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Appendix A

Description of Deir Mar Behnam

Introduction

The description of Deir Mar Behnam is based on those given in previous publications, mainly those by Preusser (1911, 3-13, Pls 1-20, Fig. 2) and Fiey (1965, II, 589-609; 1970b), to which some observations of my own have been added, using the photographic material at hand. In addition, a ground plan and a cross section of the church are readily available (Preusser 1911, Pls X1-2), which document the situation of the construction as it was in 1909, that is, before the extensive renovations carried out during the twentieth century. Though details are lacking, and the different building phases are not indicated, Preusser's architectural drawings provide us with a useful expedient.

The following will start with a general description of the monastic complex, focusing mainly on the monastery's church. This is followed by a more detailed description of the architectural units that have preserved sculptural decoration. Subsequently a description will be given of the adjacent mausoleum, which again focuses on those parts which have retained their medieval sculptural reliefs.

A. Description of the Monastic Complex and the Church of Mar Behnam

The monastic complex comprises a large rectangular stone edifice, consisting of several buildings, surrounded by four extensive walls, which give it the appearance of a true fortification (Fig. 5). At the time of Preusser's visit, the northeast corner was fortified by a large tower, where presently the main entrance is situated.¹ The Church of Mar Behnam is located in the southeast corner of the monastic complex, adjacent to the western courtyard. A large hall with pointed archways, which opens to the courtyard, extends across the entire west façade of the church. It is covered by a barrel vault which runs from north to south. The vault is strengthened by four transverse arches; at the north and south side, the arches are placed in the corners, while the two in the middle flank the *bet šlotā* (Syriac for 'house of prayer'). In front of this outside oratory (Pls 35-36), the elevation is covered by a transverse barrel-vaulted *iwan*, which leaves the west side open.² Two large rectangular gates, situated on either side of the *bet šlotā*, lead into the church (Pls 33-34).³

The church has an oblong ground plan and consists of an altar room and a naos, around which are grouped seven side chapels (Figs 7-8).⁴ Two transverse arches resting on a massive pillar divide the naos into two sections, a main and a side nave, each covered with a barrel vault. A second pillar, with a semi-column attached to it, carries two corresponding transverse arches, which are set against the north wall of the church.⁵

¹ Preusser 1911, 3, Pl. 1; Novák/Younansardaroud 2002, 174, Fig. 2.

² Preusser 1911, 4, Pls 1, 3; Diwersy/Wand 2001, Pl. 399 (current situation).

³ Preusser 1911, 4, Pl. 3; Diwersy/Wand 2001, Pl. 389 (current situation).

⁴ Pognon (1907, 133 n. 3) and Fiey (1959, 101; *idem* 1965, II, 598) have put forward the hypothesis that the lateral chapels, on the north and south side of the church, were originally arcaded galleries. During rebuilding of the church, probably in the twelfth century, these galleries would then have been walled up on the outside and simultaneously given greater openings on the inside, transforming them into the present chapels. The authors base their assumptions on a passage from Barhabraeus (*Chron. Eccl.*, III, cols 329-330), which mentions that in 1139 the monk Kasrun of Edessa was buried 'in front of the southern entrance opening to the nave'.

⁵ Preusser 1911, 4, Pl. 4.1.

The altar room is approximately 3 m. long and 8.20 m. wide, and is raised about 0.20 m. above the naos level. From the main nave, a large central doorway, the Royal Gate (Pl. 37; c. 1.60 m. wide and 2.80 m. high),⁶ and a smaller doorway to its right (Pl. 39; c. 0.80 x 1.77 m.),⁷ give access to the altar room. The two doorways are closed by a modern wooden door. In front of the central doorway, there is a raised platform of around 4.70 m. wide, which extends approximately 2.40 m. into the main nave.⁸ Inside the sanctuary, immediately to the left of the central doorway, a rectangular niche with a round-headed arch can be found.⁹ Facing the central entrance is a semicircular apse, which does not extend beyond the eastern wall, but it is formed by two transversal walls projecting into the altar room proper.¹⁰ This intrusion has resulted in two small irregular rooms on either side of the apse, the one on the right containing a very small rectangular doorway which leads to one of the lateral chapels (Fig. 7, Room 7). At a height of around 1.90 m., a horizontal frieze, decorated with an ornamental pattern, runs along the surface of the entire back wall of the apsidal niche.

