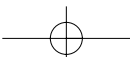
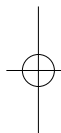
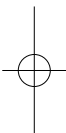


Maciej G. Witkowski



AMIR QURQUMAS COMPLEX IN CAIRO





THE MISSION

The Cairene funerary monument of the Great Amir Qurqumas (No. 162 on the Index List of Cairene Monuments), situated on Cairo's so-called "Northern Necropolis", in the Darrasa quarter, was the object of restoration and investigation by a Polish-Egyptian Mission for the Restoration of Islamic Monuments in Cairo from 1972 to 2000.

In effect of this work, a protected antiquities zone was established around this monumental complex which also includes the much dilapidated now, but still majestic funerary complex of the Sultan Al-Aschraf Inal (No. 158, built in 1451-6), remains of a large funerary enclosure ascribed to the admiral Guirbash Al-Karimi (Qashuq) and some anonymous installations, still standing between these major constructions. The decision had at least one advantage: it isolated the monuments from the local community in a quarter that, in opposition to the popular names it bears – *Madinat al-Mawt* (City of the Dead) and *Turab* or *Maqabra al-Ghafir* (Tombs or Cemetery of the Guardians), is quite alive. This in effect has prevented any further, uncontrolled spoliation.

Three institutions were involved in these works: the Egyptian Antiquities Organization, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw and the Polish State Ateliers for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage (Kielce branch). During that time the mission was headed by Andrzej Misiowski (1972-4), Ireneusz Nieduziak (1974-7), Jerzy Kania (1977-1989), Andrzej Żaboklicki (1990-1), Jarosław Dobrowolski (1992-5) and again Jerzy Kania (1995-2000). However, the formula of co-operation, conceived many years ago in a completely different reality, outlived its viability in a free market economy, forcing the Polish side to withdraw from the project in 2001.

The main objective of the mission was to preserve the monument and adapt it for modern purposes, these changing over the years from a recreation area, a center for the architectural documentation of restored Islamic monuments of Cairo, a museum for artifacts discovered in Cairo's Necropolis, workshops of the Supreme Council of Antiquities supplying other sites in Cairo, and ultimately a tourist attraction (archaeological zone) with an operating mosque. What-

ever the end result will be, in the course of its work the mission succeeded in carrying through the most thankless (because mostly invisible) interventions: restoring the stability of the foundations, securing the disintegrated wall structure and completing missing sections (including in 1989-91 some of the most endangered parts of the neighboring Inal complex), thus returning the building to its original shape, installing new roofing (while completing fragments of original ceilings still left *in situ*) and, last but not least, securing passages and fitting individual rooms of the building with adequate safety measures (staircases, pavements, barriers, balustrades, etc.). Paralleling these fundamental activities was a focus on aesthetic finishing touches, like the restoration of the minaret topping and its balconies, the missing monumental podia at the entrances, wall cresting (*sharafat* and *muqarnasat*), the marble *dados* decorating interiors, iron and wooden gratings as well as stone and stucco-and-glass openwork window decoration (*qamariyyat*), also woodwork (e.g. doors, window shutters, wall cupboards, *rafraf* roofing shadowing the *kuttab*, etc.). Finally, work was initiated in 1998 on the conservation and consolidation of preserved wooden ceilings and their inscribed supporting bands (*abandariyyat/izarat*).

The work of the mission, which has largely contributed to the more attractive present appearance of the monument, was preceded by extensive research on parallel forms in Cairo. Such studies were instrumental in deciding, for example, what the so-called *Tahuna* building should look like. Thus, this structure, which was ultimately turned into a workshop for heavy-duty woodworking, received an interior arrangement that follows preserved examples of industrial and

casernal architecture from the Cairene Citadel.

The mission's program did not include any large-scale archaeological excavations, but these proved necessary wherever the stability of the walls had to be checked, the original form of a staircase recognized and the water-supply and sewage systems traced. Moreover, cleaning and landscaping around the buildings led to two major discoveries. First, in 1984-5, the foundations of a completely destroyed *rab'a* building, originally part of the complex, were identified southeast of the complex (on the street side). Then, in 1985-6, the accuracy of descriptions contained in the preserved foundation act, *waqfiyya*, referring to the northwestern courtyard as the *hawš*, 'burial ground', was verified. Together with the crypts opened earlier (1974-8) under the main *qubba* of the complex and in its extensions, these excavations yielded a wide range of anthropological data concerning the people buried there.

