

Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th–15th Century Tabriz

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IMPERIAL AQQUYUNLU CONSTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS
ESTABLISHMENTS IN THE LATE FIFTEENTH CENTURY TABRIZ

Ertuğrul Ökten

The starting point for this paper is the premise that under the Aqqyunlus Tabriz was promoted as an imperial capital, even if it is rarely remembered as such.¹ There are a variety of reasons for this, the most important ones being the brevity of Aqqyunlu rule centered in Tabriz, the destruction of most monumental works by natural disasters or human activity, and the relatively longer survival and preservation of other capitals on par with Tabriz such as Herat and Istanbul.

More specifically, I will deal with the question of to what extent did Tabriz receive religious ‘imperial,’ ‘monumental’ investment in the second half of the fifteenth century? Although an examination of capital cities requires discussing legitimacy claims, politics is beyond the scope of the present paper. I confine the discussion within the boundaries of religious architecture for two reasons: First, given the limited amount of information on the Aqqyunlu architectural works, it makes sense to compare the most outstanding Aqqyunlu structure, the *Masjid-i Ḥasan Pādshāh*, with its predecessor, *Masjid-i Kabūd* of the *Qaraqyunlu*. Second, an examination of the activity in religious architecture sheds light on the nature of the relationship between the Aqqyunlu rulers and the people of the city. To answer the above question, I begin with an assessment of the imperial architectural heritage in Tabriz until the Aqqyunlus, and then move to their architectural contribution, mainly, the *Masjid-i Ḥasan Pādshāh*. Next, I discuss the nature of Aqqyunlu religious construction and patronage, and argue that the Aqqyunlu rulers’ architectural/religious investment in

¹ I am indebted to Dr. Sheila Blair and Dr. Judith Pfeiffer for their constructive comments, support, and patience with me in the course of writing this paper. I also thank the IMPACT project and its sponsor ERC for making available the resources crucial for bringing this article to completion. Funding for research on this paper that enabled me to finalize it for publication was made available from the European Research Council under the *European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013)* / ERC Starting Grant 263557 IMPACT. For Tabriz’s role as an imperial capital starting from the time of Ghazan and his vizier Rashīd al-Dīn see, Karl Jahn, “Tebriz Doğu ile Batı Arasında bir Ortaçağ Kültür Merkezi,” trans. İsmail Aka, *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Tarih Bölümü Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 13 no. 24 (1979–80): 59–77. 60, 61, 63.

Tabriz was not sufficient for them to penetrate certain levels of the city's religious life.

Aqquyunlu Imperial Construction and Its Precursors

One of the major traits that distinguishes an imperial capital from other culturally and politically prominent cities is that imperial ideology and expansion brings about a significantly higher level of cultural and construction activity. This activity aspires to achieve monumentality in order to overshadow other cities of the same dominion. The ideological prerequisite for this, that is, a sovereign with claims to universal sovereignty who controls the capital, is indispensable, but as mentioned above, it will not be dealt with as it is beyond the scope of the present essay. Instead I ask the following question: What constitutes an imperial architectural program? Acknowledging that the question already assumes the prevalence of the norms and values of a settled society, one can suggest that every ruler with an imperial construction program builds i) an imperial complex (*imārat*), and ii) a palace in his capital city. The Friday mosque is the central element of such complexes which typically consist of a *madrasa*, library, pantry, and bathhouse with the aim to meet religious, intellectual, and social challenges that arise with imperial rule. If economic concerns are dominating, a market may be added, but markets are not immediately recognized as examples of monumental architecture. In the specific Perso-Turkic context one can add to this list gardens as examples of royal construction. Furthermore, depending on historical circumstances, one can see the creation of entire districts in the city as a constituent of an imperial construction program.²

Tabriz as an urban settlement has been unlucky as it has been subject to almost systematic destruction, either because of natural disasters or human action. Throughout history, earthquakes consistently destroyed

² Examples are the Shanb-i Ghazan of the Ilkhanid ruler Ghazan Khan (d. 703/1304), or Mehmed II's (d. 886/1481) commissioning of the creation of districts to the leading members of his court in the recently conquered Istanbul. In Mehmed II's urban construction program most of the builders were not from the royal family but their activity should still be considered as part of Mehmed II's program since it was his imperial vision that brought about the construction activity. In that regard, should the construction of Rab'-i Rashīdī by the Ilkhanid minister Rashīd al-Dīn be considered an 'imperial project' given that it took place at the same time with Ghazan's project both of which will be mentioned below? Is it plausible to argue in favor of a shared (or propogated) 'imperial' vision between the ruler and his minister in the Ilkhanid context, too?

monumental buildings and houses in the city.³ Although earthquakes were occasionally followed by waves of reconstruction, these efforts did not always fully make up for the damage of the earthquakes. For example, the earthquake in 1050/1641 reduced what was left of Shanb-i Ghazan into merely the remnants of the original structure, yet, it was the earthquake of 1193/1780 that inflicted the heaviest damage on historical buildings. Almost no historical buildings in the city came out of these two earthquakes undamaged including the Mosque of Uzun Ḥasan which will be discussed below.⁴ As for human agency, the Timurid Mīrānshāh is reported to have pulled down many fine buildings in the city, and the Ottoman-Safawid conflict in the following centuries also had its share in the destruction of works of architecture.⁵ As a result, only a few examples of what was constructed in Tabriz of the Aqqyunlu era and earlier periods survived physically.

