

Analyzing the Environmental Graphic Applied in Iran's Religious Places (Case Study: Shahcheragh's Astaneh)

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Abstract: Shahcheragh Holy Shrine (tomb of Ahmad Ibn Musa (PBUH)) is the brilliant bezel of Shiraz and an index of Islamic-Iranian architecture and it is not only a shelter for the Iranian and non-Iranian pilgrims' refuge but also for a large number of foreign tourists. Shahcheragh is amongst the superior specimens of Iran's Islamic architecture and it has granted it a spatial identity. The present study relies on the environmental graphic's aesthetics and outstanding identity to investigate its influential role in the increase in the number of the religious tourism. In line with this and based on a descriptive-analytical method and in a documentary method through research in the credible websites (and articles), the environmental graphic and its constructive role in attracting tourists have been dealt with. The results of this research indicated that creative confrontation along with paying attention to the national identity not only adds to the religious attractions thereof but also makes it persistently remain in the minds of the internal and external tourists and causes development in the religious tourism. It is by the identification of the primary indices applied in Shahcheragh's environmental graphic and, on the other hand, the relationship between the various sectorial layers (building's structure, (Islamic) architectural decorations and contemporary additions) that tourists' guidance can be established. Artists use this art for designing symbols and drawing guiding tableaus. Such kinds of applied decorations are amongst the ornaments added to this building during the contemporary era. Guiding the pilgrims to this sacred place (Shahcheragh) and showcasing the pictorial and graphical capabilities latent therein are amongst the present study's goals. These can be introduced as proper references for the application of the environmental graphic in the contemporary era's religious places.

Keywords: environmental graphic, religious places, Shahcheragh's Astaneh, Shiraz

1. Introduction

Art and architecture underwent changes with the entry of Islam into Iran and the Islamic concepts became the most important shaping factors thereof. The impression was so deep that it caused the creation and construction of holy shrines for the religious elders. A new style and art, known as Islamic art, was formed. It was with the entry and expansion of Shiism that the relationship between religion and art was corroborated.

Calligraphy and epigraphy were employed on the religious architecture for displaying and highlighting this religion. Decorations (stone and brick works, tileworks, fretwork, colorful glasswork, altars' construction, installation of wooden windows and doors with knot-like geometric patterns, stalactite vaulting and mirror works) have been prevalent amongst the Muslims since the early Islamic periods.

Environmental graphic arts and architecture have been utilized for expressing the religious teachings and value of these elders and they convey the relationship between the displayed Shiite beliefs to the onlookers. In architectural designing of the religious mausoleums, the spatial arrangement and symbols existent in the building elements are well reflective of the Shiite beliefs' streaks and roots.

Environmental graphic incorporates the visual fascinations of a place. Shahcheragh Complex reaches its visual and aesthetical balance by means of environmental graphic and the important topics of the environmental graphic include coordination with the religious environment, aesthetics and being well identified. Relying on the structural principles of art and observing the aesthetical standards in the first place and being creative and well-identified in the second place, this area tries fulfilling its initial duties and expanding its secondary duties for enabling the religious tourism to grow.

Environmental graphic is a topic wherein the quality of using different kinds of forms, colors, roles and images is proposed and investigated in a versatile, principled and well-planned manner for bettering and simplifying the relations, providing information and navigation as well as construction of the public environment's beauties.

Shahcheragh is one of the greatest religious events in the history of Iran. The application of the Islamic architectural decorations has abundantly contributed to the establishment of the spatial identity of the great man buried there and it has to be enumerated amongst the identity-bestowing Iranian and Islamic indices.

Meanwhile introducing the aesthetical and functional indices of the environmental graphic applied in a religious building, the present study deals with the alignment of these indices with the pilgrims' perceptions thereby to reveal the weak and strong points of designing such spaces from environmental graphic perspective.

The obtained results can be useful in line with the application in the contemporary graphical designing and affairs related to planning and designing religious places.

Therefore, the followings are raised as the study's questions:

- 1) What are the main indices applied in environmental graphic of Shahcheragh Complex?
- 2) How are the various sectorial layers (building structure, architectural (Islamic) decorations and contemporary additions) related to tourists' guidance?

