

Since its introduction in the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD), Islam has been professed by the Hui, Uygur, Kazakh, and other nationalities.

Many mosques have been built in the country and are an important part of Chinese architectural heritage. In the earlier mosques, some Central Asian features were directly copied. In the course of centuries, Chinese architects gradually absorbed and blended these features to create their own style of Islamic architecture. This is particularly evident in the Xinjiang region since the 15th century when Islam became the main religion.

Generally, Islamic architecture in China (which is equated with mosques – Editor's Notes) can be classified into four types.

The Central Asiatic Type

In the early examples the strong influence of Central Asia can be seen in material, construction and exterior treatment. The material used is either brick or stone, with arches, domes and vaults. The mass of the buildings gives an effect of stability, solemnity and monumentality.

The Qing Jing Si mosque, Quanzho, Fujian, is an example of this type. The gate of the mosque is 20 metres and 4.5 metres wide in bluish granite. Another such building is the Tughluk Mausoleum, Hucheng, Xinjiang.

The Transitional Type

The Phoenix mosque, Zongshan Road, Hangzhou is an example of the transitional type. It was first built during the Tang

Right: Mosque in Ürümqi. Photograph: P. Clement.

Below: Mosque in Turfan. Photograph: B. Taylor.

Mosques of Northern China



Dynasty, destroyed in the Song and rebuilt in the Yuan. The prayer hall in brick is the oldest mosque extant. The plan is a rectangle of three bays, each nearly a square, topped by a dome. In this example, the entrance, the use of arches and domes, and lantern skylights reveal the strong Central Asian influence. However, the use of Chinese style roofs gives the buildings a nationalistic appearance which is reflected in the transitional period.

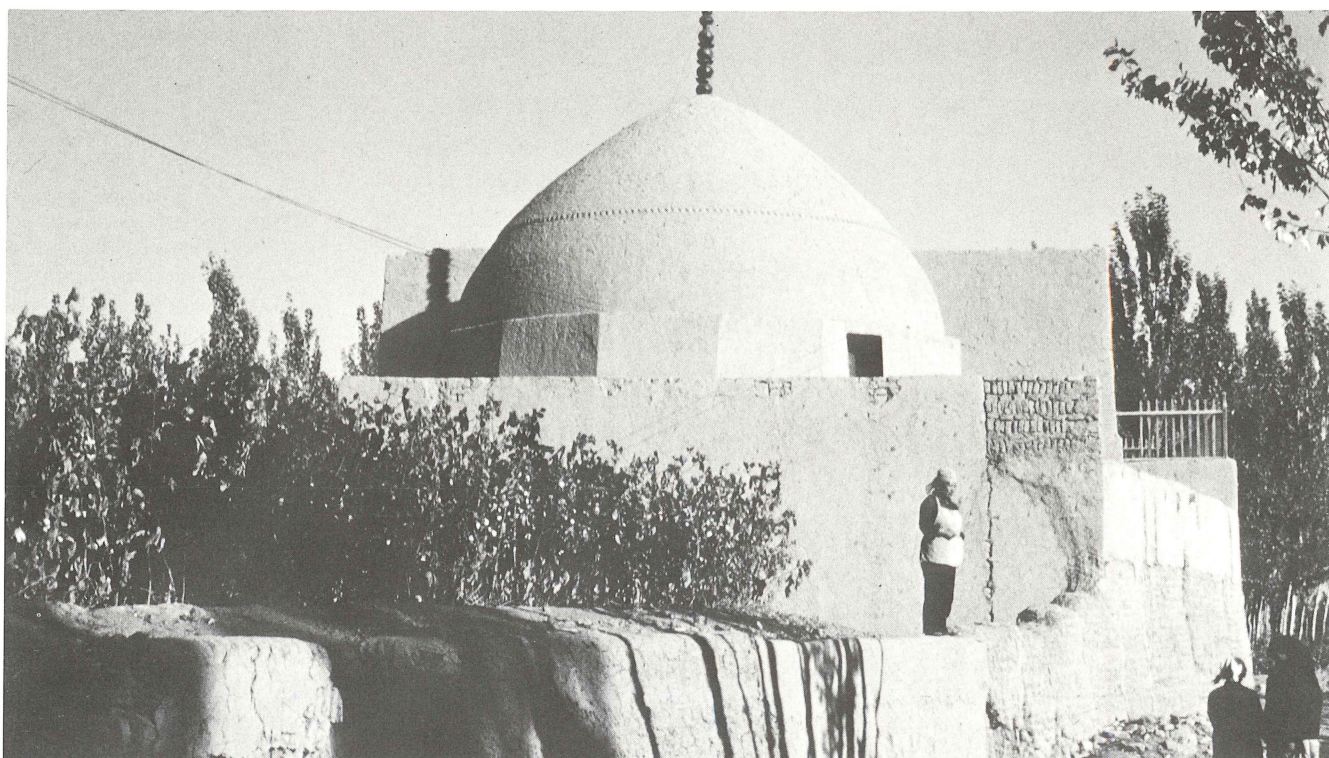
The Nationalised Type

In time, the requirements of Islamic religious activities merged with traditional Chinese architecture. Construction and design features of the mosques and mausoleums produced a new nationalised mosque, most developed by the Hui nationality. The Ox Street mosque of Beijing and the mosque at Hua Jue Xiang in Xi'an are good examples of this type. More recent mosques have followed this pattern.

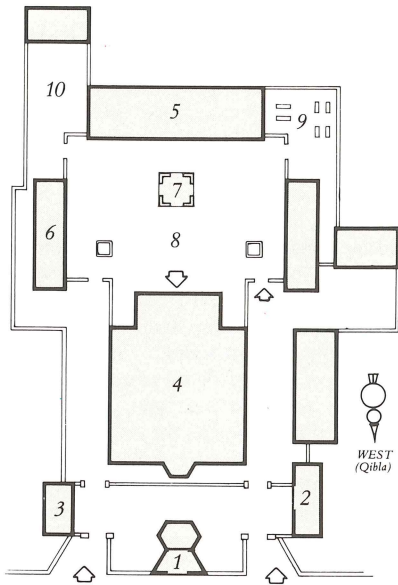
Xinjiang Regional Type

Prior to the introduction of Islam to the Xinjiang region in the 10th century, a local architectural style using timber and earth was already well developed. The distinctive wooden columns supporting closely-spaced beams and flat roofs, adobe vaults and domes, an open plan and rich surface decorations characterise these mosques. In this autonomous region the architecture remains different and is associated more strongly with an Islamic aesthetic than elsewhere. The mosques of Kashi and Turfan are good examples of this type.

This presentation has been compiled by the editors based mainly on essays by Zhang Jing-qiu.



Niu Jie Mosque Beijing



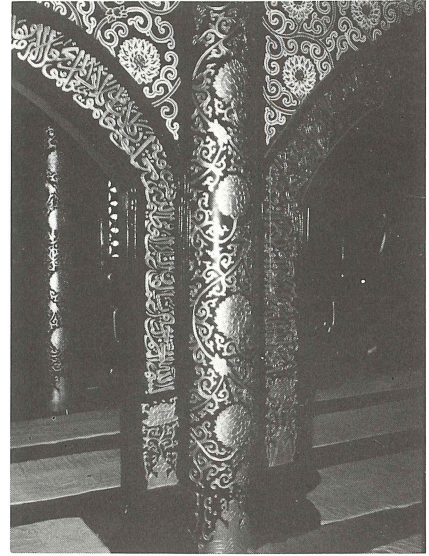
Layout plan (drawn by Zhang Jing-qiu).

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Observation tower | 6. Office and library |
| 2. Keeper's quarters | 7. Minaret |
| 3. Quarters | 8. Main courtyard |
| 4. Prayer hall | 9. Graveyard |
| 5. School rooms | 10. Imam's quarters |



The Niu Jie (Ox Street) mosque is the oldest and largest mosque in Beijing. It was first built during the Northern Song Dynasty in 962 A.D. and subsequently extended and reconstructed. The entrance to the mosque is from the West, through a long walkway into a central court. The prayer hall has its entrance from this courtyard so that those praying can face Mecca.

In 1978 the mosque was renovated, and the rich Chinese red and gold colours gleam with a shiny newness. A small patch of the original finish which remains in the mihrab area reveals that the original mix of colours was far more subtle than its present appearance. It is used by about four hundred Muslims for the Friday prayers.

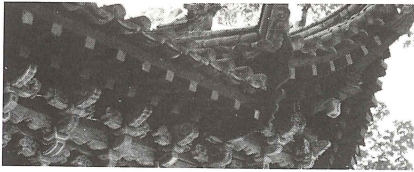


Above: Multi-foiled wood columns, supporting Central-Asian design arches, form the structure of the prayer hall. Arabic calligraphy and designs are used on beams, columns and ceilings as painting in relief with gold accents — a Chinese tradition. Photograph: C. Little.

Left, above: The roof of the main prayer hall is capped with a dome which lets in light. Photograph: C. Little.

Left: Typical roof edging detail. Photograph: C. Little.

