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*From Maragheh to Nakhchivan,
The De- Historization of Iran in the Late Seljukid
Architectural Tradition of the Tower Tombs in Azerbaijan*

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Abstract

The developmental process of architectural tradition of tower tombs in Azerbaijan during the 12th – 14th centuries (AD) is one of the basic questions in the Iranian history of architecture. Historically, the architectural constructions and decorations were developed in Nakhchivan by the end of 12th century. Based on the formulated doctrines of the former USSR academy, the late Seljukid architecture in Nakhchivan was indigenous and originated from the local innovations. Turkish art historians have classified the late Seljukid architecture in Nakhchivan as a variety of Turk – Islam tradition in the post-USSR years. These kinds of de- historized studies have not considered the socio- cultural relationships among Qazvin, Maragheh, Tabriz and Nakhchivan within the Iranian cultural context. The main aim of this study is to investigate the general specifications of the 12th – 14th centuries (AD) architecture of the tower tombs in Nakhchivan and Maragheh to examine their artistic and technical interactions appeared in the glorious architectural monuments during the Iranian Late Seljukid – Ilkhanid history of architecture. Methodologically, the origin of Nakhchivani tower tombs should be sought in the architectural manner of Maragheh due to the chronological order of their existing Persian and Arabic inscriptions. Although the USSR and Turkish decontextualized subjectivities in the architectural history of Nakhchivan are not well-reviewed, the architecture of the tower tombs in the Late Seljukid Nakhchivan has a processual trajectory initiated from the early Seljukid Kharāghān in Qazvin to the late Seljukid Maragheh and then the Nakhchivani manner of Ajami Nashawi.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, De- historization, Iranian history of architecture, Late Seljukid, Maragheh, Nakhchivan, Tower Tombs.

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Introduction

The developmental process of architectural tradition of tower tombs in Azerbaijan during the 12th – 14th centuries is one of the basic questions in the Iranian history of architecture. Historically, the architectural constructions and decorations were developed in Nakhchivan by the end of 12th century. Based on the formulated doctrines of the former USSR academy, the late Seljukid architecture in Nakhchivan was indigenous and originated from the local innovations and not inspired by the Iranian culture. For example, the precious works of Salamzadā (1976), Efendizade (1986), and Bretanizki (1988) during the USSR time were among the most cited references. During the post- USSR years, Turkish art historians classified the Late Seljukid architecture in Nakhchivan as a variety of Turk – Islam tradition (*e.g.* Yazar, 2000; Hacıyev, 2017). In such studies, the territories of post- USSR Republic of Azerbaijan, the architectural monuments in the former Persian lands of Transoxiana and Khwarazm are decontextualized from their Iranian cultural- historical context. Historically, the post-USSR Republic of Azerbaijan was composed of the Caucasian Qarabagh, Shervān, and the Azerbaijani Northern Mughān and Nakhchivan, were founded for the first time in the Southern Caucasus at the end of WWI and were re- established in December 1991(Rezultade, 1990). For this reason, the de-historized terms of ‘Northern Azerbaijan’ and ‘Southern Azerbaijan’ (*e.g.* Yazar, 2000; Shaffer, 2002) are certainly contemporary and are not formed earlier than the 20th century.

Archaeologically, in contrast with the de-historized¹ doctrines, it should be noted that Iranian architectural innovations and forerunner masterworks in Qazvin, Maragheh, Urmia and Isfahan have played key roles in the architectural development of the Late Seljukid Nakhchivan. In addition to the former USSR academy, the mutual artistic and social interactions between Nakhchivan and Maragheh in basic resources of this field are not well-documented (Ajourloo, 2009; 2010; 2013). Among these foreshadowing basic resources, one would refer to Wilber (1955), Pope (1969), Giyasi (1991), Blair and Bloom (1996), Pirmiā (2001)

1 . Touraj Atabaki (2004) in his review of B. Shaffer’s (2002) *Borders and Brethren* has specified the term and concept of *De- historization* as the Iranophobic aspect of historiography in the former USSR and the post- USSR Republic of Azerbaijan.

