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Ghurid monuments and Muslim identities: Epigraphy and exegesis in twelfth-century Afghanistan

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The eastward expansion of the Shansabanid sultanate of Ghur in the late twelfth century has usually been depicted as a confrontation between a unitary Muslim self and its Hindu ‘other’. The reification of heterogeneous and protean categories of belief implicit in this paradigm is particularly ill suited to represent the dynamic religious life of mediaeval Ghur. This was characterised by shifting patterns of royal patronage that reflect intense competition between the Karramiya, a popular pietistic sect, and the orthodox Sunni madhhab. Drawing on Ghurid architectural and numismatic inscriptions, this article examines the ways in which contemporary doctrinal disputes inflected elite cultural production during the period. Based on the content and context of Qur’anic citations, it suggests that a rhetorical emphasis on idolatry and unbelief in Ghurid epigraphy was part of a contemporary intra-Sunni polemic, and not primarily an address to those who were literally outside the fold of Islam. The deployment of scripture in the service of sectarian rivalry has significant implications for the interpretation of Qur’anic epigraphy in Indo-Ghurid mosques such as the Quwwat al-Islam Mosque in Delhi.

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Identity has to be seen not in terms of essences and thingness but temporally as the site of tremendous upheaval.

Shail Mayaram, ‘Rethinking Meo Identity’.1

In the last decades of the sixth/twelfth century, the Shansabanid sultans of Ghur, a rather marginal area of what today is west-central Afghanistan, vastly expanded the territories under their political control. In 571/1175 Sultan Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam (d. 599/1203) succeeded in wresting Herat from the Seljuqs, initiating a process of expansion into Khurasan, which saw Ghurid imperium reach as far west as Nishapur by 596/1200.2 Simultaneous expansion in the east began in the same year, and by 582/1186 the capture of Lahore effectively ended the last bastion of Ghaznavid dominion, establishing the Ghurid sultanate as the de facto successor state. Several encounters between Ghurid armies and those of north Indian ‘Rajput’ rulers followed, the most significant of which was the first battle of Tara’in in 587/1191, in which an army led by the Chauhans of Ajmir inflicted a crushing defeat on their Ghurid counterparts. The setback proved temporary, however, and a Ghurid victory at Tara’in in the following year opened the way to the conquest of north India. By the time Sultan Mu’izz al-Din fell victim to an Isma’ili assassin in 603/1206 and the Turkic slave generals of the Ghurids assumed power in north India, the territories of the sultanate extended as far east as Bengal.3

In traditional historiography, it has been taken as axiomatic that Ghurid expansion into north India in the 1190s constituted a (or indeed the) ‘Muslim’ or ‘Islamic’ conquest, in which a reified Muslim self defeated a hypostatised Hindu ‘other’ largely constructed in opposition to it. Although in recent years what C.E. Bosworth termed the ‘Ghurid interlude’ in Indo-Persian history has become the subject of review and revision, the idea of ‘Muslim’ conquest, or ‘Muslim’ victory, has remained largely unexamined. The notion is problematic on a number of counts, not least because it both assumes and produces the twelfth-century Muslim community as a homogeneous or monolithic entity, and thus leads to what has been identified in a quite different cultural context as the ‘transhistorical reification of categories of belief or philosophical allegiance’.4 Whether we define the events of the late twelfth century as a ‘Muslim’ conquest, a ‘Ghurid’ conquest, or a ‘Turkic’ conquest, the self in question was neither as bounded nor as stable as such terms imply, but was in fact comprised of multiple complementary or competing selves constituted dynamically and relationally in response to shifting cultural, historical and political conditions.

1 Mayaram, ‘Rethinking Meo Identity’, p. 37.
2 Bosworth, ‘Ghurids’, p. 1101. For a convenient historical overview, see Maricq and Wiet, Minaret, pp. 38–44.
3 Kieffer, Les Ghoridae, pp. 20–31; Jackson, Delhi Sultanate, pp. 3–32.
4 Campbell and Midler, Artistic Exchange, p. 274.
The reification of mediaeval identities in ways that ignores their protean characters has significant implications not only for our understanding of the history of the period but also its material culture. Recent scholarship on the rivalry between the ‘Abbasid and Fatimid caliphates (fourth/tenth through sixth/twelfth) centuries has demonstrated how architecture, epigraphy, numismatics and even textiles could be deployed to bolster competing claims to authority, highlighting the ways in which allied or opposed ethnic, political and religious identities within the Muslim umma inflected the artistic production of mediaeval elites.5 Focusing on the role of epigraphy in the architecture of the Ghurid sultanate, I hope to demonstrate here that the phenomenon is by no means exclusive to the context of Shi‘i-Sunni rivalry, even if the impact of intra-Sunni doctrinal disputes on pre-modern artistic patronage has received less attention.

The cultural life of twelfth-century Ghur offers particularly rich terrain on which to evaluate Sunil Kumar’s observation that ‘elite strategies of framing self and collective identities were intrinsically violent and hierarching exercises that had their own local contextual politics’.6 Despite the brevity of the Shansabanid floruit, the four decades between roughly 1160 and 1200 were characterised by dramatic political and religious shifts in the region. Not only were the Shansabanids in competition for political dominance with other claimants to authority within the tribal structures of Ghur,7 but the period was also marked by heated sectarian disputes and changing patterns of Shansabanid artistic and religious patronage. These shifts were part of a dynamic process of self-(re)fashioning on the part of the Shansabanids as their fortunes rose and their territories expanded.

The evolving titles to which the Shansabanid maliks laid claim offer an appropriate starting point, comprising complex self-representations that seek to locate Shansabanid rule within the conventional rhetoric of Islamic authority. Sheldon Pollock has noted the constitutive character of north Indian royal titles, which accomplished ‘the creation of the fame and virtue of the king through a celebration of his fame and virtue’, and the phenomenon is no less relevant to mediaeval Persianate royal titulature.8 The fluidity of the identity claims that Shansabanid titles assert reflects the rapidly changing nature of the sultanate itself in the last decades of the twelfth century. The rapidity of this expansion threw into high relief underlying tensions between the strong regional associations of the dynasty and its transregional pretensions.

The first of the Shansabanid maliks to claim the title of sultan was the arriviste ‘Ala’ al-Din Husayn, who in 545/1150 sacked Ghazna, the eponymous capital of the Ghaznavid sultanate that had dominated the eastern Islamic world for a century

5 See Bierman, Writing Signs; Tabbaa, Transformation of Islamic Art, especially Chapter 1, for a short discussion of contemporary intra-Sunni polemics.
6 Kumar, ‘Politics’, p. 5.
7 Among these were the Shishanid maliks: Juzjani, Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī, vol. 1, pp. 324–27; Raverty, Ṭabaqāt-i Nāṣirī, vol. 1, pp. 311–16.
and a half. This dramatic event, which earned its perpetrator the sobriquet *Jahān-sūz* (World-burner), marked the abrupt entry of these mountain chiefs onto the wider political stage, and heralded their meteoric rise from regional obscurity. Previously known as *malik al-jībāl* (king of the mountains), a title by which Ghurid rulers continued to be known, ‘Ala’ al-Din Husayn assumed the use of the title *al-sultān al-mu‘āẓẓam* (the great sultan), a title held by the Ghaznavids and Seljuqs to whom the Ghurids had previously been subordinate.

The aggrandisement of the Shansabanid *maliks* and the burgeoning of their titulature both reached their zenith under Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam (r. 558–99/1163–1203) and Mu’izz al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam (r. 569–602/1173–1206), brothers whose joint rule came to define the apogee of Ghurid power. Born three years apart, both brothers shared the *ism* Muhammad and the *nasab* ibn Sam. The elder of the two acquired the *laqab* Shams al-Din, his younger brother that of Shihab al-Din. Upon assuming the sultanate of Ghur in 1163 (or shortly afterwards), Shams al-Din changed his *laqab* to Ghiyath al-Din, the title by which he was known for the rest of his life. Around 569/1174, Shihab al-Din changed his *laqab* to Mu’izz al-Din, the name by which he is generally known.

