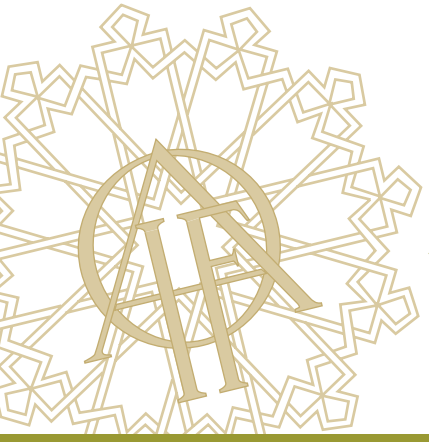
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Doris Behrens-Abouseif

The Qubba, an Aristocratic Type of zāwiya [avec 2 planches].

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THE *QUBBA*, AN ARISTOCRATIC TYPE OF *ZĀWIYA*

Doris BEHRENS-ABOUSEIF

In their chronicles of the Circassian Mamluks, Ibn Taġrībirdī and Ibn Iyās, both mention a type of religious foundation — the *qubba* — the identification of whose function presents some difficulty.

The term *qubba*, meaning dome, is not applied in these texts as a mere description of the appearance of any domed construction. Rather, as will be demonstrated, it designates a certain type of building having not only the shape of a dome, but also a specific function, a function inextricably linked to the life of the court and to sufi practice [1].

In Cairene medieval architecture, the dome is used not only in religious or funeral architecture, i.e., in mausoleums, over prayer niches and ablution fountains, but also in palaces, belvederes and garden pavilions. The palace of the vizir Yaʿqūb Ibn Kilis, the belvedere of Qubbat al-Hawā' (both Fatimid), the palace of al-Ṣāliḥ at Rawḍa and the hall of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad at the Citadel were all secular domed structures [2].

Despite extensive use of the dome in Cairene architecture, however, Maqrīzī, in his enumeration of religious foundations in Cairo, mentions only two buildings under the label of *qubba*. One of them is the dome of Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Nağm al-Dīn Ayyūb, erected after his death (1250) by his wife, Šağar al-Durr, and the other is the dome of Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn, a mausoleum the Sultan had built within his complex of *madrasa* and hospital (1285). Besides being royal mausoleums, both domes fulfilled other functions of a ceremonial character : it was at the dome of al-Ṣāliḥ that the nomination of a new amir used to take place, a function later transferred to the dome of Qalāwūn, which was also a site for sufi gatherings [3].

[1] This does not apply to architectural epigraphy, where the term *qubba* is usually used for any domed structure.

[2] al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawāʿiẓ wa'l-Iʿtibār bi-Ḏikr al-Ḫiṭaṭ wa'l-Āṯār* (Būlāq : 1270), I, p. 487; II, p. 8.

Creswell, K.A.C., *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt* (Oxford : 1959), II, p. 87.

Ibn Iyās, *Badā'iʿ al-Zuhūr fī Waqā'iʿ al-Duhūr*, 2nd. ed. (ed.) M. Mostafa (Cairo-Wiesbaden : 1961), V, p. 441.

[3] al-Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ*, II, pp. 374, 380 f.

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Besides these two *qubba*(s), Maqrīzī mentions among the list of *zāwiya*(s) a *zāwiya* called Qubbat al-Naṣr [1], founded in the Fatimid period and restored by Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa records that the sufis of Cairo used to hold their gatherings in *qubba*(s) [2]; he fails to make clear, however, whether these were mausoleums or *zāwiya*(s).

One of the most interesting references to a *qubba* in the Mamluk period appears in Ibn Taġrībirdī's « Ḥawādiṯ » in the biography of Amīr Ǧānibak al-Dawādār, Governor of Jadda [3]. The historian is particularly fascinated by the *qubba*-foundation (867-1462) of Ǧānibak and his almost legendary *bustān,* which is described as covering an area of 120 *faddān*(s) [4] stretching from his palace at Qanāṭir al-Sibāʿ to the Nile shore opposite the Island of Rawḍa at Manša'at al-Maharānī. The *bustān,* with gates at both ends of the area encompassed, is reported by Ibn Taġrībirdī as the most fabulous Egypt had known since the Tulunid *bustān* of Ḫumārawayh, so often described by historians. At the edge of his *bustān,* near a Nile-side platform and pool, Ǧānibak juxtaposed two *qubba*(s) of unequal size (see Pl. I).

