun was probably buried there,[15] and it would be the eternal resting place of the Prophet's descendants who emigrated from Arabia.[16] Before the arrival of the Fatimids, according to al-Maqrizi (1853), the Qarafa covered a vast area, stretching from Birkat al-Habash in the south to the Citadel in the north, and flanked by the Ibn Tulun aqueduct to the east and the wall of Fustat to the west.[17] We have no information as to what the tombs actually looked like, but very few—only the mausolea of certain saints and religious dignitaries—were likely to have been crowned with a dome.[18] Religious laws prohibiting posthumous ostentation seem to have been strictly observed—until the arrival of the Fatimids.

The Fatimids reigned over Egypt for two centuries (969–1171) and founded a new capital north of Fustat called al-Qahira, which gradually evolved from a royal city into an actual metropolis. Their caliphs, reviving the ancient regional traditions, built themselves lavish posthumous abodes in a variety of locations: first in the actual graveyard, the Qarafa, but later along the

Map of Fustat and Qarafa, after Kubiak (drawing by G. El Kadi).



road from Cairo to Fustat, forming what we now call the Sayyida Nafisa cemetery. The presence of 'Alid graves in the area made it into a pilgrimage site and led to the construction of three shrines there to house the remains of the Prophet and the first two 'Alid caliphs.[19] A handful of 'Alid mausolea are still extant today.[20]

Another cemetery was established beyond the northern walls of the new city, and later took its name from the nearby Bab al-Nasr gate.[21] The sheer cliff-face of the Muqattam hills was seen as a romantic arena that seduced the Fatimid caliph al-Hakim and other princes into having their tombs built there.[22] Badr al-Gamali, commander of the Fatimid armies, placed his mosque on a spur overlooking the plains.[23] Right in the center of the Fatimid city, at one of the gates south of the grand palace, on the site now occupied by the Khan al-Khalili, was a cemetery (Turbat al-Za'faran) with a mosque–mausoleum that the Fatimid caliphs took as their final resting place.[24] It was destroyed with a vengeance when the Ayyubids came to power.[25] Not far from there, along the inside of the western wall, was another small cemetery, al-Ghurayib, which survived until the mid-twentieth century.

Relatively little is known about those two centuries of Fatimid rule beyond a few descriptions provided by historians. Caliph al-Amir (1101–30) reportedly became accustomed to residing in the palace that Taghrid, mother of the caliph al-'Aziz, had had built in the Qarafa in 979.[26] He erected a platform for the Sufis and would watch them dancing from his window. Among the most outstanding features of the palace were its remarkable murals, one of them a bas-relief picture of Joseph in the well.[27] The caliphs thus built themselves palatial residences—*qusur* (palaces) and *gawasiq*[28]—in the Qarafa and resided there during their lifetime. They added mosques for teaching the Qur'an and pious foundations (*ribats*)[29] to provide assistance to the needy. In order to accomplish this, the site had to be made serviceable by boring wells and repairing the Tulunid-era aqueducts.[30] The few remaining mausolea of this kind are relatively insignificant in light of those descriptions, but they are evidence of the new relationship that was developing between the living and the cemeteries, a relationship which has continued to the present day:

- on the one hand, using the cemetaries as vacation sites;
- on the other hand, living and working in the genuine urban cores that developed around the *qasr*–mosque–*ribat* complexes (which shall be dealt with later in this book).

With the fall of the Fatimids and the arrival of the Ayyubids, the city experienced yet another period of dramatic change. The final century of Fatimid rule had been punctuated by political unrest and a series of disasters[31] that culminated in the famous fire of Fustat.[32] Those disasters were, according to various historical sources, responsible for the ruin of Fustat, which split in two after being deserted by its population.[33]

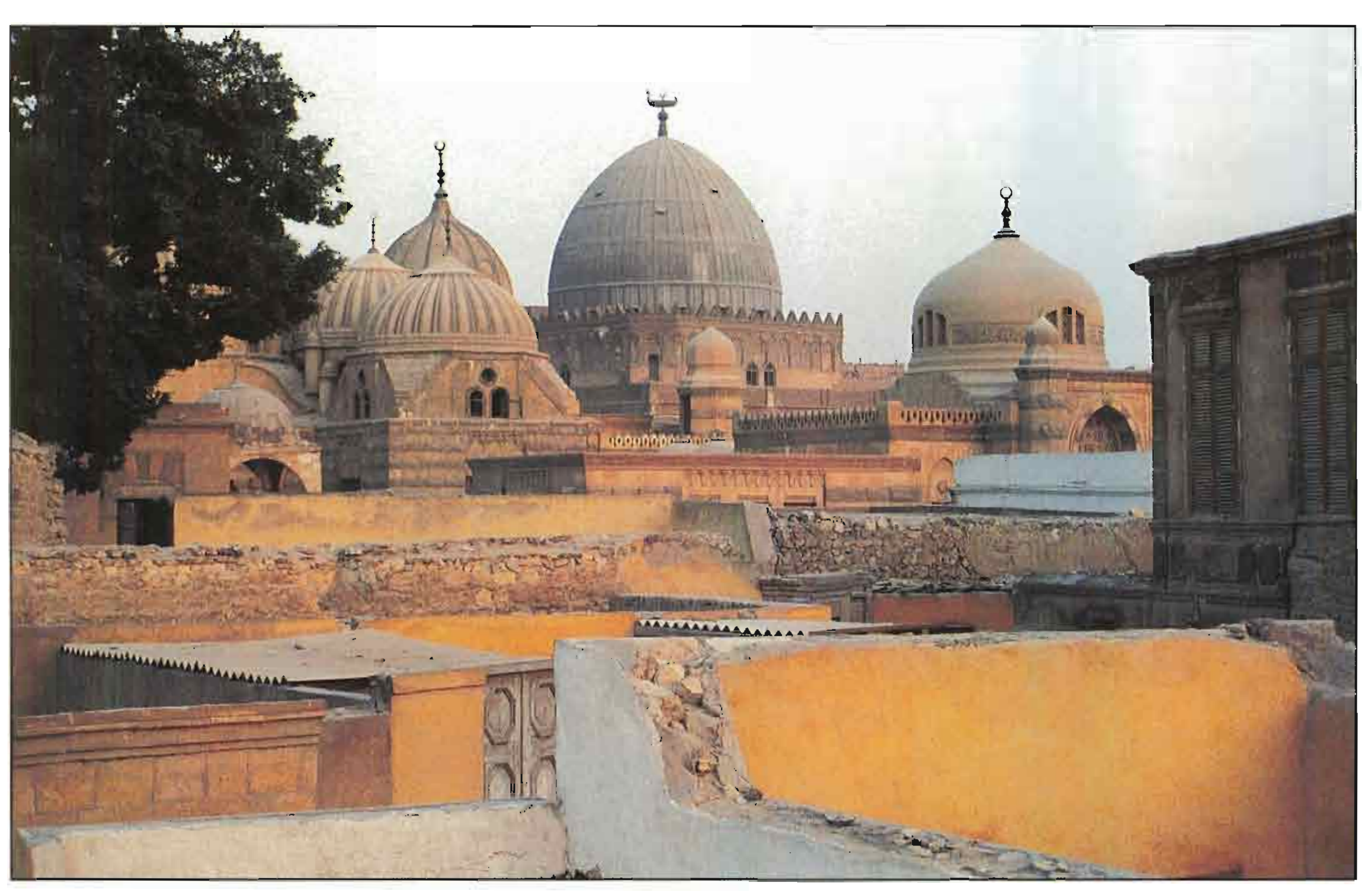
With al-Maqrizi, a great deal of importance was attached to the impact of the fire of 1168—seven years before the accession of Salah al-Din. In contrast, the writings of Ibn Jubayr, who was contemporary to the event, and especially studies by latter-day historians and archaeologists, such as Kubiak (1987) and Raymond (1993), minimize the fire's importance, and Raymond points out that "it would be hard to see why Saladin decided in 1172 that the defensive wall to be built around Cairo must encompass the whole of Fustat if it had been reduced to rubble and abandoned."[34] That said, as far as our area of interest is concerned, some of Fustat, deserted by its inhabitants, definitely does seem to have formed part of the necropolis at the time.

Developments in the Qarafa appear to have mirrored those in the city: the necropolis deteriorated toward the end of Fatimid rule and then recovered its splendor under the Ayyubids. Of particular note are the repairs carried out on the mosque and dome of Sidi 'Uqba, a companion of the Prophet who died in Egypt in 677,[35] and, more importantly, the construction of an imposing mausoleum over the tomb of Imam al-Shafi'i (d. 819), which was the first ever to comprise a *madrasa* (religious school), a *khanqah* (Sufi retreat), and a *zawya* (small prayer space).

The Ayyubid princes, in the hope of enjoying the blessings of the Imam, had apparently lavish tombs built in the vicinity.[36] It reached the point that people began to speak of a new, smaller Qarafa—'al-Qarafa al-Sughra'—as opposed to the vast funerary area of the 'southern' necropolis, but which was in fact a rehabilitated core of the old necropolis that came to be called 'al-Qarafa al-Kubra.' The dome crowning the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i was built in 1221 by al-Malik al-Kamil (1218–38), a successor of Salah al-Din (1176–92). Repairs were carried out on the Ibn Tulun aqueduct to supply it with drinking water.[37] The traveler Ibn Jubayr, on a visit to Cairo in 1217, spent the night in the Qarafa and described it as "one of the wonders of the world, peopled with the tombs of prophets and those of their companions at arms, of Sufis and of *wali*s . . . a succession of gardens with a scattering of strange-looking buildings."[38] Moving on to the Qarafa al-Kubra, he spoke of a vast space stretching as far as the eye could see, where there was hardly any visible sign of the tombs of the first conquerors. Another traveler, Ibn Sa'id al-Maghrabi, after a number of nights in the Qarafa, wrote that it contained "many houses belonging to the worthies of Fustat

Mosque of Sidi 'Uqba and adjoining rab'.

Domes of Hawsh al-Basha and, in the background, the cupola of the Imam al-Shafi'i mausoleum.



and al-Qahira, together with tombs surmounted by some quite well-kept edifices. Most striking of all, though, is the magnificent dome of the tomb of Imam al-Shafi'i. . . ."[39]

Al-Salih Ayyub (1240–49) was the last of the Ayyubid sultans, and it was he who established the Mamluks in Egypt.[40]

The Ayyubids provided the 'urbanistic' impetus for centuries to come. Sadly, few of their civic and religious buildings remain today. In contrast, their successors, the Mamluks, left us the most extensive body of architecture of the past fifteen centuries. Many members of the new ruling dynasty wanted to be buried in town and had a mosque built there for the purpose, so every Mamluk mosque was in fact a mosque–mausoleum. As far as the southern necropolis was concerned, in around 1290 the Mamluks established a new burial site to the east, on vacant land formerly used for horse racing and archery.[41] During the first few decades of the new regime, only two sultans had their tombs built in the Qarafa—in the Maragha district, not far from the Fatimid mausolea.[42] As for the charitable foundations, historians mention only the *zawya* of al-'Adawiya, also known as the *zawya* of al-Qadiriya, built in 1299 in honor of a saint named Shaykh Zayn al-Din Yusuf.[43] The ensemble attracted many pilgrims and then a population of permanent residents, which formed the medieval urban core that still exists today around the Qadiriya Mosque near Bab al-Qarafa.

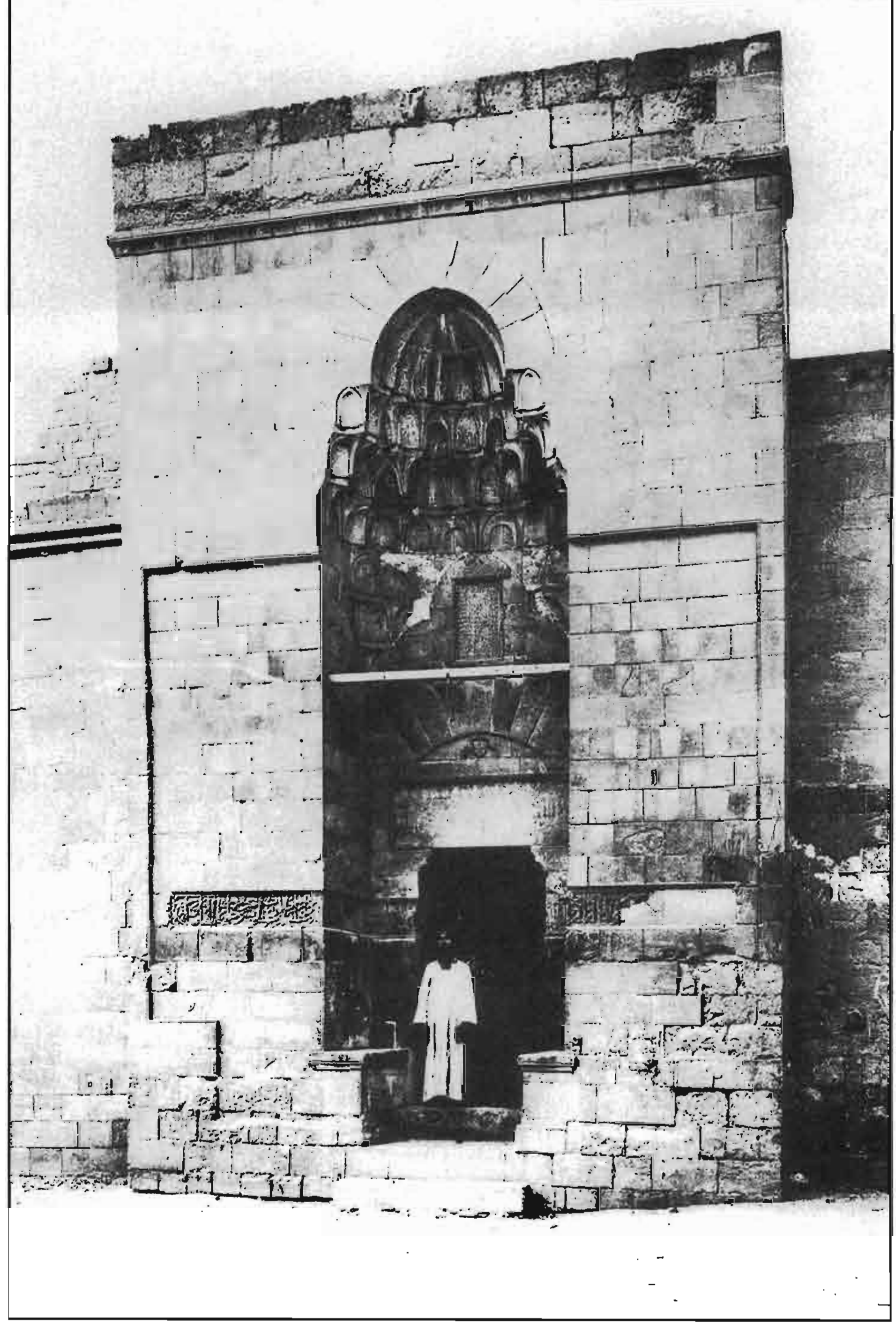
The reign of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun (1293–1340) was a time of construction and expansion for Cairo. Large funerary complexes filled the empty spaces between the shrine of Imam al-Shafi'i and Bab al-Qarafa.[44] From having been *sughra*,

Entrance to the zawya *of Shaykh Zayn al-Din Yusuf, southeastern façade (photograph by Creswell).*

the Qarafa once again became *kubra*, reportedly covering some 1,500 hectares of land from Bab al-Qarafa to Birkat al-Habash and from the old wall of Fustat to Muqattam. Al-Qalqashandi gives a firsthand account of its renewed splendor: "It has monumental buildings, magnificent palaces that are enchanting to the eye and that fill the soul with joy. It is a great city in terms of its *gami'*s, *zawya*s, *ribat*s, and *khanqah*s, but not many people live there."[45]

This, then, seems to have marked the heyday of the Qarafa, when it was at its height in terms of magnificence and size.

The latter half of the fourteenth century began with a demographic catastrophe: the Black Death (1348–49), which almost certainly wiped out a third of the population of Cairo.[46] Ironically, there seems to be little trace of the 100,000 dead in the parts of the city forming our center of interest here, and the disaster generated no specific funerary or religious architecture of the kind seen to emerge in the wake of similar circumstances in Europe at the time. One may well wonder, however, about the relationship between the atmosphere of death and the construction of the mosque–mausoleum of Sultan Hasan, built between 1356 and 1361. Nothing about the building seems, at first glance, to conjure up thoughts of death and fear thereof—and the repentance that coincides with that fear—or the necessary redemption. Yet the scale of those outer walls standing tall as a cliff-face and enclosing a space large enough to accommodate four hundred people, set like a fortress, an island, in one of the highest parts of the city,[47] a unique milestone in the architectural history of Cairo, really does seem, a posteriori, to tally with that of the crises that were about to hit Egypt. As many as sixteen plagues broke out between 1348 and 1513, and thousands of lives were lost each time.[48] Paradoxically, though, this is the period that left the greatest architectural



heritage in terms of the mosques that are still there for us to marvel at today. The late fifteenth century saw a proliferation of mosque–mausolea in the area between Bab Zuwayla and the Citadel. Then a new necropolis was established east of the city by the Circassian Mamluks, and by the end of the sixteenth century, after a hundred years of lavish building work, it had supplanted the old Qarafa.

The significant population decline, hand-in-hand with enduring political instability, had a significant bearing on the country's economy, and the opening of the sea route via the Cape of Good Hope signaled an end to Cairo's hegemony as the predominant hub of east–west trade—all of which contributed to the fall of the Mamluks and the beginning of Ottoman rule over Egypt. Clearly, the city of the dead would suffer as a result. The end of the Mamluk period was marked by the embezzlement of *waqf* funds earmarked for the maintenance of the funerary complexes of amirs and sultans.[49] In 1459, the authorities had been compelled, because of the plague, to issue a decree prohibiting anyone from living in the cemeteries.[50] With no one there to keep watch, the places were left vulnerable to plunder by former treasure hunters who now, for the most part, began plying their trade as stone merchants.[51] Only the pilgrimage sites were spared. Meanwhile, death had made room in the city for the gradual reappearance of a number of small intramural cemeteries, and the people of Cairo were even said to have grown accustomed to burying their dead in their houses.[52] The Qarafa thus found itself on the wane. For the next two-and-a-half centuries of Ottoman occupation it ceased to attract any tombs as lavish as those built there in earlier periods. The governors (*wali*s), who bore the title *pasha*, were in so much trouble financially that most ended their term in jail or under house arrest.[53] Only twenty-seven of the 110 successive pashas heading the government of Egypt between 1517 and 1798 left any trace of their precarious time in power in the capital: a mosque, mausoleum, or *sabil*.[54] Six such buildings are to be found in the Qarafa.[55] In the meantime, the Mamluks, who were still governing the provinces and thus shared power with the pashas, were growing ever more prosperous thanks to their hold over property tax revenues and a large share of urban tenant farming.[56] They could therefore afford to act as patrons of architecture,[57] but the Qarafa did not benefit from their patronage: just three of the fifty-eight edifices built in Cairo in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are to be found there.[58] Having said that, a great deal of importance was attached to the upkeep and restoration of existing religious buildings, especially the *zawya*s, mausolea of holy men and women, and the Sufi retreats.

In the seventeenth century, the Qarafa was again considered by many foreign travelers to be the fifth or fourth town of Cairo after Fustat, Fatimid Cairo, and Bulaq. After having described the four towns that made up the Egyptian capital in 1611, Georges Sandys described the Qarafa thus: "The fifth and last is the great city of *Caraffar*, facing south, and stretching several miles in the direction of the Red Sea."[59]

Another contemporary writer, the Dutchman Jan Sommer, noted that the Qarafa was shrinking, that it was neither "as large nor as populated as new Cairo," and that it measured just seven leagues in circumference in the days of the Mamluks.[60]

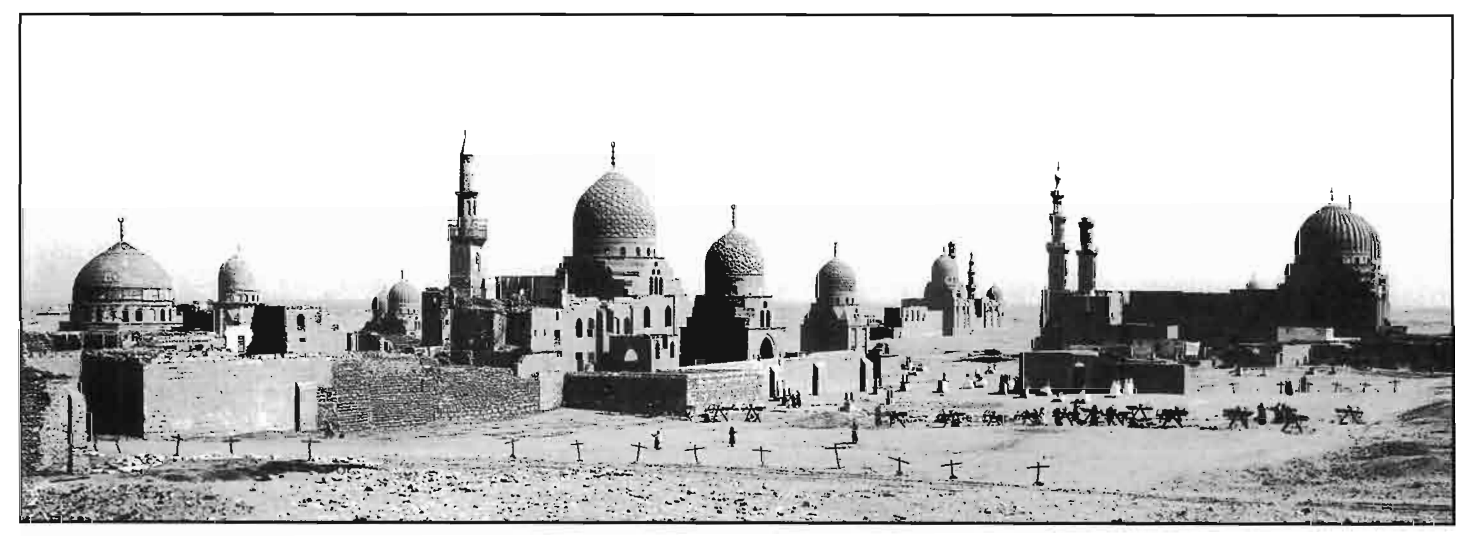
In 1798, the French Expedition ended the Ottoman occupation and, for reasons of hygiene, the practice of burying the dead inside the city.[61] Intramural cemeteries were razed to the ground—although the order to do so was not fully executed until the mid-1800s—and their occupants' bones transferred to the mosque of al-'Ezam, where they remain to this day.[62] Jomard, a member of the French Expedition, offers the following description of the Qarafa and other cemeteries at that time: "There are two cities of tombs in Cairo, one to the south and the other to the east, and together they account for a quarter of the size of the capital. The first starts at the tombs of Imam al-Shafi'i and stretches away into the distance toward al-Basatin. They are a league in length, which is more than half of Cairo. The dome of al-Shafi'i was the work of al-Malik al-Kamil, who had water channeled there from Birkat al-Habash, an old lake near the old town of Cairo and the Citadel. Around Turbat al-Imam are the tombs of the Qarafa and, beyond that, those known as Turbat al-Sayyida Umm Qasim. Most are outstanding in their magnificence, with lavish use of marble, gold, and bright colors. They are shown in six plates in the book, and a look at those engravings will give the reader an idea of their opulence. One of the most beautiful is that of 'Ali Bey al-Kabir. The large enclosures, which have gates that swing shut on their hinges, are strictly reserved for wealthy families; the Sharqawi family owns one of the principal ones. Aside from their gilded marble sculptures, the tombs are further enhanced by carvings of flowers and leaves overlaid with gold leaf and colored red, yellow, and green; their columns and stelae bear similarly carved Arabic inscriptions; and the dome ceilings are adorned with coffers carved in relief. East of Cairo is the other city of tombs, Turbat Qaytbay, which extends for a league all the way to the Qubba. The architecture of these tombs is no less magnificent and luxurious than those of the Qarafa. Outside Cairo, one can still make out the tombs of Bab al-Wazir, near the gate of that name, al-Ghurayib and Bab al-Nasr to the east, and al-Qasid to the west, close to Bab al-Qasid. Even inside the city one comes across several other

Southern necropolis, Mamluk cemetery (photograph by Lehnert and Landrock, early twentieth century).

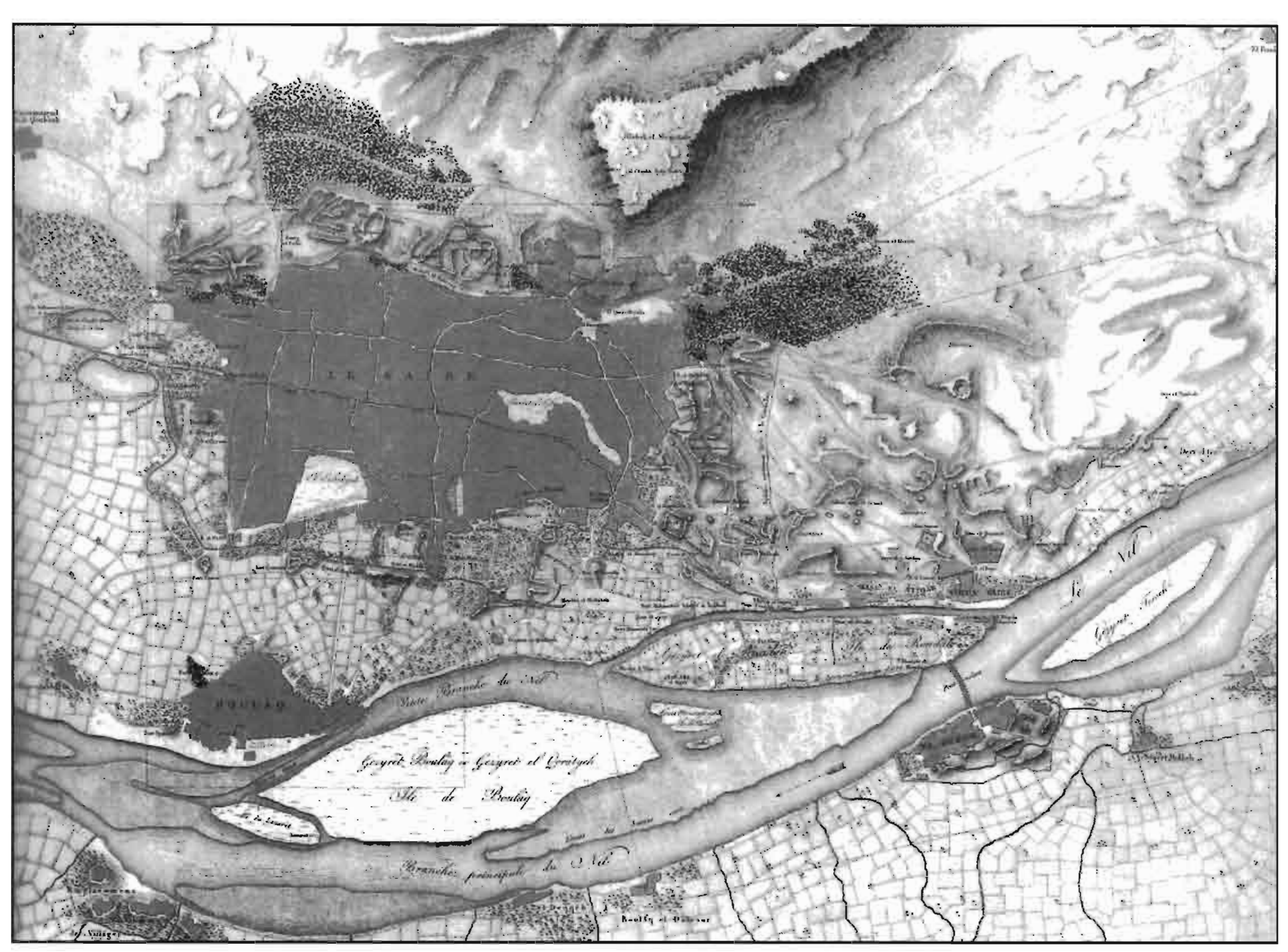
cemeteries: Turbat al-Gami' al-Ahmar, Turbat al-Riwi'i, and Turbat al-Azbakiya, near the square of that name, not to mention several smaller ones. There are thirteen large public tombs or cemeteries as well as several *madfans*. Running between these thousands of tombs and enclosures are sorts of roads where one can sit down. It is customary for people to visit the tombs every Friday at the crack of dawn. They plant flowers and aromatic plants there. Women and children accompany the men on those visits, and one can see from afar, by the size of the crowd, where these necropolises are located. It is a spectacle both religious and pompous, and which must be seen several times to be clearly understood."[63]

From the inspiration of Muhammad 'Ali (1805–48) to the achievements of Isma'il (1863–79), the nineteenth century saw Cairo striving to 'modernize' itself and to rationalize its urban development. The authorities consequently tried to confine the functions of the Qarafa strictly to burials and death-related religious practices. At the same time, economic measures such as property taxes on family *waqfs* led to further cuts in the already limited number of tomb keepers,[64] while modernization of the education system took teaching out of the hands of the mosques and *madrasas*. In the face of this, Muhammad 'Ali built himself a magnificent mausoleum flanked by five domes not far from the tomb of Imam al-Shafi'i. Fromentin likened it to the *Chapelle Saint-Denis*.[65] Gérard de Nerval provides a striking description of it: "This graveyard, devoted solely to the ruling family's children, looks like it is meant for an entire town. There are more than sixty tombs there, large and small, mostly new, and composed of white marble stelae. Each stela is surmounted by a turban or by a woman's braided hair, which gives all the Turkish tombs an air of funereal reality; it is like walking through a petrified crowd. The largest tombs are draped in rich fabrics and carpeted in silk and cashmere."[66]

The royal court and the bourgeoisie, having had the means, followed their sovereign's example and, in so doing, left us the sumptuous funerary abodes that we can still view today. Only in the past few centuries, after fourteen hundred years of being fixated on their final resting places, have the residents of Cairo seen those places as an obstacle to their city's development—but that is a subject to which we shall return in another chapter.



Map of Cairo and the surrounding area, 1825 (Pascal Coste), plate LXVI. Architecture Arabe ou monuments du Caire dessinés et mesurés pendant les années 1820, 1821, et 1822, *Paris, 1837, 70 plates.*



Zone I, Sayyida Nafisa, access map (drawing by L. Yacoub and Heba, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

Anatomy of the Qarafa

To understand the Qarafa area, we divided it into five zones, each of which subdivides into sub-zones and sectors. We used the layout of the current road system entirely for practical reasons. While some of the roads do run along ancient routes, our division of the Qarafa in no way mirrors the chronology of its development.

Zone 1
Sayyida Nafisa cemetery

The northwestern part of the Qarafa has been cut off from the rest of the necropolis since the construction of the Salah Salem Road in the 1950s. Salah Salem runs alongside the old Ibn Tulun aqueduct, which also cut through the cemetery, but in a more forgiving way. Its many arches allowed passage from one side to the other, and several routes to al-Shafi'i used to pass that way. The highway, however, is impossible to cross.

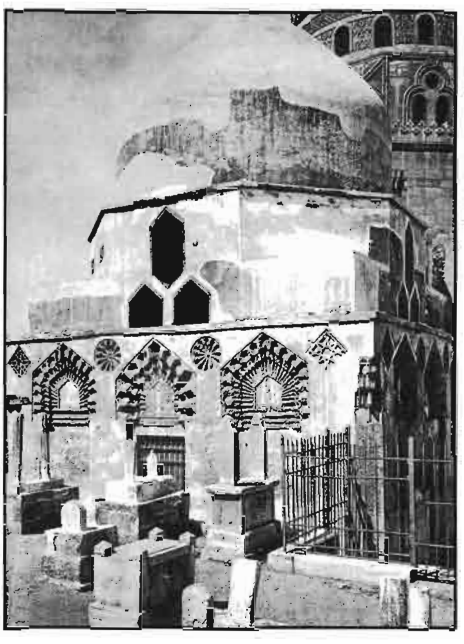
This cemetery covers a 750m x 300m trapezoid-shaped area of rather undulating terrain. The more recent parts—about a quarter of the southwestern district—have roads that were plotted by surveyors in the early twentieth century. The geometry here is relatively flexible in terms of the layout of the roads and the wide range of different-sized plots. People, it seems, had been able to acquire as much land as they needed and could afford. All the plots are walled. Almost all feature pavilions built in the usual variety of styles, which we shall be looking at later. One especially outstanding tomb boasts a façade very much inspired by ancient pharaonic times. The rest of the area is covered with far more modest tombs consisting of nothing but a pair of stelae. Some are encased in plain wooden huts a couple of square meters in size. Some plots are circumscribed by stone walls, but there is no sign of any prior overall planning. The result is an enormous clutter. This area has, as we shall see, served as a cemetery for over a thousand years, but the tombs found there today are at most barely a century old. The only remaining historic core consists of three tombs, the best-known being the mosque–mausoleum of Sayyida Nafisa, a Hasanid noblewoman who lived an ascetic life in Cairo and who appears to have been a source of consolation for the unfortunate. Sensing her death to be near, she began to dig her own grave in her bedchamber and was subsequently buried there, according to her wishes, in 808.[67] The original tomb, dating back to the Fatimid era, was demolished and rebuilt several times before it

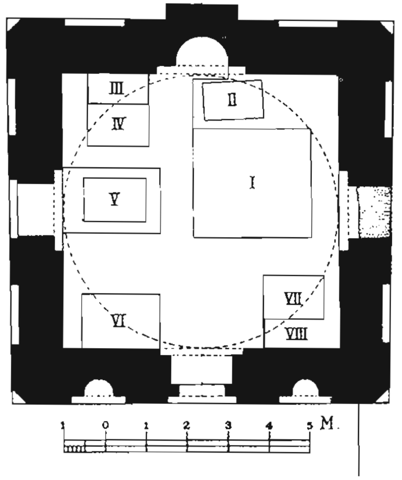
On the left, mosque of Sayyida Nafisa; on the right, mausoleum of the 'Abbasid caliphs.

Left page: Views of Sayyida Nafisa cemetery from Salah Salem Road.
Below: Mausoleum of the 'Abbasid caliphs (photograph by Creswell); plan after Creswell.

appeared in its current form in 1897.[68] In addition to the many pilgrims it continues to attract to this day, young couples became accustomed to celebrating their weddings there in order to enjoy the blessings of Sayyida Nafisa. The mosque is flanked by the mausoleum of the 'Abbasid caliphs, built in 1242, which houses eight cenotaphs and seventeen tombs.[69] Not far from here stands the eleventh-century mausoleum of Mu'fi al-Din. What is interesting about this cemetery, then, resides not in what is left of it, but in its northern fringe and its history.

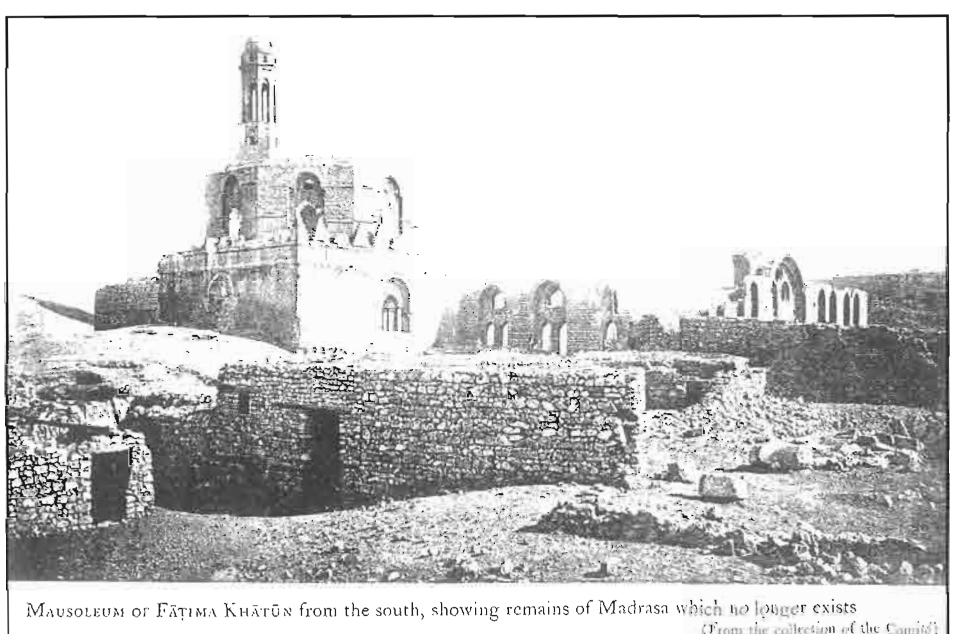
First the map: It shows quite clearly a process of transition from city to cemetery, with a large number of mausolea and mosque–mausolea embedded in the urban fabric. Going by what knowledge we have of the history of this area, it is safe to say that a good many other tombs must have been built around these mausolea in the past and that they gradually came to be replaced by buildings for the living. Moreover, the housing can be seen to be spreading and eating into the tombs on the northeastern boundary of the cemetery proper with each passing day (see Chapter 5). This cemetery's history stretches back to the Tulunid period, when it formed part of the new city of al-Qata'i'. Once that dynasty had gone, the cemetery fell into a state of ruin and neglect.[70] When the Fatimids founded Cairo in 969, people had to pass through the area on the road to and from Fustat. Its first funerary monuments were built in the midst of houses and gardens. There followed a further period of decline under the caliphate of al-Mustansir (1035–94) and then another revival during the reign of Caliph al-Amir (1101–30), especially under the influence of the vizir Ma'mun al-Bata'ihi.[71] The fall of the Fatimids brought no change whatsoever. Funerary monuments continued to be built there, and the area between Bab Zuwayla and the mosque of Sayyida Nafisa came to be called 'Bayn Misr wa-l-Qahira.'[72] Under Sultan Baybars, that area, which contained so many hallowed graves, was renamed al-Mushahid and incorporated into Cairo.[73] In those days it stretched from the mausoleum of Sayyida Ruqayya to the west, on what is now al-Wada' Street, to that of Sayyida Nafisa, but that was where the Qarafa al-Sughra began. In Ayyubid times the neighboring hill became covered with tombs, but not a trace of these remains today. The land was cleared in the 1950s to make way for a eucalyptus forest and the first public housing projects of the Nasser era. The most interesting funerary monuments are therefore those found outside this cemetery, mostly on al-Khalifa Street. Otherwise known by the evocative name of Darb al-Wada'—the road of farewells—this is none other than the southern extension of the main road through the center of the Fatimid rectangle, called al-Shari' al-A'zam by historians, which used to bear southwest to the mosque of 'Amr ibn al-'As in Fustat. It was the road that all the caliphs took when visiting that mosque for Friday prayers.[74] It was also the favored route of Madhar'i, the great protector of the Sufis who was exiled from Baghdad after the trial of the financier Hallaj, and was the first person to organize *ziyaras* (visits) in the Qarafa.[75] It still has a wealth of distinctive features that make it a recommended route for discovering a particular aspect of the city and its necropolis. Five funerary monuments dating back to Fatimid, Ayyubid, and Mamluk times line the five-hundred-meter stretch of Darb al-Wada' from Sayyida Nafisa Square in the south to the mosque of Sukayna in the north. The first, on the right-hand side of the road, is the mausoleum of the ninth Mamluk sultan, al-Ashraf Khalil (1290–93), son of Sultan Qalawun and conqueror of 'Akka. It is a brick cube surmounted by a 6.5-meter-high octagonal drum supporting quite a strangely shaped dome. The neighboring mausoleum, which

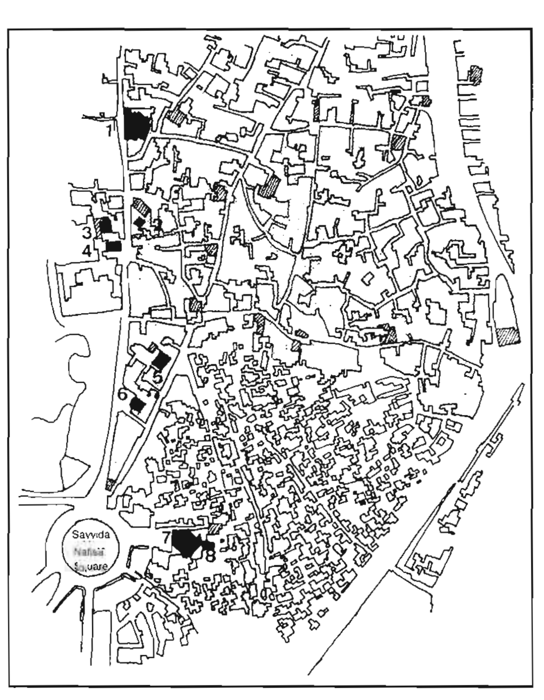




Above, mausoleum of Fatima Khatun showing the ruined madrasa, *which no longer exists (photograph by Creswell); below, the monuments of Sayyida Nafisa (drawing by G. El Kadi, base map by SFS/IGN, France, 1978, updated by the authors).*

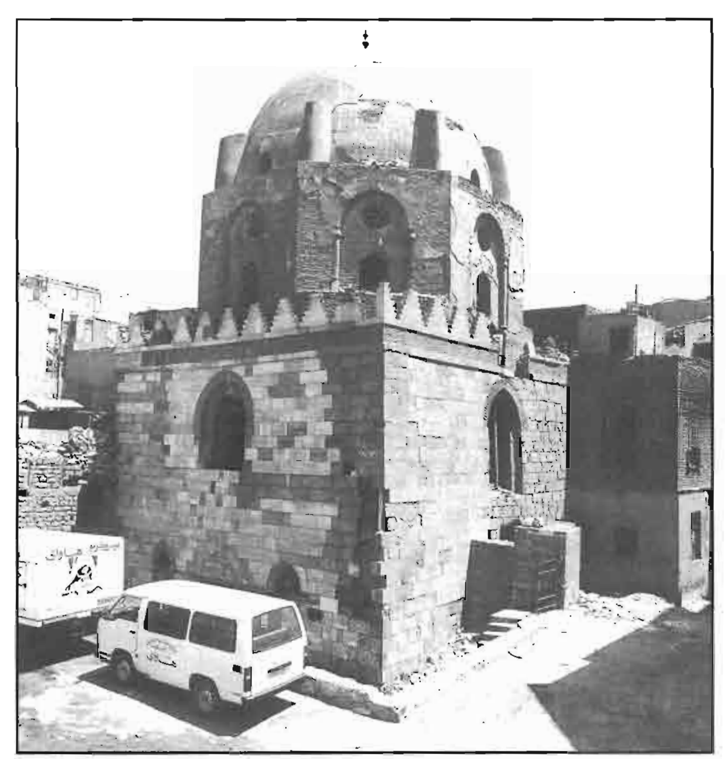
houses the remains of Fatima Khatun, the first wife of Sultan Qalawun, is almost identical in shape but no longer has its dome. Its refined entrance gate is flanked on the left by a square-shafted minaret that has lost its *mabkhara* and on the right by a vaulted tunnel leading to an open-air portico. Excavations carried out in 1915 revealed four steps leading up to the main entrance. These two mausolea, which date from the beginning of the Bahri Mamluk period, represent the emergence of funerary complexes that comprise several other buildings adjoining the actual mausoleum: old photographs show the existence of *madrasas* of which nothing remains today. The layout design is enhanced by zones of transition between exterior and interior: raised entrances, vaulted tunnels leading to porticos, and so on.[76] On the opposite side of the street stands a smaller dome with large pink-painted sides. This is the mausoleum of Sayyida Ruqayya (1133), daughter of ʿAli, cousin of the Prophet. In actual fact, it is not a genuine tomb. Legend has it that the Fatimid caliph al-Hafiz had a dream in which he met a woman wrapped in an enormous cloak who was none other than Sayyida Ruqayya. When he awoke he told members of his entourage about his dream and took them to the spot where the encounter had taken place. They started digging and discovered a tomb, whereupon he "ordered the construction of this sanctuary."[77] The building, cleared by the *Comite de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe* (CCMAA) in 1916, is reached through a triple-arched portico, 12.6 meters long and 2.48 meters deep, which has been completely rebuilt. This leads to the central sepulchral chamber, a 4.96m² room supporting the dome and flanked by two rectangular wooden-roofed buildings (5m x 2.28m). The enclosure surrounding this tomb also contains an Ottoman-era *tikiya*,[78] together with a pair of very small and poor-looking brick mausolea with a shared partition wall.

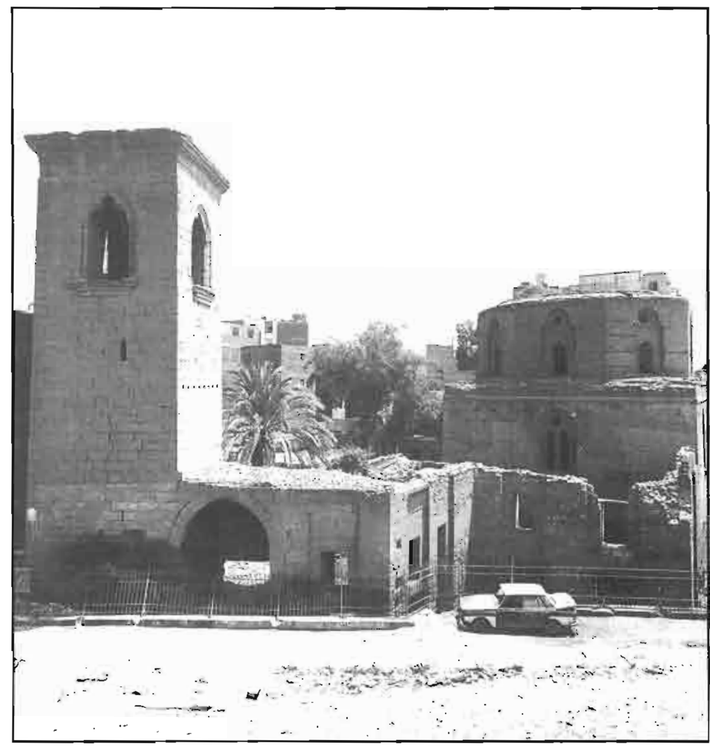


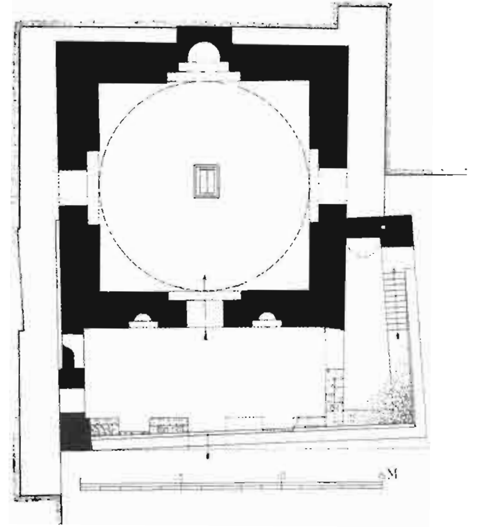


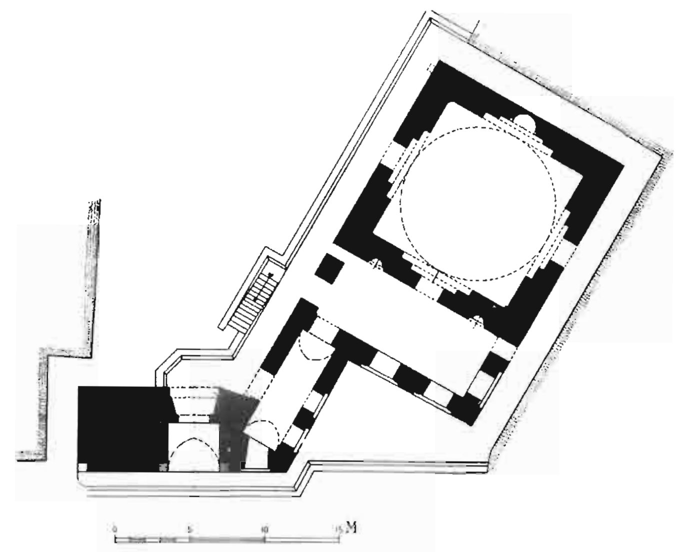
The monuments of Sayyida Nafisa:
1. Mosque of Sayyida Sakina
2. Mausoleum of Shagarat al-Durr
3. Mausolea of Muhammad al-Gaʿfari and ʿAtika
4. *Mashhad* of Ruqayya
5. Qubbat Umm al-Salih
6. Qubbat al-Ashraf Khalil
7. Mosque of Sayyida Nafisa
8. Mausoleum of the ʿAbbasid caliphs
9. Qubbat Muʿfi al-Din

Above left, mausoleum of al-Ashraf Khalil; above right, mausoleum of Fatima Khatun; below, plans of the mausolea, after Creswell.

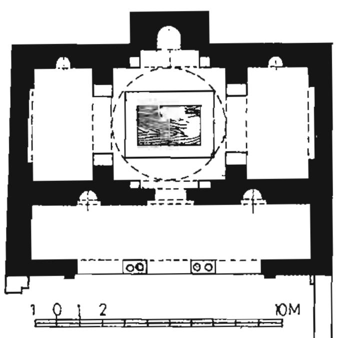








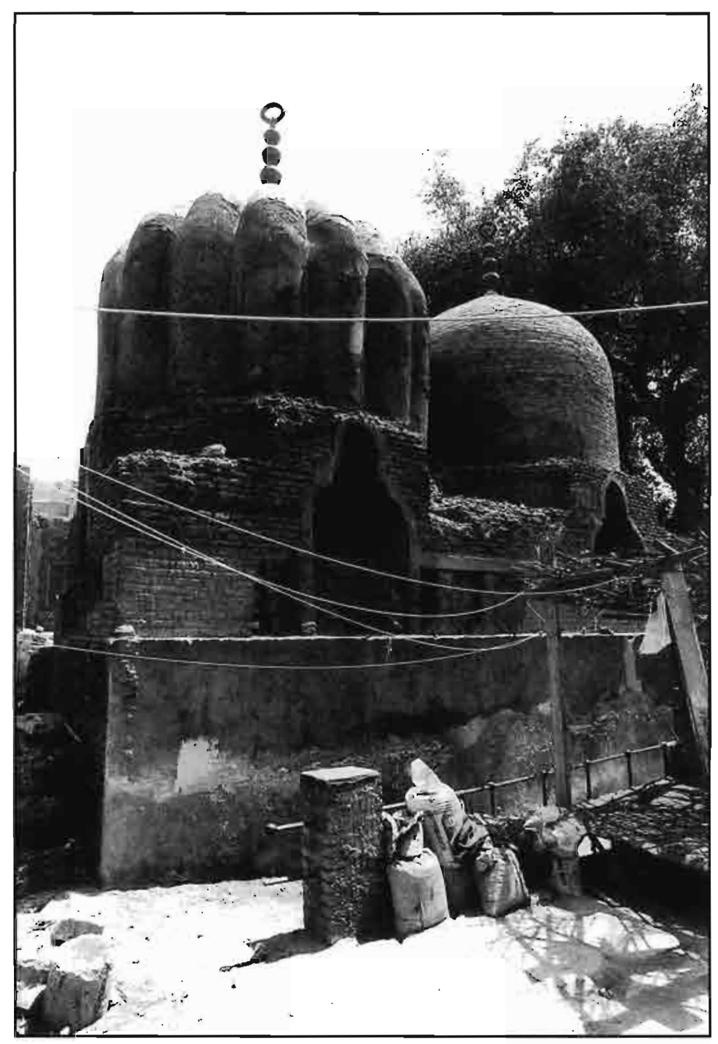
Above, mashhad *of Sayyida Ruqayya, northeastern façade (photograph by Creswell); below, plan after Creswell.*

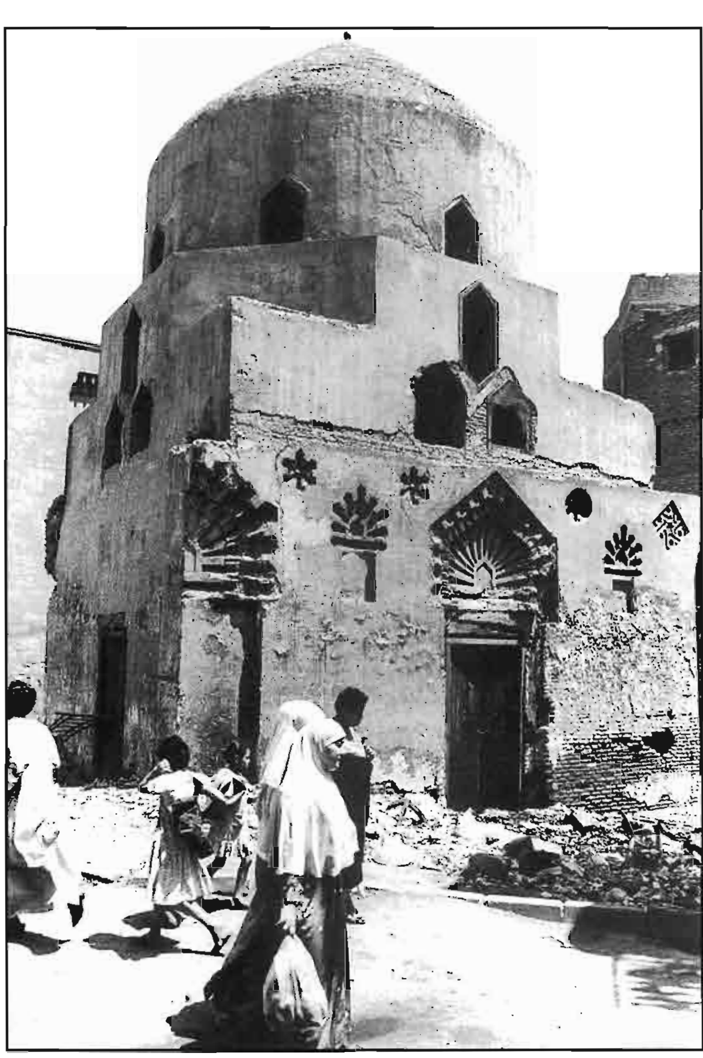


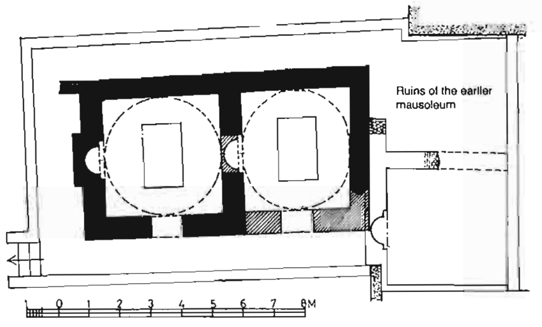
Although broadly similar, there is one outstanding difference between them: one has a smooth dome and the other a ribbed dome. They are said—although this subject is much-debated—to contain the remains respectively of Sayyida 'Atika, a beautiful poetess and aunt of the Prophet, and al-Ga'fari, grandson of 'Ali, who died in 808.[79] The tomb of al-Ga'fari (built in 1100) is a 3.8m² structure, while that of Sayyida 'Atika (built in 1120) measures 3.8m x 3.9m. The *mihrab* (apse) is carved into the supporting wall, and the square base is surmounted by an octagonal drum that is pierced with windows and supports the dome. These were the first two mausolea where the transition between drum and dome features composite squinches in place of the simpler squinches used previously.[80]

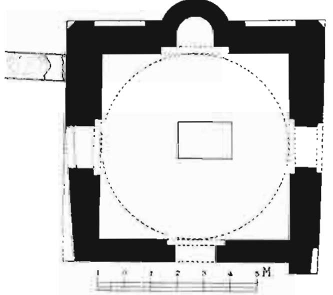
Opposite this humble Fatimid group, enclosed within its outer walls, stands a proud, fully detached building surrounded by railings: the mausoleum of Shagarat al-Durr, the "beautiful yet cruel sultana, the first Turkish sultana of Egypt, to whom Damietta was surrendered in 1250 in exchange for the ransom of Saint Louis."[81] The fourteen-meter-high mausoleum, constructed of baked brick overlaid with stucco, was built that same year, while the Ayyubid sovereign was still alive. The base is a cube measuring seven meters on each side, with a *mihrab* on the central axis, surmounted by an octagonal drum that supports a brick dome. The last monument on Darb al-Wada' stands further down the street, after a block of early twentieth century stepped buildings. It is a shrine originally established in the thirteenth century, but rebuilt on so many occasions since that there is absolutely no way to ascertain its authenticity. What makes it interesting, however, is the fact that the family tomb there bears the name of Sayyida Sakina.[82] Pilgrims are still drawn to her tomb each year to celebrate her birthday in the Islamic calendar month of Gumada. Here, as elsewhere, the worship of fantasy relics continues to thrive.[83]

Above left, mausoleum of Muhammad al-Ga'fari and 'Atika; above right, mausoleum of Shagarat al-Durr; below, plans of the mausolea, after Creswell.

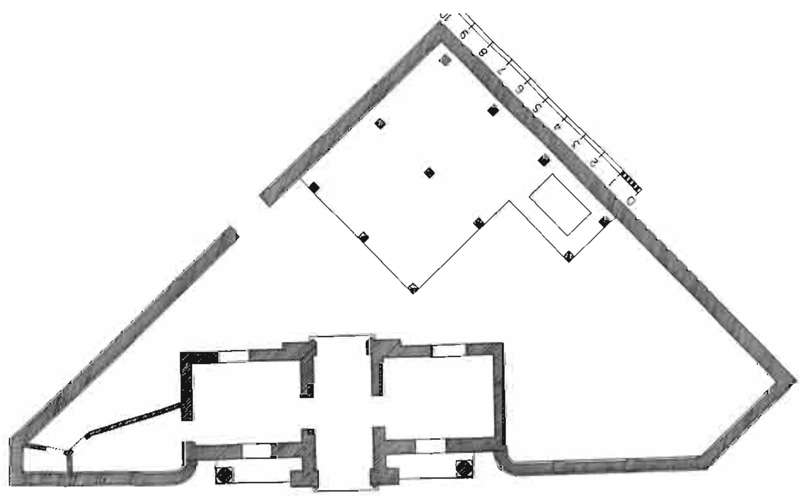




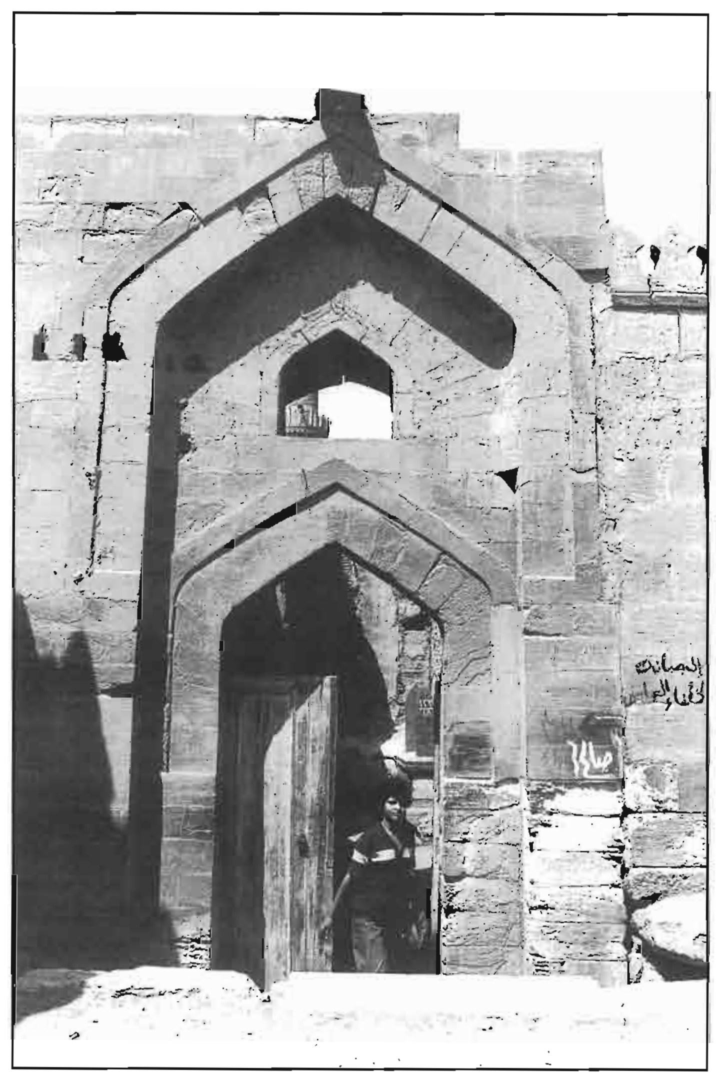




Above, tomb of the Nur al-Din family, 1940; below, plan (surveyed by A. Bonnamy and G. El Kadi, 1987).



Sayyida Nafisa cemetery:
Left, Fatimid-era doorway; right, detail of a decorated tomb.



Zone 2, access map (drawing by G. El Kadi, base map by SFS/IGN, France, 1978, updated by the authors).

Zone 2
The two Qarafas

This area occupies the central part of the southern necropolis. It is marked out by a loop of railroad track more than five kilometers long, and cut off from Sayyida Nafisa cemetery by Salah Salem Road. At the center stands the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i, in front of which passes the district's main road, called Shari' al-Qadiriya in the north, Imam al-Shafi'i in the center, and Sidi 'Uqba in the south. There are five housing blocks: al-Qadiriya neighborhood on either side of the main road in the northernmost corner; al-Kharta al-Qadima on the southeastern flank; a twenty-hectare block in the center, opposite al-Shafi'i mausoleum, which is now divided into two neighborhoods by al-Kurdi Street—Imam al-Shafi'i on the west side, closest to the mausoleum, and al-Tunsi on the east; and the smaller Imam al-Laythi estate in the southwest, south of al-Ga'fari Street. Given how it has developed through history, we have divided this area into three sub-zones.

Sub-zone I

South of al-Ga'fari Street and west of the area's central main road is the original site of the cemetery of Fustat, the old city whose founder, 'Amr ibn al-'As, is probably buried there.[84] Other *sahaba*—men and women whose deep devotion had brought them closer to God—probably lie there too. A few remnants of those tombs can still be seen today: the turba of Fakhr al-Farsi[85] and the mausolea and mosques that have enjoyed special attention on the part of the authorities. The first that we encounter is the tomb of Imam al-Laythi, an ascetic clergyman of Persian origins who died in 875. His tomb now occupies the corner of a mosque built in 1505. According to some travelers, it used to be surrounded by four hundred domed Sufi tombs.[86] Nowadays,

Sub-zone I, access map (drawing by L. Yacoub and Heba, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

however, an enclave of residential buildings surrounds it. Continuing south along the gradually narrowing and somewhat meandering Sidi 'Uqba Street, we come to a small square featuring a beautifully harmonious architectural ensemble. At the far end stands the mosque of one of the Prophet's closest companions, Sidi 'Uqba, who assisted in the conquest of Syria and Egypt and governed the latter from 647 to 650. His original tomb was built in 658 and later renovated and equipped with a dome by Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, before finally being rebuilt in 1662 by a Turkish governor who added a *zawya*, a Qur'anic school, and living quarters for the students.[87] A few meters northwest of this ensemble is a mausoleum that houses five tombs; the most important is that of Dhu-l-Nun al-Masri. "This great and pure ascetic, dragged off to Baghdad for having maintained that the word was uncreated (with Ibn Hanbal), was also a great writer of assonant prose; he founded the theory of 'mystical stages' (holy scale)."[88] Regarded as one of the first Sufi Muslims, he died in AH 858 (AD 1227). "Against his wishes, they built him a dome and a garden." The *waqf* revenues of al-Ashrafiya *madrasa*, founded in AH 827, helped pay for the garden's upkeep and for 1,000 reciters of the Qur'an.[89]

Left, tomb in the Imam al-Laythi sector; right, minaret added to the mausoleum of Imam al-Laythi by Yashbak min Mahdi.

Sub-zone II, access map (drawing by G. El Kadi, base map by SFS/IGN, France, 1978, updated by the authors).

Sub-zone II

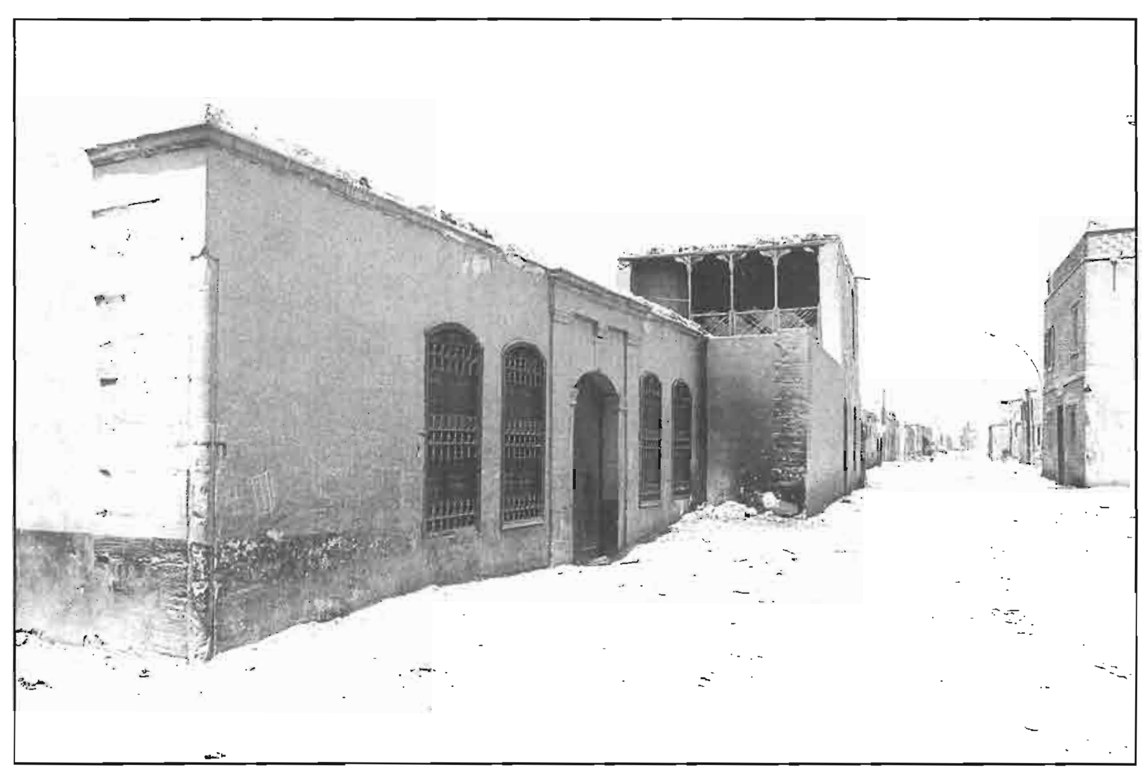
This area takes in the rest of the northern section of zone two as far as Bab al-Qarafa, with Imam al-Shafi'i Street as its eastern boundary. The history of these places, as outlined earlier, together with a lack of rules governing spatial organization, have given rise to a fabric that is complex and hard to define because it juxtaposes complete disorder with well-defined guidelines. Those lines are certainly not the fruit of surveying work. They tend instead to have been impromptu responses to elementary access needs such as providing a direct route from one place to another. A look at the map shows four vaguely parallel roads that stand out clearly from the rest: two that once led all the way to Sayyida Nafisa and two that continue to lead to Bab al-Qarafa. Just as the only reason for the existence of al-Shafi'i Street is the presence of the Imam's mausoleum, those four roads were built in response to the drawing power of a particular monument. Access between them was then provided by the addition of largely perpendicular transverse roads. These cut the wide strips between the parallel roads into rectangular sections, but one cannot talk in terms of urban networks because they are not extensions of each other. All along the longitudinal axes, it is the large freestone tombs that stand out. Concealed behind their almost regular and orderly façades, however, is a confused fabric that interweaves 'house-tombs,' simple stelae, wooden huts and *madrasas*, mausolea, *zawyas*, *sabils*, and tombs dating back to the Ayyubid, Mamluk, and Ottoman periods. There are still nineteen listed funerary monuments in this area, mostly grouped together in three ensembles—two in the north and one in south—with a few others scattered across the space in between. The largest group is concentrated in the south, in the Imam al-Shafi'i sector, which covers a rectangular area of 150m x 500m.

Imam al-Shafi'i sector, access map (drawing by L. Yacoub and Heba, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

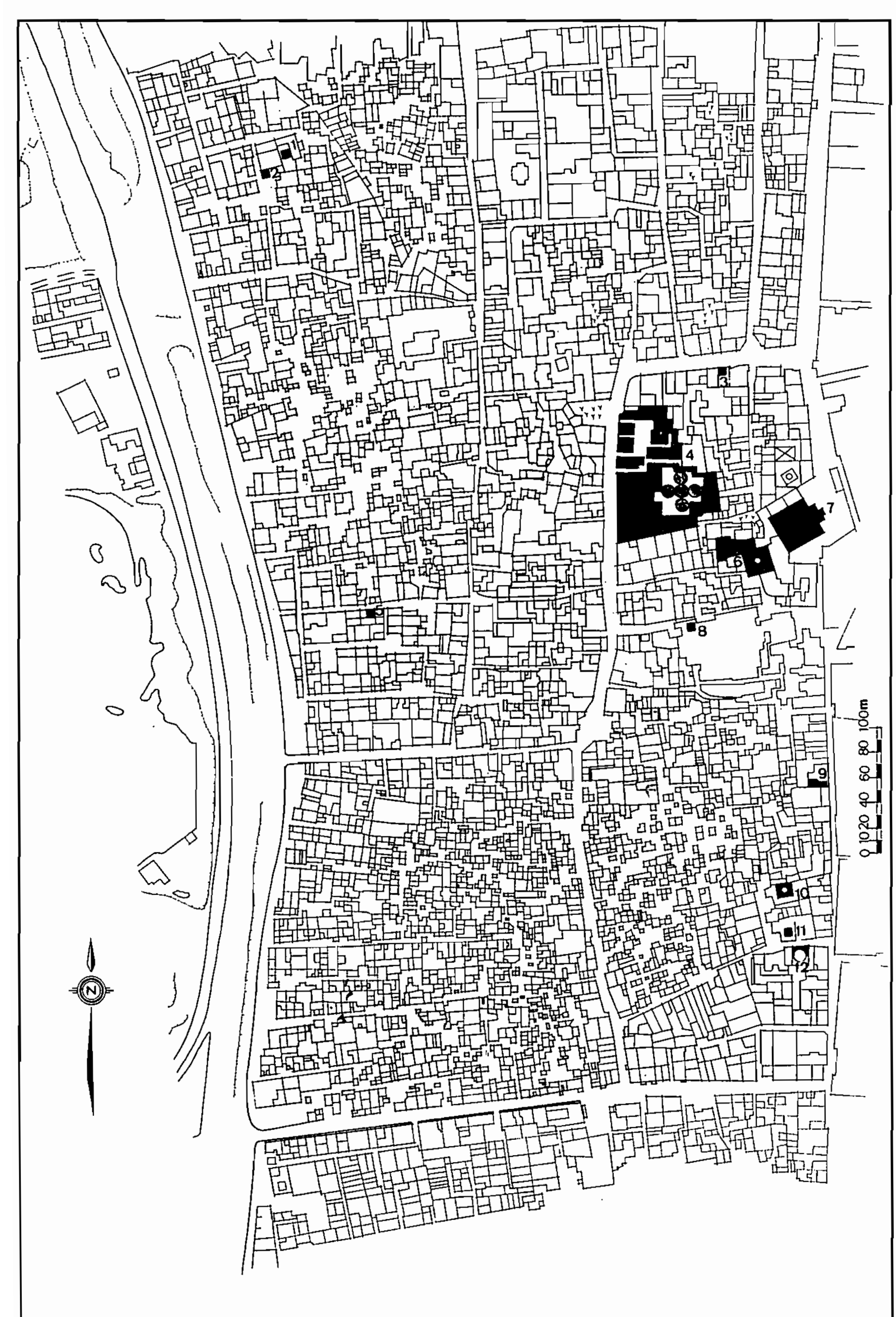
The sector of Imam al-Shafi'i

This sector is something of a museum, but it is also the core from which the Qarafa al-Sughra emerged in Ayyubid times to replace the Qarafa al-Kubra. Let us not forget that a number of large cemeteries have been built here, one on top of the other: the Quraysh cemetery, al-Mashahid, and then the Qarafa al-Sughra.[90] Four of the nine remaining monuments here date back to Fatimid times. First, as we move from south to north through a dense and irregular fabric that developed over hundreds of years, are the ruins of the mausoleum of Umm Kulthum (1112): a couple of walls and three *mihrab*s. Next comes the mausoleum of Yahya al-Shabih, a descendant of al-Husayn, son of 'Ali, who was the image of the Prophet Muhammad.[91] He was invited to Cairo by Ibn Tulun in the eighth century. The mausoleum, built in 1150, is a $7.5m^2$ structure, surmounted by a dome 3.5 meters high and surrounded on three sides by covered arcades. The east arcade comprises three *mihrab*s 2.75 meters deep; the north arcade leads to a rectangular courtyard measuring 13m x 26m and divided into three parallel bays.[92] A hundred meters or so northeast of Yahya al-Shabih, on al-Shafi'i Street, stands an edifice covered by an impressive vault. This is the *iwan* of Ibn Tha'lab, a Qurayshi, like the Imam al-Shafi'i, and one of the leading Ayyubid princes (d. 1216). Where once there used to be a mausoleum and a *madrasa*, all that remains is the *iwan*. It is a brick structure built on a rectangular plan (11.2m x 12.5m). On each side of the rectangle is a vestibule leading to a vaulted chamber. In fact, there probably used to be two *iwan*s as in most Ayyubid *madrasa*s: one for teaching the Shafi'i rite and the other for the Maliki rite.[93] It is difficult to access the monument these days because the road has been raised, so that the entrance now stands more than fifty centimeters below street level.

Northwest of al-Shafi'i Street, lost in a maze of narrow alleyways that often lead to dead ends, is a small mausoleum built in the mid-1100s. This 3.14m cube with white-painted sides and a brick dome is the final



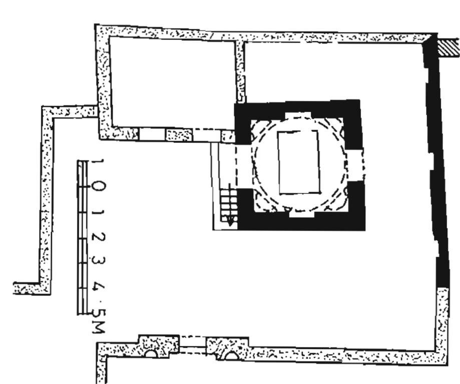
Left page: Imam al-Laythi Street.
Below: Monuments in the Imam al-Shafi'i sector (drawing by G. El Kadi, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

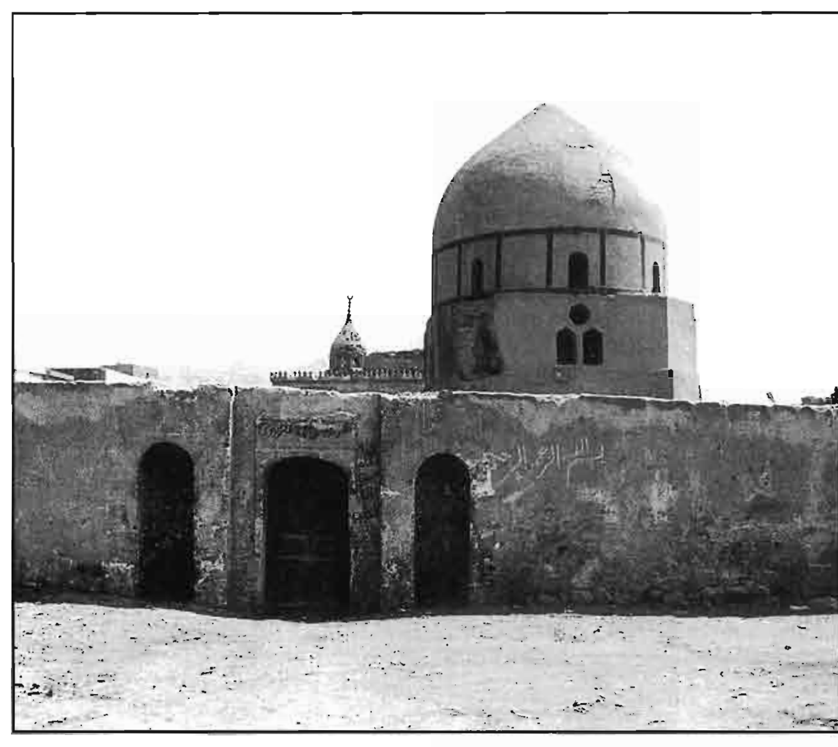


Southern monuments:

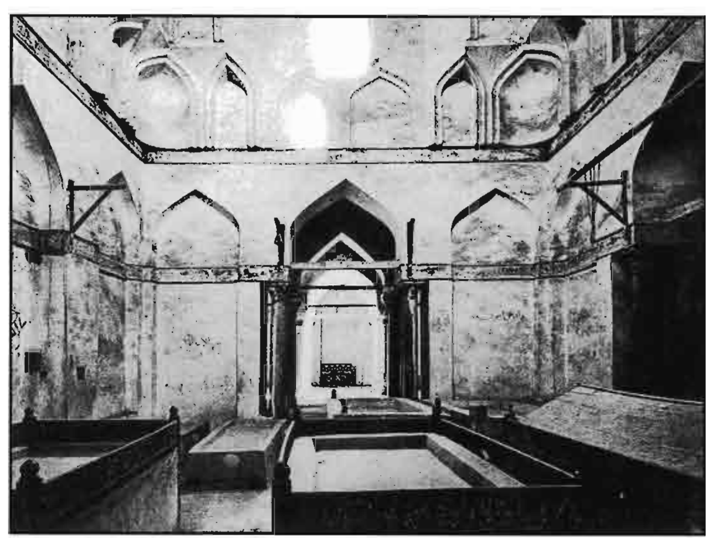
1. Ruqayya Dudu
2. Mustafa Jahin
3. 'Ali Bey al-Kabir and Isma'il al-Kabir
4. Hawsh al-Basha
5. Al-Sabil al-Ahmar
6. Mosque of al-Sadat al-Baqriya
7. Mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i
8. Mausoleum of al-Hasawati
9. Iwan Tha'lab
10. Qubbat Yahya al-Shabih
11. Qubbat Qasim al-Tayyib
12. Ruins of Kulthum

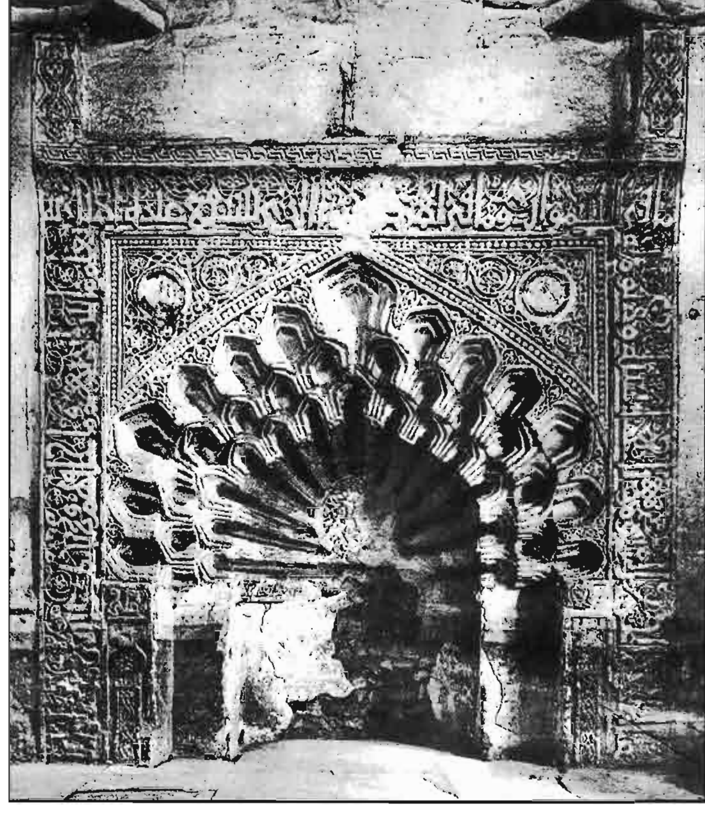
Above right, tomb of Qasim al-Tayyib; above left, plan (drawing by Amani El Rayes, after Creswell); below right, mihrab *of the mausoleum of Kulthum (photograph by Creswell); below left,* mihrab *of the mausoleum of Yahya al-Shabih (photograph by Creswell).*

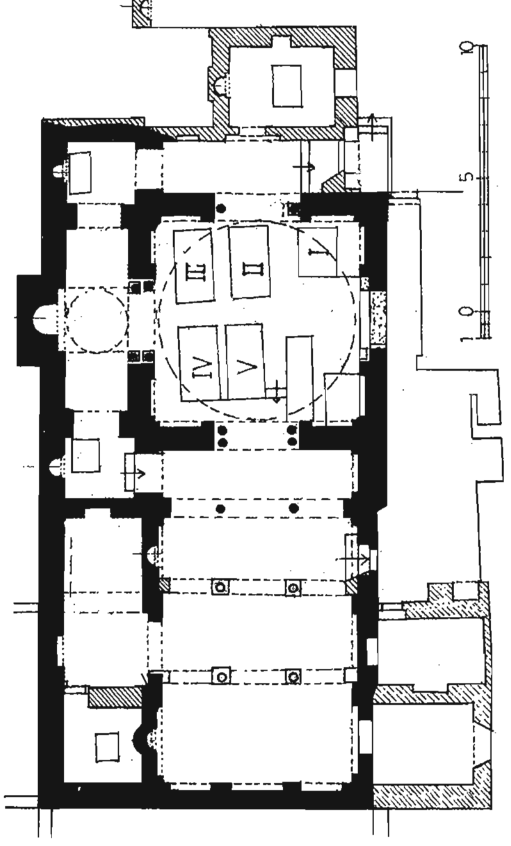


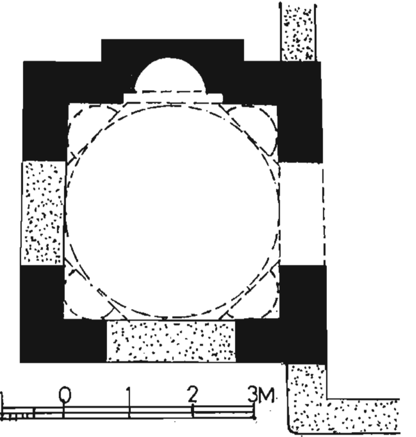


Above left, interior of the tomb of Yahya al-Shabih; below left, plan of the tomb (drawing by Amani El Rayes, after Creswell); above right, mihrab *of the mausoleum of al-Hasawati; below right, plan of the* mihrab *(drawing by Amani El Rayes, after Creswell).*

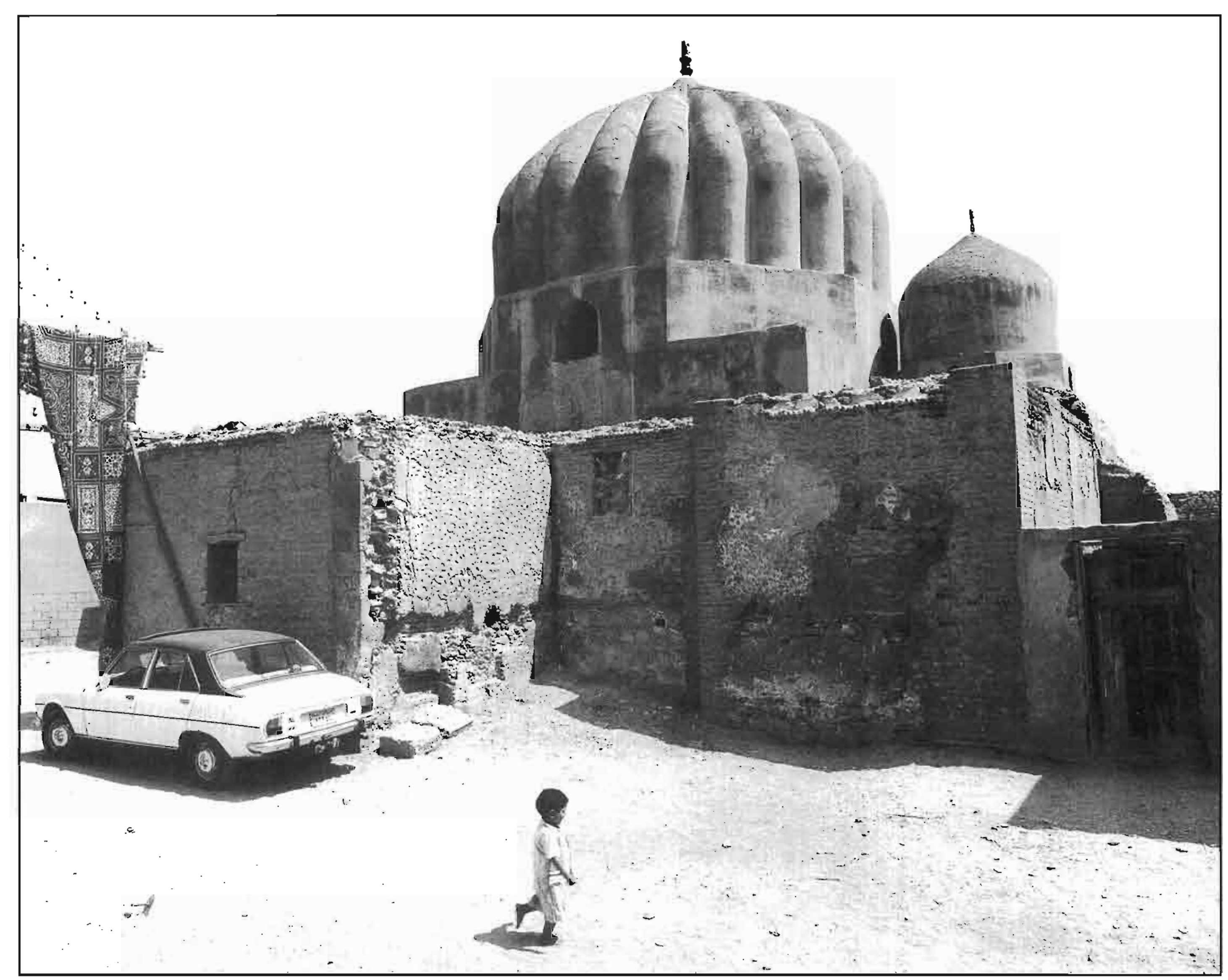




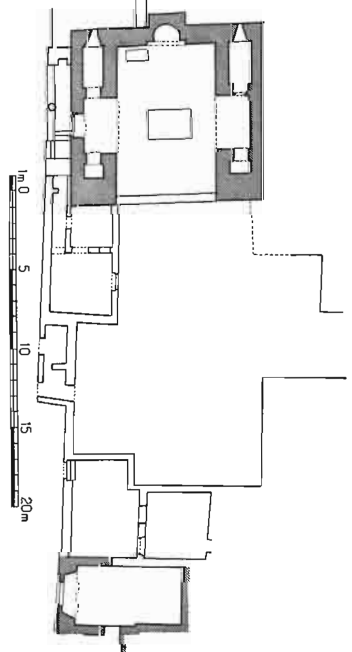


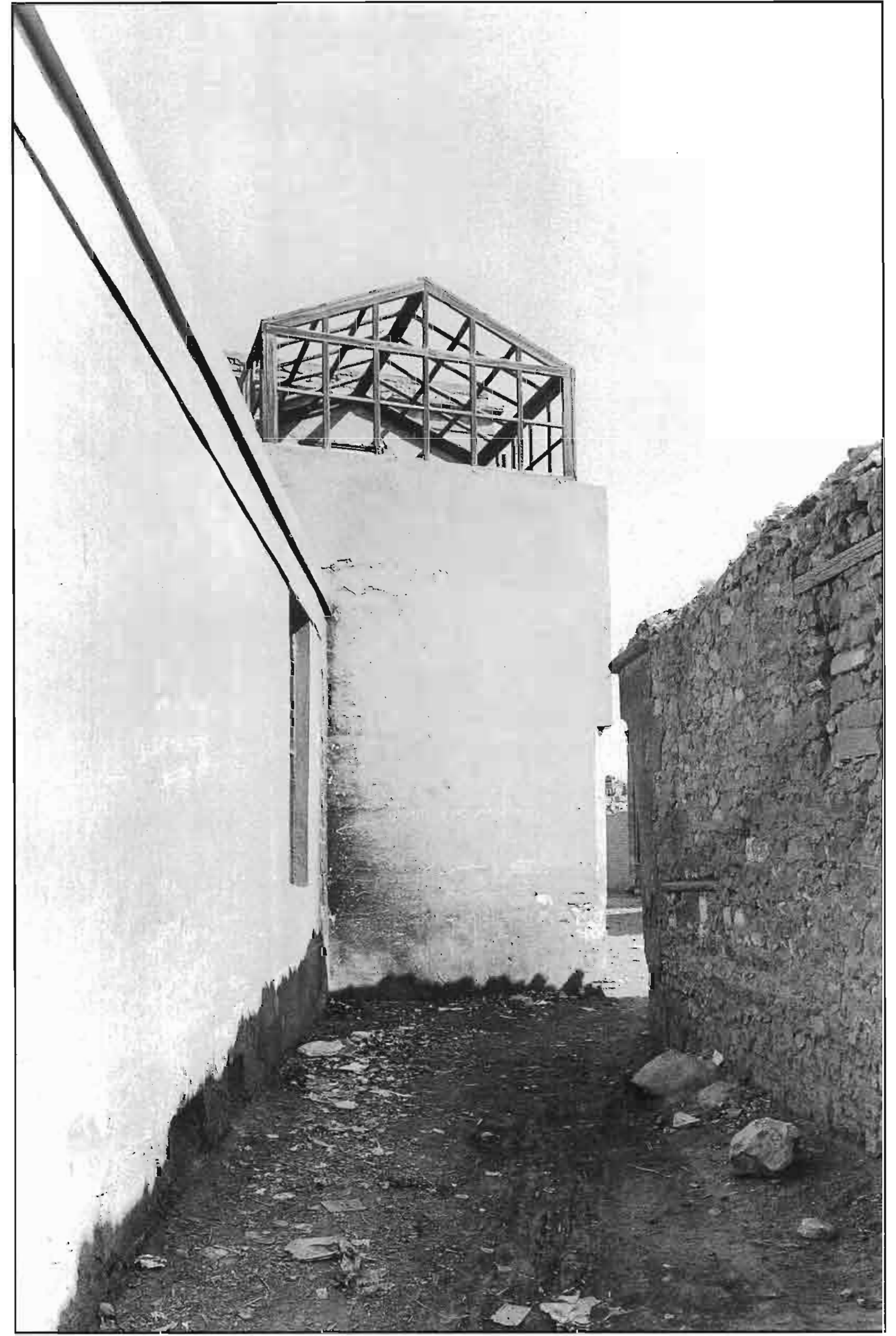


Tomb of Yahya al-Shabih.



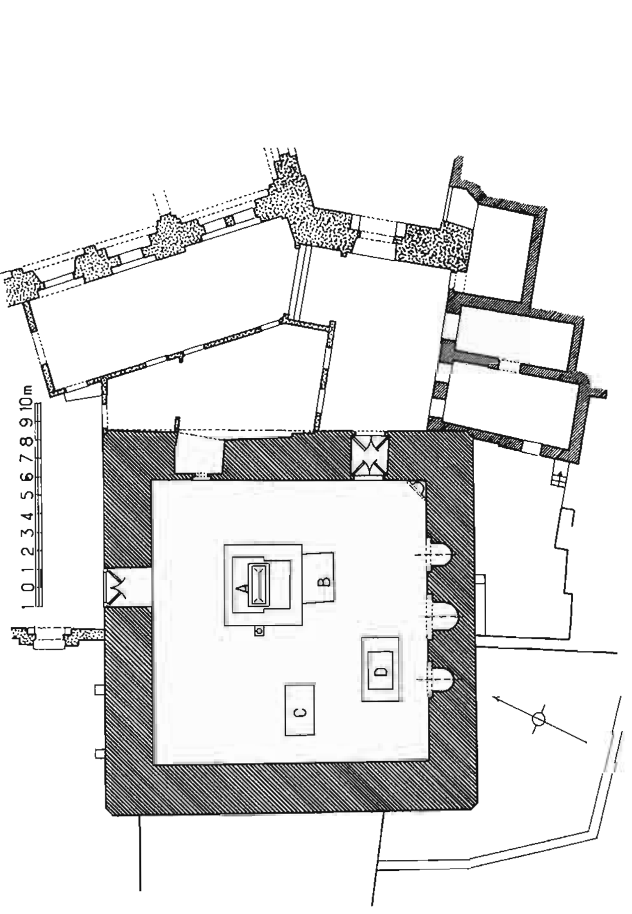
Above, Tha'lab; below left, plan (drawing by Hussein Wasfi, after Creswell); below right, interior of the iwan *(photograph by Creswell).*

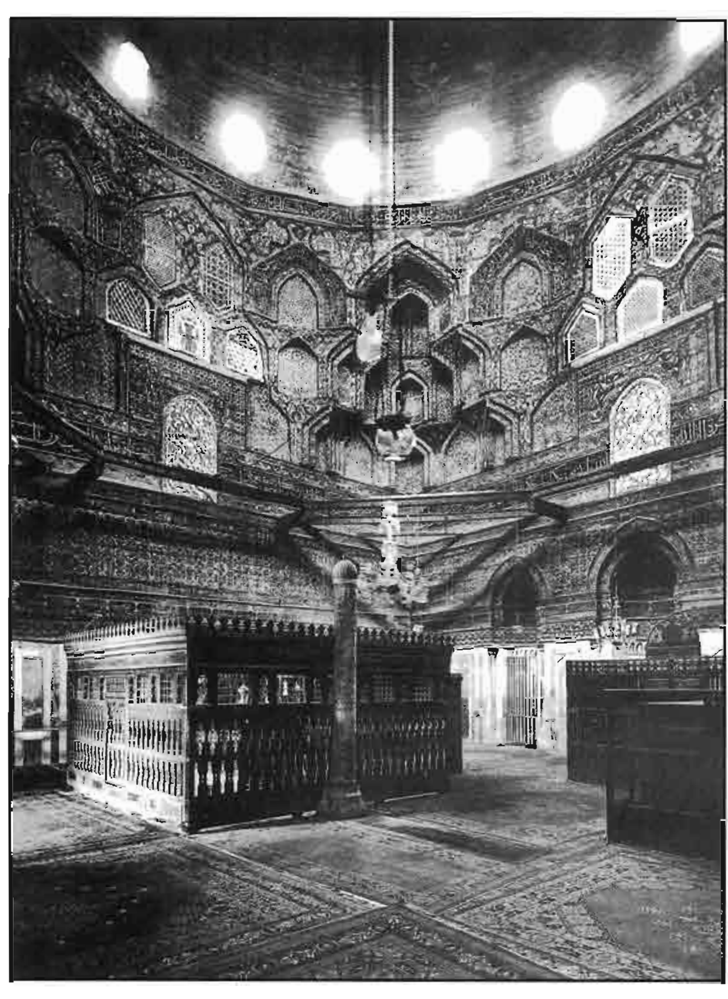




Imam al-Shafi'i Street, with the mosque in the center.

resting place of Muhammad al-Hasawati.[94] Continuing north, past the enclosure concealing the *sabil–kuttab* and tomb of Radwan Bey al-Razzaz (1754), we arrive at a small square, or quadrant, facing the south side of the housing block where the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i is located, although it takes another few detours to reach the entrance on the east side of this well-known funerary complex. The Imam, who died in 803, was the founder of one of the four rites of Sunni Islam and the pioneer of Islamic social philosophy. He was reputed to be a man of meditation and prayer. The building itself no longer matches Ibn Jubayr's description of it in 1217 as a "mausoleum lavish in its scale and splendor with an adjoining school of uniquely opulent magnificence. With its hammam, its facilities, and its outbuildings, it looks like a self-contained city."[95] All that remains today is the mausoleum: built on a plan more or less twenty meters on each side with stone walls two meters thick, it is a parallelepiped whose height, as is often the case with buildings of this kind, comes to 16.5m, which is the diameter of the circle drawn inside the square and then placed upright. It is surmounted by a single-shell, ribbed wooden dome whose ribs are visible from the outside beneath a thin layer of waterproofing lead leaf. The upper part of the façade is decorated with a succession of close-set artificial windows, each of which has a pediment shaped like a Fatimid arch and embellished with rudimentary *muqarnas* stalactite work. The cornice section consists of an arabesque frieze sandwiched between two plat-band moldings, crowned with triangular, honeycomb-patterned merlons. When seen from

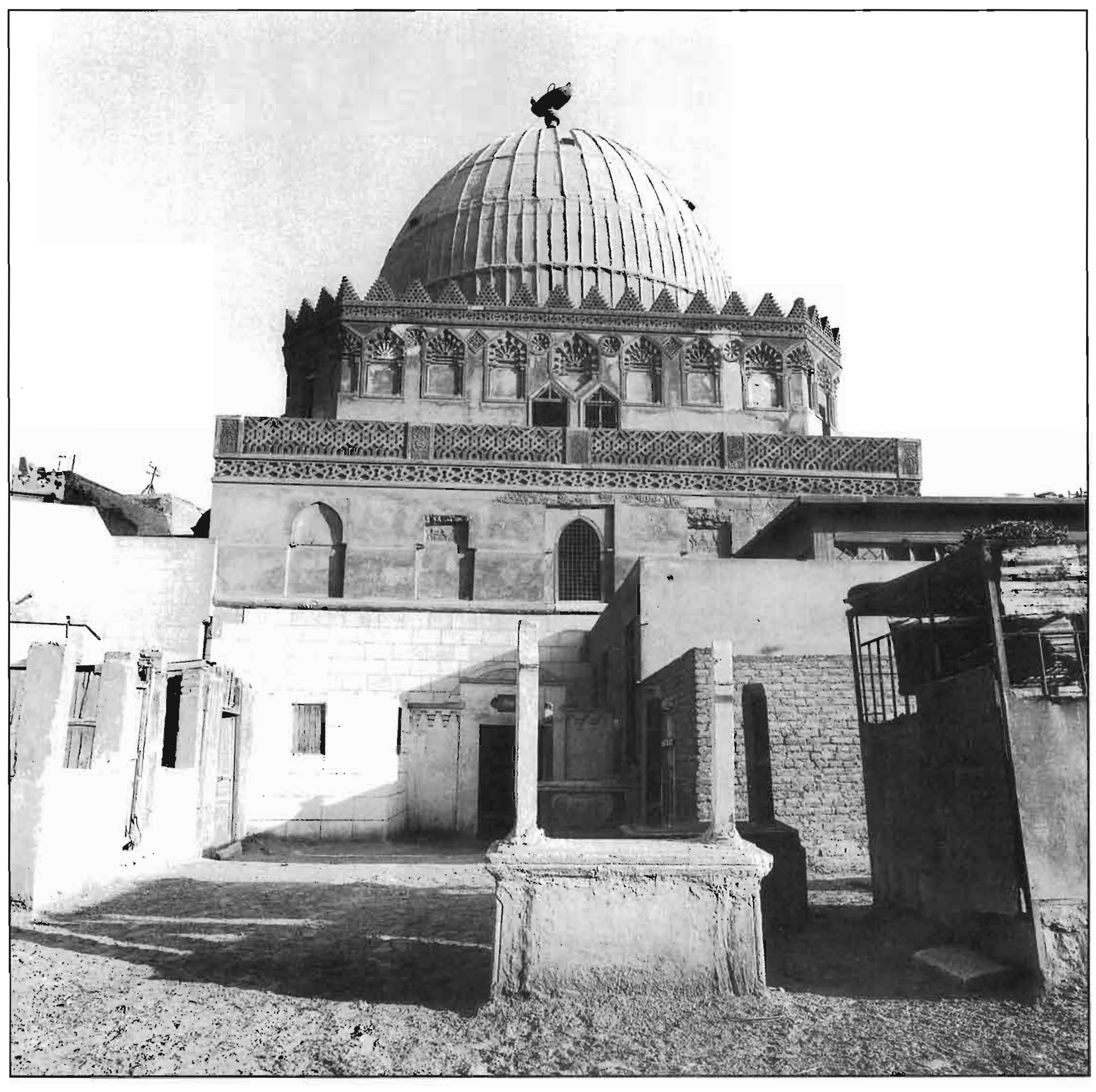




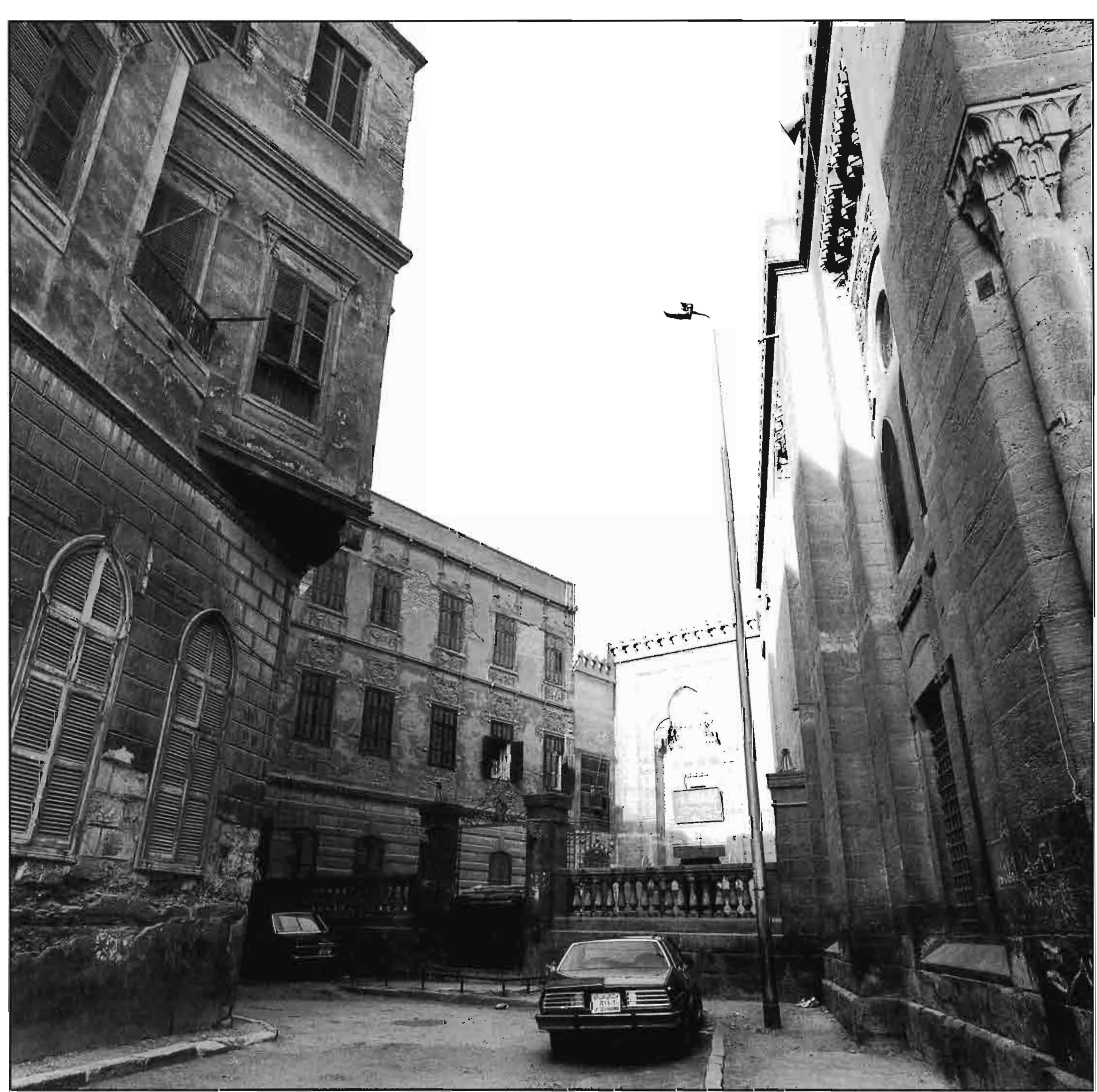
Left, plan (drawing by Hussein Wasfi, after Creswell); right, interior of the mausoleum showing the imam's tomb (photograph by Creswell).

one of the three vantage points offering a clear view of it, the building's volume and simplicity give it quite a magnificent appearance. Sadly, however, it is hemmed in by assorted buildings of varying height and poor architectural quality. Opening onto the courtyard before the entrance to the tomb is the façade of an adjoining residence belonging to the mosque superintendents. Although quite remarkable, this façade hardly compares with the opulent splendor of the one awaiting the inquisitive visitor venturing into the residence's own inner courtyard: a finely carved wooden wall twelve meters high and five meters wide. More remarkable still is the house occupying the northern extremity of the block forming the southern corner of the square on the extension of Imam al-Shafi'i Street. Its street-side façade, however, conceals the outstanding geometrical interplay produced inside the courtyard by the stepped vertical units overhanging the first floor and underpinned by wooden consoles. This house has belonged to the Muhsins, a family of Turkish-Circassian descent, for several generations: "From father to son, the Muhsins were *mitwallis* (literally 'chargés d'affaires') of the Imam's tomb—apparently a more customary than official post that was abolished in 1974. The responsibility was confined

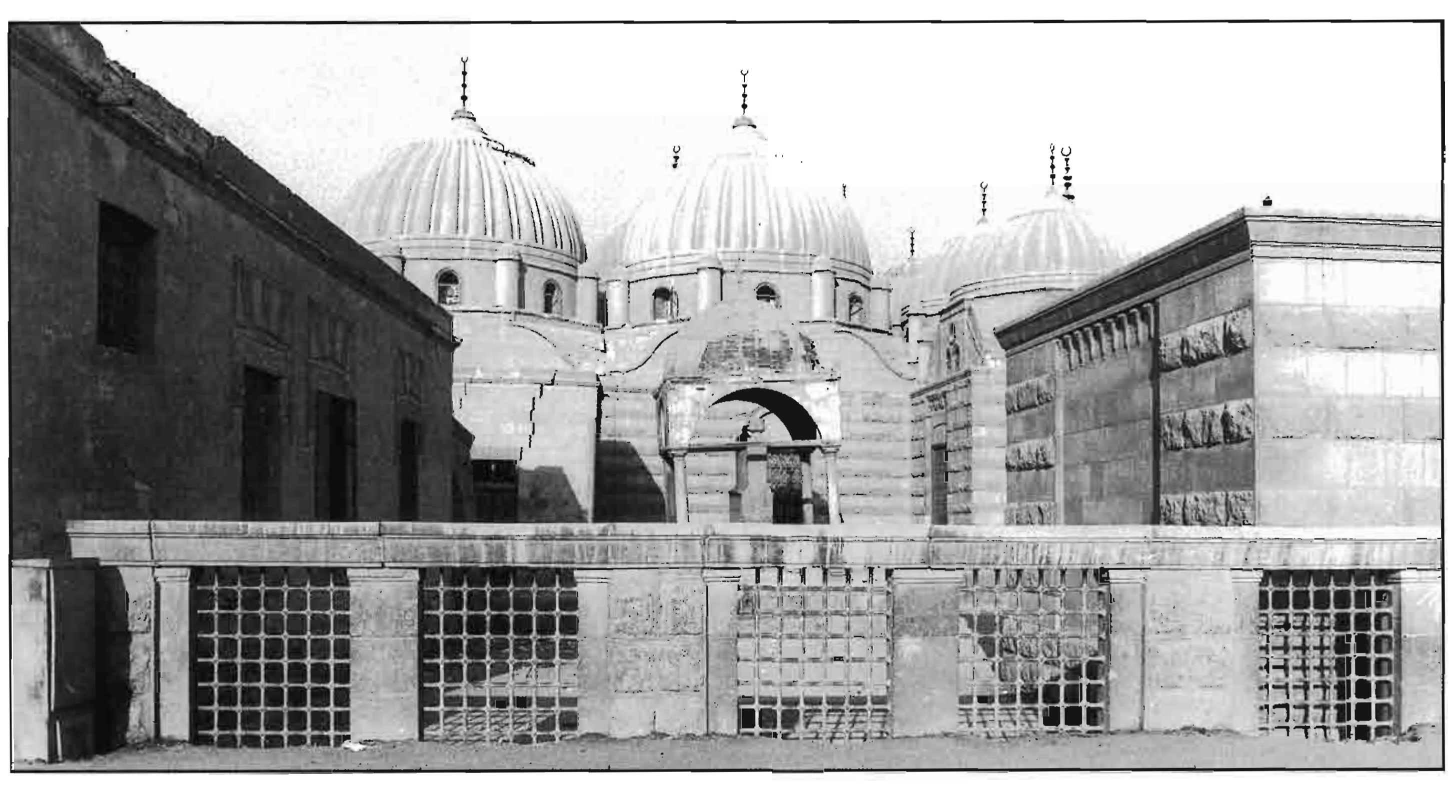
Cupola of the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i.



On the left, building of the Muhsins, caretakers of the Imam al-Shafi'i mausoleum; on the right, the mosque; in the center, main entrance to the mausoleum.

