

1. Introduction: Requiem for the Greater Qarāfa

In the 830s/1430s, under the reign of the sultan al-Ašraf Barsbāy (r. 825–841/1422–1438), the Sheikh Mubārak Abū ‘Alī al-Takrūrī, a former black slave, had grown too weak to continue working as a dough-kneader for several bakeries (*afrān*), notably the famous one of Mu‘allim Muḥammad al-Maḥallī the miller (*al-ṭaḥḥān*), located at Bāb al-Lūq. Feeling his last days coming, he settled in the Greater Qarāfa. The wondrous Ġāmi‘ al-Awliyā’ (“Great Mosque of the Saints”, formerly known as Ġāmi‘ al-Qarāfa), built in the image of the great mosque of al-Azhar, was once the beating heart of the Greater Qarāfa.¹ However, when Mubārak arrived, it was in ruins, and the sheikh found a high and large hill of rubble (*kūm*) at its south. He decided then to level the debris, one bit at a time, re-employing the material to erect tombs. He spent a long time there, wandering everywhere, searching for reusable fragments. Each time he found a slab of marble, he would put it on one of the tombs he had built. Close to Mubārak’s place of work, north of the great mystic mausoleum of al-Udfuwī, was an elevated dome under which laid two saints, Fāṭima the Senior and Fāṭima the Minor, and a group of *ṣurafā’*.² Pillagers (*mufsidūn*) had lingered in that place. Mubārak took the slab of marble that was still lying on one of the two tombs and put it on a tomb he had constructed, calling it “tomb of Fāṭima the Minor”. Later, he wrote on stones names of his own invention and placed them on the tombs he had built. The first name he had imagined was “Šukrān”. He desired to cover this specific tomb with a piece of fabric (*sitr*). It was arranged for him and brought from the Bimāristān al-Manṣūrī in Cairo to the Qarāfa. This transfer was a well-attended event.³

This anecdote is the first part of an account given by Nūr al-Dīn al-Saḥāwī (d. after 888/1484), a “sheikh of the visit” (i.e. “guide for pilgrims”). It takes us to the Greater Qarāfa in the middle of the 9th/15th century, when it was already damaged beyond repair, despite the hard work of Mubārak. The great necropolis had always been the home of ruins. However, the illustration of the *Description de l’Égypte* (1809–1822) shows the result of a process that actually started in the last decades of the 8th/14th century and accelerated at the beginning of the 9th/15th century (fig. 1). Much of greater Cairo had fallen into ruin, and if the sultans and the elites had rebuilt their capital by the middle of the 9th/15th century, it was not the case for the Greater Qarāfa.⁴

1. On this specific mosque, see Bloom 1987. See also *infra*.

2. A little south of the Ṭabāṭabā; see fig. 3.

3. Al-Saḥāwī, *Tuḥfat al-aḥbāb*, pp. 180–181; Ohtoshi 2006a, p. 94.

4. On the ruination and rebuilding of Cairo between 750/1350 and 850/1450, see Loiseau 2010.



Fig. 1. The Qarāfa in the *Description de l'Égypte* (1809).

The immense urban history of Cairo written by al-Maqrīzī (d. 845/1442), *al-Mawā'iz wa-l-i'tibār bi-dīkr al-ḥiṭaṭ wa-l-ātār*, initially composed between 818/1415 and 827/1424, and completed until 844/1440, give an overview of the Qarāfa, and especially of the Greater Qarāfa before its demise, when it was a very lively city inside the city.⁵ Al-Maqrīzī lists built-up neighbourhoods, wells, markets, cisterns (*ṣahārīğ*), a bakery (*furn*), villas (*quṣūr*), public fountains (*sabīl*), a gazebo (*manẓara*), and palaces of agreement or kiosks (*ğawāsiq*). But foremost, the Qarāfa was known as a highly religious and sacred place. Therefore, it is no wonder such places are the most numerous in the *Ḥiṭaṭ*: roofless oratories (*muṣalliyāt*) and *maḥārib*, state-sponsored Sufi convents (*ḥawānīq*) or autonomous ones (*ribāṭāt*, *zawāyā*), congregational mosques (*ğawāmi'*) and colleges (*madāris*).⁶ The number of mosques (*masāğid*) must have been particularly impressive, as al-Maqrīzī states, after having put forward thirty-three of them: "It is said that twelve thousand mosques stood at the Greater Qarāfa."⁷ By phrasing it this way (*yuqāl innahu*, "it is said"), al-Maqrīzī clearly hints that the affirmation had to be taken with a grain of salt. Nevertheless, the need for such a great number of places of worship means that a lot of people lived in the Qarāfa among the tombs, mausolea, shrines, and sanctuaries.

