

# The developments Trend of Islamic Inscriptions in the Building Portals of Dezfoul City

<sup>1</sup>Mahnoush Mahmoudi; <sup>2</sup>Hossein Zabihi; <sup>3</sup>Iraj Etesam

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Art and Architecture, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

<sup>2</sup>Associat Professor, Department of Art and Architecture, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

<sup>3</sup>Professor, Department of Art and Architecture, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

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**ABSTRACT:** In the architecture of Iranian traditional houses, the ornamentals available in the inscriptions of houses entrance portal express the identity of architects and personality of houses owners and are rooted in their religious and national beliefs and faiths. The main hypothesis of this research is changing the physique and application of religious contents in compliance with the thoughts and beliefs of people in Dezfoul historical city in the epigraphs of houses entrance portals. The objective of this study is reviewing the development trend of texts, concepts and physique of inscriptions as well as analyzing the factors effective on the quality and diversity of application of inscriptions. The present research is an applied study and descriptive-analytical method has been applied, and the data was collected by library and survey studies. The population of this research includes historical houses, houses damages in war (Iran & Iraq) and renovated and new tissue and new-built houses of Dezfoul, from Qajar era so far. Random sampling method has been applied in this study and dispersal area includes the city. Data analysis method in this study is qualitative and quantitative. The results of this study indicate that today the inscriptions available in the entrance portal of houses in Dezfoul comparing to inscriptions in Qajar<sup>1</sup> and Pahlavi<sup>2</sup> era is very simple and has lower aesthetic value. One of causes for such superficial and contextual gap between inscriptions seems to be the war and renovations during and after destruction.

**Keywords:** Architecture, Islamic Architecture, Reconstruction, Epigraph, Inscription, Entrance Portal, Dezfoul.

## INTRODUCTION

During history, the human to extend and promote the beliefs and faiths for presentation and transmission of his thoughts and ideology has benefitted from his handiworks in contexts such as art, philosophy, artifacts etc. Art and architecture is assumed as one of instances that include the culture and explain the human tendencies and needs. This context has clear relationship with living characteristics of human. From long times ago, the swelling has been the major living space of human that provides desirable environments for the comfort and calmness (Saberi Kakhaki, 2012).

One of the most important dwelling elements and components is entrance. The "entrance" as an interface element between outside and inside of living space has special features including

comparing to other elements of residential environment such as ornamental inscriptions.

The inscriptions at the houses entrance portal are in compliance with the living conditions of society and express the beliefs and faiths, and on the other side, reflect the relations and behavioral and social symbols of residents and building constructors. These inscriptions in addition to having potential capability for responding the mental demands of residents and passengers are effective on enrichment of urban appearance and perspective.

The Islamic society in order to express the religious values and emphasize on the Koran and prophet's (Mohammad) family doctrines as audio, video and heartily, ornaments its living environments to scripts of divine verses and religious narratives. Whereas the art of calligraphy is called sacred art due to inscribing the words of God and infallibles; the Muslims

\*Corresponding Author Email: [bd\\_mahmoudi@yahoo.com](mailto:bd_mahmoudi@yahoo.com)

to identify and respect their living environments have taken efforts for using the inscriptions with beautiful manuscripts such as Kufic, Tholoth, masonry-Magheli and Nastaliq (Othman & Zainal-Abidin, 2011).

The importance of this research is revealed when upon reviewing the background of this subject we understand that no appropriate research has been applied in this relation. Whereas the body of historical tissue of Dezfoul has been destroyed intensively due to unsuitable climatic conditions, exhaustion, war and subsequently renovation and irregular and unsupervised constructions, an appropriate investigations seems to be necessary in the contents used in available houses entrance portals. Hence, the present study analyzes a part of reflections of theological thoughts and beliefs in residential tissue of Dezfoul historical city in the framework of epigraphy art in residential buildings entrance portals.

