

## Original Research Article

**A Comparative Study of Decorative Patterns in the Blue Mosques of Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan and Sultan Ahmed in Turkey\***Saeedeh Joshaghani <sup>1</sup>, Mohammad Kazem Hassanvand <sup>2\*\*</sup>, Mohammad Aref<sup>3</sup>

1. Department of Analytical History and Comparative Studies of Islamic Art, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.
2. Associate Professor of Creative Arts (in Painting), Department of Painting, Faculty of Art and Architecture, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran.
3. Associate Professor of Art anthropology. Theatre Department of faculty member of Art, Tehran Branch, Iran.

Received: 05/07/2021 ;

accepted: 30/12/2021 ;

available online: 20/02/2022

**Abstract**

**Problem statement:** Decoration is the most valuable part of Islamic Art. Decoration can reflect the religious beliefs and manifestations of culture and art of the Islamic period and with all the ups and downs it has had over the centuries, it has been able to expand significantly and leave lasting works through unique and unified expressions in different climates. Among all kinds of architectural decorations, tiling and painting are the most attractive among Muslim architects and are considered the most important and effective factors in the beauty and grandeur of Islamic buildings.

**Research objective:** The main purpose of this study is to examine the decorative patterns of the two 'Kabud' (blue) mosques of 'Mazar-e-Sharif' and 'Sultan Ahmed'. The unique decorations of the blue mosques are compared to clarify the similar and dissimilar items in the decorative designs used on the tiles, which are inspired by nature and ethnic and regional influences and are derived from the art of ancient Iran and Islamic Iran.

**Research method:** The results were obtained by comparing the decorative patterns of the two mentioned mosques using the descriptive and analytical methods with the help of the tables, written documents, and data analysis.

**Conclusion:** The origin of decorative patterns in the two buildings is rooted in Iran, but each region has used its own mechanism and creativity to localize the designs. The tiling decorations used in the two blue mosques of 'Sultan Ahmed' and 'Mazar-e-Sharif' are simple, with emphasis on the commands of Islam, and are abstracted from nature in a vegetal, geometric and symbolic manner. Along with beautification, they have meanings and show order, multiplicity, and unity, and add to the coherence of the spiritual atmosphere of the environment.

**Keywords:** *Islamic architecture, Patterns, Blue Mosque, Sultan Ahmed Mosque of Turkey, Mazar-e-Sharif Mosque of Afghanistan.*

\* This article is extracted from Saeedeh Joshaghani Ph.D. thesis entitled "A Comparative Study of Decorative Patterns in the Blue Mosques of Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan and Sultan Ahmed in Turkey" is in progress under supervision of

Dr. Mohammad Kazem Hassanvand and advisement of Dr. Mohammad Aref at the Faculty of Art, Central Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.  
\*\* Corresponding Author: mkh@modares.ac.ir,+989123273692

## Introduction

Since the emergence of Islam, the architecture of the mosques has always been one of the hallmarks of Islamic art around the world. The decorations of the mosques are among the elements related to Islamic architecture, which have always been manifested in their most beautiful forms. Therefore, the blue mosques of Afghanistan and Turkey are prominent samples to be studied as masterpieces of the Islamic era in this article.

Architecture is the most prominent art of the Islamic era, the Ottomans and the Timurids, which was first manifested in the form of a mosque. Its associated decorations reflect the ethnic culture and beliefs, and the climatic and regional influences. Decorative patterns are intertwined with Iranian art, and Muslim architects have replaced the human and animal elements with vegetal and geometric patterns in the decoration of buildings to comply with the rules and regulations. Muslims built mosques in the lands where Islam found its way in, and because the art of building a mosque was a response to a religious need, the mosque was associated with religion. As in all the world, places of worship are linked to religious beliefs and ethnic-climatic beliefs, it did not take long for Islamic art to come into direct contact with the ruler and those around him. Architects also built mosques, palaces, schools, and tombs by order of the caliph or emir, painters painted on marble stones, designers drew geometric shapes inspired by plants, weavers wove carpets and rugs. Muslim artists created their own works of art, as they saw fit. Architecture, weaving, arrangement, and decoration, in addition to the manufacture of artistic tools due to the existing security, as well as the abundance of treasury revenues between merchants and princes, all led to the point that Islamic art coincided with the spread of Islam in terms of expansion. It became one of the most widespread arts in the world.

