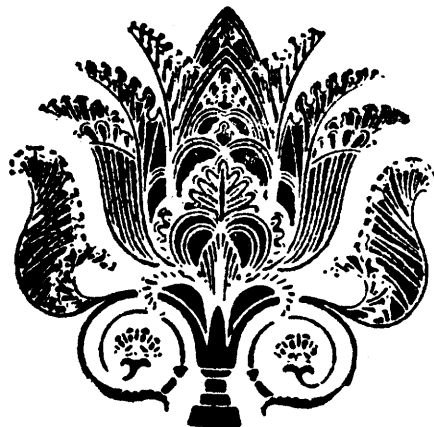
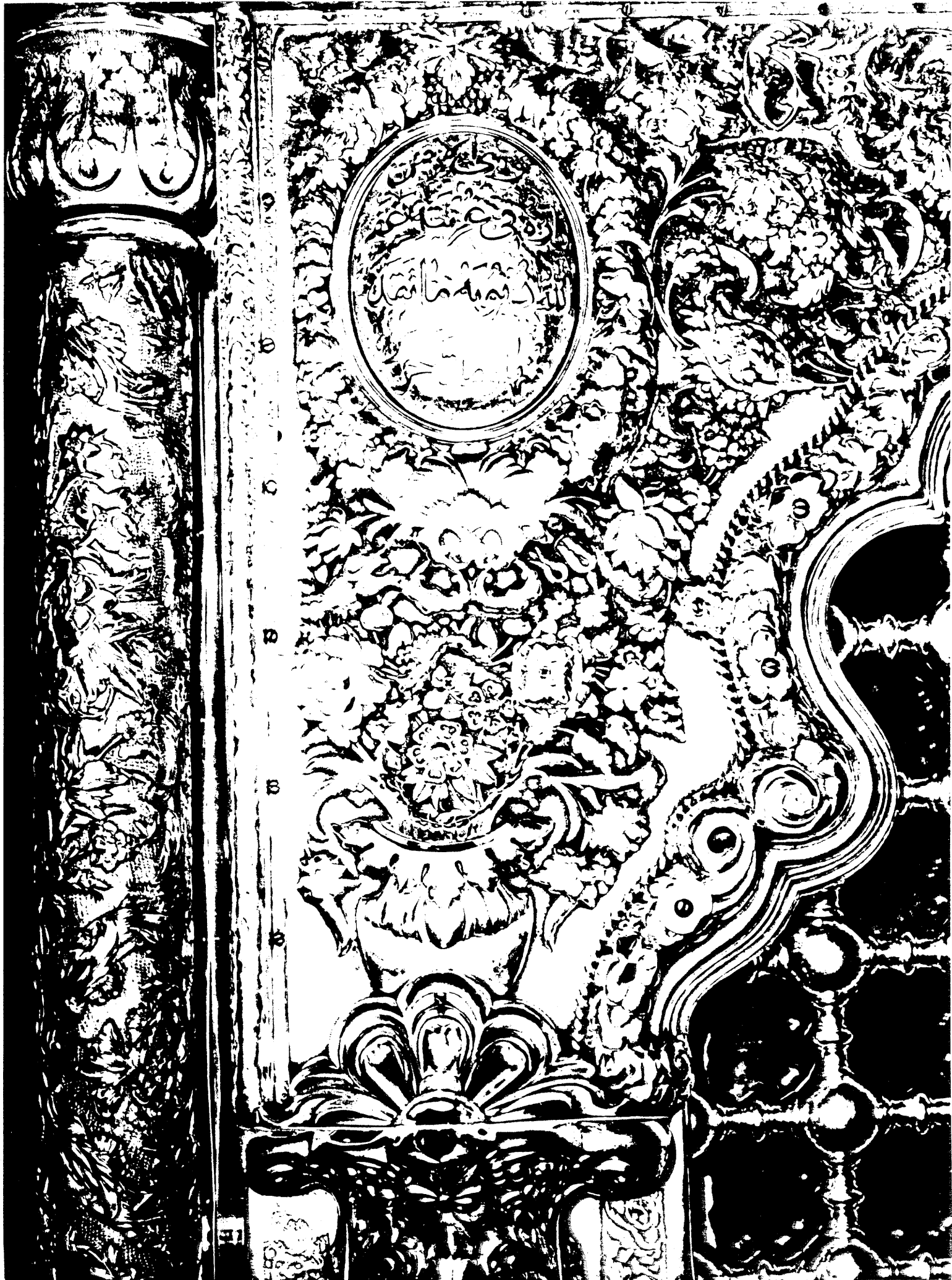


# ISLAMIC MONUMENTS



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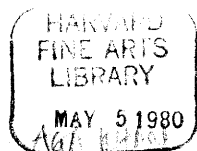




# **THE HOLY SHRINE OF IMAM REZA**

**Mashhad**

This volume which is part  
of the work in four volumes  
dedicated  
to the Holy Shrine of Imâm Rezâ  
contains the english text.



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## PREFACE

### THE CREATIVE FORCE OF FAITH

*The deep rooted history of Iran is filled with proud periods that along the path of mankind's progress have exercised a deep influence on the history of world civilization. Throughout the centuries, the Iranian people have not only courageously defended this sacred soil against the invader and would-be conqueror, but also the spiritual and moral force and the creative power of the Iranians have given Iran a prominent place in the history of art. The ideas of Iranian religious leaders and philosophers still guide the culture of humanity; and their influence acts as a force and guiding light to Western civilization.*

*The Iranians, from the earliest times, displayed a bounteous talent in the fashioning of works of art. A God-given discernment has enabled them to give the world the finest of artistic works and to make the word "art"*

and the name "Iran" synonymous. For thousands of years, the civilized world has praised the Iranian genius for its artistic achievement. Iranian art displays both the qualities of sensitivity and creativity. Both heart and mind answer to the artist's call.

Among all the forms possible, only those appear in Iranian art that constitute significant and true forms, reduced to their simplest elements and so articulated as to express the very essence and spirit of the form.

In all the fields of literature and art, the Iranians have left the imprint of their own special genius. The sweet verse of its poets, its pleasing music, astonishing bas-reliefs, wondrous architecture, delicate miniatures and fine arts: each inspires awe, a sense of majesty and pride. The most influential factor in endowing Iranian art with its scope and greatness is the wide range and variety of cultures with which the Iranians have come into contact. Innate artistic taste, a piercing intellect and flexibility permitted the Iranians to incorporate forms and ideas of the culture of others into their own, without affecting the unity and individuality of Iranian art.

Here we must say a word about the art and techniques of Iranian architecture. The ruins of Persepolis, Takht-e Jamshid, Pâsârgâd and Shûsh, the Shâh and Shaykh Lotfollâh Mosques in Isfâhân, the Friday Mosque in Shirâz, the mausoleum of Bâyezid Bastâmi in Bastâm and of Oljeitü at Soltâniyyeh, various samples of brick, tile and mosaic work: all are examples of the Iranian genius for architecture and the creation of beautiful buildings and structures.

A study of the native arts, and particularly architecture, is valuable not only for showing us that Iranian artisans were fully competent at applying

*difficult architectural principles and, by utilizing lasting materials, ensured the strength and endurance of their buildings, but also for displaying the delicate care and taste the Iranians brought to the beautification of the exterior and façades of their structures. Artistic skill and a spirit of faith and love of God came together in the creation of these buildings.*

*In Iran, religion has always provided a powerful inspiration for art and beauty. Initially Zoroastrianism, then Islam and Sufism were characterised by close affinity to poetry and art; and artists saw in all the aspects of nature an expression of the perfection and the love of God. With deep insight and discernment, they drew inspiration from religion to fire their creativity.*

*The Iranians grasped, more deeply than many others, the true spirit of religion. When we gaze at the temple of Ânâhitâ at Kermânshâh, the inspiring mihrâb of the Shaykh Lotfollâh Mosque in Isfâhân or the graceful domes and chambers of the Shrine of Imâm Rezâ, we are involuntarily overcome by devotion and spirituality. We sense that an artist or artisan who seeks through faith and love of religion to create a work of value, draws inspiration from a spiritual force; and in striving to grow nearer to the God-head brings his innermost spirit to the act of creation.*

*In such circumstances, the artist does not work for material reward or worldly station. He seeks only to glorify God. Faith, under such conditions, is a creative force, and belief in God becomes the well-head of the artist's inspiration. Art springs from delicacy of thought, purity of feeling, perfection of taste, depth of intellect and from masterly skill. Art is a reflection of the discernment of the truth and a measure of the achievement of perfection. The well-head of art is love of beauty and truth.*

*The splendor and majesty of Iranian religious buildings springs from this love of truth, faith in perfectability and deep religiosity. Iranian artisans have sought, through faith, to create buildings that survive time and the elements. The purity of spirit, devotion and dedication with which these structures were built ensure their eternal endurance.*

*The minarets against whose intricate designs the chant of the muezzin resounds to the heavens; the shâbestans which draw the spirit and mind of the devotee towards their dark silence, free him from the "we" and "I" to direct him towards the "He" and raise him closer to the angels; the tall îvâns, set between the minarets, seemingly like the glowing faces of the faithful between upraised, prayerful hands asking God's forgiveness: all these are but examples of the achievement of Iranian architects, whose spirit was imbued with great faith and their hands with great skill. Masterful tilework is a special feature of Iranian mosques. As examples of architecture, they are unequalled. And their wondrous designs and striking colours are a reminder of the genius of Iranian craftsmanship.*

*Better knowledge and understanding of these great buildings, study of Iranian architecture and particularly of the religious buildings of this land, strengthens the foundations of fellow-feeling and religiosity among the Iranian people.*

*It brings wider appreciation among the people of the world for Iranian artistic genius.*

*The Asia Institute, affiliated to Pahlavî University, is charged by His Imperial Majesty the Shahanshah Aryâmehr to undertake academic research. The purpose of the Institute is to deepen knowledge of the rich and valuable*



*Iranian culture heritage. To this aim, and to the preservation of Iranian art and historical buildings, Her Imperial Majesty the Shahbanou of Iran has always attached a special importance, and as the President of the Asia Institute. has lent her full support to its activities; her guidance has provided the Institute with its inspiration in the discharge of its weighty duties.*

*Her Imperial Majesty has wished a study to be made of the buildings of the Holy Shrine of Imâm Rezâ and the nature and architecture of its buildings. This weighty task, and the thorough research it involves, has been undertaken by Dr. Bijan Saadat, a member of the Faculty of Pahlavî University. The valuable fruit of his endeavors is here presented to the devotees of art and culture. We hope this volume will constitute the first chapter in a more extensive study of Iranian religious buildings and that it will give pleasure to scholars and art-lovers alike.*

Dr. Farhang Mehr  
Chancellor  
Pahlavî University  
Shirâz, Iran

## SYSTEM OF transliteration

The following system of transliteration which is as close as possible to actual Persian pronunciation has been applied throughout. However, the traditional spellings have been retained for words such as *imam* and *muezzin* that have become common in English.

t	ط	l	ل	p	پ	ž	ژ
z	ظ	m	م	t	ت	r	ر
'	ع	n	ن	š	ث	z	ز
gh	غ	v	و	j	ج	zh	ژ
f	ف	h	ه	ch	چ	s	س
q	ق	y, i	ی	h	ح	sh	ش
k	ك	â	الف، آ	kh	خ	š	ص
g	گ	b	ب	d	د	z	ض

û as in roof  
o as in code

## INTRODUCTION

*For some twelve centuries, the life-giving radiance of the resting place of Ali b. Mûsâ, Imâm Rezâ (may peace be upon him), has lighted the eyes of the inhabitants of this land. The blessing of its Holy Spirit has given them faith and life. Each morning, the rays of the eastern sun are privileged to kiss the holy doorstep, and each evening, the souls of his devotees delight in circumambulating his sacred Shrine.*

*The Lord so willed that the honour of guarding the pure spirit and godly person of Imâm Rezâ should be bestowed on this blessed land. Grateful for such a bounty, each has offered whatever he or she has of love, knowledge, art, discernment, wealth, and property, so that the court of his majesty and splendour has raised its head to the heavens and Khorâsân has been crowned with a glittering diadem.*

*In about the year 200 (A.H. 815-6 A.D.) the soil of Khorâsân was graced by his beloved footsteps. Two or three years later, that same soil was privileged to take to its breast that resplendent jewel, its head bowed in humility.*

*Imâm Rezâ was laid to rest in the mausoleum of Hârûm ar-Rashid at Sanâbâd, one of the districts of Tûs. So powerful was the attraction that his presence exercised on his devotees, that Sanâbâd grew*

into a great centre. It put Tūs into the shadow and, in memory of his martyrdom, came to be known as Mashhad (place of martyrdom).