### **Inscription, Inscribing**

The inscription is referred to something that is drawn on the wall and paper by paint, and inscribing has meant writing and engraving (Dehkhoda, 1959). The common theme of two words of inscribing and inscription has been formed of one united infinitives. Since past, in Persian language, these two actions have been connected to each other at the initial point. Historically, presence of calligraphy (inscribing) beside the image (inscription) has been observed from long times ago in Iran that helped each other for evolution of work configuration (Edwards & Edwards, 1999). The bond between image and calligraphy that results in transmission of eloquent reflection is thinkable, because beyond the writing and imaging, ever a word was sacred for the Iranian artists that attempted to array that sacred word by his art to the best style (Ramzy, 2013).

### **Islamic Inscriptions**

The inscription includes symbolic sketches that are ever arising out of popular culture and beliefs and are applied for manifesting the non-tangibles as tangibles. They express and reflect the spiritual thoughts and reflections of their creators. Islamic inscriptions express the ideas and ideology of Islam (Hillenbrand, 2003). Some of these inscriptions include divine and infallibles' words. Upon inscribing the sacred word aiding calligraphy art, under effect of their visual sense, an interpretation is created in the receptor people's supposition, because the humans since beginning try to interpret their around environment (Dabbour, 2012).

### **Inscription in Architecture**

The inscriptions (visual elements) that directly have meaning and concept are important from two aspects including visual (appearance) and content and text, in the buildings of Islamic era of Iran. The nature and beauty of inscriptions is dependent to the different factors: text and content, script type, composition and fitness, materials type, exact and delicate execution and other factors that each one has a share in beauty of inscription

figure. The script is not applied in the space so that to be read certainly. The designer assumes the sense of script's presence in the environment for the audience more important and effective than its reading and accessing to its concepts. So, the script has been applied extensively anywhere from mosque and school, palace and house, caravanserai and tomb, tekiyeh (somewhere like as mosque) cistern and has beatified everything. Most of inscriptions are reflections of holy Koran's verses. From the viewpoint of Muslims, Koran is the origin of all beauties, luck, salvation of human and God's word; thus, reflection of God's word and its permanent exhibition exposed to the public for demanding the mercy and blessing is very important (Naghizadeh & Khansari, 2013). One of the other important purposes of inscriptions is establishing the spiritual environment benefitting from Koran verses what has been interpreted by Martin Lings as Koran perspective. As he stated "we must not forget that one of important purposes of Koran script is making the "visual sacredness". On the other side, the inscriptions due to mentioning the important historical information are deemed as the most reliable documents and always are preferred to the historical quotations (Abdullah & Rashid, 2013).

### **Inscription of Houses Portal**

The inscription has two superficial and contextual aspects. Its superficial aspect is visible to all. In superficial definition, the inscription in artistic term includes the bold and jali manuscripts that are transferred from paper and writer's hand to the tile pages and located on the portals, walls, altars of mosques and sacred places and other important buildings. In Dehkhoda glossary, it has been defined as follows: what is written or inscribed in Jali, Nastaliq, Toghra or Kufic manuscripts, on the walls of mosques or mausoleums and sanctified places or portal of gate of emirs and the greats; lower part of a wall that has been ornamented by brick or stone or figures; what has been engraved on a stone or mountain (Dehkhoda, 1959); a writing in different manuscripts on the portal and wall of buildings (castles, mosques, sanctified places etc.) or on the body of mountain (Moeen, 1972). In the contextual definition, the inscription is the divine, epistemological and spiritual word that is originated from Koran and religious narratives (Hadith). The inscription is symbol and sign; the servant's leading demand from God; indicating the straight path and helps and connects the believer's heart to God; inscription is a citation and excellent manifestation of beauty in Islamic culture and art.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The method of this research was practical and descriptive. Combination of library studying and collection data from field was used in this research. The statistical population was historical and damaged house from Imposed War, and renovated and new house in Dezfoul from Ghajar era to now. The sampling data method was random in this city. Qualitative method was used for data analysis.

