

Takht-I-Foolad in Isfahan, Iran: A Historical, Archaeological, and Artistic Study of Gravestone

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Abstract:

This research aims to study a site in Isfahan that includes many monumental buildings, such as tombs, mausoleums, mosques, Tikyet, caravansary, water reservoir, Mousala, and stone graves; namely Takht-I-Foolad. All these kinds of buildings date back to different periods, but most of them are related to the Safavid and Qajar periods. Despite the importance of this site, it did not gain the notice it deserves by researchers. It is a site that combines a variety of buildings that share a main feature; seeming like the city of death, in Cairo, Egypt. It contains a complex for the living and the dead, serving both together, and has houses and palaces belonging to the Qajar period. For that and some other reasons it was situated far away from Isfahan.

Research Problem

This site contains numerous buildings that are different in structure, function, planning, and style; all related to each other only by their location in that site, which is characterized by its unity. It has a wall that surrounds all the buildings inside. It brings into question why the architect and the people chose this site in particular to construct their buildings although it is known as a city of death. Do they live in it? Were they from the upper class or were they poor? What is the main feature of this site? Many gravestones with different decorations reflect the concept of death. Is the type of civil or religious buildings in this site similar to the type of buildings found in the main city? Or is it different because of the distance? Many questions are posed on the genealogy of the site; the history of the men buried there, the type of architecture, and the decorations on the gravestones that surround the site and their meaning. What reason is behind providing this site with many water reservoirs to supply all the buildings with water becoming a lively city for dead people? All of these questions and more need an answer, leading to another important question that requires more research: did the method of graves' decoration that appeared in the Safavid and Qajar periods represent a European influence, or was it the result of those Safavid governors who turned back to their past looking for authenticity, finding in their gravestones from the Sassanid period a prolific heritage and decided to take it as a sample for their gravestones, resulting in the appearance of a new kind of tombstone photography.

Research Objective

This subject has many branches to follow; historical, archeological, and artistic. It is historically based in attempting to trace those who were buried in that site and whether there is any relation between them or was it random burial. The importance of study is in archeologically highlighting the meanings of the decorations and inscriptions on the gravestones, what they refer to, and their purpose. These questions are to be answered in addition to the artistic description of the decorations, making a survey of the monumental buildings in this site in terms of their relevance, description, and planning, types, and whether or not they are related to the Safavid or Qajar in accordance with their location.

Research Method

The archaeological method is reflected in the description and analysis of the units and elements in the buildings. This study also aims to trace the development of the urban structure of sites in the Safavid and Qajar periods, focusing on the religious and civil architecture. The study of urban architecture is to monitor the distribution of the buildings around the site and the causes behind such distribution. The archeological study is attempted after a comprehensive study of the historical, social, economic, political and religious motifs which play the main role in the appearance of such a site.

To avoid confusion, the study will be confined to samples of gravestones in Takht Foulad site, which is distinguished in many ways. By observing the gravestones around the world, tombstone similar to those located in this site are rarely found. Although it is difficult to deny the existence of other gravestones around Iran with some inscriptions and decorative motifs similar to those in Takht Foulad, those tombstones have elements that are different from the gravestones of Takht Foulad. Besides the written inscriptions, and geometric and floral elements, it is noticed in Isfahan that some other decorations explain the nature of the buried, their work, and ideology and so on. In this study, most of the decoration at the ancient gravestone in Takht Foulad in Isfahan will be monitored, especially those that represent the life of the buried and their life style. The sample for study

will be approximately a 100 different gravestones around Takht Foulad, analyzing their decorations in an attempt to make a survey of the animal, floral and geometrical elements carved on the surface of the tomb, and their meanings. Then, a comparative study between the gravestones that exist in Takht Foulad and some other gravestone types around Iran will be conducted to observe the differences and similarities between them. Also, reference will be made to some other decorations and statues found in those cemeteries to reflect some clues of Takht Foulad.

Keywords:

Tongue of the earth, Takht Foulad, Takht Polad, gravestone, geometric decoration, floral decoration, animal decoration, Shia ideology.

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I. INTRODUCTION

On Takht Poulad: I didn't wear Makeup My teardrop does not come to you (Anonymous poet)

Takht Foulad is a place of multiple symbols like power, magnificence, victory, intellect, pride, care, protection, and the spirit of life. It is also considered a symbol of ideology and beliefs. Most of the symbols appearing on the gravestones in this place reflect a special case of the dead. As noticed, in art and architecture, Iran is always unique in all aspects whether life or death. This could be due to hundreds of reasons, but the concern here is with ideology and how it influences people's life (pic. 1-55). So, who said dead man cannot tell significant tales!

Location

The site under study is located at the south of Zāyandé-Rūd River in Isfahan, close to an old district called Shiraz (plans 1,2) (Mahrabadi, 1352, p.846; Hunarfar, 1366, pp., 657-659). Mirzauay {1} said "Takht Foulad is considered one of the most important cemeteries in the entire world, like Bakia'a in Medina, tomb abi Taleb in Mecca, Bab el Saghier cemetery in Damascus, Wadi el Salam cemetery in Najaf Ashraf, and Qum cemetery" (Mirzauay, 1382, p.18). This cemetery consists of hospice, mosques, Musala, Ab Anbar and tomb (pic. 56-61) (plans 1-2).

Naming

It is also known as tongue of the earth {2}, Takht Polad {3}, Baba Roukn el Dien {4}.

Date

There is no fixed date to the cemetery, for it includes many buildings and gravestones since the Dayalimuh Dynasty, but it started to be regarded as an official cemetery at the time of the savvied. This area was also a residential place for Zoroastrian at the savvied period (Azmeay, 2001, p.193) before they relocated in Julfa area, south of Jiharbaghba'aen.

Material

The sculptor chose the best types of stone to suit the temperature of Isfahan and to be maintained in good shape. At the same time, the stone used is one that can be carved on, so he chose Parse stone from Najaf, white marble from Kerman like the gravestone in Mir Hospice, and green marble from Yazd.

