

Explaining the Criterion to assess the Islamic architecture and city¹

A survey in an overt and covert reality in Islamic architecture and city

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ABSTRACT: Islam is regarded to pay attention to the characteristics of urban life which can be practiced on the urban settings. Not surprisingly, Islam has made a great focus on the form and design of cities and prescribed detailed and elaborate regulations for individual and communal life. Seen from other way round, the penetration of Islam into various regions such as Iran, Europe, and Africa had an undeniable impact on life style, urban design and social interactions. As an ancient civilization with a rich set of knowledge, culture, art and unification beliefs, Iran became the host of Islamic ideology, relying on the propagation of its achievements while keeping its principle and value criteria independent of time and place. Architecture has two dimensions; material and spiritual and its body consists of structure, construction and different materials while its spirit and meaning of architecture is derived from history, memory and long lasting national and native values of a homeland which ascribes a specific meaning to architecture and produces a mental image in the minds. In this paper, we are seeking for criterion to assess Islamic architecture and evaluate it. Architecture is of different dimensions, each has its own value criteria but determining the Islamic architecture and Islamic city of architecture let alone stating whether architecture in this period is Islamic or not demands a great effort while it is worth mentioning that Islam is not limited to a specific age and place and can meet the needs of human being in different period.

Keywords: *Islam, Islamic worldview, Islamic ideology, Islamic civilization, Islamic architecture*

INTRODUCTION

The most controversial concept in Islamic architecture is that of Islamic city. Fanned in the city, Islamic suggest some basic themes to establish the city. The general idea of city-almedina as depicted in Quran seems never to be out of data and has intrigued the minds of Jurists, philosophers, and architects. The morphological and sociological aspects Islamic city, in compatible with the human beings' needs, the condition of life and technology have driven the authorities to consider a

dynamic descriptive approach to paradigms Islam has proposed for notion of ideal-type city.

Worldview is a glance at universe which makes life philosophy for human being based on which he designs different dimension of spiritual and material life and continues his being. We need first to define worldview and recognize human's status in universe to specify the effect of this worldview on architecture. An analytic look at pre-Islam and post-Islam architecture helps us to explain the principles and criteria to assess Islamic architecture as a human's artifact.

1400 years ago, Islam was endowed to human being as a perfect religion by the prophet (PBUH) along with his divine miracle (Quran). This unified worldview presented an ideology for all aspects of life in many an epoch, influencing politics, trade, social relationship, eating and drinking. Architecture

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and urbanization as the space of comprising human and his activities underwent a huge change and was refined based on this idea.

Farabi, the Muslim philosopher of the fourth century A.H, described his ideal city in civilization policy. He considered a global society consisting all masses and peoples the prime leader of which is the prophet who is connected to the active wisdom and takes command immediately from him. Farabi's system is contained in the great system of creation and a city alone can not tolerate it.

City contains all behaviors, events and artifacts of human being: city is the habitat of human body, beyond a physical corpus, in which the cultural values and beliefs are expressed. The city introduces its own constituent worldview and the goals the dwellers are committed to pave. It is the mirror of its dwellers identity and the tendency to achieve the identity they would like to have. In a nutshell, the city displays the lifestyle of its dwellers. (Naghizadeh, 1998)

The definition of unified worldview is of importance to determine the principles and values on one hand and its effects on anatomy, meaning and concept of architecture.

