Located in the town of Kunya Urgench (Old Gurganj) on the west bank of the Amu Darya (Oxus River) in Turkmenistan, the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum has received little notice because until recently travel there was difficult to arrange (fig. 1). Yet already when Yakubovskii first published this mausoleum in 1930, he declared: “There is nothing like it in the whole Muslim world” (fig. 2). Its extraordinary mosaic faience, composed of thousands of pieces of ceramic tile displaying colors that are found nowhere else, creates a model of the heavens in the interior surface of the great dome (fig. 3). Mosaic faience also coats the muqarnas vaults of its internal vestibules and exterior niches. Glazed tile set within the lattice design of the majestic cylindrical drum on the roof sparkles beneath what was once a turquoise-tiled conical dome. This two-chambered mausoleum takes its name from Turabeg Khanom, wife of Qutlugh Timur, who governed Khorezm between 1321 and 1336 for Uzbek Khan of the Golden Horde, from what was then known as Gurganj. Yakubovskii praised the monument for its elegant design and stunning tile decoration but harbored doubts about dating.

Fig. 1. Regional map of Samarkand. (Map: Lisa Golombek)
Fig. 2. The Turabeg Khanom mausoleum, from the south. (Photo: Lisa Golombek)

Fig. 3. Mosaic-faience revetments in the dome of the large hall, Turabeg Khanom mausoleum. (Photo: Lisa Golombek)
it so early. He could find no adequate contemporary parallels, noting that some of the architectural features, particularly the mosaic faience, do not appear in the other monuments of Urgench built during the lifetime of Turabeg Khanom, around 1330.

While the information provided by Pugachenkova and others was tantalizing, it was not sufficiently detailed to allow further examination of this problem. However, recent fieldwork by archaeologists and architects in Turkmenistan and a visit to the site by the author in May 2006 greatly expanded the pool of information about this monument. Before turning to an examination of the building, a brief summary of what is known about the site of Kunya Urgench will help in understanding its historical context.

**KUNYA URGENCH: THE SITE**

Kunya Urgench, referred to as Jurjaniyya/Gurganj/Gurgan in the medieval Arabic and Persian sources, lies west of the left bank of the Amu Darya in present-day Turkmenistan. Sections of walls and almost two dozen architectural monuments dot the deserted landscape of what once constituted one of the leading cities of Central Asia (fig. 4). The city was watered by a canal that ran from the Amu Darya along the south side of the site. South of the Achaemenid settlement (the fortified mound known as Kirk Mulla [see fig. 4]), the Arabs created a town in the eighth century, designated today as Tash Kala. Based on an orthogonal grid, it had four gates and contained at least one very large hypostyle mosque and a cylindrical minaret, founded by the Mamunid Khorezmshahs (995–1017; inscription dated 1011). The eleventh century under Ghaznavid and Seljukid domination was the age of Khorezm’s most illustrious sons, among whom were Avicenna (d. 1037) and al-Biruni (d. 1048).

The next significant period of growth occurred under the second Khorezmshah dynasty (1097–1231), when the city flourished as a major entrepôt on the Silk Road. To its north, a series of lavish tombs developed along a road that led from the city to the route heading toward the west. Of these only two remain standing. They are attributed on the basis of style to two of the Khorezmshahs—Il-Arslan (r. 1156–72) and Tekesh (r. 1172–1200) (fig. 5). However, there is no epigraphic data for these specific identifications. The Tekesh mausoleum was part of a larger building, perhaps a madrasa. This northern area was subsequently surrounded by a wall that enclosed the Arab city as well. Ten kilome-
the "Turabeg Khanom" Mausoleum in Kunya Urgench: Problems of Attribution

earlier construction, only restored by Qutlugh Timur around 1330. Nearby were excavated fragmentary remains of a building with glazed tile decoration, possibly a mosque or muṣallā (prayer station for the celebration of great outdoor festivals). The Mongol ruler’s interest in restoring these monuments, if indeed they were not new constructions, may indicate that this area in general underwent new development during his reign. In the vicinity of the Tekesh mausoleum a remarkable ceramic cenotaph was excavated, painted in polychrome glaze and datable to the middle of the fourteenth century (fig. 6). Of particular interest is the inscription, which refers to a woman, although the name has disappeared. The placement of the tomb within the earlier courtyard or its surrounding structures would again demonstrate the Mongols’ re-development of the earlier institution. We concur with Mamedov’s remark that this area north of the Abbasid city should be identified with the

ters in perimeter, it is attributed by archaeologists to the Mongol period (1224–1360).12 It is likely that this suburb was already under development in late Abbasid times and that the diagonal street once used to transport goods in and out of the city gradually became the major artery of a new suburb. Its absorption into the urban fabric may have begun with its use as a linear burial ground, such as developed on the slopes of Afrasiyab in pre-Mongol Samarkand, ultimately to become the Shah-i Zinda complex,13 or a similar growth of elite tombs at Shahrisabz.14 The Turabeg Khanom mausoleum, the subject of our investigation, is the farthest standing monument along this route, although others beyond it may have disappeared.