Just as the changing *laqabs* of his elder brother reflected his increasing status, Mu’izz al-Din’s assumption of this *laqab* may be related to his capture of Ghazna from the Ghuzz Turks in 569/1174, after which he was elevated from the rank of *malik* to sultan. The brothers ruled in a condominium, with Ghiyath al-Din staying the hand of the rival Khwarazmshahs and overseeing the westward expansion of the sultanate from Firuzkuh in west-central Afghanistan, while Mu’izz al-Din expanded the sultanate’s reach into the former Ghaznavid territories in the Indus Valley and into north India after 588/1192. That Ghiyath al-Din remained the elder statesman of the pair is clear from his retention of the title *al-sultān al-‘aẓam* (the greatest sultan) in comparison to Mu’izz al-Din, *al-sultān al-mu‘āẓẓam*

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13 Based on the numismatic evidence, the change can be dated later than 566/1170 and probably shortly before 569/1174: Spengler, ‘New Numismatic Evidence’, p. 114. Mu’izz al-Din had progressively borne the titles *malik al-mu‘āẓẓam* and *malik al-‘aẓam*: ibid., pp. 113–14.

(the great sultan), who acquired the former title only after Ghiyath al-Din’s death in 599/1202–3.\textsuperscript{15}

It should be borne in mind that these conventional assertions of sovereign authority were not made in a vacuum, but were intimately associated with the objects and media that bore them, and which served to reinforce the claims that they made. For example, the adoption of the chatr (parasol) was as intrinsic to ‘Ala’ al-Din’s investment of the new office of sultan as his assumption of the title itself, the former serving as an instantiation of the authority associated with the latter.\textsuperscript{16}

Other objects displayed a more literal association with the inscription of authority, among them coins, manuscripts and architectural monuments. A key document for assessing the evolving titulature of the Ghurid sultans is a four-volume leather-bound Qur’an dated 584/1188–89, the only manuscript that can be securely ascribed to Shansabanid patronage. The lavishly-illuminated manuscript, perhaps the most spectacular Qur’an manuscript surviving from pre-Mongol Iran, took five years to complete, and was completed by a scribe with a Nishapuri nisba.\textsuperscript{17}

The colophon of the Qur’an (Figure 1) gives the most extensive rendition of Ghiyath al-Din’s titles to have survived, providing an important insight into Ghurid self-representations in the decade before the conquest of India:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

The chief and great sultan, the greatest king of kings, ruler over the necks of nations, sultan of the sultans in the world, succour of the world and religion, the glory of Islam and the Muslims, victor over the unbelievers and the heretics, suppressor of innovation and the seditious, the supporting arm of the victorious state, crown of the radiant people, glory of the shining nation, order of the world, Father of Victory, Muhammad ibn Sam, partner of the commander of the believers (that is, the ‘Abbasid caliph).

\textsuperscript{15} A series of silver coins issued from an unknown mint between 569/1173 and 581/1185 are exceptional in naming Mu’izz al-Din as sulṭān al-‘ażam, hinting at divergences between the assumption and bestowal of royal authority: Spengler, ‘New Numismatic Evidence’, pp. 114–15.


\textsuperscript{17} Anon., \textit{Rahn̄a-yi Ganja-nah-i Qur’ān}, part 2, Nos. 30–33, pp. 16–17; Sourdel-Thomine, \textit{Minaret}, pp. 134–35. As part of my ongoing research on the Ghurids, I am currently preparing a major study of this important Qur’an manuscript.

\textsuperscript{18} In place of karāma in Afromd’s transcription (p. 5). This is confirmed by the appearance of the phrase in the titles of the Ghurid sultans as they appear on the Qutb Minar in Delhi: \textit{Repertoire chronologique d’épigraphie Arabe}, No. 3618.

\textsuperscript{19} Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran, Manuscript No. 3507, fol. 198a.
Figure 1
Part of the Colophon of a Ghurid Qur'an dated 584/1188–89

Source: Iran Bastan Museum, Tehran, No. 3507, fol. 198a.
Even in an era in which titles were routinely inflated, this is a remarkably bombastic document, combining epithets used earlier by both the Seljuq and Ghaznavid sultans, followed by fulsome praise of the Ghurid sultan’s boundless virtues. Many of these titles also appear in the dedication of the *Aṣrār al-Tawḥīd*, a biography of the Sufi saint Abu Sa‘īd ibn Abī’l-Khair of Mayhana written in the Ghurid territories (probably Herat) in the second half of the twelfth century, and dedicated to sultan Ghiyath al-Din. The emphasis on the sultan’s role as the promoter of orthodoxy and scourge of heretics is reflected in contemporary antipathies towards the Isma‘ili Shi‘is. Patronised during the reign of ‘Ala’ al-Din Jahan-suz (r. 544–56/1149–61), the Isma‘ilis were persecuted by his son and successor, Sayf al-Din Muhammad ibn Husayn (556–58/1161–63) and by subsequent Shansabanid sultans. This shift in religious policies points to the protean attitudes of the Shansabanid elites towards religious matters, and prefigures later more dramatic shifts in religious affiliation that will be discussed below.

If the emphasis on orthodoxy in this document reflects antipathy towards certain Shi‘i denominations, it may equally be a product of the close association between the Shansabanid elite and the Karramiya, a somewhat enigmatic Sunni pietistic sect known for its implacable hostility towards Isma‘ili Shi‘ism. Born in Sistan, the eponymous Muhammad ibn Karram (d. 255/869) had studied in Mekka, Jerusalem, Nishapur, Herat and Merv. When his preaching in Sistan provoked civil disturbances, ibn Karram sought more remote regions of the eastern Islamic world, preaching in Gharjistan and the recalcitrant region of Ghur, which his preaching is said to have been instrumental in converting from paganism to Islam. Although their disappearance in the wake of the Mongol invasions in the early thirteenth century has led scholars to overlook them, the Karramiya enjoyed widespread popularity in the eastern Islamic world in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Karrami madrasas and *khanqahs* were established in all the major cities of eastern Iran and Transoxiana, including Herat, Marv, Nishapur and Samarqand; it has even been suggested that they inspired the madrasas that proliferated among the Sunni schools of jurisprudence (*madhhab*) in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The sect (which was not homogeneous, but comprised of as many as 12 different sub-sects) competed for patronage, material resources and spiritual adherents with representatives of other legal and theological traditions, chief among them the orthodox Hanafi

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and Shafi’i madhhab.\textsuperscript{25} During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, factional rivalry between these various sectarian groups frequently led to civil strife and outbreaks of violence in the cities of eastern Iran.\textsuperscript{26}

The affiliation between the Ghurid sultans and the Karramiya during the former’s rise to power reflects the dominance of the sect among the population of Ghur, and their instrumentality in persecuting Isma’ilis, with whom they seem to have been in competition.\textsuperscript{27} Recent scholarship has drawn attention to the survival of several Karrami texts, ranging from works on \textit{fiqh} (jurisprudence) and \textit{qisas} (prophetic stories) to a Qur’an commentary (\textit{tafsīr}) written by Abu Bakr ‘Atiq ibn Muhammad al-Surabadi (d. ca. 495/1101), a leader of the Nishapur Karramis.\textsuperscript{28} The discovery of these materials suggests that the sect left more traces upon the historical record than formerly thought. But studies of it have been primarily the preserve of textual historians, with the result that the possible survival of material remains, including manuscripts (as opposed to their textual contents) that can be associated with the Karramiya has not been addressed. There can be little doubt that Ghurid patronage of the Karramiya informed contemporary artistic production, however, for we are told that sultan Ghiyath al-Din founded madrasas and \textit{khanqahs} for the Karramiya and other groups and provided them with \textit{waqfs} (endowment deeds) and Qur’ans.\textsuperscript{29} Based on its date, its unusual four-volume form and the inclusion of al-Surabadi’s \textit{tafsīr}, it seems likely that the Ghurid Qur’an of 584/1188-9 was among those commissioned by Ghiyath al-Din for a Karrami madrasa.