Unified worldview

Worldview is defined as the interpretation of a school about universe and classified into scientific, philosophical, religious and [mystic] originated from science, philosophy, religion and [mysticism].(Motahari,1997a)

The worldview can be based for ideology if it is religious-burden. In unified worldview, the principle idea is that the word has been created by a wise policy and volition which is enveloped in a series of laws named divine traditions. (Motahari, 1997a).From Islam point of view, there is nothing similar to God. The originator of the heavens and the earth; he made mates for you from among yourselves, and mates of the cattle too, multiplying you thereby; nothing like a likeness of him; and he is the hearing, the seeing (shora,11).God is the absolute rich. O men! You are they who stand in need of Allah, and Allah is he who is the self-sufficient, the praised one (fater, 15).To what direction we stand, we are towards Him. And Allah's is the east and the west, therefore, whither you turn, thither is Allah's purpose; surely Allah is ampegiving, knowing (baghare, 115) He is the sum of perfections and free from defects. And Allah's are the best names, therefore call on him thereby, and leave alone those who violate the sanctity of his names; they shall be recompensed for what they did (eraf, 180)

Islam commands people to be obedient to God and accept the direction of realities so that they can reach the ultimate point of development. (Motahari, 1997b)

The unified worldview opts some attributes for Islamic society: Islamic classless society is a society free from prejudice, ignorance while teemed with justice and equality. These rubrics can be considered as the theoretical principles of conducting humans to create its dwelling space so that we can extract

Islamic urbanization from it. (Motahari, 1997a)

Art and architecture in Islamic epoch:

In the 7th AD, Islam captured most of the countries in Asia including Iran where Islam became the basis of lifestyle. Iranian Muslims tried to reconstruct Iranian art under the commands of Islam, yet, we don't see many profound changes in the nature and form. (Hatam, 2000)

Professor poop in the book of 'introduction to Iran industries' writes about Iran architecture and its revelation to Arabs and their tradition:

Iran architecture was ascribed to Arab people and Iranians believed that beautiful domes and minarets which decorated the mosques were imported from outside while this is in contradiction with historical facts. Arab people didn't have anything other than tent and mud but Iran architecture is not influenced by Arabs. (Hatam, 2000)

In fact, Iranian mosques were built in Iranian style free from Arab's invasion. These mosques were imitated from local designs of Sassanid pentice wide, in that wide pentice gradually turned into side wall and became a mihrab in fire temple which was open from three fronts.

Our prophet said; the God created human like him. Resemblance means quality similarity since it has endowed human a faculty to express the seven fold qualities of God; life; science; power; speech; vision and hearing. (Burckhurt, 1967)

Mosque

The first mosque built by our prophet in medina became the stereotype of different mosques which were built in Iran by skilled artisans. (Pirnia, 1993)

The first mosque was but a platform to be the shelter of disciples and place of worship. (ibid, 2)

The building of the mosque conveys a social and religious message acting as mirror in which social conditions are reflected. The mosque architecture displays the path of changes created in the lifestyle of Muslims. The mosque building can transfer the status and degree of civilization or extent and nature of Muslims' worldview of each age. In addition, the mosque architecture relies on epistemologic foundation of Islam which lets the architect capture the dimensions and mental degrees of his contemporary society. He understands that the authenticity of existential logics and object is the first step of building a mosque. The mosque architecture is inspired by social order and its location which depends on the architects ability and initiatives.

If the mosque architecture is supposed to be considered as an art work, it must aggregate different concepts of art embodied in human's mentality and present them. In the architecture of the mosque, past, present and future are unified with life and culture of society while its substance is expressed in all these aspects.

Before paying attention to the features of mosque and its effect on human, we mention some Muslims' needs in relation with the

place of worship. The most important state a prayer must attain is the “presence of heart” during the praying. Secondly, human needs to be reminded mostly in spiritual cases overlooking the reminding of Islamic principles and spiritual foundations. Therefore, the architecture of mosque must meet the human’s needs and play role to direct people to their predetermined aims.

1. mosque reminds the divinity substance
2. mosque is a place to recite Quran
3. mosque is a place to think about Quran
4. the combination of calligraphy with motifs

for ordinary house. Looking at Quranic verses and different references to the word house, we see that the roofed place is the habitat of human being and the saddle of growth which is of great importance in human’s life.

