

## Gorgan City: Heritage and Ritual Landscapes \*

Reihaneh Khorramrouei<sup>\*\*1</sup>, Parto Pahlavan<sup>2</sup>, Elaheh Zarif Asgari<sup>3</sup>, Somayeh Sabouri<sup>4</sup>, Parisa Daneshi<sup>5</sup>, Pedram Sadafi Kohneh<sup>6</sup>

1. Ph.D. Candidate in Landscape Architecture, College of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Iran

2. Faculty of Fine Arts, Shahid beheshti University, Iran.

3. Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Iran.

4. Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Iran.

5. Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Iran.

6. Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Tehran, Iran.

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### Abstract

One of the components of the vitality of urban spaces is the citizen presence with the aim of “being in space”, which results in the improvement of social relations, increase of security, creation of a sense of belonging to the place due to the increased possibility of individual and collective memories, and reduction of crime in the city. Ritual spaces have long played an important role in shaping urban landscapes. They have been strongly experienced as urban public spaces and have been one of the main reasons for the formation of cities. Today, the physical components of traditional cities, even if survive, lack dynamism and citizen presence, and their activity is limited to specific social and religious occasions. In the two-day field visit to the historic fabric of Gorgan City, what attracts visitors most is the multiplicity of Tekyehs, Hussainiyas, and mosques, which are located in the center of the neighborhoods and considered as public open places with high social, religious and economic potentials. In the past, they have been the manifestation of culture, religion, social life, and formed the social identity of the people living in Gorgan City. However, today, due to the change in lifestyle, people’s needs, and modern urbanism model, they have become inactive centers in the heart of the historic and valuable fabric of Gorgan City. That is why the present study aims to use a descriptive-analytic method to examine the heritage and ritual landscapes of Gorgan City in old and new texts and references, and explore the reasons for the multiplicity of mosques and Tekyehs in this city using related texts and field study.

**Keywords:** *Culture, Heritage landscape, Ritual landscape, Mosques, Tekyehs, Neighborhood Center.*

### Introduction and Problem Statement

Religious thoughts, in the form of ritual-heritage landscapes, are of many factors that have influenced

the landscape of Iranian cities over time. Rituals are considered a way of objectifying the myths believed by human societies.

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Mansouri.

\*\* Corresponding Author: r.khoramrouei@ut.ac.ir  
+989186090192

They can be a guideline for the continuity of the concept of social life in cities by expressing the basic thoughts about life which are common among people. Ritual landscapes show the effect of rituals on human life and the structure of cities. In Iranian culture, based on naturalistic beliefs, ritual landscapes have close relations with natural elements and there is a special type of ritual landscapes with social and identity results (Abarghouei Fard, Saboonchi & Farzin, 2018, 6). Neighborhoods have always been considered as one of the oldest and most basic elements of the Iranian city structure. The city is a whole and its center is definitely the most important part of this whole. Also, the city center is the core of the whole and means what created the city, i.e. the origin of the city. In other words, the city center represents the existence of the city. About neighborhoods, by expanding the mentioned model, it can be said that the center of each neighborhood is the existence of that neighborhood, i.e. a place where all the prominent features of a neighborhood can be seen. During the Qajar period, Gorgan City (formerly Astarabad) had 6 large and main neighborhoods of Sarpir, Sarcheshmeh, Mikhchehgaran, Nalbandan, Sabzeh Mashhad and Meydan, and also several sub-neighborhoods, such as Pasarv, Darbano, Doshanbe, Shirkesh, Dabbaghan, etc. Today, these main and sub-neighborhoods, with the same names, exist in the historical fabric of Gorgan City. Nowadays, these neighborhoods, which include a large number of mosques, old tekyehs, shrines and religious places, form the old fabric, traditional and historical architecture and a major part of the heritage landscape of Gorgan city. But, unfortunately, there is no liveliness and vitality in these neighborhoods due to various reasons, and their ritual sites such as mosques, tekyehs, hussainiyas are used at specific times. Therefore, knowing the history of the city and its historical neighborhoods' centers can help to find the answer to some questions. Now, the questions raised in the field of ritual and culture during the two-day research trip are as follows: What are the instances

and manifestations of the heritage-ritual landscape in the neighborhoods' centers in Gorgan City? What are the reasons for the multiplicity of Tekeyehs, mosques and Hussainiyahs, as the physical core of the ritual-heritage landscape, during the two-day research trip? And why is the presence of people in these spaces not significant despite the municipality of Tekeyehs, mosques, and Hussainiyahs?

