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A Comparative Study of Religious Architecture in Christianity and Islam A Criticism of Titus Burckhardt's Theory (Case study: Isfahan)

Minoo Khakpour*

Fatemeh Kateb**

Abstract

Today, the plurality of different ways through which ideas in divine religions are expressed highlights an urgent need for a common language using the approach of ethnic unity. The analysis of these commonalities would be effective in coming to the point at which the spiritual-ethnic aspects of these religions converge. In so doing, art can serve as a common language. As the physical structure of religious buildings is mainly influenced by the type of ritual ceremonies in which they are held, it is more likely that the diversity of religions results in the diversity of the architecture of the holy buildings. However, the similar elements in the architecture of various religions can create a common and single language in the sacred arts to avoid the variety of ideas.

This paper is an attempt to explore the common architectural features of religious buildings in Christianity (Armenians) and Islam during the Safavid era. Drawing upon Titus Burckhardt's theory, we attempt to explain how the structures of Armenian churches and Muslim mosques in the Safavid era are different or similar? we scrutinize some samples of worship buildings. An extensive review of literature shows that essential differences in the mentioned religions have resulted in worship places with different interior designs. However, despite such differences, the building structures have been flexible architecture of these religions in shared geographic and historical domain influence each other. Similarly, apart from the influences, Armenians' architecture in Isfahan is undeniably affected by the architecture of Safavid period and its subsequent periods. That might explain why churches with Iranian-Islamic structure reflect Christians-Armenians' Architecture. The methods of data collection for this research are documentary and field-based. Data are analyzed in descriptively.

Keywords

Burckhardt, Safavid architecture, Isfahan, Church, Mosque.

*. University of Science and Culture, Rasht Branch. Corresponding author. minookhakpour@yahoo.com

**.. Faculty of Art, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran. f.kateb@alzahra.ac.ir

Introduction

Today, the followers of different beliefs have rarely reached a consensus on different concepts. Searching for the same language among different ethnic groups and religions will end the controversy over the concepts which are sometimes, similar in meaning but different in forms thereby leading to an ideological consensus. Titus Burkhart (1908-1954), a Swiss traditional scholar, drew upon primary sources to analyze extensive studies on the art of religions. He widely studied the religions of Christianity and Islam, and shed light on various aspects of these religions in form and in meaning. From his point of view, in comparison with Islamic arts (the art of the ancient civilizations of the Orient), Christian arts seem to be extremely detached in terms of spiritual quality and artistic style. The reason is that Christian thinking, which puts an emphasis on Jesus Christ, needs a figurative art while Islamic arts look for a formal homogeneity which results in essential differences in the use of physical and visual elements of arts (e.g. shape, color, and content).

Religious buildings in Isfahan city has a unique style influenced by Safavid Shia government. Shah Abbas I relocated Armenians of Julfa from the Iranian and Ottoman borders to Isfahan. That is why Isfahan has the largest number of Armenian churches, which have remained more or less undestroyed throughout history.

In this article, we first present the main definitions of the spaces and subspaces of worship places then we comparatively compare Armenian churches in the Safavid period with Muslim mosques through the lens of Burkhart (to demonstrate the qualitative differences in the architecture of the related religions), respectively. To this end, we will present some examples of churches and the mosques in Isfahan. Given that Burkhart believes in the differentiation between the arts of these religions (in the form of East and West art), we have tried to challenge this theory by analyzing the relevant examples. To this end, we have emphasized the similarities of the elements among the examples and the impact of the

buildings on one another.

Literature review

In the books of "Foundations of Christian Art" translated by Amir Nasiri (2011) and "Art of Islam, Language and Meaning", translated by Masoud Rajabnia (1986), Titus Burckhardt explains how Christian and Islamic arts are different. In the above mentioned books, religious arts have been examined separately and in its own time and place. Available studies on the arts and architectures of Christian Armenians of Iran are: "Christian Churches in Iran" (Houyan, 2004), "Armenian Churches of New Julfa in Isfahan" (Hakhnazarian, 2006) and "Vank Cathedral" (Avanesian, 2009). The studies have shed light only on the features of different churches. On Islamic architecture and Iranian arts, the existing research are: "Iranian Architecture" (Pirnia & Memarian, 2008) and "Architecture of Mosques" (Zamarshidi, 1995). One of the studies is a Master's Thesis entitled "A Study of urban spaces of Julfa in Isfahan during Safavid era with an emphasis on residential buildings and archeological viewpoints" (Rozaeipour, 2011). The author of the thesis attempts to examine how the structural elements can be used to identify urban texture of Julfa in Isfahan and he acknowledges that Safavid geometric urban space patterns have influenced the urban designs in Julfa. None of the above mentioned studies has either compared the architecture of worship places in Isfahan through the lens of Burckhardt's theory in the religions of Christianity (Armenian) and Islam or examined their similarities and differences employing Iranian architecture approach.

