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THE TILED MINBARS OF IRAN

Bernard O'KANE

There are five mosques in Central Iran which have tiled minbars dating from the period c. 1445-1535 A.D. Their very existence may come as a surprise to many Western scholars, but this is not so much the result of any conspiracy of silence as an indication of their provincial character, confined within a limited geographical and chronological range. Despite these limitations they are of interest not only for their unique form of decoration but also because of their epigraphic evidence for the chronology of the buildings in which they are situated. They also raise questions about the ways in which the minbar was used in medieval Iran. This latter point will be considered after a chronological account is given of each of the minbars.

VARZANA, MASĞID-I ĞĀMI'

This mosque, situated some 100 km southeast of Isfahan, was first mentioned in a short notice by Anthony Hutt⁽¹⁾. The forthcoming full report on the mosque which was mentioned in this notice was apparently submitted to the long- (and impatiently) awaited *Festschrift* for A.U. Pope. Meanwhile a number of photographs and a plan of the mosque were published by Hutt (Fig. 1)⁽²⁾, and a full account of its historical inscriptions was given by Hunarfar⁽³⁾.

The plan of the mosque is similar to many contemporary examples in the Yazd area, with a two-*ayvān* courtyard and a *qibla* dome chamber with an upper gallery.

Fortunately its inscriptions give full information on the patron, one Maḥmūd b. Muẓaffar, called 'Imād, and the date, 848/1444-5.

⁽¹⁾ «Recent Discoveries in Iran, 1969-70 : a Major Islamic Monument», *Iran* IX (1971), pp. 159-60.

⁽²⁾ Lutfallāh Hunarfar, *İşfahān dar dawra-yi ġānişinān-i Taymūr* (Isfahan, 2535/1976), pp. 7-18.

⁽³⁾ A. Hutt and L. Harrow, *Islamic Architecture*.

Major portions of the mosque are revetted with mosaic-faience, in particular the entrance portal, the *qibla ayvān*, the *mihrāb* and the minbar (Fig. 2). The quality of mosaic-faience is of a high order, although not of the finest. This can readily be seen by comparing the work at Varzana with that on a portal in the Isfahan Friday Mosque,

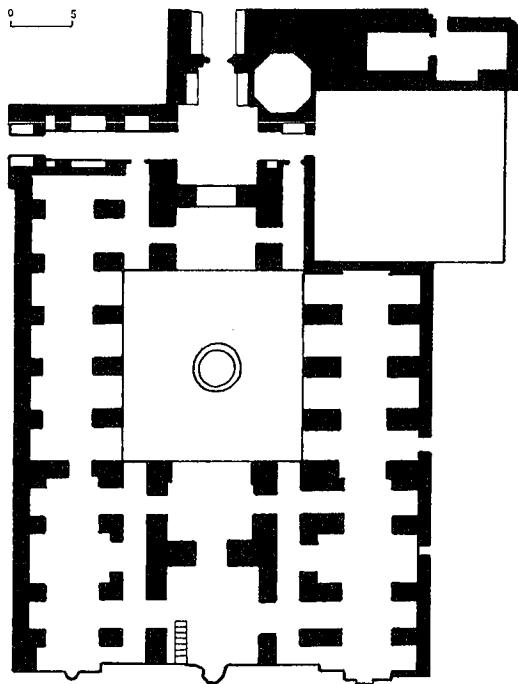


Fig. 1. — Varzana, *Masjid-i Gāmi'* : plan
(after Hutt and Harrow).

which was commissioned three years later (Šawwāl 851 / Dec. 1446 - Jan. 1447) by the same patron ⁽¹⁾. There is not much to choose between the two in terms of design, although the pieces of tile are cut to a smaller scale at Isfahan, particularly in the arabesque stems. It is the glaze which is the deciding factor; instead of the smoothness and intensity of the colours at Isfahan the tones at Varzana are washed out and the surface rough and uneven. Green, always a difficult colour to fire, is almost completely absent at Varzana, while the blacks are closer to a wine-red than the darker manganese of the Isfahan portal.

But the similarity of the wonderfully elegant and very distinctive white arabesques of the tympanum at Isfahan to those of the spandrels of the main portal at Varzana ⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ Luṭfallāh Hunarfar, *Gangīna-yi āṭār-i tārīḥi-yi Isfahān* (Isfahan, 1350-1971), p. 123. — ⁽²⁾ Hutt and Harrow, *Iran* 2, Pls. 32, 38.

suggest that the same person designed both. One can conclude that while it was relatively easy for the designer to travel, the kiln workshop that was set up at Varzana did not have the expertise or the raw materials to produce tiles equal in quality to those of the metropolis.

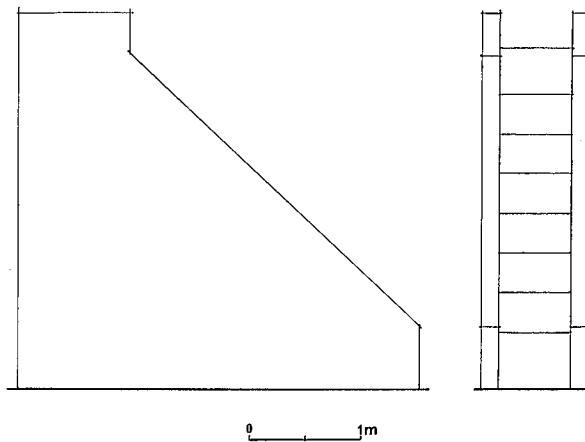


Fig. 2. — Varzana, Masjid-i Ġāmi': plan and elevation of minbar.

Given the quality of the design that went into the entrance portal and the *mihrāb*, that of the minbar is disappointing (Pl. XXXVI). The main pattern of angular interlacing strapwork based on twelve-pointed stars is an ambitious one, but, apart from the borders, it fills up the whole space without relief. Unlike those of Bundarābād and Kāshān (Pls. XXXVIII; XLI, A), there is no rear archway to force a subdivision of the design. The only contrast is provided by the step pattern along the diagonal, echoed in the narrow lower border⁽¹⁾. The colours are also limited to white, light- and dark-blue, and sparingly, amber for the rosettes at the centre of the stars, with green and black being totally absent.

Only one inscription panel is present, a reciprocal three-*'Alī* in white and dark-blue square Kufic (Pl. XLIII, A). This is homage to the first, not to the fourth Caliph, as the *ayyān* at Ḥargird covered with repetitions of *'Alī* can be interpreted⁽²⁾. The *mihrāb* at Varzana however, has the *Šī'i šahāda* ending in *'Alī wali Allāh* ('Ali is the Friend of God). While it may be surprising that this should coexist on a building which has its foundation inscription in the name of the upholder of Sunnī orthodoxy, Šāh Rūb, it provides more

⁽¹⁾ Most of the tiles of the lower border are later repair work.

⁽²⁾ B. O'Kane, « The Madrasa al-Ghiyāṣiyya at Khargird », *Iran* XIV (1976), Pl. VII a.

evidence that the divisions between the major sects of Islam were of a less fanatical nature in Iran in the fifteenth than in later centuries⁽¹⁾.

Although the minbar has several damaged areas, as far as it is possible to tell both sides were originally the same.

YAZD, MASĞID-I ČAHĀR MANĀR OR MASĞID-I HĪZR ŠĀH

This complex was built by Amīr Čalāl al-Dīn Hīzr Šāh in the district of Yazd known as Čahār Manār⁽²⁾. According to the author of the *Tārīh-i Čadid-i Yazd* it was begun in 849/1445-6 but was still not finished at the time of writing (c. 862/1457-8)⁽³⁾. Its main element was a new Friday Mosque with an adjoining *ğamā'athāna* (assembly hall or winter prayer hall). Beside this was a funerary enclosure (*hazīra*) for Čalāl al-Dīn's burial, and a *buq'a* which in this case functioned as a residence for Sufis⁽⁴⁾.

Muhammad Bāfqī, writing in 1080/1669-70, noted that many properties in the Yazd area were made waqf to the mosque and that it had an income of 550,000 (*dīnārs*). However, in the unspecified past some unscrupulous descendants of the amir who were themselves administrators of the waqf embezzled the funds to the point where the mosque was in ruins, until another descendant, Mīr 'Askar Hīzr Šāhī, restored the funds to their rightful source and made the mosque the abode of the holy once more⁽⁵⁾.

Although much of the present mosque seems to be later than the founding of the complex, the tiled dado on the qibla wall and the mosaic-faience of the minbar (Fig. 3) are in keeping with the foundation in 849/1445-6.

The dado of hexagonal light-blue tiles is similar to numerous others in the Yazd area, including that of Bundarābād below. The minbar has a similar border to that of the dado, one of stars alternating with lozenges, which suggests that they were completed at the same time (Pl. XXXVII, A).

This minbar is the smallest of the series, partly due to the fact that on one side the steps are built into the wall, so that only one side of the minbar is exposed. Like Varzana, Bundarābād and Kāšān (Pls. XXXVI; XXXVIII; XLI, A), its main pattern is one of

(1) See B.S. Amoretti, « Religion in the Timurid and Safavid Periods », *The Cambridge History of Iran*. Volume 6. *The Timurid and Safavid Periods*, eds. P. Jackson and L. Lockhart (Cambridge, 1986) (henceforth *CHI*, VI), pp. 610-23.

(2) Īraq Afšār, *Yādgārhā-yi Yazd*, I (Tehran, 1348/1969), pp. 249-53.

(3) Ahmad b. Ḥusayn b. 'Ali Kātib, *Tārīh-i Čadid-i Yazd*, ed. Īraq Afšār (Tehran 1345/1966), p. 122.

(4) *Loc. cit.*

(5) Muhammad Mufid Mustawfi Bāfqī, *Gāmi'-i Mufidī*, ed. Īraq Afšār (Tehran, 1342/1963), p. 187.

eight- and twelve-pointed stars. The eight-pointed stars are decorated with rosettes, while the larger ones display light-blue stems with amber and white flowers. Black and green are entirely absent from the range of colours. The irregular pentagons and five-sided stars which link the larger stars are also relatively uninventive, without the borders or the insets in a different colour which distinguish the other fifteenth century examples.

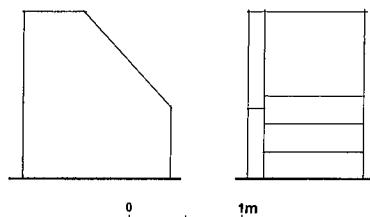


Fig. 3. — Yazd, Masjid-i Cahar Manar: plan and elevation of minbar.

BUNDARĀBĀD

The town is located c. 35 km northwest of Yazd. On the outskirts of the modern village lies a complex (Fig. 4), its outer walls half engulfed by sand drifts, whose principal components consist of a mosque, a funerary dome chamber, and a courtyard surrounded by four *ayvāns* which is referred to as a *buq'a* or *hānaqāh*⁽¹⁾. The complex is the product of several building periods, and the unravelling of these would be of sufficient interest to merit a substantial publication of its own. Although we are concerned here only with the minbar of the mosque, it will be necessary to give a brief account of other parts of the complex when the dating of the minbar is discussed.

DESCRIPTION

The minbar is the largest of the series (Fig. 5), and is second only to that of Kāšān in terms of the design and execution of the tilework. The major design is one of eight- and twelve-pointed stars (Pl. XXXVIII). The larger ones are filled with a delicate floral arabesque of amber and light-blue on a dark-blue ground except for one, which has the names of the twelve *imāms* running clockwise and anti-clockwise within a roundel, with « and pray for » repeated twelve times in the centre (Pl. XXXVII, B). Except for the

⁽¹⁾ Afšār, *Yādgārāhā*, I, pp. 126-136 discusses the historical background and notes the inscriptions found in the complex but does not enter into any chronological analysis. The publication extensively quoted by Afšār in his description of the complex, Mağdzāda Şahbā, « Ātār-i tārīhi-yi Bundarābād-i Yazd », *Mağala-yi Bāstān-şināsi* I (1338-1959), pp. 96-104, was unavailable

to me. A photograph of part of the minbar (wrongly ascribed to Bidāhavid) is published in R. Hillenbrand, « The Use of Glazed Tilework in Iranian Islamic Architecture », *Akten des VII. Internationalen Kongresses für Iranische Kunst und Archäologie. München 7.-10. September 1976. Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran. Ergänzungsband 6* (Berlin, 1979), fig. 4.