The mosque's architecture, as it contains a religious and social foundation, also reflects the social conditions of its time. It also shows the path of changes and transformations of life in societies, which shows the depth of understanding in the intellectuals and builders of the time from the mentality and faith of its contemporary society. Thus, the mosques reflect the worldview of Muslims of every age (Hoag & Martin, 2011)

The Sultan Ahmed Mosque or the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, Turkey, and the Mazar-i-Sharif Mosque in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan, are two of the most beautiful mosques in the world and two of the most unique and amazing examples of Ottoman and Timurid architecture.

Islam was the predominant religion in Ottoman Turkey, and the Turkish culture and art are very diverse and heterogeneous. It has come from West Asia, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the traditions of the Caucasus.

The country is located in a mountainous region. It is connected to seas on three sides, so the architects of this country do not consider tiling to be suitable for decorations on buildings in terms of region and climate. For this reason, the Blue Mosque of Sultan Ahmed lacks decoration on the exterior shell of the building, and only a layer of lead and vertical grooves on the surface of the facade can be easily seen on the minarets and domes.

On the other hand, there is Islam which is the religion of the people of Afghanistan, which was a part of the Timurids territory. Afghanistan is located in Central Asia, and it is mountainous and landlocked and has a dry climate. Since it usually suffered from war and conflict, it has not made significant progress in terms of culture and art. However, in the Timurid era and due to the rulers' interest in developing the culture and helping art grow in the scientific, cultural, and artistic fields, architects were also able to build the most beautiful sacred buildings with

tilled decorations in mosques. Therefore, during the reign of Timurid, blue tiles with vegetal and geometric patterns were considered suitable for Mazar-i-Sharif's mosque.

“The tendency towards nature and its reflection is evident in symbolic forms in the Iranian art, manner of thinking and ancient beliefs, and also in the style of facing natural forces. This tendency is manifested in various forms and shapes, and these symbolic patterns of nature can be seen in various geometric and vegetal shapes. This style continued throughout the Islamic era in Iran and was exported to the Islamic world” (Javadi, 2009, 12).

The combination of indigenous naturalism of Turkey and Afghanistan with Iranian ornaments has caused differences and similarities in the creation of patterns on the tiles of the mentioned mosques. Cases in point can include the presence of tulips and cloves and jujube or orange color on the Ottoman tiles, which had not been used in Iranian designs. The clove, a symbol of power, was a popular flower among the Ottoman rulers, and it is usually present in their tiling, textile weaving, and miniatures.

Afghanistan was considered as a link between world civilizations and one of the most important commercial centers of ancient times due to its location on the Silk Road. This crucial and sensitive geostrategic and geopolitical position of Afghanistan played an important role in shaping tiles enriched with great cultures and civilizations, such as Iran, Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. Due to the dry and cold mountainous climate, the decorations were performed outside the building, thus making Mazar-i-Sharif shine with turquoise blue tiles. The people of Afghanistan are naturalists and pay special attention to geometric patterns.

Therefore, the main purpose of the present study is to answer ‘where do the decorative patterns used in the blue mosques of Mazar-i-Sharif and Sultan Ahmed come from? How

much have culture and social, tribal, and ethnic characteristics influenced the transformation of the decorations of the mentioned mosques?’

## Methodology

This study established a relationship between theories and artworks through an analytical approach to compare and contrast the patterns. Investigating the meanings of decorations in the mentioned mosques from deep details (the place for semantic and fundamental categories) and their emergence on the surface (the place for the formation of shapes, style, and objective forms) is conducted through symbolic relations and the formal and tangible reality.

## Literature review

Several studies have covered these buildings, but none of them have compared these two buildings, which belong to different historical periods, independently or dependently.

In an article titled “Comparison of Inscriptions of Two Mosques: Goharshad and Kaboud (Blue)”, Bahrami, Heydari, Hoseeini niya & navid (2016, 21) studied the art of calligraphy in combination with the mosaic (abaculus), Maqeli (Bannai script), and brick tiles, as well as the geometric and Islamic patterns in the two buildings.

In an article titled “The Green Dome, the oldest example of mosaic tiling in Iran”, Javadi introduced and symbolized the tiling patterns of this building (Javadi, 1980), and claimed the role of the pomegranate flower as an original example in Iranian decorations. Another article from the same author (Javadi, 2009), titled: “Decoration, The Main Element in the Aesthetics of Iranian Art”, Javadi examined the importance of decorations in various instances in Iranian-Islamic art.

In a study by Khorami & Akbaripanah (2017) titled “Typology of Ornaments and Tiling patterns in the Domes of Yazd”, the author

pointed to tiling in Iranian architecture as one of the elements and pleasant methods of decorative architecture in Islamic lands.

Jahanbakhsh & Sheikhi Narani (2015) in an article with the title “The Place of Decorations and Tiling Patterns in the Iranian Mosques”, also mentioned tiling as one of the most important forms of manifesting the spiritual and mystical concepts in art, which seem to be the foundation of the decorations in the religious places.