## Review on Research Area, Appellation and Historical Records of Dezfoul

Dezfoul City located in Khuzestan Province has a several thousand-year background. The initial cores of city have been formed in Sasanid era, on the top of conglomerate heights at the eastern coast of Dez River and a castle (citadel) has been built therein for protection of its ancient Shadoravan Bridge (built within 261 to 269 AD3). Although the initial use of this citadel has been protective-military, but thereafter, it was used for political purposes. Upon reduction of social and economic importance of Shoosh ancient city (at the recent of second century to the end of third century AH4) and decreasing the international prosperity of Jondishapoor City, gradually some residential regions and quarters are established for residence around the ancient citadel (Emam, 1994).

The primary expansion of urban development and architecture of Dezfoul historical city has been occurred in Islamic era since Al Buyeh ruling particularly after ruling of Azadoddoleh Deylami simultaneous to golden age of Islamic civilization (4th and 5th centuries AH, 10th and 11th centuries AD). "Ronash Castle" (eastern coast of Dez River) was the beginning of development of urbanization, architecture and urbanity of Dezfoul in Islamic era. The beginnings of 11th century AH, particularly since Shah Abbas Safavi ruling has been a restart and re-movement in development of Dezfoul. After Afsharid era, due to the destruction of "Ronash" (western coast of Dez River) and transforming to non-residential state, its residents immigrated to eastern coast of Dez and took domicile therein, and urbanization and city form afterwards has been developed often from northern and northwestern side with the centralization of grand mosque along the river (for facilitating the river water). In Qajar era, in addition to following the generality of this city's specific architecture and urban development (introvert typology), interior and exterior façade ornamentations of buildings have been extended more than ever. In the first Pahlavi era, (1928), the urban development and expansion plan of new tissue of Dezfoul was prepared as checkered street layouts. This city is still alive and active and despite of expansion and development of Dezfoul, the old tissue is still the beating heart of the city.

## Traditional Architecture of Dezfoul

In this historical city we face a type of architecture that contrary to plenty of other Iranian cities that therein the dwelling architecture is subject to disciplined geometry of yard and several porches, here we have more freedom. This freedom is effective on forming the facades and general divisions of building and created varied geometric compositions and tones distinguished from what was prevalent in the traditional architecture of Iran. This freedom that has a specific logic raises the new qualities such as accepting the new changes and facilities; in other word, the architect with open hand may consider any new condition and apply in his design so that adding or reducing the rooms and architectural spaces not to damage the fundamental

organization. This point is one of obvious characteristics of Dezfoul and is connected to multi-basic nature of architecture, so that the architectural changes that are affected by temporal conditions not only doesn't damage the architectural essence but contrary to the architecture of houses in other zones of Iran that have limited potentials for changes therein, increases its complexity and consequently its richness. In architecture of Dezfoul, each one of house elements such as entrance, yard, porch, room etc. solely has all properties of a complete place, whilst their composition, location and connection to each other is not symmetric and the yard status doesn't obey the pivotal and central principles. Yet, the whole area has a harmonic and eye-catching balance. In the balance conditions, various parts may be displaced or reduced and may reestablish the balance another time, in consideration of the applicable principles (Saremi & Radmard, 1997).

In the architecture of this city and other cities' historical tissue that have brick tissue, a beautiful harmony is observed whether in part or whole, due to evolution and fitness and power of brick composition that has been resulted from three thousand years of experience and working. This harmony has direct relationship with mathematical rates and ratios and measures and sizes of materials used therein particularly the brick. In relation to urban perspective, we may state that in the past architecture, the building was ornamented by suitable materials and based on the golden and mathematical ratios, and the architects believed that the ornamentations of each building must have harmony with its identity, physique, and application as well as urban tissue. One of these ornamentations has been using the brick inscriptions. The surface of portal and other surfaces of entrance space have been the most important places that usually one of main inscriptions of building was placed thereon (Soltanzadeh, 1993). There are frequent samples of ornamental application of brick (Khovoonchini) that are ornamented by God and infallibles' words and titles, in the inscriptions of Dezfoul's historical tissue.

