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History of the shrine of Imam Ali b. Musa Al-Ridha – peace be upon him– the history of Mashhad

Mashhad is the capital of Khorasan province in the North East of Iran, 892 km away from Tehran. It is located at the altitude of 985 Meter occupying an area of 204 sq. Km. and has a population of about 1.5 million. Mashhad grew from a small village called Sanabad, 24 km away from Tus. After the martyrdom of Imam Ali ibn Musa Al-Ridha and his burial there in 203 AH, the place came to be known as Mashhad Al-Ridha. Astan-Qods-Razavi (the name given to the physical buildings comprising the Haram) is one of the most beautiful and glorious religious places in Iran. The best of Islamic art and architecture can be seen in the unique and significant monuments where Islamic art and faith is embedded.

History of the construction of Astan-Qods-Razavi

Hamza Ibn Qahtabah, the Abbasid army commander who had led the war against the Ommayyids was appointed by Mansur and Al-Mahdi, the Abbasid caliphs as the Governor of Khorasan. He made a big garden between Noughan and Sanadan and erected a palace which stood up to the beginning of the 4th century AH. Haroon, who had come to Tus to suppress the Khorasan rebellion, became ill and resided in the garden during his ailment. But he died in 193 H. And was buried inside the palace. Upon his tomb a shrine was built.

In 203 AH, Imam Al-Ridha, peace be upon him, was poisoned by Mamoun, the son of Haroon and Imam was buried alongside with Haroon. Since the martyrdom of Imam, his holy shrine became a place of pilgrimage for the world's Shias and the city spread so far as Noughan and Sanabad were annexed to it to become Mashhad Al-Ridha, shortened over time to Mashad.

The holy shrine was ruined by Saboktakin, a Ghaznavid king. But his son, Sultan Mahmud ordered the shrine to be repaired and expanded in 428 AH. During the invasion of Changis and his son, Tooty, the

holy shrine was ruined again. Sultan Mohamed Khoda-Banda, a Shiite king of Moghol dynasty, who reigned from 703 to 716 AH, had the holy shrine rebuilt. Since the time of Safavids, Afshars and Qajars to date many of the Astane-Qods buildings have been expanded.

Basts (Places of Refuge)

Basts were places of refuge from the tyranny of dictators and provided the best refuge for the people under persecution. In Astane-Qods-Razavi there exist two large yards on each side of Sahne Enqelab (Revolution Court) namely Baste Payeen Khiaban (Lower Bast) and Baste Bala Khiaban (Upper Bast). Today Basts are used as two entrances to Imam Al-Ridha's Holy Shrine. In recent years two new Basts have been built namely Baste Sheikh Bahai (between Gowharshad Mosque and Sahne Jamburi Islami) and Baste Tabarsi (between the Islamic University and the new building of Astane-Qods Library).

Sahne Enqelab

This is one of the most beautiful and glorious buildings of Astane Qods Razavi. The four balconies in this court are Abbasi (North) , Tala (South), Naqqareh Khaneh (East) upon which lies Naqqareh Khaneh, Sa'at (Clock) (West) upon which is a big clock. These balconies which attest to the best of architecture are more than three centuries old. There is a big rectangular window in this court made of bronze and steel. Tala, the golden balcony was built by Amir Alishir Navaiee, Sultan Bighara's wise vizier in 872 H. The northern Abbasi balcony was constructed during Shah Abbas's reign in 1021 AH.

Minarets

The two golden minarets of Imam Ridha's shrine have been specially built. The minarets are usually made on the two sides of the dome and near the dome. But these two minarets have been built far from each other. One, close to the Dome, upon Naderi balcony in the southern section of Sahne Enqelab and the other far in the northern section of Sahne Enqelab on Abbasi balcony. Although lack of symmetry can be clearly felt, it has been done on purpose so that when pilgrims enter Haram from Imam Ridha Avenue they can see the minarets and the Dome in the middle. The minaret which is close to the Dome was built by Shah Tahmasb Safavi and has a height of 40.5 meters and a circumference of 13 meters. The other minaret on Abbasi balcony was built at the time of Nader Shah.

