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AnIsl 18 (1982), p. 105-121

Doris Behrens-Abouseif, Leonor Fernandes

An Unlisted Monument of the Fifteenth Century: the Dome of Zāwiyat al-Damirdāš  
[avec 3 planches]. Followed by: The Zāwiya in Cairo.

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# AN UNLISTED MONUMENT OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY: THE DOME OF *ZĀWIYAT AL-DAMIRDĀŠ*

(followed by : Leonor FERNANDES, *The Zāwiya in Cairo*)

Doris BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF

The Damirdāšiyya, one of the great Sufi orders of Egypt, is a branch of the Ḥalwatiyya, which originated in Azerbaijan, whence it spread to Anatolia and the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, reaching Egypt in the fifteenth century through three disciples of the Ḥalwatī *ṣaiḥ* ʿUmar Rawṣānī <sup>(1)</sup>.

1 — Ibrāhīm al-Kulṣānī, a Turk from Diyār Bakir who took refuge in Egypt after the Safavid conquest of Tabriz. He was received by Sultan al-Ġūrī in 1507, and after the Ottoman conquest became popular among the soldiers of the Turkish army. He established a *zāwiya* outside Bāb Zuwayla (Index N° 322) <sup>(2)</sup>.

2 — Ṣaiḥ Šāhīn ʿAbd Allāh al-Šarkasī al-Muḥammadī, known as Šāhīn al-Ḥalwatī, a Mamluk of Qāyṭbāy converted to Sufism, closely related in his career to Damirdāš. He founded a *zāwiya* at the foot of the Muqaṭṭam hill, where he died in 1547 <sup>(3)</sup>.

3 — Ṣaiḥ ʿAbd Allāh Šams al-Dīn Damirdāš al-Muḥammadī, also a Mamluk of Qāyṭbāy, the son of a Naqṣabandī *ṣaiḥ* in Tabriz, captured at the age of fifteen and brought to Egypt soon after. The byname al-Muḥammadī shared with Šāhīn al-Šarkasī, confirms both careers as Mamluk. (Šaʿrānī does not mention Damirdāš as a Mamluk, but his other biographers do).

From Egypt Damirdāš went, or was sent back, to Tabriz. There, he and Šāhīn met ʿUmar Rawṣānī, who initiated them into Sufism and sent them back again to Cairo,

<sup>(1)</sup> al-Šaʿrānī, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb. *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, 2 vols, Cairo 1954, II, p. 184.

al-Ġazzī, Naḡm al-Dīn. *Al-Kawākib al-Sayyāra bi Aʿyān al-Miʿa al-ʿĀšira*, 3 vols. Beyruth 1979, I, p. 192 f.

Ibn Jumʿa. *Les Gouverneurs de Damas sous les Mamlouks et les Premiers Ottomans (658-1156/1260-1744)*. Trad. Henri Laoust. Damas 1952, p. 177.

al-Nābulī, ʿAbd al-Ġanī. *Al-Ḥaqīqa waʾl-Maḡāz*

*fī Riḥlat al-Šām wa Miṣr waʾl-Ḥiḡāz*. Mss. 1231 H. Dār al-Kutub (Juġrāfiā 344), p. 138.

Bannerth, Ernst. « Ueber den Stifter und Sonderbrauch der Demirdashīyya-Sufis in Kairo ». *Wiener Zeitschrift fuer die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, 1969 (62), pp. 116-132.

<sup>(2)</sup> Mubārak, ʿAlī. *Al-Ḥiṭaṭ al-Ġadīda al-Tawfiqiyya li-Miṣr al-Qāhira*, 20 vols, Būlāq 1306 H., VI, p. 54.

<sup>(3)</sup> Šaʿrānī, II, p. 184; Mubārak, V, p. 30.

where Damirdāš is reported to have received permission from Sultan Qāyṭbāy to cultivate an orchard in the northern suburb of the city, Ḥandaq al-Mawālī, today ʿAbbāsiyya, and establish there a *zāwiya* <sup>(1)</sup>. Šaiḥ Ibrāhīm al-Madbūlī advised him to rely only upon his own work to maintain his *zāwiya* and support himself; within five years Damirdāš and his wife are reported to have grown as many as one thousand palm trees, the fruits of his orchard becoming famous all over Cairo for their good quality. Until two decades ago, when the Egyptian government sequestrated their property, the wealth subsequently accumulated by the Damirdāšiyya order was legendary. The biographers of Šaiḥ Damirdāš report that he divided the income of his orchard into three equal parts : one third to be spent on the poor, one third for the sufis of the *zāwiya*, and a third for his own family and descendants. This information is confirmed by several *waqf* documents of the Damirdāš order, though the original foundation *waqf* has not survived <sup>(2)</sup>.

According to Bannerth, who studied the history, dogma, and ritual of the Damirdāšiyya order, the connection between Damirdāš, Qāyṭbāy, and ʿUmar Rawšānī must have had a political background : Rawšānī was a partisan of Uzun Ḥasan, ruler of the Aq Koyunlu kingdom, with whom Qāyṭbāy entertained friendly relations in an attempt to build an axis against the Ottomans <sup>(3)</sup>. Originally a Šāfiʿī, Šaiḥ Damirdāš is reported to have changed to the Ḥanafī rite after the Ottoman conquest of Egypt. Sultan Selim is reported to have paid a visit to him in his *zāwiya* while on an excursion to the balsam garden of Maṭariyya <sup>(4)</sup>. Damirdāš died in 930/1523.

## THE DOME

The *zāwiya* founded by Šaiḥ Damirdāš is known as Ġāmiʿ al-Muḥammadī and stands in the suburb of ʿAbbāsiyya. It consists of a modern mosque built around the original *zāwiya* dome, which is not included within the official list of the Islamic monuments of Cairo, although there can be no doubt that it is the construction built by Šaiḥ Damirdāš himself in the late fifteenth century. Archeological analysis, as will be demonstrated, confirms the historic data, which assign the foundation of the *zāwiya* specifically to the reign of the Sultan al-Ašraf Qāyṭbāy (1468-96).

<sup>(1)</sup> Mubārak, IV, p. 112.

<sup>(3)</sup> Bannerth, *Sonderbrauch*, p. 118.

<sup>(2)</sup> Waqf Ḥasan Bāšā Ḥalīfa al-Ruznāma, Maḥkamat Miṣr, 20 Ġumādā I 1105 H., n° 28/7, copy dated 15 Raġab 1295 H. Awqāf/Siġillāt 4902/2.

<sup>(4)</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ al-Zuhūr fī Waqāʾiʿ al-Duhūr*. 2nd ed. Muḥ. Muṣṭafā, Cairo-Wiesbaden 1963, V, p. 188.

The dome is surrounded on all sides by the walls of the modern mosque, so that it is best visible from the roof of the mosque itself (Pl. XI, A). It is a plain brick construction resting on a square base of stone. Its architecture differs totally from that of other fifteenth century Cairene domes. With three exceptions, all other extant Mamluk domes are funerary structures and are usually slender constructions in brick or stone, with the high transitional zones typical of Mamluk architecture <sup>(1)</sup>, resting on pendentives decorated with stalactite carving.

The Damirdāš dome lacks the high transitional zone and rests, not on pendentives, but on trilobe squinches set immediately within the square. These features link it with these exceptions, three other domes built during the fifteenth century, none of which belongs to the category of funeral dome architecture <sup>(2)</sup> (Pl. XI, B & XII).

The earliest of the three domes is that of Maʿbad al-Rifāʿī, built by Sultan al-Ašraf Barsbāy around 1433 and restored during the reign of Qāyṭbāy in 1478. It is located opposite the mausoleum of Barsbāy in the northern cemetery.