To answer the questions raised in this article, first, important ritual-heritage and cultural themes are examined by studying the historical texts on the formation of Jorjan province (today, Gorgan) and etymology of the names as well as the descriptions of cultural, urban and ritual landscapes that are mentioned in Iranians and foreign advisors' travelogues. Then, it is assumed that the multiplicity of mosques and Tekyehs is due to the fact that Jorjan city was founded on the ruins of the Sassanid city and after the arrival of Islam to this city, the uses of pre-Islamic ritual centers have been changed. Moreover, it is assumed that the special ceremonies and rituals existing as culture and tradition in this city can be a reason for the multiplicity of mosques and tekyehs in this city.

### Research Background

There are many studies in the field of ritual and culture. Besides, numerous studies have been carried out on the history of Gorgan's neighborhoods and its urban landscape and the principles such as sense of belonging, sense of place, satisfaction, etc. This research is the result of a two-day research trip to Gorgan, and therefore, the references and texts mentioned in the article are the result of this two-day trip. On the other hand, it should be noted that the issue of ritual and culture in Iran, especially in the northern cities such as those in Mazandaran, Gilan, and Golestan provinces, due to the presence of various religious places, is so widespread that it is not possible to completely address them in this article. Therefore, in this research, it was attempted to examine Gorgan City in terms of ritual and heritage entitled "Gorgan: heritage and ritual

landscapes” through the field study of its six main neighborhoods. To this aim, those articles on ritual, culture and neighborhoods of Gorgan city were applied. In the field of ritual landscape, Jalal Mohaddesi, in his article entitled “Ritual and Landscape”, stated that there is a linkage between the external appearance and the intellectual basis of the Iranians’ reaction to the occasions. This linkage between the object and the mind, which is rooted in the ancient history of the Iranians, can be traced by reviewing the basics and history of Iranian celebrations. Also in Shohreh Javadi and Hekmatollah Mollasalehi’s (2017) study entitled “A Criticism of Iran’s Religious- Ritual Places: an Analytical Perspective Focusing on Historical Background”, religious-ritual sanctums, places and structures existing and active in today’s Iranian society including mountains, caves, sacred chahartaqs (an architectural unit consisted of four-barrel vaults and a dome), mosques and holy shrines of Imams and Imamzadeh and those of the leaders of Islam, as well as the churches and burial towers, which are located within nature and besides rivers, streams, ponds, and Qanat, have been respected and sanctified by people and have served as sanctuaries for religious people and as sacred places for meeting pilgrims’ desires and wishes, as well as performing religious-ritual ceremonies on various religious occasions. Also in this regard, Shohreh Javadi (2018), in her study entitled “Sacred places of Mithraism background”, stated that holy places have been existed in Iranian beliefs and rituals since the past and related to the worship of the sun and moon gods continued to Zoroastrian era. With the rise of Islam and thereby, the formation of a new culture, these beliefs have been transformed in a new way and mixed with Iranian-Islamic thoughts and customs and have remained until now. Also in the field of cultural landscape, Parvaneh Parchekani (2014), in her study entitled “Cultural Heritage Tourism (Tehran’s Cultural Development Capacity)” has divided cultural landscape in different ways due to conceptual scope perceived by different individuals

and groups, and in these categories, heritage landscape is hidden in the cultural landscape.

### Theoretical Foundations

#### • Cultural landscape

The UNESCO World Heritage Committee has defined the cultural landscape as the geographical distinction of lands or their unique attributes as follows:

It is a demonstration of natural and human works (Flower, 2003, 13) and it has been divided into the following categories:

- A landscape that has been consciously designed and created by humans.

2. An original evolved landscape that may be remained from the past or has continued from the past to the present. Such a form of the landscape has been created by the interaction between early societies, and their livelihood, customs and rituals with nature, and includes two types:

- Heritage (fossil) landscape: it was formed in an evolutionary process in the past, and now, its significant attributes remain in the environment. (The evolutionary process was over in the past.)

- Continued (stable) landscape: it has an active social role in today’s life and has remained from past traditions. Its evolution is still ongoing, and its effects and evidence can be recognized.

- Common (mixed) cultural landscape: It may have been valued for rituals, arts, and the combination of cultural with natural elements.

