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Redefining Urban Spaces in Cairo at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries

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Résumé

Au départ de cette contribution il y a, notamment, une sorte de bizarrerie que l'on observe au Caire dans le vocabulaire urbain. Dans la partie ancienne de la ville, six termes, dont deux sont à peu près synonymes, distinguent en les hiérarchisant quatre catégories de voie en fonction de leur taille, de leur largeur et de leur degré d'ouverture, en fonction de leur importance et de la place qu'elles occupent dans le réseau. En revanche, dans les extensions réalisées depuis le milieu du XIXe siècle, on emploie seulement l'un de ces six termes pour désigner indifféremment ce que l'on aurait tendance en français à appeler tantôt « rue », tantôt « avenue » ou « boulevard ». L'emploi, en n'importe quelle partie de la ville, d'un même mot, pour toute sorte de place, de la placette à l'esplanade, est la seconde « exception » cairote. Le Caire moderne : une ville de *shâri'* et de *mîdân* ?

Abstract

At the beginning of this article, we can see, in particular, something bizarre in the urban vocabulary of Cairo. In the old part of the city, six different words, including two that are almost synonymous, were used for describing four different categories of roads depending on their size, width and degree of openness, importance, and position in the communications network. On the other hand, the new roads built after the mid-19th century were designated by only one of the six words for what we, in France, call a '*rue*', an '*avenue*' or a '*boulevard*'. Another Cairene 'exception' is the use of the same word for all types of '*place*', '*placette'*, '*esplanade',* regardless of the city district. Modern Cairo: a city of *shâri'* and *mîdân*?



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Redefining Urban Spaces in Cairo at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries

We shall begin our study by pointing out a rather odd characteristic of Cairo's urban vocabulary. In the old section of Cairo, known as 'medieval', 'Islamic' or 'Fatimid', depending on the more or less academic or technical expressions in use today, six terms (*shari', sikka, hara, darb, 'atfa, zuqaq*), including two practically synonymous, *hara* and *darb*, are used to rank four categories of lanes according to size, width and traffic density (whether they are through streets or dead-ends), and according to their importance and their location on the network. On the other hand, extensions completed since the mid-19th century are labelled *shari'*, to designate what the French might call indifferently, 'street', 'avenue' or even 'boulevard' and *mamarr*, or 'passage', a term not used in the old city, where such passageways occur as covered or uncovered pedestrian passageways. The use of the word *midan*, or *maydan* in written Arabic, in any section of the city, for any kind of place, from a small square to an esplanade, is the other 'exception' in the language of Cairo. Modern Cairo: a city of *shari'* and *midan*?

Two Cairo exceptions

Since they appeared only recently – in the 19th century – these two characteristics are contemporary and indeed exceptional in comparison with other cities of the Arab world, both close by or far away. Both follow the same mechanism: a word which formerly applied to a quasi-unique and remarkable object and has now come to designate indistinctly a whole field of morphological and functional phenomena well beyond its initial definition. Though it may seem somewhat brutal to historians, we shall begin by jumping back through centuries in order to emphasize or rather play up disparity rather than continuity.

In Cairo and elsewhere in the Arab world, the word *shari'* has nearly always referred to a major highway. This so-called type of thoroughfare was so rare however that the term has acted as a true toponym: when used alone, it indicates, according to the 10th-century geographer Ibn Rustah, the road dividing Sanaa into two equal parts and 'it is, as N. Elisseeff wrote, Straight Street, Damascus' main street par excellence' in Ibn 'Asakir's 12th-century description. When used with the qualifier *al-'azham* ('major') the term designates the central avenue in Abbasid Samarra or Cairo's *qasaba*, the thousand-year-old North-South road, and critical structural element for the structural development of the city, as described in Maqrizi's *Khitat*, an extensive, 15th-century study of historical topography.

