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# ARCHITECTURAL DECORATION OF THE ARTUQIDS OF MARDIN DURING THE 12TH AND THE 13TH CENTURIES: BETWEEN ANTIQUE AND ISLAMIC STYLE

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The Artuqids represent a Turkish dynasty, originally from Central Asia.[1] They arrived in Upper Mesopotamia in the 11th century, under the reign of the Great Saljūqs, and subsequently ruled the region. The dynasty is divided into several branches. The Artuqids ruling over Mardin and its region (south-eastern Turkey) lasted from the beginning of the 12th to the beginning of the 15th century. During their long reign, many Islamic buildings were constructed, and much of their decoration has survived, representing several phases of change and evolution. An important phase occurs during the 12th and the 13th century. The ornaments of that period belong to four monuments, all of them situated in the Old City of Mardin: Jāmiᶜ al-Aṣfar, first half of 12th century, Madrasa Sittī Raḍaviyya, 1176–1184/85, Madrasa Maᶜrūfiyya, first quarter of 13th century, and Madrasa Šahīdiyya, first half of 13th century.[2]

The ornaments are concentrated in certain architectural elements like the openings – niches, windows and portals – several columns and one dome, and two fountains. The remainder of the walls consist of large surfaces of rows of ashlar masonry, accentuating the decoration and creating a contrast between the plain and carved parts. They employed in general limestone – the common architectural material in the region. The tone varies from light yellow to deep orange. The only exceptions are the fountain of the Madrasa Maᶜrūfiyya, where they used white and black stone in a mosaic technique creating a polychrome effect, and the dome of Madrasa Sittī Raḍaviyya constructed and decorated with brick. The decorated parts of the limestone are all composed of carved blocks set regularly into the ashlar masonry and thus becoming part of it. Most of the

1 Many studies exist about the history of the Artuqids, for a complete work cf. Väth 1987.

2 For the architecture of these monuments cf. Altun 1971: 71–88, figs. 82–199, and Altun 1978: 21–26, 115–121, 143–160; the section on the decoration in Altun 1978: 283–288, is superficial.

decoration is worked in low or high relief. The rest has been worked on the sides of the stones and assembled in a way to create window grills (claustra), or a kind of puzzle surface in relieving arches. The motifs and compositions are geometrical or vegetal (excluding the inscriptions, not part of this study).

A detailed analysis of the material suggests two different types of architectural ornament. The first represents elements and motifs known from Antiquity[3], as for example capitals with naturalistic acanthus leaves (figs. 4, 5), rows with dentils (figs. 2, 4, 10) and meanders (figs. 2, 4, 10), hemispheres in form of a shell (figs. 1, 4), and a row evoking pearls and pirouettes (figs. 4, 10). This type of decoration belongs to the monuments dating from the 12th century, Jāmiᶜ al-Aṣfar, and Madrasa Sittī Raḍaviyya.[4] Examples similar in style can be found in Upper Mesopotamia and Northern Syria: they are in general to be found in Early Christian buildings like those of Dārā and Ruṣāfa,[5] in many other Christian monuments of the Ṭūr ᶜAbdīn in general,[6] but also in contemporary Islamic buildings, like those of Ḥarrān, Diyarbakır, and Aleppo.[7] We also have to mention the presence of a "continuous moulding" in the dome of the Madrasa Sittī Raḍaviyya (fig. 3), another local characteristic since at least Early Christian Antiquity.[8] For some ornaments, like for example the acanthus leaves, no example has been found.

Ornaments typical of Islamic art define the second type, such as stylised plants, or the half-palmette, where it is impossible to identify an origin in nature. The motifs develop within dense compositions organised on more or less symmetrical axes (figs. 4, 6, 7, 10, 11). The emphasis is placed on the repetition of simple units, work on the surface and the two-dimensional aspect. There are

3 In the present paper the term "Antiquity" refers to the Greek, Roman, Late Antique, Early Christian and Byzantine periods.

4 All the examples belong to the Madrasa Sittī Raḍaviyya. The only exception is the hemisphere in the form of a shell of the small niche of the Jāmiᶜ al-Aṣfar (Fig. 1).

5 See the meanders at Dārā, cf. Wiessner 1983, II: Abb. 124, and Ruṣāfa, cf. Van Berchem/Strzygowski 1910: 222, Abb. 138.

