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Original Research Article

The Nature of the Sacred in Architecture from the Perspective of Aesthetic Discourse: An Interpretive Historical Reading of Selected Travelogues from the Islamic Period

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Abstract

Problem statement: Religious architecture and landscapes are not merely collections of physical and aesthetic elements; rather, they acquire sacred qualities through their connections with memory, belief, ritual, and human experience. However, the relationship between beauty and sacredness in travelogues of the Islamic period is not fixed, but varies according to travelers' cultural horizons, religious affiliations, social positions, and modes of observation. Accordingly, this study examines how the sacred shapes the perception and representation of architectural and landscape beauty.

Research objective: This study aims to formulate analytical dimensions of representations of the sacred, identify spatial, sensory, semantic, and ritual indicators in selected texts, and explain relationships among architectural form, observers' experiences, religious memory, and collective practices. It also investigates how sacredness is produced, interpreted, and evaluated in travel narratives.

Research method: This qualitative study adopts an interpretive and historical approach. Its corpus comprises selected travelogues and geographical works by Muslim and Iranian authors from the fourth to the early fourteenth Islamic centuries. Data concerning religious buildings, ritual routes, and natural landscapes were extracted, categorized, and interpreted through comparative readings.

Conclusion: The findings identify four interconnected dimensions of the sacred: spatial and physical, sensory and perceptual, semantic and symbolic, and ritual and behavioral. Centrality, orientation, thresholds, light, water, sound, transcendence, purity, historical memory, and pilgrimage constitute key indicators. Sacred beauty does not necessarily result from ornamentation or formal grandeur; simplicity, antiquity, martyrdom, the presence of a sacred figure, and ritual repetition can also confer sanctity upon places. Thus, the sacred is not an intrinsic quality of architectural form, but a relational, historical, and interpretive phenomenon emerging from interactions among place, narrative, sensory experience, and human action. Travelogues, likewise, are not neutral accounts of reality, but discursive texts revealing historically and culturally varying ways of seeing, interpreting, and valuing sacred places.

Keywords: *The Sacred; Architectural Aesthetics; Sacred Landscape; Islamic Travelogues; Spatial Representation*

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Introduction

In architectural studies, understanding space without considering its semantic, cultural, and experiential layers provides an incomplete picture of the relationship between humans and their environment. Accordingly, architecture and landscape are not merely assemblages of physical, geometric, and functional elements; rather, they constitute arenas for the formation of meaning, experience, memory, and identity (Tuan, 1977). In this regard, Mansouri and Javadi consider the Iranian landscape to be the product of continuous interaction among humans, nature, and culture. They argue that the harmonious presence of elements such as water, trees, and chahartaq (four-arched structures), in addition to shaping the identity of Iranian space, contributes to the perception of its beauty and sacredness (Mansouri & Javadi, 2019). Not every beautiful building is necessarily sacred, nor is every sacred place necessarily perceived according to conventional aesthetic criteria, such as ornamentation, harmony, order, and decorative richness. In this context, travelogues constitute valuable sources for examining how landscapes and architecture are perceived and represented. Thus, travel narratives not only provide researchers with information about observed places but also reveal the interpretive horizons and modes of perception of their observers (Thompson, 2011).

A place may be regarded as sacred within a local tradition, yet a travel writer may describe it merely as beautiful, unusual, historical, or even irrational. Conversely, when encountering a space that is not formally religious, a writer may employ terms such as grandeur, awe, silence, transcendence, or presence, thereby attributing a quasi-sacred quality to it. From this perspective, the central problem addressed in the present study is how the concept of "the sacred" has manifested itself in the perception and representation of the beauty of Iranian architecture and landscape, and how this relationship has evolved over time. The originality of this article lies in its examination of the historical transformation of the relationship between the sacred and the aesthetic qualities of architecture and landscape, rather than treating sacred architecture, aesthetics, or representations of Iran in travelogues as separate subjects. This transformation is explored along three principal dimensions: first, the transformation in the nature of the sacred, from sacredness grounded in religious attribution, ritual, and reverence toward experiences characterized by awe, grandeur, silence, mystery, and transcendence; second, the transformation in the sources of sacredness, from indigenous and religious beliefs and narratives toward historical memory, artistic value, national identity, and cultural heritage discourse; and third, the transformation in modes of representing place, from pilgrimage and religious narratives toward historical, aesthetic, Orientalist, and touristic descriptions. On this basis, the main research question is formulated as follows: "From an interpretive–historical reading of travelogues, how has the sacred shaped the perception and representation of the beauty of Iranian architecture?"

Literature Review

Considering the central research problem of this article, namely how the sacred shapes the perception and representation of the beauty of Iranian architecture and landscape in selected travelogues from the Islamic period, previous studies can be classified into three main areas: theoretical studies of the sacred and sacred places, studies of architecture and the spatial experience of the sacred, and studies of travelogues and spatial representation.

• The First Area: theoretical studies of the sacred and sacred places

For example, Anttonen (2005), in his article "Space, Body, and the Notion of Boundary: A Category-Theoretical Approach to Religion," argues that sacredness is not a natural or intrinsic property of objects or places; rather, it is constructed through separation, boundary-making, behavioral rules, and distinctions between inside and outside or pure and impure. Kong (2001), in her article "Mapping 'New' Geographies of Religion: Politics and Poetics in Modernity," similarly argues that the study of religious space should not be limited to formal places of worship, since identity, community, rituals, sensory experiences,

and historical and political contexts also contribute to the sacralization of place.

• The Second Area: studies of architecture, embodied experience, and the aesthetics of sacred aspace

Barrie (2012), in his article "Sacred Space and the Mediating Roles of Architecture," argues that sacred architecture mediates between humans and the transcendent, everyday life and ritual life, and the individual and the community. Holloway (2003), in his article "Make-Believe: Spiritual Practice, Embodiment, and Sacred Space," maintains that the distinction between the sacred and the profane emerges through embodied action, sensory perception, and human interactions with objects and the environment, and that the sacred is realized through spatial experience and practice. Furthermore, Mazumdar and Mazumdar (1993), in their article "Sacred Space and Place Attachment," examined the relationship between sacredness and place attachment, emphasizing the significance of belief, memory, ritual repetition, and collective experience.

• The Third Area: studies of travelogues, observation, and spatial representation

Gregory (1995), in his article "Imaginative Geographies," argues that descriptions of territories and places are not neutral reflections of reality but are shaped by cultural discourses, power relations, prior knowledge, and the observer's mode of perception. Similarly, Sohrabi (2005), in her article "Early Swedish Travelers to Persia," examined accounts of Iran written by Swedish travelers. A review of previous studies indicates that existing research has generally addressed the theory of the sacred, the experience of sacred architecture, place attachment, and representations of Iran in travelogues as separate subjects. However, relatively little attention has been devoted to a comprehensive study that historically and comparatively examines the relationships among the sacred, aesthetic judgment, and the representation of Iranian architecture and landscape in travelogues written by Muslim and Iranian travelers. Moreover, the transformation in the sources of sacredness, from religious and ritual associations toward historical memory, artistic value, national identity, and cultural heritage, as well as the transition from pilgrimage narratives to aesthetic and touristic descriptions, has not been systematically investigated. Accordingly, the principal research gap addressed in the present study is the absence of an interpretive–historical reading of the evolving concept of sacred beauty in travelogues from the Islamic period, alongside an integrated examination of how architectural characteristics, rituals, the observer's identity, and the language of representation influence the perception of the sacredness of place.

Theoretical Foundations of the Research

• Etymology of the term "the sacred"

Dehkhoda defines the Persian term qodsi as "angelic," "spiritual," and "righteous and virtuous." Under the entry moqaddas, he also provides meanings such as "described as pure," "pure, clean, and immaculate," and "endowed with sanctity and worthy of respect." The term qodsi is a relational adjective denoting the association of a person, object, or concept with the spiritual realm and a domain beyond the ordinary world. Accordingly, the term "the sacred" refers to something that belongs to the spiritual, divine, or transcendent realm, or that humans perceive as belonging to such a realm. The term "sacred architecture" primarily refers to architecture associated with transcendent reality, the spiritual world, or religious experience. Consequently, qodsi is more closely associated with a quality or relationship pertaining to the transcendent, whereas moqaddas refers more specifically to a state of being revered and sanctified (Dehkhoda, 1998, SV. "Qodsi" and "Moqaddas"). In the Oxford Dictionary, the term "sacred" is defined as something associated with God or a deity and regarded as holy or pure. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary uses the term "sacred" in its primary sense to describe something connected with God or a god and considered holy. In its second sense, the term refers to things regarded as extremely important, treated with great respect, and not to be readily changed or challenged (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

- **The concept of the sacred from the perspective of islamic philosophers**

It should be noted that "the sacred," as an independent term in the philosophy of religion, does not directly correspond to the terminology employed by classical Muslim thinkers. In their works, sacredness is generally discussed through concepts such as quds (holiness), taqdis (sanctification), tanzih (divine transcendence), taharah (purity), hurmah (sanctity and reverence), barakah (blessing), tajalli (theophany), hudur (presence), and nur (light). Accordingly, in the Islamic tradition, the sacred is not an independent reality competing with the divine; rather, the sacredness of persons, times, places, and objects derives from their association with God, revelation, worship, divine presence, or a revered event. This principle is particularly evident in Allameh Tabataba'i's interpretation of sacred places.