5. This work and its historiographic trajectory are presented in Loiseau 2010, pp. 19–27.

6. The places pertaining to the Qarāfa are scattered throughout the *Ḥiṭaṭ*. See the volume of index from Sayyid Fu'ād's edition: al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, *al-kašāfāt al-taḥlīliyya*.

7. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, IV, p. 874.

The history of the medieval Qarāfa has been an interest of academic studies from the early 1900s. Many scholars, among whom historians Yūsuf Rāḡib, Tetsuya Ohtoshi and Christopher Taylor, have reconstructed the main sequences of its history.⁸ The Qarāfa was as old as Fuṣṭāṭ, the first Muslim settlement in Egypt. The cemeteries first developed east of Fuṣṭāṭ and alongside the foot and the slopes of the sacred mountain of the Muqaṭṭam. It is possible to single out three particular moments of urbanisation in the medieval history of the Qarāfa. The necropolis was already inhabited and visited from the Tulunid period (254–292/868–905) to the Ikhshidid period (323–358/935–969).⁹ Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn (r. 254–270/868–884) notably built a monumental aqueduct than ran from the lake (*birka*) al-Ḥabash to ‘Ayn al-Šīra, crossing the heart of the Greater Qarāfa (fig. 2).¹⁰ The Fatimid period was the first significant moment in the urban development of the Qarāfa. In 366/976, Durzan, the caliph al-Mu‘izz’s concubine, built with her daughter Sitt al-Malik the complex of the Ġāmi‘ al-Qarāfa, a sumptuous edifice that reflected the philanthropic activities of powerful women at the time in the Qarāfa. Building within the walled city of Cairo was the prerogative of men of the court.¹¹ A second symbolic event takes place during the Ayyubid period (567–648/1171–1250). In 572/1176, Saladin started the construction of well-endowed madrasa near the tomb of al-Šāfi‘ī (d. 204/820), founder of the Šāfi‘ī *madhhab* (legal school), and the sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil (r. 615–635/1218–1238) erected an enormous mausoleum over his tomb in 608/1211.¹² Since the foundation of al-Qāhira (358/969), the city had slowly outgrown its walls. Starting from the Ayyubids, the Qarāfa’s centre of gravity gradually shifted toward what came to be known as the Lesser Qarāfa (fig. 2), with al-Šāfi‘ī’s mausoleum at its centre, attracting most of the burials of the new popular saints and the religious or political elite.

Finally, the urban zenith of the Qarāfa was reached under the long reign of al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (r. 693–694/1293–1295, 698–708/1299–1309, 709–741/1310–1341). The architectural work occurred mainly in the Lesser Qarāfa, but the necropolis as a whole drew ever more people, from the *amīr*-s to the common crowds, for visits or to settle there.¹³ At that time, the Qarāfa exerted a powerful attraction on people for ambivalent reasons: it was a place where one could escape the constraints of society, where women could frequent men, where all kind of social behaviours could be found, but at the same time it was a holy place, a refuge for indigents and those fallen from grace.¹⁴ In his *Ḥiṭaṭ*, al-Maqrīzī offered snippets of poetry to reflect this reality:

8. Guest 1926; Massignon 1958; Rāḡib 1972; 1973; 1974; Ohtoshi 1993; 2006a; 2006b; Taylor 1999; el-Kadi, Bonnamy 2001; al-Ibrashy 2006.

9. Massignon 1958, pp. 55–56; Ohtoshi 2006a, p. 87.

10. Taylor 1999, p. 18.

11. Bloom 1987, pp. 16–17.

12. Taylor 1999, pp. 20, 27; Ohtoshi 2006a, p. 88.

13. Ohtoshi 2006a, pp. 89–90; al-Ibrashy 2013, p. 149.

14. Ohtoshi 2006a, pp. 95–96.

The Qarāfa gathers two opposites, * the here below and the thereafter. It is the most excellent abode.
 The outcast mingles with the illustrious in friendship. * The ascetic flies around its tombs.
 How many nights did we spend in it while our companion of pleasure * sang, nearly melting stone
 away.