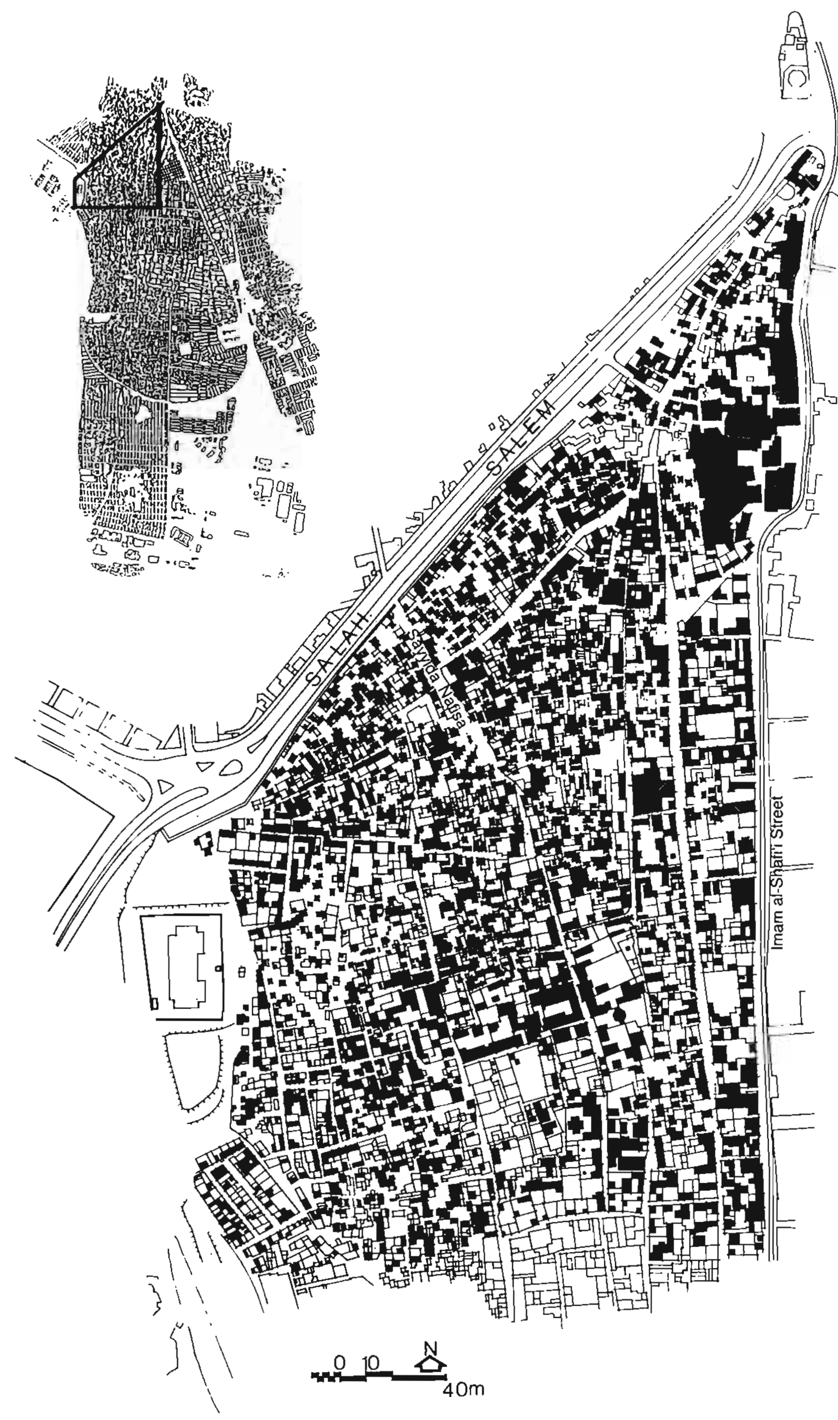


Hawsh al-Basha: khedival tombs of the Muhammad 'Ali family and the Mamluks.



exclusively to four large, sacred tombs: the tombs of al-Sayyid al-Badawi in Tanta and Sayyidna al-Husayn, Sayyida Nafisa, and Imam al-Shafi'i in Cairo. Louis Massignon, in his book on the city of the dead, mentions a faithful companion accompanying him on his pilgrimages to the cemeteries of Cairo who was none other than Shaykh al-Khaliq Muhsin, Shaykh al-Imamayn, great-uncle of the current owner."[96] Finally, behind it and to the west of the tomb of Imam al-Shafi'i rise the five domes of Hawsh al-Basha, the khedival tombs containing some of the family of Muhammad 'Ali together with the fifty Mamluks he had had assassinated when he came to power. Not far from here is the cemetery of al-Sadat al-Baqriya with its new mosque.[97]

Sub-zone II, northwestern sector, access plan (drawing by L. Yacoub and Heba, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

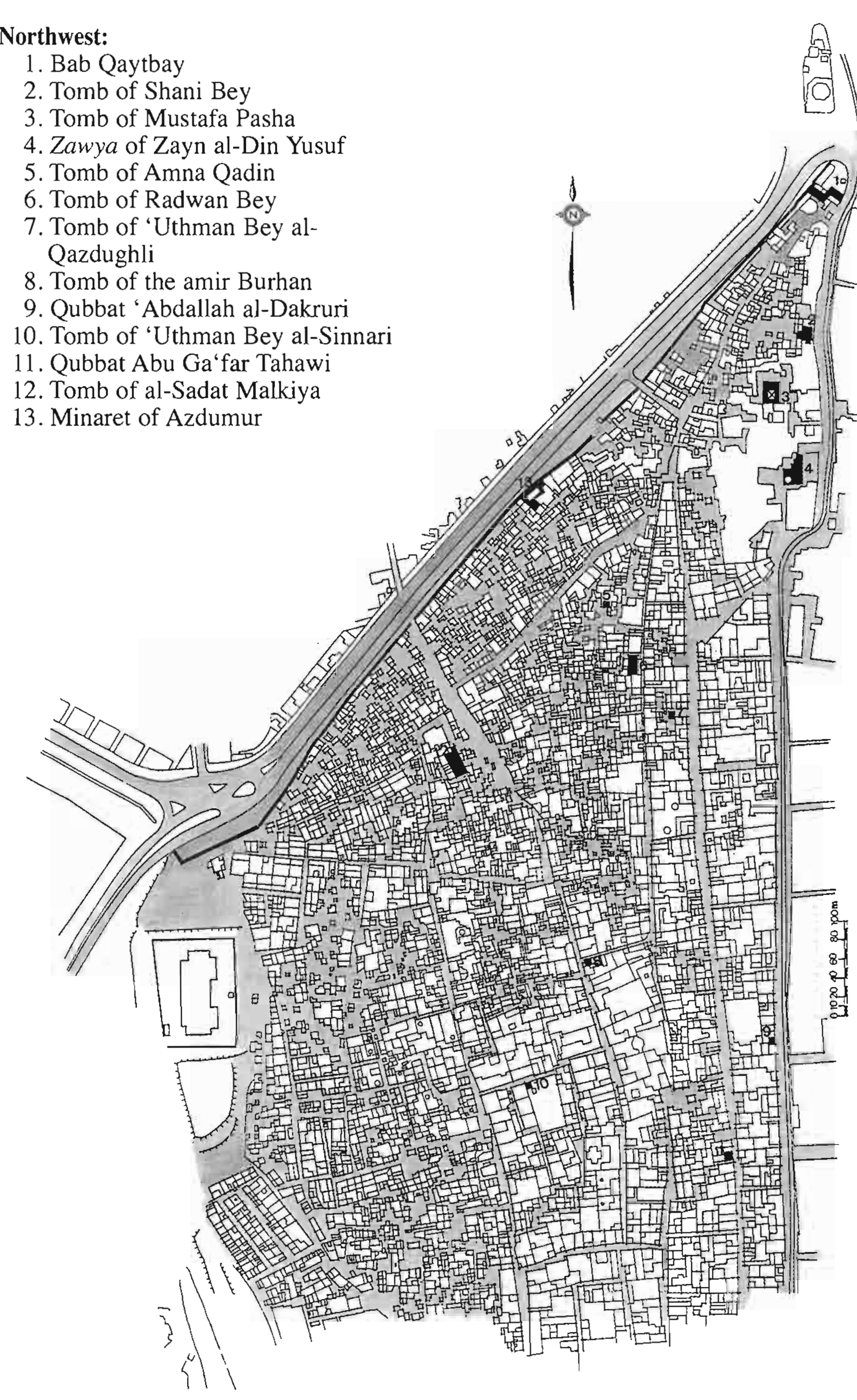


The northwestern sector of sub-zone II

Access to this sector, at the point where Imam al-Shafi'i Street meets the Salah Salem Road, is marked by the gate built by Sultan Qaytbay in 1499: Bab al-Qarafa. Starting in the north, al-Shafi'i Street is called Shari' al-Qadiriya, and the first monument on the right-hand side bears a plaque identifying it as the *zawya* of Shaykh Zayn al-Din Yusuf—a religious dignitary born in Mosul who emigrated to Syria and became leader of the 'Adawiya Sufi order, which attracted many followers in Syria at the time of Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil. With his order facing persecution, and he himself under suspicion as a political agitator during the sultanate of al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun, he was forced to flee and take refuge in Egypt. The foundation he had built in the Qarafa in 1298 reflects the social status of this shaykh who, it is said, was a prince.

The monumental projecting entrance of this building stands a third of its height taller than the wall. In the upper part, a semicircular arch supported by a series of corbels with small trefoil squinches opens onto a shell niche. Through the entrance, which is set, off-center, toward the corner of the east façade, is a groin-vaulted vestibule to the courtyard of a cruciform *madrasa* with four *iwans*. The south *iwan* gives access to the mausoleum. According to Creswell (1959–60), the *iwans* must have had lodgings upstairs for the students, but these have since been demolished during restoration work. This small 'funerary complex' is one of the last surviving examples of its kind from the Bahri Mamluk period.[98]

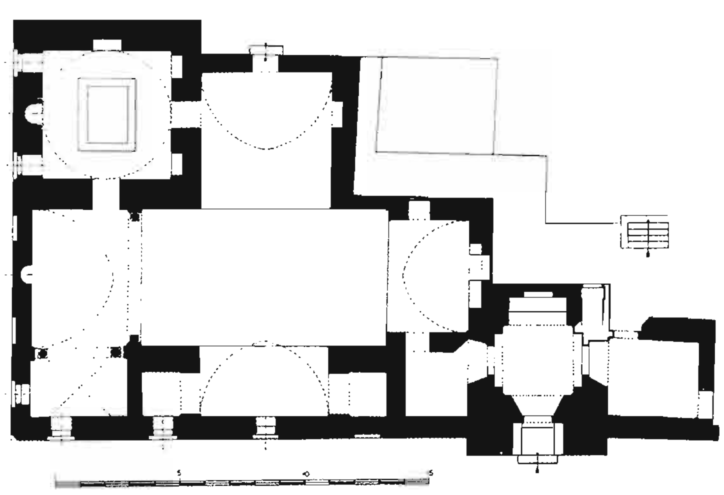
A few meters north, embedded in al-Qadiriya block, is another monument of major architectural interest: the so-called Mausoleum of Mustafa Pasha (1269–73). In addition to the mausoleum itself, it comprises a *khanqah*, a *madrasa*, a *ribat*, and study cells. Creswell (1959–60) attributes

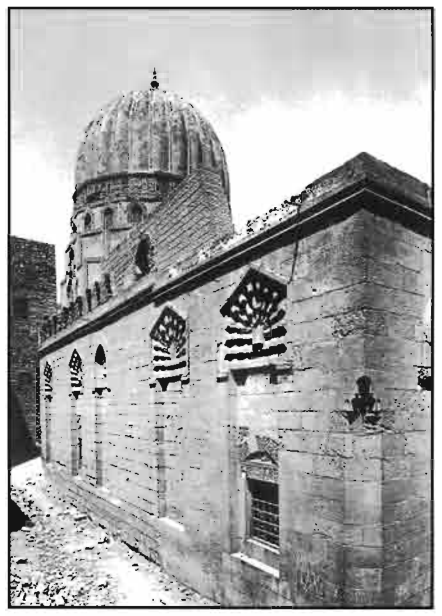


Monuments of the northwestern sector (drawing by G. El Kadi, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

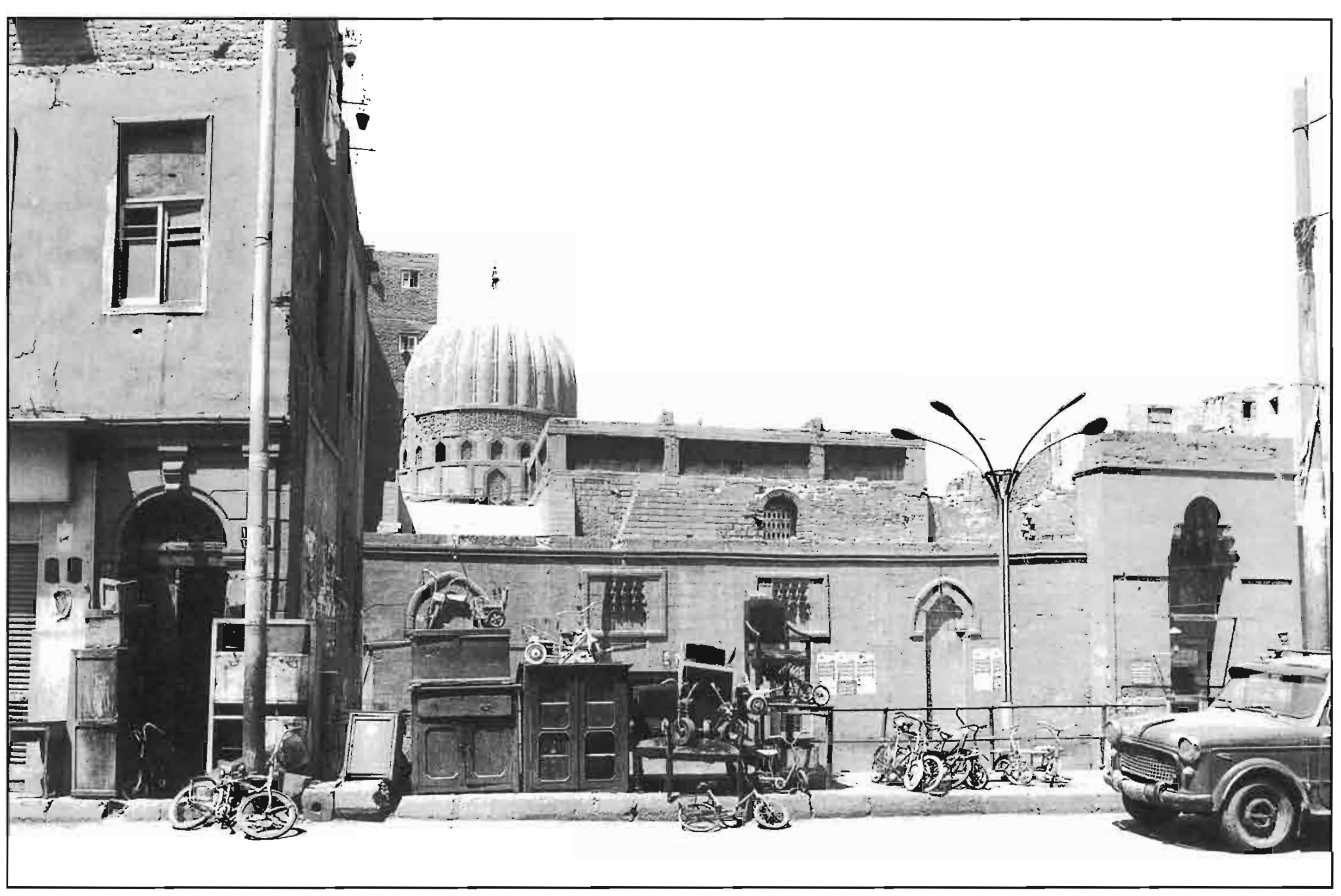
this edifice to two shaykhs: Yusuf al-'Agami al-'Adawi, grandfather of Zayn al-Din Yusuf, and Muhibb al-Din Abu-l Farag, founder of the Kamiliya order, who died in 1272. Its entrance at the corner of the north façade is less spectacular than that of Zayn al-Din. A Moorish arch with small interlacing loops decorating the archivolt leads to a vestibule and then a passage that opens into a square courtyard with five vaulted cells, each 2.18 meters deep, lining the east side. A large *iwan* takes up part of the south façade whose corner forms the mausoleum, which is accessible from the courtyard.

Above right and below, southeastern façade and interior of the mausoleum and madrasa *of Shaykh Zayn al-Din Yusuf (photograph by Creswell); above left, plan (drawing by G. El Kadi, after Creswell).*

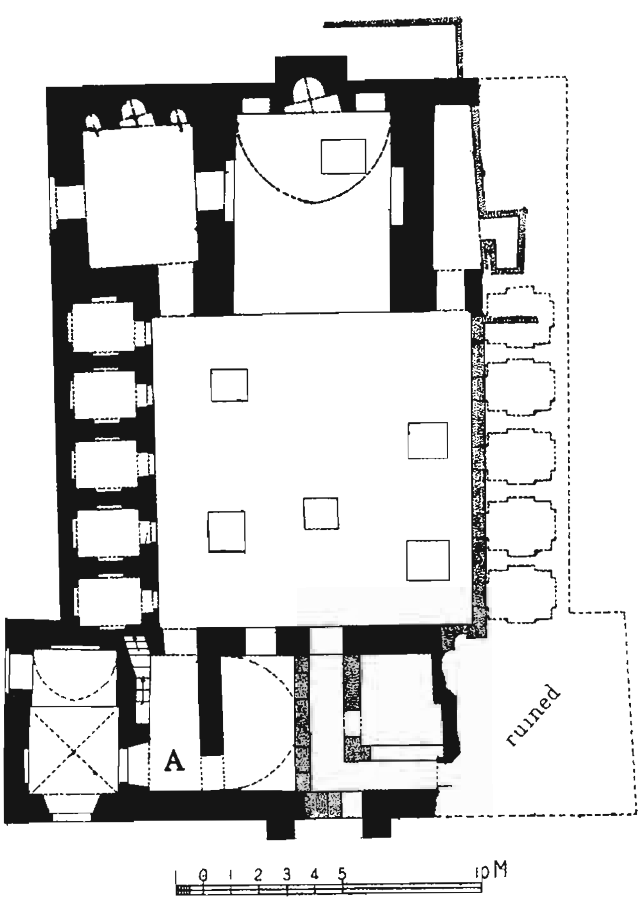


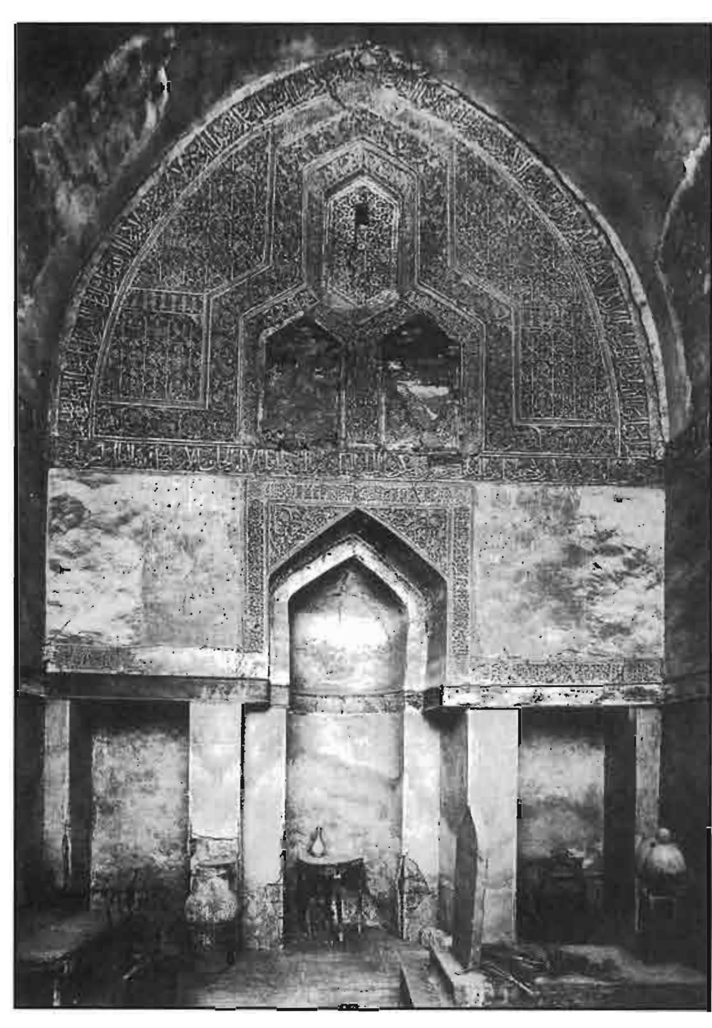


Mausoleum and madrasa *of Shaykh Zayn al-Din Yusuf, seen from Imam al-Shafi'i Street.*



Right, interior of the tomb of Mustafa Pasha (photograph by Creswell); left, plan (drawing by G. El Kadi, after Creswell).

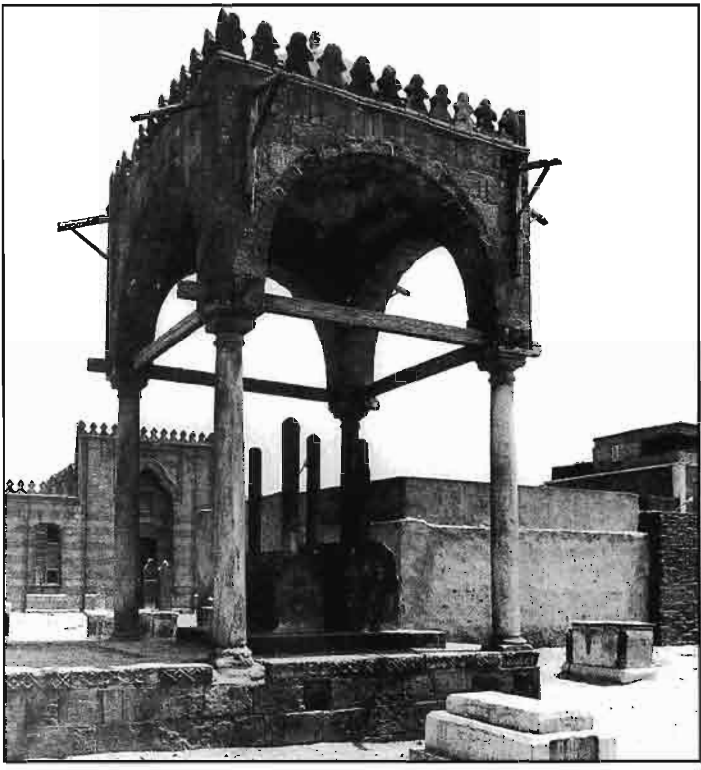




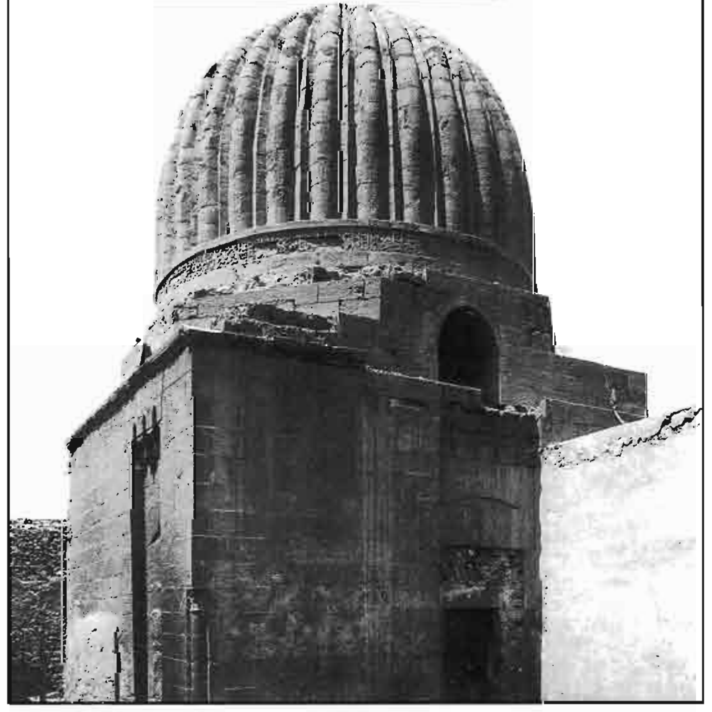
Continuing south along Imam al-Laythi Street, which runs parallel to Imam al-Shafi'i Street, we find, on the right-hand side of the road, the tomb of 'Uthman Bey al-Qazdughli (1767). It represents the most common type of funerary architecture developed during the Ottoman period, which usually consists of a sarcophagus set beneath a sort of baldachin on a square or rectangular plan.[99] This particular tomb has a square base surmounted on each side by a semicircular arch supported by columns that form a kiosk, which is covered by a cupola; the cenotaph is lavishly decorated.

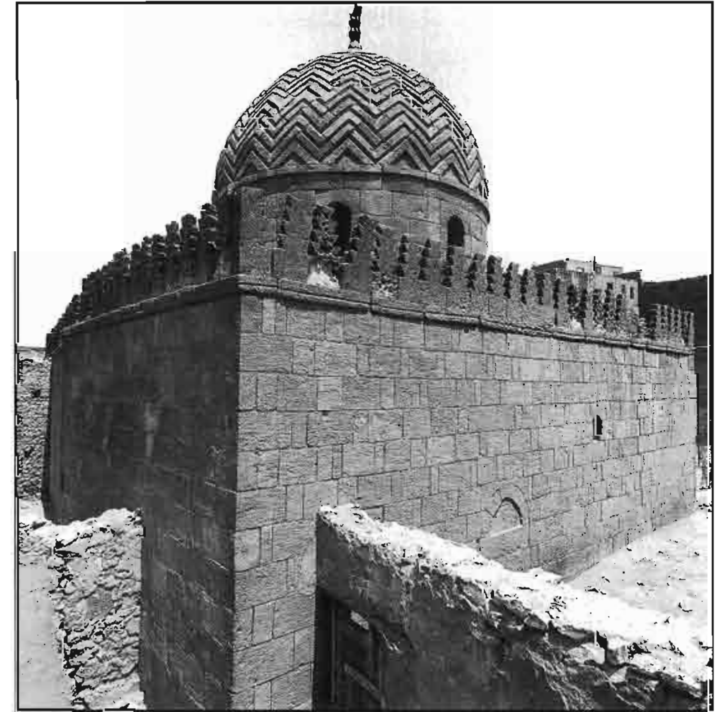
The rest of the monuments in this sector are just cube-shaped structures surmounted by a dome. They line the entire length of the parallel al-Shafi'i and al-Laythi streets and are squeezed into the islands formed by the vast palace–tombs of the old aristocracy.

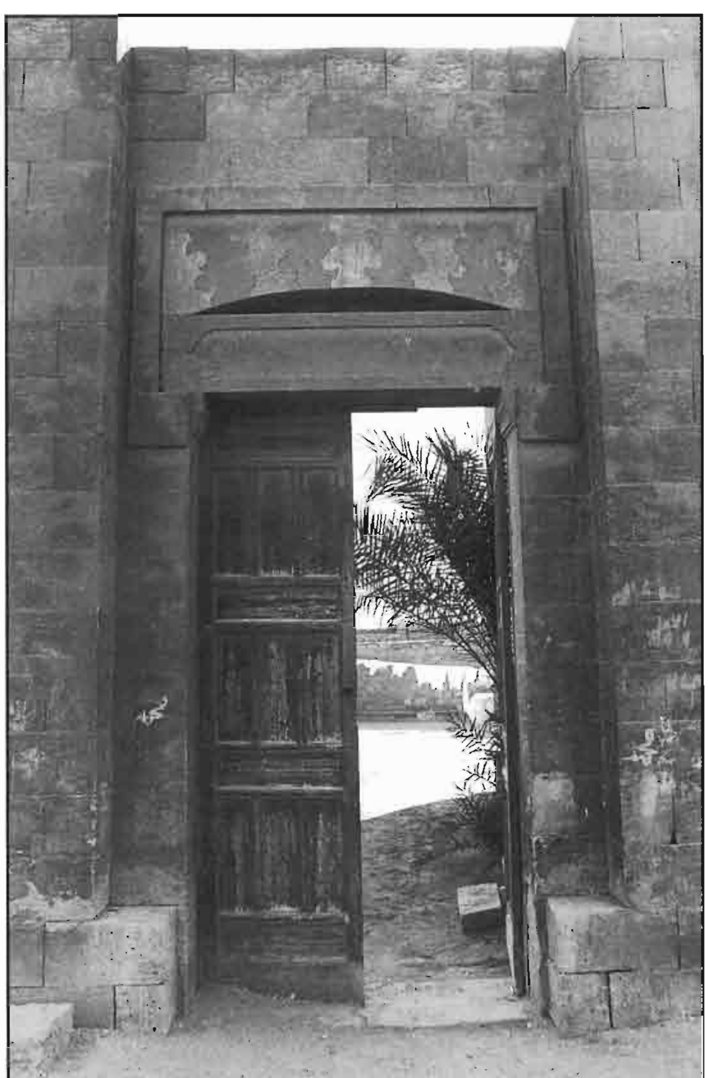
Above left, tomb of 'Uthman Bey al-Qazdughli; below left, detail of the sarcophagus, above and below right, neighboring tombs.

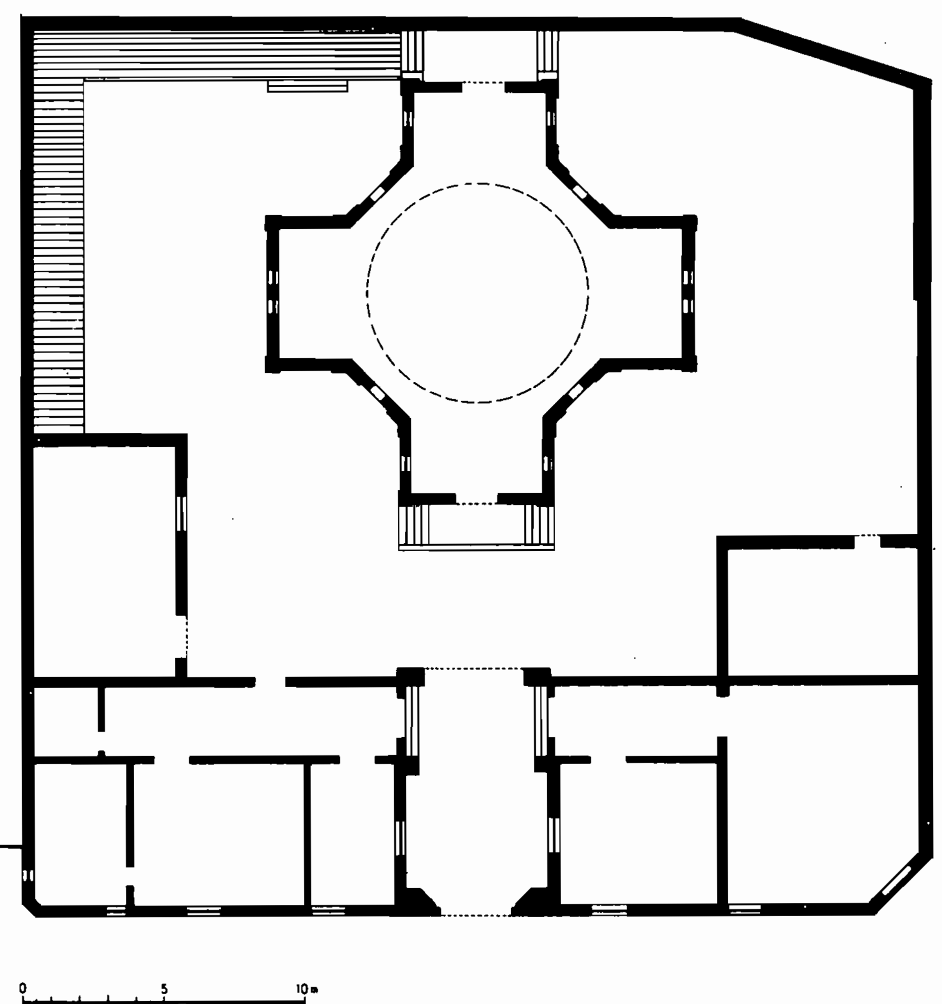


Above, general northern view of sub-zone II, bordering the aqueduct, with the minaret of the mosque of Azdumur in the background; below right, tomb of Tahawi.









Plan of the tomb of Sitti Kulthum Ismat Hanim, widow of Isma'il Pasha Yakan (surveyed by G. El Kadi and A. Bonnamy).

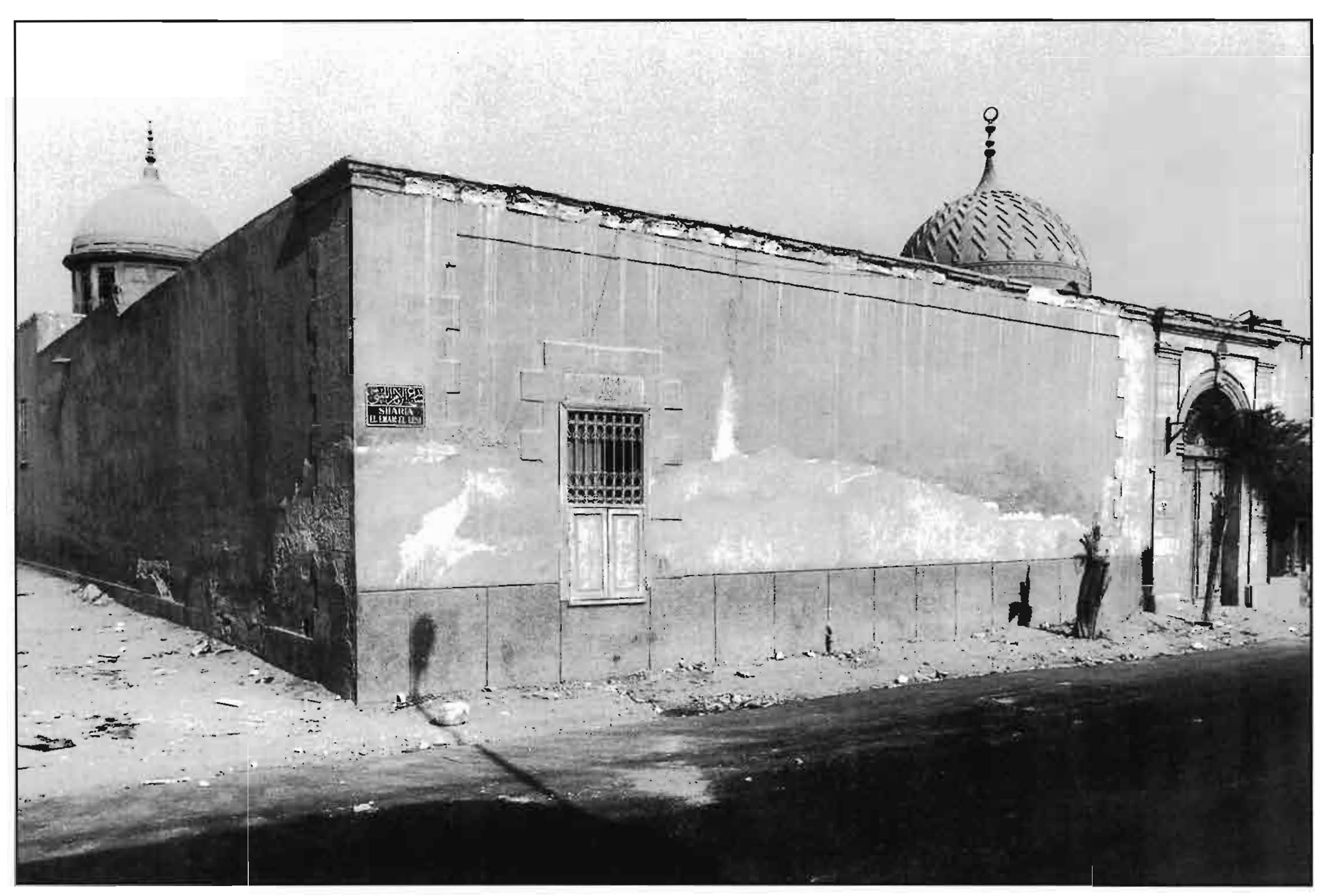
Tomb of Sitti Kulthum, widow of Yakan, Imam al-Laythi Street (1906)

Taking up the entire street side of a plot measuring about a thousand square meters is a large two-story building that stands more than ten meters tall, with two short, single-story wings at the back and, unusually, a pitched tile roof. Because it protrudes some three meters into the street, the architect was able to work with perspective rather than height. One corner—the focal point of the composition—is flat and carefully designed to accommodate a *sabil* at street level and the first arch of a loggia on the upper story. The *sabil* opening, with its beautifully simple masonry, is crowned by a one-piece lintel and a relieving arch of joggled voussoirs, framed within a rectangular band. The rest of the façade is 'classical' in style, with little ornamentation. The large central gate has a Roman arch decorated simply with a carved concave molding that continues onto the jambs. Lower-story quoins as well as window, door, and wall jamb stones are dressed. The rest of the wall here, like the entire upper-story wall, is made of coated rubble stone. Each window opening, all but one of which are similar in appearance, is surmounted by a cornice supported by two glyph-embellished modillions. Strangely, however, they are not set at regular distances from each other and, from the inside, do not appear designed to perform the usual functions of such openings. The upstairs loggia is the most interesting part of this façade. It is made entirely of wood, with four fancy Tuscan columns on plinths surmounted by an entablature that serves as an impost for a depressed arch of ornamental fretwork. The whole section is crowned with a beautiful carved vergeboard. The entrance leads to a vestibule that provides access to the reception areas and living quarters to the left and right and then opens onto a large, square courtyard with an imposing mausoleum built on an octagonal plan and surmounted by a dome.

This book may constantly liken the cemeteries to a metaphorical city, but in this particular case the building could be transplanted as it is into a real city without raising an eyebrow. Only the *sabil* and its cartouche, which originally must have borne a Qur'anic inscription, would come close to betraying its true purpose.

Tomb of Sitti Kulthum Ismat Hanim, widow of Isma'il Pasha Yakan, façade on Imam al-Laythi Street.

Burial place of the Sharif family, façade on Imam al-Laythi Street.



Plan of the Sharif family tomb (surveyed by A. Bonnamy and A. Sharif).

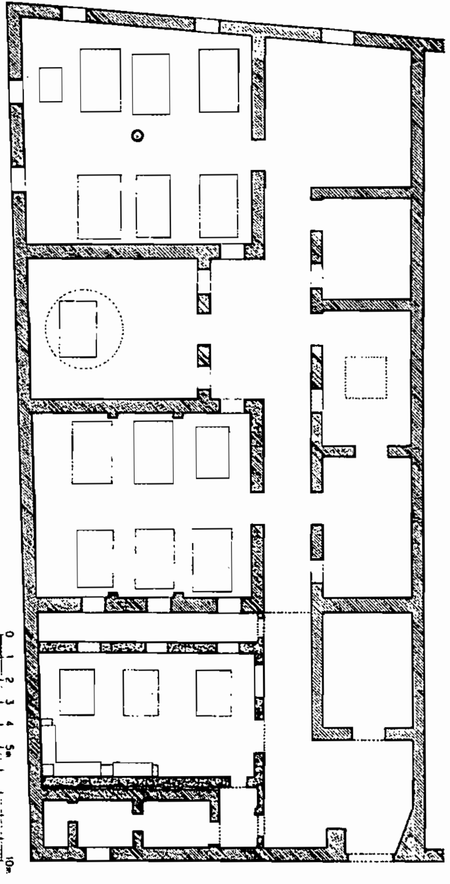
Sharif family tomb

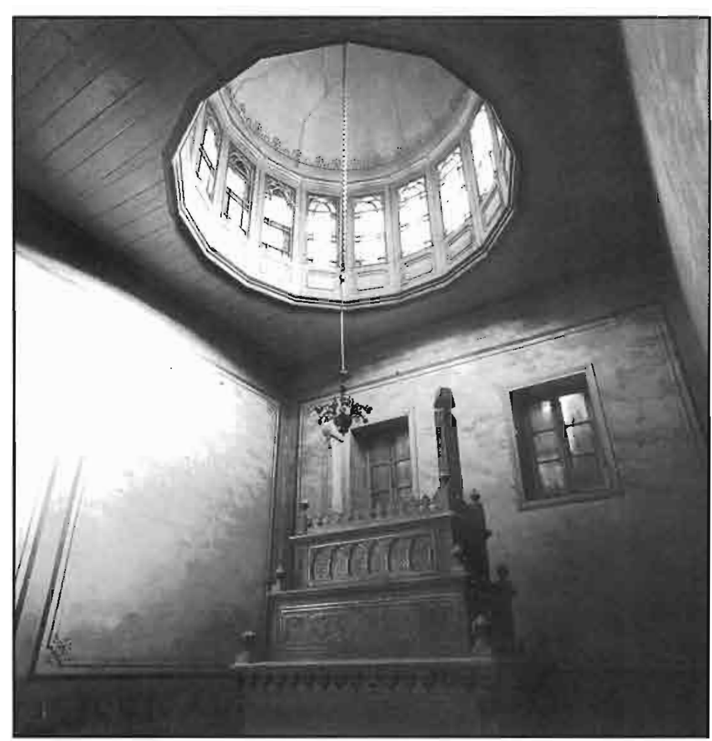
On Imam al-Laythi Street, on a more or less 655m² plot of land bordered on the south side by a smaller side street, stands the tomb that has housed the graves of the Sharif family since 1922—senior civil servants, their wives, descendants, sons-in-law, and so on.

From the outside, it is a highly sober-looking tomb surrounded by an almost four-meter-high outer wall that makes it impossible to tell where the buildings on the other side end and the courtyard begins. Dressed cornerstones and opening jambs stand out slightly from the main body of the coated rubble-stone wall. Bonding has been left visible on both the façade and the courtyard side. The Imam al-Laythi Street wall is crowned with flat stones whose jutting edges, decorated with moldings, form a cornice that projects above the main entrance to form the architrave. Stepping back a little, a dome can be seen over the top.

The entrance is flanked by two pilasters, almost flush with the wall, and surmounted by an entablature comprising an architrave and projecting cornice. It has a Roman arch with an archivolt decorated plainly with three plat bands and a circular torus, and a projecting keystone in the shape of a fluted scroll surmounted by a palmette. A strong wooden lintel supports an intrados fitted with a wrought-iron grille. Its double doors are relatively basic in terms of embellishment and workmanship. Embedded in each pilaster is a wrought-iron bracket for hanging a lantern.

The entrance used to open onto a courtyard taking up around a quarter of the plot, but a recently constructed oratory has reduced that space to no more than a canopy-covered entrance hall and stretch of corridor. Overall, the plan looks like that of an apartment, with a corridor running from one end to the other and providing access on either side to a series of rooms of various shapes and sizes: on the right are the reception rooms to accommodate visitors—one each for the men, the women, and the servants; on the left are much larger rooms that serve as oratories for the long-term residents. The oratory built on what had been the courtyard is a deplorable example of current building trends: concrete structure, Tyrolean finish, terrazzo flooring, store-bought—and deplorably disproportionate—doors and windows. A few embellishments have been added as Islamic cultural referents: Qur'anic calligraphy inscribed across the sides of concrete beams; stalactite-shaped corner corbels at the intersection of ceiling beams. And the windows are fitted with protective metal grilles featuring geometric patterns that draw on the kinds of designs customarily found in marble inlay work. The older oratories are altogether different: beautifully proportioned, with high ceilings, parquet floors spread with rugs, and fine walls coated with plaster and adorned with delicate painted lines and stenciled palmettes. The first is quite large and has had to be fitted with concrete beams and posts—certainly because of a collapsing ceiling. The second, which is smaller, contains the most magnificent ornamental sarcophagus of finely cut and carved white marble, adorned with gilded relief-carved calligraphy. Directly above the sarcophagus, in the middle of a wood-paneled ceiling, is a small lantern dome, just three meters in diameter. Its polygonal drum consists of sixteen rectangular windows whose tracery design depicts a pair of interlacing arches. The overall structure of the dome is wood covered in white stucco and enhanced with painted lines and stenciled palmettes on the inside, with a ribbed outer shell coated with lead.





Sharif family tomb, interior, oratories, and courtyard.

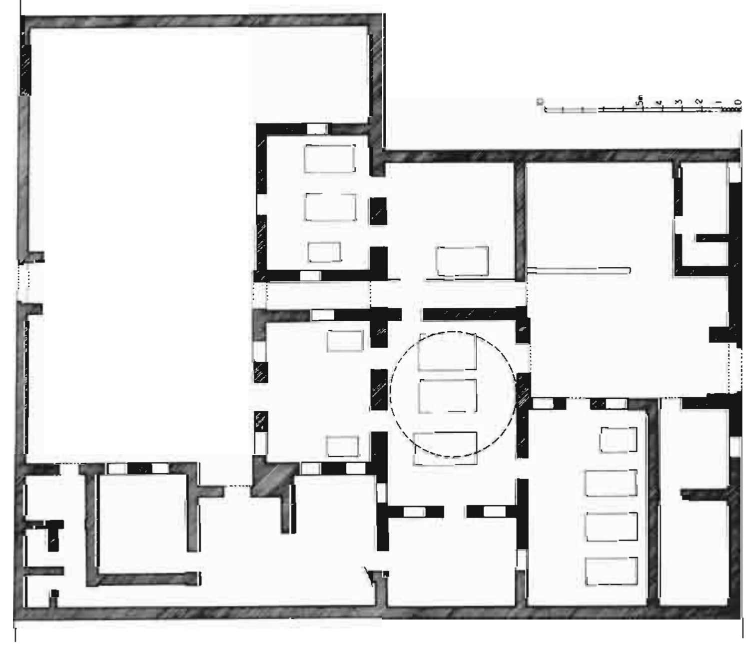
Khan family tomb, detail of the cupola.

The Khan family mausoleum

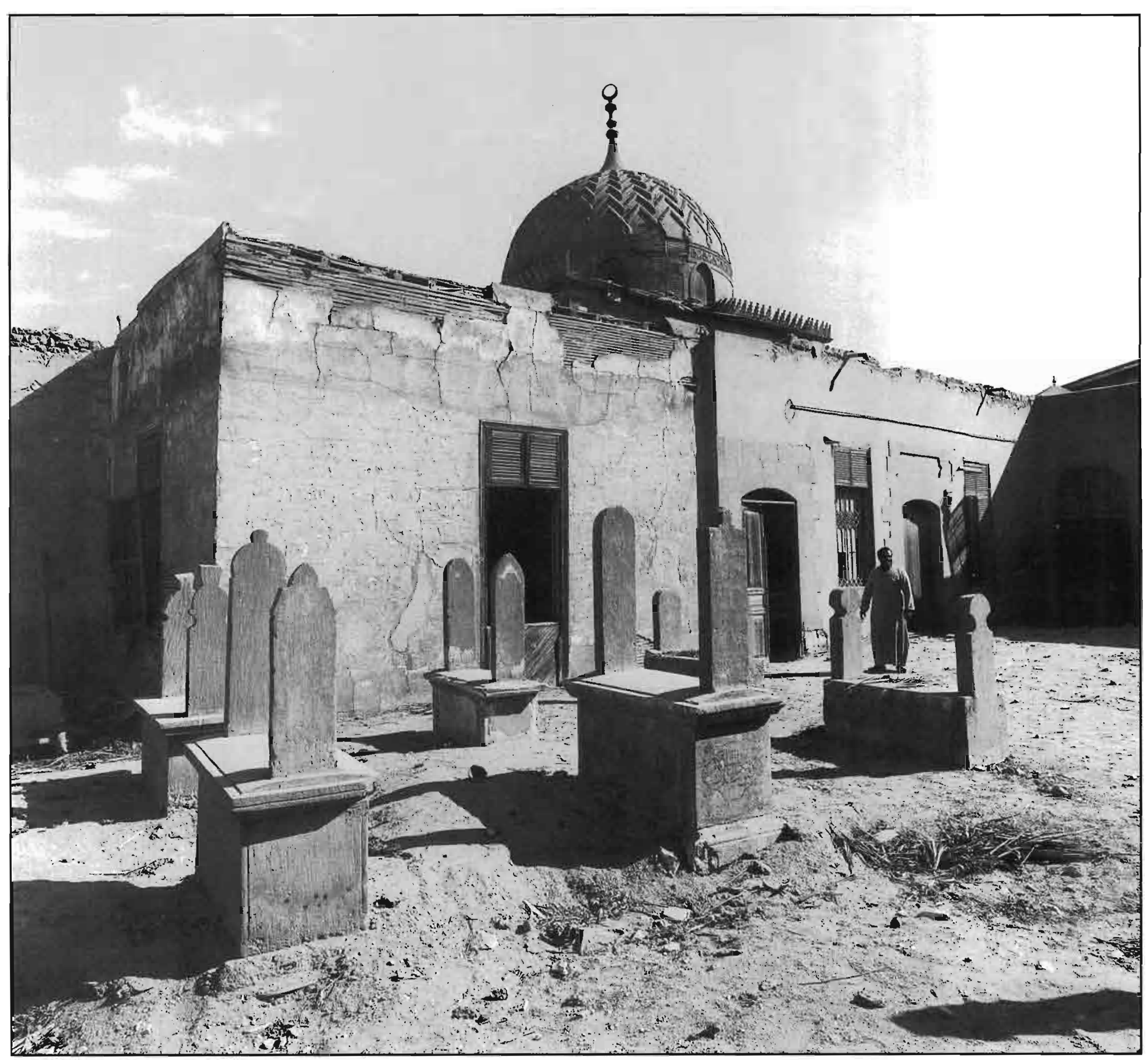
Next to the Sharif family mausoleum, and certainly established during the same period, the Khans' mausoleum occupies a large plot of a thousand square meters. A central building with two wings set at right angles divides the plot along its width. The building occupies half the plot's surface, leaving a small courtyard at the main entrance and a much larger one, reached by the parallel street, at the back. All the walls of similar height are built and decorated in fairly diverse styles.

The walls are built of cheap square rubblework with coating on wooden lattices, squared stone with vertical-join stops, and salient jambs; the whole is extremely sober. The plan is organized around a rectangular central oratory with six openings, which command most communication within the building. This oratory is highlighted by the only two decorative elements in the building: an entranceway and a cupola. The cupola rests on a square drum with openwork on its four sides; the structure is made entirely of wood. The cupola is covered with stucco, which is smooth on the inside of the arch and molded in chevrons for the covering. The drum is topped by a cornice and a wooden pelmet imitating merlon capstones. The entrance appears as a raised, projecting section of wall, dressed in simple stone. The bay has a plate-band lintel with passing arch stones, framed by a wide casing. The latter is made up of a quadruple baguette intertwined with garlands that enclose a cartouche of Qur'anic texts. An architrave cornice with stalactites and merlons crowns the whole. The *arabisance* decorative motifs, especially the stalactites, are usually carved out of the stone; here all these elements project out of the façade. It is thus clear that the building's designer did not implement the established architectural canon, but simply added a few elements chosen from this decorative repertoire. Paradoxically, the sarcophagi located beneath the cupola, although executed in the entirely orthodox style devoted to this type of work, are decorated not in the arabesque register most frequently associated with it, but rather in a flamboyant, ornamental Gothic–classical–rocaille style.

Above left, Khan family tomb; above right, view of the interior courtyard and the large oratory; below, plan (surveyed by A. Bonnamy and T. Yusuf).



Khan family tomb, large courtyard.

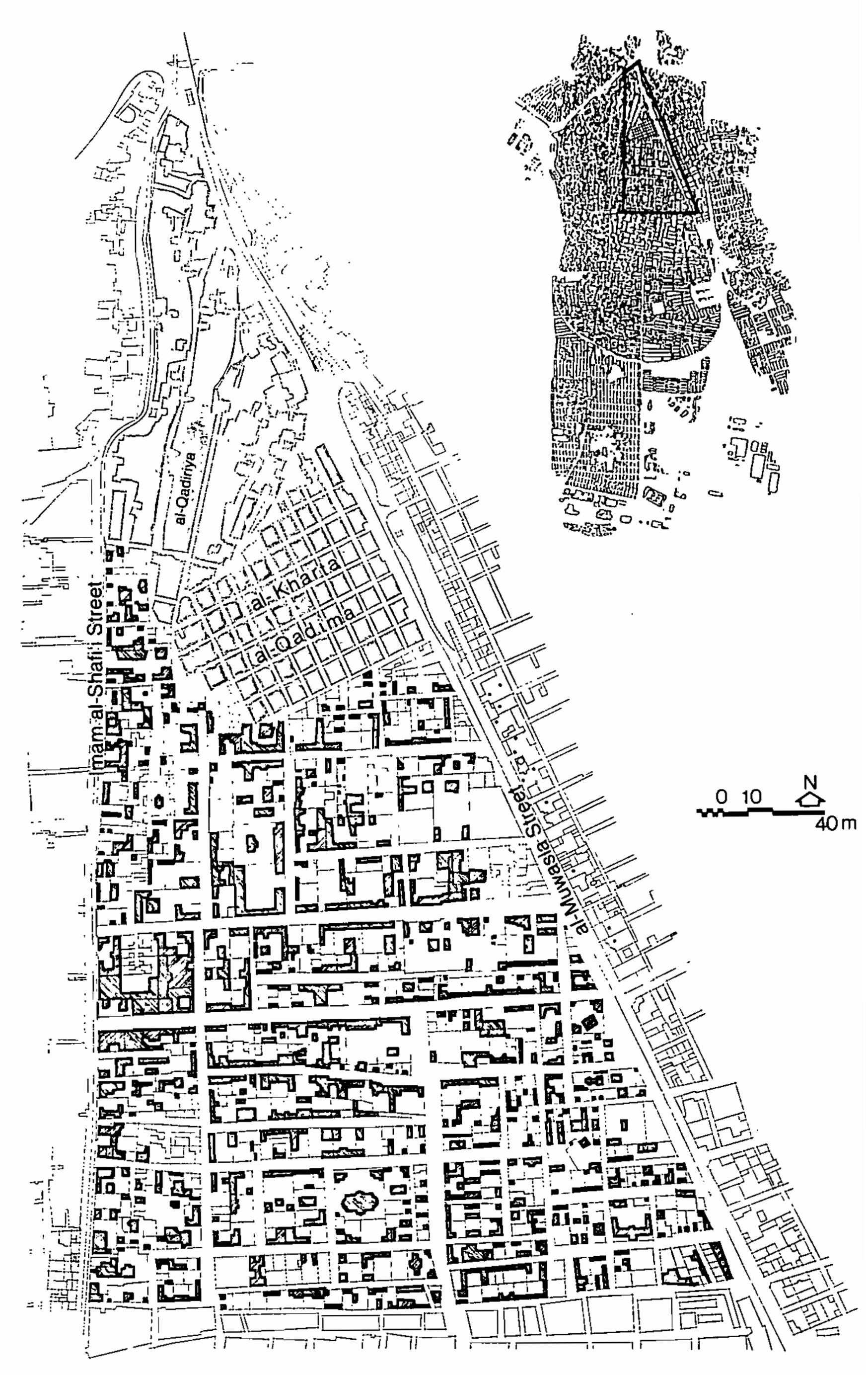


Zone 2, northeastern sector, access plan (drawing by L. Yacoub and Heba, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

The eastern sector of sub-zone II

The fourth sector is located east of Imam al-Shafi'i Street. It is characterized by the almost complete absence of historical monuments and its alternate residential and funerary spaces.

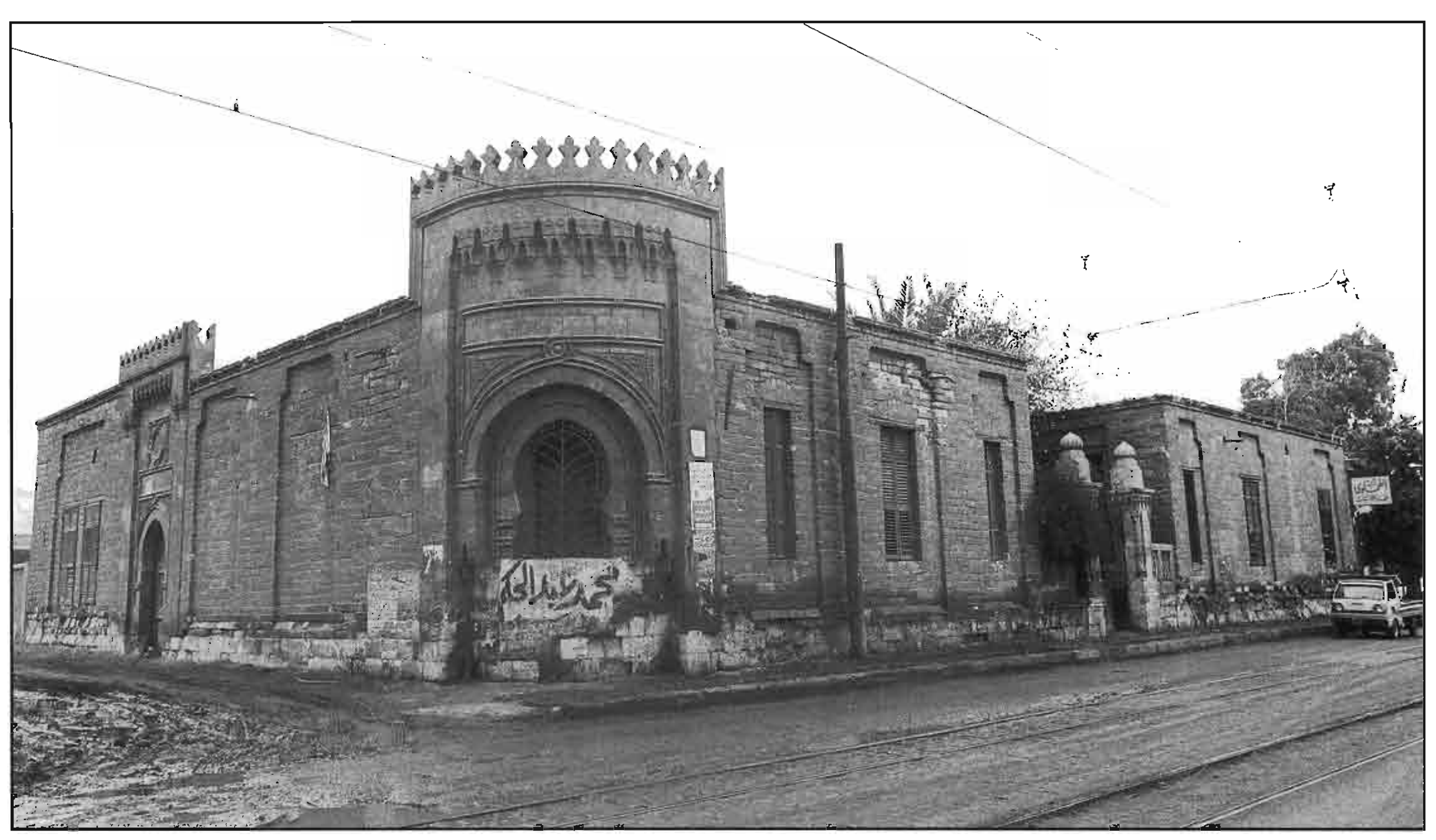
The northern tip has become exclusively urban. Two neighborhoods of very distinctive shapes lie side by side. The older of the two, 'Arab Quraysh, resembles the medieval city in every respect, from the irregular layout of its streets to its architecture. The more recent one, paradoxically known as al-Kharta al-Qadima ('the old plot'), was built on an orthogonal plan, with nine roads of equal width, laid out lengthwise and running parallel to the railroad, and eight roads of equal importance cutting across them. The result is a grid of exceptionally regular rectangular plots that is disrupted only along the northwestern border, which abuts the area built during an earlier period. The median part was a favorite place for the construction of sumptuous tombs by the last aristocrats. The sector could be a neighborhood of wealthy secondary residences; it is made up of plots that are often a vast several hundred square meters, enclosed by high walls and stone façades, where one finds an entire architectural repertory dating from the late nineteenth century, in carefully wrought Islamic style. The tombs themselves are never visible from the street in this area; they are most often relegated to one of the pavilions that are an integral part of each plot. This sector has the shape of a trapezoid rectangle: its height, 250 meters in length, is part of Imam al-Shafi'i Street, and it has one base measuring 280 meters and another of 150 meters. Logically, the roads drawn in perpendicular lines to Imam al-Shafi'i Street are the most numerous. While to say they were 'drawn' is an exaggeration, the overall effect is fairly harmonious, with large,



Gate of a large tomb in the northeastern sector.

rectilinear thruways that intersect at right angles. The buildings that border them are most often of similar materials and height. We do not know how the development of this sector began, but it must be noted that, unlike in other areas, here there are no older blocks incorporated within a more recent fabric; this leads us to believe that the area was empty. It must also be noted that those who are buried here are the same individuals who participated at the highest levels in Egypt's modernization, and most notably those who sought to transform Cairo into a modern, rational city in the Hausmanian style. The result was not a regular network, but rather an assembly of rectangles that range from 1,300 to 2,500 square meters. The constituent plots are also rectangular, but vary widely in surface: from thirty-six to 2,500 square meters, with between one and twenty plots per parcel, and façades overlooking the street that measure between five and seventy-five meters in length. Here, too, no framework was set for development: square meters were sold according to the buyer's means. This area nonetheless remains one of the most prestigious architectural zones of Cairo's cemeteries, as illustrated by the three tombs described below.

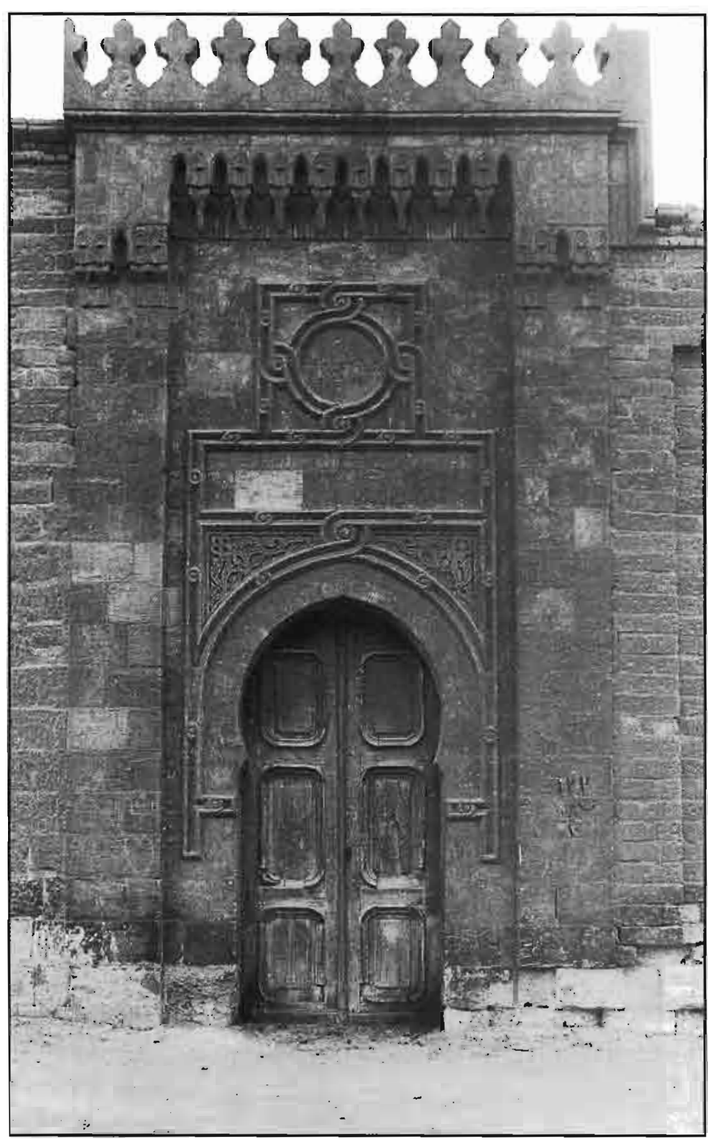
Tomb of Dawlatlu Afandim Mustafa Riyad Pasha, main and side façades, at the intersection of Imam al-Shafi'i and 'Umar ibn al-Farid streets.

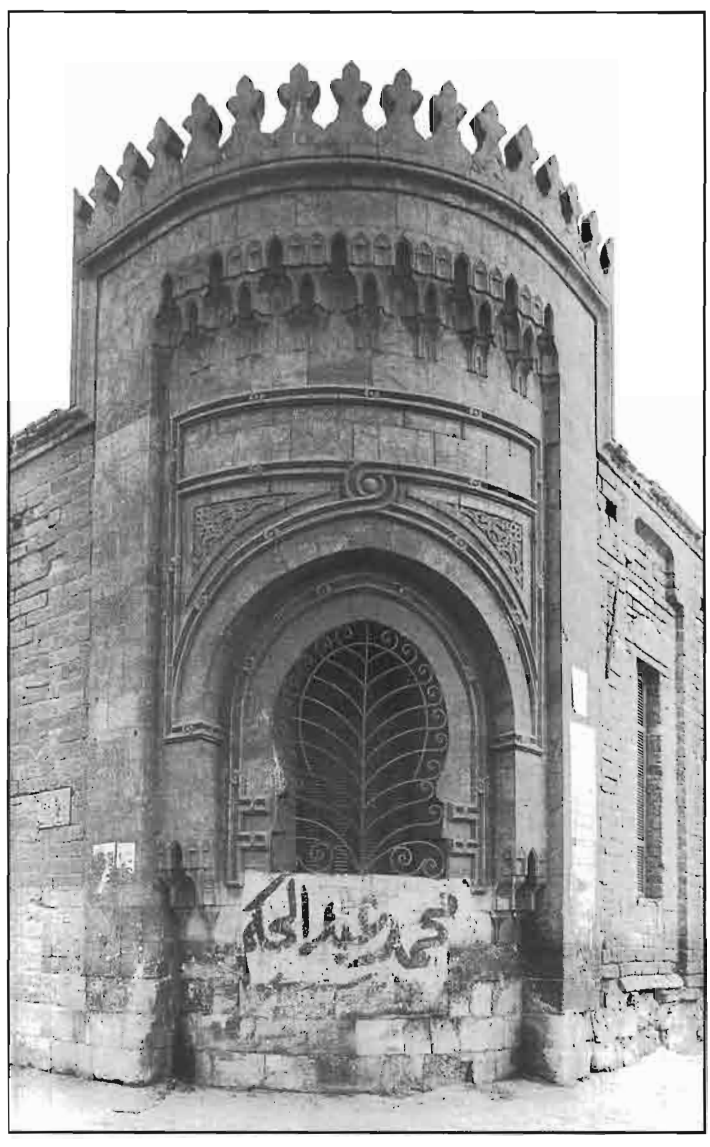


Tomb of Dawlatlu Afandim Mustafa Riyad Pasha, 1887, Imam al-Shafi'i Street
Near the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i, the Riyad Pasha foundation has sheltered the tombs of high-ranking dignitaries since the end of the nineteenth century. Situated at a crossroads, on the main avenue, the dimensions of the plot and the building can be measured at a glance. The decision to use the angle as the dominant element in the façade reinforces this very visible position. A *sabil* with a quarter-circle turret, one-third higher than the adjacent walls, has received a decorative treatment belonging to the catalogue of *arabisance* forms that were already well established at the time: embrasures, projecting Moorish arches, an archivolt decorated with interlacing and arabesques sculpted in the stone, and a false lintel festooned with stalactites and topped by an acroterion with a stylized foliage motif between the embrasures. The entrance for the dead, on Ibn al-Farid Street, is decorated in the same manner. Both façades take their rhythm from lessene-shaped buttresses. The visitors' entrance, on the main façade, has an entirely different character. The aperture offers a glimpse of the garden within. The art nouveau door, in voluted iron, is flanked by two pillars. Each has engaged colonnettes at the angles and capitals with corbeled squinches, topped by bulbs in ribbed marble. The half-walls are capped with marble 'balustrades,' making up a triptych of panels in openwork interlacing with molded frames. This magnificent decorative element was also used on the supporting walls of the largest windows that overlook the courtyard. The composition of the design is organized along the median lengthwise axis of the rectangle, where the entrances to the courtyard and the oratory are situated. The T-shaped courtyard, on the axis of this median, looks onto three buildings.

The oratory, which is at the rear of the plot and occupies a rectanglular area on a third of its surface, and the two buildings that serve as reception rooms for visitors, are laid out in an approximately symmetrical L-shape on either side of the compound's axis. The buildings' three entrances are situated across from each other in a triangular alignment. In the courtyard, planted with closely pruned trees, nothing reminds the visitor of death: there are no tombstones or cupolas

Tomb of Dawlatlu Afandim Mustafa Riyad Pasha:
Left, gate to the entrance for the dead; right, sabil *(fountain).*

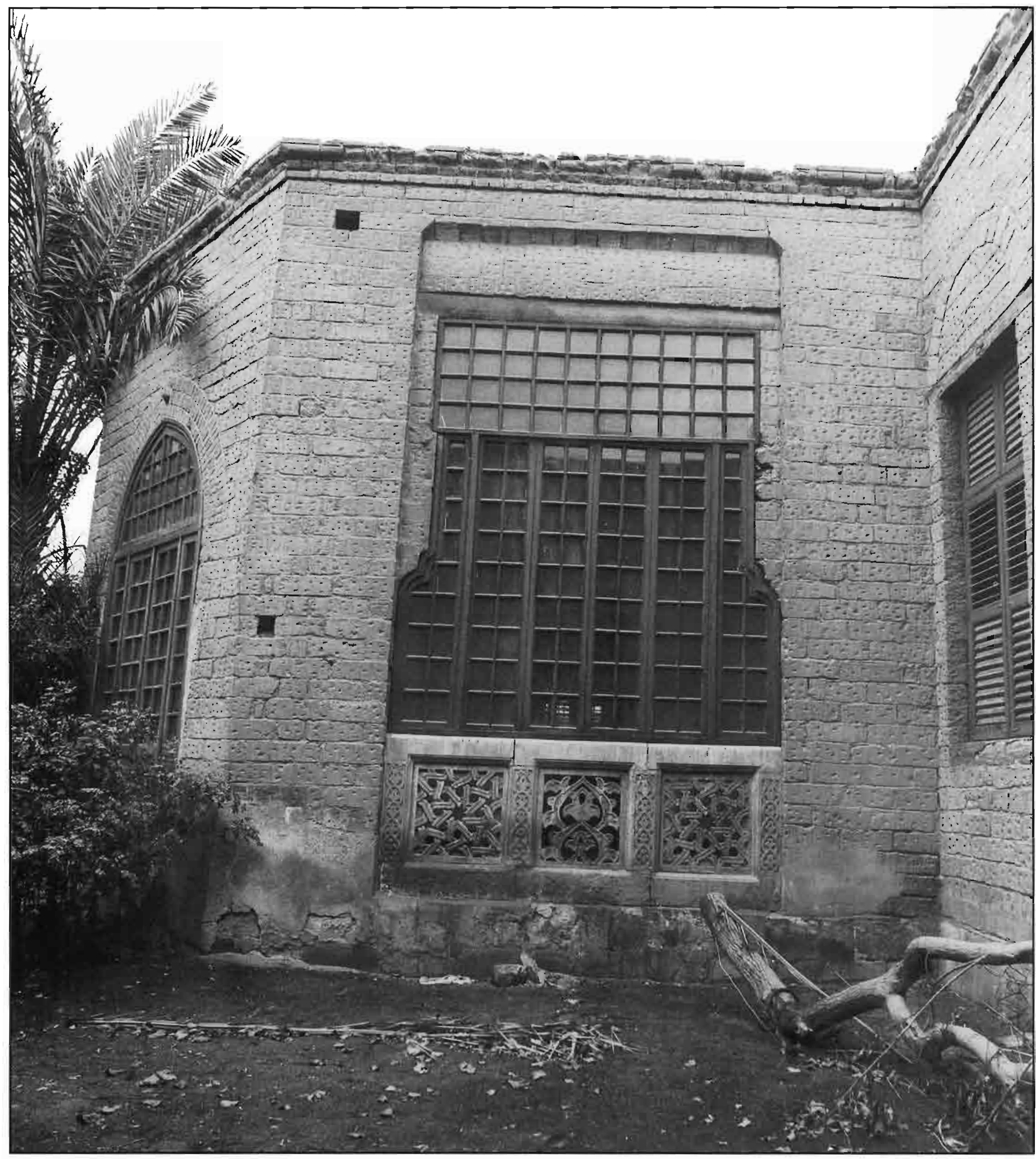




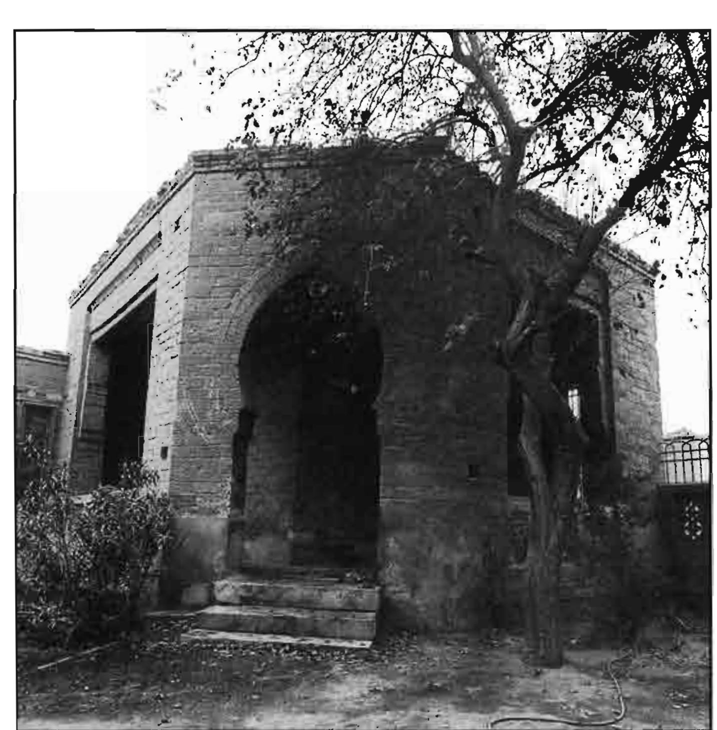
here. Even in the oratory, where *maqra'a*s (Qur'anic recitations) are held, there is no ceremonial sarcophagus: instead, *mastaba*s (benches) are set out along walls hung with pictures of the deceased. The building is made entirely of squared stone with stops of curiously modest size; only the base coursework is of middling size, and there are no right-angle quoins or strengthening joints (buttresses). The finish of the stone indicates that it was meant to be coated. The openings are of diverse types:

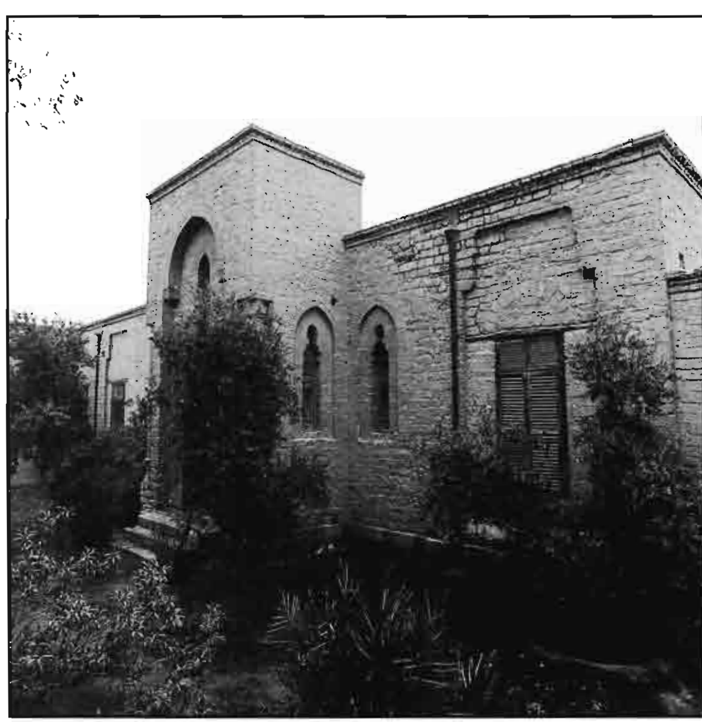
- windows with wooden lintels and discharging arches;
- open windows and doors topped with Moorish arches;
- windows and doors situated in arched embrasures, with Moorish, lancet, and even alveolated arches.

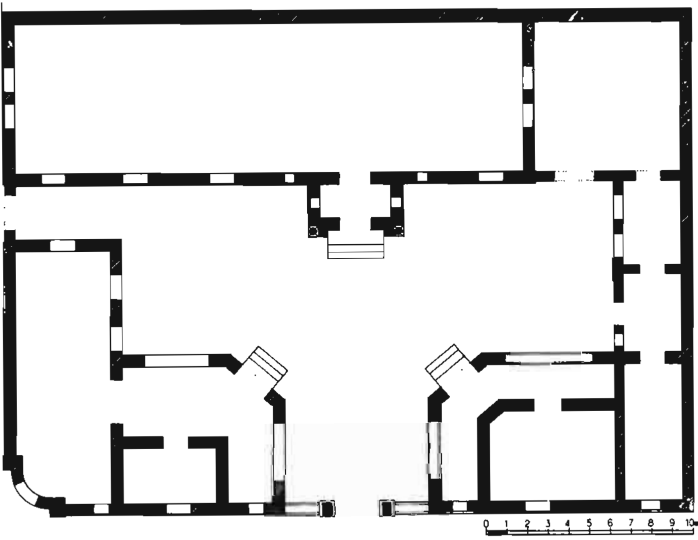
The large windows of the reception areas are the most remarkable architectural elements in the building; garnished with small rectangular panes, they accentuate the building's civilian character even further.



Tomb of Dawlatlu Afandim Mustafa Riyad Pasha:
Above and below left, façades of the oratory and the reception buildings overlooking the courtyard; below right, plan of the tomb (surveyed by A. Bonnamy and G. El Kadi).







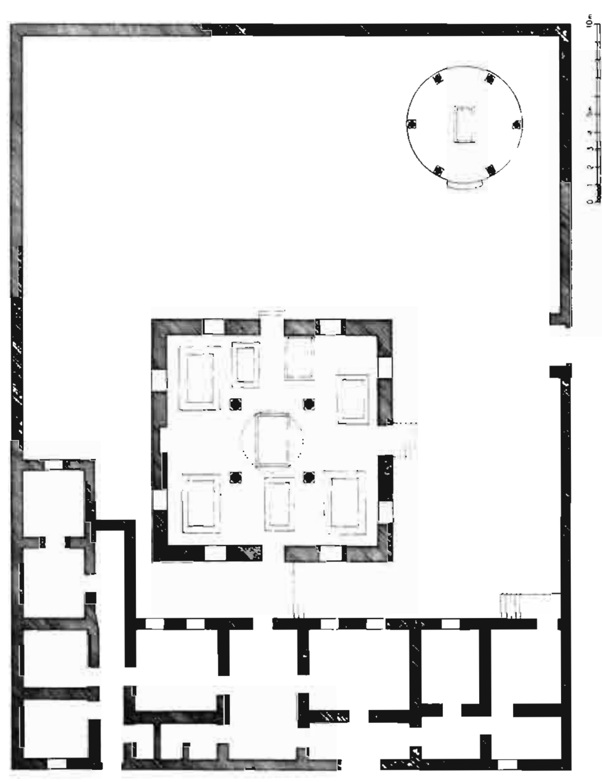
Below: Tomb of the Yusri family: monopteros.
Right page: Above, façade of the oratory; below left, interior of the oratory; below right, plan of the tomb (surveyed by A. Bonnamy and T. Fouad).

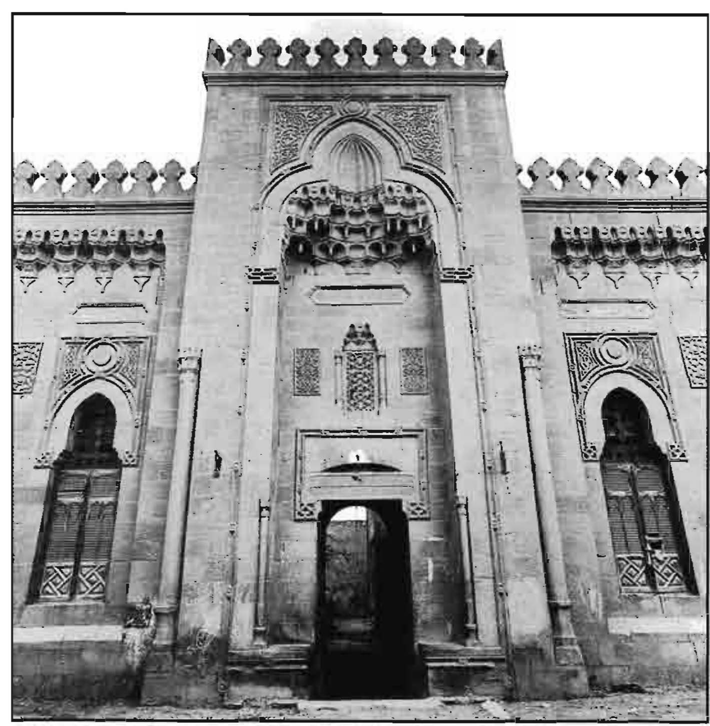
Yusri family tomb, 1930s

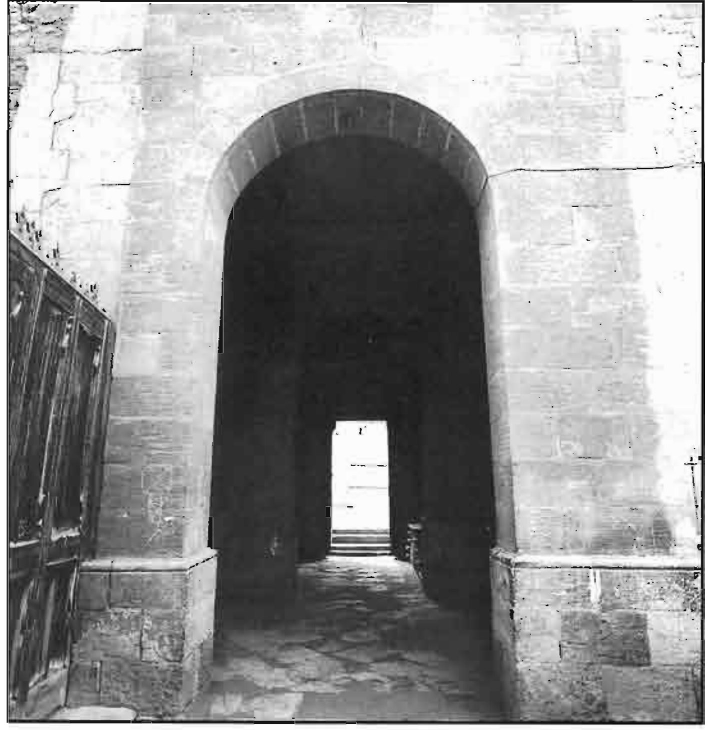
This tomb, located on the street, takes up only 500m² in an enclosure of 1,300m². Tall trees give it a fairly bucolic aspect. The edifice is divided into three elements:

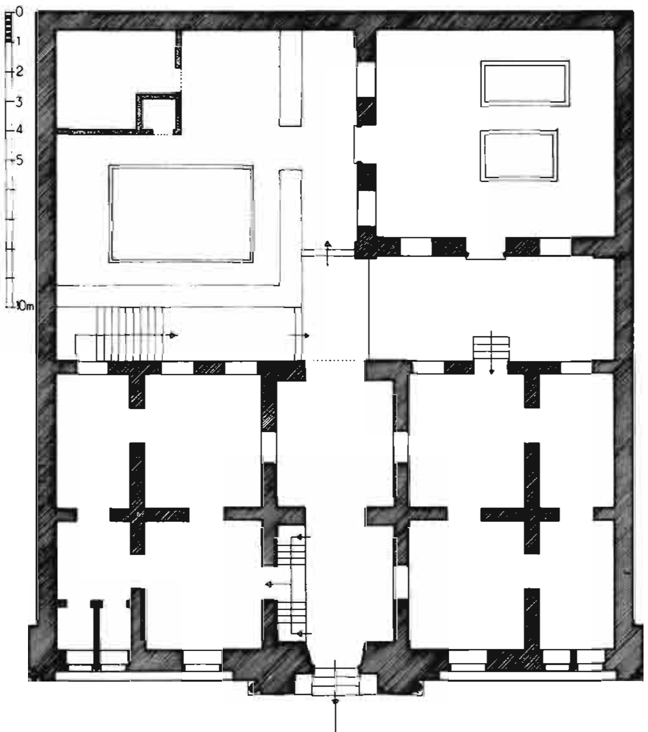
- an L-shaped band that abuts the surrounding wall along the whole width of the plot and serves as a reception and lodgings for the guard;
- a square-plan oratory that occupies the center of the rectangle;
- finally, isolated in the angle across from the buildings, a monopteral sanctuary.

The reception building has a dressed-stone façade in which the only form of relief is a small acroterion cornice. All the windows, in simple Gothic arches, are located according to the geometry of the interior spaces. The oratory is also stone-built, but here the wall's components are marked by consecutive slender indentations. First comes the course at the base, then the buttresses. Next, the two horizontal courses, above and below, form a frame around the doorway, with twinned struts at the right-angle quoins. Finally, a layer of coating veils the last surface made up by the remaining span of wall. The crown is a simple cornice of cavetti topped by an entablature. The windows and doors all have identical vertical double casements. The building is made up of four walls and four concentric columns that bear two beams. These share the load of the terraced roof and a small wooden tambour cupola with a clerestory covered in striated stucco. The eight sarcophagi located there are all in white marble, decorated with colonnettes at the angles, atop which sit Medici vases, and with sculpted foliage scrolls on the sides. The oratory, shaped like a monopteral antique temple, is surprising. To our knowledge, it is the only one of its kind in the whole of Cairo's necropolis. It is composed of a surbased dome, certainly made of brick coated on both sides, marked by a cornice added on in stone. It rests on a six-columned peristyle, also in coated brick. The cushion capitals, which take the shape of polygonal bulbs, are of stone, as are the pedestals, which are reduced to cubic proportions. The columns' heterodox aspect suggests that this edifice was not the work of a single architect.





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Left page: Family tomb, Abu Sri' Salem Street:
Above, oratory and street façades; below left, entrance portico; below right, plan (surveyed by A. Bonnamy and T. Fouad).

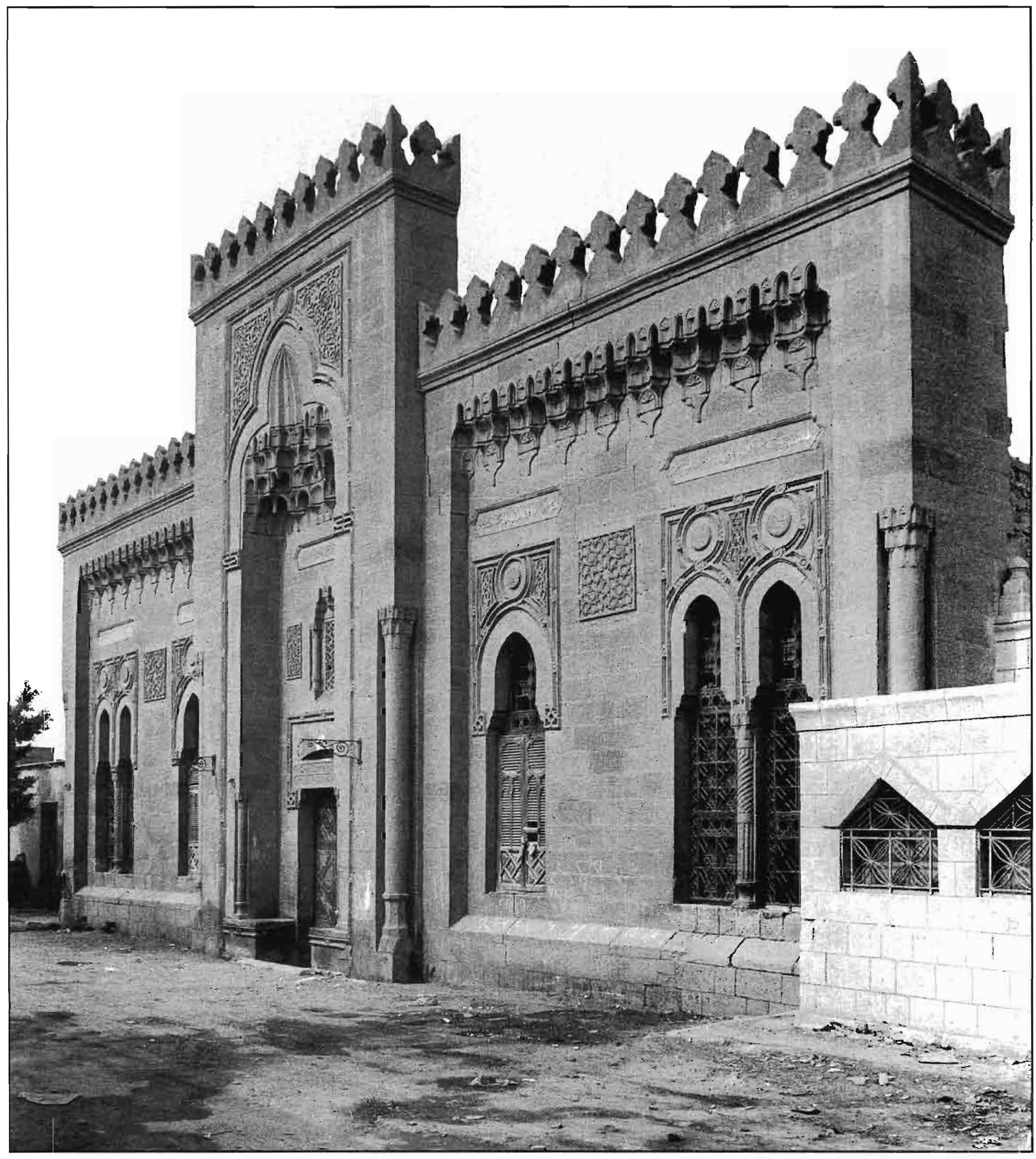
Family tomb, Abu Sri' Salem Street
While the history of mosque architecture illustrates the diversity of form, method, and influence, the mid-nineteenth century saw the formal vocabulary develop into a catalogue preserved essentially because of its originality and the ways in which it differed from the dominant 'Greco-Roman' style and the so-called 'Gothic' style, which left important traces on the architecture of places of worship. These architectural forms can be said to have developed in contrast to the other, non-Muslim forms. They were brandished and used as markers of a Muslim identity, and they characterize this rigorously designed façade, which is a veritable case study with a fairly complete sample of stereotypes—although not one to be followed, of course.

The façade is a horizontal rectangle interrupted at the center by another rectangle, added as a projection along the width, and which makes up a sort of *iwan* as a gateway to the building. Apart from the gable, made up of a cornice with an acroterion of stylized foliage slightly overhanging the façade, all the decorative elements were developed 'deductively,' as a crystal is cut away from the surrounding mass. The major element of the gateway is a trefoil arch that carves out a niche. The arch is framed by a rectangular tympanum, covered in arabesque carved into the stone, and an intertwined double baguette that follows the casing to the ground. The niche's upper lobe is ribbed, and each of the ribs becomes a stalactite where it intersects with the two other lobes. The stalactites cover the entire recess drawn by the two inferior lobes, creating a gradual transition to the back wall, where the door is situated. A wide casing, built without foundations and interrupted at the height of the benches flanking the entrance, frames the arch and piers. Its lower section is flanked by two engaged colonnettes as tall as a man.

The entrance has a monolith lintel engraved with two Qur'anic texts in horizontal cartouches. The archstones of the discharging arch above it are curvilinear, and a rectangle made up of two intertwined baguettes surrounds the entire arrangement.

Above the door, in the center of the composition, is a false window with lacework flagstones in a hexagonal frame. Only a few openings exist for upper-level ventilation, and above this small rectangle is an arch making up a stalactite-work niche similar to the entrance's major arch. The embrasure's ribs also have engaged colonnettes. This opening is flanked by two rectangular panels ornamented with fluid floral arabesques, similar to those of the tympanum. The entranceway juts out from the façade, but the effect is softened on either side by an engaged column about as high as two men, with a stalactite capital and an octagonal base on a square plinth. These columns resemble pins holding together the base and the capital. The same treatment was used at both ends of the façade. Each of the façade's two elements, which are perfectly symmetrical, forms an approximate square seven or eight meters high. All the work on the façade is in the background, situated in a recessed concentric square. The remaining peripheral band, flush with the façade, forms a frame, and so the upper entablature, which overhangs, is not wedged, but might be beveled—it is impossible to tell without taking the wall apart. It is carved into seventeen lobes with elongated pointed arches, following the same proportions as those used for the windows. These small arches provide rhythm and composition for the squinches that make up the transition with the recessed part of the wall. There are three openings in the façade: one alone and two together, but separated by a large pier. The openings are covered by elongated ogive arches with curved voussoirs. The twin arches rest on colonnettes with fluting at the bottom, torsades at the top, and stalactite capitals. Each of the two groups of arches is framed by a rectangular tympanum ornamented with arabesques, in a manner similar to the entrance, but here the intertwined double baguette used for the frame is more important than the arabesque. Above each arch is a Qur'anic text in a horizontal cartouche. The two leaves of the door are of paneled wood; each of the panels is made up of interlacing on a square base, put together in small squares on two facings. The shutters show three uses of wood: in the lower part, closed interlacing; in the middle, Persian blinds with fixed slats; and the tympanum pierced with *mashrabiya*.

The building behind the façade bears little relation to it. Only the ground-floor portico maintains a sense of space. Load-bearing walls divide the built area into eight rooms in which to receive visitors. The oratory is an isolated pavilion built of coated rag-stones in the courtyard. The magnificence of the main building is echoed only in the height of an acroterion with a molded cornice, which provides a somewhat characterless reminder of the façade's stalactites and merlons.

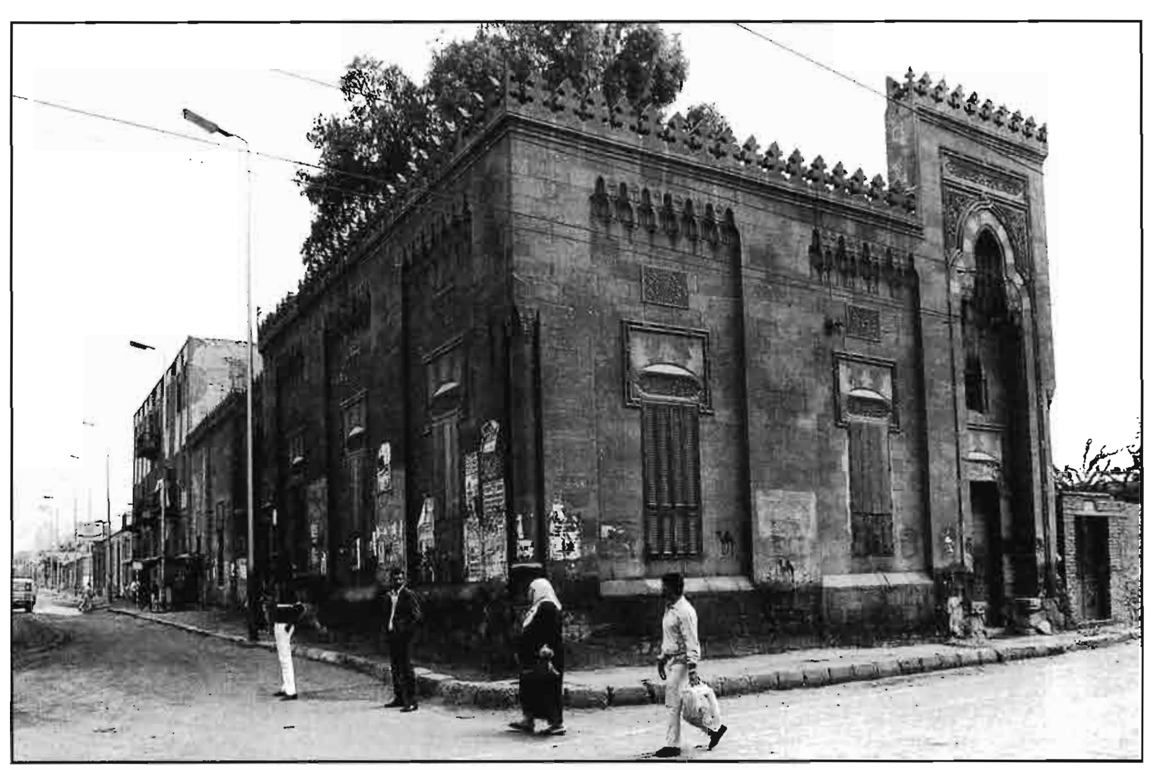


Left page: Family tomb, façade on Abu Sri' Salem Street.
Below: Zone 2, southeastern sector, access map (drawing by L. Yacoub and Heba, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

The southeastern sector of sub-zone II
At the northern border is the largest urban agglomeration of the entire necropolis, stretching over thirty hectares: the Tunsi neighborhood, which developed in an entirely illegal manner starting in the 1940s. Because of its variegated fabric, made up of narrow, winding passageways and wider, more regular streets, it resembles both the old city and informal neighborhoods on the periphery. Early twentieth century buildings stand next to more recent ones; numerous construction sites testify to the neighborhood's ongoing evolution in the absence of any planning regulations or constraints. Handicrafts and trade take up almost all the ground floors, making this a very lively space. To the north, a street ten meters wide clearly marks these blocks off from the funerary sector; to the south is a zone of mingled tombs and dwellings, which precedes the exclusively funerary southern sector. The layout is far from a checkerboard plan, but is marked by a degree of regularity nonetheless.

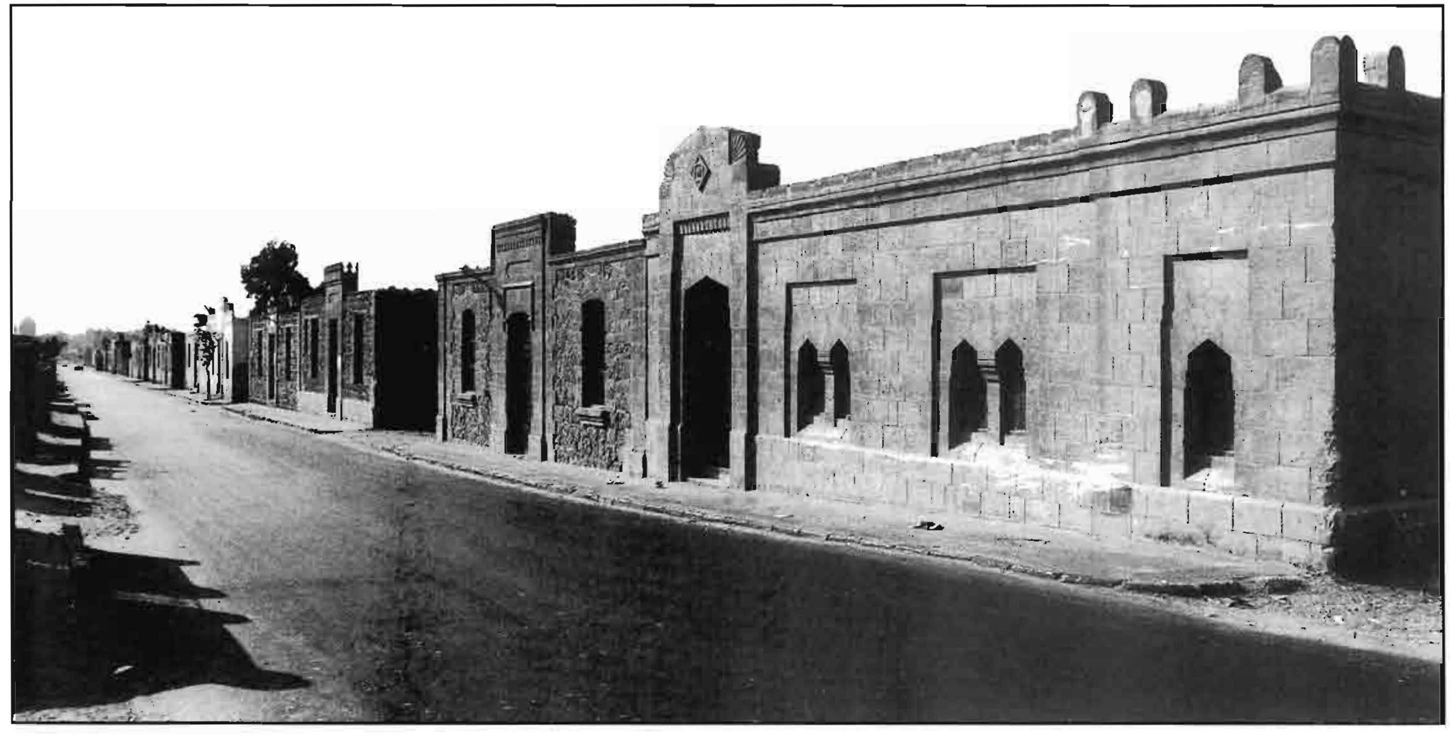
This area may be divided into two subsectors on either side of al-Kurdi Street, which is the north–south axis parallel to and about four hundred meters from Imam al-Shafi'i Street. Due to its width and the number of vehicles it accommodates, al-Kurdi Street is the main axis of the previously mentioned residential neighborhood; at this level, it serves as the predominant route for internal circulation, relegating Imam al-Shafi'i Street to second place. Al-Kurdi and Imam al-Shafi'i streets mark out a rectangle approximately one kilometer in length and intersected by a number of transverse roads that are fairly straight, albeit rarely perpendicular. They enfold several blocks of older tombs built at a time when no one thought of laying out thoroughfares.

The second sub-sector, east of al-Kurdi Street, is entirely regular. The layout,



Above, tomb of Nasrat Pasha (1881), at the corner of Imam al-Shafi'i and Tahawi streets; below, entrances and sabil *of the neighboring tomb.*

Al-Kurdi Street.



developed after 1945, was not designed all at once, but by successive additions; the desire for a perfectly orthogonal layout is visible nonetheless. Because some parts developed along oblique generatrices, however, one finds many trapezoids at the junctions. The supple geometry of these public roads seems to have been a response to topographical constraints, obstacles that could not be eliminated (like the railway line), and the need to fill up the available space as much as possible. In this sector, one finds a few plots earmarked for the official *sadaqa* cemetery, where the indigent are buried.

As mentioned earlier, this part of the cemetery holds few ancient monuments, but it does contain a few beautiful burial places, well conserved and in a variety of architectural styles. The oldest and best known of them, which gave its name to the area, is that of M.B. Mahmud M. Shihab Sanobadhi Tunsi: "A specialist in the Shafi'ite canon and an audacious preacher of very independent character, he provoked violent reactions from Shi'ites and Hanbalites alike in Baghdad. When Salah al-Din invited him to Cairo, where he was to head first Khanqah al-Su'ada and then Manzil al-'Izz, he was a moral reformer."[100] His tomb holds two classified buildings.

Zone 3, plain of Fustat (drawing by L. Yacoub and Heba, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

Zone 3: The Fustat plain

To the south and below zone two is a vast space stretching from Muqattam in the east to the walls of Fustat in the west. It holds the oldest monuments of the Qarafa's original site. To the north, relatively new plots resulting from development carried out in the 1950s lie on the other side of al-Kurdi Street and make up two large rectangles of unequal dimensions. On the whole, the layout is perfectly regular; it is made up of a grid of roads five or ten meters wide, which mark out residential blocks of virtually equal size: thirty by fifty meters. The tombs seem to have been designed to fit a pattern that varies only in the details. Rose-colored brick dominates in the façades, further accentuating the impression of homogeneity. A mixture of pink brick and stone, as well as greater freedom of mass and proportion, characterize the large tombs lined up along the main axis (al-Kurdi Street).

This well-ordered space comprises three enclaves where very small tombs flout all the rules. At the center of the northwestern enclave is a tomb built in 781, where Qadi Mufaddal ibn Qitabani is buried alongside his wife and children.[101] Nothing here serves to remind visitors that they are at the heart of the original Qarafa al-Kubra, apart from this inconspicuous, virtually unknown tomb and the unrecognizable ruins of the aqueduct built by Ibn Tulun. Centuries of erosion have reduced it to a pile of rubble waiting to be cleared. Three great Egyptian singers of the twentieth century restored this site to some of its former glory by choosing to make it their last resting place: Farid al-Atrash and his sister, Asmahan, as well as 'Abd al-Halim Hafiz.

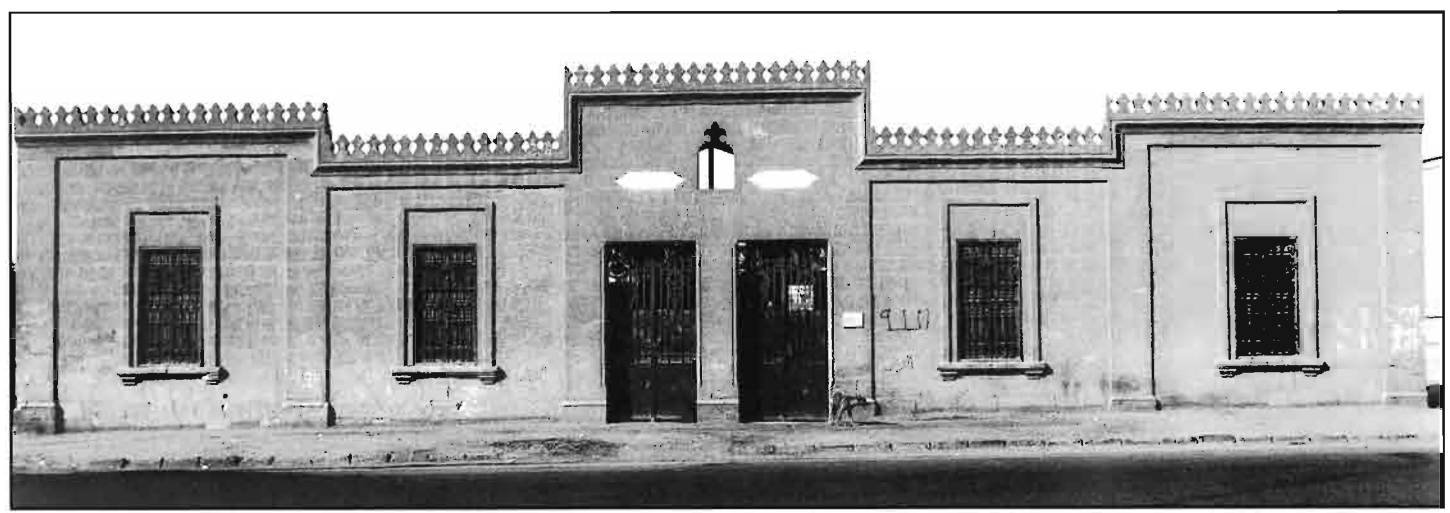
There is no cemetery as such, apart from this reconstructed section, but there are isolated monuments that no longer belong to the vast continuum of the southern necropolis and are located at a considerable distance from it.

The closest is al-Tabataba Mausoleum, located at the edge of the Misr al-Qadima thoroughfare that intersects Fustat on an east–west axis. It is the only surviving monument of the Ikhshidid period (pre-Fatimid, 933–969). Built in 943, this sanctuary has a rectangular layout, with four pillars marking out another rectangle in the center. The columns must have supported arches holding nine cupolas, but only seven remain after restoration. According to Creswell, this monument is "utterly unique in Muslim architecture."[102] To reach the other remaining monuments

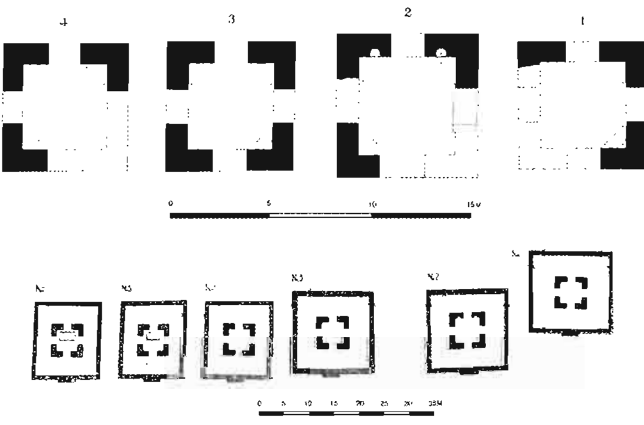
Al-Kurdi Street.

on this plain, one must head west and then take a left further into the Fustat plain, winding one's way through potters' kilns, improvised wheel repair shops, and heaps of rubbish. After a while, it becomes possible to make out four imposing brick monuments of virtually identical shape and size. Each is made up of three stories in receding steps, topped by molded cornices. The lower floor has a square floor plan with a large opening on each side, and there are four corresponding openings on the façades of the middle floor. The third floor, which is square outside and octagonal within, was probably the drum. The octagon has eight windows and must once have borne a cupola, which has since disappeared. On the ground, one can still see the traces of two other monuments. It is the location of the mausolea belonging to the *Saba' Banat* ('Seven Virgins'), but no virgins rest here; the name comes from folklore. Y. Raghib noted that "popular tradition ascribes these monuments either to seven virgin warriors, said to have fought by the Prophet's side, or to the seven women whom the Amir al-Guyushi loved and supposedly watched from atop the Muqattam hills, where he is buried. These legends helped turn the *qubba*s into a pilgrimage site and saved them from the demolition suffered by monuments of the Qarafa."[103] Built in 1010, these mausolea hold the mortal remains of six male relatives of the vizir Ibn Sa'id al-Maghrabi, who was executed by the caliph al-Hakim.[104] This drama, recounted in the chronicles, was also made famous thanks to an elegy composed by a poet from the same family who escaped the massacre.[105]

The last monument in this area is on the Fustat plateau, overlooking the plain. It is currently part of an informal zone that developed on the site of the Fustat archaeological dig. It has a rectangular shape thirty meters long by twenty wide, marked off by a rubble stone wall. The back wall has three *mihrab*s, but none of the cenotaphs recorded by Creswell exists in the courtyard. Popular culture attributes this ruin to Khadra al-Sharifa, the mother of Abu Zayd al-Hilali, the hero of the famous epic poem.[106] For years, historians of Arab art could not pinpoint its origin or nature. They identified it with the Gami' al-Awliya' ('Mosque of the Holy Men'), the most important of the thirty-five mosques in the Qarafa al-Kubra, which was built at the beginning of the Muslim conquest and then renovated and rebuilt several times before the Mamluks took power.[107] Yet the enclosure housing the holy men still existed in the nineteenth century and was adjacent to this monument. Raghib's investigations revealed the origin of this edifice, but were unable to provide further information as to the identity of its builders and occupants. According to him, these ruins were once a funerary complex "that dates to beginning of the tenth or eleventh century. It holds the tombs of figures whose social status is evident in the building's proportions, its careful design, and the historical characteristics of the shroud that was found there."[108]



Above, mausoleum of the Saba' Banat; below, plan after Creswell.



Zone 4, Mamluk cemetery (drawing by L. Yacoub and Heba, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

Zone 4: The Mamluk cemetery

This area has been squeezed by railway lines since the beginning of the twentieth century. It makes up a long triangle with a narrow base to the north, traced out by Salah Salem Road, and two sides, the western one abutting the central zone. The Cairo–Helwan highway, passing above, marks its easternmost limit. The north-western third holds a dozen historical monuments of which the oldest extant dates back to the end of the thirteenth century. For the most part, only vestiges remain: minarets, cupolas, *iwans*, and a few walls, all mingled in great disorder with numerous tombs of infinitely more modest proportions and history. There are also a few small buildings that come into view gradually, gnawing away at the cemetery from within. The northern and western outskirts are far from welcoming: along Salah Salem Road, a small block of residential buildings partially masks the view of the prestigious mausolea. To the west, along al-Muwasla Street, two strips of informal shanty dwellings stretch over more than a kilometer, screening the length of the cemetery. The median and southern part, which developed in the twentieth century, has a much more standard fabric, with three streets parallel to al-Muwasla and perpendicular transverse lanes. The streets are rectilinear and lined with fine, freestone tombs, some of which were even designed by renowned architects in the 1940s. In many respects, this area resembles the neighboring zone, on the other side of al-Muwasla Street, toward Imam al-Shafi'i.

The Iwan *of Manufi, northern façade.*

Monuments in zone 4 (drawing by G. El Kadi, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

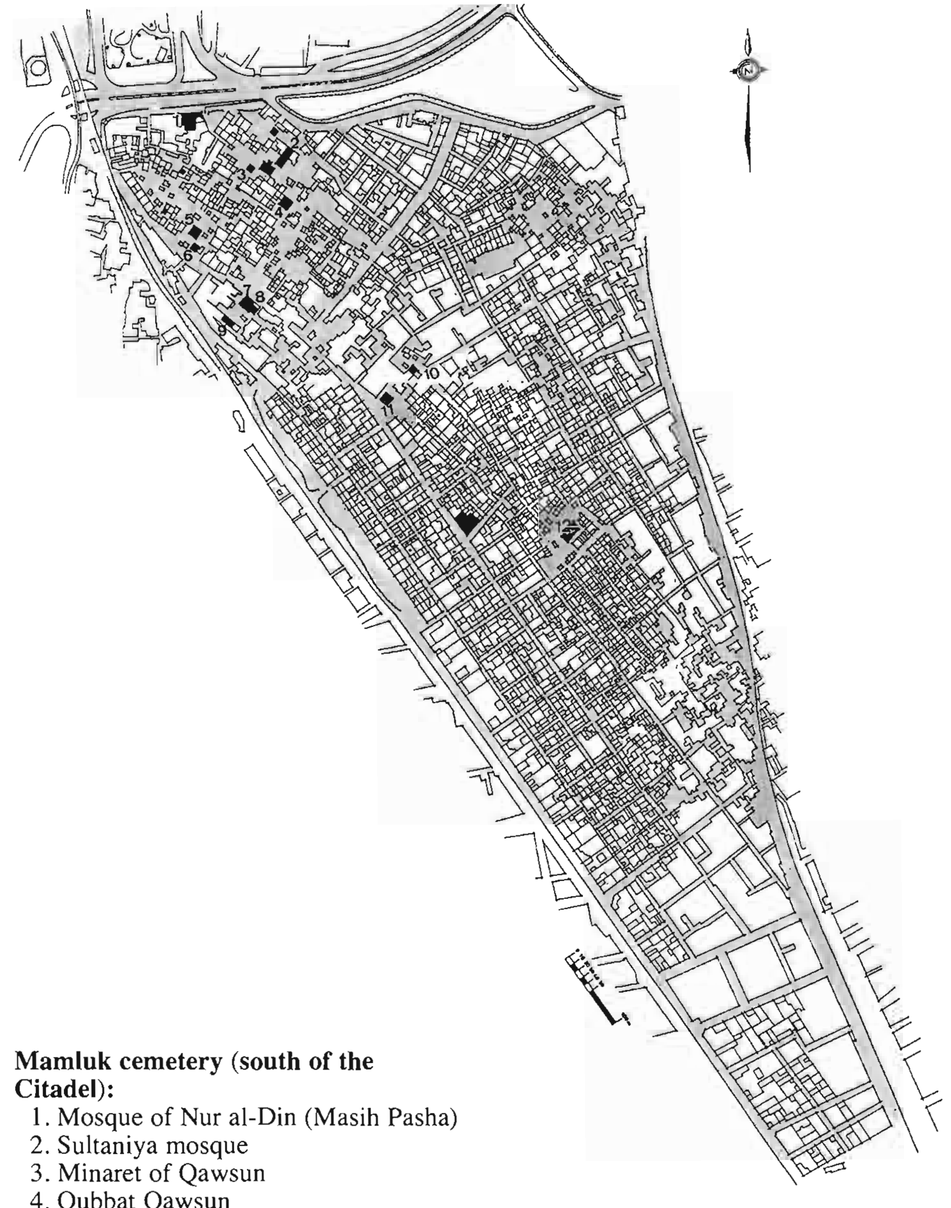
The funerary monuments

A century ago, Max Herz Bey mourned the decline of these burial places: "These monuments stand in disorder, forming groups at some points, scattered elsewhere, and the intervals between them are filled with *hawsh* and modern tombs. Most of them are half ruined and give—even more than the caliphs' tombs—the impression of being completely abandoned. They seem even to have been used as a veritable quarry, in the same way as antique temples. Thus, the walls and, more generally, all the smooth surfaces that provided easily reusable blocks, were spared far less than the buildings' more ornate parts. To these circumstances we owe the preservation of a few cupolas, decorated with lengthwise ribbing and chevrons, as well as three superb minarets with stalactite corbels; deprived of their mosques, which have been completely destroyed, they produce a very strange effect."[109] Apart from the four monuments restored by the Supreme Council for Antiquities in the early 1980s (the mausoleum of Qawsun, al-Sultaniya, the mosque of Masih Pasha, and the *iwan* of Manufi), there has been no improvement since Herz Bey's time.

From north to south

Starting from the north along Salah Salem Road, the mosque of Masih Pasha (also known as Nur al-Din), which was built in 1575, is being restored. A few steps in is the largest extant mausoleum in this area: al-Sultaniya. Recently restored, it is composed of an *iwan* flanked by two cupolas. In this tomb lies the mother of Sultan Hasan (ruled 1347–61). The plan is rectangular, with a vaulted *iwan* over a cloister similar to that of the Tha'lab. The form of the ribbed domes is reminiscent of the architecture of Samarqand and Herat.

