

EVERLASTING MARK OF REVELATION ON IRANIAN BUILDINGS

***Zeynab Yousefi Zadeh¹ and Fatemeh Delavari Parizi²**

¹*Department of Architecture, Bandar Abbas Branch, Islamic Azad University, Bandar Abbas, Iran*

²*Department of Western Philosophy, Tehran University, Tehran, Iran*

**Author for Correspondence*

ABSTRACT

Culture is the most significant aspect of a civilization and art as the epitome of culture and architecture is the most concrete and the most assessable of arts. Architecture as a blend of technique, skills and precision, plays a major role in introducing intellectual, cultural and artistic atmosphere of a society, and embodies the significant and real characteristics of an artistic era. Commitment and passion of artists of Islamic era for religious teachings are to be perceived from prominent role they play in the construction of buildings belonging to that era, and this Commitment and passion is such that, in designing and constructing, architects have considered many of Islamic principles. Additionally, employment of koranic revelations in tablets, structures and buildings of the period, testify to the intimacy and connection between the artist's soul and the magnificent revelations. Regarding the absence of distinction between practical and decorative arts in the artwork of Muslims, and the unique and particular role of calligraphy in Iranian buildings, Iranian architects and masons in the post-Islamic arena, constructed the most practical and magnificent buildings and added a new dimension to the wisdom of art. Blending architectural skills and technique, geometrical calculations and principle-based designing, individual innovations and initiations, and utilizing other art forms, namely the offspring of Islamic civilization, calligraphy, and drawing inspiration from righteous and Islamic teachings and doctrines, Iranian architects and masons have eternally inscribed revelation on Iranian buildings.

Keywords: *Calligraphy, Islamic Architecture, Iran, Inscription*

INTRODUCTION

Companionship between architecture and calligraphy during Islamic civilization prompted us to study the role of calligraphy in tablets, tile work and superstructure of Iranian structures during post-Islamic period (Warberton, 2009). This role is to be studied in the following areas:

-Aesthetics: the primary characteristic found in calligraphies in historical buildings is the enhancement of visual value and grandeur. Presence of Sols writings with stretched alef and interwoven letters sometimes make the script somewhat illegible, which is a testimony to the importance of aesthetic value for calligraphy.

--Endowing identity: calligraphy is the soul to flesh of these buildings. Employing calligraphy not only enhances the aesthetic value of buildings, but also adds to their spiritual and heavenly expression and endows the architecture with a particular religious identity along with religious aura. Porticos, minarets, domes, tiles and margin calligraphy, alongside aesthetic value, contributes greatly to grasping the debt these buildings owe to Islamic and religious identity (Henfling, 2010).

-cognitive: paying heed to revelations and doctrines and choosing the revelations fitting the contexts of buildings in many works of architecture is quite visible. Choosing 18th verse from Tobesura for above the entrance to the mosques attests to the artists' awareness of the real creator and the absolute architect, and also the required qualities in the architect. On the whole, above anything, art has been in the service of religion and its exalted concepts, and the legacy of Islamic Iran in art considers the prophetic hadith in Kanzola'amal which says: decent script- and art on the whole- reveals God more perspicuously.

-Historical: in addition to all that went before, these calligraphies are of historical importance, because in majority of these buildings, the date of construction and the architect's name have been inscribed in abstract, which is suggestive of many historical mysteries (Rikhtegaran, 2003).

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The Place of Calligraphy in Architecture

With the advent of Islam, mosques were among the first creations to emerge. To observe Islamic rituals which are mainly of social and communal essence, gathering places belonging to pre-Islamic era would be ideal- mainly temples, churches, shrines and fire temple that underwent minor modifications to become mosques.

A. Papadopoulos, the contemporary orientalist and art connoisseur, remarks, Other art forms such as architecture, painting, etc. were influenced by non-Muslim world to some extent. But calligraphy is a pure breed, born and evolved in Islamic world and has influenced other art forms to some extent. Although calligraphy has been considered an excellent art form in other civilizations, namely Chinese, it has nowhere enjoyed the variety and sanctity of Islamic calligraphy and has never achieved such level of perfection and significance (Rikhtegaran, 2002). Greeks and Romans had never thought of script as a ground for artistic manifestation. But Muslims developed the thought that God's word must be adorned, as its grandeur requires. Calligraphy, for this reason, came to be known as a great art, an even the greatest, for centuries before painting joined it in 15th and 16th AD (Zekrgoo, 2001).

