

The Imam Reza shrine (Persian: حرم امام رضا, romanized: Haram-e Emâm Rezâ, lit. 'Sanctuary of Imam Reza') in Mashhad, Iran, is a complex which contains the mausoleum of Imam Reza, the eighth Imam of Twelver Shias. It is the largest mosque in the world by area. Also contained within the complex are the Goharshad Mosque, a museum, a library, four seminaries,[2] a cemetery, the Razavi University of Islamic Sciences, a dining hall for pilgrims, vast prayer halls, and other buildings.

The complex is a tourism center in Iran[3][4] and has been described as "the heart of the Shia Iran"[5] with 25 million Iranian and non-Iranian Shias visiting the shrine each year, according to a 2007 estimate.[6] The complex is managed by Astan Quds Razavi Foundation and currently headed by Ahmad Marvi, a prominent Iranian cleric.

The shrine itself covers an area of 267,079 square metres (2,874,810 sq ft) while the seven courtyards which surround it cover an area of 331,578 square metres (3,569,080 sq ft), totaling 598,657 m² (6,443,890 sq ft).[7] Every year the ceremony of Dust Clearing is celebrated in the Imam Reza shrine.

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Religious significance[edit]

Shia sources quote several hadiths from the Shia Imams and Prophet Muhammad that highlight the importance of pilgrimage to the shrine. A hadith from the Islamic Prophet reads:

One of my own flesh and blood will be buried in the land of Khorasan. God the Highest will

surely remove the sorrows of any sorrowful person who goes on pilgrimage to his shrine. God will surely forgive the sins of any sinful person who goes on pilgrimage to his shrine.[8]
History[edit]

Early years[edit]

Dar-ul-Imarah (Royal Residence) or the garden of Humayd ibn Qahtaba al-Ta'i was a fortress in the village of Sanabad. It dates back to the era before the Islam religion. It had been placed at the fork road of Sanabad, Neishabour, Sarakhs, Toos and Radkan. In fact, this fortress has been a place for the frontier guards to take position and establish the security of these roads and regions. After the demise of Harun al-Rashid, he was buried in this place. Due to this historical event, the Dar-ul-Imarah was known as the Mausoleum of Haruniyyeh. The original inner building of Dar-ul-Imarah has been in fact a temple used by the Zoroastrians to worship. This building was demolished by the order of al-Ma'mun, and then it was reconstructed according to the special architecture of Khorasan. Four plain and short walls, covered with a low-slope dome, were constructed around the building. Afterwards, the name of the mausoleum (Haruniyyeh) was changed and known as the Mashhad-ur-Reza, due to the Holy Imam. Mashhad literally means a place where a martyr has been buried.[9]

Martyrdom of Ali al-Ridha[edit]

In 818, Imam Ali al-Ridha was murdered by the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun (ruled 813–833) and was buried beside the grave of al-Ma'mun's father, Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809).[10] After this event, the location was called as Mashhad al-Ridha ("the place of martyrdom of al-Ridha"). Shias and Sunnis (for example, Ibn Hibban wrote in his Kitab al Siqqat that whenever troubled and in Mashad he would always visit the shrine to ask for relief from problems that bothered him) began visiting his grave on pilgrimage. By the end of the 9th century a dome was built on the grave and many buildings and bazaars sprang up around it. For the next thousand years, it has been devastated and reconstructed several times.[11] The celebrated Muslim traveler Ibn Battuta visited Mashhad in 1333 and reported that it was a large town with abundant fruit trees, streams and mills. A great dome of elegant construction surmounts the noble mausoleum, the walls being decorated with colored tiles. Opposite the tomb of the Imam is the tomb of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, which is surmounted by a platform bearing chandeliers.[3]

Ghaznavid era[edit]

By the end of the third Hijri century, a dome was built on the grave of Imam Reza and many buildings and bazaars sprang around the holy shrine. In 383 A.H. / 993 A.D., Sebuktigin, the Ghaznavid sultan devastated Mashhad and stopped the pilgrims from visiting the holy shrine of Imam Reza. But in 400 A.H./ 1009 A.D., Mahmud of Ghazni (born 971, ruled, 998-1030 A.D.,) started the expansion and renovation of the holy shrine and built many fortifications around the city.[12]

Saljug era[edit]

Sultan Sanjar (b. 1086 A.D., r. 1097-1157 A.D.), after the miraculous healing of his son in the holy shrine of Imam Reza, renovated the sanctuary and added new buildings within its precincts. At the time of Sultan Sanjar Saljuqi, after Sharaf al-Din Abu Tahir b. Sa'd b. Ali Qummi repaired the shrine, he began to construct a dome over it.[13] In 612 A.H./ 1215 A.D., as borne out by inscriptions on certain tiles, Allaudin Khwarezm Shah carried out

renovations on the shrine.[13]