Below: At the centre of the courtyard is the Chinese pagoda minaret. The call to prayer is still made by the muezzin who climbs to the top. To the left is the prayer hall and to the rear is the library and office. Photograph: H. U. Khan.



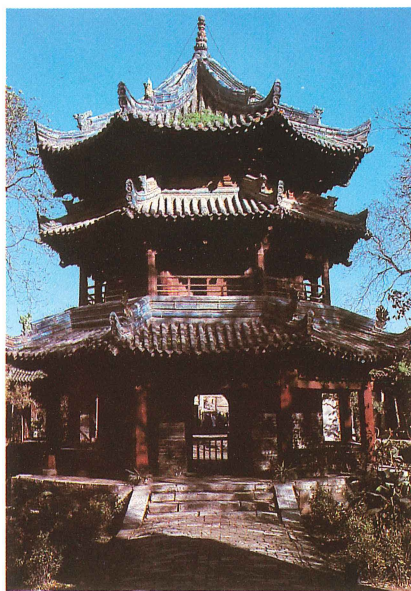
The Great Mosque is situated at Hua Jue Jiang near the Drum Tower in the city of Xi'an (population two million). It lies in a district chiefly populated by Hui Muslims and serves not only as their religious centre, but also as a centre for their political, cultural, educational and social activities. It is the largest of fourteen mosques said to be still in use in Xi'an. Architecturally it is one of the most important Muslim buildings in all of China.

The original mosque on this site (named Qing Xiu Shi) was founded in 742AD, under the Tang dynasty, probably at the instigation of foreign Muslim mercenaries taken on by the Han. The present buildings date from 1392 (in the early Ming) and through 1522. The mosque was restored and added to in 1606 (Wan Li) and 1764-8 (Ching dynasty).

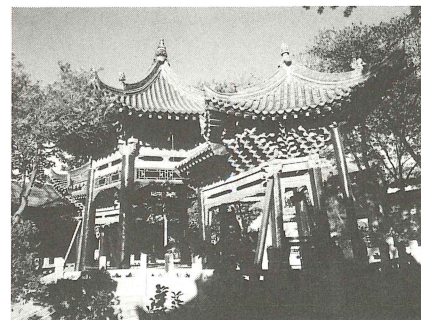
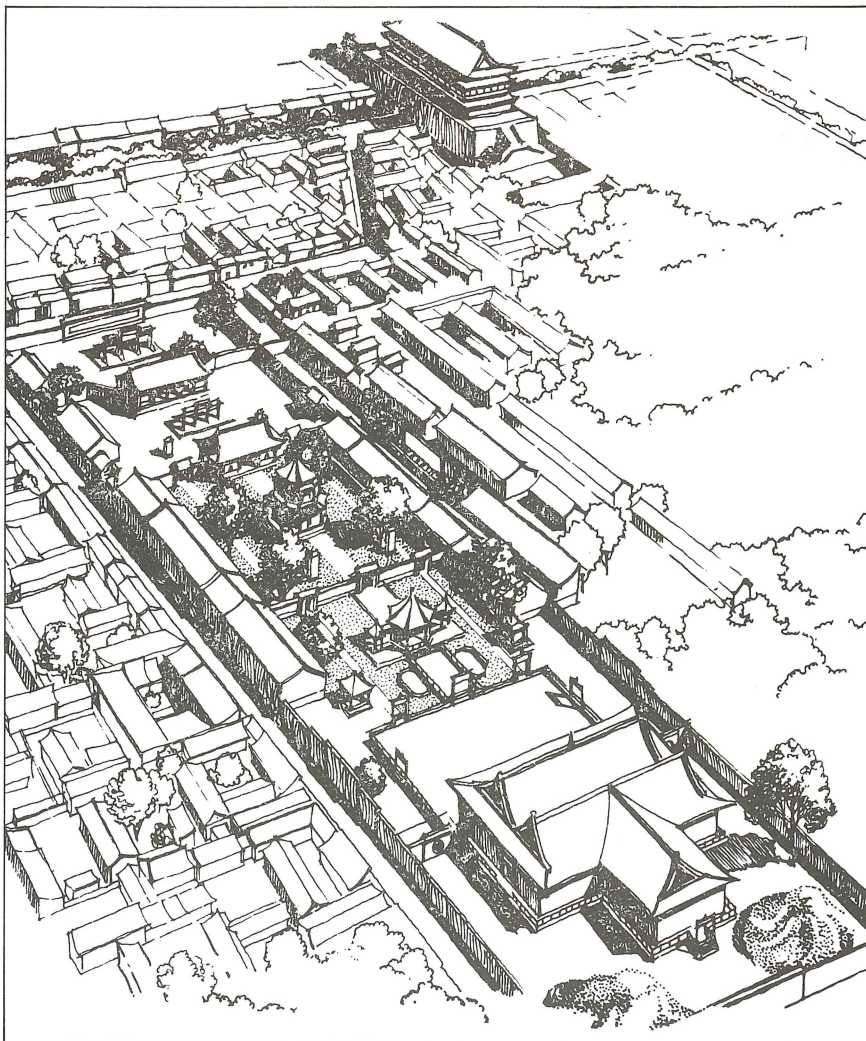
The mosque is built on a main central axis running east to west which is 245.68 metres long and is 47.56 metres wide along its north-south aspect. It is the largest recorded central axis of any Chinese Mosque.

The complex is planned around five main courtyards, covering an area of 12,000 square metres with a built-up area of 4,000 square metres.

Hua Jue Jiang Great Mosque Xi'an



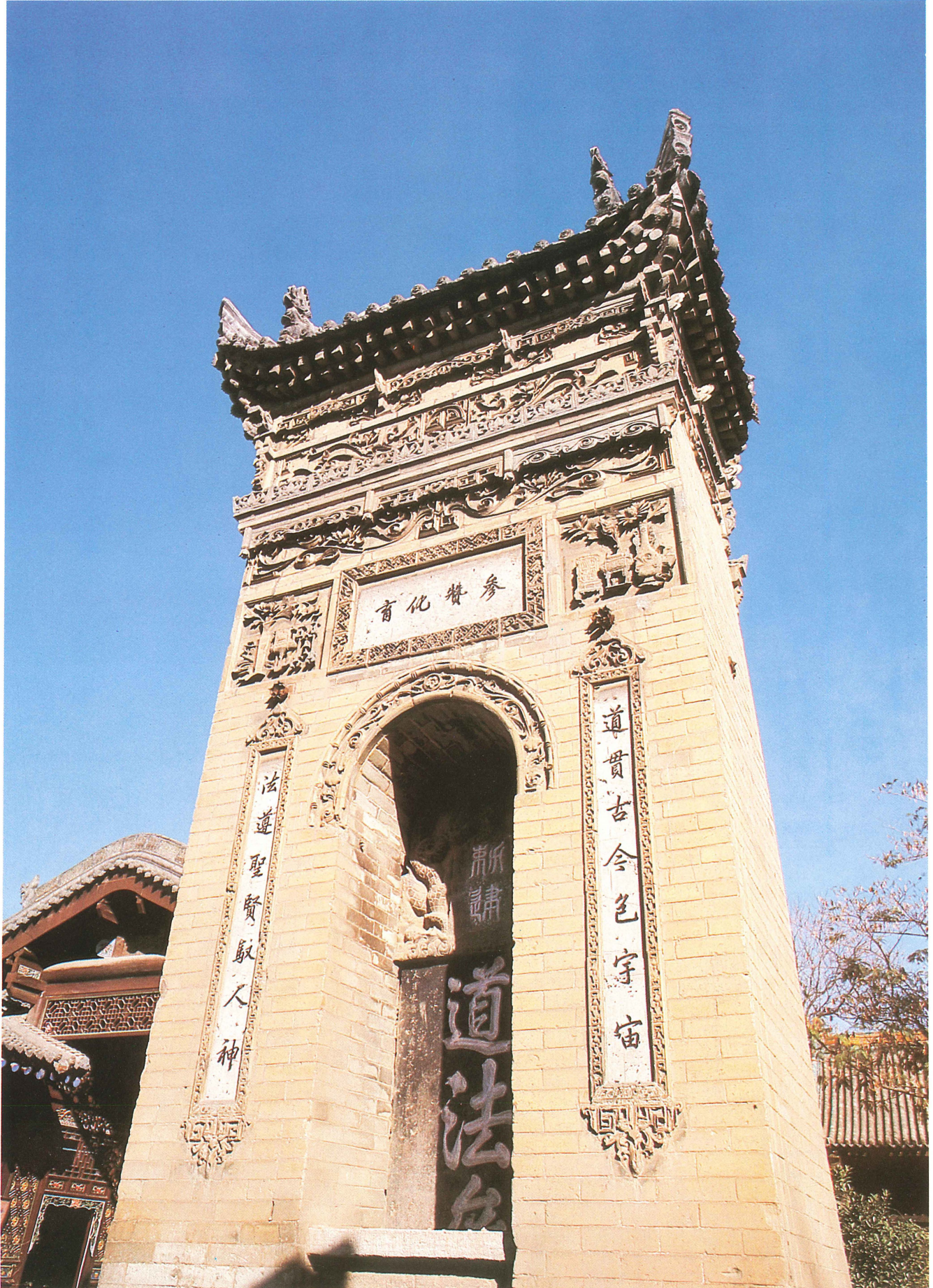
The first courtyard is the entrance forecourt with its main entrance on the north wall, the memorial archway, and rooms where a few visitors may spend a night or two. The space south of the second courtyard was originally designated as the Hui cemetery but was never used for that purpose. This courtyard was used as a reception room (now as a shop) and as the ablution room. There are a number of interesting gateways and stone archways which lead to the third court. The third court, known as Qing Xiu Dian (Place of Meditation), is a gathering or meeting area for the community. It measures 45 metres along its east-west axis and 32.2 metres north to south. It houses the minaret (Sheng Xin Lou), and other archways. The library in the north annex contains manuscripts in Arabic written in China. At least 30 books date from the Qing dynasty. There are also a number of stone tablets of Arab and Persian origin. In the court's south annex there are a number of visitors' rooms, furnished with some marvellous traditional Chinese screens, vases and furniture. There is also an unexpected narrow 5 metre wide landscaped court which is more Buddhist in character than anything else.

