

# **Identity And Nature Of Islamic Sacred Architecture**

By

**Ali Sadeghi habibabad**

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With great pride, this book is dedicated to:

با کمال افتخار و امتنان تقدیم به: محضر پاک مولا امیرالمؤمنین  
علی علیه السلام و آقا امام زمان عجل الله فرجه الشریف .  
باشد که غنای دفتر خالی از معرفت و تهی از دانشم، روشن به  
نام مقدسشان باشد.

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## Author's Note

The writing of this book stems from a personal and academic journey that began long before its first pages took shape. As an architect and researcher, I have always believed that architecture is not merely a technical discipline - it is a reflection of the human soul. Islamic mosque architecture, in particular, has long served as a mirror of humanity's spiritual longing. The more I studied its forms, proportions, and symbols, the more I realized that behind every arch and every dome lies an entire universe of meaning. During my years of teaching and research, I encountered countless students who were eager to understand the philosophical foundations of Islamic architecture but lacked access to comprehensive and integrated sources. Many existing texts either focused on historical description or on decorative analysis, while the deeper theoretical and spiritual principles were often overlooked. This gap became one of the primary motivations for writing the present book.

Another motivation came from observing the rapid changes within contemporary urban and architectural landscapes. Modern architecture, while powerful in its technological achievements, often falls short in addressing the spiritual and cultural needs of society. Many cities in the Islamic world have gradually lost their architectural identity, replaced by forms that do not resonate with local memory, history, or belief. In such a context, revisiting and understanding the identity-forming principles of Islamic mosque architecture becomes not only valuable but necessary. Through this book, I aim to contribute to a renewed understanding of Islamic architectural identity-an identity that is dynamic, meaningful, and deeply rooted in the wisdom traditions of Islamic civilization. My intention is not to romanticize the past or advocate for direct imitation of historical forms. Rather, I believe that by understanding the metaphysical principles, symbolic structures, and human-centered values embed-

ded in traditional architecture, we can create contemporary designs that are both innovative and spiritually resonant.

The writing of this book required me to engage with a wide range of disciplines—philosophy, mysticism, theology, cognitive science, environmental psychology, and architectural theory. Each discipline opened new perspectives on the meaning of space, the experience of place, and the relationship between humans and their environment. This interdisciplinary approach became essential to understanding how spiritual principles become embodied in architectural forms. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my mentors, students, colleagues, and all those who guided and supported me throughout this journey. My postdoctoral experiences in Florence and Rome allowed me to study the spiritual dimensions of architecture across different cultures, deepening my appreciation for the universal language of sacred space. I am also grateful to my home institution, Yasouj University, where much of the research for this book was developed.

This book is dedicated to the seekers of beauty, wisdom, and truth—to those who believe that architecture is not only a profession but a responsibility, a calling, and a path toward understanding the deeper dimensions of existence. If this work helps a student become more aware of the spiritual essence of architecture, or inspires an architect to design with greater sensitivity and purpose, then my efforts have been worthwhile. May this book serve as a small contribution to the ongoing dialogue about Islamic identity, spirituality, and the built environment. I offer it with sincerity and hope that it will open new doors of reflection for its readers.

With deep respect and gratitude,

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## Preface

Architecture is more than the construction of physical spaces; it is the subtle articulation of a society's worldview, values, and spiritual aspirations. Among all architectural traditions, Islamic mosque architecture possesses a unique quality-it is simultaneously a physical structure and a spiritual text. Within its walls, domes, and patterns lies a profound narrative about the relationship between human beings, the cosmos, and the Divine. This book was written with the intention of exploring that narrative, seeking to understand how the essence of faith, identity, and spirituality finds tangible expression in the architecture of mosques across history. Over the past decades, discussions surrounding Islamic art and architecture have gained renewed interest. Scholars, students, architects, and philosophers have increasingly sought to rediscover the underlying principles that shaped the timeless masterpieces of the Islamic world. However, much of the discourse has remained dispersed, either overly historical, highly technical, or narrowly aesthetic. This book strives to bridge these gaps. It introduces readers to a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach-one that blends architectural analysis with philosophy, mysticism, anthropology, and environmental psychology. The chapters of this book guide the reader through conceptual, theoretical, and applied layers of Islamic architecture. Beginning with the wisdom of Islamic art, we examine how sacred forms emerge from metaphysical principles rooted in the Qur'an, prophetic tradition, and the intellectual heritage of thinkers such as Ibn Arabi, Suhrawardi, and Mulla Sadra. We then move toward the concept of identity-both individual and collective-and explore how identity is manifested within architectural space. This investigation reveals that identity is not an abstract idea but a lived reality shaped by place, culture, history, and memory. The book further highlights how traditional Iranian-Islamic archi-

