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# Some Mosques of the Jebel Nefusa\*

J. W. ALLAN

This article is based on work carried out in the Jebel Nefusa, Tripolitania, under the auspices of the Society for Libyan Studies. In 1969 Olwen Brogan, James Allan and Ramadan Kedida surveyed some of the mosques catalogued below, and the work was continued in 1971 and 1973 by Olwen Brogan, Philip Kenrick and Mohamed Worfelli, joined in 1971 by Antony Hutt. It was through the kindness and courtesy of the Libyan Department of Antiquities that these expeditions were able to take the field, and we record with particular gratitude the help of the late Awad Sadawiya and the late Isa al Aswad. We also wish to record our thanks to Dr. Amar al Nami who took us to the mosques of Nalut and Forsettā, and also to Sharūs.

Map references are given to the American 1/50,000 survey, 1962, and are taken from Sheets 1588, i, Kabaow; 1688, i, Awlad Bu Jadid; 1688 iv, Marqus; 1788, iv, Baldat ad Duwayb.

The photographs were taken by J. W. Allan, A. Hutt and P. M. Kenrick; the plans were made by P. M. Kenrick, A. Hutt and O. Brogan.

The mosques dotted about the pleasant rolling uplands of the Jebel Nefusa, or on the crags and in the valleys of its majestic escarpment, have been known to travellers since the early years of Islam, and many of them, or their successors, are mentioned by Islamic writers of the middle ages and early modern times. Those that can be seen today arouse curiosity because of their topographical setting and because of their association with the Ibadite sect to which the tribes of the Jebel have so long adhered. It has long been assumed that this country, in the hinterland of Sabratha, felt to some degree the impact of the Christian religion which spread over the Roman province of Tripolitania in the fourth and fifth centuries, a view supported by occasional allusions in late antique literature and by echoes which are met in Muslim traditions (see notes 1. to 4, 20). Students of Roman history are naturally interested in the theme of the christianisation of this region, and in 1925 Romanelli summed up the traditional accounts.

What is now required is descriptions of the mosques themselves, old and new.

This article attempts to provide a contribution towards a record, and it contains a catalogue of twenty-nine mosques (fig. 1). Many more still await study.

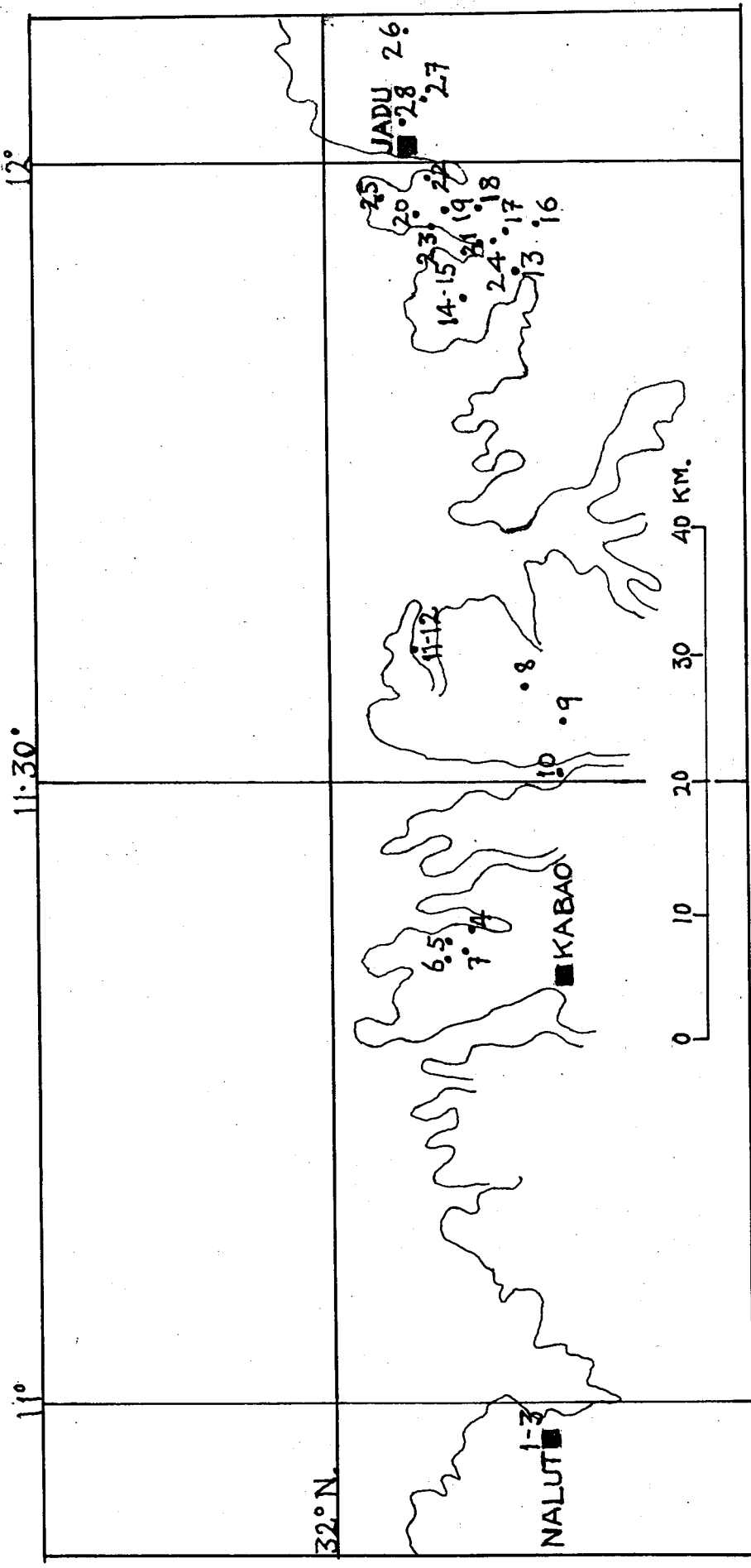
\* P. ROMANELLI, *Le Sedi Episcopali della Tripolitania Antica*: «Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia», VI, 1925-1926, p. 156.

See also:

A. DI VITA, *La Diffusione del Cristianesimo*

*nell'Interno della Tripolitania*, «Quaderni di Archeologia della Libia», 5, 1967, 121-142.

Short notes on some Gebel Mosques are given in *Notiziario della Missione Francescana della Tripolitania*, September 1968, pp. 29-32.



- The map is based on Despois' *Le Djebel Nefousa*.
- Nālūt, near the Gastr.
  - Al Jami Al Ali;
  - Tindrār (or Tin Adrar).
  - Forsetta. Sidi Abu Yahya (1588 i.
  - Kabao. 260274). Forsetta. Hawariyin Mosque (1588 i. 243294).
  - Subterranean mosque beside No. 5.
  - Forsetta. Taghlis. (1588 i. 245286).
  - Ibughturin (Bughtura), Taghlis. (1688 iv. Marqus 442299).
  - Wighu. Ajalmam. (1688 iv. 445233).
  - Sharwas (Sharus). Sidi Abu Mahruf. (1688 iv. 392279).
  - Dijji. Shaykh Abu Shayba. (1688 iv. 480358).
  - Dijji. Abu Urthman Al Mazati.
  - Al Kherba (Rehibat). Jami Sudga (Saduqa), or Al Amirat. (1688 i. Awlad Bujadid. 742314).
  - Iner. Abu Sulayman Al Ineri. (1688 i. 750355).
  - Iner. Hawariyin Mosque. (1688 i. 812351).
  - Umm Al Tabul Tayishaq). Sidi Ishaq. ((1688 i. 810368).
  - Al Kherba (Rehibat). Hawariyin Mosque (on road to Tmezda). (1688 i. 791329).
  - Kanisiya Mosque. (1688 i. 793335).
  - Buqar Mosque. (1688 i. 812351).
  - Mashad Taghlis. (1688 i. 814382).
  - Tmezda. Mosque of Abu Nasr. (1688 i. 736357).
  - Damriyya Mosque. (1688 i. 813388).
  - Wifat. Jami. Tarigh. (1688 i. 799379).
  - Abu Zakariyya Al Tukiti. (1688 i.
  - East of Jadu. Jami Shubat Muri. (1788 iv. Baldat Al Duwayb. 281390).
  - Jami Azzabi Yunis. (1788 iv. 223391).
  - Jami Khirbat Al Harah. (1788 iv. 205397).
  - Ycfren. Tiwitrwin Mosque.

Fig. 1. - The sites of the Mosques.

\* \* \*

CATALOGUE

NALUT

1. Name – The Old Mosque (Pl. LI *a*).  
Position – By the gasr in Nālūt.  
Description – An underground mosque with mihrab orientated approximately south. An inscription in the plaster work mentions a re-building in 1226 H/A. D. 1811.
2. Name – al-Jāmi' al-'ālī (The Upper or High Mosque) (Pl. LI *b*).  
Position – In Nālūt.  
Description – The mosque contains the trunk of an old tree which is associated with a local holy man and hence venerated. The mihrab is orientated approximately south-south-east. There are a number of inscriptions in the plaster work of the ceiling.
3. Name – Tindrar or Tin Adrar (of the mountain) (Pl. LI *c*).  
Position – In Nālūt.  
Description – The mosque originally had five aisles with a central nave, but the two western aisles have disintegrated leaving a space which looks like a small court. Orientation of mihrab 140°. Each arcade has four piers. A number of pieces of column drums (? Roman) were re-used in the building, and others are lying about.  
Notes – Despois (1) records the existence of an old mosque with only three out of five naves still standing in the ruins of what is known as 'Old Nalut'. Lewicki (2) suggests that these ruins are indentical with the town of Tāgh(e)rwīt, recorded by al-Shammākhi (3).

