

Original Research Article

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«نقش مضامین مذهبی در کتیبه‌های نستعلیق بناهای دوره صفوی»

The Role of Religious Concepts in the Nastaliq Inscriptions of Safavid Monuments

Abstract

Problem Definition: The usage of inscriptions in the Safavid monuments has been expanded and diverse, and the initial study of these works shows that the Safavid artists often used Thuluth and Kufic inscriptions to write religious themes and Nastaliq for non-religious inscriptions. However, this is not certain as Nastaliq inscriptions that contain religious themes exist.

Objective: The present research has been carried out with the aim of identifying and categorizing the religious themes used in Safavid Nastaliq inscriptions. In other words, the main question of this research is that what is the status of religious themes in the Nastaliq inscriptions during the Safavid dynasty?

Research Method: This research follows a descriptive and analytical method. The research data are based on library studies and field findings. The case studies are belonging to the Safavid era in Iran, with all historical monuments being considered in this period. In this research, all available samples were studied and after collecting data, the religious themes used in the samples were classified.

Results: The results of this investigation, based on the study of the contents of about 250 Nastaliq inscriptions in 140 Safavid monument, indicate that 33 of them contain religious themes (about 13%). In other words, about 87% of Nastaliq inscriptions contain non-religious themes. In addition, the results indicate that the religious themes used are as follows: praying phrases (14 items in 19 works), Quranic verses (4 verses in 9 cases), and Hadith (2 hadiths in 5 inscriptions). Also, among the Nastaliq religious inscriptions in Safavid era, the most frequent is the prayer of "Nad Ali" (4 items) and the Hadith "Madinat al-Ilm" (I am the city of the knowledge and Ali is its entranceway) (3 items), which confirms and emphasizes the existence of Shiite tendencies in the formation of the mentioned works.

Keywords

Nastaliq Inscriptions, Safavid Architecture, Religious Content.

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Introduction

Nastaliq inscriptions appeared in Iranian art from the middle of the Timurid era. The first examples of which are the tombstones of the Timurids in Herat. After that, in the Timurid period, an inscription with the poems of Amir Alishir scribed by Sultan Ali Mashhadi and carved in the marble in the pool of Bagh Morad in Herat. (Qomi, 2004, p. 61) In the Safavid era, in addition to tombstones, based on the intentions and needs of customers, works with different structure and use and themes such as memorial inscriptions, endowment letters, royal decrees and construction inscriptions were formed. The abundance of non-Quranic themes along with different executive techniques in the architectural constructions of this period, I can consider as one of the transformational sentences that have been formed under the influence of special social, political, religious, cultural and economic conditions of the Safavid era. The Safavids were a religious dynasty of Iran that ruled for more than 230 years. The founder of the Safavid kingdom was Shah Ismail I in 906 AH. This monarchy ended with the defeat of Shah Sultan Hussein from the Afghans in 1135 AH. (Romer, 2011, p. 7) Kings, courtiers, commanders, and other wealthy Safavids paid attention to their buildings and built religious buildings such as mosques, schools, and tombs in Tabriz, Qazvin, and Isfahan, which were their capitals. They did the same in the cities of Mashhad, Qom, Kashan, Kerman and many other cities. What is obvious is that the use of inscriptions in these monuments has expanded and varied to a great extent. Preliminary study of these works shows that the artists of the Safavid era used the separation of calligraphic scripts to write different themes. As far as it can tell, religious inscriptions in architecture are scribed with the Thuluth and Kufic scripts and non-religious inscriptions are written with the Nastaliq type. However, Nastaliq inscriptions can also be seen, which contain religious themes. Therefore, the present study is carried out with the aim of identifying and classifying the religious themes used in the Safavid Nastaliq inscriptions. The main question of this research is: What is the role of religious themes in the Nastaliq inscriptions of Safavid monuments in Iran? In other words, what is the quantity of religious examples along with the non-religious examples of the Safavid Nastaliq inscriptions and what are the exact themes of the religious inscriptions?

