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THE CAIRENE SABIL: FORM AND MEANING

The object of this study is to determine the connections between Islamic doctrine and *sabil* building, and particularly to demonstrate that the characteristic features of the sabil in Cairo have their sources in the Quran and the hadith. Studies thus far have concentrated solely on architectural description and have overlooked the symbolic meaning of these structures.

Because from ancient times mankind has always been aware that water is essential to life and survival and that it plays a part in every biological process, not surprisingly it has also played a major role in a variety of mythological and religious cosmogonies. When the Ionian philosopher Thales of Miletus (624-545 B.C.) replaced the gods with natural law as the force governing all phenomena, he made water the central element in his theory. Even Newton in *De Natura Acidorum* assumed that all substances can be reduced to water.

All civilizations have also necessarily been preoccupied with the problems of supplying water, which they have solved by building aqueducts, cisterns, and wells, and devising other means of ensuring a steady water supply. The question then arises, do structures in the Islamic world that provide water simply represent yet another supply system, or do they display features inspired by the shari'a and, because of that, represent an architectural type that is distinctly Islamic?

A quick survey of structures comparable to the sabil in the ancient civilizations that once occupied the area covered by Islam is needed before the question can be answered, for first we must ascertain whether any connections existed between ancient and Islamic sabil, or whether the latter were entirely the creation of Islamic civilization.

In pharaonic Egypt¹ wells were dug in the Nile basin, in the oases mainly for irrigation and in the desert for drinking water. Among the last, the major known achievements of the Egyptians are the wells dug during an expedition by Mentahotep IV to the Hammamat Valley; a well inside the temple built by Siti I on the road to the gold mines in Baramiya by Edfo in Upper Egypt; the well dug by Ramses II on the road to the

gold mines in the 'Alaqi Valley, and the water station, with its hieroglyphic inscriptions, on the Red Sea in the Gazuz Valley which is attributed to the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. Neither that inscription nor Egyptian papyri mention any religious dictum about the charitable offering of water to the thirsty, however, as is the case in Islam.²

The importance of water for survival was also well recognized by the ancient Mesopotamian and Persian civilizations, whose water god was named Ea.³ Although there is indisputable evidence that both peoples built wells, cisterns, and canals to supply palaces and houses — as, for example in Sargon palace in Khorsabad (722-705 B.C.)⁴ — there are no known references to their having built them as an act propitiating a god that would make their structures comparable to the sabil built in Islamic towns.

Water-supply systems built in ancient Greece, for example the sixth-century B.C. pipeline in Athens ordered by Pisistratus and the so-called well with the nine canals,⁵ were built of finely cut stone and plastered on the inside. The Greeks also used earthenware pipes that were sometimes glazed. There were public fountains as well as public and private cisterns, but again no evidence that their construction had any particular religious significance.

The Roman Empire, of course, had an extraordinarily well-developed water supply system, both public and private. Aqueducts were constructed to transport water from high places, and lead pipes carried it to secondary cisterns, fountains, baths, and other public buildings.⁶ Romans collected their water from public fountains; in some places, water consumption per person reached fifty gallons a day. The water supply elements were formed as lakes or fountains, or sometimes both in one composition; they were adorned with columns and sculpture. Wealthy Romans also built fountains in the atriums and patios of their villas, executed in marble or granite and decorated with bronze nymphs. In Pompeii water was used as a decorative element in living spaces: bronze lion's heads

were installed in mosaic-decorated niches from which water flowed. In the palace of Augustus, water ran from a niche into a large rectangular basin surrounded by columns.⁷ Clearly the Romans appreciated clear running water, and used it to help decorate the monumental buildings they constructed to commemorate their heroes and honor their dead. They were probably the first to use it for symbolic purposes.⁸ Western cultures continued the practice of building fountains in central squares as a public service and as decoration for a public place.⁹

The word *sabīl*—derived from the verb *sabala*,¹⁰ “to let fall, drop, to let hang down, to close eyes or to shed tears”—means “a road, or a path.” In the Quran it is used both literally and metaphorically.¹¹ An example of its literal use can be found in surah 3:97, *wa-lillāhi ʿalā al-nāsi ḥijju al-bayti man istafāʿa ilayhi sabīlan* (“And pilgrimage to the house is a duty unto Allah for mankind, for him who can find a way thither”). An example of metaphorical use is *fi sabīlihi*, “on behalf of God and his religion,” that is, to fight against the infidels as a religious duty (*jihād*), to seek knowledge, and to perform charitable acts ordered by God.¹² Another is surah 25:27; *yā laytanī ittakhadhtu maʿa al-Rasūli sabīlan* (“Ah, would that I had chosen a way together with the Messenger [of Allah]”), where *sabīl* means “in the Prophet’s way, the true way.” Another is surah 4:15, *ʿaw yajʿala Allāhu lahunna sabīlan* (“Allah appoint for them a way”), where *sabīl* is used in the sense of “acquiring an object,” or “a way out of difficulty or trouble.” The expression *ibn al-sabīl*, meaning literally, “son of the road,” has the metaphorical meaning *al-musāfir alladhī unquṭiʿa bihi*,¹³ that is “tramp.” The use of *sabīl* to refer to a public drinking building or fountain is probably derived from its meaning referring to a work done on behalf of God.

Scholars have given all sorts of reasons for the use of water in an architectural setting. Grabar sees it as a visual composition for the embellishment of inner and outer spaces: “For instance water in the shape of streams, a pool or fountains in fancy gardens around or within buildings serves to identify it as a palatial setting rather than a sanctuary.”¹⁴ Jones regards it as an element for environmental treatment in secular buildings or for ritual washing in mosques: “Its use for decoration as well as coolness is best seen in house and palace architecture rather than in religious buildings, where the paramount function of water is for ritual purposes.”¹⁵ Eleanor Sims,¹⁶ in her study on markets and

caravanserais, notes that “an assured source of water was needed for drinking, bathing and ritual ablution.”

According to Ardalan and Bakhtiar, “Water, cold and wet, is symbolically the giver of life, who is merciful in sending down rain, the element that purifies and returns life to its primordial state. In Islam water also symbolizes the descent of revelation; in ablution through water, the Muslim is symbolically returning into his primordial state.”¹⁷ Ardalan’s interpretation marks an important step in defining the symbolic meaning of water, but his sole support for it is a reference to a study by Corbin.

