



# **Comparative analysis of the concept of Islamic City in Esfahan during Seljuq and Safavid dynasties**

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## **Abstract**

Cities are the consequence of mankind civilization, therefore the first step in studying a civilization, is to study the characteristics of the cities. In a preliminary point of view, an Islamic city is a city which demonstrates Islamic values. In other words, the city was the presence of the culture of a society in form of a city. So assigning the characteristic of being Islamic to a city is based upon the features which roots from Islam religion. This investigation studies Esfahan as an urban civilization which ascribes to Islamic period through Seljuq (1037-1157) and Safavid (1501-1739) dynasties. The research progress takes part through a comparative analysis method that compares the characteristics of a geographical context during two different historical eras. Four main topics are being considered in this research; in the first section explains the main research method and theoretical framework. The second section is the studies about Esfahan city and in third section focuses on Seljuq and Safavid period. The final section is the final conclusions based on the first tree parts. Esfahan Islamic city during Seljuq and Safavid dynasties had many similarities. This city had a central urban authority space with various functions and a governmental identity. It was similar to a square that people would have gathered there for different rituals and this form of classification in urban spaces was a sign of equality between people with different religions in an Islamic city. The following research, aims at explaining the main characteristics of Islamic city based on searching in Islamic values of an urban civilization and comparing its features through different eras.

**Keyword:** *Islamic city, Islamic civilization, Esfahan, Seljuq dynasty, Safavid dynasty*

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## **1.Introduction**

The greatness of Islamic civilization is primarily appertained to an urban civilization at primarily. It is obvious that cities are the outcome of civilizations, but this fact is much more stressed about Islamic cities. For the habitants of the cities, the city was a presence of Islamic values. In fact, the city is a place to centralize the cultural values which form the civilization (Bagheri 2007: 9-10). Cities are the emergence of a culture and hold the characteristic of the culture of the people who are living there, therefore we may give the Islamic attribute to a city if it holds Islamic values and Islamic thoughts governs in that city. Searching for Islamic values in a city, through comparative analysis of its features may guide us to a better understanding of the basic features of an Islamic city. The aim of this research is to better define the features of Islamic cities by comparing the features of Esfahan city through Seljuq and Safavid dynasties.

## **2.RESEARCH METHOD**

In this research, we are holding two primary approaches:  
[1] Finding and defining the primary Islamic values as a guidance of the analysis

[2] Concentration on the features of Islamic city and

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finding the common features as a pattern of these cities. In this order, we can study the features of different Islamic cities through a single era or we can analyze the features of a single Islamic city through different eras. It seems that the second approach is much more plausible, because during a single era, cities may be affected by non-Islamic features of the culture of the people living in those cities, however, analysis through different eras holds Islamic values as the concrete features of the city, and it will be possible to separate the Islamic values from the ethnic values of the city.

## **3.HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **3.1 Esfahan in different historic eras**

Esfahan is one of the ancient cities in Iran. Historical background of this city is ascribed to Hakhmaneshian era, and there are evidences which support the hypothesis that Hakhmaneshian kings used to reside in Esfahan in certain periods of time. Since then, Esfahan has been a prosperous city both before and after Islam (Pirnia,2008: 272). Based on archaeological studies about Iran and also East studies, this city is one of the three important historical cities that are still available in world, which is also well-known in Islamic history (Honarfar, 2007: 51), and these days, Esfahan is also known as the cultural center of the Islamic world. The

most important reason behind the development of this city is Zayande-rood river, which used to be the most important river of Iran, and it was at the commercial mainstream between Halab, Samargand and Bokhara and the eastern countries (Kiani, 1995). Esfahan used to be a combination of two adjacent cities during the first centuries of Islam. These two cities were called Jay city and Yahudieh city (living place of Jewish people) which was at the northern east side of the city next to main mosque. After a certain period, Jay city used to weaken and people migrated to Yahudieh city (Gholum beik, 2006). The economic and political importance of Esfahan caused the city to become the capital city during Al-e-Buye dynasty, Seljuq dynasty and Safavid dynasty. By the start of Seljuq dynasty, Esfahan became officially the capital of Iran. In this era many artists and architects travelled to Esfahan and constructed main mosques, gardens, bridges and caravanserais under the attention of Khajeh-Nezam-Al-Molk, the Seljuq prime minister (Kiani, 1995: 589). By the start of Safavid dynasty, the importance of Esfahan became more obvious to Shah-Abas, the great Safavid king. In this era, Esfahan found its importance and magnificence more than any time before by addition of many palaces, streets, mosques, bridges and many other important building to the city (Kiani, 1995: 599).

