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Body, Place, and Memory: Sufism in Egypt throughout the 21st Century

Abstract

The study aims to contend that Sufism has long been considered in the hearts and minds of many Egyptians. People have always wanted to visit quality shrines to take Karamat or Baraka, a blessing power. The study sheds light on the importance of Sufi places for Egyptians through storytelling. Specific mosques are studied such as Al Sayida Zeinab, Al Sayida Nafisa, Sayyidna Al Hussein, Sidi Abdel Rahim El Qenawy, Sidi Al Morsi Abou El Abbas, Qubet Abou El Hawa. The focus is on the interaction between body and place in Sufi places through several questions raised throughout the study. From the stories mentioned throughout the paper, it is clear that not all Sufi Sheikhs Awliyaa are originally Egyptians. A lot of Sufis came to Egypt from all areas in the Arab World. Moreover, it was found that there is multifunctionality of a Sufi mosque and its influence on politics.

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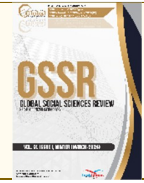
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Body, Place, and Memory: Sufism in Egypt throughout the 21st Century

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Abstract

The study aims to contend that Sufism has long been considered in the hearts and minds of many Egyptians. People have always wanted to visit quality shrines to take Karamat or Baraka, a blessing power. The study sheds light on the importance of Sufi places for Egyptians through storytelling. Specific mosques are studied such as Al Sayida Zeinab, Al Sayida Nafisa, Sayyidna Al Hussein, Sidi Abdel Rahim El Qenawy, Sidi Al Morsi Abou El Abbas, Qubet Abou El Hawa. The focus is on the interaction between body and place in Sufi places through several questions raised throughout the study. From the stories mentioned throughout the paper, it is clear that not all Sufi Sheikhs Awliyaa are originally Egyptians. A lot of Sufis came to Egypt from all areas in the Arab World. Moreover, it was found that there is multifunctionality of a Sufi mosque and its influence on politics.

Keywords: [Sufism](#), [Place](#), [Body Waliyy](#), [Memory](#), [Ahl Al Bayt](#), [Egypt](#)

Introduction

Scholarly works on Sufism have been almost entirely concerned with the philosophical underpinnings of Sufism and have given scant attention to the contemporary practice of Sufism. This study aims to pinpoint some of the basic principles and key concepts of Sufism in addition to the relation between body, space, and memory for

Sufis in Egypt. There are various interpretations of Sufism explaining its' meaning, main values, and principles. The study highlights some of those writings and stories related to Sufism in Egypt. It is not a holistic study of Sufism in the world. Nevertheless, it is a study of the interaction between body, place, and memory in Egypt with an emphasis on Sufi mosques.



The following places will be the focus of the study:

1. Al Sayyida Nafisa mosque, Cairo.
2. Al Sayyida Zeinab Mosque and Mouled, Cairo.
3. Imam Al Hussein Shrine, Cairo.
4. Al Sayyida Aisha mosque.
5. Demerdash hospital, Cairo and Seidi El Muhammadi Mosque.
6. Sidi Abd El Rahim El Qenawi mosque, Qena (Upper Egypt)
7. Sidi Al Awwam, Marsa Matrouh
8. Sidi Al Gharib, Suez
9. Qubbet Abou El Hawa, Aswan
10. Abou El Haggag – Luxor
11. Al Mursi Abu Al Abbas Mosque

Methodology

The study adopts participant observation as a method which is a qualitative method that involves the active participation of the researcher. The researcher here is immersed in a particular social setting or group, observing the behaviors and interactions of the participants. Understanding the experiences of individuals or groups in a particular social context is crucial. It involves spending time with people and communities in order to understand them (Possamai & Blasi, 2020).

Moreover, the study adopts the storytelling technique by focusing on the story of Sufi places in the memories of Egyptians. Stories usually offer a holistic view of participants' lived experiences. They allow us to gain insights into the cultures of local people who visit those places. Narratives are collected from in-person conversations and observations at the Sufi mosques.

Stories and storytelling are central to human experience and understanding. Narrative understanding is an innate human capacity; we think, live, and dream in story form. (Lewis, P. J., & Hildebrandt, K., 2019).

Introduction

Waliyy shrines in Egypt have long been considered a place of special importance in the hearts and minds of many Egyptians. Waliyy means a righteous man known for his piety, devoutness, and closeness to God.

