

ARTICLE

# Saljuq Architecture in Iran: The Friday Mosque of Urmiya

Alireza Anisi 

Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tourism, Tehran, Iran (the Islamic Republic of)  
Email: [anisi61@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:anisi61@yahoo.co.uk)

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## Abstract

This study details the Masjid-i Jami' of Urmiya, the earliest surviving mosque in the West Azerbaijan province in Iran. The building suggests the expansion of constructing Saljuq-domed mosques outside central Iran in the mid-sixth/twelfth century, embellished with a stunning Ilkhanid *mihrah* (prayer niche) in the seventh/thirteenth century. This study provides as much information as possible for recognizing the structure's main features. While the mosque is comprised of various parts, this paper mainly focuses on its dome chamber as the earliest surviving structure. Several new inscriptions and drawings in the mosque's decoration are published for the first time in this article.

**Keywords:** Saljuq architecture; Urmiya; mosque; Ilkhanid; *mihrah*

## Introduction

In the 1970s, Robert Hillenbrand published a series of articles entitled “Saljuq Monuments,” which had a leading role in distinguishing the architecture of the period and paved the way for further studies on Saljuq buildings.<sup>1</sup> However, this type of article and similar, particularly from Western scholars, appeared less frequently after Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1357/1979. This study aims to fill this gap, continuing previous research by discussing other Saljuq mosques in Azerbaijan.<sup>2</sup> The first monument of the series is the Masjid-i Jami' (Friday mosque) of Urmiya (or Urmia).<sup>3</sup> The populated and developed city is now the capital of West Azerbaijan Province, in the northwest of Iran. In the literature, the mosque has only been briefly discussed by previous scholars. Thus, through a detailed study, this article aims to describe the monument and its main architectural features, revealing its position in the history of Saljuq mosque architecture.

Wilson was the first to describe the building, providing a drawing of the mosque's plan, sections, and north elevation.<sup>4</sup> Due to two similar passageways, to both the west and east of the dome chamber, Wilson claimed that a vaulted passageway (like a fire temple) runs once around the dome chamber on all four sides. This scheme corresponds with local stories, which claim the mosque was originally a fire temple in the Sasanian time and converted into a mosque in the Islamic period.<sup>5</sup> In *Survey of Persian Art*, Pope also briefly discusses

<sup>1</sup> The full list of his articles are as below: Hillenbrand, “Saljuq Monuments in Iran: I”, 64–77; Hillenbrand, “Saljuq Monuments in Iran II, The Pir' Mausoleum at Takistan”, 45–55. Hillenbrand, “Saljuq Monuments in Iran: III, The domed Masjid-i Gami' at Sugas”, 47–79. Hillenbrand, “Saljuq Monuments in Iran: IV. The mosques of Nushabad”, 265–77. Hillenbrand, “Saljuq Monuments in Iran: V. The Imamzada Nur, Gurgan”, 55–76.

<sup>2</sup> The Azerbaijan region of Iran was divided into two provinces, West and East, in 1316/1938.

<sup>3</sup> The name of city was changed to Reza'ya in 1305/1926 and then returned to its original in 1358/1979.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, “The Masjid-i Jami' of Riza'ya,” 38–42.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, “The Masjid-i Jami' of Riza'ya,” 42.

the mosque; however, he mainly repeats Wilson's material without adding any new information. Pope, like Wilson, states that the wall and piers of the dome chamber are remarkably thick, and there are signs of a corridor surrounding it. These elements strongly suggest the mosque was an ancient fire temple, although the evidence is uncertain.<sup>6</sup> The unusual thickness of the walls may suggest a traditional measure of precaution in this high-risk zone, protecting the structure against earthquakes.

Godard classified the mosque as an isolated pavilion or *kiosk*-domed mosque similar to those of Yazd, Simnan, etc.<sup>7</sup> He also published a photo of the building's transition zone.<sup>8</sup> Wilber, in his account on the building, wrote that the mosque's dome chamber is generally a Saljuq monument, and its massive construction linked more to the northwest type, such as Qazvin, than the articulated buildings of the Isfahan area. He also briefly described the mosque's Ilkhanid *mihrāb* (prayer niche) and gave its date of construction.<sup>9</sup> In Robert Hillenbrand's study of the Saljuq dome chambers in the northwest of Iran, he grouped the building with five other mosques with similar architectural characteristics: Ħydariya of Qazvin and the Friday mosques of Qazvin, Qirva,<sup>10</sup> Sujas, and Marand, as the "Qazvin school of Saljuq architecture."<sup>11</sup>

### Historic setting

The city of Urmiya (Urmia), 37° 32' 16.52" N, 45° 03' 07.59" E, is an ancient, multi-ethnic city, the largest in the province, and is located 17 kilometers west of Lake Urmiya, on a large fertile plain. The city's history goes back to 2000 B.C.E and the remains of the ancient settlement are scattered across the plain, which some may know as the prehistoric Kingdom of Urārtu. The area is named Parāsu, and its inhabitants immigrated south in 815 B.C.E.<sup>12</sup> The majority of Iranian and Arab geographers mention that Zoroaster, the spiritual founder of the Iranian religion of Zoroastrianism, was born in the Urmiya area.<sup>13</sup>

Baladhuari, in *Futūh al-Buldān* (third/ninth century), wrote of the ancient city and mentioned its conquer by Muslims in 20–22/640–42 and the Arabs who then built several castles there.<sup>14</sup> In the third/ninth century, Šādaqa b. Ali Rawadi rebelled against the caliphate's army and conquered the city. He chose the city of Urmiya as the center of government and ordered the construction of strong fortification around the city and a deep ditch surrounding the ramparts. By 330/941, Marzubān b. Muhammad controlled the whole of Azerbaijan, including Urmiya.<sup>15</sup>

Iṣṭakhrī, in *al-Masal va al-Mamālik* (c. 340/950), described the city as large, prosperous, located next to a sea, and with several promenades.<sup>16</sup> Ibn Ħuqal, in *Ṣurat al-Arz* (367/977), wrote that Urmiya was the largest town (in the Azerbaijan area) after Maragha. The city is pleasant and has grapevines and waters flowing in the city and its villages. Commerce is proceeding in the city, and it has plentiful corns.<sup>17</sup> The anonymous writer of *Hudu al-'Alam min al-Mashriq ilā Maghrib* (372/982) mentioned that the city was large, developed, and prosperous.<sup>18</sup> Muqaddasī, in *Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm* (375/985), described the town as attractive

<sup>6</sup> Pope and Ackerman, *Survey of Persian Art*, 1048–49.

<sup>7</sup> Godard, "Les anciennes mosques," 193.

<sup>8</sup> Godard, "Les Coupoles," 274.

<sup>9</sup> Wilber, *The Architecture of Islamic Iran: The Ilkhanid Period*, 112–13.

<sup>10</sup> Qirva in the Zanjan Province should not be mistaken with Qirva in the Kurdistan Province.

<sup>11</sup> Hillenbrand, "Saljuq dome chambers in north-west Iran," 98.

<sup>12</sup> Dihqān, *Sarzamīn-i Zartusht Režai'ya*, 330.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>14</sup> Baladhuari, *The Origins of the Islamic State: Kitāb Futūh al-Buldān*, 27.

<sup>15</sup> Dihqān, *Sarzamīn-i Zartusht Režai'ya*, 339.

<sup>16</sup> Iṣṭakhrī, *al-Masal va al-Mamālik*, 155.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Ħuqal, *Safar Nāma Ibn Ħuqal Iran dar Surat al-Arz*, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Sutūda, *Ḥudūd al-'Alam min al-Mashriq ilā al-Maghrib*, 59.

and populous and indicated the mosque (*masjid*) was in the clothmakers' market (bazaar). The town also had a stronghold and a stream.<sup>19</sup>

Urmiya was a flourishing and pleasant city by the end of the sixth/twelfth century. Yāqūt Hamawī, who visited in 617/1220–21, referred to it in *M'ujam al-Buldān* as a prosperous, fruitful place with abundant orchards, fruits, and water.<sup>20</sup> During the Mongol invasion, like other parts of the region, the city was out of danger. Indeed, the early Mongol rulers selected the Azerbaijan area as their governing center in the seventh/thirteenth century because of its natural advantages, which were compatible with the Mongols' nomadic lifestyle. Thus, the cities of the region, including Urmiya, received attention during the era.