### **3.1.1 Esfahan through Seljuq dynasty**

In 443, Toghrol (one of Seljuq kings) entered Esfahan and after conquering, named the city as his capital city and from the mid fifth century, Esfahan became the capital city of Seljuq dynasty (Honarfar, 1971: 16). Naser-khosro, the Iranian traveller explained Esfahan in this way: "A city over Hamun river, with a mild and excellent weather. You can see the gates and the defense towers with abundance of rivers and streams everywhere. At the center of the city there was a great mosque and the city and about twenty kilometers of defensive walls around the city. I could not find any ruined place in the city and there where various bazaars. I have seen a bazar with about two hundred salesmen and each market had a beautiful door and the main stream of bazar had a beautiful gate. I have seen a street called Kootraz, and there was about fifty caravanserais that in each of them, the sales men used to sit." Based on Naser-khosro's descriptions, we can find the importance of defensive aspects in Esfahan during Seljuq dynasty. Ebn-e-Hoghal also mentions the silk, fruits and saffron of Esfahan as praise to this city during the second half of the fourth century (Soltan Zadeh, 1986: 94). After Toghrol-Beik, Alb-Arsalan used to reside in from 455 to 465 and after him Jalal-Al-Din Malek-shah from 465 to 485, through his governorship, usually used to reside in Esfahan and that had a huge effect on the development of Esfahan both in the city and its neighborhood. We can mention Karan garden, Beit al-ma, Ahmad Siah garden, Dasht-koor garden, meidan-kooshk, city palace, Dej-kooch palace, and Shah-

forte where was the place of treasury, warehouse of weapons and his seraglio. In this era many ministers of Malek-shah tried to develop Esfahan city, as Marzban-ebn-Hassan-ebn-Firooz who ordered building of the dome of main mosque, and Khajeh-Nezam-Almolk who built Sadreih school similar to Nezamieh school in Baghdad, which was the first school built in an Islamic style (Eshraghi, 1999: 11,12). During Malek-Shah, Esfahan was one of the most populous cities in world (Honarfar, 1994: 50). The most important monuments of Malek-shah era are Nezam-Al-Molk dome and the other one is Taj-Al-Molk at the north side of main mosque (Honarfar, 1994: 52). Malek-Shah palace, Nezam-Al-Molk school and Sultan Mohamad tomb around the old square of the city were from Seljuq dynasty era, but there is no remaining of them today (Honarfar, 1971: 20). Seljuq dynasty is known as the founder of central and powerful government. There was no religion and cultural freedom during this era. The important feature of this government was the implementation of power through tribunals, the influence of governmental politicians on resources and the power of central government over national resources. In this order, Seljuq government changed their approach from the gold-based economic to agriculture based economics. Seljuq government banned any religion freedom by presenting Shafe-I religion as the official religion of the country. Since the official religion needs official education, therefore Nezamieh schools had the duty to teach this official religion (Habibi, 2008: 72-74). Shar is a part of cities during Seljuq era. It is the definition of a place where politicians resided in and controlled commercial activities in addition to managing Agricultural productions. Shar was based on social and religion hierarchy. The structure of Shar was based on governmental centers, old zonings, bazaar and luxurious quarters. Urban quarters were the symbols of contradictions and ethical conflicts, and people did not have many common interactions in contrary to their daily relations (Habibi, 2008: 75-76). The structure of cities in this era consisted of a main square at the center of the city with palaces, courts and sometimes hospitals around it. A German traveller named Enqellbert Kaempfer, who visited Esfahan on 1684, confirmed the centralized role of the Kohneh-square. At the end of fifth century, when Esfahan was the capital of Seljuq powerful empire, in addition to the main function of the square, Kohne-square was the place for sports and commercial activities, and its location resulted in a religious importance for it (Kiani, 1995: 595). The main entrance of bazaar opened to Kohne-square and spread its streams through the entire city. The quarters of the city were formed around this structure (Habibi, 2008: 77). Urban fabric which formed around the main mosque, was developed from center of the city to the south west across the bazaar (Etesam, 2008: 130). the increase in the number of tourists to meet their needs has faced many problems. Among these problems is the lack