In the present study, tiling and painting decorations in the two blue mosques of Afghanistan and Turkey are compared, and symbolic elements and patterns are introduced and studied (Figs. 1-3).

### Mazar-i-Sharif Mosque

The Blue Mosque of Mazar-i-Sharif 1 is one of the most valuable examples of Islamic architecture in Mazar-i-Sharif (one of the largest cities in northern Afghanistan) in the center of the Balkh province, and it was built in the 9th century AH (Fig. 4). This city has found its power and popularity due to the existence of the Blue Mosque of Mazar-i-Sharif (see Fig. 1) through the ages. The Mazar-i-Sharif Mosque was built during the reign of Sultan Hussein Bayqara and was rebuilt during different governments. In recent years, the building, entrance porch, and other parts were renovated and decorated (Figs. 5&6). In the southwestern part of the dome and porch, a large court can be seen that belongs to the Timurid era. Inside that small portico, which is located at the left side of the entrance door, there is a tombstone decorated with marble, which belongs to the Timurid era. The court is decorated with tiles, and a wide courtyard is in the center with four large doors that face the street from four sides. The interior parts of the tomb and porch are decorated with Islamic patterns, which were performed by the order of Mohammad Zahir Shah. In addition, he ordered the construction of canopies in front



Fig. 1. The interior wall of Sultan Ahmed Mosque with the pattern of tulips. Source: [www.Istanbul.com](http://www.Istanbul.com)



Fig. 2. The interior wall with pomegranate flower pattern in Sultan Ahmed Mosque (Tiling). Source: [www.Istanbul.com](http://www.Istanbul.com)

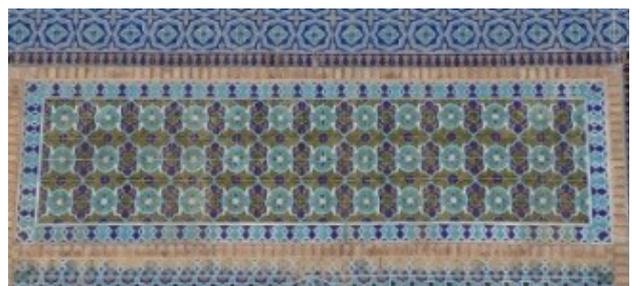


Fig. 3. The interior wall of Mazar-i-Sharif Mosque with geometric pattern or tiling with pomegranate flower pattern. Photo: Kave Besharat, 2021.



Fig. 4. The Blue Mosque of Mazar-i-Sharif - Afghanistan.  
Photo: Kaveh Besharat, 2021.



Fig. 5. The main wall - Blue Mosque of Mazar-i-Sharif - Afghanistan.  
Source: www. shutterstockpars.com.

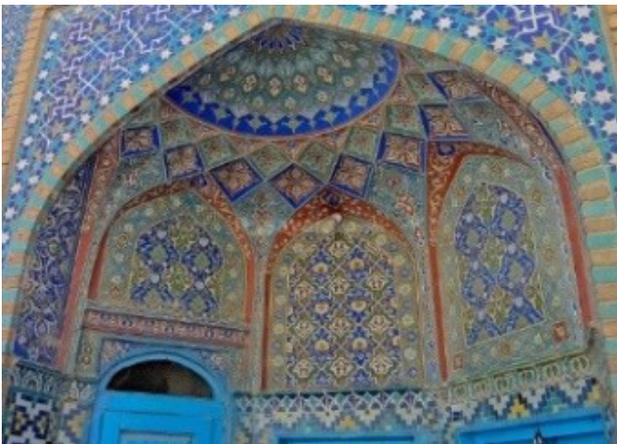


Fig. 6. Tiling with crescent muqarnas from the main wall.  
Source: www. shutterstockpars.com.

of the portico doors to create a place for saying prayers. A large shrine is located in the middle of the courtyard, which draws everyone's attention upwards by creating a unique spiritual atmosphere. Muslim pilgrims always worship there with the utmost humility every day.

## The architecture of the Kaboud Mosque of Mazar-i-Sharif – Afghanistan

Local residents believe that the name of the city comes from the belief that Mazar-i-Sharif is where Imam Ali (PBUH) is buried. According to some narratives that are not historically accurate, Imam Sadegh (PBUH) ordered Abu-Muslim Khorasani to transfer Imam Ali's (PBUH) body from Najaf to the current location of the tomb. Following the beliefs of the majority of Muslims, the tomb of Imam Ali (PBUH) is located in Iraq, because the exhumation of his body is not allowed religiously, and the tale of Imam Sadegh's request is not compatible with the accepted beliefs. By historical evidence, this location is a tomb for one of the descendants of Imams, who lived in the fifth century and due to his similarities with Imam Ali (PBUH), these confusions have been created. These similarities include the name, kunya, and nickname of the Imam and his father's name. Regardless, the people of Afghanistan respect this place very much, and thousands of people visit this Mosque for pilgrimage annually.

