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Urban Growth in the Western Outskirts of al-Qāhira around the Turn of the 17th Century : Some New Observations Based on Ibn al-‘Ajamī’s Descriptions

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Abstract

This paper attempts to elucidate urban development in the southern bank of Azbakiyya Pond and Bāb al-Lūq, the western outskirts of al-Qāhira, during the late 16th and early 17th centuries, by examining relevant descriptions of *Mabāhij al-ikhwān* written by Ibn al-‘Ajamī, a contemporary historian working as a weigher in Ottoman Cairo. According to Ibn al-‘Ajamī, the southern bank of Azbakiyya Pond was characterized as “Kafr al-Azbakiyya,” and construction of residences by wealthy citizens and the civilian elites drove urban growth there, prompting the migration of retailers, craftsmen, and others. Regarding Bāb al-Lūq, the establishment of tanneries by Ottoman court eunuchs deserves attention during this period, although in its initial stage there were efforts of a military officer to obtain an imperial decree for improving his own living conditions. Ibn al-‘Ajamī also portrays the dark side of urban development by the eunuchs, criticizing one of them heavily, which to some extent reflected the views of ordinary residents of Cairo at that time.

Keywords

Ottoman Cairo, Suburban Growth, Azbakiyya, Bāb al-Lūq, Tannery

I. Introduction

The southern and western banks of Azbakiyya Pond (Birkat al-Azbakiyya) in Ottoman Cairo were considered a “luxury residential area” in the 18th century, where influential religious families like the Bakrīs, wealthy merchant families like the Sharāyibīs, and powerful military leaders of al-Qāzdaghiyya such as ‘Uthmān

Katkhudā, ‘Alī Bey, and Murād Bey established their palaces.¹ In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte, who invaded Egypt, partly at the behest of commercial interests of Marseille, settled in the palace of Alfī Bey on the western bank, adjacent to which he established the headquarters of the French occupation forces, making the area around the pond the central base for French military rule in Egypt.² After 1837, Mehmed Ali Pasha transformed the area into a European-style garden by drainage and reclamation. Furthermore, during the term of Ismail Pasha (1863–1879), landscaper Barillet-Deschamps reformed the area to resemble Parc Monceau in Paris, establishing the Khedivial Opera House to its south. In the southwest direction of Azbakiyya Garden, a new urban area, al-Isma‘īliyya, was created, which was designed on the lines of Haussmann’s Paris.³

André Raymond and Doris Behrens-Abouseif examined the area around Azbakiyya Pond in the 16th and 17th centuries, which is the subject of this paper, in their respective works. According to Raymond’s analysis of registers of *qisma ‘askariyya* for the years 1679–1690, only one elite officer lived in the vicinity of the pond, at that time; the area was inhabited by non-military people of middle level of upper strata.⁴ Meanwhile, in a comprehensive historical study, Behrens-Abouseif emphasized the importance of the area around the pond as the base of the Bakrī family, which led a socio-politically influential Sufi order, not only in the 18th century but also in the 16th and 17th centuries.⁵ This paper attempts to elucidate the actual state and the factors driving urbanization of the southern bank of Azbakiyya Pond and Bāb al-Lūq located to the southwest of the pond, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, by analyzing relevant descriptions in *Mabāhij al-ikhwān* written by the weigher and historian Ibn al-‘Ajāmī. This unique historical writing has never been utilized for research on the subject, although it features a wealth of information about the western and southern areas of Ottoman Cairo, where he spent most of his life.⁶

¹ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs from Azbak to Isma‘īl, 1479–1879*, Cairo: IFAO, 1985, pp. 49–62; André Raymond, *Cairo*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 221–224.

² Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, pp. 71–80; Raymond, *Cairo*, pp. 291–299; Juan Cole, *Napoleon’s Egypt: Invading the Middle East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 70–71, 203–205.

³ Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, pp. 89–100; Raymond, *Cairo*, pp. 311–318.

⁴ André Raymond, “The Residential Districts of Cairo’s Elite in the Mamluk and Ottoman Periods (Fourteenth to Eighteenth Centuries),” in T. Philipp and U. Haarmann (eds.), *The Mamluks in Egyptian Politics and Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 217–220.

⁵ Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, pp. 49–52.

⁶ Ibn al-‘Ajāmī, *Mabāhij al-ikhwān wa manāhij al-khillān fī ḥawādith al-duḥūr wa al-azmān*, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Ms. orient. A 1631. On Ibn al-‘Ajāmī and his works, *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*

II. Ibn al-‘Ajamī and Bāb al-Lūq

Bāb al-Lūq originated from the gate of a suburban horse stadium built by Ayyūbid Sultan Ṣāliḥ (r. 1240–1249), which during the reign of Mamluk Sultan Baybars I (r. 1260–1277), became a gathering place for displaced Mongolian settlers (*wāfidiyya*). It was located on the way to the Nile river from outside Bāb Zuwayla of al-Qāhira, built in the Fatimid era and surrounded by city walls, to the west, via Bāb al-Kharq at the point where it crossed al-Miṣrī Canal, about 600m southwest of Azbakiyya Pond. Bāb al-Lūq, now in the east of Tahrir Square, was once frequented by hashish addicts and street performers during the Mamluk period. This marginality appears to have been carried over to some extent into the Ottoman period.⁷ Ibn al-‘Ajamī was closely associated with the areas south of al-Qāhira, through his weighing work at Maq‘ad al-Qibāna in the market of Qanāṭir al-Sibā⁸ and his habit of visiting the holy tombs in al-Qarāfa Cemetery,⁹ but he also describes in detail the areas west of al-Qāhira. It is worth noting, then, that he studied in Bāb al-Lūq district perhaps around his mid-teens.