According to the definitions of culture and cultural landscape, Fig. 1 shows how the main core of the cultural landscape is formed by the three elements of environment, time and human. The mutual relationships between these factors lead to the creation of new elements (Khorramrouei, Mahan & Farzin, 2019, 54).

The cultural landscape is a concept containing natural -cultural values that are the result of the interaction between man and nature throughout history. Moreover, cultural landscapes include,

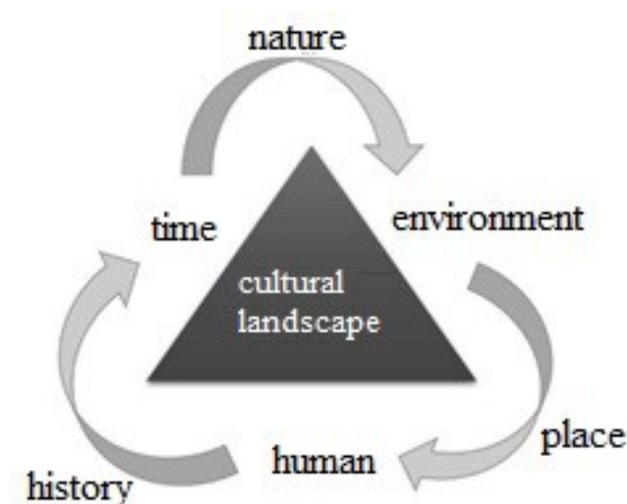


Fig. 1. Elements of cultural landscape.

Source: authors.

preserve and express the identity and history of a region and its inhabitants, and thus, it is of great importance to protecting cultural landscapes and their values (Mokhles, Farzin & Javadi, 2013, 27). Cultural landscapes are also historical objectives that have somehow achieved a stable interaction with their natural environment. The obtained product is secondary nature with a cultural perspective, which is formed by the interaction between the two elements of primary nature and built environment (Mansouri, 2014,45).

#### • Ritual Landscape

The ritual landscape is a subset of landscape and as an important part of the cultural landscape. It is considered as the society's reaction to its spiritual needs. Humans have had a direct relationship with nature since ancient times, so the biological and ritual landscapes have been influenced by the natural landscape and its elements. This, especially about ritual landscape, becomes significant when we know that the natural elements of the landscape have always had intellectual, mystical, and spiritual meanings, in addition to their objectivity and function, and they have been used as symbols and metaphors (Khorramrouei et al., 2019, 54). The landscape is the combination of environmental symbols and human

perception of these symbols. Symbols are the products of living in the environment. Symbols are diverse. The landscape whose symbols are often cultural is called "cultural landscape", and the city landscape, which is the context of human living in the city, is called urban landscape. Ritual is a subset of culture, and the landscape formed by it, in addition to being cultural, is called ritual because of the importance of ritual symbols in it. Honoring the Ashura epic is the ritual of Shiites and Muslims following the prophetic tradition. In Iran, by borrowing from historical experiences and ancient symbols, this ritual has become so widespread that it can now be called the Iranian landscape. According to this definition, in the Iranian landscape, the description of Iran and Iranianism prevails. The ritual landscape of Ashura reveals Iranian identity. The Iranian identity is a set of attributes that have been collected from the stable Iranian society in the long history of this land. Muharram reverberates in every town and village to honor the Ashura epic (Mansouri, 2013, 5).

#### Research Method

The present study is descriptive-analytic research in which, first, a citation method was used to develop the theoretical framework. To do this, the information required to express the literature and the studied concepts, as well as the views and approaches related to the research question were collected by referring to the relevant books, publications and sites and taking notes from them. Then, using descriptive and analytical methods, the conceptual framework was developed to provide suggestions and conclusions. The data collection tools in this method were field study of Gorgan City and its old neighborhoods during a two-day research trip and library research.