Ettinghausen *et al.* (2003), Hillenbrand (2004) and Əmənzadə (2016). Based on their anachronic presentism in history, for example, Giyasi (1991) and Əmənzadə (2016) have decontextualized the architectural monuments in the historical Azerbaijan (Atropatene) from the Iranian context of civilization under the contemporary de-historized concept of ‘Southern Azerbaijan’. Like Pirniā (2001), L. Korn (2010) in his remarks on the Iranian art and architecture in Azerbaijan during the Seljukid dynasty has limited his discussions within the present geopolitical borders of Iran. In other words, the investigation of the architectural traditions in Nakhchivan in the 12th – 14th centuries (AD) has been merely restricted to the borders of the former USSR. These kinds of de-historized studies have ignored the objectivity of socio- cultural relationships among Qazvin, Maragheh, Urmia, Tabriz and Nakhchivan within the Iranian cultural- historical context. Historically, such socio-cultural close ties, contrary to the de-historization of Perso-Azerbaijani interactions formulated by the former USSR academy, are well-presented in the Persian literature during the High Medieval Period. For example, Nezāmi of Ganja, the famous Persian poet, has been honored by the Seljukid governor of Maragheh (*e.g.* Luther, 1987; Nezāmi, 1999, 2015). In the geographical masterpiece of *Nuzhat al-Qulūb* (1340), furthermore, Nakhchivan and Urdūbād, as the territorial parts of the historical Azerbaijan, fall within the frontiers of Iran (Le Strange, 1919: 90). Later historical objectivities validate the report of *Nuzhat al-Qulūb*. In addition to the Persian inscription of Abbās Mirazā Qajar at the St. Stephen Church in Jolfā, his fleecy carpet portrait, at the Carpet Museum of Nakhchivan, has a Persian poem to verify such a historical viewpoint (Figure 1).

بحمدلله که بر جان مرده باز جان آمد ولیعهد ابد مدت باذربایجان آمد

Archaeologically originated from the Turkic burial cults of the Eurasian steppe (*e.g.* Hillenbrand, 2004), the architecture of the tower tombs, adopted by the Seljukid elite class, is a remarkable cultural appearance in the architectural traditions of the 11th – 13th centuries (AD) in Western Asia. Later, the Mongol Ilkhanates and their pastoral- nomad successors, *i.e.* Āq Qoyunlu and Qara Qoyunlu in Iran and the East of Anatolia adopted this tradition of architecture.

Methodologically, the origin of Nakhchivani tower tombs should be sought in the architectural manner of Maragheh due to the chronological order of their existing Persian and Arabic inscriptions.

Discussion

The architectural tradition of the tower tombs during the Late Seljukid Maragheh, under the rule of the local Seljukid dynasty, known as the Atābakān of Azerbaijan, Shams al-Din Ildegoz and his successors (1135 – 1224 AD / 530 – 622 AH) is well-presented by four survived unique samples: Gonbad-e Sorkh, Gonbad-e Modawar, Gonbad-e Kabud and Urmia Sæ'Gonbad (Figure 2). Regardless of the disputed Gonbad-e Kabud, these works existed earlier than the Nakhchivani Late Seljukid tower tombs especially Momena Khātun, Joseph ibn Quseyr and the Ilkhanid Qarabāghlār.

The Group of Maragheh

Gonbad-e Sorkh is the first member of the group in Maragheh. According to its Kufic inscriptions, the mausoleum has been constructed by Bani Bakr Mohammad ibn Bandan ibn Hassan Me'mār, the master of architecture, in 1146 AD / 542 AH, under the patronage of Abd al- Aziz ibn Mahmud ibn Sa'd, the local governor of the region in the Late Seljukid. Gonbad-e Sorkh (the Red Dome) has a cubic shape probably covered by a pyramid dome that collapsed later. The building is in ornamental brick decorated by the embedded tiles in turquoise color. This is known as the Kāshi-e Mo'aqqali technique (Figure 2). These turquoise tiles should be considered as the earliest samples of the tile works in the Caliphate and post-Caliphate architecture of the Middle Ages. They were used later in Iran, in the early 13th century, and in the Seljukid Anatolia. In addition to the tile works and ornamental bricks, seven blind arch panels - two in three sides and one at the main entrance - would be indicated as the basic elements adopted by the Nakhchivani architecture later. They could be observed in Momena Khātun and Joseph ibn Quseyr mausoleums. Besides the tower tombs of Nakhchivan, clearly the Red Dome has inspired the architect of the Ilkhanid tower tomb, Ghaffāriyya in Maragheh (Figure 2).