6 See the meander at Çatalçam, cf. Wiessner 1982, I: Abb. 23; See the dentils at Dereiçi (single row), cf. Wiessner, I Abb. 34, and Acırlı (double row), cf. Wiessner 1993, III: Abb. 120; See many other examples of dentils in the Ṭūr ᶜAbdīn, cf. Bell 1910: 229, 239, 245, 261.

7 See the dentils at the Great Mosque of Diyarbakır (1163/61), cf. Mango 1982: fig. 16, at the Great Mosque of Ḥarrān (1174–1183), cf. Mango 1982: fig. 14, in the minaret of the Great Mosque of Aleppo (1089–?), cf. Allen 1986: fig. 32, at the Madrasa aš-Šuᶜaybiyya of Aleppo (1150/51), cf.. Allen 1986: figs. 4–6.

8 Tabbaa 1993: 33–34; Mango 1982: 127, 129, calls it "plain profiled molding".

some interlacing vegetal structures which develop infinitely. This type of ornament is usually known as an arabesque. The geometrical ornaments also present similar features. Mostly we have types of interlaced motifs with a complex appearance: this is because of the frequent repetition of the basic motif (as for example a hexagon), or because of the use of different motifs – simple or complex (as for example a T-shaped motif, fig. 9). We also have to mention the *muqarnas*, one of the most typical motifs in the decoration of Islamic architecture (figs. 3, 7, 8, 12). In Mardin there exist several types and variations. That type of ornament which we call "Islamic", develops over all in the first half of the 13th century, in the Madrasa Maᶜrūfiyya and the Madrasa Šahīdiyya. it appears too in several parts of the Madrasa Sittī Raḍaviyya,. The closest examples we can find in the decoration of Islamic architecture come from contemporary buildings in Anatolia (Saljūq or other Turkish dynasties), Syria, Northern Iraq and Egypt (Ayyūbid, Zangid and other dynasties).[9]

Thus we have two distinct groups among the ornaments, one "Antique" and the other "Islamic". Statistically, we have less Antique decoration than Islamic (about 15% of the motifs are Antique); no spoils exist. During the 12th century, both types coexist in the same decorated parts (figs. 4, 10). The Antique motifs are usually integrated in dense compositions of Islamic ornaments like special vocabulary in a text. During the 13th century, the Islamic style, introduced already in the 12th century, dominates. Different Antique elements of the 12th century, like the acanthus leaves of the capitals or the shell-shaped hemispheres, are replaced in the 13th century by *muqarnas* and compositions of plants in arabesque style. Shells appear as a small vestige at the top of the 13th century's hemispheres; sometimes they are part of it, beside *muqarnas* and other Islamic motifs (figs. 7, 8, 12). Except for lines of ornaments which look like transformed or more complicated meanders (figs. 8, 12), there is no type of transitional motif, where we could identify a transformation or evolution from one language to the other. The type of motif looking like a mini-niche could be interpreted as the product of a carver's experiment trying to make a *muqarnas* (fig. 3). The technique of working and cutting limestone does not seem to have changed. They used probably the same techniques known for centuries. The emphasis is placed on the work with units; one unit corresponding in general to one piece of regularly cut stone. Change and evolution happen on different but not all levels, each one having its own feature.

9 Many examples exist. Listing them all, would quickly exceed the number of pages permitted in this publication.

The reasons of the change from Antique to Islamic decoration are not clear at all. An explanation may be found if we concentrate on the question of presence of Antique elements. The architectural ornaments of the Artuqids of Mardin are not an unique example. It seems like if there were a movement of Antiquity in the whole region and in different artistic domains. Numismatic art presents lots of examples, which obviously have been copied from old models.[10] We find examples of illustrated manuscripts partly in a Byzantine style,[11] and other examples of architectural ornaments with Antique elements like the famous example of the Great Mosque of Diyarbakır[12], where Early Christian spoils have been integrated in 1116/7–1124/5 in the west façade of the courtyard and copied in 1163/4 on the east façade. Among scholars different opinions exist: Some speak of "Classical survivals"[13] and others of "revivals"[14]. So is it more an isolated and conscious phenomenon – of Antiquity or Classicism, reviving at this period,[15] or should we see in the Antique elements of Mardin the result of a slow evolution developing from the beginning of Islam, and culminating in the 12th century in the architectural decoration of the Artuqids?

For the moment it is difficult to give a satisfying answer. There is a real lack of architectural and artistic material in the whole region. The existing information is insufficient for a complete image of the evolution of architectural ornaments, from the 8th/9th centuries to the 11th/12th centuries. During several centuries political changes in several cities of the region – such as Raqqa and Ḥarrān – led to an impoverishment of the economic prosperity of the cities, and

10 They can be compared to coins from Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Antiquity, and even to Sasanid coins, cf. Lowick 1985: 160, 169; Brown 1974: 353.

