



Saqqakhanehs in Sangalaj Neighborhood of Tehran: Case Study of Abbas Ali Karbalai Saqqakhaneh

Samira Nourian

Department of History and Archeology, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

Hayedeh Khamseh*

Department of History and Archeology, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

Mohammad Reza Saeedi Harsini

Associate Professor of Institute of Humanities Research and Development, SAMT, Tehran, Iran

Article Information

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.71647/jaa.2025.1129812>

Received Date: 22/08/2024

Revised Date: 03/10/2024

Accepted Date: 09/12/2024

Available Online: 25/09/2025

Abstract: Saqqakhaneh which is a kind of drinking fountain is one of the non-profit buildings of the Islamic era, which were built in accordance with religious beliefs and values in public streets to quench the thirst and remind the event of the Karbala desert. In most Iranian cities, Saqqakhanehs play a significant role and should be considered a "socio-religious phenomenon" rooted in the ancient Iranian culture of the sanctity of water and is intertwined with Shia beliefs about the Karbala incident. The word "sagha" comes from the Arabic "saqaya," meaning to give water. The first Saqqakhanehs in Iran were built during the Safavid era when Shia Islam became the official religion. The oldest Saqqakhaneh belongs to this period. Historically, Saqqakhanehs were an important part of urban spaces, usually constructed in crowded areas like mosques, schools, or as standalone buildings in alleys and markets. Today, there are over 290 Saqqakhanehs in Tehran, though only a few remain visible as most have been demolished or no longer attract public attention. Sangalaj neighborhood is one of the neighborhoods of the 12th district of Tehran Municipality, which has a part of the historical body of this city during the Safavid and Nasrid eras, and it was the most important neighborhood of old Tehran after Auladjan and Bazar neighborhoods. This study examines the sacred elements of water and fire in Saqqakhanehs, the factors that influenced their formation, architectural features, functions, and customs. By analyzing some of Sangalaj's old Saqqakhanehs, particularly the Karbalaee Abbasali Saqqakhaneh, one of the oldest from the Qajar period, we aim to uncover architectural features and historical mysteries. This study utilizes descriptive-analytical methods, library research, and field studies to explore existing documents and research.

Keywords: Saqqakhaneh, Tehran, Sangalaj Neighborhood, Karbalaee Abbasali Saqqakhaneh.

Citation

Nourian, S., Khamseh, H., Saeedi Harsini, M.R., (2025). Saqqakhanehs in Sangalaj Neighborhood of Tehran: Case Study of Abbas Ali Karbalai Saqqakhaneh., *Journal of Archaeology and Archaeometry* 4 (2), 15-32, Doi: <https://doi.org/10.71647/jaa.2025.1129812>.

* Corresponding Author

Email Address: hkhamseh72@yahoo.com (Hayedeh Khamseh).



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Introduction

saqqakhanehs are a prominent architectural element in Iranian cities, notable for their unique architectural styles. The symbols, customs, beliefs, and rituals associated with saqqakhanehs embody a distinct culture influenced by local traditions and religious beliefs, offering various societal functions (Derakhsh & Basooli, 2021: 55). Saqqakhanehs are socio-religious phenomena with a long history, where life-giving water is freely available to thirsty passersby. These structures are considered sacred by Muslims, especially Shia, and can be found in most Islamic cities. Due to water's significance in ancient Iranian culture and its connection to the Karbala incident and Imam Hussain's martyrdom, saqqakhanehs were established as public-benefit buildings to offer blessed water and fulfill people's needs. Thus, water—the sacred, healing, and soothing liquid—represents faith, sacrifice, devotion, and martyrdom (Bonyadloo, 2002: 13). Iran's water scarcity has elevated the reverence and sanctity of saqqakhanehs, which gained religious significance following the advent of Islam and the Karbala incident. They served dual roles: water distribution and religious-cultural functions. Over time, popular beliefs have formed around Saqqakhanehs, some of which persist today. While many sacred sites in Iran are revered due to religious associations, the sanctity of Saqqakhanehs stems from the sacred nature of water and its link to Karbala, despite diminishing beliefs due to scientific advances. Detachment from these cultural beliefs is challenging due to their deep-rooted presence. Today, Saqqakhanehs still serve as spiritual havens for some believers (Atiyabi, 2004: 56).

Research Methodology

This descriptive-analytical study, based on the subject's nature, uses library research, document analysis, and available records to examine the overall nature and functions of Saqqakhanehs within urban spaces, focusing on Tehran's Sanglaj neighborhood, particularly Karbalaee Abbasali's Saqqakhaneh. Field studies assess architectural features, characteristics, and decorations of the case study.

Background

From an archaeological perspective, Saqqakhanehs from the Islamic period are significant but have received limited scholarly attention compared to other Iranian structures from this era. The sacredness of water is an ancient cultural theme in Iran, tracing back to prehistory (Zarei & Habibi, 2013: 38). Saqqakhanehs are key Shia pilgrimage sites representing cultural and religious beliefs. The "Moein Encyclopedic Dictionary" defines them as "where they store water for the thirsty and consider it blessed and every knot and lock, signs and symbols on the door and wall tells about their wishes and needs" (Atiyabi, 2003: 56). Saqqakhanehs are sacred structures in public spaces, providing water and reminding people of the Karbala tragedy. The main element of Saqqakhanehs is water, representing Anahita, the goddess of waters from ancient times, and Fatima Zahra's (a.s.) dowry. Saqqakhanehs reflect the fusion of ancient and Islamic beliefs, honoring water's significance and commemorating Imam Hussain's (a.s.) martyrdom at Karbala. A widespread belief associated with Saqqakhanehs is that making a vow with a candle will fulfill one's wishes (Haghighi Rad, 2022). The earliest Iranian Saqqakhanehs were constructed during the Safavid era when Shia Islam was formalized, as the oldest Saqqakhanehs date from this time. They were built by benevolent sponsors for two main reasons: providing water to the public and commemorating Karbala's martyrs, the latter being a major motivation for their construction in Iran (Bonyadloo, 2002: 16, 112). Saqqakhanehs and its privacy are highly respected among people, as people swear by it and believe that the water of Saqqakhaneh is blessed and only for drinking and should not be poured on the ground; Also,

it is considered a sin to extinguish the burning candle of the Saqqakhaneh before it is extinguished (Dadmehr, 1999: 68-69).