The historian further reports that at the domes Ǧānibak settled foreign sufis (*fuqarā' min al-aʿǧām*), whom he provided with generous allowances. Ibn Taġrībirdī does not, however, refer to the place as *ḫanqā* or *zāwiya.* Ibn Iyās, on the other hand, uses the term *zāwiya* once in reference to Ǧānibak's foundation, but otherwise it is consistently called simply *qubba* [5].

Ibn Taġrībirdī dedicates two complete pages of his chronicle to the description of a banquet (*walīma*) given at these domes by the amir, without, however, indicating the purpose of this great reception. The description of Ǧānibak's banquet, besides being interesting in itself, may shed some light on the function of such *qubba*(s).

DESCRIPTION OF THE BANQUET (résumé).

Ǧānibak, *ʿAẓīm al-Mamlaka* (the Great Man of the Kingdom), invited to his banquet at his dome at Manša'at al-Maharānī, all the notables, the *qāḍī*(s), the *mubāširīn*

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 433.

[2] *Riḥlat Ibn Baṭṭūṭa al-Musammāh : Tuḥfat al-Nuẓẓār fī Ġarā'ib al-Amṣār wa ʿAǧā'ib al-Asfār* (Cairo : 1958). I, p. 20.

[3] Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ al-Duhūr fī Madā al-Ayyām wa'l-Šuhūr* (ed.) W. Popper (Berkeley, California : 1932), pp. 566-69; 766-68.

Idem, *al-Nuǧūm al-Ẓāhira fī Mulūk Miṣr wa'l-Qāhira* (ed.) J. Šayyāl / F. Šaltūt (Cairo : 1972), XVI, p. 323.

Ibn Iyās, *Badā'iʿ*, II, pp. 406, 449.

[4] Nowadays one Egyptian *faddān* equals ca. 4,200 M².

[5] *Ibid.* p. 409.

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(secretaries), the *amirs* and the *ḫāṣiqiyya* (his ministers). He also invited the *fuqarā'* of all the sufi orders, each group sitting separately at the platform without mingling with other sufi groups. Coran readers performed their recitations inside the great dome. An enormous crowd filled the park at the platform, while amirs were posted on the way to the *qubba* to prevent the access of the masses. In the afternoon, the host had a lavish banquet served to himself and the notables inside the dome, and to the *fuqarā'* outside on the platform. The banquet lasted until the afternoon prayer, when Ğānibak started politely bidding farewell to most of his guests. He then sat at the platform in company with the *fuqarā'* and a select group of the notables.

A multitude of lamps flooded the party with light. They were hanging from posts erected for that purpose along the platform. In addition, a great ship anchored on the Nile shore in front of the dome was covered from top to bottom with lanterns. Also, the dome, in spite of its large size, was completely illuminated, together with its minaret. The celebration lasted until dawn, the lights (between 5,000 and 10,000 candels) still burning until then. It was, according to Ibn Taġrībirdī, the most famous of all nights, nothing like it ever having been seen before! Its memory seems also to have impressed Ibn Iyās, who compares the number of lanterns burning at a feast celebrated by Sultan al-Ġūrī at his palace at Rawḍa with the lights of Ğānibak's banquet some forty years earlier.

In his description, Ibn Taġrībirdī refers only to the large dome, although he previously mentioned two *qubba*(s) erected by Ğānibak on this site. It is not stated if the occasion for the party was a religious one, but it is obvious from this report that the *fuqarā'* were less prominent guests than the notables and amirs with whom Ğānibak sat at the banquet within the dome. In Ibn Iyā's version there is mention of *muġanni* (singers) and *qaṣaf* (fun and amusements).

YAŠBAK'S DOMES [1].

Under the reign of Sultan Qāytbāy almost a decade later (1477), another mighty amir, Yašbak min Mahdī, also a *dawādār,* similarly erected a *qubba* on the outskirts of Cairo near Maṭariyya, a place of excursion for amirs and sultans for generations. This dome is mentioned several times by Ibn Iyās in connection with banquets, receptions and excursions that were participated in by the sultan, amirs and high-ranking guests, and which included music and dance (probably in a sufi context).

[1] For the history of the domes, Behrens-Abouseif, Doris, « The North-eastern Extension of Cairo Under the Mamluks », *Annales Islamologiques,* t. XVII (1981), pp. 171-183.

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Two years later, the same amir erected a second *qubba* on a larger scale in the northern suburb but closer to the city. It was connected with a number of residential structures, gardens and a pool dug « for the view », the whole complex overlooking a panorama. This dome, like the earlier one, is very richly decorated inside but has a plain exterior, a combination of features distinguishing it from most contemporary funeral domes. It, too, is mentioned in the context of *plaisance* visits of the sultan and the amirs.