Research Method

This research is considered as a basic research in terms of purpose and follows a descriptive and analytical method and research data is based on library studies as well as field findings. The statistical population in question is the Safavid era (906-1135 AH) in Iran. All available samples were studied and then the religious themes used in the samples were classified. The results of the present study, based on the study of the contents of about 250 Nastaliq inscriptions in 140 monuments of the Safavid era have been done.

Research Background

Among the previous researches, we can mention Sheila Blair's book, which has studied and categorized the themes of historical inscriptions of the first five centuries of Islam in Iran and Central Asia, and her classification was based on the separation of themes into two groups: historical and religious. Historical texts include the name of the ruler, the history, the name of founder, as well as the name of the craftsman and religious inscriptions containing verses from the holy Quran, hadiths, supplications, and religious phrases. (Blair, 1992, pp. 3-4) According to Blair's research, the verses of the Quran are applied more in mosques and the frequency of the holy verses 9: 18, 55: 26 and 21: 35 are more than the

other verses. (Blair, 1992, pp. 3-4) A detailed description of Sheila Blair's thematic classification can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Classification of the contents of inscriptions based on the opinion of Sheila Blair. Source: Author.

The monumental inscriptions from early Islamic Iran	Historical Text	Foundation
		Restoration
		Construction
		Dating
		Commemorative
		Signature
		Naming
	Religious Inscription	Quranic
		Hadith
		Prayers
		Pious Phrases

Khosravi Bizhaem (2013), in a part of the article "Evolution of content and form of the Nastaliq Inscriptions in the Safavid Tombs of Isfahan", has studied thematic changes of Nastaliq inscriptions in seven tomb buildings of the Safavid period of Isfahan, including: Imamzadeh Ismaeil, Imamzade Shora, the tomb of Setti Fatima, the tomb of Shahzeyd, the tomb of Harun Velayat, the tomb of Darb-e-Imam and Tekiyeh Khansari, which shows that these works contain themes such as Persian poems in the eulogy of Imams and also the prayers of kings. Based on the results of this research, verses and hadiths are not seen in these samples. In another study (2018) he has dealt with "The evolution of Nastaliq inscriptions in the Safavid monuments of South Khorasan " and in this regard, has examined ten inscriptions. The results indicate that with the exception of one inscription which is a royal decree, the other samples fall into the category of foundation inscriptions. Non-use of religious themes is another dominant feature of these works. The limited statistical population of the last two studies is the main difference between them and the approach of the present study. In view of the above, it should be acknowledged that the classification of religious themes in the Safavid Nastaliq inscriptions - which requires the study of all available examples - is one of the subjects that have not been studied so far. Due to the impressive quantity and quality of the statistical community, requires a research that has been addressed in this article.

The Themes Applied in Safavid Nastaliq Inscriptions

The diversity of use in a large number of Safavid era monuments is clearly visible; including mosques, schools, tombs, palaces, caravanserais, baths, markets and cisterns. Religious buildings, however, were decorated to show the greatness of God and the palaces as a result of the lavish life of the court; In public monuments such as caravanserais and cisterns, religious aspects and worldly aspects were not discussed (Hillenbrand, 2011, pp. 310-311) and it is obvious that such buildings often contain foundational inscriptions rather than decorative ones. One of the noteworthy points in Safavid inscriptions is the existence of a large number of works that include the names of calligraphers and other artists and craftsmen. Another point is that, due to the length of the text, many inscriptions contain various themes. For example, a Waqf inscription may also contain religious themes and the name of the endowment, or in many cases, the construction inscriptions may contain items such as the prayers of the Imams, praises of the kings and rulers, and the date of

construction. Hence, many inscriptions can be classified in two or more groups. Of course, in some cases, the inscriptions contain only one theme. In general, the themes used in Safavid Nastaliq inscriptions can be classified into three main groups of religious, historical and literary inscriptions, each of which also includes sub-branches (See Table 2). According to the thematic studies of the statistical population, more than 85% of Nastaliq inscriptions in Safavid era monuments have no religious themes and less than 15% of these works are among religious inscriptions. This point indicates that the use of Nastaliq script in Safavid inscriptions was mainly for writing non-religious texts. In order to avoid prolonging the content and also focusing and refining more on religious topics; in this research, only these samples have been studied.

