

A Comparative Analysis of Decorative Motifs of Seyed Shams-o-ddin Tomb in Yazd and the Soltanieh Dome in Zanjan, Iran

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Abstract

The city of Yazd had one of its most historically prosperous periods in the time of “āl-e-Muzaffar” dynasty, in the 8th century. In this period, various monuments and buildings were built, one of which was the tomb of “Seyyed Shams-o-ddin” in Yazd. This monument was previously a complex of “khanqah” (Sufis’ worship place), “madrasah”, (traditional school), “bazaar” (traditional enclosed marketplace), “āb-anbār” (traditional reservoir), and historical bathroom.

By the support of Seyyed Shams-o-ddin, the plan of this building was designed in the city of Tabriz and was sent to Yazd to be built. After Seyed Shams-o-ddin’s death, this building turned into his tomb. In addition to its architecture, the decorations of this tomb are samples of the most accurate and various-pattern ornaments of the Ilkhanid period, created in the forms of tilings, paintings, and plasterworks. Through field and library studies, this article presents a case study about motifs and arrays of Seyed Sham-o-ddin tomb and compares them with the ornaments of Soltaniyeh dome in the city of Zanjan. Then through historical and descriptive method, different characteristics of these ornaments are analyzed. In general, this research shows that the decorations of Ilkhanid period have an independent and unique style. They were expanded in a vast geographic area and then were taken to other areas as well. In terms of technique and design, the decorations of Seyed Sham-o-ddin tomb; is in continuation of the Ilkanid style, especially those related to the Soltaniyeh dome.

Keywords: Decorative Motifs; Yazd Architecture; Seyed Shams-o-ddin Tomb; Soltanieh Dome

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1. Introduction

In the Ilkhanid period, buildings had varieties of decorations, especially in respect with plasterworks. The methods of creating these decorations remained as a secret and were only transmitted orally between the generations from master to apprentice. Despite the unique style, architectural decorations in Ilkhanid period are yet a compilation of the precedent Iranian arts, the same as Ilkhanid architecture. In Islamic architecture, the quality of space causes introversion and individual contemplation, even the abundance of decorations does not contradict this quality in any way. "It is believed by the Islamic artists that this spatial quality could not be accomplished if portrait motives were used among the ornaments, in contrast, decoration with abstract motifs increases the sense of peace and contemplation in space. It is because of the infinite complexity and continuity of rhythm and harmony of the motifs (Corbin, 1993: 43). The repetition of geometrical motifs, missing any worldly themes, displays a harmonic rhythm of the unification among multiplicities. It acts like "recitation" that removes any other mental engagements from the mind (Khakpour, 2009: 21). Also, colors in Islamic architecture have symbolic significance. "Turquoise and lapis lazuli colors are the symbols of sky and create spiritual tranquility and internal peace" (Makinejad, 2007: 105).

Yazd, in the 8th century, in the time of āl-e-Muzaffar, was one of the thriving cities with many remarkable buildings and constructions. In the unsafe conditions of that time in Iran and because of the security and peace of the city of Yazd in that era, scientists and scholars migrated to this city and settled. This matter caused and persuaded the empowered people of the city, such as the judge Seyed Rokn-o-ddin and his son Seyed Shamas-o-ddin, to construct many schools (Madreseh) and cultural places in Yazd. One of these important complex buildings that was built with the order of Seyed Shams-o-ddin in Yazd, was a school in the "Chār-Menār" neighborhood. This is the place that he was buried in after his death and was called "Shamsieh". In the past, this tomb included a complex of Khanqah, Madrasah, Bazaar, historical bath, and Ab-anbar. Realizing the technique of creating plasterworks in the buildings of "Shamsieh" is very important, because it gives us basic information in respect with the history of architectural decoration in the āl-e-Muzaffar's period, and even in the history of Islamic architecture. In this period, the tendency to create mirroring and symmetry in architectural decorations becomes more strengthened. Also, most of the plasterworks are colorful in this period or have been created on a colorful background.