For the Muslims the Quran and Sunna are the only sources of law. They define for them their way of life—behavior, manners, rules for business and for social relations. Verses in the Quran upon which this belief is based include surah 6:38, “We have neglected nothing in the Book [of our decrees],” and surah 18:54, “And verily, We have displayed for mankind in this Quran manner of similitudes.”¹⁸

Water was stressed in Islam not only because of its importance to the maintenance of life and the cultivation of land, but also because of the importance of ritual ablution and because of the numerous references to water in the Creation. Surah 21:30, “And We made every living thing of water, will they then believe?”; surah 24:45, “Allah hath created every animal of water”; and surah 25:54, “And He it is Who hath created man from water,” clearly state that the omnipotence of Allah is revealed in the creation of all creatures from water.¹⁹

Water also represents spiritual purity, as symbolized by ablution and the resurrection of mankind metaphorically expressed by references to fertility returned to fallow land. Examples are found in surah 25:48-49, “And We send down purifying water from the sky, that We may give life thereby to dead land, and We give many beasts and men that We have seated to drink thereof.”

Offering water to pilgrims on their way to Mecca was already a custom in pre-Islamic times in the Arabian peninsula, for Mecca was a place of sanctity long before Islam. Surah 9:19 says, “Count ye the slaking of pilgrim’s thirst and tendance of the inviolable places of worship as [equal to the worth of] him who believeth in Allah and the last day and striveth in the way of Allah? They are not equal in the sight of Allah. Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk.”²⁰ There are no verses directly exhorting the Islamic faithful to quench the pilgrim’s thirst, however, but the hadith does include exhorta-

tions to offer water to thirsty creatures, both human and animal, and the Quran requires Muslims to follow the hadith if they are to win God's approval and forgiveness (surah 4:80, "Whoso obeyeth the Messenger hath obeyed Allah"; surah 59:7, "And whatsoever the messenger giveth you take it. And whatsoever he forbiddeth abstain [from it]"). According to Abu Hurayra, the Messenger said,²¹ "Three [persons] Allah will not look to on the day of resurrection, [they will] be chastened and will have a severe punishment. [One is] a man who has water on the road, but denies it to the wayfarer." According to Abu Hurayra, the Messenger also said,²² "While a man was walking, he became thirsty; he therefore went to a well, where he drank. As he went out, he met a dog with lolling tongue who was eating the damp earth [for its moisture] from thirst. He said, 'The same thing has befallen this [dog] as happened to me.' He filled his shoe [with water], held it in his mouth, and went up and gave water to the dog. God thanked him and forgave him. They [the people] said, 'O Messenger, we have charity for [giving water to] animals.' He replied, 'In cooling every living thing there is charity.' " And in another passage,²³ "If one of God's slaves dies, his deeds cease, except for three: continuous charity, knowledge that is beneficial; and a righteous son praising God."

In the Quran, it is made clear that water is a blessing shed by God, who offers it to men and to animals to drink. Surah 15:22, "And We send the winds fertilizing, and cause water to descend from the sky, and give it to you to drink. It is not ye who are the holders of the store thereof." Surah 56:68-69, "Have ye observed the water which ye drink? Is it ye who shed it from the raincloud, or are We the shedder?" If the shedding of water is all the doing of God, what is the role of the man in the Islamic conception? Surah 2:30 says, "And then thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo! I am about to place a viceroy in the earth." By this, God did not mean literally a viceroy; he was referring to Adam and his descendants who were ordered to obey Allah, to judge fairly, and to obey his commandments according to the directives in the Quran.²⁴

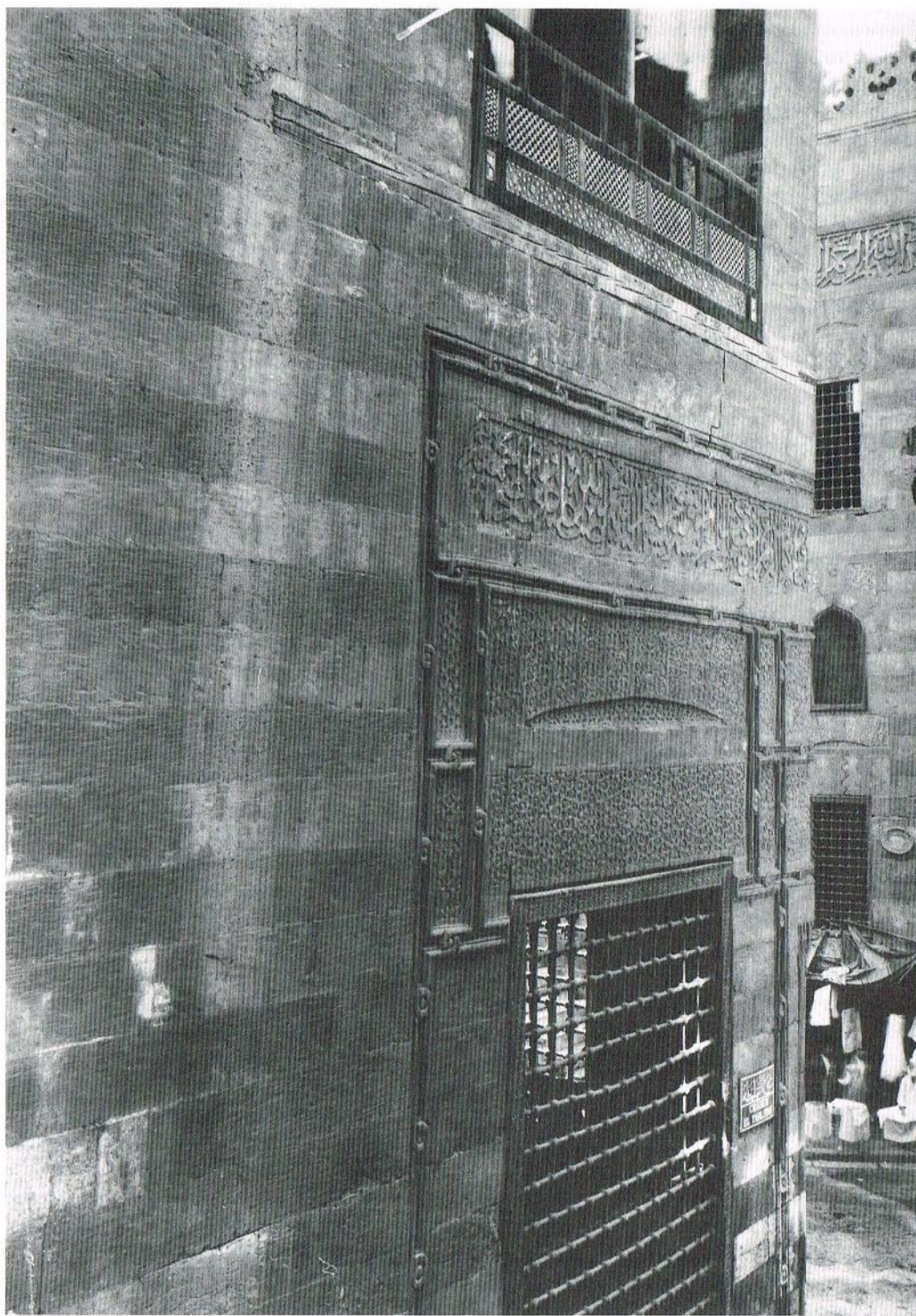
It is obvious from all this that a sabil is not merely a piece of commemorative architecture.²⁵ Providing a public place that supplies water to both men and animals implements one of God's commandments and follows the dictates of the hadith regarding charity on behalf of God. Why these structures became such sophisticated and elaborate buildings, particularly

