



BĪBĪ ZAYNAB, MAUSOLEUM OF

BĪBĪ ZAYNAB, MAUSOLEUM OF, named after Bibī Zaynab, its legendary occupant, together with her mother Oljā Aīm, the wet nurse of Tīmūr (r. 771-807/1370-1405). This twin-domed mausoleum stands just inside the southern entrance to the Šāh-e Zenda necropolis in Samarkand (Cohn-Wiener, p. 38). Neither Bibī Zaynab nor her mother is mentioned in contemporary sources or on the building itself. The attribution of the mausoleum to them was common in the earlier part of the twentieth century, while its attribution to Qāżizāda Rūmī, the astronomer of Oloġ Beg (r. 851-53/1447-49), which became standard in Soviet publications from the 1940s onwards, equally was based only on tradition. With the more recent publications (Shishkin, p. 14; Nemtseva and Shvab, p. 172) it is perhaps best to refer to the building simply as the “twin-domed mausoleum.”

The form of the mausoleum is unique in the Šāh-e Zenda. It originally consisted of two cruciform dome chambers; the larger with four small corner rooms and two portals. The bigger portal was on the south, while a subsidiary one on the east led to the central axis of the main street of the Šāh-e Zenda (best plans in Nemtseva and Shvab, figs. 167, 172). Each of the dome chambers was crowned by a high double dome. The plan could be seen as a reduced version of the shrine of K̄vāja Aḥmad Yasawī in Yasa, with the anterooms also serving as places of congregational prayer or, perhaps, as temporary abodes of shelter.

Only fragments now remain of the foundation inscription, which was in *cuerda seca* tiles. These were also present on the *moqarnas* at the base of the



two domes, while the drum of each is decorated with *bannāʾī* Kufic. The most spectacular decoration is reserved for the interior of the smaller dome chamber, with four *moqarnas* semidomes leading up to the central stalactite dome, which still bears traces of delicate blue paintings. With the lack of any concrete historical references the building must be dated on stylistic grounds. The extreme elongation of the double domes is a pointer to a date later than the majority of the mausoleums in the Šāh-e Zenda, as is the finely painted *moqarnas* dome. Although a date in the second half of the ninth/fifteenth century cannot be ruled out on stylistic grounds, it is more likely that the mausoleum was erected not long after Oloḡ Beg’s nearby entrance complex of 838/1434-35, filling up the vacant site between it and the first group of mausoleums.

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