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A Re-Examination of the Stucco Mihrab and Lustre Tiles from the Pir-i Husayn Khanqah (13–14th Centuries, Hacıqabul, Qubalıbalaoglan, Azerbaijan)

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Abstract

The Shirvanshahi-era Pir-i Husayn *khanqah* is a unique monument, exemplifying a syncretism of a Caucasian cut-stone-constructed fortified ensemble, embellished with lustre tiles and a carved stucco mihrab belonging to the Iranian Ilkhanid artistic tradition. Its inscriptions, rich in information on patronage, construction and decorative interventions, attracted early scholarly attention. Nevertheless, the distribution of the *khanqah's* lustre tiles and carved stucco mihrab between museum collections (Baku, Tbilisi, St. Petersburg, etc.) caused them to become de-contextualised. Dynastic (Shirvanshah vs. Ilkhanid) and territorial (Azerbaijan vs. Iran) divisions distort their meanings in the context of the history of Islamic art and architecture. The *khanqah's* monumental stucco mihrab (National Literature Museum, Baku) has escaped detailed scrutiny and requires further study alongside other lustre tiles from the same monument.

Keywords

Ilkhanid – Pir-i Husayn – carved stucco – lustre tiles – aesthetics – Sufi shrine – funerary architecture

1 Introduction

The Pir-i Husayn *khanqah*¹ was constructed at the crossroads of the main medieval communication routes between Baku and Salyan.² The monument was in a ruined state at the beginning of the twentieth century and further damaged by the USSR Pirsaat River dam construction project (Fig. 2). The period in which the building was functional, which coincides with the most significant constructive and decorative interventions, dates from the local Shirvanshah dynasty,³ vassals of the Ilkhans who ruled over the Caucasian territory. The monument thus presents an architectural structure from

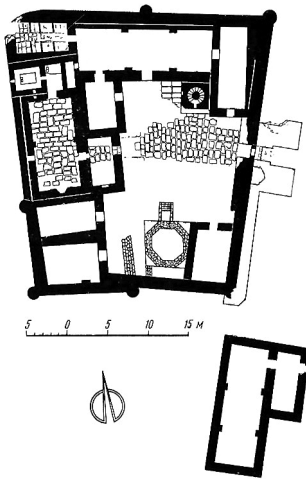


FIGURE 1
Plan of the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah*
(After Bretanickij 1966, p. 93)



FIGURE 2
1907 photograph by Avetissian
showing the ruined Pir-i Husayn
khanqah. (After Kratchkovskaya 1946,
Plate 3)

the far reaches of the Ilkhanid Empire, the form of which was determined partially by local building traditions, and partially by the trends in Ilkhanid architectural decoration aesthetics. The *khanqah* complex is formed around the grave of the Qalandariyya sect Shaykh, known as Pir-i Husayn ibn ‘Ali, an Azeri Shaykh who lived in the tenth or eleventh century CE (Fig. 1). The tomb of the Shaykh has been located on the site of the *khanqah* since his death and, beginning in the thirteenth century, the *khanqah* complex was built at the site owing to the grave’s location. The mausoleum of the *khanqah* has frequently been misidentified as the grave of the Turkmen Qara Quyunlu ruler, Pir-i Husayn Abu Sa’id.

The first systematic scientific research into the complex was performed by Bartolomeyev and Dorn in 1861 (For a detailed discussion of the history of the research into the monument, see: Kratchkovskaya, Vera, (1946), *Izrazcy Mavzoljeja Pir-Huszejna (Les Faiences du mausolée de Pir Houssein)*, Tbilisi, pp. 19–28). The site was also excavated between 1939 and 1940. The main study on the monument was published by Aslanapa (Aslanapa, Oktay, (1979), *Kirim ve Azerbaycan’da Türk Eserleri*, (Istanbul: Baha Matbaasi), pp. 84–92.), although the monument received limited attention, and later, Kratchkovskaya published more detailed epigraphic studies of the complex’s inscription programme in stone and particularly its tile corpus (Kratchkovskaya, 1946). Mammadova and Mammadova date the complex to between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries (Gulchohra Mammadova and Zahida Mammadova, (2013), *History of Azerbaijan Architecture. Medieval Architecture (VIII–XIV century)*, the Second Volume, (Baku: Sharq-gharb), p. 112), and estimate that the date of Shaykh Husayn’s death was between 466/1074–75. Despite the extensive studies conducted by scholars from the USSR, little is known about the monument, and in particular its monumental carved stucco mihrab (Fig. 6). Moreover, the lustre tiles need to be examined in relation to the later monumental carved stucco mihrab.

This article proposes an art historical study of the *khanqah*’s carved stucco mihrab and lustre tile decorations, which examines both their production and artistic techniques, religious and socio-political functions, and finally their aesthetics. The production of the mihrab required the employment of Ilkhanid stucco craftsmen, like the import of lustre tiles from Kashan. These craftsmen brought the Persian stucco tradition



FIGURE 3
Exterior of the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah* in 2018, following major conservation work. (Ana Marija Grbanovic)

to the Caucasus, re-decorating the *khanqah* and modifying its interior aesthetics. This socio-politically charged activity resembles examples of Ilkhanid complexes at Natanz, Ardabil or Linjan, illustrating knowledge transfer and craftsmen mobility between the centre of the Ilkhanid Empire and its hinterlands. This article contributes to the better understanding of Ilkhanid architecture and architectural decoration; their function, meaning and aesthetics.

2 The Khanqah's Architectural Structure

The monument is built out of cut stone, plentiful in the area, and it features a *ribat*-like architectural form (a fortified structure enclosing several separate structures pertaining to several construction phases) (Figs. 1–3). Its rectangular, north-to-south oriented floor plan is irregular and consists of several separate structures flanking a central courtyard. They are enclosed by the monumental crenelated ramparts, which are buttressed with round bastions on the corners and semi-circular bastions in the middle sections of the three rampart structures. The monument is entered from the south-eastern side through a monumental entrance portal formed by its *iwan*. The entrance portal was photographed in its ruined state in 1907 by S. Avetissian and his photographs document the historic inscription on the portal (Kratchkovskaya, 1946, Plates 3, 7, 31). The main components of the complex are: the fortified enclosure, the mosque structure, the mausoleum of the Shaykh, a seclusion room, a second, anonymous mausoleum, service spaces (e.g. stables) and the monumental minaret.⁴ The historic inscription on the entrance portal of the *khanqah* provides information as to the patronage of the monument (Fig. 4; <https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; b.). It was constructed by Sharaf al-Dawla wa-l-Din Hasan, during the reign of Shirvan Shah Warajam Afridun Abu al-Muzaffar Fariburz (Fariburz III, r. 1225–1255); the waqf of the complex was established in 641/1243–44 (Fig. 4). The two most important periods of the complex's construction activities were between 602/1203–04 and 641/1243–44. The mosque of the



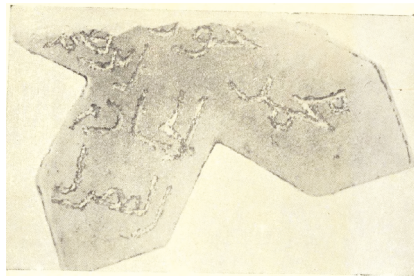
FIGURE 4
Detail of the inscription above the khanqah's main entrance, naming its patron and the waqf's foundation in 1343–44. (Ana Marija Grbanovic)

complex featured a monumental stucco mihrab, produced in the 1260s, as a work of monument redecoration intervention (Figs. 6–9). Tiles from the mosque and the cenotaph and burial chamber of the Shaykh (Figs. 5, 10–20, 25) are now primarily stored in the Hermitage Museum (in St Petersburg); they provide information concerning the redecoration of the complex's interior with lustre tiles, which began in 681/1282. This is one of the earliest dated monuments with carved stucco and lustre tile revetments from the Ilkhanid period, although the monument is considered to belong to the Shirvanshah dynasty by Azerbaijani scholars.⁵ The complex is also the most northerly structure which retained a monumental carved stucco mihrab.⁶ The *khanqah* monument therefore represents an exceptional example of architectural syncretism.

The earliest significant historical inscription on the monument is found on the stone slab, dated 603/1203–04, inserted into the minaret structure (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; a.). It designates the architect of the building as Shahzada Habibullah ibn-i Shaykh Hajji Muhammad.⁷ This architect could have been in charge of the construction of the mosque and other structures in the interior of the complex as well as the monumental fortified enclosure of the complex which, in view of the characteristics of the monument's floor plan, appears to be contemporary to the construction of the mosque as well as several monuments in its interior. In another inscription, the architect of the minaret is identified as Shams al-Din Muhammad ibn-i Abi al-Abbas; his name is followed by a signature, starting with *work of* and continuing *Muhammad ibn-i Ibrahim* (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; e.). It is likely that the signature pertains to the head of the stonemason's workshop in charge of the minaret construction.

FIGURE 5
Turquoise eight-pointed star
with pilgrim graffiti. (after
Kratchkovskaya 1946, Table
XLVIII/1)

Note: Kratchkovskaya identified
the inscription with the following
names: "الله محمد حو رسيد (?). ابراهيم
(?) الخادم المصرا".



3 Construction Chronology and the Khanqah's Epigraphic Programme

3.1 Phase One – the Earliest Khanqah Complex

The first *khanqah* complex was formed around the grave of Shaykh Husayn, who reportedly passed away sometime between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. The sacredness of the grave of the Shaykh was the *raison d'être* for the formation of the monumental complex. Historic inscriptions (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; a–i.) indicate that state officials were involved in the patronage of these constructive and decorative interventions. The *khanqah* complex came to play a significant role as a pilgrimage destination (Fig. 5) and religious learning centre; functioning as an institution in its own right whilst simultaneously being indirectly connected to the state.

The formation of the *khanqah* took place between the beginning (around 603/1203–04) and the middle of the thirteenth century. This process is partially reflected in the slightly irregular form of its plan (Fig. 1).⁸ The form and orientation of the fortified structure protecting the complex indicate that some structures might pre-date its construction. The most plausible construction sequence of the complex is as follows: after the burial of the Shaykh on the site and the construction of the burial structure, the mausoleum of another unidentified personage was built on the site; on this basis, a plan was laid out to construct a larger complex, comprising the mosque with the vestibule and incorporating the grave of the Shaykh, service areas and stables. The layout and dimensions of these structures were planned as part of an enclosed complex, but the minaret was an afterthought or a later addition. The listed construction activities concluded around the 1240s, when the plans for the waqf of the complex were drawn up.⁹ The construction of the minaret took place around 654/1256–57 or later: as an independent building project. Subsequent interventions in the monumental complex included re-decoration interventions, and additions and modifications made in order to increase the monument's prestige and assert political power through patronage.

3.2 Phase Two – the Evolution of the Khanqah Complex

The complex developed further during the second half of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century, and the minaret may have been rebuilt or repaired sometime in the early fourteenth century. The main change to the complex entailed the installation of carved stucco and tile revetments in the most significant interior spaces during two separate decorative activities. A monumental carved stucco mihrab (dated 665/1266–67) was installed on the *qibla* wall of the main prayer hall of the mosque, which covered the pre-existing mihrab (a modest stone-carved niche) and gave it a more monumental appearance (Figs. 6–9).¹⁰ A decade later, between 1282 and 1285, a decision was taken to install an extensive lustre tile programme in the interior of the monument.¹¹ The only evidence suggesting further interventions on the monument is the historic inscription on its entrance portal (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; h.).