We can also now be fairly certain that the preeminent architectural monument of the Ghurid sultans, indeed one of the most important monuments of mediaeval Iranian architecture, the spectacular 65-metre high minaret at Jam in central Afghanistan (roughly mid-way between Herat and Kabul), was a Karrami monument (Figure 2). Constructed of baked brick, terracotta, stucco and blue-glazed ceramics, the minaret stands in the narrow confines of a remote mountain valley that is difficult to access, and susceptible to flooding by spring melt-waters. It bears the name of the Ghurid Sultan Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad ibn Sam, and is widely believed to mark the site of Firuzkuh, his summer capital.\textsuperscript{30} Since its discovery in the 1950s, the minaret has been recognised as the chef d’oeuvre of Ghurid patronage, the high aesthetic values of which are today attested by only a

\textsuperscript{25} On the subdivisions of the Karramiya, see al-Shahrastani, \textit{Al-Milal wa’l-nihal}, p. 111; Seelye, \textit{Moslem Schisms}, p. 38; Bosworth, ‘Karrāmiyya’, p. 668.

\textsuperscript{26} See Malamud, ‘The Politics of Heresy’, and Note 69 later.


Figure 2

*Minaret of Jam*

*Source:* Courtesy of Warwick Ball.
handful of fragmentary monuments scattered across Afghanistan, Pakistan and north India; the Jam minaret is believed to be a precursor of the most famous of these, the Qutb Minar in Delhi (1199 onwards). The minaret has attained the rank of a national symbol in Afghanistan, while assuming canonical status as a cynosure of mediaeval Persianate architecture among art historians. Despite its renown, the monument has remained enigmatic, its date uncertain, its function disputed, and its immediate architectural relationships unknown.

The minaret bears a series of inscriptions which are contained in five encircling bands ranging in height from 1.5 to 3 metres. The two uppermost bands contain religious texts, with the culminating inscription the *shahāda*, the Muslim profession of faith. Below this is an extract from Qur’an 61:13–14: ‘And (He will give you) what is dearest to you—help from God and early victory. So give good tidings to those who believe. O you who believe ....’ The three lower bands are occupied by increasingly elaborate and bombastic renditions of the name and titles of sultan Ghiyath al-Din. A concern with legibility reveals itself in their positioning, and in the use of turquoise blue glaze for the letters of the central historical text. The most extraordinary inscription appears, however, on the surface of the lowest shaft of the minaret. Here the entire text of the Surat Maryam, a Qur’anic *sūra* (chapter) relating to Mary the mother of Jesus, appears in a series of narrow ribbon-like bands that overlap and intersect each other to form panels filled with geometric ornament. The form and content of the inscription are unique in the Islamic world. Indeed, since the minaret’s discovery 50 years ago, the raison d’être of this long inscription has been one of the enduring mysteries of Islamic Art History.

Although the minaret bears a foundation text, scholarship has long been divided about its interpretation, with opinion split between a reading of 570/1174–75 and 590/1193–94.31 The latter date has long been accepted in most of the literature on the minaret, which has consequently been identified as a commemorative monument, erected after a major Ghurid victory against the Chauhans of Ajmir in 588/1192

31 In the absence of diacritical marks (which were often omitted in mediaeval inscriptions), the words for seventy (sab‘īn) and ninety (tis‘īn) in Arabic are virtually indistinguishable. Ralph Pinder-Wilson (‘Ghaznavid and Ghurid Minarets’, p. 169, figs 22–24) has argued for a reading of 590/1193–94, and this date has been cited in most literature on the minaret. Using photographic material garnered in 1960, however, Sourdel-Thomine (Minaret, pp. 135–39) reads the inscription as *bi-ta‘rīkh sana sab‘īn wa khamsami‘a* (on the date of the year five hundred and seventy [1174–75 CE]) rather than *tis‘īn wa khamsami‘a* (five hundred and ninety). Everything rests on the question of whether or not the *hasta* of the initial letter of the disputed word extends horizontally leftwards at its terminal point, as Pinder-Wilson suggests in his text and accompanying drawing. This would identify it as the Arabic letter ج rather than the first of the three *hastae* of the letter س. Sourdel-Thomine argues that Pinder-Wilson has been misled by the decay of the horizontal brick frame above the inscription. Two factors support her reading: first, where such horizontal extensions do occur in the inscriptions surrounding the dating panel, they are similar in thickness to the *hastae*, which is not the case here (hence the ambiguity). Second, the three initial strokes of the disputed word decrease in height as one reads from right to left; careful examination of the three vertical strokes of the letter س in the preceding word *sana* show the same characteristic (although it is not as pronounced), supporting a reading of س rather than ج.
at the second battle of Tara’în, which paved the way for the conquest of northern India. In light of this interpretation, references to idolatry and unbelief in Surat Maryam have been read as allusions to the conquered Hindu subjects of the sultan. Epigraphy has thus come to play a central role in constituting the minaret as a symbol of ‘Muslim’ victory over the conquered ‘Hindus’, taking it as a given that references to idolatry and unbelief in the chosen verses were intended as allusions to those who were literally outside the fold of Islam.

In a recent study of the minaret, Janine Sourdel-Thomine has demonstrated that the minaret, which today stands isolated, was once associated with a mosque built of more ephemeral materials. Perhaps more importantly, she argues convincingly that the correct reading of its date is 570/1174–75. The re-dating of the minaret has significant implications for our understanding of Ghurid architecture and epigraphy. Re-dated to 570/1174–75, the minaret is shorn of any obvious Indian associations, since it antedates the first Ghurid incursions into the Panjab (against the Isma’îlis of Multan and the Hindu ruler of Uch) by at least a year. Sourdel-Thomine suggests instead that the minaret commemorates the capture of Ghazna from the Ghuzz Turks in the preceding year. The practice of constructing minarets to commemorate military victories was known at the Ghaznavid court, and assuming that the date given in the foundation text reflects the commencement of work at the site, the presence of Qur’an 61:13–14 on the minaret, with its invocation of victory given to the believers, might offer support for such a reading, especially since many of the Ghuzz were pagans. Moreover, the capture of the former Ghaznavid capital was not merely a matter of regional significance, but a pivotal event for the development of the Ghurid sultanate. After the victory Mu‘izz al-Din was installed as ruler of Ghazna and elevated to the rank of sultan, sharing in the sovereignty of his elder brother, and thus consolidating the political structures of the state. Identifying the likely commemorative function of the minaret does not, however, resolve one of the central mysteries surrounding it: why was it felt necessary to cover the surface of this remote structure with the entire Surat Maryam?

Sheila Blair has noted that Ghurid patronage of religious monuments (mosques, minarets, madrasas) was ‘part of a coordinated campaign to champion Islam … both to combat the heathen and to counter internal heresies’. Several studies of the minaret at Jam have raised the possibility of a Karrami connection but have been hampered in their pursuit of this idea by a dearth of information on the sect. Basic details of Karrami beliefs are, however, contained in mediaeval Arabic
heresiographies. Combining these with Sourdell-Thomine’s careful reconstruction of the spatial relations of the epigraphic bands on the minaret, it is, I believe, possible to demonstrate this association. In order to do so, we have to first broach the arcane world of mediaeval kalâm (speculative theology) and the issue of anthropomorphism in particular.