Study's Theoretical Foundations:

Designing of the environmental graphic is neither alone an art nor alone a science rather it encompasses both of the foresaid aspects; designing should be a mixture of effective creative effects and it has to be in the form of a logical investigation and technique and this that how the task should be accomplished. The result of such a combination is the creation of signs that effectively establish communication with the people.

In the environmental graphic, the human-environment bond is corrected. Amongst the most primary general goals of environmental graphic are factors like easing the establishment of relationship with and understanding the environment, creating a visual identity and construction of a beautiful environment (ministry of sciences, research and information technology, no date).

In between, environmental graphic can serve different cultural, religious, instructional, advertising and social functions; it can beautify the environment; this art can play a determinant role in reaching the aforesaid goals.

Shahcheragh, a Beautiful Holy Shrine with Eye-Catching Architecture (Architecture-Decorations):

The religious attractions of Shiraz are amongst the tourism capacities of this city with Shahcheragh (PBUH) being the most important of them.

Many hearts find a second hope by looking at this dome and shrine; a hope that is the effect of the holy shrine's spirituality and special architecture.

Shiraz is one of the important poles of tourism and the historical-cultural capital of Iran and the third holy shrine of Ahl Al-Bayt (Peace Be Upon Them) in Iran.

The people of Shiraz consider the Holy Shrine of Shahcheragh as being especially magnificent and sacred and, due to the same reason, it has always been the pilgrimage destination of the believer men and women.

The unprecedented architecture of Shahcheragh has been drawn on the architectural style commonly used during Safavids, Zandiyeh and Qajar (Azari) Eras and it is eye-catching and it brings about tranquility in the soul. This type of architecture features a special fascination in any other place and it amazes and fascinates the eyes of every human beings herein with its double fascination. The arts applied in this holy place signify the peak of the Islamic art's splendor and there is a lofty insight concealed beyond this spiritual building.

Study Background:

In a research termed "investigating and analyzing the Chinese knot-like geometric decorations applied in the buildings of the historical city of Masuleh (case study: Kasheh Sar Olia Neighborhood)", Saeed Hasanpour Lamar (2013) expresses that there are four common knot-like geometric patterns, namely Shamseh (the sun), flower with eight petals (symbolizing the cycle of the nature), cross (symbolizing the four primary elements of the universe) and circle (symbolizing eternity); of course, circle also symbolizes tree and nature in this plan.

In a research, Muhammad Reza Bemanian (2012) investigated the role of light in the elaboration of the sequence of the mosques' architectural space and concluded that light serves an ordinary function in the Islamic architectural spaces as well as some extraordinary functions the most important of which is illustrating the sequence between the material and the spiritual worlds. This action happens in three temporal spectra and, respectively, in detachment, transition and unification in the Islamic architectural space.

In a study named "the quiddity of the Iranian visual identity from the perspective of graphic", Asghar Javani, Muhammad Khaza'ei and Mansour Kolahkaj (2015) have expressed that the goal of their research is proposing the title "Iranian visual identity", recreation of the archetypes, creation of contemporary Iranian visual patterns or their influences on the new applications based on the latest graphical principles and criteria.

2. Study Method:

The present study is a fundamental-applied research in terms of the study's objectives. The study's advancement requires a descriptive-analytical method and library and field researches have been employed for gathering the needed information. Qualitative and quantitative analyses have been performed for analyzing the information considering the type of the collected data.

Shahcheragh is a specimen featuring religious environmental graphic in Iran. It is a situational sample and it follows a nearly regular method. This example can be utilized as a function in the religious places.

This study has been conducted based on three layers of analysis:

- 1) Building's orientation
- 2) Orientation of the architectural decorations attached to the building
- 3) Orientation of the information added in the contemporary era

Each of the abovementioned cases has been analyzed based on its own specific method (orientation). These three layers can together establish a regular communication with the tourists' guidance (navigation).

First Perspective: this religious place is viewed physically; it guides the pilgrims' look at the place and it possesses a special spatial identity.

Second Perspective: the architectural decorations of the building attract the pilgrims' look and feature general visual identity.

Third Perspective: in fact, in this perspective, we need a series of guiding signs for directing the pilgrims towards the pure holy shrine (Shahcheragh) which possesses an organized visual identity.