The word *shari'*, formed from the present participle 'opening onto ...', or 'leading to ...', clearly points to the specificity of this type of road: an open and busy street. More exactly, it expresses its legal status. Indeed, in addition to factors of width, length, shape or function. Moslem lawyers have traditionally classified roads according to two opposite

criteria, *nafidh* (or *salik*) /*ghayr nafidh*, 'opening onto' or 'not opening onto'. A *shari'* is necessarily *nafidh*. As Robert Brunschvig, a writer specialising in Islamic law wrote, 'it is the true street, opening at both ends…, a public way where all may pass' and whose integrity must be protected, or according to more contemporary usage and by definition, a public space.

While the *Description of Egypt* depicts the state of the country in the late 18th century and mentions only some very rare, and what's more, outlying instances of such thoroughfares, 'Ali Pasha Mubarak's late 19th century *Khitat* includes more than two hundred mentions of the word, as opposed to only three mentions in Maqrizi's medieval masterwork. Such profusion appears to illustrate a change in habits as revealed by an Arabic inventory of Cairo's streets (*shari'*), squares (*maydan*) and hara established by the postal service in 1893. Moreover, during the same period, *shari'* describes one of the categories used in the documents of certification of highways as public works.

With regard to *maydan-midan*, we will likewise jump back through times and observe an equally obvious change. The word, which meant originally 'large wide open space, delimited, level and generally quadrangular and intended for all equestrian exercises', also meant a place which, even if one of several in a capital city, was out of the ordinary because of its size or popularity, such as a hippodrome, an arena, a field for polo or *jerid*, a kind of horse tournament, a walkway where one could watch riders perform and which could accommodate huge demonstrations or group gatherings, royal and diplomatic processions, military troops or caravans. In Cairo this type of space could only be created, symbolically and functionally, under the reign of the horse-crazy Mamluk sultans, and remain, through time, deeply engraved in representations. Some of the city's *maydan* – esplanades reserved for equestrian exercises – are at least as old as the 9th century, the most famous being the huge Citadel plaza, Qaramaydan, which can still be identified in the urban network. However, in today's Egypt, none of the terms used elsewhere such as *saha* or *rahba*, or *batha* (Tunisian), or *sarha* used in Sanaa, Yemen, are used to talk of plazas, large or small; in Damascus the word *maydan* is only found today in the toponym of a suburb located in the southern part of the city, 'Midan', whose name comes from the Maydan Al-Hasa area dating back to the 12th century.

When the change took place, the equestrian reference and essence of the original definition, disappeared, leaving other, less significant elements of the original definition, especially reference to size, as we will observe in a noteworthy example of terminology issues arising in the 19th century, from Rifa'a al-Tahtawi description of Paris in Arabic. Confronted with problems of translation and lexical innovation, Sheikh Tahtawi, who was inspired, as a result of a meeting with orientalist philologists, Sylvestre de Sacy and Caussin de Perceval, to create a School for the study of language, reflected at length on the respective advantages and disadvantages of neologisms, revived traditional expressions and dialectical borrowings. In *Takhlis al-ibriz fi talkhis barris* (*The extraction of gold: An Overwiew of Paris*), is a narration of his stay in France between 1826-1831, when be escorted as Imam (chaplain, one might say) the first forty-member study mission sent by Muhammad Ali. In Takhlis he used the word *maydan* (pl. *mayadin*), or more specifically, *mawadi*', to describe for Egyptian readers Parisian public squares citing as

an example, *al-Rumayliyya* (square and not *maydan* which derives from 'located at the foot of the citadel' not to be confused with *Qaramaydan*, previously mentioned) which he defined as *fasahat 'azima* or 'large open spaces'.

