



ARDABĪL

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i. History of Ardabīl

Ardabīl (spelled Ardavīl in the *Ḥodūd al-‘ālam*, and vocalized Ardobīl by Sam‘ānī), the name of a town and a district in northeastern Azarbaijan. It is situated at 48° 17' east longitude and 38° 15' north latitude, about 25 miles from the present Soviet frontier and 40 miles from the Caspian Sea across the mountains and then the lowlands of Ṭāleš. The town of Ardabīl lies on a plateau (alt. 4,940 ft.) surrounded by mountains, with the Kūh-e Savalān, or Sabalān, on its west. The medieval geographers allude to the latter's perpetual snows and its peak (rising to 15,784 feet) visible 50 *farsaks* away. Ardabīl accordingly had the reputation of being a *sardsīr*, with a cold but healthy climate, and Ebn al-Faqīh (p. 209, tr. H. Massé, *Abrégé du livre des pays*, Damascus, 1973, p. 254) considers it as one of the six coldest spots in the Iranian world, on a par with the extreme climates of places in Central Asia like



Ķvārazm and Marv. The Ardabīl plateau has a dry, chalky soil that is virtually treeless; the Islamic geographers had already noted as a wonder of the district that no fruit trees would grow there, though in fact temperate fruits like apples and pears flourish there today. Ardabīl lies on a river, the modern Bāleq-sū, called in medieval Islamic times the Nahr Ardabīl after the town itself; it rises in the southern parts of the Kūh-e Savalān massif, joining the Qara-sū and then the Ahar river, and finally emptying into the Araxes or Aras. In the district of Ardabīl, irrigation is necessary for agriculture. Hot mineral springs in the vicinity of the town continue to attract visitors to the present day.

The pre-Islamic history of Ardabīl is very obscure. An old tradition, given for instance by Yāqūt, attributes its foundation to the Sasanian emperor Pērōz/Fīrūz, son of Yazdegerd II (r. 459-84), after whom the town was named Bādān Pērōz (a name known to Ferdowsī, see Nöldeke, *Geschichte der Perser*, p. 123 n. 3). The town is not mentioned by the early Armenian historians, but appears in Ļevond as Artavēt and subsequently as Artavēl. Marquart thought that the capital of Azarbaijan, mentioned but not specifically named in the mid-2nd/8th-century Pahlavi geographical account, was probably Ardabīl (*Provincial Capitals*, pp. 22, 106), and that in the Islamic period, Šīz and Ardabīl were the capitals of Azarbaijan, the latter being the summer one on account of its cold climate (*Ērānšahr*, p. 108).

A mint name given in Pahlavi as ATRA on Sasanian and pre-Reform Islamic coins apparently equals Azarbaijan (Mid. Pers. Āturpātakān), but it is unclear whether this ATRA is actually Ardabīl (see J. Walker, *A Catalogue of the Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum: I. A Catalogue of the Arab-Sassanian Coins*, London, 1941, pp. cii, cix; H. Gaube, *Arabosasanidische Numismatik*, Brunswick, 1973, p. 87). The first Islamic dirham unambiguously minted at Ardabīl dates only from 286/899 and the time of the Sajids (see below). The Arabic historians record, however, that in the period of the great conquests Ardabīl was the residence of a *mārzban*. It surrendered to Ḥoḍayfa b. Yamān by treaty during ‘Omar’s caliphate, and the terms of this agreement allowed the people of Ardabīl to continue the ceremonies at the fire-temple of Šīz (the modern Taḵt-e Solaymān hill fortress 90 miles southeast of Lake Urmia) (Balāḍorī, *Fotūḥ*, pp. 325-26). Under ‘Oṭman and ‘Alī, the governorship of Ardabīl was entrusted to al-Aš‘aṭ b. Qays al-Kendī, who settled Arab troops there and built the principal mosque. Under the Omayyads, it seems to have alternated with Marāḡa as the capital of Azarbaijan; at one point it is recorded



that garrison troops were shifted from Marāḡa to Ardabīl.

Because of its proximity to the Caucasus and to the frontier of the *Dār-al-ḡarb*, Ardabīl was always vulnerable to incursions by the Caucasian mountain peoples and by the steppe dwellers of South Russia beyond the mountains. The historians mention that in 112/730-31 the Ḳazar Turks penetrated through the Alan Gate, defeated and killed the Arab governor of Armenia al-Jarrāḡ b. ‘Abdallāḡ al-Ḥakamī al-Maḡḡeḡī on the plain outside Ardabīl, captured the town, and reached as far as Dīārbakr and Jazīra before the Omayyad prince Maslama b. ‘Abd-al-Malek hurled them back (Ya‘qūbī, Beirut, 1375/1955-56, III, p. 59; Ṭabarī, II, pp. 1530-32; Ebn-al-Aṡīr, V, pp. 159-64; see also D. M. Dunlop, *The History of the Jewish Khazars*, Princeton, 1964, pp. 69ff.). A certain amount of Kharijite activity is mentioned for the Ardabīl region in the late Omayyad period, but it suffered more seriously a century later during the Ḳorramī rebellion of Bābak, whose epicenter was at Badd, in the Qaraḡa Dāḡ west-northwest of Ardabīl, but whose activities affected most of northwestern Persia. Ardabīl was therefore used by the Afšīn Ḥaydar and Bogā al-Kabīr as base for operations against Bābak. Just after the final defeat of Bābak in 224/839, the town was defended by the local *ṡāḡeb-barīd*, or postmaster, a Shi‘ite named ‘Abdallāḡ b. ‘Abd-al-Raḡmān, against attack by the rebellious governor of Azarbaijan, Monkaḡūr al-Ošrūsānī, a relative of the Afšīn (see E. Marin, *The Reign of al-Mu‘taṡīm(833-842)*, New Haven, 1951, pp. 9-12, 109).

