

NIALL CHRISTIE
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Reconstructing Life in Medieval Alexandria from an Eighth/Fourteenth Century *Waqf* Document*

On 12 Jumādā I 726/16 April 1326, the Mamluk sultan of Egypt, al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, sold a large quantity of property in Alexandria. The purpose of this sale was to finance an increase in the salaries and allowances of the inhabitants of the *khānqāh* (Sufi convent) at Siryāqūs, some twenty miles northeast of Cairo, which he had founded the previous year. The transaction and the subsequent increases in salaries are recorded in a *waqf* (religious endowment) document from the period, now kept at the Dār al-Wathā'iq al-Qawmīyah in Cairo.¹ In the document the property to be sold, which consists of inns, dye-houses, oil presses, and other buildings, is described in great detail. The approximate positions of the buildings in Alexandria are also specified. These details allow the modern historian to collect a large amount of information regarding the spatial relationships between the individual structures and the area they occupied, as well as giving an insight into the activities that took place there.

Currently modern knowledge of the layout of medieval Alexandria (Fig. 1) is fairly sparse.² Writers of the period give only a general description of the city, and so this *waqf* document, published by Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn in 1982,³ sheds vital new light on this topic. In this article an attempt is made to reconstruct maps of the properties described and, where possible, to determine their approximate location using a combination of the document and the existing reconstructions of

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¹The *waqf* is written on the versos of two documents, 25/4 and 31/5. The rectos contain the original *waqf* of the *khānqāh*.

²The map is derived from those published in 'Abd al-'Azīz Sālim, *Tārīkh al-Iskandarīyah wa-Ḥaḍāratuhā fī al-'Aṣr al-Islāmī* (Alexandria, 1961), 115; idem, *Takhṭīṭ Madīnat al-Iskandarīyah wa-'Umrānihā fī al-'Aṣr al-Islāmī* (Beirut, 1964), (between) 80–81, 96–97; and Martina Müller-Wiener, *Eine Stadtgeschichte Alexandrias von 564/1169 bis in die Mitte des 9./15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1992), 332.

³As an appendix to Ibn Ḥabīb al-Ḥalabī, *Tadhkirat al-Nabih fī Ayyām al-Manṣūr wa-Banīh*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo, 1982). The document may be found on pages 419–48.



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the city by modern historians, which are based on the historical sources. Consideration will also be given to the role of the properties in the city and its commercial life. A translation of the relevant part of the *waqf* document (lines 15–91) forms an appendix to the article.

FUNDUQ AL-BAYḌ WA-AL-QAṢAB (FIG. 2, LINES 15–28)

The first property described in the document is listed as being a *funduq* named “al-BayḌ wa-al-Qaṣab.” The modern Arabic word *funduq* means a hotel, and derives from the Greek *pandokheion*.⁴ In the Middle Ages it had a similar meaning, being a hostelry where people could store goods and find lodging for themselves and their animals.⁵ As Olivia Remie Constable has shown, textual references to *fanādiq* are found in documents dating from at least as early as the year 284/896,⁶ and isolated references to them continue to appear during the fourth/tenth century.⁷ References to *fanādiq* become much more common during the Ayyubid sultanate (564–647/1169–1249),⁸ and throughout the Mamluk Sultanate (647–923/1249–1517) they occupied a position of great importance in the Levant. The majority of the clientele of these *fanādiq* were merchants.

As Martina Müller-Wiener notes, *fanādiq* were administered in a number of ways. Some were owned and administered by families or amirs who were heavily involved in trade, whereas others were dedicated to particular trades or to particular nationalities.⁹ The last was particularly true in Alexandria, as European trade was

⁴See Olivia Remie Constable, “Reconsidering the Origin of the *Funduq*,” *Studia Islamica* 92 (2001): 195–96. The Byzantines used the term *phoundax* (itself derived from *funduq*) to refer to these buildings. Other buildings similar in function included the Byzantine *mitaton*, and the Muslim *khān* and *wakālah* (Ennio Concina, *Fondaci* [Venice, 1997], 21, 58).

⁵R. le Tourneau, “Funduq,” *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., 2:945. Mirfat Maḥmūd ‘Īsā suggests that *fanādiq* were not themselves used for accommodation, but that they normally had a *rab*’ (living quarters) built above them that fulfilled this function (“Dirāsah fī Wathā’iq al-Sultān al-Malik al-Ashraf Sha‘bān ibn Ḥusayn: al-Munsha’āt al-Tijārīyah wa-Aḍwā’ Jadīdah ‘alā Takhṭīṭ al-Mi‘mārī lil-Fanādiq wa-al-Ribā’ fī al-‘Aṣr al-Mamlūkī,” *Al-Mu’arrikh al-Miṣrī* 21 [1999]: 155–56). This distinction does not seem to be drawn in this document.

⁶Constable, “Reconsidering the Origin of the *Funduq*,” 196.

⁷See M. Sharon, “A *Waqf* Inscription from Ramlah,” *Arabica* 13 (1966): 77–84; Ibn Ḥawqal, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ*, ed. J. H. Kramers, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, vol. 2 (Leiden, 1967), 432–33; and Abū al-Ma‘ālī al-Musharraf ibn al-Murajjā ibn Ibrāhīm al-Maqdisī, *Faḍā’il Bayt al-Maqdis wa-al-Khalīl wa-Faḍā’il al-Shām*, ed. Ofer Livne-Kafri (Shfaram, 1995), 200. Although the last of these was written between 1030 and 1040, the account seems to date from the previous century.

⁸André Raymond and Gaston Wiet, *Les Marchés du Caire*, *Textes Arabes et Études Islamiques*, vol. 14 (Cairo, 1979), 2.

⁹Müller-Wiener, *Stadtgeschichte Alexandrias*, 250–51.



not allowed in Cairo,¹⁰ and hence the town became Egypt's most important center for trade between the East and the West. However, unless the name has no direct connection to the usage of the establishment, rather like that of an English public house, it would seem to indicate that the *funduq* described here is based around trades, in this case in *bayḍ* (eggs) and *qaṣab* (reeds or sugar cane), rather than being linked to a particular family or nationality.

The *waqf* states that this *funduq* is located on the southern side of the Maḥajjah al-‘Uzmá, the main road that runs from the Rosetta Gate at the east end of Alexandria to the Green Gate at the west end. Given that the Muslims used the West Harbor of the town,¹¹ and might be expected to prefer shorter rather than longer trips to transport their goods (particularly in the case of eggs!), a western location on this road is not inconceivable.

The layout of the *funduq* itself seems to be slightly different from that of other Alexandrian *fanādiq* of the Middle Ages. One enters through a door into a vestibule (*dihlīz*), before coming into a central hallway (*qā‘ah*), which is surrounded by other rooms, mostly storerooms (*makhāzin*) with a vault (*khaznah*) on the eastern side. The layout of the first floor is similar, with another central hall surrounded by two rooms, a pantry (*khuristān*), a utility room (*murtafaq*) and a bay window (*rawshan*) projecting out from the northern wall. Directly above the bay window is another similar bay window and a small room. One of the major sources for the layout of these buildings, the German traveller Felix Fabri, who travelled to Alexandria in 887–88/1483, describes *fanādiq* belonging to the Venetians, Genoese, and Catalans, and all of them have central spaces like those found here, but these are courtyards, rather than the halls found in this building.¹² He notes that the Catalan and the larger of the two Venetian *fanādiq* he saw are constructed like monasteries,¹³ with the Catalan *funduq* in particular having bedrooms around the courtyard.¹⁴ This implies a cloister-like structure, with buildings surrounding the

¹⁰Subhi Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Ägyptens im Spätmittelalter (1171–1517)* (Wiesbaden, 1965), 197.

¹¹Ibid., 134. Franks and Byzantines used the East Harbor.

¹²Felix Fabri, *Voyage en Egypte*, trans. R. P. Jacques Masson (Paris, 1975), 693–95, 959–61. Bernhard von Breydenbach, another German traveller who made the pilgrimage in this year, notes Alexandrian *fanādiq* belonging to the King of Sicily, the Venetians (two), and the Genoese (Bernhard von Breydenbach, *Die Reise ins Heilige Land*, ed. Elisabeth Geck [Wiesbaden, 1961], 39). Symon Semeonis, an Irish friar who visited the city in 723–24/1323, notes *fanādiq* belonging to Marseilles, Genoa, Venice, the Catalans “and others” (Symon Semeonis, *Itinerarium Symonis Semeonis ab Hybernia ad Terram Sanctam*, ed. and trans. Mario Esposito, *Scriptores Latini Hiberniae*, vol. 4 [Dublin, 1960], 48–49).