Sacred Elements of Water and Fire in Saqqakhanehs Creation

Sacred Element of Water:

The four elements—water, soil, air, and fire—hold special significance in Iranian tradition and have always been present in traditional Iranian architecture (Nazem et al., 2020: 211). Water's sacredness has deep roots in Iranian culture, dating back to prehistoric times (Zarei & Habibi, 2013: 83). The Mithraic cult emphasized water's sanctity (Atiyabi, 2004: 56). Water, as the source of life, influenced Iranian urban planning, with cities built around water bodies, a practice as old as urban history itself. Locations for activities were chosen based on water flow, and urban elements were shaped by it (Hooshmand et al., 2015: 2). Given Iran's arid climate, safeguarding and honoring water has always been paramount (Eslami Nodushan, 1984: 37). Iran's arid and semi-arid climates have profoundly influenced the creation of various architectural forms (Kiani, 2000: 223). Before Islam, Iranians revered Anahita (the goddess of water), and post-Islam, Fatima Zahra (a.s.) became associated with water. These revered figures reflect the significance of water in Iranian life (Yavari, 1980: 42). Folklore about water and rain is abundant in Iranian culture, with farmers considering water as Fatima Zahra's (a.s.) dowry and public property (Khosravi, 1978: 101). Iranian literature also celebrates water in proverbs, such as: "Water is light," "Water brings prosperity," and "Water is in Yazid's possession" (Boyce, 1967: 136). The Quran mentions water (Ma'a) 63 times in various contexts (Aminzadeh, 2003: 68). Surah Al-Anbiya verse 30 states, "We made every living thing from water." In the Quran, water symbolizes life, paradise, and purity. "The Water of Life" is an Islamic belief about a spring that grants immortality; in Islam, water is Fatima's dowry (Shin Dashtgol, 2003: 126). Many Islamic sacred sites, like mosques and shrines, are near water sources (Bahar, 1998: 279). Providing water is a subtle aspect of Islamic insight; during early Islamic battles, offering water to prisoners was encouraged (Afsal Toosi & Mani, 2013: 52). Shia mourning practices and constant remembrance of Karbala's historical events, especially water deprivation, heightened water's sacredness in religious culture and influenced Iranian art, including performance, painting, music, literature, and architecture. In Iran, creating Saqqakhanehs in arid areas is equated with earning paradise, symbolizing all water-related activities dedicated to Imam Abbas (Khosravi, 1999: 13, 115).

The emergence of Saqqakhanehs in Iran brought popular culture into new religious beliefs. These include prayers, rituals, and traditions, some of which endure despite changes in lifestyle and modern water infrastructure diminishing their appeal. Nonetheless, Saqqakhanehs remain respected sites, often sworn upon.

Sacred Element of Fire:

From the earliest days of humanity, fire's importance was recognized, valued, and revered. In Islamic tradition, fire, unlike in Zoroastrianism, lacks its own temple as Islamic thought supplanted it. However, pre-Islamic beliefs and traditions persisted, manifesting in Islamic forms, replacing Anahita temples and fire temples with Saqqakhanehs, sanctifying both water and fire. Respect for fire alongside water continues today, with candles and lamps in Saqqakhanehs traced back to Zoroastrian influences absorbed into Islam (Dadmehr, 1999: 34-35).

Saqqqa and Saqqakhaneh in Terms of Meaning

The act of providing water is the primary reason for constructing Saqqakhanehs in Islamic

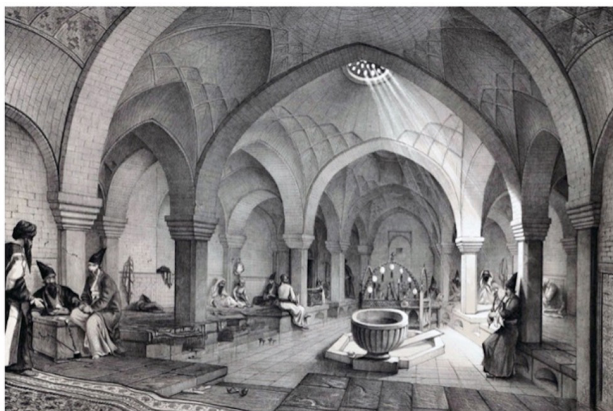


Figure 1- Sangab in the middle of Khosrow Agha's bath, Isfahan, photo by Pascal Coste, 1867. (Source: www.data.abuledu.org)

lands. The Arabic words "saqaya" and "sagha" (meaning "to give water") have entered Persian culture, signifying "to offer water" and "to sell water" (Bonyadloo, 2002: 14–15). Water carriers were called "saqqa," and the storage places were "saqqakhaneh" (Bahmanyar & Talebi, 2015: 4). The word "saqqa" is derived from the verb "sagha" (to give water), and "Saqqakhaneh" is defined as a place where water is stored for the thirsty, considered blessed (Atiyabi, 2004: 56). "Sagha" means water vendor (Dehkhoda Dictionary), water seller, water-giver, and wa- person who brings water home, water worker (Amid). "Saqqakhaneh" is a place where water is stored for the thirsty (Dehkhoda Dictionary), a place for water storage considered blessed (Moein Encyclopedic Dictionary), a large vessel or tank built to store water for the thirsty (Amid, Vol. 5: 62). "Sagha" means water bag, milk bag, or container, with "saghiya" being its plural form, and "saqi" meaning water-giver (Jafarnejad & Jafarnejad, 2017: 91). In Iranian culture, both pre- and post-Islam, water has always held a high value, but the "saqqakhaneh culture" truly emerged post-Karbala, rooted in the religious beliefs of Iran, a water-scarce land. Islamic teachings encourage saying "Ya Hussain" after drinking water, and religious poetry refers to "the water carrier of Karbala, Abul Fazl." Thus, the word "saqqa" likely entered Persian culture post-Islam. Historically, "sangab" was also used alongside "saqqakhaneh." A "sangab" is a large stone vessel used for storage (Figure 1), an undeveloped form of saqqakhaneh, placed in public spaces by benefactors to store clean drinking water (Bahmanyar & Talebi, 2015: 4).