The Shrine of Imâm Rezâ on numerous occasions was the victim of damage and destruction, until, in the reign of Sûltân Mohammad Khodâbandeh (Oljeitü), it was rebuilt. During the reigns of the Iranian rulers that followed the Shrine was beautified and other buildings were erected around it. Today, the Holy Precincts of the Shrine of Imâm Rezâ represent the greatest and most complete complex of religious buildings in Iran.

It is unnecessary, in this introduction, to refer to the architectural variety and artistic perfection to be found in the Holy Precincts. As already remarked, each of the ruling dynasties of Iran sought, as a mark of their devotion, to add to its greatness and glory. This process achieved its most perfect expression in the era of the Pahlavi Dynasty, and particularly during the reign of His Imperial Majesty Mohammad Rezâ Shâh Pahlavî Shahanshâh Aryâmehr.

In each era, Iranian master-builders and artisans, imbued with love and selfless dedication, devoted their best skills and art to the further beautification and glorification of the Holy Precincts. To turn over these pages, to study the pictures and read the text, and to cast light on the history of the Shrine, is to delight the eyes with the vision of that paradise of the spirit, and to understand the meaning of eternal bliss.

The responsibility for this study was entrusted by Her Imperial Majesty the Shahbanou of Iran to the Asia Institute at Pahlavî University. The Institute, in turn, gave me the honour of this assignment. The present volume, not worthy of King of Khorâsân but representing only the insignificant fruit of the endeavours of this unworthy person, is presented to Empress Farah, Empress of Iran and Iran's patroness of the arts, that she may, by her approval and permission to proceed with publication, fill all the devotees of Imâm Rezâ, and also this humble and devoted servant, with joy and happiness.

BIJAN SAADAT  
Pahlavî University SHIRAZ

## Khorâsân

It is said the sun rises in Khorâsân and spreads light over the earth. Khorâsân is a cradle of civilization, the birth place of the great men of history, of poets and scholars. It is the home of Ferdowsi, of poetry and literature.

It is from Khorâsân that brave men such as Abû Moslem arose to defend the independence of this ancient land and gain eternal fame for themselves and their country. The Parthians laid the foundations here for a West Asian civilization.

Khorâsân possesses a glorious history. Even today the ruins of the "city of one hundred gates" speak of its past greatness. It is among the flourishing and bountiful provinces of Iran. Over the centuries, it has been the scene of battles and the target of invasions. But through the efforts of its courageous people, it has always overcome adversity, fittingly playing its role in the defence of the frontiers and the sovereignty of our country.

Khorâsân is situated in the north-east of Iran. It is bound by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the north, by Afghanistan on the east and by Iranian provinces on the south and west.

In the past, Khorâsân was larger than it is today. In *Hodûd al 'Âlam*, written in 372 (982-3), Khorâsân is described as "a district to the east of which lies Hindûstân (India); to the south, partly the outlying areas of Khorâsân and partly the desert of Karkas Mountain; to the west lies Gorgân; and to the north is the River Jayhûn. It is a large district, with great riches and abundant wealth."

Yâqût, the famous Iranian geographer, who died in 626 (1228-29) writes in *Marâsed al-Eṭlâ*: "Khorâsân is a vast land one end of which touches, through Jovayn and Bayhaq, on 'Irâq; and the other end, through Taqârestân (Takhârestân), Ghaznâ and Sajestân (Sistân) touches on India. Among its important cities are Nîshâpûr, Harât, Marv, which is a part of Balkh, and Tâleqân, Nesâ', Abîvard and Sarakhs. Some consider Jayhûn and Khârazm also part of Khorâsân. "Khorâsân, it is said, contains four districts:

"The first is Irânshahr, which is comprised of Nîshâpûr, Qahestân, Ṭabîn, Harât, Pûshanj (one of the towns of Harât) Bâdghis (one of the districts of Harât and in the past a large city) and Ṭûs, which has been called Tâberân.

"The second is Marv and Shâh Jahân, Sarakhs, Nesa', Abîvard, Marv-Rûd, Tâleqan and Khvârazm.

"The third includes the western side of the Jayhûn River, Joriân, Khârazm, upper Takhârestân, Mâvarâ'an-Nahr, Andarâneh (a town near the Hindu Kush), Sâsân, Baghalân (a town in the district of Balkh), and Vâlej (a city in Takhârestân).

"The fourth includes Mâvarâ'an-Nahr, Bokhârâ, Shâsh (Châch, where good bows were made), Saghd (near Samarqand, which, due to its clement weather, was known as one of the four paradises) and Nasaf (between Jayhûn and Samarqand)."

In *Nezhat al-Qolûb*, Hamdollah Mostowfi recalls the greatness of the Khorâsân of his day. These sources and a quick glance at its history will show that Khorâsân, due to its expanse, greatness and size of population, was one of the flourishing provinces of Iran and one whose environment was particularly conducive to the nurturing of abilities, talent and skills.

Khorâsân today stretches over 313,337 sq. kms. and has a population of 3,166,000.

The Iranians were shaped and formed in Khorâsân. The various Aryan peoples who came to Iran from the Ural Mountains and across the northern frontiers of Khorâsân, were forced, by the attacks of the native people, to create social and political institutions. So strong was the sense of nationalism among the people of that region, that despite numerous setbacks, they never bowed their heads in surrender.

The Iranians, with that same courageous and patriotic spirit, might have for a time outwardly accepted the rule of foreigners, but such rule has always been temporary. Through the efforts of its freedomloving people, Khorâsân always threw off the foreign yoke and planted again the tree of freedom and independence, and its people again showed themselves to be pillars of the perseverance and continuity of the Iranians.

It is thus hardly surprising that the first spark of the movement for independence, following the Arab conquest, burst into flame in Khorâsân. The Tâherids and the Sâmânids dedicated themselves to the freedom and independence of Iran.

We do not intend here to touch on all the details of the political and social history of Khorâsân. It is sufficient to note that Khorâsân, where "Mashhad ar-Rezâ" is located, is like the diamond on the bracelet of Iranian provinces. Judging by past history, this brilliance shall continue to dazzle for centuries to come. But Khorâsân, always flourishing, today displays a particular grandeur and splendour. Since, in addition to all the national and historical honours it has acquired, Khorâsân also provides a resting place for Imâm Rezâ, the province is the focus of all attention and the point

to which all eyes turn. The location of the mausoleum of the Imâm in the city of Mashhad has provided fuel for Khorâsân's development and growth. Each year, and every month in each year, a large number of people make the pilgrimage to the Holy Shrine, and ensure the prosperity and wealth of the people of Khorâsân.

### **The City of Mashhad and Its History**

Our concern in this book is, however, primarily with the Holy City of Mashhad, its history, the buildings of the Holy Shrine of Imâm Rezâ, and the secret of its present glory and beauty. Mashhad is not as old as Nîshâpûr, Dâmghân and Tûs. But as the place of pilgrimage of the Shî'as, it has grown rapidly and flourished over the centuries, and has become one of Iran's largest and most beautiful cities.

Mashhad was founded in 791 (1388-89). Today, it boasts broad avenues, large squares, lovely boulevards, expansive parks, a university, well-equipped hospitals, and modern buildings. Before the rise of Mashhad, Tûs the resting place of Ferdowsi, was the central city of Khorâsân and a home of famous scholars, poets and writers. Some historians believe Tûs to be a city of the pre-Islamic era. Some consider the founder of the city to be Tûs Nožar. Others believe Tûs was founded by Alexander the Great. There is little historical foundation for these claims. What is certain is that the gradual growth of Mashhad, and the pillage of Tûs by various invaders, led to the decline of that city. Today little is left of Tûs aside from part of the old city wall.

Before Mashhad was founded, developed and became a centre of importance, Tûs comprised two major districts, Tâberân and Nôghân. The book, *Hodud al-'Âlam*, written in 372 (982-83) and published in 656 (1259-60), says of Tûs: "Tûs is a district in which are located mountainous towns like Tâberân and Nôghân. At Nôghân is located the blessed resting place of Alî ben Mûsa, to which people go on pilgrimage. The tomb of Hârûn al-Rashîd is also situated there."

Ibn-Khalkân writes in the book, *Vafiyât al-Imâm*: "Tûs is a district in Khorâsân, consisting of two towns: one Tâberân and the other Nôghân, which used to have 1,000 villages." In Tûs, which enjoyed a mild climate, there was a village named Sanâbâd. This village lay at a distance of one-fourth of a *farsakh* (or about a mile) from Nôghân. Nôghân was larger than Sanâbâd. According to Idris and Ya'qûbî, up to the close of the 3rd century A.H. (9th century A.D.), Nôghân

was even larger than Tâberân, which was considered the central town of Tûs.

The greatness of Tûs dates from the Islamic period. Up to the age of the Tâherids (204-259/820-873) it was a major town. It was then gradually replaced in importance by Nîshâpûr.

Histories indicate that Tûs was a flourishing town up to 548 (153-54). It was a city that produced great men, like Ferdowsî, Khâjeh Nezâm-ol-Molk, Imâm Ahmad, Mohammad Ghazzâlî and Khâjeh Nasîr ad-Dîn Tûsî, and which made a valuable and lasting contribution to art and literature.

In 548 Tûs was attacked and over-run by the Ghuzz Turks. Like other towns and cities of Kho-râsân, it was looted and its populace massacred. The Mongols inflicted further grave damage on the already half-ruined city. Tûs was just recovering from these two ruinous attacks when in 791 (1388-89) Mîrân Shâh, the son of Tamurlane, seeking to defeat Opak Mîrzâ, besieged the city. When Tûs finally fell to him, he built minarets out of the decapitated heads of the inhabitants and left nothing standing but ruins.

Those of the people of Tûs who escaped these massacres alive fled to other cities. Some of them chose to make their homes at Sanâbâd, seeking security under the protection of the Shrine of Imâm Rezâ. In 808 A.H. Shâhrokh Mîrzâ, who unlike the other Timurids, was a humane man, charged Khâjeh Seyyed Mîrzâ with rebuilding Tûs.

Khâjeh Seyyed Mîrzâ applied himself to this task. But the people of Tûs, whose memories of their city were bitter and painful, did not wish to return again to the place. Thus it was that the people of Tûs remained at Sanâbâd, and Tûs remained a ruin. But Sanâbâd, the place of the martyrdom and burial of the Imâm Rezâ (peace be upon him), became the habitation of the people of Tûs. Shâhrokh Mîrzâ, seeing little use in rebuilding Tûs when its people refused to return there, ordered a fortified wall to be built around "Mashhad," and instituted measures to develop the new city.

### **Sanâbâd and its summer district**

Because of its mild climate, its good water and its green fields, Sanâbâd was the summering district of Tûs. A residence had been constructed there by, according to some books, Hamîd ibn



Qaḥṭabeh, for the use of the notables of Ṭūs. Some believe that the building had been constructed by Junayd ibn 'Abd ar-Rahman who had been named governor of Khorâsân by the Ummayyid Caliph, Heshâm, between 111 and 116 (729-735).

