

The effect of religious values in the formation of spaces in Islamic architecture of Iran

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Abstract

In any society governed by religion, each activity performed in the society is closely associated with religious factors. In an Islamic society where Islam is the basis for the elements of the society, various arts including architecture are the most important manifestations of Islamic principles. After emergence of Islam in Iran and introducing the Islamic worldview to Iranians, it changed the Iranians' way of thinking and beliefs. This worldview affected Iranian architecture in constructing different buildings such as mosques, houses, tekya, caravanserai, and other buildings based on Islamic theoretical foundations. Different parts of these places, such as the dome, minaret, entrance, vestibule, and other parts, were built according to Islamic principles and foundations and formed an architectural style that is currently known as the Islamic architecture of Iran. This style, like other existing architectural styles, has been influenced by local and historical characteristics and is considered one of the most important and successful Islamic schools.

The investigation of architectural principles in different Islamic buildings, including the meanings of dome, hijab, mihrab, and aesthetics in Islamic architecture of Iran was the purpose of the present study. The study sought to examine the principles formed based on religion in the Islamic architecture of Iran. The results indicated that the Islamic spaces of Iran were built based on Islamic religious values.

Keywords: Unit; Islamic Architecture of Iran; Dome; Altar; Entrance

1. Introduction

Islam has directed human activities toward connection with Allah and gaining His pleasure. It has differentiated the path of guidance from astray so that the person can distinguish the path of guidance from misguidance by following the instructions of Islam. Islam has provided instructions in all aspects of life, and architecture is not an exception. Various factors influence a Muslim architect's work. These factors are of different natures: some are caused by a person's religious beliefs, some are caused by social thoughts, and so on [1-3].

Through believing Islam, a Muslim architect develops his/her faith. This is reflected in all of his/her works. The stronger the Muslim architect's faith is, it can more effectively direct the architect to get closer and connect to Allah. A Muslim architect sees his/her work as a means to connect to and worship Allah [4, 5].

The religiosity of the Muslim architect is a factor affecting the identity of Muslim architect, and the success of Muslim architectural works is also the result of this faith. Religiosity is a factor in determining the role of a Muslim architect. The principles resulting from religiosity play an important role in the formation of Muslim architectural work. Until recently, there are numerous studies on Islamic architecture, including architectural analysis, designing principles, spatial quality, and similar issues. The present study focused on studies investigating the basic structure of Islamic architecture, which is created based on religious values, and examined the principles that value Islamic architecture [6].

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2. The spiritual importance of the courtyard and the complementary role of water reflection in it

In general, the use of space in Islamic art is one of the most important direct outcomes of the metaphysical principle of monotheism in art. The word of monotheism that is manifested in the phrase “there is no deity but Allah” emphasizes, in one sense, the “otherness” of absolute truth. In other words, it concentrates on the fact that Allah is beyond what the mind and ordinary senses can perceive as a reality in the common sense of the word, and this corresponds to the word “deity” in the phrase. From this point of view, if objects are considered in their common sense, the vacancy, i.e., what is devoid of things, is reflected as the effect of Allah’s presence in the system of existence because it refers to what belongs to everything though negating “things” [7, 8]. Therefore, the vacant space is a manifestation of Allah’s exaltation and His presence in everything [1]. Thus, the vacant space that, in traditional architecture, corresponds to the space of living is a holy element and a manifestation of the omniscient presence. Introvert traditional architecture in cities in the desert contains a vacant space, whether in the central courtyard or in mosques, that has turned into the truth of existence. According to Seyed Hossein Nasr, mosques, either small or big, inspire the feeling of “divine presence” thanks to their vacant spaces [9]. The vacant space eliminates the limiting effect of the cosmic space on man because whenever the veil of the body is removed, the divine light shines on the heart [10-11]. Just as concentrating on the inner and achieving inner peace is a principle in Islam, introvert architecture directs the person toward the manifestation of the sacred and invites him/her to the introspection and the hidden truth in one’s self [12].