Among the most theologically problematic verses in the Qur’an are those that seem to imply the divine possession of corporeal attributes, apparently contradicting or undermining the notion of an eternal and uncreated deity, which was central to Islamic thought. The opponents of the Karramiya depict them as taking a particularly literalist or anthropomorphist approach to these questions, with the result that they were sometimes known as mujassima, those who ascribe jism (body) to God, and were even accused of harbouring quasi-Christian beliefs concerning an embodied godhead. In the heresiography of Abu Mansur al-Baghdadi (d. 429/1037), the beliefs of the Karramiya are summarised as follows:

Ibn Karram urged his followers to ascribe corporeality to the object of his worship. He held that He is a body, possessing an end and limit below, where He comes in contact with His throne .... In one of his books Ibn Karram has described the object of his worship as a substance .... Ibn Karram writes in his work that God touches His throne and the throne is a place for Him.

Divine speech was among the various divine attributes and qualities aggressively contested by various sectarian groups in the light of these anthropomorphising verses. The issue was of some importance, central not only to the question of God’s nature, but also to the ontological status of the Qur’an itself as the textualised trace of a speech-act. At one extreme of the argument stood the Mu’tazilite opponents of the Karramiya, who asserted that the Qur’an consisted of words and sounds and was therefore not eternal, but originated in space and time. At the other end of the spectrum were those scholars of the orthodox Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence who argued that the sounds, words and even material fabric of the Qur’an were eternal and enduring. The Ash’ari theological tradition that was closely associated with the Shafi’i law school sought to mediate between the two poles, distinguishing between the meaning of God’s words, which constituted a kind of internal speech (kalâm nafsī), part of His divine essence and therefore eternal, and revealed commands, promises and threats spoken by prophets, iterated in stories about them, or transmitted in revealed books, all of which are created expressions of His eternal word.

39 Van Ess, ‘Tashbih wa-Tanzīh’.
41 Cited in Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, Religion and Politics in India, pp. 50–51.
42 Gardet, ‘Kalâm’, p. 469.
43 For an overview of these controversies see Ceylan, Theology and Tafsīr, pp. 136–46; Arnaldez, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, pp. 62–64.
The Karramiya also steered a middle course between extremes, judging from the account of their beliefs in the book of Muslim sects and divisions written by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani (d. 548/1153), a resident of Khurasan who had first-hand experience of them:

They hold that there are many incidents (hawādith) in God’s essence; such as, for example, information about past or future events, the books revealed to the prophets (peace be upon them), stories, the Promise and the Threat, and commands. In this category also are acts of hearing and seeing in regard to things audible and visible. Bringing into being and annihilation consist of God’s Word and Will; for example, his saying ‘Be’ (kun) to the thing that He wills to be and His willing the existence of that thing .... Muhammad ibn al-Haysam [a Karrami theologian d. ca. 409/1019] explained bringing into being and annihilation as Will and Choice, this being connected with His Word by the testimony of the Qur’an: ‘To anything which We have willed, We but say to it “Be” and it is (kun fayakān)’ [Qur’an 16:40]; or, again, ‘Verily, when He wills a thing, His command to it is “Be”, and it is (kun fayakān)’ [Qur’an 36:82].

In their attempt to distinguish between eternal attributes and temporal acts, the Karramiya differentiated between attributes of essence (such as power and knowledge) and attributes of acts (such as creation). While God has eternal power to act, acts themselves are contingent and temporal incidents (hawādith) facilitated by His power; every created thing and every temporal event is created and annihilated by the incidents that arise in God’s eternal essence. Al-Baghdadi puts the matter succinctly:

Ibn Karram and his adherents hold that the Object of their Worship is a subject in which created entities exist. They believe that His utterances, His will, His visual and auditory perceptions, His contiguity to the uppermost surface of the Universe, are all accidents originated in Him and He is the place for these creations which originated in Him.

Created things and temporal events are called into being not through power, which is intrinsic to the divine essence, but through the divine command kun! (Be!). On this point, al-Shahrastani again quotes the well-known Karrami mutakallim, Muhammad ibn al-Haysam:

44 Al-Shahrastani, Al-Milal wa’l-niḥal, p. 113; Gimaret and Monnot, Livre des religions, vol. I, pp. 352–53; Kazi and Flynn, Muslim Sects and Divisions, pp. 93–94.
45 Madelung, Religious Trends, pp. 41–42. The resulting implication of temporal incidents arising in God’s eternal essence, and an implied limit on God’s power over created objects that originated in His essence was especially abhorrent to the opponents of the Karramiya: Bosworth, ‘Karrāmiyya’, p. 667.
46 Nizami, Religion and Politics in India, p. 51.
At the time He creates, He wills whatever He creates with a contingent will (irāda ḥāditha); and to everything that comes into being by His command He says ‘Be’ (kun) and it becomes.⁴⁷

Like the words of the Qur’an, and those revealed in commands, promises, prophetic stories and warnings, this imperative exists in time as a reflection of power, which is eternal.

As al-Shahrastani indicates, the Qur’anic phrase kun fayakūn, (Be! And it is) occupied a central position in Karrami polemics concerning the relationship between divine nature and the created universe. The phrase occurs eight times in the Qur’an, including in verse 35 of Surat Maryam.⁴⁸ This verse falls at a key point in the decorative scheme of the minaret, offering tangible support for the suggestion of a Karrami connection.

In her recent study, Sourdel-Thomine detected an axial hierarchy to the decorative scheme of the lower shaft of the minaret. She noted that all the inscriptions on the minaret terminate on its western face (Figure 3, face 8), and demonstrated that the eastern and western faces of the minaret (Figure 3, faces 4 and 8) constitute the axis around which the entire decorative programme is articulated.⁴⁹ The observation is of considerable importance, for it suggests that the Karramiya shared the conventional designation of a westerly qibla with their Hanafi contemporaries in Afghanistan and Central Asia.⁵⁰ The eastern face, which one would have seen while oriented towards a westerly qibla, is further distinguished by the presence of a knotted rhomboidal pattern that is unique among the conjunction of epigraphic bands delineating the geometric panels of the minaret. It is precisely here, at what is clearly the visual and iconographic fulcrum of the minaret, that verse 35 falls. There is no statistical logic for this positioning. The verse is not the median point of the chapter, but the 35th verse in a series of 98; considerable care was thus taken to ensure that it fell precisely within the unique forms on the eastern facade. The verses that begin within the bands of the knot (Figure 3, between I and J above panel 3), then run down the left hand frame of the arched panel below and the right side of the star beneath, read as follows:

This was Jesus, son of Mary:
A true account they contend about (34).
It does not behoove God to have a son.
Too immaculate is He! When He decrees a thing
He has only to say: ‘Be’, and it is (kun fayakūn [35]).

⁴⁹ Sourdel-Thomine, Minaret, pp. 93–95.
⁵⁰ For the relationship between the Karramiya and the Hanafiyya in Ghur see note 64 below.
Figure 3
Minaret of Jam, Schematic Diagram of the Epigraphic Bands Containing Surat Maryam

Source: Drawing by Claire Hardy-Gilbert, reproduced by permission from Sourdel-Thomine, *Minaret*, fig. 55.
The chapter then continues:

(Jesus only said:) ‘Surely God is my Lord and your Lord, so worship Him. This is the straight path (36).’ Yet the sectarian differed among themselves. Alas for the unbelievers when they see the Terrible Day! (37).

The same verses had appeared almost five centuries earlier in the interior of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (72/692). There the emphasis on the mortality of Jesus revisited a locus classicus of doctrinal difference between Islam and the Christian majority of the city.\(^{51}\) However, there is little evidence for a Christian population in mediaeval Ghur, and it seems a priori unlikely that the entire epigraphic programme of the Jam minaret was designed to address the small community of Jews known to have existed in the vicinity of Jam.