¹³Fabri, *Voyage*, 694, 960.

¹⁴Ibid., 694.



central yard.¹⁵ However, be it a hall or a courtyard, it seems likely that the central space surrounded by other rooms was a standard design for *fanādiq* in Alexandria. Expanding beyond the city, there are also examples of Cairene *fanādiq* from the period built in this way,¹⁶ and Ennio Concina has shown that the design was used for *fanādiq* and similar buildings in Europe, the Byzantine Empire, and throughout the Levant,¹⁷ although it is not clear exactly where it originated. One can imagine that it would be practical, since the central space would provide both an area for maneuvering large bundles of goods and safe overflow storage for times when the stores were full. Fabri describes the two Venetian *fanādiq* as having goods stored in the courtyard,¹⁸ which would seem to support this possibility.

The existence of shops outside this *funduq* suggests two possibilities. Either local merchants set up shops outside *fanādiq* in order to supply travellers with goods, or the travelling merchants carried out some direct trade with the public, rather than trading entirely through agents. Either way, the location of shops outside *fanādiq* was a normal practice at the time.¹⁹

It is worth noting that there does not appear to be a religious building of any type in this *funduq*. This further supports the suggestion that this was not a building used by foreigners, from the West at least. As Wilhelm von Heyd notes, *fanādiq* used by Europeans had chapels, where Western priests ministered to the inhabitants.²⁰ In Alexandria this service would not be required by local traders, who could attend religious buildings in the city. Thus the absence of a religious building in the *funduq* suggests that it probably catered to local inhabitants, rather than Europeans.

Two of the buildings surrounding the *funduq* are of particular interest. The ruined bath on the west side is interesting as there seems to be a link between baths and *fanādiq*. It is understandable that hot, sweaty travellers might be relieved to find a bath near the *funduq* in which they were staying, but what is interesting is that the bath is ruined. The historian al-Maqrīzī (766–845/1364–1442), in his

¹⁵This is also in accordance with the description given by Wilhelm von Heyd in *Histoire du Commerce du Levant au Moyen Âge* (Leipzig, 1923), 2:430.

¹⁶For other examples from the period, see Sylvie Denoix et al., *Le Khan al-Khalili et ses Environs: Un Centre Commercial et Artisanal au Caire du XIII^e au XX^e Siècle*, Études Urbaines, vol. 4/1–2 (Cairo 1999), 2:8–10 and 105–8 (both in Arabic section).

¹⁷Described in Concina, *Fondaci*.

¹⁸Fabri, *Voyage*, 960.

¹⁹See ʿĪsā, “Dirāsah fī Wathāʾiq,” 143.

²⁰Heyd, *Histoire du Commerce*, 2:433. According to Fabri’s work, this is true of the Genoese, Catalan, and at least one of the Venetian *fanādiq*. See Fabri, *Voyage*, 691–92, 959. Muslim *fanādiq* did sometimes contain mosques or rooms for prayer. However, this is not the case with regard to either of the *fanādiq* mentioned in this document.



description, or *Khiṭaṭ*, of Egypt, refers to two *fanādiq* in similar locations in Cairo. The Funduq ‘Ammār al-Ḥammāmī, in the area of Suwayqat al-Mas‘ūdī, was built on the site of a ruined bath,²¹ and the great *funduq* of the Office of Inheritances, in the area of al-Akfānīyīn, was built next to similar ruins.²² This might suggest that there was something provided by such ruins that *fanādiq* required. The most likely answer is that *fanādiq* required large quantities of water for both the inhabitants and their beasts. However, in the face of a lack of definite evidence, this must be regarded as mere speculation for the moment.

The second building of interest is the madrasah on the other side of the baking oven and ruined bath. The madrasah is that of Abū Ṭāhir ibn ‘Awf, which was established by Riḍwān al-Khashī, the vizier of the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥāfiz, in 533/1137.²³ Unfortunately, the identification of this madrasah is of limited use in establishing the precise location of the *funduq*. Although the madrasah was well known in the Mamluk period, nothing remains of it today²⁴ and its exact location is unknown.

FUNDUQ AND SESAME OIL PRESS (*FUNDUQ WA-MI‘ṢARAT AL-SHĪRAJ*, FIG. 3, LINES 28–45)

The second property described consists of two buildings, another *funduq* and a sesame oil press. It is difficult to determine the exact location of these two buildings, as no information is given regarding this apart from that they are on the eastern side of Musk Alley, as shown. The fact that they are bordered to the south by three markets might suggest that they are on the northern side of the Maḥajjah al-‘Uzmá, between the East Mosque and the Sea Gate, for as Müller-Wiener notes, it is here that most of the markets were located.²⁵ However, this location is by no means certain.

This second *funduq*, which is not named, is constructed in a similar fashion to the Funduq al-Bayḍ wa-al-Qaşab, although its layout is more complex. Once again, it has the central hall surrounded by stores. However, instead of another hall on the first floor it has a wooden gallery (*riwāq khashab*) which goes around the space above the hall below and crosses it from east to west.²⁶ This seems more

²¹Ḥammām Ibn Qaraqah, listed in al-Maqrīzī, *Al Mawā‘iz wa-al-I‘tibār fī Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa-al-Āthār* (Bulaq, n.d.), 2:81.

²²Ḥammām ‘Ajīnah, listed in *ibid.*, 2:81.

²³Sālim, *Tārīkh al-Iskandarīyah*, 63–4. See also Ibn Ḥabīb, *Tadhkirat al-Nabih*, 430, n. 4.

²⁴Sālim, *Takhṭīṭ Madīnat al-Iskandarīyah*, 79–80.

²⁵Müller-Wiener, *Stadtgeschichte Alexandrias*, 241.

²⁶A similar arrangement is found in the layout of the Funduq al-Ḥujar, in the area of Bāb al-Zuhūmah in Cairo. This building is recorded in the *waqf* of the sultan Barsbāy, written in



in accordance with the standard design of *fanādiq* described earlier, in that the central space at ground level is open to the elements. The gallery is surrounded by rooms upstairs, in what seems to be the usual arrangement. The stores on the eastern side of the first floor are used by (*maḥmūl ‘alá*) shops in the Carpenters’ Market to the south. Again, there are shops outside the door, suggesting direct trade was carried out with the public, and there are no religious buildings in the *funduq*, implying that it catered mainly to local inhabitants.

Immediately to the south of the *funduq* is a sesame oil press. This is a simple, two-storey building with a baking oven, an animal stall, and a variety of pieces of equipment for making the oil in a small rectangular area on the ground floor. On the first floor are two stores. The existence of this press is interesting as, according to Subhi Labib, Egypt imported oil, most particularly sesame oil,²⁷ which was rarely produced in the country.²⁸

It is not clear if there was a link between the press and the *funduq*, or whether they are mentioned as being together purely for convenience’s sake. The *funduq* door, the public fountain, and two shops to the north of the *funduq* door are contributory to (*ḥāmilah ilá*) the mosque next door. This fact, and the fact that several stores are used by two shops in the Carpenters’ Market, as mentioned above, suggest a fairly high level of interaction between the *funduq* and other local properties and institutions. In the case of the stores that are used by the shops in the Carpenters’ Market, the use of storage space nearby is understandable. However, the precise relationship between the mosque, its shops, and the *funduq* is less clear. It seems that the *funduq* is required in some way to contribute to the mosque’s upkeep, but what form this takes, and why only parts of the property are regarded in this way, remains a mystery. It may be that the incomes of these parts of the property are a *waqf* for the mosque.

GLASS-WORKS (*ZAJJĀJAH*, FIG. 4, LINES 45–52)

The next property described is a glass-works, which according to the document is located in an area known as the (two) baths of al-Akhawayn. The location of this area is unknown, but as the property contains a well that is described as being on the Nile, this might place it on the western side of the city, where the *khalij* from the river passes through it.

The glass-works, which the *waqf* states was originally a soap-works (*ṣabbānah*), consists of a vestibule that goes past two rooms and a well, before ending at a

846/1442. It also has an upper storey that overlooks the courtyard, although this does not include a gallery (see Denoix, *Khan al-Khalili*, 2:8–10 [Arabic section]).

²⁷Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Ägyptens*, 39

²⁸*Ibid.*, 321.



hall. On the opposite side of the hall is a store, a room where the glass is made, and a *sābāt*, which Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn and Laylá ‘Alī Ibrāhīm describe as a raised passageway which would normally pass between two buildings above ground level.²⁹ Since the *waqf* does not state that the rest of the building is above ground level, this definition does not seem to be appropriate here. It is more likely to be a roofed passageway at ground level. A number of properties in this document include these structures, as will be shown below. The passageway contains a number of pieces of equipment that are left over from when the building was a soap-works.