The rectangular space in front of the apse is covered with a barrel vault, which runs from north to south, only leaving open a square section directly in front of the apse. This square opening is crowned by a conical dome (c. 11.30 m. high), resting on an octagonal zone with squinches (Fig. 8).¹¹ The north, east, south, and west wall of this transitional zone are each filled with a blind arch. The octagonal zone itself rests on four pointed arches, the two transversal ones of which give the altar room the sense of a tripartition. Two small windows filled with transenna, and a small opening at the apex of the dome, give the room its light.

The modern altar is detached from the back wall and accessed by three steps. Both the altar and the steps are built of stonework covered with plaster. It is surmounted by a stone beam (0.25 m. thick and 0.75 m. high) resting on two consoles and decorated with alternating crosses and coloured octagons.¹² To the left of the altar, at a height of 3.25 m., a marble slab (55 x 32 cm) is embedded in the wall, bearing a Syriac inscription (AE.01.34) that mentions the restoration of the 'altar' in A.D. 1164. A second stone tablet, sculpted with the image of an equestrian saint (Pl. 62), is inserted into the north wall, at a height of 1.25 m.¹³ In the north wall is also a small rectangular doorway (0.75 x 1.25 m.) leading to the *bet qaddišē* (Syriac for 'room of the holy ones'), a burial chamber known as the 'Chapel of the Forty Martyrs' (Fig. 7, Room 5).

The main entrance to the *bet qaddišē* is a pointed archway of around 1.80 m. wide, which opens from the side nave (Pl. 41).¹⁴ This burial room has a square plan (c. 4.20 m. on each side) and is covered by a dome resting on an octagonal zone, which is first transformed into a

⁶ Preusser 1911, 5, 8, Pls 9.2, 10.1; Zibawi 1995, 62, Fig. 43; Gierlichs 1996, Pl. 59.3; Novák/Younansardaroud 2002, Fig. 3.

⁷ Preusser 1911, 9, Pl. 10.2.

⁸ Preusser 1911, Pl. 9.2.

⁹ Obviously, the location and width (c. 0.90 m) of the niche corresponds with that of the small doorway located symmetrically in the eastern wall of the church. This similarity seems to suggest that the niche that is now blocked up was originally a second small doorway opening onto the altar room. Preusser (1911, 6) has pointed out, however, that the apex of the arch covering the niche only reaches a height of approximately 1.10 m, which, according to the author, excludes the possibility of a former doorway. On the other hand, the arched construction may be a later addition, added to the existing masonry during one of the church's reconstructions. At present this has to remain a mere suggestion. Only a closer examination of the sequence of layers of stonework may perhaps shed some more light on this matter.

¹⁰ Preusser 1911, 5, Pl. 4.2; Novák/Younansardaroud 2002, Fig. 3.

¹¹ Preusser 1911, 5, Pl. 2.

¹² Preusser 1911, 5, Pl. 4.2; Novák/Younansardaroud 2002, Fig. 3.

¹³ Preusser 1911, 5, Pl. 6.1; Fiey 1965, II, 602-604, Pl. F; Snelders/Jeudy 2006, 130, Pl. 17.

¹⁴ Preusser 1911, 5, 7, Pls 7.2, 8.3.

sixteen-sided elevation. The lower part of the east wall contains four marble slabs bearing funerary inscriptions in Syriac, dating between 1417 and 1777.¹⁵

The north wall of the main nave contains two doorways, which give access to Rooms 3 and 4. The former doorway is not embellished with any stone decoration. Room 3 is nearly square in plan (c. 4 m. on both sides) and has a rectangular niche in both its east and the west wall. The eastern niche is also provided with an extra recess in the middle which, at the time of Preusser's visit, still contained a large stone slab, adorned with an engraved cross and a short Syriac inscription.¹⁶ The room is crowned by a dome resting on several corbels in the corners. An unfinished archway of around 1.70 m. wide gives access to Room 4, a side chapel known as the Chapel of the Virgin. The chapel is nearly square (c. 3.50 x 3.70 m.) and has a deep rectangular niche in the east wall. Above the chapel, a stuccoed dome (c. 13 m. high) rests on a transitional zone formed by four rows of corbels set at different angles (Pls 50, 52).¹⁷