of recreation and accommodation centers. Also, according to official statistics announced by the Climatological Research Institute, Iran has a temperature between 17 and 25 degrees centigrade only 35 days a year as an ambient comfort temperature. The sum of these factors has led to tourists being less willing to use urban spaces and tourism. Therefore, in this study, the existing literature in the field of microclimatic effects on environmental comfort in tourism spaces with tourism potential such as fields at the end of Vakilabad in the cultural capital of Iran, Mashhad, is studied to get familiar with research in this area to express the structural problems and existing obstacles to providing appropriate solutions in this area. Table 1 provides a brief history of the studies. Regarding the literature review on the issues of tourism, environmental comfort, and urban microclimate, it should be acknowledged that Mohammadi et al. (2005) in his article the needs and sensitivities of tourists that should be considered in the design, including the needs of physiology, the need for change activities in the environment, the need for peace, health and social communication and cultural interactions [10]. Khanzadeh Natanzi (2010) in his article on sustainable tourism and microclimate and green roof stated that the benefits of small-scale roof greenery in improving the thermal comfort of the outdoor environment is limited to the area around the planted roof and the effects of greenery roofs on the microclimate in dense mobile areas are more noticeable than others [11]. Martin et al (2016) in their paper presented new validation protocols for an urban microclimatic model based on city temperature measurement as well as a new model for estimating man-made heat caused by traffic in urban spaces [12]. Pijpers and Esch (2015) in their book examines the effects of urban microclimate on physical well-being and health, the influence of urban environment on its micro-climate such as the effects of building height on shading, etc. and finally provides a framework to support knowledge dissemination the knowledge of urban microclimate reached the process of urban design [13]. Vanus (2014) in his article examines the vulnerability and mental health of children due to microclimate in public and outdoor open spaces, the relationship between mental health, behavior and, physiology of children with weather conditions and offers policies to control children's climatic health [14]. In his book, Erell et al. (2011) examined the impact and application of climate in urban planning and design and the application of linear spaces and vegetation on urban microclimates and urban design strategies based on urban microclimates [15]. Finally, Brown (2010) in his book examines the conflicting cases and situations related to microclimates and examines the basic mechanisms in micro-climates and offers design solutions [16]. To put all in a nutshell, during Malek-Shah's empire and Nezam-Al-Molk ministry, Esfahan was the capital of an empire from Jaihoon to Antiochia.

The importance of the capital city of this empire had nothing less than the capital city during Safavid dynasty. The amount of wealth in this city sometimes makes the description of the city look mythological (Entekhabi, 2008: 158).

### 3.1.2 Esfahan through Safavid dynasty

Safavid dynasty had become the most coherent government by relying on religious laws of Shia (a branch of Islam). The formation of central government caused the formation of a political hierarchy and it was a renovation in Seljuq political structure (Habibi 2008, p:87-89). In Safavid political structure, the government and at the head of it, the king, were the owner of everything and all other kinds of ownerships became the king's properties. All residents were considered as producers in this structure. Safavid government undertook the improvement of urban infrastructures; therefore, the development in urban infrastructures was at the highest level in that era (Habibi, 2008: 90-91). In 1591 A.D Safavid dynasty moved their capital from Qazvin to Esfahan. The fifth and greatest king of the dynasty made Esfahan the strongest city in the world (Honarfar, 1971: 274). In this year, Esfahan became officially the capital city of Iran. Shāh Abbās decided to change the structure of the city and built an appropriate capital worthy of the Safavid great emperor (Etesam, 2008: 124). Safavid government developed Esfahan so extraordinarily that Sharden, French traveller equalized it with London, a city with 1.2 million populations, and about 400000 buildings (Pirnia, 2008: 274). The previous development of the city had a direct effect on its development in this era, because most of the people used to reside at the old quarters on the north side, where Seljuq Kohne (Old)-square was the main core. The king had lots of freedom to develop the city to the south side, and to the bridges over the river. The presence of the river and plurality of derelict grounds made the development plan more flexible. Changing styles in a short time was an important characteristic of Safavid architecture. Shah-Abas decided not to live in old quarters and moved his residence to southwest of the city. The main core of Shah-Abas` design was a square that was surrounded with religious, academic, economic and governmental buildings. The functions which had been used in Kohne square during the past centuries were improved in Shah-Abas` new design, and the square had a significant development in a short time. Shah-Abas decided to move all commercial activities from Kohne-square (old square) to Nu-square (new square), in order to enhance the benefits from the commercial buildings and caravanserais. Fortunately, this transmission of commercial buildings did not happen, because the balance between Kohne and Nu squares caused a sustainable combination of new and old Safavid cities (Kiani, 1995: 600). Shah-Abas had built Naghsh-e-Jahan Square, a mosque at the south side of the square, Alighapu and Sheikh-LotfAllah mosque