It is interesting that the glass-works is bordered by the house of a Jewish jeweler to the north, and the house of a (presumably Muslim) swordsmith to the east. The existence of these craftsmen side by side suggests that Alexandria may not have had sharply delineated quarters defined by the religions of their inhabitants, but consisted rather of a mix of peoples living throughout the town. However, in the face of a lack of further evidence, it is difficult to say how far this one instance is representative of the general situation.

DYE-WORKS (MAṢBAGHAH, FIG. 5, LINES 52–57)

This dye-works is one of two properties that the *waqf* describes as being located in an area called “al-Qamarah.”³⁰ As ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Sālim notes, in the Classical era the gate at the western end of Alexandria was known as the Gate of the Moon.³¹ It might be that the area near the gate would have picked up its name. If one were to assume that the name of the gate was carried over after the Muslim conquest, becoming Arabicized to “Bāb al-Qamar,”³² before falling out of use in favor of the name “al-Bāb al-Akhḍar” (the Green Gate), it might be that the name of the area nearby would also have become Arabicized, becoming “al-Qamarah” (the crescent moon).³³ This would place this property at the west end of Alexandria, near the Green Gate.

One enters the dye-works through a vestibule containing a well, before coming into a hall, on the opposite side of which is another hall, a *sābāt*, a room, and a staircase leading up to another room. On the north side of the building, to the west of the vestibule, is another area where dyeing kettles are made.

²⁹Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn and Laylá ‘Alī Ibrāhīm, *Al-Muṣṭalaḥāt al-Mi‘mārīyah fī al-Wathā’iq al-Mamlūkīyah* (Cairo, 1990), 60.

³⁰The other is the slaughterhouse listed next in the document.

³¹Sālim, *Tārīkh al-Iskandarīyah*, 19.

³²This is the name used by the Arabic sources (Sālim, *Takḥṭīf Madīnat al-Iskandarīyah*, 42).

³³It is known that the Muslims did not change the layout of the town when they conquered it (ibid., 69).



Textiles formed a large proportion of the industry of Alexandria. As one of the major trade centers between the East and the West, it was well positioned to take advantage of the dyes that passed through the town. Labib describes numerous dyes that came to Egypt from India and places further east.³⁴ Thus it is likely that this building was very important to merchants who dealt in textiles. It is probably no accident that it was built immediately to the north of the silk *funduq*.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE (MASLAKH, FIG. 6, LINES 57–61)

This is noted as being the second property in al-Qamarah, but beyond that little information is given. The properties around the building are mentioned, consisting of two houses and a dye-works. However, the description of the building itself is very brief.

DYE-WORKS (MAŞBAGHAH, FIG. 7, LINES 61–69)

This property is located in an area called al-Qaṭṭābīn, and would appear to be on the other side of the area of Bi'r Ḥar, to the east of the slaughterhouse just mentioned, as the document states that the road runs from this property west to Bi'r Ḥar, whereas the road was described as running east from the previous property to the area. Assuming the area is not huge, this would place this property in the western end of the city, near al-Qamarah. This proposed location is further supported by the existence of a well on the Nile canal inside the building.

The description of this building is slightly confused, particularly as the Arabic word "*mutaqābil*" may mean either "being opposite" or "being together with." In particular, the two *īwāns* are described as "*mutaqābil*" but then it is stated that one is in the north, and the other in the west. The map given presents what seems to be the most likely arrangement.

SCALDING-HOUSE (MASMAṬ, FIG. 8, LINES 69–72)

The description of this building is very brief. It is described as being a large building roofed with wood and palm fronds in the area of Lesser Ḥaddādīn. The properties surrounding it are also mentioned, consisting of a blacksmith's shop, an oil press, and the Qaysārīyat al-Nashā, which may be a perfume workshop. Apart from that there is no further information.

SESAME OIL PRESS (MA'ŞARAT AL-SHĪRAJ, FIG. 9, LINES 72–78)

This property is in the area of Dār al-Jadīdah, Qaysārīyat al-A'jām, and Furn al-Sabbānah. "Qaysārīyat al-A'jām" translates as "the trade complex of the non-

³⁴Labib, *Handelsgeschichte Ägyptens*, 334–35.



Arabs,” which might place the property in the eastern half of Alexandria, near the harbor used by foreigners.

The description of the property is confused, seeming to make little sense when it is drawn out, and so the map presented here should be seen as a particularly rough reconstruction. In particular, it has been assumed that the entrance passage turns to the north, in order to allow for the existence of rooms on either side of it, even though this is not specified in the document. Again, the existence of this press seems to contradict Labib’s suggestion that sesame oil was rarely produced in Egypt.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE (*MASLAKH*, FIG. 10, LINES 79–83)

This slaughterhouse is described as being in the area of the Great Market, to the south of it. Considering that the *funduq* and sesame oil press described in lines 29–45 of the document are described as being to the north of the Great Market, this would place this property somewhere to the south of these, perhaps on the northern side of the Maḥajjah al-‘Uẓmá, between the East Mosque and the Sea Gate, where most of the markets were located.

The description of the property itself is extremely brief, and as it seems to consist of only a vestibule and a *sābāt*, it is not clear exactly where the actual slaughter of animals takes place. It is surrounded by a shop, a bench where skins are sold, a mosque, and an area where taro is grown.

BAKING OVEN (*TANNŪR*, FIG. 11, LINES 83–91)

The last urban property described in the document³⁵ is a baking oven on the southern side of the street running from it in the direction of Saqīfat al-Zardī. It includes an upper level, which seems to include a way down to the hall below. However, it is not clear how this is achieved, and so a way down has not been marked on the map.

CONCLUSION

It is important, when conducting a study of this type, to remember that one is dealing with possibilities, rather than definite facts. The information presented in the *waqf* document is unclear, with the descriptions of the buildings being vague and sometimes confused. This suggests that the scribe was not actually at the properties when the descriptions were written. In addition, it is notable that towards the end of the list of properties the descriptions gradually become shorter and less detailed, with more difficulties regarding the feasibility of the layouts described.

³⁵The document also describes a piece of rural property which is sold to help finance the *waqf*.



This, combined with increasing omissions of words (particularly “*yantahī*” [extends] in the description of borders) suggests that the scribe may have become either rushed or bored with this part of his work. Given that the rest of the document is carefully written, the latter seems more likely. One additional problem with the descriptions of the properties sold is that they lack any measurements.

As a result of the problems with the descriptions, the maps presented here must be regarded as possible interpretations, rather than definite representations. Likewise, the interpretations of the relations between the properties, the surrounding environment, and the local inhabitants, based as they are on sparse historical records and a relatively small quantity of modern scholarship, must also be regarded as remaining open to debate. However, despite the tentative nature of the reconstructions presented here, they present a model that may be enhanced and refined as more information becomes available in the future, and so remain a valid contribution towards our knowledge of the geography and history of Alexandria.

Regardless of the problems with the reconstruction of properties, this document still sheds an important light on al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and his involvement in Levantine trade. The properties being sold by this sultan represent a wide range of trades and commodities, including reeds or sugar cane, eggs, sesame oil, glassmaking, dyeing, slaughter of livestock, and preparation of meat and bread, to say nothing of income from accommodating merchants and travellers in the *fanādiq*. As has been noted by Eliyahu Ashtor and Ira M. Lapidus, the Mamluk sultans and amirs of Egypt, including al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, were frequently involved in the exploitation of products of particular commercial importance, of which sugar was one,³⁶ so his ownership of a *funduq* which may have been involved in this important trade is not surprising. However, it is interesting to note how many other trades al-Nāṣir Muḥammad was involved in. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that this mercantile policy might also have been employed by the Mamluk amirs, in order to avoid being vulnerable to crises in the market for a particular commodity.

Many of the trades represented by these properties declined significantly during the eighth/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries. Most particularly, the trade in sugar, textiles, glass, oil, and soap suffered in the face of increasing European competition.³⁷ Amalia Levanoni traces the origins of this decline back to excessive expenditure during al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s reign, during which there was also a

³⁶Eliyahu Ashtor, “Levantine Sugar Industry in the Later Middle Ages—an Example of Technological Decline,” in *Technology, Industry and Trade: The Levant versus Europe, 1250–1500*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Croft Road, Hampshire, and Brookfield, Vermont, 1992), 237–40; and Ira M. Lapidus, “The Grain Economy of Mamluk Egypt,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 12 (1969): 1.

