

Study and Classification of Tombstones of the Safavid Period (Ardabil City)

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Abstract: *Ardabil, now known as one of the provinces of the country, has been one of the oldest and ancient cities in various historical periods, including Islam. This province comes to the end of the majesty and power during the reign of Safavid. Tombstone is among the heritage of the past that reflects culture and civilization. The existence of a tombstone on the tombs of Islamic period has always been observed in all parts of Iran. Though this issue exists in most cultures, it has always been considered by Muslims as an indicator of burial in the culture of the Islamic era and of Iran. The purpose of this research is to identify and study tombstone in the relevant area during the Safavid period. According to the results, the status of Shia religion can be clearly seen in all the tombstones of the Safavid period of Ardabil. In fact, it can be said that the combination of art and belief has caused the tombs of stone to be of particular importance and variety, and the line drawn on them represents the beliefs and cultures, as well as the scope of the literature of this region. Most of the designs include Islamic designs, flowers and leaves, animal designs and Quranic verses. The method used in this study is based on field study.*

Keywords: *Ardabil, Safavid period, tombstone*

Introduction

Archaeological studies in different parts of the world show the importance of the subject of death, worldly life, traditions, and customs as one of the most important human concerns in various cultures and periods. Signs of the importance of the life after death in different cultures can be found in the methods of burial of human beings, which have emerged in different forms. The presence of Islam in the Iranian history has had a great impact on culture and social structures. The effects can also be seen in art and

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post-Islamic developments. Also, the Iranian culture influenced by the school of Islam can be clearly seen in Iranian customs and traditions. Tombstones, their structure and motifs are among the rituals and traditions influenced by Islamic culture. The tombstones contain many values in terms of historical, cultural and political information. The tombstone and its existing mosaics reflect the effects of the culture, art, and religious roots of a particular ethnic group at a particular time on the death of the deceased, and that the sample of religious beliefs associated with the beauty and inner feelings can be found in the tombstones of the Islamic period. Because of the special connection with humans, tombstones are a good platform for displaying their thoughts and symbolic images of them, the images and motifs disappeared from the tombstones today due to the forgetting of their concepts. The tombstones belonging to any ethnic group can be considered as part of the historical relics. It preserves the ritual and cultural characteristics of those people. The way they look at the category of death, which has always occupied the human mind, can be obtained from the form of this historical object. Awareness of the style and artistic techniques used in the tombstones of different periods provides us with very good information about the way of life of different civilizations. The purpose of choosing the subject is to study the motifs of tombstones, to examine, recognize and separate the tombstones in terms of appearance and motifs used on them; to classify and analyze patterns separately; to examine the symbol, the style of tombstone motifs visually, coherence, presentation of an appropriate analysis and response by carefully analyzing motifs in details and morphology, classification, type of application, date of construction, place of construction and builders of these tombstones in an accurate and appropriate research.

Ardabil province, located in the northwest of Iran, with an area of 17,953 km², makes up 0.91% of the total area of the country.

According to the archaeological evidence obtained in the Ardabil region, this area has been considered since prehistoric times and former communities have always lived in these areas. In the historical period, the importance of this region is always preserved and various relics of this period have been left in Ardabil region. However, some Muslim authors have attributed the building of Ardabil to "Sassanid Peroz" (459-483 AD) and have called it "Bazan Peroz", "Piroozabad" or "Firoozgard". But according to some of the writings, it was apparently built much earlier than Firooz's time. In the Islamic period of Ardabil, it has survived and has been mentioned in various texts. But with the advent of Sheikh Safiuddin, the head of the Safavid dynasty, Ardabil became the "Dar Al-ershad" and found a new significance at the time of the Safavid kings¹. Despite this, Ardabil was considered the spiritual capital of the Safavid kings and enjoyed a special

¹ Nasrollah Falsafi, *The Life of Shah Abbas I*, 1986, p. 108.

sacredness due to the fact that Sheikh Safi al-Din was buried there. Thus, the golden age of Ardabil culminated politically, religiously, and socially during Safavid period, but after that, Ardabil lost much of its political centrality and it was only satisfied with the religious importance and the shrine, which was constantly threatened and invaded by the Ottomans.