under the Mamluks and the Ottomans, however, is another question, since the most modest basin or fountain would have fulfilled the required charitable function. Probably they sought to build, not just a source of water, but a holy building suitable for divine revelation, since water was regarded as a divine and not a mundane gift. It is shed by God, and it is God who gives it to the thirsty. Water symbolizes Creation. The sabil is therefore one of God's houses. Waqfiyyas tell us that in the Mamluk period, some sabils even employed Quran reciters.²⁶ In the Ottoman period, a sabil was furnished with a mihrab and had *mīda'a*; one of the sabil's employees acted as imam, and the sabil was used as a musalla for the five ritual prayers.²⁷ The sabil of Sultan Mahmud in Cairo (Index 308, 1163/1750) was originally also used as a Quran school, and the sabil of Mustafa Sinan (Index 246, 1040/1630), also in Cairo, was attached to a musalla.

Sabils in Cairo bear pious inscriptions²⁸ that testify to their function in both religious and secular buildings.²⁹ The one on the Sabil al-Amir Shaykhu (Index 144, dated Dhu al-Qa'da 755/Nov.-Dec. 1354) reads: [Basmala] *qāla Rasūl Allāh ṣallā Allāh 'alayhi wa-sallam: fī kull dhāt kabd ḥarrā ajr.*³⁰ *wa-su'ila ṣallā Allāh 'alayhi wa-sallam: ayy al-a'māl aḥḍal; qāla saqy al-mā';* ([basmala] "The Messenger of God, God bless him and grant him salutation, said: In every thirsty living thing, there is charity. And he was asked, What works are better than ever? He said, Giving water for drinking").

Inside the mosque of Faraj ibn Barquq by the Bab Zuwayla (Index 203, dated 1 Dhu al-Qa'da 811/18 March 1409), is a sabil (see appendix) on which is inscribed surah 76:21, which ends, "...their Lord will slake their thirst." The sabil in the sabil-kuttab and wakala of Qaitbay at al-Azhar (Index 75-76, Sha'ban 881/Nov.-Dec. 1476) uses the same passage in slightly fuller form, "Their Lord will slake their thirst with a pure drink." The sabil in the mausoleum of Qaitbay in the cemetery (Index 99, 877-79/1472-74) uses 76:5-7: [Basmala] "Lo! the righteous shall drink of a cup whereof the mixture is *kāfir*. A spring wherefrom the slaves of Allah drink, making it gush forth abundantly, [because] they perform the vow and fear a day whereof the evil is wide-spreading." The Sabil Yusuf al-Kurdi (Index 230, 10th/16th century) has 76:5-28; the Sabil Yusuf Bey (Index 219; 1044/1634) uses 76:5-9. Many of these same verses are also to be found on the walls and wood lattices where drinking water is provided in religious buildings (*muzammala*; *mazyara*).³¹

The Quran provided the Muslim architect with



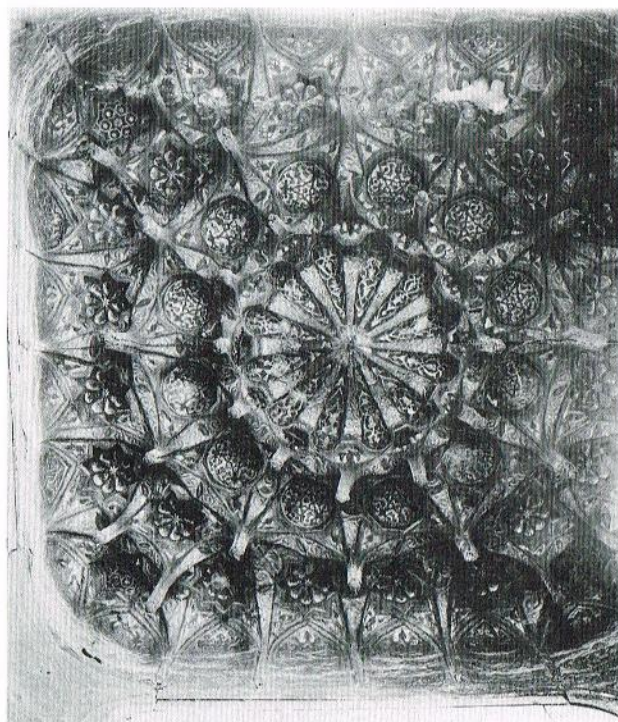
1. Cairo, Mausoleum of Sultan al-Ghuri, Sabil window, 1504.

inspiration through its descriptions of Paradise with its springs, fruits, and trees, and led him to try to attain a kind of perfection which is both symbolic and aesthetic.³² Samhudi³³ quotes Ibn Zabala who reports that the workers who were setting the glass mosaic decorations (*fusayfisā*) on the walls of the Prophet's tomb in Medina, told him: "We have done these according to our notion of what the paradise and its palaces look like."

