

Manifestations of Shiite Thoughts in the Architecture and Decorations of Soltaniyeh Dome

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Abstract Islamic Art and Architecture is influenced by cosmological foundations of Islam and also a reflection of religious and spiritual facts. An example of religious-burial architecture in Ilkhani era is Soltaniyeh Dome located in Soltaniyeh town, Zanjan province, northwest of Iran. Evidence supports the fact that Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh —the founder of the dome—was under the impression of Shi'a visions and beliefs, when spacing and making ornaments. The main purpose of this research is recognition of Shiite principles dominating design and ornaments of this huge historical monument. One such principle is the belief that there are 12 successors to the holy prophet who continue his teachings among people after his passing. Research findings show that the Contents of epigraphs, precise appropriateness of ornaments, and symbolic and overt language of sacred geometry of this huge monument clearly reflect that the Shia believe in Imamate principle, justice and its inner and interpretative attitude toward affairs of all kind. Implementing some certain numbers in geometrical figures and using different shades of green and blue colours reflect Shiite spirituality and mental unity of architectures and artists of this work with underlying principles of this religion.

Keywords Islamic architecture, Soltaniyeh Dome, Principles of Shiite thought, Decorative ornaments, Ilkhani era

1. Introduction

Islamic architecture is an art rooted in Islamic school with its body based on beliefs, wisdom, and mystic issues. It can be deemed as the apotheosis of Islamic art laying its real nature on two elements, namely ‘wisdom’ and ‘technique’. By the help of the first element, the artist observes mystic and religious truths; through the other, he manifests his inspirations and mental ideas and makes an astonishing change in the real world. Respecting the principles of Shiite religion is one of the main foundations of creating works of art among Islamic artists, and the method of its manifestation has been varied in terms of quality and quantity during Islamic-Iranian art history depending on the ruling governments—be them Shiite or non-Shiite ones. In some historical periods especially Buyid (Āl-e Buye), Timurid, and Safavid dynasties, Shiite elements are outstanding and tangible while in other periods they are either hidden or pale [1]. By taking a look at evolution history of Shiite art, it can be concluded that there has been a regular interaction between structure of political systems ruling Iran and this kind of art. Moreover, Shi'a spirit has been mostly under impression of particular arts

like architecture and calligraphy.

Since the dawn of Islam in Iran, we are facing a wave of construction of some tombs and buildings in the forms of domes and monuments in addition to mosques in Iranian architecture whose ornaments and architecture are in the utmost beauty and quality indicating direct impression of religious beliefs of their constructors. Soltaniyeh Dome is one such historical monument consisting of an octagonal building to which the bodies of Shiite Imams were supposed to be transferred. Discovering and explaining the sacred principles dominating its design is among the most important means to review the spiritual thoughts and knowledge of architectures of Iran. It is also a great way for confirming the beliefs and cultural thoughts of the governors and artists of that time.

This huge monument was constructed in Ilkhani era, ordered by Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh (Oljaito), and executed by the architect Alishah from 703AH/1303AD to 713AH/1313AD in Zanjan [2]. The main purpose of such monument was constructing a tomb for the sultan, and it is narrated that another purpose was to transfer the dead bodies of the first through third Imams of Shi'a from Iraq to that place. This complex represents two periods of decoration—each with different features. In the first period planned for transferring dead bodies of holy Imams, we face some ornaments with tiling decorated with Kufic handwriting in the center that include geometrical designs, Kufic scripts, and rectangular constructions with turquoise,

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azure, and blue tiles. The ornaments of second period probably date back to the time when the plan for transferring dead bodies of holy Imams was cancelled, so previous decorations including some other beautiful epigraphs and designs were covered by a plaster coating then [3]. Nonetheless, conversion of Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh to Islam and Shia in the short interval between 709AH/1309AD to 713AH/1313AD helped the propagation of that across the country and it paved the way for absorbing the art exported by the Mogul rulers from the eastern Asian countries in Iranian-Islamic concept and reforming them based on local traditions and experiences [4]. Architecture and decorations of Soltaniyeh Dome are formed significantly under the influence of attitudes of the ruler of the time and his political and cultural approaches which reflect Islamic vision and Shia tendencies both in terms of framework (main Shabestan, verandas, dome and minarets), and decorations (light, colour, epigraphs, sacred figures and numbers).

1.1. Research Goals and Background

This research aims at reaching religious foundations of Shia reflected in the architecture and decorations of Soltaniyeh Dome. Moreover, it focuses on identifying the thoughts which provided grounds for the creation of such a huge monument and decorative elements and writings on its surface. The investigations proved that none of the previous researches were in line with the scope of this research, and they were mainly introducing the monument in historical terms and explaining its decorations and architecture in a descriptive way without referring to the prevailing principles of belief. In Soltaniyeh bibliography, names of a large number of books, papers, student theses, research plans, travel accounts, manuscripts and general works on the monument are inserted [5]. Professor Sheila Blair has also significantly contributed to the body of research regarding the art and decorations of this huge monument¹ by submitting a number of papers on this topic.

A list of some books and papers on the architecture of this building is provided in the following table. Among them, only the paper written by Mr. Hatef Siahkouhian titled ‘The Effects of Islamic Mysticism on Iranian Architecture by an Emphasis on Decorations of Soltaniyeh Dome’ has had a look at mystical and spiritual foundations dominating the epigraphs, figures, and decorations of this significant monument. Some written works in the field of Shiite art are mentioned below references.

Table 1. A list of some books and papers on the architecture of Soltaniyeh Dome

Book/Paper	Author/Authors
Islamic Art and Architecture	Robert Hillenbrand
Iranian Art	Andre Godard
Iranian Architecture	Arthur Pope
Islamic Art and Architecture (2)	Sheila Blair and Jonathan Blum
Highlights of Iranian Art	Richard Ettinghausen and Ehsan Yarshater
Iranian Islamic Art in Ilkhani Era	Donald Newton Wilber
Iranian Architecture Stylistics	Mohammad Karim Pirnia
Iranian Capitals	Mohammad Yousef Kiani
Architecture of Soltaniyeh Dome On the Crossroad of Art	Hooshang Sobooti
Study of Historical Works of Soltaniyeh	Hooshang Sobooti
Soltaniyeh Dome on the Basis of Epigraphs	Abdollah Ghoochani
Soltaniyeh	Nasser Takmil Homayoun
Clavijo Travel Account	Ruy Gonzalez de Clavijo
‘Epigraphic Ornaments of Soltaniyeh Dome’	Mahnaz Shayestehfar
‘Generalities on Architecture of Soltaniyeh Dome’	Ahmad Asgharian
‘The Effects of Islamic Mysticism on Iranian Architecture with an Emphasis on Architecture of Soltaniyeh Dome’	Hatef Siahkouhian
‘A Study on Soltaniyeh Dome’	Reza Kasaee

1.2. Research Questions

What are the intellectual foundations and principles of Shiite religion? To what extent can the architecture and decorations of Soltaniyeh Dome express the spiritual principles and dominant message of the founders and the spirit manifested in this huge monument? By analyzing the artistic elements of this monument, the present paper indicates how the beliefs and teachings of Shiite religion are inserted in the contents of epigraphs, figures, and the colours in this magnificent construction.

