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## The Impact of Religious Tomb Buildings on the Formation of Iran Cities in Islamic period

### Case Study: The Role of Ali Al-Saleh in the Formation of Saleh Abad City (Ilam)

Bentolhoda Nesari\*  
Abraham Moradi\*\*  
Behzad Vasiq\*\*\*  
Zeinab Salehi\*\*\*\*

#### Abstract

During different human periods, many factors have influenced the formation of cities. Sometimes one or more factors constitute city including mountains, rivers, building, roads, religion, and customs. Religion as a cultural element is the source of change and difference in various countries. The orders of Islam religion is such that they can be achieved easily in urban environment. Then Islamic governments were established, and city development was their goal to show their strength and achieve idealistic, social and political purposes. Ideals and duties of Islamic government embody in the city. In Islamic period, the first example of impact of on building as a religious factors in city development can be identified as prophet's mosque in Madineh city. Religious buildings have a great influence in formation and development of many cities in Iran and in Islamic realm. Considering their abundant historic, artistic, religious and social impacts on architecture, focusing on these buildings can lead to creation or development of cities in this territory to be introduced as a tourist destination and exhibit the architecture of Islamic city.

Ilam province, located on common borders of Iran and Iraq on the direction of migration and exile of Alevis, is home to many Imamzadeh and their companions Shrines in its cities and villages due to the impassable mountainous. This study aims to investigate the effect of Ali-alsaleh Shrine (pbuh) as a cultural and religious element in the formation of Saleh Abad city located in Ilam province.

According to library and field studies and based on history of the shrine existence in Hegdandasht region and the prepared development map of city, it can be conclude that this shrine as a religious tomb building in Islamic period is the only factor of city formation and growth in a hot and arid climate. Noted city has taken its name from this shrine, and has been known as Saleh Abad.

#### Keywords

Religious tomb buildings, Islamic city, Ali- Saleh shrine, Saleh Abad city, Visual and physical identity.

\*. M. A. in Architecture. Islamic Azad University-science and research branch, Ilam, Iran.

\*\* . Ph. D. in Archaeology. Assistant Professor, Islamic Azad University, Ilam, Iran.

\*\*\*. Ph. D. in Architecture. Assistant Professor, Dezfoul Jondi Shapour industrial university, Iran.

\*\*\*\* .M. A. in Aarchitecture. Islamic Azad University, Qazvin. Iran.

## Introduction

Shrines, after mosque, are the most common public-religious buildings in Islamic architecture. Shrines have pierced in the origins of Iranian cultures and there is almost no city unrewarded of this (Kiani(A),2007:58). These buildings are factors for the settlement of population, urbanization expansion and prosperity at each location (Hillenbrand, 2010:272). The current geography of Ilam province embraces many holy shrines. Most villages and districts that somehow provided accommodation have had holy shrines. Geographical situation which is more impermeable than the central regions of Iran, and the first bio-region known as Jebal (the Mountains), is the direction for migration of the leaders and political figures such as Alevis and their children due to pressures of Bani Ummayah and Bani Abbas caliphate. Shiite morale of residents with the religious sentiments of the people in this part of the country is the reason for the presence and settlements of Imamzadehs in the province (Khaital, 2011:267). Having introduced the background, many Imamzadehs including Salah-al-din Mohammad, Ali Alsaleh are buried and commended by the people of this region. Naming the villages and towns after Imamzadehs that are affiliated to Shiite indicates the depth of the attachment to these people. Imamzadehs can characterize a village or be the name of a city or village. The holy city of Mashhad, Mazar-i-Sharif, Astaneh-ye-Ashrafiyeh and Imamzadeh Hashem are among the examples (Ghoravi, 1997:10). The emergence of city and settlements of Ilam, besides bio-climatic aspects, is dependent on the presence of the holy shrines.

Saleh Abad is one of subordinates of Mehran County in Ilam province. One of the most significant features of it is the role of Ali- Saleh shrine in the emergence and growth of city. This city is located in the direction of Holy Shrines. Reopening of Iran and Iraq's boundary in Mehran County and the presence of martyrs tomb and cemetery are effective factors that influence population growth and physical development of this city from religious aspect. This paper tries to discuss the formation of the city based on the relationship between the city and the Imamzadeh.