In the tentative chapter of *Mabāhij al-ikhwān* on “my shaykhs,” Ibn al-‘Ajamī mentions ‘Alam al-Dīn Ṣāliḥ al-Kutāmī, a Shafī’i jurist and the imam of “the late Ali

and its sequel, see Fumihiko Hasebe, “Weighing Merchandise and Writing History in Ottoman Cairo: Notes on Ibn al-‘Ajamī (Part I),” *Al-Madaniyya: Keio Bulletin of Middle Eastern and Asian Urban History*, vol. 2 (2023), pp. 27–68. The emergence of what Dana Sajdi characterizes as “nouveau literacy” in the Arab grand cities can be traced back at least to the late sixteenth century, if we note the presence of historians who made their living in commerce and industry but also experienced some higher education, such as Kamāl al-Dīn of Aleppo, whom Boris Liebrecht and Kristina Richardson’s recent research has elucidated, and Ibn al-‘Ajamī of Cairo. See Dana Sajdi, *The Barber of Damascus: Nouveau Literacy in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Levant*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013; Boris Liebrecht and Kristina Richardson, *The Notebook of Kamāl al-Dīn the Weaver: Aleppine Notes from the End of the 16th Century*, Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, 2021. It is imperative to revisit this issue, considering the pioneering works of Nelly Hanna. See Nelly Hanna, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo’s Middle Class, Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, Syracuse N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003; id., “Literacy and the ‘Great Divide’ in the Islamic World, 1300–1800,” *Journal of Global History*, 2-2 (2007), pp. 175–193; id., “Literacy among Artisans and Tradesmen in Ottoman Cairo,” in Christine Woodhead (ed.), *The Ottoman World*, London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 319–331. Borrowing Hanna’s expression, we may state that Ibn al-‘Ajamī was closer to “those with a great erudition, familiar with a vast literature, who had exposure to higher education but who for various socioeconomic reasons were not scholars, or not primarily scholars.” (Hanna, *In Praise of Books*, p. 70.)

⁷ Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, pp. 6–7.

⁸ On Ibn al-‘Ajamī as a weigher, see Hasebe, “Weighing Merchandise and Writing History,” pp. 57–66.

⁹ For Ibn al-‘Ajamī’s frequent group pilgrimage to al-Qarāfa, see *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fols. 174r, 262r–263r, 275r; Ibn al-‘Ajamī, *Ta’rīkh al-‘Uthmān*, Forschungsbibliothek Gotha, Ms. orient. A 1632, fols. 42rv, 54r, 64rv.

Pasha's mosque in Sūq al-Lūq, formerly known as Jāmi' al-Ṭabbākh."¹⁰ According to the author, al-Kutāmī belonged to the group (*jamā'a*) of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bakrī al-Ṣiddīqī and studied under Walīy al-Dīn al-Ḍarīr, a visually impaired Shāfi'i jurist.¹¹ Ibn al-'Ajamī studied under al-Kutāmī the work of Abū Shujā', a scholar of Seljuk Iraq, and *al-Muqaddima al-Ājurrūmiyya*, an Arabic grammar book by Fez-born Ibn Ājurrūm (d. 1323). This teacher read a book on preaching (*wa'z*) called *Bustān al-fuqarā' wa nuzhat al-qurrā'*, which was written by him, to the people who gathered for prayers at the aforementioned mosque during the sunset and evening prayers during Ramaḍān.¹²

According to *al-Khiṭaṭ al-jadīd* by 'Alī Mubārak (d. 1893), al-Ṭabbākh Mosque was built by the Mamluk Amir Akūsh and renovated by Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's court cook, al-Ḥājī 'Alī al-Ṭabbākh, although the designation Ali Pasha Mosque has not been indicated there.¹³ By the early 17th century, there were three Ottoman governors of Egypt named Ali, among whom, according to *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, Sofu Hadım Ali Pasha (in office, 1559–1560) built a congregational mosque on the street leading to Būlāq in the district.¹⁴ He may not have built a new mosque, but rather renovated it. It may also have been called Ali Pasha Mosque in the early 17th century, when *Mabāhij al-ikhwān* was written, and only the old name al-Ṭabbākh Mosque remained in the late 19th century. In any case, the author's experience of commuting from his home in Būlāq to Bāb al-Lūq to attend lectures by al-Kutāmī may have fostered his interest in the district and the southern bank of Azbakiyya Pond, which was connected to it, resulting in his constructive descriptions of the area in *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*.

¹⁰ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 53r. There, a blank space is seen where the author intended to write in the date of al-Kutāmī's death later. On the tentative chapter of *Mabāhij al-ikhwān* on "my shaykhs," see Hasebe, "Weighing Merchandise and Writing History," pp. 39–40.

¹¹ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 53r. The author also notes that al-Kutāmī's son later took over the positions of imam and khatib at the Ali Pasha Mosque. On Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bakrī al-Shāfi'ī (1492–1545), see Adam Sabra, "al-Bakrī, Abū l-Ḥasan," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Three*.