1.3. Research Method

This research employs a descriptive, analytical, and interpretative methodology, and the data has been collected through field and library studies. First of all, a sufficient explanation on procedure of construction of Soltaniyeh Dome and the goals behind that is provided by referring to the historical and art resources; subsequently, the type of architecture and implemented decorations are studied in a descriptive way. Afterward, by expressing the fundamental beliefs of Shiite religion, the facades of architecture and decorations of Soltaniyeh Dome are explained in an analytical and interpretive way.

¹ Some of her papers are as follows:

Sheila Blair ‘The Epigraphic program of the tomb of Oljaito at Soltaniyeh: Meaning in Mogul Architecture’, in *Journal of Islamic Art*, vol.2 (1987), 43-96.
 Sheila Blair ‘The Ilkhani Palace’, in *Art Orientalis*, vol. XXIV (1994), 244- 235.
 Sheila Blair ‘The Mogul Capital of Soltaniyeh the Imperial’, in *Iran*, vol. XXIV (1986), 139- 151.
 Sheila Blair ‘Soltaniyeh Monuments’, in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd.ed, vol. 8 (1995), 860- 861.

2. Performance and the Causes of Creation of Soltaniyeh Dome

Form—or the facade of work in Islamic art and architecture—is considered to be a reflected image of meaning. In other words, meaning is the basis for the facade and appearance of the construction in the mind of an artist, and is then shaped into various artistic forms. But it should be considered that appearance of the meaning follows a pre-set cause. Therefore, assuming the fact that architectural aspect and decorative forms of Soltaniyeh Dome are formed on the basis of Shiite thoughts and beliefs, causes and roots which paved the way for flourishing of such meanings and concepts in Ilkhani era need to be clarified beforehand.

In last years of his life, Ghazan Khan, the 7th king of Mogul, decided to construct a city in a grassland area later known as ‘Soltaniyeh’. It contained a school, a clinic, a guest’s reception, a house of Sadats (the descendants of Imam Ali), a convent, a library, a law office, a court, and a grand mosque. The construction began as of 703AH/1303AD by Oljaito (brother of Ghazan Khan) and it took about ten years to be completed [6]. According to the tradition prevalent among the kings of Mogul, a great dome was constructed in the middle of city upon his order to be used as his tomb². It had lots of endowments and was managed in a unique way (figure 1), although Etemadal-saltaneh denied the matter in the book Meratol Boldan and named it only as a grand mosque in that era³. In any case, at the time of building the construction Sultan Mohammad was a Muslim and he had a tendency towards Hanafite belief of Sunnis. Until he officially became a Shiite in 709AH/1309AD upon encouragement of one of his high-ranked men, Tarmtaz, and he ordered the preachers to mention the names of Ali, Hassan, and Hossain, to inscribe the names of twelve Imams on coins across Iran, and to add the phrase ‘Hurry for the best deed’ in the call for prayer [11]. In the meantime, all the Shiite top clergymen from all regions were invited to come to his court, and from among them, Sultan chose the greatest elite who was Jamaleddin bin Motahar Helli (Allameh Helli) and made him his attendant [12]. According to some historical resources, after changing his religion, Sultan Mohammad decided to turn his grave into a shrine for the bodies of Imam

Ali (pbuh) and Imam Hossian (pbuh); though the idea was ruled out by some great scholars of Shia and hence cancelled. The interesting point is that the religion conversion and the order of Sultan for transferring the dead bodies of Shiite Imams took place at the beginning of the first stage of the decorations.⁴ According to date of some epigraphs made on the walls, external decorations were completed in 710AH/1310AD (façade of eastern veranda) and the internal decorations were completed in 713AH/1313AD [14]. In the beginning, the construction was supervised by Khajeh Saadeddin, the Shiite minister of Sultan Mohammad, and after he was murdered in 711AH/1311AD, Khajeh Rashideddin Fazlollah, a wise minister of shafei belief took his place. Tajuddin AliShah Jilani was the last manager of the construction who, after killing Khajeh Rashideddin Fazlollah and destroying many of his works, undertook the decorations of the second stage. [14]. Therefore, it is necessary to place our interpretations of the decorative elements of this huge monument in line with intellectual and religious circumstances and with the grounds for the emergence of generation of political elites and Shiite scholars in that era.



Figure 1. Dome of Soltaniyeh

3. Architecture and Decorations of Soltaniyeh Dome

Iranians have presented the greatest examples of art based on Islamic vision and Soltaniyeh Dome is one of the most outstanding ones. This octagonal monument—with a

² Eight researchers such as Rashidi in Jameol Tavarikh believe that Sultan Mohammad is buried in the cellar of this monument but twelve other researchers have rejected the idea. [7]. they believe that he was buried somewhere in hidden due to some political reasons or the beliefs of Mogul kings to their ancestral rituals (Shemini). It reads so in Roazatol safá by its author: “Oljaito passed away at the night of Eid e Fetr in 716AH/1316AD, and he was buried under a dome that he had built in Soltaniyeh.” [8]. Mohammad ibn Mahmoud Amoli believes that he was buried there as well: “Oljaito built a dome with eight minarets to be served as his tomb later. He built some charity houses there and donated many properties to the monument.” [9].

³ “The idea that the monument was built to be the tomb of Sultan *Khodabandeh* (*Oljaito*) is completely wrong and it was a Friday mosque from the very beginning and another monument was build next to that to be served as a tomb for Sultan *Khodabandeh* that is already there and it called as ‘*Chaharsoo*’ by the people.” [10].

⁴ Professor Pirosan Paolozzi writes so in this regard: “*Oljaito* was the first emperor of Moguls periods in Iran who converted to Sunni religion because he was already baptized in his childhood. Due to political and state issues, he converted to Shi'a later. His tomb underwent the same changes during its construction because it was generally designed to be used as his tomb but it was immediately allocated to a tomb for the dead bodies of Imams and the martyrs of *Karbala*. By doing so, he was planning to give a lasting name and reputation to Soltaniyeh city but his intention was not only turned down in Baghdad but also across the whole Iran and for that reason he had to change his mind.” [13].

hemisphere dome as high as 54m and a diameter of 25m—has eight minarets coated with turquoise and azure tiles of Khofte-bidar style which all have added to their beauty and strength. There is a labyrinth below the minarets circling the monument with arched roofs covered by decorative plaster work in imitation of a delicate brick work [15]. The roof of western, northwest, eastern and northeast verandas in that part are decorated with star-shaped motifs with the word Allah in the middle written in Sols script ; by implementing white, cream, and ochre bricks and colorful figures, a masterpiece in combination of colors, plaster, and brick is presented. This labyrinth which is thought of as the roof of the monument and a leg for the dome leads to the second floor through some spiral stairs. The second floor is actually a corridor around the monument and consists of some rooms facing the main part of the building. This part has some beautiful decorations including tiling, plaster work, honeycomb work (Muqarnas), a combination of tiles, bricks, and epigraphs that are “among the newfound types of art of calligraphy in Islamic architecture of Iran.” [16]. The eight sides of monument are presented in the ground floor in the form of eight porticos (four big and four small) representing the eight gates of heaven; their ‘good gates’ include three floors and three parts: the main Hall of Worshiping, Prayer room, and Cellar (Ghonbadkhane, Torbatkhane⁵, Sardabe) [7]. Sheila Blair describes the internal space of Soltaniyeh dome as follows:

“The high internal space of Soltaniyeh monument, which is one of the highest connected spaces in the middle centuries with a magnificent outside outlook of the huge construction, deeply astonishes the viewer. The glory and dignity of its space indicate the capability of the designers who could make Sultan Mohammad’s dreams for such a unique and complicated monument come true” [17].

