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BURIALS IN THE COMPLEX OF THE GREAT AMIR QURQUMAS (NO. 162) IN CAIRO'S "NORTHERN NECROPOLIS"

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Abstract: The article summarizes results of a comprehensive investigation — anthropological, archaeological and architectural — of burials of late Mamluk through late Ottoman(?) date, explored in the funerary complexes of the Great Amir Qurqumas (No. 162) in Cairo's Northern Cemetery in the years 1972/1976–2000 by a Polish–Egyptian Restoration and Conservation Mission.

Keywords: Qurqumas, Cairo, Mamluk/Ottoman/Islamic, burial customs, cemetery, tomb, Qur'an

The very well known Cairene funerary monument of the Great Amir Qurqumas (No. 162 on the Index List of Cairene Monuments), situated in the so-called Northern Necropolis, of Cairo¹ underwent restoration by a Polish-Egyptian team of specialists under the joint auspices of the Polish Archaeological Centre in Cairo and Egypt's Antiquities Organization (now Supreme Council for Antiquities of Egypt) between

1972 and 2000. In 1976–1977, 1981–1983 and then again in 1987–1988, the mission had an unparalleled opportunity — because requiring permission from the authorities of Al-Azhar, beside those of the SCA — to investigate archaeologically and anthropologically burials located within the complex. Once the exploration has been completed, all the human remains were, naturally, assured decent reburial.

¹ The complex is positioned on the western slope of the Muqattam Hills, falling gently in this place toward the east walls of medieval Qahira (Misr). It stands next to the much ruined, but still imposing foundation of the Sultan Al-Ashraf Inal (No. 158; date 1451–1456; see Behrens-Abouseif 1989: 143–144; 2007: 267–272, 306–312), almost exactly in line with the northern defences of the walled city, approximately 1.5 km from Bab al-Nasr and at a distance of about 3 km north of the Citadel. The place is now right off the Salah Salem Road in the Ad-Darrasa quarter, next to the place called Kubri al-Misrah (because of the vicinity of the well known Cairene theater), largely known as the "Northern (but as a matter of fact rather Northeastern) Cairo Necropolis" or "City of the Dead". The local name of the area is Turab (or Maqabra) al-Ghafir, i.e., "Tombs (or Cemetery) of the Ghafirs" (see Hamza 2001; El-Kadi, Bonnamy 2001 and 2007: 171–252). By Mamluk times the region was simply called As-Sahara. Despite the name, it was quite densely overbuilt, even though outside the main city walls, and the term was probably used as a specific name for the northeast agglomerations *fuaori le mura*. In reality, an uninterrupted "extension" of the city reached far northwards, well into the grounds of the actual Heliopolis (Masr al-Gedida) district (Behrens-Abouseif 1981).

There is no conclusive evidence as to why Qurqumas chose this location for his foundation. It could have had something to do with his belonging to the Al-Ashrafiyya "party", as indicated by the titles of numerous owners of surrounding monuments (see Hamza 2001: 18, 34, 41–45, 49, Table 4, Figs. 10–14).

FUNERARY FOUNDATION

The funerary foundation of Qurqumas, erected on a truly sultanic scale, was constructed in 1506–1507 by the Great Amir Qurqumas As-Saifi (sometimes called also Waly Ad-Din). He was a private individual born about 1446/7–1448/9(?), who was considered a mamluk of Al-Ashraf Sayf Ad-Din Qa'it Bey (sultan of Egypt 1468–1496). He lived through the end of the first decade of the 16th century, dying on 24 December 1511). At the peak of his political career Qurqumas was Great Marechal (Atabik) and “Commander of the Victorious Armies of Egypt” (according to the inscription on a wooden frieze in the complex *sabil* interior), i.e., in reality the second in charge of the Egyptian Mamluk state during the first decade of the reign of the last great Burgi Mamluk sultan, Al-Malik Al-Ashraf Qansuh Al-Ghawri (reigned 1501–1517).

The still standing parts of the foundation consist of the: *Qubba* or “mausoleum” (dated Zu-l-Qada’ 911 = 26 March–24 April 1506); *Madrasa* of typical Cairene cruciform plan with integrated *sabil-kuttab* (completed in Ragab 913 = 6 November–5 December 1507); *Qasr* or “residence” of the Amir, a one of a kind structure preserved in Cairo (not dated); *Riwaq* (*arwaqa*) for sufis (being in fact *khanqah*, i.e., their “habitation quarter”, also not dated); so-called *Tahuna* (“mill”, still under construction at the time of

Qurqumas’ death in 1511 and altered significantly at a later date), and a funerary court, *Hawş*, extending “northwards”.²

The main, “south”, that is, *qibla* façade of the preserved part of the complex, some 110 m long, faced the so-called Maghribi Pilgrims Road and the rear one the “northern” *Hawş*, which was the funerary area extending in the foreground of the Qasr. Both facades were conceived to attract the view of passersby by their architectural magnitude, the “northern” one obviously following the example of Al-Ashrafiyya Complex in Jerusalem (Walls 1990: 11–26). Due to the situation of the building on the sloping foregrounds of the Muqattam Hills, its “northern” façade was higher by about one floor than the “southern” one, allowing direct entrance from the funerary *Hawş* into rooms arranged in the basement of the complex.

Two kinds of burials were attested in the Qurqumas funerary complex. In the first one the bodies were deposited in funerary chambers (crypts), arranged in the basement of the *Qubba* (T. 1–6) and its “north” (T. 11–14) and “west” (T. 7–10) extensions, as well as outside the building, under the *Qasr* arcades (TQ. 1–4). The other kind (labelled “G”) comprised burials in pits dug directly in the ground and scattered all around the funerary *Hawş*, spreading to the “north” of the *Qasr* and *Qubba* structures.

² As in most religious buildings in Cairo, the main axis of the Qurqumas complex deviates from true North–South by some 35 degrees (King 2004). For the sake of commodity, however, the *qibla* side will be here referred to as the “south” one, and the opposite side as the “north” one, thus being in accordance with the denominations used (although not consistently) in the *Waqfiyya* (foundation deed) of the complex itself.

