

## An Examination of Khaje Atabak's Tomb, a Remained Memorial Monument from Seljuks' Era in Kerman<sup>1</sup>

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Research Article

### Abstract

Seljuks ruled Kerman for almost a century and a half (433-583 A.H.) and left historical monuments in this city. The current study, being a basic examinational research, aims at introducing one of these memorial monuments named Khaje Atabak's Tomb, while examining the works done to restore its outer façade and also the present condition of this monument. In order to collect the data library results were utilized along with field studies. The research questions include: 1. Who does Khaje Atabak's Tomb belong to and when exactly has it been built? 2. What are the decorative details used in this monument? 3. What is the present condition of this place? The results of the study suggest that Khaje Atabak's Tomb has been one of the most beautiful Iranian monuments of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AH, mainly famous for its diverse decorations and writings of the inscriptions. Brick decorations, Negin tiles, different plaster work with geometric and natural shapes, knotted Kufi inscriptions, thuluth calligraphy, and many more elegant decorations can be seen in this monument. Despite all this beauty, this place has remained unknown and requires substantial restoration, which has kept the writer occupied for a decade.

**Keywords:** Kerman, Seljuks, Khaje Atabak's Tomb, Present Condition of the Monument, Necessity of Restoration.

## Kirman'da Selçuklu Dönemi'ne Ait Bir Anıt Olan Kral Atabak'ın Mezarının İncelemesi

### Öz

Selçuklular yaklaşık 150 yıl (M.S. 1041-1187) Kirman'da hüküm sürdü ve arkalarında tarihi yapılar bıraktılar. Temel deneysel bir araştırma olarak bu çalışma, tarihi yapılardan biri olan Kral Atabak'ın mezarının şuan ki halini ve restore edildikten sonraki dış cephesinin durumunu incelerken, bu tarihi yapıyı tanıtmayı amaçlar. Verilerin toplanabilmesi için saha çalışmaları ile birlikte kütüphane sonuçları da kullanılmıştır. Araştırma şu soruları içerir: 1) Kral Atabak'ın mezarı kime ait ve tam olarak ne zaman inşa edildi? 2) Bu yapıdaki dekoratif detaylar nelerdir? 3) Bu yapının şuan ki durumu nedir? Çalışmanın sonuçları, Kral Atabak'ın mezarının 12. yüzyılda, İran'ın en güzel anıtlarından biri olduğunu ve özellikle çeşitli süslemelerle ve kitabelerin yazılarıyla ünlü olduğunu gösteriyor. Bu anıtta, tuğla süslemeleri, Negin çinileri, farklı sıva çalışmaları, geometrik ve doğal şekiller, düğümlü Kufi yazıtları, thulut hat sanatı ve daha pek çok zarif dekorasyon görülebilir. Bütün bu güzelliğe rağmen, bu yapı pek bilinmemektedir ve yazarmın on yıl boyunca meşgul olmasını sağlayan önemli bir restorasyon gerektirir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kirman, Selçuklular, Kral Atabak'ın mezarı, Yapının şuan ki durumu, Restorasyon gerekliliği

<sup>1</sup> This article is analyzed by two reviewers and it is screened for the resemblance rate by the editor. (Bu makale iki hakem tarafından incelenmiş ve editör tarafından benzerlik oranı taramasından geçirilmiştir)

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## **Introduction**

With the Seljuks governing Iran and due to the stability of the vast country in their time, Iranian art and architecture began to flourish and brought about one of the most magnificent eras in Iranian history of art. During that time cities of Isfahan, Marv, Neishabur, Harat, Rey, and Kerman were centers of art and artisans. Seljuks' architecture utilized elements in order to build enormous mosques with central yards, four ivans, and a square domed hall. These elements can be observed, for instance, in Turanshah Jama (Malek) Masjid in Kerman, Jama Masjid of Isfahan, Mosque of Qazvin, etc. Khaje Nezam al-Molk Vazir also built several schools in important cities of Iran and expanded educational settings. In the area of monuments, Seljuks also constructed tombs in different shapes such as squared, circular, and octagonal – nowadays remaining in different parts of Iran. Monuments such as Toqrol Tower, Mehmandust Tower, Sheikh Joneid Dome, Kharaqan Tower, and Khaje Atabak's Tomb have been constructed in Hamedan, Damqan, Qazvin, and Kerman, respectively. In the late Seljuk's era it was common to use glazed bricks in architecture and architects performed well in combining ordinary bricks with turquoise and azure glazed bricks to make different shapes.