Figure 1 A view of the role of the central courtyard in the Islamic architecture of Iran

3. Moving towards evolution in Islamic architecture of Iran

Through simulating the perfect creation and nature, the Islamic architecture of Iran turned to perfectionism. It tries to consider all components of its structure to the extent to be perfect. Like a living creature whose parts of the body are interrelated, the components of Islamic architecture are connected, each part is carefully designed based on the action of the previous part and to complement it, as if the absent or incomplete entrance part in the Islamic building calls into questions the construction of vestibule [13].

For example, the main hall of a house, or the balcony or porch of a mosque has the most decorations; however, the space under the dome or its earrings has been also examined and carefully decorated by Mocarabe (Mogharnas) [14].

4. Integrity (unity)

Accepting Islam and its principles and beliefs, being inspired by Islamic theology and teachings, and based on the principle of monotheism, the architect could achieve unity and integrity in architecture, which has never been observed in history, despite a variety of materials, climate, etc. This made the factor of unity and integrity more prominent than other factors such as time and place conditions and requirements. In other words, the faithful Muslim architect has considered unified principles that despite the multiplicity of buildings, they all have considerable unity. Unity and integrity can be considered the major inspiring factors in the constructed buildings. [15].

The Islamic architecture of Iran, like other creatures that have been created to achieve a goal and have interrelated organs, has an integrated and unified goal and inspires a sense of unity in the beholder [16].

In the Islamic architecture of Iran, all spaces are concentrated in one center. In buildings such as mosques, caravanserai, and houses, some elements create a sense of unity; for example, a courtyard in the center and other spaces built around the center. Inside the courtyard (or the center of the courtyard), there are points based on which other spaces have been built and seek to achieve a goal. Imagine the dome of a mosque around which all points are gathered and connected and inspire a sense of unity, or the spaces in the bazaar, which are around a center [17]. This requires the spaces to be in their specific places and any defect affects the whole.

Regarding the spiritual manifestations in a mosque, it can be said that a mosque is the only house where, according to the Holy Quran, is built for everyone, whether they are black, white, red, or yellow, rich or poor, ugly or beautiful, devout or rebellious. This means nothing but justice. Justice can be felt in both outside and inside mosques. Mosques reflect the meaning of the verse "and hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together". Symbolically a mosque is a circle in which all the parts have a single place; that is, all parts are connected to each other and find unity. Mosques are the house of gathering and, according to the words of imams, the gathering is the symbol of divine mercy [18]. Allah helps people to gather, and Allah's mercy is one of the most beautiful spiritual beauties a faithful person tries to achieve.

5. Proportion in the building (compliance with the module)

Inspired by the teachings of Islam, the Muslim architect had realized that both the form and the content and both the inside and the outside should have spirituality in such a way that the beholder and observer feel it.

Believing this perspective, the Muslim faithful architect builds spaces as a material form for spiritual and humane life and filled the inside with divine light [19].

According to Islamic teachings, the Muslim architect has tried to pay attention to both the inside and outside the building, find the harmony between form and content, and simply represent this harmony.

The Muslim architect could simply not only consider the inside but also value the form and find a pleasant harmony between the inside and outside. All parts of Islamic architecture have been designed in association with each other, like a living being. This is evident in the very beginning of the designing process, selecting the construction place, and considering the main place of each space in the Islamic architecture of Iran [20]. This led to the formation of the module in the Islamic architecture of Iran. According to the module, each space follows a standard size in the Islamic architecture of Iran, and even the names of some spaces are derived from their size; for example, three-door room, five-door room, or different types of the arch, such as arch 5 or arch 7.

This harmony can be found in other parts of the building as well, such as the central courtyard. In addition to the issue of the module, attempts have been made in Islamic architecture to observe the appropriate height of the human body in designing different parts of the building not to be standard.

Proportions in the spaces of the Islamic architecture of Iran symbolize the glory and magnificence of the divine system so that man prays for Him [21]. To symbolize the desire for perfection and achieving unity, the architect introduces a multiplicity of lines and patterns that are unified and integrated to move toward Allah.

6. Sense of mysticism in the entrance of Islamic architectural buildings

The entrance doorway of mosques is one of the most important places with many symbolic meanings. For example, the indentation of the mosque entrance seems to invite the prayers inside and welcome them.

