

Reciprocal Effects between Shabestan as an Architectural Element and Iranian Tiling and Carpet Design

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ABSTRACT

Reciprocal effects of arts on one another have led to significant controversial elements in Eastern societies, particularly in Iran. Explicitly, it can be observed that architecture has many interactions with other arts such as carpet design and tiling since the designer draws inspiration from various artworks either directly or indirectly. “Arcaded semi-open veranda” or Shabestan is an old element in Islamic architecture that has been used in tiling and carpet design. The effects of Shabestan and some other elements on different arts including carpet design and tiling are significant such that it has been used not only in context, but also in details of carpet as a major pattern. The same pattern can be observed in tiling of Shabestan in mosques where it is aesthetically translated into bricks, mud and glaze.

Aimed at finding the above mentioned effects, the present research investigates a number of samples of carpets and tile works to show the impacts of Shabestan on other arts. It has been revealed that there are facts that may be inferred from the similarities existing in different arts, reflecting the interactions between architecture, carpet design and tiling. Generally, reciprocal effects of arts on each other can be seen in a large number of arts around the world. But the impacts between architecture, and tiling and carpet design are not only elegant and somehow unfamiliar, but also bold and strong enough to conduct an in-depth study in this regard. Sometimes, it is so simple yet complicated to prove that an art is affected by another to the same extent as vice versa.

KEYWORDS: Shabestan “Arcaded semi-open veranda”, tiling, carpet design, arts' reciprocal effects, Islamic architecture.

INTRODUCTION

Architects have exhibited the glory and might of kings through construction of palaces and decorative elements therein. They would wisely convey the commands of the king to the people or nations through symbols and signs in the form of decorative elements used in palaces, such as engraving, tiling, and plastering. The advent of Islam turned architects' attention to the construction of mosques, Madrasas, and tombs.

Considered to be like home, Mosque is of numerous functions for Muslims. Orders issued by the king, such as declaration of war or peace and mobilization took place in mosques. Meanwhile, many official contracts were concluded by and between people there. It was also considered as a kind of court. Moreover, mosque was deemed to be a type of religious school for training scholars [1]. In general, construction of Shabestan, a type of a big Islamic city hall, has a series of advantages for people including the establishment of a place for their gatherings and meetings where they could discuss and bring up their problems.

Since the simplicity of personal life is emphasized in Islam, early Shabestan was designed in a simple manner. Islamic Architects constructed mosques much more differently than other places. From a constructional point of view, Shabestan may be considered as an entrance to the interior space of a mosque, isolating it from the surrounding area. Mosque courtyard is replete with repetitive elements such as roofed columns, known as Shabestan. Thus it can be inferred that attention to the interior part of the mosque structure is an indirect message sent by Islamic architects to make human concentrate on his inner-self world, an approach to theology which has been reiterated for so many times in principles of religion [1].

Since mosque was a closed spaced, architects began to construct Shabestan as an accommodation for Muslims as well as a sort of shelter against cold and heat [1].

In Persian, the word Shabestan has another meaning; bedchamber. However, the current study is focused on the main meaning of Shabestan, that is, arcaded semi-open veranda as illustrated in figures 1 to 5.

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Shabestan is also referred to as “Lanai”, “Porch”, “Portico”, “Verandah”, “prayer hall” and “Harim”. In Islamic world, nevertheless, it is mostly called Shabestan.

Decorative elements like Shabestan are significant parts of Islamic culture and identity [2]. Similar to a variety of other decorative elements, Shabestan represents the value of Islamic design in architectural Islamic interior and exterior surfaces [3].

Today's Shabestan in mosque courtyard is a recurring construction in center of which arcuate soffits are situated. Early Shabestan had a flat roof and a simple form [1], but as time went by, their decoration changed into one of the most varied, important and constant elements of a mosque.

The discipline, simplicity, balance, centrality, and aesthetics used in Shabestan caused artists, especially carpet designers and tile setters, to make use of the concept of Shabestan in their art works. The aim of this study is to understand the direct effects of Shabestan on carpet designers and tilers.

Shabestan and its Functions

Shabestan is one of the applied elements in Islamic architecture, consisting of a series of columns that support the roof. Its main function is to develop a closed space inside the mosque to preserve Muslims against tough weather conditions.

Having flat and non-curved roof along with simple columns, the first Shabestan constructed in Prophet Mohammed’s house had no similarities to today's ones. This small shelter was first constructed in a small area but then extended across the court of the house in the direction of Qibla, as shown in figure 1. Later on, such a method prevailed in construction of other mosques and Shabestan monuments [4].