People have always wanted to visit waliyy shrines to take Karamat or Baraka which means a blessing power. Of course, not all Egyptians believe

in Sufism especially Salafists in Egypt who perceive this as a kind of heresy and they are completely separate from true and right Islam. Sufi mosques are considered favorite destinations for Muslims who wish to pray for health, success, prosperity, and peace of mind and heart. They are places of reciting *Dhikr the remembrance of God* which means recitations of the names of God.

Egypt is well-known for the shrines of the Prophet Muhammed family (Ahl Al Bayt); Imam Hussein, Al Sayyida Zeinab, Al Sayyida Aisha, Al Sayyida Nafisa. People who are raised in the neighborhoods where there are Sufi shrines have certain memories of those places as well as individuals who are keen on paying visits regularly.

The paper sheds light on the definition of Sufism, the Philosophical underpinnings of Sufism: Body and Place, an overview of Sufi places in Egypt, and memory of Sufi Places in Egypt.

First: Sufism explained

Sufism is defined as the inner dimension of Islam, scholars mention that it originated from a group of people who gathered on the platform of the prophet's mosque in the 7th century.

Some scholars mention that the origin of the word comes from this group, *Ahle Suffa*, the People of the Platform (International Association of Sufism: 2023).

Sufism is debatable. The etymology is still unknown. Whether Sufism originally comes from the word "Istifaa" Choice or Al Istifaa or the line (Al Saff) the trait (Al Sefa) or wool (Al Soof) or related to the purity of the soul (Al Safaa).

Sufism started with the prince of believers Ali Ibn Abou Taleb the Abou Zir El Ghaffari and Salman Al Farisi (Mohamed Madi Abou El Azaem, 1983, 8)

Linguistically, some scholars trace the origin of the term "Sufism" or "Sufi" (and in Arabic al-sufi) to "suf: meaning wool.

Sufism is like a sea, you have to swim and dive in deeply to discover it (Ahmed Bahgat: 2009) you have to be a good swimmer to discover this sea. Sufism emphasizes the inner search for God and the renunciation of worldly matters. Sufis regularly visit the shrines of the "Ahl al-Bayt" (the family of the Prophet Muhammad), and "waliyy" (people deemed to be favored by God), and attend festivals that celebrate their birthdays (Moulid).

One of the key concepts to understanding Sufism is "Sufi school or order (Tariqa)". Over thousands of years, Sufis and their students traveled to many countries to spread their teachings. Thus, over time, many schools, orders, and *tariqat*, of Sufism were established. Each School has teachings introduced by the guide of the tariqa, a teacher (International Association of Sufism, 2023).

There are basic characteristics of the Sufi

Sufi prioritizes the hereafter but the Sufi knows the worth of this life and the hereafter.

The Sufi has to challenge himself/herself. The Sufi recognizes his faults really well.

For the Sufi, this world is so small. He wants to live in the afterlife with the prophet Mohamed and become from *Ahl Al Safwa*. He tries to perform all prayers and acts of worship. He seeks to swim in God's kingdom. He tries to purify his body and soul. He wants to live and die in the service of Islam. (Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'em: 2012, p. 17) Sufis try to do everything in the ideal way. They know the worth of this life, and they transcend it to the hereafter.

The characteristic of the Sufi is humility. For him/her true humility is the gift of those who bow to the greatness of the Creator.

Sufism is a fragrance to the soul and a light to humanity. It is for the soul to make it softer and it is for the mind to make it brighter. It is considered as food for the soul. It is science and it is taught by Sufis from one generation to another. The Sufi is always seeking purity, trying to purify the soul from impurities (Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'em: 2012, 28).

The Muslim is a believer in Allah alone, and he obeys Allah's commandments till doomsday. He believes in God's books, prophets, angels, fate and destiny, and doomsday (Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'em: 1983: 9).

Very important for Muslims to become true believers. He has to be frank, faithful, generous, patient, trustworthy, trust God, and count on him (Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'em:1983, 12).

Al Ihsan for the Muslim to be a true believer he has to have *Ihsan*. It means *to do beautiful things*, "*beautification*", "*perfection*", or "*excellence*". A Muslim has to work efficiently. He has to do his job

while knowing that Allah is observing (Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'em: 1983, 17).

He has to totally believe that God will help and support him. Even if all evidence is against you, you have to believe that God is there for you (Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'em: 1983, 18).

There are different ranks for believers which are first: Al Zahed (The ascetic): turns away from the enjoyment of life and from enjoying the goods of the here and now. Second: Al 'Abed (The worshipper): he performs all prayers and all acts of worship. Third: Al 'Aref (The knower): he is trying to approach God with his thoughts and spirituality.