Other decorations of the Shamsieh building includes tiling and painting of geometrical and herbal patterns such as lotus, "Shamseh", and their combination with calligraphy of the Quran verses that have been written on inscriptions. These motifs strengthen and emphasize the basic architectural divisions of the building and accompany the movement of wall surfaces and their hollow and solid volumes. The rhythmic various motifs have been organized in such a way that seems like a unified collection. From the view of design and decorative compositions, every corner of this tomb involves very subtle and accurate artistic innovation. It can be said that the most important part of these decorations is the great designed motifs under the "Ivan's" (porch) ceiling with a Shamseh in the middle. This decorated collection of motifs is like a spread surface of book illuminations in Islamic art that indicates a rhythmic composition of "arabesques", "Khatayees", and calligraphies. They have been organized to create an infinite space of forms and colors.

1.1. Soltanieh Dome

The "Soltanieh" dome is a reminder of the Glory and prosperity of the city of Zanjan about 700 years ago. In the year 702 AH, emperor "Muhammad Oljayto" decided to construct a building

according to the design of the “Qazan khan's” tomb in Soltanieh. Although the Soltanieh dome is very similar to the tomb of emperor “Sanjar” in “Marv”, the creativity and innovation in this building has turned it into one of the masterpieces of Iranian art and architecture. Altogether, the decorations of the Soltanieh dome have been divided in two periods: the first period includes the original decorations of the dome, and the second period consists of the plasterworks and paintings that have been created over the first layer. What can be concluded from the study of the applied arts of the Soltaniyeh dome is that we find that both courses of ornamentation belong to the Ilkhanid period and coincide with the reign of “Oljayto” and “Abu Saeed” (Hamzehlu, 2002: 82).

This great dome turned into a model for the construction of many buildings in the upcoming periods. The dome structure, which is one of the most prominent buildings of the Islamic architecture, is also very important and unique in terms of construction and decorative elements. Most of the researchers have attributed a part of the art works of the dome, including the brick works, tilings, and inscriptions such as the “Moaghali” inscriptions in and out of the building, to the first period. A great part of the plasterworks, such as the works related to the outside facade and the second floor ivans have been credited to the first period as well. They have also attributed some of the other parts to the second period of the dome decoration, including a few of the plaster works, paintings, calligraphy and inscriptions, especially those related to the inside of the dome and “Torbat khaneh” (sacred space for worship), which have been executed in beautiful colors (Hamzehlu, 2002: 83).

There are many similarities between these decorations and the art works created at the same period in Iran, such as metal works, wood carvings, and manuscript illuminations. This matter proves that the Ilkhanid designers were among the first artists who used paper sketches in order to enlarge their plan into the scale of architecture (Vilber, 1970: 90). Also, existing documents show that in “the Ilkhanid period, the architecture plans and decorative sketches were created on paper and sometimes on plaster, and they were exchanged between the states of Iran and “Turan” (Najib Oghlu, 2000: 69). These exchanges can be clearly observed in the elements of wall paintings related to this period. The colors mostly used in these plans are red, orange, blue, green, and black, executed on white plaster surfaces. Among these colors, blue is the dominant one and has covered most of the surfaces. The forms of Shamsieh, created in different sizes and forms are the special pattern in this period, and examples of which can be observed in the second period of decorations in the Soltanieh dome, and Seyed Shams-o-ddin, and Seyed Rokn-o-ddin tombs (Shekofteh & Salehi Kakhaki, 2014: 93). The outside and inside motifs of the ivans in the Sultanieh building and the indoor and outdoor decorations of the dome are some of the works that we are going to compare, in this article, with the decorations of the Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb in Yazd.

1.2. Seyed Shams-o-ddin Tomb in Yazd (Shamsieh School)

According to the historical documents, the Shamsieh School was built in 767 AH, Ilkhanid period, in the city of Yazd. This building is one of the buildings that were constructed by the order of Seyed Shams-o-ddin, the son of Seyed Rokn-o-ddin, in order to teach religious sciences. At the time being, this monument is the only part that has remained from that grand school. It was turned into the tomb of this famous Sufi after his death. Some of the artworks existing in this building are plasterwork, “Moaraq” tiling, painting, as well as different inscriptions. The significance of this monument comes from the plaster works, eye-catching paintings, and also relief inscriptions that have remained to this day. Seyed Rokn-o-ddin who was “the judge of the judges” in the city of Yazd, built the “Roknieh” school in Yazd. But due to sectarian and ideological conflicts with “Atabak Yousef”, the governor of the Yazd; he was imprisoned in the village of Qaleh Khormiz.