"Al-taqdis: al-tathir al-ilahi." Translation: "Sanctification is divine purification and cleansing" (Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, 2001). Al-Raghib al-Isfahani, an Iranian Quranic scholar and lexicographer, distinguishes sanctification from sensory and material purification in his book Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur'an (Vocabulary of the Quran). A sacred place is not merely a place that is clean or ornamented; rather, it is a place that, through its association with God, revelation, or worship, is set apart from spiritual impurity and inappropriate uses (ibid.).

"Al-Quddus huwa al-munazzah 'an kull wasf yudrikuhu hiss aw yatasawwaruhu khayal." Translation: "The Most Holy is He who transcends every attribute perceptible to the senses or conceivable by the imagination" (Al-Ghazali, 1996). From Al-Ghazali's perspective, the divine name Al-Quddus (the Most Holy) signifies more than freedom from imperfection and deficiency; it refers to God's transcendence beyond all human conceptions and limitations. Accordingly, sacred architecture cannot fully represent divine reality through material form; rather, it can only evoke an awareness of divine presence and guide human beings toward a reality beyond the sensory world.

From this perspective, emptiness, silence, the absence of direct figural representation, shadow, indirect light, and restricted visibility in architecture can convey meanings associated with divine transcendence (tanzih). The function of these elements is not to provide a complete representation of divine reality but to establish a perceptual distance that makes observers aware of the inability of sensory perception and imagination to fully comprehend the transcendent (ibid.). From Suhrawardi's perspective, the Light of Lights (Nur al-Anwar) is the source of all degrees of light. Within this framework, light in sacred architecture transcends physical illumination and symbolizes manifestation, guidance, and divine presence. As a perceptible medium, it directs human beings toward a reality beyond the material world (Suhrawardi, 2024). According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, sacred art is not merely characterized by religious subjects or symbols; rather, its form, material, and process of creation are intrinsically connected to spiritual principles and religious rituals. He distinguishes between sacred and traditional art and considers mosque architecture, calligraphy, and Quranic recitation among the most significant manifestations of Islamic sacred art (Nasr, 1987)."The sanctification and reverence of the valley were due to its being a precinct of proximity to God and a place of divine presence and intimate communion" (Tabataba'i, 1999). One of the clearest Islamic and Iranian explanations of how a place becomes sacred is provided by Allameh Seyyed Mohammad Hossein Tabataba'i in his interpretation of the Quranic verse: "Fa-khla' na'layka innaka bi-al-wadi al-muqaddasi Tuwa" ("Remove your sandals, for indeed you are in the sacred valley of Tuwa"). According to his interpretation, the command to remove one's sandals was given as an expression of reverence and proper conduct toward a place sanctified through divine presence and communion. Tabataba'i subsequently extends this principle to other sacred places and times. In his view, the Kaaba, the Sacred Mosque (Al-Masjid al-Haram), other mosques, revered shrines, religious festivals, and blessed days derive their sacredness from their association with a revered event

or sacred act of worship. He explicitly states that the material components of space and time do not possess intrinsic differences; rather, distinctions arise through relationships, events, acts of worship, and presence. This definition is significant for architecture in several respects. First, it does not regard sacredness as a natural property of building materials, land, or geometric form. Second, it does not consider sacredness to be entirely subjective or arbitrary. Rather, sacredness emerges from a historical and religious relationship among place, revered events, acts of worship, and the community of believers. Third, sacred places require an "etiquette of presence" (adab-e hozur), meaning that entering such places should be accompanied by changes in behavior, clothing, movement, and inner disposition.

Accordingly, architectural elements such as thresholds, entrances, shoe-removal areas, ablution facilities, courtyards, and gradually unfolding entrance sequences are not merely functional components; rather, they can prepare the human body for entering the "precinct of divine proximity" (hazirat al-qurb) (ibid.).

- **Sacred Place, space, and landscape**

"For religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions and breaks in it" (Eliade, 1959). According to Mircea Eliade, in religious experience, not all points in space possess equal value or quality. Eliade identifies the manifestation of the sacred as the factor that reveals a "fixed point" and establishes a center of orientation (ibid.). Crossing the threshold of a sacred place may involve removing one's shoes, performing ablution, changing one's clothing, maintaining silence, engaging in religious remembrance (dhikr), or modifying one's manner of movement. According to Belden Lane, the sacredness of place emerges from the experience of the manifestation of the sacred and its association with spiritual events, and is reinforced through human rituals and narratives. The continuity of this sacredness depends on the repetition of rituals, pilgrimage, and the preservation of collective memory. When these practices and memories are forgotten, a sacred place may be transformed into a merely historical or tourist site (Lane, 1988).

From Rana Singh's perspective, sacred space constitutes a multisensory environment in which architectural elements such as light, sound, smell, color, and materials, together with behavioral and ritual regulations, shape the experience of sacredness through the engagement of the human senses and body (Singh, 1993). A sacred landscape emerges from the relationships among revered places, ritual routes, narratives, and embodied human experience, and is not limited to an individual building. Not every beautiful landscape is necessarily sacred, nor does every sacred landscape necessarily conform to conventional aesthetic criteria. The beauty of a sacred landscape may arise not from ornamentation or embellishment but from silence, simplicity, awe, antiquity, or the difficulty of accessing it (Lane, 1988).

- **The Relationship between beauty and the sacred**

Beauty and the sacred are two related yet distinct concepts. Not everything beautiful is necessarily sacred, nor is everything sacred necessarily experienced according to conventional aesthetic criteria. To explain this distinction, Rudolf Otto associates the experience of the sacred with the "numinous," an experience characterized by mystery, awe, reverential fear, and fascination. However, the sublime and the numinous are not identical: the sublime is an aesthetic category, whereas the numinous refers to a religious encounter with the "Wholly Other" (Otto, 1958).

From this perspective, beauty can serve as a medium for perceiving the sacred, but it is not the ultimate source of sacredness. A beautiful form approaches sacred beauty when it transcends sensory pleasure and directs the observer's attention toward meaning, presence, reverence, or a transcendent reality.

"Indeed, God is beautiful and loves beauty" (Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, 1996).

Mohammad-Taqi Jafari states: "Beauty is a graceful and transparent manifestation drawn over perfection." Jafari does not regard beauty merely as the product of sensory pleasure or an individual's aesthetic response; rather, he associates it with perfection. The more closely beauty is connected with truth, justice, life,

and human transcendence, the more it moves beyond purely sensory beauty and approaches spiritual beauty (Jafari Tabrizi, 1983).

Accordingly, the relationship between beauty and the sacred can be summarized in three categories:

1. Non-Sacred Beauty: A pleasing or magnificent quality that has no association with transcendence, ritual, or sanctity.
2. Sacredness Without Conventional Beauty: A revered place that may be simple, ruined, awe-inspiring, or visually unadorned.
3. Sacred Beauty: A quality in which perceptible form, sensory experience, and architectural order become associated with presence, worship, memory, or transcendent reality.

Therefore, "sacred beauty" is not merely a combination of two concepts but a relational quality that emerges at the intersection of form, meaning, ritual, and human experience.

- **The Aesthetics of the sacred in architecture**

The aesthetics of the sacred in architecture does not merely concern the study of the visual beauty of places of worship, religious buildings, or pilgrimage sites; rather, it examines how architectural form becomes a medium through which presence, reverence, transcendence, and meaning are perceived. Within this approach, the central question is not whether a religious building is beautiful, but how architecture, through spatial organization, light, material, scale, sound, movement, symbolism, and ritual, facilitates human encounters with the sacred.