Tombs are treasures of motifs. The tombstones have not just been made to decorate the stones, and beyond their obvious form, they have various themes and meanings including these paintings originated from the beliefs of the people of the region or their themes have taken from everyday life.

The motifs of tombstones are divided into 5 groups: Herbal motif, animal motif, human motif, motif of tool and object, and abstract and geometric motif.

Animal motifs

The number of tombstones with animal motifs are extremely rare. These creatures, whose number is less than one hand, have often been designed and engraved on the south side of the stones. Animal motifs on these scenes include images of various animals such as horses, deer, birds and lions.

Lion

Lions in the culture and art of many nations symbolize courage, power, courage, pride and protection. "Lions may be regarded as the symbol of immortality in the endless time in connection with the god of times"³. In the ritual of Mithraism, the sun is the same as Mehr and the lion as guardian of the Mithra and has a high position. The motif of the lion and the sun represents the belief that the lion is seen as a guardian.

Bird

Birds are a sign of flying and ascension that in philosophy and mysticism indicates the ascension of the human soul and fly to the immaterial world and can be a reference to the ascension of the deceased soul. "The bird is a symbol of the spirit, and in ancient Persia, birds and hens were the symbol of clouds and the messenger of rain."²

Horse

This animal has a very valuable and praised motif in various historical periods as well as in mythology and ancient religious texts.

Manuscripts

There are few traces of such motifs. Only three pieces of tombstone are roughly decorated with an inimitable motif, except for a relatively healthy case, most of which are often confusing over time and their motif details are

² Sirous Parham, *Fars Tribal and Rural Achievements*, 1993, p. 154.

hardly recognizable so that sometimes a depicted human image, a member of Part of the body remains.³

In the thesis of the Islamic tombs and its cultural base in the northwest of Iran, "Azerbaijan" has come in the case of Kurestan Niar. During the investigations carried out on the tombstones of the Azerbaijan region, only two tombs in the Islamic tomb of Niar (eastern part of Ardabil county), two adjacent tombstones were found that were in different size and shape, but what is obvious was the motif of a man who was seen for the first time on the tombstone.

It is necessary to explain that Islam, with its order based on the denial of painting, caused the removal of sculpture from the agenda of Muslim artists, and in this regard, we rarely encounter the human body. Therefore, these two examples are very important. So in this respect, these two examples are very important for this reason.

Here we have to admit that our information about these two reliefs is very small, and the lack of any inscription on them adds to our aberrations. It is not exactly clear what the size of the rocks was at the beginning, and whether it was from the very beginning or has been carved or later created by the artist. What can be said about these reliefs is that they should be rooted in indigenous culture and arts, and they should be based on economic issues. The motifs, while being simple and primitive, show the artist's skill. However, in the studies carried out by the author, no trace of these tombstones was observed. However, no trace of this tombstone was found in the investigations carried out by the author (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Man sitting on a horse, Shahidgah's Cemetery of Sheikh Safiuddin Ardabili, Ardabil county⁴

³ Hassan Yousefi and Malakeh Golmaghanizade Asl, *Shiite Arts in Sheikh Safi-ad-din Ardabili's Historical and Cultural Collection*, 2010, p. 384.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

Geometric and abstract motifs

In the era of Islamic art and its appearance in the motif of tombstones, to avoid material reality and closeness to the divine truth, the motifs deviate from the natural state and become decorative and abstract. The circle is among geometric motifs. The circle is the most complete form and symbolically has had a special historical significance in all periods. "In addition to the concept of perfection, the circle is a symbol of the creation of the world as well as the concept of time. It is a symbol of the continuous and circular motion of the sky and it is associated with divinity, and the spirit has also been introduced"⁵.

The craftsmen of Islamic arts have always sought to illustrate the beauty of the eternal world, with an unbelievable contemplation of the material world. Hence, they have placed allegorical and abstract forms in their arts. "The symbol is something used or implied rather than something else. It seems that there should be the natural tendency to create symbols in the way we think and should reflect the deep psychological manifestation"⁶.