Methodology

To investigate the effect of Safavid culture on the architecture of churches and mosques and to compare thw cases with each other in terms of physical structure, we will first present Burckhardt's views on the architecture of the divine religions of Christianity and Islam. Then we will compare the architectural elements of several historic -religious cases in

Isfahan. All buildings analyzed have Isfahani style and dates are reported based on the lunar calendar. The methods of data collection for this research are documentary and field-based. Data are analyzed in a descriptive manner.

Sacred traditions and arts

In the Oriental lands, the essence and the face of the art are intertwined in such a way that they are considered as a single entity. Moreover, the sanctity in the seemingly non-spiritual layers of the oriental arts is also noticeable and sometimes inseparable. Whereas in the western type of sacred arts, which is known as the Christian arts, the halo of sanctity has been discarded in some parts of the arts, and the arts have features of the material world.

No art deserves to be entitled sacred unless its form reflects the spiritual view of a specific religion. Burckhart believes that the religious content of an art does not qualify it to be sacred, but its form should also have the same origin because art is essentially a form. (Burkhart, 1991) From his point of view, all sacred arts are based on a religious point of view and necessarily belong to a mystical area. This affinity is in such a way that religious views are not only reflected in its essence, but also in its form. "the art of the traditional Eastern civilizations, in its true sense of the word, cannot be divided into two parts of sacred arts and unscarred arts, because even the popular manifestations of arts are also inspired by the sacred patterns. However, Christian world not only deals with the art which in its true sense of the word is sacred, but also is familiar with religious arts that more or less have the features of the material world"(Burkhart, 2011: 57).

From this perspective, all the arts that are sacred in essence and meaning must have a formal manifestation otherwise this sanctity will not be displayed and fully perceived. Every sacred art because of its form and meaning is necessarily religious, whereas any religious art (as Christianity) cannot be broadly interpreted as sacred since it may be basically infused with the features of material

world. Having such a viewpoint, we cannot deny the fact that the mentioned arts are sacred for its followers, therefore it is definitely religious.

Sacred places

From Christianity perspective, the body of the Church is the incarnation of Christ on earth.

The Jesus Christ's head corresponds with the church's back which is eastward and his open arms are the crossed arms of the church. His bust and legs are in the seraglio and his heart is in the main sanctuary; the man-god embodied in the holy building is the sacrifice that reconciles the heavens with the earth (Burckhardt, 2011:68).

Burkhart interprets the arrival of the first Muslims in a church in Syria and the associated changes in the structure of churches as follow: they sat towards Qibla to adhere to Islam religion. Christian churches are eastward while Mecca is located in the south of Syria. Therefore, instead of looking at the length and depth of the seraglio and the place of the chanters, their attention was limited to width of the wall and its nearby. In the holy Christian architecture, time is pictured in relation to the space (location). This means that the axis of the church is toward a righteous equinox, and the believers are looking at the horizon where the sun or manifestation of Christ, rises during the Eid of Resurrection. (Burkhart,1986) therefore, this point of time is a moment dependent on the rotation of the earth and the sun and its divisions east, west, north and north. But in the sacred architecture of Islam the point is merely a place. It is because the Qibla is on the ground and centralized a point which is not dependent on time and planets.

Sacred spaces

• Seraglio

The architecture of the Latin Church, like a cross, consists of two axes which are movable. Seraglio is the path of pilgrimage's journey to the sanctuary, a sacred land and paradise. Seraglio has more or less concentric circles as if the space has been gathered in itself. However, the shape also shows that there is no

restriction on the circle or the sphere (Burckhardt, 2011). In Islamic architecture, the seraglio is a hallway with pillars and the bedroom's roof is covered with successive vaults. This is a place where Muslims pray. The decorations of the side walls and pillars and the ceilings of this space are in a harmony with each other.

● Sanctuary and Qibla

From Burckhardt's viewpoint, the ceremonies for (Qibla) orientation are universal and have been common among all civilizations. (Burckhardt, 2011: 28). Church has a center for the Lord's supper, which is the sanctuary. The place of chanters is a holy area surrounding the sanctuary. The prayers' place resembles a path from the external world to the holy place of sanctuary. By attending this process, the hierarchy of gradual proximity to the holy place or the church sanctuary is perceived.

The essential difference in church and mosque is that the sanctuary of church reflects a material image of a cosmic event. This element in the mosque is neither quantitatively nor qualitatively associated with the sacred center within the mosque's body, and only represents the Qibla and the physical location of the Imam who stands in front of a group of believers to pray.

This element is guiding Muslims for praying a creator whose symbol of unity lies in a holy place called Kaaba. Kaaba is respectable as it directs the prayers towards the most holy place. Therefore, the direction is of a great value. The sanctuary of the mosque reflects the spiritual journey through the religious gate. Such a journey requires praying at this space.