Monuments within this northern region continued to be built or restored during the Mongol period. A large minaret15 bears the name of Qutlugh Timur (fig. 5). On the basis of its decorative brickwork, including Kufic inscriptions, the minaret is thought to be an earlier construction, only restored by Qutlugh Timur around 1330. Nearby were excavated fragmentary remains of a building with glazed tile decoration, possibly a mosque or μuṣallā (prayer station for the celebration of great outdoor festivals). The Mongol ruler’s interest in restoring these monuments, if indeed they were not new constructions, may indicate that this area in general underwent new development during his reign. In the vicinity of the Tekesh mausoleum a remarkable ceramic cenotaph was excavated, painted in polychrome glaze and datable to the middle of the fourteenth century (fig. 6). Of particular interest is the inscription, which refers to a woman, although the name has disappeared. The placement of the tomb within the earlier courtyard or its surrounding structures would again demonstrate the Mongols’ re-development of the earlier institution. We concur with Mamedov’s remark that this area north of the Abbasid city should be identified with the

Fig. 5. View of the twelfth-century mausoleums and the minaret of Qutlugh Timur. (Photo: Lisa Golombek)
suburb developed by the Mongols, known as Qaʾan (= Khan).  

Qutlugh Timur also erected a major building for the tomb of the renowned Sufi leader Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 1220), far north of these monuments, beyond the Mongol walls. While this was certainly not the first building at his tomb, anything pre-Mongol must have been thoroughly reconstructed. Its exquisite underglaze-painted tiles demonstrate the skills of Khorezmian potters in the 1320s and 1330s (fig. 7). Of outstanding beauty and importance is the underglaze-painted cenotaph. Qutlugh Timur’s name appears in the tile inscriptions on the portal. This monument will be examined below as representative of the state of the art before Timur’s arrival on the scene.

The last monument along the diagonal route from the Abbasid city to the gate in the Mongol walls is the so-called “Turabeg Khanom” mausoleum. As shall be seen later, the wife of Qutlugh Timur was indeed a luminary in her own right and might well have built herself a tomb or at least a tomb chamber within a religious complex. Unfortunately, like the two pre-Mongol mausoleums, it is anepigraphic.

Before discussing this monument, I have attempted to contextualize it within the historical development of the city of Gurganj. The location will be significant in reassessing its identification. It stood along the same route as the other major elite tombs and religious monuments and was situated among other building projects of the Mongol period. Further archaeological investigation of the area should bring the context of these monuments into closer focus.

The site of Kunya Urgench contains many other monuments that are not our concern here because their present structures all postdate the Timurid period (ca. 1370–1507), although some may represent reconstructions of earlier buildings. After Timur’s devastation of Kunya Urgench in 1388, the town never recovered its former vitality. Members of the Sufid dynasty continued as local governors through the fifteenth century, subject either to the Timurids or the Khans of the Golden Horde (ca. 1240s–1502). After the brief rule of the Shaybanids (1506–10), a local Uzbek tribe, the Arabshahids gained power in 1511 and governed Khorezm from Khiva, which eclipsed Kunya Urgench thenceforth as a seat of power.
The “Turabeg Khanom” Mausoleum in Kunya Urgench: Problems of Attribution

The Architectural Design of the Turabeg Khanom Mausoleum

The original building had two chambers—a large domed hall and a smaller one behind it (fig. 8). The large chamber is twelve-sided on the exterior and hexagonal on the interior. It is preceded by an entrance portal and a vestibule. The portal is so broad and dominant that it obscures three of the twelve facets of the large dome chamber.

This dome chamber would have served as the ziyāratkhāna (antechamber), leading to a small domed vestibule, followed by a rectangular room over the crypt. Only a fragment of the rear vestibule dome sur-
vived into the last century and the rectangular room was replaced sometime before then by a low domed structure (fig. 9). Recent excavations revealed the original foundations of the room, and it has been reconstructed according to the plan of the restorer M. M. Tuhtaev (fig. 10). The reconstruction added a secondary entrance portal behind this room, as found in the sixteenth-century Sultan 'Ali mausoleum (opposite the Najm al-Din Kubra shrine), which in many respects (but not all), appears to be a copy of the Turabeg Khānom mausoleum.

Tuhtaev’s cross-section shows that the staircase going down to the crypt was entered from the floor beneath the arch that opened into the rear vestibule. The crypt itself extends from the center of the domed vestibule to the end of the building. This is rather awkward, since the true burial chamber (gūrkhāna) is not the domed space alone but all of the area up to the ziyāratkhāna. The apparent lack of correspondence between the crypt and its superstructure suggests that they may belong to different periods of construction. More information about the architecture of the crypt and its roofing, as well as about the burials (or lack thereof), might resolve this question.

The exterior facets of the dodecagon that do not accommodate the main and secondary portals have deep, arched niches that accentuate the height of the outer walls (fig. 2). There are openings where the niches lie in front of the sides of the interior hexagon; the other facets are carved out as semi-octagonal bays. This treatment gives the exterior a sense of movement not found in the simple blind arcades found on so many other polygonal mausoleums.

Two-chambered mausoleums are not uncommon in Central Asia for both secular and holy tombs, as in the (secular) mausoleum of Buyan Quli Khan in Bukhara (fig. 11), dated to around 1358, or the shrine of Ahmad Yasavi in Turkestan, built by Timur between 1397 and
the “Turabeg Khanom” Mausoleum in Kunya Urgench: Problems of Attribution

1399 (fig. 27 [see p. 152]). A second chamber was often added later to the original tomb, making it bicameral. At Kunya Urgench, the tomb chamber is much smaller than the hexagonal room, and its external dome terminated below the drum of the large dome. Its tomb chamber is also relatively small compared with that of the Yasavi shrine, but it is larger than the one built into the Buyan Quli Khan. The neighboring bicameral mausoleum, erected next to the Buyan Quli Khan for the Sufi shaykh Sayf al-Din Bakharzi in the fifteenth century, has an even larger tomb chamber relative to its ziyāratkhāna.24 The enlargement of the tomb chamber in relation to an adjoining ziyāratkhāna may perhaps be viewed as a chronological phenomenon. If so, the Urgench monument would fall closer in date to that of the Yasavi shrine at Turkestan.