¹² *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 53r. The work of Abū Shujā' can be considered to have been *Ghāyat al-ikhtisār*, a compendium of Shāfi'ī jurisprudence. Ibn al-'Ajamī also studied the commentary by Ibn Qāsim al-Ghazzī (d. 1512) on the same book under Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Fashnī, one of "my shaykhs." See *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 52rv.

¹³ 'Alī Mubārak, *al-Khiṭaṭ al-jadīd li-Miṣr al-Qāhira wa mudun-hā wa bilād-hā al-qadīma wa al-shahīra*, 20vols., Būlāq: al-Maṭba'a al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya, 1305 A.H., vol. 5, p. 41. Cf. Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, p. 14.

¹⁴ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 6v.

III. Growth of “Kafr al-Azbakiyya”

The development of the western side of al-Miṣrī Canal, that ran north-south outside the city walls of al-Qāhira, began during the third reign (1310–1341) of al-Nāṣir Muḥammad, as the Nile’s course moved westward and a wide-open space emerged. In 1325, al-Nāṣir opened al-Nāṣirī Canal, which ran parallel to al-Miṣrī Canal and allotted about 600 hectares of land between the two canals to powerful military officers on long-term leases to encourage development. Therefore, the residences of *amīrs*, canal bridges, and gardens appeared successively mainly around a pond called al-Birka al-Nāṣiriyya created by the sultan in the southern part of this newly developed area, but there were no notable religious facilities there at that time, and the suburban landscape was dotted with small Sufi convents and handcraft workshops for processing agricultural products.¹⁵

Of special note in the history of the western suburbs of al-Qāhira during the Circassian Mamluk period was a construction project by Amir Azbak min Ṭuṭkh (d. 1498). He created a large pond spanning about 20 hectares by connecting the dry pond with al-Nāṣirī Canal after 1476 and constructed a new cluster of buildings in its southeast corner, called al-Azbakiyya, comprising Azbak’s residence, Azbak Mosque, *sabīl-kuttāb*, *rab’* (apartment), *qaysāriyya* and *ḥammām*. Azbak opened the pond and gardens to the public, where he also hosted fireworks display for the citizens.¹⁶ When European merchants were allowed to settle in Cairo under the Ottomans, the Faranj district was formed along al-Miṣrī Canal, east of Azbakiyya Pond, which became an important point for international long-distance trades connecting the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. On its western side, near the pond, a Nubian residential district, including Darb al-Barābra, was formed following the construction of a mosque by Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Nūbī, a Nubian judge in 1649. Al-Maks located northwest of the pond was an old Coptic settlement, considered one of the main Coptic districts in the provincial capital even during the Ottoman period.¹⁷

Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Sunbātī, a Shafi’i judge, died on Ramaḍān 8, 997 A.H./July 27, 1589. He was a prominent scholar who lectured on Islamic jurisprudence and the Qur’anic exegetics and recitation at al-Azhar

¹⁵ Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, pp. 9–15; id., “Al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and al-Aṣraf Qāyṭbāy: Patrons of Urbanism,” in U. Vermeulen and D. de Smet (eds.), *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, I, Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1995, pp. 267–279; Raymond, *Cairo*, pp. 125–128.

¹⁶ Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, pp. 22–35; Carl Petry, *Twilight of Majesty: The Reigns of the Mamlūk Sultans al-Ashraf Qāyṭbāy and Qānṣūh al-Ghawrī in Egypt*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993, pp. 49–50.

¹⁷ Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, pp. 37–45.

Mosque in al-Qāhira.¹⁸ According to Ibn al-‘Ajamī, when “the residential quarter (*maḥalla*) near al-Azbakiyya Cemetery (Turbat al-Azbakiyya)” was constructed, Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Sunbātī built his house and a congregational mosque there, retired from lecturing at al-Azhar Mosque, and began lecturing at his new residence. Under him, Ibn al-‘Ajamī also studied *Umm al-barāhīn*, a commentary on the articles of Islamic faith by the Tlemcen-born al-Sanūsī (d.1490) but discontinued it after Aḥmad al-Sunbātī’s death.¹⁹ Ibn al-‘Ajamī commuted not only to Bāb al-Lūq, but also to the south shore of Azbakiyya Pond. Consequently, Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Sunbātī’s obituary is interspersed with his unique and detailed description of the development of the south area of the pond. The following section summarizes and considers the contents of this report. Al-Sunbātī’s residential area, Ibn al-‘Ajamī notes, was “a large piece of land (*sāḥa kabīra*) where people would race on horseback on Fridays.” He also describes as follows:

After such a long period of time, influential figures and farmers (*fallāḥūn*) chose to live there and built beautiful residences (*buyūt ḥasana*) facing Azbakiyya Pond, many houses (*dūr*), shops (*ḥawānūt*), flour mills (*tawāḥīn*), and bakeries (*afrān*), mushroomed. Furthermore, various commodities began to be weighed there in a loggia for the weighing business (*maq‘ad lil-qibāna*). Subsequently, this place came to be called Kafr al-Azbakiyya, in a rural way (‘*alā ṭarīqat al-aryāf*’), but it is larger than the villages of the countryside (*qurā al-rīf*).²⁰

Its use as a suburban racetrack lasted for a long time, followed by a construction boom, which led to the growth of staple food production and commercial activities. It is worth noting that despite urbanization, the land continued to be still called Kafr al-Azbakiyya, or Azbakiyya Hamlet. This could be attributed to the fact that the new district was relatively far from al-Qāhira, the major center of the provincial capital, and the river ports of Būlāq and al-Fustāt, and sub-centers of al-Ṣalība and Ibn Ṭūlūn, showing a hamlet-like settlement landscape with a pond and green areas. Although the mention of *maq‘ad lil-qibāna* can be considered to be specific to this author, who was a weigher, the emergence of a facility dedicated to weighing merchandises could

¹⁸ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fols. 41v–42r. His father Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Sunbātī al-Shāfi‘ī was the first *shaykh al-shuyūkh bil-Jāmi‘ al-Azhar*. See Ḥusām Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Mu‘īṭ, *Shaykh al-Jāmi‘ al-Azhar fī al-‘aṣr al-‘Uthmānī, 945–1227 A.H./ 1538–1812 A.D.*, Alexandria: Maktabat al-Iskandariyya, 2015, pp. 22, 24–25, 29, 37.

