Analysis of Plant Designs of Seven-color Tile

(This article was adopted from a research project)

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Abstract
Tiling is one of the pleasant methods of architectural decoration in all Islamic lands. Tiling has been one of the most important aesthetic manifestation of creator spirit and Iranian artists’ aesthetic, and plant designs used in the seven-color tile are evidence for this claim. Plant designs are beautiful and simple. Despite diversity, they have unity and cohesion. The aim of this paper is to introduce seven-color tiling and plant designs used. In this study, we examined the cedar, Khataei, and pot designs. The, we will respond to this question: 1- what are the features of plant designs?

Methodology
Library method and content analysis method were used in this study. Library method was used as the main tool to collect data and note taking and video documents were also used in this regard.

Keywords: tiling, seven-color tiles, plant designs.

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Introduction

Those who are familiar with Islamic architecture know well that tiling is one of the valuable arrays of architecture that Iranian artists have developed it to such level of beauty that it has aroused the admiration of viewers. Using seven-color tiling was introduced and used commonly since late Timurid era in different buildings. This method is used in decoration of buildings. Seven-color tile designs are divided into plant and mythological designs in which plant designs ranking first. Plant designs are inspired from delicate and beautiful flowers found in the nature, while Iranian artists have brought some changes in their main form.

The definition of tile

Tiling is one of the pleasant architectural decoration methods in all lands of Islam. The development of tiles started from external small colored elements in brick facades, led to complete coverage of the historical buildings of eighth and ninth centuries. Various forms of the word “tile” have been used over the years and centuries, and examples of early use of this word has been mentioned in Arabic texts derived from Kashan city more probably, as it is famous for producing tile. In the simplest definition of tile, it can be considered as a kind of glazed pottery, led to formation of different types of tiling based on type of pottery, the way it is glazed, and various methods of using it in the architecture (Wilbur, 2010, 13). Tiling is one of the most important decorative and an integral part of Iran’s Islamic architecture. The use of tiling art in decorating of buildings multiplies its beauty. Seven-color tile of Abulghasem Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Ali bin Abi Taher, historian of Ilkhans court and one of the descendants of the famous family of potters of Kashan known as Abu Taher applied the term “seven-color” in painting technique with enamel on glaze, and this term reflects the same technique nowadays. Using the seven number is due to limitations in colors not in their number. Number “seven” is symbolic. However, we do not have more than three main colors, and main colors in painting include yellow, blue, and red, which other colors are created by combination of these colors. The number seven is perfect number rooted in mysticism. Using seven-color tile was introduced since late Timurid era in different buildings. It is used in decoration of buildings. Artists were closely visiting the place and they were choosing the appropriate color by considering the required light. Colors were different in south and north of mosques. In places where light is not sufficient, brighter colors are used, while darker colors are used in brighter places.

The construction process of seven-color tile

Seven-color is a type of tile constructed usually at the sizes of 15.15, 20.20, 5.7.15, and 10.20. After taking form, tiles are covered with opaque or semitransparent white glaze. Then, desired designs are drawn on cutaneous papers, and their surrounding is pierced by a needle. Then, they are placed on glazed tiles that are on smooth surface. After stencilling, designs are penned by a black mineral material. Then, tile surface is removed slowly and the effects remained by coal are drawn on it by Maqn color. Grape juice is mixed with Maqn color so that this color finds adhesive property and leaves effect completely on tile. When the design is drawn by Maqn color and it is dried, the effects of duff are cleared so that Maqn color will have no adhesive property. By covering a cloth on tiles, it is cleared and disappeared (Spanta, 1963, 76). According to a design painted by artist, inside the penned lines is painted. The used colors are mainly blue, turquoise, green, yellow, red, and azure blue and more than 20 colors are created by combining these colors. It is obvious that designs have different colors, the corner or back of the tiles are
numbered after removing the tiles and reinstalling them after cooking, so that they are not selected wrongly when they are arranged together. Designs used in most of the works are twisted flowers and leaves, statements containing the names of saints and verses of Qur'an or other phrases, vases, birds and animals. The appropriate time to cook tiles inside the furnace is seven to nine hours so that their colors to be fixed. After cooling, they are removed from furnace, and they are placed on their right place according to number inserted back of tiles before cooking, and their back is filled with chalk (Naderi, 1978, 63).

The reason for using seven-color tilt

- Seen-color tilting involves lower cost in construction process
- Craftsmen have achieved to the point that they can use various designs in tilting
- Craftsmen have achieved to level of capability that they can use multiple colors in this regard

Seven-color tiling, compared to previous tiling techniques, had less artistic value and it has been introduced only as quick alternative for mosaic tile, while it provides more artistic capabilities for artists (Shayestehfar, 2008, 54).

Plant designs in seven-color designs

Considering the Iran’s art, it can be stated that it is symbolistic and symbol’s function can be clearly seen in various artistic areas of Iran. This characteristic of Iran’s art has strengthened its relation with myths and mythical concepts. Plants designs can be seen throughout the history of Iranian art. These elements sometimes were manifested more in some arts. Language of art has been converted to symbolic language, including seven-color tiles design. Plant designs used in seven-color tile and investigated in this paper include a variety of Islimi and Khataei, cedar tree, and potted flowers.