CONSTRUCTED BURIAL CHAMBERS UNDER *QUBBA* AND *QASR*

The *Qubba* (i.e., Mausoleum) is certainly the oldest part of the complex and was primarily erected as a freestanding and self-sufficient monument of a kind very popular in Cairo, built to house the earthly remains of the founder and his relatives and suite. Many minor architectural features (including vertical joining of walls) as well as the monumental character of the portal giving on a large *maq'ad*, called *darkah murabba* (i.e., rectangular space; see *Waqfiyya* 45) and situated on the "northern" side of the structure, prove this assertion (see Misirowski 1979 = *Mausoleum* 1: 22–24, 28–32). An inscription in the interior of the *Qubba* (middle inscriptional band on the "west" wall, next to its "southern" end) dates the completion of the Mausoleum to Zu-l-Qada' 911 (26 March–24 April 1506).

The original Mausoleum, i.e., proper *Qubba* foundation, which contained six vaulted burial chambers, called *fasaqi* in the foundation deed (*Waqfiyya* 44, 46), was extended later on to the "north" and "west" to make place for more crypts of the same kind [*Fig. 1*].

Whatever the original intention, the "north" extension of Mausoleum, the *darkah murabba* of the *Waqfiyya*, was overbuilt with a high tripartite arcade, forming thus a kind of gigantic *maq'ad* looking towards the city — deliberately recalling the external shape of the Al-Ashrafiyya mosque in Jerusalem, intended to be admired from the Mount of Haram Al-Sharif (Walls

1990: 11–26). These arcades, originally provided with "wooden openwork gratings (*harakat*), allowing light to penetrate freely into this space", were blocked up later with plain masonry screens, pierced with five window openings, equipped with iron gratings. An outer narrow staircase of red stones was installed along the *madrasa* wall, leading directly from the "north" funerary court of the Complex (through the sixth, "easternmost" opening in a form of a small vaulted door) into the *darkah murabba*. Four vaulted *fasaqi* (crypts, accessed from above, through shafts) and three huge and deep *mahzan* (storerooms), accessed directly from the *Hawṣ*, were arranged within the basement of this "anteroom".

The "west" extension of the *Qubba*, containing four other *fasaqi* (T. 7–10), was completed with a small *mabit* (guard's room) and a toilet next to it. This space was provided with a separate staircase, allowing also direct communication with the nearby *Qasr*.

In both extensions the roofs were flat and "made of wood called *naqi*, while their pavements were of tuff limestone" (*Waqfiyya* 44–46).

The huge and truly breathtaking construction of the *Qubba*³ (especially when viewed from the inside) was once decorated with marble and stuccowork, covering the pavements and lower parts of the walls. This decoration has all but been stripped, leaving only the *mihrab* niche, three bands of inscriptions carved in *naskhi*

³ The stone dome, over 12 m in diameter and almost 35 m high (from ground level to the top of the dome), is one of the biggest in Cairo, and considerably bigger than that of the nearby funerary complex of the Sultan Qait Bay (No. 99).

script directly in the stone walls (the uppermost one, almost invisible from the ground, at the base of the dome, just above its transitional zone, and two others, on the walls, below and above the row of windows), an inscriptional rosette on the apex of the

dome, and monumental *muqarnases* on the dome squinches — “all finely gilded and painted” once (*Waqfiyya* 46). Some remains of the original stucco and glass *qamariyyas* could be recovered from the *occuli* and from the windows in the transitional zone

