



DARBAND EPIGRAPHY II. DAR-E QIĀMAT SHRINE

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ii. DAR-E QIĀMAT SHRINE

Dar-e Qiāmat (*Darvāza-ye Qiāmat*) was a medieval Muslim cultic site, now forgotten and non-functioning, in Darband. In the 18th-19th centuries, this shrine was known also as Arab. *Bāb al-Qiyāma* and Turk. *Qiyāmat-kapı* (in translation “Gate of the Day of Judgement” or the “Gate of Resurrection”). This cultic site is located near Tower No. 50 of the northern defensive wall of Darband (from the exterior side, beyond the boundaries of the medieval *šahrestān*). Its location was determined by comparing information from written sources with the numerous engraved symbols found on the tower and the section of the wall under consideration, especially the Persian inscription from the year 814/1412 (Figure 1), which mentions the construction here of a “blessed building” during the rule of the *amīr* Isfandyar (Esfandyār) (Lavrov, 1966, p. 131, no. 341). This shrine was discovered and excavated by the Darband Archeological Expedition, Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of the Dagestani Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences during the years 2002-04 (Gadjiev, 2008; Hajiev, 2009).

Prince Dmitrii Cantemir (1673-1723) was the first to determine the name of this cultic object in its Arabic form, *Babul-Kiyamet*. Cantemir headed Tsar



Peter I's field chancellery during the emperor's Persian (Caspian) campaign (1722-23). At the end of August-beginning of September 1722, the prince and the emperor visited Darband together, and the prince laid the foundations for the study of the epigraphy of Darband. We were able to identify the *Babul-Kiyamet* mentioned by Cantemir thanks to certain sketches found in the prince's diary of several symbols (*revera hieroglyphicae sculpturae*) that he had discovered. He noted that they were located "on small subterranean gates, which the local residents call Babul-Kiyamet" (Cantemir, 1883, p. 16). These symbols have been preserved until the present time near Tower No. 50 (Gadžiev and Kudrjavcev, 2001, pp. 369-70, abb. 11, 236-65).

A.-K. Bakikhanov (1794-1846) also mentioned the name *Dar-i Qiāmat*, in 1841, in his *Gūlistan-i Iram*. That work reports that the 814/1412 inscription mentioned above, "of [Amir] Isfandyar," is located "on the Darband gates called Qiyamat" (Bakikhanov, 1991, p. 89). General Komarov (1823-1904) also mentions this inscription. On his plan of Darband he notes the name of the tower on which the inscription is engraved as, "Dar Qiyama burji," that is, "Tower of the Qiyamat Gate" (Komarov, without year, No. 1). The Persian name of this object also appears in Komarov's note, where he states that "Der-i Kiyamet is located in the northern wall across from the town gardens ..." (Komarov, 1872, p. 22).

Here, during the expedition's investigations, over forty engraved symbols were discovered. Most of them illustrate various types of arches, and several represent specific symbols or signs (circles with appendages, and others) used by the builders of the town in the mid-6th century (Gadžiev and Kudrjavcev, 2001, pp. 369-370, fig. 11, 236-265). This is one of the largest clusters of symbols on the walls of Darband. In addition, the wall around the arch in the defensive wall next to the tower is literally strewn with hundreds of iron nails hammered in up to the end. A portion of the nails are of medieval forged handicraft manufacture and a portion are of early 20th century industrial production.

In this connection, Komarov listed a series of precepts that were supposed to secure a happy life for the Darband Shi'i Muslims during the course of the year. This list included the need "to fasten a wooden nail to the Der-i Kiyamet and to make a vow [*nazr*]" (1872, p. 22). In the territory of the Apsheron peninsula (in the Republic of Azarbaijan) there is a solitary rock bearing the name "Imam-zade," into which Shi'is (Tats and Azarbaijanis) hammer nails with the same aim (This information was provided by Dr. Idris Aliev, Institute



of Archaeology and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan.) Similar acts were performed at the end of the 19th century by Armenian Christians in the cave of St. Oganēs (St. John) near Novobaiazet (Fedorov, 1892, p. 15). If the “rock accepts the nail” (that is, if the hammering succeeds in driving the nail into the stone), then the cherished dream or desire will be realized. Also, pious persons in *Dāgestān* performed acts that were, in essence, very similar. According to ethnographic data, a sick person seeking a cure would come (or be brought) to the sacred site, drive a nail into a stone found there, and then extract it; a ring would be made from this nail, and the person would always wear it as a protective amulet (Gadjiev, 1996, p. 155).

At the Dar-e Qiāmat shrine, on the connecting curtain and the tower, there are three Arabic inscriptions from the 11th-13th centuries. One of them in Kufic letters consists of one word—*masjed*, that is, “mosque.” The second inscription is written in Naskḵ writing is a phrase used by pious Sufis, evidently a Shi‘i. It reads, *Yā ‘Alī, darvīsh Sadiq*. The third inscription is badly preserved and cannot be deciphered. The inscriptions can be dated by their paleographic features to the 11th-13th centuries. The beginning phrase of the second inscription (*Yā ‘Alī*) is a characteristic exclamation used in appealing to ‘*Alī b. Abī Tālib* (d. 661), the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad, the fourth “righteous” Caliph, especially revered and adored by the Shi‘is as a saint and hero, “the ideal knight of Islam,” in the expression of I. P. Petrushevskii (1966, p. 40).