It is dated 800/1397–98 and indicates that the monument might have been repaired around that date.

4 Religious Function of the Complex

The oldest part of the monument is the grave chamber of the Shaykh. In addition to this grave, there is a tomb tower on the southern side of the complex, built to house the grave of an unknown person.¹² The construction of the mosque at the site was necessary to fulfil the pilgrimage function of the complex (Fig. 5).¹³ The vestibule at the entrance of the mosque could also serve as a prayer space or a space for other religious rites.¹⁴ The installation of both the stucco mihrab and lustre tiles should be understood as stages of enlargement and monumentalisation, as well as redecoration interventions on the complex. These activities increased the symbolic significance and worth of the monument's architectural structure. In addition to these religious spaces, the site also comprised structures which served to maintain the complex (for example, stables).

5 Interior Architectural Revetments of the Complex

5.1 Background

The interior architectural revetments of the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah* can be divided into two groups, on the basis of their medium: carved stuccos (Figs. 6–9) and lustre tiles (Figs. 10–25). Most lustre tiles originating from the site have since been removed and are currently stored in different museum collections (see below). The monumental carved stucco mihrab was removed from the ruined monument in the 1960s and transported to Baku for the purpose of its preservation. It was subsequently put on permanent display at the Nizami Museum of Azerbaijani Literature.¹⁵ These revetments were originally concentrated in the most significant parts of the monument. The monumental stucco mihrab might originally have had a tripartite composition (a large central part and two flanking smaller niches) and was installed against an already existing *qibla* wall of the



FIGURE 6
The monumental carved stucco mihrab from the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah* is now permanently displayed at the National Literature Museum in Baku. (Ana Marija Grbanovic)

mosque, with a smaller stone carved mihrab niche featuring abstracted vegetal elements and a three-tier muqarnas hood. The location of the entire lustre tile revetment programme, its function and meaning, have been discussed by Kratchkovskaya. However, her reconstruction, based solely on tiles preserved at the Hermitage needed to be refined according to onsite data. Also, a thorough study of the stucco mihrab and its relation to the tiles is lacking (Kratchkovskaya, 1946, see especially pp. 28–61, 80–99). Lustre tiles covered the cenotaph of the Shaykh and the dado area of the burial chamber, as well as perhaps the vestibule and the mosque prayer hall. The tile dado area featured star and cross tiles topped by a large frieze (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14;m-n>.) with a lengthy historical inscription highlighting the function of the monument and the identity of the tiles' patron.

5.2 *The Monumental Carved Stucco Mihrab*

5.2.1 Mihrab Installation

The Pir-i Husayn complex mihrab (Figs. 6–8) is relatively squat in form, and its vertical axis is lower in comparison to the more frequently employed forms and proportions of Ilkhanid mihrabs. The specific form of the mihrab is determined by the dimensions and form of the *qibla* wall built out of cut stone (Fig. 9). The central niche of the stucco mihrab on display is missing and it is not clear what its original form was. The *qibla* wall of the mosque features a custom-built carved stone niche (with vegetal elements resembling a trefoil arch and forming a muqarnas hood),¹⁶ which was produced at the time of mosque's construction – this stone carving is directly related to the ornamental stone entrance portal of the mosque's prayer hall. The stucco mihrab was produced later; in relation to the construction of the mosque structure, this intervention should be understood as a redecoration. This is confirmed by the historic inscription on the mihrab dated 665/1266–67, which post-dates construction of the complex (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14;i>). The stucco mihrab installation resulted in an enlargement, monumentalisation, and change of decorative aesthetics of the *qibla* wall. The intervention was most likely performed for political reasons of patronage, as indicated by the size and position of the historic inscription which highlights the name of its patron. The proportions of mihrab, its panels and their designs featuring epigraphic, vegetal and geometrical ornamentation are all unusual.



FIGURE 7
Detail of the historic inscription in glazed elements and upper mihrab panels, which display varied techniques to create slight relief. (Ana Marija Grbanovic)

5.2.2 Mihrab Description and Discussion

The internal core of the monumental mihrab is missing. What remains is the historic inscription panel (Fig. 7; <https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; i.) topping the niche area of the mihrab and the framing bands of its exterior surfaces. In the central part of the niche, the historic inscription indicates the ruler during whose reign the mihrab was commissioned (Fariburz III) and the date of its completion (665/1266–67). This inscription is produced in a medium other than carved stucco: it is a mosaic of cut-glazed elements, which have been inserted into stucco or mortar.¹⁷ A thin concave band that smooths the transition between the exterior and interior visual planes of the



FIGURE 8
Detail of the carved stucco mihrab framing bands on its right-hand side. (Ana Marija Grbanovic)



FIGURE 9
The *qibla* wall of the Pir-i Husayn khanqah mosque, showing the carved stone niche that once held the mihrab. (Ana Marija Grbanovic)

mihrab's stucco panels frames the niche. The band features an arabesque pattern of leaf elements with star perforation patterns and half-palmettes.

The exterior surfaces of the mihrab consist of two monumental framing bands (Fig. 8). The interior band comprises two vertical bands formed of geometric patterns, produced using perforation and incisions, and a horizontal band featuring a vegetal composition flanked by two panels with epigraphic content.¹⁸ The two vertical bands feature a basic scale-like grid form filled with perforations and incision patterns composed for the most part from six-pointed star motifs. The visual elements of these panels are disproportionately large compared to the mihrab and its other more subtle designs.

The unusually large size of scale-like elements could be attributed to the craftsmen's lack of skill, but they nevertheless contrast with the rest of the mihrab from technological and skill perspectives.¹⁹ The horizontal central panel of the internal band features symmetrical compositions of split palmette elements and epigraphic bands with invocations to God in Kufic style.²⁰ Central parts of the designs retain traces of surfaces where protruding elements were applied.²¹ Split palmettes therefore functioned as the background of the composition, some of them made to protrude from the background in order to enhance the appearance of the stucco relief.²²

The second monumental band outlines the exterior edges of the mihrab and features different visual characteristics to the interior framing band. The inscription band displays a fragmented Quranic excerpt (the Basmala and *Surat al-Tawba*, 9:18)²³ in Kufic style. The background of the inscription is filled with floral scrolls and other vegetal ornaments (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14; j-k>).²⁴ The Kufic inscription has elegant proportions, slightly elongated letter *hastae*, and occasional elaborate *hastae* finials. At its corners, the inscription has multiple, repeated knotted star-like elements which are common features in architectural revetments from the Ilkhanid and Seljuq periods, appearing frequently in a variety of media. This external framing band is an example of one of the most elaborate design compositions of the mihrab.²⁵

The main stucco mihrab's appearance was shaped by bands and panels of vegetal designs using perforation and incision techniques, giving it a manneristic look. Its visual effect combined epigraphic, geometric, and vegetal elements, reflecting complex stuccowork, though it appears somewhat provincial – which is probably due to few skilled craftsmen or the properties of locally sourced gypsum.

6 The Small Mihrab Niche

The mihrab contains another smaller niche structure located on the left-hand side of its core; there may have been a corresponding niche on the right-hand side of the mihrab in order to form a symmetrical tripartite composition. These niches may have been incorporated into the mihrab design to fill gaps on the architectural surfaces of the *qibla* wall of the mosque. Part of the stuccos of the left-hand side niche are preserved, although the central section, which presumably also featured a niche, is no longer extant. The niche was framed by an inscription band likely featuring Quranic content in Kufic style (now illegible owing to extensive damage); the inscription is set against a plain background, the empty spaces between the letters filled with vegetal elements carved into the same stucco body layer as the inscription. This fragmented framing band is topped by a horizontal panel, which features a *Naskh* inscription with superimpositions in several places and a Quranic excerpt from *Surat al-Saff* (Q 61:13; <https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14; l>).²⁶ It is set against a plain background, but some vegetal elements have been carved out to fill the empty spaces between the lettering.²⁷

7 The Mihrab Patronage

The *khanqah's* carved stucco mihrab is, together with the stucco works of the Alinja *khanqah* in Alinja, Nakhchivan (Grbanovic, Ana Marija, (2023), *Ilkhanid Stucco Revetments in Iran, c. 1256–1335. Function, Meaning and Aesthetic Principles*, PhD dissertation, University of Bamberg Press), the most northerly extant Ilkhanid stucco repertoire in the Caucasus region.²⁸ The stucco mihrab of the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah* was created by

a group of craftsmen summoned intentionally for the task. The *khanqah* complex also comprised an extensive lustre tile programme, produced in Kashan and sponsored by a patron who appears to have had family ties with north-western Iran (see below). It is thus likely that one of the patrons mobilised the stucco craftsmen's workshop for the mihrab production, likely from the Iranian territories of the Ilkhanid Empire.²⁹ The presence of lustre tiles and carved stuccos at the *khanqah* in Qubalibalaoğlan demonstrates the patrons' appreciation of these decorative media and their will to sponsor their production signals both the prestige and religious significance of the structure and, indirectly, their own political and economic power.³⁰

8 The Mihrab's Craftsmen

The stucco mihrab was produced by trained craftsmen, but its visual properties were either impacted by the locally available material, or because of a limited number of skilled craftsmen on-site at the time. Although there is evidence of complex stucco production technology and artistic techniques in the mihrab, its visual appearance does not match Ilkhanid stucco repertoire masterpieces such as the Uljaytu mihrab (1310) in the Isfahan Friday mosque (Grbanovic, Ana Marija, (2022), "The Oljeitu Mihrab (1310; Isfahan): the Ilkhanid Stucco chef-d'œuvre Re-Examined," in: *Beiträge zur Islamischen Kunst und Archäologie* 8, eds. Markus Ritter and Nourane Ben Azzouna, Reichert Verlag, pp. 177–196) or the stuccos of the Pir-i Bakran mausoleum (1303–1313) (Grbanovic, Ana Marija, (2017), "The Ilkhanid Revetment Aesthetics in the Buq'a Pir-i Bakran: Chaotic