Indications from a number of books are that persons such as Junayd ibn 'Abd ar-Rahman and Hamîd ibn Abî Ghanam Ṭâ'î lived in the residence. But reports are conflicting, and the facts uncertain. Since the early inhabitants of this building are not directly relevant to our account, it suffices to recall that in order to quell the rebellion of Râfe' ibn Layš, Hârûn ar-Rashîd was forced to come to Khorâsân. According to Khând Mîr, after three days in this summer residence, on Jamâdî I, 193 (Feb-March 809), he passed away.

His remains were buried in the garden of that same residence. On the orders of Ma'mûn, the son of Hârûn ar-Rashîd, a tomb chamber was built on his grave. Ten years later, when Ma'mûn returned from Marv, and stopped on his way at Sânbâd, he appointed Imâm Rezâ as his successor.

Imâm Rezâ was poisoned and martyred in 203 (818-19). Ma'mûn, wishing to clear himself of the suspicion of having a hand in the murder, ordered the remains of Imâm Rezâ (may peace be upon him) laid to rest in the tomb chamber of Hârûn ar-Rashîd; and thus the first foundation for the buildings of the Holy Shrine was laid.

The name "Mashhad" appears, probably for the first time, in the *Moqaddasî's* book. Ibn Ḥoqal who came there in 331 (924-43) referred to it as "Mashhad ar-Rezâ," Yâqût Ḥamavî as "al-Mashhad ar-Rezâ" and Ḥamdollah Mostowfî as "The Holy Mashhad."

### **The Buildings of the Holy Shrine**

The numerous edifices that, collectively, are known as the "Astân Qods Razavî" or the Holy Shrine of Imâm Rezâ, are situated inside a circular ring road. The edifices were built in different eras. The architectural styles of several centuries are represented in these buildings, and the development of the art and techniques of architecture from the age of Hârûn ar-Rashîd to the present day can be detected in its structures.

Among the buildings of the Shrine, the oldest is the Tomb Chamber which is the very same tomb chamber of Hârûn ar-Rashîd and the resting place of Imâm Rezâ. The probable date of its

completion is 194 (809-10), one year after the death of Hârûn. Its foundations remained untouched over the centuries. Changes were effected only on the exterior face of the structure <sup>(1)</sup> the account of which will come later. The buildings of the Holy Precincts thus cannot architecturally belong to one specific period and, except the three sides of the foundation on walls of the Tomb Chamber, cannot be considered untouched, and still retaining their original form and related to one period in the history of Iranian architecture.

Several forces induced change in these buildings. The Shrine and courts and chambers were destroyed in various attacks, due to enmity to the religion of the inhabitants, out of strategic considerations or from a desire for conquest <sup>(2)</sup>. But the love and dedication of the people, who because of their faith were killed and looted, led to reconstruction. Those who remained alive repaired the ruins. During periods of peace, the faithful also regarded repair and beautifying of the Shrine a means of achieving greater proximity to the Imâm, and as work deserving reward on Judgement Day.

### **The Impact of Modernization on the Buildings of the Shrine**

The Tomb Chamber, the court and the surrounding buildings have understandably been the focus of the devotion of the faithful over the centuries. Such devotion has found expression in beautification and renovation; and in the present age the buildings of the Shrine have also been subject to change and transformation. These changes are described below.

But it should be noted that changes have also been introduced in the foundations and exterior of the buildings of the Shrine in the interests of public health.

For example, the floors of the tomb chamber, the other chambers, the court of the Shrine and the floor of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque — important for the insight they could give into architectural styles, the art of tile-making and types of materials used — were removed and replaced by ordinary stone or marble for reasons of health and ease of cleaning. The rapid increase in the number of pilgrims had made it difficult to maintain floors clean. The replacement of the candle-holders and old lamps with electric lights was also necessary, even if it marred the traditional spirit of the building.

### **The Impact of King & Governors**

The artistic taste of kings and governors, the ruling tastes of the day and the work of architects and artisans of each era also influenced the character of the buildings and led to their transformation. Governors, ministers and kings have ordered the walls of the Shrine to be decorated, and the rulers that have followed, not finding what had been done to their taste, have ordered the decorations to be plastered over or covered with mirrors. In certain Shrine buildings, rich designs were covered with mirror-work during the Qâjâr period.

### **The Impact of Time**

The passage of time has also resulted in changes to the exterior and the structure of the Shrine. Tiles, for example, are destroyed with passage of time and climatic variations. Repair and replacement is thus necessary, and this mars the uniformity of the tiles. As a result, one can see in the tile-work of the buildings of the Shrine examples of tiles from earlier eras down to the present time; and close inspection will enable the student to distinguish the old tile-work from the new.

### **The Influence of Artistic Principles of Various Eras**

Artistic tastes of various eras also had an impact on the structure and exterior of the buildings. For example, mirror-work, while highly favoured in certain periods, is not now regarded by some experts as "Art", whereas faience mosaic tiles is unanimously regarded as a distinguishing characteristic of the Iranian mosques. There fore, recently, on the basis of instructions given by His Imperial Majesty and a plan drawn up by the engineering department of the Holy Shrine, parts of the walls and the *ezâreh* (the "skirting," or band girdling the lowest section of the wall next to the floor) of the Tomb Chamber and the other chambers will be reworked in faience tile. There is thus the possibility that all the mirror-work will, over time, be replaced by mosaic tile.

The passage of time also undermines the foundations of the buildings. Since part of the walls and dome of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque were in danger of collapse, the Endowments Organisation has ordered extensive repair work. Walls and domes built in the age of Gowhar Shâd Khâtûn will

be built anew, drawing on modern architectural techniques, but maintaining the unity of the exterior appearance of the buildings.

In the same way, since one of the *ivâns* of the Old Court (which leads to the Bast-e Bâlâ) was decorated in non-faience tiles, these tiles will be removed, and, to reinforce the uniformity of the tile-work of the court, the *ivân* will be decorated in mosaic tiles. These changes thus constitute tampering with the original work, but are necessary.

As a result, if study of the construction and the architectural history of the Shrine is not very difficult, it is not very simple either. One who wishes to address himself to this task must deal with the architecture of twelve centuries and pay great attention to detail.

Unfortunately, this task is made difficult by the failure of past observers to note down the features of the earlier buildings and to provide ample descriptions, before subsequent generations tampered with the form and structure of buildings. Books on the Shrine have mostly set down only the names of the buildings and their builders, and paid less attention to the architectural studies. In short, a composite of the architectural styles of the Mongol, Saljûq, Tîmûrid, Safavid, Afsharid, Qâjâr and the present eras is observed in the buildings of the Holy Shrine.

### **The Architecture of the Haram**

As remarked earlier the Tomb Chamber and Dome are the oldest of the buildings of the Shrine. The Tomb Chamber was constructed shortly after the death of Hârûn-ar-Rashîd in 193 or 194. The remains of Imâm Rezâ were laid to rest in the same place. The foundations and supports of the Tomb Chamber remain the same as those laid during original construction. Research has shown that the attacks and destruction to which the Shrine buildings were subjected did no damage to the basic foundations of the building of the Tomb Chamber. The only change that has taken place occurred in the present era, when a part of the wall was removed to enlarge the chamber and provide more ample room for pilgrims visiting the sarcophagus.

The chamber is square in shape. Its southern wall measures 10.40 metres, the northern wall 10.90 metres, the eastern wall 10.40 metres and the western wall 10.90 metres. Four *soffehs* (large recessed niches) or *ivâns* stand on the four sides. Each is 3 metres wide.

The building was originally built with a special clay. The wall is three metres thick. But in re-

construction, the remaining part of the wall was built to the same thickness in brick. The supports of the dome thus now stand on a wall in which the part resting on the ground is of clay and the upper part is of brick, two metres thick.

The interior of the Tomb Chamber was not initially decorated. The mortar on that part of the chamber, which was built in brick was for a time lined with lime. Later, at some date not known to us, it was covered over with plaster and the plaster embellished with simple designs and colours. On top of the first layer of plaster can be now found a second layer of plaster which may date from the Bûyid period. The decoration on the second layer is more precise and of higher quality than the first.

The walls of the Tomb Chamber were decorated for yet a third time with blue tile, gold and cinnabar. This work can be traced to the Safavid period.

In 1155 (1742-3), the decorations and gold-work were reworked on orders of Nâder Shâh. In the reign of Nâser ad-Dîn Shâh and when 'Azd ol-Molk was Keeper of the Shrine (1257/1841-2), this decoration was replaced with mirror-work; mirror-work was also used to decorate the walls of the other buildings.

The skirting around the chamber is of marble and rises to a height of 20 cms. Above this are tiles of high quality. Most of these were made in the reign of Sultân Sanjar and are known as Sanjarî tiles. Calligraphy graces the tiles. They are among the finest examples of tile-work extant.

Above the skirting (*ezâreh*) there is an inscription in relief in the *šols* script on glazed tile, comprising two *sûrâs* from the Qur'ân. As mentioned earlier, since space in the upper portion of the chamber was narrow, rendering the circumambulation of the pilgrims difficult, the area between the Bâlâ-Sar Mosque and the Tomb Chamber has been widened, and an open space has been created whose support columns are at least three metres away from the zarîh, or grill, surrounding the sarcophagus.

To create this space, a large arch has been built across the western side of the Tomb Chamber (between the chamber and the Bâlâ-Sar Mosque), whose two sides stand on the northern and southern supports of the sanctuary. Below the arch, a doorway was formed by using two pillars, allowing pilgrims to pass from the Tomb Chamber to the Bâlâ-Sar Mosque. The area below the central arch is four metres wide. The doorways formed by the two smaller arches measure 1.70 metres in width.

In making these changes, a beautiful *mihrâb*, decorated with faience tiles, was removed entirely from its former place and later safely replaced onto the same wall, but recessed about 60 cms. into it. This renovation was undertaken between 1342 and 1344 (1923-24). The main arch is decorated with striking faience tiles. An inscription on stone, one of the *qâsidehs* of Dabîr ol-Mamâlek Farâhânî, previously located on the bâlâ-sar wall of the chamber, has now been moved to the newly constructed supports inside the Tomb Chamber.

According to some accounts, the mortar of the chamber was made of Armenian clay, grape juice and makhruj wool to give its strength. The mortar has in any case been strong enough to withstand the weight of the dome over the centuries without suffering damage.

Travellers who visited the Tomb Chamber in the third, fourth, fifth and sixth centuries (10th to 14th centuries A.D.) make no mention of the details of the structure of the Tomb Chamber or its decorations. It is thus not possible to give an exact description of the sanctuary in its original form.

Abû al-Fazl Bayhaqî, who made a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Imâm Rezâ in 431 (1039-40) has written nothing of the sanctuary. Even Nâser Khosrow makes no mention of it in his *Safar-nâme*. The fact that he was an Isma'îli cannot explain this oversight, and inexplicably, he describes some of the cities of Khorâsân but omits even a brief description of the tomb of Hârûn ar-Rashîd and the Mausoleum of the Imâm.

Ibn Baṭṭûṭa writes in his travels, (he made a pilgrimage to the Shrine in 734/1333-34) that "the Shrine has a superb dome, inside a sanctuary situated next to the mosque. All those glorious buildings are part of the complex. Its walls are of beautiful tile. On the tomb is a sarcophagus of wood which is covered with silver sheets; and silver candle holders have been hung over it. Above it is a *qobbeh* (small dome) of silver. On the door of the sanctuary is a fine silk curtain and inside are spread many kinds of carpets. The mausoleum of Hârûn ar-Rashîd faces it."

The devotion of Shia's and of certain rulers and governors to the shi'î religion, and their interest in and dedication to, spreading shi'ism naturally led to measures for the beautification of the Tomb Chamber and the surrounding buildings. A scholar like Nasîr ad-Dîn Ṭûsî requested that after his death his body be placed next to that of the Imâm.

