Imperial Aqquyunlu Construction of Religious Establishments in the Late Fifteenth Century Tabriz

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The starting point for this paper is the premise that under the Aqquyunlus Tabriz was promoted as an imperial capital, even if it is rarely remembered as such. There are a variety of reasons for this, the most important ones being the brevity of Aqquyunlu rule centered in Tabriz, the destruction of most monumental works by natural disasters or human activity, and the relatively longer survival and preservation of other capitals on par with Tabriz such as Herat and Istanbul.

More specifically, I will deal with the question of to what extent did Tabriz receive religious ‘imperial,’ ‘monumental’ investment in the second half of the fifteenth century? Although an examination of capital cities requires discussing legitimacy claims, politics is beyond the scope of the present paper. I confine the discussion within the boundaries of religious architecture for two reasons: First, given the limited amount of information on the Aqquyunlu architectural works, it makes sense to compare the most outstanding Aqquyunlu structure, the Masjid-i Hasan Pādshāh, with its predecessor, Masjid-i Kabūd of the Qaraquyunlu. Second, an examination of the activity in religious architecture sheds light on the nature of the relationship between the Aqquyunlu rulers and the people of the city.

To answer the above question, I begin with an assessment of the imperial architectural heritage in Tabriz until the Aqquyunlus, and then move to their architectural contribution, mainly, the Masjid-i Hasan Pādshāh. Next, I discuss the nature of Aqquyunlu religious construction and patronage, and argue that the Aqquyunlu rulers’ architectural/religious investment in

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Tabriz was not sufficient for them to penetrate certain levels of the city's religious life.

*Aqquyunlu Imperial Construction and Its Precursors*

One of the major traits that distinguishes an imperial capital from other culturally and politically prominent cities is that imperial ideology and expansion brings about a significantly higher level of cultural and construction activity. This activity aspires to achieve monumentality in order to overshadow other cities of the same dominion. The ideological prerequisite for this, that is, a sovereign with claims to universal sovereignty who controls the capital, is indispensable, but as mentioned above, it will not be dealt with as it is beyond the scope of the present essay. Instead I ask the following question: What constitutes an imperial architectural program? Acknowledging that the question already assumes the prevalence of the norms and values of a settled society, one can suggest that every ruler with an imperial construction program builds i) an imperial complex (*imārat*,) and ii) a palace in his capital city. The Friday mosque is the central element of such complexes which typically consist of a *madrasa*, library, pantry, and bathhouse with the aim to meet religious, intellectual, and social challenges that arise with imperial rule. If economic concerns are dominating, a market may be added, but markets are not immediately recognized as examples of monumental architecture. In the specific Perso-Turkic context one can add to this list gardens as examples of royal construction. Furthermore, depending on historical circumstances, one can see the creation of entire districts in the city as a constituent of an imperial construction program.²

Tabriz as an urban settlement has been unlucky as it has been subject to almost systematic destruction, either because of natural disasters or human action. Throughout history, earthquakes consistently destroyed...