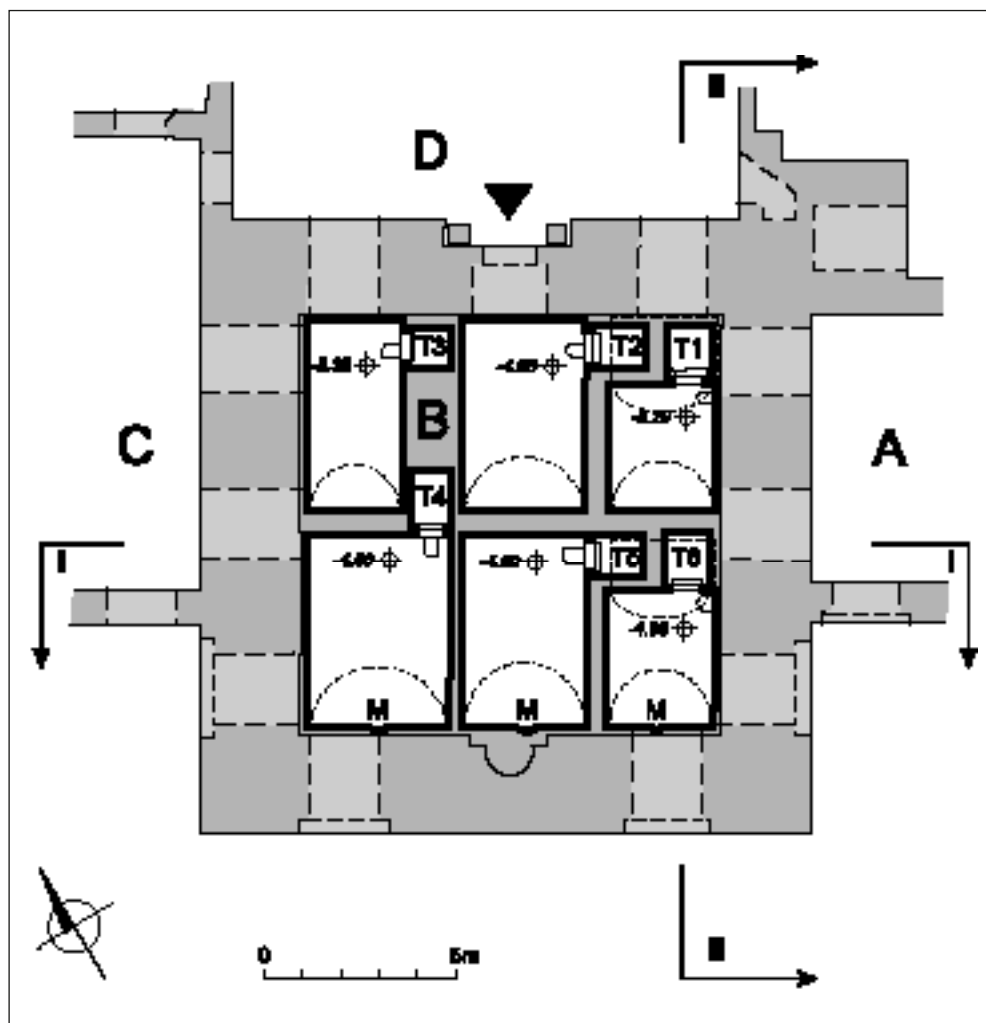


Fig. 1. Disposition of the constructed tombs – fasaqi (T. 1–14) in the Qubba (mausoleum). A – underground of the Madrasa; B – Qubba (mausoleum); C and D – “west” and “north” extension of the mausoleum respectively (Drawing J. Kania, after Nieduziak 1979)

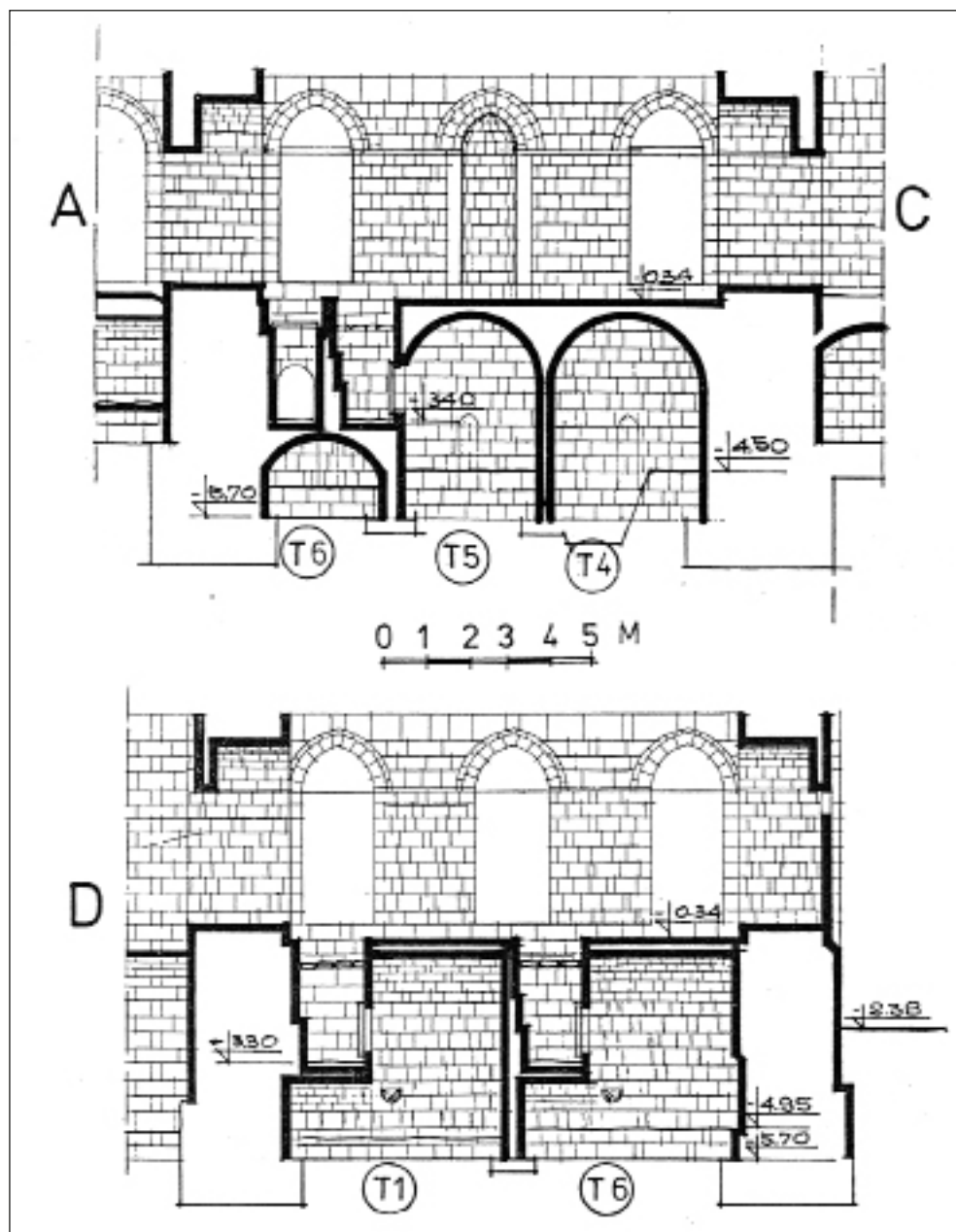


Fig. 2. Cross sections through the Qubba ground level and constructed tombs – fasaqi, T. 1, T. 4, T. 5 and T. 6 underneath. A – qibla iwan of the Madrasa; C and D – “west” and “north” extensions of the mausoleum (Drawing by J. Kania, after Nieduziak 1979)

of the dome.⁴ At an unknown time the destroyed *qamariyyas* were replaced with simple lattices, made of bare palm leaf ribs. The sole original “equipment” of the mausoleum interior still preserved *in situ* is a huge wooden octagonal lamp hanger, well anchored in the *Qubba* walls.