ture achieved harmony between function and meaning, body and spirit, aesthetics and ethics. This architectural language, profoundly shaped by local climate, natural materials, geometry, and symbolic forms, offers valuable lessons for contemporary designers. In a world where modern architecture often struggles with placelessness, detachment, and uniformity, the principles of Islamic architecture present a path toward meaningful, sustainable, and human-centered design. While this book draws upon historical sources, it is not solely a historical study. It seeks to demonstrate the continued relevance of Islamic architectural identity in the contemporary era. By examining the spiritual and symbolic dimensions of mosque design, I hope to inspire today's architects, planners, and students to reconnect with the metaphysical foundations that once shaped the Islamic built environment. At its heart, this book is an invitation to reflect—not only on buildings, but on the human experience they shape. This work is the result of years of research, teaching, travel, and personal reflection. My academic journey—from Iran to Italy and my experiences studying both ancient and contemporary architectural traditions—allowed me to see Islamic architecture not as a static historical category but as a living, evolving phenomenon. Writing this book has deepened my conviction that architecture is one of the most powerful means through which a society expresses its identity and spiritual truth. I hope that this book will serve as a useful reference for scholars, a source of inspiration for architects, and a thought-provoking reading for anyone interested in the deeper meanings embedded in the built environment of the Islamic world. Above all, I hope it contributes, even modestly, to the preservation, revitalization, and understanding of Islamic architectural identity for future generations.

## The Importance of Religion and Spirituality

For many years, psychologists have maintained a positive view of the psychology of religion, recognizing the value of faith in individuals' lives. What brings reassurance to humans is the remembrance of God. As stated in the Holy Quran: "Those who believe and whose hearts find tranquility in the remembrance of Allah-truly, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find peace"<sup>1</sup> (Quran, Ar-Ra'd 28). This remembrance, acknowledging God as all-powerful and merciful, through whom no force in existence operates independently, grants humans a sense of calm and inner peace. Carl Gustav Jung emphasized the influence of religious beliefs on mental health, noting that in contemporary times, understanding the impact of religious devotion on human emotions and spiritual well-being is more essential than ever.

## The Architect and the Spiritual Dimension

Human beings possess the unique ability to manifest divine knowledge and understanding through their art. Dr. Gholamreza Aavani explains that, from a mystical and religious perspective, a human is inherently an artist, created in the image of God. Being created in God's image signifies that humans reflect the divine names and attributes, and all divine qualities exist in humans in a comprehensive, albeit condensed, form. Humans carry a divine spirit, and through this divine infusion, their creative works and artistic expressions must contribute to revealing the truth and harmony of the universe. The Prophet emphasizes that God created humans in His own image; therefore, if God is the ultimate creator, humans too can act as creators-not of the universe itself but as originators of forms and manifestations. The essence of art is thus the power of forms, with imagination and symbolic forms being the primary tools of the artist or architect.

---

<sup>1</sup> (الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَ تَطَمَّنُ فُلُوْبُهُمْ بِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ أَلَا يَذِكْرُ اللَّهُ تَطَمَّنُ الْقُلُوبُ)

The human capacity for form creation is confined to those forms that can be perfected and infused with a suitable spirit.