The two other domes were both built by Amir Yašbak min Maḥdī al-Dawādār, an Amir of Qāyṭbāy, in 1477 and 1479. The first and smaller dome was built south of Maṭariyya in the quarter now called Qubba as part of a large residential and religious complex of which only the dome has survived. The second and larger dome, known today as Qubbat al-Fadāwiyya, was erected between Ḥusayniyya and Raydāniyya — today's ʿAbbāsiyya — very close to the place where Damirdāš later established his own *zāwiya*. This dome was also part of a large residential complex of which it is the only structure to have survived.

The domes of Yašbak and Maʿbad al-Rifāʿī all consist of a brick dome resting on squinches each composed of an arch including another trilobe arch. The squinch starts immediately within the square part of the building without a pronounced transitional zone. The squinches at the Damirdāš dome show only a slight difference from these squinches in that they lack the outer arch and consist only of a semi-dome resting above two side arches which form a trilobe. This type of squinch has its origins in the groin-vaulted portals of Circassian Mamluk buildings, which appear for the first time during the reign of Sultan Barsbāy.

The proportions and silhouette of the Damirdāš dome are very similar to the smaller dome of Yašbak as can be seen on an old photograph by Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Waḥḥāb, taken

<sup>(1)</sup> Alī Ibrāhīm, Layla. « The transitional zone of domes in Cairene architecture ». *Kunst des Orients* X 1/2, pp. 5-23.

<sup>(2)</sup> Behrens-Abouseif, Doris. « Four domes of the late Mamluk period ». *Annales Islamologiques*. 1982 (17), pp. 191-201.

before its outer shape was altered <sup>(1)</sup>. Both buildings are of nearly the same size. The Damirdāš dome did not preserve any original inscription or decoration. Like other domes of the same period, its drum is pierced with pointed arched windows alternating with blind arches.

The Damirdāš is not merely similar in its architecture to the dome of Maʿbad al-Rifāʿī and the domes of Yašbak, but also shares a functional feature with all three of them : none was built as a mausoleum : all can be related to Sufi use.

The dome of Maʿbad al-Rifāʿī is mentioned in the *waqf* deed of Sultan Barsbāy as a *zāwiya* built for the Rifāʿī order <sup>(2)</sup>; the dome of Yašbak south of Maṭariyya is mentioned in connection with Sufi ritual by Ibn Iyās <sup>(3)</sup>; and the Fadāwiyya dome is described by Evliyā Čelebī as connected with a number of Sufi dwellings being used in his time, the seventeenth century, by the Aḥmadiyya order <sup>(4)</sup>. The Damirdāš dome is likewise mentioned in the sources as a *zāwiya* and the fact that its founder was buried within its walls does not imply that it was built as a mausoleum. In fact, the cenotaph of Šaiḥ Damirdāš is not located in the center of the chamber, but in its southeastern corner, leaving the large room to be used for other purposes.

Since Damirdāš died in 1523, its construction must be of an earlier date. As has been demonstrated, the architecture of the dome of Zāwiyat al-Damirdāš relates it to a style of *zāwiya* architecture of the fifteenth century, particularly to the domes of Yašbak, built during the reign of Qāyṭbāy. Since the documentary sources also connect the career of Šaiḥ Damirdāš in Egypt with the reign of this sultan, the *zāwiya* dome is most likely to have been erected sometime before the death of Qāyṭbāy i.e. before 1498.

#### THE ḤALWA AND THE CELLS

The Ḥalwatiyya order <sup>(5)</sup>, from which the Damirdāšiyya derives, is so named after the term *ḥalwa* or retreat, a Sufi exercise adopted originally by most of the orders and traditionally traced back to the Prophet's seclusion in the cave of Ḥirā'. During the retreat the novice is supposed to stay in a dark room in order to promote a spiritual state of being through prayer, *dīkr*, and meditation, remote from society.

<sup>(1)</sup> ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, Ḥasan. *Tārīḥ al-Masāʿid al-Aṭariyya*, 2 vols Cairo 1946, II, p. 192.

<sup>(2)</sup> Ḥuḡḡat Waqf al-Ašraf Barsbāy Nr. 880/ Awqāf dated 1030 H., p. 30.

<sup>(3)</sup> Ibn Iyās, *Badāʾiʿ*, III, p. 171.

<sup>(4)</sup> Čelebī, Evliyā. *Siyāḥātnameṣi*. Vol. X: *Misir*,

*Sudān, Habeş* (1672-80), İstanbül 1938, pp. 253-480.

<sup>(5)</sup> Martin, B.G. « A short history of the Khalwati order of Dervishes ». *Scholars, Saints and Sufis. Muslim Religious Institutions since 1500*, ed. Nikki R. Keddie. Univ. of California Press 1972, pp. 275-305.

The Damirdāšiyya has preserved the *halwa* ritual, it takes place during three days in the middle of the month of Šaʿbān, just before the *mawlid* of Šaiḥ Damirdāš. The present mosque of the Damirdāšiyya or Ġāmiʿ al-Muḥammadi, therefore, contains a number of cells, large enough to allow one person to lie on its floor, and quite different from the cells of the *ḥanqāh*(s) built as lodging for the Sufis. Though most of the cells now existing are part of the modern construction added at the turn of the century, there are a number of cells located within the walls of the square on which the dome of the *zāwiya* rests, which must thus be contemporary with its construction. They present an arrangement unique in Cairene architecture.

As the plan of the dome shows <sup>(1)</sup>, the walls of the square chamber are pierced on all sides by arches, three on each side, except for the *qibla* wall, where the prayer niche occupies the central part. As the walls of the chamber are quite thick, each arch covers an area of approximately 2 m<sup>2</sup>. In three walls, above each arch, between its apex and the summit of the square part of the building i.e. in the mezzanine, there is a small room covering as much space as the arch below. Each cell has a small window overlooking the *zāwiya*. The northwestern wall has a different arrangement : the arched openings have been replaced by three high door openings connecting the dome with the modern part of the mosque. On this side there are no cells, although at the northwestern corner a space as large as half a cell is included within the northern wall and may have been originally part of a cell a part of which disappeared when the large door openings were pierced. Most probably the present door openings were heightened during the course of the modernization of the mosque. In this case, there may originally have been at least two more cells on this side, perhaps three if the central entrance was not higher than the rest of the arches.

The cells located within the northeastern and southwestern wall of the *zāwiya* can be reached by a staircase on each side which leads to a wooden gallery running along the cells and onto which the cells doors open. This gallery, which must be modern, also leads to another group of cells of more recent construction located outside the dome (Pl. XIII, A-B).

As it looks today the dome contains eight cells within its walls. If the northwestern wall had a mezzanine, they may have been ten or eleven. This number would be almost doubled if cells also existed at the groundfloor level i.e. underneath the arches. Nor can it be excluded that this space within the arches was originally used for cells, since the presence of arches could be used for cells if the arches were on both sides walled up, with a door on the backside and a window on the dome side as in the mezzanine. There, a

<sup>(1)</sup> Surveyed by Dr. Adel Yassin (fig. 1, 2, 3 and 4).

