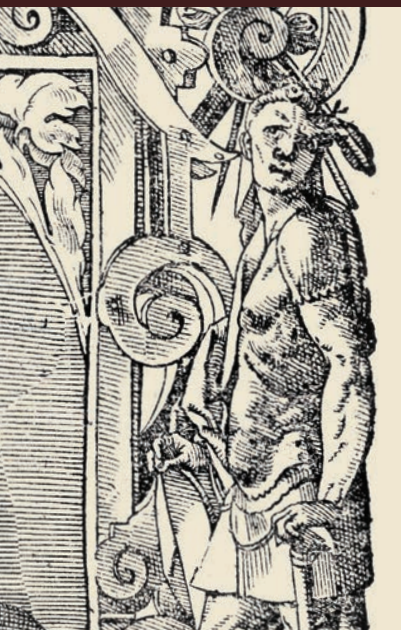


# ALIVE



HERITAGE  
for the LIVING  
in CAIRO'S 'CITY OF THE DEAD'



Since 2014, Cairo-based consulting office ARCHiNOS Architecture, in cooperation with the Historic Cairo Project of the Ministry of Antiquities, has been working in the area known as the 'Desert of the Mamluks' within the 'City of the Dead' in Cairo. The work focuses on the area developed in the 1470s by Sultan al-Ashraf Qaitbey and has been financed primarily by the European Union Delegation to Egypt, with contributions from other donors. The project comprises conservation of historic monuments, promotion of art and culture, and a social development component. The ultimate objective is the re-integration of the area's cultural heritage into the life of the neighbourhood community.

**#EuropeForCulture**



OUR HERITAGE:  
WHERE THE PAST  
MEETS THE FUTURE



Produced by ARCHiNOS Architecture  
May 2018

Magnus Caythbeius Mem-  
PHITICVS SVLTHANVS.

# MORE THAN STONES

HERITAGE  
for the LIVING  
in CAIRO'S 'CITY OF THE DEAD'

designed by Agnieszka Dobrowolska

text: Agnieszka Dobrowolska and Jaroslaw Dobrowolski

special thanks to David Murphy



Mamluk domes  
of the City of the Dead,  
"Desert of Mamluks",  
north of Sultan Qaitbay Mosque.  
photo: Agnieszka Dobrowolska





View on the Citadel of Cairo over the  
'City of the Dead' south of the complex  
of Sultan Qaitbay.

photo: Jaroslaw Dobrowolski

## LIVING with the PAST in the 'CITY OF THE DEAD'

The vast Muslim cemeteries of Cairo – sometimes called the 'City of the Dead' – are a unique urban environment and include valuable architectural monuments and living communities that have preserved traditional ways of life. Unlike in Western cemeteries, its mausolea were multifunctional religious complexes that permanently employed large numbers of people, so the 'City of the Dead' has also always been a city of the living. Today, in addition to including some of the most important and best preserved architectural monuments in Cairo that bear testimony to a thousand years of history, the cemeteries are home to numerous living communities, and among them, many craftspeople practicing traditional trades that are becoming increasingly rare.



The fence protecting the six-hundred years old mosque of Sultan Ibn Barquq makes for a perfect playground for the children of the neighbourhood.

photo: Jaroslaw Dobrowolski

## A LIVING CEMETERY

The enormous burial grounds, stretching for more than eight kilometres between the historic city and the desert plateau, have now been now swallowed by the ever-growing metropolis of Cairo. Still, the 'City of the Dead' retains a distinctive character. Here, the pace of life is different from the frenzied commotion of the city so nearby. The wind-swept, quiet streets and vast empty spaces still sometimes have an almost desert-like air. Yet life finds its way in. People live in funerary enclosures turned into residential courtyards, in former guards' rooms, in historic buildings, and in new houses. Contrary to common misconceptions, the cemetery inhabitants are not a bunch of outcasts squatting among the graves, but a population of another neighbourhood in the rich mosaic of Cairo. Everybody knows everyone else in the close-knit communities. Groceries are sold at the marketplace, craftsmen work in their workshops, people do their everyday chores, children play, crowds gather to celebrate annual *mulid* festivals. Cairo's 'City of the Dead' is definitely *un-dead*.





View of the North Cemetery with  
tombs of Amir Qurqumas, Sultan  
Inal and Sultan Qansuh Abu Said.  
Lithograph by David Roberts.

In this picture of 1838, the dome to the right, once part of  
a huge complex, is shown isolated like today. Many more  
structures disappeared: in the 16th century, the caravan  
would walk down a street between tall stone buildings.

## the DESERT of the MAMLUKS

*Al-saharat al-mamalik* (the Desert of the Mamluks) is a fitting name, because this eastern section of the cemetery was first developed during the Bahri Mamluk period in the early 14th century as the burial ground for sultans and dignitaries. Their tombs were parts of huge religious complexes that comprised mosques endowed as religious schools, various charities, and Sufi convents amongst other buildings.

After the end of the Mamluk sultanate in 1517 the area was no longer the royal necropolis, but it continued as a cemetery for prominent families. The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw a revival of the Eastern Cemetery when members of the Egyptian royal family and other important people were buried here.

Typically, walled enclosures containing family tombs also included rooms for visiting descendants. The custom of visiting the graves continues today, while many of the enclosures have been turned into residences. Increasingly, multi-storey residential buildings are now erected in the area.





Interior of the Mosque/Madrsa of  
Sultan al-Ashraf Qaitbay, 1472-74  
photo: Jaroslaw Dobrowolski

The sumptuously decorated wooden ceiling over the central  
covered courtyard is an early 20th century reconstruction  
by the *Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe*.



Complex of Sultan  
al-Ashraf Qaitbay  
by David Roberts, 1838

By the time of the Scottish artist's visit, the service buildings of the Sultan Qaitbey's complex (to the right) had been much altered; by now, they have been removed altogether. The top story of the minaret, once an open canopy on marble columns, is shown walled-up. It has since been restored to its original shape.