These were the first formal representations of Shia respect for Karbala martyrs and the water carrier tradition stemming from that event (Afsal Toosi & Mani, 2013: 53). Iranian sculptor, painter, researcher, and collector Parviz Tanavoli, a pioneer of the Saqqakhaneh School, quoted Peter Lamborn Wilson, a saqqakhaneh phenomenon researcher, saying, "The saqqakhaneh is simultaneously a sacred place and a memorial of martyrs' graves, reminding us of God's mercy in the dry lands of Islam and symbolizing Karbala's tragedy. It is a public water source for thirsty passersby, funded by mosques or philanthropists, and more than just water; it is sacred" (Emami, 1977: 38).

Factors Influencing the Formation of Saqqakhanehs

The formation of urban spaces, including Saqqakhanehs, is influenced by factors like the natural environment, societal culture, residents' worldview, and events like Karbala, adherence to religious teachings, enduring beliefs, and endowments (Ebrahimi, 2007: 40). These factors are briefly illustrated in Figure 2.

Examining the fundamental form of Saqqakhanehs is challenging due to modern urban

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Figure 2- Factors and reasons for the emergence of the tavern as an urban element (authors)



development and lack of systematic archaeological research and historical sources. This discussion focuses on their current state (Etimadi, 1998: 30–31). Spatially, Saqqakhanehs act as nodes connecting pathways. As reminders of spirituality, they offer resting points for travelers to drink water and remember Karbala's martyrs amid daily hustle (Sattari Fard, 2013: 6). Architecturally, Saqqakhanehs resemble rooms built into walls along pathways. These cavities vary in size but are generally small (Hashemi & Jafari, 2016: 3). Sizes range from small to large, with varying levels of decoration. Saqqakhanehs architecture resembles mosque and mihrab architecture, with similar arches (Ahmadi Maleki, 1998: 86). They were built in diverse styles, sometimes topped with bronze domes, storing water for the thirsty, and considered blessed by the public (Zavosh, 1991: 181). Some were as small as three by four meters or smaller, appearing as wall cavities. They were often near mosques, in busy markets, or at intersections (Atiyabi, 2004: 57). Beyond functionality, Saqqakhanehs became spiritual structures, transformed by religious artists into symbolic canvases. Though relatively new, their underlying concepts are ancient, influencing many artistic creations in Iranian history. For Saqqakhaneh enthusiasts, each architectural element holds meaning: the metal grille resembles saints' shrines; the dome evokes martyrdom; the raised hand symbolizes the five members of the Prophet's family and Abbas's blessed hand; inscriptions include Quranic verses, religious slogans, or poetry praising Imam Hussain (a.s.) and Abbas (a.s.) (Etimadi, 1998: 30–31); green is a dominant color due to its association with the Prophet's family and Muslims' affinity for it in religious practices; symbolic objects like banners, pennants, domes, minarets, and the color green feature prominently. Symbolism extends to the brass bowls used for drinking, often inscribed with "Ya Hussain (a.s.), curse upon Yazid" (Dadmehr, 1999: 59–65). Saqqakhanehs are generally built in three distinct forms:

1. Standalone Saqqakhanehs (Cubical, Cylindrical, or Octagonal): Independent structures not connected to adjacent buildings, often cubical, cylindrical, or octagonal, visible and accessible from all sides (Zarei & Golzarian, 2012: 418).
2. Shop-like Saqqakhanehs: Semi-open or single-bay structures near shops or residences, usually located on main roads and busy streets (Ghaabeli, 2011: 412).
3. Attached Saqqakhanehs: Part of adjacent structures, like mosques or homes, often found in side streets and alleys (Anasori, 2004: 123).

Typically, Saqqakhanehs are rooms with wooden doors and windows, decorated with intricate latticework. Common designs include twelve-pointed star, Jafari square, and other geometric patterns. They are often located near mosque doors or intersections, with some benefactors dedicating parts of their property to their construction. Many are at busy intersections, like bazaars (Zarei & Habibi, 2013: 45). Ownership is either private or waqf (endowed), with some documented and others lacking official waqf status (Ebrahimi, 2007: 51).

Functions of Saqqakhanehs

Over time, Saqqakhanehs have gained functions reflecting societal changes and technological advancements, leading to significant shifts from their original purpose. In modern Iranian cities, Saqqakhanehs are rare architectural elements outside of historical areas. Their primary function was providing water to passersby (Derakhsh & Basooli, 2021: 57). While offering water to the thirsty was a core motivation, these unique structures fulfilled various other roles. Naser Najmi described Tehran's old Saqqakhanehs: "In old Tehran, Saqqakhanehs were built for virtuous deeds. A small shop housed large stone vessels or bowls, surrounded by chained cups, particularly during mourning and commemorating Karbala's martyrs. At night, candles

were lit near the water to guide the thirsty, eventually becoming a ritual for those with vows, with candles lit every Friday night" (Tabibi, 1989: 280). In larger Saqqakhanehs, holy portraits adorned the walls, each managed by caretakers, and some were built to help the thirsty, especially in summer, with ice placed in the water (Najmi, 1983: 389–390). Beyond their primary function, Saqqakhanehs served social, religious, artistic, and cultural purposes (Derakhsh & Basooli, 2021: 57), illustrated in Figure 3.

The manifestation of teamwork in social activities A serious role in religious rituals Carrying out charitable works in a cooperative manner A place to hang out problem solving	social	Functions of Saqqakhanehs
Ashura symbol A special place in beliefs stop sitting	religious	
Ashura symbol A special place in beliefs stop sitting	artistic	
The origin of words and proverbs The origin of some superstitions	cultural	

Figure 3- The functions of the brewery (authors)

Customs and Traditions of Saqqakhanehs

Lighting Candles: Lighting candles at sacred sites for wishes is an ancient Iranian belief. Women, young and old, visit Saqqakhanehs, especially on Thursday evenings or religious occasions, to light candles (Ebrahimi, 2007: 52). Naser Najmi wrote in "Old Iran and Old Tehran": "Candles were lit near the water at night for the thirsty to see, later becoming a ritual for those with vows, lighting candles every Friday" (Tabibi, 1989: 280).