"Khovoon" in Iranian architectural art was referred to ornamental inscriptions like as mosaic that was built on the forehead of building (Emam, 1994). This style is a specific type of brick work in objected and knotted form that has been prevalent in Shooshtar and Dezfoul frequently. Khavoonchini brick work in Safavid era has been developed extensively and continued to the recent of Qajar and first Pahlavi era (Naima, 1997).

## Observations

Upon selecting Dezfoul historical city as the study sample, we intended through analyzing and examining the selected samples of this city's houses entrance portals, to find an appropriate solution for reviewing the development trend of texts, concepts and physique of inscriptions and provide an analysis of factors effective on the quality diversity of application of religious inscriptions. Hence, in the selected samples, type and number of God and infallibles' titles and words, script type, quality of

materials and color, procedure and location of inscriptions have been analyzed. Upon analysis of samples, we may identify the origins of the effects of Islamic thoughts and mental-psychological characteristics of citizens in the art of Dezfoul historical city, as inscriptions available in the houses entrance portals.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Samples

The population of this study includes the historical houses, houses damages in war (Iran & Iraq) and renovated and new tissue and new-built houses of Dezfoul, from Qajar era so far. Random sampling method has been applied in this study and dispersal area includes the city. For this purpose, the selected samples were presented in three groups including historical houses, houses renovated during and after war and new tissue houses, and then were analyzed.

### Historic Houses

One of characteristics of historical tissue houses of Dezfoul has been using the God and infallibles titles and words as citation in the body of buildings particularly entrance of houses. The major area of brick buildings has been covered by carved

bricks in small sizes of mosaic that in local language is called “Khavoonchini”. The cross inscription forms the major basis of Khavoonchini inscription, so that has been created from formation of cross petal-liked vanes around a center and their merging with different compositions. These flower vanes in different designs create multilaterals that have different names depending on the type of multilaterals; in other word, the artist has symbolized the sun design in different inscriptions. Often the center of an inscription that is a combination of several vanes and forms the most salient part of the inscription is ornamented by words such as Allah, Mohammad and Ali etc. in masonry script content (Kiyani, 1988) (Fig. 1).

In some historical houses, in addition to inscriptions by masonry scripts in Khavoonchini, specifically in one or several points of building particularly the house entrance, special religious inscriptions have been used. In this research, we intend to identify and introduce the inscriptions text and type. For this purpose, 100 residential units from Qajar era to the end of second Pahlavi era from all historical quarters of city have been selected randomly and the buildings were examined in terms of inscriptions available at the portal of buildings (Table 1).

Results obtained from this study indicate that the inscriptions with the contents of "In the name of God the compassionate



Fig. 1: Sample of inscriptions available in historical tissue.

Table 1: Introduction of inscriptions available in the historical tissue of Dezfoul (Qajar to the end of second Pahlavi era)

Titles	Contents of inscriptions	Text and script type	Materials	Frequency (%)
Sample 1	Names of five infallibles [Mohammad, Ali, Hassan, Hossein and Fatemeh]	God and infallibles titles/ Nastaliq	Brick	3
Sample 2	My (own) affair I commit to God	Divine word/ Nastaliq	Tile	2
Sample 3	Verily we have granted thee a manifest victory	Divine word/ Nastaliq	Brick	5
Sample 4	In the name of God the compassionate the merciful	Divine word/ Nastaliq	Brick	55
Sample 5	Peace be upon Mohammad and his holy family	Divine word/ Nastaliq	Brick	5
Sample 6	My Allah	Citation/Nastaliq and masonry	Brick/metal	13
Sample 7	Ali	Citation/Nastaliq and masonry	Brick	9
Sample 8	Ali help me	Citation/Nastaliq	Brick	3
Sample 9	This is by the Grace of my Lord	Divine word/ Nastaliq	Brick	5

the merciful", "My Allah", "Ali", "titles of five infallibles", "Peace be upon Mohammad and his holy family", and Koran verses including "Verily we have granted thee a manifest victory" and " This is by the Grace of my Lord " and term "Ali help me" have been used frequently (Fig. 1 and Fig.2). Most of inscriptions have been written by Nastaliq script and their materials are made of brick, but during second Pahlavi