In addition to the waves of reconstruction following earthquakes, Tabriz received other significant waves of construction, the most intensive one being perhaps during the reign of the Ilkhan Ghazan Khan.⁶ Thanks to the patronage of Ghazan Khan and his two viziers, Rashīd al-Dīn and Tāj

³ For the period between 244/858 and 1193/1780 Ambraseys & Melville mention seven earthquakes. The most severe one in terms of casualties was in 434/1042, killing forty thousand people. 8, 37, 39–40, 43, 47, 49, 55. N.N. Ambraseys and C.P. Melville, *A History of Persian Earthquakes* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1982). C.P. Melville, "Historical Monuments and Earthquakes in Tabriz," *Iran* 19 (1981): 159–177. 159, 164. Ḥāfiẓ Ḥusayn Karbalā'ī Tabrizī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān va Jannāt al-Janān*, ed. Ja'far Sulṭān al-Qurrā'ī. 2 vols. (Bungāh-i Tarjuma va Nashr-i Kitāb, Tehran: 1344–1349/1965–1970), 1: 16, 276.

⁴ Ambraseys & Melville, *A History*, 49, 55. After the earthquakes in 244/858 and 1194/1780, rulers promptly ordered the reconstruction of the city. Karbalā'ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 1: 17; Ambraseys & Melville, *A History*, 55.

⁵ Ruy González de Clavijo, *Embassy to Tamerlane*, trans. Guy le Strange, 1928. Reprint: ed. Fuad Sezgin. (Frankfurt/Main: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, 1994), 153. The destruction of the cities of conquered peoples is a show of power: Melek Ahmed Pasha took pride in laying waste hundreds of cities and regions in Iran on the return journey of Murād IV's Rawān campaign. One of the cities that Evliya Çelebi specifically mentions in this respect is Tabriz. *Evliya Çelebi in Bitlis. The Relevant Section of the Seyahatname Edited with Translation, Commentary and Introduction*, ed. and trans. Robert Dankoff (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), 168. Shāh 'Abbās ordered the destruction of the buildings in Shanb-i Ghazan so that the Ottomans could not use them for military purposes. Nādir Mīrzā, *Tārīkh va Jugrāfi-yi Dār al-Salṭana-yi Tabriz*, ed. Ghulam-Riḍā Ṭabāṭabā'ī Majd (Tabriz: Intishārāt-i Sutūda, 1373), 122. Mehmed II seems to be an exception to the rule: After the Battle of Bashkent in which he defeated Uzun Hasan he was generous enough not to destroy the latter's country. Ashikpashazade, *Die altosmanische Chronik des 'Āshīkpašazāde*, ed. Friedrich Giese. Reprint of the 1929 edition (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller Verlag, 1972), 174.

⁶ Birgitt Hoffmann, *Waqf im mongolischen Iran: Rašīduddīn's Sorge um Nachruhm und Seelenheil* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2000), 108.

al-Dīn ‘Alī Shāh, two entirely new districts,—the Shanb-i Ghazan and the Rab‘-i Rashīdī—and a monumental mosque with the claim to surpass the gigantic arch in Ctesiphon, namely, the Mosque of ‘Alī Shāh, were built. Both the Shanb-i Ghazan and Rab‘-i Rashīdī fell out of favor once their patrons passed away, and especially the Rab‘-i Rashīdī suffered heavy damage as it was plundered right after its patron’s execution. The Mosque of ‘Alishāh gradually acquired a new use as a castle (Arg) which can be explained through its central location in the city.⁷

The next rulers of Tabriz, the Jalayirids, put their seal on Tabriz with their Dawlatkhāna, a palace building, in the middle of the fourteenth century.⁸ The Dawlatkhāna, built by the Jalayirid Sultan Uvays, was one of the major monumental buildings that the Aqquyunlus inherited.⁹ It was a well-planned structure with an astonishing number of rooms and apartments that were decorated with paintings. The statement about twenty thousand rooms, which it reportedly had, is interpreted as an exaggeration in the literature; nevertheless, it implies that the building was enormous and the question of why Sultan Uvays wanted such a large building continues to await an answer.¹⁰ The Dawlatkhāna could very well be one of the buildings that impressed the Spanish envoy Clavijo, who visited the

