

Architecture, Politics and Religion Synthesis: Political Legitimacy in Early Islamic Iran

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Abstract : Ideology, politics and art have always been omnipresent patterns of Islam since its early age. The Islamic empire, expanded from China to Andalusia, has instrumentalized art and architecture to enhance political legitimacy of different dynasties or states throughout its history. Quranic verses utilized to convey ideological messages in the major mosques and mausoleums. Iranians had already been employing art and architecture to propagate their political legitimacy prior to Islam. The land of Iran and its art with strong civilizational pre-Islamic history has been profoundly politicized since the rise of Islam in the region. Early Islamic period in Iran has witnessed introduction of a new architectural language, new formulas for spatial configuration in built spaces, as well as new system of architectural decoration. Studying Iran's Early Islamic architecture helps in better understanding the process of socio-political identity making of Iranian-Islamic culture, and thus art and architecture. This period also set the stage for formation of glorious architectural movements through Persianate world in later periods. During the Early Islamic period in Iran, the innovative combination of Islamic ideology and Iranian Architecture created formidable ideological tools in politicizing art in the region and beyond. As such, this paper aims to investigate the political history and architectural legacy from late Sassanid to Early Islamic period, delves into the ways in which Early Islamic architecture played role in transforming Persian concepts of kingship, administration, and social organization. In so doing, the study focuses on the Perso-Islamic architectural synthesis under the Samanids and Seljuk dynasty as case studies. The paper also explores how the newly introduced Islamic architecture has been employed to address the question of political legitimacy and to propagate states' political agenda in early Islamic Iran (650-1250). As for the existing literature, despite its uniqueness and significance, Early Islamic architecture of Iran has received little scholarly attention. However, there exists a sizeable body of scholarship on socio-historic condition of the land of Iran during Early Islamic period which provide a solid base for the project. Methodologically speaking, the authors look into the subject through various lenses. They will conduct historic and archival research in libraries, private collections, and archives in Iran and the related neighbouring countries in Persian, Arabic and English. The methods of visual and formal analysis are applied to examine architectural features of the period. There are also a high number of intriguing, yet poorly examined, published and unpublished documents, old plans, drawings and photos of monuments preserved in Cultural Heritage of Iran Organization which will be consulted.

Keywords : Iran, Islamic architecture, early Islamic Iran, early Islamic architecture, politicized art, political legitimacy, propaganda, aesthetics

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