

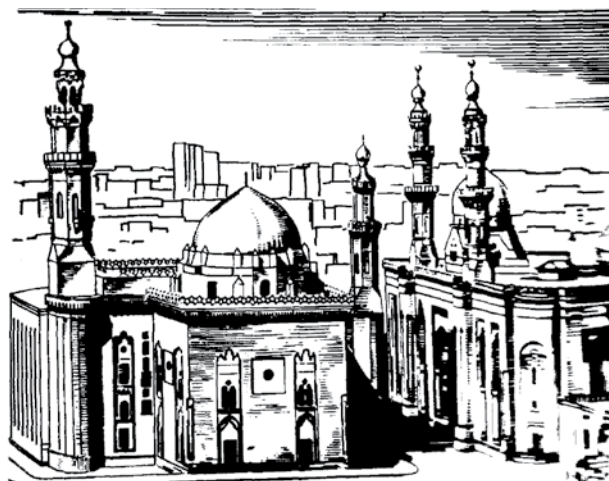
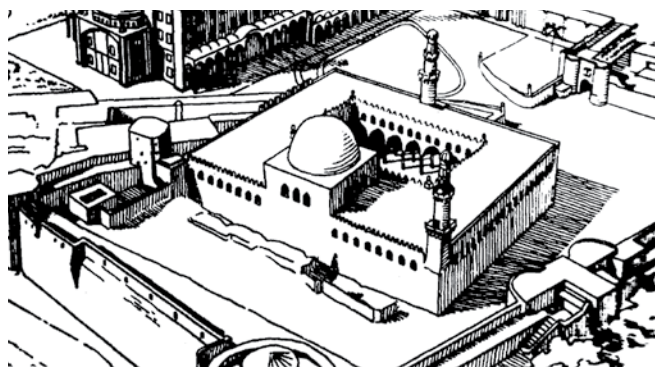
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# MEDIEVAL AZERBAIJANI ARCHITECTS IN ARAB COUNTRIES

Starting from the 7<sup>th</sup> century, with the spread of Islam, the vast area of the East adapted to the new ideology in all spheres of life. This process led to radical changes in the architecture of the peoples of the region. These changes were not based on the building skills brought by the Arabs. On the contrary, the types of structures that appeared after the Islamization and even temples of the new religion - mosques - were created based on the traditions of those countries that had developed architecture before Islam. Azerbaijan took a special place among them.

**In the first several centuries of Islamization, many**

**Azerbaijanis, including architects and construction specialists, worked in the centers of the Arab Caliphate, making a worthy contribution to the development of science and art.** In the 7<sup>th</sup> century, Caliph Omar invited an architect from the ancient Azerbaijani city of Hamadan to build the first mosque in Kufa (1). But the known facts on direct architectural contacts between Azerbaijan and Arab countries belong to a later period.

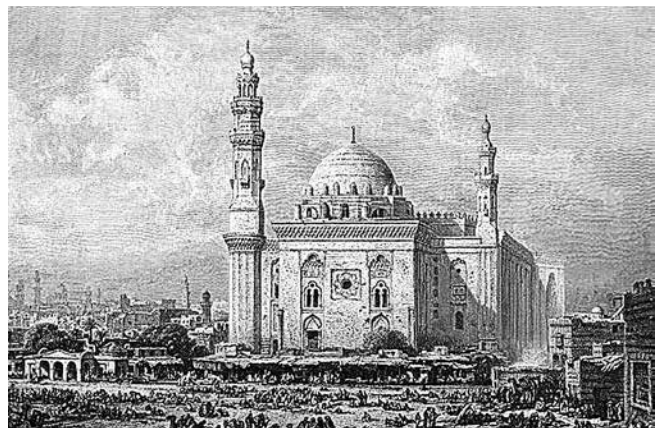


*Sultan Hassan Mosque. General view. Modern photo*



In contrast to the early Egyptian mosques, **Baybars Mosque in Cairo (1266-1269) is closer to Seljuk religious buildings in Azerbaijan and Iran for its space-planning structure:** in front of its mihrab, there is a big domed maqsura – a square box for rulers (2, 120; 3, 35). The penetration of this technique in the religious architecture of Mamluk Egypt is, in all likelihood, one of the results of Mongol invasions.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Ilkhanid ruler Abu Said Bahadur Khan improved diplomatic relations with Egypt, which had a positive impact on cultural relations between the two countries. Mamluk Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad



*Sultan Hassan Mosque in an old engraving*

(1294-1340 with intervals) sent his envoy Amir Aytмыш to Tabriz in 1322. Struck by the majestic beauty of Alishah Mosque in Tabriz, the Mamluk official described it in detail. Mamluk scholar Ibn Dokmak also gave a picturesque description of the mosque in one of his books (4, 91). Thus, the glory of Alishah Mosque reached Egypt.