His son, Seyed Shams-o-ddin, who was familiar with Rashid-o-ddin Fazl-o-llah, the minister of Abu Saeed Bahador Khan (the king of Iran at that time) traveled to Tabriz in order to get the king's permission for his father's freedom. Seyed Rokn-o-ddin managed to free his father and marry Rashid-o-ddin Fazl-o-llah's daughter and stay in Tabriz (Kazemeini, 2003).

One of the sons of “Khajeh Rashid-o-ddin”, named “Ghias-o-ddin Muhammad”, who had position in the court, took him to Abu Saeed and entrusted him with the posts of general liaison of estates and judge. In Tabriz, Seyed Shams-o-ddin provided the plans and sketches of the complex building, including madrasa, dār al sayādeh (the place of sādāt gathering), khānqāh, and bāzār and sent it to Yazd. Then, the building was built in Yazd with his support. Afterwards, he died in the year 733 AH, in Tabriz. They transported his corpse to Yazd and buried him under the dome of Shamsieh School. His wife, Rashid-o-ddin's daughter, gave the order to build a coffin from Abnoos and Sandal wood and to prepare a “Mehrab” (Altar) from green marble stone and had it installed in the west side of his grave (Afshar, 1995).

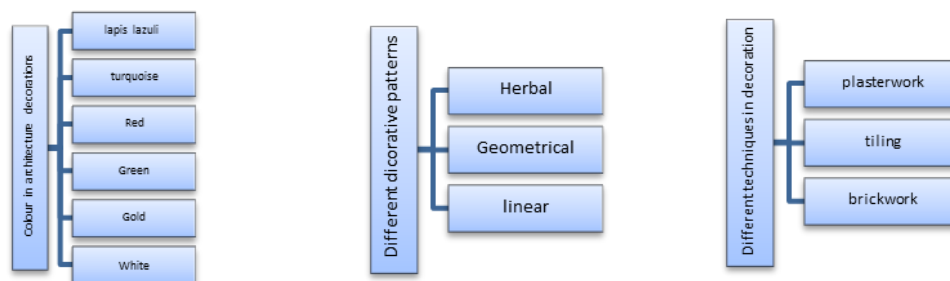


Fig 1 Introduction and analysis of the Seyed Shams-o-ddin building in Yazd

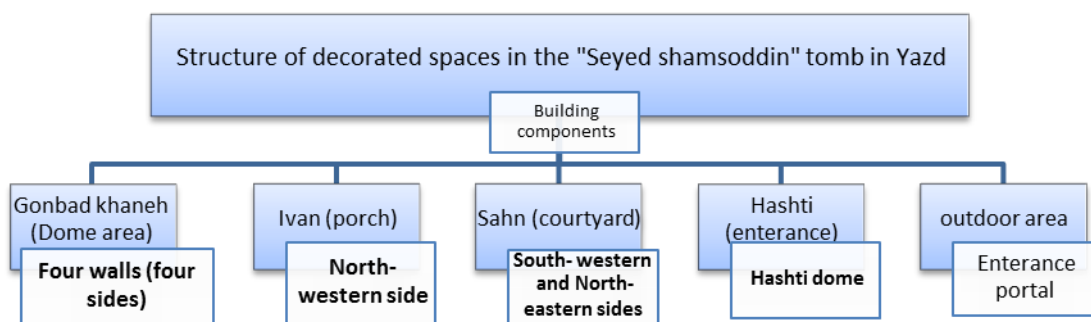


Fig 2 Structure of the decorated spaces in the Seyed Shams-o-ddin

The different parts of this tomb include:

“Pishkhan” (entrance counter) without any decorations, “Hashti” (entrance hall) decorated by simple brick and plasterworks, “Sahn” (courtyard), whose walls are covered with Moaraq tiling, “Ivan” decorated with painting, plasterworks and inscriptions, “Gonbad khaneh” (under the dome's ceiling) decorated in different styles of plasterwork and painting, “Shabestan” (indoor halls), and the open space at the back of the tomb, without any decorations (Sharifi, 2013).

2. Decorations of the Ivan Ceiling

Before the entrance to Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb, there is an Ivan with a tall cradle arch, consistent of different paintings and plasterwork decorations. The ceiling of the Ivan is in the form

of two symmetrical templates with the “sura” (chapter) of “Fath” written on it, along with the calligraphy of “Solse Jali”. All around its narrow and rectangular bands have been painted. The verses of 1 to 10 have been written on the right side band, and the 11 to 20 verses are written on the left side band. The “Sols” calligraphy, with its fluid and non-geometric nature, has been surrounded with various kinds of herbal decorations. These decorations create a kind of complexity with the calligraphy in such a way that the inscriptions written between the patterns turn into a complete decorative surface and cannot be read easily (Nadim, 2008).

