



ZAYN-AL-'ĀBEDIN MAR'ĀŠI MAUSOLEUM

ZAYN-AL-'ĀBEDIN MAR'ĀŠI MAUSOLEUM (*EMĀMZĀDA*), located in Sāri, Māzandarān, close to the Emānzāda Yāhyā, a shrine where Sayyed Yāhyā, a son of Qawām-al-Din Mar'āši is buried (Sotuda, IV, p. 531). Its architecture, decoration, and woodcarving well illustrate the style of tomb-towers erected in Māzandarān during the rule of the Mar'āši dynasty, which dominated Māzandarān from 760/1358-59 up to the second half of the 10th/16th century.

History. The Zayn-al-'Ābedin mausoleum in Sāri formerly housed the *şanduqs* (cenotaphs) of two great-grandsons of Kamāl-al-Din (d. 781/1379), founder of the Mar'āši dynasty. The first one belonged to Zayn-al-'Ābedin (d. 892/1486-87); the *şanduq* burned at the beginning of the 20th century and no longer exists (Rabino, p. 55; Sotuda, IV, pp. 540-44). Yet the monument is still dedicated to Zayn al-'Ābedin: on the entrance facade, a fragment of ceramic tile inscription names the “Sayyed Zayn-al-'Ābedin b. al- ... Kamāl-al-Din al-Ḥosayni” (PLATE I; see Godard, n. 1 p. 311; Aube, 2015, p. 48; Sotuda, IV, p. 543). The second cenotaph belongs to Zayn-al-'Ābedin's brother, Šams-al-Din (d. 905/1500, see “Wooden *şanduq*,” below; Sotuda, IV, p. 540).

Several historical inscriptions have been removed. Hyacinthe Rabino reports a former inscription above the entrance door that named a certain 'Alā'-al-Din b. Darviš Moḥammad (*banā wa etmām yāft in 'emārat be sa'y wa ehtemām-e in banda-ye dargāh 'Alā'-al-Din b. Darviš Moḥammad Abu'l-Wafā*; Rabino, p. 55;



Sotuda, IV, p. 539). Although his role in the construction is not so clear, ‘Alā’-al-Din could be the patron of the monument. Noşrat-Allāh Meškāti and Manučehr Sotuda mention another inscription that gave the name of the architect (or builder; *bannā*): ‘*amal-e Sayyed ‘Ali b. Sayyed Kamāl-al-Din Bannā’ Āmoli* (Meškāti, p. 185; Sotuda, IV, p. 540).

The precise date of construction is not known. A wooden door, nowadays vanished, communicated with another building to the south. This door was dated to 894/1489 (Rabino, p. 55), which is only two years after Zayn-al-‘Ābedin’s death. This gives a reasonable chronological mark to the period of the foundation of the building. Another date is delivered by the wooden *şanduq* of Šams-al-Din, which cites 25 Jomādā II 905/27 January 1500 as the date of his death (Rabino, pp. 21-22, 55; Sotuda, IV, p. 540): the monument was probably not entirely finished by the turn of the 15th century and has undergone further transformations. A modern tympanum over the front door dates the restoration works undertaken in 1973 (Aube, 2015, p. 35).

Architecture. The Zayn-al-‘Ābedin Mausoleum is a square tomb-tower (about 7 m. on each side), built with baked bricks (PLATE II). On the outside, the monument is covered by an octagonal pyramidal roof, supported by an octagonal drum. The drum is embedded in the basis of a quadrangular truncated pyramid (hiding transitional squinches). Each level is marked by a *moqarnas* cornice (PLATE III; see Aube, 2015, p. 36, for a detailed description of the architecture).

The inner plan of the tomb-tower is also square. The entrance door opens from the middle of the western facade. Inside, the octagonal transitional zone is created by *moqarnas* squinches, which are overcome by an additional range of *moqarnas*. A cupola crowns this room (PLATE IV). A window shines the inside of the mausoleum from eastern and northern facades and four smaller windows are also arranged in the drum. On the southern facade, a former wooden door (dated 894/1489) communicated with an adjoining structure, nowadays vanished (Rabino, p. 55).

