

Role and Function of Religious Texts in Iranian Traditional Architecture

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Abstract

What do the religious concepts and elements remaining from every epoch of history and repetition of these religious texts and elements as art mean in current time? How much do tough political and religious beliefs could affect these religious concepts and texts in different periods? In each period, a series of religious concepts and elements have been highlighted, and the reverse has happened in the next period. What is the impact of religious trends on these concepts and elements? In this paper, using historical-interpretation method, by studying history and architecture books as well as verses of Quran, the role of these concepts and texts is examined. It is hoped that the results reveal these concepts and texts, and influence the designing of religious places.

Key words: Islamic Architecture, religious texts and concepts in architecture, Quran and Hadith
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Introduction

Existence of religious contexts and texts in inscriptions located in mosques or other religious sites, in addition to the artistic issues ranging from calligraphy, tiling and plastering arts, can have another purpose. The repeated use of the verses of the Quran in most mosques shows a hidden spiritual secret. This is true in a few verses of the Quran, so that a few verses of the Quran are used in different mosques with one or two verses more or less.

This repeated use at different times was not accidental, and perhaps we can say that it has an inner secret. Similar use in one or more selected verse in a specific location of mosques is remarkable. An example is use of an inscription with a theme on the altar of mosques or a specific verse in the dome ring of most mosques.

Literature review

Research focused on Islamic architecture in relation to past practices were different. There are several studies about different types of scripts, inscriptions, and inscription art. In general, it can be said that there is no applied research in this area that indicates the secrets and mysteries of or reasons for emphasizing the use of these texts and religious concepts.

Methodology

The method of this research is historical interpretation, and the study of religious, historical, and architectural books through library-based method, the data and studies are collected and classified, and by analyzing and interpreting them, some results are inferred that may reveal religious concepts and texts in Hadithal architectural, and may even influence the design.

Quran verses

Verses of the Quran as Islamic religious concepts can be seen on most mosques. The interesting thing is that specific verses of Quran are commonly seen in all the mosques in different periods.

Motifs on the facade of Jorjir Jame' mosque

Great Kufic inscriptions in the Jorjir Jame' mosque consists of three parts, its middle part no longer exists. The remaining text is from Sura Ali-Imran, verse 18.

In addition, there are two types of inscriptions in the mosque Nain. On the left of the entrance (inside the mosque), the sentence of (God is Mighty) is seen, and at the top of the facade, the sentences (There is no God but Allah, Mohammad (PBUH) is the Messenger of Allah) are written. An inscription can be seen at the top of sentences that might be part of the verse 4 of Sura Al-Fath.

(Abdullah Ghouchani, studying historical inscriptions in Natanz complex and Jame' Mosque of Nain, p. 138).

Main content Sura Ali-Imran refers to the unity and attributes of God, resurrection, other Islamic knowledge, Jihad, discussion about some Islamic rules and the need for patience in the face of difficulties and God exams as well as a part of the prophets history (Makarem Shirazi, Nemouneh, 2002, vol. 2, p. 408).

Verse 18 of Sura Al-Imran states:

"Allah witnesses that there is no deity except Him, and [so do] the angels and those of knowledge - [that He is] maintaining [creation] in justice. There is no deity except Him, the Exalted in Might, the Wise."

The content of this verse used in the facade of Jorjir Jame' mosque refers to the oneness of God, As well as his justice, power, and wisdom as the Creator of the universe. Another God's attribute (God is Mighty), meaning the greatness, power, glory on the left side of the entrance of Nain mosque is spiritually important, especially that the name of Prophet Muhammad is written on top of that as the last prophet of God, that has doubled the meaning.

And in interpretation and overall meaning of verse 4 of Sura Al-Fath in Nain mosque, it is stated that:

The overall content of Sura Al-Fath has seven parts, on the victory, sabotages of hypocrites (Munafiqs), the position of the Prophet, and his noble objective, and true companions of the Prophet (Makarem Shirazi, Nemouneh, 2002, vol. 22, p. 6).

