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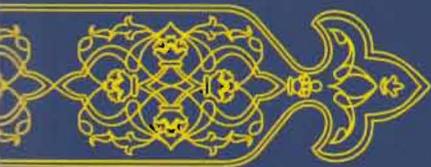


ISIAO

ISTITUTO ITALIANO  
PER L'AFRICA E L'ORIENTE

## ADAMJI PROJECT

*From the Excavation (1972-1978)  
to the Archive (2003-2010)  
in the Masjed-e Jom'e, Isfahan*



**Bruno Genito and Fariba Saiedi Anaraki (eds.)**

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To the memory of Umberto Scerrato

*Nulla è altrettanto intuibile come la vocazione al sacrificio: chi ne è  
provvisto è già maestro di vita, senza neppure saperlo*

Ermanno Rea (1995) *Mistero Napoletano*, p.14. Torino

*As this volume was going to press we learned of the unexpected death of Prof. Arch. Eugenio Galdieri. Not only was He an eminent scholar, but also a dear friend to all of the contributors of this volume. The importance of His studies towards the theme of this volume on the Restoration and Archaeology of the masjed-e Jom'e is amply testified to by the papers of various scholars who have relied on His works. The editors feel it just and fitting to dedicate this volume in His memory.*

*In order to give uniformity to the texts the system of transliteration from Arabic and Persian languages has been simplified and, in most of the cases, it is as follows:*

ā, ī, ū = a, i, u;  
ḏ, ṭ = dh, th;  
ḏ, ḥ, ṣ, ṭ = d, h, s, t;  
ġ = j;  
ġ = gh;  
ḵ = kh;  
š = sh

*For the geographic and historical names the most common terms have been used. In most of the cases, basically in those of the Iranian authors, the ezāfe has been maintained.*

# THE SALJUQ INSCRIPTIONS OF THE GREAT MOSQUE, ISFAHAN\*

*Roberta Giunta*

The Great Mosque of Isfahan still preserves numerous inscriptions of the Saljuq period, dating from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century, when the architectural plan of the Abbasid mosque was entirely modified with the construction of the two imposing domed halls and of the four ivan.

With few exceptions, these epigraphic documents, attested in five different areas of the building (Fig. 1), almost all in their original position and generally in a good state of preservation, have already been the subject of publications<sup>1</sup>; for this reason our contribute aims above all to provide a brief synthesis of the location and the content of the texts<sup>2</sup>, and a preliminary palaeographic-decorative analysis<sup>3</sup>.

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\* In 2006 I was invited by Bruno Genito to participate to the activities of the ADAMJI project in order to resume the study of the epigraphic documentation of the building. My gratitude goes to him and to all the members of the Italian and Iranian team. A special thank is also due to Faribah Saiedi Anaraki for her kind attitude and availability.

<sup>1</sup> The earliest studies have been carried out by Gaston Wiet in 1929 (Schroeder 1938-1939, 954; Wiet 1940) and by Jean Sauvaget who, in May 1934, spent a week in Isfahan together with Albert Gabriel (Gabriel 1935). Lotfallah Honarfar (1971) is the author of the most comprehensive work on the complete epigraphical *corpus* from which Grabar (1990) drew a synthesis which led him to propose a chronology of the various construction and enlargement stages of the building. In the late 70s and early 80s Ventrone (1979; 1981) took up the analysis of the *ductus* of the letters of the main Saljuq kufic inscriptions. The most recent study, devoted only to the epigraphs of the two domed halls, was published by Sheila S. Blair (1992, 160-167). Finally, Scerrato (1994) has analyzed the content of an interesting fragment of a cursive inscription which had been retrieved on the outside of the southern domed hall.

<sup>2</sup> None of the previous publications reports the complete Arabic text, with the corresponding translation, of all the Saljuq inscriptions.

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, no complete and in-depth study of the entire epigraphical *corpus* of the Saljuq period has been accomplished so far, this being an issue we aim to address soon.

The inscriptions are presented following their location, advancing from north to south<sup>4</sup>.

#### The northern dome (area 476)

This area preserves the largest number of Saljuq epigraphs, distributed on several supports and sometimes divided into various sections (Fig. 2).

**no 1** The main inscription is included in a wide band running at the base of the dome. Simple kufic, in relief, with some of the upper endings in the shape of semi-palmette; ornaments of the epigraphic field composed of two parallel shafts joined in the lower part by two oblique segments (Fig. 3). The text begins on the southwest side.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم \* ان ربكم الله الذي خلق السموات و الارض  
في ستة ايام ثم استوى على العرش يغشى الليل النهار يطلبه حثيثا  
و الشمس و القمر و النجوم مسخرات بامرہ الاله الخلق و الامر تبارك  
الله رب العالمين \* امر ببنا هذه القبة ابو الغنائم المرزبان بن خسرو  
فيروز ختم الله له بالخير في شهور سنة احدى و ثمانين و اربع مائة

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. \*Surely your Lord is God, who created the heavens and the earth in six days then sat Himself upon the Throne, covering the day with the night it pursues urgently and the sun, and the moon, and the stars subservient, by His command. Verily, His are the creation and the command. Blessed be God, the Lord of all Being!\* (Kor. 7: 54)<sup>5</sup>. The building of this dome was ordered by Abu'l-Ghana'im al-Marzuban b. Khusraw Firuz. May God allow him a good ending (for his life)! In the months of the year 481 (1088-89).*

The inscription, introduced by the *basmala*, contains the complete verse 54<sup>6</sup> of Sura 7, which is considered important especially because the terms *khalq* and *amr* ("Creation" and "Order") *frequentissimi nel Corano separatamente, si trovano appaiati solo in questo passo* (Bausani 1988, 549). The verse is followed by a foundation text - introduced by the formula *amara bi-bina'* - of the

<sup>4</sup> The only two inscriptions with a precise dating are from the northern area of the mosque.

<sup>5</sup> The English translation of all Koranic quotations is from Arberry 1964.

<sup>6</sup> Wiet 1940 identifies it as verse 52 (as reported also in RCEA 1936, no 2774), while Blair (1992, 164, 165) reads it as verses 52-54. The latter further specifies that these verses are frequently attested in the Fatimid funerary epigraphy in Egypt, in the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century (*eadem*, 165).

domed hall (*hadhi-hi'l-qubba*), which reveals the name of the patron of the work. An invocation to God for the benefit of this personage and the date of the works (inclusive of the year only) terminate the text. The patron does not carry any title, but three elements of his name mentioned in the inscription allowed to identify him, with absolute certainty, as Taj al-Mulk, an important personage of the Saljuq court entrusted by the Sultan Malik Shah (465-85/1073-92) with the superintendence of his private residence and the administration of the treasury and the direction of the official mail service (Wiet 1940; Lambton 1978). In 485/1092-93, four years after the construction of this domed hall, he replaced the renowned prime minister Nizam al-Mulk<sup>7</sup> but was assassinated the following year. We are aware of only another inscription where Taj al-Mulk is mentioned (with the form “Taj al-Mulk Abu'l-Ghana'im”). It is located above the southern door of the mausoleum al-Salihin in Aleppo and it is two years earlier than the one we are presenting here (479/1086)<sup>8</sup>; the expression *wa jarà dhalika 'ala yad* (“and this happened under the supervision of...”), which introduces the name of the personage, underlines that in this case his role was that of responsible of the construction works only<sup>9</sup>.

