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**Author(s):** Meissam Aliei, AmirReza Vasegh Abbasi

**Source:** Caspian, January 2026, VOL. 3, NO. 5, 35-62.

**Published by:** Tissaphernes Archaeological Research Group

**Stable URL:** <https://doi.org/10.22034/cj.2025.400188.1024>



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# Ilkhanid Inscriptions in Bayazid Bastami Complex, A Case Study: Inscriptions of the Mihrab of Bayazid Bastami Mosque

Meissam Aliei<sup>1</sup> , AmirReza Vasegh Abbasi<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

The Bayazid Bastami complex, located in Bastam, Semnan province, is considered one of the outstanding examples of the Iranian religious architecture during the Ilkhanid era. Due to the existence of a renowned Sufi's shrine, Bayazid Bastami (161-234 AH), this complex has attracted the attention of different reigns and kings since the very early Islamic period, and numerous constructions have been performed in this monument during various periods from the Deylamiyān (Deylamites) dynasty to the Qajar period. Most of the constructions in this complex and also the restorations conducted here relate to the Ilkhanid era, and particularly to Sultan Muhammad Ghazan Khan's reign (694-703 AH) and Sultan Mohammad Khodābandeh Öljaïtū's time (703-716 AH). Thanks to his high regard for Bayazid, Öljaïtū even selected his own children's names according to Bayazid's name and titles: Bastam, Bayazid, and Tayfur. In various Ilkhanid buildings and extensions in Bayazid Bastami's complex, numerous inscriptions can be seen that have adorned the architectural elements of this complex. Due to the existence of multiple features and the religious importance of this part, inscriptions on the mihrab of this mosque, called Mardana or Bayazid, have been widely investigated and analyzed from different aspects, including ritual, artistic, and historical. In the present research, a descriptive-analytical methodology has been applied, and the data have been collected from documentary and field studies with a theoretical approach to study the cultural history.

**Keywords:** Inscription; Mihrab; Mosque, Ilkanid; Bayazid Bastami Complex.

<sup>1</sup> Faculty Member, Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities. University of Gonabad, Khorassan Razavi, Iran (Corresponding Author).  [meissamaliei@gmail.com](mailto:meissamaliei@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Faculty Member, Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities. University of Gonabad, Khorassan Razavi, Iran.

**Article info:** Received: 28 July 2025 | Accepted: 29 September 2025 | Published: 1 January 2026

**Citation:** Aliei, Meissam; Vasegh Abbasi, AmirReza. (2026). Ilkhanid Inscriptions in Bayazid Bastami Complex, A Case Study: Inscriptions of the Mihrab of Bayazid Bastami Mosque. *Caspian*, Vol. 3 (5), 35-62.

<https://doi.org/10.22034/cj.2025.499188.1024>

## Introduction

Among the inner city parts of every city or village, temples have always had their special position, and they are more prominent and visible than other elements. For the same reason, they were situated at the heart of a settlement. In the Islamic culture, mosques hold a unique place, so their presence in every region reflects the religious beliefs of the people in that area. In Quranic verses, Hadiths and traditions of religious leaders, both construction and establishment of mosques, and also visiting them and not preventing their expansion have been highly recommended (for example, Tawbah Surah, verse No. 18; Baqara Surah, verse No. 114). During the Islamic periods, mosques were considered the city's most important buildings and were built to be easily visible from a distance (Memarian, 2008: 250). Also, in Iran during the Islamic age, different mosques were built and decorated in every period according to the climatic features, types of materials, and the art of the artists in those eras.

In fact, a mosque is literally an Islamic building, and from this perspective, it's considered a manifestation of Islamic architectural secrets and mysteries (and decorations). Unlike other architectural elements, mosques have been built to remain and survive, while many non-religious buildings, despite their rich decorations, had a loose structure (Hillenbrand, 2002: 31). Hence, study of the architectural elements applied in the mosque as well as the decorations related to them, can serve as a primary and first-rate source to investigate the

social, cultural and belief features of every period.

## Geography and History of Qūmis and Bastam

In the northern edge of Lut Desert, an area is located which has been known as Qūmis in its historical past. The small state of Qūmis consists of a narrow land which is low in area, surrounded by the Alborz Mountain ranges to the north and Lut Desert to the south. The great highway starting from Rey in a mountainous region and leading to Khorasan passed through the entire Qūmis state, and all the important cities of Qūmis were located along this road (La Strange, 1930: 364) (Fig. 1 and 2).

Today, the name Qūmis is no longer used to refer to the region. Instead, after abundant changes over time, some time ago, one part of it in the east was considered an area of Khorasan (Al Yaghubi, 1422 AH: 90 and 91), and another part of it, i.e., Khar, was considered an area of Rey (Estakhri, 2004: 124). Today, this region is known as a region in Semnan province with the city of Semnan as its center.

Bastam is a town in the north of the ancient Qūmis state and the modern Semnan province. It is located at  $55^{\circ} 0' 0''$  longitude and  $36^{\circ} 29' 5''$  latitude and is 1412 m above sea level (Edrisi, 2011: 184).

In historical and geographic texts of the Islamic period, the Bastam region has been frequently mentioned, and its climatic features and agricultural products have also been described; moreover, the name of this city has

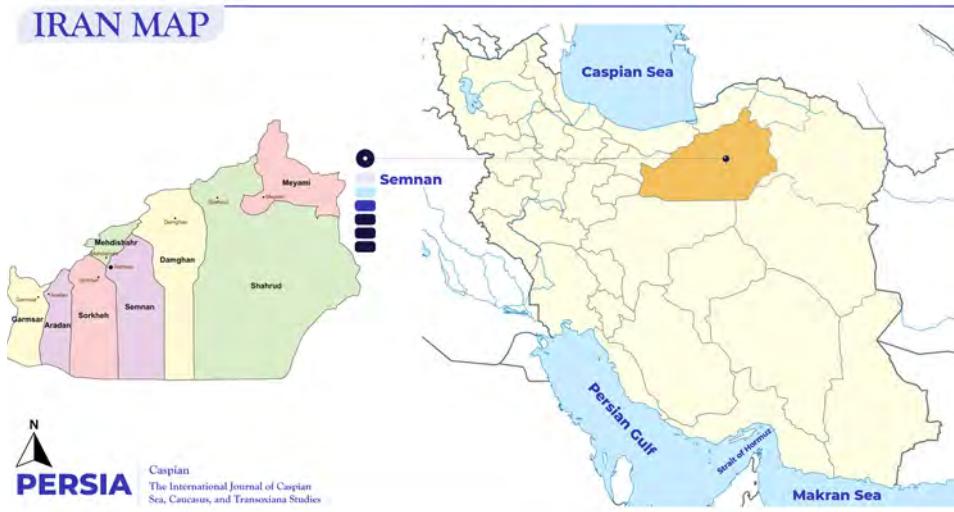


Fig. 1. Map of Iran and Seman Province

(Adapted by *Sinus Persicus* from a Map from Wikimedia Commons under a Creative Commons Licence CC BY-SA 4.0)