The big tribal structure of Seljuks caused the separation of some tribes from the central government, even during their power. And these tribes formed new small governments in Iraq, Rum, Kerman, and Sham. Kerman Seljuks were one of these tribes that ruled Kerman and the lands around Kerman for a long time and were finally destroyed by Qoz Turkmans. The remained Seljuk monuments in Kerman, just like other monuments possess magnificent beauty and strength. One of the most notable Seljuk monuments is Khaje Atabak's Tomb which has preserved around nine centuries of Kerman history but is now abandoned in the corner of one of its oldest neighborhoods.

The main point is that this monument has been rarely examined, and in some studies it has even been ascribed to a person other than the real owner. In the current study, while introducing the monument's owner, the present condition of the monuments is also examined. The research objectives therefore include: 1. Introducing Khaje Atabak's Tomb and the way it was built, 2. Studying the decorations of the monument, 3. Examining the present condition of the monument and the necessity of its restoration.

## **Background**

Despite the importance and special position of Kerman Seljuks in the history of Iran, this dynasty has not been thoroughly examined by scholars. Although little information about Seljuks' architecture, namely Khaje Atabak's Tomb, is provided in historical references, but there are still valuable books written in this area, such as "The History of Art and Architecture in the Islamic Era" by Mohamad Yusef Kiani (2009), "Islamic Architecture of Iran During Seljuk's Era" by Qolamali Hatam (2000), "Examination of Decorative Details of Khaje Atabak's Tomb in Kerman" by Shahrzad Pursafar (2007), and an article titled "The Emergence of Colour in Outer Decoration of Monuments, the Case of Khaje Atabak's Tomb, with the Oldest Negin Tiles in Iran" by Shohre

Javadi (2003). In these references the monument and its decorations have been described; however, firstly the owner is still unknown, and secondly, the present condition of the monument is missing in these works. These two issues are going to be examined in the current study.

### **Method**

In terms of objective, the present study is a basic research and in terms of nature and method, it is an analytical research. The data and information required were extracted from the early references and new researches and in order to achieve scientific results, qualitative analysis was carried out. Therefore, although the present study was conducted by library method, field study was performed and in addition to investigation of the current situation of one of the Seljuk monument in Kerman, it was photographed. In other words. The data was collected by the both library studies (documents and approved plans) and field studies (objective observation).

### **Introducing Khaje Atabak's Tomb and its Owner**

Seljuk Turkmans made an effort to expand the foundations of their vast government since Toqrol –ibn Mikael –ibn Seljuk(431–455 A.H.), who decided to divide the conquered areas and leave them with their brothers and nephews, so he could stabilize his influence on these areas and also begin to conquer other parts. He therefore sent his nephew named Qavard Seljuki to invade Kerman. Qavard conquered Kerman and Tabas in the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century AH. “Malek Qavard Seljuki began to invade Kerman under the demand of his uncle, Toqrol Beig, in the year 433 AH” (Mirkhand, 1996: 698/4). After defeating Deilamis and Qofs<sup>3</sup> and complete conquering of Kerman, Malek Qavard went on to invade Oman and asked Amir Hormoz to give him a hand in preparing the war equipment. Oman’s ruler called Shariar –ibn Tafil, however, surrounded without resistance, and Khutbe and coins were named after Qavard (Khabisi, 1994; 339). After invading Oman and Kerman, Qavard owned the whole community (figures 1).

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<sup>3</sup>. Some historians say that Qofs (Kufoj) were some tribes, apparently living in Jiroft and Jabal Barez (Khabisi, 1964: 5). Other historians believe that Qofs was the name of a mountain in Kerman near Baluchestan borders, and the Qofs or mountain-living nomads lived in that area. In this part of Kerman two old tribes of Qofs (nomads) and Balus (Baluch) used to live (Safi Nejad, 2004: 107; Rusta, 2013: 93).