As mentioned before, tiles and bricks with epigraphs, mingled figures of flowers and stars were used to decorate the inside walls of the monument during the two decoration phases. The four main walls of the monument are decorated with a design of intersecting polygons and pentagram stars by using tiles and plaster work, and the other four walls are decorated with blue tiles and light brown bricks. The unique method of implementing the plans and decorations of Soltaniyeh Dome indicates that “the construction of this tomb was not an imitation of any other building and was an invention in construction of a monument with magnificent decorations, proving that tiling reached its climax in Ilkhami era.” [18]

There are many structural and written elements in architecture and decorations of this huge monument that have created a unique balance and eminence supporting the achievement of religious and spiritual goals of Shiite belief in that era. Moguls’ religious tolerance of their ideas in

Ilkhami era promoted in most cases religious debates and a kind of religious freedom was prevalent across Iran [19]. In the meantime, religious policies of Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh provided freedom of speech among the Shia which was unique until after Buyid dynasty (Āl-e Buye) in Iran and it created one of the first Shiite architectural works among civilized Iranians by entering into the realm of art and architecture.

4. Religious Basics in Shi'a

Elements of Shiite art—affecting Iranian-Islamic art or finding a way through which they could express themselves—are a combination of beliefs, myths, and events of Shia’s history. Imamate and believing in Imams’ right to guide people after Prophet Mohammad are the most essential and basic beliefs of this religion that play a significant role in religious and social life of the Shia. Believing that Holy Imams are like saviors and can intercede people in the next world are also among other beliefs rooted in Quran, traditions, and life of prophet Mohammad which have been transferred to the masses through jurists and preachers. In the verse 72 of Al-Ahzab sura, Allah says, “Allah wishes only to remove Ar-Rijs (evil deeds and sins, etc.) from you, O members of the family (of the Prophet), and to purify you with a thorough purification.” [49] Moreover, in prophet’s quotes Saghalien and Jaber, the Shia consider Prophet Mohammad and his offspring up to the last Imam being innocent and consider obeying them imperative [20]. Imam Ali (Pbuh), who has been directly appointed by God and introduced to the community of Muslims by the prophet, is an evidence of necessity of accepting right succession of Prophet Mohammad. It indicates another belief of the Shia that is chastity of the prophet household and Imams. Regarding verse 59 of Nesa⁶ sura, Imam Ali said, “God ordered to obey prophets and those in authority among you, because they are immaculate and pure and never order committing sins.” [21] Upon another Shiite belief, a religious government must establish a true discipline in Islamic society and prepare the grounds for all people to enjoy full freedom, and individual and social equity under the Divine justice [22].

5. Contents of Epigraphs and Status of Imamate in Shi'a

As semantic and decorative elements in Islamic architecture, epigraphs are significant tools in the hands of governments to develop their religious policies and beliefs among people, and since they are written, they express ideas

⁵ It was named TurbatKhaneh because according to a narration, Sultan Mohammad ordered to use soil of Karbala (Turbat) in some parts of the monument to give holiness to that and it shows his passion to Shi'a Imams.

⁶ “Believers obey Allah and obey the messenger and those in authority among you. Should you dispute about anything refer it to Allah and the messenger, if you believe in Allah and the last day. That is better and the best interpretation.” [49]

and thoughts of different periods of time. These epigraphs, In terms of text, are generally divided to three types of construction⁷, religious, and construction-religious epigraphs, each having a different and special function in architecture. Construction epigraphs are important merely in historical terms indicating issues like name and date of construction and constructor and also mentioning and admiring rulers, and describing historical events. Therefore they have a great value in terms of archaeological discoveries and historical researches. But more value goes to the kind of epigraphs revealing many spiritual facts and mystic debates through their religious themes, the discovery and interpretation of whose meaning lead to recognizing the religious state prevalent in the relevant era [23]. Religious epigraphs of Soltaniyeh Dome are among the solid evidence in identifying this historical monument, religious attitudes of Sultan Mohammad (Oljaito) and policies of the authorities. The epigraphs made in decorations of the first period of this monument are usually written in beautiful Kufic script and in 'Muaghali', 'Mushajjar', 'Muwashah', and 'Muwaraq' (leafy) styles consisting of Names and Words of Majesty, names of Prophet Mohammad and Imam Ali, some verses of Quran, and prophetic quotes that were completed in year 713AH/1313AD. The epigraphs of the second period are also written in Sols and different Kufic handwritings such as Mohaghegh, Reihan, and Naskh script and are mostly made of plaster and contain Quranic verses, prophetic quotes and titles of the Prophet and Shiite Imams [24]. Among the most beautiful epigraphs of the first period of this monument, is the one with the script 'Glory be to Allah' which, as one of the important slogans in Islam, has been written five times on interior surfaces of eastern porticos combined with bricks and tiles in beautiful handwriting of Muaghali. There is also a pentagram star on the side wall of eastern portico, in combination of bricks and tiles and in a decorative *Shamsa*⁸ indicating the divinity of the position of Prophet in Shiite school, whose sides consist of the word 'Mohammad' in Bannaei script.

On the other side wall of this portico, the word 'Ali' can be seen in the same combination and structure inside *Shamsa* and the star inside it. Blue-like reflection of such *Shamsas*, which bear the holy names of Ali and Mohammad, represent a shining sun of prophecy and Imamate in the sky of Shiite religion as well as beliefs of constructors and their guiding role.⁹ (Figures 2 & 3)

In this regard, Keith Critchlow has written, "The holy name of Mohammad (Pbuh) that is inscribed round a

pentagram star indicates a connection among five-time prayers, sound repetition, important numbers and ordering symmetry of space." [26] another interpretation is that five-time repetition of such names can be a representation of sacred number 5 in Shiite school that centers around the five members of the Prophet's household, and is an implicit indicative of Imamate principle and household of Prophet Mohammad. The word Allah in a pentagram star that is decorated with name of Mohammad (Pbuh) is also shining on the ceiling of south veranda. This is manifested in a circle since in Islamic geometry, a circle symbolizes eternity and entirety (Figure 4).



Figure 2. 10-side *Shamsa* and reflection of name of Mohammad (محمد)



Figure 3. 10-side *Shamsa* and reflection of name of Ali (علي)

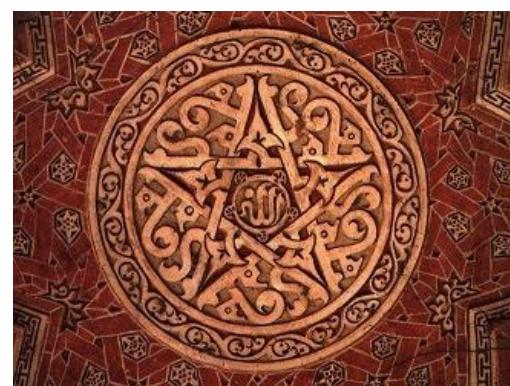


Figure 4. Pentagram star decorated with names of Allah and Mohammad

Writing the name of Mohammad in that circle as a perfect human, and the fact that one like him is an image of Divine

⁷ In Persian: *Ehdasiyeh*

⁸ "Shamsa is a star or sun like design and close to circle in decorative arts like tiling, plaster work, carpentry, writing and the like." [25]