been mentioned among the three most important states of Qūmis.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In al-*Masālik w'al Mamālik* (The Book of Roads and Kingdoms), (written in 318-321 AH), apparently, it is the first time that Bastam has been mentioned (Estakhri, 2004: 124). And subsequently, in other work, related to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AH/10<sup>th</sup> AD, such as *Surah Al-azr* (Ibn-i Hoghal, 1938: 380), *Abūdolaf's Itinerary* (Abūdolaf, 1975: 82), *Tanbih al-Ashraf* (Masoudi, 1970: 49), *Ashkal al'alam* (Jehani, 1989: 147-149), *Hudud al-Alam* (Men al-*Mashreq o al-Maqreb* (Hudud al-Alam, 1993: 399), *Aḥsan al-taqāsim fi ma'rifat al-aqālīm* (Moghadasi, 1906: 51, 353, 354, 356, 367, 368, 371, and 372), *Naser Khosrow* (Naser Khosrow, 2002: 3 and 4), *Jahan Nameh* (6<sup>th</sup> AH/12 AD) (Bakran, 1963: 58 and 62), *Al-Isharat* (6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries AH/12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) (Heravi, 1423 AH/2002 AD: 83), *Mu'jam al-buldān* (7<sup>th</sup> century AH/13 AD) (Yaqut al-Hamawi, 1995/1: 421 and 422; 1995) Va Al-Mushtarak (Yaqut Hamawi, 1983: 154), *Asar al-Belad va Akhbar al-Ebad* (7<sup>th</sup> century AH/13 AD) (Qazvini, 1994: 367 and 368), *Taghvīm al-Boladān* (8<sup>th</sup> century AH/

Bastam district and generally Qūmis state, thanks to being located at a crossroad connecting east to west and north to south, has been an important traffic place for trading and pilgrimage caravans, and also a place for the establishment of military camps in different eras.

### Bayazid Bastami Complex and Bayazid Mosque

The most excellent architectural plans in Ilkhanid era were burial/tomb complexes. These shrines were typically integrated into endowments belonging to the righteous and pious

14 AD) (Abu al-Feda, 2007: 499), *Nozhat al-Qolub* (8<sup>th</sup> century AH/14 AD) (Mostufi, 2002: 229), *Masalek al-Absar fil Mamalik al-Amsar* (8<sup>th</sup> century AH/14 AD) (Ibn-i Fazl al-Allah Omari, 1423 AH/2003 Ad/ 5: 162 and 163), *Ibn-i Batuta's Itinerary* (8<sup>th</sup> century AH/14 AD) (Ibn-i Batuta, 1417 AH/1997 AD M. Vol: 3: 57) and many other writings following Ilkhanid era, the Bastam area has been mentioned.

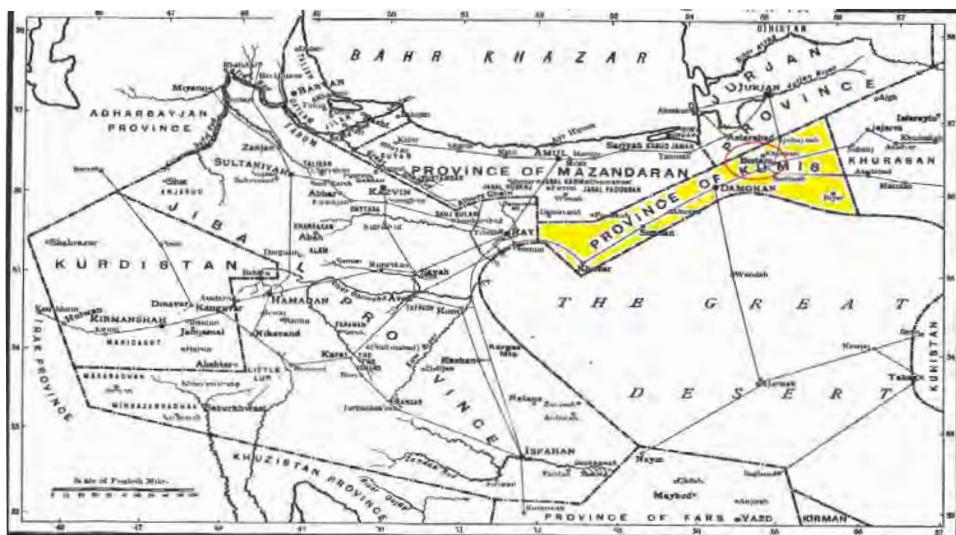


Fig. 2. Geographical Location of Bastam and Qūmīs Province (La Strange, 1930:185)

men and were associated with public services such as mosques, monasteries, hospitals, residences, etc. Ghazan Khan and Khajeh Rashid al-Din complexes in Tabriz have been destroyed (see Shekari Niri, 2004). However, complexes such as Natanz (Blair, 1986, and Blair, 2008) and Pir-I Bakran religious complex in Lenjan, Isfahan (Wilber, 1955: no. 26; Pope, 1964/3: 1077-1079; 1964/8: 390), Torbat-i Jam (Wilber, 1955, no. 81 and Golombek, 1971: 27-44), and also Bayazid Bastami complexes (Hillenbrand, 1974 & 1982; Blair, 1982; Alieie, 2016), which have been constructed in different regions of Iran, have remained (see Blair, 1984).

