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LOCALIZATION OF PANJ GONBADAN
IN MARAGHEH (NORTHWESTERN IRAN)
BASED ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE
AND HISTORICAL SOURCES¹

Abstract. Studies aimed at identifying the exact location of historic buildings is of special interest for archaeologists. The historic buildings of Panj Gonbadan (*Five Domes*) are among the constructions of the Islamic period in the northwestern region of Iran mentioned in the historical sources of the Seljuk (5 and 6 AH) and Ilkhanid (7 and 8 AH) periods. Antiquities of the Seljuk period in northwestern Iran were neglected in archaeological studies for a long time, no research has been carried out, which show the necessity of their investigation. This research is aimed at exact localization of this architectural complex in northwestern Azerbaijan with special stress on the compatibility of archaeological data with historical sources. Based on historical sources and data obtained from the excavation season in the historical context of Maragheh, the locations of these buildings were identified. Accordingly, in the area between Gonbad-e Kabood and Modavvar Towers, there were identified materials from three other tombs studied and analyzed in this paper.

Keywords: Northwestern Iran, Maragheh, Islamic period, Tomb tower.

Introduction

Archaeological investigations of ancient buildings play an important role in recognizing architectural materials, artistic elements, religious tendencies of societies in different historical periods. Studies of the surviving texts of historians and geographers

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of different Islamic periods indicate the existence of historic buildings that no longer exist today, information concerning them is available only through the study of written sources. Matching the results of archaeological studies of the surviving remains and analysis of historical texts can only help historic constructions to be discovered reliably. The Maragheh city was one of the most important centers in Iran in the Middle Ages of Islam, especially the Seljuk (5 to 6 AH) and Ilkhanid (7 and 8 AH) periods. In the sources of the Islamic period the name of this city is mentioned many times, and it is considered as one of the important cities of Azerbaijan.

Historians and geographers of Islamic centuries had made numerous references to Maragheh city (*Ibn Khordadbeh*, 1889. P. 124; *Ibn Rustah*, 1892. P. 272; *Qazvini*, 1994. P. 642; *Hudud al-'Alam...*, 2002. P. 164; *Hamawi*, 1947. P. 109). This city was located in the important communication route of the northwestern region of Iran (Azerbaijan) in the 2nd to 8th centuries of Islam, for some time it was chosen as the capital of Azerbaijan (*Le Strange*, 1998. P. 176). This special situation and its importance led the city to flourish in the middle centuries of Islam. Various historical remains of this period are known in Maragheh. Among them mausoleums have a special place. Mausoleums of Gonbad-e Kabood and Ghaffariyeh tomb tower (*Sattarnejad et al.*, 2020b), Modavvar Tower (*Kargar*, 1993. P. 219), Gonbad-e Sorkh (*Sattarnejad et al.*, 2020a), and Goy Borj tomb are preserved and can be seen today. Some of the city's mausoleums have disappeared over time, leaving only their names in historical sources; among them the tombs of Amid al-Din Abu al-Fazaill Sa'id ibn Muhammad al-Baghdadi (*Ibn al-Fuwati*, 1996. P. 222), Muhyi al-Din Muhammad ibn al-Arabi al-Hatimi (*Ibn Arabi*, 1985. P. 3), Muhyi al-Din al-Maghribi (*Nasir al-Din al-Tusi*, 1989. P. 20), Al-Mustarshid Billah (1118–1135), 29th Abassi khalifa (*Hindu Shah*, 1978. P. 296) and Panj Gonbadan. However, no archaeological research has been performed aimed at localization of these mausoleums in the city of Maragheh until today. Therefore, in this study, the localization of these remains is presented in this paper, based on the data obtained during the first season of archaeological excavation of Gonbad-e Kabood and Modavvar Tower site of Maragheh and its comparison with the descriptions provided by historical sources.

Research method

The present study is a library-based research. It was based on the study of ancient texts of the Islamic period, especially medieval books (5 to 8 AH), which are considered as primary sources for this research. Archaeological evidence has been obtained from the excavation of the site of the Gonbad-e Kabood and Modavvar Tower of Maragheh. Accordingly, by choosing the descriptive-analytical method and matching the information of written historical sources with the data obtained from the archaeological study and excavation of the historical context of Maragheh, the location of the five domes should be introduced into scientific circulation.