In the early 4th/10th century, Ardabīl was the seat of the largely autonomous governors of Azarbaijan, the Sajids, when Abu‘l-Qāsem Yūsof b. Abi‘l-Sāḡ Dīvdād made it his capital; according to Ebn Ḥawḡal, he moved the seat of power from Marāḡa because Ardabīl was more central. It is now that the series of Islamic coins from Ardabīl starts; survivals include lengthy runs of issues by the Sajids, the ‘Abbasids (316-22/928-34), the Il-khanids, the Safavids, and finally the Qajars (up to 1249/1833-34; see E. von Zambaur, *Die Münzprägungen des Islams, zeitlich und örtlich geordnet* I, Wiesbaden, 1968, p. 41). A caliphal army under Mo‘nes defeated Abu‘l-Qāsem Yūsof at the gates of Ardabīl and captured him in 307/919-20, but he was subsequently restored to his governorship and succeeded by his nephew Abu‘l-Mosafer Faḡḡ b. Moḡammad, who was killed at Ardabīl in 317/929. Soon afterwards, much of Azarbaijan, including Ardabīl, passed into the control of the Daylami Mosaferids (or Sallarids or Langarids). In the years just after 326/937-38 possession of Ardabīl was disputed between the Kurd Daysam b. Ebrāḡīm, formerly a partisan of the Sajids, and the Daylami from Gīlān, Laṡkarī b.



Mardī, a follower of the Ziyarid Vošmgīr, but in 330/941-42 the Mosaferid Marzobān b. Moḥammad b. Mosāfer secured possession of Ardabīl and Tabrīz, and until his death in 346/957-58 made Ardabīl his capital. Whether Ardabīl suffered when the Scandinavian Rūs descended on the coastland of Mūgān and Arrān, sacking the Mosaferid town of Barḍaʿa in 332/943-44, is unclear, though it lay only two or three days' march from the Caspian. Ardabīl's defense of the cause of Dayṣam against Marzobān apparently led to the destruction of its defensive walls, which probably contributed in turn to a general decline of the town during the 4th/10th century, commented upon by more than one contemporary authority; henceforth, Tabrīz was to rise in importance and become the main center of Azarbaijan. Ebn Ḥawqal describes how in 331/942-43 Marzobān compelled the citizens of Ardabīl, including the rich and finely dressed merchants and notables, to dismantle the walls themselves, using their costly robes to carry away the debris.

The geographers of this period provide us with good descriptions of the town and its topography. It was a nodal point for roads radiating from Ardabīl to Barḍaʿa, Zanĵān, Marāġa, and Meyānīj (modern Meyāna). It had four gates (the fact that Eṣṭakrī, p. 181, mentions only three is explained by the fact that the eastern gate was used only for local traffic and did not connect with one of the great highways), and within the city (*madīna*) was the citadel (*gohandez*), described as smaller than that of Dvin (Dabīl); behind this citadel lay the suburb (*rabāz*). The markets lay in a cross formation along the two main axes of streets, with the Friday mosque at the intersection and upon a hillock. A considerable number of artisans were employed in carving bowls and platters from *kalanĵ* wood, which was found in the forests of the Alborz spurs between Ardabīl and the Caspian. Also, striped cloth, brocades, and carpets were woven there, for all of which the crimson dyestuff *qermez* was used (R. B. Serjeant, *Islamic Textiles: Material for a History up to the Mongol Conquest*, Beirut, 1972, p. 67). Provisions and the necessities of life were very cheap, and the consumption of fish from the Kor and Araxes rivers is mentioned. Nevertheless, those geographers who visited it personally, such as Moqaddasī, were not impressed by the people of Ardabīl, who are described as miserly, thickwitted, and boorish, producing few scholars (in fact Samʿānī, [Hyderabad], I, pp. 157-58, mentions some traditionists from Ardabīl); indeed, Moqaddasī calls the town stinking and “one of the latrines of the world” (Eṣṭakrī, p. 188; Ebn Ḥawqal, pp. 334-35, 349-53, tr. Kramers, pp. 326-28, 343-46; Moqaddasī, pp. 377-78; *Ḥodūd al-ʿālam*, tr. Minorsky, p. 142, commentary p. 394).



In 605/1209 Ardabīl was sacked by the resurgent Georgians, with 12,000 citizens reputedly killed. Yāqūt visited in 617/1220, just before it was again sacked, this time by the Mongols, after withstanding two attacks; shortly afterwards it had recovered and was in a more flourishing state than before, although the principal center of Azarbaijan was now Tabrīz, and under the Il-khanids, Solṭāniya (Yāqūt [Beirut], I, pp. 145-46). Of the post-Mongol geographers, only Zakarīyā b. Moḥammad Qazvīnī has any significant information; in his, *Āṭār al-belād* (Beirut, 1380/1960, pp. 291-92), he mentions the extraordinarily large rats of Ardabīl and the consequent keen demand for hunting cats, sold in a special market.

Not long after Yāqūt's time, in 650/1252, came the birth of the religious leader whose descendants were to raise Ardabīl to new heights of importance—Shaikh Ṣafī-al-dīn Eshāq—so that the town became the center of Ṣafawīya Sufi order (see W. Hinz, *Irans Aufstieg zum Nationalstaat im fünfzehnten Jahrhundert*, Berlin and Leipzig, 1936, pp. 12ff.). In 905/1499-500 Esmā'īl b. Ḥaydar, later Shah Esmā'īl I, returned from exile in Gilān to Ardabīl and began the final struggle against the Āq Qoyonlū (q.v.) that soon led to his becoming shah of all Persia. Shortly afterwards (906/1500-01), Esmā'īl transferred his capital to Tabrīz, captured from Alvand Mīrzā in that year, and then, after the defeat of Čalderān (920/1514) at the hands of the Ottomans, to the greater safety of Qazvīn.