THE MONUMENT

A real understanding of the complex came with the opportunity to compare the preserved architectural evidence with descriptions contained in the foundation act, called specifically *hogga* or *waqfiyya*. Such a written will was a must for every pious foundation in medieval Egypt, creating an economic base for its maintenance. Documents of this kind give a closer look at the organization of the *awqaf* and the everyday life of such estates, while recording precisely their furnishings. Although the original *hogga* of Qurqumas remains unknown, its copy, the *Kitab al-Waqf*, recorded in 1536 (containing also duplicates of all the other legal documents of the Amir still preserved at the

time) was identified in 1913 by L. Patricolo (active in the restoration of the Qurqumas complex in 1913-19) in the archives of the Cairene Ministry of Awqaf under No. 901. The impressive funerary foundation of the Great Amir Qurqumas was raised on the western slopes of the Muqattam Hills, gently descending here towards the walled city of Al-Qahira in an area called in Mamluk times Al-Sahara (litt. 'desert'). This term, however, was almost certainly used as a designation of the city area *fuori le mura* which was actually built over quite heavily.

The main, i.e., *qibla* facade of the imposing Qurqumas complex, some 110 m long (truly worthy of the sultan himself!) gave on the main road of Cairo's "Northern" (rather "Eastern" in fact) Cemetery, called also the "Maghribi Pilgrims' Road". The rear elevation looked out on the city itself. As a whole, the complex was clearly inspired by a similar funerary complex of Qait Bay (No. 99, built in 1472-4), situated some 1.5 km to the south on the same cemetery, while the rear of the buildings, looking towards the city, shows a striking resemblance to the Al-Ashrafiyya complex, erected by the same sultan in Jerusalem. The impressive beauty of the complex inspired numerous artists, including David Roberts, Richard Dadd and Adrien Dauzats.

To return to the material evidence, the preserved elements of the Qurqumas *waqf*-complex (starting from the west end) cover the following:

- *Qasr* ('Palace'; not dated), unique in Cairo, erected on a *hawš*, that is, burial ground with four tombs and 21 earth graves, all but the tombs containing multiple burials (from 2 to 21 bodies), most probably belonging to the poorer "clientele" of the Amir's household.

- *Qubba* ('Mausoleum' with dome, one of the largest of this kind in Cairo), originally a free-standing, simple but impressive funerary unit with six *fasaqi* (vaulted crypts containing multiple burials, from 3 to 67 bodies) of the mamluk elite class; later on, extended towards the north and west by the addition of two halls (provided each with four *fasaqi*) and joining the *Qubba* with the *Madrasa* and *Qasr*.

- *Madrasa*, typical Cairene 'mosque-school' on a cruciform plan (two large *iwans* on the *qibla* and opposite side, and two small *sid[i]llas* on the remaining two sides) integrated (next to the main entrance) with a *sabil-kuttab* ('Well' for dispensing water on the ground level, combined with a 'primary school' for teaching the Quran above). This *Madrasa* has some unique features: a suspended *dikka*, internal corridor running between the walls around the *sahn* space on the level of the first floor of the building, small room with no access (maybe part of the *malqaf*, that is, the ventilation system) and a blind cell (used by the *imam* to concentrate before prayer) just below it. A separate staircase allows almost direct access to the ablution area (many times rearranged and now in a dilapidated state) and to the *riwaq*.

- *Riwaq* (or *arwaqa*), huge block of eight paired residential units (with storerooms on the ground floor and living quarters on the first) for sufis serving in the complex (therefore, also often called somewhat abusively '*khanqah*').

Opposite the *riwaq*, towards the north, there was an economic annex, described in the *waqfiyya* deed as:

- *Tahuna*, that is, 'Mill', which never assumed its intended function, but was used subsequently (as proved by excavations) as a

stables or barn, primitive farmstead, military magazines (18th-20th century), and finally, after restoration, a woodwork workshop.

Added to these standing remains were two other buildings listed in the foundation *waqfiyya*, namely:

- *Rab'a*, a kind of 'Hostel' for pilgrims and merchants, very similar in structure to the above mentioned *riwaq/arwaqa* and situated opposite the main body of the foundation (the income from this building was referred to as a major means of support for the *waqf*), the existence of which was proved by excavation (during the digging of foundations under a fence constructed around the monument in 1984-5), and
- *Tibaq*, which was a 'Casern' for Qurqumas' own mamluks, situated nearby according to the *waqfiyya* (its exact localization however remains unknown; most probably its ruins have been covered — if not entirely destroyed — by modern constructions).