**In 1329, Amir Aytмыш arrived in Tabriz again on the orders of the Sultan and invited the architect of Alishah Mosque to Cairo. Historian al-Maqrizi reported that this Azerbaijani architect (unfortunately, the historian does not name his name) built Amir Qasun Mosque in Cairo in the same year (4, 92).** The mosque had a four-eyvan structure. The main entrance to the courtyard of the mosque was a two-minaret brick portal, and a domed hall was located on the opposite side.

Evliya Celebi, who saw the mosque in 1678, noted that «the southern gate of the mosque has three-tiered

emerald minarets». This message indicates that the minarets of the Cairo mosques were built in the Tabriz style with tile cladding. In the planning structure, Amir Qasun Mosque was also identical to Tabriz's Alishah Mosque.

The same Tabriz architect, who served the Mamluk ruler, **built in the Cairo Citadel in 1335 the big cathedral mosque (al-Jami al-Jadid) of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad**, which was also famous for its magnificent tiled decoration (4, 97). The 16<sup>th</sup> century Arab historian Ibn Ilyas said that the «Big Dome» in the Cairo Citadel was covered with green tiles and claimed that «*since then, no such large dome has been built in Egypt*». We should also emphasize that the space-planning structure of Al-Nasir Muhammad Mosque and Amir Qasun Mosque are close.

Apparently, the work of the Tabriz architects, builders and specialists on the decor made a great impression on the Mamluk government. At the very least, **Sultan Hasan (1347-1361) sent his architects to the capital of the Ilkhanids (5, 88) for a kind of apprenticeship. In Tabriz, they studied design systems of monumental Ilkhanid buildings with grand arches and domes.** After their return, the dome structures changed. Basilica-type mosques were ousted from Mamluk architecture and replaced with vaulted mosque with eyvans (5, 118).

**The Sultan Hasan complex in Cairo (1356-1363) is the most famous Mamluk monument, which is unparalleled in the Arab world (3, 39).** This grand complex of mosques, madrasas and a mausoleum has a four-eyvan courtyard. The mosque itself is arched and is shaped as a huge deep eyvan. The location of the tomb behind the prayer hall, on the axis of symmetry (in early Mamluk mosques, mausoleums were located in the corners of the room), and the nature of the placement of corner minarets reflect the influence of Ilkhanid structures at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century in Tabriz and Sultaniyeh.

Egypt researcher M. Meinecke emphasizes **the contribution of Azerbaijani masters of tiling to the architectural decoration of Mamluk buildings. According to his research, in 1330-1350 in Cairo (Fustat) there was a Tabriz ceramic tile shop**, which carried out architectural and decorative work in Egypt (4, 124-128). The inlaid mosaic tiling technique brought to Egypt by Azerbaijanis influenced even the artwork of Cairo's stone domes - they are often covered with solid carvings of geometric or plant design.

Mamluk architecture is considered the top of medieval Egyptian architecture. In this context, the contribution of Azerbaijani masters with their architectural traditions



*Plaque on the Mosque of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad*

to its development reflects the potential strength of the Tabriz architectural and artistic circle.

Among the Arab countries, Azerbaijan had the most long-standing and closest cultural ties with its neighbor Iraq. **Architectural contacts between the two countries in the Islamic period can be divided into four main stages - the reigns of the Abbasids, Seljuks, Ilkhanids and Safavids.** The last two stages are characterized by the influence of the Tabriz school of architecture on the architecture of Iraq. This is primarily due to the fact that for a long time, Iraq was part of large states (Ilkhanids, Qaraqoyunlu, Aggoyunlu and Safavids), of which Tabriz was the capital and leading cultural center.

The creative work of the genius Azerbaijani composer and musicologist Seyfaddin Urmavi belongs to the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Being also a talented calligrapher, he served in the palace of the last Abbasid

*View of the Mosque of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad*

Caliph al-Mu'tasim and decorated a number of buildings erected by this ruler in Baghdad (6, 33).

**The recruitment by Ilkhanid rulers of masters from Tabriz to carry out restoration work in Baghdad at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century** marked a new phase in Azerbaijani-Iraqi cultural ties. At the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the vizier and architect Alishah Tabrizi developed frantic activity in Baghdad in a short period of time. How these works contributed to the spread of the influence of Azerbaijani architecture in Iraq is noticeable in Baghdad monuments of the time. The form, details and architectural decoration of **the minaret of Souk al-Ghazal Mosque**, built during the reign of Abaga Khan in 1279 (7, 139), stylistically belong to the Tabriz art circle. In this regard, the cylindrical barrel of the minaret covered with two-colored bricks forming geometric patterns and inscriptions is particularly revealing.