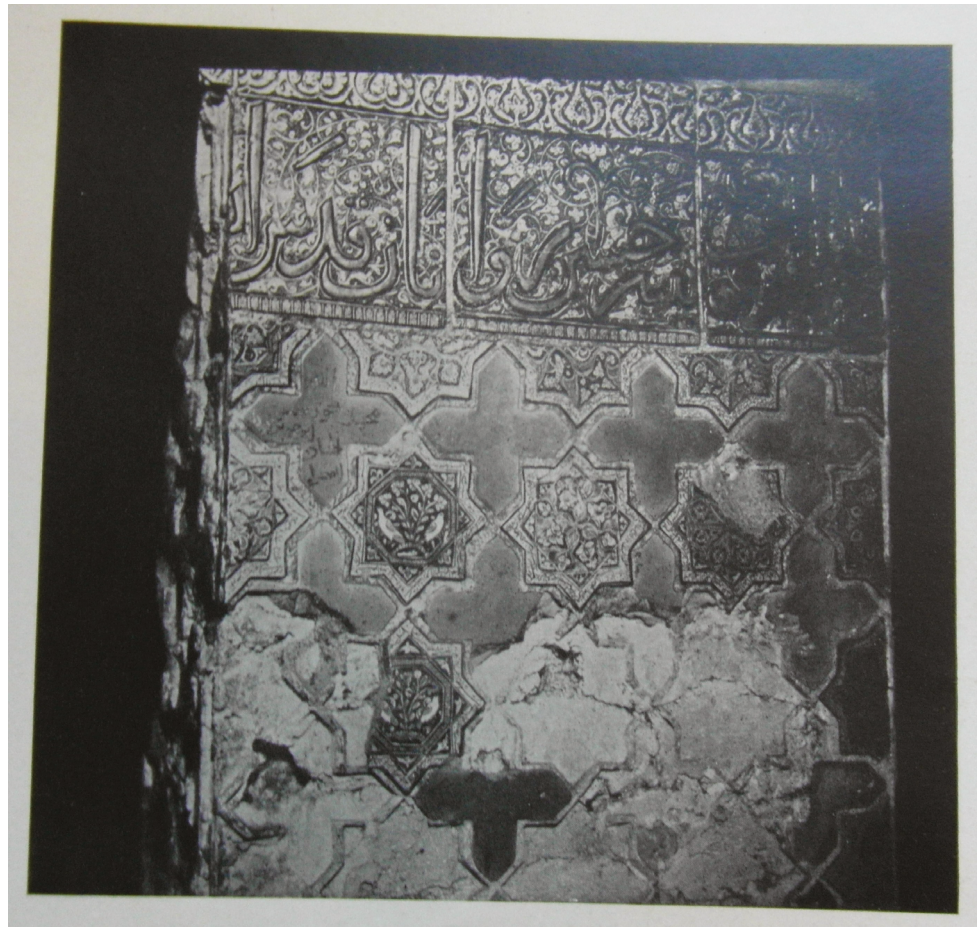


FIGURE 10
1907 photograph by Avetissian showing the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah*'s lustre tile frieze and cross-and-star tile dado. (After Kratchkovskaya 1946, Plate 5)



FIGURE 11
Detail of the Pir-i Husayn
khanqah's cross and star tile
panel in the Hermitage Museum
collection, inv. IR-233-287. (Anaïs
Leone)

Exuberance or a Cunningly Planned Architectural Revetment Repertoire?" *Muqarnas, An Annual on the Visual Cultures of the Islamic World* 34(1), pp. 43–83), to give just two examples. The Pir-i Husayn stucco mihrab is more modest, produced in a simpler manner and presumably with more restricted resources. The Pir-i Husayn mihrab only shares some characteristics with the small mihrab of the Alinja *khanqah* in Nakhchivan,³¹ but the ties between the two nevertheless indicate that the Alinja *khanqah* stucco mihrab could have been produced in a chronological context contemporary with the one at Qubalibalaoğlan, or at most a few decades later. The Pir-i Husayn mihrab is not directly linked to Ilkhanid stuccos of north-western Iran, but the craftsmen are still likely to have originated in this geographical area or, more likely, in central Iran.

9 The Stucco Mihrab and Its Polychromy

The transfer of the mihrab to the Baku Museum required it to be separated into smaller panels which were then reassembled in the collection. Observations of Blair and Bloom's 1984 photographs (https://archnet.org/sites/3695/media_contents/41240 Last accessed: August 28, 2020), and their comparison to the state of the mihrab at the time of the museum collection visit in 2018, show that it was restored several times. The relief of the mihrab was affected by this separation and subsequent reassembling; there are gaps between sections of the mihrab and some parts of it appear to have been damaged. Blair and Bloom's photographs document extensive amounts of yellow on the surface of the mihrab, but this is likely a modern colour which might have been applied to cover parts of the mihrab relief where it was archaeologically reconstructed. The yellow was subsequently removed sometime between 1984 and 2018.³² Close examination of the mihrab's stucco relief, at the time of viewing in 2018, revealed that it does not retain any traces of its original polychromy. It is nevertheless reasonable to assume that the mihrab was brightly coloured with white, red, blue, green and ochre hues, like most carved stucco revetments in the Iranian territory from the same chronological period.

10 The Stucco Artistic Techniques of the Mihrab

The mihrab was produced using a diverse selection of stucco artistic techniques. Its less significant parts, such as the small niche on the left-hand side, were carved out of a single stucco layer with deep incisions. The panels and framing bands of the central part of the mihrab were produced in different ways. The interior framing band, which features scale-like compositions with geometric ornamentation, was produced with

different stucco perforations. These panels showcase the versatility of craftsmen in working stucco surfaces, although the resulting ornamental elements are disproportionate in their size. The exterior framing band of the mihrab utilises yet another technique; it consists of a relief produced by carving a single layer of stucco. The carving modality employed is peculiar, because the cutting angle for the stucco amounts to around ninety degrees. While the inscription surface was left plain, the inscription outline was made to feature elaborate and elegant vegetal extensions of letters and a minutely worked background of vegetal compositions. These elements were produced by continuously perforating and incising the stucco relief surface. The mihrab's most unique artistic techniques are found on the horizontal panel of its interior framing band. This panel was produced through the carving of several applied layers of stucco and featured circular protruding bosses and further protruding elements which were likely carved prior to their attachment to the mihrab panel.³³

In sum, the mihrab of the *khanqah* of Pir-i Husayn was produced using a wide variety of stucco artistic techniques and demonstrates the advanced production technology knowledge of the craftsmen. The mihrab also presents issues of disproportion between the size of ornamental elements and panels, which could be attributed to restoration, or was perhaps the result of different levels of skill among the craftsmen forming the same workshop. The relative shallowness of the mihrab's stucco relief could also be attributed to the specific material properties of the locally available gypsum.

10.1 *The Aesthetics and Style of the Mihrab*

The aesthetics of the stucco mihrab of the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah* were influenced by several factors. The proportions of the mihrab were determined by the available space and form of the *qibla* wall of the mosque. Furthermore, the shallow carving of the stucco body of the mihrab, as discussed above, could reflect the stucco material composition, or perhaps difficulty in applying layers of stucco onto the supporting wall. The stucco relief of the mihrab is therefore rather flat in appearance, except for the central horizontal panel above the niche area. The stucco panel carving does not contain contrasting, deep or very plastic reliefs; instead, most frequently its panels feature a single visual plane. The characteristics of the mihrab, as described, should therefore be understood as both a specific mark of the workshop which produced it, and also as being dictated by the architectural and geographical context.



FIGURE 12
Example of a lustre tile made
to cover Shaykh Pir-i Husayn's
cenotaph. Hermitage State
Museum, Saint-Petersburg, inv.
A3-45 (Anaïs Leone)

11 Historiography of the Lustre Tiles of the Tomb Chamber

As mentioned above, the site of the *khanqah* was “discovered” in August 1858 by the Russian numismatist Iwan Alexejewitsch Bartolomeyev (1813–1870), (“Extrait d’une lettre de M. Bartholomäi écrite en 1858,” In Dorn, Bernhard, (1862), *Mélanges Asiatiques tirés du Bulletin Impérial des Sciences*, Tome IV, Saint-Petersburg, pp. 477–481). Following his observations, Bartolomeyev describes the site in a letter to his colleague Bernhard Dorn. In a published passage from this letter, he mentions a mosque adjoining the mausoleum, a minaret, an audience hall, and a few surrounding rooms. Bartolomeyev points out that the exterior parts are badly damaged, but the interior decorative elements are in sufficiently good condition to inspire his admiration. Motivated by this description, Dorn included the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah* in his exploration of Caucasian sites and devoted two full days to studying the complex in April 1861 (Dorn, Bernhard, (1862), “Bericht über eine wissenschaftliche Reise in dem Kaukasus und den südlichen Küstenländern des Kaspischen Meeres,” *Mélanges Asiatiques tirés du Bulletin Impérial des Sciences*, Tome IV, Saint-Petersburg, pp. 454–456). He subsequently published a detailed corpus of dated inscriptions, accompanied by a lithograph of the general view of the elevations (Dorn, Bernhard, (1862), “Bericht über eine wissenschaftliche Reise in dem Kaukasus und den südlichen Küstenländern des Kaspischen Meeres,” *Mélanges Asiatiques tirés du Bulletin Impérial des Sciences*, Tome IV, Saint-Petersburg, pp. 454–456). In 1907, S. W. Ter-Avetissian undertook a more detailed study of the building, drawing up a plan of the complex and producing sketches, illustrations, and photographs of the elevations, inscriptions, and some of the decorative elements. The data collected by Ter-Avetissian constitute the last evidence of the decoration *in situ*. The entire ceramic decoration was removed in a short period between 1907 and 1913. In an unprecedented and pioneering approach, in 1946 Véra A. Kratchkovskaya published a comprehensive monograph devoted to the ceramic tiles of the *khanqah* of Pir-i Husayn (Kratchkovskaya, 1946, p. IX).³⁴ She discusses the site and its decoration on several scales. On one hand, she situated those pieces within the technical development of lustre ceramics, and on the other hand, compared them with other monumental programmes. Its most significant contributions, however, concern the case study itself. She traces the historiography of the site and the history of the tiles outside their original walls. Then, she proposes an exhaustive inventory (preserved pieces, dated pieces, types of decoration, etc.) and a reconstruction of the ensemble. On the basis of the elements she identified in the collections of the Hermitage and the Tbilisi State Museum; she was able to formulate precise proposals for each zone of the lustre decoration (dado, epigraphic frieze, and cenotaph). Apart from a recently published historiographical synthesis, the building and its decoration have been studied only rarely thereafter, although it does occasionally appear in inventories concerning the architecture (Wilber, Donald, (1955), *The Architecture of Islamic Iran: the Ilkhanid Period*, Princeton, p. 106, no. 7) and lustre ceramic decoration (Watson, Oliver, 1985, *Persian Lustre Ware*, London, pp. 186–187, Appendix IV; p. 409) of Mongol Iran.³⁵

Thus, a visit to the site in May 2018 enabled us to update the data (observations, measurements, etc.) concerning the current state of the building. This important *in situ* work allowed us to verify and rectify the hypotheses put forward by Kratchkovskaya, who did not visit the site herself. The brilliant re-contextualization of the decorations that she formulated in the 1930s–1940s, based solely on material preserved in St. Petersburg and Tbilisi, has now been completed by our fieldwork approach.



FIGURE 13
Fragments of lustre star-tiles
exhibited on Pir-i Husayn *khanqah*
(Anais Leone)

12 Lustre Tiles of the Pir-i Husayn's Tomb Chamber: History of Collections

The process of removing the decorations from the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah* differs from the process of removing elements from monuments located on the central Iranian territory (Masuya, Tomoko, (2000), "Persian Tiles on European Walls: Collecting Ilkhanid Tiles in Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Ars Orientalis* 30: pp. 39–54). The recent history of the Caucasus since the end of the nineteenth century has seen developments that differentiate it from the Qajar Iran. Consequently, the lustre tiles were not removed following the same motivations and modalities, and did not follow the same path, as those from the Iranian sites (Watson, 1985, p. 184). This monument and its decoration thus reveal a distinctive trajectory in the history of the removal and collection of architectural revetments.