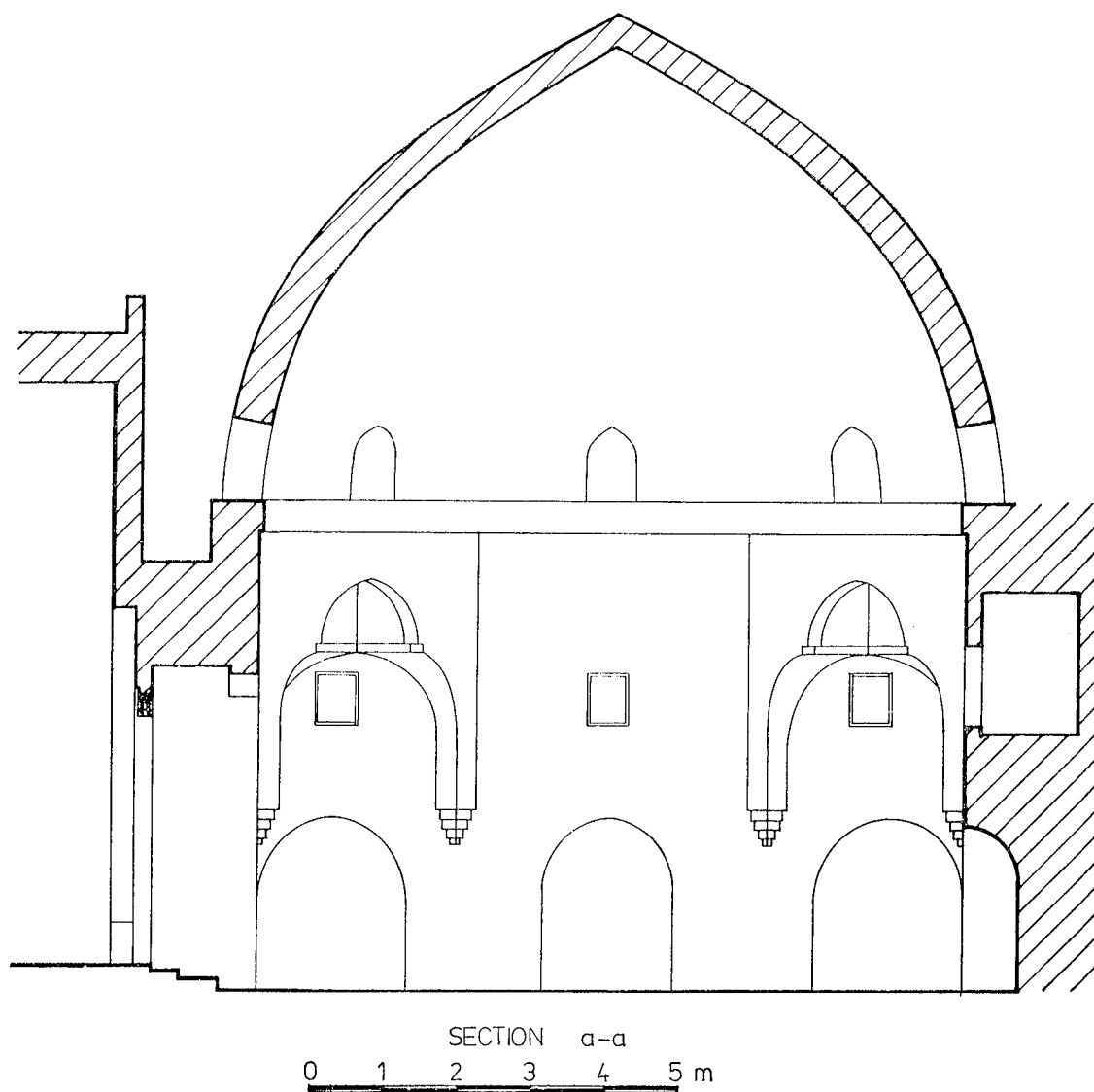


Fig. 1. — Section of the Damirdāš dome.

person, could find enough room to lie as in the cells of the mezzanine, which occupy an equal space. In any case the presence of the cells within the walls of the Damirdāš dome strengthens the argument that the dome was conceived as a *zāwiya* and not as a mausoleum.

One of the most interesting features about the dome of Zāwiyat al-Damirdāš, is that it demonstrates the close connection between design and function, which implies that the founder of the building must have given specific guidelines to the architect in charge of the construction.

The Damirdāš is the only example of a Mamluk dome to present such an arrangement of cells for the *ḥalwa* exercise. Since the ritual was practiced by almost all sufi orders, the question arises : where did the Sufis in *ḥanqāh*(s) or *zāwiya*(s) usually practice the *ḥalwa*? The great *ḥanqāh*(s) like those of Barqūq, Īnāl and Qurqumās have enough rooms which could have fulfilled the requirement of the *ḥalwa*.

The *waqf* documents, though, do not mention the *ḥalwa* as far as sufi rituals in *ḥanqāh*(s) are concerned, so that it is not quite evident if it was practiced by the *ḥanqāh* community <sup>(1)</sup>. As for the *zāwiya*(s), almost nothing is known about their architectural development in Cairo.

The mosque of al-Ġuyūšī on the Muqaṭṭam, built by the Fatimid vizir Badr al-Ġamālī in 1085, has on its roof small domed structures that look like kiosks, large enough to allow one person to stand. Each of these structures has a prayer niche on its *qibla* side. Were it not for the prayer niches one would assume, with Farīd Shāfi'ī, that they were meant to shelter a guard, the whole building being a disguised watch tower <sup>(2)</sup>. But the presence of the prayer niches in each of the domed kiosks suggests that they were perhaps built for the *ḥalwa*; using the roofs of the mosques for retreat and meditation is a sufi tradition recorded in sufi biographies <sup>(3)</sup>.

Basements as well can fulfill the same function : Šaiḥ Šams al-Dīn al-Ḥanafī, who died in 847/1443, is mentioned as having retreated several years in a cell beneath the floor of his *zāwiya* <sup>(4)</sup>. Šaiḥ Abū 'l-Sa'ūd al-Ġarḥī likewise used to practice his *ḥalwa* in the *sirdāb* or basement of his *zāwiya* <sup>(5)</sup>.

The complex of Ibrāhīm al-Kulšānī, contemporary with that of Damirdāš, also a Ḥalwatī institution, shows a plan totally different from that of Zāwiya al-Damirdāš. The historic sources call it a *zāwiya*, 'Alī Mubārak designates it as a *takiyya*, while the Damirdāš foundation is always referred to as a *zāwiya* both in historic sources as well as in *waqf* documents. Takiyyat al-Kulšānī is built around an elevated constructed esplanade which can be reached by two flights of about twenty steps altogether. A mausoleum dome stands in the center of the esplanade, surrounded on three sides,

<sup>(1)</sup> This was pointed out to me by Dr. Leonor Fernandes who has worked on the *ḥanqah* in fifteenth century *waqf* documents.

<sup>(2)</sup> Shāfi'ī, Farīd. « The Mashhad al-Juyūshī : Archeological notes and studies ». *Studies in Islamic Art and Architecture in Honor of Professor K.A.C. Creswell*. Cairo 1965, pp. 237-252, p. 251.

<sup>(3)</sup> The Sufis of the Suṭūḥiyya order (*saṭḥ* = roof; pl. *suṭūḥ*) used to hold their meditations on the roof of buildings, like Aḥmad al-Badawī. Ša'rānī, II, p. 184.

<sup>(4)</sup> Mubārak, IV, p. 117.

<sup>(5)</sup> Ša'rānī, II, p. 117.



