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Islamic Architectural Elements in Kandahar City's Historical Buildings: A Comprehensive Assessment

MAHMOOD WASIQ[1*] & AHMAD JAWAD NIAZI[2]

[1]Teaching Assistante, Architecture Department, Engineering Faculty, Kandahar University, Kandahar, Afghanistan. Email: mahmood11wasiq@gmail.com.

[2]Professor, Architecture Department, Kabul Polytechnic University, KPU Campus, 5th District, Kabul, Afghanistan. Email: a.j.niazi@kpu.edu.af.

Abstract

This article presents a comprehensive evaluation of Islamic architectural elements in Kandahar City's historical buildings, aiming to identify, classify, and interpret stylistic and architectural features rooted in the Islamic tradition. Drawing on field surveys, photographic documentation, and typological analysis, the research focuses on significant monuments including Shah Jameh Mosque, Ahmad Shah Baba's Mausoleum, Khirqa Sharifa, Mirwais Khan Nika's Mausoleum, Eidgah Gate, Sarposha Covered Bazaar, Chehel Zina, and the traditional house of Ahmad Shah Baba. The study adopts a qualitative methodology to examine architectural components such as domes, iwans, muqarnas, pointed arches, geometric ornamentation, calligraphy, and spatial hierarchies. These features are analyzed in terms of architectural integration, symbolic significance, and cultural adaptation. This study shows that the historic structures of Kandahar reflect a deep connection to the principles of classical Islamic architecture, enriched by stylistic contributions from Persian, Timurid, Mughal, and indigenous Afghan traditions. These findings add a new perspective to the ongoing academic debate on Islamic architecture in Afghanistan and highlight the urgent need for proper documentation and heritage conservation. By presenting Kandahar architecture as a blend of Islamic tradition and regional character, this study supports future efforts in conservation strategies, academic study, and cultural education.

Keywords: Architectural Documentation, Historical Buildings, Islamic Architecture, Kandahar City, Urban Identity.

* Corresponding Author

1. Introduction

Islamic architecture is one of the most important and historic architectural styles that combines aesthetic expression and practical design, reflecting the cultural and spiritual heritage of Muslim societies. Islamic architecture's evolution through various periods, such as the Umayyad, Timurid, Mongol, and others, demonstrates a continuous interaction between religious belief, architectural form, and local adaptation. This study emphasizes the importance of examining local interpretations and focuses on the historical buildings of Kandahar city to gain a more accurate understanding of the broader Islamic architectural identity of the Islamic buildings of this historic city.

Kandahar Province, located in southern Afghanistan, served as an important cultural and political center during the reign of Ahmad Shah Baba, the founder of the Durrani period, and important buildings of Islamic architecture were built during the Durrani period. The historic urban layout of Kandahar, consisting of a rectangular grid, four main gates, and a central mosque, reflects key principles of Islamic urban design such as balance and symbolic order. Despite its historical role in Islamic governance and architecture, this historic city's architectural heritage has received little attention in national and international academic research.

Unlike cities like Herat, Bukhara, or Isfahan, which have been extensively studied, Kandahar's Islamic architectural heritage is much less studied or poorly documented. While the city is home to several notable monuments that offer a regional interpretation of classical Islamic design. Among these are the Shah Jame Mosque, Chehel zina, the tombs of Ahmad Shah Baba and Mirwais Khan Nikah, the Kharqa Sharifa Shrine, the Eidgah Gate, the Sarposha Covered Bazaar, and the traditional residence of Ahmad Shah Baba.

Unfortunately, many of Kandahar City's historical monuments are currently facing serious threats due to environmental degradation, rapid and unplanned urban growth, inadequate restoration efforts, and the lack of clear conservation strategies. Restoration efforts are often carried out without regard for historical accuracy, putting significant architectural features at risk of irreparable loss. Furthermore, the lack of academic research and standard typological documentation prevents architects, conservators, and policymakers from implementing well-informed conservation plans. This scientific gap not only undermines conservation efforts but also undermines public awareness and appreciation of Kandahar’s rich architectural heritage.

This study addresses the urgent need for scholarly attention to Kandahar’s Islamic architectural heritage by conducting a comprehensive evaluation of selected historical buildings. Employing a qualitative methodology comprising field surveys, photographic documentation, and typological analysis, the research identifies and interprets core architectural elements such as domes, iwans, arches, muqarnas, inscriptions, and decorative motifs. These features are examined within structural, spatial, and symbolic frameworks to uncover their roles in expressing Islamic identity and regional adaptation.

The research is guided by three key objectives: (a) to identify and classify significant Islamic elements in Kandahar’s monuments (b) to assess their spatial and structural integration (c) to interpret their cultural and stylistic meanings within the broader

context of Islamic architecture. Central questions include: What are the dominant motifs across case study buildings? How are these elements functionally and symbolically embedded? And how do they reflect the synthesis of Islamic design with local craftsmanship?

Beyond technical documentation, the study argues that Kandahar's monuments are cultural artifacts reflecting centuries of evolution, adaptation, and continuity. It advocates for heritage-sensitive urban planning and systematic documentation as tools for informed conservation. The research contributes to bridging a significant academic gap by integrating Kandahar's underrepresented heritage into global Islamic architectural discourse, which has largely focused on Persian, Ottoman, and Andalusian contexts.