Two rectangular doorways in the south wall of the main nave lead to Room 9 and 10. Above the two doorways, the wall is pierced by a window. Room 10, a side chapel known as the Chapel of Mar Mattai, is nearly square (c. 4 x 4.20 m.) and contains a large niche in both the east and west wall. These two niches are each covered with a pointed arch. The chapel is covered with a stuccoed dome resting on concave squinches (Pl. 51). In each of the four walls of this transitional zone, two rectangular cassettes are placed. The apex of the dome is pierced with a small round window. Room 9, a side chapel known as the Chapel of Mart Sarah, has a rectangular plan (c. 3 x 4 m.) and is covered by a barrel vault. In the east wall is a doorway leading to two interconnected rooms, again with an oblong plan (c. 2.40-3 x 4 m.) and barrel-vaulted. A modern altar, comparable to the one in the sanctuary, can be found in Room 7.

As most of the medieval sculptural decoration is found on and alongside the main gates and the *bet šlotā*, these will now be described in greater detail.

The Southern Exterior Gate

The southern exterior gate in the west wall gives access to the main nave of the church (Fig. 7A; Pl. 34).¹⁸ The entire structure measures around 2.30 m. in width, and 3.70 m. in height, including the friezes with inscriptions and decorative patterns. The horizontal lintel of this gate is composed of seven joggled voussoirs with two half ones on the sides, all joins of which are cut into a geometric pattern. The lintel is decorated with a foliate cross in the centre (Pl. 58) flanked by two interlace motifs and two pairs of birds, whose heads are turned backwards (Pl. 57). The tails of the pair on the left terminate in dragons' heads. Underneath the central cross is an arabesque design made out of two stylised dragons with protruding tongues. Above the lintel is a depressed arch with a smooth profile, embellished with two addorsed dragons with horns and interlaced tails, each with a forked tongue extending above a chalice (Pl. 54). The spandrels of the doorframe are occupied by a pair of lions sitting on their hind legs (Pls 55-56).

The actual doorway (1.25 x 2.30 m.) is framed on its three sides by two long friezes, the innermost of which represents an intricate decoration pattern alternately forming crosses, stars, and leaf ornaments. The outer frieze contains a Syriac inscription of poetic content

¹⁵ Harrak 2009, inscr. nos AE.01.42-AE.01.45, excluding the 1966 inscription on the tomb of Ephrem Abdal.

¹⁶ Preusser 1911, 4. This inscription seems to have been lost by the end of the twentieth century, for it is not included in Harrak's corpus.

¹⁷ Preusser 1911, 4-5, Pl. 5.1. The horizontal facets of the corner pieces and the moulded roof bear two Syriac and two Arabic inscriptions. The first Syriac inscription (AE.01.46a) is placed on the four ribs, the second Syriac inscription (AE.01.46b) is written between these four ribs and refers to the chapel dedicated to the Mother of God. The first Arabic inscription is written on the corbels and the second on one of the ribs (AE.01.46c).

¹⁸ Preusser 1911, 11, Pls 15.2, 16.2; Fiey 1959, 145 n. 1, Fig. 12; *idem* 1970b, 8-9, plate on p. 22; Gierlichs 1996, 236, Pl. 59.1.

(AE.01.5). Starting on the right-hand side of the gate, the inscription continues on the left-hand side, where it is connected with the inscriptions framing the three niches of the *bet ṣlotā* and the northern exterior gate, consecutively. A monumental Arabic inscription, which comprises a translation and adaptation of a Syriac prayer for Vespers,¹⁹ together with a palmette frieze underneath, functions as a cornice. The palmette frieze is interrupted only by a frontal lion's head, which is partly effaced. Several smaller Syriac inscriptions are carved in the jambs, underneath the crouching lions, one of which fittingly contains Ps 118:19-20 (AE.01.6-7). The same Psalm is featured on the insides of the doorposts (AE.01.9). Finally, the stone slab placed horizontally against the floor on the lower left jamb bears a commemorative inscription in Syriac (AE.01.8).

