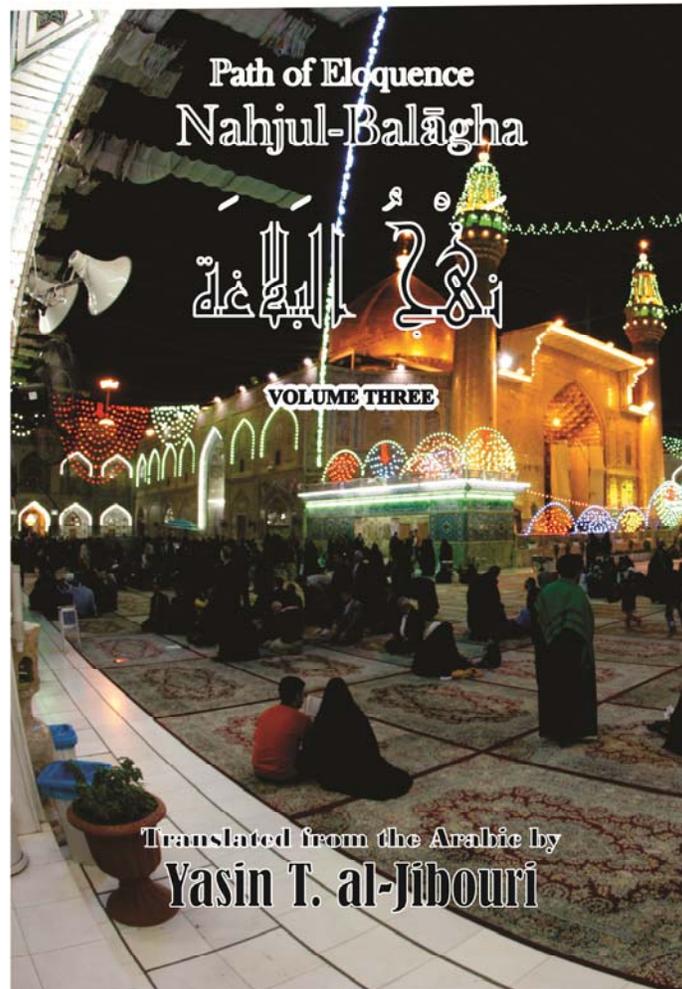


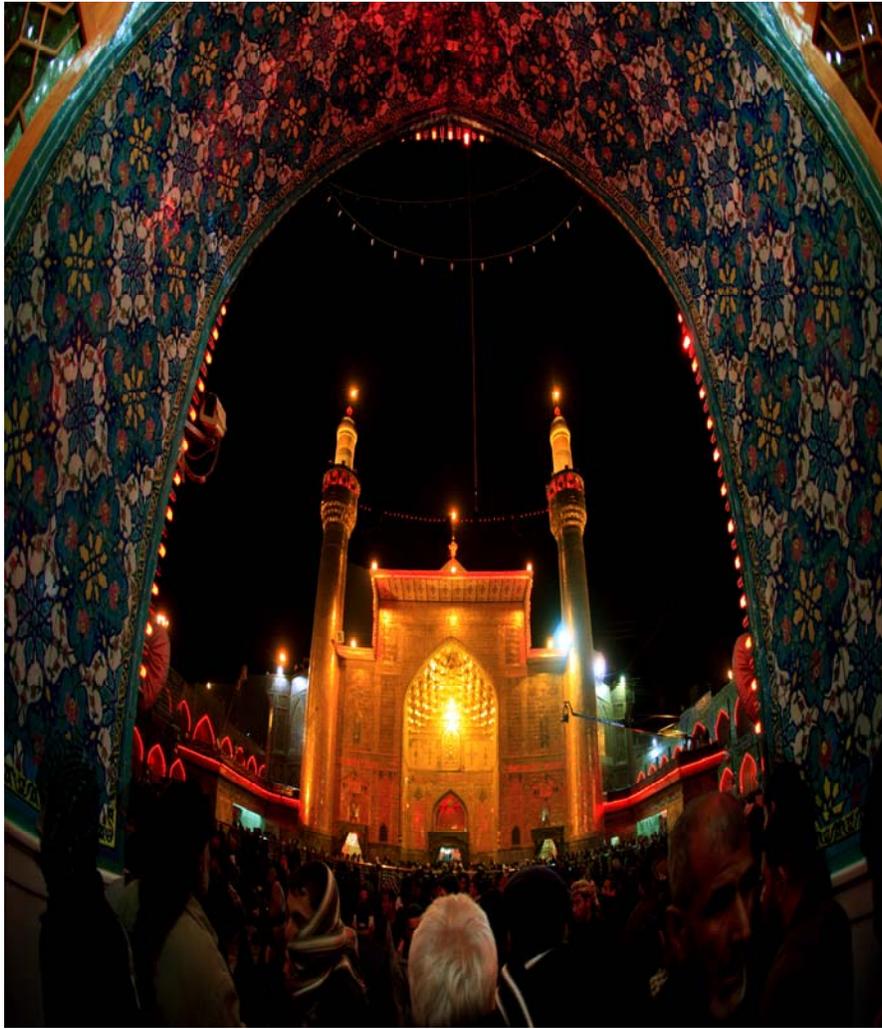
A PICTORIAL TOUR OF IMAM ALI'S SHRINE IN AL-NAJAF AL-ASHRAF, IRAQ

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A Look at the Shrine of the Commander of the Faithful,

Imām Ali ibn Abu Tālib عليه السلام







In the Name of Allāh, the most Gracious, the most Merciful

All praise is due to Allāh, Lord of the Worlds, peace and blessings with the best of His creation, the Messenger of Allāh, and with his sinless and auspicious Progeny.

Hiding the Gravesite of the Commander of the Faithful ﷺ

Perhaps the war stances of the Commander of the Faithful Ali ibn Abu Tālib ﷺ in which he humiliated the polytheist heroes and chiefs of Quraish tribe in defense of Islam, in firming its foundations, filled the hearts of the enemies of Allāh and of Islam with animosity and hatred, so they kept waiting for the opportunity to seek revenge on him, to charge him, and to harm him.

Everybody knows what Banu Umayyah (descendants of Sufyan) had done, followed by the descendants of Abul-Abbas [al-Saffah, the blood-shedder], their hatred and animosity towards the Commander of the Faithful Ali ibn Abu Tālib ﷺ. For this reason, Ali ﷺ stated in his last will and testament that his gravesite should be hidden. He ﷺ knew that power after him would be the lot of Banu Umayyah; therefore, he did not feel safe about his grave been desecrated. He ﷺ, hence, stated before his death that he should be buried secretly for fear of Banu Umayyah and their supporters, the Kharijites and the like, who might inter it due to their knowledge of its location, and that such interring would prompt the Banu Hashim, his clansmen, to fight, a situation which he ﷺ always avoided even during his lifetime; so, how could he accept it to be the cause of a feud after his demise?

What proves this concern is what actually was done by al-Hajjaj ibn Yousuf al-Thaqafi¹ when the Umayyads did, indeed, rise to power. He called for digging up as many as three thousand graves looking for the sacred corpse of the Commander of the Faithful ﷺ as history books tell us. This is why only the children of Ali ﷺ and those whom they trusted from among their close followers knew exactly where the grave was located.