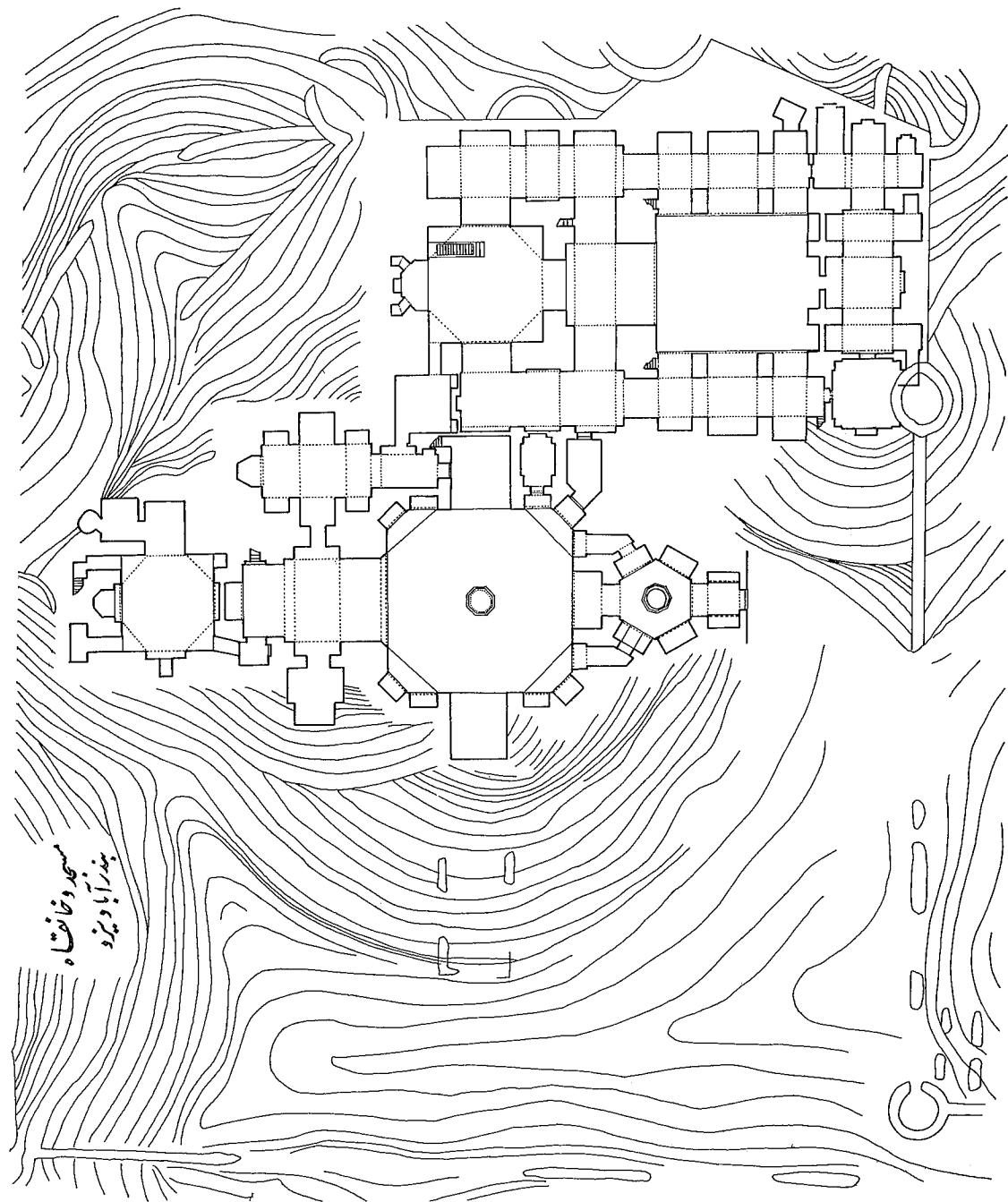


Fig. 4. — Bundarābād, plan of complex (after Afšār, with modifications).

replacement of this with an arabesque pattern on the side of the minbar furthest away from the *mīhrāb*, the two sides are the same. One of the smaller stars also has an inscription, the *šahāda* in square Kufic. The elements which link these larger stars are perhaps

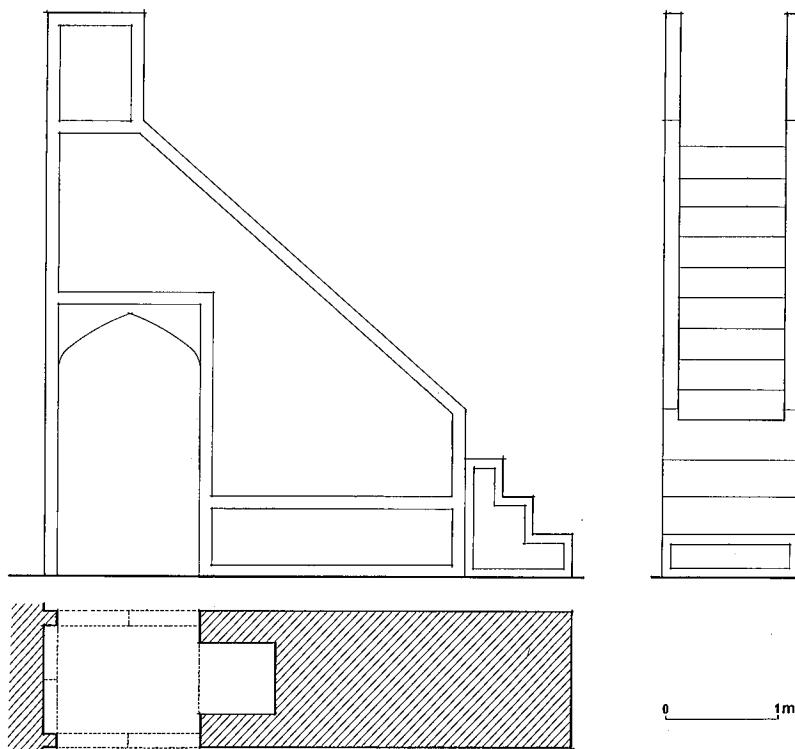


Fig. 5. — Bundarābād, complex : plan and elevation of minbar.

the most successful of the whole series. They are composed of strips of light-blue tiles outlined in black in the form of interlocking key-shaped elements. The small white stars at their points of conjunction orbit in perfect harmony around their larger counterparts.

The spandrels of the arch at the rear of the minbar together with a rectangular panel above it are decorated differently. The spandrels have a floral arabesque comparable to the large stars, while the panel above has a spidery form of square Kufic with interlacing stems. It is surprising that the width of this panel is much less than the arch below. Compared to the Kāšān minbar (Fig. 7), where they are both of equal width, its proportions seem unduly small.

A dado of light-blue hexagonal tiles runs along the base. At the front they make up the first three steps, and the border here is of reciprocal black and white triangles (Pl. XXXIX, B). This is different from the border which runs around all other parts of

the minbar, one of white cartouches and light-blue stars alternating on a dark-blue ground. This raises the question of whether or not the first three steps are contemporary with the rest of the minbar. It is impossible to see whether there is a break in bond here since the point at which they join has unfortunately, like several other parts of the minbar, suffered from repairs and is now plastered over. As the examples of Kāšān and Ḥiżšāh show, however, one would normally expect the borders of the minbar to be of the same design as that used elsewhere in the sanctuary (cf. Pls. XLI, A; XXXVII, A). This is a matter of some importance since, as we shall see, the dado with the border of black and white triangles may be dated by reference to a stone *mihrāb* in the domed mausoleum of the complex.

THE COMPLEX

At this juncture a brief discussion of the complex as a whole is called for, in order to provide a chronological framework.

The fame of Bundarābād as a religious centre is due to Ṣayḥ Taqī al-Dīn Dādā Muḥammad, a Sufi who founded numerous *ḥānaqāhs* in Bundarābād and the surrounding towns at the end of the seventh/thirteenth century⁽¹⁾. Upon his death in Šawwāl 700 / June-July 1301 he was buried « in the dome chamber behind the mosque of the *ḥānaqāh* » of Bundarābād⁽²⁾. A disciple, Qādī Šihāb al-Dīn, removed his body to a *ḥānaqāh* which Ṣayḥ Dādā had founded in a suburb of Yazd, and in 720/1320-1 built a lofty *maqbara* (tomb), *dargāh* (portal) and *sābāt* (arcade) at the site⁽³⁾. Ṣayḥ Dādā's four sons were also renowned for their piety, and the eldest, Maḥmūd Šāh, was buried in the dome chamber at Bundarābād after his death⁽⁴⁾. A great number of properties were made waqf to the *mazār* of Ṣayḥ Dādā and to the *ḥānaqāhs* which he had founded in Bundarābād and other towns so that their income was reckoned to be 800,000 Tabrizī *šāhīs* in 1080/1669-70⁽⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁾ The following information is condensed from Ča'far b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Ča'fari, *Tārīh-i Yazd*, ed. Īraq Afšār (Tehran, 1343/1965), pp. 134-40 and Kātib, *Tārīh-i Čadid-i Yazd*, pp. 158-63.

⁽²⁾ Kātib, *Tārīh-i Čadid-i Yazd*, p. 162 : *dar gunbad pušt-i masjid-i ḥānaqāh*.

⁽³⁾ Ča'farī, *Tārīh-i Yazd*, p. 138; Kātib, *Tārīh-i Čadid-i Yazd*, p. 162, where it says that a *suffa* and *dārgāh* were built. This is probably to be equated with the dome chamber in which the tomb of the Ṣayḥ is to be found at present. On this see Īraq Afšār, *Yādgārhā-yi Yazd*, II (Tehran,

1354/1975), Monument no. 120, pp. 350-7. The site was also patronised by a daughter of the Muzaffarid Sultan Mu'bāriz al-Dīn Muḥammad who in 786/1384-5 erected a madrasa, portal, living quarters (*hānahā*) and a *chahār suffa* (four *ayvān* structure) beside the *mazār* as well as a *chahār suffa* opposite the *mazār* : Kātib, *loc. cit.*

⁽⁴⁾ Ča'farī, *op. cit.*, pp. 136, 140.

⁽⁵⁾ Muḥammad Mufid Mustawfi Bāfqī, *Āmī'i-Mufidī*, III, p. 585. The *šāhī* was equal to fifty *dīnārs* : B. Fragner, « Social and Economic Affairs », *CHI*, VI, p. 562.

The oldest part of the complex seems to be the funerary dome chamber in which Sultān Maḥmūd was buried, together with other descendants and disciples of Šayh Dādā. Although the tombstone of Sultān Maḥmūd has been removed, six others remain with dates ranging from 766-897/1363-1491. The dome chamber has a zone of transition of three tiers of stalactites and a *mihrāb* with a stalactite semi-dome (Pl. XL). The relatively large proportions of these stalactites make them unlikely to be later than the fourteenth century⁽¹⁾. However, set in the tiled dado of the *mihrāb* is a carved marble panel which is dated 878/1473-4. The tiled dado covers the edge of the panel and so cannot be earlier than 878; the two are almost certainly contemporaneous. This dado shares the border of black and white reciprocal triangles which is found throughout most of the mosque, although it is more elaborate in that the light-blue hexagonal tiles are here outlined in dark-blue. It seems that at this date the axial entrance to this dome chamber was also walled up, since it has a dado of exactly the same kind, with a superb mosaic-faience vertical climbing arabesque panel in the centre⁽²⁾. The colours and design of this panel are very similar to those which adorn the large stars on the minbar.