Tying Threads (Dakhil): Women, facing difficulties, tie threads (dakhil) to Saqqakhaneh windows—perhaps a piece of green cloth, a strip of clothing, or a small lock—vowing to give charity if their problems are solved. They seek intercession from Imam Hussain (a.s.) and Abbas (a.s.) to fulfill their needs. Seyed Mohammad Taqi Mostafavi noted: "Tying threads and hanging lamps are traditions dating back thousands of years. They reflect pure devotion among simple-hearted people seeking help from sacred places through candles and threads" (Ebrahimi, 2007: 53). Throughout history, people have sought help from the powerful, relying on spiritual or material strength for their needs. Religious individuals, before all else, turn to God for peace, making temples both places of worship and places of refuge for those in need (Mostafavi, 1982: 11).

Tehran's Saqqakhanehs and Their Distribution

Tehran, a major city in a dry, steppe region, lacks rivers running through or around it. Its climate is hot and dry in summer, with temperatures reaching 42.5°C. Water scarcity, urban



Figure 4- Map of Darul-Khalifah, Tehran - drawn by Kirshish in 1896, Sangalaj neighborhood is marked in this map (Khorshid Building Consulting Engineers, 2022)

expansion, and intense summer heat led benefactors to build public Saqqakhanehs, particularly for the poor. Famous Saqqakhanehs in old Tehran include Nowruz Khan, Ayeneh, and Agha Sheikh Hadi Najmabadi Saqqakhanehs (Ebrahimi, 2007: 41, 46). According to Tehran's cultural atlas, before 1921, the city had 103 Saqqakhanehs, 79.6% built between 1871-1920. Between 1921 and 1933, 193 more Saqqakhanehs were added, with the peak construction in 1961-1965 (15%). Of Tehran's Saqqakhanehs, 53.7% are less than 1 square meter, 28.4% between 1 and 1.99 square meters, 8.5% between 2 and 2.99 square meters, 3.7% between 3 and 3.99 square meters, and 2% between 4.44 and 4.99 square meters, with larger sizes also present (Cultural Atlas, 1976: 43). Today, with urban development, Tehran has about 100 Saqqakhanehs (Ebrahimi, 2007: 50), some in the Sangalaj neighborhood.

Sanglaj Neighborhood in Tehran

Tehran, fortified in 1553 under Shah Tahmasp Safavi, had four main districts: Oudlajan, Sanglaj, Bazaar, and Chaleh Meydan, which later developed smaller neighborhoods: Sar Cheshmeh, Pamenar, Shiraziha, Armenians, Jews, Royal Yard, Mulemen, Turkmen, Sar-e Gabr Agha, Naw Gate, Khosrow Khan Garden, Qomiha, Amin Garden, Pesteh Bigh Garden, and Arab District (Rasouli Nejad et al., 2021: 3). Sanglaj (Figure 4), one of Tehran's 12th municipal district's 13 neighborhoods, spans 134 hectares and includes historical elements from the Safavid and Naserite eras. It is bordered by 15 Khordad Street to the north, Molavi Street to the south, Khiabani (Khayyam) Street to the east, and Eslam Unity (formerly Shapour, later Hanif Nejad) Street to the west, near Qazvin Gate, Shah Square, and Qavam al-Dowleh Bazaar. In western Molavi Street, it reached Mohammadiyeh Gate, also known as the new or cave gate, located in the Pakapog or Execution Square (current Mohammadiyeh Square). The name "Sanglaj" likely has ancient roots, as there is a Sanglich region in Badakhshan, Afghanistan. The "Limits of the World from the East to the West," authored by an unknown 10th-century writer, mentions Sanglich or Sanglaj as "a place at the foot of the mountains with Bighara Badakhshi and Laleh mines, with a hot, stagnant spring nearby that one cannot touch." Minorski, in his commentary on "Limits of the World," suggests Sanglaj, Sanglich, or Sang-laj may be an Arabized form of "Sangs," a place in the greater Khorasan region. Sanglich or Sanglaj is in the Pamir mountains, in Badakhshan, where residents speak Sanglich, a Persian dialect. Some researchers believed "Sanglaj" was derived from "sang" (stone) and "raj" (line), related to water allocation (Emarat Khorshid, 2022: 18, 23).

As of 2016, Sanglaj's population was estimated at 26,829. Despite recent developments, the neighborhood has retained its original structure but has not advanced with contemporary demands. Its residential quality has declined due to inadequate access, narrow streets, low service availability, and structural issues (Forouzandeh, 2013: 4). In the past, many of Tehran's gardens were in Sanglaj, a desirable area. Sanglaj remained a vital part of Tehran until the end of the Qajar period, but Reza Shah's reign brought significant changes, demolishing much of the neighborhood, leaving only memories. During World War II and Allied occupation, Sanglaj suffered severe damage, becoming a ghost town. However, during the Pahlavi II era, efforts were made to restore the area. Sanglaj was the first Tehran district to receive piped water. Recent years have seen restoration efforts for its historic structures. Prominent residents included: Adud al-Mulk, deputy sultan and head of the Qajar family; Ayatollah Mohammad Tabatabai; Ayatollah Abdullah Behbahani; Sheikh Kerna (Nasir's court jester); Mirza Zaki Khan; Karbalaee Abbasali Goomrakchi; Sheikh Fazlollah Noori; Mirza Abdolkarim Minister; Mirza Seyyed Abolghasem Soltani al-Hokama Naeini; Seyf al-Ataba, and Agha Hossein Najmabadi (Emarat Khorshid, 2022: 18–23). Notable Saqqakhanehs in Sanglaj include:

- Shapour Saqqakhaneh: Located on Vahdat Eslami Street, Tarkhani Street, near Vaziri Street.

- Abulfazl (a.s.) Saqqakhaneh: On Khiabani Street, Abanbar Moayer Alley, Mahdavian Ahadi Alley, No. 70, over 50 years old, shop-like structure also known as Seyyed Nasreddin Saqqakhaneh, built by Mr. Moshtaqi, adjacent to his house, maintained by its current owner (Bonyadloo, 2002: 71).