As it can be seen in Ghaffāriyya, contrary to the local innovations of Ajami Nashawi in Nakhchivan, formerly discussed by Salamzadā (1976)

and Giyasi (1991), the architect has done his best to follow the Gonbad-e Sorkh example both in form and in the composition of the ornamental bricks and turquoise tiles. Subsequently, although Ghaffāriyya seems not to follow the architectural doctrines of the Ilkhanid Tabriz that is famous for its full usage of tile lining as the basic architectural decoration, less or more it reflects the same manners (Ajourloo, 2010; 2013). For instance, the technique of muqarnas gable arch applied in the main entrance of Ghaffāriyya is similar to the tower tombs of Sæ'Gonbad (the Three Domes) in Urmia and Qarabāghlār of Nakhchivan (Figures 2, 3). According to the inscriptions, the construction of this tower tomb was completed during the reign of the Ilkhanate Sultan, Abu Sa'id Bahādor Khān who was dead in the Caucasian Qarabagh (1336 AD / 736 AH), as recorded by the Persian historians (Spuler, 1968; 1989).

The second structure in Maragheh is Gonbad-e Modawar (the Circular Dome). It is about 10 meters far from the northern façade of Gonbad-e Kabud. According to its Kufic inscription, the circular tower tomb dates back to 1167 AD / 563 AH. The inscription presents no information about its patron and architect. Its main entrance has a plain arch well-decorated by the composition of the ornamental bricks and turquoise tiles (Figure 2). The same as the Red Dome of Maragheh, the pyramid dome of this tower has fallen. Obviously, the building structure was influenced by the Turkic tradition of entombment under the tower tombs during the Medieval Ages.

Unlike the above-discussed monuments, the tower tomb of Gonbad-e Kabud (the Dark Blue Dome) in Maragheh is controversial. Not only the pyramid dome of the tower, but some of its Kufic inscriptions, including the date and the name of the architect and the patron is damaged (Figure 2). Regardless of the fact that people of Maragheh would imagine the building as a mausoleum for the mother of Hulāgu Khān the Mongol, the tomb clearly belongs to the Late Seljukid. Archaeologically, it is remarkable that the construction date of Gonbad-e Kabud (1198 AD / 595 AH) suggested by A. Godard has not been confirmed yet.

To the author, Gonbad-e Kabud might be considered as the mausoleum of Sultan Alā al-Din Karpa Ar Aslān, the Seljukid Atābak ruler of Maragheh. Rāvandi in his work entitled, *Rāhat al-Sodur va Āyat al-Sorur dar Tārikh Āl-e Saljuq* (1201 AD / 599 AH) and Ali Ibn-i al-

Athir in his work named, *Al- Kāmel fi al-Tārikh* have recorded his years of reign as 1188 – 1206 AD / 585 – 604 AH. During these years, he supported the Persian poems of Hakim Nezāmi of Ganja known as Ganjavi. Nezāmi also presented Sultan Alā al-Din Karpa Ar Aslān with his famous masterwork entitled, *Bahrām Nāma*. In his Persian *Bahrām Nāma*, Nezāmi of Ganja has great admiration for Iran:

همه عالم تن است و ایران دل نیست گوینده زین قیاس خجل

Meanwhile, Nezāmi's other Persian masterwork known as *Makhzan al- Asrār* is presented to the Seljukid Bahrām Shāh (de Blois, 2012).