Because of the blue tiling used in this mosque, it is called Kabud (i.e. blue) Mosque (Figs. 7&8). This Mosque has been destroyed and rebuilt for centuries, and the Timurids and Gurkanis played significant roles in its revival.

Decorative designs created in different eras have given this building beauty and a unique appearance (see Fig. 3). The height of the entrance attracts the audience's gaze upwards. This movement from the bottom to the top is a sign of diversity in the Muqarnas and a symbol of unity in the center of the Shamsah (the sun). It seems that the mosque invites man to the higher world and, by passing through the entrance, one can enter a space in which all its elements are pointing towards unity (Burckhardt, 1986, 50).

This mosque was first built by Ahmed Sanjar in 1136 in Balkh, and it was repaired and renovated many times. After the earthquake and

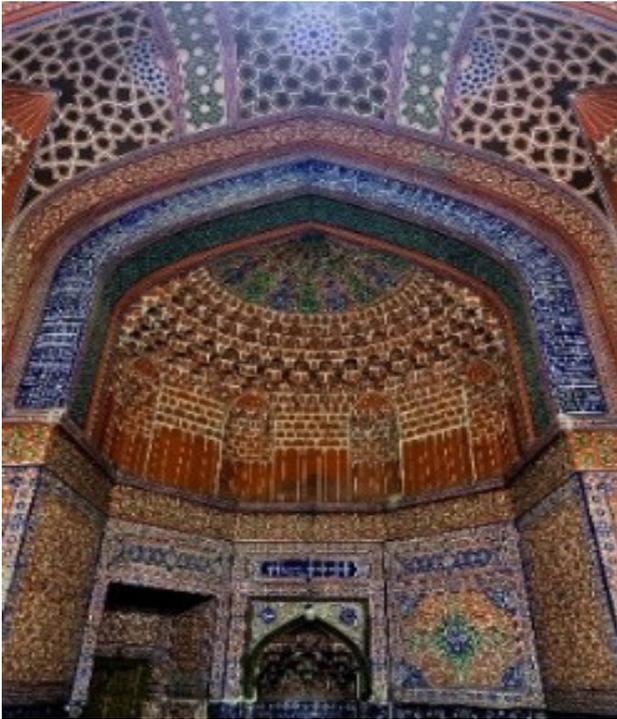


Fig. 7. Interior view from under the dome of Mazar-e-Sharif – Afghanistan. Source: Kaveh Besharat, 2021.



Fig. 8. Main entrance to the courtyard with tile decorations - Mazar-e-Sharif – Afghanistan. Source: Kaveh Besharat, 2021.

the dome's collapse, its dome was renovated by Nabi Qoli Khan, the ruler of Balkh. Its court was decorated with tiles by Sami Samarkandi in 1908, and Mohammad Zahir Shah also added some decorations to the building in 1940 (Al-Rifa'i, 2005, 57).

The architecture of this court can be classified into three categories: 1. Renovated 2. Under reconstruction 3. Vintage and abandoned.

Tables 1- 3 shows examples of the mosque decorations that display geometric and vegetal

patterns, or a combination of both with the influence of the Iranian-Islamic art, the local taste, and the environmental requirements (Abdullahi & Embi, 2013, 243).

### The Blue Mosque of Sultan Ahmed

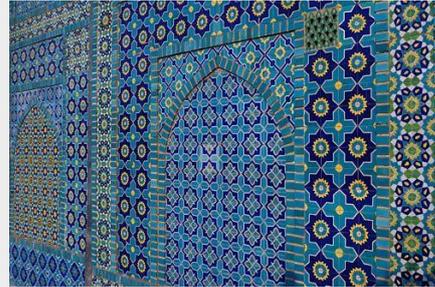
The Blue Mosque of Sultan Ahmed<sup>2</sup> was built by order of Sultan Ahmed I during the years 1609 to 1616 under the supervision of the architect Sinan and the royal architect "Agha Mohammad the Architect" in the oldest part of Istanbul (Fig. 9). Before 1453, this region was considered the center of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. This mosque was built near the hypodermis between two main buildings, Little Hagia Sophia and Topkapi Palace, after the destruction of several palaces. At first, this building included a school, a hospital, an inn, a primary school, a bazaar, and a mansion, and the tomb of Sultan Ahmed, but unfortunately, these buildings were destroyed in the 19th century.