## Research Questions

1. How religious factors can be effective in emergence of urban culture?
2. How the shrine of Ali- Alsaleh is effective in the arrangement and structure of Saleh Abad city?

## Research Hypothesis

1. Religious factor as the cause for strengthening the sense of place can be considered as a reason of settlement and growth of urban culture.
2. Creating a pilgrimage and accommodations enclosure, can be considered as the most important factor influencing the organization of Saleh Abad city.

## Research Methodology

The current study investigates the role and impact of Shrines and religious tombs on formation and development of Iran cities in Islamic era using library studies and documentations. In the next stage and by utilizing library research methodology, field studies and the history of urban development in Saleh Abad is discussed and the historical layers of the city and the shrine in this formation and development is identified. Due to lack of valid documents in historic development of Saleh Abad, the authors have shown the city developments through maps.

## Research Background

With the increase of Islam impact in Iranian territory, shrines and holy tombs have become buildings that influenced Islamic architecture in various historic, artistic, religious and social aspects (Khalaj, 2003:5). Both large and small tombs were known by different names based on their shape and function to honor the memory of the deceased (Nazari Arshad, 2005: 324). With the spread of Shiism in the early centuries of Islam, towns and villages have become centers for the life of Imamzadehs where they became a place for pilgrimage after their demise (Hosseini & Zeraat Pisheh, 2011: 2). In the first two centuries of Islam, the burial place of the Prophet's companions or his holy family were marked protected from wind and rain. Hence, it is not unlikely that the first tombs were built by Shiites and followers of the Prophet and his family to preserve the memories of the past, especially of Imams and Imamzadehs for honoring them (Momeni Dehghani, 2012:4). From the first century to the third century AD, there is no Shiite tomb in Iran, which could be attributed to a certain date. After the martyrdom of Imam Reza (pbuh), he was buried in Mashhad. Therefore, the largest and most important Shiite religious shrines was formed in Iran. The emergence and spread of shrines started from the fourth century AD that can be attributed to migration of Imamzadehs and Sadat to Iran and their martyrdom or demise in the territory or the formation of governments and local states. Shiite dynasties

and movements considered the shrines of Imam Ali descendants of a great importance. Building tombs and shrines for prophet's descendants and Imzadehs began with the emergence of Shiite government of Alevis in Tabarestan. However, the great movement of building shrines for Imamzadehs began from Alebouyeh dynasty (Nazari Arshad, 2005: 235,236). In Muslim territories if the tomb belonged to a religious person, the desire to benefit from his blessings encouraged people in the competition to have the honor to be buried by his side. In fact, people visit these places with a respectful attitude. The idea that the tomb of the Holy or martyr is the source of holiness and divine blessing is widespread. The pilgrimage ritual especially on Friday and Eid nights is increasingly popular. In some aspects, great shrine of Mashhad and Qom are fit with such a development process (Ghoravi, 1997:10). During the Islamic period, excellent shrines were built which are categorized architecturally. The main forming nucleus of these religious complexes, such as the shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, the shrine of Qom and Sheikh Safi in Ardabil (Kiani(b), 2007: 166) is the tomb of a prominent religious or political figure which is expanded by mosque, school, convent and inn in the following years (Hosseini, 2009:15). The important point about this particular set of religious shrines is the substantial impact on the formation and development of many Iranian cities during Islamic era because they were the main nucleus of city formation (Hillenbrand, 2010:264). Ardabil in its heyday was a sign of the greatness of the Safavid Dynasty, several kings of this dynasty was buried there. Shrine of Mashhad gradually became the prime of Khorasan. Qom also is the major religious center for scholars trained in Iran (Kiani, 2008:61).