Furthermore, the study provides a foundation for future academic, policy, and public engagement. It aims to benefit scholars, students, conservationists, and urban planners by offering structured architectural classifications, contextual interpretations, and preservation guidelines. In doing so, it raises awareness of the role of architecture in shaping collective identity, particularly in regions impacted by conflict and modernization, and presents Kandahar as a model for broader efforts in cultural heritage preservation.

2. Literature review

2.1. Islamic Architecture

Islamic architecture emerged in the 7th century CE, initially shaped by pre-Islamic traditions such as Roman, Byzantine, and Sassanian styles. Early mosques, including the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus, integrated domes, arches, mosaics, and mihrabs with large open courtyards, setting the foundation for hypostyle and four iwan mosque plans that spread across Iraq, Egypt, and Iran [1]. Originally confined to buildings from the 7th to 18th centuries, the definition of Islamic architecture has expanded. [2] Suggests that any structure built by Muslims or within a cultural context influenced by Islam, regardless of era or style, may be considered Islamic. Early Islamic architecture preserved continuity with previous traditions by adapting square layouts, barrel vaults, domes, and transitional elements like squinches and pendentives. Instead of demolishing older structures, Muslim builders transformed them to fulfill new religious purposes, reflecting a pragmatic approach focused on reuse and spatial optimization [3].

The evolution of Islamic architecture across dynasties reflects structural adaptation, regional integration, and decorative innovation. The Umayyads introduced mosque typologies with minarets and domes inspired by Byzantine and Sassanid designs. The Abbasids emphasized monumental scale and hypostyle plans as seen in the Great Mosque of Samarra. Fatimid architecture employed keel-shaped arches and rich stucco decoration. Seljuks advanced four iwan mosque plans with brick ornamentation and axial geometry. Mamluks focused on vertical expression using stone domes, slender minarets, and detailed carvings. Ottoman architecture featured large domes, semi-domes, and geometric harmony, integrating Byzantine structural forms. The Mughals fused Persian, Islamic, and Indian motifs characterized by bulbous domes, jali screens,

symmetrical gardens, and decorative inlay. Each era contributed unique material choices, layout innovations, and visual features that shaped the diverse identity of Islamic architectural heritage [4].

Islamic architecture incorporates a comprehensive range of elements, including domes, minarets, arches, iwans, muqarnas, calligraphy, arabesque patterns, geometric designs, and floral ornamentation. The dome serves as a structural solution for covering large central spaces and allows vertical expansion with visual emphasis. Minarets are tall vertical structures used to mark religious buildings and enhance visibility within the urban landscape. Arches and iwans provide transitional gateways and load distribution, commonly appearing in entrances and prayer halls. Muqarnas adds dimensional complexity to ceilings and niches. Geometric patterns, arabesques, and floral motifs decorate surfaces through repetition, balance, and abstraction. Calligraphy, especially Quranic scripts, introduces textual meaning into architectural components such as domes, mihrabs, and walls. These elements collectively enhance both the structural logic and the decorative language of Islamic buildings [5].

Islamic architecture synthesizes science and beauty by integrating decoration, geometry, light, and color into functional forms [6]. Islamic architecture is not bound by a rigid model; rather, it functions according to fixed principles derived from Islamic Sharia. These principles include privacy, inward orientation, environmental harmony, and social responsibility. Architectural tools such as courtyards, mashrabiyas, double walls, and wind catchers serve as flexible yet meaningful elements adaptable to regional contexts while remaining rooted in doctrinal meaning [7]. Islamic architecture is broadly defined by four main structural types: the mosque, the tomb, the palace, and the fort. From these, a comprehensive architectural vocabulary developed, influencing auxiliary structures such as madrasas, public baths, and fountains. Key features like domes, iwans, courtyards, and minarets were symbolically and functionally integrated into both public and private spaces, forming a recognizable template across the Islamic world [8].

Islamic architecture is not solely defined by geographic origin or builder identity but by adherence to Islamic values and design logic. It includes both religious and secular buildings that reflect privacy, comfort, and orientation principles rooted in Quranic teachings and prophetic traditions. Characteristic elements include domes, horseshoe and round arches, tunnel vaults, and the avoidance of figurative imagery [9]. Islamic architects employed three primary proportional systems: triangulation (based on equilateral triangles), quadratue (grid-based squares), and quinture (using pentagons and the golden mean). These systems governed floor plans, facades, and spatial divisions [10].

In contemporary mosque architecture, domes and minarets continue to be dominant and widely used, forming integral parts of facades and skylines. However, traditional elements such as shabestans (prayer halls) and arcades are increasingly replaced by simplified open spaces due to functional and economic factors [11]. Islamic architecture integrates natural elements such as light, wind, water, soil, and vegetation to enhance comfort and environmental performance. These are embedded in the spatial design of courtyards, domed spaces, and wind catchers. Water channels and gardens follow

geometric principles while vegetation provides shade and microclimate control. These features serve practical environmental functions rather than symbolic ones [12].
Islamic architecture employs colors such as blue, turquoise, green, yellow, and white for both perceptual and functional purposes. Blue induces calmness, turquoise enhances clarity, green signifies balance, yellow stimulates the mind, and white conveys purity. These hues, especially in faience mosaic and tile work, were chosen for visual harmony and climate adaptability [13].