Humans, throughout history, have blended script and beauty to produce different calligraphies. They embark on the age of civilization, early human communities, as can be seen in figures 1 and 2, felt the need for a new communication medium so as to go beyond limitations of oral communication, bounds of time and space, and record and convey thoughts, intentions and concepts, establishing a more stable communications among humans.



Figure1: Two examples of pictorial writing, Egypt



Figure 2: Shapour Cave stone inscription, pictorial writing, before Islam

To this purpose, art forms of drawing and painting which were among the most primitive tools for communication were employed and through simplification in shapes and forms, humans came to invent pictorial writing. Combinations of writing and beauty were achieved in a variety of ways in all civilizations and cultures, but achievements of Muslim artists during the heights of Islamic culture and civilization, led to the emergence of Islamic calligraphy which is the peak of human artistry in writing and calligraphy. During this brilliant period, the art of calligraphy rose to such level of perfection and

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excellence that was elevated from mere decent writing to the status of abstract painting and heavenly art, and over a short course, Muslims produced unprecedented works of marvelous writing and calligraphy. Iranian artists played a major role in inventing and developing Islamic calligraphy and were pioneers in producing notable works of calligraphy and its applications in architecture.

Knowledge of visual and aesthetic characteristics of styles of calligraphy would certainly be impossible without extensive and regulated research into the genesis and evolutionary and structural process of each of them (Rashvand, 2001).

Art in ancient Iran (which started in pre-history and continued into 7th century) mainly consists of sculpting, architecture, reliefs, and painting to the end of that century, examples of which can be found in Persepolis, Sialk and, to some extent, Susa (see figure 3) (Davaloo and Mohammadi, 2001).



Figure 3: Examples of reliefs, Persepolis

Arrival of Aryans brought with it a new wave of culture and art (painting in particular) which is a mix of Greek, Egypt and Mesopotamia.

In post-Islamic era and with the domination of Omavi and Abbasi rulers over Iran, painting came to encounter a paradox.

Drawing on Islamic ban on pictorial representation, Omavi and Abbasi rulers prevented the growth of painting among people and imposed restrictions on artists, and the result being that Iranian artists turned to calligraphy to adorn their art, namely architecture.

The History of Islamic Calligraphy

This writing first flourished in Kufa and later in Abbasi era Baghdad became the center for Islamic culture.

“Ibn Muqla”, an Iranian by origin, founded upon “Kufi” writing style, and script called “Naskh”. Before long, well-known calligraphers such as “YaqtMosta’semi” introduced new elements into Naskh and add to its elegance.

In Iran, In 8th century Hijri and during Teymoori dynasty, a new style emerged which came to be known as “Nast’aliq”, which combined “Naskh” and “Taliq”. It was an invention mostly by “Mir Ali Tabrizi” and later made its way into India through Mongol kings. Figures 4 to 6 present famous Islamic buildings such as “TajMahal”, Known as one of the world wonders, are the creation of Iranian engineers and are embellished using calligraphies by Iranian calligraphers (Khatibi et al., 2001).