- Dabbaghkhaneh Saqqakhaneh: In Molavi Bazaar, Teymouri Street, Ibn Sultan Alley, 70 years old, has a single tap in a simple space, popular with devotees. The locked window and tied charms indicate trust in its miraculous powers (Bonyadloo, 2002: 79).

- Moayer al-Mamalik Saqqakhaneh: Next to Moayer Mosque, built by Dostali Khan Moayer al-Mamalik, known as Nazam al-Dowleh II (b. 1820), on Khiabani Street, Moayer Mosque Alley (near Moayer Garden). Unfortunately, the old Saqqakhaneh no longer exists, locals have rebuilt it with wooden pieces, and its candle house remains (Rabani Khalkhali, 2007, Vol. 4: 216; Balaghi, 2007: 208).

- Two other "Moayer Saqqakhanehs" exist: one on Shapour Bazaar, Moayer Bazaar, Abdollah Ahmadiyan Alley, with only two decorative tiles left, reportedly part of Moayer al-Mamalik's endowment. Built over 90 years ago, a single-bay shop with two floors, demolished after its last caretaker, Asadollah Khan Anari, passed away, though locals still light candles by the remaining tiles on mourning nights (Rabani Khalkhali, 2007, Vol. 4: 218). Another is in the same neighborhood, not far away, on an alley named Shahid Moayer. This relatively new Saqqakhaneh, over 80 years old, initially built by an unknown sponsor, was recently rebuilt by Seyyed Mohammad Nasiri from the area as a standalone cubic Saqqakhaneh (Bonyadloo, 2002: 60–62).

- Abulfazl (a.s.) Saqqakhaneh: On Khiabani Street, Morteza Moshtaqi Alley, behind Imamzadeh Seyyed Nasreddin, Shahid Fatahi Alley, at the corner of Shahid Davood Akbarpour Alley. A small, simple structure with a modest façade in a neighboring wall, built by Moshtaqi, reportedly 90 years old. Often referred to as Seyyed Nasreddin (Seyyed Nasiruddin) Saqqakhaneh due to its proximity to Imamzadeh Seyyed Nasreddin. Despite being part of a neighboring property, it is independently maintained by locals (Bonyadloo, 2002: 71). The current Saqqakhaneh lacks water but has a candle house, cared for by Seyyed Mohammad Pourya, known as "A Seyyed," until his passing, after which his wife and sister took over (Great Islamic Encyclopedia Center, 2023, Vol. 1: 16).

- Qamar Bani Hashim Saqqakhaneh: In Shapour (Qavam al-Dowleh) Bazaar or (current Haj Taqi Tarkhani Bazaar), opposite Hariri Mosque. Dates back to the late Qajar or early Pahlavi periods, built by a man named Tehrani, renovated by the sponsor's family in 1990 (Abbasi, 2008: 73; Rabani

Khalkhali, 2007, Vol. 4: 230). Initially had a stone basin, now replaced by a refrigerator donated by the late Ms. Shah Mahmoud. It lacks a candle house (Bonyadloo, 2002: 72–73).

- Abulfazl (a.s.) Saqqakhaneh: On Khiabani Street, Mahdavian Ahadi Street, Moayer Mosque Alley, part of Hajj Abdullah Larzadeh's private property. Dates to the late Pahlavi I or early Pahlavi II periods. Due to municipal restrictions, its water supply was cut off, but its candle house remains (Great Islamic Encyclopedia Center, 2023, Vol. 1: 16).

- Rajabali Saqqakhaneh: (next to Haj Rajabali Tekyeh and Mosque, built in 1800) on the old Derakhunga street in Sanglaj, now demolished.

- Gozar Qoli Saqqakhaneh: (Qajar period) at Shahpur Bazaar's intersection (Qavam al-Dowleh Bazaar, Moayer Bazaar) in Gholamreza Fasih Alley, in a central neighborhood along Moayer al-Mamalik passage, known as Gozar Qoli over time. It was registered as a national monument on June 6, 2000, under No. 2691.

- Karbalaee Abbasali Saqqakhaneh: (Qajar period) on Vahdat Eslami Street, Alborz Street, built between 1876 and 1881, according to its inscription. Besides having an electric water cooler, like other active Saqqakhanehs, it features a metal plate for lighting candles. It was registered as a national monument on July 21, 2005, under No. 12215. This article examines it in detail.

Abbasali Gomrokchi, the Saqqakhaneh's Founder

Karbalaee Abbasali Khan Gomrokchi was a well-known and prosperous merchant during Naser al-Din Shah Qajar's era (Figure 5). In 1881 and earlier, he managed Iran's customs, building numerous public structures like baths, tekyyehs, bazaars, zoorkhanas, and Saqqakhanehs bearing his name in records and tales. Many stories circulate about Naser al-Din Shah's customs minister, known as "Kal Abbasali," who personally oversaw Tehran's customs, collecting duties from importers and merchants to prevent corruption. Kal Abbasali would issue receipts upon receiving goods and had a unique request from them. Jafar Shahr writes in "Old Tehran" that: "Kal Abbasali was a cheerful man who, when issuing customs receipts, asked clients to insult him, after which he would laugh heartily and see them off with jokes." It is said that Kal Abbasali Gomrokchi's cheerful and incorruptible nature made him famous, linking his name to one of Tehran's major thoroughfares at the time (Shahri, 1992, Vol. 1). Naser Najmi's "Tehran in the Naserite Era" recounts: "... Abbasali Gomrokchi was a well-known Sanglaj figure who rewarded jokesters with cash for creative insults, known as 'insult-buying'" (Naseri, 1985: 60). In Morteza Ravandi's fourth volume of "Iran's Social History," it is mentioned that an incident occurred in Karbalaee Abbasali's bathhouse: "Conversation in the bath, Monday, November 203, 1906: Today in the bath, Karbalaee Abbasali Gomrokchi, two of Haji Sheikh Fazlollah's men, Gholamali Khan, Karbalaee Abbasali's younger son, who serves the minister, and others discussed how the minister often talks about being in debt in Tabriz..." (Ravandi, 1980, Vol. 4, Part 2: 860).