The Mongol ruler Oljeitü who converted to shi'ism and became known as Sultân Mohammad Khodâbandeh dedicated himself to the repair of the Shrine.

During the Sāmānid period special attention was paid to the mausoleum. Bûbakr Shahmard sought to develop Mashhad. Although he was a cruel ruler he attached importance to religious matters. Sultân Mahmûd of Ghaznâ (387-421/997-1031) dedicated himself to repair the damage done by his father. He enlarged the sanctuary and built a minaret. He bought a village and endowed it to the Shrine of Imâm Rezâ. He sought to make up for destruction, resulting from the fanaticism of Sultân Sebük-Tegin. However, Sebük-Tegin caused no damage to the foundations of the buildings when he attacked Mashhad; the damage was inflicted primarily to the exterior of the Tomb Chamber and the sanctuary.

The Ghuzz Turks attacked Khorâsân on several occasions and did not hesitate to inflict damage to the Shrine. In 548 (1153-53) when they took Sultan Sanjar and his wife prisoner, and carried him from city to city, according to Anvar, "they made the mosque of each city a stable and left neither its ceiling nor its walls standing." The Shrine did not remain immune from this plague. In 550 (1155-56) the Tomb Chamber and the dome were destroyed.

The chamber remained in this state until acting on behalf of Sultân Sanjar, Sharaf ad-Din Ṭâher Vajîh ol-Molk, one of the Saljûq military commanders and governors constructed the dome anew. Accounts indicate that aside from a crack caused by an earthquake and repaired during the Safavid era, no further damage was inflicted on that holy place, once Sultan Mohammad Khodâbandeh (Oljeitü) rebuilt the dome and the Tomb Chamber.

The bombarding of the Shrine by Tsarist troops in 1330 (1912) only pierced holes in parts of the dome. The damage was later repaired, and it can thus be said that the present dome is the same dome Oljeitü raised over the roof of the Tomb Chamber and which was gilded by later rulers.

### **The Interior of the Tomb Chamber**

The Tomb Chamber, in which the blessed remains of Imâm Rezâ is buried, has a strikingly beauty and the mirror-work of the ceiling, on the inner layer of the dome, having been decorated with fine designs enhances its glory. Ibn Baṭṭûṭa says of the Tomb Chamber that the walls were all covered with tile and only later decorated with mirror-work. If this was the case, the loss is an unfortunate one.

The ceiling has at present two layers, over which stands the golden dome. The layer visible

to the eye is concave and curved. The height from the floor to the inner layer of the dome measures 18.80 metres. The distance from the floor to the tip of the dome is 31 metres. The outer circumference of the dome measures 42 metres, and the distance from the beginning of the gold part of the dome to the tip is 16.50 metres.

There were said to be calligraphic designs on the tile-work of the skirting of the Tomb Chamber; these have been lost over time. The inscriptions gave the name of the builder, date of construction and the name of artisans who worked on it, but due to disregard for the proper placing of the tiles during renovation, there are gaps and scattered phrases in the inscription.

There is another calligraphic inscription, on glazed tiles, which begins on the wall facing the Imâm (may peace be upon him) and working in an easterly direction, based on Qur'ânic *sûras*. Further *sûras* appear in the same script around the *soffeh* situated at the feet of the Imâm. The calligraphy ends near the *soffeh* of Shâh Tahmâsb.

Behind and on the skirting tile-work of the *soffeh* of Shâh Tahmâsb, sayings from the Prophet are written in the *naskh* script. The calligraphy includes two lines of poetry. Altogether, the calligraphy of the Tomb Chamber, apart from the content and significance of the quotations, adds to the striking impression of the mausoleum.

The section starting above the calligraphic inscriptions on stone up to the base of the dome were decorated with mirror-work by Mîrzâ Sâdeq Khân Qâ'em Maqâm Nûrî during the reign of Nâser ad-Dîn Shâh. The mirror-work shows fine taste and artistry.

The sparkling mirrors, the masterful glazed tile, the intertwined calligraphy and the splendour that the Holy Zarîh confers on the mausoleum inspire in the pilgrim awe, depth of religious feeling, and admiration for the craftsmanship and art that created the chamber.

The Tomb Chamber contains three *mihrâbs*. The first is situated against the southeast wall. It is 1.75 metres wide and 2.40 metres high. The second *mihrâb* is situated against the southwest wall. It is 2.15 metres wide and 2.60 metres high. Both are covered with fine, attractively coloured tile, worked in Kufic script.

The third *mihrâb* is situated above the head of the Imâm. It is 1.25 metres wide and 1.90 metres high, also worked in tile. A door, permitting entrance to the *zarîh*, for cleaning and collection of donations, is located on the southern side and near the eastern corner. It is 55 cms. wide.

Towards the end of 1975, at Imperial orders, the entire "skirting" of the chamber was covered



by a glass frame to protect the *sanjari* tilework. The upper wall, worked previously in mirror-work, was covered in faience tile, but in a manner so as not to damage the mirror-work beneath.

At the same time, work was begun on pulling down the shops and other buildings around the ring road so as to create a large open space around the Shrine.

### The Entrance Doors to the Haram

The Tomb Chamber contains four *soffehs* standing on the four sides and leading out of the chamber. The northern *soffeh* is 2.3 metres wide and 3.2 metres long. It stands behind the head of the Imâm and leads to the Mausoleum of Shâh Tahmâsb. Until a few years ago, it connected the Tomb Chamber to the Bâlâ-Sar Mosque, but changes were introduced when the Tomb Chamber was enlarged. The eastern *soffeh* is 1.48 metres wide and 3.05 metres long. It links the Tomb Chamber to the Dome Chamber of Hâtam Khân. These *soffehs* lead through exquisite and finely wrought doors to the outside. The doors, of considerable delicacy and beauty, are examples of the skills of Iranian craftsmen. The golden door facing the Holy Imâm (Dar-e Pîsh Rûy) is 3.20 metres high and 2 metres wide. It is decorated with gold plates. (According to the *Montakhab at-Tawâr ikh*, this door was gilded in 1272 (1855-56) during the government of Mîrzâ Mohammad Hosayn Qazvîni, 'Azd ol-Molk, the Keeper of the Shrine. On this, there are copious inscriptions. On the sides of the two door is inscribed a *qasîdeh* from Sorûsh Isfâhânî.

The lower door of the Tomb Chamber is also plated with gold. The door is 3.85 metres long and 1.95 metres wide. It is worked in relief and extremely fine design. On the two doors are a number of round protuberances. On one is inscribed an Arabic *qasîdeh* comprising the names of 14 martyrs. On the sides of this beautiful door too a *qasîdeh* from Sorûsh Isfahânî is inscribed.

### The Zarîh

Some historians and researchers date the sarcophagus of the mausoleum of Imâm Rezâ to the year 500 (1106-07). Various reports are given as to the first builder of the sarcophagus. What is certain is that devoted kings and governors, each contributed to the beautification and enrichment

of the *zarîh* and the sarcophagus. Today, the sarcophagus is composed of coloured marble. It is 2.10 metres long, 1.06 metres wide and 1.90 metres high. This marble sarcophagus rests on a base made of the same material. Arabic verses are inscribed on the sarcophagus, and the date of the stone, determined from the inscriptions, is 1351.

A steel *zarîh* is built around the sarcophagus, encrusted with precious stones. Another *zarîh* of plain steel is built around the first grill. This structure dates from the reign of Fath 'Alî Shâh Qâjâr.

Fath 'Alî Shâh presented the Shrine with a valuable, jewel encrusted door, of a width of 1.04 metres and a height of 1.70 metres. Behind it is a jewelled door 86 cms. wide and 1.60 metres high. The door is made of wood, and it is covered with a thick plate decorated with various precious stones. This door is now protected by glass.

### The Golden Dome

It is the great dome, its burnished gold shimmering in the sun, that first strikes the eye of the weary pilgrim who approaches Mashhad from Shâhrûd or Nîshâpûr, along Tehran Avenue. It is a thrilling, even awe-inspiring sight.

Unlike other Iranian domes, the great dome of the Shrine of Imâm Rezâ is cylindrically-shaped at the base, and up to the point where the graceful curve of the dome proper begins. Only at the Tarîk-Khânî Mosque at Dâmghân can a dome with a similar base be found, with this difference, that in the Tarîk-Khânî Mosque, the cylinder of the base gives way to a cone-shaped dome, while in the golden dome of the Shrine of Imâm Rezâ the cylinder of the base is transformed into curve.

This feature of the dome of the Holy Shrine speaks of the originality, artistry and unerring sense of Iranian artisans and builders.

The dome is of brick and covered with gilded copper plates. The last occasion on which the gilding and gold-plating was renewed was in 1010-1016 (1601-1607), during the reign of Shâh 'Abbâs. According to some accounts, which appear reliable since such was the tradition in Iran, the dome was initially covered with tiles. In 932 (1525-26). Shâh Tahmâsb ordered the tiles removed and replaced with gold. The gold plates, along with other treasures of the Shrine, according to these

accounts, were looted when 'Abd al-Mo'men Khân Ūzbek attacked the city. Shâh 'Abbâs thus ordered the dome to be once again plated with gold.

Around the dome, at a height of 6.74 metres, there is a finely wrought inscription, 1.90 metres wide and in four medallions, executed by the famous Safavid calligrapher, 'Ali Rezâ 'Abbâsî. The inscription notes that Shâh 'Abbâs began the gilding of the dome in 1010 and completed this work in 1016. Below the dome, in a *šolš* script, there appears in Arabic the words: "Dome by Kamâl ad-Dîn Mahmûd in 1015." On the two smaller torangs are inscribed two lines of verse.

Following the earthquake of 1086 (1675-76), during repair work undertaken during the reign of Shâh Solaymân, a further inscription in four medallions was inscribed around the dome. The work was done by the well-known calligrapher of the period, 'Alî Rezâ Emâmî.

### The Minarets

The minaret is the structure from which the *muezzin* calls the faithful to prayer. In the tradition of Iranian architecture, the minaret had more than a religious function and meaning. The two minarets also constituted columns that reinforced the arch and were utilized to add to the glory and beauty of the mosque.

Already in the early Islamic period, the *muezzin* had a special place from which he issued the call to prayer. Tradition has it that Bilâl, the *muezzin* to the Prophet, stood on the roof of the highest house or tower of the city to issue the call to prayer. In the early days of Islam the *muezzin* sometimes stood on the fortifications of the city; this tradition survives in the city of Damascus.

The tradition of the *muezzin* issuing the call to prayer from a prominent point, led the Muslims to build a lofty place for the purpose. With the expansion of Islam and its spread to new areas, it became necessary to build a mosque in every town and to add a place for the *muezzin* in every mosque. In Iran, where the mosque was patterned after Iranian religious structures, the minaret came to be based on Sâssânian towers. According to Professor André Godard, the 'Abbâsid Caliphs built a large number of such mosques in Arabian cities.

In his book, *Ganjineh-ye Asâr-e Isfâhan*, Honarfard states the Iranians were not attracted by the plain style of the Arab mosque. They began to embellish their mosques, utilizing various types of beautiful tiles. They also applied Sâssânian architectural styles in the construction of the sup-

ports, arches and minarets. The early minarets were simple; and there is little doubt that it was the Iranians who began to elaborate on the style of the minarets and to apply originality of approach and artistic expression to the construction of the buildings.

The minaret appears to have emerged as a feature of Islamic religious structures shortly after the emergence of the mosque itself. The earliest minarets were constructed in the Ummayyid period. The first minaret to be constructed in the form we recognize today is to be found in the Friday Mosque at Basra. The mosque was constructed in 44-45 (664-666) and is attributable to Ziyâd ibn Abihî, whom Mu'âwiya had appointed vâlî of Basra.

