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PHOENIX MOSQUE

PHOENIX MOSQUE, also known as the Phoenix Temple□□□□), a historical monument built in 1281 in Hangzhou (lat 30°15′ N, long 120°10′ E), Zhejiang Province, on the coastal area of China. In the long history of Hangzhou, China's showpiece resort on its east coast, two episodes drastically changed the historical fortunes of the city. In 1127 the Southern Sung dynasty made it their capital following their expulsion from the north by the Jurchen Chin dynasty, and in 1276 the city fell to the Mongols, who under Noyan Bayan proceeded peacefully to occupy the city and open its gate to an influx of westerners. Considering the extent and impact of this contained population explosion, surprisingly few artifacts and still less buildings or other traces from the Yuan period (1279-1368) remain today. At least two religious buildings were constructed by foreigners in the first decade of Yuan rule. Almost all trace of the Nestorian church constructed in 1281 by Mar Sargis has disappeared. However, the other prayer hall, the Phoenix Temple on Zhongshanlu Street, still stands today (Figure 1; Figure 2; Figure 3). It was built in 1281 and remains a monument to the western, mainly Persian-speaking, Muslims who flocked to Quinsai or Khansai as it was then known.

Over the centuries, the mosque has been mentioned by a variety of very different names. It is referred to as the Li Bai Ssŭ on some steles and as Wu-lin Gardens on a 13th-century street map. The name Li Bai Temple is thought to be the oldest designation. The mosque is also referred to as the Hui Hui fang (the Muslim hall), which would appear to be a purely functional and descriptive title, and Temple of the True Believers or Temple of the True

Teachings. Both are common names denoting a mosque as well as descriptive and functional labels. A stele dated 1493, housed in the mosque complex, claims that "it is tradition to call these temples Li Bai Ssŭ, or temples of ritual salutations." A magnificent scroll map created for the Qing Emperor in the Qianlong period (1711-99) depicts the Phoenix Mosque as one of the Emperor's special sites in the city. In fact it was celebrated as the mosque used by his beloved consort, the Fragrant Concubine (Chinese, pinyin: Xiāngfēi; Uyghur, Ipārḵān/Cyrillic: Īparkhan) when in Hangzhou. The street map created circa 1274 just before the Mongol occupation records a certain "Wu-lin garden" in the space where it is calculated the mosque should stand, and this would accord with a late version of the mosque's chronology, which registers that the mosque complex underwent considerable damage towards the end of the Song era, leaving the site derelict before being rebuilt in 1281. Earlier steles and gazetteers make no mention of an older building and claim 1281 as the date of the mosque's founding (Stele dated 1493 in Phoenix Mosque, tr. Vissière, p.)

One reason, often overlooked, for the sudden rise in the Persian population of Hangzhou could be the direct and indirect connections that existed between the Mongol commander Bayan Noyan and Persia. Bayan spent his youth in Persian Turkistan before, and at the age of eighteen he accompanied his father to Iran with Hulāgu Khan's entourage in the early 1250s. He married a Persian wife, with whom he sired a son, Noqai, before being assigned to Qubilai Khan's service in 1265. In 1276, after the peaceful conquest of the Song capital, and faced with the formidable task of establishing an administration in Hangzhou to replace the former Song officials who had either gone north with the empress-dowager, or had simply disappeared, he would naturally have used his connections with Iran and its vast pool of expertise and opportunist adventurers, who would be very happy to seek their fortunes in the prosperous east of their newly adopted empire. The Persians who made that journey very quickly formed a small but very powerful and influential community in the former Song capital, which remained an economic and cultural powerhouse. Their mosque was at the heart of the city's commercial district within a short walk of the still standing Drum Tower and the long gone palace gates. Their residences were likely situated in the southern hills, neighboring the royal palace hills in an affluent area known as Strangers' Hill, and most telling of all, the Muslim community established their own cemetery in the lakeside lands formerly part of the royal estates known as the Ju-jing Yuan (Ju-jing Gardens; Zhou Mi, pp. 142-43).