In 1907, the Pir-i Husayn's tiles were still *in situ* when the Ter-Avetissian expedition visited. In Iran, by this date, the monuments at places such as Natanz, Qum, Varamin, and Damghan had already been comprehensively stripped of tiles. Portions of the decoration, however, suffered the same fate shortly afterwards, disappearing from the mausoleum walls by 1913 (Giyasi, "Sufi Shrine – The Pearl of Muslim Architecture," p. 25).³⁶ The Pir-i Husayn tile corpus was less dispersed than at other sites and its tiles are now largely preserved at the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg (Ivanov, Anatol, 2003, "HERMITAGE MUSEUM II. COLLECTION OF THE ISLAMIC PERIOD," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. XII, Fasc. 3, pp. 245–254; Kratchkovskaya, *Izraztsy mavzoleia Pir-Khuseina*, pp. 28–33). The richness of this collection is the result of the fusion of several smaller examples. The Stieglitz Museum's collection was formed by acquisitions on the Paris art market (mainly from Mme Duffeuty from 1915 onwards) and pieces from the Moscow Asian Museum. Other pieces from the site were also acquired from dealers in St. Petersburg and Baku (Kratchovskaya, *ibid.* p. 164). Dmitry Sadoveef, curator at the Hermitage recently investigated and discussed lustre tiles preserved in this collection and attributed by Kratchovskaya to the Khanqah of Pir-i Husayn (Sadoveef, Dmitry. (forthcoming). "Questions of Attribution of Some Tiles from the Mausoleum in the Khanqah of Pir Huseyn,").

In a historiographical context of comparable Iranian sites, the Pir-i Husayn complex has received unequal treatment and lesser attention. At the same time, the preservation of these lustre tiles outside Western European collections – at the Hermitage Museum, but also in the National Museum of Tbilisi and the Nizami Museum of Azerbaijani Literature in Baku – has resulted in them being less known, studied, and published than other such tiles. As a result, the Pir-i Husayn mausoleum and its decoration have so

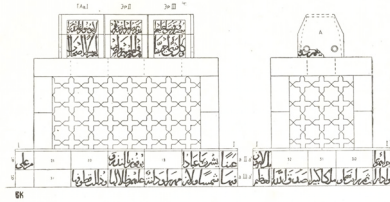


FIGURE 14
Reconstruction of Pir-i Husayn's cenotaph showing the tile revetment locations. (After Kratchkovskaya 1946, Plate 46)

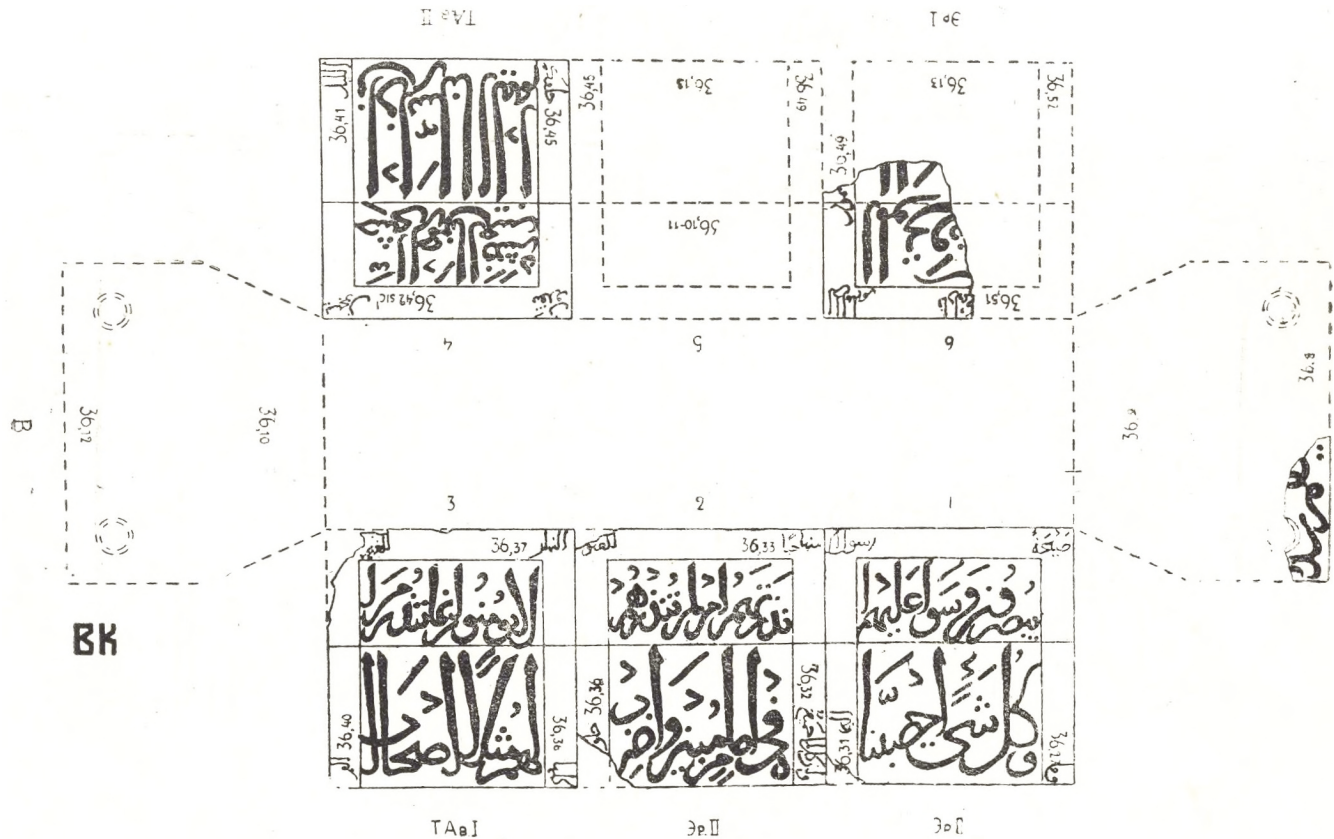


FIGURE 15
Reconstruction of the upper cenotaph of Pir-i Husayn showing tile revetment locations. (After Kratchkovskaya 1946, Plate 45)

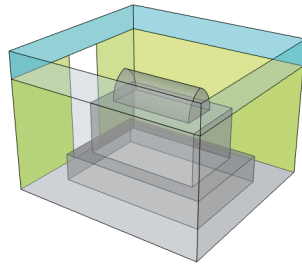
far failed to achieve the place they deserve individually and within the field of Islamic architectural history.

13 Different Zones of Lustre Tiles in the Tomb Chamber of Pir-i Husayn

It is plausible that the monument's visitors were aware of the high cost of tile revetments and thus the sacredness of a specific architectural space could therefore be evaluated based on the abundance of these expensive tiles. The composition of the walls surrounding the cenotaph is identified in a 1907 black-and-white photograph from Ter-Avetissian; this small portion of the revetments *in situ* constitutes a major clue to establishing how tiles were displayed. Three zones are identified (Figs. 10, 16, 21):

- Zone A (Green): a dado of interlocking turquoise glazed crosses and eight-pointed lustre stars.
- Zone B (Blue): an inscriptional band with the foundation text dated 684/1285.
- Zone C (Grey): the cenotaph materialising the burial of Pir-i Husayn, which is organised on three levels (1, 2, 3).

FIGURE 16
Zones of lustre tile decoration
in Pir-i Husayn's tomb chamber.
Zone A (Green) - dado; Zone B
(Blue): inscriptional frieze; Zone
C (Grey): cenotaph (A. Leone and
A. Kiriakides)



13.1 Zone A: the Dado

This zone is located on the lower part of the walls below the epigraphic frieze (Zone B). It is composed of panels that combine turquoise crosses with lustre stars about 20 cm in diameter. Other data, such as the height of this panelling, cannot be determined from the 1907 photograph, which shows only a partial detail of the wall (Fig. 10). In the photograph, three crosses and four and a half stars can be seen vertically: this corresponds to a section of panelling of around 70 cm. The covering at the bottom of the wall extends beyond the frame of the photograph. V. Sysoyev, who observed the panels of stars and crosses *in situ*, reports that they extended from the floor to a height of around 1.62 m (Kratchkovskaya, *ibid.*, p. 40). As the other descriptions are more evasive or difficult to interpret on this point, it is this information that forms the basis of our reconstruction of the decorative programme area. (Dorn, 1861, p. 481).³⁷

Extrapolating from Sysoyev's observations, the panelling covered a total surface area of approximately 16,60 m². This figure corresponds to the entire height of the room's base (around 1,60 m), except for part of the east wall where the entrance is located and where the decoration was interrupted (around 60 cm). If we use this surface area to estimate the number of pieces, around 400 elements of each type (lustrous stars and turquoise crosses) formed the panels of the lower parts of the walls.

In her innovative approach to the building and its decoration, Kratchkovskaya attributed a specific group of tiles to the panelling of Pir-i Husayn's mausoleum. Her proposals are based on notes recorded at the end of the nineteenth century, the photograph taken by Ter-Avetissian in 1907, and pieces of information compiled in museum registers. Then, she identified a set of 123 lustre stars dated between 681/1282 and 684/1285 and 325 turquoise crosses in the collections of the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg. All the stars share the same typology. Each star is an eight-pointed module approximately 20 cm in diameter, surrounded by a border in cursive script (*Naskh*) on a white background, around a central register painted on lustre (Figs. 11, 17).³⁸ On the basis of this standard commonly found in the lustre-painted ceramics of Kashan's workshops, the preserved portions or immortalised pieces in the 1907 photograph show that they adopted a variety of compositions, motifs, and epigraphic content: verses from the Quran and poetic quatrains (Kratchkovskaya, *ibid.*, pp. 80–99).

Central motifs are of several types of compositions: geometric, vegetal, or animate (mainly birds).³⁹ The photograph taken *in situ* shows that some tiles found in the sanctuary depicted animals. There is also a piece with an epigraphic motif, which, although described as being in the Hermitage Museum, has not been found in the current collection. The epigraphic content written on the borders of the stars attributed to the Pir-i Husayn's tomb comes mainly from the Quran. Twenty sura have been identified: some are represented only once, while others are found up to 27 times within the group, often combined on the same piece and inscribed one after the other to fill the space. In addition, the sura and verses are sometimes incomplete, with gaps or interruptions when the perimeter is already completed. A minority of the text, around 8% of the



FIGURE 17
Eight-pointed lustre star tile from
Pir-i Husayn's tomb chamber.
Diam. ca. 20 cm. Hermitage
Museum, Saint-Petersburg, inv.
0114. (Anaïs Leone)

inscriptions, corresponds to poetic quotations in Persian. The photographic record also provides evidence that they were integrated indiscriminately into the same panel as the Quranic stars. The dado made from turquoise crosses and lustre stars in the Pir-i Husayn's tomb chamber follows the established standards for compositions of this type. The dimensions, typologies, and epigraphic and ornamental choices of the individual stars correspond to those commonly found in Kashan's ceramic production. The module in which the elements are arranged is also common. Out of context, and when preserved without reliable provenance information, elements from this dado are difficult to identify as belonging to the same group and to link to a precise architectural programme. A photograph of a section of a wall in its original state provides a valuable snapshot of pieces juxtaposed within the same space, despite their disparities. It also constitutes a major contribution to our knowledge of medieval lustre tiles and their architectural contexts.

