

Significance of Epigraphy in the Islamic Architecture Emphasized on the Epigraphies in Enghelab Courtyard of Imam Reza Shrine

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Received 01 December 2020; revised 08 December 2020; accepted 01 January 2021

Abstract

The Imam Reza shrine is a kind of museum with varieties of Islamic arts. In this museum the art masterpieces are related to different historical periods. The age of this great museum is more than thirteen centuries. This is a well-known museum because of the valuable position of the holy shrine of ‘Alī ibn Mūsā ar-Riḍā. There are too much epigraphies around this place. These epigraphies have been repaired by the consideration to their history. There are too many epigraphies from Timurid Empire in the Enghelab Courtyard of Haram. Another name of this courtyard is ancient courtyard. These epigraphies indicate the social conditions of each period. The current research is descriptive-analytic. Library studies and also field studies were used in this research. The findings of this research indicate that epigraphy in the Islamic architecture has an effective role in order to create the spirituality spirit within the building. This kind of art is derived from the spiritual essence of Holy Quran. Therefore, the purpose of epigraphy in the holy shrine of ‘Alī ibn Mūsā ar-Riḍā is creation of spiritual communication between God and man. The recent studies show that most of the epigraphies are derived from Safavid era. Most of their concepts are related to the religious contexts.

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This article is based on PhD dissertation entitled “Metamorphosis of Architectural Ornaments of the Safavid and Qajar periods with phenomenological approach from the prospective of Henry Carbon (with emphasis on the old and new precincts of Razavi’s Holy Shrine”, under the supervision of Dr. Gholamali Hatam and advisor Dr. Mohammad Khazaei and Dr. Mohammad Aref in the Department of Analytic and Comparative Studies of Islamic Art, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

Keywords: Islamic Architecture; Epigraphy; Porches of Enghelab Courtyard; Concept of Epigraphy

1. Introduction

Arrays and decorates are the most important aspects in the Islamic architecture. These arrays are like stucco, tiling and brickwork. Epigraphy is an Arabic word which means army or the herd of horses (Rajaiee Baqhsorkhi and Basiri, 2012: 78). There are also other definitions for epigraphy such as written text, endowment, and acknowledgment (Khanipour, 2004: 160). According to the statement of Fazaeli about the script, the word epigraphy is “ketabat” in Persian concept. Epigraphy means big calligraphies which the katib writes on the tiles. After that, these tiles would take place on the walls, holy places, altars and other places (Fazaeli, 2005: 130). In the past, Epigraphy was used on different surfaces such as stone, wood and gypsum. In general, the word epigraphy is a kind of written text which is provided by means of different calligraphies, around buildings, mosques’ walls, and courtyards. Epigraphies are able to indicate the beliefs and ideologies of rulers in order to transform the information for people in the futures (Nasrallah zadeh, 2011: 308). Some epigraphies have the origin date and the end date. Some of these epigraphies explain about their decorating and restoration (Rajaiee Baqhsorkhi and Basiri, 2012: 81). There are different types of epigraphies as well as different subjects. Differentiation of these subjects is related to the different historical periods. The mentioned subjects indicate social, cultural, historical and religious conditions (Shayesteh far, 2002: 69). Enghelab courtyard is a set of marvelous epigraphies because of their different historical literature. Hence, the research questions are as the following:

What is the history of these epigraphies?

What are the roles of epigraphies in the holy shrine of Imam Reza?

What are the concepts of these epigraphies?

The method of this study is descriptive- analytic. This is also historical research. Data were collected through the library studies.