According to the available epigraphic evidence, the *Qubba* was completed in the month of *Zu-l-Qada'* 911 (= 26 March—24 April 1506) and the *Madrassa* some 18 months later, in the month of *Ragab* 913 (= 6 November—5 December 1507). The exact chronology of the remaining elements remains to be determined. All one can say is that everything but the *tahuna* was almost certainly completed by the time that the *waqfiyya* was finally written down, that is, before December 1510.

THE FOUNDER

The best résumé of the life and career of Qurqumas (along with numerous details from his life) comes from Ibn Iyas' famous chronicle *Badai' al-Zuhur...*, but important notes appear also in the works of other

serious historians of late Mamluk times, namely Abd al-Rahman al-Suyuti and Shams al-Din Ibn Tulun. These sources, combined with Qurqumas' own *Kitab al-Waqf*, permit a reliable reconstruction of the life of the Amir. Of Circassian origins, this mamluk of Qait Bay (1468-96) keeping in the background of mainstream events under this sultan's ephemeral successors, was slowly climbing the accepted ladder of honours to reach a peak in his career as *Amir al-Umara* and *Atabek* of the Egyptian army under Qansuh Al-Ghawri, the last great Burji Mamluk ruler (1501-1516), becoming in fact the first after the sultan in the declining Mamluk state. He must have been born shortly before 1448/9 and died on 25 December 1510, most probably of Paget's disease, at the age of about 64 years. He was buried in his complex, most probably in tomb T 2 (situated not in front of the *mihrab*, but in the second row of tombs!). Except for some sins of youth (well fitting the widely accepted model of a 'ruthless mamluk brute'), Qurqumas clearly garners Ibn Iyas' sympathy as time goes on, the chronicler's account presenting an image of a modest man, not particularly skilful in the martial arts nor brave (contrary to his name which, taken literally, means *Neverfear*), but a good commander and organizer, gentle and rather shy, but a righteous person, sensitive to any symptom of injustice.

Upon dying Qurqumas left one wife, Fatima, at least four children (two sons, unnamed, and two daughters, Fatima and Sitt Muluq) and a younger brother called Al-Mas/Olmaz (who disappeared 12 years later, in 1522, after a quarrel with Khairbak, traitor of the mamluk cause at Marj Dabiq, awarded then by the Ottomans with the governorship of Egypt). The

Amir's estate without counting the movable property was estimated at about 70,000 dinars (ca. 160,000 USD), a rather modest sum for a man who was second in the state! His land property was larger: apart from the *waqf* foundation, his real estate embraced

two huge palaces inside the city walls and two others outside, a large *rab'a-khan* (next to the Bab al-Nasr), a *hammam*, some villages and land in the Delta, and finally isolated estates in Giza, Saqqara and even as far away as in the Sudan(?) and Syria.