On the other hand, he transferred the word 'boulevard' into Arabic with specific details on the correct pronunciation: *bulwar*, pl. *bulwarat*, and distinguished between outer and inner boulevards. Indeed, Tahtawi did not use the word *shari'*, as might be expected. One explanation may be that, while a comparison with Parisian squares was possible, French boulevards and Cairo's time-honoured thoroughfares – even the most important ones – were incommensurable. There may be another explanation however, in that the word *shari'*, by the early 19th century, had become archaic; it was no longer in use by the author and had not yet become part of the modern city vocabulary. This interpretation is confirmed by the absence of *shari'* among the terms used by Jomard in his *Description of Egypt*, who mentions as 300 'major' roads, mostly *sikka* and *darb*, all of which branch into *'atfa*. On the other hand, Tahtawi's spontaneous use of *maydam*, without inventing or borrowing a foreign word, may be sufficient reason not to rely on the inventory completed by the scientists in Bonaparte's expedition of only thirty years earlier. Indeed, their list did not include the word *maydam*. They used only *wasa'a*, 'widening', along with *birka*, 'easily flooded square', 'pond'. The former may be an equivalent term used as an *a posteriori* comment or a commonplace name actually heard on the field during the survey (the *Dictionary of Egyptian Arabic* by Badawi and Hinds mentions the current use of wasa'aya, 'capacious space', with the example of the vast esplanade located in front of the Abdine Palace). We may also assume that, as is often the case for squares or avenues and more generally for places of exception in cities, a *maydan* in the late 18th century was usually identified in Cairo by its proper name, with no need of an additional common noun to specify that it was a 'square'.

As for *shari'* the transformation of the word *maydan* in Cairo seems to be rather 'unnatural' and essentially the result of a modernisation strategy. During the 19th century, the urban nomenclature was subjected to an overall restructuring, with successive readjustments not unlike by trial and error method (but, apparently, without ever applying the word *shari'* to a dead end). Nawal Al-Messiri Nadim rightly emphasised the continuity of street names, by mentioning the use, even today in the old districts of Cairo, of terms whose 'meaning...has not changed significantly since medieval times'. The hierarchical junction system that she describes is remarkably clear in the urban network, but we cannot be sure this clarity and the coherence which lies beneath it are a legacy of the past, unaffected by clearings, encroachments and obstructions. Rather, they may be the result of a reform process, which, by redistributing old categories, 're-ordered' these (such is the meaning of the word *tanzim* – an Egyptian peculiarity – used to designate the Highway Department set up in stages since 1882), and identified clearly the various types of roads. This seems to be the case for a number of variants in the names of roads (more often common names than toponyms) used in the course of the 19th century: most changes having taken place between Bonaparte's Expedition and modern Egypt's first census (1848). In the *Darb al-Ahmar* district where in the 18505 25-30% of the roads were *shari'*, in 1848 *darb Sa'ada* was known as *Shari' al-Majalat*, a name that remained

unchanged. On the other hand, *darb Shoghlan* after being categorised as a *shari*‘ for a time, reverted to its original status and *sikka al-Ansari* became *shari*‘ *al-Ghandûr* then later, *‘atfa Bashtak* before becoming again *shari*‘ *al-Ghandûr*. We also observed that, beginning in 1848, the few roads identified until then by toponym (such as the Canebiere in Marseilles), were now identified by the common noun *shari*‘, a probable sign of higher status.

Redefining public space

These variations and adjustments in terminology are part of a redefinition of the status of urban space. André Raymond showed how in Muslim legal texts public spaces in traditional cities were a low standard issue, even negative to some extent, whereas dwellings and family space generally, had a positive image. This representation was often understood schematically inferring a negative quality from the legalistic arguments that in Muslim cities, if public spaces existed at all, they existed as residual spaces. André Raymond also showed how, during the Ottoman period, in residential districts, outside the private domestic sphere, spaces located in close proximity, likely to be a source of conflict, negotiation, covetousness and arrangement – especially the *fina'*, which borders houses – was ‘managed’ by neighbouring families, and beyond such spaces, by larger groups, even by communities. In Cairo as elsewhere, ‘de facto solidarity’ was established, sometimes independently of ethnic, religious, family or even professional bonds and more formal regulations. Among mediators acting out various roles, whether official or not, the *shaykh al-hara* or district leader, an individual (‘an interface‘, as one would say today) stood out as a double-faced and ambivalent representative of both the residents and the civil authority. Whether in private or general contexts, between the public collective what might be considered civil authority, André Raymond observed instances of intermingling, noting: ‘There are indeed public and private spaces as well as intermediate categories such as the *fina'* which lend themselves to privatization.’