All sources confirm that Urmiya was a prosperous and important city in the medieval period. As in similar contemporary cities, it was standard to have a Friday mosque beside the bazaar. It is thus possible that a hypostyle mosque sat originally on the same site as the Urmiya Jami', and a domed structure was added later.

### Location and description

The Masjid-i Jami', 37° 33' 03.38" N, 45° 04' 33.33" E, is located in the city's old, historic core, to the southwest of Imām Khumeīnī (previously Sipa) Square, in the bazaar district. The mosque is free on all sides except to the west, which is where the city's traditional bazaar is located. Through its courtyards, the mosque is connected to a part of the bazaar, locally known as *rāsta-i sangtarāshān* (stonemason row). The area surrounding the mosque is congested due to its commercial function.

The mosque is comprised of a central, open courtyard surrounded by several structures to the south, east, and west, and an enclosing wall to the north (Fig. 1). Apart from the south side of the courtyard, where the old part of the mosque sits, the other sides suffered major destruction and underwent change in the twentieth century (see below). This paper mainly focuses on the old part, including the dome chamber and the flanking buildings.

The dome chamber (*gunbad khāna*) is approximately square and measures 10.74 m x 10.77 m. The space is enclosed by two arched openings, equal in size, on all sides except the *qibla* side (Fig. 2). This form of plan can be seen in other Saljuq dome chambers of the northwest, such as the Friday Mosque of Marand (485/1092) and Sujas (third quarter of the sixth/twelfth century).<sup>21</sup> Each opening is inside a rectangular frame. Over each doorway is a four-centered, pointed arch, which rests on two short, round engaged columns in plaster. Each of the short columns sits on an inset base, which is at a height of 1.20 m from the ground floor. From this level, a Qur'anic inscription band in *Thuluth*, 30 cm wide, surrounds the rectangle entrance frame. Due to the similar inscription styles, these adjoining bands seem to be dated to the Qajar period, possibly to the time of its renovation, around 1250/1834 (see below).

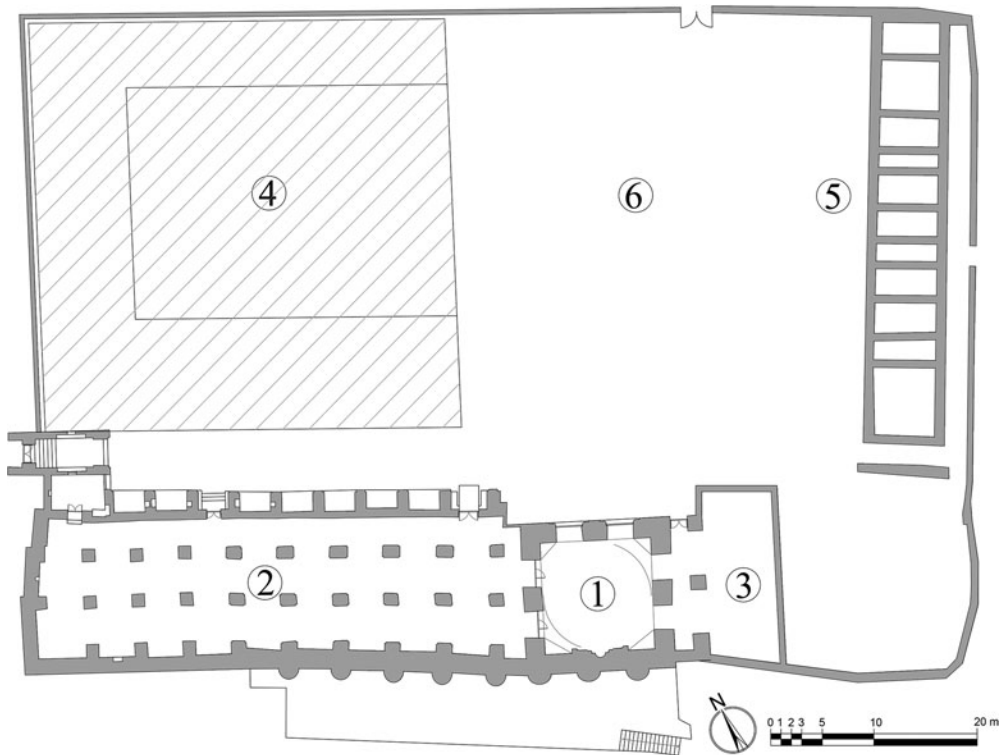
The dome chamber is flanked by two unequal *shabistāns* of stone square piers. Their width is equal to that of the dome chamber and they create a linear structure necessary to facilitating parallel rows during congregational prayer. The west wing is ten bays in length and three bays in depth (45.69 m x 15.87 m). However, the eastern one has only one bay in length and three bays in depth (3.37 m x 14.07 m). The west *shabistān*, locally known as *Chihil Sutūn* (meaning 40 piers), is covered with a series of hemispherical domes.<sup>22</sup> The walls and piers of the other *shabistāns* are of stone; however, they are both vaulted by baked brick (Fig. 3). Some pillars of the *shabistān* lean slightly. It is possible that earthquakes damaged the *shabistān* in the past. The main entrance to the building is now to the west, through the adjacent *shabistān*.

<sup>19</sup> Muqaddasī, *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions*, 333.

<sup>20</sup> Yāqūt Hamawī, *M'ujam al-Buldān*, 56.

<sup>21</sup> For the date of Marand mosque see: Anisi, Saljuq Architecture in Iran; Masjid-i Jam'of Marand, 326.

<sup>22</sup> *Chihil Sutūn* is a common name for a mosque prayer hall with numerous piers.



- |                   |                            |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1- Dome Chamber   | 4- Modern Building         |
| 2- West Shabistan | 5- New Reconstructed Cells |
| 3- East Shabistan | 6- The open Courtyard      |

**Figure 1.** General plan of the mosque

A barrel-vaulted corridor, two meters wide, is on the west and east exterior sides of the dome chamber. The corridor is flanked on each side by the dome chamber and adjacent *shabistān*. Thus, this dome chamber was likely added or constructed within part of an earlier pillared *shabistān*, the original feature of which is unclear.

The National Organization inside the west shabistan for Protecting Ancient Monuments in Iran (NOPAM) conducted an archaeological investigation in 1356/1977. This excavation revealed architectural remains (including partitions), stone pier bases, and cultural materials (e.g., copper coins, glass, and fragments of pottery) dating from the Saljuq to Qajar periods. This discovery shows that the pillared *shabistān* underwent various alterations.<sup>23</sup> However, this excavation did not yield a definitive date for the *shabistān*'s original construction. The recent excavation of the dome chamber's floor by the Iranian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts (IMCTH) in 1397/2018, revealed the remains of a stone wall, possibly dating to the pre-Islamic period, about three meters under the dome chamber's existing floor, suggesting there may not have originally been a pillared *shabistān* in this place.<sup>24</sup>

The building's exterior height, from the apex of the dome to the ground level, is 19.66 m and its inner height is 18.30 m, so the dome chamber's internal ratio of width to height is

<sup>23</sup> Hiydarī, "Guzarish-i Muqadamatī Tūs'a va Tahavūl Mi'marī va Shahr-sāzi-ya Urmiya," 501–502.

<sup>24</sup> Hājī Muhamadī, "Guzārish-i Nahāie-yi Gamānazarī-yi be Manẓūr Khūānīsh Lāyiaha-yi Kaf Gunbad Khāna-i Masjid Jami'-yi Urmiya," 133.



**Figure 2.** Dome chamber, southeast view

about 1:1.72. This conservative ratio suggests the mosque builder aimed to construct a durable structure, able to withstand natural hazards such as earthquakes. A rectangular window, measuring 1.69 m x 1.16 m and topped by a pointed trefoil arch, is positioned at the transition zone on each side of the building. Two windows, each measuring 1.50 m x 1.11 m, sit below the transition zone on every side of the dome chamber except the *mihṛāb* side. A Qur'anic inscription band in *Thuluth*, similar to that running around the below opening frames, stretches around each window. Likely, these bands date to the Qajar period.