*The present sultan, whose name is Qait Bey, had a large, very spacious mosque built with an elegantly decorated, very high tower. He had large houses built all around it, with great number of rooms...*

Bernhard von Breydenbach, a pilgrim from Mainz, in 1484

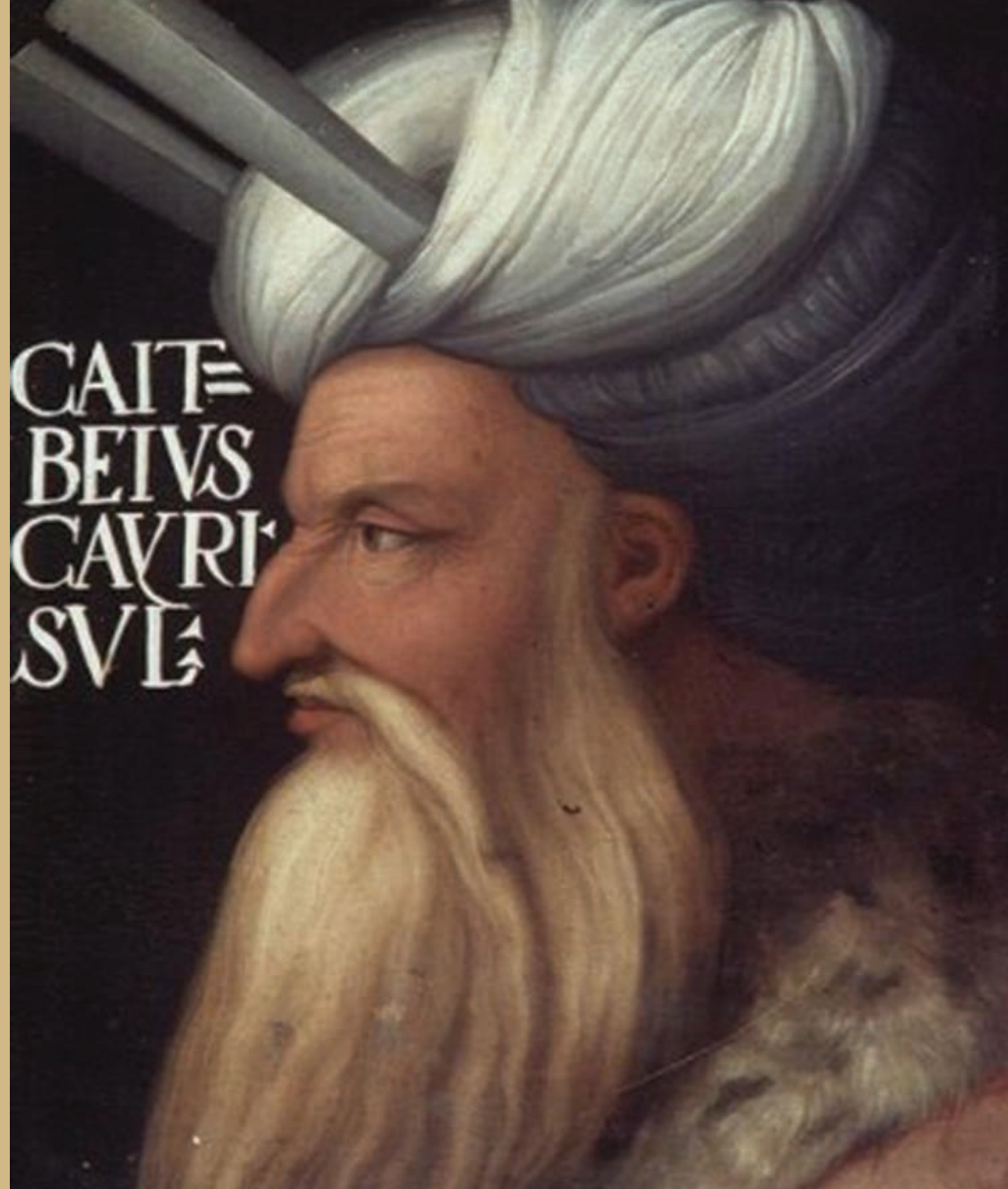
## the ROYAL SUBURB

Among the many architectural treasures in the 'Desert of the Mamluks', the funerary complex of Sultan Qaitbey is the most splendid. Like his predecessors, Qaitbey built not just a tomb, but a huge religious complex, and created a complete "royal suburb" in the desert. Its centrepiece is the mosque/madrassa with a covered courtyard, small in size, but exquisitely built and decorated, with a slender and gracious minaret. The decoration of the dome above the attached tomb is the crowning achievement of the stone-carving art in which Cairo excelled. The building is an outstanding example of Mamluk architecture and a well-known icon of Cairo's visual identity depicted on the Egyptian one-Pound note.

The complex also included charities providing free drinking water and education, a great palatial hall for the Sultan's use, further tombs, residential buildings, and a huge hostel for visitors. They were all supported by service buildings and installations and maintained by funds coming from a dedicated religious endowment (*waqf*) that gained revenue from different income-generating properties assigned to the charitable trust.

Of the huge complex built between the 1460s and 1474, eight different structures are listed as registered monuments under separate numbers, while some of the components are not listed.





Sultan Qaitbey,  
a 16th century  
painting possibly  
based on a portrait  
from life

## the GREAT SOVEREIGN

Sultan Qaitbey reigned between 1468 and 1496 over a regional empire that comprised Egypt and the surrounding lands. He was one of the few truly great Mamluk sultans who enjoyed a long reign, commanded admiration and respect, and died peacefully at an old age.

Of Circassian origin, Qaitbey was bought by Sultan Barsbay after being brought to Cairo as a slave like other Mamluks. He was given military training and religious instruction, and finally freed by Barsbay's successor Jaqmaq, then rose through the ranks serving under six sultans consecutively. Elected to the throne when he was already more than fifty years old, for 28 years Qaitbey steered astutely through the difficulties of his troubled times while gaining renown for charitable acts, until he died peacefully, aged around eighty.

Qaitbey was a great patron of architecture. During his reign the distinct and indigenous Mamluk style in Cairo reached its apex of glory, marked by refined elegance and perfect craftsmanship. He founded more than 200 buildings in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Arabia. More than thirty monuments in Cairo date from the time of his reign.