³⁷Amalia Levanoni, *A Turning Point in Mamluk History: The Third Reign of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalāwūn (1310–1341)* (Leiden and New York, 1995), 140–41.



significant decline in the transit trade with Europe.³⁸ In this light, the sale of a number of properties associated with trades that would eventually wane seems ominous, although it may be too early to read any greater significance into it.

The use of contemporary legal documents is a relatively new field in Islamic studies, simply due to the fact that it is only recently that collections of such documents have become available to modern scholars. In addition to giving insights into both the possible geography and urban life of medieval Alexandria and the mercantile policy of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and the Mamluk amirs, this article illustrates one way in which these documents may be used to complement the evidence of textual sources, illuminating aspects of urban history that they neglect.

³⁸Ibid., 142–96.



APPENDIX

15.³⁹ . . . All of the *funduq* that is in the protected port of Alexandria, known as Funduq al-Bayḍ wa-al-Qaşab.

16. He is appointed to sell it⁴⁰ and the four shops outside its door and the upper level overlooking the north side of the *funduq* mentioned

17. and its shops mentioned. It is on the Maḥajjah al-‘Uzmá. On the southern side of it [the road] on the east side are two of the shops of its [the *funduq*’s] property, and on the west side of it are two shops

18. also of its property. One enters from the door of the *funduq* to a vestibule that has a platform on the western side of it. Then one enters a hall

19. in which, on the eastern side, there are three stores containing the property of others. Next to them is a door through which one enters a vault, which is part of the property of this *funduq*.

20. That is going round in a circle from the south.⁴¹ On the west side there are also three stores. On the north side to the east of the vestibule are two stores,

21. and to the west of the vestibule is one store. On the opposite side of the *funduq* are three stores. The door of the overlooking upper level mentioned is to the west of the two western shops mentioned.

22. One goes up from it on a stone staircase to a vestibule, then to the door of a marbled hall. On the western side of the hall is a room, and opposite it is a room like it. On

23. the southern side is a platform, next to which is a door to the utilities. Opposite the platform on the northern side is a bay window made of baked brick and lime. In it are

24. windows with wooden shutters looking out over the road. Next to the bay window is a pantry in which is a wooden staircase. One goes up it to a bay window, above the bay window

25. mentioned, with windows with wooden shutters also looking out over the road. Next to it is a small room in which is a staircase. One goes up it to the roof above.

26. Four borders surround that [property]. The southern [border] extends to the crypt, which is the tomb of the Muslims. Its second border, which is the northern [border], extends to the

27. main street, which is the Maḥajjah al-‘Uzmá, in which is its door. The eastern [border] extends to a house known as [belonging to] Shihāb al-Ḥall, the

³⁹The description begins on the fifteenth line of the document.

⁴⁰Reading “*li-bay‘ihi*.”

⁴¹In other words, from south to north one has a store, another store, another store, and then a vault.



house of Muḥammad al-Karābilī and the upper level known as

28. [that of] Ibn al-Zarqā. The western [border] extends to the ruined bath and the baking oven, which separate it from the ‘Awfī madrasah. And [also being sold is] all of

29. the *funduq* and the sesame oil press and the five shops outside their doors, which are in Alexandria in the area of

30. Musk Alley. The sesame oil press is outside the *funduq* mentioned. The doors of these places are on⁴² the east side

31. of the alley mentioned. One sees their doors from the west. One enters the *funduq* through the door to a vestibule on the southern side of which is a platform,

32. [then] one enters a hall. On the northern side of it are four stores, in one of which is a cistern. On the eastern side of it are also four stores

33. and a staircase with stone stairs. One goes up it to a long passageway in which are six stores. These stores are used by shops in the Carpenters’ Market.

34. Some of them are religious bequests. On the southern side of the lower part of the *funduq* are three stores. On the western side is a false door. On the eastern side

35. is a staircase that one goes up on stone stairs to a second level, on top of the stores below, and a wooden gallery with wooden bannisters. In the middle of the

36. gallery is a gallery with wooden bannisters extending from it, from the east side, to the west side. On the northern side of the

37. second level are four rooms, on the eastern side are five rooms, on the southern side are four rooms, and on the western side are four rooms.

38. Then one goes down to the hall of the *funduq* and one finds next to the platform of the vestibule a door in which is a staircase. One goes up it to the roof of the *funduq* mentioned. One goes out of the *funduq* and one finds next to it, on the southern side, the door of the oil press. One enters through it to a small rectangle in which is a baking oven. Opposite it is

39. the sesame oil [grind]stone. On the northern side are oils and kneading troughs. Above the oil press shop is a store for sesame seeds. To the west of it [the store] is another store. To the north

40. of the [grind]stone is an animal stall. The two stores were property of the *funduq* mentioned. To the south of the door of the oil press are three shops, and to the north of its door

41. is the door of the *funduq*, the cistern of a public fountain, and the two remaining shops. The door of the *funduq* and the cistern of the public fountain⁴³ and the two shops next to

⁴²Lit. “clinging to.”

⁴³Reading “*ṣahrīj al-sabīl*.”



42. the cistern are contributory⁴⁴ to a mosque there. That is surrounded by four borders. The southern [border] extends to the two shops separating the southernmost shops
43. outside the door⁴⁵ from the Great Market, which extends from it to the Carpenters' Market on the east side and to the market . . .⁴⁶
44. on the west side. The northern [border] extends to the mosque mentioned and to the *funduq* known as [that of] al-Jamālī 'Abd Allāh ibn Ḥasan 'Alī. The eastern [border extends] to the Qaysārīyah
45. al-Jukundārīyah, known now as Sufi dwellings. The western [border] extends to the street in Musk Alley, and in it is the door. And [also being sold is] all of
46. soap-works, which is now a glass-works for making glass in the protected port of Alexandria in the area of the two baths of al-Akhawayn, on the
47. eastern side of the passing alley, which is on the northern side of the two baths mentioned. One enters through its door into a vestibule in which, on the left
48. of the one entering, is a room. Opposite it is a utility room. Next to the door of the room is a cistern, then one enters a hall, in the eastern side of which is a *sābāt*
49. and two pillars. In it is a copper dome for making soap and also basin troughs for the soap. Opposite this *sābāt* is a room, next to which is
50. a well on the Nile canal. On the opposite side of the hall is a large room for making the glass, next to which is a store. Four borders surround that. The southern [border] extends to
51. the main street to the two baths mentioned and other places. The northern [border] extends to the house of Mūsā the Jewish jeweller. The eastern [border extends] to the house of Muḥammad
52. the swordsmith. The western [border] extends to the main alleyway, and in it is its door. And [also being sold is] all of the dye-works
53. that is in the port of Alexandria in the area of al-Qamarah. One enters through its door into a vestibule in which is a well, then one enters a hall in the southern side
54. of which is an *īwān*.⁴⁷ Opposite it is a place in which dyeing kettles are made. Opposite it is a *sābāt* with pillars. Next to it is a room, and next to the room is a staircase. One goes up
55. it on stone steps to another upper room above the lower room mentioned. Four borders surround that. The southern [border extends] to the silk *funduq*

⁴⁴Reading "*ḥāmīlat tilka*."

⁴⁵Lit. "the southern shops of its shops, which are outside its door."

⁴⁶Unreadable word in manuscript.

⁴⁷Three-sided hall.



56. facing the tomb of Fuḍūl the teacher. The northern [border extends] to the main street, and in it is its door. The eastern [border extends] to the upper level of which it is mentioned that it is property of
57. Sayf al-Dīn Khalaf ibn Farāj. The western [border extends] to the school appointed for the teaching of the noble Quran. And [also being sold is] all of
58. the slaughterhouse, which is appointed for the slaughter of sheep in the protected port of Alexandria, in the area of al-Qamarah on the southern side of the street running from it
59. eastwards in the direction of Bi'r Ḥar. On enters through its door to a large room for the purpose of slaughtering the sheep. Four borders surround that. The southern [border] extends to the house
60. of al-Naṣārī. The northern [border extends] to the main street. The eastern [border extends] to the dye-works known as the bequest of the amir Sayf al-Dīn Sallār.
61. The western [border] extends to the house of Abū al-Hinā the Christian, and in it is its door. This slaughterhouse contains the property of others. And [also being sold is] all of
62. the dye-works that is in the protected port of Alexandria in al-Qaṭṭābīn, on the northern side of the street running east of it
63. to al-Maḳūqas, and west, passing in the direction of Bi'r Ḥar. One enters through its door into a vestibule in which are two rooms opposite one another. One has in it a *sitt jawābī*⁴⁸
64. for the purpose of dyeing, and a room [that has] in it a well on the Nile canal. One enters from it [the vestibule] into a hall in which are two *īwāns* near one another in the west and the north. The western [one] has in it a vault
65. with a door. Next to the northern [one] is a room for firewood and utilities and a staircase. One goes up it to an upper room above its shop, [which is to the] west of⁴⁹ its [the dye-works'] door
66. and next to its door. On the eastern side there is also a shop of its property. This dye-works has four borders. The southern [border extends] to
67. the main street, and in it is its door. The northern [border extends] to the turn of the western alley. The eastern [border extends] to the shop
68. that is [part] of its property,⁵⁰ which divides it from the alley without crossing it. The western [border extends] to the shop that is [part] of its property,
69. which divides it from the alley that crosses the main street. And [also being sold is] all of the scalding-house appointed for the scalding of heads

⁴⁸It is not clear what this means.