Though general references to Hangzhou's Muslim community and to the mosque can be found in medieval literary sources, including the histories of Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allāh and Waṣṣāf, an important source of information about the Phoenix Mosque is a number of steles, most of which are today found in a specially built annex in the mosque complex itself. Only one of the steles is inscribed in Arabic and Persian, though a number of the twenty extant tombstones rescued from what was once the lakeside Muslim cemetery, the Ju-jing Yuan, and now housed alongside the steles, are written in a mixture of highly stylized Arabic and Persian. The headstones date from the Yuan and record the deaths of a mixture of military and religious figures and merchants, which include two amirs by the names Boḵāri and Badr-al-Din. Many, like Ḵᵛāja Ebn Arslan Ḵānbāleqi, the merchant Semnāni, and the preacher Tāj-al-Din were considered martyrs signifying that they had died away from their homeland. Other than Ḵānbāleqi and a certain Ḵᵛāja Ḥosām-al-Din Yaḡān Ṭoḡril Bak, whose names evoke their Turkish backgrounds, the *nesba*s of the other owners of the tombstones indicate Iran as their homeland. Semnān, Isfahan, Bokhara, Aleppo, and Khorasan are thus indicated, while travels to the two ʿErāqs, Syria, Arabia, and Najd are referenced and performance of the Hajj acknowledged. These men were apparently well known. At least one of the tombstones and the 1452 stele have the date given in more than the Islamic calendar, including the Turkic animal calendar and the Chinese calendar, indicating the more cosmopolitan attitude characteristics of Toluid Mongol world. (Lewis, Tombstone A11 of Amir Baḵtiār).

The style of the inscriptions suggests the work of a skilled Persian artisan and, although many of the inscribed compositions are Qoranic, there are also present at least seven different verses. Four of these poems might possibly have been composed locally, but three are elegies written specifically for named individuals, and these must therefore have been especially composed in honor and commemoration of the respected figures buried in the Ju-jing cemetery. This suggests that the community could afford to maintain, not only highly skilled calligraphic engravers, but also their own poets, examples of whose work have sadly only been preserved on these unique headstones. From a total of twenty-six lines of verse dedicated to a certain Ḵᵛāja Jalāl, whose full name and details are no longer decipherable, only twenty-three lines survive. However, those twenty-three lines are sufficient to demonstrate a poet fully cognizant of the rules and conventions of Persian poetry, as well as being familiar with traditional Persian poetic imagery, Qoranic motifs, astrology, and Islamic history. The few examples found on these headstones

reveal their composers to have been sophisticated and well-educated wordsmiths.

Today the Phoenix Temple complex itself houses most of the historical relics related to the mosque, but two other historical sites relating to the Yuan period add further to the picture of the medieval Muslim community of Hangzhou. There is a lakeside pavilion and tomb belonging to the poet Ding Hanian (b. 1335-36, d. 1424), very possibly the grandson of the mosque's benefactor and founder, the Persian ʿAlāʾ-al-Din, and the Three Babas' sarcophagi, along with two steles in honor of a Persian merchant, Purhatiyar (Baḵtiār; stated on the inscription beside the pavilion). Unfortunately, local legend pertaining to a Persian divine who introduced Islam and dispensed health care long before the Yuan period, along with an early mistranslation of Baḵtiār's tombstone inscription, has resulted in the fusion of these two episodes, and today the site is venerated in honor of Baḵtiār and his two faithful followers/sons. All three Muslim sites lie below the Palace Hill and nearby Strangers' Hill, the Phoenix Temple to the north, and Ding Hanian's pavilion and the 'Three Babas' to the west.

Records and dates concerning the construction of the mosque prior to and during the Yuan dynasty are sketchy and vague. The 1493, 1743, and 1892 steles state that the mosque was built south of the West Wen-Jin-Fang area of embroidered silk textiles and brocades quarter. The 1892 stele adds: "Then they [the Uighurs] chose the west of Wenjinfang [quarter of embroidered silk] for their establishment, and wrote on its pediment: Fenghuang, the Phoenix." Only the 1670 stele claims that a mosque existed before 1281. "The mosque had its origin under the Tang (618 to 907) and was destroyed by fire towards the end of the Song (960 to 1279)" (Vissière, pp. 57-64, 71-75). Certainly the three-domed prayer hall standing today dates from 1281. Various sources, both literary and archeological, provide the evidence and background for the mosque's long history. In more recent years, the mosque complex suffered destruction at the hands of city planners during the 1920s when the imposing Wang Yue Lao Diwan (Watching Moon Gate-house), built during the Ming dynasty, was bulldozed. Fortunately, plans and grainy black and white photographs of the magnificent structure survived, and in 2009 a replica of the Persian-style building was faithfully and painstakingly reproduced (Vissière).