A) The Transom of Shahcheragh's Entrance Gate:



Image (1): transom of the entry gate

Building's Orientation:

This building is comprised of a transom and two small rooms; it guides the pilgrims' eyes in four directions to (directly) move through the passes towards the front.

Orientation of the Architectural Decorations Attached to the Building:



Image (2): the small room under the transom of the entry gate

The building has been decorated with traditional bricks and blue tiles (Nuh Al-Wujud) on which the God's names have been calligraphically written in Kufi style of writing (the prominent index of Islamic art); thereon, there are

installed wooden windows ornamented with knot-like geometrical patterns and covered with colorful glasses in the form of altar.

Orientation of the Information Added During the Contemporary Era:



Image (3): the transom of the entry gate

This identifying (navigating) transom serves the pilgrims’ pass into the place. On the transom, there are signs and calligraphies (saluting Ahmad Ibn Musa) for recognizing the personality of the space.

The inscriptions with calligraphical writing are amongst the outstanding elements of the decorations in most of the Islamic buildings. This indicator has also been applied on the transom of the entry gate (in Shahcheragh Holy Shrine) as an aesthetical and functional index.



Image (4): symbol of Ahmad Ibn Musa

Locating the Elements and Signs:

In the upper side of this transom, a protruded black symbol with internal golden writings reading Ahmad Ibn Musa has been designed within the format of a dome. The goal of this designing has been the creation of an index for this holy place and it serves a functional role. This property is of a greater importance for the pilgrims that less frequently prove a presence therein. It also serves the recognition of the personality of the designed space which possesses a spatial contextual identity.

Symbol and Calligraphy That Have Gained Visual Identity:

The calligraphical writing and symbol have been used on the uniforms of the holy shrine’s servants, flags and so forth.





Image (5): visual identity of Shahcheragh

The last one is called Hawl and it is pertinent to the servants who can guide the foreign tourists. This symbol has been designed along with Iran’s flag which possesses a national identity and a writing in English which possesses a global identity and it has been transformed into an international symbol and it has gained an international visual identity.

Having passed from beneath the transom of the entry gate, the pilgrims will face five guiding signboards: 1) Ayatullah Shahid Dastgheyb safekeeping; 2) men’s entry signboard; 3) exit signboard (males and females); 4) women’s entry signboard; and 5) pilgrims’ guide

These signboards have been designed for directing the pilgrims. A number of the signboards are not appropriate for navigating the foreign tourists for they have writings only in Persian and lack the international standards.

Table 1: evaluating the signboards installed post the entry gate

Number of signboards	Color	Color of writings	Material	View point	Writing of three languages	Graphical element
5	Blue	White	Metal	Possesses	Only one case	Lacks



Image (6): pilgrims’ guiding signboard

B) Imam Javad (PBUH) Precinct:

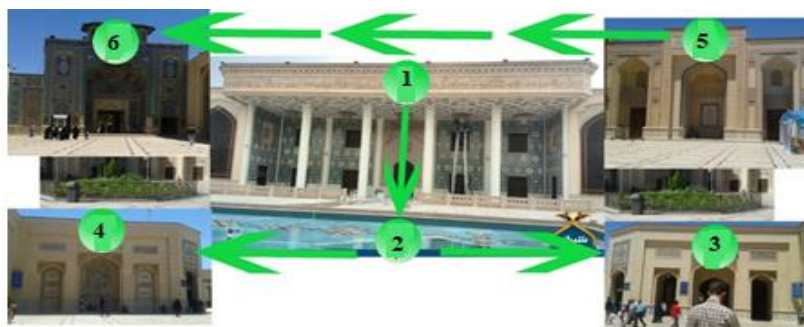


Image (7): interior parts

Building’s Orientation:

This building is consisted of entry and exit doors, seraglio, gardens and pond, watering room and restrooms, northern entry gate that ends in the seraglio. The building guides the pilgrims' eyes towards six directions so as to pass through the paths and fall on the main building (the holy shrine of Shahcheragh).

Orientation of the Architectural Decorations Attached to the Building:



Image (8): front view of the seraglio

In front of the seraglio, the columns, the front view of the porches' transom on which the honorable SŪRAH NOOR has been carved in woodworks in Thulth Calligraphy Style in brown actually strongly emphasizes on the visual sacrosanctity; the ponds' interior has been ornamented with colorful tiles.