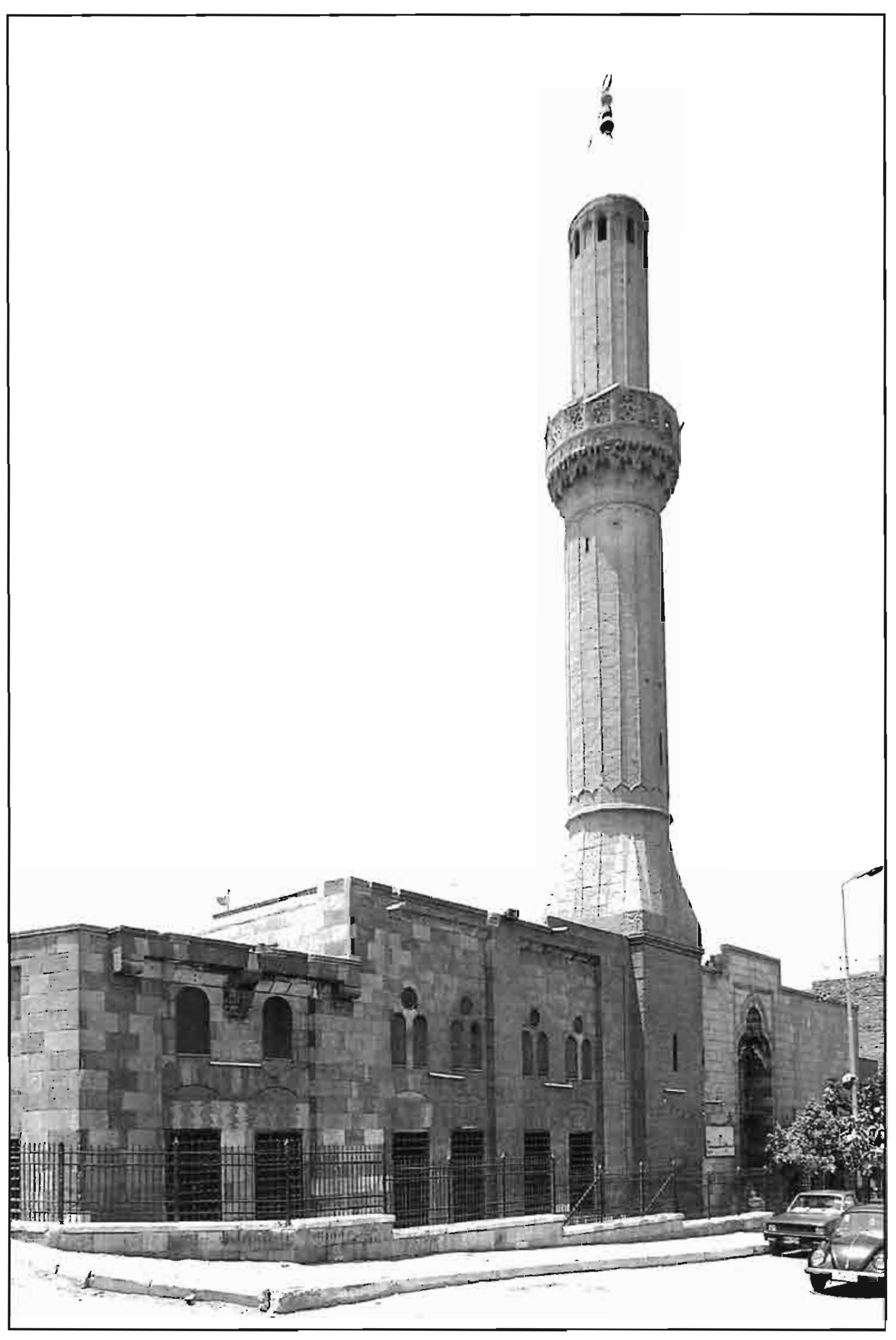
Close by, to the southwest, is the minaret of Qawsun (1335), an eminent amir of



Mamluk cemetery (south of the Citadel):

1. Mosque of Nur al-Din (Masih Pasha)
2. Sultaniya mosque
3. Minaret of Qawsun
4. Qubbat Qawsun
5. Qubbat 'Ali Badr al-Din al-Wafa'i
6. Southern minaret
7–8. Cupolas of Sawabi and Sawdun
9. *Iwan* of Rihan
10–11. Cupolas of Tankizbugha
12. *Qubba* and *iwan* of Manufi

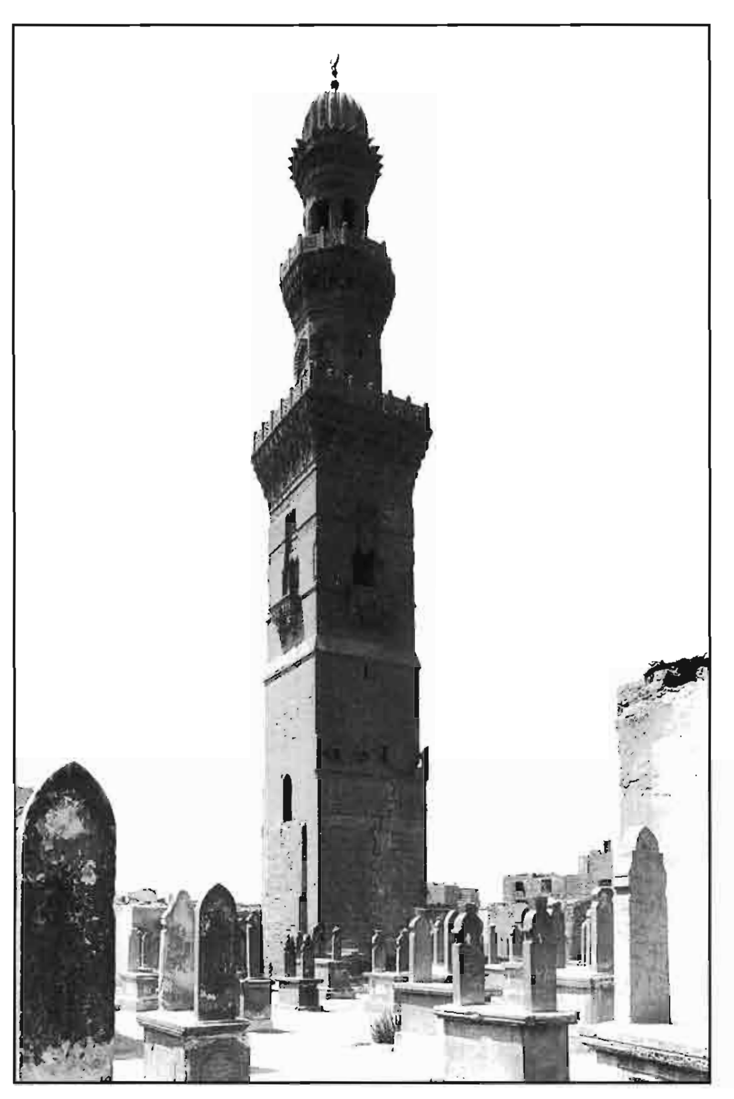
Mosque of Masih Pasha, bordering Salah Salem Road.

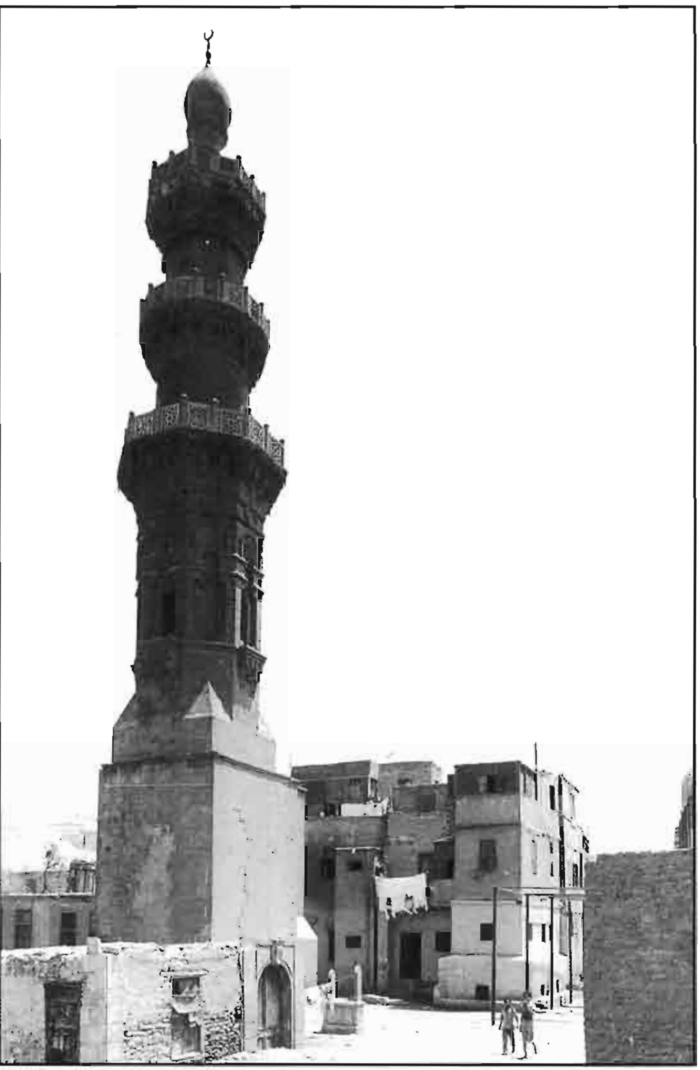


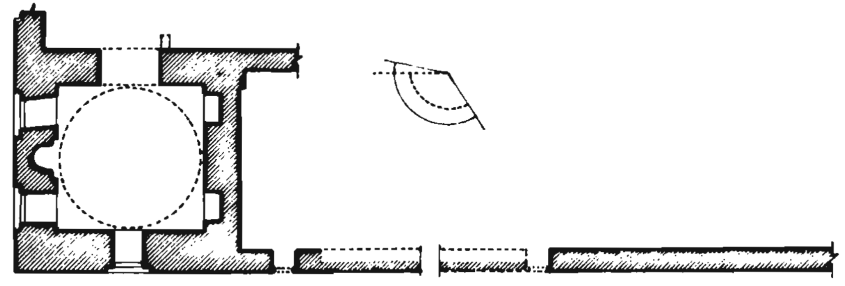
Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad. The *khanqah* and the mausoleum no longer exist, and this is the only vestige of one of the first funerary complexes built under the Bahri Mamluks—an outstanding example of the architectural style of the period. At the same latitude, a few meters away to the west, one reaches a fourteenth-century minaret, called the Southern Minaret, and a small mausoleum with a cupola: the tomb of Badr al-Din al-Qarafi, which dates to 1300. Seventy-five meters further south, there are three other ruins surrounding a rectangular space: the *iwan* of Rihan (1534), the large stone cupola from the mausoleum of Sudun (1504), and the small brick cupola from the Sawabi mausoleum (1286). A hundred meters further south are two mausolea with cupolas that bear the name Tankizbugha. The first was built in 1359 by a Mamluk amir of Greek origins; as for the second, the date of its construction is uncertain, but its style suggests that it was built during the same period. Still further south, and isolated 250 meters away, are the mausoleum and *iwan* of Manufi. This is a remarkable building from the late thirteenth century, although only its enormous stone cupola and its vaulted *iwan* remain. Very few people visit it because of its location, although it stands quite alone. But Hasan 'Abd al-Wahab, an eminent expert in Arab art and architecture, paid it special attention: he chose a humble, unobtrusive burial site just a few meters north of the Manufi complex as his own final resting place.

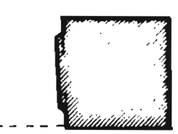
Al-Sultaniya, with the northern minaret on the right; plan (after Kessler, facsimile, library of the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi).

Left, minaret of Qawsun; right, southern minaret; below, plan (after Kessler, facsimile, library of the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi).









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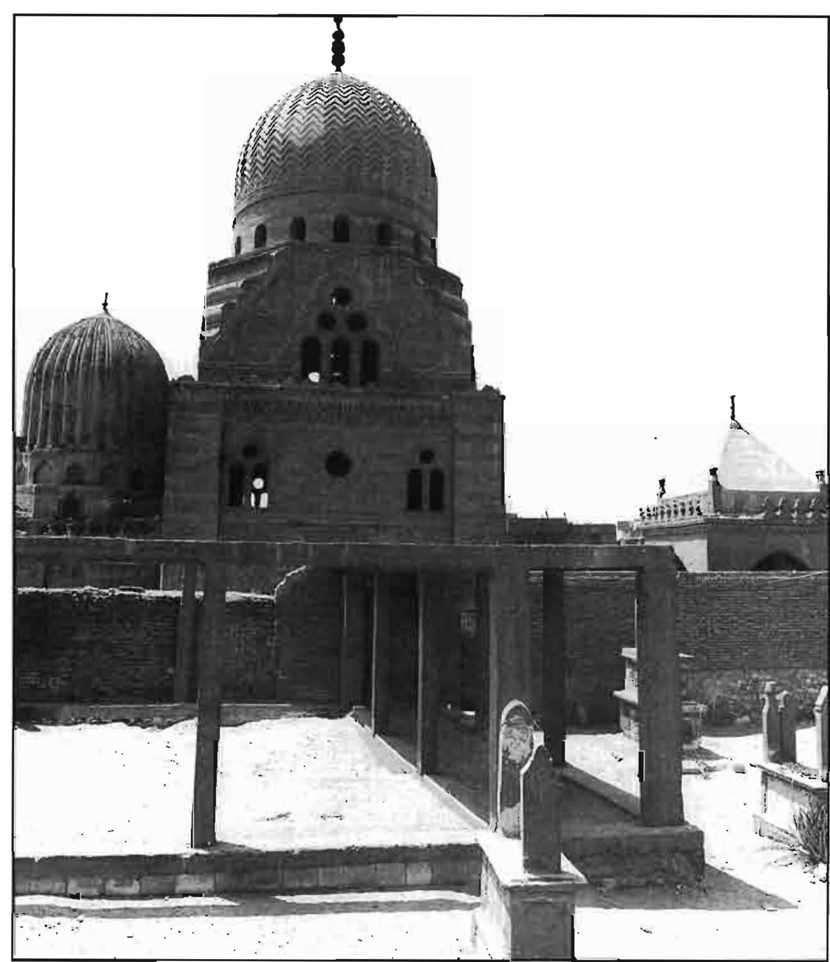
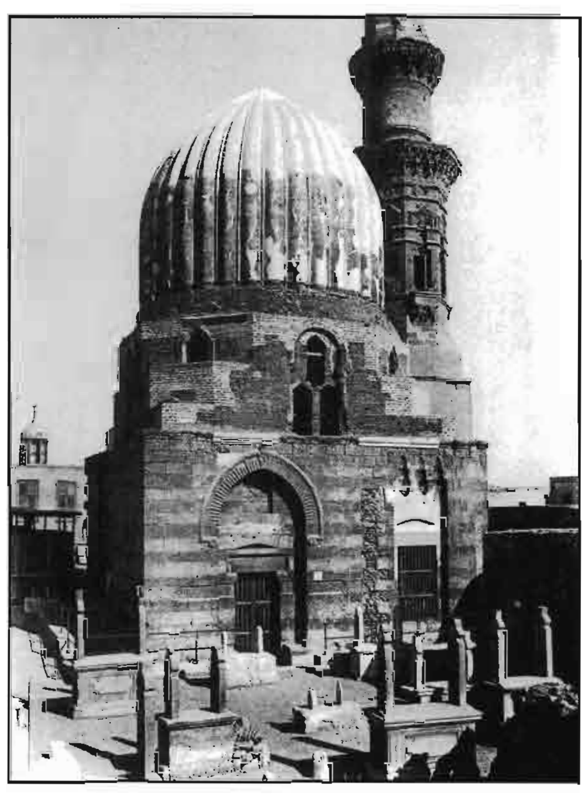
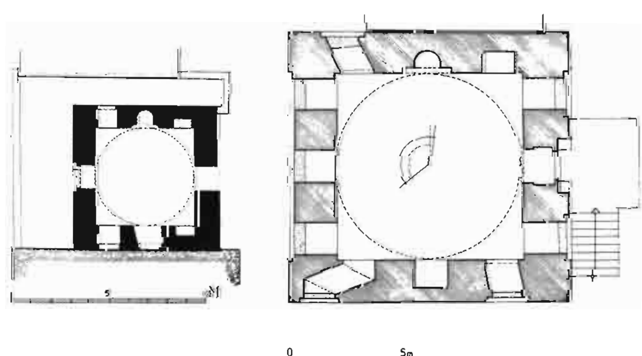
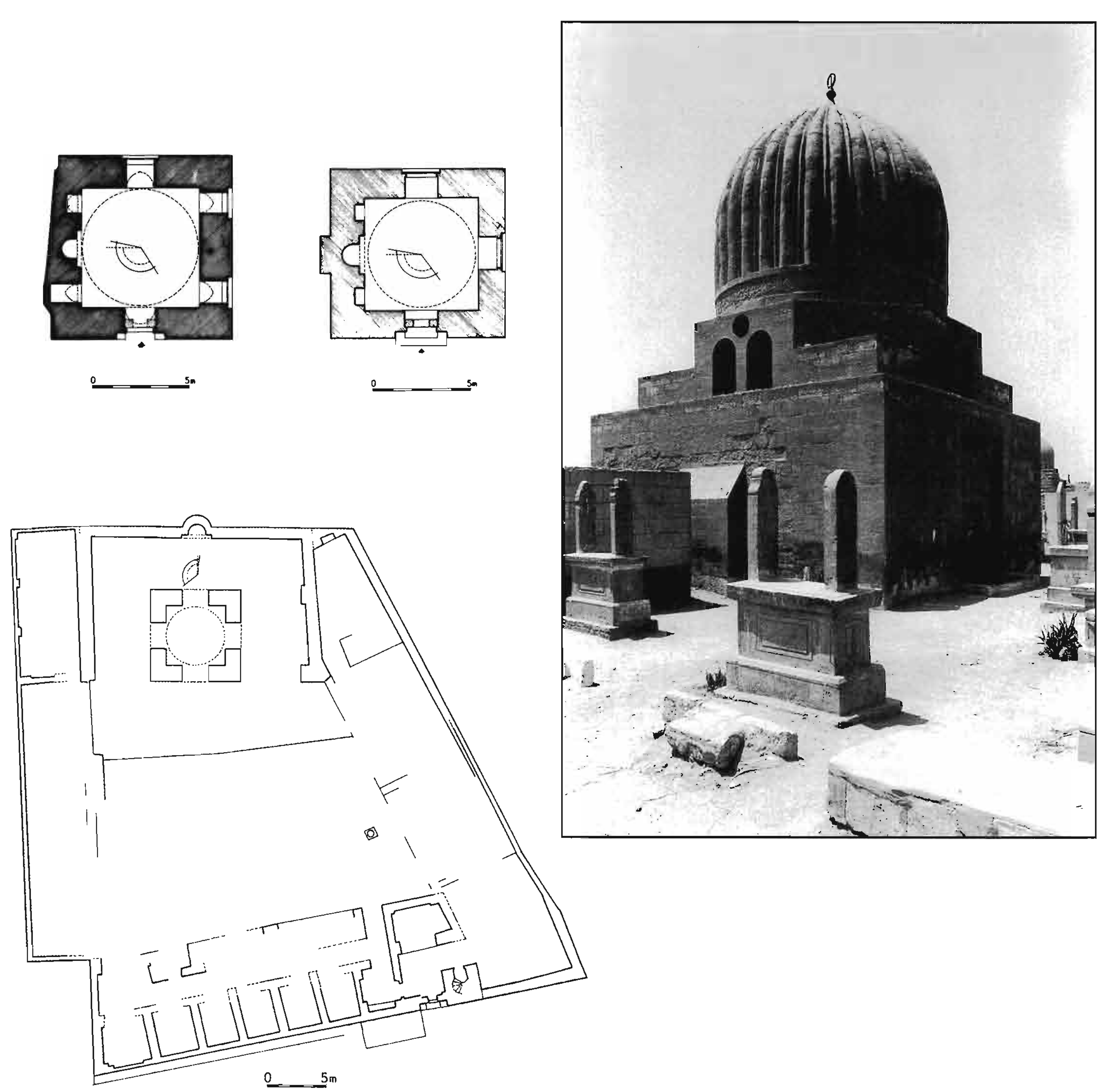
Above left, mausolea of Sawdun and Sawabi, with the iwan *of Rihan in the background to the right; below left, plan (after Kessler, facsimile, library of the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi); above right, cupola of 'Ali Badr al-Din al-Qarafi and southern minaret (photograph by Creswell).*





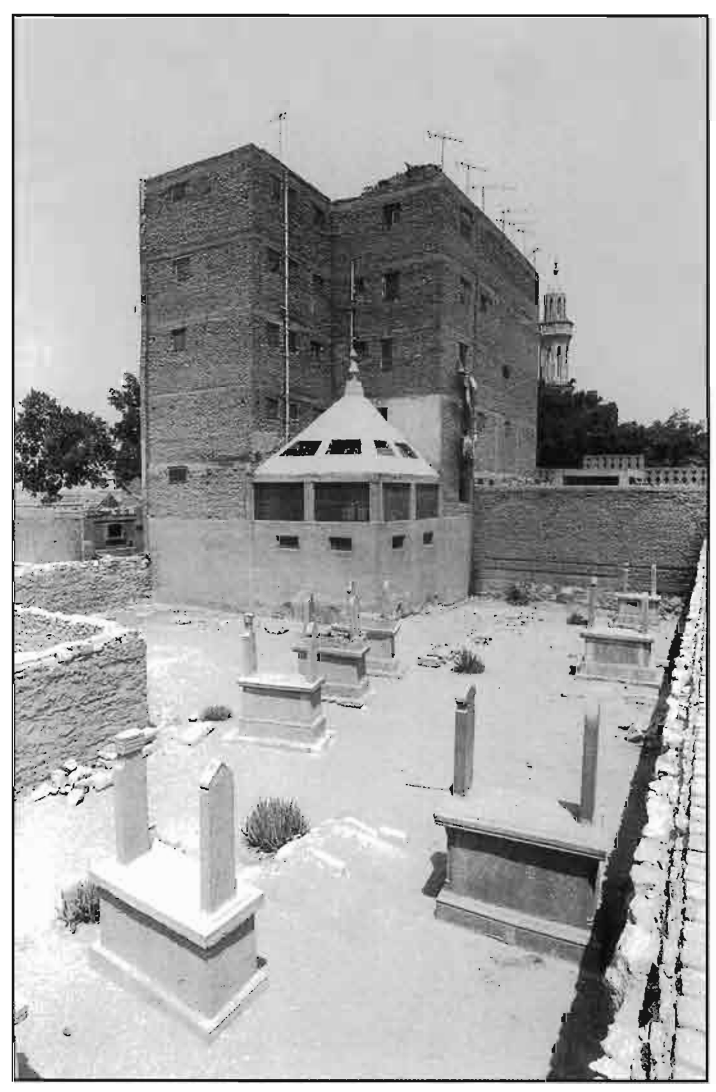


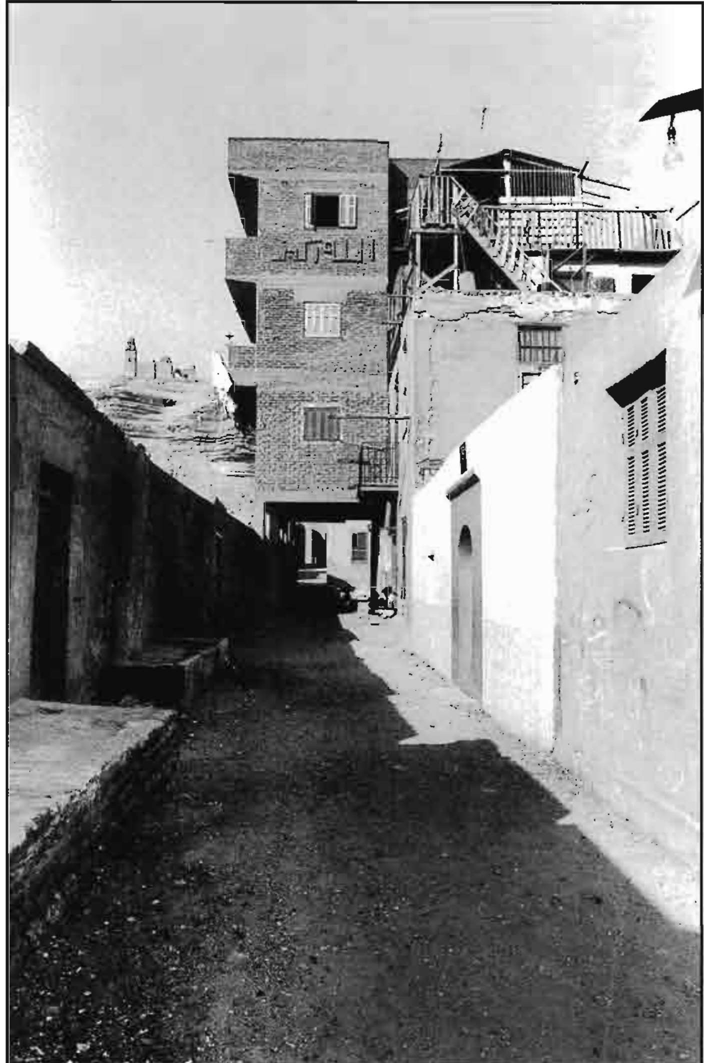
Tomb of Tankizbugha and plans (after Kessler, facsimile, library of the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi).



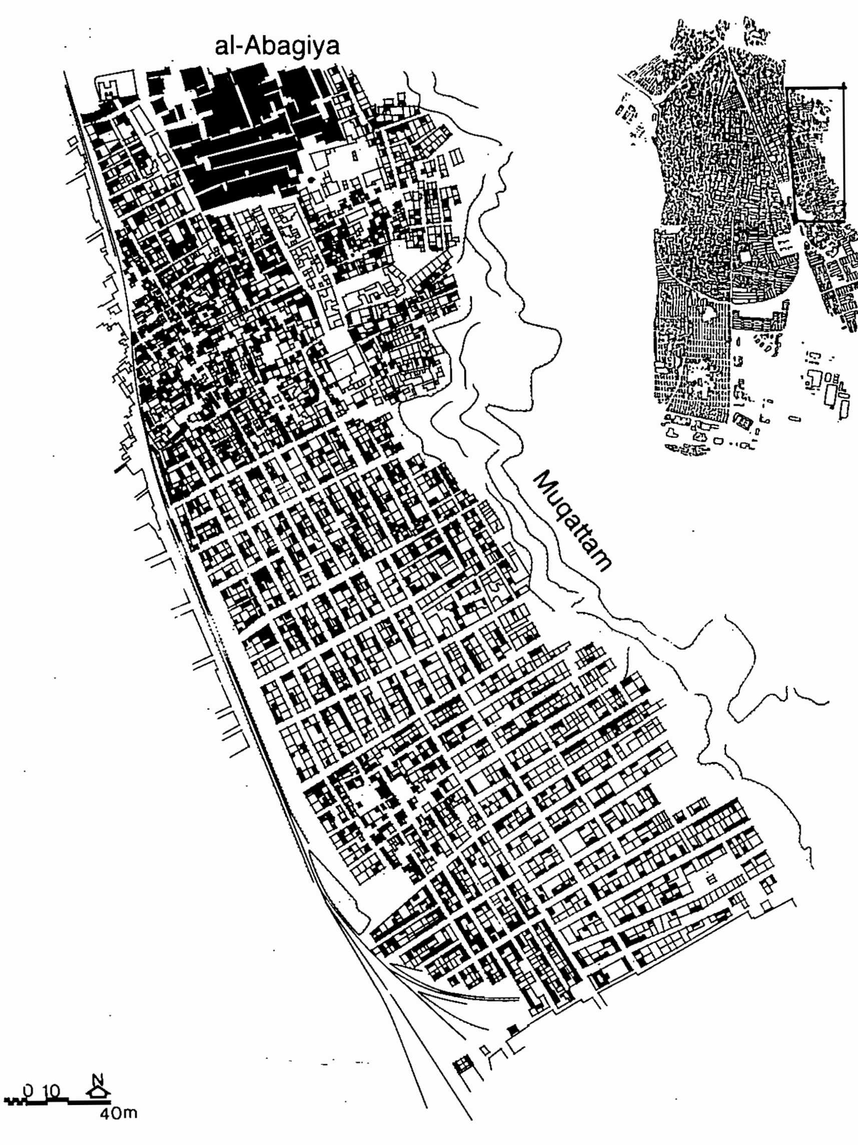
Tomb of Tankizbugha (photograph by Bahari).

Residential encroachment on tombs, zone 5.





Zone 5, northern sector (drawing by L. Yacoub and Heba, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).



Zone 5

The easternmost portion of the railway cuts across the last section of the southern necropolis—a long band blocked by the Muqattam hills. Its relief is quite hilly and overhangs the surrounding areas. The northern part, making up around a fifth of the area, is old and untidy, much like the neighboring Mamluk cemetery across the railway lines. The remaining four-fifths, recently developed, are perfectly linked rectangular plots. This vast area holds only a few historic tombs very widely spaced. The most remarkable are those clinging to the cliff face and visible from a great distance. Approaching from the north, the first thing one encounters is a low-income housing development built in the mid-1960s on the site of a powder magazine that belonged to the British army. On the southern border, there are additional informal dwellings of the type called *abagiya*. This part was built at the end of the nineteenth century. The transition from residential buildings to the cemetery is very gradual, with reciprocal infiltration. Furthermore, some of the houses are tombs to which several floors have been added; one can still see parallelepipeds topped with stelae in the courtyards. Gradually, tombs become the exclusive occupants of this space. The plots have been designed with complete freedom. They are all small and surrounded by walls. The space has been filled in to the maximum extent right up to the cliff's sheer rise, and the ground's unevenness has been put to judicious use. This type of ground use continues into the neighborhood of the mosque–mausoleum of 'Umar ibn al-Farid, in front of which are a square and a few residential buildings. This is the southernmost limit of the old sector, but the transition occurs smoothly. It is one of the funerary zone's last conquests of the Cairene agglomeration, and certainly the definitive one, begun in the 1960s around 'Umar ibn al-Farid. The last buildings are now several kilometers to the south. Here, the plots are rigorously laid out, all the roads are rectilinear and equal in width, and intersections are at right angles. The grid was applied without concern for the topography, and the blocks are almost all of equal dimensions.

As for the plots, this area must be divided into two sub-zones. From 'Umar ibn al-Farid to al-Sadat al-Wafa'iya Mosque, the plots are small but still of varying sizes. In the second sub-zone, south of al-Sadat, the surfaces rarely exceed sixty square meters, which indicates a desire to rationalize the use of

Zone 5, southern sector (drawing by L. Yacoub and Heba, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

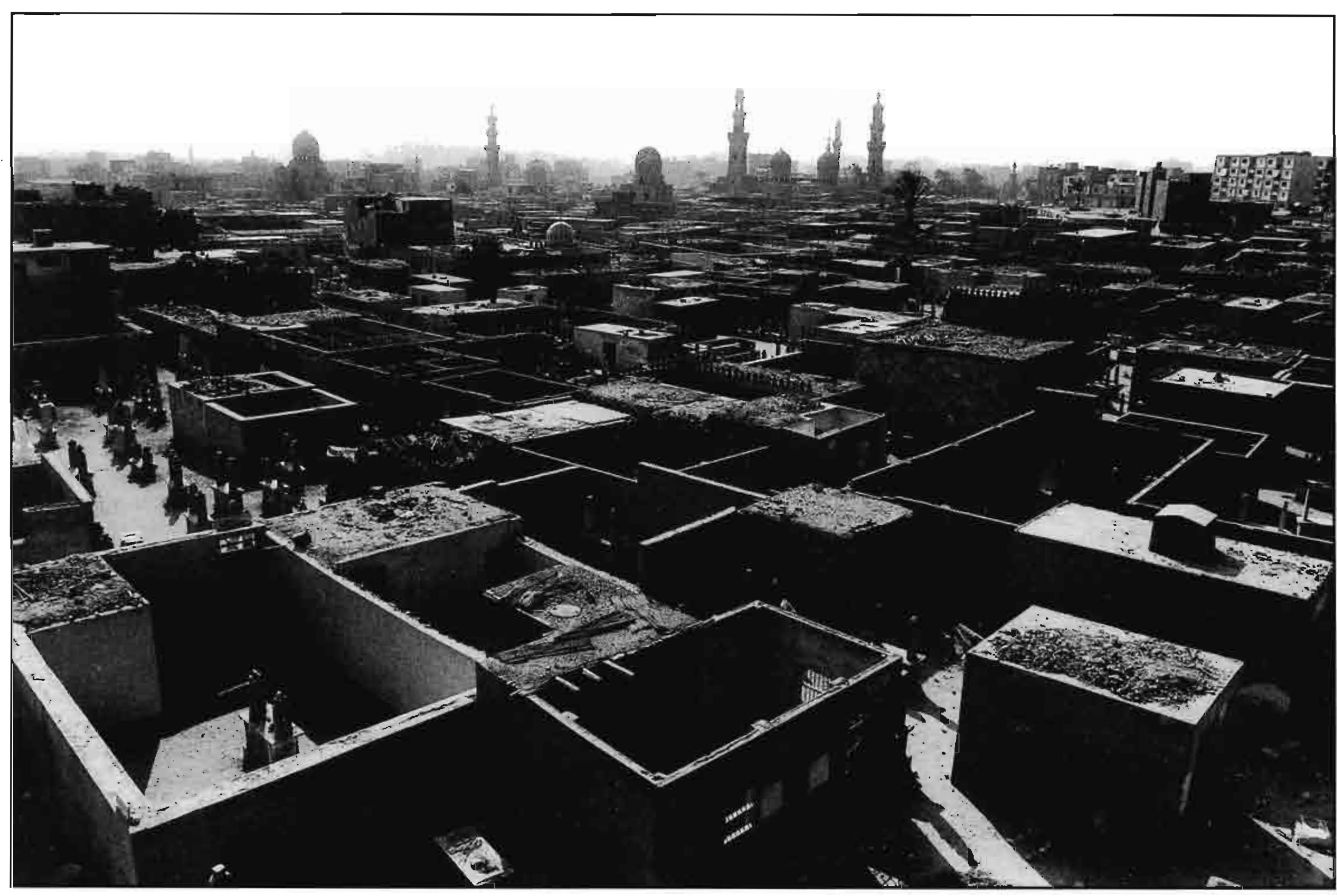
space and to reduce the size of burial places according to new norms. The architectural uniformity, accentuated by the use of rose-colored brick in all the façades and the existence of a construction model, is broken up by the unevenness of the ground. But even in death's low-rent housing, one can still find a few tombs and mausolea with cupolas, sheltering mystics, men of letters, qadis, Sufis, authors of maxims, and jurists. The most important of these are: the tomb of the great *muqri'* and imam al-Shatbi (1190); the monumental complex of al-Sadat al-Wafa'iya, built in 1407 and restored in 1797, which is surrounded by several tombs belonging to the Shadhiliya (a Sufi order still extant today);[110] and the tomb of Ibn 'Ata Allah, the author of maxims and one of the four greatest Sufi mystics (the others are Dhu-l-Nun al-Misri, al-Dusuqi, and Ibn al-Farid). Of 'Umar ibn al-Farid it has been said: "Mystic and poet, virtuoso of symbolism, he expressed the Arab spirit's thirst for pure water. His immoral nomism earned him enraged accusations of apostasy, but a more penetrating description struck the Algerian amir 'Abd al-Qadir: Ibn al-Farid was one of those who filled the world with clamor instead of (silently) absorbing the perfume of wisdom."[111]

The mausoleum was built in the reign of Sultan Barquq (1382–99). It comprises a square funerary chamber topped by a stone cupola, which was restored several times (in 1773, 1816, and 1882) before its final restoration over fifty years ago by a Turkish princess, Jamila [Cemile] Hanum, who died in Istanbul and therefore could not be buried beneath the cupola she had prepared for herself near the 'sultan of lovers.' This site no longer witnesses the glamor of the Ottoman crowds that once visited it, but many Western admirers of the Orient still came to see it in the 1930s.[112]

Clinging to the cliff, from north to south, one finds the following burial sites:

• The deepest, called Kahf al-Sudan, was placed in a natural Muqattam cave. According to al-Maqrizi, it is "a grotto in the mountainside carved out by persons unknown, who were probably Sudanese."[113] Massignon provides additional information: "The northernmost and deepest of the Muqattam's natural caves, it was enlarged at an early date by black ascetics of Nubian or Takruri origin. Qarqabi supplied it with water in AH 451. The *mihrab* and main stairway were built in AH 421. Early on, the cavern was dedicated to the Seven Sleepers

General northern view of zone 5.



of Ephesus (Ahl al-Kahf), a fact confirmed by the large inscription on the pediment, dated 905; Maghawri and one of Hallaj's disciples are buried here."[114]

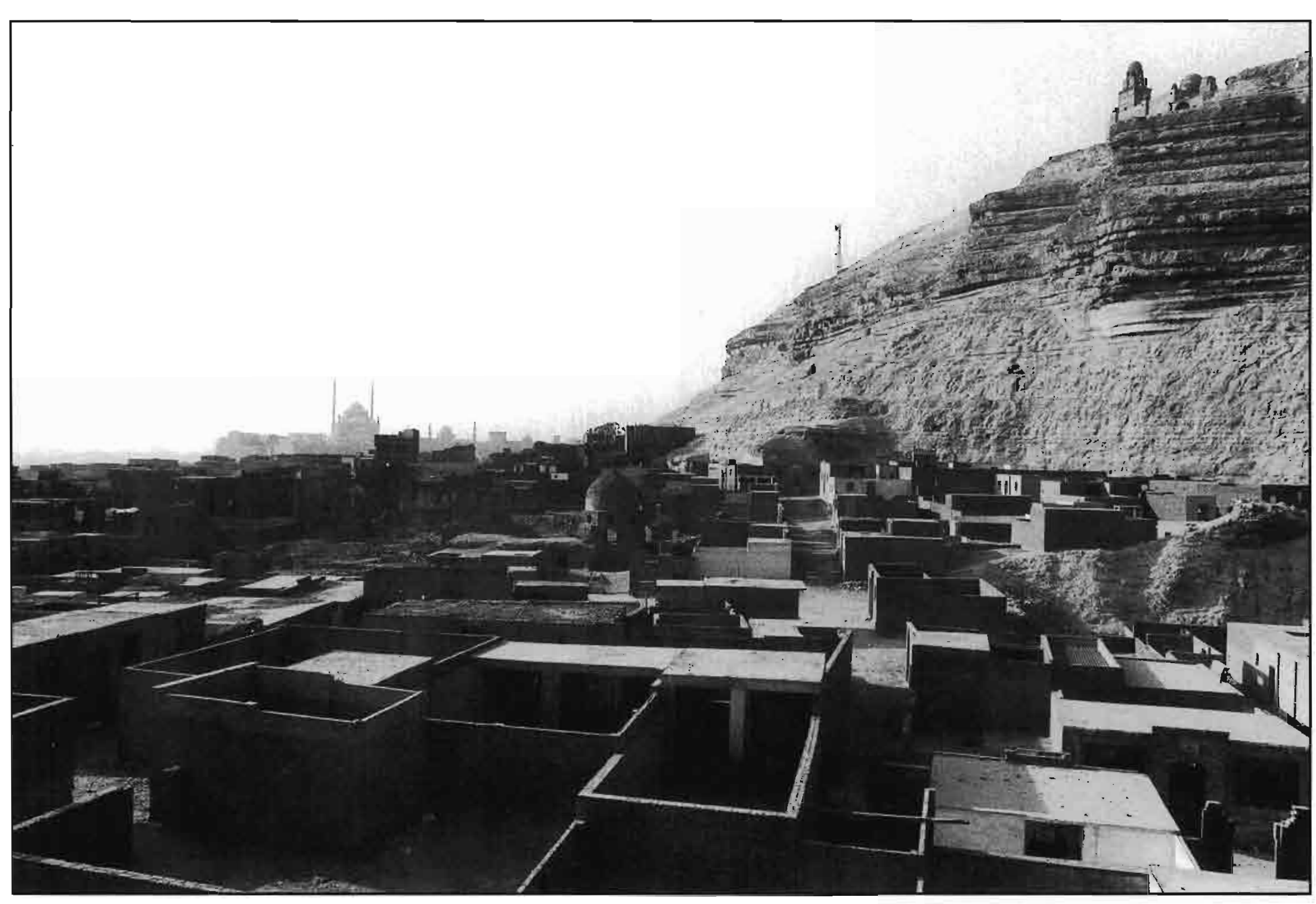
• To the northeast is the tomb of the Turkish prince Husayn Kamal.

• Three hundred meters to the southeast, the *mashhad* of Badr al-Gamali, the Amir al-Guyushi (commander-in-chief of the armies), is situated on a prominent spur of the Muqattam that overlooks the whole plain of Cairo. According to legend, this ideal location allowed the commander, who was of Armenian origin, to see the seven women he had loved—the Saba' Banat—from his tomb. Nothing, however, proves that the general was buried there. This is an old pilgrimage site, like many others in the Qarafa.

• A few meters below, to the west of this curious edifice, is another *mashhad*; said to belong to Ikhwat Yusuf al-Asbat, it dates from 1100. "This monument, erected after a dream, was sunk on the site of a pre-Islamic Jewish cemetery and reaches from Rubil to the petrified forest. The place is riddled with memories of Moses."[115] One enters through a door on the southern side, which leads to a square-plan vaulted chamber 3.74 meters in length. On the right is a larger room with a mihrab in the eastern wall. This leads to a building divided into six rooms covered with cupolas, which lead in turn to the square-plan mausoleum, 5.73 meters long and 4.64 meters high.

A little way above 'Umar ibn al-Farid is the mosque of Jahin al-Khalwati (1545), one of the Mamluks of Sultan Qaytbay. This downgraded monument is accessible

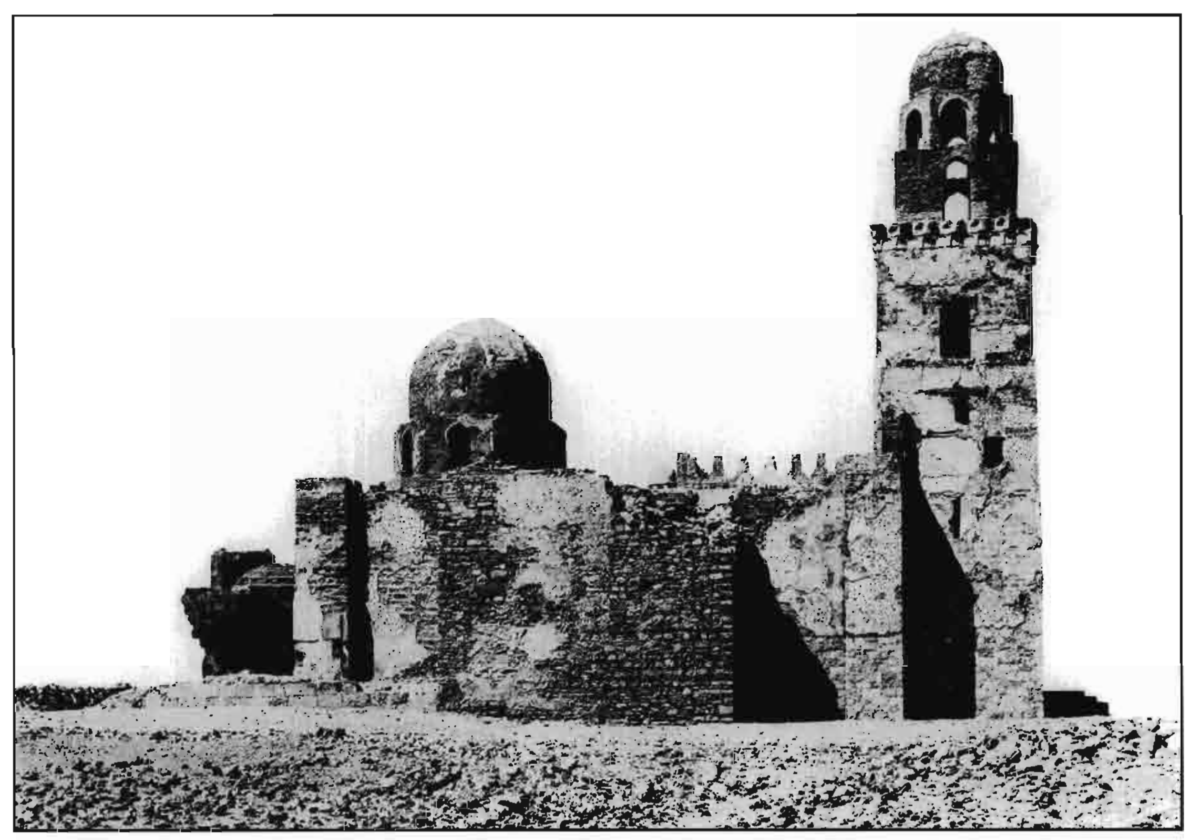
General southern view of zone 5. On the right, the Muqattam, with al-Guyushi sanctuary at the summit.

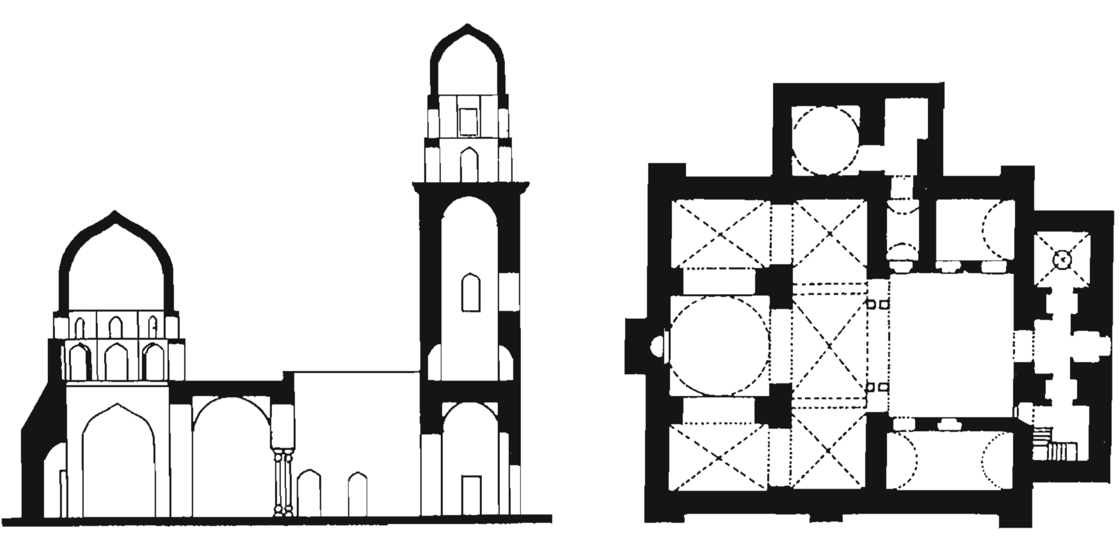


via a ramp. Here was once the "original nucleus of the Iraqi cemetery, formed in the eleventh century by the tombs of Sufis exiled from Baghdad after Hallaj's trial."[116]

This arid, solitary square space, as Massignon described it half a century ago, is currently covered with tombs. It is still one of the calmest spots in the Qarafa.

Al-Guyushi sanctuary. Photograph, plan, and section after Creswell.

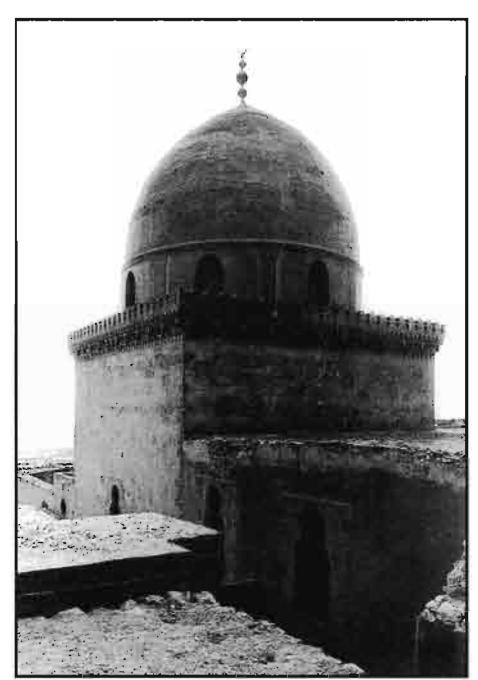


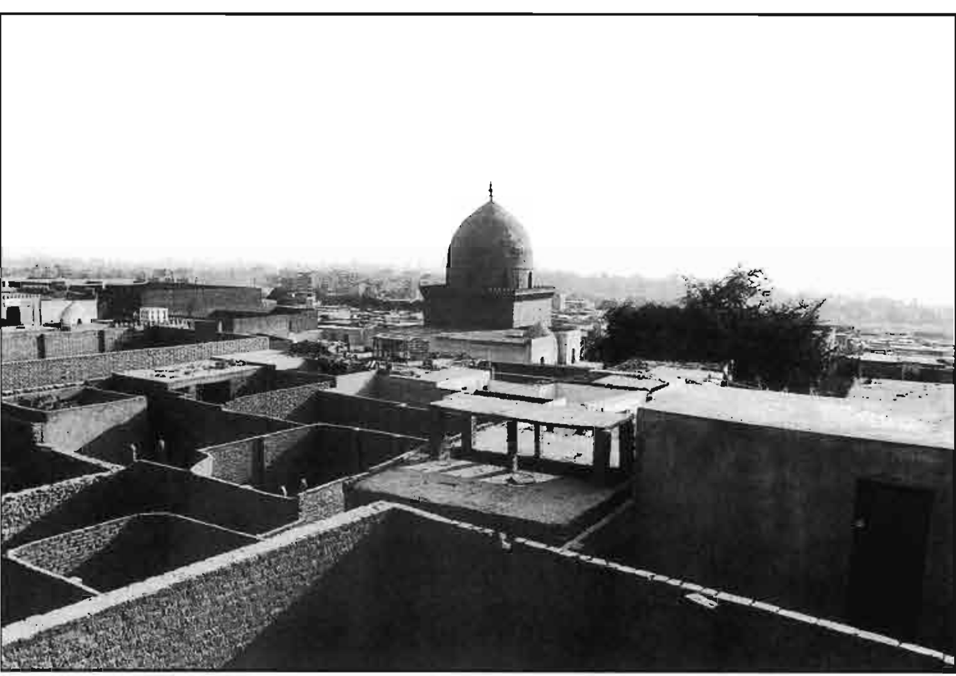


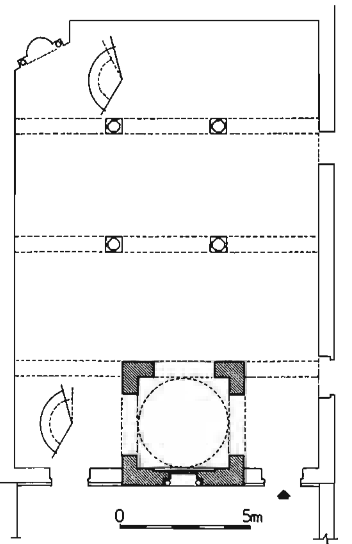
Tomb of Sidi al-Shatbi.

Mosque of Jahin al-Khalwati, overlooking the southern part of zone 5.

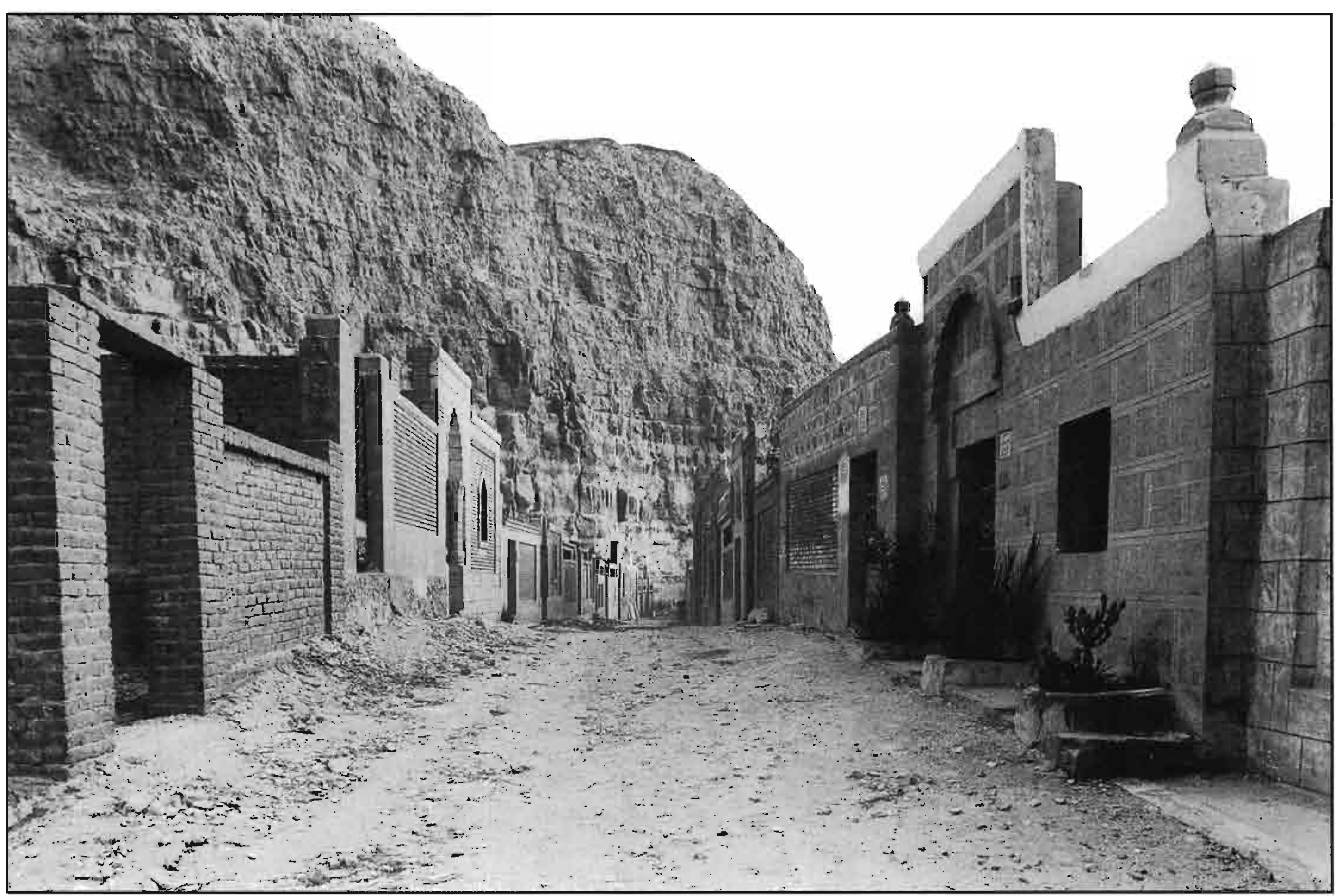
Above left, tomb of 'Umar ibn al-Farid; below left, plan (after Kessler, facsimile, library of the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi); above right, partial view of the cemetery; below right, entrance to the tomb.







Southern part of zone 5, recently constructed tombs.



Southern part of zone 5, recently constructed tombs.

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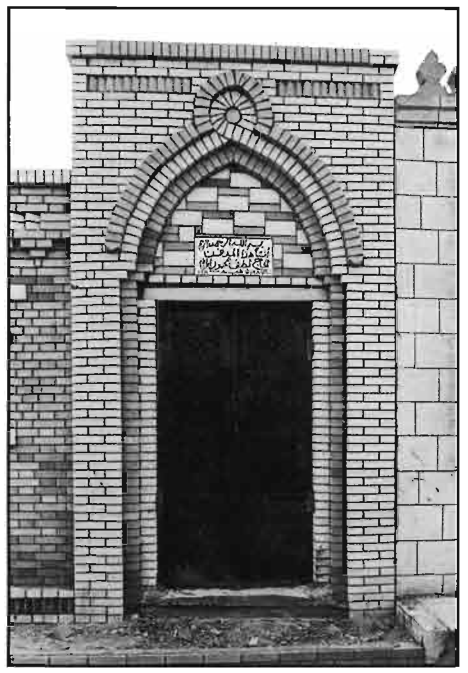
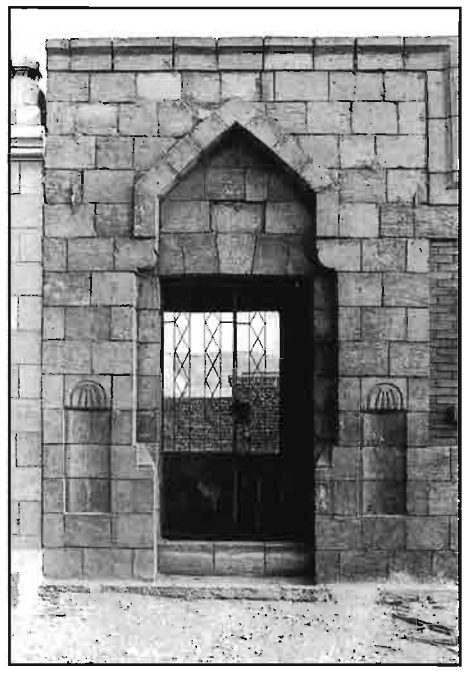
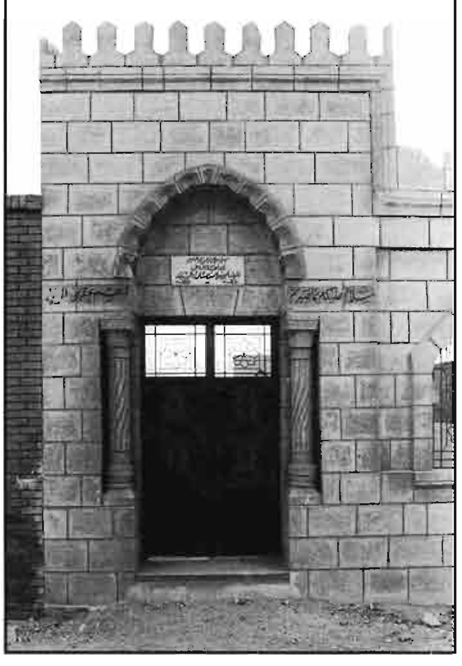
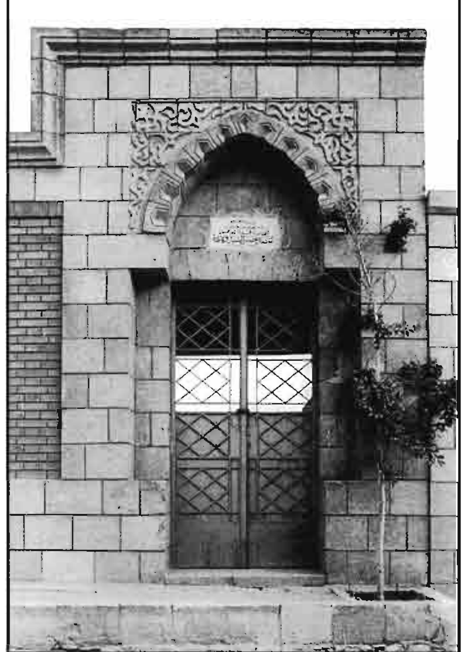
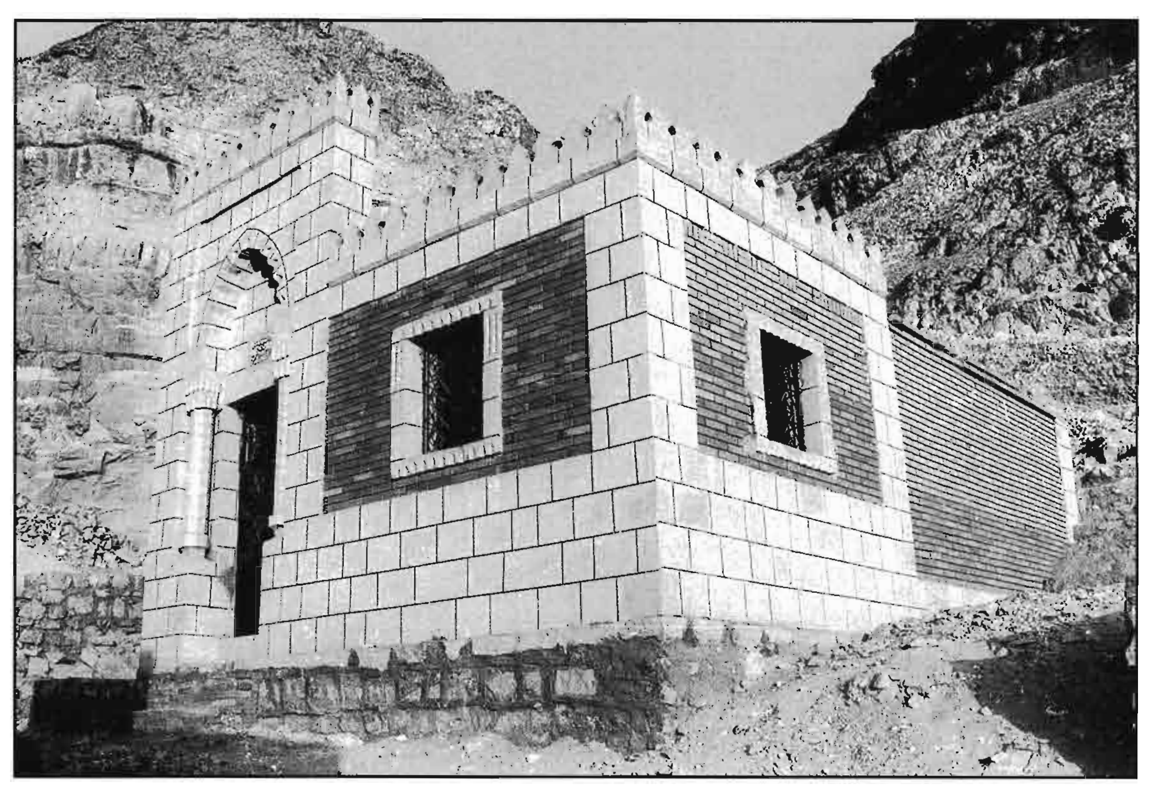
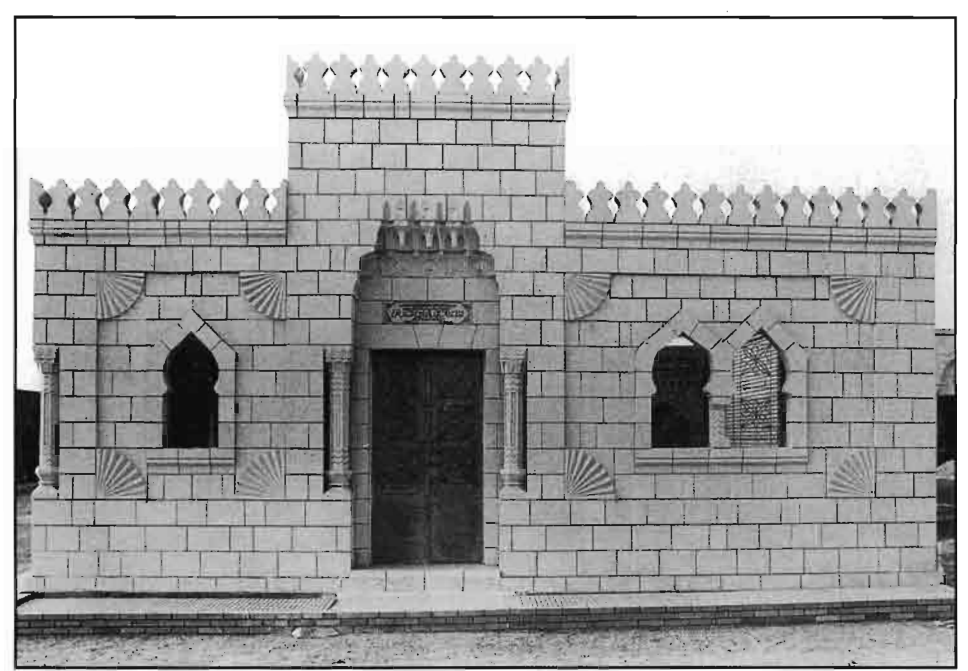


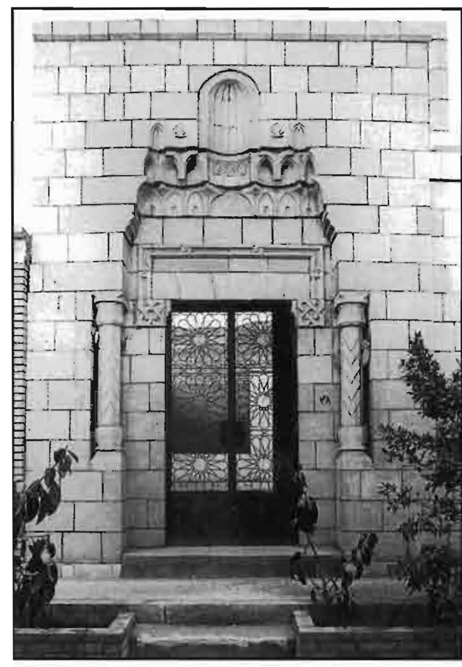



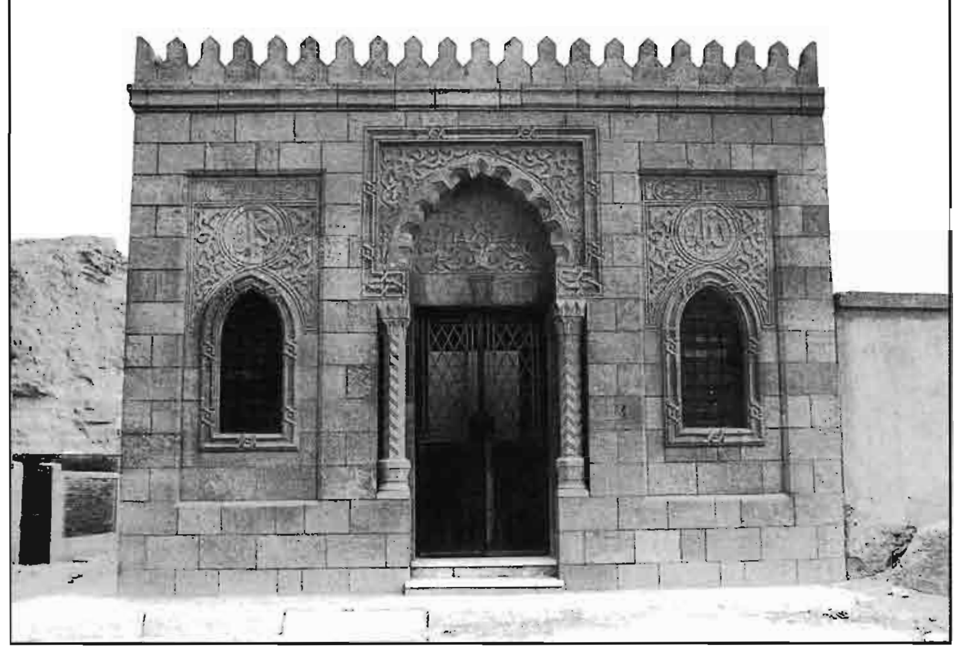


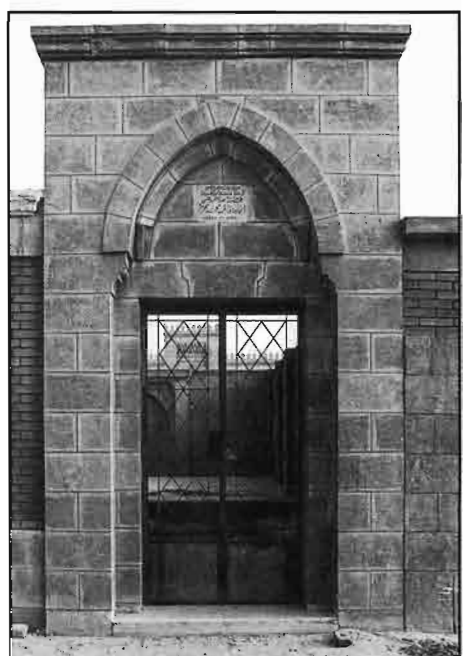


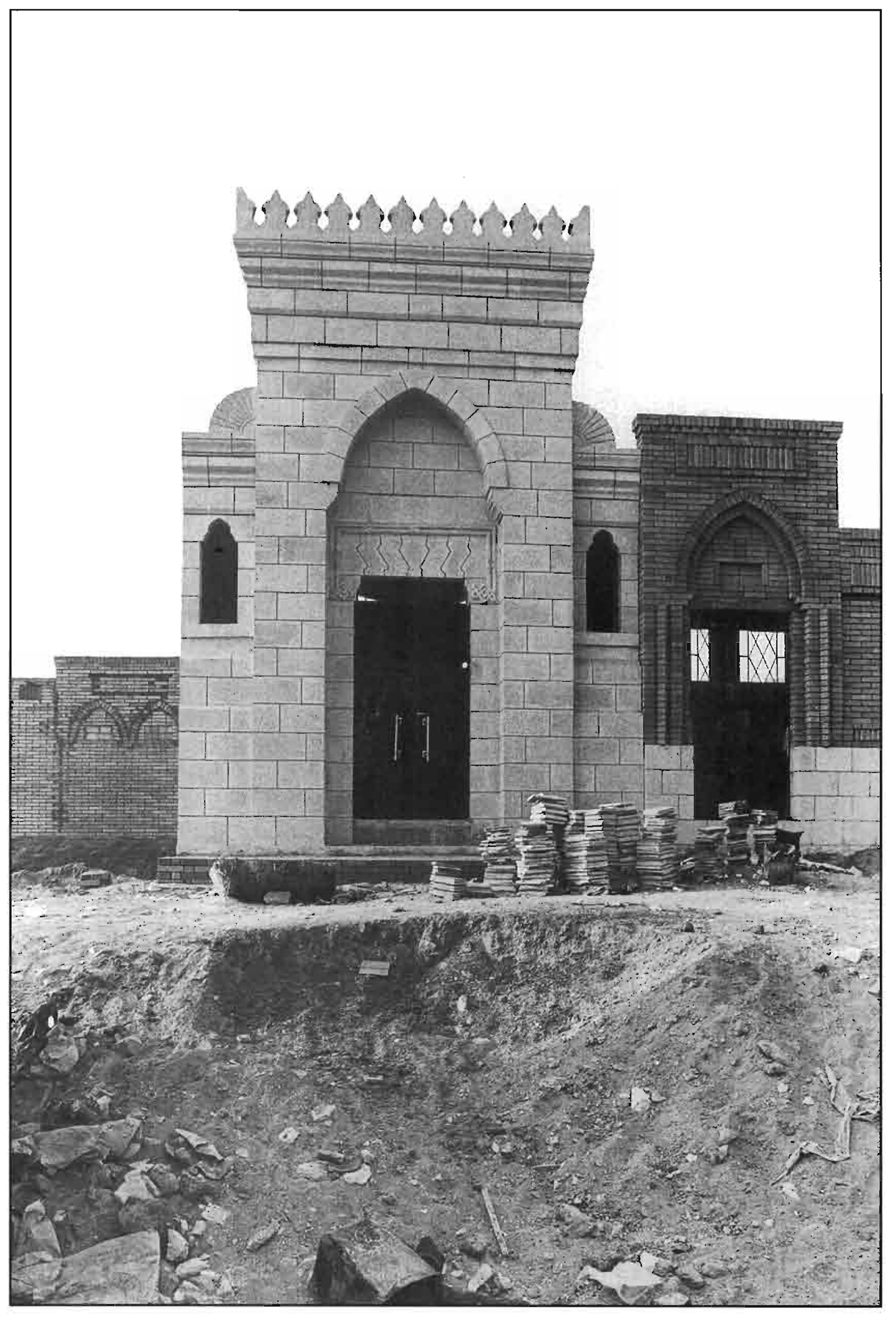
Left page: Southern part of zone 5:
Above, a recently constructed tomb; below, a family tomb under construction with two burial places, one for men and the other for women.
Below: Southern part of zone 5, recently constructed tombs.











Left page: Southern part of zone 5, recently constructed tomb.

Notes

[1] Fustat, the first Arab settlement in Egypt, was founded in AH 21 (642 CE) in the vicinity of the Greco-Roman city of Babylon to serve as a garrison town for the conquering Arab armies. There is some debate over the etymology of the name Fustat. Arab historians say it stems from the Semitic word for 'tent,' while to European historians such as Butler and Kubiak it derives from the Latin *fossatum* or 'settlement surrounded by ditches.' It would seem, however, to be an ancient name mentioned in reference to this site in papyrus texts (Kubiak 1987, 11).

[2] A toponym stemming from the name of the Banu Qarafa ibn Ghusn ibn Wali clan of the Yemeni tribe of Banu Ma'afir. Originally, it denoted the tribe's allotted *khitta* (plot of land) in the city of Fustat. It fell into a state of neglect and ruin during the famine that ravaged Egypt from 1066 to 1072, and probably came to be used as a burial ground thereafter. The name Qarafa was subsequently extended to all of Cairo's cemeteries. (al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, 442; al-Hamawi 1906, vol. 7, 43–44). It is still used for Muslim cemeteries—especially in urban areas—in place of more fitting terms such as *gabanat* (plural of *gabana*), meaning 'desert'; or *maqabir* (plural of *maqbara*), which stems from *qabara* ('to bury a body'); or *madafin* (plural of *madfan*), 'burial place,' the verb *dafana* meaning 'to hide' (Ibn Manzur 1967, 189). In rural areas, the most commonly used term is *turab*, plural of *turba*, meaning 'dust,' that is, the fate of the human body after death (al-Maqri 1898, vol. 1, 43).

[3] An estimate arrived at by comparing the Qarafa's boundaries as reported in historical sources with recent maps. The area between Birkat al-Habash to the south, Bab al-Qarafa to the north, the walls of Fustat to the west and Muqattam to the east comes to 3.75km x 5km.

[4] Al-Maqrizi 1932, 54.

[5] The road through Bab al-Qarafa was once one of the main routes from the city to the Qarafa. But the gate fell in ruins and was eventually closed in 1447 on the orders of Sultan Gukmak. Later, in 1493, Sultan Qaytbay built another gate, which was named after him, some thirty meters to the south. Bab Qaytbay underwent restoration in the 1990s (Ibn Taghri Birdi 1932, vol. 9, 111; Creswell 1959–60, 57–58).

[6] Sightings were reported, in the wake of highly disturbing mass hallucinations, in the area between Gareh hill and 'Ayn al-Sira (Massignon 1958, 42).

[7] Casanova 1919.

[8] Salmon 1902, 12.

[9] Massignon 1958, 42.

[10] According to Kubiak (1987), this was not standard practice among the Arabs in the lands they conquered. In Kufa, for instance, each tribe had its own cemetery located within the boundaries of its allotted share of land, its *khitta*. And in Damascus, tribal cemeteries were located at the foot of Mount Qaysun because it was believed to be hallowed ground. In Cairo, as in Damascus, the choice of site had less to do with geology and geography than with religious beliefs and symbolism (Kubiak 1987, 109; Ibn Khalqan 1878, 342; Hamza 1986, 16).

[11] "Each tribe evidently had a separate cemetery. These tribal burial grounds, which are confirmed for the fourteenth/fifteenth century, must have originated at a time when the tribal social structure was still strong" (Kubiak 1987, 109).

[12] The Quraysh were an exception to the rule in locating their cemetery within the tribal *khitta*. Various accounts by historians confirm this to have been the case, citing the example of the *mashhad* of Sayyida Kulthum in the middle of the Ahl al-Raya *khitta* (Kubiak 1987, 110).

[13] Kubiak 1987, 94, 110.

[14] Kubiak 1987, 87.

[15] Kubiak 1987, 84, 87; 'Abd el-Wahab 1994, 33.

[16] Raghib 1981, 1–29.

[17] We can pinpoint roughly the area it covered using an up-to-date map thanks to the remains of the walls of Fustat, the Ibn Tulun aqueduct, and the Citadel. All the same, an area of such proportions does seem rather large. Kubiak (1987) cites al-Maqrizi (1853) and other historical sources to argue that there were two Qarafas before the arrival of the Fatimids: al-Qarafa al-Sughra, or Smaller Qarafa, stretching three kilometers south of the Citadel and flanked by the wall of Fustat to the west and the Muqattam hills to the east; and al-Qarafa al-Kubra, or Greater Qarafa, extending north to south from the *musalla* of Khawla—which no longer exists, but which used to be located near the *mashhad* of Sharif Tabataba at Birkat al-Habash—and from west to east from the Ibn Tulun aqueduct to Muqattam. These two areas were probably merged to form a single large area (Hamza 1986, 24–25; Kubiak 1987, 109).

[18] Al-Muqaddasi provides the only description of their architecture, describing them as "magnificent and whitewashed"—a succinct yet vague glimpse that tells us nothing about their shapes and sizes. Tombstones in general were probably barely indistinguishable from the other rocks on the ground or the *shawahids* (single, *shahid*) of the kind still found there today. The only edifices of note were the various tribes' mosque–mausolea, all thirty-five of which have since vanished (Hamza 1986, 28; Kubiak 1987, 110), together with the six domes of the *mashhad* of Sharif Tabataba, which dates back to the Ikhshidid period (933–969), i.e., before the Fatimids.

[19] The 'Alids were the descendants of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, cousin of the Prophet, and his son-in-law by marriage to his daughter Fatima, and the caliph al-Hakim, who built the shrines, planned to transport the supposed ashes of the Prophet and the two caliphs there from Madina. Although the shrines remained empty, they still became a pilgrimage site revered and visited on various occasions by the Fatimids and their dignitaries (Raghib 1981, 3–4).

[20] The *mashhads* of 'Atika, Ga'fari, Sukayna, and Ruqayya (Raghib, 1981, 3–4).

[21] Bab al-Nasr cemetery, which we shall be looking at in the next chapter.

[22] Al-Hakim (996–1020) was said to have gone for nocturnal walks there in search of pious memories (Massignon 1958, 65).

[23] It was actually a shrine built in 1085 for someone whose identity remains a mystery to historians. According to Farid Shafi'i, for instance, it was an observation post "disguised as a mosque." Whereas to others, such as Oleg Grabar, it was a memorial to Badr (Behrens-Abouseif 1989, 66).

[24] The Khan al-Khalili was established in 1292 by Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil ibn Qalawun; it was later enlarged during the reign of Qansuh al-Ghuri. Nowadays this *khan* is the main bazaar in Cairo (Herz Bey in *Le Guide*, Benedite (G.) et Joanne, 1920, 91).

[25] Herz Bey 1920, 91.

[26] It was the largest of the eight palaces in the Qarafa and had a hammam, vast gardens known as *al-Tag al-Ma'ruf*, covered walkways, and loggias (al-Maqrizi 1932, 453; Raghib 1974, 70).

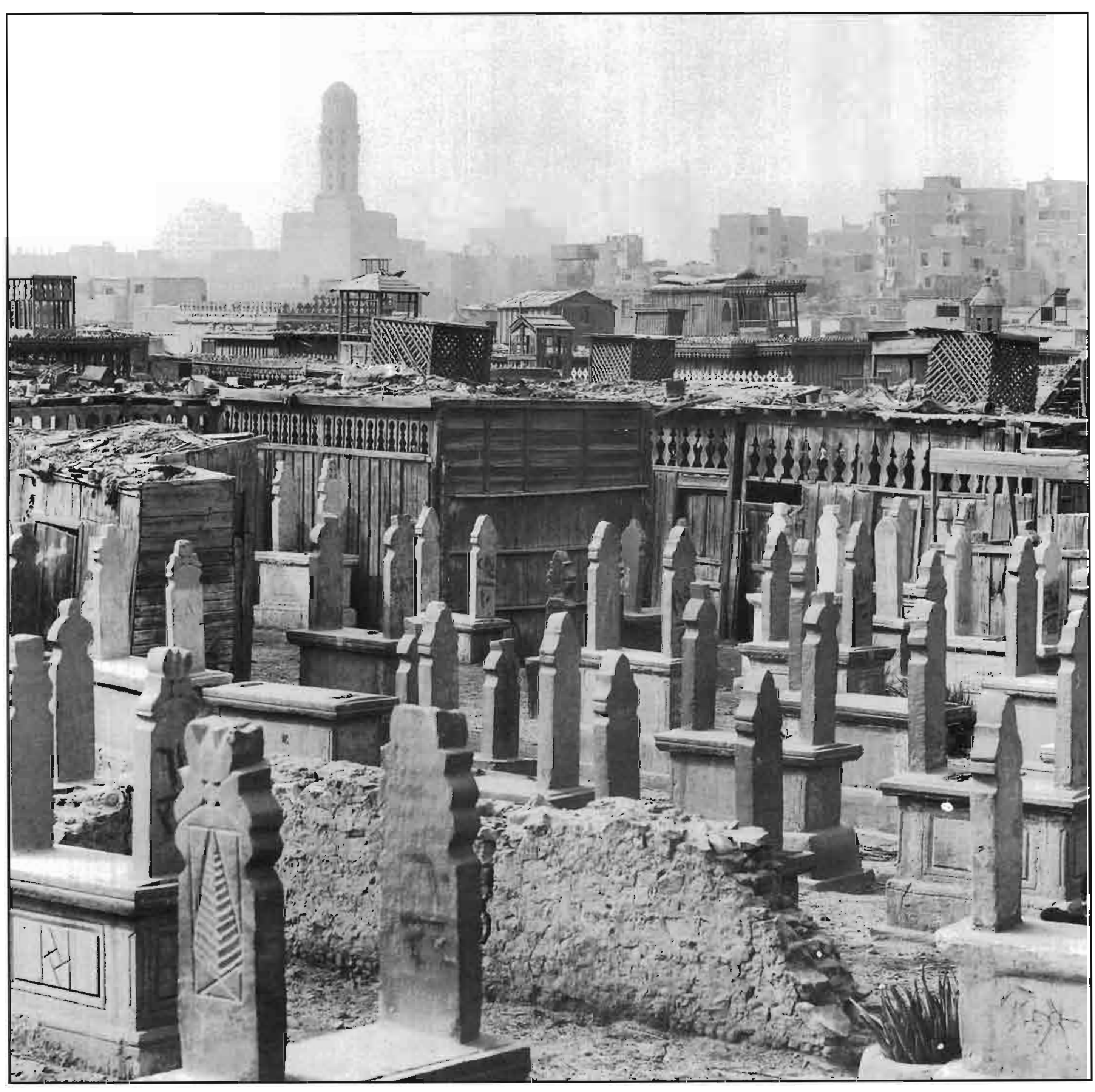
[27] Chemayel 1949, 175.

[28] *Gawsaq* is a Persian word for small fortress or *qasr* (palace). There were eighteen of these in the Qarafa. Usually built on high ground and

offering a panoramic view, they were places where people went to walk, seek solitude, or pray (al-Maqrizi in Hamza 1986, 42).
[29] *Ribat* was originally the word for an army barracks: a place for resting soldiers and their horses. It later came to be used for various kinds of pious foundations, such as Sufi retirement homes and hostels for the elderly and needy. The Fatimids were the first to introduce *ribat*s—eight of them in all, serving as old people's homes and hostels that provided social welfare and a religious education for the needy—into the Qarafa (al-Maqrizi in Hamza 1986, 42).
[30] Historians have mentioned ten or so wells, *sabil* fountains, and drinking troughs in the Qarafa. The water supply system also included two aqueducts; the most important of these was the Ibn Tulun aqueduct, built in the ninth century to supply the Ma'afir *khitta* with water from Birkat al-Habash. Another aqueduct was built in 1121 by al-Afdal Shahinshah, son of Badr al-Gamali (al-Kandi 1971, 115; Ibn Khalqan in Hamza 1986, 50–52).
[31] During the caliphate of al-Mustansir Billah (1053–1094), a civil war broke out between the Turks and the Sudanese troops, and Egypt was blighted by a seven-year famine and ravaged by the plague. Having lost his authority over Upper Egypt to the slaves and with the countryside in the hands of the Bedouins, the Fatimid caliph appealed to the governor of 'Akka (Saint John of Acre) and the general Badr al-Gamali for help. Order was soon restored, Cairo regained its splendor, and a proliferation of new mosques and trading companies appeared. The restoration work, however, centered on al-Qahira to the detriment of Fustat, which had been severely affected by the political and economic strife. The recovery of the Fatimid state under Badr and his successors was to prove short-lived: the accession of Caliph al-Amir ibn Ahkam Allah in 1101 marked the start of its slide into terminal decline (Mubarak 1969, vol. 1, 51–59; Raymond 1993, 76–79).
[32] In 1164 a Frankish army arrived in Egypt, responding to an appeal from the Fatimid vizir Shawar to help his people defend themselves against the attacking Syrian forces led by Shirkuh. The campaign ended three years later in an agreement settled between the belligerents. But the hostilities resumed. The Franks seized the town of Bilbays (on the eastern side of the Nile Delta), directly threatening Cairo. As the invaders drew near, Shawar, who had just overturned his alliances, gave the order to set fire to Fustat. "Twenty thousand pitchers of *naft* (oil) were poured on the workshops, houses, palaces, and mosques. The inhabitants were evacuated to Cairo, and the fire raged for fifty days" (al-Maqrizi 1853, 337; Mubarak 1969, vol. 1, 62).
[33] Al-Maqrizi 1853, 337; Mubarak 1969, vol. 1, 62
[34] Raymond 1993, 82.
[35] 'Uqba ibn Amir was governor of Egypt for three years (655–658) during the caliphate of Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan (Mubarak 1969, vol. 5, 133; al-Sakhawy, n.d. *Tohfet al-Ahbad*, Cairo 345; Ibn Iyas, vol. 1, 118).
[36] The most famous is the turba of Amir Lu'lu'a al-'Adili, who died in 1202. This tomb, also known as Masgid al-Andalusi, was built in 1178 but has vanished without trace; it had a garden, fountains, and a loggia *(maq'ad)* overlooking the patio *(rihba)* (al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, 85–86).
[37] Chafe'i 1970, 9.
[38] Ibn Jubayr 1954, 90.
[39] Ibn Sa'id al-Maghrabi, *al-Maghrib fi hulay al-Maghrib*, vol. 1., eds. Zaki Hassan et al. (Cairo: Cairo University Press, 1953), 10.
[40] After the death of al-Salih Ayyub in 1249 at Mansura, where the Ayyubid army had been doing battle with the crusaders, his wife, Shagarat al-Durr, sent for their son, Turan Shah, who led the troops to victory and secured the surrender of Saint Louis. The latter's reign as sultan, however, was cut short after just two months: he was assassinated by his father's Mamluks in April 1250. Shagarat al-Durr was named sultana on 6 May 1250, but was pressured into abdicating eighty days later by the Mamluks and the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mustansir Billah. Her new husband, 'Izz al-Din Aybak, took her place and thereby became the first sultan of the Bahri Mamluk dynasty (Raymond 1993, 110; al-Ansari 1994, 92–93).
[41] Al-Maqrizi 1853.
[42] The tombs of al-Ashraf Khalil (1290–93) and Fatima Khatun (1284).
[43] This *zawya* was surrounded by the dwellings of the descendants of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani, which is how the northern stretch of Imam al-Shafi'i Street and the urban neighborhood bordering it to the east came to be named al-Qadiriya (al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, 304).
[44] Hamza 1986, 71–81.
[45] Hamza 1986, 82.
[46] Raymond 1993, 144.
[47] Raymond 1993, 147.
[48] Raymond 1993, 145.
[49] Amin 1980.
[50] Ibn Taghri Birdi 1932, vol. 14, 342.
[51] Al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, 453.
[52] Mubarak 1969, vol. 1, 199.
[53] Hamza 1989, 25.
[54] The number of such structures built by the pashas fell sharply, from sixteen in the sixteenth century to just two by the time Muhammad 'Ali came to power in the nineteenth century (Hamza 1989, 30).
[55] The mosques of Mesih Pasha (sixteenth century), the *zawya* of Mustafa Pasha (seventeenth century), the mausolea of Sidi 'Uqba (renovated) and Tahawi (1686), the Sabil al-Ahmar built by 'Ali Pasha al-Salihdar, and the *khanqah* of Nizamiya in the eastern cemetery (Hamza 1989, 25).
[56] The Ottomans retained some of the administrative machinery that was in place when they conquered Egypt, and chose to leave governance of the provinces in the hands of the Mamluks (Raymond 1993, 199).
[57] Unlike the pashas, the Mamluk amirs built all manner of structures—mosques, *zawyas*, *takiyas*, *sabils*, and others—the number of which increased exponentially from eight to fifty over the same period. Oda Pasha, Ibrahim Agha Mustahfizan, 'Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda, and others dotted Cairo with an array of lavish buildings. Katkhuda in particular played a leading role through the architectural work he pioneered and hence came to be dubbed the "the greatest of all patrons" or the "prince of renovators" (Raymond 1993, 31–32; Raymond 1995b).
[58] The *turba* of 'Uthman Bey al-Qazdughli, the tomb of Nur al-Din al-Qarafi, and al-Sadat al-Wafa'iya Mosque.
[59] *Voyages en Égypte des années 1611 et 1612: Georges Sandys et William Lithgow*, ed. Oleg Volkoff, 65.
[60] *Voyages en Égypte des années 1589, 1590 et 1591: Le Vénitien anonyme, Le Seigneur de Villamont, Le Hollandais Jan Sommer*, eds. Carla Burri and Serge Sauneron, 189.
[61] Several cemeteries between 'Ataba and Bab al-Khalq Square were razed to the ground: al-Qasid, al-Azbakiya, al-Riwi'i, and Sayyida Zaynab (Mubarak 1969, 159).
[62] Mubarak 1969, 159.

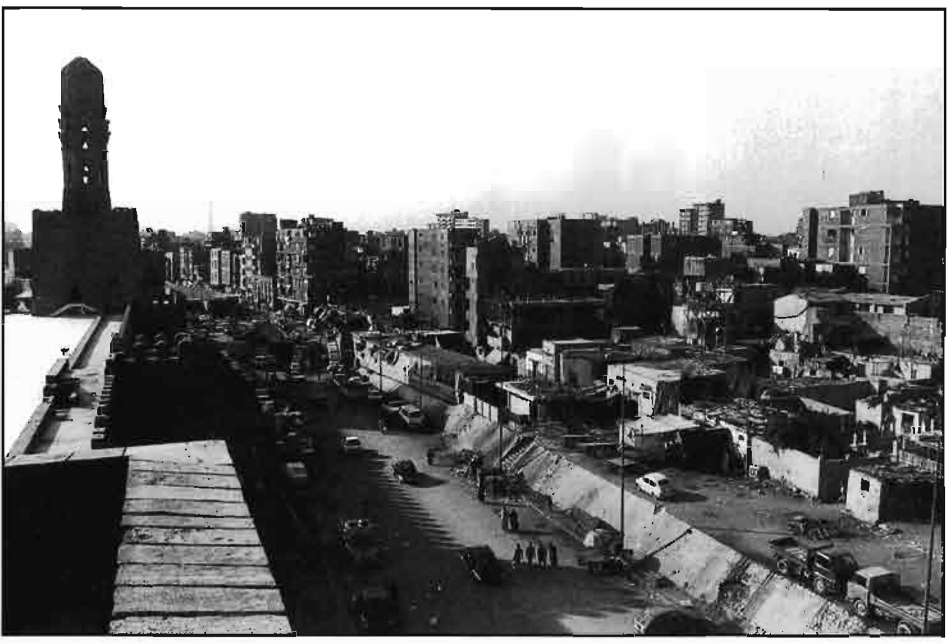
[63] Jomard 1822, 346.
[64] Amin 1980; Gad 1984.
[65] Muhammad 'Ali was buried in his mosque in the Citadel. This mausoleum is also the final resting place of his son Ibrahim (2/9/1848–10/11/1848), his son Tusun and grandsons 'Abbas (1848–54) and Isma'il (1863–79) and their wives and children, and then, later, King Farouk (1936–52).
[66] Wiet 1950, 262.
[67] Maher 1971, vol. 1, 122–23.
[68] Maher 1971, vol. 1, 122–23.
[69] These are the tombs of the 'Abbasid caliphs who moved to Egypt after the Tartar invaders brought down the caliphate in Baghdad in 1258. In welcoming them to the country, the Mamluks were seeking to legitimate their power, which hinged on the use of force. Although the 'Abbasid caliphs were living in Cairo, real power remained in the hands of the Mamluks (al-Ansari 1994, 93–94).
[70] Raghib 1981, 2–3.
[71] The vizir Ma'mun al-Bata'ihi instructed owners to rebuild their houses or to rent or sell them—without removing the materials—to individuals ordered to rehabilitate them. Any failure to comply would result in their property being seized by the state (Raghib 1981, 3).
[72] Raghib 1981, 3.
[73] Raghib 1981, 3.
[74] Darb al-Wada' appears on the map drawn up by Massignon, based on the Survey of Egypt, as a dotted line cutting across al-Qarafa al-Kubra. Its northern section, starting at the mausoleum of Sayyida Nafisa on al-Khalifa Street, dates back to the eleventh century (Massignon 1958, plate 57). According to another historical source: "From earliest days, a road ran south to the cemeteries past the *mashhad* of Sayyida Nafisa to the southern cemetery. This is the famous Shari' el Safa [which] continued north from Ibn Toulun to the Fatimid Bab Zewela" (Russell 1962).
[75] Massignon 1958, 44.
[76] Creswell 1959–60, vol. 1, 257.
[77] Raghib 1981, 24
[78] A *tikiya* is square or rectangular building with an inner courtyard providing free food and shelter for travelers and the poor. This particular *tikiya*, which belonged to the dervishes of the Qadiriya Sufi order, appeared in the Fatimid enclosure in the late nineteenth century, during the reign of Sayid Pasha (Raghib 1981, 28–29).
[79] 'Atika has been proved never to have set foot in Egypt. She died around 632, and nobody can say with certainty where she was buried. Nothing is known about the life and identity of al-Ga'fari (Raghib 1981, 15).
[80] Hautecoeur and Wiet 1938, vol. 1, 225.
[81] Massignon 1958, 57.
[82] She was first reputed to be the daughter of 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin, then of al-Husayn (Raghib 1981, 8).
[83] "Foreign pilgrims tend to be satisfied with the apocryphal locations given by popular tradition, which are based on arbitrary collective vaults that, in Jerusalem, have changed place three times; the tombs move, and the cenotaphs are basically as effective for the *ourant* as genuine tombs" (Massignon 1958, 53).
[84] There is no certainty as to the exact location of the tomb of 'Amr ibn al-'As. According to Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, the founder of Fustat was buried at the foot of Muqattam not far from the road to Mecca, which is also the burial place of five *sahaba* (Kubiak 1987, 163).
[85] Fakhr al-Farsi was a Persian ascetic who played a key role in making the "seven sleepers" route official in the thirteenth century. The *turba*, built in 1222, consists of a domed chamber surrounded on three sides by barrel-vaulted bays. The original order, however, has been changed completely by endless alterations and centuries of neglect (Raghib 1977, 56).
[86] Al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 1, 246–47.
[87] Massignon 1958, 59; Maher 1971, vol. 1, 84.
[88] Massignon 1958, 59; Maher 1971, vol. 1, 84.
[89] Massignon 1958, 59; Maher 1971, vol. 1, 84.
[90] This toponym, which first appeared in a passage from the writings of al-Quda'i (1062), also covers the Maragha district (Raghib 1977, 47).
[91] Sitti Kulthum was the daughter of al-Qasim al-Shabih. This mausoleum originally featured a domed hall surrounded on three sides by barrel-vaulted arcades. Like the tomb of Fakhr al-Farsi, it has been significantly altered over time. Popular tradition identifies Yahya al-Shabih as the brother of Nafisa (Raghib 1977, 62).
[92] Creswell 1959–60; Maher 1971.
[93] Creswell 1959–60, 78–79; Hautecoeur and Wiet 1938, vol. 1, 253–68.
[94] It is an arcaded pavilion open on three sides (Creswell 1959–60, 259).
[95] Ibn Jubayr 1954, 59.
[96] Berens-Abouseif 1989, 111–12.
[97] Massignon 1958, 62.
[98] Creswell 1959–60, 11–13.
[99] Chabrol (1822) contains a number of plates showing examples of such architecture.
[100] Massignon 1958, 62.
[101] Massignon 1958, 62.
[102] Creswell 1959–60, 11–13.
[103] Raghib 1972, 189.
[104] Raghib 1972, 191.
[105] "If you wish to see Karbala, look at the Muqattam plain / You will see men of al-Maghrabi: a group whose belts and breasts are covered with blood. / Against my will, I left noble men, dear to my heart, though they dwell in the Muqattam's flank. / They spilled their blood unjustly, knowing that they killed only noble and generous creatures. / How many *mihrab*s did they abandon, neglected, and how many Qur'anic recitations did they leave incomplete?" (Raghib 1972, 191–92).
[106] Raghib 1974, 72–75
[107] This mosque was renovated and enlarged in 717, when Sulayman ibn Malik added a cupola. It was then renovated in the Tulunid period and rebuilt by Taghrid, the wife of al-Mu'izz, under the Fatimids in 960 (Hamza 1986, 37).
[108] Raghib 1974, 72–75.
[109] Herz Bey 1920, 89.
[110] The imam Ibn Firrah al-Shatbi was a renowned *qari'* or Qur'an reciter. The Sadat al-Wafa'iya were followers of Muhammad Wafa and his son 'Ali, leaders of the Shadhiliya order (Massignon 1958, 68, 64).
[111] Massignon 1958, 65.
[112] Al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, 456.
[113] Massignon 1958, 66.
[114] Massignon 1958, 65.
[115] Massignon 1958, 107.
[116] Massignon 1958, 107.

3 Bab al-Nasr: The Wood Necropolis



Bab al-Nasr, access map (drawing by G. Amer, base map SFS/IGN, France, 1978, updated by the authors).

Views of the cemetery.



Despite its grandiose name—which it takes from the nearby Bab al-Nasr, or Gate of Victory—this is a quite modest necropolis.

Its history is synchronous with that of the neighboring Husayniya district to the north and west. In Fatimid times, Husayniya was divided into two distinct areas: the first extended from Bab al-Futuh (Gate of the Conqueror) to al-Khandaq (now Dimirdash Hospital) and was subdivided into eight *harat* (administrative districts) inhabited by some seven thousand people, mainly Persians and Armenians;[1] and the other was a vast, far more sparsely populated stretch of land from Bab al-Nasr to Raydaniya (now 'Abbasiya), where a forest of plum trees offered shade and shelter to pilgrims on the road to Mecca.[2] One well-known landmark beyond the city walls was a small mosque known as the Musalla al-'Id because it attracted its largest crowds at 'Id al-Fitr, the festival of Lesser Bairam, when the caliph, leading a procession from the city, would come to pray with the congregation.[3] It was here, in the area surrounding Musalla al-'Id, that the first tombs of Bab al-Nasr were built. When Badr al-Gamali—the general of Armenian descent responsible for the construction of the monumental Bab al-Futuh and Bab al-Nasr gates[4]—died in AH 478 (1088), he was buried north of the mosque in a magnificent tomb that he had had built there in AH 466 (1077). This is said to have marked the start of the area's use as a cemetery.[5]

Neither al-Maqrizi nor, to our knowledge, any other historian has specified its exact boundaries. But it is fairly safe to say that it did not cover the entire area between Bab al-Nasr and 'Abbasiya because we are told that it became inhabited after 1301 (AH 700)

Above left, Bab al-Nasr, 1798, base map from Description de l'Égypte, *plotted by M. Simonet Jomard; above right, Bab al-Nasr, 1874, "Plan général de la ville du Caire" by Pierre Grand Bey; below left, Bab al-Nasr, 1945, cadastral map; below right, Bab al-Nasr, 1990, base map by SFS.*

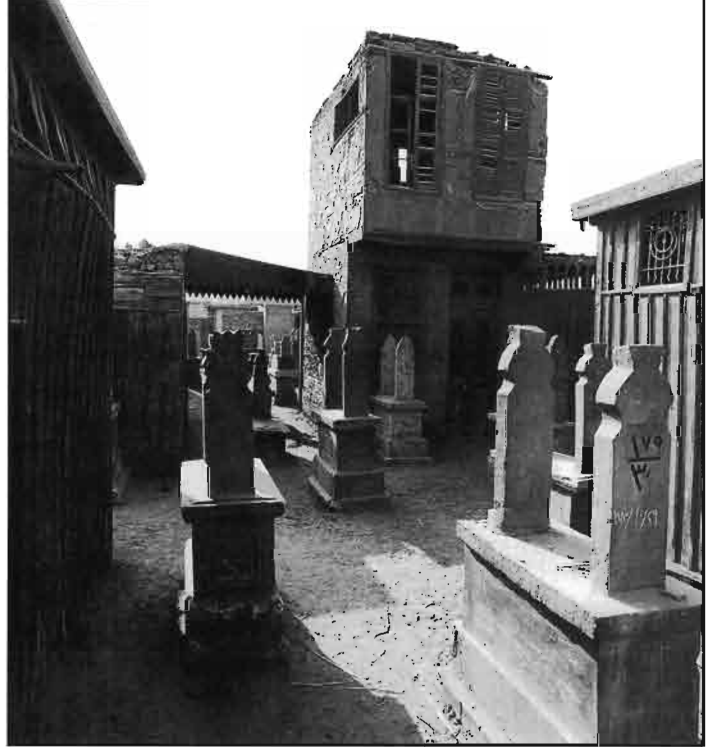
and that the Mamluk worthies had their palaces, summer houses, and second homes built there.[6] It is hard to tell whether those dwellings replaced any tombs or not, as residential districts and burial grounds have always encroached upon each other in these parts.

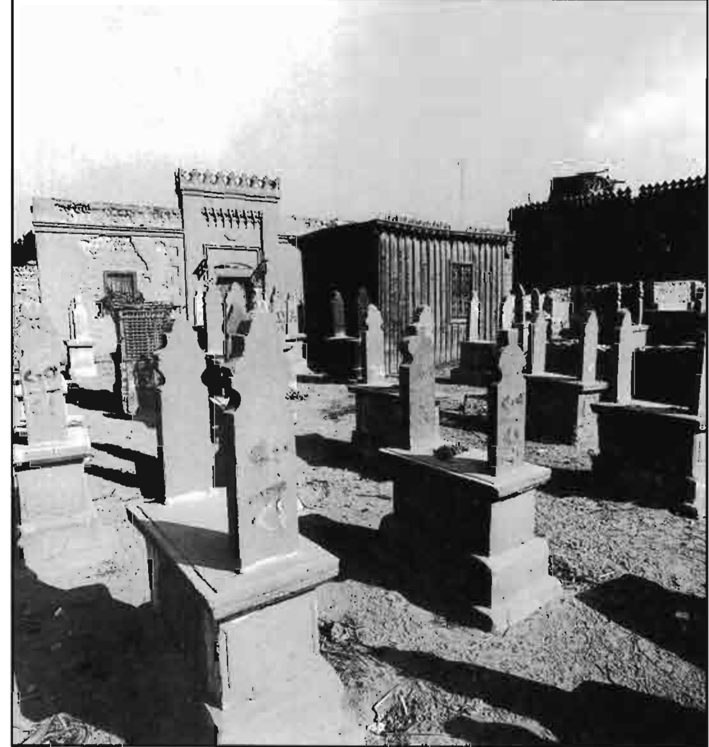
The Husayniya district, and Bab al-Nasr in its wake, have experienced periods of growth and decline over the course of their history: in 1302 an earthquake caused enormous damage,[7] then in 1403, in the early days of the Bahri Mamluk dynasty, a plague of termites ate into the wooden rooftops of the houses. Al-Maqrizi, who witnessed the disaster, reports that it reduced Husayniya to a narrow strip of buildings set against the walls of Cairo.[8] It suffered the same misfortunes as befell the rest of city after the Ottoman conquest of 1517. Then, in 1790, the houses and tombs alike were ravaged by floods. By the arrival of Napoleon Bonaparte, Husayniya consisted of a triangular area with a straight road—now called al-Husayniya—cutting across it and ending at the gate of the same name. The cemetery occupied the base of the triangle, with tombs densely grouped together in the south and more scattered in the north, and featuring large walled tombs known as *madfans* (vaults) and *hawshes* (tombs with an inner courtyard).

Its development since the French Expedition is relatively easy to trace thanks to the handful of maps that have been produced. In spite of the various changes it has undergone over time, it has remained confined to a triangle formed by the walls of old Cairo to the south, the Husayniya suburb on the west side, and great mounds of debris known as the Tilul al-Gabal al-Ahmar on the east side. It has thus not really grown a great deal in spatial terms, even though the western boundary with Husayniya, with no dividing line between houses and tombs, has shifted as the population has waxed and waned. The *tilul* on the east side have been whittled down to a noticeable yet still relatively minor degree. Terraces should have been developed down their slopes to make them useable, but that is not the Cairene way of doing things. Even now there are still tombs partially buried beneath the masses of fallen rocks from the *tilul*. The southeastern *tilul* were leveled in the early twentieth century to pave the way for the construction of roads and factories.

A single road, barely suitable for traffic, cuts through the center of the necropolis from Bab al-Nasr to al-Gaysh Square.[9] Another, Galal Road, runs parallel to the northern wall and provides access to the necropolis. Through successive widening efforts, it has carved into the necropolis—to the detriment of the tombs. In the 1940s, these spread as far as the foot of the wall between Bab al-Nasr and Bab al-Futuh.[10] The last remaining strip between the wall and Galal Road was cleared in 1989.[11] Apart from these two perpendicular roads, the only way to visit the rest of the necropolis is by foot. Because it was never able to expand in terms of surface area, it grew into an ever denser, utterly chaotic labyrinth that is hard to negotiate by any other means of transport, but this contributes to the charm of the place.

Views of the cemetery.





This necropolis is modest not only, as mentioned above, in size—thirty-two hectares—but also in its lack of either prestigious funerary foundations or lavish, palatial, or mosque-like tombs. Even so, there are some great historical figures buried here: Badr al-Gamali, the vizir who ruled Egypt under the Fatimid caliph al-Mustansir Billah; Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, the Swiss Egyptologist who converted to Islam and changed his name to Shaykh Ibrahim; the celebrated historian and pioneer of sociology, Ibn Khaldun; and, in all likelihood, the chronicler al-Maqrizi. There is no way to tell, however, where any of their tombs are located, apart from that of Burckhardt and, possibly, Badr al-Gamali—a small mausoleum that had fallen into near total ruin before being restored in 1989,[12] and said also to house the remains of Shaykh Yunis.

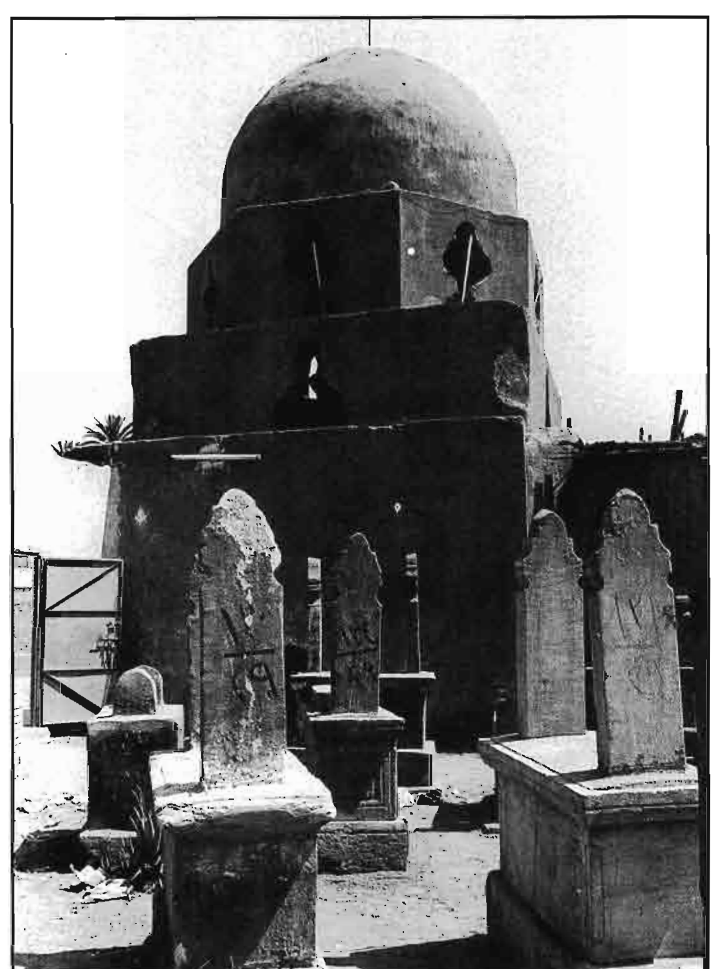
A wood necropolis

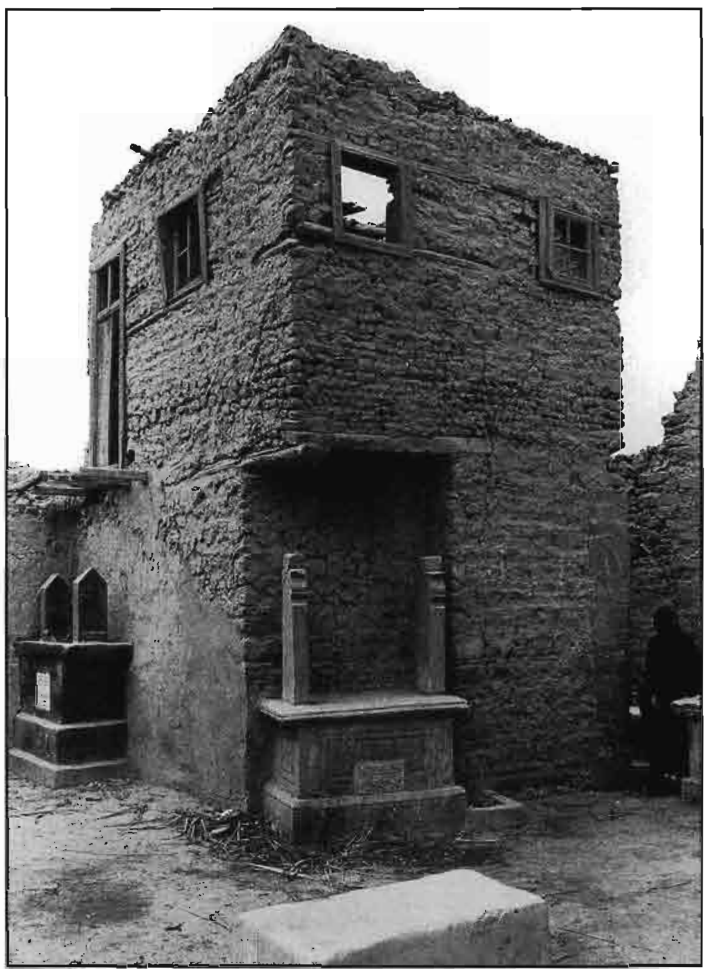
The tombs here are extremely simple: each is a parallelepiped made of rough and unpolished blocks of limestone and shaped like a rectangular column pedestal, with a a plinth-like base, occasionally adorned with a molding, and a more or less molded entablement formed by the protruding edges of the horizontal slab across the top. The whole structure is surmounted by two limestone stelae, their tips carved into a shape symbolizing the occupant's gender: a turban for the men and a braid for the women. Some are adorned with bas-relief crescent moons or palms. The more recent ones are made of molded concrete and covered in layer upon layer of paint or dust—it is hard to tell which. Hardly any of these tombs bear a name, just a number painted in black by the cemetery administration services. In accordance with the dictates of Islam, every tombstone points toward Mecca. They would take up hardly any space at all were it not for the fact that many stand in a walled enclosure. Some enclosures consist of four rubble-stone and loam-mortar walls covered, partially or wholly, by a roof made up of a lean loam and lime mortar slab reinforced with reeds or wooden laths. Covered enclosures provide shelter for visiting relatives. Most of these enclosures—and this is the distinctive feature of this necropolis—are made of wood. Although often smaller in size, they, like their stone counterparts, are cube-shaped structures with a flat or two-sided pitched roof, often fitted with an openwork wooden dome or the wind scoop of a *malqaf* cooling and ventilation device. Each wall consists of a light timber frame with a central crossbeam and a row of upright planks set side by side and nailed in place across the front. There is some use of wooden strip to cover the joints between planks, but little in the way of plinths, moldings, or cornices. Moving parts (windows and doors) are just as rudimentary, with few rabbeted jambs and assembled in a highly imprecise manner. Carpentry work tends, on the whole, to be minimal; most of the carpenter's creativity and know-how was put toward a frieze featuring a repetitive pattern of arabesque motifs, each finely carved with a jigsaw into the same sort of planks that are used to make the walls. The buildings in this necropolis may be remarkably uniform, but no two friezes are alike. Set at the inner angle between the walls and the ceiling, they are designed both to let in light and to discharge warm air, while shielding the inside of the building from the view of passersby. One occasionally comes across other openwork systems using lattices or balusters. Overhanging roof edges too are decorated with quite basic carved wooden friezes whose motif is almost always in the shape of a lovage leaf. These wooden tombs, known as *maqasir*, represent the main architectural feature of this necropolis.[13]

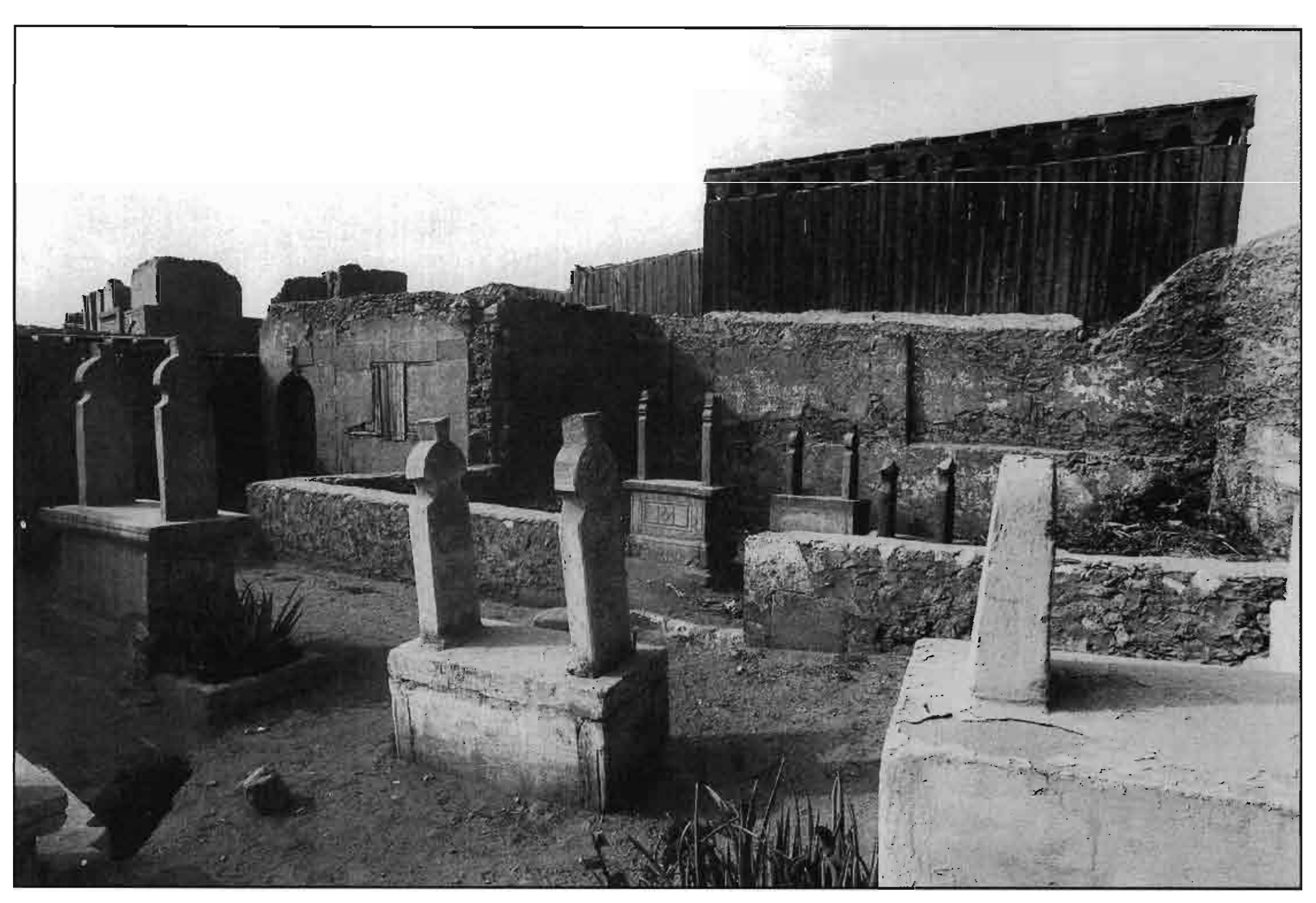
Maqsura (singular of *maqasir*) is a name that refers to an enclosed space reserved for a prince and placed close to the *minbar* (the imam's pulpit in a mosque). It usually consists of *mashrabiya*-type wooden partitions. There is nothing surprising about the use of *maqasir* in funerary architecture; borrowing from religious architecture is an abiding feature of all of these cemeteries. A good number of theories have been put forward as to why there are so many *maqasir* in Bab al-Nasr. Some say it is because space there is so limited or because wood is more affordable than stone to less well-off families. Others contend that the proximity of the necropolis to the Fatimid city wall—a listed monument—required the use of wood because of the decision to allow, in the protected areas around listed monuments, only lightweight structures that are easy to move.[14]

The future of this necropolis has remained shrouded in uncertainty since 1934, when a royal decree ordered that it be demolished and replaced by a public garden; those orders were never carried out. Since 1990, it has been the focus of a good many projects developed within the framework of a program to rehabilitate the northern district of the medieval city. None of these has been implemented either.