Because the Bayazid Bastami complex is located on a major road connecting east to west and north to south of the Iranian Plateau (Fig. 2), it has always been considered by rulers in different ages. The central core of this complex is around the shrine of the famous Sufi, Bayazid Bastami (161-234 AH/777-849 AD) (Sahlegi, 2005: 37), and following that, some extensions

have been added to it or some restorations have been performed there. The main buildings and restorations of this complex relate to Ilkhanid era and two important rulers: Sultan Mahmud Ghazan Khan (694-703 AH/1295-1304 AD) and Sultan Muhammad Khoda Banda Öljaïtü (703-716 AH/1304-1316 AD). Even though Sultan Muhammad Öljaïtü had a high regard for Bayazid Bastami, he chose his children's names based on Bayazid's name and titles, including Bastam, Bayazid, and Tayfur (Kashani, 2005: 7 and 49).

During the last two centuries, Iranian individuals and some foreign travelers have visited the Bayazid Mosque and provided some explanations about it (Fig. 3). James B. Fraser, who travelled to northeast Iran (Khorassan) between 1821 and 1822 AD (1238 AH), provided some descriptions and explanations about different parts of Bayazid Bastami complex. He mentions some Ilkhanid inscriptions in the mosque. Also, he refers to the date of 699 AH/1299 AD and

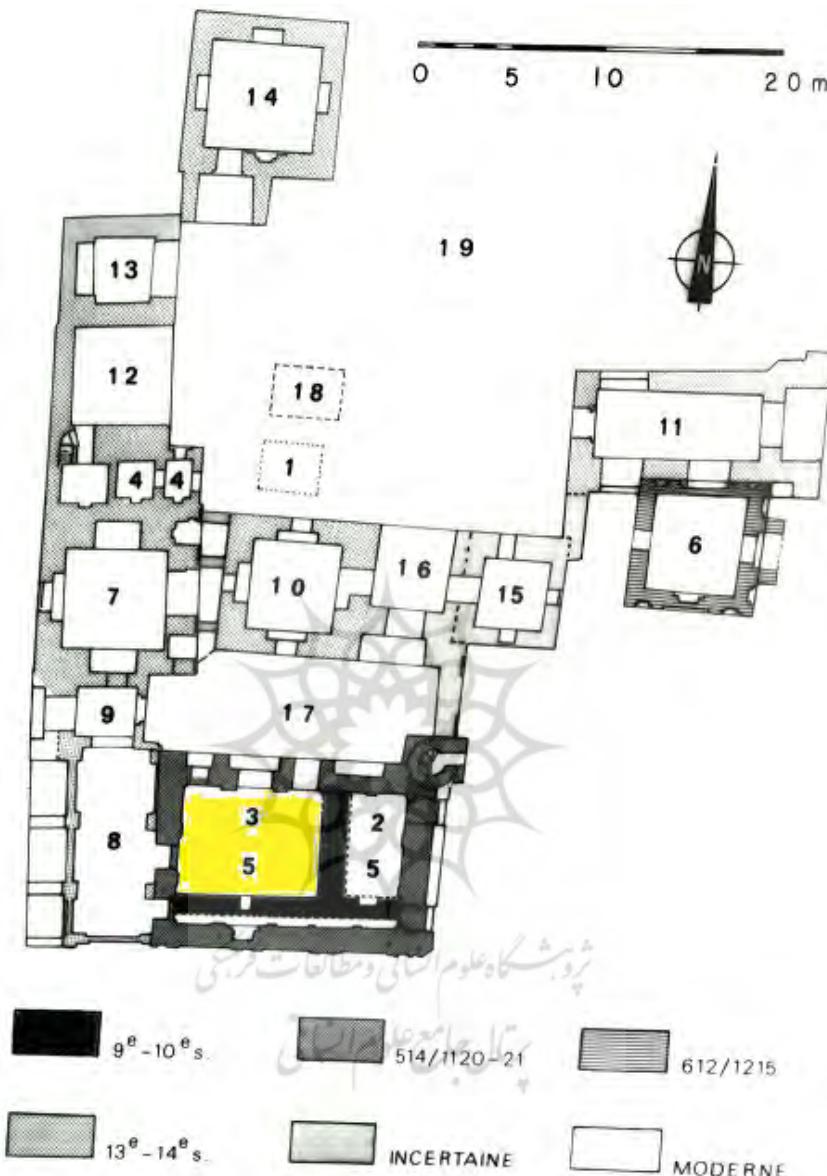


Fig. 3. Plan of Northern Part of the Complex. Bayazid Mosque is Highlighted (Adle, 2015: 243)

presents some explanations regarding the mosque's dome and the highly detailed interior stucco, the Quranic verses, and its carved doors (Fraser, 1825: 336).

Khanicoff, a Russian tourist, in his travel to Bastam (1858 AD/1274 AH),

has also pointed to various parts of the complex, including Bayazid Mosque (Khanicoff, 1861: 78-80).

Etemad-al-Saltaneh, in the Naser al-Din Shah Qajar's reign, after a travel to Khorasan region, has also provided



Fig. 4 and 5. Ilkhanid Mihrab of Bayazid Mosque. Before Restoration: right (Pope, 1964: 393) and after Restoration.

detailed descriptions about this complex, including Bayazid Mosque. He has mentioned that the inscriptions on the wooden doors of the mosque are illegible because of erosion (Etemad-al-Saltaneh, 1976:1:51). Also, Arthur Pope, assisted by Alfred George (Pope, 1964), has prepared some plans and images of the complex and Bayazid Mosque.

The main significant activity resulted in the discovery of Ilkhanid inscriptions related to Shahriar Adle's excavations in the early 1980s in the complex, especially in the Bayazid/Mardaneh mosque (Adle, 1985). He has just narrated the discovery process of these inscriptions in a very general manner and introduced them very generally.

Among the latest people who have written about Bayazid Bastam Mosque and complex, John Taboroff (Taboroff, 1981) and Zarei (Zarei, 1992) can be mentioned.

### Ilkhanid Inscriptions of Bayazid Mosque

The Ilkhanid inscription of Bayazid Mosque is categorized into two main parts: the first part includes the area around the old mihrab of the mosque, and the second part contains all around the mosque beltway, under the dome

### Inscriptions of the Mihrab

Stuccos of the current mihrab contain beautiful writings and exquisite decorative designs. The mihrab is 4 m in height, encompassing an inscription.