The external shape of the ziyāratkhāna, a dodecagon, is relatively rare and appears to have had symbolic significance when employed. Alluding to the Twelve Imams, the dodecagon was used for the tomb chamber in several mausoleums associated with Shi’ite personages25 but, to my knowledge, it was not used for a ziyāratkhāna. The other possible symbolism is cosmological. Ghazan Khan’s mausoleum in Tabriz, according to Vassaf, was a twelve-sided polygon to correspond to the auspicious signs of the Zodiac, which were depicted on it.26

While the juxtaposition of a tomb chamber and a ziyāratkhāna does not pose problems of dating, the presence of the vestibule does. Such vestibules became common in Timurid architecture, but do not normally appear earlier.27 Timurid architects favored this device (called a dihlīz in contemporary literature) because it appealed to their taste for rationally conceived spaces, both horizontal and vertical. The Timurid historian ʿAbd al-Razzaq al-Samarqandi describes the shrine at Gazurgah in detail: “…on either side of the vestibule [dihlīz], north and south, are arranged two assembly-halls [jamāʿatkhāna] of perfect elegance.”28 The vestibule creates a space that removes the visitor from the external world and allows him to prepare for entry into a more sacred environment. In the Turabeg Khanom monument, the visitor moves from the small, easily grasped, cave-like space of the vestibule into the awesome, soaring space of the central hall (fig. 15 [see p. 144]). Light pours through the many windows under the dome, perhaps blinding him for a moment, as he gazes upward to the model of the cosmos pictured in the dome. The vestibule also offers the visitor a chance to change direction. To the right, he may ascend a spiral staircase. To the left, he enters a very small chamber, perhaps meant for storing items such as candles and books, or for use as a chillakhāna, a room for Sufi retreat.

The design of the vestibule is also worth considering (fig. 12). It is not a simple square room but rather a square with deep, arched niches on the sides giving entry to the two lateral spaces. The room is therefore a chahār-tāq, as often seen in Timurid buildings. The superstructure is supported not on four walls, but on four arches. The spaces under the arches on the longitudinal axis are filled in to look like walls, but the lateral arches open into niches. The roofing is actually a small dome resting on the four arches and the brackets laid between them. The original structure can still be seen above the remnants of the mosaic-faience muqarnas. The small dome preceding the gūrkhāna has also been constructed in this manner, although the sides are closed in (fig. 13). This novel solution created a sense of openness not possible when solid walls penetrated by doorways were employed. The chahār-tāq system occurs
almost to its apex (figs. 16 and 17). From the upper lip of the drum rose the thin shell of an external dome that was clad in turquoise tiles. It was supported by spur walls attached to the middle dome.

The shape of the outer dome has not been satisfactorily resolved since so little of it remains. It is generally thought to have been conical, as seems to be apparent from the remaining fragment (fig. 17), and in a photograph of the south side taken in 1929. Most scholars, including Tuhtaev, Pugachenkova, and Bulatov, tend to concur with this reconstruction. Other double domes in Kunya Urgench favor the conical over the curved dome, and this may have been the reason for its use here.

Experiments with constructing inner and outer domes go back to the Kharraqan tombs of the late eleventh century in Iran, but it is only around 1350 that architects seized upon the idea of combining the double dome with the high drum. Both domes did not have to spring from the roof of the building as they do extensively in Timur’s buildings at Turkestan and Samarkand, and in Timurid architecture throughout the period, but it is not seen in this region prior to the 1390s. Some of the best examples are found in the Tuman Aqa complex (1405–6) at the Shah-i Zinda (fig. 14), and in the shrine of Ahmad Yasavi at Turkestan (1397–99) (figs. 27 and 28 [see p. 152]).

Domes

The dome over the hexagonal hall rises over a transitional zone consisting of two horizontal rings: a dodecagon and a twenty-four-sided ring with twelve windows (fig. 15). The reconstruction by Tuhtaev shows a conical outer dome rising from a circular drum around a spheri-conical inner dome (fig. 10). The lower dome, which has the profile of a pointed three- or four-centered arch, is concealed on the inside by the tile work (set in a plaster shell). From the twenty-four-sided ring that supports this dome also springs, on the roof, the cylindrical drum, encasing the dome outside and rising almost to its apex (figs. 16 and 17). From the upper lip of the drum rose the thin shell of an external dome that was clad in turquoise tiles. It was supported by spur walls attached to the middle dome.

