

# Effects of Varamin Jami Mosque's Ornamentations on the Spatial Qualities

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**ABSTRACT:** Mosque as the house of God has always been significant to rulers, people and Muslim artists. It is one of the most ancient architectural subjects. Varamin Jami mosque from Ilkhanid<sup>2</sup> era is one of the masterpieces of Iranian-Islamic architecture. It was one of the first projects which started the glorious era of renovation after the dark times of the Mongols<sup>3</sup> invasion. Perfect stucco ornaments in mihrab<sup>4</sup>, inlaid mosaic in the iwans<sup>5</sup> and beautifully done inscriptions with Kufic<sup>6</sup> and Thuluth<sup>7</sup> calligraphy in different parts of it, not only have created an admirable visual beauty but also have contributed to the spatial quality of the mosque. They deeply affect worshipers and make them concentrate and think of God only and ignore earthly matters. This research tries to investigate the quantitative and qualitative aspects of these ornamentations and tries to find out how these ornaments affect the qualitative beauty of the space inside the mosque. The research methodology is qualitative and correlational with field study. Well decided choices on the ornaments of different parts of the mosque, the effects of Shia<sup>8</sup>, noticing some of the rules of beauty such as symmetry, repetition, massing and other areas are some of the results of this research.

**Keywords:** Varamin Jami Mosque, Ornaments, Stucco relief, Tile work.

## INTRODUCTION

Having a tendency toward ornaments, or in other words toward beauty and increasing the spatial qualities of the built environment is of human's instinct. The holy book says: oh son of Adam, gather your beauty from any mosque around you... (Al-Araf<sup>9</sup>:31). There are two main approaches regarding ornaments. One based on physical function and the other based on semantic function. Those who have a formalist look toward the ornaments believe that they are merely a physical cover and they do not have any cultural and religious significance which are used to cover the underlying coarse strata of a surface. On the other hand, people like Burckhardt<sup>10</sup> believe that these ornaments have a non-historical sublime significance and are representations of unity in plurality and plurality in unity. From this point of view ornaments are not merely a physical cover, but are surfaces of symbolic and sublime significance (Maki nejad, 2007). Oleg Grabar has a different opinion though: he believes that ornament could convey religious and sublime meanings, but it depends on the beholder. On the other hand he believes that ornaments have not any meanings per se, they only remind the beholder of meanings (Qayumi Bidhandi, 2011). Some think that the emergence of ornaments in the mosques has decreased the spiritual quality of the space. Pirnia (2010) thinks that in the Seljuq<sup>11</sup> era some changes developed in the mosques. The quantity of ornaments increased and this diminished the spiritual quality of the space.

In this research the role of ornaments is investigated in Varamin Jami mosque. There are many ways in classifying

the ornaments: based on subject (flora and vegetal, geometric, calligraphic), based on the technique (tile work, stucco relief, break work) and based on the position (dome, iwans, and other areas) in this research since most of the ornaments exist on the northern-southern axis and is concentrated on this area.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Since most of the research variables belong to the ancient time, an interpretive-historical approach has been implemented in the investigation of the results of the research which are extracted from the field and other methods of study. In the study of the documentation, historical, social and cultural context and in the field studies documentation of the project and the techniques of the ornaments has been highlighted.

### Historical-Social Context

One of the dark points in the history of Iran is the invasion of Mongols under the command of Genghis Khan<sup>12</sup> in 1219 A.D. it happened during the glorious time in which Iranian art and literature was flourished and people like Mevlana<sup>13</sup>, Saadi<sup>14</sup>, Hafiz<sup>15</sup>, Attar<sup>16</sup>, Nasir al-Din Tusi<sup>17</sup> and others had done amazing works in their fields. The Mongols not only destroyed the cities and buildings but also they killed many artists, poets and craftsmen and made others to immigrate. After Hulagu Khan<sup>18</sup> period the relations between Muslim countries and China increased. This resulted in the infiltration of Islamic architecture of Seljuqs and Abbasids<sup>19</sup> in China and also Chinese architecture in Muslim countries. One of