The Northern Exterior Gate ('Gate of St Peter and St Paul')

Approximately 4.40 m. to the left of the southern exterior gate, one finds the northern exterior gate, the women's entrance, which gives access to the side nave of the church (Fig. 7B; Pl. 33). The entire structure of the gate measures around 2.30 x 3.70 m., including the friezes with inscriptions and decorative patterns.²⁰ The horizontal lintel of the northern exterior gate is decorated with two standing angels on either side of a cross on a mound, with flaring arms, placed against a background of eight six-pointed stars (Pl. 65). Above the lintel is a depressed arch, embellished with two circular indentations running right across the whole breadth of the arch, two open-work stars, and three small crosses on a mound, with flaring arms. Two nimbed male saints with beards, standing and holding a cross-staff in their right hands, occupy the corners of the doorframe. Two small Syriac inscriptions (AE.01.12 a-b) give their names: 'St Peter' on the left, and 'St Paul' on the right (Pl. 65).

All of these elements are enclosed by two long friezes that frame the doorway on its three sides, the innermost displaying the same decorative design of alternating crosses and stars encountered on the previous gate. The outer frieze contains a Syriac inscription (AE.01.11), which is only interrupted in the centre by a frontal lion's head. The inscription is of great interest, since it mentions the names not only of the initiators, the monks Isa and Fadl-Allah the priests, Abu Nasr and Behnam the deacons, Thomas and Mahbub, but also of the artists: Abu Salim, and Abraham his brother. Strikingly, the names of these artists are also encountered inside the church, on the Royal Gate (see below; AE.01.32). While the inscription terminates on the left side of the gate, it continues on the right side, where it is linked with the inscriptions framing the three niches of the *bet ṣlotā*, and the southern exterior gate, respectively.

A second Syriac inscription (AE.1.10), of poetical content and devoted to Mar Behnam, is carved in the uppermost frieze, which, together with a palmette frieze and a frontal lion's head underneath, functions as a cornice. In addition, the inscription mentions a female financial contributor, 'the wife of Muqaddar', whose name is encountered in connection with the erection of a gate inside the church (see below; AE.01.23).

The Bet Ṣlotā

In the centre of the west façade, between the two main gates leading into the church, is the *bet ṣlotā* (Fig. 7C; Pls 35-36). The outside oratory consists of a large central niche flanked by two smaller niches, which were probably destined to hold crosses and candlesticks.²¹ Above the smaller niches are protruding stone rings that were perhaps used as supports for either candles or liturgical fans, such as the one discussed in Chapter 3. The lower part of the central niche has an architectural frame consisting of two columns with a pedestal and a capital, each

¹⁹ Harrak 2009, cat. no. AE.01.5.

²⁰ Harrak 2009.

²¹ Fiey 1970b, 8.

decorated with an intricate ornamental design. Its background consists of a marble slab inscribed with a large cross on a mound, surrounded by four rosettes and several Syriac inscriptions (Pl. 48), one of which states that the central niche was reserved for the 'adored and holy Gospel' (AE.01.16). The spandrels and the conch of the niche are filled with an intricate arabesque design, the latter topped with a large foliate cross on a mound (Pl. 47). Above the niche is a depressed arch with a scalloped profile, decorated with stars, half-moons, and rosettes.

This tripartite structure is framed on its three sides by two ascending and descending friezes, the innermost of which contains the same decorative design consisting of alternating crosses and stars that was encountered already on the two main gates leading into the church. The outer frieze encloses a Syriac inscription (AE.01.15) of poetical content, which continues both to the left and right side of the gate, where it is connected with the inscription friezes framing the northern and southern gates. A three-line Syriac inscription of poetical content, referring to the healing miracles performed at the monastery, forms the cornice of this architectural unit (AE.01.14). These miracles are also the subject of the Syriac inscription (AE.01.17) carved on a stone slab underneath the central niche. Finally, two other slabs embedded in the wall at the upper left and right side of the *bet slotā* (Pl. 35) show a crude representation in bas relief of the Crucifixion (Pl. 53) and a cross, respectively.

