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**EXAMINING THE ARCHITECTURAL SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE TEMPLES
OF ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS: A STRATEGY TO FOLLOWERS SOLIDARITY
FROM WORLDLY BODY TO SPIRITUAL UNITY OF RELIGIONS**

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ABSTRACT

Examining the temples and shrines of Abrahamic religions which are Islam, Christianity, and Judaism reveals that the architecture of these places is highly similar. The existence of dome, adytum, and harem is good evidence for this similarity. The present study is functional and we have used from the method of data gathering.

At the end of this study samples of the shrines in the three religions are examined and the similarities are highlighted, according to which it is concluded that there are spiritual similarities between these religions as well. It is notable that this relationship is investigated based on meaningful relationships in architecture which is proved in the study.

Keywords: Religions, Temples, Architectural frame, Similarity, Understanding

INTRODUCTION

In religious thinking, not only diversification of nations and languages is accepted, but also it is emphasized that the philosophy of this

diversity is to know each other by means of relationship and conversation. The best

evidence is seen in verse 13, Alhojorat Sura, Holy Quran:

“O men, we created you from a male and female, and formed you into nations and tribes that you may recognize each other. He who has more integrity has indeed greater honor with God. Surely God is all-knowing and well informed.” [1]

In verse 22 of Alroom Sura, this diversification is considered of divine symbols. In the words of the Holy Prophet, Muhammad (PBH), after the triumph in Mecca, not only the varieties in human beings is accepted, but also the discrimination roots are dried in a very beautiful way: “Surely all of mankind – from the time of Adam until our time – are like the teeth of a comb (all equal to one another) and there is no greatness for an `Arab over a non-`Arab and no greatness for a red-skinned person over a black-skinned person, except due to one’s consciousness of Allah.” [1]

In short, if recognizing various nations, tribes, races and languages is necessary, in religious view the philosophy of diversification is Letatrafou (to know), which is a more strong base for encouraging to converse. Because it is possible that the diversification of people is accepted on the base that as people are different, they should be in war and struggle; while in Islamic view variety of people is the

philosophy of knowing each other emphasizing that all human beings in any skin color or race are equal. This view is a barrier to racism and pride, thus restricts the conflict between nations and the acceptance of difference, with emphasize on equality, is a strong basis for dialogue among civilizations. [1]

If we enclose the discussion of guidance and the principle of inviting Muslims with other previous principles including there is no compulsion in matter of faith (Albaqara, 256), those who listen to the words and then follow the best it contains, are the ones who have been guided by God, and are men of wisdom (Alzomar, 18), people who follow their fathers blindly are blamed in Quran (Albaqara, 170), and many of the people will be sent to Hell because of not applying rational power (Alaraf, 179,...), we conclude that:

1. It is necessary to invite others to conversation.
2. We should not expect people welcome our invitation by weak discussion. Therefore it is necessary to know the expression, logic and rationales of others. Also we should present stronger and better discussion for our words to be accepted.

3. It is only in interaction and conversation with others that a group or a school can claim well words and complete religion; since already every school and group claims completeness.
4. In guiding, conversation is different; elites and logical should be approached by wisdom, while common people are addressed through sermons, and partials through struggle (in a correct way), in a way that there is no contempt.
5. The fact that all human beings should be invited to Islam is a human and universal message rather than ethnic and racial. For this we don't see "o Arab people", but we see "o you Human" in the Holy Quran, and even it is said: "this is a reminder for all the peoples of the world". (Altakvir, 27)
6. If human beings are created in nations and tribes (Alhojorat, 13) and religion is for humanity, the guidance of these tribes and nations is due to conversation and emotional and lingual interaction on one hand, and using logic, discussion and language on the other hand. Therefore anyone who accepts guidance basis, he should also accept to interact with others.