16-17



Painting by John  
Frederick Lewis -  
*The Mid-Day Meal*  
- Cairo, 1875.

The English  
artist combined  
everyday reality in  
Cairo in his own  
days with historic  
costumes and  
details to evoke  
life in the city in  
the bygone days.  
A meal in a Mam-  
luk-period *maq'ad*  
must have looked  
similar.

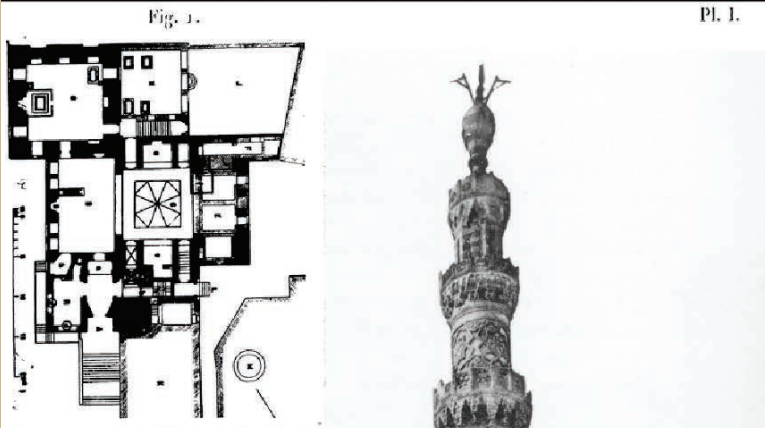
## PAST GLORY

Sultan Qaitbey's buildings in the 'Desert of the Mamluks' exemplify the unique style of Mamluk art, which at its best was locally created in Cairo. The architecture is monumental and ordered, and at the same time imaginative and fanciful, with regular, formally designed components put together in asymmetrical, seemingly casual compositions.

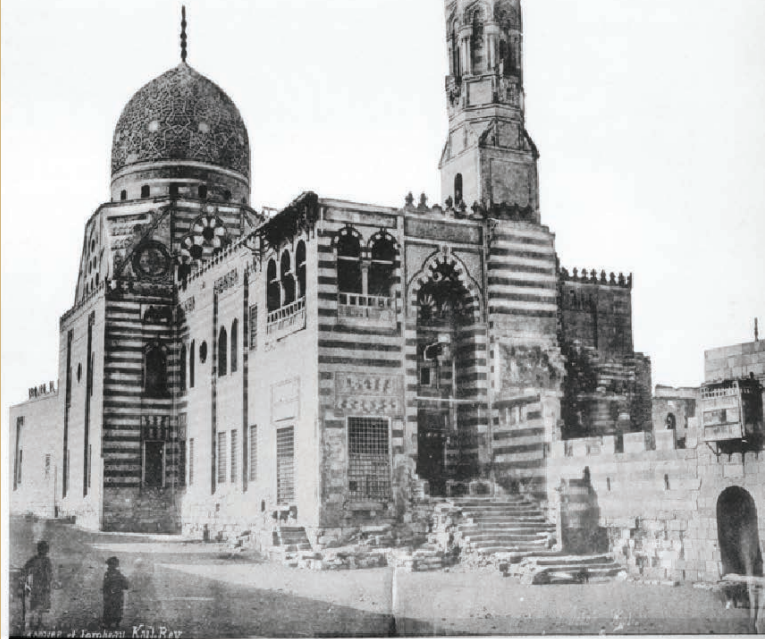
Structure and decoration are one: geometric and floral patterns on the domes, decorative stalactite niches, joggled lintels and pointed arches, inscription bands and royal blazons all expertly carved into the locally-quarried limestone masonry. The craftsmanship is of the highest quality. Carved, painted and gilded wooden ceilings, brass fittings, marble inlays, window grilles with multicolour glazing - all come together in a harmonious whole of remarkable stylistic unity.

The Sultan cared not just about the beauty and splendour of his buildings, he also provided services for the large number of people employed by different charities and for visitors who could lodge in a vast residential building erected for them. Drinking water stored in huge underground cisterns was distributed to passers-by, a water-wheel fed water from a well into a large tank, a network of well-built underground channels disposed of sewage. Children learned to read and write in a charitable school, Sufis recited prayers, salaried personnel took care of the upkeep of the buildings and maintenance of the infrastructure, of supplying oil for lamps, and of all everyday needs. A palace with a sumptuous reception hall was ready to receive the Sultan and his retinue when he visited.





Complex of Sultan al-Ashraf Qaitbay on an archival photograph, late 19th century.  
*Bulletin of the comité de conservation de monuments de l'art arabe, 1897, pl. I.*



MOSQUÉE FUNÉRAIRE DU SULTAN KAITBAI AU DÉSERT

(TOMBEAUX DES KHALIFES).

FIG. 1. PLAN. — FIG. 2. VUE D'APRÈS UNE ANCIENNE PHOTOGRAPHIE.

The late-19th century photograph was taken during the demolition of the buildings shown on David Roberts' 1838 lithograph (p.11). The cemetery is incorrectly described as "Tombs of the Caliphs", a mistake common at the time.

## RAVAGED, THEN SALVAGED

Sultan Qaitbey's magnificent buildings in the 'Desert of the Mamluks' did not escape the ravages of time. Still in the 1670s, the famous Turkish traveller Evliya Çelebi described the Sultan's "royal suburb" as a summer resort with gardens (...) which took three hours to walk around. By the end of the 19th century, however, the condition of the Sultan's complex was precarious. Starting in the last years of the 19th century, serious restoration work was carried out in some of its buildings by the Comite de conservation des monuments de l'art Arabe, an agency of the Egyptian government with both Egyptian and foreign members. Most notably the mosque/madrassa was restored, which included the reconstruction of the ornamented ceiling over the central court. In 1905, parts of the *maq'ad* or palatial reception hall of the Sultan were rebuilt, but only after its eastern section had collapsed.