In Cairo during the 19th century, the notable development of *shari*‘ ‘and to a lesser extent of *maydam* could be attributed to the official organisation and redefinition of public thoroughfares and spaces. This means that this type of space was no longer, to use André Raymond’s clever expression, a ‘threatened category’ but truly *shari‘*, which is to say, guaranteed open to public traffic by civil authority and free of individual or community control. Such ‘proliferating’ systematisation, leading as it does to the homogenisation of urban spaces, at least in the modern section of the city, has been observed elsewhere in the Arab world although applied more selectively to a single type of road. *Maydan*, for their part, emerged as places for visibility: for advertising. Far from yesterday’s equestrian performances, the *maydan* not only lost their image of wide open spaces (the word now applied to modest-sized squares) but they also their dimension as exhibition spaces.

Defence and illustration of public spaces, an 1864 circular addressed to the consuls of Alexandria, and applicable in Cairo, recalled the accepted fact that ‘in theory and in all countries, public roads cannot be monopolized or used exclusively by any business or



Figure 1. Cairo's old town, an intricate urban system where dead ends (shown in blue) occupy most of the street network (drawing J.-L. Arnaud).

private operation, likely to interrupt or even simply obstruct traffic'; the letter then mentioned cases of encroachment, infringement or abuse as well as a number of measures 'of public interest to be taken by the Police Administration'. Among such measures, the destruction of *mastabehs* (sidewalks) had been, at least since the French occupation, a recurrent theme in speeches on good urban organisation. The September 1889 decree, which set up the Tanzim Council and organised delegations to major Egyptian cities, specified the rules of alignment and again ordered the suppression of *mastabehs* 'existing outside constructions', except for 'historic, religious or art buildings, until their facades had been rebuilt on the line'. Article 9 of the 13 July decree of the same year offered some definitions: 'private individuals cannot open public streets without prior authorization and without first, as a rule, surrendering to the State free of charge the land

covered by these streets… No authorization is necessary to open a private street, if it is closed at both ends by a fence, gate or chains.'

Such texts represent an invaluable reference for the observer of 19th-century Cairo. The succession of measures and regulations over the years reflects not only the will of a civil authority to interfere in allocations of urban space for the 'general interest', but reveal the practical intelligence of a reforming philosophy, which, when faced with behaviours it wished to restrict, took into account the weight of traditional urban sociability. Indeed, while throwing objects from windows, unrestrained garbage disposal or inconsiderately beating carpets were purely and simply prohibited, the old tradition of setting up tents in the street at the time of festivals and ceremonies (in the 17th century J. Thévenot wrote of 'streets decorated with beautiful tents and beautiful cloths and other fabrics') was regulated by rules which varied according to the occasion, weddings, mourning, illuminations, carnivals, charity performances... Thus, 'occupying public streets on the occasion of a death was still permitted free of charge and did not require prior authorization, although the surface occupied could not, in any event, exceed one third of the total width of the street.' Underlying such legal texts is a vivid portrayal of city practices, whose timeliness and creativity are revealed by the measures provided to contain them. Between infringements – especially in the persistence of public cafés to expand, a practice which successive administrations have never quite managed to curtail – as well as practices arising from generally tolerated urban traditions, and regulated public spaces which allowed for occasional collective and individual appropriations, civil authority has been able to reaffirm control over an extremely full and vibrant urban space.