## **The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Traditional Mosque Architecture**

Islam pervades every aspect of human life, leaving no sphere untouched by the sacred. In this worldview, there is no strict separation between sacred and profane; rather, there is a hierarchy rooted in divine unity. This unity is most prominently reflected in the arts of the Islamic world, where no distinction exists between fine arts and applied crafts. Technique and beauty are complementary aspects of artistic creativity. In Islam, art is inseparable from craft, and craft is intertwined with the spiritual and daily life of the practitioner. This is particularly evident in the historical connection between spiritual brotherhoods and industrial guilds, where mastery of craft and refinement coincided with spiritual discipline.

Islamic architecture is not “grand” in the sense of Renaissance monuments or a vehicle for individual expression as in modern art; its grandeur lies in creating spaces that honor God, with each element serving as a reminder of divine majesty. Traditional Islamic cities lack grand avenues or prominent visual axes with monumental buildings; instead, sacred architecture, such as mosques, is fully integrated into the urban fabric. Mosques were never isolated from their surroundings, reflecting the principle that sacredness permeates all aspects of life. Religious rituals performed in mosques also extend to domestic and community life. One cannot fully appreciate Islamic mosque architecture from the exterior alone; the dense urban environment envelops it, and its experience is primarily internal, guiding humans from worldly multiplicity to deep reflection and spiritual contemplation. For centuries, implementing Islamic architectural principles and creating patterns for spaces of worship has been of paramount import-

tance to architects. Designing a mosque, following prophetic models, serves as an entrance into a sacred space and a connection with God. This process requires architects to understand innate human capacities, which are crucial in shaping the themes and structural foundations of mosque architecture.

## Chapter One

# The Wisdom of Islamic Art

In this chapter, we delve into the profound aspects of Islamic art, exploring its unique characteristics and the philosophical depth that distinguishes it within the realm of global artistic traditions. The journey begins with an understanding of the foundational paradigm that shapes Islamic art, emphasizing its harmonious blend of form and spiritual meaning.

We examine how Islamic art transcends mere aesthetics, reaching a higher plane of metaphysical and symbolic significance. This transcendence reflects not just the artist's creativity but also an embodiment of divine inspiration-connecting the earthly with the celestial.

The discussion further leads us to the divine nature imprinted in Islamic art, wherein each intricate motif, architectural masterpiece, and calligraphic detail reflects a deeper spiritual truth worked into its very fabric. Through these expressions, the divine is not only represented but also celebrated as an integral part of artistic creation.

Finally, the close relationship between art and mysticism in Islamic culture is analyzed. Here, we consider how the esoteric dimension intertwines with artistic works, transforming them into conduits for mystical experiences and vehicles for spiritual reflection. Islamic art, therefore, becomes more than a representation; it is a profound path toward enlightenment and understanding of both self and the divine.

## Introduction

In recent years, the discourse surrounding the philosophy and wisdom of Islamic art has gained significant traction in our region. A course under this very title is now being offered in certain academic disciplines, emphasizing the growing importance of understanding the theoretical and philosophical foundations behind this concept. This chapter seeks to examine the subject from this perspective. Teaching art provides a pathway to integrating open-mindedness and critical thinking into our educational systems, fostering creativity and intellectual development. However, the cultivation of creativity (considered a fundamental goal of all education systems) seems unattainable without an understanding and appreciation of the knowledge and artistry passed down by previous generations.

Islamic art serves as a profound reflection of the Islamic worldview, encompassing the spiritual, cultural, and civilizational essence of Islam. This art form is rooted in theoretical, spiritual, and ethical principles that merit specialized attention. With modern methodologies, we can delve deeper into these foundational aspects. According to Mir-Mohammadi (2004), human beings initially sought merely functional shelters. Over time, with the emergence of collective life and communication, humanity began to construct cities and create masterpieces, shaping environments marked not only by utility but also by aesthetic consideration. Among humanity's most remarkable impacts on its surroundings has been the incorporation of nature's aesthetic dimensions, which eventually gave rise to enduring artistic expressions. One significant distinction between humans and animals lies in humankind's inherent need for order and beauty-a sense of satisfaction derived from aesthetics unique to humans alone.

The artworks of Iran, particularly in the Islamic period, beautifully exhibit a profound harmony and order. This refined beauty found

in Iranian art reflects an intrinsic belief in the pervasive presence of spiritual beauty flowing through nature and existence. Many theorists regard beauty as the very essence or “soul” of art, making any study of beauty indispensable to a deeper understanding of artistic creation. Iranian art emerges as a genuine product of the symbiotic interaction between mind and life within the natural environment of its creators.