The domes of Yašbak were clearly not mausoleums, never being mentioned as anything other than *qubba*(s) or Qubbat Yašbak. The Coranic inscription of the first smaller dome (Sur. 76/5-9) refers to water and is often applied to *sabīl*(s), while the only surviving inscription of the second dome commemorates the pilgrimage of Sultan Qāytbāy, as do several other inscriptions on buildings of this period.

Architectural comparison of the domes of Yašbak with the domes of Ğānibak, on the one hand, and with an earlier dome built by Barsbāy and a slightly later dome built by Šayḫ Damirdāš al-Muḥammadī [1] — both of which were *zāwiya*(s) — on the other hand, strongly suggests that the domes of Yašbak were also a type of *zāwiya,* although they are not referred to as such by the historians. This interpretation is supported by Ibn Iyā's single reference (noted above) to Ğānibak's foundation as *zāwiya*. Similarly, Ğānibak's domes could not have been mausoleums, inasmuch as the context in which they are mentioned does not refer to any funeral function. Moreover, the actual mausoleum dome of Ğānibak, which survives in the cemetery (Index Nr. 171), is referred to by the historians as *turba,* not *qubba* [2].

Later travellers describe the domes of Yašbak as connected to dwellings for sufis. Yet neither contemporary nor later sources associate Yašbak's domes with the name of a certain *šaiḫ* or a certain sufi order, as *zāwiya*(s) generally are. The domes of Ğānibak, now no longer extant, are, however, reported to have been used in the Ottoman period by the order of the Baktāšiyya and to have been known as Takiyyat Qaṣr al-ʿAynī. They acquired this name because al-Šahābī Ibn al-ʿAynī had dwelt nearby in a palace formerly belonging to Ğānibak that eventually gave its name to the entire quarter [3].

[1] For an architectural comparison, Behrens-Abouseif, Doris, « Four Domes of the Late Mamluk Period », *Annales Islamologiques,* t. XVII (1981), pp. 191-201; « An Unlisted Monument of the Fifteenth Century : The Dome of Zāwiyāt al-Damirdāš », *Annales Islamologiques,* t. XVIII (1982), pp. 105-115.

[2] Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ,* p. 769.

[3] Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ibid.,* pp. 496, 541.

al-Nābulsī, ʿAbd al-Ġanī, *al-Ḥaqīqa wa'l-Maǧāz fi Riḥlat al-Šām wa Miṣr wa'l-Ḥiǧāz 1105/07, Ms. Dār al-Kutub Ğuġrāfiā,* Nr. 344, p. 102 v. Mubārak, ʿAlī, *al-Ḫiṭaṭ al-Ğadīda al-Tawfīqiyya,* Būlāq 1888, VI, p. 56; Čelebī, Ewliyā, *Siyāhatnamesi, X : Misir, Sudān, Habes;* Istanbul 1938, p. 243 ff.

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The question arises whether or not we are dealing, as far as these *qubba*(s) are concerned, with a special type of *zāwiya*. The *zāwiya* in the Mamluk period [1] developed into an independent kind of structure which, though small in scale and indefinite in architectural features, was always connected to a particular *šaiḫ* who represented a specific order (*ṭarīqa*). The *zāwiya* was used by the *šaiḫ* as residence for himself and his family. Sometimes, though not always, the *šaiḫ* would be buried in his *zāwiya*, which then would become a place of pilgrimage for his adherents and acquire the character of a *mašhad*.

In contrast to the institutionalized sufism of the *ḫanqā*, which by the mid-fifteenth century had become fully integrated with the *madrasa*, the sufism of the *zāwiya* was usually popular. Still sufi *šaiḫ*(s) did not automatically represent the poor classes but were often associated with the life of the court, and Ibn Taġrībirdī, himself an aristocrat, tries to defend some *šaiḫ*(s) against popular accusations of having attached themselves to the rulers, or leading an unorthodox style of life [2]. The *šaiḫ*(s) of the *zāwiya* often preferred being financially and socially independent of the rulers in spite of endowments they might receive from them. The *šaiḫ*(s) not only enjoyed the respect of rulers, but, thanks to their influence upon the masses, were sometimes even feared by them.