### Research Theoretical Basis

Religion, as one of the cultural and socio-cultural phenomena has been the origin of change difference and contrast the in various places (Sattari Sarbangholi, 2011: 48). Islamic culture and civilization and its elements are constituted in a way that from one hand they can be used as moral and material development solutions for human society and on the other hand, their devine teachings can be used as answer for human problems (Bemanian, et al, 2008:60). Islam is introduced as a religious city (Khodayi and Taghavi, 2011: 104) and the city as the means to realize Islam in material body. More teachings of Islam, is best reflected in the urban environment (Sattari Sarbangholi, 2011: 48). The significance

of city In Islam is not limited to the interests of the city, having a city is considered an imperative. In the city, responsibilities and ideals of Islamic state are embodied and the implementation of the provisions and regulations issued by the Islamic State requires a specific authority. At all times of Islamic state -regardless of place or time- arranging the city, its organizing or founding one was a prevailing concern that showed ideals and powers of the Islamic state for the next eras. (Habibi, 2008: 50). Governing the city is rooted in the Islamic thinking to the city and other Islamic social and political conditions.

The factors forming city features include natural and man-made and human factors which have their own attributes and variables (Table 1). Man-made factors such as buildings and monuments, combined with human components such as religion and located in good position to natural factors can be effective in strengthening the urban character. In addition, texture and spatial structure of the city is one of the most important aspects of the urban identity; because the formation of the city physical fabric is the reflection of beliefs, and cultural experiences that can be received in the form of human components. Hence knowledge of this part of the city can lead to learning more about social, economic and cultural factors. In fact, the physical urban fabric provides a possible visual identity of the city and it is more accentuated (Neufel, et al, 2009: 59);(Table 1).

The most important aspects considered in the physical identity can be briefly stated in the following table (Ibid: 60);(Table2).

According to the table, cities having religious background including Mashhad and Qom carry the largest share in physical identity which enriches the settlements in the city.

Different views exist about the development of urban elements according researchers. William Marche believes that Islam is distinctly urban and urban life is compulsory for Muslims according to religious and Islamic law. George Marche, as an intellectual in the field of Islamic cities such believes that since Islam is a city religion, the mosque are located in the center of the city as an Islamic religious-political center (Falihat, 2011: 37);(Table 3).

Having compared research findings of the above intellectuals, it could be concluded that most of researchers emphasize that the religious factors have been effective in the development internal organization of Islamic cities. For instance, the tomb of Imam or religious and pilgrimage factors have been able to explain the city's future development of

Table 1. constituent components of a city personality. Source: Noufel, et al, 2009: 59.

Factors	Variables
natural	Mountains, rivers, hills, plains
built	buildings, roads, neighborhoods, squares, urban block
human	Culture, language, religion, customs, literacy

Table 2. constituent elements of city physical identity. Source: Noufel et al, 2009: 60.

Elements of physical identity	Outlines of theoretical domain
City formation	Settlement selection history and origins and its evolution over time
Features and physical structure of the city	Map of arrangement order, size, density and spatial distribution of urban phenomena
Ancient and historic sites	Tombs ,fire temples, Shrines, schools, bridges, cemeteries, buildings, monuments
Access properties	inter-urban and sub-urban road network
The functional properties of elements and components of the physical fabric of the city	Identifying old neighborhoods, tourism routes, public open spaces
Architectural display and City Construction	Urban views, construction practices, materials, architecture, scale
Dynamic characteristics of the city	he effect of time on the visual aspects of the city, sound and smell

Mashhad and Qom. However, focusing on religious elements such as mosques, holy shrines associated with religious factors have been less considered and written about.

History of urbanization in the Ilam Province and Saleh Abad City

The current Ilam land today has been considered by various nations as a part of their territory in ancient Elam civilization. It was located on communication road of the Susa to Ecbatana in the Medes and Achaemenian period and on the way of connecting Ctesiphon to the central plateau from East to West and vice versa during the Parthian and Sassanid dynasties. Cities were formed in this region in the Sassanid era and by the expansion of urban areas. Most Islamic texts have introduced two Masbzan states- Sirwan or Shirvan centers and subsidiaries cities like Aryojan, Alraz and Deh Bala (current Elam) as well as Mehrjanqazaq state with Simre capital (Moradi, 2001:12).