Decorations and elements

By surveying the area, it is clear that the artist and the sculptor used all kinds of decorations, like floral, geometrical, animal, and human and angelic elements, side by side with inscriptions from Quran, poetry, and the name of the dead ones. The uniqueness of the elements in those gravestones lies in the tools which could be regarded as a representative of the official work of the buriers, what they love, and even what they prefer to wear or use. Of course most of the inscriptions are related to the Iranian ideology which is their accompaniment in life and death.

- Floral elements

One of the most prominent elements used in gravestones all over the world referring to paradise are floral. Some of the floral elements on this cemetery symbolize the kinds of flowers or trees planted in Iran and some others are different ones that could not be planted in Iran, especially Isfahan, because of the weather like Cedar (p.7). Some of those planted in Iran are Papaver, Anemone, R. Oecidentalis (Hekmatey, 2004, p. 142, 195, & 212) (pics. 4-6). Cedar in Old Persian culture refers to Ihramazda in Zoroaster religion and it refers in Shia ideology to immortality, first found at Takht Jamshed in Shiraz.

Generally, floral motifs refer to paradise and renewal of life for the dead, but sometimes by choosing a specific flower or branch or even tree the artist means something else. Hence, trees in general refer to the whole human being process and his/ her completion, while they could simultaneously refer to the forbidden tree and the sin of Adam and Eve.

Holding a flower in one hand or in both refers to the number of tombs the buried one has seen (Nejad, 2001, p.44; Nina, 2015, p.70) (pic. 23, 28, 31, 30, &55). At any case, as trees and flowers need water to grow, the dead need water to be alive again, so the sculptor provides gravestones with something similar to a basin to fill it with water to water the dead and renew life again (pic. 8,24)

Floral elements are sometimes used as the main decoration, and at some other times on the edge of the gravestone, between animal and human motifs, or between the lines and the words. The floral element appeared in a vase, in one hand, or by itself (fig. 1, 2, &3).



Pic (1) MortdaRizey. District 37



Pic (2) MortdaRizey. District 37



Pic (3) MortdaRizey. District 37



Pic (4) Kolbasey, District 3



Pic (5) Rokn el Mulk. District 12



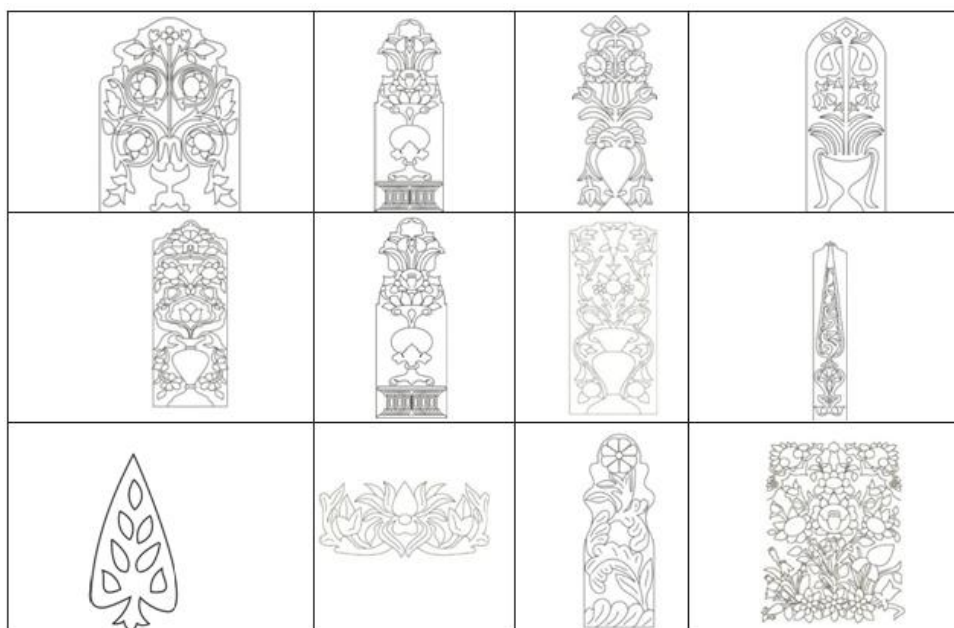
Pic (6) Baba Rukn el Din. District 27



Pic (7) Imam Juma Hospice. District 22



Pic (8) Fadel Hindi Tombs. District 9



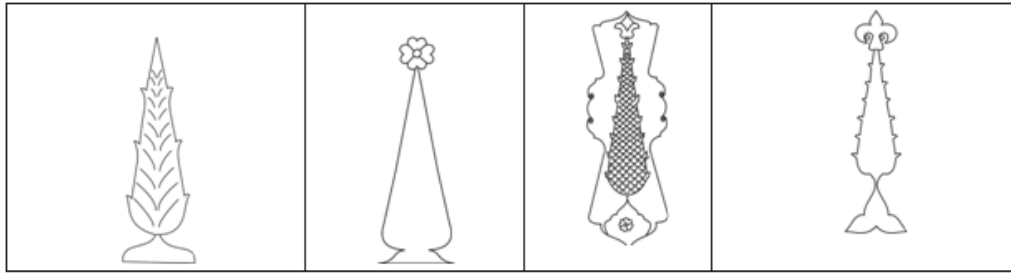


Fig (1) Floral elements (Nina Safi Khani, et.al, 1389, pp70-71)

- Animals elements

The second most frequently used decorations on gravestones after the floral are animals. There are four legged animals like lions, horses, deer, and sheep. Birds are like hoopoe, peacocks, chicken, and sparrows. The fish element comes at the end of decorations beside the water basin. Animal decorations are sometimes found all over the gravestone (fig. 2, 3) and at other times just in a scene. Some of the animals tell a story like hunting or war (pic.19, 32) and others reflect paradise (p. 12, 13, 14). Animals may also refer to the previous work of the dead person or to his/her beauty or strength. But, there is always a meaning behind these symbols before and after Islam {5}.