Fig. 6. Inscriptions around the Mihrab. Pay Attention to Kufic Inscriptions in the top Corners of Mihrab Panels with Elaborate Decorations in Spandrels of Mihrab Arch.

This inscription, which has been written in a kind of Thuluth script invented by a stucco artist<sup>2</sup>, starts from the right side of the wall in a frame, which is about 4 m in width, and after going all around the mihrab, it comes down on the left side and ends there (Fig. 4). The text of this inscription is consisted of verses no. 18 and 19 of the Surah Tawbah (9) in

<sup>2</sup> Taboroff mistakenly argues that this inscription has been written in Naskh script (Taboroff, 1981: 54).

addition to some other phrases:

«اسْمَهُ اعْلَى [.] بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ إِنَّمَا يَنْهَا  
مَسَاحِدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ أَمْنٍ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ  
وَآتَى الرِّزْكَهُ وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ إِلَّا اللَّهُ فَقِسْمِي أَوْلَىكَ أَنْ يَكُونُوا  
مِنَ الْمُهْتَبِينَ» (verse no. 18)

His name is the highest. In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful “Only those who believe in God, the Day of Judgment, perform their prayers, pay the religious tax, and have fear of God alone have the right to establish and patronize the



Fig. 7. Beginning and end of the Inscription around the Mihrab. Tawbah (9):18 & 19, Which is Erased in Some-where.

mosque of God so that perhaps they will have the right guidance" (18).

This verse ends at the top left side of the mihrab and following that, we can read:

«أَجَعَلْنَا سَقَايَةَ الْحَاجِّ وَ عِمَارَةَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ كَمَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَ أَيْمَنَ الْآخِرَ وَ جَاهَدَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ لَا يَسْتُرُنَّ عَنَّ اللَّهِ وَ اللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ»  
(verse no. 19).

Do you (pagans), because you served water to the pilgrims and constructed the Sacred Mosque, consider yourselves equal to those who have believed in God, the Day of Judgment, and have fought for the cause of God? In the sight of God you (pagans) are not equal to the believers. God does not guide the unjust (19).

In this part, the ending section of the inscription which leads to the ground, has been erased (Fig. 5).

Small inscriptions in Kufic script are

found on the top corners of the mihrab, on both the right and left sides. The text of the Surah Tawbah is visible on the inscription, and words such as «بِسْمِ اللَّهِ» are legible (Fig. 7).

On the second inscription, which has been written on the arch above the mihrab, these words have been written in Thuluth style:

«سَلَّمَ عَنْ سُلْطَانِ الْعَارِفِينَ قَدَسَ اللَّهُ تَقَسَّهُ بِمَا نَلَّتْ مَا نَلَّتْ قَالَ بِادْخَالِ السَّرُورِ فِي قَلْبِ الْمُؤْمِنِ عَمَلَ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْحَسِينِ بْنِ أَبِي طَالِبٍ الْمُهَنْدِسِ بْنِ بَنَّ الْدَّامَغَانِيِّ فَغَرَّ اللَّهُ لَهُ وَ لَوْلَدِيهِ وَ لِجَمِيعِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ».

“Ask after the sultan of the believers, God sanctifies his spirit. How did you obtain what you did? He said: By making joy penetrate the heart of the believer. The work of Mohammad, the son of Al-Hossein the son of Abī Tāleb, the architect (Mohandes), the Mason (Bannā), the Dāmghān (al-Dāmghānī), whom Allah (God) pardons as well as



Fig. 8. Inscription *Āyat al-Korsi* (Defective) into the Arch, Sophisticated Inner Decorations, and the Name of the Architect of the Mihrab

his parents and all the believing men and women."

At the end of the inscription, since the artist has made a mistake in calculating the inscription's size, the last two words have been written in a short form above the mihrab arch. This situation indicates that the artist must have performed his design impromptu, and no previous accurate calculation may have been conducted (Fig. 8).

Also, the verse no is within the upper space of the mihrab and below the arch. 255 of the Surah Baqare, known as Al-Kursi, has been carved in Thuluth script.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Taboroff again mistakenly argues that this inscription has been written in Naskh script (Taboroff, 1981: 56).

The inscription starts from the lower right side and, after passing through a few arches, it reaches the top of the mihrab and descends with an arch that is symmetrical to the opposite side and reaches the left side just opposite the initial point of the inscription. However, surprisingly, this inscription initiates with:

«بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم الله لا إله إلا هو الحى القيوم لا تأخذه .....»

(The continuation of the verse),

But at the left side end, it continues only until the words «لا يحيطون بشىء». Here, the *Al-Kursi* verse has been written incompletely that this point again similar to the previous inscription (سفل) .... (عن سلطان العارفين) indicating that no



Fig. 10. Small Inscriptions in Half of the Mihrab: Up: Kufic, Down: Thulth

preliminary design or plan has been provided for implementing the work and the inscriptions may probably have been performed impromptu (Fig. 8).

"God exists. There is no God but He, the Everlasting and the Guardian of life. Drowsiness or sleep do not seize him. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. No one can intercede with Him for others except by His permission. He knows about people's present and past. No one can grasp anything from [His knowledge besides what He has permitted them to grasp. The heavens

and the earth are under His dominion. He does not experience fatigue in preserving them both. He is the Highest and the Greatest]". 2: 255

In the middle of the mihrab (the belt), a wide inscription in Kufic Moshajjar (arborated (furcated), Mozahar (floriated/ with bush and floral design) Mogh'aad (knotted latticed) script<sup>4</sup> which starts from the right/west side of

<sup>4</sup> For detailed explanations about different styles of Kufic script and its decorations see Fazaeli, 2011.

the mihrab, and then after passing the halfway of the mihrab, it descends to the other side, the eastern side (Fig. 9). (The Surah Jinn (72): 18). Apparently, this inscription has been reversely written on the body of the mihrab.

Some small and short inscriptions are also observed in different parts of the mihrab, all of which contain the same content: «الله ربِّي» (Allah is my Lord). One of them in Thuluth script, exactly below the inscription containing Al Kursi verse; and in the middle, there is a decorative strip which is located just at the beginning of the mihrab's arch and above the colonnettes below the arch (Fig. 5). Four others, written in Kufic script, are located at the outmost decorative edge of the mihrab and between the flowers and arabesques (Fig. 7).

