

Persian translation of this paper entitled:

مروری بر جایگاه «نقودونی» در تزیینات داخلی معماری

نمونه موردی: مسکن سنتی دزفول

is also published in this issue of journal.

DOI: 10.22034/jaco.2021.286623.1196

Original Research Article

Role of *Noghldouni* in Interior Architectural Decorations Case Study: Traditional Houses of Dezful

Mahnoosh Mahmoudi^{1*}, Abdolamir MoghadamNiya²

1. Department of Architecture, Islamic Azad University, Dezful Branch, Dezful, Iran.

2. Faculty Member, University of Principles of Religion, Dezful, Iran.

Received; 17/05/2021

accepted; 21/12/2021

available online; 01/01/2022

Abstract

Decoration in the traditional building architecture of Dezful is an inseparable element of the building structure. Among the decorative elements, which contribute to the beauty of the traditional housing structure, is a kind of space craved within the wall of the room. This built-in space that makes using the internal wall possible is known as “Noghldouni”. This term has been defined as a necessary and meaningful element in the main housing space. Thus, the research’s main question is: What is the role and function of Noghldouni in traditional housing decorations of Dezful? The research also aimed to examine the position and application of this decorative space, which was made obsolete over time and removed from the building decorations. The current research is a survey that uses a descriptive-analytical method and library and field data to investigate traditional house decorations in the historical context of Dezful. Speaking of home appliance arrangement, residential spaces are regularly arranged parts of the existential context of a house with the place of arrangement also referred to as a significant, meaningful, artistic, beautifying, and effective element that represents its beauty. The findings of this study show that Noghldouni has changed its functions over time and served as a background for decorative spaces such as a fireplace, buffet, stand, etc. Noghldounis have mainly been made of plaster nicely decorated with Arabesque motifs around their sides. Noghldounis are generally divided into simple and complicated forms, mainly serving as places for holding and displaying decorative and valuable objects as well as Pishbokhari (in English fireplace) at houses.

Keywords: *Traditional Architecture, Decorative Spaces, Noghldouni, Niche, Dezful City.*

Introduction

Beautifying the living environment has gained the attention of humans throughout history. This can be inferred from the patterns on the walls of caves which served as places of dwelling for primitive humans. Decoration is a way to communicate with the audience visually than verbally. Decoration has certain principles of which the most important ones are coordination among the design, motif, color, and association between decorations and various interior and exterior space

surfaces, and quality of the materials used as well as their exact implementation. The significance and value of decorative elements whether they are small or big are dependent on the level of quality, completion, and creativity of the creators (Maki-Nejad, 2010).

In Iranian architecture, decoration is a unifying component that plays a significant role in the traditional housing context of Dezful. Exterior wall decorations are mainly limited to the overdoor of entrances to houses and partly to the fences surrounding them. However,

* Corresponding Author: bd_mahmoudi@yahoo.com, +989166437033

Raf (ledge or a holding place for objects) and niche feature the decorative elements used in the houses of Dezful serving as functional elements. Niches and Rafs or depressions of different sizes create beautiful spaces at home which are made more beautiful by plaster molding (Ukhovat, 2013, 4).

Noghdounis originate from architectural decorations in traditional Dezful housing. Because Iranian-Islamic architectural principles seek to avert vanity and to employ the rules to create harmony in the traditional building structure, it appears that the decorative space created by Noghdouni has been impressive and warrants further research.

The objective, questions and method of the research

This research reviews the role and functioning of Noghdouni in architectural decorations, specifically the interior housing architecture in Dezful. In this regard, there are questions: a) What is the role of Noghdouni?, and b) What are the functions and utility of Noghdouni in a living environment? To answer the questions, the authors of this study first reviewed the library sources to understand the meaning of Noghdouni and then sought to explain the role of decorations in traditional Iranian architecture. Concerning decorations in traditional housing architecture in Dezful, especially the Noghdouni element, the authors used a descriptive-analytical method to examine its building blocks. They also used a field survey and direct observations to gather the data from the traditional housing structure in Dezful and categorize them.

Decorations and their role in traditional Iranian architecture

Literally speaking, decoration suggests relieving plainness or monotony by adding the beauty of color or design. It is the process or art of decorating something. Decoration refers to the process of making something more attractive, or to the items that are used to make something more attractive (Ansari, 2002, 63). The

term decoration, as blended with the Iranian-Islamic architecture, can vary from physical aspects and refer to the inward faces and spiritual and psychic elements of architecture.