Orientation of the Information Added During the Contemporary Period:



(a)



(b)

Image (9): a) ornamental lamps installed on the entry and exit parts' ceilings in the seraglio and b) gardens on the right and left sides of the precinct

The objective of the installation of this lamp inside the ceiling of the seraglio is actually guiding the pilgrims' eyes (at night) towards the decorations and it plays a notable role for showcasing the visual identities. Lamp is one of the lighting indices in graphics. It can be also amongst the applied and aesthetical indices. This indicator has also been applied in Shahcheragh (PBUH) Complex; here, all of the decorations possess a high visual identity and sacrosanctity with the existence of light.

Cedar trees have been planted inside the gardens and they represent Iranian nationality. In Islamic architectural decorations, trees are usually designed in the form of cedar. This visual identity has been designed herein in a live manner.

Transom of the watering room:



Image (10): transom of the watering room

The transom of the watering room has azure blue fretworks written in Thulth style of calligraphy and reading “Al-Salam Alayk Ya Aba Abdullah Al-Hussein” and “Al-Salam Alayk Ya Abolfazl Al-Abbas”.

It enables the recognition of the identity of the place (watering room) and, due to the same reason, it is of a greater importance amongst the other identity dimensions; it is amongst the Islamic and religious indices; such indices have been used for designing the watering rooms’ transoms.

C) Northern Entry Gate:

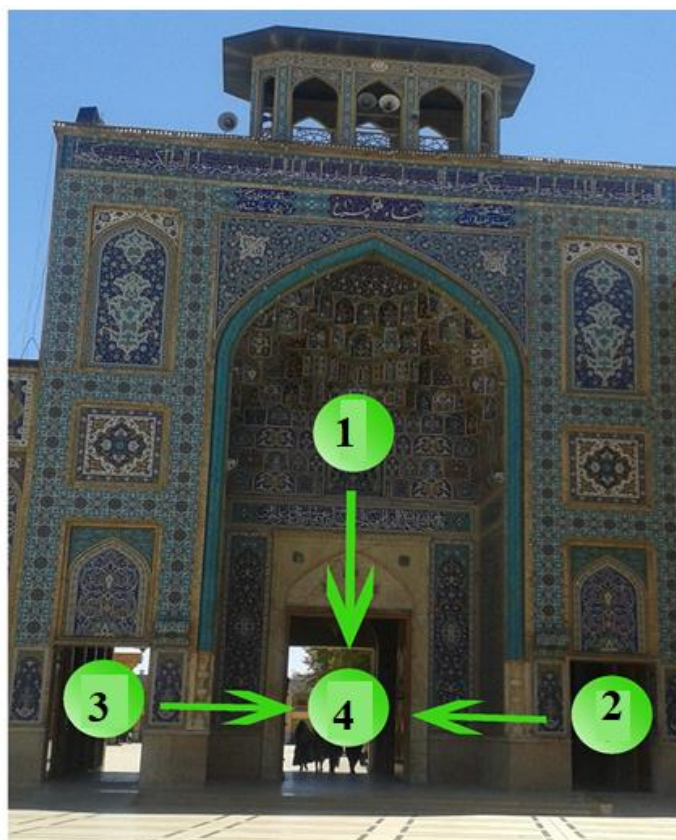


Image (11): the transom on the northern entry gate

Orientation of the Building:

This building guides the pilgrims’ eyes towards four directions so that they pass through the paths and enter the front part of Shahcheragh’s precinct.

Orientation of the Architectural Decorations Attached to the Building:



Image (12): inscriptions on the transom

In the upper section of the door and in the form of an altar and in arabesque reliefs, holy Quran’s ĀYĀT have been ornamented in Thulth style of calligraphy and they are amongst the highlighted indices of the Islamic art.

Orientation of the Information Added in the Contemporary Era:



Image (13): the part in the upper section of the entry gate’s transom

In the upper section of the transom, two verses describing Shahcheragh have been written. In the middle part, there is a writing reading “He Is Shahcheragh”.

The pilgrims will be only theosophically guided towards the recognition of this elder son of Imams; the verses are in proportion to the place and serve the identification of the space’s identity. They feature a spatial-contextual identity which is more of an aesthetical aspect.