Mongol invasion[edit]

During the Khwarazmian dynasty, Razavi Shrine was paid much attention and some repair and decoration was made inside it.[13] In this era (612 A.H./1215 A.D.), two very glorious embossed Thuluth (a large Naskh handwriting) inscriptions in form of square tile work were fixed on both sides of the shrine entrance-by the side of Dar al-Huffaz porch—in which the names and descent of Imam Reza back to Imam Ali were written. Some other inscriptions and three mihrabs (a special place for prayer-leader in mosques) belonging to this age exist in this holy complex. During the Mongol invasion in 1220 A.D. (617 A.H.), Khorasan was plundered by the invading hordes and the survivors of this massacre took refuge in Mashhad and settled around the holy shrine.[14] Sultan Muhammad Khudabandeh Iljaitu (b. 1282 AD), the Mongol ruler of Iran, converted to Shi'ism and ruled Iran in 703–716 A.H (1304–1316 AD), once again renovated the holy shrine on a grand scale.[12]

Timurid era[edit]

The glorious phase of Mashhad started during the reign of Shahrukh Mirza (b. 1377 A.D., r. 1405-1447), son of Tamerlane, and reached its zenith during the reign of the Safavid Shahs who ruled Iran from 1501 to 1736. Shahrukh Mirza, whose capital was Herat, regularly visited Mashhad for the pilgrimage of the holy shrine of Imam Reza (A.S.). In the 15th century, during the reign of the Timurid Shahrukh Mirza, Mashhad became one of the main cities of the realm. In 1418, his wife Empress Goharshad funded the construction of an outstanding mosque beside the shrine, which is known as the Goharshad Mosque.[15]

Safavid era[edit]

With the emergence of the Safavid dynasty in 1501 A.D. and their declaration of the Twelver Shi'ite sect as the state religion, Mashhad reached the peak of its development and soon became one of the greatest sites of pilgrimage. However, since Khorasan was a border province of the Safavid Empire, Mashhad suffered repeated invasions and periods of occupation by the Uzbek Khans – Muhammad Khan, Abdullah Khan Shaibani, Muhammad Sultan and especially Abdul-Momen Khan. These invasions continued up to 996 A.H./ 1586 A.D., the reign of Shah Abbas I, who finally drove out the Uzbeks from Khorasan.

Sahn Atiq was extended in the time of Shah Abbas I, and during the Safavid era, great efforts were made for its further improvement. Shah Tahmasp I began to repair and gild the minaret near the dome and in 932/1525, precious tiles covering the dome were changed into gold-coated bricks. After they were plundered during Abd al-Mu'min Khan Uzbek invasion, the gold-coated bricks were rebuilt by Shah 'Abbas in 1010/1601, the details of which was written on an enamelled inscription by Ali Reza Abbasi. Shah Abbas also began to establish northern porch, rooms, chambers, facades, as well eastern and western porches. It is said that Mullah Muhsin Fayd Kashani ordered to establish Tawhid Khanah portico in the north side of the Shrine. Allahverdikhan portico, porch in the north side of Dar al-Ziyafah (reception chamber) and Hatam Khani portico, all were built in the time of great princes of Safavids, Allahverdikhan and Hatam Beq Ordoobadi.

Shah Abbas II commanded to repair and tile Sahn Atiq and Shah Sulaiman also ordered the repair of the Holy Shrine Dome which had been split because of the earthquake; this can be read in an erected inscription. He also commanded to establish several Madrasahs (Islamic

seminaries). The northern porch of Goharshad Mosque, the Holy Shrine entrance, along with Musallah (place of prayer) located in Payeen Khiyaban (lower street) were repaired and tiled by a skillful Isfahani mason called Ustad Shuja'.

During the Safavid era, the shrine also received patronage from rulers of the Indian subcontinent, namely Quli Qutb-ul-Mulk (founder of the Qutb Shahi dynasty) and Mughal Emperor Akbar. The latter was notably a Sunni.[16]

Afsharid and Qajar era[edit]

Nadir Shah Afshar (b. 1688, r. 1736-1747 A.D.) and the Qajar Shahs who ruled Iran from 1789 to 1925 illuminated, beautified and expanded the various courtyards (Sahn), porches (Riwaq) and places in the holy shrine. The golden porch of Sahn Atiq and the minaret on its top were repaired and gilded, the minaret of north porch was erected and illuminated; and Sangab (a vessel or container made of single block of marble) in Ismail Tala'ee Saqqa Khanah (a public place for drinking water) was built in Sahn Atiq. All these happened during Nadir Shah Afshar's monarchy.