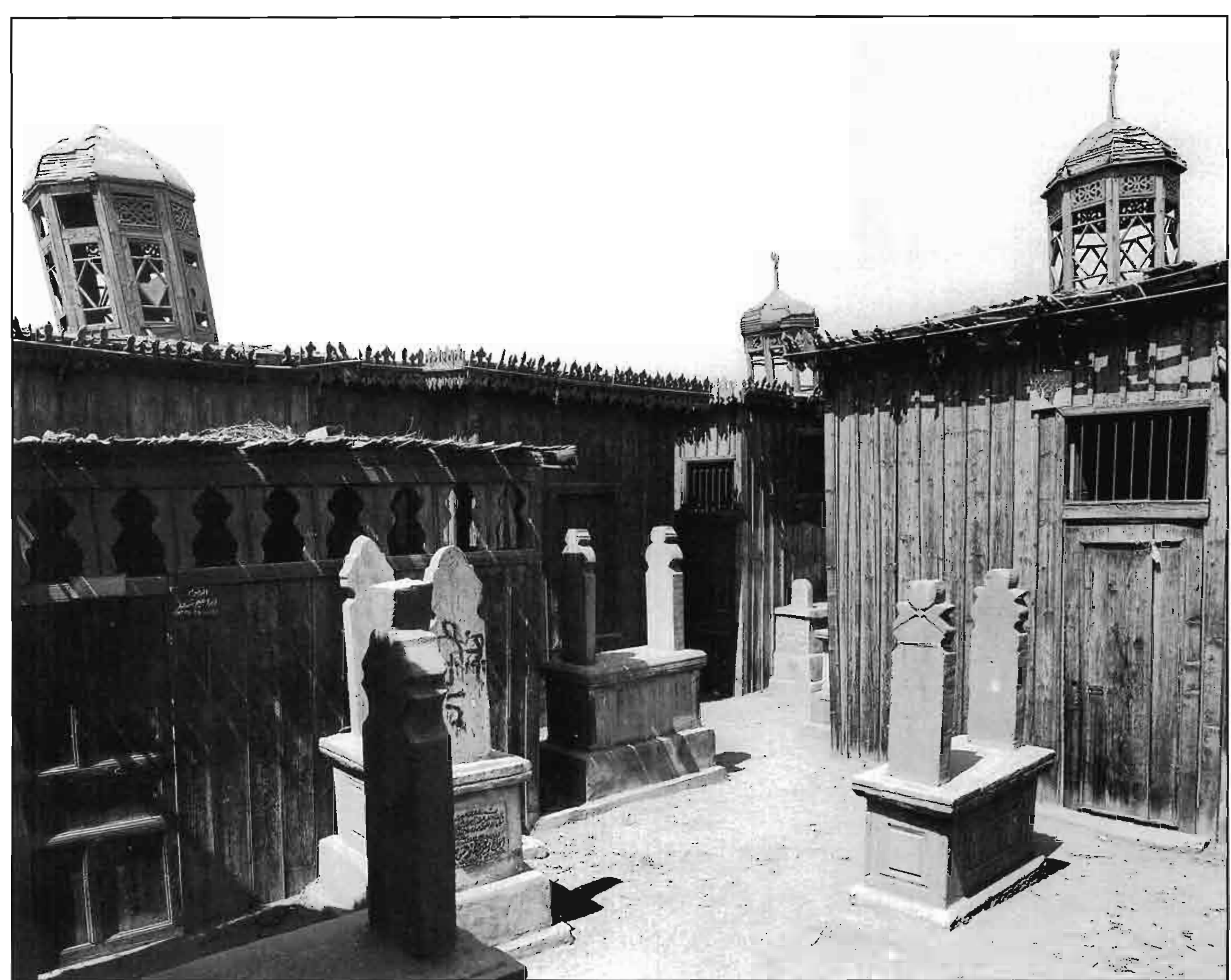
Left, 'Shaykh Yunis' mausoleum, said to be the final resting place of Badr al-Gamali; right, ruins of a two-story brick tomb.



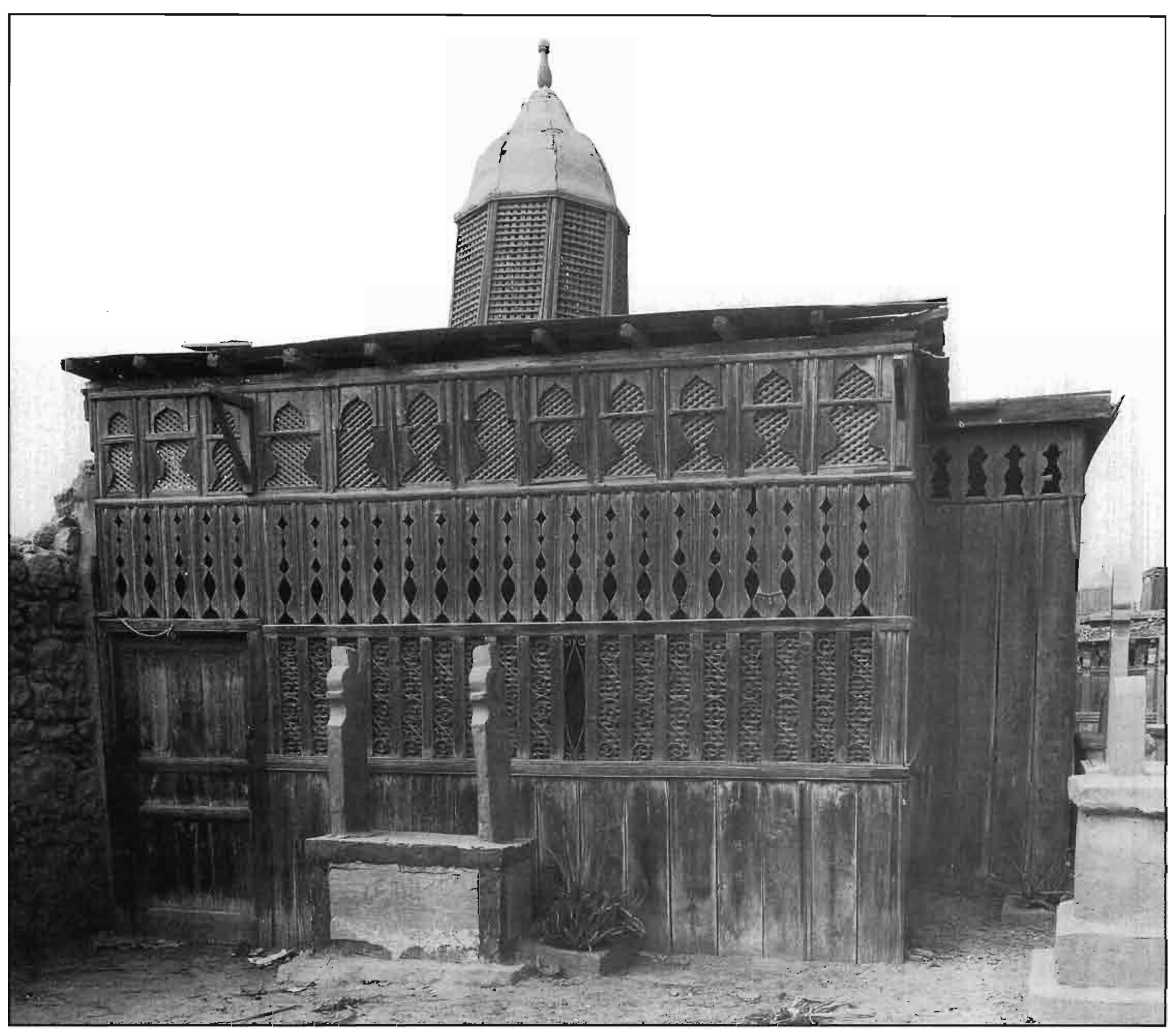


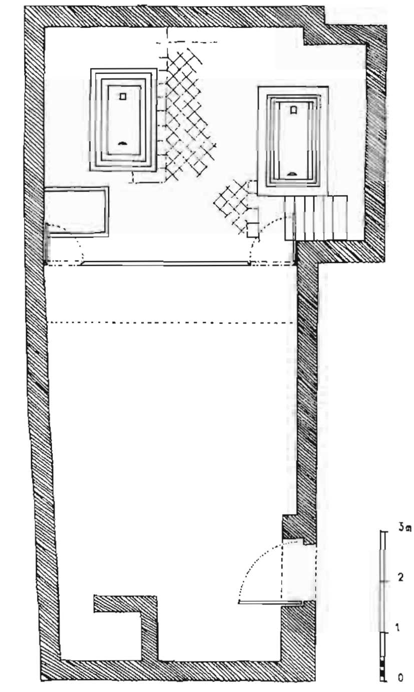


Wooden tombs topped with octagonal-drum cupolas covering the ventilation and lighting shafts in the ceilings.



Wooden tomb with a façade in four parts, or registers, which may be found individually in other façades.

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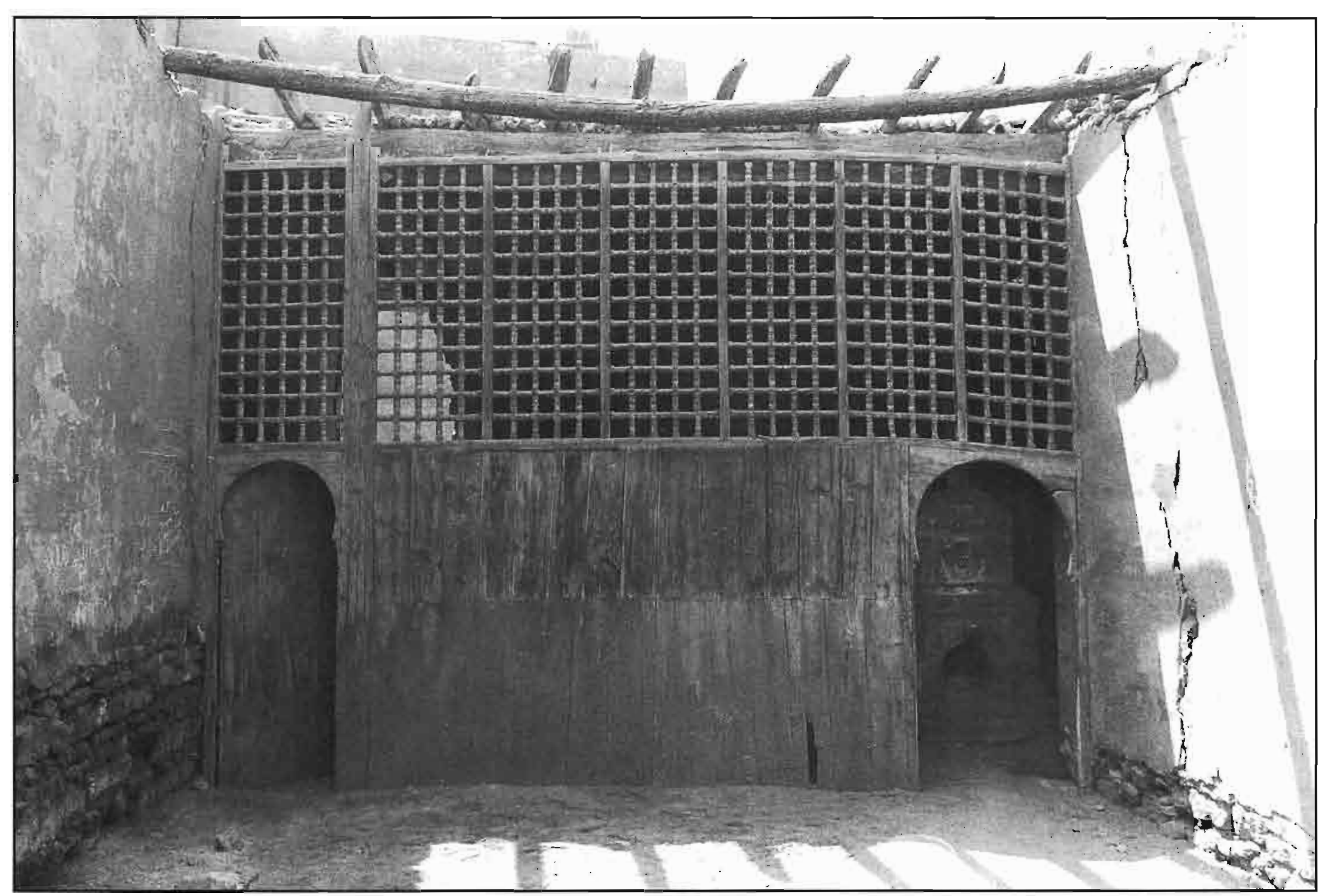
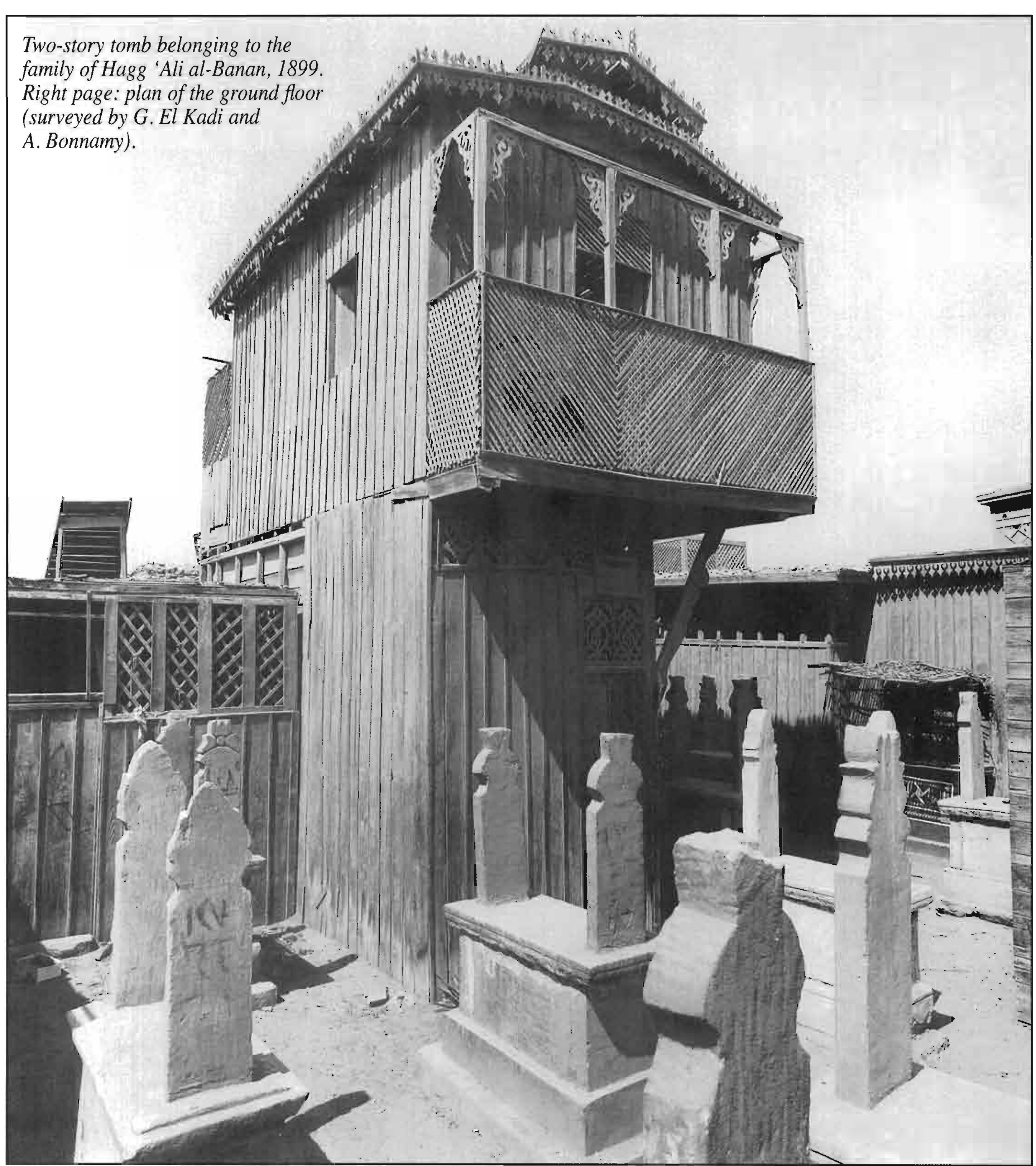
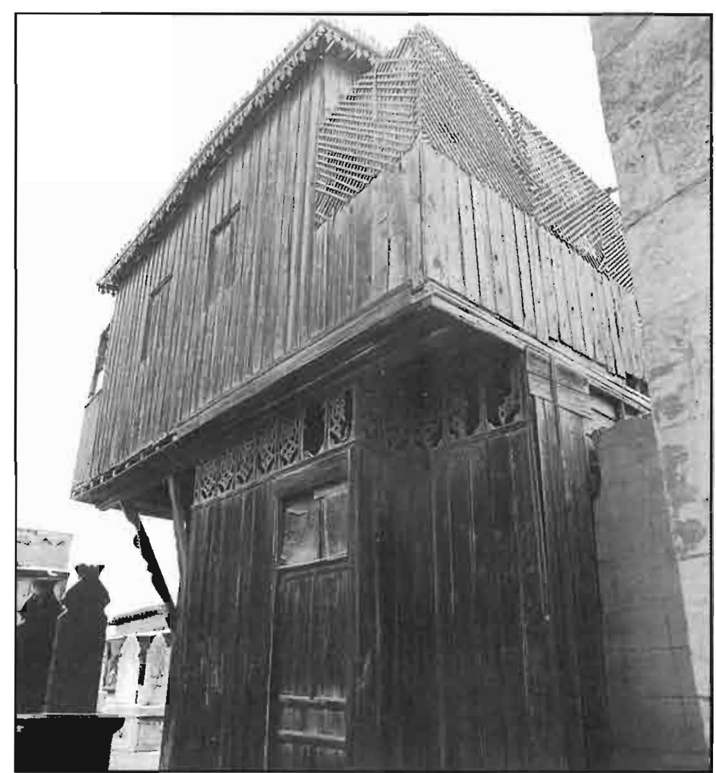
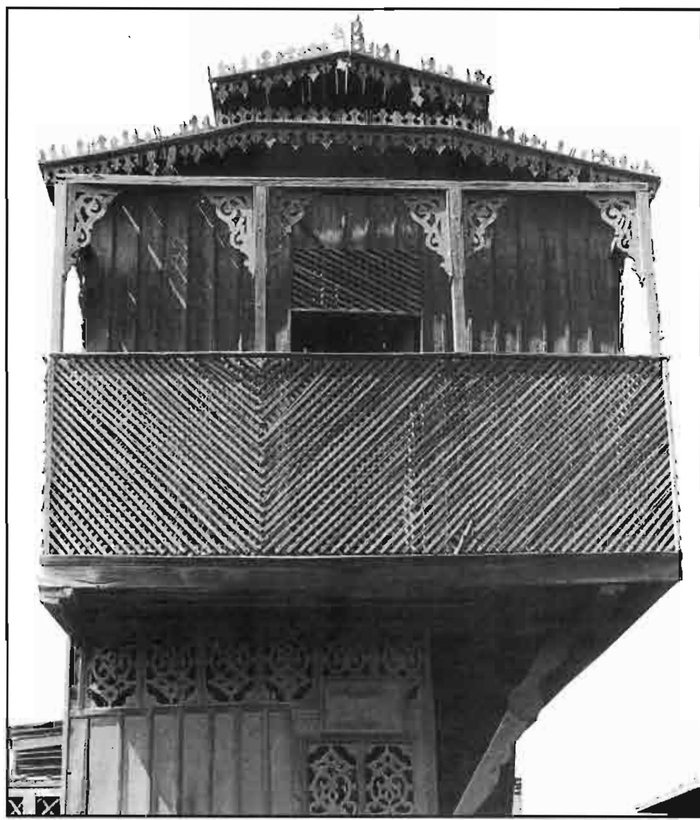
Left page: Above, interior of the oratory; below, plan (surveyed by G. El Kadi and A. Bonnamy). The tomb was demolished in 1990.
Below: Kharasawi family tomb, interior courtyard.

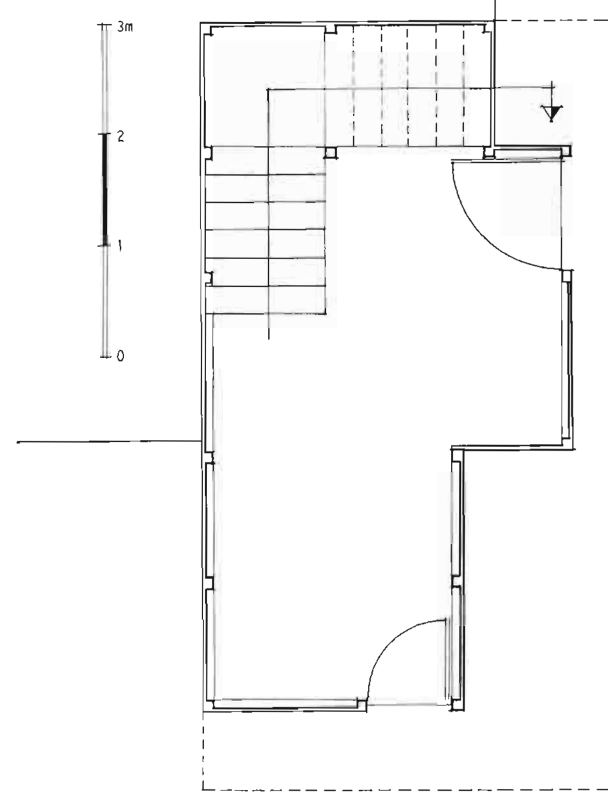




Two-story tomb belonging to the family of Hagg 'Ali al-Banan, 1899. Right page: plan of the ground floor (surveyed by G. El Kadi and A. Bonnamy).



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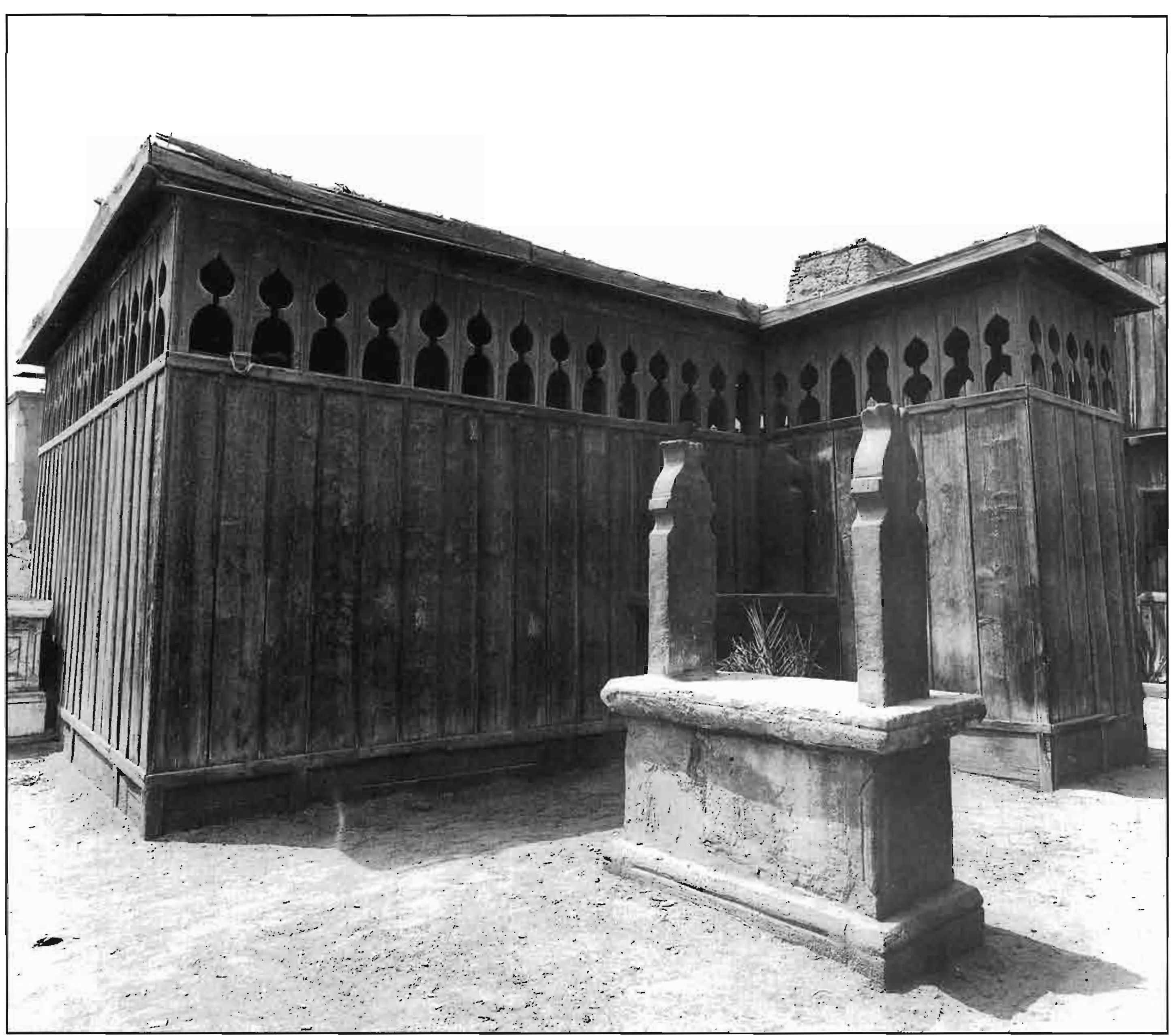
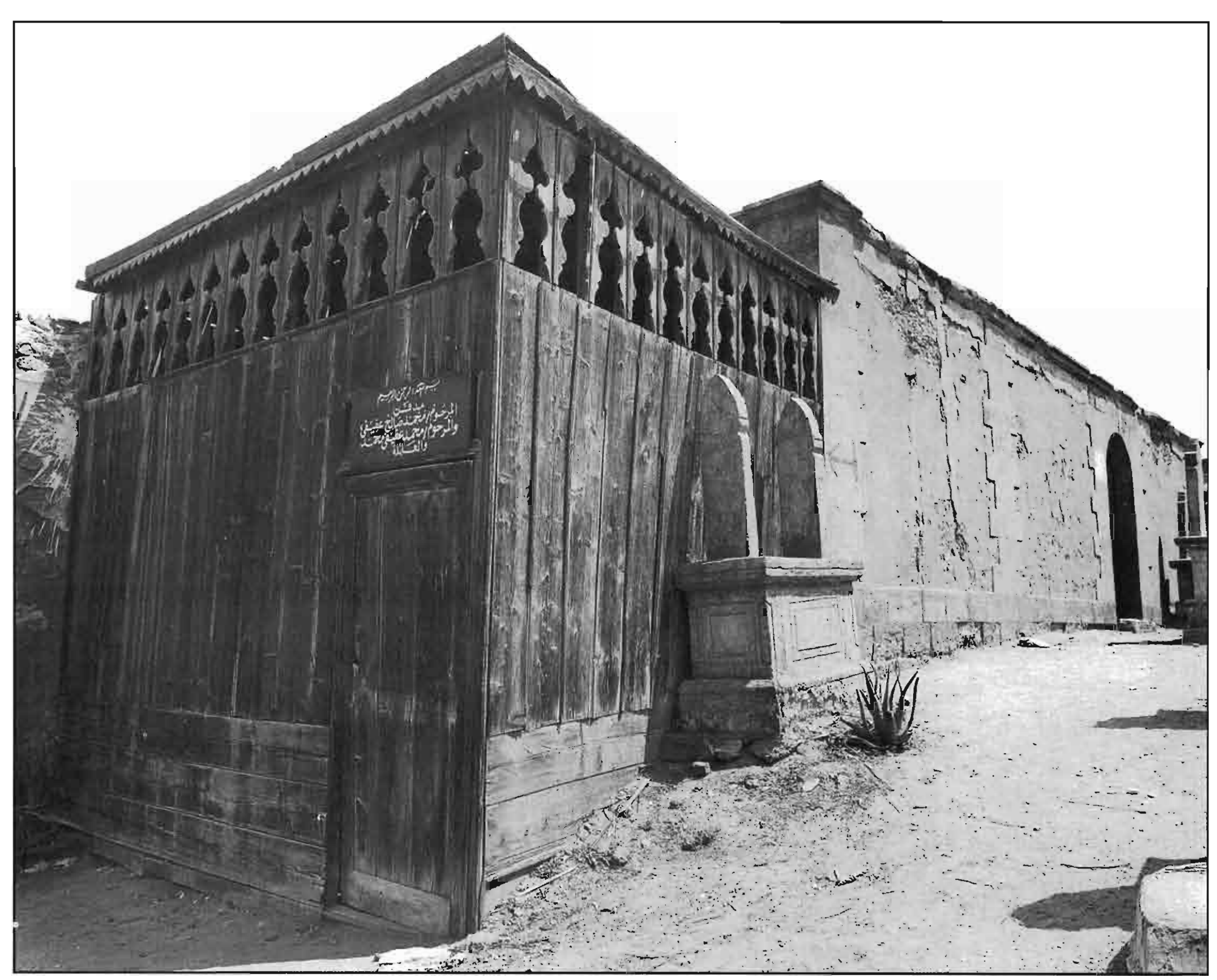
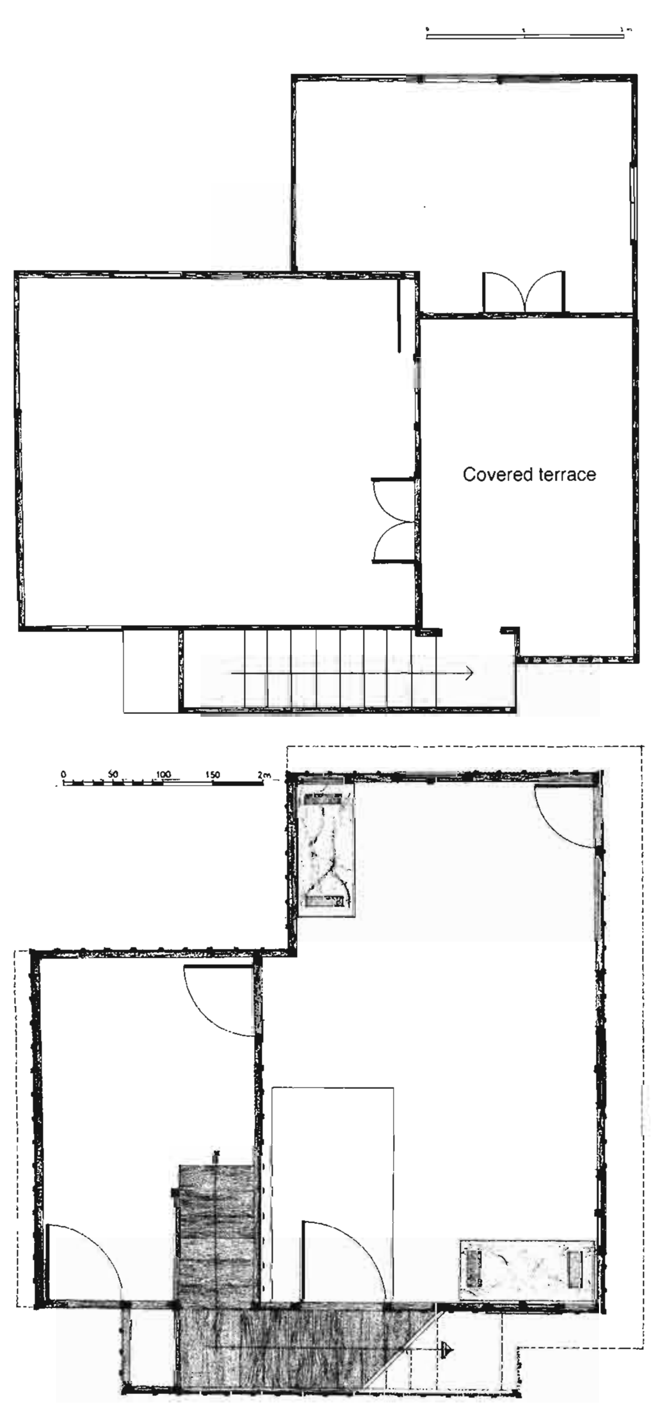
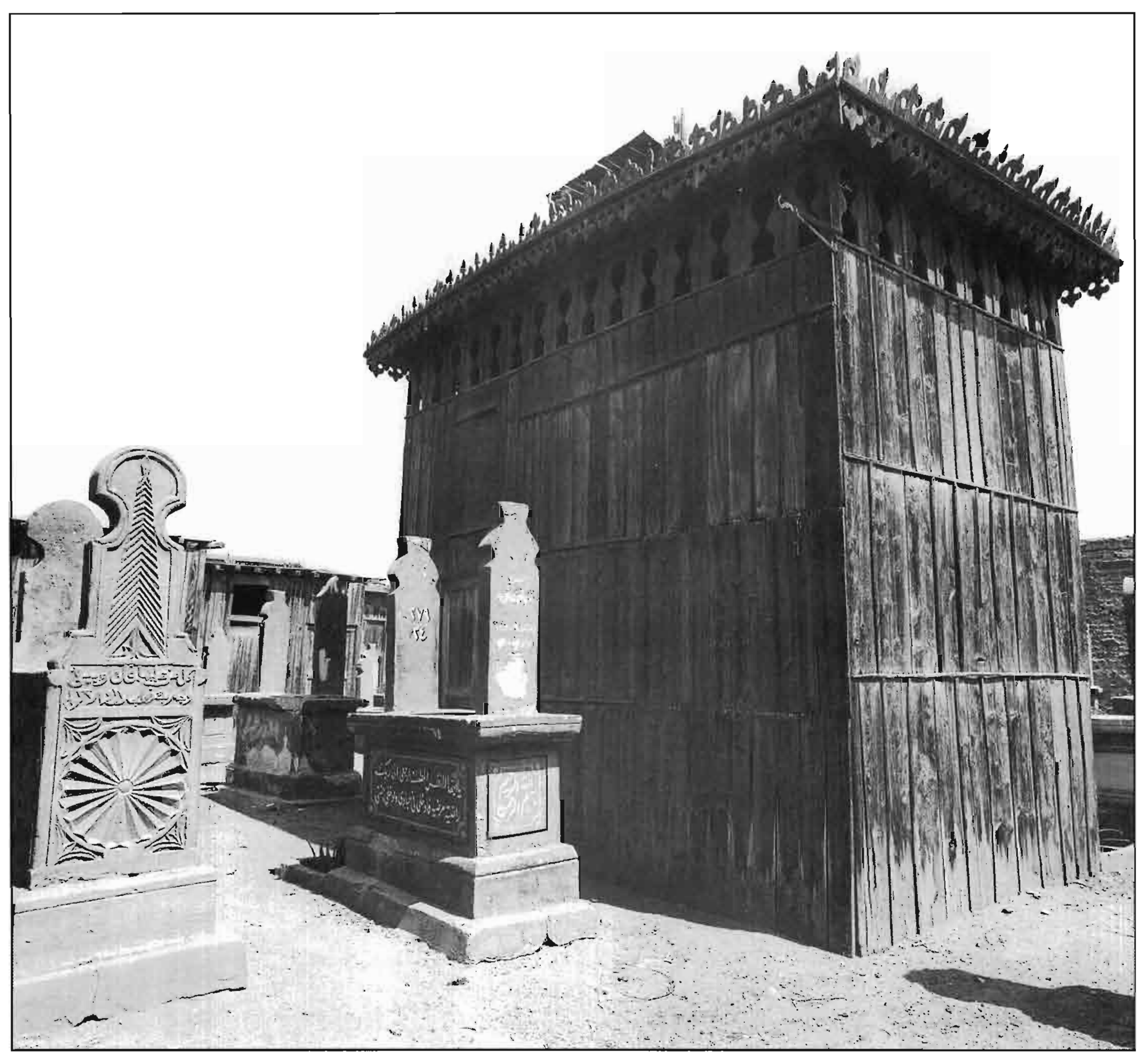
Pages 142, 143, 144, and 146: Wooden tombs.



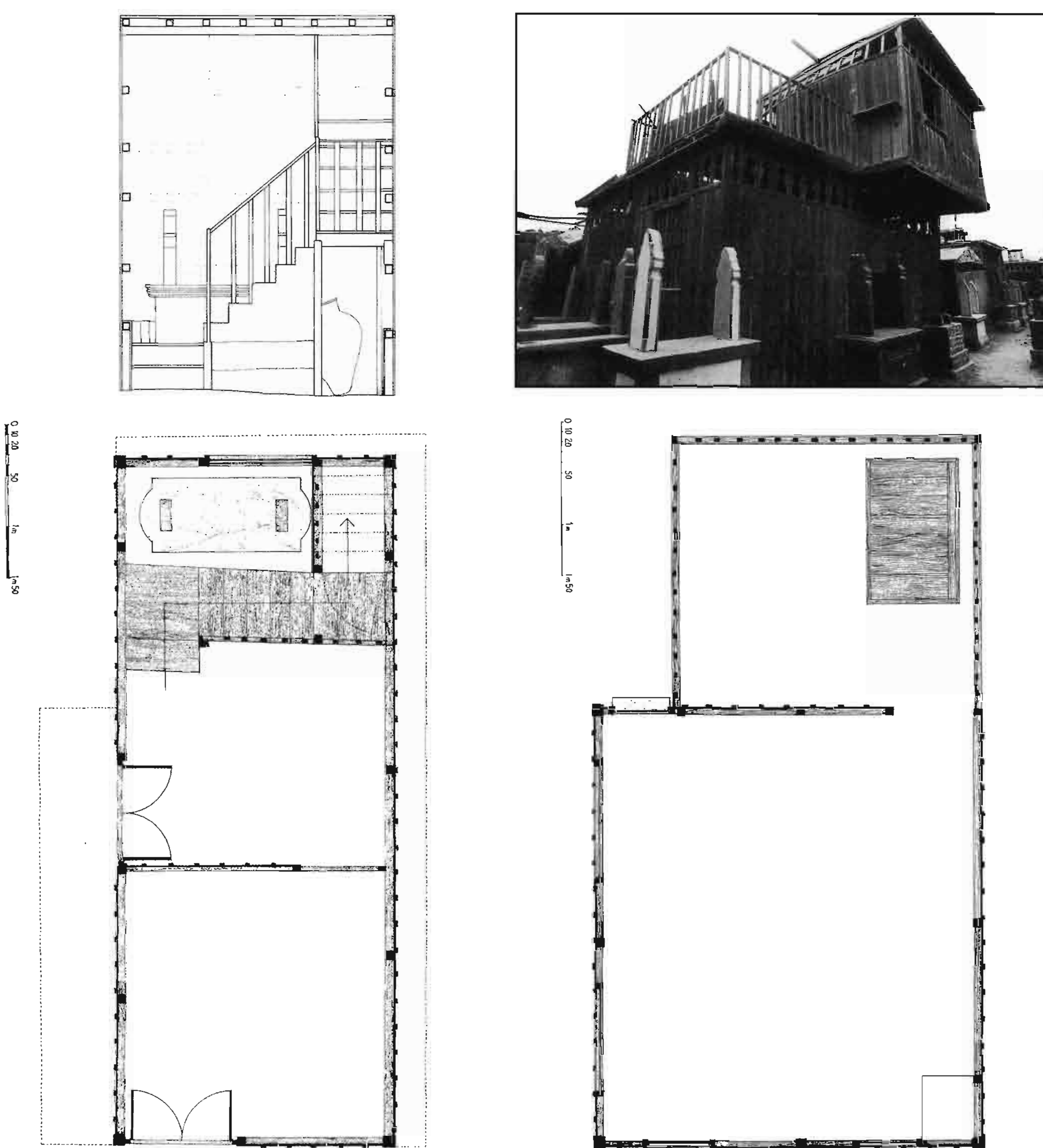

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Mazhar family tomb, 1930, and plans (surveyed by G. El Kadi and A. Bonnamy).

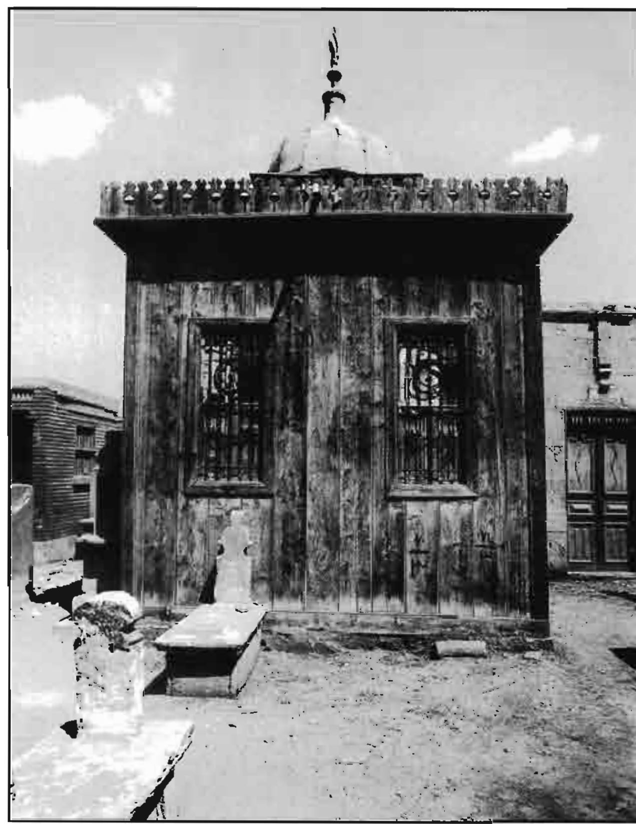


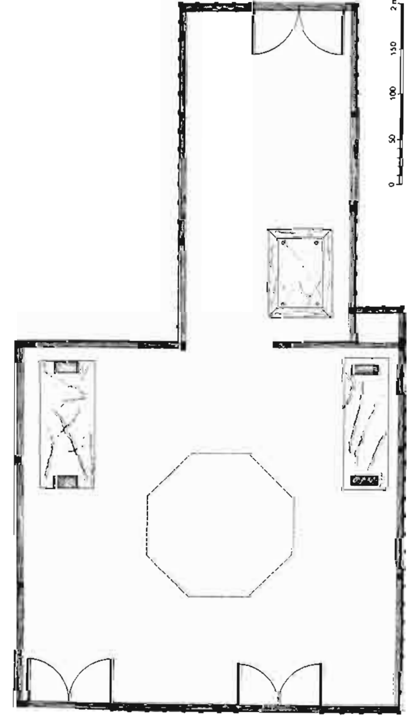


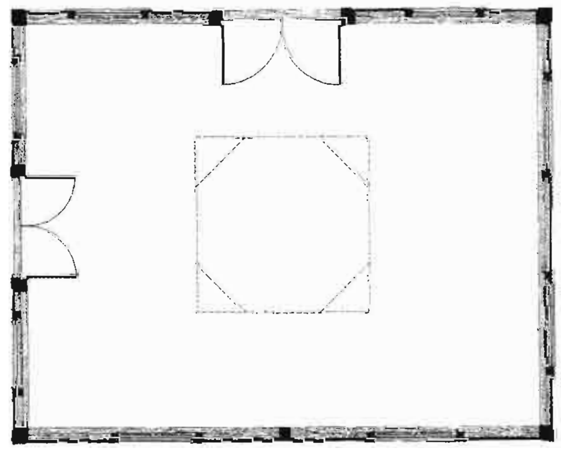
Family tomb and plans (surveyed by G. El Kadi and M. Volait):
Above left, cross-section; below left, plan of the ground floor; below right, plan of the first floor.



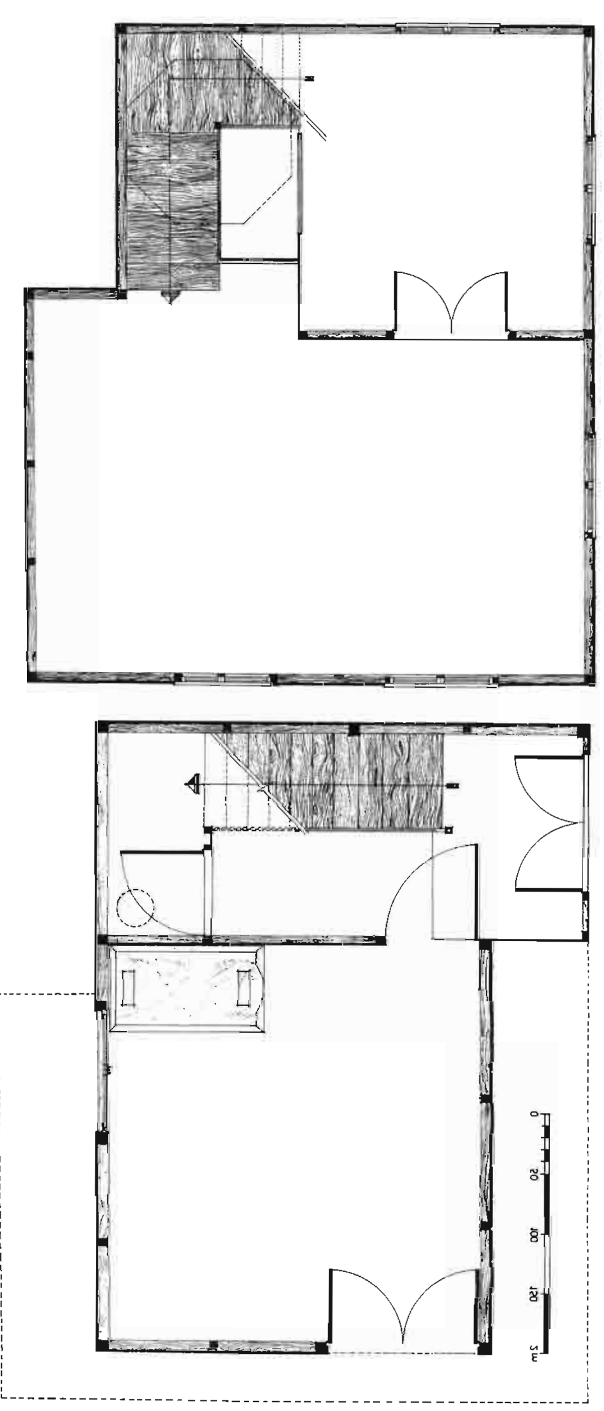
Above, two single-story tombs of modest dimensions; below, plans (surveyed by G. El Kadi).

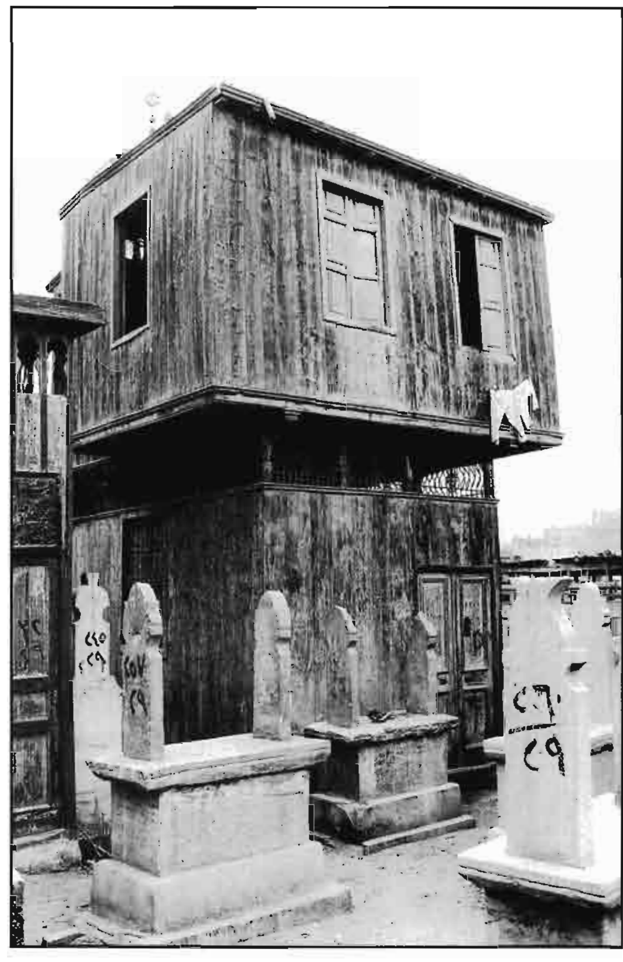




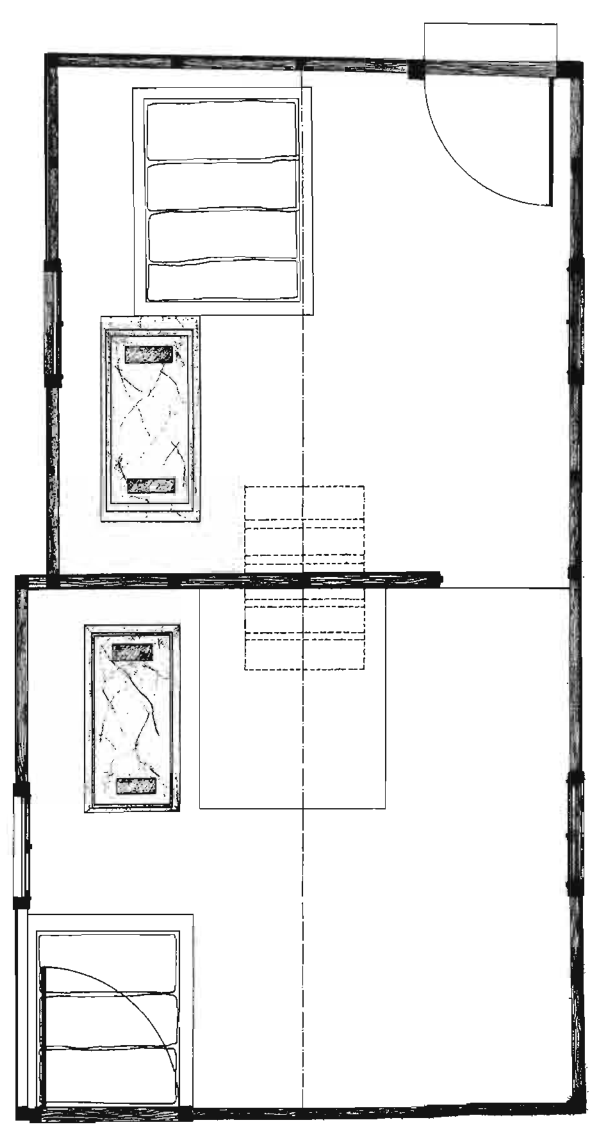


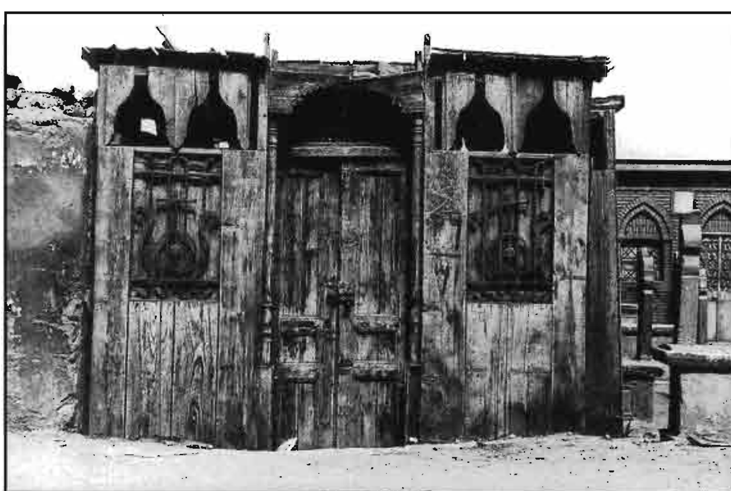
Two-story tomb belonging to the 'Abd al-Magid family, 1901:
Above left, plan of the ground floor; below left, plan of the first floor (plans surveyed by G. El Kadi).

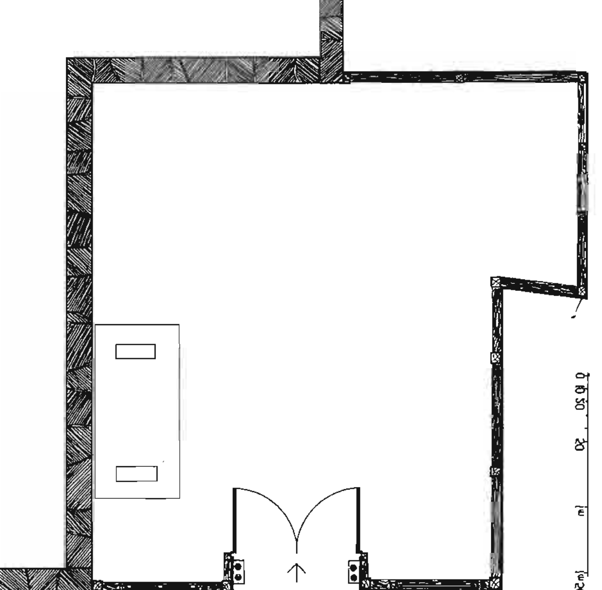


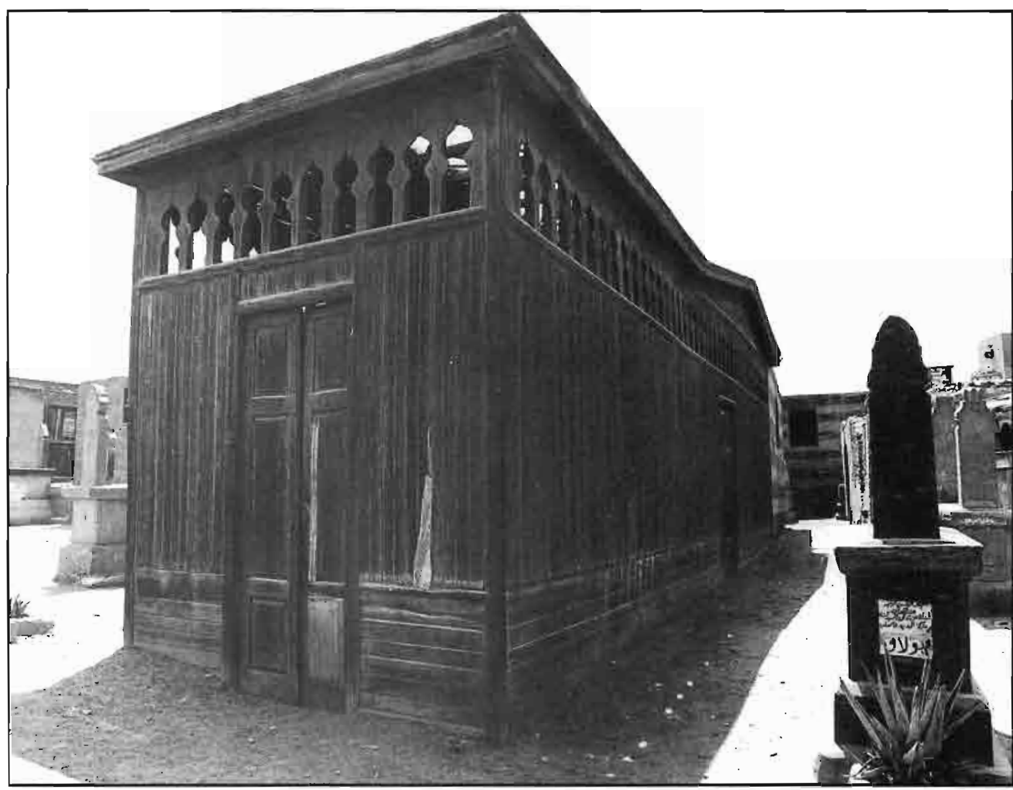


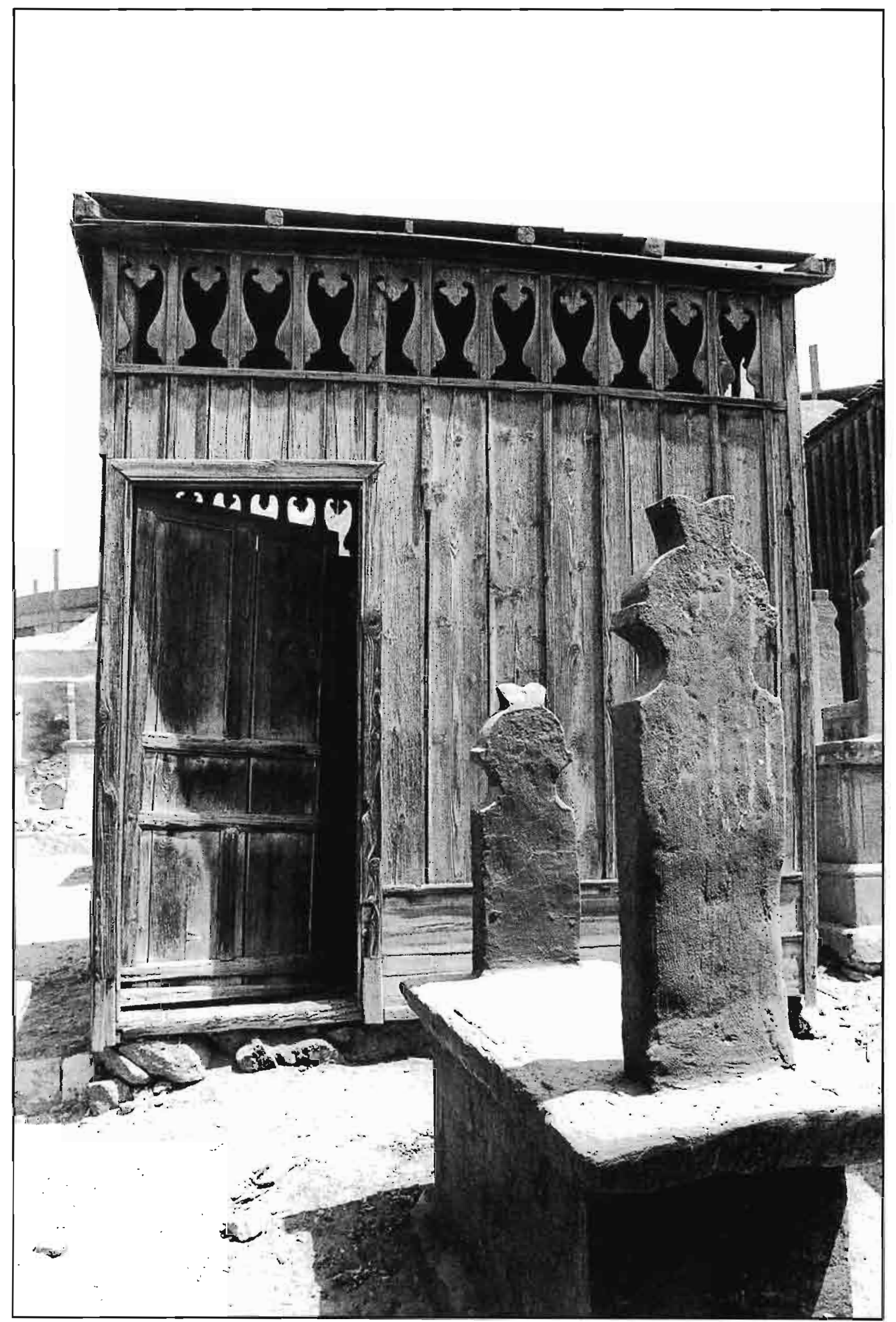
Wooden tombs in Bab al-Nasr (plans surveyed by G. El Kadi).

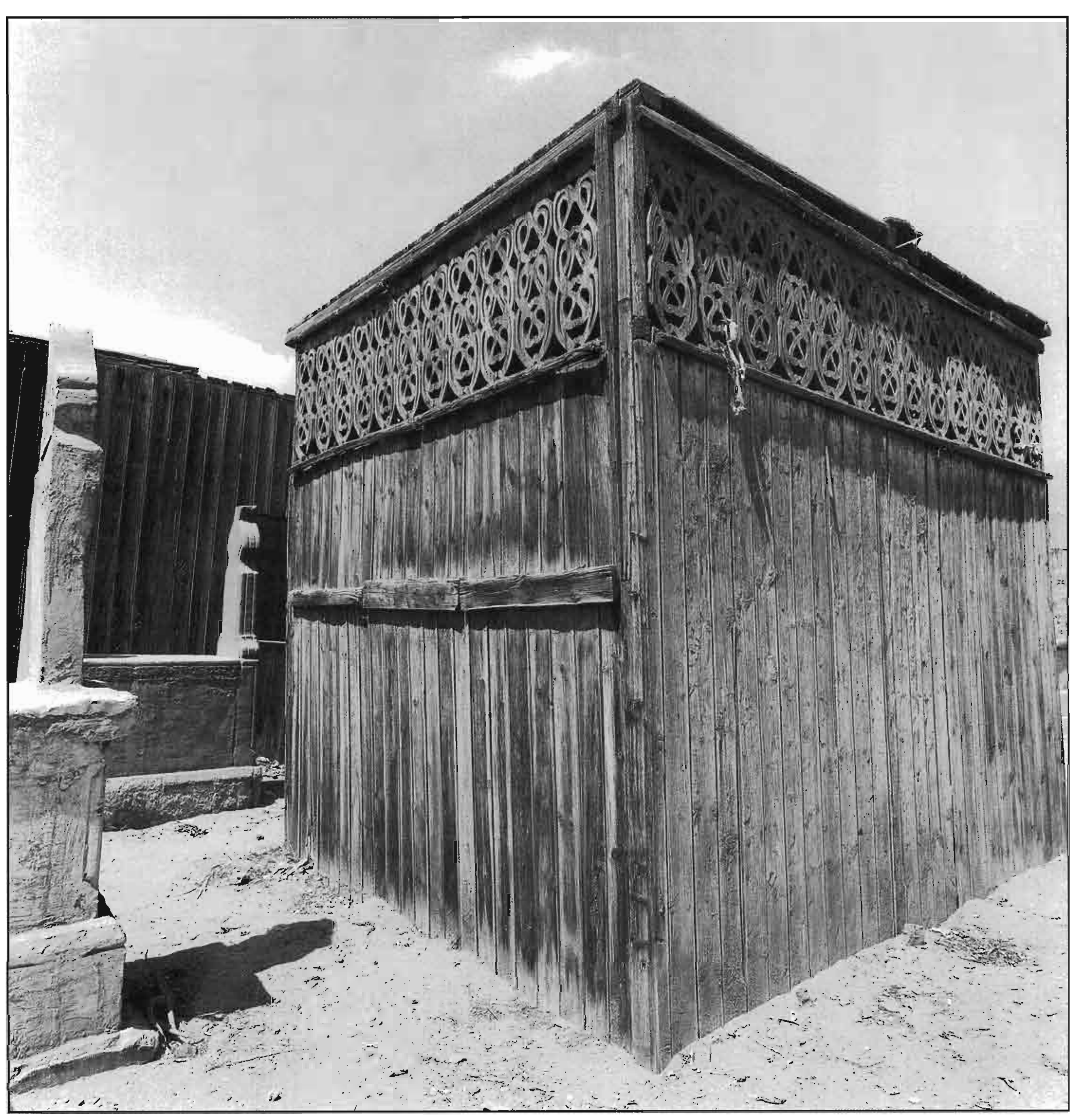


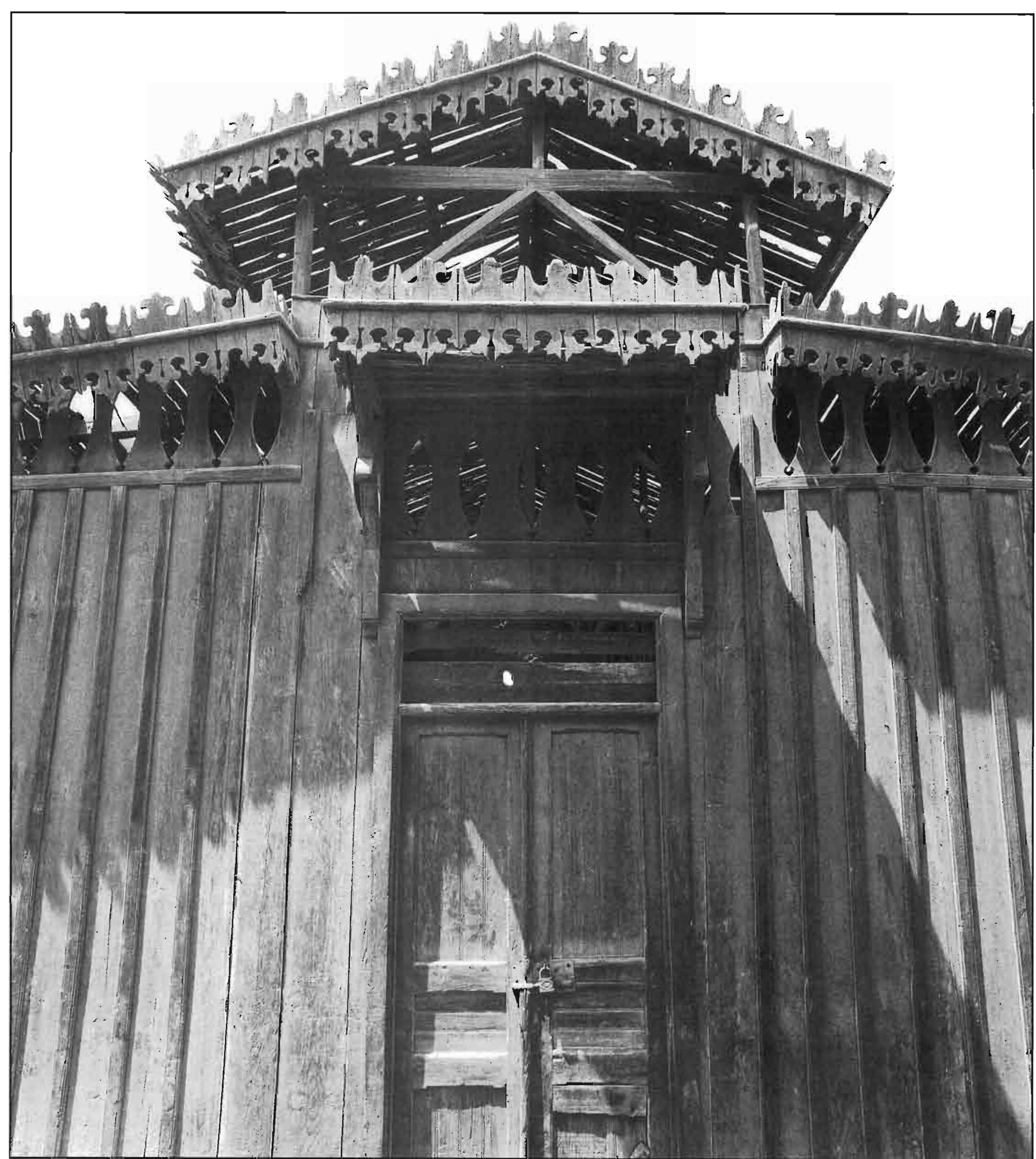




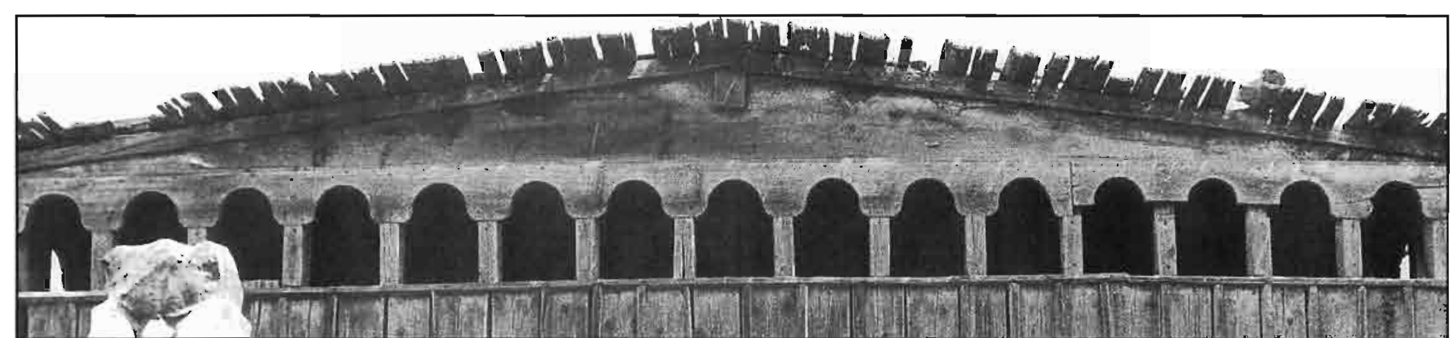


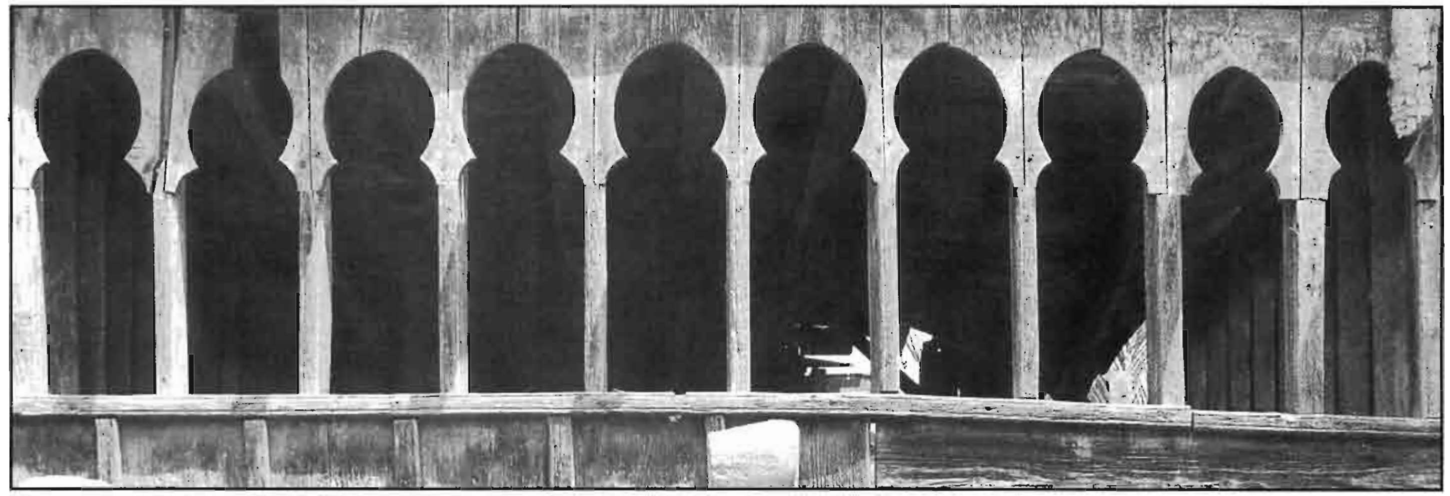


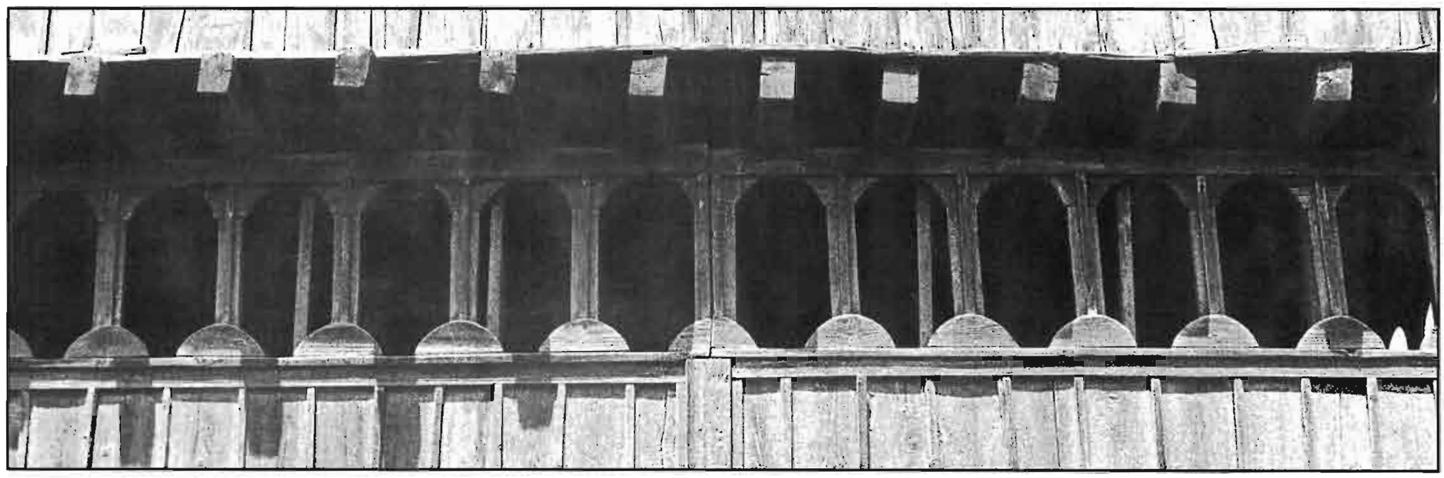


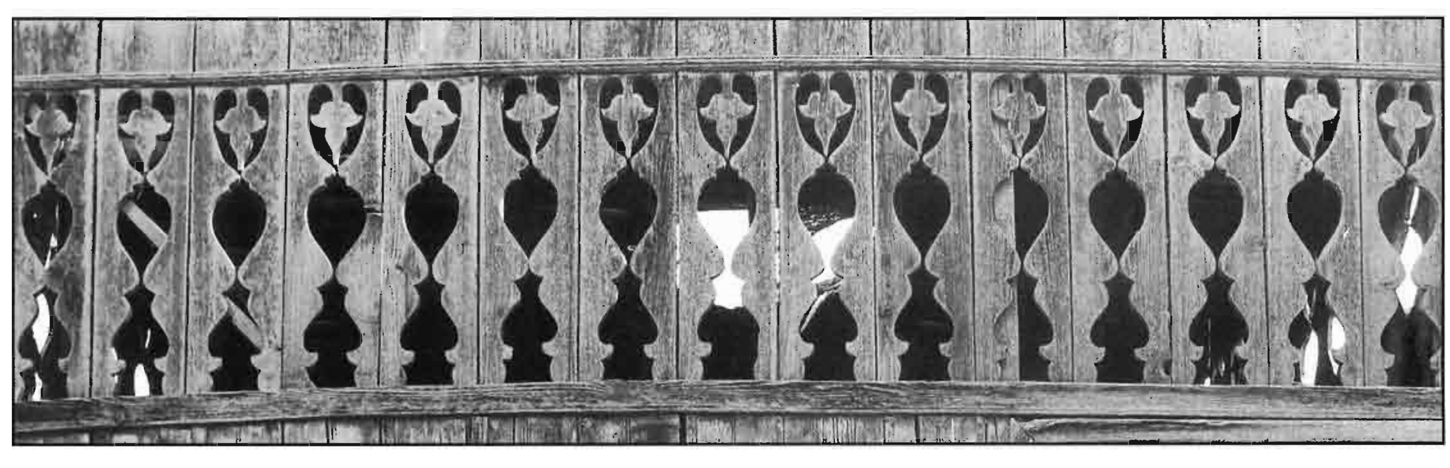


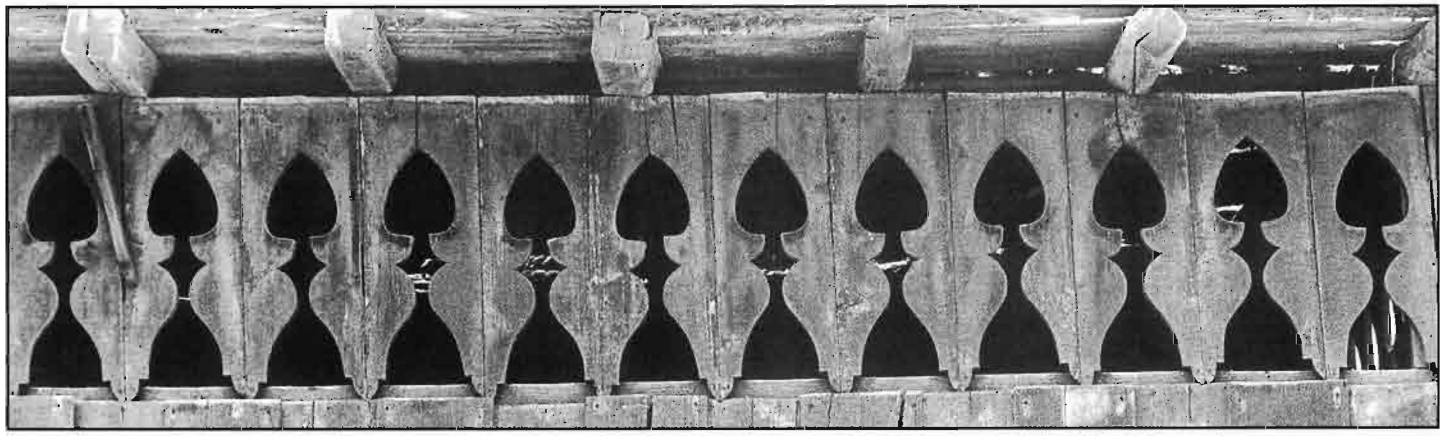
Wooden tombs in Bab al-Nasr: construction details of upper ventilation shafts.

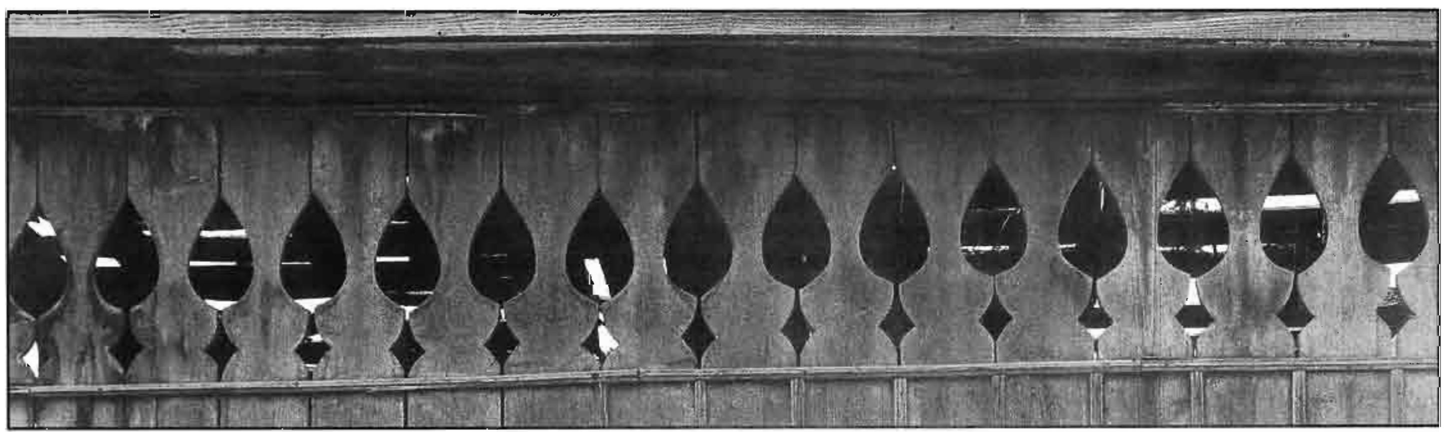


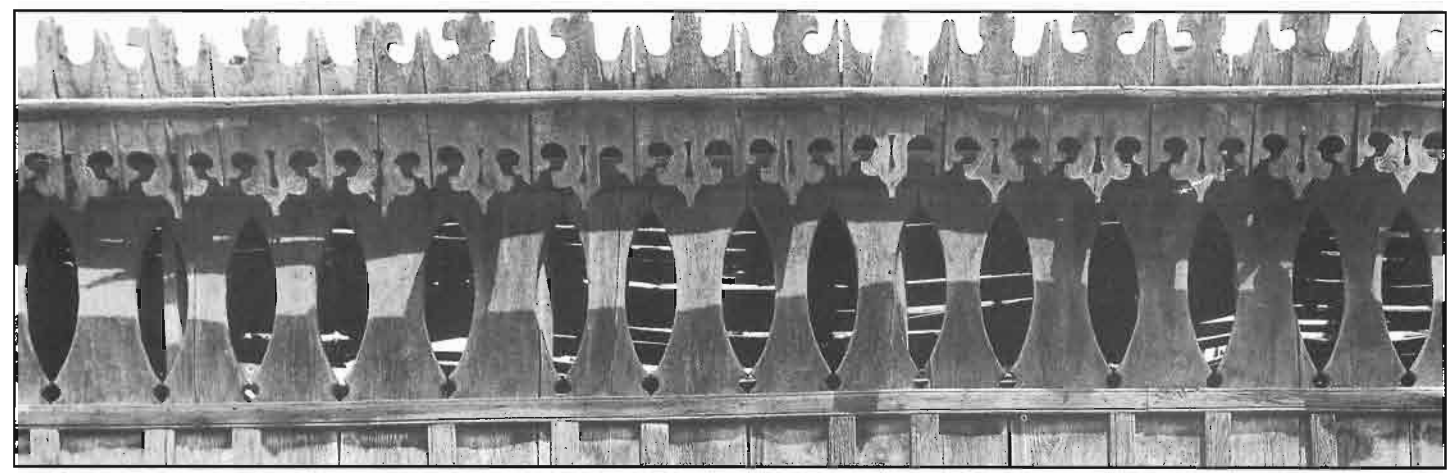


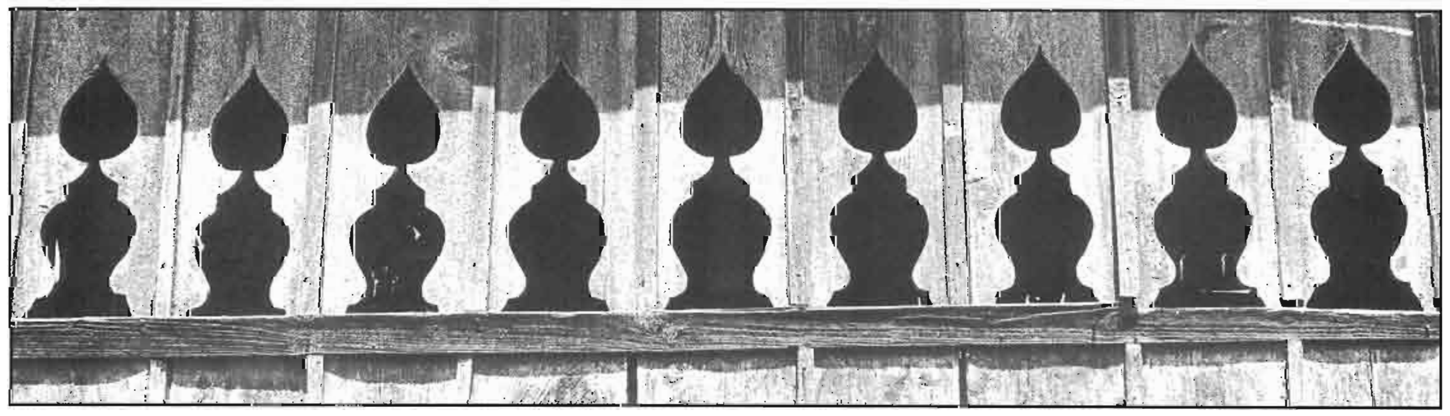


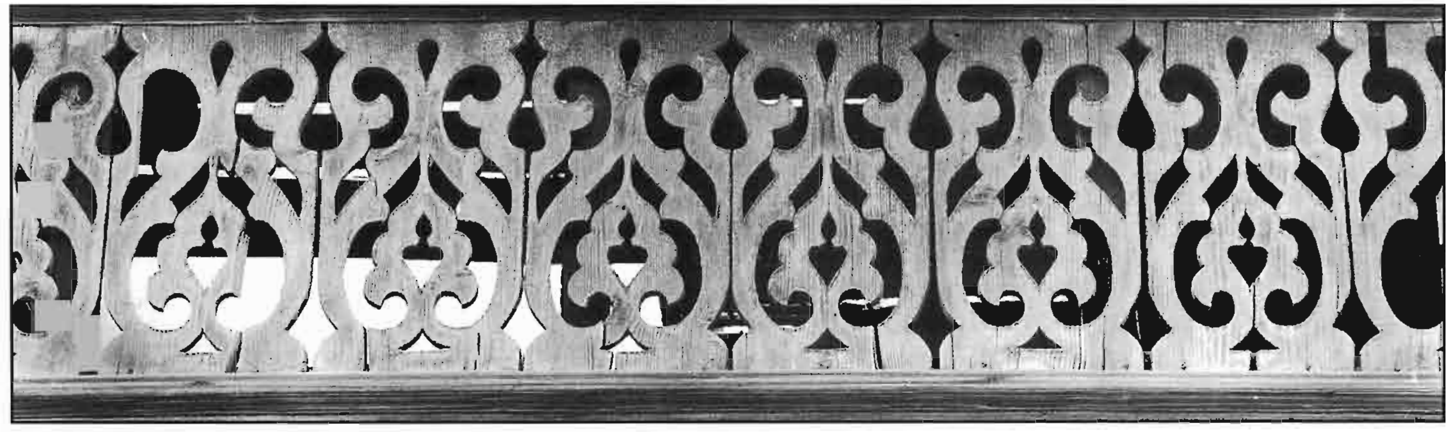


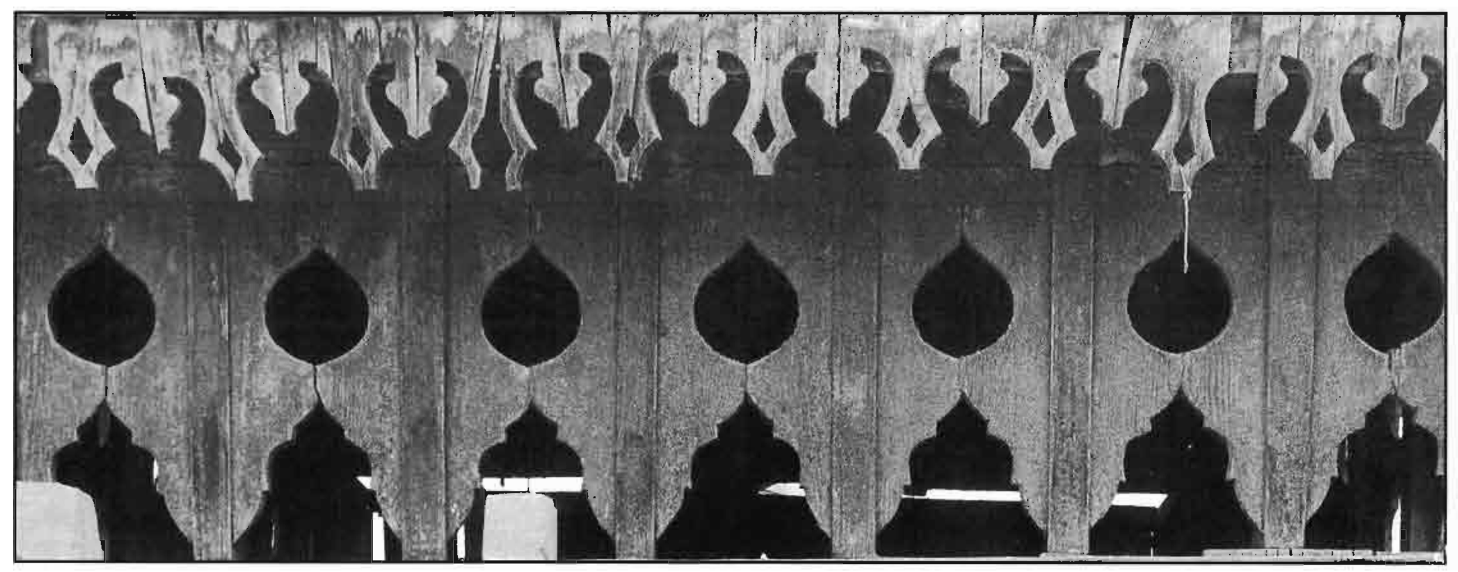
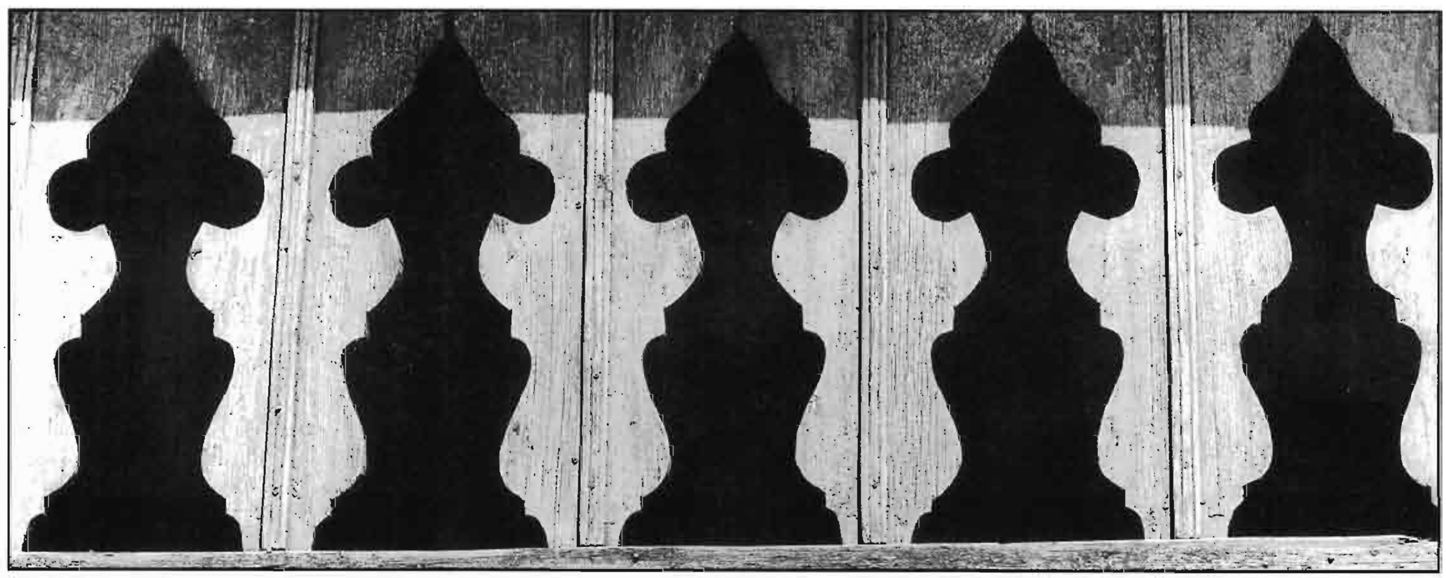
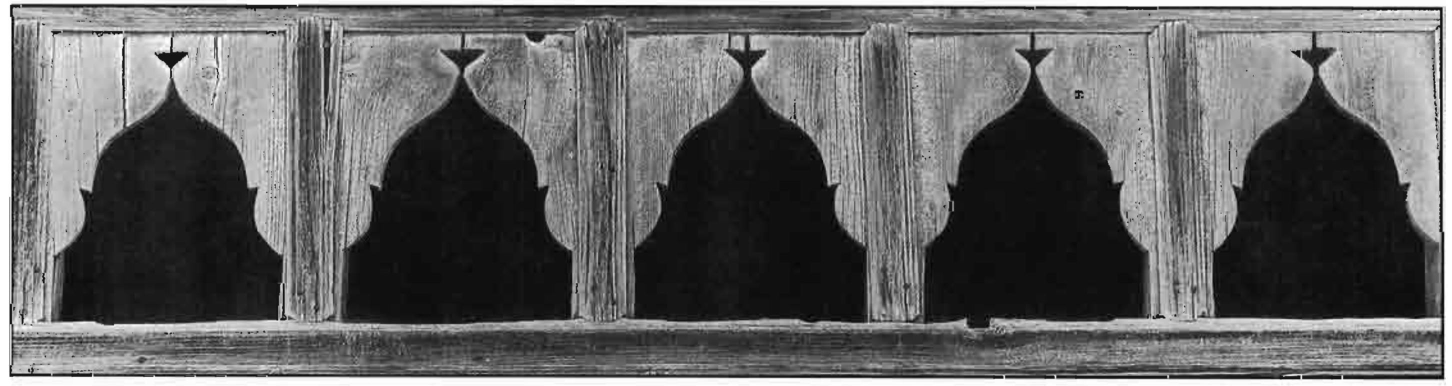