Rab'a of Sultan al-Ashraf Qaitbay, 2015 photo: Ahmed Abdelaziz

## RAVAGED, THEN SALVAGED

In the 1980s and 90s more work was undertaken. New roofs have been constructed, walls consolidated, and the buildings surrounded by protective fences. With such measures in place, the structures survived for decades, but before the present improvement works began, the overall condition of most of the Sultan's complex was miserable. Many buildings were in ruin, roofless, filled with waste and debris. An important reason for this dilapidation was that with the exception of the prayer hall of the mosque, the monuments could not be used by the people of the neighbourhood for any useful purpose. The 'Desert of the Mamluks' is home to a vibrant and diverse, if traditional, conservative and low-income community. However, the only way that the monuments could be useful for the local community was as garbage dumping grounds. Historic buildings are part of their neighbourhoods, and if people cannot use them, they inevitably fall quickly into disrepair.

This was the situation in 2014 when ARCHiNOS were contracted to undertake the current improvement works.



22-23



Chief conservator Salam Imbarak at work in the *hawd* of Sultan Qaitbey, May 2014.  
photo: Mahmud Badawy.

24-25



the Dome of Madrasa of Sultan Qaitbey, March 2016. photo: Ahmed Abdelaziz

## THE PROJECT

With funding primarily from the European Union and with contributions from various other donors, ARCHiNOS Architecture has worked since 2014 on different buildings erected by al-Ashraf Qaitbey in his 'royal suburb' with the Sultan's magnificent mosque and tomb at its centre. The overarching aim is to secure long-term preservation of the monuments by making them useful to the local community.

THE PROJECT





*Camels at the Watering Place,*  
Painting by Jean-Léon Gérôme,  
courtesy of  
Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center,  
Vassar College

The famous French orientalist Gérôme based his painting closely (but not exactly) on Qaitbey's *hawd* in the Cemetery. He showed the building as he could see it in the second half of the 19th century, with the original roof missing.

## COMING to the RESCUE PART ONE

ARCHiNOS began its involvement in the Eastern Cemetery, or the 'Desert of the Mamluks' with a pilot project in a small, partly preserved building next to Qaitbey's mosque/madrassa. This was a *hawd* (literally, drinking-trough), a building housing a charity that provided drinking water to animals. In mediaeval Cairo, in addition to hundreds of *sabils* that offered potable water to people, there were numerous *hawds* benefitting horses, camels, and donkeys. Sultan Qaitbey had no less than three *hawds* erected in the city, one as part of his funerary complex.

In December 2012, the Delegation of the European Union Delegation to Egypt, as part of its programme *Egypt-Europe Cultural Cooperation 2012: Reinforcing capacities and cultural cooperation in Egypt*, approved a proposal from ARCHiNOS for work at the *hawd* of Sultan Qaitbey.



Sultan's Festival ceremony on the occasion of the official opening of the *Hawd* of Sultan Qaitbey after conservation, July 2015. photo: Jarosław Dobrowolski

## COMING to the RESCUE PART ONE

The objectives were to preserve the monument through conservation work, and to make it useful for the neighbourhood community, in this way securing its continued maintenance. The legal custodians of the building, the Supreme Council of Antiquities of the Ministry of Antiquities, supervised the work. Coinciding with troubled times in Egypt, the project experienced delays and only commenced in April 2014.

The completion of the work in 2015 was an occasion for a huge celebration in Qaitbey Square, with the Minister of Antiquities, the EU Ambassador, and the Governor of Cairo in attendance, and with a varied programme of entertainment and an arts and crafts fair.

The small building, which was decaying and filled with refuse when the work commenced, was thoroughly conserved, which made visible its elaborate decoration, as sophisticated as anything found in the grander buildings of the Sultan's complex. Now, the hawd is occasionally used as a venue for events and performances for local children.





Maq'ad of Sultan Qaitbay after conservation, December 2016. photo: George Fakhry

## COMING to the RESCUE PART TWO

In 2015, ARCHiNOS extended the scope of its work in the 'Desert of the Mamluks' as the Delegation of the European Union granted financial support for the project entitled *Outside In: The Art of Inclusion. A Place for Arts and Culture in Cairo's 'City of the Dead'* within its programme Support to Cultural Diversity in Egypt.

This time the object of the work was the *maq'ad*, (literally, 'sitting-place'), a lofty reception hall which is the sole remaining part of a palatial residence once attached to the funerary complex of Sultan Qaitbay. It is an early and, in some respects, unique example of an architectural feature that was to become standard in Cairene houses. The façade expertly built of local limestone features elaborate stone-carved decoration typical of Qaitbey's reign, which was the heyday of Mamluk architecture. Research by ARCHiNOS (always an integral part of architectural conservation) revealed its unusual construction history: the *maq'ad* was originally built as an open loggia but converted during its construction into an enclosed hall. All these aspects make the building a highly significant monument even by the high standards of mediaeval Cairo.





Public performance in front of the *maq'ad* of Sultan Qaitbey, March 2017. photo: Jarosław Dobrowolski

## COMING to the RESCUE PART TWO

Despite being restored in the early 1900s and then again in the 1990s when the project commenced, the *maq'ad* was decaying and in need of conservation again, mostly because of its disuse.

Building on the experience of the completed pilot project, the work by ARCHiNOS aimed at preservation of the endangered historic building by architectural conservation that adapted the monument for contemporary use in the service of the local community.

With the objective of providing access to diverse cultural and artistic activities in a low-income, under-served and marginalised urban area, the *maq'ad* of Sultan Qaitbey was turned into a permanent hub for art and culture in the neighbourhood, to contribute to sustainable and participatory cultural development.

The conservation work concluded in December 2016, but even before, cultural events were periodically organised throughout the duration of the project to demonstrate to the local community that the work was undertaken with their benefit in mind. The project was not limited to the building itself. ARCHiNOS upgraded the facades of the buildings in the small city square in front of the *maq'ad* and restored a mediaeval gateway leading to it, to make the square a fitting setting for cultural events and performances.





