



## **The Role of Family Tombs in Developing and Strengthening Spiritual Tourism (A case study of Isfahan Takht-e-Foulad Cemetery)**

**Zahra Torki<sup>1</sup>, Morteza Nosoohi<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Isfahan Municipality Research Office, Isfahan, Iran  
[z\\_fars@yahoo.com](mailto:z_fars@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D. Student in Public Administration, Director of Isfahan Municipality Research Office, Isfahan, Iran  
[nosoohi55@gmail.com](mailto:nosoohi55@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract**

The cemetery has been used as an indigenous urban space, a place for social interactions, the memories of survivors, and the cultural identity of the legibility of urban areas in the past. For example, Takht-e-Foolad Cemetery is one of the most valuable cemeteries in the Shiite world. Takht-e Foulad Cemetery is one of the successful architectural examples of the attitude towards spiritual tourism. The tomb's architecture shows the depth of the Iranian spirit of belief in the spiritual dimension of life. In most parts of Iran, this type of architecture, mostly in the form of shrines (Imamzadeh) or the tombs of people with honors, and sometimes family tombs, can be found. Tomb architecture in Iran has been different according to time and place. One factor that has had a significant impact on the type of architecture is each period's cultural, social, and spiritual conditions. Despite their socio-historical importance, family tombs are among the buildings that have been less studied and considered in tomb architecture. Family tombs have different functions according to different definitions. Although they have gradually lost their function and importance over time, recognizing them seems necessary.

The difference in the performance of these buildings (family tombs) in each period creates the motivation to study and analyze them from a historical and cultural perspective. With a qualitative research approach, analytical-comparative research method, and field research with studies, the present study is a library to address the role of family tombs in the development of spiritual tourism that is part of tomb architecture. It should be acknowledged that the spatial and temporal realm of this research includes the family tombs of Takht-e-Foolad Cemetery in Isfahan.

**Keywords:** Cemetery - Family tomb - Takht-e-Foolad - Tomb architecture

### **Introduction**

As historical, cultural, and social places, cemeteries are among the oldest documents of human civilization. Despite emphasizing their importance, there is no clear definition of a historical cemetery in oral literature, landscapes, and urban sciences. This fundamental issue has led to the formation of sometimes contradictory definitions of the issue in the eyes of urban management institutions and their increasing tastes and passivity in the face of historical cemeteries as structural, cultural, social elements of the city landscape. The result is acceleration in the oblivion of these areas in recent decades.

One of the most typical manifestations of this phenomenon can be observed in the history of the architecture of mausolea. The shrines and tombs have appeared in unique architectural forms in all areas conquered by Islam (Kovács, & Rabb, 2020).

With a study approach to formulating strategic policies for the protection of burial landscapes in the cities of the country, the present study intends to provide an indigenous definition of the issue of historic cemeteries, and in scientific and operational fields, in an attempt to take steps to protect urban burial landscapes.

Due to lack of knowledge in these areas and the enactment of destructive urban laws and irresponsible interventions, the rapid development of settlements and the passivity of conservation, urban planning, and urban management sciences have led to the destruction of the country's historic cemeteries. Therefore, in addition to recognizing the nature of the cemetery

from a historical point of view and presenting an indigenous definition of these areas, this study emphasizes the tomb's architecture by highlighting the formation of the family tomb structure in the cemetery. However, research is complex due to the lack of available resources that make it possible to identify variables.

The present study has tried to study the existing literature on cemeteries at both international and national levels while categorizing the scientific efforts of experts and researchers in this field to give a clear picture of the concept of cemeteries in Isfahan and a comparative comparison of their historical and physical structure to understand the nature. And what are these areas? Emphasis on the nature of cemeteries and their analysis as cultural landscapes emphasize the artificial design of these burial areas.

Investigating the factors shaping historical cemeteries, showing the fundamental relationship and environmental context, religious and cultural beliefs, historical aspects, and the influential force of human factors in organizing the body and landscape of the natural arena using natural elements, artistic and architectural concepts, and a certain system are physical and trans-physical signs.

The relationship created by synergy is a broader and deeper concept than the simple sum of the architectural value of these socio-natural environments. On the one hand, natural-cultural aspects have emerged from the existence of a system of signs and beliefs and religious myths and architectural elements (family tombs, monuments, tombstones, etc.) over time. Cemeteries mainly have different religious-religious, cultural-social, and memorial aspects due to the burial of literary, cultural, scientific, political, social, and artistic celebrities of the community respected by the citizens of a settlement at the local, urban, regional and territorial scales. With special physical-visual features, they are the reference point of human societies.