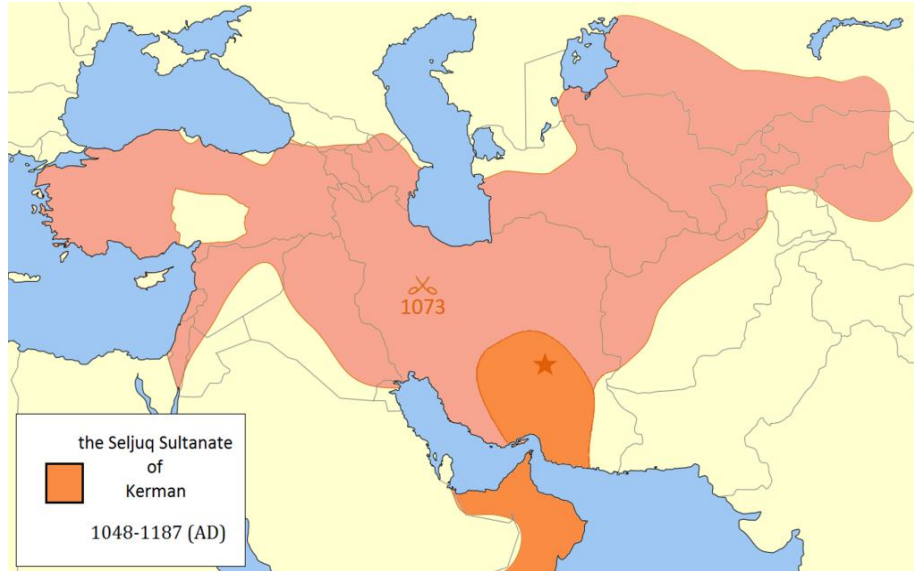
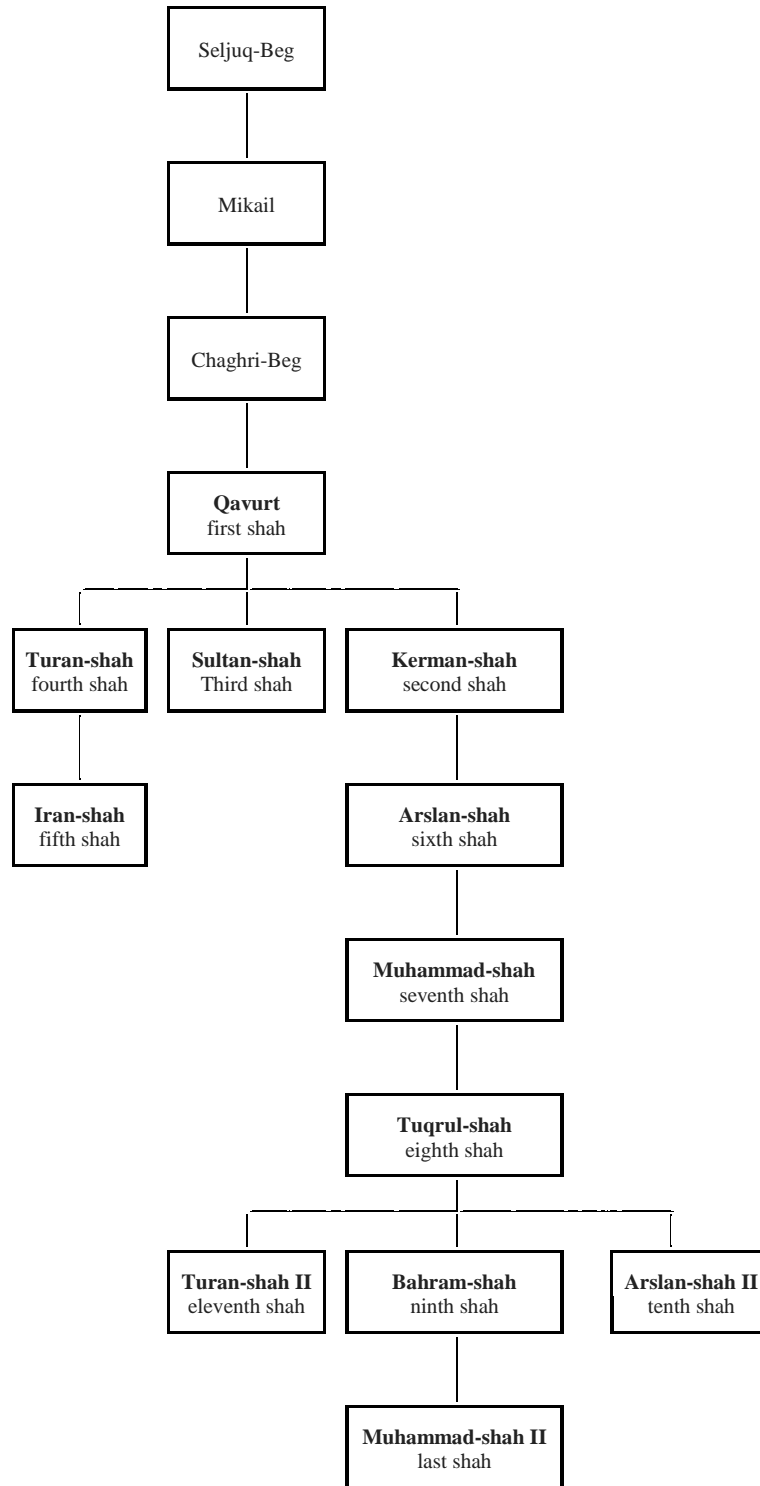