The glass-blower Khaled Ahmed 'Ali and the British artist David Murphy work in Khaled's workshop on the Magnifying Cairo project, December 2016. photo: Agnieszka Dobrowolska

## COMING to the RESCUE PART TWO

The events in and around the *maq'ad* have been very varied, ranging from art exhibitions and installations, art and design competitions, though music, dance and theatrical performances to scholarly lectures. Local children attend cultural and educational workshops organised for them. Periodically, the "Sultan's Fairs" offer craftspeople from the neighborhood and from further afar an opportunity to present their wares and sell them directly, always featuring also art exhibitions and performances.

With funding from different cultural institutions, contemporary artists in residence produced their work, often working together with traditional local craftsmen. Since the beginning of 2016, fourteen European and American artists visited. Some of their works now adorn the small square in front of the *maq'ad* in addition to the ones by Egyptian art schools students and faculty. In 2017, the prestigious Downtown Cairo Contemporary Art Festival (DE-CAF) staged in and around the *maq'ad* a day of five international theatrical and dance performances featuring performers with disabilities.



Bill Amberg teaching leather production, April 2018. photo: Jarosław Dobrowolski

## COMING to the RESCUE PART TWO

In October 2016 ARCHiNOS established a not-for-profit organisation, the Sultan Foundation, which oversees the operation of the place for arts and culture to ensure continuous maintenance of the important historic building, thus securing its long-term preservation. The Foundation also runs training courses that teach local women the designing and techniques of producing leather goods. This work is supported by Alfano Foundation, which aims at applying the principles of private sector investment to charitable giving through its social entrepreneurship approach. By learning marketable skills, women of the neighbourhood, who often find it difficult to take up jobs, can supplement their household income by working from home.





A bird's eye view on the complex of Sultan Qaitbey, January 2018. photo: iFly Egypt

## COMING to the RESCUE PART THREE

In 2017, the European Union Delegation once more came to the help of the heritage and community of the Sultan Qaitbey area by funding the project *Heritage for the Living in the 'City of the Dead'* as part of its programme *Cultural Heritage for Social and Economic Development*, and in 2018, within the broader framework of European Year of Cultural Heritage. The project aims at re-integration of cultural heritage of the Qaitbey area into the life of the neighbourhood community, with corresponding economic, social, and cultural benefits. It continues grafting together historic preservation, cultural activities, and social development. Directed by Agnieszka Dobrowolska, like previous projects the work is carried out by a team of experienced Egyptian conservators and craftsmen, many trained on earlier enterprises of ARCHiNOS Architecture.

Three areas within the complex of Sultan Qaitbey are included in the conservation programme: The mausoleum of Gulshani and the adjoining remains of the place of Sultan Qaitbey, a service area with installations including a water-wheel (*sakiya*), and a *sabil*, i.e. a building from which drinking water was distributed as charity.





The dome and the minaret of Madrasa of Sultan Qaitbey, August 2015.

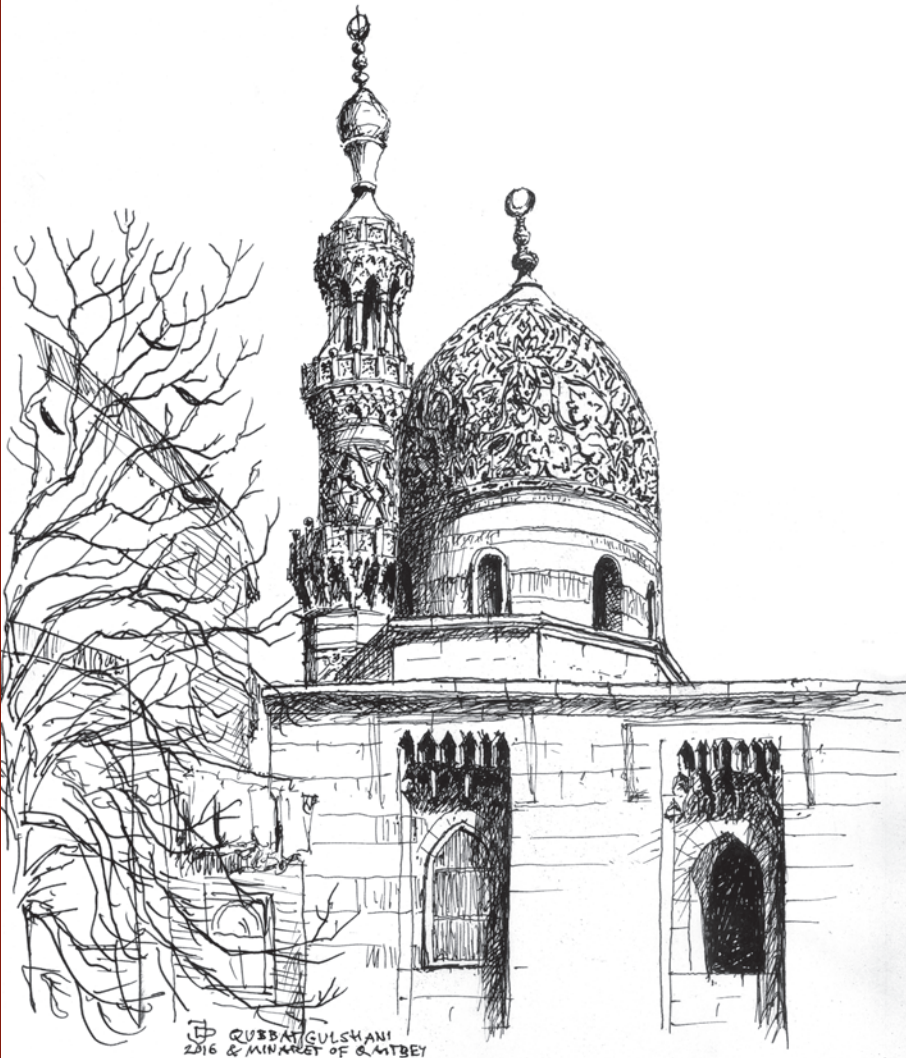
photo:  
Jarosław Dobrowolski

## COMING to the RESCUE PART THREE

Buildings within the complex of Sultan Qaitbey differ from the lavishly decorated jewel box of the mosque/madrasa to more utilitarian service structures, but all were expertly built utilising the same techniques, a uniform style and with great attention to detail. Some features are still intact, though obscured by dust and grime accumulated through centuries. Some are lost, and we often have to infer the original appearance from better-preserved examples, while some features are still waiting to be exposed. All the original material deserves to be preserved for the future generations to admire and enjoy.