It was mentioned above that Šayh Dādā was first buried in the dome chamber of the mosque of the *hānaqāh*; presumably this is the same dome chamber in which his son Sultān Maḥmūd was buried. When used as a mosque it would obviously need to have communicated with the *ayyān* outside it. If another large mosque were built adjoining the *hānaqāh*, however, this would no longer apply, and the dome chamber could function solely as a *mazār*, a place of pilgrimage and private prayer rather than one for all of the community.

In keeping with this hypothesis it could be suggested that the mosque in which the minbar is found is contemporary with the installation of the dado and marble *mihrāb* of 878/1473-4, although it is also possible that 878 H. merely represents a *terminus ante quem* for the mosque. One peculiar feature of the mosque, the way in which the recess of the *mihrāb* is disguised by the tiled dado (Pl. XXXIX, B), suggests two building periods, or at least a change of plan in the course of erection. The architecture of the mosque is in general similar to several fifteenth century examples in the Yazd area. The squinch-net zone of transition (Pl. XXXIX, A), for instance, is like those of the mosques of Pīr Ḥusayn Dāmḡānī (822/1419-20) and Mīr Čaqmāq (841/1437-8) in Yazd and those of the *gāmi*'s of nearby Taft (873-889/1468-1484) and Bafrūiyya (c. 866/1461-2)⁽³⁾. One

⁽¹⁾ Close parallels are provided by the sanctuary dome chambers of the Masgīd-i Čāmi' of Haftādūr (Afšār, *Yādgārhā*, I, pp. 50-52) and that of Kūhpāya (see Pl. XLII, C).

⁽²⁾ Afšār, *Yādgāhā*, I, Pl. on p. 506.

⁽³⁾ For these see Afšār, *Yādgār*, II, monuments No. 33, 48 and *idem*, *Yādgār*, I, monuments No. 246 and 55, respectively.

unusual feature, the incorporation of mosaic-faience star-shaped panels into a plaster stalactite vault (Pl. XXXIX, A)⁽¹⁾, has a parallel in the *šabistān* (winter prayer hall) of the Masğid-i Sar-i Rik in Yazd⁽²⁾.

Although it is therefore not certain that the minbar is contemporary with the repair works carried out in the funerary dome chamber in 878/1473-4, the stylistic parallels to the mosque in which it is located suggest that it is not likely to be more than several decades earlier.

KAŠĀN, MASĞID-I MAYDĀN

This minbar is the finest of the series (Fig. 7), although its fame has been overshadowed by the former presence of a superb lustre *mīhrāb* within the same dome chamber⁽³⁾. The minbar was first mentioned by Schroeder⁽⁴⁾ and subsequently given a brief, disparaging, and partially erroneous notice in the *Survey*⁽⁵⁾.

DESCRIPTION

It differs from the others in that it rests on a plinth formed of light-blue hexagonal tiles bordered with a narrow black and white strip above and below (Pl. XLI, A). This is exactly the same as the dado of the sanctuary dome chamber, showing that the remodelling of this part of the mosque and the erection of the minbar were undertaken simultaneously. Above this area the whole of the minbar is decorated in mosaic-faience. Its front has been truncated so that the design of the main triangle has been severed. This is partially disguised by the continuation of the plinth on the front — clearly a later restoration, as the borders do not match up with those on the sides.

⁽¹⁾ *A Survey of Persian Art from Prehistoric Times to the Present*, ed. A.U. Pope and P. Ackerman (London and New York, 1939) (henceforth *Survey*), Pl. 538 B, wrongly labelled as Abrandābād.

⁽²⁾ Afšār, *Yādgār*, II, Pl. 34/5. This part of the mosque is probably to be equated with one of the *gāmā'atḥānas* which was repaired after a flood in 860/1455-6: Kātib, *op. cit.*, p. 117. This wonderful combination of the two media finds its loveliest expression in a Safavid portal to the Shrine of Šāh Ni'matallāh Vali at Māhān (Pl. XLIII, D).

⁽³⁾ This is dated 623/1226 and was seen *in situ* by Jane Dieulafoy in the nineteenth century (*La Perse, la Chaldee et la Susiane* (Paris, 1887), p. 206). It is now in the Staatliche Museen in Berlin (*Survey*, Pl. 704).

⁽⁴⁾ « Preliminary Note on Work in Persia and Afghanistan », *Bulletin of the American Institute for Persian Art and Archaeology* IV/3 (1936), p. 130.

⁽⁵⁾ Pp. 1163, 1330. The mistaken dating was subsequently repeated by L. Golombek, *The Timurid Shrine at Gazur Gah* (Toronto, 1969), p. 74, « S ».

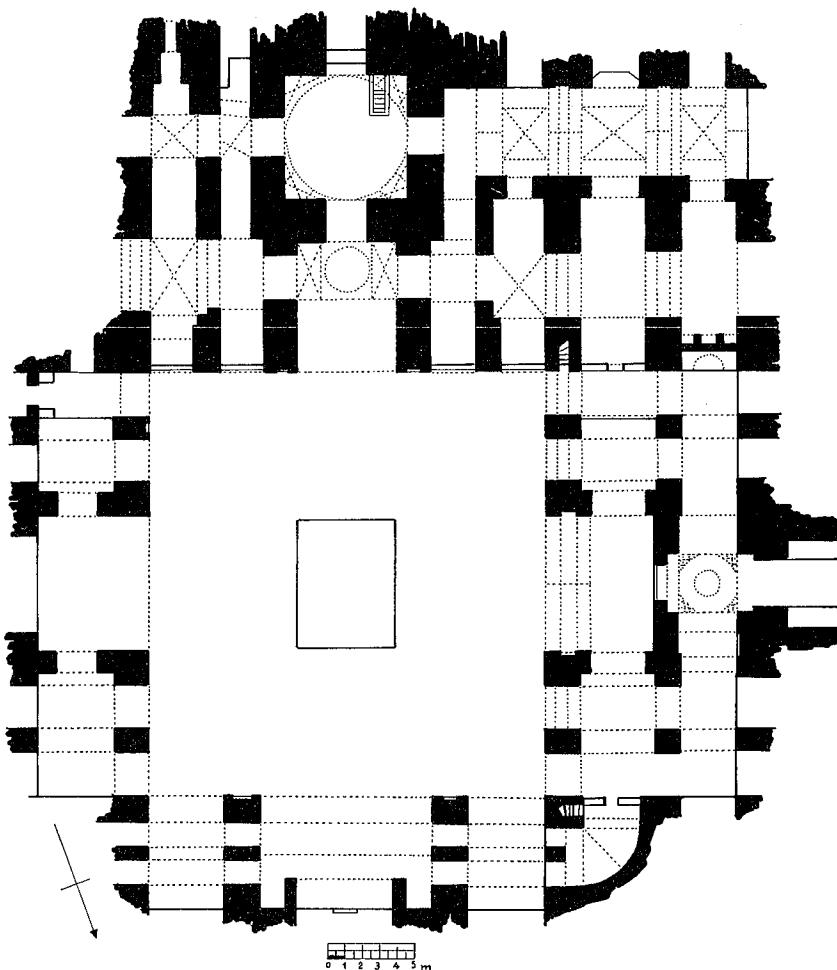


Fig. 6. — Kāšān, Mas̄gid-i Maydān : plan (after *Survey*).

The main triangle has an extremely involved angular interlacing strapwork pattern of eight- and twelve-pointed stars with rosettes at their centres (Pl. XLI, A). Two of these rosettes towards the top left of the field are filled with inscriptions as follows :

أغنى يا غاث المستغشين on the upper :

Forgive me, O Forgiver of those seeking forgiveness

عمل حمل کاشی تراش on the lower :

the work of Haydār the tile cutter

The balustrade is composed of hexagons inset with openwork rosettes.

The area to the left of the triangle is divided into three main fields : a lower arch, a square panel with a radial arabesque and a naskhi inscription in two lines above, and an upper square panel of lozenges and pierced rosettes (Pl. XLI, B).

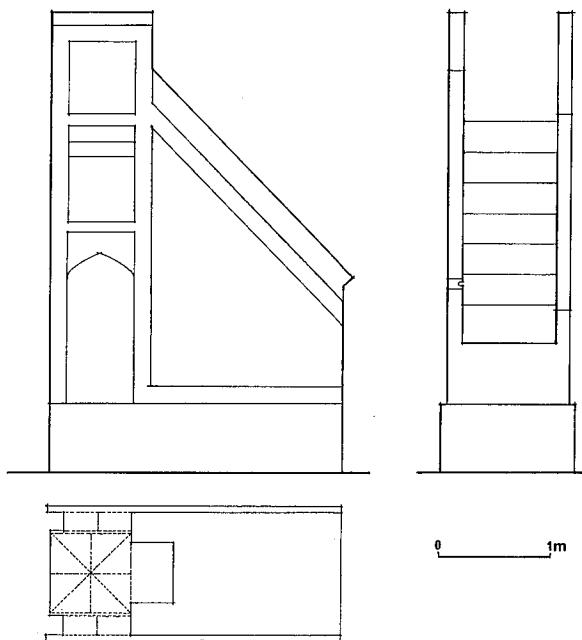


Fig. 7. — Kāshān, Masjid-i Maydān : plan and elevations of minbar.

The lozenges contain the following in square Kufic :

in the center, in amber : الحمد لله ، *Praise to God*

in the four surrounding the center : سبحان الله : *Praise to God*

in the two side triangles : الله *Allāh*

in the four corners : fragments which could be read as 'Alī or *Allāh*.

The two lines of naskhi are as follows :

في ايام دولة السلطان الاعظم والحاقدان الافخم الاكرم
غياش الدنيا والدين سلطان أبو سعيد كوركان خلد الله ملكه وسلطانه

In the days of the government of the most mighty Sultān and most magnificent and generous Hāqān Ḥiyāt al-Dunyā wal-Dīn Sultān Abū Sa'īd Gūrgān may God preserve his Kingship and Sultanate.

In the square panel below, each of four cartouches has « *Muhammad* » in Kufic.

The greatest surprise, however, comes when the other side of the minbar is viewed. We have already seen that allowances were made in Bandarābād for the « blind » side of the minbar by omitting one inscription, but here the composition is quite different from the *mihrāb* side (Pls. XLII, A-B). While the basic layout of the triangle is the same, a very different impression is created by the great simplification of the colours and of the detailing of the design. White has been totally omitted and amber is only found on the rosettes at the centre of the stars. The difference between the two sides is even more marked on the panels above the arch (Pl. XLII, B), for here there is not only the reduction of colours and detail but a radically different design with a row of reciprocal fleur-de-lys on a base of hexagonal tiles above the spandrel of the arch topped by an interlace of dodecagons.

It is not difficult to understand the reason for this dichotomy — the oblique angles from which Pls. XLII, A-B were taken was necessary because of the extremely cramped viewings space on this side. The Timurid work was constrained by the dimensions of the pre-existing dome chamber. Because of this the minbar could not be placed immediately to the side of the pre-existing Il-Hanid *mihrāb* since the latter was set within a large recess in the *qibla* wall. What is surprising is that the minbar is one of the very few examples of Islamic art where considerations of viewing angle were taken into account, predilection for symmetry usually overriding them.

Although it is true, as Pope asserted ⁽¹⁾, that the quality of the glaze on the pieces of tile is below that of the finest work in the fifteenth century Hurasan or Isfahan, it is still far above average, and indeed is the finest of the minbars in this series. In terms of design, not least in the differing patterns of the two sides, it shows a clarity which places it in the forefront of architectural invention.

Tilework of a similar quality is found not only on the dado, but also on the grilles above the three axial entrances and on the upper windows of the dome chamber. A fine arabesque panel and triangular underglaze-painted tile on the dado at the rear of the *qibla* *ayvān* (Pl. XLIII, B) shows that this was also part of the Timurid restoration.

