

Kashan's Aqa Bozorg Mosque, fusion of Iranian and Islamic cultures



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One of the most significant buildings in Iranian architecture is Aqa Bozorg Mosque in Kashan, Isfahan Province.

You can see a fusion of Iranian and Islamic cultures in this mosque. Aqa Bozorg Mosque, which stands out in the heart of the desert, is one of the most magnificent monuments left from the Qajar Period (1789-1925 CE), surfiran.com wrote.

This mosque is located in a complex consisting of a mosque and a school, which is attributed to Mullah Mahdi Naraq, a Shi'a scholar.

This mosque has exquisite decorations and elements used in it. The muqarnas structure of the mosque's entrance and delicate plasterworks and unique tile works dazzle the eyes.



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Aqa Bozorg Mosque has five floors and two courtyards at the top and bottom. One of the most outstanding points which can be mentioned about the site is that it combines the mosque and the school, and all the diverse spaces needed by the two buildings are placed together. Aqa Bozorg School was built in the style of Cha-

har Baq and Sadr Schools in Isfahan. The existence of the Khajeh Tajeddin historical monument, which is 700 years old and located in the east of the mosque, cannot be ignored.

Another unusual part of this historical building is its portal, which reminds us of old Iranian gardens. This portal has caused the

porticoes and the dome to have a certain height, which is different from usual architecture.

The central courtyard and the lovely pool in its middle are good examples of Persian architecture. Another place of wonder in this structure is the ceiling under the dome.

Moreover, the school located next to the mosque

has a badgir, the traditional wind-catcher in Persian architecture that worked as an air-conditioner for the building. All of these elements represent the simple life of both the people and rulers of Kashan many years ago. Other than admiring its beauty, the best thing to do is to take your camera and capture little interest-

ing details that you find in every corner of this majestic mosque.

Agha Bozorg Mosque is in the heart of Kashan, so you have easy access to most of the famous tourist attractions of Kashan such as Borujerdiha House, Tabatabaei House, Ameri House, Sultan Amir Ahmad Bathhouse, and the Toy Museum.



The Shahnameh ('Book of Kings') has been called 'the title-deeds of the Persian nation'. It was composed by the poet Abul-Qasem Ferdowsi Tusi, between about 980 and 1009-10. In over 50,000 rhyming couplets,

it recounts the history of pre-Islamic Iran through the reigns of fifty mythical and historical kings. Ferdowsi wrote his vast epic almost entirely in the 'New Persian' language of the early medieval period; it is in one way an

Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, well suited to pictorial interpretation

Iranian 'declaration of independence'.

Copies of Ferdowsi's great poem soon began to acquire special significance: It had for some centuries been transcribed with care and ornamented with precious materials, so other significant texts began to be similarly treated.

Pictures added yet another dimension to Ferdowsi's great poem.

By early in the fourteenth century, many of the Iranian conventions ordaining the layout of illustrated manuscripts had coalesced; with virtual certainty this occurred in the cosmopolitan Ilkhanid capital of Tabriz, 'rich in goods and abounding in wealth'. The magisterial 'Great Mongol' Shahnameh, now thought to have been made between 1325 and 1335, is the example par excellence: Comparison with almost contemporary manuscripts like the 'Freer' Shahnameh is telling.

The Shahnameh was well suited to pictorial interpretation. Its vast text falls into three sections: Mythical, leg-

endary and historical (treating, however, only the Parthian and Sassanid dynasties); when narrative images illustrating the manuscript — as opposed to the more limited detail possible on a moulded ceramic tile — became desirable, they were readily determined by the text itself. The first two sections of Ferdowsi's epic, the mythical and the legendary, especially lend themselves to splendid imagery.

Both abound in dramatic episodes in which unreal beings interact with the Iranian kings and the heroes who loyally served them: Wondrous birds, demons and angels, monsters and dragons. Even historical kings encounter dragons. These first two sections often have many illustrations; the historical third section usually has fewer pictures, battles being so often the primary event of the Shahnameh's historical section — as is also often the case with true historical texts. Nonetheless, the pictorial possibilities inherent within the entire poem are immense and per-

mit yet a different kind of variety: That of an underlying pictorial program. For this reason, no two illustrated Shahnameh manuscripts are ever quite the same.

Illustrated copies of Ferdowsi's great poem were made with increasing frequency throughout the fourteenth century. At least twenty illustrated Shahnameh manuscripts dated (or datable) in this century are now known. They have surprisingly varied formats, quite different illustrative programs, and many pictorial styles. Such stylistic differences characterise the workshops in certain Iranian cities: Tabriz, Isfahan and Shiraz are documented, while other places remain as yet unidentified.

At the death of the last Ilkhanid ruler in 1335, control of Tabriz was quickly seized by an Amir of the Jalayir tribe. His bibliophile son, Sheikh Uwais is usually accounted the patron of a magnificent Shahnameh spoken of, with great admiration, in a celebrated document of the mid-sixteenth century. This Jalayirid masterpiece today

survives only as a series of seven superb paintings. But the manuscript was clearly treasured by his son, Ahmad, who was as profoundly book-loving as his father; and the volume was kept in Jalayirid princely possession even after his death.

In 1420-21, it was appropriated by the Timurid bibliophile Baysunghur, and transferred to his own remarkable (and documented) ketabkhaneh, in Herat.

The conquest of Iran by the Central Asian warlord Timur and the re-establishment of more ordered governance also had an effect on the making of fine manuscripts. Timur himself may have been functionally illiterate, but Shahrukh, his son and successor, had educated his own sons to an extremely high standard, literate in and appreciative of Arabic, Persian and Turkish. When these princes were assigned appanages, including the governorships of cities rich in skilled artisans, and craftsmen working in all materials, they too began to exercise the patronage offered

by means and status: Timurid patronage of all the arts rivals that of their princely contemporaries in France and Italy.

The Shahnameh volumes commissioned by three of Shahrukh's sons reflect the state of fine manuscript culture in the first half of the fifteenth century. Ibrahim Sultan's relatively unassuming copy was made in his Shiraz workshops between about 1422 and 1424; its pictorial program emphasises familial relationships, but it also has the unusual feature of three double-page frontispieces picturing the traditional pursuits of kings: Battle, the hunt, and the feast. Baysunghur's manuscript was the largest and most lavishly produced, both textually and materially; made in his ketabkhaneh in Herat in 1430, its restrained illustrative program essentially focuses on the obligations of a just ruler but also includes versions of pictures developed from those in Sheikh Uwais' celebrated fourteenth-century Shahnameh.