The ascetic if he is not a knower, he favors special treatment. He does and performs his duty in the *here and now* to gain the reward in the hereafter. The ascetic if he is not a knower, his asceticism is a special treatment. He sells the *here and now* for the *hereafter*.

The knower tries to avoid anything that takes him away from truth and God. Performing prayers and religious duties is a sport for purifying the soul. So, it is purified from anger, hatred, and arrogance. Thus, it becomes servile and peaceful to the Godly and sacred spirit. There is no rivalry to the face of the light of God.

The ascetic has a different purpose than the knower which is enjoying pleasures in the hereafter. The purpose of the worshipper is different from the knower which is the pleasures of the hereafter in return to the worshipping. The purpose of the knower is only God and truth. (Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'em:1983, 27-29)

Al Zhikr, Remembrance of God in public spaces, makes people use time as the best way to take the surplus or increment *Al Fadl* from God. Brothers of the order *Al Tarika* notice each other. They love each other. The main characteristics of brothers should be that they love each other, are humble, love God, cooperate to obey God, and gather for good purposes. (Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'em:1983, 29)

For Sufis, people of the path or order "Ahl Al Tarik" are scientists who know Allah and Sunna well. God gave them secrets. God disclosed to them his wisdom and gave them strange powers. God gave them morality and thus they became of a higher rank. He protected their souls from committing sins. Their hearts are submissive and

devout to God (Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'em:1983,35).

They have a deep belief that this life is trivial and they care for the hereafter. They are absolutely merciful. The Sufi is there to help the poor and needy. He tries to avoid committing any harm to others.

The name of the Sufi as well is "The disciple "Al Mourid" who has to submit to God's will even if he doesn't know why he is obeying but he has to obey.

Muslims are organs in the human body. Each organ has a function that contributes to the body as a whole (Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'em:1983, p. 40).

Muslims help each other to reach happiness in the hereafter. They should help each other and should be compassionate to each other as if they are one body. Every Muslim should be happy when he sees his brother happy. He should seek all means to make his brother happier (Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'em:1983, 42-43).

For the Sufi, he has to understand the following conceptions:

Divine presence: Tassawwuf is a path that leads man towards Unity. It is the man who created duality by making himself distinct from God. In the Quranic verse, " *We (God) are closer to him (man) than his jugular vein* (Sura 51, Verse 16). God has always been present in the heart of man (Dehlvi, 2009).

Time: The best time has to be spent with God.

Travel: Travelling of the heart to reach truth and wisdom.

Al Murid: He is taking the preliminary steps towards knowledge.

Al Maqam: Status of the worshipper in the prayers.

Disclosure: when things unravel and we comprehend the wisdom of God.

Seeking refuge/Recourse: The heart of the Sufi approaches God.

Transfiguration/Manifestation: when light shines on the knowers, truth approaches.

Observation: when you see the truth with the evidence of Tawhid.

Liberty: the individual is a worshipper of God. He is free when he is a true worshipper.

Man, of the era/ Living man: To reach the way to Allah, to be able to win and reach happiness, Man has to try to reach a living man who can guide him/her to understand the Quran and Sunna well. He knows how to purify the soul from all diseases (Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'em:1983, 48).

Salafists attack Sufis as they are presenting heresies. For Sufis, you should seek the way to God by all means. As a science, you learn through teachers, you can't seek the way to God without teachers who inspire you and give you different tools to induct and deduct. You know God not by mind alone as "Mu'tazala said" but through mind and heart (Mohamed Mady Abou El Aza'em:1983, 30).

Madad: The main concept of Sufism is "Madad", which means I gained support from you. When you call upon the *madad*, it's asking for the *uli al amr* (Spiritual Guides). The quality here is a means to help you reach God, it doesn't mean that the waliyy is giving you something directly. She/He acts as the means "Al Waseela."

So, the word "*madad*" means: to ask to be given something and to get the positive energy from the Waliyy and it is to be interpreted according to the state of the person to whom it is said. This is the true meaning of madad.

Righteous saints of God (Awliyaa Allah Al Saleheen): The guides who are considered teachers that help Sufis understand God's teachings.