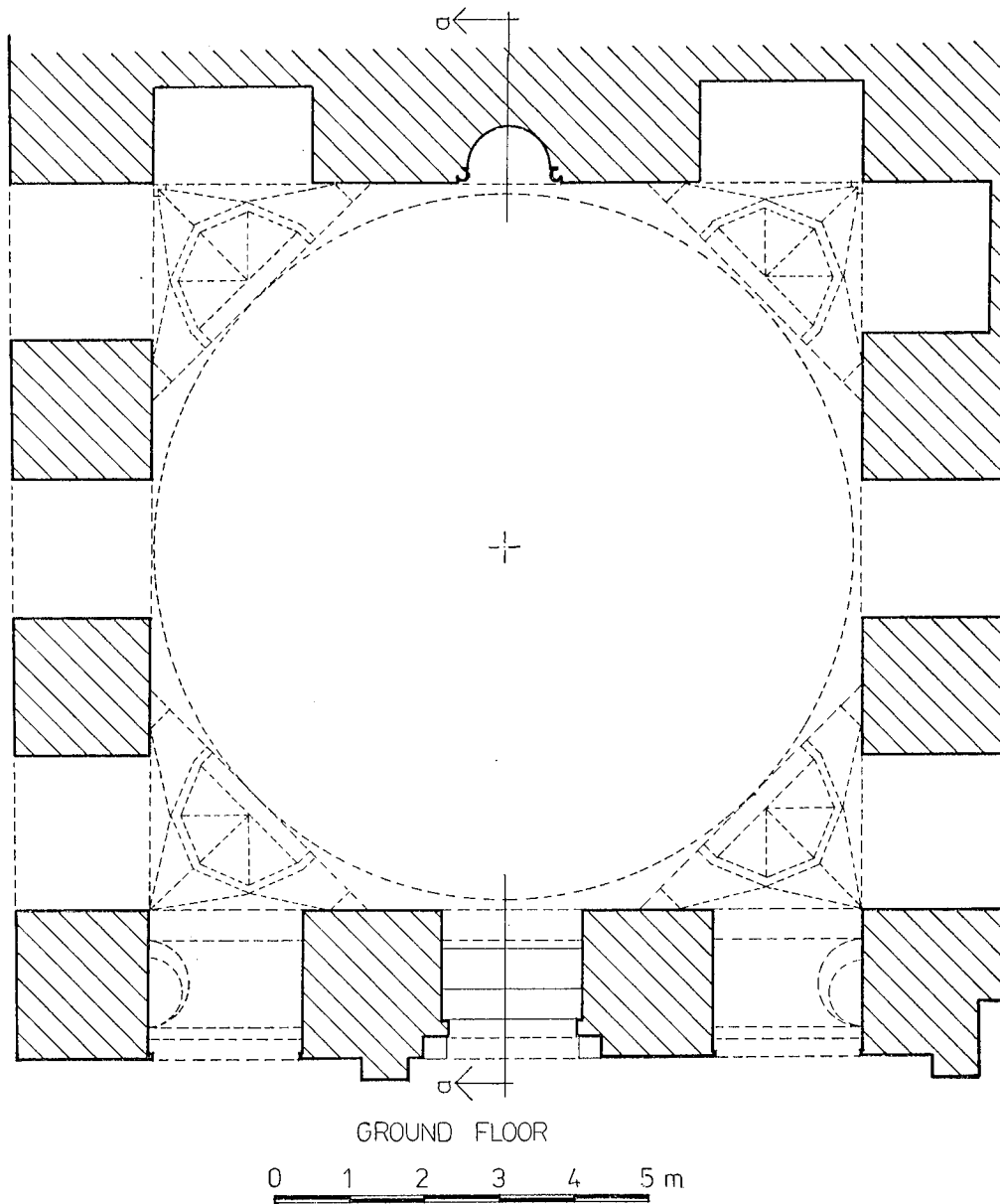


Fig. 2. — Ground plan of the Damirdāš dome.

according to the *waqf*, by Sufi dwellings. Today cells exist only on the eastern and western sides, those of the southern side having meanwhile disappeared. Between the esplanade and the street there is a twostoryed construction, its upper story is a vestibule which leads to the *takiyya* as well as to the *masḡid* parallel to the street on the northern side of the esplanade. Underneath this vestibule, i.e. on street level, we see five small

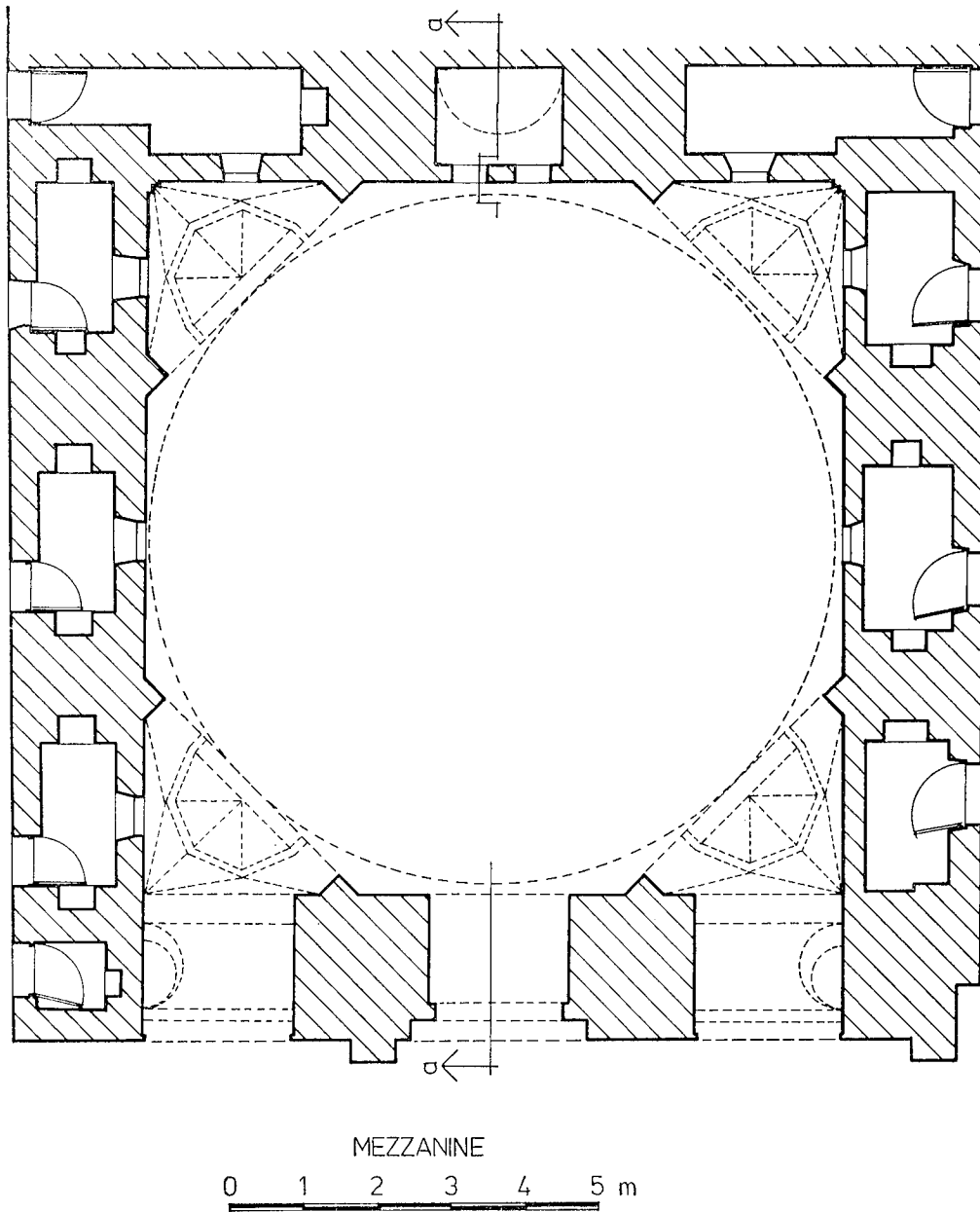


Fig. 3. — Plan of the mezzanine showing the cells.

cells of a similar size to the cells of the Damirdāš *zāwiya*, arranged around a room used today as a shop. The five small cells must be *ḥalwa* cells <sup>(1)</sup>.

<sup>(1)</sup> Unfortunately the *zāwiya* and mosque of Šāhin al-Ḥalwatī on the Muqāṭṭam is not accessible

at the moment, therefore I am not able to make a statement about the presence of *ḥalwa* cells there.

Examples of *ḥalwa* structures under the floor of a building are documented, as well, in fifteenth century Iran and Tunisia <sup>(1)</sup>. Al-Zarakšī in his legal guidebook on the use of mosques mentions the *sirdāb* of mosques as a possible place of worship <sup>(2)</sup>.

As it seems the *ḥalwa* could be practiced either on the top of a building or within its basement — the Damirdāš dome presents an additional device in this context — In a domed structure there is no roof available, but the basement provides darkness, which in the Damirdāš ritual — perhaps in other Sufi orders as well — is necessary for seclusion.