⁷ With its gigantic proportions, 65 by 30 meters, the Mosque of ‘Alishāh claimed to surpass the Sasanian arch at Ctesiphon, which measured 50 by 25 meters. It was also a model for future buildings, even as far as Cairo, namely, the Mosque of Sultan Ḥasan (1357–64). Sheila Blair, “Tabriz: International Entrepôt In the 14th and 15th centuries,” keynote address. International workshop “Beyond the Abbasid Caliphate: Politics, Patronage and the Transmission of Knowledge in 13th–15th Century Tabriz,” Istanbul, Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations, 1–2 October, 2010, 9, 10 (see Sheila Blair’s contribution to this volume). I am again thankful to Dr. Blair for kindly providing me with the text of her keynote address. See also Sheila Blair, “Ilkhanid Architecture and Society: An Analysis of the Endowment Deed of the Rab‘-i Rashīdī,” *Iran* 22 (1984): 69. If it was a model for Cairo it must have been a model definitely for the Aqquyunlus. For its collapse in the 1090 Armenian era/1641 earthquake see C.P. Melville, “Historical Monuments,” 164. According to Chardin’s panorama, the Shanb-i Ghāzān and Rab‘-i Rashīdī were somehow situated off the center. Johannes Chardin, *The Travels of Sir Johannes Chardin into Persia and the East-Indies*, 2 vols. (Westminster, London: Printed for Moses Pitt in Duke Street, 1686), 1, between 352 and 353.

⁸ Sheila Blair, “Tabriz,” *El* 10 (2010): 49–50.

⁹ Clavijo, *Embassy*, 153, 155. On the other hand Barbaro, visiting the court of Uzun Ḥasan in April of 1474, did not seem to be impressed by the architectural features of Tabriz, but he reported extensively on the activities in Uzun Ḥasan’s palace and precious gems that Uzun Ḥasan showed him. Josaphat Barbaro, *Anadolu’ya*, 73–5. Apparently, Uzun Ḥasan granted the Dawlatkhāna to Baba Ḥasan Majzūb. Karbalā’ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 1: 470.

¹⁰ Blair, “Tabriz;” Clavijo, *Embassy*, 153. The Qaraqyunlu rulers prior to Jahānshāh used it as a palace; Jahānshāh transformed it into a castle.

city in 1404 before the establishment of Turkoman rule. He reported that there were many rich, fine buildings throughout Tabriz, the bathhouses were the most splendid in the entire world, and the mosques were especially beautifully adorned with tiles in blue and gold.¹¹

Al-Muẓaffariyya/Masjid-i Kabūd

After more than half a century following Clavijo's visit the Qaraqyunlus built another outstanding example of those mosques described by Clavijo. The Masjid-i Kabūd was built as part of a larger complex, al-Muẓaffariyya, the imperial construction program of Jahānshāh the Qaraqyunlu. The name is derived from Jahānshāh's epithet al-Muẓaffar, the victorious, and attests to the imperial claim of the enterprise. Its patron was Khātūnjān Begum, Jahānshāh's wife. It was located outside the south-east entrance of Tabriz on the boulevard called Khiyābān, where the main trade route from Khurāsān connected to the city. Khātūnjān intended this complex as the burial ground for the Qaraqyunlu family as attested by the fact that she, Jahānshāh and most of their children were later buried there.¹²

Apart from being the best surviving example from the Turkoman period, and the only one from the Qaraqyunlu period, the Masjid-i Kabūd is significant in its scale which refers back to the last great monumental Timurid structure, that is, the Madrasa al-Ghiyāthiyya at Khargird. This *madrasa*, completed in 848/1444, was built by Ghiyāth al-Dīn Pīr Aḥmad Khvāfi, a vizier of Shāhrukh, whose architect was the Timurid royal architect Qivām al-Dīn Shīrāzi.¹³ By building a structure comparable to this *madrasa*, the Qaraqyunlus must have been conscious of the fact that they were assuming the role of the next great builders after the Timurids.¹⁴

The complex, the construction of which finished in Rabīʿ I 870/October 1465, consisted of a mosque, *khānqāh*, court-yard (صحن), library, a series of water basins (حوضخانه), *madrasa* and a graveyard.¹⁵ The variety of

¹¹ Clavijo, *Embassy*, 153, 155.

¹² Karbalāʾī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 1: 524.

¹³ Bernard O'Kane, "The Madrasa al-Ghiyāthiyya at Khargird," *Iran* 14 (1976): 79.

¹⁴ Sheila Blair and Jonathan Bloom, *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250–1800*, Pelican History of Art (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994), 51.