13.2 Zone B: the Epigraphic Frieze

During our surveys of the site, no evidence corresponding to the portions of the linear frieze could be found in the current state of the walls. Nevertheless, the image recorded in 1907 shows that this zone was directly interacting with the dado: it formed a large epigraphic band above the panels of crosses and stars (Fig. 10). At the same time, Bartolomeyev mentions the position of the inscription only very vaguely, placing it "at support height" and "at half human height." The height of the frieze can therefore be estimated at around 1.60 m on the basis of the data on the dado. According to the measurements taken on site, the inscription band ran between the panels of the dado and the top of the walls (around 2 m high) and filled the entire space in between. The division of these areas corresponds to the dimensions of the funerary chamber. Each portion forming the frieze corresponds to a common type of almost square tile (approx. 35 cm²), organised in three horizontal registers (Fig. 18). Thanks to the sketches made during Ter-Avetissian's mission, it has been possible to transcribe the entire linear inscription running through 30 complete tiles.⁴⁰ The upper border features a frieze of half-palmettes punctuated with turquoise in white relief on a brown lustre background. The main register bears an inscription in cobalt relief in *thuluth* style on a background of vegetal foliage with turquoise.

Unusually for lustre-ware friezes, the entire text is a foundation inscription that contains important documentary information. It gives the name, titles, and genealogy of the person to whom the tomb was dedicated (Kratchkovskaya, Vera, (1954) "Texte de



FIGURE 18
 Tile from the epigraphic frieze
 of Pir-i Husayn's tomb chamber.
 Dimensions: ca. 35 cm. Hermitage
 Museum, Saint-Petersburg, inv.
 A3-20

construction: Khanakah Pir Husain," *Répertoire Chronologique d'Épigraphie Arabe* XII: pp. 54–56, no. 4865):

This is the martyrdom of the Shaikh, the Imām, the mystic, the being devoted to the worship of God, the pole of saints, the model of those who revere God, al-Husain son of 'Ali, known as Pir Husain Rawānān.

Moreover, it also indicates the date and the patron of the renovation and decoration:

Its construction was redone by the avid of God the One 'Umar, son of Muḥammad al-Shīrẓādī, al-Qazvīnī. This [was completed] in the months of the year 684 of the Hegira of the Chosen Prophet (1285). (Kratchovskaya, 1954)

This information is of value as it shows that the frieze was commissioned and produced specifically to fit the tomb chamber in the mausoleum of Pir-i Husayn. On the basis of these parameters, a precise and reliable re-contextualization of these tiles within the architectural space of the room is proposed.

Kratchkovskaya has identified 26 of the 30 sections of the original inscription in the collections of the Hermitage, in Baku and Tbilisi. These sections remain the only ones that have been identified to the present day, and the distribution of these pieces between these collections remains unchanged to this day (Kratchkovskaya, 1946, p. 65). Most of the sections of the frieze are still in St Petersburg, and 22 of these tiles were exhibited by the Hermitage in Amsterdam in 2007 (Adamova, Adel, ed. (2007), *Persia. Thirty Centuries of Art and Culture*, Hampshire and Amsterdam, p. 34, Cat. 52–73). The five tiles that Kratchkovskaya identified in Baku are now on display in the rooms of



FIGURE 19
Mosque entrance with recently installed photographs of tiles preserved at the Hermitage. (Anaïs Leone, 2018)

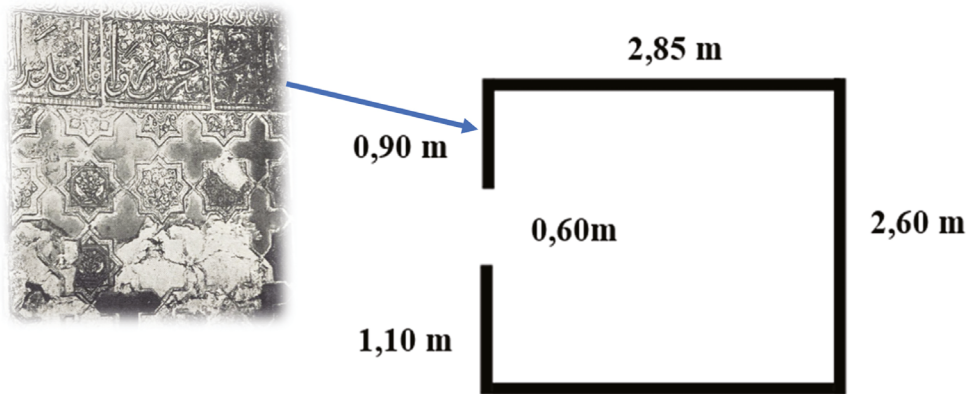


FIGURE 20
Location of the Ter-Avetissian wall photographed *in situ* with on-site measurements. (Anaïs Leone)

the Nizami Museum of Azerbaijani Literature.⁴¹ It should also be noted that “grandeur nature” photographic reproductions of the portions now preserved in St Petersburg have been placed in frames all around the entrance to the mosque (Fig. 19).

This initiative, which does not constitute a strict reconstruction of the original decoration of the mausoleum, reveals a desire to preserve the memory of a link that has now been lost. The arrangement of this zone of decoration in its initial environment can be reconstructed from measurements recorded in the room and the estimated length of the frieze. These two types of data coincide. For example, the 30 tiles, each around 35 cm long, formed an epigraphic band 10.5 m long, which fit into the overall perimeter of the 10.9 m-long room (Fig. 20).⁴² On the basis of the photograph of the inscription on its original walls, it is possible to estimate its progression around the perimeter of the room and to put forward a hypothesis as to the starting point of the frieze.

Kratchkovskaya identified the portion captured in the photograph as belonging to the southeast corner of the room. Nonetheless, according to our measurements, it is more likely that this corresponds to the northeast section of the wall, located to the right of the entrance. The southeast section of the wall measures only 90 cm, which is insufficient to accommodate the three tiles visible in the photograph. In contrast, the dimensions of these tiles correspond to those of the northeast wall section.⁴³ According to the sequence of inscription, the frieze may have originally begun in the southeast corner, extended above the entrance, and then continued along the other walls. On this point too, the data collected on-site allows us to refine the proposal made by Kratchkovskaya. She had assumed that the frieze was elevated to frame the entrance to the room on the east wall. According to the height of the walls of the room and the entrance door, only the star-and-cross dado was interrupted at this location and the frieze followed the same course (Fig. 21). The frieze was located at a sufficient height to be inscribed directly above this opening. According to this proposed reconstruction, the longer south and north walls would have held eight frieze tiles each, while the shorter east and west walls would have contained seven.⁴⁴

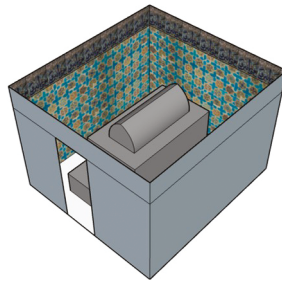


FIGURE 21
Proposition of reconstitution of the general decoration of Zone A (Dado) and Zone B (Epigraphic frieze) (Anaïs Leone, Alexandre Kiriakides)

In the tomb chamber, the combination of the dado (Zone A) and the epigraphic frieze (Zone B) extended from floor to ceiling, covering the entire height of the walls (Fig. 21). This complete coverage may explain why one *in-situ* description mentions decorations on the vault above the room (Kratchkovskaya, 1946, p. 160). Even so, this claim, which is not mentioned in any other source, remains questionable. It is more likely that this general impression stemmed from the visual impact of the mausoleum when its walls were still covered in its extensive lustre decoration. These large panels filled the entire surface of the walls in this small space. The ceramic covering formed an appropriate setting with a metallic sheen for the composition at the centre of the room: the cenotaph.

13.3 Zone C: the Cenotaph (Figs. 22–24)

In 1858, Bartolomeyev mentioned,

Le tombeau formait au milieu de cette chambre une élévation carrée, et il était tout recouvert de briques faïencées d'une richesse et d'une finesse remarquable. (Dorn, 1861, p. 481)⁴⁵

He also stated that the ensemble had, already at this time, suffered damage and deterioration.⁴⁶ A multiple-stage stone structure remains in the room today (Fig. 22)⁴⁷ and, on the basis of observations and measurements conducted on each level of the cenotaph in 2018, the current tomb probably remains in the shape and dimensions of the earlier lustre version. This suggests that, despite the loss of its decorative covering, the location and structure have been preserved.

The tomb consists of three levels (Figs. 23–24). On the basis of the revetments identified as originating from the tomb of Pir-i Husayn, Kratchkovskaya proposed a preliminary reconstruction of its decorative scheme. Since then, data collected *in situ* along with the examination of the lustre tiles held in the Hermitage Museum's storerooms have allowed for the refinement, and in some cases reconsideration, of her hypothesis. As a guideline, the following analysis describes each of the levels, proceeding from bottom to top:

- 1) The ensemble stands on a parallelepiped base (ca. 2.15 × 1.45 m) approximately 40 cm high.



FIGURE 22
Current cenotaph structure in the tomb chamber (Anaïs Leone, 2018)

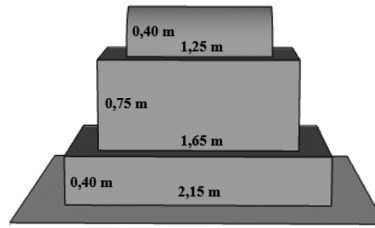


FIGURE 23
Cenotaph; North and South Faces
(Anaïs Leone)

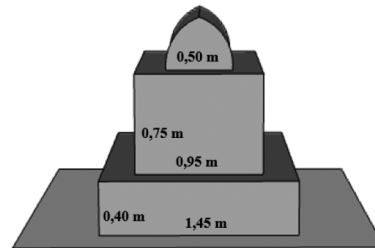


FIGURE 24
Cenotaph; East and West Faces
(Anaïs Leone)

- 2) Above this pedestal, a parallelepiped (ca $1.65 \times 0.95 \times 0.75$ m) forms the central part of the structure.
- 3) The upper cover of the tomb adopts a more unusual trapezoidal shape, approximately 40 cm high.⁴⁸

13.4 The Parallelepiped Base

The tomb rests on a rectangular base (ca 2.15×1.45 m) that follows the arrangement of the room: the north and south sides are the longest. Only a narrow passageway about 50 cm wide on the widest sides allows movement around this structure representing the deceased's body.

In the reconstruction by Kratchkovskaya, a group of lustre tiles, consisting of rectangular elements (ca 40×20 cm) of a simple linear frieze and corresponding corner-shape items, is attributed to this zone of the composition (Fig. 14). This band, inscribed with Quranic content (Q 76:1–20), displays a consistent layout across both formats: a single register of cobalt-blue relief calligraphy set against a lustre-painted background of vegetal scrolls, richly highlighted with turquoise (Fig. 25). The corner-pieces, forming 90-degree angles, measures approximately 25 cm per side. Although Kratchkovskaya was unable to verify her proposal on-site, she described the pedestal's decoration as consisting of two vertical registers running from corner to corner – five tiles per long side and three per short side. Nevertheless, several inconsistencies emerge when this hypothesis is compared with the actual structure. The portion of the base reconstructed by Kratchkovskaya on her diagram is not compatible with the dimensions of either the cenotaph or the room (Fig. 23; Fig. 24).⁴⁹ She estimates this segment of inscription running from one corner to another (Q 76:6–8) to be 2.50 m long, significantly longer than the actual measurements allow.⁵⁰ The attribution of this frieze to the base of the cenotaph is further weakened by the identification of an additional, previously unpublished portion corresponding to this sequence of text.