According to Thomas Barrie, sacred architecture serves as a mediator between human beings and the transcendent, shaping human perceptual and spiritual experiences of sacredness through spatial elements such as thresholds, axes, centers, height, and light (Barrie, 2012). From Lindsay Jones's perspective, sacred architecture constitutes a ritual–architectural event whose meaning emerges not merely from the physical structure of a building but through human presence, movement through space, ritual performance, and the experience and interpretation of these elements (Jones, 2000). According to Veikko Anttonen, thesacredness of place is not an intrinsic characteristic but is constructed through spatial boundaries, behavioral rules, and distinctions between sacred and non-sacred realms. Accordingly, architectural elements such as thresholds, gateways, and hashtis (entrance vestibules) play a fundamental role in establishing and experiencing sacredness (Anttonen, 2005).

Sacred architecture can be understood as a mediator between the sensory realm and religious meanings. Thomas Barrie describes sacred space as a "mediating" or "in-between" place that establishes connections between earth and heaven, humanity and God, ordinary life and ritual life, and the individual and the community (Barrie, 2012). Based on the perspectives examined, the aesthetics of the sacred in architecture cannot be defined through a single component. Therefore, in the present study, the aesthetics of the sacred in architecture is defined as follows:"The aesthetics of the sacred in architecture is an experiential, evaluative, and discursive quality through which an individual, community, or cultural tradition distinguishes a place, building, object, time, or action from the realm of ordinary life and associates it with a transcendent reality, a foundational memory, or an inviolable value. This distinction is perceived and reproduced through narratives, symbols, rituals, spatial demarcation, behavioral rules, and the sensory and aesthetic qualities of architecture."

Research Methodology

The present study is qualitative in nature and adopts an interpretive historical approach. The textual scope of the research is limited to travelogues and geographical writings by Muslim and Iranian authors dating from the fourth to the early fourteenth century AH. Data analysis was conducted through a combined deductive inductive approach. In the first stage, based on the theoretical foundations of the study, four dimensions spatial physical, sensory perceptual, semantic symbolic, and ritua behavioral were established as the initial analytical categories. In the second stage, descriptions and statements concerning places characterized by sacred qualities were extracted

from the travelogues and coded according to meaning units. During the comparative reading process, the indicators and markers associated with each dimension were refined and revised in light of recurring themes identified across the texts. Accordingly, these four dimensions were employed not as universal or previously established components of the sacred, but as an analytical framework for classifying and comparing textual data.

In the coding process, the mere occurrence of an individual word was not considered sufficient for assigning it to a particular indicator. Rather, attention was given to words, semantically related expressions, and their meanings within the context of sentences and narratives. For example, expressions such as "high," "elevated," and "lofty," along with descriptions indicating vertical prominence, were classified under the conceptual category of "Height and Transcendence." Similarly, terms such as "enclosure," "gate," "portal," "sacred precinct," and "threshold" were grouped under the conceptual category of "Boundary-Making and Hierarchy of Entrance." Therefore, the primary unit of analysis in this study was the "meaning unit," rather than merely the frequency of an isolated word. The general characteristics of the selected texts, the positions of the observers, and representative examples of the buildings and landscapes mentioned are presented in Table 1.

Discussion

• Spatial–physical representation of the sacred

The findings derived from the examination of travelogues indicate that the spatial–physical representation of the sacred is shaped through boundary-making, centrality, orientation, elevation, hierarchy of access, geometric order, and integration with the urban structure. Sacred places are distinguished from their ordinary surroundings through spatial organization and their relationship with surrounding elements. In the description of the Shiz Fire Temple, the city walls, lake, and seven streams establish a spatial system that separates the sacred center from its surrounding environment. Similarly, in the account of the temple's foundation, after witnessing a light, the king's agent "drew a line around the light," and the building was constructed within that same boundary. Thus, the sacred precinct was defined before the construction of the architectural structure, and the boundary line transformed ordinary space into a distinct territory (Abu Dulaf, 1975). The same pattern is evident in the Congregational Mosque of Dvin, with its second enclosure, moat, and spring, and in Jerusalem, with its fortified ramparts, iron gates, and location atop a mountain. These successive layers not only provide security but also organize movement from the outside to the inside, facilitating a gradual approach to the sacred center (Ibn Hawqal, 1987; Nasir-i Khusraw, 1956). Ibn Hawqal describes the Jur Fire Temple as being situated atop an elevated structure in the "middle of the city," a position that afforded views over the city and its surrounding villages and transformed the building into a dominant landmark within the urban landscape (Ibn Hawqal, 1987). The Dome of the Rock, with its octagonal geometry, radial arrangement of columns, and the placement of the rock beneath the dome, aligns the building's physical and semantic centers (Nasir-i Khusraw, 1956). In Damascus, a dome is visible "above all other buildings," and in Tabriz, minarets and "tall domes" make the presence of religious buildings apparent in the urban skyline and reinforce their orienting function (Ibn Battuta, 1997; Evliya Çelebi, 1959).

Nasir-i Khusraw's statement that "the Kaaba is at the center of the Sacred Mosque, and the Sacred Mosque is at the center of the city of Mecca," together with Ibn Battuta's similar account, reveals a nested spatial order in which the city is oriented toward the mosque, and the mosque toward the Kaaba. The arcades, gates, Zamzam Well, Maqam Ibrahim, and the Black Stone also regulate pilgrims' movements in relation to this center. Accordingly, the centrality of the Kaaba is not merely geometric; rather, it is established through collective orientation and circumambulatory movement (Nasir-i Khusraw, 1956; Ibn Battuta, 1997). The Congregational Mosque of Shiraz was located

Table 1. List of Travelogues Examined in the Study, Arranged in Chronological Order. Source: Authors.

Travelogue Title	Historical Period	Author	Observer's Position	Perspective of Observation	Geographical Scope and Representative Examples of Buildings and Landscapes
Abu Dulaf's Second Treatise	Samanid and Buyid Periods	Abu Dulaf Mis'ar ibn Muhalhil al-Khazraji	Arab traveler, man of letters, and poet associated with Iranian royal courts.	An observer from outside the Iranian cultural context, yet familiar with Iran's political and scholarly circles, who documented his observations of routes, cities, natural phenomena, and historical and religious sites.	Northern and western Iran and routes associated with Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Jibal, and the central regions; cities and settlements, roads, historical and religious monuments, mines, springs, and natural landscapes.
Surat al-Ard (The Configuration of the Earth), commonly known as Al-Masalik wa al-Mamalik (Routes and Kingdoms)	Buyid and Samanid Periods	Abu al-Qasim Muhammad ibn Hawqal al-Nasibi	Muslim geographer and traveler, and possibly a merchant	An observer from outside the region but within the Islamic world, who combined information obtained through personal travels with the geographical traditions of the Balkhi and Istakhri schools.	Khuzestan, Fars, Kerman, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Jibal, Daylam and Tabaristan, Khorasan, Sistan, and the regions surrounding the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf; including cities such as Shiraz, Isfahan, Rayy, Nishapur, Ahvaz, Shushtar, Ardabil, and the coastal towns of Fars. Topics that can be examined in this work include urban structure, fortifications and gates, citadels (kuhandiz), extramural suburbs (rabad), congregational mosques, bazaars, routes, and the relationship between the natural environment and urban organization.
Ahsan al-Taqasim fi Ma'rifat al-Aqalim (The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions)	Buyid and Samanid Periods	Shams al-Din Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Muqaddasi	Muslim geographer from Jerusalem	A traveler and scholar working within the Islamic civilization who examined cities, populations, religious denominations, routes, and the built environment with the aim of classifying the regions of the Islamic world.	Fars, Khuzestan, Jibal, Daylam, Khorasan, Kerman, and other regions of Iran; including cities such as Shiraz, Nishapur, Isfahan, Rayy, Shushtar, and Ahvaz. Prominent subjects addressed in this work include congregational mosques, bazaars, neighborhoods, fortifications, gates, extramural suburbs (rabad), bathhouses, water supply systems, and the location of significant buildings within the urban structure.
Safarnama of Nasir Khusraw (The Travelogue of Nasir Khusraw)	Seljuk Period	Nasir Khusraw Qubadiyani	Iranian thinker, poet, and government administrator	An observer from within the Islamic civilization, with a religious and philosophical perspective	Cities, routes, mosques, bazaars, and caravanserais in Khorasan and northern Iran; Jerusalem, Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the Dome of the Rock; Fatimid Cairo; the Sacred Mosque (Al-Masjid al-Haram), the Kaaba, and pilgrimage spaces in Mecca. His seven-year journey extended from northern Iran through the Levant, Palestine, the Hejaz, and Egypt, encompassing descriptions of Islamic cities and architectural structures.
Ibn Battuta's Travelogue: Tuhfat al-Nuzzar fi Ghara'ib al-Amsar wa 'Aja'ib al-Asfar (A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travels)	The Ilkhanid Period	Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta al-Tanji	A Moroccan Muslim Traveler and Maliki Jurist	A Cross-Cultural Observer Within the Islamic World; a Pilgrim and Seeker of Knowledge	Tabriz, Isfahan, Shiraz, Kazerun, Shushtar, Hormuz, and other Iranian cities; mosques, madrasas, Sufi lodges (khanqahs), bazaars, and mausoleums; the Shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad and its associated spaces.