### The architecture of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque

Around the courtyard of the mosque is decorated with 20,000 pieces of handmade tiles, and these ceramics were made in Iznik<sup>3</sup> (Ancient Nisha), and the upper part is painted (Fig. 10). More than 200 glass windows direct light into the main courtyard (Fig. 11), and large chandeliers have been used to illuminate the mosque. Some parts are decorated with inscriptions of calligraphy by Seyed Kazem Ghobari, the greatest calligrapher of that time (Godfrey, 2009, 62).

The most important interior part is the altar, which is made of delicate and carved marble, and its sidewalls are made of ceramic. This mosque has numerous domes (Fig. 12), and a courtyard that extends horizontally. The relatively gentle upward movement of its other domes, towards the central dome and finally with its six minarets, indicates the continuation of Ottoman architecture's main pattern. The mosque has six

Table 1. Tiling and painting with geometric patterns in the Mazar-e-Sharif Mosque, Afghanistan. Source: Authors; Photos: Kaveh Besharat, 2021.

No.	Pattern	Location
1		<p>Interior View The ceiling displays geometric patterns and simple leaves, Painting; Mazar-e-Sharif</p>
2		<p>Interior View A combination of hexagonal geometric patterns and hexagonal stars and hexagonal flowers, Tiling; Mazar-e-Sharif</p>
3		<p>Exterior View A combination of geometric and the patterns of Shamsah, and octagonal flowers, Tiling; Mazar-i-Sharif</p>
4		<p>Interior View The geometric patterns under the main dome, Painting; Mazar-i-Sharif</p>
5		<p>The ceiling of one of the outer arches with geometric patterns, Tiling; Mazar-i-Sharif</p>

exterior minarets and luxurious tiling in its interior decorations. Due to the blue and patterned tiling used in this mosque (Figs. 1&2), the Sultan Ahmed Mosque

is known as Kabud (Blue) Mosque and is considered one of the masterpieces of Islamic architecture under the Ottoman reign (Shaterian, 2011, 114).

Table 2. Placement of tiling and paintings with vegetal patterns on the interior walls, Blue Mosque of Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan. Source: Authors; Photos: Kaveh Besharat, 2021.

No.	Pattern	Location	
1			<p>Interior View The arabesque patterns with small flowers and bergamot, paintings on the plaster of the squinches under the dome's ceiling; Mazar-i-Sharif</p>
2			<p>Interior View A combination of carnation and pentagonal flowers with acanthus leaves and continuous stripes of color and geometric squares, Painting; Mazar-i-Sharif</p>
3			<p>Interior View The upper part of the wall next to the altar, Painting; Mazar-i-Sharif</p>
4			<p>Interior View Pomegranate flowers and small leaves under the dome, Painting; Mazar-e-Sharif</p>
5			<p>Interior View The upper part of the main wall of the building is decorated with pomegranate flowers, bergamot, and small leaves and continuous lines, Painting; Mazar-i-Sharif</p>

Table 3. Analysis of the patterns used in the decorations in the main design of Mazar-i-Sharif Mosque, Afghanistan. Source: Authors; Photos: Kaveh Besharat, 2021.

NO.	Pattern Images	Analysis of Pattern				
1	 <p data-bbox="256 551 671 607">The arabesque and acanthus leaves - painting on the ceiling</p>	 <p data-bbox="708 551 852 607">Bergamot with trigonal flowers</p>	 <p data-bbox="900 551 1043 580">Acanthus leaves</p>	 <p data-bbox="1107 551 1251 580">Trigonal flowers</p>	 <p data-bbox="1315 551 1410 607">Planetree leaves</p>	
2	 <p data-bbox="261 826 671 936">Roses and acanthus leaves with pentagonal flowers with wide colored connectors stripes and pomegranate flowers-tiling on the interior wall</p>	 <p data-bbox="751 826 807 855">Roses</p>	 <p data-bbox="916 826 1035 882">Pomegranate flowers</p>	 <p data-bbox="1107 826 1251 855">Acanthus Leaves</p>	 <p data-bbox="1307 826 1410 855">Small leaves</p>	
3	 <p data-bbox="256 1200 671 1285">Pomegranate flower and blossom, pentagonal flowers, inside the bergamot with arabesque and acanthus leaves on the inner wall-tiling</p>	 <p data-bbox="727 1200 828 1229">Carnations</p>	 <p data-bbox="948 1200 1003 1229">Roses</p>	 <p data-bbox="1123 1200 1251 1256">Pomegranate flowers</p>	 <p data-bbox="1331 1200 1402 1256">Harmal flower</p>	
4	 <p data-bbox="272 1559 660 1644">Muqarnas decorated with trigonal flowers and pomegranate blossoms on the ceiling-painting</p>	 <p data-bbox="735 1559 828 1588">Bergamot</p>	 <p data-bbox="948 1559 1003 1588">Rose</p>	 <p data-bbox="1123 1559 1251 1588">Rose blossom</p>	 <p data-bbox="1315 1559 1410 1615">Stems and leaves</p>	
5	 <p data-bbox="261 1890 671 1975">Pomegranate flowers and twisting lines with bergamots and geometric divisions on the main wall-tiling</p>	 <p data-bbox="735 1890 828 1919">Bergamot</p>	 <p data-bbox="916 1890 1035 1946">Pomegranate flower</p>	 <p data-bbox="1123 1890 1251 1946">Pomegranate flower</p>	 <p data-bbox="1307 1890 1410 1919">Small leaves</p>	