At the same time, drawing on these same legal sources, Nelly Hanna pointed at the concept of *maslaha 'amma* used by the religious courts until the 19th century to define 'acceptable or unacceptable behaviours, activities authorized in specific parts of the city and those not allowed', and observed a shift from the notion of common interest to that of public interest, which, by the end of the 19th century, the State was supposed to represent. That 'State' excluded vagrants, and later, based on the more restrictive legislation which followed the English occupation, rejected 'such individuals who attempted to earn a living by playing games of chance or fortune-tellers doing business on *public* roads, *publicly*-owned establishments or any place within *public* view'. The State also divided city businesses into a number of selected categories (cabarets, cafés, refreshment bars, breweries, theatres, circuses or clubs), in this way contributing to the heterogeneity evident in the asymmetry existing between the modern centre and other parts of the city.

New tools to master space

Based on an attempt to better control the organisation and use of urban spaces, the transformation of street names became part of a re-qualification process by which the administration gained increasingly precise and effective means of control. While the change in street names seems to have begun in the early part of the century, it is only at the time of the English occupation – at the end of 1882 – that the administration systematically created new tools for the control of Egyptian public spaces. The issue then

became one of ensuring that effective control of the reality of public spaces was consistent with the means of ensuring its administration.

Beginning in 1882 and for the first time in Egypt, English administrators developed pursued their municipal activities within the framework of annual budgets associated with work programs. The administration was centralised and employees made interchangeable. The hierarchical system of public services imposed a standard for summary reporting at all decision levels. In this context, knowledge of specific actions ceased to be tributary to the memory of civil servants. The administration undertook the production of inventories, censuses and cartographic documents. Streets, canals, land parcels, factories and individuals were drawn up, tallied and classified in order to make the work operational. Functional categories were designed to conform to the organisation of public services and objectives. One of the most extensive projects completed in this context was the establishment of a land registry for agricultural zones: each parcel of land was measured, charted and classified according to access to irrigation and fertility in order to determine the applicable tax base.

More generally, the competence of each administrative service was established in close connection with the categories set up to account for land use practices. To be efficient, administrative services could not overlap – each classified object could belong to only one category – and each must occupy the entire space – all objects were recorded. The nomenclature created according to these rules led to a reclassification of people, things and places, not always in line with the previous organisation.

While the English Occupation accelerated and generalised the production of nomenclature, the first sign of interest in Cairo's road system had had a similar perspective; indeed the same context of Occupation had inspired the members of the French Expedition to Egypt to draw up a detailed map of Cairo, a list of roads with more than 6,000 entries and to divide neighbourhoods according to new limits. It was indeed a re-categorisation achieved by the central power to increase their competence, and counteract land appropriation by communities of residents (*hara* – in Cairo, this term means a neighbourhood unit as well as the road that leads to it) and, by extension, restrict the individualisation of the residents' status and the personalisation of their respective roles. Two examples will illustrate how, by the end of the 19th century, the Occupation public services were motivated by similar objectives.

Declaration of public utility and alignment

Beginning in 1876, Egyptian finances were placed under the control of a national debt office whose principal objective was to promote cotton and sugar exports, investments served primarily to increase land productivity and cities and municipal projects were then minor issues in public finance. However, at the beginning of the English Occupation, the Public Works Department reformed the municipal administration services (there was no municipal authority then) by creating a system for the management of public roads. The service, named 'Tanzim service', perfectly suited their task. Their role was to draw a layout of alignments, classify streets, name them and establish their

widths… They did not intervene directly in the organisation of urban spaces, but were responsible for handling building permit applications and providing tools for the control and management of alignments. The first task of the Tanzim engineers was to draw up maps as a reference for all future projects. For each street they established a listing, a drawing, a proposed alignment and in the end, a declaration of public utility for ministerial decree. Once approved and declared of public utility the maps were used to oppose those residents with plans for construction. In this way, each road made up an independent unit for intervention, which had to have its limits set and be given a name before any action could be taken; all sections of public space were designated with names recognised by the administration who established a numbered list. Then, each land parcel front was assigned to one street and one street only. Such preliminary operation meant a complete 're-assessment' of Cairene urban space. The city was now divided into squares and subject to the surveyors' measures; work projects could now be evaluated. This first phase of the Tanzim activities required several months since the declarations of public utility did not begin before spring 1883. Then, the greatest portion of the Cairo street network was subjected to the new procedure, but ten years were necessary to reach the most remote dead ends. The number of streets declared of public utility by then had reached 1,125.

