

Analysis of Old Deeds and Manuscripts of Isfahan as Historical and Cultural Sources from the Safavid to Early Pahlavi Era

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Abstract

Among the most significant historical and ancient sources in Iran are local handwritten deeds and manuscripts. Through their examination and study, valuable historical information can be obtained. These documents contain detailed accounts of geographical, economic, social, cultural heritage elements, customary laws, and traditional customs. Today, they serve as valuable and primary historical resources. In this context, the province of Isfahan stands out as one of the richest regions in terms of historical depth and the tradition of deed writing in Iran's local and traditional history. Notably, the handwritten deeds related to the Gavart neighborhood in eastern Isfahan (Eastern Jay) have not yet been studied from historical, archaeological, or codicological perspectives. This research aims to present the writing style, structure, and valuable historical content of these documents, introduce them by their original and traditional names, and highlight their importance as precise historical and archaeological sources. It also seeks to showcase the artistic features used in their illustration and decoration as part of the region's art history. The central question of this study is: How can we extract historical and artistic information from handwritten deeds and evaluate them as credible historical sources? To achieve this goal, three historical manuscripts from the Gavart neighborhood in eastern Isfahan have been scientifically and analytically examined: Deed of the Dove Tower at Darb Deh (Aziz Tower), Deed of the Dove Tower of Agha Hossein, (New Tower) Deed of the Gavart Farm Qanat. These manuscripts belong to a private local collection, preserved as family heritage, and have all been registered as movable historical artifacts by the Cultural Heritage Organization of Isfahan.

Keywords: Historical Sources, Manuscripts, Safavid Era, Qajar Era, Isfahan, Gavart.

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Introduction

Human prosperity is shaped by knowledge and awareness. Experience has shown that wisdom plays a decisive and fundamental role in achieving a fulfilling and prosperous life, surpassing all forms of wealth.

The first step in research is gathering information for study and analysis. Manuscripts include scrolls, deeds (banjaq), and handwritten books, dating back to a time before lithographic and lead printing or the invention of the printing press (Soltani & Raštin, 2000: 410).

Two key reasons for the value of manuscripts are their historical antiquity and their scientific and research significance. Understanding manuscripts is crucial for their selection, analysis, and correction. Manuscripts consist of material and artistic (spiritual) components: paper, pen, script, and calligraphy are material elements, while illumination, gilding, and similar features are considered artistic.

Al-Khouri, an Algerian bibliographer and codicologist, believes that a significant portion of human thought has been transmitted to future generations through manuscripts, and their circulation has facilitated the spread of ideas across the world. Introducing manuscripts hidden in public and private libraries is the first step in serving the realm of knowledge (Vafadar Moradi, 2000: 2).

To understand manuscripts and handwritten books, attention must be paid to two fundamental principles: bibliography, which includes intellectual aspects such as title, language, subject, and author; and codicology, which covers physical aspects such as paper, script type, author, date, place of writing, and seals.

Manuscripts hold immense historical, scientific, economic, political, social, religious, and cultural value. Studying these works allows us to enter the world of the past. Unfortunately, despite their importance, serious efforts to understand manuscripts have been lacking.

This article aims to introduce the valuable historical, geographical, economic, and social information embedded in these deeds, with detailed descriptions, and present them as historical sources. Due to their rich content and attention to detail and geographical context, manuscripts and deeds are of great significance.

Two perspectives can be taken regarding the value of manuscripts: 1. A traditional view, treating them as historical and museum artifacts for display to researchers and visitors. 2. A scientific and practical view, recognizing their utility for researchers, legal professionals, government institutions, and the public, and their role in generating knowledge within academic and research communities, contributing to the development of civil society.

Literature Review

Although various books and articles have addressed such documents, none have scientifically and analytically examined handwritten deeds and banjaqs, despite their rich informational value.

This article focuses specifically on these types of documents and analyzes aspects that have been overlooked or insufficiently addressed in other works.

Relevant studies include:

- Analysis of the Structure of Mirza Ahmad's Dove Tower in Gavart Neighborhood, East Isfahan ([Badiei Gavarti, 2022](#)), which utilized information from handwritten deeds.
- Introduction to Property and Cataloging Rules in Manuscripts ([Vafadar Moradi, 2000: 8](#)).
- Research on Manuscripts and Rare Works ([Fadaei, 2007: 6–7](#)).

Books of interest include:

- Principles and Foundations of Codicology in Manuscripts ([Azimi, 2010: 30–42](#)),
- Dove Towers in Iran ([Hadizadeh, 2006: 72–81](#)),
- Codicology ([Mollin, 2006: 16](#)).

The manuscripts and historical deeds examined in this study have not been introduced in any of these sources, making this research a pioneering effort.

Research Methodology: This study is classified as fundamental research in terms of its objective and historical research in terms of its nature. The subject has been explored using primary data obtained through field studies, including on-site inspections and surface surveys, with full access to written documents from a private family collection. These documents are being analyzed for the first time.

Historical Background of Isfahan or Ancient Jay

Development of Jay and Yahudiyeh Cities

Jay was the original city of Isfahan during the Sassanid era ([Hafez Abu Na'im, 2014: 27–28](#)) and remained prominent until the 4th century AH. Afterward, Yahudiyeh also emerged within the Jay district.

Following the peace treaty of Isfahan during the Muslim conquest (between 19–24 AH), the first mosque was built in Jay, and displaced populations from surrounding destroyed towns settled there. Yaqut al-Hamawi and later Abu al-Fida explicitly stated that the native inhabitants called the city "Shahrestan," while Arabs referred to it as "Madina". Thus, the terms Jay, Shahrestan, and Madina all refer to the same location ([Elahie, 1965: 5, 181](#)).

Historical events indicate that Jay continued to thrive from the Sassanid period through the rise of the Buyid dynasty without destruction or relocation. Until the mid-4th century AH, when Yahudiyeh gained prominence, Jay maintained its superiority

through expansion beyond its original walls, similar to its pre-Islamic status (Fesharki & Javari, 2022: 7–9).

Throughout history, tracing the continuous development of Isfahan is challenging. Although centrally located on the Iranian plateau, Isfahan was not a focal point for the Achaemenid to Sassanid empires, whose centers of gravity lay in the western territories, especially Mesopotamia (Christensen, 2011: 125).

Up to the Islamic era, various cities with different names, locations, and populations can be identified in the area now known as Isfahan (Van Gall, 1999: 29).