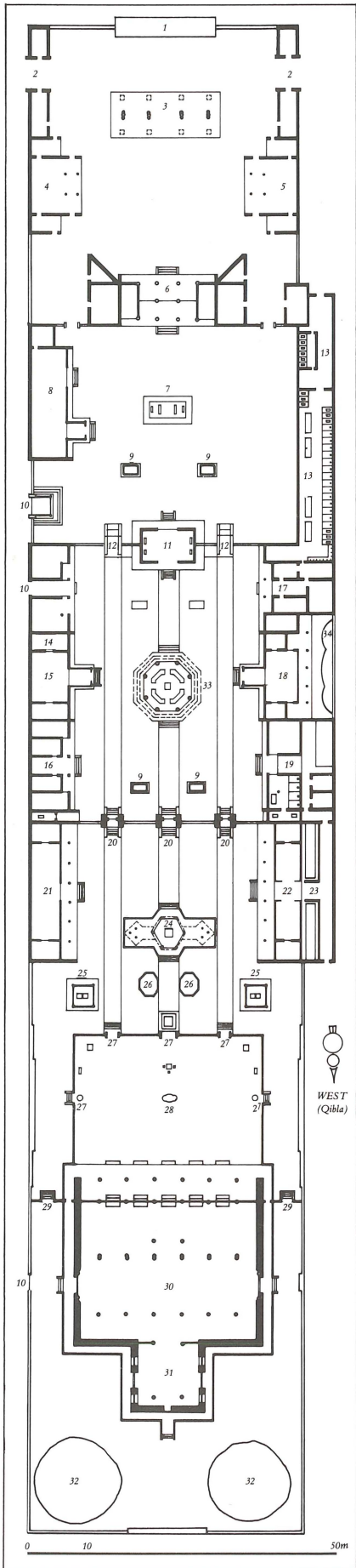


Above: The wooden memorial archway in the first court has recently been restored. Photograph: C. Little.
Top: The minaret (Sheng Xin Lou) is in the third courtyard. This three-storey pagoda 10.13 metres high is the tallest building in the mosque. It has an octagonal plan, a moveable staircase and three terraces with octagonal roofs covered with glazed tiles. Photograph: C. Little.

Left: Birds-eye view of the mosque located in the city, near the Drum Tower, surrounded by houses mainly inhabited by the Hui Muslims. (Drawing courtesy of The Architectural Journal of China).

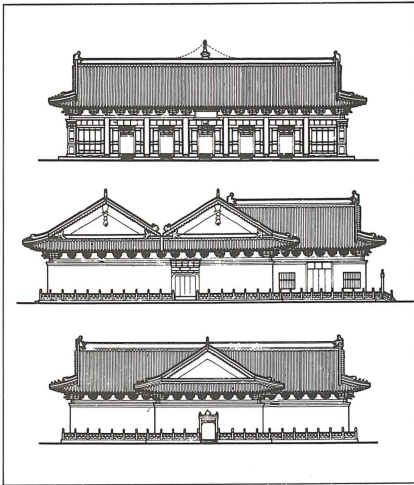
Right: One of four stone archways, located in the second and third courts. Photograph: C. Little.





Right: Front elevations of prayer hall.

- Left: Plan
- | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Wall of mirrors | 19. Visitors' washroom |
| 2. Main entrance | 20. Four-bay entrance gates |
| 3. Memorial archway | 21. North Hall |
| 4. Visitors' room | 22. South Hall |
| 5. VIP room | 23. Tablet gallery |
| 6. Two-arched gateway | 24. Phoenix pavilion |
| 7. Stone gateway | 25. Pavilion |
| 8. Reception | 26. Pond |
| 9. Stone-archways | 27. Stone gateways |
| 10. Entrances | 28. Platform |
| 11. Three-arched gateway | 29. Moongate |
| 12. Floral gates | 30. Prayer hall |
| 13. Ablution rooms | 31. Mihrab |
| 14. Imam's room | 32. Moon observation hills |
| 15. Library | 33. Sheng Xin Lou |
| 16. Restrooms | 34. Minaret |
| 17. Washrooms | 34. Landscaped court |
| 18. Visitors' lounge | |



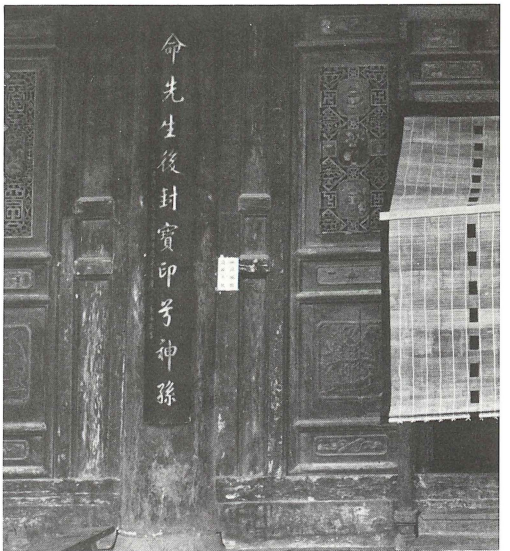
Top: The prayer hall (masjid) has a covered area of 1,278 square metres. The seven-bay facade is 33 metres long and 27.6 metres deep. The hall accommodates over a thousand people for prayer.

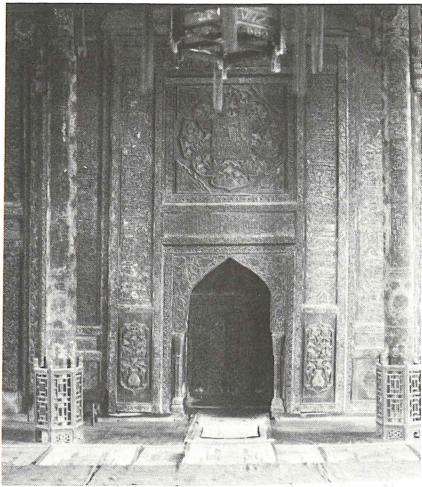
The double-interlocking roof is supported by a system of diminishing beams and has become stylistically associated with Hui prayer halls. The height of the roof is proportional to the depth of the building (the deeper the structure the higher the roof). Photograph: C. Little.

Above, right: There are five entrance doors off the front facade and four other side entrances. The hall height is 6 metres. Photograph: H.U. Khan.

Right: The mihrab wall has been preserved from the Ming era is a superb artistic achievement. It is dimly lit by two skylights on either side giving it a profoundly religious aura. The mihrab itself is 1.2 metres wide X 1.9 metres high X 0.83 metres deep. The wall of concentric wood carved and painted motifs, is Central Asian in colour, though the chrysanthemum, lilies and peony floral patterns give the design a Chinese flavour.

The coffered ceiling has 600 painted panels, each different and quite beautiful. Photograph: C. Little.

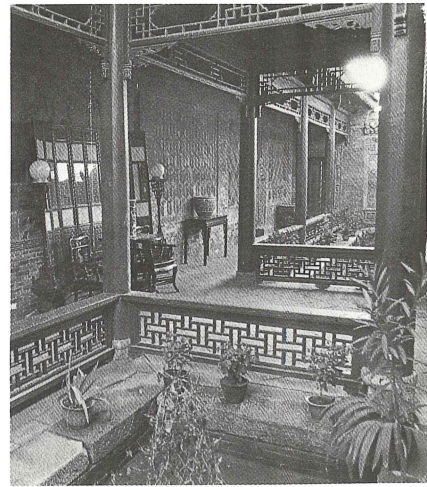




Above: The Phoenix Pavilion (the Feng Hua Ting) is a garden pavilion, 17.5 metres in front of the three-arched gateway to the fourth court. This Qing dynasty structure of an hexagonal pavilion, flanked on each side by two smaller, lower triangular pavilions. Photograph: C. Little.

Right: The 'tablet gallery' in the south hall of the fourth court. Several tablets in Chinese tell the history of Islam in the region. Photograph: C. Little.