The plan of the Zayn-al-‘Ābedin mausoleum shares some of its traits with a large scale of 15th-century tomb-towers from Mazandaran. Its exact reproduction is even repeated at least in six 15th-century tomb-towers (sometimes heavily restored) located around Āmol, namely the Emāmzāda Ebrāhim, the Gonbad-e Nāşer-al-Ĥaqq, the Gonbad-e Gabri, and the Emāmzāda Ĥāji Nāmdār (PLATES V-VIII), as well as other structures like the



Emāmzāda ‘Abd-al-Šāleḥ in Marzrud (about 10 km north from Sāri), or Emāmzāda Sayyed Moḥammad Zinavā in Qā’emšahr (on the road south between Bābol and Sāri, about 20 km from both; Hillenbrand, pp. 360-64, 369-73; Golombek and Wilber, I, pp. 429-44; Aube, 2015, pp. 38-41). They all repeat the same square plan, the same double pyramidal dome, the same cornices, the same openings, and the same decoration seen in the Zayn-al-‘Ābedin mausoleum. But only the name of the architect/builder of the Zayn-al-‘Ābedin mausoleum is known, namely Sayyed ‘Ali b. Sayyed Kamāl-al-Din Bannā’ Āmoli (Meškāti, p. 185; Sotuda, IV, p. 540). His *nesba* suggests that he lived, worked, or originated from **Āmol**. Thus this group constitutes a coherent corpus of monuments that makes one wonder how far they could have been designed by Sayyed ‘Ali himself or his atelier. In any case, the architectural style is typical of the Āmol region (Aube, 2015, pp. 38-41).

Decoration. The outside facades of the Zayn-al-‘Ābedin mausoleum have a sober decoration. Each transitional level is pointed out by a cornice ornamented with a single range of high *moqarnas*. A frieze of low arches tops the main *moqarnas* cornice, and each arch is highlighted by a monochrome-turquoise glazed cut tile (PLATE III). Lower, footprints of rectangular and square panels are left on all facades (PLATE I). This kind of decoration is quite typical of 15th-century tomb towers in Māzandarān. It is found, for example, in Āmol on the Emāmzāda Ebrāhim, Gonbad-e Se Tan, Gonbad-e Gabri (PLATE VII), as well as on the mausoleum of Āqā Šāh Bāluzāde in Āhudašt or the Darviš Faḵr-al-Din in Bābol (Aube, 2015, p. 46; idem, forthcoming-a; idem, forthcoming-b).

On a sketch published by [Jacques de Morgan](#) in 1894, the main bandeaux of the Zayn-al-‘Ābedin Mausoleum are filled with inscriptions (de Morgan, p. 167). According to Rabino and Meškāti, the names of ‘Alā’-al-Din b. Darviš Moḥammad and Sayyed ‘Ali b. Sayyed Kamāl-al-Din Bannā’ Āmoli were mentioned in these inscriptions (Rabino, p. 55; Meškāti, p. 185; see “History,” above). All these decorations have nowadays disappeared, except on the main bandeau over the front door where is displayed a fragment of a ceramic tile inscription. It can be assumed that this inscription was not intended for this position, since it is a little narrower than its frame (PLATE I). It dedicates the building to Amir Zayn-al-‘Ābedin b. al-... Kamāl-al-Din al-Ḥosayni (Godard, n. 1 p. 311; Aube, 2015, p. 48). Another part of this inscription has been removed to the inner part of the mausoleum (PLATE IX). The two tiles of this inscription are decorated with the cloisonné colored glaze



technique (i.e., the former *cuerda seca*).

The same polychrome over-glazed technique is used inside the mausoleum. The inner elevation is completely covered by plaster, but the four great arches below a level of niches are highlighted by four inverted U-shaped inscriptions made from cloisonné colored glaze tiles (PLATE IV). Written in white *tolot* script (like the two outer fragments) over a flowery scroll background, this text records Sura 36 of the Qo'ran: verses 1-14 (east wall), end-14-26 (north), 27-37 (west, over the door) and end-27-47 (south).