The service spent most of several years designing alignment maps; they were drawn up, street by street, on long paper tapes. This type of representation prohibited any possibility of broad-spectrum visualisation of the city (and require assemblage of hundreds of documents) as well as any assessment of the organisation and hierarchy of the traffic network, which shows that the administration's primary objective was to control space on a very fine scale, that of streets and real property. Contrary to what one may expect from a highway department, the main objective of the service created at the end of 1882 was not to improve the traffic of goods and people. The alignment maps did not specify the allotment of parcels (what's more, they were unusable as cadastral or pre-cadastral maps), but they mentioned along the streets the start of the divisions and the names of each owner. With this procedure, the State came to individualise responsibilities which previously, had been mostly collective. The practice of *fina'* which was one of agreement between neighbours – not necessarily owners – became strictly prohibited.

The administration seemed obsessed with their plan to separate the public domain from private properties. Initially, they were only in charge of public thoroughfares; roads passing through private property, did not concern them. The distinction between the two categories was established by law, but it was not enough for them, they imposed material distinctions between the two types of roads; private roads, as we mentioned earlier, had to be closed. Also in keeping with their will to separate the two types of property, the roadway system regulations provided with the original Tanzim text stipulated that all plots bounded by squares and streets should be enclosed and that the fences should be built on the property lines. Finally, if a building located inside the alignment were to be rebuilt, the owner had to set the new construction in front of the old one, so that it would follow the alignment.

These rules did not provide for a widening of streets to a set minimum width and their objective was more ideological than functional. The real issue was not so much to improve traffic as it was to ensure that the 'abstract' line on the map coincided with the 'concrete' line of street space, which became in this way an exclusively public space. Located between two rectilinear layouts, it no longer included places with unclear statuses, ie. that the administration could not categorise, or places likely to be appropriated by residents. Once the limits were set, the Tanzim could manage each square metre of surface in need of sweeping, lighting or macadamising Cairo's municipal employees, English at first, French later on, were experts at such accounting exercises.

As mentioned earlier, the mode of representation selected and the scale of the project prohibited any assessment of the city as a whole. The geographical distribution of roads declared of public utility, which Tanzim spent ten years developing, confirmed the deficiency. The priority of works projects was determined by their proximity to the seat of the government rather than by the hierarchy of the traffic network, a practice which led to discrepancies between the centre and other parts of the city and was highlighted by Nelly Hanna. Indeed, one third of the streets declared of public utility during the first year of the project were located in the Abdine district, around the government palace whereas there were none in the districts of Bab al-Sha'riyya (northside), Muski (centre of economic activities) and Khalifa (southern border). Five years went by before the service showed an interest in the industrial district of Bulaq which did not have the good fortune of including government buildings.

The maps included the name of each landowner. While the individuation of responsibilities resulting from this process could put an end to a user's rights in the residential and/or neighbourhood communities, the way of designating owners showed that public services identified other groups. *Waqfs* and, more generally, properties belonging to religious communities, were also mentioned on the maps with the names of their administrators. The form of the designations varied according to the nature of the property and of the group in question. Each *waqf* was generally identified by the name of its administrator. Remarkably they were exclusively Muslim, no Christian or jewish *waqf* appeared to be under the responsibility of a single individual. When *waqfs* were managed by administrations or communities, their names were cited instead of individuals' patronymics. In keeping with this system, each land parcel on the alignment maps was named after an individual or institutional administrator, and in all cases, a representative designated for dealings with the administration in matters of expropriations, demolition orders for buildings threatening to go to ruin, and when necessary, tax collection. This method may explain why the maps made no mention of the Christians' mortmain property; community properties were all referred to as *waqfs*. *Waqfs* and mortmain properties have very different legal statuses but, the municipal services were only concerned with identifying the land assignees.