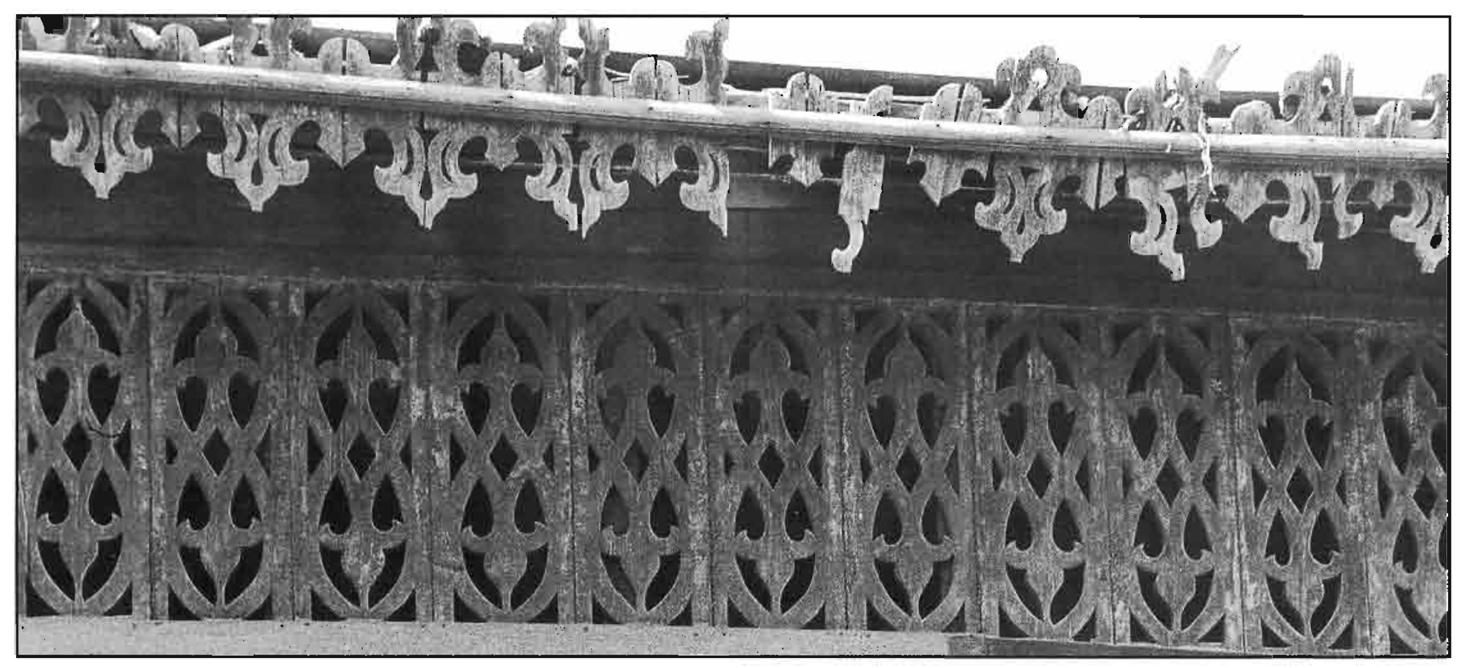


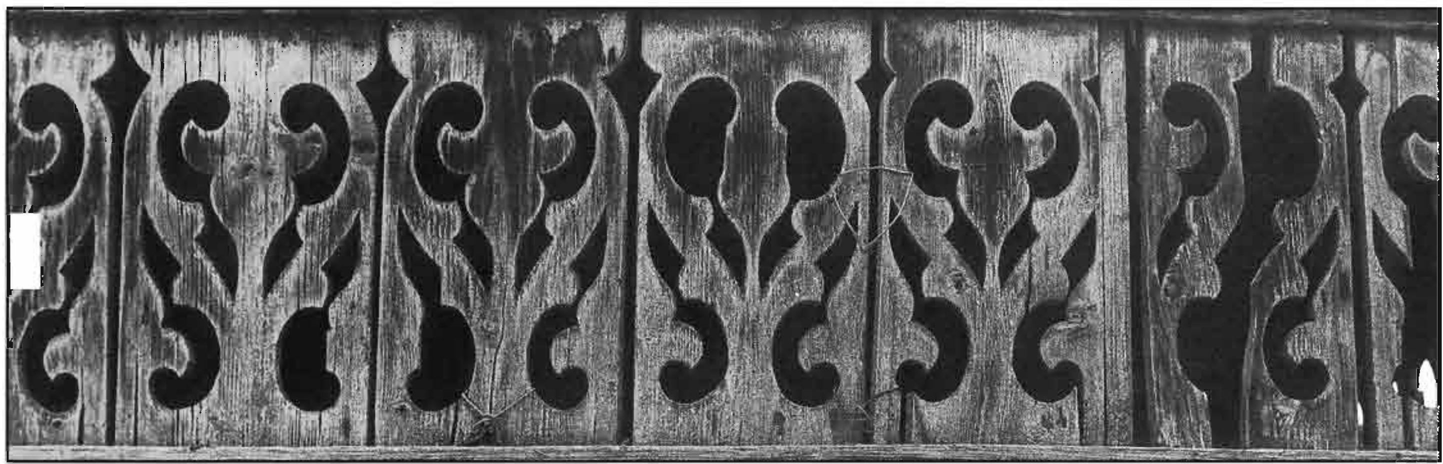


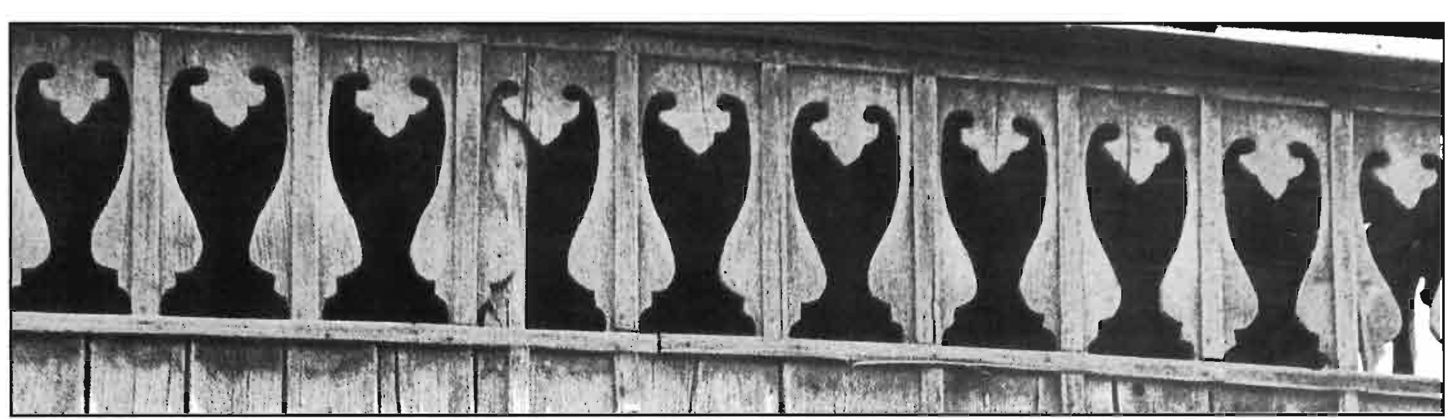


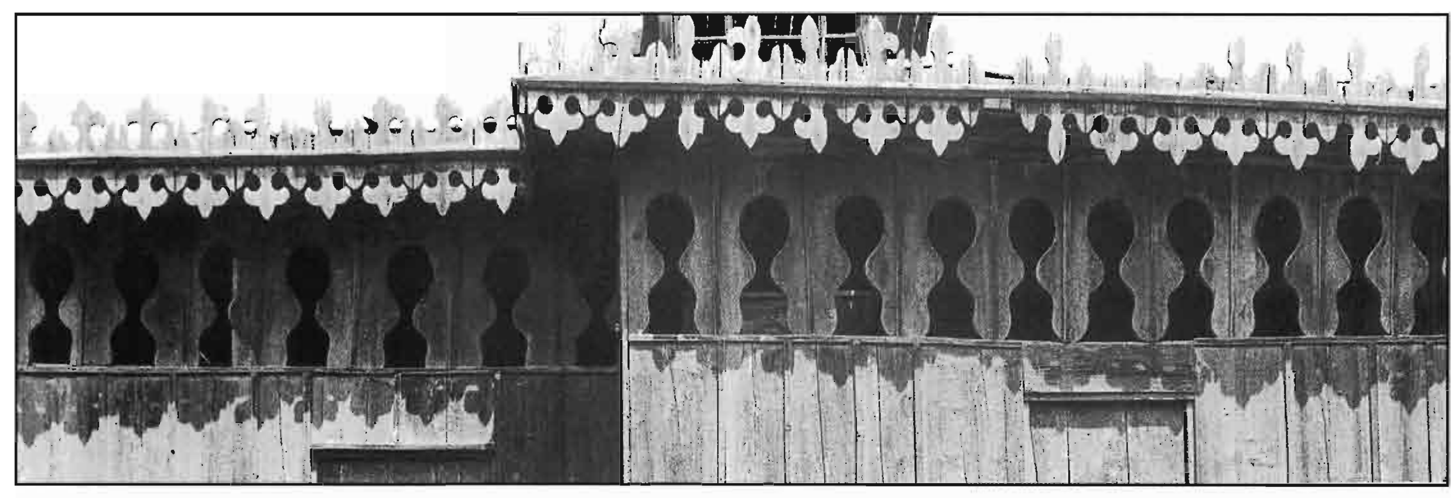


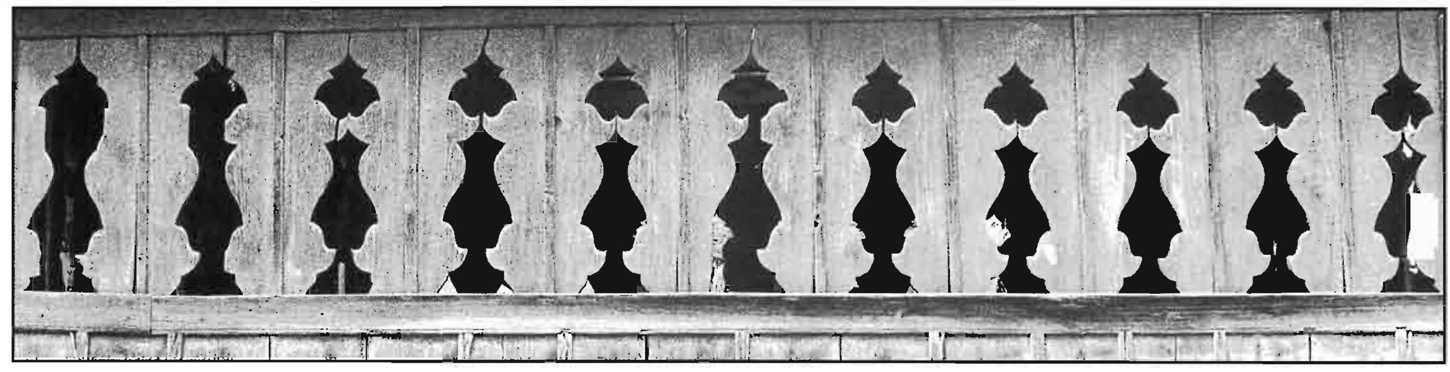




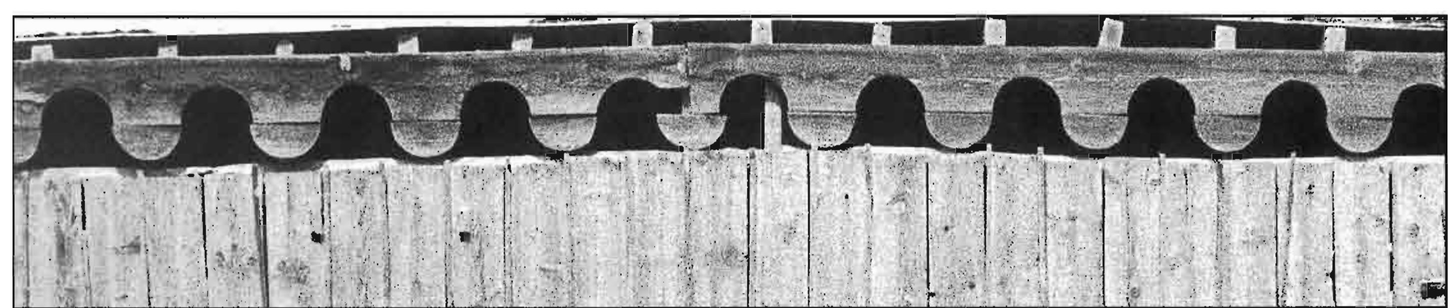


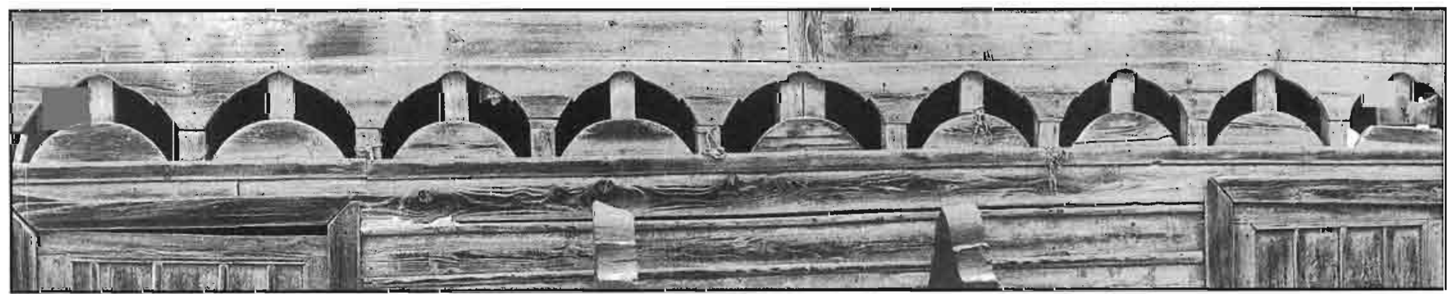


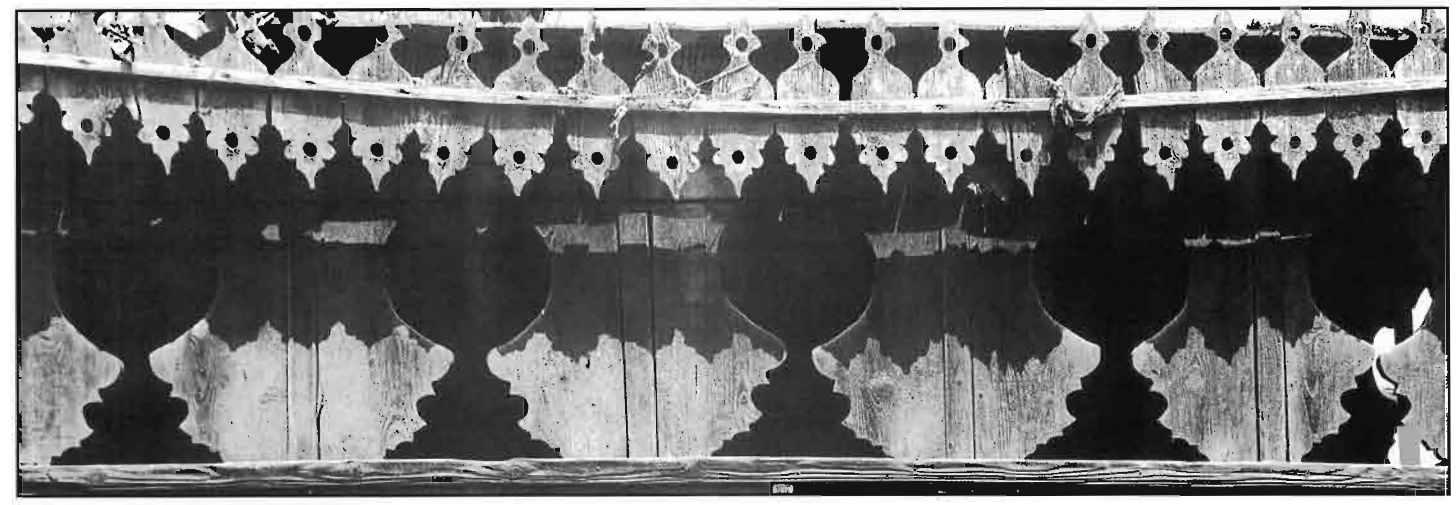


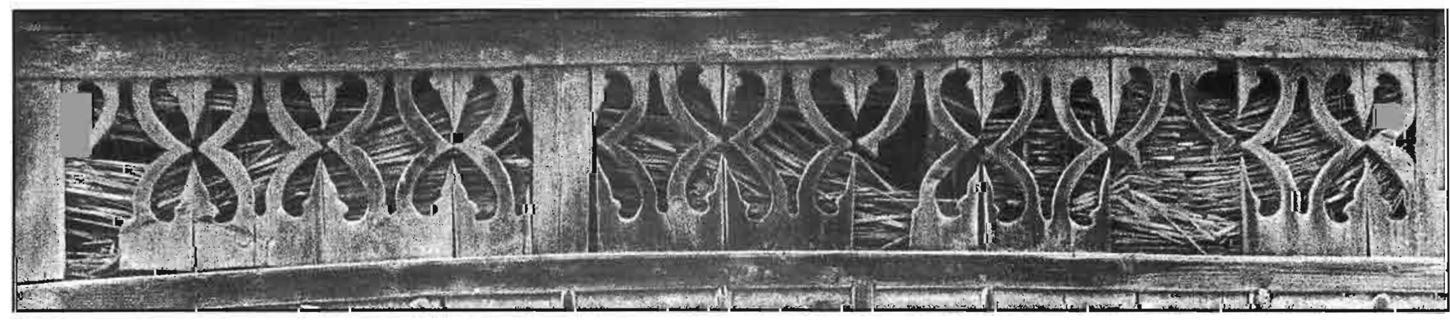


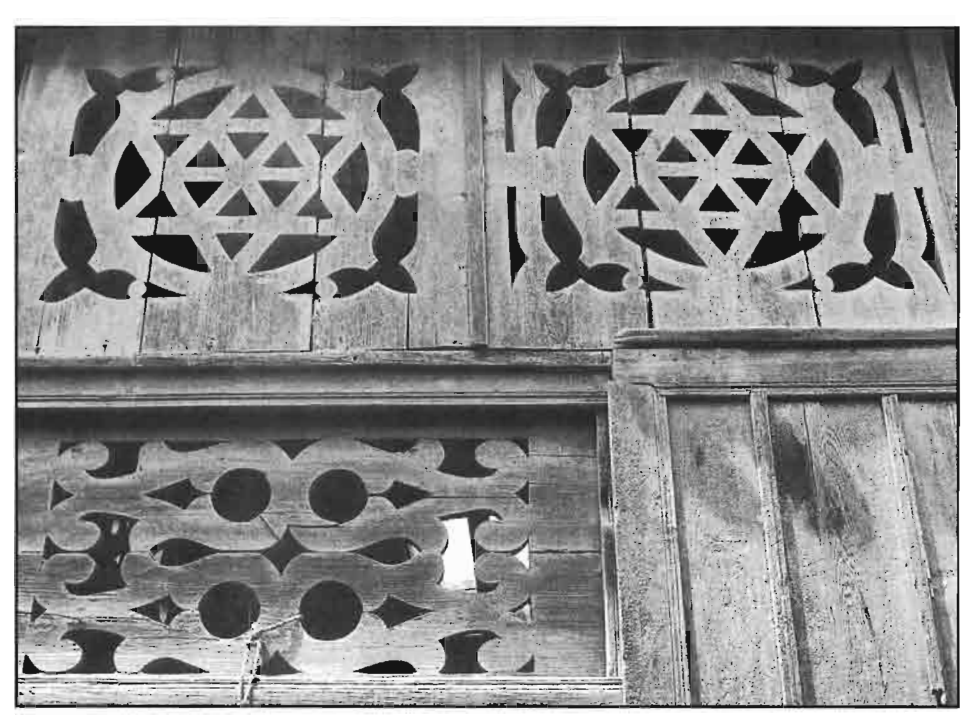


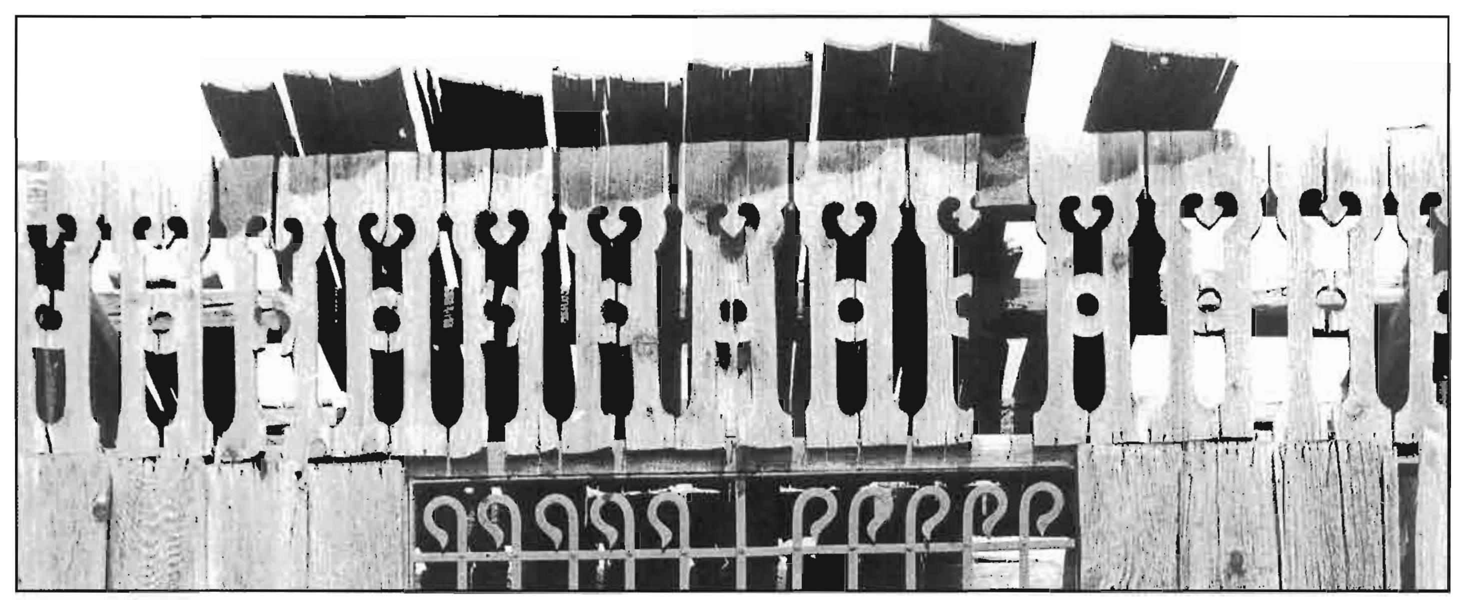


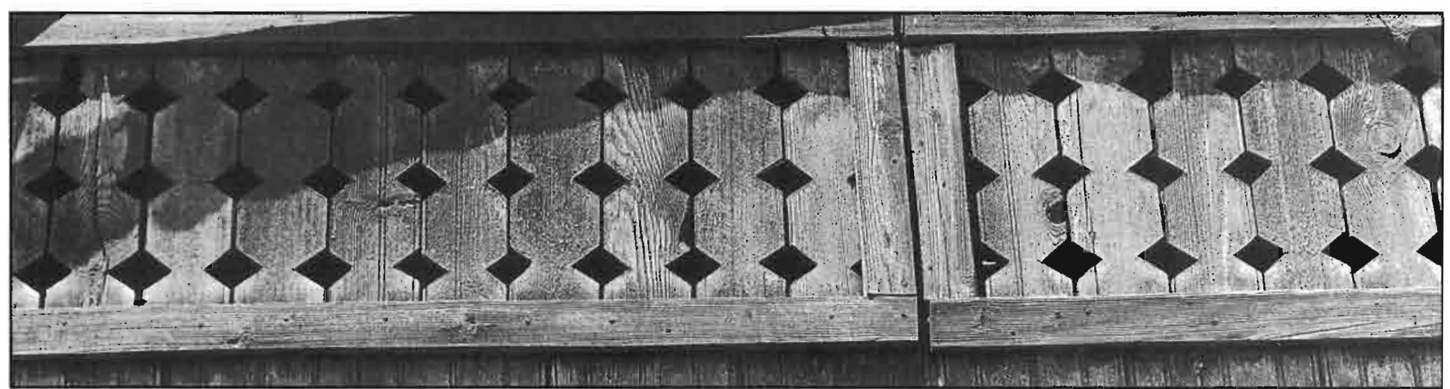


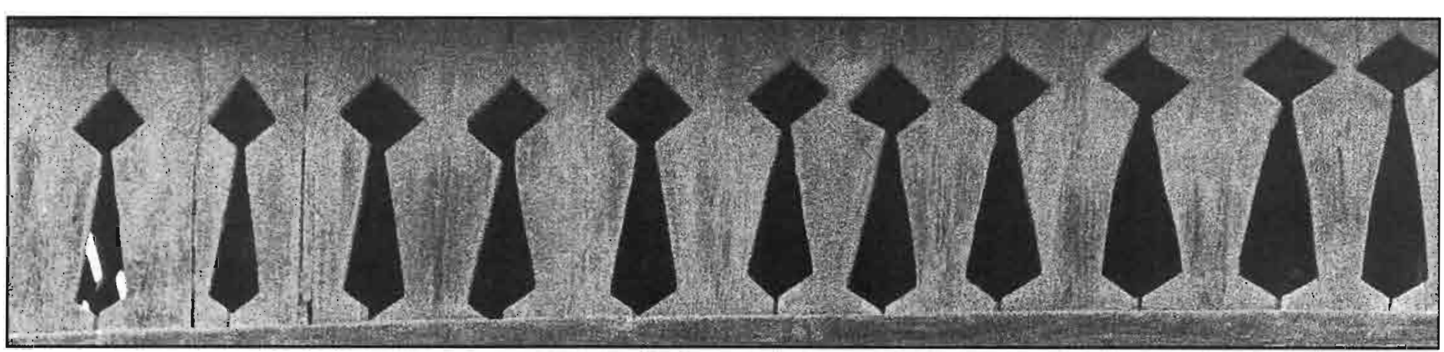


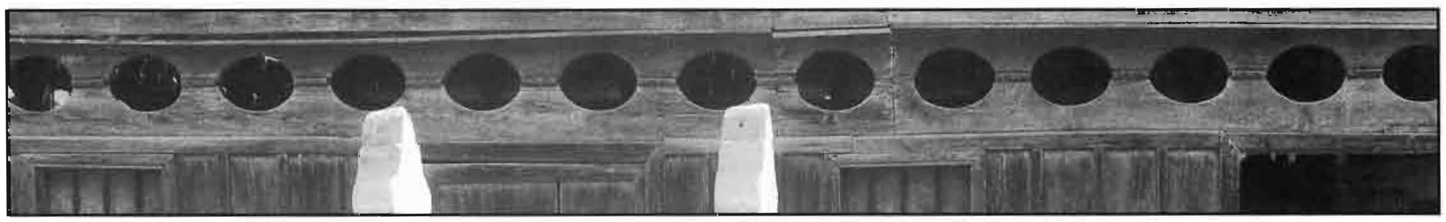


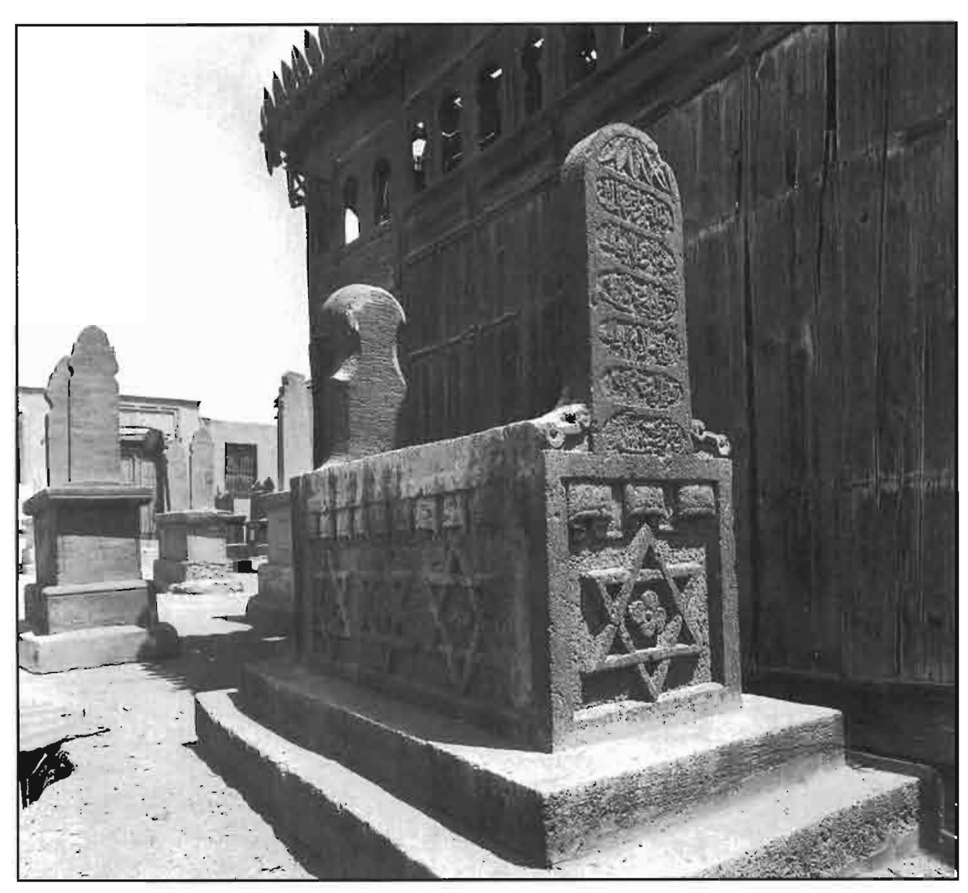








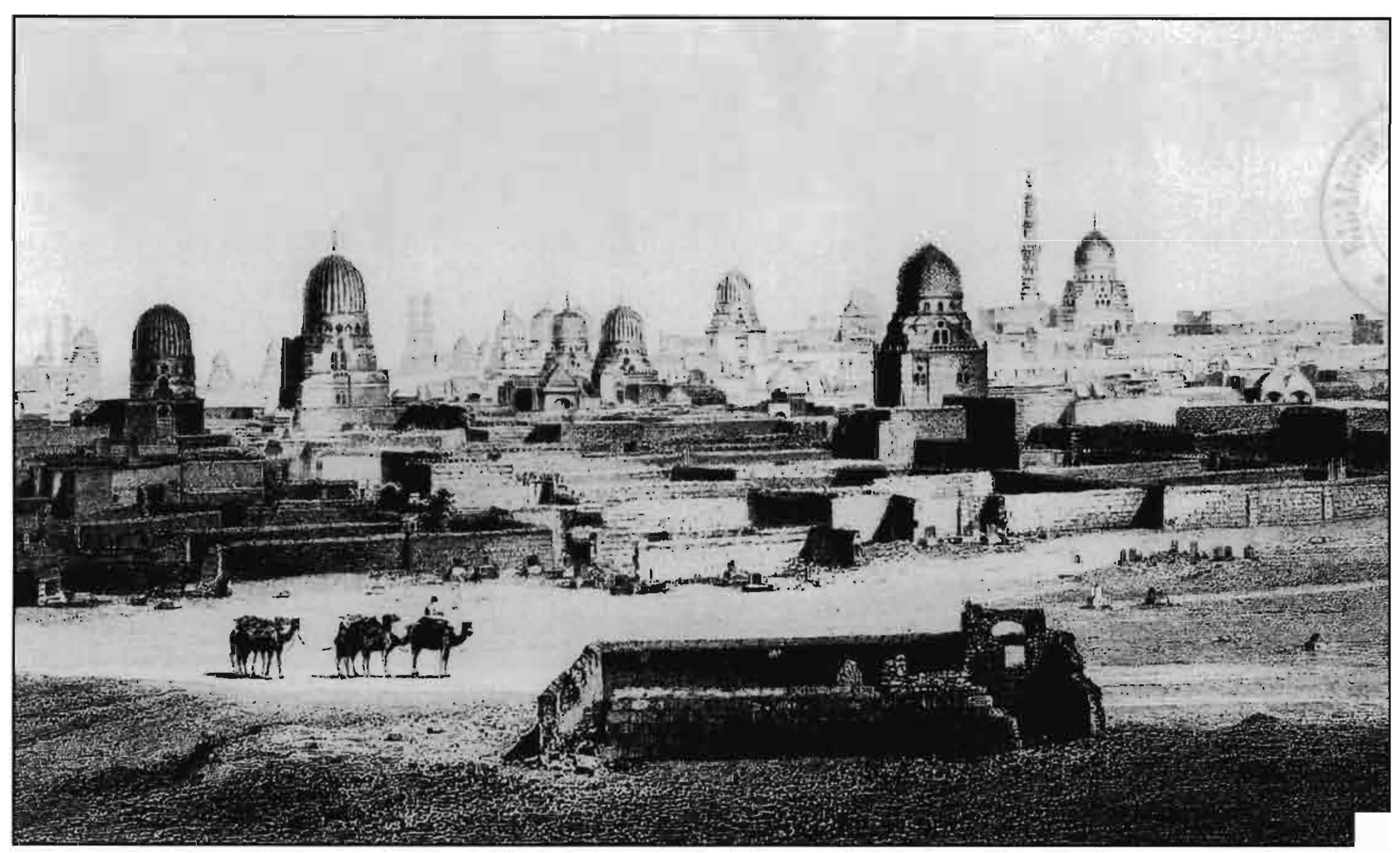




Notes

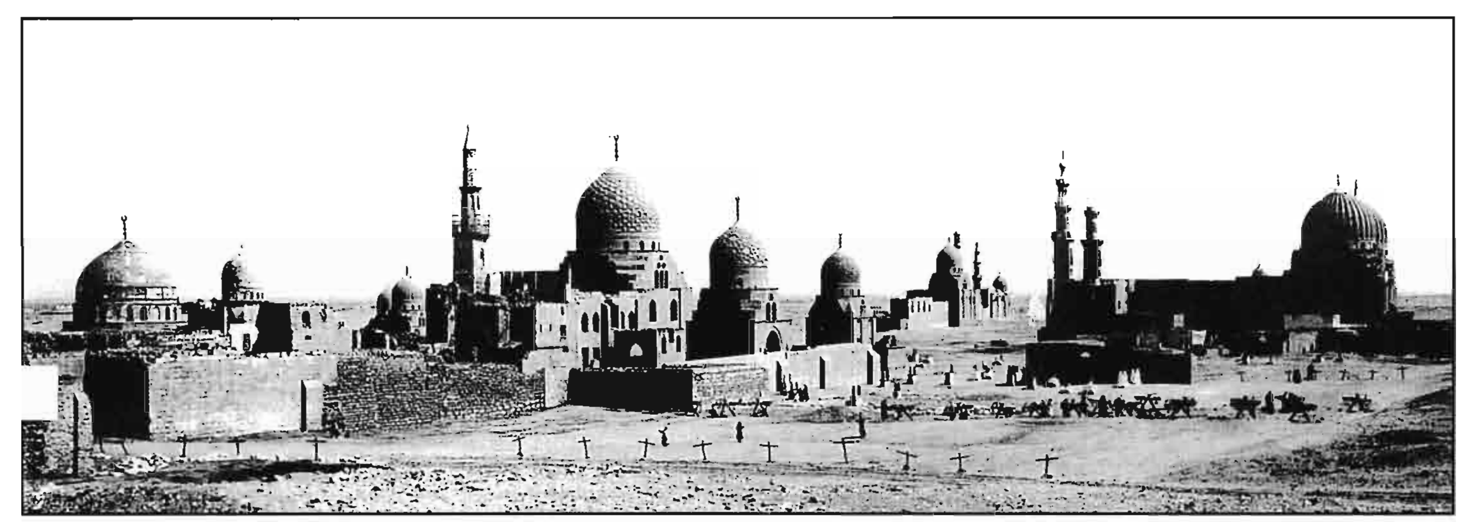
[1] It was reportedly during the rule of the caliph al-Hakim (996–1020) that this area first began to be populated (al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, 20).
[2] Al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, 138–39.
[3] The Musalla al-'Id was built by the general Gawhar al-Siqilli in 969 soon after the Fatimid conquest of Egypt. It was later renovated by the caliph al-'Aziz Billah (975–996) (al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 1, 451).
[4] Badr al-Gamali, son of Gamal al-Dawla ibn 'Umar, was an Armenian Mamluk who became Wali of Damascus in 1066. He was dispatched to Egypt in 1076 by the caliph al-Mustansir Billah during the major social and political upheavals that were rocking the country at the time (Mubarak 1969, vol. 2, 195–96).
[5] Al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, 138–39.
[6] Al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, note 1.
[7] The district was rebuilt under al-Nasser Qalawun (1293–1340) (al-Hadidi 1982, 71).
[8] Al-Hadidi 1982, 71.
[9] Al-Gaysh (formerly Farouk) Street was opened in 1930, and subsequently became the boundary between the districts of Husayniya and Daher (al-Hadidi 1982).
[10] It was the archaeologist and Arab art expert, K.A.C. Creswell, then Chairman of the *Comité de Conservation des Monuments de l'Art Arabe* (CCMAA), who ordered their demolition in order to clear the area around the walls and gates of the Fatimid city, which were newly listed monuments (al-Hadidi, 1982).
[11] We witnessed the destruction and the loss of one of Bab al-Nasr cemetery's most beautiful tombs. A particular point to bear in mind is that a royal decree issued in 1934 had ordered that the cemetery be destroyed and replaced with a public garden.
[12] According to Mubarak (1969), this small mausoleum could not possibly belong to the commander-in-chief of the armies, whose tomb is described in documents of the same era as a magnificent building, more like the enormous domed mosque of Caliph al-Hakim (Mubarak 1969, vol. 2, 197).
[13] Some architectural historians believe the *maqsura* to be a remnant of the Byzantine imperial loggia. Whether developed to assuage a caliph's fear of being assassinated or as an additional means of honoring the prince as an imam, they were found in none but the largest mosques in the capital cities of the Muslim world. One, with a superb wooden partition, has been preserved in Kairouan. Another, in Cordoba, occupies three bays in front of the *mihrab* (Hautecœur and Wiet 1932; Grabar 1987).
[14] This is the view we arrived at based on the CCMAA reports that we examined.

4 The Eastern Necropolis: Tombs of the Caliphs

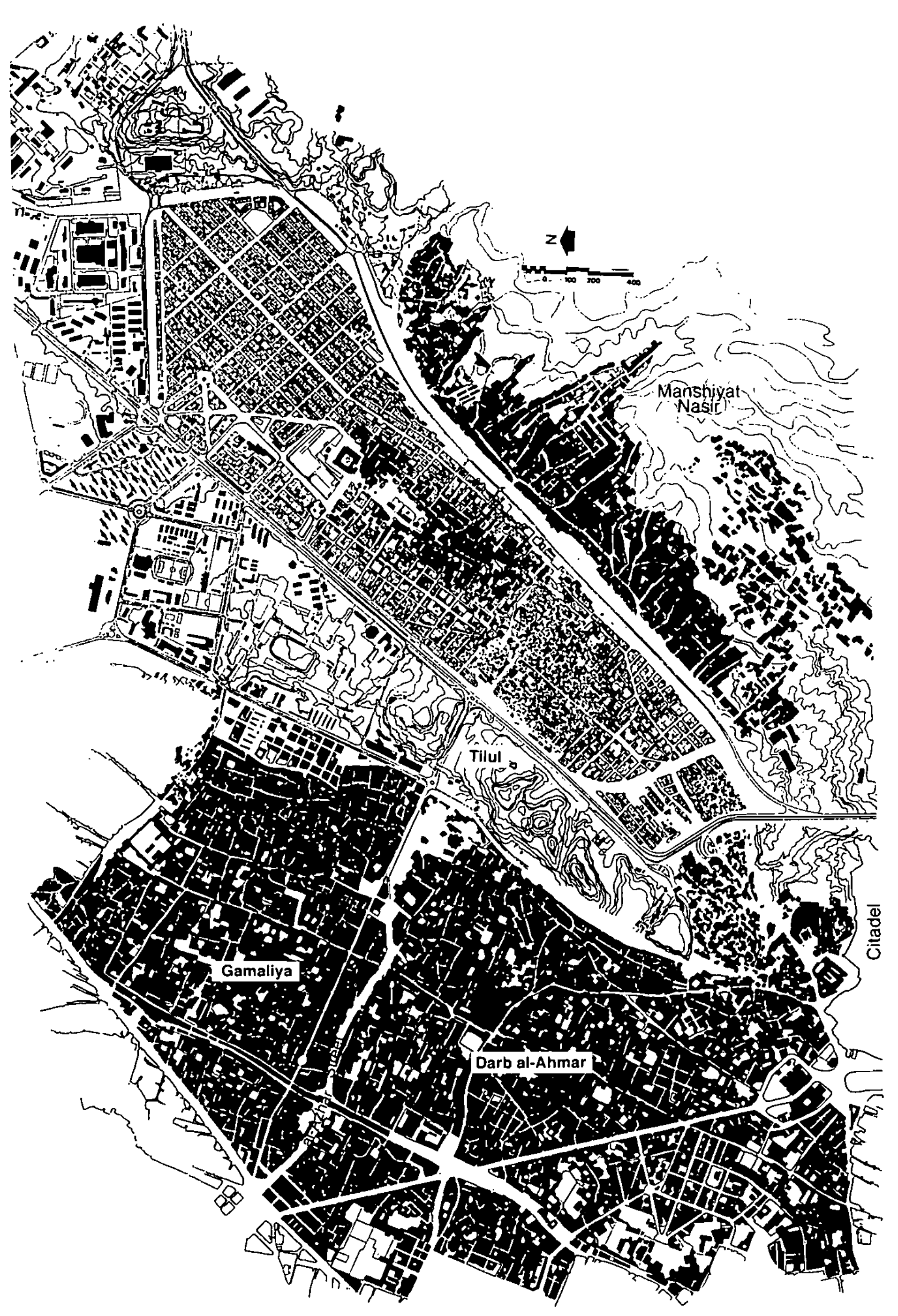


Engraving from Baedeker's Guide to Egypt, *2nd edition, Leipzig, 1895.*

Above, northern view of the necropolis in the early twentieth century (photograph by Lehnert and Landrock); below, northward view of the necropolis, taken from the minaret of Qaytbay (1990).



Access map of the eastern necropolis (drawing by G. El Kadi and Amani El Rayes, base map SFS/IGN, France, 1978, updated by the authors).



It is generally agreed that this area's origins as a cemetery date back to the first funerary group—a mausoleum, a mosque, and a *sabil*—built for one of al-Nasir's princes in 1328.[1] But that is probably for the sake of convenience given how hard it is to put a date to the older, smaller groups of tombs by the city walls, especially around the Bab al-Wazir and Bab al-Ghurayib gates.

Geography

The eastern necropolis occupies a strip of desert land some six hundred meters across and 3.5 kilometers in length. From its highest point at the foot of the Citadel—sixty-five meters above sea level—it slopes northward, stretching between the city to the west and the Muqattam hills to the east to the 'Abbasiya plains at the opposite end, some twelve meters below. The gradient of the slope, though relatively steep where it begins around Bab al-Wazir, eases off toward the north.

To the west, the cemetery is separated from the city by the Tilul al-Barqiya—mounds of debris made up of a thousand years' worth of urban waste. Most of the *Tilul* were leveled in the mid-twentieth century to clear the land for police and other activities; the rest were leveled at the beginning of the twenty-first century to make room for al-Azhar Park. Most significantly, however, this cleared the way for the construction of Salah Salem Road, a major four-lane expressway, to serve the conurbation from east to west.

To the east, the modern al-Nasr freeway provides an even faster north–south route. Opened in 1985, it arches round Cairo in the tracks of the old railroad built to service the quarries.

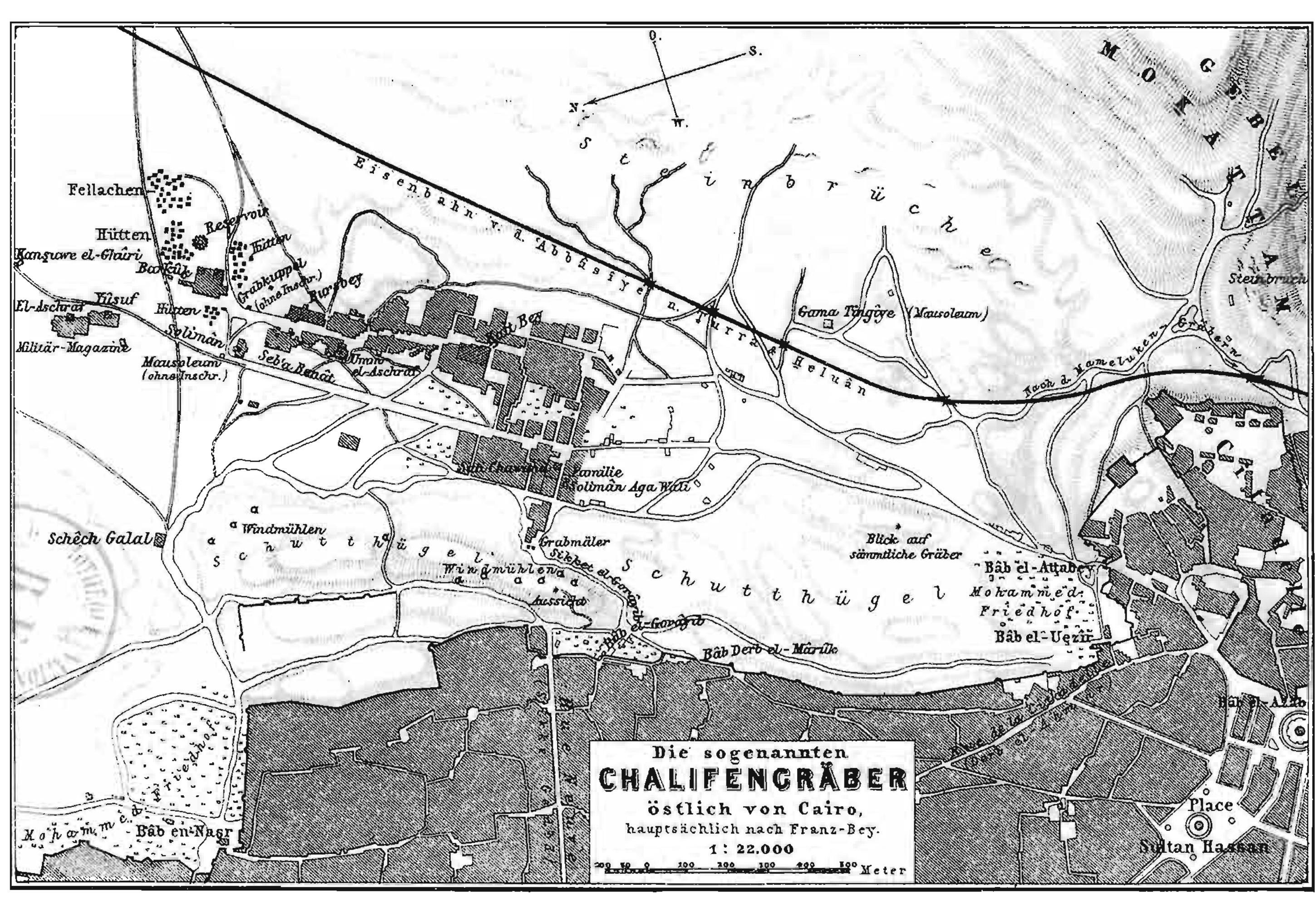
Further east, in the foothills of Muqattam—otherwise known as the Red Mountains[2]—the terraced squatter settlement of Manshiyat Nasir (population

Ruins of the Tankiziya Mosque, in the informal neighborhood of Manshiyat Nasir: Above, minaret; below, cupola.

170,000)[3] has closed in around a burial site containing one of the most beautiful edifices in these parts, the mosque–mausoleum of al-Tankiziya (1357).

Except in its southernmost corner, where it ends at the walls of Salah al-Din and the Citadel, this necropolis is entirely circumscribed by roads.

The eastern necropolis in the late nineteenth century (map from Baedeker).



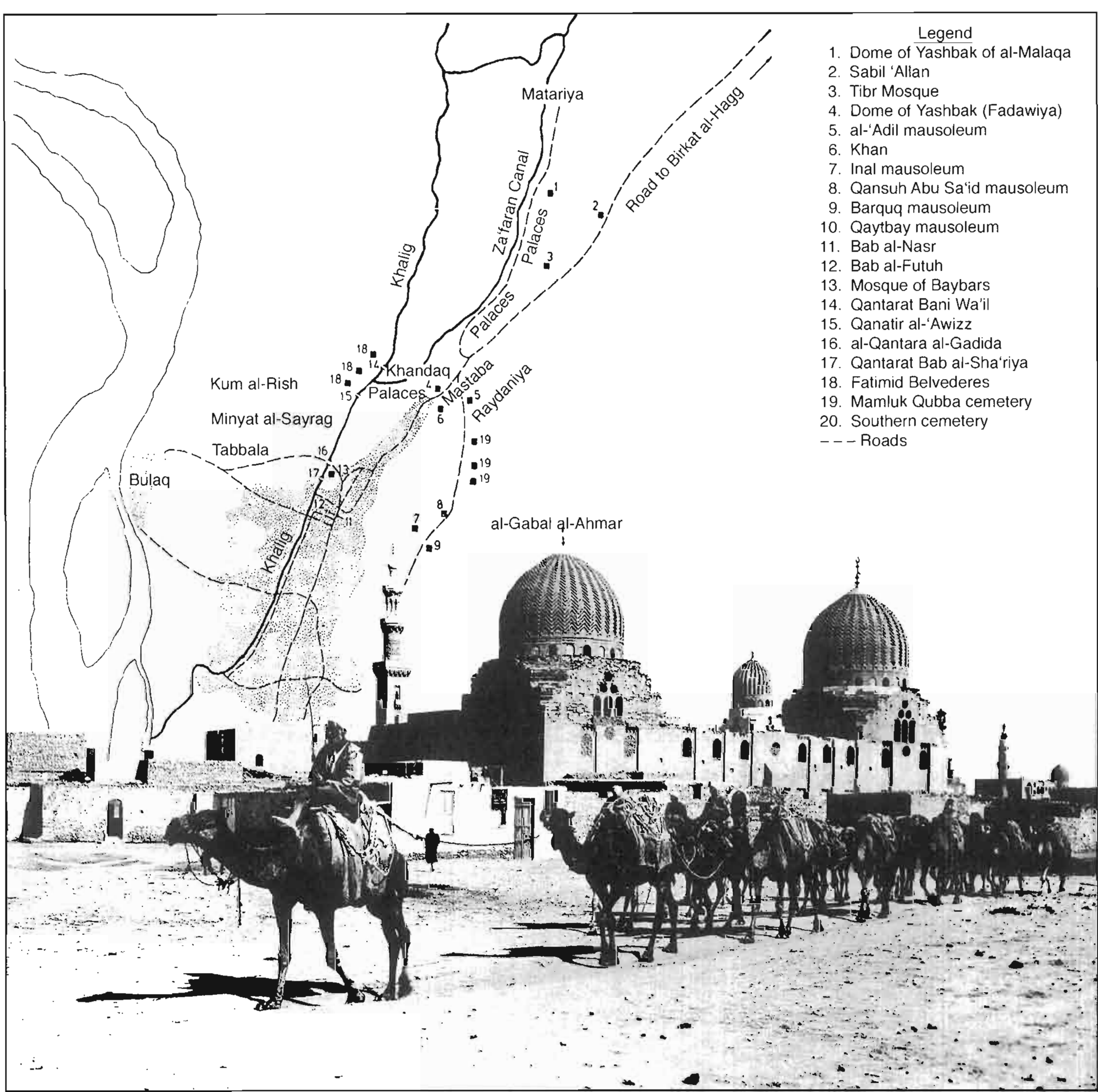
History

The end of Frankish rule over Palestine in the mid-twelfth century meant that pilgrims were free once again to travel to Mecca overland from Sinai, after having been forced to take a detour south, via Qus, to the port of ‘Izab on the Red Sea.[4] The old pilgrimage route was reopened in 1250 by the sultana Shagarat al-Durr.[5] Caravans would assemble in front of the Citadel then set off through Bab al-Wada‘, heading along a path that would later become the main thoroughfare of the eastern necropolis.[6]

This route, which runs through the desert parallel to—but at a fair distance from—Cairo's main arterial road, developed directly alonside the city, and is therefore of considerable interest to this study. It gradually evolved into the main pilgrimage route during the reign of Sultan al-Zahir Baybars (1260–77), when it came to be named Darb al-Sultani or the Sultan's Highway[7] and attracted a wide range of service activities such as *khans*, restaurants, caravanserais, stables, and so on.[8] Just beyond Bab al-Barqiya,[9] it came to an intersection with another road leading up through the only gap in the hills flanking the city, known to the locals as “Qat‘ al-Mar'a” or Lady's Slit—a beautifully symbolic name in that the dead were thus leaving the land of the living along the same route by which they had arrived: the route from the womb.[10]

Also on the desert side of Bab al-Barqiya was the area where Sultan Baybars and the Mamluk princes used to go to indulge in equestrian games.[11] In declaring an end to the games in 1320, al-Nasir Muhammad

Caravan headed for Mecca, passing before the funerary complex of Barquq (photograph by Lehnert and Landrock); sketch showing the pilgrimage route through the eastern necropolis, after Fernandes.



paved the way for the area's subsequent urbanization.[12] The intersection between the main route to Mecca—Darb al-Sultani—and the continuation of the road from al-Azhar became the site of the first large funerary foundations east of Cairo.

What we now see as a necropolis may have begun as an abortive attempt at urban development. A number of urban phenomena would appear to support this, and we shall be looking at some of these later on. First, though, let us trace the origins of the eastern necropolis.

In the late twelfth century, a number of clerics, unhappy about what was happening in the Greater Qarafa, managed to persuade Sultan Baybars himself that the ostentatious tombs must be razed and the cemeteries brought back in line with the precepts of Islam. The sultan's vizir, however, warned that this might trigger protests or insurgency among the Mamluk princes; he advised him to consult with the *'ulama'* and suggest to them that a *fatwa* be issued. No such *fatwa* was ever issued, and Baybars died in Aleppo.[13]

A telling passage from an earlier *fatwa*, proclaimed in 1194 during the reign of al-Salih Nagm al-Din, reads as follows: "I made every attempt to persuade al-Malik al-Salih to demolish every foundation in the Qarafa. He told me it was his father's work. I replied that it was a calamitous piece of work and reminded him that over and above the purposes of interment, the sumptuous edifices that had proliferated there were designed for the pursuit of leisure and ostentation. The refuse and waste of the living is polluting the tombs [with] a host of impurities that threaten the Muslim dead, the saints, the nobles, and everyone else".[14]

The traveler Ibn Jubayr, meanwhile, had noted that "both the good and the evil find what they are looking for in the Qarafa: ascetics the solitude and brigands the shelter from retribution."[15]

The *'ulama'*, stepping up their threats and remonstrations, finally gained partial satisfaction. The many *fatwas* calling for demolitions went unheeded, but an end was declared to the construction of new funerary buildings in the Qarafa, which would thenceforth be "devoted exclusively to burials," as 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, 'amir of the faithful,' had prescribed in the early days of Islam.[16]

By 1320, the Qarafa was at its zenith, and hence at something of a saturation point. The Mamluk princes, not content to confine their lofty ambitions to building in its interstices, were inevitably drawn to the strip of empty desert east of the city. The area's development, then, clearly came about in response to a lack of space in the southern necropolis, but the question remains as to whether it was conceived as a future necropolis from the beginning. After all, a good number of mosque–mausolea continued to be built along the main thoroughfares of the city.

Details provided by historians would appear to support the hypothesis of planned urbanization, for instance the fact that the sultan Farag had sought to transfer the *suq al-harir* (silk market) to a location near his *khanqah*,[17] and that he had even undertaken in 1411 to move the camel and donkey market from the outskirts of the Citadel to the vicinity of his funerary complex in the northern part of the necropolis.[18] His intention had been to have a large *khan* built there, but only a windmill, a *hammam*, and a bakery were completed during his lifetime, and even these were abandoned after his death.

Evidence of urban planning can also be seen in the scale of the funerary complexes in the area and in the diversity of the functions they performed. Alongside the emblematic *madrasas* and *khanqahs*, first introduced as early as in the Ayyubid era, they now comprised *sabil–kuttabs*, *rab's* and other purely commercial premises for trade and accommodation, including *qa'as* (reception halls) and *tibaq* (lodgings for shaykhs and mosque dignitaries), together with kitchens, water cisterns, and stables for the horses and camels.[19]

Rhoné (1910) argues that these foundations served another purpose altogether. Although it is not a view that we share, here, for the record, is the basic thinking behind his theory:

"The Mamluk princes or pashas, forever weakened by political rifts and rivalries, or by family feuding, felt they needed to secure the support of the desert Bedouin, whose long lineage and indomitable energy gave them an air of awesome superiority. Their friendship must be won at all costs; if this failed, they would have to be divided and neutralized by means of intricate and sustained scheming. But the Bedouin had always detested cities and loathed their suffocating fumes." The only way to receive the nomad chiefs in a manner befitting royalty, and thereby to own them, was to build residences outside the city, in the desert. Plausibly, then, our enormous fourteenth- and fifteenth-century mosque–mausolea might have had a similar purpose: it must have been predominantly the tribes from the neighboring desert that came to the mosques and that sent their sons to the schools of the reigning sultan.[20]

Between 1328 and 1376, the Bahri (Turkoman) Mamluk princes ordered the construction of about twenty mausolea and funerary complexes, mainly in what is now the central part of the eastern necropolis;[21] only seven remain.[22]

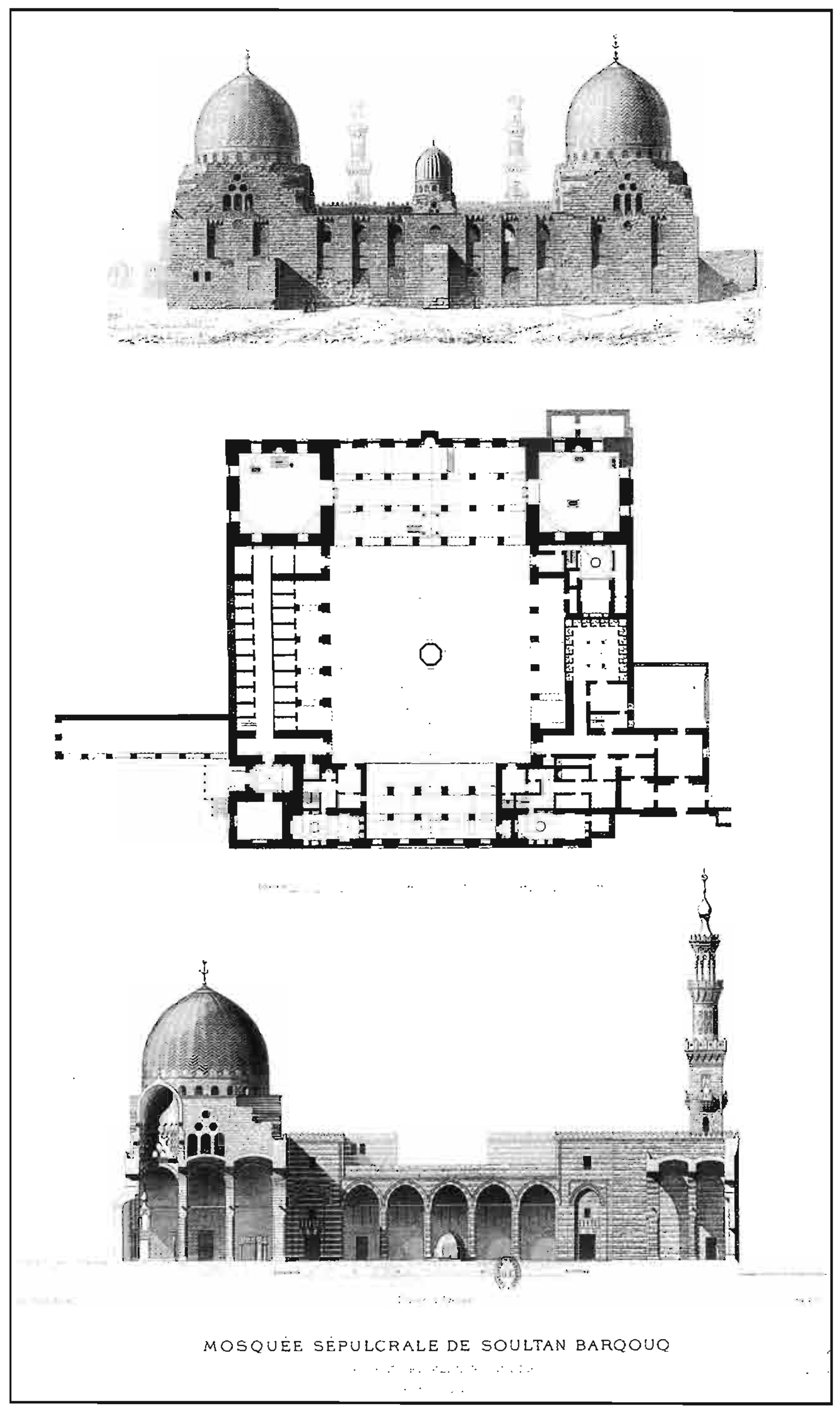
Later, under the Circassian (Burgi) Mamluks (1382–1517), the necropolis expanded to the north, along the line of royal funerary complexes,[23] and to the south, where another funerary site containing the tombs of the amirs had been growing at the foot of the Citadel since

Khanqah *of Sultan Barquq (illustration by Pascal Coste).*

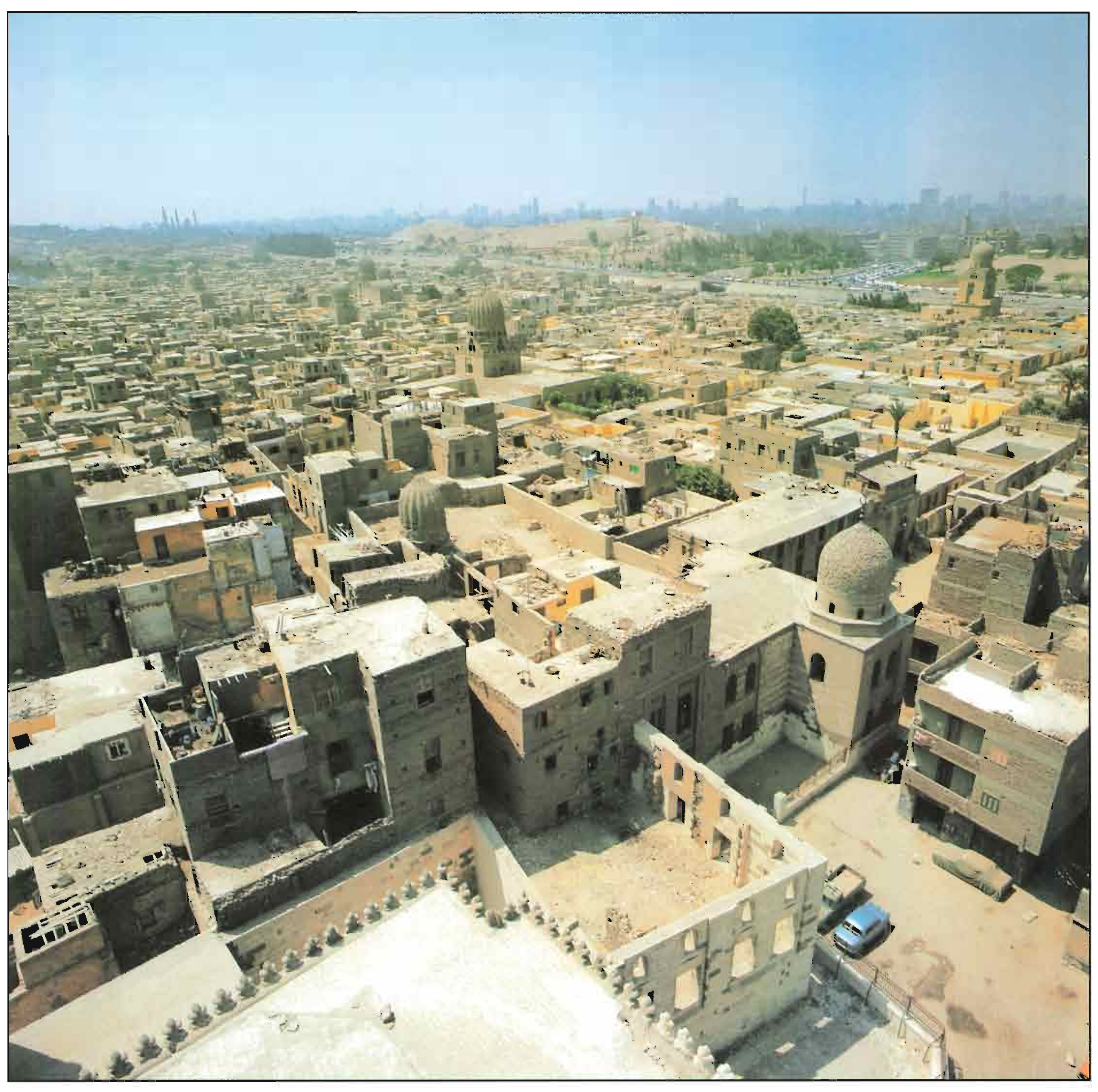
1348. Of the forty-six mausolea built in this period, eighteen have survived, including those of the five sultans.[24]

At the same time, the great plague of 1348 had wiped out a third of the population of Cairo and with it, one might have thought, any justification for further urban expansion. And yet the following century and a half of recurrent epidemics saw the construction of a host of monumental masterpieces such as the foundations of Barquq (1328), Inal (1450), and Qaytbay (1472), to name but the most prestigious. The economic grounds for the existence of such sumptuous buildings are easily explained by the fact that an epidemic can make surviving heirs extremely rich—and make the authority in charge of collecting inheritance tax even richer.[25]

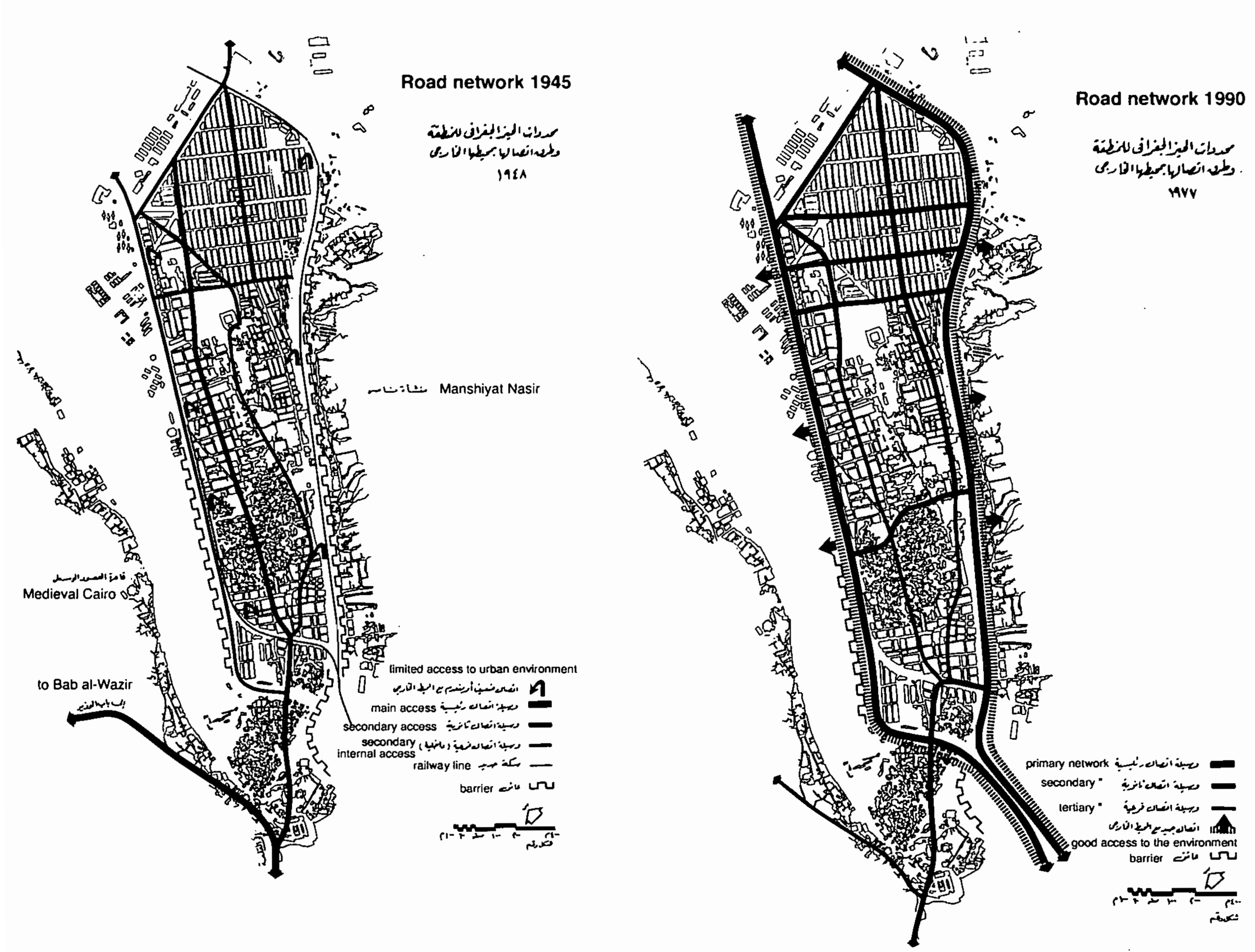
But the foundations may also have been built in such isolated places because of a desire to escape the overcrowding and the pestilential fumes of the city.



View of the eastern necropolis (taken from the minaret of Qaytbay).



Evolution of the traffic network, 1945–90 (drawing by G. El Kadi, base map SFS/IGN, France, 1978, updated by the authors).



Spatial separations (drawing by G. El Kadi, base map SFS/IGN, France, 1978, updated by the authors).

Overview

After the breathtaking panoramic view from the Salah Salem Road, a far more sobering sight awaits the visitor heading into the center of the necropolis along Hasan 'Abd al-Wahab Street, which is now the main route from the city, a function formerly performed by Khawand Talhai Street, which passes through Bab al-Barqiya gate. More or less a continuation of al-Azhar Road, which was built in 1923, and formerly known as Qarafat al-Mamalik, Hasan 'Abd al-Wahab began as a shortcut between Bab al-Barqiya and Qaytbay. It does not feature a single noteworthy tomb. Its recent redevelopment—with a rectilinear grid imposed on a freely developed, unplanned fabric—ripped the guts out of the area. It has not even been extended across the Sultan Ahmad Road. Instead, it takes a fifty-meter detour north along a tortuous route called al-'Afifi Road—which has also been widened—and then skirts the southern limits of the residential block between Qaytbay and Barquq, yet fails to provide the block with adequate access to the nearby longitudinal highway because Bab Qaytbay is so low and narrow.

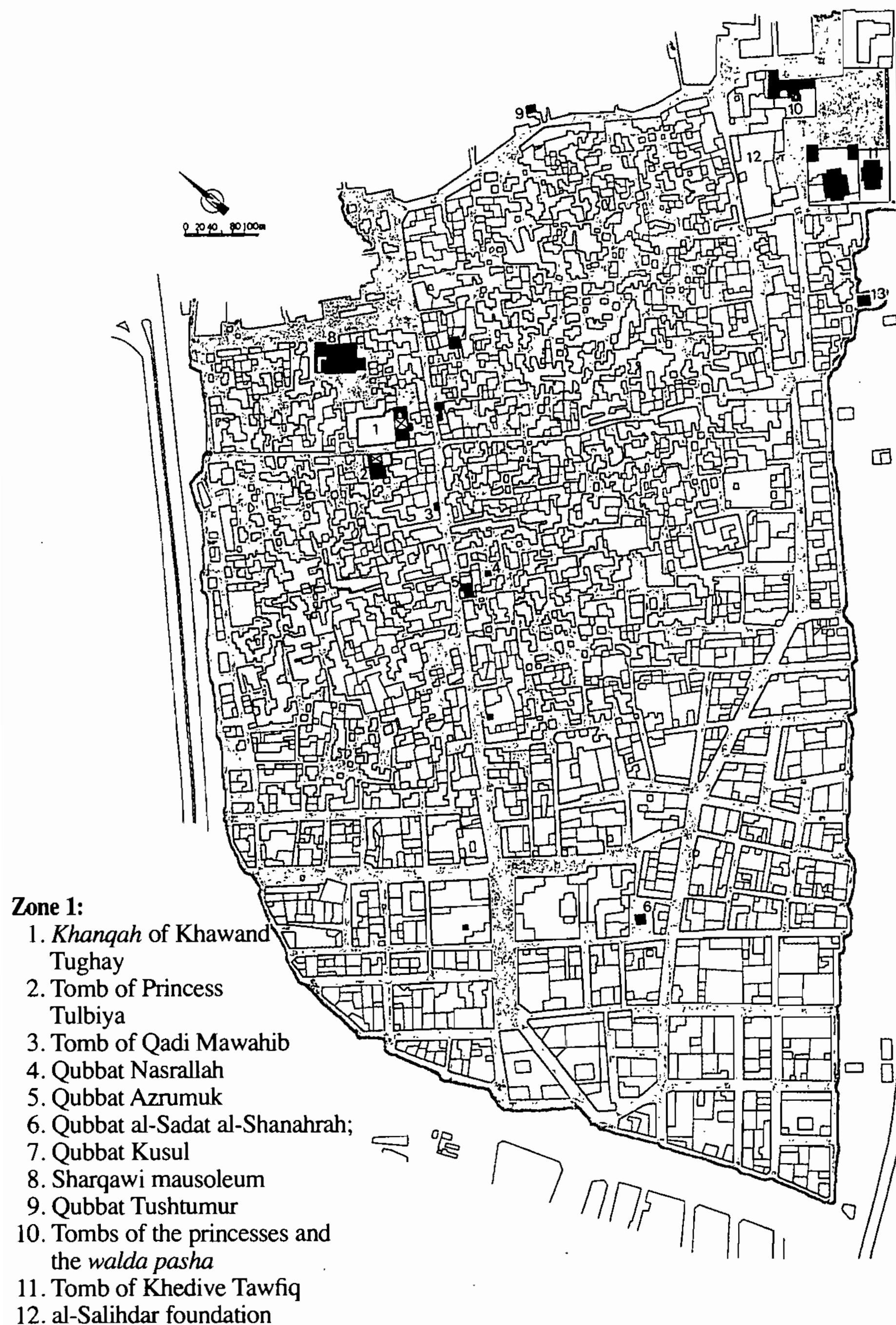
The road system of this historic fabric of tombs and houses has yet to be adapted to present-day traffic needs and has thus become one of the factors causing its increasingly rapid degradation. Traffic flow relies on a constrictive grid dating back to the late nineteenth century. Sultan Ahmad Road, which leads from Bab al-Wada' to the tomb of Sultan Inal at the foot of the Citadel and was previously called 'the royal way' and various other names, is virtually unused.

The threat to the fabric here is enormous. It is subject to the general pressures that affect the rest of Cairo's cemeteries, which we will see in Chapter 6. But it is also being steadily eroded by factors specifically linked to its proximity to the city and to the size of its urban core: the unauthorized construction of housing to meet the demands of a growing population is eating into the disorderly mass of simple shapes, destroying the very features that constitute its poetic charm.

Urban analysis

We chose to divide the necropolis into three zones: Migawirin, in the center, is one of two nuclei that developed between 1328 and 1348; Qaytbay (al-Ghafir), to the north of Migawirin but cut off from it from since the 1970s by an east–west highway, contains the tombs of the five Burgi sultans; and Bab al-Wazir cemetery, which is at the foot of the Citadel.

Monuments in zone 1 (drawing by G. El Kadi, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).



Zone 1: Migawirin

We enter this zone via Khawand Talhai, which used to be the main road into the eastern necropolis. At the intersection with the Sultan Ahmad Road stand two of the oldest buildings in the necropolis: the tombs of Khawand Tughay, also called Umm Anuk (d. 1348), and Princess Tulbiya (d. 1363), who were the wives of al-Nasir Muhammad.

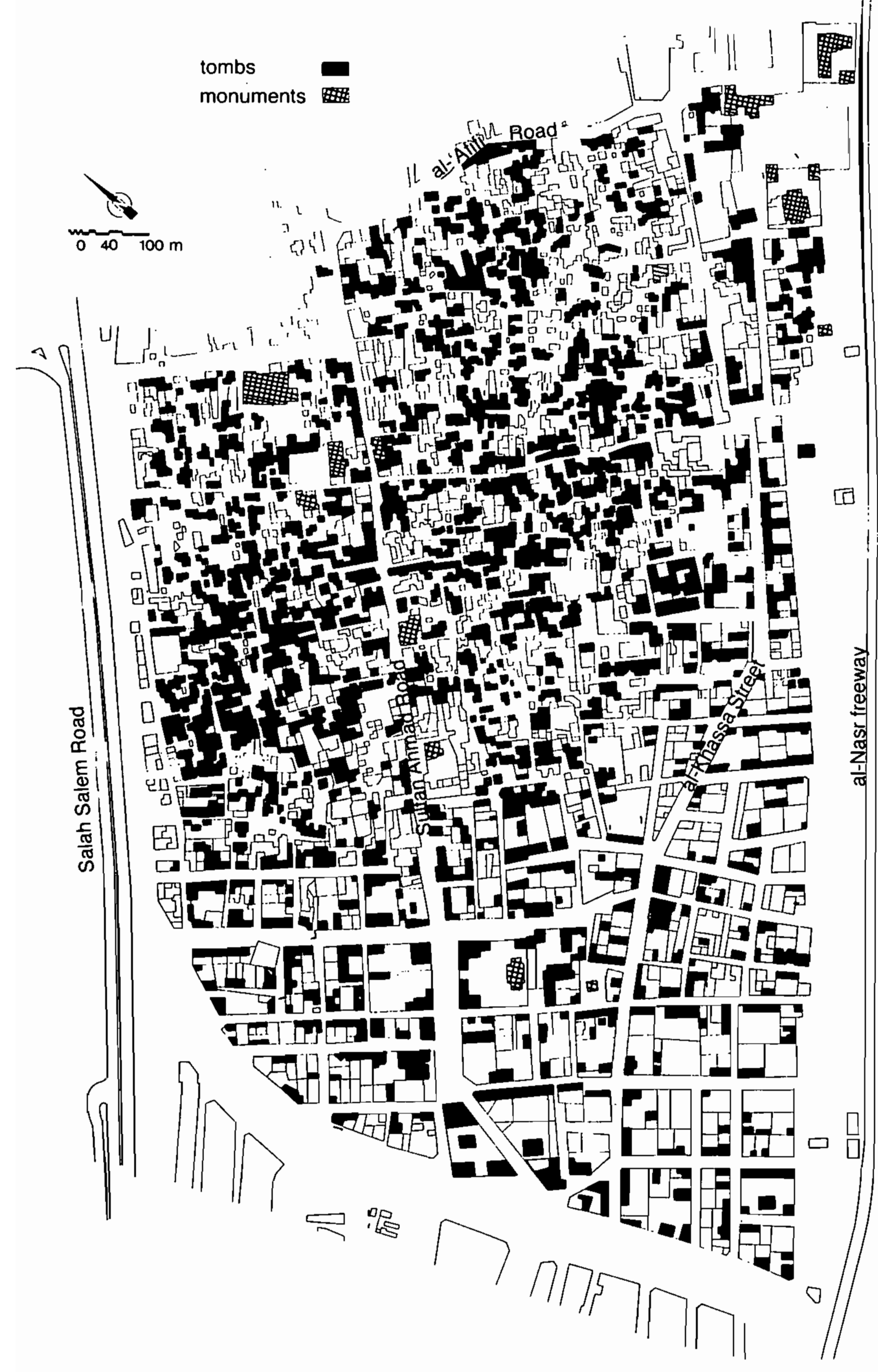
Umm Anuk appears to have been al-Nasir's favorite, and the mother of Anuk. All that remains of her original complex—a *khanqah* with two *iwans* and a domed mausoleum—is an impressive vaulted *iwan* whose size and location make it the main local landmark, visible even from a distance. The mausoleum's ribbed stone dome rests on a drum embellished with an elaborate faience frieze (much of it ruined) featuring a mosaic of small irregular polygons with a beautiful Qur'anic inscription in white lettering on a blue and green background, its upper edge decorated with merlons shaped like fleurs-de-lis.[26]

Directly opposite, on the other side of the street, is the domed mausoleum of Tulbiya, a Tartar princess from the banks of the Volga yet inferior in rank to Umm Anuk. Rivals in life, the two wives of al-Nasir have continued to stand face-to-face in death.

Other than these, the last few monuments scattered along Sultan Ahmad tend to be little more than stone parallelepipeds topped with a dome—all that remains of the grand foundations of the past.

Across the intersection, Khawand Talhai becomes ever narrower as it passes through the area where the least damage has been done to the fabric by housing construction. A few dozen meters down the road stands a small stone kiosk with a pyramid-shaped roof, said to be the tomb of Qadi Mawahib, a high-ranking Ottoman official. Built in 1685, it once had a *sabil* and a drinking

Zone 1, access map (drawing by T. Fouad and T. Youssef, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

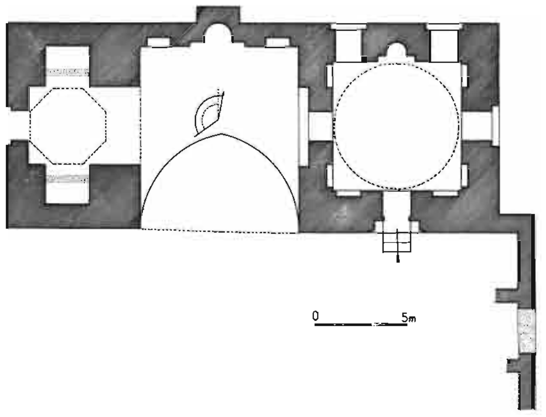


trough for cattle in the entrance, but no trace of these remains.[27]

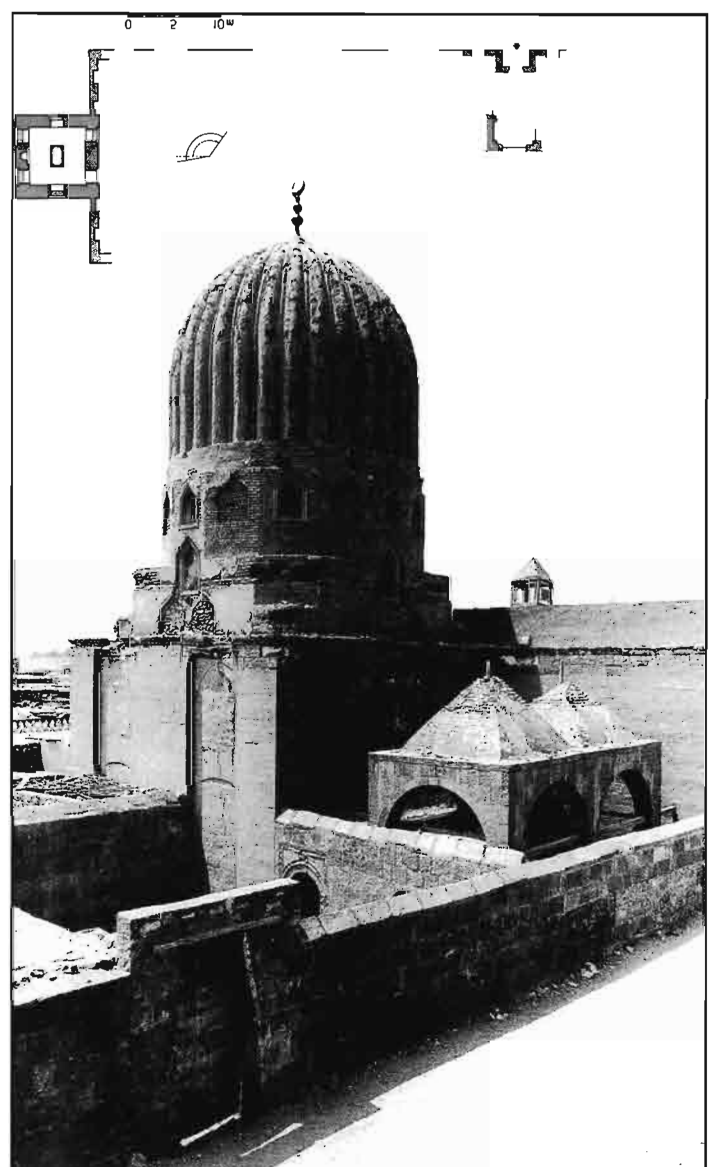
Opposite, embedded in a relatively complex fabric, are two Mamluk domes. The first, on the tomb of Nasrallah, as it is called locally, has a molding with a zigzag motif and rests on a circular drum. It is attributed to Muhammad Kuz al-'Asal, a "sultan whose name means pot of honey and who only ever existed in the people's imagination."[28] The second, a few meters south, is the *qubba* of al-Ashraf Azrumuk (1504), one of the last amirs of the Mamluk period. Among the distinguishing features here are the semi-ovular blue enamel bosses enhancing the arabesques that cover this dome that is embellished with star-shaped polygons.

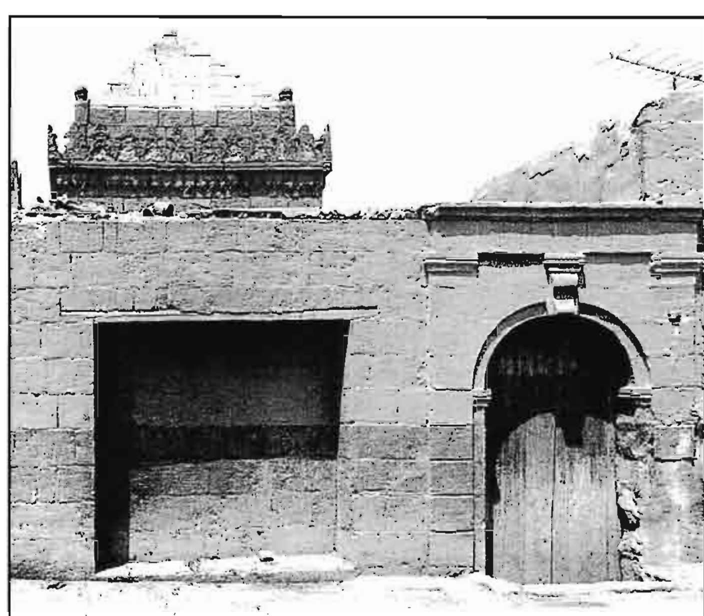
Further south on Sultan Ahmad Road is the most regular and homogeneous part of Migawirin cemetery. The only monuments of note here are the Mamluk dome of al-Sadat al-Shanahra and a couple of recent *zawyas*. This is where Sultan Ahmad Road is at its widest—twenty meters across—and where it ends, at a small polygonal square where the youth of Manshiyat Nasir go to play soccer. The land here was parceled out in 1923, after the Tilul al-Barqiya had been cleared following the closure of the railroad track running along their southern slopes.

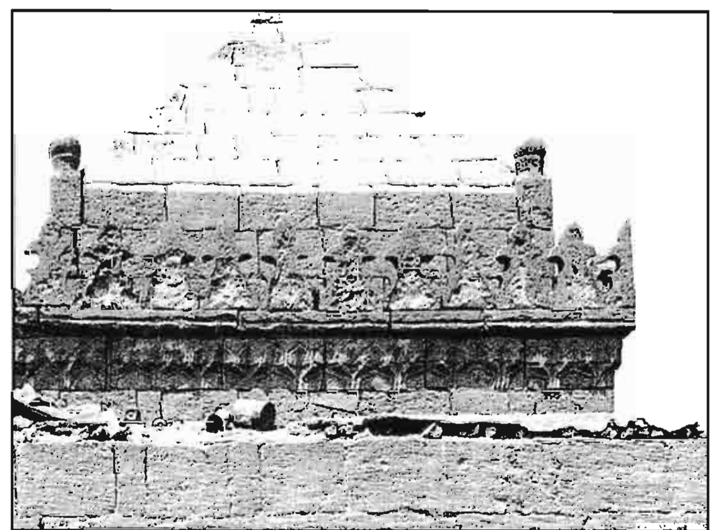
Above, Khawand Tughay mausoleum, northwestern façade; below, plan of the monument (after Kessler, facsimile, library of the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi).



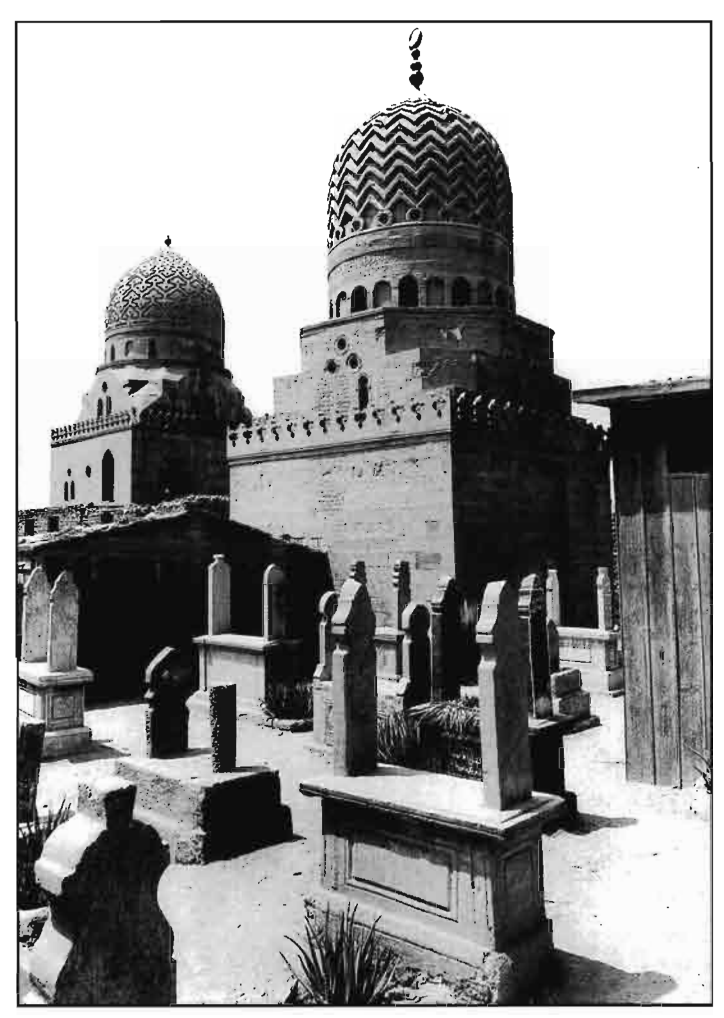
Left, tomb of Princess Tulbiya, with plan (after Kessler, facsimile, library of the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi); above right, tomb of Qadi Mawahib; below right, detail of the pyramid-shaped cupola.

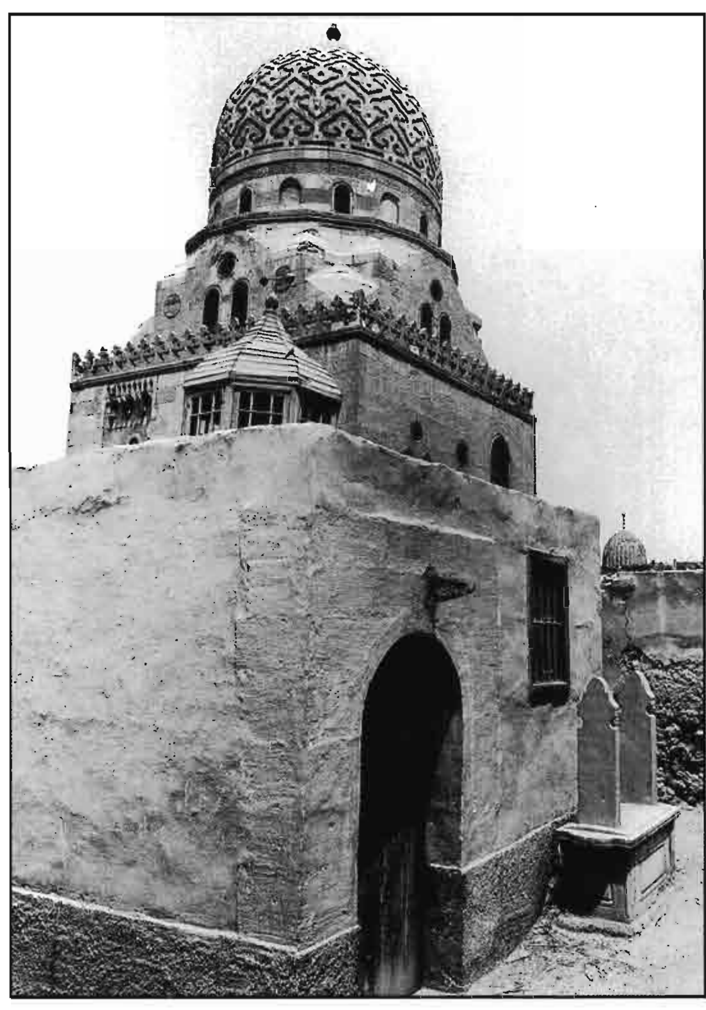


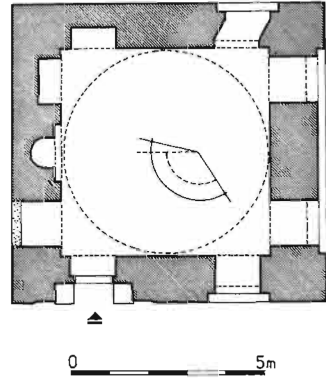


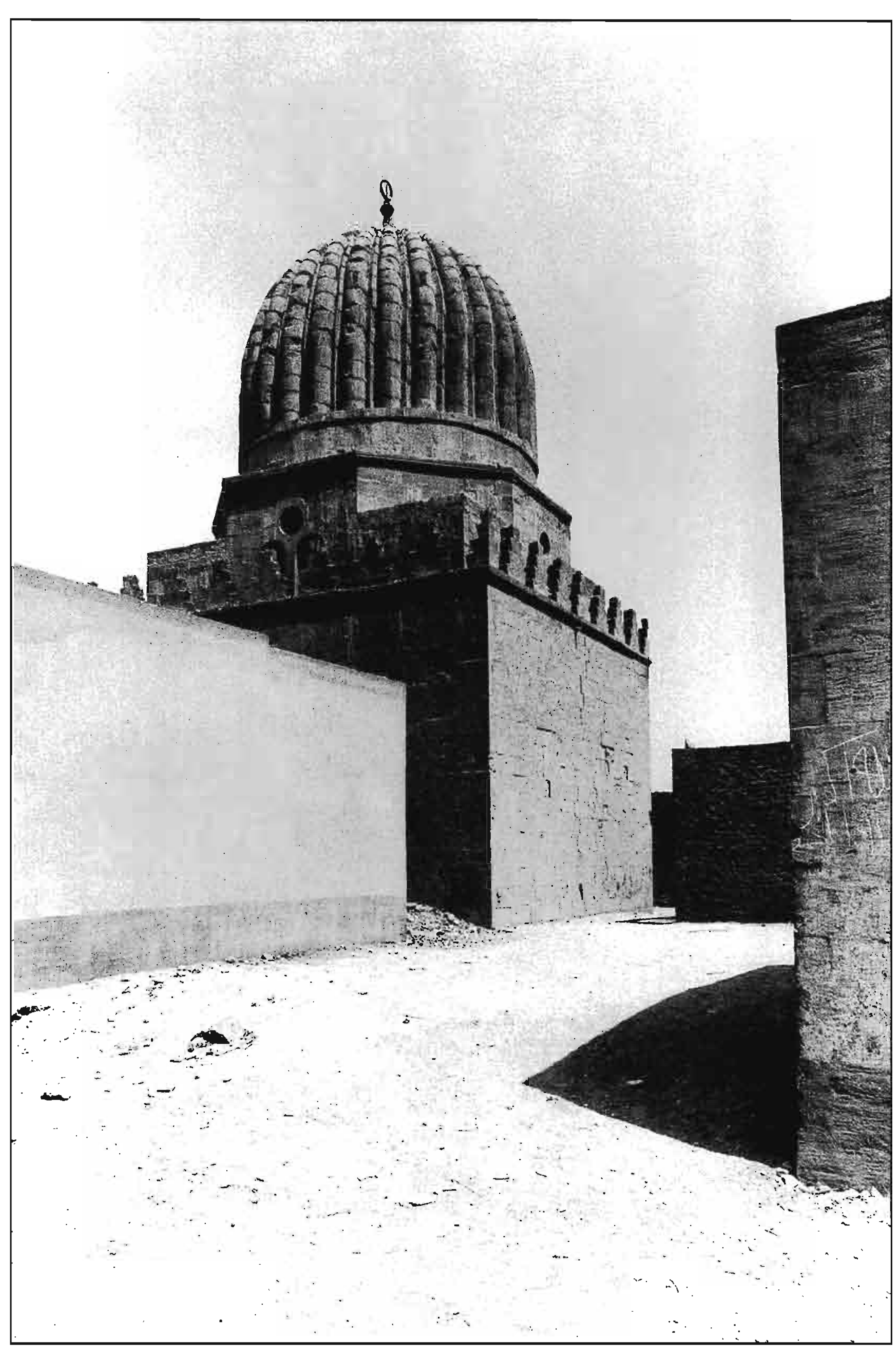


Below: Left, cupola of Nasrallah, with the cupola of Azrumuk in the background; right, cupola of Azrumuk.
Right page: Cupola of al-Sadat al-Shanahrah.

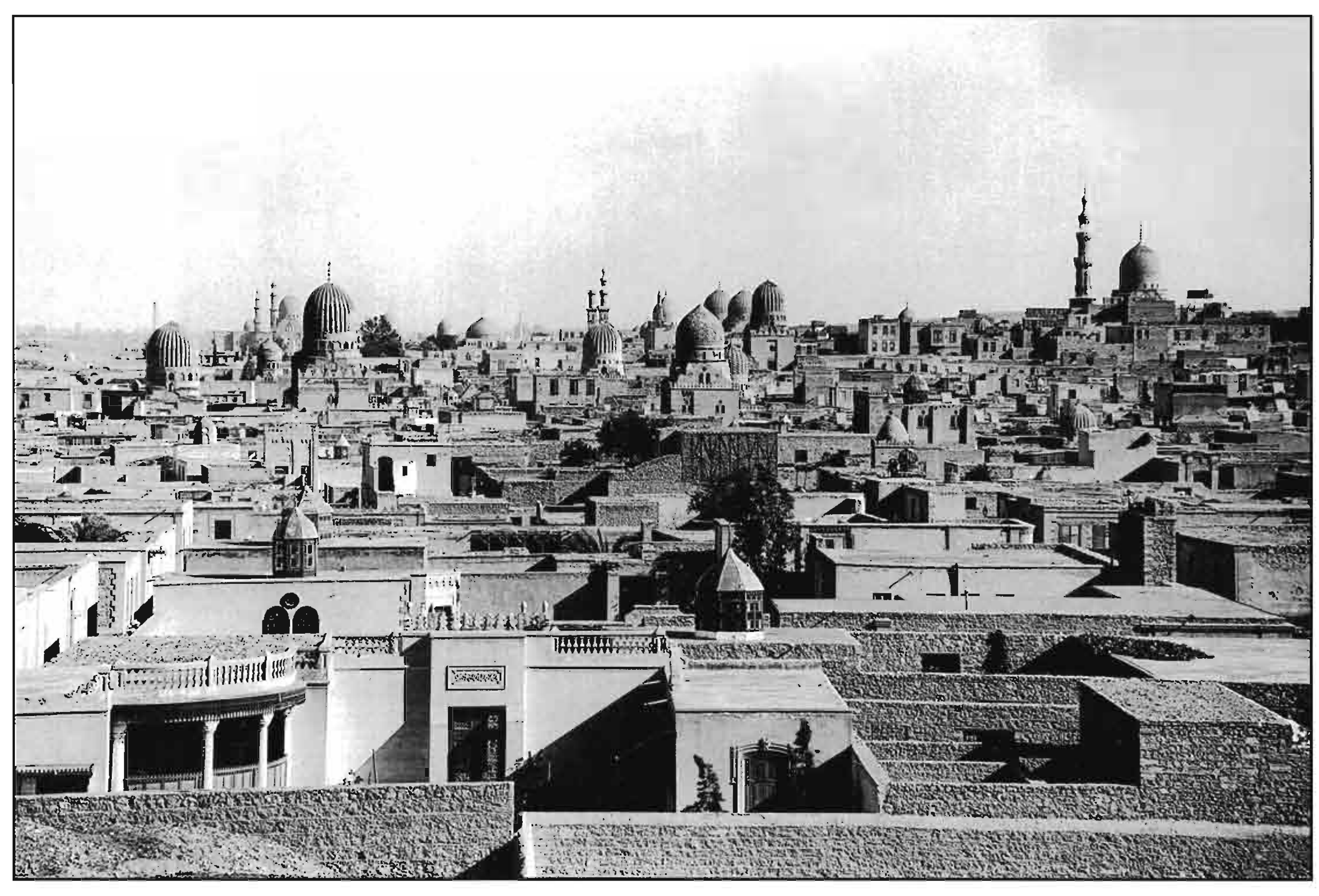




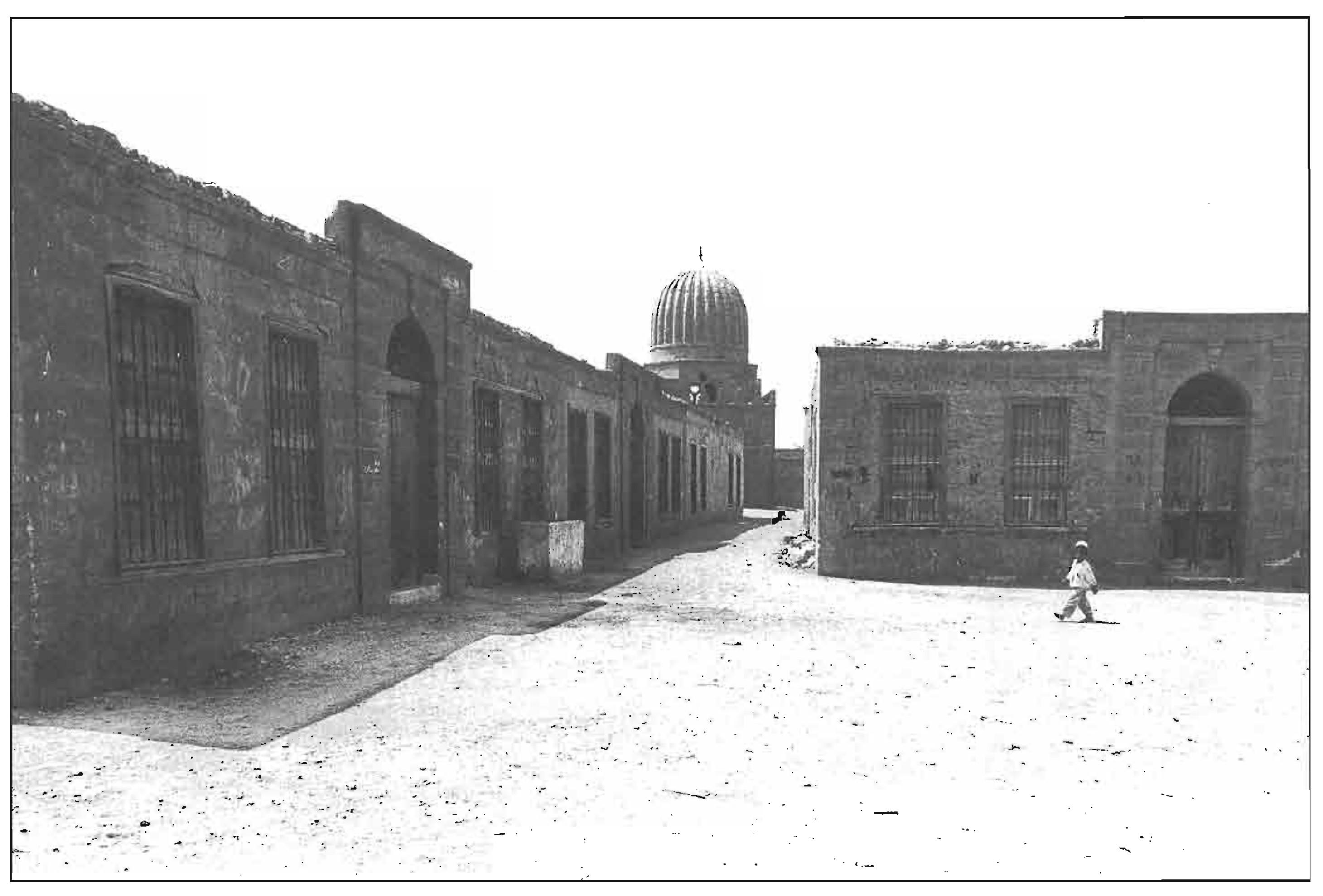




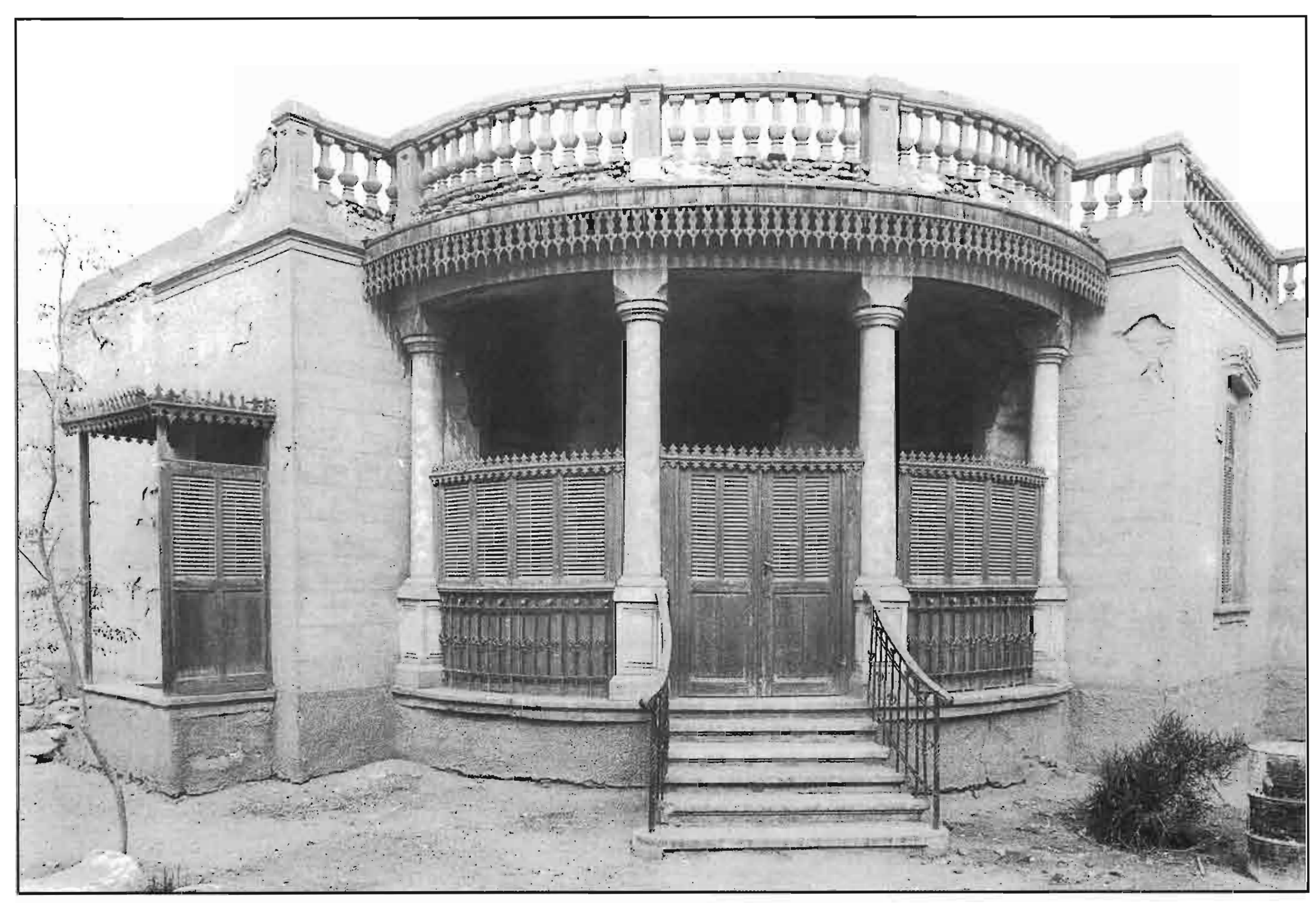
Eastern necropolis, zone 1 (photograph by Lehnert and Landrock, 1924).



Zone 1, with the cupola of al-Sadat al-Shanahrah in the background.



Below: Al-Hagin family tomb: residential pavilion overlooking the courtyard.
Right page: Street-side façade (plan surveyed by A. Bonnamy and T. Fouad).



Al-Hagin family tomb
The façade here, as with many of the other luxurious tombs in this part of the cemetery, is deceptive, and it is impossible to tell from the street how much of the plot within is occupied by buildings and how much is vacant. In this particular case, the buildings take up a mere fifth of the entire 640 square meters.

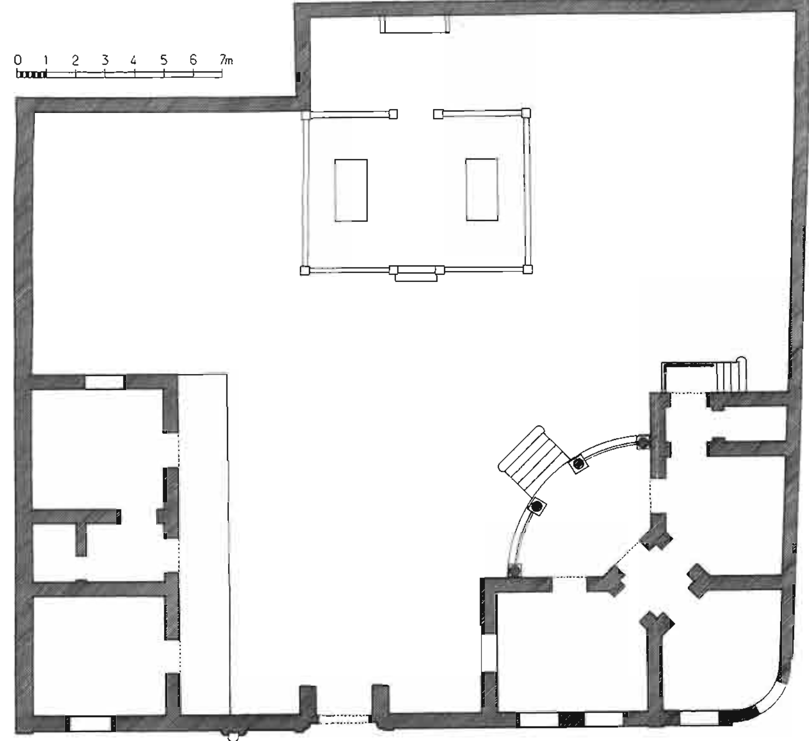
The architectonics derive mainly from the decorative 'neoclassical' style still frequently used in house-building in the early twentieth century. *Arabisance* additions to the façade are confined to minor enhancements: the stalactite-embellished lintel soffit above the entrance gate and the merlons of its crowning acroterion. The *sabil* is just a small fountain with a basin, whose only *arabisance* feature is its crowning stalactite and merlon cornice framed within a rectangular band engraved with an interlace pattern.

Although from the street outside, this building looks like a monolith, the entrance gate opens onto an empty space: a courtyard with two small buildings, one in the left-hand corner and the other in the right, with nothing in common except for the fact that they share the same back wall, which surrounds the entire plot.

To the left is the service building, a 67m² parallelepiped with three doors and two windows sheltered by a projecting roof with a wooden lambrequin-style eaves board. To the right are the visitors' reception rooms, housed in a very different looking building: an L-shaped floor plan with the curve of vestibule in the right angle forming what looks like a quadrant protruding from the courtyard side of the

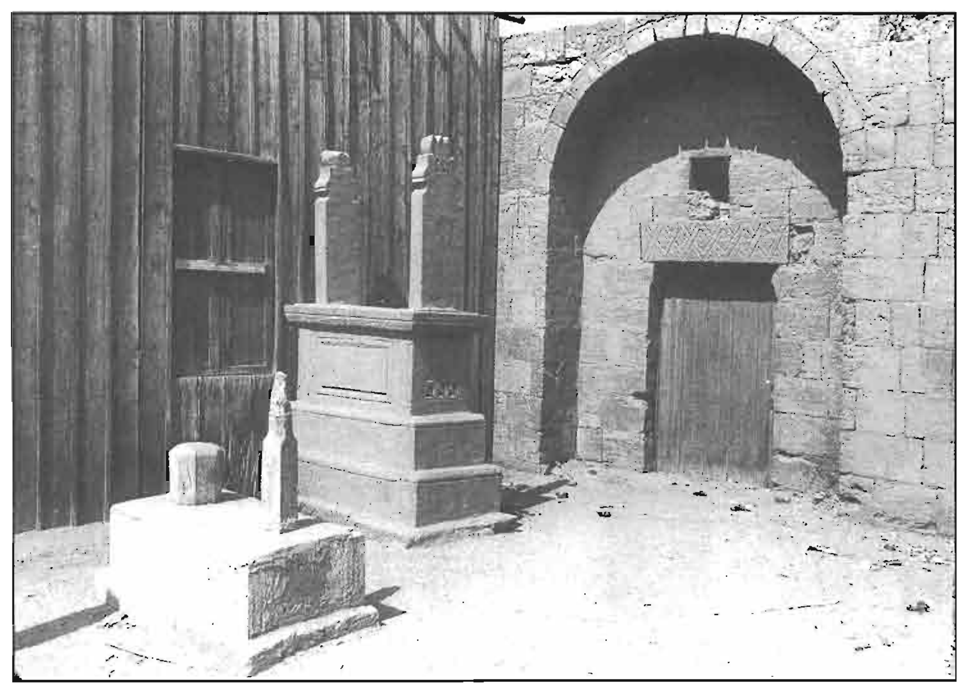
façade wall. It is a very elegant building, with four supporting Tuscan columns on pedestals, a cornice with a carved wooden valance, and an acroter with square pear-shaped balusters continuing round to the outer wall. The quality of the layout is worth noting: a square space at the center surrounded by a couple of arcs, two rectangles, and a curved corner which used to look out over a crossroads in the days before the plot plan was changed and the adjacent tomb was built.

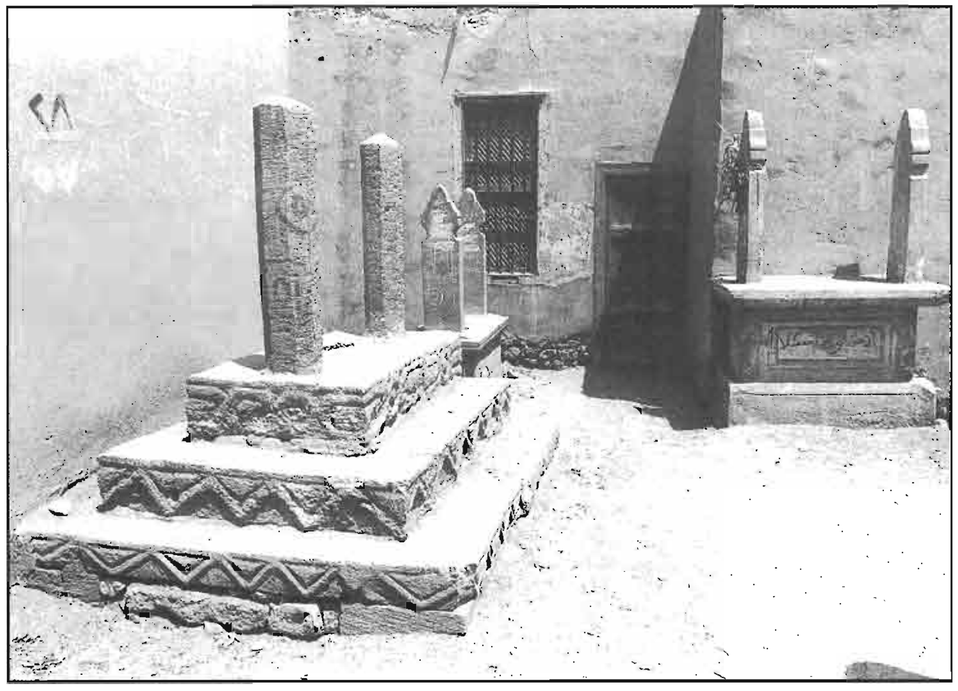
This tomb has no oratory, just two magnificent ornamental sarcophagi made of marble and built in the classical style, with a small column at each corner and side panels featuring carved foliage and palmette patterns, standing majestically on a simple rectangular paved terrace surrounded by a balustrade. The entrance to the terrace is flanked by two pedestal vases. The stonework throughout is of remarkably high quality.



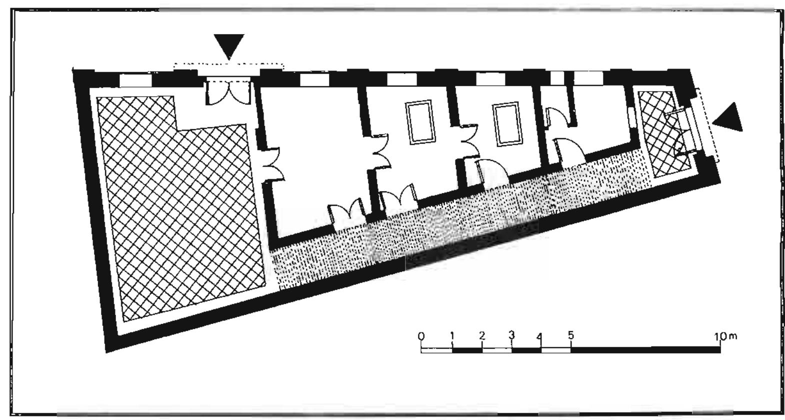
Al-Hagin family tomb:
Left, fountain; above right, guardian's loggia; below right, tombstones.

Various types of tombstones:
Above, small tombstone over the grave of a male child, bearing a column and skullcap; below, tombstone in the shape of a stepped mastaba, *topped with two columns.*



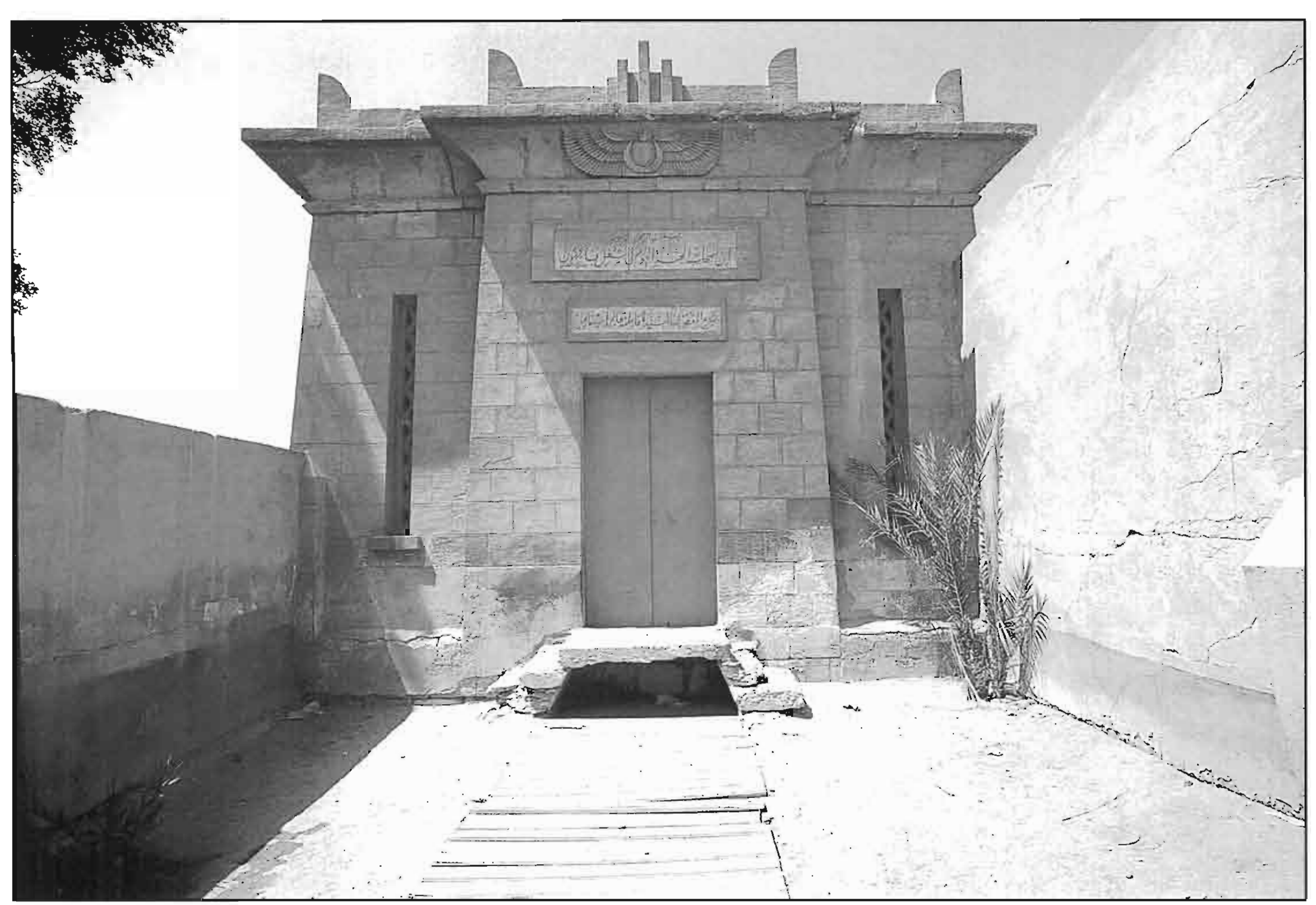


Sirafi family tomb, 1930s:
Interior courtyard (plan surveyed by G. El Kadi and A. Bonnamy).

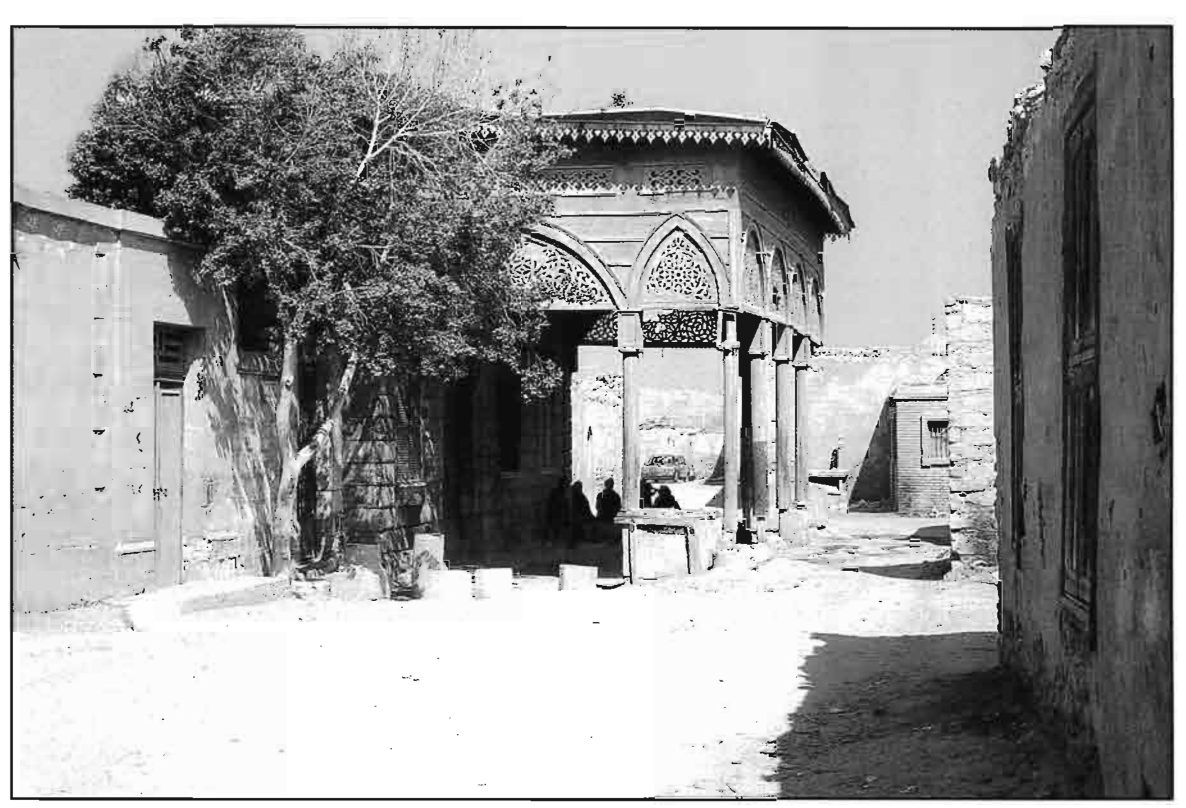


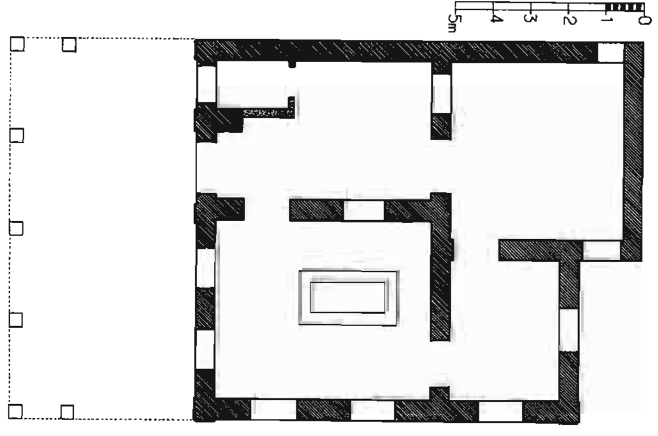
Sirafi family tomb, reception room.

Tomb of F. Isma'il, in the pharaonic style, 1930.



Tomb of Salih Pasha Silim, 1910:
The burial place has no interior courtyard; instead the seating area extends to the outside and is protected by a canopy with valance, held up by wooden pillars (plan surveyed by A. Bonnamy).



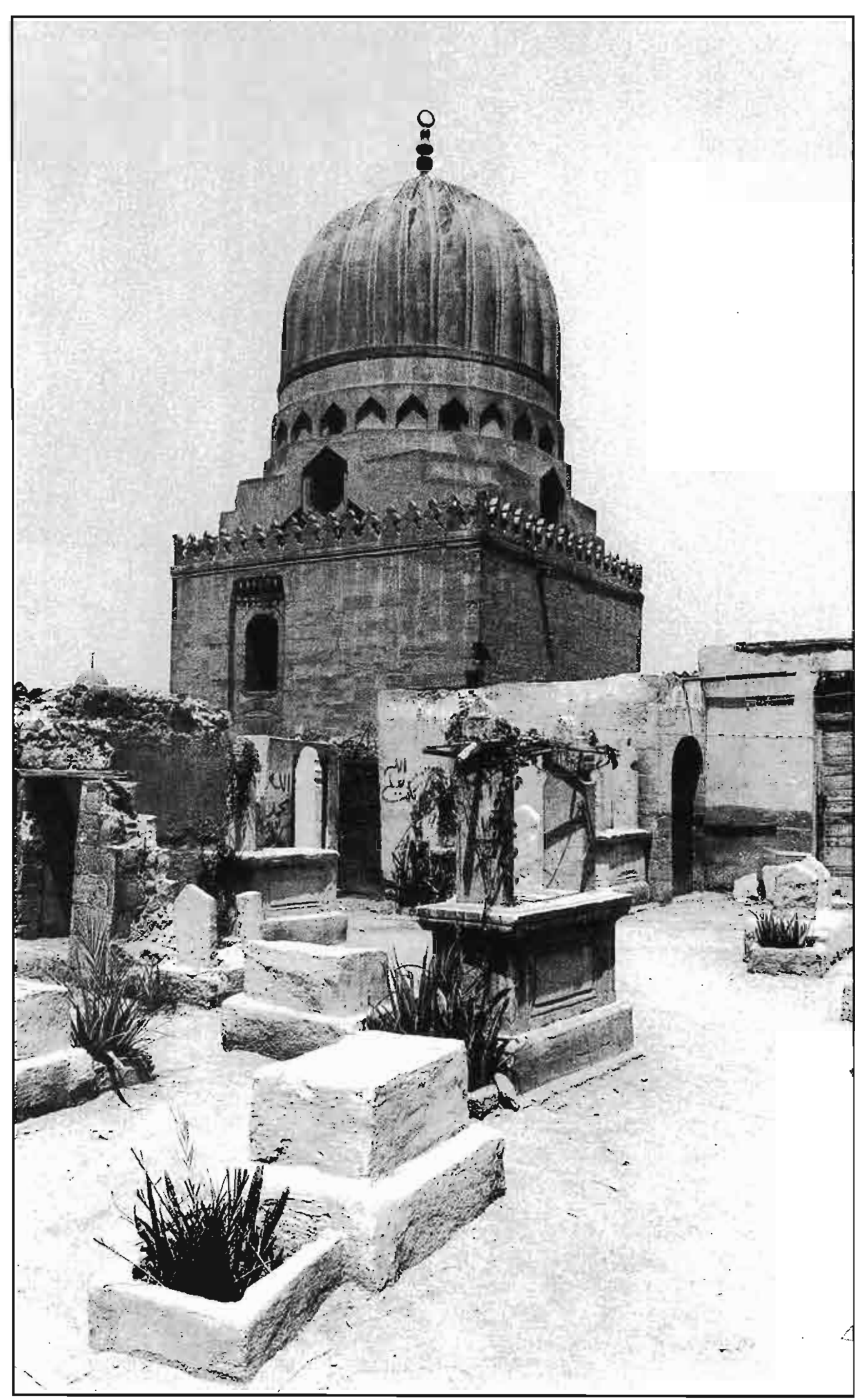


Ghuzal mausoleum.