The project will result with the historic properties conserved and adapted for re-use benefitting the community. In addition to improving the conditions of individual monuments, the work is designed to make the Sultan's complex better recognisable and easier to appreciate in its completeness, increasing the attraction of the area as a cultural tourism destination and thus contributing to the local economy. For the same reason, and to improve the quality of life of the local community, some urban upgrading measures are planned, and are currently discussed between ARCHiNOS, the antiquities authorities, and the Governorate of Cairo.





The minaret in the background belongs to the Mosque/Madrasa that al-Ashraf Qaitbey built when he became Sultan.

The dome of al-Gulshani Mausoleum, November 2016.

drawing:  
Jarosław Dobrowolski

## COMING to the RESCUE

The fieldwork started in February 2018 with survey, documentation, study and design in preparation for actual interventions.

### HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Shortly before his elevation to the sultanate in 1468, al-Ashraf Qaitbey built a domed tomb and an oratory in the 'Desert of the Mamluks'. At that time, he was an amir commanding a hundred Mamluks, and the mausoleum reflected his position: it is relatively small and simple, and comprises a simple prayer hall rather than a fully-fledged mosque. Consequently, there is no minaret, though the craftsmanship and the decoration are both very refined. The arabesque floral patterns carved on the stone dome presages the exquisite decoration on the one that Qaitbey built nearby as the Sultan over the tomb where he is ultimately buried. The small mausoleum is named after shaykh Gulshani who lived here in the Ottoman period.

In spite of conservation carried out in the 1980s, the building is disused and dilapidated. It suffers seriously from stone deterioration caused by rising damp.

After conservation, the mausoleum of Gulshani will be a natural extension of the place for art and culture in the Maq'ad of Sultan Qaitbey. Even before conservation started it is being regularly used for vocational training courses for local women and as artist's workshops.



Ruined palace of of Sultan Qaitbey, March 2018. photo: George Fakhry

## COMING to the RESCUE PART THREE

### SULTAN'S FORGOTTEN PALACE

Qaitbey's complex included a palatial residence where the Sultan and his retinue would stay when they visited the cemetery. Behind the *maq'ad* conserved by ARCHINOS and used as a cultural hub, which is its only remaining part, there is a sizeable lot of land with ruins of other parts of the palace. The lot also includes two earlier monuments that the Sultan incorporated into his complex (mausolea of Ibn Ghurab and of Amir Mankalinbugha), and borders on a huge burial courtyard at the back of another Qaitbey's monument.

Little is known about the ruined place; only systematic excavations will reveal information and architectural features. It is hoped that the finds might be spectacular, as Qaitbey was a great patron of the arts and his reign marks a peak in both public and private buildings.

Once cleaned of debris and refuse, and with remnants of ruined structures stabilised and rendered safe, the neighbourhood community and general public will be able to use the area as a public space.





*Sabil-kuttab of the  
Mosue/Madrasa of  
Sultan Qaitbey,  
June 2016.*

photo:  
Jarosław Dobrowolski

## COMING to the RESCUE PART THREE

### SULTAN'S BENEVOLENCE

Adjoining the mausoleum and mosque/madrassa of Qaitbey to the south is a façade built in the 1470s as an integral part of the complex. Behind it are later tombs (the name Tomb of Murad Bey comes from a 19th-century owner.) Furthermore a sabil adjoins - a building that housed charitable distribution of free drinking water.

In Cairo, water in wells was brackish and potable water had to be bought from water-carriers, who were very numerous in the city. Therefore, offering drinking water for free, always a virtuous act in Islam, was a particularly welcome charity in the city. The *sabil* drinking fountains, in Cairo uniquely combined with charitable primary schools (*kuttab*) placed on the upper floor, were so plentiful that by the end of the 18th century more than three hundred operated. The seventy-odd remaining ones still to a large extent define the character of the historic city. The sabil-kuttab attached to the corner of Sultan Qaitbey's mosque at the cemetery is a classic example of this building-type.





Sabil of Sultan al-Ashraf Qaitbay, 2015 photo: Agnieszka Dobrowolska

## COMING to the RESCUE PART THREE

The Sultan built two more sabil within his complex. They are unusual in being single-storey, and are covered with shallow domes instead of more typical wooden ceilings. The southern sabil also has a room opening of the street with two huge arches, possibly a hawd distributing water to animals. It would be a logical place for a charity taking care of both people and their mounts, because it stands next to the gate through which people would ride from the city to the “royal suburb” in the desert. Intriguingly, there are no traces of a cistern or any water installations. Only excavations might solve the riddle. Once the building is studied and conserved, it will be put to modern use., possibly housing a small medical facility is an option.