* * *

I was filled with wonder at the case of the Qarāfa! Here it was * with the sorrow of its dead and
 yet our heart brightened with the joy of a child.
 I found it a haven for all the lovers. * The besotted were settling there, the heart was becoming
 infatuated with it.¹⁵

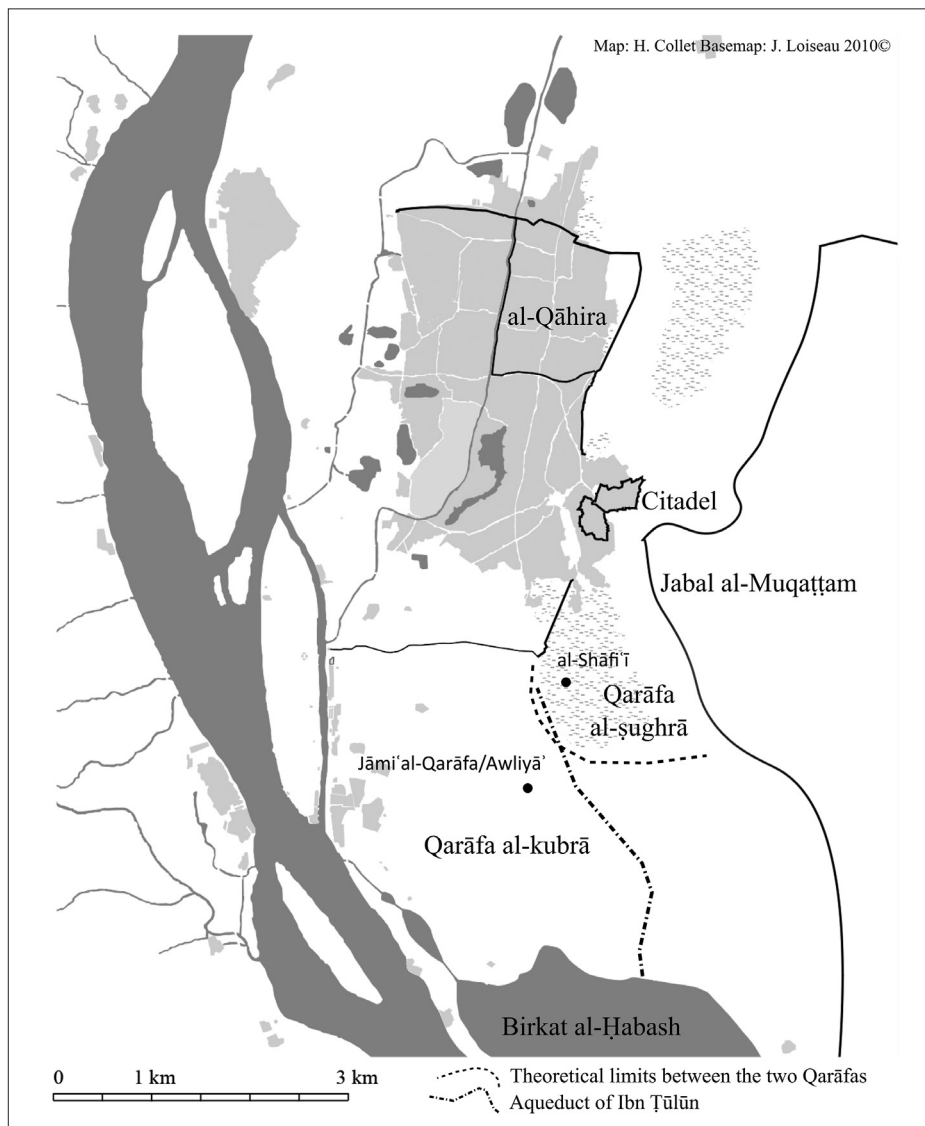


Fig. 2. General map of the Qarāfa in Cairene context.

15. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, IV, pp. 849–850.

2. Al-Takrūrī, a new *nisba* for Islam

Mubārak bore the name of “al-Takrūrī”. The *nisba* (name of origin) “al-Takrūrī” (pl. al-Takārīr, al-Takārura, al-Takārna) appeared toward the mid-7th/13th century in the Middle East. Al-Takrūrī means “from al-Takrūr”. In 1969, ‘Umar al-Naqar was among the firsts to take an interest in that name in the Egyptian context in his PhD dissertation “West Africa and the Muslim Pilgrimage: An Historical Study with Special Reference to the Nineteenth Century” and in an article published in the *Journal of African History*, “Takrūr: The History of a Name”. In 1986, Nehemia Levtzion realised a similar study entitled “Mamluk Egypt and Takrūr (West Africa)”.