The *qubba* seems to have been a quite different sort of sufi foundation from the type of popular institution that is commonly represented as *zāwiya*. *Qubba*(s) were aristocratic foundations and maintained an aristocratic and ceremonial character closely connected with the personal use of the sponsor and consequently more subject to his control. This difference might explain the reluctance of the historians to call them simply *zāwiya*(s). The term *qubba*, used instead, certainly implies more than the mere definition, of the shape of the building, as noted above, since all mausoleums of the period were domes and yet were generally not designated by this term.

Such a foundation is exemplified again in Ibn Iyās, who reports that during one of his excursions to the outskirts of Cairo, Sultan Qāytbāy stopped at a place called al-Marǧ wa'l-Zayyāt, which pleased him so much that he decided to establish a *zāwiya* there. This *zāwiya* was known as Qubbat Muṣṭafā [3], and its *šaiḫ* must have enjoyed the confidence of the sultan, since Qāytbāy sent him as ambassador to the Ottoman court.

The connection of sufism with a certain royal style of life was in the middle ages an established tradition. In the Fatimid period the Caliph al-ʿAzīz attached at Qaṣr al-Andalus at the cemetery a belvedere where he could sit and watch sufi dances performed

[1] Fernandes, Leonor, « The *Zāwiya* in Cairo », *Annales Islamologiques*, t. XVIII (1982), pp. 116-121.

[2] Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ*, p. 379 f.

[3] Ibn Iyās, *Badā'iʿ*, III, pp. 181, 315 f.

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by candlelight on a carpeted stage built for that purpose. Following the performance a banquet was given by the Caliph and robes of honor offered [1].

Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad established his great hippodrome with its complex of palaces built for his hunting excursions and polo tournaments at Siryāqūs near the *ḫanqā* he had founded there, the most prominent sufi foundation of the Bahri Mamluk period [2]. Similarly, Sultan Īnāl is reported to have settled a sufi *šaiḫ* at the belvedere of al-Tāğ, built by the Fatimid Caliphs overlooking the Ḫalīğ and later restored by Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Šaiḫ as a residence for himself [3].

The foregoing circumstances concerning the foundation of the *qubba*(s) do not conform with the character of the *zāwiya* and sufi life, ascetic and humble, as described by Šaʿrānī in the later part of the fifteenth century. Neither were these foundations part of a funeral-religious complex, comprised of the founder's mausoleum, a *ḫanqā* and *madrasa,* together with a Friday mosque. Simple Friday mosques in the late Mamluk period mostly included sufi gatherings (*ḥuḍūr*), but these *qubba*(s) do not seem to have been Friday mosques in the usual sense, although the *qubba* of Yašbak at Maṭariyya had Friday prayer. The *qubba* seems rather to be an aristocratic type of sufi-foundation or aristocratic *zāwiya,* distinct from the popular *zāwiya* of Šaʿrānī's hagiographies. A place where sultans and amirs and their guests could attend sufi performances in an atmosphere of leisure.

It is possible that sufi performances had acquired an artistic character and came to be looked at within aristocratic circles as an aspect of culture, worth being integrated into the *plaisance* and cultural scheme of court life, especially if the *fuqarā'* sponsored by the rulers were *aʿğām,* i.e., foreigners. This function of sufi performance seems to have been already established in the Fatimid period, hence the above-mentioned platform and belvedere built for that purpose. The connection between sufi practice and *plaisance* may also allow the simple interpretation of being a religious cover to royal leisure. In any case, the existence of the *qubba* foundation reflects the complexity within the aspects of sufi life in the late Mamluk period and represents its architectural expression.

Architectural Note [4].

Thanks to the unexpected circumstances [5] which brought to light nineteenth century photographs of the domes of Ğānibak at Qaṣr al-ʿAynī, it is now possible to establish

(1) Maqrīzī, *Ḫiṭaṭ,* I, p. 486.
(2) *Ibid.* II, pp. 199, 422.
(3) Ibn Taġrībirdī, *Ḥawādiṯ,* p. 216 f.
(4) S. n. 1 p. 4.
(5) I am particularly grateful to Mrs. Laylā ʿAlī Ibrāhīm and to Dr. Maḥmūd el-Manāwī for having given me these photographs (Pl. I-II).

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an important series of Mamluk buildings displaying a type of architecture which so far has not been considered within the typology of Cairene architecture.

These domes are :

— the dome of Maʿbad al-Rifāʿī, built by Sultan Barsbāy at the cemetery around 1433 (called *zāwiya* in its *waqf* document);
— the two domes of Ǧānibak at Qaṣr al-ʿAynī, 1462 (Pl. I and II, A-B);
— the dome of Yašbak min Mahdī near Maṭariyya, 1477;
— the dome of Yašbak min Mahdī north of Ḥusayniyya, 1479;
— the dome of Zāwiyat al-Damirdāš, built before 1496 in the northern outskirts of Cairo.