Select bibliography

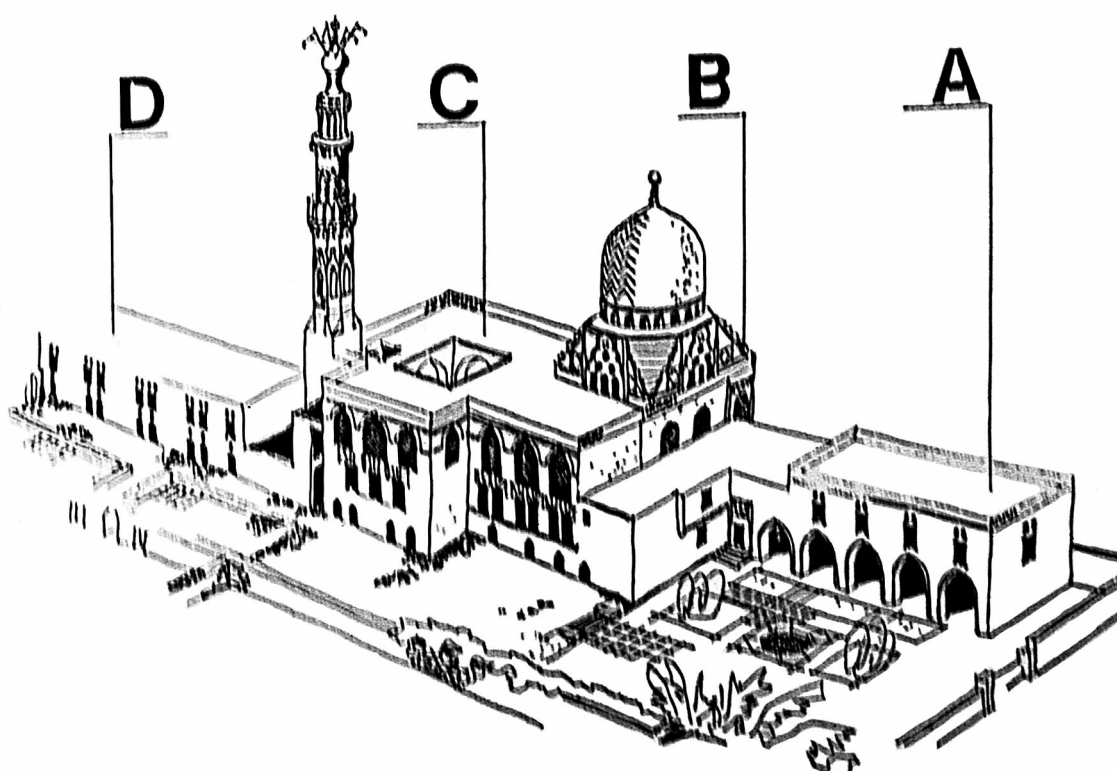
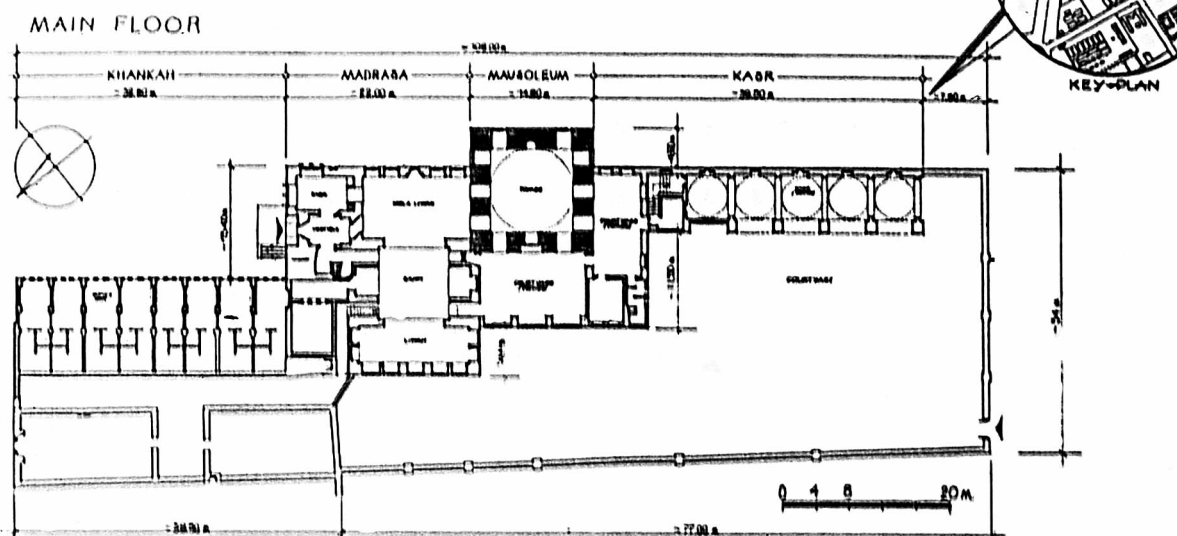
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General plan of Qurqumas' funerary foundation in Cairo's "Northern Cemetery"
(No. 162) and an early concept for its presentation as a tourist zone:

A = Qasr; B = Qubba; C = Madrasa; D = Riwaq (Khanqa)

(Drawing J. Kania)

QURQUMAS MAUSOLEUM





Example of the rank, heraldic coat-of-arms, of Sultan Qait'bay, shared by Qurqumas with some other mamluks of his period
(PCMA Archives)

Two pages from a copy of Qurqumas' *Kitab al-waqf* (No. 901) with the beginning of the hogga (foundation act) of his funerary estate in Cairo's "Northern Cemetery" (No. 162)
(PCMA Archives)