¹His *kunya* was “Abu Muhammed.” Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, the Umayyad king, appointed him commander of his army, so he killed the *sahabi* Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr by crucifying him inside the Ka’ba. Then Abd al-Malik installed him as governor of Mecca, Medina, and Taif, then added to them Iraq. He remained governor for twenty years. He built the city of Wasit (located between Kufa and Bara) where he died in 95 A.H./714 A.D. He is proverbial in his passion for shedding blood, ridiculing the Sunnah, and deliberately violating the Islamic code of conduct.

Building of the Sacred Grave Rises

Knowledge of the location of the grave of the Commander of the Faithful Ali ibn Abu Tālib ؑ was kept hidden from people during the entire Umayyad period, i.e. about 92 Hijri years, from 40 – 132 A.H. which coincided from 661 – 750 A.D., that is, about 89 Anno Domini years, since the Hijri lunar year is shorter than the solar one. Only the Imāms from among the Ahl al-Bayt ؑ and the elites from among their sincere followers knew where the grave was. All this was done according to the will left by the Imām ؑ shortly before his death in 40 A.H./661 A.D.

When the Umayyad state collapsed and was followed by the Abbasid state in 132 A.H./750 A.D., Imām Ja`far ibn Muhammed al-Sadiq ؑ kept going to both Heera and Kufa cities and visiting the sacred grave before its site was made public. He was accompanied by his sincere supporters who started telling those whom they trusted from among the people about its location. Its site was thus determined to be in the Ghari land near Najaf. This public revelation was made by Imām Ja`far ibn Muhammed al-Sadiq ؑ² during the time of caliph Abu Ja`far al-Mansur, who ruled from 136 – 158 A.H./754 – 775 A.D., during the time when he used to go often to Heera city and from there he would go to Najaf and visit the sacred grave accompanied by some of his companions.

The Abbasid Dawud ibn Ali (d. 132 A.H./750 A.D.) narrates how a wooden box covered the grave. Changes kept taking place to the grave since then as well as many renovations and construction projects the most important of which are as follows:

- FIRST:** Hārūn al-Rashīd renovated it in 170 A.H./787;
- SECOND:** Al-Dā`i al-Saghīr did so in 279 A.H./893 A.D.
- THIRD:** The Hamdānis renovated it in 311 A.H./924 A.D.
- FOURTH:** Ibn Buwayh al-Daylami in 371 A.H./982 A.D.
- FIFTH:** The Safavids constructed the present shrine as it now stands during the years from 1040 – 1052 A.H./1631 – 1643 A.D.

²His full name is: Imām Ja`far al-Sādiq (the truthful one) ibn (son of) Imām Muhammed al-Bāqir ibn Imām “Zainul-`Ābidīn” Ali ibn al-Hussain ibn Ali ibn Abū Tālib, peace with them all. He is the faqih of Muslims who follow the Sunnah of the Prophet of Islam through the holy Ahl al-Bayt whom Allāh purified and protected from all sins as we read in verse 33 of Sūrat al-Ahzāb of the Holy Qur`ān. According to p. 472, Vol. 1 of *Usool al-Kāfi* by mentor al-Kulayni, his mother was “Umm Farwah” Asma` daughter of Qasim ibn Muhammed ibn (first caliph) Abu Bakr who was one of the seven most prominent jurists of Medina. Imām al-Sadiq ؑ was born on Rabī` al-Awwal 17 of the Hijri year 83, which corresponded to Thursday, April 20, according to the Julian Christian calendar, of 702 A.D. The Imām was poisoned with grapes at the hands of the then governor of Medina, and he died on Shawwāl 15, 148 A.H./December 4, 765 A.D. He needs no introduction since not only the Muslims of the world recognize his lineage, character and ocean of knowledge, but the non-Muslims, too, are quite familiar with him and with thousands of his students who spread far and wide.



The Sacred Nave:

Its general form is called “al-sahn al-shareef,” the sacred nave, and the overall upper area of the shrine, including the brick wall, is 13,240 m². The sacred nave covers most of this area, and it surrounds the shrine from the northern, eastern and southern areas, and the estimated area of only the shrine is about 4,219 m².



Outer Brick Wall

The architectural design of the nave is most magnificent; rarely is there anyone like it. In its design, astronomic matters have taken into consideration, such as sunrise and the determining of midday time. A huge structure surrounds the resting place, dome and minarets in the shape of a square brick wall most of which is plated from inside with Kashani (or Kashi). Qur'ānic verses are inscribed in very beautifully entwined letters on its frontal areas.



Nave's Gates

1. **Southern Gate: *Bab al-Qibla***

This gate is so named because it is located in the direction of the *qibla*, in the center of the southern side of the nave's brick wall, and it leads to the Rasool Street. It rises as high as 4.30 meters and has a total width of 3.48 meters. It is comprised of two huge teak wood shutters. Surrounding each shutter is a huge built façade covered by Kashi made in Kerbala decorated with various very beautiful inscriptions.



2. Western Gate: *Bab al-Faraj*

This gate is located in the western side of the brick wall, in the second grandiose hall to be specific, and it is the last gate to open to the nave. It was opened during the time of Sultan Abdul-Aziz in the year 1279 A.H./1863 A.D., so it was called the *sultani gate*, after the sultan. But it was called *bab al-faraj*, the gate of ease, because it ends at an area which is believed to be a spot chosen by the Mahdi Imām عليه السلام to offer his prayers. Residents of Najaf city call it *bab al-imara* because one who leaves it behind will be facing the Imara quarter, an old city quarter which was demolished in its entirety during the time of tyrant Saddam Hussein in the pretext of expanding the shrine. The real reason behind its demolition was the large number of mosques, schools and homes of theology professors. It is similar to the rest of the shrine's gates: It is comprised of two huge shutters made of teak wood. It is 4.30 meters and its entire width is 3.20 meters and is surrounded by a huge façade covered with Kashi made in Kerbala decorated with various inscriptions.



3. Northern (Tusi) Gate:

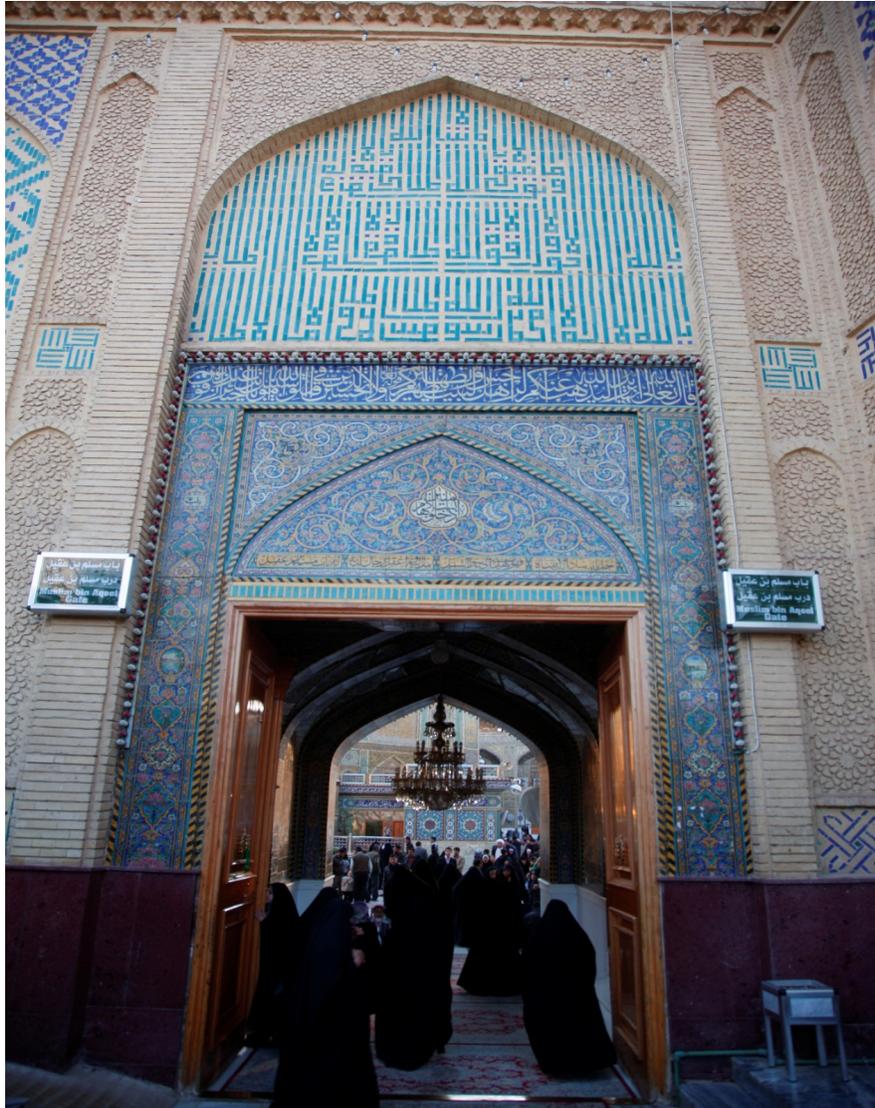
It is located in the northern side of the upper sacred sanctum. This this gate is named after mentor "Abu Ja`far" Muhammed ibn al-Hassan al-Tusi³. His resting place is located in the street which is named after him and which leads to the Wadi al-Salam Cemetery.