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the things taken from Chinese architecture was the form of the domes and also the use of color light blue in tile work and covering the outside surface of the domes with dark blue tiles which resembles the tents of the nomads (Eqbal Ashtiani, 1986). Before Oljeitu<sup>20</sup> the tile work of the dome was solely done for the interior of it. But after this period the outer surface was also covered in tiles. Some believe this resulted from Mongols customs in ornamenting their tents. They used to put ornaments on either sides of their tents and after they started living in cities, they started to do that on the domes as well (Ibid). It seems that the enameled cover of Varamin Jami mosque (Dieulafay, 2011) is done with the same strategy. It was built on the command of Oljeitu. He was a Christian in the beginning. But later converted to Islam and became a Hanafi<sup>21</sup> Sunni<sup>22</sup>. Then again because of the disputes between the Sunnies of Hanafi and Shafi'i<sup>23</sup>, he became a Shia on the recommendation of Al-Hilli<sup>24</sup>. Signs of this conversion could be found in the inscriptions of the mosque in the southern dome and portico with the name Ali<sup>25</sup> on them.

### Varamin Jami Mosque

Varamin Jami mosque is of the typology of four-parted plan with four iwans. The construction started in 1322 A.D. under Oljeitu and finished four years later in the reign of Abu Sa'id<sup>26</sup>. In the course of time the building has endured many incidents and has been renovated many times. The description of one of these renovations is inscribed in the southern iwan which was done by Shahrukh Mirza<sup>27</sup>. After many damages among them the destruction of the two minarets and the outer surface of the dome, some parts of the western arcade were also destroyed. In the current situation, there are arcades around the square central court of the mosque. The main entrance on the northern side, the high southern iwan, and the dome behind it have created a strong northern-southern axis. The axis not only highlights the direction of Kaaba<sup>28</sup> but also most of the building's ornaments exist here. The second entrance of the building is the eastern iwan and the western iwan which is less in height has less ornaments (Fig. 1 and 2).

### The Ornaments of the Mosque

From the point of view of ornaments Varamin Jami mosque follows Azari style<sup>29</sup> guidelines. Pirnia states that in this style

the building is constructed with adobe and dirt without any finishings, then a layer of finishing was done on the surface of it in the form of either bricks with knot work and course or a layer of stucco with painting on it (Pirnia, 2010). On the eastern wall of the dome chamber between the two entrances there is a layer of brick work on the beneath surface (Fig. 3). Also in comparison with the previous style-Khorasani<sup>31</sup>-the mixed use of brick and mosaics and stamp break (mohri)<sup>32</sup> was replaced by the mere use of breaks. On the other hand the use of faience mosaic in turquoise and azure color in the form of knot work is of significance in the main axis of the mosque (Fig. 4). Without any doubt the most significant ornament of the mosque is the stucco relief. These relieves could be classified into two categories: 1. The deep relieves (barhashte)<sup>33</sup> on a large scale in the niche. 2. Shallow thin stripes of arabesque (shir shekari)<sup>34</sup> on a small scale. These stripes separate two surfaces or enclose inscriptions as a frame. The ornaments of the mosque have always been appreciated by the tourists as a high characteristic of Iranian architecture. Madam Dieulafay writes in her notes: the entrance is covered with mosaics and is very interesting. The mihrab and the stucco relieves are amazing and are clearly made by a master. The breaks are covered with white mortar and there are gaps as much as 4 centimeters broad on the walls with ornaments carved on them in the Arabian style (Dieulafay, 2011). Now we go through the ornaments separately.

### The Entrance

The main entrance is located on the northern side with arches on the sides. Over the entrance there is what remains of an inscription with white Thuluth calligraphy on blue mosaics with the construction date of the mosque (Etemad Saltane, 1989). There is a broad clay stripe of Kufic calligraphy over the inscription with light blue arabesque ornaments in between the calligraphy. The sides of the outer arch and the pedestals of the iwan are covered in light blue mosaic with geometric patterns (Fig. 5 and 6) (Table 1).