Triangle: The geometric motif of the triangle had also been used in the decoration of tombstones that is seen alongside the motif of the flower and the star (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 The motif of the triangle, Kalkhuran cemetery, Ardabil county

Altar (Mihrab)

Other simplified geometric patterns include the design of the altar, which is crystallized in the physical form of the tombs as well as the frames of the altar. The motif of the altar is a symbol of world architecture and is clearly reminiscent of a cave covered by the sky and supported by the earth, and probably dates back to pre-Islamic times, but, during the Islamic period and the Umayyad caliphs, this motif was rebuilt and it was given a special importance, especially in mosques. Some associate its existence with Mithraic temple, which was called Mithraism, and due to its importance, this motif has been used in the arts of painting, architecture, carpet, zilou, carving, etc.

⁵ Javad Pouyan and Mojgan Khalili, *Semiotics of the Motif of Tombstones in Dar al-Islam Cemetery of Shiraz*, 2010, P. 106.

⁶ James Hall, *The Culture of the Images of Symbols*, 2001, P. 14.

"The altar is in fact the place of manifestation and presence of God and his inhabitation is the infinite existence on earth. The altar in the Christian tradition and other religious traditions is the pure sanctuary of God and it is the place to be considered for God. There is another form of the altar in the Buddhist and Indian traditions. The Indian or Buddhist sanctuary, in addition to being a place of solitude with God, also has a kind of centrality, that is, in Indian and Buddhist teachings, the sanctuary is also the center of the spiritual world. It has emerged in the form of a mosque in the Islamic tradition. Altar is the place of manifestation of the light of God in the Islamic tradition. His mysterious presence is in the form of words that are both recited and sometimes written on the walls of the altar. In addition, the shape of the altar in Islamic mosques is in fact a kind of door and entrance to the other world".⁷

Altar motifs, in various forms, are among the most common tombstones of the Islamic period and are very prominent in tombstones that are more simple. Of course, they can be seen even in tombstones with exquisite ornaments, Islamic motifs, flowers, leaves and Shah Abbasi ornaments.

This style of marble tombstone can be seen in abundance in Shahidgah's cemetery of Sheikh Safi complex and with sedimentary stones in Kalkhuran cemetery. This decorative technique is very simple and fast, so it has become common in other cemeteries in Ardabil. The taste of the sculptor has caused the motif of the altar to be performed each time with a unique variety with other designs. Although this form is always a special form in the main structure, it has changed in various ways and engraved on these tombstones (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3 The motif of the altar, Shahidgah's cemetery of Sheikh Safiuddin Ardabili, Ardabil county

⁷ Nazari, Mostafa (2010). *Thesis Study of tombstones in the Seljuk period of Hamadan*, University of Tehran

Sun

Juan Eduardo Cirlot says: "In the genealogy of the Gods, sun (above all objects, in successive celestial dynasties) represents the moment when the heroic principle shines at its highest radiating point. The sun, with its youthful and childlike qualities in contrast to the father, which points to the heavens, is reminiscent of a hero. That is why the heroes promotes to the point of the rising sun and even become united with the sun. At a certain historical period and at some cultural levels, worshipping of sun has been the predominant religion, or cult. Mithraism is a heroic, courageous, creative and groundbreaking force, and the core of solar symbolism, and can itself form a complete religion. The death of the sun is necessarily a sign of belief in the resurrection, and in fact this death should not be considered a real death".⁸

James Hall writes: "Once upon a time in the sun, as a god of God, was a clear goddess, omniscient, source of fertility and life, and as a sunset, it was a symbol of death and resurrection".⁹ (Fig 4)