In the Arabic sources of the Muslim West, Takrūr was a kingdom that was first described by the Andalusī geographer al-Bakrī in his *Masālik* in 460/1068. It was probably located in the valley of the Senegal River, in the Bilād al-Sūdān (“the Land of the Blacks”) of the medieval Arabic geography. Warḡābī b. Rabīs (d. 432/1040–1041), one of its kings, al-Bakrī says, was the first to convert to Islam and support its diffusion in the kingdom.¹⁶ Takrūr remained independent until its conquest by the sultanate of Mālī around the mid-7th/13th century. ‘U. Al-Naqar and N. Levtzion stated that the name Takrūr appears first in the oriental Arabic sources in Ibn Ḥallikān’s *Wafayāt*, written between 654/1256 and 672/1274, to denote a land and a people west to Kanem.¹⁷ Afterward, the use of “al-Takrūrī” to refer to Sahelian Muslims became widespread, and the Islamised part of the Sahelian strip was renamed “Bilād al-Takrūr” (“the Land of Takrūr”) to single it out from the broader non-monotheist Bilād al-Sūdān. However, the *nisba* “al-Takrūrī” had likely spread earlier. The earliest mention I was able to find in the chronicles is in the *Tārīḥ Irbil* of al-Mustawfī (d. 637/1239) who quotes a certain Mas‘ūd b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Takrūrī as one of his informers.¹⁸

It is generally admitted that the name “al-Takrūrī” came to define West African Muslims as a whole through the pilgrimage of Muslims coming from the kingdom of Takrūr. The kingdom is purportedly one of the first whose dynasty adopted Islam officially in the region. Then, people in Mecca, Medina, and later Cairo developed the habit of calling “Takrūrī” any black Muslim coming from the Bilād al-Sūdān. If the Kanem was first separated from the Takrūr, all the Sahelian strip, including the Chad Lake region, was gradually incorporated in the geographical acceptance of the term. It poses a problem as medieval geographers and historians had a limited geographical knowledge on the Sahel. To their eyes, a single king could rule the entire region. Therefore, they call “king of the Takrūr” whoever appears to be the hegemonic ruler of the moment, sometimes blurring our ability to tell which part of the Sahel this title refers to. In the middle of the 8th/14th century for example, there is no doubt it is the sultan of Mālī. The same goes for the period after the middle of the 9th/15th century, when the expression “king of the Takrūr” designates the sultan of Borno. But for the first half of the

16. Al-Naqar 1969, p. 367; Levtzion 1986, p. 183.

17. Al-Naqar 1969, p. 369; Levtzion 1986, p. 183.

18. Al-Mustawfī, *Tārīḥ Irbil*, I, pp. 292–293.

9th/15th century, when the power of Mālī waned and Borno was on the rise, it is trickier to tell. In general, the use of the *nisba* “al-Takrūrī” is a curse and a blessing at the same time. It allows us to better find Sahelian Muslims in the documents, but most of the time erase all information on their origin and personal history.

As ‘U. al-Naqar’s, N. Levtzion’s and many others’ works indicate, the history of Sahelian Muslims in Egypt has been conducted in the remit of two thematics tied to travelling. First, the journey for the pilgrimage to Mecca of which the sojourn to Cairo was one of the highlights. Second, the journey in the pursuit of science (*ṭalab al-‘ilm*).¹⁹ Cairo had indeed become, after the Sunni restauration of the Ayyubids, the dominant centre of Islamic scholarship.²⁰ The Egyptian capital was also the meeting point of western and eastern mystic ways of Islam.²¹ Muslims thirsty for any kind of Islamic experience could then quench their desire with normative and spiritual initiations or both. This history of mobilities between the Sahel and Egypt seems to have overshadowed another vivid historical reality. West African Muslims had also settled in Egypt, the Mamluk domain, and above all, Cairo. They were part of the social landscape, could be found in any level of society. Cairo is obviously the place we find them in greater number. Yet, there is a particular place that was closely associated to Takrūrī Muslims during the last three centuries of the medieval period: the necropolis of the Qarāfa. The subject is not entirely new, as they appear in passing in several historical studies on Cairo or the Qarāfa.²² It is now time to make them the centre of attention.

3. The “books of the visit”, *lieux de mémoire* of the medieval Qarāfa

Holy men of Islam dwelled early in the Qarāfa. Sufism and more broadly mystical Islam gained a prominent status in the Egyptian society under the Ayyubids and the Mamluks, and were favoured by the court.²³ Yet, living or dead, saints residing in the Qarāfa were visited long before these eras. The necropolis was already part of the Egyptians’ spiritual daily life under the Fatimids and previously.²⁴ Scholars (*‘ulamā’*, *fuqahā’*) and mystics (*ṣūfiyya*, *fuqarā’*) respectively animated the normative and spiritual religious life, but the two worlds were deeply intermingled and connected.²⁵

19. I am obviously talking of free persons, who are the focus of this study. It goes without saying that this history of mobility has also been dominated by the subject of slavery, through what is called the “trans-Saharan slave trade” or “the oriental slave trade”.