Pic (9) MortdaRizey. District 37



Pic (10) Kolbasey. District 3



Pic (11) Hospice and Boka Najafey. District 28



Pic (12) Mir Hospice. District 25



Pic (13) Mir Hospice. District 22



Pic (14) Mir Hospice. District 22



Pic (15) Hospice Bourjwardey. District 38



Pic (16) Hospice Bourjwardey. District 38



Pic (17) Kazwrney Hospice. District 17



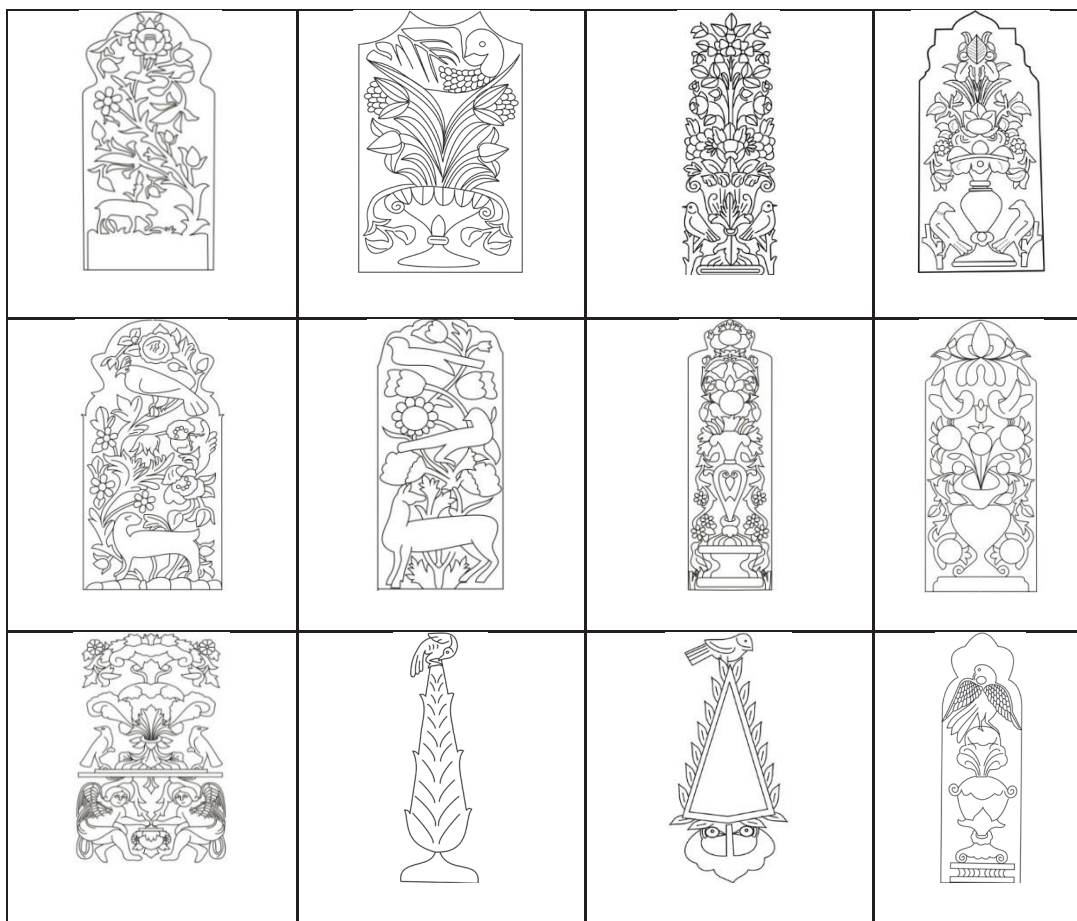
Pic (18) Faydyn Boka'a. District 9



Pic (19) District 1. Tongue of the earth



Pic (20) District 1. Tongue of the earth



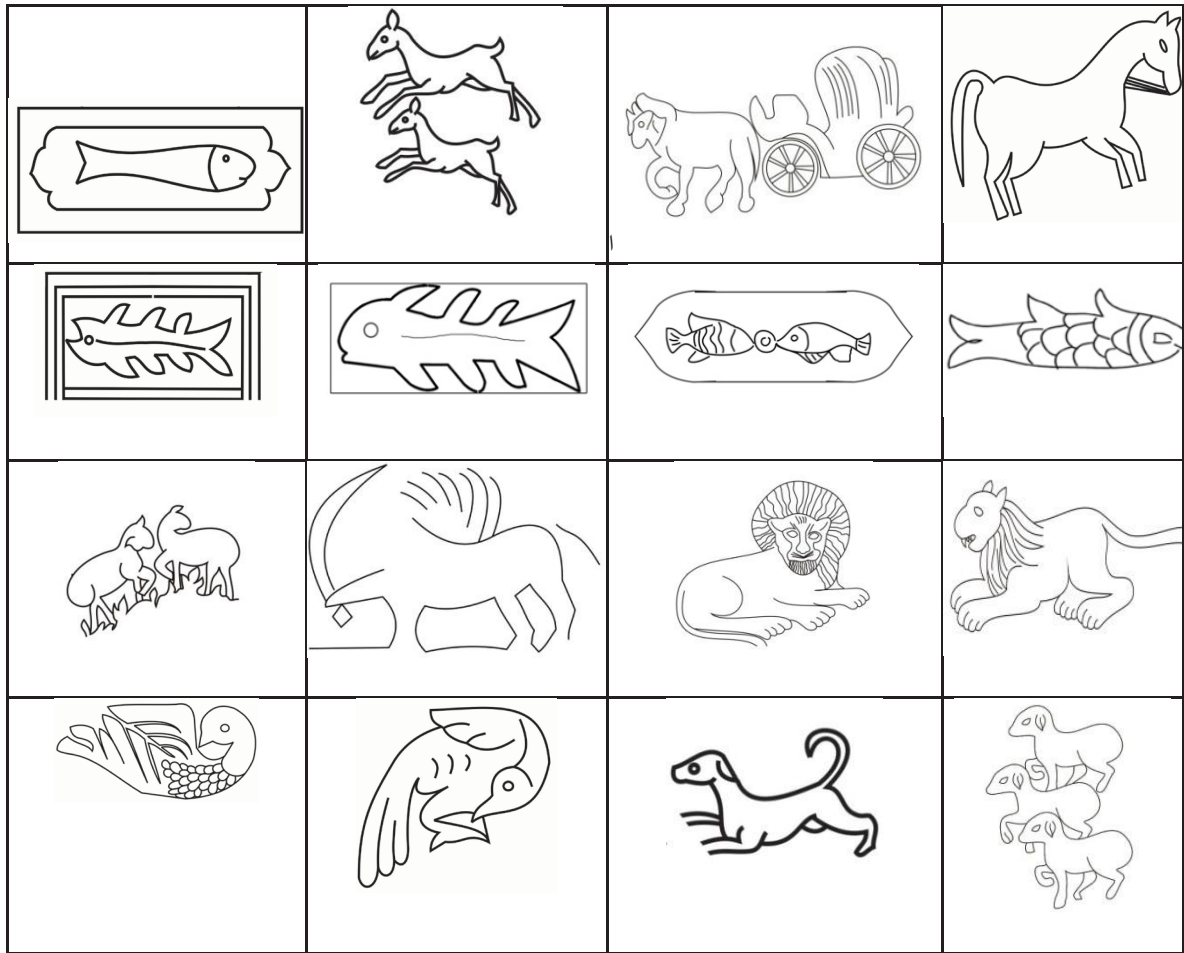
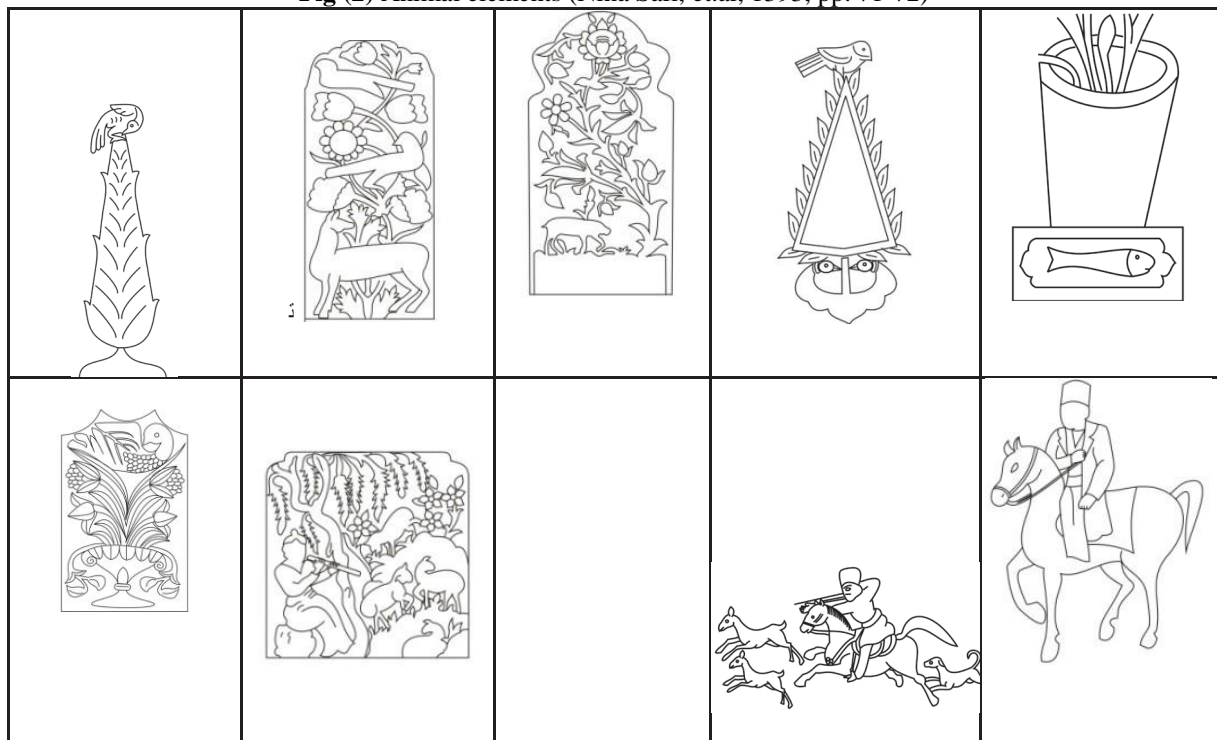


Fig (2) Animal elements (Nina Safi, et.al, 1393, pp. 71-72)



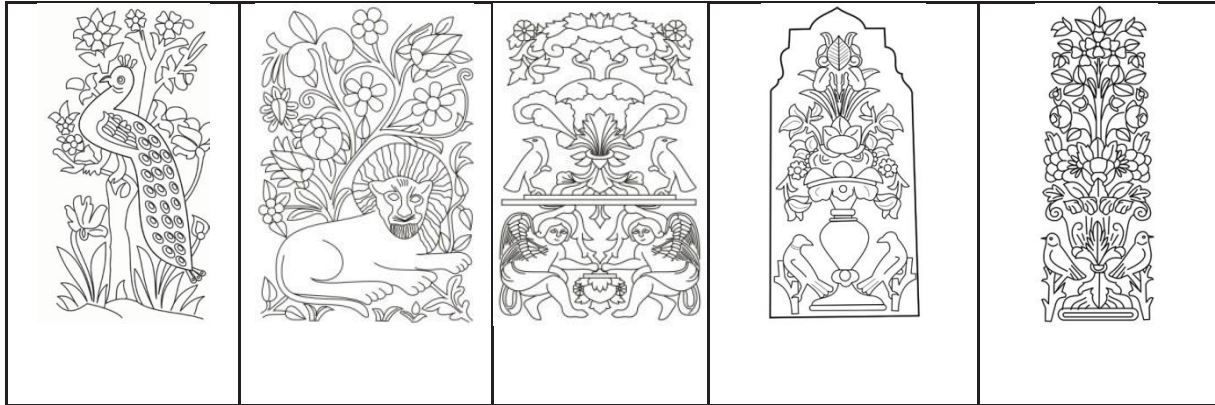


Fig (3) Animal and human elements (Nina Safi, et.al, 1393, pp.72-73)

• Human and angel decorations

Human elements are generally rare; some tell a story of victory like the one in Imam Zadah Ahmed (pic. 32), while others show the dead one riding a horse (pic.22) (fig 4), having a flower (pic. 23,24,&28), catching a stick (pic. 28), or sitting on chair (pic. 25). Besides the human motifs, many gravestones have a couple of angels on top (pic. 21,26, &29) for protection and showing love and support. Angels are messengers between Allah and man for guidance, referring to spirituality. They guard the tomb, guide the soul, pray for the soul in purgatory, and direct the living visitor to think heavenwards. Two angels can be named as Michael and Gabriel. Angels shown without one or another of these artifacts belong to the nameless legions of personal guardian angels and they also reflect rebirth.