In Islamic architecture, the entrance of each building is built at an appropriate height with respect to its use. The height of entrance in religious buildings such as mosques and tekyes is higher, which is decorated with verses from the Holy Quran and forces the person to stop and think about Allah's glory before entering the mosque, indicating a kind of divine mysticism. However, the height of the entrance in buildings such as houses and caravanserai is lower and is separated from other spaces due to the indentation or protrusion that emphasizes the mystic wisdom of the space [22].

7. Decorations in the Islamic architecture of Iran

The architecture of the Islamic era consists of many interesting geometric and non-geometric patterns. These patterns have been used in the construction of different public, religious, and private buildings such as schools, bazaars, mosques, and tekyes with various materials such as plaster, tile, stone, and brick. The formation process of decorations along with

the development of architecture has developed before and after Islam. The reliefs of Persepolis, the glazed bricks of Susa during the Achaemenid period, and the plasterwork of Sassanid palaces in Firozabad, Fars, provided very good grounds for the decorations of the Islamic period in Iran. In this period, they found a high position in Islamic art, thanks to an insight based on Islamic principles. In general, the decorations of Islamic architecture have two major dimensions: practical (material) and conceptual (meaning). The practical dimension includes the type of materials, tools, and instruments, implementation methods, size, place of implementation, and physical quantities. It has always attracted attention and artists have made architectural decorations more beautiful and complete during the past centuries by taking advantage of their creativity and experience and appropriate executive and technical solutions [22, 23].

The most important part of decorations is the conceptual dimension that has attracted many Muslim and non-Muslim thinkers. To understand the aesthetic meaning of these patterns, knowledge about visual codes and symbols of Islamic culture. However, decoration in Islamic art is used to show the sacred space, and Muslim artists have always tried to direct the matter to meaning.

Mocarabe is one of the decorations invented by Muslim architects based on the teachings of Islam in addition to considering the aesthetic aspects.

8. Wisdom of Islamic architecture

The wisdom of Islamic architecture is a level in which the material and spiritual needs of human beings are reflected in a dynamic balance, human norms, and divine teachings reach the highest degree of conformity at a certain point, and a work of art at this point responds to material and spiritual needs in the same manner [24].

Seyed Hossein Nasr explains the concept of wisdom in the Islamic culture: "According to Mulla Sadra's definitions of wisdom in the book of Rasael, wisdom is a kind of pure intellectual knowledge that changes the knower in the process of acquiring knowledge in such a way that his/her soul becomes a mirror that reflects the cosmic hierarchy" [34].

The level that Mulla Sadra calls "wisdom" is a position in which a person finds the ability to create architecture or any other artistic work, and what s/he creates is full of good and comprehensible answers to material and spiritual needs. Islamic architecture is the result of spirituality that flourished little by little with the help of the pure thoughts of Muslim architects. In the following, the spaces related to mosques and other Islamic buildings are investigated [25].

9. Dome and stem

Dome in a sacred place represents the whole spirit. Dome or baldachin, as its name implies, represents a symbolic similarity with the sky or the throne. "The dome represents the sky and the cubic space under it represents the earth and the mocarabed arch is considered as the link between the earth and the sky". According to a narration, the Holy prophet described a huge dome made of a white shell, on corners of which the four words of the first surah "Hamd" were written: *بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم* (In the name of God, the merciful the compassionate). Also, he described four streams of water, milk, honey, and heavenly wine, which are eternal and heavenly rivers of happiness [26].

It can be said that "the shell" can symbolize a divine spirit that embraces pearls (creatures). In other words, the shell is the divine throne that encloses all creatures. This is perhaps the spiritual inspiration of any dome-shaped sacred building that Muslim architecture benefits from so that the cube-shaped part of the building represents the universe and the four corners symbolize the spiritual and physical elements of the world, and the whole building represents the balance that reflects Allah's hadiths in the system of the universe [37]. Dome is also the symbol of the union between the earth and the sky, where the rectangular base of the building corresponds to the earth and the spherical dome of the building corresponds to the sky. In other words, Muslim architects have embodied belonging to the earth with a square building, which represents endurance and stability, and belonging to the sky with a round and rotating dome, which represents the connection to Allah [27, 28].