On both sides of the Mihrab, there are two plaster colonnettes, about 2 m high, whose tops are built like a vase, and the upper arc of the Mihrab is placed on these two potted colonnettes. On the body of these two vases, the phrase of faith declaration *Shahādah* (لا إله إلا الله: There is no God but Allah) has been written in Thuluth script (Fig. 9).

In addition to a wide range of inscriptions, this mihrab has diverse decorations that reflect the dexterity and mastery of the producer and artist.

## Analysis and Discussion

### Scripts

All the inscriptions on the mosque's mihrab have been written in a Thuluth script invented by the artist and also in a Kufic script. The script used by the artist in this part is, in some aspects, different from the Thuluth script prevalent during

this era, which has also been applied in buildings such as Natanz complex, the Öljaïtü Mihrab, or Pir-i Bakran complex<sup>5</sup> (Figs. 12 and 13). This special kind of script has made it specific to the writing style used exclusively by the artist of this mosque, i.e., Muhammad ibn Hussain abi Taleb Damghani. The kind of twist made in the way the letters are written and the filling signs applied to them, such as the V-like movements, along with a twist resembling a snake coil, which has been employed very beautifully and uniquely in the mihrab, are among such examples. This writing style is also seen in other complex parts, such as the mihrab of Jameh mosque of Bastam in the south (Figs. 3 and 11).

The delicacies and elegance applied in the inscriptions and decorations in the mihrab of Bayazid Mosque and the mihrab of Jameh Mosque are higher than in examples such as Pir-i Bakran. In Pir-i Bakran, the upper parts of letters, such as ک/کاف are more extended, and the width of inscriptions in Pir-i Bakran is higher. While the flowers and Khathaies of Pir-i Bakran are deeper, red and blue colors have been used to decorate. The texts in some places are written in red on a blue background (Zarei *et al.*, 2012: 105 & 106). Many multicolored plaster walls on the walls of the dome house in Pir-i Bakran are observed (Tayyab, 1975).

Unlike Pir-i Bakran, the main colors applied in the inscriptions of Bayazid Bastami complex are made of plaster mixed with ash (Fig. 15).

<sup>5</sup> For Natanz complex, see: Blair, 1986. For Pir-i Bakran complex, see: Tehnyat, 2008; Zarei *et al.*, 2012.



Fig. 11. Colonnettes on Two Sides of the Mihrab: Inscription and Decorations.

Kufic script is another one of the styles used in the mihrab. It can be argued that the type of Kufic script is Moshajjar (arborated/ furcated) Mozahhar (floriated design) Mogha'ad (knotted or latticed) (See Fazaeli, 2011). Here, the artist created the letters and their movements among Khataies and nested circles with great proficiency and generated a beautiful and eye-catching order (Fig. 11).

This technique can be seen on the belt of the mihrab most perfectly, where it starts from the right/west side within the mihrab and then, after passing through the mihrab width, it ends in the left/east side. Similar things are observed on the internal edges of the mihrab of Jameh mosque and also in the second room of

Bayazid monastery, as well as the Kufic inscriptions on the right side of the portal of Kashaneh tower (Fig. 16, 17, and 18). A great number of similarities exist between the type of lines in the mihrabs of the Jameh mosque and Bayazid Mosque, leaving no doubt that they have been performed by the same artist.

#### **Quranic Verses**

Among the inscriptions of the mihrab of Bayazid Mosque, the Quranic verses stand out more than anything.

The mihrab has been surrounded by verses 18 and 19 of the Surah Tawbah.

Use of verse 18 in mosques is customary because this verse enumerates the characteristics of "mosque developers". However, it seems



Fig. 12. Decorations and Inscriptions in the Pir-i Bakrān Sepulchre at Lenjān, Isfahan.

that here, the application of verse 19 is a particular emphasis on visiting Bayazid's tomb (Taboroff, 1981: 54). Verses 18 and 19 of the Surah Tawbah are also seen on the edge of the mihrab in Bayazid Mosque. This indicates that the hypothesis of applying verse 19 of the Surah Tawbah

to emphasize visiting Bayazid Bastami's tomb as a pilgrimage does not seem so reasonable. Still, here, this verse has been employed to emphasize Jihad for the sake of God. According to the fact that the date of this complex is the year 699 AH (Fig. 19), and with reference to Ghazan Khan's



Fig. 13a. Mihrab-i Öljaitu, Friday Mosque of Esfahan.

accepting Islam in 695 AH, it is probable that this verse serves as a declaration to display the faith of the Ilkhan (Ghazan Khan) and the regional ruler (Öljaitung) against the enemies; since following the attack of Mamluks corps to Bakr and conquest of Mardin castle, Ghazan Khan launched a military campaign towards Damascus and entered into Damascus in 699 AH/1299 AD (Mortazavi, 2005: 216).

The application of verse 18 of the Surah Tawbah continued until the Qajar dynasty, among the significant examples of which

Sepahsalar mosque and school can be mentioned (Mahjur and Alie, 2011: 49-58).

Another important phrase which is visible inside the internal arch of the mihrab is *بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ* (There is no God but Allah) and another one is the verse 255 of the Surah Baqara called *Āyat al-Kursi* (Fig. 8 & 20). Almost all chapters of Quran start with the name of God<sup>6</sup>. The presence of verse 255 of

<sup>6</sup> The Surat Tawba lacks this verse, but this verse has been stated twice in the Surat Naml (see the Holy Quran).

