

# **A Comparative Comparison of the Architectural Decorations of the Blue Mosque of Yerevan with the Blue Mosque of Tabriz as a Cultural Strategy**

## **Abstract**

The vast geographical area of the Islamic world has triggered the existence of numerous traces of Islamic civilization in far and near regions. Armenia, a section constantly under the conflict of Christian and Muslim governments, beholds many artworks and historic monuments related to the Islamic culture. An exploratory study on the similarities of the historical monuments of Armenia and Iran during the Islamic period can be considered as a cultural strategy; thus, in this study, the Blue Mosques of Yerevan and Tabriz will be deliberated upon. In terms of content, the research has been carried out following a descriptive and comparative method, and the collection of information has been complied via library and documentation research. To conclude, the result of the upcoming research expresses that the artistic style and the category of decorations used in the two mosques are more or less similar, which is due to the influence of the rich culture of Iran on the people of Armenia; however, the Blue Mosque of Tabriz beholds more modest decorations and both structures follow the style of Iranian design and architecture of the Timurid era.

## **Research aims:**

١. Recognizing the architectural style in the Blue Mosque of Yerevan and the Blue Mosque of Tabriz.
٢. Comparative comparison of the architectural decorations of the Blue Mosque of Yerevan and the Blue Mosque of Tabriz as a cultural strategy.

## **Research questions:**

١. What is the relationship between the artistic style in the architectural decorations used in the Blue Mosques of Yerevan and Tabriz?

۲. How and to what extent has the cultural impact of Iran been effective in the final development of the Blue Mosques in Yerevan and Tabriz?

**Keywords:** architectural decorations, Blue Mosque of Yerevan, Blue Mosque of Tabriz, cultural strategy.

## **Introduction**

Recognizing and introducing the works and remnants of past civilizations and cultures, along with apparent economic benefits aids with the familiarization of identity and national aspects. The simplified equation of the problem that knowledge and techniques only include maintenance and protection, became a complex equivalence that their recognition and introduction will cross the threshold of the most private aspects of individual and social life, and in many cases neglect and inattention causes the formation of social and political tensions. In this article, from the point of view of architectural decorations, two glorious works of Iranian architectural heritage, namely the Blue Mosque of Yerevan and the Blue Mosque of Tabriz have been discussed and investigated. This research will aid to give a logical answer to several questions: What is the relationship between the artistic style in the architectural decorations applied in the two mosques? How and to what extent has the cultural atmosphere of Iran been effective in the final development of the Blue Mosques in Yerevan and Tabriz? Dissimilarities and resemblances can be seen in the architectural decorations of the two mentioned mosques which will be addressed in detail. The significance and value of this research is due to the fact that the comparison between the decorations of the mentioned mosques has not been premeditated preceding this paper and the need for a thorough study on the decorations of these two mosques, particularly distinguishing the similarities and dissimilarities of the two structures appears compulsory.

Regarding the background of Iranian mosque architecture, the knowledge in creating the architecture of the Blue Mosque of Tabriz is exclusively unique and belongs to the Timurid period, on the other hand, the Blue Mosque of Yerevan was built during the end of the Zandiyeh dynasty. Therefore, despite considering the time difference in the construction of these two buildings, the hypothesis of the present research is that the two mentioned mosques, in addition to being similar

in the color of the dome, have other similar architectural decorations. The research method of this paper is descriptive and comparative and library information is applied for data collection.

To study and acknowledge the Blue Mosque of Yerevan and Tabriz, it is possible to obtain a variety of information from written sources, in each of which, in a special way, the artistic and architectural wonders of these two works have been separately commented; This is despite the fact that no research has been carried out regarding the comparative study of the two mosques. It should be noted that the architectural decorations of the Blue Mosque of Yerevan have not been studied. Therefore, the background of the upcoming research is mostly related to the Blue Mosque of Tabriz. For instance, the study of Saeed Mehriar and Mehdi Razani in the form of an article entitled "Criticism of the methods of preservation and restoration of decorations in the Mozaffari Mosque of Tabriz" have investigated the renovations of the Blue Mosque and the results of their research shows the imbalance and stylistic unity in the actions related to the restoration of the building and the decorations related to architecture; moreover, they believe the main focus of this imbalance is in the tiling decorations and carved stones. (Mehriyar and Razani, ۱۳۹۱). In another research, Shahbazi Shiran et al (۱۳۹۰) analyzed the influence of mysticism and Sufism on the themes and decorations of the inscriptions of the Blue Mosque of Tabriz. According to their findings, among the colors, two colors, azure blue (in the context of the inscriptions) and white (in the writing of the text of the inscription) are the dominant colors in the decorations of this mosque, and symbolically, these two colors are directly related to the beliefs of mystics; and they are considered to be a manifestation of mystics' beliefs in the decorations of this mosque; moreover, in the mentioned paper, the authors believe that the religious developments of the ۹th century A.H. such as the power of letters in addition to Sufism and mysticism had a significant impact on the depiction of the motifs and inscriptions of this building (Shahbazi Shiran et al., ۱۳۹۰). Hosseinpour Meizab (۱۳۹۸) also discussed "Aesthetics of architecture and decorations of the Timurid period (case study: Blue Mosque of Tabriz)"; in this study the author studies the type of architecture and decorations of the mosque by analyzing the architecture and decoration of the Timurid period; thus, he has compared the buildings of two distant regions, Central Asia and Asia Minor, in order to discover how these influences dominated the construction of the Blue Mosque. The result shows that the location and time of the Blue Mosque, the background of its formation, religious and political developments and the presence of experienced local experts have initiated the emergence of such a masterpiece (Hosseinpour Meizab, ۱۳۹۸). Hossein Sultanzadeh is another researcher