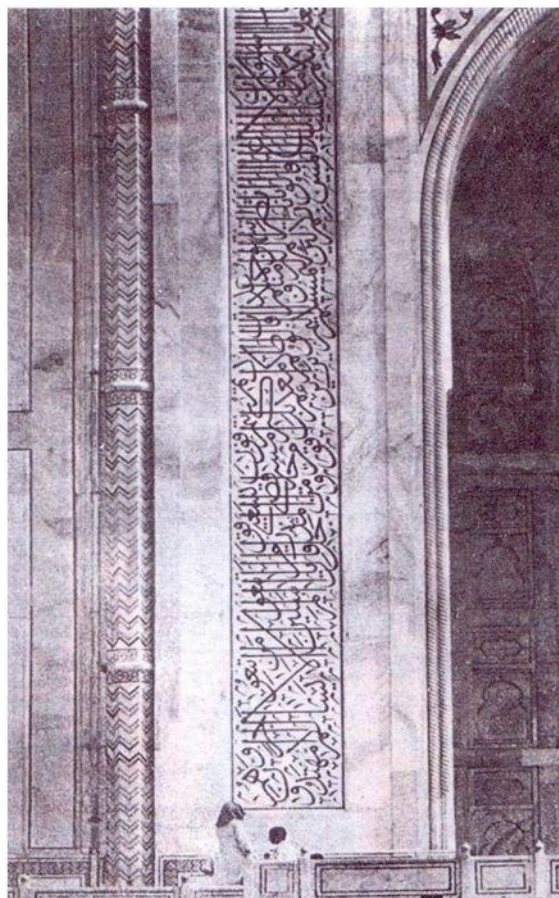


Figure 4: Calligraphy on southern wing in TajMahal by Iranian Artists

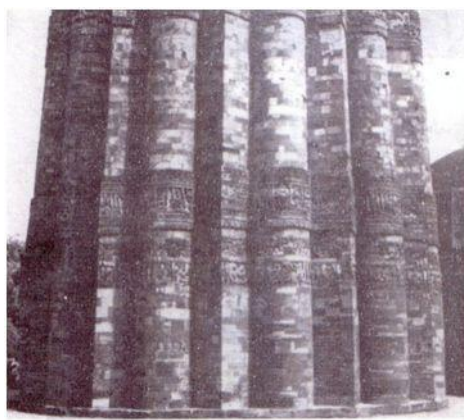


Figure 5: Qotb Minaret, Dehli, India

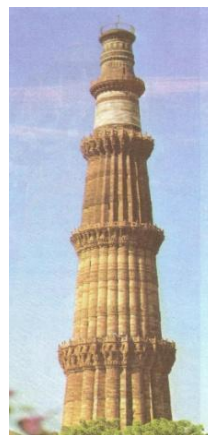


Figure 6: Qotb Minaret inscription, India

“Islamic culture and civilization”, employed art and artistic creation as a means of prayer and refinement, acquisition of virtues, manners and desirable morality, and elevation of human and brought with it invaluable outcome in the history of Islam. It should be noted that, in constructing all buildings, Muslim artists and architects has summoned their sincerity, good intentions and honest effort, trace of which is nowhere absent in Islamic buildings. But the expression of Islamic art and architecture is even more perspicuous in religious and non-profit buildings. In these buildings, laboring and artwork equates worship, charity and good deeds left behind (Aboozari *et al.*, 2001).

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An individual in a mosque, is never a mere observer, but in a way relates to meaning and spiritual echoes of depicted prayers and Koranic verses on the walls. Islamic architects and inscribers have made an attempt to create an atmosphere that expresses all spiritual features and qualities. In effect, the spiritual atmosphere generated by inscriptions in religious places such as mosques, shrines and temples leads one to intuition and illumination (Yasharter and Pearson, 1975). One the features of inscriptions in Islamic architecture is the employment of calligraphy as a decorative element and an agent to equalize different Islamic buildings with Qoranic themes, prayers and hadiths on interior and exterior surfaces on minarets, portals and the bases of domes.