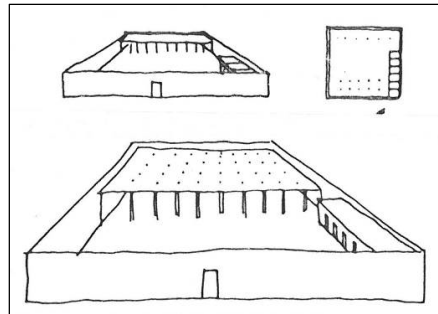


Figure 1: Shabestan of Prophet Mohammad’s house, developed after rebuilding [4]

Considering the geographic and architectural circumstances, Shabestan can be situated on either one, two, three or all four sides of a mosque, as presented in figure 2 [4].

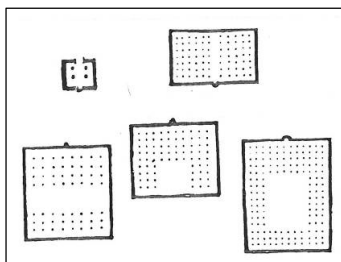


Figure 2: Shabestan's situation on one, two, three or all four sides of a mosque based on the architectural circumstances [4]

Figures 3 and 4 show Goharshad Mosque built in Mashhad, Iran in 1418 CE, where Shabestan is situated on all four sides of the mosque [5].

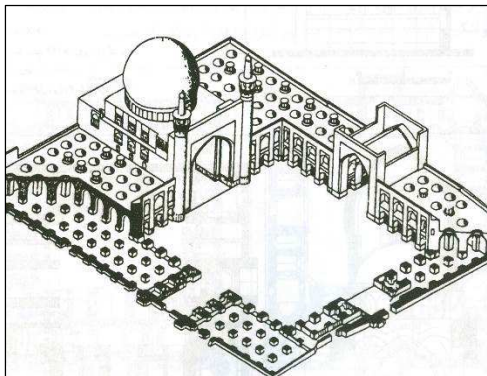


Figure 3: Shabestan on all four sides, axonometric view, Goharshad Mosque, Mashhad, Iran [5]

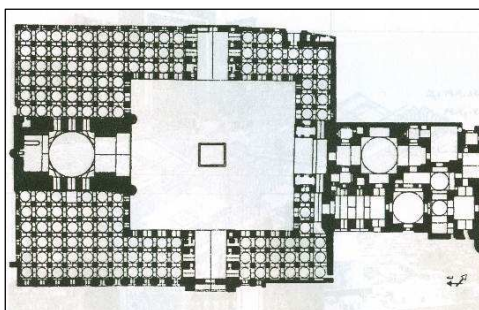


Figure 4: Shabestan built on all four sides, Isometric view, Goharshad Mosque, Mashhad, Iran [5]

Figure 5 shows Jame or Tarikhane Mosque, a Sassanid-era monument [6], in Damghan, Iran which is an example of a Shabestan with wide and simple columns as well as a brick-made curved roof. As another example, Vakil Mosque, with construction work commenced in 1751 AD and completed in 1773 CE, in Shiraz, Iran has delicate decorative elements, as presented in figure 6 [1, 7, 8].

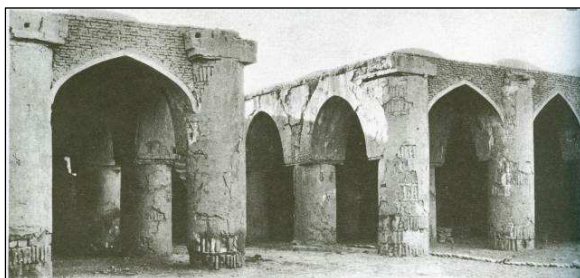


Figure 5: Jame Mosque – Tarikhane, Damghan, Iran [1]

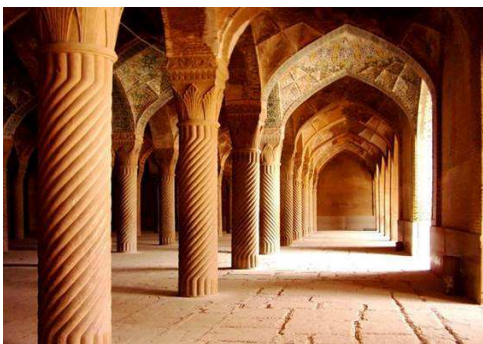


Figure 6: Vakil Mosque, Shiraz, Iran [9]

Shabestan of Imam Mosque, with construction work commenced in 1611 AD and completed in 1629 AD, and Sheikh Lotfollah mosque, with construction work commenced in 1602, and completed in 1619 both in Isfahan, Iran, have been tiled in a magnificent style, as illustrated in figures 7 and 8 [10, 11].