Table 2. Classification of the contents of Safavid Nastaliq Inscriptions. Source: Author.

Religious Text	Quranic
	Hadith
	Prayers and Pious Phrases
Historical Text	Waqf
	Royal Decrees
	Dating
	Naming
	Tombstone
	Commemorative
Literary Text	Eulogy
	Selected Poems

Religious Texts in Safavid Nastaliq Inscriptions

The religious themes of the Safavid Nastaliq inscriptions can be divided into three groups: Quranic Verses, Hadiths, Prayers and Pious Phrases, which are discussed below.

1. Verses of the Quran: A thematic study indicates that with the exception of “Bismillah” “بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ” (In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate) at the beginning of some royal decrees, the verses of the Quran have rarely been used in Nastaliq inscriptions. This is significant because, according to Blair's research, it has been determined that early Islamic inscriptions in Iran mainly contained religious themes. Library studies as well as field observations show that in the Safavid period, the use of calligraphic scripts such as Thuluth and Kufic to write Quranic verses was common and the findings of this study, based on the rarely use of Nastaliq in this group, confirms this statement. In the eastern entrance corridor of the Isfahan Jame Mosque, the inscription of Shah Tahmaseb's decree on the date of 971 AH (See Figure 1) is written in ten lines, beginning with Bismillah. In the last line, a part of verse 181 of Surah Al-Baqarah is stated. According to the meaning of this verse, mentioning it at the end of the command shows the emphasis no movement and interference which testifies the validity and importance of the decree. A part of this verse is written at the end of the Zolfaqar Mosque in Isfahan (Shah Abbas decree dated 1037 AH – Figure 2) and complete of that is written in Imam Mosque in Isfahan (Shah Abbas decree dated 1038 AH). Another verse that can be seen in the text of the Safavid Nastaliq inscriptions is a part of verse 160 of Surah Al-Anaam in Imam Mosque (Shah Abbas decree dated 1035 AH) is in public view. (Honarfar, 1965, p. 444)

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Figure 1. Jame mosque, Isfahan.

Source: Author.

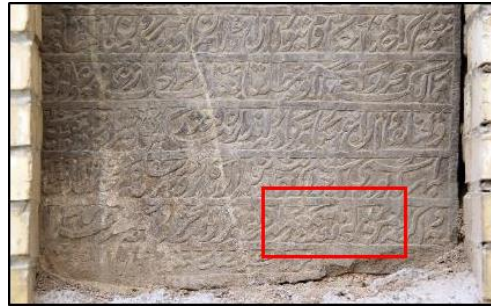


Figure 2. Zolfaqar mosque, Isfahan.

Source: Author.

In the Jame Mosque in Semnan (on the right side of the porch) there is an inscription containing the order of Shah Sultan Hussein Safavid (See Figure 3) which in addition to "Bismellah", verse 26 of Surah Al-Imran is also inscribed. One of the noteworthy points about the Quranic inscriptions is that in none of them are the verses of the Quran mentioned alone, but the appropriate verses are used throughout the text of the royal decrees. Studying the text of eight inscriptions containing Quranic themes shows that only the inscription of the tomb of Haroun Velayat in Isfahan is written in verse and the text of the rest of the works is in the form of prose.