TOMB SUPERSTRUCTURES

The tomb superstructures, that is, the *turba* themselves, originally built of brick on the *Qubba* floor and faced with decorative marble slabs, were all completely destroyed. Some traces of bricks still preserved on the floor positioned two of them — one situated directly in front of the *mihrab* (supposedly that of Qurqumas himself) and another one to the “west” of it. The description of the room in the foundation deed (as a matter of fact not quite explicit in this place; see *Waqfiyya* 68 and 83–87) allows up to six tombs to be located under the *Qubba*, namely:

- one for Qurqumas, having four corner-pillars with grenade-shaped toppings, located in front of the *mihrab*;
- one for his children;
- one for Qurqumas’ brothers and the first *nazir* of his *waqf*, amir As-Saifi Al-Maqarr Al-Mas and his family;
- one for amir Al-Saifi Dawalarmay Al-Gahrakin, favorite Mamluk of Qurqumas and second *nazir* of the foundation, and his relatives;

– two for the amirs Darwish and Qan-Taz, otherwise unknown.

Absolutely nothing has survived either of the *turba* which could have once existed over the tombs arranged in the *Qubba* extensions (T. 7–14) or of those under the *Qasr* arcades (TQ. 1–4). The latter were destroyed most probably by the activities of auto-repair workshops, still operating there in the late 1970s.

TOMB SUBSTRUCTURES

Several *fasaqi* consisting of huge vaulted crypts were constructed within the body of the *Qubba* basement (T. 1–6) and the mausoleum’s “north” (T. 11–14) and “west” (T. 7–10) extensions, these last ones being actually aboveground — in consequence of the difference in ground levels between the “south” (*qibla*) and “north” (*haws*) side of the monument [Fig. 1].

Four other tombs of the same kind were situated under the *Qasr* arcades, being fully underground due to their location. All but the easternmost one were completely destroyed by the above-mentioned auto-repair workshops.⁵ By the way, this sole surviving tomb presents some architectural peculiarities not shared with the other tombs in the complex. It could be evidence of an earlier, independent structure existing here even before the installation of the *Qasr* building.⁶ Moreover, it is the only tomb in the complex furnished with an

⁴ The blue-red-yellow-white coloring of the glass in these windows, was representing (according to the collected remains) an approximative ratio of 4:1:1:2.

⁵ One of these tombs, namely, T. 4, had actually been used for repairs to car chassises!

⁶ The excavation documentation revealed the complex form of this structure, which was plainly divided into two units disposed on a bent axis; the first one, preceding the partly preserved crypt, could have served as an “access room” or “dromos” of a kind and of unknown form (but certainly not the usual shaft). It is possible therefore that this tomb is of earlier date than the *Qasr* and that the epitaph inscribed next to it, on the south wall of the *Qasr* arcade, commemorated only reuse and/or reburial within this crypt (see also below, note 7).

individual epitaph (poorly preserved) next to it, namely, that of a certain "Ahmad [...], prince of the pious, excelling in the reading of the Qur'an [...]", dated to 912 or 922 A.H. (1506–1507 or 1516?).⁷

All the *fasaqi* except for the last mentioned one were accessed from above, through vertical shafts (approximately 2 m deep) and a stone step imbedded in the crypt wall, either directly beneath the

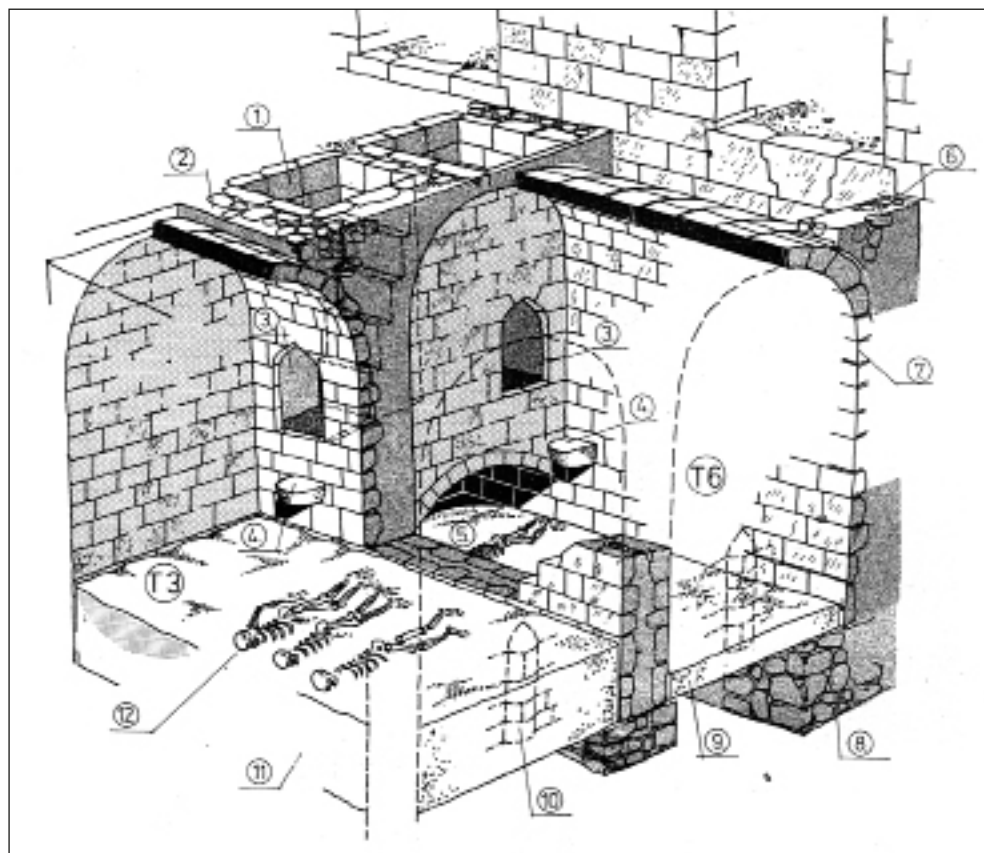


Fig. 3. Stereometric view of the constructed tombs – *fasaqi*, T. 3 and T. 6: 1 – entrance shafts; 2 – mausoleum floor; 3 – entrances to crypts; 4 – stone steps imbedded in crypt walls; 5 – walls separating crypts; 6 – filling of empty spaces between ceilings; 7–8 – external wall of mausoleum and its foundations; 9 and 11 – sand; 10 – mihrabs; 12 – skeletons and/or bodies (Drawing J. Kania, after Nieduziak 1979)

