

Original Research Article

## Critical and Supplementary Review and Investigation of the «Karat Minaret» Inscription in Bakharz (Taybad) and the Dating of the Building

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** «Karat Minaret (Mil-e Karat)», located in Karat village of Taybad City in Razavi Khorasan Province of Iran, is one of the old buildings in good condition. The studies that have dealt with the Karat Minaret have not read the inscription of this minaret completely, and in some of them, the text of the inscription and the date of the building are different from each other. Iran's cultural heritage organization registered this work as number 123 and considers it to belong to the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.H. To resolve the differences and ambiguities in the text of the inscription and the dating of the building, the present research tries to answer the following question: «What is the text of the inscription of this minaret and the date of its construction?»

**Research Method:** The current research was conducted using a qualitative method. In this research, the data about the Karat Minaret was presented through field studies at the minaret site and comparative analyses with minarets built in the period of 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century A.H. in the Khorasan geographical area and through referring to additional sources. Also, the review of the achievements of the researchers in this field has been collected in the form of library documents and presented descriptively and analytically.

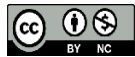
**Findings:** By reading and reconstructing the remaining parts of the inscription of this building by digital method and matching its content with historical sources, this research found out that the Karat Minaret is independent and belongs to the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H., probably the period of Ghaznavid rule in Iran. The minaret was built by order of "Sheikh Abu Bakr" during the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H., on the road from Khaf to Bakharz, on top of a hill near Karat village. Based on reading the inscription and discovering the construction date, the Karat Minaret is the oldest historical minaret in Iran.

**Conclusion:** Considering the dominance of this minaret on the surrounding environment, it seems that its use was strategic; in addition to the collection of Arsalan Jazeb, there are two works related to the Ghaznavid period that are located in today's Iran.

### Keywords

Inscription, Karat Minaret, Taybad, Architecture, Ghaznavid

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### **Introduction and Problem Definition**

The works left from different eras in Iran have many variations in the type of building and application as well as the type of construction. It can be said that Khorasan has played a positive role in the growth and prosperity of the arts, including architecture. Khorasan has been essential in terms of its geographical location since it is located on commercial and transit highways through which many transportation routes pass that connect the north, south, east, and west, and the communication routes of different cities, including Balkh, Samarkand, Bukhara, Rey, Isfahan, etc., all passed through the Khorasan region. The passage of merchants and travelers has prompted the governments to build caravanserais on their way and, in some cases, minarets (Mil) and other public buildings near them. Among the surviving works in Khorasan, there are many minarets, each showing an identity document of architecture, decoration, technique, and power established at that time and place; «Karat Minaret (Mil-e Karat)» can be among them. The choice of this minaret is essential because the building does not have a precise date of construction, and there are various readings of its inscription. Moreover, there are disagreements on the text of the inscription and the year of its construction. Understanding this issue can help clarify this region's history and the process of changing the minarets of Khorasan. The results are subject to change. In most books, the minaret is equal to the place of fire and light, and more clearly, the place of fire and lighting, to which the words Mezanah and guidance tower are also applied. Apart from the goals that have been considered, the minaret is also built to express the ruling power over the society, and in a way, the splendor of the minaret and any such structure will be a visual display of the ruling power over that land. It is a joint show of the wealth and power of engineering, the elegance of design, and the recognition of beauty in one building to express the general concept of «power». Karat Minaret is one of the oldest minarets in Iran. Due to the importance of this minaret in terms of age, building, inscription design, and decorations, as well as the lack of accurate explorations on this building and the incomplete and sometimes incorrect readings of the inscription, the issue of lack of precise dating has been selected and analyzed. This research aims to reach the names of the possible founders, the time of making this work, and their goals and motivations, reading the inscription, and hiding aspects in its text. Also, the author's effort is to recognize and recover decorative motifs and techniques and the various forms implemented by drawing them. Therefore, the central question of the current research is «What is the text of the inscription of this minaret and the date of its construction?»

### **Research Method**

The approach used in this research is qualitative. The central part of the collection of materials and findings was done using field studies, and investigations carried out at the minaret site. Considering the historical nature of the work in library and documentary studies, using first-hand and recent historical sources for the historical parts has been a priority. In this research, the data about Karat Minaret has been analyzed descriptively and analytically.

