

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE FIRST ABBASID  
MASJID-I JUM‘A OF IŞFAHĀN\*

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*Following an in-depth study and comparison of historical sources and the archaeological data from the Italian Mission, a new interpretation of both the topographical position and the precise dating of the first Abbasid Friday Mosque of Işfahān can be suggested, which departs from previous theories. Particularly, the date of 772 so far accepted by scholars should be called into question and a new and earlier date hypothesized.*

Keywords: Iran; Işfahān; Abbasids; 8<sup>th</sup> century; Friday Mosque

In the past, scholars have paid much attention to the Masjīd-i Jum‘a of Işfahān, but very little has been devoted to its early construction phase. The first mosque, erected by the Abbasids in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and brought to light in the '70s by the Italian Archaeological Mission of IsMEO (fig. 1),<sup>1</sup> has been patchily studied and few attempts have been made to reconstruct its genesis.

In this paper I seek to place the first Abbasid Masjīd-i Jum‘a in a coherent historical and topographical context, the Işfahān region in the early Abbasid period, in order to precisely understand when and where the Friday Mosque was built.

At present there is unanimous agreement among scholars on when the first Masjīd-i Jum‘a of Işfahān was built. In fact, it has been generally equated with the mosque constructed in 772 by the Banū Taym, one of the Arab tribes settled in the region of Işfahān since the Umayyad period.<sup>2</sup>

As for where the mosque was built, on the other hand, two major hypotheses have been formulated so far. The first claims that the Friday Mosque was located in the city of Yahūdiyya;<sup>3</sup> the second puts it in the village of Yawān.<sup>4</sup> The city of Yahūdiyya was founded by the Abbasid governor Ayyūb ibn Ziyād under the caliph al-Manşūr in 767 by means of a *tamşīr*, coalescing fifteen villages in the area of Işfahān.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently the *mişr* of Yahūdiyya<sup>6</sup> developed over time through the annexation of other villages rapidly expanding into the flourishing city depicted in historical accounts and leading to the formation of the oldest nucleus of modern Işfahān.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, prior to the arrival of the

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\* This paper is based on part of the author's MA thesis (Duva 2016).

<sup>1</sup> Scerrato 1973-1978.

<sup>2</sup> Here, the form 'Banū Taym' given by the *Dhikr Akhbār Işbahān* of Abū Nu‘aym (see Appendix) has been chosen. Instead, in Māfarrūkhī's *Kitāb mahāsīn Işbahān* the form given is 'Banū Tamīm', a tribe placed by Ya‘qūbī among the Arabic people who moved to Işfahān under Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (76 [274]: «[...] ils appartiennent aux tribus de Thakīf, de Tamīm, des Banū Ḍabba, de Khuza‘a, des Banū Ḥanīfa, des Banū Abd al-Kais et de différentes autres»).

<sup>3</sup> See among others: Le Strange 1905; Gaube 1979; Barthold 1984; Grabar 1990; Falahat 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Golombek 1974.

<sup>5</sup> Abū Nu‘aym, I, 16-17; Māfarrūkhī, 8-9; *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa al-qiṣaṣ*, 523-525.

<sup>6</sup> As regards the name of Yahūdiyya, see footnote 10.

<sup>7</sup> «Djey fut ruiné et il n'en resta qu'une petite portion, tandis que la Yahoudieh s'agrandit et devint la ville moderne d'Ispahān» (Yāqūt, 45). The same information is to be found in Abū'l-Fida, II, 160 [411].

Abbasids and the consequent urban rearrangement of the area of Iṣfahān they accomplished, a place named *yahūdiyya*<sup>8</sup> already existed but it referred to a small suburb of the village of Yawān where Jews had lived and worked since at least the Parthian period.<sup>9</sup> Thus there is a substantial and essential difference between Yahūdiyya<sup>10</sup> (the *miṣr*/city founded in 767 by the governor Ayyūb ibn Ziyād) and the *yahūdiyya* (the area inhabited by the Jewish community prior to 767 where Ayyūb located the market probably in order to stem Jewish power in controlling the economic and merchant activities of the area). Most Muslim authors from the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries when mentioning the Masjid-i Jum‘a label it as ‘the mosque of Yahūdiyya’ because they describe the city of Yahūdiyya as it was at their time or blindly transmit information through *isnād*.<sup>11</sup> As a result, scholars have not as a rule made a chronological and territorial distinction between the Jewish quarter of *yahūdiyya*, preceding the *tamṣīr* of 767, and Yahūdiyya, the city that originated from the *tamṣīr*, wrongly considering it to have been a big city even before the coming of the Abbasids.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, even if the Masjid-i Jum‘a of Iṣfahān can be correctly identified with the mosque of Yahūdiyya, this is only the case after the *tamṣīr* of 767 when Yahūdiyya was actually founded.

The second theory, which locates the Abbasid Masjid-i Jum‘a in the village of Yawān, one of the fifteen villages merged into the *miṣr* of Yahūdiyya, was formulated by Lisa Golombek as part of a reconstruction of the urban area of Iṣfahān in the first Islamic period.<sup>13</sup> This study is the best undertaken on Iṣfahān so far and Golombek’s assumption has been largely accepted in the academic world.