Pic (21) MortdaRizey. District 37



Pic (22) cemetery in Shiraz.



Pic (23) District 1. Tongue of the earth



Pic (24) District 1. Tongue of the earth



Pic (25) HatonAbady Hospice.District 24



Pic (26) Imam Juma Hospice.District 22



Pic (28) Mir Hospice. District 25



Pic (29) Mir Hospice. District 25



Pic (30) Hospice Bourjwardey. District 38



Pic (31) Mir Hospice. District 25



Pic (32) Imam Zadah Ahmed

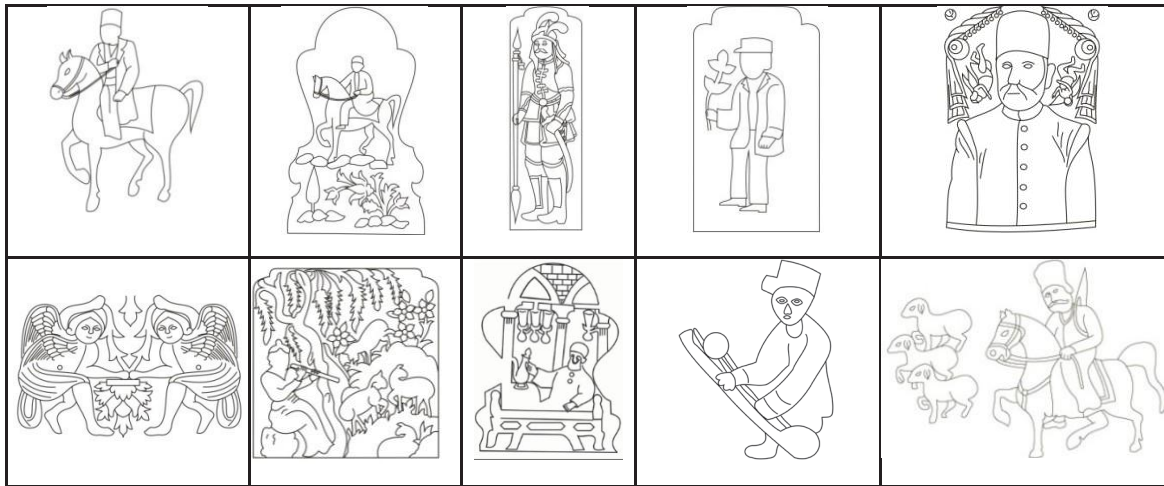


Fig (4) Human elements (Nina Safi, et.al, 1393, p. 76)

- Landscape and geometrical elements

Landscape is a rare motif, shown at a very small scale (pic.33), but geometrical motifs are used in general for the edge of the gravestone as a shape of Mihrab or to frame the inscription or the rest of the motifs. Some geometrical shapes can be noticed appearing side by side, as circles, triangles, and rectangles all together in some examples of gravestones (fig.5). These decorations are a symbol of divine fate and act, for they are always sacred and reflect the afterlife and the mystery of creation.



Pic (33) Hospice Bourjwardey. District 38



Pic (34) Imam Zadah Ahmed

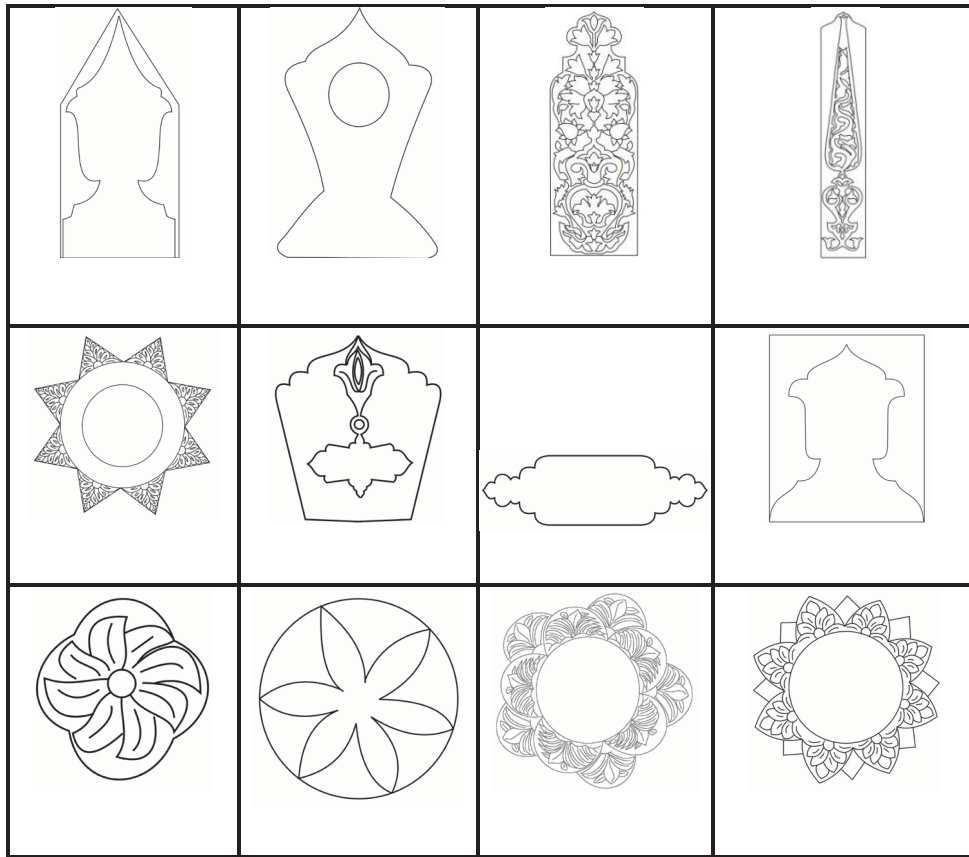


Fig (5) Geometrical elements (Nina Safi, et.al, 1393, p.77)

- Inscriptions

Gravestone inscriptions are written in many calligraphic types, such as Kufic, Naskh, Thuluth, Ta'alik and Nasta'alik. Beside the difference between the calligraphy types used, the gravestones themselves have various types according to their division. Some of them are divided into vertical sections into horizontal ones, while others just include inscriptions inside geometrical shapes, depending on its size and the sentence written on it.