The references to *ḥalwa* cells underneath the floor of religious buildings throw a light on the architecture of the domes of Yašbak mentioned above, both of which carry a feature so far not clarified. Both domes are elevated constructions, built high above street level, so that space is left between the street level and the floor of the domed chamber for a room of which the function has so far not been identified, though it certainly was not built as a tomb. As both domes were built as a kind of royal *zāwiya* within residential structures, we may not be wrong in attributing the function of the lower room to the *ḥalwa*. In the case of the smaller dome, south of Maṭariyya, however, the lower room could not have been used during the season of the Nile flood : the building being located in a depression, the lower story would have been submerged during the three summer months.

None of the three domes compared with the dome of Zāwiyat al-Damirdāš — Maʿbad al-Rifāʿī and the two domes of Yašbak — includes the tomb of a *šaiḥ*, they are all three royal or princely constructions, not connected in documentary sources with any particular *šaiḥ*. The dome of Maʿbad al-Rifāʿī for example, is dedicated to a particular order, the Rifāʿiyya, but not to a person.

The dome of Damirdāš, however, was erected by a *šaiḥ* for himself, for his own *ṭariqa*, perhaps also at his own expense. This circumstance explains the presence of a tomb within the walls of the *zāwiya*. Other *zāwiya(s)* of the same period, however — those for instance, of ʿAlī al-Ḥawāṣṣ, Šaʿrānī, Dašṭūṭī, Abūʾl-ʿIlā, Šāhin al-Ḥalwatī and

<sup>(1)</sup> In Irān, Masʿūd Chihil Sutūn, and Masʿūd i Gunbad at Ziyāratgāh near Herat, both XVth century constructions include *chillakhāna* or cells for the *ḥalwa* exercise. At the Chihil Sutūn mosque they are located under the floor of the mosque. This has been pointed out to me by B. OʻKane, whose D. thesis *Timurid Architecture in Khurasan*, Edinburgh 1982, includes the descriptions of both

buildings. — As for Tunisia, Prof. L. Golvin pointed out to me that the *zāwiya* of Sidi Bakr Ḥasan at the cemetery of Djellāz near Tunis has an underground floor, the function of which he attributes to the *ḥalwa*.

<sup>(2)</sup> al-Zarakšī, Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh. *Iʿlam al-Sāʿid bi Ahkām al-Masāʿid*, Cairo 1964, p. 342.

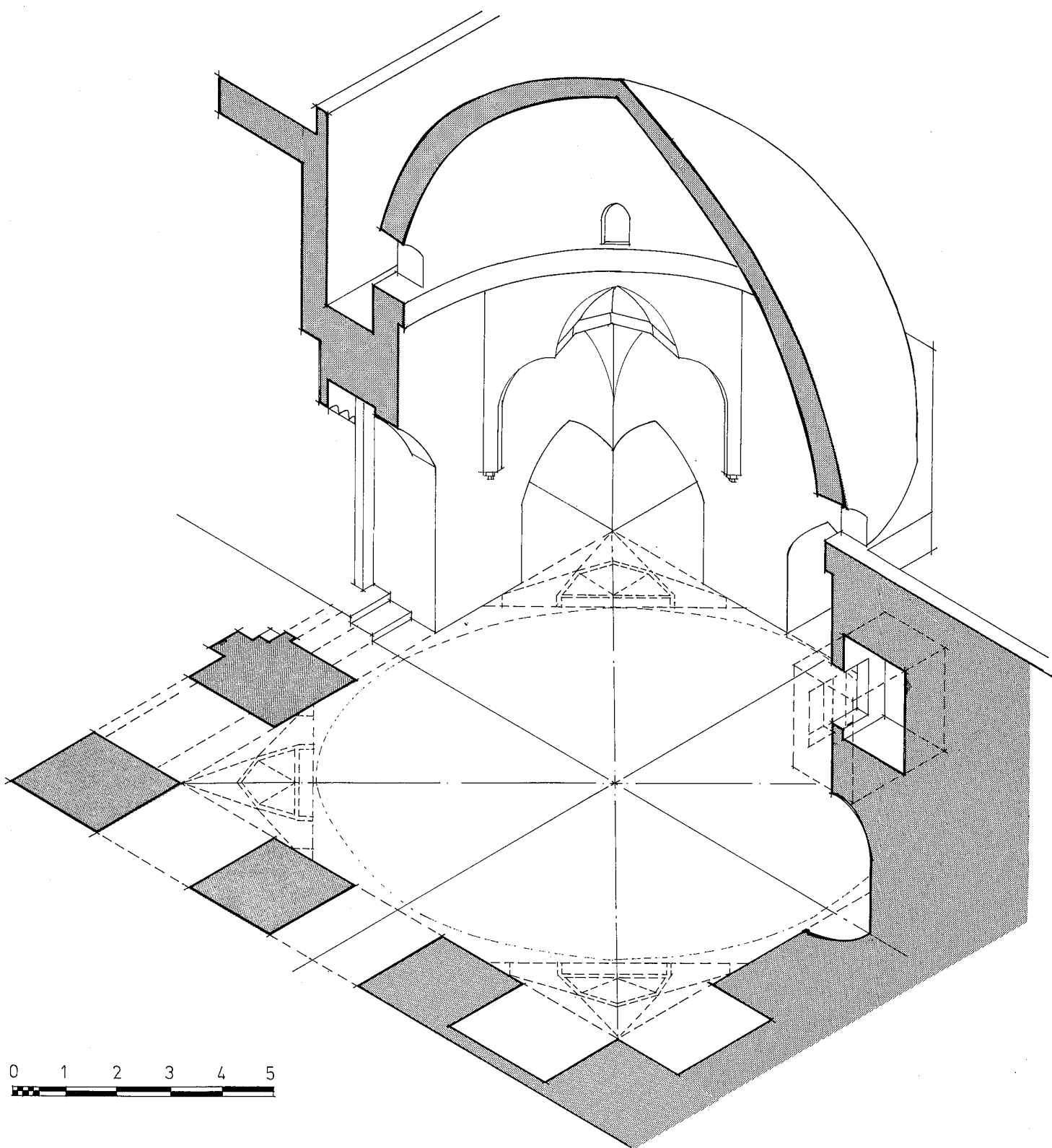


Fig. 4. — Isometric drawing of the Damirdāš dome.

Ibrāhīm al-Kulšānī — are connected with domes representing the usual funerary function : the cenotaph occupies the central part of the domed chamber, not much space is left that could be used as a congregational room, and their architectural features correspond with those of the usual contemporary funeral domes.

The dome pattern for a *zāwiya* does not appear for the first time in Cairo with the four above mentioned domes. There was already a tradition of building domed *zāwiya*(s). Maqrīzī mentions Qubbat al-Naṣr, a *zāwiya* built in the Fatimid period for the Sufis from Persia <sup>(1)</sup>. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa records that the Sufis in the *zāwiya*(s) of Cairo used to hold their meetings in domes <sup>(2)</sup> : and Sultan Qāyṭbāy is reported to have built a *zāwiya* in a village in the Delta for a *ṣaiḥ*, called Qubbat Muṣṭafā, i.e. it was built in the shape of a dome <sup>(3)</sup>.

The question of why certain *zāwiya*(s) were built as domes and others not cannot be answered here, since the architecture of the *zāwiya* has not been documented yet. In the funeral complex of Sultan Barsbāy two *zāwiya*(s) are described in his *waqf* deed <sup>(4)</sup>, one in the shape of a *qā'a*, and the other, Ma'bad al-Rifā'i, in the shape of a dome.

It is possible that the dome, because it covers an independent square space, was more appropriate for certain sufi rituals than the *qā'a* or the hypostyle room, the vaulted *iwān* seems to have been abandoned in Cairo by the fifteenth century. The square and the spatial representation of the Sufi community play an important role in the ceremonies of many orders, and in the Damirdāšiyya as well <sup>(5)</sup>.

[D. B.-A.]

