



ĀSTĀN-E QODS-E RAŻAWĪ

ĀSTĀN-E QODS-E RAŻAWĪ, the complex of buildings surrounding the tomb of the Imam ‘[Alī al-Rezā](#) at Mašhad (the “shrine complex”).

The pre-Mongol period. The city of Mašhad (Meshed), the present-day administrative capital of Khorasan, is a relatively recent foundation which grew up about the tomb with its important pilgrim traffic following the decline of the ancient nearby cities of Ṭūs and Nišāpūr in the period of the Mongol conquest. Before the interment of the imam the place was already the site of the tomb of the ‘Abbasid caliph, Hārūn al-Rašīd (r. 170/786-193/809) in the precincts of which the imam was himself buried close to its west wall on the upper side of the head (*bālā-ye sar*) of Hārūn’s tomb. The mausoleum (*boq’a*) of al-Hārūn stood in the grounds of the house of the governor of Ṭūs, Ḥomayd b. Qaḥṭaba al-Ṭā’ī, at the village of Sanābād just outside Nūqān, one of the two big towns in the Ṭūs district at that time (Ebn Ḥawqal, p. 434). Its erection is attributed to his son and second successor, al-Ma’mūn (r. 198/813-218/833), but no documentary evidence has yet appeared to support this. This same structure which eventually became the imam’s mausoleum (*rawza*) also is an almost perfect square (see below), in the center of which was placed the caliph’s grave. The earth used in the construction of the walls is coarse (*čīna*) or layered (*dāy*) earth, consisting of clay that has been kneaded and then fired like the clay used in the construction of kilns and jars. It is alleged that goat’s hair and molasses (*šīra*) were employed to strengthen the earthen compound. The walls are more than two meters thick and therefore unusually sturdy. It seems that at the beginning, in accordance with the architectural technique of



the age, the compound was topped by a cloistered-vaulted ceiling, not a dome. After Imam Reżā's remains had been brought to the mausoleum, the building came to be known as the Mašhad, i.e., place of martyrdom (e.g., Moqaddasī, p. 352; Bayhaqī, 2nd. ed., pp. 531-32; Ebn al-Aṭīr, repr., X, pp. 210, 522; Jovaynī, I, pp. 200, 201, where it is referred to as Mašhad-e Moqaddas), because the imam was believed to have been poisoned and to have died a martyr; and the city that in subsequent centuries grew up about the shrine also acquired this name. According to Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan Ṣanī'-al-dawla, who does not mention his sources, efforts to adorn the mausoleum date from as early as the Daylamite period (*Maṭla' al-šams*, Tehran, 1302/1884, repr., Tehran, 2535 = 1355 Š./ 1976, II, p. 50; 'A. Mo'taman, *Tārīk-e Āstān-e Qods-e Rażawī*, Tehran, 1348 Š./ 1969, p. 61). Later the Ghaznavid ruler Nāṣer-al-dawla Sübūktigin (r. 366/977-387/997) destroyed the mausoleum in an act of fanaticism leaving intact only just over two meters of walls from the building of al-Ma'mūm's time. People were forbidden to repair the place, and it remained in ruin until the reign of Sübūktigin's son and successor Sultan Maḥmūd (387/997-421/1030) who, because of a dream that he had, had the mausoleum rebuilt (Ebn al-Aṭīr, IX, p. 401); the work was completed in 400/1009 through the efforts of Abū Bakr Šahmard, the *kadkodā* (steward) of Fa'eḡ *kādem-e kāṣṣa*. Abu'l-Faẓl Sūrī b. Mo'tazz, the contemporary governor of Nīšāpūr, donated a flourishing village as an endowment (*waqf*), ordered several additions, and built a minaret (Bayhaqī, pp. 531-32). This is the minaret which today stands on top of the golden *ayvān* of the Ṣaḡn-e Kohna (old court), not far from the great dome. As will be noted later, the minaret was later embellished with gold bricks and other ornamentation. The new building incorporated the remnants of the original structure, using bricks in the walls and in the new, barrel-vaulted roof, as in the contemporary tomb of Arslān Jāḡeb (a governor of Ṭūs under Sultan Maḥmūd) near the village of Sangbast (on the Mašhad-Farīmān road, some 40 km east of the city), locally known as the tomb of Ayāz. The two buildings show close similarity in general architectural design, particularly in the placing of squinches over the corners, in the claddings, and in having four arches which formed four openings in the middle of the original four walls.

According to B. Sa'adat (*Bārgāh-e Reżā*, Shiraz, Asia Institute of the Pahlavi University, 2535 = 1355 Š./1976, the plan of the building), the direction of Mecca (*qebla*) in all the buildings of the complex is exactly southwest. In the present article, "south" is written for convenience instead of "direction of Mecca." Thus the real directions are all 45° different from the directions given here. The dimensions of the Ḥaram are: length from north to south, 10.90 m;



breadth from east to west, 10.40 m; height of the rim of the vault, 18.80 m; height of the apex of the dome above the floor of the Ḥaram, 31.20 m; external circumference of the dome, 42.10 m; height of the entire gold-clad part of the dome, 16.40 m; height of the gold-clad cupola of the dome, 3.50 m.