This paper will propose new perspectives on where and when the first Abbasid Friday Mosque of Iṣfahān was built. It suggests that the latter should be identified with the mosque erected at the same time as the *tamṣīr* (767) by Ayyūb ibn Ziyād in the *miṣr* of Yahūdiyya, in the area earlier occupied by the village of Khushīnān. Indeed, by comparing the historical sources with the archaeological data originating from the excavations carried out by the Italian Archaeological Mission, it reaches the conclusion that the reconstructive model so far proposed in scientific literature, which reads the Masjid-i Jum‘a as built by the tribe of the Banū Taym (or Banū Tamīm)<sup>14</sup> in 772, should be called into question.

To better explain this hypothesis, it is now necessary to briefly discuss the urban situation of the region of Iṣfahān at the rise of Abbasid power and to focus on the *tamṣīr* of Yahūdiyya. The *Dhikr Akhbār Iṣbahān* written by Abū Nu‘aym in the 11<sup>th</sup> century has proved to be a very important source of information on that point. In fact, the author owes

<sup>8</sup> Persian *kō johūdan*, literally meaning ‘the street of the Jews’.

<sup>9</sup> «While the presence of a Jewish community in Iṣfahān area is undoubted at least since the reign of the Sassanid king Yazdagird I, it’s only under Islām, in particular during the two decades after the Abbasid revolution and the foundation of Baghdād, that it widely grew in number» (Pourshariati 2012, 10).

<sup>10</sup> The name Yahūdiyya given to the new *miṣr* probably reflected the economic role fulfilled by the Jewish community and the number that Jews had reached in the area in the pre-Abbasid period.

<sup>11</sup> Iṣṭakhṛī, 117; Ibn Ḥawqal, 354 [362]; Abū’l-Shaykh, 12; Muqaddasī, III, 345-346 [388-389]; *Hudūd al-‘ālam*, 131; Idrīsī, II, 167-168 [667].

<sup>12</sup> Le Strange 1905; Golombek 1974; Gaube 1979; Barthold 1984; Falahat 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Golombek 1974.

<sup>14</sup> See footnote 2.

his historical introduction to Iṣfahān to the lost *History of Iṣfahān* by Ḥamza Iṣfahānī, the most authoritative history of the city written in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

At the coming of the Abbasid dynasty in 750 the plain of Iṣfahān was in urgent need of rearrangement in terms of the urban layout. In fact, several small or medium-sized villages orbited around Jayy,<sup>15</sup> the Sasanian city chosen as the governmental seat of the province by Muslims, and moreover Arab settlements had been disseminated throughout the region since the Umayyad period. Therefore, in 767 al-Mahdī, son and heir of the caliph al-Manṣūr and *walī* of the Khurāsān region, appointed Ayyūb ibn Ziyād as *'āmil* (governor) of Iṣfahān and charged him with the *tamṣīr* of a new *miṣr* that would unify the area in a unique centre. The primary purpose of this foundation it is likely to be to ease the political control and economic management of the region, thus guaranteeing efficient tax collection and constant income, especially given the presence of ancient caravan routes. The *tamṣīr* coincided with a great deal of building and development. According to Abū Nu'aym, the new city of Yahūdiyya was established jurisdictionally by merging fifteen villages (Bāṭīrḡān, Fursān, Yawān, Khurjān, Filfilān, Sunbulān, Furā'ān, Kamā'ān, Jūzdān, Lunbān, Ashkahān, Jarwā'ān, Khushīnān, Barwaskān and Fābijān) and building up a core consisting of the main buildings and facilities associated with an Islamic city: the congregational mosque and the *dār al-imāra* in the former village of Khushīnān,<sup>16</sup> and the *sūq* in the neighbouring Jewish settlement (*yahūdiyya*).<sup>17</sup>

#### 1. THE FIRST ABBASID MASJID-I JUM'A: A NEW INTERPRETATION

Though, as just mentioned, Abū Nu'aym's work has been very helpful in this study, the section concerning the *tamṣīr* and the concomitant foundation of the first Friday Mosque is quite complex. In fact, the author uses three different chronological periods (one preceding, one contemporary to and one following the time of Ayyūb) switching from one to another. In the first stage Abū Nu'aym talks about the "mosque of Khushīnān", while for the years after the *tamṣīr* he speaks of the "mosque of Yahūdiyya". This discrepancy can be explained in that following the physical union of Khushīnān to the new *miṣr* the identity of the single village got lost in favour of complete territorial unity. Consequently the mosque of Khushīnān became the congregational mosque of the new *miṣr* of Yahūdiyya.

However, when the time disparity between the different chronological periods used by Abū Nu'aym is resolved, the setting is sufficiently reliable and consistent, and in the end it is the most detailed and complete section based on the original work of Ḥamza Iṣfahānī.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Jayy, جي, the Arabic form of the middle-Persian term *Gay*. *Gay* was a round city located around 4 km east of where the medieval Iṣfahān developed (Abū'l-Fida, II, 160 [411]; Ibn Ḥawqal, II, 354 [362]; Idriṣī, II, 167-168 [667]; Muqaddasī, III, 345-346 [388-389]; Yāqūt, 188-89). Its fortifications were built sometime between the reign of Ardāshīr I (224) and that of Fīrūz I (459-484), but it seems very likely that a small settlement had existed since the Achaemenid period (Strabo, XV, 3.3; Ptolemy, VI, 4.4; Curtius Rufus, V, 13.2; Polybius, XXI, 9.3).