FORSETTĀ

4. Name – Mosque of Sīdī Abū Yaḥyā (Pl. LII *a, b*; fig. 2).  
Position – Below Forsetṭā castle, on the hillside. AMS. Sheet 1588 i, 260274.  
Description – This is one of the larger mosques in the Jebel Nefusa, and measures 11.70 × 12.70 m. There are four aisles but originally there was a fifth. There is a tomb within the mosque. Outside is a courtyard of irregular triangular shape with its own mihrab. Orientation of mosque mihrab, 160°. Notes – Two men by the name of Abu Yaḥyā are connected with Forsetṭā—one the son of Abū D'err Ṣadduq who perished at the battle of Manu in 283 H/A. D. 896–7, the other the son of Abū' l-Qāsim Yūnis who lived at the same period (4). Whether this is the

(1) J. DESPOIS, *Le Djebel Nefousa*, Paris-Tunis 1935, pp. 234–6 (henceforward referred to as Despois).

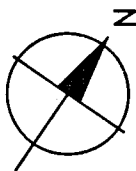
(2) T. LEWICKI, *Études Ibādites nord-africaines*, Warsaw 1955, p. 79 (henceforward referred to as Lewicki).

(3) AL-SHAMMĀKHI, *KITĀB AL-SIYAR* (henceforward referred to as al-Shammākhi). Quoted by Lewicki p. 79.

(4) R. BASSET, *Les sanctuaires du Jebel Nefousa*, *Journal Asiatique*, série 9, t. 13 and 14, 1899 p. 445 (henceforward referred to as Basset).

FORSATTA

Sidi Abu Yahya



Scale 1 : 50



Orientation of  
mihrab = 154°

A: column drum  
with lamps  
B: stand with  
lamps

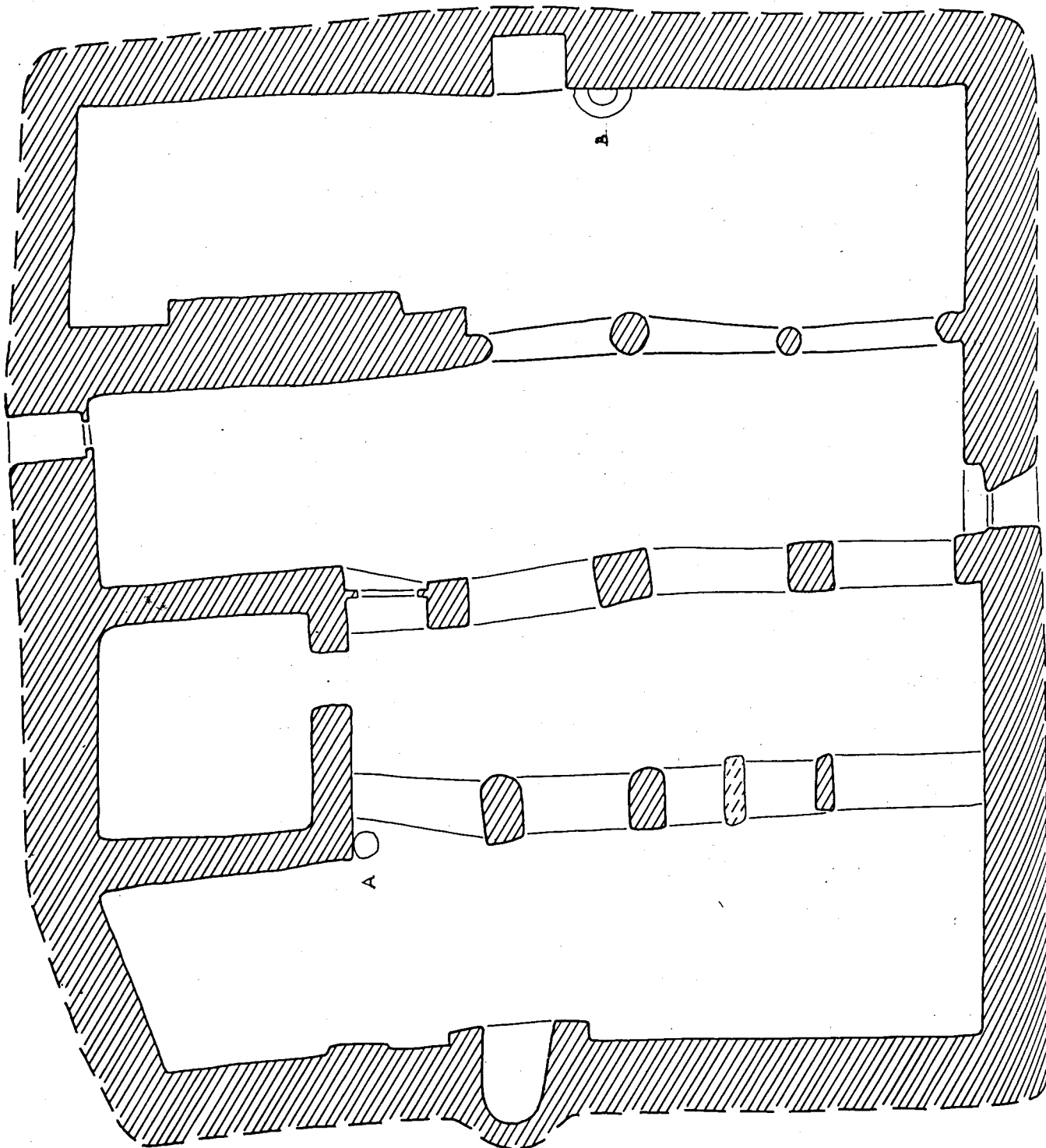


Fig. 2. - The Mosque No. 4.

*kanīsat* mentioned by al-Shammākhi is not clear, though there is a well lower down the hill called *Bir Kanīsat* where Christians are said traditionally to have met.

5. Name – Ḥawāriyīn (Pl. LIII *a*; fig. 3).  
 Position – 2–3 km. north-west of Forsetṭā. AMS Sheet 1588 i, 243294.  
 Description – The mosque measures approximately 7.80 × 9.00 metres. Orientation of mihrab 136°. There are three aisles, the central one being slightly higher than the other two. The south-eastern arcade has three arches still open and one blocked up, while the north-eastern arcade is in a bad state of repair. The piers of both contain columns, and there are some dressed stones around the doorway and in use as steps. An inscription says that the mosque was last repaired in 1312 H/A. D. 1894–95.  
 Notes – Perhaps this is the Lahourin ruin mentioned by Despois (see also Mosque No. 7) (5).
6. Name – Unknown (Pl. LIII *b*).  
 Position – Alongside Ḥawāriyīn mosque, on its north-west side.  
 Description – This is a rough subterranean mosque, with its entrance at the bottom of a gully cut into the ground and walled with stones. Orientation as 5.
7. Name – Taghlīs (Pls. LIV *a, b, c*, LV *a*; fig. 4).  
 Position – On a hill near Forsetṭā commanding a fine view. AMS. Sheet 1588 i, 245286.  
 Description – The mosque consists of a prayer hall and several other chambers. Retaining-walls of roughly-packed stones have been added at some fairly recent date round the whole of the exterior. The overall measurements are 22 × 9 m.; orientation of mihrab, 170°. A plaster inscription, now fallen, said that it was made by Sheikh Suleyman 'Amr al-Azzabī, and another records repairs made to the mosque in 965 H. / A. D. 1557–8. Fragments of Late Roman pottery were found in the vicinity.  
 Notes – Perhaps this is the Taghlīs ruin mentioned by Despois (6). Lewicki (7) suggests that either this mosque or Despois' Lahourin mosque may be identical with the oratory of Abu 'Amr at Tasrar, mentioned in the *Siyar al-mashā'ikh*.

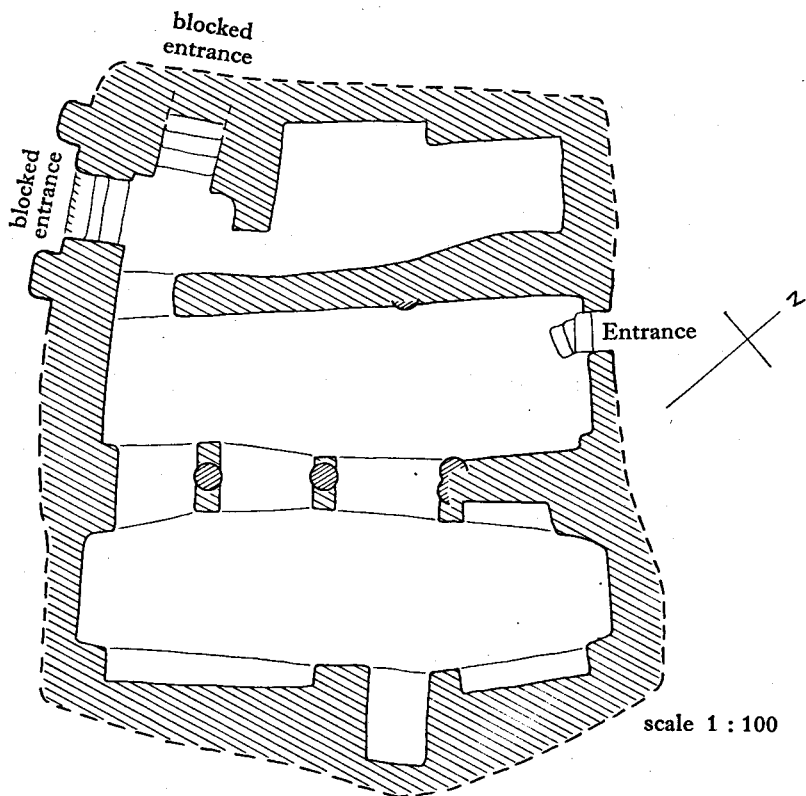
#### IBUGHṬŪRIN / BŪGHṬŪRĀ

8. Name – Taghlīs (Pls. LV *b*, LVI *a, b, c*; fig. 5).  
 Position – About 2 km. north of Bighighila (Buqayqilah). AMS Sheet 1688 iv, 442299.  
 Description – The body of the mosque measures approximately 16.90 × 9.00 m. The door is on the south side, and has heavily plastered cut jambs. The arch-head of the doorway has three shallow-cut roundels. The mosque consists of two aisles linked by a single opening, and three of the arches in the aisles have been strengthened with rough piers of dressed stone. There appear to be two mihrabs, one orientated 172°, the other 140°. The latter appears to be a later addition and has a number of finely-dressed stones, including one with five-pointed roundels, well-cut. Plaster decoration in the mosque includes the star of Suleymān, comb patterns, and the hand of Fātima. A piece of Roman red slip ware was found outside the mosque.