11 Many authors figure out the Byzantine influence in 12th/13th century miniatures. For regional examples cf. Nassar 1985.

12 Mango 1982: 128, figs.15, 16. Since Van Berchem/Strzygowski 1910: 43–69, 136–163, 207–218, 298–334, figs.23–25, 57–59, pls. VIII–XVI, XX, many authors have referred to the building.

13 Many figure out the phenomenon: See one of Herzfeld's statement, cf. Herzfeld 1943: 30–40. For more detailed works see, Grabar 1971: 371–380, who concentrates more on Early Islamic Art, but who develops a good method of analysis, being also very helpful for the Medieval period; Tabbaa 1993: 29–41, speaks of "survivals and archaisms", avoids terms like "Classic" or "Antique". He focuses on the importance of an entire local production being quite isolated from the mainstream of Islamic Art, and having had its own evolution and characteristics like the presence of "continuous mouldings".

14 Allen 1986: wrote an entire book about the question; Hillenbrand 1986: 123–140; Mango 1982: 128; Rogers 1971: 347–361.

15 Allen 1986; Hillenbrand 1986: 132–135; Rogers 1971: 349, 354.

thus influenced architectural patronage.[16] From the 11th and particularly the 12th century onwards this changed, a real flourishing in the economy emanating from the cities, led to the creation of buildings.[17] At the same time there is a strong building activity in whole Syria, Northern Iraq and Anatolia. Caravan serais were constructed and the commercial routes became more active, and in some cases were revived (see the example of Anatolia during the beginning of the 13th century, where more than 100 caravan serais are constructed during a short period). Another fact is the important presence of Christians in the region, and with them their artistic traditions.[18] In Mardin, Nestorians had a brilliant period starting in about 755.[19] From the great controversies of Christianity until today, the whole region has been part of the Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, the "mountain of the [Christian] devotees", centre of the patriarch of the Jacobites;[20] the borders of Armenia and Byzantium were not far away either. The geographical distance of Mardin and its region from important Islamic centres with artistic activity and exchange during the earlier centuries must have reinforced its isolation and the development of a strong local tradition.[21]

Finally, we think that in the case of Mardin, the evolution of architectural ornamentation was very slow or even stopped before the arrival of the Artuqids.[22] Then construction revived. The Artuqids, being Turkomans fighting for the Great Saljūks[23], and unknown as a sedentary people before their rule over Upper Mesopotamia, did probably not bring any strong architectural tradition with them. So the adoption of existing local and regional traditions must have taken place. The choice of limestone as a general architectural material required corresponding technical know-how; the presence of Antique motifs, partly in a regional style, and sometimes without any comparisons, the existence of "continuous moulding" – a typical local feature – and of transitional motifs – like the transformed meanders –, the fact, that statistically few Antique motifs have been integrated in dense compositions of Islamic ornaments, and finally the absence

16 Heidemann 2002: 437–448. One reason are the nomads ruling over the region and being rather unfamiliar with urban culture, and thus having other economic interests than those supporting the wealth of live in the city.

17 Ibid.

18 For the architecture of the Ṭūr ʿAbdīn see over all Bell 1910; Wiessner 1982–1993.

19 Minorsky 1991: 527.

20 Streck 2002: 717–722.

21 See argumentation in Tabbaa 1993: 29.

22 Ibid.

23 Väth 1987: 23–51.

of reused blocks,[24] reinforce this explanation, rather than pointing to a conscious motivation. Beside the Antique repertory – either inspired from Early Christian models existing in the region, or part of a local Christian school, which slowly evolved until the 12th century – also new ideas in design were brought in the meantime from other Muslim centres like those of Anatolia, Northern Iraq, Syria and Egypt. But this is only a hypothetical solution. The work has not finished. A work on the Christian monuments of Mardin and the region may help to give a more secure answer. It is more certain that with the Artuqids an Islamic style with classical Islamic motifs and compositions develops in architectural ornamentation during the 12th/13th centuries. In Mardin, the Islamic style remains dominant in the following centuries and even sometimes becomes a common feature in non-Islamic buildings.[25]

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24 See Grabar 1971: 371–380, who distinguishes between reused or newly created elements. Corresponding to his theory the case of Mardin would correspond to the second type of his three "classical survivals"; See also Tabbaa 1993: 30.