Rest of Table 1.

Travelogue Title	Historical Period	Author	Observer's Position	Perspective of Observation	Geographical Scope and Representative Examples of Buildings and Landscapes
The Seyahatname (Book of Travels) of Evliya Çelebi	The Safavid Period	Evliya Çelebi	An Ottoman Traveler, Courtier, and Official, and a Sunni Muslim	An Observer from Outside the Political and Religious Context of Safavid Iran, Whose Travels Were Linked to Administrative and Diplomatic Missions.	Tabriz and the cities of Azerbaijan, Ardabil, and the regions of the Caucasus and the Ottoman–Safavid borderlands; mosques, shrines, bazaars, bathhouses, squares, gardens, fortifications, and public spaces. His detailed account of Muharram rituals and the reenactment of the narrative of Imam Husayn's martyrdom in Chovgan Square in Tabriz makes this text particularly significant for analyzing the relationship between urban space, collective behavior, and the formation of the sacred.
Riyāż al-Siyāḥa (The Garden of Travels)	The Qajar Period	Haj Zayn al-Abidin Shirvani, known as Musta'li Shah	An Iranian Shi'a Scholar, Sufi, and Traveler	An Insider Observer with a Mystical Perspective, Who Integrated Geographical Accounts with Historical, Religious, and Sectarian Information, as well as Personal Experiences.	Iraq-i Ajam (Persian Iraq), Gilan, Shirvan, Mughan, Talesh, Azerbaijan, Khorasan, southern Iran, India, the Hejaz, Egypt, the Levant, and Asia Minor; cities, pilgrimage sites, mosques, Sufi lodges (khanqahs), mausoleums, bazaars, and pilgrimage routes.
Hidayat al-Sabil wa Kifayat al-Dalil (Guidance on the Path and Sufficiency of Evidence): The Travelogue of Farhad Mirza	The Qajar Period	Farhad Mirza Mo'tamed al-Dowleh	A Qajar Prince, Provincial Governor, Writer, and Statesman	An Insider Observer with Religious, Administrative, and Educational Perspectives	The travel route through Iran and the Ottoman Empire to the Hejaz; cities and architectural structures along the route, mosques and Ottoman architectural spaces, the Sacred Mosque (Masjid al-Haram), the Kaaba, Hajj ritual spaces, the Prophet's Mosque (Al-Masjid an-Nabawi), Al-Baqi Cemetery, and pilgrimage sites in Mecca and Medina. The text is structured as a daily account of the Hajj pilgrimage over a period of 233 days.
Naser al-Din Shah's Second Travelogue to Khorasan	The Qajar Period	Ali Naqi Hakim al-Mamalek	A Qajar Monarch, Shi'a Pilgrim, and Political Ruler	A Thoroughly Insider Observer with a Governmental Perspective, Who Integrates the Pilgrimage Experience with Assessments of Cities, Routes, Architectural Structures, and Royal Ceremonial Protocols.	The route from Tehran to Khorasan; cities, villages, stopping places, and caravanserais along the route; Mashhad, the Shrine of Imam Reza, the Old and New Courtyards (Sahn-e Atiq and Sahn-e Jadid), the dome, iwans, the Naqqareh Khaneh (ceremonial drumming house), the Dar al-Shifa (healing center), and the ritual and urban spaces surrounding the shrine.
The Travelogue of Mirza Mohammad Hossein Farahani	The Qajar Period	Mirza Mohammad Hossein Hosseini Farahani	An Iranian Official and Writer of the Qajar Period	An Insider Observer with a Religious and Reportorial Perspective	Beginning in Tehran and passing through Qazvin, Rasht, and Bandar Anzali; the Caucasus, Ottoman territories, and the Hejaz; cities and architectural structures along the route, mosques and urban spaces in Istanbul, the Sacred Mosque (Masjid al-Haram) and the Kaaba, Hajj ritual sites, and pilgrimage spaces in Mecca and Medina.

near the city gate and the rabad (suburban district); the Congregational Mosque of Karaj was situated adjacent to the bazaar; and the Congregational Mosque of Qazvin was located within the city and connected to its water network (Ibn Hawqal, 1987). The Congregational Mosque of Nishapur was also described as being adjacent to the bazaar and comprising a sequence of courtyards and arcades. Accordingly, movement from the bazaar into the courtyard and the arcaded space represents a gradual transition from the public realm to the domain of worship (Al-Maqdisi, 1982). In Najaf and the shrine complexes of Qazvin, bazaars, madrasas, courtyards, iwans, chambers, and entrance thresholds organize the approach to the mausoleum. Consequently, sacred places remain connected to the city while preserving their distinctive precincts through a sequence of spatial transitions (Ibn Battuta, 1997; Farahani, 1964). The Shrine of Imam Reza in Tus developed into a core comprising a fortress, mosque, residential buildings, and bazaar, while the Shrine of Sheikh Safi al-Din was described as "the circumambulation ground of the peoples of the age," serving as a center for the presence and orientation of diverse groups (Al-Maqdisi, 1982; Shirvani, 1960). In Medina, the Prophet's Mosque, Al-Baqi Cemetery, Quba, Mount Uhud, Masjid al-Fath, Masjid al-Shajara, and Wadi al-Aqiq are connected through pilgrims' routes, creating a multicentered landscape of sacred sites. Within the Prophet's Mosque itself, doors, named columns, the Rawdah, the pulpit (minbar), the chamber, and the tomb enclosure organize different degrees of proximity to the sacred center (Farhad Mirza, 1987). Hagia Sophia and the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, through their domes, minarets, expansive courtyards, and associated structures, represent the grandeur and centrality of religious architecture within the urban landscape (Farahani, 1964). Naser al-Din Shah's travelogue likewise depicts the Shrine of Imam Reza through its courtyards, dome, iwans, Naqqareh Khaneh (ceremonial drumming house), Dar al-Shifa (healing center), and surrounding spaces, presenting it as a multilayered urban complex that guides pilgrims' movement from the city's public realm toward the central sacred precinct (Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, 1990). Overall, the spatial–physical representation of the sacred in travelogues does not depend on a single element; rather, it is shaped by the interaction between center and periphery, upper and lower levels, interior and exterior, routes and thresholds, buildings and cities, and architecture and landscape.

• Sensory and perceptual representation of the sacred

The findings from the travelogues indicate that the sensory and perceptual experience of the sacred is shaped through a combination of visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile, and bodily qualities. However, these elements are not inherently sacred in themselves; rather, they acquire sacred meaning when associated with religious narratives, the presence of sacred figures, historical memory, or pilgrimage and ritual practices. In his account of the foundation of the Shiz Fire Temple, Abu Dulaf describes the sight of a "great light" in the darkness of night, which reveals the location where the structure is to be erected. The continuity of the fire and the belief that its flame never goes out transform light from a material phenomenon into a symbol of permanence and a presence extending beyond time (Abu Dulaf, 1975). In Ṣūrat al-Arḍ, the extensive distribution of fire temples throughout Fars, together with the combination of a blazing fire and a water fountain that reaches the top of the building in the city of Jur, creates a striking multisensory experience. The movement of water, the brilliance of the flames, and the height of the structure distinguish the site from its everyday surroundings and generate a sense of visual wonder (Ibn Hawqal, 1987). Shirvani also regards fire in the fire temple as one of the "complete manifestations" of the divine. Accordingly, light, heat, and the movement of flames become tangible means through which a transcendent reality is perceived (Shirvani, 1960).