The verses do not so much contribute to the navigation of the pilgrims towards the holy shrine. In fact, the pilgrims need to be exactly and regularly guided (such as by signboards); they should be able to easily find the direction and act rapidly and smoothly in the space. Of course, the above explications pertain to the southern entry gate’s transom, as well.

D) Her Highness Ma’asumeh Precinct:



Image (14): the entry gate’s transom

Orientation of the Building:

This building guides’ the pilgrims’ eyes in four directions so that they pass through the paths and enter the main area of Ahmad Ibn Musa’s holy shrine.

Orientation of the Architectural Decorations Attached to the Building:

The transom has been decorated with Quranic AAYAAT and Islamic signs with arabesque images.

The important and prominent feature of Shiites’ art is the use of Shiite themes and symbols in the artworks, including the use of themes and symbols from the holy Quran. They are amongst the applied and aesthetical indices and feature visual identity.

Orientation of the Information Added in the Contemporary Era:



Image (15): the transom on the precinct’s entry gate

On the transom, it has been written “Her Highness Ma’asumeh’s Precinct” in Nasta’aliq style of calligraphy in white. It serves introducing the space’s personality for her highness Ma’asumeh is one of the greatest ladies of Islam (personality identity) and it has been designed for the entry (navigation) of the pilgrims. It features contextual-spatial identity.

The inscriptions with calligraphical writings are amongst the prominent indices of ornamentation in most of the Islamic buildings. This index’s use on the transoms serves aesthetical and applied purposes.

E) Precinct and Holy Shrine of Shahcheragh (PBUH):

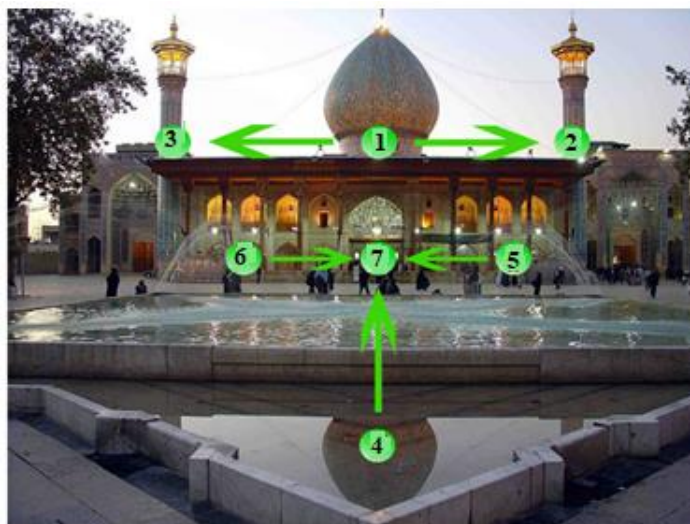


Image (16): interior view

Orientation of the Building:

This building is composed of dome, finials, portico and pond that guide the pilgrims’ eyes in seven directions so that they pass through the paths and enter the holy shrine of Shahcheragh.

Orientation of the Architectural Decorations Attached to the Building:

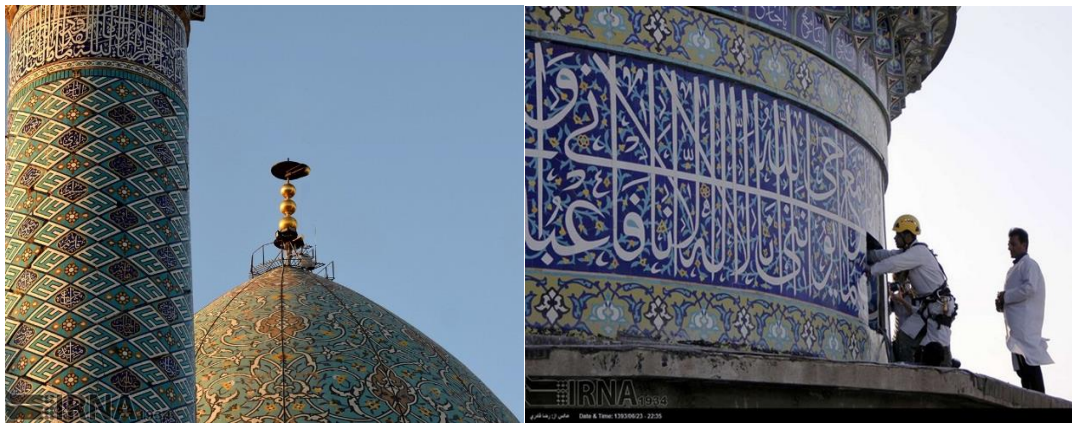


Image (17): Dome and Finials

This dome is very beautiful and it can be stated that it is amongst the most beautiful ones globally. Amongst the prominent and outstanding points is the holy shrine's architectural design. The calculation and ornamentation of the dome is a hard task. The tiles are blue and bear plant-like images and golden water-lily flowers and this has made the dome become known as turquoise dome in the world.