Richard Antoun has argued that to consider Qur’anic verses divorced from their ‘spatial, social and diachronic contexts’ is to confer upon them ‘a false semantic content’.\(^{52}\) This is especially true of Qur’anic inscriptions on mediaeval monuments, each of which constitutes ‘an interpretive moment given permanence’, an enduring reflection of the particular valences acquired by sacred scripture in specific historical contexts.\(^{53}\) To read the verses inscribed upon the minaret of Jam as a literal address to Christians and Jews ignores the fact that mediaeval ‘legal scholars and others constantly reexamined specific verses to justify sectarian, legal, or doctrinal disputes and divisions’, thus imbuing them with diachronic meanings and exegetical nuances not immediately apparent to modern observers.\(^{54}\)

Rather than an address to some nebulous monotheist or polytheist ‘other’, the central epigraphic programme of the minaret should be understood as a bold address to the fractious monotheist self. At the heart of the decorative scheme, in the focal inscription of the minaret, we have a distillation of the themes of prophecy, revelation, Promise and Warning central to Karrami belief. The same themes are reiterated at regular intervals throughout Surat Maryam, which invokes a dazzling array of ancestors and prophets, including Aaron, Adam, Abraham, Idris (Ezra), Isaac, Isma’il, Jacob, John, Jesus, Moses, Noah and Zachariah. Indeed, it is hard to think of another Qur’anic chapter in which such a panoply of prophets appears.\(^{55}\)


\(^{52}\) Antoun, *Muslim Preacher*, p. 234. I owe my knowledge of this work to Holly Edward’s excellent ‘Text, Context, Architext’.

\(^{53}\) *Ibid.*., pp. 68–69. See also Ralph Pinder-Wilson’s comments on the difficulties of accommodating the various prophetic references in Surat Maryam within an interpretative paradigm that emphasises victory alone: ‘Ghaznavid and Ghūrid Minarets’, p. 170. For the deployment of Qur’anic verses referring to Maryam in other architectural contexts, see Soucek, ‘The Temple after Solomon’.


\(^{55}\) It is precisely the proliferation of such familiar Old Testament figures that reportedly led Ja’far b. Abu Talib, the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, to create this *sūra* to the Negus of Abyssinia...
The theme of the Book is also repeatedly emphasised, often in conjunction with the commemoration of these saintly figures, and dire warnings are visited on those who deny the unity of God or disbelieve in Him.

The care taken to position verse 35 is the clincher, for it evidently reflects the centrality of the Qur’anic phrase kun fayakūn in kalām concerning the complex relationship between Divine will and word, power and creation. Moreover, the linkage between the person of Jesus and the creative power of the divine command kun throws these issues into high relief, since the Virgin Birth (in which Muslims believe) offers one of the ultimate proofs of God’s ability to call into being with His command.56 However, the highlighted verses also reject Christian belief in Jesus’ divinity, which contradicts the notion of tawḥīd, the oneness of God, central to Islamic thought. Indeed, four of the eight Qur’anic occurrences of the phrase kun fayakūn (including that in Surat Maryam) relate specifically to the creation and nature of Jesus, asserting his mortal character despite the unusual circumstances of his conception, and denying his divinity. The Qur’anic commentary of al-Surabandi constitutes a key document for evaluating how these verses were understood in a contemporary Karrami milieu, for its inclusion in the royal Qur’an of 584/1188–89, a Qur’an probably commissioned for a Karrami institution, indicates its currency at the Ghurid court. In his exegesis of Qur’an 19:35, al-Surabandi links the phrase kun faykūn in Qur’an 19:35 with the creative power of God, while emphasizing that the verse contains a rebuttal to those who assert that Jesus was His son.57 Rather than a transparent allusion to a hypothetical Christian community, therefore, this emphasis on the mortality of Christ in the Qur’anic verses highlighted on the Jam minaret is likely to reflect contemporary criticisms that certain of the anthropomorphist views of the Karramiya had a Christian origin, criticisms that are found in the work of scholars such Abu Mansur al-Baghdadi (d. 429/1037) and Abu’l-Muzaffar al-Isfara’ini (d. 471/1078).58

Considered within the frame of Karrami theology (or at least what we know of it), Qur’an 19:34–35 addresses the relationship between God’s eternal essence and His temporal creative powers, while underlining that the latter did not extend to the production of divine progeny. If the choice of Surat Maryam reveals the entire programme of the minaret as a doctrinal exposition of Karrami theology, the focal verse highlights the issue of anthropomorphism and establishes its appropriate limits. These questions were central to contemporary polemical exchanges, which were routinely conducted within the rhetorical frame of infidelity (kufr) and heresy (tabdīl).59 Assuming (as seems likely) that the verses were chosen for their ability to reflect contemporary concerns, the polytheists and unbelievers referred to in

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56 Wensinck –[Johnstone], ‘Maryam’, p. 629.
58 Bosworth, ‘Karrāmiyya’, p. 667; El-Galli, History and Doctrines of the Karrāmiyya Sect, p. 73.

...to win his sympathy and support for the nascent religion of Islam and the community of Muslims who sought shelter at his court: Le Gassick, Life of the Prophet, vol. 2, p. 13.
Surat Maryam are more likely to refer to the Ghuzz Turks, or the Muslim opponents of the Karramiya, who depicted them in turn as heretics and spreaders of sedition, than the far distant Hindus with whom the Ghurid sultanate had yet to engage militarily.

The minaret represents a remarkably sophisticated synthesis of architectural form, decorative elaboration, and epigraphic content that opens a unique window onto the complex entanglements of architectural patronage, dynastic aspirations, legal proscriptions and theological disputations in the turbulent marches of the eastern Islamic world. Construction of the minaret was not a heuristic enterprise, but one that reflects a great deal of planning, and probably active collaboration between artisan, imam or qadi, and patron.\(^{60}\) However deliberate the choice and positioning of the Qur’anic verses on the lower shaft of the minaret, the need for modern photographic technology to decipher many of them suggests that their presence was intended as a ‘symbolic affirmation’ of Karrami doctrines.\(^{61}\) Certainly, their effectiveness as discursive statements was somewhat circumscribed by their scale and placement. The minaret may therefore have been intended to provide a focal monument for the Karrami self as much as to convey a message to its Shafi‘i or Hanafi opponents, the epigraphic content and meaning of the monument known to a learned few, but susceptible to oral transmission to those not cognisant with the arcane theological milieu in which both arose.\(^{62}\)

The likelihood that the preeminent architectural monument of the Ghurid sultans constituted a Karrami document opens the possibility that other known Ghurid monuments may also have been constructed for the sect. An obvious candidate is the richly decorated but fragmentary Shah-i Mashhad madrasa in Gharjistan, built in 571/1175-6 for a female patron. The two most likely patrons among the Ghurid elite are Malika-i Hajji, the mother of Ziya’ al-Din, sultan Ghiyath al-Din’s son-in-law, and eventual successor as sultan at Firuzkuh, and Mah Malik or Malika al-Jalali, sultan Ghiyath al-Din’s daughter, and Ziya’ al-Din’s wife. Malika-i Hajji is reported to have founded mosques, pulpits and religious schools in the Ghurid territories, while Mah Malik was famed for her religious learning and piety.\(^{63}\) To judge from the axial orientation of the Jam minaret, the Karramiya adopted a conventional western *qibla* orientation, like their contemporaries in the orthodox

\(^{60}\) Sourdel-Thomine, *Minaret*, pp. 154, 160. For a speculative attempt at reconstructing the sorts of collaborative processes that the minaret’s epigraphic programme witnesses, see Ettinghausen, ‘Arabic Epigraphy’, pp. 307–8. See also Welch, et al., ‘Epigraphs, Scripture and Architecture’, p. 14. The orchestration of the epigraphic programme so that a key verse both describes and coincides with the nodal point of the decorative programme hints at an early use of paper notation, documented only from the thirteenth century onwards.

\(^{61}\) Note, however, that the *shahīda* is set at the summit of the minaret, precluding easy legibility, yet this is arguably the most important of all the inscriptions, a basic affirmation of the core beliefs that unite the *umma*.

\(^{62}\) Ettinghausen, ‘Arabic Epigraphy’, p. 308; Edwards, ‘Text, Context, Architext’, pp. 65, 70. Both note the consequent tendency for awareness of the synchronic meanings of complex epigraphic programs to be lost over time, as did Grabar in his seminal essay on the Dome of the Rock (pp. 60–61).