³Shaikh al-Tūsi, “Abū Ja`far” Muhammed ibn al-Hassan (385 - 460 A.H./995 - 1068 A.D.), is one of the greatest literary figures in Islamic history, a scholar the scope of whose knowledge encompassed Islamic history, *fiqh* and *hadīth*.



Eastern or Clock Gate:

This main gate is located to the east of the sacred shrine. The clock stands over it facing the large bazaar. It is regarded as the main door for entering the shrine and from there to the sanctum. From both sides, it is surrounded by pillars that protrude from the outside fence by 1.30 meter and is overhead of one who enters from within or who exits. It looks like a dent having an angle similar to that arched and grandiose halls which the wall surrounds. On the pillars of the gate there are writings useful for tracking aspects of the history of this Alawi monument, including the date when the old Kashi was built. It is now called the gate of Imām Ali ibn Mousa al-Rida عليه السلام.



Muslim ibn Aqeel عليه السلام Gate

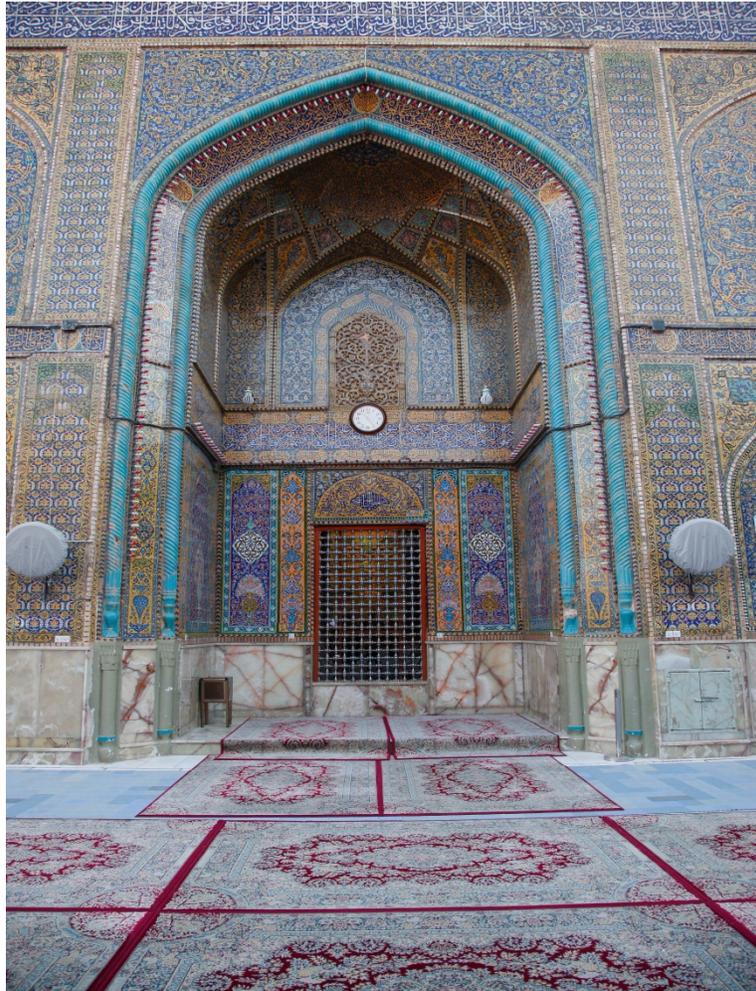
Within the brick wall's eastern side and near the area of the Khadraa Mosque is the gate of Muslim ibn Aqeel عليه السلام, brother of the Commander of the Faithful عليه السلام. This gate, too, is made of teak wood and is comprised of two shutters four meters high and 3.30 meters wide. The façade that surrounds this gate is covered with Kashi made in Kerbala and is decorated with various inscriptions.

Nave's Arcades

The wall that surrounds the sanctum is 5.12 meters high, maintaining the same height on all four sides. Totally surrounding the shrine from all sides is an almost square arcade the eastern and western flanks of which are slightly larger than its northern and southern ones. The walls of these arcades are covered with green marble which is similar to that which covers the floor and courtyard up to a height of 2.20 meters. The rest of parts of the walls and ceilings are glazed entirely with the most magnificent mirrors in mathematical and plant inscriptions.

1. Nave's Northern Arcade: It faces the Tusi Gate.

2. Nave's Eastern Arcade: It is the one where the main doors leading to the shrine are located: On one side, two gilt doors are located in the Golden Grandiose Hall, and on the other are the eastern golden doors that open into the sacred shrine.
3. Sanctum's Southern Arcade: It faces Bab al-Qibla.
4. Western Arcade: It is similar in its location to the Eastern Arcade.