2. Islamic Architecture in Iran

In the seventeen century AD, many countries have been changed and participated in the establishment of Islamic culture. Iran is one of those countries which have valuable history in both culture and art. When Islam has been developed in Iran, too many mosques were established. Today, there is a piece of evidence from the first days of Islam. Some buildings such as Tarikhaneh Mosque in Damghan indicate that its designation is the same as the primary mosques of Arabs. These mosques have a rectangular apron and columnar shabestan without any window and decorating. Gradually, some mosques have been established with the Persian style and following the local houses of Khorasan. The mentioned mosques had four vaults with tegular and modeling decorating. Accordingly, the principles of the Islamic architecture have been established on the basis of Sasanian architecture (Sahragard, 2013: 98- 99). It should be mentioned that by the development of different cultures, decorating concept has been more important than the other issues. After the Achaemenid period, these types of decorating became more remarkable than the other types in Iran. This concept has been developed during the next periods and even in the Islamic period (Makkinejad, 2006: 62).

3. Epigraphy in Architecture

Since many years ago, one of the most remarkable decorating is epigraphy. Clay and metal tablets, glazed bricks, remained art works on columns and walls are the elements of valuable Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of Iran. Studies indicate that the artists in Parthian Empire and Sasanian Empire have been used the plaster design in order to decorate the walls. These designations led to the development of writing and script (Hatam, 2014: 196). The script was defined as one of the most important elements of unity within the Islamic world. Through the beginning of the Islamic era, the Arabic script had a remarkable value and replaced with the previous calligraphies (Rajaiee Baghsorkhi and Basiri, 2012: 22). After a few years, Naskh (script) has been developed in order to enhance the epigraphy of historical buildings and decorating the objects. After the five centuries, the Kufic script reaches to its maximum enhancement in Seljuq period. It was not able to read the Persian epigraphies without any dot, so the Naskh script was added to the historical epigraphies of Iran. Other scripts which have been used in the epigraphies of Iran are Thuluth and Nasta'liq scripts. These scripts have been used more after Savafid period (Hatam, 2014: 200). Although the oldest epigraphies with Thuluth scripts are related to the sixth century, it became the most important epigraphy less than 300 years. Following the propagation of kufi's script, it played an important role in the decorating of epigraphies. Generally, the Thuluth script is used in Tiling epigraphies, so it is a kind of religious symbol which is used in mosques and holy places (Afzaltoosi, 2009: 17). Nasta'liq script was used in the literary texts from the earliest of the ninth century. However, it was used in the Architectural decoration in the earliest of the eleventh century. The usage of this script is because of its special visual characteristics and forms of letters. This script became more comprehensive in Timurid period and then in Safavid period (Rajaiee Baghsorkhi and Basiri, 2012: 110).

4. Application of Epigraphy in the Building based on Concept

The concepts of epigraphies were different based on the applications of the buildings. Although the texts of holy Quran were used in religious and non-religious buildings, there were some non-religious poems in the decorating epigraphies. There were also some texts about eulogy and praise (Kunel, 2015: 64). The scribes must write the date and the name of the buildings. They also should consider the decorating part of the epigraphy in order to create an aesthetic appearance. In fact, the scribes tended to consider the decorating design of epigraphy rather than its readability. Thus, it can be seen that today, we are not able to read the texts on epigraphy easily. It can be concluded that the application of epigraphy was in the religious places. Different aspects of these epigraphies such as Holy Quran, spirituality, tradition, prophet's statements and hadith are hidden in these epigraphies. According to this statement, the subjects of religious epigraphies are derived from the spiritual facts (Shayestefar, 2002: 91).

5. History of Holy Shrine of Imam Reza and the Enghelab Courtyard

The magnificent mount of the holy shrine of Imam reza is almost square with the geometric shape (Alemzadeh, 2011: 30). There are many museums, libraries, Islamic Universities, research centers, cultural and service centers and the Holy Shrine dining room in the holy shrine of Imam Reza. However, different parts of Haram including portico, sanctuary and courtyard are places for pilgrims (Zarifian, 2008: 16). One of the most ancient courtyards of holy shrine of Imam Reza is Enghelab courtyard which is situated in the north of Rozey-e-Monavaraeh. Its name was ancient