Returning to the Khawand Talhai–Sultan Ahmad intersection, we continue north through what is the oldest and most rundown part of this zone. Some fifty meters on, set back slightly from the street, stands the Mausoleum of Ghuzal, known as Sidi Karkar (1403). Next, on the left just beyond al-'Afifi Road, we come to the tomb of Azrumuk (1504); and then, halfway along al-'Afifi between this tomb and Bab Qaytbay, are the remains of the oldest tomb in the necropolis: the Mausoleum of Amir Tashtimur (1334), which is popularly known as the *hummus akhdar* or 'green chickpea.' This area, a buffer between the cemetery and the urban core, has been severely damaged by recent upheavals caused, for instance, by the road-widening works that resulted in tombs being demolished.

At its eastern end, before it meets the freeway, al-'Afifi Road opens out onto a small square recently carved into the disorderly mass of tombs that used to block access to the royal shrine dedicated to the son of Muhammad 'Ali.

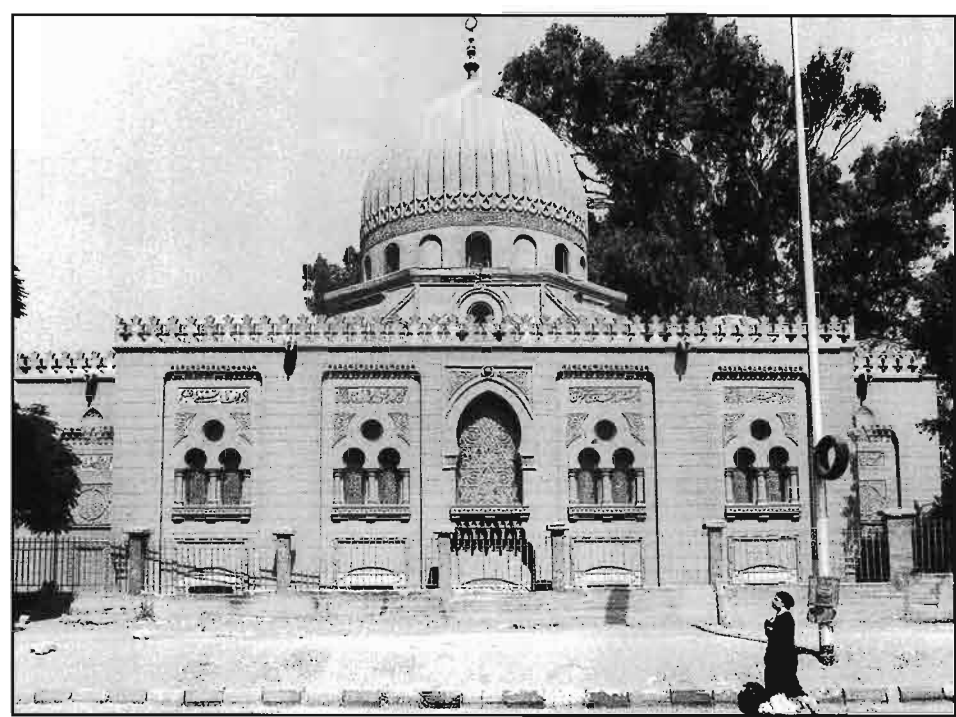
This 2,500m² funerary complex stands enclosed within an iron-railing fence put up recently by the *Service des Antiquités*. It is like a leafy oasis, and the contrast between it and the surrounding desert of sand and

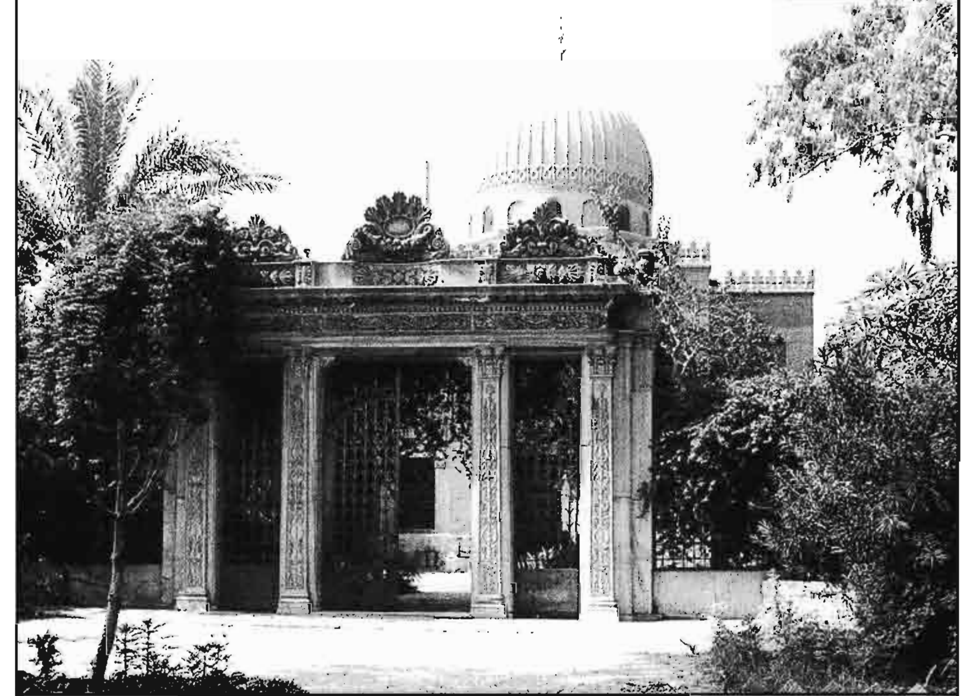


Khedive Tawfiq's tomb:
Above, main façade overlooking the highway; below, entrance from the 'Afifi Road side.

stone is remarkable. Designed in 1894 by the architect Fabricius Bey, the complex contains many different kinds of tombs, ranging from the simple marble gravestones of the princesses carefully laid out around the park to a Mamluk-style domed mosque–mausoleum that houses the graves of the khedives Tawfiq (1879–92) and 'Abbas Hilmi (1892–1914), together with those of Hilmi's son, 'Abd al-Mun'im, and mother, Bamba Qadin, for whom the beautiful Umm 'Abbas *sabil* was built in Saliba Road. The furnishings—wooden cenotaphs, armchairs, and sofas—were designed in the workshops of the school of arts and crafts set up by the pasha's mother, and this is her final resting place. The armchairs were moved here from 'Abdin Palace, and were used during the ceremony for the opening of the Suez Canal.[29]

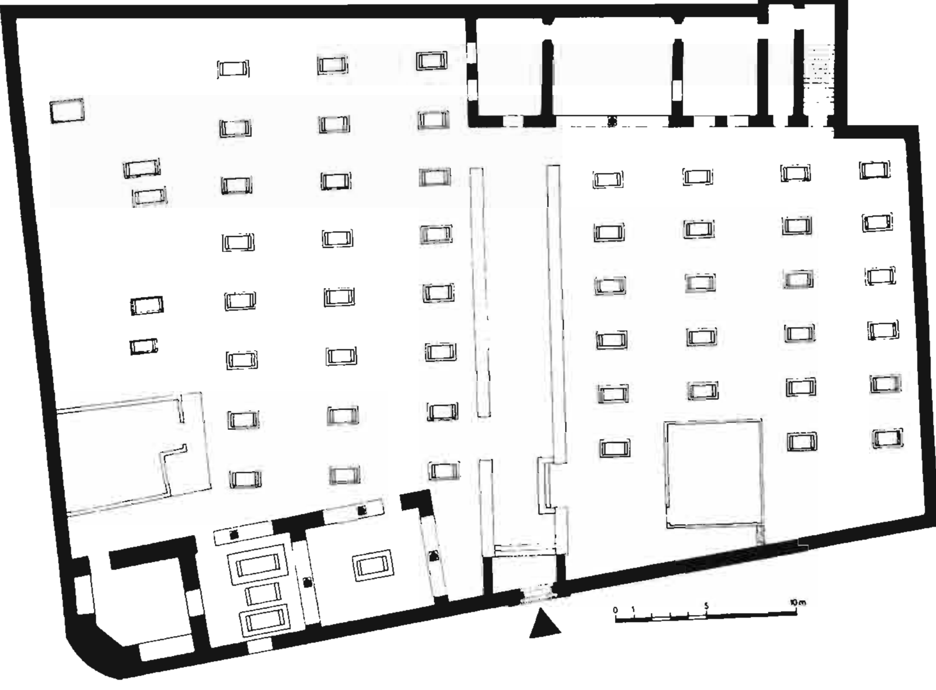
Another enclosure to the north of the royal tombs contains the mausoleum of the venerable Shaykh al-'Afifi (d. 1758),[30] after whom this cemetery is named. It is surrounded by numerous tombs of Sufis and followers, but also of princes, high-ranking state officials, their wives, and emancipated slaves. The whole area is surrounded by sycamore and eucalyptus trees. A third enclosure houses the rarest tomb in the eastern necropolis.

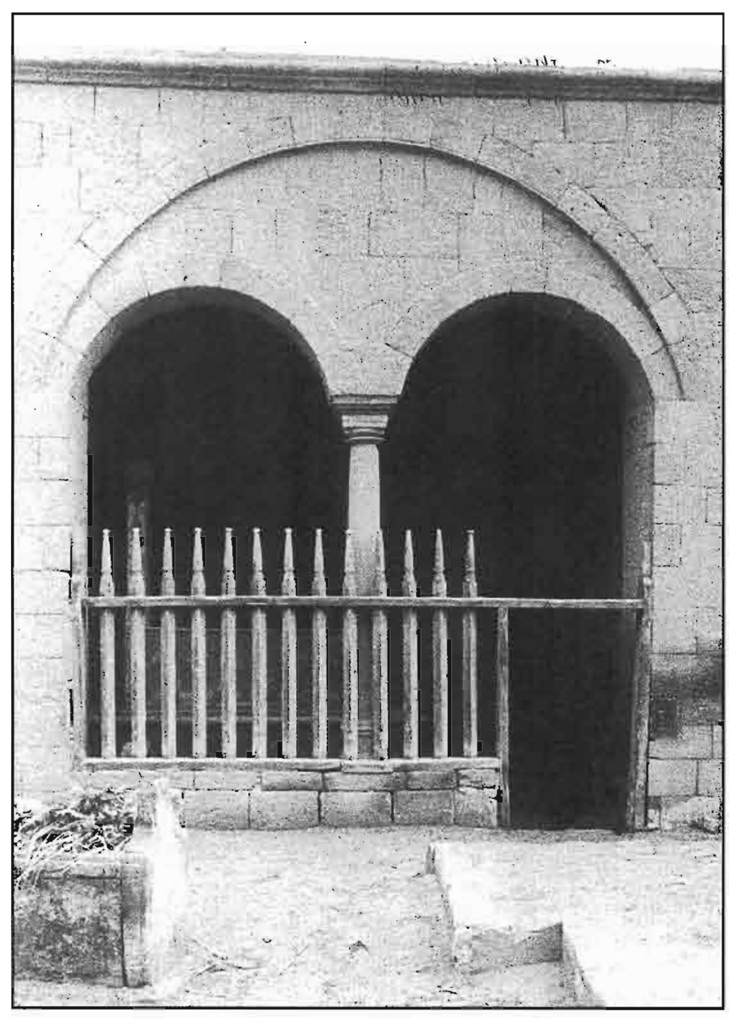




Funerary foundation of the heirs of Bamba and Zaynab Khatun, wife of Prince Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar, 1858:
Below: open oratory (plan surveyed by A. Bonnamy and T. Fouad).
Right page: Above, walls and entrance gate; below, general view of the entire plot.

The Tomb of Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar
So far, in our endeavors to describe a selection of outstanding tombs, we have come across two main styles of architecture that may, in some respects, appear at odds with one another, yet which are frequently found to coexist in an entirely acceptable symbiotic relationship. We are referring here to the majority of the surviving tombs, built between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and not, of course, to the oldest funerary mosques and mausolea. Those of interest to us were built by unknown architects in the same style as the contemporary housing of the time: neoclassical, with a few decorative rather than structural *arabisance* features to denote the purpose of the premises. Those that are the most—and even entirely—*arabisance* in style left us with the impression of a form of architecture imprisoned in stereotypes that stifled any potential inventiveness. And yet this is the model that became widespread in the latter half of the twentieth century, even when confined to a simple brick and iron gate set in a wall a few meters high. This attachment to an architectural model linked to an idealized form for places of worship can be compared to the French cemeteries where, centuries after the abandonment of Gothic architecture, small chapels were still being built with such decorative features as gates with pointed arches, small engaged columns, stained glass windows, and so on—all harking back to fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Gothic. The neoclassical model, for its part, vanished in the mid-twentieth century not only because a standardized *arabisance* style developed, but also because architects were beginning to work on 'modern'-style civil buildings, which had very little impact on funerary architecture.





Funerary foundation of the heirs of Bamba and Zaynab Khatun, wife of Prince Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar, 1858:
Left page: Above left, detail of the oratory's archways; below left, decoration of the sabil *trough, at the angle; right, reception building portico.*
Below: Ceremonial sarcophagus, topped by a shahid *(witness) and three pillars.*

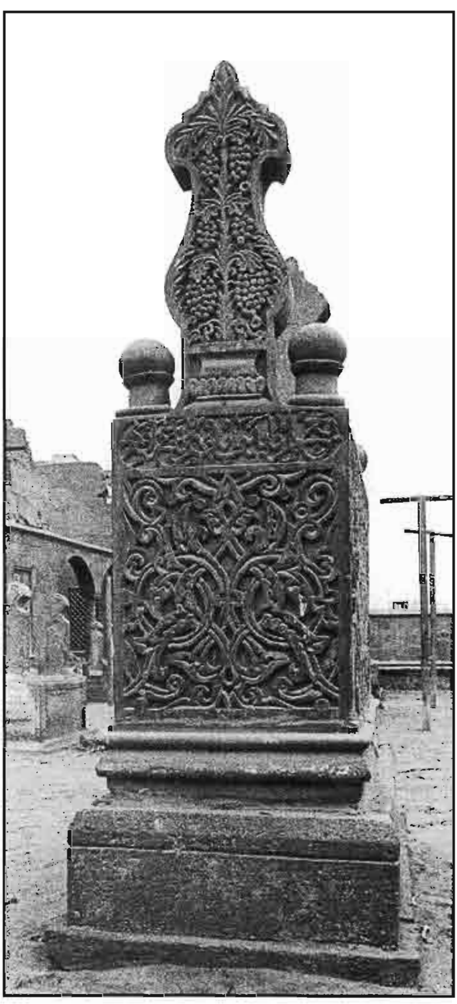
The tomb we are about to look at here conforms to neither of the architectural categories above: stereotypical *arabisance* or neoclassicism. This tomb, built in 1858 for Prince Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar by his wife Zaynab Khatun, is not a listed monument and is of no particular historical interest. It does, however, provide a good illustration of an architectural mode predating the 'Muslim mannerism' that began to emerge at the end of the nineteenth century in the face of growing Western influence.

Occupying a 1,600m² trapezoid-shaped plot containing fifty-six ornamental sarcophagi, this is effectively a cemetery within a cemetery. Two buildings with no particular spatial relationship between them stand at opposite corners of the site. The first, at the intersection of two roads, has a curved corner featuring a pretty marble *sabil* decorated with a bas-relief vase and acanthus-like foliage. It serves as an oratory and has two near-windowless façades on the street side. The two interior façades open fully onto the courtyard, with three sets of double-arched openings each sustained by a column. Access is partly restricted by a set of wooden railings resting on a low wall consisting of two rows of stones. Inside stand the finest of the ornamental sarcophagi.

The reception building covers more or less the same surface area as the oratory. All that is left of its upper story, however, are a few sections of wall, the corbel pieces, and the angle braces. The design of the first floor conveys the same sense of sobriety as the oratory, but the windows here are rectangular and fitted with wooden screens or wrought-iron grilles. The entrance is a portico composed of two double arches on a spiral-fluted column.

Although modest in their size and ornamentation, these two buildings are well

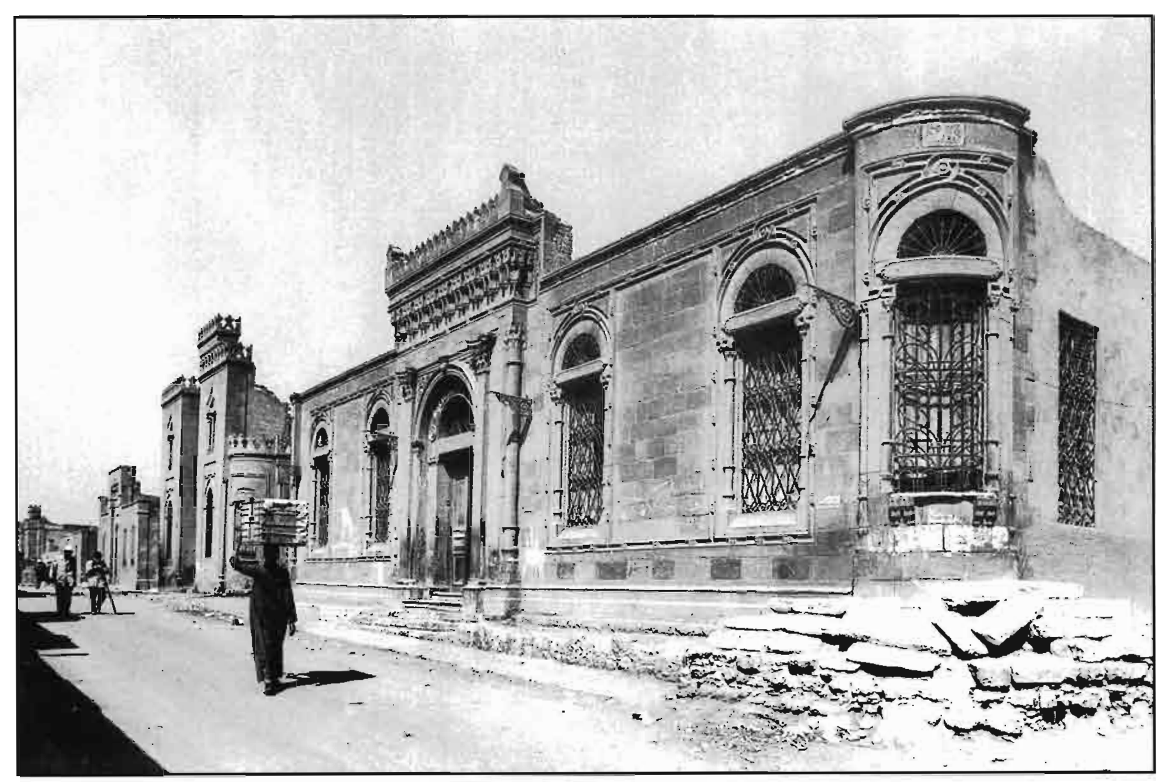
Funerary foundation of the heirs of Bamba and Zaynab Khatun, wife of Prince Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar, 1858: Ceremonial sarcophagi bearing shahids with floral motifs or decorated with Qur'anic inscriptions.

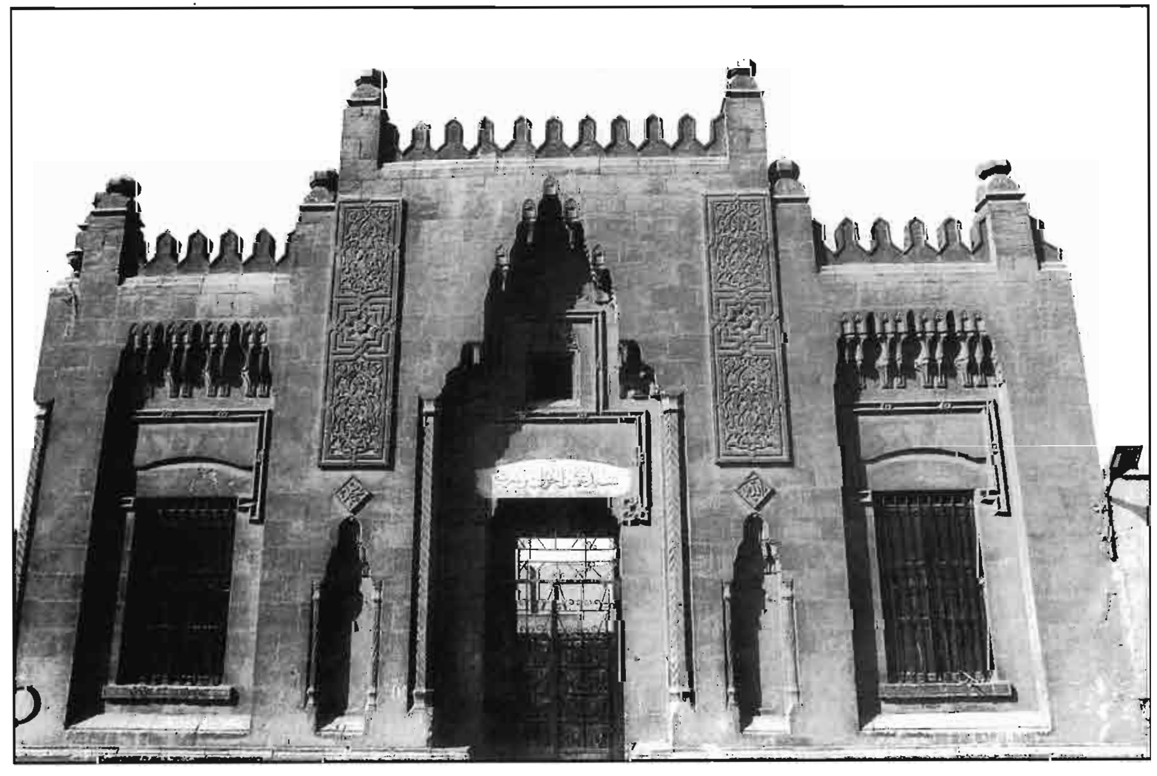


proportioned in terms of volume and the design of the openings enhancing their façades. The stonework in their dressing and cornice moldings is simple and elegant. And the stone of the enclosure wall has been worked with as much care as that of the buildings, especially in regard to the crowning cornice, which echoes the form of the entrance gate's semicircular arch with its entablature.

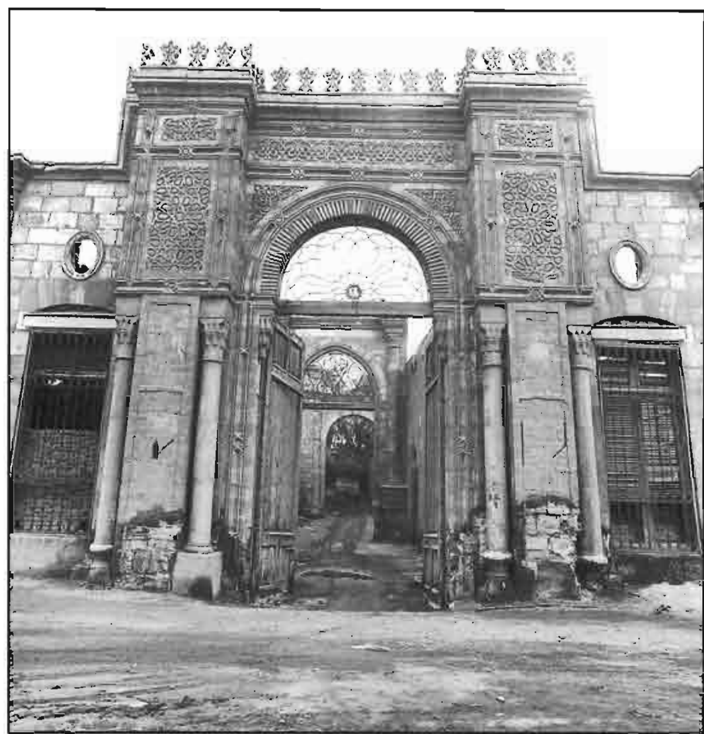
There are also several extremely rare ornamental sarcophagi with bas-relief panels featuring patterns of interlaced foliage, acanthus leaves, bunches of grapes, and magnificent square Kufi calligraphy.

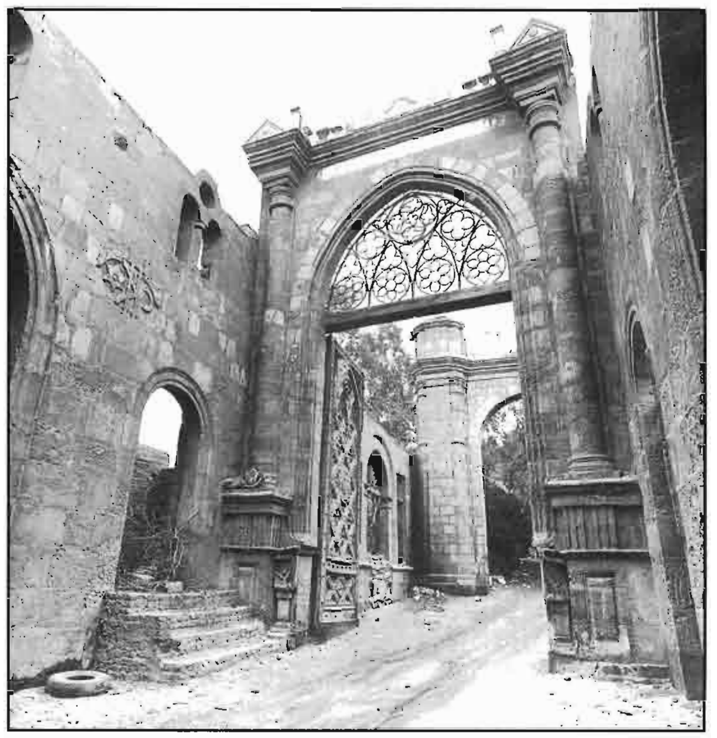
Al-Khassa Street: Above, al-Iman Mosque, founded by Muhammad Husayn al-Inan al-Rifa'i, 1910; below, al-Khuli family mausoleum, 1939.



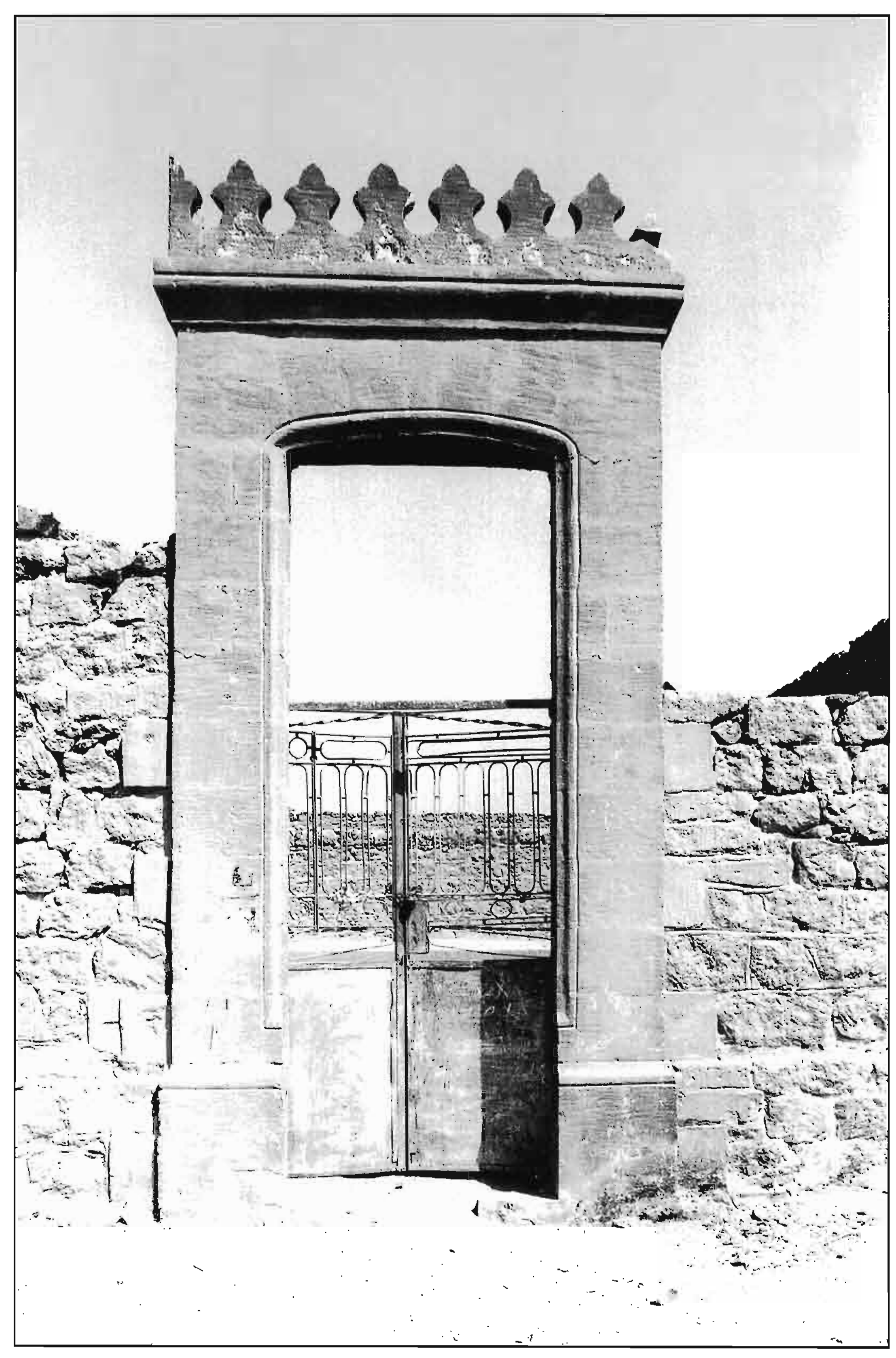


Palace built for the mother of Khedive Isma'il, purchased by the Waqad family and rebuilt in the eastern necropolis in 1870: main façade, Sultan Ahmad Road.

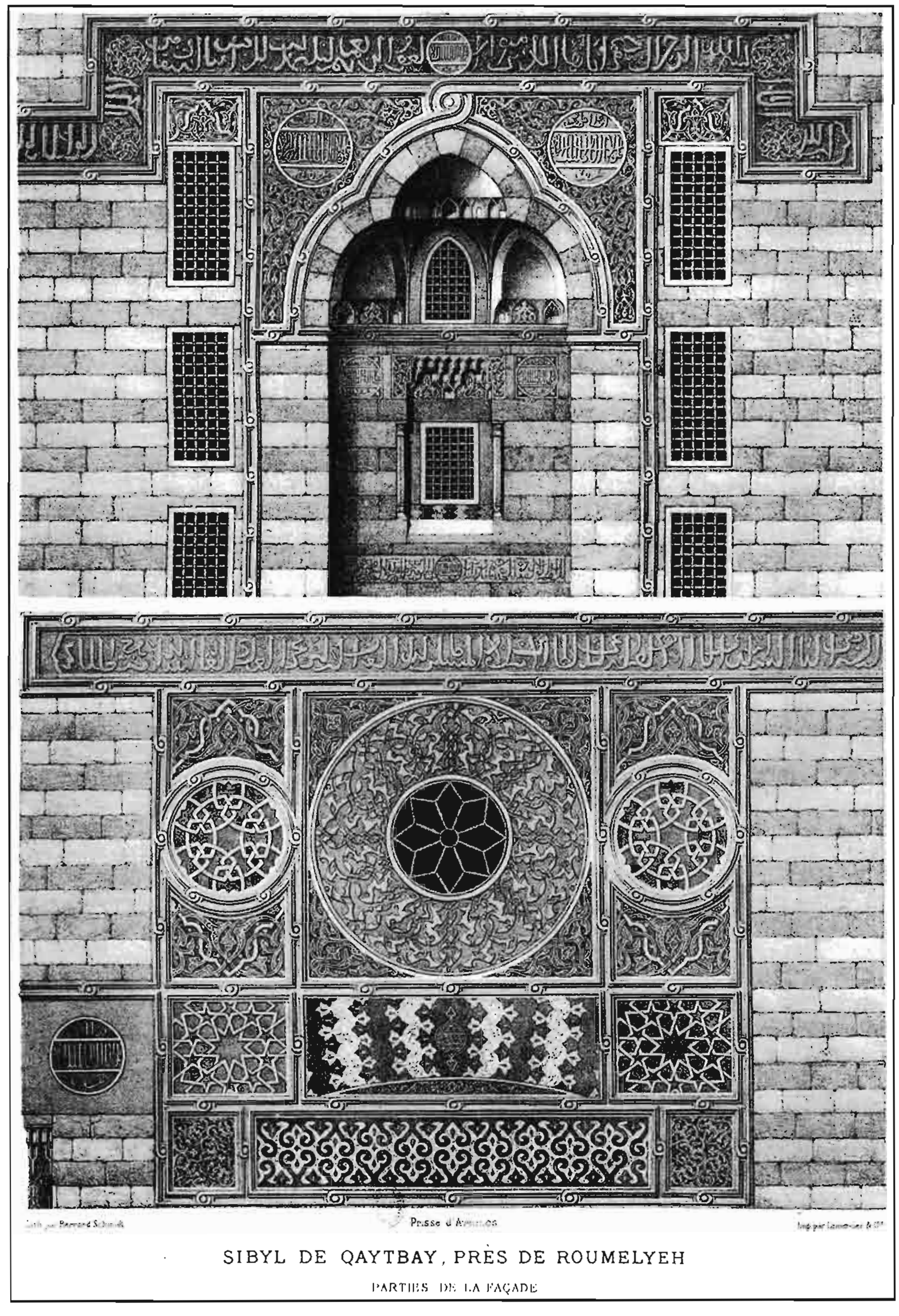




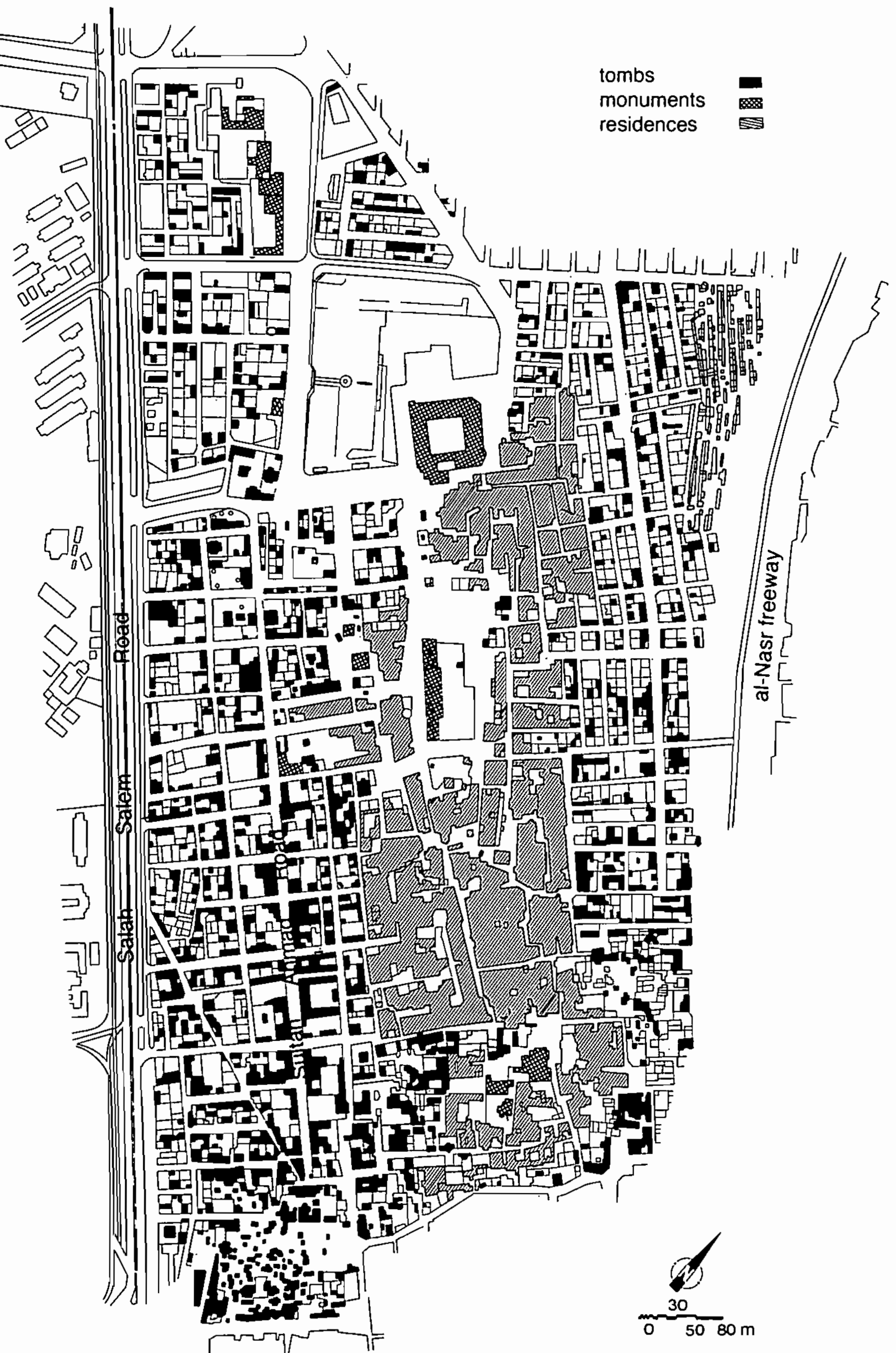
Al-Waqad family mausoleum, interiors.



Zone 2, sabil *of Qaytbay (illustration by Prisse d'Avennes).*



Access map for zone 2, southern sector (drawing by T. Fouad and T. Youssef, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).



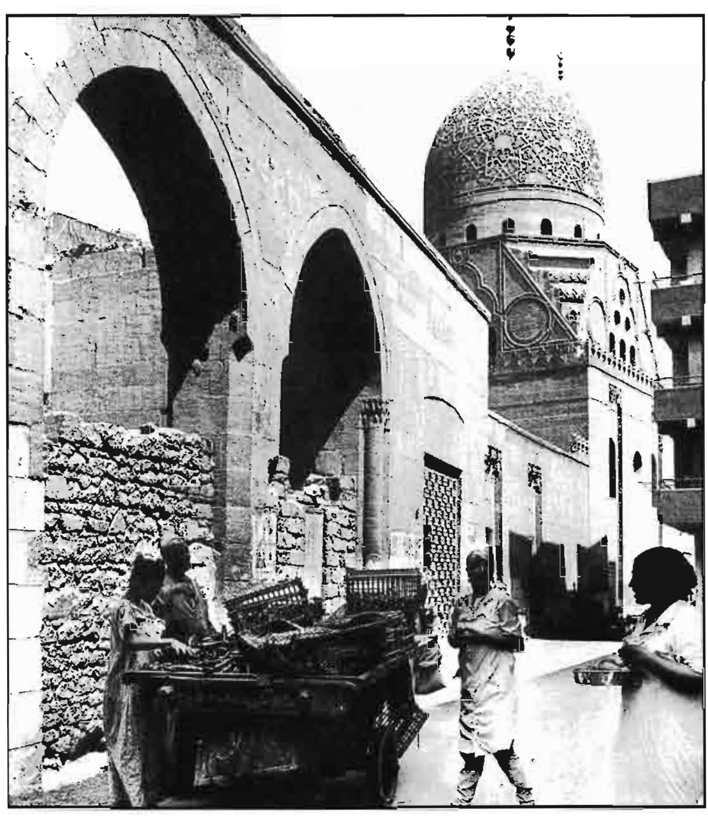
Zone 2: Qaytbay

The royal complexes built for the last of the Burgi sultans are reached by following a small alleyway off al-'Afifi Road, which runs through two residential blocks incorporating both tombs and housing to a four-meter-wide gate with a Gothic arch, set between two buildings. This gate is one of two openings in the walls surrounding the Sultan Qaytbay funerary complex. Once through the gate, the road plunges into a city district not unlike those found in the medieval old town, with labyrinthine alleyways, dead ends, and tiny squares. There are multistory apartment buildings dating back to different periods—with cafés, shops, and workshops at street level—and large, multifunction monumental complexes. The similarity between this street and those running through the center of the old town is amazing, especially by virtue of the foundations that line them.

The mosque–mausoleum of Qaytbay

This magnificent edifice is instantly eye-catching in its proportions and general harmony. It was the last mausoleum built in the Mamluk areas of the desert, on the orders of Sultan Qaytbay, one of the last three Burgi sultans. Qaytbay, a Circassian from Kipchak on the Volga, was kidnapped as a child by slave traders who sold him to Sultan Barsbay for fifty dinars. Emancipated by Barsbay's successor, he worked his way up through the ranks of the Mamluk hierarchy and was proclaimed sultan in 1468 at the age of fifty-five. During the first six years of his reign, he indulged his love of architecture by having a funerary complex built for himself, not far from his former master's mausoleum.[31] Throughout his twenty-eight-year reign (1468–96), he devoted as much attention to architecture as he did to defending the frontiers of his state against the marauding Ottomans and their expansionist ambitions. In addition to the citadels of Alexandria and

Left, one of the two gates allowing access to the wall around the Qaytbay funerary complex; right, road leading to the mausoleum and madrasa *of Qaytbay.*

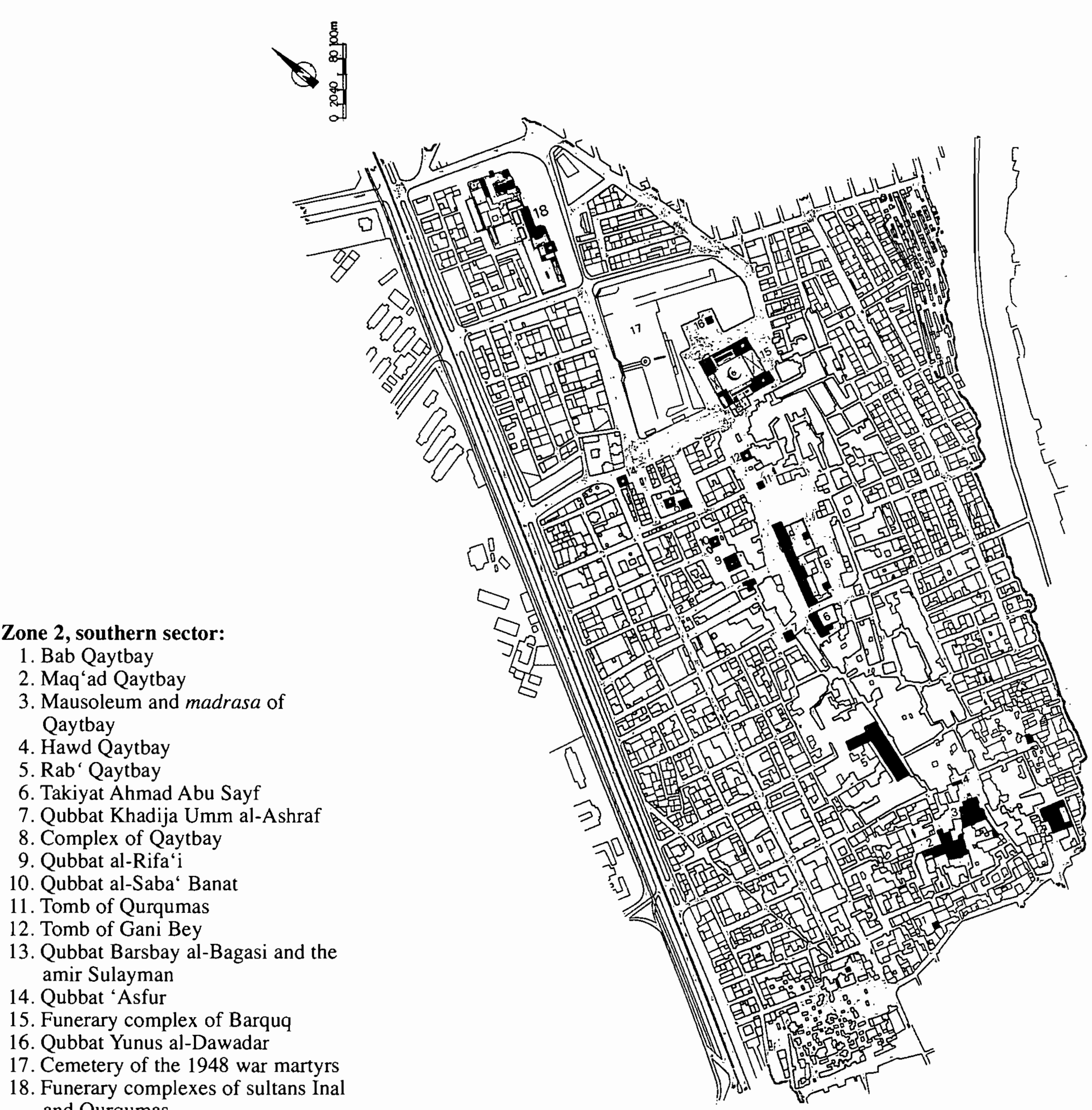


Rosetta, he endowed Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Mecca with eighty-five buildings; seventeen were built in Egypt alone.[32]

The funerary complex in the desert is one of the most remarkable of these. It is pictured on the Egyptian pound note, in the paintings of all Orientalist artists, and in the texts of most chroniclers, historians, and travelers. Arab art experts hail it as the most perfect example of the style of this period:

"This complex is one of the most characteristic examples of fifteenth-century Arab art. It was built in the late fifteenth century to house the tomb of the Circassian sultan al-Ashraf Qaytbay. To this day, Arab art has not produced a more harmonious ensemble. In the center is the entrance, on the right the minaret, and on the left the *sabil* with its wide, grille-covered windows and surmounted by the inevitable *kuttab*—an elegant loggia with a double arch at the front and a triple arch at the side. Further left, in the background, is the tomb surmounted by a dome whose interlacing patterns form polygonal arrangements of intersecting arabesques so delicate and fine that they look as though they were borrowed from a magnificent piece of goldsmith's work. The drum sits on an octagonal terrace from which four pendentives, each with an outstandingly original curvilinear stepped back, rise to join the square substruction. The design makes ingenious use of perspective, the shape of the tomb standing out boldly from the lateral alignment in such a way as to bring out the full importance of the dome while allowing it at the same time to remain a more or less integral part of the façade. The minaret is a worthy companion to the dome, the fruit of an art relying just as much on mathematical calculation as on the imagination. Towering up from a cube-shaped base on the terrace, its shaft changes in shape from the square to the octagonal then the cylindrical in regular stages, yet with such candor in the choice of ornamentation that it is engraved in the memory at a single glance as the most outstanding of the thousand minarets of Cairo. And while the soft interplay of light and shade comes second to the need to maintain the purity of its contours, the beauty of this minaret lies in its contrasts. The column-flanked niches of the

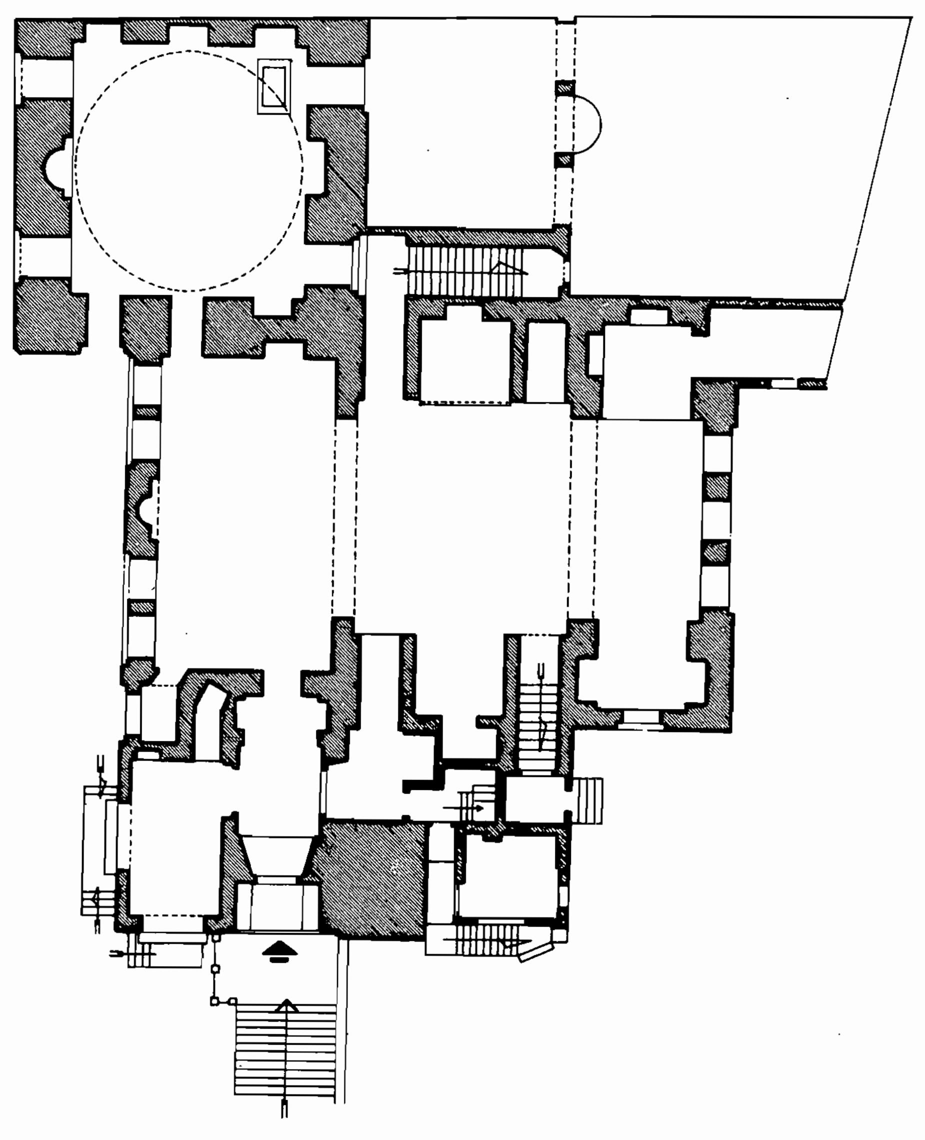
Left page: Residential plot around the complex of Qaytbay, early-twentieth-century building.
Below: Plan of the monuments in zone 2, southern sector (drawing by G. El Kadi, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).



Zone 2, southern sector:

1. Bab Qaytbay
2. Maq'ad Qaytbay
3. Mausoleum and *madrasa* of Qaytbay
4. Hawd Qaytbay
5. Rab' Qaytbay
6. Takiyat Ahmad Abu Sayf
7. Qubbat Khadija Umm al-Ashraf
8. Complex of Qaytbay
9. Qubbat al-Rifa'i
10. Qubbat al-Saba' Banat
11. Tomb of Qurqumas
12. Tomb of Gani Bey
13. Qubbat Barsbay al-Bagasi and the amir Sulayman
14. Qubbat 'Asfur
15. Funerary complex of Barquq
16. Qubbat Yunus al-Dawadar
17. Cemetery of the 1948 war martyrs
18. Funerary complexes of sultans Inal and Qurqumas

Plan of the mausoleum and madrasa *of Qaytbay (after Kessler, facsimile from the library of the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi).*



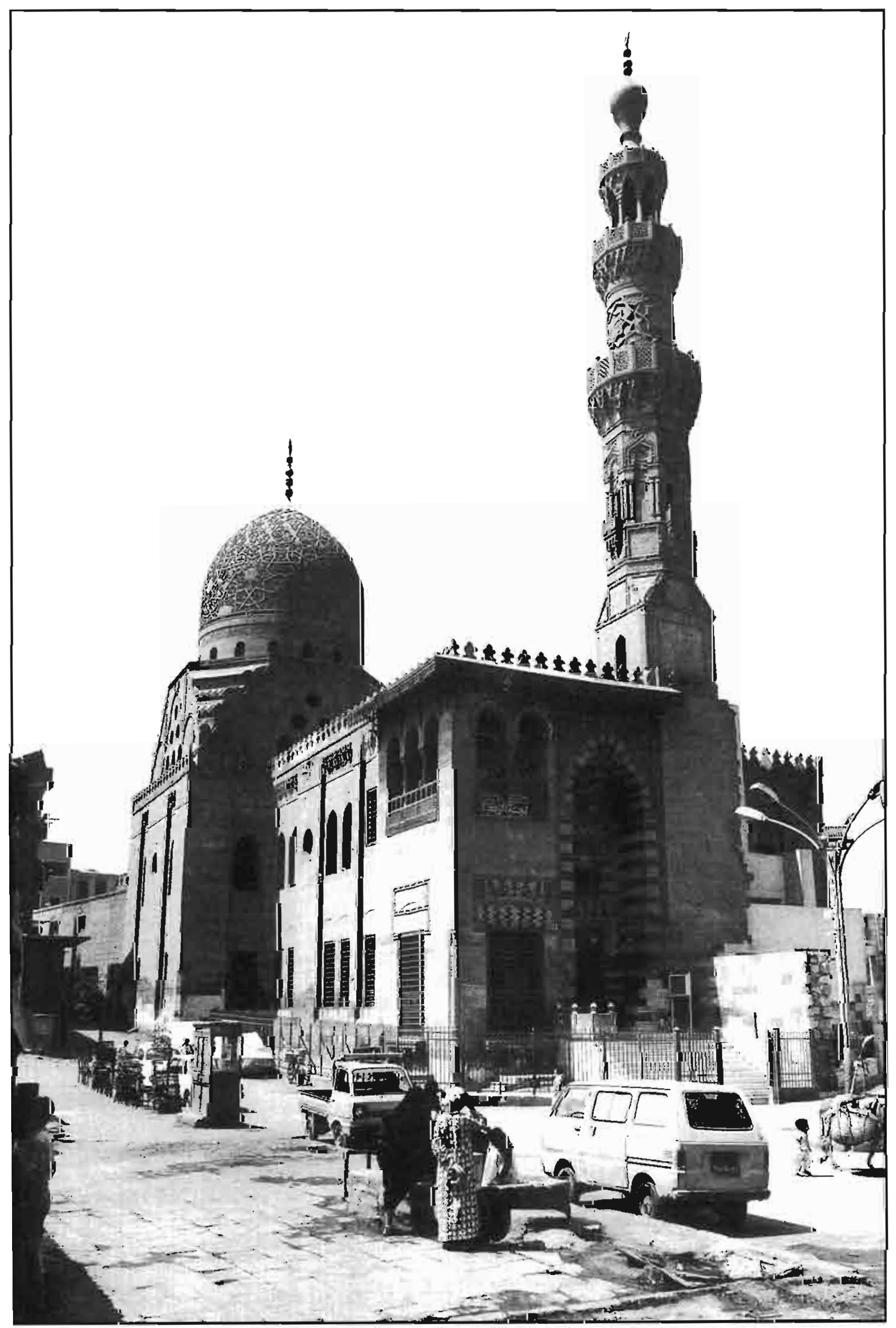
first gallery, the balcony perched upon a ring of stalactites, the twisting, intertlaced star-pattern of the second gallery, the honeycombed stalactites of the balcony above it, and the shaft of the bulb rising from the third balcony—all of this, enhanced by the intensity of the shadows, creates a bold and exuberant sense of harmony. The *tiraz* bears an inscription telling us that the building was completed in 1472."[33]

This building, however, is but the core of an outstanding group of structures that some historians have described as a "royal suburb."[34] The first components of that group to be built were the *madrasa*, with its cruciform layout and four *iwans*, and the mausoleum housing the tombs of the sultan's sons. Among the several annexes added later were the sultan's *maq'ad*, the *riwaqs* to accommodate him and the sultana when they visited, a small *sabil*, a kitchen, two washrooms, and a four-horse stable.[35]

In 1476, the group was endowed with a library. A *rab'* for the Sufis was built opposite the library, followed by a *sabil–kuttab* on the north side, and then another building of which only the façade has survived and whose function remains a bone of contention among historians: some say it was a *rab'*,[36] others a caravanserai.[37] To this core of buildings were added living quarters for al-Azhar students, a collective tomb for the sultan's emancipated slaves, apartments for important guests, lodgings for the staff responsible for upkeep and management, all the waterwheels and tanks needed for water supply, and finally houses for the dancers.[38] The whole group is surrounded by an outer wall with two entrances: the one through which we entered the complex earlier (see above), and another to the northeast beyond the ruined *rab'*.[39]

Many sixteenth-century travelers visited and spent the night in this suburb, describing the scale and splendor of those royal buildings in the middle of the desert.

Mausoleum and madrasa *of Qaytbay, main entrance.*



Others who came later were no less astonished and spellbound:

"A true gem, each piece of it carved with accomplished perfection. The florid minaret of Qaytbay is a masterpiece of its genre: the dome is perhaps unmatched by any other anywhere in the world. The phenomenal variety of ornamentation in this mosque is simply incredible: each of the tympana over the doors is decorated with a different motif; window stiles are embellished with carvings from top to bottom; shutters are furnished with bronze bearing the finest Arabic inscriptions; inside, everything is marble or woodwork inlaid with ebony and ivory, and the very stones themselves fuse together to form the most elegant interlacing."[40]

On the left side of the road as we move on through this unplanned neighborhood of relatively new residential buildings are the remains of the fifteenth-century *takiya* of Ahmad Abu Sayf. Facing it, on the opposite side, a block of houses conceals the brick dome of the *qubba* of Khadija Umm al-Ashraf (1430), which is said to house the tomb of Sultan Barsbay's mother.

Back on the other side, a few meters further on, stands a wall with two rows of vertical openings set in it, which stretches on for some three hundred meters. This is the funerary complex of Qaytbay's predecessor, Sultan Barsbay.

The sixteen-year reign of Barsbay (1422–38), who assumed the title *al-Ashraf* or 'the most noble,' was the peak of the Mamluk period in Egypt. The Egyptian fleet conquered the island of Cyprus, dethroning and taking hostage the king, Janus de Lusignan, a Frenchman of noble lineage. Once ransomed, with a Venetian merchant acting as mediator, de Lusignan and his heirs became vassals of Egypt and paid an annual tribute that amounted to quite a significant sum.[41]

Barsbay died in 1438 of a degenerative disease that had been affecting his brain

Plan of the funerary complex of Barsbay (reconstructed by L. Fernandes).

for quite some time. With his streak of cruelty and nose for business, he was far from the refined esthete. Nevertheless, following in the footsteps of his predecessors he ordered the construction of a magnificent funerary complex covering some three thousand square meters, not including the isolated outbuildings.

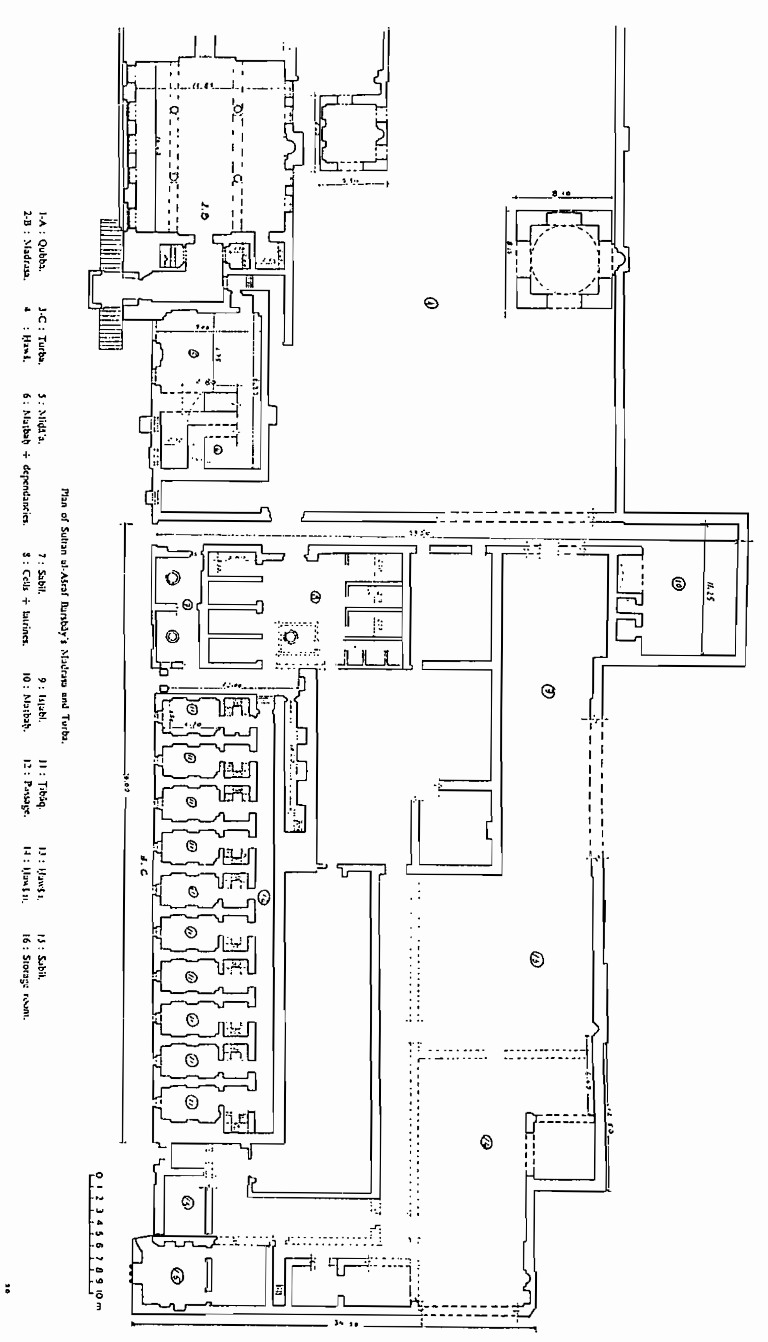
Fernandes (1981) reconstitutes the complex based on Barsbay's *waqfiya*. It consisted of four buildings situated on either side of the central thoroughfare. The two on the east side comprised the *madrasa* and the *khanqah*. They shared a single continuous façade and were interconnected inside by a passage leading from the main entrance. Each also had its own separate secondary entrance.

The *madrasa* consisted of two *iwans* flanking a *durqa'a*; the two-story mausoleum with the *riwaq* or 'living room' on the first and, on the second, a *tabaqa* (a sort of split-level living unit); a kitchen; a fountain; and the *hawsh*, that is, the open-air part of the tomb. It was a dual-purpose building, acting both as a mosque and as a school for teaching the Hanafite rite.

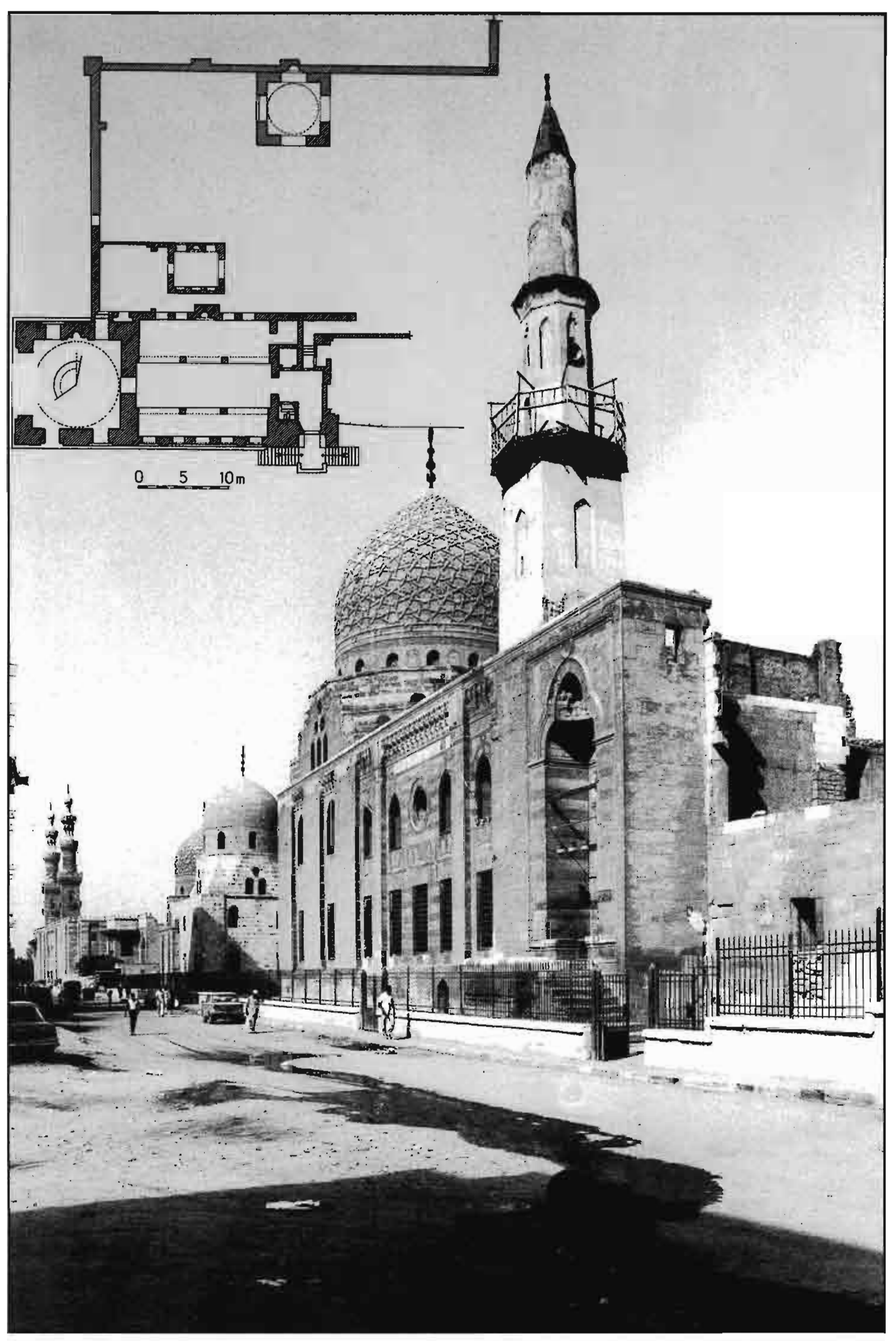
The *khanqah* comprised two *sabil*s, two *riwaq*s, ten *tibaq*, seven *khilwa*s (storerooms), two water tanks, two *hawsh*es, a stable, a kitchen, a *makan,* and a *mihrab*. It served as a hostel and a place of prayer for the Sufi students coming to take courses, to meditate, and to recite the Qur'an.[42]

As for the other two buildings making up this complex, they stood, somewhat isolated, west of Barsbay Mosque. One was a *zawya* for the poor and the other a monastery for the Rifa'iya Sufi order.[43]

The buildings may have gone, and the magnificent, austere beauty of the place—as depicted in the engravings of eighteenth-century artists—may have deteriorated as new buildings went up on its outskirts in the latter twentieth century, but the view from here is legendary. It takes in domes across



Funerary complex of Barsbay (plan after Fernandes, drawing by H. Wasfi).



the whole of Cairo's necropolitan landscape; five domes can be seen.

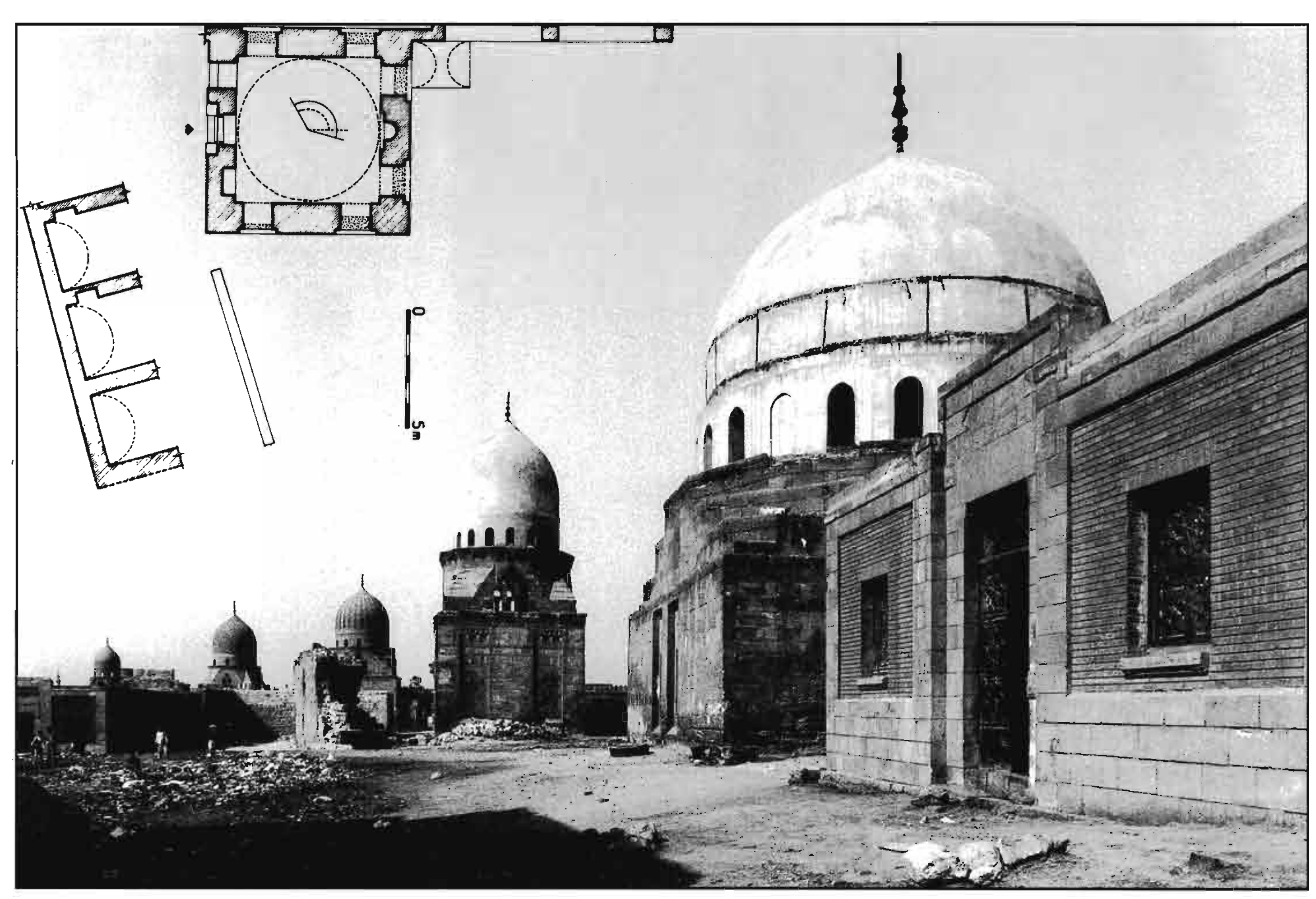
Panning from south to north, the first and most recent of these belongs to the mausoleum of al-Rifa'i; next comes the dome of the so-called Saba' Banat mausolea;[44] then those of the adjacent tombs of Amir Sulayman and Barsbay al-Bagasi,[45] with their enclosure wall and gate still standing; and finally, some way off in the distance, the isolated Mausoleum of 'Asfur (1506).[46]

Continuing along Sultan Ahmad, the road begins to widen and the residential buildings lining the west side begin to diminish in height. Opposite that continuous ocher façade of rough-cast tenements built in the early twentieth century is a vast empty space surrounded by railings and containing the domed mausolea of Gani Bey al-Ashrafi (1430), one of Barsbay's Mamluks, and Amir Qurqumas (1511), the latter mausoleum having been moved here in 1981 from its original site at the entrance to the grand mosque of al-Hakim when it was being renovated. These two monuments have so little in common with each other and with their surrounding environment that they resemble enormous sculptures or open-air museum pieces.

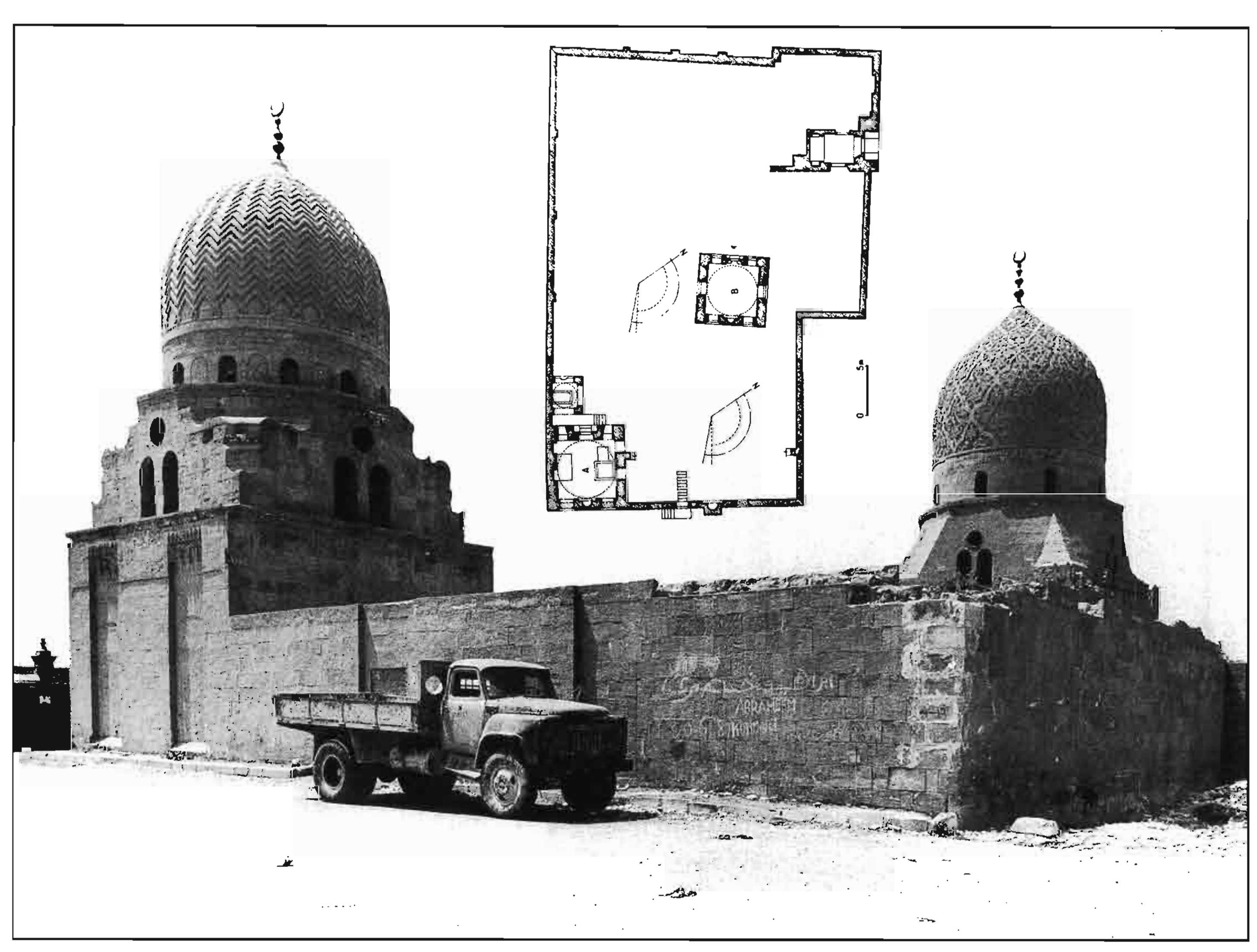
A block of old houses to the north forms a border separating this space from the *khanqah* of Sultan Barquq, the largest monument in the eastern necropolis. It is a square-shaped edifice covering an area of 4,650m^2, with two symmetrical minarets towering over the western façade and two domes, also symmetrical, rising up at either end of the southeastern façade. A third, somewhat smaller dome enhances the center of the *mihrab* wall between them.

The dome to the north houses three tombs. The first is that of Sultan Barquq (1382–99), a Mamluk of Caucasian origin. A cruel yet magnanimous and courageous man, he successfully defended Egypt

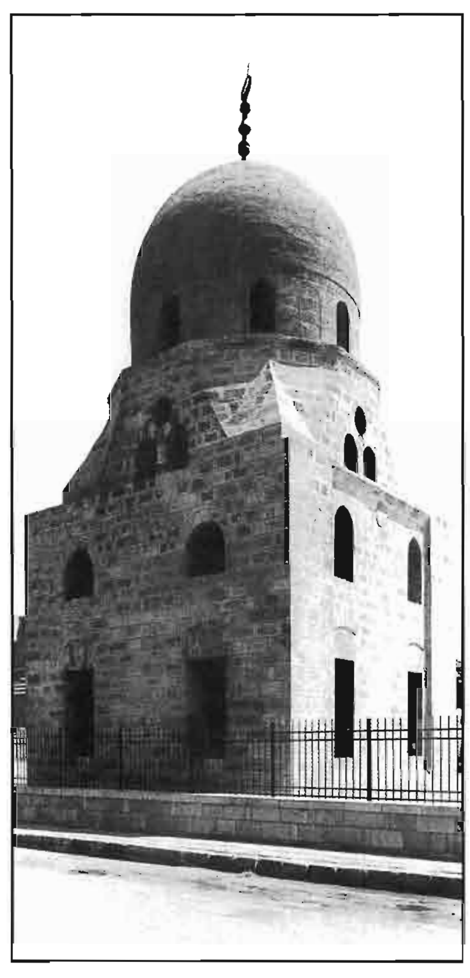
Current view of the Mamluks' desert cupolas, a scene depicted by many Orientalist painters. In the foreground, tomb of al-Rifa'i, followed by those of the Saba' Banat, Barsbay al-Bagasi, the amir Sulayman, and 'Asfur (plan of the Saba' Banat, after Kessler, facsimile from the library of the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi).

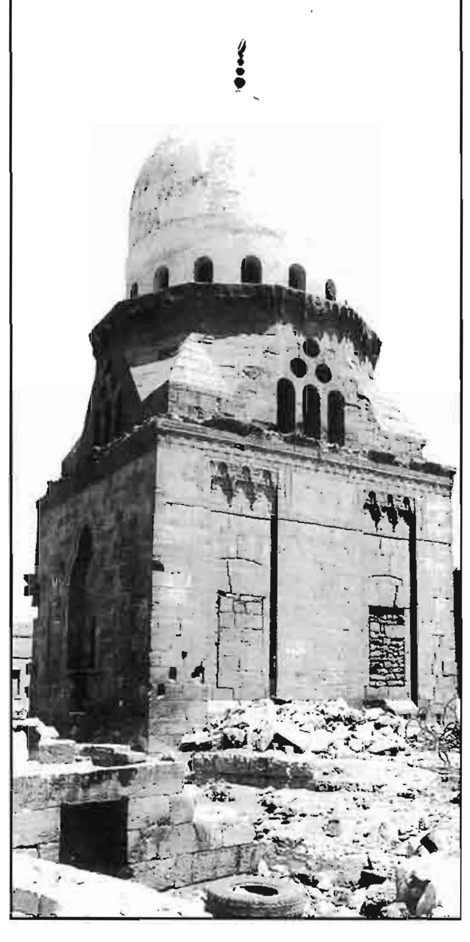


Tombs of Barsbay al-Bagasi and the amir Sulayman (plan after Kessler, facsimile from the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi).



Below: Cupolas of Qurqumas, 'Asfur, and the Saba' Banat.
Right page: Above, views of the north limit of zone 2 from the khanqah *of Barquq; below left,* sahn *of the* khanqah *of Barquq; below right, Sultan Ahmad Road with the cupolas of the mausolea of Gani Bey al-Ashrafi, Qurqumas, and the Barsbay complex on the right.*



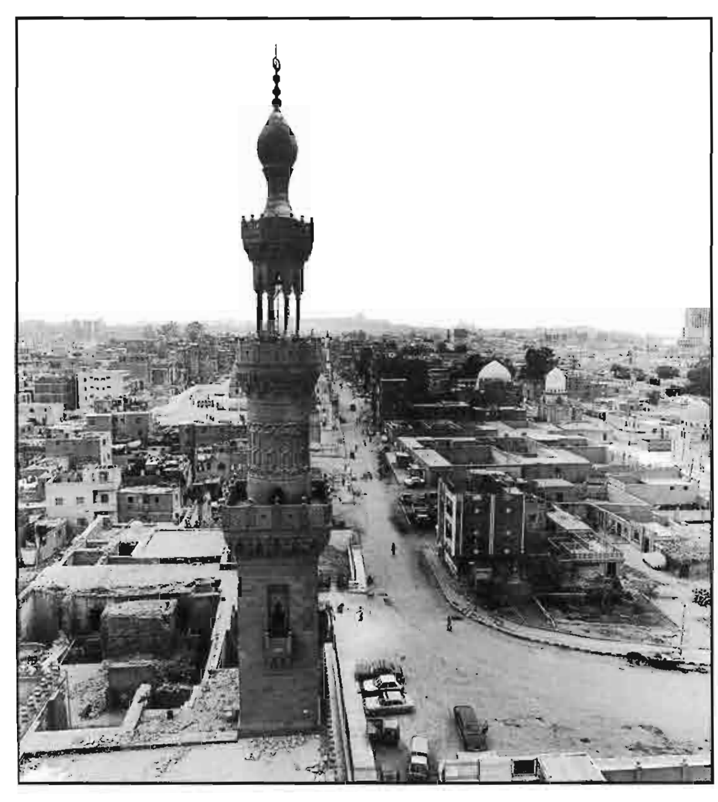


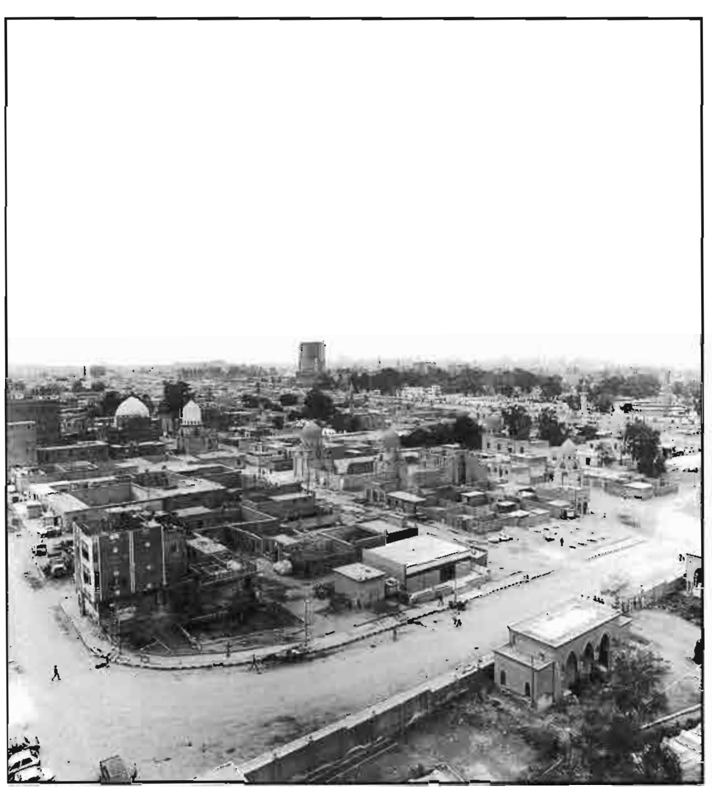
against the threat of the Mongols, substantially cut taxes and thus relieved his people of a crushing burden, and had a mausoleum built for his father Anas, a simple peasant from the Caucasus, next to the place he had set aside for himself. The second tomb was originally intended for Barquq's son, Farag, who succeeded his father and reigned over Egypt between 1399 and 1412, but it does not contain his remains. Defeated in a battle with the Mongols in Syria, he was captured and beheaded at the foot of the walls of Damascus, and his corpse was tossed onto a dung heap.[47] The third tomb is that of Barquq's brother 'Abd al-'Aziz. The other dome, to the south, houses the tombs of the sultan's three wives.

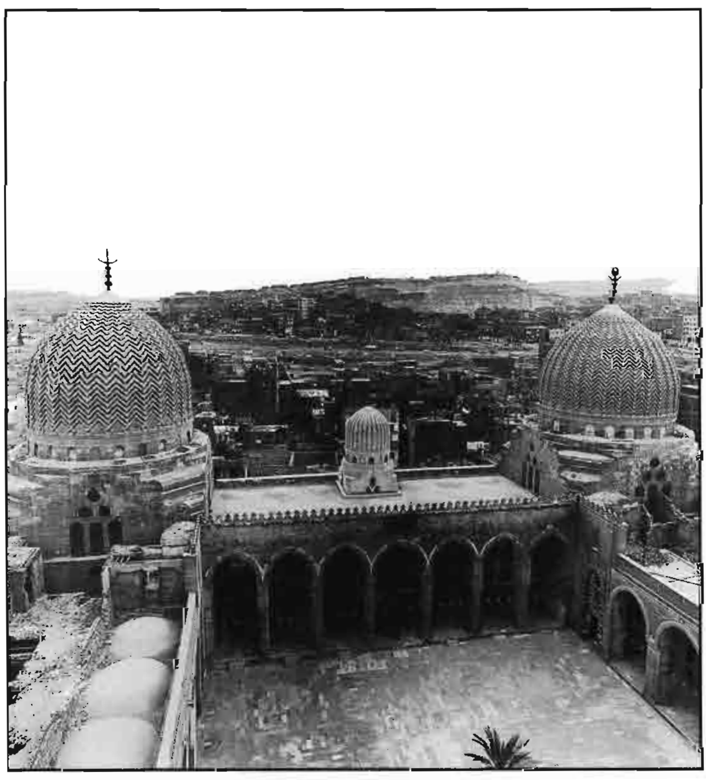
On the northern corner of the *khanqah* is a *sabil* surmounted by a *kuttab* with arcades on two sides forming a loggia. It is a vantage point that affords a view across the whole zone.

To the south is an extremely dense, complex, and contrasting patchwork of urban fabrics set side by side and alternating with or encroaching upon one another, punctuated by domes and minarets that stand out as prominent landmarks.

To the north, a homogeneous, flat, and well-spaced fabric stretches as far as the eye can see in the direction of 'Abbasiya. This, the most recent and best-kept part of the eastern necropolis, contains the tombs of such outstanding historical figures as 'Umar Makram, *Naqib al-Ashraf* or chief of the notables, a pioneer of the nationalist movement who organized the resistance to the French Expedition of 1798, and whose





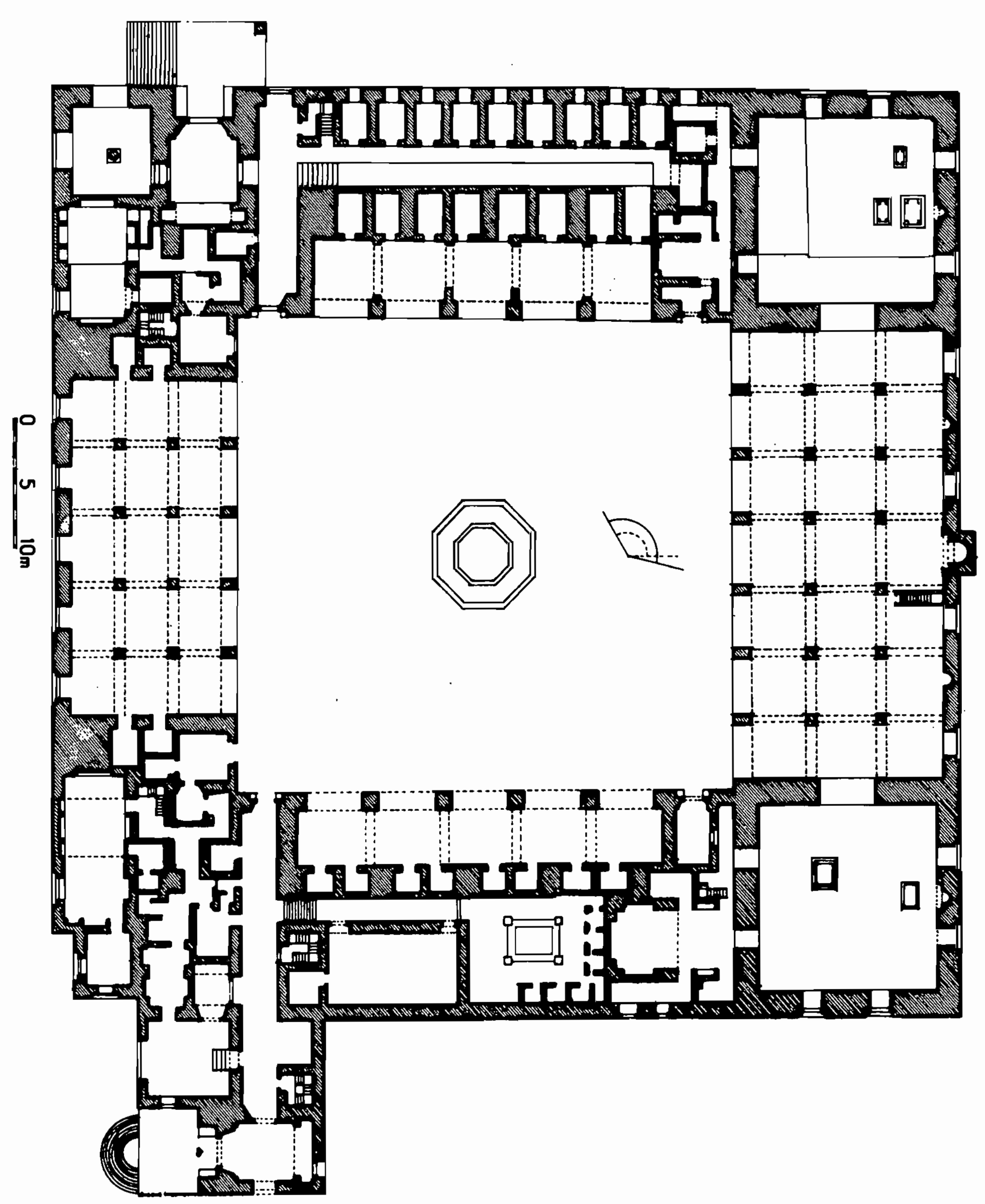


tomb, built in 1908, is now occupied by a day-care center and a crafts-training center. At the foot of Barquq is a large park surrounded by railings and covered in stelae and small, slightly raised marble tombstones. This is the cemetery of the martyrs of the 1948 war in Palestine, which, paradoxically, has enjoyed protection largely because it was built within the boundary of the Barquq complex conservation area.

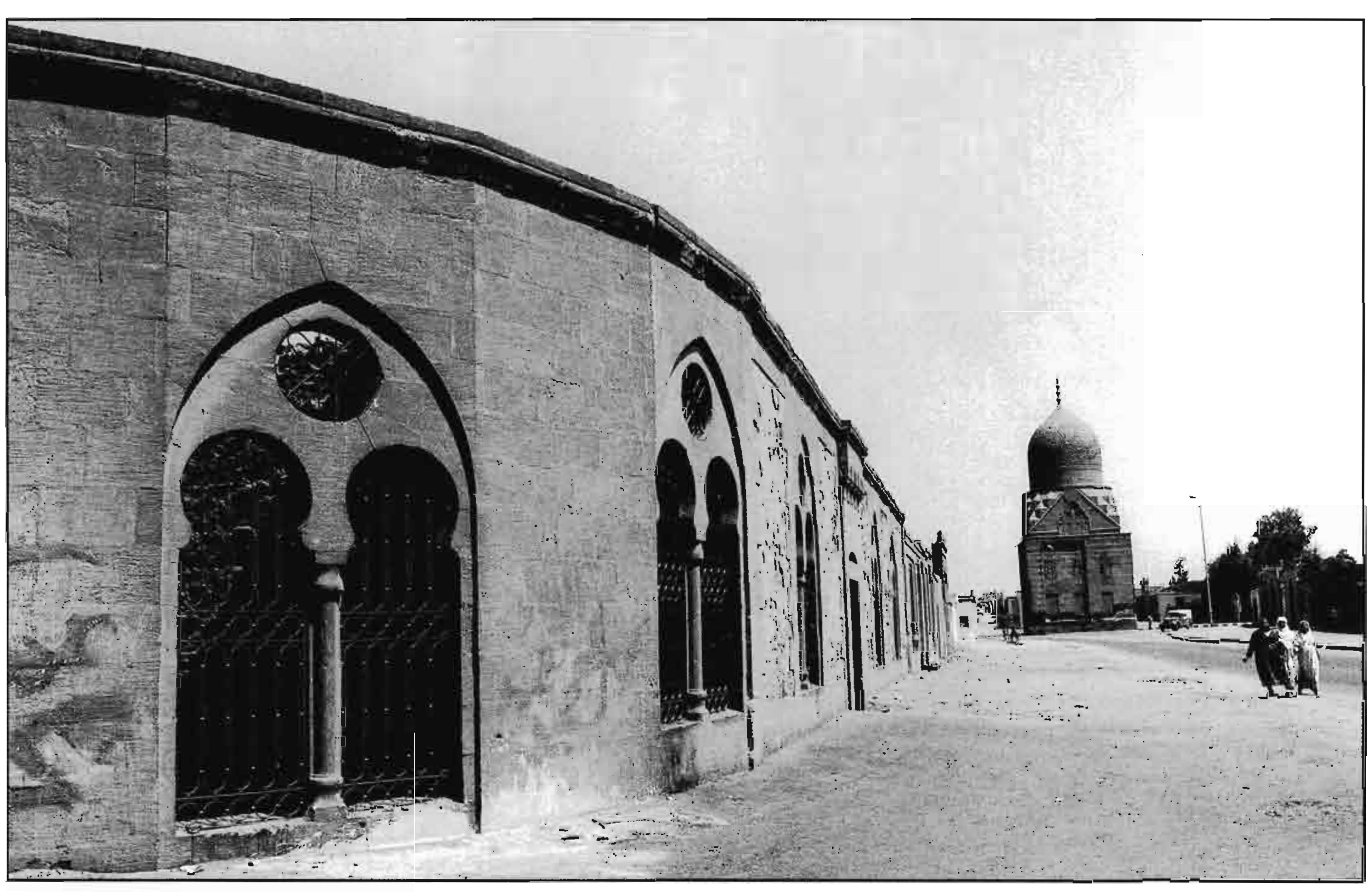
To the northeast, bordering on Salah Salem Road, is a wide esplanade leading to a luxurious, well-preserved, and recently restored funerary complex comprising the foundations of both Sultan Inal (1450) and Amir Qurqumas (1507). Inal, one of Barquq's Mamluks, reigned for eight years (1453–61) and had had this mausoleum built at record speed before he became sultan. Its walls bear inscriptions telling us the history of this building. Van Berchem relates the essence of this history:

"Amir Inal, *Atabek* of the armies of Sultan Gagmaq, had the foundations of his mausoleum laid in AH 854 (1450). He completed it the following year and, two years later, just after ascending the throne, had two cenotaphs built in the tomb room—one for himself and the other, in all likelihood, for his wife. He also ordered the construction of a large monastery and a *madrasa*. Ibn Iyas tells us how the sultan inspected the work being done in the mausoleum in the month of Rabi'i in the year AH 857, during his first visit to the city after his accession. He goes on to say that in the month of Dhu-l-Qa'da, AH 859, Amir al-Gamali Yusuf, superintendent of the sultan's private estates, began to build a *madrasa* the likes of which had never been seen in the desert. The cost, which al-Gamali is said to have covered from his own personal fortune rather than from the sultan's coffers, came to over twelve thousand dinars. A *zawya* and a *hawsh* were built opposite the school to house the graves of the people working in the service of the sultan. The *madrasa* was completed in the month of Rabi'i, AH 860, and the *khutba* was delivered there the following Ragab, marked by a great feast attended by the four *qadis*, together with all of the amirs and notables, at which a lavish meal was served. Five years later, the newly completed mausoleum received the remains of the sultan, then those of his two sons,

Left page: Funerary complex of Sultan Barquq, southern façade.
Below: Plan of the funerary complex of Sultan Barquq (after Kessler, facsimile from the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi).



In the background, mausoleum of Sultan Qansuh Abu Sa'id; in the foreground, left, tomb of the Qura'a family, 1934.



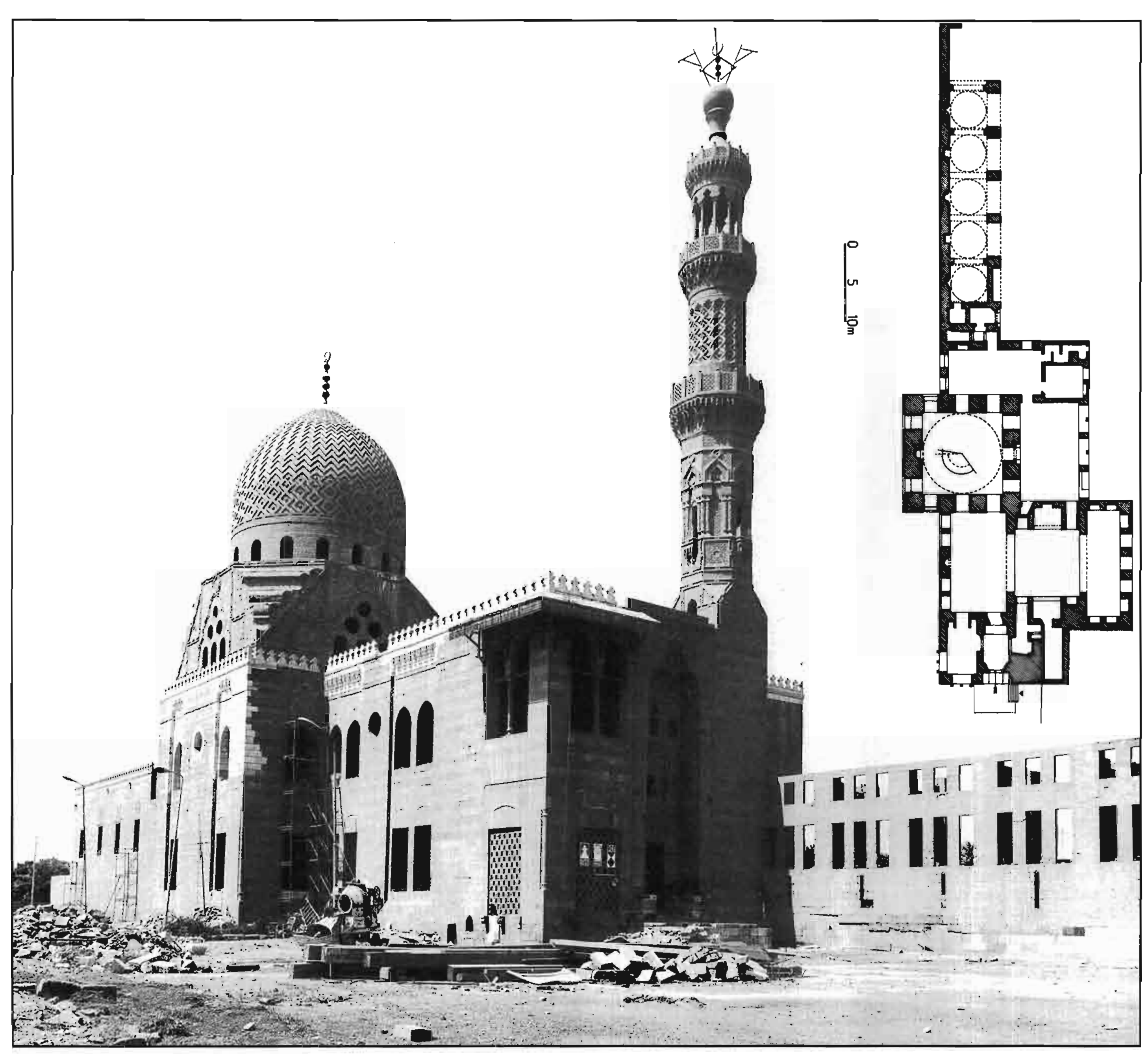
Muhammad and Ahmad, and Princess Zaynab, who may have been his wife."[48]

This group of buildings was also equipped with a *sabil* and an impressive surrounding wall.

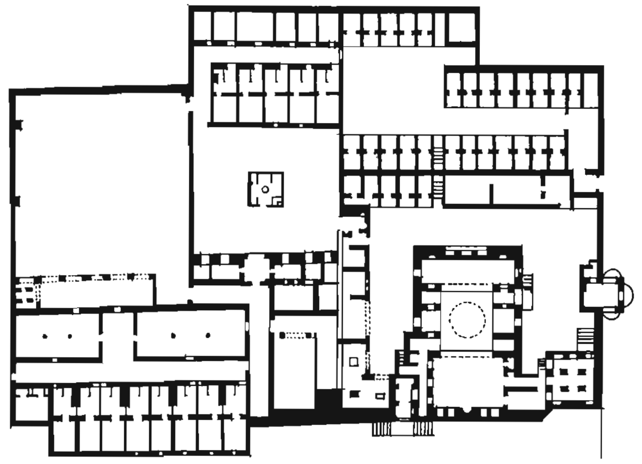
Next to the monastery and *madrasa* of Sultan Inal are the *madrasa* and mausoleum of Amir Qurqumas (1506–1507), also known as Amir Kabir. Starting out as one of Sultan Qaytbay's Mamluks, he was appointed to the position of deputy chief squire in AH 828 and rose through the ranks to become governor of Aleppo in AH 905, during the reign of Sultan Qansuh. His funerary monument is just one of the structures he built in the cemetery. In addition to the mosque–*madrasa*, the *sabil–kuttab*, and the mausoleum (typically the main components of a *turba* at the time),[49] his complex included a *rab'* and living quarters with all the necessary outbuildings. The layout of this group was largely inspired by that of Qaytbay.

The final monument in this part of the necropolis is the *qubba* of Sultan Qansuh Abu-Sa'id, whose reign lasted just 365 days (1498–99). Standing isolated in the middle of a five-lane crossroads northeast of the tombs of Inal and Qurqumas, all that is left of the original complex is the dome—a just revenge for a sultan who, according to Ibn Iyas, was so lacking in public-spiritedness that he "built a tomb in the desert which disrupted the traffic flow and blocked the view of the neighboring tombs."[50] The selfish and stubborn nature of this monarch, known only for his tomb, contrasts with the modesty of the courageous Tuman Bey (1516–17), the last—and by all accounts worthiest and most capable—sultan of the Mamluk dynasty, who located his royal complex a few kilometers northeast of here.

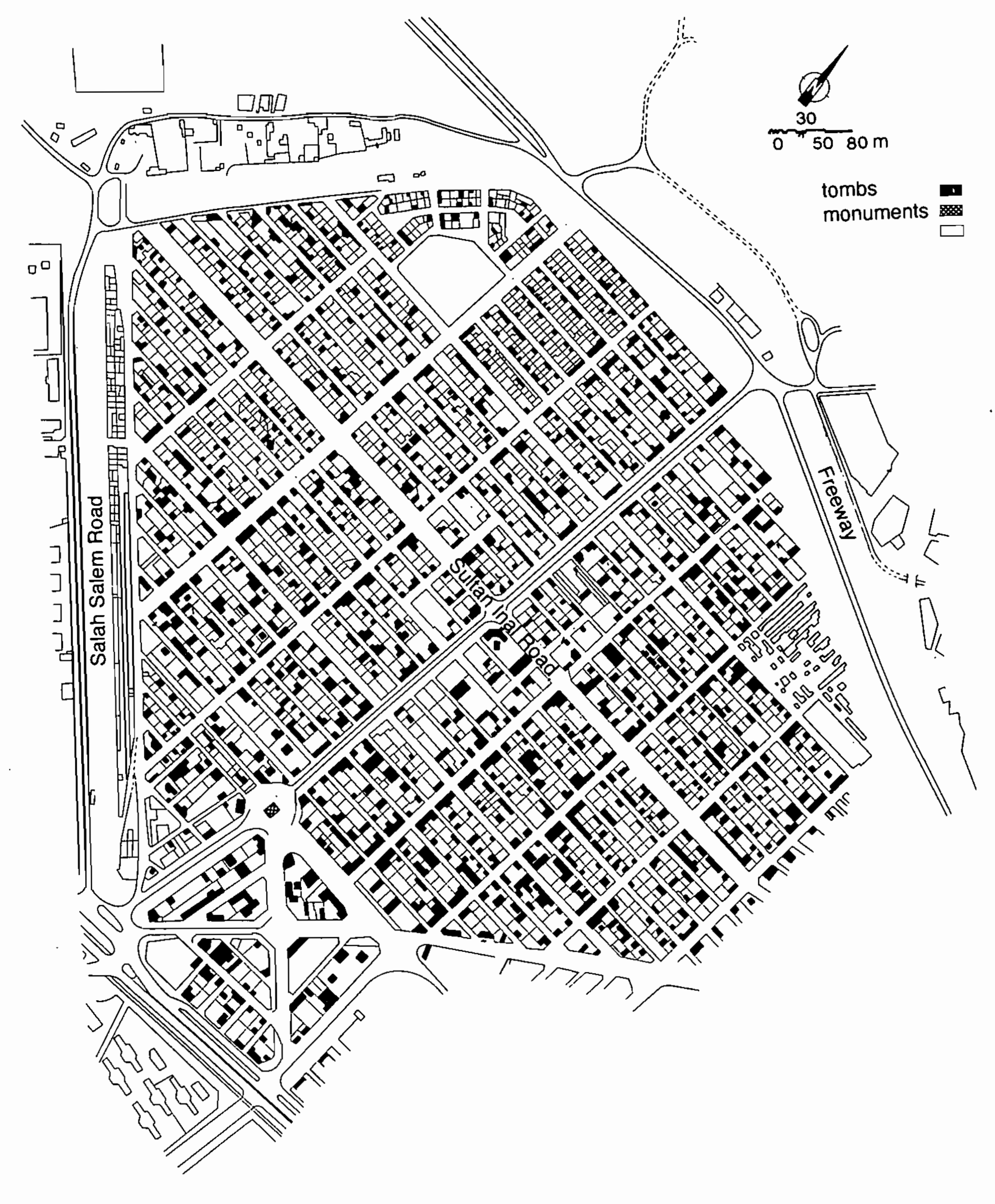
Funerary complex of Qurqumas (plan after Kessler, facsimile from the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi).



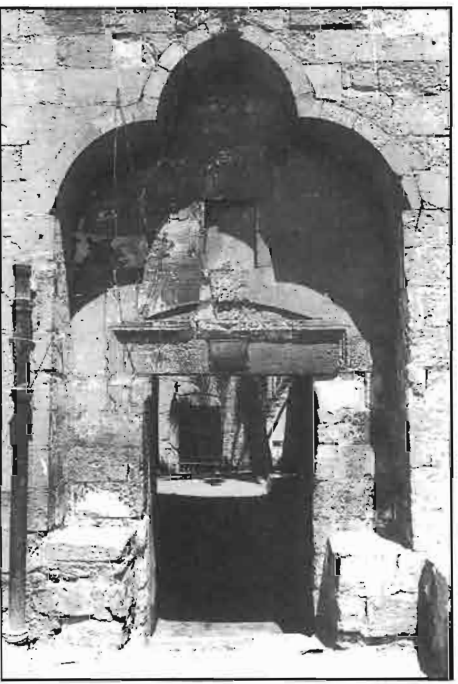
Below, funerary complex of Sultan Inal; above, plan after Kessler (facsimile from the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi).



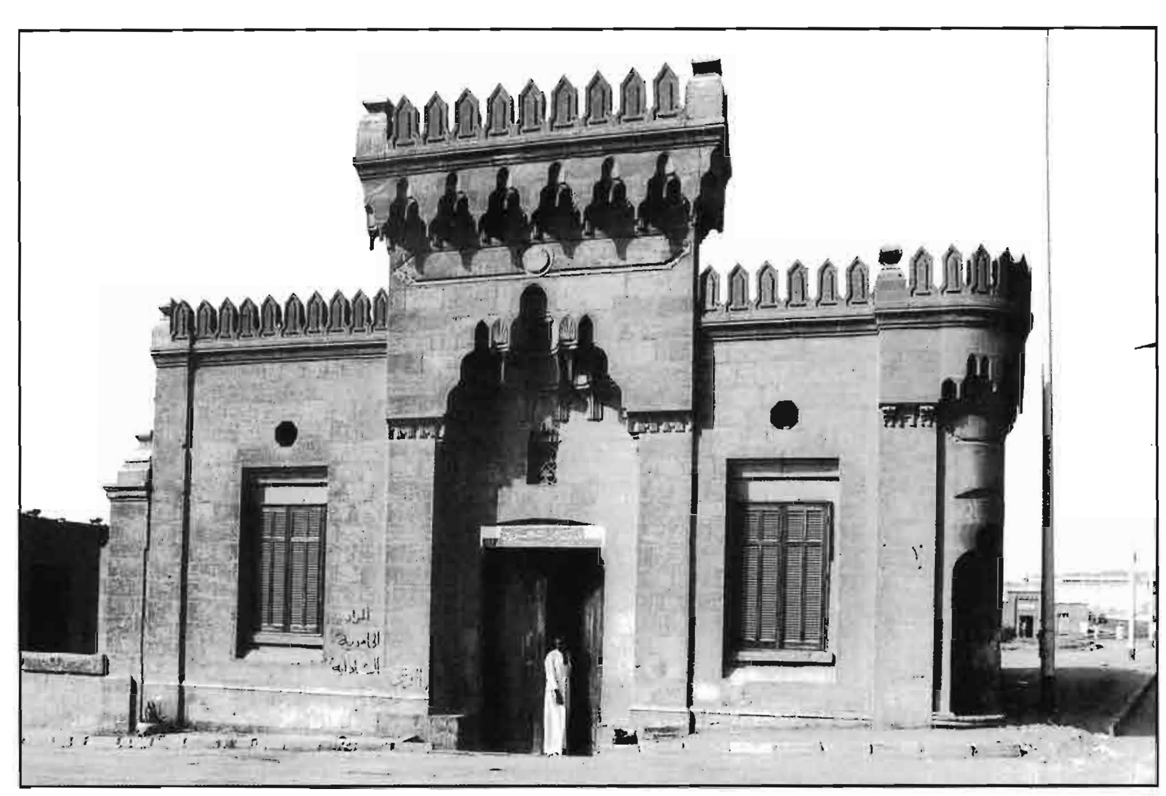
Zone 2, northern sector, access map (cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors). This zone holds the burial grounds of ministers and pashas from the period of the monarchy, pictured in the following pages.

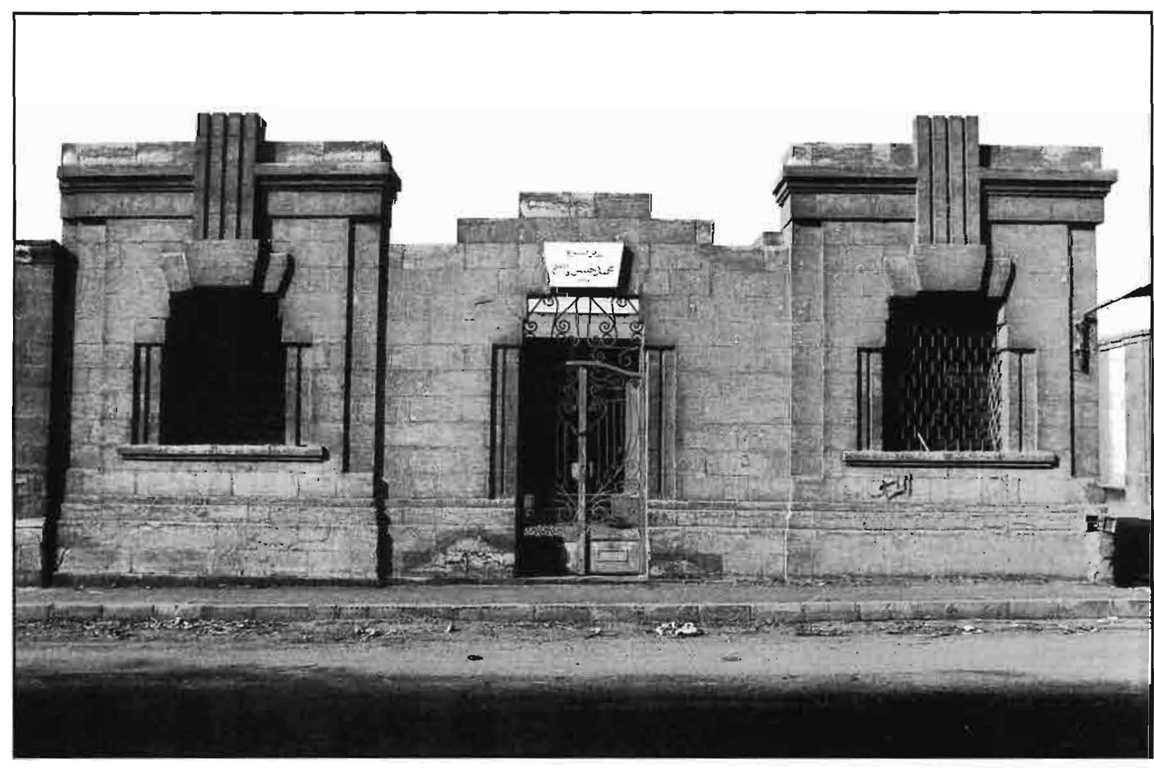


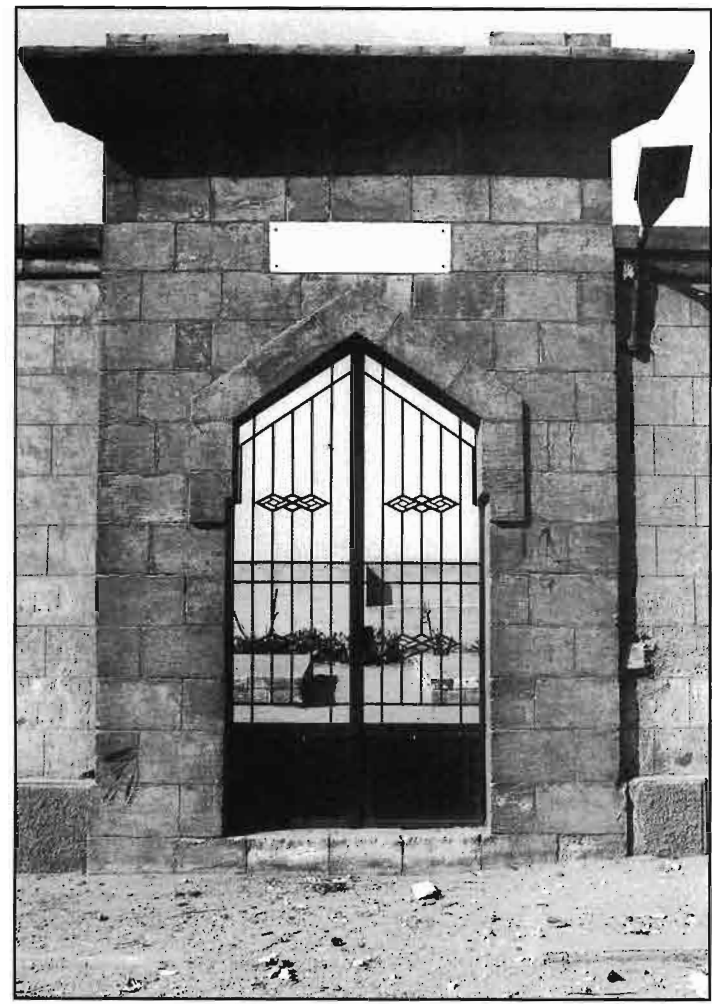
Tomb of 'Umar Makram, 1910, now the site of a nursery and a training center for seamstresses.