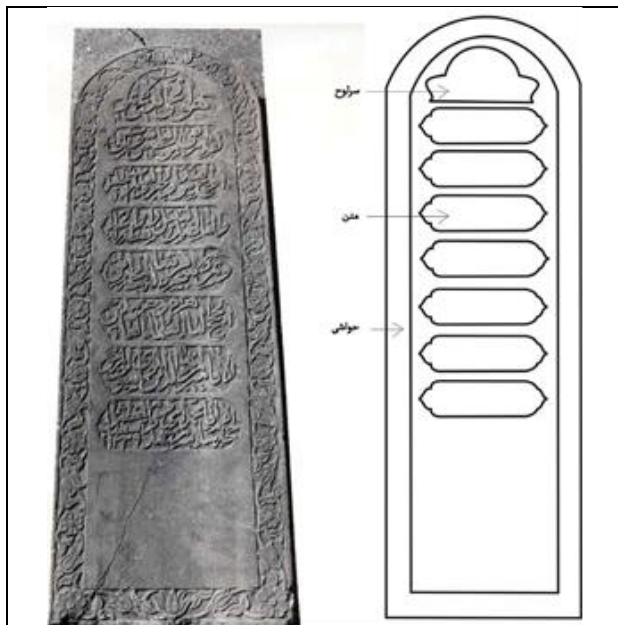


Fig (5) Example of gravestone section. (from Aflakian collection)



Pic (35) HatonAbady. District 24



Pic (36) Kazwrany Hospice. District 17



Pic (37) Mir Hospice. District 25



Pic (38) MortdaRizey Hospice.District 37



Pic (39) Iranian women “Panwey Irani”,36



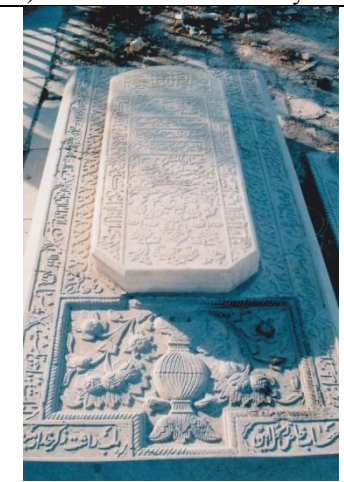
Pic (40) Iranian women “Panwey Irani”,36



Pic (41) Iranian women “Panwey Irani”, 36



Pic (42) Iranian women “Panwey Irani”, 36



Pic (43) Iranian women “Panwey Irani”,36

• Tools elements:-

Here are the unique elements carved on the gravestone, in which each element or tool in the gravestone refers to many things, like the work of the dead one, the gender, the hobbies, group affiliations, personality,

marital status, military service or ethnic origin. These kinds of tools are only carved on the tomb of the important or rich person. By analyzing the tools of the gravestones, it can be realized that some of the dead worked as writers (pic.49), carpenters or sculptors (pic. 48), physicians (pic. 54) (fig.6), cooks (pic. 47), coffee makers (fig.6), tailors (pic.55), hairdressers (pic.46, 51), or the gender (pic.45).



Pic (44) MortdaRizey. District 37



Pic (45) hospice of Mohamed JafarAbadi. District 11



Pic (46) Rokn el mulk. District 12



Pic (47) Faydyn Boka'a. District 9



Pic (48) Faydyn Boka'a.District 9



Pic (49) Faydyn Boka'a. District 9



Pic (50) District 1. Tongue of the earth



Pic (51) District 1. Tongue of the earth



Pic (52) Kazwranly Hospice.District 17



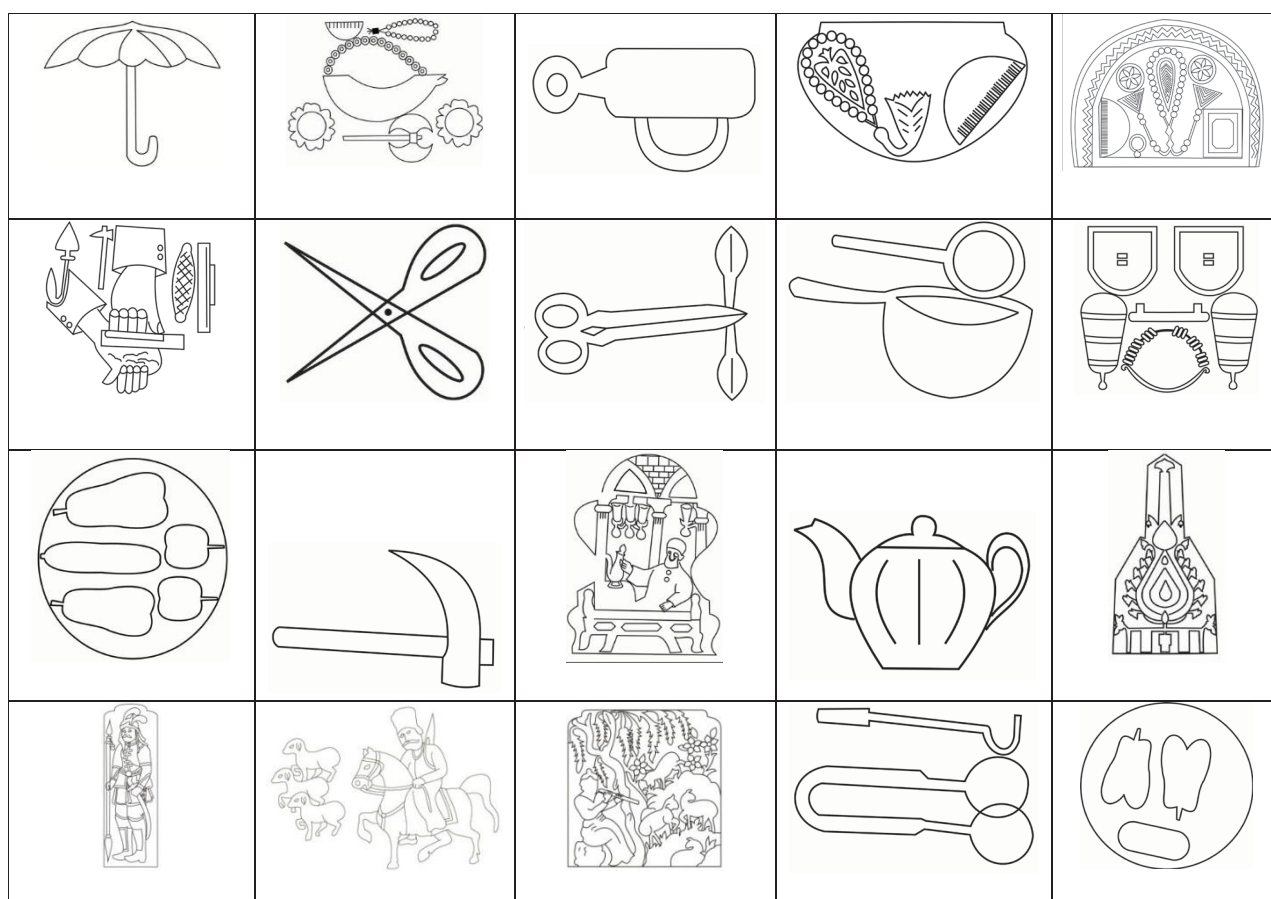
Pic (53) District 1. Tongue of the earth