Decorations

● Portrait drawing and calligraphy

Portraits in a church are drawn on a wall which lies in a place where the Lord's supper ceremony is held. The ceremony is only performed when priests are attended. The seraglio is the place where all believers can enter. Burckhardt believes that the place for portrait is a border symbol separating the

sensible world from the spiritual world. Therefore the sacred images are painted on the wall. He quotes from church elders that: since the God's word reflects human nature, therefore, the human face of God, Jesus Christ can be and must be worshipped (Burckhardt, 1986: 42). This is nothing but a biased paraphrase of the embodiment of divinity in human form which is very far from the Islamic viewpoint. Referring to prophetic traditions, he further maintains that the simulation from the viewpoint of the Muslims is reprimanded because it is a manipulation in the production of God. He believes that the art of imitation in Islam is permissible as long as it is not a full imitation.

The rigid approach that Islam employs to images necessitates that Christians to present metaphysical justifications for the sacred images. Worshiping the image of Jesus Christ is not only authorized but also indicator of the most basic rigid faith of Christianity (i.e. the belief in embodiment of divine word). In Islam, as drawing human images are reprimanded, pictures are replaced with sacred scriptures representing God's word. This art is considered as one of the noblest arts because it represents the word of revelation. Arabic script was originated from Syriac or Nabataean alphabets being used in pre-Islam. The Syriac or Nabataean writing systems were very primitive and comprised similar letters, but they gradually developed. In post-Islam period, Kufi script¹, a geometric script, was invented and became popular with people.

● Sculpture, animal and plant designs

Sculpturing expresses the principle of individuality better than any other visual arts because sculpturing directly contributes to space separation. This quality can easily be noticed in the sculptures whose surroundings are open. Except for the sculptures of the Virgin Mary, the Crucified Jesus or figurative boxes containing the remnants of the saints associated with worship. (Burckhardt, 2011: 123), the Christian art does not allow such a freedom for all objects.

Arabic Language is based on sounds and is phonetic.

The connection of script and the decorations with flowers and leaves remind us of the similarity of world book and world tree, both of which are the famous and known symbols of believers. The first one is manifested by the holy Quran and the second symbol is manifested by the most Asian narratives. Furthermore all originate from the nature of objects. (Burckhardt. 1985: 62).Arabesque originates from vine picture, in which complexity and tangling of leaves, stems and branches are simply stylized to the intertwined forms, to which this complexity gave a musical quality.

● **Architecture of Armenian Churches of Iran**

Before the advent of Jesus Christ (Peace be upon him), Iranian Armenians were followers of Mehri, Anahita or Zoroastrian religions and when they accepted Christianity, first they changed their old temples to church. The architecture of these temples was more based on the four-veranda pattern and gradually by adding some sections; Iranian Armenians changed the temples to Armenians churches. This pattern was basically different from the pattern of European churches which had the pattern of a stretched cross. Armenians’ churches had a pattern of a short cross. The pattern can be explained as a building with a dome

in its center, to which four roofed spaces were attached from four sides. One of was the space was for orators (Pirnia, et al, 2008: 212). As the main direction of church building is eastward, the internal spaces of a church from west to east are as follows:

Porch, entrance door, people’s place, chanters’ place, place for special persons and clergymen, sanctuary (Fig. 1)

Physical elements of a church

Porch: this space is in fact is in front of the entrance building and has a smooth shelter. Not all churches have a porch.

Entrance: the entrance of church includes the entrance door and a vestibule. The doors of a church are located usually in the western, northern and southern sides. People can choose any doors to enter the church and the regular people usually enter from the western door which leads to the sanctuary and they exit from the northern and southern doors not to have their back toward the sanctuary.

People’s place (B): Much space is dedicated to this place which is located in the westernmost point of the church. People participating in ceremonies sit toward the sanctuary.

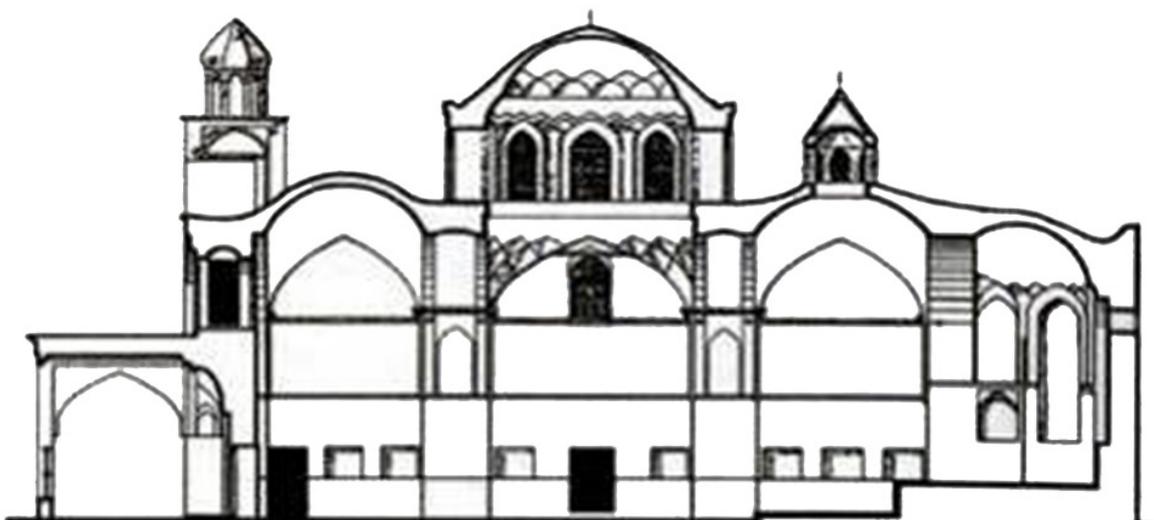


Fig. 1. The schematic structure of the hierarchy of places in a church. Source: Pirnia and Memarian, 2008: 215.