The second example of such a minaret occurs in the Friday Mosque of 'Amr, which the vâlî of Egypt built in 53 (672-73) at Mu'âwiya's orders. The vâlî, Moslem ibn Mokhle, had the mosque built with four minarets. A third example is to be found in the Friday Mosque in Damascus, built in 86-88 (705-07) by Walid 'Abd-ol-Malek. Other examples are the mosque at Rammallah, in Palestine, the Friday Mosque at Qayrawân in Tunisia, the al-Ahrâm Mosque in Mecca (130/747-48) and the Friday Mosque at Cordoba (180/796-97).

The earliest minarets to be built after this were constructed in Iran, India and Anatolia; and the golden minarets of the Holy Shrine of Imâm Rezâ at Mashhad and the two minarets of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque (821/1418-19) are among these early examples.

Before describing the characteristics and architectural style of the two golden domes of the Shrine of Imâm Rezâ a word must be said about the structure and placing of minarets in general.

Traditionally, a minaret is composed of four parts: 1. the base 2. the shaft 3. the *sarpûsh* 4. the *ra's*.

The base of the minaret was traditionally of four, seven, eight or twelve sides. The base was built on a solid foundation to carry the weight of the column. The column, raised on this square or octagonal base, was cylindrical or conical in shape. After the base and the column had been built, a kind of balcony was created for the *muezzin*. This was known as the *sarpûsh*. The *sarpûsh* had the same shape as the base. Thus if the base was square or octagonal in shape, the *sarpûsh* would be square or octagonal as well.

The *sarpûsh* is the most important part of the minaret. Generally, it is circled by a low wall or grill-work. Above it is built a roof or shade to protect the *muezzin* from the elements. Steps lead from the bottom of the minaret to the *sarpûsh*. The stairs begin either at ground level or the roof

of the mosque, or they are placed inside the minaret spiralling upwards to the *sarpûsh*.

There are instances, as for example in the minaret of the Friday Mosque at Cordoba, where two stairways were built, one for ascending and one for descending. But minarets built in Iran have all only one spiral staircase. Topping the minaret is a roof or shade of various forms called a *ra's*, on occasion of gold. A lamp or banner is sometimes placed on top of it.

There are no strict rules for the construction of minarets in mosques. The minarets are sometimes situated in the four corners of the mosque, as in the 'Amr Mosque; sometimes the minaret is placed in the western or southern part of the mosque, or by the lower half of the wall, as in the Qayrawân Mosque in Tunisia. Sometimes the minaret adjoins the entrance door to the mosque; sometimes it does not.

In Iran minarets were normally placed on the two sides of the *îvân* that is linked to the dome and the sanctuary. The dome is thus usually situated between the two minarets. But at the Holy Shrine of Imâm Rezâ, contrary to usual practice, the two gold minarets have been placed facing each other in the middle of the two *îvâns* of the Old Court (Sahn-e 'Atiq). This is unique.

The main dome stands above the sanctuary. The two minarets are thus so located that the pilgrim approaching the shrine along Tehran Avenue conceives the dome as standing precisely between the two minarets. If he is not familiar with the buildings, he gets the impression that the two minarets stand at the two sides of one *îvân*, with the dome arched between them.

Materials used in constructing minarets vary in different countries, in keeping with weather conditions and materials available. In Iran, minarets are built from brick and plaster.

### **The Shape of the Minarets**

Students of Islamic and Iranian architecture have noted that Iranian architecture never lost its distinguishing characteristics and always retained its own unique style. In the construction of minarets, the Iranians also retained a kind of artistic independence. If we accept Professor Godard's assertion, that Arab mosques were based on Iranian architectural principles, then it follows that the minaret was also based on Iranian principles, except that the minaret was in some countries square in shape, while in Iran the shape was cylindrical, in keeping with tradition. In addition, Iranian minarets are distinguished by their specially fine and exquisite tile-work.

The practice of decorating minarets and covering the surface with many-coloured tiles appears to date from the second half of the 3rd century. From this period onwards, the column and all the exterior parts of the minaret were decorated with brick, stucco, fine coloured tiles and verses from the Qur'ân. This practice, which came to be followed by others, originated in Iran.

### **The Golden Minarets**

The minarets of the Old Court, which stand facing each other, have been worked in fine tiles and gold brick. One of the two is situated near the golden dome and above the *Îvân* of Nâder (south of the Old Court). The other is situated at the other side of the court and at the far end of the opposite *îvân*. On the north side of the Old Court, is located the *îvân* of Shâh 'Abbâs.

The minaret situated near the dome dates from the reign of Shâh Tahmâsb. Either he had the dome both built and gilded; or it was built before his reign and repaired and worked in gold at his orders. The gold plating on the minaret was renewed in the reign of Nâder Shâh Afshâr when, at his instructions, the walls of the *îvân* of the Old Court were decorated in gold.

This minaret is 40.50 metres high. Its exterior circumference measures 13 metres. The lower part, from the bottom to the point at which the tile work begins, is of brick. Part has been covered in blue tile, on which Qu'rânic verses have been inscribed.

The other minaret is located behind the *îvân* of Shâh 'Abbâs. The basic construction and gold work took place in the reign of Nâder Shâh. In its dimensions and outward embellishments, it mirrors the other minaret. The lower part of this minaret has also been worked in tile, and then in gold.

### **The Minarets of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque**

On the two sides of the Small *Ivân* of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque, which is considered one of the buildings of the Holy Precincts, there are two minarets each 43 metres high. The diameter of each is three metres. The two minarets are worked in tile of great beauty, and are among the outstanding examples of the art.

### The Buildings Surrounding the Sanctuary

The buildings lying adjacent and around the sanctuary, as mentioned earlier, date from different periods and have not remained untouched. Symmetry is a common feature of Iranian religious buildings and mosques. But the structures of the Shrine, built in different eras, lack this feature. And the chambers and ceilings are of different sizes and heights.

#### Dâr al-Hoffâz

Dâr al-Hoffâz is one of the buildings constructed by Gowhar Shâd Aghâ, the wife of Mîrzâ Shâhrokh, son of Tamurlane, in the early part of the 9th century A.H. Dâr al-Hoffâz is located south of the Tomb Chamber. It is 18 metres long and 8.65 metres wide. The height from the floor to the ceiling is 26 metres.

The northern end of the Dâr al-Hoffâz is linked to the southern end of the Tomb Chamber. Between the two buildings a door has been placed known as the *dar-e pîsh rûy* (door facing the Imâm). The southern end of the Dâr al-Hoffâz is linked to the northern end of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque. A door permits passage from the mosque to the sanctuary.

Dâr al-Hoffâz contains seven recessed archways or niches (*soffeh*). The mausoleum of 'Abbâs Mîrzâ, Na'eb os-Saltaneh, the Crown Prince to the second Qâjâr ruler, Fath 'Alî Shâh, is located in the *soffeh* along the southern wall.

One of the archways leads through a door covered in finely wrought gold plate. The door, presented by Her Imperial Majesty the Shahbanou, leads to the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh. There are three *soffehs* along the northern wall. One of these leads to the Dome Chamber of Opak Mîrzâ. Tiles of high craftsmanship, bearing finely wrought inscriptions, decorate the walls. The *ezâreh*, or "skirting," rises to a height of 1.70 metres. Constructed of stone, it is decorated in relief. Above this, inscribed in stone, is a verse from Qa'ânî.

All the walls and ceiling of the Dâr al-Hoffâz are worked in mirrors. According to the author of *Badr-e Forûzân*, the walls and ceiling of this building were initially of tile. But Soltân Morâd Mîrzâ, Hessâm os-Saltaneh, replaced the fine tile with mirror-work.

Another golden door leads from the Dâr al-Huffâz to the Dâr as-Salâm. It is a door of great beauty.

### Dâr as-Siyyâdeh

Another of the buildings around the Tomb Chamber is the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh, a part of which extends southwards into the Bâlâ-Sar Mosque. Dâr as-Siyyâdeh was one of the structures built by Gowhar Shâd Aghâ and is among the largest chambers of the Shrine. It is 31.80 metres long. Its width, in three sections, stands as follows:

The central section, with its two *soffehs* on the eastern and western sides, forms a polygon. The two other sections, lying to the south and north of the central section, are each 7.70 metres long. The height of the structure is 20.80 metres. Since the main chamber is formed by a central dome flanked by two smaller domes, the width of the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh differs from point to point.

A marble *ezâreh* rises 25 cms. from the floor against the wall (in some places it reaches a height of 48 cms.). Above the marble to a height of 1.80 metres the wall is covered in mosaic tile. The tiles are hexagonal, octagonal and square in shape, brilliant in color and masterful in composition.

Above the tiles a marble panel, 40 cms. wide, has been fixed and inscribed in a verse from Malek ash-Sho'arâ. Above this, the dome is worked entirely in mirrors.

The Dâr as-Siyyâdeh leads to the Gowhar Shâd Mosque and also to the Ivân of Nâder Shah and the Dâr al-Hoffâz.

The Safavid ruler, Shâh Solaymân, repaired the damage caused to the Dâr al-Siyyâdeh by an earthquake in the Safavid era. Verses attesting to this repair work and giving the date of its completion (1086/1675-76) have been inscribed above the door <sup>(3)</sup> that leads from the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh to the Dâr al-Hoffâz.

On the northern side of the eastern wall of the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh there is also a window, measuring 3.45 × 3.26 metres, through which the Tomb Chamber can be seen. Above it are bricks gilded in gold. Changes were introduced in the building during repairs. For example, between 1342 and 1344 (1923-35), when the chamber of Dâr al-Ekhlâs was built, the northern wall of the Hâj Qâsemî *soffeh* was removed. At the moment, there is a passage between the Dâr al-Ekhlâs and the Hâj Qâsemî *soffeh*.

The Dâr as-Siyyâdeh contains a number of *soffehs* and one *mihrab*. This indicates it was in the past a mosque. This may be the mosque to which Ibn Baṭṭûṭa refers in the book of his travels. The *mihrab* is worked in fine faience tiles.



Between the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh and the Gowhar Shâd Mosque there is a silver door, 3.20 metres long and 2.27 metres wide, donated by Anîs od-Dowleh, the wife of Nâşer ad-Dîn Shâh in 1284 (1867-68). A verse is inscribed around the door.

The mirror-work on the ceiling of the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh has required repair from time to time. Between 1330 and 1340 (1911-1921), the ceiling was repaired and the mirror-work was redone. The buildings of the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh were in recent times completely repaired. The old inscription was removed, and the damaged sections were built in strong green brick and reinforced concrete.

These activities tampered with the original architectural features of the building. The basic structure has been preserved, but the building reflects the influence of new architectural features.

### **The Interior Decorations of Dâr as-Siyyâdeh**

The interior decorations of the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh bring together many of the artistic skills and forms of Iranian art, and weaves these, including the making of stalactites, to a high art. The fashioning of stalactites is an Iranian innovation. Few have been able to copy it or to execute this highly difficult and exacting art with the mastery of Iranian craftsmen.

The ceiling of the chamber is in three domes. At the centre of each a circle has been drawn. The central dome is composed of nine small half-domes in three circles and the domes on each of the two sides are composed of seven half-domes. The stalactites and other decorations endow it with a special splendour.

The largest section of the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh is decorated with simple mirrors on which are drawn different geometric forms. Coloured mirrors are designed in the *eslimi* style (marked by curved and twisting patterns), in medallions, calligraphy and script.

On the eastern side of the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh, which leads to the Dâr al-Hoffâz, there is a *soffeh* decorated with coloured mirrors, worked in various designs. Above the entrance door there is a calligraphic medallion in the *şolş* script which reads: "As-Soltân, Abû'l Hasan Alî ibn Mûsâ ar-Rezâ". Below it is incised one of the famous sayings (*hadiş*) of the Prophet. On the two doors are two large frames bearing complex designs.