Excavations in Raqqa of buildings from the ninth century have uncovered a pavement that looks as if its surface were water.³⁴ This can be traced back to the description of the pavement in the palace of Solomon in the Quran (27:44): "It was said unto her: Enter the hall, and when she saw it she deemed it a pool and bared her legs. [Solomon] said: Lo! it is a hall made smooth of glass."

The Muslim architect tried to attain perfection by introducing the *sabil* as a metaphor for a spring in Paradise: "There are they watered with a cup whereof the mixture is of Zanjabil, [the water of] a spring therein, named Salsabil" (76:17-18). In many of them, the *salsabil* with its marble *shādhurwān*³⁵ is the focal element of a sophisticated composition. The inclined marble slab, or *shadhurwan*, resting in a niche and surmounted by a gilded and colorfully painted muqarnas hood, is decorated with chevrons in the middle and surrounded by figures of animals drinking and by fish. The smooth flow of water over the chevron pattern with the surrounding animal figures achieves an interplay between the sound of trickling water, the sculptured surface, and the sun's rays falling on the polychromed gilded surface. The water is collected in a marble basin decorated with colored marble mosaics, where it remains cool and palatable.

In the Quran, drinking water is often described as "gushing" (*maʿīn*, literally "visible running water").³⁶ Examples are surahs 23:50, "We gave them refuge on a height, a place of flocks and water springs"; 37:45-46, "A cup from a gushing spring is brought round for them, delicious to the drinkers"; 56:18, "With bowls and ewers and a cup from a pure spring"; 67:30, "Say: Have ye thought: If [all] your water were to disappear into the earth, who then could bring you gushing water." For this reason *sabils* were often designed to achieve a great outpouring of water; for the purpose some of them used bronze gilded figures mounted on the *shadhurwan*. *Sabils* also show a sophisticated use of varied materials and colors: pavements of colored marble mosaics in geometric patterns, wood ceilings that



2. Cairo. Zawiya and sabil of Faraj ibn Barquq. Ceiling in sabil.

are carved, decorated, painted, and gilded—sometimes in the form of hanging stalactites—and walls inlaid with colored marble with a frieze of carved wooden inscriptions. Both the composition of the *salsabil* and the furnishing of its interior are inspired by Quranic verses. Water running over the *salsabil* symbolizes the rain which Allah sends down from the heavens (which in turn is a symbol for the descent of divine revelation) in a form that revives the dead land (which symbolizes the resurrection). In 35:9 and 26-27: "And Allah it is Who sendeth the winds and they raise a cloud, then We lead it unto a dead land and revive therewith the earth after its death. Such is the Resurrection.... Hast thou not seen that Allah causeth water to fall from the sky, and we produce therewith fruits of diverse hues and among the hills are streaks of white and red of diverse hues and [others] raven black; and of men and beasts and cattle in like manner diverse hues?"

The prototype for the *sabil ḥanūt* is a rectangular or square space (*riwāq*) with a carved, finely decorated and painted wooden ceiling.³⁷ Walls are built of finely cut, well-dressed limestone in alternating white and red

courses (*ablaq*). Marble mosaics, inlaid marble panels carved on incised stone and stucco work, and inscriptions constitute the interior decoration. The façade has large windows with bronze grilles through which people can reach in for water as they pass by. Lintels and sills are formed or encrusted with black or red-and-white marble in alternating geometric and arabesque patterns. Corners are softened by decorative chiseled columns. The exterior architecture is simple and pure; the inner space is always cheerful and colorful. In religious buildings, the sabil is always built into the corner of the building where the streets intersect adjacent to the main entrance. In the Mamluk period, they are rarely found as independent buildings, and never in private or rental housing; but the Ottomans frequently built separate ones.³⁸ They are also found in secular buildings, for example, the sabil (Index 76, 881/1476) next to Qaitbay's wakala at al-Azhar. Until recently, no sabils were known in domestic architecture in the Mamluk period.³⁹ Sabils are almost always found in association with Quran schools (*kuttāb*; *maktab al-sabīl*) on the upper floor. These schools were founded to teach orphans to write and to read the Quran; one of them is mentioned in the endowment for the sabil-kuttub of Sultan Faraj ibn Barquq.⁴⁰

The oldest known foundation inscription on a sabil is in Damascus. It is dated 470 (1077-78) and reads:⁴¹ *anṣha'a hādha al-sabīl al-mubārak al-'abd al-faqīr ilā Allāh al-Ḥajj Muḥammad al-Jabbūr 'afā Allāh 'anhu sanat sab'īn wa-arba'īn* ("God's poor slave al-Hajj Muhammad al-Jabbur, may Allah forgive him, built this blessed sabil in the year 470 [1077])." The oldest surviving example in Cairo is on the Sabil al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qala'un (built by Aqqush and Arghun), dated 740 (1340).⁴² The oldest connected to a *kuttāb* is that of Asanbugha (Index 185, 772/1370). Some references give as an earlier example a sabil that is no longer extant, which once stood beside the mosque of Aqsunqur (Index 123, 747-48/1346-47).⁴³ Al-Nuwayri says that Qala'un built a sabil with a *kuttāb* above,⁴⁴ but since he is the only historian to mention it, this is doubtful. In some sabils, the upper floor was built as an apartment for the *muzammalātī* or as a *qā'a* for the owner.⁴⁵ Sabils have cisterns built underneath of fired brick and a waterproof mortar which is also used for plastering.

Sabil architecture was inspired by descriptions of Paradise in the Quran. The Muslim architect tried to attain a kind of perfection in using water for symbolic

religious purposes. Offering water is an act of God's charity, and decorations in the *salsabīl-shādhurwān* composition emphasize that theme. The gushing water, polychrome effects, and other decoration are meant to represent perfection in form and feature. Water serves in them as a distinct religious symbol, and not merely a public function.

