

Original Research Article

The genesis of mosques in Yazd: Recognizing the architecture of the mosques of the first AH centuries in Yazd region

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Abstract

The architectural history of the mosques in Yazd, like other regions, started from the first AH centuries. There are few buildings of this period left in Yazd region, and there are no clear references in this regard in history books. So, talking about these buildings, including mosques, is considered as leaping in the dark. The historical geography texts of the 3rd and 4th centuries (AH) mention four places with pulpits in Yazd. The most famous mosque of the first centuries is Masjed-e Jame Fahraj near Yazd City, but the other mosques are less discussed or there are not many documents available. The research questions are ‘what are the first mosques in Yazd?’, ‘when were they founded?’, and ‘what kind of location and architecture did they have?’ The research method is historical-analytical based on few available authentic historical texts. The aim of the research is to investigate the origin of the mosques in Yazd region and to identify their architectural rules. The result of this research showed that, in the old cities and villages that existed in Yazd Province, at least during two centuries after the arrival of the Muslims, the Jame mosques were built as an urban or rural space and element. The first mosques in Katha (Yazd), Fahraj, Khavidak, Meybod and Nain, and Abarkouh can be added to this list. These mosques are of the vaulted nave type and are based on masonry columns and load-bearing walls, not pillared buildings that are known in other regions as Sus Siraf and Damghan. These buildings, which are not large in size, have common features of space and construction technology, and they are all built with clay and mudbrick materials.

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Among the early mosques of Yazd region, Fahraj Jameh Mosque is the most famous, but researchers have written about Yazd and Meybod Jameh Mosques too. There is a dispute about the date of construction and the architectural issues of these mosques. Probably, there were more mosques in the Yazd region in the early AH centuries because this region was conquered by Muslim Arabs in the first century and Islam became prevalent there. The history of this province in the first few centuries of Hijri is not very clear. During the Seljuq period, with the arrival of Abu Mansour Alaa al-Dawlah Faramarz in Yazd in 504 AH and the establishment of the Al Kakuyeh dynasty, the land of Yazd prospered. Also, with the rise of Atabakan and Al Muzaffar, it became more prosperous until the middle centuries. In this research, with the aim of understanding the origin of the early mosques of Yazd, the traces and evidence of such mosques will be identified and examined.

2. Research Methodology

Because the subject of the research is related to events and architectural works belonging to the past, and at the same time, there is not much information about them, the research method is historical-analytical. Library data are collected based on books, archaeological and restoration reports, and historical documents. Another part of the data will be provided by observing and studying architectural and environmental evidence.

3. Results and discussion

Among the first historical documents about the mosques of Yazd, one can mention the books of Musalak al-Mamalek written by Istakhri and Surah al-Arz written by Ibn Huqal. They were written in the first half of the 4th century (AH) about the province of Istakhar in Fars. They consider Yazd region as the largest region of Istakhar and mentioned four Jameh mosques including Kathe, Meybod, Naein and Fahraj. All these four places have the same name. There is no clear evidence of the Kathe Mosque, but the Jameh Mosque of Yazd is known. The remains of the original Meybod mosque were revealed in the excavation and restoration, but very little evidence of the original Naein mosque was discovered. Fahraj Jame Mosque is intact and standing. Apart from these four mosques, evidence for the mosques of the early AH centuries has been revealed in Abarkuh Jameh Mosque, Khavidak Jameh Mosque near Fahraj, Sheikhiha Mosque in Yazd and Bideh Jameh Mosque in Maybod during restoration investigations. Eight mosques have been studied in this research.

The mosques that have remained in Yazd from the early Hijri centuries show evidence of the Shabestani design. So far, determining the absolute chronology and the exact date of the foundation of the mosques has been impossible, because they do not have any written history and the researchers have commented according to comparative studies. Various opinions have been expressed about the date of founding Fahraj Jameh Mosque, which ranges from the first to the fourth century AH. In general, most researchers have considered the oldest foundation of Yazd

mosques to be closer to the 3rd century AH. This relative dating depends on various factors. The basis of dating is based on the architectural plan and the composition of the spaces, the technology of construction and small columns attached to the jar, the type of rather elliptical arches and the vault used in the building. Also, the dimensions and size of the mudbricks and the method of facade construction with straw and white paint and plaster are important. Fahraj, Meybod and Abarkuh mosques have a clearer status due to the availability of their architectural evidence and many similarities. Perhaps Naein and Bideh mosques, where little evidence of their first structures has remained, can be counted among these mosques. According to the little evidence left and Sirox's research in Yazd Jameh Mosque, this building can be contemporaneous with the first three mosques around the 3rd and 4th centuries. Other mosques such as Sheykhiha and Khavidak should probably be considered in the second period (5th-6th cen. AH). This is because they have the geometry of pointed arches, the type of arch and the shapes that can be seen in mosques from this time onwards.

Based on the historical documents and the urban and environmental characteristics left behind, it can be concluded that most of the mosques of Yazd were located outside the walls of the cities in the early centuries. The foundation of Jameh Mosque itself was the source of development outside the city. About the Jameh Mosque of Kathe, it has been clearly mentioned that this mosque was located outside the city gate. Other mosques can be understood according to their distance from the old urban and rural core. All the mosques were located on the path of Qanats so that their water could be used for ablution and cleanliness.

Apart from Fahraj Jameh Mosque, which has been slightly changed and expanded, none of the mosques of the first centuries in Yazd region have remained without transformation. So, recognizing the early mosque involves many problems. But the available evidence is enough to make general or partial comments about most of their architecture. The first mosques of Yazd region in their original form were generally built on a quadrangular ground and consisted of covered and open spaces. The covered spaces surrounded the courtyard on four sides, and these semi-open spaces were opened to this open space. The main nave with more space was located in the direction of the Qibla, and the other spaces were smaller. The summer space has always been facing the Qibla. The early mosques of the geographical area of Yazd have commonalities as well as differences from the Shabestani mosques of other regions of Iran or Islamic lands in terms of architectural design and plan. The nave design of the early mosques in Yazd is based on load-bearing adobe piers, not on columns. Perhaps this method was taken from the architecture of the Sassanid period and was a continuation of the local tradition and pattern commonly used in this region.

4. Conclusion

The buildings listed in this research as mosques of the first centuries of Hijri have been identified based on historical texts and the existing evidence. In addition to the early mosques of the cities and villages mentioned here, it can be assumed that the cities and villages that existed in ancient times and the early centuries in Yazd region have had such buildings since ancient times. Although

historical documents are not helpful for delving into these buildings, field research and especially archaeological excavations and studies during restoration can open the way to identify other buildings that have the characteristics of early mosques. The construction of a mosque outside the city is a sign of the social superiority of non-Muslim Iranians at least until the 4th century. Then, the intertwining of the spatial structure of the city with the mosque in the following centuries can prove the further progress and influence of Islam.

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