¹⁹ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fols. 42r–43r. From this description, it appears that the creation of the settlement in question slightly preceded the displacement of Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Sunbātī, although it is not clear who the main actors in the primary development were.

²⁰ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 42r.

be regarded as a clear indication of the commercial growth of the area.²¹

Ibn al-‘Ajamī notes that the residence of Shaykh Shihāb al-Aṣamm, who held the positions of waqf superintendent, was the most attractive building there. The sheikh was under the patronage of Zayn al-‘Ābidīn al-Bakrī (d. 1604), an influential figure, because of his concerns about such positions.²² Next to this residence of Shihāb al-Aṣamm was the residence of al-Sunbātī. Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Sunbātī built a madrasa there and “installed Friday sermon (*khutba*), bringing significant benefits to the inhabitants of the quarter (*maḥalla*),” according to the author.²³ Therefore, a higher education facility with the function of a congregational mosque emerged in the vicinity of the pond.

Al-Sunbātī was a distinguished family of Shafi’i scholars, and Aḥmad’s grandfather, ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn Muḥammad al-Sunbātī (d. 1525), studied under great scholars from Cairo, such as Ibn Humām and Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī. ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq eventually became a leading scholar of jurisprudence and Hadith studies. He was known by the honorific title *Shaykh al-Islām*, and died of illness in Mecca while staying in Ibn Fahd’s house, a famous family, as a sojourner (*mujāwir*) of the Holy City and was buried in the family tomb of Ibn Fahd.²⁴ His son Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq (d. 1542), who accompanied him during this stay in Mecca, was a Shafi’i jurist who, as mentioned above, had risen to the position of the rector of Azhar, and his name was widely known in Syria, Yemen, and al-Rūm. He also famously argued for a ban on coffee consumption.²⁵ Compared to the grandfather and father, al-Ghazzī’s biographical description of Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Sunbātī

²¹ For the *maq‘ad* as a specialized weighing facility where the author worked for some time, see Hasebe, “Weighing Merchandise and Writing History,” pp. 58–60.

²² *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 42r. The word “*aṣamm*” means handicapped person with hearing impairment. For realities of the hearing impaired in the early modern Mashriq regions, see Sara Scalenghe, *Disability in the Ottoman Arab World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 21–51. References to the time when Shihāb al-Aṣamm was poor and subsisted on copying are found in the obituary of his son Muḥammad. See *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fols. 247v–248v. For Zayn al-‘Ābidīn al-Bakrī and his son Aḥmad, see Adam Sabra, “Autobiography and Family History in Seventeenth-Century Egypt: Ahmad ibn Zayn al-‘Abidin’s Qalaid al-minan wa faraid al-zaman,” in *Jadal al-mawḍū‘iyya wa al-dhātīyya fī kitābat ta’rīkh Miṣr: Dirāsāt muḥdāt ilā al-mu‘arrikha al-kabīra Nillī Hannā*, edited by Nāṣir Aḥmad Ibrāhīm, Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma lil-Kitāb, 2012, pp. 46–72.

²³ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 42r. For the main builders and structures in the Azbakiyya Hamlet mentioned in *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, see Table 1.

²⁴ Al-Ghazzī, *al-Kawākib al-sā‘ira bil-mi‘a al-‘āshira*, 3vols., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 222–223. This obituary relies on a letter from Muḥibb al-Dīn Jār Allāh ibn Fahd (d. 1547) to Ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 1548), the famous Damascus historian.

²⁵ *al-Kawākib al-sā‘ira*, vol. 2, p. 112. See also Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in Medieval Near East*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985, pp. 39–40.

is relatively brief, with no other significant statement than the phrase “our sheikh through his letters.”²⁶ Meanwhile, according to Ibn al-‘Imād, he was engaged in the task of delivering legal opinions (*iftā*).²⁷

Behrens-Abouseif regards his grandfather ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq as the initiator of the urbanization of the western side of Azbakiyya, that is the southern shore of Azbakiyya Pond, and writes “one of his descendants, also a judge, owned a huge residence in the same quarter several generations later,” adding that the son of the man who built this residence was a military commander.²⁸ She does not specify the name of “one of his descendants,” but it can be assumed that he is Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad, grandson of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq, mentioned in detail by Ibn al-‘Ajamī above. Behrens-Abouseif also states that ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq built a mosque and that this southern bank settlement was called “the quarter of ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Sunbātī.”²⁹ According to the description of *Mabāhij al-ikhwān* above, it is plausible to assume that the existing mosque bearing the name ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq was newly built or reconstructed as a mosque that also functioned as a madrasa during the time of his grandson Aḥmad. This mosque was located between Bakrī Mosque, just south of Azbakiyya Pond, and ‘Uthmān Katkhudā Mosque, which was located west of it.³⁰ In sum, “Azbakiyya Hamlet” was the name given around the turn of the seventeenth century to a new area on the south bank of Azbakiyya Pond, which was located to the west of Azbakiyya complex founded by Amir Azbak, which witnessed urbanization in the Ottoman period.