Hanafi madhhab; that common ground should exist between the two on such a fundamental matter is perhaps not surprising in view of reports that the citizenry of Ghur adhered to Karrami doctrines in matters of religion (din) and Hanafi precepts in matters of law (fiqh).64 The fragmentary state of the Shah-i Mashhad madrasa makes its qibla orientation difficult to determine, but suggestions that it was occidented leave open the possibility that it was among the madrasas constructed for the sect by the Ghurid elite.65

This association between the Shansabanids and the Karramiya was not an enduring one, however. The shifting titulature of the Ghurid sultans hints at a capacity for reinventing the self in tandem with the shifting fortunes of the sultanate. The defining moment of that process occurred in 595/1199, when the Ghurid sultans abruptly ended their patronage of the Karramiya, embracing the orthodox madhhab of Islam instead. While Ghiyath al-Din became a Shafi‘i building Shafi‘i madrasas and a mosque at Ghazna, Mu‘izz al-Din became a Hanafi, embracing what was in effect the preeminent madhhab among the population of Ghazna.66

These changes in Ghurid pietistic affiliations were not without consequences: we are told, for example, that the feelings of the inhabitants of Ghur were sufficiently inflamed for a fitna azima or great civil disturbance to break out in Firuzkuh.67 The disturbances occasioned by this shift in allegiance were not confined to Ghur, where the Karramiya and their supporters were a majority. The Karrami imam of a madrasa at Afshin in Gharjistan, an area with historical links to Ibn Karram, penned a series of polemical verses criticising sultan Ghiyath al-Din, which were sufficiently inflammatory to earn the writer a year’s exile to Nishapur.68 Civil strife between the Karramiya and their opponents was common in eastern cities during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The violent events of 595/1199 in Firuzkuh were foreshadowed by a number of earlier disturbances in Khurasani cities, including Bayhaq (Sabzevar), Herat and Nishapur. The role of architectural
desecration and destruction in these disturbances provides a striking reminder of how potentially fractious the Muslim self could be.  

Juzjani attributes the dramatic shift in Ghurid piety and patronage to a dream in which Imam al-Shafi‘i himself appeared to the sultan. According to Ibn al-Athir, however, it was occasioned through the mediation of the Shafi‘i faqih Shaykh Wajih al-Din al-Marvarudhi, who was invited to Firuzkuh by the court poet Fakhr al-Din Mubarakshah. The notion of a reinvention of the royal persona resulting from the agency of a single individual is clearly suspect, but the idea of mediation by individuals with strong connections to a wider Islamic world is quite plausible. In 594/1198, one year before these events, the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Nasir (d. 622/1225), hoping to invoke Ghurid help against the Khwarazmshahs, had sent the famous Shafi‘i faqih Yahya ibn Rabi‘ of the celebrated Nizamiyya Madrasa in Baghdad to Ghur, where he reportedly remained for four years, strengthening the ties between Baghdad and the Ghurid sultanate. The timing is suggestive, as is the concentrated presence of major Shafi‘i theologians and Sufi preachers in Firuzkuh towards the end of the twelfth century.

The association of such individuals with transregional networks of piety and political authority is undoubtedly relevant to the dramatic shift in the pietistic inclinations of the Ghurid sultans, for this switch to a less localised and more cosmopolitan form of Islam seems to reflect the changing nature of the Ghurid sultanate itself. However unpopular at home, the events of 595/1199 coincide with the emergence of the Ghurid sultans as major players on the world stage, the result of territorial expansion westwards into Khurasan, and eastwards into north India. Ibn al-Athir observes that when the Ghurid sultans became rulers of Khurasan (that is, the wider Iranian world), they came to know that the Karramiya were considered theologically unsophisticated and therefore decided to alter their doctrinal allegiances and embrace Shafi‘ism. As Bosworth remarks:

69 Bulliet, *Patricians of Nishapur*, especially pp. 28–47 and 253; Madelung, *Religious Trends*, pp. 36–37; Bosworth, ‘Rise’, p. 13. In his study of the rivalry between the rival madhhab of Nishapur, the epicentre of internecine strife during the period, Bulliet (*Patricians of Nishapur*, pp. 38–39) has argued that the madhhab constituted not only schools of legal interpretation, but ‘political parties’ united by ‘a vision of the right ordering of society’, which were ‘vying for possession of key political posts within the city and ultimately for the city itself’.


73 Also relevant is Ibn Munavvar’s dedication of the *Asrār al-Tawḥīd*, a biography of the Sufi saint Abu Sa‘id who had clashed with the Karramiya, to sultan Ghiyath al-Din: Bosworth, ‘Rise’, 11. The author’s emphasis on the fundamental unity of the Shafi‘i and Hanafi madhhab may reflect the growing strength of both in the Ghurid domains in the second half of the twelfth century: O’Kane, *Secret of God’s Mystical Oneness*, p. 588.

It therefore seems that the brothers’ abandonment of Karāmī doctrines was connected with the extension of their power into the Khurasan and Ghazna regions. They burst out of the confines of Ghur, where the Karāmī divines had had paramount authority in religion, into the wider world. They came into contact here with the two chief law-schools of Sunni Islam in the east, and they may have felt that the Karāmī tenets were intellectually somewhat disreputable and too closely linked with their backwoods origins.75

Among the events of 595/1199 was a concerted attack mounted by the Karramiya on the celebrated Shafi‘i theologian Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, who had come to preach in Firuzkuh and Ghazna at the invitation of Sultan Ghiyath al-Din, and later served as a Ghurid or Khwarazamshah envoy to India.76 In his speech from the minbar of the Great Mosque of Firuzkuh opposing al-Razi, Ibn al-Qudwa, the leader of the Firuzkuh Karramis, denounced the faqīḥ as espousing the unbelief of Ibn Sina, and the philosophy of al-Farabi, two of the great thinkers of the wider Sunni world whose work Fakhr al-Din al-Razi had studied and commentated upon.77 As a religious faction with strong regional ties, the Karramiya were evidently opposed to the sorts of transregional theological cosmopolitanism that the Shafi‘is and Hanafis represented. It was no doubt just such cosmopolitanism that rendered both attractive to the Ghurid sultans.

Although it has escaped notice, the theological volte-face of 595/1199 was also reflected in significant alterations to the epigraphic self-representations of the Ghurid sultans and the media that bore them. In 596/1200, one year after the Firuzkuh fitna, major changes were instituted to the form and content of gold and silver coinage issued from the Ghazna mint, changes that served to link the Ghurids more directly with their Sunni contemporaries in the wider Islamic world. Previous to 595/1199, in addition to the ubiquitous ‘bull and horseman’ jital coin of northwest India, Ghurid mints had also issued coins of traditional epigraphic type, consisting of a central field with superimposed horizontal lines of script and a circular marginal legend.78 From 596/1200, however, these were supplemented by two new types of dinar and dirham introduced in a variety of weight standards; both originated in North Africa, but were widely imitated in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The changes were heralded in 596/1200 by the minting at Ghazna of gold and silver coins bearing a radically new design based on a distinctive motif of three

78 For pre-595 Ghurid issues from this mint, see Thomas, Chronicles, p. 12, Nos 1 & 2, pl. 1, No. 2; Album, Checklist, p. 39, No. 1768; Schwarz, Ghazna/Kabul, No. 539. Coins of traditional linear epigraphic form continued to be minted in both Ghazna and Firuzkuh after 595: ibid., Nos 539–57, Nos 812–14; Bates and Darley-Dorn, ‘Art of Islamic Coinage’, No. 553.
concentric circles surrounding a central epigraphic medallion (Figure 4). This innovative type had originated in Fatimid North Africa in the tenth century, and was originally intended to evoke Isma’ili theological doctrines. It was later adopted by Shi‘i and Sunni dynasties from Spain to Central Asia, including the Ayyubids, Sunni successors to the Fatimids, who continued to mint coins of this type in both Egypt and Syria.