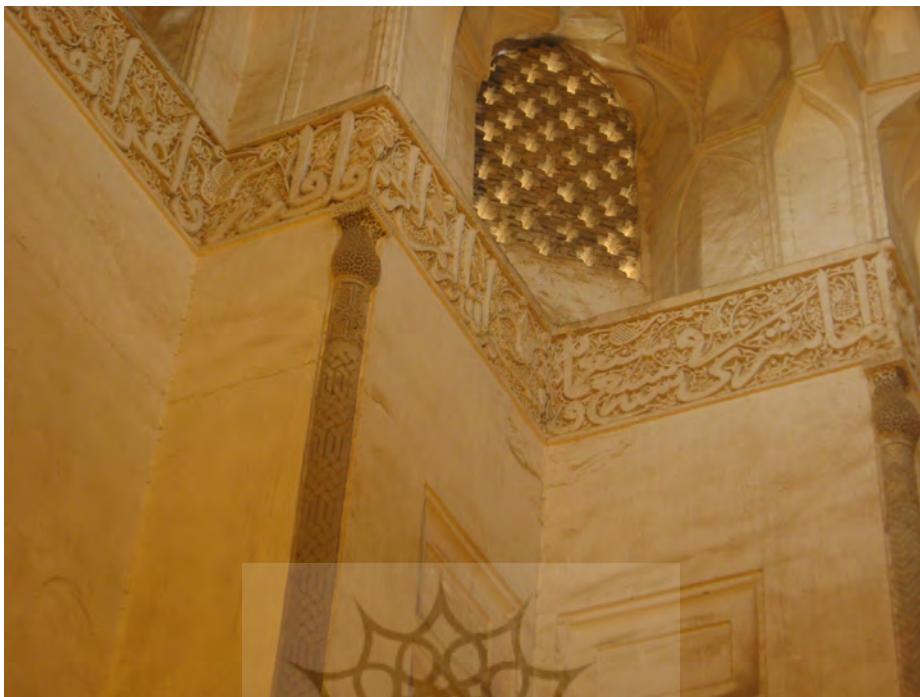


Fig. 13b. Thuluth Inscription at Natanz Tomb Complex with Date 707 AH [1307 AD].

the Surah Baqara, despite having been written incompletely, suggests the importance of this verse for the artist and the sponsors, as the very same verse is also seen on the portal of the Kashaneh tower in the south of the Bayazid complex. According to traditions, this verse is the most important and highly excellent verse that has been revealed to the Prophet (Quran Hakim, Makarem Shirazi, 2011: 42). Believing in a written destiny has caused God to be called "Katib Sarmadi" (the everlasting writer). Hence, Muslims initiated writing the Quran with the same dignity equal to its everlasting beauty (Hampartian & Saeednia, 2006: 141).

Another verse is verse 18 of the Surah Jinn, stating, "Mosques belong to God". It has been mentioned in Tafsir

(interpretations of Quran) that this word means the places where people prostrate for God a perfect example of which is Masjid al-Harām (the sacred mosque) and another example of which are other mosques, and its most extended instances are all the places where human says pray and prostrates for God; and based on the order of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who has said, "On all around the entire earth, places for prostration and purification (Tayamum) have been made for me" this place can refer to everywhere. This verse is indeed a response to those polytheists who have turned God's house into a pagoda and also a reaction to the Christian holy Trinity (Makarem Shirazi, 2011: 573). The phrase, « لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ » on the vase of the colonnettes (small columns)



Fig. 14. A Part of the Inscription of the Mihrab of the Friday Mosque at Bastam. Style of Script and Filling Signs Are Similar to Those at Mihrab-i Bayazid Mosque.

on both sides of the mihrab, is the main indication of declaring faith for Muslims (Fig. 8).

#### Prayers, Phrases, and Traditions

Also, in the middle of the mihrab and around it, the phrase "الله ربى/Allah is my Lord" has been written several times which is used as a multiple stress on belief in God and is likely to be an indication of Mongol rulers' conversion to Islam since Ghazan Khan's time. According to the date observed on the inscription under the former dome of the mosque, i.e., 699 AH (Fig. 16), and with reference to the time when Ghazan Khan joined Islam in 696 AH/1295 AD, and because he used to visit some places such as Imam Reza shrine and Bayazid Bastami's shrine (Rashi

al-Din Faz al-Allah, 1979AH/1940 AD: 208), the likelihood of this probability increases. During the same time, Öljaiteü (Hak, 703-716 AH) ruled over Khorasan and Qūmis regions, and the tendencies of both Islam are considerable<sup>7</sup>. Ghazan Khan, even before converting to Islam, was inclined to Sufism and visited the shrines of Islamic leaders in Khorasan and Najaf (Mortazavi, 2005: 340)

The phrase "Ask after the sultan of the believers.../ سُلْطَانُ الْعَارِفِينَ ..." written on the arch above the mihrab, is one of the statements attributed to Bayazid Bastami that, in *Kitab al-Nur* or the *Book of Light*, he is mentioned as saying, "A man came to me and asked, "Oh Bayazid!

<sup>7</sup> Fraser has mentioned to presence of Öljaiteü's name on inscriptions of Bayazid mosque (Fraser, 1825: 336).



Fig. 15. Inscription of Pir-i Bakran on a Colorful Texture.

How did you find this dignity? I replied, "...God has given me eight kinds of munificence...the third one was that my intention was to enter delight into believers' hearts... and the sixth one was my own struggling to enter delight in believers' hearts and pushing away sadness from their hearts" (Sahlegi, 2005: 149 and 150). The important point is that this phrase of Bayazid is also observed in the first room in Bayazid monastery, and it is an emphasis on the importance of mysticism to Bayazid (Fig. 21). In fact, here, the topic of "Mystic" (Sufi) and entering of delight to believers' hearts is the point connecting the inscription to

Bayazid, himself, and his philosophy of Sufism (Taboroff, 1981: 55)<sup>8</sup>.

In a tradition, Imam Bagher -peace be upon him- says, "Truly, the most popular deed to the Almighty God is entering delight into a believer's heart" (Koleini, 2011/2: 190) and in another tradition, he has said, "God has not been worshiped with anything more popular than entering delight into a believer's heart." (Koleini, 2011/2: 188). The holy prophet-peace be upon him-  
considers the value of this action equal

<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the courses of Sufism during Bayazid's time, and the related materials, see: Kadkani, 2007.



Fig. 16. Kufic Inscription of the Second Room in Monastery of Bayazid, 702 AH.



Fig. 17. Kufic Inscription of the Portal, Western Side of the Kashane Tower, Bayazid Bastami Complex, 700 AH.

to delighting God and his messenger (Koleini, 2011/2: 188).

