

Critical Analysis of Jame Mosque Nomination File as a World Heritage Site

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Abstract—Nowadays, monuments are assessed and registered by UNESCO based on a series of proposed criteria. The Masjed-e Jame of Isfahan which is also called Jame mosque is one of the monuments of Iran registered by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. UNESCO considers the Jame mosque to be a unique monument because of the special materials used in its construction and its unique decoration. The nomination file about the Jame mosque of Isfahan has some deficiencies when considered in the context of the inscription criteria proposed by UNESCO.

The present study, after identifying the deficiencies of the nomination file critically analyzed their weaknesses and recommends improvements. Consequently, having considered the guidelines prepared by UNESCO proposing a WHS for inscription, many opportunities for further consideration and potential additions to the documentation are presented. These would lead to the development of a reliable management plan to ensure the future of the mosque.

Index Terms—UNESCO, Nomination file, Masjid-e Jame of Isfahan, critical analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

The case study is a mosque, which is located in Isfahan in the central part of Iran which has been shown in Figure 1. The area of this province is 107,026 km². The weather is mild and dry with temperatures varying from 6-10 degrees Celsius in the winter and up to 40 degrees Celsius in the summer, with an average temperature between 7-16 degrees Celsius. Historians believe that Espahan, Sepahan, or Esfahan was a defense and military base. The plain of Esfahan, which is situated amidst the wilderness and the arid hills of central Iran and the importance of its position in relation to the extensive central plateau, plays a vital role in its connection with the historical and ancient past of Iran. The Esfahan province encompasses various sections. The majority of the people living in this province are Fars, but Bakhtiari, Armenians, Hebrews, Azari, and Turks can also be counted as residents. The official language is Farsi or Persian, though the minorities have different language such as Hebrew, Turkish, or Lori. [1].

II. JAME MOSQUE OF ISFAHAN

The proposed mosque is one of the most important mosques in Islamic world. This historic place received

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attention for two main reasons; its special architecture forms and its unique construction materials. The mosque is located in Atigh square of Isfahan. This square is related to the Seljuk Empire. From historical accounts, it is possible to propose that this square dates back to 700 years ago. Around this square other historical places are located which include: Jame Mosque; Khaje nezam-ol -molk Tomb; Soltan Sanjar Palace; Soltan Sanjar School; Ali Minaret; and Haroniyeh. Atigh square was the most important part of the city until the Safavid Empire (1502-1736).



Fig. 1. Location of Isfahan in Iran's map [2]

During the Safavid Empire (16th-18th centuries), Naghshe Jahan Square was built and became the first and most important part of the city. The importance of this place declined until the Ghajar Empire when the capital was changed from Esfahan to Tehran. The plan of this square was two times greater than what remains these days.

Important sections of the Jame mosque are included; the apron, dome, winter mosque, porch, minarate, and altar. The nominations of different sections of the Jame are included: The apron; Sofeh shagerd; the winter mosque; Sofeh Ostad; Oljayto mosque and the Oljayto altar; Sofeh Saheb; Nezamol-Molk dome; And the Tajol molk dome. Important parts that should be explained are: the apron (a place where prayers are performed); pool (with clean water); the separation between the interior parts of the mosque and exterior parts that provides a silent environment inside and

makes it ready for praying. The dome, which emphasizes the Qibla navigation and in the past was used as a navigation point in big cities. With an emphasis on the main entrance, the dome was added to the main plan of the mosque after the eleventh century. The winter mosque was a place with a row of columns, which were used for praying in winter. The porch became a common feature in the Ashkanayan Empire (732-1062 A.D.). Most of the time porches were decorated with a vault. The first mosques had been designed with one porch and throughout time plans changed until four porches were added by the eleventh century. Mina rate means “fire” in Arabic. Before Islam, this place was used as a location to build fires and help travelers find their way. In the Seljuk Empire (11th century), this area became part of the mosque’s plan and was used on both sides of the important dome after the eleventh century. The altar is a place where the leader of the prayer stands while others engaged in prayer stay at the back.



Fig. 2. Jame mosque of Isfahan

III. NOMINATION FILE OF JAME MOSQUE IN UNESCO

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. This is embodied in an international treaty called the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO in 1972. Only countries that have signed the World Heritage Convention, pledging to protect their natural and cultural heritage, can submit nomination proposals for properties on their territory to be considered for inclusion in UNESCO’s World Heritage List [3]. Nomination file based on some proposed criteria presents situation geography and historic explanation of each component of monument and a management plan presents at the end of the relevant nomination file, consequently. In the

present study, nomination file of Jame mosque of Isfahan as one of the registered monuments of Iran in World Heritage List (WHL) is assessed by proposed criteria in UNESCO.