Chanter's place: if a church does not have a special balcony for choir team (Verna don), the choir team stands in the south part of the sanctuary.

Place for VIP and clergymen: this place is located in the eastern side of chanters' place and is usually 10 to 15 centimeters above the place for people.

Sanctuary (Khoran): This space is located in the easternmost point of the church and is 80 to 90 centimeters above the place of clergymen and is in the sanctuary. There is a window behind the sanctuary to let the light go through when the sun rises.

Heritage House (Avant adon): two rooms called as Avant adon are symmetrically located on the two sides of the sanctuary. These are the place where clergymen prepare themselves for Lord's Supper ceremony and also worship in private. Sometimes holy objects are also kept in this space.

Bell Tower (Zanghadon): This space is designed to house the church bell (Zang). This structure is a square that supports a roof in the shape of a heptagonal or octagonal pyramid with a cross at its end.

Baptism pool: This marble pool is a symbol of the Jordan River, in which Jesus Christ was baptized. In addition, baptism is as a way for removal of primary sins of Adam (Peace be upon him).

Dome (Gonbat): Dome is located above the people's place and sometimes has two layers. The internal layer is Nari and the outer is sometimes Nari and sometimes Rak. In a church building the dome is the symbol of Jesus Christ (Peace be upon him).

Balcony (Vern adon): this space is a mezzanine facing the sanctuary and in fact it was basically place for the band of musicians. However, they are not designed in all churches. The balcony is the symbol of the place, in which Jesus Christ (Peace be upon him) and the disciples ate their Last Supper (Ibid: 174).

Holy Savior Cathedral (Church of the Saintly Sisters)

The complex titled Vank Cathedral (Convent) is located in New Julfa (1) and was dedicated to in the year 1075 AH. The complex has three entries. The main entry comprises a longitudinal room which lies under the bell tower and on each side of which a meeting room is located. The entry and some main buildings are opened to the vast courtyard. In the past, the yard was covered with bricks. The complex also includes a printing house, which has been changed to a museum, a library and an administrative section. There are some graves in the courtyard (Fig. 2 and 3). It seems that the oldest convent building is the Holy Joseph Church (Hakhnazarian, 2006: 49). This small church has a domed hall. The sanctuary is in the shape of a pentagon and through windows, it has access to brightness in the dome stem. The decorations in the church include murals in Armenian, Persian and also European style. The murals were the results of the relationship between Armenian businessmen with the European people and also presence of European people in Isfahan.

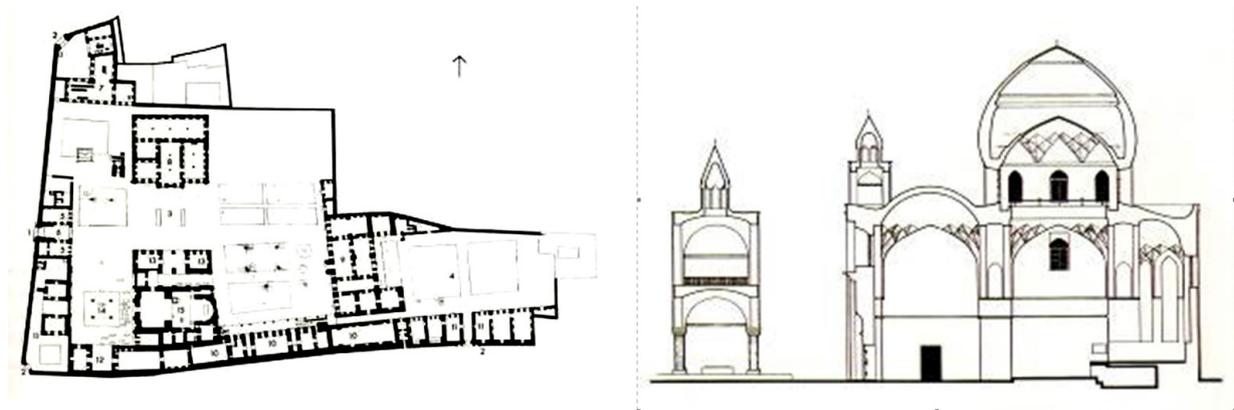


Fig. 2. The plan of church and section of Holy Savior Cathedral (Church of Saintly Sisters). Source: Hakhnazarian, 2006: 49-52.