What of the date of the minbar? A number of dates are associated with the mosque in the ninth/fifteenth century. The date which has been associated with the minbar previously ⁽²⁾, 868/1463-4, is found on the main entrance portal, and records the completion of unspecified works in the reign of Čahānshāh the Turkman Sultān and his wife

⁽¹⁾ *Survey*, p. 1330. — ⁽²⁾ See n. 5, p. 142 above.

by one 'Imād al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Šīrvānī⁽¹⁾. The same patrons are mentioned in a *farmān* (edict) of the following year which is also located on the main portal⁽²⁾. A panel of mosaic-faience on a pier in the west corner of the mosque displays two couplets in Persian as a *waqf* of one Quṭb al-Dīn b. Šams al-Dīn Firūzābādī-yi Maybūd-i Yazd, with a date in figures that could be read either as 867 or 897⁽³⁾.

One might be tempted at first to associate this minbar with some lustre tiles in the name of Sultan Abū Sa'īd commemorating the erection of an unspecified building ('imāra) in 860/1455-6⁽⁴⁾, but Kāshān and the whole of 'Irāq-i 'Ağam had been under Qara Quyunlu rule since 856/1452⁽⁵⁾. These lustre tiles are assumed, on good grounds, to have been made in Kāshān, but while it is quite possible that the Turkman governor of the town would have been happy for the town potteries to fill an export order, it is inconceivable that he would have permitted a prayer for the extension of Abū Sa'īd's Sultānāt (such as that which is found on the minbar) to appear on a local building. As Abū Sa'īd at this time was ruling over Transoxiana — his conquest of Ḫurasān was not until 861/1457⁽⁶⁾ — it is equally unlikely that the tiles could have been destined for a building other than in Transoxiana⁽⁷⁾.

It is clear that the minbar and the accompanying restoration of the sanctuary dome chamber of the Masğid-i Maydān must be assigned to a time when Abū Sa'īd had control over 'Irāq-i 'Ağam. There is only one period when this was the case. On the death of Čahānshāh Qara Quyunlu on 14 Rabi' II 872 / 11 November 1467 Abū Sa'īd hastily drew up plans for the conquest of Western Iran. Within a few months his army was on the

⁽¹⁾ Hasan Narāqī, *Ājār-i tārihi-yi šaristānhā-yi Kāshān va Naṭanz* (Tehran, 1348/1969), p. 211. I have been unable to find any further references to 'Imād al-Dīn in the sources.

⁽²⁾ *Ibid.*, pp. 220-1.

⁽³⁾ The former is the suggestion of Golombok (see n. 5, p. 142 above), the latter that of Narāqī, *op. cit.*, p. 206, with illustration. The tilework is chipped at this point; either reading is possible.

⁽⁴⁾ O. Watson, *Persian Lustre Ware* (London, 1985), p. 160, Pls. 129-30; *idem*, « Persian Lustre Ware from the 14th to the 19th Centuries », *Le monde iranien et l'Islam* III (1975), pp. 69-70. See also the references in his *Persian Lustre Ware*, p. 160, n. 6.

⁽⁵⁾ H.R. Roemer, « The Türkmen Dynasties », *CHI*, VI, p. 164.

⁽⁶⁾ For the most convenient summaries of his reign see J. Aubin, « Abū Sa'īd », *EI*², pp. 147-8 and H.R. Roemer, *CHI*, VI, pp. 111-18.

⁽⁷⁾ We have no information on any structures which were erected by Abū Sa'īd in Transoxiana. None of the (admittedly few) buildings known to have been erected by him in Herat has survived, while the one building enterprise from his reign which has survived is not mentioned by any of the sources. For this structure, the Čār-i Karuḥ, see B. O'Kane, *Timurid Architecture in Khurasān* (Costa Mesa, 1987), Cat. No. 31.

move and several of his amirs had been sent into Kirmān, Yazd, and the major cities of 'Irāq-i 'Ağam and Fārs to wrest control from the Turkman governors⁽¹⁾. Their arrival there was apparently welcomed as a relief from the oppressive rule of the former Turkman overlords⁽²⁾. It might have been thought that this was simply a move to obtain whatever booty was available to finance his ill-fated campaign against the Aq Quyunlu Sultān Üzün Hasan, but in the event the lapse of almost a year before Abū Sa'īd's death on 22 Rağab 873 / 5 February 1469 seems to have left enough time for his governor to initiate major repair works at the Masjid-i Maydān in Kāshān. There is certainly no other period in which this could have been undertaken in Abū Sa'īd's name.

KŪHPĀYA, MASĞID-I ĞĀMI'

The town of Kūhpāya is situated 70 km east of Isfahan, on the main road to Nā'īn. According to the only study of the mosque, that of Maxime Siroux⁽³⁾, it has a complicated building history. The earliest part seems to be the sanctuary dome chamber, where the unusually thick walls and indications of an arched entrance on each of its four sides are cited as evidence that the original structure was pre-Islamic.

The decoration of the interior of this dome chamber is, however, indubitably later. On the basis of the lustre tile which is set in the *mihrāb* and its underglaze companion at the top of the minbar, Siroux assumed that the restoration of the dome chamber, including the minbar, was to be dated 735/1334-5. Recently, however, Oliver Watson has shown that the number for the hundreds on these tiles must be read as nine⁽⁴⁾. He also published the inscriptions on the tiles, showing that they commemorated the donation of the minbar as *waqf* by one Iskandar b. Šams al-Dīn b. Iskandar in Muḥarram 935 / September 1528 and Ramaḍān 935 / May 1529⁽⁵⁾.

Siroux and Godard could certainly be forgiven for assuming that the minbar (Fig. 8) was fourteenth century. The lobed plaster blind arches of the dome chamber (Pl. XLII, C),

⁽¹⁾ Roemer, *CHI*, VI, pp. 115-6; 'Abd al-Razzāq Samarqandī, *Maṭla' al-Sa'dayn*, ed. Muḥammad Shafī (Lahore, 1360-8/1941-9), p. 1327.

⁽²⁾ Hasan Rūmlū, *Aḥsan al-tavāriḥ*, ed. 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Navā'i (Tehran, 1348/1969), p. 471.

⁽³⁾ «Kouh-Payeh. La mosquée djum'a et quelques monuments du bourg et de ses environs», *Annales Islamologiques* VI (1966), pp. 137-156.

The minbar was also illustrated by Wilber, *op. cit.*, Pl. 190, who had not visited the building, but referred to a communication of André Godard which stated that the minbar was dated 735-1335 and that the mosque was erected prior to that date: *ibid.*, p. 181.

⁽⁴⁾ *Persian Lustre Ware*, p. 73.

⁽⁵⁾ *Persian Lustre Ware*, pp. 73-4, Pls. IV, XII.

as Siroux remarked, can be paralleled by those of the *Masjid-i Bābā 'Abdallāh* at *Nā'īn*⁽¹⁾ (700-737/1300-1337) (Pl. XLII, D); the large stalactites of the zone of transition by the mausoleum of *Hvāḡa Sa'd* in Isfahan⁽²⁾, and while the stucco of the *mihrāb* is of a more idiosyncratic provincial nature, it has certainly more in common with fourteenth than with twelfth century examples.

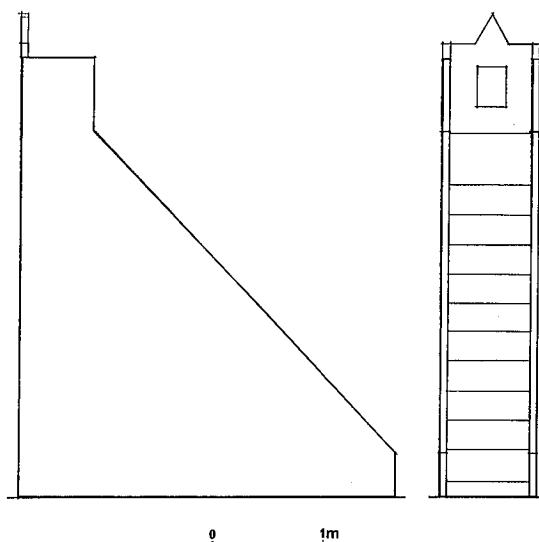


Fig. 8. — Kūhpāya, *Masjid-i Ġāmi'* : plan and elevation of minbar.

What could be more natural, then, than to expect that the minbar would be of the same date as the *Il-Hanid* restoration of the come chamber? This impression is heightened by the tilework of the minbar itself (Pl. XLII, C).

The design of repeated hexagons is the simplest of the whole group. The colours used are restricted to white and light- and dark-blue, precisely those which were common in the early fourteenth century. Only its tiled stairs and large underglaze-painted tile could claim to be features which set it above the earlier examples. It is unlikely, however, that the style of the minbar was a deliberate archaism. Considering the proximity of Varzana to Kūhpāya (c. 40 km), the surprise is not that Iskandar b. Šams al-Dīn was

⁽¹⁾ See Wilber, *op. cit.*, p. 128. The purported photograph of the monument, Pl. 41, is in fact one of the *Madrasa-yi Husayniyya* in Yazd (726/1325-6) : cf. Afšār, *Yādgārhā*, II, pp. 369-71,

plate on p. 1125.

⁽²⁾ Wilber, *op. cit.*, Pl. 204. Cf. also the *Masjid-i Ġāmi'* of *Haftādur* : n. 1, p. 141 above.

inspired to donate a tiled minbar, but that it was not in a more costly technique. Although he was prepared to order a commemorative tile from Kāšān, the difficulties or expense of designing and especially installing one in mosaic-faience of the complexity of Varzana ruled this technique out of the question. However, it would have been a relatively simple matter for local masons, unskilled in tilework, to construct a base and revet it with the large pieces of tile which were actually used.

MINBARS AND MATERIALS

Given the great facility of Iranian tileworkers, and the scarcity of wood in Iran, why is it that so few minbars of this type are known? The most obvious feature which distinguishes them from their wooden counterparts is their solidity. Could this have represented a drawback in any way?

In the first centuries of Islam portability was likely to have been a desirable feature. This is because the *ḥuṭba*, which at that time was still largely of a political character, seems frequently or even usually to have been given from the minbar which was placed directly in front of the *mihrāb*⁽¹⁾. Although no minbars have survived from the Umayyad period, the literary sources indicate that they were small wooden structures which would have been easy to move from the space in which they were kept when not in use to the *mihrāb*, for use in *ḥuṭbas*⁽²⁾. They could double as, or even be synonymous with, the ruler's throne, as emphasised by the fact that Mu'āwiya took his with him on a journey to Mecca⁽³⁾.

It should be remembered, of course, that in early Islam *ḥuṭbas* were performed not only at noon prayer on Fridays, but at any time when a pronouncement of a political nature needed to be made by the Prophet or by the later Umayyad rulers or governors⁽⁴⁾. The ease with which the minbar could be moved from its normal resting place at one side of the *mihrāb* was thus clearly of importance.

By the end of the Umayyad period, however, when the religious aspects of the *ḥuṭba* had superseded its secular importance, the tradition had probably already arisen of a large non-portable minbar⁽⁵⁾. The earliest surviving example, that of Qayrawān, is already of the standard type in later centuries, too large to be moved from its permanent

⁽¹⁾ J. Sauvaget, *La mosquée omeyyade de Médine* (Paris, 1947), p. 148; J. Schacht, « An Unknown Type of Minbar and its Historical Significance », *Ars Orientalis* II (1957), p. 171.

⁽²⁾ Sauvaget, *op. cit.*, pp. 139, 143, Schacht, *loc.*

cit., J. Pedersen, « Masđjid », *EI*¹, p. 340.

⁽³⁾ Pedersen, *loc. cit.*

⁽⁴⁾ Pedersen, *op. cit.*, p. 348; Sauvaget, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-7.

⁽⁵⁾ Schacht, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

place to one side of the *mīhrāb*⁽¹⁾. If later minbars were not by virtue of their size and weight themselves confirmation of their fixity one can turn to medieval illustrations of the *Maqāmāt*, several stories of which depict sermons in mosques. When the setting is sufficiently detailed to show both the niche of the *mīhrāb* and the sermon taking place on the minbar it is clear that the minbar is to one side of the *mīhrāb*⁽²⁾.

The artistry and use of tilework by the Safavids was arguably no less than that of their predecessors, so one must seek other reasons why the tiled minbar failed to gain popularity. This is equally true of Anatolia where tiling on minbars appears tentatively only in the later Ottoman period in combination with stone and never completely ousts it.