2.2. Islamic Architecture in Afghanistan

Islamic architecture in Afghanistan has evolved over thirteen centuries, shaped by diverse regional, political, and cultural shifts. Early mosques influenced by Abbasid styles featured simple hypostyle plans with minimal ornamentation. This gave way to the more elaborate forms of the Ghaznavid and Ghurid periods, marked by tall brick minarets and intricate decorative work. The Seljuk era introduced key innovations, including the four-iwan mosque layout and axial symmetry, which laid the groundwork for the highly artistic and spatially refined architecture of the Timurid period [14].
The Timurid era is considered the zenith of Afghan Islamic architecture, characterized by glazed tilework, grand scale, and spatial hierarchy. Subsequent periods, including those influenced by the Safavids and Mughals, introduced a hybrid style that blended Persian and Indian elements. The Durrani period marked a shift toward a more localized Afghan Islamic identity, focusing on simplicity and symbolism. In modern times, Afghanistan's architectural heritage faces preservation difficulties and pressures from modernist trends. Collectively, these historical phases demonstrate the enduring adaptability and continuity of Islamic architecture in the Afghan context [14].

2.3. Islamic Architecture in Kandahar City

The fortified city of Ahmad Shahi Kandahar established in 1747 by Ahmad Shah Durrani, was a highly organized urban and defensive complex that reflected the strategic and architectural sophistication of its time. Designed in a rectangular layout and divided into four quarters by two perpendicular roads, the city was enclosed by a massive mud brick wall reaching approximately 9.3 meters in height and 5.5 meters in base thickness. The wall was strengthened by a surrounding moat about 4.8 meters deep and 7.3 meters wide [15].
Four main monumental gates, Eidgah, Shikarpur, Herat, and Kabul, provided access at the cardinal directions, while two smaller gates, Bar Durrani and Top Khana, served additional functions. Each corner of the city featured a large round tower influenced by Indian and Iranian styles, reinforcing the city's defensive perimeter. These architectural elements, along with the central citadel (Arg), covered bazaar, and geometrically organized neighborhoods, contributed to a well-structured and fortified urban environment. However, after 1945, most of these features, including the walls, towers, and gates, were demolished during urban expansion. Today, only fragments remain, and their historical presence is preserved through maps, satellite imagery, and archival photographs. Collectively, these elements reflect the defensive planning, symbolic

authority, and architectural legacy of 18th-century Islamic urbanism in southern Afghanistan [16].

3. Methodology

This study adopts a comprehensive qualitative and historical analytical methodology to investigate the Islamic architectural elements embedded in Kandahar's historic buildings. The research is centered on eight significant monuments, including mosques, mausoleums, civic structures, and commercial spaces that collectively represent the rich architectural and cultural heritage of Kandahar. The methodological strategy is designed to address both the tangible and intangible dimensions of architecture, including spatial organization, stylistic continuity, functional logic, and symbolic meaning.

Field-based observation and architectural documentation formed the cornerstone of primary data collection. The researcher conducted direct site visits to each of the selected monuments, measuring key architectural elements such as domes, arches, iwans, courtyards, mihrabs, and entrance portals using standard tools. High-resolution digital photography was employed to capture facades, decorative details, inscriptions, and spatial compositions.

To complement the fieldwork observations, this study examined a wide range of secondary sources, including scholarly books, journal publications, architectural articles, and archival materials related to Kandahar's Islamic architecture. Historical maps, photographs, and official documents were also reviewed to provide historical context and support architectural interpretations. In addition, comparative analysis with Islamic architectural traditions from cities such as Herat, Bukhara, and the Mughal era helped to situate Kandahar's heritage within a broader historical and stylistic framework.

One of the key strengths of this methodology is its emphasis on architectural diversity. The selected case studies encompass a wide range of building types, religious, civic, commercial, and residential, including the Tomb of Ahmad Shah Baba, the Shah Jama Mosque, the Tomb of Mirwais Khan Nikah, Kharqa Sharifa, Chehel Zina, the Eidgah Gate, Sarposha Bazaar, and the House of Ahmad Shah Baba. This diverse selection allowed for an in-depth analysis of how elements of Islamic architecture were adapted to different spatial functions and social roles within the historic urban fabric of Kandahar.

4. Result and Discussion

Islamic architecture, known for its rich regional diversity and enduring historical presence, offers a profound reflection of spiritual values, functional purpose, and refined aesthetic principles. From its early development during the Umayyad period to the architectural grandeur of the Timurid and Mughal periods, it developed into a complex system of form and meaning. Core architectural elements such as domes, mihrabs, iwans, minarets, muqarnas, calligraphy, geometric patterns, and arabesques were designed not only to fulfill structural requirements but also to express symbolic and cultural depth.

Kandahar, located in southern Afghanistan, stands out as a remarkable regional example of both the adaptation and persistence of Islamic architecture in a wider context. Its historic buildings, including mosques, tombs, civic gates, and traditional residences, contain core elements of Islamic design that have been thoughtfully modified to suit the local climate, cultural practices, and available materials. Frequently seen features include pointed arches, courtyard-centered arrangements, and brick facades finished with lime plaster. At the same time, specific regional features such as vase-shaped columns, crenellated parapets, and simple wooden windows highlight the creative ways in which the Islamic architectural language has been deployed in Kandahar.

This section summarizes the study's findings drawn from field observations and documentation of important architectural sites in Kandahar. Each monument was analyzed for its defining architectural features, Islamic design elements, and the cultural-historical significance woven into its structure.