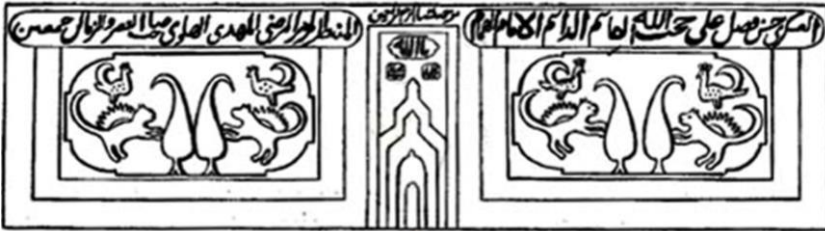


Fig. 4 The motif of the lion and the sun from the tombs of Sheikh Jabrail Kalakhuran, Ardabil county

Tashtab (water tub)

Tashtab is a title for carvings motifs on old tombs, often created in the form of small or large ponds in different geometric shapes. Tashtabs, as their name imply, are the place where water accumulates (element of life and light) and are decorative and semantic elements of graves carved in the heart of tombstones and presented in beautiful and various forms along with other motifs such as trees, fish and angels.

Tashtabs are not only related to Iran and the Islamic world, but they also benefit from a common global thinking and attitude in different civilizations, especially in the Orient, so that these types of motifs, with steel bed, existed in plenty and abundance in the Armenian tomb of Jews in Isfahan and even the Far East. They are both practical elements and have semantic features that, although sometimes seemingly simple in form and image, these mysterious forms are associated with a sacred and eternal realm that is gradually associated with beautiful concepts gradually decorated epistemologically. These basins, which had a special place in some of the

⁸ Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *Culture of Symbols*, 2010.

⁹ James Hall, *The Culture of the Images of Symbols*, 2001.

tombs of the past, were carved in the heart of the tomb stones and presented in beautiful and various geometric forms with elements such as fish and angel, and at the same time, they were closely connected with laver, basins and Saqqakhana. Basically, the Tashtab should be carved and engraved to a size that takes into account the volumetric capacity of the water, and therefore shapes that are accidentally or for other uses engraved on the tombstone should not be considered the same as the tashtab¹⁰. "In a word, we can say that water is the secret of all potential things, the origin and source of all possibilities of the world", says Eliadeh. Water, which is the indistinguishable and potential source of everything, and the basis of the manifestation of the universe and the reservoir of all germs, is the mystery of the first and primitive essence, in which all forms are born, and return to it by regression or by the occurrence of melting. It has been existed at the beginning, comes back at the end of every historical or cosmic period, it is always there, though it is never alone, because water is always the name and includes all potential forms, in their unbreakable unity. Water, in the creation of the universe, rituals, and iconography, apart from the structure of their cultural wholes, always have a role. It is prior to any form and function, and it is the foundation of each creation. Immersing in water is a mystery of return to the state of pre-creation, full rebirth, and new reproduction, because any immersion is equal to the dissolution and demise of the face and the redeployment of the uncertain state precedes existence, and the abandonment of water is the repetition of face manifestation in the creation of the cosmos.

The connection with water always implies revitalization, because on the one hand, following any dissolution, there is a new birth, and on the other hand, immersion increases the potential facility of life and creation. Water, through the rite of mystery teaching, inherited a new birth, and with the help of the magical rite, is healing, and with the blessing of the rites related to the dead, causes the resurrection after death, and with all its potential facilities, has become the key to life¹¹ (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 The motif of tashtab, Kalkhuran cemetery, Ardabil county

¹⁰ Shahmandi, Akbar and Shahidani, Shahab, *Enduring motifs*, 2013.

¹¹ Mircea Eliade, *A Treatise on the History of Religions*, 1997.

Plant motifs

Among the types of motifs, what can be inspired directly or indirectly from plants, flowers and trees can be called plant motifs. These motifs include mostly used motifs in Islamic art decoration. Inside the middle frame and the northern end, a beautiful stony vase has been carved, and arabesque, Khatai and Shah Abbasi flower designs come out of the vase beautifully and surrounds the space around the vase and the upper parts. The surface of the most of the tombstones has been decorated with paintings of flowers, vases, leaves, plants, convolvulus, arabesque, Shah Abbasi flowers, and tools of war (Fig 6).