In ten years, most of Cairo's thoroughfares were categorised; alignments for the main roads as well as for the more remote dead ends were drawn on a detailed map and declared of public utility. Many owners however, asked the administration to provide the streets in the new subdivisions with mains services as compensation for the

encumbrances imposed upon them. These claims were so frequent and financially impossible to satisfy that the services were forced to re-examine the classifications completed a few years earlier. Between 1885 and 1900, no less than thirty subdivisions were downgraded on the pretext that their streets were not adapted for through traffic. Thus, at the beginning, alignment maps seemed to be a pretext to draw up a list of streets and property owners. A few years later, when it was forced to develop the streets acquired from owners free of charge, the administration refused to take responsibility on the grounds that there was a change of policy with respect to traffic management. By acting this way, the administration indirectly validated the excuse used to justify several years of study, drafting and cartography for thoroughfares, down to the most remote and intricate dead ends.

Sub-division of neighbourhoods

On a scale just above that of the traffic network and by dividing the city into Account Units for census management, the public services also redefined categories. At the beginning of the 19th century, the city of Cairo was divided into administrative units based on two scales. The first was the *thumn*, literally the 'eighth'; this division, created by the administration of the Expedition to Egypt, divided Cairo into eight sections plus two districts at the periphery: Bulaq and Old Cairo. The city therefore included ten *thumn*; each under the authority of a *sheikh*. These units were then subdivided into *hara*, which, like the *thumn*, were under the responsibility of a *sheikh*.

The definition of neighbourhoods proposed by Jomard at the end of the 18th century was ambiguous. First of all, he identified 53 neighbourhoods (*harah* or *harat*) in a rather vague and incomplete list. Among the neighbourhoods he identified about 20 'main' districts. Then, in the index of names of places, he used three different terms to identify neighbourhoods: '*hârt'* (53 units), '*khott'* (13 units) and '*quartier'* (quarter) (6 units). Based on the above definition, one would think that the 53 *hârt* covered the entire city. Yet, their rather heterogeneous geographical distribution showed this was not at all the case (Figure 2). The *hârt* listed in the index occupied less than half of the residential area while the *khott* and the '*quartiers'* did not fill in the areas ignored by the distribution. It may be the discrepancy between the text supposed to cover the whole area and the actual distribution of space units stemmed from a twofold definition: an administrative definition of the city, divided into about 20 as opposed to 53 units on one hand, and on the other hand, a practical definition applying to many more smaller roads and/or neighbourhoods not recognised by the government services.

In order to organise the 1848 population census with, perhaps, the need to give a full and continuous picture of the city, Mohammed Ali's administration introduced a new degree of division: the *shiyakha*. It was an intermediate unit. For example, the *thumn* of Bulaq was divided into 25 *shiyakha* that each included several *hara* and other Account Units such as *hawsh* and *échéches* or parts of *tariq* (road) or *shari*'. The *shiyakha* were also placed under the authority of a *sheikh* and usually named after him. A comparison of the 1848 and 1868 censuses showed that, as a result, these designations were subject to