(5) DESPOIS, p. 265.

(6) DESPOIS, p. 265.

(7) LEWICKI, pp. 133–4.



Mihrab

Fig. 3. - The Mosque No. 5.

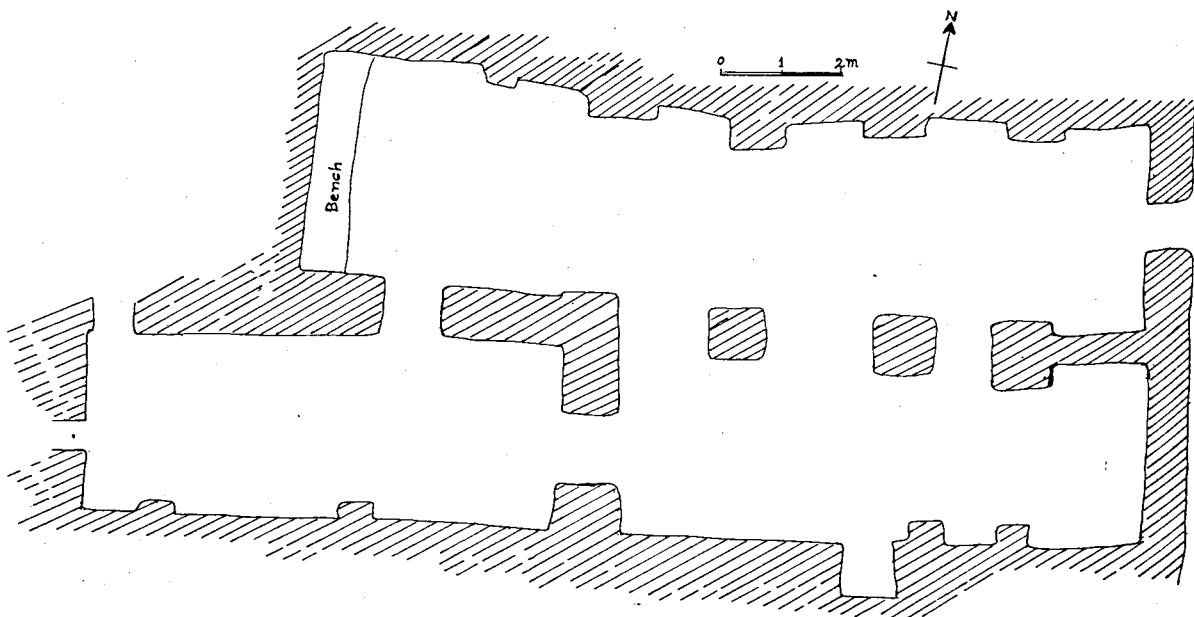


Fig. 4. - The Mosque No. 7. Mihrab

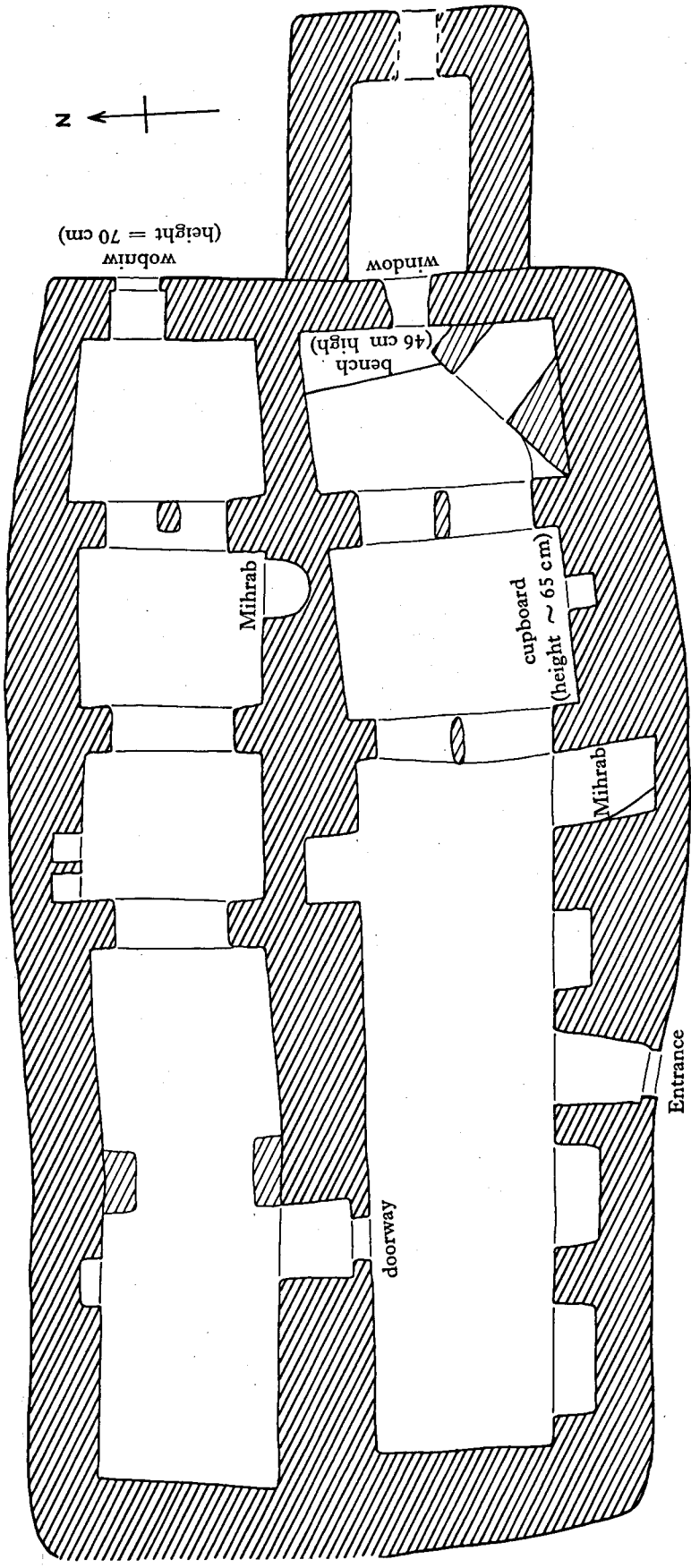


Fig. 5. - The Mosque No. 8.

Notes – Lewicki deduced a geographical location for a mosque of this name which fits well the location of mosque No. 8. Bughtūrā, according to al-Shammākhī, was an apostolic mosque (8). In the *Tasmīyat meshāhid al-jebel* it is called a *kanīsat* (9).

## WIGHŪ

9. Name – Ajalmām (Pl. LVI, *d*).

Position – In Wighū, south of the ruins. AMS. Sheet 1688 iv, c. 445233.

Description – The mosque now consists of a simple rectangular building 11.35 × 3.40 metres. Originally it had three aisles of similar size, the remains of the third being visible in the small courtyard outside the mosque. Orientation, 135°.

Notes – The *Tasmīyat meshāhid al-jebel* records the existence of two mosques at Wighū: Ajalmām, and the mosque of Sheikh Abān (10). Despois (11) recorded an underground mosque at Wighū (not seen by us) which seems to fit the description of the latter.

## SHARŪS

10. Name – Mosque of Abū Mahrūf (Pls. LVII *a-d*, LVIII *a, b*).

Position – In the centre of the ruined town of Sharūs which was destroyed by its rival Wighū about A. D. 1100. AMS. Sheet 1688 iv, 392279.

Description – This is the largest and most impressive of the mosques we visited. It has four aisles. Sixteen Kufic inscriptions on stone were photographed and Nicholas Lowick of the British Museum read them from the photographs and his text and translation were published in the *5th Report of the Society for Libyan Studies*, 1973–4, pp. 14–19. The mosque is being comprehensively surveyed and studied by Mohamed Worfelli.

## DIJJI

11. Name – Mosque of Abū Shayba.

Position – On left of road just before village, approaching from the south. AMS. Sheet 1688 iv, 480358.

Description – A two-aisled mosque; mihrab orientated 150°. It contains some re-used columns and capitals.

Notes – According to Lewicki Abū Shayba carried the Ibādī flag at the battle of Manu (283 H./A. D. 896–7) and al-Shammākhī records a mosque at Dījjī in his name (13).

12. Name – Mosque of Abū 'Uthmān al Mazāti.

Position – In Dījjī.

Description – A plaster inscription on one of the arches gives the date H./A. D. 1757–8.

Notes – Abū 'Uthmān was an early 9th century Ibādī, and his sanctuary was visited by 16th century pilgrims (14).

(8) LEWICKI, pp. 68–9.

(9) BASSET, pp. 435 and 464.

(10) LEWICKI, pp. 47–8; BASSET, pp. 435 458, 461.

(11) DESPOIS, pp. 265 and 299.

(12) LEWICKI, pp. 121–2.

(13) AL-SHAMMAKHI, p. 267, quoted by Lewicki, p. 121.

(14) AL-SHAMMAKHI, p. 544, quoted by Lewicki, p. 122; Basset, pp. 435 and 465.

WEST OF JADŪ

AL-KHERBA

13. Name - Jāmi' Sudga, or al-'Amirat (Pls. LIX *a, b*, LX *a*; fig. 6).

Position - In a'-Kherba. AMS. Sheet 1688 i, 742314.