⁴⁹Reading "*gharbī min*."

⁵⁰Reading "*huḳūqihā*."



70. in the protected port of Alexandria in the area of Lesser Ḥaddādīn. It is a large house roofed over with wood and palm fronds. Four borders surround it.
71. The southern [border] extends to the oil press known as that of the Banū al-Qawāmī. The northern [border] extends to a blacksmith's shop acknowledged as a possession of Ibnat Ismā'īl al-Ḥanafī.
72. The eastern border extends to the passage in the market, and in it is its door. The western [border] extends to Qaysāriyat al-Nashā.⁵¹ And [also being sold is] all of
73. the sesame oil⁵² press that is in the protected port of Alexandria in the area of Dār al-Jadīdah, Qaysāriyat al-A'jām, and Furn al-Sabbānah.
74. One enters through the door of this oil press into a passage to a [grind]stone then to kneading troughs and oils. On the eastern side of this passage is a baking oven then
75. an animal stall. Facing this animal stall mentioned is a store for the sesame seeds. Next to the baking oven is a staircase. One goes up it on stone steps to an upper room
76. for the sesame seeds, then to another upper room. Next to the door of the oil press is a shop, [which is part] of its property, for selling the sesame oil. Next to the shop is a well.
77. Four borders surround this oil press. The southern [border extends] to benches and a baking oven, which are religious bequests. The northern [border] extends to al-Dār
78. al-Jadīdah. The eastern [border extends] to the main street, and in it is its door. The western [border extends] to the 'Imādī madrasah.
79. And [also being sold is] all of the slaughterhouse appointed for the slaughter of sheep in the port of Alexandria in the area of the Great Market on
80. the southern side of the street running eastwards in the direction of . . .⁵³ One enters through its door to a long vestibule then to a *sābāṭ*
81. with two pillars roofed with palm fronds and reeds. Four borders surround it. The southern [border] extends to the bench known for the sale of skins.⁵⁴
82. The northern [border extends] to the Great Market. The eastern [border extends] to a shop known⁵⁵ as [that of] the Banū Salāmah and others. The western [border extends] to the mosque
83. known as the work of the *faqīh* Nāṣir al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī and to the ruins

⁵¹Possibly a perfume workshop.

⁵²Reading "shīraj."

⁵³Unreadable word in manuscript.

⁵⁴Reading "al-maq'ad al-ma'rūf bi-bay' al-julūd."

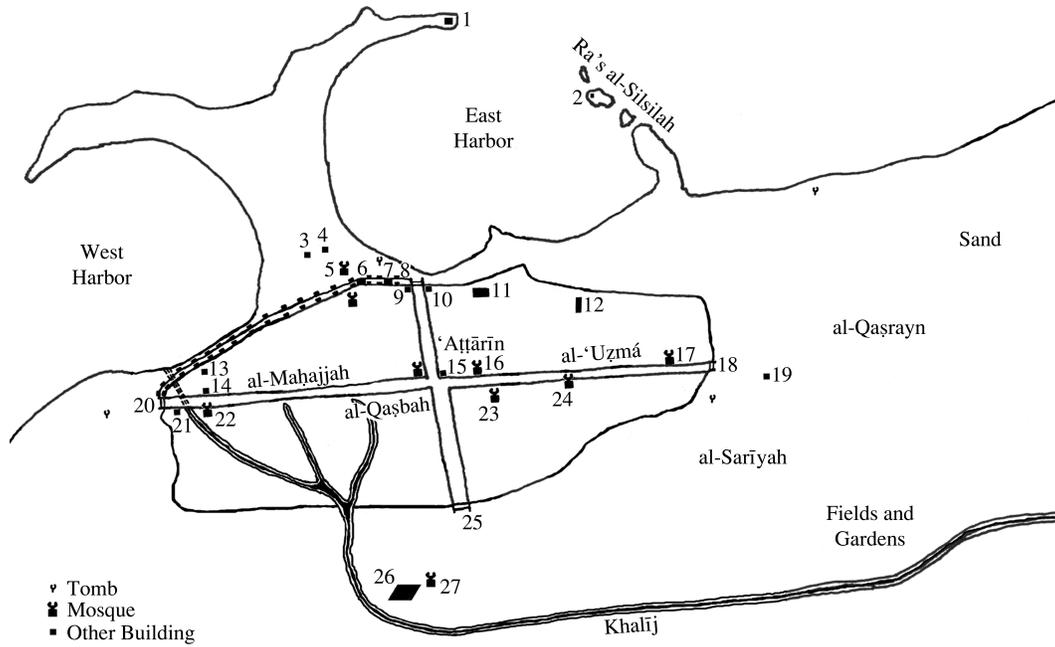
⁵⁵Reading "yu'rafu."



- appointed for the growing of taro. And [also being sold is] all of
84. the baking oven appointed for the preparation of grilled meat⁵⁶ in the protected port of Alexandria, on the southern side of the street running from it in the direction of Saqīfat
85. al-Zardī. One enters through its door to a hall in which are two ovens and a well and a fireplace for scalding heads and sheep. On the southern side
86. of the hall is a well, and on the northern side is a *sābāt* with a pillar and a large store for slaughtering. Among the properties of this oven is
87. an upper level over the southern side of it. Its [the upper level's] door is on the north side of the road [that is] next to the oven on the southern side of it. One goes up to its door on a
88. stone staircase. One enters through it into the hall mentioned. All of the roof of this place is reeds and palm fronds. Four borders surround that.
89. The southern [border] extends to the road known as that of al-Baṭlah, in the front of which is the door of its upper level, [which has been] mentioned. The northern [border] extends to the house of Yāqūt
90. al-Ḥabashī al-Shawī. The eastern [border extends] to the passage in the road, and in it is its door. The western [border extends] to the mill known as [that of] the amir 'Alam al-Dīn
91. ibn Khālīd al-Sulamī.

⁵⁶Reading "*shiwā'*."





- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Pharos | 16. East Mosque |
| 2. Tower of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad | Mosque of al-‘Aṭṭārīn |
| 3. Ribāṭ al-Siwār | 17. Mosque of Ibn al-Ashhab |
| 4. Ribāṭ al-Wāsiṭī | 18. Rosetta Gate |
| 5. Mosque of al-Ṭarṭūshī | 19. Ribāṭ al-Hakkārī |
| 6. Arsenal (Dār al-Ṣinā‘ah) | 20. Green Gate |
| 7. Textile factory (Dār al-Ṭirāz) | 21. Tomb of al-Ṭarṭūshī |
| 8. Sea gate | 22. West Mosque |
| 9. Center for exports (al-Ṣādir) | 23. Mosque of Dhū al-Qarnayn |
| 10. Jafār al-Qaṣārīn | 24. Mosque of al-Mu’tamin |
| 11. Governor’s Palace
(Dār al Niyābah) | 25. Gate of the Pillars
Gate of al-Sidrah
Spice Gate |
| 12. Obelisk | 26. Cavalry Pillars and Ruins of
the Serapaeum |
| 13. Weapons Depot (Qaṣr al-Silāh) | 27. Mosque of the Cavalry (al-Sawārī) |
| 14. Sultan’s Palace (Dār al-Sulṭān) | |
| 15. Dār Ibn al-Jiyāb | |