This report suggests that Abbasali Khan Gomrokchi owned and founded the bathhouse frequented by statesmen and city notables. In Shaban Jafari's biography, a prominent figure in the August 19, 1953 coup, it is stated: "... Shaboon's large stature and his brother's athleticism introduced him to zoorkhanas and ancient sports at 14. He later rented a semi-active zoorkhana known as the Bazaar Zoorkhana in Karbalaee Abbasali's bazaar, located in southern Hasan Abad's intersection, named after San-Karbalai Abbas Ali Gorglaj's renowned figure Karbalaee Abbasali Gomrokchi..." (Sarshar, 2002:



Figure 5- The image of
akchi, the builder of the
Saqaqhana



Figure 6- The location of the coffee house on Abdul Ghaffar's map (Tehran Naseri map, 1891 AD. Late Qajar period), where the name of Abbas Ali's Karbala coffee house is mentioned. The presence of this passage in this map shows the importance and antiquity of this area. But what seems clear is that this passage was not covered. Because in the semiotics of this map, covered passages are not displayed in this way.



Figure 7- The current location of the brewery in Sanglaj neighborhood and near Shahr Park (Google Map)

27). This passage references the bazaar and zoorkhana associated with Abbasali Gomrokchi. The zoorkhana, integral to the bazaar's identity, still stands today. Considering Abbasali Khan's property, café, and Saqqakhaneh construction, it is plausible he also built the zoorkhana. His house was near the zoorkhana. In Tehran's Cyrus Street, near Imamzadeh Seyyed Esmail, there is a tekyeh named Abbasali, which some researchers attribute to Karbalaee Abbasali Gomrokchi. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that Karbalaee Abbasali, with his influence and wealth, built structures for charity, the most famous being Karbalaee Abbasali's (Kal Abbasali) Saqqakhaneh. Figures 6 and 7 show the Saqqakhaneh's location in the Sanglaj area.

Karbalaee Abbasali Saqqakhaneh

Karbalaee Abbasali Saqqakhaneh (Figure 8) is located on old Alborz Street (now Asadi-Manesh Street) in the Sanglaj neighborhood. It is one of Tehran's oldest Saqqakhanehs, dating back about 150 years. If Saqqakhanehs are categorized into three types—polygonal pavilion-like, niche-like in passages, or archway-like in passages—Karbalaee Abbasali Saqqakhaneh belongs to the third type, an archway-like shopfront. It was likely built in 1895, coinciding with the final years of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar and Abbasali Khan's probable customs tenure. According to the building's inscription, its construction dates between 1876 and 1881.

Given conflicting reports, there is a discrepancy of over ten years, but this does not affect its historical period. This historic structure declined over time, nearing demolition, but local memories and its role in Ashura ceremonies prompted restoration, making it a local focal point. The oldest known caretaker was "Mashhadi Gholam," who owned a neighboring shop and managed the Saqqakhaneh until 1956. Subsequently, "Seyyed Kazem Sanavari" served as its caretaker

from 1961 to 2012, during which it was registered as a national monument on July 21, 2005, under No. 12215. The current caretaker, Mr. Arabi, resides on Alborz Street. Karbalaee Abbasali Saqqakhaneh resembles adjacent shopfronts with a tiled façade and brick piers, later covered with newer bricks. Inside is a small veranda with an eight-and-a-half-eight plan, raised about 70 cm above the historical passage floor, with an interior platform 60 cm higher than the Saqqakhaneh's floor.

A semi-domed, 14-point half-carved structure forms its ceiling. The interior is fully tiled with European, Islamic, and Ashura paintings. Two inscriptions with dates adorn the Saqqakhaneh's outer arch. The upper inscription reads "In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, Abbasali Year 1313 (1895)," suggesting construction or renovation during the Pahlavi I era (Figure 9). However, considering the lower inscription's date, renovation seems unlikely two years apart. Regardless, Karbalaee Abbasali Saqqakhaneh belongs to the Qajar era, renovated in Shahrivar 1311 (September 1932). The lower inscription, in Nastaliq script on a seven-color tiled background, records the renovation: "A thousand thanks to God, this worn structure / Gained splendor again by God's grace." Between verses are "Ya Aba Abdillah al-Hussain" and Shahrivar 1311 (September 1932).

On either side of this tiled inscription are plaster reliefs with a poem praising Abbas, though the first part is missing (Figure 10). Documents describe a bazaar in front of the Saqqakhaneh, suggesting a dense cluster of shops on this street, with remnants of older buildings nearby indicating a former market presence. No evidence exists of a covered bazaar. The oldest map of this area, Abdolghaffar's map (Figure 6), depicts the alley as open, with no signs of coverage, as covered passages are not depicted this way. Thus, a definitive claim of a covered passage cannot be made, though a local bazaar's existence is unquestionable. As mentioned, the Saqqakhaneh was renovated in 1932. A photo from before 1979 shows wooden and metal railings (Figure 11), replaced in 1979 by a green metal lattice window (Figure 12) crafted by local artisans Haj Qasem and Ahmad Yousefi, which remains to this day.

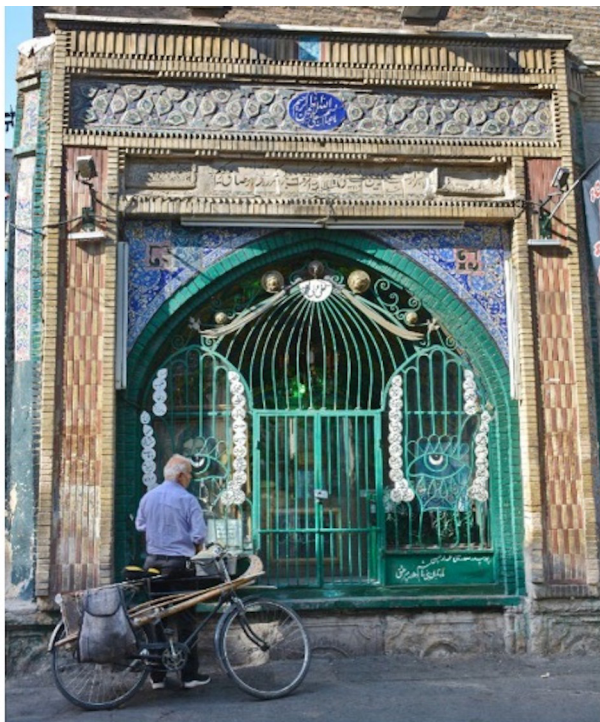


Figure 8- Abbas Ali Karbalai Tavern in Sangalaj neighborhood (Archive of Tehran City Beautification Organization)