Stone, in fact, is the material which was used most frequently after wood for building minbars. Its desirability in fifteenth century Iran is shown by Ḥvāndamīr's account of Mīr 'Alī Šīr's restorations of the Herat Friday Mosque at the end of the fifteenth century A.D. The old wooden minbar of the mosque was in bad repair so it was decided to replace it with a marble one. After an extensive search a suitable block was found in the province of Ḥvāf and purchased at a great price. It was transported to Herat and carved into a minbar of unequalled beauty by the stonemason Šams al-Dīn⁽³⁾. Although this has not survived, a good idea of its appearance may be obtained from the depiction of an emerald minbar in the Herat *Mi'rāğ Nāma* of 840/1346⁽⁴⁾. This has floral designs on it which greatly resemble those on the stone *kursī* of the Mosque of Bibi Hanum in Samarcand⁽⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁾ K.A.C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* (Oxford, 1932-40) II, pp. 317-19, Pls. 89-90.

⁽²⁾ O. Grabar, *The Illustrations of the Maqamat* (Chicago and London, 1984), Ills. 2A1, 5E12, 5F1, 5F3, 5F9. This consistency makes it less likely that the tiled wall behind the minbar in Ill. 4D12 might be, as Grabar suggests (p. 64), part of a *mīhrāb*. It is sometimes possible for practice to change, however. Although the *ḥuṭba* in contemporary Cairo is given from the minbar, it may be the dictates of the medium which has resulted in televised sermons there being given from a portable wooden throne set up in front of the *mīhrāb*, despite the availability of the adjacent minbar.

⁽³⁾ *Hulāṣat al-Āḥbār*, ed. Gūyā I'timādī (Kabul,

1345/1966), p. 12. The nine steps of the minbar mentioned by L. Golombek, « The Resilience of the Friday Mosque : The Case of Herat », *Muqarnas* I (1983), p. 98, are rather those of the great minbar in the sky which the sun ascends every morning — a metaphor of Ḥvāndamīr for the sun's course in the heavens. It may not be coincidental that the number is the same as that of the minbar of Muḥammad as enlarged by Mu'āwiya which was preserved in the mosque at Medina : Sauvaget, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-8.

⁽⁴⁾ M.-R. Séguy, *The Miraculous Journey of Mahomet* (New York, 1977), Pl. 26.

⁽⁵⁾ The most convenient illustration is M. Rogers, *The Spread of Islam* (Oxford 1976), p. 21.

Despite the relative abundance of wood in Anatolia the most prestigious Ottoman mosques there have minbars of stone or stone and tiles. This popularity of stone was achieved despite a saying ascribed to the Prophet in which he forbade his companions to erect stone minbars⁽¹⁾, although the existence of this *hadiṭ* suggests that stone minbars were known from an early age.

All in all it is surprising, with wood so difficult to obtain in many parts of the Islamic world, that more use was not made of humbler materials such as brick⁽²⁾ or of brick revetted with tiles as in the above examples. The reason why this was so is possibly to be explained by the preservation of the original minbar of the Prophet in the Mosque at Medina until its destruction by fire in 654/1256⁽³⁾. The original consisting of two steps leading to a seat was raised six steps by Mu‘āwiya, both parts being of wood except for a low socle of marble which was probably also part of Mu‘āwiya’s work⁽⁴⁾. As a measure of the veneration which was accorded to it one can cite the accounts of several pilgrims. In Nāṣir-i Ḫusraw’s description of the mosque at Medina he concentrates on the Prophet’s tomb and minbar, quoting a *hadiṭ* which says that the space between the two is one of the gardens of Paradise⁽⁵⁾. Ibn Jubayr relates how, despite the presence of a wooden board nailed across its top step (the seat of Muḥammad), men would insert their hands beneath it to acquire blessings⁽⁶⁾. Even though the minbar had been destroyed some seventy years before Ibn Battūṭa’s visit in 726/1326 he still devotes considerable space to relation of the legends concerning it⁽⁷⁾. Other sources relate how litigants had to swear their oaths of innocence at the minbar and how, like the Ka‘bah, it was covered with a *kiswa* by the time of ‘Uṭmān’s reign⁽⁸⁾. Given that the Prophet’s minbar was of wood and that it was visited by Muslims from all over the Dār al-Islām every year at the time of the *hājj*, it is hardly surprising that wooden minbars were the norm. Its

⁽¹⁾ I. Goldziher, *Muslims Studies* tr. C.R. Barber and S.M. Stern vol. 2 (London, 1971), p. 50, n. 6; Pedersen, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

⁽²⁾ For a possible early example in the Tārīhāna Mosque in Dāmgān see R. Hillenbrand, « The Mosque in the Medieval Islamic World », *Architecture in Continuity. Building in the Islamic World Today. The Aga Khan Award for Architecture* ed. S. Cantacuzino (New York, 1985), p. 37.

⁽³⁾ Sauvaget, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁽⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁽⁵⁾ *Safar Nāma*, ed. and tr. C. Schefer as *Sefer Nameh. Relation du voyage de Nassiri Khosrau* (Paris, 1881), text, p. 57; tr., p. 164.

⁽⁶⁾ R.C. Broadhurst, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr* (London, 1951), p. 200.

⁽⁷⁾ C. Defrémery and B.R. Sanguinetti, ed. and tr., *Voyages d’Ibn Batoutah* (Paris 1893), pp. 275-6.

⁽⁸⁾ See Ghazi Izzedin Bisheh, *The Mosque of the Prophet at Madīnah throughout the First-Century A.H., with Special Emphasis on the Umayyad Mosque*, Ph.D., University of Michigan, p. 275.

marble socle, however, may have encouraged the use of stone as an alternative building material.

A different factor may have encouraged the retention of a portable minbar. From the late eleventh century onwards, when the dome chamber of Malikshāh was inserted in the *qibla* wall of the Isfahan Ġāmi', it became more common in Iranian architecture for the space in front of the *qibla* wall to be broken up in various ways. The addition of a *qibla* dome chamber to the hypostyle plan, usually in combination with *ayvāns*, meant that there was no longer an uninterrupted space between the *mihrāb* and the courtyard. At times of communal prayer on Fridays, when the minbar was actually used, it could have been quite difficult for the *ḥaṭib* to make himself heard beyond the confines of the dome chamber. If the attendance was such as to overflow the dome chamber considerably, then it may have been preferable to transport the minbar into the *qibla ayvān*, nearer to the courtyard.

These factors may explain readily why the corpus of tiled minbars is such a limited one. It is possible to go further and ask why was the attempt made at all? The phenomenon can be related to the increasing use of tiles and mosaic-faience for revetment in general⁽¹⁾, and perhaps in particular to their use on cenotaphs. The latter is a subject which would itself merit a separate investigation, especially when so much of the comparative Iranian material has yet to be published⁽²⁾. It is possible to point to one example, however, which has a design closely resembling those of the fifteenth century minbars. This is found in the above-mentioned Masjid-i Bābā 'Abdallāh in Nā'īn⁽³⁾. The dome chamber contains numerous cenotaphs, most of them decorated uniquely in stucco, and all apparently of the early fourteenth century (Pl. XLII, D). One in front of the *mihrāb*, however, is decorated with white and light- and dark-blue mosaic-faience, in a pattern of eight- and twelve-pointed stars (Pl. XLIII, C). It could well be contemporary with the foundation of the building⁽⁴⁾. The more numerous examples from Anatolia and

⁽¹⁾ On this see Hillenbrand, « Glazed Tilework ».

⁽²⁾ For some examples see Afšār, *Yādgārhā*, I, pp. 142-5 (mosaic-faience cenotaphs dated 848 H. and 878 H. in the Masjid-i Rik, Mağumird); *idem*, *Yādhārhā*, II, pl. on p. 1118 (mosaic-faience cenotaph in tomb of Šayh Dād, dated 854 H.). An example illustrated by Narāqi, *Kāšān*, p. 184, in the Imāmzāda Darb-i Zanġir in Kāšān, is claimed to be dated 696 H., but the wide range of colours employed, including amber and black,

preclude a date earlier than the late eighth century H., while the style suggests a ninth century H. date. Unfortunately it was not possible at the time of my visit to examine the upper part of the cenotaph where the date is allegedly situated.

⁽³⁾ See n. 1, p. 148 above.

⁽⁴⁾ The minbar of Kūhpāya, however, is a salutary warning to adhering too slavishly to these dating criteria.

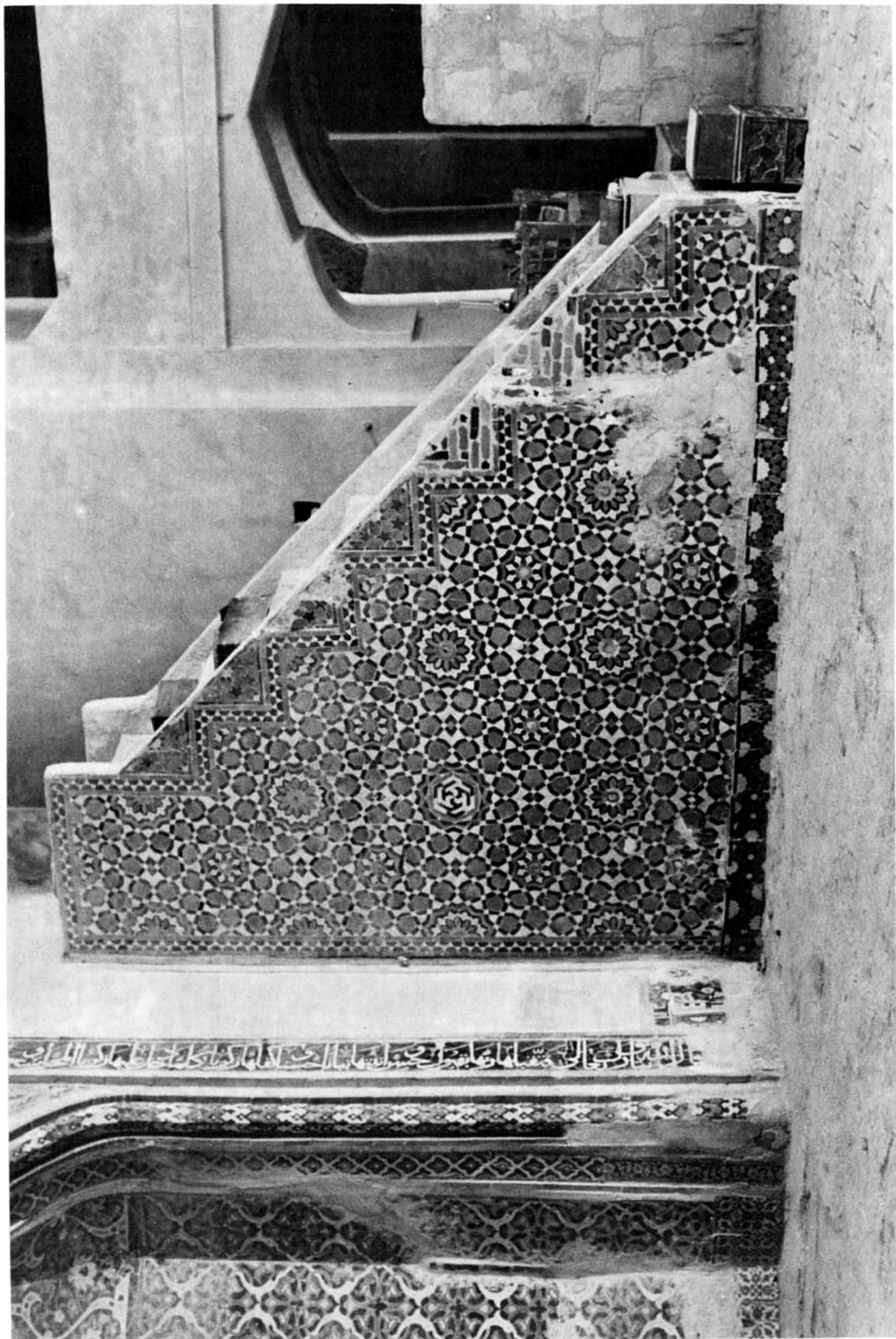
Transoxiana⁽¹⁾ may well have encouraged the development of tiled cenotaphs in Iran⁽²⁾, and may have led to the thought of revetting other surfaces with tiles. This in turn could have inspired the corpus of minbars presented in this paper⁽³⁾.