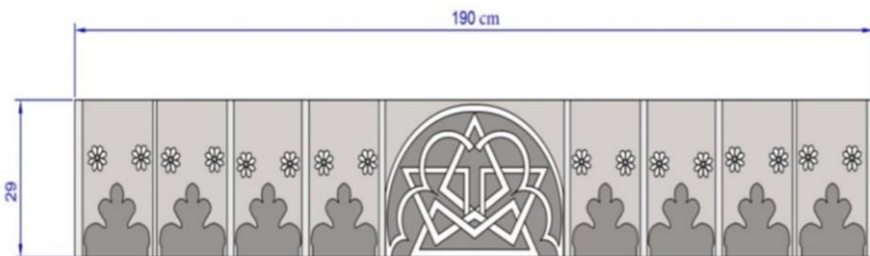


Fig. 6 Plant motifs in Kolkhuran cemetery, Ardabil county

Arabesque or spiral design

The main element in this design is spiral branches surrounded by flowers and leaves, and its branching ends in a designs. "Arabesque (Slimi) is a type of motif and painting, including complex lines, curves and rotational

arches drawn in decorations, inscriptions, and some other paintings. Arabesque has been sometimes used as main motif and other times along with other designs in Architectural, illumination of manuscripts and handicrafts arts¹². Flower and plant carving, in addition to filling the empty space of graves and considering its aesthetic aspect, after the integration of religion with people's lives, found other symbolic meanings and other special forms.

Tree

The tree is the most significant element that has been mentioned in religious beliefs both in pre-Islamic and post-Islamic scriptures. One of the most important abstract and symbolic motifs of the tree in Iranian art is the tree of life, whose crystallization in the tombstones can be considered as a cypress tree. In fact, in pre-Islamic Iranian mythology, cypress is the holiest tree. "In the world of human belief, despite immobility, the tree is considered a symbol of birth, growth, evolution and life in general. The tree is an example of life and a symbol of evolution and renewal"¹³. The tree of life represents a form of a belief or thought system that does not wear out in the passage of time, but continues its life in the realm of popular rituals and traditions. (Fig. 7)



Fig. 7 The motif of the tree of life in the southern surface of the tomb of Seyyed Hossein, son of Seyyed Ali, Sheikh Jabrail Kalkhuran tomb, Ardabil county (authors)

Vase

In most inscriptions, flowers and plants have been depicted in vases that can be considered as a symbol of the main shrine and place, and flowers and plants in it as the motif of the dead who have returned to God and were placed in the eternal vase.

"In the Egyptian pictorial system, the vase is a decisive symbol equal to the goddess of peace, immortality and contentment. The full vase is

¹² Eva Wilson, *Islamic Designs*, 2001, p. 5.

¹³ Fahimeh Ghani Nejad, *It is Legendary and Charm*, 2000, p. 46.

associated with the plant of life and a sign of fertility. Golden vase, full of white lily flowers, is a conventional sign of Madonna lily"¹⁴. Vase with a variety of natural flowers refers to the good qualities of the deceased and His heavenly position (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8 The motif of the vase with arabesque motifs, Shahidgah's cemetery of Sheikh Safiuddin Ardabili, Ardabil county

Qandil

The motif of Qandil has a special religious message. Perhaps one of the reasons for using it is the visualization of light, because using Qandil in holy places and using this motif in altars also refers to verse 35 of Surah Noor: *Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp — the lamp is in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star — lit from a blessed olive tree*"¹⁵.

Inscription

Most of the inscriptions are in Thuluth script and some are in the Kufic or Naskh script. Writings that contain Persian poems are usually in Nastaliq script. The study of Safavid tombstones shows the existence of verses and duas related to the official Shiite religion of the time.

In general, the array of most of the stones includes Quranic verses, prophetic hadiths, various duas, hymns of the names of the infallibles, great prayers and Persian poems in Nasta'liq, Kufi, Thuluth, and Naskh scripts in a prominent and concave manner. The most prominent tombstones of the Safavid era are calligraphy and inscription.

¹⁴ Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *op. cit.*, 2010.