25 Tunçer 1972–73.

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## Figures

*Figure 1:* Mardin: Jāmiᶜ al-Aṣfar, wall north of minaret's basis, detail of small niche.

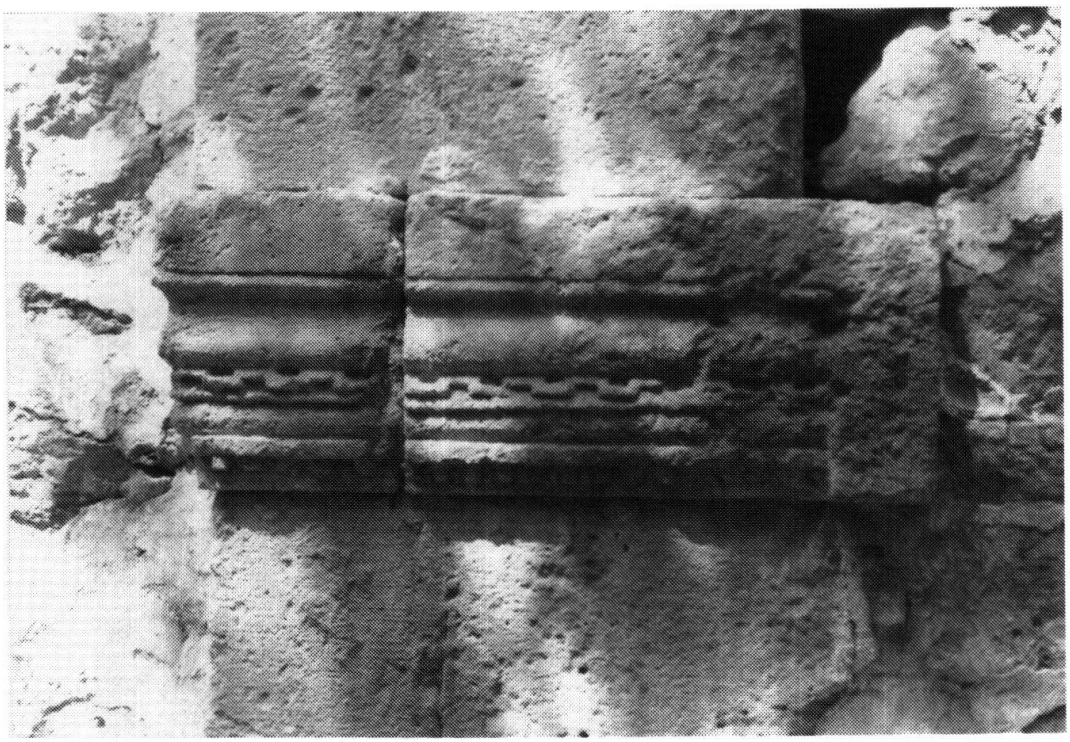

*Figure 2:* Mardin: Madrasa Sittī Raḍaviyya, courtyard, capital west of *īwān* north.

*Figure 3:* Mardin: Madrasa Sittī Raḍaviyya, mausoleum's tambour, wall south.

*Figure 4:* Mardin: Madrasa Sittī Raḍaviyya, *īwān* south now covered, *miḥrāb*'s niche.