Etymology of Isfahan (Gi)

Isfahan is among the cities whose history and antiquity may rival that of Iran itself. Throughout various historical periods, it has been considered one of the major and renowned cities of the country. Early historians attributed the founding of Isfahan to Tahmuras Divband, the third king of the Pishdadian dynasty. During the Achaemenid era, Isfahan was known as Gaba or Gi, serving as a crossroads of major routes and a royal residence for Achaemenid monarchs.

The terms Gaya or Gaben first appeared in Greek sources during Alexander's campaigns and later in the accounts of his successors' wars (Honarfar, 1997: 10). According to Professor Ernst Herzfeld, the renowned German orientalist, the original name of Isfahan was Anzan, which later evolved into Gaiban, and from the Achaemenid period onward became Gi, eventually transforming into Ji in Arabic.

There are various interpretations regarding the origin of the name Isfahan. Yaqut al-Hamawi, in his *Mu'jam al-Buldan*, states that some historians trace the name to Asfahan ibn Fuluj ibn Sam ibn Noah (peace be upon him), (Hamawi, 1968: 216-230). Ibn Duraid suggests that Isfahan is composed of Asb, meaning "city" in ancient Persian, and Han, meaning "rider," thus rendering the meaning "City of Riders."

Hamza ibn Hasan, in his *History of Isfahan*, claims that Asfahan derives from the word Sepah (army), and when translated into Persian becomes Sepahan, the plural of Sepah, meaning "army". Al-Tabari writes that when Alexander ordered the construction of several cities, twelve were built and all named Alexandria. One of these cities was located in Sepahan, which was referred to as Ji.

In *Mu'jam al-Buldan*, it is also mentioned that Zahhak, a mythical tyrant, would kill two people daily to feed the serpents on his shoulders with their brains. When it was Kaveh the Blacksmith's turn, he fashioned his leather apron into a banner and rallied the people to rise against Zahhak. The people supported him, Zahhak was imprisoned, and Fereydun was chosen as king. From that day forward, because the people of the region were brave and militaristic, the city came to be known as Espahan or Sepahan.

Thus, the name Isfahan has evolved through various forms over the ages, including: Anzan – Gaiban – Gabieh – Gi (Ji) – Espahan – Sepahan – Espahan – Safahan – Esfahan – Esfahan – Asbehan – Asfahan – Asihan. (Fig. 1)

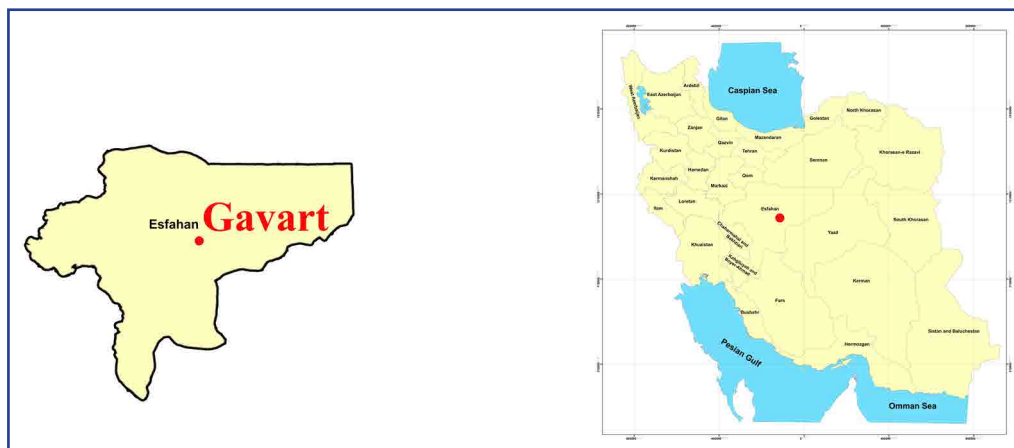


Fig. 1: Geographic Location of Gavart Neighborhood Adjacent to Isfahan (Authors, 2019).

Gavart Neighborhood (One of the Districts of Jay City)

Gavart is a subdistrict within the Qahab block, one of the nine administrative divisions of Isfahan County. This historic neighborhood is located approximately 5 kilometers east of Isfahan, along the Isfahan–Na'in road.

Gavart is bordered:

- To the west by the neighborhoods of Khatoonabad, the lands of Ardeh Jay, and the villages of Sanjavanmerekh, as well as the northern Gouwart Fortress mountain range.
- To the east by the historic villages of Jilanabad and Jaladaran.
- To the south by the southern Gouwart Fortress mountains and Shah Kuh.

There is no precise historical record regarding the founding and development of this neighborhood. However, some historians and geographers consider Gavart to be part of the ancient city of Jay (Honarfar, 1997: 10).

Etymology of Gavart

Place names in Iran are often derived from factors such as geographic location, architectural features, burial sites of religious figures, construction by notable individuals, and other cultural or environmental influences. The name Gavart reflects several of these factors. Two main theories regarding its etymology are presented below:

First Theory: Linguistic Evolution from “Gi Varde”

The word Gavart is believed to have originally been Gi Varde, composed of two elements:

- Gi: Refers to the city of Jay in Isfahan.
- Varde: According to Persian dictionaries (e.g., Dehkhoda, 1986: 425), this term translates to “dovecote” or “pigeon tower.”

Thus: Gi + Varde = Dovecotes of Jay

In ancient languages, the phonetic distinction between the letters dal (د) and ta (ت) does not significantly alter meaning. Over time, Gi Varde evolved into Gi Vart, and eventually simplified to Gavart for ease of pronunciation.

One of the strongest pieces of evidence supporting this theory is the presence of over 35 dovecote towers in the area, 22 of which still stand side by side in alignment. This concentration of dovecotes may have contributed to the naming of the neighborhood (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Row of Dovecotes in the Gavart Plain Along the Safougard and Aminabad Qanats (Badiei Gavarti, 1991)

Second Theory on the Etymology of Gavart

In the literature and cultural texts of this region, we encounter a term that serves as the root and origin of several newer words. The name Gavart is derived from the original term Gavart or Gavartar, which is translated in Persian dictionaries as “pleasant breeze” or “refreshing wind”.

This naming is attributed to Gavart’s geographical location—situated at the intersection of two distinct climatic zones: the hot and arid central Iranian desert to the east, and the temperate mountainous slopes of the central Zagros range, including Mount Rokh, to the west. The collision of these two air masses creates a gentle and refreshing breeze, historically referred to as Gavart, a term that has found its place in Persian lexicons.

This type of climate (Gavart) is ideal for raising birds, especially tower-dwelling pigeons—commonly known as kaftar-e chahi (well pigeons) among locals—since in

the absence of dovecotes or towers, these birds nest in qanat shafts.