Description - The Mosque measures approximately 12.10 × 9.00 m., is rectangular in shape, and is divided by a 5-arched arcade into two aisles. The qibla aisle is barrel-vaulted and plastered; the second aisle has a flat roof of palm-trunks. The plaster in much of the mosque is decorated with criss-cross patterns, dots, circles, hands, feet and arms, and an

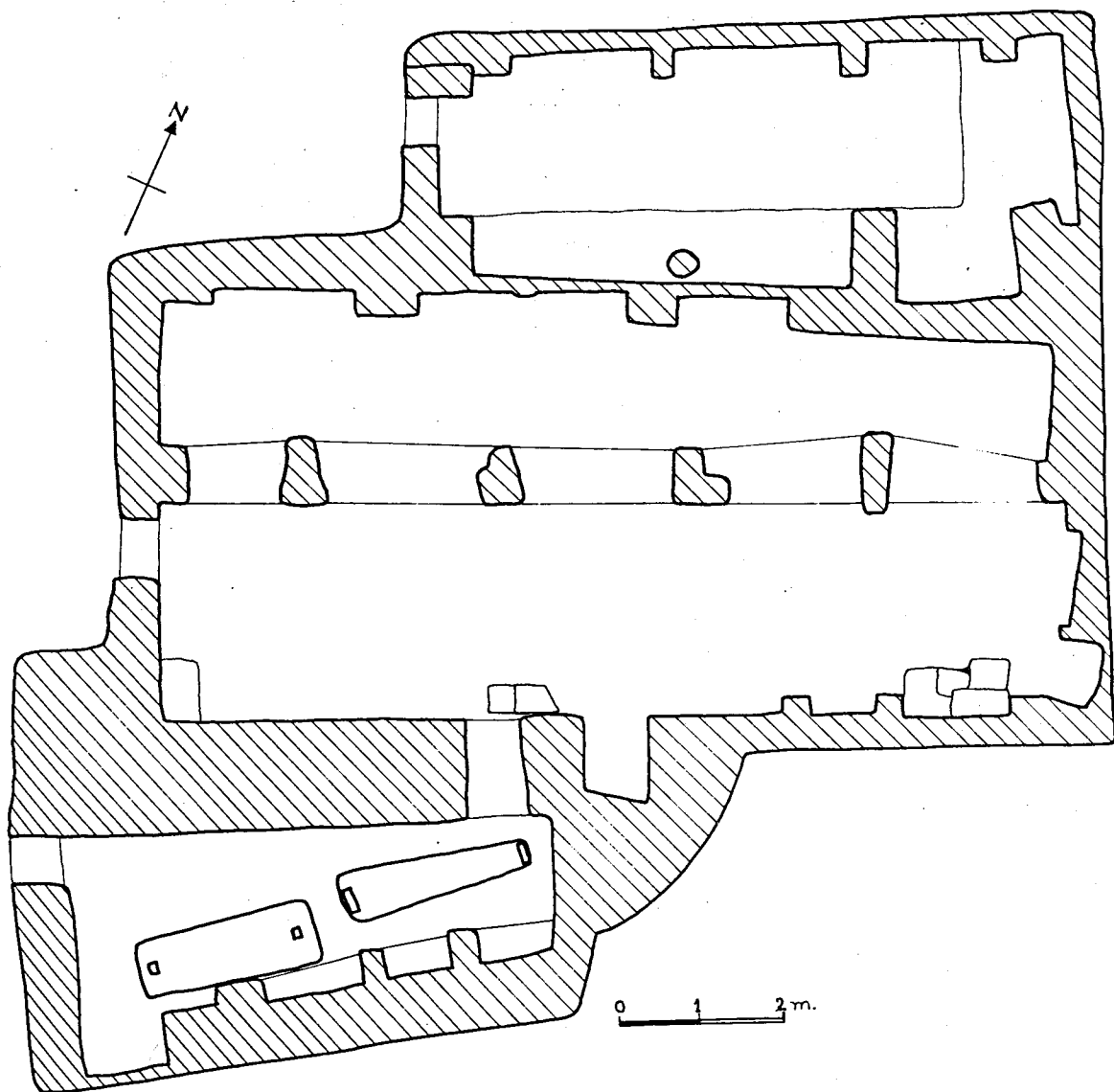


Fig. 6. - The Mosque No. 13.

inscription dates it to 1330 H./A. D. 1912. There are two mihrabs, and two minbars. The main mihrab is orientated 155°, and next to it is the entrance to a chamber approximately 7.00×3.50 metres with two tombs in it, one of them that of Sidi Sudga. 4 or 5 pieces of column are re-used in the mosque. There is a large circular basin to hold a water-jar by the first pier of the arcade in side the door. Tradition says that Sidi Sudga was buried here and the mosque built afterwards.

## INER

14. Name – Mosque of Abū Suleymān al-Inerī (Pls. LX *b*, LXI *a*, *b*).

Position – In Iner village. AMS. Sheet 1688 i, 750353.

Description – The mosque is approximately 11 m. square, built of stone, and has a small cloister-courtyard attached to it on the north-east side. The exterior is featureless apart from the metre-wide protruding mihrab; inside, the mosque consists of 5 aisles divided by 4 arcades, with an additional arcade built against the qibla wall. This qibla arcade has 7 arches, the rest have 6. Some of the columns of the arcades have lamp-holes above them, including that behind the minbar. The deep mihrab orientated 140° lies behind the central arch in the qibla arcade, and to the right of it is the minbar consisting of three steps set parallel to the qibla wall. All the aisles are barrel-vaulted and windows are located at either end of the qibla aisle and behind the minbar. The doorway is at the east end of the aisle next to the qibla aisle. The inside of the mosque is plastered and occasionally decorated with inscriptions, hand and crosses and dotted patterns. The courtyard is entered at its south-east corner, has a plain south-east wall, and rooms on the other two sides, the north-east side having four arches (two blocked) and the north-west three arches (two blocked). The two rooms on the north-east side are used one as a mortuary and the other for students.

Notes – A muṣalla of Abū Suleymān is mentioned by al-Shammākhī (15).

15. Name – Ḥawariyīn Mosque (Pls. LXI *c*, LXII *a*, *b*).

Position – At Iner.

Description – The mosque is square in plan and made of stone. It is entered by a door in the north-east side, and consists of 4 barrel-vaulted aisles divided by 3 arcades each consisting of 4 arches. The second and third arcades have lamp-holes above each column, while the qibla arcade has no lamp-holes at all. The mihrab is in the middle of the south-east wall, is 2.15 m. high, 1.25 m. deep, and 75 cms. wide and is orientated 130°. To the right of the mihrab is the minbar, consisting of three steps running up against the qibla wall. The mosque is of one period and dates from 1311 H. A./D. 1893-4, as is testified by the plaster decoration of the window by the mihrab. The mosque is said to have been founded by 'Abdūllāh Barūnī and his cousin Sa'id'Alī Bū Khalifa. 'Abdūllāh Barūnī's father, Bu Suleymān Barūnī, is said to have appointed the direction of the mihrab. The inside of the mosque is plastered and decorated with hands, feet and daggers. The builder of the mosque is also said to have made the plaster decoration in it.

(15) BASSET, pp. 90-1.

TMEZDA-MEZGHURA

16. Name - Ḥawāriyīn Mosque (Pls. LXII *c*, LXIII *a*; fig. 7).

Position - On the left of the road to Tmezda, 1 km. north of where it turns off the main Jadu-Nālūt Jebel road at km. 226. AMS. Sheet 1688 i, 791329.

Description - The mosque measures approximately  $12.80 \times 8.70$  metres, and is easily identified by its three conspicuous barrel-vaults, the low protrusion running the length of the south-east side, and the still further protruding mihrab also on the south-east side. The mosque has also been recently white-washed. It is entered through a door on the north-east side located under the central of the three barrel-vaults. The three aisles inside are divided by two arcades and a third arcade is built against the qibla wall. This arcade has 6 arches with the mihrab behind the third one, the next arcade has 5 arches, and the third arcade has only 4. A small room has been built into the west corner of the mosque. There are three very small windows at the base of the barrel-vault in the qibla wall. The mihrab is 1.90 m. high, 1.80 m. deep, and 80 cms. wide, and is orientated  $145^\circ$ . There is a lamp-hole above the pillar to the left of the mihrab. The inside of the mosque is plastered, and occasionally decorated with hands, inscriptions (badly deteriorated), and line, cross, and dotted patterns.

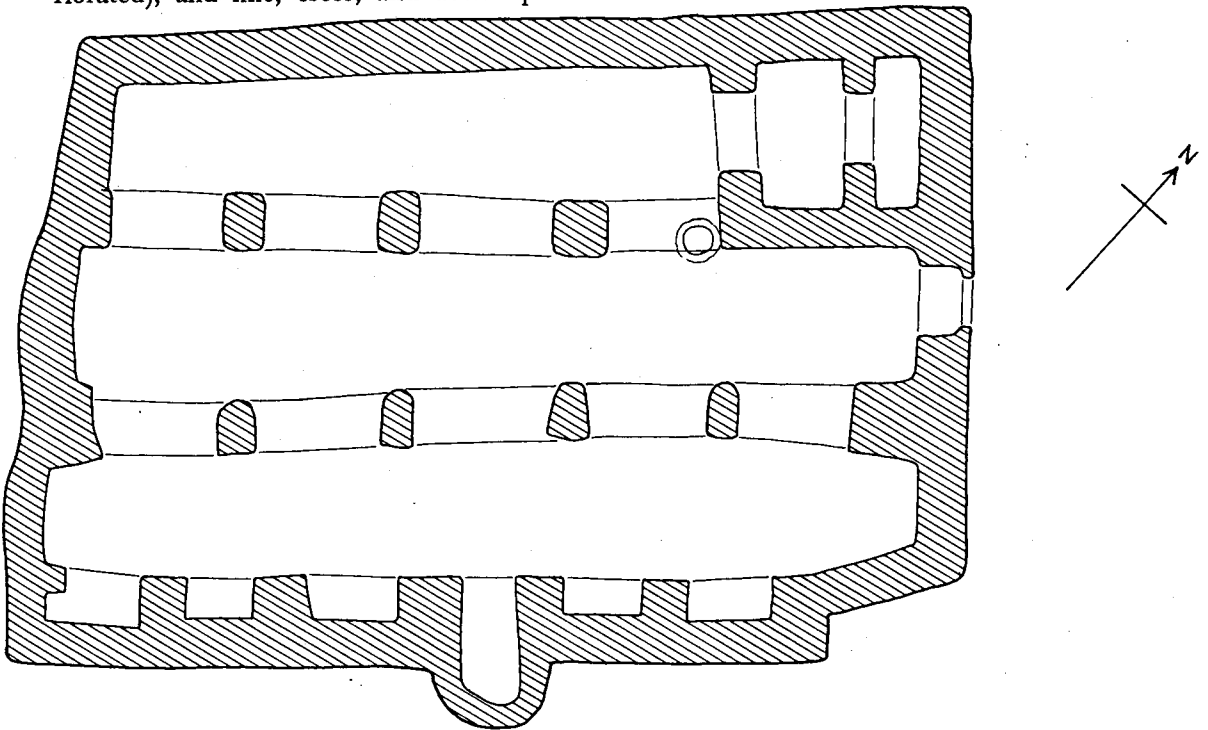


Fig. 7. - The Mosque No. 16.