⁹ The basis of our interpretation is God pointing to the role of stars in guiding people in some verses of Qur'an. In verse 97 of Al-Anaam Chapter He says: "it is He who has created for you the stars, so that you can be guided by them in the darkness of land and sea. We have made plain our verses to a nation who knows." [49]

Essence, have a close relationship with the aforementioned interpretation. The light of word Allah in that space is a symbol of stability, unity, and attribution of authority to Allah; the sides can be seen as closely connecting prophecy and divinity. The basis of this idea comes from Quran addressing the Prophet, “Oh, Prophet, we have sent you as a witness, as someone who bears glad tidings and warns and as someone who invites to Allah by His permission, and as a light-giving torch.”¹⁰ [49]

Connection of prophecy to divinity is also seen in the 8-sided star on the ceiling of southeast veranda and the 6-sided star on the ceiling of northeast veranda. On the other hand, it can be said that the repeated inscription of the name Mohammad round the word Allah in these stars “indicates universality, solitude and unity of the Absolute Being and plurality and materiality and combination of creatures of which the respected Prophet Mohammad (Pbuh) is a perfect and great example.” [27]. on the eastern entrance of the monument, there are some epigraphs with Bannaei script consisting of twelve small triangles and three big triangles that are made using tiles and bricks. Every small triangle includes three words of ‘Mohammad’ in three sides, and three words of ‘Ali’ in a hexagon (Figure 5 and Plan No. 1).



Figure 5. Repetition of names of Mohammad and Ali, outside view of dome



Plan No. 1. Name of Mohammad in sides of triangle and name of Ali in the hexagon

In the other three big triangles, three basic parts of Shiite testimonies of faith (*aš-ṣahādah*), which include ‘There is no

god but Allah’, ‘Muhammad is the messenger of God’, and ‘Ali is the wali (friend) of God’, can be seen; their repetition in southeast veranda indicates sincere belief of the constructors of such a huge monument and the remarkable importance given to such statements because they had chosen to place these triangles to be on the facade of the main entrance in order to be always seen by the public as the most important slogans of the Shia. The interesting point is that according to construction epigraph on the facade, its decoration was completed in 710AH/1310AD—a year after conversion of Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh to Shia¹¹.

Repetition of these words and the text of Shiite testimonies of faith inside the monument can be seen in one of the ground porticos which is made from bricks and turquoise tiles and on which the words and the testimony are written in Muaghly Kufic handwriting, but of course some tiling works have been ruined [14]. The other epigraph with the theme of ‘Allah-Mohammad-Ali’ (written in Muaghly Kufic handwriting) on the stem of dome is made from tiles and bricks and is repeated around the dome. The content of this epigraph and its style of writing were highly prevalent in Islamic constructions, especially in religious architecture. In fact, they were reflecting basics of Shiite thoughts which are affirmation of Divine Unity, prophecy, and Imamate. Amongst the epigraphs belonging to the first period, there is one that contains Al-Ikhlas sura written in Kufic Mushajjar style and made from bricks on a background of tiles that is mounted in the loge of the first floor. Verses 255 and 256 of Al-Baqarah sura (AyatulKursi) are also repeated on that dome for at least three times and the relevant epigraph is written in decorative Kufic handwriting using bricks on a background of mosaic¹². Another epigraph containing the text ‘Sultan Oljaito is under the power of God’ can be seen in the ground floor of southeast portico executed in a combination of Turquoise tiles and bricks, and written in Muaghly Kufic handwriting. On a Symmetrical epigraph, there is the rest of the text which goes: ‘May God bestow eternity upon Sultan’s kingdom’. Such texts imprinted on the coins made from 709AH/1309AD to 713AH/1313AD under Shiite rituals symbolize religious tendencies of Sultan of the time in that huge monument [28]. Among other epigraphs

¹¹ It seems that the power of Shi'a and its spread and official prevalence in the country reached its climax in that year of ruling of Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh and it was seen through themes of epigraphs belonging to that decoration era as well issuance of coins with Shi'a slogans that were mostly made in 710AH/1310AD. On the other hand, a variety of historical books prove the idea. In the book of *Religion and State in Iran in Mogul Era*, we read: “Once Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh converted to Shi'a religion, Sa'adaddin Savoji, who was not a minister yet, was responsible for all the affairs from allowing the Shi'a clergymen to get involved and develop their goals to issuance of orders to officially recognition of Shi'a religion across the country and he became a minister one year after the sultan converted to Shi'a and the works of that sect faced a remarkable progress in that year.” [12]

¹² Some people believe that this verse of Qur'an protects the requirements of humans and accordingly, it has been selected for the monument and repeated to protect the monument against accidents during times.

¹⁰ Verses 45 and 46 of Al-Ahzab Chapter

belonging to that period, verses 78-80 of Al-Isra sura and two quotes of Prophet Mohammad can be mentioned. Generally, most of the epigraphs of Soltaniyeh monument in the first period of decorations, which are also the most important ones belong to names of Mohammad and Ali as well as Names of Majesty that have been executed through titles like 'Al-Bagha', 'Al-Malek', and 'Allah' in interior and exterior surfaces.



Figure 6. Four-time repetition of name of Ali in decorations of first period

In some texts, it is stated that covering the decorations of the first period and execution of other elements on them were due to religious return of Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh from Shia to Sunni, while a more proper study on the plaster work of the second period of the monument shows some quotes from Imam Ali (Pbuh) and his sacred name that outnumbers those on the first period epigraphs¹³. Furthermore, if covering the main decorations by the Sunni constructors was for the purpose of eliminating Shiite elements, covering the eastern facade epigraph outside the dome mentioning two Shiite testimonies of faith, 'Ali is the wali (friend) of God; Ali is the executor of the Prophet' could have been of a greater necessity while it never took place [29]. Some researchers of Islamic art and architecture consider year 716AH/ 1316AD as the date for commencement of epigraphic decorations of the second period¹⁴. In the second period of decorations, we see some verses of Al-Anbiya, Al-Baqarah, Al-Kahf, and Al-Fath suras as well as some quotes from Prophet Mohammad, all referring to performing daily prayers, obeying, and worshiping His Majesty as the main basics of Islam. Their contents are also in line with the function of the monument on the one hand, and with drawing the attention of newly-converted Muslim Moguls on the other. The existence of such epigraphs indicates that the monument was not constructed to be merely used as a tomb, but for religious rituals as well. Such epigraphs were generally inside the monument and written using plaster element. Among the epigraphs, there is one with the word 'Ali' on it mounted on

left side of southeast portico, written in white on a blue background, and repeated six times. Epigraph of 'Mohammad-Ali' is also located in upper side of arc of southeast portico in which the word 'Mohammad' is written in Kufic and 'Ali' in Sols handwriting with the same pen and colour and is repeated 16 times.