So it is obvious that the principle of dialogue between religions is highly emphasized. Now we are going to investigate the frame similarities between the shrines of the three religions, Islam, Christianity and Judaism and get to similarities in spirit and beliefs of these religions; as professor Sayed Hasan Nasr and Shwan discuss that: here we talk about Mighty Unity. On this basis, in spite of different forms, all religions come from a unit Divine fact. This unity is not in appearance or form of the religions, but rather in their origin and reality. Complete unity means that people while believing and acting to their own religion, acknowledge other religions and respect them. Accordingly in the framework of each religion there are two things that must be discriminated: external Shariah (believing mass) and internal Tariqah (religion mystics). Religions, while different and diverse in external Shariah, are unit in internal Tariqah. Religions are convergent to God and more or less divergent of less than God. The unity of religions is created in the level of Almighty order of God, so it is called Mighty Unity (the basis of Shwan and Sayed Hasan Nasrollah). [1]

The following **Table 1** shows the belief similarities of the three religions:

Table1: Similarities and differences between Abrahamic religions (Reference: the authors[2])

No	feature	Judaism	Christianity	Islam
1	Believing in oneness of God	*	*	*
2	Believing in Triad	-	*	-
3	Special Name for God	*	-	*
4	Sanctity of God's name	*	*	*
5	Holy Book	*	*	*
6	Transcendence of God in Holy Book	*	*	*
7	Believe in Akhirah	*	*	*
8	Believe in revelation from God	*	*	*
9	Believing in Prophet's Innocence	-	*	*
10	Believing that their prophet is the last prophet	*	*	*
11	Believe in messengers before their prophet	*	*	*
12	Experiencing 3 periods of prophet life	*	-	*
13	Showing exclusive salvation	*	*	*
14	Being proud of following Holy Abraham	*	*	*
15	Integrity of political and religious leadership	*	*	*
16	propagation	-	*	*
17	Accept converters	*	*	*
18	Special meaning for Nabi(Prophet) and Rasool(Apostle)	-	-	*
19	Holy Book is Human words	*	*	-
20	Observing miracle from their Prophet	*	*	*
21	Universal prophesy of Prophet	-	-	*
22	Priests (medium of Divine Grace)	*	*	-
23	Rejecting uncommon predicates	*	*	*
24	Heresy order	-	*	*
25	Punishment for sinners and atheists	*	*	*
26	Popular followers follow special followers	*	*	*
27	Demission of world	*	*	*
28	Asking people to observe ethics	*	*	*
29	Qibla	*	*	*
30	sacred	*	*	*
31	public worship ceremonies	*	*	*
32	individual worship ceremonies	-	-	*
33	Believe in the other world gratuity and punishment	*	*	*
34	Holy places	*	*	*
35	Abomination of translating the Holy Book	*	*	*
36	Holy language	*	*	*
37	Translating, interpreting and anagogy	*	*	*
38	Horrible news about Apocalypse	*	*	*
39	Promised savior	*	*	*
40	Existence of antichrist	*	*	*
41	Raise of fake saviors	*	*	*

Investigating the shrines in religions

1. Shrines in Zoroastrian religion:



Figure1.1 Nisasar penthouse (chahartaghi), reference: decoding symbols and constellations in the pre-Islamic Iranian architecture

Zoroastrian shrines are polar and oriented in shape. That is the existence of firebox in the centre of all the Zoroastrian shrines gives them centralized orientation. Since Zoroastrians pray toward light or any other source of light (in the absence of sun light), an outlet to identify the light orientation is necessary. Altars are built on high lands or

separated from the ground by a few stairs. Padyab (water pool) is usually seen in altars because some parts of the body which are not covered must be washed. Paintings of Zoroaster face and Farvahar symbol is seen in shrines. There are not wonderful decorations in the architecture of altars and the place is simply decorated [3].

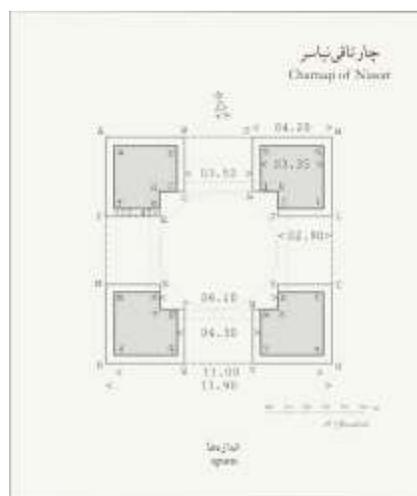


Figure 2.1, plan of Niasar penthouse (Chahartaghi), reference: decoding symbols and constellations in the pre-Islamic Iranian architecture

