



GOWHAR-ŠĀD MOSQUE

GOWHAR-ŠĀD MOSQUE. Since its construction in the early 15th century, the Gowhar-šād Mosque has served as the Friday mosque for pilgrims to the tomb of Imam ‘Ali al-Rezā (q.v.) in Mašhad, so named after this famous shrine. Over the centuries many new buildings were added to the shrine complex, but the Timurid mosque remained the dominant monument and the only place for congregational prayer ([PLATE I](#)).

Foundation. Gowhar-šād Āgā (q.v.), wife of the Timurid ruler Šāhroḡ (r. 811-50/1409-47), is named as the founder of the mosque in the inscription on the *qebla ayvān* ([PLATE II](#); see [AYVĀN](#)), in the endowment document (*waqf-nāma*), and in several Timurid texts. The lengthy inscription which records the building of the *masjed-e jāme’* “from her own funds” was written by her calligrapher son Ġiāt-al-Din Bāysonḡor (q.v.) in 821/1418 (text in Šani’-al-Dawla, II, p. 147; O’Kane, pp. 123-24). The same date is given again in a shorter inscription (Šani’-al-Dawla, II, p. 146). An early copy of the *waqf-nāma* in the shrine library, from which extracts have been published (Šani’-al-Dawla, II, p. 153-57; O’Kane, pp. 126-27), gives the date Rajab 829/May-June 1426. References to the mosque’s foundation occur in ‘Abd-al-Razzāq Samarqandi (*Maṭla-e sa’dāyn*, ed. Šafi’, II/1, p. 214, describing Šāhroḡ’s visit on the occasion of presenting a gold candelabra to the shrine in 821/1418. Also noting that the mosque was nearly finished) and Ḥāfez-e Abru (I, p. 98; O’Kane, p. 120, noting that other structures were built beside it).

Beneath the *qebla ayvān* inscription is a panel of mosaic faience naming the architect Qewām-al-Din b. Zayn-al-Din Širāzi al-Ṭayyān, “the plasterer.” He



was also the architect of Gowhar-šād's mosque and *madrasa* in Herat, built over a twenty-year period from 820/1417 to 841/1437-38 (O'Kane, pp. 167-77), thus overlapping with construction of the Mašhad project. As almost nothing remains of the Herat buildings, the preservation of the Mašhad mosque is critical as an example of Qewām-al-Din's commissions for the royal family.

Spatial organization. The mosque was designed to fit into the pre-existing structures at the shrine, as described in the *waqf-nāma*. On the northeast lay the mausoleum of the Eighth Imam. A small *bāzār* ran along the north-west, and the public thoroughfare ran along the other two sides with some additional buildings. To connect the new mosque to the existing square mausoleum with its auxiliary structures (possibly the Bālā-sar Masjed, a minaret, and a *madrasa*, the architect built two elegant rectangular halls side by side, the Dār-al-Ḥoffāz and the Dār-al-Siāda. Because the mausoleum doorways have undergone so many alterations it is not clear how these halls functioned, whether as rooms for gathering or as passageways between the mausoleum and the mosque. As the mosque is not provided with a monumental portal, it is possible that the Dār-al-Siāda originally had such an entry point. Today it is surrounded by later buildings.

The mosque itself is a traditional four-*ayvān* type with a much larger *qebla ayvān*, followed by a very large domed sanctuary (the dome was rebuilt in concrete in the 1960s). Pillared prayer halls flank the sanctuary and connect the axial *ayvāns*. Secondary entrances are located in the exterior walls that border on the *bāzār*. The sanctuary dome with its huge *ayvān* compensates for the lack of a monumental entrance portal so typical of Timurid architecture. The *qebla ayvān* towers over the courtyard façade, which rises as a two-story arcade. It is framed by a pair of cylindrical minarets with *gol-dastas* reaching the height of the dome. Inside the sanctuary there is an unusually clear view from the *ayvān* to the prayer niche (*meḥrāb*), nestled within a cloud of plaster *moqarnas*. The architect has all but eliminated the wall of the domed sanctuary that normally intervenes between the domed hall and the *ayvān*. Instead, as he does elsewhere, Qewām-al-Din uses transverse arches to bear the dome. He has done the same in the Dār-al-Siāda on a much smaller scale.

Decoration. While the exterior of the mosque except for the dome and its drum was undecorated, the courtyard façade and the *ayvāns* were completely covered with tile revetments. How much of this is original is difficult to determine, as numerous dates of repair are recorded. More recently, the lateral *ayvāns* and the dome were rebuilt in concrete. Much of the tile work of



the *qebla ayvān* is original and demonstrates the predominance of mosaic-faience technique. The use of plaques of mosaic-faience set into a ground of unglazed brick-like tiles to cover the minarets is a hallmark of Qewām-al-Din and is found on his buildings at Herat and Kargerd. Less common in the mosque are *haft-rangi* (*cuerta seca*) tiles and underglazed-painted tiles. Large expanses of wall such as found in the *ayvāns* are ornamented with glazed brick-like tiles (*bannā'i* technique).

See also [ĀSTĀN-E QODS-E RAŻAWI](#).

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