Bibl.: Gabriel 1935, 25, figs. 14, 16, 17 (*partial translation, brief commentary, photos showing partial view of the text*); Godard 1936c, 213-215 (*text, translation, commentary*); RCEA 1936, no 2774 (*text, translation*); Schroeder 1938-1939, 954, fig. 290 (*quotation, photo showing partial view of the text*); Wiet 1940, 131-133, pl. I (*text, translation, commentary, photos showing partial view of the text*); Honarfar 1971, p. 77, fig. 77 (*text, commentary, photo showing partial view of the text*); Galdieri 1972, fig. 476e (*photo*); Ventrone Vassallo 1979, 314, fig. 5 (*quotation, alphabetical table*); Grabar 1990, 38, 39, figs. 39, 40 (*translation, commentary, photos*); Blair 1992, 164-167, figs. 110, 111 (*text, translation, commentary, photo showing partial view of the text*).

**no 2** Inscription located in the 32 reclaimed triangular gaps between the epigraphic band at the base of the dome (inscription no 1) and the arches, and divided into as many sections. Simple kufic, in relief, with

<sup>7</sup> See below, inscription no 11.

<sup>8</sup> RCEA 1936, no 2760. See also Wiet 1940, 133.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed commentary of this inscription and its patron, see in particular Blair 1992, 165-167.

some of the upper endings two-lobed; no complementary ornaments in the epigraphic field (Figs. 4a, b).

هو الله / هو الرحمن / هو الرحيم / هو الملك / هو القدوس / هو السلام  
 / هو المومن / هو المهيمن / هو العزيز / هو الجبار / هو المتكبر / هو  
 الخالق / هو الباري / هو المصور / هو الفرد؟ / هو الصمد / هو الاول  
 / هو الاخر / هو الظاهر / هو الباطن / هو الحي / هو السميع / هو  
 البصير / هو الواجد / هو القادر / هو القابض / هو الاعلى / هو التواب  
 / هو الحق [...] / هو العلي / هو الحلیم / هو الحق

*He is God / He is the Compassionate / He is the Merciful / He is the Sovereign Lord / He is the Holy / He is the Source of peace / He is the Guardian of faith / He is the Protector / He is the Mighty / He is the Compeller / He is the Majestic / He is the Creator / He is the Evolver / He is the Fashioner / He is the Single One / He is the Eternal / He is the First / He is the Last / He is the Manifest / He is the Hidden / He is the Alive / He is the All earing / He is the All seeing / He is the Finder / He is the Able / He is the Constrictor / He is the Supreme / He is the Acceptor of Repentance / He is the [...] / He is the Most High / He is the Forbearing One / He is the Truth.*

The text contains the name of God followed by 31 of his 99 Names (*al-asma' al-husnà*)<sup>10</sup>. Each of them - including that of Allah which acts as *incipit* of the inscription - is introduced by the pronoun *huwa* ("He is"), and the first 13 Names<sup>11</sup> are presented with the sequence attested in the verses 21-24 of Sura 59<sup>12</sup>. Of particular interest is the fact that the Names of God are not frequent in the monumental inscriptions of this period.

Bibl.: Gabriel 1935, figs. 14, 16, 17 (*photos showing partial view of the text*); Honarfar 1971, 77, 78 (*text*); Grabar 1990, 39 (*quotation*); Blair 1992, 164, fig. 110 (*text, translation, commentary, photo showing partial view of the text*).

**no 3** Inscription included in eight bands located in the lower part of the arches above the niches which, in groups of two, are situated in each of the four walls of the domed hall. Simple kufic, in relief, with

<sup>10</sup> "To God belong the Names Most Beautiful; so call Him by them, and leave those blaspheme His Names they shall assuredly be recompensed for the things they did" (Kor. 7, 180). See Gardet 1960, 736.

<sup>11</sup> That is up to *al-musawwir*.

<sup>12</sup> A good photographic documentation permitted a careful deciphering of almost all the names mentioned in this inscription and the rectification of some of those featured in the reading suggested by Honarfar (1971, 77, 78) and re-published by Blair (1992, 164).

some of the upper endings shaped as two-lobed motif or as semi-palmette; ornaments of the epigraphic field similar to that of inscription no 1 (Figs. 5a-h). The text begins above the south-west niche (Fig. 2).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم / \* اقم الصلوة لدلوك / الشمس الى غسق الليل /  
 وقران الفجر ان قران الفجر / كان مشهودا ومن ا / لليل فتهد به نافلة /  
 لك عشى ان يبعثك / ربك مقاما محمودا \*

*In the Name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful. \*Perform the prayer at the sinking of the sun to the darkening of the night and the recital of dawn; surely the recital of dawn is witnessed. As for the night, keep vigil a part of it, as a work of supererogation for thee; it may be that thy Lord will raise thee up to a laudable station\* (Kor. 17: 78-79).*

This third inscription of the domed hall, certainly coeval to the previous two, contains only two Koranic verses introduced by the *basmala*. According to Grabar (1990, 39) the choice of this passage, which insists on the importance of the morning prayer, would be perfectly in line with the message contained in the inscription, dated to some thirty years later, that can be found at the sides of the north-east portal (see inscription no 7).

Bibl.: Gabriel 1935, figs. 14, 16 (photos showing partial view of the text); Godard 1936c, fig. 148 (photo of one of the epigraphic bands); Schroeder 1939, fig. 291 (photo of one of the epigraphic bands); Honarfar 1971, 78 (text, commentary); Ventrone Vassallo 1979, 314, fig. 5 (quotation, alphabetical table); Grabar 1990, 39, fig. 9 (translation, commentary, photo showing partial view of the text)<sup>13</sup>; Blair 1992, 164, fig. 110 (translation, commentary, photo showing partial view of the text).

**no 4** Six small epigraphical bands on the cylindrical capitals of three pairs of small leaning columns, situated at the two sides of three niches (two in the west wall, one in the south wall; Fig. 2). Simple kufic in relief; no complementary ornaments in the epigraphic field (Figs. 6a, b).

الملك لله / الملك لله / قل هو الله

*The sovereignty belongs to Him! / The sovereignty belongs to Him! / Say: He is God!*

<sup>13</sup> Grabar specifies that “outside, on top of the niche of one doorway is Koran 17: 78-79”. As a matter of fact these Koranic verses are situated within the domed hall, while the epigraphical band referred to by the scholar is situated on the outside of the hall” (see the inscription no 6).

It is possible to propound the hypothesis that this inscription was originally on the capitals of eight small columns situated, in pairs, at the sides of the four axial openings of the domed hall. The two small columns of the west sides feature the same text which is repeated identically and praises the highest sovereignty of God with a formula recurring often in monumental epigraphy, especially in the eastern regions. The three words of the third section are found at the beginning of Sura 112<sup>14</sup>.

Bibl.: Grabar 1990, fig. 9 (*photo of one of the three small columns*).

**no 5** Inscription along the edge of the intrados of the southern arch. Simple kufic, in relief, with some of the upper endings shaped as two- or three-lobed motifs, of a similar type of that of inscription no 3; ornaments of the epigraphic field identical to that of inscriptions nos 1 and 3 (Figs. 7a, b). The text begins on the west side of the intrados (Fig. 2).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم / \*قل اللهم مالك الملك تؤتي الملك من تشا  
و تنزع الملك ممن تشا و تعز من تشا و تذلل من تشا بيدك الخير انك  
على كل / شي قدير تولج الليل / في النهار و تولج النهار في الليل  
و تخرج الحي من الميت و تخرج الميت من الحي و ترزق من تشا  
بغير حساب\*

*In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. \*Say: O God, Master of the Kingdom, Thou givest the Kingdom to whom Thou wilt, and seizest the Kingdom from whom Thou wilt, Thou exaltest whom Thou wilt, and Thou abasest whom Thou wilt; in Thy hand is the good; Thou art powerful over everything. Thou makest the night to enter into the day and Thou makest the day to enter into the night, Thou bringest forth the living from the dead and Thou bringest forth the dead from the living, and Thou providest whomsoever Thou wilt without reckoning\* (Kor. 3: 26-27).*

As the previous texts, this inscription is of religious nature and contains two Koranic verses introduced by the *basmala*. An interesting parallel for the location and the development of the text is offered by one of the inscriptions of the slightly later Great Mosque of Ardistan (mid 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century; Godard 1936d, fig. 190).