⁷ The date remains uncertain, owing to the poor preservation state of the inscription, which is due to inadequate and too frequent conservation interventions. For its content, see: *Corpus of Cairene Inscriptions*, prepared by the American University in Cairo, under the direction of Bernard O'Kane, who most kindly provided me with access to the Corpus files concerning the Qurqumas complex well before their publication.

entrance opening or on the adjacent wall, next to it. The opening between shaft and crypt was blocked (within the shaft space) with a limestone slab slightly larger than the opening itself, and sealed, after each reburial, with lime mortar. Then the access shaft was filled with pure sand and its mouth in the floor covered with another accurately cut slab, masking the entrance, *nota bene* never covered by a corresponding *turba* superstructure [Figs 2, 3].

All the crypts had vaulted ceilings, and those extending beneath the entrance shafts had them lowered in these spaces. The three tombs of the “south” row under the *Qubba* dome (T. 4–6) had *mihrabs*, either carved or painted, on their *qibla*, i.e., “south” walls (Nieduziak 1979).

Fasaqi were manifestly designed for multiple use and reuse, over an extended period of time. Their floors were covered with a thick layer of pure sand. The bodies were placed on this layer, one after another, according to Muslim burial custom, that is, lying on the right side, face oriented in the *qibla* direction. Only the destroyed crypts under the *Qasr* arcades did not contain human remains. Nothing was found with or around the bodies, except for scant remains of richly embroidered, frequently silken shrouds; this feature being also in keeping with Muslim burial custom.

The different *fasaqi* were explicitly destined for different sexes, although some irregularities could be noted following anthropological examination of the human

Table 1. *Burials in the tombs in the Mausoleum complex, breakdown by sex and age (after Promińska, Dzierżykraj-Rogalski 1991)*

Tomb (exploration date)	Burial content
T. 1 (1983)	1 man (45–55 years), 2 children (1 infant) and 5 other corpses
T. 2 (1976)	1 man (over 60 years) 1 child (under 6 years) and 2 infants
T. 3 (1983)	6 youths/adults (18–28 years), 2 older women and 2 children (2–5 years)
T. 4 (1976)	7 elderly (50–80 years) women
T. 5 (1976)	1 youth and 5 elderly (40–60 years) men and 2 children (10–14 years)
T. 6 (1983)	6 men (25–60 years) and 1 child (c. 10 years)
T. 7 (1981)	3 men (35–60 years) and 3 women (45–65 years)
T. 8 (1981)	8 elderly women (45–65 years) and 2 adult women (c. 25 years), 5 children (8–12 years), 2 infants and 2 old men(?)
T. 9 (1982)	4 elderly men (55–75 years), 2 young women (16–20 years) and 1 older woman (c. 50 years), 9 infants/small children (less than one year old)
T. 10 (1982)	8 younger (20–40 years) and 2 elderly (50–60 years) women, 1 male teenager and 3 infants (c. 6 months)
T. 11–T. 14 (1977)	Tombs found plundered, yielding fragmentary data only

remains deposited there. In principle, however, crypts situated under the dome and containing male bodies were situated to the "east" and those with female ones to the "west" of the building axis. Children, regardless of sex, were present in both, while infants did appear only in "female" tombs (Promińska, Dzierżykraj-Rogalski 1991; Dzierżykraj-Rogalski, Promińska 1990) [Table 1].

RITUAL

The foundation deed gives insight into the ritual maintained in the mausoleum (*Waqfiyya* 58, 80). This "liturgy" consisted in the first place of loud recitation of the Holy Quran at the tomb of Qurqumas by three *sufis*. They were granted for this office 500 dirhams monthly, "rounding off/out" with this money the fees received for other duties performed in the Complex. Another 148 dirhams a month came from a fund for maintenance of the *turba*, which included their decoration with fresh palm-leaves and green plants and burning frankincense (100 dirhams for the Amir's tomb, and the remaining 48 for his children's). A sum of 30 dinars a year was reserved according to the founder's will for perfumes and incense destined for the *turba* of the amirs As-Saifi Dawalarmay Al-Gahrakin and Darwish.⁸

The inscriptions still preserved on the *Qubba* walls are the only preserved hard evidence for which parts of the Holy Text could be recited at the Qurqumas tomb,⁹ exposing (from the top down):

- Qur. 17: (*Banu Isra'il* — Children of Israel) 84 (medallion at the dome apex);
- text not identified (the inscription is not visible from the ground, as it is located on the incurved part of the dome, in the transitional zone);
- Qur. 9 (*Taubah* — Repentance): 21–22 and Qur. 33 (*Ahzab* — Confederates): 11–12 and date (middle band);
- Qur. 39: (*Zumaar* — Troops) 73–74 and fragment of the *Burda* (Prophet's Mantle) poem, 154–164 (lower band);
- Qur. 2: (*Baqarah* — Cow) 255 (on the exterior of the dome, around its base).¹⁰

According to the foundation deed, six *sufis* led by a sheikh were supposed to read and recite the Holy Quran during the daily prayers in the *madrasa*, in particular, the *suras*: *al-Ihlas* (112 Unity), *al-Mu'aminun* (23 Believers) or *al-Mu'amin* (40 Believers), *al-Fatiha* (1 Opening), first verses and conclusion of *al-Baqarah* (2 Cow), as well as "the usual formulae, appealing to Allah the Supreme and saluting His Prophet". Meantime, one of the *sufis* was expected "to pray expressly for the Prophet, His Family and His Companions and to recall the *waqf* founder, his followers and all Muslims" (*Waqfiyya* 72–75). It is, however, impossible to go further into the true character of interrelations, that obviously must have existed once between prayers around the tombs under the *Qubba* and the daily ones in the *Madrasa* (Halevi 2007: *passim*, in particular 160, 186, 226–233).