Fig. 2: Sample of "In the name of God the compassionate the merciful" available in historical tissue.

era other materials such as tile, cement and metal have been used. Considering the scope of research, "In the name of God the compassionate the merciful" seems to have the maximum diversity on the entrance of historical tissue houses. In the next priorities, "Ali" and "My Allah" citations are seen more than other inscriptions. (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4)

## Houses Reconstructed During and after Iran and Iraq War

Dezfoul during this war was attacked by 176 missiles, 340 air bombings and 2500 cartouches. The damage arising out of war caused the destruction of 19000 building units that 15000 units thereof were destroyed completely or damaged extremely (Chaedeheh, 2010). Several methods were applied for renovation of damaged areas so that some areas were renovated by government and some other by public collaboration and self-construction. In this group of observations, 100 units out

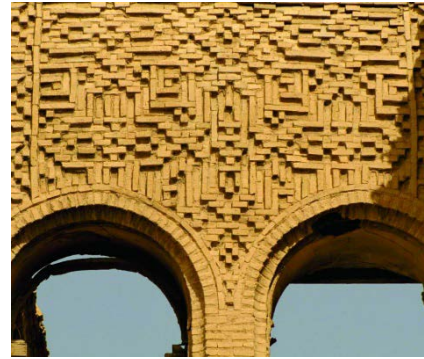


Fig. 3: Sample of inscriptions "Ali" available in historical tissue.



Fig. 4: Sample of inscriptions "Ali" and "Mohamad" and "Allah" available in historical tissue.

of houses renovated during and after war in all damaged places of city were selected randomly and analyzed so that all types of renovation to be available in samples and include houses built within the aforesaid period by people or government.

The observations and studies indicate that utilization of Islamic inscription in self-construction and collaborative renovations are more than governmental renovation. We may conclude that no sign of entrance ornamentalations and inscriptions are seen in the structures renovated by the government. Due to the speed of renovation during war and hasty actions for renovation after war caused the application of religious and national inscriptions as ornaments of houses portal to be disregarded and instead, other problems such as proving refuge and such topics were prioritized.

In a few cases, the residents of houses renovated by government have manifested some inscriptions in their quarter, with the contents of "In the name of God the compassionate the merciful" and "Not youth like ali not sword like Zolfaghar<sup>5</sup>" by means of simple tools and materials such as metal, paper script or calligraphy on the walls. (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6)

It is notable that within this period, in some city areas, the

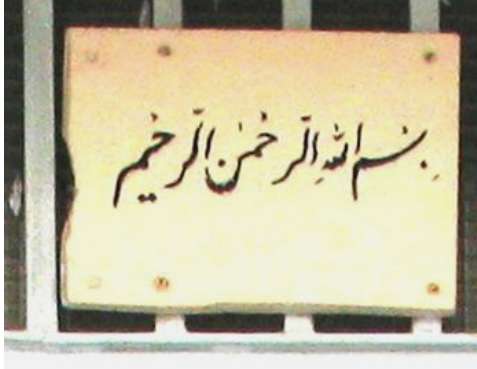


Fig. 5: Sample of available in reconstruction period during and after war.



Fig. 6: Sample of available in reconstruction period during and after war.

government had constructed residential complexes that unfortunately in their residential units no Islamic inscriptions have been used; on the other side, in different city areas, citizens that themselves had constructed the lands assigned by Housing Fund have used the inscriptions in their living environment.

In consideration of achieved information, within this period, most of inscriptions which have been used in a few cases included "Ayatolkorsi<sup>6</sup>" and "En yakad<sup>7</sup>".

### New Tissue Houses

Dezfoul City after war due to increase of population and housing demands was developed and expanded; on the other side, some urban structures due to the exhaustion required renovation and improvement. For this purpose, the citizens began the construction. Thus, about one third of Dezfoul consists of new urban tissues. Therefore, out of this group 100 residential units in new and renovated places were selected randomly and studied.