Bibl.: Honarfar 1971, 78 (*text, commentary*); Grabar 1990, 40 (*translation, commentary*); Blair 1992, 164 (*translation, commentary*).

<sup>14</sup> “Say: He is God, One, God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not any one”.

**no 6** Inscription included in a band running along the lower part of the arch of the outer south-east side of the domed hall (Fig. 2). Simple kufic in relief, similar to that of inscription no 3 but lacking in ornaments of the epigraphic field (Figs. 8a, b).

\*و من دخله كان امنا\*

*\*and whosoever enters it is in security\** (Kor. 3: 97).

Taking into consideration the extant part of the text (few words of the central part of a Koranic verse different from that featured within the hall) and the dimensions of the hall it is possible to presume that the Koranic quotation contained at least the verses 96 and 97 of Sura 3<sup>15</sup> in their entirety, and that it originally developed along the three, or even four external walls of the building.

Bibl.: Galdieri 1972, fig. 475 (*photo*); Ventrone Vassallo 1979, 314, fig. 5 (*quotation, alphabetical table*); Blair 1992, 164 (*translation, commentary*).

### The north-eastern gate (area 433)

**no 7** Inscription at the sides of the entrance (Fig. 1). Simple kufic in relief; ornaments of the epigraphic field similar to that of inscriptions nos 1, 3, 5 (Fig. 9).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم \*ومن اظلم ممن منع مساجد الله ان يذكر فيها  
اسمه وسعى [...] / [...] اعادة هذه العمارة بعد الاحتراق في شهور  
سنة خمس عشرة و خمس مائة

*In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. \*And who is more in just than he who forbids that in places for the worship of God God's name should be celebrated, whose zeal is in fact to ruin them? [...]\* (Kor. 2: 114). / [...] this building was restored after a fire in the months of the year 515 (1121-22).*

The central part of this text, which would have been situated on the upper part of the two lateral bands, is unfortunately lost. As a consequence the Koranic verse, at the right of the entrance, is not complete and the text of construction, situated at the left, is missing its initial part. Grabar (1990, 26) believes that this verse, only rarely

<sup>15</sup> “The first House established for the people was that at Bekka, a place holy, and a guidance to all beings. Therein are clear signs, the station of Abraham, and whosoever enters it is in security. It is the duty of all men towards God to come to the House a pilgrim, if he is able to make his way there. As for the unbeliever, God is All-sufficient nor needs nay being”.

found on monuments, “clearly refers to some particularly revolting form of desecration that had befallen the mosque”. The foundation text commemorates instead the restoration works, which became necessary after a violent fire broke out in the mosque in 515/1121-22. The inscription bears no mention of the patron of the works, but the date permitted to ascribe them to the reign of Sanjar, son of Malik Shah (511-52/1118-57).

Bibl.: Gabriel 1935, 37, fig. 15 (*translation, photo*); Godard 1936c, 224, 226, fig. 149 (*text, translation, photo showing partial view of the text*); Godard 1937, fig. 2 (*photo showing partial view of the text*); Wiet 1940, 133, 134, pl. I (*text, translation, commentary, photo showing the second part of the text*); Honarfar 1971, 80 (*text, commentary, photo of the second part of the text*); Galdieri 1972, figs. 433a-c (*photos*); Ventrone Vassallo 1979, 315, fig. 5 (*quotation, alphabetical table*); Grabar 1990, 26, fig. 15 (*translation, commentary, photo*).

### The eastern ivan (129)

**no 8** Two epigraphic bands in the lower part of the arches of the two niches located at the sides of the eastern ivan. Kufic similar to that of the inscription no 3; only one ornament of the epigraphic field of the same type of the previous inscriptions (Figs. 10a, b).

لا اله الا الله الملك الحق المتين / محمد رسول الله الصادق الامين

*There is no god but God, the Sovereign Lord, the Truth, the Firm One / Muhammad is the Messenger of God, the Truthful, the Loyal!*

The text contains the profession of faith (*shahada*) divided into two sections: the first is dedicated to God, the second to His prophet. The attestation of the absolute uniqueness of God is followed by three of his 99 Names<sup>16</sup>. The expression *Allah al-malik al-haqq* is taken from the Koranic verse 20: 114. For the third name Honarfar (1971, 133) oddly suggests the reading *al-mubin* (“clear, evident”)<sup>17</sup>. We further point out that the term *sadiq* is attested also in a particular form of *shahada* found in the inscription of the tomb tower of

<sup>16</sup> See also inscription no 2.

<sup>17</sup> This adjective is rather referred to the Koran (*al-kitab al-mubin*).

Resget<sup>18</sup> and in that of the Great Mosque of Demavend (both dating back to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup>-early 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>19</sup>.

Bibl.: Gabriel 1935, fig. 24 (*photo of the second part of the inscription*); Godard 1936c, 265, figs. 175, 176 (*translation, photos*); Honarfar 1971, 132, 133 (*text, commentary*); Galdieri 1972, fig. 129g (*photo of the first part of the inscription*); Ventrone Vassallo 1979, 315, fig. 5 (*quotation, alphabetical table*).

**no 9** Inscription on the intrados of the rear wall of the ivan. Simple kufic in relief; no complementary ornaments in the epigraphic field (Figs. 11, 12a-f).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم \*شهد الله ان لا اله الا هو و الملائكة و الولوا  
 العلم قائما بالقسط لا اله الا هو العزيز الحكيم ان الدين عند الله  
 الاسلام \* صدق الله

*In the Name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful. \*God bears fitness that there is no god but He and the angels, and men possessed of knowledge upholding justice; there is no god but He, the All-mighty, and All-wise. The true religion with God is Islam\* (Kor. 3, 18, 19). God testifies!*

The inscription is again exclusively of religious nature: a *basmala* followed by a Koranic verse. The composition of the bricks in the background of the epigraphic band and especially the presence of a vegetal ornament which fills the gaps between the base line of the inscription and the lower part of the band do not have any parallel in the Saljuq epigraphic documents of the mosque. In a study devoted to the architectural decoration of the Ilkhanid period of this building, Ventrone (1981, p. 56) suggested that the bottom wall of this ivan, including the arch and its kufic inscription, be attributed “to the age in which numerous works of embellishment were performed inside the mosque” (*eadem*, p. 63). The hypothesis advanced by the scholar is certainly well defended. However, as we have stated above<sup>20</sup>, waiting for a more in-depth study of the palaeographic feature of the Saljuq inscriptions, we prefer not to exclude the possibility that this epigraph has been executed at the same time of the carved bands in the niches

<sup>18</sup> Village not far from Lajim, in the province of Mazandaran.

<sup>19</sup> لا اله الا الله مخلصا محمد رسول الله صادقا. Godard (1936a, 120) suggests the following translation: *Il n'y a de Dieu que Dieu. (Je le dis) d'un cœur pur. Muḥammad est le prophète de Dieu. (Je le dis) d'un cœur sincère.* See also Blair 1992, 208.

<sup>20</sup> See above, note 3.

of the external wall of the ivan and maybe only re-worked in a later period.

Bibl.: Gabriel 1935, fig. 25 (*photo showing partial view of the text*); Honarfar 1971, 134 (*text, commentary*); Galdieri 1972, fig. 129j (*photo*); Ventrone Vassallo 1979, 315, fig. 5 (*quotation, alphabetical table*); Ventrone 1981, 56 (*quotation, photo showing partial view of the text*).