Similar naming patterns can be found in other parts of Iran, such as Mount Gavart, Gavartar Bay, and Pasa Bandar. Gavart, as one of the neighborhoods of the ancient city of Jay in eastern Isfahan, has a long historical background. This study aims to uncover and publish the valuable historical sources of this area, based on several authentic handwritten manuscripts dating back several centuries.

Calligraphy Styles Used in Manuscripts and Deeds in Isfahan (Jay)

One of the most important features of old manuscripts, highly regarded by bibliographers, is the style of handwriting used in their composition. The script of the author and scribe plays a crucial role and is considered the cornerstone of codicological studies of handwritten books and deeds.

The main types of script found in Islamic manuscripts, based on the documented history of calligraphy in Islamic civilization, are as follows:

1. Naskh Script

The most common script used in manuscript writing is Naskh. It gained popularity gradually from the 4th century AH due to its ease of writing, making it favored among scholars and scribes. Because it replaced other scripts, it came to be known as Naskh, meaning “the copying script” (Fadaei, 2007: 62).

Some historians believe that Naskh evolved from Kufic script and attribute its development to Abu Ali Hussein ibn Muqla Bayzavi Shirazi (Azimi, 2010: 30). Today, Naskh is widely used in Arab and Islamic countries for writing books, magazines, and newspapers. (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3: Naskh Script (Rezazadeh, 2008).

2. Nasta'liq Script

The origins of the Nasta'liq script date back to the Timurid era in the 8th century AH (14th century CE). This script was founded by Mir Ali Tabrizi, one of the greatest Iranian calligraphers, and quickly became one of the most beloved and aesthetically refined styles of calligraphy in Iran and other Persian-speaking regions.

Nasta'liq is a distinctive style of Persian calligraphy, formed through the fusion of two earlier styles: Naskh and Ta'liq. It is recognized as the second uniquely Iranian script and was widely used in biographical collections (tazkiras), illuminated manuscripts (muraqqa's), and poetic works by both poets and calligraphers ([Sepehr, Tazkira-ye Khoshnevisan, Vol. 1, p. 45](#)).

Often referred to as the “bride of Islamic scripts,” Nasta'liq is a purely Iranian innovation that reflects the artistic taste and aesthetic sensibilities of Iranian culture. It is characterized by a well-defined and orderly structure, with flowing, circular movements that generally slant from left to right ([Rezazadeh, 2008](#)).

The pen moves more freely and comfortably in this script compared to Naskh. Diacritical marks are typically omitted unless necessary to avoid ambiguity, though tanwīn (nunation), punctuation, and dotting conventions are maintained. The script avoids words that could cause confusion or resemble one another too closely, and most words feature extended horizontal strokes for visual balance and elegance ([Rezazadeh, 2008; Fig. 4](#)).

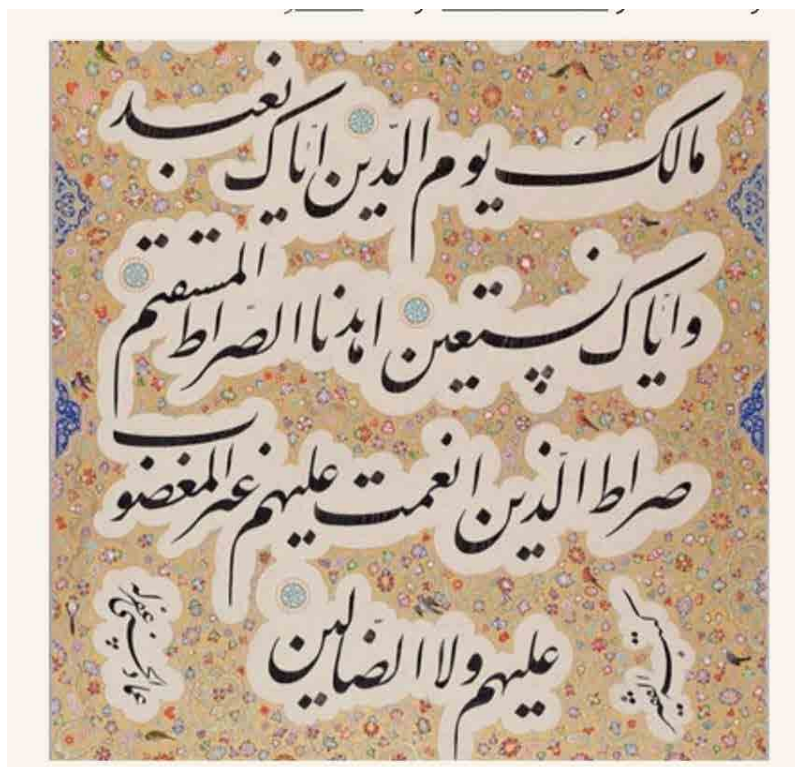


Fig. 4: Example of Nasta'liq Script ([Rezazadeh, 2008](#)).

3. Shekasteh Nastaliq Script

Shekasteh Nastaliq is one of the newest and most elegant styles of Persian calligraphy, and the third major form of Iranian script. It was developed in the early 11th century AH (17th century CE). The style gained its name—Shekasteh meaning “broken”—because many of its forms are derived from the deconstruction and simplification of the Nastaliq script.

This script is considered the most distinctly Iranian among the various styles of Islamic calligraphy. It combines the structural elements of the Taliq script, used for rapid writing, with the aesthetic grace of Nastaliq. The emergence of Shekasteh Nastaliq in the late Safavid period was driven by the need for faster writing due to its widespread use.

The most prominent calligrapher associated with this style is Darvish Abdolmajid, who elevated it to artistic excellence. Shekasteh Nastaliq is primarily used for writing Persian literary and poetic texts and has also found applications in painting and graphic design.

This script is recognized for its beauty, fluidity, and distinctiveness. It occupies less vertical space compared to Nastaliq but requires more horizontal space (Rezazadeh, 2008: 10). The letters and words in Shekasteh Nastaliq exhibit greater harmony and warmth, and the hand and pen move more freely than in Nastaliq.

Unlike other styles, Shekasteh Nastaliq does not typically include ornamental flourishes, but it does require the use of tashdid (emphasis marks) and hamza. The size of letters and words may vary—some are large, others small. Vertical strokes are generally shorter than usual, and circular letters such as sīn, šād, qāf, and nūn are written in both rounded and elongated forms (Ibid).