### Research Background

Much has been said about the minaret and Mezanah in Islamic art and architecture investigations, but very little about the «Karat Minaret» in particular. «Diez» (1918), an Austrian researcher, in a book entitled «Churasanische baudenkmaler» which he wrote in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, recorded the Karat Minaret and gave some explanations. Diez has investigated a part of the inscription of the building. Also, the authors of the article entitled «Studying Mil, Khorasan minarets, with emphasis on their structural role and the content of their inscriptions» «Faraji and Akbari» (2013) have tried to investigate some ancient minarets of Khorasan, of which Karat Minaret is one of the selected options. This article makes the content of the inscriptions different from what Diez stated, which is mentioned in the text of the article. «Blair» (2015) also discussed this minaret very briefly in the book entitled «The first inscriptions» and presented a part of the text of the building's inscription. She states the year of its construction was around 500 A.H. The readings of these researchers from the text of the Karat Minaret inscription and their achievements are fully presented and analyzed in this research. By studying and examining the accomplishments of previous researchers, the present study compares their findings with field and historical studies. Using modern methods in studying images, with the help of computer reconstructions, it succeeded in reading the minaret's inscription. It found out the date of its construction by referring to the building's inscription.

### Historical Geography of Quhistan

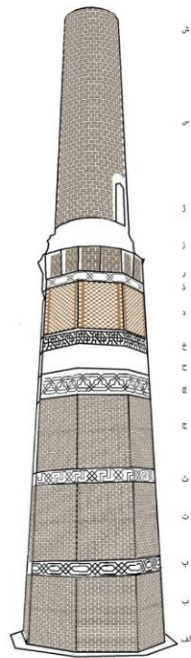
Quhistan itself «is in Khorasan at the border of Fars and Kerman deserts, and there is no city with this name, and this is a district» (Jeyhani, 1989, 170). «Le Strange» considers the Quhistan region to be the same as «Tunocain» and considers the cities of Qaen, Toon, Torshiz, Basht, Zaveh, Buzghan and Zam, Bakharz and Malin, Khaf, Zirkuh, Gonabad, Bejestan, Tabas, etc. to be part of Quhistan region (Le Strange, 1998, 379). Like other parts of Khorasan, this area was conquered by the Arabs around 30 A.H. (Belazari, 1958, 159). Muslims were able to reach Khorasan by conquering Quhistan. They called Quhistan «Bab (door) of Khorasan» (Moghadasi, 2006, 321). Torbat-e-Jam City borders Taybad City from the north, Torbat-e Heydariyeh City from the south and west, and Afghanistan from the east. The city of Taybad (Taibet), the center of this county, is 23 km from the Afghanistan border and 250 km from Mashhad, and its essential part includes the Pain Velayat, Miyan Velayat, and Bala Velayat rural districts. This city was one of the parts of Torbat-e-Jam City until 1976. Karat is a village in the central part of Taybad City in Razavi Khorasan Province. It is located 25 km south of Taybad on the old road from Taybad to Khaf. Bakharz was one of the districts of Taybad City in Razavi Khorasan Province of Iran, which became a city in August 2009; however, in the past, this name has been applied to all areas of Taybad, and Taibet or Taybad has been considered a village of Bakharz in various sources (Khosravi, 2014). Dahaneh and Karat region is located 25 km south of Taybad; a once safe village for travelers and guides who went to Bakharz and Herat from Khaf or from Herat to Neyshabur. There is a minaret on top of a hill near Karat village, a relic of ancient times that brought glory to this village and borrowed its name from it.

## Karat Minaret

From the evidence of the environment, it can be stated that Karat Mil (Figs 1 and 2) was a single minaret that was built on the road from Khaf to Bakharz, and it is very likely that its primary use was monitoring and navigation. «It is not a minaret attached to the mosque, as it is located on a relatively steep hill with no space for expansion» (Diez, 1918, 49). This minaret, of which 25 m remain today, has two main parts in the stem. The first part, which starts from the top of the hill and rises to a height of 15 m, is built in an octagonal shape (on top of this part, there was a Merlon/Ambulatory or a Mezanah, of which only traces remain today). Next, a cylinder with a height of 10 m has been implemented on the lower octagon, which has slightly deviated to the south and west over the years. The minaret has an octagonal plan in its outermost layer. Most of the minarets in Khorasan today are based on a circular base (Firuzabad minaret<sup>1</sup> and Ayaz minaret<sup>2</sup>), and if their plan is not circular, this rotation from polygon to circle is done in the lower parts of the minaret so that it can be called a platform and considered separate from the minaret (like Khosrovjerd minaret<sup>3</sup>). The Karat Minaret is circular in the inner layer, and its central core is also octagonal.