In the ceiling of Ivan, two rectangular frames have been painted horizontally beside each other, and the form of Shamseh has been executed in the middle. The spaces around the Shamseh have been filled with herbal patterns, and there are four “Lachakis” (Gussets) on each side. This type of composition is very similar to Quran manuscript decorations and Persian carpet patterns. The Shamseh has been decorated with numerous interconnected stripes, but their forms cannot be recognized due to their destruction. The main colors on the Ivan's ceiling are white, lapis lazuli, and brown. The form of Shamseh is a symbol of light and spirituality. The verses 21 to 25 of the sureh of Fatha have been written in Kufic script, located at the middle of the Ivan.

The picture below shows similarities between the ceiling paintings of the Seyyed Shams-o-ddin's tomb, the decorations of the opening page of a manuscript, and the cover of a Quran belonging to the Ilkhanid period. What one can see in these pictures are the forms of rotational Shamsehs in the center, which are surrounded by decorated margins (Fig 3).



Fig 3 The picture of the north - western ceiling of the Ivan of Seyyed Shams-o-ddin in Yazd in comparison to a Quran cover page and book layout version of Ilkhanid period.

In precious manuscripts, Shamseh is a complete and single form that sometimes is joined with two head-shamsehs (Sar Shamseh) or head-toranjes (Sar Toranj). And sometimes four “Toranj

Lachaks” (Bergamot gussets) surround it. In this case, it is called Shamseh and “Lachak Toranj” (Mojarrad Takestani, 1996).

3. Decorations and Wall Paintings

The interior decorations of the tomb of Seyed Shams-o-ddin consist of:

- Decorations of the under-dome ceiling (Gonbad Khaneh)
- Decorations of the north-western wall (the entrance side) and the south-eastern wall (the opposite side)
- The south-western wall (right side) and the north-eastern wall (left side)

Each of the north-western (the entrance side) and south-eastern (the opposite side) walls can be divided to three parts. The middle part is a shallow arch that includes the entrance door. The divisions of the walls with a prominent decorative band, along with the geometrical motifs have caused integrity and continuity of the space.

The decorations of the entrance and the front arches have been created like two symmetrical frames in a rectangular form. In each of them, two 12-petal lotuses, and in each corner a half or a quarter form of an 8-petal lotus has been created. These plasterworks have been painted with watercolor technique, through the juxtaposition of the colors of gold and lapis lazuli. The decorations under the entrance and in the front-arches are structurally very similar to the ceiling decoration of the under-arch of south-eastern Ivan in the Soltanieh dome in Zanjan (Fig 4).

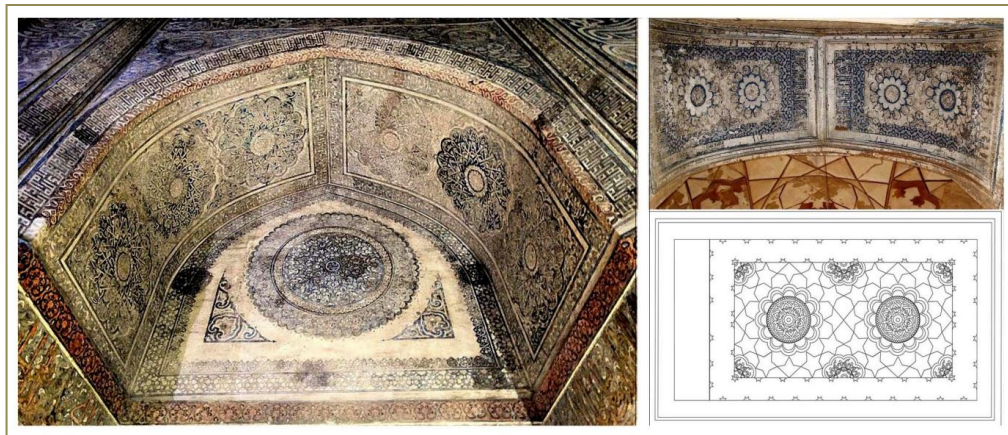


Fig 4 The north-western and south-eastern walls in the Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb and the decoration under the arch of the south-eastern Ivan of the Soltanieh dome.