The majority of awliyā' belonged to the House of the Prophet and that is why they claim the title as-sayyid (for men) or as-sayyida (for women) which means "gentleman". Or they can be descendants of Prophet Mohamed (Al Intisab ila Al Al Bayt)

Friendship: All friendships are there for a purpose. Not for those who love each other in the name of God *Al Mutahabbeen fi Allah*. Their friendship is like a family bond. They are like one soul in different bodies. Bodies may change but souls cannot change. (Mohamed Mady Abou El Aza'em 1975, Shahzad Bashir, 2011)

Baraka: For the majority of visitors of mawlid are craving for baraka. Baraka means the blessing. The conventional wisdom for Sufis holds that it can be acquired quite physically, e.g. by means of kissing the trellis of the tomb, touching the sepulcher

itself, or even by handshake of a living man/living sheikh.

Dhikr: The most important practice for Sufis is "dhikr" (remembrance of God). It typically involves reciting God's divine names.

ruyā: Visionary dreams (ruyā): In Sufi traditions, dreams are regarded as a source of divinely-inspired insights and even revelation

Khalwa: Khalwa is the practice of self-isolation, typically in a small cell, in order to focus on pious devotions (Nathan Hofer, 2023).

Sufi order (Tariqa) Sufi brotherhoods (Tariqa): In Egypt, there are millions of Sufis, who follow 77 *Turuq* (orders). The biggest orders are al-Rifa'iya and al-Azmiya. And of the main Sufi orders is "The Shadhili Order" is an order tariqah or Sufi order of Sunni Islam founded by al-Shadhili in the 13th century

Waliyy: In Sufism, one saintly person of every age is said to receive the illuminations (tadjalli) from God. (Gifted from God). He has Karamat (Blessings from Allah). He is protected from Allah so as not to commit ethical faults as he is a prototype for people.

Waliyya: Even a woman becomes the object of veneration (Waliyya)

Waliyy Shrine: The tomb of a wali called in Egypt generally as *maqām* a modest and smaller object, *darih* usually a more imposing building or *zāwiya* this is also the term which is used for Sufi hospice.

Mashhad, Mazar, Qubba, Qasr: *Mashhad* is the place of a martyr, shahīd, *mazār* the place of pious visits, *ziyārāt*, *qubba* i.e. a dome or even *qasr* palace.

Maqam: Two colors clearly prevail in the Sufi maqam. Green is the color of Islam, the color of eternal life, and first of all color of Akhadar, the mysterious benefactor of Sufis. On the other hand, the blue color—as common Muslims usually believe—can repel demons (jin).

Maqam is a mark that showcases how successful the human being is in his/her path to reach God. The human being who seeks to reach God is called the passable *Al Salek* (Zaher Azab El Zoghby: 1980).

Moulid: "Moulid" means birthday in Arabic, and is a celebration of a holy person (Either the day of birth or death of a Waliyy) Each moulid has its own center, that is to say, the supposed burial place of Waliyy. The moulid is a place where people gather

to celebrate the waliyy as if they celebrate the man or woman who is alive in their minds even if he or she is dead.

There are several mawlid in Egypt distinguished by strongly determined data, e.g.: Al Hussein (famous festivity in Cairo), Al Sayyida Zeinab (famous festivity in Cairo), Abd El Rehim al-Qināwī (famous festivity in Qena), Yūsuf al-Hajjāj (renowned feast in Luxor) and of course prophet Muhammad (commemorated annually at the 11th day of the month rabīc al-awwal and is celebrated in all governorates in Egypt). Egyptians travel from different areas in Egypt to attend the near moulid to them or the moulid of Waliyy whom they feel attached to.

The family of the Prophet (Ahl Al Bait/Al Al Bayt): The centrality of devotion to the Prophet and his family is one aspect of Egyptian Sufi religious life (Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd, 1992)

In Egypt, there were many members of the family of the Prophet (ahl al-bait), Companions of the Prophet (sahāba or ashāb), and their Followers (tābiḥ ū as-sahāba) in the country shortly after its conquest (639–641 A.D.)

There are several shrines of members of the Prophets' family, especially Imam al-Husain, the grandson of Muhammad, whose head was supposedly buried directly in the mosque (next to Al Azhar mosque) entitled by his name.

Ahl al-Bayt in Islam means the holy family of the Prophet Muhammad, particularly his daughter Fatimah, her husband Ali Ibn Abi Taleb (who was also Muhammad's cousin), their sons al-Husayn and Hasan, and their descendants.

Since the 12th and 13th centuries, most Sufi orders have included members of the Prophet's family as their ancestors which they trace back to the Prophet through sayyidna 'Alī Ibn Abi Taleb. (Encyclopedia Britannica: 2023)

Second: Sufi mosques in Egypt

There are many Sufi areas in Egypt that are attractive destinations to many Egyptians and non-Egyptians, Sufis, or people who love the family of Prophet Mohamed Peace be Upon Him (PBUH) *Ahl Al Bayt* but don't necessarily call themselves Sufis.