**Fig 1.** Karat Minaret  
Source: Authors.



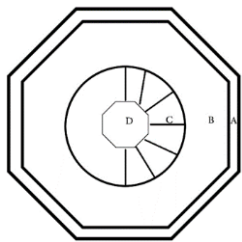
**Fig 2.** The reconstructed plan of Karat minaret  
Source: Authors.



**Fig 3.** Karat Minaret, the west side of the minaret  
Source: Authors.

The core of Karat Minaret is one of the features of this minaret. Among the existing minarets in Khorasan, Karat is the only minaret with an octagonal core. «In Iran itself, perhaps the only octagonal minaret that still plays an important role is the Karat Minaret [or Mill]» (Pope, 2008, 1232). The minaret's core is connected to its round body through stairs that circulate around it and make the building firm. In the minarets of Khosrovjerd and

Firuzabad, a piece of wood is placed on each step and plays the role of a supporting element. However, in the Karat Minaret, such an issue is not considered, and the bricks are entangled in the form of coils and are inserted from the core to the body of the minaret and play the role of supporting the building. At the same time, they also have their primary function, which is access to the heights of the minaret. The whole minaret can be divided into its constituent parts. The first part is the base of the minaret, which forms the supporting bed of the minaret and is not visible to the viewer, and it was implemented inside the ground; because the entrance door of the building is located on the ground and this indicates the retrofit of the hill bed for the construction of the minaret. Nowadays, the guardians of Iran's cultural heritage have improved a bed about 40 cm around the minaret and provided a frontage (Fig 3). The second part can be considered as the octagonal stem of the minaret. This part of the minaret is the most important because all the decorations of the building and the inscription of the construction order have been executed on it. On the other hand, with a height of 15 m, it has taken the most significant part of the minaret. This part of the building, each side of which is about 2 m, has a simple and multi-part structure. The walls move upwards with simple brickwork, and the decorative brickwork strips surround the minaret like a ring (Fig 3). The thickness of the wall of the minaret in its thickest part is about 135 cm, which decreases as it moves upwards. The wall thickness in the parts under the Merlon is about 90 cm, and in the highest part of the building (the end of the minaret cylinder), it reaches 40 cm. It is worth mentioning that the diameter of the outer wall of the building in the heights could have been smaller than this, which unfortunately has been lost today. Like most Iranian minarets, the stairs rotate around the central axis in this minaret and move upwards. The stairs of this minaret have a passage of about 85 cm in its lowest part (the distance between the inner wall and the central core). The entire minaret building is built with 25×25 cm bricks with a thickness of 4 cm. Every four bricks form a step. At the same time, if we consider each step a triangle, the larger side is the opening of the step, which is about 115 cm, including the central core. This size reaches 86 cm in the middle height of the minaret and is about 60 cm at the end (Fig 4). The height of the stairs with minor differences in the entire minaret is about 30 cm. The dimensions of the stairs in the lowest part are 35-110-115 cm (Fig 5).



**Fig 4.** Plan of Karat Minaret. Source: Authors.



**Fig 5.** Stair plan of Karat Minaret, the west side of the minaret. Source: Authors.

**1. Core:** The core of the Karat Minaret is different in the lower and upper parts. In the initial part of the building, which supports the minaret up to a height of 15 m, it has a regular octagonal structure and is like the outer wall of the minaret. Each side is about 60 cm, which consists of 3 bricks.

In this minaret, no supporting elements are used to connect the core and the body of the minaret. Only clay and mortar, plaster, lime, and sand have been used. For the stability of the building, the bricks are tied together in coils. The lower rows carry the load of the upper rows. The bricks of the stairs are part of the core and body of the minaret (Fig 6). This type of arrangement of bricks continues until the end of the lower part of the minaret - up to the Merlon. After constructing the Merlon and a platform like it, at a height of 15 m above the ground, the minaret takes a cylindrical structure and is executed as simple brickwork. The core of the minaret is executed very delicately in this part. This part of the minaret does not have an independent core and is practically devoid of a core. The building's support is done with the stairs. In this part, the first bricks of the stairs are placed on top of each other circularly and create a node (so that two squares are placed on top of each other and together create the role of a Shamsa). In this way, they have made a core in the center of the minaret, on which the stairs and the body rest, and all the components depend on each other.