The art of architecture can be called the most popular art because of a deep connection with history, cultural beliefs, people, era, and time. In architecture, meanings and concepts are embodied, so architecture is the language and expression of definitions and concepts. For this reason, it contains the identity and culture of a nation and civilization. Art and architecture are among the most prominent manifestations of any nation's culture and historical period and show the human living space.

### **Theoretical foundations of cemetery studies**

Basic studies approach: The subject of historical cemeteries has been studied from a phenomenological point of view. Lloyd Warner believes in an analysis of the nature of the cemetery and refers to it as "a sacred representation of the masses and a small example of life." His emphasis on the concept of structural interaction between life and death and the confrontation between the two in the field of cemeteries can be seen in anthropological research. Cemeteries are symbols of man's presence and his culture in the land that once played a role in his settlement. Corel portrays cemeteries as a burial ground and writes: "Cemeteries are large-scale landscape parks built to place corpses in the heart of the earth. Emphasizing the concept of identity and identification of graves, Klebowski considers the most crucial feature of cemeteries to be the existence of a semiotic system that reflects the name and identity of the deceased. Therefore, the definition provided by Kalbuzovsky can be considered by the theory: "Cemeteries, due to their rich semiotic system, are the identifiable areas of the country's cities (Behzadfar & Tahmasebi, 2013,). According to Mahir, cemeteries have burial lands with inscribed graves that express personal information, date of birth, and death. Emphasis on identifying the deceased is a prominent feature of this definition. Julie Ragg emphasizes distinguishing between different types of burial sites as a prerequisite for the definitions provided, and classifies the types of burial sites in the form of cemeteries, church sites, burial grounds, mass graves, war cemeteries, and tombs, examining the structure of each species. Boudel considers cemeteries a combination of cultural, natural, and historical perspectives and believes that cemeteries narrate the city's history and are a vehicle for collecting signs and monuments. Considering this issue, it is also worth considering from another perspective that cities owe their formation to the presence of the great tombs in which they are present. The history of cities such as Karbala, Mashhad, and Qom can be traced through their cemeteries (Mansouri, 2005). According to Haeri, the cemetery is a long-standing, meaningful, historical, and symbolic place (Haeri, 2009). Faizi and Razzaghi Asl believe that cemeteries are valuable resources in history, culture, architecture, and archeology, which are in the category of continuous original landscapes due to their playing a lasting role in the community of yesterday and today (Faizi & Razaqi Asl, 2009). In expressing his definition of

cemeteries, Faramarz Parsi considers them as open and lost areas that, in addition to historical aspects, also benefit from natural elements. According to him, natural elements and their combination with historical elements have turned cemeteries into special places that can be described as historical and natural environments. The analysis of the views of these researchers confirms the importance of the sign system and the cognition of cemeteries and the apparent connection of these signs with the concept of the individual and social identity of the citizens of human settlements. On the other hand, it can be confirmed that the recognition of the cemetery as a valuable place in the city can be considered among the cultural landscapes of cities due to its natural and artificial structure and the representation of cultural, social, and ... aspects.

The approach of case studies is mainly from the perspective of historical, descriptive, and interpretive studies to know the history, spatial-physical structure, landscape and environment, physical condition of graves and tombs, and pathology of cemeteries which analyzes the relationship between cemeteries and the surrounding context and has set the classification of these studies as follows:

- 1- Archaeological studies carried out mainly in ancient cemeteries such as Sookhteh City, Silk Hill, Choghaznabil ancient site, and Yeri Meshkinshahr City to recognize the period of settlement and biological customs and culture of burial.

2. Value and pathology assessment studies of historical cemeteries have been conducted mainly by international institutions to present a methodology for dealing with the burial perspective.

- 3- Theoretical and methodological studies that have provided theoretical frameworks for cemeteries' protection, restoration, and organization by examining international documents and charters.

- 4- Conservation plans comprehensively studied case studies and presented their operational proposals to organize the cemetery. Studies such as the plan to manage historical, blessed, and abandoned cemeteries in Isfahan (Haeri et al., 2007), the plan to organize Takht-e-Foolad Cemetery (historical, cultural, and religious complex of Takht-e-Foolad, 2006), the plan to manage Ibn Babavieh Cemetery (consulting engineers Emarat Khorshid, 2010), introducing and analyzing the concepts of historical tombstones in Goran

region (Tehran Municipality Beautification Organization, 2016) are among these.