<sup>16</sup> Abū Nu'aym, I, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Abū Nu'aym, I, 16. See also *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa al-qīṣaṣ*, 523.

<sup>18</sup> Moreover, Ibn Rusta and Yāqūt sometimes quote from Ḥamza Iṣfahānī but they do not deal with the construction of the Friday Mosque and its history. Another important source about the *tamṣīr* and the history of the first Abbasid mosque is the *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa al-qīṣaṣ*, a chronicle from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It is not

Secondly, and more importantly, the literary sources seem to be confirmed by the archaeological data from the excavations made at the Masjid-i Jum‘a. Indeed, the archaeological reports by Umberto Scerrato have been used here for the first time to reconstruct the area around the first Friday Mosque of Iṣfahān and its history.

First of all, it should be highlighted that it seems impossible to identify the mosque built by the Banū Taym (or Banū Tamīm) in 772 as the first Masjid-i Jum‘a of Iṣfahān.<sup>19</sup> In fact, a passage from Abū Nu‘aym, even though it was not easy to interpret, talks about the mosque of the Banū Taym and seems to suggest that the mosque built by the Banū Taym was بَطْران, literally meaning ‘in Ṭīhrān’. Thus, Abū Nu‘aym doesn’t state that the Banū Taym ‘of Ṭīhrān’ had constructed a mosque as generally interpreted.<sup>20</sup> Ṭīhrān was not among the villages we listed as part of the new *miṣr* and in the 13<sup>th</sup> century it was still located outside the Buyid walls of Iṣfahān,<sup>21</sup> far from the Masjid-i Jum‘a. This is clearly reflected in the persistence of the name Ṭīrān in a village located at about 50km northwest

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as detailed as Abū Nu‘aym’s account, but it dedicates much space to that matter and occasionally provides some additional details.

<sup>19</sup> The only source that supports this theory is Māfarrūkhī, 84. Nevertheless, the information included in Māfarrūkhī’s historical introduction should be taken with a pinch of salt. Durand-Guédy in his study of the *Kitāb Maḥāsin Iṣfahān* perfectly explained that Māfarrūkhī had sifted through the anecdotes transmitted about the Abbasid period and reformulated or left aside a great many of them (Durand-Guédy 2008, 67). For instance, a comparison with the introduction to Abū Nu‘aym *Dhikr Akhbar Iṣbahān* shows a different approach on both a quantitative and qualitative level. Both authors impart information on the *History of Iṣfahān*, but while Abū Nu‘aym’s text is much more accurate, in Māfarrūkhī only some passages are reported almost identically, most being reported in a different form or not at all. Durand-Guédy states: «The same process can be observed in relation to urban development. The coherence of Abū Nu‘aym’s account, which in four pages sets out a brilliant synthesis of Isfahan’s development since the Sasanian period, disappears completely in *K. Maḥāsin Iṣfahān*, where the same information is used from a very different point of view, not so much didactic and historical as anecdotal and apologetic. Māfarrūkhī uses Abū Nu‘aym’s text on the establishment and expansion of the Friday Mosque, but integrates it into a passage of his own composition in praise of the city’s monuments (the walls, governor’s palace, bazaars and mosques). What covered a page in Abū Nu‘aym takes up only three lines in Māfarrūkhī. By contrast, the latter adds an anecdote (how the expansion of the mosque was delayed through the obstinacy of a Jew who refused to sell his land) and a first-hand description of the mosque. Similarly, the account of the *tamṣīr*, or the formation of Isfahan around the new centre of Yahūdiyya, appears in greatly abridged form in an anecdote concerning the caliph al-Manṣūr’s (d. 158/775) plan to take up residence in Isfahan [...] Abū Nu‘aym gives copious amounts of information concerning Jayy, the ancient Sasanian city alongside which Yahūdiyya/Isfahan had grown up in the early Abbasid period. The passages on the successive administrative divisions of Isfahan province, the population of Jayy before the conquest, the area of Jayy, the enmity between Jayy and Yahūdiyya, and the opening of a new gate in Jayy’s city wall after the arrival of Islam are all dropped by Māfarrūkhī. This because in the Saljūq period Jayy had entirely lost its status, becoming a mere suburb (*shahristān*) in decline on the outskirts of Isfahan. Māfarrūkhī has no reason to waste time dwelling on these events [...] Above all, Māfarrūkhī (unlike Abū Nu‘aym) was not trying to write an exhaustive history of Isfahan; he was trying to ‘sell’ Isfahan to the new regime. And so, when dealing with ancient history, he retained only those anecdotes and accounts that redounded to the city’s credit [...]» (Durand-Guédy 2008, 79-82). This is why Māfarrūkhī’s credit of the first mosque of Iṣfahān to the Banū Tamīm seems to be a complete misunderstanding (deliberate or not) of the sources he used, having summarized too much the intricate events relating to the *tamṣīr* and the subsequent period as reported by Abū Nu‘aym. In fact, the *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa al-qīṣaṣ*, much more detailed than the *Kitāb Maḥāsin Iṣfahān*, makes no mention of the Banū Taym/Tamīm or the mosque they built in 772, perhaps because that information was not considered to be as relevant, confirming that Māfarrūkhī had misunderstood his source.