On the ceiling of north portico, 'Ali' has been written four times in Muaghil Kufic on plaster and repeated several times as well. On the upper surface of southeast portico as well as right side of southwest portico of the monument, some epigraphs written with white pen on a blue background can be seen that are generally similar to sun. The word 'Ali' has been repeated for 16 times in Sols handwriting and the word 'Mohammad' in the same number in a broken form and in simple Kufic handwriting around that (Figure 7). At the far end of the design, 16 adjoining semi-circles have been designed, and inside each of them, two words of the names Abu-Bakr, Omar, Osman, Hassan, and Hossain are written and repeated. Therefore, it must be said that by religious conversion of Sultan Mohammad (Oljaito) which approximately took place in 713AH/1313AD, we are facing some Shiite themes emphasizing on Imamate and authority of Ali (Pbuh). Even when the names of Rashidin caliphs are mentioned, they are on the margins and are paid the same level of attention as that of offsprings of Ali (Pbuh). Some researchers believe that such themes indicate a kind of doubt that was prevalent in the political atmosphere of that era [1]. The authors of this Paper believe that rewriting the Shiite themes—after the conversion of Sultan Mohammad to Sunni—can be analyzed by referring to relevant documents and reliable historical texts. One of the dominating forces in Ilkhani community, especially the era of Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh, was mysticism in the beliefs and ruling tendencies of those constructing and supporting such a monument. It is written in the references that "like other Mogul rulers, Sultan Mohammad (Oljaito) respected Dervishes and Sheikhs, and he claimed himself to be a munificent fellow." [30] Furthermore, all ministers of Sultan Mohammad were the followers of a Sheikh, and gave him their assets to earn his friendship and satisfaction. Khajeh Rashideddin Fazlollah, a Shafei and an efficient minister of Sultan Mohammad, was a follower of Sheikh Safi ed-din Ardabili, a Shiite Sufi of that era who had a remarkable effect on his religious attitudes. Some great men of Shafei Sunni people such as Najmed-din Kobra had a strong tendency toward Shia and highly respected the Prophet's household, especially Imam Ali (Pbuh) [12]. As a result, even if Sultan Mohammad had converted his religion in the last years of his life, and even if after the death of Sayyid Tajeddin Avaji—the Shiite and wise minister of Sultan in 711AH/1311AD—Khajeh Rashid al-Din Fadhl-allāh had been assigned to pursue the works and custody of Soltaniyeh monument, Sultan's affection towards Imam Ali (Pbuh) and the Prophet's household was predominant; besides, by the help of scholarly Sufi masters and Sheikhs, the Shia- as the main claimant of the era- were trying to prove the

¹³ There is an epigraph written in Kufic inside *Torbat Khaneh* that belongs to the second period of decorations and some traditions of Imam Ali (Pbuh) are quoted there, but the texts are not clear because some parts of plaster works are ruined. [29].

¹⁴ For more study in this regard, refer to: H. Sobooti, Architecture of Soltaniyeh Dome over Art Passage, 1st edition, Tehran: Pazineh Publisher, 2001, P 98-115.

rightfulness and virtue of family of the Prophet (Pbuh). This was a fact the reflection of which is clearly seen in the themes of epigraphs of Soltaniyeh Dome in both of its decoration periods.



Figure 7. Repetition of the name ‘Ali’ sixteen times in decorations of the second period

6. Interpretation of Hidden Geometry of the Monument and the World of Ideas (Alam al-mithal) in Shi'a

The Soltaniyeh Dome is an octagonal space with its concentration point in the centre. In terms of structure and technique of construction, using eight vertical minarets located in inner carcass of the monument has added to its strength and better architectural relationships in two vertical and horizontal directions, and all pressures resulting from architectural arcs and symbols are tolerated by octagonal reflows [14]. Therefore, the reason for the octagonal shape of the monument is providing more strength for the structure and also for the building to be able to stand on its superficial and small foundation; yet, from another perspective in interpretation terms, another reason for that can be found. This octagonal monument, with such an orderly plan, was constructed under inspiration of eight doors of the Paradise and the purpose of constructing it was to incarnate the paradise in the material and non-spiritual world. Whether the tomb was for the Sultan or was meant to be used as a tomb for Shiite Imams, it seems the architect was intending to show the tomb of these individuals as an allegory for the Paradise on earth as their eternal resting place. The basis for this idea is not just an interpretation, but Quranic verses and historical documents. In Verse 17 of Al-Haaqqa sura, we read, “The angels will stand on all sides of it. And on that day, eight (of them) will carry the throne of your lord above their heads.” [49]. from this point of view, the Paradise described in Quran is an octagon with eight entrances. On the same basis, octagonal forms are not only seen in the formation of architectural spaces and structures, but also in lots of decorative figures of Iranian-Islamic traditional arts [31]. The historical basis of such interpretations can be found in many historical books such as History of Oljaito. In that

book, among the events of the year 705AH/1305AD, there is a description of Soltaniyeh monument attributing its octagonal form to eight sides of the Paradise, and placing the tomb of Sultan at the centre of that great and imaginary paradise:

“And he—Khaje Tajeddin AliShah Tabrizi—constructed a building which was the best of buildings and cause of astonishment. For instance, he made a paradise like building on the foreground, all ceilings in lobe like form and all walls, doors, and surfaces of apron decorated with gems, gold, shining ruby, and turquoise . . . as well as a unique dome inside opening toward four gates, like eight gates of paradise, full of joys of paradise and covered with colourful carpets and astonishing figures like pretty facades . . .” [11].

Colours used in the monument are good evidence of the symbolic imagination of the Paradise as described in Quran which is executed by cheerful colours like yellow, green, white and red.¹⁵ A detailed description on this regard is provided in the discussion on ‘Colours and numbers in Soltaniyeh dome’.

The substantial point regarding octagonal and symbolic geometry of this monument is that in Islamic art and architecture, allegory has a deep relationship with believing in the world of ideas, and Shiite Muslims have given more priority to this kind of attitude compared to the Sunnis. It seems that believing in another world named ‘Alam al-mithal’ is basically rooted in ‘Platonic Allegory’, and ‘Iranian kingly wisdom’ which has evolved after being constantly taken into consideration by philosophers like Sheikh Eshragh [32]. However, Shia’s belief in the next world is, moreover, rooted in Quranic verses and quotes from the prophet and Imams on the basis of which the Shias practice contemplation and introspection. According to the authors, under the influence of such thoughts together with believing in the Intermediate World and according to the interpretative signs of the Paradise in Quran, the artist of this monument achieves such inner contemplation that he imagines the Paradise and creates it in the material and non-spiritual world. Therefore, in interpretation terms, the sacred geometry of this monument is impressed by Shiite teachings and beliefs of this school in terms of allegory and by the imagination Paradise in the world of ideas (Alam al-mithal).

7. Proportionality of Form and Decorations, and Meaning of Justice in Shi'a

One of the distinguishable aspects of Shiite thoughts is the special attitude of the Shia toward principle of justice which constitute the material and spiritual foundations of

¹⁵ For more study in this regard, refer to: H. Bolkahri Ghehi, 2011, “Metaphysic of Color in Islamic Thought and And its impact on Formation of Book of Chivalry on Color”, Research Letter of Visual Arts, No. 2, 5-14.