In some cases, letters are written both separately and connected. The sar-kesh (elongated strokes) are longer than in Nastaliq and are not attached to the main body of the letter. The script is predominantly curved, with minimal use of straight lines (Rezazadeh, 2008: 13; Fig. 5)

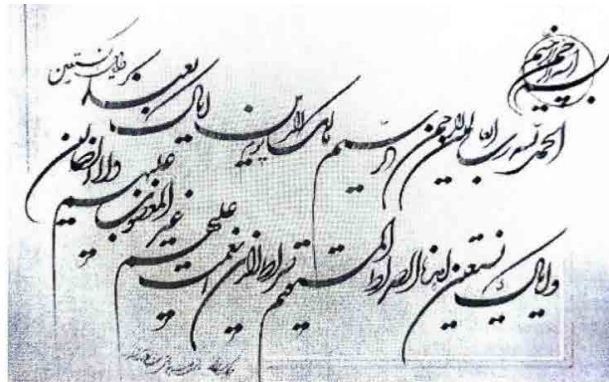


Fig. 5: Shekasteh Nastaliq Script (Rezazadeh, 2008).

4. Ta'liq Script

The Ta'liq script emerged in the mid-7th century AH (13th century CE) through the fusion and development of two earlier scripts: Tawqi' and Riqā'. Influenced by pre-Islamic Iranian scripts and shaped by Persian artistic sensibilities, Ta'liq evolved into a distinct style of calligraphy.

Initially, Ta'liq was used for writing official correspondence and drafting governmental decrees. There is some debate regarding its origin: some attribute its invention to Khwāja Abul-'Ālī, while others credit Hasan ibn Ḥusayn Fārsī (4th century AH), a scribe in the Deylamid court. The most widely recognized innovator of this script is Khwāja Tājī Sulaymānī (or Salmānī), who died in 897 AH ([Sepehr, Tazkira-ye Khoshnevisān, Vol. 1: 52](#)).

Ta'liq gained widespread popularity in the 10th century AH (16th century CE). During the reign of Shah Tahmasp I of the Safavid dynasty (984 AH), Iranian calligraphers migrated to Ottoman territories and Egypt, gradually introducing and popularizing the script in those regions ([Fazā'elī, Atlas-e Khat, Vol. 1: 410](#)).

Some of the most renowned Ta'liq calligraphers in Iran include:

- Ahmad ibn 'Alī Shīrāzī (8th century AH),
- Sultān 'Alī Mashhadī,
- Darvīsh 'Abdullāh Munshī Balkhī,
- Ibrāhīm Istarābādī, and
- Muḥammad Kāzīm Vāleh Eṣfahānī ([Fazā'elī, Atlas-e Khat, Vol. 1: 406 & 418](#)).

Ta'liq is a complex and intertwined script, characterized by the connected flow of letters designed for speed. Multiple words are often written in a continuous, uninterrupted manner ([Rezazadeh, 2008: 6](#)). The letters and words vary in form and size, and the script is predominantly curved. The interplay of vertical and upright strokes within lines contributes to its visual appeal and elegance ([Rezazadeh, 2008: 15](#)).

Ta'liq was originally developed by Hasan ibn Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī Fārsī in the 4th century AH. Alongside Naṣṭaliq and Shekasteh Naṣṭaliq, Ta'liq is considered one of the distinctly Iranian calligraphic styles. Given the importance of speed and ease in calligraphy, the Shekasteh Ta'liq variant eventually emerged. Later, Ottoman and Egyptian calligraphers modified it further, leading to the development of the Diwani script ([Fadaei, 2007: 62](#)). (Fig. 6)

5. Siyāq Script

In later periods, an alternative method known as Siyāq script was employed for administrative calculations, as well as for documenting financial records and official ledgers. Scribes used Siyāq script to write numbers, words, and abbreviated symbols, which were often difficult to decipher ([Vafadār & Morādi, 2000: 54–55](#)). (Fig. 7)

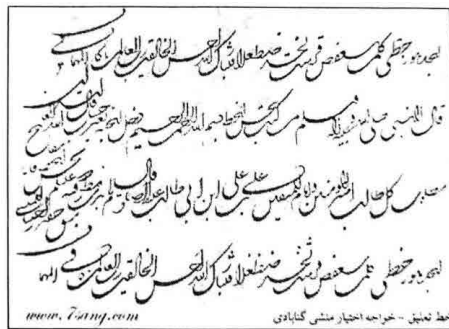


Fig. 6: Ta'liq Script (Rezazadeh, 2008).

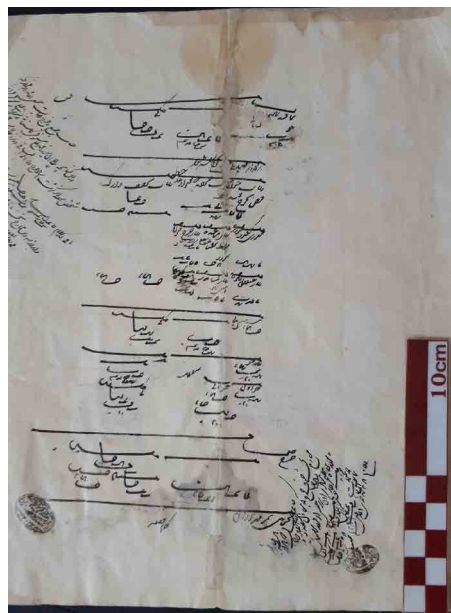


Fig. 7: Siyāq script, private collection (Badiei Gavarti, 2024).

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Fig. 8: Identification document of the deed for the Azīz or Darb-deh dovecote, private collection (Badiei Gavarti, 2024).

Analysis of Manuscript-Based Deeds from the Gavart Neighborhood in Jey, Isfahan as Historical Written Sources in the Islamic Period

This study examines three historical manuscript deeds in detail, each representing significant local heritage:

1. Deed of the Darb-deh Dovecote (Azīz Tower)
2. Deed of the Āqā Hossein Dovecote (Tāzeh Tower)
3. Deed of the Gavart Farm Qanāt

Each document is analyzed individually and in depth below.

Manuscript Deed No. 1

Title: Manuscript deed of purchase for the Darb-deh Dovecote, also known as Azīz Tower

- Paper: Handmade colored paper (Kāghaz-e Alvān)
- Dimensions: 20×40 cm
- Script Style: Shekasteh-Nasta‘līq
- Layout: Sword-like lines (Khatt-e Shamsīrī)
- Ink: Traditional waterproof ink
- Date of Composition: Month of Shawwāl al-Mukarram, 1248 AH (1832 CE)
- Age and Location: 196 years old; Gavart neighborhood, Jey district, Isfahan
- Registry Number: 56 – 11/25 (Fig. 9).