#### Discussion

##### • The evolution of cultural landscape from Jorjan to Gorgan

According to the old maps of Gorgan as well as old texts on it, one can find the historical and cultural

continuity of human habitation from the Paleolithic period to the present time. The first evidence of human settlement is observed in Kiaram Cave, located in the south of Gonbad Qaboos, and dates back to the Paleolithic period (Malek Shahmirzadi, 2000, 25). The ancient hills of Tureng Tepe, Yarim Tepe and Shah Tepe imply on the prehistoric period of Gorgan plain (Malek Shahmirzadi, 1999, 373-375). In the historical period, for the first time, the name of Gorgan - one of the states of the Achaemenid Empire - was mentioned as Varkaneh in the Behistun Inscription (Sharp, 2003, 53). In the historical texts of this period, the name of Gorgan was mentioned as Parthia, Partheh, Hyrcani, Hercanah, Hyrcaniah, Hyrcania. In terms of state divisions, Hyrcania was part of the Medes Empire in the early Achaemenid Empire (Diakonoff, 2001, 328). Later, during the Achaemenid period, it became part of the Achaemenid Empire. During the Parthian period, the state was separated from Parthia (Khorasan) (Gutschmid, 1977, 1356). After the downfall of the Parthian Empire by Ardashir, in the Sassanid empire government, the independent government of Gorgan became under the rule of Ardeshir. During this period, Gorgan was an independent province. Its name is observed in Shapur I's Ka'ba-ye Zartosht inscription and the traces of administrative stamps of this period. During the Sassanid period, in order to prevent the invasion of the savage tribes of the Huns and the Turks, defensive walls such as Sul (Dehestan) and Great Wall of Gorgan were built by Peroz and Kavad and Khosrow Anoushirvan (Khosrow I), respectively. Its capital was Jorjan city which was part of the mint of the Sassanid Empire. Although there is no exact information on the location of this Sassanid city, it is thought that it was located near the Islamic city of Jorjan, whose ruins are located next to the newly established city of Gonbad-e Qabus, and Jorjan City, which was attributed to Yazid ibn al-Mahlab in Islamic references, may have been built on the remaining of the old Sassanid city (Mortezaei, 2007). In the Islamic era, the most important human settlement in Gorgan

plain is summarized to the old city of Jorjan. The city is located three kilometers southwest of the current city of Gonbad-e Qabus. For the first time, during the caliphate of Umar, the second caliph, Jorjan was opened by Sowaid ibn Muqarn in 18 AH with the payment of two hundred thousand dirhams without bloodshed (Tabari, 1996, 1977). In the Middle Islamic era, the area of the city was about four parasangs (1 parasang=6.24 km<sup>2</sup>) and as the center of the state, it was also considered the settlement of the border guards of Tabarestan (Marashi, 1984, 40).

Jorjan was formed as a small settlement near the tomb of Zayd ibn Yahya on the bed of the Gorgan River and Chehel Chay. During the Samanid and Buyid eras, the city was expanded and became one of the Islamic art centers (Mortezaei, 2007). The Seljuk era is when the city observed economic dynamism and prosperity, along with the physical development of the urban fabric, because the area of Jorjan reached about 1200 hectares (Kiani, 1986, 231). With the attack of the Mongols in 618 AH and the destruction of most of the urban spaces, the population of the city decreased dramatically and as a result, the social life was endangered, resulting in a gradual decline in economic prosperity. In addition to political variables, natural threats such as being along the path of active Alborz faults and the occurrence of severe earthquakes in the Middle Ages can be mentioned (Melville, 1991, 150-154). This led to the abandonment of the city during the Ilkhanid period and the migration of the population to an area located about three kilometers from the tomb of Qabus bin Voshmgir. From the Ilkhanid period onwards, Astarabad city, formerly one of the most important cities in the state of Jorjan, became the capital of Jorjan and was named Dar al-Fath, Dar al-Malek and Dar al-Momenin (Mokhlesi, 2006, 161).

### **Instances and manifestations of ritual, tradition and neighborhoods of Gorgan from Travelogue writers' points of view**

The holy places existed in the beliefs and rituals of

Iranians since the past have been associated with the worship of the sun and moon gods, which continued during the Zoroastrian era. With the rise of Islam and thereby, the formation of a new culture, these beliefs have been transformed in a new way and mixed with Iranian-Islamic thoughts and customs and have remained until now. Religious-ritual places, that were the places for worshipping Mehr (Mithra) and Anahita, were later converted into fire temples and then into mosques, holy shrines of Imamzadehs, and leaders of Islam. Most of these shrines were founded near mountains, springs and old trees. A long time before the construction of ritual and sacred buildings or chahartaqs, there were sacred trees, springs, wells, and caves that were places of pilgrimage for people, as “Herodotus” says: Iranians did not have temples and prayed outdoors. Over time, the Chahartaqs were constructed near rocks, caves, mountains, springs, and trees, which are still respected (Javadi, 2018, 10). In the early years of Islam, when Muslims conquered a land, they first built a mosque according to the Prophet Muhammad’s tradition performed in the conquest of Medina. In addition to its religious role, a mosque is also a place for establishing the Islamic State (Habibi, 1996, 73). If a temple or fire temple already existed in the city, it would be turned into a mosque. Therefore, according to this historical course, the documents on the formation of ritual nuclei and the centers of neighborhoods of Gorgan, which mentioned in the travelogues, are referred to:

About the descriptions of the urban fabric of Jorjan, Moghaddasi, a geographer who lived in the fourth century AH, can be mentioned. He wrote: “Gorgan has 9 alleys: Soleiman Alley, Qomsian Alley, Rah Hayan Alley, Kandeh Alley, Badanjan Alley, Bargah Alley, and Khorasan Alley. Bakrabad is attached to it, and there are two streams and some bridges between them. It has beautiful mosques and noble elders. Its mosques are painted and their walls are decorated. Like Fasa and Baghdad, this city has two parts and, as usual, both shop and a pulpit. Next to the palace, there is a square.

There is a large cemetery [which I have not seen in any other city] in front of the city behind the river that has a bridge. Its streams have bridges and roofs. There is another river called Tifuri, which is cleaner and more palatable than the other. They also have wells with fresh water.” (Muqaddasi, 1982, 524). Ibn Hawqal also described Gorgan as follows: “Gorgan is divided into two parts by a large river with high water level, and a bridge connects these two parts. The eastern part is Gorgan and the western part is Bakrabad, which is smaller than Gorgan, and most of the silk produced is related to Bakrabad.” (Ibn Hawqal, 1987, 124).

There are also notable points in the travelogues of the Qajar era, such as Rabino’s observations. Gorgan’s Jameh Mosque (Gerzin) and the Jamajoo’s (Jamajan) neighborhoods - near Hesar-e-Naw - and Shush - near Bab al-Taqa - and the Jewish Gate are some of the important parts mentioned by him. In a part of his travelogue about Jorjan city, Rabino wrote “... We went to visit a large hill that is one of the traces of the old Gorgan city. In the northwest of the city, there is a citadel, which includes a palace, a bazaar, and a bathhouse. The bathhouse is still in relatively good condition. The citadel was located on the east bank of the Nahr-e-Qarangi-Imam or Khorramarud, which is a branch of the Gorgan River, and its water was directed to the city through rocky canals from Gorgan and Qarangi Imam (Rabino, 2004, 142-144). Quoted from Moghaddasi, Mortezaei, in his article entitled “Study of natural and cultural infrastructures in the formation of Gorgan city during the Islamic era” writes “In geographical references, the eastern side was mentioned as city” and he mentions to pomegranate, olive, melons, oranges, lemons, and grapes gardens, and streams on which bridges are built. The square is in front of Darul ‘Imara, and the city has nine gates. He lists the names of its neighborhoods. It is a precious and rich city, its bazaars and mosques are beautiful. He also said that the mosques are painted and their walls are decorated and he knows this city similar to Ramla city in Palestine (Mortezaei, 2007, 140).

Therefore, according to the texts taken from historical documents, it can be said that Gorgan, like other ancient cities, was built next to a river with high water level, and the existence of ancient hills implies the presence of Mithraic temples. In addition, the presence of names, such as Pasarv neighborhood, Sabzeh Mashhad, Sarcheshmeh, and so on, indicates the direct presence of nature in the urban and neighborhood structures, and this shows the connection between nature and ritual among the people of this city. Therefore, the manifestations of ritual landscape in Gorgan can be found in three areas: 1. symbol and myth, which include numbers, colors, natural elements, etc.; 2. structure and building, which include Tekeyehs, mosques, shrines, mosque-madrasah, Hussainiyah, cemeteries, etc.; and 3. traditions, beliefs, and customs, among which, beliefs and customs that shape the culture of this region, have had the greatest impact on the face of Gorgan city, and all the ritual activities and ceremonies, as well as the construction of holy buildings, are due to this (Fig. 2); (Table 1).