The difference is that in the Soltanieh dome, inside each rectangle on the arch of the south-eastern Ivan, three 16-petal flowers can be seen. Inside each flower, there is a 16 petal star, inside which the name of the prophet Muhammad has been repeated 16 times in Kufic calligraphy, and the name of Ali has been repeated 16 times in the Sols calligraphy. Surrounding the flowers, the names of the four Caliphs and “Hassan” and “Hossain” have been written (Hamzehlu, 2002). In the center of each 16-petal lotus the holly name of “Allah” can be observed. These motifs have been surrounded with different margin decorations and written inscriptions. The applied colors are lapis lazuli, gold, white, indigo, green, and orange-red.

One of the important characteristics in this monument is the way that the decorations have been executed. They are so intensive that even the edges of the walls have not been forgotten and have

been covered with the different spiral and rope-form motifs (Khademzadeh, 2008: 105). The decorations on the left and right sides are similar to the decorations of the entrance. These decorations have been created symmetrically. In the south-western wall (the right side) and the north-eastern wall (left side), the decorations under the arches and in the middle of them are the regular repetition of a 12-petal and an 8-petal lotus with the name of the prophet Muhammad (Fig 5). The combination of the lotuses, arabesque, and “Khataei” patterns create a kind of relation and continuity at the background.



Fig 5 The decorations under the arches in the south-western (up-side picture) and the north-eastern (down-side picture) sides

The margin decorations that have been applied in this tomb are narrow eminent bonds with herbal motifs, arabesques, geometrical forms, and the calligraphy of the verses of the Quran which have created coherence and consistency. This harmony and integrity between the motifs is very important. The designers of these decorations have been well aware of the principles of design and could create compositions in accordance with the subject. They could represent rhythm and harmony in each part and unity in the entire work, integrating all parts of the composition. The Fig 6, displays the 8-petal lotus with the name of Muhammad under the south-western and north-eastern arches of the tomb of Seyed Shams-o-ddin, and the 16-petal lotus with the name of Muhammad, Ali, and in the center Allah, which exist in the Soltanieh dome as well.



Fig 6 On the right is the 8-petal lotus in the Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb and on the left is the 16-petal lotus in the Soltanieh dome

In ancient Iran, lotus (Niloufar-e abi) was the symbol of creation and life. The “Niloufar” festival was a ceremony that ancient Iranians held. They regarded lotus as a mythical flower, whose symbolic role is clear in the official and court festivals. The role of this flower can be seen in the reliefs of Persepolis (Dadvar & Mansouri, 2006: 104). The dominant colors of the decorations in Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb are mostly lapis lazuli and turquoise. Blue in Iranian culture is the symbol of purity and spirituality. In the decorations of Islamic mosques, these two colors have been applied abundantly (Ostovar, 2012).

During different periods, Iranian artists made great effort to design and stylize the name of the prophet Muhammad in the most beautiful and accurate way. One of the best samples of this effort can be seen in the decorations of Seyed Shams-o-ddin's tomb. The visual role of the name of Muhammad in Islamic art is very important and influential, and could be considered as one of the most fundamental forms in Islamic sacred art. Along with the protection of the name of “Muhammad”, and consideration of its symbolic significances, Iranian artists decorated their buildings and their other art works through rhythmic repetition of this name and created harmony between its parts based on the aesthetic principles of Islamic art. The accuracy of the repetition of the name of Muhammad (written in Persian letters) creates a kind of spiritual tranquility in space (Khazaei, 2008: 62).

The role of Shamsheh in the form of a 5, 6, or 8 petal star with the repetition of the name of Muhammad, appeared again in Iranian architecture after the establishment of the Mongol Ilkhanid period in the 8th century, especially in the decorations of the Soltanieh dome with a great variety and beauty. At the middle of some of these shamshehs that have been formed with the repetition of this name, the name of Allah has also been written (Khazaei, 2008). These motifs of Shamsheh have been created in the colors of lapis lazuli and darksome blue (Ibid).



Fig 7 The outline of a part of the motif of lotus in the tomb of Seyed Shams-o-ddin in Yazd

Lotus flowers in the tomb of Seyed Shams-o-ddin, which are 12, 8, and 6 petals, are in the colors blue, gold, and white. A sample of these motifs can be seen in Fig 8.