Ardabīl continued to flourish as one of the holiest cities of Safavid Persia. In the early 10th/16th century it was under Qezelbāš governors, and during 956-69/1549-62 under Shah Ṭahmāsp's brother Sām Moḥammad. After 1067/1656-57 it became for administrative purposes *kāṣṣa* or crown domain land (see K. M. Röhrborn, *Provinzen und Zentralgewalt Persiens im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1966, pp. 19, 41, 122). The shrine of Shaikh Ṣafī-al-dīn acquired, as a result of rich benefactions from successive shahs, an opulently endowed complex of buildings dating from the 8th/14th century on, clustered round the Shaikh's tomb tower, which during his lifetime had been the *kānaqāh* or convent of Ṣafī-al-dīn and his followers. European travelers passing through en route to the Safavid court in Isfahan have left valuable accounts of the shrine from the later Safavid period (Pietro della Valle in 1619; the Duke of Holstein's embassy and Olearius in 1673; J.-B. Tavernier in the middle decades of the century; Jan Struys in 1671; Cornelius de Bruyn in 1703). In 1897 F. Sarre visited Ardabīl and collected material for what was to be for many years the only full-length account of the shrine in a European language



(see his *Denkmaler Persischer Baukunst II: Die Ardabil Grabmoschee*, Berlin, 1910, and *Ardabil, Grabmoschee des Schech Safis*, Berlin, 1924). Photographs of the shrine were published in Jacques de Morgan, *Mission scientifique en Perse* (I, Paris, 1894), but de Morgan does not seem to have visited Ardabīl personally. For full reference to the European visitors to Ardabīl, see A. Gabriel, *Die Erforschung Persiens*, Vienna, 1952. An early description and inventory of the shrine buildings and properties is contained in the brief *Ṣarīḥ al-melk* of Zayn al-‘ābedīn ‘Alī b. ‘Abd-al-Mo‘men, completed in 977/1570 under Shah Ṭahmāsp I (recently edited and translated, with a valuable and exhaustive commentary, by A. H. Morton, “The Ardabīl Shrine in the Reign of Shah Tahmasp I,” *Iran* 12, 1974, pp. 31-64, 13, 1975, pp. 39-58; see also Sylvia A. Matheson, *Persia, an Archaeological guide*, London, 1972, p. 78). Over the years, the shrine was enriched by many sumptuous gifts, including Chinese porcelain (see below, The Chinese Porcelain Collection), and, it is said, the Ardabīl Carpets commissioned by Shāh Ṭahmāsp (but see under Ardabīl Carpet).

Ardabīl played a significant role in the Perso-Turkish warfare of the early 12th/18th century. The feeble Safavid ruler Ṭahmāsp II (r. 1135-45/1722-32) sought refuge there after being expelled from Tabrīz by the Ottomans but was in turn compelled to flee to Qazvīn and Tehran, so that the whole of Azarbaijan fell into Turkish hands (1137/1725). Nāder Afšār expelled the Ottomans in 1142/1730 and was crowned Shah of Persia near Ardabīl in 1149/1736 (see L. Lockhart, *The Fall of the Ṣafavī Dynasty and the Afghan Occupation of Persia*, Cambridge, 1958, pp. 266, 358-59; idem, *Nadir Shah*, London, 1938). After the Sunni Nāder expropriated the shrine endowments at Ardabīl, the daily feeding of pilgrims had to be discontinued, and in 1805 the French envoy Amedée Jaubert found the shrine in a ruinous condition. In these early years of the Qajar dynasty, Prince ‘Abbās Mīrzā, son of Fath-‘Alī Shah, was local governor in Ardabīl, with his court centered on the town; his order to fortify it with ramparts, against Russian threats, was carried out by the Napoleonic general Gardanne during his 1807-09 mission to the Qajar court. During the Russo-Persian War of 1826-28, Gardanne’s fortifications were stormed by Russian troops, who temporarily occupied the town. Much of the celebrated library of Shaikh Ṣafī-al-dīn was carried off to St. Petersburg in 1827 by General Paskiewitch on the pretext of keeping it safe till it could be returned, which it never was. Visiting Ardabīl shortly before this time (1813), James Morier estimated the town’s population at 4,000 (*A Second Journey Through Persia*, London, 1818, p. 250ff.).



In the second half of the 19th century, Nāṣer-al-dīn Shah (r. 1264-1313/1848-96) began repairs on the shrine after the ravages of the Russian attack, of prolonged neglect, and of earthquakes, but many of the surviving manuscripts and most of the porcelain were taken to Tehran for safekeeping. In 1909, during the Constitutionalist period, Ardabīl was seized by the commander Raḥīm Khan, who aimed at a restoration of the deposed Qajar Moḥammad-ʿAlī Shah (r. 1324-27/1907-09); this and other incidents provided pretexts for a virtual Russian occupation of Azarbaijan until the collapse of Imperial Russia in 1917. Ardabīl is now the chief town of a *šahrestān* of the same name in the province of Azarbaijan, with four *baḳšs*: Ardabīl, Namīn, Āstārā, and Garmī.

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(C. E. Bosworth)

ii. Modern Ardabīl

Ardabīl is one of the ten *šahrestān*-centers in the province of East Azarbaijan and the main urban center of northeastern Azarbaijan. It had been made prosperous by the Safavids, was hit hard by their fall, and suffered further blows on account of its new and exposed position close to a frontier under threat of Turkish, later Russian, attack. It consequently declined in the 12th/18th and early 13th/19th centuries. After the Turkish occupation



(1138/1725-1142/1729), Nāder Afšār ended the free food distributions which had formerly drawn pilgrims to the town. In the early 13th/19th century, when the crown prince ‘Abbās Mīrzā was governor of Azarbaijan, Ardabīl sometimes served as his base but was so ruined that he had to live in a tent when he stayed there during the winter of 1805 (Jaubert, p. 169). A little later, Morier estimated the town’s population at 4000 (700 houses); in 1822 Fraser put it at 500-600 families. A modern fort, designed by French engineers of the Gardanne mission, was completed ca. 1820. Finally Ardabīl was occupied and plundered by the Russians in 1243/1828.