In 598/1201, a second new coin type was minted in both gold and silver. This consisted of a square epigraphic field inscribed in a circle (Figure 5). The type had first appeared in the North African territories of the Almohads during the reign of ‘Abd al-Mu‘min (d. 558/1163) and was adopted for silver coinage by the Ayyubids in their Damascus mint from 571/1174–75. It is possible that these contemporary Ayyubid issues provided the models for the new coinage. The renown of the Ayyubid sultan Salah al-Din (known to western sources as Saladin) was at its zenith at this period. Having ended the rule of the Fatimid caliphs in Egypt (thus bringing the eastern Mediterranean back into the Sunni fold), Salah al-Din effected the recapture of Jerusalem from the Crusaders two decades later, in 1187. Minhaj-i Siraj Juzjani, who was raised at the Ghurid court in Firuzkuh, makes an explicit comparison between the military victories of Salah al-Din against the Shi‘i Fatimids and Christian Franks in the West and those of the Ghurid Sultan Mu‘izz al-Din against the Ghaznavid and Hindu kingdoms of northern India in the East during the same period. It is probably no coincidence that the Ayyubids also promoted themselves as upholders of Sunni orthodoxy, and championed the cause of the Shafi‘i madhhab.

The introduction of these new coin types served to link the Ghurids more directly with their Sunni contemporaries in the eastern Mediterranean, but it also had concomitant economic implications. There is a general improvement in the quality and appearance of Ghurid coins, especially gold issues, from 596/1200 onwards: the confidence that they engendered is reflected by their continued use in Iran decades after the fall of the sultanate, and their possible passage as far west as England.

79 Thomas, Chronicles, p. 13, No. 3; Album, Checklist, p. 39, Nos 1760, 1770; Deyell, Living without Silver, p. 359, No. 238; Nicol, ‘Islamic Coinage’, pp. 59, 64–65; Schwarz, Ẓazna/Kabul, Nos 558–63; Goron and Goenka, Coins of the Indian Sultanates, p. 16.
80 Bierman, Writing Signs, pp. 62–70.
82 Thomas, Chronicles, p. 14, No. 4, pl. I, No. 3; Deyell, Living without Silver, p. 359, No. 239; Schwarz, Ẓazna/Kabul, Nos 564–67. The type continued to be minted until the fall of the Ghurids, and was later adopted by the Delhi sultans.
86 Morton, ‘Ghūrid Gold’.

Downloaded from http://ier.sagepub.com by SUNIL KUMAR on October 28, 2008
The sole exception known to me is a gold dinar from Ghazna with a multilinear horizontal inscription: Thomas, Chronicles, p. 12, No. 1. Thomas identifies the Qur’anic inscription as 61:9, although it is just as likely to be 9:33, since the wording is identical. The date given is 692, evidently an error for 592. This confusion raises doubts about the reliability of Thomas’ account of what appears to be a unique coin. Qur’an 9:33 does, however, appear on some ‘traditional’ epigraphic types issued after 595: Bates and Darley-Dorn, ‘Art of Islamic Coinage’, No. 553.

The ‘internationalist turn’ in the Ghurid polity was not only indicated by the connotative value of the coins, however, but in their denotative content also. The new gold and silver issues appear to mark the first time that Qur’anic quotations were deployed on Ghurid coins. On both types the quotation consists of Qur’an 9:33.

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It is He who sent His Messenger with guidance and the true faith (din al-ḥaqiq) in order to make it superior to other systems of belief, even though the polytheists (al-mushrikūn) may not like it.  

The prolific gold and silver issues minted in Ghazna from 590/1194 onwards probably reflect an influx of Indian gold after the victory over the Chauhans in 588/1192, and it is tempting to relate the presence of this verse to the Indian campaigns that were taking place at this time. However, this Qur’anic assertion of orthodoxy is intimately associated with the minting of new ‘international’ coin types that follows hard on the heels of the Ghurids’ radical shift away from the Karramiya in 595/1199, and is likely to be related. Alterations to the form and epigraphic content of Iranian coins have been correlated to the conversion of the Ilkhanid sultan Uljaytu from Shi‘ism to Sunnism in 709/1308, an event that sparked rioting reminiscent of those that followed the Ghurid’s abandonment of the Karramiya a century earlier. In the latter case, however, are dealing with numismatic changes that reflect shifting patterns of royal patronage and resulting alterations to the power balance between rival Sunni groups.

Accusations of heresy and unbelief were the stock-in-trade of the internecine theological disputes that wracked Khurasan in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, levelled with equal alacrity at Sunnis and Shi‘is, Shafi‘is and Karramis. It is precisely within the rhetorical frame of heterodoxy, innovation and polytheism that the disputation between the representatives of the Karramiya, the Shafi‘iya and the Hanafiya of the preceding year were reportedly conducted: Ziya’ al-Din, the Karrami son-in-law of sultan Ghiyath al-Din had, for example, accused Fakhr al-Din Razi of unbelief (zandaqa). Conversely, despite their popularity in Khurasan, the Karramiya had long been depicted as a heretical sect by its opponents within and without the region. The sudden appearance of a Qur’anic verse on Ghurid coins, and the choice of verse in particular, suggest that a tradition of using selective Qur’anic quotations for polemical purposes, a tradition that had previously been harnessed to the promotion of the Karramiya madhhab favoured by the Ghurid
sultans, was deployed against them after 595/1199. The numismatic dissemination of a Qur’anic quotation chosen for its ability to promote the position of a particular Sunni faction finds precedents in the eastern Iranian coin issues of the Ghaznavid and Seljuq sultans whom the Ghurids succeeded.⁹³

Sourdel-Thomine has detected a relationship between the embrace of orthodoxy and changes in the content and tone of religious invocations inscribed on Ghurid monuments after 595/1199.⁹⁴ Concerns with orthodoxy are a prominent refrain in the Qur’anic inscriptions that proliferate in later Ghurid architecture. The inscriptions of Ghiyath al-Din’s tomb in Herat (597/1201 or later) include Qur’an 112, with a strong emphasis on the oneness of God, His eternal nature, and the fact that He does not beget, amplifying a theme already present in the inscriptions of the Jam minaret. More suggestive still is the presence of Qur’an 3:18:

God is witness that there is no god save He, and so are the angels and men full of learning.⁹⁵

These inscriptions are integral to the appearance and meanings of the monuments that they adorn, which may have been equally instrumental to this realignment of the Ghurid polity. The decade after 595/1199 sees a major architectural programme undertaken in the name of the Ghurid sultans in both Afghanistan and India, a programme that reflected the contemporary shifts in religious patronage. In 597/1201, for example, when a fire provided sultan Ghiyath al-Din with the opportunity to undertake a major renovation or rebuilding of the Great Mosque of Herat (funded at least in part by Indian booty), the imamate of the mosque was bestowed upon the Shafi‘is in perpetuity.⁹⁶

The instrumentality of both architecture and epigraphy in the Afghan homelands of the Shansabanids provides the background to the architectural patronage of the Ghurid sultans and their Turkic generals after the territorial expansion of the Ghurid sultanate into north India. Construction of the major Ghurid mosques in India straddled the period of sectarian strife in those homelands. At Ajmir, for example, the mihrab of the Arhai-din-ka-Jhompra Mosque is dated Jumada 595/1199. The participation of artisans from Khurasan and perhaps Ghur, those regions most affected by factional rivalry, is suggested by the Herati *nisba* of one of those who supervised the construction of the mosque.⁹⁷ The foundation text above the eastern entrance of the Qutb Mosque in Delhi gives the date of 587/1191, the northern

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entrance 592/1195, while the screen seems to have been added in 594/1198–99.\textsuperscript{98} The date at which work commenced on the Qutb Minar is uncertain, since none of its extensive historical texts are dated, but the presence of the name and titles of Ghiyath al-Din on the fourth band of the minaret indicates that the minaret stood up to this height by at least 601/1203, the date of the sultan’s death.\textsuperscript{99}