Figure 1: The Seljuk's territory and their authority over Oman (adopted from <http://fa.wikipedia.org>).

Some references suggest Malek Qavard Seljuk's reign starting from 440 AH (1048 AD) (Kermani, 1947: 10). One of the important political events in the Seljuq rule of Kerman is its relations with the Great Seljuq dynasty. According to the tribal structure of the Seljuq dynasty, the greatest person of the tribe succeed. So, Qavard, the eldest son of Chaqri Beg, considered himself worthy of succession (Bosworth, 2001, p.89). But the basic role of Alb Arslan, the younger brother of Qavard, in the early Saljuqs' conquests, had made him more acceptable to Tuqril's succession. Although Qavard did not protest to the election of Alb Arslan for the monarchy at the beginning, but after the death of Tuqril and on the throne of Alb Arslan, Qavard opposed Alb Arslan and invaded Fars and conquered it (Morsalpour, 2008, p.59). Alb Arslan, who could not do anything against this action, immediately fought againsts Kerman in 456 A.H. He surrounded Kerman and Qavard didn't have the power to deal with his brother and surrendered to him and gave the rule of Fars to Al the the rulers to conquer Ray and to dominate other lands, and eventually he became involved with Malekshah. In this fight, in spite of the desire of the Malekshah's army b Arslan (Hosseini, 2003, p.68) and only the areas of the Fars Block became of Kerman (Vaziri, 1991, Vol.1, p.348-349).

With the throne of Malekshah in 465 A.H., Qavard decided to conquer the reign of Iraq and inci to Qavard, with Khaje Nezam al-Molk's tact, Qavard failed and escaped. He was arrested and according to some one, he was choked at night and according to some others, he was suckled poison (Ravandi, p. 127; Ibn Athir, Vol.17, p. 54; Bondari, p. 156; Shabankarehei, 1984, p. 102; Khandmir, Vol.2; p. 537 ). But Malekshah left the rule of Kerman in the hands of his children. Kerman had greatly advanced during the reign of Qavard's children and descendants and the cities such as Kerman, Bardsir and Jiroft were very active in terms of commerce. After Malek Qavard was assassinated (465 A.H.) his dynasty lasted until 583 AH (1187 AD). (Boyle, 2001, p. 61)



(Pedigree of the Seljuks of Kerman)

An Examination of Khaje Atabak's Tomb, a Remained Memorial Monument from Seljuks' Era in Kerman /Jamshid ROOSTA

During the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century AH, as different Seljuk tribes gained power in Iran, architecture began to flourish. In other words "Seljuk architecture was already elegant, strong, and complicated, but it hasn't happened in a day, it was rather the result of a resurrection in Iran during the first half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AH (10<sup>th</sup> AD) under the influence of Samanids. This resurrection was at its peak during the Seljuk's era (Pope, 2002: 102).