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Fig. 13. The rear vestibule of the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum. (Photo: Lisa Golombek)

Fig. 14. *Chahār-tāq* type structure in the tomb chamber of the Tuman Aqa complex, Shah-i Zinda, Samarkand. (Photo: Lisa Golombek)
of the exterior, and the cornice crowning the external cylindrical drum. Their striking mosaic-faience revetments will be considered later. A distinction between two types of muqarnas was drawn by the Timurid mathematician Ghiyath al-Din Jamshid ibn Mas‘ud al-Kashi, author of the treatise Miftāḥ al-ḥisāb (Key to Arithmetic, ca. 1430). The “simple” muqarnas had “only four possible measures for the bases of the facets…[while in the Shirazi muqarnas] one finds triangles, squares, pentagons, hexagons, star polygons, etc. that are flat as well as curved.”36 The very elements that distinguish the Shirazi muqarnas, particularly star polygons, proliferate in the muqarnas of the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum.37 The term “Shirazi” associates this type of muqarnas with the city of Shiraz in south central Iran. Notkin distinguished between two types of muqarnas found in early Timurid monuments in Samarkand. He identified a special type of muqarnas seen in the later monuments of the Shah-i Zinda, such as the Shirin Bika Aqa mausoleum (ca. 1390), or the shrine of Ahmad Yasavi in Turkestan (1397–99), as “radial,” in contrast to the earlier forms that were generated by an orthogonal grid (corresponding to al-Kashi’s “curved” type) (fig. 19).38 Although Notkin did not identify the radial muqarnas with the term Shirazi, this association has been strengthened through the work of Necipoğlu and al-Asad.39 The stellate roofs of the Shirazi muqarnas evolve from its radial composition.

Tracing the arrival of the Shirazi muqarnas in Central Asia will provide a post quem dating for the mausoleum. It first appeared in Central Asia only around 1390, one of the earliest occurrences being in the aforementioned Shirin Bika Aqa mausoleum at the Shah-i Zinda (erected after 1385–86).40 The very use of the term Shirazi, denoting an origin foreign to Central Asia, suggests a period during which craftsmen were being brought from Iran to Central Asia. We shall see that this occurred several times during Timur’s reign, as recorded in texts and suggested by the nisbas of craftsmen signing their works.

It is evident that the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum is a highly sophisticated work of architecture, both in its conceptualization of spaces and its engineering. Both are fully utilized in a conscious way to achieve an effect, visual, aesthetic, even spiritual.
Surfaces

The entire exterior and at least the superstructure of the interior were reveted in glazed tile. Most of the work was executed in mosaic faience, although the main inscription framing the portal was made up of large, rectangular painted tiles, combining underglaze and overglaze techniques (fig. 20).41 The technique of painting tiles with a wide-ranging palette, including low-fire pigments such as red and gold, enjoyed a brief period of popularity in the region, as testified by several of the mausoleums at the Shah-i Zinda in Samarkand. These seem to range in date from the 1380s (the so-called “Ustad ʿAli Nasafi” mausoleum) (fig. 21) to the 1390s (Anonymous 2).42 They are prominent in the dated mausoleum of Amirzada (1386).43 At the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum they occur to such a limited extent one might suggest that the building falls at the tail end of this fashion. While mosaic faience occurs in the so-called “Caravansaray”44 at Kunya Urgench, the palette is limited to two blues, white, and black, and the designs are strictly geometric, completely in accord with the state of development in Iran in the mid-fourteenth century.

What Donald Wilber called “complete” mosaic faience, with the full range of colors (two blues, white, black, green, ochre, and eggplant purple), evolved in Iran in the mid-fourteenth century.45 It is a more costly technique as it involves cutting out thousands of pieces from different colored glazed tiles and laying them out to form intricate patterns. This is more labor intensive than painting the pattern on tile surfaces. Mosaic faience was used extensively only on the most princely of monuments erected by the Timurids and the amount of coverage displayed at the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum is exceptional even for a royal monument. What is most extraordinary is the palette of the mosaic faience here: the usual blue and white dominate, but green, bright yellow, bright red, brown, and gold also appear. Pugachenkova observed that the greens shade into pistachio (fig. 22). These colors are not characteristic of the fully developed Iranian mosaic faience. However, their occurrence in the painted tiles at Kunya Urgench and at the Shah-i Zinda suggests that local Khorezmian potters were at work adapting the older technology of
Fig. 18. Mosaic-faience muqarnas in the entrance vestibule of the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum. (Photo: Lisa Golombek)

Fig. 19. Analysis of muqarnas at the Shah-i Zinda, Samarkand: a) orthogonal; b) radial. (After I. I. Notkin, “Stalaktity XIV v. iz ansamblia Shakhi-Zinda,” Zodchestvo Uzbekistana 2 [1970]: figs. 4a, 10)
Fig. 20. Painted tiles from the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum (in the site museum). (Photo: Lisa Golombek)

Fig. 21. Painted tiles on the so-called “Ustad ‘Ali Nasafi” mausoleum at the Shah-i Zinda, Samarkand. (Photo: Lisa Golombek)

Fig. 22. Mosaic faience in the exterior niches, Turabeg Khanom mausoleum. (Photo: Lisa Golombek)

Painted tiles to what seems to have been a newly imported technique.

Little tile revetment remains on the entrance portal. Traces of the cursive inscription once framing the portal survive in small areas, and the large fragment preserved in the site museum probably came from the portal (fig. 20). The muqarnas panels on the entrance portal are inscribed with some of the Ninety-nine Beau-
tiful Names of God (asmāʾ al-husnā), including the eightieth, al-Tawwāb (Repentant); the eighty-fourth, Mālik al-Mulk (King of the dominions); and the ninety-fifth, al-Badīʿ (Creator-inventor). Only two other Timurid monuments with such inscriptions are known to the author, and they are both mid-fifteenth century (the Masjid-i Shah at Mashhad, and the Blue Mosque at T'abriz), while their occurrence in Ilkhanid architecture is also rare.

All of the framing borders of the exterior, as well as the arch spandrels, were reveted with mosaic faience in vegetal patterns. The cylinder of the drum is overlaid with a hexagonal grid of unglazed, polished terracotta (fig. 16). Mosaic tiles fill in the hexagons. There is a striking resemblance between the revetments of the drum, with their arched panels of hexagonal tiles, and the treatment of the drum under the dome of the Gawhar Shad mausoleum in Herat (1417–32). Even the proportions of the drum and dome suggest an affinity with the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum.