A rectangular frame with a shouldered arch over it can be seen around each window on all sides of the dome chamber (Fig. 4). The two windows are covered by the uppermost decorative panel of the *mihṛāb*. The exterior façade of these windows on the south side of the dome chamber shows they were later blocked. It seems the two original windows over this wall were covered by the Ilkhanid *mihṛāb*, suggesting the *mihṛāb* was added to the earlier structure, which possibly dates to the Saljuq period.

The lower part of the dome chamber's exterior façade is built with stone masonry set in plaster from the ground level to the height of 4.40 m (Fig. 5). This suggests that a rough material such as stone was potentially needed to carry the low, solid masonry dome. It is worth mentioning that applying the stone on the lower level of the dome chamber was not standard in other Saljuq dome chambers in Iran. This method was customary only in the Saljuq mausolea of Azerbaijan, such as Sia Gunbad (580/1184) in Urmiya and Gunbad-i Surkh (542/1148), Gunbad Mudavar (563/1167–68), and Gunbad Kabūd (593/1196–97) in Maragha.<sup>25</sup> This construction technique was a local tradition in the Azerbaijan region.

<sup>25</sup> Notes Complémentaires Sur les Tombeaux de Maragha, 1936, 125–160.



**Figure 3.** View of western pillared *shabistān*



**Figure 4.** Dome chamber, northeast view



Figure 5. Dome chamber, north façade

The building is covered with a double-shell dome, a type in which the inner and outer shells are constructed alongside each other from the beginning; a tiny space exists between the outer and inner shells (Fig. 6).<sup>26</sup> In this type, both shells gradually separate from each other, with each finally working as an independent single shell. The closest parallel is the Friday Mosque of Ardistan (553–55/1158–60).<sup>27</sup> The dome's exterior surface was repaired on the order of Shuja'al-Dūla Afshār, the city governor, in 1287/1870–71.<sup>28</sup> At this time, the governor commissioned Ustad 'Abdul'ālī Mi'mār ('Abdul'ālī the master of architecture) to cover the dome with glazed tiles; however, these tiles gradually detached from the dome surface due to poor installation. A photograph taken by 'Alī Khān Vālī, the governor of Urmiya, around 1300/1883 and another dated 1305/1888 from the Gulistān Palace library both show the disturbing situation on the dome's outer surface.<sup>29</sup> By 1307/1929, the dome was covered with new glazed tiles, which has also been mentioned by Wilson.<sup>30</sup> Owing to the appearance of dampness on the interior surface of the dome's inner shell, its exterior surface was covered with metal panels in the 1330s/1950s.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the metal cover was removed to revive its original form. After conducting necessary repairs, the dome's outer shell was roofed with the existing baked bricks in 1351/1971–72.<sup>32</sup> The dome's profile is a low-pointed arch with a squat stilt supported by fairly massive walls. This combination creates a triple profile, which is appropriate for erecting a durable monument. A similar shape can be seen in other domed square monuments, such as Arsalān-i Jāzib (first half of the fifth/eleventh century) in Sangbast and Davazda Imām (429/1037–38) in Yazd.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The inner and outer shells are called *āhiyana* and *khūd* respectively. Pīrniyā, "Gunbad dar Mi'mari-yi Iran," 63.

<sup>27</sup> Pīrniyā, "Gunbad dar Mi'mari-yi Iran," 64–66.

<sup>28</sup> Tamadun, *Uza'-i Iran dar Jang-i Aval ya Tārikh-i Riza'ya*, 49.

<sup>29</sup> 'Alī Khān Vali 's Album, p. 20 (seq. 24). Available at [https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:6665026\\$1i](https://iif.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:6665026$1i); Gulistan Palace Library: Album 195. Photo No. 45.

<sup>30</sup> Tamadun, *Uza'-i Iran dar Jang-i Aval ya Tārikh-i Riza'ya*, 50; Wilson, "The Masjid-i Jami' of Riza'ya," 39.

<sup>31</sup> For a photo of the dome, see Kāvīyānpour, *Tārikh-i Riza'ya*, 63.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Anisi, "The Davazda Imam Mausoleum at Yazd: a re-examination," 61–62.



**Figure 6.** Dome chamber, 3d section view

The dome of the building is 10.54 m in diameter and rests on a low, 24-sided transitional zone (Fig. 7), which is 3.82 m high. The form of the squinch in the Urmiya mosque differs from the Saljuq tri-lobed squinch of central Iran.<sup>34</sup> In the latter, 8 rib vaults normally provide 8, 16, and 24-sided bases for transforming a rectangle or square shape into the circular base of the dome.<sup>35</sup> In this style, a shouldered arch spans the corners within another pointed arch frame.<sup>36</sup> However, in the Urmiya mosque, each squinch is comprised of a series of niches, which are placed over each other in three tiers. Two intersected rib arches sit on the corner and together create the three-pointed head niches, shouldered triangles in the form, beside each other. The middle one is divided into three parts with a smaller pointed niche below the middle part, spanning the corner. The second tier is comprised of two smaller, projecting pointed head niches seated over the first tier. This united combination encircles the dome and creates sufficient structural safety. A flat window frame, situated at the same height as the two tiers, fills the space between each squinch. Finally, the encircling tier is comprised of twenty-four pointed head niches placed on the top, creating a sixteen-sided base for erecting the dome (Fig. 8). In contrast to the high-pointed arch squinch in central Iran, the style of Urmiya was designed to decrease the height of the dome's transition zone to protect it against earthquakes. A similar method of construction can be seen in the Masjid-i Jami' of Marand (second half of the fifth/eleventh century),

<sup>34</sup> Hillenbrand, "Saljuq dome chambers in north-west Iran," 97.

<sup>35</sup> Godard says this type of construction was applied in all great Saljuq domes. See Godard, "Les Coupoles," 273.

<sup>36</sup> Such as the Friday mosques of Isfahan, Barsiyan, Ardistan, and Zavara.