One of the most noteworthy monuments remained from this era is without doubt Khaje Atabak's Tomb. This monument possesses around 9 centuries of Kerman history but is now abandoned in the corner of one of its oldest neighborhoods. Tombs and memorial monuments have been basically important in Iran, as Iranian have always respected the great men and have tried to preserve their name in history by building memorial monuments after them (Hatam, 2000: 102). Normally, tombs were constructed with bricks or stones, with the owner's name, life duration, characteristics, and the date of death engraved on the tombstone. A word of praise would sometimes accompany this information. The affluent would usually build a 4-collumed brick dome on the tomb.

Along with the Turkman Seljuks' reign, these memorial monuments gained increasing popularity in Iran (Kuhnel, 1986: 73-74). Monuments in different shapes such as squared, circular, cracked, and octagonal can be found in different parts of Iran. Monuments such as Sheikh Joneid Dome, Jabalie Dome, Kharaqan Towers, Chehel Dokhtar Tower, and Sorkh Dome have been also built in different areas of Iran (Kiani, 2009: 64-65; Hatam, 2000: 102-103).

Khaje Atabak's Tomb is also one of these monuments. It is an octagonal brick monument situated in one of the oldest neighborhoods of Kerman called Baq-e Lale<sup>4</sup>. Abuhamed Street now crosses this area (Figures 2 and 3).

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<sup>4</sup> . In some references this neighborhood is mentioned as Shah's Bazaar or Shahr's Bazaar (Hatam, 2009: 211; Pursafar, 2007: 77). Today this neighborhood and also Khaje Atabak's Tomb in located on 18, Abuhamed Street, Kerman.

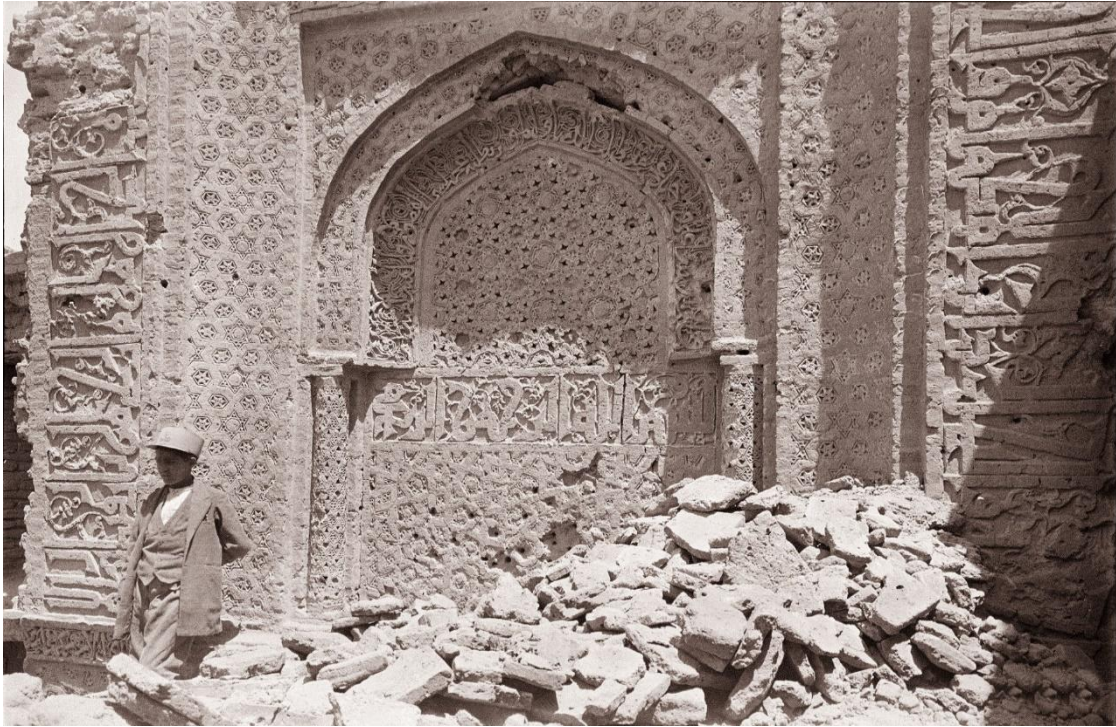


Figure 2: A view of Khaje Atabak's Tomb in 1924 (adopted from Majid Nikpur's archive)