Sayyidna Al Hussein

Al Hussein mosque Cairo was built in fact in Egypt

in 1154. In fact, it is located in the Khan El Khalili area across the street from Al Azha mosque.

Hussein ibn Ali was killed at the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD. His head was believed to have been brought to Cairo and buried in the grounds of the mosque.

The Moulid of Al Hussein is one of the biggest moulids in Egypt.

Al Sayyida Zainab

A lot of women from "The House of the Prophet" were buried just in the ground of Cairo. Al Sayyida Zainab the daughter of Imam c Alī ibn Abī Tālib. She witnessed the Karbala battle which was a key battle in the history of Islam particularly for Sufis. Al-Husayn ibn 'Ali, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and son of 'Ali, the fourth caliph, was defeated and killed on the 10th of October, 680 AD.

Al Sayyida Zainab's mother is Fatima, Daughter of Prophet Mohamed (PBUH), and Her Father is Ali Ibn Abi Taleb. She witnessed Karbelaa. Her children died and her brother Al Hussein died. She was born in Al Medina after her two brothers Al Hassan and Al Hussein in Shaaban, during the fifth Hijri year. She saw Prophet Mohamed till the age of five. She was known by a lot of names "Om El Awagez", "Om Hashem", "Al Tahra", Ra'eesat Al Diwan ", and " Sayedat Al Bayan" (Maher Hassan, 2019).

Al Sayyida Aisha

The mosque of Sayyida Aisha Bint Jaafar Al-Sadiq Bin Muhammad Al-Baqir Bin Ali Zain Al-Abidin Bin Al-Hussein Bin Ali Bin Abi Talib, the sister of Imam Musa Al-Kadhim,(Sayyida Aisha mosque, 2019)

Al Sayyida Aisha mosque is located beside the City of the Dead where sultans and princes, saints and scholars, elites, and common people have been buried in Cairo, creating a unique historic city of the dead.

Al Sayida Nafisa– Nafisat Al 'elm

Mashhad Al Sayida Nafisa or the mosque of Sayyida Nafisa is a mosque in the area of Sayida Nafisa (or Darb El Sebae), it is part of a historic tomb called *Al Karafa* City of the Dead in Cairo. This mosque is for the granddaughter of Prophet Mohamed. Her shrine is inside the mosque.

A great-granddaughter of the Prophet Mohamed who lived and died in Egypt in the eighth century. Nafisa bent El Imam El Hassan El Anwar Ibn El Hassan Ibn Ali Ibn Abi Taleb . She was well known for her worship and asceticism. Sayyida Nafisa was a beacon of knowledge and a source of blessing, baraka, from the family of the Prophet.

From the karama of Sayyida Nafisa in one day, the river Nile dried up. Some people went to her and she gave them a piece of her head cover and told them to throw it in the Nile. Then there was a flood. Egyptians loved her.

There is an area in the mosque called Solitude *Khalwet Al Sayyida Nafisa*. Al Sayyida Nafisa was This is a part of Egypt that embraced the graceful bodies of Sufi saints who pursued the love of God and the afterlife in the love of this world and its material joys (Dina Ezzat, 2019).

At Al Sayida Nafisa, Egyptians came from different neighborhoods to visit Nafisat Al Elm which means precious in her knowledge. *Nafisa* means precious, *and Ilm* means knowledge. She was well known for being pious, intelligent, and knowledgeable.

She was the great-granddaughter of the Prophet Mohamed (PBUH), daughter of al-Hasan al-Anwar, the son of Zaid bin Hassan bin Imam Ali (A.S.). Nafisa moved to Cairo from Medina in 809 AD and died in Cairo in 824 AD. She married Ishaq al-Mutamin, son of the sixth Shia Imam Jafar al-Sadiq.

Al Sayida Nafisa mosque was renovated and reopened in 2024 to the public after two years. When women entered the mosque they kept chanting "We missed you our lady ... Wahashtena ya Setena "There is a separation between women and men in prayer areas and even at Al Maqam "where the shrine of Sayida Nafisa " is located.

There are common rituals that a lot of ladies do they recite "Al Fatha ". The first Quranic verse that is usually recited at the shrine location.

Some women prefer to pray there. Some people bring food or money to distribute. At the mosque entrance, there are flower sellers. You can buy a flower when entering Sayida Nafisa to put on her shrine.