Literature review

So far, studies have been conducted on mausoleums such as Gonbad-e Kabood and Ghaffariyeh tomb tower (*Sattarnejad et al.*, 2020b), Modavvar Tower (*Kargar*, 1993. P. 219), Gonbad-e Sorkh (*Sattarnejad et al.*, 2020a), and Goy Borj tomb tower. However, archaeological research on the localization of tombs whose names mentioned by researchers in medieval Islamic historical sources has not been carried out by scholars and the location of these building in Maragheh remains unknown. Panj Gonbadan of Maragheh is mentioned in some historical sources such as Tajareb al-Salaf by Hindu Shah (714 AH) and Ḥabib al-siyar by Khawndamir (880–942 AH); Therefore, in this research, the localization of this building is studied based on historical sources and archaeological evidence for the first time. Our results show that numerous tombs functioned in the city of Maragheh and consequently this center is of great importance as one of the important areas in the study of tomb architecture in the Islamic period of Iran.

Geographical location of Maragheh city

The city of Maragheh is located in northwestern Iran in the geographical coordinates of 37°38'92"N, 46°23'76"E and an altitude of about 1480 m above the sea level. Due to its location on the southern slopes of the Sahand Mountains, the city had a suitable environment for the formation of human societies. In this region, evidences of different historical periods are known; Early Paleolithic, Middle Paleolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze and Iron Ages, Parthian and Sassanid periods have been identified (*Sattarnejad*, 2016). In the Middle Ages, the city had an important political position due to its geographical location on the communication route between important cities in the region of Azerbaijan. So that in the Seljuk Atabeyg period and later in the Ilkhanid period, it was chosen as the capital of these states (*Mostofi*, 2003. P. 134). In the city various monuments and buildings from the Islamic period, especially the Middle Ages (5 to 8 AH) are preserved, mausoleums being an important part of this heritage.

Tomb towers of the Seljuk period in Maragheh

In the studies of the Islamic period of Iran, the city of Maragheh is better known for its mausoleums from the Seljuk period. So far, three mausoleums from the Seljuk period have been identified and studied in the city. The mausoleums of Maragheh of the Seljuk period are divided into two general categories in terms of plan. Group 1 – mausoleum with a square plan such as the Gonbad-e Sorkh; group 2 – mausoleum with a round plan such as a Modavvar Tower and Gonbad-e Kabood tomb. These buildings consist of two floors. The lower floor was built as the crypt of the building, and the upper floor as the place of worship or prayer hall. The buildings are generally erected from bricks, while in the part of crypt and the foundation, worked river boulders and granite stones were used. Gonbad-e Kabood, Modavvar Tower and Gonbad-e Sorkh

from the Seljuk period have been identified in Maragheh before the present study. In the present research the location of Panj Gonbadan is identified, so that the total number of Maragheh tombs from the Seljuk period reached 6. Below the tombs of the Seljuk period studied so far in Maragheh are presented.

1. Gonbad-e Sorkh is considered the oldest brick mausoleum in northwestern Iran (Fig. 1). This building was built in the Seljuk period in 542 AH. The Gonbad-e Sorkh is the earliest of five medieval mausolea located in Marāḡheh in Azerbaijan (Fig. 2). An inscription on the north side around the tympanum records that the tomb (referred to as both qobba and mašhad) was ordered by Abu'l-‘Ezz ‘Abd-al-‘Aziz b. Maḥmud b. Sa’d, known by the title of Qawām-e Āḡarbāyḡān, and possibly a member of the Aḥmadili dynasty (*Milwright*, 2012. P. 130). The building was completed on 11 Šawwāl 542/4 March 1148 (*Sattarnejad et al.*, 2020a). A further inscription on the east side names the builder as Abu Bakr Moḥammad b. Bandān Bannā’ b. Moḥassen [or Moḥsen] Me‘mār (*Godard*, 1934. P. 4; *Hillenbrand*, 1974. P. 94; Vol. II. P. 86–89; Vol. III. Fig. 51–58; Vol. IV. Pl. 67–73).

2. Gonbad-e Kabood. This building is located in Maragheh province, 37°23’24.39”N, 46°14’20.86”E, next to the Maragheh cylindrical tower. As to its shape, it is a ten-sided prismatic construction. Its entrance door has different decorations (Fig. 1). It is known as the tomb of the mother of Hollakoo or Goey tower, yet the assignment of this building to the tomb of the mother of Hollakoo has not been confirmed. According to the Quranic inscriptions in the tomb, André Godard denied its assignment to the mother of Hollakoo, who was a Christian. He says that the tomb is the grave of an unknown person of Muslim elders. On the other hand, Godard believes that the building of this tomb does not belong to the Mogul period, since the construction of such a tomb in the Maragheh, the capital of Holoku, which was the centre of the opposition to Islam, seems quite unlikely, unless it was built in the era of the Seventh Mongol Ilkhan, Ghazan Khan. Then, referring to the architectural style of the Ghazan era, he has added that the building cannot originate from this period. Consequently, its construction dates back before the time of Hollakoo. Thus, Godard estimates this date from 582 to 656 AH and constructs his hypothesis by rebuilding the inscriptions (*Godard*, 1934; *Sattarnejad, Parvin*, 2019. P. 4).