Although the construction date of the Dark Blue Dome is not certain, its architectural specifications and decorative elements seem close to the mausoleum of Momena Khātun built by Ajami ibn Abu Bakr Bannā Nashawi in Nakhchivan. In other words, the architectural and decorative features of Gonbad-e Kabud in Maragheh are not similar to those of the Red Dome, Gonbad-e Modawar and the tower tomb of Joseph ibn Quseyr in Nakhchivan, but it is close to Momena Khātun. Similar to Momena Khātun, the building is ornamented with the Kufic inscriptions of the holy words of 'Allah' and 'al-Hamd', all embedded in a geometric brick decorated by the turquoise glazed bricks of the 12th century (AD) of Maragheh.

In the meantime, it is so interesting that the main entrance of the Urmia Sæ'Gonbad as well as the decagon façade of the Momena Khātun have muqarnas gable arches which Salamzadā (1976) would rather to consider them as the basic element of Nakhchivani architecture invented by Ajami ibn Abu Bakr Bannā Nashawi. The tower tomb of Sæ'Gonbad (the Three Domes) was built in 1184 AD / 580 AH for Sheykh al-Muzaffari, the Atābak governor of Urmia (Figure 2). The Three Domes of Urmia displays the influence of Maragheh tradition of the tower tomb architecture, and as a result, it should be categorized under the group of Maragheh. Its circular form and dimensions, 13m height and 5m span, is close to Gonbad-e Modawar. Moreover, it has a muqarnas gable arched entrance earlier than the Momena Khātun (1187 AD / 582 AH). Accordingly, the Kufic inscription of Sæ'Gonbad in Urmia confirms the factual Iranian origin of the muqarnas gable arch applied in the Late Seljukid Nakhchivani tradition of architecture. This is an outstanding

material fact never documented by any former Iranophobic works such as Salamzadā (1976), Efendizade (1986) Bretanizki (1988), Giyasi (1991), Aslanapa (1996), Yazar (2000) and Əmənzadə (2016).¹

The Group of Nakhchivan

The architectural tradition of Nakhchivan is well known for its three surviving monumental tower tombs called Joseph ibn Quseyr, Momena Khātun and Qarabāghlār (Figure 3). Among them, Joseph ibn Quseyr and Momena Khātun have been planned and constructed by Ajami ibn Abu Bakr Bannā Nashawi (Salamzadā, 1976; Giyasi, 1991). The Ilkhanid tower tomb of Bardaa (1322), which is near Qarabagh and is built by Me'mār Ayub (Giyasi, 1991), follows the Nakhchivani manner of architecture as well. The general specifications of the architectural tradition of the Late Seljukid Nakhchivan, under the artistic patronage of Ajami Nashawi, which latter left an influence on the architectural tradition of the Ilkhanid Tabriz in the 13th – 14th centuries (AD) should be noted as well (Ajourloo, 2010; 2013).

First, the designation of complexes, as it could be seen in Momena Khātun. Second is the attachment of the two high minarets to the portal of architectural complexes and mosques. Momena Khātun and Qarabāghlār (1320 AD / 720 AH) are good examples. Finally, the complete coating of the monuments by the Iranian technique of Kāshi-e Mo'aqqali, as it could be seen in Qarabāghlār in Nakhchivan (Figure 3). The Ilkhanid mausoleum of Qarabāghlār due to its applied Kāshi-e Mo'aqqali technique plays a key role in the Iranian history of architecture in Azerbaijan. This decorative technique was developed from the Late Seljukid Maragheh and later Iranian architects re- applied it in the tower tombs of Sheykh Heydar (1329 AD / 731 AH) in Khiāw of Ardabil, currently known as Meshkin'Shahr (Figure 4) and the Dome of Allah Allah (Gonbad-e Allah Allah) attached to the mausoleum of Sheykh Saffi al-Din of Ardabil (Figure 5).

Further, the engineering and construction technique of the high-collared domes is another Iranian architectural feature that could be detected in Nakhchivan. Archaeologically, regardless of the Ilkhanid

1. All of the gable-arched entrances applied in the Seljukid Anatolian structures are later than the 1215 AD (Hillenbrand, 2004).