How the interior below the zone of transition was treated is not clear. No trace of tiles seems to remain (fig. 15), although there may have been at least a tile dado, perhaps of hexagonal tiles, as was typical of Timurid architecture. The walls would likely have been plastered and painted. The arches of the twelve-sided transition zone form an undecorated arcade. The muqarnas-filled corner arches alternate with flat, arched panels, both reveted in mosaic faience (fig. 23). The flat panels feature large, tear-shaped medallions against a background of arabesque. Similar panels occupy the spaces between the windows in the twenty-four-sided zone.

The dome is truly a tour de force, reflecting the heavens with its extraordinary geometric design radiating from a central star. The outer rings contain large...
decograms with round medallions in the centers (figs. 3 and 24). Each one appears to be different. Unlike Pugachenkova, I do not see any stylistic resemblance between the mosaics here and those of the Aq Saray at Shahrisabz, which Timur built, allegedly with the help of Khorezmian workmen. The individual pieces of mosaic used for the Aq Saray are very small compared with the usual Timurid practice, but those employed for the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum are much larger than both. This anomaly suggests that the technique was not altogether familiar to the tile makers at Kunya Urgench when they were commissioned to ornament the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum. The style of the ornament is, in fact, very close to that seen on the portal of the madrasa of Muhammad Sultan at Samarkand, built around 1400 by an architect from Isfahan.51

CONCLUSIONS

Many of the features of the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum discussed above show kinship with monuments belonging to what we have called the “Imperial Timurid Style,” spanning the years 1390 to 1405, ending with Timur’s death. These features are not limited to the mosaic-faience revetments, although the latter alone are strong indications of date. Masson’s proposed dating of the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum to around 1370 led scholars such as Pugachenkova and Bulatov to attribute the new developments at Samarkand to the craftsmen taken from Urgench in 1388 by Timur. However, if the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum had existed as early as 1370, the advanced technology it exhibits would have shown up in contemporary buildings in Samarkand. It does not. Timur’s family would surely have sent such remarkable craftsmen to work at the Shah-i Zinda. One must ask why none of these features appear in the mausoleum built at the Shah-i Zinda by Turkan Aqa (d. 1383), the elder sister of Timur, for her daughter Shad-i Mulk (d. 1371).52 If mosaic faience had been available at that time (between 1371 and 1383), Turkan Aqa would surely have used it. Instead, Turkan Aqa’s building is lavishly decorated with painted tilework both inside and out. This technology was well advanced in Khorezm, as evidenced by the undated cenotaph near the mausoleum of Tekesh mentioned above (fig. 6). Indeed, all of the buildings at the Shah-i Zinda from the 1380s up to the time of the Shirin Bika Aqa mausoleum (after 1385–86) have similar painted tilework. Thus, the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum could not have been built as early as 1370, as suggested by Masson and Pugachenkova, and probably postdates the Shad-i Mulk mausoleum.

The same conclusion must be reached if one looks at the spatial design (use of a vestibule), system of vaulting (chahār-tāq support system), and advanced Shirazi muqarnas of the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum. I have argued elsewhere that the introduction of these features into the architecture of Timur was due to the arrival of craftsmen from Iran following the campaigns Timur waged after he had razed Khorezm.53 Working together in Timur’s realms perhaps for the first time, the architects and engineers brought from various centers in Iran formulated a new canon that revolutionized the aesthetics of Islamic architecture.54 They may have come in at least two waves, the first group after the campaign of 1388 and another in 1393. Inscriptions on some of the new buildings give the names of builders and tile makers with Iranian nisbas: “Shirazi” on the Turkestan shrine; “Isfahani” on the madrasa of Muhammad Sultan; and “Tabrizi” (?) on the Tuman Aqa and Aq Saray. The builder who signed the dome of the Turkestan shrine appears to have been a descendant of the Shirazi builder of the madrasa adjoining the Seljuk mosque of Isfahan, dated 1376–77.55

Fig. 24. Detail of the mosaic faience in the dome. (Photo: Lisa Golombek)
The first monument in Transoxiana to display signs of the change in technology and aesthetics is the Shirin Bika Aqa mausoleum,\textsuperscript{56} which faces the Shad-i Mulk tomb across the corridor at the Shah-i Zinda (fig. 25). It was probably Timur himself who erected it for his sister after her death in 1385–86. Its tall cylindrical drum and elevated double dome protrude high above the earlier mausoleums that surround it, dwarfing the mausoleum built by Timur’s elder sister. The portal of the Shirin Bika Aqa mausoleum appears to soar as a result of the elongation of its tympanum above the doorway (fig. 26). It is about twice the height of the actual doorframe.\textsuperscript{57} This, the heightened drum, and the double dome are features also employed to great advantage at the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum. The elongated portal was fashionable in the Muzaffarid buildings of Iran in the late fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{58} Finally, it is the display of fine mosaic faience on the Shirin Bika Aqa portal that differentiates the mausoleums of the two sisters of Timur.