**Fig 6.** The core of the second part of Karat Minaret. Source: Authors.



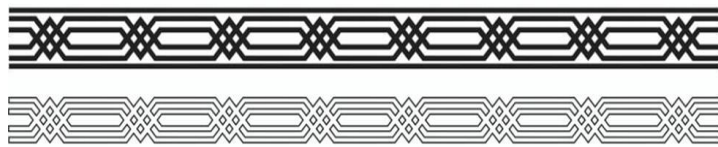
**Fig 7.** Merlon, Karat Minaret. Source: Authors.

**2. Merlon or Mezaneh:** Wood was not used in the construction of the body, core, and steps of the Karat Minaret (at least in the remaining parts of this minaret), and only in the Merlon part of this minaret include traces of wood used. A ridge was created on each side of the octagon to build this part of the minaret using projected bricks. For this purpose, the bricks were placed on top of each other, and this process was repeated in 17 rows. After these 17 rows, the brick ridge is about 30 cm wider than the minaret. The wood holding the Merlon (Mezaneh) inside the minaret is implemented on these ridges. About 20 cm thick sticks can be seen inside the minaret. In other words, these sticks were worked about 90 cm inside the wall of the minaret, and about 30 cm were placed on the Marlon (the ridges protruding from the body of the minaret). It seems they were at least 60 cm in front of the ridges, and a space of about 80 cm was reserved for the Muezzin or guardian/watchman. It seems that as much wood was inside the body of the minaret as it was outside the body. About 60 cm of flooring has been made on these sticks inside the minaret, the remains of which can be seen on the body of the Mil - especially under the entrance of the Mezaneh. It seems that Muqarnas has

been used in the outer part of the Mezaneh for its glory (Fig 7). To access this part of the minaret, a door with dimensions 170 cm high and 50 cm wide has been created above the octagonal part of the building and in the cylindrical part of the minaret in the west direction (opposite to the main door of the building).

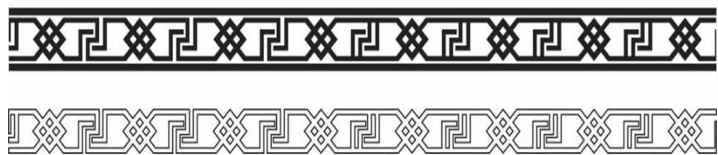
**3. The Upper Cylinder:** After the Merlon, considered the end line of the octagonal part of the Karat Mil, the building is in the shape of a cylinder. This part of the building, which is about 10 m high, has a diameter of about 3 m in its lowest part. The minaret's diameter is reduced as the height of the minaret increases. The diameter of the minaret is about 2.30 m in the highest part. This part of the minaret has no core, and only the internal turning stairs rely on each other. The outer wall can be considered as the supporting element of the building. The thickness of the outer wall is about 70 cm in the lowest part and about 40 cm in the highest part, remaining in the Karat Minaret. In this part, a brick is placed in the center of the minaret, and the brickwork is made from it towards the wall of the minaret. Another row is made on this row, and it protrudes about 5 cm, creating a circle around the center of the minaret. In this building, the first bricks of the stairs are used as the central core of the building. The central core's weakness can be one reason why this minaret deviated from this part. It is also possible to mention the collapse of the Merlon part of the building as one of the reasons for the deviation of the minaret because the formation of the cylindrical part is based on this part.

**4. Decorations of the Outer Wall of the Minaret:** The outer wall of the Karat Minaret can be divided into two parts: polygon and cylindrical. It can be said that the main burden of the minaret is on the first part because it contains all the motifs and decorations of the minaret, and apart from this perspective, it also forms a larger portion of the minaret in terms of quantity. This part of the minaret is an almost regular octagon, each side about 2 m wide. The minaret starts with simple brickwork and continues in the same way up to a height of about 2 m (34 rows). The entrance door of the building is installed on the eastern front of the minaret with dimensions of 70×170 cm. After the first 34 rows of the building, the first strip of brick decoration begins. The margin strip of the brick carvings of this minaret is worked ahead of the other bricks of the minaret. The first strip of brick carvings with a height of about 50 cm was executed using the embossing technique (Fig 8).



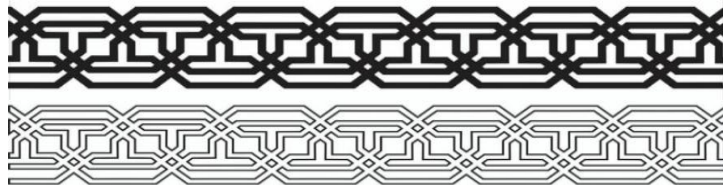
**Fig 8.** The first strip of brick carvings, Karat Minaret.  
Source: Authors.