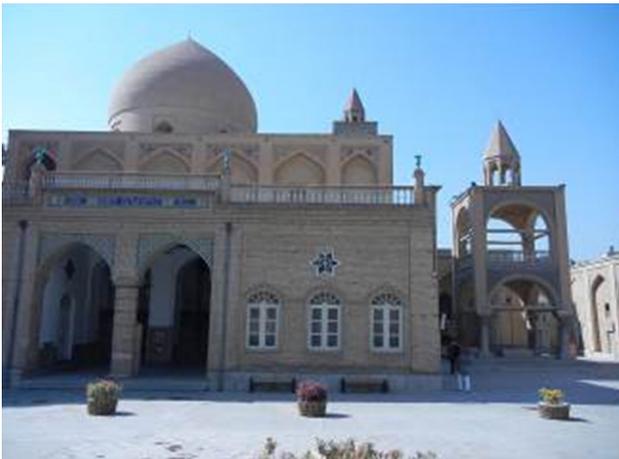


Fig. 3. The northern view of the complex. Source: authors.

Bethlehem Church

This church was built at the time of Shah Abbas the Great in the year 1038 AH in the neighborhood of Meidan and near the Holy Mother Complex. The church went through a lot of chances due to urban development projects. The complex has two entrances on the southern side of the main entrance and consists of burial halls. A collection of graves and memorial stones of the Armenian leaders are seen around the courtyard. (Fig. 4 and 5) The main building has a rectangular plan and the middle part of the hall was covered by the greatest dome of Armenian churches in New Julfa². On the easternmost side of the building there is a pentagonal sanctuary. There are two-story heritage houses on each side of the sanctuary.

The internal layer of the dome is covered with arabesque, hatay and bergamot and in corners Kar-bandi was used. The hall includes murals.

Architecture of mosques of Iran

During the pre-Islam in Iran, the most significant buildings in the city were temples. With the entrance of Islam, they were replaced by mosques. In the early days, Iranian mosques contained a dome with four perpendiculars. The mosques were gradually extended by closing its openings and adding subsidiary spaces required by Muslims. Iranian mosques have some main patterns including a dome, a columned seraglio, a seraglio with a veranda, and a seraglio with a veranda and

a dome and Tanabi³. Apart from the religious function, the mosques have had educational functions such as educating religious students, teaching mathematical sciences, astronomy and music and politics to carry out the commands of the city governor who was also the preacher of the mosque. (Pirnia, 2008: 280). Though mosques have been through abundant changes in different centuries, central yard has stayed as an integral part of the majority of mosques.

Physical elements of a mosque

Entry: It has some main parts including, a frontage, a pre-corridor, a doorway, a vestibule and an arch.

Apron: In fact it is considered as a yard and is a pre-seraglio or a pre-dome.

Seraglio: As covering the vast opening is not possible, a number of columns in the form of arch and corners or closed four-arch system have been used and it is also a place for praying and serves as a shelter for sunshine and rain.

Veranda: it is a semi-roofed and roofed space, which is open from two or three sides and is located next to the apron.

Ablution chamber: it is a roofed space with a pond in its middle. The water in the pond is used for the ablution.

Dome: this part is the best room in the mosques. It is a vast and high space with dome covering it. Like seraglio, it is a place for praying.

Sanctuary: it is an arch located under the dome and shows the direction of Qibla to the prayers.

Chamber for calling to prayer: it is a chamber on the veranda which is used for calling and invitation to prayer.

Porch: It is a semi-roofed space with columns which are based on a similar four-arch design. The design is repeatedly lies in one direction and is placed along the one or more sides of the yard

Trough: It is a great dish made of a piece of stone and is placed on the unroofed or semi-roofed area of the mosques to be used by people for drinking water.