Figure 7: Shabestan with tiling decoration, Imam Mosque, Isfahan, Iran [10]



Fig. 8: Shabestan with tiling decoration, Sheikh Lotfollah mosque, Isfahan, Iran [11]

Sometimes Shabestan in different Islamic countries comes with stone in various colors as the main decorative element.¹

There is a chandelier in the middle of each Shabestan called Qandil or Candil which is mostly used to illuminate the space of mosque [12].

According to verses of holy Quran, God is the light of earth and sky. Light and anything related thereto might be symbols of God. God is the one and the number one is the symbol of uniqueness of God, and the chandelier hanging from the interior center of each Shabestan alter reflects this symbolism, as shown in figure 10 [13, 14]. Figure 9 shows Qandils which are sometimes hung from part of the roof located up the pulpit [13].



Fig.9: Qandil located in the middle of the picture. A miniature illustration of Prophet Mohammad's preaching from the pulpit [13]

¹ An example of such a style is Cordoba mosque in Spain.



Fig. 10: Qandils in the center of Shabestan, Ibn Tulun Mosque central courtyard [14]

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Taking advantage of library references, books, articles, and websites, in this paper the following topics have been studied: shabestan's function, the first shabestan, development of shabestan in mosques, shabestan decorations, and qandil and its role in shabestan. The author has also investigated the effects of shabestan on carpet design by taking photos of some old carpets. Therefore, the research methodology is of both qualitative and quantitative type.

Discussion of Effects of Shabestan on Carpet Design

Carpet design patterns in Iranian arts are sometimes inspired by traditional or natural flowers, trees, springs, handicrafts and architectural elements such as Shabestan. The artist could combine special drawings to develop noble patterns originated from other designs [14].

The shabestan pattern has been weaved on carpets in different parts of Iran. Investigation of the aged and antique carpets in Tehran Carpet Bazaar² has revealed that the design of Shabestan on these carpets originates from Kashan (an old Iranian city) before making its way into the markets of Qom (an Iranian religious city), Tehran and other Iranian cities [14].

Figure 11 presents an old rug, with the design of Shabestan represented by two columns in the center of the figure [14]. In the design pattern of the carpet, a hanging Qandil and a flower vase in the bottom can be observed. Among decorative elements, flower vase is frequently used in carpet design and tiling. There are also two cypress trees, a symbolic tree in Iran, on both sides next to the columns [14]. It stands for sun shine and happiness and is also a common feature of Islamic art that demonstrates the spirituality [2, 15].

The carpet background is navy blue with red-colored margins. The use of traditional colors of Iranian carpet including white, light and navy blue, red, and cream creates a color balance, thus increasing the value of the carpet. Somehow, Iranian carpet is well-known for its combination of red and navy blue colors as well as for the usage of the other warm colors next to them.

² Some of the carpet pictures used in this research were taken from antique carpets of Tehran Carpet Bazaar and some from Tehran International Carpet Fair. The issue is that these carpets do not have any ID and the exact date of their weaving cannot be determined. But carpets in Tehran carpet museum as well as in other places where carpets had a certain ID were not suitable to be used in this manuscript. So pictures of carpets of Tehran carpet museum are rarely used in this research.



Fig. 11: Shabestan design in a rug, Kashan, Iran [16]

Figure 12 shows a carpet in which Shabestan, as an architectural element, has been used in both general and detailed forms. There are two columns of Shabestan on the main theme of the carpet. Decorations on the Shabestan's columns are woven in such a way as to show "Twisted tiling", a method most commonly used in old tiling techniques, as shown in figure 20, although they are not quite conspicuous. There are two small cypress trees woven in the center of the carpet. Carpet designers seem to use cypress trees whenever they are about to design a Shabestan element on the carpet. Cypress trees have been frequently found in old Iranian gardens, and even painters and miniaturists have also used it in their painting and miniature works. The tree, also called "the tree of life", is also observed in ancient engravings of Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BC), an Iranian old kingdom.



Fig. 12: Shabestan design in carpet. Ravar Kerman, Iran [17]

Figure 13 shows a rug woven in Tabriz, one of the Northwest Iranian cities, with a Shabestan design in which a Qandil is hung from part of the roof located up the pulpit. The Qandil is quite distinct from the background, as there are no other patterns woven on the background of the carpet. Therefore, emphasis has been placed on Qandil and columns of Shabestan element in the carpet.