As Ibn Arabi illustrates: Everything in existence originates from God’s essence; every manifestation of beauty and perfection is a direct gift birthed from His divine mercy. When examining shapes imbued with symbolic meanings, one observes that the center of a circle represents eternal truth (a symbol of divine enlightenment that must materialize to reveal itself, extending throughout all divine creations. Take, for example, the “Bibi Dokhtaran Mosque” in Shiraz, where the progression from a square base to an octagonal structure ultimately culminates in a circular dome) a representation deeply rooted in symbolic transcendence.

In his essay “The Principle of Unity and Sacred Architecture,” Seyyed Hossein Nasr recalls remarkable findings from electron microscope experiments that revealed striking parallels between Islamic geometric patterns in architecture and the internal structures of both animate and inanimate entities. These geometric designs are not derived through modern materialistic methods but are instead born through visionary contemplation by those endowed with spiritual insight. They affirm that what resides at the minutest levels symbolizes what exists on the highest planes of reality. From an Islamic perspective, sacred art fundamentally conveys divine unity manifested through beauty and order within creation. Such unity becomes perceptible through the harmony observed within multiplicity and within the balance and organization apparent across the physical universe.

Unlike secular art forms, Islamic art is inseparable from profound concepts and sacred meanings. It reflects the metaphysical convic-

tions of devout artists who profoundly perceive the material world while yearning for their transcendent homeland. These artists channel their experiences derived from higher realms into visual representations that evoke divine truths and cosmic harmony. Consequently, Islamic art not only resonates as a reflection of faith but also stands as a testimony to higher spiritual realms manifesting through earthly material forms.



**Figure 1-1** The mausoleum of Bibi Dokhtaran in Shiraz, a historical and architectural site. The source of this information is referenced from tourism resources of Fars Province: [farschto.ir](http://farschto.ir). Situated in the heart of Shiraz, this mausoleum serves as a significant cultural heritage site, drawing both local visitors and international travelers interested in exploring Iran's rich history and architectural marvels.

## The Wisdom of Islamic Art

Wisdom is a concept that was widely utilized in intellectual and theoretical literature before the advent of the modern world. It is only in the era of modernity that this concept has been divided into various disciplines. Esteemed thinkers and intellectuals such as Socrates, Plato,

Aristotle, Augustine, Al-Farabi, and Avicenna were all recognized as “Hakims” (a term denoting wise individuals or sages). Until recent centuries, many branches of knowledge were categorized under the umbrella of wisdom. However, modernity brought about the division of this domain into fields like science, philosophy, metaphysics, and others. In earlier thought systems, wisdom bridged theoretical, practical, and productive domains. In such settings, wisdom often intertwined with theoretical sciences and philosophies.

The concept of “the wisdom of Islamic art” represents a novel synthesis of epistemological discourse. For the first time, Titus Burckhardt introduced this idea into theoretical discussions surrounding Islamic art (Burckhardt, 1987). Since then, it has become part of the intellectual legacy cherished by scholars in Islamic thought, enriching its epistemological depth. To better understand this multi-faceted concept, it may be helpful to adopt an interpretive approach (initiating with the two central poles shaping this discourse: the human being and God. These two entities represent the beginning and end of any religious artistic expression. As Wilhelm Dilthey posited, the method for understanding cultural sciences is rooted in interpretation, which also serves as a pathway to comprehending the essence of wisdom itself) a form of inward understanding and profound knowledge.

Aristotle, in his critique of sensory-based and superficial perceptions of objects and events, also arrived at the notion of wisdom. He equated wisdom with metaphysical understanding and argued that a philosopher or lover of wisdom seeks knowledge for its own sake—a knowledge that delves into ultimate causes, ontological reality, and fundamental truths. For Aristotle, wisdom contemplates the primary principles and causes of existence and is therefore the highest form of knowledge. As such, it is one of the most abstract and challenging sciences, requiring intense intellectual effort. Sensory perception, being common to all humans, is relatively simple and does not signify

profound wisdom. For Aristotle, true wisdom lies in metaphysical insight (Rahnavard, 1998).