Some women sang Sufi songs (Tawasheeh). People hold to the shrine, to the metal part

surrounding the shrine. Sometimes they put their clothes on it to make it blessed. People ask for various things like healing the patient.

Al Sayida Nafissa bent El Hassan Al Anwar Ibn Zayd Ibn El Imam El Hassan Ibn El Imam Ali Ibn Abi Taleb is the brother of Al Imam Al Hussein. The shrine is called *Al Rawda* which means the garden as if the garden is the paradise. People seek what is called permission for *Al Izn* to visit as if the lady has to permit who visits her.

Historians mention that the well-known prayer *Duaa* of "Al Sayida Nafisa" is as follows: "A lot of adversities faced me, my chest has tightened, I was in despair then God's kindness prevailed".

From the stories that people still recall till now about Al Sayeda Nafisa, some people were really sad that she was traveling from Egypt. They wanted her to stay and teach them. She came originally to Egypt from Saudi Arabia with her husband and father. Egyptians loved her. She taught a lot of Egyptians. She wanted to travel back to Saudi Arabia. She was teaching Al Imam Al Shafei. He used to visit her on his trip to his home one of the Karamat, the Nile did not flood in one year, people come to her to complain about what happened. She removed her face cover and gave it to them.

People tell Al Sayida Nafisa what they suffer from. They pray for each other. Some take photos of the shrine as a nice memory to show to their family and friends (Personal Communication: August 2023).

Qubet Abou El Hawa

Qubet Abou El Hawa is the tomb of Sufi Sheikh Sidi Ali Ibn El Hawa. It can be translated to the *Dome of the Wind*. Princes tombs are located at the foot of the hill of Qubet el Hawa this tomb is one of the most distinguished tombs in Aswan.

This dome has been there from around 900 till 1000 years. It was there in the fourth and fifth centuries, the Hegri calendar, eleventh and twelfth centuries A.D.

The dome was used as a tower to secure Aswan and to protect commerce in the Nile (El-Din, 2020).

When you take a boat and land at Qubbet Abou El Hawa hill, you get to see the tombs of Middle Kingdom princes. Besides you can see at the same place traces of an old monastery along with old pharaonic murals.

It is a place where you can see the different layers of the Egyptian civilization; Ancient Egyptian, Coptic, and Islamic.

Abou El Hawa is one of Awliyaa who lived during the Fattamid Caliphate. The dome architecturally is similar to the domes that were built by the Fattamids.

Talking with a boatman from Elephantine Island to the hill, he told me that this place is very attractive for tourists who come specifically to see the monastery along with the ancient Egyptian tombs and they usually climb to the top of the hill where Sidi Abou El Hawa tomb is located. He added that Christians also visit the monastery during the Feast of Resurrection (Personal Communication: March 2023)

Al Mursi Abu Al Abbas Mosque

Al Mursi Abu Al Abbas Mosque was built primarily in 1775. The tomb of Abu Al-Abbas indeed became a place of pilgrimage for many Muslims from Egypt and Morocco. Algerian Sheikh Abu el Hassan El Maghreby built a much larger mosque on the site which became Al Mursi Abu Al Abbas mosque. The mosque was renovated in 1863. (Ministry of State for Administrative Development: 2014)

Al Mursi Abou Al Abbas or Abou El Abbas Al Morsi was a student of Abi El Hassan Al Shazly. He met him in Tunisia in nearly 640 A.H., 1242 A.D. (Ahmed El Badawy El Dessouky, 1978, 38-39).

There are three main mouleds of Sufi Waliyy *Awliyaa Allah El Saleheen* in Alexandria. There is Moulid Sidi El Moursi Abou El Abbas, Sidi Gaber, and Sidi Beshr.

Near Al Mursi Abou El Abbas there is Qaytbay citadel. This area in Alexandria is called Baḥarī.

Sidi El Ghareeb

Sidi El Gharib and Sidi El Arbe'een are from Awliyaa Allah Al Saleheen in the Suez governorate.

Historians mention that Al Gharib was a military officer who was known around 926 A.D. when Qarmatians stopped pilgrims and captured women and children.

Al Gharib came to Egypt around 926 A.D. and he fought the Qarmatians but he died in the battle. Al Gharib was buried in the tomb that was built by Suez inhabitants. He was not an Egyptian military officer but a Moroccan one.