### Southern Iwan

On the contrary to the main entrance which most of its ornaments were geometric patterns with break work combined with light and dark blue mosaics, in this iwan

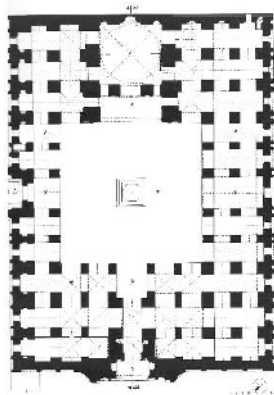


Fig. 1: Plan of the mosque (Source: Haji Qasemi, 2004)

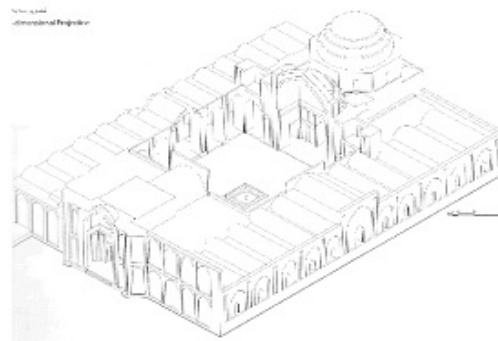


Fig. 2: Perspective (Source: Ibid)



Fig<sup>30</sup>. 3: Break work cover on the structure in the dome chamber



Fig. 4: Knot work with the combination of breaks and mosaic on the main entrance






Fig. 5: Northern entrance (Source: Haji Qasemi, 2004)



Fig. 6: Calligraphy and geometric patterns on the entrance arch

Table 1: Ornaments of the Northern Gateway

	Tile work	Stucco relief	Break work	Subject	Scale-color-style	Sample
Flora and vegetal motifs	Light and dark blue	-	-	Arabesque for emphasizing the inscription	- clear - blue	
Geometric patterns	Combination of break and mosaic	-	Combination of break and mosaic	Repetition of the knot work as medallion etc.	- Light and dark blue - large and small scale	
Calligraphy	inscription over the entrance with a frame with geometric patterns	-	-	construction date	- Thluth calligraphy in large scale and blue	
	inscription over the arch enclosed with arabesque			impossible to read because of erosion	- Kufic calligraphy in large scale and blue	

(Fig. 7) most of the ornaments are monochrome break work done in different depths (hasht o gir)<sup>35</sup> with beautiful eight sided stars and cross shape patterns (Fig. 8) with the names Mohammad<sup>36</sup>, Ali and Allah repeated in simple calligraphy. The ceiling of the iwan is covered in Muaqal<sup>37</sup> mosaic and the half dome is covered in a stalactite (Fig. 9). The side of the walls and the beginning of the iwan's arch is covered in a swirling pillar of light blue mosaic and breaks repeating the name Ali. The inscription on the outer arch of the iwan is the verses of the holy book done in stucco relief. On either sides of the door, there are two inscriptions out of stucco (Fig. 10). The one on the left reads Shahrukh Mirza son of Timur<sup>38</sup> which during his time the mosque was renovated and the one on the right reads Yusef Khan, the renovator (Etemad Saltane, 1989). Over the pendentive on the door, there is a thin stripe of stucco which repeats the names Ali, Mohammad and Allah in simple Kufic calligraphy (Table 2).

### Dome Chamber

There are four entrances with ogee arches in the four sided base area of the dome around which there are stucco relieves with arabesque patterns (Fig. 11). On the pendentive the name Allah reads in between knot work patterns. Inside the rectangular frame there is an inscription in Kufic calligraphy describing the renovations of the mosque which is done using breaks and light and dark blue mosaics. The walls are covered in organic patterns in between simple stamp breaks (Fig. 12). On the edge of the dome chamber walls and before connecting to the eight sided part, there is a broad stripe with Thuluth calligraphy and an arabesque frame which reads Al-Jumua<sup>39</sup> verse from the holy book. In the eight sided part ornaments with geometric patterns with the combination of breaks and mosaics direct the eye to the central part of the dome (Fig. 13 and 14). Around this area the holy names Allah and Mohammad add to the spirituality of space (Fig. 15) (Table 3).