Readable Text Excerpt: The document begins with a formal legal preamble, stating:

“The reason for the drafting, inscription, and recording of these clear and legally binding words is that Her Highness, the noble and virtuous Lady Emmeh Nesā Khānom, daughter of the late and blessed Mohammad Esmā‘īl Gavartī, residing in the Qahāb district of the royal city of Isfahan, willingly and without coercion or compulsion, entered into a legitimate and explicit legal agreement with the honorable and virtuous Mohammad, son of the late Āqā Hossein, also residing in the same village. The agreement concerned the full transfer of ownership of one and a half shares (ḥabbes) out of seventy-two shares of the dovecote tower known as Azīz Tower, located in the Darb-deh plain, along with all its legal appurtenances and dependencies, for the agreed sum of one Toman in silver currency, one and a half mesghāl of gold, and 1,150 dinars. The transaction was conducted in accordance with Islamic law, and the Arabic and Persian legal formulas were duly recited. The document was finalized in the month of Shawwāl al-Mukarram, 1248 AH.”

Historical Insights from Manuscript Deed No.1

1. Reference to the Qahāb District in the Royal City of Isfahan: The second line of the deed mentions “Qahāb district among the districts of the royal city of Isfahan.”

During the Safavid era, Isfahan was divided into nine districts (bolūks), each governed by prominent local families, often from the ranks of landowners and village elders. The eastern region of Isfahan, known as Jey, comprised 32 villages and towns and was referred to as Qahāb. This area was agriculturally rich and frequently favored by royalty and nobility.

2. Definition and Geography of Qahāb: Qahāb is one of the eastern districts of Isfahan County, located approximately 20 km east of the city. It is bordered by Shahid Beheshti Airport to the north, Barā'ān-e Shomālī lands to the south, Kuhpāyeh lands to the east, and the western part of Jey to the west. The name Qahāb derives from the word keh, meaning water that springs from the ground and flows in open channels. Over time, keh evolved into qeh, forming the name Qahāb (Mahyār, 2003: 293). Due to its abundant water resources, the region was highly fertile and home to numerous farms. Mirzā Gholāmhossein Afzal al-Molk, in his travelogue written between 1298–1307 AH, notes: “The third district is Qahāb, derived from ‘Kī Āb’ (meaning ‘open water’), as most of its qanāts are uncovered and flow freely. Unlike typical qanāts, they lack wells and mounds. Locals refer to such qanāts as ‘Kī’”. (Afzal al-Molk & Afshārfar, 2000: 80) In the treatise Šarīḥ al-Molk, written during the rule of Zell al-Soltān by one of his accountants, Qahāb is described as a well-known district with fertile lands and abundant water sources, primarily supplied by qanāts. The inhabitants are skilled farmers, and the district includes over thirty villages and ten to twelve farms, both famous and lesser-known (Nakhshabi, 1993).

3. Identification of the Dovecote's Location: The deed situates the Azīz Tower dovecote in the Darb-deh plain, one of the surrounding plains of the Gavart neighborhood in Jey, Isfahan. Field research revealed that locals refer to this area as the lands of Deh-e Kohneh Gavart (Old Village of Gavart), and the tower as Borj-e Darb-deh. They believe this site was the original nucleus of the settlement, with the tower standing near the village gate. Although the village was destroyed—possibly due to a flood or earthquake—the tower was restored over time due to its economic value. Fortunately, another deed related to this dovecote was obtained by the authors, confirming the above details and providing further valuable information, including the four boundaries of the property and its water sources.

4. Definition of ḥabbeh (Share): A ḥabbeh is a unit used to determine ownership in immovable properties.

In the fifth line of the deed, the term appears in the phrase: “...the entire property, including one and a half ḥabbeh out of seventy-two ḥabbeh of the specified dovecote tower...”. For properties with significant financial and economic value, transactions are conducted using the ḥabbeh unit. A ḥabbeh is a smaller division of a dāng (a sixth), such that six dāng equals seventy-two ḥabbeh. Therefore:

- 3 dāng = 36 ḥabbeh
- 1 dāng = 12 ḥabbeh Thus, the buyer's ownership of the dovecote tower amounts to 1.5 ḥabbeh, equivalent to approximately 2% of the total value of the property. (Fig. 9)

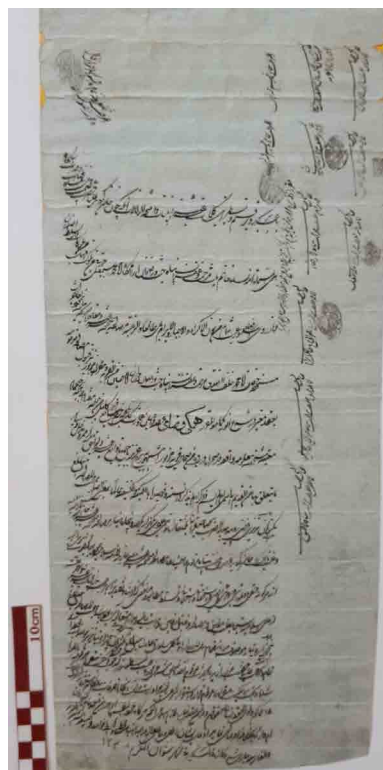


Fig. 9: Deed of the Darb-deh dovecote located in the Gavart neighborhood in eastern Isfahan, private collection (Badiei Gavarti, 2024).

Manuscript Deed No. 2

Title: Handwritten deed or manuscript of the purchase of the “Darb-deh” dovecote, also referred to as the “New Tower” or “Āqā Hossein’s Tower”

- Paper: Handmade colored Samarkandi paper
- Dimensions: 32×22 cm
- Script Type: Shikasta-Nasta‘īq
- Script Style: Shamsḥīrī (sword-like lines)
- Ink: Traditional waterproof ink
- Date of Composition: Month of Shawwāl al-Mukarram, 1315 AH (1897 CE)
- Age and Location: 130 years old; Gavart neighborhood, Jey district, Isfahan
- Registry Number: 66 – 11/25

To access the information contained in this manuscript deed, a legible transcription along with a literal translation is provided below:

The reason for drafting this document is that in a lawful religious assembly, the honorable and virtuous lady Ma‘šūmeh Khānum, daughter of the late Āqā Sa‘īd Kajānī Gharūsī Gavarti, willingly and without any coercion or compulsion, entered into a valid

religious reconciliation. She transferred all rights to four and a half shares out of seventy-two shares of a bathhouse tower located in the village of Gavart-Qahāb, known as the “New Tower” or “Āqā Hossein’s Tower,” along with all its legal appurtenances, to her eldest son, the esteemed Āqā Mohammad Hossein, son of the late Āqā Mohammad Hossein, husband of the aforementioned lady, in exchange for ten mithqāls of premium sugar and one hundred dinars in cash as the reconciliation payment.