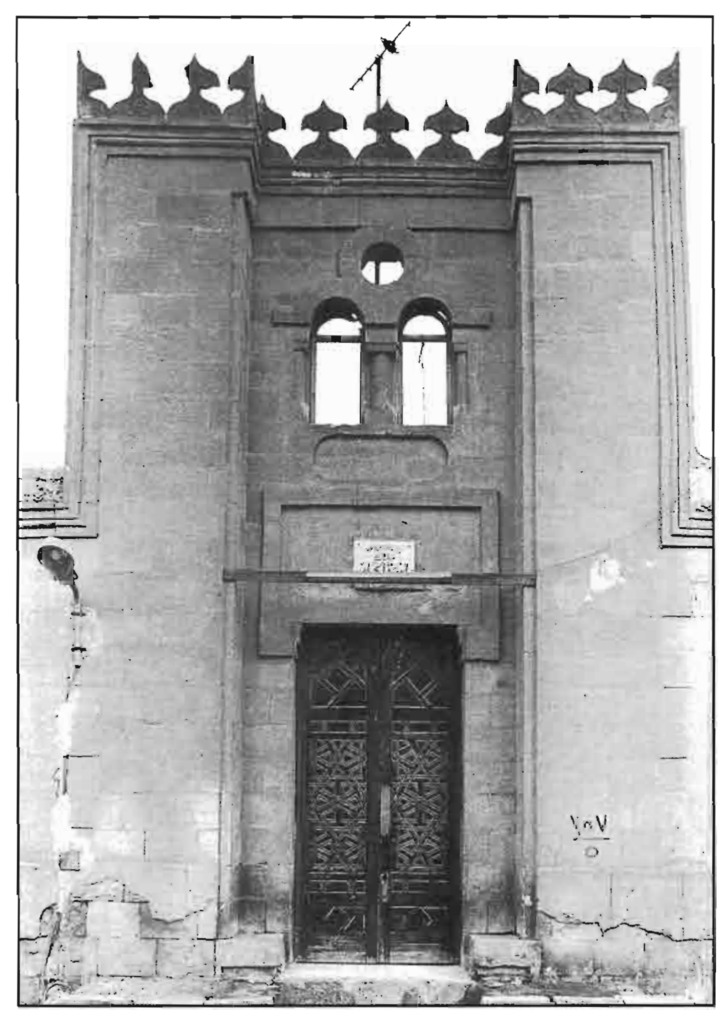
Above, tomb of the family of Isma'il Sirri Pasha (former prime minister), 1930; below, three tomb gateways.

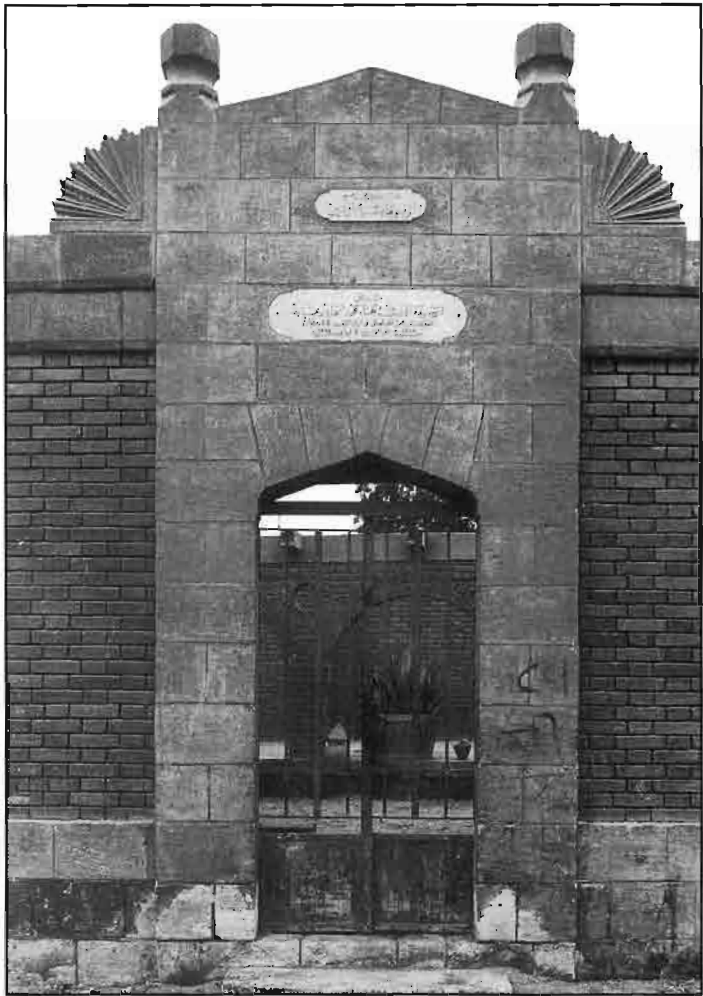


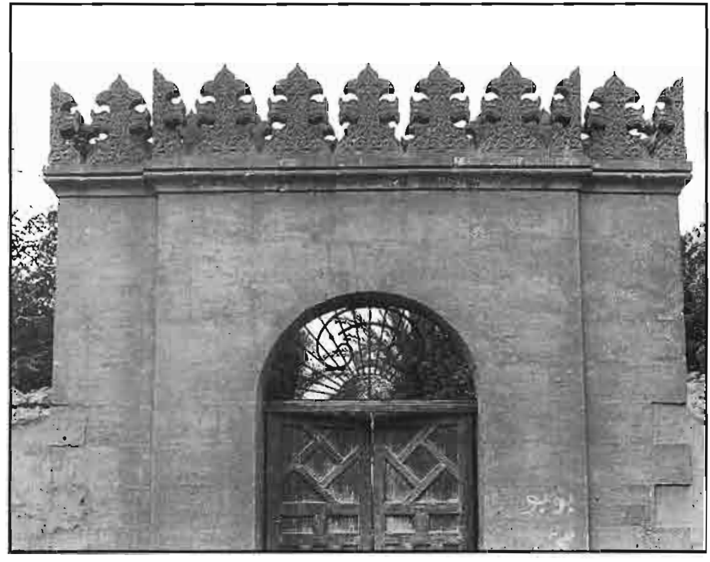




Tombs with symmetrical façades, from the 1930s.

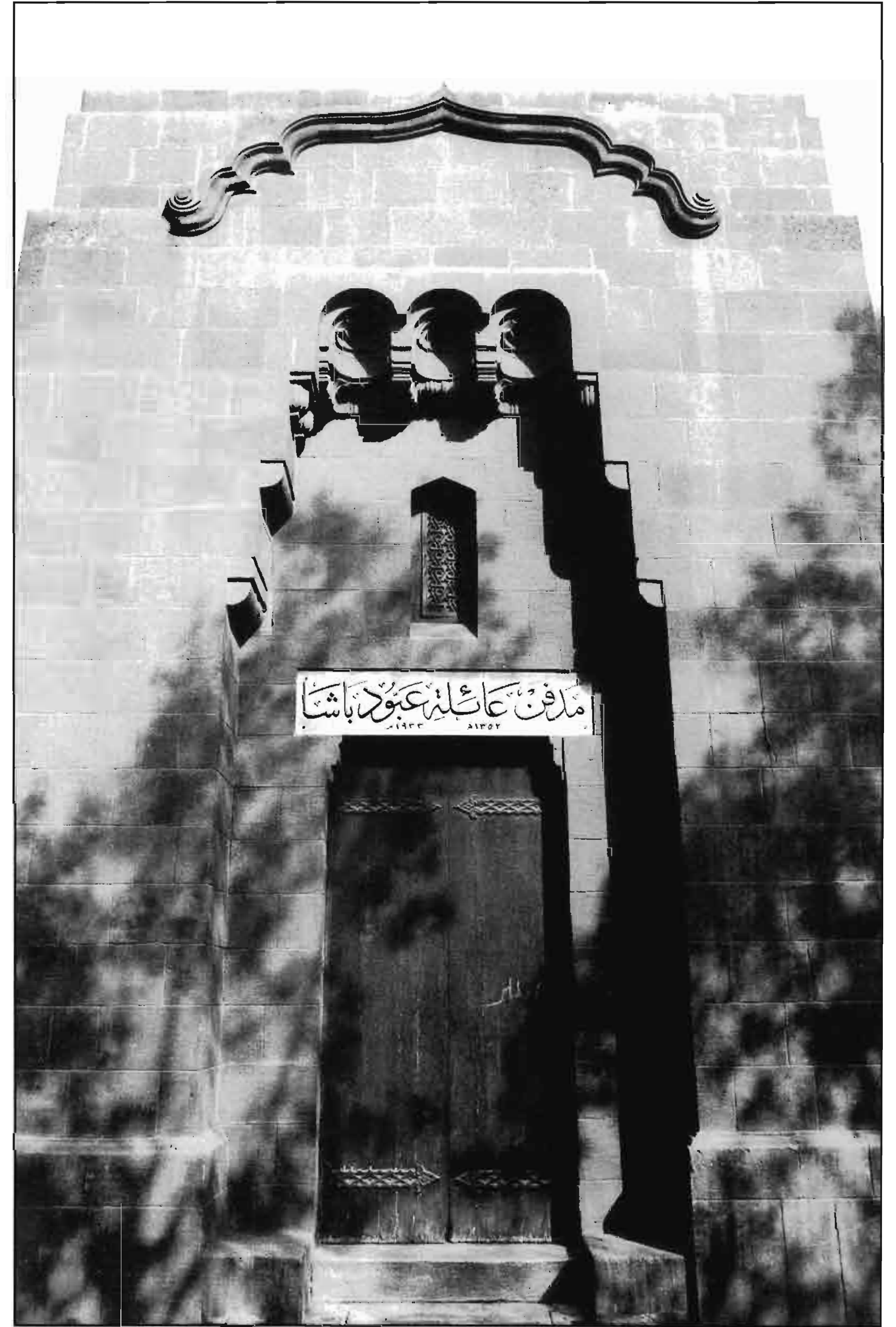




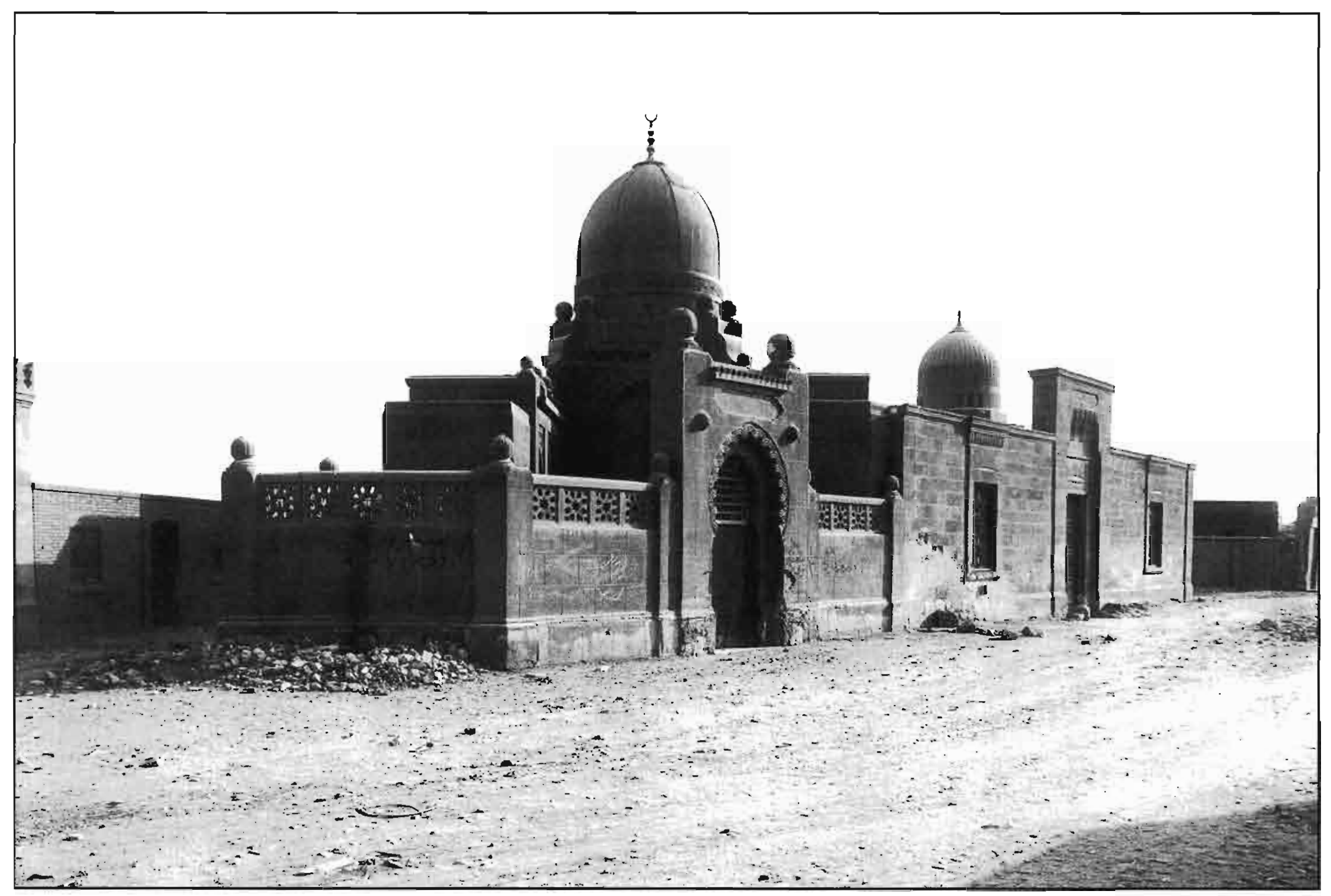


انشأ هذا المدفن الحاج مصطفى

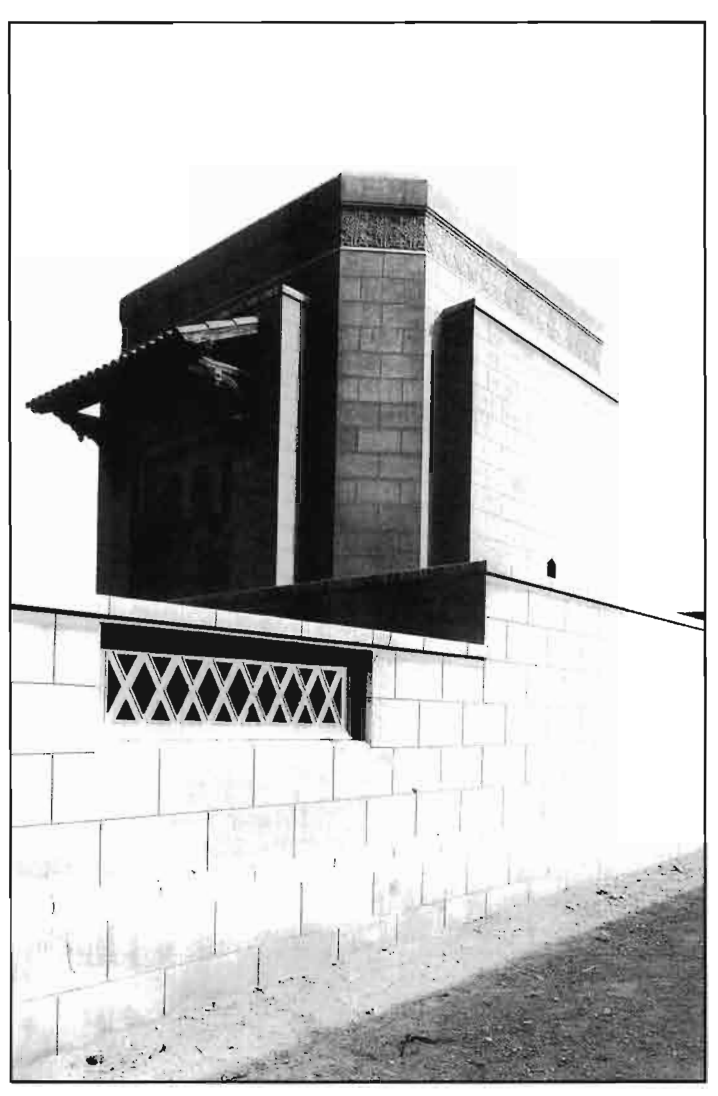
Pharaonic tomb of Muhammad and 'Abd al-Hakim Marzuq, 1930.

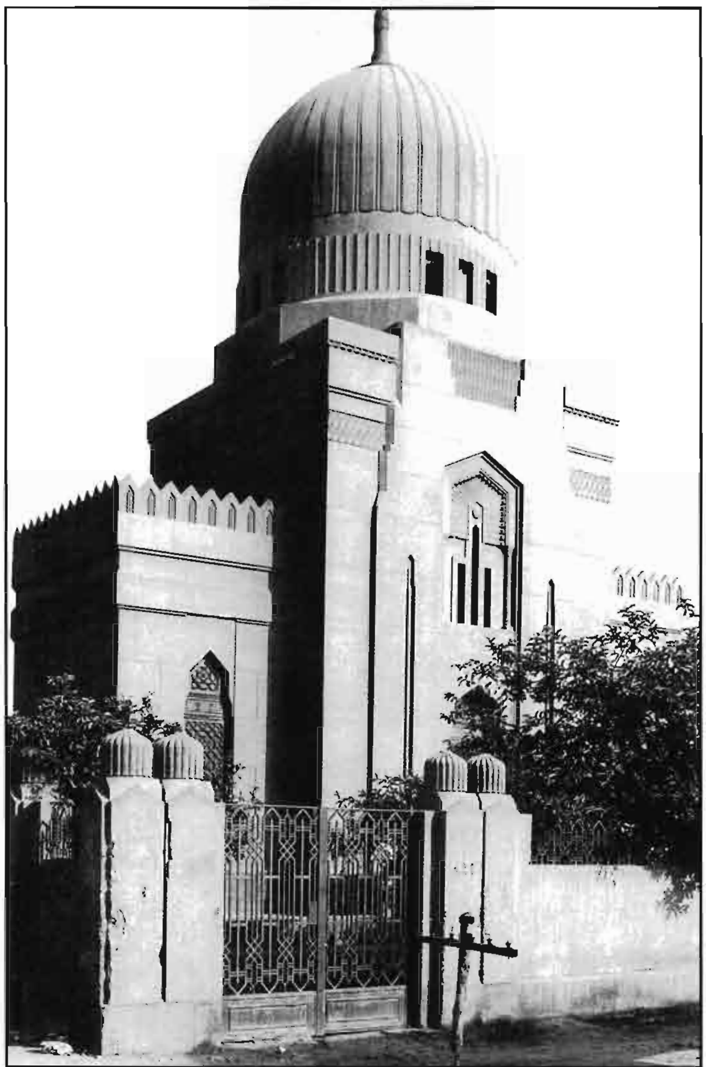

مدفن عائلة عبود باشا
١٣٥٢هـ ١٩٣٣م

Left page: Entrance to the tomb of the family of Abbud Pasha, 1933.
Below: Tomb of Zakariya Pasha Muharram, 1931.



Tomb of Salih Pasha and 'Abd al-Azim Inan, 1930.





Zone 3, Bab al-Wazir, tomb of Tarabay (drawing by Prisse d'Avennes).

Qarafat Bab al-Wazir Street, dominated by the cupola of Tarabay al-Sharifi.

Zone 3, access map (drawing by T. Fouad and T. Youssef, cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).

Zone 3: Bab al-Wazir

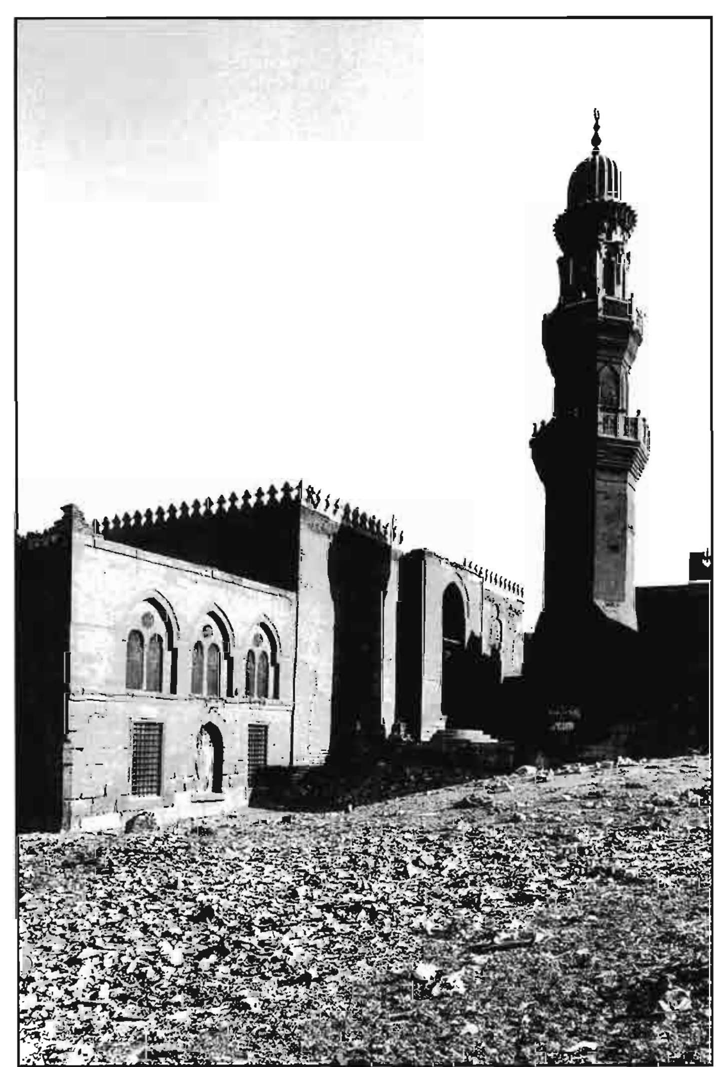
"Left of the Citadel, a narrow alley plunges into a dense crowd of children, hawkers, and idlers who pay scant attention to the car in danger of knocking them down. The crowds thin out, then vanish. We have come to a city enveloped in stony silence. The houses allow not a single living soul to slip through. This is the city of the dead. It is such a contrast with the alley leading here that one feels a strange sense of unease, as if cast into a mute world, an ailing world. But then one sees that these blind houses are roofless. These ghostly houses are the homes of the dead. . . ."[51]

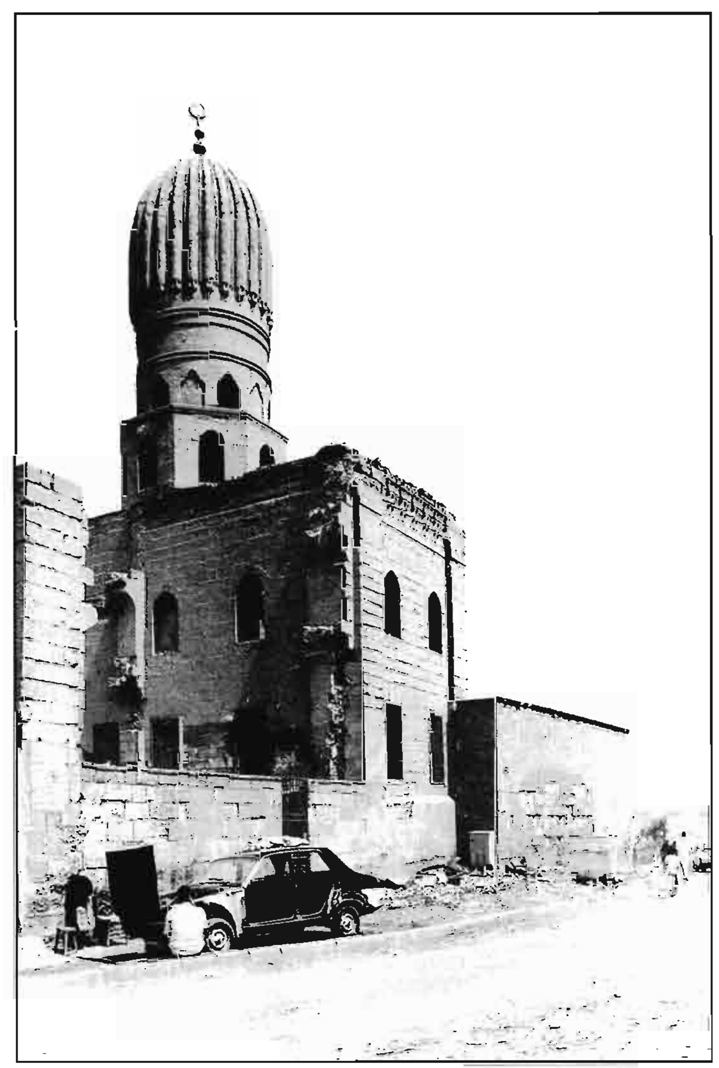
The cemetery here resembles Bab al-Nasr in that it is very much a part of the city. Arriving from the Darb al-Ahmar neighborhood, we enter the southwestern part of the cemetery at the foot of the Citadel by passing through Bab al-Wazir and proceeding along Bab al-Hataba Street, also known as Bab al-Wada', from Salah al-Din Square.

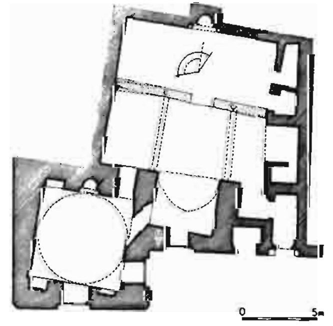
This is quite a chaotic area, made up of what looks at first glance like an indistinguishable mix of houses, tombs, inhabited tombs, and dwellings built on old funerary foundations. The road is very busy, used by all manner of vehicles as an access road or shortcut between the historic center and the Salah Salem route to the east side of the city. The funerary fabric is old and extremely heterogeneous: a chaotic blend of old foundations that were clearly luxurious once, but of which very little remains, together with a dense mass of humble stone, brick, and wooden tombs, cobbled together and rebuilt from one generation to the next.

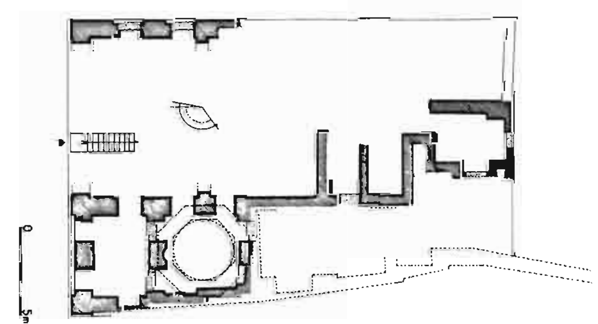
Moving on through Bab al-Wada', the first monument we come to, a few dozen meters down the road on the left, is the mosque–mausoleum of Amir Mangak al-Yusufi (1349), one of al-Nasir ibn Qalawun's vizirs and commander-in-chief

Left, Mangak al-Yusufi; right, tomb of Yunus al-Dawadar; below, plans (after Kessler, facsimile from the American University in Cairo, drawing by H. Wasfi).

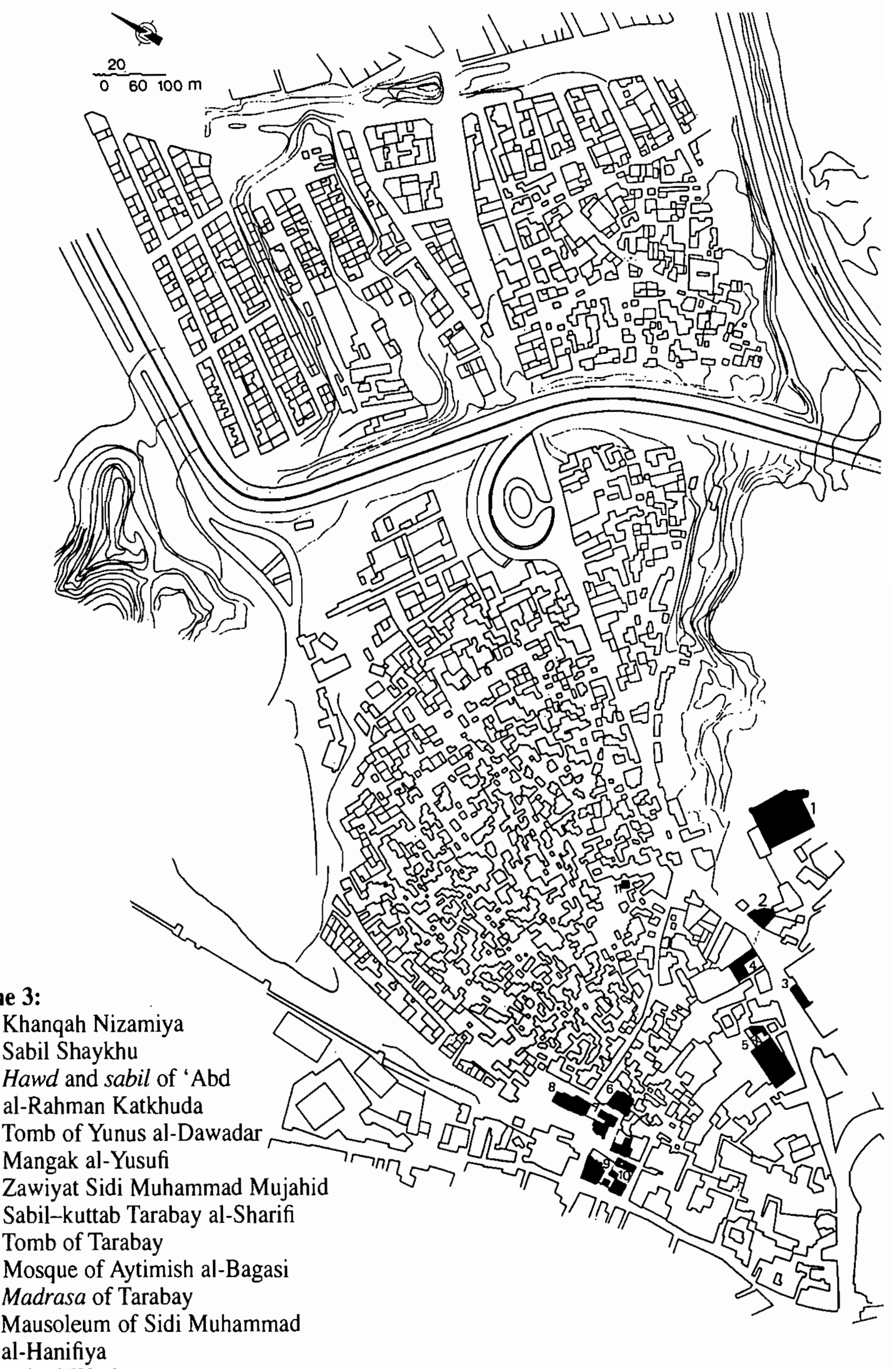








Monuments of zone 3 (cadastral map, Cairo, 1930, updated by the authors).



Zone 3:

1. Khanqah Nizamiya
2. Sabil Shaykhu
3. *Hawd* and *sabil* of 'Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda
4. Tomb of Yunus al-Dawadar
5. Mangak al-Yusufi
6. Zawiyat Sidi Muhammad Mujahid
7. Sabil–kuttab Tarabay al-Sharifi
8. Tomb of Tarabay
9. Mosque of Aytimish al-Bagasi
10. *Madrasa* of Tarabay
11. Mausoleum of Sidi Muhammad al-Hanifiya
12. Bab al-Wazir

of his armies. This funerary complex was built inside a walled enclosure with an entrance gate. The tomb is attached to the mosque as a *madrasa* and surmounted by an upper-story *khanqah*.

On the other side of the street are the *sabil* and *hawd* of 'Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda, built in the eighteenth century. Further down on the left, shortly before the crossroads with Qarafat Bab al-Wazir, stands the second largest monument after Mangak: the mausoleum of Yunus al-Dawadar (1382), the administrative secretary of Sultan Barquq. Its elongated ribbed dome is of a kind more often found in Asia Minor.

Facing this is the most unusual monument of the group, the *sabil* of Amir Shaykhu (1349), which looks like a large niche with an inner recess carved into the rock. Its façade is bedecked with stones adorned with beautiful arabesque ornamentation, and the frieze is formed by a lengthy inscription. According to the commemorative plaque:

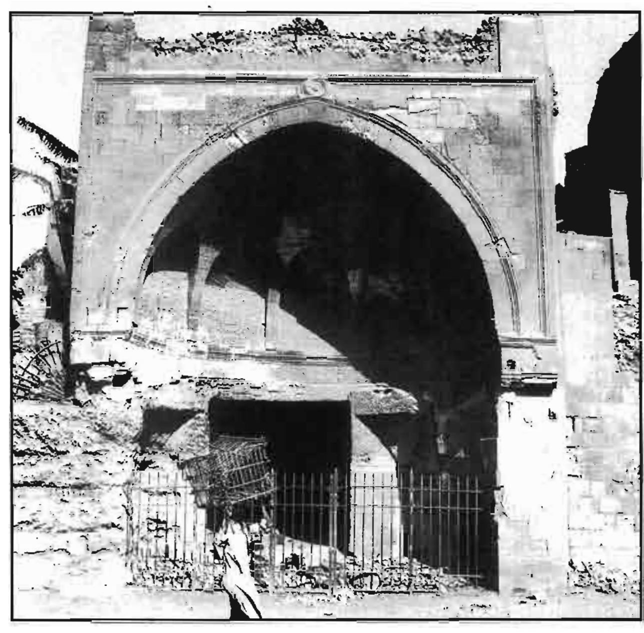
"The construction of this blessed and hallowed *sabil* was ordered by the slave and humble servant to God, Shaykhu, loyal subject of al-Nasir; it was completed in the month of Dhu-l-Qa'da, in the year seven hundred and fifty-five (1354)."[52]

The stone-arched niche leads to a 7m x 12.5m chamber hollowed out of the rock, with a water tank in the middle. In 1897, the CCMAA listed this "curious work" as a protected monument, and railings were put in place across the entrance.

On the hill above this *sabil*, looking out over the entire cemetery, are the magnificent walls of a ruined structure, often shrouded in the morning by a bluish mist. These are the remains of the *khanqah* of Nizam al-Din, a Sufi retreat built in 1356 by a Persian man from Isfahan who worked in the service of Sultan al-Nasir.

At the other gate, Bab al-Wazir, is another monumental group: the complex of

Right, sabil *Shaykhu; below, abandoned* sabil *of 'Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda.*

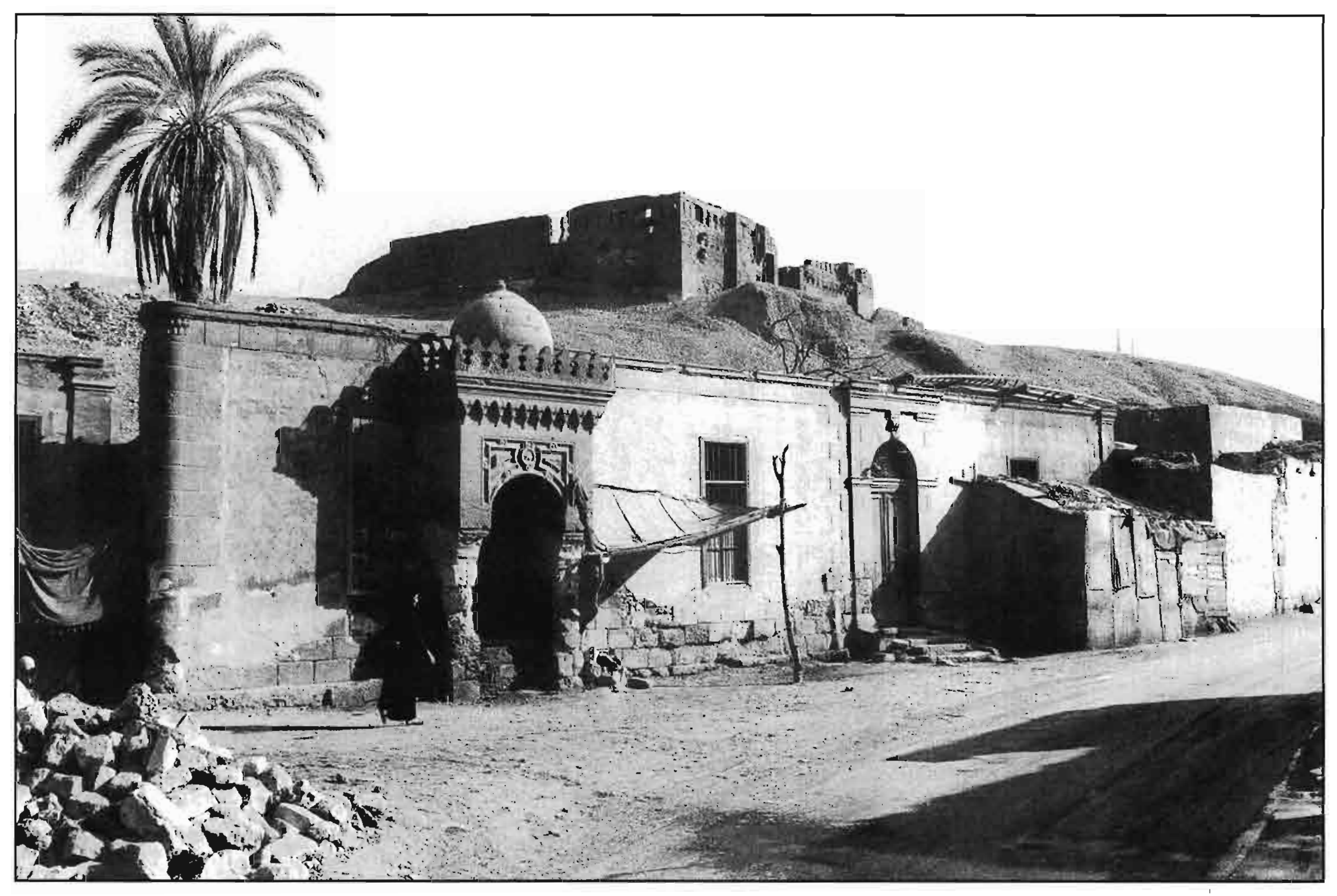


Amir Tarabay al-Sharifi (1503). Its square, dome-covered mausoleum is coupled with a *sabil–kuttab* set directly in front of the very entrance to the gate. This wonderful monument was restored in 1884.[53]

The two final monuments of this group stand on the hill to the west overlooking the cemetery:

• The mosque of Amir Aytmish al-Bagasi, regent of Sultan Farag ibn Barquq, was built in 1383. It has a detached upper-level *kuttab* whose demolition the CCMAA demanded in 1895 on the grounds that it

Khanqah Nizamiya, at the top of the hill.



Below: Mosque of Aytmish al-Bagasi.
Right page: above, cupola of Tarabay al-Sharifi; below, Bab al-Wazir, with the sabil–kuttab *of Tarabay on the left.*

was a public safety hazard. The *kuttab*, however, is still in place.

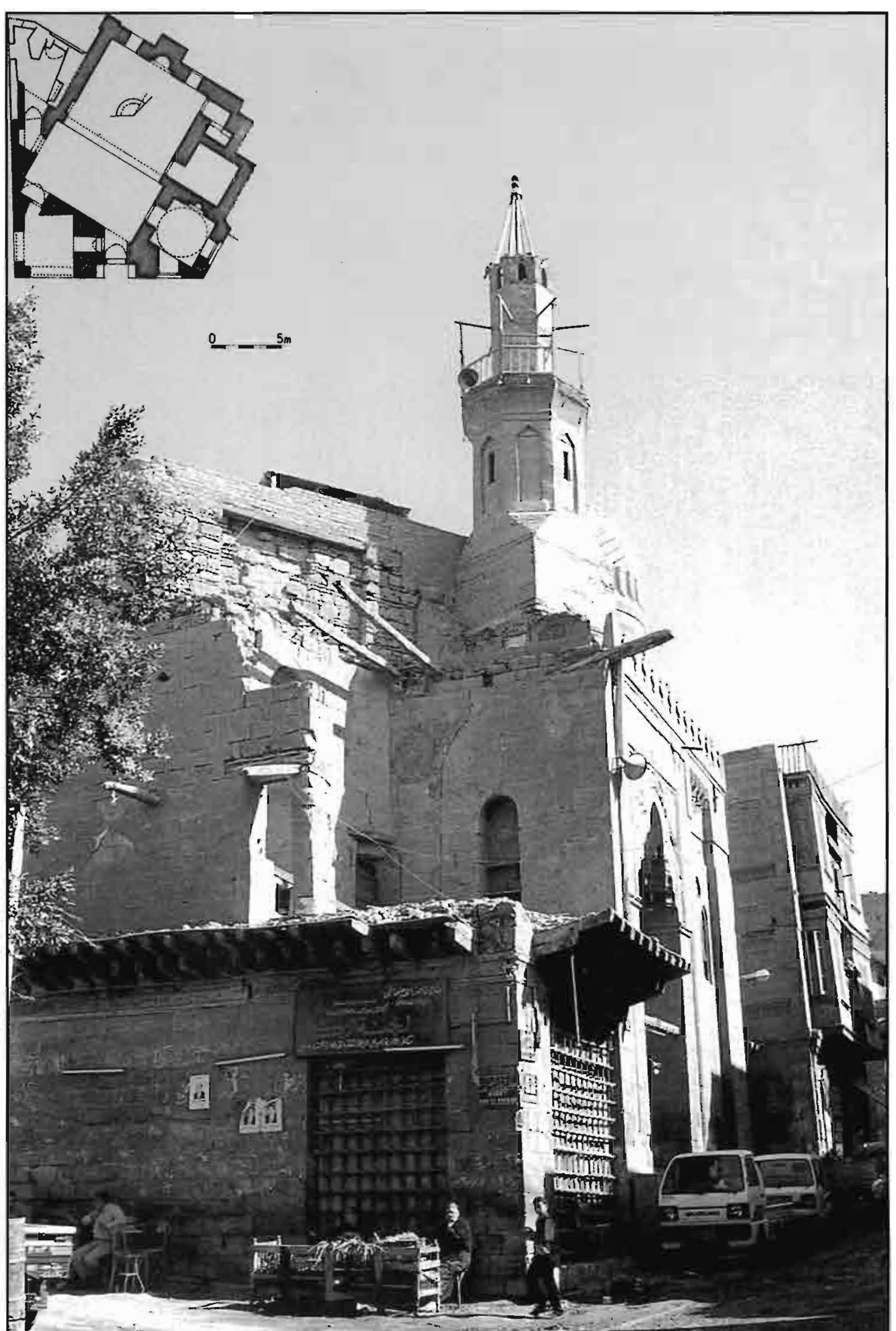
• In the midst of huge ruins stands the domed mausoleum of Azdumur. It opens out onto a vast empty space peppered with and surrounded by a few house-tombs that have been converted into permanent dwellings, some with a recently added top story.

Most of the cemetery lies in a basin divided into two unequal parts by Qarafat Bab al-Wazir Street, which runs from south to north.

To the east, a narrow, uninterrupted strip of open-air tombs runs along the foot of the hill. It broadens out slightly as the hill becomes lower toward the north, then fans out across an area where, in the early twentieth century, stone tombs bereft of any aesthetic value were built at random in strips, in clusters, or alone. This part of the cemetery used to stretch as far as the old railway line, traces of which are still visible today. Between 1984 and 1990, many outlying tombs were demolished and replaced by a park as part of a public works program originally launched in 1979 to redevelop the area surrounding the Citadel.

The western part, which is older and occupies two-thirds of the basin, no longer contains many tombs of historical or artistic note. Dozens were torn down in 1974 to build a traffic circle that was filled with plants and named the Salam Garden. Masses of new tombs now carpet the western hillside terraces all the way down to the continuation of Qarafat Bab al-Wazir Street.

Dividing the eastern part of the cemetery across the middle into a highland part to the south and a lowland part to the north is the Salah Salem Road, which runs across a viaduct over—and perpendicular to—Qarafat Bab al-Wazir Street. The northern lowlands, although topographically part of the cemetery, have been cut off from the southern highlands since the construction of a railroad in 1957. The two parts are still linked



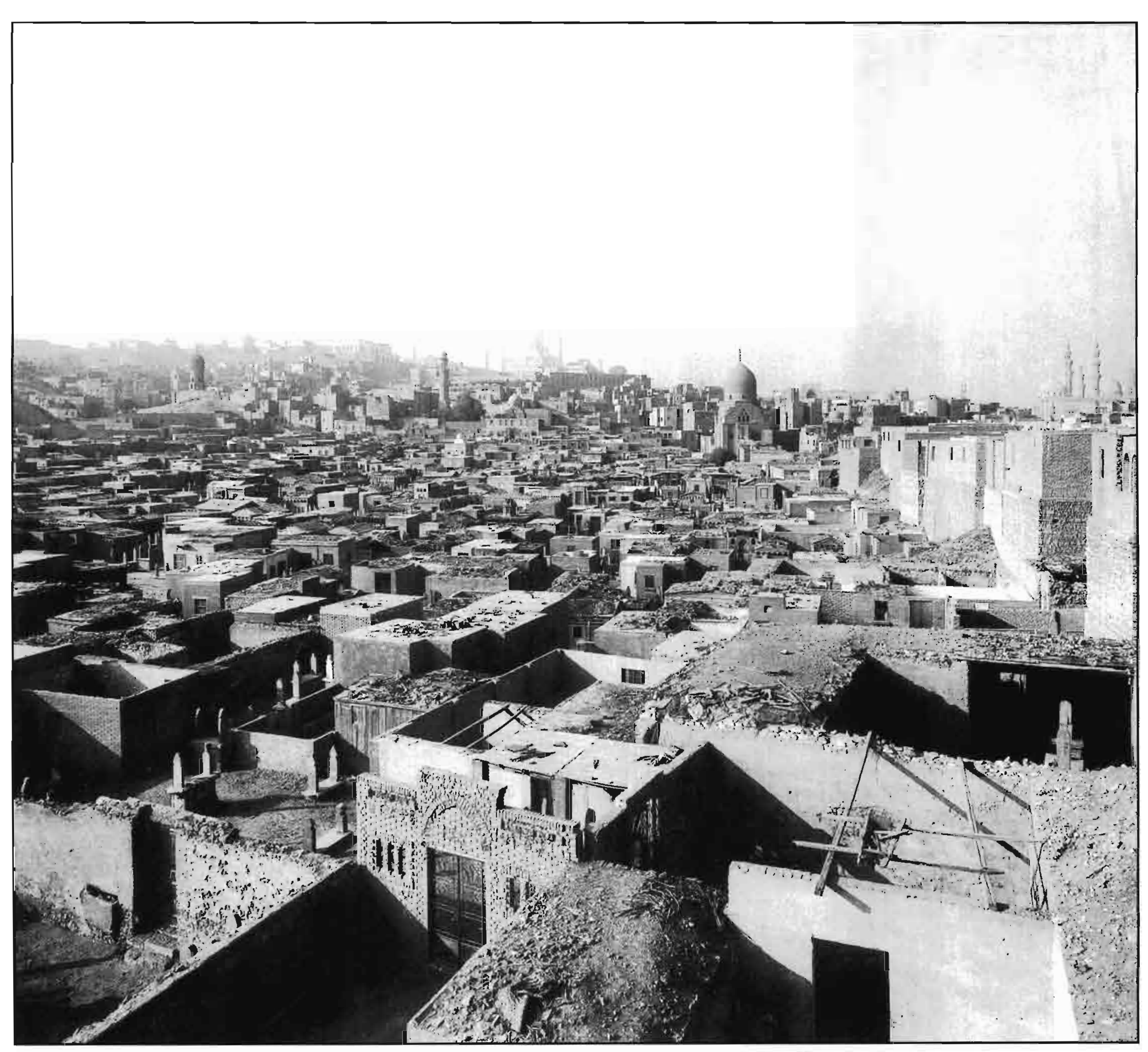
General view of Bab al-Wazir (photograph by Lehnert and Landrock, early twentieth century).

by Qarafat Bab al-Wazir, but there is no continuity in the fabric when that road passes from one side of the bridge to the other.[54]

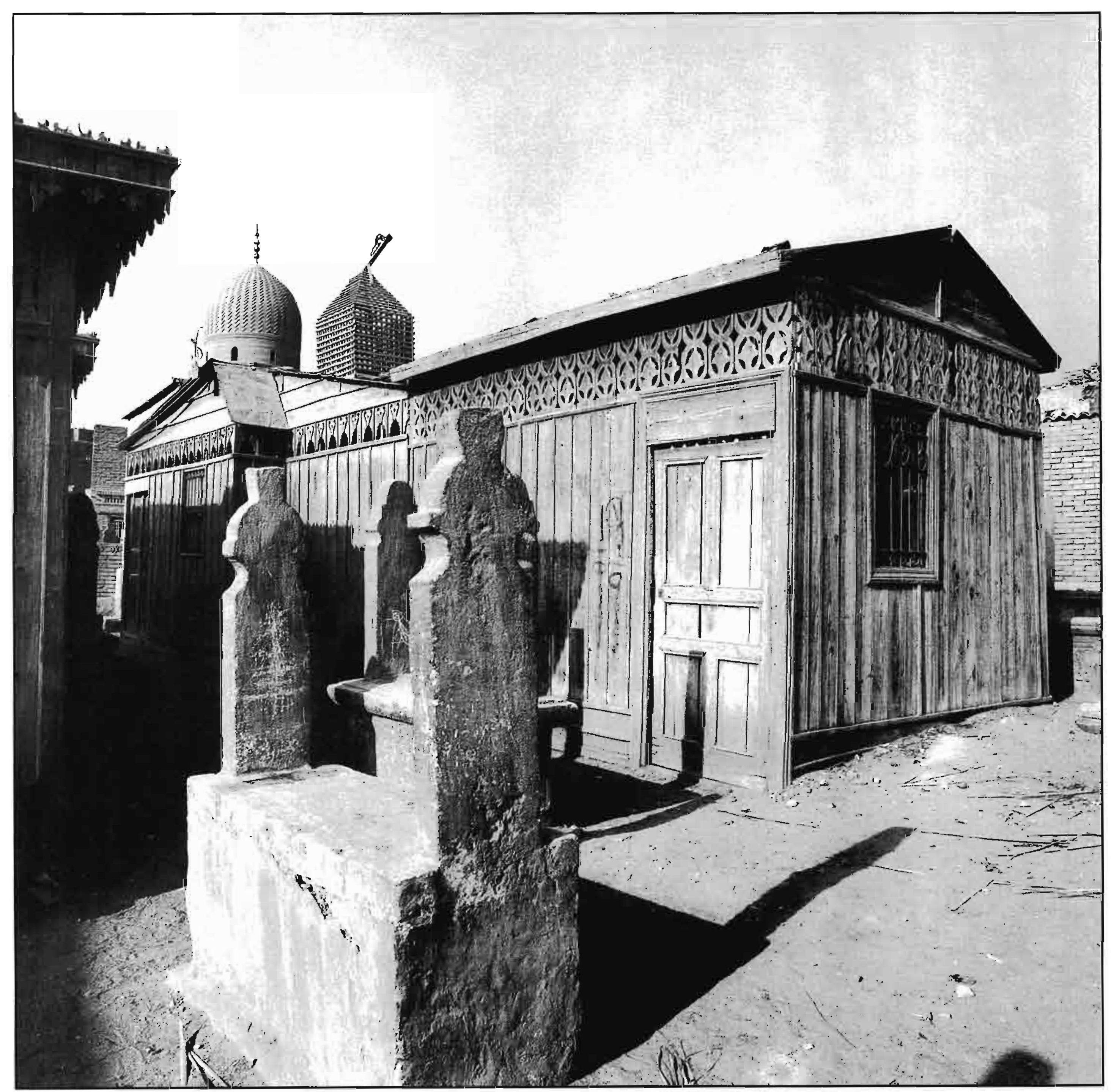
Chronologically, the growth of the cemeteries ended with the Ottoman conquest. The decisive battle between the Turkish army and the Mamluks, which brought an end to the Mamluk reign, took place at Raydaniya (present-day 'Abbasiya), on the western fringes of the valley of the tombs.

By an ironic twist of fate, it was here, in the places that those princes had set aside for their tombs, that their dynasty was also laid to rest.

General view of Bab al-Wazir, 1990.



Left page: General views of Bab al-Wazir.
Below: Bab al-Wazir, wooden tombs.



Bab al-Wazir, façades of recently constructed tombs.

Notes

[1] The amir Shams al-Din Qarasunqur was the first to have a *turba* built in this area. This tomb still existed in the lifetime of al-Maqrizi but has since vanished (Hamza 1986, 91, note 10).

[2] This term denotes part of a range running through the Arabian Desert after which the Red Sea is named (Charmes 1880, 107).

[3] Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS). 1996. *General Census on Population and Activities*. Cairo.

[4] Ramadan n.d., 183; Ahmed 1937, 243; Hamza 1986, 104–106; Atteya, Naïm, 1973, *Les routes du commerce international et leur situation entre l'est et l'ouest, Cairo*, 125–33.

[5] Traveling from Birkat al-Hagg, in the northeastern outskirts of Cairo, she crossed the Arabian Desert to the north of Suez where she rested before setting out across the sandy plains to the Negev Desert and on, via the port of Aqaba, to Mecca (Ramadan 1977, 208).

[6] 'Achour 1965, 284–86, 290.

[7] 'Achour 1965, 284–86, 290.

[8] As the first stopping place for caravans on the pilgrimage route to Mecca, Birkat al-Hagg was an ideal spot for trading establishments. The best known of these were set up by the sultans al-Nasir, al-Mu'ayyad, and Barsbay, the latter of whom also built lodgings there for the pilgrims. Darb al-Sultani also attracted such pursuits as horse-racing and falconry, hence the establishment of stables and a hawk-rearing area known as *Mat'am al Tayr* or 'the poultry restaurant' (Behrens-Abouseif 1989, vol. 17, 166–67). A complex comprising a domed mausoleum, a residential building, a *madrasa*, and a Sufi retreat was built there by Yashbak min Mahdi al-Dawadar, a Mamluk prince who rose to the highest possible rank during the reign of Qaytbay. Van Ghistele, visiting Egypt in 1843, described it as an "extraordinarily beautiful summer residence, with among the most magnificent and well-set-out gardens to be seen anywhere in the world. . . . Its floors and its walls, both inside and out, are richly decorated in golds, silvers, and blues, and inlaid with precious stones. Words can hardly convey its beauty, its magnificence, and its strangeness" (Van Ghistele 1976). All that remains today is the dome.

[9] Named after a *hara* (district) inhabited by immigrants from Barqa (Tunisia), and located not far from Bab al-Ghurayib (Mubarak 1969, vol. 1, 36).

[10] 'The Lady Slit Hills' take their name—which is often considered vulgar—from the natural pass or gap that cuts through the hills at the level of al-Azhar and that leads to the *khanqah* of Umm Anuk, mother of Sultan Qalawun (al-Hadidi 1982, 69).

[11] The *Maydan al-Qabaq* arenas used to cover the whole of what is now the eastern cemetery, from the foot of the Citadel in the south to the *khanqah* of Barquq in the east (al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 1, 361 and vol. 2, 111; Ibn Taghri Birdi 1932, vol. 2, 165–66; Mubarak 1969, vol. 1, 82).

[12] Al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, 463 *cited in* Hamza 1986.

[13] Al-Séouti, *Hosn al-Mohadra*, vol. 1, 143; Ibn Taghri Birdi 1932, vol. 9, 213, quoted in Hamza 1986, 101–102.

[14] The *'ulama'* decreed that every funerary structure in Egypt must be demolished and that their concessionaries be ordered to remove the debris at their own expense (al-Séouti, vol. 1, 140).

[15] Ibn Jubayr 1954.

[16] Al-Sakhawi recounts how a shaykh by the name of 'Ali 'Abdallah ibn Turki visited the Qarafa at midday and, despite the scorching sun, obstinately refused to take cover in the shade of the tombs because the buildings were illegal and devout Muslims must refuse to acknowledge them. It was a view shared by all of the *fuqaha*, who agreed on the need to prohibit any construction on land set aside by this prince of the devout for humble and anonymous burials (Hamza 1986).

[17] *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, 446.

[18] Fernandes 1981, 141–56

[19] Al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, 113–463 *cited in* Fernandes 1981.

[20] Rhoné 1910.

[21] Migawirin cemetery. *Migawirin*, meaning 'neighbors,' is a term referring to all those buried in the vicinity of the tombs of the Sufis, the pious, and especially their disciples, the poor students of al-Azhar university.

[22] Al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, 463–64 *cited in* Hamza 1986, 140.

[23] This part of the cemetery, on the northeastern fringes of the Mamluk cemetery, is known as *al-Ghafir*, literally 'the caretaker,' because a *ghafir* used to occupy the customs post at its boundary and collect taxes from the pilgrims.

[24] Hamza 1986, 142.

[25] Raymond 1993, 144 (n. 32).

[26] The Mausoleum of Shaykh Sharqawi was built on the site of the *khanqah* and is now one of the area's main landmarks, despite its modest size.

[27] Hamza 1989, 229.

[28] Herz Bey 1920, 293.

[29] Ricard et al. 1985, 266.

[30] Originally this was a small *zawya* built on top of the tomb of Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahab abu Yusif al-'Afifi, a teacher at al-Azhar, who died in 1781. Mumtaz Hanim Higgi, otherwise known as Umm Husayn Bak, one of the favorite wives of Muhammad 'Ali, replaced the *zawya* with a mosque where she had a tomb built for herself. She was buried there when she died in 1893. In the Sufi tombs surrounding this mosque are buried the shaykh's mother-in-law, Shaykh Fatuh al-Bigirmi, Shaykh Ahmad al-Shafi'i (a Shafi'ite teacher), and Shaykh Muhammad al-Amir al-Maliki (a Malikite teacher). Each year a *mulid* ceremony held at this mausoleum attracts believers from rural areas. It goes on for ten days (Mubarak 1969, vol. 5, 122).

[31] Devonchire 1982, 103–104.

[32] Ricard et al., 1985.

[33] Herz Bey 1920, 294.

[34] Al-Nabolsi [1986], 293, quoted in Clerget 1934, vol.1, 101–102. This royal suburb became a village at the beginning of the century. One of the two *rab*'s has been replaced by a café frequented by architects, and the other is a listed ruin with its façade still intact.

[35] Qaytbay's *waqf* deed (*Awqaf* 886, 31–33; in Nassar 1975, *cited in* Hamza 1986, 134).

[36] Creswell 1919, 139.

[37] *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, vol. 2, 438–39.

[38] Clerget 1934, vol. 1, 438–39.

[39] This entrance, which resembles the first, is still there today. The historian 'Abd al-Tawab maintains that there used to be a third gate next to the *sabil* in a space currently occupied by a residential building. It appears that the *Hay'at al-Athar* has yet to decide whether or not to begin renovating the *rab'*.

[40] Charmes 1880, 112.

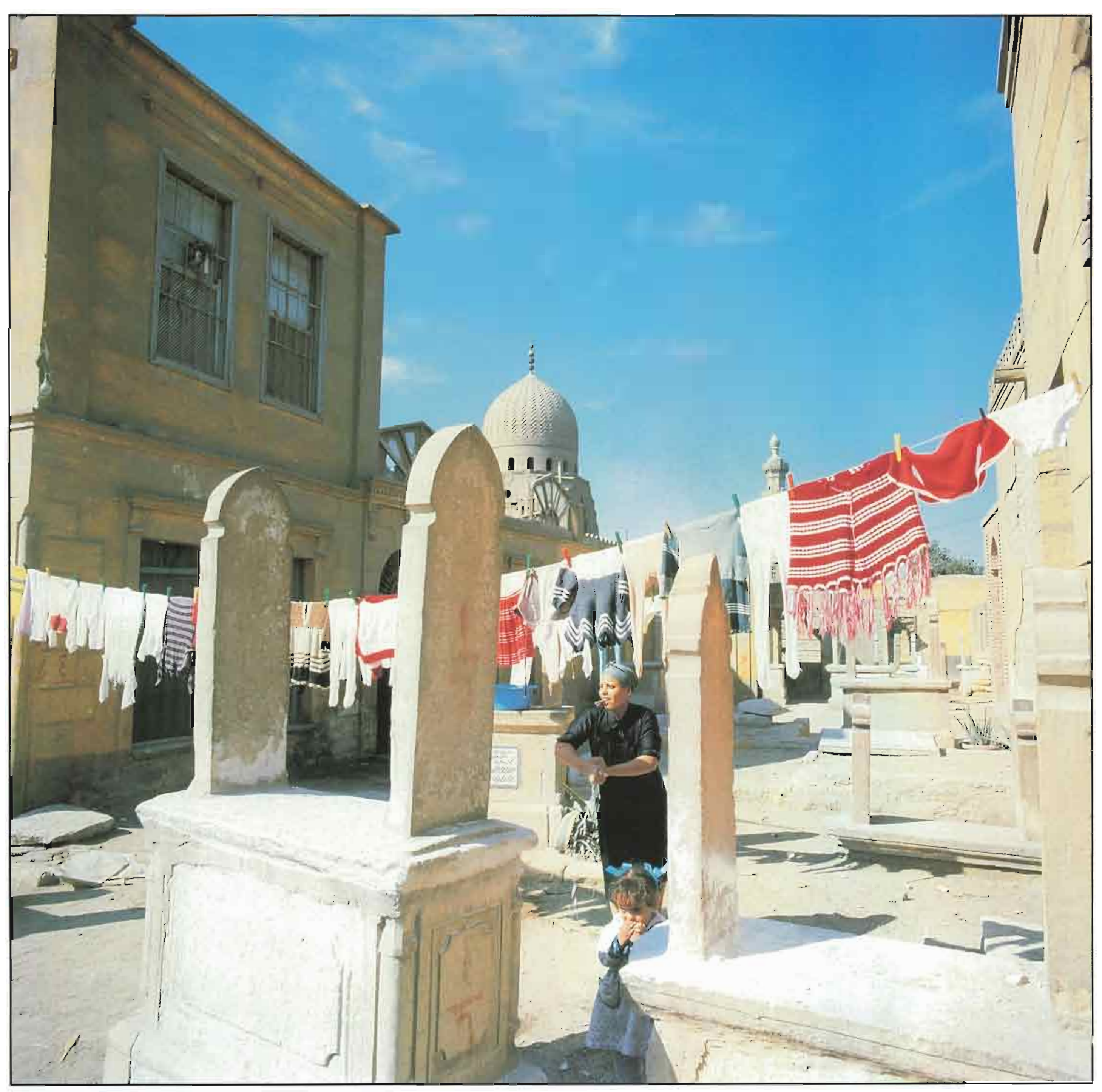
[41] Devonchire 1982, 101–102.

[42] Fernandes 1981, 141–56.

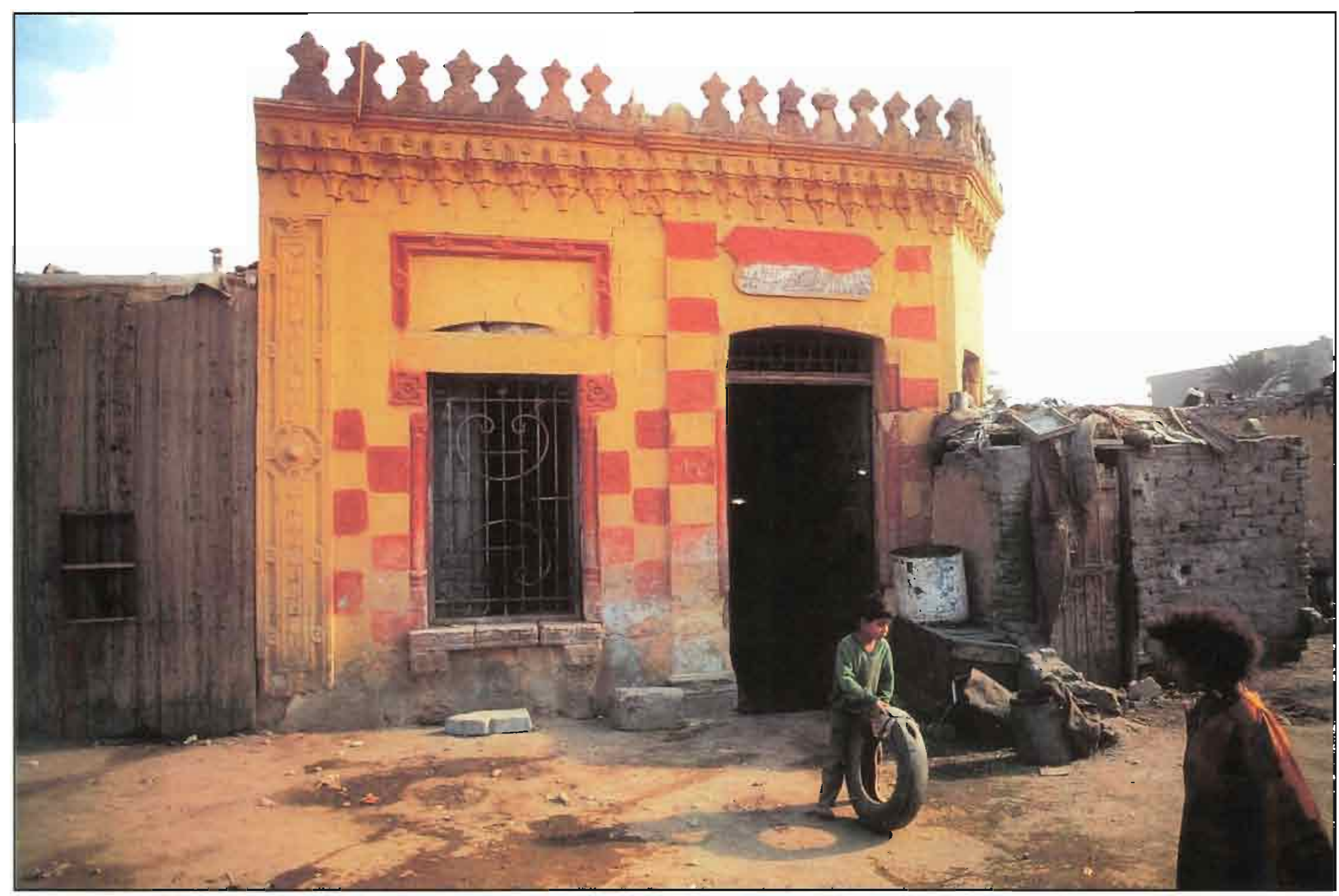
[43] Fernandes 1981, 141–56.

[44] Built in 1450. Occupants unknown.
[45] A Mamluk prince, and chamberlain to Sultan Inal. His mausoleum dates back to 1456.
[46] The sight of all those domes, when this area was still one of empty plains, was captivating; then, "painters and photographers seized on it and now that marvelous scenery is as ubiquitous as the Ponte dei Sospiri or Canal Grande in Venice" (Herz Bey 1920, 291).
[47] Fernandes 1981, 141–56.
[48] In Herz Bey 1920, 298 *cited in* Ibn Iyas, vol. 2, 46, 55.
[49] A *turba*, in the Mamluk period, was first and foremost a pious foundation, then a religious and cultural one. It generally consisted of several *riwaq*s, an *iwan* that served as a mosque or *madrasa*, a *sabil*, as well as a number of water cisterns, one or more *maq'ad*s, and kitchens, stables, and *tibaq*, etc. In short, in addition to the dome covering the tomb, it featured a combination of both domestic and religious components. Similar buildings existed in the Ayyubid period in Syria, as seen in the library of Turbat al-Ashrafiya (Hamza 1986, 164; Ibn Khalqan 1878, vol. 1, 241; Ma'an 1951, vol. 1, part 2, 241).
[50] Ibn Iyas, vol. 3, 437
[51] Marlaux 1974 *cited in* Ragon 1981, 69.
[52] CCMAA 1882–1961 (1884 report).
[53] CCMAA inspectors visited the monument and reported that it was "full of cracks and generally at risk." In addition, the carts carrying the stone from the Muqattam quarries routinely obstructed the entrance gate and crashed into the *sabil* on the corner, completely wrecking its stonework. Now, more than a century later, while the gates may be free of quarry carts, the continuing degradation of this stone-walled monument's surrounding environment is assured by the likes of the local vehicle-repair workshops.
[54] It is not clear whether the two areas just described were ever actually joined together. A map dated 1798, drawn up by scientists with the French Expedition to Egypt, shows Bab al-Wazir cemetery separated from the central Migawirin cemetery by the Qat' al-Mar'a hills. Nothing changed until 1933 (on maps dated 1823, 1897, 1913, and 1923), when the hills were leveled and the areas came to be divided by a new railway line. The expansion toward the south of Migawirin, then, must have taken place fairly recently. This is borne out by the absence of any funerary monuments or remains and by the dates when the *hawsh*es were built.

5 City of the Dead: A Home for the Homeless



Inhabited tomb in the eastern necropolis.



A city burst at the seams.
It spilled over onto its dead.
In the midst of death-dried petals,
Bulbs brought to flower by the living.
In the gloom of austere silence
The peal of *'irqsus*[1] castanets.
The smells of *taqliya*[2] wafted in the air
And the cries of children drowned out the chanting,
The wailing,
The tears.
. . .
How curious you are, O Cairo!
With life and death bundled together, jumbled up,
Inside you.
What comic tragedies.
What a tragic masquerade.
The throng within you is dead,
And death is at its busiest.
(Bahaa Jahin, translated from the Arabic by G. El Kadi)

Originally, this was to be a book on the phenomenon of mass squatter settlements in the city of the dead. Then, in the course of our research, it turned out not to be nearly as serious an issue as we had been led to believe. Now we must return to the source, as it were, to root out the causes of the recent surge in the cemetery-dwelling population. First of all, though, it is important to clear up the confusion surrounding the numbers involved.[3]

The cemeteries of Cairo have never been walled spaces. Their lines of contact with the city have shifted through the ages, resulting in countless instances of mutual encroachment. As administrative divisions have not always take them into account, some *qisms* (districts) straddle the city and the cemetery. This is particularly so in the case of the three main cemeteries: al-Shafi'i, Bab al-Nasr, and the Mamluk cemetery.

The large southern cemetery of Imam al-Shafi'i officially belongs to the *qism* of al-Khalifa and divides into six *shiyakhas* (sub-*qisms*). Three of these—al-Imamayn, al-Tunsi, and al-Qadiriya—have administrative boundaries that correspond to the cemetery's geographical boundaries; the others—Darb Guzaya, 'Arab al-Yasar, and al-Basatin al-Gharbiya—sit astride the cemetery and the medieval city.[4]

A similar lack of precision is apparent in the divisions of Bab al-Nasr cemetery in the *qism* of Gamaliya.

Only the northeastern Mamluk cemetery has administrative boundaries that tally with clear geographical boundaries—except in the southwest, where the tombs intermingle with the residential buildings of the Bab al-Wazir neighborhood.

Given the ambiguous nature of such divisions, official statistics are of little use when it comes to producing an accurate picture of cemetery population trends. They do, however, provide some interesting indicators for monitoring those trends.

Adding to the confusion, a distinction must be made between the people who actually live in the tombs and the residents of the housing estates that have developed over centuries around the various mosques and mausolea in the two main cemeteries. These estates, each of which covers several hectares, may lack definite boundaries, but we consider them to be actual patches of city set in the middle of—yet truly distinct from—the graveyards.

The true cemetery dwellers are the people inhabiting the *hawshes* (family tombs) or isolated buildings surrounded by tombs. This group then subdivides into those living in the cemetery because that is where they work—tomb keepers, gravediggers, morticians, quarrymen, masons, and Qur'an reciters—and those who are there because they cannot find such cheap rents anywhere else and who, in other countries, might be found living in shantytowns.

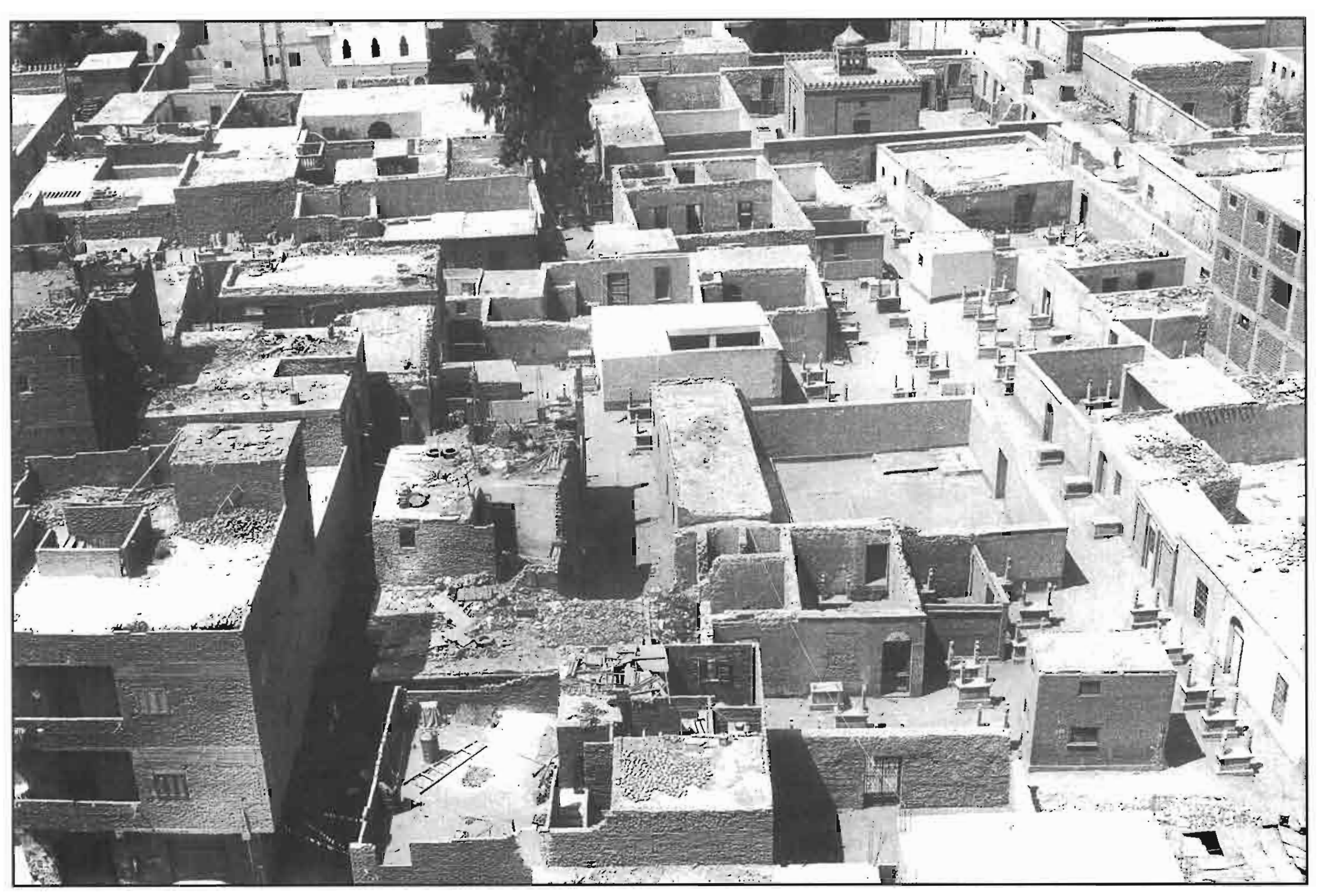
According to the enlightening, yet not entirely reliable, 1986 official population census, a total of 179,057 people were inhabiting the estates and tombs at the time. It later emerged, however, that actual tomb-dwellers numbered no more than about fifteen thousand.[5]

This brings back into proportion an issue that has long remained taboo: it has been a source of controversy in media battles between the government and its political opponents, who cite it as further evidence of failed housing policies, and it has been seized upon by moviemakers and writers seeking to lift the veil on a 'world of singularities' or to condemn the injustices suffered by some sections of the population. Al-Qa'id (1983c) offers the following description:

"Some tombs measure hundreds of square meters; the smallest, a hundred. The Tomb of Khedive Tawfiq is fifteen thousand square meters. It stands in the midst of flower gardens and has two small mosque–mausolea containing the remains of khedives Tawfiq, Isma'il, and 'Abbas Hilmi. The ornamental ivory tombs are decorated with gold paint and ebony. The walls are fitted with bookcases, also ivory, and there are wooden chairs inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The sideboards contain coffee and tea services imported from Sèvres. The other two impressive buildings in the gardens are where the family resides. Each has five rooms: three bedrooms and two luxuriously furnished living rooms. So much space and splendor for three dead rulers, the last of them a traitor whose reign culminated in the country's occupation. Not far away, thousands of honest people are entitled to just a few square meters. Inequality in life as in death . . . ."[6]

Cohabitation between the living and the dead, however, is not as unusual a situation as it might seem; there have been many other examples in other periods and other parts of the world.

Interpenetration of urban areas and cemetery.



In the case of ancient Egypt, there were large numbers of laborers, craftsmen, and tomb keepers living full-time in the cemetery of Thebes; there was even a barracks of soldiers stationed there to protect the monuments from looting.[7]

Early Islamic tombs were so plain and anonymous that the living had relatively little work to do in the cemeteries. The arrival of the Fatimids in 969, however, sparked a revival of the death culture of the ancient Egyptians. This led first to a spectacular building boom in the Qarafa and then to people's return en masse to the cemeteries, especially for festivals and funerals. It is said that Qur'an readings for the salvation of the dead person's soul could, depending on their social status, go on for days, or even a month.[8] Finally, it culminated in the emergence of different kinds of permanent housing for various social groups.[9] Under the Ayyubids, the number of places devoted to ceremony, prayer, and learning continued to grow,[10] and the first housing estates began to appear in the areas around the schools.[11]

The Mamluk sovereigns, as seen earlier, each "delighted in outdoing their predecessors through the magnificence of a tomb larger than any other,"[12] which would inevitably led to ever more people settling in the cemeteries. And in their desire to be granted a place in paradise, these potentates sought to share the benefits of religious festivals with orphans, the poor, and the residents of mosques, *madrasas*, *khanqahs*, and other religious institutions by handing out cakes, dates, nuts, sweets, clothes, and large amounts of meat. Some

of the *waqf* funds were used to buy camels, buffalos, cows, and sheep to be sacrificed in front of schools, orphanages, and mosques, and then offered to *waqf* officials and the needy (locals and those passing through).[13] All of which resulted in the cemeteries becoming a magnet for the urban poor.[14]

By the end of this period, the development of Cairo's huge city of the dead had reached its peak.[15] It had become a place offering shelter for the needy, accommodation for Sufis, and religious education; a place of relaxation and leisure for sultans and city worthies,[16] but also of exile for disgraced rulers;[17] and an obligatory prayer station for pilgrims on the road to Mecca, leading to the emergence of a number of caravansaries. The residents of Cairo enjoyed walking there—and even singing and dancing—on full-moon nights and feast days, when they would organize banquets for their families and friends.

In 1459, permanent dwellings in the Qarafa were banned by official decree after a good share of its resident population died of the plague.[18]

Mamluk rule ended in a period of decadence that also affected the cemeteries. Their population continued to decline throughout the Ottoman period. Niebhur, on a visit to Cairo at the time, noted how "the cemetery district has been depopulated. Walking there, one sees superb mosques and the tombs of past Egyptian rulers, all abandoned . . . ."[19]

Ironically, the repopulation of the Qarafa began under Muhammad 'Ali at a time when the government was striving to restrict its functions to burials and death-related religious practices. Suzerains of the ruling family, the aristocracy, and the bourgeoisie built vast funerary compounds comprising several buildings with conveniences (kitchens and washrooms) throughout the Qarafa, which meant having once again to provide permanent housing for the keepers. They were joined by other social classes as the Cairene housing crisis deepened.

The living have thus been cohabiting with the dead in the Qarafa—in ways that have varied according to the underlying sociocultural factors—for nearly ten centuries. The permanence of the arrangement has prompted some sociologists to analyze the issue from the standpoint of 'historical structuralism'[20] and to regard it as the end product of diachronic processes. Social scientists are far from unanimous on this interpretation. Many believe that the basic explanatory framework fails to shed light on the true causes of the phenomenon,[21] which are evident from even a cursory glance. Al-Qa'id (1983c), for instance, describes how "new faces are appearing in the cemeteries every day. The reasons are almost always the same: the fact that their houses have fallen down, the housing crisis, increasingly unaffordable rents, and key money," before going on to recall that the "phenomenon of people living in the cemetery has not just sprung up overnight, nor is it linked solely to the general housing crisis. It tends rather to stem from the profligacy and unbelievably luxurious tastes of the tombs' former concessionaries."[22]

A combination of three factors has caused the phenomenon to resurface: the exclusion of the very poor, the hyperurbanization of the latter half of the twentieth century, and the incredible luxuriousness of the tombs themselves. Parallels may, of course, be drawn between past and present patterns of cemetery dwelling, such as tomb keepers' lodgings for instance. But likening the temporary stays of princes and worthies in the palaces of the Qarafa to the permanent settlements of Sudanese and Takruri communities—regarded as inferior ethnic groups and excluded from the city of the living—is a gross over-generalization. The close relationship that Egyptian people, especially Cairenes, have maintained with the city of the dead is unquestionably rooted in ancient history. But there is no escaping the fact that contemporary changes in customs and practices, together with the adoption of functionalist/hygienist urban planning principles, have stripped full-time cohabitation—even for tomb keepers—of its legitimacy. Staying in the cemetery after sundown was banned by Law no. 5 of 1966, and if the local authorities have been incapable of enforcing that law, it is because of their failure to offer the homeless any other alternatives.

Beginnings of the urban crisis

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Cairo experienced the first signs of an urban crisis that would continue to the present day: rapid population growth, rural-to-urban migration, land and real-estate speculation, the exclusion of the working classes from new neighborhoods, a housing shortage, the emergence of shanty or *'ishash* neighborhoods, punctuated by street marches and strikes by workers demanding access to decent housing.[23] Extensive modernization of the capital in the Isma'ili era had resulted in the demolition of a significant number of buildings in the heart of the medieval old town,[24] forcing residents to evacuate their homes. Some took refuge in empty public and religious buildings while others headed for the outskirts and the cemeteries.[25] The 1897 census put overall population of the *shiyakha* with cemeteries at 30,969.[26]

The crisis then worsened still further.[27] Statistics from early in the century give quite a clear picture of the state of affairs: in 1917, for example, more than 40.5 percent of households in the *qisms* of Gamaliya, Darb Guzaya, and al-Khalifa were living in single rooms. It was only a matter of time before they would eventually boost the size of the cemetery population, especially in existing housing estates such as al-Kharta al-Qadima:

A tomb used by a printer, eastern cemetery, Migawirin.

built as a gift from Khedive Tawfiq to the quarrymen living in huts and being hounded by the police, it first figured on the cadastral maps northwest of Imam al-Shafi'i in 1913.[28]

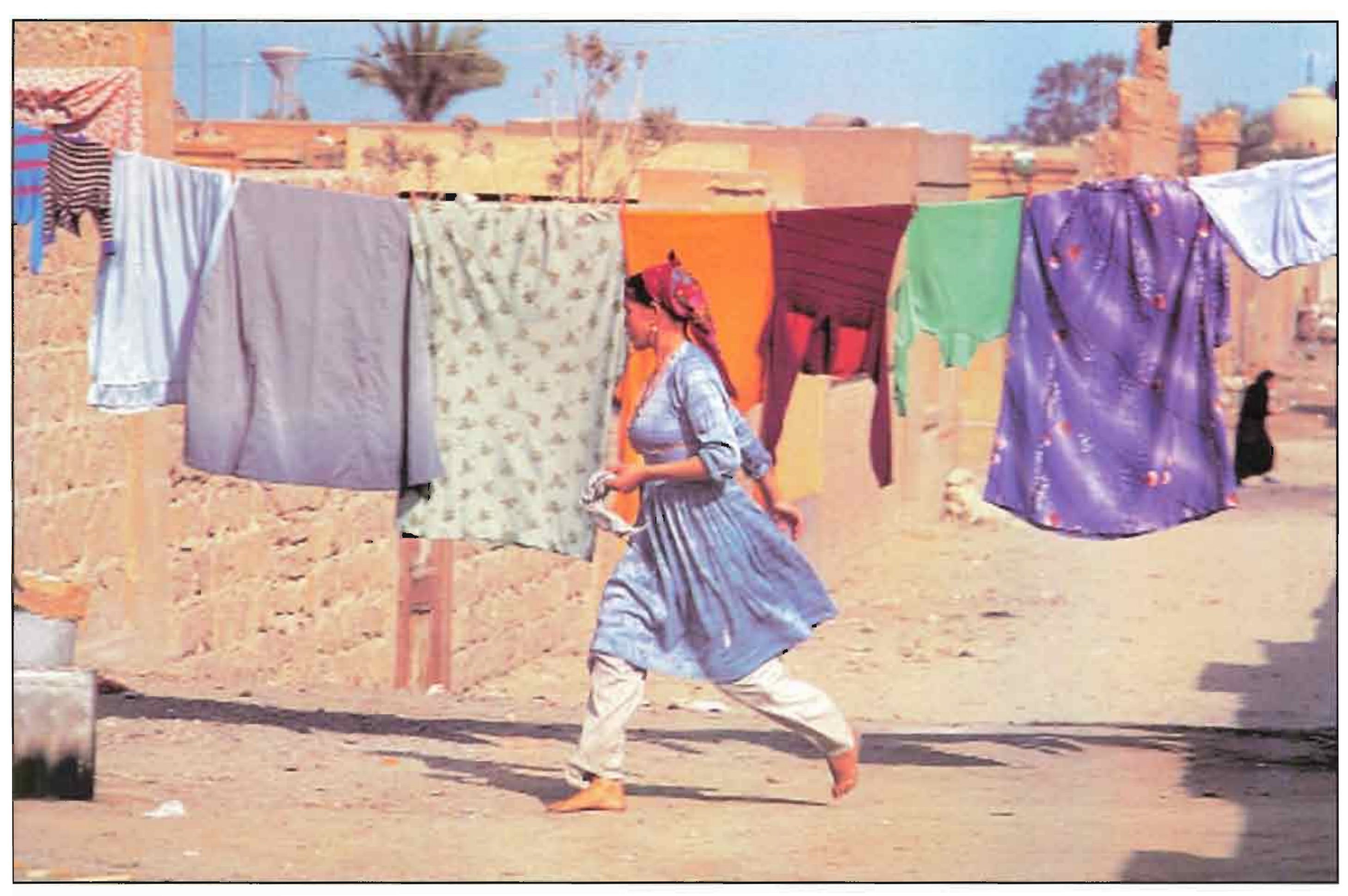
The fact that workers were being housed in the city of the dead was a fairly clear signal that Cairo's cemeteries were already considered suitable for absorbing residential overflow and providing homes for the poor.

This first public housing scheme was followed by another, private, development, east of Imam al-Shafi'i: al-Tunsi estate, built on a vacant plot of land appropriated illegally by the morticians and tomb keepers beginning to set themselves up as cemetery real-estate dealers. Indeed, interest in such plots was on the increase, and soon even the *nazirs*—the *waqf* officials in charge of managing the properties—were involved in the haggling over prices.

In 1907, the area was incorporated into the city transportation network: a new streetcar line was installed that ran from the pyramids in the west to a terminus on Imam al-Shafi'i Square. This would inevitably play a big part in the local population explosion.

Later, stagnation in agricultural development after the First World War led to massive rural–urban migration. By 1927, of Cairo's million inhabitants, 644,000 had been born elsewhere.[29]

Meanwhile, a fresh wave of rural migrants had hit the capital and a new town had appeared south of the funerary complex of Barquq: 'Izbit al-Sa'ayda, otherwise known as al-Barquqi, had a population of 1,475, most of them rural migrants from southern Egypt now working as construction-site laborers and peddlers.[30] And al-Tunsi, in the southern cemetery, was growing at a staggering 10 percent a year.



Demographic trends and housing 1927–50

Census data for this period show that there were two phases of demographic change.

First, in the interwar years (1927–37), population growth stagnated in the old town *qisms* of Khalifa, Gamaliya, and Darb al-Ahmar, and in every cemetery *shiyakha* except al-Tunsi, whose average annual growth was 5.5 percent compared to 2.2 percent for Cairo. Residents of these areas were leaving for the new *qisms* north of Cairo—Shubra, Rod al-Farag, and al-Wayli—each of which was expanding at a terrific rate, not least because the Misr Bank had opened textile factories in Shubra al-Khayma.

The period between 1937 and 1947 saw a reversal of those trends and the Cairene population more than doubled in a decade, rising from 1.3 to 2.8 million. The end of the Second World War saw the closure of factories that had been kept open during the war years only to produce supplies for the allied troops, leading to mass layoffs and a further deterioration in housing conditions. By 1947, 49 percent of Cairo households were living, on average, three to a room. Density figures in some of the cemetery *shiyakhas* exploded (143,142 residents/km^2 in al-Kurdi) as their populations grew at unprecedented average annual rates: 4.1 percent in al-Basatin, 6.5 percent in al-Imamayn and al-Kurdi, 15.8 percent in al-Tunsi, versus 5.8 percent for Cairo as a whole. The size of the tomb-dwelling population had grown fivefold in ten years.

By 1947, the population of the cemetery *shiyakhas* had grown to 69,367 inhabitants; it had doubled in less than half a century.

During this time, the Imam al-Shafi'i residential enclave was legalized. On 13 August 1932, officials from Idarat al-

Map of inhabited tombs in the eastern necropolis (surveyed by G. El Kadi et al., 1990).

Gabanat (the state cemetery authority) launched legal proceedings against the landlady of a building there, saying that she was in breach of the regulations governing the construction of housing on land set aside for burials. She was fined 15 piasters and ordered to demolish the building at her own expense. But she took her case to the appeals court and won it by arguing that:

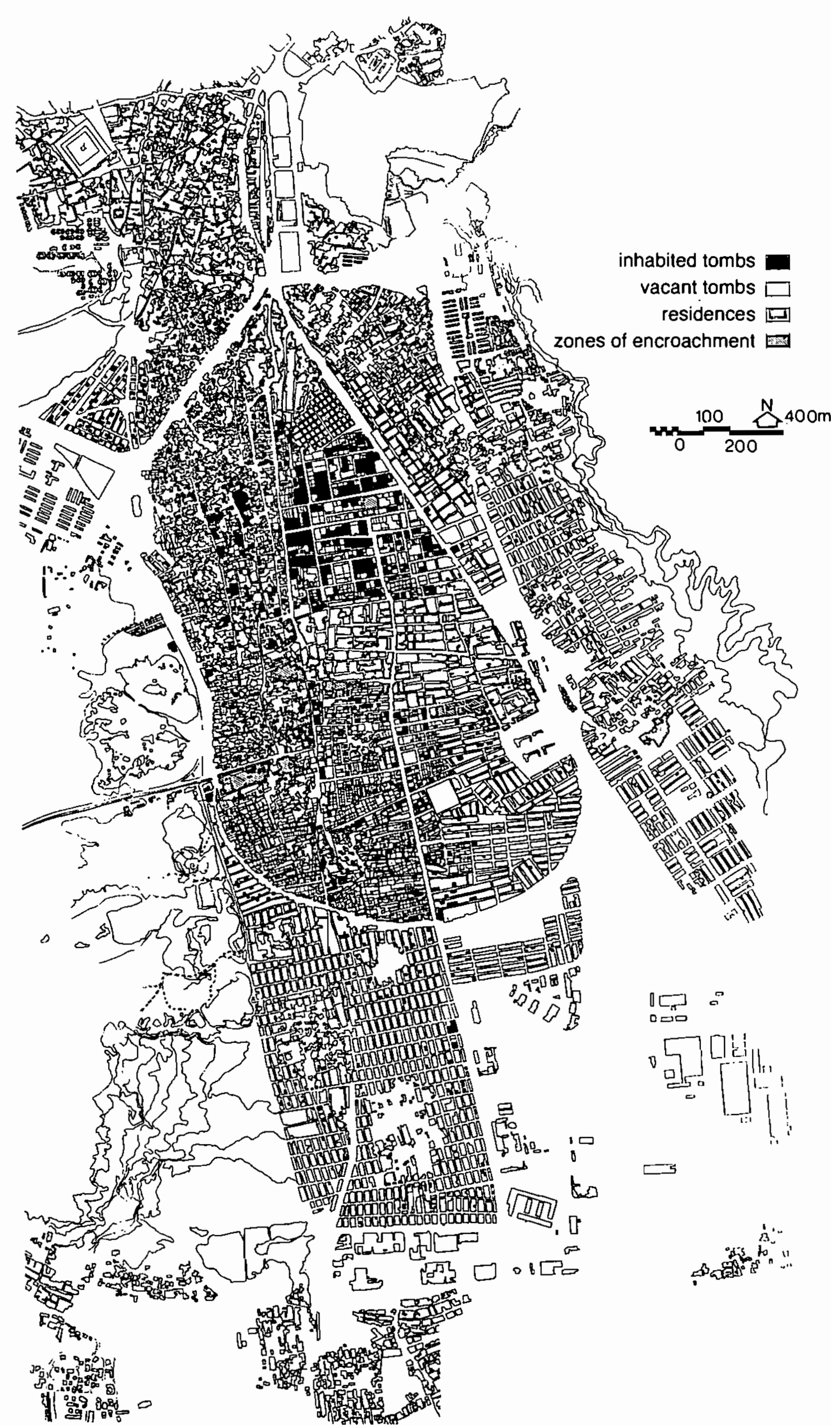
- the plot of land in question was outside the cemetery, and hence of the jurisdiction of Idarat al-Gabanat;
- the fact that the building was part of a strictly urban housing block and subject to real-estate and land taxes amounted to de facto and *de jure* acknowledgment of private ownership and the type of land use;
- and therefore, as part of that block, it was not subject to the Gabanat Code, and Gabanat officials had had no right to intervene.

Two previous rulings were cited. The first had legalized fifty-three other buildings in the Imam enclave on the grounds that they were located outside the cemetery. The second had legalized a building due to the discovery in its basement of a buried trove of gold and silver coins dating back to the days of Baybars, founder of the Bahri Mamluk dynasty. The discovery had been presented as evidence of this having formerly been a residential area, and the defense argued that its urbanization should be allowed to continue as it had done for centuries before. Clearly, then, the cyclical switch from settlements to cemeteries has served to support both sides of the argument.

Emergence of a "third city of Cairo," 1950–66

Over the next sixteen years, the construction of new residential neighborhoods,[31] workers' housing developments,[32] and satellite towns[33] saw the urbanized area expand from seven thousand to sixteen thousand hectares. As in the early 1900s,

Map of inhabited tombs in the southern necropolis (surveyed by G. El Kadi et al., 1990).



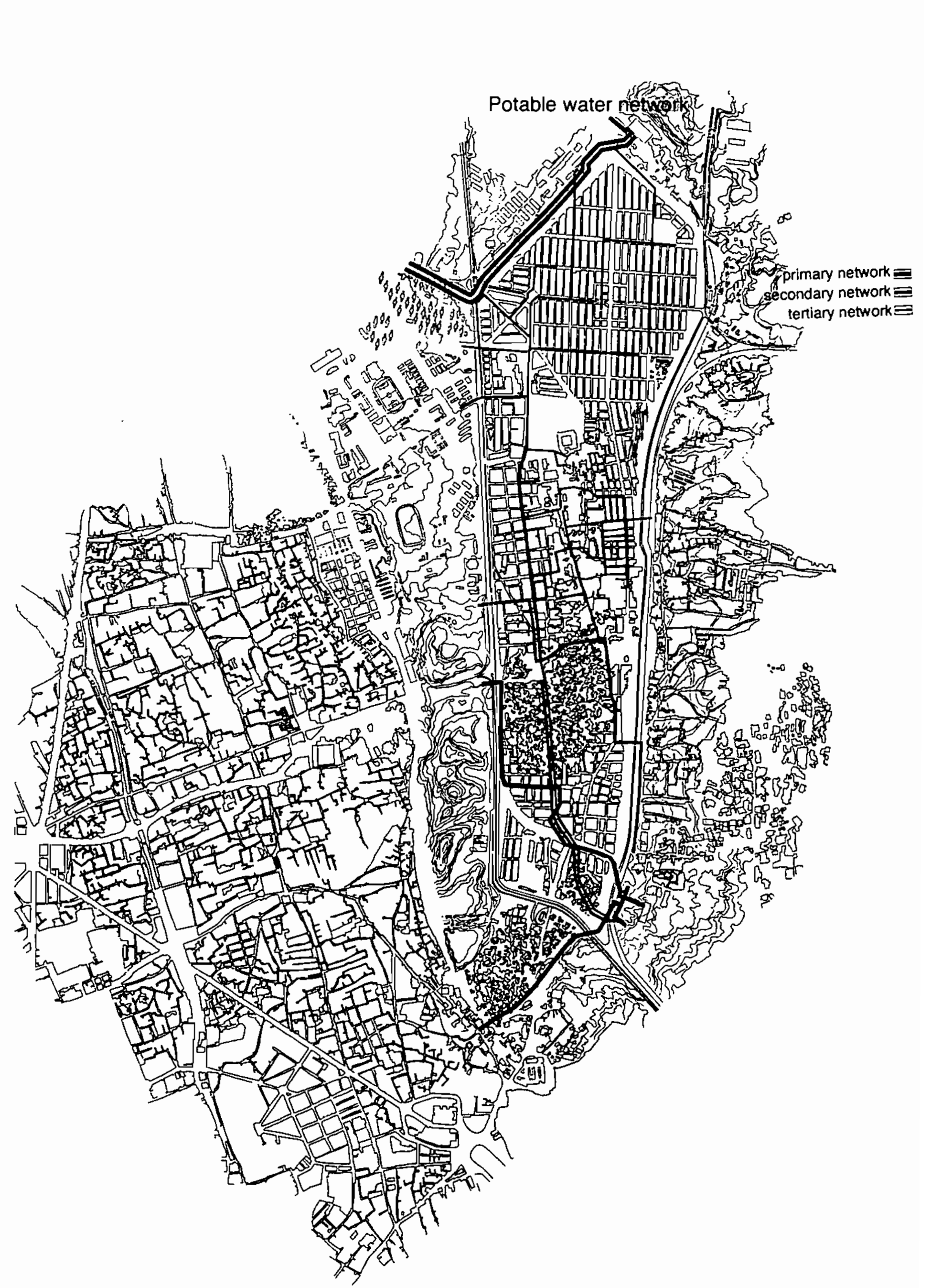
extensive work was undertaken to improve the traffic system. The new Salah Salem Road in particular was to have a considerable impact as far as the cemeteries were concerned. The Nasser government built a public housing project with infrastructure and facilities in the northern corner of Imam al-Shafi'i cemetery[34] to rehouse the people living in the towns demolished and on the land expropriated in order to build the highway; those evicted from the *'ishash* neighborhoods of Tell al-Mar'a, being eligible for neither compensation nor rehousing, found refuge in the cemeteries or went to build new homes, illegally, on the Muqattam hills, thus founding the new, unplanned settlement of Manshiyat Nasir.

Cairo, as the country's main industrial city, was constantly attracting new migrants and having to expand its housing stock as a result. Despite its best efforts, the government simply could not cope with the vast numbers of people spilling into the cemeteries. First they moved to the estates, which evolved into bona fide city districts with their own schools, police stations, markets, shops, artisans, and so on. Then they moved in ever larger numbers into the neighboring tombs.[35] The state even encouraged this by opening primary and elementary schools and branches of the Arab Socialist Union in the palace–tombs seized during the 1952 revolution and allowing *waqf* functionaries to occupy those managed by the Wazarit al-Awqaf (ministry of endowments).

Changing nature of the housing crisis (1966–86)

This was a period of great change in Egypt as a whole, with two wars followed by a peace treaty and then economic liberalization *(infitah)* setting the country on the road to an economic boom. The recovery of the Sinai and its oilfields and the

Map of potable water networks in the eastern necropolis (source: Greater Cairo General Authority for Potable Water, Egypt, 1990, drawing by G. El Kadi, base plan SFS/IGN, France, 1978, updated by the authors).



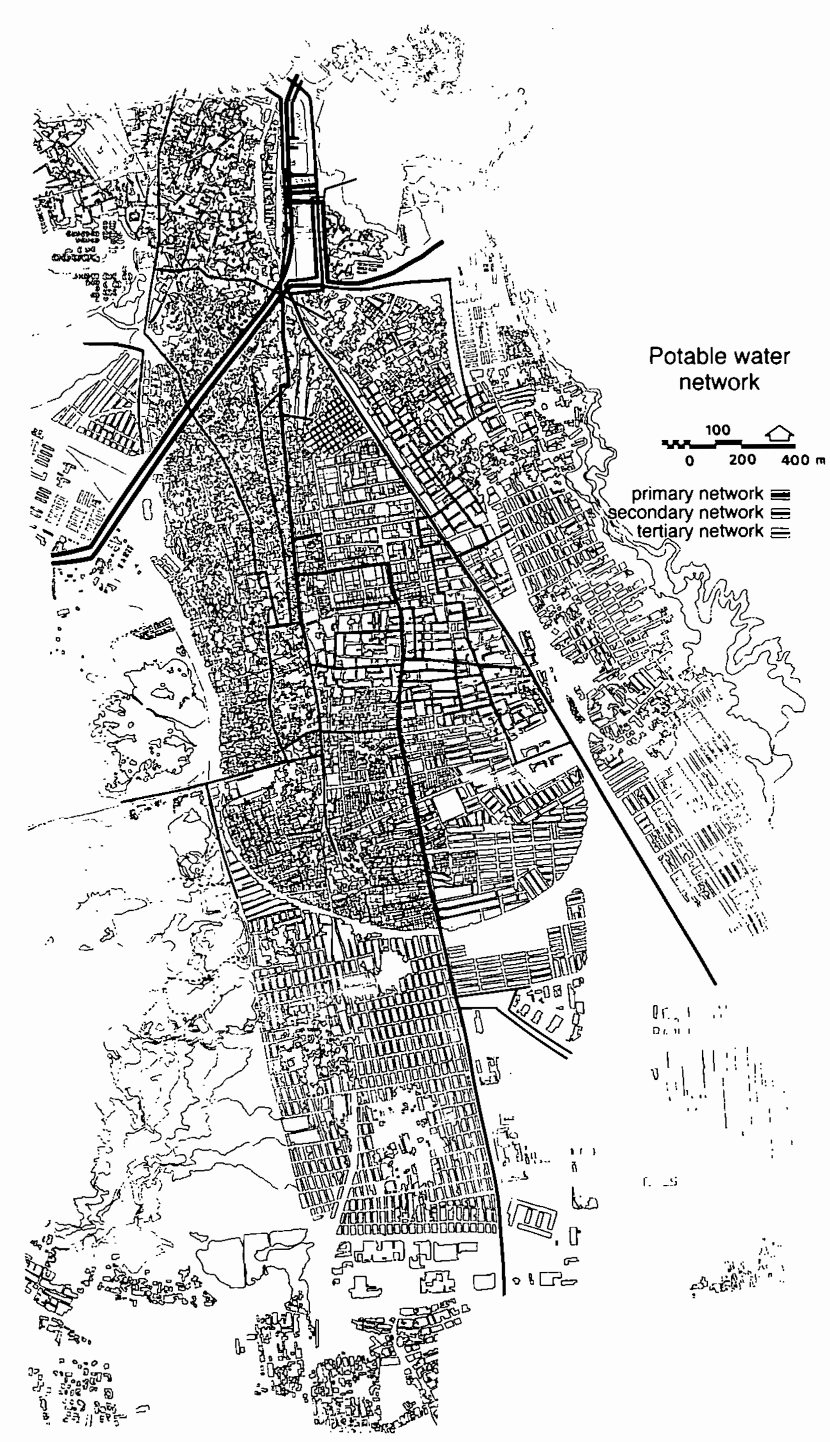
reopening of the Suez Canal, together with substantial inflows of international aid and money sent home by Egyptian expatriates working in the Gulf states, meant that there was no shortage of capital for extensive public works in Cairo, including the construction of an impressive road system created from two master plans.

Yet this led in turn to a boom in land and real-estate speculation: villas were demolished and replaced by tower blocks; extra stories were added to existing buildings; unplanned settlements proliferated in peri-urban areas and evolved into proper satellite towns. The change in scale was spectacular.

The cemeteries—hemmed in and criss-crossed by the new expressways, serviced by new bus routes, and surrounded by urban expansion to the east (Manshiyat Nasir), west (Fustat plateau), south (al-Basatin), and northeast (Madinat Ṇasr)—were absorbed ever more into the city.

These and other factors prompted the poorest to move into the tombs on the outskirts of the housing estates. Many had lost their homes in the nineteenth-century city center, and even the inner suburbs, to a sudden surge of tertiarization—a process that had begun in the late 1960s. In the old town, unplanned redevelopment and the collapse of ancient buildings had caused massive displacement. Those that could afford it headed for the unplanned satellite towns. Others were allotted tents or huts on emergency shelter sites set up by the state. The very poor went to rent tombs from the cemetery estate agents: the morticians, and the utterly destitute, with the permission of the ministry of endowments, squatted in the courtyards of mosques and *wakala*s dating back to the Middle Ages—but not for long. In 1980 they were evicted to make way for a government program to restore those ancient monuments and found themselves forced to seek shelter in the tombs.

Map of potable water networks in the southern necropolis (source: Greater Cairo General Authority for Potable Water, Egypt, 1990, drawing by G. El Kadi, base plan SFS/IGN, France, 1978, updated by the authors).



Just as these new outcasts from the city of the living were arriving in the city of the dead, some of the latter's longer-term residents were being moved out to the surrounding unplanned satellite towns, mainly Manshiyat Nasir to the east and al-Basatin to the south. Two-way traffic, perhaps, but the numbers leaving were a trickle compared to those flooding in. The result was an increase in the overall population of the cemeteries and a relative decline in certain *shiyakha*s. Between 1960 and 1976, the overall number of people inhabiting cemetery *shiyakha*s grew from 124,914 to 154,637, an average of 2.4 percent a year, but with individual variations: from –1.4 percent in Qaytbay and –0.1 percent in al-Qadiriya to 2.2 percent in al-Imamayn and 4.4 percent in al-Basatin. The following decade, the population rose to 179,057 with an average growth of 0.8 percent a year (compared to 1.9 percent in Cairo and 8.8 percent in Manshiyat Nasir).[36] But much of this overall growth stems from the urbanization of the *shiyakha*s of Basatin (population 54,384),[37] which were once the least populated parts of the cemeteries and had a tomb-dwelling population of just a few dozen. If we subtract the figures for al-Basatin, the absolute number of cemetery-dwellers in 1986 had actually fallen to 124,673.

Why was that? Where were the destitute going in a city that had next to no shanty-towns? To find out, we collated census data with empirical findings from our work in the field.

Inner-city populations declined by around twenty thousand from 1966 to 1976, and then by half a million over the following inter-censal period. There is obviously a correlation between the 'depopulating' of the city center and the very high growth rates in the outlying unplanned satellite towns.[38] The period between 1976 and 1986 also saw a clear overall improvement in housing conditions

in those towns. There were significant decreases in single-room accommodation (from 45 percent to 11 percent, on average) and occupancy ratios per room (from 2.3 to 1.6). There were equally significant increases in connections to public water and electricity networks (the averages for all the unplanned neighborhoods rose from 64 percent and 77 percent respectively in 1976 to 95 percent and 97.6 percent in 1986). Equally striking, however, were the high vacancy rates (14.2 percent of units in Imbaba, 15 percent in al-Matariya, 21.4 percent in Bulaq al-Dakrur, 26.6 percent in al-Haram, and so on) and the increases in density per square kilometer.[39] Collating these data highlights two trends: on the one hand, overcrowding in the finished housing stock; on the other, rising property prices and construction costs leading to increasing numbers of very low-income households no longer able to meet the increasing demands of landlords seeking to finance other work (joinery, plumbing, paintwork, flooring, etc.).

Visiting the unplanned neighborhoods today, it is striking to see so many empty buildings, abandoned at various stages of completion. This cannot be explained just by the tough government measures to curb urban sprawl, such as state grants to farmers to stop them selling their land, or by the closure of the local clay brickworks. Egypt had 1.8 million vacant housing units in 1986, 523,000 of them in Cairo. Egypt thus has a surplus of housing as opposed to the shortages of previous years—whether real or concocted.[40] Yet demand among the very poor is clearly not being met, to judge by how many more were living in tents, huts, cabins, and other makeshift dwellings: that number rose nationwide from 40,000 in 1976 to 144,000 in 1986, and in Cairo from 6,000 to 20,000. Many believe that there is no longer a housing crisis in Egypt and that a lack of housing is not the problem. Instead, it is social inequalities that have led to unfair allocation and to the exclusion of the very poor, even from the cemeteries: tombs are increasingly unaffordable, and the *hawsh*es are becoming inaccessible because, while rents have remained reasonably low (between LE 5 and LE 20 a month), the *hawsh* managers—the morticians—are now charging up to LE 1,200 for right of entry.

These factors led to the reemergence, between 1986 and 1990, of *'ishash* neighborhoods in the city of the dead. Corrugated iron huts were erected between the wooden tombs in Bab al-Nasr. Dwellings were built on the roofs of the vast tombs of Sayyida Nafisa cemetery. A two-hectare shantytown sprouted on the fringes of the Mamluk cemetery. But the spread of shanties in general was relatively limited compared to that of the spontaneous settlements extending into the desert. Previously, the most spectacular appropriation of state land outside the cemeteries had been in Manshiyat Nasir, whose population had reached 130,240 by 1986. Two more settlements have since appeared: 'Izbit al-Hagana on the road east to Suez (180 hectares; pop. 20,000), and Istabl Antar (150 hectares), built on the remains of Fustat west of Imam al-Shafi'i cemetery. The latter probably attracted former *hawsh* residents prepared to put up with less comfortable housing because they had never been able to come to terms with living in a tomb.

The cemetery-dwelling population

"The world of the cemeteries is full of singularities. It is governed by a large number of morticians. There are 1,200 *turabi* (gravediggers), 2,400 *musai'ds* (assistants), and eight thousand *migawirins*.[41] When a family arrives in the cemeteries, they place what is left of their ruined furniture together with all their possessions in a cemetery alley before setting off in search of a tomb keeper, for the tomb keepers are the true landlords here. He discusses, haggles, and rents. The actual concessionary is the last to know."[42]

a) Residents of the *hawsh*es

Muhammad Hasanayn is an abattoir offal salesman. He used to live in an old house in Sayyida Zaynab. When it was declared unfit for habitation in 1971, he found himself with no other alternative than to move into the family *hawsh* with his wife and five children. Ibrahim, a taxi driver, lives there for the same reasons. Three years ago, he celebrated his son's wedding there. Nadia is a widow. She has been living in a wooden tomb in Bab al-Nasr with her seven children since her house collapsed twenty-seven years ago. Mustafa works as a driver for the state post and telecommunications company. He shares a single room with his wife and four children and pays a rent of LE 5 a month. They used to live with his in-laws in 'Abbasiya, but it was so unbearable that they felt they would be "better off living in a tomb." 'Abd al-Mun'im used to be a tailor; he went out of business and moved to the cemetery, where he now plies his trade as a mortician. His three sons are still living with him. One is a high-school teacher, another an assistant professor at the faculty of arts, and the third a public-sector accountant. Umm Tariq has been a tomb keeper in Migawirin for fifty years. She and her family reside in a three-roomed annex. When her daughter married, she moved her—with the concessionaries' permission—into an adjoining apartment in the same enclosure. 'Ali Mahmud is a mortician who moved into a tomb, to which he has since added another story, because he wanted to live near where he worked. Ahmed Mahdi works for the ministry of endowments. He resides in a lavish 1,200m² tomb in Imam al-Shafi'i with a telephone connection, a bathroom, and every necessary convenience, plus a vast garden with plants that he tends with the greatest care.

