

An Aesthetical Survey of the Motifs of Faryoumad Mosque's Stucco Decorations

Abstract

Registered under number 345 in the Iranian List of National Heritage and being under the protection of the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, the historic Faryoumad Mosque is located in a village with the same name in Semnan province, near Shahroud city.

From historic-artistic point of view, the Mosque is one of the most important Iranian-Islamic mosques of the Seljuk - Khwarazmian era and one of the significant ones due to the rich stucco decorations scattered around its altar, iwan and the courtyard walls.

All the Mosque's inscriptions have been destroyed and thus, no date of construction has been discovered; however, there is the signature of the master constructor, i.e. Ali Jamiyalsnayi Semnani. Keeping in view the comparisons made between this building and the similar monuments, to André Godard the structure more probably dated 6th Hijra / 12th century built in Khorasani style. Therefore, one should know about the aesthetic features of the various motifs employed in the Mosque. It is worth mentioning that most of the studies made regarding this mosque so far have employed an architectural approach and few have been made on its embellishments and motifs of stucco decorations. This necessitates conducting the current research to address such deficiencies and also gain more understanding on the issue, paving the way for future, probable application of the research outcomes if required.

The result of this study, completed with the help of 'vector' computer software, has led to the recognition, classification and aesthetic analysis of the motifs used in this structure. The research also suggests that there exists so much diversity in the motifs that requires more detailed, independent studies. Moreover, the Mosque's stucco patterns are historically, artistically and technically valuable. These patterns have been drawn on geometrical rules which indicate the then architects and master constructors' knowledge and wisdom materialized through the use of the common materials and tools of the time. According to the studies made to date on the Mosque's motifs, the diversity of their patterns could be classified into: geometric, Eslimi, geometric-Eslimi, vegetative, geometric-vegetative, Eslimi-vegetative, Kufic inscriptions, inscriptions in Naskh script.

The motifs are technically complex in terms of design, constructed in several layers by means of special techniques of stucco work employed by the artists of the time who created exquisite works of art through their technical and practical knowledge of geometry principals.

The Faryoumad mosque has been one of the favorite architectural monuments for the prominent national and foreign scholars. One of the contemporary authors who has visited Faryoumad four times and written about it is 'Iraj Afshar'. "Faryoumad's popularity is due to the fact that it is one of the most luxurious mosques of Iran's vibrant history", Afshar states.

Besides André Godard who has also referred to this Mosque and its stucco ornaments, Dr. Ali Shariati in his book 'Travel Guide to Khorasan' has talked about Faryoumad Mosque and its grandeur.

In the book 'Khorasan Historical Monuments', Abdolhamid Molavi (1974) writes: "Faryoumad Mosque is one of the masterpieces of Iranian art styles in terms of its delicate stucco work". The Encyclopedia of Historical Monuments of Islamic Era (Mosques) published by the Research Center of Islamic Art and Culture (1999) declares: "from top the bottom of the inscriptions, the walls of the northern iwan were covered by stucco which has disintegrated. Yet the vaults survived are decorated with inscriptions and vegetative stucco works".

Neda Davari and Saeed Qalandari, in their research paper titled 'A Survey of the Decorative Motifs Derived from Nature in Faryoumad Jameh Mosque', write: "Plant patterns are the only nature-driven motifs used in the ornamentation of this Mosque and other manifestations of nature such as water, animal forms or human figures are totally absent from Faryoumad's decorative designs.

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The designs are sometimes used independently and at times in combination with geometric patterns or inscriptions. Nevertheless, in every case, we see that the vegetative motifs stand out as compared to other patterns. Likewise, Dr. Mohammad Ebrahim Zare'i writes in his article titled 'Faryoumad and its Jameh Mosque' (2011): "Faryoumad's Jameh Mosque may be considered as the museum of Iranian architectural decorations during the Islamic era." So, in light of the above, it must be acknowledged that the importance of recognizing and further studying these rich motifs is of great importance. Therefore, the current study has employed applied approach of research with the data collected through descriptive-analytical method of research gained both through desk study of library resources and field studies.

Keywords: Faryoumad Mosque, Decorations, Motifs, Stucco, Khwarazmian

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