### Room 74

**no 10** Inscription included in two bands, in the right section of the eastern wall and in the left section of the northern wall respectively (Fig. 13). Simple kufic in relief, similar to that of inscriptions nos 3, 5, 6 and 8; no complementary ornaments in the epigraphic field (Figs. 14a, b).

\* [...] و الارض و لا يود[ه / ...] و هو العلي العظيم \* في ذي الحجة  
سنة / [...]

\*[...] and earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the All-high, the All-glorious\* (Kor. 2: 255). In dhi'l-hijja of the ye[ar...].

Unfortunately only a short portion of this inscription is preserved: of the so-called “Throne verse”<sup>21</sup> only the final part survives, lacking the word *hifzu-huma* (حفظهما)<sup>22</sup> which was situated after the term *yu'du-hu* (يوده, at the end of the band in the east wall) and before the conjunction *waw* (و, therefore at the beginning of the band in the north wall). The date - introduced by the name of the last month of the Islamic calendar - is interrupted in the middle of the word *sana* (“year”), a circumstance which prevents to locate the inscription in a precise chronology and to verify if it too has been executed after the fire of 515/1121-22<sup>23</sup>.

Bibl.: Galdieri 1972, figs. 74a, 74b (*photos*); Ventrone Vassallo 1979 (*text, translation, commentary, photos, alphabetical table*); Galdieri 1984, fig. 105 (*photo of the second epigraphic band*); Grabar 1990, 38, fig. 35 (*translation, commentary, photo of the second epigraphic band*).

<sup>21</sup> This verse, as well as verses 18 and 19 of Sura 3 (inscription no 9), are among the ones most often attested in the inscriptions of the religious buildings.

<sup>22</sup> This word has been lost for the addition, in a much later period, of a vault arch.

<sup>23</sup> See inscription no 7.

The southern dome (area 190)

**no 11** As in the northern domed hall, the main inscription in this hall is included in a continuous circular band which runs at the base of the dome (Fig. 15). Simple kufic, in relief, with some of the upper endings slightly two-lobed; ornaments of the epigraphic field in the shape of two parallel shafts joined in the lower part by a segment only slightly bent (Fig. 16). The text begins on the northern side, almost exactly in front of mihrab.

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم امر ببناء هذه القبّة في ايام السلطان المعظم  
شاهانشاه الاعظم ملك المشرق و المغرب ركن الاسلام و المسلمين معز  
الدنيا و الدين ابي الفتح ملكشاه بن محمد بن داود يمين خليفة الله امير  
المومنين اعز الله نصره العبد الفقير الى رحمة الله الحسن بن علي بن  
اسحق على يد ابي الفتح احمد بن محمد الخازن

*In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. The construction of this dome was ordered during the days of the great Sultan, the august Shahanshah, King of the east and of the west, Pillar of Islam and the muslims, Strengtheners of the world and religion, Abi'l-Fath Malikshah b. Muhammad b. Dawd, Right hand of God's caliph, the Commander of the Faithful. May God glorify his victory! The servant needy for God's mercy al-Hasan b. 'Ali b. Ishaq, under the supervision of Abi'l-Fath Ahmad b. Muhammad al-Khazin.*

The inscription celebrates the work of Nizam al-Mulk, the powerful prime minister of the sultans Alp Arslan (455-65/1063-73) and Malik Shah (465-85/1073-92), born in Radkan very likely between 408/1018 and 410/1019-20 (Bosworth 1991). Unlike the other Saljuq epigraphs of the mosque, this text, already extensively examined by several scholars<sup>24</sup>, does not feature religious formulas and Koranic verses, but contains uniquely a long foundation text introduced by the usual *basmala*. The initial expression, namely *amara bi-bina'* followed by the object of the construction<sup>25</sup>, is attested only in the most ancient inscription in the name of Malik Shah<sup>26</sup>, since in his other foundation texts that are known to us the expression

<sup>24</sup> See especially Wiet 1940 and Blair 1992.

<sup>25</sup> It should be noticed that the same formula can be found also in the foundation text of the northern domed hall (inscription no 1).

<sup>26</sup> Inscription on the north-western wall of the mosque of Ani, dated probably to 466/1074 (RCEA 1936, no 2707).

*amara bi-'imara*<sup>27</sup> is used instead, or, even more frequently, *amara bi-'amal*<sup>28</sup>. The text contains the name of three personages: Malik Shah, as the sultan in power, Nizam al-Mulk (mentioned with his name and those of the father and the grandfather), as patron of the building, and a Ahmad b. Muhammad, supervisor of the works<sup>29</sup>. With the exception of the sultan, whose name is accompanied by a rich protocol including two official titles (*al-Sultan al-mu'azzam* and *Shahanshah al-a'zam*) and four honorific titles (*Malik al-mashriq wa al-maghrib*, *Rukn al-islam wa'l-muslimin*, *Mu'izz al-dunya wa'l-din*, and *Yamin khalifat Allah*), the other two personages do not carry any title, a peculiar circumstance if one considers the important role held by Nizam al-Mulk during the reign of Malik Shah<sup>30</sup>. The inscription, devoid of date, has been attributed for a long time to the period included between 465 and 485 (1073-92). Only with the study of the titles of the Saljuq sultan, Blair (1992, 165, 166) has been able to hypothesize that the construction took place between the month of *jumadà II* of 479 and the month of *dhu'l-hijja* of the following year (Sept. 1086-March 1087), thus about one year before the construction of the northern domed hall.

Bibl.: Gabriel 1935, 16, fig. 8 (*partial translation, brief commentary, photo*); Godard 1936c, 213-215 (*text, translation, commentary*); RCEA 1936, no 2775 (*text, translation*); Schroeder 1939, 954, fig. 288 (*quotation, photo showing partial view*)

<sup>27</sup> These are two inscriptions in the great mosque of Damascus, carved on the north sides of the south-western pillar (RCEA 1936, no 2734) and of the south-eastern pillar (RCEA 1936, no 2736) respectively, both dated to 475/1082.

<sup>28</sup> Two other inscriptions from the great mosque of Damascus (from the southern side of the south-western pillar [RCEA 1936, no 2735, reading rectified by the Author] and of the south-eastern pillar [RCEA 1936, no 2737] respectively), these too dated to 475/1082; an inscription from Aleppo of 480/1087 (RCEA 1936, no 2764); three inscriptions from Diyarbekir dated between 481/1088 and 485/1092 (RCEA 1936, nos 2773, 2792, 2798).

<sup>29</sup> This personage is not mentioned in contemporary chronicles.

<sup>30</sup> In the only two other inscriptions bearing the name of this minister (the fragmentary inscription coming from the madrasa of Khargird and dated most probably to the first five years of Malik Shah's reign [Blair 1992, 149] and the inscription of the great mosque of Damascus of 475/1082 [RCEA 1936, no 2737]), the minister bears some titles including that of Nizam al-Mulk. Interesting hypotheses on the absence of titles in the inscription of the Great Mosque of Isfahan have been suggested by Blair (*eadem*, p. 161).

of the text); Wiet 1940, 128-131 (*text, translation, commentary, fac-simile*); Honarfar 1971, p. 76, fig. 77 (*text, commentary*); Galdieri 1972, figs. 190i, 190n (*photos*); Ventrone Vassallo 1979, 314, 315, fig. 5 (*quotation, alphabetical table*); Grabar 1990, 32, figs. 21, 22 (*translation, commentary, photos*); Blair 1992: 160-163, figs. 107, 108 (*text, translation, commentary, photo showing partial view of the text, fac-simile*).