Iranian architecture has, on its own, formed many of the arts. Each of these arts has developed in Iranian architecture through their known specific forms; they are historical elements that found their way into architecture with specific objectives. In Iranian architecture, decorations have aimed at creating a specific and transcendent objective. Decorative elements have played a central role in Iranian architecture which also serve as unifying factors of various arts. Decorations in Iranian architecture, both from a structural or a decorative point of view, have been implemented in various formats and created special ingenuity in architecture.

The works of Iranian architecture include a myriad of nice decorations which mainly cover all the surfaces. One of the decorative methods of the walls is plaster molding employed since the Ashkanian era. Plaster-molding decorations in the Islamic era were formed based on the history of pre-Islam plaster-molding art which developed in Iran and rose to prominence in the Ilkhanian era. Traditional plaster molding followed a similar path up until the Safavid era, then changed under the influence of the European art of plaster molding, witnessing its stable characters. This trend reached its peak in the Qajar era with plaster decorations distancing from traditional plasterwork. It is thus required to examine the characteristics of the Qajar era art as the decorative element of Noghdouni appears to have found its way into Dezful's interior spaces from this era. The Qajar era art features three fundamental aspects: 1. Separation of culture from the Islamic tradition and the influx of popular art elements as well as the growing dependence on Western art, 2. The Qajar art had lower quality than the previous eras, though revealing a completely independent identity, and 3. Dependence on the West left much influence on the Qajar era (Scarchia, 2005, 48). The significance of the Qajar era was because of the confrontation between traditions and modernity in

Iran. This era witnessed key developments both in all Iranian lives and their architecture.

Discussion

• Role of decorations in traditional Dezful architecture

A look at the symbols used in Dezful architecture reveals that decorations in the architecture have not been limited to beautifying the surface yet the meanings conveyed by forms and motifs have dominated the symmetries and the aesthetics, prompting the viewer to regard them as redundant.

Decorations in Dezful's architecture were generally brick-made employed on the outer surfaces of the walls. These local materials were abundantly used in the construction and decorations of the buildings representing the city's architecture as a brick city. Brick decorations are also called Khouchini. Khouchini motifs on the entrances of houses as well as on the interior walls have embellished the architectural structure of this city. This type of brickwork (Khouchini) which is executed in a decorous way developed in the Safavid era and continued until the late Qajar era and the first Pahlavi (Na'ima, 1996, 50).

Consistent with social, economic, and family survival situations, such elements as niche, Raf (small niche), Derzeh (small window), orifice, peephole, Noghdouni (a place to keep sweet and decorative objects), Pishkhori, or Pishbokhari (i.e. fireplace, heating system, etc.) were created which were among the factors used to decorate the building. To decorate these elements, plastering and coating were used. Consistent with developments in the recent century, historical houses were subjected to destruction. However, the historical cities accounted for a large part of Iran's historical urban areas. Thus, a review of these buildings and creating a link between the past and future of this region's architecture would offer much help (Table 1).

• Niche and ledge

Niches, decorous elements, were used to enliven the space and serve as a place for the holy book, i.e., the Koran. Niches were made of clay or plaster-made coating.

The depression was made within the walls in the rooms, porches, aisles of the building, and thick walls from the very beginning. Niches were one of the main Iranian architectural elements without which Iranian houses lost their meanings. In the past, luxury houses used niches a lot which later became prevalent in the living rooms in most houses. These niches were decorative in nature and served some functional purposes. The beautiful plasterwork used artistically in the niches featuring arches and bulkheads could add to their beauty. The niches or ledges of different sizes created aesthetical elements in the house which plasterwork improved its decoration.

Ledges were small depressions constructed over the main niches, occasionally decorated by plasterwork, painting, and mirrorwork. This depression was square or rectangular-shaped which was formed of boards. Raf or ledge was a place for arranging the home items, serving as a frame for the interior house mirror. The difference between the ledge and niche lies with the curve on the upper part of the ledges.