20. See for example Sartain 1971.

21. Geoffroy 1995, pp. 169–212.

22. See for example Garcin 1976 (ed. 2005), pp. 426–429, who gives an intense and rapid overview of the Takrūrī in medieval Egypt.

23. Geoffroy 1995, pp. 101–107.

24. Bloom 1987, p. 14.

25. On the scholars who were Sufis and vice versa in Egypt and Syria, see Ṣafī al-Dīn, *Risāla*; Geoffroy 1995, pp. 126–127. For examples in Tunisia, Morocco, and the Saharan West, see respectively Amri 2013; Cornell 1998; Stewart, Stewart 1973. On the staging of an opposition between the two statuses for performative/personal purposes, see Cecere 2013.

Saints could come from any level of society and reveal their sainthood in many forms. From the end of the 6th/12th century, Sufi orders (*ṭarīqa*, pl. *ṭuruq*) became the dominant institution through which mystical Islam was expressed. Yet, the term “Sufi” itself was not widespread at the time to designate a mystic.²⁶ In general, the fact that many individuals could experience and cumulate a variety of mystical experiences should prevent us to confine them in predetermined categories or institutions such as Sufi orders. A rich vocabulary existed for mystical attributes, reflecting the richness of the paths toward hidden realities and knowledge: the renunciant (*zāhid*), the devout (*‘ābid*), the blame-seeker (*malāmātī*), the one who used science for spiritual realisations (*al-‘ālim al-‘āmil*), the illiterate sheikh inspired by God (*ṣayḥ ummī*), the master of the states (*rabb al-aḥwāl*), the one whose mind had been raptured by God (*mağdūb*, pl. *mağāḍīb*), etc.²⁷ *Mağāḍīb* particularly flourished under the Mamluk period. Their minds being most of the time coalesced in the invisible (*al-ḡayb*), they were rarely aware of their surroundings, but their eccentric behaviour was tolerated.²⁸

Saints could be distinguished with one or several of these mystical attributes. In his study on the holy men at the Qarāfa, C. Taylor gave an extensive and lengthy repository of examples about the feats, abilities, social and political functions of the saints.²⁹ Saints were particularly sought for regarding their capacity to answer prayers and demands through intercession with the divine.³⁰ The Qarāfa and its saints offered a large choice for all kind of acts of devotion with performative intents and was especially important in time of crisis for its open space and its spiritual protection, as it was the case for instance after the great earthquake of 702/1303 or in case of epidemics.³¹

Sainthood was a vivid reality in social life. The Ayyubid and Mamluk periods produced many new saints who became very popular and overshadowed older ones. Saints could also disappear from memory and history, with the ruining of their mausolea for example, as we will see in the case of many great medieval saints of the Qarāfa. Cairo and its surroundings did not have the monopoly on sainthood. Aḥmad al-Badawī (d. 675/1276), originally from Morocco, settled in Ṭanṭā in the Delta and has remained to this day the most popular saint in Egypt.³² Alexandria or Upper Egypt also saw a blooming of saints.³³

The pious visits to the tombs are called *ziyārāt* (sing. *ziyāra*). They were gradually organised by “sheikhs of the visit” (*mašāyih al-ziyāra*) who guided groups in the necropolis alongside autonomous visits. They were especially taking care of institutionalised visits happening at set times and dates, such as the Friday visits. These sheikhs instructed the appropriate

26. For instance, in the 7th/13th century, Ṣafī al-Dīn b. Zāfir doesn’t call Ibn ‘Arabī and al-Šāḍilī “Sufis” even though they are considered among the greatest men of the history of Sufism. See Ṣafī al-Dīn, *Risāla*, p. 115.

27. Geoffroy 1995, pp. 231–232, 240, 273. *Sūfī* and *faqīr* had become synonyms during the Mamluk period.

28. Geoffroy 1995, p. 252.

29. Taylor 1999, pp. 80–167.

30. Ohtoshi 1993.

31. Ohtoshi 2006a, pp. 96–97.

32. Geoffroy 1995, pp. 169–170; Mayeur-Jaouen 2019.

33. Ṣafī al-Dīn, *Risāla*; Geoffroy 1995.

behaviour during the tour in general and more specifically before tombs that required certain rituals (e.g. handshaking, taking out clothes) or orientated the visitors (*zuwwār*) to the saints fitting their needs (e.g. the settling of one's debt or good fortune for the journey of the hajj).³⁴ They were the living memory of the Qarāfa, whose topography was always evolving, keeping alive the stories of the people buried there. They must have been conscious of their unique position as they started to write "books of the visit" (*kutub al-ziyāra*), genuine guide books detailing the circuits of visits in the Qarāfa, its topography, identifying the names of the most famous tombs and giving narratives on the characters buried underneath. Four of these "books" from the medieval period are still extant.