According to *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, there was a place where Friday sermons were held even before the al-Sunbātī Mosque-Madrasa was built. It was a congregational mosque attached to the convent (*zāwiya*) of Shaykh ‘Alam al-Dīn Mu’min al-Burullusī, a Sufi (*faqīr*), built on the site of a residential complex (*shiqaq*) where a cheese shop was located. The al-Burullusī’ tomb was also present there in the 1610s. The Sufi sheikh approached powerful figures (*akābir*) to seek assistance for the construction of the mosque, which was eventually completed. It continued to function as a Friday congregational mosque, Ibn al-‘Ajamī notes.³¹

Ibn al-‘Ajamī also mentions that Zayn al-‘Ābidīn al-Bakrī built “a great house (*bayt ‘aẓīm*)” facing the pond. He constructed a small but “great public bathhouse

²⁶ *al-Kawākib al-sā’ira*, vol. 3, p. 106.

²⁷ Ibn al-‘Imād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahab*, 8 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1979, vol. 8, p. 438.

²⁸ Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, p. 49.

²⁹ Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, pp. 49–51.

³⁰ Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, pp. 16–17. ‘Uthmān Katkhudā Mosque is still extant at the intersection of Qaṣr al-Nīl St. and Gumhuriyya St. For details on this mosque, see Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, pp. 55–58.

³¹ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 42rv.

(*ḥammām ‘aẓīm*)” and began building two rows of shops, which were not completed as of the 1610s, when Ibn al-‘Ajamī recorded the relevant section of the manuscript.³² The author further refers a certain sharif, an unnamed secretary of the provincial governor’s office (*min katabat al-dīwān*), and Yaḥyā al-Zarqānī, a large-scale merchant (*khawājā*), as persons who had similar grand residences there.³³ Moreover, a few years after these large residences were erected, Muḥammad Jalabī, also a secretary of the provincial governor’s office, built an elegant residence on the western bank of the pond where the dung (*sirjīn*) had been scattered, with further construction activities continuing there.³⁴

The sidetracked and lengthy descriptions inserted into the obituary of Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Sunbāṭī concluded as follows:

Subsequently, various quarters (*ḥārāt*) emerged, and alleys (*durūb*) were formed in them, with gatekeepers (*bawwābūn*) in charge of opening and closing them. People began such construction in the early 990s A.H. (early 1580s A.D.), and they continued to build, finally reaching the farmland known by the name of Barsbāy Qarā there, near the quarter (*ḥāra*) where glass workshop (*ma‘mal al-zujāj*) was located, and the buildings reached to the cow enclosure (*zarāyib al-baqar*) in Ḥarat Nafar al-Jimāla.³⁵

The aforementioned information on the urban development of Kafr al-Azbakiyya can be summarized as follows: The land on the southern bank of Azbakiyya Pond was transformed from a horseracing track to a place where a Sufi sheikh would set up his zawiya and, in the late 16th century, into a residential district

³² *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 42v. In the margin of this folio, it is mentioned that they were completed during the time of Zayn al-‘Ābidīn’s son, Sayyidī Aḥmad, and that the store selling coffee was built there as well. For the construction of the mosque by Zayn al-‘Ābidīn and the importance of the district as a stronghold of the Bakrī family, see Behrens-Abouseif, *Azbakiyya and its Environs*, pp. 49–52. On the Bakrī family, see also Adam Sabra, “Household Sufism in Sixteenth-Century Egypt: The Rise of al-Sāda al-Bakrīya,” in Rachida Chih and Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen (dir.), *Le soufisme à l’époque ottoman xvie-xviiie siècle*, Cairo: IFAO, 2010, pp. 101–118.

³³ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 42v. For the *khawājā* merchants of this period, see Nelly Hanna, *Making Big Money in 1600: The Life and Times Isma‘il Abu Taqiyya, Egyptian Merchant*, Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997; Fumihiko Hasebe, “Khawājā Merchants in Cairo in the Early Seventeenth Century,” *The Hiyoshi Review of the Humanities*, No. 35 (2020), pp. 275–300. (In Japanese)

³⁴ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 42v.

³⁵ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 42v. Barsbāy Qarā here is supposed to be Amir Barsbāy Qarā al-Zāhirī, one of al-Zāhiriyya, the mamluks of Sultan al-Zāhir Jaqmaq (r. 1438–1453). See Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Muntakhabāt min Ḥawādith al-duḥūr fī madā al-ayyām wa al-shuhūr*, 4 vols., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932–1942, vol. 8, pp. 456–457.

of the intellectual elite, including scholars and scribal bureaucrats. Although it should not be regarded merely as an upscale residential area, given that it was inhabited by shopkeepers and farmers, it is reasonable to assert that the migration of religious and civilian elites to the quiet suburban area near the waterfront was the driving force behind the development of the area. Therefore, several quarters (*ḥārāt*) with gates and gatekeepers were established. The construction of congregational mosques by a Sufi, followed by a member of a prominent scholarly family is an indicator of population growth. Additionally, the establishment of a madrasa by al-Sunbāṭī added to its character as a place of higher education, a clear marker of medieval and early modern Islamic urbanization. On the economic side, the growth of retail and handicraft industries and the establishment of a *khawājā* merchant's residence that functioned as a hub of information for regional and remote trade are noteworthy. Starting from the mid-16th century, this frontier of the provincial capital witnessed a rapid increase in the number of structures, including houses large and small, shops, mills, bakeries, a loggia for weighing commodities, a glass workshop, public bath, congregational mosques, madrasa, Sufi convent, while an outlying space was composed of a cattle enclosure, agricultural fields, and graveyards.