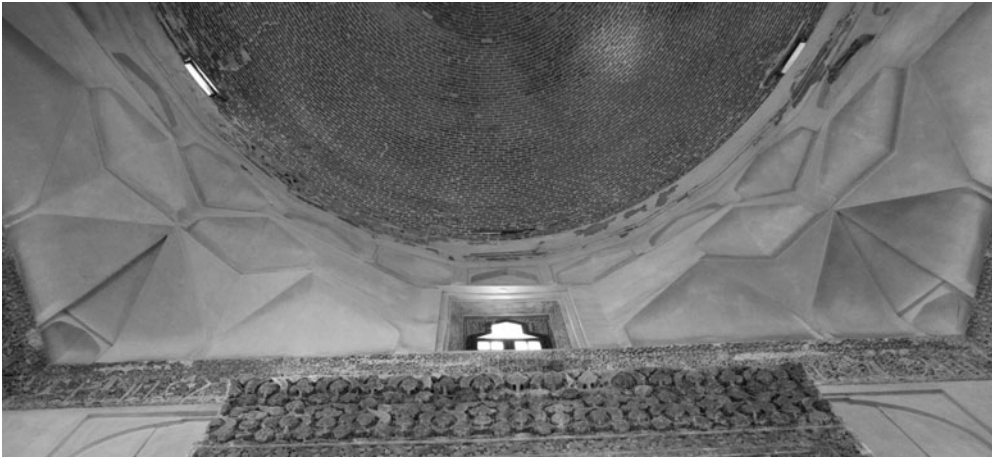


Figure 7. Dome chamber, Transition zone over the *mihrāb*

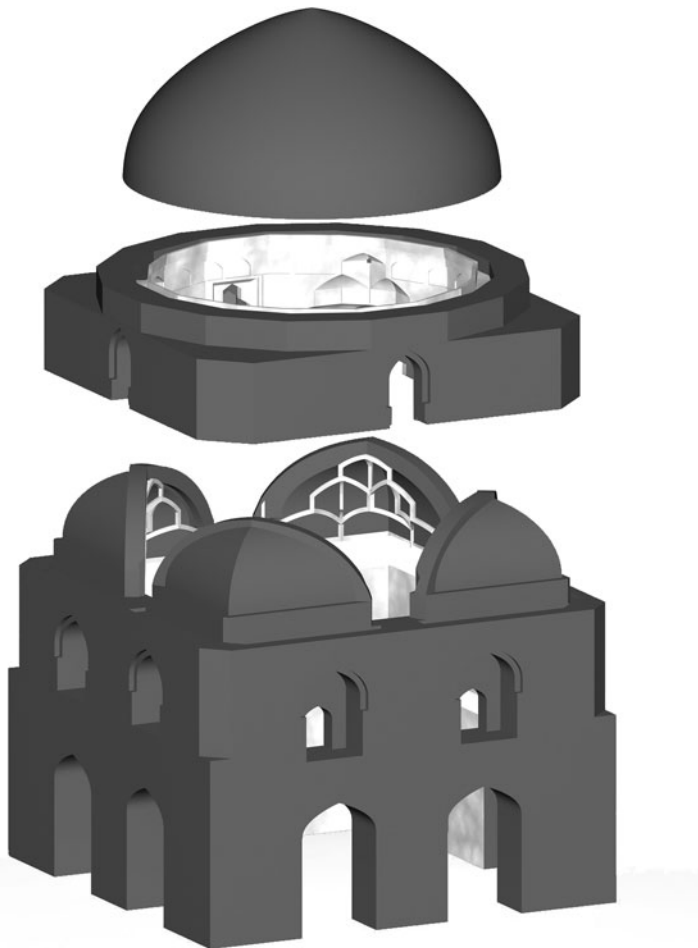


Figure 8. Dome chamber, 3D model of the construction

Gunbad-i Surkh in Maragha (542/1142), the ‘Ala’adīn Mosque in Qūniya (632–33/1235), Gök Madrasa in Sivas (669–70/1271), and Shajar al-Dūrīr mausoleum in Cairo (648/1250).<sup>37</sup>

Similar to the above Saljuq mosques in northwest Iran, there is no trace of a minaret adjacent to the Urmiya Jami‘. Contrary to central lands, it seems in the northwest, mainly due to the risk of earthquakes, the construction of a minaret was not standard.

In the Zand era (1164–1209/1751–94), a *madrassa* (theological school) was built around a large garden (the mosque’s present courtyard) adjacent to the dome chamber in 1184/1770. It seems the mosque had no dedicated courtyard, and the newly built *madrassa* was utterly independent of the mosque’s linear structure. The two structures were connected through an elaborate portal northwest of the dome chamber (see below). The courtyard façade of the west *shabistān*, in front of the dome chamber, contained a series of arcades, which were part of the previous *madrassa*. To provide direct access from the courtyard to the dome chamber, the arcades comprised of five blind niches were removed around 1350/1971. To the east of the courtyard, the cells of Zand Madrasa were replaced by some modern buildings in the 1950s. By 1960, a *husseiniya* was added to the dome chamber’s eastern exterior.<sup>38</sup>

By 1395/2016, to reconstruct the original form of the buildings around the courtyard, all modern structures adjacent to the dome chamber and east side of the courtyard were destroyed. In 1398/2018, the local office of the IMCTH in West Azerbaijan Province began the reconstruction of the cells in their original form.<sup>39</sup> To discover relics of an earlier *shabistān*, the IMCTH carried out an excavation next to the dome chamber (in the southeast of the courtyard) in 1397/2018. However, the excavation found no traces of the original *shabistān*.<sup>40</sup> All traces were likely removed during the construction of the *husseiniya* in 1340/1960. In 1368/1987, the northern and western cells of the Zand Madrasa were demolished, and the existing building, modern and large, was constructed.<sup>41</sup>

## Decoration

Inside the dome chamber, a stunning *mihṛāb* in carved plaster is the main decorative element, dominating the *qibla* side (Fig. 9). The *mihṛāb* is distinctive among the Ilkhanid samples and, therefore, worthy of detailed description.<sup>42</sup> In contrast to Saljuq *mihṛābs* of small cut bricks, the plaster *mihṛābs* became standard in the Ilkhanid period. As mentioned, the Azerbaijan area had a significant position in the early Ilkhanid era, and it is no surprise that such a *mihṛāb* appeared in Urmiya.

The earliest photo of the *mihṛāb* shows its bottom covered by tiles, which were detached in the course of restoration.<sup>43</sup> By the early years of the 1360s/1980s, the MCTHIR had removed 1.5 m of the ground floor of the dome chamber and unearthed the lower part of the *mihṛāb*. The lower part was first covered with baked brick and then redecorated with the original existing upper patterns of plaster in 1378/1999.<sup>44</sup> The *mihṛāb* is generally rectangular, measures 5.43 m wide by 8.28 m high, and projects out by 32 cm from the *qibla* wall.

<sup>37</sup> For a photo of the squinch of Masjid-i Marand, see Hillenbrand, “Saljuq Monuments in Iran: III, The domed Masgid-i Gami‘at Sugas,” Pl. II and Pl. III. For a study on Gök Madrasa in Sivas, see Blessing 2014: 104–115. For Shajar al-Dūrīr in Cairo, see Yeomans, *Art and Architecture of Islamic Cairo*, 123.

<sup>38</sup> Archive of the local office of the MCTHIR in Urmiya. For a detailed study of the ‘Ala’adīn Mosque, see Redford, “The Alâeddin Mosque in Konya Reconsidered,” 54–74.

<sup>39</sup> The construction is still in the process.

<sup>40</sup> Hājī Muhammadi, “Guzārsh-i Kavosh Fazaya-i Sharqi Mohavata-i Masjid Jami‘-i Urmiya,” 187.

<sup>41</sup> It is assumed that the modern building will be demolished and the previous Zand cells will replace them.

<sup>42</sup> Wilber mentions twenty-three plaster Ilkhanid *mihṛābs* all around Iran. See Wilber, *The Architecture of Islamic Iran: The Ilkhanid Period*, 75.

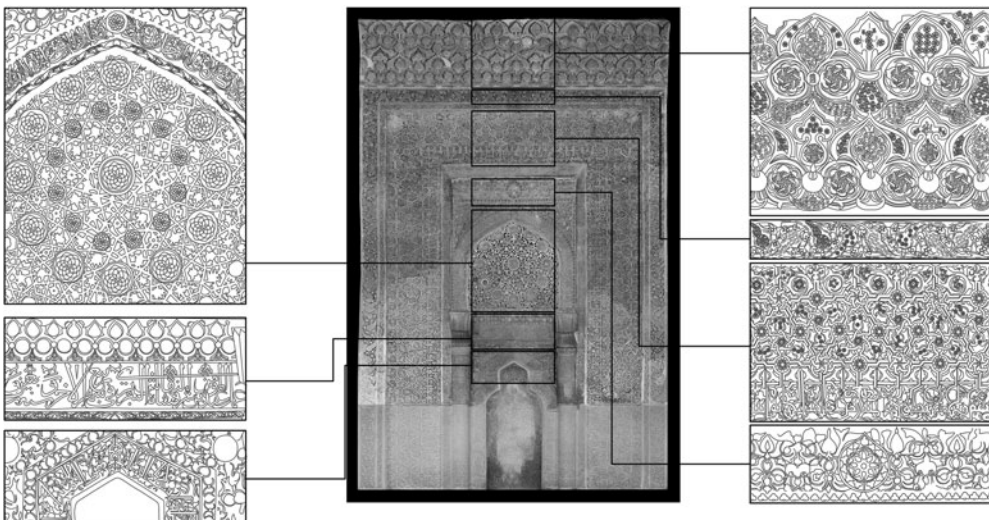
<sup>43</sup> The tiles cover about 1.25 m of the bottom of the *mihṛāb*.

<sup>44</sup> Personal communication with Mr. Farrī, head of conservation team, at the local office of the MCTHIR in Urumiya.