whom, in the book “Tabriz, Solid Adobe in Iranian Architecture”, presents theories that are partly similar to those of Yahya Zaka, and states that the Blue Mosque of Tabriz is derived from the decorative arts of Iran; however, the structure is not Iranian in terms of design characteristics and is adapted from a type of Ottoman mosques" (Soltanzadeh, ۱۹۹۷: ۱۶۷). Momeni (۲۰۱۰), in his research, has explored the concept of cultural identity in the mosque-school architecture of Iran (case study: Qajar period) and the resulting findings indicate that cultural changes have often had an indirect effect on the overall design of the mosque-school architecture of the Qajar period, on the architectural elements of such buildings, both directly and indirectly, and on the tiling and carving patterns of the mosque-schools of the Qajar period. (Momeni, ۲۰۱۰). Also, in a number of researches, the Blue Mosque of Yerevan is mentioned. As an example, we can refer to the research of Andranik Hovan (۲۰۰۶) in the form of an article titled "Iranology: Commonalities and Cultural Relations of Iranians and Armenians"; in this paper, only at the finally points, the only Iranian mosque (the Blue Mosque of Yerevan) is briefly described as a cultural heritage. In another article by the same author, titled "Effect: Blue Mosque of Yerevan", he briefly mentioned the relations between Iranians and Armenians; also, the Blue Mosque of Yerevan is introduced and described this mosque from the quotations of Diolafoea and the author merely described the external features of the building, such as the number of windows, porches and minarets and has not mentioned the architectural decorations of the building other than tiling.

## **Conclusion**

The upcoming research has compared the decorations and architectural elements of the Blue Mosque of Yerevan with the Blue Mosque of Tabriz; Therefore, in this regard, before any comment, there are discussions related to the historical architecture of two separate regions, i.e. Iran and Armenia, in diverse centuries. Then, a visual and structural comparison between the architectural decorations left from the Blue Mosque of Yerevan and the Blue Mosque of Tabriz has been discussed. Unquestionably, as mentioned before, the two historical structures apart from spatial difference also bear a temporal difference. As a result, it requires the study of the time period of each one separately, and after studying and gaining knowledge, it was found that the overall structure of the Blue Mosque in Yerevan was built in the style of Iranian engineering, however, compared to the Blue Mosque in Tabriz, it has a humbler architecture. Moreover, less decorative features are applied in the interior of the mosque and it beholds a minimal structure.

Nevertheless, regarding the general body of the mosque, as mentioned, is clearly related to Islamic-Iranian architecture, and in this regard, after studying and gaining knowledge, it was determined that the overall elements and materials of the Yerevan Mosque have similarities with the Blue Mosque of Tabriz in terms of form and structure.

The Iranian architects who built the Blue Mosque in Tabriz, were masters from the region of Azerbaijan, and aimed to import Anatolian forms with the elements of Iranian architectural culture, which resulted in the appearance of Iranian architecture; therefore, the important point is that the Blue Mosque of Tabriz is also structurally built on the basis of Iranian structural style. Among them, we can mention the artistic combination of marble tiles and bricks, which became famous during the Timurid period. Of course, although the Blue Mosque of Tabriz was built during the Timurid period, its dominant plan is imported from Anatolia. Bearing this in mind, what is worth pondering is that the architectural style of Tabriz Blue Mosque could not encourage subsequent architects to repeat and complete its form. For this reason, the structural composition of this mosque has been likened to a star that shone only once on the architectural horizon of Iran, and its counterpart is the Blue Mosque of Yerevan that although belonging to another country and from a later period than that of the Timurid period, both share the same dominant plan and design.

According to the results of the upcoming research, it can be estimated that artists and architects were capable of creating a structure that fits to the culture and climate of any nation; moreover, they were also able to communicate between different societies and cultures. For example, by examining the inscriptions and murals of the Blue Mosque of Tabriz and the Blue Mosque of Yerevan, it displays that the founders of these two buildings had strong beliefs and admiration towards the family of Ali ibn Abi Talib (PBUH); Therefore, it is clear that the founders of the mentioned mosques were followers of the Shi'ah religion. The architects of the Blue Mosque of Yerevan and the Blue Mosque of Tabriz were Iranians. Therefore, taking into account that the Blue Mosque of Yerevan was built in the region of Armenia and the Blue Mosque of Tabriz was modeled on Anatolian architecture; nevertheless, the final product has taken on the appearance of Iranian architecture as both buildings are mixed with elements of Iranian architectural culture. The great similarity of the two studied mosques, apart from the fact that the architects and founders of each of them were Iranian, is the fact that the two countries of Armenia and Iran have been in extensive interaction throughout history and this has provided the basis for the influence of Iran's

rich culture on Armenia. It can be claimed that the architectural style of the Blue Mosque of Yerevan is more Iranian compared to the Blue Mosque of Tabriz. In other words, the compatibility of the Blue Mosque of Yerevan with Iranian culture is more extent since as mentioned the Blue Mosque of Tabriz has a special style of architecture due to the influence of the Anatolian architectural plan, which is unique to this building and has no equivalent. Finally, it should be acknowledged that what has caused cultural integration and unity between the two nations of Iran and Armenia despite the political and ethnic boundaries between the two nations, as well as the ups and downs that have existed between their relations throughout history, is the presence of Islamic civilization. This is so that according to the results of the present article, Islamic cultural elements (Shi'ah religion) have prevented the complete decline of the relations between the two mentioned nations; Therefore, the importance and place of art and architecture in the dynamics of this Islamic civilization and Islamic cultural unity is exceptional and noteworthy.

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