Nqqareh Khaneh (Place of Kettle Drums)

In 860 H. When Baisoqor Shahrokh's son came to Mashad from Herat to Haram to seek remedy from Imam Ridha kettledrums were beaten to announce his presence. Since then this practice has been performed every day before sunrise and sunset except mourning period. The place where kettledrums are performed is on the eastern balcony of Sahne Enqelab.

Saqqa Khaneh (Public Drinking Place)

There is a public drinking place called hawze Ismail Talai in the middle of Sahne Enqelab with a gilded inscription belonging to the time of Nader Shah Afshar's reign. That is why it is called Naderi drinking place. The marble pool was brought from Her on Nader Shah's orders. The golden bricks with which the inscription has been written was made by Ismail, an artist whose name the drinking place bears. It was rebuilt in 1347 H.

Sa'at (the Clock)

There is a big clock on the western balcony of Sahne Enqelab. It dates back to the period of Mozaffar-al-Din Shah's period.

Sahne Jamhuri Islami (Islamic Republic Court)

This Sahn which is 10,000 square meters in size was built in recent years. It has two minarets at the back of the northern and Southern gates. Each minaret is 30 meters high. This Sahn provides one approach from Ravaq of Dar-al-Valayeh to the holy Shrine of Imam. The building situated on the eastern part of this Sahn is called Dar-al-Rahmeh.

Sahn Qods

This Sahn is recently built and 2500 Sq. Meters in size is situated between Sahne Imam Khomeini and Baste Shaykh Bahai. On the ground floor there are 28 chambers each six meters high and one veranda called Qebleh which is 50 Sq Meters in size. At the centre of this Sahn is a newly built public drinking place.

Sahne Imam Khomeini

This Sahn is located at the left side of the Holy Shrine of Imam Ridha [a] and faces Imam Ridha Avenue. Its area is more than 8300 sq Meters. Shaykh Bahai's tomb is located between this Sahn and Sahne Azadi.

Sahne Azadi

This Sahn is located east of the Holy Shrine and dates back to the time of Fath-Ali Shah Qajar. It is about 85 meters long and 54 meters wide. It has four verandas, the most famous of which is called Eivan Tala (golden Veranda) that is adjacent to the am. This veranda was gilded at the time of Nasir-al-Din Shah Qajar.

Gowharshad Mosque

This mosque is one of the most reputed in Iran and is situated adjacent to the Holy Shrine of Imam Ridha. It was built in 821 AH. under the orders of Gowharshad Khatun, Shahrokh Mirza's wife. Its area is 9410 Sq Meters and includes a courtyard, four porches and seven large prayer halls. Two beautiful minarets, each 40 meters high, are located on both sides of Maqsureh Porch. There is an inscription on the left on the margin of the porch written by Baisoqor, one of the best calligraphists of the time. The Sahib-al Zaman Pulpit is in Maqsureh porch. It was built in 1243 H with walnut wood and without using any iron or nail. This mosque has a public library with 34,650 volumes.

Imam Ridha [a]'s Tomb

It is located beneath the Golden Dome (The Golden Dome is the most prominent symbol of the city of Mashad with an altitude of 31.20 meters) and surrounded by different porches each bearing a separate name. The skilled artists have done their best in the creation of this place. It is square in shape and some 135 sq. meters have been added to its area after extension works. The walls are covered by marble up to twenty centimeters and the next ninety two centimeters are covered by expensive tiles known as Sultan Sanjari tiles. Quranic verses and Ahadiths of the Ahlul Bait [a] have been carved on these tiles. The important inscription written round the walls is eighty centimeters wide and written by Ali Ridha Abbasi, the famous calligraphist of the Safavid period and bears Surah Jumah of the Holy Quran.

Dar-al Hoffaz (the place of the Reciters)

This porch is located south of the Holy Shrine and northeast of the Gowharshad mosque. It was built under the orders of Gowharshad khatun. The pilgrims pray here seeking permission to enter the Holy Shrine. Dar-al-Hoffaz is connected to Haram through a doorway. It has been built for the Quran reciters. Abbas Mirza, Fath-Ali Shah's vicegerent is buried in this porch.

Towhid Khaneh (place of Divine Unity)

It is located north of the Holy Shrine and south of Sahne Enqelab. This porch is used for ladies prayers.