2. Hadiths: The frequency of hadiths written in Nastaliq inscriptions, similar to the verses of the Quran have been very rare. One of the few famous hadiths that can be seen in the studied examples is the prophetic hadith "Madinat al-Ilm". This hadith has been performed in three different techniques (tilework, stucco and painting) in the Isfahan Jame Mosque. The text is written as follows: "I [Prophet Muhammad] am the city of knowledge and Ali is its entranceway / in Ramadan Al-Mubarak, year 1112". (See Figure 4)



Figure 3. Jame mosque, Semnan.

Source: Taqavinejad, 2012.



Figure 4. Jame mosque, Isfahan.

Source: Author..

In addition, a famous hadith "لولاك لما خلقت الافلاك" can also be seen in the samples. In the two buildings of Nimavard School and Chaharbagh School in Isfahan (See Figure 5), this poem, can be seen:

3. Prayers and Pious Phrases: Praise and glorification of God and besides, blessings on the Prophet Mohammad and the Shiite Imams, are another religious theme that exists in statistical examples. One of the examples that can be mentioned is the carved stone tablet of Ali Mosque in Isfahan. Nowadays this inscription is applied as a staircase connecting the courtyard to the nave (See Figure 6), and the poem of Amir Khosrow Dehlavi engraved on it reads.

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Figure 5. Chaharbagh School, Isfahan.
Source: Author.



Figure 6. Ali mosque, Isfahan.
Source: Author.

Another example that has the theme of praise and prayers, is located on the south porch of the Isfahan Jame Mosque. (See Figure 7) It is a poem attributed to Imam Ali in which it is written.



Figure 7. Jame mosque, Isfahan.
Source: Author.

In addition to the above, we should mention the prayer of "Nad Ali" "ناد على". It is a prayer poem that is quoted from Bihar Al-Anwar (Vol. 20. P. 73).

This prayer has been used many times in Safavid monuments such as the entrance of Imamzadeh Sultan Ali in Mashhad Ardehal, on both sides of the entrance of the Imam Mosque in Isfahan and the south porch of the Isfahan Jame Mosque. in the last inscription, the text of the supplication has been repeated three times on the mosaic tile (See Figure 8). In the end of the west porch in Isfahan Jame Mosque, this prayer (See Figure 9) with another poem describing Imam Ali is integrated with.

This Arabic couplet is attributed to different poets: "Ammar Ibn Taqlabeh" (Bahrani, 1992, p. 260), "Amer Ibn Thalabeh," (Hussein Ibn Abdul Wahhab, p. 31) "Imam Shafi'i" (Qunduzi, 2001, p. 254 - Homavi Joveini, 1980, p. 326 - Shushtari, 1998, p. 188) and "Ahmad Hanbal". (Ibn Futi, 1995, p. 594)



Figure 8. Jame mosque, Isfahan.
Source: Author.



Figure 9. Jame mosque, Isfahan.
Source: Author.

The prayer of "Nad Ali" in front of the Imam Mosque of Isfahan (See Figure 10), with a slight difference in the final stanza, is written In the lower part of this inscription, a quatrain in the eulogy of Prophet Mohammad which is probably one of the poems of Molana Mohammad Wali Dasht-e Bayazi, is performed by mosaic tile technique (See Figure 11) In addition to these cases, around the lattice window at the end of the west porch, a prayer of the Fourteen Infallibles are also written and in the last frame, the name of the calligrapher (Abolmaali Al-Naqib Al-Hosseini) and the date of the inscription (1112 AH) are written. (See Figure 4)

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Figure 10. Imam mosque, Isfahan. Source: Author



Figure 11. Imam mosque, Isfahan. Source: Author.

The well-known Arabic ode of the Sheikh Baha'i (953-1031 AH) is another religious theme in the inscriptions. This poem is mentioned in the book "Kabab va Reyhan" (Kebab and Basil) started. This poem has been used to decorate the metal lattice inscription of the Darbe-Imam tomb in Isfahan. Four of the remaining six frames are kept in the Islamic Museum of Cairo (See Figure 12) and two frames are kept in the Malek Museum in Tehran.