Figure 3: Outer façade of Khaje Atabak's Tomb after primary restoration (photo taken by the writer in 2011)

An Examination of Khaje Atabak's Tomb, a Remained Memorial Monument from Seljuks' Era in Kerman /Jamshid ROOSTA

It must be stated that although Khaje Atabak Ala al-Din Buzqosh<sup>5</sup> (Probably dead in year 562 or 563 A.H.) and his son Atabak Qotb al-Din Mohamad were two of the Atabaks<sup>6</sup> in Seljuk dynasty, and they have undeniable importance in the policy of late decades of Seljuk's era, but are unfortunately unknown nowadays and the owner of Khaje Atabak's Tomb is even vague. The monument had been left in a miserable condition until very recently which was another disrespect toward these two great men. The following photos have been taken by the writer before the restoration of the monument which testify its undesirable condition (figures 4, 5 and 6).



Figure 4: Fires set near the walls of Khaje Atabak's Tomb



Figure 5: A view of the interior monuments, before restoration



Figure 6: a view of the west side of the monument, before restoration

Unfortunately, until 2016, the monument was abandoned and was not even protected with fences or walls in the eastern side. Urban rubbish was sometimes thrown around this place which had decreased its beauty. In addition to the increasing amount of rubbish, old cars were also abandoned around this monument and the worst part was the fire which was set around the walls (shown in the following figures). The photos prove the miserable condition of the place before restoration and construction of the yard. Fortunately, with the writer and historian's constant work, some parts of the interior and also the exterior parts of the monument were restored in 2016 (figures 7, 8, 9, 10).

<sup>5</sup> Buzqosh (Bozqosh) is a Turkish name meaning a grey accipiter gentilis (Buz; grey, qosh: accipiter gentilis) (Khabisi, 1994: footnote pg. 53).

<sup>6</sup> Atabak or Atabik was a title common during the Seljuks' era given to the people responsible for educating the princes. These Atabaks took care of all the princes and therefore felt the right to meddle in political issues. Little by little these Atabaks found the way up to higher posts and individually expanded their territory with the excuse of supporting a prince (Safa, 1999: 26/2).





Figure 7 and 8: Construction of the cobbled yard (photo taken by the writer in 2016)

An Examination of Khaje Atabak’s Tomb, a Remained Memorial Monument from Seljuks’ Era in Kerman /Jamshid ROOSTA



Figures 9 and 10: The present condition of Khaje Atabak’s Tomb after restoration (photo taken by the writer in 2019)

Qolamali Hatam, in his book named “Iranian Islamic Architecture in the Seljuk’s Era” (2000: 212), and also Shahrzad Pursafar in her book titled “On the Decorative Details of Khaje Atabak’s Tomb” (2007: 77) ascribe this place to Qotb al-Din Mohamad ibn Buzqosh, which seems unlikely. This monument, despite the common

belief, does not belong to Atabak Mohamad<sup>7</sup>, and the real owner is his father; ie, Khaje Ala al-Din Buzqosh. To prove this, we can consult historical references which clearly ascribe this place to Atabak Ala al-Din Buzqosh. One of the first historians proposing this in the first half of the 10<sup>th</sup> century AH (during the Safavids) is Mehrabi Kermani the writer of the book “Tombs of Kerman” (Mehrabi Kermani, 2004: 50).