The reception of these mosques in colonial and postcolonial scholarship has been characterised by the Manichaean division between ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ traditions that pervades much writing on the period. The mosques were largely constructed from spolia taken from temples and other structures, with the result that they have been read as instantiating the theme of ‘Muslim’ conquest.\textsuperscript{100} For mediaeval observers who wrote about their experience of the Qutb or Quwwat al-Islam Mosque in Delhi, the most celebrated of the Indo-Ghurid mosques, the extraordinary ubiquity of Qur’anic inscriptions left a far greater impression than the recycled architectural materials, however.\textsuperscript{101} The proliferation of epigraphy within this and other Indo-Ghurid mosques follows a tradition established in the Ghurid monuments of eastern Iran, Afghanistan and the Indus Valley, which have been compared to ‘huge billboards proclaiming various messages at those who enter them’.\textsuperscript{102} The programmatic nature of the Qur’anic inscriptions on Ghurid monuments has long been recognised (even if imperfectly understood), suggesting that what was exported to India in the last decade of the twelfth century was not only a penchant for monumental epigraphy, but also an established tradition of employing Qur’anic quotations discursively.\textsuperscript{103}

Recent studies of the Qur’anic inscriptions in Indo-Ghurid mosques have highlighted an emphasis on idolatry and unbelief, assuming that the content reflects their role as allusions or an address to the conquered Hindu population.\textsuperscript{104} While

\textsuperscript{99} Repertoire chronologique d’épigraphie Arabe, No. 3619, where the sultan’s kunya (damaged in the inscription) is erroneously given as Abû’l-Muẓaffar rather than Abû’l-Fath.

\textsuperscript{100} For critical analyses, see Kumar, ‘Qutb and Modern Memory’; Patel, ‘Toward Alternative Receptions’; Flood, ‘Signs of Violence’.

\textsuperscript{101} Flood, Objects of Translation, Chapter 7.


\textsuperscript{103} Idem, ‘Ghurid Tomb at Herat’, p. 140. It is worth noting that titles emphasising the role of the Shansabanid sultans as promoters of orthodoxy and extirpators of polytheism are conspicuous by their absence from surviving monumental inscriptions either in India or anywhere else in their domains. Instead, Qur’anic rather than historical inscriptions seem to have assumed a primary rhetorical function. Titles of this sort do, however, appear in the inscriptions of Iltutmish (Horovitz, ‘Inscriptions’, p. 30), suggesting shifts in the polemical content of monumental epigraphy between the late sixth/seventh and early seventh/thirteenth centuries.

\textsuperscript{104} Welch, ‘Qur’an and Tomb’; Hillenbrand, ‘Political Symbolism’, p. 109; Meister, ‘Indian Islam’s Lotus Throne’, pp. 446–48; Edwards, ‘Text, Context, Architectext’, p. 72; Welch et al., ‘Epigraphs, Scripture and Architecture’. The latter essay begins by sketching the complex theological milieu of the Ghurid heartlands, but ignores these complexities and assumes a unitary Muslim self when it comes to the analysis of the Qur’anic inscriptions in Indo-Ghurid mosques. The authors do, however, distinguish between the tone and content of Qur’anic verses on the exterior of the Delhi mosque ‘that refer to the non-Muslims’ and those of the interior that ‘address the Muslims who enter the mosque’: ibid., p. 18.

\textsuperscript{105} Edwards, ‘Text, Context, Architectext’, p. 68.
such interpretations acknowledge both synchronic and diachronic aspects of the Qur’anic text—the fact that ‘timeless truths’ can have ‘a situational relevance’—they frequently ignore questions of access (physical, linguistic, conceptual) central to understanding the discursive role of Qur’anic epigraphy. Perhaps more problematically, they take it as a given that the references to idolatry and unbelief that the chosen verses contain were intended as transparent allusions or references to those who were literally non-Muslims.

The evidence for the polemical role of Qur’anic epigraphy in contemporary Afghanistan suggests that the multiple allusions to error, falsity and unbelief in the Qur’anic inscriptions of the Indian mosques constituted an address to audiences that may have included but also extended well beyond the Hindu unbeliever. Doctrinal schisms and their correlates in architectural violence continued to be part of the cultural life of the Muslim communities of north India well into the sultanate period, following a pattern familiar from Khurasan in the preceding two centuries. In 634/1236, for example, riots broke out at the Qutb Mosque in Delhi involving elements that Juzjani terms Isma‘ilis and Shi‘is (*mulâḥida wa qarâmiţa*).  

Not only is the confessional unity of the Muslims who entered north India with (or in the wake) of the Ghurid armies far from a given, but the picture is further complicated by the existence of communities of Muslims of various sorts in north Indian cities before the conquest. The twelfth-century mosques preserved at Bhadreshvar on the coast of Gujarat may only be the tip of an iceberg so far as they attest to a pre-conquest Muslim presence. At Nagaur in Rajasthan, the survival of a tombstone dated 545/1150 belonging to the son of an Isma‘ili missionary (*dā‘ī*) serves as a reminder that these communities did not necessarily share the confessional affinities of the Ghurids or their Turkic soldiery.  

There is an intrinsic association between the suppression of heresy and the chastisement of unbelievers in the royal titulature with which I began. This linkage also pervades the ‘Mirrors for Princes’ genre of literature that proliferated in the eastern Islamic world during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In his manual on warfare dedicated to the Delhi Sultan Iltutmish, Fakhr-i Mudabbir states that one

106 See also Kumar, ‘Qutb and Modern Memory’, p. 157. Among the many elements of the inscriptions that suggest themselves for future research are the names of God that appear on the penultimate band of the first storey of the Qutb Minar; Horovitz, ‘Inscriptions’, p. 31. Welch, et al. (‘Epigraphs’, p. 22) note the likelihood that these verses reflect contemporary debates about the nature of divine attributes, relating them to the Maturidi theology associated with the Hanafi *madhab*. It is conceivable that work on the minaret began before the realignment of the Ghurid polity in 595/1199, however, raising the possibility of a Karrami connection. The Divine Names held a special place for the Karramiya who believed that God is eternally qualified by the names attributed to Him from His temporal acts: Bosworth, ‘Karrâmiyya’, pp. 667–68. The names of God also feature in early Sultanate Qur’anic epigraphy (Welch et al., ‘Epigraphs’, p. 39), long after the Karramiya had ceased to be relevant, raising the possibility of exegetical shifts in the transition from Ghurid to Delhi sultanate.


108 Shokoohy, *Bhadreshvar*. See also Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other?*

of most important duties of the ruler is to wage war on unbelievers, the seditious and the enemies of religion (kāfirān wa mufulsīn wa khuṣmān-i dīn), echoing the titles and encomiums of sultan Ghūyāth al-Dīn. 110 This fundamental linkage between campaigns against and rhetoric about heresy and unbelief is central to understanding the discursive function of the Qur’ānic citations in Ghurid architecture as a whole, not just those in north Indian mosques.

The eastward expansion of the Ghurid sultanate began with a successful campaign against the Ismā‘īlīs of Multan and Sind by Mu‘izz al-Dīn in 569/1174, and effectively ended with his murder by one of their number in 603/1206. 111 The rise and fall of the Ghurid sultanate is thus circumscribed by questions of orthodoxy, heterodoxy (or even heresy) and self-definitions made in relation to the rhetorical claims of both. The last decade of the sixth/twelfth century is particularly marked by convulsive sectarian disputes and shifting patterns of religious patronage within the Ghurid heartlands. Contemporary as they are with Ghurid expansion into north India, these shifts undermine the notion of a singular and stable self, defined through religious affinity. They also provide a context for understanding contemporary architectural patronage that is at once more nuanced and historicising than the generic tropes of Muslim victory or Hindu-Muslim antipathy.

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