¹⁵ Muḥammad Javād Mashkūr, *Tārīkh-i Tabrīz tā Pāyān-i Qarn-i Nuhum-i Hijrī*, (Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi Bahman, 1352/1973), 652–3. Mashkūr adds that today these buildings are no longer existent except for the still standing remains of the mosque. Karbalāʾī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 1: 598.

colors used the Masjid-i Kabūd, with an emphasis on blue, and the variety of designs in the tile revetments on the interior and exterior walls shows a refined taste and high level of technical expertise. The adaptation of an unusual plan for the mosque, a domed square hall with a u-shaped corridor on three sides covered by smaller domes, which was probably based on a plan followed in the Rashīdiyya complex (Rab‘-i Rashīdī) in Tabriz, and the unusual calligraphic designs bring into mind the question of whether this was an attempt at a novel architectural statement.¹⁶ Perhaps one is justified to say that this was one step further in developing the Timurid artistic vocabulary, although it was located beyond the Timurid domains.

It is not possible to sketch a detailed usage history of the Muẓaffariyya complex in the following centuries, but we know that the Masjid-i Kabūd was still in a good condition in the sixteenth century. The travelogues we have are exclusively about the mosque of the complex, therefore, it is not easy to tell when the other accompanying buildings fell out of usage. Two later travellers, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (in Tabriz in 1636) and Mme Jane Dieulafoy (in Tabriz in 1881) made the point that the Shi‘ī rulers of the city ignored the Masjid-i Kabūd deliberately since it had been built on behalf of Sunnī patrons. Hence, one can propose that the maintenance of the complex faced a sharp decline not long after the vanishing of the Sunnī section of the population in Tabriz.¹⁷ This is not surprising, considering the highly complex web of financial relationships that was created to support the complex. The endowment deed of the complex, in a manuscript entitled *Ṣariḥ al-Mulk*, show that its patrons allocated the revenues of hundreds of gardens, shops, and bath houses to this complex. A systematic study of these resources, which is beyond the scope of the present paper, is necessary to appreciate the level of financial and administrative organization required in order to maintain a complex of this magnitude.¹⁸

Its later usage aside, al-Muẓaffariyya must have turned into a prestigious, if not the most prestigious, center of learning as soon as it was built. The well-known theologian of the late fifteenth century, Jalāl al-Dīn

¹⁶ Blair and Bloom, *The Art and Architecture*, 51, 52. Blair, “Tabriz.”

¹⁷ Mashkūr, *Tārīkh-i Tabrīz*, 651, 677–8, 680–1.

¹⁸ Mashkūr, *Tārīkh-i Tabrīz*, 653–76. Unfortunately, *Ṣariḥ al-Mulk* was not available to me at the time of the writing of this essay, therefore, I depend on Mashkūr’s extensive excerpts from the text. A systematic study of it could shed light not on the working of al-Muẓaffariyya but also on the socio-economic history of Tabriz in the second half of the fifteenth century.

Dawānī, finished his *Shawākil al-Hūr fī Sharḥ Hayākil al-Nūr* in Shawwāl 872/May 1468 at the Muẓaffariya Madrasa. Again at the same institution he copied his *Risāla Zawra*, since the original copy, which had his glosses on it, was lost in the battle between Jahānshāh (d. 872/1467) and Uzun Ḥasan (d. 882/1477).¹⁹ One can say al-Muẓaffariyya was not only the architectural manifestation of the Qaraqyunlu imperial claim but also the intellectual/cultural reflection of it as shown by the employment of a top caliber scholar like Dawānī in that institution.

al-Naṣriyya

Yet, that claim could not live long. Uzun Ḥasan's expansionist policy in Iran in the 1460's brought both the end of the Qaraqyunlu dominance and a new political power in Iran with an imperial claim which found its architectural expression in Tabriz.²⁰ According to Karbalā'ī, Uzun Ḥasan built several complexes (*imārats*) consisting of mosques, *madrasas*, gardens, and public baths contributing to the prosperity of Tabriz significantly.²¹ Although detailed information about Uzun Ḥasan's and later Aqqyunlu rulers' construction activity is indeed limited, it seems safe to propose that the most illustrious product of that activity was al-Naṣriyya, a complex comprising of a mosque, *madrasa*, kitchen, market, and two gardens.²² The construction history of the complex lacks clarity, and it seems that Uzun Ḥasan developed the initial idea and started the project, and his son Sulṭān Ya'qūb brought it to completion.

How can one compare al-Naṣriyya to al-Muẓaffariyya? Despite its challenges, a basic comparison seems plausible beginning with the role of imperial claims in the founding of both institutions: As was the case with al-Muẓaffariyya, the complex was named after Uzun Ḥasan's epithet Abū al-Naṣr (conjoined with (divine) 'help'), attesting to the imperial/universal claims of a ruler who was perceived as divinely assisted.