**no. 12** Stucco inscription included within six bands running above the impost blocks of the eastern, northern and western walls within the domed hall (Fig. 15). Cursive on a background of foliated and blooming scrolls. Background painted in blue (Figs. 17a-c).

\*فعسى أولئك ان يكونوا من المهتدين / [اجعلتم سقاية الحاج و عمارة /  
المسجد الحرام] كمن امن بالله و اليوم الاخر و جاهد في / [سبيل  
الله...]\*

*\*It may be that those will be among the guided. / [Do you reckon the giving of water to pilgrims and the inhabiting / of the Holy Mosque] as the same as one who believes in God and the Last Day and struggles in / [the way of God?...]\* (Kor. 9, 18-19).*

This Koranic inscription, unfortunately in a very poor conservation state and only partially readable, has been brought to light in an unknown occasion, certainly after the 80s, since it is apparently not visible in the photographs published so far and, therefore, has never been the object of study. Its importance is attributable to several aspects. First of all, unlike the inscriptions presented until now, this one is executed in stucco and not in brick; secondly, it is in cursive rather than kufic script<sup>31</sup>. The cursive script was introduced in the monumental epigraphy during the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century in the eastern regions of the caliphate, most probably between 421/1030 and 447/1055 by the Ghaznavids in their capital Ghazni (Giunta 2001). The text that we are presenting should thus be listed among the earliest evidences of the Saljuq period<sup>32</sup>. The introduction of the cursive script did not result, however, in the abandonment of kufic, which, because of its “sacred” character, continued to be employed mainly for the texts of religious nature. Accordingly, the other interesting feature of this inscription is in the peculiar choice by the Saljuqs to use for the first time a script different

<sup>31</sup> See also below, inscription no 13.

<sup>32</sup> See also Blair 1992, 162, 163.

from kufic to transcribe the word of God; this is a quite unexpected characteristic of the inscription since all the other religious (and Koranic) texts of the mosque are rigorously in kufic script.

**no 13** Inscription included in a band running along the eastern side of the outer northern face of the dome. Cursive on a background of foliated and blooming scrolls of the same type of the inscription no 12, and equally carved in stucco (Figs. 18, 19).

\*[...] فانهم غير ملومين\*

\*[...] then being not blameworthy\* (Kor. 23, 6).

This Koranic inscription, of which only a very short part remains, shows the same features of the previous for the employ of stucco, the execution technique, the choice of the colours, the writing style, and the nature of the content. The position of the band and the presence of the last words of verse 6 of Sura 23 lead to the supposition that the text ran along all the upper part of the impost blocks of the northern side of the domed hall, and that it contained the first six verses of the Sura<sup>33</sup>.

It seems quite likely, then, that the content of the two cursive Koranic inscriptions of the southern domed hall (nos 12 and 13) was the following<sup>34</sup>:

External band: *“Prosperous are the believers who in their prayers are humble and from idle talk turn away and at almsgiving are active and guard their private parts save from their wives and what their right hands own then being not blameworthy”* (Kor. 23, 1-6)

Internal band: *“Only he shall inhabit God’s places of worship who believes in God and the Last Day, and performs the prayer, and pays, the alms, and fears none but God alone; it may be that those will be among the guided. Do you reckon the giving of water to pilgrims and the inhabiting of the Holy Mosque as the same as one who believes in God and the Last Day and struggles in the way of God? Not equal are they in God’s sight; and God guides not the people of the evildoers”* (Kor. 9, 18-19)<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> For a suggestion on the choice of these verses see Scerrato 1994.

<sup>34</sup> The underlined phrases correspond to those still perfectly readable on the monument.

<sup>35</sup> The possibility cannot be excluded that the two texts were longer and that the verses of the two Suras (in particular those of the external band) were more numerous.

Bibl.: Galdieri 1973, figs. 13, 68 (*photo, fac-simile*); Grabar 1990, 32, 33, fig. 24 (*translation, commentary, fac-simile*); Scerrato 1994 (*text, translation, commentary, fac-simile*).

#### Inscriptions found *ex situ*

**no 14** Several fragments of a kufic inscription - which unfortunately cannot be reconstructed<sup>36</sup> - bearing letters of large dimension have been brought to light during test excavations carried out in the south-eastern area. They mainly come from rooms 57 and 44, not much distant from room 74 (Fig. 13) where part of a kufic inscription still survives (no 10). It cannot be excluded that they were part of the same epigraphic band.

Bibl.: Galdieri 1984, 56, fig. 55 (*fac-simile*).

**no 15** Two fragments of cursive inscription in brick with turquoise glaze have been retrieved during the restoration works carried out behind the western ivan (Godard 1938, 321, figs. 217, 218).

شاه المـ[عظم] / المظفـ[ر]

Godard (1938, 321) noted the similarity between these epigraphic fragments and those which had been retrieved, still *in situ*, on the façade of one of the ivans of the Saljuq mosque in Gaz<sup>37</sup>, highly probably dating back to the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> century. This allowed him to suppose that the epigraphic fragments were part of the original decoration of the western ivan in the Saljuq mosque (*ibidem*). The text is quite fragmentary, but it certainly contains two elements of a sultanal protocol which does not seem to correspond to that of Sanjar b. Malik Shah (511-52/1118-57) to whose reign important modifications of the mosque are to be ascribed. It is important to point out that if the inscription dated back to the Saljuqs, it would fall within the most ancient epigraphic evidence documented in glazed brick, and would be coeval, or maybe slightly later, to that on the top of the minaret of the mosque of Sin dated to 526/1131-32<sup>38</sup>.

Bibl.: Godard 1938, 321, figs. 219, 220 (*quotation, commentary, photos*).

<sup>36</sup> Only small fragments of the body of the letters and some three-lobed ending are left.

<sup>37</sup> Located about 20 km north of Isfahan.

<sup>38</sup> See in particular Godard 1936b, 1936e, fig. 217, Smith 1939, 5, 6, fig. 7.

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The following table reports the sequence of the Saljuq inscriptions of the Great Mosque of Isfahan, following an approximate chronological order:

No.	Position	Style of writing	Content of the text	Date
11	southern dome	kufic	<i>basimala</i> + t. of constr.	s.d. (479-80/1086-87)
12	southern dome	cursive	Kor. 9: 18-19	s.d. (479-80/1086-87)
13	southern dome	cursive	Kor. 23: 1-6	s.d. (479-80/1086-87)
1	northern dome	kufic	<i>basimala</i> + Kor. 7: 54 + t. of constr.	481/1088-89
2	northern dome	kufic	religious	s.d. (481/1088-89)
3	northern dome	kufic	<i>basimala</i> + Kor. 17: 78-79	s.d. (481/1088-89)
4	northern dome	kufic	religious	s.d. (481/1088-89)
5	northern dome	kufic	<i>basimala</i> + Kor. 3: 26-27	s.d. (481/1088-89)
6	northern dome	kufic	Kor. 3: 97	s.d. (481/1088-89)
7	north-eastern gate	kufic	<i>basimala</i> + Kor. 2: 114 + t. of rest.	515/1121-22
10	room 74	kufic	Kor. 2: 255	s.d. (515-52/1121-57)
14	area 44-57	kufic	?	s.d. (515-52/1121-57)
8	eastern ivan	kufic	religious	s.d. (515-52/1121-57)
9	eastern ivan	kufic	<i>basimala</i> + Kor. 3: 18-19	s.d. (515-52/1121-57) ?
15	western ivan	cursive	royal titles	s.d. (515-52/1121-57) ?