Fig. 1. Mamluk Alexandria



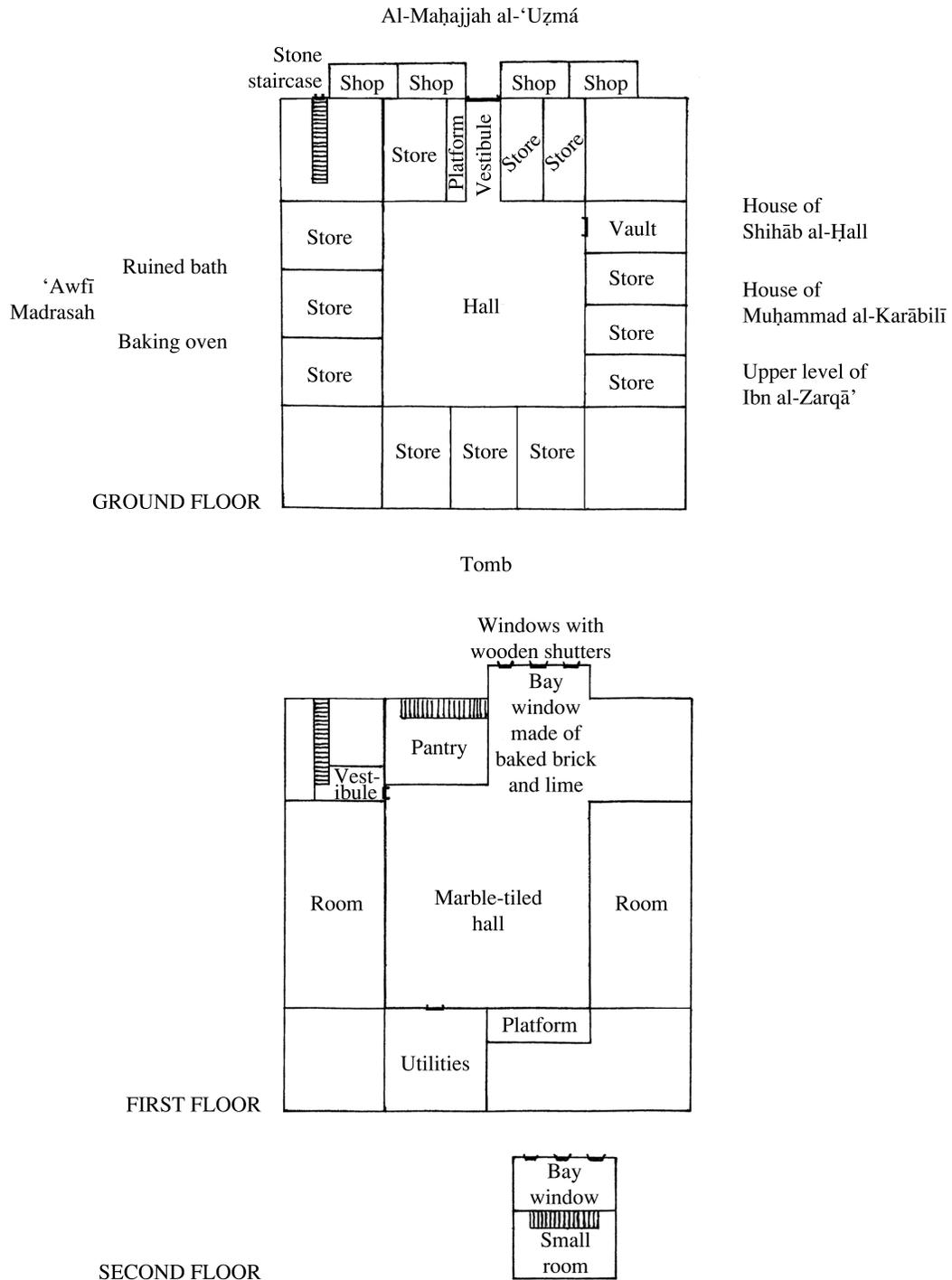


Fig. 2. Funduq al-Bayḍ wa-al-Qaṣab



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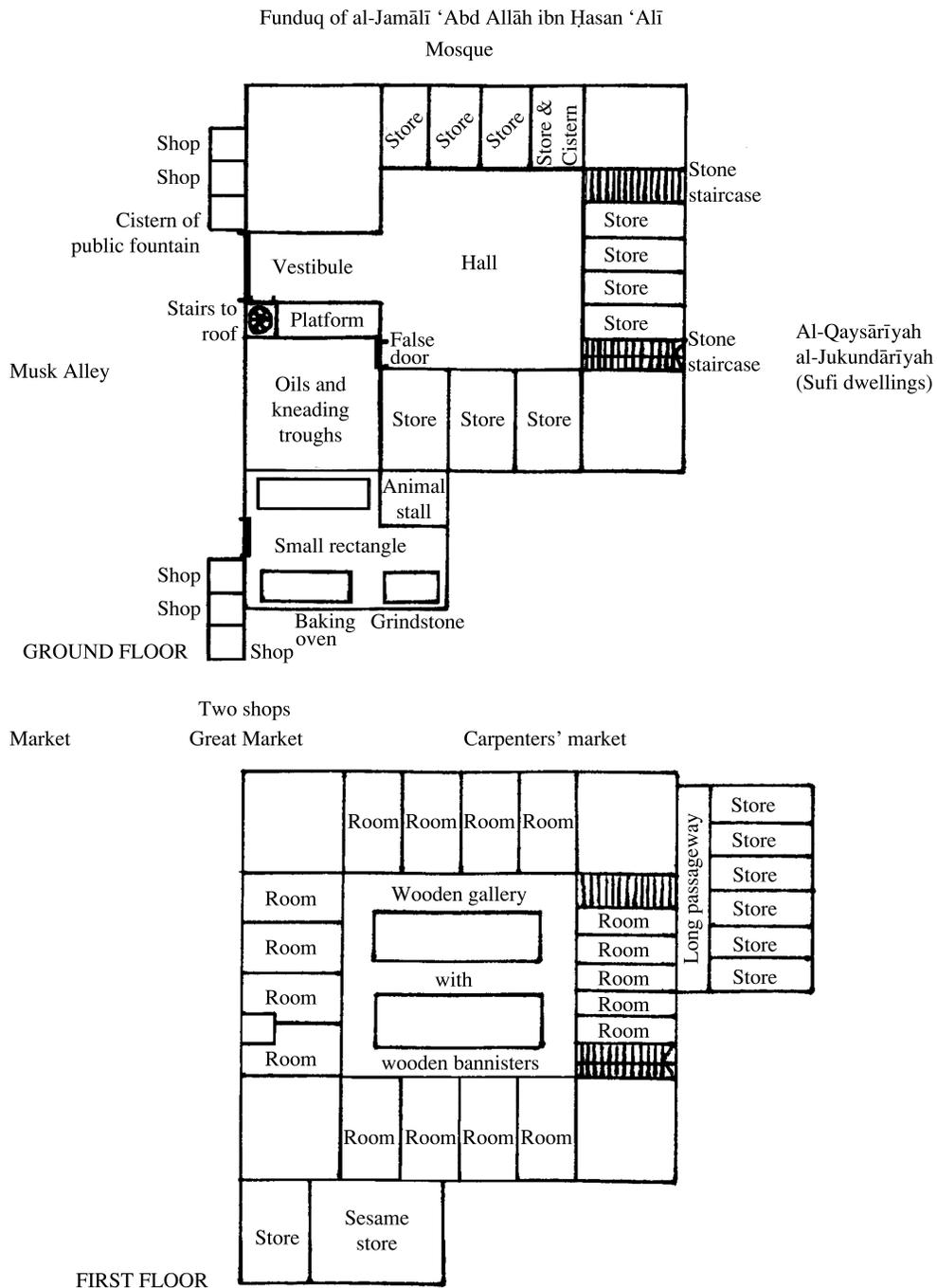


Fig. 3. Funduq and sesame oil press



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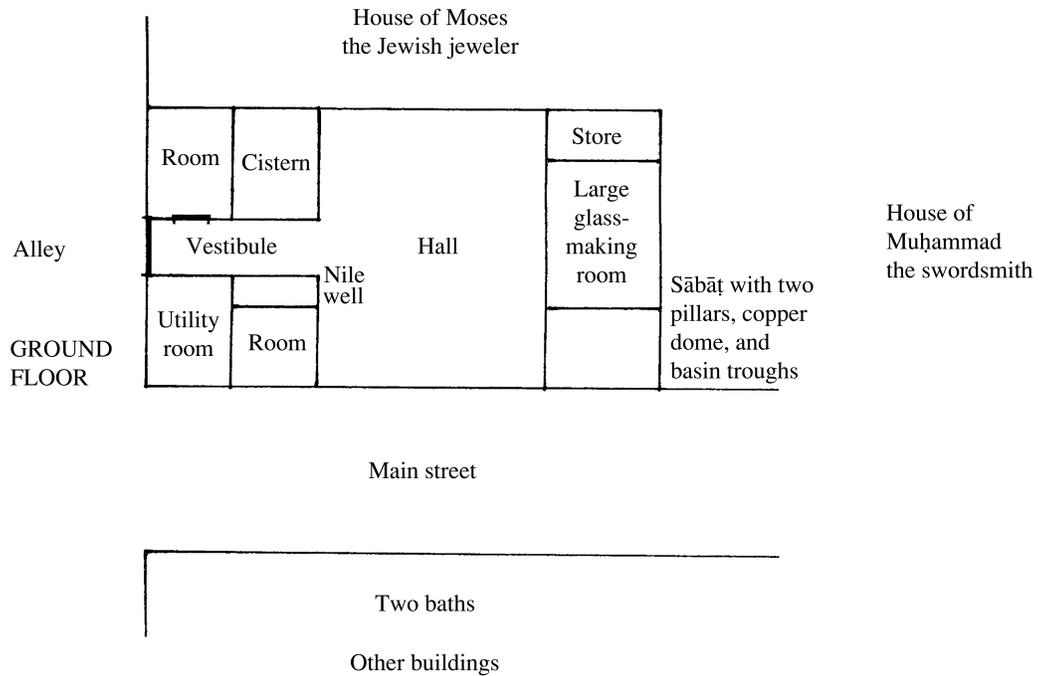