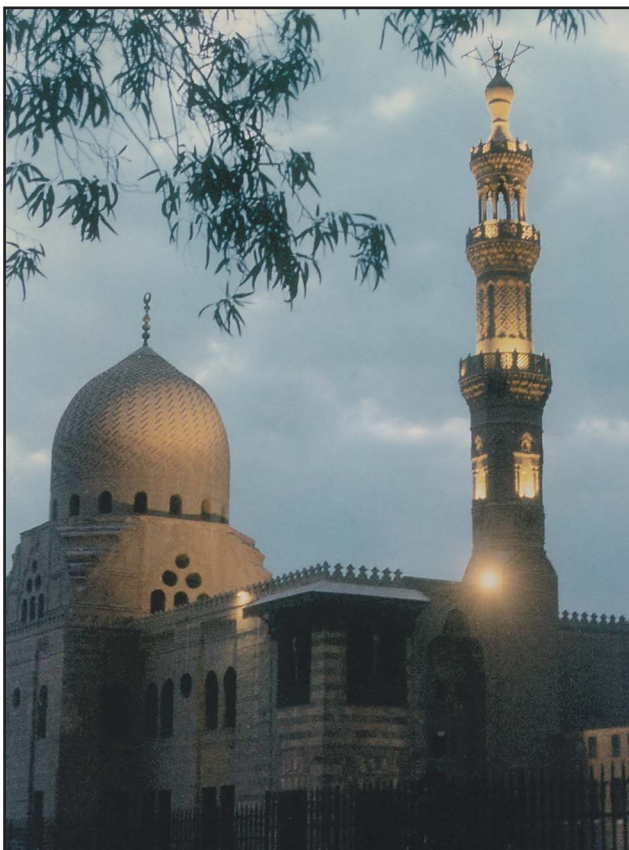
بشهادته من يرفع اسمه آخر الفل الذي يسطر بحاشيته
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نفا لي عهده صوب الرحمة والرضوان وصفة المكان المذكور
بدلالة الشاهد انه يشتمل على واجهه وابره منبته با
لحجر العف الخيت بهار بعة ابواب اجد هارم به يدخل
منه الى حوش كشي سماوي كان قصداً يعمل طاحون
والباب الثاني مقنطر عليه فردة باب يدخل منه الى
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المجازر المذكور من ناحية ابواب يدخل من كل منها الى هليز
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ايوانا ودور قاعه وطاقت منلات علي الطريق والباب
التاسع من ابواب المجازر تجاه الدخول تصل منه الى حوش
كبير يرفع دفن الاموات والباب الثالث من ابواب الوجنة
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وكتبه علي بن علي الغبي وحسبنا الله ونعم الوكيل
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم اللهم صل على سيدنا محمد وآله ومحبيه
هذا كتاب وقف صحيح شرعي وجسر شرعي صريح
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اشهد عليه شهره اذ شهاد الشرعي في صحته و
سلامته ورغبته في الخير وارادته انه وقف وجسر
وسبل وحره واكد وايد وخلص ويقصد بجميع المضاف
المسجد الانشا والحارة الذب فتاد من ماله وتسلم
حاله علي ارض ملك رقتاب الطريق الشرعي ولم
ينزل ذلك في ملكه وحيازته اليه صدور انوفق المذكور