Kabeh is a house of several thousand years old having been built by the prophet via direct command of God, Quran has a lot of verses about kabeh as seen from these two verses' kabeh was built to be the first place of worshipping God. There is controversy about the first person who built kabeh. Some believe that Ibrahim reconstructed the house as quoted in quran: The interpretation of verses shows that the foundation of kabeh existed before Ibrahim and he raised the walls with his family.



Fig.1: Isfahan, Imam mosque Source: Taken by Author

5. the mason witnesses the unity of god and the prophecy by calligraphy
6. the feeling of poverty in mosque which results in the feeling of gods presence
7. respecting the qibleh and creation of unity
8. There appears a combination of opposites in colors the base of nature relies on.
9. Introspection, hierarchy and preservation from external clamour.
10. using the special forms
11. using the ancestors' arts
12. avoidance from extravagancy
13. the mosque entrance as an invitation

House

The word house (bayt) is mentioned 71 times in Quran in different forms with twelve times meaning the house of God, two times for bayt atiq, two times for bayt mamour and the rest

Therefore, it is evident that Adam built kabeh and it collapsed in time. Then, it was reconstructed by Ibrahim. Imam Ali narrated that kabeh was the first house for people to worship. There are some hadiths in different Islamic texts pointing to the principle of urbanization and humans relationship in dwelling complexes through which Islamic spirituality is spread over the city, but as we are not at prefect, our lost paradise is realized by the last messenger.

Some hadiths are mentioned here:

1. when you are in conflict about the passage width, take it 7zar(1kubit) (Hakim, 1986)
2. Whoever revives a land, will be its owner and there is no cruelty.
3. With the humans' death, his action is interrupted but for three ways, alms given, useful science, or a good child to pray for him.

4. What inherits a pious after his death is the science he spread, the child paved the good path the Quran he inherited, the mosque he built, the house he built for the passengers, the stream he organized, or the alms he paid from his money.

5. Angels don't enter the house in which there is a statue.

6. No Muslim is allowed to do urination toward qiblah.

7. No Muslim is allowed to do repairs or construction so that he prevents the wind from blowing.

8. The neighbor is in priority of purchasing his own neighbors land.

Islam has invited the believers to do good actions and to prevent bothering others.

There is expressed the respect to other peoples rights and neighbors satisfaction.

The Muslim's city is the representative of Islamic thought and behavior and displays the comprehensiveness of Islam and Islamic regulations on the city anatomy and urban places to remove the material and spiritual needs of Muslims. The spirit of the city contains the space of mosque, house, school and market which are the most element of urbanization. The first known cities built on Islamic thought were toward qiblah with a focus on mosque.

There are extracted from Quran some suggestions about house.

1. the cleanliness of Gods house
2. house as the first environment of growth
3. suitable accommodation as the first condition of life
4. the house as a place of peace and worshipping God
5. the house is promoted by reciting god
6. The house in which Quran is recited sparks light for heavenly people.

The quality principles dominant over Iran architecture

There exists this belief in Iranian culture that architecture is the art of shaping space in terms of requisites and human's historical approach to cosmos, human and the origin of creation, related to religious or mundane culture of humans. In other words, architecture is to realize the space and place. Focusing on the spiritual features, Iranian architecture seeks to describe the sacred architecture. Nasr believes that architecture an art organize the space and sacred architecture aims at plaeing human at the court of God through endowing sacre to the space built.

The principles common in Iran art and architecture can be classified into five categories.

1. popularization: having human dimension
2. prevention from vagueness: this principle was in pre Islamic architecture and was focused after the rise of Islam
3. Structure: consisting of statics of building, science of building or technology of building along with knowing the materials.
4. Self-containing: the builders have tried to obtain the required materials from the nearest places with the cheapest

prices.

5. Introspectively

In the formation of Iranian architecture, worldview and thought were in close relationship with space. It is to seek for the solution of climatic problems but later is the evident mentality in which all intellectual changes have penetrated.