Arch of Alishah in Tabriz, perhaps the Seljukid Friday Mosque of Ardabil presents one of the first samples of high-collared domes in Iran which differs from the Seljukid ones in Isfahan and Khorasan (Ayorloo, 2010). Later, this technique was developed in Tabriz architectural manners in the 14th century (AD) and finally stretched throughout Iran until the early years of the 15th century (*Ibid.*). The fine works of the great architects from Tabriz and Isfahan in Samarqand present such influences (*e.g.* Golombek and Wilber, 1988). If one accepts the possibility of the usage of the high-collared technique for the later collapsed dome of Momena Khātun Friday Mosque, the socio-cultural exchanges between Nakhchivan and the inner Iran would be re-verified.

The first noticeable sample in Nakhchivan group is the tower tomb of Joseph ibn Quseyr in the outskirts of the old quarter of Nakhchivan. This monument is one of the rare samples in Ajami Nashawi's first works (Figure 3). According to the Arabic Kufic inscription of the tomb, its architect was Ajami Nashawi and its patron was Shahid Joseph ibn Quseyr. The written year in its inscription is 1162 AD / 557 AH. Contrary to Maragheh, the architect has decorated the façade of the tomb by the ornamental bricks, which in the motif of hexagon star, later known as the Judaic either Magen David or the Solomon's seal represents the concept of royalty for the Seljukid Turks (Figure 3). The intensive use of the ornamental bricks, instead of stucco and tiles re-confirms the author's idea that Ajami Nashawi was inspired by the two tower tombs of Kharāghān in Qazvin (Figure 6). These tower tombs are planned and built by Me'mār Mohammad ibn Makki Zanjāni and Me'mār Abu al-Ma'ālī ibn Makki Zanjāni for the two Seljukid governors, *i.e.* Abu Sa'id ibn Bijār Sa'd and Abu Mansur Iltāy Tekin ibn Tekin in 1067 and 1092 respectively (Kiāni, 1995). The external shells of these double shells tower tombs are collapsed. However, by paying attention to the pyramid dome of Joseph ibn Quseyr, it is possible to infer that these mausoleums had pyramid domes during the Seljukid Atābakan of Azerbaijan.

Ajami has followed the architectural doctrines of Maragheh and was inspired by the mausoleums in Kharāghān of Qazvin to plan the Joseph ibn Quseyr in the year 1162. Later, the mausoleum of Momena Khātun truly reflects his pure creativity and innovative mind. In other words,

Ajami has established his own architectural doctrine in the mausoleum of Momena Khātun built for the queen of Atābak Ildegoz in the year 1187 (Fig. 3). By its decagon plan and a high collared internal pointed shell, which had been covered once by an external pyramid dome, Momena Khātun presents itself as a rare sample of architectonics in the history of architecture in the Late Caliphate times.

Based on the architectural drawings of Salamzadā (1976), the height of Momena Khātun from the lower cellar to the peak of the internal elliptical pointed dome is 22.5m (Figure 3). This system of divorced double shells is comparable with the double shell dome of Tāj al- Molk (1088) in Isfahan, Persia (Figure 7). The dome of Tāj al- Molk has an internal elliptical pointed shell with a medium height. It has 10.7m span and 19.5m elevation (Ashkan and Ahmad, 2009; Moradi, 2020). This basic sample from Isfahan re-validates the Persia influence on the Medieval period Turkic tradition of the tower tombs in Nakhchivan. It also displays the application of the Persian technique of muqarnas in the lower rim of the Momena Khātun dome. Furthermore, as it is documented by M. X. Ne'matova (Неймат, 2001: 52), the sources of inspiration for Momena Khātun were the masterpieces of Persian literature created by Nezāmi of Ganja and Khāghāni of Shervān.¹ It has a Persian poet in Kufic inscription embedded in the turquoise Kāshi-e Mo'qqali (Figure 7):