**Masters (Titles and Professions)**  
On the arch of the mosque's mihrab,

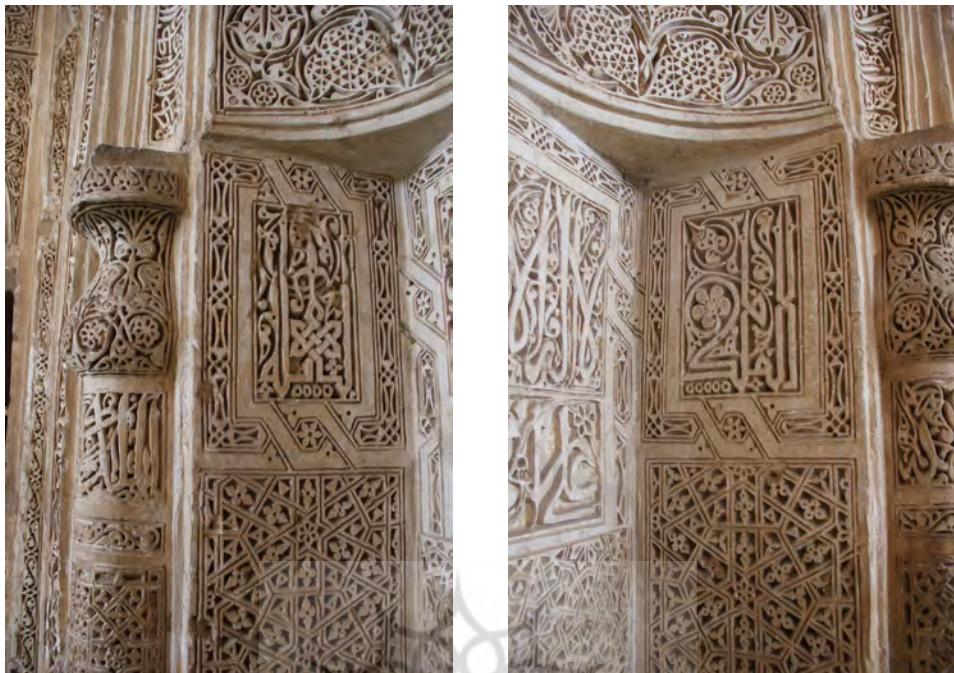


Fig. 18. Friday Mosque of Bastam, Mihrab, Kufic Inscriptions at the Sides, Date 706 AH

the name of “Muhammad ibn-i Hussain ibn-i Abi Taleb Damghani” with titles such as “engineer” and “Banna” (mason) has been mentioned. Muhammad ibn-i Hussain has been, in fact, the main architect and designer of the Bayazid Bastami complex during the Ilkhanid period, and all the parts have been constructed under his direct supervision (see Aliee, 2016); so, his name is seen on different parts of the complex. The first date accompanied by his name, is observed on Bayazid Mosque which is the core part and heart of the complex (Fig. 19). The second time, the name of Muhammad along with the date of 700 AH is seen on the portal wall of Kashane tower (Fig. 22). The third time, his name has been mentioned in the first room of Bayazid monastery (702 AH) along with

his brother’s name, “Haji” (Fig. 23). The fourth time, his name along with his father’s name, Hussain, with the date of 708 AH (For a comprehensive discussion about this inscription see: Blair, 1982) are written on the body above the Kashane tower, and the last time, his name has been written on the wall of a corridor known as Öljaiteü, which has been the original entrance way of the complex, dated 713 AH (Fig. 24).

The precision and mastery applied in Muhammad ibn-i Hussain Damghani’s work are exemplary. Although some writings are not complete in some parts, such as the mihrab of Bayazid Mosque, which indicates that the work has been performed impromptu, investigating other inscriptions, patterns, and decorations that have been left behind

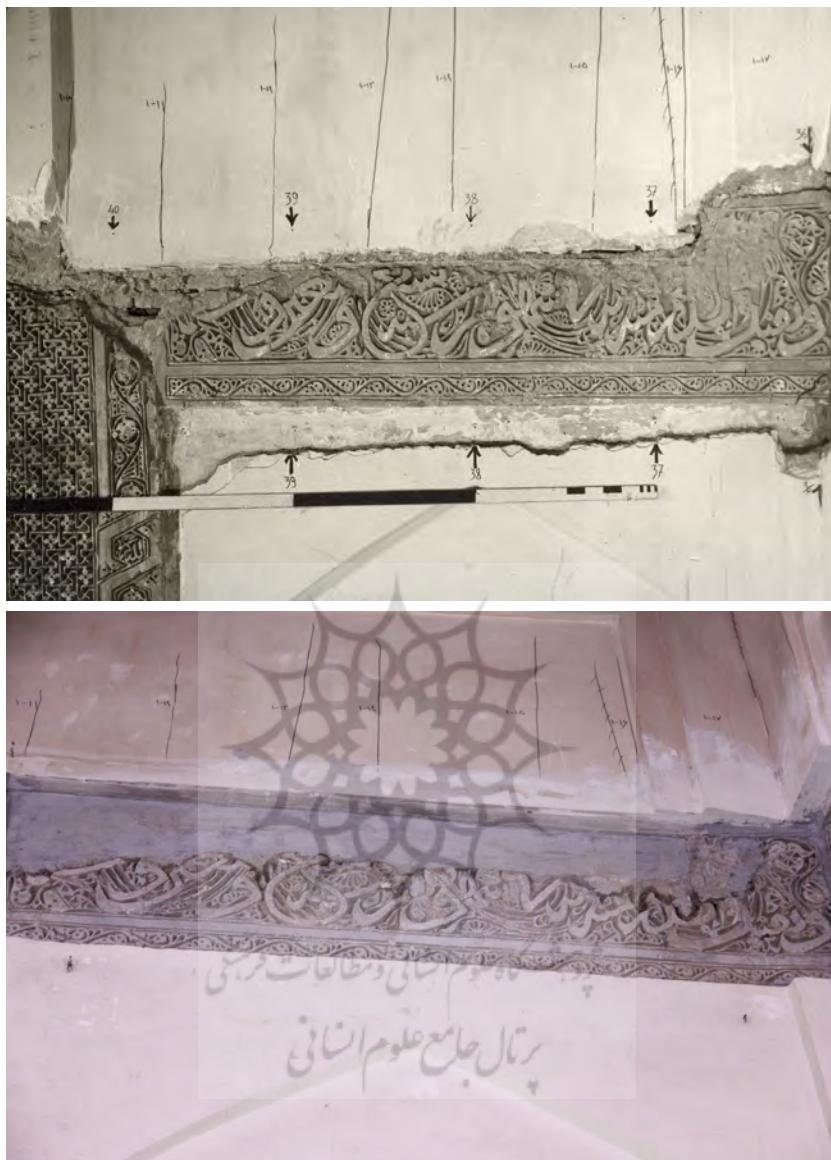


Fig. 19. Southern Side, West of Mihrab, Inscription Containing Date of Creating the Inscription: Months of 699  
Up: 1985 (Cultural Heritage of Semnan), down (2015).

as his mementos, reflects the perfection of his art and the high quality of his work.