Sakiya of Sultan al-Ashraf Qaitbay, March 2018 photo: George Fakhry

## COMING to the RESCUE

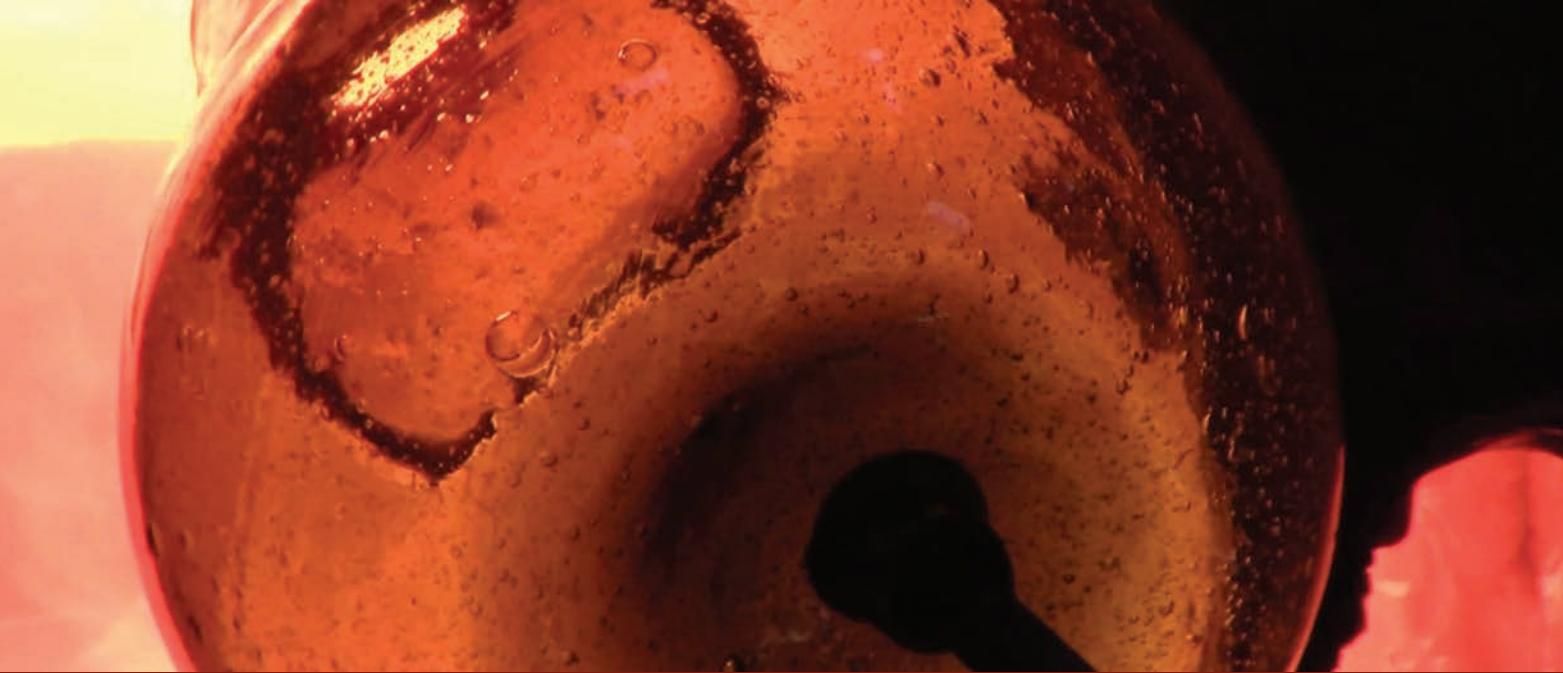
### EVERY DROP OF WATER IS A BLESSING

Behind the Sultan Qaitbey's *hawd* and next to the mosque/madrassa stand the remnants of a service area with a water tank and water-wheel that served the hawd and possibly other parts of the complex.

The walls and vaults are partially missing and have been conserved as a permanent ruin. However, a lot of original structure remains, including a huge log of wood in which the axle of the water-wheel was fixed.

The *sakiya* or a water wheel was operated by oxen and drew water from a well. *Sakiyas* have been present in Egypt since the Greco-Roman period, and were widely used in the Islamic times, described and depicted in detail in medieval engineering treatises. The animals turned a horizontal wheel, and its rotation was transmitted to a vertical wheel driving an endless belt of ropes with clay vessels that raised water from the well and fed it to channels embedded in walls. A substantial water tank is also preserved.

After the building north of the mosque of Qaitbey was demolished in the late 19th century, this area, now fenced off, has been adjacent to the square in front of the mosque. While it is currently neglected and full of refuse, it could feasibly be turned into an extension of the public space of the square and used as a recreational area.



A glass vase is being put into the furnace in a glass-blowing workshop located immediately next to the *hawd* and *sakiya* of Sultan Qaitbay. October 2014.

photo: Taher Abdel Ghani

## WORKING for the FUTURE

Not all parts of Sultan Qaitbey's complex, which originally covered more than two hectares, have been preserved, but the buildings that remain in what is now a residential area are an extremely valuable part of the cultural heritage of Cairo. The sultan's mosque keeps serving the neighbourhood community as a place of worship and the conserved maq'ad is a place for art and culture in the neighbourhood, but many listed and unlisted monuments in the area are disused, neglected, and often ruined.

The work carried out by ARCHiNOS Architecture with funding from the Delegation of the EU to Egypt and other contributors, and conducted in collaboration with the Historic Cairo Project of the Ministry of Antiquities is not only about conserving historic buildings. It also aims at putting them to use beneficial both to the monuments and to the local community, and this was to promote traditional crafts practiced in the area and arts and culture in general as well as attract cultural tourism. Completion of the ongoing project, scheduled for July 2020, will be a significant contribution to improving the condition of the Qaitbey area and will help bring back some integrity to the complex as a whole. The magnificent Mamluk architecture of Sultan Qaitbey is being conserved, preserved and protected for the local people who live, quite literally in the shadow of these monuments, for future generation and ultimately for humankind.





Rab'a of Sultan al-Ashraf Qaitbay, March 2018 photo: Gerge Fahry

## WORKING for the FUTURE

However, much more remains to be done. The huge residential building (*rab'a*) in the northern part of Qaitbey's "royal suburb" is one point in question. With funding from the Barakat Trust in the UK, ARCHiNOS is working on documentation and study of the building. Ingeniously designed, comprising 32 independently accessible units with separate sanitary and ventilation shafts and a beautifully decorated gateway, the (*rab'a*) is perfectly suited for modern re-use. This can only happen, however, when an investor is found willing to finance the adaptation.

Moreover, the beautiful complex of Sultan Qaitbey is one among many in the "Desert of the Mamluks", and this area is but one part of the vast 'City of the Dead', which in turn is just a component within the rich heritage of Cairo.

With our finite resources, our efforts will remain a small and partial contribution. But if we help to demonstrate that the way towards preserving the testimony of the past is through integrating it into the life of the contemporary community, then the work may be useful in broader terms. At ARCHiNOS Architecture we believe that putting historic buildings to modern use, so those who utilise them have interest in their upkeep, is the best way to assure long-term preservation. Also, that cultural heritage, when properly managed, can be a vehicle for development and achieving well-being.