Figure 7: Minaret in Imam Mosque, Isfahan



Figure 8: Entrance patio, Haj AbdolSamad abbey, Natanz

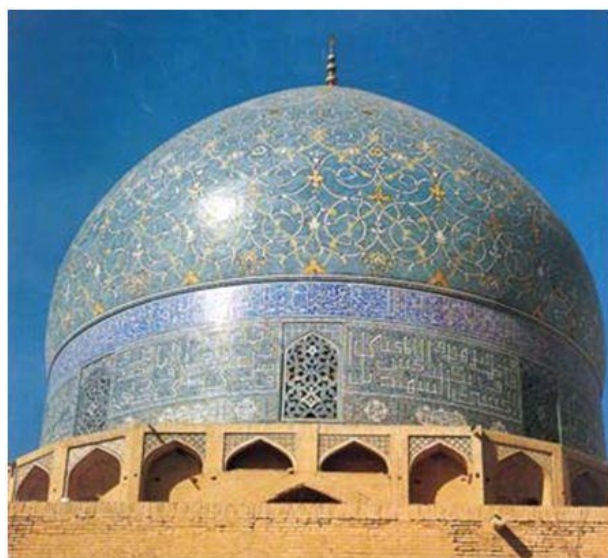


Figure 9: Imam Mosque's dome, Isfahan



Figure 10: Inside Imam mosque's dome, Isfahan



Figure 11: Inscription on tile, Imam Mosque, Isfahan

Another feature of inscriptions in Islamic architecture is the meanings and concepts that echo social, religious and cultural circumstances of the time when they were inscribed and demonstrate all creativities of Muslim artists and emergence of spiritual purity.

Inscriptions

As mentioned before, inscriptions are among the most notable symbolic elements in Islamic architecture, especially in mosques and tombs. Along with porticos, minarets, yards, sanctuaries which comprise most mosques, inscriptions are visible on the surface of porticos, minarets, yards, margins of sanctuaries, domes and around yards. Generally, the main feature of these Inscriptions is calligraphies and with the absence of elegantly inscribed words and statements, they lose the impact of their expression. Figures 12 to 15 present older inscriptions of brick-laying and frescos, and figures 16 to 18 illustrate newer inscriptions of Moarra tile and clay tile and some inscriptions engraved in stone (Hosseyni, 2001).



