



BARSIĀN

BARSIĀN (also Bersiān, locally called Bīsyūn), a village in the *dehestān* of Barāʾān 45 km southeast of Isfahan on the north bank of the Zāyandarūd; it is situated on the old caravan route from Isfahan which, following the river, passed through Barsiān, Varzana, Kargūšī, Yazd, and further on to Ṭabas and Mašhad, and which provided the locality—which prospered quickly in Saljuq times—with its commercial underpinnings. According to Mostawfi (*Nozhat al-qolūb*, p. 51, tr. p. 58), Barsiān is in the seventh district of the Isfahan area. An expression of its former prosperity is its mosque (M. B. Smith, *Ars Islamica* 4, 1937, pp. 7ff.), which exhibits three main construction phases (Kleiss, *AMI*, N.S. 5, 1972, pp. 214f.). The oldest component is the original free-standing Saljuq minaret, which is dated 491/1097-98). Built next to the minaret in 528/1134 was the domed Saljuq mosque. The structure has a dome diameter of 10.3 m and is in the form of a pavilion open on four sides. The central chamber was surrounded by an arcade which was removed in modern times. The domed chamber is significant in the art history of Iran for its decorative brickwork and its stucco *mehṛāb* (dated 498/1105), comparable to features found in the older north domed chamber (Gonbad-e kākī) of Isfahan's Masjed-e Jom'a (Friday mosque; 481/1088) and to those in apparently Mongol domed mosques in the neighboring villages of Kāj, Daštī, and Ezīran. Early in the Safavid era under Shah Ṭahmāsb I (r. 930-84/1524-76), a two-*ayvān* courtyard was appended to Barsiān's domed mosque. As discernible from the foundation, it was erected with sun-dried brick covered by baked brick; its upper wall sections, for the most part, have been destroyed. The kind of façade that was used on the entire structure is no longer discernible. The space inside of the



Saljuq domed chamber is articulated by three-quarter brick colonettes with ornamental mortar plugs in the joints.

Barsiān is the second caravan stop southeast of Isfahan. A Safavid caravansary, renovated in Qajar times, occupies the site today. It is a medium-sized structure 51.5 x 40 m with two axial *ayvāns* on the courtyard, one of them at the inner end of the domed entrance block, which is of baked brick. Four stables are located in the front and rear parts of the building; the entrances are in the oblique corner walls of the courtyard. The sleeping quarters are ranged round the courtyard, each entered through a small *ayvān*. North of the caravansary are the remains of a Safavid bath, which belonged to it (Kleiss, art. cit., pp. 223f.). East of the Saljuq domed mosque of Barsiān is a 40 x 40 m earthwork fort encircled by a trench, which appears to have served as a fortified way station and outer gateway to the caravansary (Siroux, *Anciennes voies et monuments*, p. 38).

The ten-sided fortress Nāranj Qaḷ'a has been dated to the Saljuq period (Siroux, pp. 88f.); at one time it sported ten circular towers and also served as a road station. Nāranj Qaḷ'a is also surrounded by a trench. The presence of the square earthwork fort, the ten-sided Saljuq Nāranj Qaḷ'a, and the caravansary attest Barsiān's significant place on the main route which ran from Isfahan to Yazd from early Islamic/Saljuq times until well into the Safavid period, shifted in Qajar times northward, and today runs through Nā'īn.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Rafī'i Mehrābādī, *Ātār-e mellī-e Eṣfahān*, n.p., 1352 Š./1974, pp. 814ff., 827.

[Figure 1](#). Overall view of the Barsiān mosque (2006).

[Figure 2](#). Interior view of the dome, Barsiān mosque (2006).

[Figure 3](#). Interior view of the Barsiān mosque, showing the mehrāb (2006).



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