



MINARET

MINARET (*manāra*), a tower, usually attached to a mosque, from which the muezzin (*mo'addin*) summons Muslims to prayer. In Arabic, *manāra* originally denotes a lighthouse or signaling tower at sea. The minaret was not part of the architecture of the early Islamic period. It appeared first in the 8th and 9th centuries in Arabia (Boṣrā in Syria) and in the Islamic West (Rabat, Marrakesh, Seville), in the form of square towers of great height (Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art*, 1973. pp. 43-44). Spiral-shaped minarets with an external ascent — as in 9th-century Sāmarrā — were also built on square platforms. The development of minaret buildings among the Omayyads in Syria was probably influenced by Christian church towers. In Iran, the prevalent shape of minaret buildings was from the very beginning the round, column-shaft type (Dāmḡān, Tārik-Kāna, 1030 C.E.; [FIGURE 1](#), [FIGURE 2](#), [FIGURE 3](#)). This could stand on a rectangular platform (Ḳosrowgerd, 1111 C.E.) or have an octagonal substructure, as in Golpāygān, (ca. 1100 C.E.) or Kerāt (Saljuq).

The Iranian minaret, in which group we also include the eastern Islamic examples in Afghanistan, India and the areas of the Caspian Sea, have their shafts slightly tapering off towards the top and possess one or two ambulatories for the muezzin. They are fifty or more meters high and are built of baked brick, and partially of glazed brick as decorative elements. Within the shaft of the minaret there are spiral staircases.

As a rule, minarets are closely connected with a mosque building. Where this is no longer recognizable, we can often assume a ruined mosque, probably



built in some transient building material (clay bricks) near the minaret. This does not imply a solid structural connection; there may even have been a considerable distance between the two buildings, as is the case with the Masjed-e Jom'a in Ardabil from the Saljuq period (W. Kleiss, "Zwei Erkundungsfahrten in Nordwest-Iran," *AMI*, N.F. 2, 1969, p. 33). The muezzin's climb to the balcony-shaped ambulatory takes place within the shafts of the minaret through a winding staircase with a central newel (Kleiss, *op. cit.*, p. 37). In the masonry, there are small openings to provide light at long intervals.

The ambulatories for the muezzin project in the shape of stalactite capitals and produce the impression of a column with a capital. There appears to be no functional difference between minarets having one ambulatory and those having two on top of one another. The stalactite shapes are varied, and ornamental bands — most of them with inscriptions — are put up on various heights of the shaft.

The minaret shafts are often decorated with rich brick ornaments (FIGURE 3), mainly in geometrical shapes, in baked or polychrome glazed bricks, the latter since the 14th or 15th centuries. The ambulatories for the muezzin were often covered with wooden constructions and have been preserved from Safavid and Qajar times.

A few peculiarities are to be pointed out about Iranian minarets: in Ziār, Kerāt, Gār and Golpāygān, the lower parts of the shafts are octagonal (FIGURE 1 and FIGURE 2), and the minaret shaft of Golpāygān is, in addition, richly subdivided. In the Meydān minaret in Sāva (Saljuq), the meydān minaret in Qom (Saljuq), in Bandar-e Anzali (19th century) and in Isfahan's Menār(-e) Jonbān (Safavid), the balconies for the muezzin are massively walled as tower rooms (Rezā Morādi Giāt-ābādi, *Photographic Encyclopedia of Iran*, IV, Minarets of Iran, 20).

The two "swaying minarets" (Manār-e Jombān) in Isfahan from the Safavid period are particularly interesting. They are erected above a Mongol *ayvān* structure on a grid of wooden beams (*Photographic Encyclopedia of Iran*, IV, 20). In Khoy, the Šams-e Dinbali minaret (Šams-e Tabrizi minaret) has its shaft decorated with numerous ram skulls, with their horns projecting out of the façade structure (*Photographic Encyclopedia of Iran*, IV, 22).

But for a few exceptions, such as Sin near Isfahan, Qom, and Khorramabad (FIGURE 1), Barsiān and the Safavid minaret in Qom (FIGURE 2), which are not

subdivided in their heights, most Iranian minarets of the pre-Safavid period have the subdivisions of their minaret shafts decorated with brick ornaments or inscription bands. The latter serve to separate the individual decorative areas from one another. From the 14th century on, geometric structures appear as décor for the minaret shafts. Examples are Isfahan's Bāḡ-e Quš-ḵāna and the Ḳvāja 'Alam minaret (FIGURE 1). This style was further expanded in the Timurid period, as in Abarquh (FIGURE 2), and later in Safavid minarets, as can be seen in modern mosque buildings.

The concept of several minarets for one mosque is to be understood as an architectonic decoration, for from a functional point of view a mosque only requires one minaret. Thus two minarets, as in Isfahan (Manār-e Jombān and Dardasht, FIGURE 1) or in Yazd (FIGURE 1), Abarquh (FIGURE 2) or the double minaret at the Masjed-e Shah in Isfahan (FIGURE 2) or the Qajar group of three minarets in Bandar-e Anzali (FIGURE 2) are to be considered rather as architectural motifs. The eight minarets surrounding the dome of the Solṭāniya mausoleum are to be understood as the concept of a building originally meant for the grave of eight imams (FIGURE 2). The brick decoration of the minaret shafts is composed in geometrical shapes in terms of the current brick size of 21x21x6 cm (FIGURE 3).

Among the types of minarets we may also count the Mil-e Nāderi in southern Itran, a tower built of baked bricks which is no longer preserved at its full height, situated on the caravan road between Bam and Zāhedan. It stands in the midst of flat desert land, visible from afar, but without any recognizable buildings near it, without a caravansary or a mosque. It has a winding staircase, and features horizontal bands corresponding with the widespread horizontal subdivisions of the shafts in Iranian minarets. Built no doubt primarily as a guide for caravans, the Mil-e Nāderi may have served a secondary function as the site for the call to prayer for the caravans camping around it.

In comparison with Turkish minarets, especially of the Ottoman period, Iranian minarets have small domes above them, rather than the pointed towers seen in Turkish models.

The towers of Firuzābād (Firuzābād minaret) and Nurābād (Eždehā Minaret), which are known as minarets in Iranian literature, are pre-Islamic buildings used in Islamic times as sites for the call to prayer. They stand respectively in the center of a city (Firuzābād) and higher up at the edge of a settlement



(Nurābād). The use of the site for the call to prayer appears more plausible in the case of the tower of Firuzābād (D. Huff, “Zur Rekonstruktion des Turmes von Firuzabad,” *Istanbuler Mitteilungen*, 19/20, 1969/1970, 319ff.).

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