IV. Relocation of Tanneries from al-Ḥabbāniyya to Bāb al-Lūq

In his article, which considers the relocation of tanneries to the outer fringes as an indicator of urban growth in Ottoman Aleppo, Cairo, and Tunis, André Raymond examined the relocation of tanneries in Cairo westward from the southwestern area of Bāb Zuwayla to Bāb al-Lūq, inferring that this occurred in the early 1600s or at the end of the 16th century.³⁶ He stated that “aucun texte historique contemporain ne nous signale le transfert des tanneries,”³⁷ although Behrens-Abouseif expanded it, focusing mainly on the analysis of waqf documents of ‘Uthmān Aghā, the Ottoman chief African eunuch, and Dāwūd Aghā, the on-site supervisor eunuch in Cairo of the waqf. According to her research, it was in 1600 that a report was delivered to Hızır Pasha, the provincial governor of Egypt at that time, stating that, based on the 1598 edict of Sultan Mehmed III (r. 1595–1603) that authorized ‘Uthmān Aghā to build a mosque in al-Ḥabbaniyya southwest of Bāb Zuwayla, his agent (*wakīl*) Dāwūd Aghā

³⁶ André Raymond, “Le déplacement des tanneries à Alep, au Caire et à Tunis à l’époque ottoman: un ‘indicateur’ de croissance urbaine,” *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, n°55–56 (1990), pp. 38–40.

³⁷ Raymond, “Le déplacement des tanneries,” p. 38. However, in its note, he, relying on information from Nelly Hanna, adds that according to the records of the Bāb ‘Ālī court in Cairo, the relocation appears to have occurred in 1600 with the intervention of the central government.

purchased properties including tanneries at the site, razing them to make space for a mosque.³⁸ ‘Uthmān Aghā built two new tanneries in Bāb al-Lūq, as a replacement, as well as 30 shops, 5 mills, 14 storerooms, a coffeehouse, bakery and a *wikāla*, all of which were converted into waqf properties of the aforementioned mosque.³⁹ In her subsequent paper, Behrens-Abouseif provided further details about these tanneries, including how they were established and their complex structure and layout, based on Cairo’s al-Bāb al-‘Ālī court records.⁴⁰ In June 1601, Dāwūd Aghā acquired in his own name several dilapidated estates near Birkat al-Fīl and began developing the place, the so-called al-Dāwūdiyya.⁴¹ The following month, ‘Uthmān Aghā, who was in Istanbul, designated the new tanneries as waqf properties and established the object of the endowment, a new mosque with his mausoleum attached in al-Ḥabbaniyya which would later be called Malika Ṣafiyya Mosque, Mecca and Medina, and the mausoleum of Bilāl, a famous Ethiopian companion of the Prophet, which was built in Damascus.⁴² ‘Uthmān Aghā established his own mausoleum with the intention of retiring to Cairo, but he was killed in January 1603, and Malika Ṣafiyya invalidated his waqf on the grounds of his slave status, seized it, and re-established it as her own waqf.⁴³ According to Behrens-Abouseif’s reconstruction based on deciphering Islamic court records, the new tanneries, one large and one small, together with two combined *rab*’s and shops buildings, two bakeries and mosques each, a *wikāla*, a coffee house facing al-Nāṣirī Canal, and a slaughterhouse facing Bāb al-Lūq Pond,

³⁸ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, *Egypt Adjustment to Ottoman Rule: Institutions, Waqf, and Architecture (16th and 17th Centuries)*, Leiden: Brill, 1994, p. 173. Dāwūd Aghā, who was also responsible for the management of al-Dashīsha waqf, undertook construction projects for himself in the southwest section outside Bāb Zuwayla and the south bank of Birkat al-Fīl. See Behrens-Abouseif, *Egypt Adjustment to Ottoman Rule*, pp. 174–175.

³⁹ Behrens-Abouseif, *Egypt Adjustment to Ottoman Rule*, p. 175.

⁴⁰ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “An Industrial Complex in Ottoman Cairo: The Tanneries at Bab al-Luq,” in *Dirāsāt fī ta’rīkh Miṣr al-iqtisādī wal-ijtimā’ī fī al-‘aṣr al-‘Uthmānī: A’ māl al-nadwa al-‘ilmiyya allatī aqāmat-hā Hay’at Fūlbrāyit bil-Qāhira fī al-fatra min 6–8 Dīsimbir 1996 m.*, Cairo: Dār al-Āfāq al-‘Arabiyya, 1996, pp. 1–8.

⁴¹ Behrens-Abouseif, “An Industrial Complex in Ottoman Cairo,” pp. 2–3.

⁴² Behrens-Abouseif, “An Industrial Complex in Ottoman Cairo,” p. 3. For the mausoleum of Bilāl al-Ḥabashī in the cemetery of Bāb al-Ṣaghīr, see Stephennie Mulder, *The Shrines of the ‘Alīds in Medieval Syria: Sunnis, Shi’is and the Architecture of Coexistence*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, pp. 119–129. On the additions by ‘Uthmān Aghā for his great countryman and its significance, see especially pp. 127–128 of *ibid*.