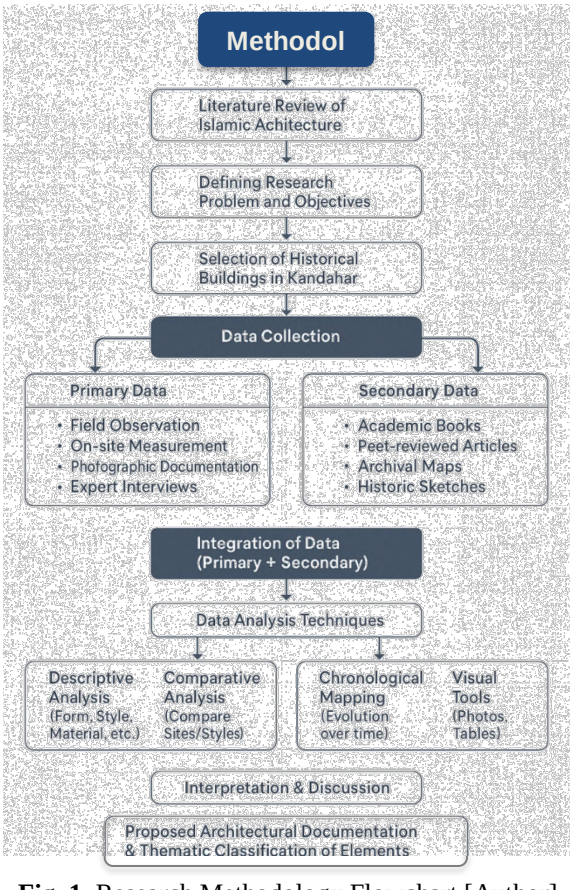


Fig. 1. Research Methodology Flowchart [Author]

4.1 Islamic Architectural Elements in Kandahar City's Historical Buildings

4.1.1. Chehel Zina

One of the famous historical monuments of Kandahar city is the Chehel Zina, located on the top of the Sarpoza Mountain in the west of Kandahar city. This historical

monument was built by the Mughal Emperor Zahir-ud-Din Muhammad Babur in nine years. The structure of this building is a combination of Islamic and Indian architecture. An arch is built on top of it, which is considered a monument to Babur's conquests. This example of Mughal architecture perfectly interacts with the nature of Kandahar's mountainous environment and provides a visual monument to the conquests.

The Chehel Zina incorporates several important elements of Islamic architecture, including: Pointed Arches, Mihrab-like Recess, Simplified Muqarnas, Inscriptions, Geometric Inscriptions Panels, and Column-like Carvings. These elements are described in detail in Table 1.



Fig. 2. Islamic Architectural Elements of Chehel Zina [Author]

Table 1. Islamic architectural elements identified in the Chilzina monument

No.	Image	Architectural Element	Architectural Characteristic	Stylistic Origin
1		Pointed Arches	Structural stability, vertical emphasis, visual elevation	Seljuk, Abbasid, Local
2		Simple Muqarnas-like Decoration	Ceiling depth, visual order, surface balance	Islamic, Regional
3		Mihrab like Niche	Dedicated prayer area, visual focus	Islamic, Local

4		Natural Stone Structure	Carved from nature, durable construction	Regional Buddhist Influence
5		Hilltop Location	Elevation, visual dominance	Local Architecture
6		Long Staircase	Vertical movement, path organization, gradual ascent	Regional
7		Calligraphic Inscriptions	Conveying history with organized framing	Abbasid, Safavid, Local
8		Geometric Calligraphic Frames	Order, symmetry, beauty of script, unity with architecture	Abbasid, Safavid, Local
9		Decorative Columns and Carving	Stone muqarnas, vertical composition	Regional, Safavid, Timurid

4.1.2. Ahmad Shah Baba's House

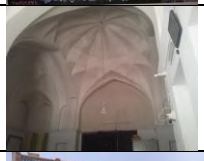
Located in Kandahar's District One, the two-story mud-built residence of Ahmad Shah Durrani, constructed in 1758 CE, exemplifies refined Islamic domestic architecture. It blends Safavid, Mughal, and local Kandahari styles through features such as a central courtyard, polygonal dome, symmetrical organization, wooden structural elements, and restrained plaster finishes. The residence demonstrates Islamic principles of spatial order, privacy, and spiritual symbolism in a localized aristocratic setting.

The Ahmad Shah Baba's House incorporates several important elements of Islamic architecture, including: Pointed Arches, Decorative Niches, Axial Courtyard, Brick parapet railing, Plaster Finishes, Wooden windows and doors, Geometric divider panels (meshrabiya), Symmetrical arrangement, Multi-faceted dome, recessed arched niches, and Muqarnas. These elements are described in detail in Table 2.



Fig. 3. Islamic Architectural Elements of Ahmad Shah Baba's House [Author]

Table 2. Islamic architectural elements identified in Ahmad Shah Baba's House

No.	Image	Architectural Element	Architectural Characteristic	Stylistic Origin
1		Pointed Arches	Spatial stability, vertical emphasis	Islamic, Abbasid
2		Wooden Windows and Doors	Climatic adaptation, natural materials	Regional, Mughal
3		Niche like Plasterwork	Visual organization, wall depth	Iranian, Safavid
4		Courtyard Oriented Structure	Axis of internal order	Islamic, Mughal
5		Polygonal Geometric Dome	Geometric unity, centrality	Iranian, Safavid
6		Symmetrical Facade	Geometric balance, visual order	Islamic, Abbasid

4.1.3. Shah Jameh Mosque

Shah Jame was built by Ahmad Shah Baba near his house in 1176 AH on half a jerib of land for a thousand worshippers. Sardar Muhammad Osman Khan further expanded the mosque by incorporating the private government land to the north of the mosque, and He constructed new northern corridors. The Shah Jama Mosque is a masterpiece that combines classical principles of Islamic architecture, regional traditions, and Iranian inspiration. This mosque represents a stable and balanced structure through its main door, towers, iwans, roof, courtyard, and inner hall.