ما بگردیم پس بماند روزگار ما بمیریم این بماند یادگار یا رب چشم بد دور کن

Although the entrance of Momena Khātun has a plain pointed arch similar to the tower tombs of Kharāghān, Gonbad-e Kabud and Gonbad-e Modawar, it should be noted that Ajami has applied the technique of muqarnas gable arches as the decagon decorative façade. Each of them is well-decorated using the technique of Kāshi-e Mo'qqali originated from the group of Maragheh. In other words, Momena Khātun tower tomb is a composition of Maragheh heritage and Ajami's engineering abilities and innovative mind. His legacy displayed architectural creativity and

1 . The same as Nezāmi, Khāghāni of Shervān, by his famous Persian poem, has glorified Khorāsān in Iran:

چه سبب سوی خراسان شدنم نگذارند	عندلیبیم به گلستان شدنم نگذارند ...
گر فرمان ندهدم به خراسان رفتن	باز تبریز به فرمان شدنم نگذارند ...

engineering innovation in Tabriz in the 14th century (AD). It is reflected in the architectural complexes of Ghāzāniyya, Rashidiyya and Alishah of Tabriz (Ajourloo, 2010; 2013).

Conclusion

The architecture of the tower tombs in the Late Seljukid Nakhchivan has a processual line originated from the Early Seljukid Kharāghān in Qazvin to the Late Seljukid Maragheh and then Ajami Nashawi's works in Nakhchivan.

It is reasonable to conclude that Maragheh and Nakhchivan have had mutual architectural interactions. Hypothetically, to the author, the architect of Gonbad-e Kabud, Ajami Nashawi, is the main figure.

The author considers two lines of formation processes in the Late Seljukid architecture of Nakhchivan. Joseph ibn Quseyr is the first one following the architectural manner of Maragheh and Qazvin. Momena Khātun is the second one reflecting the Nakhchivani manner of architecture.

Furthermore, as it is hypothesized from Gonbad-e Kabud in Maragheh, the Nakhchivani architectural manner and Ajami's innovations were not restricted to the geographical frontiers of Nakhchivan. As the Ilkhanids were gaining more power in Tabriz in the 14th century (AD), Ajami's manner of architecture left its impression in the Caucasian Qarabagh and the south of Araxes. The complexes of Ghāzāniyya and Alishah of Tabriz, the Öljeitu Dome of Sultānniyya and the tower tombs of Bardaa, Sheykh Heydar and Allah Allah in Ardabil are real examples for such impression in the context of Iranian civilization.

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Figure 1. A Persian poem on the fleecy carpet portrait of Abbās Mirzā Qajar in the Carpet Museum of Nakhchivan (Qādim, 2004).

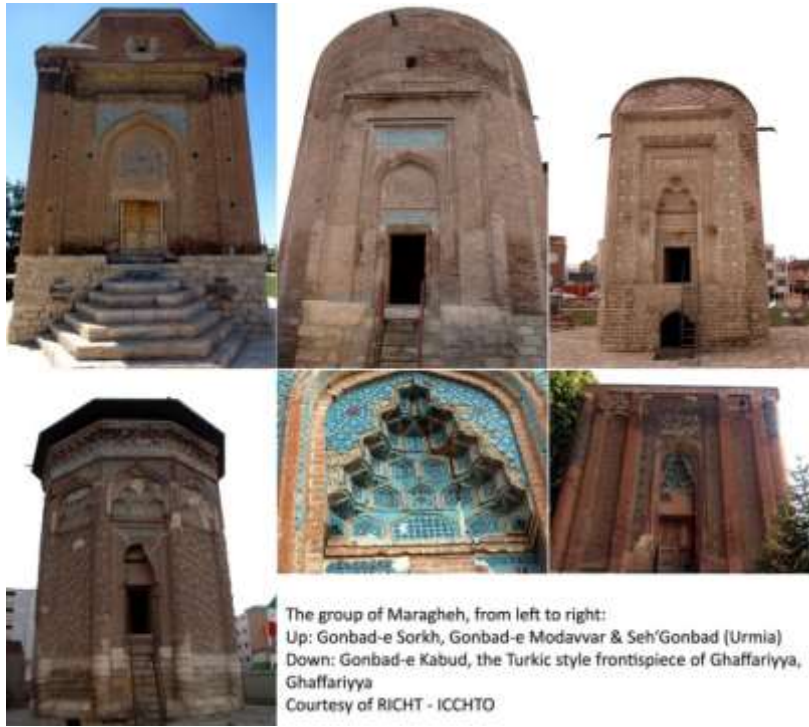


Figure 2. The group of Maragheh clockwise: Gonbad-e Sorkh, Gonbad-e Modawar, Sæ'Gonbad (Urmia), Gonbad-e Kabud and Gonbad-e Ghaffāriyya (Courtesy of RICHT - ICHHTO).