<sup>20</sup> Abū Nu‘aym, I, 17 (see Appendix).

<sup>21</sup> Yāqūt, 400.

of the present Friday Mosque,<sup>22</sup> challenging the wrong conclusion that the mosque of the Banū Taym corresponded to the first Masjid-i Jum‘a of Iṣfahān. Tīhrān was an isolated urban entity independent from the area of the *tamṣīr* and exclusively inhabited by Arab-Muslims who had never wanted to merge with the native Persian component.<sup>23</sup> It is unlikely that the Banū Taym could have imagined building a Friday Mosque so far away from their village and, furthermore, beside the Ayyūb’s mosque erected only five years earlier.

Other remarks can be reported to endorse this hypothesis.

Firstly, accepting the date of 772 - instead of 767 - would create a hiatus of five years between the *tamṣīr* undertaken in 767 and the expansion of Yahūdiyya into the other fifteen villages, thereby failing to meet the main aim of the *miṣr* to unify the area. In fact, according to Abū Nu‘aym, Yahūdiyya assimilated the other villages just after the construction of the mosque.<sup>24</sup> It was the ‘mosque-palace-*sūq*’ nucleus established by Ayyūb to act as a pivot for the centripetal centering of the various villages in a single center, as coincidentally happened at Rayy, again under al-Mahdī, the other main center along with Yahūdiyya in the province of Jibāl.<sup>25</sup>

It is not possible to think about the foundation of a *miṣr* without the simultaneous establishment of a Friday Mosque.

Secondly, both Abū Nu‘aym and the author of the *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa al-qīṣaṣ* clearly state that in their time it was still possible to see the *maqṣūra* of the mosque of Ayyūb ibn Ziyād,<sup>26</sup> probably still in use as a memory of the original mosque by now buried under the second Abbasid mosque (840-841) and its successive enlargements.

Afterwards, Abū Nu‘aym talking about Ayyūb ibn Ziyād in a different chapter designates him as *the governor of Iṣbahān, who built the mosque and the sūq*<sup>27</sup> and ruled at the time of Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr, in 151H. The author knows well which part of the city corresponded to the plots of Ayyūb’s family in Khushīnān: by the Buyid time they were neighbourhoods of Iṣfahān (Kūrā’ and Milanjah).<sup>28</sup> We know that the mosque and *sūq* are usually very close in Islamic cities or even that the mosque is within the *sūq*. On the other hand Khushīnān and the *yahūdiyya*, where the mosque and the *sūq* were respectively

<sup>22</sup> Siroux 1971, 8: «En prégnant cet itinéraire à l’inverse, à partir d’Ispahān [...] Passé Nadjaf-ābād [...] A 20 km on longe la bourgade de Tīrān (Tīhrān-Teheran-Tiroun) qui fut fondée par des Arabes de la tribu de Taīm, lesquels y fixèrent un petite colonie. L’ancien tracé entre Nadjaf-ābād et Tīrān suivant le cours desséché d’une petite rivière...». A lot of place names quoted in the written sources for the Early Islamic period have remained the same in the present day: for instance, Lunbān, Farsān and Juzdān, i.e. three of the villages unified in the *miṣr* of Yahūdiyya.

<sup>23</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Arabs still had their own market, the ‘Arab bazar’, located right next to the Dardasht door towards Tīhrān (Chardin 1811, VIII, 1). Moreover, it seems very odd that the tribe of the Banū Taym wanted to build a Friday Mosque so far from their village in a place mostly populated by Jews and Persians.

<sup>24</sup> Abū Nu‘aym, I, 17.

<sup>25</sup> At Rayy al-Mahdī merged the villages of Bibi Zubayda, Ḥusaynābād, Chashma-yi ‘Alī, Chāl Tarkhān, Ishqābād, Tepē Mill, Niẓāmābād in the unique *miṣr* of Muḥammadiyya.

<sup>26</sup> Abū Nu‘aym, I, 16; *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa al-qīṣaṣ*, 523.

<sup>27</sup> Italics by the author.

<sup>28</sup> Abū Nu‘aym, I, 38. It must be noted that the source no longer mentions the palace built by Ayyūb. This is probably because while the Friday Mosque and the *sūq* were still in use in his time, i.e. the 11<sup>th</sup> century, this was not the case with the palace, since the governmental area had shifted south of the Masjid-i Jum‘a in the Buyid period (Duva 2016).

established, already confined and got merged after the *tamšīr* due to a large building work carried out by Ayyūb.

Moreover, we are told by the sources that the Ayyūb's market place was still occupied by workshops and market activities at the sources time (Buyid-Saljuq period); precisely the Ayyūb's *sūq* corresponded to the part of the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries market where the straw sellers had their shops. Hence, the larger Buyid and Saljuq *sūq* of Iṣfahān was located roughly in the same place as that of 767. We know that in the Buyid-Saljuq period the market was next to the Friday Mosque: indeed the Buyid-Saljuq Friday Mosque is nothing but the still-standing one. Consequently, by syllogism, the mosque brought to light during the excavations is the mosque of Ayyūb.