The studies indicate that after completion of renovation, utilization of ornamentations and inscription over houses entrance has been reconsidered in the urban and renovation development process and improvement of brown fields by a different mechanism, so that the ornamentations full of designs were not seen any more, but the entrances with minimum ornamentations and tile inscriptions with different colors and inserting citations such as Ayatolkorsi, En Yakad verse, Chahar Ghol<sup>8</sup> and such terms were sufficed. As if the city residents live in fear and horror and to avoid the calamity and involvement again, insure their life and property by inserting special verses and attempt to obviate the calamity through resorting the divine verses. In fact, according to the available evidences, it is inferred that after war and renovation, not only the physiquess and appearance of ornamentations and inscriptions of entrances have been changed but the contents of inscriptions have been changed also that may demonstrate the changes in attitudes, moods and mental needs of citizens (Table 2).

It is notable that within this period, the inscriptions are varied

Table 2: Introduction of inscriptions available in the new tissue of Dezfoul.

Titles	Contents of inscriptions	Text and script type	Materials	Frequency (%)
Sample 1	Names of five infallibles	God and infallibles titles/Nastaliq	Brick	4
Sample 2	Ayatolkorsi	Divine word/ Nastaliq	Tile/stone	21
Sample 3	In the name of God the compassionate the merciful	Divine word/ Nastaliq	Tile	17
Sample 4	Chahar Ghol	Divine word/ Nastaliq	Tile	13
Sample 5	Peace be upon Mohammad and his holy family	Divine word/ Nastaliq	Tile/stone	8
Sample 6	En Yakad	Divine word/ Nastaliq	Tile/stone	31
Sample 7	This is by the Grace of my Lord	Divine word/ Nastaliq	Cement/tile	2
Sample 7	others	various	various	4

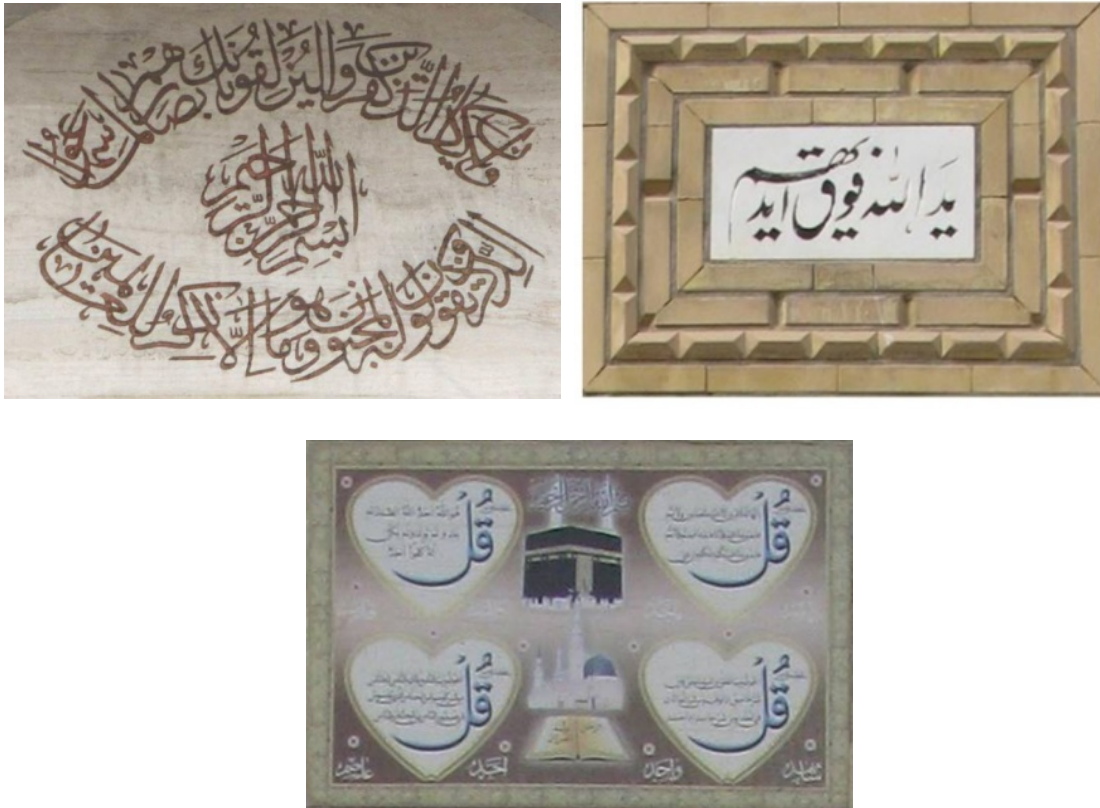


Fig. 7: Sample of inscriptions available in new tissue.