Figure 12: Imam Mosque, Ardestan, Saljooqi era

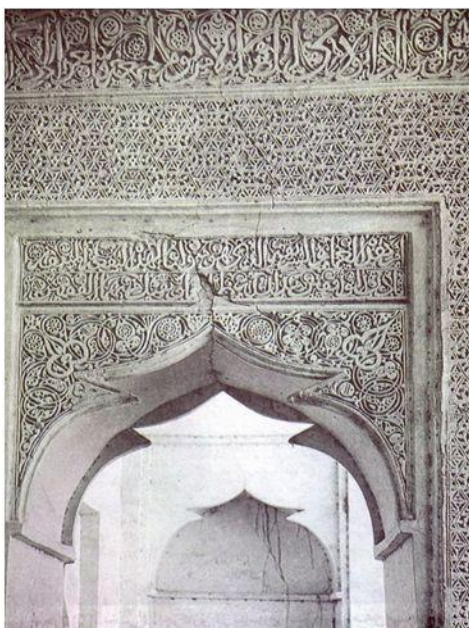


Figure 13: Bastam central mosque

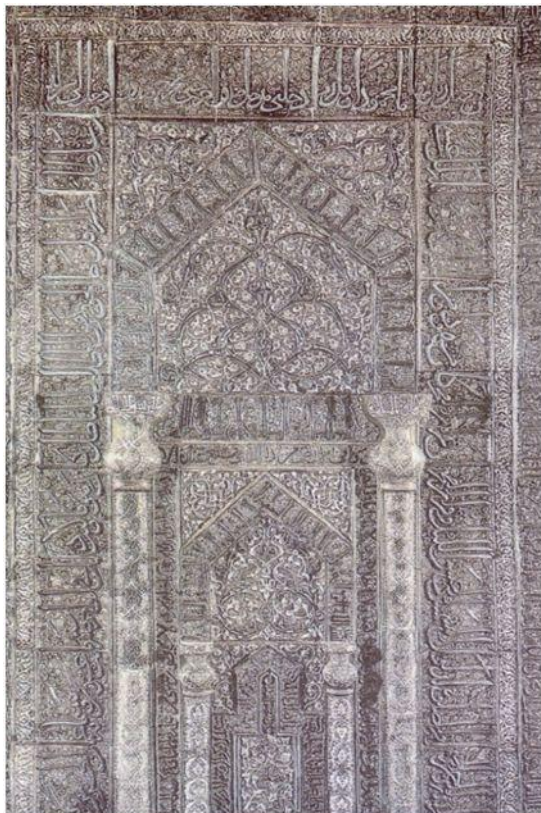


Figure 14: Meydan mosque (Emadi) sanctuary, Kashan

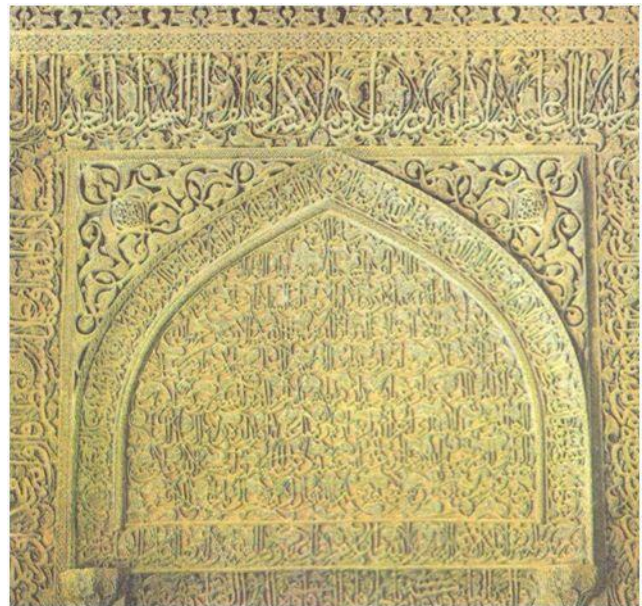


Figure 15: Oljayto sanctuary in central mosque, Isfahan

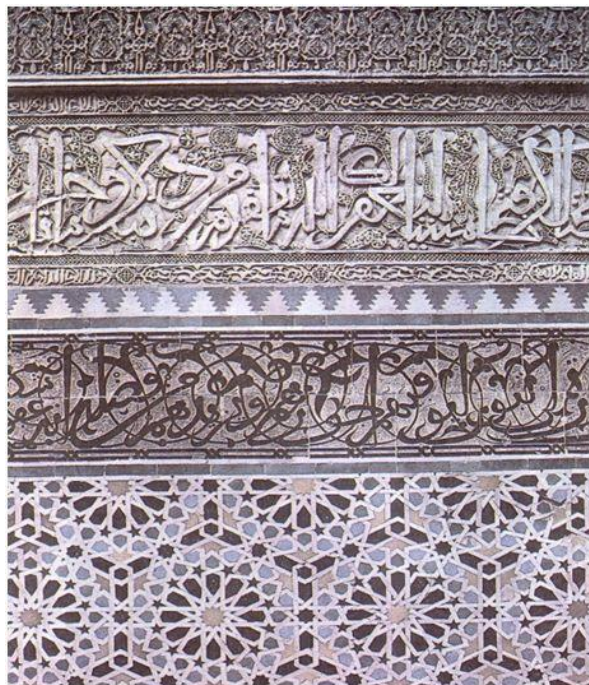


Figure 16: Examples of inscriptions in decorative script



Figure 17: SeyhkLotfolah mosque sanctuary, Isfahan

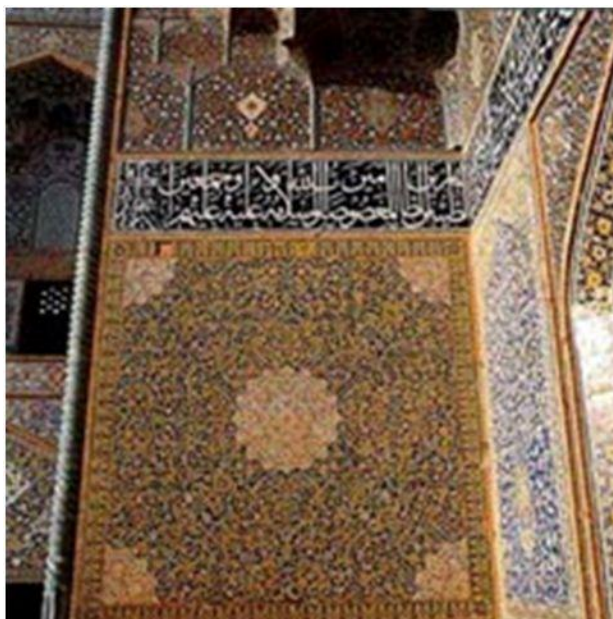


Figure 18: Imam mosque, Isfahan

According to figures 19 to 21, inscriptions dating back to the period between early Islamic centuries and Teymoori era and late Teymoori, are mainly china brick and frescos and carry decorative Kufi and Sols calligraphies, produced by masterful calligraphers or painter- calligraphers, adorning portals and walls in these religious places, as if these elegant scripts together with various images, glamorous colors and eye-pleasing curves, comprise a collection that draw admiration of all (Mirdanesh, 2001).