### Factors affecting the multiplicity of Tekyehs in Gorgan's historic fabric

During the Qajar era, Iran was divided into 4 provinces and 12 counties and Astarabad was one of its counties and divided into 5, 7, or 8 blocks: Anzan, Sadan Roštaq, Astarabad, Shahakvin and Savar, Dahat Malek, Katul, Fenderesk and Ramian and Koohsar. Each of these blocks was governed by a deputy governor assigned by the governor of Astarabad. Astarabad was one of those counties which were the base of the Qajar dynasty and became religiously important with the name of Dar al-Mu'minin. In the early twentieth century, Gorgan had a great number of mosques, religious tombs, religious schools, and tekyehs. The importance of Astarabad in terms of politics and religion in this period caused the Georgian language to become disappeared and be replaced by the Persian language (<https://shoaresal.ir/fa/news>). In the early Pahlavi era, the structure of the city was in



Fig. 2. Adjacency of a 200-year-old mulberry tree to Gorgan's Musalla, Source: Khorramrouei .

the Qajar style. The initial spatial organization of the city was formed with a star pattern where the Jameh Mosque in the center and residential neighborhoods around it and along the main ways starting from the core (Haji Eidi, 2013, 117). Neighborhoods had a plaza, sometimes in the shape of a square or rectangular, sometimes in an irregular form, trapezoid, and so on. In these places, there were elements such as Tekeyeh, cemetery, spring, Ab-anbar (traditional reservoir of drinking water), mosque, bathhouse, school and kuttab (elementary school), and sometimes an old cypress tree or mulberry tree. Although the historic fabric may seem a homogeneous fabric, it has deep differences within itself and there are significant differences between different neighborhoods, and these differences have led to a sense of pride among the residents of each neighborhood and the residents of each neighborhood considered one of their neighborhood's features to be more outstanding. Social ties, such as the tribal characteristics, have provided social solidarity in a neighborhood and defines specific physical functional elements, including neighborhood services, bathhouses, and religious facilities, especially Tekeyeh and Hussainiyahs, independence and physical identity of neighborhoods. The functional and physical elements were established along the main connection axis of the neighborhood and in the center of the city and a little openness in this space

Table 1. Instances and manifestations of Gorgan’s neighborhoods in terms of heritage and ritual landscapes. Source: a

Manifestation	Marks and signs	Case study
Symbol and mythology	Color	Ashura landscape (combination of green, red and black colors)
	Water + fire + wind + soil = the four sacred elements	Chaharshanbe Suri landscape
	Natural elements such as plants + mountains + rocks + sun, etc.	Cypress and mulberry trees, sycamore, landscapes of Ziarat mountain and Alangdareh Forest, etc.
	Making myths for people	Imam Hussein, the names of other Imams
	Objects	Alam, palm, wood, candle, etc.
	Numbers	Naming some mosques with the names of the Pure Five, and so on, believing in the number “forty”
	Pre-Islamic temples and residential spaces	In historical documents, it was stated that Jorjan city, called Hecanah, was part of the Achaemenid settlement, and some of the current shrines in Gorgan could have been built on pre-Islamic buildings, such as Bibi Sabz and Imamzadeh Noor, etc.
Structure and building	Shrines and monuments	Bibi Sabz, Imamzadeh Noor, etc.
	Tomb	Tomb of Professor Mohammad Reza Lotfi, Imamzadeh Abdullah’s Cemetery located in Ziarat village
Religious places	Cemeteries and tombs	Imamzadeh Noor, Imamzadeh Zayd bin Yahya
	Holy shrines of Imam zade Hussainiyahs	Mosque-Madrasah, Gorgan’s Jameh Mosque, in most neighborhoods, there was a mosque (the mosque of each neighborhood had its own name)
	Mosques	In most of the neighborhoods, there was a tekeyeh (the tekeyeh of each neighborhood had its own name)
	Tekyehs	12 neighborhood centers, the main ones were Nalbandan, Sabzeh Mashhad and Meydan. Great musalla is located in Sabzeh Mashhad neighborhood
	Open urban centers such as neighborhood centers	Saqakhaneh is located in Doshanbe-ei-ha neighborhood
	Musalla	
	Saqakhaneh (public drinking place)	
	Landscape of neighborhoods and alleys	In Gorgan, in addition to the mentioned religious places, the spatial-physical structure and mentality of the neighborhood centers and alleys are included in the category of ritual landscapes. In the alleys, mourning processions usually start from the tekeyeh in Meydan neighborhood and move towards Darbano Neighborhood and enter in though one of the passages of it, and then go to Nalbandan, Pasarv, Mikhchehgaran, Sarpir, Sabzeh Mashhad, Sarchechmeh, Doshanbe-ei-ha neighborhoods, respectively and finally, they return to Mir Karim and Abbas Ali Square (Moghasemi et al. 2016).