The finials have been ornamented with the names of the God and the immaculate Imams (peace be upon them). In terms of art and richness, they are very beautiful and possess an identity enabling recognition.

Orientation of the Information Added in the Contemporary Era:

Guiding Signboards on the Walls of the Portico: 1) shoe-holding section; 2) women's entry gate; 3) responding to the women's canonical questions; 4) responses to the canonical problems; 5) place for receiving the aids and oblations; and, 6) banners with writings that should be read before entry

The signboards on the portico's walls are golden yellow with black writings and they enable navigation.



Image (18): signboards in the portico

Golden is a color that has the highest brilliance due to its being calm and conservative; it is the only color that seems fascinating with all the color groups from white to black; golden is usually applied in the spaces that there is no natural light (ministry of sciences, research and technology, no date).

Due to the same reason, the portico is not exposed to direct sunlight and golden signboards are utilized considering the place's being spiritual and religious. The designer has applied such indices for designing guiding signboards for pilgrims on the portico of Shahcheragh (PBUH) in respect to the contextual space hence they have to be enumerated amongst the functional and aesthetical indices.

Path Directing Signboards Inside the Precinct of Shahcheragh (PBUH): 1) Velayat gathering hall; 2) curing place; 3) exit; 4) Imam Reza (PBUH)'s entry gate; 6) Kawthar hall; 7) toilet; 8) Martyr Ayatollah Dastgheib's gathering hall; 9) the gate to Atiq Main Mosque; 10) children's garden and playground; 11) medical aids; 12) Imam Javad (PBUH)'s precinct; 13) Imam Sajjad (PBUH)'s entry gate; 14) Imam Musa Ibn Ja'afar (PBUH)'s entry gate; 15) Imam Mahdi (may Allah hasten his honorable reappearance)'s entry gate; 16) the hospitality house; and, 17) pigeons' nest

Some of the guiding signboards have been installed around the precinct (porticos) on the walls and they serve directing the pilgrims but they do not match with the international standards for they have been just written in Persian.

Table (2): evaluation of the guiding signboards on the paths and porticos' sides and inside the precinct of Shahcheragh (PBUH)

Number of signboards	Color	Color of writings	Material	View point	Writing of three languages	Graphical element
23	Blue, white and golden	White and black	Metal	Possess	Only one case	Only one case



Image (19): signboard reading the police

The signboard has been filled with writings in Persian, English and Arabic and it matches with the international standards; moreover, the symbol of (Islamic Republic of Iran's) judicature has been shown thereon hence it possesses visual identity. This index has been utilized on the police kiosk's door in the holy shrine of Shahcheragh and it has to be enumerated amongst the functional and aesthetical indices. It possesses spatial-contextual identity. It has gained an international visual identity.