Abu Dulaf refers to a lake whose depth cannot be determined even when a long rope is lowered into it. Its unfathomable depth and unknowable nature therefore endow the lake with a mysterious

quality (Abu Dulaf, 1975). In Ibn Hawqal's account, the tomb of Daniel is concealed beneath the flow of a river and can only be seen beneath the water. Here, water functions both as a covering and protective medium for the tomb and as a means through which its hidden presence can be perceived. Consequently, the sacred is experienced through invisibility, depth, and mystery (Ibn Hawqal, 1987). Nasir-i Khusraw describes the stone pavement of Jerusalem in such a way that, after rainfall, the entire ground is "washed clean and purified." Thus, water and the city's physical organization contribute to the perception of purity and the sanctity of the environment (Nasir-i Khusraw, 1956). Al-Maqdisi also considers cleanliness a criterion for evaluating the quality of religious spaces. His criticism of the unclean conditions of certain mosques demonstrates that the formal sacred status of a building does not necessarily guarantee a satisfactory experience of it (Al-Maqdisi, 1982). The hot spring at Ribāṭ Suhayl also acquires the status of a sign of blessing because its emergence is attributed to the supplication of the Prophet's companions. In this case, warmth and bodily contact with water make the experience of divine grace tangible to pilgrims (ibid). By contrast, Abu Dulaf mentions a body of water that people avoided approaching because the sword used to kill Yahya ibn Zayd had been washed in it. Thus, the memory of martyrdom can transform the emotional perception of water, turning it into a carrier of sorrow and historical impurity (Abu Dulaf, 1975). Nasir-i Khusraw refers to "variegated enamel tiles" and decorative motifs that "dazzle the eyes of the beholder." He also identifies golden and silver lamps and the reflection of light on marble surfaces as factors contributing to the mosque's extraordinary luminosity (Nasir-i Khusraw, 1956). In the Congregational Mosque of Abrashahr, the gilded structure, black-and-white columns, and painted ceiling distinguish the religious space from the ordinary environment of the bazaar (Al-Maqdisi, 1982). In his description of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, Ibn Battuta mentions golden mosaics, marble, colored windows, and ornate mihrabs, regarding the beauty of its courtyard as unsurpassed. Accordingly, the reflection of light and the diversity of colors create an experience of grandeur and wonder (Ibn Battuta, 1997, 1). In the mosques of Tabriz, multicolored tiles, Thuluth inscriptions, and vegetal motifs create such an appealing atmosphere that, according to Evliya Çelebi, after entering, "one does not wish to leave" (Nakhjavani, 1959). At the Kaaba, its black covering, white inscriptions, silver door, and geometric simplicity create a sense of awe based on clarity and visual unity. The Kiswah, the covering of the Kaaba, envelops the structure like a sanctified body, distinguishing it from ordinary buildings (Nasir-i Khusraw, 1956; Ibn Battuta, 1997). By contrast, places such as Mount Uhud, the Trench, and Masjid al-Fath exert their influence less through ornamentation than through simplicity, stillness, and the preservation of historical traces. In these places, the landscape, mountains, and surviving historical remains generate a silent and contemplative sense of awe through their association with religious memory (Farhad Mirza, 1987).

Ibn Hawqal describes the illumination of the mosque in Tbilisi with candles and lamps, as well as the calling of the adhan "in a loud voice." In this way, light and sound make the presence of Islam perceptible within the city's temporal and spatial dimensions (Ibn Hawqal, 1987). During the Muharram rituals in Tabriz, the recitation of maqtal narratives, weeping, and cries of "Wā Husaynāh" are accompanied by the distribution of water, food preparation, and the gathering of large crowds, transforming the city square into a multisensory space. Here, the sacred is not merely seen but also heard, touched, and experienced through the collective's emotional participation (Nakhjavani, 1959). The Naqqareh Khaneh (ceremonial drumming house) at the Shrine of Imam Reza is likewise more than a musical element in Naser al-Din Shah's account. Through the announcement of time and the propagation of sound throughout the city, it makes the grandeur of the shrine and its collective presence perceptible (Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, 1990). Ibn Battuta refers to musk and perfume applied to the stones of the Prophet's Rawdah, which had altered

their color over time. At the shrine of the Commander of the Faithful (Imam Ali), rosewater, musk, silk curtains, precious carpets, and gold and silver plaques make the sanctity of the place perceptible to the senses of smell, sight, and touch (Ibn Battuta, 1997). Farhad Mirza's experience at Al-Baqi Cemetery assumes a more personal and bodily dimension. By bringing his aching foot close to the enclosure surrounding the tomb of Imam Hasan, weeping, and praying for healing, he experiences sacredness not merely through observation but also through his own body and emotions (Farhad Mirza, 1987). Ritual washing and purification before entering the shrine also prepare the pilgrim's body for presence within the sacred domain and establish a boundary between the ordinary state and the condition of pilgrimage (ibid). These qualities become a sacred experience when they are connected to religious memory, historical narratives, the presence of sacred figures, and ritual practices. Therefore, the sacred is not merely a visual or aesthetic quality but rather a multisensory and emotional experience that engages the observer's entire body and perceptual faculties.

• Semantic and symbolic representation of the sacred

The findings from the travelogues indicate that the sacred meaning of a place is shaped less by its physical characteristics than by its association with foundational narratives, sacred figures, historical and religious memory, and political relations. Architecture provides a setting for the consolidation, preservation, and representation of these sacred meanings. In the story of the Shiz Fire Temple, soil from a sacred land is buried in the desert, and its location is revealed by an extraordinary light. The structure is subsequently erected at that very spot. The transfer of the soil can also be interpreted as a symbolic transfer of sacredness from one territory to another (Abu Dulaf, 1975). The same mechanism is evident in the account of the spring at Ribat Suhayl, where the hot water is attributed to the supplications of the Prophet's companions, thereby transforming a natural phenomenon into a reminder of a religious event and a sign of blessing (Al-Maqdisi, 1982).

The attribution of places to prophets, Imams, Companions of the Prophet, religious scholars, and mystics is the most significant factor in consolidating sacred memory in the travelogues. The Mosque of Solomon in Istakhr becomes associated with a memory extending beyond local history through its attribution to Prophet Solomon, while the Tomb of Daniel, despite being concealed beneath the river, preserves the enduring presence of the prophet in the landscape of Susa (Ibn Hawqal, 1987, 27- 47). In Tus, the Shrine of Imam Reza also constitutes a focal point for the concentration of religious, historical, and political meanings. Its proximity to the tomb of Harun al-Rashid transforms the site into a meeting point of two distinct memories. Furthermore, the construction of a fortress, mosque, residential buildings, and bazaar around the shrine demonstrates how religious memory was able to shape the social and spatial structure of the settlement itself (Abu Dulaf, 1975; Al-Maqdisi, 1982).

In Jerusalem, architectural elements such as walls, mihrabs, the Rock, and prayer sites are associated with narratives concerning Solomon, David, Zechariah, Jesus, Abraham, and the Prophet Muhammad. The Rock is also associated with the first qibla and the Prophet's Night Journey and Ascension (Isra and Mi'raj), transforming a natural feature into a material symbol of a transhistorical event. In this context, the Dome of the Rock provides an architectural framework for preserving and manifesting this meaning (Nasir-i Khusraw, 1956). Beyond its spatial significance, the centrality of the Kaaba symbolizes the unity of the Muslim community, as it organizes the direction of prayer, the movement of circumambulation (tawaf), and collective supplications within a shared system (Nasir-i Khusraw, 1956; Ibn Battuta, 1997). Farhad Mirza's references to the Pillar of Repentance, the Pillar of Aisha, and the Scented Pillar (Ustuwanat al-Mukhallaqa) demonstrate that even the structural elements of the mosque transcend their material functions through their names and associated narratives, becoming markers through which the past is reinterpreted (Farhad Mirza, 1987). Similarly, Al-Baqi Cemetery, Mount Uhud, Quba, Masjid al-Fath,

and the Trench acquire their significance through their associations with the Ahl al-Bayt, the Hijra, martyrdom, and the battles of early Islam. These associations transform the landscape of Medina into a network of religious memories in which the land, mountains, graves, and mosques each play a role in consolidating collective memory (ibid.). The mausoleum of Mahmud Ghazan, through pilgrimage, the recitation of the Fatiha, and popular belief, is transformed from a governmental memorial into a spiritual focal point. The expression "its dome rises toward the heavens" establishes a symbolic connection between the architectural elevation of the building and the elevated status of the person buried within it (Nakhjavan, 1959). The shrine of Sheikh Safi is likewise situated within an extensive network of Shi'a and Sufi memory because of his mystical status, his attributed descent from Imam Musa al-Kazim, and the connection between his Sufi lineage and Imam Reza. The expression "a place of circumambulation for the peoples of the age" also presents the shrine as a symbol of unity and the gathering of diverse groups (Shirvani, 1960). The connection between the mosque and the church in Dabil transforms the urban landscape into a setting for the coexistence and transformation of two religious traditions (Ibn Hawqal, 1987). Hagia Sophia also represents an example of the accumulation of Christian and Islamic memory within a single architectural structure. Its conversion from a church into a mosque, together with the addition of a mihrab, minbar, minarets, and Islamic inscriptions, has imposed new meanings upon its pre-existing structure. The golden inscriptions bearing the names of God, the Prophet Muhammad, the Ahl al-Bayt, and the caliphs have likewise transformed the architectural surfaces into carriers of religious and historical identity (Farahani, 1964). The naming of mosques after sultans and founders also demonstrates that religious architecture can simultaneously serve as a memorial to political power and an instrument for representing religious legitimacy. This relationship becomes more evident in Naser al-Din Shah's travelogue. The Shah's presence at the Shrine of Imam Reza is not merely an act of personal pilgrimage; rather, it represents the relationship between the Qajar monarchy and Shi'ism, as well as its connection with one of Iran's most significant religious centers (Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, 1990). Overall, the semantic and symbolic representation of the sacred in the travelogues is shaped by the relationships between place and narrative, nature and memory, architecture and sacred figures, centrality and unity, and religion and power.