Fig. 7: Southern iwan



Fig. 8: Eight sided and cross shaped pattern with a Thuluth inscription on the southern iwan



Fig. 9: Moqarnas and geometric ornaments under the outer arch of the southern iwan



Fig. 10: Stucco thin stripes with organic patterns and calligraphy

Table 2: Ornaments of the southern iwan






	Tile work	Stucco relief	Break work	Subject	Scale-color-style	Sample
Flora and vegetal motifs	-	thin stripe enclosing the broad inscription of the iwan and the stucco inscriptions on either sides of the entrance to the dome chamber	-	arabesque	small scale in light brown color	
Geometric patterns	Combination of breaks and mosaics under the outer arch	Thin stripes on the walls of the outer arch with simple geometric patterns	-	Knot work with elements such as medallion etc.	Muaqal mosaic in light and dark blue	 
Calligraphy	The name Ali in swirling pillar with combination of break and light blue mosaic	-broad stripe consisting two layers, one broad and clear and the other thin and small  -Four inscriptions describing the renovations	Over the iwan the holy names (Allah and Ali) and Salavat Prayar	-Al-Jumua holy verse  -holy names	Inscription in Thuluth calligraphy and the rest in simple and Kufic calligraphy	 



Fig. 11: Ogee arches with pendentive ornaments around them

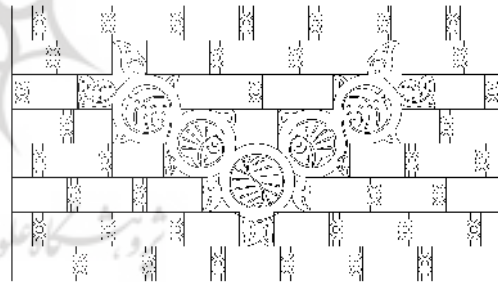


Fig. 12: Stamp seams on the dome chamber wall

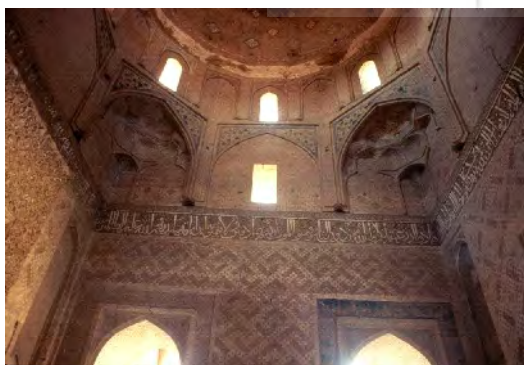


Fig. 13: The broad stripe of the inscription at the intersection of four and eight sided parts (Source: Arch Net, 2013)



Fig. 14: The central part of the dome

Table 3: Ornaments of the dome chamber

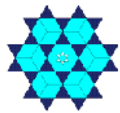


	Geometric patterns	Organic patterns	Calligraphy	Sample
The walls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less geometric patterns in comparison to the iwan</li> <li>- as a complimentary element for the inscriptions (mosaic work)</li> <li>- stamp seams (stucco relief)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the form of stamp breaks with simple arabesque patterns repeated on the walls</li> <li>- thin stripe with arabesque patterns of stucco on the margin of the inscription</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inscription in Thuluth calligraphy with Al-Jumua verses as relieves</li> <li>- renovation descriptions in Kufic calligraphy on the sides of the gateway to the nave</li> </ul>	
The eight sided part of the dome and the four sided base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Light and dark blue mosaic knot work on the arches</li> <li>- repetition of the stamp seams</li> </ul>	-	-	
The central part of the dome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16 sided pattern at the center of the dome enclosed by knot work</li> </ul>	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repetition of the names Mohammad and Allah with break and brown and green mosaic around the central pattern of the dome</li> </ul>	