Fig. 9. Blue Mosque of Sultan Ahmed in Turkey. Source: www. Istanbul.com.



Fig. 10. A collection of Iznik tiles with an inscription of Quranic lines on the inner wall of the Blue Mosque in Turkey. Source: www. shutterstock.com.



Fig. 11. The Mosque's pulpit - Sultan Ahmed - Turkey. Source: www. Istanbul.com.



Fig. 12. Domes of the mosque, interior view, Sultan Ahmed, Turkey. Source: www. shutterstock.com.

### The main space of the Sultan Ahmed Mosque

The space of Sultan Ahmed Mosque is much wider than Iranian mosques due to the use of half domes. The use of multiple windows in the mosque's interior and many lights, which are hung with chains to the center of the dome, has created a very bright space. "The central circle is decorated with spiral margins of pomegranate flowers and large bergamots decorated with flowers and bushes around it (Fig. 12), and the domes are decorated with very delicate arabesque patterns with leaves. The use of blue color in this mosque, in addition to the brightness of the lights, has enhanced the spirituality of the space" (Blair & Bloom, 2012, 261). Next to each half dome, there are windows with colored glass containing geometric and arabesque patterns, which have made the space more beautiful and conceptually significant (Kiani, 1997, 12; Fig. 13).

The space under the dome is white-colored, which is covered with bergamots with an ochre red background, and white arabesques and circles with lungwort flowers on ochre red and blue background. In the squinches of some domes, the names of Hosseini Ali, Hassan, Allah, Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman can be seen (see Fig. 13). White, turquoise, azure, brown, green, beige, and black are some of the colors used in interiors and facades (Fig. 14). The mosque's arches are decorated with simple arabesques and flowers (Fig. 15).

The design of Sultan Ahmed Blue Mosque is the result of two centuries of experience in the construction of Ottoman mosques. The Sultan Ahmed Blue Mosque has five main domes, six minarets, and eight side domes. In this building, some Byzantine Christian elements related to Hagia Sophia are combined with traditional Islamic architecture, and it is considered the last great classical mosque in Turkey.

Imitating the Masjid al-Haram, the Sultan



Fig. 13. Decorative paintings on the two squinches from the interior view of the ceiling of Sultan Ahmed Mosque. Source: shutterstockpars.com.



Fig. 14. Tiling - interior wall with azure margins, and carnation, acanthus and pomegranate flowers, the Blue Mosque of Sultan Ahmed, Turkey. Source: www. shutterstock.com.



Fig. 15. Painting on plaster on the V-shaped half domes, Sultan Ahmed Mosque, Turkey. Source: www. Istanbul.com.

Ahmed Mosque has six minarets, but to compromise with people’s criticism for the six minarets, the seventh minaret of the mosque was built sometime later in turn for additional costs.

The main domes are placed on four pillars of the tomb and the eight side domes. Each half dome has fourteen windows, and the central dome has twenty-eight windows. The complex has two hundred and sixty windows with stained glass. Its altar is made from marble, and the adjacent walls of the altar have ceramic tiles, which make the altar seem magnificent.

The patterns used in the decorations of Sultan Ahmed Mosque, as mentioned before, include arabesque and various flower leaves with twisting lines of bergamot, Shamsah (sun), acanthus leaves, small and large plain leaves, tulip flowers, carnations, large and medium pomegranate flowers (see Fig. 1) and buds, roses, geometric patterns, trees, and colored separating lines. The surfaces of the walls are covered with blue color tiles, but unfortunately, most of the blue tiles of this mosque are currently inaccessible for visitors. They are located on the upper floors of the mosque. However, for better comparison and clarification, several examples are given in Table 4 and categorized in Tables 5 & 6 (Godfrey, 2009, 102).