courtyard or “Atiqh” courtyard. After the Islamic revolution, its name has been changed to Enghelab. This historical monument has been reconstructed too many times. This courtyard belongs to Timurid and Safavid periods. Its primary building is related to the ninth century in the late Timurid periods. This courtyard is situated on the back of the head of Imam Reza. The half of this courtyard is related to Ali-Shir Nava'I and the other part is related to the Abbas I of Persia (Sani-ol Douleh, 1983: 129). When Abbas I of Persia traveled to Mashhad, he found out that the courtyard is too small, so he began to develop the courtyard, thus he established two Iwans in the east and west of the courtyard. Shah Abbas II reconstructed the courtyard in 1646. The area of this courtyard is almost 6740 m² with four big Ivan which is in the symmetry mode of each other. The names are as the following: Tala, Abbasi, Saat, Naghare. All Iwans are situated in the main entrances of Haram except the southern Iwan. Iwans have significant value because of their especial characteristics. They prevent from the sun radiation (Hill and Grayer, 1997: 18-19). Iwans also have remarkable visual scene because of their form and location. There are two small passages in both sides of each Iwan (Feyz, 1943: 381). There are 48 rooms and attics around the Iwans (Alemzadeh, 2011: 229). There are other parts in this courtyard such as Saat tower, Steel Window, Naghareh Khaneh, two jewelry minaret and dome.

6. Classification based on Concept ad Context

As it stated before, epigraphies have different concepts and applications. These epigraphies are classified based on their concepts as the following: 1) religious epigraphies including Quran verses, eulogy and pray, 2) Constructed epigraphies including the information about the date of origin, and its restoration, 3) combination of religious and constructed epigraphies (Sahragard, 2013: 38).

6.1. Religious Epigraphies

These types of epigraphies contain religious texts which are classified to different categories: epigraphies with the verses of holy Quran. Generally, the mentioned verses are from the small surahs or the long ones. Āyat al-Kursī is the most common verse in the epigraphies. These kinds of epigraphies are located in the main parts of the building or courtyards (Shayestefar, 2001: 60). These Iwans are in Enghelab courtyard more than other courtyards. These kinds of epigraphies are in the outer periphery of these Iwans. Sūrat Maryam is written with Thuluth script on the outer periphery of southern Iwan. Its calligrapher is Emami. The verse 24 of Maryam Surah and verse 19 of Yasin Surah are combined with each other in Figure 1. Sūra al-Insān is also written on the epigraphy of the outer periphery of western Iwan (Figure 2). There is also Āyat al-Kursī written on the top side of Iwan (Figure3). There is a room in the frontal side of Saat Iwan with Āyat al-Kursī written text (Figure 4). There is also Sūrat al-Muzzammil written texts on the epigraphy of eastern Iwan with Thuluth and its scribe is Mashhadi (Figure 5). Al-Noor Surah is also written on the frontal side of Iwan (Figure 6). Finally, the Jome Surrah also is written in the northern periphery of Abbasi Iwan (Figure 7). Verses 26 and 27 of Al-e-Emran Surah and Al-Kosar are also written on the bottom of the epigraphy (Figure 8).



Fig 1 Beginning and ending side of epigraphy in the outer periphery of Iwan-e-Tala