Furthermore, in his text Abū Nu'aym frequently connects the "mosque of Ayyūb ibn Ziyād" to notables of Iṣfahān as *imāms* and *muftīs*.<sup>29</sup>

Lastly, if the Masjid-i Jum'ā in Iṣfahān found by the Italian Mission is the building constructed by Ayyūb in 767, as suggested here, it would have still been new in 772, not to mention large and splendid.<sup>30</sup> The presence of rich and well-made polychrome stucco decoration in the *ḥaram* of the first Friday Mosque, brought to light by archaeologists,<sup>31</sup> fits perfectly with the high-level patronage of the mosque of Ayyūb rather than the patronage by Banū Taym/Tamīm.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, some patterns on the right panel of the *mihrāb* and some on the *qiblī* wall can be compared to the stuccos of the Friday Mosque in Raqqā<sup>33</sup> built in 772 by al-Manṣūr and those of the western building once again at Raqqā,<sup>34</sup> commissioned by the successor and son of al-Mahdī, Hārūn al-Rashīd.

Let us now examine what happened, according to the author of this paper, in the area of the *tamšīr* and the related foundation of the first Abbasid Masjid-i Jum'ā in Khushīnān.

### 1.1. *Urban and topographical reconstruction of the Masjid-i Jum'ā area at the time of the tamšīr*<sup>35</sup>

Before the *tamšīr* of Yahūdiyya, Khushīnān joined up with the medium-sized village of Yawān from the east. The Jewish settlement of *yahūdiyya*, on the other hand, had grown up on the extreme outskirts of Yawān, in a completely uninhabited area towards the southern limit of Khushīnān. Khushīnān, Yawān and the *yahūdiyya* all had risen near to the Farsān canal<sup>36</sup> which flowed through this area in a south-westerly direction.<sup>37</sup> Thus they had grown

<sup>29</sup> For instance, a passage reads: «The judge Abū al-Aswad al-Kūfī, chief judge of Iṣfahān, which held at the mosque of Ayyūb b. Ziyād [...]» (Abū Nu'aym, II, 318).

<sup>30</sup> Abū Nu'aym, I, 17. Although we know that the *minbar* of the mosque of Ayyūb was picked up by the Banū Taym after Ayyūb's imprisonment to be transferred to their new mosque in Ṭīhrān, it is unlikely that the mosque of Ayyūb was definitely abandoned.

<sup>31</sup> Scerrato 1977, 453. For a follow-up see Corsi 2017, in this issue.

<sup>32</sup> The stucco decoration of the *mihrāb* consists of close scrolls with tiny vine leaves that branch out from a candelabrum, while on the right-hand wall there is a panel divided into compartments by the intertwining of a ribbon of stylized beads, again with tiny vine leaves. The decoration on the rest of the *qiblī* wall is different, divided into panels bordered by stylized beads that contain saplings, vines and acanthus tufts.

<sup>33</sup> Creswell - Allan 1989, 246 ff.

<sup>34</sup> Meinecke 1999, *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> This paragraph is based on a reconstruction by the author of this paper.

<sup>36</sup> A canal named Farsān is mentioned in Abū Nu'aym, I, 16.

up sharing a rather narrow border area where the boundaries were quite transient and blurred and where the built-up areas almost rubbed up against each other.

Thus, in 767 the ‘*āmil* Ayyūb ibn Ziyād began the construction of the complex consisting of the mosque on one bank of the Farsān canal, with a *maqṣūra* and a *minbar* inside, and the *qaṣr* - intended as a government palace rather than a fortress - upon al-Mahdī’s wish. Lastly, he laid out plots for the *sūq* in the *yahūdiyya*, just off the mosque, and constructed some residences there for his family.<sup>38</sup>

Abū Nu‘aym does not specify that the palace and mosque faced each other on opposite banks of the Farsān. However, the presence of a *maqṣūra* in the mosque leads to the reasonably certain hypothesis that, by analogy with Umayyad political centres<sup>39</sup> as well as, and more significantly for the case of Iṣfahān, the Abbasid capital Baghdād, there was a structural link between the mosque and the *dār al-imāra* along the *qiblī* wall.<sup>40</sup> Although the source does not state exactly where the two buildings were sited, it is conceivable that the two buildings were located on opposite sides of the small canal and that they were structurally connected at the *qibla*, perhaps by some sort of device that created a ford resulting in a direct connection from the palace to the *maqṣūra*. Unfortunately, due to the particular damage to the *qiblī* wall of the 767 mosque caused by the 11<sup>th</sup> century Saljuq foundation digging,<sup>41</sup> a potential opening besides the *mihrāb* - a *bāb al-imām* - that would have permitted direct passage from the government house to the mosque has not been found. In any case, during the excavations carried out in the Saljuq southern domed hall<sup>42</sup> of the Friday Mosque, the Italian archaeological team noticed extensive water infiltration into the layers below the Timurid alabaster pavement down to those corresponding to the *qiblī* wall of 767. In fact, according to the local population, an ancient underground canal or some kind of stream flowed behind the southwest side of the mosque, initially on the surface but at some point in the past it would have been filled and obliterated.<sup>43</sup> There is no certainty that this canal can be ascribed to the pre-Safavid period - when the water system of the city was reorganized - but two interesting passages by Muqaddasī and Yāqūt

<sup>37</sup> In particular, the industrial activities carried out in the Jewish community - i.e. the shopping area with butchers, weavers, dyers, tanners, etc. - demanded a water supply to dispose of waste.

<sup>38</sup> *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa al-qīṣas*, 524.