Figure 12. Darb-e Imam tomb, Isfahan.
Source: Bernard Okane, 2007

In addition to Arabic poems, some of the religious poems used in the inscriptions have been written in Persian-Arabic. One of these poems is the ode of eulogy of Imam Reza composed by Abd al-Rahman Jami (817-898 AH) which was located in Dar al-Hoffaz in the holy shrine of Imam Reza. Mir Ali Hosseini (Mir Ali Heravi, deceased in 951 AH) did not write the final verse of this poem. (Jami, 1962, P. 50) He has written two verses containing the history as Chronogram. (Qomi, 2004, P. 80) In these two verses, from the phrase “دهم ذی القعدة” (tenth of Dhi Al-Qaeda), in addition to specifying the day of writing the work, with the Abjad numerical values, the date of writing the inscription is also available in the year 938 AH. Other inscriptions in which Shiite interests are felt can be referred to the sonnet of Molana Hosamuddin Maddah (Ibid, 96) in the eulogy of Imam Ali. This inscription, in which the poet also devoted himself to Imam Hussein (PBUH) and Imam Reza (PBUH), is written on the entrance and windows of the Chehelsotoun palace in Qazvin by Malik Deylami in 966 AH (Qomi, 2004, P. 96) In field research, the author has not come across two recent inscriptions (Mir Ali Heravi and Malik Deylami) and it seems that these two exquisite works have had an uncertain destiny over the centuries. In addition to several inscriptions that were introduced earlier, another poem that was composed in the eulogy of Prophet Mohammad and has gained a lot of fame, is a poem of the diwan Hilali Joghataei (deceased 936 AH). This poem has been written many times by calligraphers and one of the examples that is included in the statistical population of this research is the crescent inscription on the entrance of Qutbiyeh Mosque in Isfahan. (See Figure 13) This inscription, which is executed in six frames of mosaic tiles, in the final verse, also includes a Persian hint of the hadith “Madinat al-Ilm” (I am the city of knowledge) The last work that has been studied in this research is the inscription of corners of the entrance porch of Chaharbagh (Soltani) School in Isfahan by "Ali Naqi Imami". This couplet composed by Mullah Mohammad Mo'men Ghomshei (Shariat & Zamani, 2011, P. 87) is in praise of Imam Ali (See Figure 14) and is among the last Nastaliq inscriptions of the Safavid dynasty.

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Figure 13. Qutbiye mosque, Isfahan. Source: Author.



Figure 14. Chaharbagh School, Isfahan. Source: Author.

Finally, the classification of religious themes of Safavid Nastaliq inscriptions can be presented in the form of Table 3. As can be seen in this table, Quranic themes (5 verses with a frequency of 10 works), hadiths (2 hadiths with a frequency of 5 works) and Prayers and Pious Phrases (14 cases with a frequency of 19 works) have been used in the inscriptions. Among these, the most repetition belongs to the prayer of "Nad Ali" (4 cases) and the hadith "Madinat al-Ilm" (3 cases), which emphasizes the existence of Shiite tendencies in the thoughts of the artists who shape these works.

Table3. classification of religious themes in the Safavid nastaliq inscriptions. Source: Author.

