

TO STUDY THE TOMBSTONES OF THE ISLAMIC PERIOD OF AQALAR MUSEUM OF MARAGHEH (NORTHWEST OF IRAN)

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The issue of death and the world after it has been one of the basic human thoughts from the beginning of creation until today. This vision has a set of different manifestations in all societies. Tombs and tomb stones are one of the inseparable parts of this thought among all societies from ancient times to the present day, which has been used as a basic tool for its objective and spiritual manifestations. The decorative motifs of tombstones are a reflection of the cultural, social and religious conditions of a society, which is manifested in the form of geometric, symbolic, plant, epigraphic (inscription), and Muqarnas motifs. According to field studies, Maragheh city, located in north-western Iran, is one of the regions in which many tombstones of the Islamic period has remained. These tombstones can be studied methodically and scientifically from the perspective of archeological, art, anthropological and sociological studies. In recent years, a number of tombstones in the city have been collected inside the museum of lithography. This research, which is the first phase of studying the tombstones of the Islamic period of Maragheh, has studied the tombstones of this museum. In this research, the tombstones of this museum have been studied with a descriptive-

analytical approach in order to study the chronology of the tombstones and the motifs used in these tombstones. The results of the research show that the tombstones of this museum are generally from the 1495 – 1883 AD period. The motifs used in the tombstones also reflect the social status and religious beliefs of the deceased.

SATARNEZHAD, Saeid – HAJIZADEH BASTANI, Karim – AFKHAMI, Behrooz – SHAHBAZI SHIRAN, Habib. Náhrobky z islamského obdobia Múzea aqalar Maragheh (severozápad Iránu). In *Studia Historica Nitriensia*, 2021, roč. 25, č. 2, s. 561-576, ISSN 1338-7219, DOI: 10.17846/SHN.2021.25.2.561-576.

Problematika smrti a zobrazenia sveta po nej je jednou zo základných úvah, ktorá sa v ľudskej spoločnosti obajavuje v rôznych kontextoch až do súčasnosti. Táto vízia je reprezentovaná súborom rôznorodých prejavov. Hroby a náhrobné kamene sú jednou z neoddeliteľných súčastí tejto myšlienky naprieč spoločnosťami od staroveku až po súčasnosť. Výzdobné motívy náhrobných kameňov sú odrazom kultúrnych, sociálnych a náboženských pomerov spoločnosti, čo sa prejavuje v podobe geometrických, symbolických, rastlinných a epigrafických (nápisových) motívov. Mesto Maragheh ležiace na severozápade Iránu je jedným z regiónov, v ktorom sa zachovalo mnoho náhrobných kameňov z islamského obdobia. Tieto náhrobné kamene je možné študovať archeologickými, umeleckými, antropologickými a sociologickými metódami. V múzeu litografie sa v posledných rokoch v meste zhromaždilo množstvo náhrobných kameňov. Príspevok je založený na štúdiu náhrobných kameňov z islamského obdobia z miestneho múzea. V rámci výskumu boli náhrobky múzea študované deskriptívno-analytickým prístupom s cieľom študovať chronológiu náhrobov a motívov použitých na náhrobných kameňoch. Náhrobné kamene tohto múzea sú vo všeobecnosti z rokov 1495 – 1883. Motívy použité na náhrobných kameňoch odrážajú aj sociálne postavenie a náboženské presvedčenie zosnulého.

Kľúčové slová: mesto Maragheh; múzeum litografie; náhrobný kameň; symbolika; islamské obdobie;

Keywords: Maragheh city; Museum of lithography; tombstone; symbolism; Islamic period;

Introduction¹

Maragheh city is located in the geographical area of northwestern Iran.² This city has been selected as the capital of the Ilkhanid government during the Islamic period (14th to 15th century AD) and various relics have remained in this city from the Islamic period. Part of the relics of the Islamic period of this city includes ritual-religious relics such as tombs³, mosques⁴, shrines⁵ and Islamic cemeteries. The

¹ Article is based on Saeid Satarnezhad's doctoral dissertation entitled "Archaeological research of ritual-religious spaces of Azerbaijan, Iran, from the 12 century to the end of the 16 century AD (Case study of Maragheh country)" in University of Mohaghegh Ardabili.