And verse means that:

"It is He who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers that they would increase in faith along with their [present] faith. And to Allah belong the soldiers of the heavens and the earth, and ever is Allah Knowing and Wise." (Qur'an, verse 4, p. 511). In this mosque (Nain Mosque), in three other parts, verse 18 of Sura Al-Towbah, and verse 137 of Sura Al-Baqara are written and decorated by plastering (Azad, M., the Iranian architecture in the territory of Buyids, 2002, p. 102). Verse 18 of Sura Al-Towbah is written in the dome of mosques Mohammedia in Nain, and the name of the ten promised (Ushrah Mubashsherah) in addition to the name of God, but a part of it is destroyed (Ibid., P. 104). Perhaps one of the verses that is used most in mosques is verse 18 of Sura Al-Towbah. The Nemouneh interpretation states importance of this verse as follows:

There are lots of hadiths about the importance of building and the developing the mosque that shows the importance of this work, so as it has been quoted from Holy Prophet (PBUH) that "A person who sets a lamp in a mosque, the angels and carriers of the divine throne ask forgiveness for him/her, as long as the light is on". However, what is more important today is spiritual development of the mosques. In other words, what is more important than building a mosque is to foster people who care about the mosques and preserves and protects the mosques. Mosque should be a centre to any constructive Islamic movement to aware the people and prepare the environment for Muslims to defend Islam heritage. In particular, it should be noted that the mosque should be a center for faithful teenagers and youths and not just a center to accumulate retired and disabled people (Makarem Shirazi, Nemouneh, 2002, vol. 7, p. 318).

Verse 18 of Sura Al-Towbah means as follows:

"The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and establish prayer and give zakah and do not fear except Allah, for it is expected that those will be of the [rightly] guided."

Referring to the construction of mosques is done in a way that the mosques constructors are called guided groups. As described in verse 137 of Sura Al-Baqarah (The bulk of this Sura is about the fact that the servants of God must have faith in all the heavenly books, and did not discriminate on the prophets ...) (Tabatabai, Al-Mizan, 1987, vol. 1, p. 46). In 12 Imam monuments in Yazd, there is tomb of Fakhruddin Asfanjerdi in size of 6x92 installed in the altar, and the term written on the monument in Thulth, Naskh and Kufi in the first margin is verse 255 of Al-Baqarah and in the second margin is the name of twelve Imams. In addition, other than Hadiths and prayers, verse 163 of Sura Al-Baqarah is seen above the entrance facade and verse 65 of Sura Al-Qafir (Al-Muminun) is seen in the eastern port (Azad, M., the Iranian architecture in the territory of Buyids, 2002, p. 108). Verse 255 of Sura Al-Baqarah is known as Ayat-ul-Korsi has a great value among all Muslims, regardless of their cults. The verse, known as Ayat-ul-Korsi, is one of the most noble verses of Quran. In Hadiths, it is quoted from Imam Sadiq that "There is a peak and height for anything and, and the peak of Quran is Ayat-ul-Korsi". (Tabatabai, Al-Mozan, 1987, vol. 2, p. 341). The meaning of the verse refers to the oneness of God, that is the same with verse 163 of Sura Al-Baqarah:

"And your god is one God. There is no deity [worthy of worship] except Him, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful." (Qur'an, verse 163, p. 24).

Verse 65 of Sura Al-Qafir also refers to the oneness of God:

"He is the Ever-Living; there is no deity except Him, so call upon Him, [being] sincere to Him in religion. [All] praise is [due] to Allah, Lord of the worlds."

The overall content of Sura Al-Qafir can be summed up briefly as follows:

1. considering the special names of God;
2. threatening disbelievers to punishment in this world and the Hereafter;
3. description of the Resurrection;
4. monotheism and rejection of polytheism;
5. inviting the Prophet (PBUH) to patience (Makarem Shirazi, Nemouneh, 2002, vol. 20, p. 4).