⁽¹⁾ The most convenient reference to those of Anatolia is M. Meinecke, *Fayencedekorationen seldschukischer Sakralbauten in Kleinasiens*, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Istanbuler Mitteilungen, Beiheft 13. (Tübingen, 1976), I, pp. 183-7, under «Kenotaphe». Reference to many of the examples from Transoxiana is found in a publication of a cenotaph with related tiled revetment in a town near Herat: B. O'Kane, «The Tomb of Muhammad Ġāzī at Fūsānğ», *Annales Islamologiques* XXI (1985), pp. 113-28.

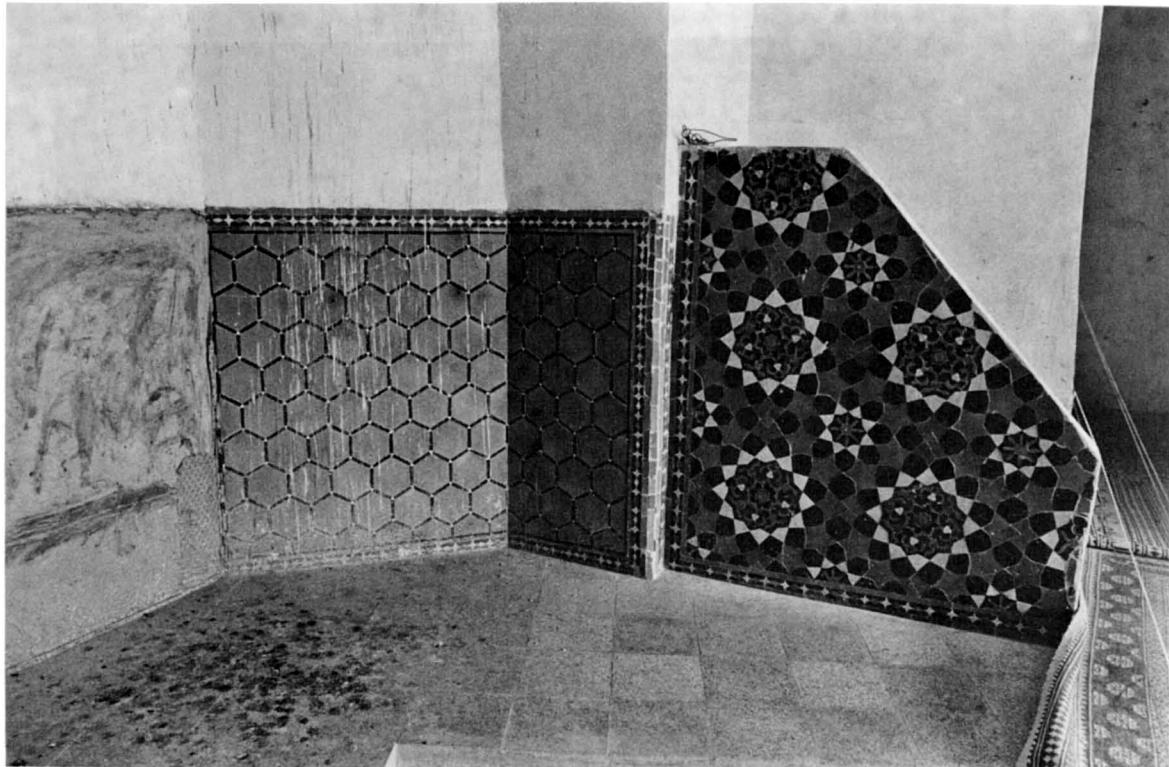
⁽²⁾ See n. 2, p. 152 above.

⁽³⁾ The only other examples of tiled minbars known to me are two late examples from Khiva. These are found in the summer mosque of the

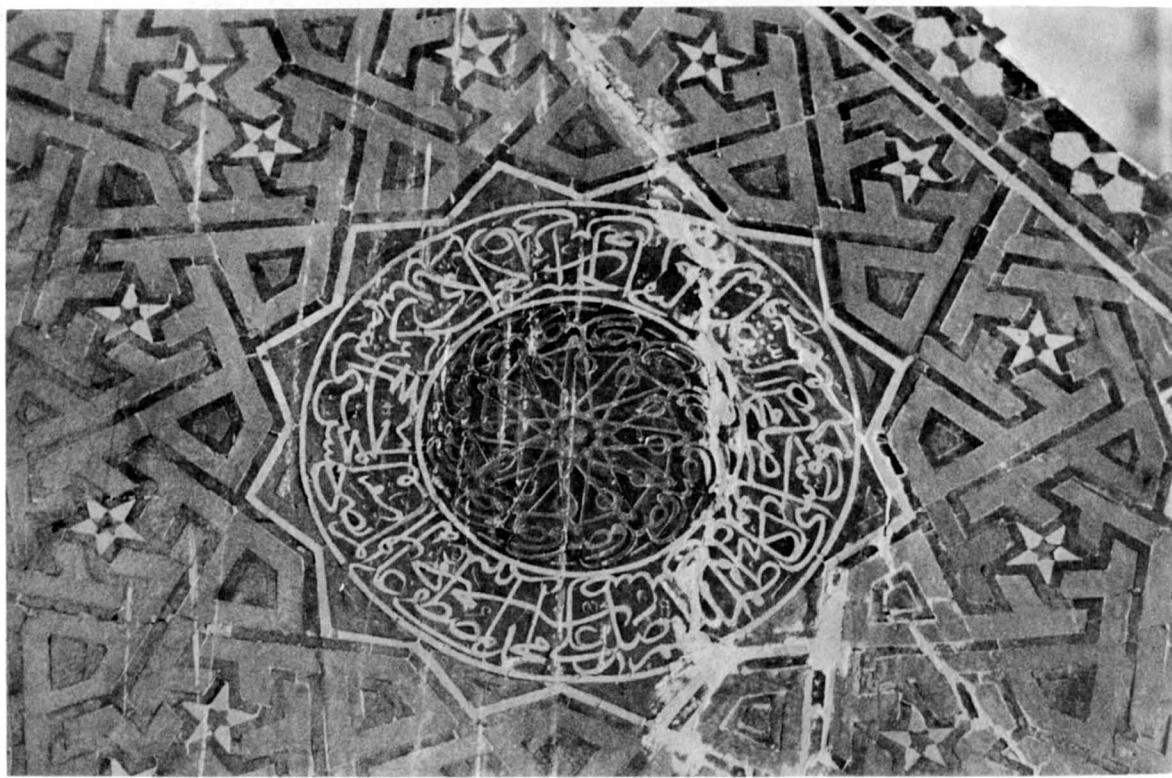
Old Ark (datable to the 1820's) (L. Mankovskaya, *Khiva* (Tashkent, 1982), pl. 71), and in a photograph of an unidentified building in Khiva described as a seventeenth century *Imāmzāda*: H.R. d'Allemagne, *Du Khorassan au pays des Backhtiari* (Paris, 1911), II, Pl. opp. p. 116. The latter also may well be nineteenth century. Both minbars are low and with four steps; only a few tiles remain on the former. It may well be that there are more tiled minbars to be found in Safavid or Qajar mosques, but I doubt if they will be numerous. Those documented above are likely to remain the only examples which can coherently be related to each other as a group.



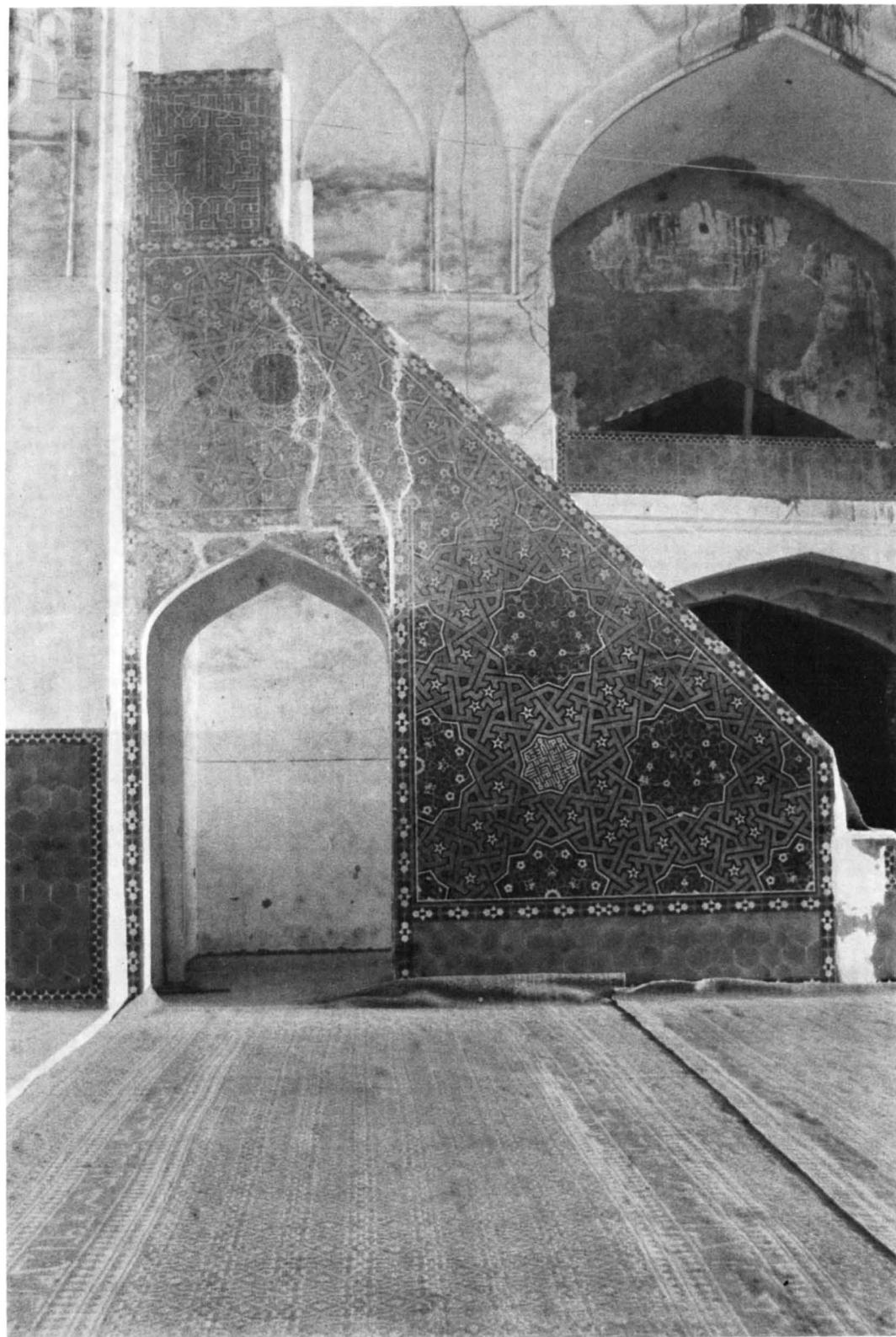
Varzana, Masjid-i Gāmī : minbar.