² PARVIN, Samad – SATTARNEJAD, Saeid – HENDIANI, Elham. The victory of islam over the buddhist religion (reviewing the inscriptions of the shrine of imamzadeh mulla "ma'sum" of maragheh). In *Golden horde review*, 2020, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 636-646; SATTARNEJAD, Saeid – PARVIN, Samad – MASTALIZADEH, Maryam. Stylistic study of Gowijeh Qaleh's rock-cut tomb from Maragheh. In *Anastasis: Research in Medieval Culture and Art*, 2020, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 1-10.

³ SATTARNEZHAD, Saeid – PARVIN, Samad. Manifestation of Islamic Decorative Arts in the Architecture of Gonbad-e-Kabood and Gonbad-e-Ghaffariyeh. In *Anastasis. Research in Medieval Culture and Art*, 2019, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 1-18.

⁴ KHEIRI, Sirus. *Architecture and Decoration of Wooden Mosques in Azerbaijan*, Tabriz 2007.

⁵ SATTARNEJAD, Saeid – OMRANI, Behrooz – NASERI SOOMEH, Hossein – HOSSEININIA, Seyed Mehdi. Study and classification of ritual-religious rock architecture in Maragheh. In *Parseh Studies*, 2020, vol 4, no. 11, pp. 153-167.

cemeteries of the Islamic period of this region generally have tombstones after the Ilkhanid period (14th and 15th centuries), especially the Timurid (1500 AD) and the Safavid period (1500 AD). The tombstones of this region have been created in various forms and have various decorations of Islamic art.

Tombstone is one of the components of the funeral and as a tool that expresses the identity, the date of death of the deceased.⁶ At the same time, it reflects the historical, literary, artistic and cultural situation of the regions and it has a special place to convey many concepts of popular culture taken from the deepest religious and cultural thoughts common in society and depicted at the heart of sign (index, icon, symbol) on the stone. This phenomenon in each region and country is affected by the architecture and culture of that region and country.⁷ According to the given definitions, tombstones have a special place in the beliefs of human societies and are influenced by the human worldview of each region. The tombstones of the Islamic period have a variety of decorative decorations and appearance. They were a very good collection for the study of archeology, history, culture, art, politics of different regions and have provided generalities of social status and beliefs of people in each region for modern researchers. To study and research on the tombstones of the Maragheh's Museum of lithography, which has various decorations and symbols from the Islamic period, can be suitable in recognizing beliefs, convictions, religious tendencies, evolution of scripts, anthropology, etc. of Maragheh society in the 1495 – 1880 period.

Review of literature

The first reference to the tombstones of the Islamic period and the motifs used in it is related to the Qajar period (19 AD). During this period, the British tourist, James Morier, while visiting the city of Maragheh, pointed to the tomb stones motifs of this city:

"Maragheh is everywhere commanded by the hills which it and when seen from their summits exhibits a monotonous of mud houses without possessing one building of note attract a stranger s observation It is flanked to the N E by a burial place in which are many ancient stones with Cuffick upon some of which are carved bows and arrows swords shields indicating a warrior books and reading boards denoting mollah or learned man hammers trowels the tomb of a mason and so forth Upon one stone was the sculpture of a man on horseback a circumstance which alone would distinguish the tomb of a Shiah from that of a Sunni who looks upon the representation of the human figure as impious."⁸

Javad Moharrampour Alaviani introduced a number of tomb stones in some villages of this region in his master's thesis in archeology.⁹ However, no comprehensive studies have so far been conducted on the tombstones in the Maragheh's

⁶ SAĞIROĞLU ARSLAN, Aslı. "Taşlar Konuşur": Türk Mezar Taslarının Bicim Dili. Uluslararası Türkçe Edebiyat Kültür Eğitim (TEKE). In Dergisi, 2017, vol. 6, no. 3, p. 1924.

⁷ ZAHED, Somayeh. Comparative Study of Carved Patterns on the Tombstones of Sefid Chah Cemetery and Khalid Nabi Cemetery. Master Thesis, Al-Zahra University, unpublished, 2016, p. 4.

⁸ MORIER, James. A Second Journey Through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor, to Constantinople, Between the Year 1810 and 1816 (etc.) Austrian National Library, 1818, p. 292.