3. Modavvar Tower (Fig. 1) is erected 10 meters away from Gonbad-e kabud building, belongs to the Seljuk era. It is a cylindrical two-story tower with a plain façade made of red bricks and stone slabs. The building has a domed ceiling which has been destroyed and a gable roof has been built instead to protect the building. In addition to the beautiful brick-work of the outer façade, impressive decorations formed by a combination of brick and tile-works on the entrance are another feature of the building. The entrance portal of the tower has crescent frames and a round arch. They surround the portal. There is a Kufic inscription composed of brick and azure tile-works bearing verse 35 of Anbia chapter of holy Quran above and beneath the arch. It shows the date 563 AH. The inner space is a 12-sided one with stucco decorations. The crypt of the building consists of a cross-shaped space. It seems to be someone’s grave and the building has been erected as the memorial. But there is no information available concerning the founder or the buried person (Fig. 3).

4. Panj Gonbadan in historical texts. Panj Gonbadan is the name of the complex consisting of five mausoleums located in the city of Maragheh. No information



Fig. 1. The tombs of the Seljuk period in Maragheh

Top – Gonbad-e Sorkh; bottom left – Gonbad-e-Kabuod; bottom right – Modavvar Tower

was available about these relics before archeological excavation undertaken in 2018. The name of this assemblage was only mentioned in the historical books of the 8th and 9th centuries AH. The book «Tajareb al-Salaf» written by Hindu Shah Nakhjavani in 714 AH, is the earliest source that indicates the existence of 5 tombs in the city of Maragheh. In mentioning the events of the Seljuk period, Hindu Shah referred to the assassination of the Abbasid Caliph in the city of Maragheh and described the location of the tomb as follows: «...The dead body of the caliph was taken to Maragheh by the judges, imams, and nobles of the countries. It was buried

in Atabeyg school, the neighborhood of judges, and a high dome was built. There are 5 tombs at the line of that school, one of which belongs to the caliph» (*Hindu Shah*, 1978. P. 296). Ghiyās ad-Dīn Muḥammad Khondamīr (880–942 AH), the Iranian historian, in his book *Habib al-Siar*, considers the history of the tombs to be related to the Seljuk period (*Khawndamir*, 2002. P. 181). These two historical books are considered as study sources that refer to the existence of 5 tomb towers in Atabeyg neighborhood of Maragheh. In accordance with these data, the archaeological team excavated the location of Panj Gonbadan in Maragheh. The excavations were carried out at the appropriate location, which resulted in the identification of Panj Gonbadan.

Archaeological evidence

So far, two archeological campaigns have been carried out in Maragheh. The first investigation related to the identification and discovery of an observatory from the Ilkhanid period belonged to Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, which was carried out by Parviz Varjavand in 1972. The second campaign was carried out by Mohammad Rahmatpour in 2019 next to two Kabood and Modavvar Tower (*Rahmatpour*, 2019). The results obtained from stratigraphic trench led to the identification of cultural periods of Maragheh, especially the remains from the Seljuk and Ilkhanid periods (*Sattarnejad et al.*, 2020b). During the excavation, 10 trenches were dug out in different parts of the site. The results from excavations in trenches I 5, I 6, H 5, H 6 led to the identification of architectural structures, which formed a part of the remains of two tomb towers destroyed over time. In later periods, human activities and architectural works took place on these structures. However, evidence of the architectural generality of the two towers were identified in the course of archaeological excavations, which is presented below.

The surface layer at the site consisted of soil, bricks, stones. After removing the surface layer, the architectural remains of two tomb towers were identified. These structures are located at a depth of about 1 m from the ground level (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Location of Panj Gonbadan in the city of Maragheh

1 – Kaboud; 2 – Modavvar; 3 – Structure 1; 4 - Structure 2; 5 – Gonbadan



Fig. 3. Structure 1 in the city of Maragheh

Structure 1 is located northwest of Kaboud tomb tower at the distance of 30 meters, with geographical coordinates $46^{\circ}14'20.02''\text{E}$, $37^{\circ}23'25.19''\text{N}$. The structure has a circular and round plan 7 m in diameter (Fig. 3). A row of dado stone of the building has survived. The dado stone is made of yellow granite. In the local dialect of Maragheh people this kind of stones is known as Sinjan. The stones are cut in rectangular shape. They are of various dimensions: $50 \times 43 \times 10$, $65 \times 23 \times 8$, $70 \times 31 \times 12$, $24 \times 20 \times 8$, $80 \times 47 \times 20$ cm.