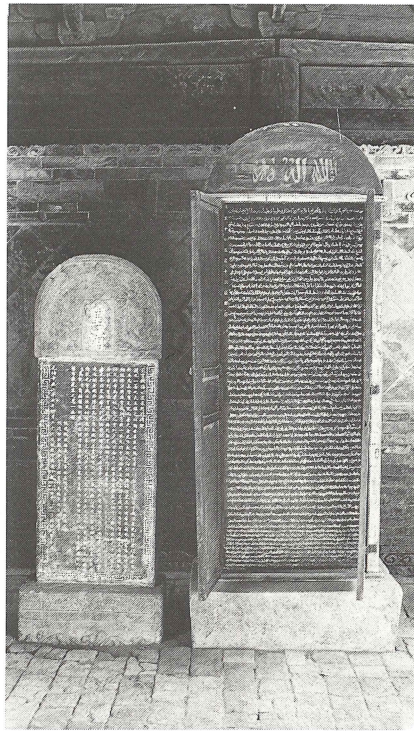
Below: The furniture, screen and vase date from different periods. Photograph: C. Little.



The fourth is the mosque's main courtyard which houses the sanctuary or prayer hall. In it is the Phoenix pavilion, which is the central landscaping element, surrounded by shrubs and ponds with rock fountains. There are two halls, one to the north and the other to the south of the court. In the south hall there is the famous 'tablet gallery' in which carved stone tablets record the mosque's history in Chinese. The prayer hall is approached in a very traditional Muslim manner by a large raised platform, which also acts as 'spillover space' during Eid prayers. It has a narrow open-to-sky space of 2.2 metres wide decorated with sculptured ceramic tiles.

At the western end of the mosque, beyond the prayer hall and entered through the moon gates, is the fifth court which has two miniature hillocks which act as platforms for observing the appearance of the new moon in accordance with Islam. These hillocks, consisting of rocks and spiralling ramps, divert the visitors' attention to the highest points to signify the termination of the series of spaces and leave a memorable visual experience.

Every courtyard is arranged as an inde-

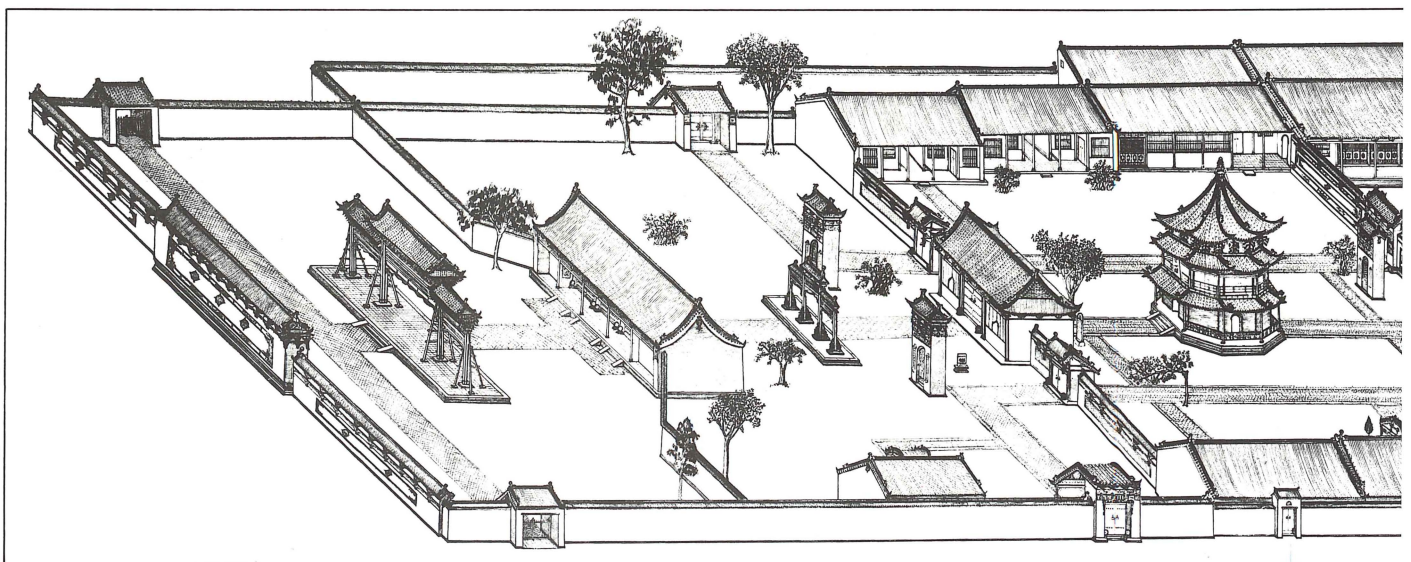
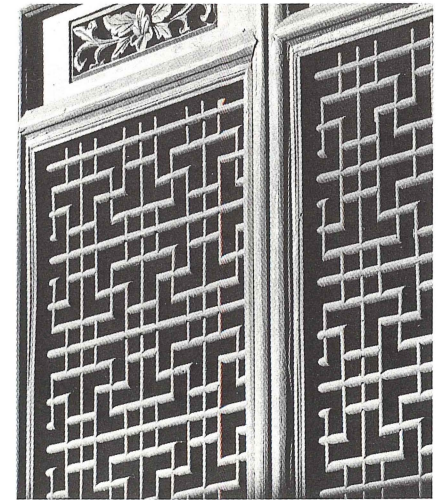
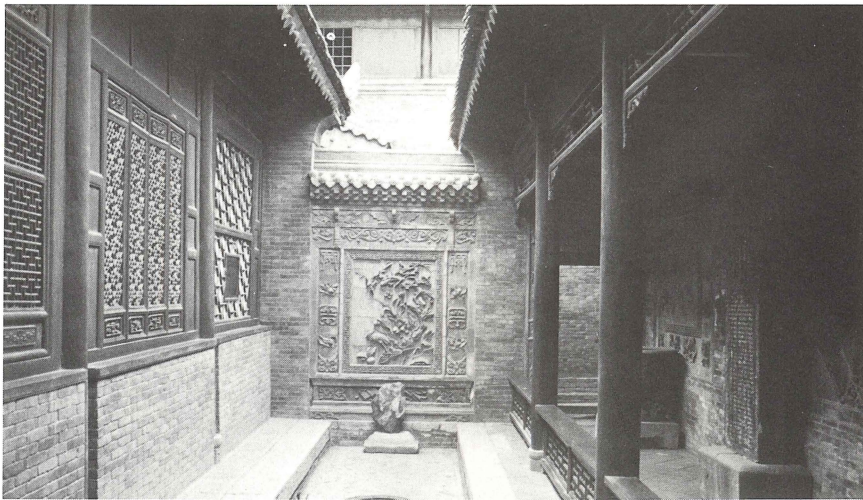


pendent and highly ornamental space. The transitions from one court to another are differently treated, consciously creating a hierarchy of spaces. The changes along the central axis provide a build-up to the eventual unfolding of the three-dimensional experiences of the prayer hall, not unlike reaching a climax in a musical movement.

The growth of the mosque is well recorded. The Ming dynasty archives recorded this evolution in terms of its size, height and the change from an asymmetrical composition to a balanced symmetry.

The ornamentations are exemplary samples of the blending of Islamic and Chinese decorative ideas. The key lies in the choice of basic colours for the different structures, the geometric, arabesque and calligraphic motifs. The colour scheme has been used consistently along the main axis; the sky-blue roof tiles and murals reflect this harmonic choice.

The Hua Jue Jiang Great Mosque is a mix of Central Asian and Han architectures assimilating successfully traditional Chinese architecture and foreign exposure. It is truly an architectural masterpiece.





Above: Screens divide the tablet gallery into three manuscript rooms. Photograph: H.U. Khan.

Right: The narrow rock garden behind the visitors' lounge. Photograph: H.U. Khan.