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APPENDIX: DESCRIPTION OF THE SABIL IN THE ENDOWMENT DEED OF SULTAN FARAJ IBN BARQUQ

The passages reproduced here concern the description in the endowment deed for the zawiya and sabil of Faraj ibn Barquq (Index 203, 1408), of the sabil (lines 108-20), its regulations (lines 432-39), and its mode of operation (lines 603-19). The deed was first kept in the Court of Vital Statistics in Shubra, Cairo, and registered under no. 66 *mahkama*. Today it is kept in the National Endowments Building by the Citadel of Cairo.⁴⁶

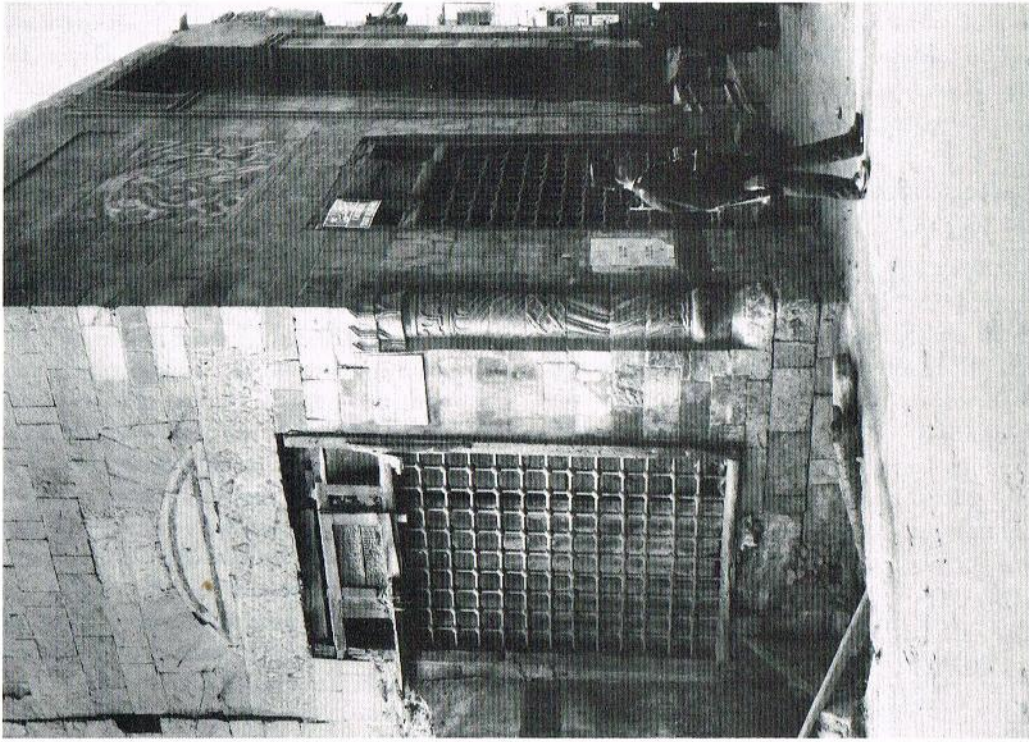
ملحق:

نلحق بهذه الدراسة وصفا لاحد الاسبله المملوكية: (سبيل فرج بن برقوق بمسجده امام باب زويلة (اثر ٢٠٣) - والذي تم افتتاحه في مستهل ذي القعدة ٨١١هـ/ ١٨ مارس ١٤٠٩م) طبقا للنص على المبنى ونظام العمل به وذلك من واقع وثيقة السلطان فرج.

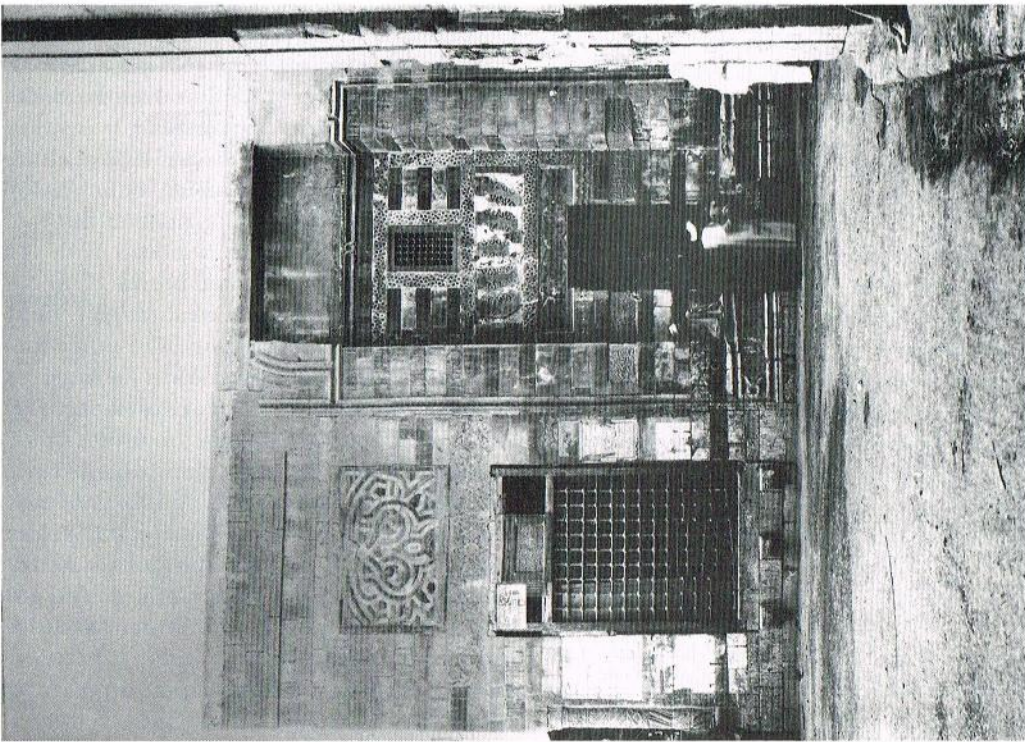
مقتطفات من وثيقة السلطان فرج بن برقوق

وصف السبيل:

[١٠٨] والباب الموعود بذكره أولا وهو الذى بالدلهيز الاول على اليسره [١٠٩] مربع عليه باب من الخشب المدهون الملون المغلف بالنحاس المذهب والكتايب المذهبه بعتبة سفلى مرخمه وعليا حجرا من حجر الماء [١١٠] يدخل من الباب المذكور الى حانوت السبيل، وهو رواق مربع مفروش الارض باصناف الرخام الملون النفيس المثمن، بوزره دائره بها [١١١] الواح كبار من نفيس الرخام من السماق والزرزورى والمرسينى والشحم واللحم وغير ذلك. وبه على التيمه شاذروان مذهب بسلسيل [١١٢] مذهب، يعلوه قوصرة معقودة بدق الرخام الملون والقصوص الملونه والتحاسين المد هشه والعروق الخطاى، وبه عده من السباع [١١٣] المعموله من النحاس المموه بالذهب المعموله برسم نزول الماء الى الشاذروان. سفلى الشاذروان المذكور صحن من المرمر الابيض برسم الماء. يعلوا ذلك [١١٤] كله انواع النقوش المنشرحه