Masbzan and Mehrjanqazaq cities enjoyed prosperity and development until the third and fourth century (Yaghoubi, 1977:43, 44). From this time on, for various reasons, including earthquake (Izadpanah, 1984: 472), the conflict between Iran central governments with the Abbasid Caliphate and local governments like Atabakan Lorestan and Lorestan governor and the Mongol invasion that devastated many cities, the area lost its past prosperity and development. From this time onwards people chose the nomadic life over urban life to avoid the war and paying taxes (Moradi, 2010: 107, 108). The foundations of Ali Al-

Saleh dates back to Mongols (Derakhshandeh, 2011: 179), to the seventh century and the governing of the nomads in land of Ilam, that can be the main cause for not having a city due to the shrine until the forced resettlement of nomads.

Saleh Abad is located about 40 kilometers southwest of Ilam city in Ilam province. It had 758 inhabitants in the 50s and became a part of the district and capital of Mehran County in 1964 (Comprehensive plan of Saleh Abad, 2006:48). The old name of the city was changed from Hegdandasht to Saleh Abad due to the shrine (Fig. 1).



Table 3. Islamic city related- theories and the impact of religious component on the growth of Islamic cities. Source: authors.

Results	Article	Intellectual
Regeneration of Islamic concept in Islamic urbanism is a phenomenological, religious and civil matter.	CONCEPTUALIZING ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE	Spahic Omer
Sustainability with justice, unity with diversity, richness with incongruity and compatibility with rationalism, the most valuable Islamic urban motifs.	Global and permanent values of Islamic urban planning- representation of approaches beyond urban time and place	Mahmoud Rezaee
Islam is and urban religion.	On construction of the Islamic city	William Marché
One of Islamic civilization factor is Islamic city.	General plan of comprehensive program of restoration of Islamic city	Mohammad NaqiZadeh
Sustainable Islamic city should reflect all aspects of Islam transcendental ideas	look for a sustainable Islamic city	Hossein Rahimi
Al Nabi Mosque was not located in the center of Medina city in the beginning. It used to be at the end of one of the bazar branches that gradually became the center of the city	A study on the positioning of mosques in Nabawi era	Attaee Hamedani et. al
Mosque as an identifying factor of Muslims' city and as a main and prevailing factor in center of the city or neighborhood, Mosque as the center of social, cultural, judicial and administrative interactions	the position of mosque in design of Islamic city	Mohammad NaqiZadeh
Mosque is placed in center of the city as a religious-political center of Islamic city	On construction of the Islamic city	George Marché & Gustave von Grunebaum

### Formation Process of Saleh Abad Urban Structure

Islamic city can be divided to physical components including the city structure and spatial components comprising space and city spirit (Cultural studies of Saleh Abad Research, 2011:61). Saleh Abad lacks an Islamic urban physic while benefiting form an Islamic space and atmosphere due to the existence of Ali Al-Saleh shrine. The significance of the city according to the contemporary construction of the city, can be identified as the continued functioning of the shrine and its spiritual role in the formation of new cities. In other words, even today religious element



Fig. 1. The situation of Ali- Alsaleh shrine in Saleh abad city. Source: Google earth- 2014/2/20.



Fig. 2. Old picture of Ali- Alsaleh shrine. Source: <https://ilamtoday.com/gallery/show.asp?n=299>.



Fig. 3. Ali- Alsaleh shrine- current building. Source: authors.

are capable of shaping and strengthen elements and processes associated urban development. Saleh Abad benefits from religious potentials for its being located near a holy shrine. In other words, the shrine is the strongest potential of the town (Saleh Abad conducting plan, 1385: 48). In the following the architectural history of the shrine is introduced and its urban elements are expressed.

Imamzadeh Ali Al-Saleh is located on the southwest side of Saleh Abad city (The conducting plan of Saleh Abad, 2006:49). The stone inscriptions of the old building dates back the building to 1265 AD during the reign of Naser Aldin Shah, the Qajar king, with an area of 240 square meters, two minarets and a dome (Moradi, 2011:318, 319); (Fig. 2).