Subsequently, the beneficiary, the aforementioned esteemed Mohammad Hasan, appeared and sold the aforementioned four and a half shares, along with an additional four and a half shares inherited from his father—totaling nine shares out of seventy-two—of the same tower and its legal appurtenances, willingly and for benefit.

The Four Boundaries of the Property:

- West: Adjacent to Reżā Tower, property of the heirs of Mohammad Bāqer
- North: Adjacent to the Safūjerd stream and qanāt, and a spring-fed pit
- East: Adjacent to the Darb-Kalgi plain and its lands
- South: Adjacent to the lands of Old Village (Deh Kohneh) and Kākolī Tower

The transaction was completed through a valid Islamic reconciliation with the honorable benefactor and builder Hajj Mullā ‘Alī, son of the late Āqā Mohammad Gavarti (may God forgive him), for a sale price of twenty-one Tabrizi tomons in cash from the royal treasury of Moẓaffar al-Dīn Shāh. The religious formula was recited in Arabic and Persian on the 13th of Ramaḍān, 1315 AH.

This unique and exceptional manuscript contains highly valuable historical and archaeological information. As it bears the seals of ten local elders and trusted figures, it has been recognized by researchers as a reliable historical source.

Historical Insights from Manuscript Deed No. 2

1. Identification and Naming of the Dovecote

In line six, where the four boundaries of the dovecote are defined, the structure is referred to as “Hossein Āqā’s Dovecote”. Initially introduced as “Darb-deh Tower,” the structure has been known by various names over time due to the disappearance of surrounding landmarks: “Darb-deh Tower,” “Azīz Tower,” “New Tower,” and “Āqā Hossein’s Tower”. Among locals, however, it is most commonly known as “Darb-deh Tower”. The southern boundary of the tower, located in the central plain of Gavart, refers to the lands of “Deh Kohneh” (Old Village), indicating that the tower stood near the northern gate of this historical site. This proximity explains its naming as “Darb-deh Tower”. Although locals refer to this area as “Deh Kohneh,” they lack precise knowledge of its location and have no documented sources to confirm it. It is highly probable that this site was the original nucleus of the village, later abandoned and buried over time. (Fig. 12)

2. Water Sources and Historical Settlement

The deed mentions the Safūjerd stream and qanāt, and a spring-fed pit. It is well established that all ancient and prehistoric civilizations formed near water sources. As indicated in the manuscript, “Deh Kohneh” had access to water from both the north and south, particularly the Gavart spring, which, according to locals and the document, had flowing water. As noted in the Qahāb section, most qanāts in this area were open-surface channels known as “kī”. The Safūjerd qanāt (or Safūgard) flowed through the lands of Gavart, passing north of the “Deh Kohneh” site and eventually reaching the village of Safūgard, located 15 km east of Gavart (Fig. 12).

3. Discovery of the Historical Plain of Darb-Kalgi

The western part of the “Deh Kohneh” site also references a historical plain previously undocumented. This is the first known mention of the “Darb-Kalgi” plain, adding a new geographical feature to the region’s historical landscape. Boundaries of Darb-Kalgi Plain (from Manuscript Deed No. 2):

- West: Lands of “Deh Kohneh” Gavart
- North: Gavart stream and spring, and Safūgard qanat
- East: Darakht Sālār Plain
- South: Gavart qanāt and Kāhrīz-e Sādeh (Farm qanāt)

This historical plain lies directly east of “Deh Kohneh” and, like the village, was bordered by water sources to the north and south. It is likely that both sites were contemporaneous, with the plain serving as the agricultural zone for the village.

Discussion and Analysis

Analysis of this historical document yields first-hand data, including identification of the “Deh Kohneh” archaeological site in Gavart, part of eastern Jey in Isfahan.

- North: Darb-deh Tower and Safūgard qanāt
- West: Režā and Sovordī Towers
- South: Kākolī Tower and Gavart qanat (Fig. 10)

Manuscript Deed No. 3

This handwritten deed, composed in nine lines, pertains to the qanāts of the Mazra‘eh Jadīd (New Farm) and Gavart qanāt, both constructed by Mohammad Badi‘ Gavarti and later managed by his heirs.

- Paper: Colored, handmade, known as Kāghaz-e Alvān
- Dimensions: 30×22 cm
- Script Type: Regular Shikaṣṭa-Naṣṭa‘īq



Fig. 10: Deed related to the “New Dovecote” or “Āqā Hossein’s Tower” located in Gavart, private collection (Badiei Gavarti, 2024).

- Script Style: Shamsheer (sword-like lines)
- Ink: Traditional, handmade, waterproof
- Seals: Bearing 18 seal impressions
- Date of Composition: 1243 AH (1827 CE)
- Age and Location: 201 years old; Gavart neighborhood, Jey district, Isfahan

- Registry Number: 58–11–25
- Scribe: Mohammad Esmā'īl al-Ḥosaynī (Fig. 11)

Transcription and Literal Translation for Accessibility

Present in the religious court of the Dār al-Salṭanah of Isfahan were the esteemed Āqā Amīn Gavartī Qahāb, son of the late Āqā Hossein Khān, acting on behalf of the male and female heirs of the late Hajj Badi' Gavarti, whose names were recorded in the power of attorney. Also present were Āqā Mohammad Zaki, son of the late Āqā Hossein; Āqā Mohammad Taqī, son of the late Āqā 'Alī; and Āqā Ebrāhīm, son of the late Āqā Reżā—each acting with personal guarantee. They entered into a valid religious reconciliation with His Excellency ... Nawāb Moštāṭāb Falak ... Rukāb-e Khorshīd, transferring all benefits, land rights, and equivalent rental value of one-sixth of the old qanāt lands of the mentioned village, and the entirety of the six-sixths of a qanāt known as the New Qanāt, also referred to as Mazra'eh Jadīd Qanāt, inherited from the late Hajj Badi' and his heirs. The reconciliation payment included: 41 tomans, 5,000 dinars, 3 kharvārs of royal silver coins, 1,000 dinars, 22 kharvārs of government grain, and 18 kharvārs of government cottonseed.

Upon completion of the religious formula and receipt of payment, the reconciliation was finalized, and all rights and claims to one year's land use were relinquished. Any future claims by heirs of Hajj Badi' would be considered invalid, and the reconciling parties would bear responsibility.

The religious formula was recited on the 26th of Jumādā al-Ākhirah, 1243 AH.

Historical Insights from Manuscript Deed No. 3

1. Identification of the Gavart Farm Qanāt (New Qanāt) and Its Founder

This qanāt was constructed by “MohammadBadi' Gavarti” in 1142 AH (1729 CE), as confirmed by the deed.