Fig 2 Beginning and ending side of the outer periphery of Iwan-e-Saat



Fig 3 The epigraphy of frontal side of Iwan-e-Saat



Fig 4 Part of epigraphy within the room of Iwan-e-Saat



Fig 5 Beginning and ending side of the periphery of epigraphy-Iwan e Naqareh

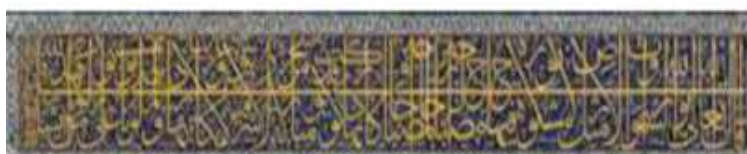


Fig 6 Frontal epigraphy of Iwan e Naqareh



Fig 7 Beginning and ending outer periphery of epigraphy-Iwan e Abbasi

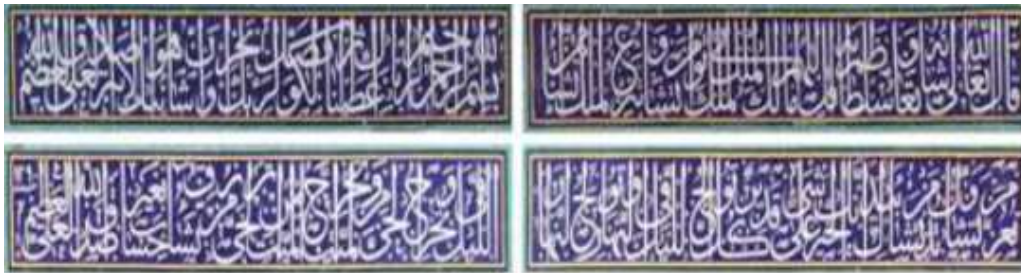


Fig 8 Internal epigraphies of Iwan-e-Abbasi

The second type of religious epigraphies is related to the ahadith of Imams and prophet. The history of these epigraphies returns to the fourth century. In fact, ahadith of Imams became more common after Safavid period (Sahragard, 2013: 39). These types of epigraphies belong to the Safavid period. There is a scroll epigraphy with the Thuluth script within Iwan-e-Tala (Atarodi, 1992: 206-207) (Figure 9). There are some ahadith about the significant value of Imam Reza pray with Nasta'liq script and Persian language. It should be mentioned that there is not any date on these epigraphies. However, there is an epigraphy in front of the Ezareh wall that indicates the reconstruction in Qajar period (Figure 10 and Figure 11). There are some hadith with Thuluth script under the vault within the Iwan-e- Saat. This kind of script is in companion with arabesque. The mentioned hadith are stated by Sahih al-Bukhari and Moslem (Atarodi, 1992: 210-211) (Figure12). There are other hadiths from Prophet Muhammad and Imam Sadeq with Thuluth script (Figure13). There is also another hadith from Imam Sadeq in Iwan on the entrance door with Thuluth script (Figure14).



Fig 9 Beginning and ending side of the internal epigraphy within the Iwan-e-Tala



Fig 10 The epigraphy on the upper side of Ezareh- Iwan-e-Tala



Fig 11 The upper epigraphy in the left side within Iwan-e-Tala



Fig 12 Part of the epigraphy within the Iwan-e-Saat



Fig 13 Part of the internal epigraphy of Iwan-e-Naqareh



Fig 14 Part of the internal epigraphy within the room of Iwan-e-Naqareh

There are some epigraphies about eulogy of Imams and prophets. It should be mentioned that some groups of epigraphies are different in their meaning and concepts. The texts of these epigraphies are Persian which have been stated in the form of Qasida and ghazal. Usually, these types of epigraphies are about the current ruler and eulogy of Imam (Rajaiee Baqsorkhi and Basiri, 2012: 24). The most significant sample of this kind of epigraphy is in the sanctuary of Iwan-e-Tala which is a kind of Qasida. This Qasida is about the eulogy of Imam Reza with Nasta'liq script during the ruling of Nader Shah Afshar. There is some information about its scribe and the date of origin (Figure 15). There are also some epigraphies in both sides of the entrance doors with Nasta'liq script on the Marble stone (Figure 16 and Figure 17). Another type of this epigraphy is in Iwan-e-Abbasi. There is Dua-e-NadeAli on the right side of the Iwan with Nasta'liq script. On the other side there is a pray from Imam Ali (peace be upon him) (Figure 18). NadeAli is a pray for demanding help from Imam Ali (peace be upon him). The expression “Ali, Ali, Ali” is the most common expression in many epigraphies (Shayesteh Far, 2002: 84). This expression is in the Safavid holy places or in some Timurid places. There is also Salawat which has been written on the periphery of sanctuary within Iwan (Figure19). There is an epigraphic tablet with the expression “‘Alī ibn Mūsā ar-Riḏā” which is curved on the tablet (Figure 20).