4. Cairo. Zawiyah and Sabil of Faraj ibn Barquq, Sabil window.



3. Cairo. Zawiyah and sabil of Faraj ibn Barquq, 1409.

برؤيتها النفوس. وبجانب الحانوت المذكور شباك كبيران بسنايل غلاظ من النحاس المذهب، أحدهما مطل [١١٥] على الطريق من الجهة القبلية، والثاني مطل على الطريق مقابلة لباب زويله فيه خلع باب صغير وفي هذه الجهة يسيل الماء [١١٦] ويجلس السقاء. وإمام كل شباك منها الحجر المحمول على الكباش الحجر البارزة المعدة لوضع الأواني. ويغلق على كل من الشباكين [١١٧] المذكورين زوجا باب خشب مدهون بالدهان والتذهيب. وهو مستقف بالسقف المذهب المقرنص بسيالات مذهبة. وفي [١١٨] هذا الحانوت من حسن الصنعة والتذهيب والرخام والتصويق ما تسر النفوس برؤيته وتذهب [١١٩] بالظما بهجته. قد زاد بالحسن والاحسان، واستقر به البر طول الزمان ويسفل ذلك وماجاوره [١٢٠] بناء الصهرج المبنى في تخوم الأرض بالطوب الأحمر والمونة المحكمة المعد لاستقرار الماء به، وهو [١٢١] المذكور اعلاه

الوظائف ونظام العمل بالسبيل:

[٤٣١] وأما الصهرج المذكور بأعاليه [٤٣٢] فإنه الصهرج باني زويله وقفه لاستقرار الماء الحلو المحمول اليه من بحر النيل المبارك ليسيل على المسلمين أسوة أمثاله من [٤٣٣] الصهاريج. والحانوت المذكور اعلاه الموصوف أيضا بأعاليه فإنه أوقفه لوضع الأواني المعذة لتسييل [٤٣٤] الماء واستقرار ما به من الأنيار والكيزان وغير ذلك، وإن يسيل الماء طول النهار، وطرفي الليل [٤٣٥] في شهر رمضان، ولجلوس السقا المقام لذلك أسوة أمثاله من حوانيت السبيل، وي زيد غسلها [٤٣٦] في السبيل المذكور طول النهار، وأما بقية الأراضي والأماكن المذكورة اعلاه، فمنها [٤٣٧] مكتب السبيل الموصوف اعلاه فإنه وقفه على أن يجلس به مؤدب الأيتام الاتي ذكره فيه والأيتام [٤٣٨] الاتي ذكرهم حالة الاشتغال بكتاب الله وتعليم الخط وجعله أسوة أمثاله من مكاتب السبيل على [٤٣٩] العادة

[٦٠٣] ويرتب الناظر رجلا خيرا حسن الخلق ذا قوة وأمانة وجودة يقيمه السقا بالسبيل بحانوت السبيل العالي على [٦٠٤] فوهة الصهرج الكائن بخط باني زويله الشارع على الطريق العظمى المذكور اعلاه على أن يتولى [٦٠٥] السقاء المذكور نشل الماء من الصهرج ووضعه في الأواني لسقية الناس وغسل الأواني المذكورة [٦٠٦] وتنظيفها وصونها من الدبيب والهوام وخشاش الأرض بالتغطية وتنظيف المكان المذكور وكنسه [٦٠٧] ومسحه وإزالة أوساخه وعلى الآنية والكيزان ووضعها بمواضعها المعمولة لها وأرضادها للشاربين [٦٠٨] وإعادة ملي ما يتفرغ منها وتسهيل الشرب على الناس ويعاملهم بالرفق وحسن الخلق ليكون البالغ في [٦٠٩] ادخال الراحة على الواردين، ويجلس لذلك من وقت الضحى إلى الغروب في كل يوم، وفي رمضان [٦١٠] من قبل الفطر إلى عشاء الآخره، ومن قبل الفجر إلى الفجر بحيث تكون صدقة دائمة وحسنة مستمرة [٦١١] طول النهار. وجعل الله صدقات واقفها على الأبد جارية وملكه على الدوام ولا جعل الدنيا عنه خاليه [٦١٢] ويصرف الناظر للسقاء المذكور ما يرى صرفه مما يكفيه. ويصرف الناظر في كل سنة في أيام النيل ما [٦١٣] يحتاج إلى صرفه في ملي الصهرج المذكور من ماء النيل المبارك وفي ثمن جملين ظهيين وعدة من روايا [٦١٤] وقرب وعدد برسم حمل الماء إلى الصهرج المذكور من بحر النيل المذكور بطول السنة على الدوام، وفي [٦١٥] كلفة الجمال المذكورة وأجرة عمال ما يرى صرفه من مال الوقف المذكور بحيث يكون العمل مستمرا ونقل الماء من [٦١٦] البحر إلى الصهرج دائما لا ينقطع، ومهما فني من ذلك اشترى الناظر عوضه ليستمر الحال على ذلك. كذلك

[٦١٧] ويصرف الناظر أيضا من مال الوقف المذكور ما يرى صرفه في ثمن فرش الجامع والمسجد ومكتب السبيل [٦١٨] وزيت للوقود وقناديل وسلاسل وعبي المسح وسفنج وأواني السبيل ونسب كل مكان بما يليق به على عادة أمثاله [٦١٩] وما يقتضيه العرف في ذلك وعادة الزمان وثمن شمع في رمضان وزيادة زيت الوقود على العادة في الشهر المذكور