These are small monuments, built primarily for the Timurid royal family. We shall see the same innovative features on a larger scale in the major monument of this period, the great shrine dedicated to Ahmad Yasavi at Turkestan.\textsuperscript{59} Texts date this structure to 1397–99, but Mankov’skaia found two periods of construction and
suggested that the project had been started perhaps five years before. An even earlier period was discovered within the walls of the gūrkhāna, the original mausoleum of the shaykh (who died in 1166). As mentioned above, the succession of portal, large ziyāratkhāna, and small gūrkhāna, which occurs in the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum, is found in this building as well (figs. 27 and 28). The similarity between the two buildings becomes apparent if the auxiliary rooms flanking the central tract of the Turkestan shrine are stripped away. The spur walls of the large dome and its very tall cylindrical drum closely resemble the dome structure and drum of the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum, although the outer contour of the domes may have differed (the latter possibly being conical). Mosaic faience was used inside for the mihrab of the masjid and for the dado in the ziyāratkhāna, but the predominant technique was painted tiles and bannāʾī tilework. The painted tiles resemble those of Timur’s Aq Saray in Shahrisabz (the tile there is dated 798 [1395–96]), but the mosaic faience is the closest stylistically to that of the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum, although the palette is more traditional. As for structural features, the Turkestan shrine shows numerous usages of the chahār-tāq support system, which we noted in the vestibules of the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum.61

All of these novel features—the mosaic faience, the portal with elongated proportions, the chahār-tāq system, the double dome and drum, the vestibule, the Shirazi muqarnas—had a history of development in the architecture of Ilkhanid Iran. The technology can be seen evolving in the Muzaffarid monuments of Isfahan, Kirman, and Yazd from the mid- to late fourteenth century. The advanced muqarnas also appears in these same monuments (e.g., the mosques of Kirman and Yazd, and the madrasa attached to the Great Mosque of Isfahan). The relevant point is that if we try to date the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum on the basis of building design, technology, and decorative techniques, we have no choice other than to place it after Timur’s conquests of Iran. It could not, therefore, have been built by a member of the Sufid dynasty, which Timur defeated just before the campaigns in Iran. The question is, how much later and for what purpose was it actually built? The inscriptions on the portal (asmāʾ al-husnā) and the preexistence of the tomb suggest that it could just as easily have been a shrine or khanaqah of a revered person as the tomb of a royal princess. This question cannot be resolved without further archaeological investigation of the site. However, the dating of the monument can be established with our present knowledge of the architecture and comparable buildings.

The insertion of a complex vestibule structure is characteristic of monuments from the second phase of Timurid architecture, known as the “Metropolitan Style,” between 1410 and 1445.62 The emphasis placed on star-shaped roofs in the muqarnas also belongs to this second phase (see, particularly the monuments around Yazd of the mid-fifteenth century).63 Yet certain features that figure prominently in Timurid architecture after around 1420 are missing here. The most obvious one is the arch-net, a system of crisscrossing arches executed in plaster, later referred to by terms such as rasmī sāzī or gulāb sāzī, which eventually replaced the muqarnas.64 The Turabeg Khanom mausoleum would therefore postdate the arrival of architects from Iran in 1388, but at least three possible moments can be suggested within the Timurid period. The first would coincide more closely with Timur’s major projects of around 1395. The second corresponds to the period of Shah Malik’s governorship of Khorezm (1413–26), which his son continued to rule until 1430–31. A prominent amir of Shahrukh (r. 1409–47), the son also built extensively in Khurasan.65 The third possible moment would fall within the period of the revival of Khorezm under Khan Mustafa, with the founding of the town of Vazir in 1464. While the third period seems unlikely because of the lack of features that became popular in Timurid architecture by the middle of the fifteenth century (e.g., the arch-net), the second period remains plausible. However, until further evidence comes to light, I would like to consider a hypothesis for the dating of the monument to Timur’s lifetime.

We have ruled out two propositions explaining the origins of the remarkable so-called “Turabeg Khanom” mausoleum: 1) that it was built in the 1330s by the wife of the ruler, and 2) that it was erected by the Sufid governors around 1370. It is unlikely that the weak governors of the Sufid dynasty who hung on after the ruination of Kunya Urgench would have had the resources to build such a first-class monument.66 While
Fig. 27. Plan of the shrine of Ahmad Yasavi at Turkestan. (After Golombek and Wilber, *Timurid Architecture*, fig. 59, based on L. Iu. Man’kovskaia, “Towards the Study of Forms in Central Asian Architecture at the End of the Fourteenth Century: The Mausoleum of Khvâja Ahmad Yasavi,” trans. Lisa Golombek, *Iran* 23 [1985], fig. 1)

Fig. 28. Section of the shrine of Ahmad Yasavi at Turkestan. (After Golombek and Wilber, *Timurid Architecture*, fig. 57, based on Man’kovskaia, “Towards the Study of Forms in Central Asian Architecture,” pl. 1)
rejecting the second attribution, we must, however, qualify our assessment of the first. What is the possibility that the present building is actually a reconstruction of a tomb or other religious monument associated with Turabeg Khanom?