Formerly, inside this chamber, in the form of a frieze that ran along the drum of the dome just beneath the clearstory windows, the sura 62 of the Qur'ān (*al-Jom'a*) had been written in a raised inscription on plaster in a fine *tolt* script by the great calligrapher 'Alī-Rezā 'Abbāsī (q.v.), the letters of which were covered with inlaid mirror-work. The doorway facing the Ḥaram and the eastern door of the sanctuary precinct are both of gold, while there are eleven doors made of silver opening onto the lateral porticoes (*rewāqs*). The floor of the Ḥaram having recently been raised 4 cm, the figures for height of the vault and the apex of the dome must now be reduced accordingly.

The mausoleum suffered severe damage as a result of the incursion of the Ġozz Turks in 548/1153 (Ḥ. Šāmlū, *Tārīḵ-e'Īrān az Mād tā Pahlavī*, Tehran 1347 Š./1968, p. 387). A few years later it was repaired and resuscitated by Šaraf-al-dīn Abū Ṭāher b. Sa'd b. 'Alī Qomī, either at his own expense or for the account of the Saljuq Sultan Sanjar (r. 511/1118-552/1157) (Mo'taman, op. cit., p. 61; Šanī-'al-dawla, op. cit., II, p. 51). Also toward the end of the Saljuq period, Zomorrod Malek, a daughter of Sanjar's nephew (sister's son), the Il-khanid prince Maḥmūd b. Moḥammad (T. Bīneš, "Sangāb-e K̄varazmšāhī," *Nāma-ye Āstān-e Qods-e Rażawī* 38, N.S. 1, pp. 81, 99), caused the dadoes of the Ḥaram to be adorned with finely colored octagonal and hexagonal star-shaped tiles. Inscriptions on remains of the tiles show that this work was done after 557/1162 (Mawlawī, in *Dāneš-nāma* I, p. 89). One tile bears the name *Torkān Zomorrod Maleka* (sic) *bent-e solṭān-e šahīd Maḥmūd*. These tiles were removed in later times, and in subsequent restorations they were refixed to the plinth of the Ḥaram in random order, the sequence of the inscriptions being ignored. The inscriptions contain useful information and have been transcribed by Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan Šanī-'al-dawla (op. cit., II, p. 63; see also 'A. -Ḥ. Mawlawī, "Kāšihā-ye ezāra-ye ḥaram-e moṭahhar," *Nāma-ye Āstān-e Qods-e Rażawī*, special edition (*šomāra-ye maḵšūš*) on the occasion of the celebration of the 2500th year of Iranian empire, Mašhad, n.d., pp. 197- 97).

One of the finest old art specimens preserved in the shrine museum is a large, circular stone drinking trough (*sangāb*) bearing inscriptions which show that it was made for the K̄varazmšāh Moḥammad and his vizier Neẓām-al-molk in 599/1203 and that its makers' names were Moḥammad b. Aḥmad . . . ,



Moḥammad . . . ,and Mas‘ūd Naqqāš (S. Ḥ. Ṣamadī, *Rāhnamā-ye Mūza-ye Āstān-e Qods-e Rażawī*, n.d., pp. 21, 31; T. Bīneš, op. cit., p. 86). Fixed to the wall on the outer margin of the surround of the Ḥaram doorway leading to the Pīšrow (approach) from the *rewāq* called the Dār al-Ḥoffāz, there is a very fine inscription on glazed bricks in embossed *tolṭ* script, in which the imam’s name and genealogy, the name of the donor (‘Alī b. Moḥammad Moqrī, the name of the potter (Moḥammad b. Abī Ṭāher, see above, I, 385), and the date (1 Jomādā 612/28 September 1215) are mentioned. Moqrī also donated the inscribed tiles over the plinth inside the chamber and the three very fine niches (*ṭāqča*) in the southern wall, all of which still remain *in situ*. The inscription on the inside of the sanctuary was repaired in 760/1358-59, which date can still be seen on the *soffa* or dais running along the northern wall of the sanctuary, known as the “Šāh Ṭahmāsbī Ṣoffa.” In the following century, the interior walls of the sanctuary were plastered and simply painted. In a later period a new coating of plaster was applied over the old and some finer drawings were traced on them. In the Safavid period it was once again decorated, with very delicate designs done in gold, lapis lazuli, vermilion, verdigris, and other colorants—in the same technique as can be observed in palaces of the Safavid period and the mausoleum of K̄vāja Rabī b. Kayṭam in Mašhad. (All of this decoration and redecoration came to view in 1344 Š./1965 when the western wall of the sanctuary was refurbished.)

In another part of the surround of the same doorway of the Ḥaram, there is an inscription comprising two verses by the Arabic poet Abū Nowās in praise of the imam and the name of ‘Abd-al-‘Azīz b. Ādam b. Abī Naṣr Qomī, who apparently was responsible for the building of the doorway. His name reappears on the *meḥrāb* on the southwest side of the Ḥaram in an inscription which also includes the name of the luster potter, [Abū Zayd b. Abī Moḥammad Kāšānī](#), and bears the date Rabī II, 612/August, 1215. The same date reappears in yet another inscription on the *Ṣoffa-ye Šāh Ṭahmāsbī*, which also consists of a Hadith of the Prophet as well as two Persian verses.