Plato asserted that wisdom is not something inscribed in books; rather, it exists inherently in the soul of the sage. This living wisdom can also manifest within the soul of a spiritual artist. The meanings, reminders, thoughts, truths, and symbolic expressions associated with divine reality are derived from truth itself. The material embodiment of these ideas-whether in brick, clay, stone, wood, or color-follows a divine method shaped by blessed artists informed by their teachers, environments, and spiritual nurturing. These artists strive to connect their souls to sublime truths. As followers of divine guidance, they create works that not only embody beauty but also reflect those higher meanings and truths-serving as reminders of divine realities (Aavani, 2003).

In pre-modern eras, theoretical and practical knowledge were indistinguishable; the two spheres were deeply integrated. However, modernity has witnessed their separation into distinct domains. Pre-modern thought treated this world as merely a field preparing individuals for an afterlife. In modern times, however, this worldly existence has assumed far greater importance. One world illustrates wisdom as its defining feature, while in another world science and philosophy occupy central positions. Wisdom stands as the quintessential symbol of the ancient worldview, whereas science becomes emblematic of modernity. Unsurprisingly, religious texts emphasize wisdom extensively. Additionally, when terms like knowledge or learning appear in such texts, their intended meanings often align with that of wisdom itself. Distinguishing between wisdom and science becomes a key component in grasping the meaning behind the phrase “the wisdom of Islamic art.”

Islamic art also demands a nuanced consideration from a conceptual perspective (Yazdachi, Fariba, 2012). Its origins represent the philo-

sophical continuity seen in earlier traditions while encapsulating a unique unifying element through Islamic tenets. Among various aspects of Islamic art that have preserved its coherence is the enduring mark of Islam itself—a religious influence consistently stronger and longer-lasting than any other contributing factor (Marçais, 1994). Islamic art finds expression in every aspect of human life to such an extent that its scope often exceeds both philosophy and mysticism in shaping everyday existence for Muslims (Aavani, 1996).

Islamic art results from the manifestation of unity within the realm of multiplicity. The harmony and balance derived from this expression function as liberating forces, freeing humanity from the confines of multiplicity while enabling individuals to experience an unbounded sense of joy and ecstasy through proximity to the One God (Nasr, 1996).

Islamic art serves as a comprehensive reflection of the Islamic world-view, as well as the culture and civilization emerging from it. It is built upon significant theoretical, spiritual, and ethical foundations that are both profound and reliable. Through detailed examination and the application of modern analytical methods, one can draw closer to a deeper understanding of this art. Conceptual and field-based analyses reveal a vision of humanity and the world that, while sharing certain similarities with the modern world, also manifests notable distinctions. Here, art is not merely created for art's sake but also serves a higher purpose of spiritual elevation.

Islamic art presents various facets of the Islamic worldview and anthropology, demonstrating its rich and multifaceted nature. From this perspective, analyzing Islamic art transcends being confined to the domain of Islamic culture and civilization alone; it opens a broader lens to the entirety of Islamic thought and tradition. In this context, the hermeneutic circle concept becomes particularly significant. For instance, comprehending a specific aspect requires an understanding

of the whole, while grasping the entirety necessitates knowledge of its components.

Islamic art is inherently embedded within Islamic culture. Therefore, to achieve a precise understanding of Islamic culture, it becomes essential to study and comprehend Islamic art. Conversely, understanding Islamic art also necessitates familiarity with the entire spectrum of Islamic culture. This interplay between part and whole vividly illustrates the presence of a hermeneutic circle in its entirety (Rahnavard, 1378:20).

By examining Islamic art through this lens, we gain insights into not only its aesthetic dimensions but also its ideological underpinnings and its capacity to represent the broader horizons of Islamic tradition. This interconnected analysis unveils how elements of Islamic art are interwoven with philosophical principles and moral visions, reinforcing art's status as both a communal and transcendental practice within Islamic culture.