Dar-al-Siyadah

Located in the western part of the Haram, this porch was built under the orders of Gowharshad Khatun. There is a silver window in its northeastern part from where Imam Ridha [a]'s Tomb can be seen.

Bala-Sar Mosque

There is a small mosque attached to the west part of the Haram. It is called Bala Sar (above the head) because pilgrims enter this mosque from the west side of Imam Ridha [a]'s burial chamber which is Bala-Sar of Imam. It is one of the oldest mosques in Mashhad and dates back to the time of Sultan Mahmood Ghaznavi.

Dar-al Rahmah Porch

This porch has an area of 365 sq. meters and is situated in the eastern part of Sahne Jamhuri e Islami. It has been decorated with gilding, plaster works, mirrors and fret work and was inaugurated in 1371 AH.

The other porches are Dar-al-Ekhlās, Dar-al-Shukr, Dar-al-Salaam and Dar-al-Zekr.

Allahverdikhan Dome

It is an octagonal dome built on Allahverdikhan's tomb. He was one of Shah Abbas's generals. It is located in northeast of Haram and decorated with colored tiles and beautiful drawings. It is one of the most valuable artistic works inside Haram.

Hatam Khani Dome

This dome is located east of Haram. One of Shah Abbas's ministers called Hatam Beik Ordoobadi built it in 1010 AH.

The Golden Dome

The Golden Dome on top of Imam Ridha [a]'s tomb is the most prominent symbol of Mashhad and has a height of 31.20 meters. A large inscription has been written round the Dome by Ali Ridha Abbasi.

Museum of Astaane Quds

The Astaane Quds museum is one of the richest and most exquisite museums of Iran. The building is located in the eastern quarter of Sahne Imam Khomeini and close to Haram square. Some of its objects date back to the 6th century AH. The collection of carpets, rugs and golden covers for the Tomb are all unique and date back to the 11 and 13th centuries.

Some inscriptions written by Ali Ridha Abbasi are among the valuable objects. Among the unique works of art in the museum is Imam's first tombstone, the inscription of which was carved in kufi relief script belonging to 516 H. There are also samples of relief tile work known as Sanjari glazed tile belonging to the 6th century H. and a big stone water pool made of a piece of Blackstone decorated with the most

beautiful arabesques.

Museum of The Quran

This museum is located in the vicinity of the Astaane Quds museum. It contains precious manuscripts of the Glorious Quran attributed to the Holy Imams and some gilded manuscripts. It was opened in 1364 H. The oldest manuscript attributed to the Holy Imams is in kufi script on deer skin belonging to the First century AH.

Museum of Stamps

The biggest stamp museum in Iran and was opened by Astaane Quds in 1368 AH. Some 50000 stamps from Iran and 18 foreign countries from Qajar period to the present time are on display in this museum.

Astaane Quds Library: This library is located in the eastern part of Sahne Imam Khomeini and was established in 681 H. It has a unique treasure of manuscripts. It contains, according to last count done in 1368 AH., 257078 volumes of which 28218 are manuscripts and 724 photographic copies and the materials are in 36 different languages. The archives of this library are considered a treasure of documents.

Astane Quds Mehmansara

This inn is located in Baste-e Sofla and every overseas pilgrim (zair) of Imam Ridha [a] has a right to one free meal as guest of Imam. Meals are served everyday.

Sheikh Bahaiee

The Tomb of Baha-o-din Mohamed Ameli, known as Sheikh Bahaiee, is located between Sahn-e-Imam and Sahn-e-Azadi in the Haram Astane Quds. Sheikh Bahaiee was born in Baalbak in 953 H. and came to Iran with his father when he was 7 years old. His genealogy dates back to Hareth Hamadani, the famous disciple of Imam Ali [a]. He had a great influence on Shah Abbas King of Iran and Iranian politics and culture and has left behind many scientific works.

Sheikh Hurr Ameli

His tomb is in Sahn-e-Enqelab in the Haram-Astaane Quds. He is one of the famous Shiite theologians and author of Wasa'el Al-Shia.

Sheikh Tabarasi

His tomb is in northern square next to Bagh-e-Rezvan and the avenue next to it has been named after

him. Fazl-ibn-Hasan Tabarasi died 548 H. is the writer of the commentary Majma'-al-Bayan.