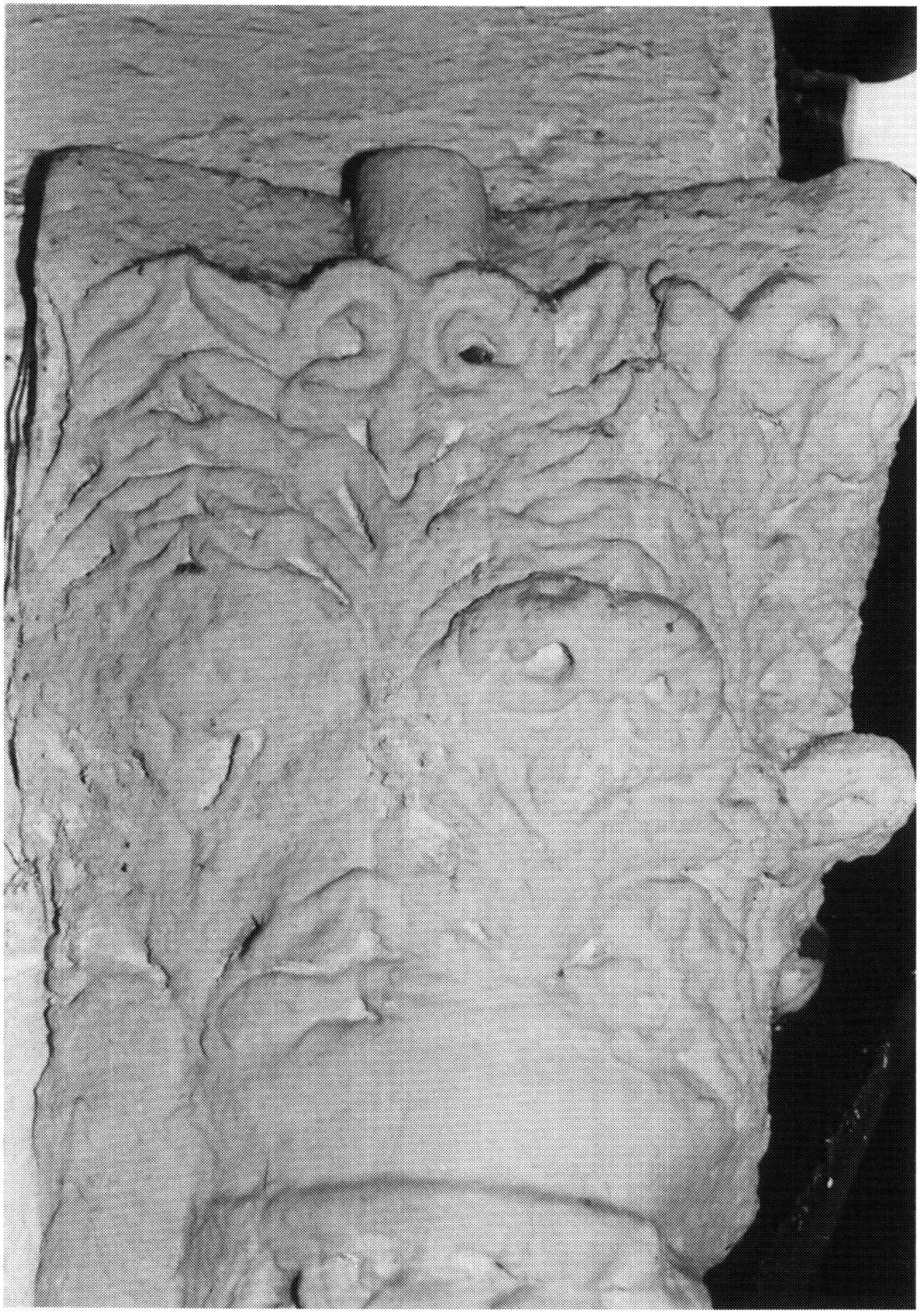

*Figure 5:* Mardin: Madrasa Sittī Raḍaviyya, *īwān* south now covered, capital west of *miḥrāb*'s niche.

*Figure 6:* Mardin: Madrasa Maᶜrūfiyya, fountain's hall, hemisphere of small niche north-west.