- **Ritual and behavioral representation in the formation of the sacred**

The examination of the travelogues indicates that the sanctity of a place is shaped not only by its physical and historical characteristics but also through the interaction between space, ritual time, and individual and collective practices such as pilgrimage, prayer, purification, and caretaking. It is sustained through the repetition of rituals and the association of religious practices with architectural elements. Abu Dulaf writes that the fire of the Shiz Fire Temple was transferred to the east and west and that its central flame had never been extinguished over the course of centuries. In this example, the continuity of sacredness does not depend solely on the flame itself; rather, it results from its continuous preservation and transmission by the religious community (Abu Dulaf, 1975). Ibn Hawqal also refers to the presence of attendants and guardians at a fire temple in the Jibal region, indicating that the continuity of the flame required a ritual organization comprising caretaking, service, and protection (Ibn Hawqal, 1987). The same pattern can be observed in mosques through the lighting of lamps, Quranic recitation, the call to prayer (adhan), and the continuous presence of worshippers. The illumination of the mosque and the calling of the adhan "in a loud voice" in Tbilisi synchronized the city's everyday temporal rhythms with the time of worship and extended the presence of sacred space beyond the boundaries of the building into the public realm (ibid.). In his description of a qadamgah (a sacred site associated with the footprints or presence of a holy figure), Abu Dulaf refers to people who stood at a specific location, prayed, and awaited the appearance of

the Mahdi. Standing, supplicating for one's needs, and awaiting the promised future generated a set of bodily and devotional practices that consolidated the sanctity of the place over time (Abu Dulaf, 1975). In Ibn Hawqal's account, the coffin of Daniel was also carried to public gatherings, where people sought blessings through it and prayed for rain, thereby transforming it into an intermediary between the community and the transcendent realm (Ibn Hawqal, 1987). In these examples, religious attribution provides the initial basis for sanctity, but its continuity depends on the presence and recurring practices of believers.

Entry into sacred places is also frequently governed by specific rules concerning purification, orientation, prayer, and passage through thresholds. In Jerusalem, the presence of ablution facilities, multiple mihrabs, illuminated lamps, and the continuous maintenance of the building indicates that architecture was organized according to the requirements of worship and bodily movement (Nasir-i Khusraw, 1956). In Medina, pilgrims stood facing the Prophet's tomb enclosure, offered greetings to the Prophet Muhammad, and then proceeded toward the other graves. This sequence coordinated bodily position, verbal expression, and movement with the architectural structure, associating each location within the mosque with a specific practice (Ibn Battuta, 1997). Farhad Mirza also explicitly states that he performed the acts of entering and visiting the shrines of the Prophet Muhammad and Fatima in accordance with the instructions provided in manuals of pilgrimage rituals. Accordingly, entering a shrine is not an unrestricted or spontaneous act but rather a regulated practice involving the selection of an entrance, the recitation of prayers, the offering of greetings, and the following of a prescribed route (Farhad Mirza, 1987).

Circumambulatory movement, touching, and kissing architectural elements are among the other practices through which the centrality of sacred places is physically reproduced. Nasir-i Khusraw and Ibn Battuta describe the ceremonial opening of the Kaaba's door as a collective event during which the custodians approached the threshold, opened the door, and people raised their hands in supplication. The opening of the door transformed ordinary time into an exceptional moment and turned the threshold into a focal point of anticipation, humility, and collective presence (Nasir-i Khusraw, 1956; Ibn Battuta, 1997). In Najaf, kissing the threshold, touching the tomb enclosure, passing one's hands over the head and face, and reciting prayers transformed architectural elements into mediating objects for seeking blessings and establishing a connection with the sacred figure (Ibn Battuta, 1997). Farhad Mirza also refers to circumambulating the tomb enclosure, touching the cenotaph of Imam Hasan, weeping, and praying for healing. Through these practices, the sacred is experienced directly through the pilgrim's body and emotions (Farhad Mirza, 1987). At Arafat, the sermon, congregational prayer, standing while facing the qibla, and supplication until sunset transformed the plain into a ritual space at a specific time. The subsequent movement of pilgrims between Arafat, Muzdalifah, and Mina, together with practices such as prayer, the ritual stoning of the pillars (ramy al-jamarat), and sacrifice, connected the various elements of the landscape within a unified sacred network (Nasir-i Khusraw, 1956). In Evliya Çelebi's account, the Muharram rituals in Tabriz, through the erection of tents, the recitation of maqtal narratives recounting the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the distribution of votive offerings, and collective mourning, transform the public space of the square into a sacred domain for the reenactment of the events of Karbala (Nakhjavan, 1959). The repetition of the same rituals in villages along the route to Ardabil also created a network of temporary ritual spaces connected through the shared memory of Karbala (ibid.). Al-Maqdisi writes that a particular day was designated annually for visiting Ribat Nur. Thus, the periodic return of people, their gatherings, and the recollection of the narrative associated with the site renewed its sanctity (Al-Maqdisi, 1982). Al-Maqdisi's account of different practices for performing the Eid prayer, together with Evliya Çelebi's reference to certain groups refraining from attending particular mosques, demonstrates that the

official sacred status of a building does not necessarily entail its equal acceptance by all communities. Rather, patterns of use and the religious affiliations of users influence the formation of a place's perceived sanctity (Al-Maqdisi, 1982; Evliya Çelebi, 1959).

At the mausoleum of Mahmud Ghazan, the presence of dervishes, the recitation of the Fatiha, and the annual sending of sacrificial offerings as votive acts constitute recurring practices that keep the mausoleum active and spiritually vibrant (Nakhjavan, 1959). The Sheikh's worship and spiritual guidance, the gathering of disciples, and the formation of a "circle of devotion" transformed the hazira from an individual's place of residence into a center of spiritual discipline, education, and collective identity (Shirvani, 1960). Similarly, in Mevlevi tekkes (Sufi lodges), the residence of dervishes, dhikr (ritual remembrance of God), instruction, collective movement, and adherence to the rules of the Sufi order generated the sacred character of the space. Accordingly, the sanctity of the tekke stemmed less from the building's ornamentation than from bodily discipline and the relationship between the spiritual master (murshid) and his disciples (murids) (Farahani, 1964). Endowments (waqf), service, and the continuous maintenance of sacred buildings also play an essential role in sustaining and reproducing the sanctity of places through the participation of endowers, attendants, and custodians in meeting their religious, educational, and social needs (ibid.). The Shah's entry into the shrine, his presence in the courtyard, the performance of pilgrimage rituals, his interaction with attendants, and the participation of members of the royal court transform the shrine's architecture into a setting for the simultaneous display of religious devotion and royal power. In this account, ceremonial order, the movement of the royal entourage, and the Shah's public presence demonstrate that pilgrimage rituals can serve not only as a means of establishing a personal relationship with the sacred but also as practices with political and social functions (Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, 1990).

Overall, the ritual and behavioral representation of the sacred in the travelogues is based on the interaction between the body, place, time, community, and repetition. Accordingly, the sacred is not merely represented through architecture; rather, it is continually actualized and recreated through human practices.