¹⁵ Hassan Yousefi and Malakeh Golmaghanizade Asl, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

In today's world, paying attention to works carved on tombstones is a rich cultural expression in different historical periods, especially in Islamic period. In addition to traditional visual symbols, inscriptions have also played a major decorative role. Iranian designers also presented Islam in true Qur'anic words.

Duas, great salavat and the Shahada

Dua is the supplication or request of people from God and the manifestation of an inner experience of communication with God without any mediation. Nade Ali's dua and the mystic scriptures of Imam Ali (AS), as well as the word of Shahada are visible in most tombstones.

The script of Persian images

The use of Persian poetry and verses became widespread in the Safavid period. Most of them are related to the instability, futility, and unfaithfulness of worldly life and the condemnation of the material world. These inscriptions are carved in Nastaliq script on the surface of the tombstones with great skill and elegance among motifs and arabesque designs. Along with the spread of inscription decorations in other Islamic countries, in Iran, these arrays have been located at the top of the holiest and most beautiful architectural decoration, and have spread to various cultural periods with existing styles of that time. Inscriptions turn the human eye to another area of religious symbolism, and that is architectural decoration. In general, the effect of the inscriptions is a combination of beautiful writings, textures and colors, and their placement in a strip way may be aimed at designing larger decorations. Along with the diversity of roles, the completely different dimension of the inscription is their concept, with a number of Qur'anic verses which often emphasize the early performance of the buildings in which the inscriptions are inscribed.

The inscriptions of this historical collection, especially the mosaic faience inscriptions, has been manifested with circular or spiral arabesque straps, ornamental flowers and vases, and blossoms and leafy bushes. The color of the flowers and plants is different from the color of the inscriptions. Sample of these decorated inscription can be seen all around the dome of God and the inscription above the steel lattice window of the southern façade (Qaboos Qibla).

Some scholars consider arabesque designs as caressing poetry and music of the mystical soul of man. They believe that it is the rhythmic forms of arabesque that, with their spiral and circular movements, take the viewer from the Islamic starting point to another point which is the arabesque end. Others consider it as the transition from one state to another in the rhythmic rotation of arabesque and spiral circles and its left-to-right rotations. They

also interpret the mystic's steadfastness in a state of symmetry and facing each other as a combination of arabesques.¹⁶

Most of the inscriptions in Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili's complex reflect the Quranic verses and the connection with the Safavid way and principles. The Qur'anic texts of this complex are about self-purification, remembrance, sanctification of mosques, emphasis on reciting the Qur'an, educational instructions such as abandoning usury (riba), infaq, forgiveness, and the Ancillaries of the Faith, and the need to pay attention to human creation, the remembrance, praying of God, the promise of the punishment of the unbelievers and the promise of paradise to the pious (Fig.10).



Fig. 9 Persian poems carved on the tombstones of Shahidgah's cemetery of Sheikh Safiuddin Ardabili



Fig. 10 The Great Salavat has been carved on tombstones of the Shahidgah's cemetery of Sheikh Safiuddin Ardabili

Motifs of Tools and Objects

They are objects that a believer has used for religious ceremonies and rituals. This motif was a graph of the spiritual states and religious faith of the owner of the grave or the occupation of the deceased. The use of these objects in the Iranian religious community proves this. (Fig 11).

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 134.



Fig.11 The motif of mohr and tespih, Kalkhuran cemetery, Ardabil county

Sword

The sword has been a symbol of bravery, courage and warfare. Also in the Safavid period, due to the formalization of the Shiite religion and the special belief towards the Imams and especially Imam Ali, the sword can be regarded as a symbol of Zulfiqar of the Imam and the devotion to him.

The sword is the symbol of power, ability, justice, and sign of the gods, heroes and martyrs of Jesus, and because their number is countless, it is difficult to identify them. "The weapon taken from the defeated enemy, in the hands of the conqueror, was a symbol of his invincible strength and power"¹⁷. The sword basically consists of a blade and a grip and is therefore considered a symbol of unity, especially when it was given the shape of a cross in middle centuries.

Among many primitive peoples, the sword was highly respectful. The custom of the Scythians (Sakas) was to sacrifice several horses for the blade of a sword, which was considered the god of war, during the annual sacrificial rites. Similarly, the Romans believed that iron could kill demons because of its connection to Mars. This belief is still prevalent in Scotland.