In order to get more knowledge about the altar we examine the construction. [3]

Aurter Pope writes:

The plan and structure of Sasanian altars were such simple and awesome that influenced the west and east highly. In Buda regions, fire temples were stimulated to Buda fire temples and in west the western churches were so much similar to fire temples that Christians and Zoroastrians used an individual building alternatively. The adoption of Sasanian architecture by the Christians caused it to be repeated in a set of churches in Armenia and spread in Balkan. A fire temple is included of three elements: a large square base with four legs, a smaller concentric square on the top of this base and a dome on this second square. Stucco was the main garnishment and a thick coating covered rough walls.[4]

Ali Akbar Sarafranz considers the structure of the fire temples in three groups:

1. Penthouse element in Zoroastrian shrines:

The basis of the fire temples is a square shaped space which has four high pillars on the four corners which are connected together by an arc like the penthouse (chahartaghi) in Kazeroun, Jareh, Khayrabad, Niasar, Khark Island, Natanz, and Tange Chak Chak.

2. Cross shape in Zoroastrian shrines:

Its base is approximately the same as square shaped which is applied for more strength of the base of pillars like Abdolabad in Bam, Khoramdasht in Kashan, Baze Hour in Khorasan.

3. Penthouses with porch:

The same as penthouse or cross with a porch or corridor around it for vendor, like Azargoshasb, Azar Barzin Mehr, Ghasre Shirin, Farashband.

2. Investigating the shrines in Judaism

Synagogue is a gathering place in Judaism, A place to be present. Synagogue that is House of God must be free from any contamination and as pure and clean as possible, constructed with an excellent plan. In terms of the relationship of the contexture of the place, it is better that the housed built around synagogue not to be higher than it. The spaces in the architecture of synagogue are Hkhal, Tva, and Azart Hnashim.[3]

1. Hkhal element in Judaism shrines:

In the western side of the synagogue, there is a closet or cupboard called Hkhal in which some parts of the Holy Torah written by hand on the animal skin and put into a special cylindrical shell, are kept. It can be said that Hkhal in synagogue is similar to Mehrab in Mosques. The orientation of Qibla toward west is because Jerusalem is located on the

west of Iran. Hkhal may be a closet or a small room on the west side.

2. Tva element in Judaism shrines

In the central part is the main saloon which is a place higher than ground and liturgists and orators do their task in this part.[3]

3. Azart Hnashim in Judaism shrines



Figure 3.1, left: synagogue, Judaism shrine, reference: decoding symbols and constellations in the pre-Islamic Iranian architecture

Figure 4.1, right: synagogue, Judaism shrine, reference: the same

3 Investigating the shrines in Christianity

Regarding the long way that church has gone since its emergence so far and regarding the changes it has seen in each era of Christianity, we address briefly the church structure in each of the periods so that we can reach some common principles in construction of church.

The architecture of the beginning of Christianity can be divided to two periods, before Constantine and after Constantine. The former period is called the prosecution period and the latter is called recognition time. In the

Is the place for women which is located higher than the place for men and is connected to Tva by networks in order to listen to orator. One of the principles in design of Judaism shrines is simplicity. The main pivot in designing a shrine is Ark of the Covenant which is oriented toward Jerusalem.[3]

first period, due to the massacre of Christians by the Romans, all the artistic works in this period have been created in undergrounds and hideouts. The most significant works of this period are the mausoleum crypts. In the second period Christian architecture was highly influenced by the Roman architecture. In such a society the Christian church gets the shape structure of the Roman Basilicas. Generally two main plans can be pointed in analyzing church architecture:

1. Basilica plan which is known as church with longitude plan.
2. Circular plan which has been spread in an imitation of Roman plans in constructing churches.[3]