Thereafter a revival began. Lying only 25 miles (40 km) from the new frontier fixed by the treaty of Torkamānčāy, Ardabīl was a necessary stopping place on a caravan route which became a major channel for importation of European goods into Iran from Russia. It occupies a commanding site at the point where a north-south road running between the coastal ranges of Ṭāleš and the volcanic massif of Sabalān joins the east-west route leading from Āstārā on the Caspian coast to Tabrīz. In 1872 Thielmann (p. 269) noted the brisk bazaar activity and the presence of many foreigners at Ardabīl; he reckoned the town’s population to be 20,000. Early in the 19th century, Aubin (pp. 107ff.) described Ardabīl as a commercial center importing Russian goods and exporting sheep and wool.

This period of trade-based expansion was ended by the First World War and the subsequent decline in traffic across Iran’s northwestern frontier. The next phase was one of development as the chief town of the eastern part of the province of East Azarbaijan and as a center of craft industries, which became the most important activity. Carpet weaving is one of the main economic activities of both the urban population and Ardabīl’s rural hinterland. Ardabīl itself may be considered one of the leading organizational centers of carpet manufacture in northwestern Iran. The other traditional industry is brick manufacture, for which the fine-textured loams and clays of the urban surrounding provide excellent raw materials. Industries in the proper sense are lacking. In 1963, according to the only available industrial census data, there were altogether 1,150 “industrial enterprises” employing 4,170 people (at the same time that there were 1,643 wholesalers and retailers with 2,387 employees; *Ministry of Interior. General Department of Public Statistics. Report on the Industrial Census of Iran August 1963, Mordad 1342. Series I.2, volume 3: East Azarbayejan Ostan.* October, 1964. Ardabīl was the only town in the region where artisans outnumbered persons engaged in trade.



Pilgrimage is still an important factor; the annual number of pilgrims to the shrine of Shaikh Ṣafī was estimated to be almost 100,000 in the early 1970s and appears to have increased considerably since then.

The population grew rapidly, rising from 65,742 in 1335 Š./1956 to 147,404 in 1355 Š./1976, making it the second largest city in the province (see *Islamic Republic of Iran. Plan and Budget Organization. Statistical Centre of Iran. National Census of Population and Housing November 1976: Ardabil Shahrestan/East Azarbayejan Ostan*. Serial No. 31. December 1979), the annual rate of increase in the decade 1345 Š./1966-1355 Š./1976 being 5.8 percent. New built-up areas, mainly to the west and southwest, have been added to the old quarters of the city. This rapid urban development on a high plateau with a cold, dry climate has not had pleasing results. The remarks of travelers in the 19th and 20th centuries on the bareness of the surrounding landscape contrast strikingly with the descriptions of Safavid Ardabīl as an amply irrigated and very verdant place, so much so that Pietro della Valle called it a “little Venice.”

See also J. Morier, *A Second Journey through Persia*, London, 1818.

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(X. de Planhol)

iii. Monuments of Ardabīl

Although Ardabīl has risen more than once to international importance and has had great and beautiful buildings appropriate to its status, war, earthquakes, and floods have devastated what would have been a rich heritage of monuments, particularly from the Saljuq, Il-khanid, and Safavid periods.

Various authors have sometimes described the town and its monuments in less than enthusiastic terms: ". . . one of the latrines of the world" (Moqaddasī); "It is large and straggling with a population of 25,000, and a good bazaar The shrine of Shah Ismael the Great is continued in a decayed mosque built by his great-grandfather Cheikh Seffi His tomb adjoins that of the valiant monarch" (Sir J. Sheil, from Lady Sheil's *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia*, 1856). Adam Olearius describes the town in 1637 as "built out of the remains of a former city It is surrounded by a ruinous wall of mud, topt with bricks and flanked with towers in a like state of decay. The houses are mean and small, built of mud or sun-burnt bricks like those of the poorest villages The only objects of real interest in Ardebeel, are the tombs of Sheikh Suffee (Şafī), the ancestor of the Suffarean (Safavid) kings; of Sultan Hyder and of Shah Ismael the first of that dynasty that filled the Persian throne . . . Everything, wore a faded and ruinous air" (*The Voyages and Travels of the Ambassadors Sent By Frederick Duke of Holstein, to the Great Duke of Muscovy and the King of Persia*, London, 1669, pp. 170-82, German edition, Schleswig, 1647). As the birthplace of the Safavid dynasty, Ardabīl long enjoyed a favored position but was often neglected under later dynasties. Today, after long cycles of neglect and natural disasters and with the urban renewal and expansion following the Second World War, Ardabīl has only three major historic monuments left: the Friday Mosque that lies on a hill at



what was the intersection of Ardabīl two main streets; the complex of buildings that form the shrine of Shaikh Ṣafī; and the tomb of Shaikh Jebra'īl, the father of Shaikh Ṣafī, which lies outside Ardabīl at the village of Kalḳorān-e bālā some 4 km north of the city.

1. *The Masjed-e Jom'a/Friday Mosque*. The Friday Mosque that now stands largely in ruins was once an impressive monument sited on a low hill in the center of the city. The “hill” may be partly a much older “city mound;” ceramic remains on the surface indicate that archeological excavations could confirm this. The architectural remains consist of two parts, the ruins of the mosque itself and a freestanding stub of a minaret. The minaret appears to date from the Saljuq period, and it is quite possible that an original Saljuq mosque was destroyed by the Mongols when Ardabīl fell in 617/1220. The ruins stand in a graveyard and consequently there has been a substantial rise in ground level. Possibly there were more buildings attached to the minaret the ruins of which lie buried. Wilber has described the surviving Il-khanid work (*The Architecture of Islamic Iran, the Il Khanid Period*, Princeton, 1955). The porch of the ruined mosque was roofed over in comparatively recent times and was still in use as a mosque in the early 1970s. The main body of the mosque was constructed of massive brickwork with a dome standing on a high flanged brick drum. Only a portion of the drum now remains.