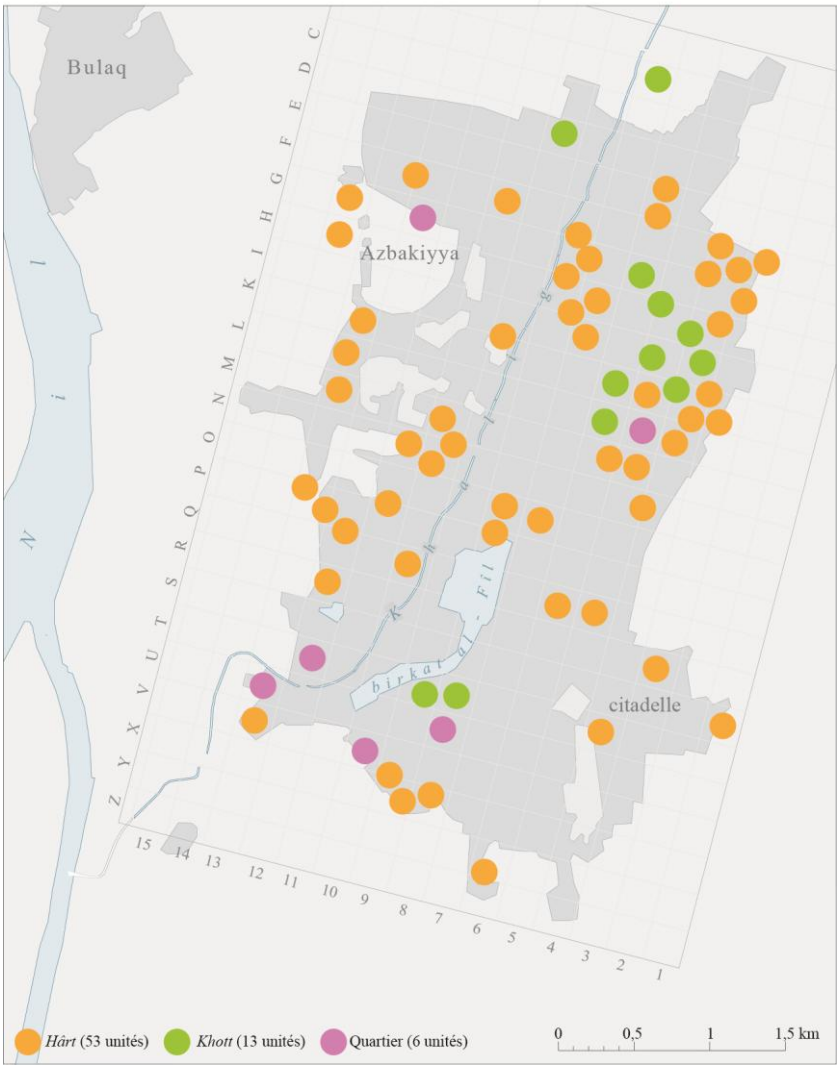


Figure 2. Cairo's neighbourhoods in 1798 by E. Jomard. Drawing J.-L. Arnaud according to E. Jomard. "Description de la ville et de la citadelle du Kaire", in *Description de l'Egypte*, Paris: Panckoucke, 1829, Vol. XVIII, Part 2, 137-288

change with each new administrator. For the last census of the century, in 1897, the *shiyakha* were again used. The 13 *qism* (sectors, new name for *thumn*) which made up the city of Cairo now included 207 *shiyakha*. The decision to return to a system of municipal divisions, abandoned for the census of 1882, was accidental. This decision made it possible to break down the data more precisely. A return to the previous units was not an automatic process, and indeed posed many technical problems whose solutions entailed a true re-appropriation of the former 'traditional' structure by the administration.

A quick comparison of the 1848, 1868 and 1897 *shiyakha* does not reveal important modifications as the same broad lines generally continued to divide the Account Units. A closer examination shows that in the 1897 census, each unit's perimeter was adjusted. The 1897 *shiyakha* were delimited to include each land parcel and roads passing through several units were split into sections which sometimes included only one house. To better manage the new division, the administration assigned individual administrative names to each *shiyakha*. Here again, the changes do not seem very significant, with the new names generally being the same as the old ones with one major

difference, they were no longer subject to change with the change of *sheikh*; patronymics became toponyms. Designations no longer eluded the administration and instead, became part of administrative decisions and publications. And so began, with the 1897 census – unlike previous censuses – the imposition of complete administrative control of municipal perimeters and their designations.

Beyond a merely technical interest, these changes can be interpreted in the same manner as the street alignment operation. Whereas in 1848 the name of the *sheikh* was that of the person in charge of the neighbouring community (he countersigned each census document), in 1897 it became a simple historical record. As for neighbourhood communities, they became geographical units: perimeters on a chart rather than the territory of a social group.

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