

# **The Course of the Influence of Symbols and Signs in Explaining the Meaning of Architecture in Qajar Historical Houses; (Case Studies: Cities of Ardabil, Tabriz and Urmia)**

## **Abstract**

Symbols exist as a representative or exemplification of a variation of the self. Electing an element or species from among all prevailing types and highlighting the various means of that phenomenon or element is what makes that element categorized as a sign or symbol. A sign is whatever thing that can reveal an implied meaning in addition to its appearance. Their method of representing these features are related to field of epistemology and semantics. In the present research, by applying a historical-interpretive, the symbols and signs and various structures in the field of architecture are studied; furthermore, it is pursued to scrutinize their associations with the historical buildings of the Qajar period. In order to explore the cause and effect relationships in the historical houses of Ardabil, Tabriz and Urmia have been selected that have the most diverse architectural features of the Qajar period in terms of external and operational structures. The findings of the research indicate that the characteristics, similarities and differences of each of the case examples while considering their special and unique features and bearing in mind their values, can be evaluated based on ordinal and relative scales. The architectural meaning of each case study are presented separately and their characteristics and connections are observed.

## **Research aims:**

1. Identifying the meaning and concept of symbols and signs in the architecture of the Qajar period in historical houses of Ardabil, Tabriz and Urmia.
2. Classifying the influencing factors on the formation of symbols and signs in the architecture of historical houses of the Qajar period.

## **Research questions:**

1. What is the cause and effect relationship between the symbols and signs in the historical houses of the Qajar period in the cities of Ardabil, Tabriz and Urmia and the associations between them?
2. What is the architectural meaning of each of the symbols and signs of the historical houses of the Qajar period in the cities of Ardabil, Tabriz and Urmia?

**Keywords:** symbol, semantics, Qajar age, historical houses.

## **Introduction**

A symbol is a code or sign that bears diverse meanings. Symbols or codes have filled human life, in a sense that no sequence of human life is free of codes as symbols have been widely particularly in the realm of arts. Through the symbol, the appearance of the word, finds a hidden and symbolic meaning that can cause diversity in the expression of thoughts and opinions. One of the most important issues in the field of preserving the local values of a region, district or city is to find signs that have remained from the past. By observing the native architecture of the world, a deep connection between the house and the environment is perceived. A sign is a stimulus or a perceptible essence in which, in the mind, its mental image is associated with an image of another stimulus; and thus, the function of the first stimulus is to provoke and the function of the second stimulus is to communicate. An often overlooked first step in investigating a symptom is to check whether the subject is an actual code or not. Symbolism is one of the old principles of human thought, which has had a special expression in works of art since the beginning of life. In this regard, based on Islamic views, a symbol or code, external and worldly aspects are considered to be of a spiritual nature. Architecture is the art of creating a place and designing and shaping it dependent on human needs and their attitude towards religious and worldly life. The past architecture of Iran has undergone continuity, change and transformation from the beginning to the Qajar period, nevertheless, from this period onwards, due to familiarity with the Western culture, the traditional architecture was formed influenced by Western architecture. This led to a fundamental change in architecture specifically during the reign of Naser al-Din Shah; and the architecture introduced during this was unprecedented until that time. During the reign of Naser al-Din Shah, structures of the previous eras were destroyed by his command and revised according to his taste, and the palaces were built ever more magnificently.

Regarding the background of the current research, it should be said that so far no independent work with this title has been published in the field of writing. However, some works have investigated the symbolic architecture of old houses. Maleki-Nejad (2013) in a research entitled "Architecture Decorations of Iran's Art History in the Islamic Period" investigated the historical evolution of decorative motifs, symbols and signs in terms of their content and evolution and their implementation methods with lesser focus on the factors of meaning. In a research titled "Reflection on the semiotics of the entrance spaces of Qajar period houses in Qazvin city", Noushin Sakhawat Sakhawadoost (2017) explains semiotics from the scientific view of semiotics and by applying the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Pearce and Umbra Tawako. The results of the research indicate that the most influential factor in examining signs depends on the mental and conceptual components that lead to the creation of a meaningful form in the method of cultural, social, religious and behavioral structures and also taking into account physical characteristics. Hossein Zomarshidi (2010), also in a research entitled "Teachings of Iranian Architecture of Residential Construction from the Qajar Period to Today", examined the design of external and internal buildings and their facade construction teachings during the Qajar period and the architecture of the contemporary period from Pahlavi onwards. Morteza Farahbakhsh (2016) in a research entitled "Typology of historical houses of the old context of Mashhad city from the early Qajar to the end of the first Pahlavi period" examines the possibility of typology and classification regarding the historical houses of Mashhad city. The results of the research show that it is possible to separate and categorize the historical houses of the city based on the characteristics of the shape and form of the elements, such as the entrance hall, vestibule, corridor, courtyard, porch, as well as the texture, decorations, facades and internal spaces that can be categorized, which are affected by the time conditions and the changes caused by the transformation of Iran's architectural model, under the influence of Western architecture and the transformation in the social and cultural structures of Iranian society during this period can be enumerated. Based on the contents of the title, the present research, using a descriptive and historical method and relying on data from library sources and field observations, seeks to investigate the role of symbols and signs in giving meaning to architectural spaces in the cities of Ardabil, Tabriz, and Urmia, and pursues to discover the meaning of symbols, signs and the cause and effect relationships and the valuations concerning them.

## **Conclusion**

Symbols or codes (in its true meaning) are full of human life, so that no part of human life is free of code. In the conventional academic view, symbols are things that are used in daily life and frequently signifies signs or actions that are intended to convey meaning to another person based on a set of norms or common conventions. Subsequently, since the symbol is a substitute for something else, it is the carrier of meaning, even though there is no necessary connection between the symbol and what it is resembling, therefore, in the first judgment approach, the symbol is an existential and non-contractual truth, and in the second attitude, it is subject to human conventions. While formal properties are constant in different cultural times and conditions, values are not. In other words, the term "shape structure" combines certain shape assumptions with their hidden interpretations and transformations, which are separated by human instinct, imagination, and mental impressions that are often under the control of time, place, and environment. The interpretation and value analysis of the house is not possible without considering the relationship between the shapes of the houses and its mutual influence on the creation of explicit and implicit meanings. In fact, the cause and effect relationships of signs and symbols can be evaluated based on their valuation in the structure of historical buildings in a specific period, such as the Qajar period, and their semantic load can be explicitly determined. The results show that two main entities are placed next to each other so that they can be placed under the title of semiotic analysis of architectural shape structure (historical houses of the Qajar period). These two entities are: architecture, whose material existence expresses itself through form; and an architectural interpreter relying on semiotic tools and parameters (encryption layers) and abstract concepts. What actually happens in this matter can be expressed as follows: a material entity can communicate with the viewer's perceptual space through the form, which is dependent on the moment in time. The audience (interpreter) conceptualizes through the codes and meanings resulting from the shape in the design and according to the depth and level of perception and mental impressions.

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