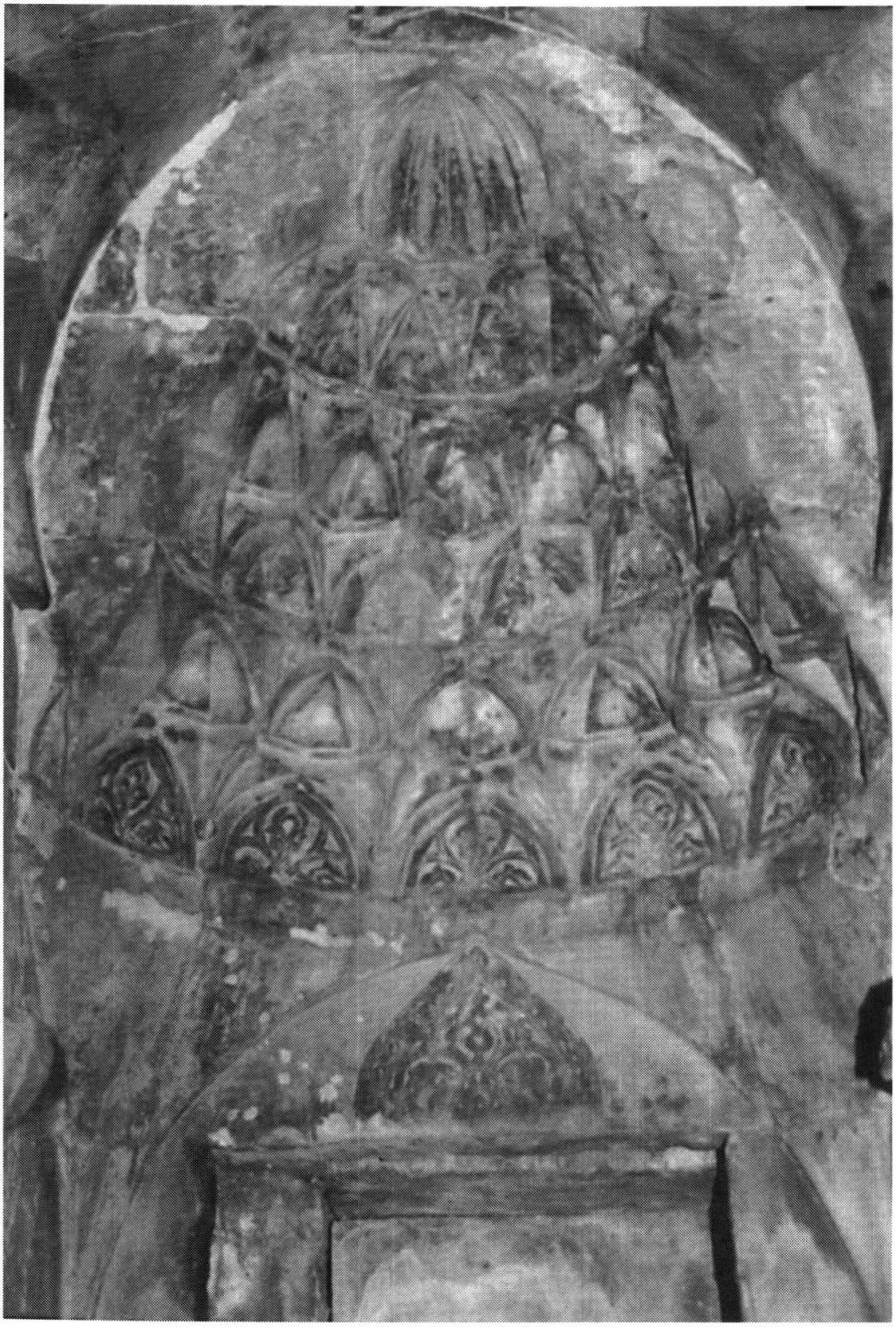

*Figure 7:* Mardin: Madrasa Maᶜrūfiyya, fountain's hall, hemisphere of main niche.

*Figure 8:* Mardin: Madrasa Šahīdiyya, *īwān* in the north of the courtyard, fountain's hemisphere.

*Figure 9:* Mardin: Madrasa Šahīdiyya, north wall of courtyard, rest of pillar.