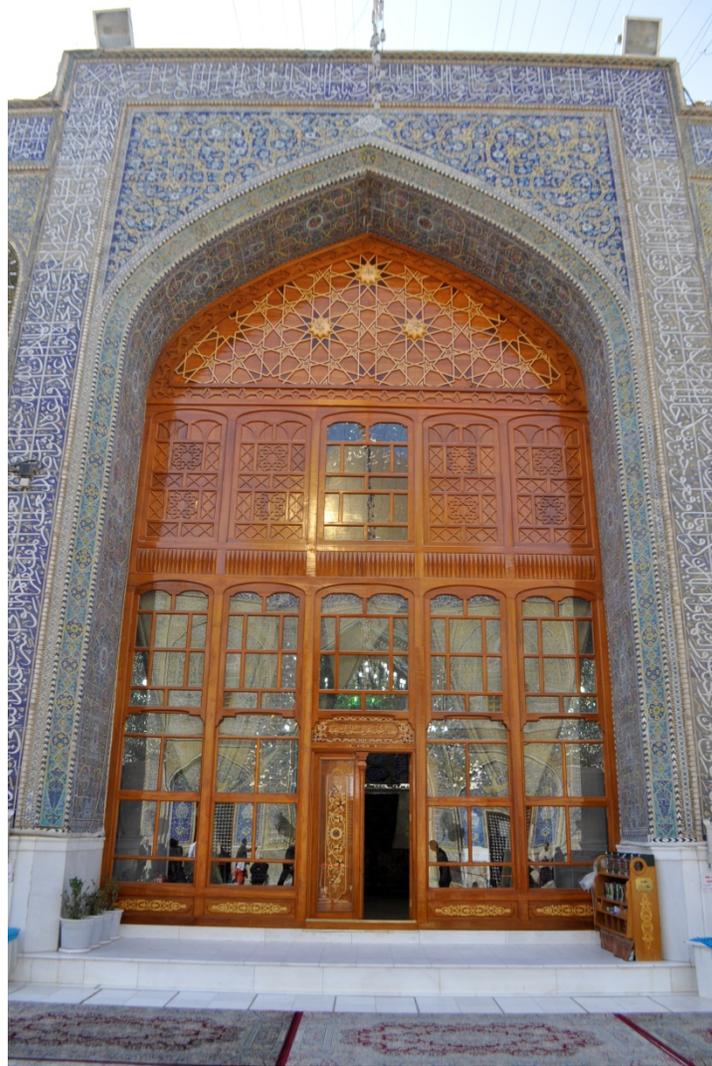
Nave's Grandiose Hall:

'Ulema Hall: It used to be called "maqam (standing place) al-'ulema" due to the large number of senior theology scholars who are buried there, and it overlooks the courtyard from the sanctum's northern side, facing the grand hall of the cemetery of senior jurisprudent Sayyid Kazim Yazdi ^{قائم}.⁴

Gold Spout Hall:

This hall overlooks the courtyard from the southern side of the sanctum's wall, facing the large hall of the cemetery of Sayyid Muhammed Sa'eed al-Habboobi ^{قائم}, and it is almost similar in shape and size to the scholars' hall.

⁴His full name is: Ayatollah Mohammed Kazem (or Kazim or Kadhim) Yazdi, one of the senior leaders of the Shi'as of the world; his date of birth is unknown, but he passed away in 1919.



Grand Hall of the Cemetery of Sayyid al-Habboobi قبرستان:

It is located to the left of one who enters through the Qibla Gate. It is a huge grandiose hall covered with domes, and its front area is beautified with decorative wood works.



Both Grandiose Halls of the Shrine's General Secretariat:

They neighbor each other and are located on the right side of one who enters through the Qibla Gate. From the inside, both of these grandiose halls are joined together to form a huge room. Each of these grandiose halls has a decorated wood façade that extends to the outer dimensions of the hall.



Cemetery of Sayyid Abul-Hassan al-Isfahani ⁵ **قبرستان**:

It is located directly to the left of one who enters the shrine through the Clock Gate. This grandiose hall has a decorated wood façade that extends along the outer dimensions.

⁵Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Abul-Hassan Isfahani (1860 – 1946) was a senior Shi`a Muslim scholar, cleric and *faqih*, jurist. He was born in 1277 A.H./1860 A.D. in a village on the outskirts of Isfahan, Iran. He was educated and resided in Iraq and became the sole *marji` taqlid* after the death of his contemporary, Mirza Hussain Naeni. The tenure of his Marjaiyyah is particularly known for its commendable administration. After his preliminary training in Isfahan, he traveled to Najaf and gradually joined the lessons of Akhund Khurasani who soon recognized the talents of his disciple. His famous dissertation in fiqh is titled “Waseelat un-Najat”, the means to salvation. Due to its comprehensive nature, it has been elucidated by many faqihs, including Ruhollah Khomeini. Among his famous students were Ayatullah Seyyid Muhsin al-Hakim, Ayatullah Seyyid Meelani, Ayatullah Mirza Hashim Amuli and others. He died in Najaf on 9th Thull-Hijjah in 1365 A.H. (1946).



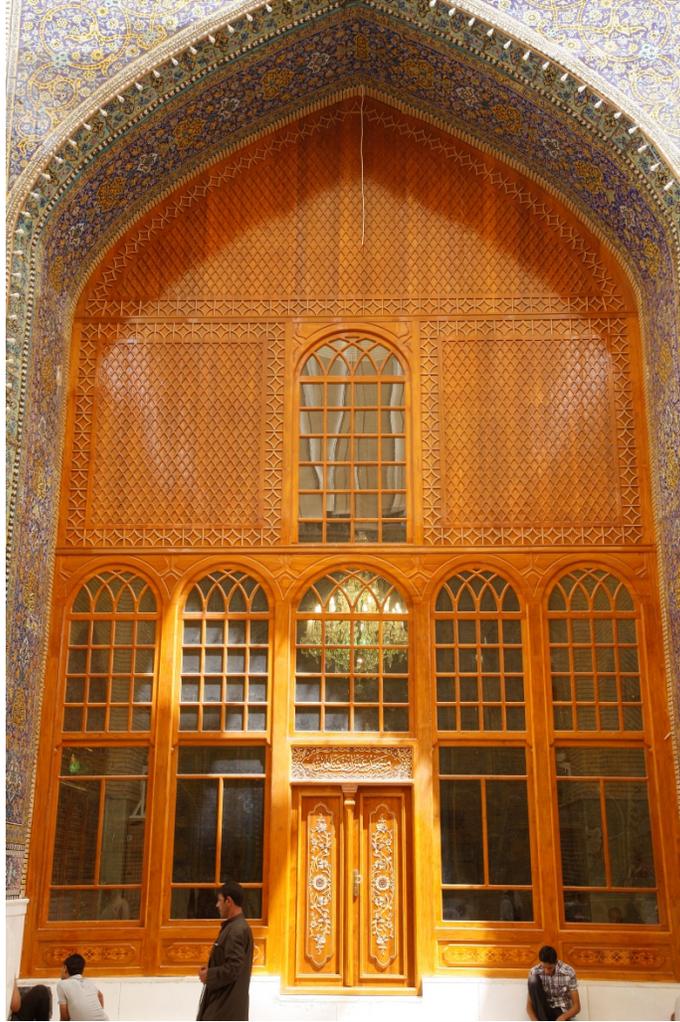
Both Grandiose Halls of the Sultans' Cemeteries:

They fall to the left of one who enters through the Tusi Gate. Each grandiose hall has a decorated wood façade that extends along its outer dimensions.



Grandiose Hall of the Cemetery of Sayyid Kadhim Yazdi قبرستان:

It is located to the left of one who enters through the Tusi Gate, and it is a huge hall covered with domes. This hall is beautified by a large façade made of decorative wood.