## **The Transcendence of Islamic Art in Contemporary Thought**

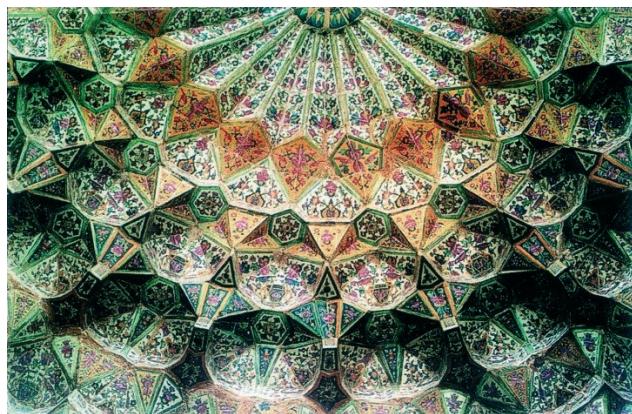
Islamic art originates from the profound inner truths of the Holy Quran, which encapsulates the realities of the universe while preserving divine knowledge and wisdom. Embedded within these artistic expressions are the spiritual truths of the prophetic essence and the blessings associated with the Muhammadan reality. The Quran reiterates the principle of divine unity, while Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) personifies this unity amidst multiplicity (Madadpour, 2002, p. 37). Consequently, Islamic art has developed as a deep reflection of divine truths, rooted in the understanding of Quranic meanings and enriched by familiarity with other Islamic sources, including the Muhammadan essence and the spiritual legacy of the immaculate

Imams (peace be upon them), referred to as the “Habl-al-Matin” (the firm rope of faith). An essential aspect of these artistic manifestations is abstract art, characterized by symbolism, allegory, and metaphor. Such art acts as a platform elevating humanity toward higher spiritual realms. The lower-level forms perpetually reference superior meanings beneath their surface, and these references constitute their very essence (Nadimi, 1999, p. 375).

As sacred art reflects transcendent realities emanating from the higher celestial realm, its description exceeds the capacity of conventional language. For this reason, it is conveyed through allegorical expression and symbolism. Symbols are not merely arbitrary or conventional figures; rather, they coincide with ontological laws, embodying archetypes or universal forms governed by metaphysical principles (Burckhardt, 1968, p. 81). The architectural movements seen in Islamic designs-such as muqarnas (stalactite-like motifs) and mashrabiyyas (latticed screens)-serve as powerful visual representations of symbolic meaning. These intricate dynamics achieve their highest symbolic manifestation in sacred structures, notably mosques (Burckhardt, 1987, p. 85). Furthermore, the application of geometric forms-two-dimensional shapes like squares and circles alongside three-dimensional ones such as cubes and spheres-presents metaphysical parallels between the physical realm (earth) and the celestial domain (heaven). Such symbolic dimensions in Islamic architecture underscore the harmony between earthly existence and heavenly transcendence (Image 6-2).



**Figure 2-1** The intricate Islamic geometric design utilized in the dome decorations of mosques, specifically referring to the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan (Safavid period). This exemplary work demonstrates the mastery of Persian artisans in combining artistic elegance with symbolic and cultural significance. The patterns, characterized by symmetrical floral motifs and intertwining arabesques, reflect a deep connection to spiritual and philosophical ideals, embodying the essence of Islamic art during the Safavid dynasty.



**Figure 3-1** Semi-domed muqarnas adorned with haft-rangi tiles featuring the “Gol-o-Morgh” (Floral and Bird) motif from Vakil Mosque in Shiraz, dating back to the