The shrine and tomb of Al Gharib were a passage for pilgrims. There was a well also to provide pilgrims with water. (egyptopia.com, [n.d.](#))

Suez governorate is well known to be the homeland of the stranger *Balad El Gharib*. Al Gharib means the stranger. A lot of Egyptians like to pray in the mosque. After the 1973 October war, President Sadat used to pray the Eid prayer in the mosque annually to celebrate the victory. (Personal communication: October 2023)

Sidi Abdel Rehim El Qinawy Mosque

For many historians, Qena is the nest of Awliyaa and the shelter of the knowers. From the Awliyaa is (Al Kamal Al Edfawy El Shafiiey). For Sufis, Qena is the place of the lion of Upper Egypt (Abd El Rehim El Qenawy)

Sidi Abd El Rehim El Qenawy was born in Morocco in Sabta. His family was originally from Hijaz (El Husseineya from descendants of Mohamed Ibn Jaafar Al Sadak).

He was raised on the importance of knowledge and religion. He travelled to the Levant to learn then returned to Morocco. He then went to Pilgrimage. He was in the Khelwa for two years in Qena.

From the songs recited: *“Give us, Sidi Abdel Rahim El Qenawy. A look at us. We came from a long distance to the lion of Upper Egypt. “To his strong fortress, We came to the Qena’ay to ask for ending plagues and hardships. Through madad, we find the medicine that will cure our hearts and souls (The Lion of Upper Egypt, Sidi Abdel Rehim El Qenawy, 2023).*

Besides the moulid, Al Mirmah is held which is called Mirmah Moulded Sidi Abdel Rahim El Qenawy. Al-Mirmah is an equestrian tradition passed by generation after the other in Upper Egypt.

Al-Mirmah is an old tradition originally of Qena consisting of a series of games played on horseback during mawlid. Knights from different tribes show their skills in riding their horses

In Al-Mirmah, Al Mizmar starts from the Asr prayer to the Maghreb Prayer. The week is divided among different families. Al Mizmar starts from a specific house. Al Mermah is a contest where different equestrians compete with each other to show the beauty and strength of their horses. The

contest is between two equestrians. Horses have names. They can be males or females. Al Remaha is truth in upper Egypt. It is for Qena. One story: when the horse eats, it is when we eat.

Al Moulded starts with Al Mermah. It is as if they respond to the calls of Sidi Abd El Rahim El Qenawy. Horses bring people and families together. Then at night, there is a party where horses are decorated and dance. (SPOT artworks, [2022](#))

Al Mirmah is linked to religious festivals, It is also held in governorates in Upper Egypt including Luxor, Aswan, and Qena. It can be in Mouldid El Nabawi (Mouldid of the prophet), Mouldid of Seidi Abd El Rehim El Qenawy, or Mid Shaaban celebration).

At Al Mirmah the city hosts a great number of people from different families. Food is served. It is a gathering for families to get to know each other more.

Sidi Al Awwam

Sidi Al Awwam's story according to historians is during King Fouad Al Awal, people found a dead body lying on the sea. Fish didn't eat the dead body. His looks didn't change because of the salty water. People built a tomb for him next to the shore and called him "Sidi El Awwam " Al Awwam means" The swimmer ". Sidi Al Awwam's mosque is located in Marsa Matrouh, Egypt. (Medhat Nassar: 2016)

Abou El Haggag – Luxor

Abu El-Haggag mosque is located in Luxor Temple and it dates back to the middle of the Fatimid Era.

Abou al-Haggag mosque is inside an Ancient Egyptian Temple. All over Egypt, there are clear signs of how this country was a melting pot of many different civilizations and cultures, such as Qubet Abou El Hawa and Abou al-Haggag Mosque which can be found within the magnificent Temple of Luxor.

Luxor temple was surrounded by churches, and by the late sixth century A.D. one had been constructed within the first court itself. Late on the mosque of Abu el-Haggag was built and it has been a main mosque in Luxor governorate for almost thirty-five centuries. (Institute of Ancient Cultures,

University of Chicago: The Mosque of Abu'l Haggag)

Sidi Al Mohamadi El Demerdash

Sidi Al Demerdash is a mosque and next to it is the famous Demerdash Hospital which was established in 1928 with a donation from Mr. Abdel Rahim El Demerdash Pasha, and the Faculty of Medicine was established at Ain Shams University in 1947 and was called Demerdash Faculty of Medicine (Ain Shams College of Medicine, ASU)

Al Demerdash Hospital which hosts millions of patients annually was land donated by Abd El Rehim El Demerdash Pasha he was affiliated to the Sufi order *Tariqa* (Al Tarika Al Demerdashiya).

Besides Al Demerdash Hospital is the palace of Abdel Rahim Pasha El Demerdash. He donated the garden of his palace to establish the hospital. Ain Shams Faculty of Medicine was established in it in 1947.