¹⁹ Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī, *Sab'a Rasā'il li al-'Allāma Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Dawānī (al-mutawaffā 908 h.q.) wa al-Mullā Isma'il al-Khwāju'i al-Isfahānī (al-mutawaffā 1173 h.q.)*, ed. Sayyid Aḥmad Tūysirkānī (Tehran: Mirāth-i Maktūb, 1381/2002), 19, 20, 25. Mashkūr, 652, 653.

²⁰ John E. Woods, *The Aqqyunlu. Clan, Confederation, Empire*, revised ed. (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 1999), 99, 109, 112, 114.

²¹ Karbalā'ī also adds that Dawānī mentions this in his *Risāla-yi 'Arḍ-i Lashkar* without going into specifics. Karbalā'ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 1: 524.

²² Blair and Bloom, *The Art and Architecture*, 52.

Market, a feature also seen in the earlier model setting Rabʿ-i Rashīdī, but not in al-Muzaffariyya, must be an indication of the importance given to commercial activity. The inclusion of a market can be also explained through the location of al-Naṣriyya. According to Chardin's depiction of Tabriz, al-Naṣriyya was situated very much in the center of the city, whereas as al-Muzaffariyya remained, as already mentioned above, outside the city walls. A market in the center of the city seems economically meaningful, especially, within the context of Aqquyunlu policies that favored commerce. At this stage it seems safe to assume that the choice for the location of the newly founded market indicates Uzun Ḥasan's desire to cherish the economic life of the city, nevertheless, full economic implications of this choice deserve further scrutiny which is beyond the scope of the present paper.²³ This also brings to mind a question about the differences between the Qaraqyunlu and Aqquyunlu economic policies. Whether the Aqquyunlus emphasized the economic prosperity of Tabriz more than the Qaraqyunlus is a question that deserves further study. Nevertheless, the specific location of the complex, Bāgh-i Şāhibābād, which was a development area, makes one think that economic concerns might have had a greater role in the construction of al-Naṣriyya.

Unfortunately, very little remains from al-Naṣriyya, only a few stones from the mosque of Uzun Ḥasan with partial epigraphs.²⁴ The Masjid-i Ḥasan Pādshāh must have been the foremost monumental structure of the complex, and the nineteenth century account of Nādir Mīrzā confirms that the Masjid-i Ḥasan Pādshāh was greater in size than the Masjid-i Kabūd.²⁵ Chardin's panorama of Tabriz depicts it somehow larger than the Masjid-i Kabūd, too.²⁶ Arriving at a conclusive statement for the artistic quality of the building is more difficult. Nādir Mīrzā notes the high quality marble and glazed tiles used for its decoration, and Karbalā'ī's

²³ On the other hand, a market location outside the city walls could actually be preferable for long-distance traders, or perhaps for nomadic tribal groups that could sell livestock to the sedentary city population. This is an issue that requires further research. I thank Dr. Judith Pfeiffer for bringing this point to my attention.

²⁴ Sa'īd Hidayī, *Tabriz va Mirāthā-yi Farhangī* (Tabriz: Shahr-dāri-yi Tabriz, 1375), 30.

²⁵ Chardin, *Travels*, 1, between pp. 352–3, Ambraseys & Melville, *A History*, 56. Nādir Mīrzā, *Tārīkh va Jugrāfi*, 148, 149. Nādir Mīrzā's account on Masjid-i Kabūd reflects a feeling of enchantment with almost every aspect of the Masjid-i Kabūd; one wonders whether the Masjid-i Uzun Ḥasan could surpass it in anything but size! Nādir Mīrzā, *Tārīkh va Jugrāfi*, 108–113.

²⁶ It is nevertheless necessary to be cautious with using this type of visual evidence as observers who produced such visual presentation may have used conventional types to represent what they saw, thus sacrificing precision in physical dimensions.

narrative on the construction of the building suggests that due care for a building of this calibre was shown. Perhaps one is justified to assume that since al-Naṣriyya as a complex matched and possibly surpassed al-Muẓaffariyya, the Masjid-i Ḥasan Pādshāh was at least at the same level with the Masjid-i Kabūd.²⁷

As mentioned above, reconstructing the construction history of al-Naṣriyya is problematic. According to Karbalā'ī, at the end of his life Uzun Ḥasan was regretful for not having constructed a mosque, *zāviya* and tomb for himself, and made the building of a complex his will, about which he told Darvīsh Qāsim, a prominent religious figure in the Aqquyunlu circles. Darvīsh Qāsim conveyed Uzun Ḥasan's will to Sulṭān Ya'qūb who accepted it wholeheartedly. In Karbalā'ī's narrative, since Sulṭān Ya'qūb moved to act after hearing his father's will, one is in a way led to conclude that it was all Ya'qūb's enterprise. Also, Karbalā'ī's narrative exclusively conveys the construction of the mosque without mentioning any other buildings in al-Naṣriyya.