In the tile decorations of the two mosques, in addition to the fact that according to the orders of Islam, only simple and symbolic geometric or plant designs are dealt with, we also see the influence of Iranian culture and art. In Table 7, for a better understanding some of the designs of the se two mosques have been compared with the designs used in Iranian architecture (Pourshiravi, 2012).

### Discussion and conclusion

Mosque architecture has always been one of the hallmarks of Islamic art worldwide from the advent of Islam to the present day, and decoration is one of the elements related

Table 4. Tiling and painting patterns of the Sultan Ahmed Blue Mosque. Source: Authors; Photos: Kaveh Besharat, 2021.

No.	Pattern	Location
1		The pattern of one of the main walls of the façade Pomegranate flower and acanthus leaves with octagonal flowers
2		The upper part of the main wall with a circular inscription with Arabic lines decorated with pomegranate flowers and acanthus leaves
3		Pomegranate flower with acanthus leaves and pentagonal or harmal flowers on the interior wall
4		The forehead of the inner arch with bergamots filled with arabesque patterns, acanthus leaves, tulips, and pomegranate flowers
5		Carnation, pomegranate, tulip, and rose flower patterns with small and large leaves, and acanthus leaves on the interior wall.

to Islamic architecture in mosques that has always been manifested in its most beautiful way. Therefore, the decorations of the blue mosques of Afghanistan and Turkey are brilliant examples that can be introduced as masterpieces of the Islamic era.

Since none of the architectural elements are built causelessly in Islamic architecture, decoration is no exception to this fact either.

Tiling is one of the arts of Iranian ancestors, and it has later emerged in Ottoman art. Still, the decorating patterns on the tiles, such as flowers and plants, carnations, plane leaves,

pomegranate flowers, and roses along with arabesque patterns, twisted lungworts with blue, red, pomegranate, white, and green colors, have a special place in the belief of Ottoman. These mentioned patterns have been used with a few changes in the Timurid period and the colors of yellow, blue, green, red, and vegetal and geometric patterns have been used in the interior and exterior of the building of Mazar-e-Sharif Mosque.

Geometric patterns mainly express the order, unity, and union with divinity and their repetition shows the sign of instability. The

Table 5. Tiling patterns, Sultan Ahmed Blue Mosque. Source: Authors.

Pattern analysis/Wall tiles				
				
Pomegranate flowers	Azure blue rose	Acanthus leaves	One of the interior wall tiles	The interior wall of Sultan Ahmed Mosque with an inscription of the Holy Quran
				
Hyacinth flower	The side view of an azure tulip	Azure blue rose from the side view	Azure blue rose	One of the interior wall tiles
				
Dragon leaf arabesque	Pentagonal or small harmal flower with simple green leaves	Carnation flower	Pomegranate flower with bergamot	One of the interior wall tiles

upward movement indicates that they move upwards continuously until they become one with God’s eternal power and essence. Vegetal patterns are scaled-down examples of the nature around us in the symbolized forms. Each of them creates true meaning in the human mind, such as the rose as the symbol of love, the pomegranate flower as beauty, immortality, and fertility, the tulip as love and resurrection, the carnation as politics and power, the acanthus as liveliness, and the pattern of Shamsah which reminds us of unity and oneness. However, these elements in each region have specific meanings and perceptions based on the local

people’s beliefs. But generally, these patterns are presented with these meanings.

In conclusion, this should be mentioned that the magnificent tile and painting decorations used in the Kaboud Mosques of Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan, and Sultan Ahmed are claimed to be beautiful and unique collections of Islamic art. However, using written documents and analogies of both decorations, it can be concluded that the patterns on the tiles are similar because they both have Iranian roots. They have only acted differently in terms of transformation, deformation, and color selection.

Table 6. Patterns on plaster, Sultan Ahmed Blue Mosque. Source: Authors.

Pattern analysis/ Plastering decorations				
				
Sangria geometric patterns around the window under the ceiling	Quranic verses along with the sun pattern	Flowers in geometric-circular shapes	Bergamot with bergamot head	Painting of two squinches of the main ceiling of Sultan Ahmed Mosque
				
Sangria bergamots with arabesque patterns	Repeated geometric pattern under the dome	Pomegranate flowers and small blossoms	Sun pattern under the dome	Painted decorative patterns in one of the domes of Sultan Ahmed Mosque
				
Pomegranate flower with acanthus leaves	Multi-pomegranate flower blossom	Geometric polygon along with the pattern of pomegranate flowers	Bergamot with bergamot head	The V-shaped half domes between the side squinches of the ceiling of Sultan Ahmed Mosque

Decoration, which is an integral part of the architecture, in addition to beautification, is a novel language and form of expression to express Islamic values.