this school in conjunction with affirmation of Divine Unity, Prophecy, Imamate, and Doomsday. According to the Shia, Justice means placing things in their right places¹⁶, and can be divided to stages like evolutional justice and legislative justice. Legislative justice discusses observing justice on the part of humans in their different kinds of relationships with each other. Evolutional justice, however, is related to the creation and the rules observed by God in creating beings, including humans [34]. In interpreting the verse 90 of Al-Nahl sura, "Allah enjoins justice ('adl) and benevolence (ihsan)" [49], Imam Ali (Pbuh) holds justice as meaning fairness¹⁷, and according to him, fairness is placing things in their right places.¹⁸ Material manifestation of the principle of justice on the grounds of Islamic art and architecture is like equilibrium [35] in which things are placed where they belong; no part dominates a whole and no whole dominates a part. In other words, every whole consists of all the parts that comprise it, and every part represents a unique whole. [36]. In the past, many of our architectural works were a confluence for the aforementioned relationships manifesting plurality in unity and unity in plurality which represented mental discipline of an artist whose mentality was formed by believing in the origins of justice and Divine order. From this point of view, the visual equilibrium established between the dome and vertical and octagonal minarets of the monument in the exterior can be considered as a wise trick by an architecture who intended to convey the concept of equilibrium to the viewers in the best form. On the other hand, these minarets are places for callers to call people in every part of the town for prayers equally. Therefore, attention to social justice and informing people equally are clearly observed in its spacing and architecture. Precision in spatial connections inside the dome indicates that all implemented parts and elements are located in their right places; there is also a sort of movement and conceptual symmetry accompanying viewers as they enter and walk across various floors. In support of this view, the vast and round area under the dome was a place to go round and hold mourning rituals (Shabestan or Ghonbadkhane); the cellar was a place to keep and bury dead bodies (Sardabe); and Prayer room (TorbatKhane)—a roofed place above the cellar—was a place to perform religious rituals and pray for the dead bodies (Figure 8). All three floors of the monument are also linked to each other by well-formed steps in the most logical way [14], and it seems that the corridors of the second floor toward the main nave have been designed for women to watch religious rituals and go round the grave.

¹⁶ In that regard, Imam Ali (Pbuh) says: "Justice puts things in their places [...]." For more study refer to: Imam Ali (pbuh), *Nahj al-Balaghah*, tradition 437.

¹⁷ "Here '*adl*' means equidistribution and *ihsan* means favor." For more study in this regard, refer to Imam Ali (pbuh), *Nahj al-Balaghah*, tradition 231.

¹⁸ We come across such concept in sentences like "Do justice for Allah and do justice towards the people" in letter No. 53 and "Behave your selves justly with the people" in letter No. 51 of *Nahj al-Balaghah*.

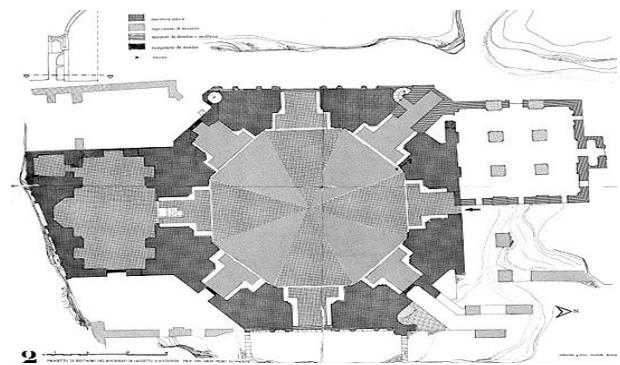


Figure 8. Octagonal plan and planned repetition of form elements in Soltaniyeh Dome

Symmetry in Soltaniyeh Dome is believed as another recognized and absolute principle in reflecting the concept of proportionality in architecture. Symmetry is the climax of a strong mind that brings with it planned repetition of reflows and spaces in various parts of the monument following precise instructions and rules. An emphasis on this principle is evident in practical decorations as well as the monument itself. In such a way that in some cases, once there is deviation in some surfaces of the monument from symmetry, the surface has reached the required symmetry by a coating of plaster or other architectural materials and then decorations have been executed [14]. (Figure 9)



Figure 9. Observing symmetry principle in interior decorations of the monument

Mughal decorations and transverse designs executed by yellow bricks and cyan tiles in interior walls of the monument are indicative of very exact geometrical divisions; constructing such decorations highlight the creativity of designers and a level of perfection in Iranian architecture that has been able to properly visualize enthusiasm of the Shia for stating the concept of justice (Figure 10). According to Shiite beliefs, Divine justice in creation of beings is based on equality and equilibrium established among all small and big creatures. It is God who has created and set a measure for everything¹⁹. "It is He

¹⁹ The concepts of fate and Divine measurement in creation of beings have been emphasized in various verses of Qur'an: "indeed, Allah brings about whatever he decrees. Allah has set a measure for all things" (65:3), "indeed; we

who established harmony in every disconformity.²⁰ And now this is the artist who proceeds to make an artwork by following the patterns of God to reflect such great patterns in equilibrium and proportionality.



Figure 10. Geometrical proportionalities in interior decorations and figures of Soltaniyeh Dome

Repetitive use of the name Ali (Pbuh) in both decoration periods of this monument implies legislative justice in Shia which—as well as authority (Imamate) principle—was observed by the artists and authorities at the time. According to them, Imam Ali (Pbuh) was justice incarnate and justice could be established in reality by following his life style; moreover, justice was an urgent need of Ilkhani community to clarify the political incidents in Oljaito era.

8. Colours and Numbers in Soltaniyeh Dome and an Inner Attitude in Shi'a

Innate attitude and knowledge of the Shia toward issues have always been among the most outstanding characteristics of the Shia during history. Being suppressed and having a strong will to establish justice have constantly been notable among the Shiite communities; these traits have found their way into art to imply beliefs and thoughts. Using symbols and ironies in the wide scope of Islamic art and architecture has been prevalent in Shiite art and culture, and a large body of artworks has indirectly reflected basic thoughts and beliefs of the Shia through symbolic forms. Using colours in architecture as a means of revealing concepts paved the way for symbolic expression of many of the innate concepts and a variety of issues in the Shia belief. Plus, using colours was mostly meant to help recall the truths of things and manifest intellectual stages of Shia school in artworks.

have created all things according to a measure" (54:49), "it was he that made the sun a brightness and the moon a light, and determined it in phases" (10:5). [49] In his Sermon No. 91 *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Imam Ali (Pbuh) gives such an explanation on God measuring creatures: "What made it stand up with accurate measurements."

²⁰ Refer to: Imam Ali (pbuh), *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Sermon No. 91.

Colours and their wide variety in Soltaniyeh monument have succeeded well in creating a spiritual atmosphere. Using vivid and allegorical colours reflects a wise expression of traditional architecture and indicates the exalted truth and manifestations of God; artists—employing such elements—prove the existence of God for the believers, "And what He has multiplied for you in the earth is of various colours; surely, in that there is a sign for a nation who pay attention."²¹ [49] All these colours are combined in an exalted equilibrium giving a unique appearance to the body of the monument. According to Andre Godard, "The colours used in Soltaniyeh monument were unprecedented until that time in terms of abundance and density; shades, dots, and tiny and delicate figures in colorations were replaced by strong compounds of colourful masses." [37] The dome is totally covered with turquoise tiles and there is a wide strip decorated with square Kufic script in its base. The minarets and portico flank are also placed in an appropriate combination of azure, turquoise, and white colours on a Khaki brickwork bed (Figure 11). The roofs of portico are decorated with unique figures in dark red.