The Shah Jame incorporates several important elements of Islamic architecture, including: Pointed Arches, Entrance iwan, minaret-like towers, Horizontal parapet, Courtyard (sahan), Proportional window arrangement, Color, Visual harmony, Corridor

orientation, central Dome, Geometric Ceiling Pattern, Mihrab Iwan, and Muqarnas Decoration. These elements are described in detail in Table 3.

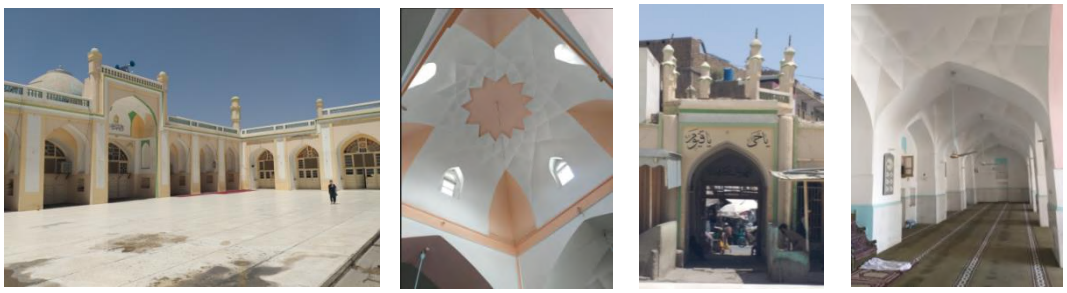
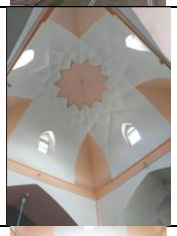
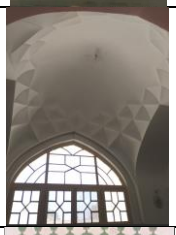
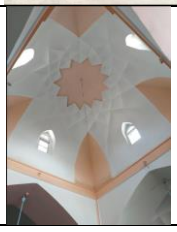


Fig. 4. Islamic Architectural Elements of Shah Jameh Mosque [Author]

Table 3. Islamic architectural elements identified in Shah Jameh Mosque

No.	Image	Architectural Element	Architectural Characteristic	Stylistic Origin
1		Pointed Arch	A tall, narrow, and pointed arch at the mosque entrance represents the threshold principle and serves for load transfer and entry emphasis.	Islamic, Seljuk
2		Central Iwan-style Entrance	An entrance reflecting the Iranian iwan style, with axial centrality, muqarnas-like plasterwork, and inscriptions.	Iranian, Islamic
3		Minaret-style Roof Towers	Decorative towers on the roof surface represent minaret fragmentation of the Mughal style.	Mughal
4		Windows and Geometric Balance	Arched windows above for light regulation, representing geometric order and interior exterior harmony.	Islamic Geometric Principles
5		Symmetry and Visual Balance	Symmetry through doors, arches, towers, and windows organizes the architectural space.	Principles of Islamic Architecture

6		Corridors and Alignment	Sequential corridors create structured movement and clear focus.	Islamic, Seljuk
7		Geometric Star-Shaped Ceiling	Star-patterned ceiling expressing transition from square to dome via pendentive/squinch technique.	Islamic
8		Mihrab Iwan	The qibla wall's mihrab is the central focus with plasterwork, muqarnas, and symmetry.	Traditional Islamic, Mughal, Local
9		Muqarnas	Soft muqarnas, like plaster under the arch, ensures a smooth connection between wall and ceiling.	Timurid, Mughal
10		Central Mihrab	Muqarnas-decorated and symmetrical mihrab	Iranian, Mughal, Local
11		Courtyard (Sahn)	Spacious white tiled courtyard for climate adaptation, thermal control, and communal use.	Traditional Islamic
12		Dome	The central dome of the prayer hall uses the pendentive technique for acoustics, focus, and height.	Islamic, Mughal

4.1.4. Ahmad Shah Baba's Mausoleum

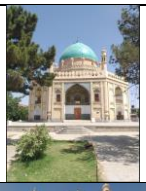
Constructed in the late 18th century in central Kandahar, the mausoleum of Ahmad Shah Baba, the founder of the Durrani Empire, stands as a prominent architectural and cultural monument. Located near the sacred Khirqa Sharifa shrine, the structure represents a sophisticated blend of Timurid, Safavid, Mughal, and indigenous Kandahari styles. The mausoleum's blue tiled dome, rich ornamental detailing, and geometric composition reflect both spiritual devotion and artistic mastery, commemorating a pivotal chapter in Afghanistan's history.