The first, from Muwaffaq b. 'Uṭmān (d. 615/1218), is known as *Muršid al-zuwwār ilā qubūr al-abrār* or *al-Durr al-munazzam fī ziyārat al-ġabal al-Muqaṭṭam*.³⁵ Ibn 'Uṭmān set a kind of standard and was quoted by successive sheikhs of the visit. Nevertheless, he focuses mostly on the Muqaṭṭam district and major figures buried in the Qarāfa. It is the less detailed of the four. The second, *Miṣbāḥ al-dayāġi wa-ġawṭ al-rāġi wa-kahf al-lāġi*, is from Muḥammad b. al-Nāsiḥ (d. after 699/1299–1300). It is much more detailed than the *Muršid* and was highly quoted thereafter.³⁶ The third, from Šams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Zayyāt (d. 814/1412), *al-Kawākib al-sayyāra fī tartīb al-ziyāra fī-l-Qarāfatayn al-kubrā wa-l-suġrā*, is the most famous of the four. It describes over one thousand and nine hundred entombed persons, and is the most prolific for the Qarāfa. Finally, we find the *Tuḥfat al-aḥbāb wa-buġiyyat al-ṭullāb fī al-ḥiṭaṭ wa-al-mazārāt wa-al-tarāġim wa-al-biqā' al-mubārakāt*, completed in 889/February 1484 by Nūr al-Dīn al-Saḥāwī.³⁷ It is less original as he drew extensively from Ibn al-Zayyāt but provides nevertheless some updates on the tombs. Furthermore, he also describes other cemeteries, such as the necropolis of the Desert (al-Šaḥrā') favoured by the Circassian Mamluk sultans.³⁸

The study of these books has a long academic tradition.³⁹ In 1958, Louis Massignon published a comprehensive study on the Lesser Qarāfa, "La cité des morts au Caire (Qarāfa, Darb al-Ahmar)", in which he gave a much incarnated and spiritual narrative on the visits partly based on ongoing practices at his time. L. Massignon notably dwells on the "Seven Saints", a particular tour in the Qarāfa that is stated to have started under the reign of the Ayyubid sultan al-Malik al-Kāmil. Called the "visit of the Seven", it was a visitor's favourite and was put forward by the "books of the visit". In his *Ḥiṭaṭ*, al-Maqrīzī gave two alternative lists for the Seven that had emerged at his time.⁴⁰ Of all the scholarly works on the Qarāfa, except L. Massignon's article, very few have attempted to reconstruct maps of the Qarāfa, and if so, they focused mostly on the

34. Al-Ibrashy 2006, p. 271.

35. Ohtoshi 2006b; al-Ibrashy 2006, pp. 271–272.

36. Tetsuya Ohtoshi (2006b, p. 305) tells us: "The total number of known entombed persons described sharply rises to nearly 1193", as opposed to the *Muršid* that described only over four hundred buried individuals.

37. Ohtoshi 2006b, p. 302.

38. Al-Ibrashy 2006, p. 278.

39. See the works listed *supra*, n. 8.

40. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, IV, pp. 907–908.

Lesser Qarāfa, for the Greater Qarāfa has almost completely disappeared from present Cairene landscape. The most detailed effort for mapping the medieval Qarāfa has been offered by May al-Ibrashy based on Ibn al-Zayyāt's *Kawākib* that carve the necropolis in many districts and sub-districts, not always easy to follow but nonetheless allowing to situate lost mausolea and tombs.⁴¹

Yet, to my knowledge, no maps have tried to situate the three lists of the Seven. Before turning to the subject of West African Muslims, it is important to visualise them in the Qarāfa, as their tombs structured the visits and the necropolis. The first list gives (fig. 3):