17. Name - Kanīsiya Mosque (Pls. LXIII *b*, LXIV *a, b*; fig. 8).

Position - 1 kilometre from Ḥawariyīn mosque; bearing on Ḥawariyīn mosque  $173^\circ$ , on Buqār mosque  $56^\circ$ , AMS. Sheet 1688 i, 793335.

Description - The mosque measures approximately  $11.20 \times 11.00$  metres, is square in plan, built of stone, and on its north-west and south-west sides is built into a small mound.

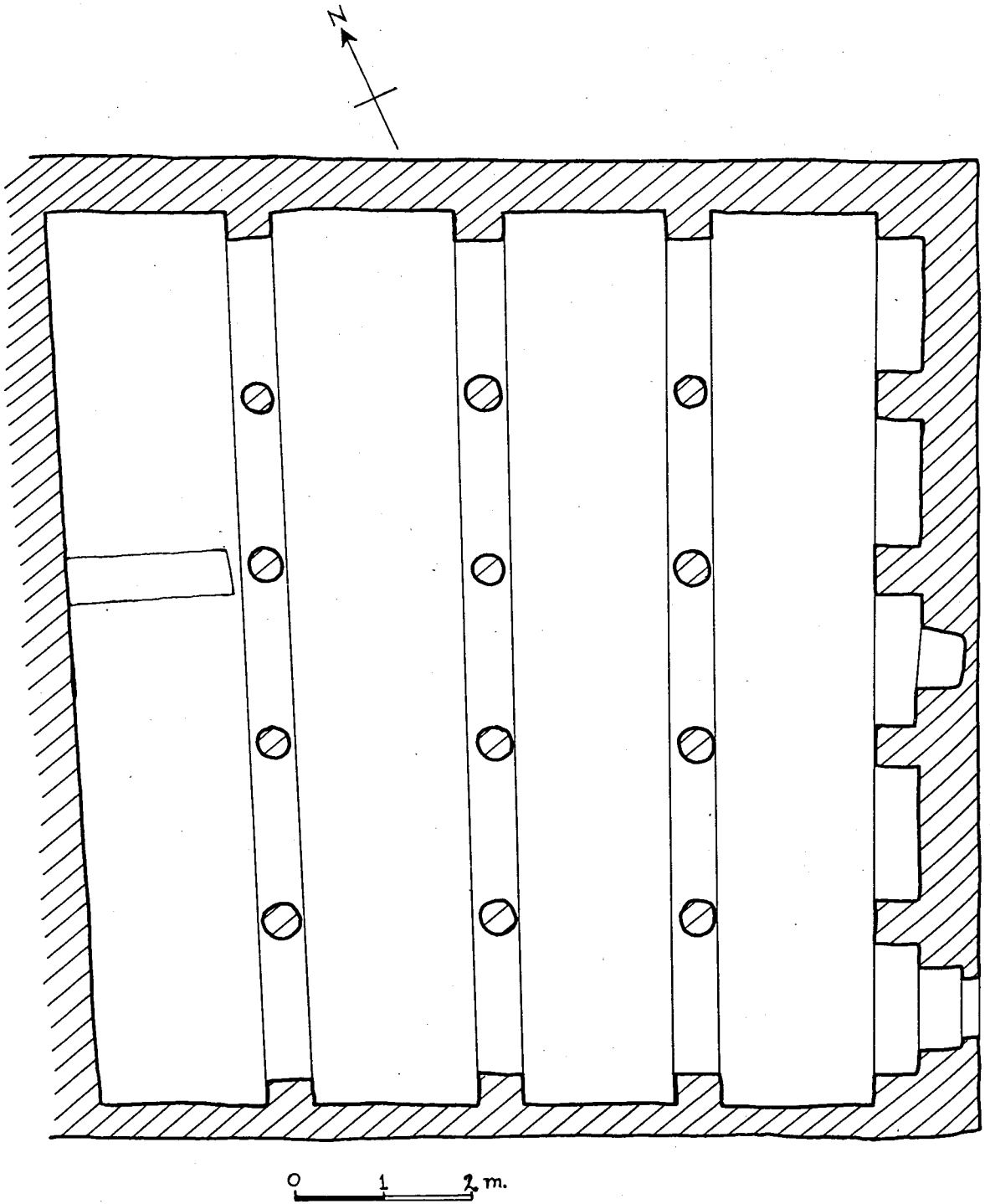


Fig. 8. - The Mosque No. 17.

On the south-east side is a twin courtyard surrounded by a rough low wall with a cistern near the south-west corner. The south-east side of the mosque, which is about 3.40 m. high, has a shallow and lower stone extension protruding from it containing the mihrab and the qibla arcade, with the doorway at the left-hand end. There are 3 other arcades inside the mosque dividing it into 4 aisles, each of these arcades consisting of 5 arches and 4 columns, with engaged piers at each end. The qibla arcade has piers instead of columns generally made up of well-cut Roman stones. Six columns have Roman bases, and three more bases are lying about the mosque; nine of the columns are probably Roman. The arches generally spring from square capitals, and two of the columns have square holes a couple of inches across in their sides. The only windows are two tiny ones at the end of the two vaults nearest the qibla wall on the north-east side of the mosque. The mihrab is 1.80 m. high, 60 cms. wide, and 50 cms. deep, and orientated 120°.

18. Name – Buqār Mosque (Pls. LXIV *c*, LXV *a*).

Position – about three kilometres north-east of Kanisiya mosque. AMS. Sheet 1688 i, 812351.

Description – The mosque is a small roughly square building, approximately 8×6 m. built of stone. Inside there are two aisles, barrel-vaulted, and 3 arcades, two of them built against the outside walls, and all three made up of four arches. Square piers are used throughout, and all but the arches on the east wall are made of stone and round. The latter are square and made with wooden beams. Both barrel-vaults are plastered, but there is no proper decoration, only the pattern of the matting in which the plaster set. The east wall contains a large number of well-cut Roman stones, and just to the left of the doorway is a sculptured stone showing a camel ploughing (16). This stone in fact blocks an earlier doorway and the present doorway is the converted mihrab; therefore the mosque now has no mihrab. Orientation 155°.

19. Name – Umm al-Tabul (or Tayishaqt) Mosque (Pls. LXV *b*, LXVI *a, c*, LXVII *a, b*; fig. 9).  
Position – Two kilometres north of Buqār; bearing on Buqār 177°. AMS. Sheet 1688 i, 810368.

Description – The mosque is square in plan and measures approximately 9.00×10.30 m. It is made of stone, and of a somewhat ruined appearance, particularly on the north-east side. Originally it had three aisles covered by three barrel-vaults running parallel to the qibla wall, and divided by two arcades. Three arches were later inserted under the qibla aisle vault. There is a third arcade built against the north-west wall. Each of the arcades has four arches, and six of the eight functional arches have had pillars inserted to hold up the middle of the arch. These pillars are quite irregular in their composition, two large Roman olive press stones and a couple of Roman capitals being employed in two instances. Other Roman stones in the building are two plain bases used as capitals, one foliated base and a spiralled column. The inside of the mosque is plastered, and there is some decoration. The best of the latter is in the qibla aisle and on the soffits of the middle arcade, and includes rosettes, inscriptions, cross-patterns, dotted patterns, 'Aquarius' signs, and multi-pointed sun motifs. The decoration on the middle aisle is

(16) O. BROGAN, *The Camel in Roman Tripolitania*, Papers of the British School at Rome, XXIII, 1955.

cruder and includes inscriptions and cross patterns, while the north-west aisle has hands, stars of Suleymān, and more inscriptions. The mihrab is located to right of centre in the south-east wall, is 2.00 m. high, 1.53 m. deep and 75 cms. wide, and is orientated 142°. In the southern corner of the mosque is a blocked-up doorway with a plaster-ornamented frame on the inside. Nearby a rough plan of the Meccan sanctuary has been scraped onto a later plaster patch.