Description of the Sabil

[108] ... and the door we promised to mention first—the one on the left-hand side of the first corridor (*dihlīz*), [109] with a quadrangular frame (*murabba^c alayhi*)—is a wooden door that is painted in colors and covered with gold-plated bronze (*nuḥās mudhahhab*) and gilded inscriptions. It has a marble threshold and a stone lintel made from water stone (*ḥajar al-mā³*). [110] Through said door one enters the *sabil* room (*hānūt sabil*). This is a square room (*riwāq murabba^c*), paved with different types of precious colored marble and having a skirting all around it. The skirting consists of [111] great plates of precious marble, like prophry (*al-summāqī*), gray-black marble (*al-zarzūri*), myrtle-green marble (*al-marsīni*), white and red marble (*al-shaḥm wa-l-laḥm*), and the like. Inside the *sabil* room on the right is a gilded *shādhurwān* with a gilded *salsabil*. [112] Above the *shādhurwān* there is an arched niche covered by colored marble mosaics, colored segmented marble, amazing decorations, and silk profiles (*urūq khīṭā³i*). There are some lions [113] made of gold-plated bronze that are used for having the water flow over the *shādhurwān*; and at the bottom of said *shādhurwān* is a white alabaster basin for [collecting] the water. Above all of this [114] are various decorations (*nuqūsh*) in the viewing of which souls take delight. On the sides of the room already mentioned are two large windows with thick lattices (*sanābil ghilāz*) of gold-plated bronze. One of these windows overlooks [115] the road (*ṭariq*) coming from the southeast (*al-jīha al-qibliyya*). The other overlooks the road in front of Bab Zuwayla. In the latter a small door is removed, and here water is distributed [116] and the cupbearer (*al-saqqa³*) sits. In front of each of these two windows is the stone plate that is borne by the projecting corbels, intended for the placing of vessels. Both of the aforementioned windows are [117] closed over by a pair of wooden shutters that are painted and gilded, and they are roofed over by a gilded ceiling ridged with gilded stalactites. In [118] this room there is in the way of fine handicraft, gilding, marble, and decorative work that which souls find pleasant to look at; and its

splendor extinguishes [119] thirst. It has increased in beauty and beneficence, and righteousness has settled there for all of time. Beneath this [*sabīl*] and that which is adjacent to it [120] is the cistern (*al-ṣahrīj*), built deep into the earth with baked bricks and waterproof mortar (*mūna muḥkama*). [The cistern] is for storing water and has been referred to above.

Functions

[431] ... As for the aforementioned cistern, it was endowed for the purpose of collecting the potable water carried to it from the blessed Nile so that the water could be distributed to Muslims—as is done by similar [433] cisterns. The *sabīl* room mentioned and described above was endowed for having deposited therein the vessels prepared for the distribution [434] of water and for storing whatever is in it in the way of clay jars, mugs, and the like. It was also endowed in order to have water distributed all day long—and all night long [435] during the month of Ramadan—and for the seating of the cupbearer employed for that [task]. [This is] following the model of similar *sabīls*. The cupbearer is supposed to wash the vessels [436] in the above mentioned *sabīl* all day long. As for the rest of the grounds and places mentioned above, among them [437] is the elementary school (*maktab al-sabīl*), described above. It was endowed as a place in which is to sit the teacher of orphans—mentioned later on—as well as the orphans [themselves], [438] also mentioned later on. The concerns of the elementary school are the study of the Quran (*kitāb Allāh*) and the teaching of handwriting. It is fashioned in the manner that similar *sabīl* schools are, [439] generally speaking.

Mode of Operation

[603] The [*waqf*] administrator (*al-nāzir*) arranges for a beneficent man of noble character, who is strong, honest, and charitable, to stay in the *sabīl* room, which is situated over [604] the opening of the cistern (*fūhat al-ṣahrīj*) in the district (*khatt*) of Bab Zuwayla, overlooking the great road mentioned above. It is incumbent upon [605] the aforementioned cupbearer to raise water from the cistern and put it into vessels to give drink to the people; to wash said vessels, [606] clean them, and protect them from creeping reptiles (*al-dabīb*), vermin (*al-hawām*), and insects (*khishāsh al-arḍ*) by covering them; to clean the space mentioned, sweep it, [607] wipe it, and [keep it] clear from dirt; to fill

vessels and mugs (*kizān*), put them in the places made for them, provide them to drinkers, [608] and refill the empties from among them; and to facilitate drinking for the people, treating them with kindness and a pleasant manner and going as far as possible [609] in making arriving persons feel at ease. For this [purpose] the cupbearer sits from forenoon to sunset every day, and during Ramadan [610] from before the breaking of the fast to the last evening meal and from before dawn up until dawn, so that there be lasting charity and continual benefaction [611] all day long. May God make the charitable gifts of the donor of the waqf flow forever, and his monarchy last forever. God forbid that this world forsake him. [612] The administrator [of the waqf] pays to the aforementioned cupbearer whatever is considered necessary to satisfy him. The administrator also pays every year during the days of the flooding of the Nile whatever [613] has to be spent to fill the above-mentioned cistern from the water of the blessed Nile, [and pays] the cost of two Bactrian camels and a number [614] of waterskins (*rawāyā wa-qirab*) and utensils (*ʿudad*) for transporting water to the aforementioned cistern from the aforementioned blessed Nile—for the entire year without interruption; and [pays] for [615] the expenses of the aforementioned camels and the charges for workers whatever he deems should be spent from the money of the aforementioned waqf. [All this is] so that work goes on continually and the transport of water from [616] the Nile (*al-baḥr*) to the cistern is perennial without interruption. And for whatever from among these [goods and services] comes to an end the [waqf] administrator buys a replacement so that the state of affairs remains unchanged. Likewise, [617] the administrator [of the waqf] spends from the money of the aforementioned waqf whatever he deems appropriate to be spent for the cost of the furnishings of the Friday mosque (*al-jāmiʿ*), the [ordinary] mosque (*al-masjid*), and the elementary school; [618] lighting oil, lamps (*qanādīl*), chains, and wiping rags (*ʿubī al-mashī*); sponges and vessels for the *sabīl*; the carpeting of every space with whatever is suitable for it, as is usual in similar places [619] and which both common custom and the practice of time require; and the cost of candles in Ramadan and the increase of lighting oil in said month, as is usual.