On the north and south sides of the *soffeh* there are also two large frames etched in a fine design. Decorations in relief and worked in brick are also to be found in the chamber. The skirting is built

of faience tiles, in triangular and hexagonal shapes, creating intertwined stars. The doors are masterpieces of engraved design in wood. The large walls are decorated with slabs of white marble. The stucco designs are striking.

### **The Towhîd Khâneh**

North of the Tomb Chamber, between the chamber known as the *posht-e Sar* and the Old Court there is a chamber attributed by some to Mollâ Mohsen Fayz. The Towhîd Khâneh was in the past connected to the *Posht-e Sar* by a door. The door was removed to enlarge the chamber and the Towhîd Khâneh thus was opened to the chamber and the Shâh Tahmâsb archway. The whole now appears to be one large chamber.

The Towhîd Kkâneh is 7.35 metres wide, 8.60 metres long, and 15 metres high. The skirting (*ezâreh*) around the base of the walls is made of attractive stone decorated in relief. The building was repaired by 'Azd ol-Molk in 1276 (1859-60).

The building is connected through a twisting passageway to the Dome Chamber of Allâh Verdî Khân. It has a door leading to the Old Court.

Between the Towhîd Khâneh and the Dome Chamber of Allâh Verdî Khân there is a silver plated door 2.70 metres high and 1.93 metres wide. Between the building and the Ivân of Nâder there is another door in silver, 2.56 metres high and 1.78 metres wide, presented by Amîr Nezâm Garûsî.

### **The Dome Chamber of Hâtam Khân**

On the eastern side of the sanctuary, there is a chamber known as the Dome Chamber of Hâtam Khân. Between this chamber and the Tomb Chamber, there is a door, plated in gold and worked in striking designs and script. The eastern side of this building leads through a large room, whose floor is one step higher than the floor of the Dome Chamber, to the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh.

The Dome Chamber is 7.30 metres wide, 13.50 metres long and 11.60 metres high. It was built by Hâtam Bek Ordûbâdî, one of the commanders of Shâh 'Abbâs, about the year 1010 (1601-2).

The Hâtam Khân Dome Chamber, its Dome, and the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh are so constructed as

to give the viewer the impression that all three parts constitute one single chamber. The Dome Chamber of Hâtam Khân, repaired in 1240 (1824-25), is linked, through a twisting passage, to the Dome Chamber of Allâh Verdî Khân. On the southern side, it is connected to the passageway of the guardhouse.

### **The Dome Chamber of Allâh Verdî Khân**

Another of the interesting buildings of the Shrine, and a masterpiece of architecture, tilework and stalactite-making is the Dome Chamber of Allâh Verdî Khân. This structure is situated east of the Towhîd Khâneh and northeast of the Dome Chamber of Hâtam Khân. It is octagonal in shape, and for this very reason is considered superior to other buildings of the type, which are usually rectangular.

According to *Ferdôs at-Tavârikh*, Allâh Verdî Khân was vâlî of Fars in the reign of Shâh 'Abbâs. He was an official of importance. He is reported to have sent a personal representative who, with the assistance of an Isfâhâni architect, was to see to the construction of the building. Work on the Dome Chamber of Allâh Verdî Khân began in 1012 (1603-04) and was completed in 1021 (1612-13). Allâh Verdî Khân himself was buried in the chamber in 1022.

The Dome Chamber of Allâh Verdî Khân is 16.19 metres high. A narrow chamber, it is 8.86 metres wide and 11.10 metres long. The skirting, of marble, is 1.90 metres high. The remaining parts of the walls are worked in the finest faience<sup>(4)</sup> tile. The harmony created by the intricate combination of design, calligraphy and colour in the mosaic tile has not often been equalled elsewhere. The mosaic of the interior of the chamber is in the Safavid style and displays the same features found in the beautiful mosques of Isfâhân.

Parts of the original tilework of this dome chamber were worn away or crumbled over time. The restoration of these tiles was undertaken by the authorities of the Shrine in 1340 (1921-22). The work was done with considerable craftsmanship, and the dome is graced with fine tilework. Only a sharp eye can today distinguish the new tile from the old.

Around the interior of the Dome Chamber of Allâh Verdî Khân are eight *soffehs*. Above the *soffehs* there are eight smaller *soffehs* or niches. The inner ceiling of some of these is worked in faience tile.

The exterior of the dome was in the present era covered with plates of copper as protection against rain and dampness. The Dome Chamber of Allâh Verdî Khân is worked in inscriptions, embodying verses from the Qur'ân, in faience tile. The intricate lines of the script create a design of great beauty and attraction.

The Dome Chamber of Allâh Verdî Khân leads, through the *soffehs* to the Dâr az-Ziyâfeh, the Old Court (Sahn-e 'Atîq), the Towhîd Khâneh, the Hâtam Khân Dome Chamber and the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh.

### The Bâlâ-Sar Mosque

The Bâlâ-Sar Mosque is situated between the Tomb Chamber and Dâr as-Siyyâdeh. It is 4.50 metres wide and 8 metres long and 10 metres high. The *ezâreh*, or skirting, is 90 cms. high and of marble. Above it, to a height of 1.70 metres the wall is worked in mosaic tile of fine quality, with floral designs of hexagonal and octagonal shape.

This structure like many of the buildings of the Holy Shrine, was covered in mirror-work. Part of this work was completed during the government of Mohammad Hasan Khân Sâlâr and part when 'Azd ol-Molk was Keeper of the Shrine. Part of the mirror-work is attributed to 'Abbâs Qolî Khân.

The Bâlâ-Sar possesses a *mih râb* worked in faience tile. But the *mih râb* is not very old and dates from the present era. The roof was in an earlier period of wood and brick. When the Tomb Chamber was enlarged, alterations were introduced to this structure. The chamber was reinforced with concrete in 1342-44 (1923-24) and covered with tiles. The mosque can thus be considered a new structure.

### The Posht-e Sar Mosque

The Posht-e Sar Mosque is 3.60 metres wide and 7.70 metres long. It was repaired on numerous occasions. A *qasîdeh* from Qa'ânî appears above the skirting, commemorating the repair and decoration of the structure.

The Posht-e Sar Mosque was enlarged in 1346 (1927-28) to provide more space for the pilgrims. The original shape was altered. But the alterations were necessitated by the increase in the number of pilgrims and the march of time.

### **The Riyâz Mosque**

The Riyâz, or Women's Mosque is connected on the north to the Towhîd Khâneh and on the west to the Posht-e Sar. The mosque is 4.30 metres wide, 7.30 metres long and 9.50 metres high. It can be considered part of the Towhîd Khâneh.

Changes were also made in the outward form and the structure of this building during repairs.

### **Dâr as-Sa'âdeh**

The Dâr as-Sa'âdeh is one of the structures built at the instance of Allâhyâr Khân Aşef od-Dowleh. Its construction was due mainly to the gap left between the Gold Ivân of the New Court and the Dome Chamber of Hâtam Khân, following the construction of the New Court.

The Dâr as-Sa'âdeh is 14.90 metres long, 12.80 metres wide and 14.80 metres high. The walls are covered by mirror-work. Above the *ezâreh* appears inscribed a verse from Malek ash-Sho'arâ Sabûrî. This structure has also not remained untouched. In 1334-44 (1915-26), its ceiling was repaired and the mirror-work was renewed. The north *ivân* was eliminated and a wide portal was opened on the south side of the Dâr as-Sa'âdeh to the Dâr as-Sorûr. The south *ivân* was also removed.

A door worked in silver was placed between the Dâr as-Sa'âdeh and the Dâr as-Sorûr. The door was built during the reign of the present monarch, Shahanshah Aryâmehr.

### **Dâr az-Ziyâfeh**

The Dâr az-Ziyâfeh was built following the construction of the New Court and is located between this court and the Dome Chamber of Allâh Verdí Khân. The main section is 15.50 metres long, 9.50 metres wide and 15 metres high. On the north and south sides, royal boxes (*shâh-neshîn*) have been created. The northern *shâh-neshîn* leads to the Old Court.

The *ezâreh* of the chamber is of marble and 1.50 metres high. Above it, in *şols* script there is inscribed a verse from the Qur'ân. The portion of the wall above the inscription and up to the ceiling is worked in mirrors.

The Dâr az-Ziyâfeh has two passageways leading to the New Court. There is passage from the western side to the Dome Chamber of Allâh Verdî Khân. The *ivân* on the western wall is worked in stalactites, and attributed to Allâh Verdî Khân. The mirror-work and the faience tile of the *ivân* are among the finest examples of the kind.

#### **Dâr as-Sorûr**

Dâr as-Sorûr is situated south of the Dâr as-Sa'âdeh. The chamber is 4.80 metres wide, 24 metres long and 4.70 metres high. Like in the other buildings, the *ezâreh* is of marble. The walls are covered with mirror-work. In the past the Dâr as-Sorûr was made up of several rooms. The pantry of the Shrine was located there. In 1334-1338 (1916-20) these rooms were transformed into one large chamber.

#### **Dâr al-'Ezzeh**

The Dâr al-'Ezzeh was previously the guardhouse or the *kishîk-khâneh*, for the staff of the shrine. The Madresseh of 'Alî Naqî Mîrzâ used to be located on the eastern side. It is one of the newer buildings, having undergone thorough repair in the years 1342-44 (1924-26) and decorated with mirror-work. The structure is 3.10 metres wide, 11.50 metres long and 4.35 metres high. It is connected to the Dâr as-Sorûr and the Dâr az-Zekr. When the Dâr as-Salâm was enlarged and repaired, three openings were made in the western wall of the Dâr al-'Ezzeh to Dâr as-Salâm. A stone railing was placed before it and the south wall was repaired and linked to the *shabestân* (oratory) of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque.

#### **The Opak Mîrzâ-Dome Chamber**

To the southeast of the sanctuary, there is a chamber which leads through a silver door to the guardhouse and has come to be known as the *kishîk-khâneh* passageway. This dome chamber is connected to the Dome Chamber of Hâtam Khân and the Dâr al-Hoffâz. The floor of the chamber is two steps higher than the floor of the Dome Chamber of Hâtam Khân. The Dome Chamber of Opak Mîrzâ is 8.40 metres long and 8.20 metres wide and 13 metres high. Major reconstruction took place in 1346 (1927-28) and the chamber is now part of Dâr as-Salâm.

### Dâr as-Salâm

The Dâr as-Salâm, the Chamber of Peace, was originally built by that devout lady, Gowhar Shâd Aghâ, at the same time as she ordered the construction of Dâr al-Hoffâz and Dâr as-Siyyâdeh.

For a period, the Dâr as-Salâm, which had been given an upper floor, served as a storehouse for rugs (ground floor) and provided rest rooms (upper floor) for the Shrine. But in the repairs undertaken in 1334-38 (1916-20), the middle ceiling was removed and the structure was transformed into a single chamber. Following repairs and decoration, it was named the Dâr as-Salâm.

The chamber is connected to the *shabestân* of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque, the Dâr al-Hoffâz, the Dome Chamber of Opak Mîrzâ and the Dâr al-Ezzeh, through two passageways. During repairs to the building in 1346 (1927-28) and to accommodate the greater number of pilgrims and create a larger space in the buildings surrounding the Tomb Chamber, changes were introduced in the Dâr as-Salâm and the *kishik-khâneh* passageway. Dâr as-Salâm emerged as a handsome chamber 20 metres long, 10 metres wide and 9.5 metres high.

The *ezâreh*, or skirting, of the building is of green stone 1.65 metres high. An inscription is followed by mirror-work. A noble *mîhrâb* has taken the place of the door that led to the *shabestân* of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque. On the west side of the Dâr as-Salâm, two large structures have been created, which are connected to the Dâr al-Hoffâz, and enhance its beauty and sense of proportion.

Three openings have been created on the eastern side, along which stone railings have been built. This has created another passage, in addition to the previous one, between the chamber and the Dome Chamber of Hâtam Khân. The chamber contains marble plaques on which verses have been inscribed. In 1346 (1927-28) the foundations of the building were renewed and built with reinforced concrete. It can thus be said that the Dâr as-Salâm is a new structure, in which an effort was made to retain traditional features.