Parts of the original interior still remain exposed above the rubble. Plain plastered squinches are decorated with traces of Il-khanid wall paintings. The *qebła* wall has been severely cracked, probably by the earthquakes that caused the collapse of the dome.

2. *The Shrine of Shaikh Ṣafī*. The shrine consists of the remains of a dervish *kānaqāh* originally founded by Shaikh Ṣafī-al-dīn in the 7th/13th century and subsequently added to with his tomb as the focal point. Although the two buildings were temporarily used as mosques in the latter part of the 13th/19th century, they were never designed as such, and there are no *qebłas* in the original structures. The shrine survives today as a complex of buildings arranged around a garden and a paved courtyard. Among the many written and pictorial sources that assist in the reconstruction of the original complex are Pietro Della Valle, *Suite des fameux voyages*, Paris, 1658, pp. 497-504; Adam Olearius, *The Voyages*, pp. 170-82; Jacques de Morgan, *Mission Scientifique en Perse I*, Paris, 1894; F. Sarre, *Ardabil, Grabmoschee des Schech Safis*, Berlin, 1924; idem, *Denkmäler persischer Baukunst*, 2 vols., Berlin, 1901-10; E. Dībaǰ, *Rāhmamā-ye ātār-e tārikī-e Ādarbāyǰān-e šarqī*, Tabrīz, 1334 Š./1955, pp. 55-88



and a second work of the same name with minor additions, Tabrīz, 1343 Š./1964; M. E. Weaver, *Preliminary Study on the Conservation Problems of Five Iranian Monuments*, Paris, 1970, serial no. 1865 BMS. RD/CLT; idem, *The Conservation of the Shrine of Shaikh Safi at Ardebil*, Paris, 1971, serial no. 2560/RMO.RD/CLP (these two are UNESCO consultant reports for limited distribution); A. H. Morton, “The Ardabīl Shrine in the Reign of Shāh Tahmāsp I,” *Iran* 12, 1974, pp. 31-64 and *Iran* 13, 1975, pp. 39-58 (based on Ṭahmāsp’s *Ṣarīḥ al-melk*, or property register); R. Stead, *The Ardabil Carpets*, Malibu, 1974.

At the time of Sarre’s visit in 1897 the complex was entered through the damaged remains of a great gate finished in 1057/1647-48; these remains were demolished by the Archeological Service in 1321 Š./1942. The shrine is now entered through a two-story brick building (built 1305 Š./1926) with shops on the ground floor and offices above. Inside is a garden court enclosed by high brick walls with blind arcades on the long sides (northeast and southwest). The walls probably date to the reign of Moḥammad Shah (r. 1834-48) although the southwestern wall was largely rebuilt in 1312-13 Š./1943-44 (Morton, in *Iran* 13, 1975, p. 51). A small gateway leads from this court to the *ṣoffa* court, on the right of which (to the southwest) lie the ruins of the New Ālla-kāna, which was once a glazed-brick faced building with two stories of rooms arranged symmetrically around a central domed hall. The New Ālla-kāna was used for Sufi dervish ritual and was built when Ṣadr-al-dīn was shaikh of the Ṣafavī order of dervishes (734-91-92/1335-92); it was repaired and given a new dome by Shah Ṭahmāsp I. The dome was intact in 1703 (*Voyages de Corneille Le Bruyn . . .*, Paris, 1725, pp. 18-30) but must have fallen before 1759 (inspection and inventory by Motawallī Moḥammad Qāsem Beg Ṣafawi, 25 Raġab 1172/24 March 1759). Olearius described this building in 1637 (op. cit.).

The *ṣoffa* court consists of a paved walk to the inner part of the shrine; it is flanked on both sides by a range of arches that once contained the tombs of amirs, close companions, and the children of the shaikhs (Zayn-al-ābedīn ‘Alī b. ‘Abd-al-Mo’men ‘Abdī, *Ṣarīḥ al-melk*, 977/1570, tr. A. H. Morton, *Iran* 12, 1974, p. 41). This court was once decorated with some of the finest Safavid glazed tile mosaic in the entire complex, but neglect and poor restoration work have left very little of the original tilework here. A gate from the *ṣoffa* court leads into the main courtyard. The gate has been much altered and restored but was built or rebuilt under Shah ‘Abbās I and has a damaged inscription that once gave a date of 1039/1629-30 (Morton in *Iran* 13, 1975, p. 40). The main courtyard was probably first organized in its present form in the reign of Shah