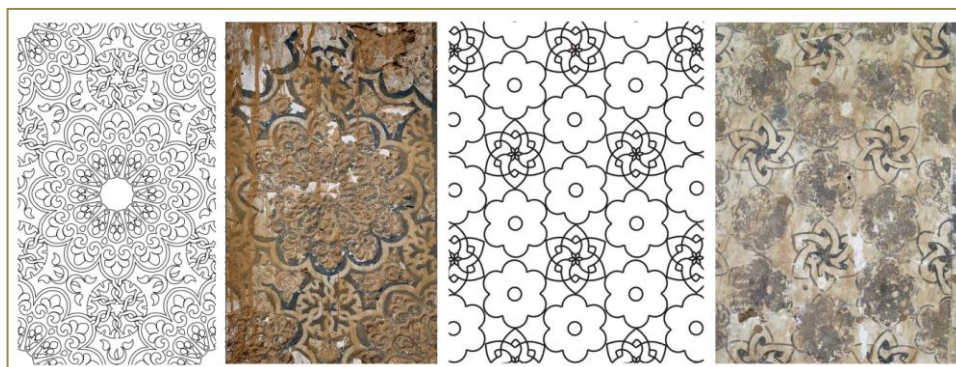


Fig 8 On the right is motifs in different spaces and on the left are the motifs in the south-western side and the north-eastern wall of the tomb

Another sample of arabesque design is presented in Fig 9, related to the entrance door of the tomb of seyed Shams-o-ddin, similar to what can be observed in the Soltanieh dome (Fig 10). The repetition of this motif in the continuation of the main divided lines in the façade, emphasizes the sections and gives each part of the building the sense of stability and balance. Sometimes arabesques traverse through the surface and sometimes they appear intensively in a part of the pattern. And at the end, a harmony is created between the whole and the details of the decorated parts. Arabesque, which is a decorative form, has become more complex through joining with other forms such as leafy arabesque, “Dahan- Adhdary”, “Mari- goldary”, etc. In this way, it increases the richness of Persian decoration.

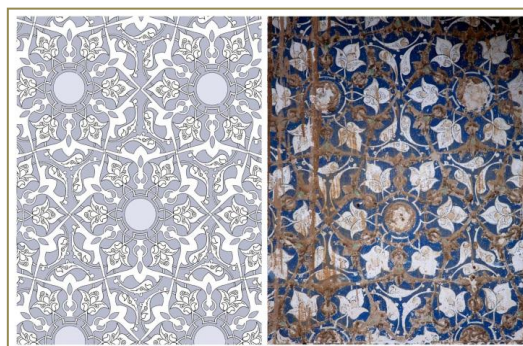


Fig 9 The motifs in different places of the tomb of Seyed Shams-o-ddin



Fig 10 Decorations of the Soltanieh dome.

4. Five and Eight Petal Shamsheh Star

In the tomb of Seyed Shams-o-ddin, a few Shamshehs similar to the 5-petal star have been created on the north-west edge (entrance direction) and on the two sides of the entrance door, where the name of the prophet Muhammad has been repeated five times. They have been surrounded by circles that are a symbol of the sun, as depicted in Fig 11, and on the right side, the 5-petal star of Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb has been presented. The rest of the images are related to the Soltanieh dome. Above the arches, on all four edges, there are two symmetrical 7-petal stars with the name of the prophet “Muhammad” repeated seven times. On the 8-petal star, located in the north-west side (entrance direction) and on the south-east wall (facing the entrance), the name of the prophet Muhammad has been repeated eight times. Surrounding them, the word of “Malek-o-llah” has been also repeated and increased its sense of spirituality. This form has been placed four times on each side. And again, we see an 8-petal star without the word of “Malek-o-llah”. In Fig 12, we can compare the 8-petal star (on the wall) in the Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb in Yazd with the 8-petal star in the Soltanieh dome (on the ceiling). In both of them, the Prophet Muhammad’s name has been repeated eight times inside the circle, with this difference that in the Soltanieh dome the name of Allah exists in the center of the 8-petal star.

Shamsheh in the form of a complete circle is decorated with “Arabesques” and “Khatayi” patterns, and its place, the same as Toranj, is at the center of the illumination. Of course, we already mentioned that Shamsheh is a complete individual form and with the rays that fill the surrounding area, called “Sharafeh” (Machiani, 2007:15). However, Toranj is a pattern which is created from the straps and branches of the “arabesques” pattern and exists in various sizes; large, medium, and small. “Toranj is sometimes placed on the margin or the head piece of the illuminated pages and has many different names (Mojarrad Takestani, 1996: 27).