Figure 3. The group of Nakhchivan, Up from left to right: Joseph ibn Quseyr, the enterances of Joseph ibn Quseyr and Momena Khātun. Down from left to right: the section of Momena Khātun and Qarabāghlār and Bardaa (Courtsey of J. Giyasi).



Figure 4. Khiāw, Sheykh Heydar tower tomb (Courtesy of RICHT, ICHHTO).



Figure 5. Ardabil, Gonbad-e Allah Allah tower tomb (the author).

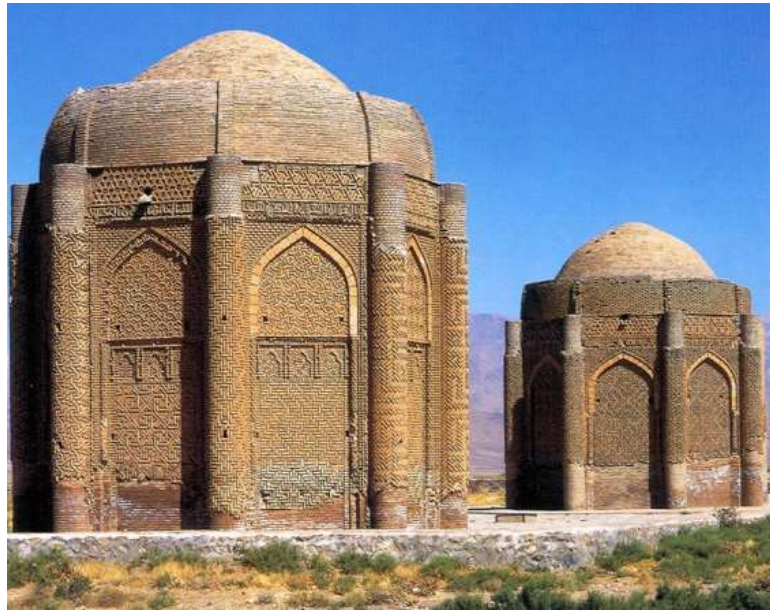


Figure 6. Qazvin, the tower tombs of Kharāghān (Kiāni, 1995).

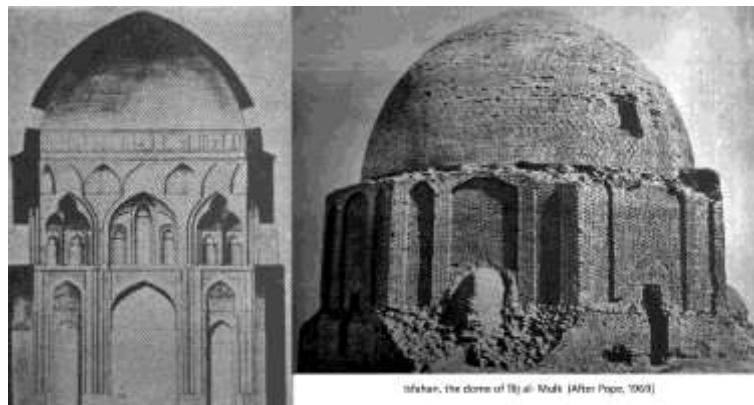


Figure 7. Isfahan, the dome of Tāj al- Molk (Pope, 1969).



Figure 8. Nakhchivan, Momena Khātun, a Persian poem in Kufic inscription under the muqarnas rim of the dome (Courtesy of M. Rezvanfar, RICHT, ICHHTO).