⁹ MOHARRAMPOUR ALAVIANI, Mehrdad. Study and study of tombstones in Maragheh city in the Islamic period, Master Thesis in Archeology, Azad University, Central Tehran Branch, 2003.

Museum of lithography and we do not have enough knowledge about the signs used in the tombstones and its periods. So, in the present study, these tombstones are addressed for the first time. Studying the tombstones of Maragheh can lead to understand the status of religious beliefs, anthropology and artistic manifestations of the people of Maragheh from the 1495 – 1880 period.

Geography of the studied area

Maragheh city is located in the geographical area of northwestern Iran in East Azarbaijan province, on the southern slope of Sahand mountain (Figure 1). Maragheh is one of the historical cities of Iran. Many relics and buildings of many different historical periods have remained in this city.¹⁰ After the arrival of Islam in this area, the people of Maragheh followed the religion of Islam. The religion of the most of Maragheh's inhabitants was Shafi'i madhhab before the 11th century 14th century AD and gradually with the expansion of the Safavid movement, the people of the area turned to Shiism. Today, the main religion of the people of Maragheh is Shiism.

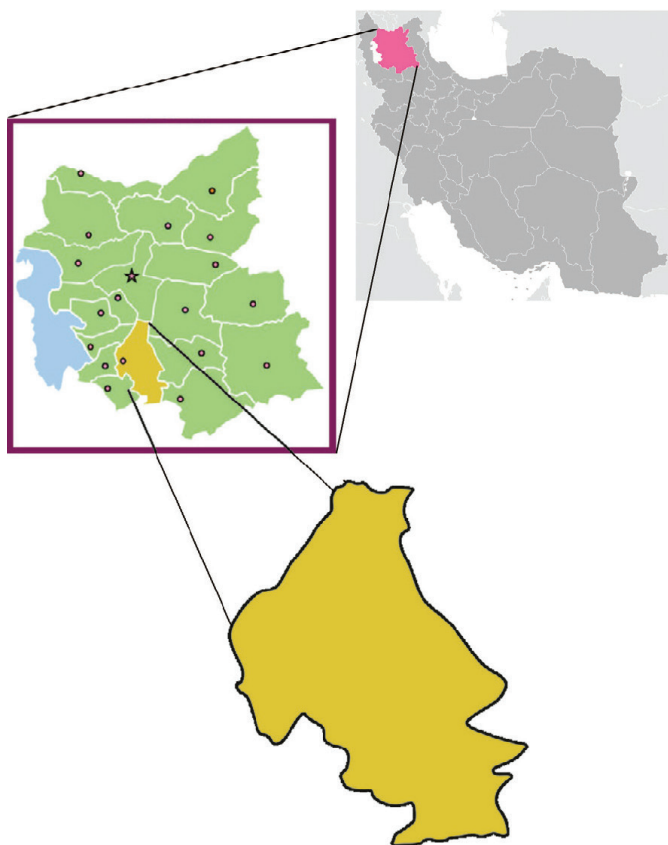


Figure 1. Geographical location of Maragheh city.¹¹

Aqalar Museum of Maragheh

The Aqalar Museum is located inside the city of Maragheh, in Rahahan Street, Aghalar Street Shahid Moghadam Boulevard (Figure 2, 2A). This building is located 350 meters west of Gonbade – Sorkh monument.¹² It is located inside Aqalar

¹⁰ SATTARNEJAD, Saeid – PARVIN, Samad – HENDIANI, Elham. Chronology of The Historical Context of Maragheh City Based on Archaeological Exploration and Historical Written Sources. In *Kratkiye Soobshcheniya Instituta Arkheologii*, 2020, vol. 260, p. 400.

¹¹ SATTARNEJAD, Saeid – PARVIN, Samad – HENDIANI, Elham. Chronology of The Historical Context of Maragheh City Based on Archaeological Exploration and Historical Written Sources. In *Kratkiye Soobshcheniya Instituta Arkheologii*, 2020, vol. 260, p. 399.

¹² SATTARNEZHAD, Saeid – PARVIN, Samad – HENDIANI, Elham. The Symbolism of Swastika in The Gonbade- E Sorkh Tomb. In *Codrul Cosminului*, 2020, vol. 26, no. 1, pp 7-18.