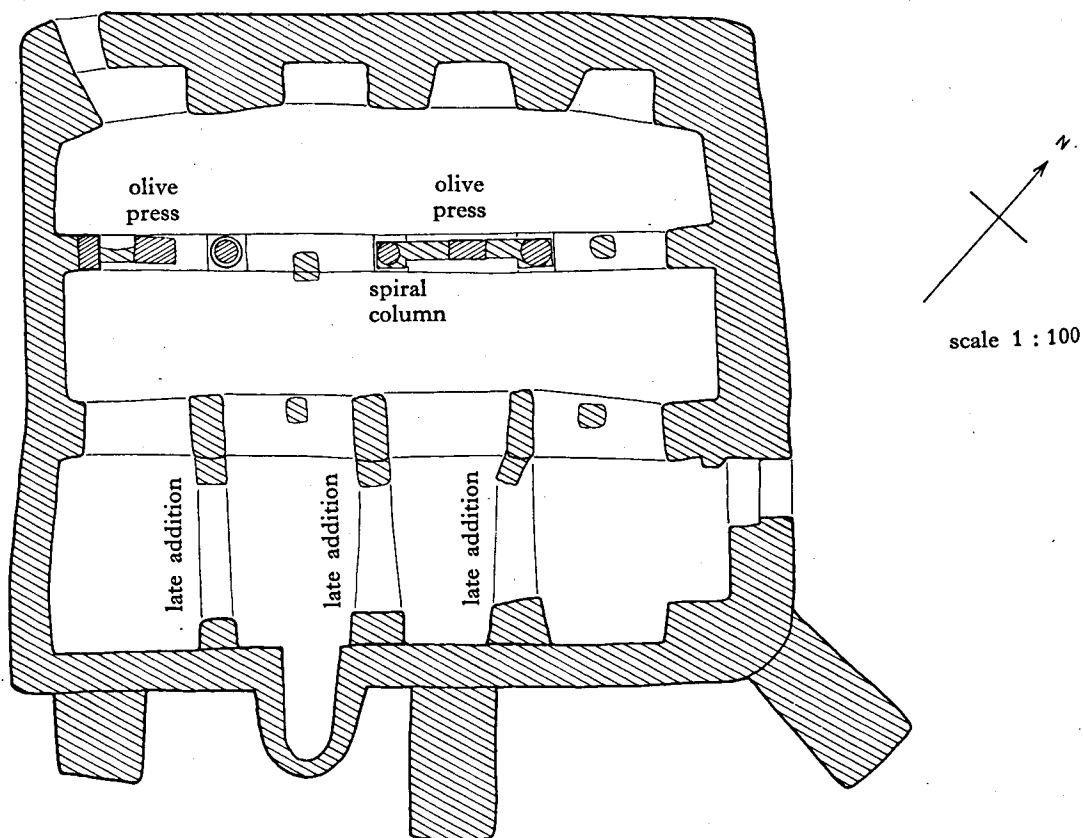


Fig. 9. - The Mosque No. 19.

20. Name - Mashhad Taghlis (Pl. LXVII c; fig. 10).

Position - AMS. Sheet 1688 i, 814382.

Description - The mosque is rectangular in plan, and made of stone. It is very small, measuring approximately 3.50×6.00 metres, and consists of but one aisle with an arcade of arches along each of the two long walls. Each arcade has three arches. The mosque is roofed with a barrel vault covered with inscribed plaster, and there are two lamp-holes in the mosque, above the piers on either side of the mihrab. The mihrab itself is orientated 130°, and is 1.95 m. high, 1.80 m. deep, and 1.00 m. wide. A number of rectangular Roman stones have been used in the walls, and the outer side of the doorway consists of two short Roman columns with another, rectangular, cut stone as a lintel.

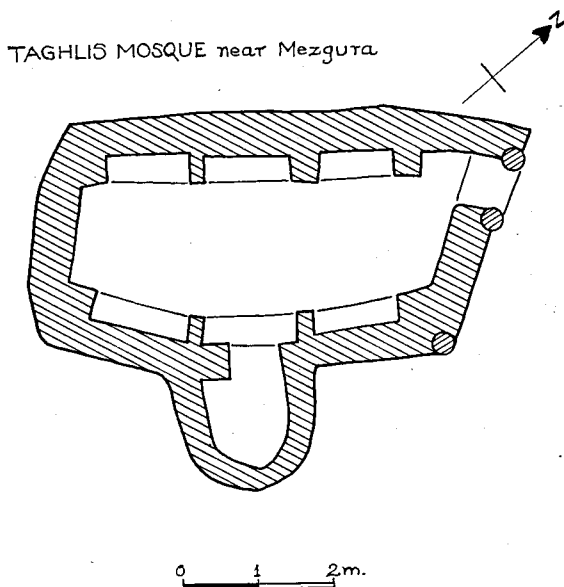


Fig. 10. - The Mosque No. 20.

21. Name - Mosque of Abū Naṣr (Pl. LXVIII *a, b*; fig. 11).

Position - On the hill at Tmezda. AMS. Sheet 1688 i, 786357.

Description - The mosque measures approximately  $12.30 \times 8.50$  metres and consists of three aisles divided by two arcades of five arches each. The north-west arcade has had

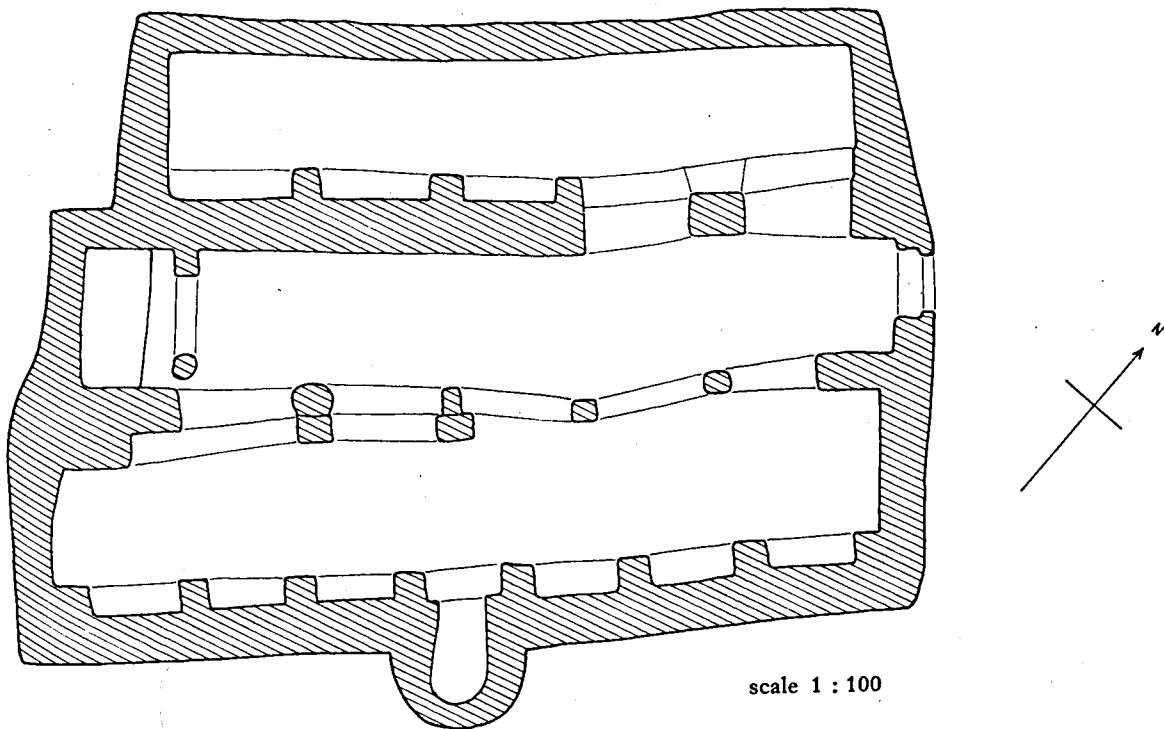


Fig. 11. - The Mosque No. 21.

its three south-western arches blocked by a wall. There is also a blank arcade running down the qibla wall of the mosque. The mihrab juts out beyond the qibla wall and is orientated 148°. At the south-west end of the centre aisle is the tomb of Abū Naṣr, orientated south-west, north-west, and the roof above the tomb is propped up on an inserted column. Two piers in the south-eastern aisle are shored up with tree-trunks, stones and plaster. There are two high steps down into the mosque and light comes through the doorway and through two windows (each only a stone's width in diameter) in the main aisle. Several of the piers contain niches for lamps, and the vault of the qibla aisle has plaster decoration—inscriptions, trees, hands and other patterns. The mihrab is decorated with cord and star patterns. Outside the mosque is a cistern.

Notes – Al-Shammākhī mentions a *kanīsat* at Tmezdā (17).

22. Name – Damriyya Mosque (Pl. LXIX *a, b*).

Position – 1 kilometre from Mosque 20, on left of the metalled road. Bearing on Mezghūra tower 344°. AMS. Sheet 1688 i, 813388.

Description – The mosque measures approximately 12.00 × 6.50 m., is rectangular in shape, and made of stone. It consists of two aisles divided by a central arcade, with blind arcades attached to both the long walls of the mosque. Each arcade has six arches. The central arcade is in fact double, and the north-west aisle a later addition to the building. Both aisles are barrel-vaulted and plastered, with decoration in the form of inscriptions, hands and mat-patterning, the quality of that of the south-east aisle being superior to that of the north-east end of the mosque. There is one Roman column base in use inside the building and another lying on the ground not far away. The mihrab is 2.00 m. high, 1.50 m in depth and 65 cms. wide, and is orientated 135°.

23. Name – Jāmi' Tarigh.

Position – At Wifat. AMS. Sheet 1688 i, 799379.

Description – The mosque has two aisles, divided by an arcade and covered with barrel vaults. At the east end of the qibla aisle is a small attached room. The mihrab projects beyond the qibla wall, is 2.10 m. high, 1.18 m. deep, 0.75 m. wide, and is orientated 175°. The stones used in the mosque include four Roman column shafts and one capital.

24. Name – Mosque of Abū Zakariyyā al-Tukīti (Pl. LXX *a, b, c*; fig. 12).

Position – Left side of a wadi north of Wifat. AMS. Sheet 1688 i, c. 775335.

Description – The mosque at first appears to be an underground cavern, but is in fact built into a very deep hollow cut out of the silt, in the same way as the houses nearby. It is reached by descending a long flight of steps, and consists of a very high barrel-vaulted chamber (about 7.30 m. × 3.90 m.) with a tomb chamber at either end. The latter have low olive tree or stone arches and are also barrel-vaulted. All three rooms are plastered, the tomb chambers being more elaborately decorated, with herring bone, snake and dotted patterns. The mihrab is 1.80 m. high, 1.10 m. deep, and 80 cms. wide, and has a square, moulded plaster frame, roughly 8 cms. wide. It is orientated 40° east of south. There is a Roman stone at the foot of the staircase outside the mosque door.

(17) BASSET, p. 91.