### **Death Architecture**

The cemetery is one of the successful examples of an architectural approach to the phenomenon of death, which expresses the culture and beliefs of the people of the society about concepts such as life, death, goodness, eternity, nature, etc. With the creation of tomb buildings in Rezvan Garden, this tomb is considered one of the valuable sources of art and architecture from a cultural and social point of view. It is regarded as a collective urban open space using socio-cultural landscapes.

The critical and remarkable thing about the cemetery is that the phenomenon of death forms a part of the landscape around us. For this reason, it is stated that the only common architecture in the world that can be described is the architecture of tombs. The rest have been created based on functional needs, but the architecture of the tomb and memorial is basically architecture; that is, the word architecture is appropriate for this subject. Basically, in all civilizations, attention to death has led to the formation of different types of architecture. For example, in western society, the Etruscan catacombs (underground tombs) and in Iran, the graves of Medes' and Achaemenid tombs, many tombs are still in the Islamic period in existence. It has functional aspects for the living and therefore represents the proximity of life and death.

Due to the cemetery's importance in societies, the concepts of death, as the architectural bodies of death, human myths in all eras and civilizations are precious. The architecture of the memorials of death is among the oldest architectures globally. Tombstones are cultural-historical and social concepts that have given rise to religious landscapes.

### **Islamic - Iranian tomb architecture**

In the early Islamic centuries, the dead were generally buried in the city, which still survives in some of these examples. In this structure, signs designed for death generally emphasized the idea of death. In this case, there is a concept called the Illustrator Cemetery. In later periods, the concept of a cemetery garden has similarities with the garden of Iranian tombs. The Tomb Garden is an example of an Iranian garden that has been used as a burial place for several great people while preserving its original theme (Wilbur, 2004). It is terrestrial, but perhaps it can be said that paying attention to paradise in Islam and the description mentioned above has been influential in the

emergence of this type of tomb, which can be considered a reflection of the desire of people to go to paradise. Over the years, religious and popular structures such as mosques, schools, libraries, water storages, etc., have been formed next to shrines in different historical periods. For instance, Takht-e-Foolad Cemetery in Isfahan is the best example of a collection of mausoleum buildings such as Tekyeh<sup>1</sup>, Tomb, Mosalla<sup>2</sup>, Mosque, Caravanserai,<sup>3</sup> and Ab Anbar.<sup>4</sup>

Cemeteries were once an essential part of the foundations of human habitats and one of the fundamental pillars of cities and have been used as permanent spaces in the service of religious, cultural, and spiritual activities. They have an urban texture in different regions of the world. These urban elements, and in a way, tombs, were erected to commemorate the status of the dead and have had their style and context in each of the various historical periods. Cemeteries are among the most enduring urban elements. According to the classification provided for the historical, cultural, and social landscape, cemeteries may be considered in the category of continuous original landscapes due to their lasting role in society past and now. These places, as memorable landscapes, have a significant role in preserving the memories and names of the past (Faizi & Razzaqi Asl, 2009).

### **Social perspective of cemeteries**

The success rate of urban spaces is proportional to their use and human presence in them. The main goal of architecture and urban planning is to increase social interactions and human solidarity.

So, factors such as user mixing, vitality, visual beauty and maintenance of space in particular, and other factors such as physical comfort, the ability to sit and stop, proper access and security, fitness reading, the diversity of the space form the most critical factors affecting attendance and social interactions (Behzadfar & Tahmasebi, 2013)

In the study of the cemetery, it is seen from the community perspective that the grave, as a place where a human rests, is a physical sign of the deceased person, and by establishing communication between the addressee

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<sup>1</sup>. A tekyeh is a place where Shiite Muslims gather to mourn muharram.

<sup>2</sup>. A place of worship for Muslims.

<sup>3</sup>. Temporary resting place for passengers.

<sup>4</sup>. Water storage.

of this place and the buried person, different aspects are given to this space. Despite this feature, cemeteries take on other spatial qualities depending on the buried people (Kashigar, 2003).

It seems that the burial of an acquaintance and relative in this place, in addition to giving a unique identity to this space, creates memorable aspects for these people and the presence at the tomb of one of the country's celebrities in a cemetery, considering that it may not have been possible for the majority of the community to meet him during his lifetime, suggests a different kind of relationship; a factor that seems to reduce the unconventional nature of the cemetery for the general public. In addition, where the deceased person is known to many people, it becomes a relatively common experience. It brings a significant aspect of sharing and reminds one of their national identity (Ismaeili, 2009).