Let us first take a closer look at Turabeg Khanom. We know that she was a real historical figure, whom the traveller Ibn Battuta met during his visit to Urgench en route to India circa 1330. Finding the bazaars packed with people and goods arriving from the Far East and travelling north of the Caspian to the Volga, he headed for the Friday Mosque, which, he says, was built by Qutlugh Timur’s remarkable wife, Turabeg, the “pure Khatun.” He visited other significant places, such as the tombs of Najm al-Din Kubra and al-Zamakhshari, and was entertained in the lavishly furnished majlis of the kadi, apparently a relative of the ruler, in a room spread with carpets, its walls hung with textiles and its niches filled with precious silver vessels, embellished with gold. The ruler himself was ill, but Ibn Battuta paid him a visit as well, in a large wooden room with a wooden dome, draped in silk. He then narrates a story about the wife of the ruler, demonstrating her great kindness toward him and mentioning her hospitality at the zawiya (Sufi lodge) that she had built. He thus attributes to her two public monuments—a Friday mosque and a zawiya, where food was distributed to the poor and to travelers. We cannot know whether the mosque mentioned by Ibn Battuta was the one to which the surviving minaret might have belonged. Nevertheless, this possibility cannot be ruled out just because it bears an inscription naming Turabeg’s husband, Qutlugh Timur. For the queen to have been credited with the building of a mosque that was actually erected or restored by her husband was not a unique occurrence: Timur’s Friday mosque in Samarkand eventually became known by his queen’s name (in folk culture, the “Bibi Khanom”).

Had the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum existed during his visit, Ibn Battuta would surely have commented on it, but perhaps no tomb had yet been erected for her. Nevertheless, it is possible that either she or her husband did build a mausoleum on the site of the present building attributed to her, perhaps within the very zawiya that Ibn Battuta does mention. If so, it must have been completely razed when the current building was erected. The lack of correspondence between the crypt beneath the tomb chamber and the articulation of the superstructure, discussed above, does suggest that the present building incorporated something that existed before. The dodecagonal shape of the large dome chamber may also be a reference to an earlier building that could have been inspired by Ghazan Khan’s zodiacal twelve-sided tomb, mentioned above. A religious meaning is unlikely for the fourteenth or fifteenth century, as Twelver Shi’ism was out of favor in Urgench under Qutlugh Timur. Timur himself was Sunni and is reported to have denigrated Shi’ism at times (viz., his conversation with the Sayyids of Mazanderan). Reverence for the family of Ali, which was certainly current throughout this period, does not imply Shi’ite affiliation.

If the present building is actually a reconstruction of the tomb of Turabeg Khanom, who might have undertaken this project? Since the mausoleum is datable stylistically to Timur’s reign, could he himself have commissioned it? If so, what could have motivated him to order so costly a project, given that its association was with an earlier ruler? Turabeg Khanom was the wife of Qutlugh Timur but she was also a Chinggisid princess. The “Chinggisid” (i.e., Mongol) association may be the very key to explaining this phenomenon. Timur sought to legitimize his claim to rule by inventing or creating (through marriage) links with the Chinggisids, the descendants of the great Mongol emperor Chinggis Khan. Timur also asserted his descent from Mongol lineage twice in his Friday Mosque at Samarkand: over the entrance portal carved in stone and over the door to the sanctuary in unglazed tile. The direct association with the lineage of Chinggis Khan was made by his grandson Ulugh Beg, on the cenotaphs of the Gur-i Amir. It is helpful to review Timur’s relationship with Khorezm and its chief city. The historian Yazdi speaks of three different occasions on which Kunya Urgench figures in his strategy. Timur defeated the ruler of Kunya Urgench, Yusuf Sufi, in 1379–80 (781), but although he took away craftsmen at this time, he did not destroy the city. When he returned in 1388 (790), he utterly razed the city such that no population remained. Three years later (in 1391 [793]), however, he ordered Amir Musaka Qa’uchin to rebuild a quar-
ter in Urgench known as Qa’an, which had been developed by the descendants of Chinggis Khan. This quarter most likely can be identified as the area around the minaret of Qutlugh Timur (1321–36); this is the same area in which the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum is also situated. By restoring the mausoleum and perhaps having plans to repopulate the town, Timur was making the same statement that he had in his genealogical inscriptions in the mosque of Samarkand, mentioned above.

I have tried to show that the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum comprises many elements that appear to have been in the process of development, such as mosaic faience. Some colors that occur here were never used again in mosaic faience. I have also pointed out the close resemblance between this building and the shrine of Ahmad Yasavi, which Timur erected, I believe, only a few years later. Perhaps the ruined city of Kunya Urgench should be viewed as a sort of laboratory, indeed, a crucible, to which Timur sent his imported architects and engineers to experiment in anticipation of building the great shrine at Turkestan. The Turabeg Khanom mausoleum might then be regarded as a working model for this new monumental project, as well as an homage to his own Mongol heritage.

Only future studies, including detailed drawings and further excavations of the city, will determine which of the three Timurid generations actually produced this building. There remains no doubt, however, that it stands among the greatest architectural masterpieces of the Islamic world and deserves further study.

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NOTES

2. Lisa Golombek and Donald Newton Wilber, The Timurid Architecture of Iran and Turan, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1988), 271–74. Clavijo was the Spanish ambassador to the court of Timur; the tiles are dated by an inscription to 798 (1395–96) and signed by a master craftsman from Tabriz, but the crews of workmen may have indeed come from Khorezm.
6. For specific examples, see the “Conclusions” section below.
7. The most recent and up-to-date description of the mausoleum is Mukhammad Mamedov and Ruslan Muradov, Gurqanj: Architectural and Historical Guide, ed. Gabriele Rossi-Osmida and G. A. Pugachenkova, trans. Andrej Bulakhov (Padua, 2001). See also V. I. Piliavskii, Kunia-Urgench (St. Petersburg, 1974). I am grateful to Bernard O’Kane and Devin DeWeese for providing slides before I was able to visit the site myself. The visit was made possible by the Government of Turkmenistan and UNESCO, to whom I am most indebted.
8. Mamedov and Muradov, Gurqanj, 88–89.
9. Ibid., 86–88. The minaret and mosque were rebuilt several times, including during the Mongol period.
10. Ibid., 45–48.
11. Ibid., 63–70.
12. Ibid., 34. The wall encloses an area of 430–640 hectares.
15. Mamedov and Muradov, Gurqanj, 78–85.
16. Ibid., 19. The term Qa’an is discussed in the “Conclusions” section.
17. Ibid., 48–55.
19. One monument for which old photographs and some archaeological material suggest a fifteenth-century date—the so-called “Gulgherdan” mausoleum (Mamedov and Muradov, Gurganj, no. 8)—no longer stands; it may have been part of a large complex neighboring the Turabeg Khanom mausoleum.