• Noghdouni

Noghdouni is an element that is almost always found in old Dezful houses. This element is mainly made of plaster constructed inside the room walls which is characterized by artistic and beautifully crafted symmetries and orderly arrangements. Dividing parts of the main room walls and creating niches not only beautify the interior design but also display nice manifestations of the plasterwork art. Noghdouni is not just used in Dezful city as it is also represented in the architecture of other areas of Iran, especially decorations of the Safavid era palaces (Fig. 1). However, in other similar architectural designs, such as the Sheikh Safi Al-Din monument, these spaces are used to hold and display items looted. In Isfahan, more examples of Pishbokhari, attributed to Sheikh Bahaei's house are noted. Noghdouni was gradually removed from the interior design decorations and replaced by such items as buffets, stands, wall shelves, etc.

• Dezful Noghdouni

Exactly opposing the room entrance, the first element that catches the eye of the beholder is the charming

Table 1. Application of Khouchini in interior decoration. Source: Authors.

Area used	Components	Forms	Explanations
Inside the building (functional and decorative)	Beneath the bulkhead Arches Arches and main façade	Cutting the brick in half on either side with an oblique cut; smoothened	Background
	Marginal and brick decorations around the frame	Applying the brick in a smooth form or a square or rectangular form without oblique cut	Margin
	Main arches and facades Side arches and main facades Engraved motifs (overdoor and above the windows)	Smoothened Full brick Clod Three-quarter of a brick	In line with the wall Mainly arranged in a V-shaped and warp and woof forms

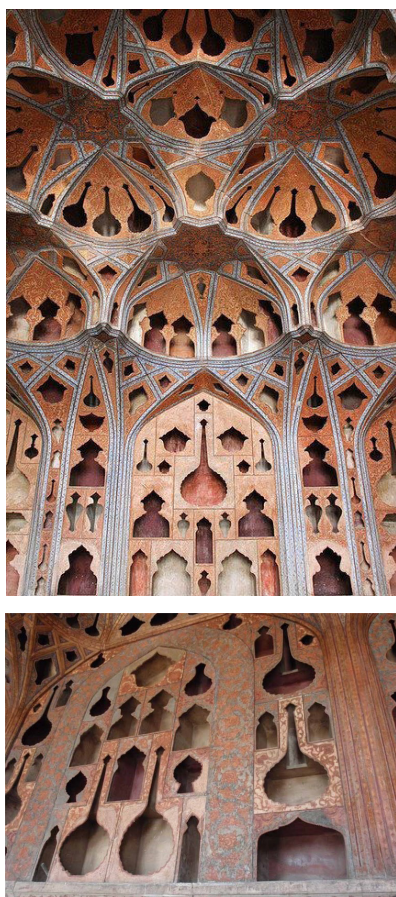


Fig. 1. Noghdouni in the palaces of the Safavid era. Source: Author's archive.

and cozening view of the Noghdouni, which is the very plaster-made niche, with the pishbokhari beneath decorated with flowers and petals intertwined. Noghdounis in Dezful are unique. This element consists of two interconnected segments: the upper segment which includes the Noghdounis with their delicate niches and the lower segment, which is a blend of Tashkhouneh (fireplace) and the Noghdouni, embracing the pishbokhari on either side (Fig. 2).

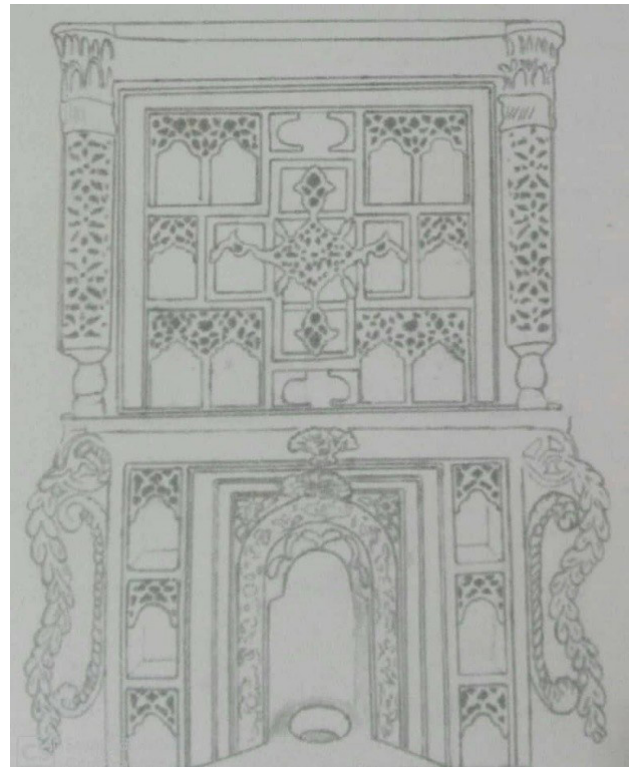
The upper part of these luxurious Noghdounis is depicted with skillful symmetries, as the balance is set with symmetry on either side and top and bottom parts. In three two-by-two rows, the niches are repeated with plaster-made and lattice arches, with the length width, height, depth, and type of the cuts made to the lattice arches are exactly the same in a two-by-two way. Symmetry, rhythm, and balance are noticeable in designing Noghdounis.