After the implementation of this strip, the decorations of the minaret were re-implemented in a simple way. Again, about 2 m of simple brickwork has been done. The next decorative strip of the minaret has been implemented, which is about 50 cm high (Fig 9).

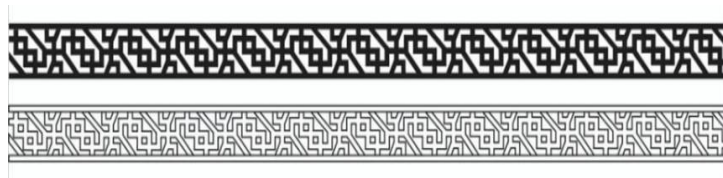


**Fig 9.** The second strip of brick carvings, Karat Minaret.  
Source: Authors.

The builders of Karat Minaret have been able to create decorative strips using simple bricks. The second decorative strip of this minaret, which evokes a pattern of Swastika<sup>4</sup>, is implemented at the height of 4 m of the minaret. This motif has been used in many works of Iranian art. It is very rare in Khorasan and during the rule of the Umayyad and the Abbasid caliphs, and with the rise of the eastern dynasties, its use is seen again, and in the Seljuk period, its application becomes very common. Khosrovjerd Minaret (505) can be mentioned as such. There is a lot to be said about the use of this motif and the Chalipa pattern, which is used a lot in the decorative strips of this minaret, which requires further research in this direction. After this decorative strip, simple brickwork was implemented again in 35 rows. The third, fourth, and fifth decorative strips have been implemented in this part, equal in size to other decorative strips worked in this minaret and are about 50 cm wide. This part of the minaret consists of three strips, the central strip of which is the inscription of the building; of course, not much remains today. Two decorative strips have been worked on the top and bottom of the inscription, which can be reminiscent of the gilding/decoration of the inscription of the building; this can be seen in most of the minarets, such as «Khosrovjerd» and «Firuzabad» minarets (Figs 10 & 11). What remains of the text of this inscription shows that the text of the inscription included the order to do the work, which is discussed in the following. After the building, there was an inscription, and another decorative strip was made around the minaret.

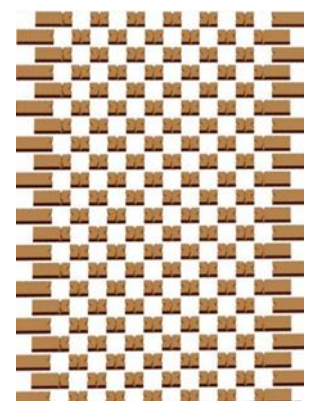


**Fig 10.** The third strip of brick carvings, Karat Miaret. Source: Authors.



**Fig 11.** The fourth strip of brick carvings, Karat Miaret. Source: Authors

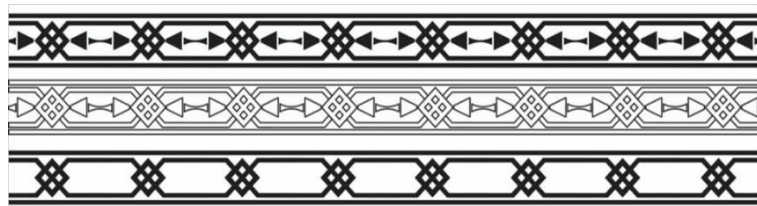
After these decorative strips in the octagonal upper part of the Karat Minaret, a design has been implemented that can be said to be exclusively executed in this minaret. On the octagonal exterior walls of the minaret at a height of about 13 m and the threshold of the formation of the Merlon, frames have been created with simple brickwork. Inside these frames, a pattern of the Shamsa (Sun) is executed with 10 cm bricks (Fig 12). The bricks of this part are carved in such a way that these bricks create the Shamsa motif in their negative space next to each other and using the distance created between them by the band. In other words, in this part of the building, we see the creation and construction of a well-known motif in Islamic art through the knowledge of designers and architects about its negative space. Whatever can often be seen in Ma'qeli and Bannai Kufic inscriptions can also be seen on this part of the building. This motif is created in 22 rows and eight sides of the minaret. After these brick carving frames, another decorative strip covers the minaret, which is a simplified design of motif number 1 of the same minaret, and it can be said that the same design was used in a modified way to implement this part of the minaret (Fig 13). In the continuation of this part of the minaret, on this decorative strip, the formation (balcony) of