The people inhabiting the *hawsh*es of Cairo do not make up a homogeneous social group: 31 percent are artisans, 20.1 percent, state employees,[43] 12.8 percent, day laborers, and 8.1 percent, morticians and gravediggers; the remaining 28 percent consist of tomb-keepers and others involved in unspecified lines of work. The employment rate in this mini-society is relatively high: 73 percent of people aged fifteen and over are working, compared to just 44.8 percent in town, and most of the non-working population are home makers, retired, or disabled. One in ten of our interviewees works in the cemeteries.

An analysis of what drove people to move to the cemeteries shows the root causes to be closely linked to the housing crisis. Only 13 percent of our interviewees were actually born there; 55 percent of the others had come from various parts of the old town after their homes had collapsed, while the rest were rural migrants. The overall illiteracy rate stands at 64 percent, and just 0.6 percent are university graduates. The connection with the housing crisis becomes apparent when one takes a chronological look at the populating of the *hawsh*es. No more than 1.1 percent of current residents have lived there for more than fifty years, compared to 20.3 percent for the period 1935–45, 18 percent from 1955 to 1964, 28 percent from 1965 to 1974, and 32.6 percent between 1975 and 1985. The growth in the *hawsh* population thus came after the housing crisis had worsened.

The social hierarchy breaks down into four distinct classes. At the top are the morticians and *waqf* functionaries, who generally occupy the vast funerary estates of the erstwhile aristocracy and enjoy every comfort bar a bathroom. They have acquired their status on the back of profits made in the cemeteries: renting out tombs whose owners had died heirless (49 percent of interviewees were renting from morticians, 61 percent of them in the *waqf*-run *hawsh*es), selling vacant plots of land, and even dealing drugs.[44] Some have used their gains to branch into trading activities, others into construction work in the city. The next class down comprises the artisans, small shopkeepers, workshop owners, and established gravediggers. Then come the low-level civil servants, public and private-sector office clerks, day laborers, and struggling gravediggers. At the bottom are the hawkers and the unemployed, the retired, the elderly, and the disabled. The heterogeneous social hierarchy in the *hawsh*es reflects the fact that social exclusion is a problem affecting not just the underprivileged but also a section of the middle classes facing what appeared to be irreversible ruin, with some families reduced to moving in with their own dead when their homes collapsed in the city of the living.

How many people are living in the house-tombs? Findings from our field research put the figure at 12,870 (in all but the Jewish cemetery), including:

- 7,020 people in 1,404 households in Imam al-Shafi'i and Sayyida Nafisa, in the *qism* of al-Khalifa (54.5 percent of the total cemetery-dwelling population);
- 4,350 (870 households) in the eastern cemetery (*qism* of Manshiyat Nasir);
- 1,500 (200 households) in Bab al-Nasr (Gamaliya).

These figures tally with those of CAPMAS, the official statistics agency, by whose reckoning 13,419 people were living in *hawsh* accommodation in 1986:

- 6,430 (1,663 households) in al-Khalifa, i.e., 51.8 percent of the total cemetary population and 0.12 percent of the Cairene;
- 4,217 (953 households) in the eastern cemetery, i.e., 30 percent of the total cemetery population;
- 350 households in Bab al-Nasr (11 percent of the total), and a further 166 in Zayn al-'Abidin cemetery and 26 in al-'Amr, neither of which we took into account.[45]

It may be hard to come to terms with the social-image implications of living in a tomb, but housing conditions there are often better than in poor inner-city or inner-suburban neighborhoods. And while many households may be crammed into one or two bedrooms (a room occupancy ratio of 2.3 versus 1.46 for Cairo), they have access to a vast, private space with surrounding walls and plants, on a calm, wide street with sidewalks and a name—important details often missing in many parts of the city of the living.

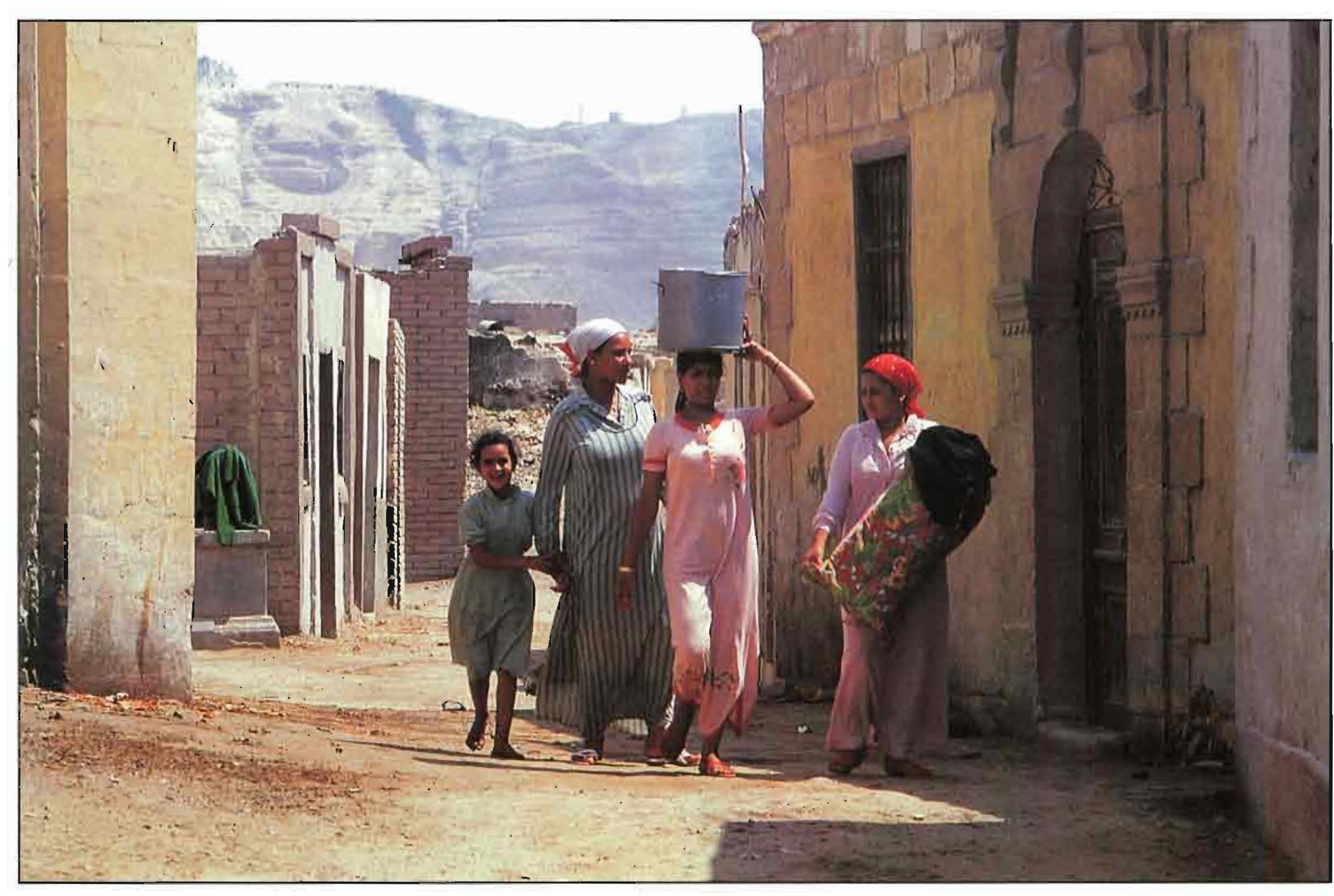
Such places, however, are often lacking in services and facilities. Residents have to choose between paying the water carrier or walking a hundred yards or more to the nearest tap. And the nearest schools and most workplaces are miles away. Only 38 percent of our sample population have running water and electricity; just 3.8 percent have mains drainage. The rest use car batteries and dry-pit latrines, periodically drained like those in the squatter settlements.

Still, it is striking to note the number of households with a fridge (25.5 percent) and a television set (47 percent: 12 percent color and 35 percent black and white). And groups of women clustered around outdoor washing machines are a common sight in cemetery side streets.[46]

b) Residents of the estates

Neighborhood activity in the cemetery housing estates has been identical to that of residential districts in the city from as early as 1927. In the 1940s, in addition to their functional role as dormitory settlements, the estates also evolved into centers of production and absorbed the overflow of artisans and small manufacturers spilling out of the old town.[47] Transformation industries came to employ 32.5 percent of the resident workforce in Qaytbay, 31.8 percent in Migawirin and al-Gharib, and 26 percent

Women carrying water.



in al-Tunsi, compared to 21.6 percent in Cairo. The percentage of carrying and construction sector workers in Qaytbay (21.5 percent) and in 'Izbit al-Barquqi (13.6 percent) far outweighed that in the rest of the city (8.3 percent). By 1986, while little of note had changed in terms of the occupational profile of local residents, the numbers employed in the transformation industries had grown considerably larger.[48] In contrast to the districts reserved strictly for burials, the cemeteries' urban developments now look in every respect like regular, lower-middle-class districts in the city.

The social heterogeneity of these places, due in part to the length of time for which they have been inhabited, prevents the cemetery-dwelling population from presenting a united front in an effort to demand anything from either the public authorities on the one hand or the morticians on the other, which puts the vast majority of *hawsh* residents in an even more precarious position. Moreover, they find themselves systematically threatened with eviction by the tomb concessionaries when the latter take legal action and the courts decide in their favor.

The state, society, and the issue of people living in the cemeteries

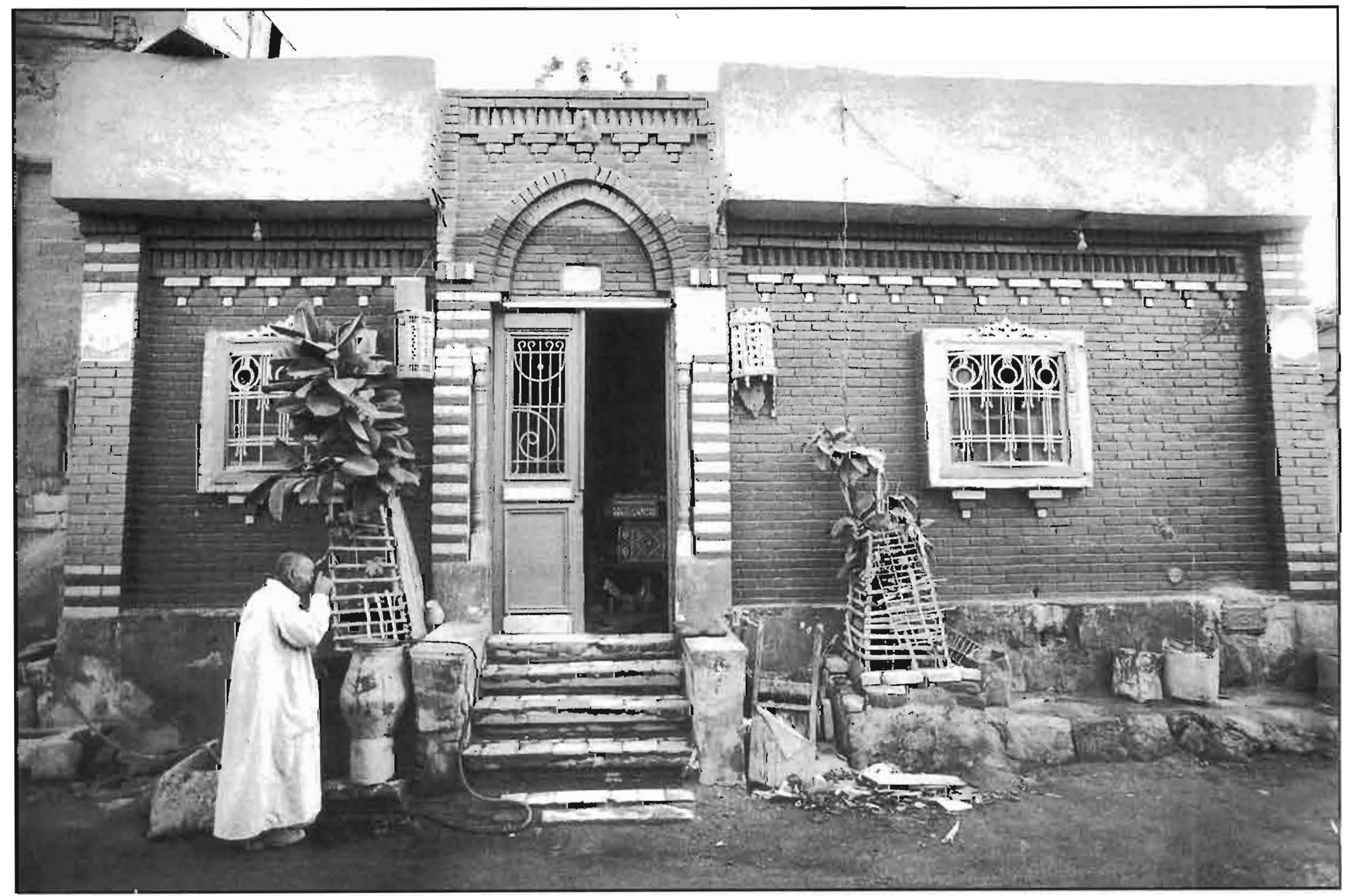
"The cemetery-dwelling population constitutes, alongside other social strata, a breeding ground for social hatred and crime. They are a danger to social peace and harmony."[49] So went the official spin of a state seeking to deflect attention from its powerlessness in the face of a problem it did not know how to resolve, a line which resonated with the long-held popular conception of the people inhabiting the cemeteries as dropouts and outcasts.

Tomb transformed into a storehouse for antique furniture, Bab al-Wazir, Muhammad Salih, 1940.

Only very recently has a somewhat more balanced picture begun to emerge thanks to press reports and movies showing them to be no more 'dangerous' than the residents of any regular working-class neighborhood elsewhere.[50] One made-for-television movie —*Ana la akzib wa-lakinni atagammal* ('I'm not lying, just trying to look better')—tells the story of a brilliant young student, well thought of by his classmates and professors, who is a mortician's son. Not wanting anyone to see where he lives, he systematically turns down his classmates' offers to walk him home. Then, because he imagines he is being followed, we see him leaping from minibuses to taxis and so on, taking a thousand twists and turns to try and lose his pursuer. When he falls in love with a girl in his class and lets her in on his secret, she accepts him despite the conflict it causes with her family and community. But she gradually comes to understand the reality of living in a tomb and eating the food brought as offerings by visitors, and when she witnesses her fiancé helping his father to bury a dead body, she realizes that the man she has chosen belongs to another—very frightening—world.

This harrowing tale provides an accurate account of the social segregation to which the cemeteries' inhabitants are subjected.

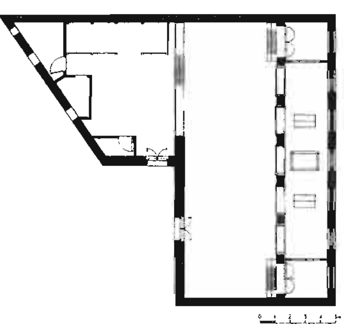
In 1987, in response to an opposition politician's indictment, the housing minister unveiled a five-year plan designed to eradicate every 'indecent' form of housing—every tent, hut, and building unfit for habitation—in Egypt. Those ends have yet to be achieved. When the earthquake struck in 1992, the cemetery- and *'ishash*-dwelling populations were quickly forgotten as the priority shifted to rehousing the thousands of newly displaced.[51]

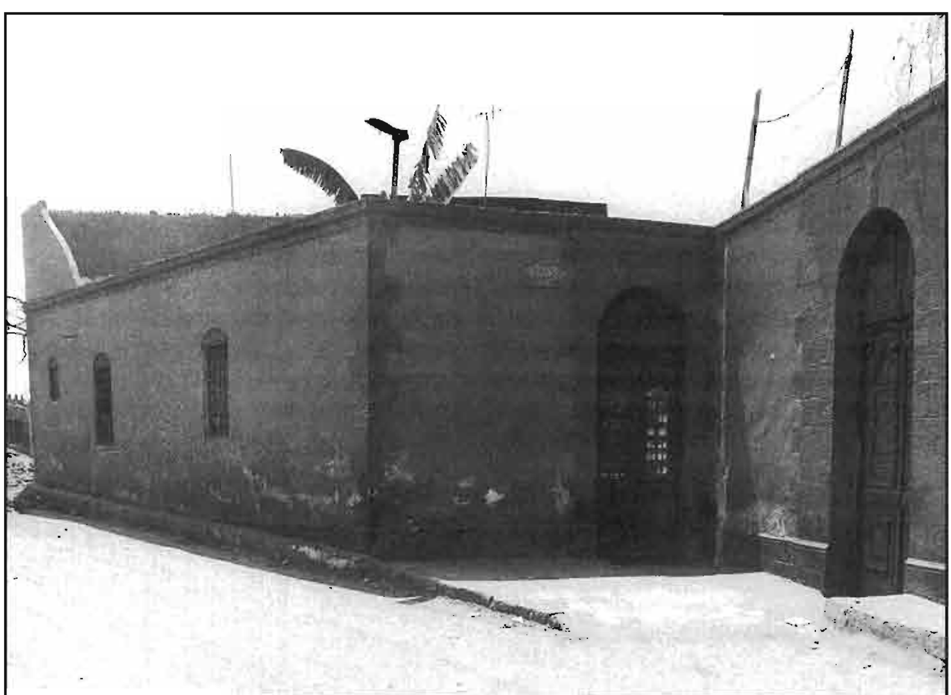


Right, inhabited tomb in Bab al-Nasr; left, plan by G. El Kadi and A. Bonnamy. Mahmud Habb al-Rumman, 1928.

Opinion in the upper echelons of the government is divided over what to do about the cemeteries. The extremists want their residents cleared out into the desert—an unrealistic solution that fails to take into account the social, financial, and cultural costs of such an operation. The pragmatists, in contrast, see the 250,000 house-tombs as housing stock for the homeless,[52] some of whom were subsequently moved in by Governorate decree.

The ambiguity of the state position on the matter is reflected by the ongoing cemetery infrastructure work: "Twelve tombs on a single cemetery street have a telephone,





obviously installed by a public company, and the neighborhood has water and electricity, six schools, two fire engines, a drugstore, and public transport. Every sector is guarded by two police officers. And the residents of the *hawsh*es denied a mains connection fetch drinking water from the four public fountains installed in 1975."[53]

It looks very much as though the cemeteries are set to continue evolving in that direction, with the intensive construction of variable quality—yet definitely no longer shanty-grade—housing, and the gradual ascendancy of activities such as garbage 'processing.'

Worse still, they look set to evolve into fourth- or fifth-rate towns.

Notes

[1] Licorice juice: *'irqsus* vendors attract customers with the sound of castanets.

[2] Garlic and dried coriander mixed together and fried in butter.

[3] Before 1987 there were just two conflicting evaluations of how many people were populating the cemeteries: one put the figure at 275,000 (Gad 1984) and the other at 900,000 (cf. *Annales de la Sociologie*, 64, April 1984). Then the press blew it completely out of proportion with reports of there being one or two million inhabitants. Opposition politicians seized on those rash estimates, thus maintaining the confusion for some time to come.

[4] We have considered the *shiyakhas* that historically formed part of the Qarafa, but which are now partly urbanized.

[5] According to a comprehensive field survey carried out by ORSTOM and GOHBPR between 1985 and 1989.

[6] Al-Qa'id 1983c, 231–35.

[7] Posener 1989, 166.

[8] Relatives would gather to recite the Qur'an and ask for forgiveness on *subha*, the first day after burial. They returned on the third day and stayed there for a month that culminated in a large religious assembly. That month of prayer was also a time for handing out gifts to the poor (al-Maqrizi n.d., vol. 1, 289; vol. 2, 57, 67–69).

[9] These included keepers of rich people's tombs, widows, divorcées, the children staying at the orphanages, and the students taking classes at the mosques. Alongside these groups, all of whom lived in the Qarafa out of necessity, there were also those who spent almost all of their time there because it was their job to build, restore, and maintain the tombs.

[10] 'Abd al-Satar 1976; Chehata 1959; Fakhri 1969.

[11] Al-Maqrizi 1932, 296.

[12] Rhoné 1882.

[13] Amin 1980, 142–43; 144–48.

[14] Al-Maqrizi 1932, note 8.

[15] Some travelers have compared the populations of al-Qarafa al-Kubra and al-Qarafa al-Sughra respectively to those of Alexandria and Homs ('Achour 1962, 57–58).

[16] Travelers such as Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Sa'id al-Maghrabi, and others spent several nights in the Qarafa during their stay in Cairo. The chronicler Ibn Iyas, for his part, wrote that "the people preferred to live in the Qarafa than in the city of the living" (Hamza 1986, 49).

[17] Hamza 1986.

[18] According to the historian Ibn Taghri Birdi, it wiped out some three thousand Malian and Sudanese people living in the Qarafa (Ibn Taghri Birdi 1932, vol. 14, 342).

[19] Neibuhr 1795.

[20] Zayed 1982, 101–38. This article served as the theoretical basis for a survey on the cemetery-dwelling population carried out by the sociology department of the Faculty of Arts at Cairo University.

[21] Gad 1984; Moselhi 1979; El Kadi 1990, 134–53.

[22] Al-Qa'id 1983c, 234.

[23] Ilbert 1989, 266–82.

[24] The construction of Muhammad 'Ali and Clot Bey avenues alone, for instance, involved the leveling of some 750 buildings (André 1977, 213–42).

[25] Ilbert 1989, 266–82.

[26] A closer look at the census data shows the arrival in the cemeteries of new socio-professional groups involved in the large-scale urban development work that had been ongoing for half a century: the quarrymen and marble cutters. (*Recensement général de la population du Royaume de l'Égypte*, 1897, vol.1, bk. 1).

[27] The housing crisis affected the nascent working classes first and foremost: Cairo was home to 88,270 workers in 1907, including 2,646 women working in urban transport, on the railroads, in the tobacco factories, and in construction (Vallet 1911).

[28] According to statements gathered from the local population and utility service providers. During the same period, the poor were being evicted from housing unfit for habitation in such neighborhoods as Ma'ruf in the modern city center, and Hawsh al-Sharqawi in the old Darb al-Ahmar district (Clerget 1934, vol. 1, 241).

[29] Raymond 1977, 213–42.

[30] Al-Hadidi 1982, 163.

[31] This period saw the development of what became the residential neighborhoods of the new bourgeoisie: Dukki, 'Aguza, Giza (Nile Waterfront), the pyramid district and, above all, Madinat al-Muhandisin.

[32] Shubra al-Khayma in the north, Hilmiyat al-Zaytun to the east, and Helwan to the southeast, to name but the largest.

[33] Madinat Nasr and Muqattam, both of which figured in the 1956 Master Plan. The former, entrusted to a public contractor, was a great success; in the case of the latter, the work was entrusted to a private company, began late, and proceeded very slowly indeed thereafter. Nowadays, they are no longer satellite towns but fully fledged neighborhoods of Cairo.

[34] North of the old shantytown of al-Abagiya, on the site of a former British ammunitions dump.

[35] Twelve thousand housing units a year were collapsing at the time. In 1965, seventy thousand new units had to be built to replace run-down properties (Raymond 1972, 234).

[36] Single-room lodgings account for over half of the housing stock of Manshiyat Nasir, making it one of the more affordable neighborhoods for low-income groups.

[37] By 1986, al-Basatin had become the capital's largest *qism*, with a population of 450,143 (7.2 percent of the total for Cairo), of whom 54,383 were in al-Basatin al-Gharbiya alone.

[38] For example, these were 4.7 percent and 10.3 percent in Imbaba and Bulaq al-Dakrur respectively in 1976–86.

[39] They almost doubled in Helwan, al-Matariya, Bulaq al-Dakrur, al-Haram, and Imbaba.

[40] Reports by government departments and foreign experts have been shown to have deliberately inflated housing demand in the interests of local and foreign construction companies (Hanna 1987).

[41] This comes from *giwar*, which literally means 'proximity.' *Migawirin* are the poor students of al-Azhar living near the graves of holy men and women buried in the Qarafa.

[42] Al-Qa'id 1983c, 232.

[43] Low-level, public sector workers performing subordinate functions. They generally figure among today's most disadvantaged social groups.

[44] Drug trafficking among morticians has been brought to light by a number of press reports and confirmed in the findings of research carried out by Cairo University's Department of Sociology (cf. *Annales de la Sociologie*, 64, April 1984).

[45] 'Amer 1990; al-Wali 1993.

[46] 'Amer 1990; al-Wali 1993.

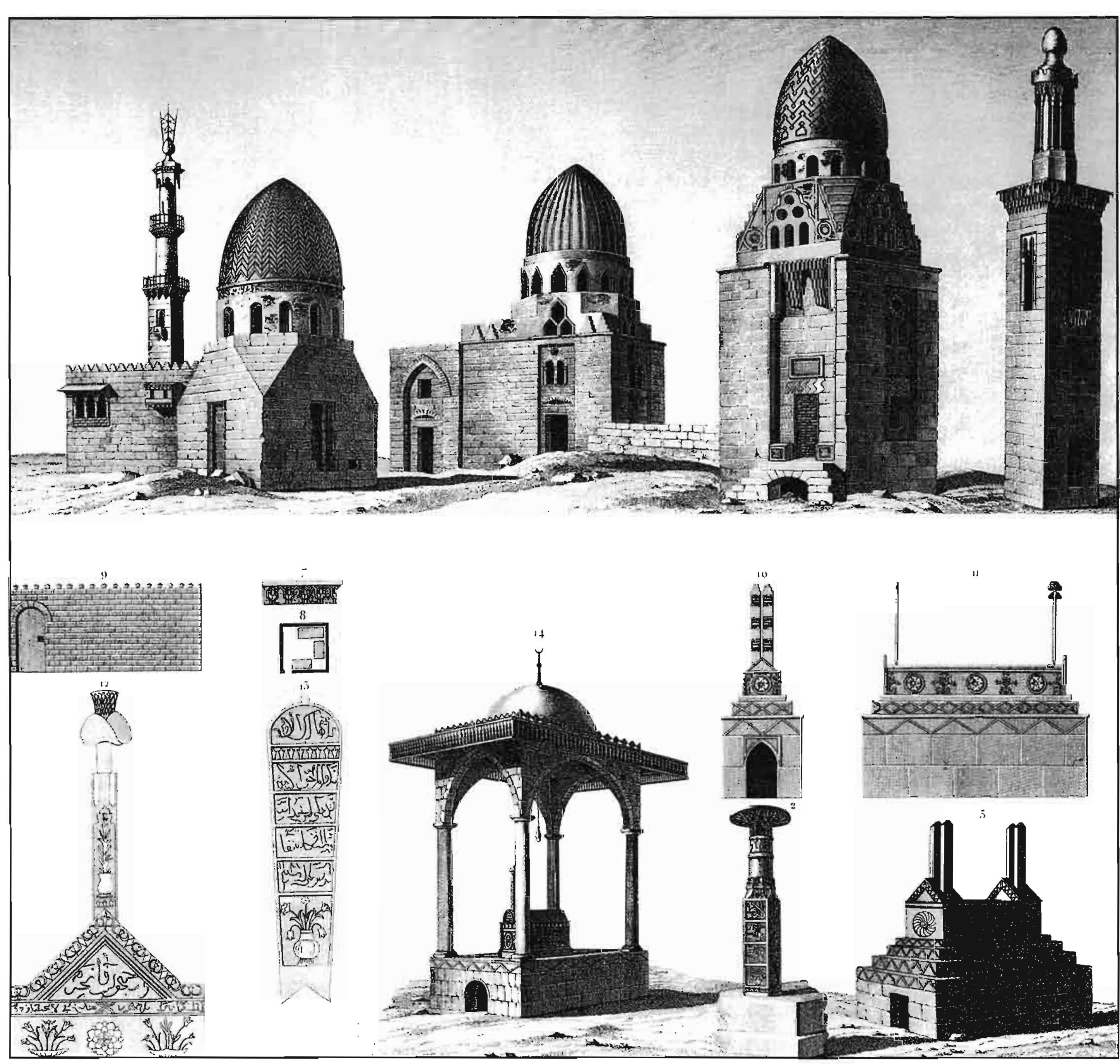
[47] These are mostly weaving, leatherworking, woodcutting, welding, and filing shops.

[48] 40.3 percent in Qaytbay, 34.5 percent in 'Izbit al-Barquqi, 33.4 percent in al-Imamayn versus 27 percent for Cairo.
[49] From a Senate report on the housing issue published in the national daily *al-Ahli* (18 April 1984).
[50] Three movies were made in the 1990s—two for television and one for the big screen—on the problems of living in the tombs, and the location scouts for contemporary Egyptian movies about life in poor neighborhoods have shifted their attention from the old town to the cemeteries.
[51] The earthquake turned five thousand buildings to rubble, and a further 11,500 were declared unsafe; cracks of varying dimensions had appeared in the walls of 2,748 school buildings, and 187 monuments were seriously damaged. Only some of the nearly twenty-six thousand homeless households in the Governorate of Cairo were rehoused (El Kadi 1993, 163–95).
[52] The Council of State had already tacitly recognized their use as lodgings seven years earlier when it rejected a proposal to bring them under the *hawsh* rent-capping laws. Ironically, it had done so on the grounds that "the law prohibited citizens from spending the night in the cemetery, and thus living there is an unjustifiable act of defiance, even in the light of the housing crisis. . . ." (*al-Ahram*, 14 November 1986).
[53] Al-Qa'id 1983c, 235. Translated into French from the Arabic by G. El Kadi.

6 Heritage and Challenges

The original site of the southern necropolis (photograph by Lehnert and Landrock, early twentieth century).

Engraving from Description de l'Égypte: État moderne, *vol. 1, plate 65.*



We are aware of how much energy the peoples of Egypt have always, since their earliest beginnings, put into preparing for a possible fate after death.[1] That constant effort produced a wealth of artifacts, the oldest of which—after successive generations of destruction and looting, of being bought and sold and then converted to other uses—have survived as mere relics of interest to none but Egyptologists and museographers. Human behavior did not change with the transition to the monotheistic religions, and funerary art and architecture continued to incite the same interests, and even disputes. What did change was that the cemeteries began to be plundered not for gold and precious gems, but for the actual stone.

Treasure hunting today is a fairly marginal activity and attention has shifted to the value of the land. The fact that the cemeteries are so vast, so near to the city, and so full of historic monuments means that the stakes are high. This raises the question of protecting the architectural heritage of both individual families and society as a whole in the face of the demands of urban development, the interests of property developers and real-estate speculators, and the damage caused by residents. These issues are being discussed within the framework of a wider debate on the need to safeguard and develop historic centers, not just in Egypt but throughout the Maghrib and Mashriq. Egypt, however, is one of the few countries in those regions to regard its cemeteries as ancient sites, areas, and fabrics in need of safeguarding. Indeed, the large funerary complexes, domes, and isolated *sabil*s of the Mamluks have all been listed as monuments of Arab art since the late nineteenth century, as have the Fatimid mausolea and the sacred sites housing the remains of the first Muslim conquerors; these have been joined, more recently, by the royal tombs built in the twentieth century. But drawing up inventories, lists, and protective legislation is not enough to promote a collective awareness of the need to safeguard the memory of all that gives meaning to a nation's history. Safeguarding policies and regulations are often as unworkable in the city of the dead as in that of the living. The fact is that heritage protection is still somewhat removed from the social realities of Egypt, and Egyptians still find modern notions of heritage somewhat hard to grasp. But while such ideas have only emerged over the past twenty years or so, the systematic maintenance and restoration of the built environment has been going on for thousands. It even amounted, at times, to a real heritage protection approach endeavoring to pass monuments on to future generations as evidence of their history and as clues to the way their ancestors lived. This chapter takes a broad look at that approach and its various manifestations, examining how people have engaged with valued artifacts at some points in time and neglected them at others.

Early safeguarding practices

Al-Maqrizi tells us how in the Fatimid period, three days before Ramadan, "the judges of Misr would begin their round of inspection at the mosque of al-Maqs, outside Cairo. Next they would tour each of the mosques of the Fatimid capital—al-Azhar, al-Aqmar, and al-Hakim—followed by the pilgrimage shrines containing the noble remains of the people's family. From there, they would proceed to al-Qarafa cemetery, then to Misr (Fustat), where they visited the mosques of 'Amr and Ibn Tulun, before winding up the tour with the mausoleum housing the head of Zayd ibn Zayn al-'Abidin, grandson of al-Husayn. At each of these sites, they would examine the state of the matting, the lamps, and the building in order to make any necessary repairs."[2] The fall of the Fatimids and Egypt's transition to the Sunni religion under the Ayyubids saw not a single act of vandalism or iconoclasm on the part of the faithful, who continued to worship at the 'Alid shrines. Even though the new rulers radically transformed the center of the Fatimid city by replacing the fallen dynasty's palaces and tombs with new buildings devoted to culture and learning,[3] they kept its religious monuments intact.[4] Whether consciously or otherwise, the Ayyubids thus laid the foundation for the city's architectural heritage, which came to be jealously guarded because—over and above any religious sentiment—it gave the community a sense of identity.[5] Active conservation and enhancement continued under the Mamluks and the Ottomans, whose sumptuous architectural works further enriched the fabric they had inherited and gave the city a fresh air of magnificence. The attention devoted to those monuments cannot be seen solely as a sign of piety, but also as an expression of pride, a source of prestige both for those carrying out the work and for the city.[6] Travelers were filled with admiration for the city's buildings, which "were a delight to the eye." What more telling evidence is there of the Mamluk elite's aesthetic sensibilities than the way they rebuilt the minarets of the monuments along the main road of the Fatimid center after they had been damaged by the earthquake of 1304?[7] Did they do so in order to preserve the skyline of prominent minarets and domes lining that road? Or were they simply striving to call humankind back to God? The artistic splendor of Mamluk Cairo gives us reason to believe that a feel for the beautiful and the sublime was a greater driving force than religious sentiment.

Between the founding of al-Qahira in 969 and the setting up of the CCMAA in 1881, the safeguarding of monuments was not motivated by solely spiritual and

emotional concerns, or by a random occurrence; it was institutionalized, and protective measures were extended beyond monumental works to cover all *waqf* properties too.[8] The terms and conditions for the functioning of this legal institution were codified in Egypt during the Fatimid period through the creation of the Diwan al-Ahbas, a special administrative body in charge of managing and allocating financial resources in line with the demands of donors. The Diwan was presided over by a judge assisted by *nazirs*—officials assigned to ensure that the terms of *waqf* deeds were fully respected, in line with a highly complex body of rules and regulations.[9] Let us look at the main principles of the *waqf* system.

The *waqf* system basically involved tying up a property in such a way as to make it impossible for it to be given away or sold and to ensure that any revenue it generated went to charitable causes. The property in question was given over, for an unspecified period of time, to a pious cause or to work for the good of the community. *Waqf* documents stipulated the share of a property's proceeds to go toward "building mosques, mausolea, hospices, *khanqahs*, or *rab*'s, to paying the salaries of servants, eunuchs, and *muqri*'s, and to offerings to the poor and needy."[10] New interpretations of Islamic legal thinking later allowed donors to retain the right to grant the use—or merely the usufruct—of the property to persons of their choice, not excluding themselves. Thus even though this institution had originally been set up to create endowments to help the poor and to assist schools and mosques, many used it as a means to protect private property from confiscation—on the grounds that *waqf* property had been entrusted to God—and to circumvent inheritance laws. Now that donors had an opportunity to continue using the property, tax-free, while waiting for it to be turned over to some religious or charitable cause, the *waqf* typology underwent a remarkable expansion. During the Ottoman period, in addition to economic resources such as farmlands and orchards in rural areas, a *waqf* also came to include all manner of real-estate assets—buildings used for trade and production (*wakalas*, shops, coffee houses, plaster factories, textile workshops) or for services (*hammams*, reservoirs, laundries, pigeon houses)—and even boats, slaves, and money.[11] By the time the *waqf* system reached its prime under the Ottomans, nearly half of Egypt's farmlands and a more or less equivalent share of its urban real-estate had been endowed as *waqf*.[12] Many studies have analyzed the social advantages and economic implications of the *waqf* system in Muslim countries. We shall confine ourselves here to its impact on practices surrounding the maintenance of the built environment.

The safeguarding of *waqf* property was an essential condition for the sustainability of charitable work. That sustainability hinged on the property not being allowed to deteriorate, hence the need to ensure its systematic maintenance and conservation. Donors, therefore, were required to outline the *'amarat al-awqaf*—the means of safeguarding the property, that is, restoration *(tarmim)*, upkeep *(siyana)*, and repair *(islah)*—in the *waqf* founding documents, as well as the amounts of money to be earmarked to that end (usually around 30 percent of the total revenue generated).[13] Should they fail to do so, the documents in question would become null and void. Many donors went beyond these broad guidelines and set down over-precise demands. The *waqf* papers of Amir Qurqumas stipulated that sums of forty *dirhams* and sixty *dirhams* per lunar month be taken from the *waqf* endowment to purchase fresh basil and fragrant oils for the graves of the donor and his children.[14] Similar instructions can be found in the papers of Sultan Hasan, which also demanded that ten honest servants be hired and lodged in his mausoleum to protect it against thieves and raiders, in return for which they would receive a monthly salary of one hundred *dirhams* and the status of "former slaves emancipated by the owner or his children."[15]

Salah al-Din, seeking to ensure the continuous functioning of the institutions of religious learning founded in the Qarafa during the Ayyubid period, took as *habus* (synonym of *waqf*) the Sagha jewelers' district and a village to provide for the Nasiriya school; thirty-two shops located in various *haras* of Cairo for the Suyufiya school; and the entire island of al-Fil, a few shops, a *hammam*, and a bakery for the school adjacent to the mausoleum of Imam al-Shafi'i.[16] In the latter case, maintenance was required both for the revenue-generating property (the *hammam*, shops, and bakery) and for the public buildings (the *madrasa*). It is important here to distinguish between these two categories of property, each of which faced a quite different fate. The former, in some respects the fixed capital of the state, had no historical value and was purely and simply utilitarian. It needed safeguarding on strictly economic, not cultural grounds. The exponential increase in the number of such *waqf* properties led its governing body to offload a share of the management and maintenance tasks onto tenants, who were granted the right to exploit them for a fixed period of time in return for payment of a pre-determined rent. Later, long-term concessions of ninety years also came to be codified. The increase in the number of usufructuaries, rights holders, and beneficiaries of *waqf* revenues went hand-in-hand with multifarious

abuses and affected the functioning of the entire system. Some failed to pay their rent regularly; others pocketed the money or even set themselves up as the actual owners of the endowed properties. Such practices resulted in a general decline in *waqf* revenues, which was compounded by fraudulent levies on the part of the *nazir*s or sporadic looting by the governors themselves. All of this became more frequent during periods of decadence, political instability, or economic crisis, when *waqf* properties fell into ruin or decay for want of maintenance. Countless buildings were lost. Those that survived were saved thanks to the benevolence of individual governors, their vizirs, or enlightened worthies who took initiatives to enhance or restore neglected or badly kept buildings. Those initiatives worked mainly to the benefit of the second category of *waqf* property, that is, non-revenue-generating properties—mosques, *madrasa*s, mausolea, *khanqah*s, *zawya*s, *sabil–kuttab*s and so on—whose maintenance was the direct responsibility of the *habus (waqf)* governing body.

When the last rulers of the Mamluk period appropriated the *habus* revenues, they paved the way for the institution's demise.[17] The Ottomans, however, revived it while stressing the importance of the *'amarat al-awqaf* in their *qanunnama*—the new framework law governing regions annexed by the Ottoman Empire. Surveys were carried out at the very start of the Turkish conquest to determine what had caused the deterioration of certain buildings. Lists were made and restoration measures implemented. A large share of *waqf* revenues once again came to be allocated to rehabilitation work, this time for the properties wrecked by the Mamluks.[18]

Of course, the alternating periods of decline and prosperity, strife and political stability, disrupted the continuity of public approaches to safeguarding monuments, and some of the more prominent monuments were closed down or fell into ruin. In the twelfth century, the mosque of Ibn Tulun was inhabited by North African immigrants; in 1263 there was even a bakery operating there, followed by a woolen mill in the eighteenth century.[19] Also in the eighteenth century, there was a glass factory in the mosque of al-Hakim.[20] In 1194, unplanned expansion work had seen stables and shops added to the venerable mosque of al-Azhar.[21] The mosque–*madrasa* of Sultan Hasan, for its part, suffered as a result of its strategic location at the foot of the Citadel. Dissident militias, during their frequent battles with government forces, would often barricade themselves inside, prompting the systematic bombing of the building by their opponents in the Citadel; this caused enormous damage.[22] Travelers and chroniclers have on many occasions, and with great sadness, drawn attention to the examples of monuments in danger of disappearing due to damage or neglect. This shows an awareness of the material, historic, and aesthetic value of the monumental works that the communities in question were on the brink of losing. On a visit to Cairo in 1765, the North African traveler al-Warithilani noticed workers clearing the rubble of one of the ruined walls of the mosque–*madrasa* of Sultan Hasan, which had been destroyed in the course of a battle between rival princes in 1736. When he returned from his pilgrimage a year and a half later, al-Warithilani was greatly relieved to find that the work on the wall had been completed. But the rest of the damage inflicted during that battle was not repaired until 1785 when, at the initiative of Prince Salem Agha, the rubble that had been blocking the main gate for nearly half a century was cleared, the entrance renovated, and the shops that had sprung up along the walls removed.[23]

The restoration, enlargement, and enhancement work carried out on the main monuments of Cairo through the ages has not always been based on a scientific approach. Some buildings have been subjected to in-depth change, leaving just a few of their original decorative elements intact. The mosque of 'Amr, for instance, underwent twenty-five phases of alteration, reconstruction, and extension work within the space of thirteen years. The mosque of al-Azhar was subjected to at least as many alterations and additions. That said, the successive restoration and conservation of *minbar*s and doors, inscription-covered friezes and domes, wooden ceiling decorations, and so on, demonstrates a concern for the safeguarding of the very oldest elements.

While all of the above may show that a public 'heritage conservation' effort has been ongoing since the tenth century, especially with regard to selected structures elevated to the rank of 'historic monuments,' it does not give us grounds to speak in terms of a thought-out policy that stems from a cognitive process and an overarching vision of history and the national heritage. It must not be forgotten that antiquity would remain buried and unknown until the arrival of the Bonaparte expedition. A modern inventory of the heritage came to be established just under a century later. In the meantime, many buildings vanished due to indifference, laxity, neglect, and the willful destruction required for the sake of modern development. Their memory, however, has been preserved in al-Maqrizi (1853), a remarkable work written in the fifteenth century that describes the monuments and sites in minute detail and constitutes both an urban atlas and a forerunner of the cataloguing of every building, both major and minor, in the city and its cemeteries. Indeed, the scholars working on the Cairo volume of

Description de l'Égypte used it as the basis for their assessment of the state of these places in the eighteenth century.

A hundred years of destruction and neglect

The end of the Ottoman era saw the country hit by a succession of economic and political crises on top of a series of disasters that wiped out a third of the population of Cairo alone.[24] This had a significant impact on the state of the built environment. While the main religious buildings, periodically visited and maintained, may have escaped demolition, none were spared the effects of degradation. Their walls, and even in some cases their entrances, were obstructed by a cluttered mass of shops "so tightly packed together that one might think them designed for some hideous animals."[25] The city of the dead suffered more than that of the living. As mentioned earlier, the Ottomans showed little interest in the cemeteries of Cairo. Few major tombs were built in the Qarafa during their two centuries in power, and only two of the monuments there benefited from enhancement work: the mausoleum of 'Umar ibn al-Farid and the mosque of Sidi 'Uqba. Meanwhile, the demise of the cult of 'Alid saints condemned their shrines to neglect, and some disappeared altogether. Other poorly maintained monuments fell into disuse and their stone was plundered. Al-Jabarti tells us in his chronicles how the "disastrously malicious" Sulayman Agha al-Silahdar "set his heart on what was left of the desert mosques, *madrasa*s, and *tikiya* and stripped them of their stone, moving it to the city via Bab al-Barqiya. He also plundered stone from Bab al-Nasr, piled it up close to the gate of that name, and then had a *wakala* built on the way to the Khan al-Khalili."[26] The author of *Journal d'un notable du Caire durant l'expédition française* talks of "what was left" because the plundering had, in fact, been going on for a very long time. In addition to the plundering and neglect, willful destruction took place during the expedition to Egypt. Al-Jabarti, in a passage entitled *Encore des destructions*, wrote about "the mausolea and tombs of the Qarafa [being destroyed] for fear of the combatants taking refuge in them. They and the buildings were blown up using explosive charges, as in the mines: the whole building collapsed when the gunpowder trapped in the ground exploded. A very loud noise was heard. They destroyed a great many things in this way."[27] Notwithstanding the destruction, the expedition also fostered a new way of looking at the heritage. Archaeological digs unearthed the treasures of antiquity; Champollion deciphered the Rosetta Stone; artists reproduced all of the monuments and antiquities that had resisted the ravages of time in paintings still consulted by historians and studied by the arts.[28] But the effects of these endeavors, which went on for three years, would not emerge until later. While foreign teams continued to conduct excavations on a regular basis, locals showed no respect for the vestiges of ancient art. All they saw were quarries that were easy to exploit. The intensive mining of those quarries for manufacturing activities in the days of Muhammad 'Ali was a source of frustration to the foreign consuls and to the European scientific community. Champollion noted how thirteen temples "of enormous interest to science" had disappeared without trace.[29] The Austrian Consul accused the enlightened pasha, who went to commendable lengths to build a modern Egypt with an army and the basic infrastructure needed to launch the country's industrial development, of having "caused greater damage to monuments than all of the other Turkish rulers from 'Umar and his general 'Amr, through to the present day."[30] Had it not been for Prisse d'Avennes, the pylons of the temple of Karnak would have ended up in the pasha's saltpeter factories and the stone from one of the pyramids of Giza would have been used to build the Aswan Dam.[31] Predations of ancient sites were also committed by foreigners under cover of scientific excavations.[32] Yet despite the general lack of concern for the conservation of antiquities in those days, it was under Muhammad 'Ali, in 1836, that a museum was created on the advice of the consuls to house an initial collection of 188 antiquities.[33] Muhammad 'Ali was also the first ruler to reform the *waqf* administration system, taking it into state control and nationalizing all endowed properties in return for a meager indemnity for beneficiaries and other rights holders. Henceforth, it was the state that would have to carry out the necessary maintenance work on religious buildings. Increasing criticism and reports by consuls and foreign advisors to the successors of Muhammad 'Ali led—with the backing of the new, foreign-educated, local elite—to the setting up of the *Service des Antiquités* in 1974, the Museum of Islamic Art (Mathaf al-Fann al-Islami) in 1869, and the CCMAA, within the framework of the medieval *waqf* administration, on 18 December 1881.[34] The creation of specific bodies to take charge of inventorying, listing, and specifying ways of restoring cultural goods echoed European concerns for the conservation and enhancement of the heritage of humankind. Indeed, the French Consul Mimaut, in a letter asking the viceroy of Egypt to abandon plans to demolish the pyramids, described these as "the most venerable monuments of the ancient human race, the only wonder of the ancient world still standing today . . .

interesting to all peoples."[35] Yet the European consuls were not quite as forthcoming in voicing their concerns and recriminations in the face of the indiscriminate waves of demolition and rebuilding that were devastating the morphology of Egyptian cities, especially Cairo. One even notes a degree of admiration for the modernization work carried out under Muhammad 'Ali. Xavier Marmier, for instance, speaking in the most laudatory terms of the founder of modern Egypt, talked about how hard it was "to imagine the extent to which Muhammad 'Ali has, in the past ten years or so, cleared, demolished, and rebuilt. He is only happy, it seems, when he can hear from his palace the sounds of the carts carrying away the rubble and the saws rattling around the walls. . . . The reign of Muhammad 'Ali, for Cairo, has been an age of grandeur and enhancement of a scale that this city has not seen before now."[36] The palace in question was the one that the pasha had built at the Citadel after having cleared the plateau, destroying the monumental Diwan of al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun illustrated in the Egyptian expedition plates.[37]

Muhammad 'Ali's successors did not show any greater leniency toward the civil architecture. The list of palaces and residences in relatively good condition drawn up by the CCMAA contained just forty-two of the 134 recorded by Jomard, in addition to twenty vestiges, façades, *maq'ad*s, or *durqa'a*s that were disfigured or in ruins, and of interest to none but the archaeologists.[38] The rest, together with a good many public buildings, had been lost due to a combination of three main factors:

- first, changing tastes had resulted in urban worthies abandoning the old styles of architecture in favor of new homes built in the baroque style, and moving away from the Ottoman districts to new neighborhoods designed in line with modern urban planning principles;
- second, Haussman-inspired redevelopment, restructuring, and enhancement work under Khedive Isma'il had resulted in entire blocks and public buildings being torn down;
- and third, a good many businesses, services, and schools had been shut down due to obsolescence or the neglect of their maintenance on the part of the *waqf* property administration.[39]

The numerous abuses committed by the *nazir*s enabled them to strengthen their control through an official body answerable to the Khedive, set up by Khedive 'Abbas I in 1851. In 1913, a ministry was established to rationalize the management of *habus* properties and put an end to the scandals of an administration whose influence, according to Lord Cromer, the British consul general, was harming the country. The early twentieth century saw the heritage of the old Fatimid city in serious danger. With awareness of that built heritage virtually non-existent among a new elite mesmerized by modernity, the protective approach of the CCMAA proved difficult in the extreme. Merely listing what needed safeguarding could not *ipso facto* secure recognition that such heritage, which by that time included historic and more recent monuments, formed the bedrock of both the city and the nation's identity. The Egyptians found themselves presented with a fabricated heritage made up of a variety of cultural objects that left them bemused or totally indifferent. The severing of their ties first of all to fifteen centuries of ancient history and then to their more recent past—a tie severed in the mid-1800s—did not help efforts to nurture a general acceptance of all those objects. It would take time for them to discover, rediscover, become familiar with, and appreciate them; to look at the newer monuments from a historical perspective; to choose a few as readily acceptable symbols; and to become mature enough to see them all in a new light as objects of art, culture, and history. Indeed, it is a process that still, more than a century later, has yet to come to fruition. Given the trials and tribulations of heritage approaches—linked in part to the troubled search for identity, to social and political instability, to population growth, and to ignorance—the right conditions have yet to be created for new thinking vis-à-vis the heritage to flourish, and for an academic, progressive, and continuous heritage approach to be implemented. Let us now trace the history of CCMAA intervention in the city of the dead.

The CCMAA and the historic monuments of the Qarafa

Other damaging practices in the cemeteries emerged toward the end of the nineteenth century, especially in the areas around historic monuments. Those doing the damage were the morticians appropriating vacant plots for unlicensed construction, but the *waqf* officials in charge of monument maintenance quite obviously had a hand in it too. And what of the authorities who were allowing those dealings to continue? Statements from the time testify to the CCMAA's vigilance, but they also, and more importantly, reveal the involvement of the *waqf* administration in the ongoing land and real-estate speculation. The committee's report following initial visits to draw up an inventory and plan restoration work paints a sorry picture. The funerary complexes of Sultan Inal and Amir Kabir had been used by the war department as gunpowder depots. "The minarets have lost their upper galleries, the thick walls are cracked, the lintels are collapsing; the mosaic, the paving, and the material lining earlier base walls has all vanished."[40] In

1895, Grand Bey drew the attention of the CCMAA commission to the looting of tombs in the enclosure containing the Sultan Inal monument. The commission visited the site and was "incensed at the acts of vandalism to which this beautiful monument has been subjected; the sultan's tomb and many others are in ruins, their vaults open; everywhere you look you see bones tangled up in scraps of shroud newly extracted from the graves. . . ." It went on to accuse the *waqf* administration *nazir* of being directly responsible for the "damaging effects on this, one of the loveliest Arab monuments, as a result of having left it in a state of neglect."[41] In 1897, the commission learned from the *waqf* authorities that a gravedigger named A.K. Subh had taken the liberty of erecting a building against the walls of the *waqf*-administered *qubba* of Shaykh 'Abdallah al-Dakruri. After examining the case, it put forward a proposal to list the dome as a protected monument and asked *waqf* administrators to prevent any construction work from being carried out within three meters of the *qubba*'s walls.[42] The request went unheeded. The following year, in 1898, Max Herz Bey told the technical services that he had seen a large building being built right next to the Zumr *qubba*, in complete defiance of the commission's instructions. A circular was sent out to all the wardens, asking them to make sure that no buildings went up in the vicinity of monuments under their supervision.[43] The report added that the construction work next to the *qubba* was being carried out for a certain 'Abduh Bey al-Ratli by a gravedigger who had taken on the role of stopping members of the public from building anything near the monumental tombs of al-Zumr and Khawand Tulbay. Claiming to have found evidence of an old *hawsh*, he insisted that the Zumr *qubba* was not a listed monument and that there was nothing to prevent anyone erecting a structure adjacent to it. This is exactly what he went on to do. The technical section (of the CCMAA) were enraged and demanded its demolition.

From as early as 1890, the commission had recommended that iron railings be set in place at the entrances to al-Ashraf Khalil, Qaytbay, Amir Kabir, and all of the Mamluk desert monuments to protect them from the robbers now looking to steal the wood. In 1897 the commission attempted to have the space within a five-meter radius around each monument declared a protected area, and wrote to the ministry of pubic works on the matter.[44] The ministry, in a letter dated 8 February 1910, informed the CCMAA that it had taken proper note of its observations, adding that the area within at least twenty meters of the monuments should be kept empty. This, however, would mean having to move a good many tombs. The public works ministry consulted the Mufti of Egypt, who issued a *fatwa* declaring that it was against Shari'a law to dig up and move the tombs of the dead. The technical services pointed out that never in any of its recommendations had there been any question of removing existing tombs, and that the one and only goal of the building-free area was to prevent any further construction in the future.[45]

In answer to the earlier requests, the minister informed the CCMAA of another *fatwa* that forbade any attempt to "prevent the dead from being buried anywhere on land set aside for cemeteries."[46] The technical services realized that it had been issued on the basis of a misunderstanding as to why the committee wanted to "keep a narrow band of land free around the old religious monuments in future," that is, so as to "ensure its conservation."[47] Under the circumstances, it proposed to seek the enlightened support of Ibrahim Nagib Pasha, Governor of Cairo, in order to find a practical means of putting an end to the improper dealings of gravediggers and members of the public in the areas around monuments in the cemeteries.

Between 1897 and 1930, as the offences continued, the committee for its part persevered with its work. It turned down every request for permission to build tombs or engage in any other kind of construction work too close to the monuments, or even to carry out maintenance or cleaning work, or to use brick in place of wood. It campaigned vigorously to stop trucks and other vehicles parking opposite the monuments. Its ultimate goal was to prevent anything from being built anywhere in the vicinity of a historic monument.

On 10 March 1924, the gravediggers rallied together and lodged a complaint with the ministry of public works: they demanded the right to work on the tomb vaults without having to go through the rigmarole of obtaining a permit. Their demands were rejected by the Governor of Cairo and the chairman of Idarat al-Gabanat, the state cemetery authority. Faster procedures, they were told, meant that it only took a day to obtain a building or restoration permit and red tape could therefore not be used as a pretext to break the rules. But while the procedure for restoring tombs was abridged, that required to build a new tomb remained as tedious as ever. Applications had to be submitted in the form of a request to the Governorate of Cairo; the form was then passed on to the ministry of endowments and the Gabanat committee together with a certificate proving that the applicants had no other concessions in any other cemetery or anywhere else in Egypt. Investigations would be carried out, and then the Governorate would write to the Tanzim (town planning department) to make sure that the site of the requested concession was not located in an area earmarked for public utility works, and

that it complied with the alignment regulations. If it happened to be located in the vicinity of any historic monuments, the case would be referred to the CCMAA for approval. The complexity of these procedures demonstrates that the authorities were keen to establish and maintain a certain order. But this new order, introduced by an elite group of city councilors, was bound to meet the resistance of many stakeholders who had scant regard for aesthetic values or urban rationality, and who were driven solely by an interest in speculation. Cairo's rapid growth from the First World War on would make it even harder to keep urban development under control. Over the following decades, as the rigor of the CCMAA dwindled, the authority of the morticians grew ever stronger. Enjoying support from various quarters within the government, they finally relegated the CCMAA to a purely marginal role and became the absolute masters of the city of the dead.

1930–70: Decadence and decay

This period marked a watershed for the city of the dead. The CCMAA's dogged campaign may have culminated in legislation laying down "cemetery rotation zones (protected areas) around listed monuments in cemeteries,"[48] but that success did not translate into a greater exercise of authority, nor did it prevent those very monuments from being encircled by real urban neighborhoods. In the 1940s, the historic monuments of the Qarafa were affected by successive waves of demolition work. In 1949, for instance, residents of the Tunsi neighborhood wrote to the director of the CCMAA to report such acts of vandalism near Sidi al-Shatbi in the southeastern part of the cemetery, where "citizens [were] tearing down monuments, digging the earth, and putting up buildings day and night."[49] The previous year, the complex of Qaytbay, with its domed mausoleum partly damaged and the *saqyat* in ruins, was put up for sale by a man named H. 'Abd al-Hadi, who claimed to be a descendant of one of the originators of the *waqf*.[50] Even more alarming was the partial destruction of the Fatimid shrine of Ikhwat Yusuf and the construction in its place of a mortician's house.[51] The conversion of the water cistern at the tomb of al-Manufi into a vault[52] and the theft of windows from the Qawsun funerary monument[53] appear somewhat negligible compared with the partial or total destruction of entire monuments. There were countless instances of encroachment upon conservation areas. Thirty-eight offences were reported, which ranged from the unlicensed construction of tombs (twenty offences) and apartment buildings and other premises (fourteen offences, including the construction of a garage opposite Qaytbay), to the setting up of production facilities inside monuments, for example, the bakery at al-Shatbi mosque. In the other reported cases, the CCMAA's response was to demand additional surveillance or to turn down requests for water conveyance. We came across two examples that illustrate the situation at the time.

On 22 July 1948, Tanzim managers authorized the construction of a *hawsh* inside the perimeter of the Manufi conservation area without consulting the CCMAA. On 4 October 1957, tombs were built across seven hundred square meters of land in the vicinity of al-Manufi. Less than a year later, on 12 May 1958, the emboldened offenders built a number of *hawsh*es a mere six meters away from the monument. The director of the CCMAA, now known as the Maslahat al-Athar al-'Arabiya ('agency for the monuments of Arab art'), wrote to the head of the Tanzim asking him to take action to curb the systematic encroachments upon the conservation area around what he described as a monument that was "one of a kind." He demanded the demolition of every construction, some of which were pressed right up against the *qubba* walls.[54]

In 1960, three new *hawsh*es appeared near al-Manufi. Meanwhile, new tombs had been proliferating in the area around the mausoleum of 'Umar ibn al-Farid since 1954. Historic tombs were also said to have been looted for their "silk shrouds and silver coins"[55] and then erased from memory by the construction of new tombs. All the reports and the letters of protest from civil servants at the Hay'at al-Athar (also known as the *Service des Antiquités*) to the Khalifa or Darb al-Ahmar police stations noted that the offending citizens must have been aided and abetted by the *ghafir*s (tomb keepers) and their superiors, together with senior police officers and even local government officials.

Yet another piece of evidence from the time is a letter, dated 2 October 1952, from the director of the Maslahat to the leader of the Cairo city council: ". . . coming from 'Abbasiya (in the north), we notice that the vacant land between the *khanqah* of Barquq and the mosques of Amir Kabir and Inal has been turned into a dumping ground for rubble and debris from building sites, thus hindering access to the Barquq complex. The situation is made worse by the presence of stagnant water, which represents a health hazard and undermines the public image of Egypt. Arriving from Darrasa in the west, visitors are greeted by a rather different picture: a shantytown inhabited by poor and dangerous people. If ever they manage to make it across this shantytown, it is impossible to reach the Qaytbay complex: one runs into a maze of narrow streets winding tortuously through the enclave of permanent dwellings taking up the area between the complexes of Qaytbay and Barquq. Plainly, this neighborhood densely populated by the living is

not administered by Idarat al-Gabanat, nor even by the Tanzim."[56]

The groundswell of protest about the deteriorating environment around the Mamluk monuments finally struck a chord among urban planning managers,[57] but it took the intervention of a charismatic figure like K.A.C. Creswell[58] to get plans underway for a traffic circle in front of the *khanqah* of Barquq. The project enjoyed the backing of the aristocracy, albeit motivated by a degree of self-interest: Princess Khadija Halim insisted that a sepulture be erected for her mother right in the middle of the circle, and her demands were met in order to save whatever could be saved.

The Imam al-Shafi'i district

On 21 December 1937, the technical services of Maslahat al-Athar al-'Arabiya decided to list a number of areas of archaeological interest in the Qarafa. The Tunsi site, for instance, which stretched from Imam al-Shafi'i in the west to Muqattam in the east, contained the ruins of the *iwan* of 'Agami, a fourteenth-century Sufi, together with the remains of an adobe *musalla* (three *mihrabs*), and the twelfth-century *turba* of 'Abduh al-Fath al-Tunsi, which was rebuilt in the fourteenth century. Although these remnants were of little architectural interest, they had historical value as landmarks indicating the boundary between the Qarafa al-Sughra and the Qarafa al-Kubra. Archaeological excavations had unearthed a number of small stelae dating back to the Ayyubid period, which were deposited at the Museum of Islamic Art: the stelae of Amir Lu'lu'a (d. 1202), Shaykhun al-Dimishqi (d. 1206), and the *fiqi* Abu-l-'Abbas. Given the size and relatively isolated location of this Maslahat conservation area, it was the scene of a good many breaches of regulations perpetrated not only by individual members of the public, but also by the authorities.

Some were stealing stone from the ruins to build houses;[59] others were appropriating plots of land and encircling them with barbed-wire fences so as to sell them. The Idarat al-Gabanat cut itself a 16,000m² slice for the construction of *hawsh*es, and the ministry of education joined in and built two schools—with the consent of the Maslahat, no less. Under these circumstances, in 1961 the Maslahat revised the old plan that had been in place since 1937 and agreed to reduce the conservation area around each protected monument to a sixteen-meter radius. Seven years later, on 3 April 1968, the Hay'at al-Athar, or Hay'a, issued a memorandum summing up the situation in al-Tunsi; it criticized the Idarat al-Gabanat for allowing citizens to carry out building work there without informing it or seeking its opinion. The Idarat in turn blamed the department of urban planning and construction for having drawn up the allotment plan specifying which areas were for tombs and which were for housing. The Hay'a finally asked that building plans be submitted to it in advance so that it could make sure that conservation area boundaries would be respected. It urged the cemetery authority to suspend all ongoing construction work until the urban planning aspects had been examined and was infuriated when the work was allowed to continue regardless. "We note that the Idarat al-Gabanat is unaware of the value and importance of the monuments in this area, even though they are key landmarks mentioned in every cemetery guidebook. . . . What worries us most is that the Governor of Cairo himself approved the allotment plan, which is highly regrettable given that it is an outright threat and challenge. Finally, we deplore the damage being done to several monuments by the increasing amount of building work going on in their vicinity."

The Tunsi affair gives clear insight into the processes underway to exploit the 'wealth of real estate' in the cemeteries and the collusion it involved at every level of society, so it is no surprise to find evidence of morticians, still unpunished, having dared to send a death threat to a Maslahat supervisor named 'Abd al-Tawab.[60]

The days when the Hay'at al-Athar could rely on "the enlightened support of the Governor of Cairo, who assisted, with the greatest possible commitment, in the work of the Committee . . . and who did everything within his power to respond to [its] views" were well and truly over.[61]

Heritage between the monarchy and the republic

Unsurprisingly, the Hay'at al-Athar was encountering problems in the course of its work. Beyond the maneuvering of the speculators, which clashed with the culturalist goals of the Maslahat, there was a total lack of understanding vis-à-vis the point of its approach. Virtually nobody was interested in the memories conjured up by the monuments of the Qarafa. The buildings themselves drew only the attention of intellectuals, artists, and scholars. Some sought to trace their history, others to perpetuate that history by means of concrete elements. For most people, a family tomb meant more than the *qubba* of a shaykh whose cult had completely died out, or even a large funerary complex whose builder had never really occupied a place of importance in the collective memory. The lawmakers and academics were thus going against the customs and practices of the majority, and even the interests of the bourgeoisie. The large number of monuments and sites to be protected in the cemeteries meant a significant reduction in the amount of land available for contemporary use. Add to that the plots appropriated for the private concessions of the aristocracy, and the remaining space was not nearly enough for everyone else. It

was always going to be hard to muster support for moves that would see the heirs of the pharaohs deprived in this way of the right to a final resting place—to a decent refuge for the eternity of death—which explains the collusion between the citizens and the Idarat al-Gabanat. As for the state, represented by the Governor of Cairo, it sometimes, depending on the circumstances, intervened on behalf of the Maslahat, but at other times it prevaricated or sidestepped issues likely to stir up social strife and thereby allowed the situation to deteriorate.

It was after the fall of the monarchy that the new state bourgeoisie clearly demonstrated its indifference toward the architectural heritage, as seen in the Tunsi affair. That lack of concern, however, did not represent a total break with the heritage conservation practices of the French protectorate. For one hundred and fifty years, all development work had been marked by the illusion of modernity, leaving little room for conservation. British rule too had reaffirmed the triumph of the new. And although the nascent nationalist movement may, in the interwar years, have looked to the past for symbols of identity, this sporadic revival was confined to the reproduction of public buildings modeled on pharaonic or on Mamluk- or Ottoman-style architecture. The link between reproduction and conservation was never established, and the influence of the modernist movement prevailed. A monthly column on monuments of Arab art in a journal published by architects may have shown a desire to raise public awareness,[62] but it remained a passive form of resistance to prevent those monuments from falling into oblivion. There is no evidence of architects during this period rallying to support the Maslahat in its efforts to combat the acts of vandalism perpetrated against the heritage. Deprived of the crucial support of a learned elite, with the random backing of just a handful of charismatic figures, and with no powers of dissuasion or enforcement, the Maslahat, challenged by developers and the highway maintenance authority, was becoming increasingly isolated. It began to lose its relative independence in 1953, when it was brought together with the Hay'at al-Athar, the Museum of Egyptology, and the Museum of Islamic Art to form a single body placed under the supervision of the ministry of education and later, in 1957, the ministry of culture. During the first decade of military rule, the value of the cultural heritage was hardly at the top of the agenda. Sacrifices were accepted in the name of industrialization, national development, and the legitimate struggle against Zionism and imperialism. The master plan drawn up for the capital in 1953 totally ignored the medieval city and the historic heritage. The old town, proletarianized and delisted, was thus reduced to a pile of ruins that, in the words of the central character in Naguib Mahfouz's *Khan al-Khalili*, were "capable of stirring the imagination and arousing both affection and pity. To conserve them means to sacrifice the lives of human beings; how much nobler it would be to guarantee people a happy and healthy life by razing these places to the ground."[63] And razed to the ground they were, by the army. Public housing projects and school buildings ate into the historic fabric throughout, mutilating and obliterating rare structures and completely disfiguring a landscape that had long since lost its cultural references, and hence its relevance. Even the great mosques of al-Azhar and al-Husayn and other key symbolic structures suffered from a degree of neglect. Agnostics saw them as nothing but heaps of stone. The *waqf* properties, meanwhile, were in a state of complete disrepair. Although they were no longer maintained, their demolition was forbidden. Therefore anyone wanting to capitalize on the value of the land had no recourse but to wait for the buildings to fall down.

In the Qarafa, the legacy of the past belonged to others—to the dead—and scores were about to be settled. The Egyptian revolution began confiscating furniture from the private chapel–residences of the Qarafa's large family tombs.[64] Primary and secondary school classrooms were set up in the vast tomb of Amir Husayn Kamal in al-Ghafir; the tomb of Halim Pasha in Imam al-Shafi'i became al-Imamayn primary school; and a welfare center took up residence in the nearby Tahawi family tomb, just as the enormous tomb opposite was being converted into a private general hospital. There were even plans on the table in the early 1960s to clear a large part of the Mamluk cemetery from Qaytbay to Khawand Tulbay, and the ruling party actually went so far as to commandeer a number of two-story tombs for its offices. The living, according to an old saying, take priority over the dead.

In 1966, a new cemeteries code came into force—nearly a century after the first.[65] In the intervening years, an irreversible state of affairs had taken hold in the city of the dead, leaving historic monuments hemmed in by residential buildings and masses of often illegally built tombs. The new code gave greater powers to the municipal authorities. They took charge of land use and the creation and upkeep of cemeteries, and they set usufruct rights at a maximum 500 milliemes per square meter (article 7). The city council was authorized to determine the surface area of any new *hawsh*es about to be built, and it had the right to seize vacant plots of land, when unoccupied by tombs, and to parcel them out to large numbers of beneficiaries (article 2 of the executive rules and regulations). Morticians were

forbidden from plying their trade without securing the approval of—and a permit from—the city council (article 21). They were made responsible for preventing citizens without a permit from building tombs or carrying out any restoration work. At the same time, they were also forbidden to spend the night in the cemetery or to use it for any other activities (articles 36 and 39 of the executive rules and regulations). Article 3, meanwhile, empowered the president of the republic to authorize the founding of private tombs pursuant to a request from the minister of local government and upon the approval of the Governorate council. It was clearly stated that "private concessions will nonetheless be granted only to those offering to set up foundations or to make donations." And for the first time, a distinction was drawn between three types of burial place: individual tombs, without enclosures and surmounted by a stela; family tombs enclosed in a *hawsh* and comprising one or more rooms; and private tombs, the only ones allowed to have a chapel–residence.

In passing this new legislation, the state was seeking to rationalize land use in the cemeteries, to introduce a degree of equality after life, and to restore order. The results of the new order can be seen today in the regular housing projects south and east of the Qarafa, northeast of the Mamluk cemetery, and inside the cemetery of Sayyida Nafisa. Control over the city of the dead, however, continued to elude the management and planning authorities. Absolute power remained firmly in the hands of the morticians.[66] The ambivalence of the state in its attitude toward the necropolitan heritage of Cairo, combined with its collaboration in reallocating the residential tombs of the old aristocracy, paved the way for housing development and for moving the homeless into the hawshes. As for the historic monuments, a great many have been restored since the mid-1970s. The state, realizing after the military defeat of 1967 that one cannot build the present and plan for the future when suffering amnesia, set out to "reconcile historical authenticity with future renewal."[67] The reconciliation would come about in several stages: in 1969, an international symposium was staged to celebrate Cairo's thousandth anniversary; in 1973, a friends of historic monuments association was created; in 1977, two projects were mounted with financial support from the World Bank to renovate the medieval fabric in the north of Fatimid Cairo and in the eastern cemetery; also in 1977, six protected areas were designated by a team of UNESCO experts sent to Egypt in response to a request from the Egyptian government; in 1979, Egypt signed up to the World Heritage Convention; and also in 1979, medieval Cairo was inscribed on the World Heritage List. There were three main reasons for this interest:

- economic, with tourism development becoming one of the priorities for regional development policy from 1979;
- ideological, in response to universal demands to safeguard the heritage;
- and cultural, with the standardization of the environment and the degradation of the old city centers sparking a need to assert one's identity, to return to one's roots in a rapidly changing world.

All these efforts in aid of the heritage, which are ongoing today, have resulted in the restoration of major historic monuments. Yet the surrounding environment continues to deteriorate, the fabric to become ever denser. The declared aim of prioritizing culture over speculation remains but a pious wish. And the various rehabilitation projects for protected areas that emerged in the early 1980s have yet to begin fulfilling their goals. Let us now take a look at those who have been involved with the cemeteries.

Notes

[1] Burial sites in ancient Egypt enjoyed special attention. There were legal, economic, and religious institutions protecting the rights of the dead and putting a multitude of people to work for them: a variety of tradesmen stationed permanently on-site to build or restore the tombs; priests to perform the common rites; and a standing regulatory body overseeing the priests, attending to the allocation of concessions, and sending inspectors to check on the state of the tombs (Posener 1989, 185).

[2] Raghib 1977, 49.

[3] The Ayyubids demolished the two central Fatimid palaces and built, in their place, the *madrasa* of Kamel Ayyub (1229), the *madrasa*–mausoleum of Nagm al-Din Ayyub, and the complexes and mausolea of Qalawun and al-Nasir Muhammad (Bierman 1995, 4).

[4] During the Ayyubid period, the Azhar mosque lost its role as a center of Shi'ites teaching and Friday prayers were moved to al-Hakim mosque ('Abd el-Wahab 1994, 52, 176).

[5] Babelon and Chastel 1994, 24.

[6] Each person undertaking the restoration or expansion of a building would immortalize their work with a commemorative plaque.

[7] Bierman 1995, 5.

[8] The *waqf* system was established throughout the lands conquered by Islam, even during the lifetime of the Prophet.

[9] Bierman 1995, 5.

[10] Amin 1980, 290-291.

[11] 'Afifi 1988, 102.

[12] 'Afifi 1988, 108.

[13] 'Afifi 1988, 109.

[14] Amin 1980, 290.

[15] Amin 1980, 292.

[16] Ibn Taghri Birdi 1932, vol. 1, 296.

[17] Al-Maqrizi tells us: "We reached the current state of affairs with certain judges having even made the situation worse: some accepting the sale of mosques whose surrounding areas had deteriorated on the pretext that the original owner was being paid the price of the salvaged materials; others granting permission to sell the *waqfs* themselves for the benefit of the owners and with nothing expected in return. These practices became so widespread that they damaged the two cemeteries of Cairo and the beautiful houses of al-Qahira and Fustat" (al-Maqrizi 1853, vol. 2, 296).

[18] 'Afifi 1988, 109.

[19] Al-Maqrizi (1932) tells us that in 1263 Baybars ordered the distribution of one hundred

loaves of bread baked in the Ibn Tulun mosque to the poor in the *zawyas* ('Abd el-Wahab 1994, 45).
[20] Mubarak 1969, vol. 4; Hautecoeur and Wiet 1938, vol. 1,169.
[21] 'Abd el-Wahab 1994, 53; al-Maqrizi 1932, vol. 1, 121.
[22] 'Abd el-Wahab 1994, 53; al-Maqrizi 1932, vol. 1, 121.
[23] In 1497, during the battle of Aqbardi, the mosque of Sultan Hasan was bombarded from the Citadel. The reprisal destroyed a window, and then the rugs, the marble, and the lamps were looted. Although restored a year later by Tuman Bey and then by al-Ashraf Gan Balat (1500), the mosque suffered further damage in the course of a battle during which eleven Mamluks were murdered in the house of Muhammad Bey al-Daftardar ('Abd el-Wahab 1994, 175–76).
[24] Raymond 1995a, 86–91.
[25] Raymond 1972, 366.
[26] Al-Jabarti 1979, 323.
[27] Al-Jabarti, 1979, 323.
[28] Babelon and Chastel 1994, 24.
[29] Wiet 1950, 22.
[30] Wiet 1950, 30.
[31] In 1836, the Russian Consul wrote that "the stone for the dam was going to be taken from one of the Giza pyramids, but at the insistence of the French Consul, it came from the Muqattam quarries instead" (Wiet 1950, 30–31).
[32] In 1820, Europeans with permits left to excavate the hypogea and temples of Upper Egypt and to extract the antiquities, statues, paintings, and sarcophagi. Henry Salt demolished part of the temple of Karnak. According to an entry in the official gazette of 15 August 1835: "Some foreigners are destroying the ancient structures, extracting the stones and other worked objects, and exporting them to foreign lands. . . . " (Wiet 1950, 27–28).
[33] Wiet 1950, 29.
[34] The CCMAA was assigned, *inter alia*, to produce a comprehensive inventory of the monuments of Arab art, to attend to their conservation, to carry out restoration work and report to the ministry of endowments, to prepare any necessary statements, and to inform the ministry in charge which relics and other items needed to be deposited at the museum. The CCMAA board comprised members of the Egyptian elite and associate foreign experts, all of them eminent specialists.
[35] Wiet 1950, 32.
[36] Wiet 1950, 80.
[37] Pauty 1933, 63.
[38] Pauty 1933, 75–90; Jomard 1988, 204–207.
[39] "All of the traditional services that seem to have been functional in the early nineteenth century were in a state of collapse. The *sabils*, for instance, were crumbling, and their tanks were filling up with garbage" (Ilbert and Machhour 1982, 23; Mubarak 1969, vol. 4, 10).
[40] CCMAA 1882–1961, vol. 1.
[41] Report no. 178 of the 22nd commission, 94.
[42] Report no. 215, 64.
[43] Report no. 204, 102.
[44] Report no. 215, 65.
[45] Report no. 414, 27.
[46] Report no. 420, 92.
[47] Report no. 420, 92.
[48] Report dated 1936–40, 107.
[49] Letter from residents of the Tunsi district to the director of the CCMAA dated 11 September 1949.
[50] Statement of 5 February 1948.
[51] Letter from the director of the CCMAA to the head of the Tanzim, 4 June 1948.
[52] Statement of 5 July 1949.
[53] Statement of 14 August 1959.
[54] Letter dated 28 September 1959.
[55] Statement of 5 September 1959.
[56] Originally translated into French from the Arabic by G. El Kadi.
[57] Several letters and reports dated 21 December 1957, 25 May and 22 July 1948, 5 May and 11 June 1952, 10 January 1960, and 31 October 1962.
[58] A distinguished expert in Islamic art, a founding member of the CCMAA, and the author of many books on Islamic architecture in the Muslim world.
[59] Statement of 2 September 1961.
[60] Letter dated 5 May 1962.
[61] Report 420 of 1910, p. 9.
[62] *Al-'Amara*, the Arab world's only architecture journal, first published in 1939.
[63] Mahfouz 1964, 26-51.
[64] Massignon 1958, 32.
[65] The first cemeteries code, promulgated in 1877, set out the rules and regulations for burials, building permits, and the transfer of human remains. On 29 January 1884, the Sultanate issued a decree on unsanitary conditions in cemeteries and the ways and means of shifting them away from urban areas. This was followed by a host of edicts laying down guidelines for morticians and gravediggers. In 1938, a royal decree made public the fact that Egypt had signed up to the international Arrangement Concerning the Conveyance of Corpses signed in Berlin on 10 February 1937. The modern Egyptian state had thus, from very early on, shown an interest in cemetery management, and had set in place a range of specific tools: a legal framework together with a special administrative body with absolute authority to ensure its enforcement-the borough council and its governing body, Idarat al-Gabanat, presided over by the Governor of Cairo.
[66] According to Idarat al-Gabanat, official permission to build had been granted for just 250,000 of the two million tombs built through to 1990-not counting the number of tombs heightened by a story or converted into permanent housing units.
[67] President 'Abd al-Nasser in his opening address at the *Colloque International sur l'Histoire du Caire*, which took place in Cairo from 27 March to 5 April 1969 (Arab Republic of Egypt 1972, 15–16).

7 Where Do We Go from Here?

"I was asking a tomb keeper one day, as he walked in the midst of an enormous family, what had caused the prolific ardor that I beheld around me. 'What do you expect?' he replied. 'Life is so boring here.' An artist would never find it boring there. It would take him years to collect the exquisite remains strewn across the ground, to discover the nearly faded marvels beneath the dust and the rust, to reconstruct in the mind those lovely monuments that are vanishing every day, carried off in pieces by the desert wind."

Gabriel Charmes, 1880

Some years ago, the Egyptian housing minister declared that moving the cemeteries away from Cairo would be a "heaven-blessed act." Those plans may now be off the agenda, but no alternative course of action has been taken. And yet in the early 1980s, endeavors to safeguard the heritage, which became a new way of attracting the funds of international organizations, gave rise to a number of projects to rehabilitate the historic fabric.

The UNESCO heritage safeguarding project

In 1980, UNESCO created a team of experts and consultants to examine the state of the historic core of Cairo and to identify the areas in need of safeguarding. When they began work in 1982, they decided to add the Imam al-Shafi'i and Mamluk cemeteries to the heritage conservation areas that had been previously established around Fustat, Fatimid Cairo, and the Citadel.[68] Eleven such areas containing groups of monuments were created, nine of them in the two cemeteries. The aims of the survey were to:

- conserve the Islamic heritage;
- identify priority projects for investment programs;
- improve living conditions for the people inhabiting the areas;
- and exploit the areas' potential for attracting tourists.

The first phase culminated in the selection of six priority action areas, including the northern part of the medieval city and hence Bab al-Nasr cemetery. Setting the conservation area boundaries made it possible to conduct more finely tuned surveys of the Fatimid city, which had been inscribed on the World Heritage List. The rehabilitation projects that were put forward sought to account for the structure, the homogeneous nature of the urban fabric, and its key values, as well as the quality of public spaces, the skyline, the street grid, the views, how its various components interrelated, and so on. This whole series of studies resulted in the restoration of critically important monuments of huge interest to tourists.

The structural scheme

While taking UNESCO's zoning into consideration, our structural plan went further. Based on a more comprehensive mass of data and on analysis of land use and the state of the built environment, the plan helped establish not just conservation but also restoration areas. Four main types of district were identified:

- those containing nothing but tombs—some architecturally outstanding palace–tombs in fairly good condition but no important funerary monuments—as in the central Qarafa and the north of the Mamluk cemetery;
- those containing wooden tombs of some architectural interest standing next to or in the vicinity of imposing monuments, as in Bab al-Nasr, north of the Fatimid wall, Bab al-Wazir, at the foot of the Citadel, and the northern part of Sayyida Nafisa, south of Ibn Tulun mosque; renovation work there could contribute to the enhancement of surrounding historic areas;
- urban, predominantly residential districts, some containing historic funerary monuments (e.g., al-Qadiriya and 'Arab al-Yasar) and others containing none (e.g., al-Abagiya), the former also featuring interwoven houses and tombs;
- pockets of housing located inside the cemeteries, containing historic monuments of great value and surrounded by tombs, e.g. Imam al-Shafi'i, Imam al-Laythi, Sidi 'Uqba, al-Sadat al-Wafa'iya, 'Umar ibn al-Farid and al-Tunsi in the Qarafa, and Qaytbay and Barquq in the eastern cemetery.

Each district type corresponded to a specific approach that took into account the state of the built environment, whose analysis helped bring out three kinds of areas:

- where the state of deterioration was in excess of 50 percent;
- where it was between 20 percent and 50 percent;
- where it was under 20 percent.

By cross-referencing the data on land use and the state of the built environgment, we came up with the proposals for future land use contained in the structural plan. The thrust of the plan revolved around three main aims:

- to conserve architecturally outstanding areas through a process of museumization;
- to relieve pressure on the fabric by clearing ruined tombs and developing urban parks so as to establish a degree of balance with the natural environment;
- to upgrade areas containing historic monuments and to separate residential districts from the actual cemeteries.

The necropolitan park project that we devised for Bab al-Nasr cemetery sets an example for areas with a deterioration rate of over 50 percent, but its qualities, its geographic position, and the aesthetic value of its wooden tombs put this site among the areas to be conserved through museumization.

The Bab al-Nasr planning project: the cemetery as a museum

"Ours, as we know, is the age of museumization. We museumize everything: old stones, old towns, and even contemporary arts. And the cemetery, of course, has become a museum too."[69]

Bab al-Nasr, as mentioned earlier, covers an area of thirty-two hectares and contains wooden tombs (60 percent) as well as stone and brickwork tombs (40 percent). Fifty-five percent of the latter and 89 percent of the former are in ruins.

The work we plan to carry out will begin with a phase of demolition and restoration, with the demolitions involving tombs covering 75,029m², i.e., 62 percent of the total net developed area.

Decisions regarding composition tie in with the location of the tombs to be preserved and the topography of the land.

Various strategies bring vegetation, in this case low cyprus hedges, into play: some are molded to the topography; some form almost completely enclosed areas containing clusters of tombs; the rest converge on the three main entrances to the necropolitan park, producing a variety of routes and spaces that feature a blend of architecture and landscape gardening. The main north–south artery is preserved and accentuated by safeguarding the vast stone tombs that line it.

Tall palm trees punctuate the space and give rhythm to the hedgework: sudden variations break up lines that the viewer sees or imagines stretching to the horizon. This helps to generate an overall rhythm, albeit one that lacks perfect harmony because of the contrasting forms and building materials.

Critics called the project 'appealing,' but have interpreted it as an attempt to recreate a sort of *Via Apia* to the gates of Cairo. Its chances of success were thus downgraded with the argument that this was 'a long way away from the Roman countryside.'

The fact is that the cemetery's environment is not all that attractive, and is in need of comprehensive remodeling. Realistically, the renewal of Bab al-Nasr cemetery would have to form part of a wider project covering the whole of the north of Fatimid Cairo. The Institut d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme de la Région d'Île-de-France (IAURIF) and the General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP)[70] began working on just such a project in 1989. Broadly speaking, the project set out to:

• carefully restore the ancient walls, after clearing away the various structures built up against them over the previous century;

• improve access to the neighborhood by building a ring road alongside the ramparts to interlink Mansuriya Street and al-Gaysh Street;

• do away with the industrial zone and move the companies outside of Cairo;

• build new housing and infrastructure for evicted residents and create a high-quality built environment around the future park;

• build new hotels for tourism development;

• and redevelop the run-down neighborhoods on the other side of the ramparts.

These complementary courses of action, required to improve the neighborhood's overall image, were designed to make it more multifunctional and to create an entryway worthy of the architectural treasures housed in the north of the Fatimid city beyond the ancient Bab al-Nasr and Bab al-Futuh gates, with the Bab al-Nasr urban park as its centerpiece.

A national competition was launched for its planning and development. The resulting entries may well have worked with the idea of a recreational area, but they also introduced leisure facilities (a hotel complex), a group of apartment buildings, and a handicrafts district. Our plans of a peaceful and picturesque place of memory were about to be ripped apart.

By 1990, ten years since these proposals were initially put forward, the only work that had been completed was the partial clearing of the area around the Fatimid walls. The brutality of the operation had sparked a debate that saw urban planners calling for the implementation of the North Gamaliya project. But then, in 1992, Cairo was struck by a massive earthquake and the rehabilitation programs slipped down the official agenda. Top priority was given to repairing damaged buildings. This marked a return, by force of circumstance, to minimalist actions based on a dreadful approach of seeking quick fixes devoid of any notion of urban planning or development. Yet notwithstanding the damage caused, the earthquake provided possibly the last chance to rethink the devastated areas and to organize them in a rational manner.

It may be somewhat redundant to set out targets that appear disproportionate and beyond the means of a developing country in urgent need of new housing and infrastructure, but we felt it important to launch the debate and to make a modest contribution toward raising people's awareness of the need to safeguard the heritage and to handle it with care.

Notes

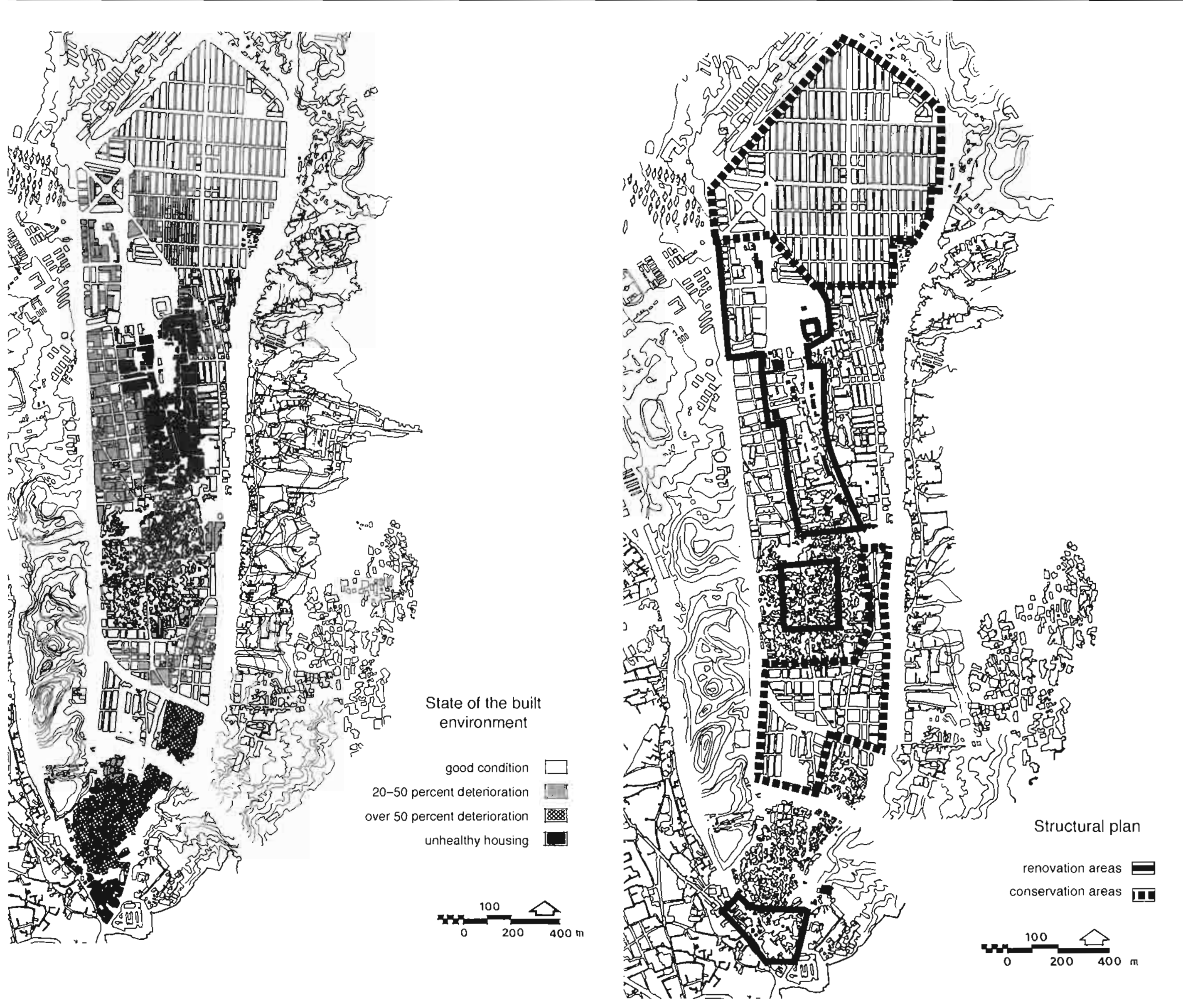
[1] UNESCO report presented by Jim Antonio at the international colloquium: *The expanding metropolis coping with the urban growth of Cairo*, The Agha Khan Award, Cairo, 1984.

[2] Ragon 1981, 102.

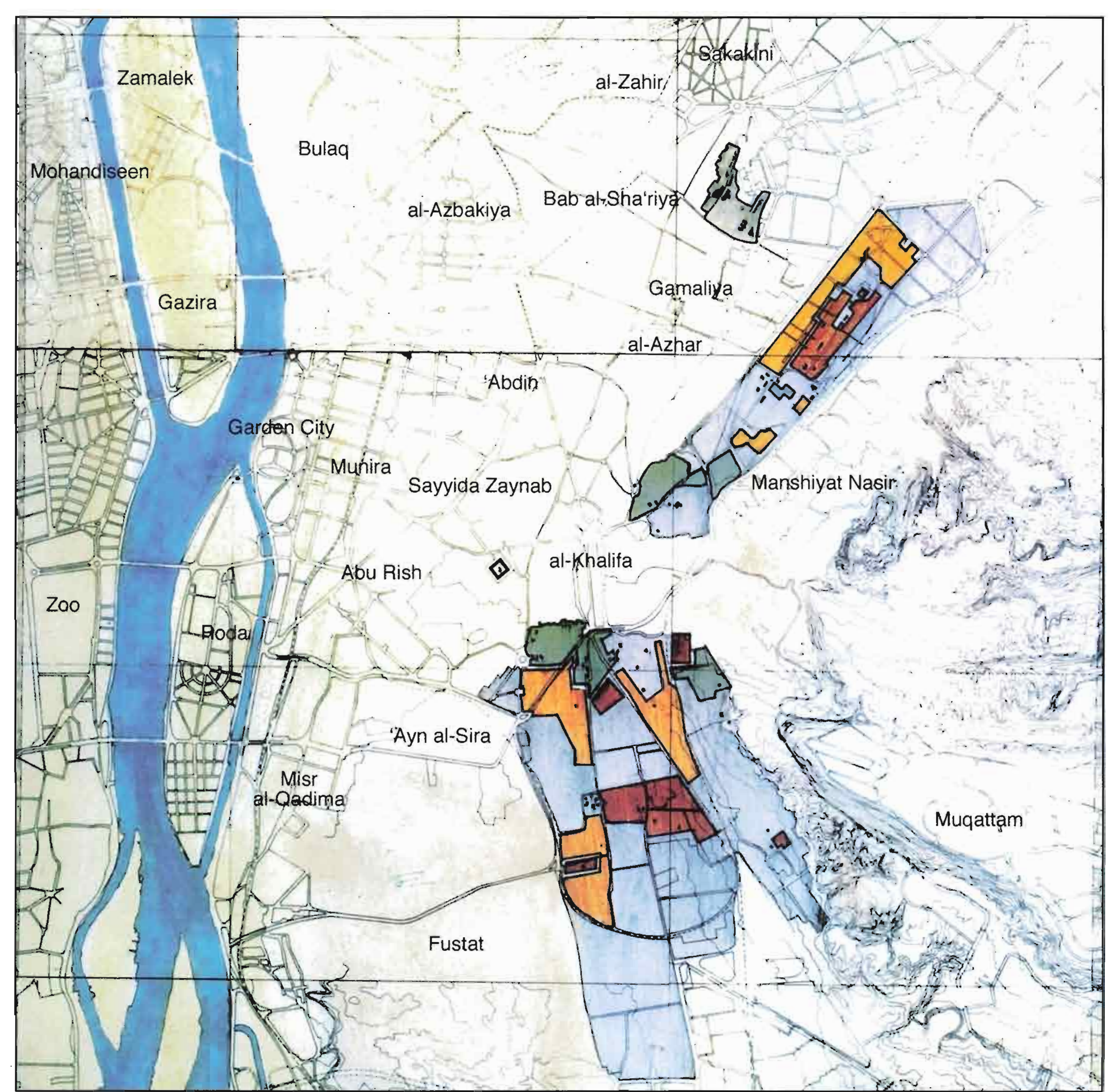
[3] Central urban and rural planning and development agency overseen by the ministry of infrastructure.

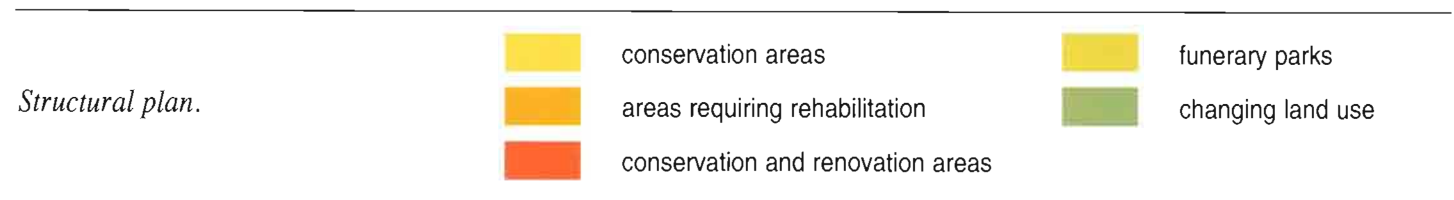
Southern necropolis, state of the built environment and structural plan.

Eastern necropolis, state of the built environment and structural plan.



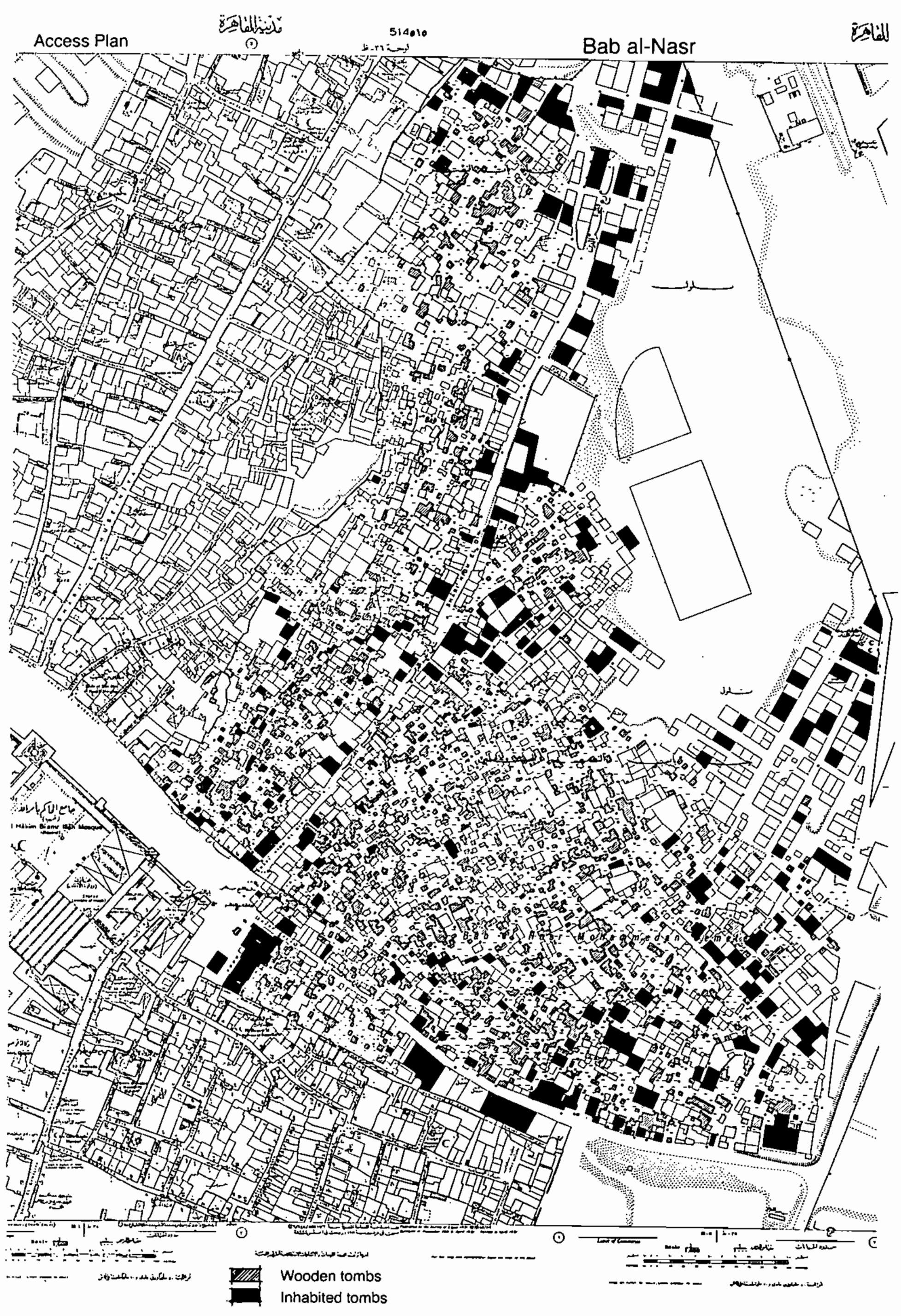
Survey, 1990.





Structural plan.

Bab al-Nasr necropolis, access map.



Bab al-Nasr, plan showing tombs in need of conservation.

Bab al-Nasr, revitalization plan, Alain Bonnamy, 1989.

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Glossary

al-Ahli: Cairene weekly opposition newspaper
'Akka: Acre
A'la: the highest; supreme
Amir: prince, emir
Arabisance: architectural term that designates the neo-renaissaince of Fatimid, Mamluk, or Ottoman architectural style (equivalent to neo-Arabic renaissance)
Ashraf (superlative of sharif): descendant of the Prophet Muhammad
'Ashura: anniversary of the death of al-Husayn, one of the Prophet's grandchildren, which some Shi'ites mark with self-flagellation rituals
Awliya' (pl. of wali): holy men
Awqaf (pl. of waqf): pious foundations
A'yan: notables
'Ayn: source or spring
Bab: door
Banat (pl. of bint): girls, daughters
Basha (pasha): high-ranking title
Bey (bek): Ottoman grandee's title
Birka: pool, pond, small lake
Darb: alley
Diwan: council
Durqa'a: term used in Mamluk documents to designate the central part of a house, mosque, or madrasa of cruciform shape, with two or four iwans. In this case, the iwans are a step higher than the durqa'a.
Fatwa: religious opinion
Fuqaha (pl. of faqih): learned men, jurisconsults
Gabana: desert; term commonly used to designate the cemeteries
Gami': mosque where communal Friday prayers are held
Gawsaq (pl. gawasiq): small palace
Giwar: near
Gumada: month of the Hijri calendar
Hadith: a saying of the Prophet Muhammad
Hagana: special police force, particularly responsible for guarding country borders
Hagg: pilgrimage
Hammam: public bath
Hanbali: follower of the school of Ibn Hanbal, one of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence
Hara: neighborhood, alleyway
Hawd: basin, trough
Hawsh: enclosure, courtyard
'Id: feast
'Id al-Kabir: the festival of the sacrifice
'Id al-Saghir: the feast marking the end of Ramadan
Idara: administration
Imam: preacher, prayer leader
Infitah: policy of economic liberalization, also called the Open Door policy
'Irqsus: licorice
Islah: reform
Iwan: Farsi term designating the throne chamber. In architecture, the iwan is a volume completely open on one of its sides, quite similar to a fairly deep archway. In eleventh-century Iran, it became the basic spatial form in the organization of public buildings, especially madrasas and mosques. It became associated with the voussoir—the arch created to surround the opening of the iwan—and the whole served as a three-dimensional module, both for interior façades and for those looking onto inside courtyards. The iwan spread throughout Egypt in the Mamluk period and was used in architecture for palaces, religious monuments, and funerary buildings.
'Izba: small rural agglomeration
Jabal: mountain
Jazira: island
Kahf: cave
Khala': vacuum, or zone that has not been urbanized
Khalifa: leader of the community; successor of the Prophet Muhammad
Khan: caravanserai
Khanqah: a Sufi spiritual retreat, traditionally a building designed for gatherings of a Sufi *tariqa*, or brotherhood. Also served in the past as a hospice for Sufi travelers.
Khilwa: small room, usually devoid of windows, used as a retreat by Sufis or as a dwelling space for students boarding at the schools attached to mosques or other religious institutions
Khitta: plot, space marked out in an urban plan
Kitab (pl. kutub): book
Kubra: the largest
Kuttab: elementary school teaching religion and basic literacy
Madfan (pl. madafin): burial spot, from the verb dafana, to hide or inhume
Madina: city
Madrasa: literally, 'school,' a teaching establishment or college; usually a theological school
Mahamal: pilgrimage procession
Majlis: council
Malik: king
Mamluk (pl. mamalik): he who is owned by a master
Mantiqa: zone, area
Manzil: house, dwelling
Maq'ad: loggia, reception area often oriented toward the north
Maqbara (pl. maqabir): from the root q-b-r, to place in a tomb
Maqsura: variation on the Byzantine imperial lodge
Masgid: mosque
Mashhad (pl. mashahid): sanctuary
Maslaha: department, organ of the state
Mat'am: restaurant
Mathaf: museum
Mihrab: niche indicating the direction of prayer, toward Mecca
Millieme: a unit of currency equivalent to a thousandth of an Egyptian pound
Misr: semitic term for Egypt
Mufti: religious authority who issues fatwas
Mu'gam: dictionary
Muhafza: governorate
Muharram: first month of the Hijri calendar
Muqri' or qari': Qur'an reciter
Musa'id: assistant
Musalla: open-air prayer space
Nazir: overseer, supervisor
'Uthmani: Ottoman
Qa'a: noble room, which may be located on the ground floor or the first floor of a residence. It serves mainly as a reception area and is usually made up of two iwans separated by a durqa'a, which is one step down from the qa'a and includes a water feature.

Qadi: judge
Qal'a: citadel
Qarafa: place name referring to the clan of Banu Qarafa ibn Ghusn ibn Wali, of the Yemeni Banu Ma'afir tribe. The word initially designated the plot of land allocated to this tribe in the city of Fustat. This area was covered with tombs after the famine that struck Egypt in 1066 and 1072. The name was later extended to describe Muslim cemeteries in Egypt; it is still used today.
Qasr (pl. qusur): palace
Qubba: cupola
Rab': collective residential building, with apartments for rent
Ragab: month of the Hijri calendar
Ribat: pious establishment that takes in military veterans, the needy, orphans, and widows; by extension, a small Sufi communal dwelling
Riwaq: reception room
Sa'ayda (pl. of Sa'idi): people from Upper Egypt
Sabil: fountain
Sabil–kuttab: dual-function edifice, which provides elementary instruction for children and offers water to passersby and their mounts. In this architectural type, which is specific to Egypt, the sabil takes up the ground floor while the kuttab is found above it.
Saghir: small
Sahaba (pl. of sahabi): companions, and especially the companions of the Prophet
Salatin (pl. of sultan): sovereigns
Shari': street, road
Shaykh: head of a community; respected elderly person
Shiyakha: administrative subdivision in urban areas
Sholek: brioche-type bread made for visits to cemeteries
Sufi: Muslim ascetic, mystic
Sughra: the smallest
Sura: chapter from the Qur'an
Tabaqa (pl. tibaq): in Mamluk architecture, independent dwelling unit
Takruri: describes Islamicized Malian descendants of the shaykh and scholar Abu Muhammad Yusuf ibn 'Abdallah al-Takruri, who studied at al-Azhar in Cairo and then disseminated the knowledge he had acquired there.
Tanzim: urban plan and municipal administration, created at the end of the nineteenth century
Turabi: gravedigger
Turba (pl. turab): dust, earth; used in reference to the grave. In architecture, the term designates both the grave and all visible constructions associated with it, featuring one or more *riwaqs*, an *iwan*, a *qa'a*, a *sabil*, a *hawsh*, a water tank, a *maq'ad*, a kitchen, stables, *tibaq*, and lavatories. These are a combination of domestic and mosque-related structures, most frequently attached to a mausoleum or other religious building. There were turab in Damascus as early as the Ayyubid period. The most representative example is provid by Turbat al-Ashrafiya, which also had a library.
Tikiya: building where travelers and the poor can obtain free food and lodging; square or rectangular building with inside courtyard, and, by extension, monastic foundation
'Ulama' (pl. of 'alim): religious scholars, learned men
Waqfiya: waqf deed
Wikala: caravanserai
Vizir: minister
Zawya: literally, isolated angle or corner in a mosque where theology students can go to devote themselves to their work; also a place where people can pray.
Ziyara: visit

Chronology

Date	Event / Dynasty	Cemetery Location	Burial Site / Monument
640	**Arab conquest of Egypt**		
642	Foundation of Fustat by 'Amr ibn al-'As		
	Foundation of the Qarafa	East of Fustat, limited to the north by Jabal Yashkur, to the east by Muqattam, and to the south by Birkat al-Habash	
640–658	**Rashidun caliphs: 6 reigns, 6 walis in Egypt**		
661	**Beginning of the Umayyad caliphate**		
661–749	25 walis, among them 'Amr ibn al-'As		
665–667	'Uqba Ibn Amir		Mausoleum of Sidi 'Uqba
749	**Abbasid caliphate**		
749–868	96 walis in Egypt		
750	Foundation of al-Askar, north of Fustat		
781			Tomb of Qadi Mufaddal ibn Qitabani
808			Tombs of Nafisa and al-Shafi'i
868–904	**Tulunid era: 9 reigns**	Demolition of Jewish and Christian cemeteries	
868	Foundation of Qata'i'		
875			Tomb of Imam al-Laythi
876–879	Construction of Ibn Tulun Mosque	Formation of al-Maragha district (future Sayyida Nafisa cemetery)	Ibn Tulun Aqueduct, 3km long
905–969	**Ikhshidid dynasty: 6 walis**		Mausoleum of al-Tabataba (943)
969	**Fatimid conquest of Egypt and foundation of al-Qahira**		
969–1174	**Fatimid era, 12 caliphs**	Fustat cemetery becomes al-Qarafa al-Kubra	Saba' Banat (1010)
			Gami' al-Qarafa (known as Khadra al-Sharifa; tenth to eleventh centuries)
			Mausoleum of Mu'fi al-Din (eleventh century)
			Qasim al-Tayyib (twelfth century)
			Umm Kulthum (1112)
			Muhammad al-Hasawati (twelfth century)
			Yahya al-Shabih (1150)
	Development of Sayyida Nafisa cemetery	Sayyida Nafisa cemetery	'Atika and Ga'fari (1120)
			Sayyida Ruqiyya (1133)
		Muqattam hills	Kahf al-Sudan (905)
			Guyushi (1090)
			Ikhwat Yusuf (1100)
			Tomb of Imam al-Shatbi (1190)
	Foundation of Bab al-Nasr cemetery	Bab al-Nasr	Mausoleum of Shaykh Yunis

1175–1250	**Ayyubid era: 12 reigns**	Development of al-Qarafa al-Sughra around Imam al-Shafi'i mausoleum	Imam al-Shafi'i mausoleum (1211)
1176–1192	Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi	Construction of the Citadel	Construction of the Imam al-Shafi'i complex: madrasas, khanqah, and zawya
			Iwan Tha'lab (1216)
1218–1238	al-Malik al-Kamil		Cupola of Imam al-Shafi'i mausoleum (1221)
1240–1249	al-Malik al-Salih	Merging of the two Qarafas and Sayyida Nafisa cemetery. Geographical borders: Birkat al-Habash to the south, Bab al-Qarafa to the north, the wall of Fustat to the west, and Muqattam to the east.	Mausoleum of the 'Abbasid caliphs (1242)
			Cupola of Sidi 'Uqba
1250 (80 days)	Shagarat al-Durr regency	Sayyida Nafisa cemetery	Mausoleum of Shagarat al-Durr
1250–1380	**Bahri Mamluk era, 27 reigns**	Qarafa	
1260–1277	Baybars	Qarafa	Mausoleum of Mustafa Pasha (1267)
1279–1290	Qalawun	Sayyida Nafisa cemetery	Mausoleum of Fatima Khatun (1283)
			Mausoleum of al-Ashraf Khalil (1288)
1290		Foundation of Mamluk cemetery, south of the Citadel	Qubbat al-Sawabi (1286)
			Iwan Minufi (late thirteenth century)
1293–1340	al-Nasir Muhammad	Qarafa	Madrasa and mausoleum of Zayn al-Din Yusuf (1299)
		South of the Citadel	Mausoleum of 'Ali Badr al-Din al-Qarafi (1300)
			Khanqah Nizamiya (1303)
			Tomb of Tashtimur (1334)
			Khanqah, mausoleum, and minaret of Qawsun (1335)
			Sabil Shaykhu (1349)
			Mausoleum of Tankizbugha (1359)
			Northern mausoleum of Tankizbugha (fourteenth century)
			al-Sultaniya mausoleum (1360)
		Foundation of the Eastern necropolis, north of the Citadel	Khawand Tughay (1348)
			Mausoleum of Khawand Tulbiya (1363)
			Mausoleum of Taybugha al-Tawil (1363)
1382–1517	**Circassian (Burgi) Mamluk era: 28 reigns**		
1382–1398	Sultan Barquq	Eastern necropolis	Mausoleum of Azdumur
	Sultan Farag ibn Barquq		Mausoleum of Anas (1382)
			Aytimish al-Bagasi (1385)
			Funerary complex of Farag ibn Barquq (1382)

1399–1412	al-Ashraf Barsbay		Mausoleum of Ghuzal (1403)
			Mausoleum of Ghurab (1406)
1422–1438			Khadija Umm al-Ashraf (1430)
			Tomb of Gani bey al-Ashrafi (1430)
			Barsbay funerary complex (1432)
			Tikiya of Ahmad Abu Sayf (fifteenth century)
1453–1460	Sultan al-Ashraf Inal		Inal funerary complex (1450)
			Tombs of Barsbay al-Bagasi and Amir Sulayman (1456–1544)
1468–1496	Sultan Qaytbay		Qaytbay funerary complex (1472)
			Saba' Banat (mid-fifteenth century)
			Mausoleum of Gulshani (1474)
1498–1499	Qansuh Abu-Sa'id		Qubbat Qansuh Abu-Sa'id (1499)
			Mausoleum of Turabay al-Sharifi (1503)
			Tomb of Azrumuk (1504)
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			Mausoleum of Sudun (1504)
1506–1507	Qurqumas (Amir Kabir)		Funerary complex of Amir Kabir (1507)
			Ma'bad Rifa'i (beginning of the sixteenth century)
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			Mosque of Jahin al-Khalwati (1545)
			Sabil of Radwan Bey al-Razzaz (1754)
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			Hawd and sabil of 'Abd al-Rahman Katkhuda (eighteenth century)
1799–1801	French Expedition		
1805–1849	Muhammad 'Ali	Qarafa	Hawsh al-Basha (1816?)
1863–1879	Khedive Isma'il		
1892–1914	'Abbas Hilmi (2 reigns)	Eastern necropolis	Royal tombs of Tawfiq (1879–1892), 'Abbas Hilmi and princess
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