Fig 11 On the right side is the 5-petal star of Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb in Yazd and the Soltanieh dome.



Fig 12 On the right side is the 8-petal star of the Seyed Shams ad- din tomb in Yazd and the Soltaneh dome.

Another example of Shamsheh and Toranj is inside the Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb, on the north-west (entrance) and the south-east (opposite side) edges of the walls which have been demolished by termites. In Fig 13, the Shamsheh and Toranj have been repeated on the north-west and south-east edges and on the two sides of the arches.


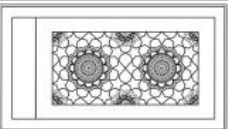






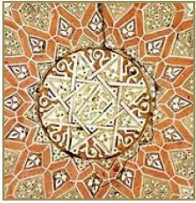





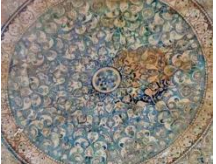


Fig 13 The 4-petal Shamsheh and 8-petal Toranj on the north-west and south-east walls of the Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb.

Table 1 The analysis of the Lotus design, and the 8-petal star in Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb.

The various kinds of lotuses in the Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb	6-petal (different spaces)	8 and 12 petal (right and left direction)	12-petal (right and left direction)	12-petal (entrance and opposite side)	12-petal (right and left direction)
8-petal star	8-petal star the entrance and opposite side	8-petal star the entrance and opposite side	5-petal star the entrance and opposite side	Under the arches, the 8-petal lotus flower has been repeated eight times with the name of the prophet Muhammad.	
Shamsheh	Ivan (porch)	(Different spaces of the tomb)	(The entrance opposite side)	(The entrance and opposite side)	

Table 2 Analysis of the patterns of Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb and Soltanieh dome.

Decoration	Main design of Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb	Contour drawing	Soltanieh dome	Description
Entrance arch				The arch of Soltanieh dome is very similar in structure and layout to the north-western and south-eastern arches of Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb in Yazd
Arch				In the Soltanieh dome the 16-petal Lotus and the name Ali are confined in the center of the name Allah In the Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb the 8-petal Lotus is repeated eight times with the name of prophet Muhammad
North-west (entrance) and south-east (opposite side) walls				The repetition of the name Muhammad and the 8-petal star, with the difference that in the Soltanieh dome the name Allah is placed in the centre
North-western wall (entrance), 5-petal star				
Motifs (in different parts of the building)				

5. Conclusion

This paper has introduced the aesthetic characteristics of the motifs in the tomb of Seyed Shams-o-ddin in Yazd, and has compared their similarity and conformity with the motifs of the Soltanieh dome. The decorations of the tomb of Seyed Shams-o-ddin are based on the form of lotus as the symbol of creation and life, and the application of the form of Shamseh, as the symbol of light, divine manifestation, and the names of God. These motifs and symbols are seen clearly above the surfaces of the ceilings and the walls.

The decorations of the tomb have a similar approach to the Soltanieh dome, in terms of architecture, plasterworks, lotus motif, and the holy name of Muhammad in the form of the petal star. They are also similar in their design and composition, as well as the method of applying the motifs on the walls.

The relief plasterworks, in the form of lotus around the decorations of the Soltanieh dome, have been covered by gold plates. These lotus decorations have been applied also in the tomb of Seyed Shams-o-ddin, but in the Soltanieh dome they have been realized more accurately. Furthermore, in the Ivan, the composition and structure of the plaster decorations have many similarities with the decorations of the book covers and pages of Qurans and other manuscripts from the Ilkhanid period, which proves the relation between the book illuminators and architects of this period.

It is worth mentioning that the construction of the Oljayto School and the great building of Soltanieh started from 702 AH and ended in 713 AH, while the construction of Shamsieh School was finished in 733 AH. Considering the fact that the Soltanieh dome decorations are older than the tomb of Seyed Shams-o-ddin, we can conclude that the decorations of the Seyed Shams-o-ddin tomb have been adapted from the Soltanieh dome.

Therefore, it can be said that the building of Soltanieh has been an appropriate model, both structurally and decoratively, for the other buildings which were built shortly afterwards. And after the end of their work, the talented art masters of the Soltanieh building have transferred the techniques and decorations to other cities, in proportion to their needs.

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