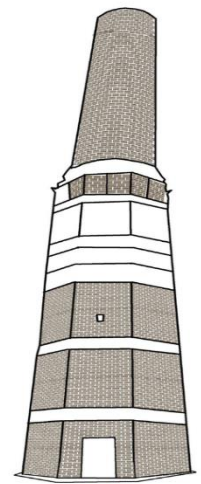
**Fig 12.** Brick carving frame, Karat Miaret. Source: Authors.



the Merlon or Mezaneh is established. In this part, each side is divided into two parts, and the implemented bricks are placed on top of each other in pairs (Fig 14). This type of brickwork can also be seen in the Ayaz minaret. Here, the bands are slightly deeper and create more intense shadows. On top of each of the corners of the minaret body, protruding bricks are made, and they are mounted on each other with a slight protrusion in such a way that within seven rows of brickwork, they are pushed forward about 30 cm from the body of the minaret. All around the minaret are 16 columns of this type of brickwork, on which wood is placed. These sticks, implemented inside the minaret's body, were probably about 180 to 200 cm long. Of this amount, 90 cm has been placed inside the body of the minaret. About 30 cm has been mounted on the columns created on the body of the minaret. About 60 to 80 cm could be separated from the body of the minaret so that people can move around it easily. A door is installed on the western front of the minaret's cylindrical part to access this part of the building. Considering the location of the building and its height, this minaret can be regarded as one of the strategic minarets. Minarets have been used as watchtowers or guardtowers, apart from the issue of finding the way for caravans. With the completion of the Merlon/Mezaneh, the minaret's octagonal structure is completed, and the structure continues upwards in the form of a small cylinder in the center. The brickwork of this part is executed in a straightforward way. Unfortunately, part of the building is unavailable today and only remains up to a height of 10 m from the surface of the Mezaneh. In its continuation, the building could have a platform for observation or fire-setting, but we cannot be sure about this; however, considering its location, it is not far from expectations.



**Fig 13.** The fifth strip of brick carvings, Karat Miaret.  
Source: Authors.



**Fig 14.** The reconstructed plan of Karat Miaret.  
Source: Authors.

**5. Inscription:** The Karat Minaret is currently decorated with an inscription executed between two decorative brick strips. This inscription, most of which has collapsed over the years and made it highly illegible, can be the solution to many questions related to this minaret. The inscription is executed on the eight sides of the minaret, and the present study divides it into eight numbers and adopts the number 1 for its initial part for clarification and more precise expression. The construction order begins in the initial part of the minaret, on the eastern front and above the building's entrance. «Diez» describes the text of the inscription as follows: ... امر به بنا هذا المناره ال شيخ ... (This minaret was ordered to be built by Sheikh...) (Diez, 1916, 49). «Blair» also discussed the inscription of the Karat Minaret and presented its text as follows: ... بسمله امر ببناء هذا المناره الشيخ ... «In the name of God, the Sheikh ordered the construction of this minaret...» (Blair, 2015, 207). The illegible text of the building inscription is likely to be assumed to be Quranic verses (Faraji & Akbari, 2013). In the investigations carried out by the authors of this research, in the place of the minaret taking multiple pictures and reconstructing the text of the inscriptions by digital method, the authors have been able to reread another part of the inscription of this minaret. The parts of this inscription include: 1. تقبل الله منه بسم الله (May Allah accept it from him. In the name of Allah) 2. الرحمن الرحيم (The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful) 3. امر ببناء هذه (He ordered

us to build this) 4. (The Sheikh's minaret) 5. ابوالبكر (Abu al-Bakr) 6. (completely lost). 7. (completely lost). 8. و ثلثمائة (and three hundred) (Fig 15).



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Fig 15. The reconstructed inscriptions of Karat Miaret. Source: Authors.