Omran ibn Shahin Mosque:

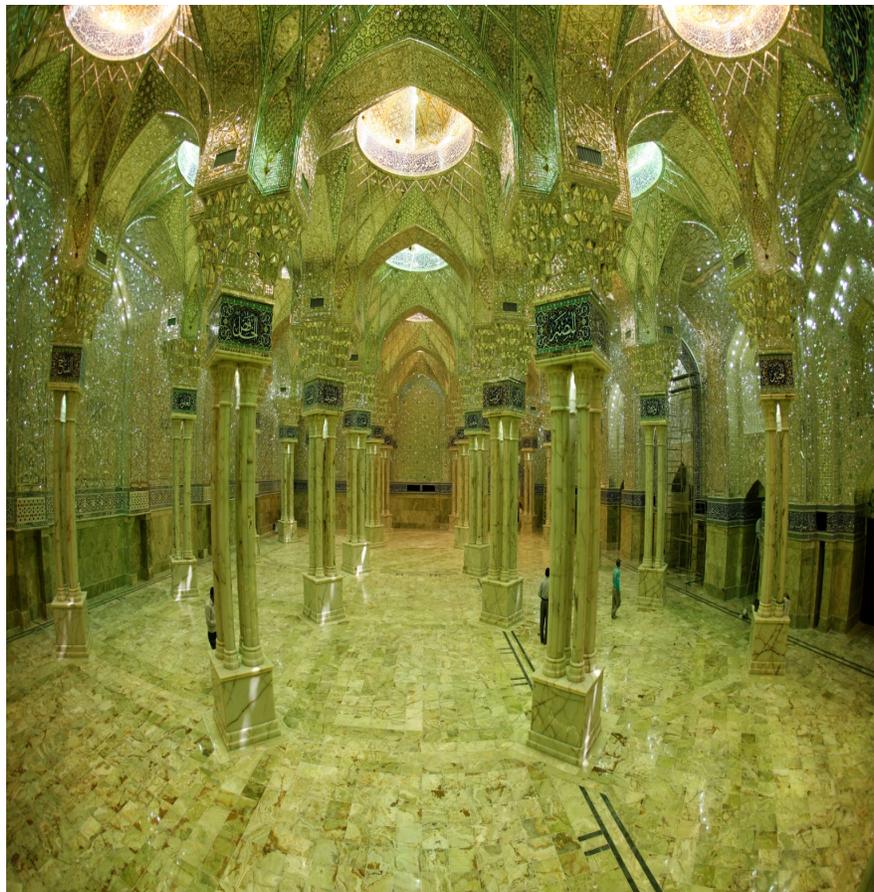
It is located in the northern side of the shrine's outer wall. Nowadays, the remaining portion of the arcade, which was built by Omran ibn Shahin, is called Masjid Omran (Omran Mosque) which was built in the mid-fourth Hijri century (10th Century A.D.). Its door is now located within the entrance of the Shaikh al-Tusi Gate which has been expanded, swallowing a portion of the Omran arcade in the year 1369 A.H./1950 A.D.



Al-Khadraa Mosque:

It is located in the area where the northern side meets the eastern one of the outer brick wall, and it is regarded as one of the old mosques. In the month of Rajab of 1368 A.H. (May of 1948-9 A.D.), the local

government demolished a third of it in order to open the street that surrounds the shrine to traffic. It was renovated later, and a gate for it was opened onto the street. In 1384 A.H./1964, the mosque and its attachments were all demolished and rebuilt by orders of the then supreme religious authority, the late Grand Ayatollah Abul-Qasim al-Khoei⁶ who used to deliver his lectures there. Its new construction was the first which Najaf witnessed for one of its mosques and in such a grand style; more than twenty-five thousand dinars were spent on it, a huge sum of money at the time (whereas now the same amount buys one meal for a couple at a modest restaurant!). After the departure of al-Khoei from this vanishing world, presently Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani replaces his predecessor in leading congregational prayers and delivering lectures and has been doing so for a number of years. The endowment administration closed it down in the pretext of renovating it, which it never did, until it was opened on a Monday, May 29, 2006 by orders of Sayyid al-Sistani.



Mosque of the Head (*masjid al-ra's*):

⁶Late Grand Ayatollah Abul-Qasim al-Khoei was one of the senior leaders of Shi'a Muslims of Iraq and abroad, one of the most learned, charismatic and wise leaders of the Islamic world. He was born on Rajab 15, 1317 A.H. (November 19, 1899) at Khoei in Iranian Azerbaijan, heartland of many great Shi'a thinkers and *sufis*, ascetics, and he died at 3:13 pm on Saturday, Safar 8, 1413 (August 8, 1992). He was versed in religious Persian and Arabic poetry and language as well as in Turkish.

It is located in the western part of the nave, and it is named so because it was built near the head of the buried Imām and Commander of the Faithful ﷺ. The date of its construction goes back to the time of the Elkhans (the Khans), a Mogul dynasty that once ruled Iraq, Iran and the Caucasus as well as parts of Asia Minor starting in the month of Thul-Hijja of 653 A.D./February 1255-6 A.D. The mosque's area was added to the extension area as the upper arcade of the sanctum which was called "Ali ibn Abu Tālib Arcade" as part of a large expansion project.



Gharawi Husainiyya and School:

Within the enclosure of the northern part of the nave's brick wall, in its eastern portion to be exact, there is the Husainiyya of the sacred Alawi Ataba which used to be a school for students of sciences of theology, and it is now open to students of all sciences as well as pilgrims visiting the shrine.



Library of the Hayderi Shrine:

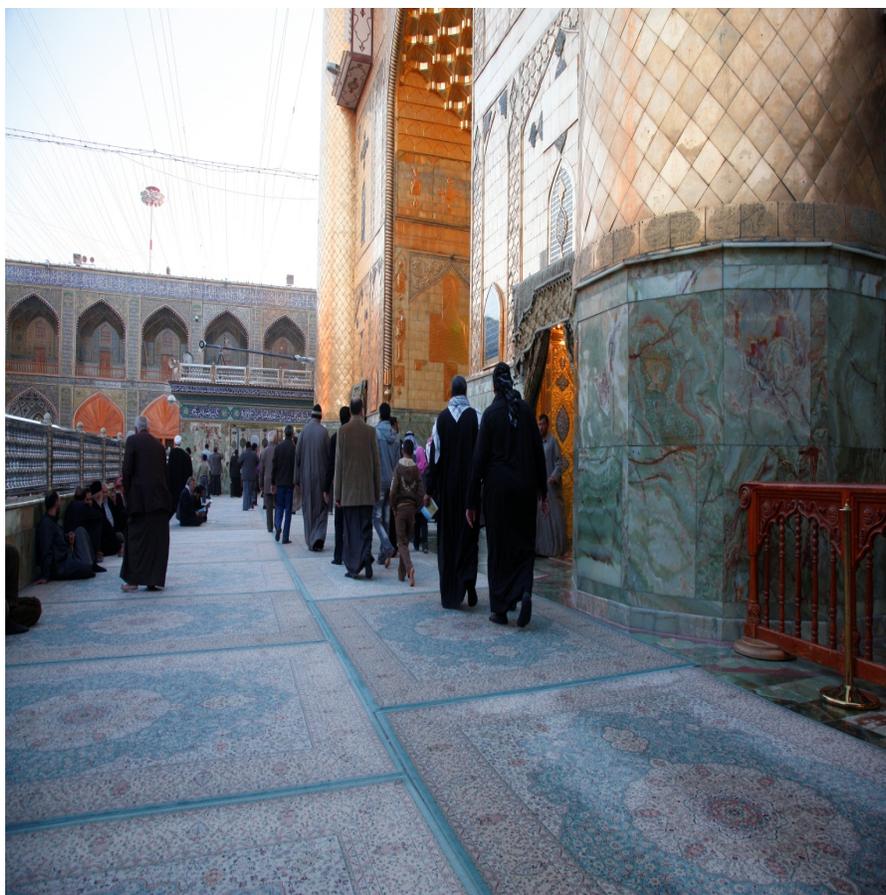
It is called library of the “Hayderi Rawda”, and it is one of the most distinguished and advanced libraries in the city of al-Najaf al-Ashraf where there is hardly a street without a library or bookstore. In the past, it housed many books and manuscripts most of which were handwritten by their writers. Kings, sultans and the like paid a great deal of attention to this library, gifting the precious manuscripts which they had to it, helping it gain fame and a great status. Scholars, writers and famous personalities paid it attention, too, providing it with books by purchasing entire private libraries and giving them as gifts to this grand library or marking them as a trust, a gift to the Commander of the Faithful عليه السلام. Throughout history, this library was given many names, including the Gharawi chest, the most famous and popular name, the Alawi chest, the shrine’s chest, the chest of the Commander of the Faithful عليه السلام, the Alawi shrine’s library, the Alawi library, the Hayderi library and finally the Hayderi Rawda (garden of knowledge).