### Dâr âsh-Shokr

A further change to permit accomodation of the growing numbers of pilgrims was introduced in 1343-44 (1924-25). At that time, the area of the former reading rooms of the Shrine, entered through the southeastern corner of the Gold Îvân of the Old Court, was transformed into a chamber by the addition of part of the passageway leading from the Bâlâ Sar Mosque to the Towhîd Khâneh.

This chamber was constructed utilizing modern architectural techniques. It was named the Dâr âsh-Shokr. It is 6.5 metres long, 6.5 metres wide and 9.50 metres high. Its doors open to the Gold Ivân of the Old Court, the Bâlâ Sar, the Dâr al-Ekhlâş and the Towhîd Khâneh.

The *ezâreh* is 1.70 metre high, built of marble. The portion of the wall above the *ezâreh* and the ceiling are covered in mirror-work. There are three *soffehs* along the walls.

### **The Dâr al-Ekhlâs**

The Dâr al-Ekhlâs was created out of the old *saqqâ-khâneh* passageway, the southeast corner of the Gold Ivân (Old Court), the large area for taking off the shoes in this court, and the room used by the head of the shrine. The purpose was once again to improve accommodation of pilgrims. The chamber is connected to the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh, Dâr al-Hoffâz and the Tomb Chamber. It is 12.80 metres long, 10 metres wide and 9.5 metres high.

The *ezâreh*, as in other buildings where repair and reconstruction has taken place, is 1.70 metres high. The walls and ceiling are covered with skillful mirror-work.

### **The Courts and the Esplanades**

The complex of buildings that comprise the Holy Shrine of Imâm Rezâ are ringed by a circular road. The buildings are linked to the road through the two great *basts* (esplanades) and other passageways.

The pilgrim who enters the Holy Precincts through the Bast-e Bâlâ or the upper esplanade, will first move through an area known as the Bast-e Bâlâ Khiyâbân. Shops stand on either side of the *bast*. The Bast-e Bâlâ leads to the Old Court. The court is situated on the north side of the Holy Precincts. Its southern half was constructed by Amir 'Alî Shîr Navâ'î and its northern half by Shâh 'Abbâs.

The well known book, '*Alam Arâ-ye 'Abbâsî*', reports that Shâh 'Abbâs found the old court and the *ivân* of Amîr 'Alî Shîr Navâ'î small and humble. He drew up a plan to remove the building lying to the east, which had been ruined, and to add it to the court in such a fashion that



the *ivân* would stand at the real centre of the court. He wished the court to have a second *ivân*, on the northern side, facing south, and two other *ivâns* on the east and west. He also ordered an avenue (*khiyâbân*) to be built from the east and west gates of the city, meeting the court on both sides and running through these *ivâns*.

Thus a major transformation and enlargement of the court took place during the reign of Shâh 'Abbâs. Four openings were built at the upper and lower ends, and behind the openings small and large rooms.

The length of the court from east to west is 104 metres and the width from north to south measures 64.5 metres. A stream runs through its centre. The stream, open in the past, has now been covered over.

The court with *ivâns* is one of the characteristic structures in Iranian religious architecture, which has drawn on traditional principles and has been little affected by foreign influences. With its slightly recessed and lofty *ivâns*, the court provides the believer a place for prayer and contemplation and for mixing with other worshippers; and the *ivâns*, inspiring in form and rich in decoration, have always drawn the pilgrim and the worshipper.

The Old Court has four *ivâns*. All are of great beauty. The tile-work is exquisite, and reinforces the spiritual effect of the surroundings.

The Old Court is worked in polychrome tiles. Tiles that had chipped or crumbled have been replaced. The polychrome tiles of the *ivân* will be replaced by mosaic tiles. These measures will somewhat mar the unity of the tile-work of the court, but they were necessary as means of preserving the beauty of the court's exterior.

Of the four dazzling gold *ivâns*, one was built in 875-885 by Amîr 'Alî shîr Navâ'î. Nâder Shâh had the *ivân* gilded. It is now known as the *Îvân-e Talâ'î-ye Nâderî* (the Gold *Îvân* of Nâder). The width of this *ivân* is 7.80 metres, the length 14.70 metres and the height 21 metres. It is replete with inscriptions and *ezârehs*. The inscriptions draw on *hadîth* of the Prophet. The entire roof is decorated in gold. Even the stalactites are in gold. The *ivân* leads through four silver-plated doors to the chamber of the Shrine.

The *ivân* was repaired in the reign of Nâşer ad-Dîn Shâh. An inscription on the southern side commemorates the occasion. Four highly interesting niches have been built into the upper part of the wall.

### **Îvân-e 'Abbâsî (Îvân of Shâh 'Abbâs)**

The Îvân of Shâh 'Abbâs, on the northern side of the Old Court, was built by Shâh 'Abbâs the Great. The *ezâreh* is of plain black stone. The walls are decorated up to the ceiling in strikingly beautiful faience tile and stalactites. The *îvân* contains a fine *mihîrâb* and four niches. The inscriptions bear witness to the repair work done during the reign of Shâh 'Abbâs and also in the reign of Mo-hammad Shâh Qâjâr.

### **Îvân-e Sâ'at (The Clock Îvân)**

The west *îvân*, known as the Îvân-e Sâ'at or the Clock Îvân, was also built in the reign of Shâh 'Abbâs. Between the reign of Shâh 'Abbâs and the reign of Nâşer ad-Dîn Shâh, the *îvân* was re-constructed. The width of the *îvân* is 6.90 metres and the height measures 24 metres. The tile-work shows considerable mastery and originality. In 1340 (1921-22) repairs were done to the tile-work and some other changes were introduced.

### **The Naqqâreh-Khâneh Îvân**

Like the other three *îvân*, the Naqqâreh-Khâneh Îvân is highly interesting for its decorations and tile-work. The *îvân* faces the *naqqâreh-khâneh*. It is 7.80 metres wide, 18.20 metres long and 26 metres high.

The Naqqâreh-Khâneh Îvân was initially covered with polychrome (*haft-rang*) tile. When the structure underwent extensive repair in 1346 (1968-69), the old tile-work was replaced by beautiful faience tiles. The interior stalactites were repaired and covered with mosaic tile.

The *naqqâreh khâneh* of the Old Court appears to have been built in the Qâjâr era. Since the structure was weak, extensive repair work and renovation was undertaken in 1338-40 (1959-61). The new *naqqâreh-khâneh* is built on two floors, rising to a height of 9.50 metres. The façade is a work of beauty, decorated in faience tiles. The molding has been embellished with three rows of stalactites. Above the stalactites, there is a row of rounded, small dome-like shapes in deep blue whose stalactites are of great beauty.

### **The Soffehs of the Old Court**

Along the sides of the Court, in line with the rooms, there are 12 large *soffehs* famous for their calligraphic inscriptions, done by great Iranian calligraphers.

### **The Saqqâ-Khâneh of the Old Court**

In the middle of the old court there is a *saqqâ-khâneh* known as the *Saqqâ-Khâneh-ye Esma'il Talâ*. In the book, *Badr-e Forûzân* it is written of this *saqqâ-khâneh* that it contains a large *sangâb* (single-piece marble pool) that Nâder Shâh carried back with him from Harât; and that Esma'il Khân Talâ'î set a roof on it, supported by marble columns. The walls are decorated with gold brick.

The length of each side of the *saqqâ-khâneh* is 1.95 metres and the height up to the inner side of the dome measures 4.55 metres. The height of the dome is 1.80 metres. The *saqqâ-khâneh* was renovated in 1346 (1927-28). It is now interestingly placed in the centre of the court and in the centre of four pools of water.

### **Şahn-e Jadîd (The New Court)**

The New Court is situated in the eastern part of the Holy Shrine. It contains 56 lower rooms linked together by openings and doors. Behind them there are rooms. The New Court was built in the reign of Fath 'Alî Shâh. The initial decorations and tile-work were made in the reign of Mo-hammad Shâh.

The court measures 81.50 metres in length and 51 metres in width. The *ezâreh* is of black stone and rises to a height of 1.44 metres. The entire wall is worked in polychrome tiles. The New Court contains a large pool. It was renovated in 1345 (1926-27). Four *îvâns* and three large doors have been built into the four sides of the court. One of these is gilded and known as the *Îvân-e Talâ-ye Nâşeri* (the Gold *Îvân* of Nâşer).

### **Îvân-e Talâ-ye Nâşerî**

This *îvân* is linked through a silver door and through a small door to the Dâr as-Sa'âdeh and is connected to the Tomb Chamber. From a point immediately above the *ezâreh*, the walls are

entirely plated with gold bricks. The *ivân* is 7.25 metres wide, 15.30 metres long and 20 metres wide. There are three gilded niches.

#### **The Eastern Îvân and Portal**

The eastern *ivân* and portal is connected to the south side of the ring. It is covered in beautiful tiles and its ceiling is marked by fine stalactites. The *ivân* is 7.10 metres wide, 15.80 metres long and 20 metres high.

#### **The Southern Îvân and Portal**

The *ezâreh* of this *ivân* is of stone. From the top of the *ezâreh* to the edge of the ceiling the wall is covered with stalactite tiles. The *ivân* is 7.30 metres wide, 18.30 metres long and 20 metres high. Standing at the top a tower is a clock with four faces that can be seen at a considerable distance. The clock-tower is in three floors, the top floor being covered by a green-coloured roof. The last floor was built in 1354 (1975-76), and did not exist when the present plans of the buildings were drawn.

#### **The North Îvân and Portal**

This *ivân* measures  $7.19 \times 7.20 \times 20$  metres. There is passage from the *ivân* to the Pâ'in Khiyâbân, or Lower Esplanade. The *ezâreh* is of black stone. The rest of the walls are covered with tiles.

The New Court has been repaired and renovated on several occasions, since the foundations had grown weak, they were reinforced in 1346 (1968-69). The black stone of the *ezâreh* was replaced by stone of brighter colour.

#### **The Basts (Esplanades)**

Pilgrims generally enter the Holy Precincts through the two great esplanades, the Bast-e Pâ'in (Lower Esplanade) and the Bast-e Bâlâ (Upper Esplanade). The Bast-e Bâlâ is 86 metres long,

30 metres wide. On the two sides are shops. The Bast-e Bâlâ leads to the Old Court. The entrance to the *bast* is in the present day through five portals. The central portal is the largest and covered with attractive tiles. The Mehmânkhâneh-ye Razavî is located in the *bast*, and each day a large number of people are fed there.

The Bast-e Pâ'in stands facing the Bast-e Bâlâ. It is 115 metres long and 29 metres wide. Its entrance, like that of the Bast-e Bâlâ, is constituted by portals decorated with strikingly coloured tiles.

#### **Sahn-e Pahlavî (The Pahlavi Court)**

Rezâ Shâh the Great, Founder of the Pahlavî Dynasty, who displayed special devotion to the Eighth Imâm, ordered repair and renovation of the buildings of the Shrine. He also ordered the construction of a new *ṣaḥn*, or court, south of the New Court and the 'Alî Taqî Mîrzâ Madresseh, which was once a *tîmcheh*, or courtyard, but had suffered damage over time. The new *sahn* was to provide room for a museum and a library.

Work on the library and museum began in 1316 (1937-38) and was completed in 1324 (1945-46). But the need for a larger library and appropriate museum became evident in later years. Thus at the orders His Imperial Majesty the Shahanshah Aryâmehr, alternations were made to the Pahlavî Court.

The library was pulled down and work was begun next to the present museum, on a new library and museum, utilizing modern techniques and principles, and maintaining traditional characteristics.

The construction work is now under way. With the removal of the library, the Sahn-e Pahlavî has emerged as a large and striking court. The Dâr az-Zohd and the mausoleum of Shaikh Bahâî, the famed scholar of the Safavid era, are situated to its north. And on the northern side a door has been constructed leading to the New Court.