Ṭahmāsp. Proceeding clockwise around the court from the entry gate, at the northeastern end of the court lies the *ayvān* fronting a large octagonal brick building known as the Jannatsarā (ca. 950/1540). This structure was once crowned by a high dome (spanning approximately 17 m), which seems to have collapsed early in the 11th/17th century. The *Ṣarīḥ al-melk* describes it as domed in 977/1570. The dome was repaired in the reign of ‘Abbās I but is not mentioned by Olearius in 1637 (Morton, *Iran* 13, 1975, p. 42). The building was most probably originally designed for dervish ritual but was used as a mosque for a short period from 1299/1881-82 (Weaver, *Preliminary Study*, Paris, 1970, pp. 14-18 and *The Conservation*, pt. 2, Paris, 1971, pp. 1-3; Morton, *Iran* 12, 1974, p. 40 and 13, 1975, pp. 41-43). Much of the eastern side of the courtyard is occupied by the high, richly decorated facade of the Dār al-Ḥoffāz, known more recently as the Qandīl-kāna or Rewāq, a building originally intended for the reading of the Koran as a pious act at the tomb of Shaikh Ṣafī. The current building, although much restored and altered, is dated at least in part to the period of Shaikh Ṣadr-al-dīn Mūsā (735-94/1334-91-92) by an inscription on the portal. The facade is decorated with glazed polychrome tile mosaic, which has been much repaired and restored often with more enthusiasm than accuracy. Many of the inscriptions have been changed in the “restoration” process. The hall was roofless in an undated late 19th-century photograph—probably taken in the 1880’s—reproduced by Morton (*Iran* 12, 1974, pl. III). The photograph clearly shows some of the interior decorations dating to the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I, part of which survive today although there have been two new roofs since then. These include silver grilles and a silver gilt shutter and door casings, but a gold grille was sold “more than forty years ago.” (Morton, *Iran* 12, 1974, p. 55. See also Dibāḡ, *Rāhnamā*, translation in Weaver, *Preliminary Study*, Paris, 1970, pp. 99-122; and pp. 40-46, 81-84, 137.) ‘Abbās I ordered some of these works in 1021/1612. The silver-sheet-covered door at the portal dates to 1011/1602-03, and an inscription on the wall dates the gilding, painting, and plasterwork of the main interior to about 1037/1627-28. The Dār al-Ḥoffāz or Hall of the Koran Reciters is separated from the tomb tower of Shaikh Ṣafī by an apsidal extension of the hall, known as the *Ṣāh-nešīn*.

According to the Safavid genealogy contained in the *Selselat al-nasab* of Shaikh Ḥosayn Zāhedī (ed. K. Īrānšahr, Berlin, 1303 Š./1924, p. 39), the tomb tower of Shaikh Ṣafī was built by his son Ṣadr-al-dīn in ten years, probably commencing when Ṣafī died in 735/1334. The tower consists of a cylindrical brick shaft standing on a polygonal stone base; a slightly bulbous dome caps the shaft. The surface of the shaft is decorated with diagonal layers of blue



glazed brick on a red brick background, repeating the word *Allāh*. Above the main part of the shaft, a deep inscription band of polychrome tile mosaic is set between two bands of running palmettes. The three bands encircle the tower and act as a transition to the dome. The tower has been heavily restored and redecorated, particularly in 1328 Š./1949. Inside the tower are the grave covers or tombs of Shaikh Ṣafī, his son Shaikh Ṣadr-al-dīn Mūsā (d. 794/ 1392), his great-grandson Shaikh Ebrāhīm (d. 851/1447), and his great-great-great-grandson Solṭān or Shaikh Ḥaydar (d. 893/1488). Next to Shaikh Ṣafī's tomb tower lies the domed tomb of Shah Esmā'īl I. The interior and exterior of this mausoleum have been heavily altered and restored. The catafalques or wooden grave covers of Shaikh Ṣafī and Shah Esmā'īl are described by popular legend as gifts from the Mughal emperor Homāyūn (r. 937-63/1530-56). Although the enameled silver plaque on Shaikh Ṣafī's tomb cover is inscribed in Arabic that Morton (*Iran* 12, 1974, p. 47) describes as “a bit shaky, a characteristic shared with other inscriptions at the shrine,” the writer is not aware of any historical documentation for these as Mughal gifts.

Adjacent to the tomb tower of Ṣafī and Esmā'īl lies another domed brick building containing tombs; it is known in modern times as the Ḥaram-kāna. European writers have almost always described this monument as the burial place of the women of the Safavid dynasty. One tomb cover bears an inscription to the effect that it is the grave of the Bībī Fāṭema, wife of Shaikh Ṣafī (d. 724/1324). Morton has shown (Morton, *Iran* 12, 1974, p. 50) that the inscription painted on the interior plasterwork of the drum states that the building is the “abode” of the “lamented” Moḥiy-al-mella wa'l-dīn, eldest son of Shaikh Ṣafī (d. 724/1324). The building thus antedates Ṣafī's tomb tower by about ten years; it has been quite heavily repaired.

To the southeast of the Dār al-Ḥoffāz and northeast of the tombs is the large, domed, octagonal brick building known since shortly before 1021/1611 as the Čīnī-kāna, a pre-existing structure that was converted into the repository for Shah 'Abbās's great *waqf* of Chinese porcelain between 1015-16/1607-08 and 1021/1611 (Morton, *Iran* 12, 1974, p. 56-57; J. A. Pope, *Chinese Porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine*, Washington, 1956, pp. 7-8). Only the richly decorated blue and gold interior with its multiple niches, tile work, and fine plasterwork dates from this period; there are remains of an earlier interior with windows and blocked-off staircases hidden deep in the thick walls. Nothing is directly known about the date or function of the original building, although on the evidence of blocked windows facing the Dār al-Ḥoffāz and certain features of



the plan it appears that it was once freestanding and must antedate the Dār al-Ḥoffāz, probably from the 8th/14th century, when it would have been used for either dervish rituals or a tomb. The existence of a crypt with burials under the building supports the latter hypothesis; Morton (*Iran* 12, 1974, p. 57) identifies the building with the “Dome of the Princes” mentioned in the *Šarīḥ al-Melk* for 975/1567-68. Part of the plasterwork of Shah ‘Abbās’ interior dome collapsed just before 1969; a new external dome was added in 1971.