Fig 15 Parts of the internal epigraphies of the Iwan-e-Tala



Fig 16 The upper epigraphies of internal sanctuary if Iwan-e-Tala



Fig 17 Parts of epigraphies on the upper side of Ezareh-entrance doors of Rozey-e-Monavvareh-Iwan-e-Tala



Fig 18 Internal epigraphies of Iwan-e-Abbasi



Fig 19 Parts of the epigraphies around the inner sanctuary-Iwan-e-Abbasi



Fig 20 The internal epigraphy of Iwan-e-Abbasi

6.2. Constructed Epigraphy

This group of epigraphies contains information about the data of construction, the name of architecture and the time of restoration. Many of these epigraphies are written in Persian or Arabic. In general, they fixed these epigraphies with the name of the ruler in the center. It should be mentioned that the position of the ruler and the restoration date were the two main parameters of epigraphies' designation (Sahragard, 2013: 40). This type of epigraphy is on the frontal side of Iwan-e-Tala with Thuluth script. Its scribe was Emami in Safavid Era. This epigraphy was destroyed at the time of Amir Ali Shir (Atarodi, 1992: 203-204) (Figure 21). There is another epigraphy under the Qasida within the sanctuary of Iwan-e-Tala and on the upper side of Ezareh stone. The mentioned epigraphy is related to the time of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar (Atarodi, 1992: 206) (Figure 22). There is an epigraphy under the head of Iwan-e-Abbasi (Figure 23). There is also an epigraphy with Nasta'liq script which is related to Enghelab courtyard (Figure 24). According to the history of Astan-e-Qods, there was an epigraphy held on this part of Iwan (Motamen, 1976: 126). Other types of epigraphies within the sanctuary of Iwan-e-Abbasi indicate varieties of restorations in Safavid and Qajar periods (Figure 25 and Figure 26)



Fig 21 The frontal epigraphy of Iwan-e-Tala



Fig 22 The epigraphy under the sanctuary of Iwan-e-Tala



Fig 23 The frontal epigraphy of Iwan-e-Abbasi



Fig 24 The frontal sanctuary within Iwan-e-Abbasi



Fig 25 Parts of internal walls of Iwan-e-Abbasi sanctuary



Fig 26 Internal walls of Iwan-e-Abbasi sanctuary

6.3. Constructed-Religious Epigraphies

Some religious epigraphies contain information about their scribes and creators. Otherwise, there are some constructed epigraphies including verses of Holy Quran and Hadith. These types of epigraphies are combined epigraphies. As it mentioned before, the epigraphies on the Ezareh within Iwan-e-Tala contain information related to Naser al-Din Shah Qajar. In the other group, there are some religious texts and information about the construction of the place (Rajaiee Baqsorkhi and Basiri, 2012: 24). It should be mentioned that the name of employer is stated after the following expressions: "Hasab-Al-Amr" or "Hasab-Al-Farmayesh". This type of epigraphy is on the bases of columns of three Iwans as follows: Saat, Abbasi, Naqareh khaneh. All parts of this epigraphy are written in Thuluth script. There are two epigraphies on the Iwan-e-Abbasi base. The scribes of the two mentioned epigraphies are as the following: Nayeb Aqaiee and Mirza Mosa Khan. The names of the above scribes are curved on these epigraphies (Figure27). There is a written tablet on the right side of Iwan-e-Naqareh khaneh including the creator of the epigraphy (Figure28). According to the the valid documents, this Iwan needed restoration in 1967. They began to remove the broken tiles in order to set some great mosaics (Motamen, 1976: 129). There are also other epigraphies on the both sides of Iwan-e-Saat. There are some verses of holy Quran on these epigraphies (Figure 29). There are also some poems on the bottom of these epigraphies with Nasta'liq script about eulogy of Allah (Figure 30) (Table 1, Table 2, Table 3, Table 4).