Nave's Clock:

The clock of the nave is so unique, it is often compared with the famous Big Ben clock in London due to its huge size. Its top takes the shape of a dome covered with gold bricks, while inside there are three huge bells that are heard every fifteen minutes. The dome stands on gilt columns that shape something like roofed halls, eight in number, as the columns are supported on a square area representing the ceiling of the main clock chamber which houses its engine.



Gold Grandiose Hall (Courtyard or Parlor):

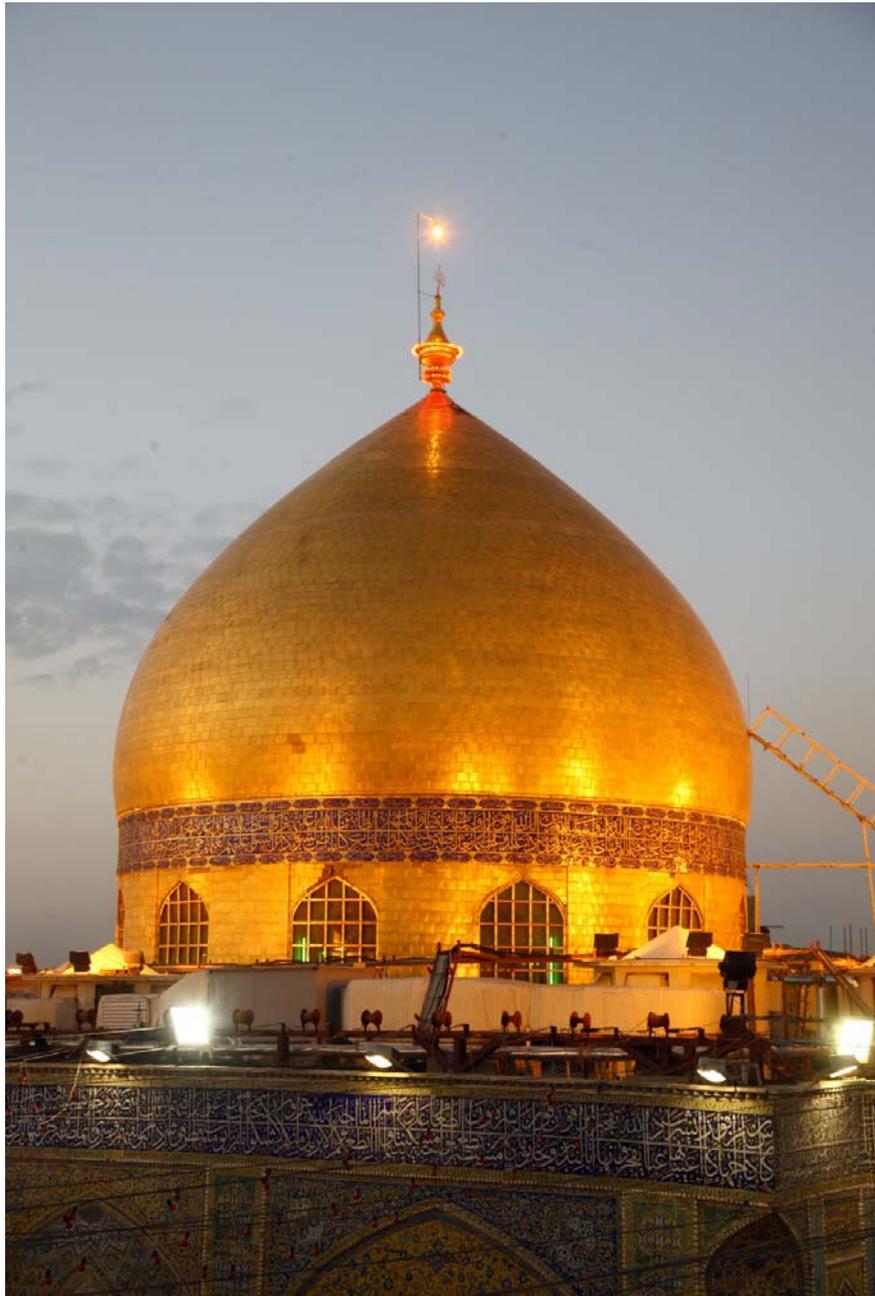
It is located in the sanctum's courtyard in the eastern side. This Golden Hall faces the main entrance to the sanctum's upper arcades and is covered with green marble. It is accessed from the northern and southern areas only. Its eastern area was closed with a wall that rises 90 cms above the parlor's ground over which there is a beautiful fence-like wall made of shiny silver and rises 75 cms. Within the parlor, the bases of both minarets are located in addition to a door so one can go up the minarets, in addition to two doors one of which has a chamber where Sayyid Mustafa Khomeini رحمته is buried, and it is located in the northern side, whereas the other is the chamber of the caller to prayers, the *muathin*, which is located in the southern area. Beside the base of each minaret, there are two doors made of pure gold and decorated with the most beautiful plant and Qur'anic verses which demonstrate precision and originality. The northern door leads to the resting place of *'allama* al-Hilli رحمته and is named after him. It leads through a short passage to the upper sanctum's arcade. The southern door is located at the resting place of al-Muqaddas al-Ardabili رحمته.

In the midst of the open veranda is the shrine's large hall which is covered with pure gold, and it is a marvel in precision and craftsmanship, one of the masterpieces of Islamic architecture. It is full of embossments and inscriptions. The gold hall is decorated with a huge braid of pure gold, and its top contains large gold decorations that drape to almost the third top part of the hall. They are so grand and beautiful, they attract everyone's attention and make everyone breathless. Both façades of the side halls have something like arched windows beautified with protruding decorations on blue enamel; two windows are in each side.



Gilt Minarets:

Both gilt minarets are located on the sides of the gold-covered halls, i.e. the main entrance to the sanctum's arcade, within the sanctum's courtyard area. With the huge gilt dome, these minarets are considered to be the most beautiful and the most important architectural parts of the shrine: The minarets are among the most important architectural elements of sacred landmarks. Each minaret is 29 meters high, and it is shaped like a cylinder the diameter of which keeps decreasing as it rises high in the sky.