Park today. The museum is inside a historical building called „Mir Tomb“, which was built in 1796 by the order of Zell-e Soltan on the tomb of Mir Abdolfattah Mousavi. Mirfatah was one of the famous poets of Maragheh and two books named “Riyaz Al-Futuh” and “Saqinameh” belong to him.¹³ This building was completely renovated once in 1868. This building has four sides, each side of which is 16 meters. It has stone tools and a brick blind arch with a height of 5 meters. The Museum of lithography was established in 2002 in the city of Maragheh, on the site of the tomb of Aqalar, which has many marble tombs. This historical monument, as a remnant of the Zandieh period (19th century), shows the type and style of architecture of that important period. There are 64 tombs from Qajar (19th century) and Pahlavi (20th century) tombs in Aqalar tomb and 32 tombs belong to Timurid period. The tombs of the Qajar and Pahlavi periods are related to the religious and political figures of Maragheh at that time.



Figure 2 and 2A. Aqalar building; Museum of lithography. Photo provided by Saeid Satarneshad.

Tombstones of the Islamic period of Maragheh Museum

A total of 32 tombstones have been collected from the villages of Jeyran, Agh Kand, Amir inside Museum of lithography. 8 tombs stones are in the shape of cradle, 22 tomb stones are in the shape of Boxes, and 2 tombstones are in the shape of a ram. The material of these tombstones is generally limestone and sandstone. Apart from their appearance and placement, tombstones can be classified into the following types in terms of images and decorations used on tombs: a) epigraphic (inscription), b) Mihrab, c) plant, d) geometric, e) objects and tools, f) Muqarnas (Figure 3). Also, the roots of many of these themes go back to the pre-Islamic traditions of Iran including sun-like motif, Chalipa (cross), circles, plant motifs, etc., which can be seen on ceramics, metal wares and historical monuments of different regions of Iran.

¹³ BEYG BABAPOUR, Yousef. Tombs and Petroglyphs of Maragheh. Tehran, 2009, p. 68.

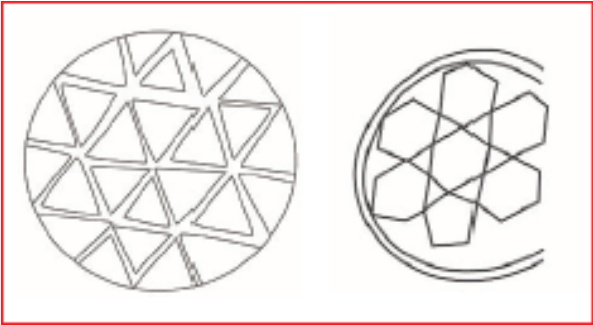
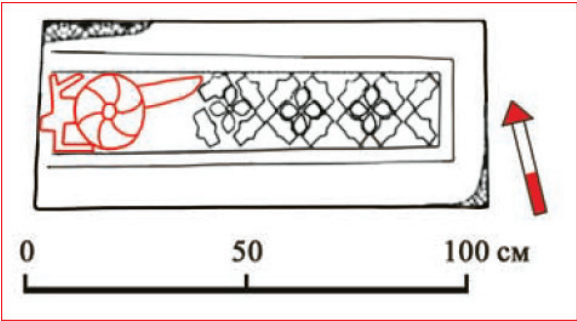
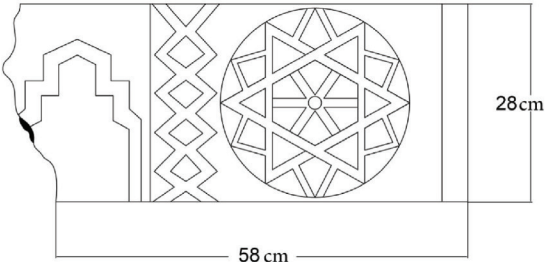
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Figure 3. Decorations of tombstones of the Islamic period of Iran.