The stone inscriptions show that the shrine building started in Safavid era and has been rebuilt in the Qajar era. The current shrine building was expanded to one thousand square in 1362 AD. Shrine building has 9 naves, a dome and two minarets. The materials used in the façade include brick, moqarnas and tile decoration (Derakhshandeh, 2011:179);(Fig. 3).

There only existed the shrine for a long period of time and this place was deserted and only the nomads would settle there in winter (No. 1).

Thereafter, the area behind the shrine (No. 2) was formed as a graveyard. In the next stage the courtyard (No. 3) was added and a part of it was made into a cemetery, where burial is now no longer the case. Later, a garden known as the “Shrine Garden” (No. 4) was shaped; containing surrounding fence used privately. This sets a bond between the garden and the tomb shrine, as a garden-shrine area. In the years after, a brick building of police station (No. 5) has been constructed that can be considered as the second largest building after the shrine in Saleh Abad city. In another period, the county’s adobe building was

built and a number of tribes were forced to be settled around. This can be stated as the starting stages of building formation and construction and emergence of Saleh Abad city (No. 6).

A few years after the initial formation of residential area, a number of tribes were settled in the 7th area again. Currently this area is used as a park of the Shrine which is purchased by the Imamzadeh’s Endowment organization income.

The communication road from Mehran city (in the East) and Ilam city (in the north) crosses through Saleh Abad which is considered as Saleh Abad’s main road. This road was asphalted in 1974 and 1975 (No. 8). After the mentioned items, district 9 was allocated to construction of residential houses and an elementary school was built there.

District 10 was completed after the residential district 9 and middle and high schools in this area have been constructed.

Due to increasing population and especially the people’s belief to be buried by the Imamzadeh, people began to pre-purchase the grave places and this territory belonged to the city’s first inhabitants. Therefore, district was allocated to cemetery which is divided into two parts; martyrs burial and the burial places for public (District 12). Due to increasing population of the city after the war and the city’s renewal in Ilam province, adding a cultural venue in the city was essential which led to the construction of a library and green space around the shrine in 1993 (District 13). Hence, structural development of Saleh Abad indicates a religious discipline based on topographic and economic patterns.

The below figure shown the city growth briefly. According to the figure, the city nucleus is the shrine building and all axes, constructions and urban zones were shaped surrounding the nucleus (Fig. 4).