The inscription reconstructed by Kratchkovskaya contains three gaps. The missing element she identifies as number 21 on her diagram likely corresponds to two pieces. A portion of the frieze that has been identified in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum contains a sequence matching this missing portion but does not fully complete it.⁵¹ This indicates that the original segment consisted of six tiles rather than the five initially proposed. As a result, the estimated total length of the frieze between the two corners increases to approximately 2.80 m – considerably longer than the

FIGURE 25
Rectangular tile with linear
inscription from the cenotaph of
Pir-i Husayn. Dimensions: 20 ×
40 cm. Hermitage Museum, Saint
Petersburg, inv. 1342 (Anaïs Leone)



pedestal of the cenotaph allows. These dimensions do not coincide with the base of the structure: this would mean that the cenotaph could barely be contained within the space of the room, making any circulation around the structure impossible. The attribution of this frieze to the pedestal may be reconsidered considering the architectural constraints of the site. It could, however, be considered for other parts of the composition of Pir-i Husayn's cenotaph.⁵² Four other corner tiles have been misattributed to the corners of the central parallelepiped but can now be assigned to the base of the structure. These pieces share a common composition within a 90-degree angle. The main register is covered with a repeating motif of interlaced vegetation highlighted in cobalt and turquoise. It is framed by inscriptions from the Quran in *Naskh* on a white background (Kratchkovskaya, 1946, pp. 80–99). The 40 cm height of these tiles corresponds to the height of the current pedestal. Although this hypothesis cannot be definitively confirmed, the dimensions of the crosses and stars associated with the site (ca 20 cm in diameter) could easily fit into the space allotted between the two rows of corner tiles.⁵³ Such an arrangement would be particularly fitting for the base of the structure where decorative elements typically placed at the bottom of walls would naturally find their place.

13.5 *The Central Parallelepiped*

The central part of the cenotaph forms a parallelepiped (ca. 1.65 × 0.95 × 0.75 m). Kratchkovskaya's reconstruction of this elevation must be reassessed in light of *in situ* observations. In her schematic diagram, the central parallelepiped reaches a height of around 1.10 m, comprising two superimposed 40 cm corner tiles at each corner, surmounted by a register of epigraphic friezes. This configuration exceeds the actual height of the structure on site and cannot fit within the given dimensions. Nevertheless, the height of 75 cm does allow for the inclusion of a single 40 cm corner tile at each corner, possibly accompanied by one or more registers of frieze tiles. Besides, analysis of the cenotaph's pedestal has shown that the Quranic frieze from Sura *al-Insan* could not have taken place there. It is therefore highly likely that this epigraphic frieze formed the central body of the cenotaph (Fig. 23; Fig. 25). This inscription, estimated to comprise around 56 tiles, would have extended over a length of just 22 m. On the basis of this scale, we can assume that it was arranged in multiple registers. Given the current state of documentation, however, its precise layout remains difficult to reconstruct. The inventory of tiles that can be attributed to this group has nevertheless been expanded by around 15 pieces since Kratchkovskaya's publication. This expanded dataset allows us to better fill the gaps in the frieze and opens more accurate reconstructions in future

studies. Nonetheless, this epigraphic frieze would not have been the only decoration of this area of the cenotaph. On this point, Kratchkovskaya's proposal remains convincing: the lateral surfaces of the parallelepiped were decorated with panels of crosses and stars. Similar decorative strategies were used for the lateral panels of the cenotaphs of Fatima in Qum and Habib ibn-i Musa in Kashan. This hypothesis may also explain the absence of more specific elements, such as steles and lustre plaques that could be associated with this location among those attributed to Pir-i Husayn.

13.6 *The Trapezoidal Cenotaph Cover*

The unusual trapezoidal shape of the tomb cover allows for a successful reconstruction. This atypical feature required the creation of specially designed tiles, as no comparable typology is known from other sites. On the basis of the collections of the Hermitage and the descriptions of the Tbilisi State Museum and Dorn, Kratchkovskaya attributed four complete tiles and two fragments to this part of the cenotaph (Fig. 15). Each one forms a rectangle (ca. 40 × 48 cm), with the upper edge inclined at an angle of 25 degrees (Fig. 12). The layout of the inscriptions, all quotations from Sura *Ya-Sin*, adapts to this unusual configuration. They are divided into three registers: a cursive band on a white background (Q 36:21–51) frames three sides of the rectangle. The central space is divided into two horizontal registers (Q 36:10–13) following its linear sequence. Apart from a fragment preserved in the Hermitage collections, the two smaller sides are incomplete. The proposed reconstruction of these facings corresponds to the data recorded on site. The base of the trapezium is 1.25 m long and 50 cm wide. This dimension corresponds to the three 90-degree angled elements on the north and south faces of the cenotaph's summit. The height recorded on site is also compatible with that of the tiles.

This tomb cover is a fundamental example for our broader knowledge of lustre-ware forms in funerary buildings. Its rare and possibly unique design highlights the diversity of solutions tailored to the requirements of individual sites. It can be reasonably assumed that the stone structure of the tomb of Pir-i Husayn (who died in 467/1074) was already in place within the room. The commission given to the Kashan workshops of lustre ceramic would therefore have been determined by specific shapes and dimensions of this existing structure. On the basis of these precise parameters, the final composition blended standard and custom-made elements to suit the specific features of Pir-i Husayn's tomb.

13.7 *Pir-i Husayn Lustre Tiles Programme through the Art Historical Lens*

The opportunity to identify the different zones of the lustre programme and its respective tile typologies goes beyond a simple case study. Until now, the Pir-i Husayn complex has remained at the forefront of studies devoted to monumental ceramics from the Iranian world. The site's location has played a decisive role in its historiographical treatment. This reconstruction enriches our global knowledge of the forms of monumental lustre ceramic programmes associated with funerary buildings. Firstly, the adoption of a dado of interlocking turquoise crosses and lustre eight-pointed stars (Zone A) form a common layout in the funerary buildings of the Ilkhanid period (Watson, Oliver (1977), "Persian Lustre Tiles of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries." PhD dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, pp. 48–97). Indeed, the implementation of this scheme, established from elements of around 20 cm in diameter, is attested within several shrines: the tombs of 'Abd al-Samad in Natanz, of Imamzada 'Ali ibn Ja'far in Qum (Godard, Yédda, (1937). "Pièces datées de céramique de Kāshān," *Athar-i Iran* 2: Fig. 145; Leone, Anaïs, (2021)., "Revêtements au lustre métallique dans l'architecture religieuse et funéraire de l'Iran Ilkhânide," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Aix-Marseille Université, pp. 249–261; Masuya, 2000, p. 49; Watson, 1985, p. 122, 142, 181, 184, 196,

Fig. 121; Wilber, 1977, pp. 132–133, no. 37), of Mir Muhammad on the island of Kharg, (Leone, *ibid*, pp. 300–307; Watson, 1977, pp. 188–189) and of Imam Riza in Mashhad. The adoption of this composition follows the standards of the period. Nevertheless, the case of the Pir-i Husayn mausoleum demonstrates a different conception of this decoration in its original architectural environment. In the case of the tomb chambers of ‘Abd al-Samad in Natanz (Blair, Sheila (1986), *The Ilkhanid Shrine Complex at Natanz, Iran*. Cambridge, fig. 47 Leone, Anaïs, (2021b), “New data on the Luster Tiles of ‘Abd al-Samad’s Shrine in Natanz, Iran,” *Muqarnas* 38: pp. 331–356; Leone, 2021a, pp. 261–299; McClary, Richard P., (2018). “Re-Contextualizing the Object: Using New Technologies to Reconstruct the Lost Interiors of Medieval Islamic Buildings.” *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 7, no. 2 (2018): pp. 263–283; McClary, Richard P. and Grbanovic, Ana Marija, “On the Origins of the Shrine of ‘Abd al-Samad in Natanz,” Watson, 1977, pp. 187–188, fig. 117; Wilber, 1955, pp. 133–134.), Imam Riza in Mashhad, and Yahya in Varamin (Blair, Sheila (2014). “Art as Text: The Luster Mihrab in the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art.” In *No Tapping around Philology: A Festschrift in Honor of Wheeler McIntosh Thackston Jr.’s 70th Birthday*, edited by Alireza Korangy and Daniel J. Sheffield, pp. 407–436; Blair, Sheila (2016). “Architecture as a Source for Local History in the Mongol Period: The Example of Waramin.” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 26:1–2; pp. 215–228; Leone, *ibid*, pp. 183–223; Overton, Keelan and Maleki, Kimia. (2020). “The Emamzadeh Yahya at Varamin: A Present History of a Living Shrine 2018–20” *Journal of Material Culture in the Islamic World* 1: 120–159; Watson, 1977, p. 63; Wilber, 1955, pp. 109–111, no.11;) the dado was designed to surround the entire lower parts of the space and highlight the more ambitious elements of the decorative programme such as the mihrabs. In contrast, in Pir-i Husayn’s mausoleum, the dado forms the focus of the decoration owing to the room’s confined dimensions: it is conceived as a panelled surface filling almost the entire space.

Secondly, the dated foundation frieze (Zone B) placed above the dado also illustrates an exception between the standard and this case. The epigraphic friezes that encircle the entire architectural space were a frequent feature of decorative programmes in Ilkhanid Iran. Generally situated at eye level, these continuous bands constitute an important visual marker. For this reason, these independent friezes constitute separate decorative zones that are part of a precise decorative scheme linked to the rest of the architecture. The narrowness of the Pir-i Husayn burial chamber stands in stark contrast to other models (Fig. 20). In the configuration of this room, the frieze formed a crown of 30 units at the top of the walls. This position brings it into line with the sculpted stucco friezes at the top of walls or the base of vaults in Ilkhanid buildings. Furthermore, no lustre-ceramic frieze has so far been identified as being allocated to the base of a vault or at the top of walls. This parallel also seems to be echoed in the textual content of the Pir-i Husayn frieze, which identifies the frieze, the commissioner, and the date of its creation. This also constitutes a rare and precious case of foundation inscription executed on lustre tiles. Consequently, the frieze illustrates a probable hybridization between several models.