⁴³ Behrens-Abouseif, “An Industrial Complex in Ottoman Cairo,” p. 3. For Malika Ṣafiyya Mosque completed in 1610, and the circumstances surrounding its construction, see Behrens-Abouseif, *Egypt Adjustment to Ottoman Rule*, pp. 162–163, 176–177; Jane Hathaway, *The Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Harem: From African Slave to Power-Broker*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 185.

formed “an industrial complex.”⁴⁴

The details of the process regarding the relocation can be found in *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*’s unique descriptions, not available elsewhere. It begins as follows:

On 4 Rabī‘I, 1007 A.H. (October 5, 1598), an imperial decree (*amr khunkārī*) was delivered by an amir named Aḥmad Aghā, who was not a eunuch (*khaṣīy*), concerning the demolition of tanneries (*madābiḡh*) where cattle, buffalo and goat skins were tanned and a slaughterhouse (*madhbah*) where livestock were slaughtered by a person named al-Mu‘allim Ghālī ibn Ḥunuk al-Misraja. Therefore, all the structures were destroyed and a madrasa, houses (*buyūt*), and shops (*ḥawānūt*) were built there. It was aforementioned Aḥmad Aghā who drove the destruction, because he had built a house (*bayt*) near the aforementioned slaughterhouse, and because of its location facing the slaughterhouse, he was subjected to the disgusting smell of blood, dung, and filth that accumulated there. He continued his efforts to destroy or abolish them for years, finally achieving his goal.⁴⁵

To summarize, this military officer Aḥmad, who may have been a current or former head of one of seven regiments of the Egyptian province, given that he was “an amir who was not a eunuch” and bore the title of *aghā*, succeeded in relieving his own dissatisfaction with his living conditions through the power of an imperial decree that he had drawn from the sultan of Istanbul, Mehmed III.⁴⁶ With regard to the location and form of ownership of the old tanneries prior to the relocation, Ibn al-‘Ajamī notes the following:

These tanneries were initially located from Darb al-Fawākhir to Khuṭṭ al-Ḥabbāniyya, which Dāwūd Aghā al-Ṣaghīr designated as waqf properties for building maintenance and expenditures. He acquired many houses there, which he usurped from their owners through coercion, fraud, and aggression.⁴⁷

Dāwūd Aghā’s coercive and harsh methods made him notorious in Cairo society in

⁴⁴ Behrens-Abouseif, “An Industrial Complex in Ottoman Cairo,” pp. 4–5, 8. See especially the reproduced bird’s-eye image on p. 8. However, for the northern and southern buildings in the discussion on p. 4, it seems right to reverse them.

⁴⁵ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 31rv.

⁴⁶ The identity of Aḥmad Aghā, including his relationship with ‘Uthmān Aghā and Dāwūd Aghā, requires further research in the registers of the Islamic courts in Cairo and other Ottoman documentary sources, but that is a subject of future study.

⁴⁷ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 31v.

those days. Furthermore, the author also criticizes the construction of the new madrasa after demolishing the tanneries and a slaughterhouse.

A large amount of soil was then removed from the site, and the reminder of the site was filled with multiple walls. According to the information I received, many workers died during the excavation of the foundations. A large piece of land on the side collapsed and buried them, under which they lost their lives and ceased to pulse. Their affairs are to Allah, the Highest! This madrasa was submerged underground, without intimacy (*uns*) and light (*nūr*), and I am unable to identify the point in time when Friday collective prayers originated there.⁴⁸

He also notes that the people who were deprived of their homes prayed divine punishment for Dāwūd Aghā, and that “he was a tyrant (*jabbār*), obstinate (*‘anīd*), and unjust (*ẓālim*) and he hated Muslims greatly.”⁴⁹ The author also states that the construction work was interrupted for many years and that finishing touches commenced “in the year I began writing this work of history,” that is, around 1610.⁵⁰

According to *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, the construction of the new tanneries (*madābiḡh jadīda*) began in 1008 A.H./ July 1599–July 1600, on the site of the dilapidated shops. The author also mentions that, “I have seen one of them when it was still in business.” There were two tanneries, one for cowhide and the other for goatskin. There were also shops where the upper floor was used as residences, but only a few people lived there. Dāwūd Aghā was in charge of its construction.⁵¹ The author offers a vivid description of the scene:

Darkness and gloom descended on these tanneries and this souk. For they were built with illegal revenues (*māl ḥarām*), and the filth and garbage collected from tanneries began to pour into al-Nāṣirī Canal under Qanṭarat Qudādār. In the period of the Nile (*zaman al-Nīl*), it flowed out and went where Allah wished, but in the period of summer (*zaman al-ṣayf*), it accumulated in al-Nāṣirī Canal, clogging up near al-Maghribī Mosque, where it flowed like blood from dying of the brazilwood (*baqqam*), so much so that a person who did not know it

⁴⁸ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 31v.

⁴⁹ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fols. 31v–32r. Note that Ibn al-‘Ajamī does not mention ‘Uthmān Aghā at all.

⁵⁰ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 32r. It roughly coincides with the year of completion of the Malika Ṣafiyya Mosque, but there is no mention of any confiscation by the empress. It should also be taken note that the author considered this religious establishment a madrasa, not a mosque.