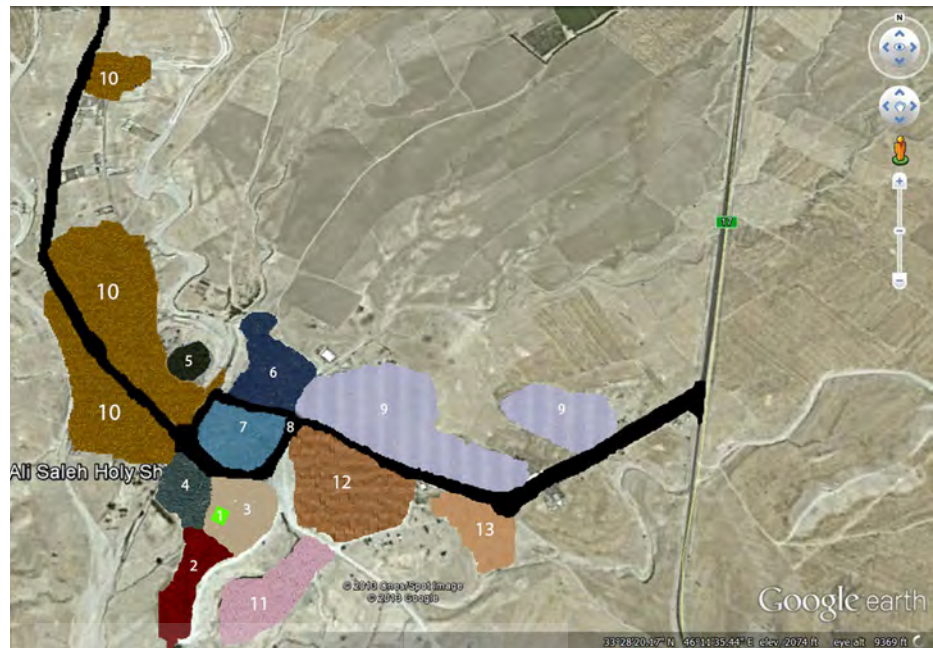


Fig. 4. Emergency order of different parts of Saleh abad city up to now  
 1. Ali- Alsaleh shrine 2. cemetery  
 3. Yard of shrine, 4. Garden of shrine,  
 5. Guardhouse, 6. The building of  
 country offices and the limit of first  
 residential constructions built in the  
 city, 7. Residential limit,  
 8. Main road of Saleh abad city, 9.  
 Residential and educational limit,  
 10. Residential and educational limit,  
 11. Cemetery, 12. cemetery,  
 13. Library. Source: authors.

**Conclusion**

Reviewing the evolution of Saleh Abad city and the history of Ali Al-Saleh shrine presence in the region shows that the formation of the city is influenced by the shrine according to two aspects; firstly the presence and settlement of the people in this area due to religious beliefs, and secondly due to governmental investment in creating a city since it is located on the borders and considered a strength both from political and security aspects (Diagram 1).

The presence of shrine is vivid in the urban geography. The first designers have paid attention to elements location and urban services and placed the shrine at the center of development growth despite its being out of center. Therefore, the shrine is placed on a higher level from the whole city topographically and outbursts as an urban element. The inter-urban and suburban connection network are figured based on appropriate access to the shrine and the open public space is determined around the shrine and this place is highly populated during religious rituals. Saleh Abad benefits from a religious spirit due to the presence of shrine, however, it does not have the physical aspects of an Islamic city due to separation of spatial factors from physical ones. Table 4. Briefly explains the religious factors in formation of physical identity of Saleh Abad city.

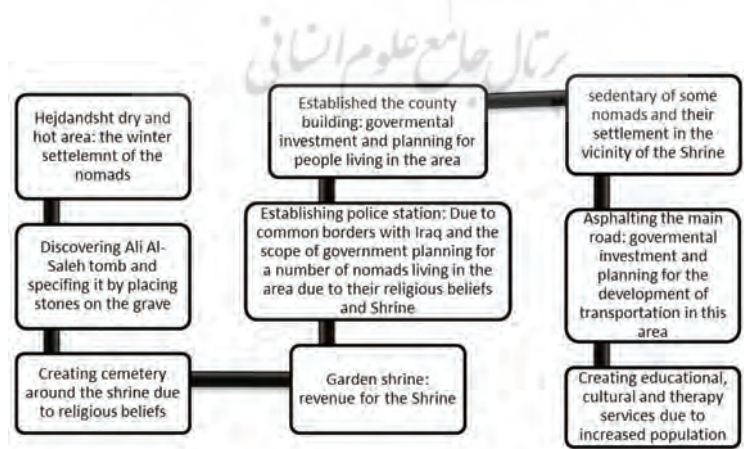


Diagram 1. Formation trend of Saleh abad city. Source: authors.

Table 4. Detection of religious instrumental elements in physical identity of Saleh abad city. Source: authors.

Elements of physical identity in Saleh Abad city	Outlines of the theoretical domain
City formation	Settlement selection based on Imamzadeh shrine
Features and physical structure of the city	Map of urban space density and sprawl due to vicinity and remoteness to the shrine
Ancient and historic sites	The shrine is the oldest urban element and symbol
Access properties	There are Sub-urban and inter-urban road network based on access to the shrine.
The functional properties of elements and components of the physical fabric of the city	Public open spaces are formed around the shrine.
Architectural display and City Construction	Islamic architecture style is not obvious in the city.
Dynamic characteristics of the city	In religious ceremonies, rituals, holidays and leisure times, the space around the shrine is the most vibrant.

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