**Figure 9.** Dome chamber, view of the *mihrāb* and *qibla* wall

The *mihrāb* is in baked brick, and its main façade is embellished with various geometric, vegetal, and floral patterns of plaster (Fig. 10). A large panel, 1.22 m high, of vegetal patterns of carved stucco in high reliefs is on the top of the *mihrāb*. The panel has several rows of various elements, such as high-relief arabesque, multi-lobed leaf, and roundels. A foliated band adorns the *mihrāb*'s outer frame. Another rectangular frame measuring 5.72 m x 2.54 m (covering most of the *mihrāb*) is within the first one. A decorative plaster pattern comprises a series



**Figure 10.** *Mihrāb* of the mosque, line drawings of the ornaments

of vegetal ornament interwoven with knotted triangles adorning the surface edged by the two rectangle frames. The combination creates a vast geometric pattern rare in Ilkhanid *mihhrābs*.

An inscription band in interlaced Kufic contains verses from the Qur'an (2:255 and 256 in parts) and runs around the inner rectangle frame.<sup>45</sup> The text includes the famous Throne verse (*Āyat al-kursī*), which contains a general evocation of the glory of Islam and has been widely applied on pious buildings in the Islamic lands.<sup>46</sup> This Quranic text has also been inscribed in the other Ilkhanid *mihhrābs*, such as those of Masjid-i Haftshūya (c. 740/1339–40) near Isfahan, Pīr Bakrān (698–712/1299–1312) at Linjan, and Bayazīd's mausoleum (c. 699/1299) in Bastam.<sup>47</sup> This inscription elegantly merges into the adjacent plaster decoration and connects through strapwork bands extended from the rounded interlace segments. The interwoven method in Urmiya is reminiscent of the combination of five-fold and ten-fold pattern balances that cover the central portion of the exterior facade of Gunbad Kabūd (593/1196–97) in Maragha.<sup>48</sup> The thickness of the inscription's letters is the same as the adjacent decorative patterns. The combination of letters such as *alf* and *lam* with geometrical patterns and knots creates a harmonious surface in which the inscription seems to extend across the decorative surface (Fig. 11). This innovative combination shows a new style of decoration in the Ilkhanid *mihhrābs*.

On the inner edge of the central rectangle frame is an inscription band in Thuluth that contains the Qur'an (23: 1–12).<sup>49</sup> The Qur'anic verses mention the characteristics of Muslim believers, including being humble in praying and observing it, which are aptly mentioned in the *mihhrāb* to remind of the duty of Muslims. The same verses are seen in other Ilkhanid *mihhrābs*, such as Rabi'a Khātūn at Ushturjān and the Friday mosque in Tabriz.<sup>50</sup> Within the latter frame is a pointed four-centered arch, which rests on the flat top of the capitals of two equally ornamented engaged round columns (Fig. 12). Each capital contains a series of fretwork grooves in plaster. This type of decoration is also seen in the Pīr Bakrān mausoleum.<sup>51</sup> The flat top of the capitals at the bottom level of the upper arch is also found in the *mihhrāb* of Masjid-i Marand. It is notable that *Sura al-Baqara* (II) and *al-Mu'manun* (XXIII) of the *mihhrāb* are among the most common Qur'anic *suras* of the Ilkhanid *mihhrābs* in Iran.<sup>52</sup> So, it is likely that the *mihhrāb* of the Masjid-i Jami' of Urmiya was imitated as a pattern in the later cases.

An inscription band in Thuluth contains two *hadiths* from the prophet of Islam running on the extrados of the pointed arch. An elegant boss is at the apex of the arch and separates the two bands. The full texts are as below:

(a) قال النبي عليه الصلوة والسلام اقبل علي صلوا تك ولاتكن من الغافلين :

(b) قال النبي عليه الصلوة والسلام كونوا في الدنيا اضيافاً واتخذوا المساجد بيوتاً :<sup>53</sup>

Translation: The prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said peace and blessings be upon him, come and pray and do not be one of the Heedless. The prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said be guests in this world and make mosques your homes.

<sup>45</sup> Quchānī, "Barasy-yi Katibahay-i Burj -i Seh Gunband va Masjid-i Jami' Urmiya," 44.

<sup>46</sup> For a list of applying these verses, see Dodd and Khairallah, *The Image of the Word A Study of Quranic Verse in Islamic Architecture*, vol. 2, 11–17.

<sup>47</sup> Shikufta, "Mazmūn-i Katibiha-yi Qurani dar Mihrābha-yi Gachburī Aṣr-i Ilkhaniyan," 114.

<sup>48</sup> Bier, "The Decagonal Tomb Tower at Maragha and Its Architectural Context: Lines of Mathematical Thought," 252.

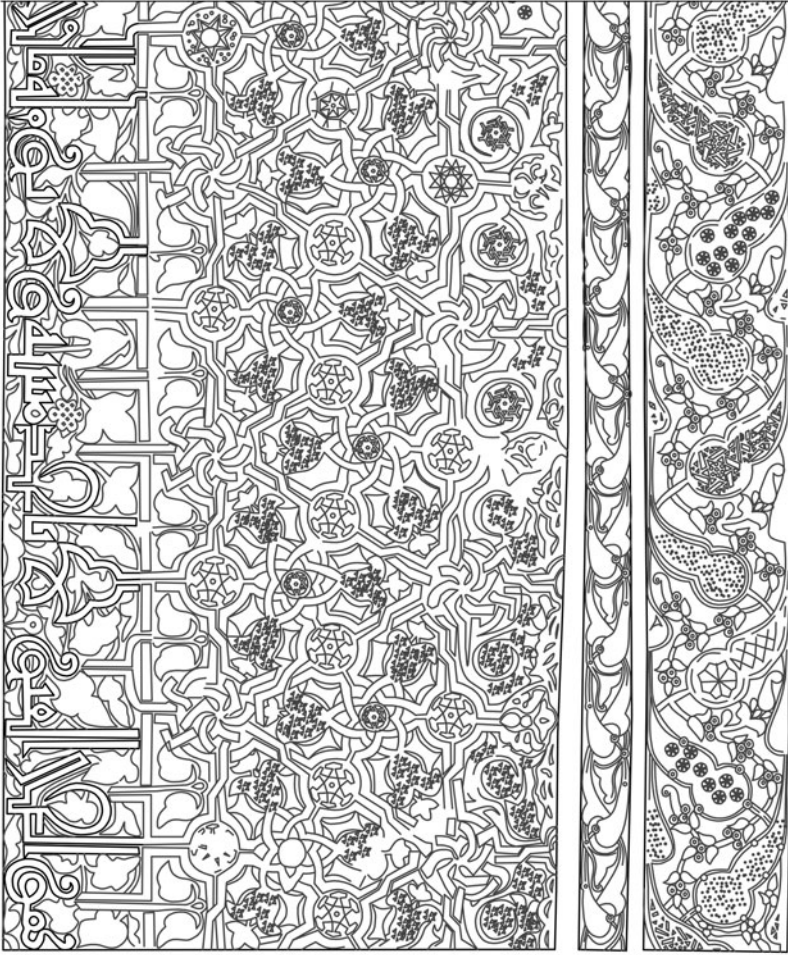
<sup>49</sup> Quchānī, "Barasy-yi Katibahay-i Burj -i Seh Gunband va Masjid-i Jami' Urmiya," 46.

<sup>50</sup> Shikufta, "Mazmūn-i Katibiha-yi Qurani dar Mihrābha-yi Gachburī Aṣr-i Ilkhaniyan," 110–111.

<sup>51</sup> The fretwork was normally produced by the repetition of geometric forms like triangle, hexagon, circle, etc.

<sup>52</sup> Shikufta, "Mazmūn-i Katibiha-yi Qurani dar Mihrābha-yi Gachburī Aṣr-i Ilkhaniyan," 117–118.

<sup>53</sup> Quchānī, "Barasy-yi Katibahay-i Burj -i Seh Gunband va Masjid-i Jami' Urmiya," 47. The small *mihhrab* has no date, however its form of construction attributes it to the Saljuq period, possibly no later than the first quarter of the sixth/twelfth century.



