

# Wood Application in Islamic Architectural Decoration of Mazandaran

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## ABSTRACT

Traditionally, Iran is known because of its deep roots of architecture and fine arts. Architecture which is actually excellence of arts and perfection and delight of cultured people has focused the attention of great artists and great builders and the world on itself.

Islamic architecture in a certain stage of its development prioritized many types of decorations that can be made to the interior and exterior surfaces to other architectural elements. These arrays of architectural designs are rich treasures of paintings that represent its cultural and religious mysteries in addition to its nominal value and beauty.

Using woods in the types of buildings of Islamic era ranging from the religious and secular buildings interwoven to create architectural elements and decorative arts, especially painting and wood is considered as the most important and the first building element in the Caspian region due to dense forest.

Identification and consideration of wood in decoration related to Islamic architecture includes the introduction of additional elements of the body by being present at the location, fieldwork and library studies are discussions which are to be considered in the present article.

**KEYWORDS:** decoration, architecture, application of woods, extensions

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In not too distant past in which using building material was specific to canvas materials and were compatible with human delight, people built their homes with wooden beams, straw, soil, stone, cane and etc. Also, homes had windows with three, five, and seven-doors. Door, windows and tamping ceiling were built full beauty and with using walnut, red willow, free or other woods and were drawn and painted with elegance and beauty. The crescent and surrounding of the door and windows were decorated by woodcarving and intricacy and small pieces of colored glass were somehow put in these intricacy that were presented like flowers of plants and odd geometric shapes (sash). The tamping of roof and tap of the houses, sanctuaries and mosques and other buildings were built wooden and sometimes had wood carving and paintings in different shapes like geometrical, natural and mythical animals including poems and lyrics of Mohtasham Kashani and other poets, human face image, Koranic verses, hadiths and etc. Some heads and bases of pillars in homes, Sqatar (Sqanfar), mosques and such religious places had boasts shavers, Mogharnas and unique paintings. Even beautiful sanctuary and altars were built with woods in order to polish the mosques and sancturies and ... .

Various kinds of conifers and deciduous trees grow in the forests of Mazandaran and trees that grow in cold climates are more strengthen than trees that are in moderate areas including Mers (Rush), Azar, (azad), Sur (Juniper or yew), elm (Ulmus species), linden, hornbeam and ... . In the moderate zones tress such as Karat (wild acacia), Veloly (silk or Shokhes), walnuts, banana (oak), ooja and ... grow that are very durable and sturdy.

The applications of buildings were identified according to the features of mentioned trees, wood types and their uses. Therefore, use and choice of wood type in different buildings varied and were selected based on building application.

The present study considers and identifies decorations and wooden extensions in Islamic architecture of Mazandaran. Firstly, geographical location of it in the country, wood history in Islamic era of Iran, wooden array, definition of buildings and used expressions in the study are to be considered and then decorations and building extensions are introduced and finally the conclusion is to be presented.

Using wood in various shapes was pervasive among different methods of used decorations in Islamic buildings of Iran according to climatic area in wide geographical of the country. Mazandaran climate offered wood as the most important material in the region to artists of Islamic era in order to use them as valuable architectural ornament with the help of regional, national or imported achievements and elements . The necessity of introducing and classifying

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declining species of wooden decorations includes different kinds of colored woodturning and designs with themes of human, animal, plant, geometry and line are the main issues of the present study.



**Figure 1.1.** Introducing geographical location of Mazandaran in the country

### **The background of using wood in Islamic era of Mazandaran**

There are not many cases of the lumber industry left from the period before the Seljuk government (Deimand, 2010, p. 120-121). In addition, not only using wood was common in art and industry of the Seljuk era but also they paid special attention to decorate it. It is suggested from consideration of two pieces of a pulpit, which is built in 12th century- late Seljuk- and is keeping in Metropolitan museum now, that wood decoration with flower and plant, similar to recent woodcarving, was common (Yavari, 2010, p. 16). Wood was used in building furniture and other building extensions and also portable things in the Patriarch. Wooden sanctuaries of Isfahan and Nain Jameh mosques in the center of Iran are one of the most important remained pieces of the early 8th/14th century (Blair and Bloom, 2009, p. 53). It is worth mentioning that methods of industrialists and artists of wooden works of Patriarch continued in Timurid era. One of important samples of this era is one carving which belongs to second half of 15th /9th AH century which is keeping in Metropolitan museum (Yavari, 2010, p. 16-17). Our information about lumber industry of the Safavid is more that doors which are in Iran and western Turkestan mosques and in various museums such as Golestan museum in Tehran and Islamic collection of Berlin Museum. Decoration of these doors mostly includes ductility shapes or flower plan which are sometimes jointed with animal shapes (Deimand, 2010, p. 125). Iran wood industry was declined in Afsharieh and Zand period and what is built in 17th and 18th centuries includes oil painted decorations instead of carving (Yavari, 2010, p. 17).