around the square. It seems that there was a small square at the place of Naghsh-e-Jahan square which was the place of the town hall. This square was 521 by 159 meters (about 8 hectares) with a functional approach; in the ground level it was shops and in the first level there were residencies. This square was a place for different activities such as commercial activities, a Wicket field, a performance stage, a place for animals fight games and also an appropriate place for night activities. Almost always, there were many tents in the square that were used as a place for commercial activities and on Fridays; there were a weekend bazar for rural residents.

There were also some goals pasts at each end of the square for playing Wicket. Behind the arcs around the square, in east, west and south sides of the square, you could find some shops and bazars. This square was connected to Chahar-bagh Avenue from west side (Kiani, 1995: 597-598). The name of Chahar-bagh is retrieved from four grapes gardens that Shah-Abas rented to develop his plan. The original shape of Chahar-bagh Street was a North-South Street with 4 kilometers length. The main function of the street was for tourism and it was not used for commercial activities (Pirnia, 2008: 276).

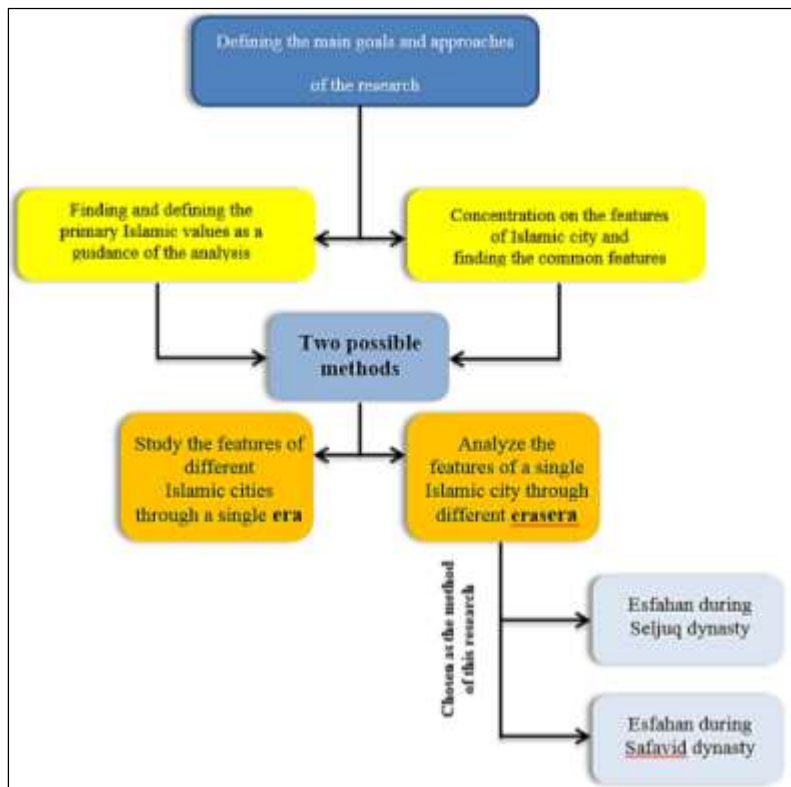


Fig 1. Research Progress (Reference: Authors)