Hakim Mosque

The date is carved on the inscription of this mosque goes

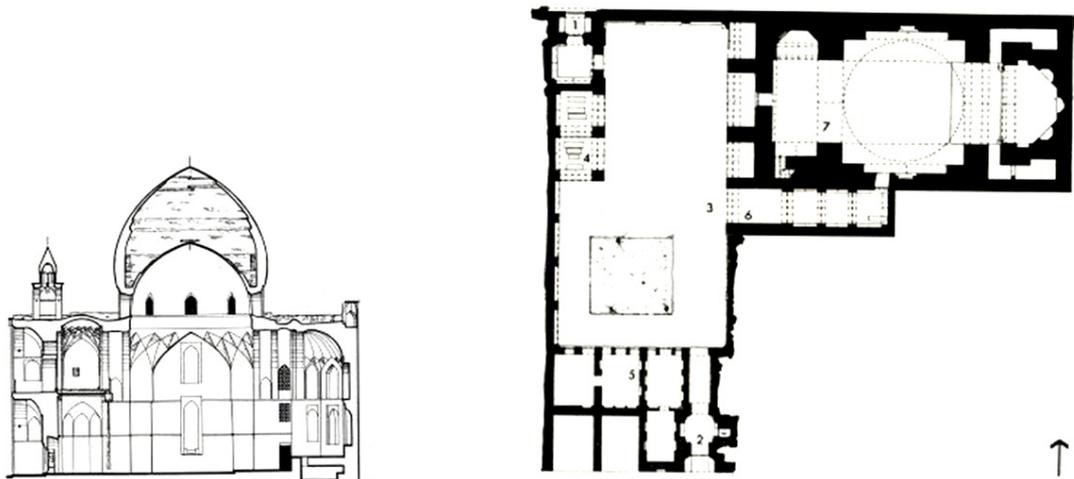


Fig. 4. The plan and section of Bethlehem Church Complex. Source: Hakhnazarian, 2006: 72.



Fig. 5. The entrance facades of church. Source: authors.

back to 1067. It was built on the ruins of the Georgian mosque, which dates back to the second half of the fourth century AH. Nowadays only a gate has remained from the old mosque. Apparently, the mosque was built during Shah Abbas Safavid II and its decorations were completed during Shah Soleiman (Haji Ghasemi, 1996: 41).

The building has four entrances. The main entrance of the building has an angle with the whole complex.

The angle has been corrected on the way from a veranda- yard-veranda and has made the access to the main courtyard .The chamber used for calling to prayer is located on the northwestern side and on the veranda (Fig. 6 and 7). The complex has two stories and the pulpit and the sanctuary are decorated by mogharnas brick can be seen at the end of the dome. The decorations include arabesque, scared names in the form of a knot (a combination of bricks and tiles).

Imam (Shah) Mosque

Imam (Shah) Mosque whose inscription goes back to 1030 AH is one of the famous monuments in the Safavid era. It was built by order of Shah Abbas I. The mosque has two entries. Concerning the conflict of the transverse axis of the square with the Qibla axis in the mosque, the architect has decided to rotate between the vestibule and the main apron. The complex has three aprons, which lie around the southern secondary apron.

Religious schools and their domed educational spaces are located at the back of the verandas. The chamber for calling to prayer is on the southwest dome. The complex has a sanctuary with rich tile decorations. (Fig. 8 ad 9).

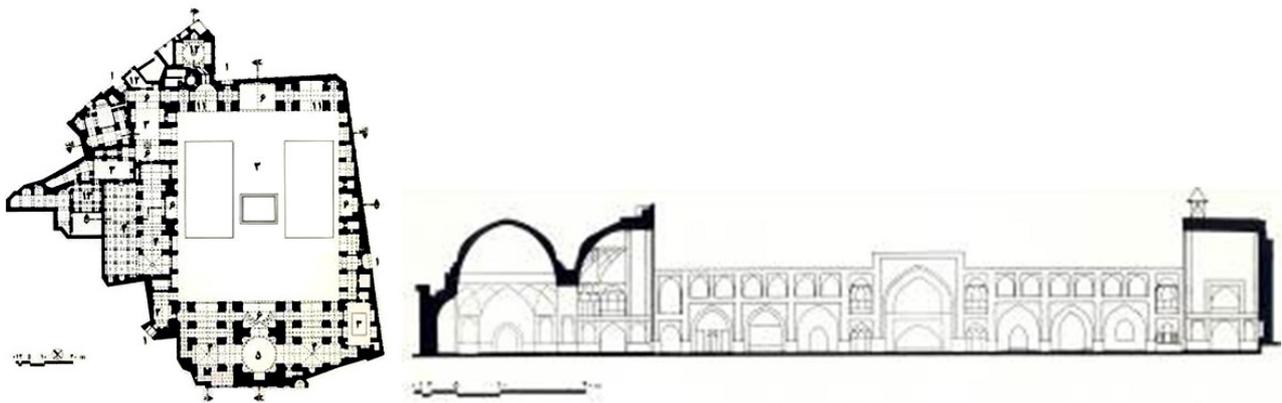


Fig. 6. Plan of the first level and a section of Hakim Mosque. Source: Haji Ghasemi, 1997: 42 – 47.



Fig. 7. A view of the yard. Source: authors.

The schools on the southwestern and southeastern sides underwent some repairs at the time of Shah Soleiman Safavi and Naseraddin Shah Qajar respectively. That's why they are known as Soleimanieh and Naserieh Schools. Paving the apron was completed at the time of Shah Soleiman Safavi and at the same time two Mahtabi(s)⁴were added to the yard.

Discussion

● Building orientations

the vital importance of Qibla element in worship places and its undeniable effect on the orientation of the building are presented in the above-mentioned data.