Epigraph (inscription)

In terms of their written form and nature, inscriptions play a role in inducing concepts such as monotheism, worship, presence before God¹⁴. The inscriptions written on the tombstones have not only revealed beautiful examples of identification, but also like historical and written sources have played an important role in determining the religious, political and artistic situation of Iran in different periods¹⁵. The inscriptions used in the decoration of the tombstones of the Maragheh's Museum of lithography can be divided into inscriptions with religious and non-religious themes. In non-religious inscriptions, the name of the deceased, date of death, genealogy, etc. has been mentioned. The inscriptions have been arranged in a strip around the geometric and plant ornaments. Religious inscriptions include Quranic verses such as Ghafrullah, Allah Almighty, Yallah Baghi, Ela Rahmatullah and Persian poems such as:

ای تازه جوان در این مغاک خوش باد*** در صدر بهشت روح پاکت خوش باد

Oh newcomer, be happy in this Naghak ***** At the top of heaven, be happy
with your pure soul

این نوشتم تا بماند یادگار *** کس نداند حالم جز کردگار

I wrote this to be a memento ***** No one knows my mood except God

The meaning of these poems and verses generally refers to the passage of life, the shortness of human life, belief in the Hereafter, the high position of God, and so on. These inscriptions has been generally written in Thuluth script (Figure 4).

Plant motifs

One of the motifs seen in many tombstones is the lotus flower or water lily (Figure 5, 5A). This flower has been used in many buildings of ancient civilizations, including Iran, Mesopotamia and Egypt. In Iranian mythology, this flower is a symbol of the goddess Nahid, which occupies an important place in the rituals of ancient Iran. She is the goddess of water. This role has been used a lot in the reliefs of Persepolis. This type of motif has been used in many tombstones of the Islamic era of Iran including: Meshkin shahr, Ardabil, Azershahr, Ahar, Varzeqan and Tabriz.

Geometric motifs

At the beginning of Islam, depicting human beings, animals, and sculpting them was forbidden in order to fight against idolatry, and visual artists exerted their efforts to decorate them with abstract motifs. In the creation of such designs, a kind of symmetry is often seen. Geometric motifs and their derivatives can be named

¹⁴ KAZEMPOUR, Mehdi – MOHAMMADZADEH, Mehdi – SHOKRPOUR, Shahriyar. The Iconography Analysis of the Islamic Period Grave Stones in Ahar Museum. In Honar-Ha-Ye-Ziba: Honar-Ha-Ye-Tajassomi, 2020, vol. 25, p. 76.

¹⁵ ETTINGHAUSEN, Richard. ojhayeh derakhshane honare *iran*, translated by Rouin Pakbaz. Tehran 2000, p. 205.



Figure 4. A sample of the inscriptions used in the tombstones of the Aqalar Museum
Measure: length: 110cm, width: 30cm, height: 80 cm. Photo provided by Saeid Satarnezhad.



Figure 5. Samples of lotus flower used in the tombstones of the Aqalar Museum (length: 120cm, width: 27cm, height: 70 cm). Photo provided by Saeid Satarnezhad.



Figure 5 A. Samples of lotus flower used in the tombstones of the Aqalar Museum (length: 150cm, width: 25cm, height: 40 cm). Photo provided by Saeid Satarnezhad.

as the second type of Islamic art motifs. Islamic art designs are a type of traditional Iranian designs that, while having a variety of beauty, sophistication and applications, also used a series of principles and rules of art and mathematics. The principles of geometry including architecture and handicrafts are visible in all Islamic arts and are associated with cosmic and philosophical symbolic concepts. One of its applications is to put together and repeat simple patterns that can be expanded to infinity.¹⁶ It is certain that geometric motifs, in harmony and sense of unity with the spiritual themes of the inscriptions, show valuable spiritual messages that not only penetrate into the soul and thought of the viewer, but also create amazing combinations together that are very important from an aesthetic point of view.¹⁷ The motifs created on the tombstones of the Aqalar Museum are in the main forms of circle, square, triangle, rectangle, etc. (Figure 6). Orientalists have considered the intertwined polygonal motifs as a mystical expression of the Almighty beauty, which calls the soul to existing contemplation and attraction.¹⁸ Each of the symbols and numbers has specific concepts and symbols. For example, the sign of circle or the round mill, used as a symbol of the transition from the temporary world to the real world,¹⁹ has been widely created on tombstones. Geometric motifs, with a combination of Islamic and celestial sentences of inscriptions, show their value and excellence as much as possible. The arrangement of polygons, squares, and triangles in a circular rotation around an axis creates a Sama- like dance in which each component reveal its existence with the rest of

¹⁶ AZADBAKHT, Massoud. Study of ritual and symbolic motifs of the Islamic period from the arrival of the Ilkhanids to the rise of the Qajarids. Master Thesis in Archeology, Sistan and Baluchestan University. 2011, p. 92.