<sup>(1)</sup> al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā'iz wa'l-I'tibār bi Dikr al-Ḥiṭaṭ wa'l-Ātār*. 2 vols. Būlāq 1270 H., II, p. 433.

<sup>(2)</sup> Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭa al-Musammāh Tuḥfat al-Nuẓẓār fī Ḡarā'ib al-Amṣār wa 'Aḡā'ib al-Asfār*, 2 vols, Cairo 1958., p. 20.

<sup>(3)</sup> Mubārak, IV, p. 100.

<sup>(4)</sup> s.N. 11.

<sup>(5)</sup> Gilsemann, Michael. *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt*, Oxford 1973, p. 161 f.

## THE ZĀWIYA IN CAIRO

by Leonor FERNANDES

The preceding section had dealt with a *zāwiya* foundation in the late fifteenth century. A *zāwiya* such as that example represents the final stage in the evolution of this Sufi foundation at the eve of the Ottoman conquest of Egypt.

By the end of the fifteenth century, foundations which served « popular Sufism », appealing to a broad strata of the population had already been fully integrated in the fabric of the society and were indeed to play an active role in the political and social scene <sup>(1)</sup>.

The purpose of the following section is to try to define the type of Sufi foundation which is referred to as « *zāwiya* » and to follow its evolution from a humble mosque or small construction rarely of architectural importance <sup>(2)</sup> to a fairly large structure with a plan dictated by the needs of the rituals of the order it serves — as in the case of *Zāwiyat al-Damirdāš*.

When did the term *zāwiya* first appear in Egypt? Ayyūbī sources do not bother to explain the origin of the term as they do with *ḥanqāh* and *ribāṭ* — a fact which indicates that the term was commonly used in Egypt at the time. However, it fails to indicate whether it was applied to parts of a construction or to a foundation, and old dictionaries must be consulted in an attempt to clarify the meaning of the term.

The word *zāwiya* as defined by Arabic dictionaries is a term of Arabic origin derived from *zawā*, which means « to bring together, gather, contract, conceal ». It also means « to withdraw into a corner, to go into seclusion ». When applied to a building, it refers to a corner <sup>(3)</sup>.

An interesting attempt to explain the origin of the term *zāwiya* in connection with religious life is provided by ʿAlī Mubārak who writes :

« ... and the village of al-Zāwiya is the old town known to the ancient people under the name of Aziyū or Azwā. Twenty Roman miles separated it from the city of Banī Suwayf and perhaps the distortion of its name in the Islamic period turned it into al-Zāwiya; and

<sup>(1)</sup> Cf. J.C. Garcin, « L'insertion Sociale de Šaʿrānī dans le milieu Cairete », *Colloque International sur l'Histoire du Caire*, GDR 1972. « Deux Saints Populaires du Caire au début du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle », *BEO*, 1977.

<sup>(2)</sup> See articles « *Zāwiya* », *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st edition; « al-Ḳāhira », *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edition.

<sup>(3)</sup> Ibn Manzūr, « *Zawā* », *Lisān al-ʿArab*; see also al-Zubaydī, *Tāğ al-ʿArūs*.

possibly the name *zāwiya* which refers to a place intended for praying for Muslims was also derived from it because there were, in this town, many places by the name of Azyū dedicated to the cult of Osiris most of which had been transformed into *masğid(s)* for Muslims after the Arab conquest of Egypt. It is likely that the term *zāwiya* was taken from Azyū » <sup>(1)</sup>.

The preceding definitions do not indicate what the *zāwiya* looked like. Furthermore, the only surviving example of a building labelled *zāwiya* by its inscription, that of Zayn al-Dīn Yūsuf, is already late <sup>(2)</sup>. Scattered information provided by the sources are therefore the only way to follow the evolution of the *zāwiya* as a foundation.

From the accounts of the chronicles, it can be surmised that for at least the two centuries following the Arab conquest of Egypt, the term *zāwiya* designated a part or a corner of a religious building rather than a separate structure. Both Maqrīzī and Ibn Duqmāq mention eight *zāwiya(s)* which formed an integral part of the Ġāmi' al-'Atīq, the first congregational mosque built by 'Amr Ibn al-'Āṣ in Fuṣṭāṭ. Each of the *zāwiya(s)* was reserved for one ṣāiḥ and his students. There, the ṣāiḥ met daily with the students who gathered around him to listen to his teachings. The funds which provided for the upkeep of the *zāwiya(s)* came from *waqf(s)* endowed for each of them <sup>(3)</sup>.

Even though such teaching-*zāwiya(s)* survived through the Mamluk period, there soon appeared another type of *zāwiya* directly connected with sufism, and thus conceived as an independent structure <sup>(4)</sup>.

It is difficult to know from the scanty information provided by sources when such *zāwiya(s)* made their appearance. However, we do know that when Ḍū'l-Nūn al-Miṣrī, the founder of Egyptian Sufism, died in 245/859, he was buried in his *zāwiya*. Later, the *waqfiyya* of Barsbāy, which mentions restorations done by the Sultan at the *zāwiya* of Ḍū'l-Nūn, provides us with some information which allows us to assert that this *zāwiya* was conceived as an independent structure. Indeed the endowment deed allocates a monthly sum of 1,000 dirhams from the revenues of the *waqf(s)* to be used to restore the *ḍarīḥ* (tomb) and to buy water, mats, and lamps for his *zāwiya* <sup>(5)</sup>.

<sup>(1)</sup> 'Alī Mubārak, *al-Ḥiṭaṭ al-Tawfiqiyya al-Ġadida*. (Bulāq 1306 H.), XI, 83.

<sup>(2)</sup> For a detailed study of the *zāwiya* cf. Laila 'Alī Ibrāhīm, « The Zāwiya of Ṣayḥ Zayn al-dīn Yūsuf », *MDIK* 34, Cairo 1978.

<sup>(3)</sup> Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Mawā'iz wa'l I'tibār fi ḍikr al-Ḥiṭaṭ wa'l-Āṭār*. (Bulāq 1853), I, 255-56. Ibn Duqmāq, *Kitāb al-'Intiṣār li Wasīṭat 'Aqd al-Amṣār*. (Bulāq 1309 H.), IV/1, 100-104.

<sup>(4)</sup> Maqrīzī (*Ḥiṭaṭ* II, 430-36) refers to *riwāq(s)* and *maqṣūra(s)* serving the same purpose within the Azhar mosque. Qalqaṣandī (*Ṣubḥ al-A'ṣā fi Ṣinā'at al-Inṣā'*, XI, 228-29) reproduces a document of investiture dated 730 H. appointing Qāḍī 'Izz al-Dīn b. Badr al-Dīn b. Ġamā'a to the teaching position in the *zāwiya* of Ġāmi' Miṣr.

<sup>(5)</sup> *Ḥuḡḡat Waqf al-Sultān al-Aṣraf Barsbāy*. Wizārat al-Awqāf, Siğill al-Daftarḥāna 880.

We can assume that with the spread of Sufism the number of such *zāwiya*(s) used as a retreat by a saintly *šaiḥ* increased rapidly. However it seems that the foundations remained rather modest up to the Ayyūbī period, when the country was brought back to the main stream of Orthodox Islam after the fall of the Fatimid Caliphate. The return of Egypt to Sunnism exposed the country to new influences coming from other parts of the Muslim world. Among such influences are found those of the Sufi orders which made their appearance in Cairo and Alexandria as early as the thirteenth century <sup>(1)</sup>. The appeal of the Sufi orders, each sponsored by one *šaiḥ*, was not restricted to the masses of the population but attracted members of the ruling class as well. Sources mention frequent involvement of amirs or even sultans with one particular *šaiḥ* whom they revered, and to whom they paid visits. The *šaiḥ*(s) lived in *zāwiya*(s) often built for them by a rich amir or the sultan himself. Yet, at the request of some *šaiḥ*(s) their *zāwiya*(s) did not have *waqf*(s) providing for their upkeep. Rather than accept *waqf*(s) for their *zāwiya*(s) the *šaiḥ*(s) often chose to live on donations or sometimes sent their Sufis to beg from people. This refusal of the *šaiḥ*(s) to accept endowments for their foundations perhaps indicates a desire to act in accordance with one of the principles of Sufism : *faqr* (poverty). However, another possible reason would be the conscious attempt of the Sufi *šaiḥ* to remain independent from any political pressure which might eventually have been exerted on him, and remain closer to the masses. It is perhaps due to this lack of endowment that so few of the earlier *zāwiya*(s) have survived. Maqrīzī mentions 26 *zāwiya*(s) and Ibn Duqmāq 9, and as suggested by ‘Alī Mubārak, that number increased rapidly during the Ottoman period <sup>(2)</sup>.