Figure 11. Combination of Khaki and turquoise colours in Soltaniyeh Dome

Domes in Islamic architecture symbolize circularity; circles in turn represent perfection and durability and they are symbolically attached to the ceiling as a sky. "Domes are always and everywhere a representation of sky reminding viewers of a reflection of sky and earth through being placed on strong bases." [38] The turquoise colour of the dome and the azure colour of the tiles in the exterior facade of the building can be deemed as the symbol of infinite sky with peace, sublimation, and passion. The blue colour has a rotational, inward move and has a high coordination with circles among other geometrical figures. The blue colour is also visible in the figure of the dome and the minarets of this monument. The khaki colour of brickworks conveys a sense of simplicity, convenience, confidence and strength alongside representing stability and strength of the earth. Despite their contradiction, combination of khaki and turquoise represents the combination of heavenly and earthly colours in a pleasant

²¹ Quran, verse 13 of Al-Nahl chapter

harmony. Andre Godard writes so in this regard, “This beautiful and pleasant work is the outcome of an art which has nicely connected azure colour of the dome margin to natural colour of bricks; consequently, this has decreased the obsolescence and monotony of the blue mass on the dome by elaborately using materials to make the viewer admire the unique talent of the architect and artist.” [37]

Despite the outer façade in which tiling is generally mingled with bricks, inside the monument, tiled figures are mingled with white figures of plasterworks to imply silence, contemplation, and inner peace. The colours used in paintings, plasterworks, handwritings, and other figures of the monument generally include red, green, different shades of blue, yellow, golden, and ochre executed on enamel tiles and geometrical plasterworks. It seems that the artists of the monument were more interested in blue and green than in other colours. Blue is a peaceful and inward colour that attracts viewers and fills them with a sense of tranquillity. This colour is considered as a spatial colour and God has placed it over the earth for peace and tranquillity. Blue colour attracts and strengthens the eyes, just like the blue sky that enters the minds of viewers. Imam Jafar Al-Sadiq (Pbuh) told one of his companions, “Oh, Mufadhal, think of the colour of sky. God has created it in blue colour which is of the most conformity with human eyes; so much so that even looking at it strengthens them.” [39] According to the beliefs of Muslims concerning wearing turquoise rings as recommended by the Shiite Imams²², cyan blue has been chosen as the absolute colour of the Shia and used in sacred monuments as a symbol of purity which makes the viewer feel a kind of inner peace. Green is a mild, moderate colour and, according to Quranic verses, is the colour of Paradise. “He has prepared for them gardens underneath which rivers flow, where they shall live forever. That is the greatest victory²³.” [49] The main feature of the Paradise is numerous trees and streams in it. The Paradise is also covered with green trees whose colour is magnificently reflected in the clear water running beneath them and multiplies their beauty. If the constructors of this monument meant to visualize the Paradise on earth, it should be affirmed that they succeeded in doing so using red and green colours and making the viewer feel what they desired. According to a Shiite quote from the Prophet (Pbuh), the camel of Imam Ali (Pbuh) in the Paradise has eyes in ruby and a body in peridot green. There is a green cupola on it made of shining white pearls and the eyes can see through it. [41]. On the other hand, bright colours such as green, blue, and yellow have a great tendency for expansion and

implementing them in the interior of the monument creates a paradise-like extension and vastness before the eyes of viewers; this point has a direct relationship with the glory and hugeness of the monument and the purposes underlying its construction. A beautiful tiling in mosaic form in blue, white, green, and yellow tiles is seen on the surface of arcs located in northeast, east, north, and southwest porticos of the monument. Blue (azure) is an allegorical colour that belongs to the Heaven and the Resurrection Day and its representation in the viewer’s mind is an indicative of ascending to the Heaven and also of heavenliness and eternity of the monument or the people buried there. “Azure is the colour of God and divine blessing that is reflected in the endless sky.” [42] In another interpretation, azure represents tranquillity and calmness the use of which in the space creates a sense of mental equilibrium and tranquillity in viewers. Blue is the colour of inner concentration and it has such a depth that takes human beings to infinity and to the world of imagination and innocence [43]. Using yellow among different shades of blue is a symbol of intelligence and love that creates a high visual equilibrium together with blue. Golden yellow which is displayed in a big flower decorated with layers of gold on the margins of an arc on the south portico is a joyful symbol of light, hope, and ascendance [44]. Ochre colour of portico ceilings is an image of human’s self and the material life of human beings—in mystical and intuitional terms—which gradually fades in the path of mortality and gives its place to modesty and servitude of white colour (Figure 12). The reflection of white located in the centre of arcade-like sections indicates sincere belief of the devoted artist in mortality and represents affirmation of monotheism. “White is the extreme of unity among all colours. It is pure, and in its non-manifested state, it represents a pure light.” [45] The devoted here is absorbed in light and the word of Allah is the source of such light. “Allah is the one who gives light to the heavens and the earth [...]”²⁴ [49]



Figure 12. Ochre colour of ceilings and its central, white core

Implementing the essential element of numbers in geometrical form and decorative figures in this spiritual

²² On the advantages of wearing turquoise ring, Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq (pbuh) says: “The hands of one who is wearing turquoise ring shall not face poverty.” It is said that Imam Ali (Pbuh) was always wearing a turquoise ring with the figure of ‘Allah al-Malek’. Also Prophet Mohammad (Pbuh) has said that: “God says: I am ashamed of turning down the hand extending to me for asking something while wearing a turquoise ring.” [40]

²³ Quran, verse 100 of Al-Taubah chapter

²⁴ Quran, verse 35 of Al-Noor (the light) chapter

tomb has been highly successful in symbolic and mysterious presentation of many of Shiite concepts. Soltaniyeh monument has eight spiral stairs which are placed among piers forming a way among the three floors of the monument. It is worthwhile to mention that the number of stairs is 110, and this number represents the name of Ali (Pbuh) in Arabic alphabets. This symbolic method shows the devotion of Sultan Mohammad and the architects of this huge monument to the first Imam of the Shia.

The symbolic meaning of number 5 is observable in many star-like figures and Shamsas existing on the interior walls. Number 5 is of a great importance in Islamic tradition, especially in the Shia; the most notable reason is the belief in and great respect of this school to the five members of the Prophet's family including the Prophet (Pbuh), Imam Ali (Pbuh), Hazrat Zahra (SA), Imam Hassan (Pbuh), and Imam Hossain (Pbuh). They are considered as the main founders of the Shiite Islam and the five fundamentals of the religion besides prayers. As one of the Shiite groups in Iraq, Ikhwan Al-Safahas implicitly based Islam on number five which, apart from the aforementioned reasons, is due to the five Ulu'l-Azm Prophets—Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad (Pbuh); these prophets were granted state of Imamate in addition to prophecy [46]. There are pentagram stars on the southwest ceilings of the monument with the sacred word of 'Mohammad' forming their sides as well as other pentagram stars on the wall of eastern portico with the names 'Mohammad' and 'Ali' beautifully mingled with each other in Kufic handwriting; all these are the outstanding examples that are related to the numerical concept of 5 and its attribution to the five members of the household. There is a big 16-side shape in the middle of the ceiling of outer southeast portico on which the sentence 'Al-ezzo, Al-daim, Al-eghbāl' is written in plastered Kufic and is repeated on each side for sixteen times. Moreover, there is a star-like octagon with a designed word of 'Allah' in the middle of it the sides of which are formed by eight words of 'Mohammad' written in Kufic [29]. (Figure 13)