Figure 9 - Dated inscriptions on the forehead of the Saqqakhana building - the date of the upper inscription is 1313 (1895 AD) and the lower inscription is 1311



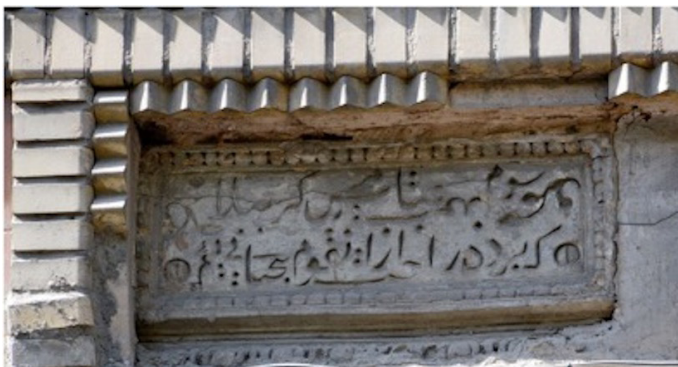


Figure 10- Plaster inscription on the right side of the façade

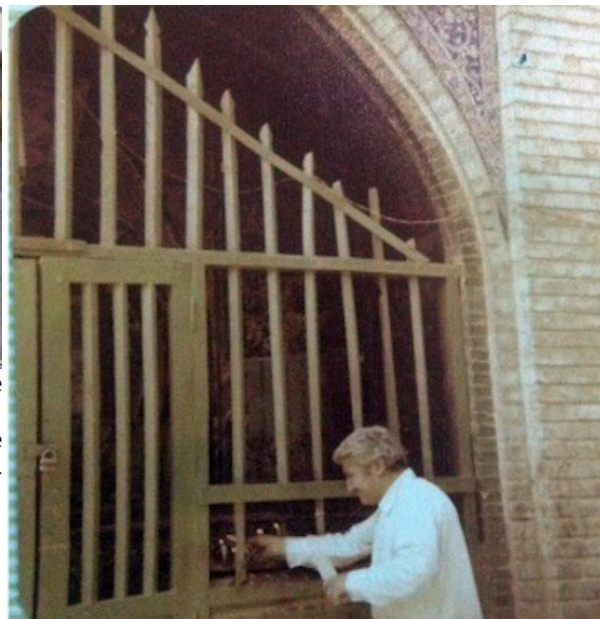


Figure 11 - A photo of the 1950s Saqqakhaneh before the reticulated window was changed, with wood and metal railings. (Khorshid Mansion Consulting Engineers 2022, 27)



Figure 12 - The metal reticulated window of the reticulated, which was built and installed in 1979 (Archives of Tehran City Beautification Organization)

Figure 13 - The view of the Saqqana in the 1990s - before the recent interventions (Khorshid Building Consulting Engineers 2022, 27)



Figure 14- The tile inscription of the date of the building and the name of the founder "Abbas Ali" on the front of the building in 1895, the details of the tile work around it with enamel glaze and in relief (Tehran City Beautification Organization Archive)

Figure 15- The formalization of the 14-story half-work inside the building with seven-color tiling and its red six-flame chandelier (Tehran City Beautification Organization archive)



Architecture and Decorations of Karbalaee Abbasali Saqqakhaneh

The Saqqakhaneh is an archway about 3 meters wide with brick piers on either side and an eight-and-a-half-eight interior plan, covered by a green metal lattice window. Its floor is 60 cm higher than the current passage, with five sculpted stone pieces forming its base. The stonework suggests the current passage level is about 50 cm higher than the historic passage, hiding half of the stone base.

The façade's piers and arch are covered with 3.5 cm wide, 20 cm long vertical bricks, forming vertical columns and cornices around inscriptions and tiles. Photos and construction details indicate recent additions. According to the caretaker, this brickwork occurred in the 1990s, damaging inscriptions and tiles (Figure 13). Karbalaee Abbasali Saqqakhaneh features stonework decorations on its base, plaster and tile inscriptions, vertical brickwork, seven-color tiles with simple Islamic motifs, mina glaze geometric patterns, typical late Qajar decorations, and metal latticework. In the second, older main façade inscription, a single tile bearing "In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful" and the founder's name, "Abbasali," is featured. The white text on a cobalt background date to 1895 (Figure 14). Inside, the Saqqakhaneh is entirely tiled with seven-color tiles. The semi-dome, a half-carved 14-point structure, features turquoise tiles and mina glaze Islamic patterns (Figure 15).

The tiles exhibit typical Qajar motifs and color schemes, with natural flower vases painted on yellow backgrounds characteristic of the period. Across from this, the interior's arch features seven-color tiles depicting Abbas's battle by the Euphrates (Figure 16). Some tile placement errors occurred during restoration, but the overall scene remains intact. A modern platform with 25x25 cm mosaics has been added inside, lacking a clear purpose (Figure 17).

Beneath the internal arch's ellipse, seven-color tiles with turquoise motifs and natural flower patterns depict two Ashura scenes: Zainab's (a.s.) metaphorical depiction at Ashura and a scene of Abul Hussain's shrine (Figure 18). The Saqqakhaneh's internal base features large embossed tiles, about 35x60 cm, with Islamic designs, partly hidden by modern flooring (Figure 19). The stone bases are partly buried beneath the current passage.