- **Analysis of results and data**

Based on the theoretical studies and conceptual foundations of the research, the sacred in landscape and architecture is a multidimensional and relational phenomenon that emerges through the interaction of spatial structure, human experience, meaning, and ritual practices. Accordingly, as illustrated in Fig. 1, the analytical framework for the research findings is organized into four categories: the spatial–physical representation, sensory–perceptual representation, semantic–symbolic representation, and ritual–behavioral representation of the sacred. In other words, physical structure enables sensory experience and the performance of rituals; sensory experience endows a place with distinctive qualities; narratives and symbols confer meaning upon it; and recurring individual and collective practices sustain its sacredness. In the Jur Fire Temple, the centrality, orientation, height, and monumentality of the structure, together with spatial elements such as thresholds, enclosures, courtyards, and stairways, distinguish the sacred place and

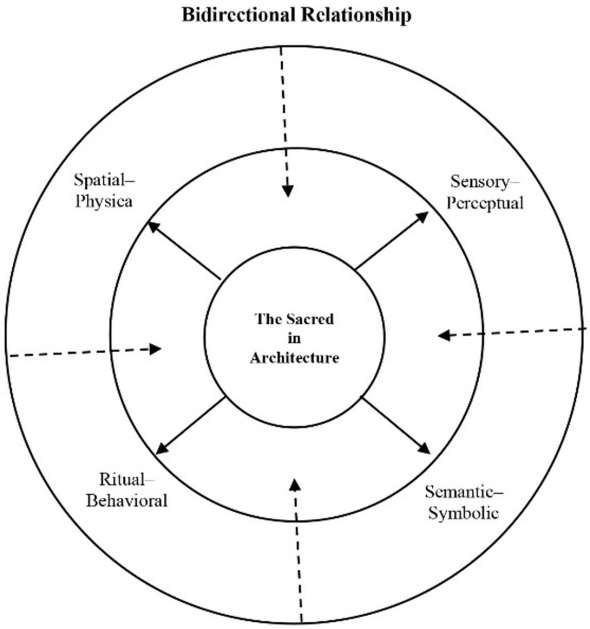


Fig. 1. The proposed analytical framework of the research for examining the representation of the sacred in architecture and landscape. Source: Authors.

establish a spatial hierarchy that facilitates a gradual transition from public space to the sacred core.

Elevated domes, tall minarets, monumental arches, and expansive courtyards have transformed buildings such as the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, the mosques of Tabriz, Hagia Sophia, the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, and the Shrine of Imam Reza into prominent urban landmarks. However, monumentality is not the only means of representing the sacred. The physical simplicity of the Kaaba, the stillness of Mount Uhud and the Trench, and the secluded character of the hazira of Sheikh Safi demonstrate that austerity, silence, and the reduction of formal elements can also enhance the perception of sacredness.

In the sensory–perceptual dimension, light, color, water, sound, fragrance, touch, and environmental qualities constitute the primary mediators of the experience of the sacred. The extraordinary light in the account of the foundation of the Shiz Fire Temple, the lamps of Jerusalem, the gilded surfaces of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, the multicolored tiles of Tabriz, and the golden inscriptions of Hagia Sophia distinguish sacred spaces from their everyday surroundings. By contrast, the unfathomable depth of the Lake of Shiz and the concealment of Daniel's tomb beneath the water create an experience characterized by ambiguity and mystery. In the travelogues, sensory elements such as water, sound, fragrance, and touch generate a multisensory and emotional experience of sacredness and extend it beyond the physical structure of the building. Meanwhile, the attribution of places to foundational religious figures and events plays the primary role in shaping their sacred meaning. The Mosque of Solomon, the Tomb of Daniel, the Shrine of Imam Reza, the Rawdah of the Prophet, Al-Baqi Cemetery, Mount Uhud, Quba Mosque, the Shrine of Sheikh Safi, and the Tomb of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari acquire meaning through narratives of the presence, burial, passage, or temporary stay of sacred figures. In such cases, architectural form is not, in itself, the source of sanctity; rather, its role is to consolidate and preserve the religious memory associated with the place. Hagia Sophia and the Shrine of Imam Reza demonstrate that sacred architecture, in addition to its religious function, provides a setting for the representation of historical memory, religious identity, and political legitimacy. Thus, sacred meaning emerges through the relationship between religion, history, and power.

In the ritual–behavioral dimension, pilgrimage, circumambulation (tawaf), prayer, purification, ritual standing (wuquf), touching, votive offerings, mourning, dhikr (remembrance of God), and the maintenance of sacred buildings activate sacred places. The continuous preservation of the fire in fire temples, the perpetual circumambulation of the Kaaba, pilgrimage to the Shrine of Sheikh Safi, offering greetings in the Prophet's Mosque, and touching the tomb enclosure in Najaf demonstrate that sacredness is reproduced through the repetition of bodily and verbal practices.

The overall findings of the analysis indicate that a single place may simultaneously fall within more than one dimension. For example, the Kaaba is spatially centralized, sensory-wise distinctive and austere, symbolically representative of unity, and behaviorally the focal point of circumambulation. Similarly, the Shrine of Imam Reza, the Prophet's Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, and the Shrine of Sheikh Safi become sacred places through the overlapping of physical form, perception, narrative, and ritual. Table 2 comparatively presents the analytical dimensions and indicators, spatial examples, intertextual coverage, and related travelogues, revealing how the sacred emerges through the interaction of physical structure, sensory perception, symbolic meanings, and ritual practices. The term intertextual coverage refers to the number of travelogues in which at least one textual piece of evidence related to the indicator under consideration was identified. Therefore, this measure is not equivalent to lexical frequency as understood in corpus linguistics. Synonymous words and expressions were grouped into conceptual families. Nevertheless, given the interpretive nature of the research, lexical frequency alone was not considered a criterion for determining the significance of an indicator. Instead, each piece of evidence was analyzed within the context of its narrative and in relation to place, experience, and ritual practice.

Table 2. Analytical dimensions, indicators, and manifestations of the representation of the sacred in the travelogues examined. Source: Authors.

Analytical Dimension of the Sacred	Indicators and Lexical-Semantic Markers	Referenced Place	Travelogues	Intertextual Coverage (Number of Travelogues Containing Relevant Textual Evidence)
Spatial–Physical Dimension	Centrality and Orientation: The location of a sacred structure at the center of a city or complex; the organization of routes and movements around a focal point; and the transformation of a dome, shrine, or fire into an orienting landmark.	The Fire Temples of Shiz and Jur; the Dome of the Rock; the Kaaba and the Sacred Mosque (Masjid al-Haram); the Congregational Mosque of Dvin; the Shrine of Imam Reza; the Shrine of Sheikh Safi; and the Prophet's Mosque.	Abu Dulaf's Treatise; Ṣūrat al-Arḍ by Ibn Hawqal; Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Riyāż al-Siyāḥa; Hidāyat al-Sabīl; Naser al-Din Shah's Khorasan Travelogue.	8
	Thresholds and Hierarchy of Access: Enclosures, gates, moats, courtyards, arcades, stairways, and multiple entrances; the gradual transition from the city and bazaar into the sacred precinct and its central core.	The enclosure of the Shiz Fire Temple; the gates and stairways of Jerusalem; Bab al-Hadra in Najaf; Bab Jibril of the Prophet's Mosque; the shrine complexes of Qazvin; and the courtyards of the Shrine of Imam Reza.	Abu Dulaf's Treatise; Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Hidāyat al-Sabīl; Farahani's Travelogue; Naser al-Din Shah's Khorasan Travelogue.	6
	Scale, Height, Awe, and Monumentality: Tall domes and minarets, expansive arches, massive columns, spacious courtyards, and the dominance of buildings over the urban skyline.	The Jur Fire Temple; the Dome of the Rock; the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus; the mosques and the Mausoleum of Mahmud Ghazan in Tabriz; Hagia Sophia; the Sultan Ahmed Mosque; and the dome of the Shrine of Imam Reza.	Ṣūrat al-Arḍ by Ibn Hawqal; Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname; Farahani's Travelogue; Naser al-Din Shah's Khorasan Travelogue.	6
	Geometry, Proportion, and Order: Centrally organized geometry, radial arrangement, repetition of columns and arcades, successive courtyards, and spatial organization of the building's components.	The Dome of the Rock; the Kaaba and the Sacred Mosque (Masjid al-Haram); the Congregational Mosque of Nishapur; the Prophet's Mosque; Hagia Sophia; and Ottoman mosques.	Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Hidāyat al-Sabīl; Farahani's Travelogue.	5
Sensory–Perceptual Dimension	Light and Darkness: Extraordinary illumination, the continuity of the flame, hanging lamps, the reflection of light on gilded surfaces, and the contrast between light and darkness.	The Shiz Fire Temple; the mosques of Tbilisi; Jerusalem; the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus; Hagia Sophia; and the Shrine of Imam Reza.	Abu Dulaf's Treatise; Ṣūrat al-Arḍ by Ibn Hawqal; Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Farahani's Travelogue; Naser al-Din Shah's Khorasan Travelogue.	6
	Color and Ornamentation: Multicolored tiles, white marble, gold and silver metals, black coverings, golden inscriptions, and vegetal and geometric motifs.	Jerusalem; the Kaaba; the Congregational Mosque of Nishapur; the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus; the mosques of Tabriz; the Prophet's Mosque; Hagia Sophia; and the Shrine of Imam Reza.	Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname; Hidāyat al-Sabīl; Farahani's Travelogue; Naser al-Din Shah's Khorasan Travelogue.	7
	Water, Sound, Silence, and Environmental Quality: Water for ablution and purification, springs and lakes, the call to prayer (adhan) and Quranic recitation, ceremonial naqqareh drumming, ritual lamentation, silence, and the tranquility of the landscape.	Lake of Shiz; the Tomb of Daniel; the Spring of Ribat Suhayl; the mosques of Tbilisi; Ashura Square in Tabriz; Ardabil; the mosques of Istanbul; Mount Uhud and the Trench; and the Shrine of Imam Reza.	Abu Dulaf's Treatise; Ṣūrat al-Arḍ by Ibn Hawqal; Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm; Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname; Riyāż al-Siyāḥa; Hidāyat al-Sabīl; Farahani's Travelogue; Naser al-Din Shah's Khorasan Travelogue.	8
	Simplicity, Purity, and Mystery: Unfathomable depth, the concealed presence of the tomb, geometric purity, stillness and seclusion, and the observer's inability to fully comprehend the place.	Lake of Shiz; the Tomb of Daniel beneath the river; the Kaaba; Mount Uhud and the Trench; the Hazira of Sheikh Safi.	Abu Dulaf's Treatise; Ṣūrat al-Arḍ by Ibn Hawqal; Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Riyāż al-Siyāḥa; Hidāyat al-Sabīl.	6