Cedar tree

Since old days, typical illustration of tree has been as a mirror reflecting all aspects of human and his deepest wants. This typical illustration generates a large number of mysteries expanding in numerous branches and penetrating into mythology, religions, arts, literature and diverse civilizations. The scientific name of cedar was adopted from old Greek word and two words of kuo (meaning generating) and parsio (meaning equal) were derived from it, indicating the symmetry of branches and crown of immediate tree.

"Evergreen trees such as cedar and pine are symbol of immortality meaning life after death, from the perspective of many Asian and Mediterranean nations. For this reason, they are found beside tombs in ancient Greece, Italy, Middle East (Iran), India and China, and Christian Europe, since it prevented the death body against corruption. On monuments of Mithras, seven cedars can be seen representing seven planets that the spirit passes through it on the journey to heaven (Behzadi, 2001, 78). At all times, cedar design has been one of the most common designs used on potteries and tiles. They were so important for human that they were using these designs in their artifacts. Islamic period artists have immortalized these sacred designs on different forms on their works, with their pure beliefs (Kuhzad, 2010, 12). Islamic period tiles were also suitable for plant designs. An example of these tiles shows a person mounted on a horse that animals, birds and plants are his surrounding, and a cedar tree can be seen against him. It seems that this
person has entered to heaven and he is looking to cedar tree. By looking to these designs, a sense of spirituality arises from human. These types of tiles have special sanctity (porter, 2001, 43).

**Khataei designs**

Khataei designs include a bouquet of flowers, buds, and leaves on twisted stems creating very beautiful and unique combinations on revolving stems. Circular and dynamic motions of Khataei flowers play critical role in decorating the religious buildings, and it has been interpreted as allegory of heaven. In general, Islimi designs are forming the skeleton in the plant designs compounds, that they are visually firmer, stronger and thicker, and Khataei flowers and leaves are found in Islimi designs (Maki Nejad, 2008). Khataei designs have been inspired from nature. Initial and similar examples of Shah Abbasi flower is pomegranate flower. Khataei designs having love-like stems include different types of leaves, buds, and flowers. These designs are stylization of nature in some aspects (Pashazanus, 2009, 12). Khataei designs are moving along with Islimi designs. Khataei designs are inspired from delicate and beautiful flowers found in nature, but artists have brought some modifications on their original form (Machiani, 2000, 14-16).

Figure 1- Islimi-Khataei, Chaharbagh School. Source: Bemanian, 2010

The pot design (pot is ancient symbol of fertility and fertility rituals) has been embodied in numerous forms since third millennium before Christ so far. According to symbolic associations of pot, it is usually shown in crescent base of moon, and plants are placed on it as symbol of abundance, or one of the universe trees.

An Islimi pair is usually hung from edge of pot that they are palm tree clusters hung on tree moon. Then, branches hung on each of universe trees can be found coming out of palm branches and returning to pot itself (Poop, 2008, 2722). With a closer view, it is found that motifs that were in the form of jars full of roses and lilies or natural landscapes adopted from new-entered postal cards from Europe have been unprecedented themes in tiling (Farieh, 1995, 291). The point is that pots are not limited to this, but they have flexibility in using trees and plants.

Figure 2- Flower and pot designs- Seyed School- Source: Bemanian, 2010

**Conclusion**

In the simplest definition of tile, it can be considered as glazed pottery in which kind of pottery, the way it is glazed, and different methods of using it in architecture have created different types of tiling. The word “seven-color” was used by Abu Taher for the first time in painting with enamel on glaze. The use of number “seven” is symbolic in this type of tiling and it is rooted in mysticism. Plant designs used in the seven-color tile and examined in this study include different designs of Khataei and Islimi, cedar and pot flower designs. Then, this question is answered: 1. What are the features of plant designs? The first design examined in this study is cedar tree. The scientific name of cedar was adopted from old Greek word and two words of kuo (meaning generating) and parsio (meaning equal) were derived from it, indicating the symmetry of branches and crown of immediate tree. Cedar is the symbol of immortality, the life after death, and it is one of the most common designs used by artists at all times. By looking at these images, sense of spirituality can be aroused in human, as if, human has entered to heaven. The second plant design investigated in this study is Khataei designs inspired from nature. Khataei designs
that have love-like stems include different leaves, buds, and flowers. These designs are sterilization of nature. Another combination of Khataei designs is circulation of stem and different flowers. These designs are mainly turquoise and azure. The final design studied was pot design, that it was found that this design is ancient symbol associated with fertility. It is usually shown in crescent base of moon, and plants are placed on it as symbol of abundance or one of the universe trees. Motifs that were in the form of jars full of roses and lilies or natural landscapes adopted from new-entered postal cards from Europe have been unprecedented themes in tiling. Pot designs have higher flexibility in using trees and plants. Investigating these designs can help us to know beliefs, culture, and social and religious customs of this land people. On other hand, an opportunity is provided to use them in contemporary architecture decorations consciously.
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