10. Minaret

- believed that the gates of mosques in Iran, with two minarets on their sides, remind us of the eternal memory of the gates of heaven.

11. Decorations

One of the perceptible beauties of Islamic architecture, especially in the building of mosques, is the decorations. Decorations are the manifestation of real and reasonable beauty through representing beliefs. In other words, the devout servant can behold reasonable beauty or the beauties of Allah through the perceptible beauty of decorations. This concept of unwanted decorations refers to their function and necessity in Islamic architectural buildings and reminds this point that.... and decorations can effectively define spaces, relations, and considerations. These decorations that are especially common in the Islamic architecture of Iran include tiling, inscriptions, brickwork, carving, woodcarving, mirror work, etc. Each of these decorations that are accompanied by symbolic forms and lines giving beauty to the mosque [6, 29].

12. Light

Light is the manifestation of Allah, and is reflected in Islamic architecture, especially in the mosque which is considered Allah's house. "Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth". Light plays an important role in reducing the hardness and coldness of stones and buildings, and the metaphysical manifestation of light on the physical aspect of buildings makes it the main center of Islamic architecture aesthetics in mysticism and meaning. In the buildings of Islamic architecture, shiny floors, and walls were used to catch light, and sometimes the light shined from the diamond-shaped ceilings, which caused reflection [30, 36].

Light gives a dynamic quality to the decorations of Islamic architecture, and gives life to patterns, shapes, and designs. In Islamic architecture, light and shadow create strong contrasts on surfaces and give a context to the carved stones, and plaster and brick surfaces. The light passed through the wooden mashrabiya, the plaster and marble walls, and the patterned glass of the windows, and create patterns on the back and inner surfaces, forming a temporal cover of color and shade [31-33].

Light not only determines the boundaries of Islamic architectural spaces but also forms uniform white buildings that reflect the purity of the desert and the disappearance of multitudes before Allah, according to the belief that "there is no deity but Allah". At the same time, it facilitates the use of colorful buildings that reflect heavenly states on Earth. White is a symbol of indeterminate unity, while colors that result from the reflection of light are a symbol of the manifestation of unity in multiplicity and the dependence of multiplicity on unity. Each color is a symbol of a state and the light itself, with no limitation to a particular color [5, 38].

13. Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the effects of Islam on the formation of Islamic spaces in Iran. To achieve this purpose, the principles that value Islamic architecture were examined according to religious values.

With the emergence of Islam, Muslims tried to move towards human perfection and use wisdom in doing works. Muslim artists who knew geometry, colors, history, and religious belief used their artistic creativity and nature in constructing and designing Islamic buildings, regardless of their material rewards. And the result was a perfect building that found such great value and beauty only as gifts for the Creator. In other words, this art is a combination of insight and thinking, reflecting the quality of what exists in the form of manifestation, and shortly speaking, love reflects the beauty of Islam in the art of Islamic architecture of Iran. Islamic architecture, especially mosques in Iran represents interest and excitement, relaxation and peace that reflect aesthetic taste and has no resource but religious beliefs and divine inspiration. Considering research in the mentioned definitions and the examples, it can be concluded that in the building of Islamic architecture of Iran, human is faced with the perfect architecture, and this perfection is the beauty and perfection of Islam. The beauty of the Islamic architecture of Iran is the result of divine light.

Based on the results of the present study, one of the secrets in Muslim architects' works, which is resulted from Islamic culture and is reflected in the elements and different parts of the buildings, is perfectionism. It can be considered as an architectural indicator in Muslim architects' works; a Muslim architect considered Islamic teachings and themes to design and build the perfect form of the building in order to draw the beholder's attention to Allah's perfection and give spirituality to his/her work. Indeed, the work is beautiful and perfect when it reflects the attributes of Allah. Therefore, Muslim architects considered the instructions of Islam in designing buildings.

Compliance with ethical standards

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