1. Introspectively: this inevitable feature of buildings such as house, mosque and bath is related to the introspective property which originates from social and philosophical foundation of life in Iran. Introspectively seeks to find an environment in which anatomical conditions reach a harmonic order through thought and worship to find their own origins.

2. Centrality: the emergence of scattered elements to the central unity is seen in most architectural spaces of Islamic regions. The central internal space which is beyond the central court regulates all activities and the basis of space is located in a place in which inflection point happens.

3. Reflection: the best examples of this regular formation through reflection can be found in metaphysical mirrors of four-Ivan mosques.

4. Relationship of architecture with nature: numerous points have been made in the scripture about plant, light and nature. Elements have given rise to the presence of nature in Iran architecture and semi-open and semi-closed spaces are placed in a hierarchical order which respect the divine gifts.

5. Geometry: in Islamic art and architecture, geometry is of great importance which is the place of divine thought and understanding of cosmos. In traditional house, the movement from outside to inside is not a cultural reality but it brings a prerequisite to recover essence of house.

6. Transparency and continuity: against the concept of closed and completed spaces is the concept of transparency. In such a space, the direction of human's movement or his approach happens in a continuous trend so that spatial openings in horizontal and vertical lines cause transparency in walls and columns to revive the prospects.

7. Secret and ambiguity: feeling the spiritual splendor and ultimate simplicity have been considered in building Iranian structural which are sensible and is concomitant with a whole inducing its perfection through a perfect image.

8. Harmonic balance/feeling equilibrium: in architecture, a balanced equilibrium is evident between building and natural environment and building is considered as a nature beings. Deep understanding of builders of architectural structures caused the anatomical elements to specify their presence and the function of each are responses to environment such as dome, Ivan, thick walls, and base.

Quality principles of architecture and city extracted from Islamic

The city consisting of rules is expressed as a mirror of human life and directs his activities by inducing values and cultural

dimensions extracted from ideal and worldviews. In fact, the human being receives the meaning from contact with materials sensible and tangible, while this understanding can be packed in different levels.

These values, having unique meaning and significance in Islamic school, consist of unity, unification, remembrance, piety and human status, all summarized in unification principle. Unification as a specific doctrine influences all Muslim's activities and its effects on Muslim's behavior, life and performance are necessary to recognize so that the city and life environment can be delineated accurately.

Looking at tradition from this view, we consider a heavenly position for city and architecture. Nasr believes that whoever walks in the city of Isfahan remembers God the same as the occasion he is in the mosque. All these expressions come from a dominant unification on every object.

Islamic city must have qualities such as the place of worship, of piety, of justice, of security, and of thanks giving.

To seek the sacred and to play with symbols and teachings which have sacred origins can be a deviation if there is no commitment to sacred.

Infect, architecture takes its principle of construction from unification, piety and thought.

CONCLUSION

Muslim city reflects the general socio-cultural, topological and economical structures of the space for people to be free from environmental troubles so that they can turn to God easily. The reliance of Islamic city on natural laws, religious and cultural beliefs and on principles stemmed from sharia along with social consideration supports the idea of harmony between human being and natural life. The controversy over the real definition of Islamic city has been posed as a historical debate in the architecture.

Lack of theoretical foundation is the obvious drawback existing in architecture and urbanization of Iran. This causes impossibility of assessing the programs implemented in the country; therefore, compiling the theoretical foundation for architecture and urbanization becomes a necessitating matter so that designers, planners and the executives can use them.

The following principles and values based on Islamic thought can be drawn up to express some principles for Islamic city and architecture:

1. the intention to build is for God
2. avoidance from extravagancy
3. the expression of unification in architecture
4. the expression of worship, thanks giving and remembrance
5. dominance of sustainable signs of Islamic thought
6. introspectively and attention to meaning of transcendence in architecture
7. nondestruction of nature
8. keeping the size, limit and borders

9. hierarchy, modernism, variety, compatibility, harmonies, standards

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