• Noghdouni components

Traditional Noghdounis in Dezful are fascinating, charming, and glorious, which are divided into two simple and complicated categories. Simple Noghdounis are featured by a row of simple niches embedded inside the wall body without considering the pishbokhari,



Fig. 2. Schematic view of Noghldouni components. Source: Authors.



which also displays a space for laying the books, small items, etc. as well as the social prestige of the landowner. Noghldounis were not painted, though there were also some cases of painting (Fig. 3).

In complicated Noghldounis, meticulousness and intricacy are focused attention. Plasterwork with motifs, Arabesque patterns, scaled networks, embossed flowers, and the nice motion of the intertwined lotus, wreaths, blossoms are seen on such designs. In the Noghldounis, the plasterwork adds to the value and aesthetics of the space created. Besides this beautiful element, the arrangement of colorful backs, candlesticks, watering cans, teapots, and antique dishes, arranged with an artful taste, together with the sunlight radiated over the Noghldounis through the colorful glass of the overdoor of the rooms which would create an imaginary picture in the mind of the users. Tables 2 & 3 evaluate the decorative components of Noghldounies.

In Dezful architecture, it was necessary and significant to make residential spaces luxurious by decorating



Fig. 3. Noghldouni of Ghassab-Khalaj House, Dezful. Source: Authors Archive.

Table 2. Decorative components of Noghdouni. Source: Authors.

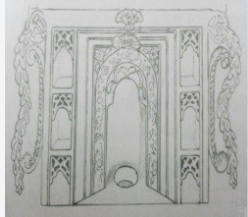
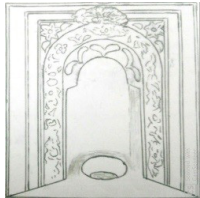
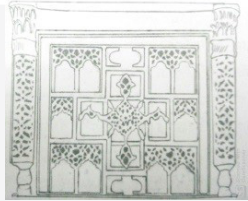
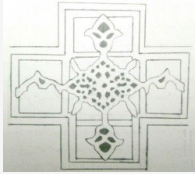
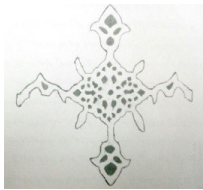
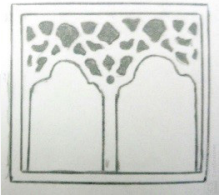
Place of use	Component	Forms and materials	Image
Pishbokhari	Two-column bulkhead of two Noghdounis; semi-circular bulkhead; the lower part also represents a two-column bulkhead for two Noghdounis	Spanning in 1.2 cm in width and 90cm in height with two uniform and symmetrical rows of Noghdounis on either side constructed in a perpendicular way; with plasterwork format or bulkhead embedded on the front view of the Noghdouni; also, clay or bricks are used inside the format	
Fireplace	Lotus stalk patterns, semicircular arches, flower symmetry, side arches, and flower twisting, niche slope, two pieces of wreaths laid over each other, two rows of flower arches, and twisting	54 cm high and 22cm deep; with a hole in the center which is a place to hold woods and charcoals to warm the plastered room	
Noghdouni	Artful symmetry, repetition of three two-by-two rows with niches or plastered and lattice arches the same	Length, width, height, and the type of cuts made to the networks are exactly similar to each other in a two-by-two form	

Table 3. Decorative components of Noghdouni. Source: Authors.