The inscriptions mentioned above, especially the one from 814/1412 about the construction of a “blessed building” (that is, a mosque or ziyārat) and the one mentioning *darviš* Sadiq, along with the quite large number of engraved symbols and the multitude of nails hammered into the walls—all these items clearly indicate that this is the site of a medieval Islamic cult. This is also evidenced by the site’s name, as ascertained from written sources dating to the 18th and 19th centuries. Old-time residents of Darband do not remember these designations. According to my informant (S. Sultanova, born 1920), there was a revered site here (called *pīr* after the object of devotion who was regarded as buried there) at the end of the 1920s. It was located in the vicinity of an arched vault, partially visible above ground, in the corner of the curtain wall where it joined with the tower. This revered site bore the Azeri name “Burunj pīr,” that is, “the pīr located in a corner” or “the pīr located at the bend.” Shi‘i Muslims would gather here prior to their pilgrimage to *Karbala* (Mashhad al-Ḥosayn), and appeal to the Most High One in prayer, asking for His help.



According to archeological data, this cultic site appeared in the 10th-beginning of the 11th centuries in place of a well-guarded, narrow, arched passageway in the defensive city wall that existed here in the late Sasanian and early Arab periods (Figure 2). The excavations established that during the 10th-beginning of the 11th centuries the arched passageway was blocked from the interior (*šahrestān*) side, turned into enclosed premises with a small entry and exit, and became part of the system of the cultic site. The shrine area (6.7 × 5.2 m in dimensions) was enclosed by stone supports with grooves for wooden beams, and it had an entry, executed with two carved columns (Figure 3). Outside the shrine area there was an extensive medieval Muslim graveyard, now completely built up, except the most highly esteemed cemetery, *Kyrkhliar* (Turkic “the place of the forty [martyrs]”; Pers. *Čehel tanān*), where warrior-martyrs (*šohadā*) of the 11th- beginning of the 12th centuries are buried.

On the walls of the passageway were found several Arabic Kufic religious inscriptions of the 10th-12th centuries, including a large inscription (80 × 40 cm) handwritten by a professional engraver, as well as images of four bows with arrows pointing downward (toward the next world) and a ligatured writing the Arabic letters *’alef* and *lām* (ﻻ) (Figure 4). As is well known, symbolism occupies a very important place in Islam, especially the symbolism of letters, and especially among the Sufis. To be more specific, in Sufi mystical semantics the letter *’alef* represents Allāh, and the letter *lām* represents the “holy spirit” of Jabrā’il (Jebrīl), chief of the four angels closest to Allāh, whose name in Muslim magic is written on the edges of magical squares (Schimmel, 1975, p. 416; tr., 2000, p. 321; Piotrovskii, 1991, p. 64; on letter symbolism, see also JAFR). The linked *’alef* and *lām* represent the first word in the symbol of the faith (“There is no” [God except Allāh]”) and a sign of protection, symbol of *Du’l-Faqār*, the righteous Caliph Ali’s famous double-bladed sword, and the powerful sword *la*, which was supposed to be capable of destroying the whole of creation (Schimmel, 1975, p. 419; tr., 2000, p. 324). The depictions of downward pointing bows with arrows undoubtedly had deep symbolic significance, which so far has not been fully unraveled. In this connection, of special interest is the find of an armor-piercing iron arrowhead of the 10th-13th centuries that was discovered in a seam between the blocks of the upper layer of the stonework of the ceiling of the arched vault. It may be assumed that these depictions performed protective and aid-seeking functions, since they are associated with the cultic site here being investigated and with the rite of hammering in nails that was ascertained.



In the 11th-12th centuries the Dar-e Qiāmat shrine assumed special significance, and soldiers of the Darband garrison performed their duties here. The Petersburg copy of the chronicle *Darband-nāma* [The Annals of Darband] (at present held by the State Public Library in St. Petersburg)—the holograph of which was most probably authored by Shaykh Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf al-Bābī al-Lakzī al-Darbandī (d. before 1089) (Alikberov, 1998, pp. 63-64)—contains a supplement called *Bāb al-Abwāb Šuhedalerī* [“Martyrs (šohadā’) of *Bāb al-Abwāb* (Darband)] (*Derbend-Nameh*, 1851, pp. 606-8 [= pp. 152-54, sep. pag.]). This supplement lists the names of fifty *šohadā’* from the 11th –beginning of the 12th centuries who are buried in cemeteries in Darband (including the Kyrkhliar cemetery). Among the names appearing there is that of Pīr-Nal’band, who bore the title “Sultan of the Ghazis of the Gate of Resurrection” (*sultān darvazē-ye Qiāmat gāzīyan*). In other words, he was the commander of a detachment of *gāzīs* (holy warriors) who performed their duties at the “Gate of Resurrection.”

The transformation of the place (a narrow passageway in the defensive wall) into the “Gate of the Day of Judgement” or the “Gate of Resurrection”, which pious Muslims surely believed would open on the Day of Judgement, and its development into a Muslim cultic site, took place in the medieval period, when Islamic activity became quite vigorous in Darband, and Sufism, the mystical trend in Islam, gained a very strong position.

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