*View of the Mosque of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad**Mosque of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad*



**Marjaniyah Mosque** stylistically stands out in **Baghdad** (8, 29). It has a multi-dome structure similar to the mosques of the Tabriz area. The high corrugated drum of its central dome is not typical of Baghdad either, while Azerbaijani architects used an identical technique in tower mausoleums in Konya (13<sup>th</sup> century) and in Karabaglar (14<sup>th</sup> century). Comparative analysis is confirmed by a construction inscription at the Baghdad mosque, which retains the name of the master - Ahmadshah an-Naqqash Tabrizi (8).

**The coating of the caravanserai Khan Ortma or Marjan Khan**, according to researchers, is also not typical of Iraqi architecture. The transverse vaults on arch walls overlapping the rectangular central hall of Khan Ortma are a design that was widely used in Azerbaijan and Iran (11, 46-47). This shows that not only the mosque, but the whole Marjaniyah complex was built under the direction of a visiting master.

«All the inscriptions of **the building in Najaf, erected by the Azerbaijani ruler Uveys I**, were made by the famous calligrapher from Tabriz, Mubarakshah Zarrin-qalam,» Qazi Ahmad recorded (9, 68). The same ruler

restored **the mosque and tomb of al-Kazimeyn** in northwestern Baghdad in 1367, attaching two domes and a minaret (7, 144). The famous calligrapher Zahiraddin Azhar Tabrizi (died in 880 AH - 1475) was in Herat, Yazd, Kirman, Isfahan, Basra, Baghdad, Mecca, Aleppo and Jerusalem. At the request of the Sheikh ul-Islam, he created the inscriptions of **Aleppo's cathedral mosque** (10, 93). Perhaps, as a calligrapher and monumentalist, the master worked in other cities, including in the Iraqi cities he had visited.

Safavid rulers, who created a huge theocratic state, erected solemn sepulchers over the graves of Shiite imams in order to strengthen the influence of Shi'ism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, for which they recruited choice masters of the country led by palace architects of Tabriz. The founder of the state, Shah Ismayil I, was especially notable in this field (11, 47, 7, 144). **All the holy mausoleums in Baghdad, Karbala, Najaf and Samarra were built in the Safavid style.** They consist of a central dome hall with a bypass gallery and differ with single methods of architectural space typical for both Safavid domed mauso-

*Mausoleum and mosque of Imam Abbas. Karbala*

leums with corner rooms and for monumental religious buildings of the Tabriz area in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The **mosque-mausoleum of al-Kazimeyn**, which was built by Sultan Uveys, was demolished and rebuilt in 1515-1519 by Shah Ismayil I after the seizure of Baghdad (7, 144). Although it underwent several changes later, it generally kept its «Safavid» appearance. Al-Kazimeyn has almost identical facades with a deep columned eyvan. The corners of buildings are marked by four brick minarets with a thin encrustation and pompous balconies. The central part of the monument is emphasized by paired domes on high cylindrical drums.

**The Mausoleum of Imam Ali in Najaf** (16<sup>th</sup> century) has a simpler structure. Behind its two-minaret portal is the huge dome of the central hall. The external faces of the Ali mausoleum are covered with fine kashi mosaics. The main facade of the **Mausoleum of Imam Abbas (16<sup>th</sup> century) in Karbala** is also in the form of a deep eyvan with columns. The mausoleum has one dome. The trunks of the paired minarets are covered with brickwork in the form of ornamental inscriptions.

The **Mausoleum of Imam Hussein in Karbala** is the largest structure and from an architectural and artistic point of view, the most expressive among the Shiite shrines of Iraq (11, 47). Built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and having undergone a series of minor changes later, the Mausoleum of Hussein has a three-dimensional structure that is close to Tabriz's Goy Masjid (15<sup>th</sup> century): the large dome located in the center is surrounded by small corner domes. Its dynamic multi-dome structure is completed with a pair of minarets with cylindrical trunks. The Mausoleum of Hussein is lined with rich tiled decor and stalactites from outside, while its interior is decorated with drywall carvings, wall paintings and mirror mosaics.

Safavid rulers spared no money for these monumental cult-memorial structures in Iraq. To increase the grandeur

*Mausoleum and mosque of Imam Hussain. Karbala*

of the image, their main dome and individual parts of the minarets were gilded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (7, 145). Although this led to some loss of architectonic and natural style, Iraq's Shiite shrines are expressive and majestic on the whole.

The Shiite religious-memorial complexes of Iraq have another feature peculiar to the Azerbaijani religious buildings of the Safavid period. These luxurious buildings use the same techniques and elements of residential and palace architecture as the Sheikh Safi Ensemble in Ardabil (13<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries).

The creative activity of masters of architecture of medieval Azerbaijan was not limited to these facts. Contacts with Arab countries in the field of architecture were broad and fruitful. ✨

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