All these domes are sufi foundations, without a funeral character (except that the dome of Zāwiyat al-Damirdāš includes the tomb of the founder). The architecture of these domes differs from that of most contemporary mausoleum domes in that they are built of brick carried by large squinches, they lack the accentuated transitional zone of funeral domes, and their exterior is plain.

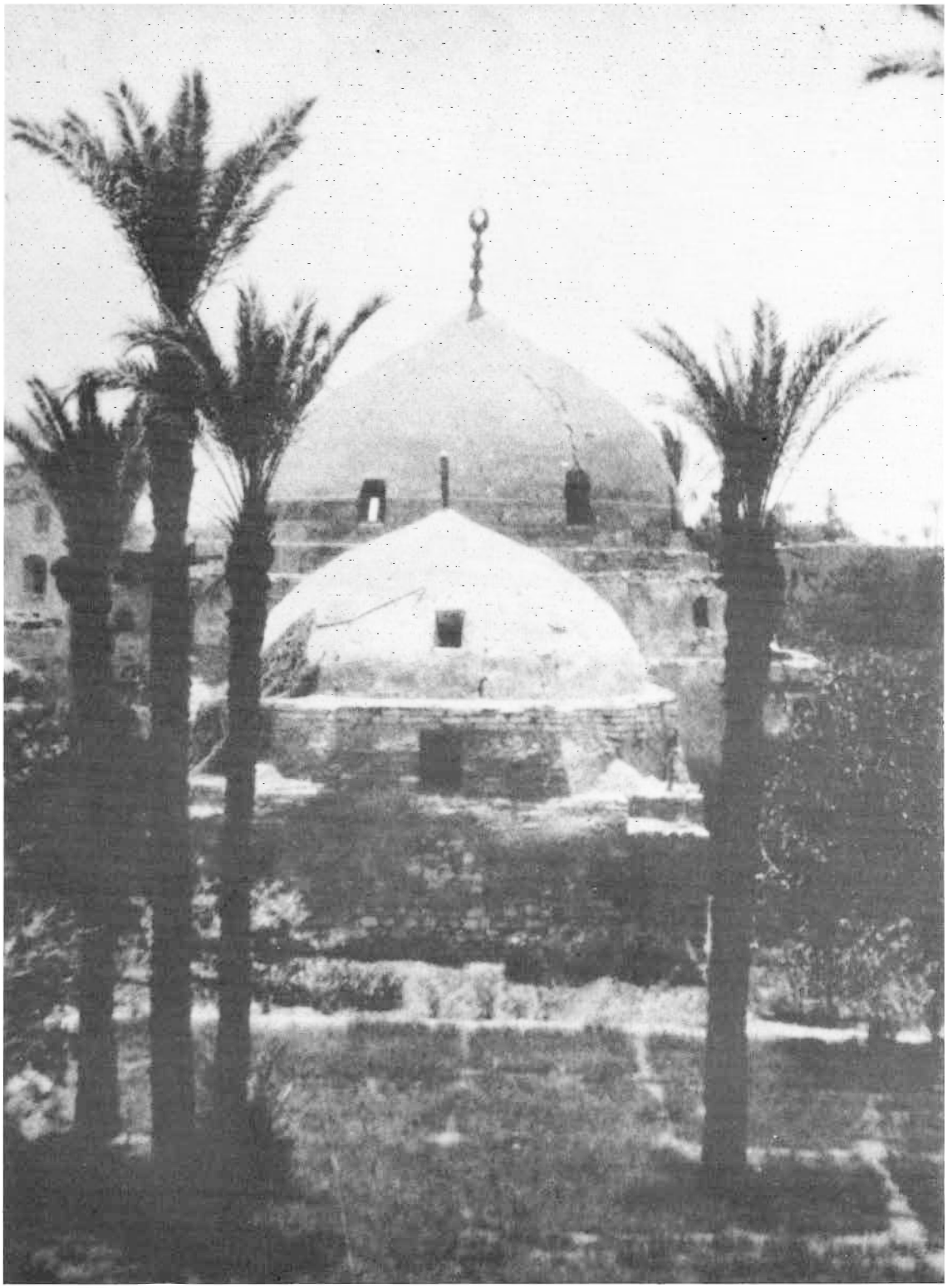
This means that the plan of the single domed chamber existed in Cairo about the same time as in western Anatolia, where it characterizes the architecture of early Ottoman mosques. This raises the question whether or not there exists any direct connection between both types of architecture.