2. Comprehensive Description of the Qanāt

For the first time, a scholarly article presents a detailed technical description of the qanāt, based on expert assessments for official documentation. This includes terminology such as:

- Mādar-Chāh (mother well)
- Ḥaqq al-Arż (land rights)
- Ḥaqq-e Rīzesh-e Harzāb (right to discharge surplus water)
- Ḥaqqābeh (water rights)
- Ḥaqq-e A'yānī (property rights along the route)

- Haqq-e Pūḍ va Pīshkār (rights to maintenance and extension)
- Haqq-e Sadd (dam rights)
- Mazhar-e Qanāt (qanāt outlet)

3. Description of the Gavart Farm Qanāt (New Qanāt):

This active qanāt begins at the lands of Khātūnābād, forming 117 wells before entering the requested property and irrigating the Mazra‘eh Qasr—the farm where the grand palace of Gavart is located. This estate was acquired by Lady ‘Azmā, daughter of Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh Qājār and sister of Zēll al-Sultān, governor of Isfahan, where she resided until her death.

Additionally, 14 active wells extend into the lands of Sanjavān-Marreh, a village 4 km southeast of Gavart. The qanāt holds dam rights over the Amīnābād Qanāt, meaning that without permission from the owner of Gavart, the Amīnābād qanāt cannot proceed with maintenance or pass through Khātūnābād lands.

Other rights include:

- Grazing rights for livestock from Gavart in adjacent pastures
- Discharge rights for surplus water from the Gavart qanāt and Mazra‘eh Qasr into the Amīnābād and Safūgard qanāt channels
- Water rights from the Amīnābād qanāt for 32 jarīb of land in Gavart
- Property rights for 98 houses, including spring shelters, stables, hay barns, all shops in the village, 22 dovecote towers, and two water mills—one in Mazra‘eh Qasr powered by Amīnābād and Safūgard qanāts, and the other in Gavart powered by surplus water.

The location of all these properties is marked on the map (Fig. 11). The deed also confirms the route rights of the Amīnābād and Safūgard qanāts, which enter Gavart from the west, forming 18 wells, then split into two branches near the royal garden (Gavart Palace), irrigating both Amīnābād and Safūgard villages ...

Additionally, the deed mentions:

- The abandoned qanāt of Mazra‘eh Bāyereh Maimūneh (a satellite farm of Gavart)
- 12 wells of the Ḥasanābād Qahāb Qanāt
- 156 wells of the Mazra‘eh Hāj Āqā Amīn Gavarti Qanāt
- A qanāt known as Kojān Qanāt located in the lands of Mazra‘eh Gavart

Neighboring villages retain rights to maintain and extend these qanāts as far as their channels reach.

Conclusion

Following the formulation of research questions and the pursuit of the study’s objectives, the findings obtained can be utilized as historical sources. These include:

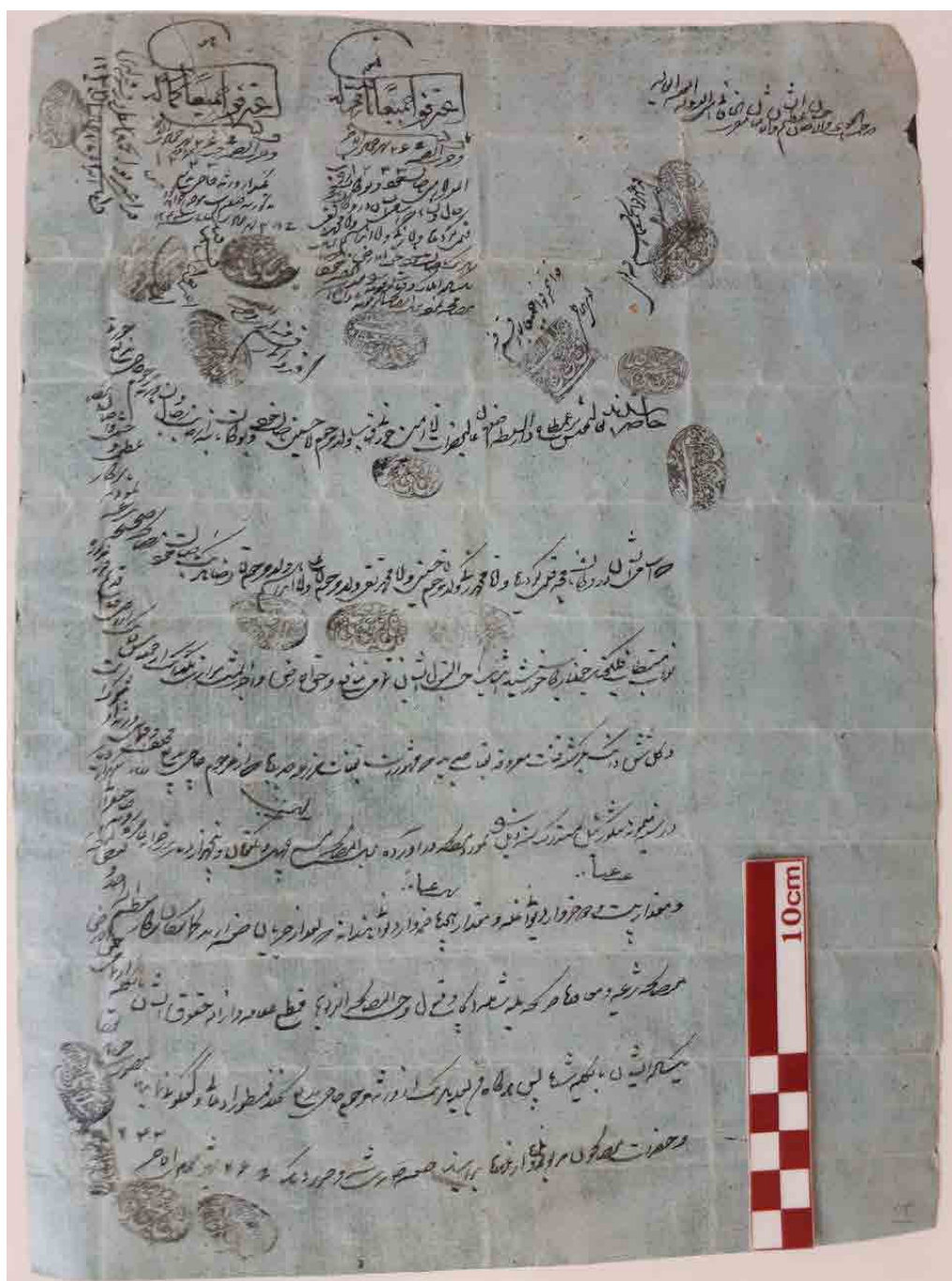


Fig. 11: Deed of the Gavart farm qanāt in eastern Isfahan, private collection (Badiei Gavarti, 2024).