One of the most valuable architecture of Ghajar era is building residential buildings (internal and external) with very reasonable spaces, following "models and methods" and implementing principles, especially viewing. Many works of art included wooden sash doors with node shapes and even bergamot woodcarving in the roof (wooden) like lachak or toranj in beautiful shapes with delight paintings and used new carpentry models and designs of in wooden windows and presumption of colorful glasses in them which all are new artistic values in Ghajar (Zomorshidi, 2008, p. 11).

### **Wooden arrays in Islamic architecture of Iran**

**Wood carving:** wood carving in known as an art of creating detailed plans and paintings with vulvas, dents and bumps which are along with accurate implementation from observing proportions, symmetries and balances (Yavari, 2010, p. 127).

**Diaphoretic:** wood diaphoretic is one of the wooden crafts and is not made of integrated and thick wood against other wood workings and pieces based on components of one plan from the same and low wood thickness and sometimes non-timber is cut on it and is put on a integrated infrastructure or is embedded inside the infrastructure (Sohrabi Nasir Abadi, 2009, p. 67).

**Sealing:** Sealing is the art of decorating the surface of wooden things, something mosaic with equal small wooden, bony or metal and sometimes ivory and shell three-sided or two-sided triangles which were and are common from about 400 years ago in some parts of the country and mostly in Shiraz and Isfahan (Yavari, 2010, p. 141).

Lattice: Firstly, the considered design and line are attached to board, metal or leather which is the main basis of the work, next, the points which must cut are to be identified and then holes are made by drill after consideration and marking on the plan. After that, additional paintings will be cut by coping saw and lattice design will remained. Then, abrasive will be used in order to polish it (the author).

Carving: carving on woods is the art of crating simple, superficial and shallow designs and painting with using a simple instrument based on artistry creativity and delight of the artist (Yavari, 2010, p. 125).

Node and frame: nodes are one of the architectural decorations of Iranian and are based on an identified principle and create node apparatus (Mehr Pouya, 1997, p. 567).

Porcelain node: node work or node creating in carpentry was also simple meaning that they can be created by joining apparatuses or by composing apparatus and "clamping" and this kind of carpentry was seen in different kinds of religious buildings, palaces and great homes from 5th century (AH) and utmost intricacy and elegance of this art were done in windows, sash and small wooden doors with using colored and very small glasses (Yavari, 2010, p. 139-140).

Script and calligrapher: Joining script with architecture has a lasting and ancient background. It means that blessed tablets wanted blessing and pleading with words full of religious meaning for the building which was built and was put under the base and foundation of it. Although script was not considered as one of the architectural elements, it was a beginning to a connection. Later, this connection became more strengthen and script found a high position in building and architecture. Sometimes, it was put on the forehead, sometimes on the body and sometimes on the pillars like inscriptions and nice posts and became expressive language of its history and had the duty of introducing the culture and civilization of every era and period to future (Rahim Zade, 2003, p. 121-122).

Drill, Nastaliq, East Kofi, Tuluth, Naskh, Muhaqqaq, Reihani, Taliq, and building Kofi can be mentioned as used scripts in buildings.

### **The application of geometry in Islamic architecture**

There was a relationship between geometrics and architects in Islamic world and explanation of identifying the language of this relationship can be seen in Arabic geometry which is the base of geometry knowledge and also means engineering.

Application and geometrical principles in architectural works represent pervasive and flexible strategy in Islamic world (Al-Asaad, 1997, p. 36).