The identity of the environment is the result of a person's natural and logical relationship with it, and this connection and sense of attachment will not occur unless the person can know the environment profoundly and understand the difference between other environments. According to Proshaski, the identity of the environment is the infrastructure of a person's identity, which consists of a person's mental cognition of the physical world in which he lives (Daneshpour, 2009).

The quality and richness of the experience formed for human beings from any place depend on each person's relationship with the site. From this perspective, Takht-e-Foolad cemetery has a unique feature in which memories and recollections become physical signs. For this reason, this place acquires a human character, and the individual's relationship with the cemetery becomes a human-human relationship. The addressee in this action is the dead person. Due to this feature and the variety of characters buried in Takht-e-Foolad, this place takes on a distinctive face. The tombs of the general public, celebrities, great men, national heroes, artists, etc., create a different quality of the cemetery space. According to the characteristics of the buried figures, what happens in this space has various meanings.

People go to the cemetery and cover the graves of their relatives and friends with flowers, candles and distribute charity food. There is a meeting place for people with a typical attitude or feeling in such cases. Due to the strengthening of positive and even soothing characteristics for the cemetery,



the possibility of social interactions among people has increased. The unpleasantness of the experience has decreased. This cemetery has been built throughout history.

The cemetery is a public and tourist open space; it belongs to the citizens regardless of its roots and religion. It is a public space in which the effort for the well-being of tourists provides facilities for traveling in specific groups. Today, this cemetery is a travel place for many people, such as cemetery staff, locals, families of buried people, artists, tourists, etc. For the above reasons, and also the freedom to choose the location and design of the tomb, suitable urban space, providing facilities for the disabled, the variety of monuments, the presence of green space, appropriate urban furniture, and social security, cemeteries have become sustainable space of the city.

### **The cultural landscape of the cemetery**

In defining the term “cultural landscape,” we faced two words: landscape and culture, the definitions of which are as follows:

The landscape is an objective-mental-dynamic and relative phenomenon that is the product of human interaction with nature and society with history. (Mansouri, 2004). Culture is anything that depends on the daily beliefs of a group of people and their behaviors. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee has defined the cultural landscape as clean geography or its unique features: a show composed of natural and human works. This committee divides the cultural landscape into three categories as follows:

- 1- A landscape that has been consciously designed and created by man.
2. The originally evolved landscape may be a remnant of the past or a continuous landscape of the past to the present.
3. A standard (mixed) cultural landscape may have gained value because of rituals, arts, and culture mixing with natural elements.

The European Landscape Convention also considers cultural-historical landscapes such as the cemetery as the most fundamental and diverse cultural heritage. It states that to protect cultural and historical landscapes, it is necessary to pay attention to their contextual, environmental, and human relations (Momtazpour, 2011). The interesting point is that cemeteries are stable from a continuous perspective because in many of them, intervention is still taking place, and they are changing.

The family tomb has a significant effect on promoting the sense of place, memory, and identity of space because the tomb's architecture in a logical and visual combination with the environment has caused adequate thirst in communicating with the audience. Species can be categorized as:

- 1- Combining the mausoleum with the memory of human figures with a view to humanistic thoughts
- 2- Combining family building with famous and honorable people
- 3- Using decorative and allegorical symbols in tomb buildings
- 4- Using sacred spiritual and religious symbols in the design of even family tomb buildings

### **Family tomb and its effects on the spatial development of the monastery**

Family tombs generally reflect the life and people's way of living in public areas based on geographical features; they also carry messages for the future and introduce various concepts and topics. The (family) tomb in the cemetery expresses a wide range of meanings that have given an identity to it and make it recognizable from other different and homogeneous phenomena; while using the system of these symbols and signs in the analysis of understanding and criticism waiting for this cemetery is one of its strengths. Finally, the tomb complex (family building) will be unique in terms of diversity and beauty of form and content (emotional, religious, historical, cultural, political, literary, scientific, etc.). While introducing artistic methods and traditions, it promotes public vision and reflects a part of the history of Isfahan. In the Takht-e-Foolad cemetery, tombs and family-type tombs (total architectural space) manifest their time's culture, art, and history.