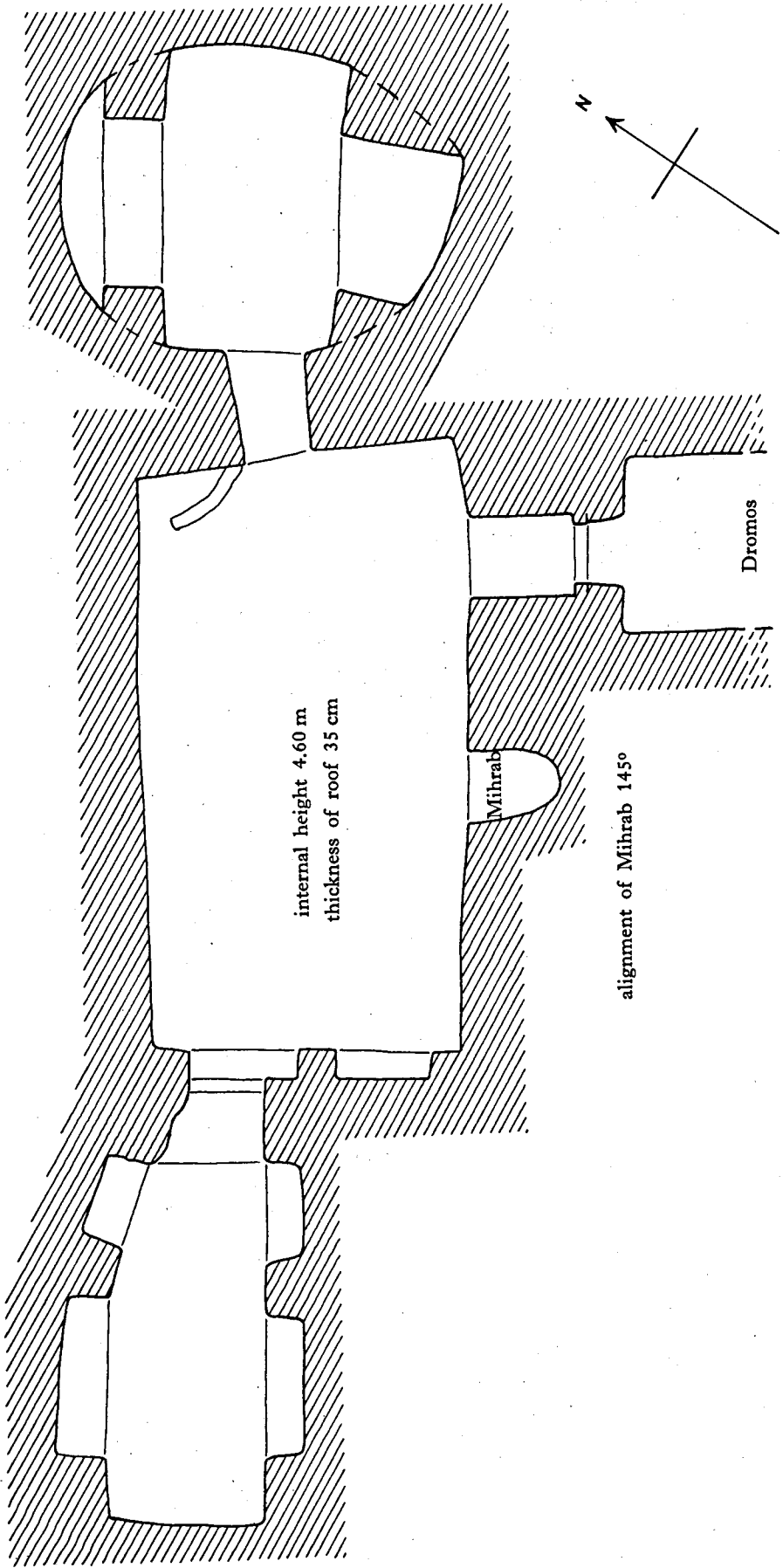


Fig. 12. - The Mosque No. 24.

Notes - According to al-Shammākhī (18) there was an apostolic mosque at Tūkīt. The *kanīsat* recorded by the *Tasmiyat mashāhid al-jebel* (19) is probably the same building. A description of this mosque is given by Motylinski (20). An underground mosque at Tūkīt is also mentioned by al-Shammākhī (21) and by Motylinski (22). Abū Zakariyyā was a celebrated scientist of the time of the Rustamid 'Abd al-Wahhāb (23).

25. Name - Unknown.

Position - In Mezghūra. AMS. Sheet 1688 i, 810408.

Description - This mosque has been entirely rebuilt quite recently. One piece of Roman column base was found in the courtyard.

Notes - Two mosques are recorded at Mezghūra: the mosque of Abū Mansūr Ilyās, a 9th century Rustamid governor of the Jebel Nefusa, and the mosque of Abū Zayd al-Mesghūrī. According to Basset the former still existed in his time (24).

#### EAST OF JADU

26. Name - Jāmi' Shubat Miri (Pl. LXXI a).

Position - AMS. Sheet 1788, iv, 281390.

Description - A full description of this mosque is being prepared by Mohamed Worfelli.

The mosque lies within an enclosure and, both in the original building and in subsequent repairs, a number of Roman stones have been used, including portions of the uprights of one or perhaps two olive presses. There are the remains of a deserted village to east and southeast. The pottery picked up was indeterminate in character, though some may be Roman.

27. Name - Jāmi' Azzabī Yūnis.

Position - Close to the Yefren-Jadu road; kilometre 210. AMS. Sheet 1788 iv, 223391.

Description - The mosque measures approximately 9.00 × 11.00 m., and is built of stone, with a protruding mihrab on the south-east side. It is easily distinguished by the small round-topped ornament (presumably a secondary mihrab) on the edge of the roof directly above the mihrab proper. The door is on the north-east side, and there are three steps inside it leading down to the floor of the mosque. At its highest point above the ground outside the mosque is about 1.70 m. high; inside, the distance between the floor and the top of the barrel-vaults is about 2.35 m. The interior of the mosque is divided into 5 aisles by 4 arcades, three consisting of 8 arches, the fourth (to the left of the door) having only 7. All the columns are rounded except one, and vary considerably in diameter and composition. There are three lamp-holes in the arcade next to the qibla and two in that to the right of the door. There are windows at the south-

(18) AL-SHAMMAKHI, p. 572, quoted by Lewicki, p. 36.

(19) BASSET, pp. 435 and 104.

(20) A. DE CALASSANTI-MOTYLINSKI, *Le Djebel Nefousa, Bulletin de Correspondance Africaine*, Vols. 22-23, 1898-9, p. 93 (henceforward referred to as Motylinski).

(21) AL SHAMMAKHI, p. 341, quoted by Lewicki, p. 36.

(22) MOTYLINSKI, pp. 93-4.

(23) BASSET, p. 104.

(24) MOTYLINSKI, pp. 91-2. BASSET, pp. 92 and 435.

west end of each barrel-vault. A fluted column has been walled into the south-west corner, and though most of the columns have no capitals occasionally a squared stone is used. The mihrab is orientated  $140^\circ$ , inside it measures 45 cm. in width and 1.40 m. in depth; outside it rises just over a metre above the ground. The inside of the mosque is plastered, and in the qibla aisle is some plaster decoration, in the form of several hands and an inscription, the latter giving the name Sa'īd Mālyū and the date 1343 or perhaps 1323 H./ A. D. 1904-5 or 1925-6.

28. Name - Jami Khirbat al-Harah.

Position - 2 km. east of Jadu, north of the Jadu-Yefren road. AMS. Sheet 1788 iv, 205397.

Description - The mosque is made of stone and square in plan. Inside there are six aisles running parallel to the qibla wall, each covered with a barrel-vault. Each arcade has six arches, and there are four lamp-holes in the mosque arcades. The vaults are plastered and decorated with hands, the star of Suleymān, and some very short inscriptions. The mihrab is deep and orientated  $160^\circ$ . Various Roman stones have been re-used in the building of the mosque, including 9 columns, 2 bases and 3 or 4 capitals.

29. Name - Tiwitrāwīn Mosque (Pls. LXXI *b*, LXXII *a b c*).

Position - South-east of the old willage of Yefren, standing on a hill overlooking the road, about 3 1/2 km. from Yefren. From the mosque Soffit is visible on the skyline, bearing  $143^\circ$ ; bearing on Yefren hotel  $236^\circ$ .

Description - The building is 14.70 m. long and consists of a small mosque, a minaret, a small auxiliary room and a semi-subterranean chamber, running roughly from west to east. The mosque at the west end consists of two parallel chambers, each quite narrow and low, which communicate by a single opening at the east end. This mosque is separated from the auxiliary chamber by a narrow staircase, consisting of seven spiralling steps, which emerges at roof level underneath the minaret. The minaret is 1.45 m.  $\times$  1.55 m. square and has two stories, the lower consisting of a barrel-vaulted room reached by a single projecting stone, the latter of a domed room with open sides. Between the dome and the square of arches is an intermediate octagon of plaster. The upper room is reached by a further series of three projecting stones. The auxiliary chamber is a simple barrel-vaulted room, as is the semi-subterranean chamber, which is a holy man's tomb running north-south with its entrance down a few steps on the south side. Outside the building on the south side is a rough wall in the centre of which is a mihrab, orientated in the same direction as that in the mosque itself. The plaster which covers the whole of the inside of the building is decorated occasionally with short inscriptions, hands, the star of Suleymān or patterns of the matting. The mihrab is orientated  $170^\circ$ .

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

There is a considerable variation in size between the various mosques catalogued. The largest are up to about 11 metres square, the smallest are only an eighth of that size, and the number of aisles varies between 6 and 1.