Although it is not entirely implausible that Ya'qūb was the sole commissioner behind al-Naṣriyya, it is necessary to take into account the fact that Uzun Ḥasan had already built a *qanāt* system extending to the site of al-Naṣriyya. Nādir Mīrzā states that this *qanāt* system started from outside the city in the east, had the purest water in Tabriz, supplied water to the *madrasa* and mosque of Uzun Ḥasan, and it was very well-known.²⁸ Considering the intricacies of the water economy in the medieval socio-economic system, it is hard to conceive that Uzun Ḥasan did not envision starting a significant construction project at a location where he had already provided the infrastructure.

Karbalā'ī gives further details of the Masjid-i Ḥasan Pādshāh's construction as follows. It was a crowd of *sayyids*, Sufi shaykhs, scholars, astrologers and wise men (*hukamā*) who determined the hour for starting the project and the direction of *qibla*, and laid down the foundations in 882/1477. The construction required an amount of skilled labor in proportion to the size of the project which Sulṭān Ya'qūb had to supply from the

²⁷ Blair and Bloom, *The Art and Architecture*, 52. Nādir Mīrzā's narrative shows that he sincerely admired the Masjid-i Kabūd, and lamented its destruction. He does not show the same kind of emotions when he describes Masjid-i Ḥasan Pādshāh. Nādir Mīrzā, *Tārīkh va Jugrāfi*, 108–111, 148, 149. Probably, the destruction of the latter was at a much more advanced stage when he saw both buildings. After all, people used the construction material from these buildings/complexes as they needed, and its location in central Tabriz may have worsened the situation for the Masjid-i Ḥasan Pādshāh.

²⁸ Nādir Mīrzā, *Tārīkh va Jugrāfi*, 47, 49.

surrounding regions. Master builders and peerless architects were summoned to Tabriz, and the project employed a huge number of workers. Sixteen hundred pairs of oxen had to be used, probably to transport soil and construction materials. The entire project took seven years to complete, and an enormous amount of money, 100 million (*dirhams*?) was spent on it.²⁹

An important question to consider is how this complex was used. One can argue that Tabriz continued to be a center of learning under Uzun Ḥasan and possibly Ya'qūb. It was probably in the early 1470's that Qāḍī Ḥasan, an administrator in Uzun Ḥasan's court, prevented young Ibrāhīm-i Gulshani from leaving Tabriz and pursuing his studies in Transoxania by arguing that the [same kind of] knowledge was attainable in Tabriz.³⁰ Again during Uzun Ḥasan's reign one sees scholars of the surrounding regions drawn to Tabriz in order to discuss with the prominent scholars of the city a popular subject of the time, namely, the *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of being) doctrine. This doctrine propogated by the works of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240), the well-known Sufi of the thirteenth century, had turned into a one of the most debated topics in the intellectual/cultural centers of the Islamic world in the subsequent centuries, and apparently Tabriz was no exception.³¹ One should also mention that Uzun Ḥasan was able to keep 'Alī Qushji, the well-known astronomer of the fifteenth century, in Tabriz if even briefly, in the early 1470's.³²

Yet, al-Naṣriyya was completed in the early 1480's and the question of whether it contributed to the role of Tabriz as a center of learning remains to be answered. Information about who was employed in al-Naṣriyya is almost non-existent: Other than Darvīsh Qāsim who was the rector of the complex, it has not been possible to figure out other individuals who worked at this institution.³³ Rather than for its scholarly import, however,

²⁹ Nādir Mirzā, *Tārīkh va Juḡrāfi*, 169. Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, 137. Karbalā'ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 1: 90, 91. Karbalā'ī does not state the unit of currency but it seems plausible to assume that it was dirham, a standard currency in the region. Whether the figure of 100 million is a realistic reflection of the actual money spent, or a symbolic figure to indicate an enormous sum is a valid question: A dirham weighed around 3 gr. which implies that 300 tonnes of silver were used in the project.

³⁰ Muḥyī uses the term *qāḍī 'askar* and *jumlat al-mulk* for Qāḍī Ḥasan. Muḥyī-yi Gülşeni, *Menākīb-i Ibrāhīm-i Gülşeni*, ed. Tahsin Yazıcı (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1982), 25.

³¹ Gülşeni, *Menākīb*, 212.

³² Abdülhak Adnan [Adivar], "Ali Kuşçu," *İslam Ansiklopedisi* 1 (1950): 321–323.

³³ Woods, *The Aqqyunlu*, 141. Apart from Dawānī, Jahānshāh brought Qāḍī Majd al-Dīn to Tabriz for his knowledge and piety. He turned out to be so popular with the population of

al-Naṣriyya comes to the foreground as the stage for a violent incident in the city in 891/1486.