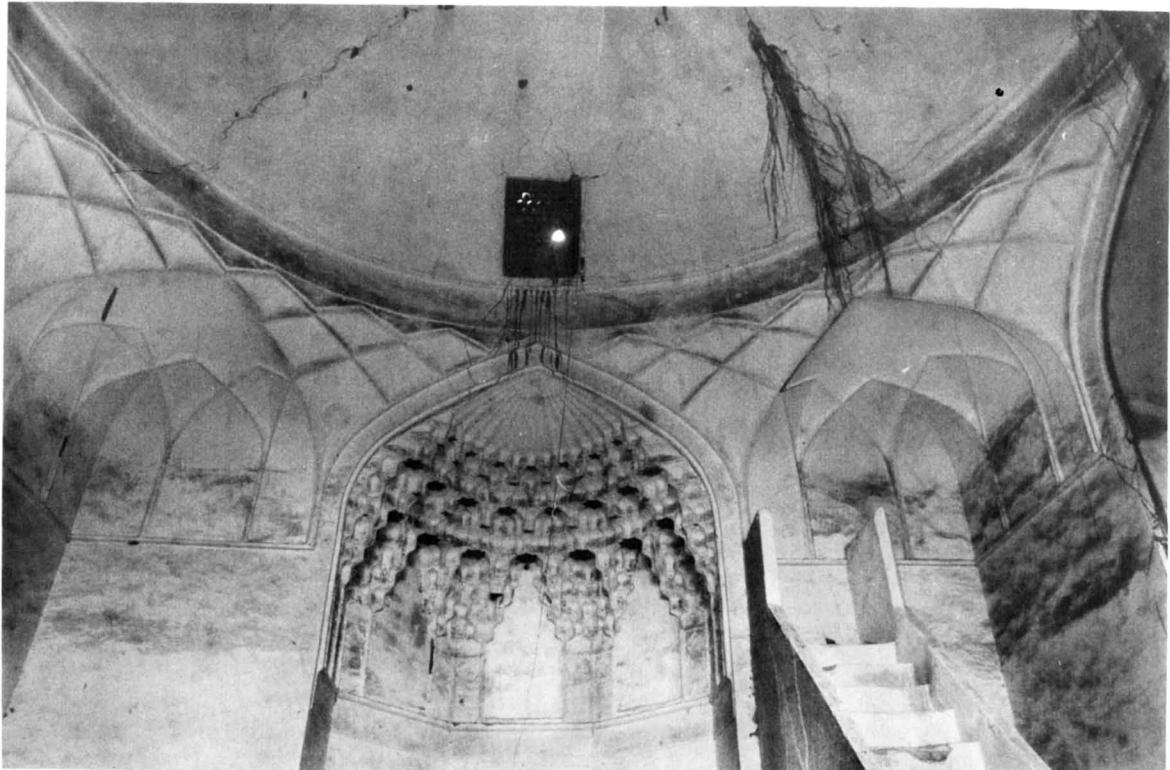
A. — Yazd, Masjid-i Čahār Manār : minbar.



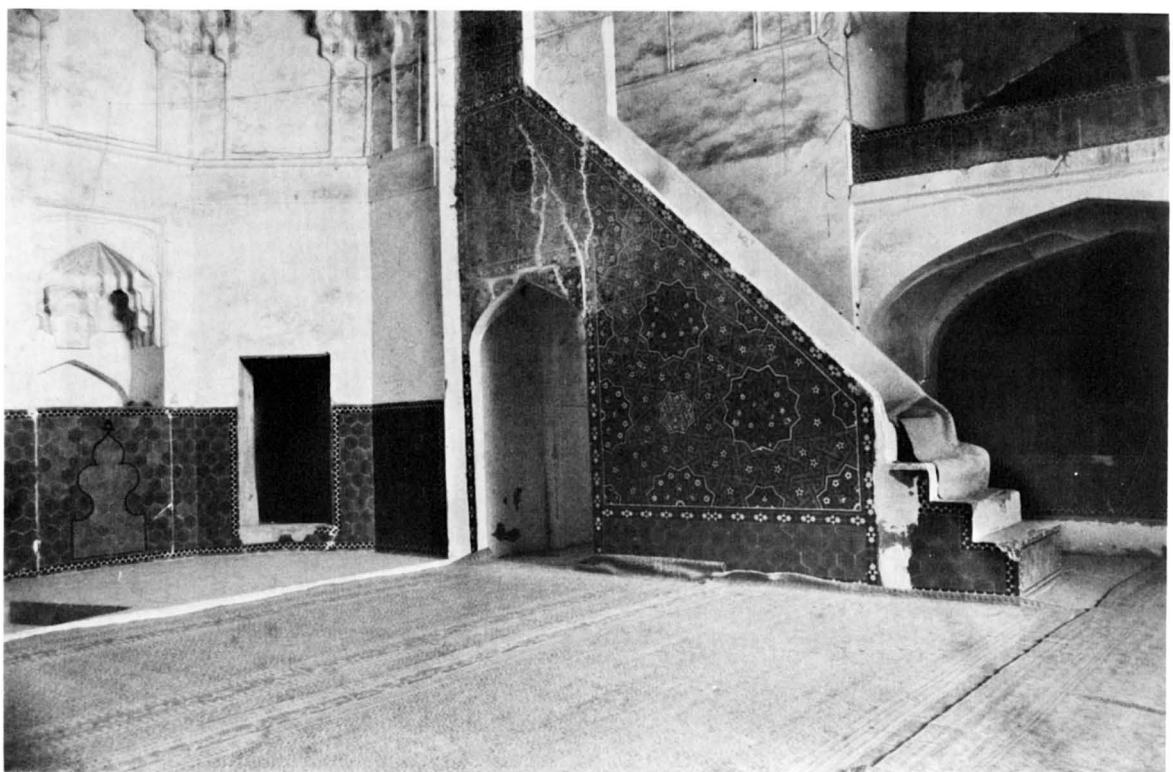
B. — Bundarābād, complex : detail of minbar of mosque.



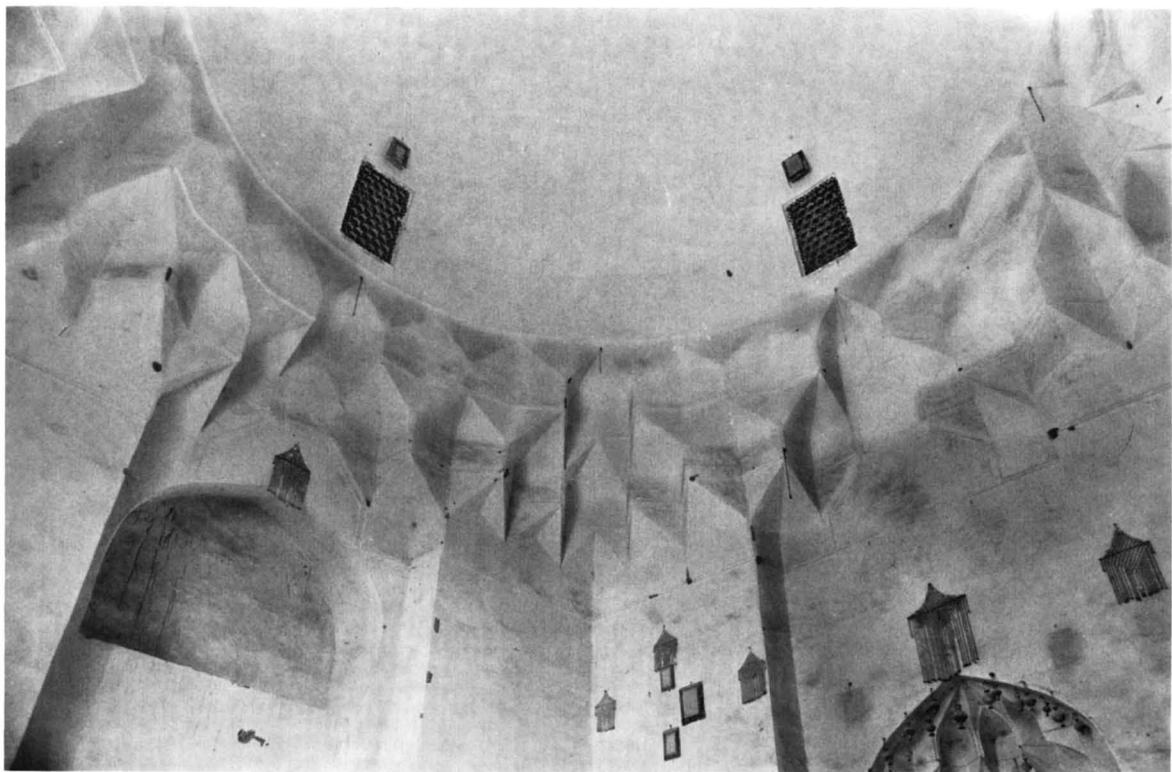
Bundarābād, complex : general view of minbar.



A. — Bundarābād, complex : dome chamber of mosque.



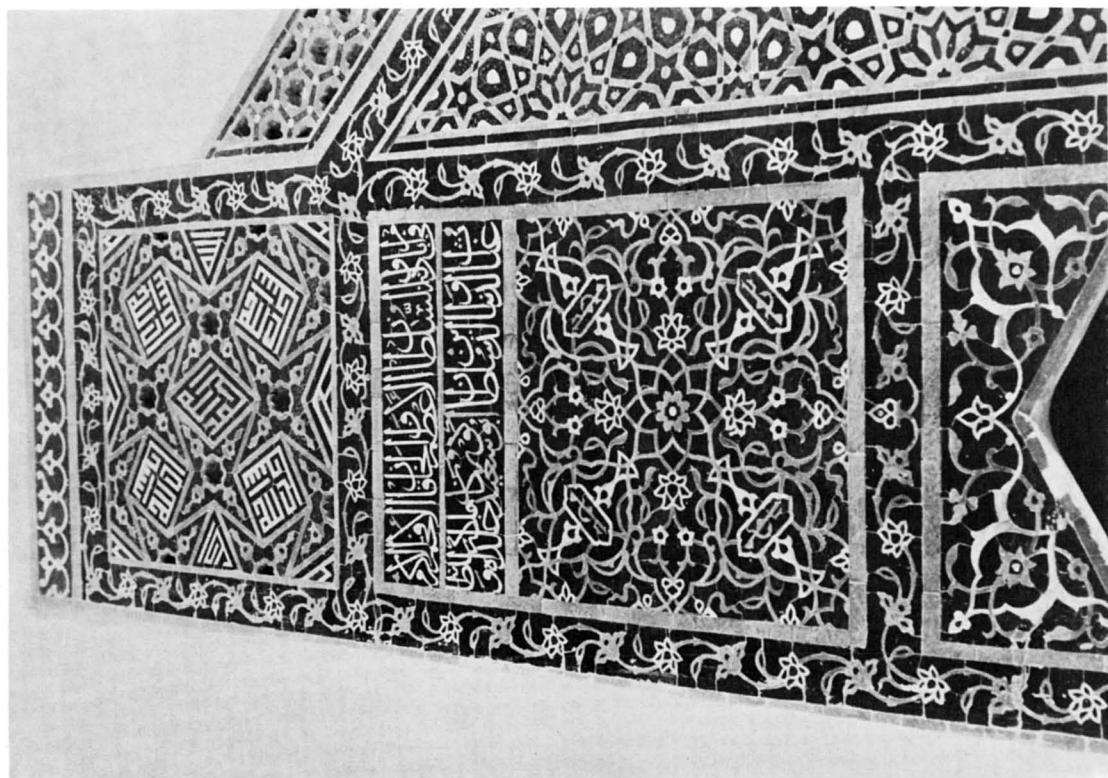
B. — Bundarābād, complex : dome chamber of mosque.