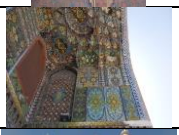
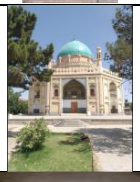
The Ahmad Shah Baba's Mausoleum incorporates several important elements of Islamic architecture, including: Pointed Arches, Central Dome, Iwans, Muqarnas Decoration, Decorative Tilework, Minaret-like towers, Vase-like pillars, Use of Brick, mihrab-shaped entrance, Vaulted Ceilings, Geometric Ceiling Painting, Floral Ornament, and Interior Muqarnas. These elements are described in detail in Table 4.



Fig. 5. Islamic Architectural Elements of Ahmad Shah Baba's Mausoleum [Author]

Table 4. Islamic architectural elements identified in Ahmad Shah Baba's Mausoleum

No.	Image	Architectural Element	Architectural Characteristic	Stylistic Origin
1		Central Dome	Spatial and structural axis of the building, covered with blue tiles, vertical balance	Safavid, Timurid
2		Pointed Arches	Visual focus, load transfer	Islamic
3		Iwan	Deep, open structure on all sides, climate adaptation, light and shade control	Seljuk, Mughal
4		Exterior Muqarnas Decoration	Layered muqarnas over the mihrab-like form, decorative depth	Safavid, Timurid

5		Interior Muqarnas Work	Deep, multi-layered muqarnas on arch and wall tops, visual depth	Safavid, Timurid
6		Decorative Tilework	Geometric and vegetal patterns, organized, colorful, and ornamental beauty	Timurid, Safavid
7		Minaret-like Turrets	Vertical balance and decoration on four sides	Mughal, Islamic
8		Vase-shaped Columns	Curved brickwork, surface depth, decorative application	Safavid, Regional
9		Brickwork	Locally produced, climate adaptive, thermal regulation, and visual simplicity	Islamic, Kandahari
10		Mihrab-shaped Entrance	Central entrance with arched form, visual focus	Islamic, Safavid
11		Vaulted Ceilings	Underground arches, load-bearing, acoustic stability, durable structure	Seljuk, Timurid
12		Geometric Ceiling Painting	Star-shaped patterns, precise, balanced, colorful painting	Safavid, Timurid
13		Floral Ornamentation	Wall and ceiling decoration, nature-inspired, ornamental	Safavid, Mughal

4.1.5. Khirqa Sharifa

Built in 1776 during the reign of Timur Shah Durrani, the Khirqa Sharif was purposely built to house the sacred shroud of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Located next to the tomb of Ahmad Shah Baba, this one-story rectangular structure holds deep religious significance and is considered one of the holiest sites in

Afghanistan. The complex includes a mosque, a madrasa, and a cemetery, all of which form a multi-faceted sacred space. Architecturally, it presents a beautiful blend of Timurid, Safavid, and Mughal influences, including detailed tilework, floral decorations, calligraphic inscriptions, and symmetrically balanced structural elements, creating a space that embodies both spiritual sanctity and artistic refinement.

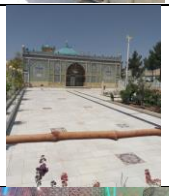
The Khirqa Sharif incorporates several important elements of Islamic architecture, including: Pointed Arches, Central Dome, Tilework, Calligraphy, Muqarnas, Floral and Nature-Inspired Paintings, Main Door Iwan, Decorated Ceiling, Large Arched Windows, White Marble Flooring, Jali Window (Latticed Screen), and Mirrorwork Decoration. These elements are described in detail in Table 5.



Fig. 6. Islamic Architectural Elements of Khirqa Sharifa [Author]

Table 5. Islamic architectural elements identified in the Khirqa Sharifa building

No.	Image	Architectural Element	Architectural Characteristic	Stylistic Origin
1		Central Dome	Covered with geometric paintings, star-shaped motifs, and floral patterns; it serves as the decorative and spatial center.	Safavid, Timurid
2		Pointed Arches	Reinforces vertical lines in doors, windows, and niches.	Islamic
3		Tilework	Geometric shapes, bud-like flowers, surface depth, rhythm, and movement.	Safavid, Timurid
4		Calligraphy	Quranic verses in Kufic and Nastaliq scripts for visual focus and decoration.	Abbasid, Safavid, Timurid
5		Muqarnas	Multi-tiered composition above doors and arches as an artistic spatial transition.	Timurid, Safavid, Mughal

6		Floral and Nature Paintings	Bushes, flowers, natural shapes offering visual dynamism and colorfulness.	Iranian, Safavid
7		Main Entrance Iwan	Tall, decorated iwan with muqarnas bearing an arch emphasizing entry.	Safavid, Timurid, Ottoman
8		Geometric Ceiling	Star-like, floral, precise patterns provide visual clarity and focus.	Timurid, Safavid
9		Arched Windows	Transparency, airflow, and climate adaptation.	Seljuk, Timurid
10		White Marble Flooring	Visual brightness, climatic harmony, and cleanliness.	Mughal
11		Jali (Latticed Window)	Metal geometric screen offering security, climate control, and decoration.	Safavid, Mughal
12		Mirrorwork	Around arches and columns, the reflected light creates depth and visual movement.	Safavid

4.1.6. Sarposha Bazaar

Built in 1829 CE by Sardar Kohandil Khan, the Sarposha Bazaar is Kandahar's oldest surviving commercial structure from the post Ahmadshahi era. Located at the heart of the historic city, its right-angled layout connects two of Kandahar's oldest trade corridors, Kabul Bazaar and Shah Bazaar. The bazaar's arched and vaulted roof system, natural ventilation, and harmonious proportions exemplify Bukhara-influenced Islamic architecture adapted to Kandahari conditions. It is a rare example of Islamic commercial architecture that balances structural logic, aesthetic clarity, and urban functionality.