After introducing Khaje Atabak Buzqosh and the reasons he was named like that (as mentioned earlier) his tomb is described as a “a domed tomb of 400 years of antiquity which looks newly built, suggesting the owner’s greatness” (Mehrabi Kermani, 2004: 50). Apparently, the two aforementioned scholars misjudged the owner of this tomb, simply because of the attributed name to Atabak Buzqosh before explaining about his life in the book “Tombs of Kerman”. If the name in the title is to be read carefully once more, it can be seen that Mehrabi, after talking about Atabak Buzqosh also mentions another person named Khaje Mohamad Mehrzaban. It seems that this new name causes a misunderstanding by the scholars in thinking he is in fact Khaje Atabak Mohamad; however, these are two different people as thoroughly explained in “Tombs of Kerman” by Mehrabi.

Mehrabi, after talking about Khaje Atabak Ala al-Din Buzqosh and his tomb, goes on to describe Khaje Mohamad Mehrzaban and says “Khaje Mohamad Mehrzaban, after years of spiritual abstinence, was always silent. Some believe his father had been called Marzban, a newly converted Muslim, and therefore famous as Sheikh Mohamad Mehrzaban, who passed away 400 years ago (Mehrabi, 2004: 50).

On the other hand with an overview of the Seljuk’s history in Kerman it can be concluded that in the time Atabak Ala al-Din Buzqosh was in charge of Kerman there was a period of peace and security; However, when his son Atabak Mohamad gained the power, there was a constant struggle among Toqrol Shah’s children for the thrown. These struggles did not leave any time to think of constructing schools and mosques, let alone personal memorial monuments. (Kermani, 1947: 94)

### **Architectural Decorations of Khaje Atabak’s Tomb**

There are eye-catching beauties in every side of the exterior of this monument. Each side of this place is divided into squared and rectangular parts containing floral, star-shaped, and polygon bricks. The bricks used in this monument, just like in other historical monuments, are very beautiful and persistent. As Arthur Upham Pope states in his book of “Architecture of Iran” (2002: 139) “Seljuks, knowing the characteristics of the bricks, made the best use of it in developed details and forms and therefore left everlasting results of “the magic of Iranian brick” in architecture” (Pope, 2002: 139). Each square or rectangular surface is like a picture with floral and geometrical margins, and turquoise jewels shining among the floral shapes (Javadi, 2003: 36) (figures 11 and 12).

<sup>7</sup> Khaje Atabak Mohamad ibn Atabak Buzqosh used to be a great man of the Safavid court, who was given the title “Atabak” in the late Safavids, who was present in the court along with the start of tensions among Seljuk princes and conflicts in Kerman in the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AH. Qotb al-Din Mohamad ibn Atabak Buzqosh was a patient, wise, and devoted man (Kermani, 1947: 36).

An Examination of Khaje Atabak's Tomb, a Remained Memorial Monument from Seljuks' Era in Kerman /Jamshid ROOSTA



Figures 11 and 12: A view of plaster geometrical decorations of the exterior of the monument (photo taken by the writer)

In addition to the exterior details there are beautiful decoration inside of the monument. The west side of the monument – headed toward Qible – contains a vertical rectangular frame (figure 13). There exist beautiful

Turi and Negin tiles<sup>8</sup> in octagonal shapes around the frame. The upper part of this frame is also decorated with a Kufi inscription. These decorations and inscriptions, which are in need of a scientific exact restoration, are shown in figures 13 and 14.

But the shapes inside the frame are of even more importance. With a quick review of the photos taken from this place, it can be observed that there used to be a white stone tablet famous as Mihrab Stone, but nowadays the frame is empty inside. This Mihrab stone has been detached from the frame and relocated to Harandi Garden-Museum of Kerman. The writer made an effort to observe this stone in person, which was unfortunately accomplished through a glass window. However, as seen in figure 15, this stone is of white marble with engravings of Quran verses in Kufi and Thuluth. These inscriptions are decorated with small fine arabesque motifs.