Figure 19: Inscription in Imam mosque, Isfahan



Figure 20: Inscription in SeyhkLotfolah mosque, Isfahan

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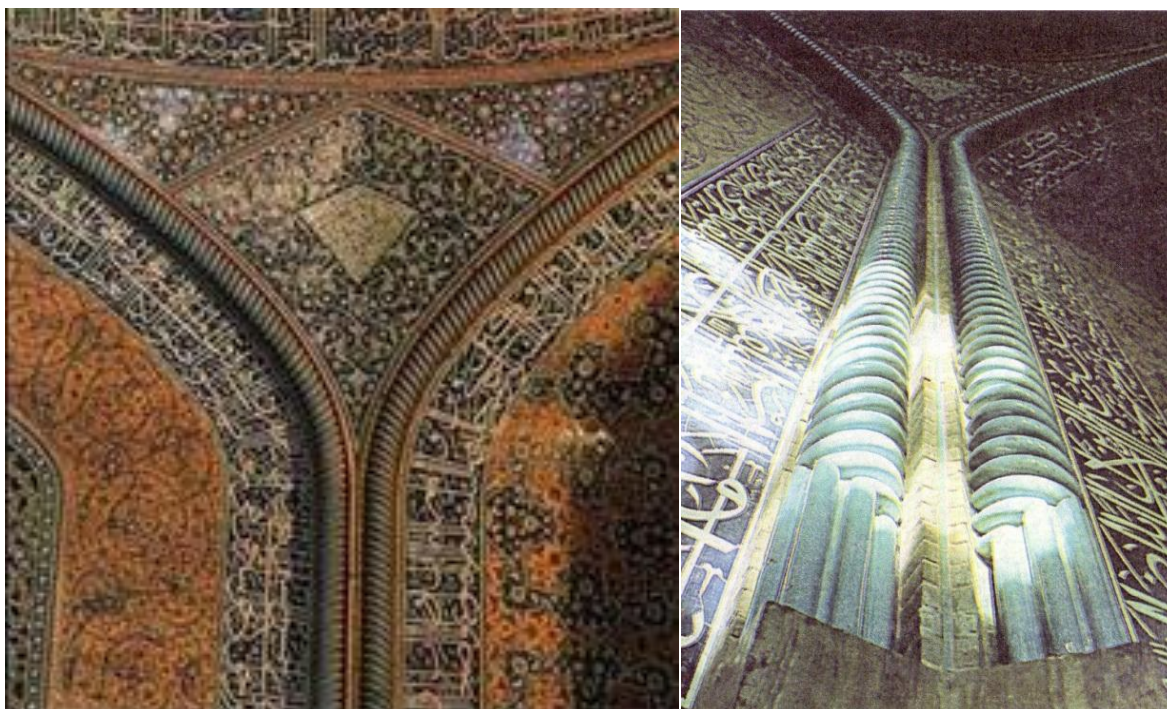


Figure 21: Inscription in Seyhk Lotfolah mosque, Isfahan

Conclusion

Islamic Iran's cultural and artistic legacy well depicts that unless a concept is clothed in artistic attire, it won't be persuasive and enduring, and unless artistic concepts are not committed to precious and exalted humane and Islamic concepts, they won't integrate into communal and religious identity of the people. Paying attention to the history of Islamic art and employing its enormous potential, both in engineering structures and laying foundation and constructing based on principles and in exterior design and using aesthetic and artistic skills, and combining it with architects and builders commitment to spiritual issues and religious concepts will eternally provide an enduring model of combining art and religion and enriching of art with religious concepts and expressing religious concepts through art.

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