# MAP OF THE PROJECT'S AREA

FUNERARY COMPLEX  
OF SULTAN BARSBAY

RAB'A  
OF SULTAN QAITBAY

HAWD and SAKIYA  
OF SULTAN QAITBAY

MOSQUE  
OF SULTAN QAITBAY

SABIL  
OF SULTAN QAITBAY

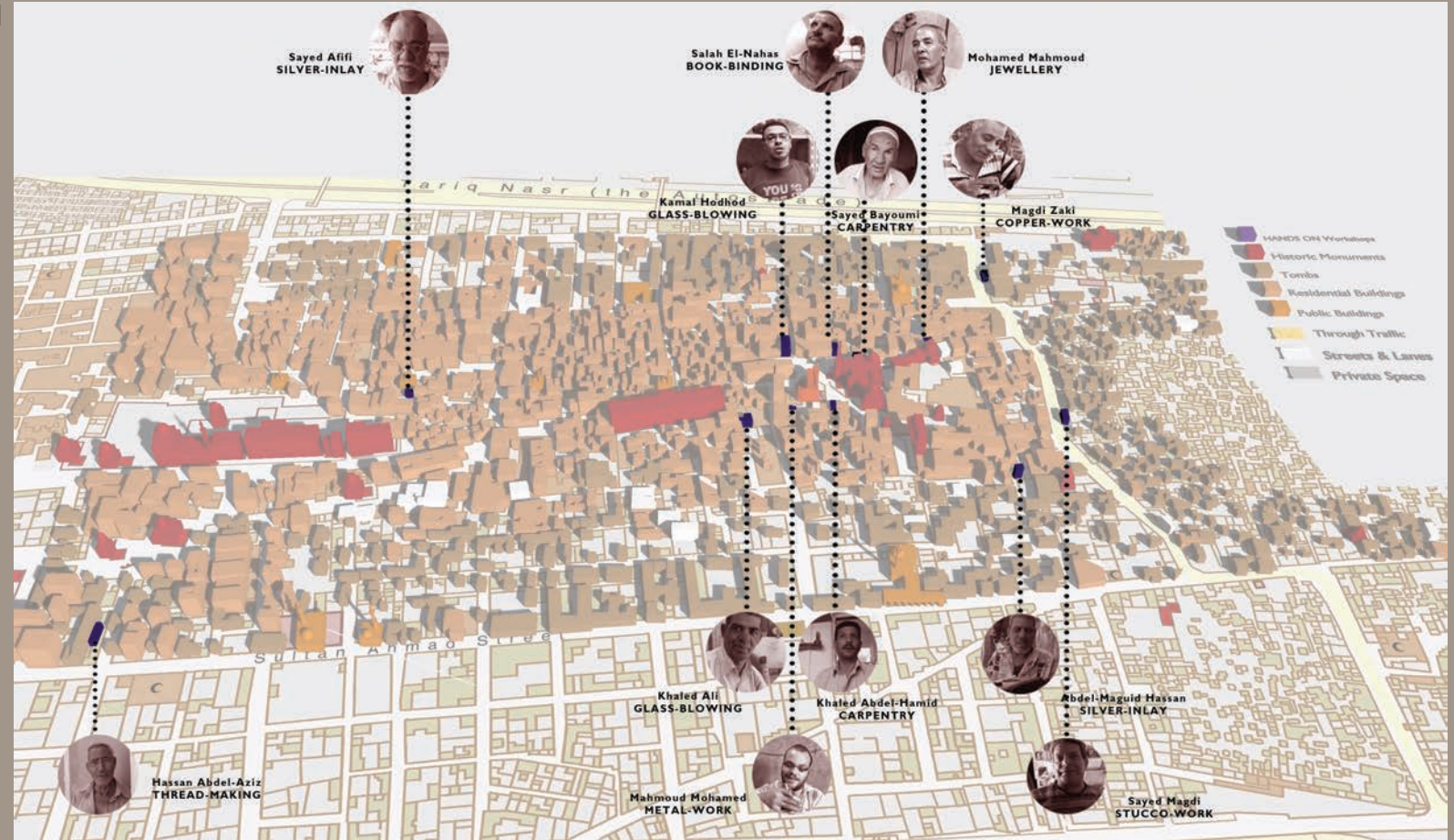




# HANDS ON

Traditional Crafts in the City of the Dead

# TRADITIONAL CRAFTS IN THE AREA



[www.undeadcrafts.com](http://www.undeadcrafts.com)

This map shows the location of workshops featured in the HANDS ON website [www.undead.com](http://www.undead.com). There are many more people in the area.



Item dort gingen vber durch die munde porte dar sin  
 den der Goldene marstall die inne her dar sinchliche her  
 hat steyn Item dort gingen vber noch durch die porte  
 die man dar wart ind quame dar in sin recht gemach  
 dat gar keusslich getzieret was **C**te ab vore die Pallay  
 wart beseyn hatten gingen vber wider auffwarts nae der  
 Stadt dar begehende vnt hant vnt dem Pallay me dan  
 dusent junger swartzer moren die alle sind mamelouke  
 behorten Ich vrachte dese zwien syrische mamelouke  
 vore vnt dat alle die knappen so dem Pallay ginge mit  
 dem seken ind knappen **E**y antblonde vnt ind sprach  
 Unser heer der Goldene hat so deser byt vntstehen di  
 sent mamelouke dat sent verkenende rufen der dan noch  
 dat iare dusent eslagen vnter desen mamelouke geue hie

# Magnus Caythbeius Mem- PHITICVS SVLTHANVS.

Sultan Qaitbay on his  
throne

From Account of Arnolf von  
Harff's travels in 1496-1499,  
illuminated manuscript in  
the collection of the  
Bodleian Library.



#EuropeForCulture



OUR HERITAGE:  
WHERE THE PAST  
MEETS THE FUTURE



Project funded by the European Union



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ARCHITECTURE