**Table. 1. Environmental dimensions of the cemetery**

| Principles and criteria  | Explanation   | Quality   |
|--|---|---|
| Persian garden pattern (Mazar garden)  | Creating open green spaces in connection with existing nature   | Greenness   |
| The architecture of the tombs also turned the cemeteries into an open-air museum | Presence of people in the collection  | Vitality  |
| According to the construction of graves and resources available on site          | Preservation of natural resources (- organic) and creation of artificial spaces in harmony with nature      | Compatibility with nature   |
| Combining trees and plants with tombstones                                       | Survival as a personal and family sign, planting a tree in the area of the tombs                            | Possibility of clients' participation in planting and communication with natural elements |
|  | Existence of bathhouses - optimal waste disposal - washing water - sanitary drinking water - clean services | Hygiene and cleanliness of the environment  |
|  | Do not be in the wind to the city to prevent pollution from entering the city                               | City health   |

The family tomb is a cultural-historical and social document expressing its religious concepts, showing society's attitude to the phenomenon of death in its own time and having a dual function for the dead and the living. Therefore, it offers a load of art, culture, and history for people who enter this space. Its area is considered memorable and with identity for the deceased's relatives, acquaintances, and other members of society. In addition to the particular dimension, the tomb will play an essential role in preserving the memory and names of the past. In addition to its aesthetic, environmental, and ecological functions and characteristics, it has historical dimensions in today's life, and provides the means for social interaction, the promotion of quality, vitality, and reveals essential aspects of the ethnic, cultural, and artistic roots of the people of that community and national and local identity.

**Table 2. Social and cultural dimensions of buildings (family)**

| Principles and criteria  | Explanation   | Quality                         |
|--|---|---------------------------------|
| Enjoy relaxing buildings, spaces, colors, elements, and signs  | Create a suitable atmosphere for the mourners to not increase the mental anguish of the people who have lost their loved ones.  | Peace                           |
| Open and wide spaces and establish social interactions   | Historical cemeteries with a vast open space, easy and convenient entrance, free choice in the type of use and ease of social interactions such as urban space, a suitable place for holding rituals and religious ceremonies | Attendance                      |
| Ability to add extensions and personal belongings and tombs  | Possibility of adding signs, memorials, planting trees, and generally stamping oneself next to the graves of the old cemetery. These cemeteries act as libraries that are regularly read by future generations.               | Colors belong and give identity |
| Ability to increase communication and become a socio-cultural space  | Placement of cemeteries as urban squares with architectural concepts in the undeniable enrichment of plant elements   | Favorable urban landscape       |
| Old cemeteries in the form of small neighborhoods  | The location of old cemeteries in the heart of the city and the creation of a spiritual sense within are reminiscent of the concept of death and the prominent role in the religious advice of the Imams in daily life.       | Reminder to the resurrection    |
| Tombs became a place for every class   | Holding religious ceremonies and rituals in old cemeteries, a close connection between the dead and the living, increasing the spiritual sense of the people  | Holding events and rituals      |
| People determined security and protection in their neighborhoods.  | The location of old cemeteries in the heart of the cities and the high level of security and safety   | Safety and importance           |
| Ability to create memorial spaces and space for communication between peers as well as recollection in place | Located in the heart of cities by creating memories and making memories in the old cemetery   | Sense of place                  |
| Waqf <sup>1</sup> , attention to the needs of the cemetery, attention to the needy                           | Possibility of developing the good tradition of endowment, helping the needy, meeting the needs of clients  | Charity and benevolence         |

<sup>1</sup> an endowment made by a Muslim to a religious, educational, or charitable cause.

## Conclusion

The only common architecture in the world which can be referred to as architecture is the architecture of cemeteries, and the rest have been created based on functional needs, but the architecture of graves and memorials is actual architecture, that is, the word architecture is appropriate for this issue. In all civilizations, attention to death has led to different types of architecture. The architecture of the tomb (family building) and the memorials of death as one of the oldest architectures in the world are stone libraries of countless stones with symbolic and historical signs and concepts. Cultural-historical and social aspects have led to the emergence of such landscapes. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) says in a Hadith: "Go to the graveyard and see the people of the graves remember the Hereafter. Imam Ali (AS) also says in this regard: Visit your dead (visit the graves of your family) because their soul will be happy with your visits, and also people seek their needs at the graves of their parents, it means because of their happiness and praying for these visits, the people could gain a fortune in their life..

The cemetery as a collective and independent urban open space is a cultural and social phenomenon and a point of intersection between two opposing concepts; namely, life and death; and as one of the most historic urban elements and identity spaces by the city and urban culture, the ability to create, provides the necessary platform for the development and continuation of a sense of belonging, identity and the formation of national and civil society. Moreover, using artistic elements, various tombstone designs, thinking, and landscaping will make it attractive as a tourist destination and create Isfahan's sustainable cultural and social landscapes.

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