⁸ Here, see also extensive study of Qurqumas' *waqf* in Nağib 1975.

⁹ Identification of these texts follows that of the *Corpus of Cairene Inscriptions* published by AUC (see above, note 7). The texts sculptured within the *mihrab* niche and those on the monumental portal linking the Mausoleum proper (*Qubba*) with *darkab murabba* comprise conventional *basmalas* and blessings in the name of Allah, and hence are rather of no interest in this regard.

EARTH GRAVES

Another kind of burial was observed in the “northern” *Hawš* (funerary courtyard). Nineteen such graves were excavated there in 1987 and the twentieth one was discovered during restoration works in the *Qasr* arcades, about 10 years later (Witkowski 1996). Most of them were located in the *Qasr* forecourt, although some were situated under the arcades (G. 5, 9, 11, 12, 13 and 20) [*Fig. 4*].

These graves apparently had no superstructures at the time of their exploration, but this may be the result of frequent reshaping of the area in later times (see above, notes 6 and 7). The simple graves were cut straight in the hard, compact sandy ground of the courtyard. They consisted of shafts, approximately 2.5–3.0 m deep, with the upper edges reinforced sometimes with lime mortar (G. 6 and 20) to support a covering

Table 2. Burials in earth graves, breakdown by sex and age (based on Report 1987; Report 1988; Witkowski 1996)

Grave	Number of niches	Burial content
G. 1	2	2 adults + 3 children
G. 2	1	1 adult
G. 3	1	1 adult
G. 4	2	6 adults + 1 adult
G. 5	2	15 corpses + 6 corpses
G. 6	2	no data
G. 7	2	1 adult + 1 adult and 3 small children
G. 8	2	3 adults and 3 children + 1 adult
G. 9	2	2 adults + 1 small child
G. 10	1	2 women and 8 infants
G. 11	1	1 adult woman(?) and 1 child
G. 12	2	1 women and 3 small children + 3 women and 5 small children
G. 13	2	4 women and 1 small child + 5 small children
G. 14	1	1 woman(?)
G. 15	1	2 adults and 7 children (including 3 infants)
G. 16	2	3 adults + 2 adults and 1 child
G. 17	2	1 woman, 3 teenagers and 5 small children (the second niche left empty)
G. 18	2	5 young/adult men(?) + 2 men(?) and 1 child
G. 19	1	1 adult, 1 teenager and 7 small children/infants
G. 20	2	4 men and 2 children + 2 men

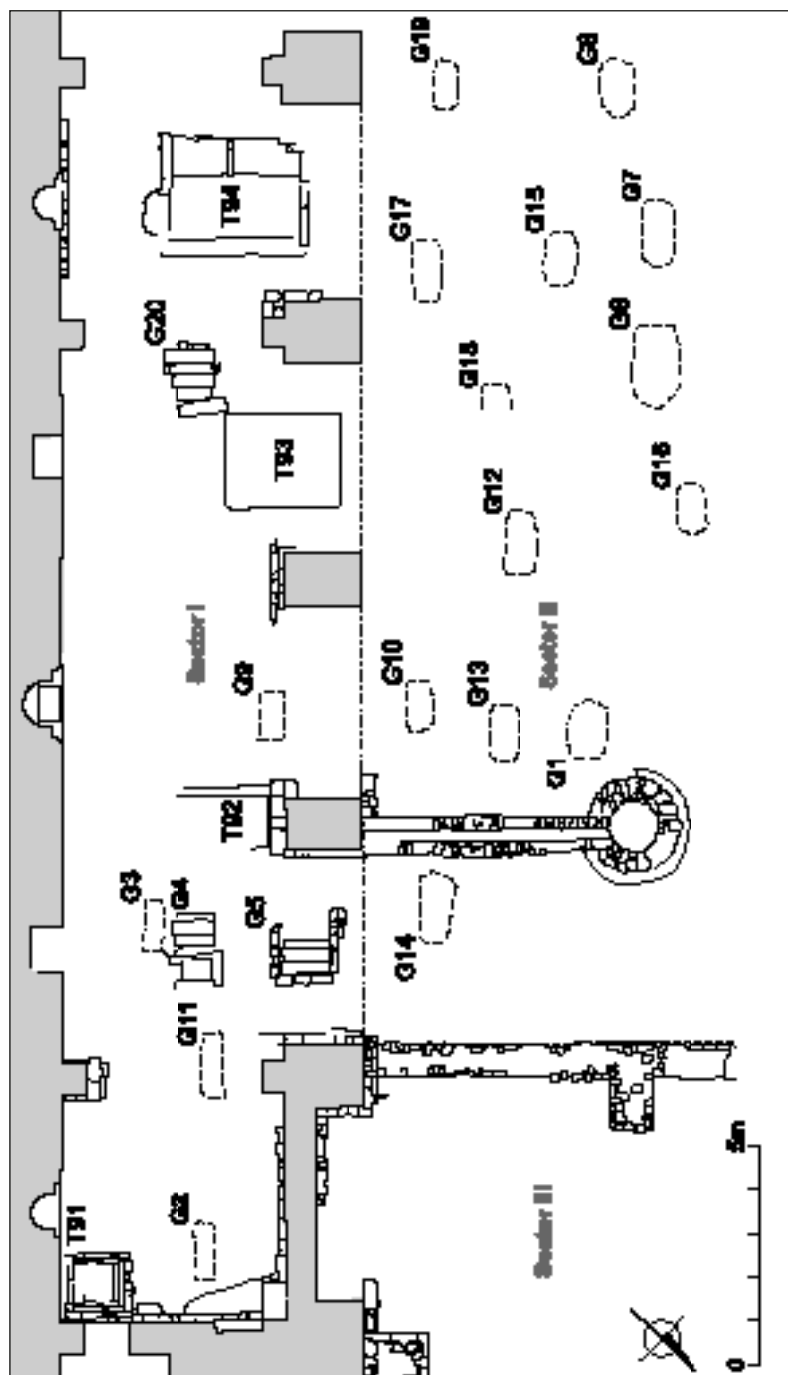


Fig. 4. General plan of excavations in the "northern" Hawṣ (funerary court) in 1986
(Drawing S. Maślak, after A. Jurkiewicz, L. Stoński, [in:] Report 1988)