¹⁷ FROST, Maryam. Consistency of inscriptions and geometric patterns in the buildings of Isfahan in the Safavid era". In Two scientific quarterly journals of Islamic art studies, 2006, vol. 3, no. 5, p. 25.

¹⁸ MEHRDAD, Sogol. Study of Symbolic Patterns of Pottery of the Ilkhanid Period. Master Thesis in Islamic Art, Tarbiat Modares, 2013, p. 173.

¹⁹ AKTEMUR, Ali Murat. Posof Çeveresindeki Mezarlıklar Ve Mezar Tsalari. In The Journal of Academic Social Science Studies, 2017, vol. 64, p. 239.

the components, leaving a massive defect in itself without the other that, when combined, forms the coherent unite whole.²⁰ An example of the composition of the inscription in the form of geometry can be seen in some of the tombstones of Shahidgah in Ardabil.



Figure 6. An example of geometric motifs used in the tombstones of the Aqalar Museum (length: 105cm, width: 25cm, height: 75 cm). Photo provided by Saeid Satarnezhad.

Mihrab

In Islamic thought, Mihrab indicates the direction of the qibla (Kaaba). Accordingly, in religious buildings, especially mosques, in southern wall, a semicircular niche has been created, which is called an mihrab. It can be considered as the symbolic gate of heaven where all thoughts are connected to God. In Islamic thought, the human soul is connected with mihrab of the Hereafter and mihrab is presented as heaven.²¹ Mihrabs have been created with different designs on the tombstones of the Aqalar Museum in Maragheh. Some of them have been made in a simple way and some in the form of Muqarnas, which, in this respect, are very similar to the mihrab of the entrance gate of Gonbade Ghaffariyeh (Fig-

²⁰ AZADBAKHT, Massoud. Study of ritual and symbolic motifs of the Islamic period from the arrival of the Ilkhanids to the rise of the Qajarids. Master Thesis in Archeology, Sistan and Baluchestan University. 2011, p. 93.

²¹ PARVIN, Samad – AFKHAMI, Behrouz – HENDIANI, Elham. Investigating and Analyzing the Motifs of The Tombstones of The Ounar Cemetery. In *Kratkiye soobshcheniya Instituta arkheologii*, 2020, vol. 259, pp. 398-409.

ure 7). Samples of the motif of mihrab has remained in the buildings of Gonbade Sorkh in Maragheh²², Onar in Meshginshahr²³, Ahar Museum²⁴, Shahidgah in Ardebil etc.

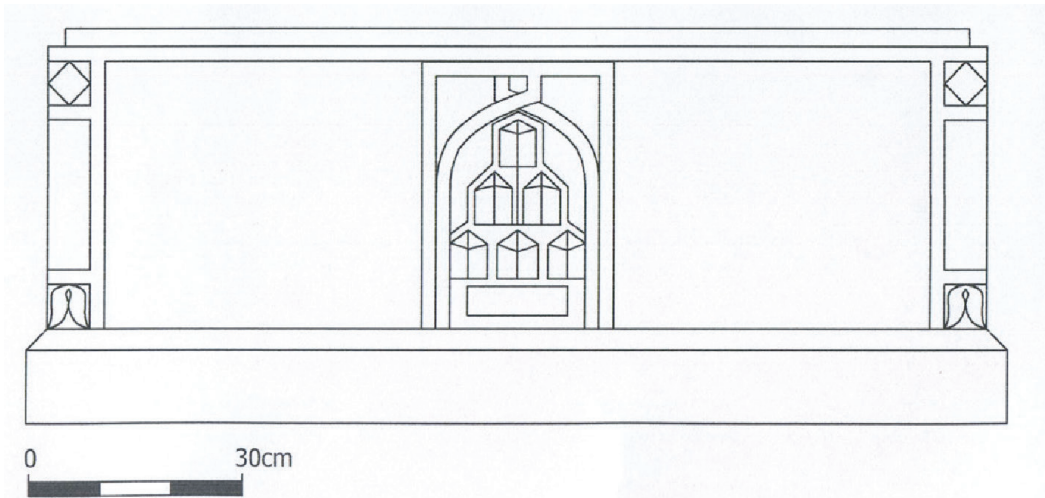


Figure 7. Mihrab used in the tombstones of the Aqalar Museum, provided by Saeid Satarnezhad.