The emphasis of Iranian architecture is on beauty. Iranians have always had great respect for the beauty over the centuries and geometry knowledge is a powerful instrument in the hands of Iranian engineers that sky symmetries can be measured by using it and creates balance, coordination, beauty and discipline on the earth. Therefore, geometry is both science and art for Iranian architects (Hejazi, 2008, p. 17-18).



**Figure 2.1.** One sample of calligraphy with rising Arabesque in the margin (a woodcarving door, Najaf, SavadKuh)



**Figure 2.2.** A wooden door with wood carving frame and node decoration (Seyed Nezameddin, Pasha Amir Village, Eastern Band Pei, Babol)

The connection between geometry and woodcarving art have been depicted very artistically and rational in above sample and samples like this can be seen more frequently in this province.

Sqatar (sqanfar), sanctuary, Ghajar homes and minarets of mosques can be mentioned as buildings in Mazandaran which are to be explained in details in the following part.

**Sqatar**

Sqatar or Sqanfar or Sanpar are said to small wooden buildings which are in Mazandaran villages, especially in its central part. Mentioned buildings which are built from two stories on four bases of wooden thick-set in the shape of squares assign small space in shrines, sanctuaries and cemeteries. The connection between two stories is possible by wooden ladder or staircase (Rahim Zade, 2003, p. 33).



**Figure 2.3.** A view of pillar, its head (Kamacheh), nal, edge strap, vavand, shirsar, flaring, hala (from silk wood), board and seamless flooring in Pasha sqatar of Kala-Amol



**Figure 2.4.** A picture of human face painting (angel) on a wooden roof in Amir Ghasemi Ghajar home- Ask-Larijan-Amol



**Figure 2.5.** One sample of calligraphy on wooden roof in Kija sanctuary sqatar-Babol **Sanctuary**

It is a place for mourning of Muharram or religious holidays which has two situations: temporary and permanent (Bozorg Nia, 2005, p. 122).

Sanctuary is a symbol of Imam Hussein (AS). This symbolism which is the result of movement of Imam Hussein (AS) and his loyal followers in plains of Karbala and their martyrdom has a direct relationship with the application and shape of the building (Pirzad, 2009, p. 88).



**Figure 2.6.** A picture of a square head pillar and painted wooden mogharnas in Firozkala sanctuary- Amol



**Figure 2.7.** A picture of a mythical dragon painting in one of the head of wooden roof of Firoozkala sanctuary- Amol

### **Ghajar home**

Home is a suitable and safe place for relax after a hard day. The huge mass and their various pictures which cover all the roof and front of the building made the small and limited space of this building a delight and catching the spirit place instead of a dry and lifeless space that add to the calmness after a hard day. The picture contents of this home have been taken from the heart of the nature, humans, symbols and myths and are illustrative of beliefs, habits, and sometimes customs of simple people (the author).



**Figure 2.8.** A picture of sash windows with colored glasses of Aghajan Nasab home-Babol



**Figure 2.9.** A picture of wooden door with battalio n slates of Aghajan Nasab home-Babol



**Figure 2.10.** Reticulated valve with proclaim knot (Babol museum)



**Figure 2.11.** Wooden door with frame and knot decoration from Band pei-Babol



*Figure 2.12.* Double valve wooden inlaid lattice doors



*Figure 2.13.* Wooden pulpit with proclain knot (Babol museum)



*Figure 2.14.* Wooden pulpit with proclain knot (jameh mosques of Babol)



*Figure 2.15.* Wooden enshrine and box of Mola Nasira tomb with proclain knot



**Figure 2.16.** Wooden woodcarving rice box of Kalbadis' home-Sari



**Figure 2.17.** A picture of wooden ladder of Hashemian Ghajari home- Amol

### **Conclusion**

According to conducted observations and considerations, wood has been used in different parts for extensional decorations and building framework of Iran Islamic era including door and window, tamping painted ceiling, ladder and guard, pulpit, enshrine, box of keeping food (rice), pillar and its head, shir sar, kemache, sash and other parts that this fact explains extensive application of wood decorations in buildings of Islamic era in religious or unreligious buildings.

### **Purpose of the study**

Due to lack of sources that specifically state decorations and wooden extensions in Mazandaran Islamic architecture, studies and field interpretations explained this fact for researchers and scholars to take advantage in addition to using concept and definitions of introduced sources at the end of this paper.

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