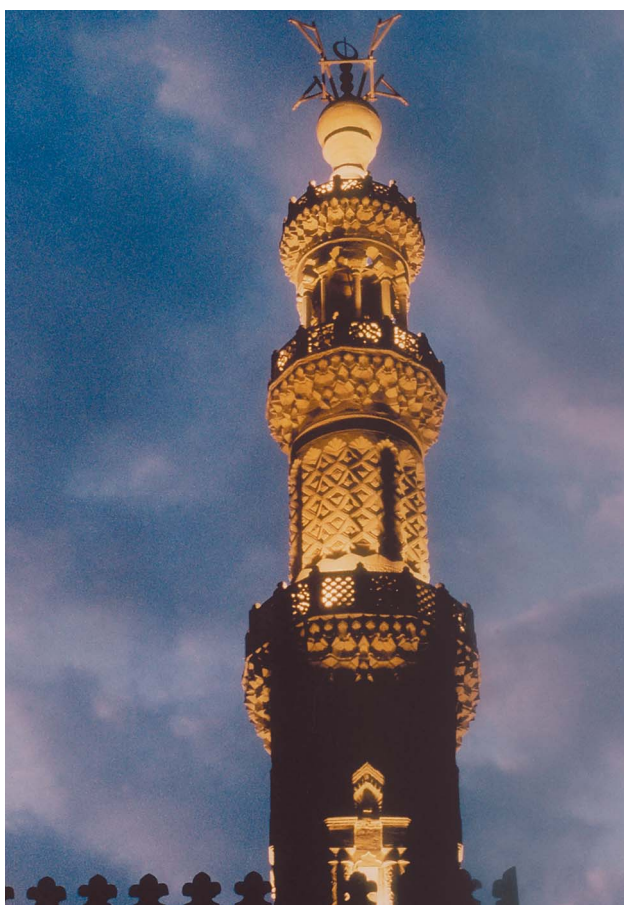
الشهادة

*General view of the so-called northern side of the Qurqumas complex
(Photo M.G. Witkowski)*



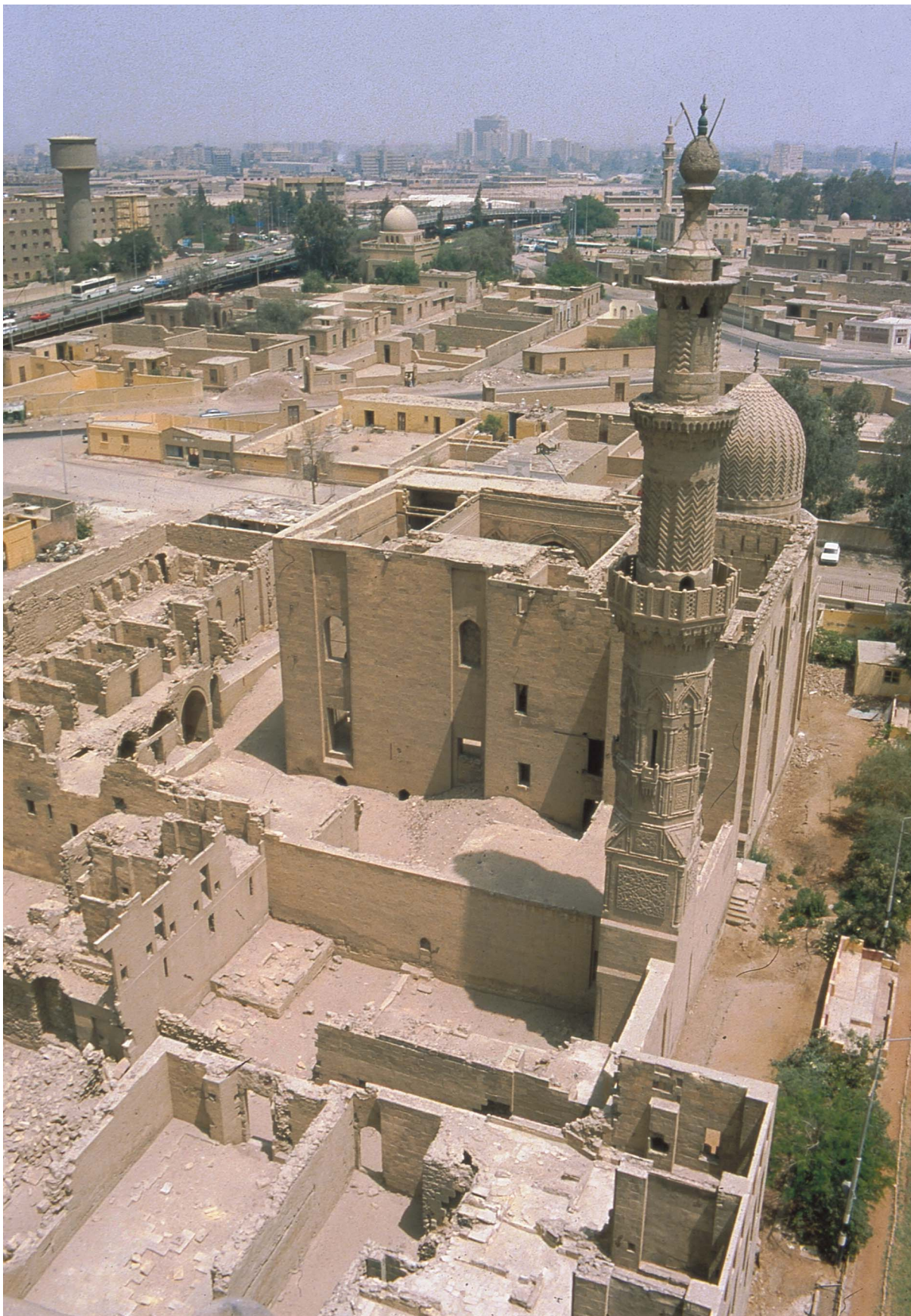


*Evening view of the Qurqumas complex after
installation of lighting in 1999
(Photo J. Kania)*