The important parts of this reading are sections 5 and 8 and this inscription, which includes the founder's name and the date of its construction. With the identification of the name of the founder and the research about Sheikh Abu al-Bakr in the period of around the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century A.H., the authors have come across four influential people who lived with the name of Abu Bakr. 1. «Mohammad ibn al-Abbas al-Khwarizmi<sup>5</sup>» known as «Abu Bakr Khwarizmi» (323-383 A.H.) 2. «Faqih Abu Bakr Nihi<sup>6</sup>» 3. «Abu Bakr Hasiri<sup>7</sup>» 4. «Sheikh Abu Bakr Quhistani». Abu Bakr Quhistani, whose full name is «Ali bin Hasan Quhistani», was one of the greats of literature, poetry, and politics of Quhistani during the Ghaznavid period. His birth and death are not clear, and this subject is not mentioned in historical books. «Hedayat» writes about him as follows: «It is said he was one of the scholars of

Quhistan, and his contemporaries were pleased with his accompaniment, but not much is known about his status» (Hedayat, 2002, 310). «Ayati» talks about Abu Bakr Quhistani in detail. He narrated from «Gardizi»: «Amid Abu Bakr Ali bin Hassan Quhistani is one of the noble and literate elders of Khorasan, and during the reign of Sultan Mahmud Ghaznavi and his sons in that country, he had an extraordinary reputation for grace, generosity, and morals. At first, he lived in the service of Amir Muhammad bin Mahmud. Sultan Mahmud appointed him to this service. Recently, he reached the position of head of Dar al-Nasha and Sahib Diwan (financial administrator) of Amir Mohammad. In 408 A.H., the Sultan honored his son, Amir Muhammad, and sent him to Jowzjan. Abu Bakr Quhistani also accompanied him» (Ayati, 1992, 177). What is extracted from the sources shows his intelligence and tact. In his youth, he was a courtier in the court of Mahmud of Ghaznavi, and upon discovering the caliph's secret orders to Mahmud, he drew his attention and became a court official, and was sent to Jowzjan region with Amir Muhammad in 408 A.H. «The governorship of Jowzjan continued to honor Amir Muhammad and sent him to Jowzjan, and Abu Bakr Quhistani was sent with him» (Gardizi, 1984, 397). Quhistani was in the service of Muhammad until 421 A.H. when Mahmud died, and during Muhammad's one-year rule, he assumed the headship of Dar al-Nasha and received the title of «Amid». Amid was the nickname of Abu Bakr Quhistani during the time of Amir Muhammad Ghaznavi. Amid was the title of the head of the Diwan Resalat (Hosseini Kazerooni, 2005, 729). Abu Bakr Quhistani had nicknames and titles that indicated his position in the Ghaznavid court, including Sheikh or Khawaja, which was one of the big titles at that time (Hosseini Kazerooni, 2005, 799). At the same time, Muhammad was removed from power by his brother Abu Bakr and fled to Baghdad. In 431 A.H., when the Seljuks came to power, Abu Bakr Quhistani returned to Khorasan and reached a position in their court (Ayati, 1992, 177). According to what has been mentioned, it can be considered that Karat Minaret was built in the last years of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H. by the order of Sheikh Abu Bakr (probably a Quhistani, one of the scholars and literary men of the Ghaznavid court) in Khorasan on the road from Khaf to Bakharz. In confirmation of the year of construction of this building, we can also refer to the opinion of «Pope». In examining this minaret, «Pope» attributes it to the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.H. «According to the shape of its Kufic script and the motifs of its brick decorations, it was built in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, it is ahead of the invasion of the Seljuks» (Pope, 2008, 1232). To further support these findings, we can refer to the «Dome of Kavus and Ayaz Mil», built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H. in northeast Iran. The script structure and decorations of the Karat Minaret - simple brickwork, angular building - broken decorative strips, the multifacetedness of the building, and the construction of the building on the hill - make this building very similar to the Dome of Kavus. On the other hand, the type of inscription makes the building very similar to Dome of Kavus in the design of some letters such as «م» and «و»; especially, the shape of the design of the word ثلثمائة (Figs 15 & 16) and بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ in this minaret is similar to the «Shams al-Maāli» tomb. In the Karat Minaret inscription, other evidence of the similarity of this script to the «Ayaz Mil» inscription related to the Ghaznavid period can be seen, especially in the design of the letters «و» and «ر»; this similarity can be seen more (Fig 17). «Blair» declares the date of this building around 500 A.H. «according to the «Yarti» inscription of the Sarakhs Dome, which is related to the year 491 A.H. Both the stylistic evidence and the content of the inscription can be used as the basis for the attribution to around the year 500. At the same time, people who are not so high-ranking have been working on minarets. Here, the founder of the minaret is a Sheikh, a scholar of religion. The style of the inscription with its dignified and heavy Kufic decorated with speared stems of

three-lobed tails and decoration on «» is reminiscent of the Yarti inscription of Sarakhs Dome dated 491 A.H. and Vakil Bazar attributed to around 500 A.H.» (Blair, 2015, 327). However, with what has been discovered in the inscription of this building, the building undoubtedly belongs to the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H., which can be one of the buildings of the Ghaznavid period or concurrent reigns.