Muqarnas (Honeycomb)

Muqarnas is one of the decorative elements of architecture that plays an important role in beautifying Iranian buildings with different uses. In the historical monuments of Maragheh city, honeycomb started from Gonbade Sorkh (1163 AD) and is still used to decorate buildings. Honeycomb or muqarnas has been used on a number of tombstones in the Museum of lithography. The use of Muqarnas on tombstones can be considered a symbol of plurality in unity and unity in plurality. This decorative element, while consisting of a multifaceted set of motifs and space, is perceived as a unique element. The use of muqarnas in tombstones can be a symbol of the gate and entrance of paradise, like mihrab motif.²⁵ Muqarnas has been created in the body of tombstones of the Aqalar Museum. The margins of the muqarnas has been decorated with plants and some Quranic verses (Figure 8). Many tombstones and religious buildings in Iran, such as Ghaffariyeh and

²² SATTARNEZHAD, Saeid – PARVIN, Samad – HENDIANI, Elham. The Symbology of Swastika in The Gonbade- E Sorkh Tomb. In Codrul Cosminului, 2020, vol. 26, no. 1, p. 16.

²³ PARVIN, Samad – AFKHAMI, Behrouz – HENDIANI, Elham. Investigating and Analyzing the Motifs of the Tombstones of the Onar Cemetery. In Kratiye soobshcheniya Instituta arkhologii, 2020, vol. 259, pp. 398-409.

²⁴ KAZEMPOUR, Mehdi – MOHAMMADZADEH, Mehdi – SHOKRPOUR, Shahriyar. The Iconography Analysis of the Islamic Period Grave Stones in Ahar Museum, Honar – Ha – Ye – Ziba-Honar-Ha-Ye-Tajassomi 2020, vol. 25, pp. 71-86.

²⁵ PARVIN – AFKHAMI – HENDIANI, pp. 398-409.

Kaboud tombs in Maragheh²⁶, tombstones of Ahar Museum²⁷, Onar Meshkin-shahr²⁸ and etc. have been remained.



Figure 8. Muqarnas created in the tombstones of the Aqalar Museum (length: 110cm, width: 30cm, height: 70 cm). Photo provided by Saeid Satarnezhad.

Weapons

In pre-Islamic Iranian burial traditions, objects were placed inside the graves appropriate to the social status of the deceased. With the advent of Islam, changes were made in the burial traditions according to which any placing of objects inside the grave was forbidden. So, in order to show the profession and social status of the deceased inside the grave, some motifs were created that was informative and indicated the spiritual sense or occupation of the deceased, such as: the sword, which had been considered as a symbol of the spirit and the word

²⁶ SATTARNEZHAD, Saeid – PARVIN, Samad. Manifestation of Islamic Decorative Arts in the Architecture of Gonbad-e-Kabood and Gonbad-e-Ghaffariyeh. In Anastasis. Research in Medieval Culture and Art, 2019, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 1-18.

²⁷ KAZEMPOUR, Mehdi – MOHAMMADZADEH, Mehdi – SHOKRPOUR, Shahriyar. The Iconography Analysis of the Islamic Period Grave Stones in Ahar Museum. In Honar-Ha-Ye-Ziba: Honar-Ha-Ye-Tajassomi, 2020, vol. 25, p. 74.

²⁸ PARVIN, Samad – AFKHAM, Behrouz – HENDIANI, Elham. Investigating and Analyzing The Motifs of The Tombstones of The Onar Cemetery. In Kratkiye soobshcheniya Instituta arkheologii, 2020, vol. 259, p. 402.

of God and had been especially common in the Middle Ages.²⁹ At the same time, the sword can be considered as the social status of the deceased. Among the tools used in the tombstones of the Aqalar Museum in Maragheh are daggers, swords, bows, arrows and knives (Figure 9).