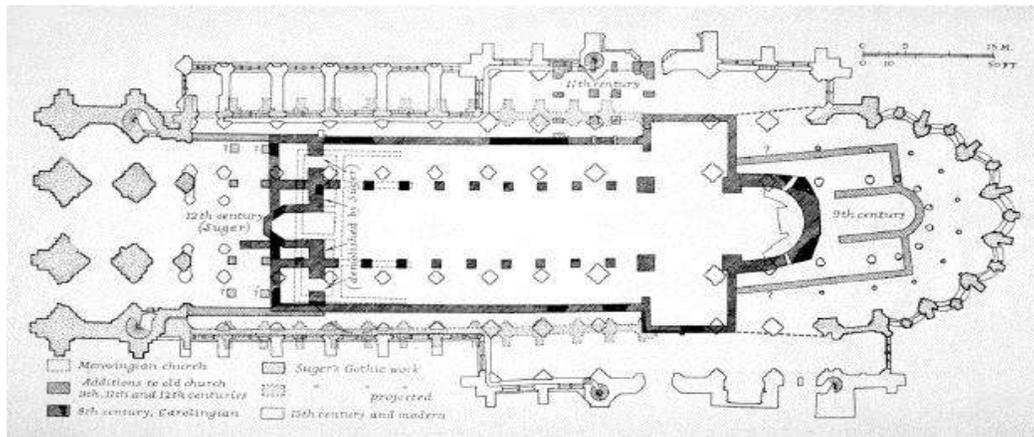


Figure 5.1, an example of the plan of a church in Christianity, reference: decoding symbols and constellations in the pre-Islamic Iranian architecture

The cryptograms of Christian shrines are based on the similarity between the temple and the body of Christ. Also in rituals of worship and ceremonies of church Christ has been simulated to invincible sun and the orientation of altar to east shows this similarity. Some of the principles of designing churches are:

- Churches are oriented toward east, toward the sunrise.
- In the architecture of churches the basic form of cross is surrounded in a circle.

- In the architecture of churches geometry is a basic element which acts as a cryptic presentation of The Divine plan.
- The space of church is either dark or if there is light, it comes from a side which adds to the richness of the structure like Gothic cathedral in which color glosses have given a different flavor to the inside space. The important element in church altar is cross in Presbyterian Church and the image of Christ in other churches.[3]



Figure 6.1, Light church, reference: decoding symbols and constellations in the pre-Islamic Iranian architecture

4 investigating shrines in Islam

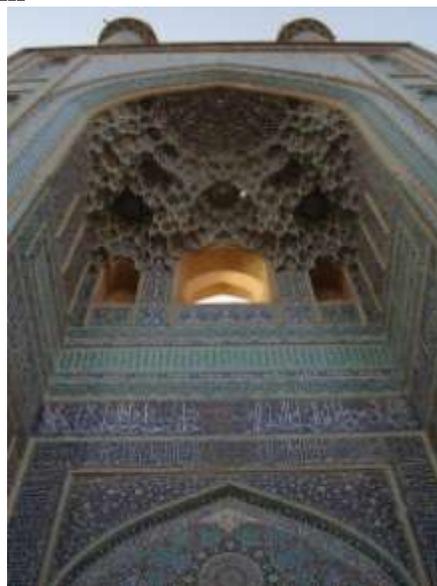


Figure 7.1, entrance porch of Jame Masjid in Yazd, reference: the author

Islamic mosques are displays of visual grace and typical of incorporation and integration of symbolic forms with deep religious beliefs. Pattern forms and symbolic relationships are seen apparently in all sides and faces of the

mosques. Mosques have been the first element of urban buildings that were constructed on the neighborhood level. Some mosques have gone through various changes during different periods. The structure of

mosques is often created from the combination of geometric shapes located by each other based on the principle of proximity. The main spaces have often certain geometric shapes (square and rectangular) and some parts of the building take non-geometric and amorphous forms due to necessity of connection to adjacent bodies or conformity with the crossing line. Mosques are necessarily oriented toward Qibla.[5] In major and important mosques the whole construction of the mosque is oriented toward Qibla. Pool is one element often seen in the open space inside the yard of the mosques. This is because of the significance of water in the free space of the mosques. The entrance of mosque is the beginning of an invitation. [5]