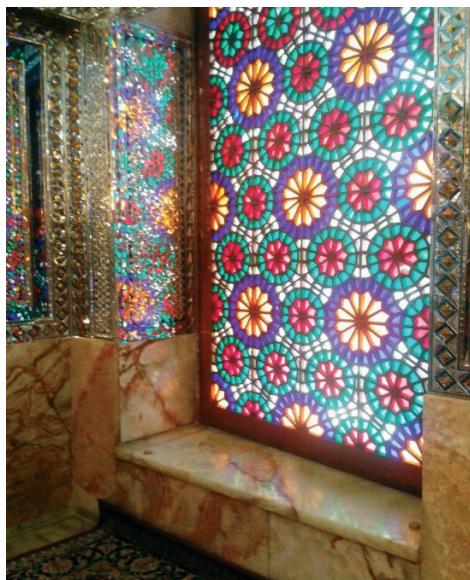
*Zand Dynasty period. This architectural element represents a remarkable example of Persian craftsmanship, where intricate tilework and decorative muqarnas converge to display the aesthetic and cultural values of the era. The design not only reflects the artistic traditions of the Zand dynasty but also underscores the regional adaptation of Persian-Islamic architecture to achieve a harmonious blend of function and beauty.*  
*(Source: Zamrashidi, Hossein, 2017)*



**Figure 4-1** The detailed depiction of the “Tase’i Muqarnas Design,” as seen in the entrance portal to the arcade of the Imamzadeh Saleh shrine in Shemiran (contemporary times). This intricate ornamentation exemplifies a significant feature of traditional Islamic architecture, characterized by its geometric precision and layered, three-dimensional patterns. The use of Muqarnas in this structure not only serves a decorative purpose but also reflects the innovative architectural principles of the era, seamlessly blending aesthetics with spirituality. Such designs are integral to Persian-Islamic architecture, symbolizing both celestial harmony and cultural heritage.

Islamic art is characterized by its constant harmony with the spirit of Islam, an alignment that is especially evident in its primary manifestations such as the architecture of sacred spaces. Islamic art places a significant emphasis on beauty, as beauty, among all the divine attributes reflected in this world, is the most profound reminder of the Absolute Being. Burckhardt once remarked that Islamic art exemplifies precisely what its name suggests, without ambiguity. For individuals who engage in contemplation, Islamic art serves as an exceptionally

valuable foundation for spiritual life and as a priceless opportunity to recall divine truths. Drawing its vitality from the aesthetics of Islamic philosophy-a central element of mysticism-Islamic art emerges, both consciously and unconsciously, from this perspective, adopting this worldview in its creative process.



**Figure 5-1** illustrates the holy shrine of Ahmad bin Musa Shah-e-Cheragh, located in Shiraz, Iran. This revered site holds significant historical and religious importance as a prominent pilgrimage destination for Muslims, particularly those of the Shia sect. The architecture of the shrine is a harmonious blend of Persian design elements, adorned with intricate tile work and mirrors that reflect a deep cultural heritage. As one of the central landmarks of Shiraz, this shrine serves not only as a spiritual sanctuary but also as a remarkable embodiment of Iran's artistic and cultural identity.

## **Islamic Art**

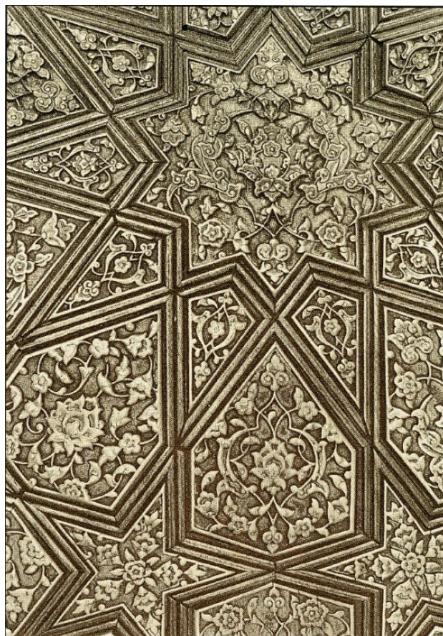
Art, in essence, refers to the creation and crafting of objects in accordance with their intrinsic nature, which embodies potential beauty. This is because beauty originates from God, and the artist is tasked

with nothing more than channeling and manifesting that beauty. From the broadest Islamic perspective, art is not merely a method of aesthetic refinement but a means of spiritual elevation for material substances. As Burckhardt (1369/1990) suggests, Islamic art is, in its truest sense, a reflection and embodiment of the spirit - and perhaps even a manifestation of Qur'anic revelation within the earthly realm.