Titles such as engineer and mason (Banna) for Muhammad Damghani, have been frequently used in Bastam

complex in some locations, such as the portal of Kashaneh tower or Bayazid monastery (Fig. 25). For example, in *History of Beyhaqi* where events of the year 427 AH have been stated, a person called "Abdol Malik Naqash Mohandes"



Fig. 20. Verse of Basmallah and a Part of Baqara (2): 255 (Ayat al-Korsi)

has been mentioned (Beyhaqi, 1995: 2: 721 and 722), but mentioning such titles on buildings is a rare thing which is observed in Bastam example.

In past eras, as observed in Beyhaqi and Bastam examples, people have had various kinds of expertise. As about Muhammad Damghani, he has been called with titles such as engineer, mason, and Jassās (plasterer)<sup>9</sup>. The popularity of Muhammad Damghani and his family's art has been widely known in the region. For instance, his brother's name, Hahi, is observed on

a half-ruined mosque near Alamdar Tower in Damghan (Wilber, 1995: 150). According to the high frequency of times his name has been mentioned in various parts of the Bayazid complex, it can be argued that he has been the construction supervisor performing there, and Haji has been considered as his apprentice. Hence, the absence of his name on other buildings seems impossible, and further research on this issue is continued.

Artists' travel to participate in various and extensive work was very prevalent during the Ilkhanid era. For instance, Heidar, the renowned calligrapher of the seventh and eighth centuries<sup>10</sup> and a

<sup>9</sup> For more information about the craftsmen's names and other information, see Wilber, 1976. However, Wilber has made some mistakes in some parts of Bastam complex. See Aliee, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Known as *Gonde Nevis* (Big writer), he wrote scripts clearly (Jali). Among his students, Khajeh Taj Al-Din Ali Shah, minister of



Fig. 21. Monastery of Bayazid, First Room, a Tradition Attributed to Bayazid, Similar to that of Mihrab of Bayazid Mosque.

student of Yaqut Mostaasemi, has recorded his name on the Natanz complex in 709 AH and also on the huge mihrab of Öljaite in the Jameh mosque of Isfahan in 710 AH (Blare, 2008/ 1387sh: 160). (Fig. 13 and 25). Gathering of many artists from around Öljaite, and Abu Saeed, and also Khajeh Ghias al-Din Muhammad Ibn-i Rashid al-Din Fazlollah Hamedani, minister of Sultan Abu Saeed, can be mentioned (Fazaeli, 2011: 317 and 318).

the country for huge constructions, such as the city of Soltanieh (see Rezvan, 2015; Blair, 1986; Akhavan, 2001), and then their scattering across the country after they returned to their hometown led to the promotion of their art and experience across the country.

### Conclusion

The inscriptions on the mihrab of Bayazid Mosque, the heart of the Bayazid Bastmai



Fig. 22. Name of Mohammad ibn-i Hossein on the Wall of Portal at Kashane Tower.

complex, are significant in various aspects. The Thuluth script applied in the mihrab was invented by its writer and artist, Muhammad ibn-i Hussain Damghani. It is beautifully depicted in different parts. The elegance and

complexity of the script style are much higher than contemporary examples such as Pir-i Bakran and Natanz.

Those signs filling spaces, like the letter V with a snake-like coiling, are specific to the artist of this complex. The Kufic script



Fig. 23. Name Mohammad Ibn-i Hossein Damghani and His Brother Haji.



Fig. 24. Name of Mohammad Ibn-i Hossein Damghani on the Hallway of Öljaiteü.

employed for this mihrab with fine and floral netting is a beautiful manifestation of the Heaven promised in the Quran. There are many similarities between this

script and some examples, such as Jameh mosque in the south of the complex.

Some verses of the Quran written on the mihrab emphasize the issue of



Fig. 25. Natanz Complex, End of Plaster Inscription on Northern Iwan. Name of Heidar on the Lower Part (Blair, 2008: 160)

developing mosques (Tawbah: 18), the application of which has been continued until the Qajar era. However, the presence of verse 19 has been intended to stress the issue of Jihad. It may point to a time when Ghazan Khan launched a troop towards Damascus to fight against the Mamelukes of that territory. Mentioning the Bismillah and Al-Kursi verses also emphasizes starting every work with God's name and pointing to the most excellent Quranic verse, i.e., Al-Kursi. Writing the Declarations of Faith on the colonnettes on both sides of the mihrab, is a declaration used to indicate being a Muslim by the then rulers. All the phrases such as «الله ربی» which have been frequently repeated, are considered as an emphasis on this declaration.

A phrase attributed to Bayazid, "Ask after the Sultan of the believers...", demonstrates Bayazid's mystical themes and beliefs. This emphasis, in addition to the Bayazid Mosque, is also observed in the Bayazid monastery, i.e., in two buildings constructed since the beginning of Bayazid's presence in this place and his praying and devotion to God, and their application has been continued even to the present date.

The great artist of this era in the region is "Muhammad ibn-i Hussain ibn-i Abi Taleb Damghani" who has attributed titles such as engineer and mason in Mihrab, and Plasterer in Öljaıtü Corridor to himself. This artist and his father, Hussain, as well as his brother, Haji, worked in Bastam region for about 15

years. The title, engineer, used on this mihrab, has been observed for the first time on a building. The popularity of artists in every region has resulted in the creation of numerous buildings in different areas, as the work of Haji son of Hussain Damghani can also be

found in the city of Damghan. Among the similar cases, the work of Heidar, the famous calligrapher in Ilkhanid era, can be mentioned, whose works can be observed in Isfahan -Öljaitü Mihrab: 709 AH- and in Natanz on the northern Iwan: 709 AH.

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