Professor Ali Hasouri³ (1937) believes that such a Qandil is called Anador, meaning a fireless torch. This name is translated in this carpet very well as it illustrates a Brazier or Qandil in which a flower grows instead of fire. Therefore, Shabestan-pattern carpets are also called Qandil carpets.



Fig. 13: Qandil in carpet, Tabriz, Iran [14]

Figure 14 shows a Qandil positioned lower than its common place to play the role of Medallion or the center in the carpet. Presence of Medallion in a carpet could be interpreted as a symbol of God's unity whereby he is the center of the universe [14]. The sharpness of red color in the carpet background is balanced by the dark color of the margin.



Fig. 14: Qandil in the middle of carpet [14]

As shown in figure 15, there is a Shabestan in the background and a Dervish bowl weaved in the center of the carpet. A traditional plate which has a shape of Dervish bowl might rarely be used instead of Qandil or Anador.⁴ Columns are weaved in the same way as twisted-tiles (table 1, figure 15-1). There are wreaths over the columns with a five-Cathay pattern twisted therein to eliminate the monotony of the two columns. There are three flowers weaved inside the vase. It is worth noting that the numbers three and five may have roots

³ An author, compiler, researcher and editor, and currently professor of Iranian History at Uppsala University, Sweden. He is one of the prominent scientists and researchers in the field of Iranian literature, culture, art, and carpet design [18].

⁴ Iranian Dervishes use a bowl to keep money. A dervish is someone treading a Sufi Muslim ascetic path or "Tariqah", known for their extreme poverty and austerity [23, 24]. People generally poured 1100 or 110 Rials in this bowl so as to pay tribute to Ali ibn Abi Talib as the numbers are symbols of this religious leader.

in religion and ideology. A Hadith quoted from Quran considers the number three as three-time divorce for women and five as five sacred persons including the Prophet Mohammed, Ali, Hassan, Hussein and Fatimah, known as “The Five” or “Al Aba”, who are Islam’s five heavenly infallibles.



Fig. 15: Candle in carpet, Tehran, Iran [14]

Presenting some details of figure 15, figure 15-2 in table 1 shows a Shabestan carpet in which there are three castle-shaped patterns along the margin that are weaved in a square frame. Indeed, the direct effect of architecture can be seen in the margin of the carpet.

Figure 15-3 in table 1 shows Achaemenid soldiers-Susa, from Persepolis complex, with a dress of that era, a glazing mud brick inscription which can be considered as a starting effort at tiling art. Figure 15-4 presents some details of figure 15-3, indicating the lower part of an Achaemenid soldier's dress in a larger scale. The interesting point is that the details of the dress is completely matched with those of the carpet shown in figure 15-2 that represents itself the margin of the carpet shown in figure 15.

In its art, Achaemenid architecture represents a specific style along with glory, creativity and unity, as shown in figure 15-5 [27]. The monument presented in this figures is known as “Jan-Panahe-Shakhdar” building which is located in the southwest corner of Persepolis complex [27]. Rarely exposed to discussion in historical references, the building seems to be a type of castle, major part of which has disappeared in today's Persepolis complex. Details of the building are shown in figure 15-6 in table 1. Margins of the carpet shown in figure 15, as described in details in figure 15-2, may have been built inspired by the Jan-Panahe-Shakhdar monument. In fact, this margin design may originate from details of Persepolis engravings as well as from the overall form of Persepolis monument. Due to the fact that the approximate date of the carpet weaving has not yet been definitely determined and it probably belongs to the 19th or 20th century, it is more than likely that the carpet designer is inspired by Achaemenid arts and architecture.

Table 1. Further details of figure 15



 <p>Fig. 15-1: Twisted tile in carpet, further view of figure 15, Tehran, Iran [14]</p>	 <p>Fig. 15-2: Farther view of figure 15, margin of carpet which match with figure [13]</p>
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Fig. 15-3: An Achaemenid soldier, glazed bricks, Susa, Persepolis complex [25]



Fig. 15-4: A closer view of figure 15-3, Lower part of an Achaemenid soldier's clothes [25]

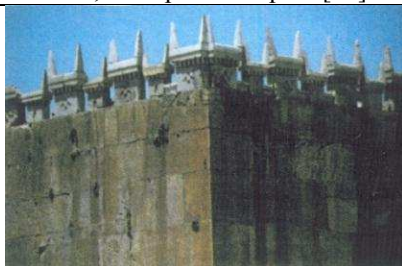


Fig. 15-5: Jan-Panahe-Shakhdar, Persepolis complex, Iran [26]