Fig 2. Esfahan boundary during Seljuq dynasty (right) and Safavid dynasty (left) (Ardalan, 2000)

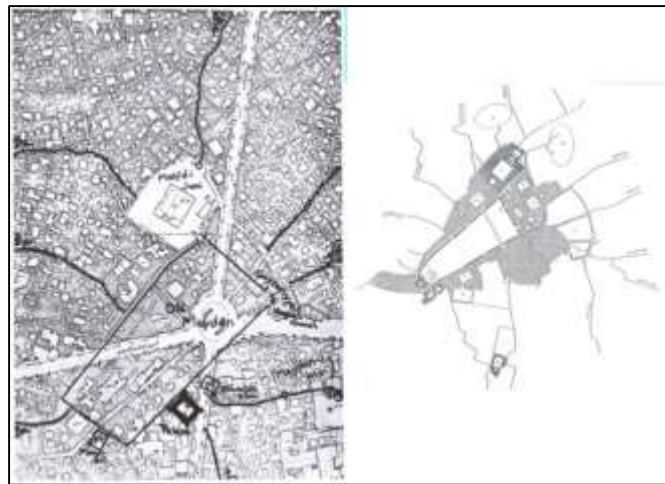


Fig 3. Atigh square during Seljuq era (Etesam, 2008)

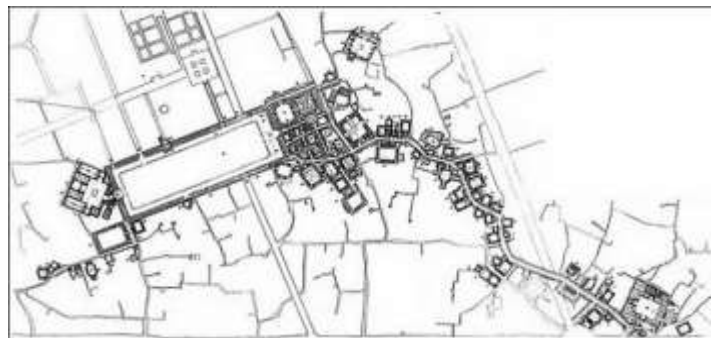


Fig 4. Naghsh-e-Jahan square (Entekhabi, 2008)

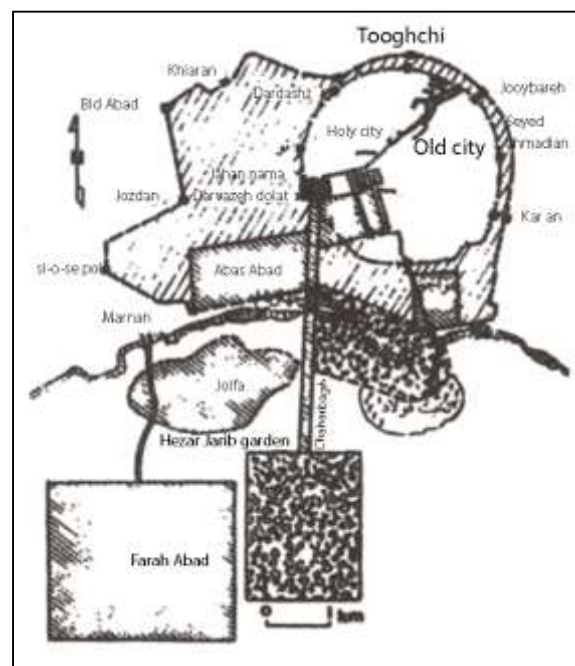


Fig 5. Esfahan and the gardens around the city during Safavid era (Shahcheraghi, 2008)