1. Abū al-Ḥasan b. Ṣā'ig al-Dīnawarī (d. 331/943);
2. 'Abd al-Ṣamad al-Baġdādī (d. 335/946–947);
3. Ismā'il al-Muzanī (or al-Muznī; d. 264/877–878);
4. Bakkār b. Qutayba (d. 270/883–884);
5. al-Mufaḍḍāl b. Faḍāla (d. 181/866);
6. Abū Bakr 'Abd al-Malik al-Qumanī (or al-Qimnī; d. 432/1041);
7. Dū-l-Nūn al-Misrī (d. 245/859–860).⁴²

As we can see, this list contains old saints buried in the Qarāfa who were visited long before the institutionalisation of the visits. To give an order of the tombs' density in the "books of the visit", let's consider the case of al-Dīnawarī and al-Baġdādī, whose tombs are no longer extant. Their mausolea were located between the Lu'lu'a mosque and the mausoleum of the mystic poet Ibn al-Fāriḍ. Between these two extant constructions, Ibn al-Nāsiḥ's *Miṣbāḥ* gives the name of forty-two buried individual and informs on the presence of many other tombs. Yet, even if the pages belie us to think we have walked some distance in company of the sheikh, only 170 m separate the two extant monuments as the crow flies.

The first alternative list given by al-Maqrīzī states:

8. Ṣila b. Mu'ammal (d. 429/1038);
9. Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Ḥuwarāzmī (d. 401/1011);
10. Sālim al-'Afif (already present in the *Muršid*);
11. Abū al-Faḍl b. al-Ġawharī (d. 480/1088);
12. Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Bazzāz (already present in the *Muršid*);
13. Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Ṭayr (Ṭabb) al-Warḥš (in the state of identifiable ruins at the time of Ibn al-Zayyāt);
14. Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ṣāliḥ al-Andalusī al-Kaḥḥāl (already present in the *Muršid*).⁴³

41. Al-Ibrashy 2006, pp. 296–297.

42. Ibn al-Zayyāt, *Kawākib*, p. 580.

43. Al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, IV/2, p. 908.

As for the third list, some names are familiar:

15. 'Uqba b. 'Āmir al-Ġuhanī (d. 58/678, companion);
16. al-Šāfi'ī (d. 204/820);
17. Abū Bakr al-Zaqqāq (4th/10th c.);
18. Ismā'īl al-Muzanī (d. 264/877–878);
19. Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad al-Ḥarrār (d. around 620/1223);
20. al-Faqīh b. Diḥya al-Kalbī (d. 632/1235);
21. Ibn Fāris al-Laḥmī (appears in the *Kawākib*).

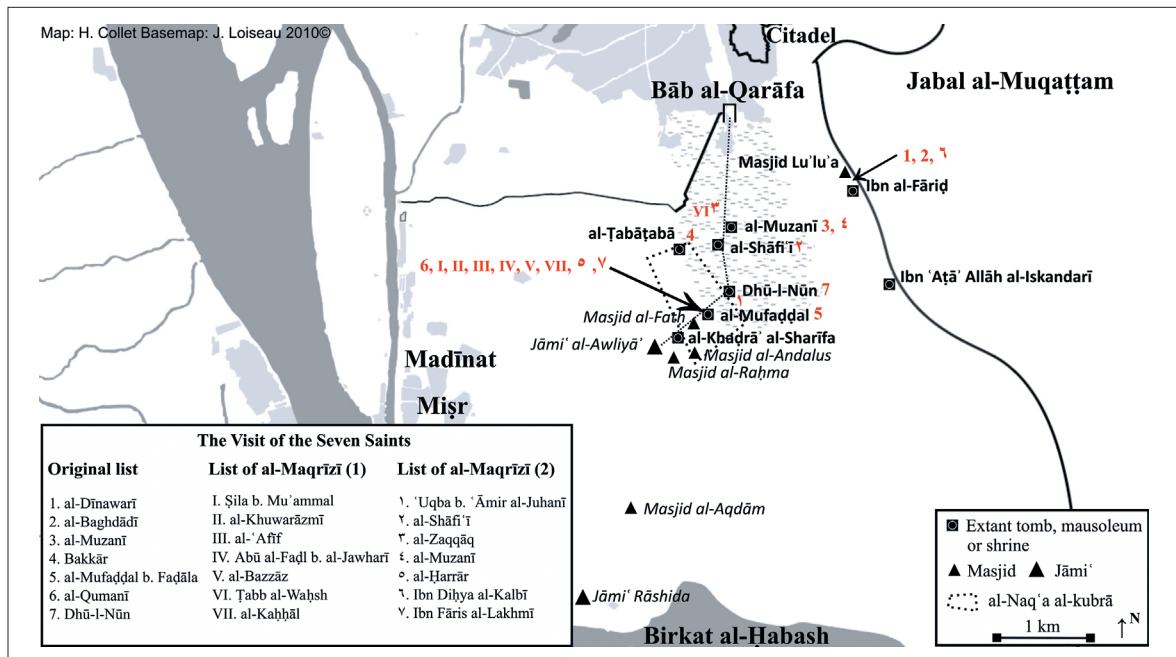


Fig. 3. The visit of the “Seven”.