The land surrounding the complex on the southeast and northeast is occupied by a large cemetery part of which was known since Shah Esmā‘īl’s time as the Place of the Martyrs (Šahīd-gāh). The level of the graveyard has risen several meters since the time of Shaikh Šafi. In 1322 Š./1943 it was partially cleared and a new enclosure wall was built. Excavations carried out in 1971 by ‘A. A. Sarfarāz of the Iranian Archaeological Service revealed graves and pottery dating to the 8th/14th or even 7th/13th century. The shrine was also once the home of a great library which was especially enriched by the *waqf* of Shah ‘Abbās I (Eskandar Beg, tr. Savory, pp. 954-55). The best part of the library was plundered by the conquering Russians under General Paskiewitch in 1828, and was sent to St. Petersburg. The plundered volumes are now in the public library in Leningrad (W. Barthold, *An Historical Geography of Iran*, tr. S. Soucek, Princeton, N. J., 1984, p. 217). A catalogue of the books was drawn up by the order of Sayyed Moḥammad Qāsem Beg, the Custodian of the Shrine in 1167/1752 (see the edition *Ganĵīna-ye Šayk Šafi*, ed. Sayyed Yūnesī, Tabriz, 1348 Š./1969; on rare documents from the Library of the Shrine see M Weaver, *The Conservation*, Paris, 1971, pp. 3-9).

3. *Tomb of Shaikh Jebra‘īl*. The building standing today dates largely from the 11th/17th century and has been substantially restored in recent decades. The tomb consists of two parts: a square central building and an attached apse-like pentagonal structure preceding it. The whole ensemble stands on a raised stone socle or base. The brick walls above the base are modulated with a series of high *ayvāns*. Over the octagonal central room a dome stands on a high drum decorated with a diagonal pattern of blue glazed bricks forming a repeat pattern based on the word *Allāh*. The building was once famed for its costly carpets, silver and gold lamps, and fine inlaid work, nearly all of which had disappeared by Sarre’s visit in 1897. De Morgan’s photographs of the building, taken sometime between 1875 and 1889-90, show the dome and drum fallen in ruins (de Morgan, *Mission*, Paris, 1894, pls. XLII and XLIII). Sarre examined the building in 1897 and identified several phases of construction: the tower



appears to date from 8th/14th century, while the building on a socle surrounding it was added in the early 10th/16th century.

According to inscriptions on the door between the porch and the tomb and in the northwest corner of the dome chamber, the building was repaired and decorated in the year 1030-31/1620-21 in the reign of Shah ‘Abbās I.

Given in the text.

(M. E. Weaver)

iv. Ardabīl Collection of Chinese Porcelain

Jalāl-al-dīn Moḥammad Monajjem Yazdī records that the Chinese porcelains were installed in the Čīnī-ḳāna of the Ardabīl shrine in 1020/1611 (*Tārīḳ-e ‘Abbāsī*, B.M. Add. 27.241, fols. 339-42), approximately three years after Shah ‘Abbās decided to make his property *waqf*: The collection had been acquired through diplomatic and other gifts as well as through the normal resources of trade. Shah ‘Abbās’ faithful servitor Qaračaḡāy apparently made his contribution, since over ninety pieces, all but three or four of them of the finest quality early 9th/15th-century ware, bear his name. Other pieces may have entered the collection by more devious routes, perhaps some from the collection of Uluḡ Beg, who, according to the *Bābor-nāma* (tr. A. S. Beveridge, London, 1922, p. 80), built a four-doored Čīnī-ḳāna and “Sent to China for porcelain to use in it.” Chinese histories make it abundantly clear that Uluḡ Beg received porcelains as diplomatic gifts, and he was probably one of the first to create a Čīnī-ḳāna, so that even in the early 9th/15th century collections were beginning to be formed. In any case porcelain was the most highly regarded import from China throughout the 9th/15th century and almost certainly in the previous century as well.

The original gift amounted to 1,162 pieces, 805 of which were removed to Tehran in 1935 (J. A. Pope, *Chinese Porcelains from the Ardebil Shrine*, Washington, D. C., 1956, p. 49); an additional eighty or ninety pieces, many of them broken, remain in the Čīnī-ḳāna. About thirty-one pieces lack the dedicatory inscription of Shah ‘Abbās, which was neatly engraved into the glaze in a rectangular cartouche. The inscription reads *Banda-ye šāh-e welāyat ‘Abbās waqfbar āstāna-ye Šāh Šafī namūd* “Abbās, slave of the King of Sovereign power (‘Alī, the first Shi‘ite imam), made endowment [of this] to the threshold of Shah Šafī” (J. A. Pope, *Ardebil*, p. 50). Many of the pieces also bear other



inscriptions, some of them unexplained. A number of names are recorded, including Abū Ṭāleb, Behbūd, and, as mentioned, Qaračāgāy. The porcelains include fifty-eight 8th/14th- and early 9th/15th-century celadons; an impressive group of eighty white wares, many with finely incised decoration under the glaze, including four large white dishes with the remains of gilt decoration; and a group of other monochromes, including some fine yellows still in the shrine, as well as a few polychrome pieces of the 10th/16th century.

It is, however, the 400-odd pieces of blue and white (including what remains in the Čīnī-kāna) which are the most important and interesting, forming a remarkable cross-section of the best quality for the period from about the mid-8th/14th to the 11th/17th century. Thirty-seven of these date from the 8th/14th century, most of them large dishes with rich and varied decoration; the earlier pieces are painted on the back with floral scrolls and the later ones with the so-called petal panels. The earlier and more elaborate pieces frequently have the decoration reserved in white against a deep blue ground, the flattened foliated rims painted with a powerful wave pattern. The bases of these dishes are unglazed and discolored reddish in the firing. Other pieces include vases, wine jars, and two handsome flattened rectangular flasks (Pope, *op. cit.*, pl. 28, acc. nos. 29.475 and 29.476). Three of the five vases bear the Qaračāgāy mark in addition to that of Shah ‘Abbās. These 8th/14th-century porcelains must have been quite numerous in Persia, for the Topkapı Serai contains a fair number of pieces; these were looted from the royal collection in Tabrīz in 922/ 1516 (J. A. Pope, “Fourteenth Century Blue and White; A Group of Chinese Porcelains in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, Istanbul,” *Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers* 2, 1, Washington, D. C., 1982).