The chain of events leading to the execution of the aforementioned Darvīsh Qāsim started in the mosque of al-Naṣriyya. An ecstatic Turkoman soldier who was a devotee of the Prophet Muḥammad and called himself Mahdī fell asleep during the Friday Prayer in the Masjid-i Ḥasan Pādshāh, and saw the Prophet in his dream. The Prophet told him to wage religious war (*ghazā*) on a certain Christian in the city who had made it a habit to insult the Prophet. When Mahdī woke up he went to the shop of that Christian, invited him to convert to Islam, and when the Christian ridiculed and insulted him he cut his head. He took it around the market where a large group of people gathered around him and praised him. When the news reached Sulṭān Ya'qūb, he was furious; Mahdī was brought before him and executed.

This time the Christians took Mahdī's head to their neighborhood and insulted it causing extreme distress among the Muslims. Allegedly after getting permission from the ruler, a large group including religious leaders went to Mahdī's house to prepare the body for burial. The funeral ceremony turned into an almost open protest: The coffin was taken to Ṣāhibābād through markets and streets while people loudly recited greetings upon the Prophet. A huge crowd was present at the funeral prayer at Ṣāhibābād, the garden where al-Naṣriyya was located. On the way to the burial ground the crowd passed by Ya'qūb's residence. Ya'qūb was so scared from the huge procession that when certain 'envious' people told him that Darvīsh Qāsim was the reason of this 'mischievous' he had the popular rector of al-Naṣriyya killed the very same night, on 18 Rabi' I 891/24 March 1486.³⁴

Whether Darvīsh Qāsim was as innocent as Karbalā'ī depicts him, to what extent he played a leading role in escalating tensions, and whether there were other political interests and conflicts involved in Ya'qūb's execution of Darvīsh Qāsim are questions that have to await further research. What is clear is that almost immediately after its construction had been

Tabriz that in his funeral the entire population of Tabriz was reportedly present. Karbalā'ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 1: 114.

³⁴ Karbalā'ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 1: 92–95, 570. This incident also shows the existence of a very significant Christian section among the population and reflects tensions between confessional groups. This issue certainly deserves to be further studied in terms of the history of conversion. Woods adds that this caused a rift between the people of Tabriz and Ya'qūb, and after this incident Ya'qūb did not really spend much time in Tabriz. Woods, *The Aqquyunlu*, 141.

completed,—since the construction began in 882/1477 and lasted seven years, it must have come to conclusion around 889/1484—, al-Naṣriyya assumed a central role in the city's life. Even if one assumes that the area already had a significant social function in the city prior to al-Naṣriyya, one can still propose that that function was further emphasized by its construction.

Apart from construction programs at the imperial level, the Aqqyunlus patronized relatively smaller scale projects in Tabriz. Sulṭān Ya'qūb had a *maṣjid*, *zāviya*, and rooms constructed for the followers of Dede 'Umar Rūshānī, the Khalvatī sufi of the fifteenth century. The *Menākub-i Gülšenī* informs us that once the construction was finished just cleaning the ground for the opening of the complex would require a month's work of several hundred men, but thanks to Dede 'Umar Rūshānī's and Gulshānī's spiritual support the dervishes finished it all in a mere three hours.³⁵ Despite the obvious exaggeration in this account one might still think that this project was probably not a small one.

The Akhī Khayr al-Dīn Zāviya in Chahār Minār neighborhood must have been a significant institution as we are told that Jāmī (d. 898/1492) stayed there when he visited Tabriz on 24 Jumāda II 878/16 November 1473.³⁶ This *zāviya* was established around the tombs of a certain Akhī Khayr al-Dīn, a noteworthy Sufi, and Bahlūl, an ecstatic (*majdhūb*) who was killed by an Aqqyunlu prince, suggesting that a shrine institution was at stake. Karbalā'ī states that it was functioning and prosperous until the end of Aqqyunlu rule, yet at the time Karbalā'ī was writing there was no trace of the *zāviya*. Therefore, we may infer that the prosperity of the *zāviya* was related with the Aqqyunlu patronage. This is one of the rare indications of Aqqyunlus as patrons of a shrine and it takes us to the final section of the current discussion.

The Aqqyunlu Rulers and Religious Life in Tabriz

The Aqqyunlus did put their seal on Tabriz through their construction activity, but a close reading of the *Rawḍāt al-Jinān* suggests that they did

³⁵ Gülšenī, *Menākub*, 167–8. When Sultan Ya'qūb saw the miraculous performance, he fell at the feet of Rūshānī with perplexion and supplicated him. The word Muḥyi uses the double plural '*hujurat*' for 'rooms,' which is not uncommon in Ottoman Turkish.