Fig. 15: The geometric ornaments of the central area of the dome

### Mihrab

Mihrab consists of an arch which is enclosed by two frames (Fig. 16). Inside the arch flora and vegetal motifs with stucco fringe in Thulth calligraphy (in a very small scale which is difficult to read) repeat and separates itself from the arabesque ornaments of the pendentives. The first stripe enclosing the arch is a broad inscription in Kufic calligraphy reading Al-Isra<sup>40</sup> verse from the holy book (Fig. 17). The second stripe consists repeating arabesque patterns. The flora and vegetal stucco (Fig. 18) relieves are deep and the area devoted to the geometric patterns is really small in size. Also in the mihrab niche and the wall behind it there is not any color diversity as it is in the iwans and the main entrance.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Compared with the previous data table, transforming the decoration of Varamin Jami mosque is expressible along the North – South axis. At the entrance of the mosque, at the beginning of mentioned axis, often decorated with geometric patterns with “Muaqal” tiles and use of turquoise and azure colors are more common than the other parts. Content of the mosque inscriptions is not Quran, but it is about introducing the mosque, the builder’s name and date of construction. It seems that with using the attraction of patterns and colors the inviting role of the entrance is highlighted. After entering



Fig. 16: The frame enclosing the inscription in between the Flora and vegetal motifs



Fig. 17: Verses from Al-Isra in Kufic calligraphy  
(Source: Arch Net, 2013)



Fig. 18: The organic patterns inside the mihrab arch  
(Source: Arch Net, 2013)

the courtyard to surrounding iwans, a high iwan with diversity of decoration shows off on the south side. Iwans and other bodies with simple geometrical patterns with uniformly colored bricks do not attempt to attract viewers. At the external southern iwan arch, arabesques with calligraphy and geometric knot work are more abundant than the entrance. Inscriptions' contents are verses of "Al-Jumua" chapter, the holy names and prayers. Colorful Tiles are used less than the entrance and most of the decorations are "Hasht-Gir" style brickwork. After entering the dome, undoubtedly one color of the space is obvious because it uses the least blue color here. Geometric designs are also used less than other places. The altar is covered with stucco plant designs and space spirituality with "Al-Isra" and "Al-Jumua" verses and the holy names have become greater.

Since the geometric motifs are oriented toward the center and the arabesques have not any specific direction and center and always keep spinning, this could be assumed that the density of geometric patterns in the entrance and iwans was referring to a particular center or axis and the dome and the altar as the last part of stretched and significant north - south axis has been highlighted in this way.

## CONCLUSION

It can be noted that there are different attitudes to ornament; sometimes it is to identify the origin of the building, some consider it as a source of visual pleasure, another look at the practical function of ornament is considered for framing, filling and joining of the elements and in a more general view ornament consists of a number of intermediaries between the object on one side and the observer on the other side. Decorations are such filters that the messages and symbols and perhaps even conscious or unconscious pleasures are transmitted through them in order to contact with the audience in the best way (Qayoumi Bidhandi, 2011). Application of decorative arts in Varamin Jami mosque at the most magnificent altar plaster, Muaqal brickwork iwans with geometric patterns content, arabesques and calligraphy, in addition to visual appeal for prayers, was created to draw attention, focus and more reflection. Also have a positive effect on the quality of architectural space in order to optimize the performance of the mosque as a place of worship that is briefly mentioned in the following:  
Considering esthetic principles

The principle of Symmetry in combination: at the external arch of southern iwan of "Muaqal" knot work; in which the objective manifestation of balance as well.

The principle of rhythmic repetition: in the wall of dome the visual elements such as stamp brick with repetitive rhythmic are scattered in whole space without causing any attention at all; this important principle can be compared with the hint principal of religious teachings (Naghizadeh, 2012).

The principle of reflection in the mirror: in plaster frame around altar with plant motifs

The principle of diversity and innovation: using different knots and different ways of calligraphy (style, way of construction, scale and size)

The principle of density and composition: compactness of stamp seams and narrow strips plaster in the changing level (dome)

The Principle of separation: different colors are used in decorations for more attraction. For example, the color of the letters of the entrance inscription is different from the background; therefore the writing is quite distinct but the plaster inscription on the south portico and dome (verses of "Al-Jumua") is same as the background color and perhaps because the builder has not wanted to show off.

Using inscriptions in large-scale with broad strips with Quran content or description of repairing the mosque and in small-scale repetition of the holy name of Allah, Ali and Muhammad or in the form of thin strips of plaster as well as a separator, and also the element of unity.

Creating visual effects by diagonal writing the holy names on the walls of the southern iwan.