It introduces itself with a special identity, sometimes by a volume dent, sometimes by a different tile color and decoration, and sometimes by a very high façade that is inviting. Almost the majority of mosques have elements that are from the main components of mosque architecture which are considered as follow:

1. Porch element

Porch is a dented space or a large platform with a half dome on the top, which is related to the main chamber of the mosque; in this way there is a connecting way that is neither inside nor outside. The porch is covered without being closed and shapes the basic flexible joint of the building.[6]



Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan, reference: the Author

2. Corridor element

We cannot go directly to the yard (apron) from the inside of the vestibule, but the visitor is guided through one or two corridors to the

yard which is due to respecting the hierarchical order.

3. Vestibule

Functionally, the vestibule should be circular, because it makes concentration possible.

However, since circle cannot meet the other designing needs including certain defined sides for splitting other functions like the entrance, stairs and corridor, it is changed to polygons. The best form of polygon is octagonal which is made from rotation of two equal squares in the angle of 45.[3]

4. Pool or fountain

There are notions in the Holy Quran that consider the ablution more than a merely physical act. Special values have been mentioned for water in many verses of the Holy Quran. For example, Paradise has always been described with streams flowing under trees or the boiling springs in it. Water is the mercy of God and purifies human beings from contamination and sin. Therefore pool and water are basic elements in mosques which give there a high richness.[3]

5. Dome house

Dome house is usually a square shaped space which is sometimes called bedchamber (shabestan), in which people pray. This space is covered by a circular dome.[3]

6. Altar (mehrab)

Praying orientation in mosques is toward Qibla and Mecca. In order to show this part it has been tried to while keeping the space of dome house without direction, by minor changes in one side of the space, lead the non-directional space toward Qibla. For this reason mehrab is made.[7]

Introducing some typical shrines in religions

Mediation space, UNESCO (Tadao Ando)

In 1995 on the fiftieth anniversary of foundation of UNESCO, a mediation space as built on the site of central office of UNESCO in Paris. This place was an invocation space for eternal peace and unity of all people around the world. Peace that overcomes the conflicts in religion, nationality, culture and history. The building of the mediation space in UNESCO is a single floor building with concrete structure and is 6.5 m high, in the area of 350 m². Due to its function, the building has a peaceful and dignified appearance. For sympathy to Hiroshima as well as praying for eternal peace, granites exposed to atomic bomb radiations, were used at the bottom of the pool.[3]



Figure 9.1, left: mediation space, using skylight in ceiling, reference: Tadao Ando

Figure 10.1, right: mediation space, building view, reference: Tadao Ando

Temple of MIT University

For a more functionally successful example we can point to Temple of MIT University in the USA. This building is constructed in an academic complex. It is located in a free space so that it can be seen from all the spots. This may be the reason why the temple has been shaped like this, a symmetrical shape that can be perceived the same from all sides. The temple is a place for purifying the human beings, a place of excellence of spirit. The building is seated in the water that is the symbol of pureness. Due to the fluid and flowing nature of water, the bed designed for it takes a circular shape which is in harmony with the cylindrical volume of the temple. The building seats on the water directly, while its intersection with water are some white arcs. The temple separates from the surrounding space by several layers. The wall of temple, water bed, the surrounding

landscape, In order to get to the temple, we should pass over the bridge, the element associating with feeling of passage and disconnects one from the behind world. Passing over water also is a metaphor of purifying in order to inter a holy place. Inside of the building is on a bed of light reflected from water surface which makes one feel pure and holy. The unique quality of this building is due to the bed provided for light. A dark bed with no connection to the outside world and the only thing we can see there is the light shining from the above. A statuesque has been used for light to be seen more shining. This element has some suspended components which make the reflected light seen better. The light flow is guided to inside in a vertical behavior which shines only on the position of liturgist. According to images of the temple, it has no decoration and the only manifestation is its bell which gives the

building Christian flavor. At the same time, some special features of Judaism shrines have also been applied. Features like concentrating on a point in the centre, no decoration and

simplicity. The temple is made of bricks which shows the mundane nature of the building.[3]