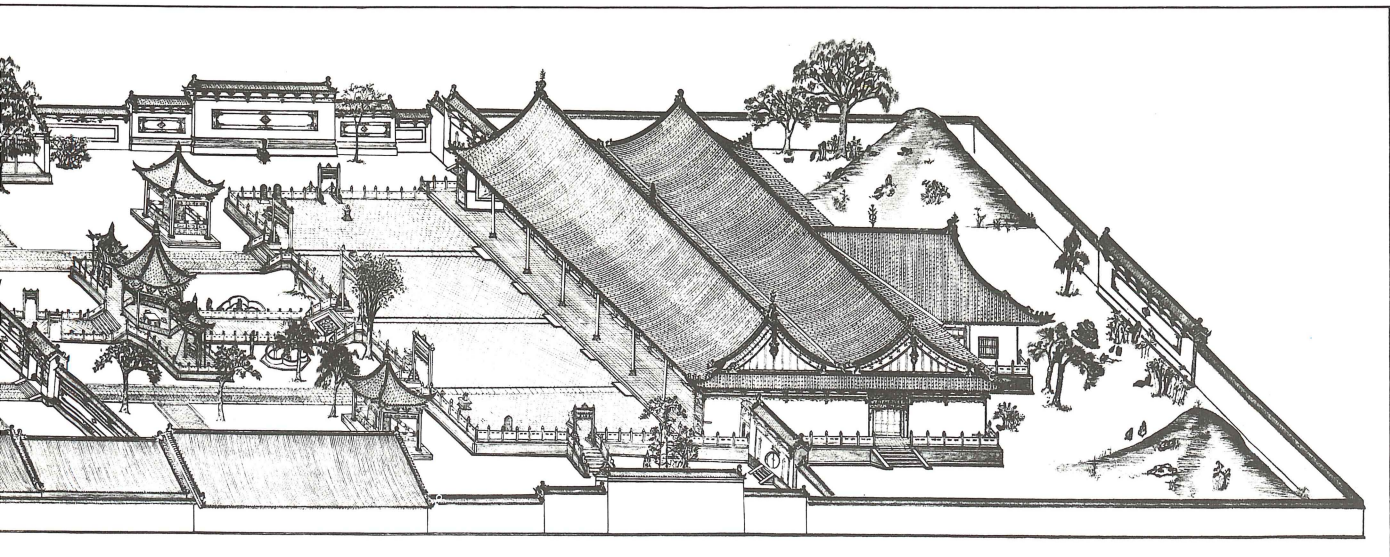
Left, above: Stone tablets in Chinese and Arabic record the history of the mosque and Hui Muslims. Photograph: C. Little.

Extreme left: The stone carved end walls of the 'tablet gallery' and the long pool (no longer filled with water) divides the gallery into two. To the left are the manuscript rooms and the open gallery on the right contains the tablets. Photograph: H.U. Khan.

Left: Typically Chinese wooden screens are used for windows and doors. Photograph: C. Little.

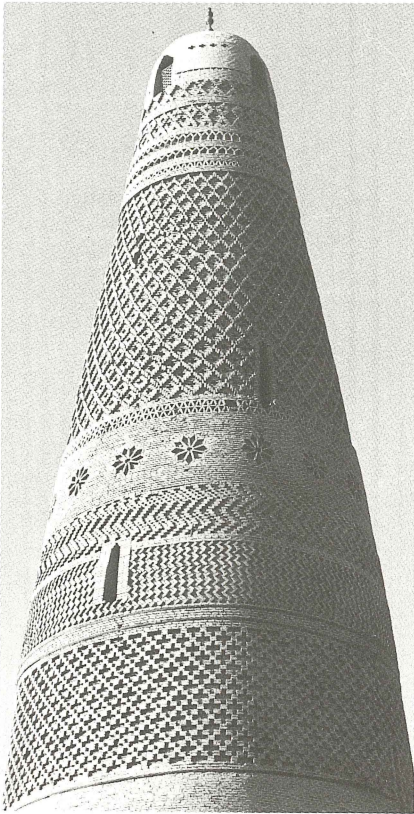
Below: Drawing of the mosque from the archives of the mosque. (Drawing courtesy of the Imam of the Great Mosque).

Overleaf: The 'moongate doorway' leads into the fifth court. Two identical exquisite doorways, in low partitions lead to the hillocks to the west of the site. Photograph: C. Little.





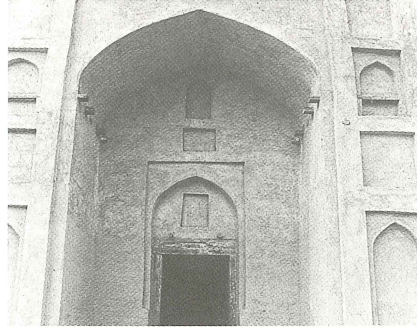
Amin Mosque Turfan



Above: The minaret of decorated brick. Photograph: P. Clement.

Above, right: The entrance to the mosque follows the classic Central Asian pattern. Photograph: C. Little. Extreme right, from top to bottom: The prayer hall with open skylight; interior of the main dome; the flat-roof is a timber-framed structure. Photographs: C. Little (top and centre) and P. Clement.

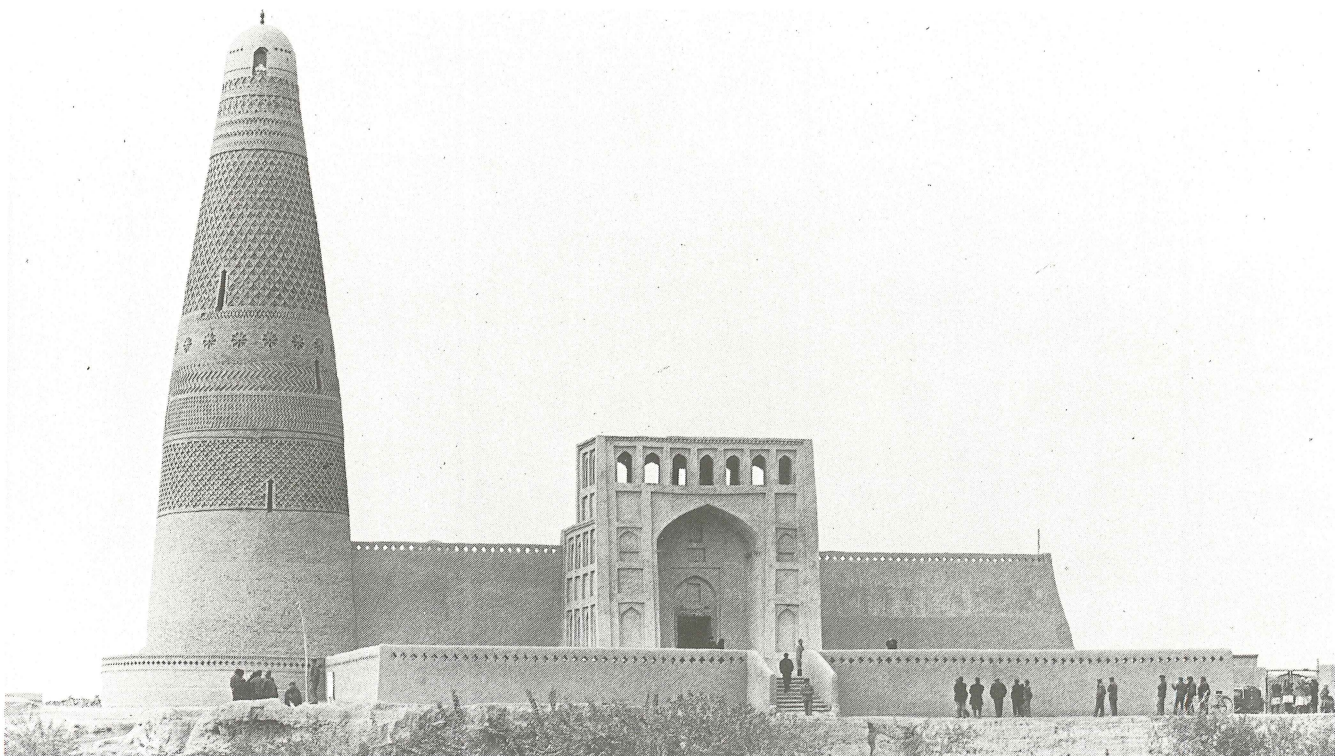
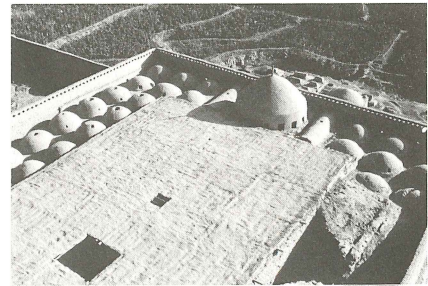
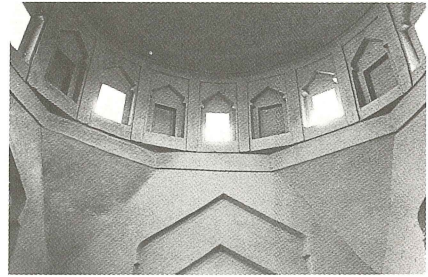
Below: Entrance view. Photograph: C. Little.



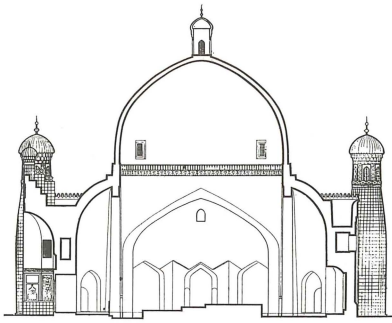
The Amin Mosque, two kilometres east of Turfan, was built in 1778. It is famous for its 44 metre tall minaret.

During the reign of the emperors Yong Zheng and Qian Long, Amin Khoja, the Uygur hereditary head Imam of Turfan, contributed to the unification of China by quelling a major rebellion in the area. He was rewarded with several titles. In his commitment to the region and piety to Islam, he started to build the mosque. He died in 1777, and the work was completed a year later by his son Sulaiman.