<sup>39</sup> In *miṣrs* such as Baṣra, Kūfa and Wāṣit and also in other seats of government (a comprehensive overview is to be found in Santi 2015).

<sup>40</sup> It may have been a wooden walkway or a bridge of boats to cross the river. For instance, a case where the mosque and the *dār al-imāra* were located on opposite banks of a river is that of Uskaf Banū Junayd in Iraq (Creswell - Allan 1989, 267, figs. 166-167). A direct link through a masonry bridge was used, instead, to mind the difference in height between al-Aqṣā mosque and the *dār al-imāra* in Jerusalem (Ben-Dov 1971, 39-41, fig. 1).

<sup>41</sup> Scerrato 1976; 1977, 451.

<sup>42</sup> Built by the Saljuq minister Nizām al-Mulk in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>43</sup> In fact, recent excavations led by Mohsen Javeri (deputy head of the Cultural Heritage Department of Iṣfahān) in the Atīq Square - just off the Friday Mosque on SW - found on the south-west side of the mosque, i.e. the *qibla* side, an old canal at the depth of about 10 m (Javeri 1387). Furthermore, Safa Mahmoudian suggests that the modern Fadān canal, traceable from the Zāyanda Rud as far as the Naqsh-i Jahan Square, is part of the old Farsān. From the Naqsh-i Jahan, the canal branches off into three other canals: two, in an easterly direction, are still in use; one, in a north-easterly direction, is no longer existing but it can be detected from the oldest street network and it is possible to see that it passed by the Masjid-i Jum‘a (Mahmoudian 2017; Mahmoudian - Bidhendi 2017).

respectively can further our understanding. The first states: «The river (*nahr*) flows through the town, but the people do not drink from it, for it has become polluted from the sewage dropped into it»;<sup>44</sup> Yāqūt claimed: «[...] it's the water that flows through its [of Iṣfahān] congregational mosque».<sup>45</sup> It seems quite unlikely that Muqaddasī is referring to the Zāyanda Rud with his mention of a river so polluted that it would prompt the inhabitants of Iṣfahān to cease drinking from it. In fact, at the time of Muqaddasī's writing in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Iṣfahān did not touch yet the banks of the Zāyanda, and later sources still locate the latter outside the city limits to the southwest and no mention is made of pollution - highly unlikely for such a big river - but rather it is praised for its pure water.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the river mentioned by Muqaddasī may be the Farsān canal quoted in Abū Nu'aym's account. Indeed, one can argue that the small river had become very polluted due to its reduced flow rate and proximity to the market. As regards Yāqūt, on the other hand, that passage talks about the Zāyanda but, as just pointed out, the latter did not reach the medieval centre of the city in the 13<sup>th</sup> century so it is likely to have been, synecdochically, a tributary of the Zāyanda that flowed past the Friday Mosque, i.e. the Farsān.

Ayyūb placed the *sūq* in a *maydān*.<sup>47</sup> It later came to be known as 'the straw sellers' rows/platforms',<sup>48</sup> probably because it included many shops arranged in a row and under porticos on the sides of the former *yahūdiyya*, well suiting the shape of the 'street of the Jews' preceding the *tamṣīr*. The *sūq* thus followed the 'linear market' model with lower branches developing laterally into a major axis, conforming to other Iranian bazars.<sup>49</sup>

We can be reasonably certain that the *maydān* was known as *maydān-i Sulaymān* even under al-Ma'mūn (813-833), after the name of its owner, Muḥammad b. Sulaymān al-Iṣfahānī.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, the mosque was built close to the southern border of the former village of Khushīnān where the latter adjoined the *yahūdiyya* since the mosque was deemed to be next to the *sūq*. The Friday Mosque was associated with the commercial centre of the city from the very outset, as was the case in most Islamic towns in Iran and beyond.<sup>51</sup> The two structures fit together perfectly in the street plan preceding 767 - as can still be partially inferred from aerial pictures of the area surrounding the present-day Friday Mosque (fig. 2) - as if they were placed in an already existing urban layout (i.e. that of *yahūdiyya* and part of Khushīnān and Yawān). It is no coincidence that in 1973 at various points of the modern area of the mosque the Italian archaeologists unearthed some secular structures dated to the late-Sasanian and Early Islamic periods and representing part of the urban layout where the Ayyūb's mosque and market were situated. These structures were mostly oriented on a north-south east-west axis, the same orientation recognizable in the first Abbasid mosque

<sup>44</sup> Muqaddasī, III, 345 [389].

<sup>45</sup> Yāqūt, 44.

<sup>46</sup> Yāqūt, 44; Mustawfī, 55.

<sup>47</sup> A large and often rectangular open space where markets were usually held (Gaube 1979, 76).

<sup>48</sup> Abū Nu'aym, I, 16; *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa al-qīṣaṣ*, 524.

<sup>49</sup> Like those in Kirmānshāh, Kashān, Shīrāz (Bonine 1989) and, albeit in a later period, in Lashkarī Bāzār (Schlumberger 1978, pl. 3) and Ghaznī (Scerrato 1959).

<sup>50</sup> Abū Nu'aym, I, 38. See Abū Nu'aym, I, 34, where the author states that the mosque was located on one side of the *maydan-i Sulaymān*.