The greatest part of the blue and white collection consists of early 9th/ 15th-century material, which is very varied. There are well over 200 pieces, most of which, as in the earlier specimens, are large dishes. Ninety of the best pieces carry the mark of Qaračāgāy. Three of the dishes are exceptionally large, measuring 63.5 cm in diameter, and are decorated with landscape garden scenes and with flower sprays in the cavetto (Pope, *Ardebil*, pls. 42-44, acc. nos. 29.310-12). Among the very finest of early 9th/15th-century production, they are in the best of Chinese taste. Other examples from this rare group are found in the Topkapı Serai, in the Idemitsu Art Gallery and the Umezawa Kinenkan Museum in Tokyo (see *Sekai Tōji Zenshū* 14, 1976, pls. 11, 12), and in the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (acc. no. 61.14). The remainder of the large dishes, varying in size from 28 to 43 cm, are variously decorated in the center



with lotus bunches, flower sprays, floral scrolls, fruiting vines, melons, peach sprays, or dragons, and with floral scrolls or sprays in the cavetto; if the rim is flattened it may bear a wave pattern. On the backs are floral scrolls or sprays. The base is always unglazed.

The bowls, which are mostly about 20 cm in diameter, are either conical or deep and well rounded with a straight rim. Floral scrolls are a popular decoration, but some have fruiting sprays; these are highly symbolic for the Chinese, since the peach, the pomegranate, and cherry apple (representing long life, numerous progeny, and peace, respectively) form a flattering combination for the owner. One conical bowl is decorated around the outside with a lively three-clawed dragon; a badly damaged companion ewer, which is probably unique, remains in the shrine. The other six long-spouted ewers are decorated with floral scrolls or peach sprays in panels supported around the sides by the flowers of the four seasons.

There are about fifteen large, high-shouldered, small-mouthed vases of the shape named *mei-ping* “prunus vase” by the Chinese. These are decorated around the main part of the body with floral scrolls or symbolically charged fruiting sprays, and with a band of scrolls or panels on the shoulder and either flower sprays or stiff plantain leaves in a band around the foot. One unique piece of exceptional quality, rather strongly waisted near the base, is decorated with two five-clawed dragons reserved in white with incised detail against a blue-painted sea with bands of panels above and below (Pope, *Ardebil*, pl. 50, acc. no. 29.403). The large wine jars and flasks that make up the remainder of the early 9th/15th-century material are distinguished by the intensity of the blue color, which the Chinese called “heaped and piled,” since it darkens almost to black where it is applied thickly. (This effect may be due to uneven grinding or the ore.) The glazes exhibit a moderate, “orange peel” gloss.

These features disappear in the twenty-five or thirty pieces dating from the late 9th/15th century. This relatively small number of objects is an indication of the decline of trade, which dropped off rather sharply from about 840/1436, following the termination of the Chinese maritime expeditions and the internal troubles after the death of the Hsüan-tê emperor. The late 9th/15th century material falls into two groups: the imperial quality ware, represented by a number of bowls decorated with even-toned blue in a very refined outline and wash technique and an extremely glossy glaze, and the “Provincial type” (Pope, *Ardebil*, pls. 70-74), mostly from the central kilns of Ching-tê Chên,



but those that were privately financed and operated. Some of the provincial pieces may date from the early 10th/16th century. They are very different in character from the imperial ware in both form and decoration; in addition to a *kendi* (a South Asian water vessel), ewers, flasks, and basins, there is an interesting series of large dishes that look back in decorative style to the 8th/14th century but are more crowded in composition and rougher in execution.

A plate dating to the period of Chêng-tê (1506-21) belongs to a rare group decorated with formal scrollwork and medallions with inscriptions in Arabic (Pope, *Ardebil*, pls. 75-76, acc. no. 29.313). During the Chêng-tê period, many of the eunuchs in the Chinese imperial palace were Muslims and were also extremely influential and rich, able to order objects with Arabic or Persian inscriptions for their private use. Most of these were small and intended for the scholar's study rather than for export, although there are also a few bowls, plates, and dishes, of which the large plate is one of the two surviving examples. (There is another in the Freer Gallery which was formerly in the Eumorfopoulos and Sedgwick collections. See R. C. Hobson, *Catalogue of the George Eumorfopoulos Collection of Chinese, Corean and Persian Pottery and Porcelain*, London, 1927, IV, pl. iv, D19).

The 10th/16th- and very early 11th/17th-century material, consisting of over 120 bowls, plates, ewers, vases, and *kendi*, demonstrates a marked change in decorative style. Landscape scenes, often with deer, birds and flowers, garden scenes with scholars, and sea horses and waves replace the elegant floral scrolls and sprays of the preceding century. The organization of these motifs on the surface is similarly varied, and among the later dishes and plates there are many examples of deer in a landscape in the central field surrounded by a series of radiating flower-filled panels divided from each other by jewel strings. This type was to have a much more profound influence on the newly emerging Safavid blue and white than did the earlier ware, which was probably less accessible than the numerous contemporary imports. The impact of Chinese porcelain upon the Persian potters was very great, although the elaborate 8th/14th-century examples were less influential than those of the 9th/15th century. There are many imitations of early 9th/15th-century dishes with large floral scrolls in the center, or with the lotus bunch, the latter rather stiff and neatly tied, unlike the carelessly tied ones of the Chinese, which display a dashing style and bold flaunting of ribbons. It was really the 10th/16th-century and very early 11th/ 17th-century Chinese material that had



the most profound influence on the ware of the Safavid period, when the potters began to take a lively interest in the contemporary blue and white. Their approach was more humorous and often a great deal more inventive than that of their Chinese counterparts. Persian pottery in the 11th/17th century benefited greatly from the Chinese impact at a time when the arts in their own country were being much encouraged, partly as a result of Shah ‘Abbās’ interest and his gift to the Ardabīl shrine.

Given in text. See also *Sīāḥat-nāma-ye Ebrāhīm Beg*, ed.

M. K. Šīrāzī, Calcutta, 1910, pp. 115-16.

(M. Medley)