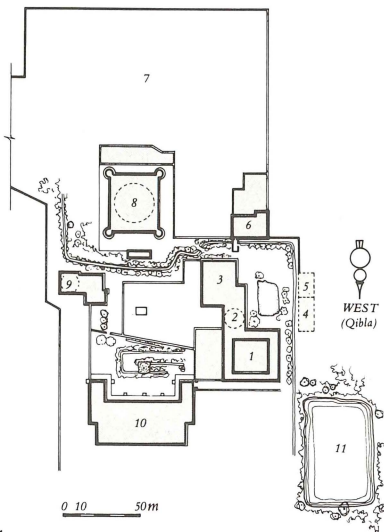
The mosque is in mud-brick and was whitewashed throughout its interior. There are no traces of any exterior decorations, though there probably were some in the niches and panels on the walls. The striking minaret is in a patterned load-bearing brick. A spiral staircase which leads to the top commands an overall view of the town.



Aba Khoja Mosque & Mausoleum Kashi

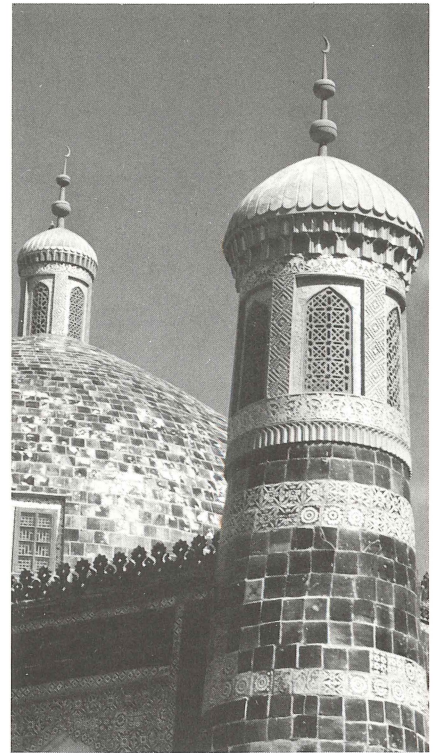
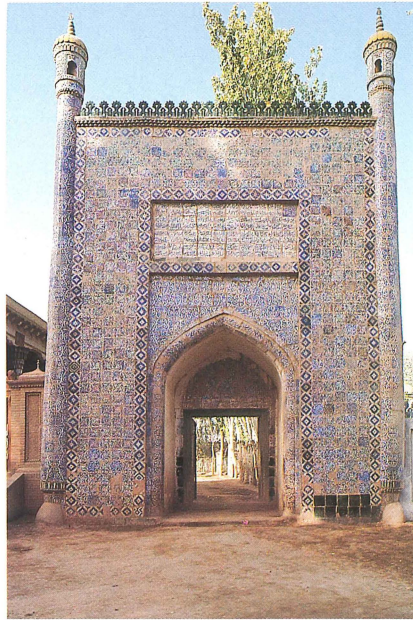


Section, mausoleum.



Plan

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Madrasah | 7. Graveyard (City of the dead) |
| 2. Lower prayer hall | 8. Mausoleum |
| 3. Upper prayer hall | 9. Green domed mosque |
| 4. Bath | 10. Main mosque |
| 5. Canteen | 11. Pond |
| 6. Living quarters | |



The Aba Khoja Complex is a large architectural ensemble consisting of a mausoleum, a large mosque and three other places for prayer, a lecture hall and madrasah (religious school) and an adjacent graveyard, known as 'the city of the dead'.

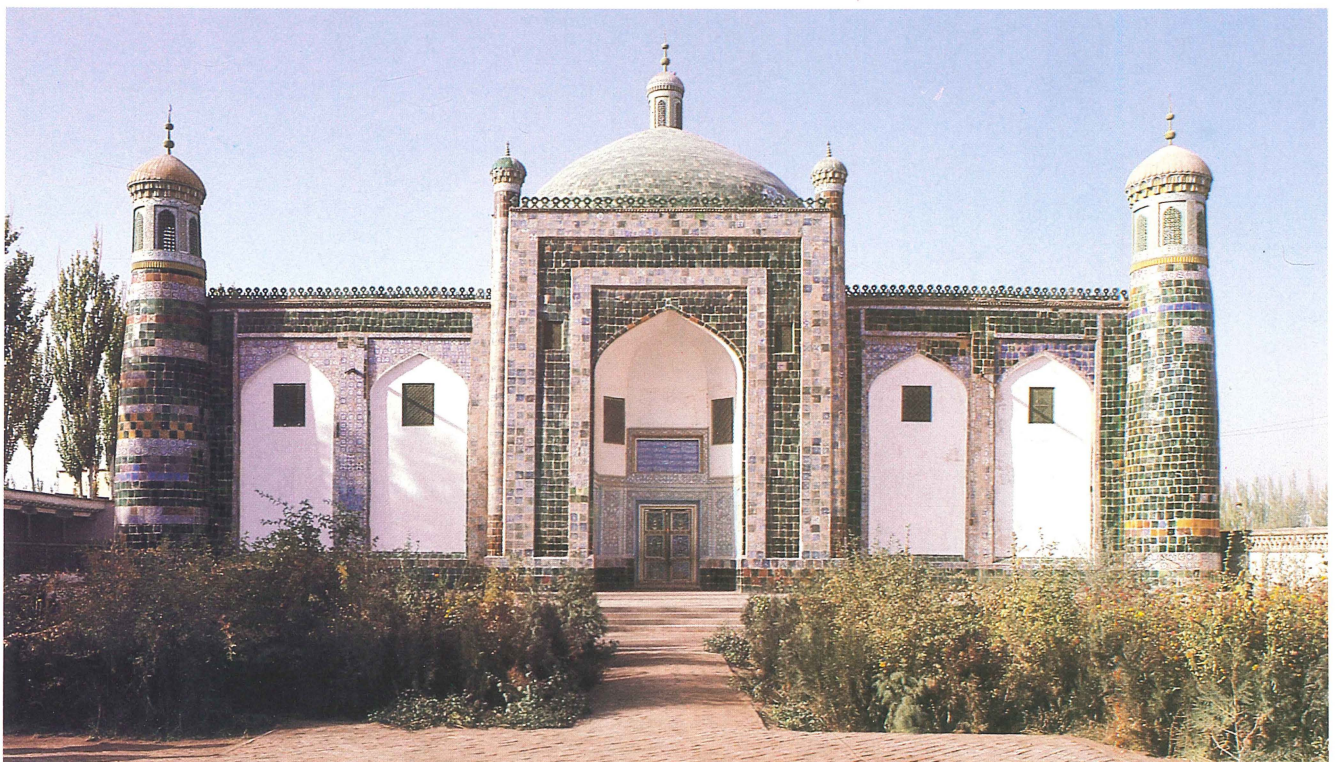
Construction commenced in the early 18th century, with later extensions made in groups.

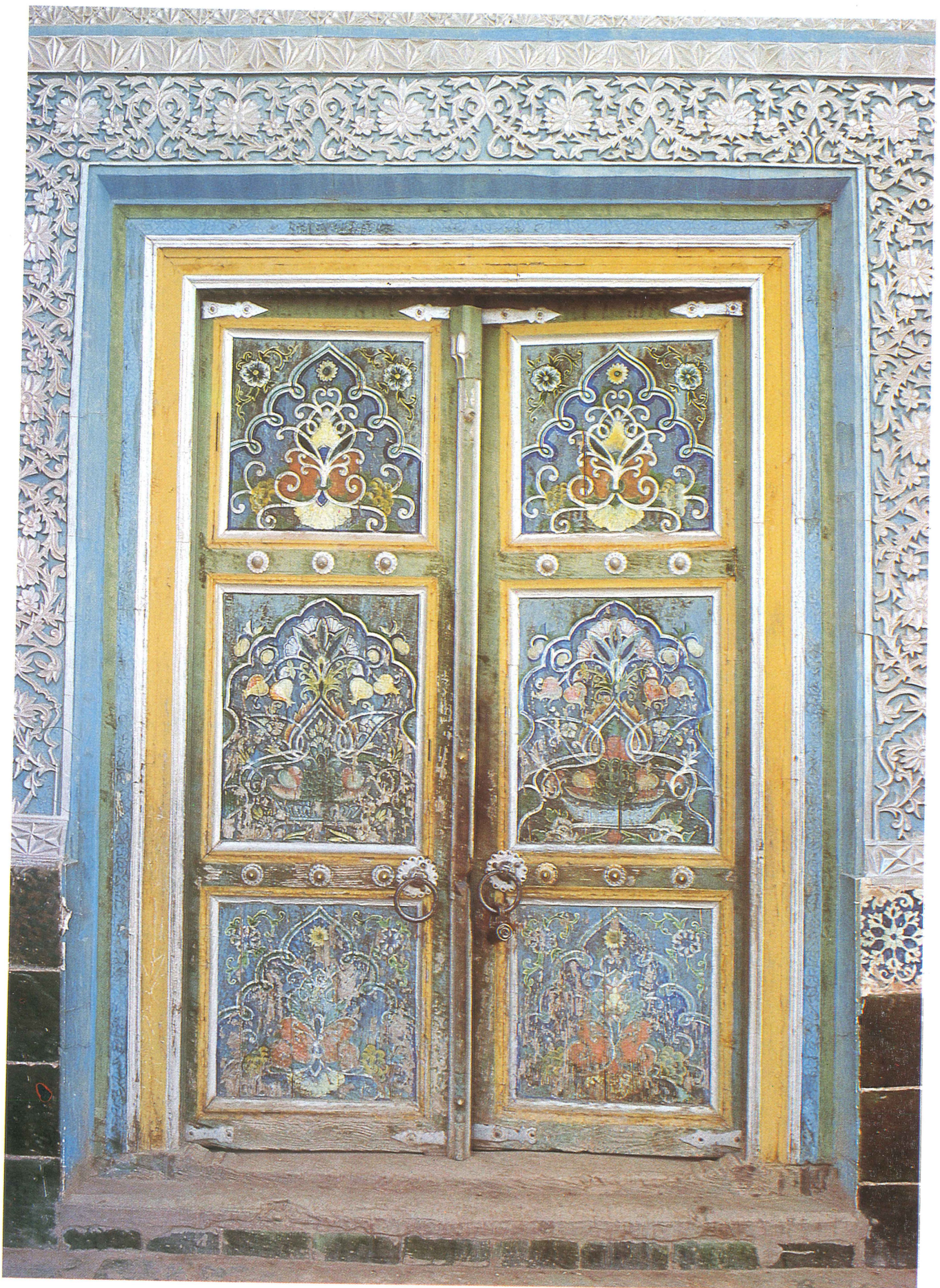
Above: The dome and minaret. The tiles on the minaret, as all over the mausoleum, have been replaced at various intervals and do not match, creating a rather lively effect. Photograph: J. Oubo.