**Fig 16.** A part of the Kavus Dome inscription. Source: Authors.



**Fig 17.** A part of the reconstructed inscription of Ayaz minaret.

Source: Musa Tabar & Salehi Kakhki, 2015, 21.

### Conclusion

According to what was discussed about the Karat Minaret and with the investigations carried out at the minaret site and its image reconstructions by software, the decorative motifs used were extracted, and the remaining parts of the minaret inscription were reviewed. In terms of the location on the hill, the angular structure, the execution of the walls with simple bricks and limited decorative motifs, and the design of the letters in the inscription, it is similar to the Kavus Dome. Regarding the design of some letters in the inscription, it is like Ayaz Mil. According to the inscription, the building belongs to the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H. Also, by reading the name of Sheikh Abu Bakr in the text of its inscription, examining historical texts, and identifying the nobles of Quhistan and Khorasan in the period of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.H., this research has come across four people with the name of Abu Bakr: First, Abu Bakr Hasiri, one of the court servants of Mahmud and Masoud, and the other is Abu Bakr Nihi, one of the jurists of Sistan, who lived in the south of modern Khorasan in the city of Nahbandan and is considered one of the most influential jurists during the time of Mahmud Ghaznavi. Also, Abu Bakr Khwarizmi, one of the writers and jurists of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H., who was present in the court of many emirs during his lifetime, and his classroom was established in Neyshabur for about 20 years, and finally, Sheikh Abu Bakr Quhistani, one of the court jurists and writers of Ghaznavid court. Regarding the title of Sheikh that was used for Abu Bakr Quhistani and also his title that was known as Quhistani, also, paying attention to the location of Karat Minaret, it is very likely that the name of Abu Bakr Quhistani is the correct one. According to the review of the word ثلثمائة in the text of the minaret inscription, this building can be considered the oldest historical minaret in Iran that is in good condition. It should be noted that according

to the lifetime of all four people, the construction period of the Karat Minaret was most likely the Ghaznavid period or concurrent reigns. Perhaps it can be said that the Karat Minaret is a single minaret that was built in the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H. (probably during the Ghaznavid period) by order of Sheikh Abul Bakr on top of a hill near the village of Karat, overlooking the plain and the road. Considering this minaret has a Merlon, it can be assumed that it has a strategic use. This minaret is among the Ghaznavid works in Iran. This work, along with Arslan Jazeb's collection, is one of two works related to the Ghaznavid period in Iran today. It should be noted that the current research findings are subject to change.

## Author Contributions

This article is extracted from author 1's doctoral dissertation in Islamic art entitled «Analysis of the function and concepts of the structure and decorations of Khorasan minarets from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.H.», supervised by authors 2 and 3 at Tarbiat Modares University of Tehran.

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## Conflict of Interest

The author (s) declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest related to this research, in writing, and publication of this article

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## Appendix

1. Built in the mid-5th century A.H., Seljuk period, Firuzabad village, Bardaskan city, Razavi Khorasan, Iran (Kargari Arian, Khazaei, Salehi Kakhki, 2021, 161).
2. Built in the 4th century A.H., Ghaznavid period, Sang Bast, Razavi Khorasan, Iran (Musa Tabar & Salehi Kakhki, 2015, 24).
3. Built in 505 A.H., Seljuk period, Sabzevar, Razavi Khorasan, Iran (Kargari Arian, Khazaei, Salehi Kakhki, 2019).
4. An ancient motif known by the names of Gardoone-Mehr, Aryan Sun, and Broken Cross.
5. Abu Bakr Khwarizmi Muhammad bin Abbas, writer and poet of the 4th century A.H., is known as Abu Bakr Khwarizmi in most sources. They mentioned the date of his birth as 323 A.H. (Sadeghi, 1988, 249).
6. Qazi Abu Bakr Nihi is one of the jurists of nearly 400 A.H. (Ayati, 1992, 197).
7. Abu Bakr Hasiri, one of the close friends of Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznavi and his son Masoud, studied jurisprudence, hadith, and morals, and became so proficient in this are that Farrokhi mentioned his skill in writing and called him the head of Hadith and Hujjat Shafi'i and the master of manners (Ansari, 1988, 248).

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