20. The earliest photographs already show this replacement.

21. Mamedov and Muradov, Gurganj, fig. 44.

22. N. B. Nemtseva, K istorii arkhitekturnogo kompleksa (Bukhara, 2003); Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, 226.


27. There is a square vestibule behind the portal of the Dar al-Huffaz in the Shrine of Ardabil, datable to around 1370: Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, fig. 112. No doubt, it occurred in other places, particularly in madrasas, where it was necessary to create transitional spaces between the courtyard and the rooms flanking an entrance.


29. Mamedov and Muradov, Gurganj, fig. 49.


32. Hutt and Harrow, Iran I, pl. 130 (fourteenth century).

33. Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, 113.

34. Ibid., no. 40, 275–78.

35. According to Wilber, it was not until the construction of Gawhar Shad’s madrasa at Herat in 1432 that we find the triple dome, which the architect Qawam al-Din repeated in the Khargird madrasa. One must then ask whether the “triple” dome observed by Yakubovskii at Kunya Urgench is really three domes, or is the inner dome little more than an armature for hanging the panels of mosaic faience? At the Gawhar Shad madrasa it is possible to crawl into the space between the two lower domes: Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, fig. 76.


37. The closest parallels are found in the mid-fifteenth-century monuments of the Yazd region: Abrandabad and Bondarbad. See Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, figs. 223, 224, and 354.


40. Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, no. 17, pp. 242–43.

41. One of these is still in situ; the other is in the site museum. Further study of the technique may reveal whether the black outlines were used to contain the glazes, as in haft rangi, a technique resembling cuerda seca, in which an oily black pigment serves to separate colors during the firing.

42. Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, nos. 18 and 19, pp. 243–45; see examples of tiles from the Shah-i Zinda complex in Degeorge and Porter, Art of the Islamic Tile, 114–15.

43. Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture, no. 18, p. 246, pl. 37.

44. Mamedov and Muradov, Gurganj, 32–34.


46. The list of these names varies, but the most standard ones are given by Louis Gardet, Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition (henceforth EI2) (Leiden, 1954–2002), s. v. “al-Asmā’ al-husnā” (list based primarily on al-Ghazali’s Maqsūd).


48. According to Sheila Blair, examples are found at the Pir-i Bakran near Isfahan and the shrine of ‘Abd al-Samad at Natanz. Personal communication, 2009.


52. Ibid., no. 14, pp. 238–40.

53. Ibid., 187–89.

54. We know that Timur brought craftsmen back from many of his conquered cities, and the movement of potters, for example, from Damascus to Samarkand in 1402, spawned a new industry in Timur’s capital: Lisa Golombek, Robert B. Mason, and Gauvin A. Bailey, A New Approach to the Chinoiserie Ceramics of Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Iran (Toronto, 1996), 127.

55. These inscriptions are all discussed under the relevant catalogue entries in Golombek and Wilber, Timurid Architecture; for the inscription naming the architects at the madrasa at Isfahan, see ibid., 381.

56. Ibid., 242–43.

57. Compare drawings of the two portals by Bulatov, Geométriceskaia garnizontatsia, figs. 92 and 93.

58. For example, the portal of the Masjid-i Jami’ of Yazd, ca. 1364; illustrated in Arthur Upham Pope, Persian Architec-

60. In the *bannāʾī* technique (lit., “builder’s” decorative brickwork), designs composed of glazed and unglazed brick-shaped pieces are laid out as if part of the masonry, in horizontal courses, interrupted by vertical pieces that form geometric patterns and Arabic (Kufic) letters; it developed in Iran in the fourteenth century and was ubiquitous in the fifteenth century: Golombek and Wilber, *Timurid Architecture*, 127–28.

61. Similar comments can be made about the mausoleum of Timur’s wife, Tuman Aqa, at the Shah-i Zinda, dating from 1405–6, with respect to its use of the *chahār-tāq* structure, its elongated portal and high dome on a cylindrical drum, and its beautiful mosaic faience: ibid., no. 21, pp. 246–50. Likewise, the madrasa of Muhammad Sultan (ca. 1400), into which Timur inserted the Gur-i Amir (ibid., no. 29A, B, p. 261), had a portal displaying full mosaic faience stylistically very close to that of the Turabeg Khamom mausoleum.

62. Ibid., 189–94.

63. E.g., Bondarabad, 1473–74: ibid., 372–75.

64. Ibid., 169–73.


72. Along with the literati, he took the guilds/various types (aṣnāf) of tradesmen (pīšā-kārān): Yazdī, *Ẓafarnāmah*, 1:220.

73. Ibid., 1:323.

74. This amir belonged to the *qaʿūchin* amirs who governed many of Timur’s major towns; Musaka b. Changi *qaʿūchin* seems to have governed Khorezm for at least ten years: Beatrice Forbes Manz, *The Rise and Rule of Tamerlane* (Cambridge, 1989), 122, 197 n. 72.