**Figure 11.** *Mihrāb* of the mosque, line drawing of the inner frame

It is worth mentioning that the Urmiya *mihrāb* is the earliest surviving from medieval Iran that bears two *hadiths*.<sup>54</sup> The first *hadith* (a) in Kufic is found on the small *mihrāb* in the Friday mosque of Gulpāyḡān.<sup>55</sup> A similar text, dated 516/1122, is on a small memorial stone in marble, which is generally considered the earliest surviving tombstone of Imam Reza (the eighth Shi'ite Imam).<sup>56</sup> The similarity shows the popularity of the first *hadith*. A vegetal pattern in relief is placed in the spandrel of the arch.

A stucco grille, in a color lighter than other parts of the *mihrāb*, covers the tympanum of the arch. The grid forms a geometric pattern and contains a ring of twelve large carved hemispherical bosses in high relief. Through the panel, the remains of an earlier carved

<sup>54</sup> The earliest *mihrāb* with a *hadith* is that of Iskodar (ca. 400/1010). See Blair, *The Monumental Inscriptions from Early Islamic Iran and Transoxiana*, 27.

<sup>55</sup> Quchānī, "Barrisi-yi Katībihā-yi Masjid Jami' Gulpāyḡān," 14.

<sup>56</sup> The stone is now at the Āstān-i Quds Razavī museum in Mashhad. More information is available at: <https://library.razavi.ir>.



**Figure 12.** *Mihrāb* of the mosque, view of decorative capital

stucco *mihrāb* in plaster are visible.<sup>57</sup> This stucco molding lattice was installed in a later modification, likely in the Qajar period.<sup>58</sup>

At the bottom of the *mihrāb* is a niche topped by a trefoil arch.<sup>59</sup> Notably, the form appeared in the Ilkhanid style and likely replaced the earlier Saljuq pointed arch. A similar form can also be seen in other *mihrābs*, such as Masjid-i Jami' of Marand (731/1330).<sup>60</sup> A deeply carved stucco decoration is preserved inside the top of the niche. An inscription band in Kufic, containing Qur'anic verses (3: 18), runs around the arch.<sup>61</sup> The inscription

<sup>57</sup> Wilber attributes the earlier carved stucco to Saljuq times. See Wilber, *The Architecture of Islamic Iran: The Ilkhanid Period*, 113.

<sup>58</sup> Personal communication with the conservator of the *mihrāb*. It is likely that the remnants behind the grille were contemporary with the rest of *mihrāb* and the grille as a later addition. See McClary and Danesh, "Tabrizi School of Ilkhanid Stucco Carving? A Comparative Analysis of Ilkhanid *Mihrāb* in Urmia, Marand and Tabriz," 174.

<sup>59</sup> This form is akin to that of the Friday Mosque of Marand and Kashan.

<sup>60</sup> Pope and Ackerman, *Survey of Persian Art*, 398.

<sup>61</sup> Quchānī, "Barasy-yi Katibahay-i Burj -i Seh Gunband va Masjid-i Jami' Urmiya," 46.



**Figure 13.** *Mihrāb* of the mosque, signature band

band has a distinguishing composition of scripts, such as *lam* and *alaf*, about the arch. The spandrel of the pointed arch around the central niche comprises relief-carved split palmettos. In addition, two carved hemispherical bosses are seen on the spandrel.

A further inscription band (signature band) in Thuluth in relief, immediately above the Kufic inscription band, gives the name of the artist and the date of construction (Fig. 13). The text is as below:

عمل عبد المومن بن شرف الشاه نقاش تبریزی فی شهر ربیع الآخر سنه ستہ و سبعین و ستمائہ .

Translation: The work of ‘Abd al-Mū‘min b. Sharaf al-Shāh, the painter of Tabriz, in the month of Rabi‘al-Akhar in the year 676 (September 1277).

The adornment of the band is limited to an arabesque pattern in less relief and two large, knotted sections. In contrast to other elaborated parts of the *mihrāb*, the above-mentioned inscription band is less ornamented. It seems that the designer aimed to create a contrast so the viewer can easily recognize the artist and pay tribute to him. It is worth mentioning that the earliest surviving inscription of a *mihrāb* that bears the date and name of the craftsman is that of Imāmzāda Karrār at Būzān (528/1133), in Isfahan.<sup>62</sup> The *mihrāb* of Urmiya Jami‘ is the oldest dated Ilkhanid *mihrāb* of plaster, which is still in its original place. It is also worth mentioning that the date (676) is scribed on a glazed tile in the Imāmzāda Sayyid Ishāq in the city of Sava.<sup>63</sup> Such can suggest the popularity of architectural epigraphy in various styles in the second half of the seventh/twelfth century.

The title of *naqqāsh* (painter) can be seen at the end of a plaster Qur’anic inscription in the Pīr Bakrān monument.<sup>64</sup> Applying the title of *naqqāsh*, as opposed to a common title like *ustād* (master), is rare in monumental inscriptions. Literally, the title *naqqāsh* means designer, who creates various artistic patterns.

<sup>62</sup> The inscription in *naskhī* is inside a frame over the *mihrāb*’s central niche and dated 528/1134. See Smith and Herzfeld, “Emam Zade Karrar at Buzin,” 82–83; Pope and Ackerman, *Survey of Persian Art*, 311.

<sup>63</sup> The date is written in number form. For the building, see Wilber, *The Architecture of Islamic Iran: The Ilkhanid Period*, 113.

<sup>64</sup> Hunarfar, *Ganjīna-i Athār-i Tarikhī-ya Isfahan*, 256. For the monument, see Wilber, *The Architecture of Islamic Iran: The Ilkhanid Period*, 121–24.

Compared to earlier Saljuq plaster *mihrābs*, such as Pīr-i Hamza’-i Sabzpūsh in Abarku, Ardistan, Imāmzada Karrār, and Gunbad-i ‘Alavīān in Hamadan (all in the sixth/twelfth century), the Ilkhanid *mihrāb* at Urmiya has an identical structure but in a larger size.<sup>65</sup> It displays the importance of the *mihrāb* and its ornament by applying various decorative designs and inscription bands of carved stucco. The latter caused the progress of different styles of epigraphy to elaborate *mihrāb* surfaces. The *mihrāb* at Urmiya originally had an azure (bright blue) background, which disappeared.<sup>66</sup> It is worth mentioning that the light and dark blue plasters were two primary tones whose application continued from the Saljuq period.<sup>67</sup>

In contrast to Ilkhanid *mihrābs* from the eighth/thirteenth century, such as Isfahan’s Uljaytu and Marand, the patron’s name was not inscribed. The erection of the Urmiya *mihrāb* was contemporary with the reign of Abāqā (r. 663–81/1265–82), who followed his ancestral shamanism, giving Islam no position within his reign.<sup>68</sup> Thus, ordering the building of a *mihrāb* was not considered a pious act and provided no honor to the patron at the time.

Inside the dome chamber, there are several plaster inscription bands, which can be organized into three levels. At a height of 5.14 m from the ground floor is an inscription band in Thuluth with an azure background. The band is 61 cm high, encircling the dome chamber (Fig. 14). The band contains Qur’anic text (Qur’an: 76, 48, and 56) and ends with the name of the artist, Sharif Muhammad Afsar (Afshar?) and is dated 1250/1834 (Qajar time).<sup>69</sup>

At the height of 3.76 m, two rectangular decorative frames in plaster, each containing an inscription band, flank the *mihrāb* (Fig. 15).<sup>70</sup> Their inscription styles differ. The text in the south-west frame is in Thuluth and bears the name of Fath ‘Ali Shāh (r. 1212–1250/1797–1834) and Hussein Qulī Biglar Beygī Afshār, the governor of Urmiya (r. 1212–1236/1798–1821). The southeast frame on the *qibla* wall contains a seven-tiered text in Nasta’liq. However, the sixth and seventh lines have vanished. The text is damaged and mostly illegible. The text likely mentions the repair of the mosque and the name of Hājī Khalīl, who was possibly the patron or commissioner of the repair. The inscription of carved plaster in Thuluth with the name of Fath ‘Ali Shāh, which can be seen here, is rare amid the other Iranian mosques.<sup>71</sup>

A carved stucco Kufic inscription band, 83 cm high, is located at the height of 8.70 m from the ground floor (Fig. 16a). The band encircles the dome chamber and contains Qur’anic verses (48:1–5 and 6 in part).<sup>72</sup> A similar text can be seen in the flanged tomb tower at Bastam (700/1300).<sup>73</sup> The upper part of the inscription is ornamented with a repetitive vegetal relief pattern in lines. A low relief of a scrolling vine with various vegetal apes embellishes the background of the inscription band. Zeniths of letters like *alf* and *lam* beside each other are decorated with a stylized leaf. The letter *ri* is upright and terminates with a floral pattern. The letter *hi* is cursive, and over it is an interlaced floral form (Fig. 16b). The epigraphy style of the band is reminiscent of that of the Masjid-i Jami’ of Qazvin (500–509/1106–1115) and Masjid-i Jami’ of Zavara (530/1135).<sup>74</sup> The dating of the inscription band in Urmiya

<sup>65</sup> For the earlier Saljuq plaster *mihrābs*, see Pope and Ackerman, *Survey of Persian Art*, 391, 322, 311, 330.