Figure 11.1, left: the cathedral on the water, reference: Sepehri Muqadam, contemporary architecture
Figure 12.1, right: the cathedral on the water, reference: Masau Foriama, Tadao Ando

A church on the water: Tadao Ando

The church on the water has been built in a plain on the hillsides of the mountains in east north of Yubari Range in Hukaido. The area is covered in snow from December to April. Water is splits from a nearby river. The depth of the fountain and water fall is designed such that in mild wind and breeze the sound of water can be listened. Two squares, one with 10 m sides and one with 15 m sides, intersect each other in one side of the plan. An L-shaped concrete wall encloses them. The people who walk alongside the external edge cannot see the fountain; they can see it when they pass the wall and rotate 180 degrees. A place surrounded by glass walls on the four sides can be seen along with the fountain and

the mild slip. A box from light with four crosses is seated under the sky. There is direct vision to sky and natural light through the glass frames. From here curved stairs in darkness leads us to the church space in which we can see a vast bright fountain in the water.[3]

Tadao Ando says: “the glass view of the church which opens to fountain connects directly to the nature. The rustle of leaves, bird songs and water sound create a peaceful environment together. Light and water create pleasant songs and views that continue until the next years. I thought about the nature of the holy space when designing some churches. Anyway, I believe that a holy place must be connected to nature in a way. I

perceive nature in a different way. I think the holy nature should be connected to the nature built by human architecture. I also believe that when plant, light, water or wind are distorted from nature, they become near holiness.” The main characteristic of Ando’s works is seen well in this church: beautiful concrete walls, pure geometric combinations, respecting traditional culture backgrounds, and combining nature with abstract space to make a new vision of life.[3]

Masjid Ahle Hadith in Pakistan

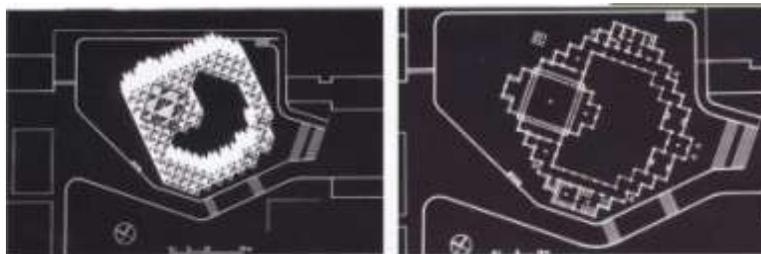


Figure 13.1: plan of Masjid Ahle Hadith in Pakistan, reference: Pour Javadi, contemporary Mosques

Table 2. Holiness of water in Abrahamic religions

Reference:<http://www.aftabir.com> [1]

Judaism	In Judaism, purification ceremony is the symbol of revival and maintenance of pureness and religious purity. Its roots can be found in Torah.
Christianity	Almost all churches and denominations have primary ceremonies in which water is used; water is important in Christianity based on this fact that Christ named it water of life. Water of life is blessed water that is used in special ceremonies. It is the name of the water used to baptize the new comers to Christianity.
Islam	The importance of water in Islam is in purification and refinement. Muslims should be pure when praying.

CONCLUSION

Concentration and creating a sense of centrality and focus originate from belief in God’s unity have always been reflected in architectural works of the shrines in Abrahamic religions, synagogues, mosques and cathedrals. Also applying purifying

This mosque designed by Anvar Saeid was constructed in 1973 in Islam Abad, Pakistan. The plan of the building is based on a 75.2*75.2 network. The form related to this network is a quadruplet arch which is based on four pillars. This main element is repeated to create a building including a surrounded yard, chapel, and common rooms. The pillars and arcs are made from concrete and for building the other parts bricks and cement blocks have been used.[5]

elements which distort human beings from contaminations and abominations of mundane world, like water and light is from other similarities between these shrines. By investigating the appearance of the most temples in Abrahamic religions we can see easily these similarities. If we consider the

architectural and artistic basis of any religion based on and originated from philosophical and ideological foundations of that religion, then similar and sometimes the same architecture in three religions, Islam, Judaism and Christianity can be indicating of many similarities in concepts, ideological and philosophical principles in these three divine religions.

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