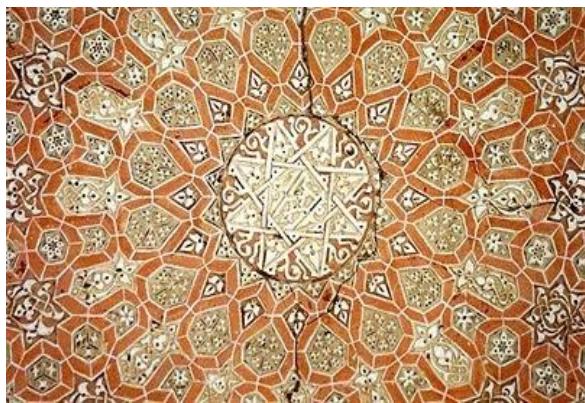


Figure 13. Reflection of the number 8 in geometrical and epigraphic decorations of the monument

As mentioned before, in allegorical reflection of Paradise in Soltaniyeh Dome, the number 8 is widely referred to as a heavenly and divine number among Muslims, especially the Shia based on Quranic verses and well-known quotes about gates of Paradise and the Throne of God, and this number has been the basis for numerous architectural designs and decorative figures. Octagonal star is somehow a developed form of a circle—and later the cross—that has been manifested in different periods and places as a symbol of sun [47]. Regarding semiotics of number 8 in Quran and Shiite narratives, the opposite pairs in verse 6 of Al-Zumar sura should be mentioned, "...and He sent down to you eight pairs of the livestock." [49] But verse 17 of Al-Haaqqa sura, as mentioned before, is the most important verse in Quran which is about semiotics of this number and refers to the Throne of God carried by eight angels.

Ten-side geometrical figures and ten times repetition of the name 'Ali (Pbuh)' in Shamsa and star-like motifs of Soltaniyeh Dome are among other indications of symbolic expression of Shiite concepts in that place. As a result of sum of the first four natural numbers ($1+2+3+4=10$), this perfect number has been accompanied by uniqueness of eternal existence, duality of manifestation, triple activity of the soul, and the existence of four basic substances seen in four elements [46]. In a higher level, this number is considered as the return of plurality to unity. In Ikhwan al-Safa beliefs, levels of devotion are introduced in ten stages each with ten traits [48]. In Quran, decouple nights have been the subject of oath by God and some commentators believe that these nights are the first decouple nights of Zilhaj (November). As with Shiite interpretations, however, those nights refer to innocent Imams which include Imam Hassan Mojtaba (Pbuh) to Imam Hassan Askari (Pbuh) who are placed next to the Even (Shaf)—Imam Ali (Pbuh) and Hazrat Zahra (Pbuh)—and the Odd (Vatre)—that is the Prophet, "By the dawn, and the ten nights, by the Even, and the Odd."²⁵ [49]

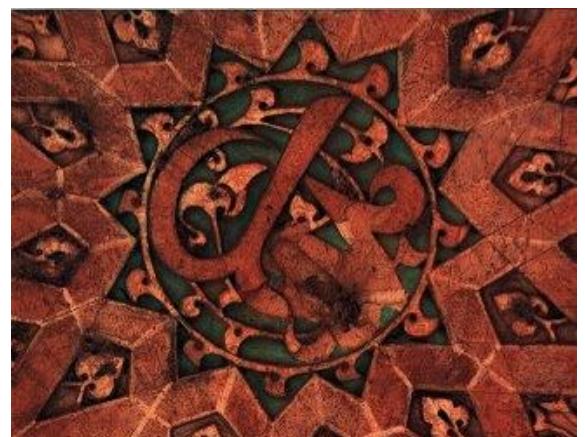


Figure 14. Symbol of number 12 in Shamsa decorated with the name of Mohammad (Pbuh)

²⁵ Quran, verses 1, 2, 3 of al-Fajr chapter.

There is an ornamental star designed in the form of Shamsa in the middle of eastern portico of this monument on which the name Mohammad (Pbuh) is seen on all twelve sides written in Naskh script. The number of such sides is in accordance with the belief of the Shia in the twelve Imams who are moving around the holy name of Mohammad (Pbuh) like shining lights of the sun of prophecy—in a circle and toward perfection (Figure 14). A sense of movement and vision is conveyed to the viewer through the use of plant-like motifs bent in clockwise direction which is elaborately carried out by the architect with tiles and bricks.

9. Conclusions

In this paper, the vision and beliefs of Shiite religion were taken into consideration initially; then, their influence on the quality of building Soltaniyeh monument manifested in the form of signs, symbols, and ornaments was identified. The findings are presented as follows:

The Shiite religion enjoys a comprehensive and deep vision, and the beliefs of this religion are based on Quranic verses and quotes of Prophet Mohammad. Meanwhile, due to the restrictions on the Shia during history, they usually faced severe limitations in expressing their beliefs, so they had to deliberately turn to symbols and metaphors. In a short period of time in Mogul Lithuanians and Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh eras in which the Shia got an opportunity to become the official religion, Shiite architects gained the opportunity to advertise their beliefs through art and decorative elements of Soltaniyeh monument and reveal Shiite vision through creating architectural spaces, especially religious and tomb architecture for the first time.

In this paper, four of the most notable thoughts of the Shia including Imamate, justice, world of ideas(Alam al-mithal), and intuitive and inner attitude of this school, as well as their reflection in spatial and decorative examples of this monument were taken into consideration. Muaghali epigraphs and inscriptions on outer and inner surfaces of that monument prove tendencies and thoughts of this school by referring to two Shiite testimonies of faith and repeating the sacred names of Allah, Mohammad, and Ali through emphasizing Imamate issue along with two important principles of affirmation of Divine Unity and prophecy. The octagonal space of the monument, Quranic and narrative basis of number 8 on the carriers of the Throne of God, and sublime Paradise are also overt points to the paradise-like incarnation of the monument on earth which can be achieved only through background of Shiite beliefs and believing in the world of ideas. The spatial diagram of this tomb monument shows a regulated and planned movement, and by a regulated equilibrium, it directs viewers' steps across its three floors to a kind of elevation. This equilibrium and proportionality, which is intensified as you enter the monument and move around in it, can be related to the concept of justice in the Shia.

The unique proportionabilities implemented in decorations and geometrical figures of the monument also demonstrate highly artistic and architectural achievement in this monument. The inner and intuitive attitude of the Shia can be observed in symbolic expression of the concepts via two essential elements of colours and numbers in geometrical figures and decorations of this monument. Employing blue, green, and azure colours in most parts of the monument indicates tendencies toward spirituality and meaning; moreover, these colours remind viewers of the world of ideas and the memories of Paradise—where they have come down from. Turquoise colour in this monument refers to the absolute colour of the Shia and speaks of genuine and religious identity of the constructors and artists of this tomb monument. The numbers used in the form of elements and star-like figures of this monument represent some concepts like the five members of the Prophet household, the twelve innocent Imams, and name of Ali (Pbuh) in Arabic alphabet having numerical values that are highly respected in Shiite beliefs and thoughts.

Generally, contrary to the beliefs of some researchers and historians of Islamic art which consider the annihilation of artworks and rich culture of Iran and the spiritual basics of Islam as the outcomes of the Moguls' invasion of Iran, it should be noted that this negligence was largely compensated for in architectural space of Soltaniyeh Dome, and as one of the first absolute works in Shiite architecture, this rich artwork was formed based on Islamic wise thoughts and culture. In other words, according to the aforementioned interpretations and in line with historical evidence remaining since that era, the architecture of this monument was the outcome of short-term thought of Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh in converting to Shiite religion and putting the Shiite ministers and elites to work in the Ilkhani government.

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