There were also some improvements in the Holy Shrine complex during the Qajar Dynasty, including new courtyard establishment and gilding its porch, both of them started during the reign of Fath-Ali Shah and finished during Naser al-Din Shah's reign. The porch and northern façade of Sahn Atiq, as written in the inscription of its top, were also repaired during Mohammad Shah Qajar's rule. Tawhid Khanah was repaired in 1276/1859 in the time of Adud al-Mulk's custodianship. He had the fine paintings and tiles of the Shrine decorated with mirrors in 1275/1858. Naser al-Din Shah, too, had the gold-coated bricks put up on the walls, from dado up to the top of western porch of the new courtyard and its stalactite-shaped ceiling. So it was called "Nasiri Porch". There was also some repairment in both courtyards, the old and the new one during Mozaffar ad-Din Shah's monarchy.

Following the coup in December 1911, Russian artillery shelled revolutionaries who had taken refuge in the holy shrine.[17] The whole complex was greatly damaged in 1911, but it was repaired again after a while by Hussein Mirza Nayyir al-Dawla, Khorasan's governor.

Modern era[edit]

There happened some essential changes round the complex in 1347/1928, when Falakah (round open space with the radius of 180 meters from the top of the Dome) was established. Then they began to build the Museum, the library and the Hall for ceremonies. Old Falakah was extended up to a radius of 620 meters before the victory of the Islamic Revolution, and an important part of Holy Buildings' historical structure was demolished without considering its antiquity and elegance.

On 11th Rabi al-Thani 1354 A.H. /13 July 1935, during the Goharshad Mosque rebellion, the armed forces of Reza Shah (b. 1878, r. 1925-1941 A.D.), the founder of Pahlavi dynasty in Iran, invaded the holy shrine and massacred people gathered in the Goharshad Mosque. The people there were protesting against the anti-Islamic law by Reza Shah of banning Hijab (headscarf) for women in Iran. During the days of Iranian Revolution, on 21 November 1978 Mohammad Reza Shah's (b. 1919, r. 1941-1978 A.D.) troops killed a large number of people within the shrine.

The shrine is depicted on the reverse of the Iranian 100 rials coin, issued since 2004.[18]
Specifications[edit]

Courtyards (Sahn)[edit]

The complex contains a total of Seven courtyards, which cover an area of over 331,578 m2 (3,569,080 sq ft):[19] The courtyards also contain a total of 14 minarets,[20] and 3 fountains.[21]

This list is incomplete; you can help by adding missing items. (January 2009)

Name	Images	Area (m2)	appurtenant	Year of first building
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Revolution Courtyard	four balconies, steel window	[[{{{1}}}]]		
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Freedom Courtyard	4,600 golden Veranda	[[{{{1}}}]]		
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Courtyard of Goharshad Mosque	[[{{{1}}}]]			
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Quds Courtyard	2,500	[[{{{1}}}]]		
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Islamic Republic Courtyard	10,000 two minarets	[[{{{1}}}]]		
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The Razavi Grand Courtyard	[[{{{1}}}]]			
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Gadeer Courtyard	[[{{{1}}}]]			
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Halls[edit]

From the courtyards, external hallways named after scholars lead to the inner areas of the mosque. They are referred to as Bast (Sanctuary), since they were meant to be a safeguard for the shrine areas:[22]

Bast Shaykh Toosi – leads to the Central Library

Bast Shaykh Tabarsi

Bast Shaykh Hur Ameli

Bast Shaykh Baha'i

The Bast hallways lead towards a total of 21 internal halls (Riwaq) which surround the burial chamber of Ali al-Ridha.[23] Adjacent to the burial chamber is also a mosque dating back to the 10th century known as, Bala-e-Sar Mosque.[24]

Goharshad Mosque[edit]

Main article: Goharshad Mosque

This mosque is one of the most reputed in Iran and is situated adjacent to the Holy Shrine of Imam Ridha. It was built in 821 AH. under the orders of Goharshad Begum, Shahrukh Mirza's wife. Its area is 9410 Sq Meters and includes a courtyard, four porches and seven large prayer halls. Two minarets, each 40 meters high, are located on both sides of Maqsureh Porch. There is an inscription on the left on the margin of the porch written by Baisonqor, one of the best calligraphists of the time. The Sahib-al Zaman Pulpit is in Maqsureh porch. It was built in 1243 H with walnut wood and without using any iron or nail. This mosque has a public library with 34,650 volumes.