At this point one should stop to examine what is meant by a *zāwiya* when referring to a Sufi foundation. It seems that from the thirteenth century and up to the mid-fifteenth century the term *zāwiya* should be construed as referring to an independent structure of small architectural importance. The structure, which could be a domed chamber, or a *qā’a*, with a *miḥrāb*, was always built for a particular *šaiḥ* representing a *ṭarīqa* (order). The *zāwiya* served as a residence for the *šaiḥ* and his family, if he had any. It also served as a meeting place for the members of his order. The *šaiḥ* met daily with his *atbā’* (followers) and *murīdīn* (neophytes) who came to listen to the teaching of the order, meditate, pray and attend *ḥuḍūr* (Sufi ritual) <sup>(3)</sup>. Such *ḥuḍūr* sessions, the core of the

<sup>(1)</sup> For further information in *ṭarīqa* (s), cf. «*Ṭarīqa*», *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st edition; J.S. Trimingham. *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, (Oxford 1971), 67-104.

cit., VI, 89.

<sup>(3)</sup> Cf. *The Evolution of the Ḥanqāh Institution in Mamlūk Egypt*. Ph. D. dissertation, (Princeton University 1980), 128-132, by the writer.

<sup>(2)</sup> ‘Alī Mubārak, *al-Ḥiṭaṭ al-Tawfiqiyya*, op.



Sufi ceremony and aimed at the catharsis of the spirits of the participants, varied from one order to the other.

At the death of the *šaiḥ* he was usually buried in his *zāwiya* which subsequently became a place of pilgrimage and acquired thereby some of the characteristics of a *mašhad* (shrine). Indeed the death of the *šaiḥ*, who was already a saint during his lifetime, was commemorated every year by a *mawlid* (festival) which took place in his *zāwiya*. The *mawlid*(s) attracted people from all parts of the country, who flocked to the *šaiḥ*s' tomb to get his *baraka* (blessings). According to the sources most of the festivals were accompanied by reprehensible behaviour, bitterly criticized by the orthodox men of religion.

Since the foundation of a *zāwiya* aimed at the spreading of a *ṭarīqa*, the death of its *šaiḥ* was followed by the selection of a Sufi of the same order, often trained by the deceased, to replace him. Most of the time, the position of *Šaiḥ al-Šūfiyya* reverted to the son of the deceased whose close relationship with his father made him the most suitable of his followers. By the Ottoman period, the position of *Šaiḥ al-Ṭarīqa* had become hereditary as is the case with the *Damirdāšiyya*, the *Bakriyya*, the *Suṭūhiyya*, to name but a few.

Up to the fifteenth century, it seems that the internal affairs of the *zāwiya* were left to the whim of its *šaiḥ*. He was in charge of the spiritual life of his followers and was left to decide about the hours of meditation, recitation of the Coran, attendance of Sufi teachings and *ḥuḍūr* sessions. Since there were no rules imposed on the Sufis, except those set by the *šaiḥ*, the unity of the group was preserved by the personal appeal of the *šaiḥ* whose virtues and qualities called for respect and admiration from all members of his *ṭarīqa*. Such loose ties based on spiritual attraction allowed an individual to join the *zāwiya* provided he showed the required disposition. Thus, if judged qualified by the *šaiḥ*, he would be accepted as a *murīd* (neophyte) and begin his initiation to Sufi teachings. After his initiation was completed, the neophyte was invested with the proper *ḥirqa* (robe) <sup>(1)</sup> during a ceremony in which all members of the *zāwiya* took part, and thus acquired the status of full Sufi i.e., he could consider himself as one of the *atbā'* (followers) of the *šaiḥ*.

There is no reason to believe that any changes were introduced in the internal life of *zāwiya*(s) at least up to the fifteenth century, as mentioned earlier. Even then, the only major development which can be noted is that Circassian founders provided *zāwiya*(s)

<sup>(1)</sup> For discussion of the various sufi *ḥirqa*(s) cf. Trimingham, *op. cit.*, 183, 306.

with considerable *waqf*(s) to maintain their upkeep. Moreover, the tendency was to build *zāwiya*(s) that were specifically founded for a particular order. Hence, we read in the *waqfiyya* of al-Ašraf Barsbāy that the sultan built a *zāwiya* which he founded especially for the *ṭarīqa* Aḥmadiyya Rifā'iyya <sup>(1)</sup>. This new tendency to sponsor a particular *ṭarīqa* led to the foundation of more than one *zāwiya* serving the same *ṭarīqa* within the same city, as was the case with the Ḥalwatiyya in Cairo.

The end of the Mamluk period saw the decline of institutionalized Sufism as embodied in the *ḥanqāh* foundations. It also witnessed a rise in the importance of popular sufism and consequently of the foundation serving its diffusion : the *zāwiya*. Hence, the new foundations were gradually taking some of the functions of both *ribāṭ*(s) and *ḥanqāh*(s) and were subject to major changes in their internal structures. As it appears from *waqfiyya*(s) of the early Ottoman period, life in the interior of the *zāwiya* was under the strict control of the founder who had to appoint the Sufis, limit their number, ask them to take up permanent residence in the foundation, and forbid them to work. In addition, Sufis were given a monthly salary fixed by the founder in the endowment deed. Some *wāqif*(s) imposed celibacy on all members of the *zāwiya*, while others chose to control their daily diet <sup>(2)</sup>. The modifications of the life style of the Sufis within the foundation also entailed a change in their architecture. Hence, the small construction gradually turned into an important building. The *zāwiya* thus conceived, formed the core of a larger complex intended to meet the needs of the members of the *ṭarīqa*. Such *zāwiya* complexes included a meeting place (*qā'a* or *qubba*), a large living unit for the *šaiḥ* of the *zāwiya*, his family and his servants (*riwāq*), living units for the Sufis (*ḥilwa* or *bayt*), an ablution fountain (*miḍa'a*), a kind of bath (*mustaḥamm*), latrines (*marāḥiḍ*), a well (*bi'r*) with a waterwheel (*sāqiya*), a cistern (*ṣaḥrīg*) to store the drinking water distributed through the public fountain (*sabīl*), a grain-mill (*ṭāḥūn*) and bakery (*furn*) for the preparation of bread. Some *zāwiya*(s) had also an oil-press (*ma'ṣara*) and perhaps a large garden where fruit trees or vegetables were grown. The tomb of the *šaiḥ* was often

<sup>(1)</sup> The fact that Barsbāy states clearly that the *zāwiya* was founded for Rifā'iyya indicates his care to respect the legal requirements of the *waqf* (cf. al-Ḥaṣṣāf, *Kitāb Aḥkām al-Awqāf* (Cairo n.d.) and Ṭarābulṣī, *Mu'in al-Aḥkām* (Cairo 1973) according to which a *waqf* is valid only if its object is not doomed to perish. We may thus assume that most of the *zāwiya*(s) said to have been built for one particular *šaiḥ* by an amīr or a sultān