In the building interior unworked river stones are used. The stones are black, gray, brown in color and different in size, for example $35 \times 23 \times 10$, $33 \times 30 \times 12$, $30 \times 28 \times 10$, $31 \times 20 \times 18$, $27 \times 25 \times 20$, $25 \times 20 \times 10$, $18 \times 10 \times 5$ cm. The mortar used in the architectural structure of this building is gypsum-lime type. The building is solid, like Modavvar Tower. Its crypt was leveled to the ground level and, unlike the Kaboud tomb tower, has no stairs.

Structure 2 is located at the distance of 23 m to the northwest of Kaboud tomb tower. This building, like structure 1, has a cairn structure with river-type stones of different size, their average dimensions are $40 \times 30 \times 15$, $38 \times 30 \times 20$, $35 \times 25 \times 15$, $30 \times 30 \times 21$, $30 \times 28 \times 25$ cm. This tomb tower, unlike tower 1, was not solid and was created as a hollow cylinder. The building is very similar to Kaboud tomb tower in terms of its structure. The crypt of the Kaboud tower is located below ground level, for steps were built to enter it. The crypt of the discovered building is also situated below ground level. The building is 7 m in diameter with the preserved height of the walls reaching 110 cm. Lime mortar was also used in the structure (Fig. 3).

In the western part of this building, evidence of other architectural structures was identified, based on which it can be supposed that these buildings were located next to other architectural structures.

Pottery

Ceramic collection retrieved at the site confirms that the pottery belongs to the Islamic Middle Ages. The description of ceramic materials is published (*Sattarnejad et al.*, 2020b. P. 402, 403. Fig. 3).

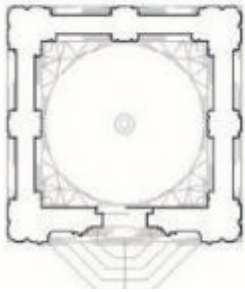
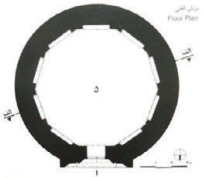
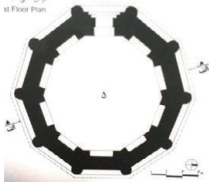
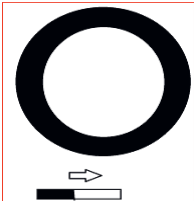
Data analysis

Our initial information on the existence of five tombs from the Seljuk period in Maragheh is related to the text of the book *Tajareb al-Salaf* written by Hindu Shah Nakhjavani who mentioned the location of Panj Gonbadan in the city of Maragheh (*Hindu Shah*, 1978). Later sources, especially the book *Habib al-Siar* written by Khawndamir, mentions the history of these tombs related to the Seljuk Atabeygan period (*Khawndamir*, 2002. P. 181). Based on these sources, we started searching for 5 tomb towers in the city of Maragheh from the Seljuk period. To achieve this goal, the old neighborhoods of Maragheh were first identified. Maragheh consists of 4 old neighborhoods with the names of: 1 – Atabeyg, 2 – Salar, 3 – Darvazeh, 4 – Maidan (*Gholamieh*, 2007). The book *Tajareb al-Salaf* states that Panj Gonbadan are located inside Atabeyg school. The name of the school (Atabeyg) has survived today in one of the old neighborhoods of Maragheh. The word Atabeyg is a compound of the Turkic word *ata*, «ancestor», or «father» and the word *beg* or *bey*, «lord, leader, prince». This term was used in Iran to mean the teacher of the sultan and sometimes the noble of a tribe. Therefore, the name of Atabeyg neighborhood has survived from the Seljuk period. In this neighborhood, Kaboud and Modavvar Tower from the Seljuk period are situated. These two tombs helped a lot in localization of Panj Gonbadan, so we guessed that Panj Gonbadan was probably located next to these two tomb towers. Therefore, archeological excavations were started at a distance of about 5 m from the Kaboud and Modavvar Tower. The excavation in the Atabeyg neighborhood and next to the tower of Kaboud and Modavvar Tower began with digging a stratigraphic trench. The trench has yielded a lot of information about the settlement status in the historical context of Maragheh city in the Seljuk and Ilkhanid periods (*Sattarnejad et al.*, 2020b). Based on this trench, it was determined that this part of Maragheh city was used in the 4th to 8th centuries AH. Therefore, 4 excavation trenches were dug out between the Kaboud and Modavvar Tower. The results of the excavation were very surprising, so that in this part, round structures were identified with cairn structure. These buildings were very similar in plan to the two Seljuk tomb towers around them. Also, bricks, tiles, truncated stones were discovered in the rubble layer of this area.