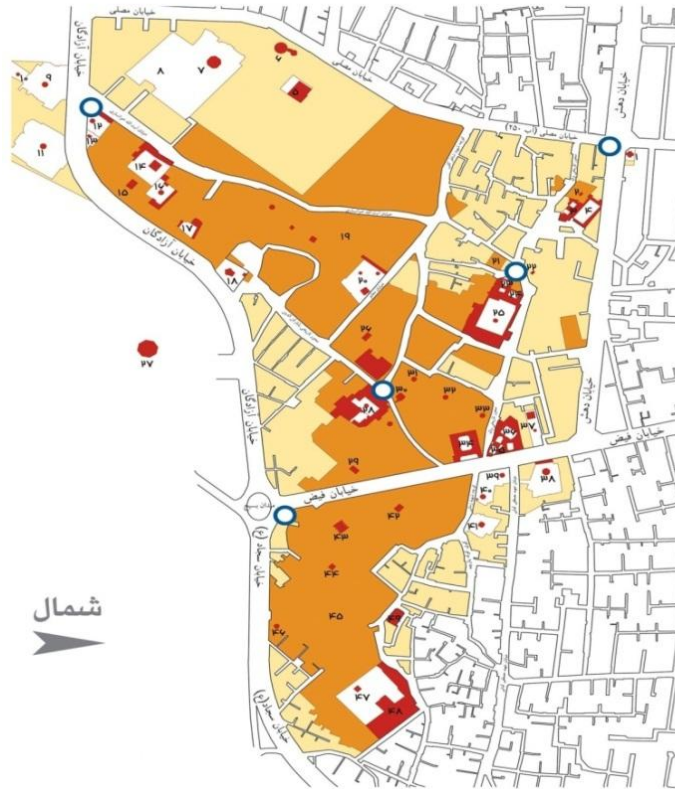
Pic (54) District 1. Tongue of the earth



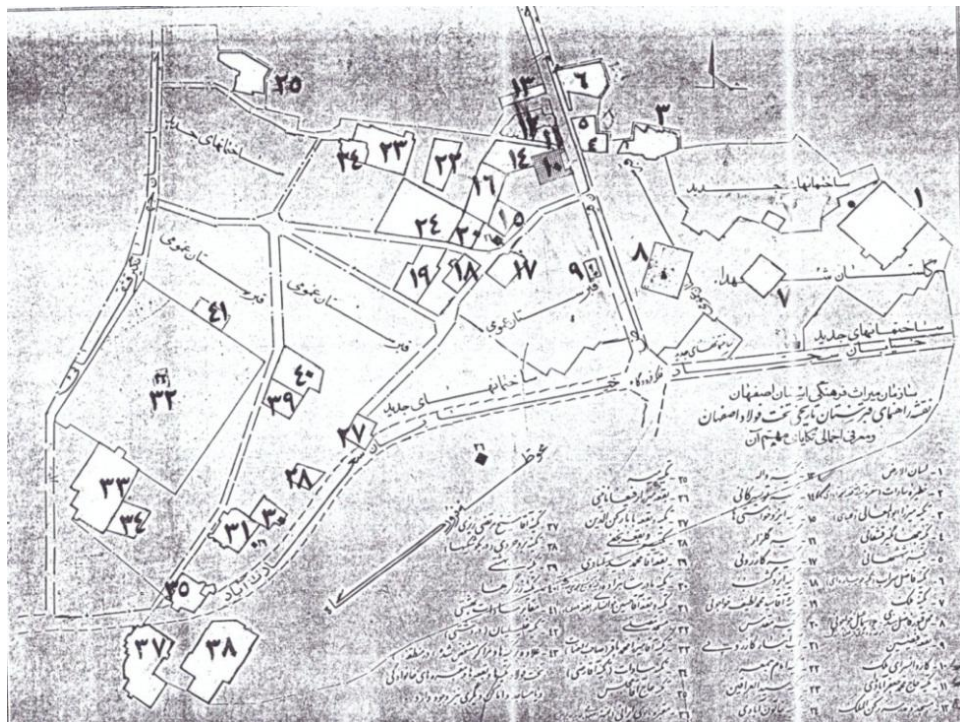
Pic (55) District 1. Tongue of the earth



Fig(6) Tools elements. (Nina Safi, et.al, 1393, p. 78)



Plan1. Historical, archeological and ideological complex site in Takht Foulad, (culture heritage ministry in Isfahan) {6}.<https://www.google.com/url>