<sup>51</sup> Under Ayyūb, in fact, the area of the *yahūdiyya* and that of Khushīnān ended up to join.

and the surrounding street network. In particular, the sectors excavated in correspondence to the north Saljuq *īwān* show a complete stratigraphic sequence dating to the late or post-Sasanian period, providing evidence of the continuous occupation of the area.<sup>52</sup>

Lastly, Māfarrūkhī informs us that during the first extensions of the mosque made shortly after the *tamṣīr* of Yahūdiyya, it was necessary to buy the surrounding land from a Jewish man who lived there,<sup>53</sup> thus providing - if we trust the source - further confirmation of the proximity of the mosque of Ayyūb to the *yahūdiyya*.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Scerrato 1975, 538-40; 1977, 454.

<sup>53</sup> Māfarrūkhī, 84-85. The rapid demographic growth occurred in Yahūdiyya after the *tamṣīr* demanded a first enlargement of the mosque. Thus, Khaṣīb ibn Sālm bestowed some lands on the mosque that were added to its perimeter and consequently named *khaṣībābādh*. See also Abū Nu'aym, I, 17 and *Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa al-qīṣaṣ*, 524.

<sup>54</sup> Consequently, I questioned the localization of the Friday Mosque in the village of Yawān proposed by Lisa Golombek in the article she published in 1974 where she offered *inter alia* an urban reconstruction of the area of Iṣfahān from the pre-Abbasid period to the time of the *tamṣīr* (Golombek 1974, 42, fig. 2). First of all, Golombek confers to Yawān a doubled concentric fortification system while attempting to interpret the story of the Sasanian foundation of Gay related by Abū Nu'aym: «He [the Byzantine physician] wrote to him [King Firūz II] thus: I travelled the length and breadth of your kingdom until I arrived in a region where there is nothing imperfect. There I stopped in the area between the two fortresses [*bayn al-ḥiṣnayn*] of the village of Yawān and if the King deems to grant me what is between the two forts and let me build a church and a house, I will solve his problem. Thus, he built his house in front of the two fortresses [*bi-izā' l al-ḥiṣnayn*] and his plot was where the home of al-Nushajān and Iṣḥāq of Yawān still stands. He built the church in front of the other fortress and the term 'other fortress' means the area of the present-day Friday Mosque. Since at that time there were two fortresses of the village of Yawān and the plot of the church was at the mosque which is now on the side of Sulaymān Square, the one that was built and remains to this day» (Abū Nu'aym, I, 34). The fortification system imagined by Lisa Golombek seems implausible as it would be too imposing for a medium-sized village, for which such a defence was not necessary. Furthermore, only 4 kilometres away, Jayy was provided with the same defensive system, making the simultaneous development of two urban entities at such a short distance unlikely because they would inevitably come to clash. However, it should be noted that this passage from Abū Nu'aym is not simple and straightforward, either because we are not aware of any fortifications in this area from other sources or it is not clear what the relationship was between the church and the palace on the one hand and the two fortifications on the other. In fact, the author seems to deliberately include some notes in the text to clarify the cryptic passage handed down through the *isnād* in the work of Ḥamza Iṣfahānī. Even the possibility of translating the dual *ḥiṣnayn* as 'two fortresses' was excluded because there is neither archaeological nor literary trace of them among the Sasanian fortresses forming part of a defensive system of the hinterland of Jayy. For example, in the account of the resistance against the Muslim conquest the fortresses of the area played an important role (such as those of Qah, Māhrbīn, Taimarā, etc.), but there is no mention of Yawān among them (Balādhurī, 485 ff. [312 ff.]; Abū Nu'aym, I, 19-30). Furthermore, as stated above, Golombek made no distinction between the Jewish settlement of *yahūdiyya* and the *miṣr* of Yahūdiyya founded in 767. Consequently, as regards the location of the mosque, the *qaṣr* and the *sūq* established by Ayyūb ibn Ziyād, she gave them a somewhat unusual position. The mosque was placed in the middle of the walled city of Yawān completely isolated from the outside and, in particular, from the area of the *miṣr* of 767. If, according to Abū Nu'aym, the market of 767 was still in the same place in his time - i.e. next to the Friday Mosque - locating the Masjid-i Jum'ā in Yawān would place the latter far from the market. The *sūq* was placed behind the palace and not, as one would expect, near the Friday Mosque. In addition, contrary to what Abū Nu'aym states, the market was placed by Golombek not in the *yahūdiyya*, but in the periphery of Khushīnān. Lastly, the *maydān* was proposed as a separate urban entity even at the time of the construction of the *sūq* in 767.

## APPENDIX

## Abū Nu‘aym, I, 16-17

وأما تمصير البلد المسمى باليهودية فمصرها أيوب بن زياد في خلافة أبي جعفر المنصور في سنة نيف وخمسين ومائة من الهجرة وورد عاملا على الخراج مع خال المهدي سعيد بن منصور الحميري وكان على الحرب ثم صرف سعيد وجمع لايوب الحرب والخراج فنزل بقرية خشينان وبنى قصرا على شاطئ نهر فرسان ثم بنى بحذائه مسجدا ذا مقصورة هي باقية إلى اليوم ووضع فيه المنبر وخط سوقا للباعة والتجار والعمللة ذات صفوف في طرف اليهودية في الموضع الذي يعرف بصف التبانين واتصلت في أيام ولايته بدور اليهودية دور قرية خشينان \* وخطة أهل بيته من باب مسجد خشينان طولا إلى باب [ باغ ] عيسى بن أيوب وعرضا من جانب محلة كوراء إلى ملنجة \* وكانت اليهودية تسمى في أيام مملكته الفرس كوجهودان يعني سكة اليهود وهي من صحراء قرية يوان فأحد حدودها ينتهي إلى قرية يوان والثاني إلى قرية خرجان وسنبلان والثالث إلى قريتي كماءان وأشكهان والرابع إلى قريتي جروءان و خشينان ورقعتها سبعمائة جريب وسكنتها

