



ABARQUH II. MONUMENTS

ABARQŪH (or **ABARQŪYA**), a town in northern Fārs; it was important in medieval times, but, being off the main routes, it is now largely decayed.

ii. Monuments

Numerous pre-Safavid monuments survive in Abarqūh, but the lack of important later buildings suggests a sharp decline in the city's wealth, probably resulting from the new trade routes which bypassed it. A partial recovery in recent years has nevertheless left large tracts of the old city still derelict.

Among the round dozen surviving medieval buildings in Abarqūh only half have some claim to importance. The Masjed-e Bīrūn deserves special attention as one of the earliest Iranian mosques extant (M. Shokoohy, *Studies in the Early Medieval Architecture of Iran and Afghanistan*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Heriot-Watt University, 1978, pp. 22-41). Sited, as its name indicates, outside the city, it adjoins an ancient cemetery south of the town and comprises a two-*ayvān* courtyard flanked by irregular rooms and with a dome chamber forming the sanctuary. The *qebla ayvān* is, according to custom, rather larger than its counterpart. The exterior is entirely irregular, reflecting successive additions, repairs, and inept joins in the structure (thus the curiously oval perimeter of the dome chamber is uncomfortably aligned with the rest of the mosque). This evidence of a checkered building history is clinched by an inscription of typically Timurid titlature which records major repairs (Ī. Afšār, *Yādgārḥā-ye Yazd* I, Tehran, 1348 Š./1969, pp. 357-58, pl. 208). A



damaged minaret also seems to be Timurid. The original mosque probably comprised the dome chamber preceded by the *qebla ayvān*, an arrangement typical of certain fire temples. The *qebla* is 18° out of true, a characteristic feature of early Iranian mosques but by no means rare in later times; in this same city the *qeblas* of the Gonbad-e ‘Alī and of the tomb of Ḥasan b. Kay Ḳosraw are out by 35° and 28° respectively. Other circumstantial evidence of an early date is provided by the arch profiles (elliptical but with a slight tendency to point), the brickwork technique, which employs vertical and horizontal bonds in alternation, and (as at Nā‘īn) the creation of a gallery by a broad masonry brace between arches which itself gives rise to another arch. The junction between the ponderous dome and its bearing walls seems to have been managed, as in much Sasanian architecture, more by eye than by calculation. Small windows are let at irregular intervals into the thickness of the dome, whose exterior profile is stepped.

The Gonbad-e ‘Alī, dated by inscription to 448/1056, is among the earliest and most individual of the great Iranian tomb-towers (A. Godard, “AbarkĀrūh,” *Āthār-e Irān* 1/1, 1963, pp. 49-54). Perched dramatically on the extreme edge of a rocky spur jutting into the plain and dominating the city, its octagonal plinth and elevation, executed in rudely dressed rubble masonry, betray Caspian influences alien to central Iran. Contemporary politics fully explain this: ‘Amīd-al-dīn Šams-al-dawla, who with his mother is identified by inscription as the tenant of the tomb, was in fact a Dailamite prince, of the local Kakuyid dynasty. The tower is notable for its massive two-tier stalactite cornice, feebly echoed internally by round-backed squinches; the Kufic inscriptions, formed laboriously of cut-brick segments, their primitive angularity unsoftened by a stucco coating; and finally the skewed stucco *meḥrāb*, an after-thought to judge by its awkward position.

Later medieval tombs in the city attest an entirely different style also fashionable in Muzaffarid Yazd (Godard, “Abarkūh,” pp. 68-70, 72; D. N. Wilber, *The Architecture of Islamic Iran: the Il Khānid Period*, Princeton, 1955, p. 176; Afšār, *Yādgārhā* I, pp. 348-52). Mud brick is their medium of construction and seems to inhibit the architects, for ground plans are uniformly square and exteriors devoid of refinement. Internally the same basically simple construction applies but is overlaid by a complex articulation of multiple moldings, lofty reveals, and panels and blind arches with playfully varied profiles innocent of any architectural function. All these details are executed in white plaster (occasionally in low relief) thinly coating the plain



mud-brick shell. Elaborate floral medallions reminiscent of carpet designs are stenciled in various colors onto this plaster, and sunburst motifs appropriately fill the apex of the dome. Highly mannered plaited Kufic inscriptions, often executed in light blue paint, resurrect the modes of three centuries earlier, though their flowering shafts with tightly curled buds and the unimaginative rigidity of the significant letters themselves betray their later date. The masterpiece among these buildings was the now demolished tomb of Ḥasan b. Kay Ḳosraw; a long historical inscription above the *meḥrāb* dated it to 718/1318 (Godard, “Abarḳūh,” pp. 60-68; Wilber, *Architecture*, pp. 154-55; Afšār, *Yādgārḥā* I, pp. 344-48). Epigraphy dominates this building, forming long consecutive bands, roundels, and individual phrases on which complex edifices of applied ornament are built. The squinches are *tours-de-force* of meaningless complexity in which a double tier of angular *moqarnas* cells rests on four keel-shaped arches. As in the squinch of the roughly contemporary Kūhpāya mosque, a return tomb structural simplicity is overlaid by a superficial complexity.