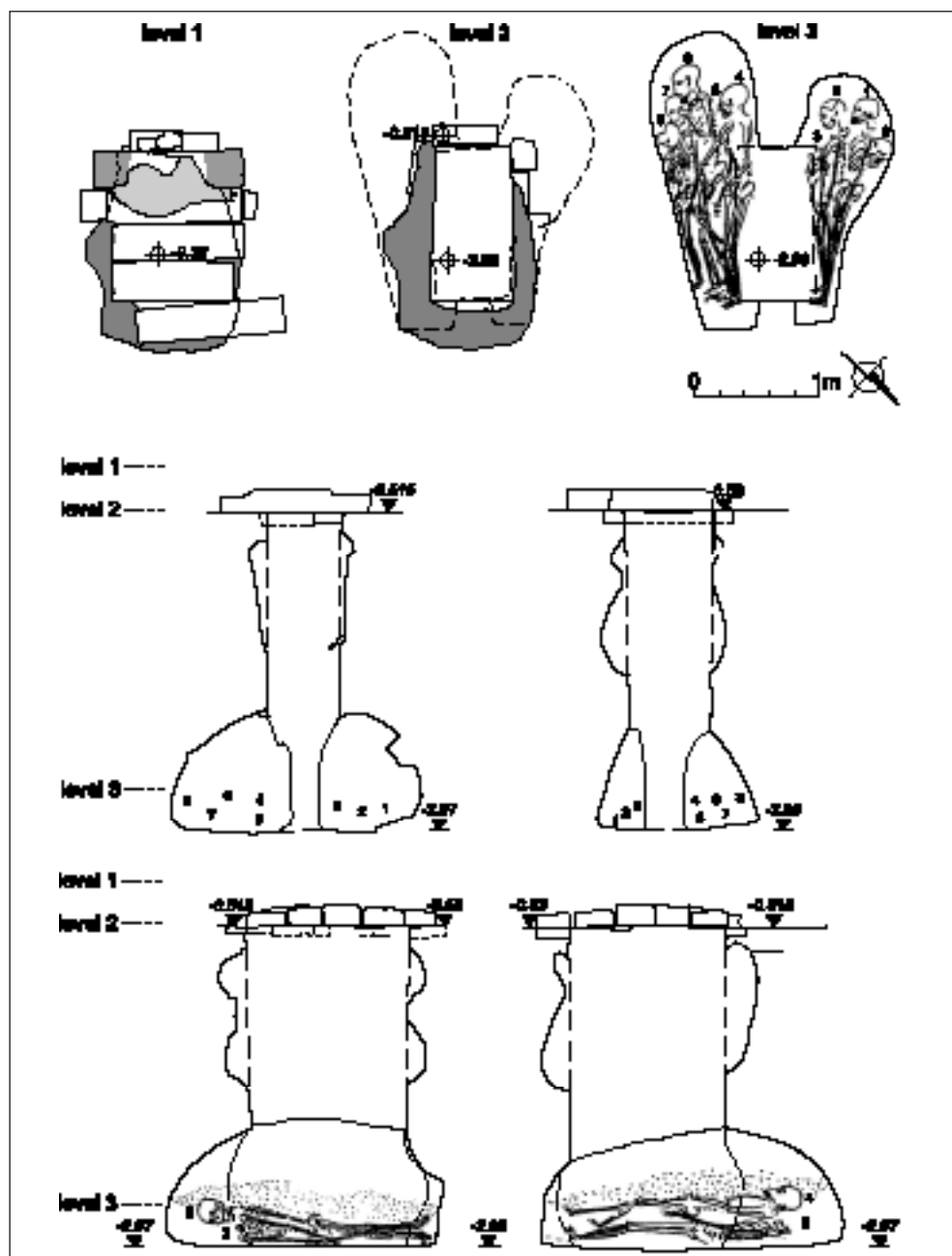


Fig. 5. Plan and cross-sections of grave G. 20 discovered in 1996 under the Qasr arcades
(Drawing S. Maślak, after M.G. Witkowski [in:] Report 1996)

of oblong limestone slabs.¹¹ At the bottom the shafts widened into one (G. 2, 3, 10, 11, 14, 15 and 19) or two (13 remaining graves) narrow burial "niche(s)", separated, except for G. 5 and G. 20 [Fig. 5], from the shaft by a row of irregular limestone slabs. The bodies of the deceased were disposed within these niches, their position obviously indicative of a practice of multiple burials (3–21 bodies), with the exception of G. 2, 3 and 14, containing each only one corpse. These graves appear to have been originally intended not only for multiple burials, but also for separated sexes — even if it was possibly not always rigorously observed in later practice [see Table 2].

Except for some small finds (one carnelian ring and some pieces of copper ones) and poor remains of linen shrouds and turbans (some of them of green silk turned ruddy-brown in the grave micro-environment), these sepulchres were void of objects of any kind (Report 1988). The

bodies of some infants and small children were enveloped additionally in something that resembled a tufted doublet (Witkowski 1996). Both the body position in the graves and lack of any significant "equipment" testify to a Muslim burial rite.

This almost complete absence of artifacts makes it impossible to precise the date of use of the cemetery. However, the area was explicitly designated as a "funerary *hawṣ*" already in the founder's *Waqf* (*Waqfiyya* 42–50) and, as pointed out by our Egyptian colleagues, the blue-and-white striped shrouds used to wrap some of the bodies, could suggest a "Turkish/Ottoman date" (M. Al-Mennabawy and I. Farag Ibrahim, personal communications). This fits in well with information from an early 18th century inspection document, included in the final copy of the *Waqfiyya* book, stating that at this time the *fasaḳi* under the *qasr* arcades and in the foreground of the complex were still in use (*Waqfiyya* 80).