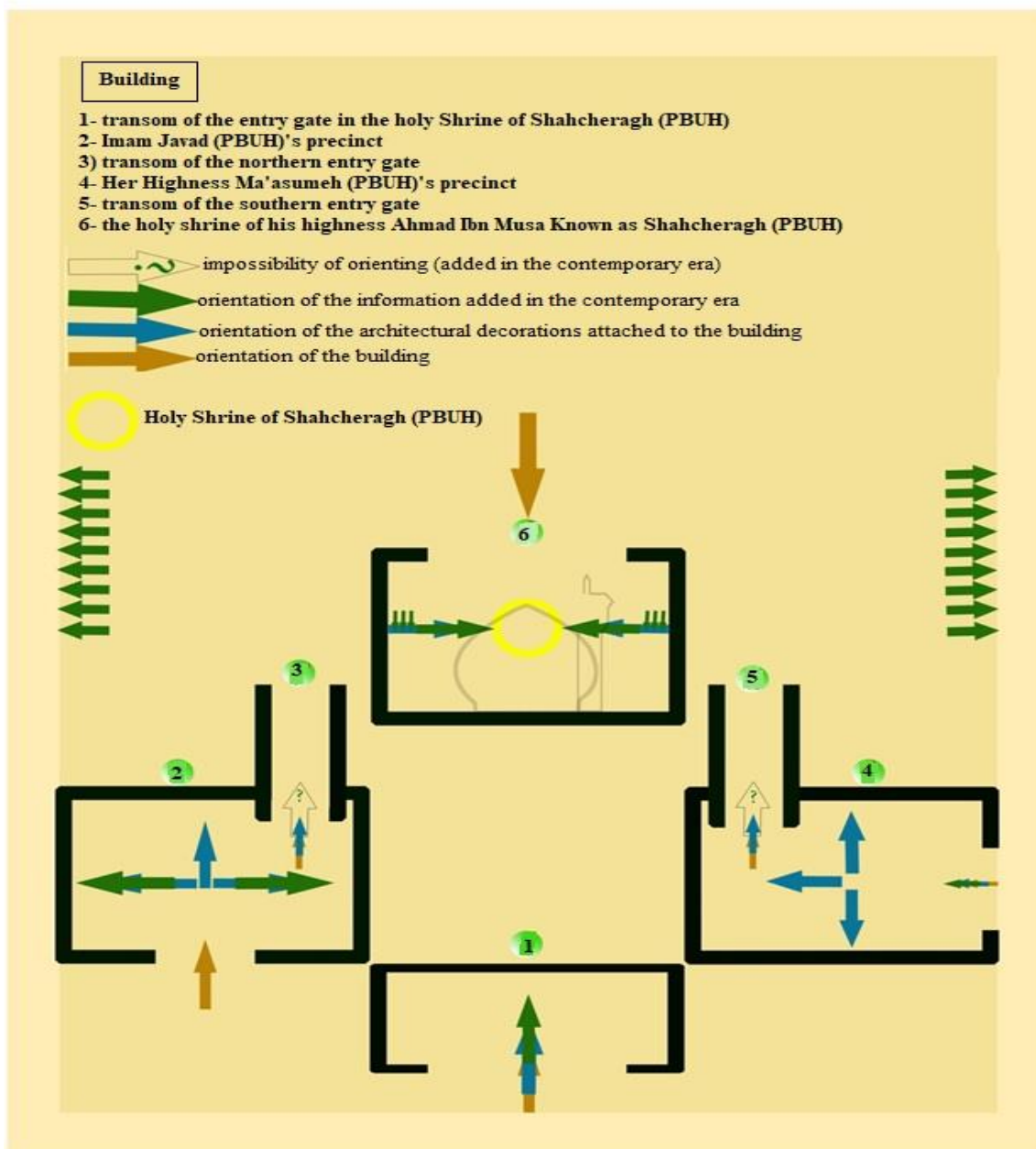


Image (20): a bird-view plan for showing the relationship between the three layers in terms of the guiding of Shahcheragh’s pilgrims

3. Conclusion:

The goal of this research is analyzing the environmental graphic applied in Iran’s religious places (case study: Astaneh in Shahcheragh). In line with responding to the study’s questions, the following results were obtained:

- 1) What are the primary indices applied in the environmental graphic of Shahcheragh Complex?
 The primary indices applied in the environmental graphic of Shahcheragh Complex pertain to the information added to this contemporary building, including the symbols (decorative lamps for lighting), carved inscriptions bearing writings in Nasta’aliq style of calligraphy and guiding signboards all of which are amongst the superior indicators of the environmental graphic and possess identification and navigation behaviors and they have been implemented by versatile masters.
 The application of the primary indices for guidance and navigation and the method of a pilgrim’s circulation in the spaces play essential roles.
- 2) How are the various sectorial layers (buildings’ structures, architectural Islamic decorations and contemporary additions) related to the tourists’ guidance?
 The relationship between the three layers for guiding the tourists and pilgrims: orientation of the building, orientation of the architectural decorations attached to the building and orientation of the information added in the contemporary era.

Orientation of the Building:

The major issue in this regard is the investigation of the physical structure of the buildings and the exterior and interior works and, in fact, it will be made clear that the pilgrims are in certain routes and paths that feature spatial identity.