Such is the drawing of the Scythians. It was customary for the Scythians to sacrifice a few horses for the blade of a sword that they considered God of War at the annual sacrifice. Similarly, the Romans believed that iron was able to destroy the soul of the demons by reason of the relationship with Mars.

In any case, its main symbolic meaning is wound and the power of wounding, and therefore it means freedom and strength. Schneider shows that in the culture of the megalith age, the sword was the counterpart of the spinning wheel, which is a symbol of feminine and the continuity of life. Swords and spinning wheels symbolize death and fertility, respectively. That is, two contrasting objects that form the basic symbolism of the mountain. The sword had been regarded as a symbol of physical destruction and spiritual will, as well as a symbol of the spirit and the word of God. It was especially common in the Middle Ages.¹⁸

¹⁷ James Hall, *op. cit.*, 2001.

¹⁸ Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *op. cit.*, 2010.

Perhaps the motif of the dagger shows the social status of the deceased, and given that in various books the cemetery of Shahidgah is considered the burial place of the martyrs of the *Battle of Chaldiran*, this issue is also documented and shows the warfare of a deceased person (Fig. 12)

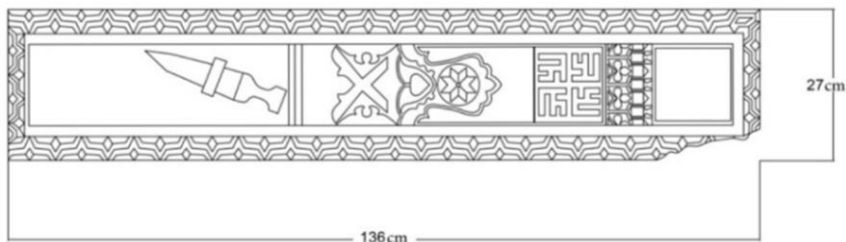


Fig.12 The motif of the sword, the Shahidgah's cemetery of the Sheikh Safiuddin Ardabili, Ardabil county

Conclusion

Death as an influential event has been the source of many human approaches to the world and its environment. All the rituals related to burying the dead, burning them or abandoning, and eating them have been influenced by animals and the creation of human from dust and return to dust has been one of the most influential thoughts in burying and building tombs and tombstones. On the other hand, the belief in life after death has transferred the idea of house architecture to graves and tombs. Tombstones are one of the most mysterious sources of the history of the past that are created to commemorate the dead. Tombstones of any region and country are influenced by the architecture and culture of that region. Introducing characters, verses and hadiths, poems and other historical information engraved on tombstones is a very good collection to study the history, culture and art of different regions and indicates the social status and beliefs of the people of each region that are now available to modern human. With the studies and surveys that have been done in the field of tombstones of Ardabil Safavid period, it can be stated that the predominant material of tombstones in different cemeteries of Ardabil often corresponds to the climate of that region. In all the cemeteries of Ardabil county and the tombstones in them, the place of Shiite religion can be seen well. One of the most important cemeteries in Ardabil is Shahidgah courtyard, which is located in Sheikh Safi's complex. The motifs used are often in the form of an altar frame. Then the motifs have been engraved around the altar on the tombstones. In many tombstones of the Islamic period of Ardabil province, scripts are written irregularly. Although Nastaliq or Naskh scripts have been skillfully used in a large number of tombstones, these scripts do not have generality and nobility over all tombstones. Raised tombstones in this province has been less used than other tombstones. In some of the tombstones, in addition to the main

surface of the tombstone, the other four sides of the stone were decorated with different motifs, which shows the importance of the deceased person. One of the most important motifs and decorations used in the tombstones of the Islamic period of Ardabil province are arabesque motifs, flowers and leaves, animal motifs and Quranic verses. Plant motifs often include intricate trees and plants, with tree trunks in the form of a vertical stem and several oblique branches on either side, and plant ornaments include arabesque, Khatai, and Shah Abbasi flowers inside decorative vases.

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