Finally, the preservation *in situ* of the structure of the cenotaph and attempts to reconstruct its composition are invaluable also in a wider approach (Zone C). Indeed, a few examples of lustre-glazed tomb covers are identified from either pre-Mongol or Ilkhanid shrines. However, many lustre-painted ceramic panels, now preserved without context, have been identified as tombstones (Fehervari, Gèza, (1972), “Tombstone or mihrab? A speculation,” In *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. Richard Ettinghausen, pp. 241–252, New-York, pp. 241–252; Blair, Sheila (2022), “On lustre cenotaphs,” *Medieval Kâshi Online*, INHA, February 16, 2022, Online; Watson, 1977, pp. 116–122). The cover of Fatima’s tomb in Qum is the most complete of this type that

has survived. At the same time, we now have proposals for partial reconstructions of the lustre tombs of ‘Abd al-Samad at Natanz (Leone, Anaïs. (2022), “On luster cenotaphs,” *Medieval Kāshi Online*, INHA, February 16, 2022, Online), and ‘Ali ibn-i Ja‘far in Qum. In fact, as a zone of decoration independent of the walls, cenotaph structures are more difficult to apprehend from the current state of the site. For this reason, the Pir-i Husayn tomb provides us with an example that also allows us to develop a comparative approach. Compared to dadoes, epigraphic friezes, and mihrabs, a diversity of formulae is particularly evident in these compositions: it could be that these different choices were dictated by the pre-existing tomb structures in these mausoleums. As we already assume concerning the trapezoidal cover of the cenotaph (Zone C.3), specific tiles had to be manufactured to adapt the shape and dimensions of the pre-existing stone structure.

14 Stucco and Tiles of the Pir-i Husayn Khanqah – Some Remarks

The lustre tile programme of the *khanqah* was of considerable dimensions and would have required an extensive amount of labour for its production and transport. The date of this prestigious commission was relatively early in relation to the major proliferation of lustre tile production in the first decades of the fourteenth century (rather than late thirteenth century). The lustre tile programme provides a rare insight into the patronage, production, and circulation of these rare decorative objects. These lustre tiles were employed to embellish an architectural interior which also contained carved stucco works. The coexistence of these elements with differing dates within the same architectural ensemble reflects the desire to preserve the stucco mihrab during the second phase of decoration. When the lustre tiles were commissioned from the Kashan workshops, the option of replacing the stucco mihrab with a new lustre composition was not part of the redecoration plan. The choice of decorative medium might have been determined by the difficulty in production. The largest piece, the monumental – perhaps tripartite – mihrab was produced in carved stucco, probably because this was a less demanding and less costly activity than producing it in the lustre-tile medium. Lustre tiles were employed for the monument’s smaller surfaces and because the transport thereof would not have been excessively difficult. The observed difference between the decorative media could also have been determined by the fact that the mihrab installation was an intervention during the decoration of the interior of the mosque, which was separate from tile production and installation. There does not appear to have been a clear distinction between the two decorative media. The mihrab was the focal point of the interior of the complex and thus it should not have been produced in a medium considered inferior to the others. Furthermore, it is likely that it was polychrome in its original iteration, which complemented the lustre tiles. The decisions regarding the media for each revetment were therefore made on the basis of its technical characteristics (such as dimensions and plasticity). These tiles are a significant example of architectural revetments which were most likely produced in Kashan, perhaps on the personal order of their patron, with the *nisba*, *al-Qazvini*, who may have had personal or political ties and contact to their production centre (see below).

Tiles were probably produced in Kashan and then shipped to the site of the monument, perhaps accompanied by an expert who would have ensured the tiles’ successful installation. The specific form and nature of the cenotaph tiles indicate that there were a clear plan and goal to produce tiles for the *khanqah* and that they were commissioned, rather than bought prefabricated. This is also the case of the epigraphic frieze that crowned the upper part of the walls of the room – a foundation inscription necessarily

implies a specific commission. This evidence is significant for the understanding of the production and distribution mechanisms of Ilkhanid lustre tiles. The information provided by the tiles from the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah* is of the utmost significance: tile production in Kashan and their installation at Qubalibalaoglan, – more than 700 km distance from the production centre – provides evidence of the almost exceptional area of circulation of Ilkhanid lustre tiles. A similar case is made by the Ilkhanid lustre tiles discovered on the island of Kharg, some 500 km south of Kashan, at the Imanzada Mir Muhammad (1300–1301, 1337–1338).⁵⁴

15 Exterior Architectural Revetments of the Pir-i Husayn Khanqah

The exterior architectural revetments (Fig. 3) of the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah* are produced of cut stone. They can roughly be divided into two groups: inserted carved stone slabs featuring historic inscriptions with vegetal ornamentation in their background and works of stone carving such as muqarnas elements. These revetments have been preserved in two parts of the complex: on the exterior surfaces of the minaret and the exterior surfaces of the *khanqah*.⁵⁵ Further works of stone carving at the complex include the interior revetments of the passages between the spaces of the mosque, which are limited to simple twisted column elements.⁵⁶

The minaret of the complex has a square base and is entered from the courtyard. Its base gradually transitions first into an octagon shape and subsequently into the cylindrical shaft of the minaret. One historic inscription tops the entrance to the minaret, and in addition to elegant lettering it also features vegetal elements in its background. Another historic inscription with the signature of its architect (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; e.) is located on the octagonal part of the minaret and is oriented symmetrically towards the courtyard, in order to maximise both visibility and legibility of the inscription. Two more cartouches with cut stone historic inscriptions (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; c-g.), that provide important information concerning the patronage and endowment of the complex, are located on the upper portions of the minaret's shaft.⁵⁷

The entrance portal (Fig. 4) of the complex is formed by a pointed arch and an *iwān* structure. The complex's longest historic inscription is located in the interior of the *iwān* opening (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; b.). This inscription was removed from the ruined structure of the complex and transferred to Baku and has only recently been re-installed on the reconstructed architectural structure of the monument. It features a *Naskh* inscription divided into four lines.⁵⁸

16 Patronage of the Complex and Revetments

The complex's longest historic inscription, now returned from Baku and re-inserted in the structure of the rebuilt monument, provides important information concerning patronage (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; b.). It is dated 641/1243–1244 and offers information regarding some of the most extensive constructive undertakings tied to the formation of the complex. The inscription firstly refers to the Shirvanshah ruler Fariburz III, during whose reign the monument was sponsored, and continues by stating that the endowment for the monument was provided by one of his officials, Hasan ibn-i Muhammad ibn-i Barwandi. The large-scale undertakings on the monument were thus directly sanctioned by the ruler of the local dynasty and patronage was performed by one of his close officials. The *khanqah* complex is therefore one of the few

monuments of the Ilkhanid period which provides primary source information concerning the mechanism behind its patronage and is one of the few examples of monuments with a Sufi component, making it evident that it was tied to the patronage of state officials. Another reference is made to the same ruler, Fariburz III Shirvanshah, on a carved stone slab of the minaret dated 1256–1257 (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; c.).⁵⁹

The stucco mihrab and lustre tiles of the complex retain some inscriptions providing information regarding their patronage (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; i., m., n.). These two redecoration interventions were distinct undertakings. The first was the production of the mihrab and it was followed by a separate installation of lustre tiles a decade later. It has been demonstrated that the mihrab has undergone significant alterations, particularly due to its removal from the architectural context and transfer to the museum collection in Baku. It is therefore not clear whether the historic inscription above the location of the former central niche was originally longer and could have contained further information regarding patronage. It is plausible to suggest that the patron of the mihrab installation was probably one of the ruler's officials. The patron might have had personal ties with the geographical origin of the stucco craftsmen's workshop. This was the case with the patron of the complex's lustre tiles, who seems to have had connections to central Iran, which probably facilitated securing the revetment production for the monument.

The lengthy historic inscription in the lustre tile medium provides important information concerning the patronage of the lustre tile repertoire of the *khanqah* (<https://doi.org/10.48564/unibafd-063kw-zyh14>; m.). It specifically refers to the act of tile sponsorship as a renovation, or rather, a redecoration. Furthermore, it cites the full name of the sponsor of tiles: 'Umar ibn-i Muhammad al-Shirzadi al-Qazvini, supposedly a state official. Most importantly, the name of the tiles' patron carries the *nisba*, al-Qazvini. Although *nisbas* should not be interpreted in a strictly geographical sense, the *khanqah* tiles' patron seems to fit this system of *nisbas*. This therefore implies that the patron or his ancestors originated from the city of Qazvin, which held important socio-political and economic roles in both the Seljuq and Ilkhanid periods. Qazvin is located roughly 290 km (as the crow flies) north-west of the city of Kashan, the main production centre of lustre tile revetments. Familiarity with the Iranian territory, and eventual familial or political ties might have been beneficial to the patron in securing the commission of the extensive lustre tile programme for the *khanqah*.⁶⁰ Another defining aspect of the *khanqah* tiles is their relatively early date, 1285–1286, which makes them one of the earliest lustre tile revetment repertoires with a known architectural context. This indicates that lustre tiles were already fashionable in the early Ilkhanid period, and their prestige must have been popularly recognised. For these reasons, the tiles were sought out specifically for the *khanqah*. It thus seems that construction, maintenance and additions to the complex were sanctioned by the state, which was of utmost importance in order to attract wealthy patrons to sponsor the endowments. In this respect, the patronage of the complex impacted its institutionalisation, situating it apart from the Alinja *khanqah* in the geographically related area of Nakhchivan. There, the Shaykh was executed by the state, which was probably the reason wealthy patrons were deterred from sponsoring the complex.⁶¹

17 Conclusion

This research provides a comprehensive account of the constructive and decorative chronology of the Pir-i Husayn complex. It shows that after the formative period of

the complex, which concluded in around 1243–1244 with the institution of the waqf, the site not only attracted pilgrims, but also patrons who were willing to sponsor the construction of additional buildings forming the complex, such as the minaret, and above all to contribute financially to the lavish revetments, which added to the sacredness of the focal spaces of the complex. For this reason, a monumental carved stucco mihrab was installed in the mosque of the complex, and subsequently the cenotaph of the Shaykh, and its burial chamber, as well as some parts of the mosque, were redecorated with an extensive lustre tile repertoire. These tiles, sponsored by a patron with ties to the Iranian territory, were probably commissioned in Kashan before installation in the complex. The use of carved stuccos and lustre tiles for the redecoration of the complex illustrates the popularity and appreciation of the two decorative media, which extended beyond the Ilkhanid territory. The case of the complex and its revetments is important because it hints at the migration of stucco craftsmen towards the Caucasus to work on specific commissions, and also at the long-distance circulation of lustre tiles for important commissions. The research also puts forward the hypothesis that the complex evolved and formed around the tomb of the Shaykh, that this was sanctioned by the state, and that the architectural structure and the revetments in carved stucco, stone and lustre tiles functioned as a container for the grave of the Shaykh, as in examples of Sufi complexes and mausolea across the Ilkhanid territory.

Discussion of the evidence relating to the identity and involvement of different artisans in the formation of the architectural structure and decorative program of the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah* complex provides invaluable insight into the world of construction and decoration activities during the Ilkhanid period. It has shown that at least two different architects were employed in the construction of the minaret and the complex. Furthermore, these architects worked on both the design and supervision of construction projects, with assistance and guidance from master stonemasons (whose names are also immortalised in the minaret inscription). The stucco mihrab of the complex does not feature a stucco craftsmen's workshop signature, but further examination provides evidence that the workshop had to be summoned specifically for the commission in question. Observations of stucco production technology and visual elements employed on the mihrab suggest that, in all probability, the craftsmen arrived from the north-western or central Iranian region. The lustre tile revetments are unlikely to have been produced anywhere other than Kashan and were shipped to the destination of the monument upon completion. It remains unclear whether some tile craftsmen from Kashan were also present and active at the site.⁶² Finally, the complex of the *khanqah* is an example of a monument which gradually evolved into a monumental pilgrimage and religious complex through different prestigious endowments. This was influential in the selection of its architectural revetments and the appointment of the craftsmen who produced it.