Khwajeh Morad

His tomb is 14 kilometers away in south east Mashad on the outskirts of Binalood mountains (opposite Bahesht-e-Ridha cemetery). Herthameh bin Ayn, known as khwajeh Morad was a disciple of Imam Ridha [a] and he died in 210 H.

Khwajeh Rabiee

Rabiee ben Haytham known as Khwajeh Rabiee was famous for his piety. His tomb is in the middle of a garden bearing a high dome. Its construction dates back to 11th century H. and is considered as a Safavid monument. It is one of the important buildings of Shah Abbas period in Khorasan.

There are two inscriptions written by Ali Ridha Abbasi inside the shrine. The shrine is located at the end of Khwajeh Rabiee avenue and one of the great public cemeteries of Mashhad lies next to Khwajeh Rabiee tomb. His death is recorded as in 63 H. Abasalt-e-Heravi's tomb: Abasalt, Imam Ridha [a]'s servant died in 236 H and was buried beside the road to Fariman 10 kilometers from Mashhad.

Gonbad (Dome) Kheshti

This dome, located in Tabarasi avenue, houses the grave of Imamzadeh Mohamed whose genealogy can be traced to Imam Sajjad [a]. The monument belongs to the Safavid period in architectural style.

Peer-e Palandooz (the old pack saddler)

Sheikh Mohammad Aref (died 985 H.) known as Peer-e-Palandooz was one of the most pious of his time. He was called so since he made pack saddles to earn his living. His tomb is in front of Baste-Payeen which was originally built by Sultan Mohammad Khoda Bandeh and has recently been reconstructed by Astan-e-Qods.

Gonbade Sabz (Green Dome)

This shrine is located in Khaki avenue and its dome has a color close to turquoise. Sheikh Mohammed Mo'men Aref Astrabadi, died 90 H. is buried here. He wrote the medical work Tohfeh Hakim Mo'men. The dome was built by Shah Abbas in 1011 H.

Mosalla Mashhad

This monument is located in Payeen Khiaban and has a high porch and two porticoes on both sides. According to extant inscription it was built in 1087 H. during Shah Sulayman period. Its facade is made

of bricks and it was previously used for prayers of the two Eids. The date of construction 1086 H. has been carved inside the Mehrab. The building is decorated with inscription and glazed tiles.

Akhanjan Tower

This tower is located 22 kilometers away from Mashhad and it is believed that the tomb of Gowhartaj, the sister of Gowharshad Agha Taimuri is here. The facade of the tower is covered with octagon bricks and it has a conic dome.

Miami (Imamzadeh Yahya)

Imamzadeh Yahya was Zaid's son and grandson of our fourth Imam Sajjad [a] His mother Raiteh was the daughter of Abi Hashem Abdullah ibn Mohamed Hanifah. He was born in 107 H. and as his life was threatened by Umayyads, he migrated from Kerbala to Madaen and from there to Khorasan. He was martyred at the age of 18 in Jowzjan in 125 H. His tomb is on the Sarakhs road 50 kilometers from Mashhad and one kilometer from Miami village. The construction of the shrine dates back to the 10th century H.

Nadir's monument

It is located in a beautiful garden and built by National Monuments Association in 1958 A.D. Nadir's statute riding horse holding an Axe is on the top of the monument. The height is 5 meters weighing 14000 kilograms. There is a museum of weapons, helmets and armours inside the monument which was inaugurated in 1342 H. Nadir Shah ruled from 1148 to 1160 AH. The Allama Tabatabaie public library is in this monument run by Islamic Guidance Organisation.

Ferdowsi's monument

Abul Quasem Ferdowsi (died 411 H.) is the greatest epic poet who composed Shahnameh in 30 years. His shrine is located 22 kilometers northwest of Mashhad alongside Quchan road. The monument is surrounded by a beautiful garden and was completed in 1968 A.D. There are still some old walls in the end side of the garden and there is a museum in the west part of the monument. Among the items in the museum is a manuscript of Shahnameh weighing 73 kilograms.

May Allah bless us all with the Ziyarat of Imam Ridha [a] more and more often. I trust the above narrative will be of benefit to the pilgrims (*zawwar*) of Imam Ridha [a].

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