These findings were exactly the same as the material used in the other two tomb towers. Therefore, we have the following reasons to identify these structures and

the surrounding materials with the Panj Gonbadan mentioned in the historical books of the Seljuk and Ilkhanid periods is located exactly in this place (Table 1).

Table 1. General characteristic of the Maragheh tombs

Title	Plan	Date	Materials
Gonbad-e Sorkh		542 AH	Brick, gypsum, tile, stone
Modavvar Tower		563 AH	Brick, tile, stone
Gonbad-e Kaboud		583 AH	Brick, tile, gypsum, stone
Panj Gonbadan		Seljuk	Brick, tile, stone

1. The tombs of Panj Gonbadan are located inside the city of Maragheh and Atabeyg neighborhood. During the excavation of the Kaboud and Modavvar Tower site, evidence of three new tomb towers was discovered and identified, consequently, the total number of tombs in this place has increased to five. Thus their number is the same as the number of Panj Gonbadan.

2. Panj Gonbadan is located inside the school yard. According to surviving images from the Qajar and Pahlavi periods, there existed old schools in this part of the city of Maragheh, then destroyed over time.

3. The architectural plan and materials used in the Kaboud and Modavvar Tower are the same as in the identified tomb towers. The tiles discovered in the excavation trenches are similar in structure and color to the Kaboud and Modavvar Tower towers tile work.

4. The pottery from this place belong to the Seljuk and Ilkhanid periods and show that the site has been used since the Seljuk time. Based on the above evidence, the authors suggest the location of Panj Gonbadan in the area of Atabeyg neighborhood and next to the Kaboud and Modavvar Tower. In this place, based on archeological excavations, five tombs from the Seljuk period have so far been identified inside historical schools. Therefore, it is likely that one of the tombs belongs to Al-Mustarshid Billah (1118–1135), the 29th Abassi caliph.

Conclusions

Panj Gonbadan is the name of five tombs from the Seljuk period, which has been mentioned for the first time in the book *Tajareb al-Salaf* written by Hindu Shah Nakhjavani belonging to the 8th century AH. However, over time the location of the Panj Gonbadan in Maragheh has been forgotten due to the destruction of three tombs out of five mausoleums. The first season of the archeological excavations in the Kaboud and Modavvar Tower site led to the identification of structures from the Seljuk period. They have a round plan that is very similar to the Kaboud and Modavvar Tower. Taking into consideration the archaeological evidence, especially the discovered structures, the historical school, the Atabeyg neighborhood and pottery data of the location of Panj Gonbadan within the historical context of Maragheh were identified. The Panj Gonbadan mentioned in the historical sources of the 7th and 8th centuries AH is in fact the same as Kaboud and Modavvar Tower and the surrounding structures. Today, only two tombs have survived, while the other three tombs have been destroyed. These mausoleums belong to the Seljuk period and are the burial places of the Seljuk Atabeygans and Al-Mustarshid Billah, the 29th Abassi caliph.

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ЛОКАЛИЗАЦИЯ КОМПЛЕКСА ПАНДЖ ГОНБАДАН В МАРАГЕ (СЕВЕРО-ЗАПАДНЫЙ ИРАН) НА ОСНОВЕ АРХЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ МАТЕРИАЛОВ И ИСТОРИЧЕСКИХ ИСТОЧНИКОВ

Резюме. Особый интерес для археологов представляют исследования, направленные на определение точного местоположения исторических зданий. Среди построек исламского периода в северо-западной части Ирана, упоминаемых в исторических источниках сельджукского (5 и 6 вв. хиджры) и хулагуидского (7 и 8 вв. хиджры) периодов, фигурируют исторические сооружения Пандж Гонбадан («Пять куполов»). В течение длительного времени древностям сельджукского периода на северо-западе Ирана не уделялось должного внимания, поэтому их изучение весьма актуально. Цель настоящего исследования состоит в точном определении местоположения рассматриваемого архитектурного комплекса, а также проверке непротиворечивости археологических данных и данных исторических источников. В исторической части