Place of use	Components	Form and materials used	Image
Cross	In the center of the Noghdouni, the broken cross-shaped design involves four niches in a two-by-two form interconnected by a very much beautiful and lozenge-shaped network	The wall between the niches has a diameter of 1.5 cm installed on the ground or the plaster.	
Lozenge-shaped lattice	Lozenge-shaped (four equal parts in the form of scaled networks, uniform carving in the form of four petals and two flower blossoms on the entrance of the upper and lower niches on the central niche	Plaster grout is used to hold it firmly, with the lozenge-shaped parts extending in an oblique way from the center of the left and right niches; on either side, the petal network is laid on the body	
Bulkhead	The wide niche is divided into two bulkheads by a separating wall; the second and third rows are installed like the third row of arches.	Plaster is poured on the body of these bulkheads and is installed on the place; then	

them. The niches sometimes surrounded the room, and symmetry was observed when making the niches as they beautified the whole view. Ceiling plasterwork, room corners, etc. added to the beauty of the Noghdouni body. The art of plasterwork and designing flower and bush patterns as well as embossed motifs were employed on plaster-made designs. Plasterwork was mainly a kind of ornamentation done with plaster, such as a layer of plaster on an interior or exterior wall structure, or plaster decorative moldings on ceilings or walls.

In the upper row of the Noghdounis, the interface between the stalactite work of two finials and the pattern of two flowers are repeated in an orderly way (Fig. 4).

From the right side, we have the evergreen flower and then the blue lotus flower repeating five times (Fig. 5).

In this plasterwork, there is a blue lotus with eight petals (Fig. 6) as the artistic pattern has revealed the beautiful motif of the lotus, embraced with eight evergreen flowers on either side.

On both sides of the space used for the fireplace, two beautiful plasterwork forms are seen with intertwined leaves falling like long hairs, though hung from an orifice inside a circle (Fig. 7).

Conclusion



Fig 5. Evergreen flower pattern. Source: Authors.

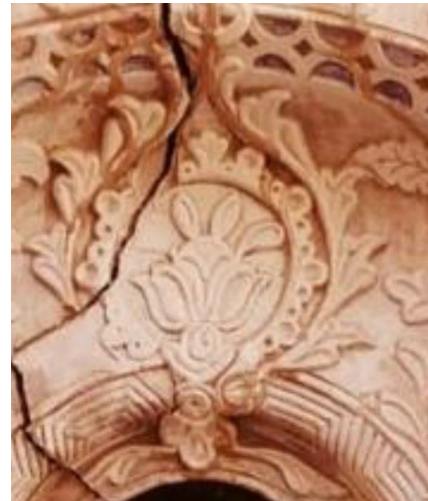


Fig. 6. Lotus with eight petals. Source: Authors.



Fig 4. Patterns of finial and two flowers above it. Source: Authors.



Fig. 7. Noghdouni. Source: Authors.

Noghldouni is a charming and useful element used in most traditional Dezful houses which have fallen under two simple and complicated forms. They were usually made of plaster and served to hold antique and precious items. Consistent with studies, the element of Noghldouni appears to improve the qualitative features of rooms in those traditional houses. Dividing parts of the main room walls and creating niches not only beautify the interior design but also nicely manifest the plasterwork art. Noghldouni is not just used in Dezful city as it is also represented in the architecture of other areas of Iran, especially decorations of the Safavid era palaces. One would think that the quality, type, and size of the Noghldounis were directly related to the position, livelihood, and characters of families in this city. Noghldounis were gradually removed from interior house

designs; however, they are of paramount significance in modern Dezful architecture. The interviews with local architects revealed that Noghldounis served as cabinets, shelves, open, drawers, buffets, etc.

Reference list

- Ansari, M. (2002). Decoration in Iranian architecture and art of the Islamic era with emphasis on mosques. *Modarres-e Honar*, 1(1), 47-59.
- Maki-nejad, M. (2010). *History of Iranian Art in the Islamic Period - Architectural Decorations*. Tehran: SAMT.
- Na'ima, Gh. (1996). *Dezful, the Brick City, Cultural Heritage Organization*, Iran: Sazman-e Miras-e Farhangi-ye Keshvar.
- Scarchia, J. R. (2005). *Safavid Art, Zand, Qajar* (Y. Azhand, Trans.). Tehran: Movalli.
- Ukhovat, S. R. (2013). *Stylistic and functional decoration in houses*. Tehran: Pazhuhesh-e Ukhovat.

COPYRIGHTS

Copyright for this article is retained by the author (s), with publication rights granted to the journal of art & civilization of the orient. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Mahmoudi, M. & MoghadamNiya, A. (2022). Role of Noghldouni in Interior Architectural Decorations Case Study: Traditional Houses of Dezful. *Journal of Art & Civilization of the Orient*, 9(34), 61-68.

DOI: 10.22034/jaco.2021.286623.1196

URL: http://www.jaco-sj.com/article_142666.html?lang=en