in color and script. As it was observed, in some inscriptions, several words and citations have been combined to each other. The other contents used in this period include terms such as "the Hand of Allah is over their hands", "Tell there is no God but Allah to become salvation" and "Ali ibn Abi Talib friendship is my stronghold, everyone who enters the stronghold will safe from my punishment" and suras such as "Tohid" and "Hamd" and citations such as "My Allah" and "Ali" that are mostly made of stone and tile (Fig. 7).

## CONCLUSION

Dezfoul historical city in past has had unique characteristics in the ornamentalations of houses entrance. In these ornamentalations, very varied and beautiful designs have been utilized. These ornamentalations in addition to being effective on beautification of city perspective seem to have responded the mental and intellectual needs and demands of citizens and audiences.

The results of this research indicate that identification of the effects of religious thoughts on each zone as inscriptions available in the houses' entrance portals. In addition, it provides the requirements for researches of other researchers that search and study in the similar and relative contexts.

The achievements of this research indicate the importance

of religious contents particularly the God's titles, verses and religious narrations in the thoughts of popular artists. These contents have been created in different shapes in the portal inscriptions and often written as masonry and Nastaliq scripts. Although the calligraphy art is very valuable among the region residents, but these works may not be placed in the prominent samples group, thus simplicity and indigenus being of writing style of these scripts have characterized them uniquely.

In the historic samples, the ornamentalations of houses entrance despite of simplicity have special attraction and generally religious terms implying the calmness and citations of divine titles and God saints have been used. Furthermore, within first Pahlavi era, mostly symbols and signs of ancient Iran and since recent of Pahlavi onwards, materials such as tile, ceramic, cement and metal were the dominant element in the ornamentalations. According to the applied research, the renovated houses' use of Iranian-Islamic inscriptions in this city has been reduced considerably and gradually elimination of inscriptions in most of entrances was sensible and the content of a few available ornamentalations with inappropriate quality expresses the religious concepts in general. Based on the observations, it is concluded that the war and renovation has disordered the transfer of inscriptions to the next generation. It

is notable that the inscriptions used after war and renovation mostly contain contents such as calamity warding-off, and staying away from evil eye and look that has direct relationship with religious and popular beliefs of city residents. The Koran contents used in the inscriptions include divine verses such as "Chahar Ghol", "Ayatolkorsi", "En Yakad "and such contents that refer to calamity obviation and removal have been attracted by the citizens of this city. In addition, among the citations, My Allah, Ali and names of five infallibles were used. Type of citations and inscriptions at the portal of house entrances has direction relationship with religious-national beliefs, spiritual-mental and living conditions of its residents, so that following occurring an event (such as war), the citizens for establishing calmness in their life resort to citations and prays the in their beliefs are origin of calmness and calamity warding-off, and use them as inscriptions in their living environment.

### ENDNOTES

1. The Qajar dynasty (also romanised as Ghajar, Kadjar, Qachar etc.) is a Persianized Iranian royal family of Turkic origin, which ruled Iran from 1785 to 1925.
2. The Pahlavi, was the reigning constitutional monarchy of Iran from 1925 until 1979, when the monarchy was overthrown and abolished as a result of the Iranian Revolution.
3. Anno Domini.
4. After Hejrat.
5. The name of a sword.
6. The part of Baghareh chapter (255-257 Verses) of Quran
7. The part of Galam chapter (51-52 Verses) of Quran
8. Four chapter of Quran that starting with Ghol word.

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