*Illuminated manara (minaret) after installation of
lighting in 1999
(Photo J. Kania)*

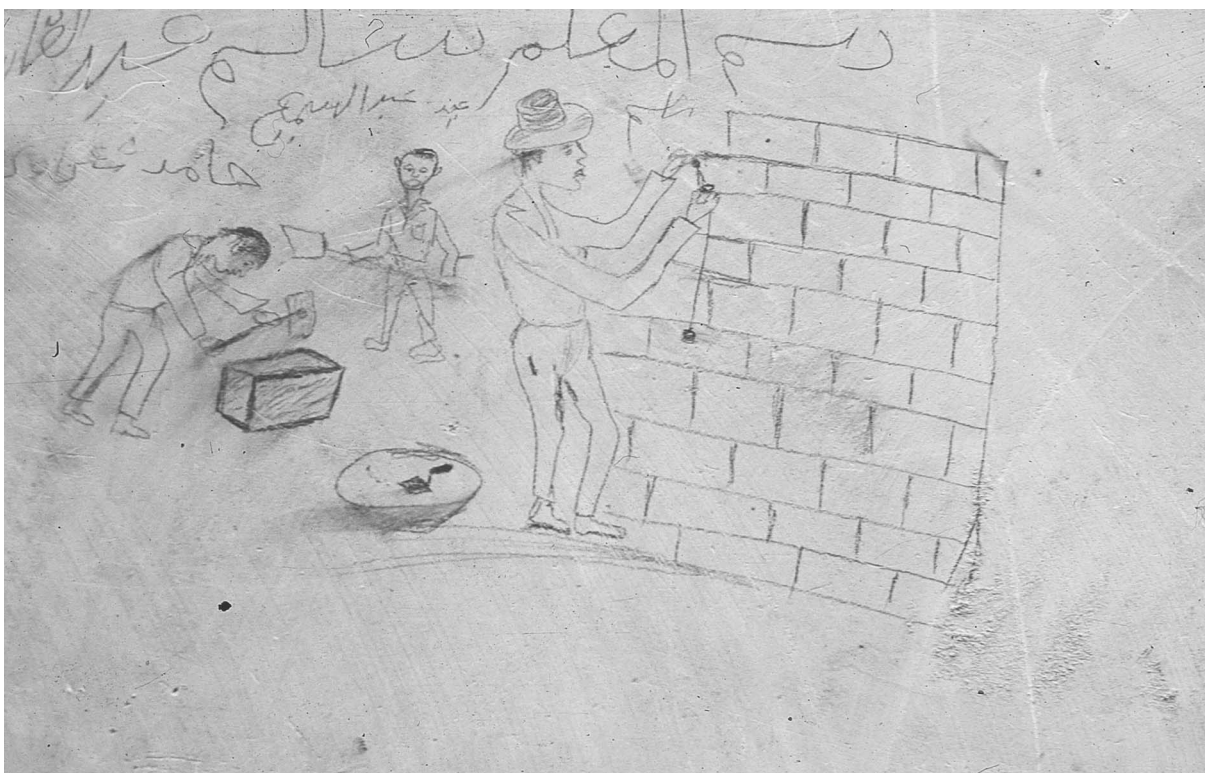
General view from the Madrasa roof of Qurqumas onto the extensive funerary complex No. 158 of Sultan Al-Ashraf Inal (built in 1451-1456), adjacent to Qurqumas' enclosure and included in the same monumental zone. In the foreground, the upper floor of Qurqumas' riwaq (khanqa) restored as a permanent ruin
(Photo M.G. Witkowski)





Foundation remains of the rab'a once completing the funerary estate of Qurqumas, discovered during the construction of a fence around the monumental zone on the side of the modern street
(Photo M.G. Witkowski)

The mission at work — graffito drawn in 1998 on one of the limestone blocks by a worker, a jack-of-all-trades able to handle all the difficult tasks on site
(Photo M.G. Witkowski)



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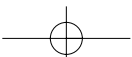
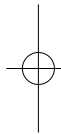
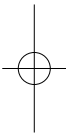
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