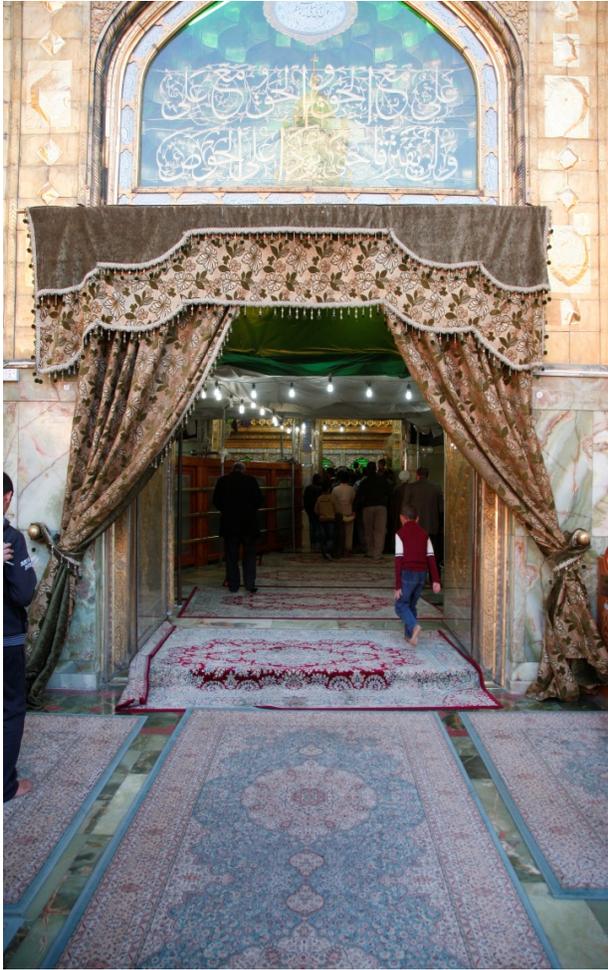
Gilt Dome:

The upper shrine is covered by two domes one of which is internal, arched in the shape of half an almost circular ball embroidered with mosaics and beautiful Kashi and rises 50.23 meters above the sanctum's ground, and an outer one shaped like a bulb that rises 15.18 meters from its base to the word "Allāh" above it. There is a space between both domes. The diameter of the internal one is 5.13 meters, whereas the diameter of the outer dome is 6.16 meters. This dome is regarded as one of the high and huge domes and is distinguished by a long neck that enhances its awesome shape and size; it is one of the most precise, symmetrical and beautiful domes.



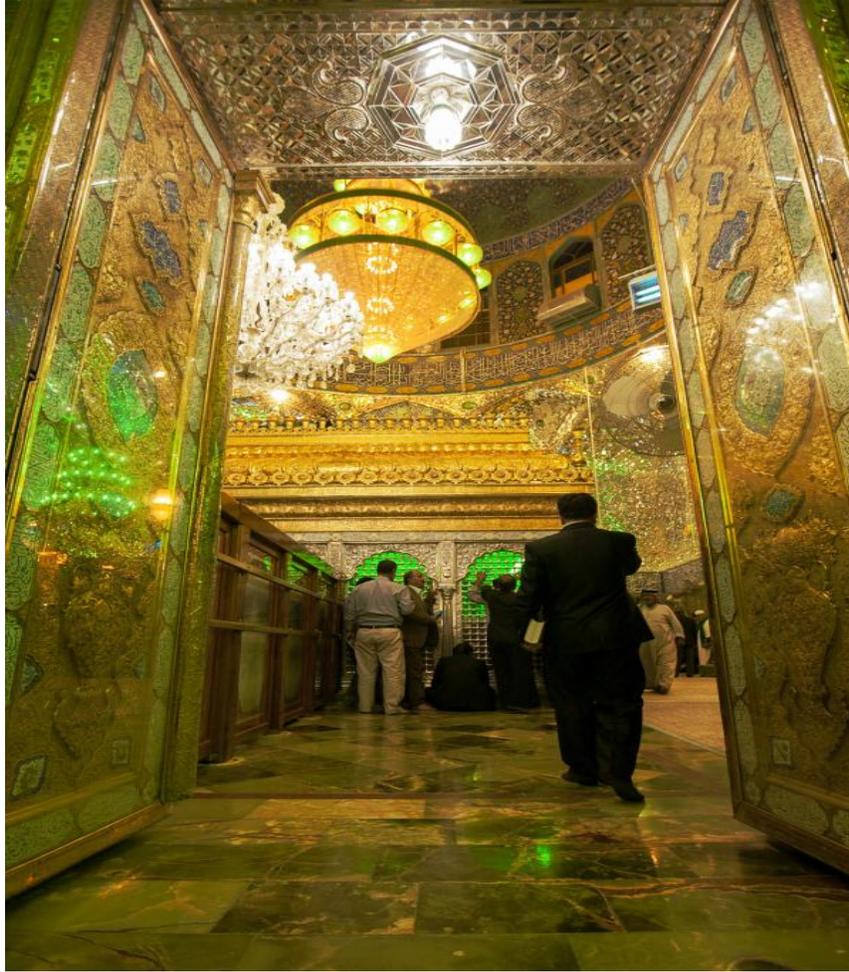
Dome's Stripe:

On the dome, there is an outer stripe of blue enamel 1.46 in height on which there are sacred verses from Surat al-Fath, Chapter of Victory (Ch. 48 of the Holy Qur'ān) inscribed in protruding gold letters.



Entrances to the Upper Sanctum Arcades:

Six entrances decorate the sanctum: The first, the main one, falls in the center of the large golden grandiose hall; there is a gold door across the resting place of *allama* al-Hilli, two silver ones face each other and overlook the Shaikh al-Tusi Gate, another faces the Qibla Gate and is called “Bab al-Murj̄d”, two other doors also face each other at the beginning and end of the sanctum’s western arcade: The northern one, which is located at the right side of the *ulema* arcade is called al-Fadil al-Sharbyani Entrance, while the southern one, which is located to the north of the Gold Spout Arcade, is called the Umm al-Baneen Entrance; both are made of teak wood.

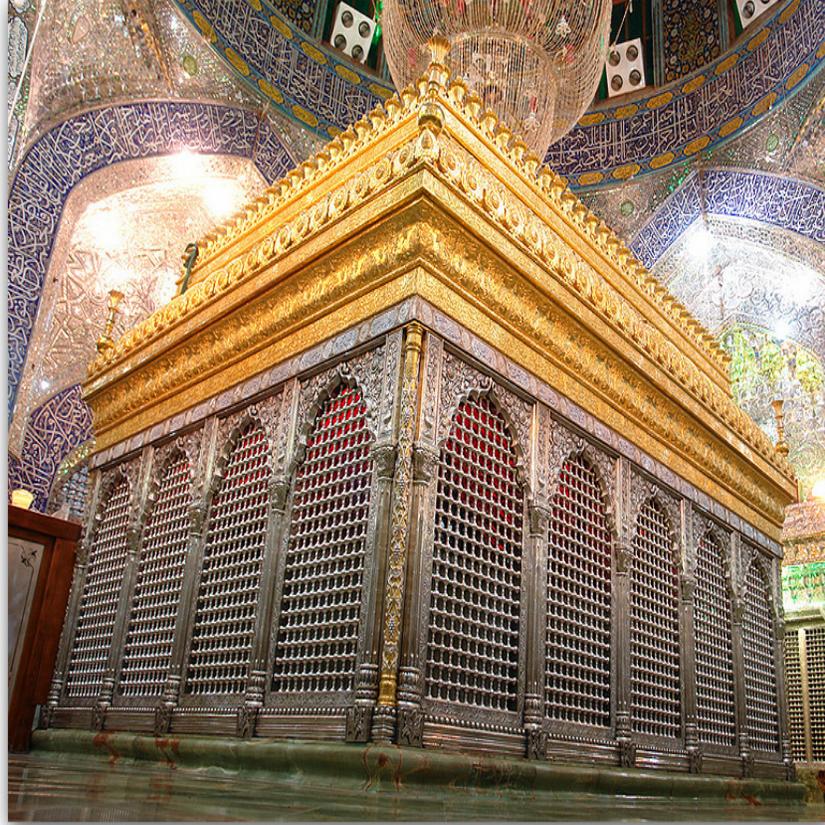
**Entrance Doors to the Holy Shrine:**

One can enter the shrine from the northern arcade areas where there are two silver inlaid doors and eastern ones, the main for entering the shrine, as well as the southern ones. As for the western side, the area of the sacred head of the Imām عليه السلام, there is an enclosure that overlooks the arcade that has no exit, and it is three meters high and 20.2 meters wide.