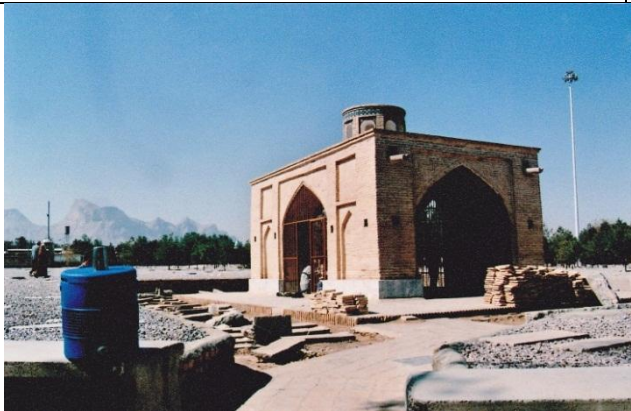
Plan2. The site of Takht foulad (Culture heritage ministry in Isfahan)



Pic (56) MortdaRizey. District 37



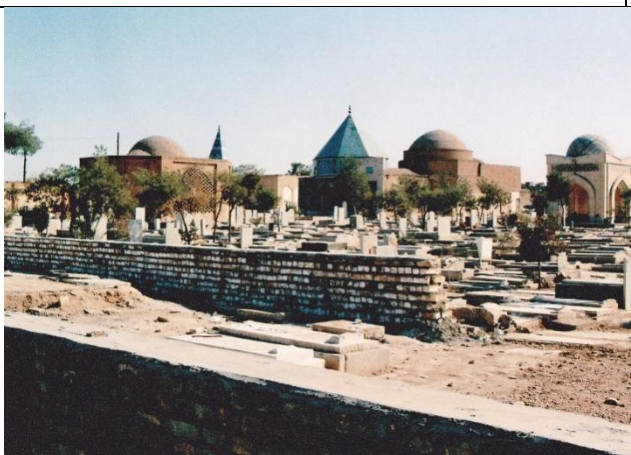
Pic (57) Rokn el Mulk.



Pic (58) District 9



Pic (59) District 17



Pic (60) Mir Hospice



Pic (61) Mir Hospice

II. CONCLUSION

- Takht Foulad represents the city of the dead in Iran in terms of its wholeness, importance and exceptionality.
- There are multiple usages of several elements together to reflect the social, economic and ideological beliefs of the dead.
- New use of tools has been found in order to reflect the social and economic status of the dead.
- Most of the gravestones have tools dating to the Qajar period to facilitate telling the story of the dead with few words and the least inscriptions on stone.

- Takht Foulad is one of the best cemeteries in Iran but not the only one found with tools carved on gravestones, for also Hafezjan in Bakhtiari city in west Iran has many gravestones similar to Takht Foulad but not of the same quality in shape or carving.
- By the name of the sculptor and calligrapher, some undated gravestones can be dated, and vice versa.
- Despite the relationship between Iran and central Asia and India, tombstones in Iran are completely different in the carved symbols from the other two countries.

Notes:

{1} he is a Shia jurist, professor in Azad University in Tehran, Iran.

{2} There is an interpretation about this naming related to one of the verses in Quran, Sura Fuṣṣilat, verse 11, “Then He turned to the heaven, and it was smoke, and He said to it and to the earth, ‘Come! Willingly or unwillingly!’ They said, ‘We come heartily.’ (Isfahani, 1999, p. 41)(Azmezy, 2001, p. 207). It is said also that Imam Hassan, when he was passing through Isfahan on his way to spread Islam he prayed at this place so the land talked to him (Tatemat al Montaha, Quami, p.390). Some of historian calls this place as Alanbey Joshua – prophet Joshua- because they believe that some of Israelis prophet buried at this land like Daniel, Haykok and ash’howel prophets (Isfahani, 1999, p.41)

{3} this area was belong to Jewish and in order to neutralize Jews' magic whom was living there, Imam Hassan made a bed of steel in that area. Or, it called Polad because it was the name of one of the protagonists and commanders of the Dayalema dynasty, who used to build and sit on the rocks in the middle of the street between the Khaju Bridge and the cemetery gate (Mahdaway, 1992, p.50). Some other said that a stone bed “throne” was built in this area for the Buihey prince, and it was broke and demolish at Qajared period (Azmezy, 2001, p. 206)

{4} Many scholars, poets, politician and relic were buried in this area, the most elder and famous one was Baba Roken el Dien (D.769 H.) also there is many relic live and die there like Mir Fandaresky, WallahIsfahani, Bourgourdy..etc. (Azmezy, 2001, 193-206)

{5} for more information about the meaning of the animal symbols in the Persian culture before and after Islam see (Hakey, 2008)

1-Hospice of Darvish AbdelMajiedTalkaney	2-Hospice of bekhtyarbya	3- Hospice Mir Fandreskey
4- MusalaMasjed	5- Ab Anbar Musala	6- Hospice Mirza Mohamed Baker Gihar-Sw
7-Hospice of Syed el Erakayen	8- Hospice Rizey	9-Hospice Fateh el Mulk
10- Hospice Brojeredey	11- Hospice Haj AqaMajlesey	12- Hospice Amien
13-Hospice AqaHussienKhwasarey	14- Hospice Bed Abadey	15- Hospice Madorshahzadah
16- Hospice HojatNajafey	17- Hospice Baba Rokn	18- Hospice Kermaney
19-Garden Twbey	20- Hospice Sadat Mahdaway	21- Hospice Baba Foulad
22- Hospice HatwonAbadey	23- Hospice AqaBashey	24- Hospice Sayed el Erakayen
25- Hospice Sayed Mohamed Latef	26- Hospice MirzaNayieney	27- Hospice and MasjedKarzwney
28- Tomb Complex Faied	29- Ab Anbar Karzwney	30- Hospice Mokadas
31- Hospice Kalzar	32- Hospice Twesarkany	33- Caravansary Malek
34- Hospice Haji Mohamed JafarAbady	35- MasjedRokn el Mulk	36- Hospice WalahIsfahani
37- Hospice FadelSarab	38- Hospice shahshahany	39- Hospice Jehangir Khan Kashkay
40- Hospice Mirzaabu el Ma'alyKalbasey	41- Tomb Mola Mohamed Ismail	42- Tomb FadelIsfahani” Hendi”
43- Tomb Haj Aqa Rahim Khan	44- Hospice Soheda	45-Tomb ShahidAyat Allah Isfahani
46- Gravestone Yosha'a	47- Hospice Lisan el Ard	48-Tomb Sayed Mohamed Fakeh Ahmed Abadey

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