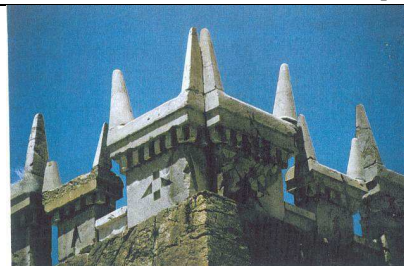


Fig. 15-6: Further view of figure 15-5, Jan-Panahe-Shakhdar, Persepolis complex, Iran [26]

In figure 16, a carpet weaved in Tabriz in 1864 AD is shown and considered as priceless and precious. Qandil is frequently weaved in the background of the carpet while crimson (blood-red) and buff (pale yellow-brown) colors combinations are among original and traditional colors of Iranian carpet. The name of the carpet has been mentioned in its ID as "Repetitive Qandil".



Fig. 16: Candle in carpet, called "Repetitive Qandil", Tehran, Iran [19]

Discussion of Effects of Shabestan on Tiling

The relationship between Shabestan and tiling designs may be observed not only in general but also in detailed manner. Figure 17 demonstrates a Shabestan design of Mirza Jafar Madrasa (1649 AD) tiling, and figure 18 pertains to the tiling used in Nasir-olmolk Mosque, whose construction work commenced in 1876 and completed in 1888 AD in Shiraz, Iran. The general form of a Shabestan with two columns along with an

altar can be seen in the figures. There is no Qandil, but a huge vase with natural flowers located between the two columns, decorating the main theme of tiling and filling the entire gap between the two columns. The tiler has demonstrated one of the most complicated techniques of tiling, called twisted type, in these tiling monuments [14].

Not only have tillers used twisted tile technique but carpet designers have also made use of this technique on carpet patterns, along with the Shabestan element.

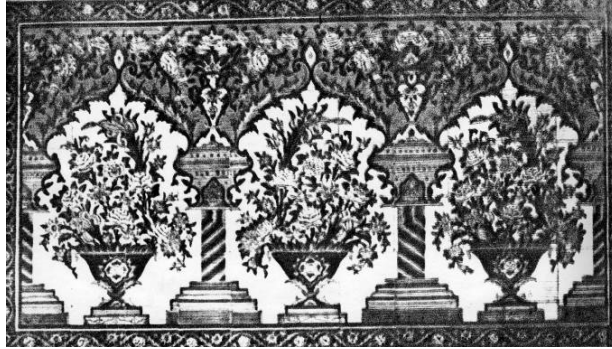


Fig. 17: Tiling, Shabestan in Mirza Jafar madrasa-mosque, Iran [20]



Fig. 18: Tiling, Shabestan design, Iran, Nasiralmolk mosque [21]

Figure 19 shows a twisted tiling in Chahar Bagh School, Isfahan, Iran (1704-1714 CE) [22]. On the left side of the figure, there is a twisted tiling, in the bottom of which there is an engraved vase. In both of the above pictures, there is a huge vase replete with flowers which has filled the background of the tiling, and seems to be inspired by real architectural elements such as what presented in figure 19.



Fig. 19: Twisted tiling technique, Chahar Bagh School, Isfahan, Iran [22]

Conclusion

Structure of earlier Shabestan has been based on several simple columns with a flat roof. As time went by, there appeared a lot of advancements in architecture and Shabestan was supplemented by many other decorative elements such as tiling, plastering and stone engravings. In the meantime, Shabestan is no longer a shelter only for protecting people against tough weather conditions, but has also become a huge component including several decorating elements for improving mosques' and Madrasas' architectural glory and grandeur. In some cases, there is a Qandil as a source of light situated in the middle of Shabestan, and in some others, there are some stone-made vases placed in it.

Such a structure including columns, altar, Qandil and vase, as presented in the real architecture, inspires carpet designers and tillers to use it as a pattern in their works. In architecture, Qandil is a source of light, but as it is not possible to define the light in carpet and tile, carpet designers and tilers have come to use flower instead of light in their works. It has been subtly matched with the nature of these arts.

As a result, carpet design and tiling have drawn inspiration from architecture not only from a sketchy, but also form an in-depth point of view. In Islamic arts and monuments, reciprocal effects of the proposed arts are so strongly obvious that one can consider it difficult to distinguish which one has the main effect on the others.

There is also a rare possibility that architectures have been inspired by carpet designers or tilers, but there is not yet any historical evidence found in this regard. It is recommended conducting studies on the effects of carpet designers and tilers on the architecture or other topics like this in the future researches.

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