Fig 27 Epigraphies on the base of Iwan-e-Abbasi



Fig 28 Epigraphies on the base of Iwan-e-Naqareh







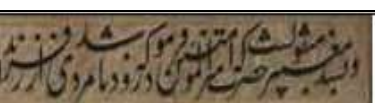


Fig 29 Epigraphies on the base of Iwan-e-Saat



Fig 30 Epigraphies on the base of Iwan-e-Saat

Table 1 Epigraphies of Iwan-e-Tala

Shape	Number	Position	Date	Concept
	1	Periphery of Iwan	No date	Religious-Maryam & Yasin Surahs
	21	Front of Iwan	1674	constructed
	9	In Iwan	1732	Religious-Hadith
	16	Upper side the sanctuary	No date	Religious-Hadith
	15	Within sanctuary	1732	Religious-constructed (Qasida)
	22	On the Ezareh of sanctuary	No date	constructed
	10	On the Ezareh	No date	Religious-Hadith












	11	On the Ezareh	No date	Religious-hadith
	17	On the Ezareh	No date	Religious-pray

Table 2 Epigraphies of Iwan-e-Abbasi

Shape	Number	Position	Date	Concept
	7	Periphery of Iwan	1845	Religious (Al-Jumua Surah)
	23	Head of Iwan	1649	Constructed
	27	Columns of Iwan	1845	Constructed
	18	Within Iwan	1649	Pray
	8	Under the inner rooms	1873	Religious
	19	Around sanctuary	1649	Religious
	24	Head of sanctuary	1978	Constructed
	25	Within sanctuary	1649	Constructed
	26	Within sanctuary	1796	constructed


	20	Within sanctuary	1873	Religious-Imam's name
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Table 3 Epigraphies of Iwan-e-Saat












Shape	Number	Position	Date	Concept
	2	Periphery of Iwan	1845	Religious
	3	Head of Iwan	1845	religious
	29	Columns of Iwan	No date	constructed
	30	Columns of Iwan	No date	poem
	12	Within Iwan	No date	religious
	4	Upper side of the inner room	No date	religious

Table 4 Epigraphies of Iwan-e-Naqareh

Shape	Number	Position	Date	Concept
	5	Periphery of Iwan	1844	Religious-Al-Mozammel
	28	Columns of Iwan	1650	Constructed
	6	Head of Iwan	No date	Religious-Noor Surah

	13	In Iwan	1649	Religious-Hadith
	14	In the Iwan's room	1967	Religious-Hadith

7. Conclusion

The historical identity of each place is dependent on its architecture and epigraphies. Thus, epigraphies play important role in the field of architecture. In other words, epigraphies are the symbols of different beliefs and historical periods. Epigraphies have two special aspects: artistic and ethical. Decorating of epigraphies creates visual appearance and insight. Otherwise, artistic aspect creates cooperation among form, message and materials. A process of evolution in the decorating system of Islamic periods is derived from the experts in the architecture field. Muslim artists always try to create spirituality by means of Arabic calligraphy and epigraphy. Calligraphy has spiritual nature and derived from the divine origin. Therefore, epigraphies are useful in order to create spiritual spirit in the holy places. According to the recent studies, epigraphies must be kept in Iwans. All the outer peripheries of Iwans are decorated with holy Quran Surahs. The inner spaces of Iwans are decorated with Ahadith. Constructed epigraphies are implemented in the following spaces: Naqare khaneh, Saat, sanctuary, head of Iwan-e-Tala and Iwan-Abbasi, columns of Iwan-e-Abbasi. The greatest number of religious epigraphies belong to Safavid Dynasty with Thuluth script. The greatest number of constructed epigraphies belong to Qajar Dynasty. Epigraphies with poems are in the sanctuary of Iwan-e-Tala which is belonged to Afsharid period. The important point is that the epigraphies with Nasta'liq script belong to the periods after Safavid. Constructed epigraphies are hanged in the inner sanctuary of the Iwans. Constructed epigraphies were in Thuluth script in Safavid period. The position of these epigraphies is on the front head of Iwan. In addition, the epigraphies in Iwan-e-Saat and Naqareh Khaneh do not indicate any name of their creators. The most constructed epigraphies with the name of rulers belong to Qajar period. The rulers liked to present themselves more than other periods in Qajar period.

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