Therefore, Safavid Chahar-bagh was mainly a street with a function similar to gardens, with many shades and pathways appropriate for pedestrians. Shah-Abas developed Chahar-bagh Street and share the grounds around the street with statesmen to build their residents there. After a while, due to the growth in the population of the city, the residential spaces became so rare because of the huge amount of immigration to Esfahan. To provide enough residential quarters, Shah-Abas built Abas-Abad quarter. After that he built Farah-abad quarter because of the shortage of residential quarters. Sharden had resided for about 6 years in Esfahan, during the second Shah-Abas kingdom and he witnessed the development of the city this way: 162 mosques, 48 schools, 1802 caravansaries, 273 baths and 12 grave yards (Soltan zadeh, 1986: 138). After Shah-Abas, the crown prince, Shah-Safi, became the king of Safavid dynasty, he started conserving lots of buildings in Esfahan. For example, repairing and renovating ornamental elements of ImamZade-Esmail, the flooring of Shah-mosque, and finishing the remaining parts of Shah-mosque main building. Shah-Abas the second built many buildings such as Chehel-sotun palace, Khaju Bridge and the royal buildings around Zayande-rood river such as Haft-dast palace, Aine-khane, Namak-dan and the great garden of Saadat-abad. Shah-Soleiman built Hasht-behesh palace, and the last, and the weakest Safavid king, Shah-Soleiman, built Chahar-bagh school which was one of the most important Iranian buildings in the field of Iranian tiling industry. He also ordered building of Fathie and Shahi bazaars (Honarfar, 1971: 31-32). About the urban structure of Esfahan during Safavid dynasty, it can be said that the design is the combination of organic and minimal designs, and there is no major intervention in spatial structure and historical facade of the city. Chahar-bagh street was like a boundary between the historical and new spatial organizations of the city. Naghsh-e-Jahan was the symbol of the modern city, and the mark of central powerful government. For the first time in Iranian history, shar was defined as the spatial organization of the city, and for the first time it was defined as the social divisions in the structure of the city. During this period of time, we had a new city next to the old one. During Safavid dynasty in Esfahan, the architecture was mainly considered as an element of the city instead of individual buildings. Rampart was not an object that differed between city and rural areas, but they were the boundary that defined the city (Habibi, 2009). Another feature of the architecture of this era was new quarters among old quarters. The old quarters had been kept and new ones had been added to them including places and straight streets (Omran pour, 2009).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Esfahan was one of the most important cities in Iran, both before and after Islam. Based on many evidences,

this city was, and still is a crucial city in Islam territory; it is the cultural center of Islamic world. An important element in development of this city was Zayande-rood river, whose location was in the middle of the commercial routs in Iran. The political and economic importance of Esfahan caused that it became the capital city during different dynasties such Al-e-Buye, Seljuq dynasty and Safavid dynasty. By considering the structure of the city during Safavid and Seljuq dynasties we can conclude that:

[1] During both dynasties the center of the city was the governmental buildings, and contained many political centers such as governmental palace, economical centers, religious centers (Jame-Mosque and Shah-Mosque) and cultural centers (Sheikh-LotfAllah mosque). Therefore, the evidences support the hypothesis that this square had a religious role that also can be seen by the importance of the location of Shah-Mosque as the final point of the main axis. This spatial structure indicates that Islamic approach towards the structure of the city did not cause a neglecting about other functions of the city. Politic, cultural and economic functions were planned based on sovereignty of Islamic rules.

[2] Another feature of governmental squares was their social role, and these squares were the center for gatherings during weekly events. This feature may be the effect of Islamic approaches that indicate, the governmental places should be open to all the people.

[3] The main feature of Seljuq urban structure was its organic structure and gradual reformation during different times. However, during Safavid dynasty the structures of the city were mainly geometrical and regular, but this feature did not cause any intervention with the old facade of the city, and we can find the composition of both structures in this era. In Safavid era, new quarters were formed next to the old ones, while the old parts were protected. In the new part of the squares, new palaces and strait streets can be found with aqueducts of water and Plane-trees. Also the importance of Zayande-rood river was more than its agricultural role. It had the role of forming the regulation of the landscape of the city, and this fact caused the development of the city towards this river during Safavid dynasty.

[4] Finally another equally salient feature of the city during these two eras was the urban hierarchy based on the religion. This fact is based on an Islamic viewpoint that all religions should have equal rights in the society. To put all in a nutshell, we conclude that the main feature of Islamic city in Esfahan during the two Seljuq and Safavid dynasties were having a governmental center which was a composition of various functions such as religious, social, economic and political. This place was the place of gatherings and a symbol of equal position of people with any religion in the city.

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