Fig. 4. Glass-Works



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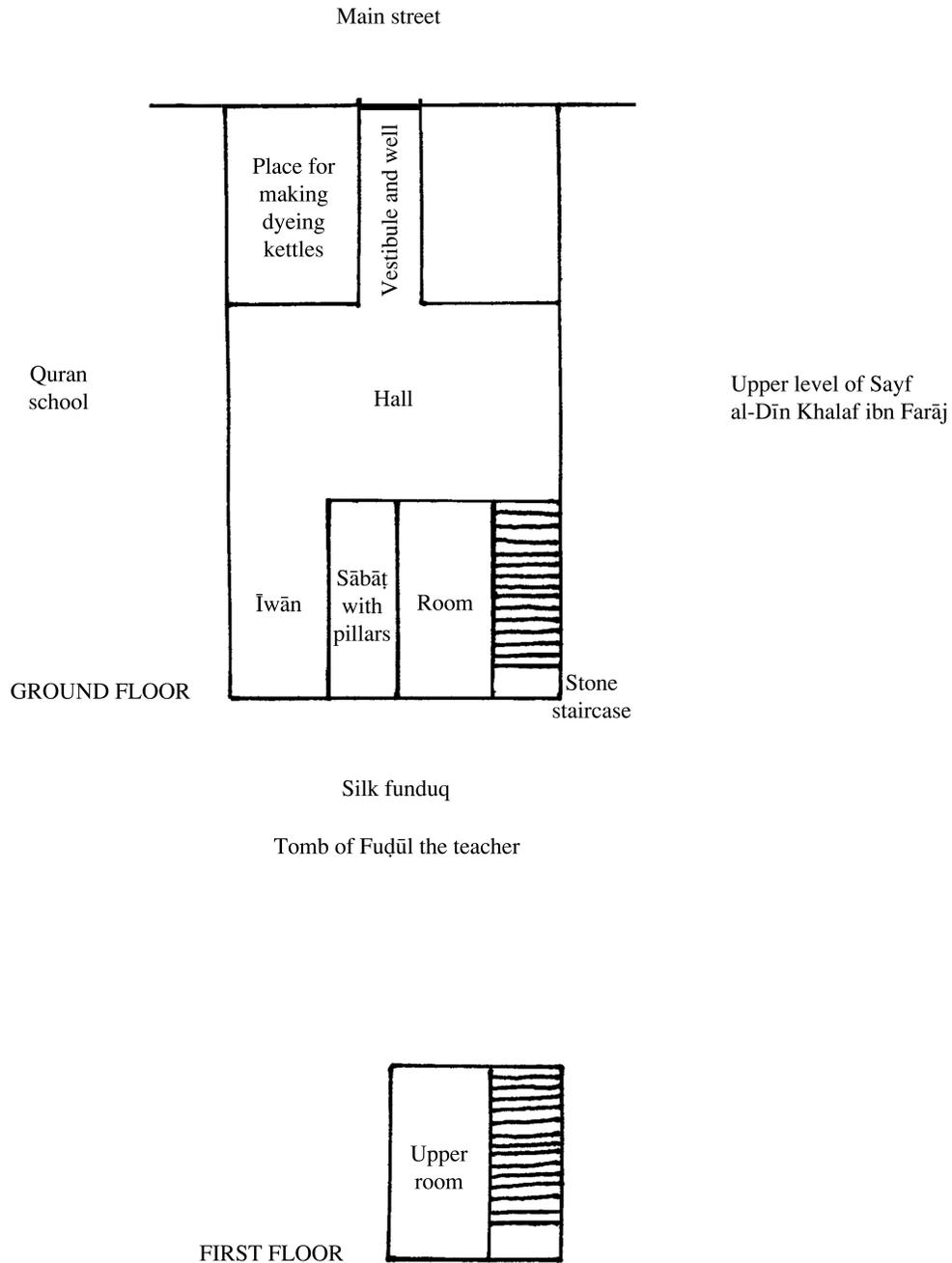


Fig. 5. Dye-Works



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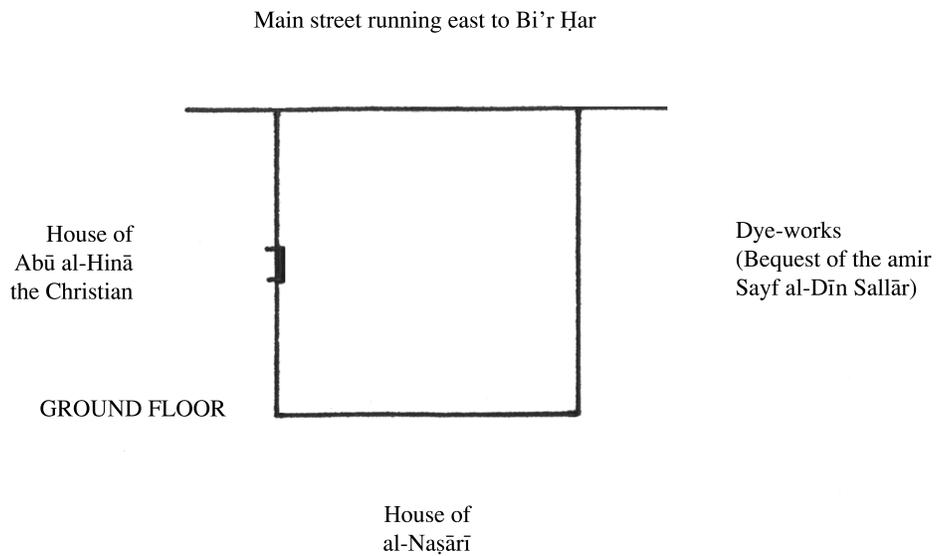


Fig. 6. Slaughterhouse



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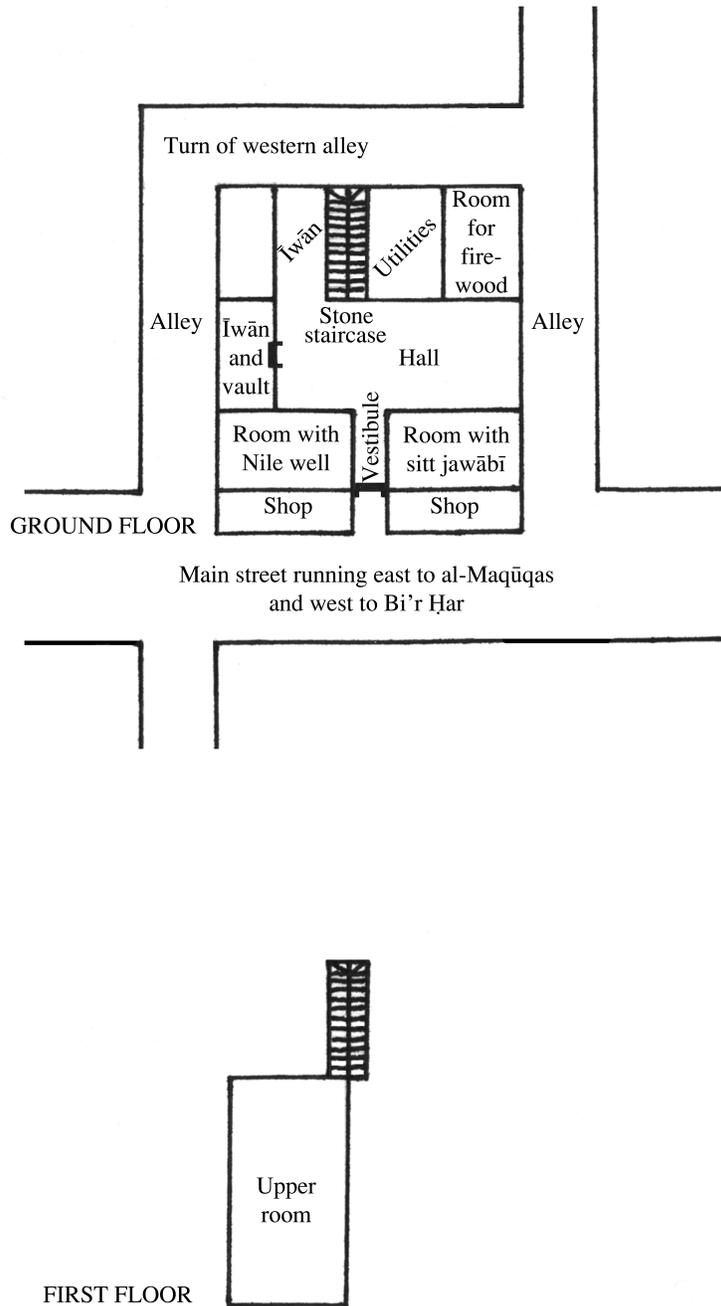