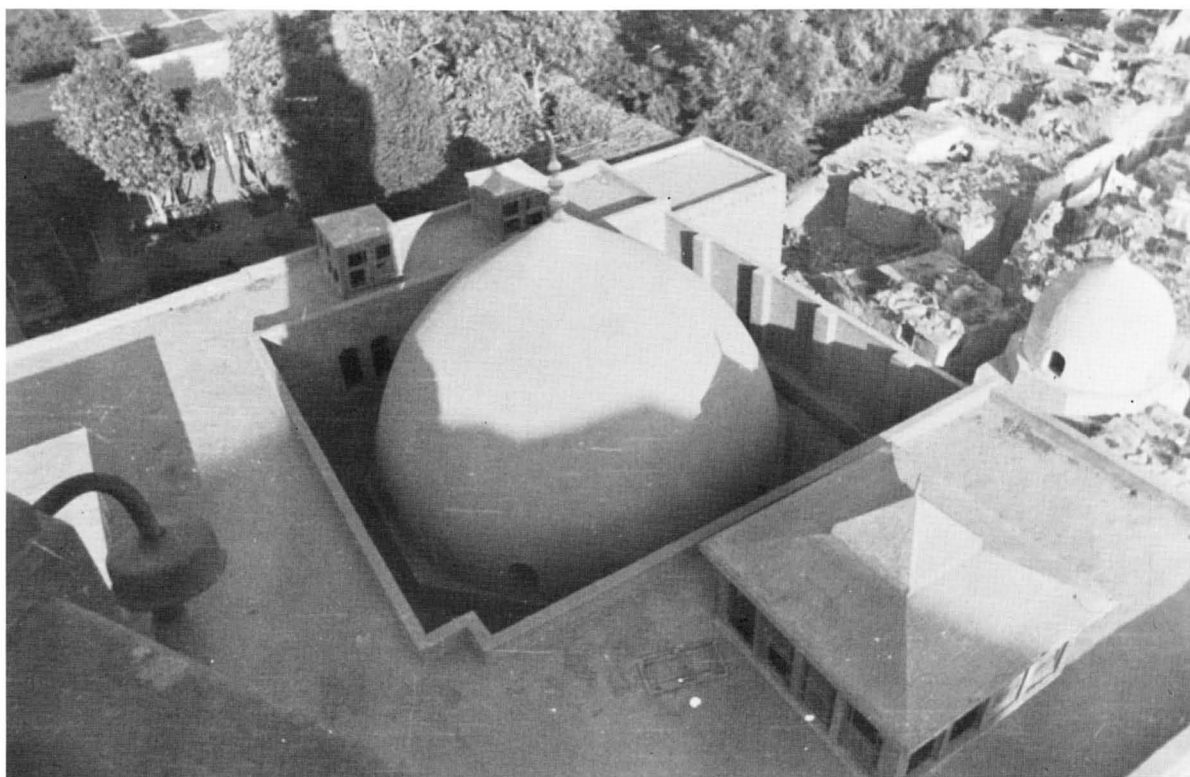
or a rich person, were founded for a particular *ṭarīqa* which was meant to last.

<sup>(2)</sup> *Ḥuḡḡat Waqf al-Šayḥ Ḥasan b. Iliyās*. Wizārat al-Awqāf, Siḡill al-Daftarḥāna 1079, dated 941/1534; *Ḥuḡḡat Waqf Sulaymān Bāšā*. Siḡill al-Daftarḥāna 1074, dated 975/1567; *Ḥuḡḡat Waqf Raḍwān Bey*. Siḡill al-Daftarḥāna 994, dated 1038/1628.

incorporated in the complex, however this was not necessarily the case since some šaiḥ(s) chose to be buried in the cemetery.

It thus appears that since the Arab conquest of Egypt, and because of the evolution of Sufism during the following centuries, the *zāwiya* as an independent structure progresses from what was a simple retreat for a mystic to a large foundation serving a Sufi order, and developed an architecture proper to meet the needs of its members as well as the ritual of its *ṭarīqa*.

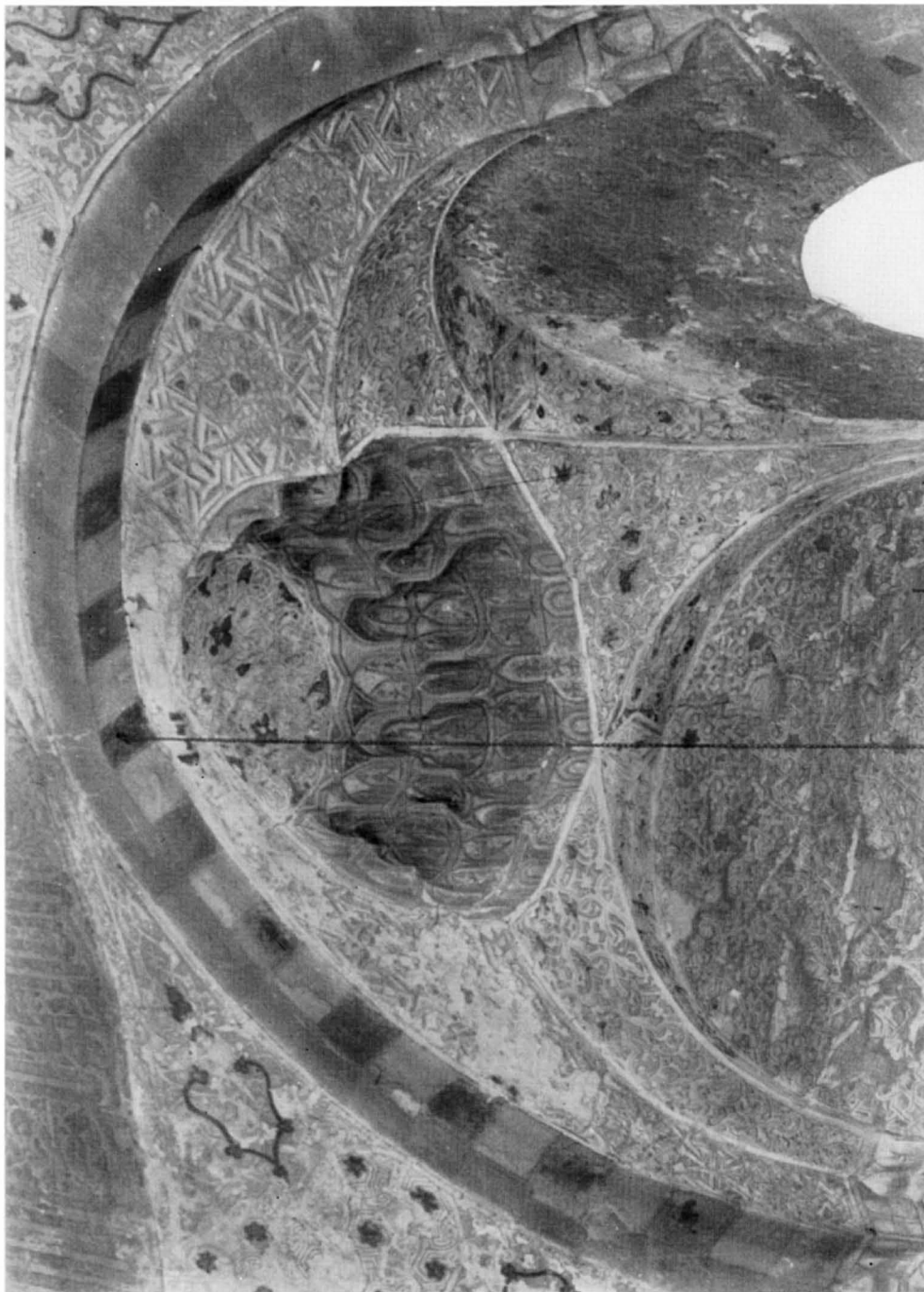
[L. F.]



A. — The dome of Zāwiyat al-Damirdāš. Exterior view.



B. — Interior view of the Damirdāš dome.



Squinch of the Fadāwiyya dome.



A. — Interior of a *halwa* cell.



B. — Gallery leading to the cells.