The Pahlavî Court contains attractive rooms, all of which have been decorated with the best faience tile and which are among the finest examples of the execution of this form of art in the present era. A large pool stands in the middle of the court. It is generous in dimension. The reflection of lights in the pool at night-time makes a striking sight.

The Museum of the Holy Shrine is of great interest. Objects are on display on both floors. Of

particular value are the *qalamkar* curtains which, wherever they are hung, reflect a part of the handicraft art, the originality and the taste of Iranian artists in different ages.

The library of the Shrine houses important collections. The collection of Qur'âns is unique and unrivalled for fineness of calligraphy and art of book-illumination, binding and cover decoration. The library includes 7,000 hand-written manuscripts, each of which is unequalled for beauty and importance.

### **The Gowhar Shâd Mosque**

The Gowhar Shâd Mosque was built at the instance of Gowhar Shâd Aghâ. The architect was Qavâm ad-Dîn b. Zayn ad-Dîn Shîrâzî. It is without doubt among the most beautiful of Iran's many striking mosques. The mosque appears to have been completed in 797 (1394-95). The architects of the period, working to fulfill the wish of this devoted and imaginative lady, applied all the genius of their art in building this place of worship. They raised a mosque that must leave every viewer awe-stricken at its mastery of conception and skill of execution.

Before describing the distinguishing characteristics of the building, it is necessary to point out that Iranian mosques are distinguished from all other mosques of Islam by their lofty *îvâns*, graceful and beautifully decorated arches, and striking tiles. The Gowhar Shâd Mosque also bears these distinguishing marks.

The Gowhar Shâd Mosque reflects the fullest expression of Iranian architecture. All the distinguishing qualities of this architecture have been applied to its realisation. In particular, the great *îvân* (Ivân-e Maqşûreh) inspires, by its conception, execution and decoration, in viewer and devotee alike, a spiritual calm, and a sense of peace.

The Ivân-e Maqşûreh is larger and more imposing than the other *îvâns* of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque. It is 37 metres long. Its entrance is about 13 metres wide. It is built to accommodate a great many people. The interior decoration shows particular originality and taste. The artist or artists charged with decoration of the *îvân* must have concluded that even if the entire ceiling and wall space were decorated with faience tiles and stalactites and great care lavished on working the designs and the colours, the tile-work — given the size of the *îvân* — would not create the desired effect. They thus left the background a simple white and worked it, here and there, with medallions and interesting design patterns.

The effect of the whole has been to endow the *îvân* with a beauty unmatched in any other mosque, both in Iran and the world. The *mihrâb* of marble, stands amidst stalactite tiles, strikingly decorated, making the over-all effect more imposing.

Above the *Îvân-e Maqşûreh* stands a fine dome. On the two sides of the *îvân*, rise two minarets. They stand next to the external façade of the *îvân* and rise from the ground to a height of 43 metres. The placing of the base and stalk of the minarets on the two sides of the *îvân* is infrequently seen in other mosques. Generally, when it was desired to place the minarets on the two sides of the *îvân*, the base of the minarets was set on the roof adjacent to the *îvân*.

The situation of the minarets of the *Îvân-e Maqşûreh* adds to strength of the building, relieves the effect of the great depth of the *îvân* and draws the eye to the minarets themselves. The height of the dome above the *Îvân-e Maqşûreh* measured to the tip of the needle rising above the dome is 41 metres.

On the two sides of the *Îvân-e Maqşûreh* there is a calligraphic inscription part of which is the work of Bâysanqor Shâhrokh, the son of Amîr Tâymûr. It is considered one of the finest pieces of the art of this era. Unfortunately, part of inscription was lost during repairs; but what remains speaks of the beauty and highly developed calligraphy of Bâysanqor.

Another *îvân* of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque is situated on the north side and is connected to the Dâr as-Siyyâdeh. An inscription speaks of repairs undertaken during the reign of Shâh 'Abbâs. Another inscription commemorates the repair of this or another section of the mosque during the reign of Shâh Solţân Hosayn. Further repairs were undertaken by Shâh Solaymân.

The west *îvân* of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque stands on the bazaar side. This section, including the wall and the rooms have been pulled down for reconstruction and retiling by the Khorâsân Endowments Office. The foundations of that part of the building had grown weak. The east *îvân* is situated on the side nearest to the *sahn* of the museum. The tile-work is exquisite.

The Gowhar Shâd contains eight *shabestâns* of various sizes.

Two large *shabestâns* stand on the two sides of the *Îvân-e Maqşûreh*. Each contains 40 columns. Vaulted arches, in the Timurid style have been built above the arches. On the two sides of the east *îvân*, there are two other *shabestâns* which are smaller than the columned *shabestâns*. Two other *shabestâns* have been built on the two sides of the north *îvân*, and are used as a prayer area.

The dome of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque, standing above the *Îvân-e Maqşûreh*, is covered with

green tile. It is built on a cylindrically shaped base, of limited height. The main part of the dome begins with a soft curve which grows into a semi-circle and ends in a slender point.

The stalk is covered with tiles worked in regular geometric designs. Above these are tiles which mark the beginning of the dome proper. The face of the dome is of green tile, decorated in the lower part with multicoloured designs. The whole blends effectively with the two lofty minarets.

The mosque is square in shape, measuring 50 × 55 metres. As evident from the inscriptions of the north *ivân* and the *Îvân-e Maqşûreh*, the mosque was completed in 797 (1394-95). The mosque required repair and even reconstruction over time. Such renovation, in the western part of the mosque, became necessary in the present era. The ceilings, rooms and the *ivân*, almost down to the *ezâreh*, were badly damaged and held up with wood supports.

In recent years, the brick floor of the mosque was removed and replaced with stone. A pool was built in the centre of the court to permit worshippers to perform their ablutions, and the *Pîr-e Zan Mosque*, which previously stood at the centre of the court, was pulled down.

The original inscriptions, except in certain areas (including the *Bâysanqor* inscription), also in time required replacement. New inscriptions were based on traditional styles and appear on faience and non-mosaic tile. But the foundations of the building, and particularly the *Ivân-e Maqşûreh*, remained untouched.

The date 821 (1419-20) in an inscription in the *Ivân-e Maqşûreh* by *Bâysanqor* indicates that repairs were done to the mosque in his day, and that the walls of the mosque were not all decorated with tile during the lifetime of *Gowhar Shâd Khâtûn*. This task was left to *Bâysanqor*.

Other dates, 1059 (1649-50) 1366 (1946-47) and 1053 (1643-44) indicate repairs to the tile-work of the mosque at these dates.

The early Islamic mosques were exceedingly simple. As mentioned earlier, it was the Iranians who began to embellish the mosque with tile work, inscriptions and architectural forms, such as minaret, the *ivân* and the *şahn*. Even in the earlier period, when only plain brick was used, Iranian builders managed to utilize the bricks in such a fashion as to break the monotony of the façade and create a strikingly-patterned exterior.



### Changes to the Gowhar Shâd Mosque

The Gowhar shâd Mosque, like other historic structures, has not remained immune from the ravages of time. In addition to repair work done on the mosque in earlier ages, of whose exact dates and nature we are unfortunately not fully informed, repair and renovation was undertaken in the present era, beginning in the year 1343 (1924-25).

The doors and the tiles and the ceiling of the Îvân-e Maqşûreh were repaired. The exterior tile covering the dome, which had been damaged, was completely removed, and the dome was rebuilt with cement and iron, retaining the original shape, and once again covered with tile.

The east *ivân* was pulled down to the foundations for reconstruction. The south-east wall, which over time had grown bent and crooked was repaired. The *shabestâns* also benefitted from this renovation work.

Thus, the need for repair has impaired the original unity of the buildings. Some of the structures have been entirely rebuilt. The new buildings were laid on the original foundations, but they cannot be considered as original or historic structures. These descriptions apply also to other buildings of the Shrine of Imâm Rezâ.

These facts emphasize the point made earlier, that examples of architectural style stretching back from the 3rd century (10th century A.D.) to the present day can be seen in the buildings of the Holy Shrine and this makes the task of research and identification a difficult one.

The highly developed application of various arts to the decoration and embellishment of the mosque was intended by the Iranians to capture the lofty majesty and high ideals of their religion and to symbolise the eternal glory and values of Islam.

It is the majesty of God, expressed in the genius of the artist and builder, that impresses the worshipper standing before the Îvân-e Maqşûreh of the Gowhar Shâd Mosque and fills him with awe. The muted colours against the white background and ceiling of this building fills the soul with peace. The high façade of the *ivân* emphasizes of the glory of the Almighty, for whose worship this mosque and other religious buildings of Islam were created.

The ceiling is shaped in a pointed arch, whose soft convex curve is of striking originality and characteristic of Iranian style in the construction of *ivâns*. The Îvân-e Maqşûreh cannot but remind the viewer of the genius of Iranian builders and craftsmen and their contribution to the development of the mosque.

The special attention paid by kings and governors in each age to the exterior beauty of mosques led to the maturing of the arts of tile-glazing, calligraphy and fashioning of stalactites, and to the development of the *îvân* and the *shabestân*. Iranian tile-makers, encouraged and supported, succeeded in developing new methods and designs in tile and mirror-work. If others have copied these forms and arts, the followers never surpassed the creativity of the original masters.

(<sup>1</sup>) Except where the foundation was reinforced, and other changes made, during the enlargement of the Tomb Chamber.

(<sup>2</sup>) Mashhad was looted and razed by the Ghuzz Turks in 558 (1161), the Mongols in 695-6 (1296), and the Uzbeks in 912 (1507) and again in 951 (1545) and in 997 (1589). The followers of 'Abd al-Mo'men Uzbek are reported to have killed so many of the inhabitants, that a special place of slaughter was created. The burial ground associated with this place, evidence of which remains, is a reminder of the massacre. Sultan Mahmûd of Sistân in 1122 (1709), the Ahdâli in 1135 (1722) and Ahmad Shâh in 1167 (1753) inflicted damage on the city. Turkoman tribes attacked the city in 1241 (1825).

(<sup>3</sup>) The door was built in 1271 (1854-55) at the orders of Fereydûn Mîrzâ Farmânfarmâ and gold-plated in 1345 (1926-27).

(<sup>4</sup>) Reference has often been made to faience, or mosaic, tile. Such tile, which decorates the walls and façades of Iranian mosques and some of the buildings of the Holy Shrine of Imâm Rezâ, is without doubt an Iranian innovation.

Mosaic tile is made by a special process. Flint stone, extracted from mines, is broken up into smaller pieces at workshops and mixed with a sticky white clay. The mixture, to which water is added, is ground in a mill to create a thick paste, which is then poured into special molds. After the tile bricks in the molds are dry, the rough edges are smoothed and the stone slightly polished. Colour is then added, and the tiles baked in ovens for about 24 hours, the temperature regulated to create the particular colour desired. The square shaped tiles, now coloured in those brilliant hues, are taken to a mosaic workshop. Here master-craftsmen, trained in a time-old tradition, trace on paper the desired mosaic patterns, number each piece of the mosaic by colour, cut up the paper pattern into its parts and paste these on the variously-coloured tiles.

The tiles are now cut, with fine chisels and tools, according to the paper pattern, generally into geometrically shaped sections, and the sides of each piece polished. The pieces are then laid down, polished and coloured-face down, on a flat piece of ground, according to the pre-determined pattern. When one section of the mosaic pattern is fully laid out, a layer of cement is poured over it. Once the cement is dry, the mosaic is ready for mounting.

If the wall on which the mosaic is to be mounted is convex or concave, then the mosaic block has to be shaped accordingly. As can be imagined, this is a task which requires great skill. The same materials are utilised to make non-mosaic square tiles. Such tiles are, however, first worked in a multi-coloured design, then baked and glazed in ovens.