As we can see on Figure 3, most of the saints listed lied around al-Mufaḍḍāl, at the junction between the Lesser and Greater Qarāfa. The area, called al-Naq'a al-kubrā, was considered the most sacred of the necropolis.

4. Early presence of Tākūrī Muslims in Cairo: Myth-coated narratives

The mentions of the oldest Tākūrī Muslims in Egypt appear in the literature of the “books of the visit” with some confusion. A great saint, Abū Muḥammad Yūsuf b. 'Abd Allāh al-Tākūrī, lived at the time of the first Cairene Fatimid caliph.⁴⁴ Ibn al-Nāsiḥ gives a fair account of his life exposing mostly his miracles (*karāmāt*), the most famous of which tells of a time he stopped

44. Al-Mu'izz li-Dīn Allāh (r. 341–365/953–975), fourth Fatimid caliph, arrived in Cairo in ramadān 362/July 972, but the city was founded after the conquest of Egypt in 358/969.

the wind, the Nile flow, and walked on water to retrieve a child abducted from his mother by Sudanic bandits who had escaped by boat. Another miracle tells us that one day, the caliph had sent men to seize gallnuts from him. Yet, when the gallnuts arrived to him, the caliph found that they had turned to stone. As soon as he gave them back to the saint, they turned back to their normal state.⁴⁵ Abū Muḥammad lived in Būlāq, on the west bank of the Nile. The great mosque there took his name, and this district took the name of “Būlāq al-Takrūrī” (or “al-Takrūr”).⁴⁶ Further in his book, Ibn al-Nāsiḥ speaks of an Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Takrūrī but fleetingly comments: “It is said that he is the Takrūrī mentioned before.”⁴⁷ The problem is that this time, this Takrūrī is located in the Qarāfa, not in Būlāq. Ibn al-Nāsiḥ might have conveyed hearsays to mask the fact that he had no information on the latter saint or might have repeated a common confusion. In his *Kawākib*, Ibn al-Zayyāt provides more information on Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad:

Ibn Ġābār passed away in 973. [...] On the west side, at the tip of Ibn Ġābār’s tomb, lies] the Sheikh Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Takrūrī al-Mālikī, companion of Ibn Ġābār. He discoursed on the *uṣūl al-fiqh* of the Maliki and Shafiite school. It is said he is the Takrūrī mentioned before in Būlāq. *Rather, it is said that he was his sheikh.* He was an eloquent *faqīh* and engaged in numerous sciences. He used to say: “The wealth our bodies seed is for horses.” The *amīr* of Egypt [*Kāfūr al-Ikhshīdī*] had visited him and asked prayers of him. His eyes had been touched [by a disease]. He [*Muḥammad al-Takrūrī*] implored God so He would give him back his eye, and his eye returned as it was before. Kāfūr had a hundred dinars sent to him. It appeared to the envoy that he [*Muḥammad al-Takrūrī*] was in a state of madness [*al-ġunūn*]. He then returned to Kāfūr and said: “You sent me to a madman [*maġnūn*].” Kāfūr answered to him: “He is not mad. He does his religious deeds at night and fast in silence during the day [*yaqūm al-layl wa-yaṣūm al-nahār*].” The man [*the envoy*] resolved to return there at night and to bring to him a company of pious men [*ġamā’a min al-ṣāliḥīn*]. They came to Ibn Ġābār and asked [to see] al-Takrūrī. “But we did not find him and we stepped outside. That is when [we] saw a man praying, looked at him [from a distance], and he was al-Takrūrī! We saw him and followed him until he reached a huge door [*darb*], which he found closed. He said: ‘Is it my habit with you to close the door to my nose?’ Then the door opened up and he went out [through it]. We went through behind him until we reached a cemetery. Then, he started to pray and left afterwards. Then, a wild animal [*waḥṣ*] arrived and rolled on the floor where he had prayed.”⁴⁸

45. Taylor 1999, p. 153.

46. The current neighbourhood of Būlāq al-Dakrūr is located further west than its medieval homonym.

47. Ibn al-Nāsiḥ, *Miṣbāḥ*, p. 139.

48. Ibn al-Zayyāt, *Kawākib*, p. 237.