اليهود مقبلين على صناعاتهم القذرة كالحجامة / والدباغة والقصارة والقصابة إلى أن سخط المهدي على أيوب بن زياد فحمل إلى الحضرة وحبس فاجتمع عرب قرية طهران وهم التميم على بناء مسجد جامع واسع ينقلون إليه منبر مسجد أيوب ابن زياد وكان موضع صدر الجامع المسقف إلى وراء السقاية طارارا لصخر بن سنان وأرض مركة لزيارة<sup>55</sup> بطهران فوهبه للجامع فنقل المنبر إليه في سنة ست وخمسين ومائة في إمارة هانئ بن أبي هانئ بعد تمصير أيوب بن زياد لليهودية بخمس سنين \*

## Mujmal al-tawārīkh wa al-qīṣaṣ, 523-525

اندر عهد خلافت منصور سنة اثني وخمسين و مايه ايوب ابن زياد كه عامل خراج بود و بر حرب درين وقت سعيد بن منصور الحميرى بود خال مهري چون سعيد بر رفت همه كاوها ايوب را ماند و بديه خوشينيان قصرى كرد و مسجد با مقصوده چنانك بجايست و منبر بنهاد و كسانى را كه با وى بودند بدانجا باز رها روزگار و صفها ساختند جاني كه آنرا كاه فروشان خوانند تا بعد روزگار سراها بدان پيوست و آنست كه اكنون كه رسته خوانند و باز حقيقت چنانك گويند جامع خوشينيان نخستين مسجد بود كه باصفهان كردند در اسالم و بناء آن ابو خناس مولى اميرالمؤمنين عمر بن خطاب كرد در خلافت على ابن ابى طالب عليه السلام و بعد از آن مسجد وليد بن نامه كردند در سنه مائة درخلافت سليمان بن عبد الملك اندر و پس مسخد سعيد بن دينار در سنه ثمان و مايه و پس مسخد الفضل بن عوث درخلافت هشام و شهر فراخ گست درخلافت منصور و اين پانزده پاره ديه بود كه همه صحراى آن خانها ساختند و بهم پيوست محلتها را بدان نام ديهها باز خواند چون : باطوقان فرسان يوان جرمان فلغلان سبيلان كمان جوزدان لنبان اشكهان جروآن خشيشان براوسكان قالحان و جامع اصل هم درين وقت كردند

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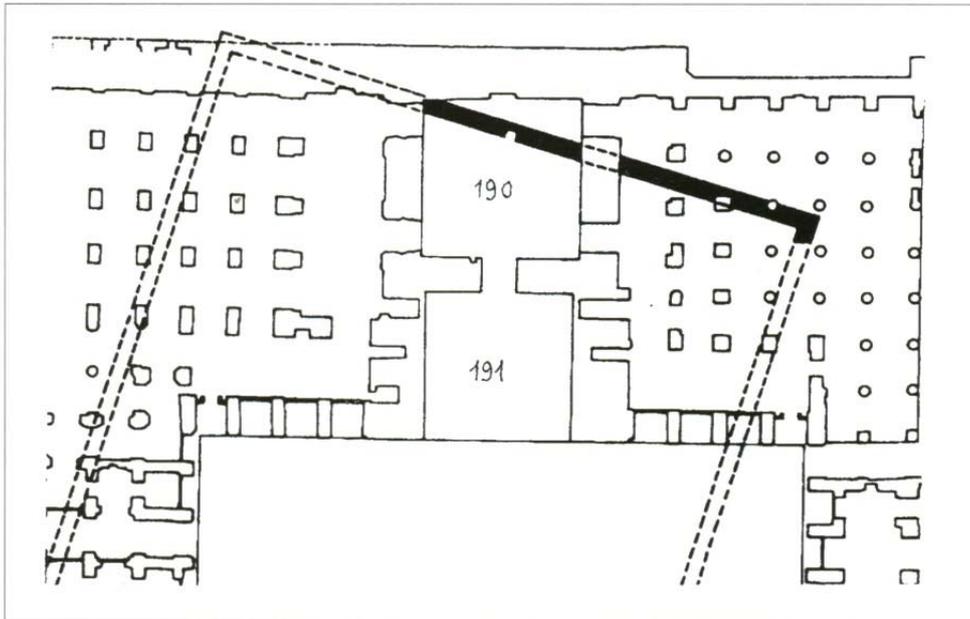


Fig. 1 - *Qibli* wall of the first Abbasid mosque uncovered in the southern area of the Masjid-i Jum'a of Iṣfahān (after Scerrato 2001).



Fig. 2 - Iṣfahān, the street network of the *tamṣīr* area in 767, including the first Masjid-i Jum'a (© Duva 2016).