Continue of table1.

Manifestation	Marks and signs	Case study
Tradition (beliefs and customs)	Ancient and national Eids Religious Eids Mourning ceremonies Fun celebrations and parties Donations Sacrifice Beliefs and customs	Nowruz landscape, Sizdah Be-dar landscape Ashura landscape, Laylat al-Qadr landscape Chaharshanbe Suri celebration, wedding celebration, etc. Donations such as cooking food and distributing it among the poor (cooking barberry rice with chicken and Ghorme sabzi) on Ashura Sacrifice of sheep and cows on Eid al-Adha The tradition of marriage, belief in numbers, hanging ribbons and cloths on sacred trees such as mulberry, oak and plane trees, and ceremonies of chest-beating, Tugh-e-Bandan, Dasteh Choobi, etc.

has usually defined the neighborhood square. The functionality of this square is remarkable, especially during religious occasions such as Ashura (Roshani, Rezvani & Pasian Khamari, 2018, 93). Therefore, one of the most important factors affecting the multiplicity of Tekeyehs in Gorgan city is the beliefs and customs among residents. Probably, this issue originates from culture, in addition to the management of Tekeyehs that was carried out by families. Therefore, different neighborhoods' residents have raised their own ethnic and tribal characteristics and there has been a conflict between them. So, building Tekeyehs and holding Ta'zieh in urban squares has led to the creation of public open spaces during the Qajar period. According to the texts and documents on Gorgan city, in the 5th century AH, it is one of the most important economic cities located on the historical and strategic Silk Road and it has been mentioned in travelogues that Gorgan was economically welcoming to guests and traders due to silk production and many gardens in it. So numerous religious spaces as well as Tekeyehs could be considered safe places for travelers. Also, given that in the northern cities of Iran, like other cities, devotion to Imam Hussain and holding the ceremony of Ashura are of special importance and are considered one of

the most important ritual landscapes in Iran. Such a devotion to Imams, especially Imam Hussain, is a reason for providing a special space for residents in each neighborhood. In fact, due to the importance of Imams, those people whose wealth was greater than others, have constructed tekeyehs, and each family has provided a tekeyeh for itself. Therefore, the reasons for the multiplicity of tekeyehs and mosques in Gorgan can be found in the traditions and culture of Gorgan. According to Ali Nasibi, a resident of Gorgan, the special features of Muharram mourning in Gorgan, including the ceremonies of Tugh-e-Bandan, Alam Moshti, the movement of mourning group from each of the historic neighborhoods on a specific night and mourning in Pirtekeyehs and Gooshvareh, Chehel Menbareh (40 pulpits) and Dasteh Choobi Tekeyehs. In the Chehel Manbareh ceremony held in the evening of Tasua, the families place the pulpit, which was inherited from several generations ago, at home, light candles on it, and place food and drinks such as Ghorme Sabzi, juices, etc. on it to cater guests who are mostly women. Gorgani women believe that if they come to forty houses and light candles on 40 pulpits, their dreams will come true. In fact, the belief in the number "forty" can be considered as another type of

belief in the ritual landscape of this city. Of course, some of these customs and beliefs are observed in other cities of Iran, such as Khorasan and Azerbaijan. On the first night after Ashura, Dasteh Choobi (moving sticks) ceremony is held in the city's historical sites, during which people hold tall sticks in their hands and move the sticks up and down according to what told by panegyrist and some people with lighted torches move among them to keep the space bright for mourners. Also, in addition to the mourning ceremony, spending time in holy places at the Persian New Year Countdown is another tradition and ritual that is performed every year in Gorgan. Newly married girls and boys, and of course, some other people of Gorgan, attend the holy shrine of Imamzadeh Noor, located in the historic neighborhood of Sarcheshmeh, to have a happy and successful year, and also they pray there. Therefore, the beliefs, rituals, and culture in Gorgan have become a factor effective in increasing religious places such as mosques and tekeyehs.