The Royal Gate

The structure of the Royal Gate (c. 2.30 x 4.15 m.) is formed by a shallow arch with a horizontal lintel underneath, displaying two stalactite decorations on its lower side and two consoles on the sides, which minimize the lintel span (Fig. 7D; Pl. 37). Together with the horizontal line of the lintel, the stalactites form three segmental arches. The lintel is constructed by means of five joggled voussoirs flanked by two half ones, all joins of which are cut into a geometric pattern. It is decorated with two confronted equestrian saints in bas relief flanking a heavily damaged sculpture in haut relief (Pl. 60). The relieving arch above the lintel is embellished with several open-work rosettes and two small crosses on a mound, with flaring arms. Two long friezes frame the portal on its three sides, the innermost of which represents an intricate arabesque design interspersed with crosses.

The outer frieze contains a long Syriac inscription (AE.01.32) of the Lord's Prayer, a commemorative note, as well as the names of the artists, Abu Salim and Abraham. The names of these two artists were stated on the Gate of St Peter and St Paul as well (see above; AE.01.11). The inscription is interrupted visually only by a frontal lion's head in the centre sculpted in high relief. A second Syriac inscription (AE.01.31) is carved in the uppermost frieze, which, together with a palmette frieze underneath, functions as a cornice. Besides stating that the Royal Gate was 'renovated, rebuilt, completed, and adorned', its text contains a liturgical prayer often used during the elevation of individuals to diaconical and sacerdotal ranks.²² Finally, two short Syriac inscriptions (AE.01.33) are carved on the inside of the two jambs, describing the altar as being 'forgiving' and 'holy'.

The Secondary Entrance to the Sanctuary ('the Small Gate')

To the right of the Royal Gate is a second, but much smaller gate giving access to the sanctuary (Fig. 7E; Pl. 39). This small gate is located in the south-east corner of the nave, with part of its decoration skilfully placed on the south wall, probably due to lack of space at the time of its execution. The horizontal lintel of the gate is constructed by means of three joggled voussoirs with two half ones on the sides, each of which is inscribed with a vertical Syriac inscription (AE.01.28), including Ps 24:7. All the joins are carved into a curvilinear

²² Harrak 2009, cat. no. AE.01.31.

pattern. The very shallow arch above the lintel is decorated with a small cross on a mound in the centre and four open-work stars, all flanked by two crouching lions with rosettes at their tails (Pl. 59). In contrast to the gates described previously, this gate is only framed on its three sides by a single frieze. It contains a Syriac inscription (AE.01.25) providing part of the Creed, which actually starts at the Gate of the two Baptisms and continues until the Royal Gate (AE.01.26), thereby connecting the three different gates. Another Syriac inscription (AE.01.27) is carved in the uppermost frieze, which, together with a palmette frieze underneath, functions as a cornice. The text of this inscription is of appropriate biblical content: Ps 24:9-10. Finally, a commemorative inscription in Syriac (AE.01.29) is carved in the left jamb of the gate, mentioning the name of a certain Simon, who may be identified with the Simon of the Hindo referred to on the façade of the church (see above; AE.01.14). This Simon seems also to have been responsible for a Syriac hymn in the Mausoleum of Mar Behnam (see below; AF.02.3).

The 'Gate of the Two Baptisms'

The eastern part of the south wall is dominated by the most extensively sculpted gate of the church, which is known as the Gate of the Two Baptisms (Fig. 7F; Pl. 38). Measuring approximately 2.70 x 2.70 m., the gate gives access to a chapel known as the Chapel of Mart Sarah. The horizontal lintel of this gate is composed of seven joggled voussoirs with two half ones on the sides, all joins of which are cut into a geometric pattern. The lintel rests on consoles decorated with arabesque designs. The voussoirs are left plain, except for the central one, which bears a foliate cross. Above the lintel is a depressed arch, each spandrel of which contains the image of a small bird. The actual doorway (1.30 x 2.90 m.) is framed by twenty-one panels composed of trefoil (keyhole-shaped) arches, which are linked together by simple loops. The moulding which marks out the shape of these niches has evolved here to become the elongated bodies of dragons. In this way, seven pairs of dragons together form the twenty-one panels. The other panels are filled with an arabesque, a rich floral ornament, topped with a foliate cross on a mound (Pls 63-64).