Ali al-Ridha's Tomb[edit]

It is located beneath the Golden Dome (The Golden Dome is the most prominent symbol of the city of Mashad with an altitude of 31.20 meters) and surrounded by different porches each bearing a separate name. The skilled artists have done their best in the creation of this place. It is square in shape and some 135 sq. meters have been added to its area after extension works. The walls are covered by marble up to twenty centimeters and the next ninety two centimeters are covered by expensive tiles known as Sultan Sanjari tiles. Quranic verses and Ahadiths of the Ahle Bait have been carved on these tiles. The important inscription written round the walls is eighty centimeters wide and written by Ali Ridha

Abbasi, the famous calligraphist of the Safavid period and bears Surah Jumah of the Quran. Museums and other historical appurtenants[edit]

There are two Museums in the Holy shrine limits. Astan Quds Museum and Quran Museum. The Astan Quds museum is one of the richest and most exquisite museums of Iran. The building is located in the eastern quarter of Sahne Imam Khomeini and close to Haram square. Some of its objects date back to the 6th century AH. The collection of carpets, rugs and golden covers for the Tomb are all unique and date back to the 11 and 13th centuries. Some inscriptions written by Ali Reza Abbasi are among the valuable objects. Among the unique works of art in the museum is Imam's first tombstone, the inscription of which was carved in kufi relief script belonging to 516 H. Also Quran museum is located in the vicinity of the Astan Quds museum. It contains precious manuscripts of the Glorious Quran attributed to the Holy Imams and some gilded manuscripts. It was opened in 1364 H. The oldest manuscript attributed to the Holy Imams is in kufi script on deer skin belonging to the First century AH.

Because of historical background of Imam Reza shrine, it is collection of historical objects such as; Minarets, Nqqareh Khaneh (Place of Kettle Drums), Saqqa Khaneh (Public Drinking Place), Sa'at (the Clock), Dar-al Hoffaz (the place of the Reciters), Towhid Khaneh (place of Divine Unity), Dar-al-Siyadah, Bala-Sar Mosque, Dar-al Rahmah Porch, Allahverdi Khan Dome, Hatam Khani Dome, Golden Dome, Astan Quds Mehmansara.

Notable burials[edit]

Harun al-Rashid (763–809) – Abbasid caliph (786–809)

Imam Reza (765–818) – 8th Imam (798–818)

Shaykh Tabarsi (1073–1153) – Scholar

Sultanum Begum (1516–1593) – Queen consort

Allahverdi Khan (ალავერდი ხანი უნდილაძე) (ca. 1560–1613) – Iranian general of Georgian origin

Sheikh-e Baha'i (1547–1621) – Scholar

Dilaram Khanum (d. 1647) – Queen consort

Horr-e Ameli (1624–1693) – cleric

Crown Prince Abbas Mirza (1789–1833) – Qajar Crown Prince

Prince Mohammad-Taqi Mirza (1791–1853) – Qajar prince

Mohammad-Baqer Sharif Tabatabai (1823–1901) – Scholar

Abutaleb Zanjani (1843–1911) – Scholar

Princess Ashraf os-Saltaneh (1863–1914) – photographer

Prince Mass'oud Mirza Zell-e Soltan (1850–1918) – Qajar prince

Hassan Ali Nokhodaki Isfahani (1862–1942) – cleric

Ahmed Aref El-Zein (1884–1960) – Scholar

Forough Azarakhshi (1904–1963) – scholar

Mohammad-Taqi Amoli (1887–1971) – cleric

Ali-Akbar Fayyaz (1898–1971) – scholar

Mohammad-Hadi Milani (1895–1975) – Scholar

Manouchehr Eghbal (1909–1977) – prime minister (1957–60) and CEO of NIOC

Asadollah Alam (1919–1978) – prime minister (1962–64) and minister of the Imperial

Court (1967–77)

Gholam-Hossein Tabrizi (1881–1980) – Scholar

Ali Motamedi (fa) (1896–1980) – diplomat and politician

Mahmoud Farrokh Khorasani (fa) (1895–1981) – politician

Abdolkarim Hasheminejad (1932–1981) – cleric

Abdollah Musavi Shirazi (1892–1984) – cleric

Gholamreza Ghodsi (1925–1989) – poet

Badri Teymourtash (1908–1995) – scholar

Mohammad-Taqi Jafari (1925–1998) – cleric

Ali-Akbar Aboutorabi Fard (1939–2000) – cleric

Hassan-Ali Morvarid (1911–2004) – cleric

Jalaleddin Ashtiani (1925–2005) – cleric

Hassan Tabatabaei Qomi (1912–2007) – cleric

Mohammad-Sadegh Farman (fa) (1921–2012) – politician

Mohammad Ezodin Hosseini Zanjani (1921–2013) – cleric

Mohammad Baqer Shirazi (1931–2014) – cleric

Abbas Vaez-Tabasi (1935–2016) – cleric and chairman of the supervisory board of Astan

Quds Razavi (1979–2016)

Hassan Firouzabadi (1951–2021) - military commander and Chief of Staff of the Iranian

Armed Forces (1989–2016)

Gallery[edit]

See also[edit]

Holiest sites in Shia Islam

Astan Quds Razavi

Fatimah al-Ma'sūmah Mosque

Shāh Abdol Azīm Mosque

Goharshad Mosque