In the place where Ali ibn Musa al-Rida stepped (Qadamgah), in addition to holy names of God, a few verses are written in two rows of margins. The first margin is verse 23 of Sura Al-Shura and second margin is "In the name of God" and names of the Twelve Imams. In the main text, the first line is verse 23 of Sura Al-Ahzab, and the second line is "There is no God but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah (PBUH)", and in the following, it is written that "Ali is the heir of Allah" in a newer script. The third line includes the first verse of chapter Sura Al-Muminun (Azad, M., the Iranian architecture in the territory of Buyids, 2002, p. 112).

The concept and overall content of the Suras Al-Shura, Al-Ahzab, and Al-Muminun emphasize several key points.

In Sura Al-Shura, discussion is about revelation, and there are also discussions on monotheism, resurrection, believers and disbelievers, and etc. In the interpretation of this verse, there are doubts about the Imamate and the caliphate, that are considered as reward for the prophecy, a reward that makes people closer to God and the benefit is for people. (Makarem Shirazi, Message of Quran, 2002, vol. 9, p. 225).

And on the concept and content of Sura Al-Ahzab, several points can be noted:

1. The invitation to obedience to God,
2. veil (hijab)
3. Resurrection and salvation (Makarem Shirazi, Nemouneh, 2002, vol. 17, p. 184).

Verse 23 of Sura Al-Ahzab refers to a concept that is very important: martyrdom.

"The verse has a broad concept that include all true believers in every age and time, whether they were martyred in Allah's way, or the people who were ready for jihad and martyrdom without any wavering and kept their oath with the God." (Makarem Shirazi, Nemouneh, 2002, vol. 17, p. 245).

And the first and second verses of Sura Al-Muminun emphasize on humility and the spirit of prayer. The overall content of the Sura is divided into several sections as follows:

1. The attributes that cause the believers to prosper

2. Resurrection
3. The sovereignty of God in the universe
4. Resurrection again
5. The purpose of the creation of human (Makarem Shirazi, Nemouneh, 2002, vol. 14, p. 190).

The names (of God or Holy persons) and Hadiths

5.1. The names and Hadiths, and the Hadiths of the attributes of God is seen several times in mosques. The sovereignty of each period, depending on the type of religion, used different inscriptions in the architecture of mosques, so as these concepts were used in a period of time in mosques, and with the arrival of a new government with a different religion, other inscriptions according to that religion were used. An example is the space above altar of Jame' Mosque of Natanz, where after repeating the word Ali on the altar wall, the term (I am the city of knowledge and Ali is the door) is molded in brown color on a white background (Azad, M., the Iranian architecture in the territory of Buyids, 2002, p. 105).

The meaning of this sentence of the Prophet of Islam is expressed in Mafatih Al-Jinan:

I am the city of knowledge and Ali is the door (Qomi, A., Mafatih Al-Jinan, 2012, p. 863)

And other example is Jame' Mosque of Isfahan, where inscriptions of Sunnis and Shiites can be seen frequently together. Historical documentation indicates that different religions did not have oppositions to each other.

(For example, on the sidelines of the altar in Mosque of Neyriz, there is a part of the ten promised hadith quoted from the Prophet by Sunnis. This hadith syndicates that despite the dominance of Shi'ite belief in the time of Buyid, other religions were also comforted to survive, and the prevailing opinion was not imposed to people by force. (Azad, M., the Iranian architecture in the territory of Buyids, 2002, p. 147).

Conclusion

- Mosques as centers for intellectual and rational development of Islamic civilization
- Lack of religious conflict in mosques and unity of Muslims
- Mosques as a place for public gathering as a strategy for political, social, and cultural purposes
- Mosques as strengthening the moral and spiritual dimensions
- Quranic concepts as playing a vital role in the true path of human perfection and happiness
- Mosques, aimed at understanding the universe and Mercy of God
- Concepts creating drawing and images of the other world (heaven and hell)

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