Besides having in common their single domed construction, there is not enough architectural evidence to support an argument in favor of an exchange of patterns between the early Ottoman domed chamber and the Cairene *qubba*. In spite of their partial distinction from funeral dome architecture, the buildings in question remain closely linked with Mamluk dome tradition : the pointed silhouette of the domes being typical for that period. Also, the use of a squinch instead of the more frequent triangular pendentives does not immediately imply early Ottoman influence, since it was only scarcely used there and was soon abandoned in favor of the pendentives.

The difference in style between the funeral domes and the *qubba*(s) discussed herein should instead be interpreted by the differences in their respective functions.

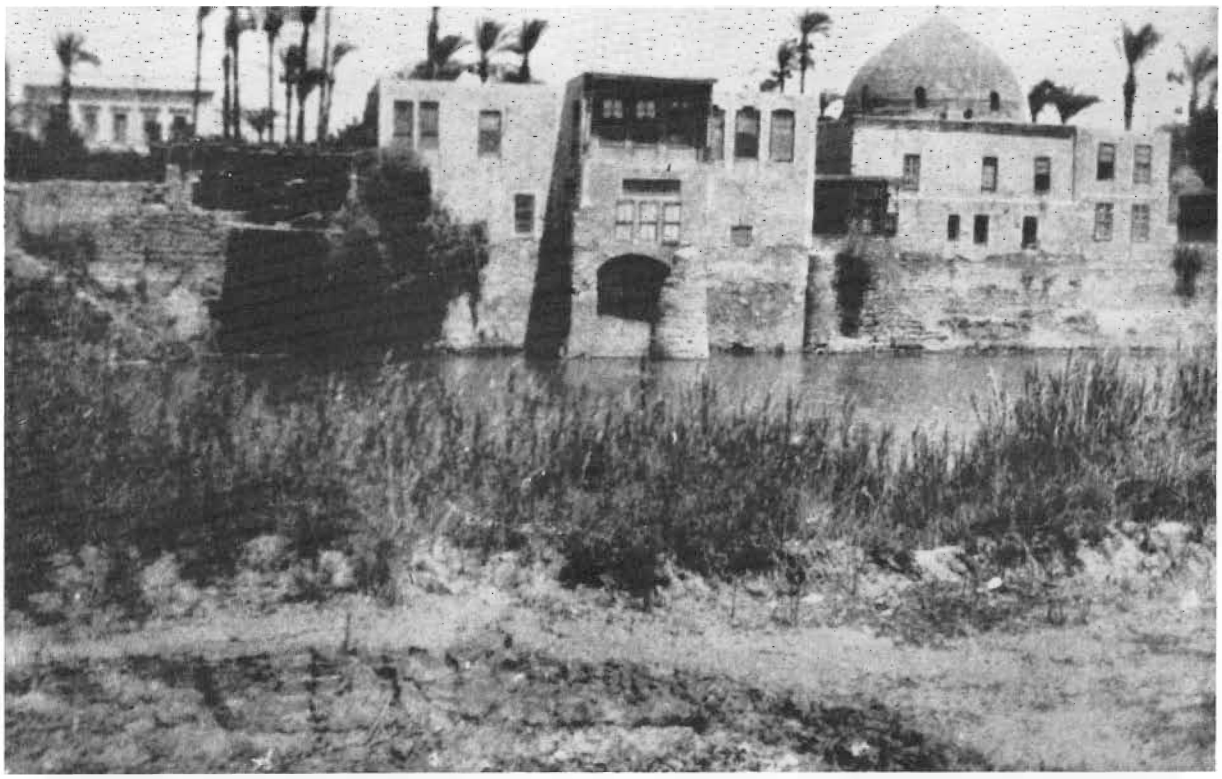
The mention of a *zāwiya,* built in the Fatimid period and known as Qubbat-al-Naṣr, indicates that the tradition of domed *zāwiya*(s) did not start in the fifteenth century, but much earlier.

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The domes of Ğānibak at Qaṣr al-ʿAynī before their destruction last century to make place for the hospital (The large dome overlooks the Nile).

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A. — The dome of Ǧānibak overlooking the Nile (1462).



B. — Squinch of the large dome of Ǧānibak at Qaṣr al-ʿAynī.

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