NOTES

1. W. Helk and E. Otto, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden, 1972), pp. 872-73.
2. Information provided by Klaus P. Kuhlmann of the German

Filling the
cistern

The cupbearer
in the *sabīl*

- Archaeological Institute in Cairo and Horst Jaritz of the Swiss Archaeological Institute in Cairo.
3. Edith Porada, *Alt-Iran*, 2d ed. (1979), pp. 42-44; Faraj Başmagī, *Kunūz al-Mathaf al-ʿIrāqī* (Baghdad: Department of Antiquities, 1972), p. 18.
 4. Bannister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture* (London, 1950), p. 51, fig. C 58.
 5. W. Müller and C. Vogel: *Atlas zur Baukunst I* (Munich, 1974), p. 179.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
 7. Siegfried Giedion, *Architektur und das Phänomen des Wandels* (Tübingen, 1969), p. 206, fig. 141, 148, 150.
 8. Fletcher, *History*, 198-99.
 9. *Ibid.*, pp. 568, 658, 655.
 10. Al-Firuzabādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 3 (Bulaq ed., 1301/1883), pp. 380-81.
 11. "Sabil," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st ed.; E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 1 (London, 1877), pp. 1301-2; R. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, vol. 1 (Beirut, 1981), pp. 629-30.
 12. Al-Firuzabādī, *al-Qāmūs*, 1:3, 380-81; B. al-Bustānī, *Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ*, vol. 1 (Beirut, 1867), pp. 919-20.
 13. Saʿid al-Shartūnī, *Aghrab al-Mawārid fī Fiṣḥ al-Lughā wal Shawārid* (Beirut, 1889), p. 705.
 14. Oleg Grabar, "Palaces, Citadels and Fortifications," in *Architecture of the Islamic World: Its History and Social Meaning*, ed. George Michell (London, 1984), p. 79.
 15. Dalu Jones, "Surface, Pattern and Light," *ibid.*, pp. 173-74.
 16. Eleanor Sims, "Markets and Caravanserais," *ibid.*, p. 79.
 17. Nader Ardalan and Leila Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 58-60, n. 12.
 18. All Quran translations are taken from Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Glorious Koran* (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1976).
 19. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, ed. A. Ghunaim, M. ʿAsūr, and M. al-Bannā, (Cairo: Dār al-Shaʿb, 1971), 6:79.
 20. *Ibid.*, 4:69.
 21. A. J. Wensinsk and J. P. M. Mensing, *al-Muʿjam al-Mufahras li-ʾAlfāz al-Hadīth al-Nabawī al-Sharīf (Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane)*, vol. 2 (Leiden, 1943), p. 405.
 22. *Ibid.*, 2:270.
 23. *Ibid.*, vol. 3 (Leiden, 1955), p. 291.
 24. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1 (Cairo, 1971), pp. 100-3.
 25. Sophie Ebeid, "Early Sabils and Their Standardization," Master's thesis, American University in Cairo, 1976, p. 9.
 26. Ḥusnī Nuwayṣar, "Majmūʿat Subul Qāitbāy," Master's thesis, Cairo University, 1970, pp. 18, 107.
 27. Maḥmūd al-Ḥusaynī, "al-Asbila fī al-ʿAṣr al-ʿUthmānī," Master's thesis, Cairo University, 1982, p. 51.
 28. For inscriptions, see Max Van Berchem, *Matériaux pour une Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum*, pt. 1, *Egypte*, vol. 1, *Le Caire* (Cairo, 1894-1903); Étienne Combe, Jean Sauvaget, and Gaston Wiet, *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, IFAO, 7 vols. (Cairo, 1931-82).
 29. Oleg Grabar, *The Alhambra* (London, 1978), p. 100.
 30. Wensinsk and Mensing, *al-Muʿjam*, 2:485.
 31. Muṣṭafa Najīb, *al-Muzammala ka-Mawrid li-Miyāh al-Shurb bi-Munshaʾat al-Qāhira fī al-ʿAṣr al-Mamlūkī; Majallat Kulliyyat al-Athār*, vol. 2 (Cairo, 1978), pp. 151-56.
 32. Muḥammad Quṭb, *Manhaj al-Fann al-Islāmī* (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1981), pp. 90, 118, 146.
 33. S. Mustafa Lamei, *al-Madīna al-Munawwara; Taṭawwuruha al-ʿUmṙānī wa-Turāthuhā al-Hadīrī* (Beirut, 1981), p. 70.
 34. Grabar, *Alhambra*, p. 129.
 35. For *shādhuriwān*, Dozy, *Supplément*, 1:715; F. Steingass, *Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, 3d ed. (Beirut, 1975), p. 722; Ebeid, "Early Sabils," pp. 84-92; Muhammad al-Tawanjī, *al-Muʿjam al-Dhahabī* (Beirut, 1980), p. 361.
 36. Al-Firuzabādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* (Bulaq ed., 1302/1884), 4:267; al-Qāḍī Nāṣir al-Dīn Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr Anuwār al-Tanzīl wa-Asrār al-Taʾwīl*, vol. 5 (Istanbul 1303/1885), pp. 131, 324-25.
 37. There are a few examples with a stone roof: Sabil Khayer Bey (Index, 248; 908/1502), with shallow circular domes and sabil attached to Tarabay al-Sharifi's mausoleum (Index 255, 909/1503) with fan vault (Maḥmūd al-Ḥusaynī, *al-Asbila*, p. 8).
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
 39. Ḥusnī Nuwayṣar, *Majmūʿat Subul*, p. 8.
 40. The endowment deed of Faraj is now in the Dār al-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyya by the Citadel; earlier it was in the archives of the court for vital statistics in Shubra. It was partially published by me (in *Kloster und Mausoleum des Farag ibn Barqūq in Kairo* [Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Kairo, Islamische Reihe 2 (Gluckstadt, 1968)]); *idem.*, *Moschee des Farag ibn Barqūq*, *ibid.*, 3 (Gluckstadt, 1972), pp. 49 ff. For the Mamluk endowment deeds, see Muḥammad Amīn, *Fihrist Wathāʾiq al-Qāhira Ḥattā Nihāyat ʿAṣr Salāṭin al-Mamālīk*, MIFAQ (Cairo, 1981).
 41. Combe, Sauvaget, and Wiet, *Répertoire*, vol. 7, no. 2721/203-4.
 42. Ebeid, "Early Sabils," pp. 11-25.
 43. Max Herz, *Dalīl Dār al-Athār al-ʿArabiyya* (Cairo, 1328/1910), p. 41.
 44. Ḥusnī Nuwayṣar, *Majmūʿat Subul*, p. 6.
 45. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
 46. Other details regarding the document are provided in n. 40 above. The English translation was supplied by Dr. R. Kevin Lacey.