### **The reasons for the absence of people in tekeyehs and mosques in the historic fabric of Gorgan**

After the rise of Islam and the arrival of Muslims, tekeyehs and religious elements were formed in the residential cores and other parts of cities. Due to their location and small population, tekeyehs, in addition to religious role and being a place for holding religious and ritual occasions, as a valuable element, were a factor for social solidarity and unity in the neighborhood. Moreover, they have belonged to different classes of society and played a political and social role. In other words, their ritual, cultural, social, political, and economic roles may be considered more prominent than their religious role in the collective life of the people in the neighborhood. In Islamic cities, religious centers are considered as community centers in the urban fabric. From the semantic perspective, collective rituals have created memorable, meaningful, and symbolic spaces and

have been effective in identifying the spaces and the sense of belonging to them (Alalhesabi & Paykan, 2013, 77). The extensive changes and developments of the historic fabric of Gorgan city began from the beginning of the Pahlavi era. Construction of new streets in the first Pahlavi period changed the face of the old city of Astarabad forever, and buildings with new faces and functions such as offices, schools, industries, etc. were constructed in the city as new streets were constructed, including the current Imam Khomeini Street constructed during the period 1932 to 1934 and Sar Pir Street (Shohada Street, now), Moulin Rouge Street (5 Azar Street, now), Sarkhajeh and other streets constructed in later periods.

During this period, the superiority of the street and the competition for being located alongside it, have changed the past architecture styles of the city. Passages, tekeyehs, and neighborhood centers, which have been the main places for developments throughout the city's long history, have gradually disappeared with the presence of new elements. Physical changes and changes in lifestyle were accompanied by social changes, and the demographic and social changes in the historic fabric or the old city began despite the local people's initial resistance. Over time and as the attention to places and areas outside the old walls of the city increases, leaving the historic fabric and living in peripheral areas, especially areas with better climate, would become the main demand of original residents, especially in future generations (Roshani et al., 2018, 93). Therefore, changes in lifestyle and people's values as well as changes in today's public needs compared to previous generations, seem the main factors causing the lack of vitality in the historic fabric and the centers of neighborhoods of Gorgan (despite the valuable religious and ritual element). On the other hand, the new urbanism model of Gorgan and the new street constructed on the east-west axis have caused the historical and valuable fabric of the city to be physically and mentally disintegrated. The disintegration created in the historical layers of the

city has made people distance themselves from their historical background and turn to modern life, and ultimately led to the transition from the historical and valuable identity. Unfortunately, these developments are also observed in other historical cities of Iran.

## Conclusion

Today, the significance and role of neighborhoods and especially, their centers in the historic fabric of Gorgan city have been greatly reduced. As mentioned earlier, the city center is the active part of a city, but the vitality in these centers has reduced as habitation in them has declined. Despite the reduced vitality in the historic sites of Gorgan city, the ritual is still the most important factor that can help revitalize these neighborhoods. Every year, special rituals such as mourning during the month of Muharram, and especially on the day of Ashura, are held in these places, and this is the missing link that can connect neighborhood centers and help revitalize them. In fact, these neighborhood centers are connected by a passage or alley, which is actually the ritual route of Gorgan. In fact, in the historical neighborhoods of Gorgan, the ritual has not only been a factor forming many neighborhoods but can still be used to revitalize them.

Culture and economy are the two main factors that have led to the multiplicity of tekeyhs in the historic fabric of Gorgan. Among these two factors, culture plays a more significant role in constructing numerous tekeyes. It includes people's historical memory of enemy attacks in the past, which has divided the fabric into several independent areas. The disputes and rivalries between the neighborhoods and the traditions formed during the Qajar period led to the construction of multiple tekeyes. On the other hand, the price decrease of land in the historic fabric, which is due to the residents' reluctance to live in this fabric, was the result of modernism and has changed people's lifestyles and caused their migration from the center to the newly constructed suburbs. This issue, along with people's tendency to create value credibility by

constructing tekeyehs, has caused an imbalance in the fabric. Nowadays, the historic fabric of Gorgan is facing many problems, the most important of which is the abandonment of the fabric by the residents. So, it is necessary to revitalize the historic fabric by providing favorable living conditions. According to the field study and local interviews, it is found that a possible way to increase citizen presence and enhance vitality in neighborhood centers (considering changes in lifestyles) is to combine religious, economic, social, educational, and cultural activities, among which the depth connection between economic and religious activities that has had a profound effect on the identity and vitality of urban nuclei in the past, is of great importance. Such spaces with cultural, economic, and social potentials are expected to become dynamic, vibrant and multifunctional arenas in the center of heritage and original fabric of Gorgan City.

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