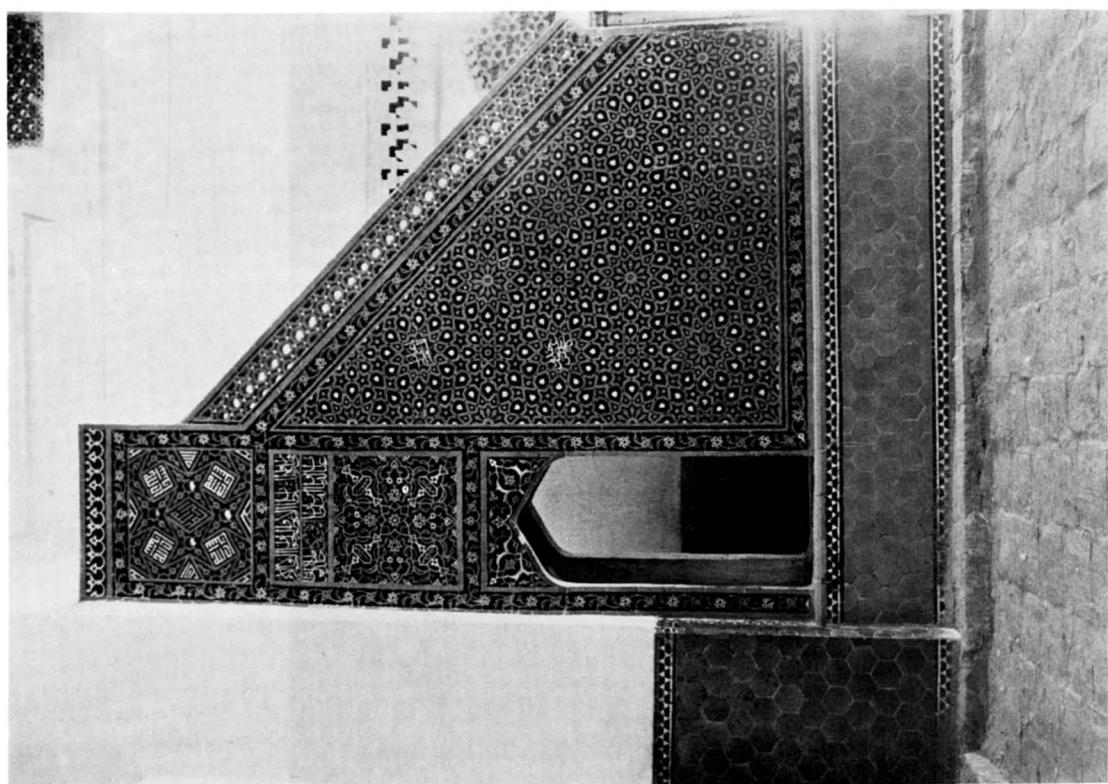
A. — Bundarābād, complex : funerary dome chamber.



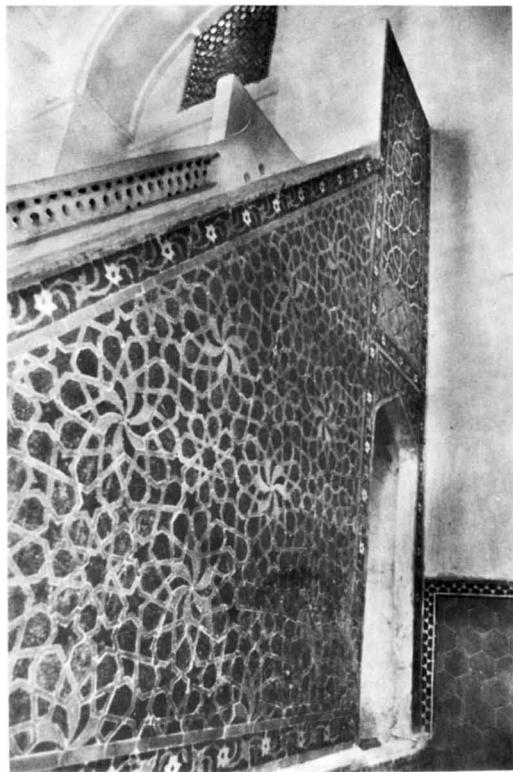
B. — Bundarābād, complex : funerary dome chamber.



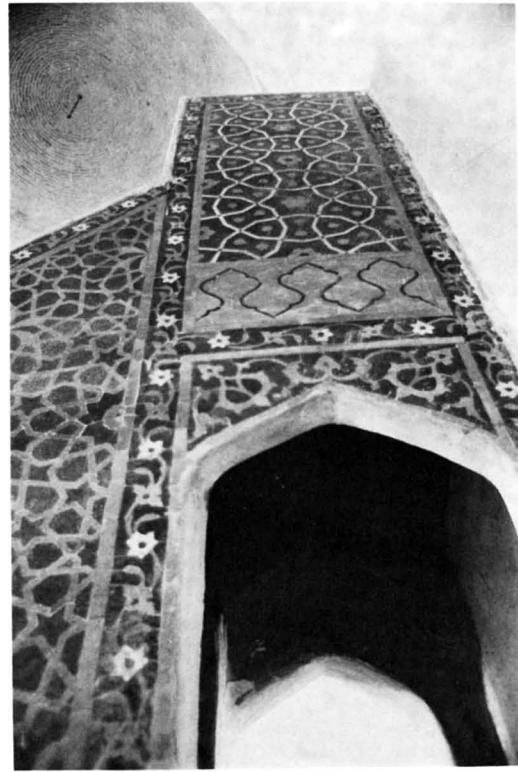
B. — Kāshān, Masjid-i Maydān : detail of minbar.



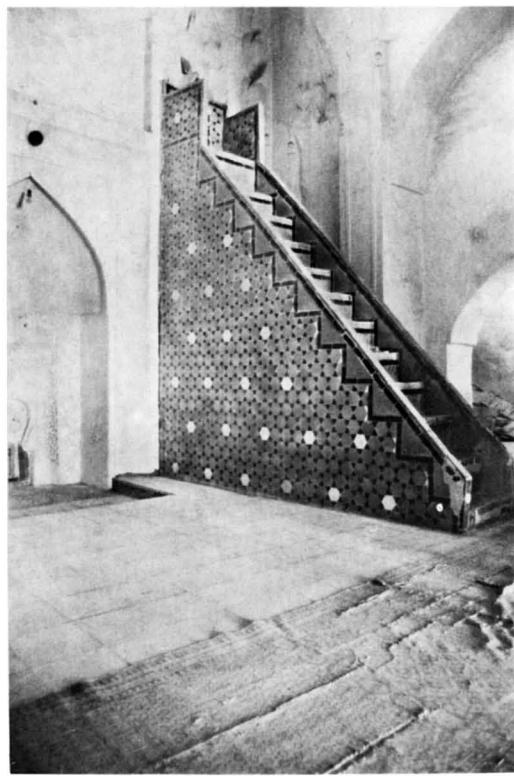
A. — Kāshān, Masjid-i Maydān : minbar.



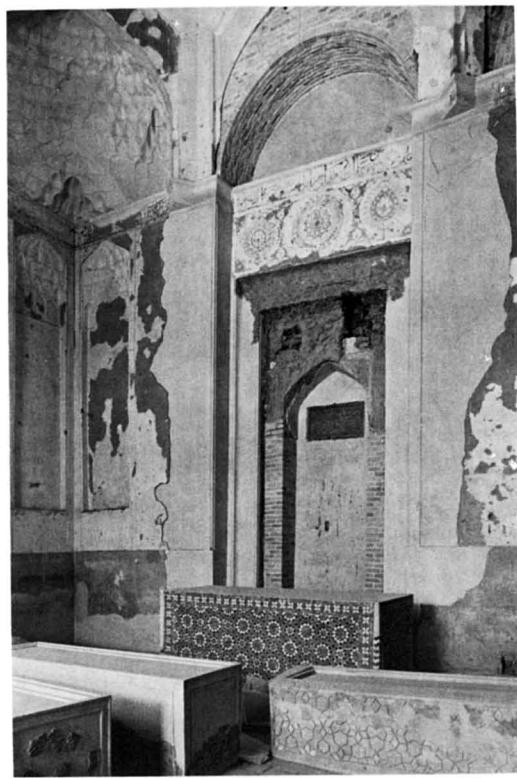
A. — Kāshān, Masjid-i Maydān : right-hand side of minbar.



B. — Kāshān, Masjid-i Maydān : detail of right-hand side of minbar.



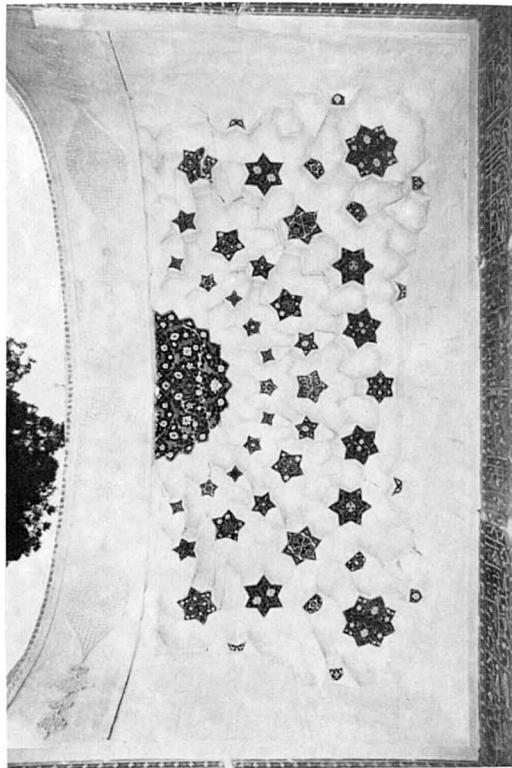
C. — Kūhpāya, Masjid-i Ġāmi' : minbar.



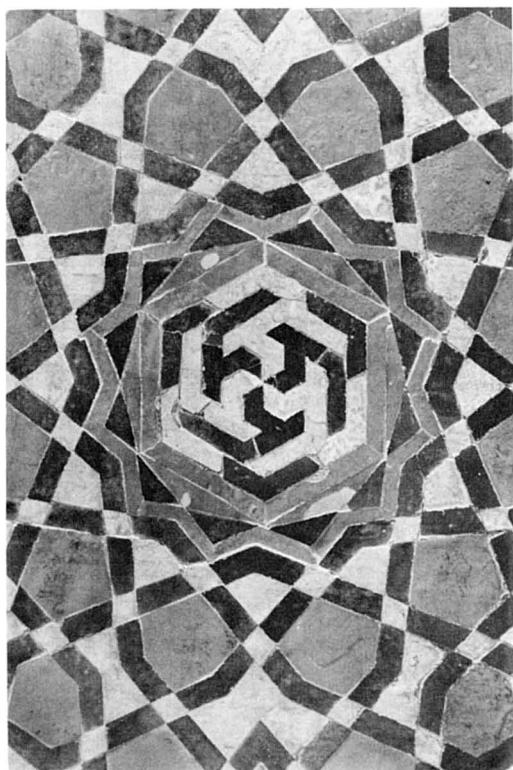
D. — Nā'in, Masjid-i Bābā 'Abdallāh : sanctuary dome chamber.



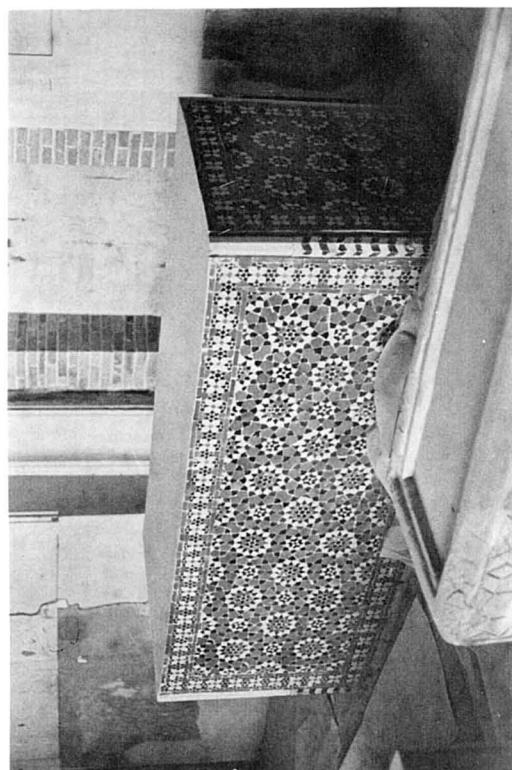
B. — Kāshān, Masjid-i Maydān : dado at rear of *qibla* *ayvān*.



D. — Māhān, Shrine of Šāh Ni'matullāh Valī : semi-dome of portal.



A. — Varzana, Masjid-i Čāmī : detail of minbar.



C. — Nā'in, Masjid-i Bābā 'Abdallāh : cenotaph.