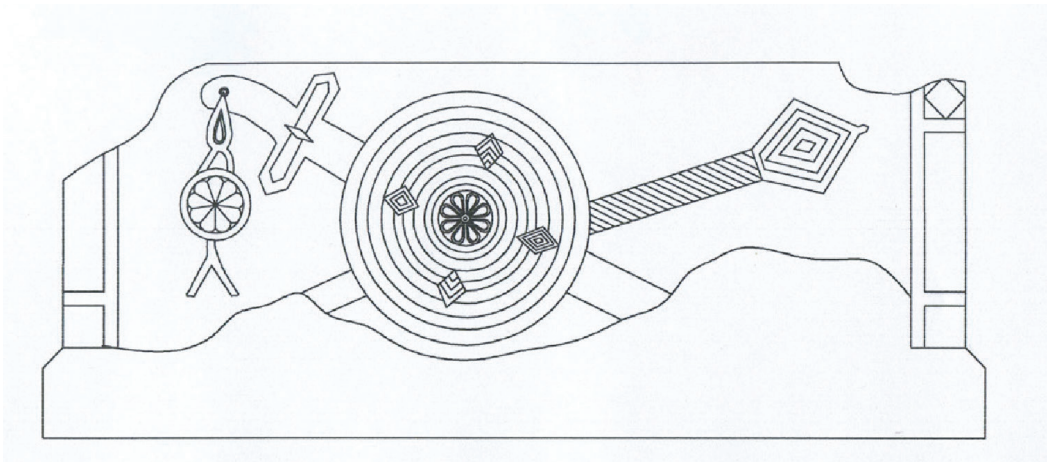


Figure 9. Motifs of tools used in the tombstones of the Aqalar Museum: length: 140cm, width: 32cm, height: 80 cm. Photo provided by Saeid Satarnezhad.

²⁹ EDUARDO SERLO, Juan. *Culture of Symbols*. translated by Mehrangiz Ouhadi, Tehran. 2010, p. 45.; SAMARI, Maryam – REZALOU, Reza. *Study and Classification of Tombstones of the Safavid Period (Ardabil City)*. In *Anastasis. Research in Medieval Culture and Art*, 2020, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 77-92.

Life accessories

The motif of two vessels has been created in one of the tombstones of the Aqalar Museum. These vessels look like pitchers. In the society of Qajar era in Maragheh (19th century AD), there were drinking vessels inside the houses. These vessels have been used more for washing hands and face for ablution (prayer) (Figure 10).



Figure 10. The motif of drinking vessel created on the tombstone
length: 95cm, width: 23cm, height: 70 cm. Photo provided by Saeid Satarnezhad.

Conclusion

In this article, the tombstones of the Islamic period of the Museum of lithography (Aqalar Tomb) were studied, based on which 32 tombstones from different periods were examined. These tombstones are typologically divided into different types such as standing stone, rectangular cube, cradle like and ram-shaped tombstones. These tombstones include plant motifs, tools and geometry motifs, honeycomb (muqarnas), and inscriptions. The study of tombstone decorations shows a close connection with the head in the tomb buildings of the region, such as Gonbad Ghaffariyeh, Molla Rostam Mosque. Tombstone designers seem to have adapted most of the artistic elements from their surroundings, especially religious buildings. The tombstones completely reflect the beliefs of the Islamic society about the Hereafter and the oneness of God. In the Muslim belief, eternal life is only for God, and the rest of the human beings in this world are mortal. All Quranic verses and Persian poems refer to such concepts. Other results of this study show that these tombstones are more related to Shiite beliefs, especially after the Timurid period. In general, the study of the tombstone decorations of the Aqalar Museum with the tombstones of other regions of northwestern Iran shows a kind of connection and similarity between them. Therefore, the most important factor in the similarity of designs and decorations should be considered in the spread of Shiism in the region.

Explanation of terms

The Shafi'i madhhab: The Shafi'i madhhab is one of the four major traditional schools of Islamic law in branch of Sunni Islam.

Safavid dynasty: The kings of this dynasty ruled in Iran from 1501 to 1736 AD.

Thuluth script: It is one of the common scripts in the Islamic world.

Ghaffariyeh Dome: It is one of the buildings of the Ilkhanid period (rule of the Mongol Ilkhanids) (13th century) in Iran.

Onar Cemetery: one of the cemeteries of the Islamic era in the northwestern region of Iran.

Persepolis: The most famous architectural building from the Achaemenid Empire (550 BC to 330 BC), which is located in Fars province (southern Iran).

Zand dynasty: This dynasty ruled in Iran between 1750 and 1795 AD.

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