IV. CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF NOMINATION FILE OF JAME MOSQUE OF ISFAHAN

Comparing nomination file of Jame Mosque of Isfahan by proposed criteria in UNESCO leads following defections which include:

Based on UNESCO guideline, various applications during different eras of this monument should be considered. Although there is no detail about this part in the Masjed-e Jame file [4].

In this part a general description of Masjed-e Jame is given without mentioning the important details of the structural parts especially fired brick which has been used as an important element in both structural and decorative parts. The importance of this monument is in its unique brick laying technique compared to other monuments in the same era. A detailed examination of this component is necessary and has to be covered elsewhere in this work [5], [6].

Although repeated use of descriptions is prohibited in UNESCO guidelines, in the document about Masjed-e Jame some parts have been repeated twice [7].

Referring to the decorative merit in the nomination guideline, there is no information about the tile decoration which is related to Safavid era. This type of tile decoration in Savavid era is one of the unique features in Islamic decoration which is not mentioned in Masjed-e Jame file [8].

Page 50 of the same document contains contact details of those who have responsibilities for Masjed-e Jame, but unfortunately no response has been received after one month. Therefore, it seems that the contact details given are not correct [8]-[9].

Based on UNESCO guidelines in the nomination file, negative effects of population development should be discussed, but in Masjed-e Jame file there is no mention of this [10].

According to WHL guideline the items relating to authenticity have been mentioned as follows:

- 1) Material and substances
- 2) Use and function
- 3) Traditional techniques and management systems
- 4) Sprit and feeling

However, none of the above items has been mentioned in the Masjed-e Jame file [11].

Based on the NESCO guidelines, more explanation should be provided on how the suitable protection systems will be used to secure the building and more details are required regarding the future plan for repairs and maintenance [12].

Moreover, the similarities with other selected buildings and the reasons that make the nominated building stand out are two criteria mentioned in the guidelines and should be discussed in detail. However, in Masjed-e Jame file there are some general explanations about some selected monuments, but there is nothing to explain the similarities or distinguishing features that make Masjed-e Jame stand out [13].

Again, in the UNESCO general instructions for world

heritage list nomination file on state of conservation, the following items appear:

- 1) Conservation and factors affecting the properties
- 2) Physical condition
- 3) Threats to outstanding universal value
- 4) But there is not enough information in Masjed-e Jame file about these factors [14].

In the UNESCO guideline it is noted that increasing visitors should be mentioned in the nomination file for world heritage and that it should also be discussed how the management plan could reduce the negative points of this increase. In this part of Masjed-e Jame file more details need to be added [15].

A clear explanation on how the property will be protected and ensuring the property's survival are two items which are mentioned in the UNESCO guidelines, but in Masjed-e Jame file there are just some details about damage and current problems of the building without adequate information about conservation projects, repairs process, protection details and the future plan [16].

With reference to the guidelines, it would be better to include in the nomination file a timetable and a description of various duties as well as a list of selected agencies to conduct future projects, since lack of these items could make the proposed plan unclear [17].

Although based on the item mentioned on page 111(5.j), experts working on Masjed-e Jame should be categorized in a separate list with their respective responsibilities explained, in the nomination file available for this building only a list of experts appears without any explanation about their duties [18].

In item 5.e on page 110 of the UNESCO guideline with the title "Property management plan or other management system" it is mentioned that the proposed management plan needs to be analyzed and explained how it will be performed. However, on pages 225-227 in the Masjed-e Jame file the current problems are mentioned without any details about the practical ways on how and in what order of priority these problems will be rectified. Some of these points from the proposed management plan will be mentioned below:

Although according to the available evidence existing cracks in some parts of the building are in a critical condition, the examination of these cracks has been included in the 10 year long term program of the nomination file.

Other areas which may be mentioned include the using of unsuitable air-conditioning system in the interior parts of the building and also installing grill doors for separating the internal parts, both of which are mentioned in a 2 year short term program with no explanation as to how these problems should be solved during the two year period.

In addition, health and safety issues for safeguarding visitors and creation of facilities for their convenience as well as the installation of sign posts for guiding visitors are included in a five year program whereas expanding tourism in general has been included in a two year program. These are only a few problem areas in connection with the proposed management plan in the Masjed-e Jame file which need to be discussed [19].

V. CONCLUSION

Having considered the guidelines proposed by the UNESCO on the one hand and the nomination file for Masjed-e Jame on the other, it seems fair to say that the management plan in question is more like a survey rather than a conservation program for protecting a historic building such as Masjed-e Jame, which is one of the unique examples of Islamic architecture in Iran. The management plan is one of the most important parts of the nomination file that needs to be revised with clear identification of priorities as regards conservation projects and allocation of adequate resources together with a proper time-table for carrying through the plan and achieving the objective which is both protecting the building and minimizing further damage to it in the future.

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