Examples of Iranian 15th-century cloisonné tiles are very limited; a few evidences survive in northern Iran, in [Dāmḡān](#), Semnān, [Kashan](#), and Tabriz (see O'Kane; Aube, 2016, pp. 41-42, 50-52). The quality of the Sāri cloisonné is slightly different and does not seem to belong to the foundation period of the mausoleum. These cloisonné tiles should probably be more associated to renovation works undertaken some time later.

Wooden şanduq. The remaining *şanduq* belongs to Şams-al-Din Mar'aši, brother of Zayn-al-'Ābedin and great grandson of Kamāl-al-Din, founder of the Mar'aši dynasty. Each side of this wooden *şanduq* is framed by a cursive inscription dedicated to the amir Şams-al-Din b. Amir Kamāl-al-Din Ḥosayni (d. 25 Jomādā II 905/27 January 1500; PLATE X). The *şanduq* is ornamented with geometric panels, delimited by floral borders (PLATE XI). The ornamental repertory employed here is typical of the wooden masterpieces from Māzandarān. The friezes of bilobed trefoils between each vertical panel of Şams-al-Din's *şanduq* (PLATES X-XI) are, for example, employed in most of Māzandarāni wooden furniture pieces during the 15th century (see Aube, forthcoming-b). Other compositions are exactly repeated on several wooden works around Sāri; for instance, the geometrical network centered around a six-pointed star (PLATE X) is already employed on the wooden door of the Qāsem b. Musā mausoleum in [Bābol](#) (890/1495), on the *şanduq* inside the Şāhzāda Ḥosayn mausoleum in Sāri (896/1490-91), as well as on the *şanduq* in the Emāmzāda Ebrāhim in Āmol (925/1519); a similar model of two vertical friezes of palmettes is employed for the cenotaph inside Faḡr-al-Din mausoleum in Bābol (833/1429-30), as well as for the door of the Mausoleum Ebrāhim Abu Jawāb in [Bābolsar](#) (906/1500) and once again for the Şāhzāda Ḥosayn mausoleum in Sāri; the bilobed quatrefoil frieze on Şams-al-Din's *şanduq* (PLATE XI) is here again repeated on the wooden pieces inside the Şāhzāda Ḥosayn Mausoleum in Sāri, the Emāmzāda Ebrāhim in Āmol, and the Ebrāhim Abu Jawāb in Bābolsar (about all these comparisons, see: Aube, 2015,



pp. 42-45; idem, forthcoming-b). Thus the *şanduq* of Šams-al-Din can arguably be considered a representative to woodworking traditions around Āmol and Sāri between the 15th and early 16th centuries.

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List of Plates:

Plate I: Inscription above the entrance door of the Zayn-al-'Ābedin mausoleum, Sāri. (© Sandra Aube, September 2014)

Plate II: General view of the Zayn-al-'Ābedin mausoleum, Sāri. (© Sandra Aube, September 2014)

Plate III: Double pyramidal dome of the Zayn-al-'Ābedin mausoleum, Sāri. (© Sandra Aube, September 2014)

Plate IV: Inner elevation of the Zayn-al-'Ābedin mausoleum, Sāri. (© Sandra Aube, September 2014)



Plate V: General view of Emāmzāda Ebrāhim, Āmol. (© Sandra Aube, September 2014)

Plate VI: The Gonbad-e Nāṣer-al-Ḥaqq in Āmol, before modern transformations.

Plate VII: Gonbad-e Gabri in Āmol. (© Sandra Aube, September 2014)

Plate VIII: Emāmzāda Ḥāji Nāmdār in Āmol. (© Sandra Aube, September 2014)

Plate IX: An isolated inscription replaced inside the Zayn-al-‘Ābedin mausoleum, Sāri. (© Sandra Aube, September 2014)

Plate X: *Şanduq* of Şams-al-Din Mar‘aši, inside the Zayn-al-‘Ābedin mausoleum, Sāri. (© Sandra Aube, September 2014)

Plate XI: Detail of Şams-al-Din *şanduq* (southern side), inside the Zayn-al-‘Ābedin mausoleum, Sāri. (© Sandra Aube, September 2014)