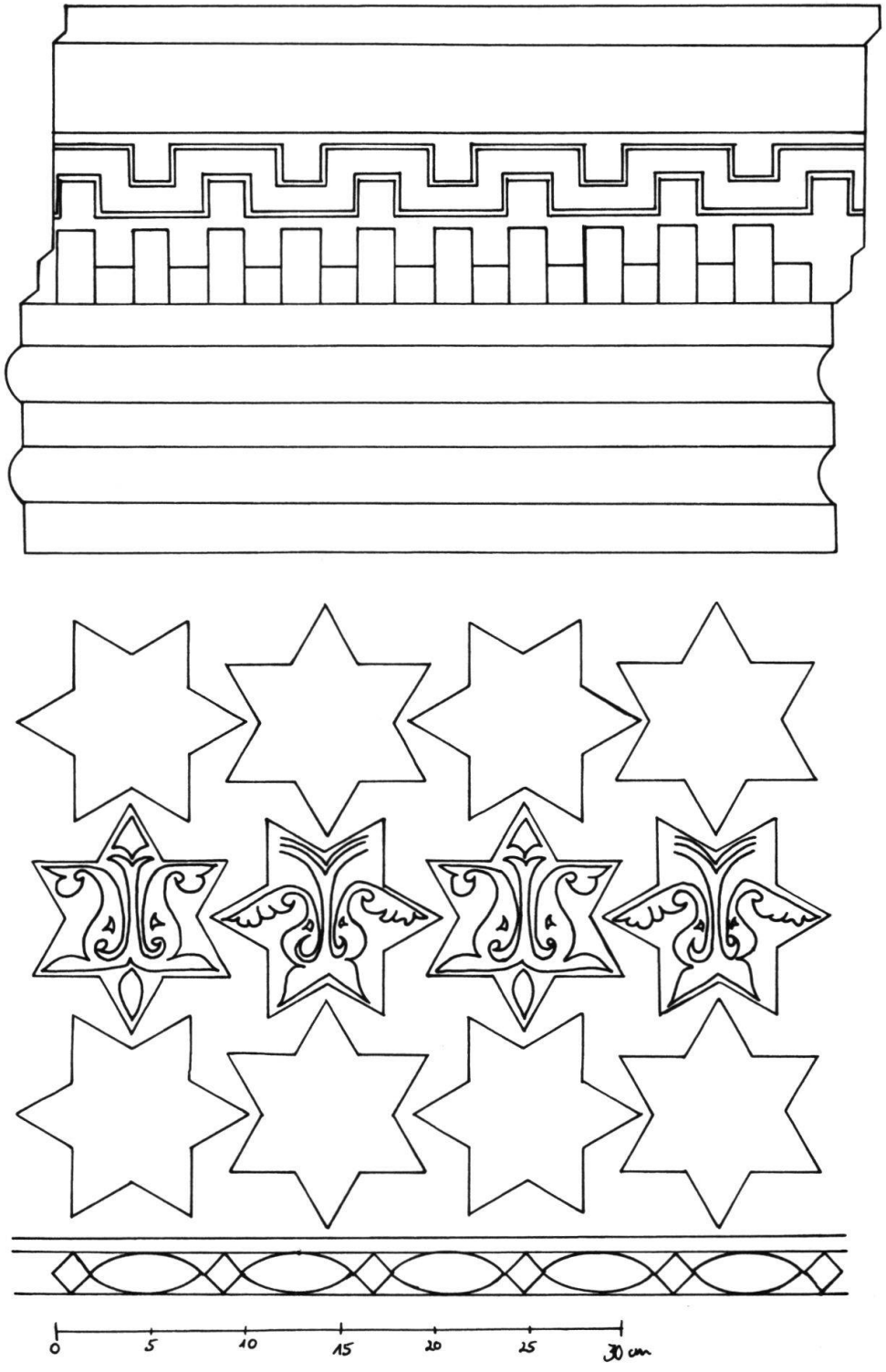


*Figure 10:* Mardin: Madrasa Sittī Raḍaviyya, *īwān* south now covered, detail of *miḥrāb*'s niche.

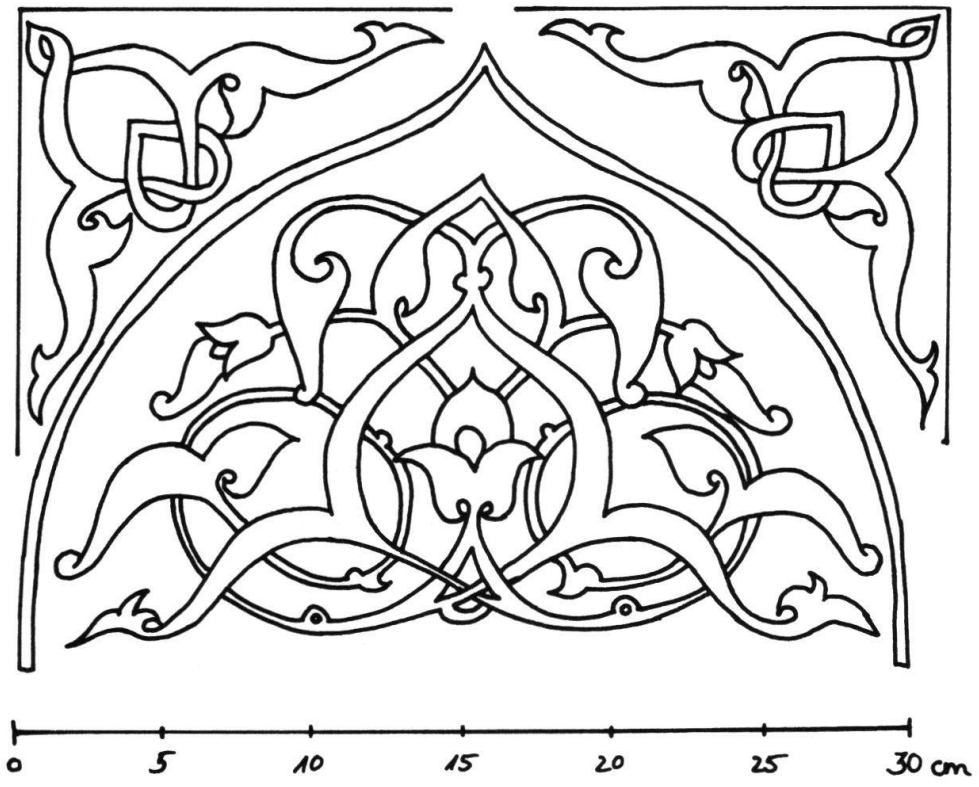


*Figure 11:* Mardin: Madrasa Maʿrūfiyya, fountain's hall, hemisphere of small niche north-west.