The Sarposha Bazaar incorporates several important elements of Islamic architecture, including: Pointed Arches, Repetitive Arched Corridors, Natural Light and Arched Openings, Vaulted and Domed Ceilings, Simplified Muqarnas, Balanced Exterior façade, and Commercial Arrangement. These elements are described in detail in Table 6.



Fig. 7. Islamic Architectural Elements of Sarposha Bazaar [Author]

Table 6. Islamic architectural elements identified in Sarposha Bazaar

No.	Image	Architectural Element	Architectural Characteristic	Stylistic Origin
1		Pointed Arches	Load transfer, vertical emphasis, spatial elevation	Abbasid, Islamic
2		Repetitive Mihrab-like Corridors	Spatial continuity, visual order, and general balance	Abbasid, Islamic
3		Arched Windows	Natural lighting, air flow, and space vitality	Islamic, Regional
4		Domed Ceiling	Central space of the bazaar, centrality, sound reflection	Iranian, Mughal
5		Simple Facade	Economic focus, simplicity of production space, and low cost	Regional, Islamic
6		Interior Corridor Arrangement	Balanced shops on both sides, an axis for movement	Regional, Islamic

7		Simple Muqarnas-like Decoration	Surface depth, decorative transition, structural softness	Islamic, Regional

4.1.7. Mirwais Khan Nika Mausoleum

The foundation stone of the Mirwais Khan Nika Mausoleum was laid in 1311 S.H. during the reign of Muhammad Nader Khan under the order of Minister Gul Mohammad Khan Momand, and the work was completed in 1342 S.H. during the reign of Zahir Shah.

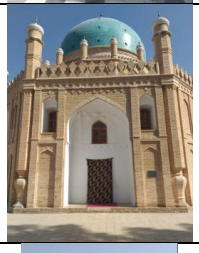
The Mirwais Khan Nikah Mausoleum incorporates several important elements of Islamic architecture, including: Pointed Arches, Central Dome, Octagonal Layout, Decorated Crenellations, Minarets like towers, Axial alignment of the entrance, Landscaped Gardens, Brick Façade, Pointed Arch Windows, Interior White Muqarnas, Painted Ceiling, Muqarnas Motifs in the Dome, Windows and Niches, and Vase-shaped pillars. These elements are described in detail in Table 7.



Fig. 8. Islamic Architectural Elements of Mirwais Khan Nika Mausoleum [Author]

Table 7. Islamic architectural elements identified in Mirwais Khan Nika Mausoleum

No.	Image	Architectural Element	Architectural Characteristic	Stylistic Origin
1		Dome	Central blue dome using squinch and pendentive techniques for visual centrality and internal harmony.	Timurid, Safavid
2		Octagonal Plan	Transition from octagonal geometric plan to dome, representing spatial order and centrality.	Safavid

3		Pointed Arches	Technical solution for load transfer, visual balance, and vertical lines.	Classical Islamic
4		Muqarnas Style Decorations	Muqarnas structure from drum to ceiling, enabling a soft spatial transition.	Timurid, Safavid
5		Minaret-like towers	Imitating Mughal minarets, emphasizing vertical movement.	Mughal
6		Brick Facade	Structured brickwork with climatic adaptation and decorative effect.	Kandahari, Safavid, and Bukhara
7		Axial Arrangement	The entrance axis aligns with the Chaharbagh principle for order and orientation.	Mughal
8		Dome Belt	Belt with slender columns, muqarnas, and arched windows for visual harmony.	Safavid, Mughal

9		Doors and Windows	Pointed arch structures enable air, light, and aesthetic coordination.	Islamic
10		Garden Layout	Trees and walkways are arranged for climatic and decorative balance.	Islamic, Mughal
11		White Muqarnas style Plasterwork	Soft, three-dimensional plasterwork inspired by the Safavid decorative style.	Islamic, Safavid
12		Vase-shaped Columns	Vase-shaped form providing shade, depth, and ornamentation.	Safavid
13		Colored Ceiling	Mihrab-shaped, circular, and star motifs supporting light, sound, and motion.	Safavid, Mughal
14		Windows and Niches	Structures ensuring geometric order, natural light, and visual balance.	Islamic

4.1.8. Eidgah Gate

The Eidgah Gate, constructed during the reign of King Mohammad Zahir Shah, stands along Eidgah Road in Kandahar near the historical site of the original Ahmad Shahi period gateway. The gate integrates Persian, Mughal, and Kandahari stylistic traditions, showcasing a harmonious combination of structural solidity, decorative richness, and climatic responsiveness. Its pointed arch, ornamental tilework, crenellated parapet, and use of brick and stone reflect a refined approach to Islamic architectural design rooted in balance, durability, and urban symbolism.

The Eidgah Gate incorporates several important elements of Islamic architecture, including: Pointed Arch Entrance, Tile Decoration, Crenellated Parapet, Brick and Stone Masonry, Symmetrical Layout, and Local Brick Use. These elements are described in detail in Table 8.