³⁶ The Chahār Minār neighborhood was home to another *zāviya*, too, namely, the *zāviya* of a certain 'Imād al-Dīn who was a disciple of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Ravāsī, a Zaynī shaykh. Karbalā'ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 1: 162, 164, 167.

not penetrate into every dimension of the religious and spiritual life in Tabriz. Specifically, it seems that the Aqquyunlus did not actively pursue to create or patronize shrines in Tabriz. This point comes into contrast especially when one compares Tabriz with Herat and Istanbul, the major contemporaneous capitals of the Islamic world in the east and west. If Istanbul can be seen as an exception since it was only recently conquered and the development of the shrine of Ayyūb al-Anṣārī served the Islamization of the city, the case of Herat was certainly comparable to that of Tabriz in terms of shrine patronage. The Timurids, starting with Shāhrukh (r. 807–1405/850–1447), paid special attention to the shrine of ‘Abd Allāh Anṣārī (d. 481/1089). In the 1460’s Sulṭān Abū Sa‘īd (d. 873/1468) built a large avenue leading to the shrine, and throughout the entire Timurid rule it was promoted it as the spiritual center of the city.³⁷ For the Aqquyunlu there does not seem to be one such shrine that rose to a prominent position under the patronage of political authority.

There were several shrines that were significant in the religious life of Tabriz, and Karbalā‘ī introduces a religious hierarchy by devoting his first chapter to the companions of the Prophet buried in Tabriz. The locals recognized Muḍar b. ‘Ujayl as *ka‘ba-yi ḥājat* (the refuge of the needy), visited his tomb especially for the removal of the plague, and according to Karbalā‘ī, quickly attained their wishes. Similarly, prayers were accepted at the tomb of Abū Miḥjan al-Thaqifī (d. 30/650), and all the people of Tabriz, notables and ordinary men, favored ‘Ukkāsha (d. 11/632) extensively, whose tomb in the cemetery (*gūristān*) was discovered through dreams.³⁸ Definitely, the city had its religious centers, and a very vivid religious life.³⁹ In Surkhvāb the most central figure buried turned out to be Baba Ḥasan who was served by seventy saints in his lifetime.⁴⁰ A dream story in which the Prophet’s light came out of Baba Ḥasan’s grave

³⁷ ‘Abd al-Vāsī‘ Niẓāmī-yi Bākharzī, *Maqāmāt-i Jāmī*, ed. Najīb Māyil Haravī, new edition (Tehran: Nashr-i Nay, 1377/1999), 147.

³⁸ Unfortunately, I could not find any information pertaining to the biography of Muḍar b. ‘Ujayl. Mehmet Talu, “Ebū Mihcen es-Sekafi,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* 10 (1994): 188. The person referred to here is possibly ‘Ukkāsha b. Miḥṣān al-Asadi who died in Ridda Wars in Buzakha approximately 200 miles northeast of Madina, in the central part of Arabian peninsula. The discovery of his tomb in Tabriz may be indicative of an attempt to create a mythical past for the city. *Kitāb Athār Ibn Bādīs*, vol. II/2, ed. ‘Ammār al-Tālibī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1983), 110.

³⁹ Karbalā‘ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 24–5, 34, 42–4.

⁴⁰ When Baba Ḥasan lived is not clear. Yet, since Maḥmūd Shabistārī (d. ca. 718/1318) mentioned him in one of his poems he probably lived before Shabistārī. Karbalā‘ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 53.

associated him with the Prophet, and this probably meant the establishment of a spiritual connection between the Prophet and Tabriz.⁴¹ Perhaps this is why the tombs of the great (*akābir*) and wealthy ones, especially those of merchants, were conglomerated around Baba Ḥasan's tomb.⁴²

The list of shrines in the fifteenth century Tabriz can certainly be extended, but one observation that comes out of the *Rawḍāt al-Jinān* is that the Aqqyunlus neither tried to associate their tombs with these already established grave(yard)s, nor did they favor one among them to the disadvantage of others. Above it was mentioned that the Aqqyunlus built an imperial complex and supported the construction of more modest complexes for Sufis. In that respect, they continued the tradition of monumental construction and religious patronage. Nevertheless, at least tentatively, one can say that the control of the ruling dynasty does not seem to have penetrated Tabriz's socio-religious life extensively at the shrine level.

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⁴¹ It is also necessary to mention that Karbalā'ī emphasizes the city's connection to the Prophet and the early Islamic period through those companions of the Prophet who were buried in Tabriz. Karbalā'ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 40, 41.

⁴² For the containment of the plague and high prices (*ghalā*). Karbalā'ī, *Rawḍāt al-Jinān*, 49, 50, 52, 53. Another spiritual reference point was Baba Mazīd's tomb, *ibid.*, 105.

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