<sup>66</sup> Personal communication with Mr. Farrī, senior conservator of the *mihrāb*.

<sup>67</sup> Wilber, *The Architecture of Islamic Iran: The Ilkhanid Period*, 83.

<sup>68</sup> Jackson, “Abaqa.”

<sup>69</sup> Quchānī, “Barasy-yi Katibahay-i Burj -i Seh Gunband va Masjid-i Jami’ Urmiya,” 48.

<sup>70</sup> The full text has yet to be published and, thus, the present writer was unable to read the whole text.

<sup>71</sup> It is worth mentioning that in the Qajar time, Thuluth of curved stucco declined and Nast’aliq on glazed tile gradually dominated other scripts.

<sup>72</sup> Quchānī, “Barasy-yi Katibahay-i Burj -i Seh Gunband va Masjid-i Jami’ Urmiya,” 47.

<sup>73</sup> Dodd and Khairallah, *The Image of the Word A Study of Quranic Verse in Islamic Architecture*, vol. 2, 119. For a detailed study of the monument see Hillenbrand, “The flanged tomb tower at Bastam,” 237–60.

<sup>74</sup> For Qazvin, see *Survey III*: 996–97; Pope and Ackerman, *Survey of Persian Art III*, 305. For Zavara, see Godard, *Les anciennes mosquées*, 298–305.





**Figure 14.** Dome chamber, view end of the *Thuluth* band



**Figure 15.** Dome chamber, view of the Qajar inscription band

is still disputable. However, due to some similarities, it was likely contemporary with the Ilkhanid *mihṛāb* of the dome chamber.<sup>75</sup> The remains of a further inscription band in Thuluth, dated 1309/1892, are below the dome. The inscription begins with one Qur'anic verse (24:1) and finishes with another (26:89). The middle parts of the writing have vanished. Unlike the other Saljuq dome chambers, such as Qarva, Sujas, and Marand, there is no trace

<sup>75</sup> According to Mr. Valīpūr, who examined the mihrāb's material the result of the XRD and XRF analysis of the plaster on the inscription band shows that it is similar to that of the *mihṛāb* (Personal communication). In addition, some similarity between the inscription band and *mihṛāb* may suggest their contemporaneity (McClary and Danesh, "Tabrizi School of Ilkhanid Stucco Carving? A Comparative Analysis of Ilkhanid Mihrāb in Urmia, Marand and Tabriz," 207).

(a)



(b)



**Figure 16.** (a) Dome chamber, encircling inscription band, (b) detailed line drawing

of traditional decorative joint plugs inside the Urmiya dome chamber. This may suggest that the *masjid* had no powerful patron to complete its decoration.

To the west side of the dome chamber is a projecting *iwan*-like portal, the main entrance to the west *shabistān* (Fig. 17). The portal is 8.54 m high, 5.53 m wide, and 1.89 m deep. A four-centered pointed arch decorated with *muqarnas* of plaster dominates the portal. The area above the arch is adorned with a blue inscription band of glazed tiles (*kashī*). The inscription in Nasta'liq is divided into five sections and mentions the restoration of the *masjid-i jami'* by Haji Khalil, whose name was mentioned earlier in the dome chamber. The glazed tile decoration shows it is a later addition to the portal. On the flanking sides of the portal arch are similar decorative patterns embracing three medallions in carved plaster. The spandrel of the central arch is decorated with a floral design of carved stucco.

Two symmetrical medallions are on the portal facade. A *hadith* from the prophet of Islam about the significance of congregational prayer starts from the medallion to the right of the



Figure 17. View of the west *shabistān* portal

viewer and continues to another medallion on the opposite side (Fig. 18). The full text of this *hadith* is as follows:

”أَلَا وَ مَنْ مَشَى إِلَى مَسْجِدٍ يَطْلُبُ فِيهِ الْجَمَاعَةَ كَانَ لَهُ بِكُلِّ خُطْوَةٍ سَبْعُونَ أَلْفَ حَسَنَةٍ وَ مَحَى عَنْهُ سَبْعِينَ أَلْفَ سَيِّئَةٍ يُرْفَعُ لَهُ مِنَ الدَّرَجَاتِ مِثْلَ ذَلِكَ وَ إِنْ مَاتَ وَ هُوَ عَلَى ذَلِكَ وَكَلَّ اللَّهُ حَزْرَجَلٌ بِهِ سَبْعِينَ أَلْفَ مَلِكٍ يُعَوِّدُونَهُ فِي قَبْرِهِ يُرْسِنُونَهُ فِي وَحْدَتِهِ وَ تَسْتَغْفِرُونَهُ لَهُ حَتَّى يُبْعَثَ“<sup>76</sup>

Translation: Except that whoever walked to a mosque where he asked for the congregation had seventy thousand good deeds at every step, seventy thousand bad things were erased from him, and he would be raised from the efforts like that, and if he died. He was on that, and all God Almighty had seventy thousand kings who would return him in his grave, comfort him in his loneliness and ask for forgiveness for him until he was resurrected.

<sup>76</sup> Ḥurr-i ‘Amilī, *Vas'al al-Shi'a fi Tahsil-i Shari'a*, 372.



**Figure 18.** West portal, west medallion view

Below the medallion, a tombstone is on the façade of the portal (to the viewer's left). According to its inscription, the deceased's name is Hāshim Sultān b. Qazīkhān Qarākūiyī, who passed away in 1171/1122–23. To the west of the portal, within an arcade, is a further entrance to the west *shabistān*. Over the door is a small panel of plaster, which bears an inscription in Nasta'liq. This band provides the story of constructing the *madrasa* adjacent to the Masjid-i Jami' by Reza Qulī Khān Bīglar Begī Urumī Afshār (r.1181–85/1767–71), beneficent governor of Urmiya, for religious students in the month of Rajab 1184/November 1770 (Fig. 19).<sup>77</sup> The full text is as below:

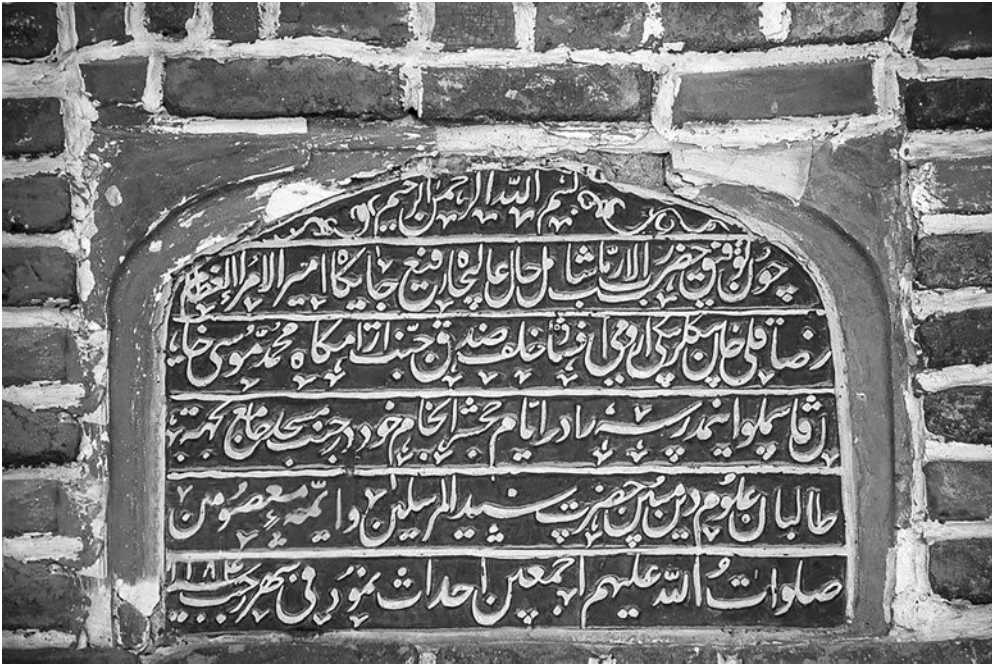
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم چون توفیق حضرت رب الارباب شامل حال عالیجاه رفیع جایگاه امیر الامر العظام رضا قلی خان بیگلر بیگی ارومی افشار خلف صدق جنت آرامگاه محمد موسی خان قاسملو اینمدرسه را در ایام خجسته انجام خود در جنب مسجد جامع بجهت طالبان علوم دین مبین حضرت سید المرسلین و ایمه معصومین صلوات الله علیهم اجمعین احداث نمود فی شهر رجب سنه 1184.

Translation: In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful, because of the achievement of the Lord, the Highest, including the status of the Amir Reza Qulī Khān-i Bīglar Begī Urumī Afshār, the apt successor of the heavenly Muhammad Mūsā Khān-i Qāsimlū, this school in the fortune days of its reign, next to the congregational mosque, for the students of the religious of the Lord of Prophets and the Pure Imams, may God bless them all, was built it in the month of Rajab in the year 1184.

Miirzā Rashid al-Dīn Adīb al-Shu'ara, in his 1183/1769 book *Tārikh-i Afshār*, mentions the construction of the cells (*hujras*), the courtyard of the *madrasa*, and a building as *Ḥusseini khāna* (*ḥusseiniya*), adjacent the dome chamber and two minarets.<sup>78</sup> However, there is no

<sup>77</sup> Dihqān, *Sarzamīn-i Zartusht Režai'ya*, 385.

<sup>78</sup> Adīb al-Shu'ara, *Tarikh-i Afshar*, 174–175.



**Figure 19.** View of the foundation inscription band 1184/1770

trace of the *huseiniya* or minarets at present. As mentioned earlier, the word “next to” in the inscription band suggests that the mosque and *madrasa* were independent, only connected via a portal facing the *madrasa* courtyard. In around 1350/1971–72, by removing a series of blind niches in front of the dome chamber, two combined structures are now integrated. It is worthy of note that the exterior surface of the Urmiya mosque has no decoration. This absence can also be seen in the exterior façade of other Saljuq mosques, such as Qirva, Sujas, Ardistan, Burujird, and Zavara.

### Dating

The detailed history of Urmiya in the Saljuq era (431–590/1040–1194) needs clarification. After the conquest of Khurasan in 429/1038, the Saljuqs main goal was to abolish Buyid supremacy and control central Iran; Azerbaijan was not prioritized at the time.<sup>79</sup> In 452/1055, Tughril Beg (r. 431–455/1040–63) invaded this region. However, due to freezing winter and a shortage of army food supplements, he failed to take over the city of Tabriz. By 454/1062, he invaded again and besieged Tabriz. Finally, Abū Nasr Muhammad b. Vahsūdān, the governor of Tabriz, made peace with Tughril by paying a great deal of money and surrendering his son as a hostage, so Tughril refused to occupy the city.<sup>80</sup>

Tughril's successor, Ālp Arsalān (r. 455–465/1063–73), came to Azerbaijan and continued the war with the Byzantine army. Finally, in Mantzikert (Malazgirt) in 463/1071, Ālp Arsalān defeated the army and opened Anatolia to Turkmen invasion.<sup>81</sup> Despite Saljuq domination in Iran, Azerbaijan was controlled by previous local governors such as Ravadiān, Aḥmadilān, and, finally, Atābeg of Azerbaijan or the Ildegūizds (c. 540–622/1145–1225).<sup>82</sup> The founder

<sup>79</sup> Sami'iān, *Azerbaijan dar Dura-i Saljuqian*, 58.

<sup>80</sup> Sami'iān, *Azerbaijan dar Dura-i Saljuqian*, 60–61.

<sup>81</sup> Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties a chronological and genealogical Manual*, 187.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

of this dynasty, Shams al-Dīn Ildegūzid (r. 530–71/1136–75), ruled for over 40 years in Azerbaijan. Concerned with literature and architecture, Shams al-Dīn and his wife built and endowed a *madrasa* in Hamadan, where they were buried.<sup>83</sup> Two other tomb towers in Nakhchivan were constructed in the period: Mū'mana Khātūn (582/1186) and Yūsif ibn Kuseyir Mausoleum (555–57/1161–62).<sup>84</sup> So, due to his long sovereignty, interest in architecture, and construction of several monuments, it is possible that the domed building in the Friday mosque of Urmiya was erected during the reign of Shams al-Dīn Ildegūzid, around the middle of the sixth/twelfth century.

## Conclusion

The Urmiya Jami' is a significant Saljuq domed mosque in the Azerbaijan area. The architecture and decoration of the *masjid* combine to make a remarkable structure, a paradigm of development and continuity in medieval Iranian architecture. The building displays the fashion of the royal Saljuq domed mosque, which first occurred in Isfahan. The mosque is a conservative copy of those of central Iran from the Saljuq period, but with some differences. From an architectural point of view, the sophisticated construction of the transition zone over the large bay of the dome chamber shows an innovative technique little known in Saljuq architecture. The dome chamber in Urmiya is not preceded by any *iwān*. This feature indicates that the mosque can be categorized as a freestanding domed mosque—or, as Godard says, a “kiosk-mosque” (*mosquée kiosque*).<sup>85</sup> However, due to the adjoining west *shabistan*, it seems that the dome chamber as a *maqsura* was likely added to an earlier hypostyle mosque, creating an exceptional case among Saljuq mosques.

Despite the fact that its form is homogenous with other northwest domed mosques, Urmiya Jami' actually has more similarities with the nearby Marand Jami'. As such, these mosques were likely built according to a local style, differing in detail from the Qazvin school of the northwest. Unlike the Saljuq domed mosques of central Iran, there are no independent minaret stands near the mosque of Urmiya.

The building's interior decoration can be generally divided into two main groups: a carved stucco *mihṛāb* and several inscription bands from various periods. In the absence of typical Saljuq interior decoration, such as brick used with carved stucco and inscription bands, the mosque's main decorative element is its Ilkhanid *mihṛāb*, which shows an advanced style of carved stucco, epigraphy, and ornamental patterns in a larger size. The decoration of the *mihṛāb* shows its link to nearby mosques, such as those of Marand and Tabriz. It is notable that the mosque's stucco *mihṛāb* is the oldest dated Ilkhanid one still in its original location.

The embellished portal of the west *shabistān* shows a rare preserved example of the Zand period in the Azerbaijan area. The dome chamber's interior inscription bears the name of Faṭḥ 'Alī Shāh and is an exceptional sample of Thuluth inscription in carved plaster still existent in Iran. Like other major Iranian mosques, Urmia Jami' is a combination of various styles and periods in one building; however, its original characteristics have been preserved.

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<sup>83</sup> Luther, “Attābakān Azerbaijan.” The *madrasa*'s name and location are unknown.

<sup>84</sup> Shams al-Din initiated the building of a mausoleum on the grave of his wife, Mu'mina Khātūn. However, its construction was finished by his son, Muhammad b. Ildegūzid (r. 571–82/1175–86), in the month of Muḥṛram, 582 A.H.

<sup>85</sup> Godard, *Les anciennes mosquées de L' Iran*, 207. See also Hillenbrand, “Saljuq dome chambers in north-west Iran,” 93.

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