

The Symbolology of Tile Patterns in Khan's Historical Bathhouse

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Introduction

Humans employ symbols to communicate and express their thoughts. Symbols permeate every aspect of human existence to the extent that no facet of human life has been devoid of symbolism since symbols play an essential role in communication. To decipher symbols and emblems an understanding of the linguistic framework and cultural context of each society is crucial. Khan's Hammam (bathhouse) in Kashan is a building that is of general benefit to the public. Studying the tilework designs in Khan's Hammam can not only reveal its artistic merits but also shed light on the symbolism employed and on the attention paid to it by both the patrons and the ordinary people along socio-linguistic frames, religion also plays a pivotal role in reinforcing symbolism during the Islamic era in Iran. Due to the constraints it faced, Shi'ism sought to express its beliefs in a symbolic and enigmatic manner. The range of symbolism in Iran's Islamic period held profound and intricate meanings for Shi'ites.

Materials and Methods

Khan's Hammam, located on the way to Kashan's Bazaar, is a building that is of general benefit to the public. An examination of the patterns and symbols employed in the bathhouse can not only reveal the symbols present in the patterns but also shed light on the reasons for their use in the bathhouse's tiles. The research methodology involves both field study and library research. The research approach is descriptive-analytical. The goal of this study is to examine and classify the patterns on Khan's Hammam's tiles based on their themes and to identify the symbols used in them. The research questions are: which symbols have been used in the patterns on the tiles in Khan's Hammam? What are the characteristics of the patterns on the tiles in Khan's

Hamman? Which themes do they convey? The findings of this study will highlight the unique position of each decorative element, including colors, patterns, forms in the creation of symbols and the generation of meaning in a building of general benefits to the public.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this research has shown that in the tiling of the entrance hall and vestibule (originally having eight sides, called Hashti) and the changing room of the bathroom (called Sarbineh), motifs and shapes have been used that are symbolically significant. Reliance of man on symbols caused symbolism to become intertwined with mysticism during the Islamic era and to be widely employed in religious structures, public places with general benefits, as well as other places. Such symbolism reflect the cultural context of the time. This study began by introducing the decorative tile works in Khan's Hammam. Subsequently, it delved into an analysis of the patterns on each tile, elucidating the rationale behind their selection and the symbolism they embodied. According to the findings of this research, the tiling motifs of Khan's Hammam included geometric shapes, plants, animals, and human motifs such as circle, Venus (called "Nahid" in Persian), the sun, hexagons, Arabesque (called slimi) motifs, flowers and bushes (called Gol-O-Boteh), bird-and-flower symbols, and depictions of men and women. In other words, the tile work artists drew upon a diverse array of patterns. The overall symbolism employed reflected the unity of existence, the reverence for the Heaven and the divine throne as well as an interest in stars and astronomy.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Islamic-era artists sought to showcase their artistic prowess while simultaneously fulfilling their mission to convey meaning, foster creativity, and employ symbolism. In other words, the purpose of ornamentation during the Islamic era extended beyond mere visual appeal to encompass the expression of profound concepts such as order, the unity of existence, and divinity, all of which are embodied in the patterns adorning structures of the period. Despite the numerous alterations it has undergone, Khan's Hammam in Kashan continues to exemplify the astute utilization of symbols and emblems, as a cultural medium for transmitting messages across generations. Upon careful reflection, it becomes evident that the tile-work patterns in Khan's Hammam are not merely decorative but possess deep-seated meanings and significance.

Keywords: Kashan Bazaar, Khan's Hammam, symbolism of patterns, seven-color tiles.