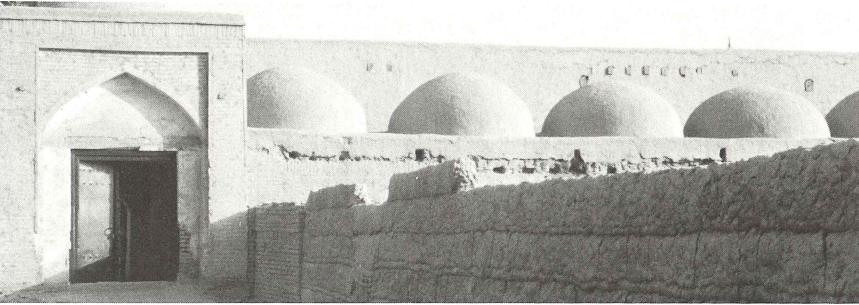
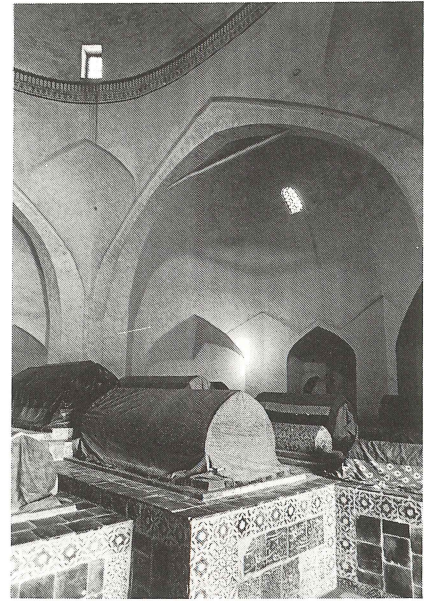
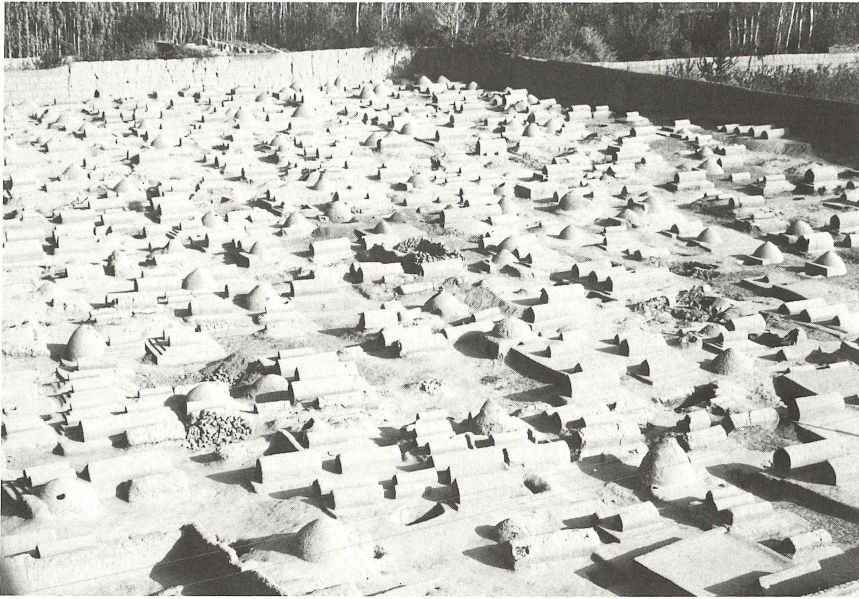
Above, left: The arched gateway to the complex has a light airy feel with its light blue and white tiles. Photograph: C. Little.

Right: The doors to the mausoleum are beautifully painted but the paint is peeling. Photograph: H.U. Khan.

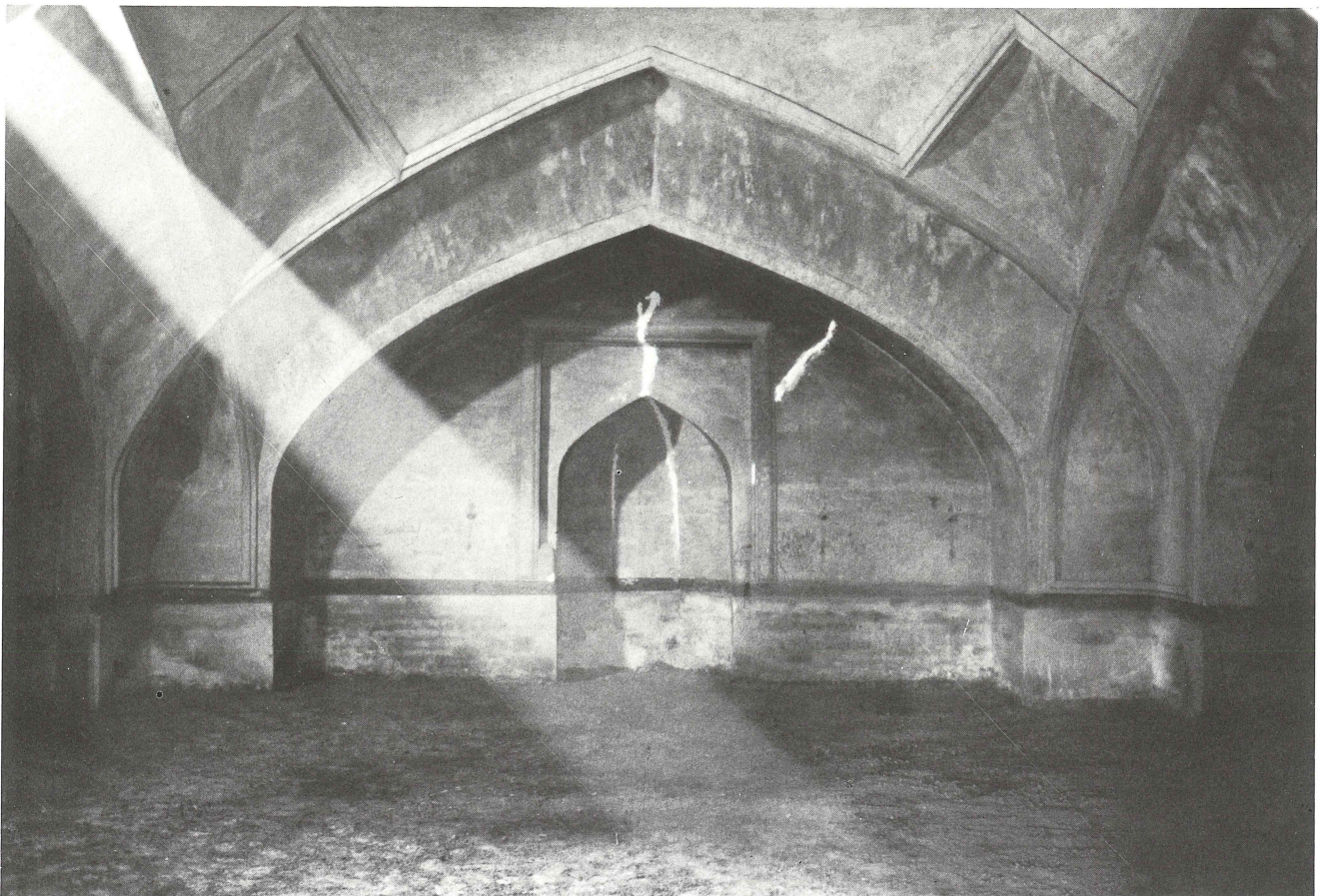
Below: The mausoleum seen from the front. Photograph: C. Little.