A long Syriac inscription (AE.01.22), containing the first part of the Creed, frames the gate on its three sides. The inscription starts on the right of the gate, and continues on the east wall, where it frames the small gate to the sanctuary and continues right up to the Royal Gate. Another Syriac inscription (AE.01.21) is carved in the uppermost frieze, which, together with a palmette frieze underneath, functions as a cornice. It contains two biblical verses, including Ps 118:19-20. Of particular importance, as far as the iconography is concerned, are the two Syriac inscriptions inscribed in the rabbet of the jambs (AE.01.23). The text of both inscriptions deals with one theme: the double baptism of Mar Behnam.

Finally, a commemorative inscription in Syriac situated directly to the left of the gate provides us with the name of the benefactress who contributed to its erection, 'Bahiyah wife of the late Muqaddar' (AE.01.23). She also provided for the erection of the Gate of St Peter and St Paul (see above; AE.01.10). Three marble slabs inscribed with a long Syriac inscription (AE.01.20) are embedded in the wall to the right of the gate. The text is of historical content, informing us about the looting of the monastery by the invading Mongol army in A.D. 1295.

The following three gates do not display any figural imagery, but are limited to decorative patterns and crosses. Typologically, the last two of these gates are different from all the other gates within the church, having arched as opposed to rectangular doorways.

The South-West Interior Gate ('Gate of the Chapel of Mar Mattai')

In its general appearance, the gate situated in the south-west corner of the church, giving access to a side chapel dedicated to Mar Mattai, resembles the Royal Gate, though it is far less embellished (Pl. 40; Fig. 7G).²³ The structure of this gate is formed by a shallow arch with a lintel underneath, displaying two stalactite decorations on its lower side and two consoles on the sides, which minimize the lintel span. The stalactites and the consoles together form three arches. This particular form returns in the joins of the five joggled voussoirs which make up the horizontal lintel, five complete ones and two on the sides. The one in the centre, the keystone, is decorated with a cross on a mound, with flaring arms. Whereas the friezes of the portals described above were decorated, in this instance they are left plain, except for the two vertical Syriac inscriptions (AE.01.19) divided into two parts, each on one jamb of the gate. The poetical text refers to the relics of Mar Behnam and is written according to the metre of St Ephrem.²⁴

The Gate to the Bet Qaddišē ('Chapel of the Forty Martyrs')

A large arched doorway in the north-east corner of the church, situated in the east wall, gives access to the *bet qaddišē* (Pl. 41; Fig. 7H).²⁵ The pointed lintel of the gate is constructed by means of a series of joggled voussoirs, all joins of which are carved into a curvilinear pattern. All voussoirs are left plain except for the keystone, which is decorated with a foliate cross. The two jambs are emphasized with an architectural framework consisting of two slender half-columns with bases and capitals in relief, while the spandrels are decorated with an intricate arabesque design. A two-line Syriac inscription (AE.01.39), which mentions that the gate was 'renovated', is carved in the uppermost frieze and functions as a cornice. Two Syriac inscriptions (AE.01.40A-B) are located one on each jamb, providing the name of the person who contributed to the erection of this door: Deacon Abu Nasr, son of the late Khalaf.

The Gate of the 'Chapel of the Virgin Mary'

The construction of the gate situated in the north-east corner of the church (in the north wall), which gives access to a side room known as the Chapel of the Virgin Mary (Fig. 7I), is typologically the same as the one to the burial room.²⁶ However, this large arched doorway is left entirely unadorned and is not provided with any inscriptions. It has been suggested that the work was left unfinished, perhaps due to the Mongol raid of Mosul in 1261.²⁷

B. The Mausoleum of Mar Behnam (the 'Outer Martyrion' or the 'Pit')

The Mausoleum of Mar Behnam is located approximately 60 m. southeast of the Church of Mar Behnam, just outside the walls of the monastic complex (Fig. 6).²⁸ A large part of the mausoleum's original elevation lies below ground level, including the entrance proper. It can be reached by two subterranean passageways, each covered with a barrel vault. These passageways are preceded by a steep staircase which opens from a small chapel situated to the north of the mausoleum.²⁹ This chapel has a rectangular shape and is divided into two distinct spaces, each crowned with a transverse barrel vault. In the centre of the east wall is a semicircular niche. During E. Wallis Budge's visit in 1844, this apse was provided with a

²³ Preusser 1911, 10, Pl. 13.1.

²⁴ Harrak 2009, cat. no. AE.01.19.

²⁵ Preusser 1911, 7, Pl. 7.2.