Equipment and Items Inside the Saqqakhaneh

Currently, during the study of the existing condition of the Saqqakhaneh, various items are placed inside it, which can be considered part of the Saqqakhaneh's essence. These items include electric lantern-shaped lamps, portraits of Imam Hussain (a.s.) with calligraphed verses,



Fig. 16- Haft-rank tile work with the battle of Abul Fazl al-Abbas (AS) by the Euphrates River. The painting is in the style of a coffee house. In the layout of the tiles after restoration, a placement error is observed (Archives of Tehran City Beautification Organization)

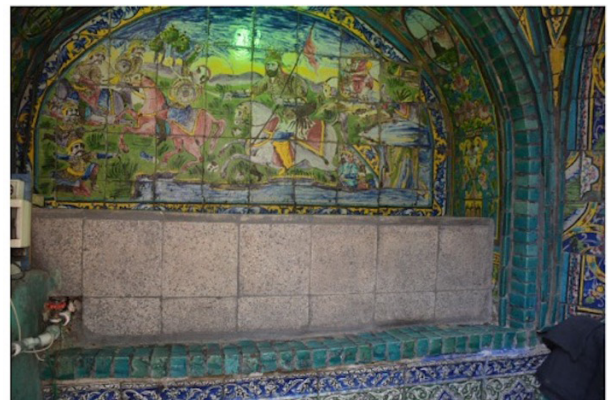


Figure 17- The interior view of the tavern and the mosaic platform that was added in recent periods (archives of Tehran City Beautification Organization)

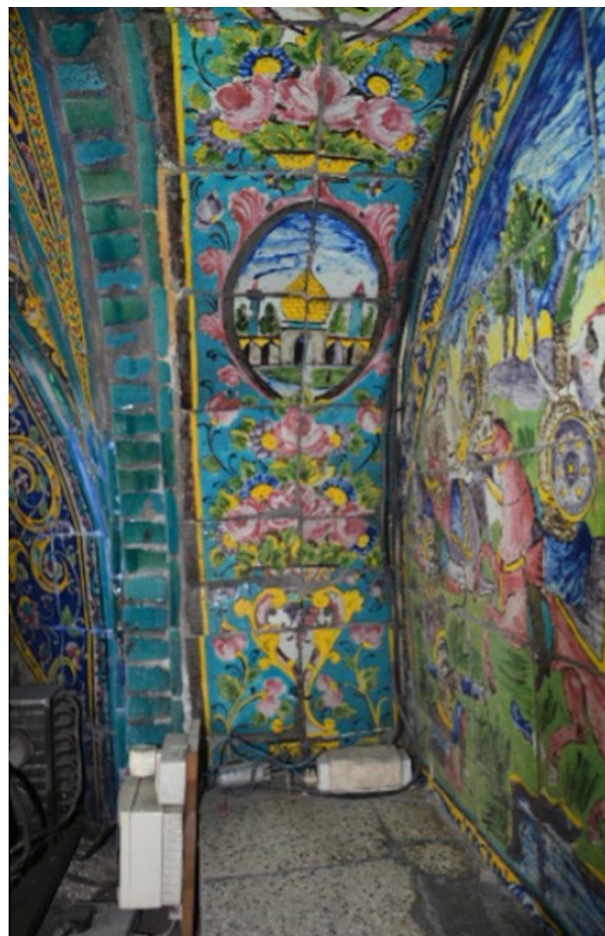


Figure 18 - Tiling under the interior arch of the building - the left image of Hazrat Zainab (AS) and the right image of Aba Abdullah's shrine (Archive of Tehran City Beautification Organization)



Figure 19- The relief tiling of the internal plinth of the Saqaqhana building, part of which is hidden in the flooring (Archives of Tehran City Beautification Organization)



Figure 20- The external stone plinths of the building consist of five pieces of carved stone, part of which is hidden in the covering of the current passage (Archive of Tehran City Beautification Organization)

religious pendants, Ashura banners, and items for the Sham-e-Ghariban ceremony such as metal stools and trays for lighting candles, among others (Figure 21). A six-lamp chandelier with red tulip-shaped lamps also hangs from the semi-dome of the Saqqakhaneh (Figure 15). According to the current caretaker, all these items are donations and public endowments kept inside the structure. On either side of the main entrance to the Saqqakhaneh, there are two platforms. The right platform is metal and designed for placing candles, while the taller cement platform on the left shows traces of a clay vessel. Currently, this platform is used to hold a water cooler and its



Figure 21: Equipment inside the Saqqakhaneh and their arrangement (author's own)



Figure 22: Cement platform and the tools on it (author's own)

electric motor, making it impossible to fully view the clay vessel inside the platform (Figure 22). This historical building, which has sustained natural and restoration damages over the years, is currently included in a restoration program by the local municipality.

Conclusion

The "Saqqakhaneh" is one of the symbols of the connection between time, place, and people. It is a unique element in the Iranian urban space, created for historical, social, cultural, and religious reasons. Although its initial purpose was to provide a place for passersby to drink water and quench their thirst, over time, it has acquired a religious function in Shia cities. People light candles and tie cloths to seek their needs in its sacred space. Thus, with its beautiful and unique architecture, the Saqqakhaneh is regarded as a spiritual and sacred structure among Iranians. Sanglaj, located in the historical core of Tehran, is one of the five historic districts from the time of Tahmasbi's fortifications. Despite many changes, a significant portion of its original structure has been preserved to this day. It has been one of the most prosperous, largest, and most populous neighborhoods, containing well-known tekyehs (religious theaters), baths, saqqakhanehs, and pathways. One of its historical buildings is the Karbalaee Abbasali Saqqakhaneh, located on Asadi-Manesh Street. This is one of the oldest Saqqakhanehs in Tehran, dating back to the late Naser al-Din Shah Qajar period, over a century and a half old, built as a shopfront arch. Founded by Karbalaee Abbasali Khan Gomrokchi, the customs minister of Naser al-Din, it is registered as a national monument under No. 12215. Today, it is a focal point in the Sanglaj neighborhood, hosting celebrations during the birth anniversaries of Hazrat Abbas (a.s.) and Imam Hussain (a.s.) and mourning and Sham-e-Ghariban ceremonies during Muharram.

Data Availability

The data underlying the results presented in this paper are not publicly available at this time but may be obtained from the corresponding authors upon reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest: The results obtained in this research do not conflict with any individual or organization.

Funding: This study did not receive any financial support.

Authors' Participation: This article was written by Samira Nourian and the analysis of data was done Hayedeh Khamseh and Mohammad Reza Saeedi Harsini.

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