Themes	Samples	Amount			
Quranic	بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم	Jame Mosque, Isfahan Imamzade Ismaeil, Isfahan Molla Abdullah School, Isfahan Rouydashtin Dam, Isfahan	10		
	Al-Baqara (2): 181	Jame Mosque, Isfahan Zolfaqar Mosque, Isfahan Imam Mosque, Isfahan			
	Ale Imran (3): 26	Jame Mosque, Semnan			
	Al-Anaam (6): 160	Imam Mosque, Isfahan			
	Al-Isra (17): 19	Haroun Velayat Tomb, Isfahan			
	Hadith	لولاك لما خلقت الافلاك		Nimavard School, Isfahan Chaharbagh School, Isfahan	5
		انا مدينه العلم و علي بابها		Jame Mosque (West Porch), Isfahan Jame Mosque (East Porch), Isfahan Jame Mosque (West Arcade), Isfahan	
Prayers and Pious Phrases		اللهم صل علي المصطفى محمد و المرتضى علي و البتول فاطمه و السبطين الحسن و الحسين و ...	Jame Mosque (West Porch), Isfahan	19	
		بنبي عربي و رسول مدني	Darbe-Imam Tomb, Isfahan		
	محمد عربي ابروي هر دو سرا	Qutbiyeh Mosque, Isfahan			
	احمد كه شه سرير لولاك آمد	Chaharbagh School, Isfahan Nimavard School, Isfahan			
	امي لقتي كز انبيا اعلم بود	Imam Mosque, Isfahan			
	ما غلامان شاه مردانيم	Chehelsotoun Palace, Qazvin			
	علي حبه جئه	Jame Mosque (West Porch), Isfahan			

	ناد عليا مظهر العجايب	Imamzadeh Sultan Ali, Mashhad Ardehal
		Jame Mosque (South Porch), Isfahan
		Imam Mosque, Isfahan
		Jame Mosque (West Porch), Isfahan
	شه دين و دنيا علي ولي	Gosht Village, Saravan
	داني ز چه اين چرخ كهن ميگرده	Chaharbagh School, Isfahan
	الملك لله تعالى	Rouydashtin Dam, Isfahan
	لك الحمد يا ذا الجود و المجد و العلي	Jame Mosque (South Porch), Isfahan
		Jame Mosque (Hakim Porch), Isfahan
	اي به درماندگي پناه همه	Ali Mosque, Isfahan
سلام علي آل طه و يس	Holy Shrine of Imam Reza, Mashhad	

Conclusion

In this study, after collecting the data of all available samples, the religious themes used in the samples were classified and the results show that out of approximately 250 Nastaliq inscriptions identified from the Safavid period in Iran, at least 34 samples contain religious themes. The amount is about 13%. In other words, approximately 87% of Nastaliq inscriptions contain non-religious themes. This significant difference in the ratio between religious and non-religious inscriptions in Nastaliq type indicates that Safavid artists deliberately used Thuluth and Kufic types to calligraphy religious texts, and Nastaliq is often used to calligraphy historical and literary themes; However, Nastaliq inscriptions are also found that contain religious themes. The classification of religious themes of Safavid Nastaliq inscriptions is in order of frequency: Prayers and Pious Phrases (14 cases with a frequency of 19 works), Verses of the Quran (5 verses with a frequency of 10 works) and Hadiths (2 hadiths with a frequency of 5 works). Regarding the verses of the Quran, it should be noticed that in no case are the verses written alone. They used during other themes, including royal decrees. These verses include: "بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم", verse 181 of Surah Al-Baqara, verse 26 Surah Ale Imran, verse 160 of Surah Al-Anaam and verse 19 of Surah Al-Isra. In the statistical population of this study, only two hadiths can be seen in the samples: "الولاك لما خلقت الافلاك" which is mentioned in a short couplet and the prophetic hadith "انا مدينة العلم و على بابها" which has been used alone. In the category of the themes of prayers, in three cases, the praise and blessing of the God has been dealt with. three cases of them are prayer of the infallibles including poems of Jami and Sheikh Baha'i. The other Three cases have been composed in the prayers of Prophet's Mohammad and in the remaining five cases, praise for the virtues of the Imam Ali has been dealt with. Among the religious Safavid Nastaliq inscriptions, the most repetition belongs to the prayer of "Nad Ali" (4 cases) and the hadith "Madinat al-Ilm" (3 cases), which is a confirmation and emphasis on the existence of Shiite tendencies in the formation of these works. In order to identify the similarities and thematic differences of Nastaliq inscriptions, the results of this research can be continued by matching the existing works with similar examples in the Timurid or Qajar eras.

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