Fig. 9. Islamic Architectural Elements of Eidgah Gate [Author]

Table 8. Islamic architectural elements identified in the Eidgah Gate

No.	Image	Architectural Element	Architectural Characteristic	Stylistic Origin
1		Pointed Arch	A tall and wide entrance arch that transfers load vertically and reinforces the central focus.	Seljuk, Abbasid
2		Tile Decoration	Turquoise, blue, and green colors with geometric and floral motifs represent visual focus and symmetrical beauty.	Iranian, Bukhara
3		Crenellated Parapet	Crown like brick row atop the gate, originally defensive but used here decoratively.	Seljuk, Mughal
5		Symmetrical Layout	A central axis with balanced sides offering order, continuity, and spatial clarity.	Islamic Geometric Principles
6		Combined Stone and Brick Structure	Integration of bricks and stones provides both technical strength and an aesthetic facade.	Regional and Hybrid Architecture
7		Local Brick Use	White gray bricks are suited for climate adaptation, economic durability, and a structured appearance.	Regional Kandahari Style

5. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive architectural analysis of Kandahar's Islamic heritage by examining historically significant buildings. It identifies and interprets essential Islamic architectural elements, focusing on their stylistic, functional, and symbolic dimensions. Drawing on fieldwork, typological documentation, and scholarly comparison, the research reveals the cultural richness and architectural diversity of Kandahar. It also highlights the growing threats posed by urbanization and neglect, calling for urgent conservation measures to safeguard Kandahar's contribution to the broader Islamic architectural tradition.

A key finding of the study is the consistent use of fundamental Islamic architectural elements, domes, iwans, arches, muqarnas, and courtyards across the selected monuments. These features served not only decorative but also functional, climatic, and symbolic purposes. Domes signified spiritual centrality, iwans and courtyards enhanced ventilation and openness, while muqarnas, inscriptions, and geometric patterns reflected a sophisticated artistic heritage linked to Persian, Timurid, and Mughal traditions.

The study reveals that Islamic architectural elements in Kandahar were not just borrowed styles but were adapted to local materials, techniques, and environmental needs. Using mud bricks, local fired bricks, and stone with minimal ornamentation reflects practical adjustments to the region's climate. Despite these adaptations, the architectural expression maintained its artistic integrity, resulting in a distinct local form of Islamic architecture where beauty and utility work together.

Kandahar's architectural heritage showcases a wide range of building types from mosques and shrines to gates and bazaars, demonstrating that Islamic design principles were not limited to religious structures. This diversity highlights how Islamic architecture shaped both sacred and everyday spaces, expanding the academic understanding of its broader functional and cultural significance.

A key conclusion of the study is the fragile condition of Kandahar's historic architecture. Neglect, material decay, and poor restorations have endangered many structures. The absence of proper documentation and public awareness has further exacerbated these issues. Unless preservation efforts are improved, Kandahar risks losing significant and irreplaceable elements of its architectural heritage.

The research also provides answers to key questions related to the structural integration and regional influences of Islamic elements. It confirms the hybrid nature of Kandahar's architecture, where influences from Mughal, Timurid, and Persian schools are intertwined with local craftsmanship and spatial needs. This synthesis results in an architectural identity that is both historically rooted and contextually responsive.

Finally, this study makes a valuable academic contribution by addressing a geographic and thematic gap in the field of Islamic architecture. The documentation and analysis of Kandahar's monuments offer a foundational reference for future research, heritage conservation, and educational integration. It highlights the need for a national architectural archive and the inclusion of Afghan Islamic heritage in academic curricula.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, the following practical and academic recommendations are proposed to enhance the preservation, documentation, and understanding of Kandahar's Islamic architectural heritage:

a. Architectural Documentation and Digitalization

- Conduct comprehensive documentation (photographic surveys, measured drawings, 3D scanning) of all case study buildings to create a digital architectural archive.
- Encourage the use of architectural databases to analyze spatial relationships and stylistic evolution.

b. Conservation and Restoration Initiatives

- Develop heritage conservation plans in collaboration with local authorities, the culture ministry, and international organizations (e.g., UNESCO, ICOMOS).
- Prioritize restoration approaches that respect historical authenticity using traditional materials and craftsmanship whenever possible.
- Implement preventive conservation measures, especially for deteriorating materials and vulnerable decorative elements.

c. Academic Integration and Research Development

- Introduce Islamic architectural heritage modules in architecture and urban planning at Afghan universities.
- Create a national archive of Islamic architectural elements for scholarly use and public access.

d. Community Engagement and Awareness

- Organize public exhibitions, seminars, and heritage festivals to engage local communities and promote pride in cultural identity.
- Train local artisans and builders in historical construction techniques to ensure continuity and sustainable preservation.

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Authors Profile



Mahmood Wasiq earned his Bachelor’s degree in Architecture from the Faculty of Engineering at Kabul University in 2018. Then he was appointed as an assistant professor in the Engineering Faculty, Department of Architecture at Kandahar University in 2020. His research interests are Afghanistan’s traditional architectural practices, landscape design, sustainable Architecture, and Islamic architecture.



Ahmad Jawad Niazi received a B.S. degree in Architecture Engineering from Kabul Polytechnic University in 2010, an M.S. degree in Civil and Industrial Structures from KPU in 2013, M. Plan in Urban and Regional Planning from UoP. Presently, Ph.D. in Architecture& Ekistics from OPJS. He is working as an Associate Professor in Department of Architecture & Urban Planning, Kabul Polytechnic University, Kabul, Afghanistan. His areas of research include Ekistics, Urban Governance and Planning, Sustainable, and Islamic Architecture.