ʿAlāʾ-al-Din's role in the mosque's construction is attested to in the archeological and literary sources. The stele dated 1670 states that the "Grand Master A-lao-ting [ʿAlāʾ-al-Din]' from the "Western regions" [Si-yu] rebuilt the

mosque from its foundations creating a magnificent edifice, a view expressed in various other sources (Vissière, p. 61; Dailiang; Yuan Shi**)**. The stele celebrating the poet Ding Hanian, whose pavilion stands amongst the trees and bushes of the gardens decorating the southeastern shoreline of West Lake, explains that the poet's great-grandfather, A-lao-ting, in the late 1270s, arrived from the west and, moved by the spirit of charity, constructed a mosque for the growing Muslim, mainly Persian, community, a story also recounted by the poet's friend and fellow writer, Dai Liang. A Ming commentator, Tian Rucheng, claims that he restored a former mosque that had fallen into disrepair (Tian Rucheng, chap. 18).

According to the Ming dynasty annals (*Ming shi*; 1368-1644) and the contemporary records, ʿAlāʾ-al-Din and his brother, rich businessmen, contributed generously to Qubilai Khan's (r. 1271-94) war effort in subduing the west, and, in recognition of their financial assistance, government positions, land, and property were proffered. The younger brother entered Qubilai's administration, while ʿAlāʾ-al-Din accepted land, feeling too old to enter government service. Since the Muslim population of the city was on the rise, ʿAlāʾ-al-Din oversaw the construction of the mosque in its central and imposing location, and his generosity has been recorded in various sources since that time (the Yuan dynasty annals [*Yuan shi*]; Tian Rucheng**)**. The growing influence of the Muslims of Hangzhou is attested to by Ḥamd-Allāh Mostawfi, who states that "the Moslems though so few in number [comparatively] have the power in their hands (p. 261, tr. p. 254). Rašid-al-Din Fażl-Allāh (2006**,** p. 2) claims that there were three mosques in the city and that Muslims "were so numerous that for the most part they do not recognize one and other." Ebn Baṭṭuṭa, who spent more time in Zaytun, also mentions that the Muslim community of Hangzhou was large, prosperous, and influential (IV,pp. 901-2).

Though the steles suggest that the original Muslim settlers came overland from the west, thesubsequent expansion of the Muslim population of the coastal cities of eastern China was from the sea with the three cities of Hangzhou (Quinsai), Quanzhou (Zaytun), Guangzhou (Canton) playing an important role as gateways to the Islamic world. The stele dated 1493 states that the Muslims came from the west and built mosques wherever they settled, and the stele dated 1892 specifies that the Uyghurs, after serving in the emperor's armies, were rewarded with honors and employment and they were invited to settle in China, and the emperor himself, Suzong of the Tang dynasty, ordered the

construction of mosques to encourage the integration of his Muslim mercenaries. With the establishment of the Il-khanate (q.v.) in Iran in the late 1250s with such strong links with the east, Persians were again attracted to China and there is evidence that Hulāgu Khan (d. 1265) dispatched military engineers to assist his elder brother in his wars with Arīg̃ Buqā and with Qaidu (Bretschneider, I, pp. 273-74; Moule, 1956, pp. 85-86). The appointment of Persian governors to a number of Chinese provinces at this time would have presumably entailed their traveling with their own retinue of administrators and soldiers, further bolstering the Persian communities of eastern Manzi and Khitai.

The Phoenix Temple of Hangzhou stands in quiet testimony and witness to the city's Islamic heritage and to the brief period in a glorious history when Muslims united East and West. Though Quanzhou has undergone considerable archeological study, much works remains to be carried out in Hangzhou.

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