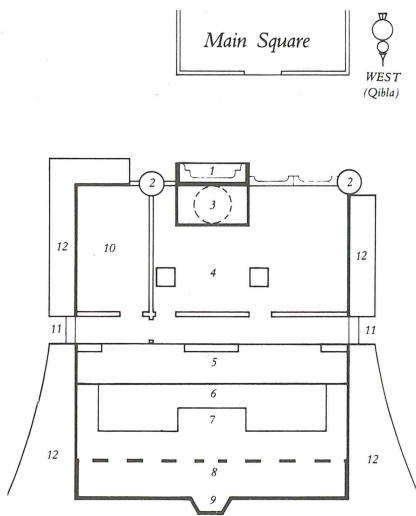


Above: The tombs are still well tended and covered in brightly covered cloths. Photograph: C. Little.
 Above, left: The 'city of the dead' — the Muslim graveyard adjacent to the mausoleum has not been used in recent times. Photograph: H. U. Khan.
 Left: The side entrance leads directly from the street into the mosque courtyard. Photograph: H. U. Khan.
 Below: The interior of the mausoleum is lit by shafts of light from windows above a mezzanine level. Photograph: C. Little.
 Right: A section of the prayer hall has been restored. Parts of the hall are in very bad shape. Photograph: J. Oubo.



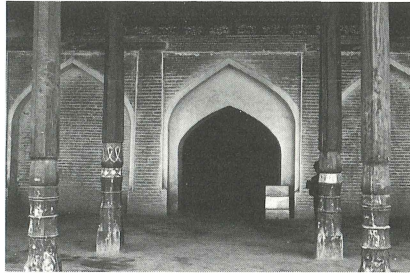
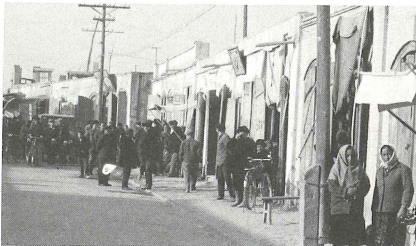


Aitika Mosque Kashi



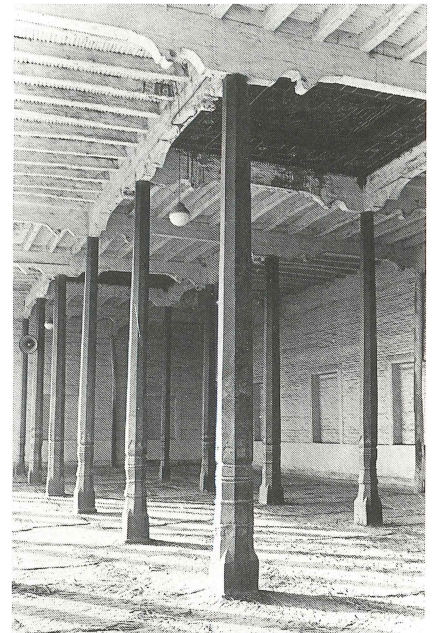
Schematic layout

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Gateway | 7. Prayer area |
| 2. Minaret | 8. Inside prayer hall |
| 3. Ablution hall | 9. Mihrab |
| 4. Courtyard | 10. Imam's quarters |
| 5. Raised platform | 11. Side entrance |
| 6. Colonnade | 12. Shops |



Kashi has been the crossroads of the Silk Route into China and the entry point for Muslims from the West. The Aitika Mosque, built in the 17th century, is the centre of the town. It is located at one end of a large square and is surrounded by shops and houses. As with many urban Asian mosques, the building is enclosed by shops, the rent from which pays for the maintenance of the mosque.

The prayer hall faces the courtyard. The area is divided into two sections, one covered but open on the side, and the other enclosed for use during the cold winters. The structure is of timber with the exception of the gateway and the mihrab wall which are of brick. The roof is flat, with joists forming a pattern. Parts of the ceiling are decorated, but on the whole the wood has been painted white.



Above: The masjid is 38 bays long and 8 bays deep and has an open colonnade in front.

Left, above: View of the prayer hall (masjid) from the open prayer area looking at the interior prayer hall.

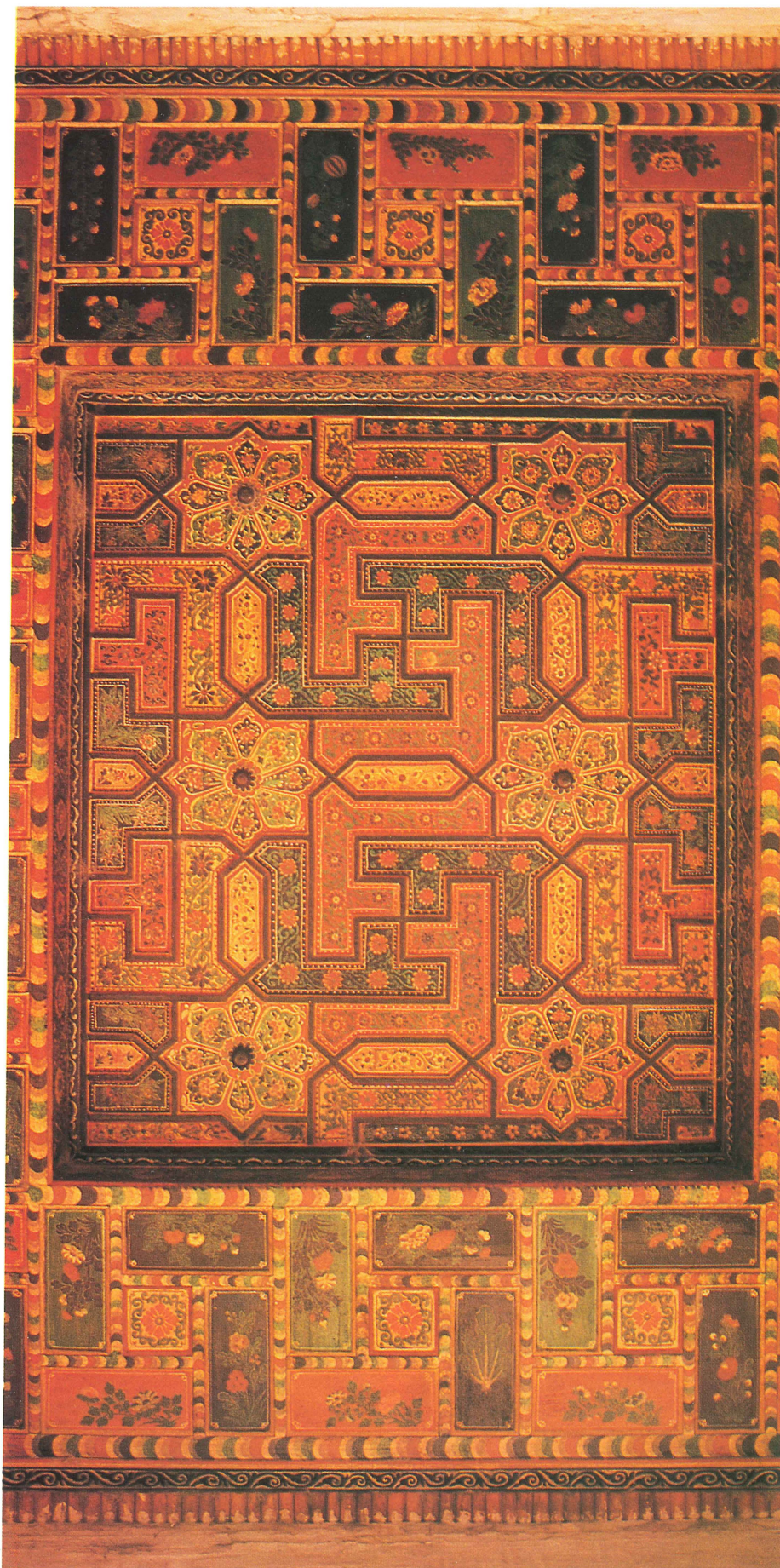
Left: Small, individually owned shops enclose the mosque on three sides.

Below: The entrance to the mosque is from the town's main square. The two minarets are unusually asymmetrically positioned.

Right: The square bays having traditional Islamic patterns are painted in bright colours. The one shown here has been recently repainted.

Photographs: C. Little, H.U. Khan.





Anatomy of a Mosque

Mosque or Masjid: Literally “the place of prostration”, in which Muslims perform their prayers.

Minaret: The turret or high point from which the muezzin calls people to prayer.

Minbar: A raised structure in a mosque from which the *khutbah* (Friday sermon) is recited. It is sometimes a movable wooden structure and is located to the right of the *mihrab*.

Mihrab: A niche in the centre of a mosque wall that marks the direction in which Mecca lies. The *Imam* (leader of the prayer) positions himself before the *mihrab* during prayer.

Qibla: The direction toward the *ka'ba* in Mecca in which all Muslims pray.

Wudu: The ablution made before saying prayers. The purpose of *wudu* is to remove impurity.