Fig. 7. Dye-Works



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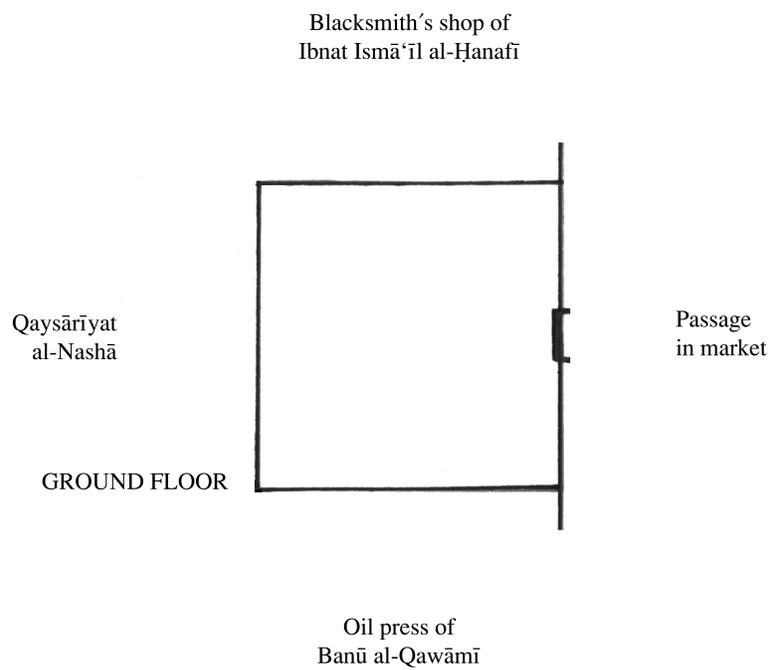


Fig. 8. Scalding-House



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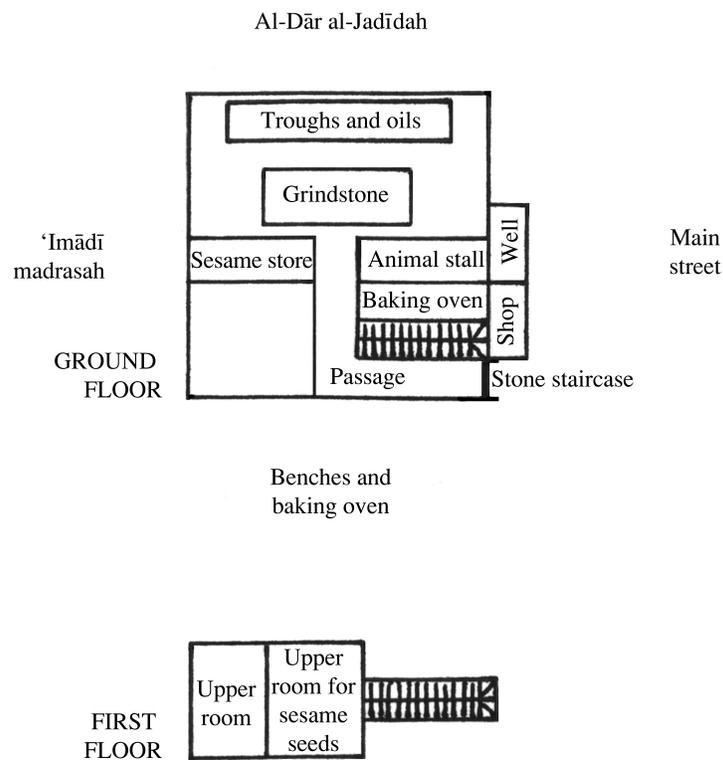


Fig. 9. Sesame Oil Press



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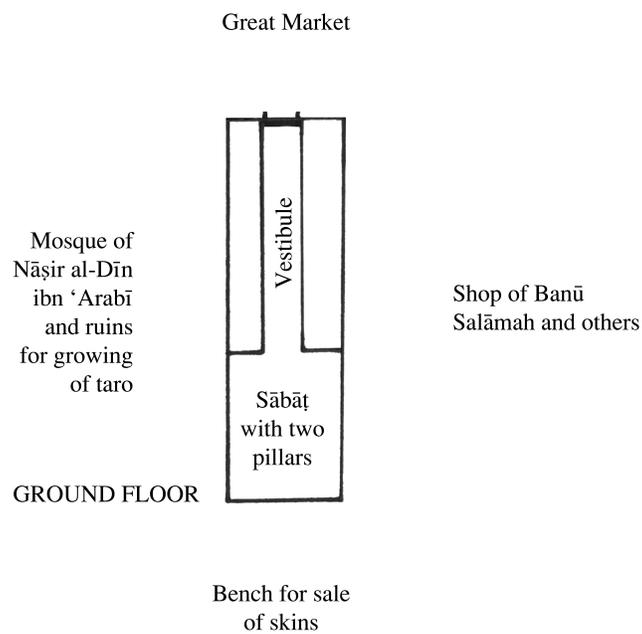


Fig. 10. Slaughterhouse



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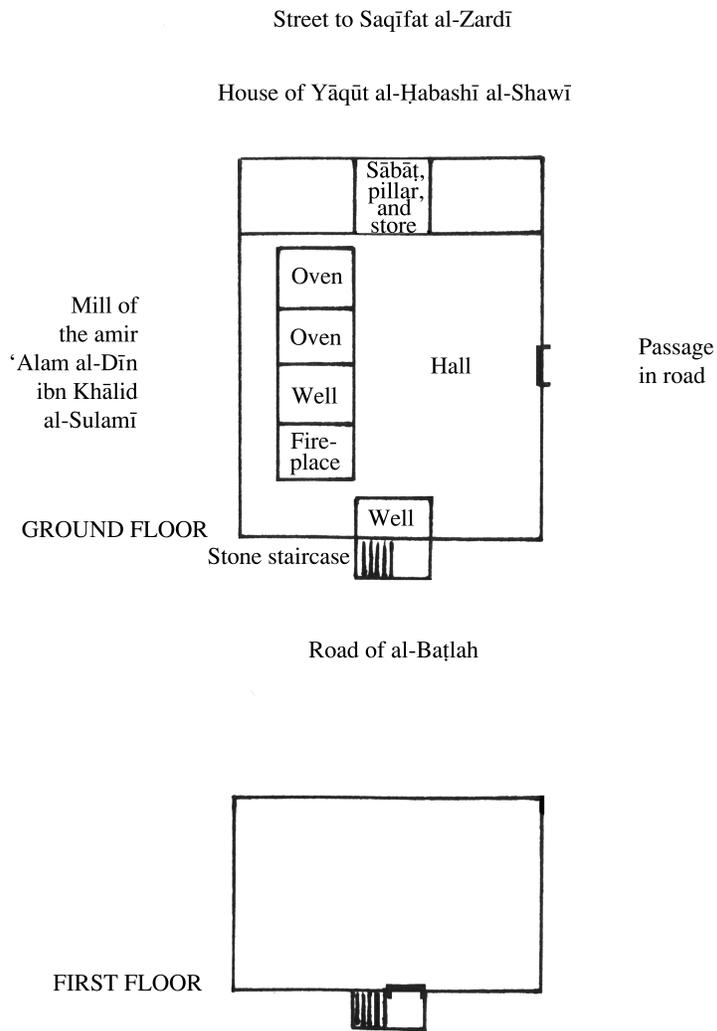


Fig. 11. Baking Oven



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