At the current state of research, the *corpus* of the Saljuq inscriptions of the great mosque of Isfahan comprises about fifteen documents. The three more ancient texts are in the imposing domed hall patronized by Nizam al-Mulk to celebrate the power of Malik Shah in the last years of his reign: the epigraphic band situated under the dome - at a considerable height and hardly readable from underneath - glorified the sultan; those situated outside and inside the pavilion, which are more visible, presented some verses of two

Koranic Suras whose reading would have been facilitated, according to some scholars, by the employ of the cursive script<sup>39</sup>. About one year later, six more inscriptions commemorated the building of a new domed pavilion patronized by Taj al-Mulk. The epigraphic program of this other hall was not much different from the previous one, with which it was meant to “compete”: a foundation text - this time precisely dated, but similarly situated beneath the dome and thus hardly readable - some texts bearing a religious and Koranic content distributed within and outside the pavilion (this time in kufic). The Koranic passages chosen for the inscriptions of the two domed halls contain a clear message of religious propaganda: they insist on the creation and the order commanded by God (inscription no 1) and on his infinite power (no 5), as well as on the duty of an appropriate behaviour of the believers, the latter being asked to humbly perform the prayers (nos 3, 13, 14), to carry out the pilgrimage to Mekka (no 6), to practise the “purification” of their wealth through the *zakat* (nos 13, 14), so that God (glorified also through the presence of 31 of His 99 names [no 2]) can always guide and protect them.

All the remnant inscriptions could be possibly attributed to a period of about thirty years later and dating to the years of reign of Sanjar, even though only the inscription of the north-eastern portal carries a date. With the exception of this text, the epigraphs bear exclusively a religious content.

The inscriptions might be grouped in three different categories on the basis of the materials and the execution techniques: most of them are obtained through an assemblage of carved bricks, in low relief (nos 1-11, 14); a specimen is in carved brick (no 15); two are in carved stucco (nos 12, 13).

All the texts are rigorously distributed along a single line<sup>40</sup>.

Kufic, of a very elegant and refined type despite its sober character and the absence of any elaborate decoration, is the almost exclusively employed script. The shafts are rigidly vertical or, more

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<sup>39</sup> For detailed information on this issue see Scerrato 1994.

<sup>40</sup> In some cases, for lack of space, the last letters of the last words of some epigraphic bands appear slightly above the base line (i.e. some sections of inscription no 2) or even in vertical position (right band of inscription no 8).

rarely, oblique (sometimes “broken”); the bodies are very geometrical and characterized by a not much pronounced height; the tales cut the base line and generate almost always short and rigid right angles<sup>41</sup>. It is possible to distinguish among three variants:

- 1 - all the letters show the complete absence of ornaments (nos 4, 9);
- 2 - the body of the letters of the group *jim/ha'/kha'* (ج/ح/خ) extends through an oblique broken shaft (nos 1, 2, 7). The latter ends in a semi-palmette (no 1), with a two-lobed element (no 2), or with a simple oblique segment (no 7);
- 3 - the body of the same letters extends through an oblique and bent shaft which ends with a two-lobate or a three-lobate element (nos 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11). A two-lobate element or a semi-palmette are also in the upper part of the bent shaft of the *kaf*.

The epigraphic field is formed by small bricks assembled with regular intervals, in horizontal rows<sup>42</sup> and “chessboard” grid. The space separating each small brick is filled with a small element in the shape of an “X”. The three bands of the eastern ivan are characterized instead by the presence of an elaborate vegetal ornament which fills the background completely (no 8) or occupies only the narrow band underneath the base line (no 9).

The ornaments of the epigraphic field, where present (nos 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11), are shaped in a form inspired by the *lam-alif*, that is two parallel vertical shafts, joint at the bottom by two oblique or slightly bent segments<sup>43</sup>. This ornament, usually named *chevron*, is never employed to recognize homograph letters, as it often occurs in Islamic inscriptions, but merely with the intent of filling part of the empty spaces among the shifts of the letters and giving a greater symmetry to the epigraphic band.

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<sup>41</sup> Among the few exceptions see the tale of the *waw* in the seventh band of inscription no 3 and those of the *zayn* and the *nun* of the last word of the inscription no 11. In this instances they extend above the base line and take the “swan-neck” shape.

<sup>42</sup> The unique exception is represented by inscription no 9, with rows of small bricks assembled along vertical lines.

<sup>43</sup> This second type is peculiar especially of the epigraphic band of the southern domed hall.

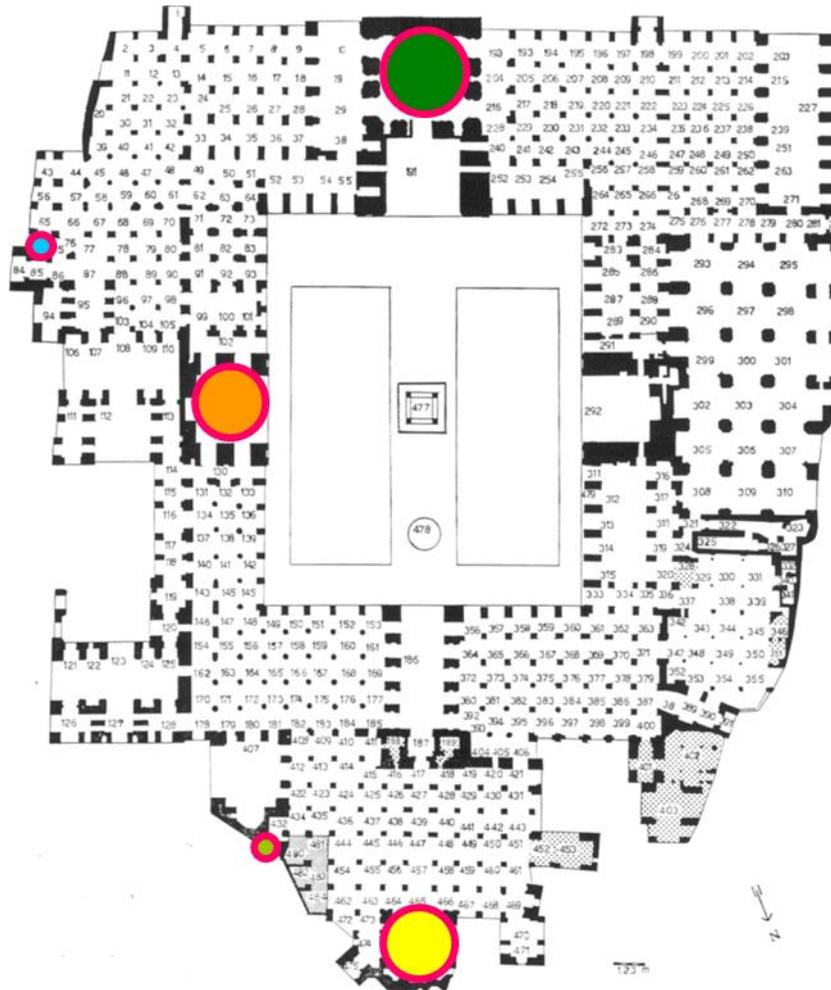


Fig. 1 - plan of the mosque (after Schroeder 1938-1939, fig. 328), with the localization of the Saljuq inscriptions still *in situ*

Legenda:

- Area 476: inscriptions nos 1-6
- Area 433: inscription no 7
- Area 129: inscriptions nos 8, 9
- Room 74: inscription no 10
- Area 190: inscriptions nos 11-13