Shahcheragh is amongst the superior specimens of Iran's Islamic architecture and it has granted the whole place a special spatial identity. One of the important roles of architecture is the objective-sensory actualization of the place that possesses a given personality. Under such circumstances, there is no distance between the pilgrims (visitors) and the place and the visitors are provided with this opportunity to perceive and appraise the place. The orientation of the building physically makes the pilgrims enter a path so it is the first priority of providing the pilgrims with paths for moving on.

Orientation of the Architectural Decorations Attached to the Building:

The architectural decorations attached to this building (holy shrine of Ahmad Ibn Musa known as Shahcheragh (PBUH)) are reflections of the Islamic art that has been worked on the four sides of the building. In order to introduce those religious buildings that possess the capability of transferring the cultural concepts and construct identity for the present generation and visually help the visitors choose a path, it is necessary to build a general visual identity.

In fact, in order to guide the pilgrims towards the holy shrine of Shahcheragh (PBUH), spatial identity needs visual identity that is granted by the use of architectural Islamic decorations with the latter being per se a general visual identity and it is the second priority in providing the pilgrims with access routes for guiding them towards this holy place.

Orientation of Information Added in the Contemporary Era:

Contemporary additions are amongst the primary indices applied in the environmental graphic of Shahcheragh (PBUH). The application of the main indices for guiding and navigating the pilgrims and the method of their finding of their ways in the spaces play essential roles.

In fact, the first and the second priorities for the guiding of the pilgrims towards the spaces in Shahcheragh Complex need exact and regular guidance with organized visual identity following which they can cause the creation of spatial-contextual identity for visually guiding the visitors and identifying the places.

The primary indices of the applied environmental graphic in the holy shrine of Shahcheragh play a considerable role in guiding the visitors.

1) Inscriptions on the transoms of the entry gate and her highness Ma'asumeh Precinct:

Inscriptions have been designed for introducing and identifying the space's personalities and they usually bear writings in Nasta'aliq style of calligraphy which is a prominent component of graphic. The inscriptions bearing calligraphic writings are amongst the outstanding elements of decorations in most of the Islamic buildings. These indices are used on the transoms for guiding and navigating.

2) Symbols on the Transoms of Entry Gate and Imam Javad (PBUH) Precinct:

The symbol of Ahmad Ibn Musa in the middle of the entry gate's transom has become the primary index of Shahcheragh and it draws a lot of attention from the visitors and pilgrims; it serves the introducing of the space's personality.

On the transom of the watering rooms, the symbols of his highness Sayed Al-Shohada and his highness Abbas (may Allah hail on them) have been worked and they are amongst the Islamic and religious indices. They also serve the recognition of the place (watering room)'s identity in a visual manner.

There are cedar trees planted inside the gardens and cedar is Iran's national symbol. In architectural Islamic decorations, trees are usually drawn in the form of cedar.

The designers have made use of this symbol which is amongst the visual Iranian and Islamic indices for designing the garden in Imam Javad (PBUH)'s precinct and for directing the pilgrims' eyes towards Iran's national symbols; cedar features a visual identity and grants spatial-contextual identity to a place.

3) Guiding Signboards in Shahcheragh Complex:

All of the signboards exhibit routing behaviors making them the functional and aesthetical indices.

Blue Signboards with White Writings:

Informing is amongst the cases that need not to be just loudly shouted. Resultantly, blue is the color that can be used for informing because it is associated in the mind with contemplation and tranquility and, additionally, a color component in graphics (Khaki, 2007, p.10).

Golden Signboards with Black Writings:

Due to its being calm and conservative, golden is the color with the highest brilliance and it is the only color that seems fascinating with all the color groups from white to black. Golden is usually applied in the spaces without natural light (porticos) (ministry of sciences, research and technology, no date). These golden signboards with black writings have been designed according to the contextual space.

White Signboards with Black Writings:

Black is the darkest of the colors as compared to white; it is a sign of majesty and dignity (ministry of sciences, research and technology, no date).

Some signboards bear writings in Persian, Arabic and English and the graphical elements that are parts of the applied global graphical indices and grant spatial-contextual identity to a place are utilized for guiding the internal and external visitors and pilgrims.

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