Sanctum's Interior:

The shrine is like a square tower the length of the side of which is 30.13 meters over an area 89,176 m² over which stands the dome which rests on four pillars. There are color mirrors and magnificent architectural designs that decorate the shrine from within with green marble, covering its internal walls.





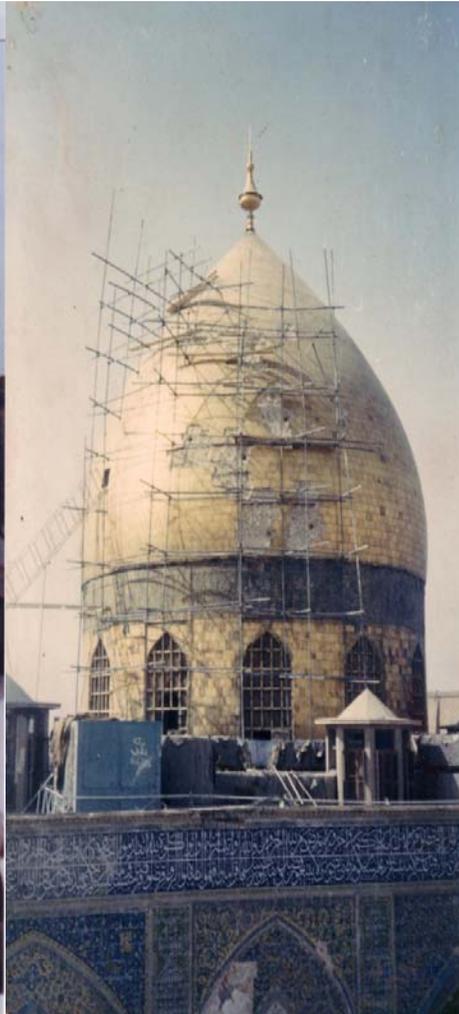
Sanctum's Wicket:

In the center of the shrine is the wicket that houses the remains of the Commander of the Faithful Ali ibn Abu Tālib عليه السلام, and it is made of gold and silver and is decorated with the most beautiful Islamic inscriptions and fabulous plant paintings in pure gold. The interior of the shrine is regarded as one of the most magnificent gems of Islamic art. In addition to its material value, it also contains marvelous gold, silver and multi-colored enamel inlaying.

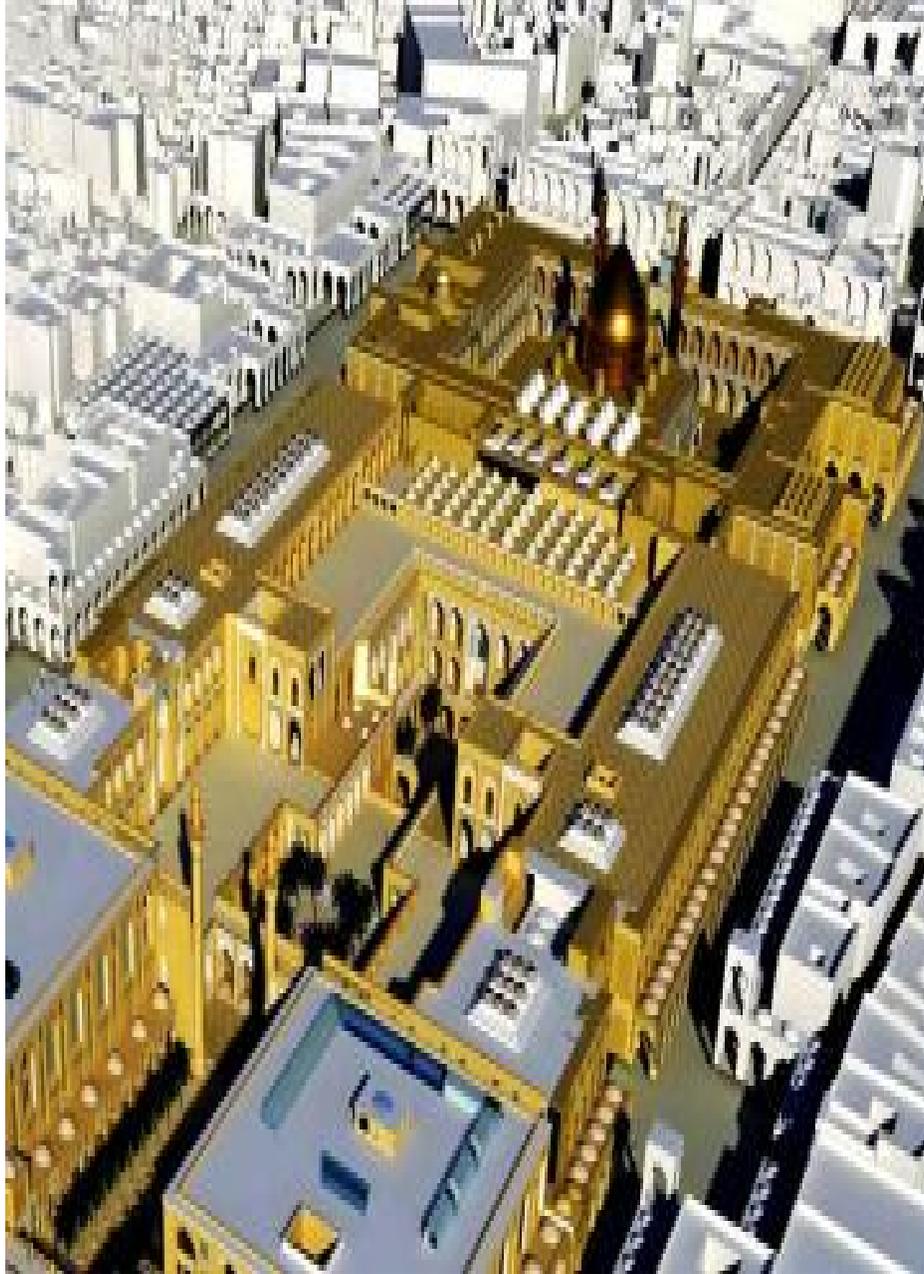
Grave's Box:

Inside the shrine is the grave's box which is called "sandoq al-khatam," ring's box, and it is made of Indian teak wood inlaid with ivory, shells and many other types of color woods, a marvelous monument of craftsmanship and inscription as well as of the art of writing and engraving. It was completed in the year 1202 A.H./1788 A.D. and it is rare. It was placed on the Imām's grave. But the damage and destruction that afflicted the shrine as a result of the army of Iraq's former tyrant, Saddam Hussein, having been given a free hand to play havoc with the holy shrine, the troops' damage reached even the wooden box of the grave, which is immeasurably precious, and you can still see the signs of such barbarism even now when you take a hard look at the box...





Impacts of the Ba`thist attack on the sacred Alawi Ataba (Shrine of Imām Ali (عليه السلام) during the Uprising of March 1991



Expansion project for the sacred Shrine of Imām Ali ﷺ



Photos provided by al-Ataba al-Alawiyya, management of the Grand Shrine of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib عليه السلام in al-Najaf al-Ashraf, Iraq