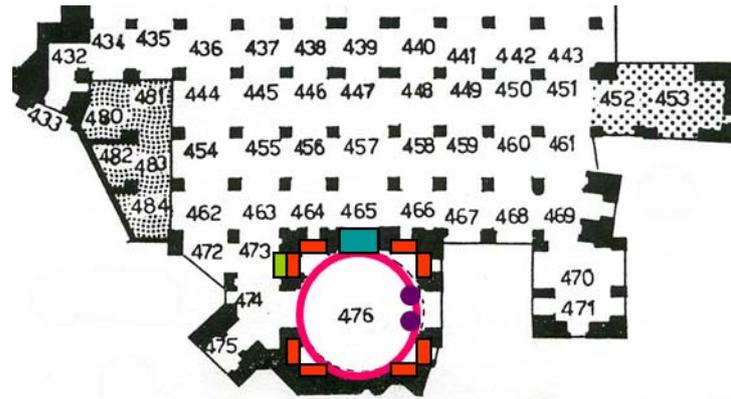


Fig. 2 - plan of the northern area of the mosque, with the localization of the inscriptions nos 1-6

*Legenda:*

- *Inscription no 1 and, immediately below, inscription no 2 (divided into 32 sections)*
- *Inscription no 3 (the arrow indicates the beginning of the text)*
- *Inscription no 4*
- *Inscription no 5*
- *Inscription no 6*

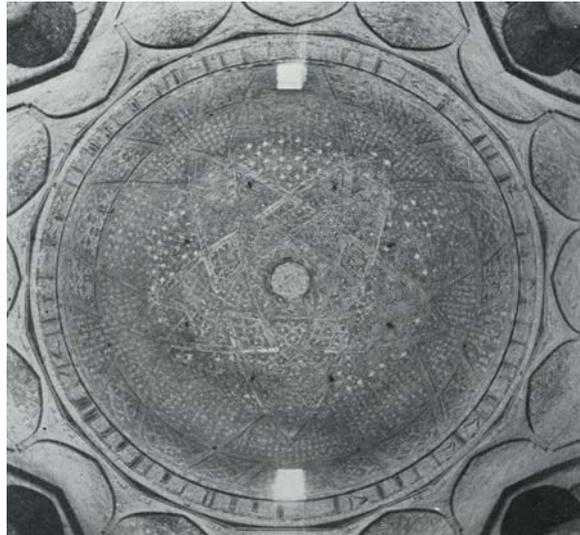
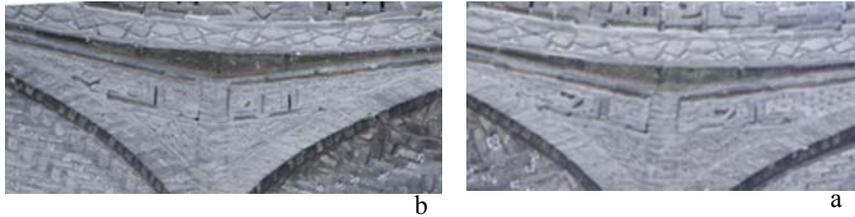


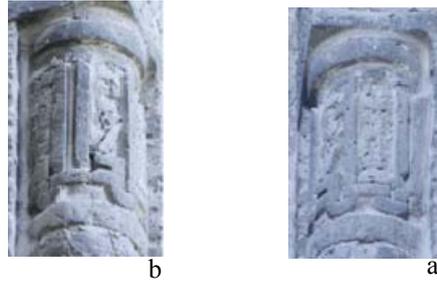
Fig. 3 - northern dome. Inscription no 1 (after Galdieri 1972, fig. 476e)



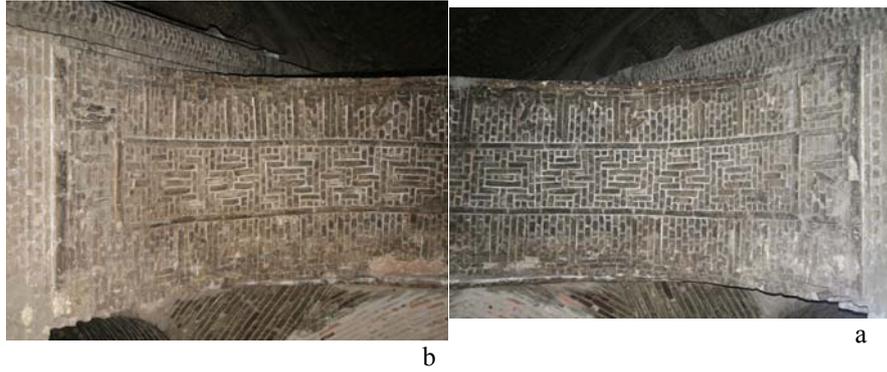
Figs. 4a, b - northern dome. Four of the thirty-two sections of the inscription no 2 (photos by the author 2006)



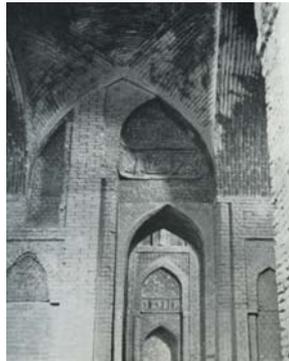
Figs. 4a, b - northern dome. Four of the thirty-two sections of the inscription no 2 (photos by the author 2006)



Figs. 6a, b - northern dome. The inscription (no 4) of one of the three small columns (photo by the author 2006)



Figs. 7a, b - northern dome. Inscription no 5 (photos by the author 2006)



a (after Galdieri 1972, fig. 475)



b (photo by the author 2006)

Fig. 8 - northern dome; a: general; b: detail of the inscription no 6



Fig. 9 - north-eastern portal. Inscription no 7 (photo by B. Genito 2009)



b



a

Figs. 10a, b - eastern ivan. Inscription no 8 (photo by the author 2006)

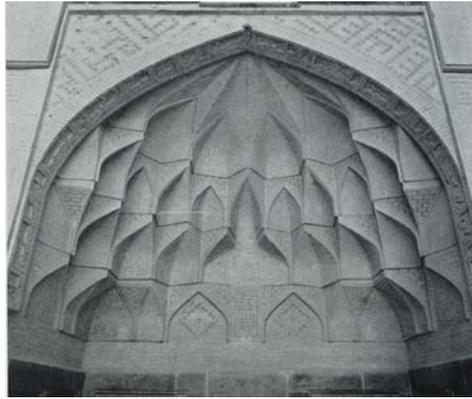


Fig. 11 - inscription no 9: general view (after Galdieri 1972, fig. 129j)



Figs. 12a-f - inscription no 9 (photos by the author 2006)

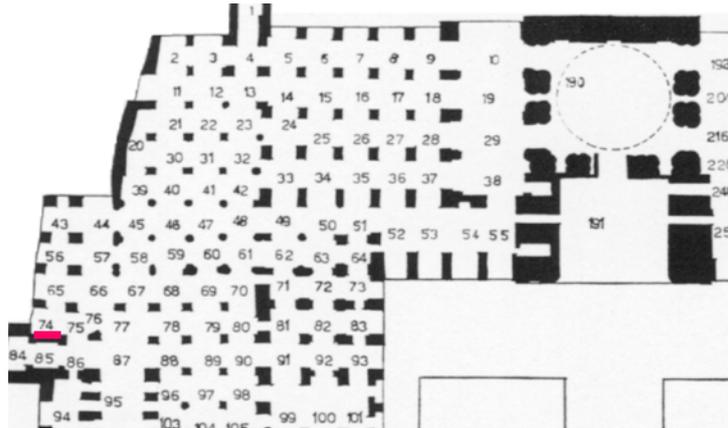


Fig. 13 - plan of the south-eastern area of the mosque, with the localization of the inscription no 10



Figs. 14a, b - room 74. Inscription no 10 (photos by L. Rendina 2008)