- Identification and understanding of historical sites mentioned in the manuscript deeds, along with their traditional names (such as plains, deserts, qanāts, dovecotes, and mansions).
- Recognition of local terminology and expressions used in the manuscript texts (e.g., Qahāb block, bathhouse tower, ḥabbah, qafīz, etc.).
- Introduction of benefactors, influential individuals, and notable artists whose names appear in the manuscript.



Fig. 12: Aerial map of the qanāts, dovescotes, and plains of Gavart (Google Earth, 2022).

- Documentation of artistic elements employed in the creation of manuscript deeds, such as decorative motifs in gold, silver, cinnabar, lapis lazuli, and floral illustrations found in marriage deeds belonging to affluent and prominent families.

- Calligraphy as an art form used in manuscript preparation, executed by master scribes, and the use of engraved brass seals containing details such as the seal owner's name, father's name, and date of engraving—serving as a method of dating these manuscripts.

If manuscript deeds from various cities and regions are systematically collected and analyzed, they can serve as highly valuable sources for introducing the history, culture, and heritage of those lands, benefiting scholars, researchers, and enthusiasts alike.

All ancient civilizations—whether extinct or still extant—emerged and thrived near water sources. The primary reason for the decline of certain settlements and civilizations has been the loss or inaccessibility of water over time. Iranians, however, pioneered the qanāt (subterranean aqueduct), which enabled them to choose settlement locations and extend their civilizations deep into deserts and arid regions. They understood that certain soils, if adequately irrigated, were highly fertile and could be cultivated effectively. Thus, the invention of the qanāt was a major breakthrough.

However, continuous and intensive farming gradually depleted soil quality, prompting communities to seek ways to restore fertility. This led to the use of natural fertilizer derived from pigeons, giving rise to dovescotes. Consequently, a third component—dovescotes—was added to the two foundational elements of fertile soil and qanāt, forming a golden triangle of agricultural sustainability. This innovation significantly boosted productivity and crop yields, contributing to economic prosperity across Iran. It became a vital economic foundation for the three great empires: the Achaemenids,

Parthians, and Sasanians, positioning Iran as a superpower in the ancient world.

Such achievements could only be uncovered through the study of historical documents and sources, as written national records reflect the culture, art, and civilization of a people—naturally shaped by historical events. History and cultural identity link the destinies of past and present nations and chart the course for their future. These valuable historical legacies are enduring human heritage, transmitting the culture and wisdom of past generations. Scientific, cultural, political, literary, and artistic truths are inscribed in these treasured records, offering researchers and analysts detailed insights into both the visible and hidden dimensions of their environments.

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Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the preparation and writing of this manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

In adherence to ethical publication standards, the authors affirm that there are no conflicts of interest, either personal or financial, that could have influenced the content or conclusions presented in this research.

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بررسی و تحلیل اسناد و قباله‌های قدیمی اصفهان به عنوان منابع تاریخی و فرهنگی از دوران صفوی تا پهلوی اول

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چکیده

ازجمله مهم‌ترین اسناد و منابع تاریخی و باستانی در ایران، قباله‌ها و نسخه‌های خطی دست‌نویس محله‌محور می‌باشند که با بررسی و مطالعه آن‌ها اطلاعات مهمی به عنوان منابع تاریخی به دست می‌آید. این اطلاعات درخصوص عناصر جغرافیایی، اقتصادی، اجتماعی، میراث فرهنگی و قوانین عرفی و آداب و رسوم سنتی می‌باشند که با ذکر جزئیات بیان شده‌اند و ما امروزه می‌توان از آن‌ها به عنوان منابع دست اول و ارزشمند بهره برد؛ بر همین اساس، استان اصفهان را می‌توان از لحاظ غنای تاریخی و پیشینه نگارش قباله‌ها در تاریخ سنتی و محله‌محور ایران جزو مناطق بسیار پربار و غنی دسته‌بندی نمود. از آنجایی که قباله‌های خطی به خصوص قباله‌های مرتبط با محله گورت واقع در شرق اصفهان (جی شرقی) تاکنون از نظر تاریخی و باستان‌شناسی و نسخه‌شناسی مورد مطالعه و استفاده قرار نگرفته، لذا هدف پژوهش حاضر نشان دادن شیوه نگارش و طرح و بیان مفاد ارزشمند تاریخی و معرفی آن‌ها با نام‌های اصیل و سنتی آن‌ها و نشان دادن اهمیت قباله‌های خطی مذکور در این پهنه فرهنگی به عنوان یکی از منابع مهم و دقیق تاریخی و باستانی و هم‌چنین نشان دادن ویژگی‌های هنری به کار رفته در ترسیم و تزئین آن‌ها به عنوان بخشی از تاریخ هنر این سرزمین است. مهم‌ترین پرسش پژوهش این است که چه تمهیداتی در نگارش و تنظیم این قباله‌ها به عنوان سند محکم و مکتوب قابل قبول و مورد اقبال عوام و خواص اندیشیده شده تا مالکیت افراد، محترم شمرده شده و مفاد آن قانونمند و مطالب آن‌ها مستند باشد. به منظور دستیابی به اهداف یاد شده، چهار قباله از قباله‌های خطی و قدیمی محله گورت واقع در شرق اصفهان به عنوان منابع محلی تاریخی و باستانی مورد مطالعه و بررسی تحلیلی قرار گرفته‌اند. نتایج پژوهش نشان می‌دهد که این اسناد مورد مطالعه، دارای قدمت تاریخی از دوران صفوی تا پهلوی اول هستند. این چهار قطعه قباله خطی با موضوعات متفاوت شامل: (۱) کبوتر خانه، (۲) آسیاب آبی، (۳) کاروانسرا، (۴) قنات هستند که بر روی انواع کاغذهای دست‌ساز و با استفاده از جوهر سنتی ضد آب مورد کتابت قرار گرفته‌اند و با توجه به موضوع پژوهش، مورد مطالعه و بررسی قرار گرفته‌اند.

کلیدواژگان: منابع تاریخی، نسخه خطی، صفوی، قاجار، اصفهان، گورت.

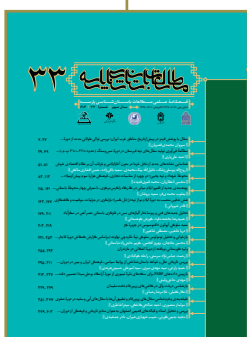
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