Rest of Table 2.

Analytical Dimension of the Sacred	Indicators and Lexical-Semantic Markers	Referenced Place	Travelogues	Intertextual Coverage (Number of Travelogues Containing Relevant Textual Evidence)
Semantic–Symbolic Dimension	Transcendence and Ascent: The vertical elevation of domes and minarets, the upward movement of flames, the symbolic connection between earth and heaven, and the spatial prominence of the sacred center.	The Dome of the Rock; the Fire Temple; the Mausoleum of Mahmud Ghazan; and the domes and minarets of the mosques of Tabriz and Istanbul.	Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Riyāż al-Siyāḥa; Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname; Farahani's Travelogue.	4
	Unity and Cosmic Order: A shared center of worship, collective orientation, organization around a focal point, and the diminishing of differences among communities in the presence of the sacred center.	The Kaaba and the Sacred Mosque (Masjid al-Haram); the Shrine of Sheikh Safi; the Prophet's Mosque; and the Fire Temple.	Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Riyāż al-Siyāḥa; Hidāyat al-Sabīl.	4
	Purity, Paradise, and Eternity: Ever-burning fire, blessed water, environmental cleanliness, gardens and freshness, and the continuity of the sacred presence beyond time.	The Shiz Fire Temple; Jerusalem; the Zamzam Well; the Spring of Ribat Suhayl; the garden of the Shrine of Imam Reza; and Ardabil.	Abu Dulaf's Treatise; Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm; Riyāż al-Siyāḥa.	4
	Historical and Religious Memory of Place: The association of buildings and landscapes with prophets, Imams, Companions of the Prophet, martyrs, mystics, and founders; the accumulation of historical and political layers.	The Mosque of Solomon; the Tomb of Daniel; Jerusalem; the Shrine of Imam Reza; Al-Baqi Cemetery, Mount Uhud, and Quba Mosque; the Shrine of Sheikh Safi; the Tomb of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari; Hagia Sophia; and the shrine complexes of Qazvin.	Abu Dulaf's Treatise; Ṣūrat al-Arḍ by Ibn Hawqal; Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Riyāż al-Siyāḥa; Hidāyat al-Sabīl; Farahani's Travelogue; Naser al-Din Shah's Khorasan Travelogue.	9
Ritual–Behavioral Dimension	Pilgrimage and Circumambulation: Movement toward a shrine, gathering around the tomb enclosure, circumambulation (tawaf), offering greetings, supplication, recitation of the Fatiha, and the seeking of blessings and fulfillment of wishes.	The Kaaba; the Prophet's Mosque; Al-Baqi Cemetery; Najaf; the Shrine of Sheikh Safi; the Mausoleum of Mahmud Ghazan; the Shrine of Imam Reza; and Ribat Nur.	Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname; Riyāż al-Siyāḥa; Hidāyat al-Sabīl; Aḥsan al-Taqāsīm; Naser al-Din Shah's Khorasan Travelogue.	7
	Ritual Purification: Ablution (wudu), ritual bathing (ghusl), washing, the use of sacred water, and bodily preparation before entering the sacred precinct.	Jerusalem; the Zamzam Well; the Prophet's Mosque; ablution basins in the mosques of Istanbul; and the Shrine of Imam Reza.	Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Hidāyat al-Sabīl; Farahani's Travelogue; Naser al-Din Shah's Khorasan Travelogue.	5
	Rules of Entry: Selection of the entrance, recitation of supplications, bodily orientation, the ceremonial opening of doors, kissing the threshold, and controlled entry.	The Door of the Kaaba; Bab al-Salam and Bab Jibril of the Prophet's Mosque; Bab al-Hadra in Najaf; the shrine complexes of Qazvin; and the courtyards and thresholds of the Shrine of Imam Reza.	Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Hidāyat al-Sabīl; Farahani's Travelogue; Naser al-Din Shah's Khorasan Travelogue.	5
	Collective Practices, Mourning, and Votive Offerings: Ritual standing (wuquf), congregational prayer, supplication for rain, mourning rituals, recitation of maqtal narratives, communal feeding, water distribution (siqaya), dhikr (remembrance of God), votive offerings, sacrifice, endowment (waqf), and service.	The Coffin of Daniel; Arafat, Muzdalifah, and Mina; Ashura Square in Tabriz; the Mausoleum of Mahmud Ghazan; the Hazira of Sheikh Safi; Mevlevi Tekkes (Sufi Lodges); Najaf; and the Shrine of Imam Reza.	Ṣūrat al-Arḍ by Ibn Hawqal; Nasir-i Khusraw's Travelogue; Ibn Battuta's Travelogue; Evliya Çelebi's Seyahatname; Riyāż al-Siyāḥa; Farahani's Travelogue; Naser al-Din Shah's Khorasan Travelogue.	7

Conclusion

The interpretive–historical examination of the selected travelogues demonstrated that, within the corpus under study, the sacred in architecture and landscape is represented not as a fixed and inherent attribute of form, materials, or ornamentation, but rather as a multidimensional, historical, and relational quality. Based on the analytical framework of the research, the extracted evidence was classified into four interconnected dimensions: spatial–physical, sensory–perceptual, semantic–symbolic, and ritual–behavioral. These dimensions do not operate independently; rather, through their mutual interaction, they distinguish a place from the realm of ordinary life.

The answer to the main research question is that the sacred plays a role in the perception and representation of the beauty of landscape and architecture not as a merely formal attribute, but as an interpretive framework through which architectural and natural elements acquire meaning in relation to concepts such as sanctity, presence, transcendence, memory, and identity. Accordingly, architectural beauty approaches sacred beauty when it transcends visual pleasure and establishes a connection between perceptible form, religious narrative, the experience of presence, and ritual practice. In this regard, travelogues are not neutral reflections of places; rather, the author's religious, cultural, and political position, the purpose of the journey, and the historical context shape how a place is observed and evaluated. Consequently, the same place may be represented in one account as a pilgrimage site and a locus of sacred presence, while in another it may appear as a magnificent historical structure or a symbol of political authority.

Ultimately, the research demonstrates that sacred architecture is not a passive vessel for religion, but rather a mediator between human beings, place, memory, and the transcendent. Its sacredness is continually recreated through human presence and practice.

A place does not become sacred and beautiful merely through its stones, domes, and walls; rather, it is the living connection between space, memory, meaning, and human presence that transforms architecture into a threshold for encountering the transcendent.

Declaration of No Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest regarding the conduct of this research.

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