ANTHROPOLOGICAL FINDINGS

Bodies buried in both tombs and graves frequently presented a state of natural mummification on parts remaining out of direct contact with the ground. In some cases, but only in the tombs, loose bones and skulls had been stashed in the crypt corner, witness to clearing or ordering activities in the course of their continuous use (Dzierżykray-Rogalski 1977).

Many of the males buried in the mausoleum presented pronounced Tartar and negroid features. Wounds, both healed and being an evident cause of death, were in evidence, as were cases of serious diseases

(such as syphilis and leprosy). *Rachitis*, evidently due to the lack of vitamin D, was attested repeatedly. The average age at death for both men and women buried under the *Qubba* was relatively high: approximately 53 years for men and 43.5 for women respectively, although more "elderly" individuals, i.e., males aged 65–75 and females over 60, were quite common. This unexpectedly elevated age even by modern standards (Promińska 1972; 1985) can be explained by a good and hygienic lifestyle (including differentiated diet) characteristic of the top Mamluk

¹¹ It could be that all these graves had originally been covered in this manner, the coverings having disappeared later on. After each burial the slabs were replaced and sealed with lime mortar (Report 1987; Report 1988; Witkowski 1996).

elite, members of which were buried here (Promińska, Dzierżykray-Rogalski 1991).

For the sake of comparison, the average age-at-death rate estimated by archaeologists (but not professional anthropologists and therefore not equally reliable) for the deceased in the graves of the “northern” forecourt was “considerably less” than 50 for men and “well below” 40 for women (Report 1987, Report 1988; also M. al-Mennabawy, personal communication).

Critical ages for children seem to concentrate around three points: infant age (up to 1 year), approximately 5 years and then again between 8 and 11 years. For young women a higher death rate occurs at the age between 17/18 and 25 years and is almost certainly to be ascribed to

circumpuerperal complications. Since many of the individuals buried in this Complex had died at a rather advanced age, the usual diseases of old age were attested (senile sterna with adhering ribs, *osteopythosis*, *ankylosing spondylitis*, rachitic changes and bone cribration due to a deficit of vitamin D, etc.). Bacterial diseases constituted a separate problem (extensive *osteomyelitis* everywhere; syphilis and leprosy on representatives of both sexes in tombs T. 8, T. 12 and T. 14 — that is, solely by curious coincidence(?) in the mausoleum extensions!). Teeth, if not missing, tended to be healthy even if fairly worn, the latter being due to a diet based on bread (Promińska, Dzierżykray-Rogalski 1991; Dzierżykray-Rogalski, Promińska 1990).

UNUSUAL “INDIVIDUAL” BURIALS

Mausoleum tomb T. 2 was perhaps the most interesting find. This “individual” crypt (contrary to others which counted always several bodies) contained the body of a man aged 60–65, plus skeletons of one child and two infants. The man’s skull presented a healed wound over the left eyebrow, and features on the bones were typical of *osteitis deformans* or Paget’s disease (popularly called also “inflammation of bone marrow”). One of forearm bones preserved also traces of another healed cut-wound.

All these elements find confirmation in Ibn Iyas’ detailed chronicle of the last Burgi Mamluks, *Badai’ az-Zuhur* (“Flowering meadows”). Namely, he states

that Qurqumas “was over 60” at the time of his death (Ibn Iyas IV, 362). The wounds, in turn, could date to the unfortunate encounter with the Azala Beduins in Shawwal 904 (12 May–9 June 1499) that took place in the al-Mu’aisira region (Ibn Iyas III, 414–415) and finally, the brief passage describing the Amir’s terrible sufferings in the last four days of his life (Ibn Iyas IV, 361) fits well the extremely painful fatal issue of *osteitis deformans*. It is highly probable therefore that the elderly male buried in crypt T. 2 was Qurqumas himself (Promińska, Dzierżykray-Rogalski 1991; 1989). The other bodies then could be his prematurely dead children, but certainly not those mentioned in the *Waqfiyya*.¹²

¹² Ibn Iyas (IV, 361) states that Qurqumas “orphaned his wife and four little (sic!) children, boys and girls”. The foundation deed (Waqfiyya 30, 69, 143) also allows Qurqumas and his wife Fatima four offspring: two boys (unnamed) and two obviously elder girls (Fatima and Sitt Al-Muluk), certainly alive at the time of the first redaction of the document (18 January 1505).

The question remains why, if it was really Qurqumas, was he buried there, in the second row of crypts, immediately next to the *Qubba* threshold and not, as one could expect in front of the *mihrab*? Would this be further confirmation of the most unusual modesty of Qurqumas, so much praised by Ibn Iyas? Or does it imply some metaphorical meaning, we are unable to penetrate or understand (see Halevi 2007: 191–242; El-Shamy 2009: 116–143)?

To complete the picture, there is evidence of another quasi individual burial in the crypt of the mausoleum tomb T. 1. Here, the corpse, set in self-evident manner apart from the others, was that of a man

aged about 45–55, accompanied by two infants. Should we consider this sepulchre to be the last resting place of Qurqumas' younger brother, As-Saifi Al-Maqarr Al-Mas? Or rather — since Al-Mas was expelled by the ill-famed governor of Egypt Khairbak (installed by the Ottomans in Cairo in reward for his betrayal of the "Mamluk cause" and defection at Marg Dabiq in 1516) to Qus in 1521 (Ibn Iyas V, 338–339) and, most probably, perished and was buried there, in accordance with the Muslim custom of immediate burial — we should see here the body of another *nazir* of Qurqumas' *Waqf*, namely that of the amir As-Saifi Dawalarmay al-Gahrakin?

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