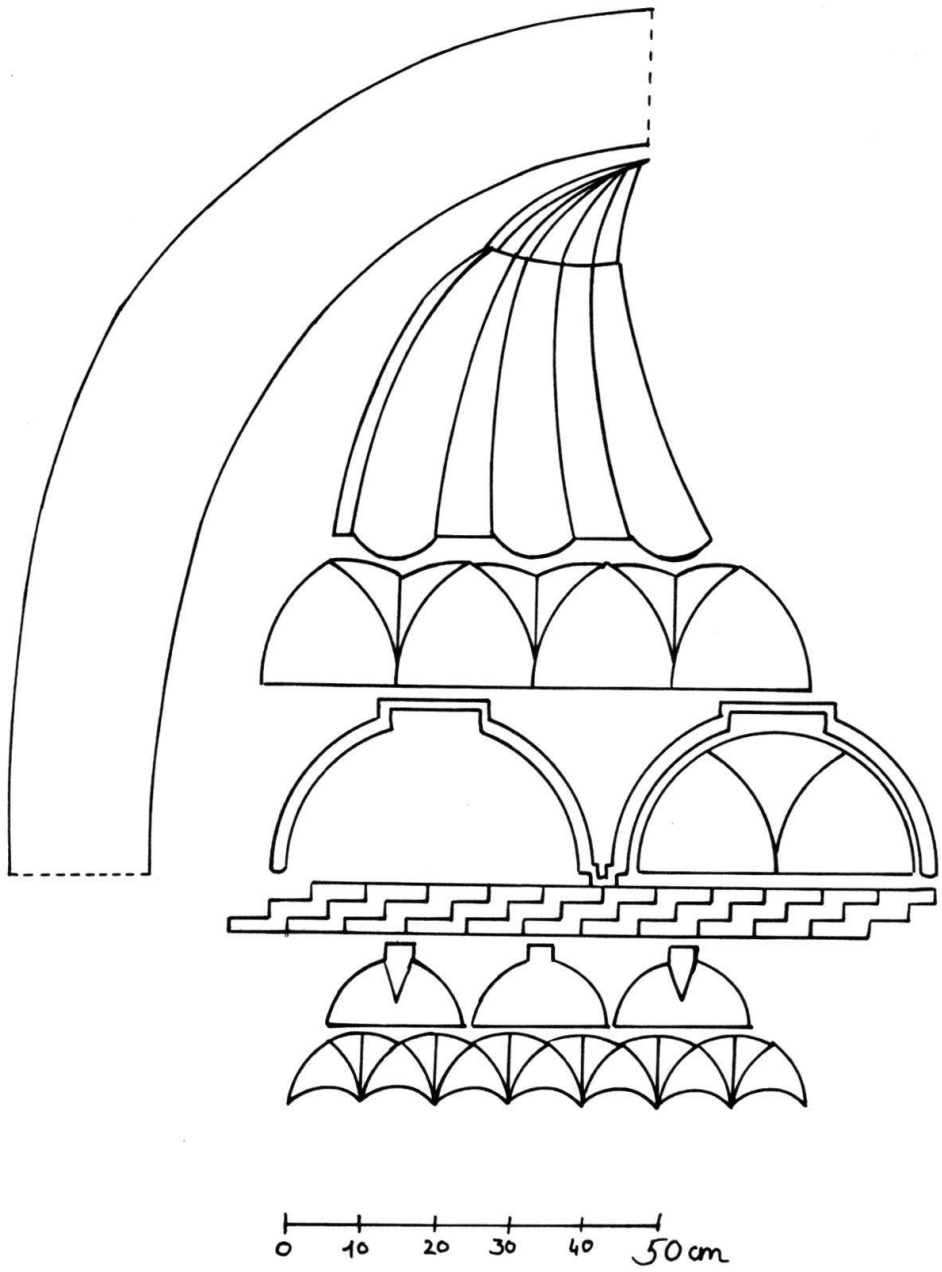


*Figure 12:* Mardin: Madrasa Šahīdiyya, *īwān* in the north of the courtyard, detail of fountain's hemisphere.