Sheikh Abdel Rahim Mostafa El Demerdash was born in Cairo in 1270 in the *zawiya* of his grandfather Al Sheikh El Demerdash Al Muhammady in Abbasiya, Cairo. This was written at the entrance of the hospital.

Al Demerdash Pasha died after the Mamluki period and the beginning of the Ottoman period in Egypt. He was buried in his mosque at Muhammady area in Abbasiya (Nahla El Sherbiny, 2020).

Third: Sufi orders Tariqas in Egypt

Sufi thought began as an individual activity until the third century AH. Sufism is targeted at spiritual purification.

Sufis follow the Quran and Sunna. They don't believe that the study of text alone can lead to spiritual purification. There are some additional practices that Muslims can adopt to raise their level of religiosity.

Sufism is not represented by one institution in Egypt but rather by fragmented groups with people tied together and linked to one Sheikh (Dina Shehata, p. 44). Examples are as follows: Al Tarika Al Azmiya (Mohamed Mady Abou El Aza'em), Al Tariqa Al Shazliyya (Abi El Hassan Al Shazly), Al Tariqa Al Dessoukeya (Ibrahim Al Dessouki).

In 1895, A council for Sufi Tariqas was established. Law 118 of 1976 established the High

Council for Sufi Tariqas which regulates the Sufi activities in Egypt. Local Tariqas must answer to this council regarding their activities.

In a book on Sufism and politics in Egypt, historian Ammar Ali Hassan argues that during the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, the disciplines of Sufism continued to flourish, and its followers continued to increase. Sufi leaders were strongly connected to the various Egyptian governments.

Sufism went beyond being a merely internal state of spirituality to being an organizational structure with a wide presence through the different paths/orders (Al Torok Al Suffiya) (Ammar Ali Hassan: 1997).

Al Tariqa Al 'Azmiya as an example of a Sufi order

Al 'Azmiya is one of the largest Tariqas in Egypt. It was established in 1893 and registered in 1934 by Sheikh Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'im. All people are welcome to the order *Al Tariqa*. They are not necessarily from a specific social class, educational background, or age group. There are circles of reciting quran and reading prayers (Salawat). These are a collection of Quranic verses and prayers combined with sayings written by Sheikh Mohamed Madi Abou El Aza'im. Usually, Sufis meet on Sunday afternoons.

A middle-aged lady told me that she feels that members of the Sufi Tariqa are like brothers and sisters to her. The bond is very strong as she feels that it is brotherhood in God (Al Ikhewa fi Allah) (Personal Communication: July 2023)

Conclusion

This study demonstrated how those places are still very significant in the hearts and minds of people. People feel attached to the Sufi mosques in different neighborhoods and they are usually like a city center where a lot of mosques or main shopping areas, restaurants, or tourist areas are next to them. Those mosques in the neighborhoods are multifunctional. Muslims travel from different governorates inside Egypt and from abroad to attend the moulids which are celebrations of the Waliyy. Sufi areas are proof of the different layers of the Egyptian identity and how Egypt is a cradle of civilizations. The study pinpoints some of the stories that form the memory of Egyptians regarding Sufi areas but it is not a full account of

the philosophical underpinnings of Sufism nor captures all Sufi areas in Egypt.

This study proved that the body is a critical concern in Sufi thought and practice. Waliyy shrines are attractive destinations for many Egyptians.

Sufi's conception of the human body and corporeality is complex. There is an intricate relationship between the mind, body, and soul according to Sufism.

From the stories mentioned throughout the paper, it is clear that not all Sufi Sheikhs *Awliyaa* are originally Egyptians. They loved Egypt and died in Egypt. A lot of Sufis came to Egypt from all areas in the Arab World. From Yemen, From Hejaz, from Morocco.

As for Sufi places, there is multifunctionality of a Sufi mosque. It can be associated with public gardens, gathering areas, funeral prayers, hospitals, and schools. This proves that these places are of special importance that Egyptians like to establish neighborhoods besides the mosque as it is considered a blessing *Baraka* for them.

From the Sufi areas that were deeply discovered in this study, it is clear that there are many activities besides celebrating the *Waliyy*. Such as Al Mirmah in Qena in Mould Sidi Abd El Rehim El Qenawy, or the food that is served in many mouldids as in Mould Al Sayida Zainab.

No doubt that there are a lot of implications of Sufism on the politics of Egypt. Sufi leaders had strong connections with political leaders throughout history.

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