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Supplementary Materials

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Notes

- 1 Associated names: Pir Husayn Khānqāh, Pir-i Husayn Khanqah and Mausoleum, Pirsaatcay Xanegahi, Seyx Pir Hüseyin Sirvani Xanagahi, Khanqah and Tomb of Pir-i Husayn bin 'Alī, Khanakah and Tomb of Pir-i Husayn bin Ali, Chanakah and Tomb of Pir-i Husayn.

- 2 Location: Pirsaatçay (Pirsaat river) area, some 16 km from Hacıqabul district, in the Qubalıbalaoğlan municipality. The location of the monument is somehow isolated, on the banks of the Pirsaat river. The monument is situated c. 75 km as-the-crow-flies from the city centre of Baku in a south-west direction. GPS location of the monument: 40.153808 N; 49.007882 E. Monument investigation: May 30, 2018; December 23, 2018; visits to the museums where the revetments from the monument are stored took place between December 21 and June 1, 2018; December 27, 2020.
- 3 The Shirvanshah dynasty ruled Shirvan (in present-day Azerbaijan and the eastern Caucasus) from the mid-ʿAbbasid to the Safavid era. They became Seljuq tributaries under Fariburz I and later a Georgian protectorate under Sultan Mahmud ibn Muhammad. In the 13th–14th centuries, Khwarazmshahs and then the Mongols controlled the region, dividing it between the Ilkhanids and the Golden Horde. The Shirvanshahs became Ilkhanid, then Timurid tributaries, remaining local rulers under the Safavids.
- 4 The date on the minaret, which contains the signature of its architect, indicates that it was completed in 1256.
- 5 Further lustre tile fragments have been found across modern Azerbaijan, showing that the *khanqah* is just one monument with direct evidence of their use. This suggests that other regional monuments also employed lustre tiles, indicating a larger quantity was imported from Kashan than previously believed.
- 6 This required stucco craftsmen to travel to the site to create the mihrab, highlighting the importance of the revetment materials and workshops.
- 7 It is plausible that the inscription was moved or added to the minaret during the complex's extensive recent renovations.
- 8 The complex's floorplan shows multiple construction phases. It is likely that the Shaykh's tomb dictated the mosque's southern placement, while the minaret's position is irregular. The courtyard served as a shared connecting space for the ensemble.
- 9 The inscription above the entrance likely approximates the completion date, as finishing the portal would follow the construction of most interior structures.
- 10 The shift from a stone to a large tripartite stucco mihrab reflected the patron's choice and the pragmatic decision to use stucco, a simpler medium, to redecorate and emphasize the mosque's prayer hall focal point.
- 11 It featured a star-and-cross dado topped by a monumental lustre tile frieze, probably in the mosque but possibly in the mausoleum or vestibule. Additional tiles were made to adorn the Shaykh's cenotaph.
- 12 This tomb tower appears to have been constructed at the site because it became an attractive place for the burial of revered persons either owing to patronage or the spiritual practices of the *khanqah*, or both.
- 13 Installing the stucco mihrab in the prayer hall highlighted political power through patronage of the complex's key revetments.
- 14 Its significance was highlighted through the application of lustre tile revetments.
- 15 The transfer involved disassembling the mihrab into panels for transport, then reassembling them in Baku.
- 16 The niche of the mihrab is quite deep and built out of cut stone elements. Its muqarnas hood has three tiers.
- 17 Comparable cases of tile material reuse have been documented at the Tekesh mausoleum in Kunya Urgench (Turkmenistan; twelfth to thirteenth century) as well as the chapel of the Holy mother of God in Éghvard (Armenia; early fourteenth century). For Tekesh mausoleum, see Mamedov, Mukhamed and Ruslan Muradov, (2001), *Gurganj. Architectural and Historical Guide*, Il Punto. For Éghvard, see Donabédian Patrick, and Yves Porter, (2017). "Éghvard (Arménie, début du XIV^e siècle), La Chapelle de L'alliance," *Hortus Artium Medievalium: Journal of the International Research Center for Late Antiquity and Middle Ages* 23(2): 837–855.
- 18 The corner panel with Kufic elements seems illogical, as its appearance differs greatly from the surrounding panels.
- 19 It is possible that a less-skilled craftsman oversaw producing these panels. Alternatively, the patterns could have been impacted by the mechanical properties of the stucco body of the mihrab; fine stucco layers were subtly applied.
- 20 This basic relief of the panel is relatively shallow. The craftsmen attached further elements of the composition upon this basic relief.
- 21 The top areas of these compositions are made more dynamic with the addition of perforated and carved protruding elements which are only partially attached and integrated into the stucco relief.
- 22 Examinations show the stucco craftsmen's advanced skills. The mihrab panels are shallower than usual, and the ornamentation is unusually large, making the final aesthetic unusual yet still demonstrating high craftsmanship.

- 23 Author's reading.
- 24 The inscription and its background share the same plane, carved from a single stucco layer. The
vegetal designs, made by carving and perforation, define the band's overall appearance.
- 25 It was made with a simple stucco technique, its distinctive look created by a near ninety-degree
carving angle.
- 26 I thank Iman Aghajani for reading this inscription.
- 27 Both extant panels of the small stucco mihrab were produced with simple stucco techniques and
they feature less demanding ornamental and epigraphic compositions. This is arguably because the
mihrab's tripartite composition was not meant to be the focus of the entire repertoire.
- 28 The distance between the two monuments, as the crow flies, amounts to some 300 km. Their stucco
works appear not to be related in terms of production technology and aesthetic features.
- 29 This indicates that patrons' connections and networks of acquaintances are likely to have assisted
them in recruiting the craftsmen.
- 30 It is unclear whether the craftsmen were hired because of a lack of local artisans or for their valued
lustre tile and stucco craftsmanship.
- 31 In fact, the craftsmen in charge of the production of the Alinja *khanqah* mihrab possessed more
advanced stucco production skills than those responsible for the mihrab of the Pir-i Husayn *khanqah*.
- 32 This indicates that the surface of the mihrab's relief was most likely thoroughly cleaned at least once
or twice since its inclusion in the museum collection.
- 33 This could, however, also be the result of restoration interventions.
- 34 The publication appeared over ten years after the author's 1935 research, presented at the *First
Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology* in Leningrad. Delays due to World War II and the USSR's
turmoil allowed her to enrich and refine her reconstruction.
- 35 Wilber dedicates an entry to the "Khanaqah and mausoleum of Pir Husayn" to his inventory of
Ilkhanid architecture. The location is incorrect, as he placed the complex seven kilometres south of
Baku. However, his account provides a valuable bibliography and key data on the site's architecture,
decoration, and lustre tiles. The *khanqah* is among twenty-two monuments listed by Oliver Watson
as originally featuring lustre ceramics.
- 36 Sysoyev mentions in 1925 that an Armenian army unit had taken possession of the site in 1918 and
destroyed the tiles. The question of which parts were affected remains because no lustre decorations
were present on the site in 1913.
- 37 Bartolomeyev mentions the frieze above the dado "à hauteur d'appui".
- 38 The panel preserved at the Hermitage, published by Kratchkovskaya which based her analysis of the
inscriptions and ornamentation on the stars of Pir-i Husayn, was observed in the museum's storage
rooms in July 2018. (Inv. IR-233-287).
- 39 Kratchkovskaya, *ibid.*, p. 42 had proposed a classification into nine categories of motifs: 1. abstract;
2. epigraphic; 3. geometric; 4. rosettes; 5. radial; 6. cruciform; 7. vegetal; 8. animal; 9. "arabesque."
- 40 These sketches were used for the research of Kratchkovskaya but could not be consulted.
- 41 These pieces could not be photographed owing to museum restrictions, but their texts were recorded
for identification.
- 42 The joints for fixing the tiles and the corner margins together account for the 40 cm in the calculation.
- 43 Detail of the calculation: $0,35 \times 3 = 1,10$ m. This measurement corresponds to the southern/eastern
part of the tomb room.
- 44 The existence of portions cut vertically among surviving pieces should be noted. It suggests that
some adjustments may have been made when the tiles were laid on the walls during construction.
- 45 It could be translated as follows: "The tomb formed a square elevation in the middle of this chamber,
and was completely covered in rich, fine faience brickwork."
- 46 He mentions: "[...] *au milieu, on voit le tombeau du saint, mais il a été profané, comme l'attestent les
pierres et les dalles amoncelées en bas et pour la plupart brisées [...]*" (Dorn, *ibid.*). Translation: "[...] in
the middle is the saint's tomb, but it has been desecrated, as evidenced by the stones and slabs piled
up below, most of them broken [...]."
- 47 No traces of tiles were found on the structure underneath this cover.
- 48 Dimensions of the trapeze base: 1.25×0.50 m.
- 49 The quotation of the inscription is (Q 76:6–8):
- عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا عِبَادُ اللَّهِ يُفَجِّرُونَهَا تَفْجِيرًا
يُوفُونَ بِالنَّذْرِ وَيَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا كَانَ شَرُّهُ مُسْتَطِيرًا
وَيُطْعَمُونَ أَلْطَعَامَ عَلَاً
- 50 She details her calculation as follows: 20 (corner) + (40 × 5) single friezes + 20 (other corner)
= 2.40 m + 10 cm (for joints and gaps between tiles).
- 51 Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Inv. 1824–1876.

- 52 According to his research about the provenance of the collection, Dmitry Sadoveef, curator at the Hermitage Museum suggests that this frieze could not have been part of the cenotaph of Pir-i Husayn. Personal discussion March 22, 2024.
- 53 For the longer sides, seven and a half stars horizontally; for the shorter sides, six stars.
- 54 One tile bears the signature ‘amal Sayyid ibn-i Amir Husayn al-Bukhari, which Mayer attributed to the building’s architect. However, since it appears on a tile, it is more likely that it belongs to the head of the tile workshop.
- 55 In both cases, the structures have been heavily restored, making it unclear whether the stone revetments remain in their original positions.
- 56 Further works of stone carving at the site are remains of historic tombstones, which have been decontextualized, but derive either from the interior territory of the monument or from the near-by cemetery on the hilltop to the north of the *khanqah*.
- 57 The upper part of the minaret appears to have been damaged and reconstructed.
- 58 The inscription is simple and does not exhibit any vegetal elements in its background.
- 59 The minaret seems independent from most of the complex and likely added later, so the inscription slab may belong elsewhere. The repeated ruler’s name highlights the project’s importance and the period’s extensive interventions.
- 60 Although lustre tiles have been found elsewhere in modern Azerbaijan, the Pir-i Husayn khanqah uniquely preserves partially known architectural context and a tile programme larger than those in central Iranian monuments.
- 61 The Alinja complex seems to have developed first, with the tomb tower added later when the Shaykh’s controversial teachings were no longer problematic, possibly explaining the size and prestige differences between the two complexes.
- 62 Craftsmen may have measured the monument to plan the revetment, while others from Kashan may have travelled with the tiles to assist with their installation.