⁵¹ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 35r.

would think it was blood.⁵²

This narration, describing how the red-dyed wastewater was flowing in the canal at the point of Qudādār Bridge, where the road extending directly west from Bāb al-Kharq intersected the above canal, is possible only by someone who has witnessed it.

Dāwūd Aghā also built a new slaughterhouse near these tanneries. It was located on the dilapidated waqf estate of Ibrāhīm al-Barddār Mosque, which had a minaret and a *maktab*, but in the *maktab* “I did not see boys reciting the Qur’an,” Ibn al-‘Ajamī writes. Dāwūd Aghā tore down the minaret and the *maktab*. The mosque functioned without a minaret, but following condemnation from the people, Dāwūd Aghā rebuilt it.⁵³ He established a bakery (*furn*) there as well, which operated briefly but closed down subsequently. Furthermore, when the slaughterhouse emerged, the old al-Shākir mosque in the neighborhood remained unused, and prayers were no longer offered there. The author, who had offered prayers there once, states that it had already closed by the time he wrote *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*. The mosque once had a muezzin with an enchanting voice, which could be heard even from a distance, “al-Duqqī next to Būlāq al-Takrūr ” on the western bank of the Nile.⁵⁴ Such expressions are characteristic of the author, who also spent time in Giza on the western bank of the Nile as a place of work.⁵⁵

The detailed descriptions we have examined above concluded with a sentence of prayer, “This Dāwūd Aghā is a sin among the sins of the age, may Allah not grant him good fortune in place of the Muslims!”⁵⁶ Ibn al-‘Ajamī, who was concerned about environmental degradation of his place, considers the eunuch who was in charge of the relocation of the tanneries and slaughterhouse to the new site as the main culprit, criticizing him harshly. However, as Raymond pointed out, it was a typical development in the growth of early modern Arab cities that these types of workplaces, which created nuisance to the residents living in the vicinity, were pushed to the new periphery, which was primarily responsible for urban development.

Of particular importance among the new aspects elucidated by *Mabāhij al-ikhwān* is the compound situation in which a powerful figure frustrated by his living conditions repeatedly appealed to the distant imperial top of power, and in tandem

⁵² *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 35r. “The period of the Nile” here can be interpreted as referring to the flooding period of the Nile since the full water (*wafā’ al-Nīl*) in August, and “the period of summer” as referring to the period from around May to before the full water in August.

⁵³ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 35rv. This mosque would refer to Jarkas Mosque. See Behrens-Abouseif, “An Industrial Complex in Ottoman Cairo,” p. 4, 8.

⁵⁴ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 35v.

⁵⁵ Hasebe, “Weighing Merchandise and Writing History,” pp. 58–59.

⁵⁶ *Mabāhij al-ikhwān*, fol. 35v.

with his efforts, a leading court eunuch and his local supervisor eunuch relocated the concerned workplaces to the fringe area of the provincial capital. As for the critical eye of Ibn al-‘Ajamī, a citizen of the Būlāq port, it may well reflect the reception of Cairo’s inhabitants at the time to the urban transformation led by the court eunuchs, who could be considered foreigners to this metropolis of the Nile.

V. Conclusion

This paper attempts to shed new light on certain aspects of urban growth in the southern bank of Azbakiyya Pond and Bāb al-Lūq, both of which can be considered outskirts of the Ottoman provincial capital Cairo during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, based mainly on a contemporary Arabic narrative source that contains no small amount of unique information but has never been utilized on this topic. On the southern bank area of Azbakiyya Pond, wealthy scholars, Sufis, civilian elites, and a *khawājā* seeking a comfortable living environment led to the formation of a residential area, which in turn stimulated the migration of retail merchants, craftsmen, and farmers, leading to the formation of townships.

In contrast, Bāb al-Lūq, which was considered a marginal space with a certain number of residents since the Mamluk period and where higher education was practiced in the sixteenth century at the latest, tanneries and a slaughterhouse that had been in al-Ḥabbāniyya outside Bāb Zuwayla were relocated. This can be attributed due in part to the efforts of an influential military officer, a resident of al-Ḥabbāniyya, who appealed to the central authorities to eliminate livestock-related production facilities in the wake of increasing population density in the district. Furthermore, court eunuchs’ plans to form a new base after their retirement appear to have been an important driving factor as well. Although the two areas of focus in this paper differed in terms of the human composition and motivations of the promoters of development, they confirm that this greatest Arab city had various individual forces that enabled its external expansion during a period of political turmoil in Ottoman Egypt.

Table 1 : Main Builders and Structures in “Kafr al-Azbakiyya”

No	Builder	Occupation	Structure	Time of Construction
①	Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad al-Sunbāṭī	scholar, judge	Residence, madrasa with congregational mosque	Before 1580s
②	Shihāb al-Aṣamm	shaykh, waqf superintendant	Residence	Same period as ①?
③	‘Alam al-Dīn Mu’min al-Burullusī	Sufi shaykh	<i>zāwiya</i> , congregational mosque	Prior to ①
④	Zayn al-‘Ābidīn al-Bakrī	Head of Sufi order	Residence, public bath, shops	Later than ③
⑤	“A certain sharīf”	Secretary of the provincial governor's office	Residence	Same period as ④
⑥	Yahyā al-Zarqānī	<i>khawājā</i> merchant	Residence	Same period as ④
⑦	Muḥammad Jalabī	Secretary of the provincial governor's office	Residence	A few years later ④⑤⑥