Some of the mosques have properly constructed courtyards adjoining them (e.g. Nos. 4 and 14), while others have a vaguely defined area in front of them usually containing a cistern. Many of the mosques are semi-subterranean: a flat area appears to have been dug out, the mosque built and the excess earth heaped up against the side of the building. The result is that from the outside the mosques often look very low, and a small doorway usually leads down a couple of the steps into the mosque itself. Windows in such mosques are generally few in number and small, and sometimes non-existent. The sun is so bright outside for much of the year, however, that enough light may filter in through the doorway to allow one to move about inside without too much difficulty. Where lighting is needed it is provided by oil lamps set in niches above some of the columns between the arch spandrels. The building material is stone which is used in a rough and unsophisticated way, in strong contrast to such dressed Roman stones as are sometimes re-used in these structures. Stone is used for vaulting as well as walls, and the vaults are supported by columns or piers, Roman columns among them. Only two of the mosques visited had a minaret (No. 10 and 18); the rest showed no traces of such an addition, a situation similar to that of the village mosques of the Tlemcen area of Algeria (25). A majority of the mosques have mihrabs which jut out from the qibla wall on the outside; where this is not the case the mihrab is usually as deep as the wall will allow. One mosque (No. 7) has a second flat mihrab on the roof. Only in one case do we know for certain a mosque's foundation date: No. 15, which according to an inscription in the plaster work of the window next to the mihrab dates from 1311 H/A. D. 1893-4. Dates recorded in inscriptions in other mosques stretch from A. D. 1557 to 1925, but it is quite impossible to be sure when, before or during that period, these and the other mosques visited were founded.

*Decoration*

Most of the mosques in question have some sort of decoration impressed into or carved out of the plastering. It is rarely very extensive, usually being confined to a few arch spandrels or parts of the vaulting. The area of vaulting most favoured is that near the mihrab in the qibla also. The motifs used are not numerous. The most common is a hand, explained by some of the inhabitants of Iner as being the hand of the builder, just as the feet in the mosque at Iner were explained as being the feet of the builder: no other mosque visited had such feet portrayed in its plasterwork. Inscriptions are quite common mainly consisting of Qu'ranic quotations and only occasionally historical. Other decorations used are dotted patterns, herringbone patterns, crosses (often in squares), and the star of Suleymān (a six-pointed star like the star of David). Sometimes the plaster retains the imprint of reed matting. One symbol of particular interest is the dagger, which was only found in one mosque (No. 15), but occurs in plaster decoration of buildings in the pre-desert

- (25) A. BEL, *Les Beni Snous et leur mosquées*, *Bulletin Archéologique* 1920, pp. 479-521.

area near Benī Walid (26). The symbolism of some of these patterns in other contexts has been discussed in the past (27) but a thorough social survey of the Jebel Nefusa is required if the patterns found there are to be interpreted correctly.

*The mosques' religious and social setting*

Some of the mosques in question are located in modern villages or small towns. For example Nos. 1-3 are in Nālūt, No. 13 is in al-Kherba, Nos. 14 and 15 are in Iner, No. 25 in Mezgura. Such mosques have a fairly obvious role in relation to the particular community nearby. Other mosques appear basically to be shrines containing the tombs of holy men, and derive their importance in the area from the holiness which the spirits of the dead concerned impart to them. Such are presumably the mosques of Sidī Abū Yaḥyā (No. 4), Sidī Sudga (No. 15) Abū Naṣr (No. 19) and Abu Zakariyyā (No. 24), all of which contain tombs and are presumably named after the occupants of the tombs and the Tiwitrāwīn mosque (No. 28) which contains the tomb of an unidentified individual. Other mosques are called after people but contain no trace of a tomb, their sanctity being derived presumably from some other association with the individual concerned. Such are No. 11 (Abū Shayba, No. 12 (Abū 'Uthmān al-Mazātī), No. 27 (Azzabī Yūnis) and No. 14 (Abū Suleymān). Certain mosques in both groups are also in towns (e.g. No. 14 and No. 15), and in this case the role of the mosques is dual, though one imagines that where there is another town mosque, as at Iner, the role of the particular mosque is based more on its human association.

A number of the mosques visited appeared at first sight to be in the middle of nowhere. In some cases the presence of a tomb pointed to their origin, but in other cases there was no such obvious reason for their presence. In certain cases a brief survey of the surrounding area showed that there had once been a village around the mosque, for the traces of walls could be seen in the ground nearby. Such was the case with mosques Nos. 17, 18 and 19 (28). But others had no visible connections with the past community, and further surveys and investigations will be needed to try and discover their origins. Whatever the purposes or origins of these various mosques, however, it is impressive to note the way most of them are kept clean, in reasonable repair, and whitewashed, evidently being used as centres of pilgrimage much as they must have been used in the past.

*Sectual architectural problems*

Two important observations have been made by past authorities on Ibādī religious architecture. The first observation was made by Schacht in his article on the diffusion of Muslim

(26) Plaster reliefs of daggers were found by O. Brogan on the ceilings of two *gsur* (Gsur Anesa) near Wishtatah and in another near the large cisterns at Tininai.

(27) J. D'UCEL, *Berber Art*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1932, pp. 207-213.

(28) Nos. 16 (Hawāriyīn), 17 (Kanīsat), 18 (Buqār) and 19 (Umm al-Ṭabūl) and 25 (Miri) where there are mounds of stones which on examination prove to be ruined buildings. Roman pottery sherds have been picked up at most of these sites. The most interesting is Umm al-Ṭabūl, where

there must have been a large village, and where also there are clear indications of a Roman olive farm. The stones belonging to an olive press can hardly have been brought from any great distance and it is tempting to suppose that they stood on the low hill beside the mosque, for Roman pottery is found in considerable quantities in the fields on the slopes of the hill. The spirally grooved column must have come from a building of some pretensions, a "Villa" or, conceivably, a church though it must be observed cautiously, that no indications of a church have been found hereabouts.

architectural forms across the Sahara (29), where he maintained that Ibādī mosques have no minbars except in Tunisia where they were required by the Tunisian government. The reason, he said was that since the fall of the independent Ibādī state in A.D. 908, there has been no Imām and therefore no need for any minbar. It is note-worthy that a number of the mosques in the Jebel Nefusa contain minbars. Mosque No. 13 has two minbars, No. 14 has one minbar consisting of three steps parallel to the qibla wall, and No. 15 has a minbar consisting of three steps at right angles to the qibla wall. Both of the latter mosques are at Iner, which is a town with a half-Arab, half-Berber population. It is possible that one of these mosques is Mālikī, therefore, but not both, and hence it would appear that minbars are not unknown in Ibādī mosques in the region.

The other observation of interest with relation to Ibādī mosques was made by Despois (30), who claimed that they are orientated south-east, whereas Mālikī mosques are orientated east. The mosques visited had mihrab orientations varying between 120° and 175°. All of these are nearer south-east than east, suggesting if Despois is right that they are all Ibādī. However, their variation is so wide that such a general distinction between the mosques of the two sects may not be valid. It is hoped that further work will clarify the situation.

### *Christian Origins*

Basset (31) comments that a certain number of the mosques mentioned by al-Shammākhī bear the title *kanīsat*—the usual Arabic word for a Christian church, and that these are evidently churches which have been transformed into mosques at some period. Lewicki (32) discusses the conversion of the Jebel Nefusa to Christianity during the Byzantine period and the subsequent growth of Muslim dominance there, and emphasizes two important indications of the Jebel's Christian past in addition to the evidence supplied by Ibādī and other texts: the use of Christian names among the inhabitants of the Jebel at various periods (e.g. Yānis—Johannes, Mātūs—Matheus) and the use of Christian words, or words with Christian connotations, for mosques in that area. Such words are *kanīsat*, *taghlīs* (evidently derived from *ecclesia*) and *hawāriyīn* (a word used in the Qu'rān, derived from Ethiopic, referring to the apostles of Jesus Christ). Many sources mention mosques with such names. Al-Shammākhī, for example, in his *Kitāb al-Siyar*, mentions the existence of a *kanīsat* at each of the following (33): Forsetṭā, al-Jazīrat, Baghturah, Tin Betin, Agheremīnān, Tmezda, Tūkit, Masīn, though elsewhere in the same text is apparently a list of 11 apostolic mosques (34), which include the above *kanīsat*. The same eight *kanīsat* are mentioned in the *Tasmiyat mashāhid al-jebel*, a text contemporary with that of al-Shammākhī but an unknown author (35). Brāhim al-Nafūsī, who related to Motylinski a description of the Jebel at the end of the last century (36), mentions apostolic mosques at Mit'er and Tar'ma (near Tazourait), and at T'ermisa and Tmezda.

The 1969 and 1971 expeditions located one *kanīsat* (No. 17), three apostolic mosques (Nos. 5, 15 and 16), and three mosques bearing the name *taghlīs* (Nos. 7, 8 and 20). It is unfortunately only possible to link one of these (No. 8) with the texts quoted, and in this case what now is called *taghlīs* is recorded in one source as an apostolic mosque and in another as a *kanīsat*, suggesting

(29) J. SCHACHT, Sur la diffusion des formes d'architecture religieuse musulmane à travers le Sahara, *Travaux de l'Institut de Recherches Sahariennes*, XI, 1954, pp. 11-127.

(30) J. DESPOIS, L'habitation dans le Djebel Nefousa, *Revue Tunisienne*, n.s. 18-19; 1934, pp. 314-5.

(31) BASSET, p. 426.

(32) LEWICKI, pp. 50-58.

(33) BASSET, pp. 434-6.

(34) LEWICKI, p. 56 quoting al-Shammākhī p. 571.

(35) LEWICKI, pp. 56-7; BASSET, pp. 434-5.

(36) MOTYLINSKI, pp. 74, 75, 86, and 93.

that these titles are in some instances at least interchangeable. Whether any of these mosques were situated on the site of an earlier church is not easy to say without excavations. Roman pottery was certainly found in the vicinity of Nos. 7 and 8, in the former case datable to the 4th-6th centuries A. D., in the latter to the 2nd and the 5th-6th centuries A. D., and Roman stones of various types had been inserted into the structures of Nos. 20 and 17. Furthermore, No. 8 is, as a building, orientated east-west in a way untypical of most of the other mosques visited, and while it contains no capitals or column bases of an obviously Roman origin it does contain a number of dressed stones including an arch-head with carved roundels over the doorway. This is in fact the only mosque bearing a Christian title which suggests to the visitor that it may have Christian origins, and even here the style of architecture is typical of the many other mosques in the area for which no Christian origin has been suggested.