The mausoleum of Pīr Ḥamza Sabzpūš (Godard, “Abarḳūh,” pp. 54-56; Afšār, *Yādgārḥā* I, pp. 342-44) is an undistinguished domed square whose interior bears a blue painted inscription of braided Kufic, apparently Muzaffarid. But the fragmentary historical inscription in the *meḥrāb* includes the words “...and five hundred” and is therefore Saljuq. The predominance of cursive over Kufic inscriptions is unusual for this period. The historical inscriptions, which include the name of the artist, Moḥammad b. Abu’l-Faraĵ ‘Erāqī, are tucked away in two escutcheons within the half-demolished overhanging mantel which crowns the *meḥrāb* proper. Reading inwards from the outermost text, the framing inscription—in cursive, Kufic, and cursive script respectively—reproduce Qur’ān 76:21-26, 2:285 (the Āyat al-korsī), and 41:30. An undulating looped line (cf. the Van and Qazvīn mosques) enlivens the background of the main inscription.

The Friday mosque is a problematic building whose full history will probably never be recovered, since it has recently undergone thorough restoration (Godard, “Abarḳūh,” pp. 56-60; *Survey of Persian Art*, pp. 995, 1050, 1067, 1086, 1286, 1358, 1734; Wilber, *Architecture*, pp. 181-82; Afšār, *Yādgārḥā* I, pp. 337-42). Its core is an open-plan dome chamber whose Il-khanid stalactite dome and bracing bridges between bays recall parts of the Nā’in Jāme’. The shallow groined squinches of this chamber would suggest pre-Saljuq work were it not for the fanciful segmental profile of Il-khanid type outlined above



them. The stumpy octagonal columns and depressed arches (one leading to a low-crowned groined vault) also wear—perhaps deceptively—an ancient air. The second-story ribbed domical vaults in this part of the mosque suggest Saljuq parallels at the Isfahan Jāmeʿ, though their true form may be obscured by their plaster exterior. Clearly, uncertainties abound, but the dome chamber is undoubtedly too small to have functions as a mosque by itself. It was probably the principal feature of a small covered *šabestān* of Saljuq or earlier date. The lower part of this dome chamber—if indeed “domed bay” is not a better term—would thus belong to the Friday mosque mentioned by Ebn al-Balkī before 510/1116. Most of the present mosque is Il-khanid and was probably built in a single campaign. Its form is classical: four *ayvāns* disposed in cruciform fashion around a rectangular courtyard. The only unexpected feature is the prolongation of the *qebla ayvān*, at a lower height, by a transversely vaulted chamber brilliantly lit in clere-story fashion. Above the *mehṛāb* here is a double *toḡrāʾī* historical inscription in tile mosaic identifying the patron as one Ḥājji Amīn-al-dīn Abarqūʾī, who “ordered the building of this mosque adjacent to the old mosque.” It seems preferable to interpret this as a reference to the entire four-*ayvān* mosque rather than to the *qebla* hall alone. As with other contemporary mosques where a four-*ayvān* plan was added to a standing structure (e.g., Naṭanz), the architect was apparently denied a free hand and was somewhat short of space. Thus the *ayvāns* achieve an undue dominance; nevertheless, the Zavāra Jāmeʿ indicates that this could be a deliberate effect. Numerous *mehṛābs*, some of them reused marble windows, are scattered throughout the mosque and testify to several rectifications of the *qebla*, which is up to 30° out of true. Their masterpiece, one of the finest Il-khanid stucco *mehṛābs* known, is dated by its central *nask* inscription to 738/1338. It has three major Koranic texts: one in Kufic framing the whole *mehṛāb* (17:80-82); one in *nask* in the inner frame (48:1-3); and a third in Kufic in the *mehṛāb* niche itself (112:1-4). Various pious phrases (e.g., *al-molk lellāh*) punctuate the coils of the *mehṛāb*. The form of the arch is echoed in the later tiled *mehṛāb*.

Other Muzaffarid structures include the twin-minaret portal to the vanished Masjed-e Neẓāmīya (Wilber, *Architecture*, p. 167; Afšār, *Yādgārḥā* I, pp. 352-53). The glazed bricks of the shafts and the tile-mosaic of the cornices below suggest an Il-khanid date, though the very similar portal at Qom is dated by inscription to the 840s/ca. 1450. Among the other medieval buildings of the town, all of mud brick and in an advanced stage of decay, may be noted two Muzaffarid mausolea of domed square type—Gonbad-e Sayyedūn and



Gonbad-e Sayyedūn Gol-e Sorḳī—the tomb of Ṭā'ūs al-Ḥaramayn with its Timurid inscription, and the undatable Menār-e Gelī. Other little-known medieval buildings survived, at least until recently, outside the city. The ruins in the vicinity of Abarqūh included Šahr-e Safīd to the northwest, which was described by Colonel MacGregor (*Narrative*, I, p. 58). An ancient origin was ascribed to the Gonbad-e 'Alī (attributed to Ḳosraw V; see *ibid.*) and apparently also to such nearby ruins as those called Daḳma-ye Dārāb and Daḳma-ye Gabrhā (Jackson, *Persia*, p. 342). For evidence of local legends, cf. also the local “mountain of Sīāvoš” (*ibid.*, pp. 343-44).

A notable and ancient natural monument near Abarqūh is the great cypress (*sarv*) which is described by several historians and is still living (*Nozhat al-qolūb*, p. 122, which gives the location as Deh Farāḡa; *Merāt al-boldān*, Tehran, 1328/1910, I, s.v. Abarqūh; *Keyhan International*, July 23, 1977, p. 2).

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