Since the mosques of Sultan Ahmed and Mazar-i-Sharif are among the architectural masterpieces of the Islamic world, they are a suitable answer to avoid futility in Islamic architecture.

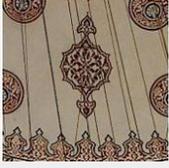
### Endnotes

1. The shrine of Mazar-i-Sharif is also called the Roza Sharif and Ziarat-e-Sakhi, which refer to Imam Ali (AS).
2. The other name for this mosque is the Blue Mosque, or the Ahmadiyya Mosque.
3. Iznik is the name of an ancient city in Turkey, which was known as the birthplace of tiling.

### Reference list

- Abdullahi, Y. & Embi, M. R. B. (2013). Evolution of Islamic geometric patterns. *Frontiers of Architectural Research*, 2(2), 243-251.
- Blair, Sh. & Bloom, J. (2012). *Islamic art and architecture*. Tehran: Dorooos.
- Burckhardt, T. (1986). *Honar-e Eslami, Zaban va Bayan* [Islamic art, Language and Expression] (M. Rajabnia, Trans.). Tehran: Soroush.
- Godfrey, G. (2009). *History of Ottoman architecture* (A. Ishraqi, Trans.). Tehran: Matn.
- Hoag, J. & Martin, H. (2011). *La grammire des styles dans l'architecture Islamique* [The grammar of styles in Islamic architecture] (P. Varjavand, Trans.). Tehran: Elmi Farhangi.
- Jahanbakhsh, H. & Sheikhi Narani, H. (2015). The place of

Table 7. A Comparison between the decorative patterns of tiling and paintings of the two Mosque of Mazar-i-Sharif and Sultan Ahmed. Source: Authors.

No.	Pattern Name - Symbol	The Blue Mosque of Mazar-e-Sharif	The Blue Mosque of Sultan Ahmed	A similar sample in Iranian architecture
۱	Rose Love, beauty, purification			 Part of the wall decorations of Kaboud Mosque in Tabriz.
۲	Pomegranate flowers Holiness, immortality, and fertility			 Decorations of Kaboud Mosque in Tabriz.
۳	Tulip Determination, resurrection, love			 Taq-e Bostan Column head
۴	Carnation flower The flower of God, politics, love, and power			
۵	Bergamot Unity and integrity of existence- Unity with God			 Part of the wall decorations of Kaboud Mosque in Tabriz.
۶	Acanthus leaves- Liveliness			 The patterns of the dome of Sheikh Fazlollah Mosque

decorations and tile designs in Iranian mosques, Chideman, 4(11), 108-117.

- Javadi, Sh. (1980). Ghobbe-Ye Sabz Ghadimi-tarin Nemune-ye Kashi-kari-ye Mo'araq-e Iran [Green dome, oldest Iranian mosaic work]. *Honar-ha-ye-Ziba*, (7), 12-20.
- Javadi, Sh. (2009). Decoration, the main element of beauty in aesthetics of Iranian art. *Bagh-e Nazar*, 2(3), 51-57.
- Khorami, H. & Akbaripanah, M. (2017). *Typology of decorations and tiling patterns in the architecture of Yazd domes*. In The Conference on Islamic and Historical Architecture and

Urban Planning Research in Iran. Shiraz: Mo'asese-ye Rah-e Mehrazi.

- Kiani, M. Y. (1997). *Taz'inat-e Vavaste be Memari-ye Iran Dowre-ye Eslami* [Decorations related to the architecture of the Islamic period]. Tehran: Miras-e Farhangi.
- Pourshiravi, A. (2012). *Decorative design in tile making art*. Tehran: Yasavoli.
- Shaterian, R. (2011). *Analysis in the Architecture of Iranian Mosques*. Tehran: Nopardazan.

#### COPYRIGHTS

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with publication rights granted to the Bagh-e Nazar Journal. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



#### HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Joshaghani, S., Hassanvand, M. K. & Aref, M. (2022). A Comparative Study of Decorative Patterns in the Blue Mosques of Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan and Sultan Ahmed in Turkey. *Bagh-e Nazar*, 18(105), 5-20.

DOI: 10.22034/BAGH.2021.292912.4932

URL: [http://www.bagh-sj.com/article\\_142830.html?lang=en](http://www.bagh-sj.com/article_142830.html?lang=en)