Figure 13: A view of the west side of Khaje Atabak's Tomb after the primary restoration (photo taken by the writer)

<sup>8</sup> . The expression “Negin tile” was coined by Shohre Javadi in her article titled “The Emergence of Colour in Outer Decoration of Monuments, the Case of Khaje Atabak's Tomb, with the Oldest Negin Tiles in Iran” (2003). The writer states “this expression was suggested by some scholars namely Mr mazarian (architectural clerk and prior manager of Cultural Heritage of Kerman). The small parts of turquoise colored tiles shine inside the grooved of golden bricks, reminding us of turquoise jewels (Negin) on a gold ring and hence the expression” (Javadi, 2003: 83)

An Examination of Khaje Atabak's Tomb, a Remained Memorial Monument from Seljuks' Era in Kerman /Jamshid ROOSTA



Figure 14: A view of Kufi inscriptions and beautiful plaster work in the west side of Khaje Atabak's Tomb (photo taken by the writer)



Figure 15: A view of Mihrab stone and the inscription of Khaje Atabak's Tomb (photo taken by the writer)

Although the exterior sides of this stone are damaged and broken, but it is still considered as one of the most beautiful engraved stones of the Seljuks' era in Kerman (figure 15). In addition to engraved inscriptions on the Mihrab Stone, and west side inscriptions, other sides are also decorated with various inscriptions, including the east side possessing at least four different inscriptions (figure 16). This side also has geometric floral shapes, hexagonal Lachaks, and six-edged stars (Pursafar, 2007: 83; Javadi, 2003: 37).



Figure 16: A view of the east side of Khaje Atabak's Tomb (photo taken by the writer)

Another side of the monument is the south side which serves as the entrance door and has beautiful decorative motifs, such as plaster works and Kufi inscriptions above the entrance door. (Figures 17 and 18)

An Examination of Khaje Atabak's Tomb, a Remained Memorial Monument from Seljuks' Era in Kerman /Jamshid ROOSTA



Figure 17: A view of the south side and the entrance of Khaje Atabak's Tomb (photo taken by the writer)



Figure 18: A view of plaster works and Kufi inscriptions of the south side of Khaje Atabak's Tomb (photo taken by the writer)



The north side of the tomb has unfortunately lost all its decorations (figure 19). This side used to have exactly the same decorations as the other sides. Since this side is opposite the entrance door, the vanishing of the decorations has substantially decreased the beauty of this monument.



Figure 19: A view of the north side of Khaje Atabak's Tomb which had undergone great damage (photo taken by the writer)

It can be observed that despite the antiquity and rare beauties of this monument, it has not been paid attention to during the past decades. The writer has started examining this place since 2009 and with great help of Iranian culture and art lovers, has prevented the total abolishment of this memorial monument. It is expected that this study can pave the way for substantial restoration of this place in the nearest future.

### **Conclusion**

The current study aimed at introducing Khaje Atabak's Tomb, one of the Seljuk's architectural heritages, while explaining about its owner, the decorative motifs, and its present condition. The results of the study are as follows:

1. Although different political, social, and especially cultural and civil aspect of Kerman Seljuks can be examined in valuable studies, they are rarely studied by Iranian scholars. It is expected that this study stimulates future examinations in this area.

2. There are different beautiful monuments left from Seljuk's era in Kerman such as Khaje Atabak's Tomb, which have unfortunately been in total abandonment during the past decades. Khaje Atabak's Tomb, among these monuments, suffers the worst situation. There have been attempt (between 2016-2019) made to

An Examination of Khaje Atabak's Tomb, a Remained Memorial Monument from Seljuks' Era in Kerman /Jamshid ROOSTA

restore the exterior façade. The monument itself has also been restored to some extent, which is still the beginning and needs more work, since this place possesses eye-catching brick decorations, Negin tiles, plaster works, floral and geometrical shapes, knotted Kufi inscriptions, Thuluth calligraphy, etc.

3. Although some scholars ascribe this monument to Khaje Atabak Qotb al-Din Mohamad ibn Buzqosh, but here Ala al-Din Buzqosh, his father is proposed to be the tomb's owner. He himself has built this place during his power as an "Atabak". To prove this, some historical references were consulted, which propose a more stable and calm situation in the city during Ala al-Din Buzqosh's power, as the struggles for thrown among the princes did not leave any time for civil constructions during his son's period.

4. It is suggested that due to the antiquity of Kerman and its numerous historical sites, restoration of these places will be of more concern, and if restoring is not an option, at least written works will be done to introduce these monuments. It is expected that at least before the total abolishment of these places, they would be introduced to the world, as the least possible action done in honor of their owners.

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