Entries: Threshold is a border through which a journey from one world to another world will be possible. In Christianity, the sun is the symbol of the gate. All

churches have several entries to the area. However, there is no entry on the eastern side though sometimes a window on this side with a metaphor of Jesus Christ is placed. Because of the importance of east-west axis, the main doors of monastery buildings are located on the western side. In the mosques no limitations are imposed on the place of entrance doors, but, the entrance of the hall is generally located on the northern side and between northeast and northwest. Due to the restriction imposed by the urban development on the mosques, orientation to the Qibla is expectable. In all buildings the entry has a door header with decorations (even only a few) and the size of the door header depends on the extent to which the building is important for people. Among the studied analyzed, Bethlehem Church has the shortest and Imam Mosque has the highest door header. As the sermon of this mosque is called Shah and its height as an indication of the power of the government and the invitation to, make the proportions are justifiable.

● Space Organizations

Organizing spaces in Isfahan mosques is clearly different from churches. In the studied mosques, the architects have protected the regular geometric shape of yard and have placed the other spatial elements around the yard to decorate it. Therefore, the pattern of central yard is observed in the mosques. Such specifications are not seen in churches structures at all.

● Sanctuaries and Dome spaces

The dome spaces in all buildings are the main

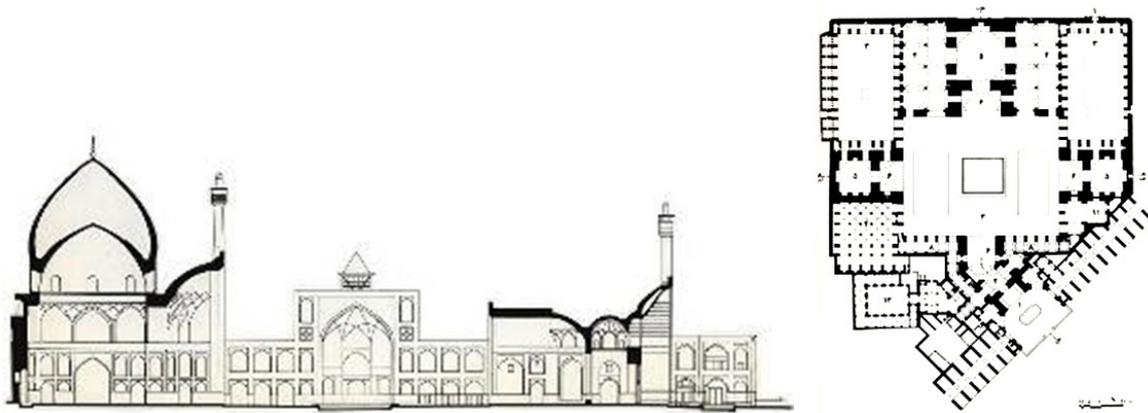


Fig. 8. Plan and section of Imam Mosque. Source: Haji Ghasemi 1996: 23-27.

worship areas and its inner parts are richly decorated (including tile and painting). Except a case, in the stem of all domes, some lighting holes are placed. However, the exterior parts of domes in churches and Hakim Mosque are devoid of any decorations. Drawing upon Burckhardt’s theory, we can identify different types of decorations under the dome (human, plant and animal figures in churches and plant figures in the mosques). In churches, a pentagonal sanctuary is located under the eastern vault of the dome. In the mosques, the sanctuary under the dome is either triangular or pentagonal. The differences don’t lie in the shapes of sanctuaries, but in their locations.

● **Bell Towers and Chambers for Calling to Prayer**

Bell towers (Zangadon) and chambers for calling to prayer have similar functions and in both buildings, they are covered by a pyramid based on a square (Rak) with porous body. In churches, domes have a high rise and in mosques they have low rise with a paper-like projection. Bell towers are generally decorated by tiles and chambers for calling to prayer are tiles with wooden mogharnas on the pillars. The elements analyzed in the studied buildings are shown in pictures in the row 10. The pictures are organized in an alphabetical order.

Pictures in the 10th row : The shapes of bell towers and chambers for calling to prayer in the buildings. Source: authors.

Water: With respect to the importance of cleanliness in both religions , the role of water in both buildings



Fig. 9. A view from yard. Source : authors.

is very obvious. The emphasis on the use of water in churches can be seen in a baptism pools which is one of the elements of purification in Christianity. In the mosques water is accessible through the pool and trough (ablution and drinking). The pool is only used for its practical purpose. However, both dimensions and location of trough in the buildings (at the center of dome or veranda) show that the trough not only has a practical but also a symbolic function. This might explain why pools are not decorated as much as the trough.

Decorations: The artistic works of Iranian Christians show that geometrical motifs such as entangled designs and parallel lines and a broken cross are amazingly with Islamic arts. Iranian Christians arts are very different from the Islamic arts in general. In the Armenian art, the religious stories and also stylized and entangled figures are one of the most important decorative elements, whereas in the

Islamic arts the emphasis is on the meaningful letters representing the sacred names and also stylized figures. Such remarkable differences cannot be a barrier to understand that decorations in churches are very similar to those in mosques. For example, Like Imam Mosque in Isfahan, for the decorations of the internal surface of Bethlehem Church, the architects have used arabesque, hatay and bergamot and all murals are inspired by the nature. The pictures in the 11th row show the decorations under the domes in the analyzed buildings:

Pictures in the row 11: The decorations of the domes in the analyzed buildings (source: authors)

One of the other similarities is using the same bricks in all pillars, different types of vaults and arcs. In this research, first we presented Burkhart’s theory on the architecture of sacred buildings in the religions of Christianity and Islam. Then we

explained both semantic and formal features of the buildings and compared all the architectural issues of the Armenian churches and the Isfahan mosques during the Safavid period. Based on the literature reviewed, no research has been conducted on this issue . This study was an attempt to compare the following elements between the churches and the mosques : shapes, directions space organizations, the appurtenances of the buildings, the numbers of entries and their directions, the types of materials used for the walls, floors, shape and orientations of the sanctuaries, the type of bell houses and chambers for calling to prayer, the role of water, shapes and types of domes and various decorations. As so far no research has been carried out to compare the above mentioned elements between these two types of building, therefore, this study contributes to our knowledge in this aspect

Table 1. physical specifications of Isfahan churches and mosques. Source: authors.

	Holy Savior Cathedral (Church of the Saintly Sisters)	Bethlehem Church	Hakim Mosque	Imam Mosque
Horizontal section				
Appurtenances of the main entry	Bell and clock towers, waiting rooms	Funeral hallways	Verandas and ablution rooms	Chambers
Number of entries	Four	Two	Four	Two
Direction of the main entry	Western	Northwestern	Northern	Northern
Direction of the subsidiary entry	Western and southern	Southern	Eastern and western	Southwestern
Old wall and flooring materials	Brick	Brick	Brick	Bricks
Shape of the sanctuary	Unroofed pentagon –odd	Unroofed pentagon –odd	Unroofed triangle, odd	Unroofed triangle, odd
Main orientation of the building	eastward	eastward	southwestward	Toward southwest
Dome	With a leaning, two discrete covers based on a square	With a leaning, two discrete covers based on a square	With a leaning, one cover based on a square	With a leaning, two discrete covers based on a square
Chamber for calling to prayer	Sharp based on a square	Sharp based on a square	Sharp based on a square	Sharp based on a square
Decorations	Murals, tiles with arabesque and geometric designs	Murals, tiles with arabesque and geometric designs	Murals, knot –like tiles, sacred names, with a combination of bricks and tiles	Murals, knot –like tiles, sacred names, with a combination of bricks and tiles

Conclusion

When the Safavid Empire came to power, an authoritarian architecture emphasizing Iranian-Islamic culture gained a momentum. The hostility of the Ottoman Turks towards Armenians and the policy of Shah Abbas for creating a dividing belt between the two governments were reasons that the Armenians in the northern borders of Iran were relocated to the center of Iran. During this period, because of the relations between Armenians and Muslims, Armenian architects consciously started to build churches based on Armenian architecture and they were influenced by Iranian-Islamic. Using the architecture patterns as models is the reason why all worship places share some similarities.

According to Burckhardt's theory, the origin of Christian architecture is embodiment of Jesus Christ (Peace be upon him), which is a one-to-one correspondence between a human body with a holy building. The architecture of Christian churches is eastward and inclined to linearize the space while constantly highlighting the importance of a sanctuary. Therefore all churches have parallel axes. However, the Islamic arts including architecture look for a path to move away from the plurality and reach the unity. This attention to unity might explain why Qibla in all mosques showing a universal point that symbolizes the unity of God. With respect to the essential differences arising from the fundamentals of Christianity and Islam and the architectural similarities of worship places in both religions, we realize that Iranian-Islamic patterns have had a great influence on the innermost layer of religious architecture of Iranian Armenians in the Safavid era. Though Burckhardt's theory separates the religious arts into eastern and western arts, the essential differences, rigidity and the limits of knowledge and even laws in these religions have not been obstacles for cultural interaction between them. In spite of the existing differences in shapes and directions of plans, accesses and locations of sanctuaries, which are the religious motifs for the religions, the similarities in the shapes of dome, the chambers for calling to prayer, sanctuaries, building materials of walls, types of vaults and arts and decorations show an ethnic and religious convergence between Armenians and Muslims in creating harmonic patterns in the buildings in the capital of Safavid era. Therefore, in different religions, common geographic zone (neighborhood) and identical historical zone (coexistence) contribute to the similarity of the sacred architectures of the religions. Imitating the architectural patterns in terms of general or specific features would result in the similarities between worship places and finally bring a harmony to the shape of the city and promote both ethnic and cultural integration and solidarity in spite of differences in religion and beliefs.

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Endnote

1. Related to the city of Kufa, which was one of the main centers of Arabic culture in Omayyads era for writing the holy Quran. / 2. When Shah Abbas the Great won a victory over the Ottoman Empire, he relocated Armenians of Julfa in Azerbaijan to this area. That is why this area was called "New Julfa".
3. The large room at the back of the main veranda is called "Tanabi". The idea for this room is originated from the patterns of old sanctuaries. / 4. Mahtabi is an element similar to a yard, which is built on the upper stories of the building and is projected from the apron floor.

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