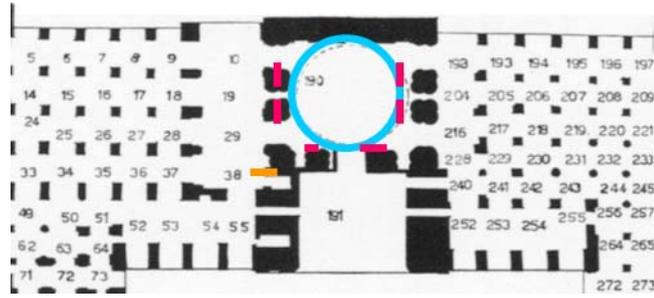


Fig. 15 - plan of the southern area of the mosque, with the localization of the inscriptions nos 11-13

*Legenda*

- *Inscription no 11*
- *Inscription no 12*
- *Inscription no 13*

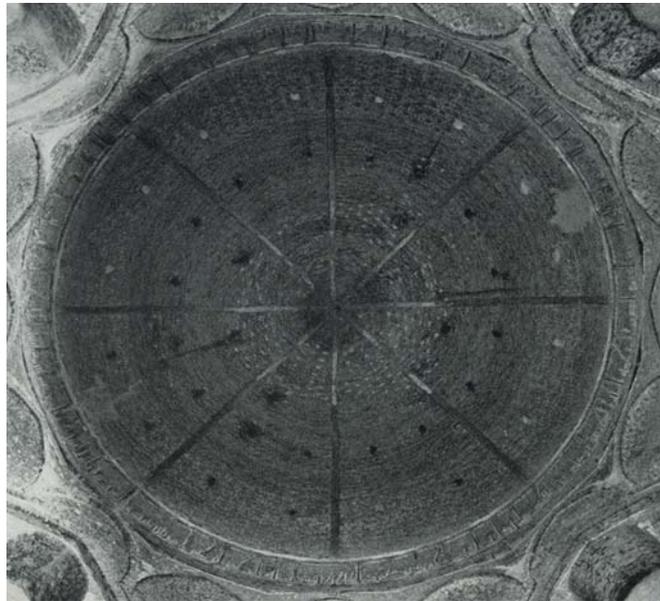


Fig. 16 - southern dome. Inscription no 11 (after Galdieri 1972, fig. 190n)

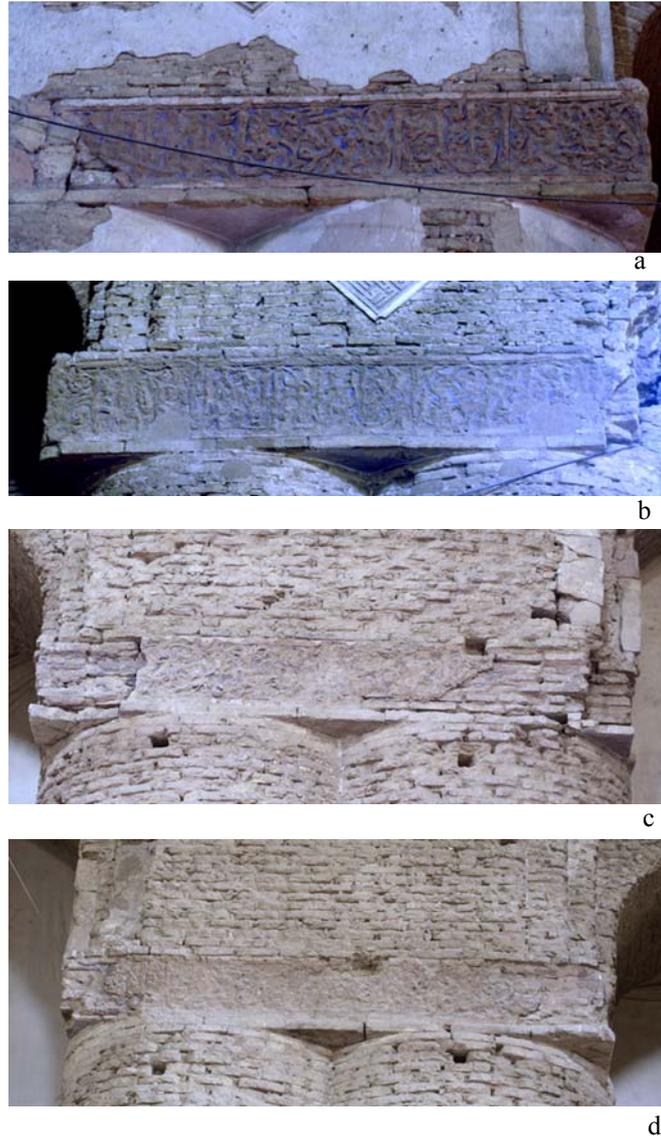


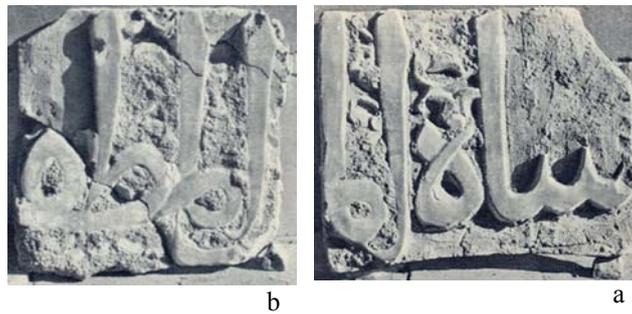
Fig. 17 - southern dome. Inscription no 12 (photo by the author 2006)  
a, b: northern wall, eastern and western pillars;  
c, d: eastern wall, northern and southern pillars



Fig. 18 - southern dome. Inscription no 13 (photo by the author 2004)



Fig. 19 - fac-simile of the inscription no 13 (after Galdieri 1972)



Figs. 20a, b - inscription no 15 (after Godard 1938, figs. 217, 218)

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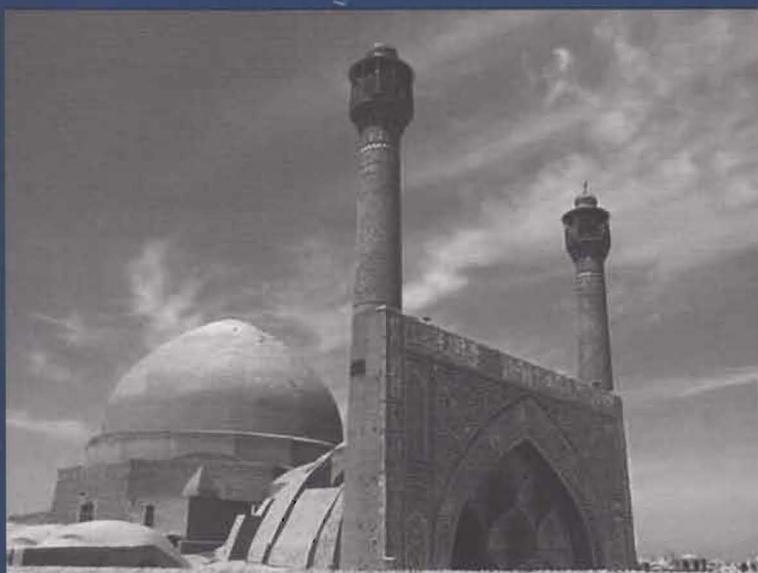
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موسسه ایتالیایی آفریقا و شرق

## پروژه بایگانی دیجیتال باستان‌شناسی مسجد جمعه اصفهان

از کاوش (۱۹۷۸-۱۹۷۲) تا بایگانی (۲۰۱۰-۲۰۰۳)



گردآورندگان:

برونو جنیتو و فریبا سعیدی انارکی

تهران ۱۳۹۰