Induction of spiritual and secular nature and impact on the audience through adding geometric designs and arabesques to inscription broad strips.

Emphasize on common religion of the time with repeating the name Ali, who seems to dominate the thinking of builders. Smart choice of decorations in parts of the mosque: such as arabesque at the altar (the most southern part of the axis) which whatever distance from the most northern part of the axis (entrance) reduces, they are less important and they are replaced with geometric designs.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1- A city in Tehran Province, Iran
- 2- A breakaway state of the Mongol Empire from 1256 to 1335, which was ruled by the Mongol House of Hulagu
- 3- An Inner Asian ethno-linguistic group and the Mongol Empire was the largest contiguous land empire in human history from 1206 to 1368
- 4- A semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the Qibla; that is, the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca and hence the direction that Muslims should face when praying
- 5- A rectangular hall or space, vaulted, walled on three sides, with one end entirely open, usually decorated with calligraphy bands, glazed tilework, and geometric designs
- 6- The oldest calligraphic form of the various Arabic scripts and developed around the end of the 7th century in Kufa, Iraq, from which it takes its name
- 7- A script variety of Islamic calligraphy which made its first appearance in the 11th century CE
- 8- The second largest sect of Islam after Sunni Islam
- 9- The seventh chapter of the Quran, with 206 verses
- 10- (1908-1984), A German Swiss, He devoted all his life to the study and exposition of the different aspects of wisdom and tradition
- 11- A Turkish Sunni Muslim dynasty that gradually adopted Persian culture and contributed to the Turko-Persian tradition in the medieval West and Central Asia from 1016 to 1157
- 12- (1162-1227), the founder and Great Khan (emperor) of the Mongol Empire
- 13- (1207-1273), Persian poet, jurist, theologian, and Sufi mystic
- 14- (1210-1292), Persian poet
- 15- (1325-1389), Persian poet
- 16- (1145-1220), Persian poet, theoretician of Sufism
- 17- (1201-1274), Persian Muslim scholar
- 18- (1218-1265), the first Ilkhanid dynasty ruler, from 1256 to 1265
- 19- The third of the Islamic caliphates from 750 to 1258
- 20- (1280-1316), the eighth Ilkhanid dynasty ruler, from 1304 to 1316
- 21- One of the four Madhhabs (schools of law) in jurisprudence (Fiqh) within Sunni Islam
- 22- is the largest branch of Islam, the word “Sunni” comes from the term Sunnah, which refers to the sayings and actions of the Islamic prophet Muhammad as recorded in Hadiths
- 23- One of the schools of jurisprudence within the Sunni branch of Islam
- 24- (1250-1325), One of the well known Shia scholars of his time
- 25- (600-661), was the cousin and son-in-law of Islamic prophet Muhammad, ruling over the Islamic Caliphate from 656 to 661
- 26- (1305-1335), the ninth Ilkhanid dynasty ruler from 1316 to 1335

27- (1377-1447), The Timurid ruler of the eastern portion of the empire established by his father, Central Asian warlord Timur

28- A cuboid building in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, It is one of the most sacred sites in Islam

29- A style of architecture when categorizing Iranian architecture development in Iranian Azerbaijan history. Landmarks of this style of architecture span from the late 13th century (Ilkhanate) to the appearance of the Safavid dynasty in the 16th century

30- All the pictures are taken by authors, unless it says otherwise

31- The first style of architecture appearing after the conquest of Persia, but is highly influenced by pre-Islamic designs

32- A sort of pre-cut breaks are called stamp breaks. Stamp breaks sometimes are put between simple breaks (with stamp seams) or were used in combination to create patterns

33- A kind of stucco relief with deep patterns

34- A kind of stucco relief with shallow patterns

35- A sort of break work with different depths which creates patterns

36- (570 - 632), A religious, political, and military leader from Mecca who unified Arabia into a single religious polity under Islam

37- A kind of colorful tile

38- (1336-1405), known as Tamerlane, conquered West, South and Central Asia and founded the Timurid dynasty

39- The 62nd chapter of the Quran with 11 verses

40- The 17th chapter of the Quran, with 111 verses

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