²⁶ Preusser 1911, 7, Pl. 7.1 ; Fiey 1970a, 16-17.

²⁷ Fiey 1970a, 16-17.

²⁸ Preusser 1911, 12, Pls 18.1-2; Diwersy/Wand 2001, Pl. 397.

²⁹ Preusser (1911, 12-13) remarked that these passageways were constructed with brickwork, which was left uncovered. At present, the vaults are covered with a layer of stucco.

baptismal font.³⁰ An opening in the floor, situated directly in front of the apse, gives access to the steep staircase.

The ground plan of the mausoleum is octagonal, with rectangular niches in each of the walls, except for the north wall which contains a doorway giving access to the mausoleum. Whereas the east, south and west wall have relatively small niches, the other four walls are provided with larger ones. Each niche is covered with a semicircular arch and provided with a stone tablet with inscriptions written either in Syriac, Arabic, or, in one instance, Armenian.³¹ The entire structure of the mausoleum is covered by a dome, which rests directly upon the octagonal elevation.

The east wall of the mausoleum is dominated by a sculpted niche (c. 3.95 x 2.5 m.), containing the relics of Mar Behnam (Pl. 42).³² An inclined stone slab, decorated with a cross at the centre, is inserted into the lower part of the niche. In the vertical back wall is placed a small piece of white marble showing a cross flanked by two angels. Above this marble decoration, a second cross is sculpted. The niche is crowned by a half-dome in the shape of a honeycomb. While the lower half of this semi-cupola is filled with three layers of *muqarnas*, the upper half is ornamented with diagonally crossing ribs in bas relief. Above the apex of the semi-dome, a small cross can be found. In the spandrels an Arabic inscription states the name of the artist who constructed the grave niche (AF.02.1D): 'Master Mas'ud son of Joseph, the stonecutter'. Above the spandrels and along the entire width of the niche runs a rectangular frieze (c. 1.50 m. wide), inscribed with an Uighur inscription (AF.02.1C) in commemoration of the Il-Khan.

All of these elements are enclosed by two long friezes that frame the niche on three sides, the innermost of these being the widest. It is decorated with a continuous interlace pattern consisting of a four-lobed motif inclosing a rosette. This motif alternates with flower ornaments. The outer frieze contains a commemorative Syriac inscription (AF.02.1B), which, besides providing us with a date for the grave's construction (A.D. 1300) states that the tomb's sculptures were mounted through the care of Rabban Mas'ud, son of Mubarak of the house of Nazik of Bartelli. This inscription concludes with an additional note written in Arabic, which mentions that Timur the goldsmith was responsible for the writing. Finally, an uppermost frieze, serving the function of a cornice contains a commemorative inscription in Arabic (AF.02.1A), which states that Mas'ud, son of Jacob son of Mubarak Nazik volunteered to build the monument.

To the right side of the grave niche, a stone slab (70 x 40 cm) embellished with an Armenian-type cross and an Armenian and a commemorative Syriac inscription (AF.02.2) is embedded in the wall. Another slab (65 x 30 cm), located in the niche directly opposite the tomb of Mar Behnam, bears a Syriac hymn to Mar Behnam (AF.02.3). A commemorative note mentions that a certain Simon was responsible for the writing. He may be identified with Simon Hindo whose name we already encountered on the façade of the church and perhaps also on the small gate leading into the sanctuary (see above; AE.01.14, AE.01.29). Finally, two commemorative inscriptions in Syriac that may be dated to the thirteenth century (AF.02.4-AF.02.5) are located on the frame of the entrance to the tunnel and on the wall directly facing this entrance, respectively.

³⁰ 'The font is 3 ft. in diameter, and stands about 4 ft. above ground' (Budge 1852, 95). This font does not seem to have been *in situ* anymore when Preusser visited the monastery.

³¹ Harrak 2009, inscr. nos AF.02.2, AF.02.3, AF.02.5, AF.02.6. Cf. Appendix B.

³² Pogon 1907, 140-142, Pl. 8; Preusser 1911, 12-13, Pls 19.1-2; Diwersy/Wand 2001, Pl. 402; Harrak/Ruji 2004, 66-72, Figs 1, 4; Zibawi 2005, 345-346, Fig. 5.