The universe, akin to humanity, serves as both a symbol and manifestation of divine order. In traditional societies, every aspect of life - including art and craftsmanship - is intimately linked to spiritual principles. From a traditional viewpoint, both humans and the cosmos can be interpreted as expressions of sacred art (Nasr, 1370/1991, pp. 59-61). The central characteristic of art within the Islamic civilization lies in its purification from vices and adornment with virtues. Empowered by these features, the Muslim artist creates novel forms, imprints enduring memories, and produces works that transcend temporal boundaries and verge on eternity.

This unique trait is evident across all forms of post-Islamic art. The architecture of mosques, domes, and Islamic decorative designs; artistic depictions of Qur'anic verses; wood carving; miniature painting; and more, are distinct examples of this sacred aesthetic. They embody an amalgamation of art with mysticism and deep religious sentiment (Soleimanian, 1387/2008, p. 67). These creations do not merely express artistic skill but reflect a profound spiritual ethos, bridging the material and metaphysical realms.

Islamic art ultimately stands as a testament to humanity's aspiration to mirror divine beauty, anchoring itself in the sacred while uplifting the tangible into realms of eternal significance.



**Figure 6-1** illustrates intricate details of the alignment and carving patterns present in the ornamental elements known as “connecting knots,” which form a part of the entrance door to the mausoleum of Imamzadeh Hossein (PBUH) in Qazvin. This exquisite piece of decorative woodwork dates back to the Safavid era. The image and the associated analysis are referenced from the book containing the proceedings of the First National Symposium on Traditional Arts. Specifically, it draws upon the article titled *\*Safavid Woodcarving: Continuation of the National Style\**, authored by Dr. Ghobad Kianmehr. In this depiction, the craftsmanship exemplifies the pinnacle of Safavid artistry, portraying a harmonious interplay between technical precision and aesthetic sophistication. The integration of geometric configurations and floral motifs within the design reflects not only the cultural ethos of the period but also the enduring attention to detail characteristic of Iranian traditional arts. Furthermore, the repetitive alignment in the carving underlines the symbolic significance of continuity and perfection, commonly observed in Safavid decorative art. Through an in-depth study of pieces like this, one can gain substantial insights into the evolution of Islamic art and architecture during one of Iran’s most celebrated historical epochs. The meticulous use of symmetry and proportion in such works further underscores their exceptional contribution to the region’s artistic heritage.

The objective of art is the manifestation of aesthetic form, whereas the aim of contemplation lies beyond form, striving to uncover the deeper order underlying its outward appearance and to penetrate its essence. From this perspective, beauty becomes a dimension of truth; in its absolute sense, it represents the minimal reflection of unity, a fragment of which resides within all things. Burckhardt (1986 [Persian date], p. 32) articulates that beauty derived from intellectual reflection serves as a manifestation of eternal truth. This dimension of beauty can be discerned across all creation. In the context of Islamic art, the Muslim artist comprehends this profound reality. Building on Burckhardt's assertion that the artist is neither the creator nor the origin of beauty, but rather an expression of artistic endeavor that gains its aesthetic depth through alignment with universal order, such works reflect and reveal transcendent beauty (Burckhardt, 2009, p. 54).

Burckhardt further elaborates on the principles underlying beauty by identifying unity, action, and generosity as its defining characteristics. These facets contribute to an approximate understanding of beauty. By redefining these qualities as unity, harmony, balance, and perfection, a more comprehensive perspective emerges. Justice in the realm of art leads to equilibrium and proportionality, while generosity fosters perfection. Unity functions as the shared fountainhead from which all virtues emanate. Considering both internal or spiritual beauty and external aesthetic quality reveals their interdependence; one stems from and nourishes the other. Human endeavors and activities that adhere to Islamic principles serve as conduits for beauty by achieving unity and harmony reflective of divine ideals.

Ultimately, Burckhardt's reflections emphasize that beauty is not merely an external attribute affixed to artistic creations; rather, it is inherently related to the fulfillment of a universal and metaphysical truth. Through this lens, Islamic art embodies a spiritual framework where unity, balance, and harmony transcend individual artistic expression and evoke enduring principles that align humanity with higher realities.